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NAG

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There's always a little light in the darkness

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Uncharted 3: Drakes Deception

Minecraft

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Sonic Generations

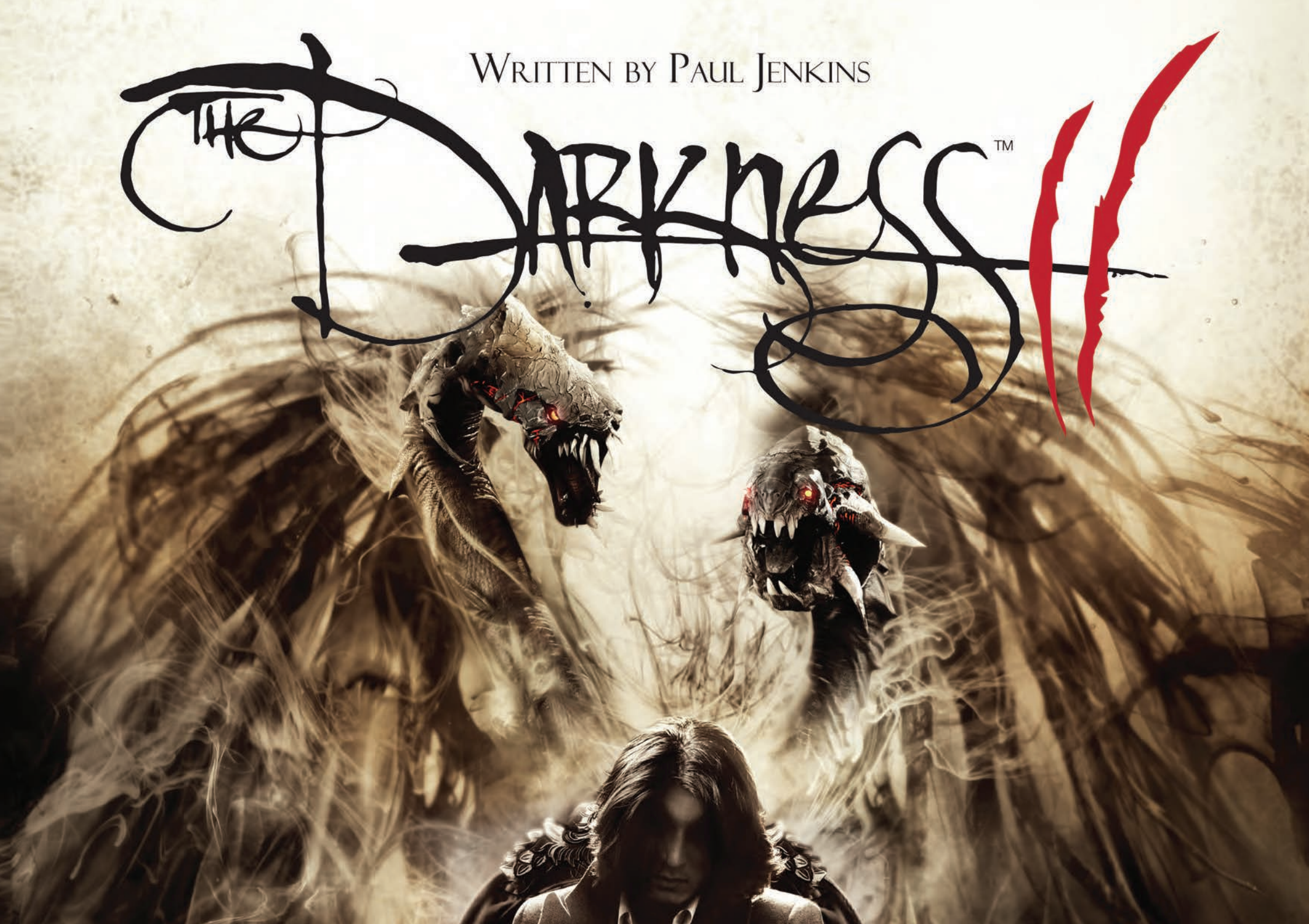
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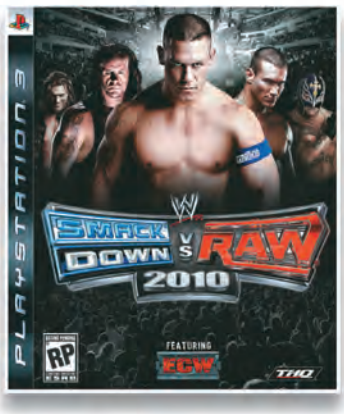






















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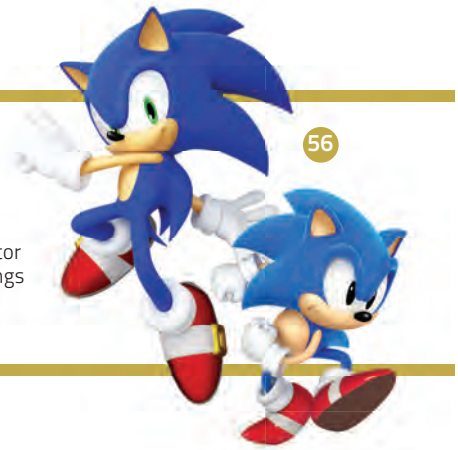
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In truth, we already have most of these lovely futuristic thingies here at our office. We've got "connections" and all that. We don't have our teleporter anymore though. RedTide broke it by overusing it to cut some distance off his alarmingly frequent bathroom trips. We're not sure what he even does in there so often. Seriously.

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I've come to talk with you again...



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Happy honest year

Well here we are again, another year gone and a new one starting. I'm just going to quickly grab last year's January *NAG* to see what I was on about then... Hold this magazine for me, I'll be right back.

...

Oh, never mind. I thought I wrote some predictions in there for 2011 and was now going to see how wrong or right I was. Damn. There goes my whole plan for this bit of the magazine...

Now what?

While I feel it's important to point out something I mentioned in that issue that I must also mention now in this one. As you can feel the magazine is thinner this month. Most other magazines do a combined January and February issue because advertising is notoriously low this time of year. It's a nice, lazy idea that we can't really do at NAG because there's just too much happening in the word of gaming all the time. That being said, most of the missing pages would have been advertising anyway, so you're not really missing out on any gaming or hardware content. Win.

But enough with the padding and word-count stuffing – I still don't really have a good topic and there is some pressure to get this done before we're off to print for the holidays. Forgive me; it's right at the end of the year (at time of writing this) and the imagination, inspiration and drive need a little refuelling on a beach somewhere. Some of you might be shaking your heads thinking what a tonsil I am, all I have to do is play games all day and write about them – what's so hard about that? All true I won't lie, this is without a doubt one of the greatest jobs on the planet, but sometimes you hit a creative dry patch.

I'm going away for a bit now, some coffee and a quick *Minecraft* session, maybe even some *MW3*... I should have something when I get back.

Nope, that didn't work. On the plus side I am exactly 345 words in now, which helps.

I asked around the office and the vote was just be honest. So here goes. I'm tired right now, I can't think of anything too smart or relevant to write here even though it's a 'fresh new year' and I just can't fake it, besides you wouldn't respect me in the morning right. ;) Tarryn has a cute new cat that looks how I feel in this picture right now. On a more positive note, 2012 is going to be a hot one but I'll get excited about it when I get there okay. Later, love you all and goodbye.

INSIGHT INTO NAG...

So, we asked Tarryn to write the Top 8 feature this month but she forgot – I mean really! So as of now she's dead to us, a useless thing, like an appendix. But not the good kind of appendix that bursts suddenly overnight and leaves you cold and stiff by morning, but rather the kind that forces you to be in the hospital on Christmas day. You know, while everyone else is laughing and drinking and opening gifts you're writhing in pain and going under the knife. But if that's not bad enough your whole family is there too, giving support and faking sympathy when they'd rather be... see above. So, special thanks to doctor Miklós for helping us and boo to Tarryn whose other employers are obviously more important to her. ;) NAG

RedTide
[Editor]



I shot this with a Canon Rebel T1i / 500D, 18-55mm lens, ARROWSTORM OF LOOOOOOVE.





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***Disclaimer:** All letters sent to NAG are printed more or less verbatim (that's as we get them for you kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors.)

Letter of the Month January 2012

From: Andreas
Subject: I-Rate PS me

Bearing my last mail in mind [*look, I get a lot of mail each month so I don't remember your last mail exactly – it was something about buying Dead Space 2 because we recommended it right, Ed*], I thought long and hard about how right your November Ace Combat: Assault Horizon review was, but then, I also finally realised (like finding the right word to use in Space Quest II to cross the river safely by "RUBBING" berries on you), you come to these conclusions (usually) at the end of the game... every game has its air of expectation (otherwise, who would buy it), and it is not until it is (thoroughly) played finished, that your expectation is satisfied... or let down... however, it takes finishing a game to fully understand it, and base your opinion on it...

I know now why I didn't enjoy the first few missions as much as I'd have liked (or perhaps could have), I already knew it'd get monotonous, so I looked out for it in every mission, and thus, experienced it. I knew there wasn't much more to come in terms of gameplay, you (and the Internet) already clarified that for me, and so I had that involuntary mind-set going into every mission - very anti-climax. Thus, I reiterate the very important, very basic rule for my fellow 'disheartened' gamers to consider when/before reading a review: If you don't want the gaming experience of your favourite title spoilt before even giving it a chance, don't read the review. Chances are, you, 1, won't be able to handle a bad review as well as you'd like (like me, apparently), 2, could've enjoyed the game in ignorant bliss, forming an opinion that contradicts the review - another's opinion, or 3, would eventually find out the game was 'bad' (as published) anyway, but experienced it the right way, on the way. Reviews aren't there to restrain you. If I remember correctly, they were better served broadening your gaming horizons to alternative genres, not turn you away from those you already support. It's a double-edged blade.

NAG; keep fighting the good fight...

You have a good point (even though you're telling people not to read a large section of the magazine each month). It's true what you say and I have my own example (because this is really all about me end of the day), I love, (love) the* Command & Conquer *series (*Red Alert *too) and was super excited to play number 4. In fact the original* Command & Conquer *rocked my world so hard it might have actually altered my path in life. For some reason or the other I didn't get and play it (*C&C 4*) on release weekend and came to the office on the Monday to poor, mixed and mostly negative reviews. I still have the game – in plastic. I never installed it because I heard so many bad things about it. In my case I guess I didn't want to ruin my good memory of the series. I'll get to it someday but it'll have dated by then and that'll probably make things even worse. So yes, 'reading' reviews is a double-edged sword which is why all the guys at NAG try and find the silver lining in everything we look at. That said, it's still fun ripping apart a rubbish game – those that really deserve it anyway. Ed.

This month, the winner can choose from any 2011 game release on the platform of your choice from Megarom.

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness.

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From: Brandon
Subject: The Passion...

Right NAG, I'll be copping out the bullsh1t and get straight to the point. Yes your magazine is awesome blah, blah, blah... But I'm going to ask you something personal. As I was playing MW3 multiplayer a few days ago shooting a camper's head off, I realised something. What am I doing? What are we as gamers doing? Am I wasting my life's time in front of a computer or am I doing something important in my life? What leads me to paying R400 for a game that's the same but with a different storyline? All I can say is that I don't have a cooking clue. Is this just what we do for fun or is it a fire that burns. That... that passion as we follow Captain Price. So please answer me this. Am I wasting my time, my life, in front of a screen to bring, me, what...?

Umm, Echo team we have a teal warning light over at Brandon's house, I repeat, a teal warning light. We might lose this one to another hobby like collecting belly button fluff or making those scrunched up balls of Easter egg paper. Be on the lookout for genre apathy and take along a copy of something different like* Minecraft *for him to try. Also get a FPS apathy specialist in to check his FPS selection for anything interesting or different besides* Call of Duty. *This is a teal warning over. Ed.

From: Brendan
Subject: The big one has landed-and it can sod off!

Yup, they're here. MW3, Battlefield 3. OMG moment – but wait, am I going to buy them? Nope and here's why. You see, as an FPS fan I find it hard to believe that so much hype can be generated around a "good" game Yes, Call of Duty is a well renowned franchise but it begs the question, what makes it so special. It's not as if it has mind blowing graphics, or an intense twist and turn storyline, or even overboard amazing game play. It's just an FPS, with slow-motion scenes and dramatic musical scores. So why spend more money on it then say, a game that scored a much higher rating. Traditionally, game developers bring out their big releases around Christmas time so that they can get the sales up. And this year, we are swamped with great games. So why not, instead of buying more of the same, FPS, 4 hour campaign, online abusing junk, find something new? *audience gasps* "Oh no, not our beloved COD!" but they forget something. Over the years, Call of Duty's storyline has gotten weaker, and weaker, and weaker. From the epic plot of COD4, to now, MW3. It's over used – great inventiveness there Activision *mock applause*. The only reason COD sells is thanks to online warfare. That's all fine and dandy, but what happened to FPS where story came first? Take Borderlands for example, interesting story, RPG elements and the online side falls away. Brilliant! Now it may seem like I'm being snooty, which I am, but this is because I have 4 COD games, all of which cost around R500, and now after completing their four hour campaign lay in my drawer collecting dust, as there are no longer people playing World at War online, the only COD worth playing. It may seem like I'm a COD-hater but I'm not. I'm just someone who says, instead of being a sheep and following everyone else in buying MW3, why not, choose your own path? The end of this year promises great releases, such as Skyrim. I just find the repetitiveness of killing random online people with different guns, just plain dull but maybe that's just me. That is why I shall be buying Batman: Arkham City and Saints Row: The Third. And maybe I'll buy COD again someday, when they make a decent single player. But until then, story based FPS only for me, because if the breed dies out, the fans die out too.

I think we just found a new leader for Echo team. You're right and wrong depending on perspective. Right, because the single-player experience is getting flashier and more Hollywood by the year but shorter and shorter (a consequence of all the expensive flash). Wrong, because this kind of game drags gaming into the limelight and grows the industry. It's the Michael Bay of gaming and we need it. On the multiplayer side – you either enjoy killing people online or you don't. I've logged hundreds of hours in* Call of Duty *and as each year passes I just move onto the next one and blow hours of my life away on that. I enjoy it because I enjoy killing humans versus the AI. You either get a kick out of this or you don't. I like to find balance and you'll just as easily find me playing* Dead Space, Minecraft *or* Terraria *in equal measures on any given night. Ed.

Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"Not that the Xbox is a bad product, hells no the Xbox is one of the cornerstones of society and the civilization would crumble if it were ever to vanish."
– Shaderow

"My console of preference is the PC, and it will always be the PC."
– Sebastian

"It seems like Bethesda has been too busy trying to sue Minecraft for a word that is in the dictionary already, and forgot what they should've been doing."
– Ruan

From: Adam
Subject: The Advert

Thank you, thank you, thank you... I'm really glad you took out that add (fat guy in jeans, you probably don't remember but I sent an email about it) and replaced it with that beach side beauty. You have my eternal gratitude (or you have it until the blood stops going to my head from hours stuck on the couch playing videogames). This add got my attention in way more pleasant means than the last one (don't put it back I'm begging you). So I want to know if you're going to put it back in the January issue beforehand... and later if possible what page it's going to be on so I can keep my eyes away from the horrific site.

I'm not really entirely sure what you're talking about here so I'll try and answer you in your language. There is a good chance

NAG Fan artwork

This is the cream of the crop that we received at NAG this issue. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Remember, don't just stick the logo on a picture – use the logo in a picture or you win squat.



George Safi, "A little tribute to the NAG office. Not sure if this is the right department to send fan art to."

what you're talking about will be in the January issue on a page in the magazine somewhere. It might not be the one you're looking for so keep an eye out for it on the page anyway. On another note, try taking a break from gaming every eight or so hours and let the blood move around the rest of your body – like your brain – before sending me mails like this that make no sense and annoy everyone that reads them. Ed.

From: Zaheer
Subject: I know it sounds dumb but...
What details should I include for the letter of the month prize?

A good start is sending me an actual letter. It should make sense and be about what we do in NAG. Try reading it once through before sending it – that helps with spelling and the making sense bit above. It should be in English with grammar and stuff. I do read all the mail that comes through that ancient system called the post office but I'll never reply because I don't know where to buy stamps or how they work – also writing with a pen is yuck. If you win we'll get hold of you so use a proper email address when sending it in. Now that you understand how the world works a little more get cracking. Also there is no 'system' for getting the letter of the month prize. Also remember Miklós, a regular writer for NAG now (also someone we send overseas to see new games), started his whole career with NAG by sending me a letter – true story. ;) Ed.

From: Ruan
Subject: Beta Gaming
Hey guys. I recently had an idea, whether it's genius or retarded is for you to decide. Some of the games that people work the hardest on are often finished, or at least in final beta, are thrown out and the developers start them from the beginning because of some trivial nonsense or because they suddenly want it to go in a new direction. The problem is that sometimes the first path was a better one than the one that's released, and we are disappointed again. Like DNF, a lot of people loved the early trailers and the demo that came out around 2001. But the developers just didn't think it was perfect enough and kept starting from the beginning, even though what they had was probably better than the re-reboot by Gearbox. So here's an idea. When we buy a game like DNF, that's been remade over and over again why not include the other versions of the game that were disposed of by the creators as well. Even if the graphics are a bit outdated, if the game is solid give us a chance to appreciate their hard work. We get more game and the developers know that at least their endless toiling away counted for something.

This is a great idea, but a little impractical. It's just like planning to travel to space using nothing but cereal boxes, a snorkelling kit and can of lighter fluid (true story this one time). These early alpha versions usually only work on a few development machines at the developer and for everyone else will be buggy and unplayable. The effort required to get them into a working state will take too long and eat up too many resources to make it worth the effort. The better idea would be to make the development code and files available to the gaming community and let people with nothing better to do finish up these half-baked efforts. Ed.

From: Hard to say
Subject: Bible as a Videogame
This pretty much something that I have been thinking would make an awesome game and yes some of the questions that the editor asks come into play, but one thing that we need to remember is that the game should not be based on interpretation but as exact and it will excel on a Wii console as most stories need interaction and the Wii mote is perfect for such an epic story... So that's my two bits to the whole thing of The Chronicles of the Bible.

I can't get the image of Moses parting the Red Sea while holding up two Wii remotes out of my head now. Ed.

From: Someone
Subject: Questions
Is there such a career as a game tester? What is an OS Drive? And what is it used for?

There is no career as a game tester in this country – sorry to ruin your bright future. When we say OS drive we mean a small SSD drive that you run your operating system from/off/etc. Also, when you send in mail to us do the following: say hi, say what you want to say and then say goodbye leaving your name... We're not savages. Ed.

On the Forums

Too many cows in the same pen, speak to us – we know. Most are welcome: http://www.nag.co.za/forums/

Question: What magical, wonderful, totally-doesn't-need-to-be-likely announcement in the gaming industry would you like to hear in 2012?

nukehead: TimeSplitters sequel... again

Gammaray: Microsoft and Sony work together to bring one console with one service. All fanbois die painful death after the announcement. World peace reigns as a result.

echo: Black Mesa Source releases in 2012.

Xperimance: The release date of Metal Gear Solid Rising.

The Wolf: BioShock Infinite has a release date! :D

ZoRPA: Rocksmith availability/release in South Africa.

Fredder: All future games at most only needs internet connectivity for activation and fully LAN friendly . . . *Cough*Diablo 3*Cough*.

ShawniF: Whatever Respawn are working on at the moment.

Jodez: A PS3 Digimon game, and it should be a mixture of Monster Hunter and Pokémon.

Acinixys: A full 3D Pokémon MMO, as well as the abandonment of ALL forms of DRM.

Jerkydarkstar: A Skyrim PS3 patch that works!

Toxxyc: Duke Nukem's non-sucking sequel.

S7wede: The return of Bullfrog and all their epic franchises. Theme Hospital, Dungeon Keeper and a real Syndicate sequel.

wisp: In-store activation , no more need for a internet connection at home -coming soon to store near you.

pArkEr: FIFA 13. What, you said it doesn't have to be likely!

spjt07: An offline version of Diablo 3. :)

Deaththekidd: A anti-camping system.

Wherewulf1: The Guild Wars 2 release date.

Changsta 187: The introduction of mind-control gaming.

5h@un13: Easy: World of Warcraft fully Free to play. And another Prince of Persia.

"A good start is sending me an actual letter. **It should make sense and be about what we do in NAG.** Try reading it once through before sending it – that helps with spelling and the making sense bit above. It should be in English with grammar and stuff."

Fus-Roh-DAH!



One of the many interesting things about *Skyrim* is the one aspect of the game that's polarized gamer opinion. That aspect's name is Lydia, the "Housecarl" (read: enslaved bodyguard) that gets assigned to you as an NPC companion near the beginning of the game.

I live in a dual-copy-of-*Skyrim* household: I play it on PC and my wife plays it on Xbox 360. We spend romantic evenings in different rooms of the house, both laughing maniacally while we slaughter dragons, and squealing with excitement when we Fus-Roh-Dah an NPC off a mountain; our future children are so, so screwed. We've agreed on ninety-nine percent of the game, but have realised that our feelings towards Lydia will always clash. I love Lydia – my wife hates her with the searing intensity of a million exploding hydrogen bombs. While I'll turn to Lydia after each dicey encounter with a Hagraven and tell her "good job" (don't you dare judge me), my wife's playtime was frequently interspersed with colourful language in response to Lydia's questionable AI. I say "was" because Lydia is dead in her game, and there might have been a cackle of delight as she met her demise.

> **"The good news is that I'm not the only nerd besotted with Lydia"**

My Lydia is also dead; this adds a morbid element to my adventures through *Skyrim*. I miss her and her constant inane commentary: no Lydia, that's the cave we just **came out of**... no use wondering what's in there. Perhaps it was her glaring stupidity that made her endearing? The fact that she doubled as a pack-donkey was also a bonus. So she triggered every trap and constantly ran in front of my arrows; I didn't care because she was always at my side and always bitching about being sworn to carry my burden. And I loved her for that.

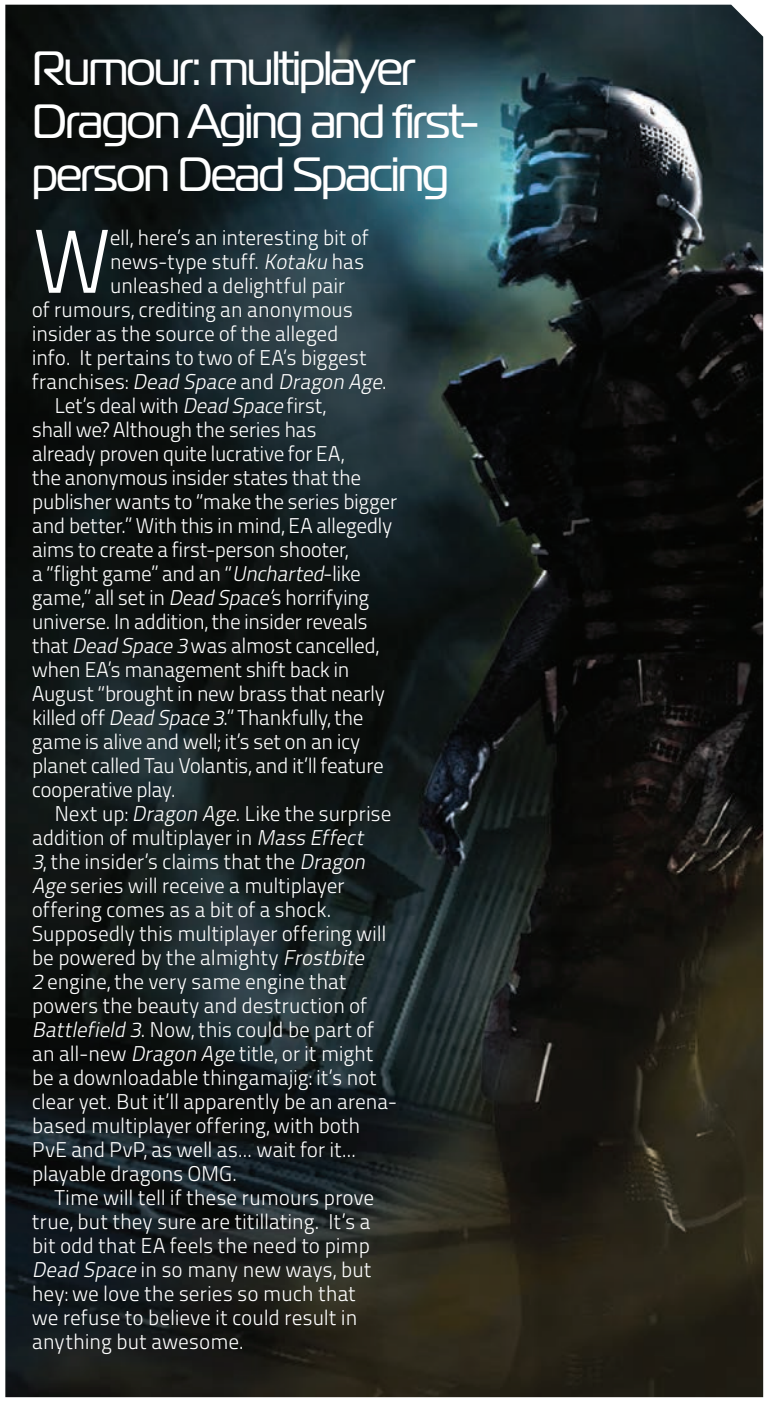
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The good news is that I'm not the only nerd besotted with Lydia. A few days after my public mourning (via Tweeted screenshots of her enshrined corpse – I'm totally claiming the label of "First *Skyrim* Undertaker for Deceased Companions") John Walker of website Rock, Paper, Shotgun posted a similar experience regarding Lydia. So what is it about this NPC companion who, honestly, epitomises everything we ordinarily hate about stupid AI partners?

I still have no idea, but I know I miss her canned responses to random events during the game, despite them being hit or miss. If this "staged organic interaction" between player and NPC is the reason, then I'm looking forward to *BioShock: Infinite* for a whole new reason. Ken Levine and company are putting a lot of effort into making Elizabeth the NPC companion against whom all future companions will be judged. All I'm really concerned about is whether or not Elizabeth will fill the void Lydia left in my pixelated heart.

Miklós Szecsei

Rumour: multiplayer Dragon Aging and first-person Dead Spacing



Well, here's an interesting bit of news-type stuff. *Kotaku* has unleashed a delightful pair of rumours, crediting an anonymous insider as the source of the alleged info. It pertains to two of EA's biggest franchises: *Dead Space* and *Dragon Age*.

Let's deal with *Dead Space* first, shall we? Although the series has already proven quite lucrative for EA, the anonymous insider states that the publisher wants to "make the series bigger and better." With this in mind, EA allegedly aims to create a first-person shooter, a "flight game" and an "*Uncharted*-like game," all set in *Dead Space*'s horrifying universe. In addition, the insider reveals that *Dead Space 3* was almost cancelled, when EA's management shift back in August "brought in new brass that nearly killed off *Dead Space 3*." Thankfully, the game is alive and well; it's set on an icy planet called Tau Volantis, and it'll feature cooperative play.

Next up: *Dragon Age*. Like the surprise addition of multiplayer in *Mass Effect 3*, the insider's claims that the *Dragon Age* series will receive a multiplayer offering comes as a bit of a shock. Supposedly this multiplayer offering will be powered by the almighty *Frostbite 2* engine, the very same engine that powers the beauty and destruction of *Battlefield 3*. Now, this could be part of an all-new *Dragon Age* title, or it might be a downloadable thingamajig: it's not clear yet. But it'll apparently be an arena-based multiplayer offering, with both PvE and PvP, as well as... wait for it... playable dragons OMG.

Time will tell if these rumours prove true, but they sure are titillating. It's a bit odd that EA feels the need to pimp *Dead Space* in so many new ways, but hey: we love the series so much that we refuse to believe it could result in anything but awesome.

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Garriott puts his prediction cap on

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He's predicted that console gaming will buckle under the weight of portable devices. Now, he's not the first to make predictions of this sort, but hey: anything to get back in the news, right? In addition, Garriott believes that MMOs will lose market share and give way to social and casual games. It seems he believes that the MMO era (the height of which ran from 2000 through to 2010) has reached its twilight years, and that social gaming is here to stay.

Now, bear in mind that Garriott's current company, Portalarium, is specifically devoted to the social gaming side of things, so we can't help but point and scream "biased!"

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Fan fiction foibles



How obsessive are you *really* about your games? Would you consider yourself a 'hardcore' gamer – and what does that mean to you?

Are you one of those people who collect all the associated paraphernalia related to a specific game – the figurines, the coffee mugs, the platinum, exclusive, collector's edition that cost you most of your salary and means your family can't eat for the rest of the month?

Do you complete a game and then forget about it as you advance towards your subsequent conquest, or do you fantasise a little about what it would be like to engage with your favourite characters in that game?

Surprisingly, despite the opening line, this isn't a speech about what defines a hardcore gamer but rather about the obsessive immersion that for many of us comes with the territory of being gamers. Including that enigmatic beast: fan fiction.

I'll even admit to having indulged in this pastime. Once.

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In my youth. When I had nothing else to do and was pretty obsessed with *NWN2*.

Right, moving on.

My point is that for many gamers, particularly those with a somewhat overactive imagination, fan fiction is a way for us to further our enjoyment of certain games. I will admit to trawling (not trolling!) certain fan fic sites at times in order to explore the perceptions others have of the characters in a specific game – and there is some awesome fan fic out there.

There is also some complete and utter garbage.

Which I recently stumbled upon. My favourite site of the week is **badfanfic.tumblr.com** – an online archive that mocks the 90% of bad fan fiction out there.

It is a place where you can find gems such as this, titled "Of Roses and Cookies, a *Dragon Age* fanfic". The summary reads, "In this one, Alistair gives Helen his rose with rather unexpected results. Also, Alistair learns about women and their cycles when Leliana, Morrigan and the PC all PMS at the same time."

Seriously? Bad sexual innuendo aside, if I wanted to read fan fiction about *Dragon Age* PMS... Oh wait, no I never want to read that. Ever.

Whilst I applaud the writing of original and interesting fan fiction, I must wonder at the wisdom of some people spewing stuff like that out on to the Internet. Did it sound like a good idea in your head? Did you write it on a whim? Or did you sit down and think long and hard about your story?

Hmmm, possible plot ideas... I want to include Alistair because he's so cute and innocent. Oh if he's innocent then not only will he be a virgin, but he also won't understand the inner workings of a woman's body. What's the best way to write about this... I know! Why don't all the women in the party all get grumpy and PMS-y at the same time! That will confuse him and yet teach him about women all at the same time!

Googling the title I was rewarded with this gem, courtesy of *Benevola* on FanFiction.net,

Alistair waved his arms in the air. "Helen is crying about being fat, even though she isn't fat at all. Morrigan has stolen Sten's cookies and eaten all of them. And Leliana..." he shuddered. "Leliana is MEAN, Wynne. Really, really MEAN."

Yeah, I see he hasn't gotten less whiny, even in someone else's imagination.

Pippa Tshabalala

CD Projekt's piracy problem



The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings: a phenomenal PC-exclusive (for now, at least) RPG that deserves to be played by as many people as possible. It'd just be nice if the majority of the people who've played it weren't filthy pirating douchewads. Marcin Iwinsky, CEO of Polish developer CD Projekt RED, has revealed that the game has been pirated approximately four and a half million times. And that number is reached via optimistic estimation.

"I was checking regularly the number of concurrent downloads on torrent aggregating sites, and for the first 6-8 weeks there was around 20-30k people downloading it at the same time," said Iwinski. "Let's take 20k as the average and let's take 6 weeks. The game is 14GB, so let's assume that on an average not-too-fast connection it will be 6 hours of download. 6 weeks is 56 days, which equals to 1344 hours; and with 6h of average download time to get the game it would give us 224 downloads, then let's multiply it by 20k simultaneous downloaders."

"The result is roughly 4.5 million illegal downloads. This is only an estimation, and I would say that's rather on the optimistic side of things; as of today we have sold over 1M legal copies, so having only 4.5-5 illegal copies for each legal one would be not a bad ratio. The reality is probably way worse."

Regardless of these shocking numbers, CD Projekt is sticking to their no DRM guns, with Iwinski stating that they're still completely against obtrusive DRM. The company doesn't want to punish legitimate purchasers of their titles by adding DRM. It's a noble gesture, one we hope makes every pirate out there feel incredibly guilty. Then again, who are we kidding: they're probably too busy shooting kittens and harvesting organs from children to worry about piracy guilt.

The DS isn't dead yet

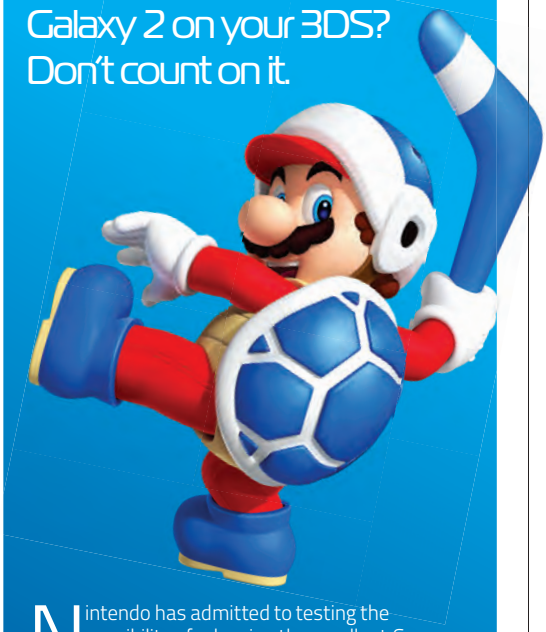


The 3DS is finally gaining steam, and the Wii U is right around the corner, so what does that mean for the humble DS and original Wii? Nintendo has no intention of scraping either, which is probably a wise decision given the huge user-base each has. It's probably also pertinent given that Nintendo is gunning for the core market with Wii U, so they aren't too concerned about giving existing players too few reasons to upgrade to the next platform. Finally, it speaks strongly about their plans for quality content for both the 3DS and Wii U.

Nintendo's super-duper leader of America Reggie Fils-Aime didn't go into any specifics, but he's adamant that both previous-generation platforms will have a place in the market for at least the whole of 2012. He claims that the DS (and, by implication, the new stripped-down PSP – whoops!) is perfect for the young crowd whose parents will be happy to spend $99 on a handheld.

Sony managed to keep a decent line-up going for the PS2 when its successor launched, so we see no reason why this couldn't work. The important factor will be whether or not Wii games are high-quality standalone products and not shameless SD ports of the Wii U's titles.

Want Super Mario Galaxy 2 on your 3DS? Don't count on it.



Nintendo has admitted to testing the possibility of releasing the excellent *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on the 3DS. They ditched the idea when they realised that it was far too difficult to play the game on the handheld's small screen (relative to a television, at least).

"When we started developing [*Super Mario 3D Land*], we displayed *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on a small TV monitor and found that Mario looked like a speck and that the game was difficult to play," said Koichi Hayashida, director of *Super Mario 3D Land*. "This led us to look into the camera and terrain types that would be conducive to playing on a portable screen with a relatively large Mario. If we were making a console game, from the very start, we wouldn't have been thinking about any of those things, and I think the game would have probably been a lot different."

So, while 3DS gamers who don't own a Wii will miss out on *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, they can at least rest assured that the game helped to provide them with the good times to be had in *Super Mario 3D Land*. Yay!

Battlefield 3 drops some sales figures

If you followed all that *Modern Warfare 3* versus *Battlefield 3* malarkey, you're likely very interested in finding out how EA's *COD* killer fared against its primary competitor. Well, according to the sales figures for the month of November 2011, everything went down exactly as was expected: *BF3* sold a whole bunch of copies, but not enough to hold out against the brute force of Activision's behemoth.

November saw another three million copies of *BF3* find their way into the hands of gamers eager for large-scale warfare. These numbers were revealed by EA CFO Eric Brown at the Baird Technology Conference in San Francisco. This put the game's end of November lifetime total at eight million sold out of the total of twelve million shipped. Those are impressive figures: but *Modern Warfare 3* still trounced that number, having broken the five-day sales records for any movie, book or game in history by making $775 million in just five days worldwide. *MW3* even managed to sell 6.5 million copies within 24 hours of going on sale. Looks like this ridiculous battle to topple the mighty *COD* is going to continue a while longer.

Last Guardian lead allegedly quits Sony

// Anyone who's been following the development of Team Ico's (*Ico, Shadow of the Colossus*) latest (ridiculously enigmatic and oft-delayed) title *The Last Guardian* should pay attention to this rumour: because if it proves true, this intriguing game might take even longer to finally reach your PS3. *Eurogamer* reports that Fumito Ueda, the game's creative lead and (former?) head of Team Ico, has left Sony and is working on the game as a freelancer.

The Last Guardian was already removed from the "holiday 2011" release window earlier this year, and a few months back the development team reportedly moved offices, relocating to Sony's headquarters in Japan. On top of that, Ueda's departure is allegedly putting even more strain on the title's already lengthy development cycle, which means we'll have to wait even longer to finally get our hands on the thing. Sony responded to the rumour, simply stating that "Sony doesn't comment on rumours or speculation."

// *Deus Ex* has now made it into Square Enix's list of stable franchises, which means that **we can expect to see a lot more content from this brand**. It now sits alongside the likes of *Final Fantasy, Tomb Raider, Hitman* and *Kingdoms Hearts*. The series will continue to be developed by Eidos Montreal, which will soon be expanded to accommodate simultaneous development of a new *Thief* title, an unannounced game, and further *Deus Ex* properties.

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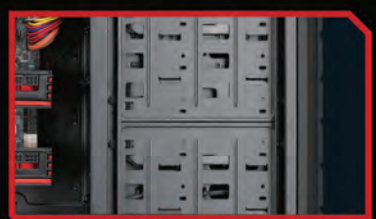


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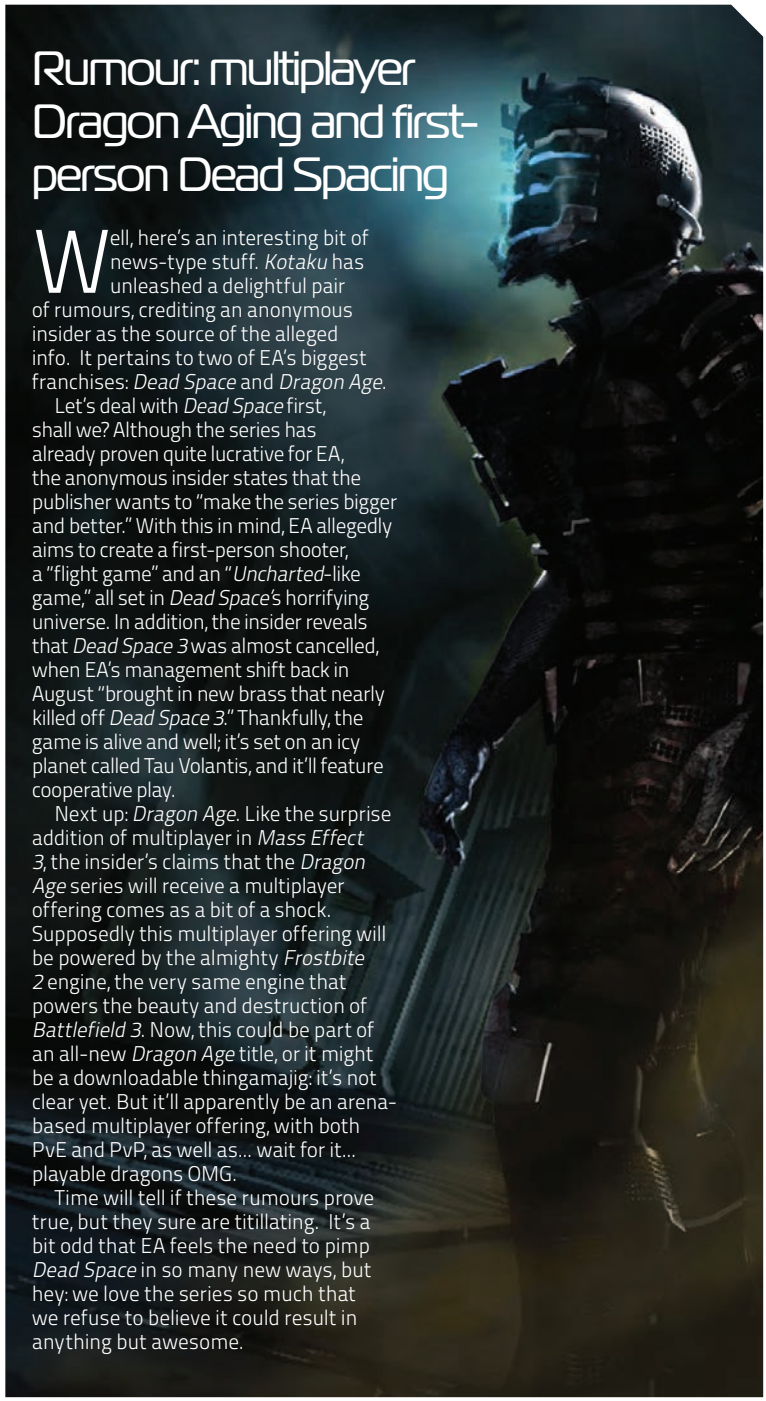
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In my youth. When I had nothing else to do and was pretty obsessed with *NWN2*.

Right, moving on.

My point is that for many gamers, particularly those with a somewhat overactive imagination, fan fiction is a way for us to further our enjoyment of certain games. I will admit to trawling (not trolling!) certain fan fic sites at times in order to explore the perceptions others have of the characters in a specific game – and there is some awesome fan fic out there.

There is also some complete and utter garbage.

Which I recently stumbled upon. My favourite site of the week is **badfanfic.tumblr.com** – an online archive that mocks the 90% of bad fan fiction out there.

It is a place where you can find gems such as this, titled "Of Roses and Cookies, a *Dragon Age* fanfic". The summary reads, "In this one, Alistair gives Helen his rose with rather unexpected results. Also, Alistair learns about women and their cycles when Leliana, Morrigan and the PC all PMS at the same time."

Seriously? Bad sexual innuendo aside, if I wanted to read fan fiction about *Dragon Age* PMS... Oh wait, no I never want to read that. Ever.

Whilst I applaud the writing of original and interesting fan fiction, I must wonder at the wisdom of some people spewing stuff like that out on to the Internet. Did it sound like a good idea in your head? Did you write it on a whim? Or did you sit down and think long and hard about your story?

Hmmm, possible plot ideas... I want to include Alistair because he's so cute and innocent. Oh if he's innocent then not only will he be a virgin, but he also won't understand the inner workings of a woman's body. What's the best way to write about this... I know! Why don't all the women in the party all get grumpy and PMS-y at the same time! That will confuse him and yet teach him about women all at the same time!

Googling the title I was rewarded with this gem, courtesy of *Benevola* on FanFiction.net,

Alistair waved his arms in the air. "Helen is crying about being fat, even though she isn't fat at all. Morrigan has stolen Sten's cookies and eaten all of them. And Leliana..." he shuddered. "Leliana is MEAN, Wynne. Really, really MEAN."

Yeah, I see he hasn't gotten less whiny, even in someone else's imagination.

Pippa Tshabalala

CD Projekt's piracy problem



The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings: a phenomenal PC-exclusive (for now, at least) RPG that deserves to be played by as many people as possible. It'd just be nice if the majority of the people who've played it weren't filthy pirating douchewads. Marcin Iwinsky, CEO of Polish developer CD Projekt RED, has revealed that the game has been pirated approximately four and a half million times. And that number is reached via optimistic estimation.

"I was checking regularly the number of concurrent downloads on torrent aggregating sites, and for the first 6-8 weeks there was around 20-30k people downloading it at the same time," said Iwinski. "Let's take 20k as the average and let's take 6 weeks. The game is 14GB, so let's assume that on an average not-too-fast connection it will be 6 hours of download. 6 weeks is 56 days, which equals to 1344 hours; and with 6h of average download time to get the game it would give us 224 downloads, then let's multiply it by 20k simultaneous downloaders."

"The result is roughly 4.5 million illegal downloads. This is only an estimation, and I would say that's rather on the optimistic side of things; as of today we have sold over 1M legal copies, so having only 4.5-5 illegal copies for each legal one would be not a bad ratio. The reality is probably way worse."

Regardless of these shocking numbers, CD Projekt is sticking to their no DRM guns, with Iwinski stating that they're still completely against obtrusive DRM. The company doesn't want to punish legitimate purchasers of their titles by adding DRM. It's a noble gesture, one we hope makes every pirate out there feel incredibly guilty. Then again, who are we kidding: they're probably too busy shooting kittens and harvesting organs from children to worry about piracy guilt.

The DS isn't dead yet

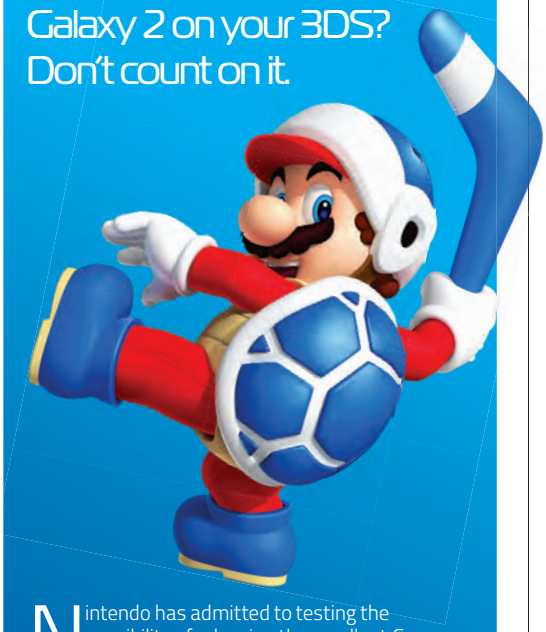


The 3DS is finally gaining steam, and the Wii U is right around the corner, so what does that mean for the humble DS and original Wii? Nintendo has no intention of scraping either, which is probably a wise decision given the huge user-base each has. It's probably also pertinent given that Nintendo is gunning for the core market with Wii U, so they aren't too concerned about giving existing players too few reasons to upgrade to the next platform. Finally, it speaks strongly about their plans for quality content for both the 3DS and Wii U.

Nintendo's super-duper leader of America Reggie Fils-Aime didn't go into any specifics, but he's adamant that both previous-generation platforms will have a place in the market for at least the whole of 2012. He claims that the DS (and, by implication, the new stripped-down PSP – whoops!) is perfect for the young crowd whose parents will be happy to spend $99 on a handheld.

Sony managed to keep a decent line-up going for the PS2 when its successor launched, so we see no reason why this couldn't work. The important factor will be whether or not Wii games are high-quality standalone products and not shameless SD ports of the Wii U's titles.

Want Super Mario Galaxy 2 on your 3DS? Don't count on it.



Nintendo has admitted to testing the possibility of releasing the excellent *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on the 3DS. They ditched the idea when they realised that it was far too difficult to play the game on the handheld's small screen (relative to a television, at least).

"When we started developing [*Super Mario 3D Land*], we displayed *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on a small TV monitor and found that Mario looked like a speck and that the game was difficult to play," said Koichi Hayashida, director of *Super Mario 3D Land*. "This led us to look into the camera and terrain types that would be conducive to playing on a portable screen with a relatively large Mario. If we were making a console game, from the very start, we wouldn't have been thinking about any of those things, and I think the game would have probably been a lot different."

So, while 3DS gamers who don't own a Wii will miss out on *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, they can at least rest assured that the game helped to provide them with the good times to be had in *Super Mario 3D Land*. Yay!

Battlefield 3 drops some sales figures

If you followed all that *Modern Warfare 3* versus *Battlefield 3* malarkey, you're likely very interested in finding out how EA's *COD* killer fared against its primary competitor. Well, according to the sales figures for the month of November 2011, everything went down exactly as was expected: *BF3* sold a whole bunch of copies, but not enough to hold out against the brute force of Activision's behemoth.

November saw another three million copies of *BF3* find their way into the hands of gamers eager for large-scale warfare. These numbers were revealed by EA CFO Eric Brown at the Baird Technology Conference in San Francisco. This put the game's end of November lifetime total at eight million sold out of the total of twelve million shipped. Those are impressive figures: but *Modern Warfare 3* still trounced that number, having broken the five-day sales records for any movie, book or game in history by making $775 million in just five days worldwide. *MW3* even managed to sell 6.5 million copies within 24 hours of going on sale. Looks like this ridiculous battle to topple the mighty *COD* is going to continue a while longer.

Last Guardian lead allegedly quits Sony

// Anyone who's been following the development of Team Ico's (*Ico, Shadow of the Colossus*) latest (ridiculously enigmatic and oft-delayed) title *The Last Guardian* should pay attention to this rumour: because if it proves true, this intriguing game might take even longer to finally reach your PS3. *Eurogamer* reports that Fumito Ueda, the game's creative lead and (former?) head of Team Ico, has left Sony and is working on the game as a freelancer.

The Last Guardian was already removed from the "holiday 2011" release window earlier this year, and a few months back the development team reportedly moved offices, relocating to Sony's headquarters in Japan. On top of that, Ueda's departure is allegedly putting even more strain on the title's already lengthy development cycle, which means we'll have to wait even longer to finally get our hands on the thing. Sony responded to the rumour, simply stating that "Sony doesn't comment on rumours or speculation."

// *Deus Ex* has now made it into Square Enix's list of stable franchises, which means that **we can expect to see a lot more content from this brand**. It now sits alongside the likes of *Final Fantasy, Tomb Raider, Hitman* and *Kingdoms Hearts*. The series will continue to be developed by Eidos Montreal, which will soon be expanded to accommodate simultaneous development of a new *Thief* title, an unannounced game, and further *Deus Ex* properties.

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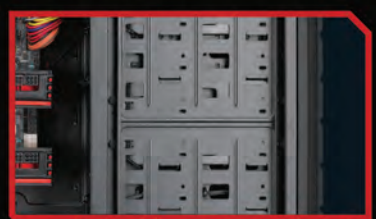


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A fractured community



Something that I wrote about a little while back was the frustration involved in getting local investors to back game development projects. While challenges like this are always likely, the situation isn't helped in a country where there's no widespread understanding of this niche industry. Even the success stories are still making things up as they go along – albeit with some care.

More recently, however, I've noticed people complaining about a slightly different stumbling block: the scattered and oft-bewildering local game development scene. Locally, the community of people interested in making games is far larger and more diverse than most people imagine. However, I like to think I'm excluded from "most people" in that particular regard. After working for years in what I consider a reputable group of communities and companies, I often like to imagine that if something significant was being done by South Africans in the field of game development, I'd know about it.

> **"I'm proven wrong considerably more often than I'd like to admit."**

I'm proven wrong considerably more often than I'd like to admit.

In game development communities everywhere, there's a frequent problem of members coming in out of nowhere after developing a new prototype or even a fully functional game. Their sudden presence in the community – their transparent attempt at "engagement" – is difficult to meet with anything but scorn. Arriving at a community and using it as a place to flog your hot new idea without contributing anything to the existing structure is something of a social *faux pas*, and with good reason. You've become that kid who arrives late to the birthday party – too late to engage in any meaningful activities, but curiously just in time to eat some of the cake.

You know; THAT guy.

In South Africa, however, that problem seems to be taken one step further by groups who seem determined to work in isolation from beginning to end: they're either unwilling to communicate with the local industry or they're unaware of its existence, and I can't help feeling that this limits our potential as a whole.

On the one hand, it's obviously a breeding ground for new ideas and approaches to common problems. South Africa hasn't become very rigid yet in the way it approaches game development and it is lovely seeing people break out of nowhere and occasionally getting somewhere.

But on the other side of the fence, there are too many cases of people who proceed with poor ideas and easily-avoided mistakes, crashing and burning and somehow telling other people in the process that, well, this is what can be expected from the local industry – not very good for the overall image of local developers. More significantly, the organised community is earning more favour and attention from journalists both locally and internationally. Actually achieving something in your isolated dev venture without letting the right people know is nothing short of a waste.

What causes this isolation and fracturing? Is it shyness? Is it not knowing where to go? Is it a lack of faith in the existing system? Perhaps the future industry will need its mavericks and revolutionaries to shake up the status quo, but in this tentative era of pioneers, we'll need every developer that we can to stand up and stick together. You know, for the greater good and stuff.

Rodain Joubert

Check out some tease-tastic art for Ron Gilbert's next game



So, we've known for over a year now that funny man Ron Gilbert has been working at funny man Tim Schafer's development studio Double Fine. Why is this pairing of random people important, you ask? Well, young one, this pair of legendary developers were essential ingredients in the brewing of the *Monkey Island* series of classic point and click adventure games: a series which holds a special place in our cold, dead hearts. Moreover, both of them were extremely influential in the creation of many beloved LucasArts adventures, with Gilbert having designed such titles as *Maniac Mansion*, while Schafer designed *Grim Fandango* – arguably the last truly high-profile adventure game before the genre's decline.

Since then, Gilbert went on to engage himself in a number of projects, most recently having headed up development of hilarious action RPG *DeathSpank* before leaving Hothead Games to dive back into bed with his old mate Schafer. Meanwhile, Schafer most recently gave us *Brütal Legend*, thereafter helping his team create a number of excellent downloadable titles for XBLA, like *Costume Quest* and *Stacking*.

Now that we've got a brief history embedded in that youthfully ignorant brain of yours, let's get down to business. It's not been known what Gilbert's been busying himself with at Double Fine, but we now have some art from the game he's working on (which is based on an idea he's had for a long time) to assure us that he's definitely doing something, even if Schafer isn't directly involved in the project. You'll find that art somewhere on this page. Here's a juicy quote from Captain Gilbert:

"Here are a couple of fine pieces of concept art from the game I'm making with the amazing folks at Double Fine. I'm so excited. This is an idea that has been in my head for a long long long time. It predates *Maniac Mansion* and *Monkey Island*. It's a game that needed to be made... That's all I can say right now, but more will follow later."

BioWare puts on a friendly face

EA continues to eat up social game development studios, this time adding Facebook-based games developer Klicknation to their ever-growing BioWare label. This purchase comes just months after the publisher acquired mega-studio PopCap Games.

The publisher claims that Klicknation is "known for combining in-depth storylines with high-quality graphics," and that their "expertise in building innovative and compelling RPGs for social platforms makes them a seamless tuck-in with the BioWare team at EA."

From the above, it seems as though EA won't be tinkering too much with the formula that Klicknation has put together to achieve their success. At the very least, expect more Facebook snin-offs of BioWare franchises, and with *Mass Effect 3* right around the corner, we're fairly sure where the studio is going to begin.





IO Interactive plans to move to new IP after Hitman: Absolution

That's pretty much all you need to know, conveniently placed right there in the headline. More words must be written, however, and here they come.

IO Interactive, original creators of the *Hitman* franchise, told *Gamasutra* that, once the latest title in the acclaimed series (*Hitman: Absolution*) finally sees the light of day, the IO team will split its focus. They'll be developing a totally new IP, while collaboratively working on a new *Hitman* title with Square Enix Montreal. Three IO employees will move from Copenhagen to Montreal to provide direction and assist in communication between the two studios, hoping to create a title that remains "faithful to the *Hitman* experience."

Not much is known about what we can expect from IO's new IP, but they have revealed that it'll share the same dark humour and antiheroic direction that they've become known for. Hopefully their split attention won't affect the quality of this new project. And hopefully it's better than *Kane & Lynch*.



NeverDead lands this month

Konami's *NeverDead*, the game in which losing limbs is merely a gruesome inconvenience, has had its release date pushed forward. Originally due this February on PS3 and 360, the game will now see release on January 31st.

The game is developed by Rebellion Developments, and the concept was born in the mind of Shinta Nojiri, game designer and director who's worked on several *Metal Gear* titles. The game sounds absolutely bonkers: if rolling around as a severed head, trying to collect all your freshly amputated limbs so you can, erm, reassemble yourself and continue your demon killing spree sounds like a fun time, be sure to save the date.

Resident Evil: China

// There's a rumour going around (which seems to be an incredibly popular thing right now) that *Resident Evil 6* might be set in China. This is according to *The Silent Chief*, who spotted the game listed on the East West Players profile of voice actress Wendy Mok. Her profile reveals that she's playing a Chinese villager/zombie in the upcoming *Resident Evil* title – which hasn't even been announced yet, but we assume to be in development. The listing has since been removed, but *The Silent Chief* managed to capture an image of Wendy's profile before it disappeared. Bear in mind that this is all speculation, so if, when the game's eventually announced, you find that it's not set in China, don't be too heartbroken.



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"10 out of 10"

Review scores are meaningless. We like to *pretend* they have meaning, because it suits our needs. Marketers and managers use it as a metric to judge the performance of their product or development team. Some use it to determine Christmas bonuses. Gamers use it to validate their confirmation bias. Everyone wants to know they were right all along, and get angry when the numbers disagree with them, because they take it as a personal attack.

Except the scores are *meaningless*. It's not possible to make a standardized metric. An 8 out of 10 for a racing game is not the same as an 8 out of 10 for a shooter. An 8 out of 10 from one reviewer is not the same as an 8 out of 10 from another reviewer. You don't know what the 8 out of 10 means to an individual person. One might argue "that's where the review text comes in", but in the bigger picture the review text is generally ignored. You don't see full reviews on the front of game boxes or in their ads, or on the various aggregate score sites like Metacritic. The score is given the stage, front and centre. It's easier to consume, and people are lazy.

"Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect."

Because scores are meaningless, it has forced people to cope by creating a series of shorthand interpretations of what the scores mean. For instance, right now, a 9 out of 10 – no matter the game or genre – means "this game is amazing and everyone should play it". So anything less than a 9 makes people instantly freak out, thinking it's not as good as it could be. All because it got an 8.9.

This situation undermines everyone's ability to be honest about games, because they're stuck playing by the unwritten rules of the score-driven industry. Publishers may pull advertising if their product doesn't get good scores. Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect.

One might argue that the aggregate score sites like Metacritic give a "more accurate picture" because it averages out the scores from multiple reviewers. Ignoring for a moment that Metacritic gives arbitrary or unfair weights to certain publications, making their scores "matter more" than another score, there's also the two problems of "junk data in, junk data out" and that reviewers have become a monoblock.

Quantity of a certain opinion doesn't make it more right, especially not when the situation creating that quantity of opinion tends to create the *same kind of opinion*. Arbitrary numbers are the best friend of passing trends and fads. Many reviewers as a whole could be receptive to a particular kind of game this year, but not next year. So they'll be nicer to the trendy game, and hostile to the untrendy, which makes their scores meaningless. And don't get me started on games designed to abuse the scoring system and manipulate reviewers by giving them exactly what they crave. Heroine always scores high to the junkie.

The obsession with numbers also gives reviewers a powerful memetic weapon. Without the numbers, a reviewer intent on stirring the pot would be left writing reviews that contain the word "poopy" repeated. But thanks to the industry's overemphasis on numbers, he just needs to give a game a 6 out of 10 and sit back to watch the world burn.

Miktar Dracon



Who's yer daddy?

Activision CEO Bobby Kotick does not seem the least bit threatened by *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, BioWare's hotly anticipated first foray into the grind-filled lands of MMO gaming. At least, he doesn't think it's going to be as big a money maker for publisher Electronic Arts (Activision's chief rival) as they think it'll be. Instead, he believes that the majority of profits will go straight to *Star Wars* license holder LucasArts.

"Lucas is going to be the principal beneficiary of the success of *Star Wars*," said Kotick at the Reuters Media Summit. "We've been in business with Lucas for a long time and the economics will always accrue to the benefit of Lucas, so I don't really understand how the economics work for Electronic Arts."

And then, not one to pass up an opportunity to gloat, Kotick later added: "If you look at the history of the people investing in an MMO and achieving success, it's a small number." Which is really just a slightly less boastful way of saying "we have *WoW* LOL."

Electronic Arts has previously stated that all they'd need to make the massive investment they've placed in *SW: TOR* worthwhile would be half a million subscribers. With BioWare's lauded name at the helm (not to mention the immense legion of *Star Wars* fans out there), 500,000 subscribers does not seem an unreachable target. But time will tell if Kotick's right, or if Electronic Arts has a true contender for the title of world's most popular MMORPG on their hands.

Deadly foursome

Here's yet another EA-related rumour to concern your rumour-obsessed brain with. According to an anonymous insider, *Army of Two* is getting another sequel (the previous one being *Army of Two: The 40th Day*). The big news is that this time it's called *Army of Four* and – you guessed it – it'll allegedly feature four-player cooperative play as opposed to the former two player co-op.

Apparently it's being built in the *Battlefield 3*-powering behemoth Frostbite 2, but from the sounds of things developer EA Montreal is not having a good time with DICE's engine. Development of the game is supposedly quite troubled, to the point where DICE might swoop in to provide hands-on help with the title. As always, until we get official word regarding all this, try not to take this rumour too seriously.





A typical example of a prisoner. Ahem.

Spot the new fish

Darwinia devs at work on something special

Introversion Software, the British studio behind the weird and wonderful games *DEFCON*, *Uplink* and the award-winning *Darwinia*, has a new game on the way, entitled *Prison Architect*. That means two things: **1)** Their prison breakout game *Subversion* has been cancelled and **2)** Simulation/management fans will soon have a dark, serious prison management game to look forward to.

The idea was born when studio lead Chris Delay was on holiday in San Francisco. After visiting Alcatraz and spending two hours chatting to a taxi driver who used to be a guard at the world-famous prison, Delay had the idea formed in his mind. It didn't take long to convince his fellow founders Mark Morris and Thomas Arundel that it was time to put *Subversion* to bed and begin production of this new game. They gave themselves six weeks to put together something playable, and in that time managed to build more of a game than Subversion gathered in its six years of on-and-off development.

Prison Architect is a partially story-driven sandbox prison building and management game. The player will be required to organise the construction of everything you'd expect to find in a prison: cells, showers, yards, eating areas, guard houses, electrical subsystems, sewerage, armouries and even execution chambers. It doesn't pull any punches, but its cartoon-like visuals should help to keep things from getting too heavy. Players will be able to build with as much attention to detail as they wish, with even small decisions like window placement having an effect on inmates and guards, as will the placement of amenities like libraries and exercise equipment. This being a prison, you'll also have to keep an eye out for inmates who are up to no good by concealing poisons and possibly dangerous items.

There's currently no date set for *Prison Architect*'s release, but from the way it looks now, we'd hazard to guess it'll be mid- to late 2012 on PC only.

Notch hands over the reins for Minecraft

// Markus "Notch" Persson, the creator of *Minecraft* and the game's lead developer, has given control of all future development of the title to Jens "Jeb" Bergensten. Bergensten has been working at Mojang for some time and co-developed *Minecraft* with Notch. He will be in charge of Minecraft from now on and will, as Notch writes, "kinda sorta become [his] boss". Of Jeb as the new lead developer for *Minecraft*, Notch said: "he's truly a great person to work with, and I feel very confident handing over the leadership of *Minecraft* to him".

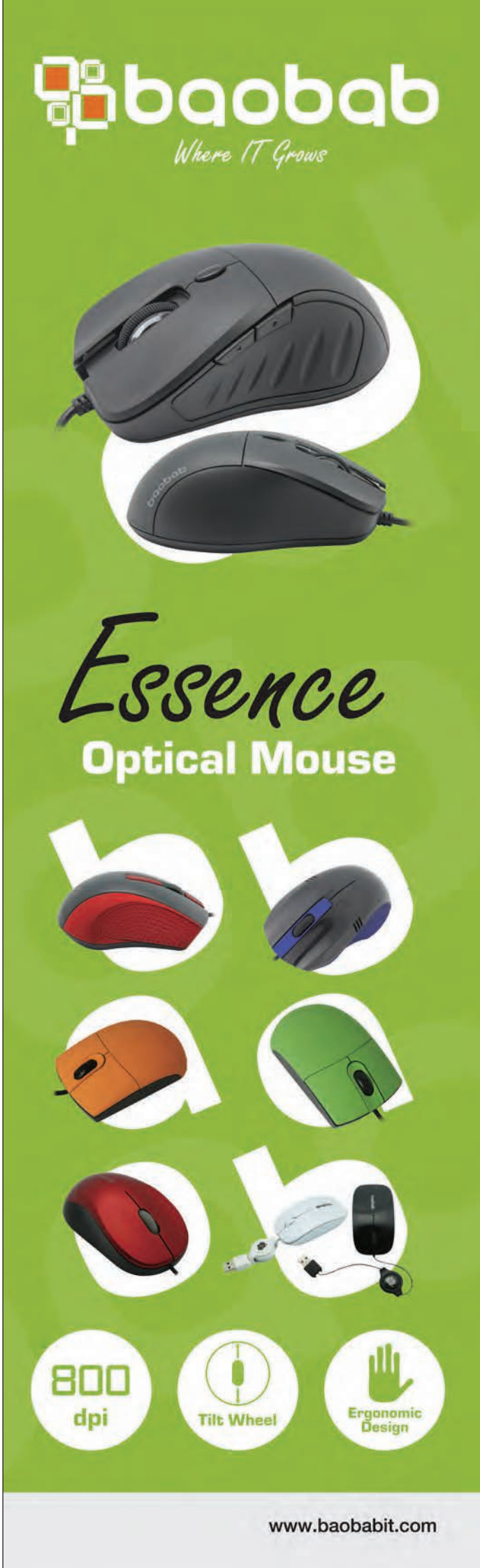
Now that the game is officially out (you can read our review in this edition), Notch plans to take a break before coming back to Mojang to start work on "some new project". It was revealed some time ago that the development team's next game will be called *Scrolls*; a card collecting, fantasy combat game. Whether or not this is what Notch was referring to remains to be seen.

Expect more digitally distributed games from Ubisoft

French publishing giant Ubisoft is pretty chuffed with the performance of Eric Chahi's download-only *From Dust*. The god-sim game managed to shift more than 500 000 copies via Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network alone. This excludes the sales through Valve's digital distribution shopfront, Steam.

According to Ubisoft, digital distribution is where it's at for releasing new intellectual properties. "There is less risk releasing a new game digitally. At retail, if you don't have a 90 Metacritic score and millions of fans, it's very risky to launch a new game. Look at *From Dust*: we sold half a million units on XBLA and PSN. Why? Because the prices were lower, but also because it was a new experience and people using digital platforms are more willing to test a new IP."

At present, Ubisoft has ten download-only titles in production across a myriad platforms including console, mobile and iOS. Upcoming *I Am Alive* has gone from download-only to full retail and back to download-only again. Expect to see more new IP from Ubisoft hitting the digital shopfronts in future.



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Support Lines

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

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Obsidian announces next title

Come on down to South Park



We've long maintained that Obsidian Entertainment is better at working with other IPs than creating their own, so it's rather good to hear that their next game won't be based on an original creation, but rather an existing one. But then, that existing IP is *South Park*.

You read that correctly: *South Park*. The studio has teamed up with Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators and producers of the show, to develop a *South Park* RPG built on their *Dungeon Siege III* engine. Players will take on the role of a new kid in town and will find themselves trying to balance becoming accepted by the existing kids and joining in a number of adventures. If it sounds weird to you, you're not alone, but there are some pretty interesting facts emanating from this announcement that have us intrigued enough to not write this off just yet.

The studio has access to 15 years worth of assets from the cartoon. That means it'll be every bit *South Park* as you could imagine, right down to the paper cut-out visuals and licensed voices. Players will use the town of South Park as a quest hub that expands and unlocks as you progress through the game, which turned into its own unique challenge as Trey and Parker realised that they've never actually had a full map of the town. As this is a role-playing game, players will be able to select their class from a list of five (warrior, rogue, wizard, paladin and a fifth, we're told unconventional, class made up by Eric Cartman), and players will be able to equip their character with all manner of strange weapons and equipment items, as well as elemental augmentations for weapons and will even have the ability to summon creatures. Combat will be similar to that of *Final Fantasy* (actually, it seems as though a lot will be similar to *Final Fantasy*), in that it will be turn-based, but with mid-combat options and interruptions to keep up the pace. Expect every old *South Park* staple to make its way into the game, including the gang of kids who you team up with, and the various other "factions" in the game including Girls, Gingers, Hippies and Goths.

There's no word yet on a release date or even projected platforms, but stay tuned for further details as they emerge.

Modders unite!

The modding scene for *Skyrim* on PC is surprisingly big, given how new the game is. Bethesda has always been quite happy to support this scene and made their games equally open, and they're not set to stop any time soon.

The studio has announced plans to release its development tools for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* for free on PC this month. This means there will be better support for modders, easier access to mods and easier installation processes (ideally, a standardised process too). In addition, the software will make use of Steam Workshop, which you may already be familiar with thanks to *Team Fortress 2*. This system will enable mod makers to share their creations on a unified platform which players can use to browse available mods, download them and flag them if they're particularly worthwhile.

Turns out EA's Online Pass codes can expire

// The one-use Online Pass codes that come bundled with new EA published games can expire. This came to light when a NeoGAF user reported having issues entering the activation code that came with his brand new, shrink-wrapped copy of *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit*. The code is required for all multiplayer modes and social networking features through the game's Autolog system.

Soon after posting about his experience with the expired code, a number of other NeoGAF users began reporting similar scenarios. This prompted some investigation on behalf of website Joystiq – they contacted EA's support desk for clarification. It turns out that the End User License Agreement in EA's games has a clause that notifies users that the Online Pass codes do in fact expire. *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* is just over a year old, but the bundled codes have already expired. Further investigation showed that the once-off codes for *Dragon Age II* will expire on 31 March 2012.

According to EA, getting a new code is free and simple; all you need to do is contact their customer support and they'll point you in the right direction. So be warned, if you pick up a first-hand copy of an EA game that has a bundled once-off pass code, and if it's more than a year since the game came out, don't be surprised if you're told your code has expired.

Killzone devs go indie



Breakaway indie development studio Might and Delight, which is made up of former *Killzone*, *Mirror's Edge* and *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* developers, has announced its debut title: Pid. This side-scrolling platform adventure game takes place on a strange world, and players take on the role of Pid, a young boy who finds himself trapped there.

Pid has a couple of neat tricks on his side to help him overcome the many typical platforming challenges and armies of giant robots that want him dead. In particular, he can "manipulate a powerful force that can be used to manoeuvre around the levels in thousands of unique ways," according to the developers. This force creates a motion tunnel similar to that seen in *Portal 2* that will allow Pid (and an optional co-op partner) to move about the level and alter its flow to suit him. The game will feature a number of locations that are presented in a hazy, dream-like manner, including attics, space stations, cities and castles.

Pid is due out sometime this year for PC and as-yet unspecified consoles. As with many indie titles, it'll be available for digital download only.

A new way to pay for Tetris



Activision has shown its rival publishers that annual subscription-based services like Call of Duty Elite are desirable and profitable, and now EA wants a piece of that pie. Well, it's quite a different pie, actually. EA has launched T-Club, which, for $29.99 (R245) a year or $2.99 (R25) a month, players will get access to a lot of stuff for *Tetris*.

The service includes access to new mobile challenges and content, exclusive discounts, "premium Tetris Log challenges", and the ability to boost player rank faster than the scrubs that aren't prepared to cough up the cash. T-Club has been launched in conjunction with an updated release of *Tetris* for iOS, which currently boasts over 100 million sales across all mobile platforms. That's a surprisingly large player-base, but we're not quite sure if milking those players for $30 a year is the best way to treat them. Still, time will tell just how successful this new service is.

Look & Listen



CHART TOPPERS / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

The Darkness II	February 10th
Syndicate	February 25th
Diablo III	March

Xbox 360

Final Fantasy XIII-2	February 3rd
Street Fighter X Tekken	March 1st
Mass Effect 3	March 9th

PS3

FIFA Street 4	March
Max Payne 3	March
Silent Hill: Downpour	March 1st

Wii

Pilotwings Resort	Available now
Nintendogs + Cats: French Bulldog & New Friends	Available now
The Sims 3	Available now

3DS

Metal Gear Solid 3D	February 1st
Resident Evil: Revelations	February 1st
Rayman Origins	March 16th

DS

New Super Mario Bros.	Available now
Super Mario 64 DS	Available now
Mario Kart DS	Available now

Kinect

Sports Champions	Available now
Racquet Sports	Available now
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	Available now

Move

Kinectimals: Now With Bears!	Available now
You Shape: Fitness Evolved	Available now
UFC Personal Trainer	Available now

Official LEGO Minecraft could be coming soon

// In case you haven't realised by now: we at NAG HQ absolutely adore *Minecraft*. Seriously, there may or may not have been a totally expensive international phone call between GeometriX and RedTide during which the merits of paying obscene amounts of foreign money for foam *Minecraft* pickaxes was discussed. This may or may not have happened at last year's Gamescom in Germany; you'll never know. (It SO happened).

All of that's irrelevant because word has reached us that Mojang is spearheading a drive to get official *Minecraft* LEGO sets produced. Seeing as *Minecraft* is practically digital LEGO to begin with, this holiest of creativity crossovers makes so much sense it's frightening.

LEGO has a public suggestions platform known as LEGO CUUSOO. Anyone can submit ideas for new LEGO sets, and once it's supported by 10,000 people, the proposed set is taken up to the LEGO bigwigs to discuss. Mojang has started their own CUUSOO drive for *Minecraft* LEGO and at the time of writing this it had already received 4,670 supporters in less than twenty-four hours. We think it's safe to say this might happen.

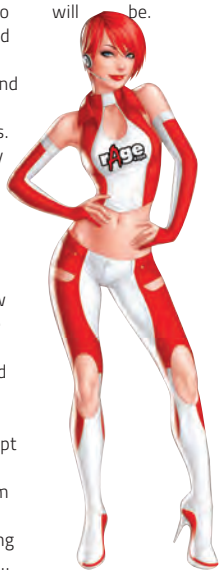
Any CUUSOO suggestion that actually makes it through to development and retail, earns the person or group who did the initial suggesting 1% of all of the profits. In the case of *Minecraft* LEGO sets, Mojang has confirmed that the 1% will be donated to charity if the LEGO sets are given the go-ahead.

What's that noise?!

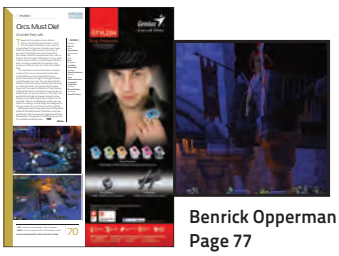
Thanks to the redesign we were rushed for time to come up with a new story for the badger. So, instead, we'll just tell you the truth. We're sick of him; we stole him from a stupid flash video like years ago and kept modifying him with more and more ridiculous ideas and stories. We've effectively washed away everything that was good and wholesome with our plagiarised garbage and now it's time to move on. Whoa! That felt good. Instead we're going to whore out a marketing concept and make you find Scarlett from rAge. See if you can find her hiding in the magazine...

Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere.

Send your sighting to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line **'January Scarlett'** and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



December Winner



Benrick Opperman , Page 77

Win!

A CTA Xbox 360 Carry Case valued at R479.99, sponsored by CTA and Bowline.



Games and console not included.

bowline distribution & logistics

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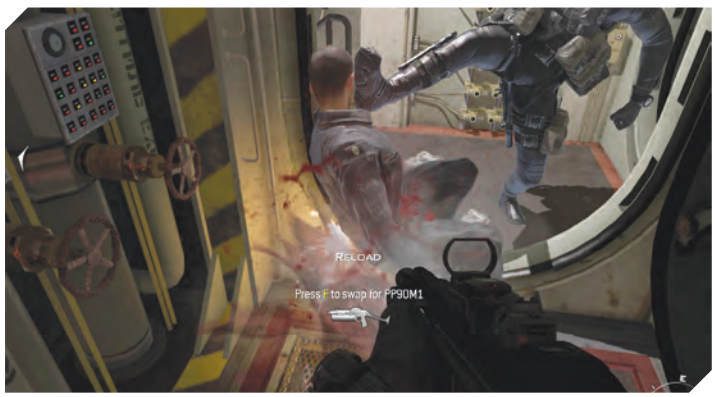
Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Saints Row: The Third* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'January Caption'.





NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / Must... not... look... at... boobs... eyes front.



LAST MONTHS WINNER / "FACEBOOT!".

- Matthew Visser

iBraaaaaains

More zombies! This time, they're on your iOS device, again. *Call of Duty*'s Zombies mode is a hit on PC and console (you may notice that we don't shut up about it), and now iPhone, iPad and iPod users will be able to get their hands on this scaled-down version of the game mode. This game is a sequel to 2009's *Call of Duty: World at War Zombies*, in case you're experiencing bouts of *déjà vu*.

If you have $6.99 (R55) to spend on a mobile game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops Zombies* will give you access to a single survival map (Kino Der Toten, with more to come in future updates), support for up to four-player co-op, and 50 levels of undead slaying action in the overhead twin-stick shooter Dead Ops Arcade. It's available right now, so buy it so that you never have to be more than a reach into your pocket or handbag away from terror and panic.

PlayStation Vita update

// Sony's handheld monster hits South Africa on 22 February, which is mere weeks away. Let's take a quick look at recent reports on the latest portable out of Sony's stables.

The PSV will use a new proprietary storage medium similar to Sony's old SD card range. The new PSV-only sticks are pretty pricy with a 32GB option setting you back about $120 or just less than R1,000. Ouch. Sony is insisting that the lofty price is for good reason: to combat piracy so as to ensure "an equal user experience for everyone". If you're planning on making full use of Sony's push for digital distribution on the new PSV, then you're going to need to fork out quite a bit for extra storage. The flip side of all of this is that rumours are circulating about digitally distributed games being reduced in price by as much as 40%. So for argument sake: while a boxed, physical copy of a PSV game might set you back around R500, the digital equivalent might only cost you about R300. This has not been officially confirmed by Sony, but the rumours seem to echo the company's desire to push digital distribution and focus on a tiered pricing structure for games.

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COLLECTORS EDITION
Pre-order the Diablo 3 Collectors edition which includes the standalone game, official soundtrack, a 208 pg artbook, behind the scenes DVD, exclusive in-game content and a 4GB USB soul stone & skull base
R100 deposit required to secure a pre-order.



End of days for Evolution Studios?

MotorStorm Apocalypse was good fun, people played and enjoyed it, but commercially, the game is cited as a failure. At least, that's according to developer Evolution Studio's group game director Matt Southern, who's concerned that the game's poor market performance and the current low level of interest for the game could mean the imminent death of the studio.

"It's been quite a tough year for us, especially early on in the year," said Southern. "We made a game we're really proud of and for some really heartbreaking reasons things didn't go so well. In perspective we've got nothing to complain about.

"I was worried it might be the end of Evolution," he added. "Racing has had a very tough time, even without extraordinary circumstances like the ones we went through."

He's not wrong, two racing-focused studios, Black Rock and Bizarre Creations were closed in 2011 due to poor market performance.

It looks as though the company has one last shot to keep themselves alive: *MotorStorm RC* for both PS Vita and PS3, which was recently confirmed by Sony. The studio will dedicate a portion of its staff to the project, with one other portion working on continued support for Apocalypse and DLC, and the remaining employees developing new ideas.

Blast from the past

Everyone knows that grid-based first-person dungeon crawling games are awesome, but if you were to ask us why exactly, we'd have no real answer for you. In a seemingly bold move, then, indie developer Almost Human Inc. Is preparing to release *Legend of Grimrock*, a grid-based, first-person tactical dungeon crawling RPG with all the bells and whistles of a modern title.

From the gameplay trailer currently available, we can see the classic movement system and mouse-driven interface combined with modern-day visuals that works very well. Combat will require some tactical thinking, and players will be able to kit out a party of four adventurers who will presumably follow the warrior/rogue/mage/cleric archetypes that we all know and love. Everything else from this humble era of gaming will be present including paper doll equipment screens, interactive environments and plenty of challenging looking puzzles.

If you're a fan of classic games like *Lands of Lore, Ultima Underworld* or *Eye of the Beholder* (which you should be), then keep an eye on Steam's upcoming release list around March.







IO Interactive plans to move to new IP after Hitman: Absolution

That's pretty much all you need to know, conveniently placed right there in the headline. More words must be written, however, and here they come.

IO Interactive, original creators of the *Hitman* franchise, told *Gamasutra* that, once the latest title in the acclaimed series (*Hitman: Absolution*) finally sees the light of day, the IO team will split its focus. They'll be developing a totally new IP, while collaboratively working on a new *Hitman* title with Square Enix Montreal. Three IO employees will move from Copenhagen to Montreal to provide direction and assist in communication between the two studios, hoping to create a title that remains "faithful to the *Hitman* experience."

Not much is known about what we can expect from IO's new IP, but they have revealed that it'll share the same dark humour and antiheroic direction that they've become known for. Hopefully their split attention won't affect the quality of this new project. And hopefully it's better than *Kane & Lynch*.



NeverDead lands this month

Konami's *NeverDead*, the game in which losing limbs is merely a gruesome inconvenience, has had its release date pushed forward. Originally due this February on PS3 and 360, the game will now see release on January 31st.

The game is developed by Rebellion Developments, and the concept was born in the mind of Shinta Nojiri, game designer and director who's worked on several *Metal Gear* titles. The game sounds absolutely bonkers: if rolling around as a severed head, trying to collect all your freshly amputated limbs so you can, erm, reassemble yourself and continue your demon killing spree sounds like a fun time, be sure to save the date.

Resident Evil: China

// There's a rumour going around (which seems to be an incredibly popular thing right now) that *Resident Evil 6* might be set in China. This is according to *The Silent Chief*, who spotted the game listed on the East West Players profile of voice actress Wendy Mok. Her profile reveals that she's playing a Chinese villager/zombie in the upcoming *Resident Evil* title – which hasn't even been announced yet, but we assume to be in development. The listing has since been removed, but *The Silent Chief* managed to capture an image of Wendy's profile before it disappeared. Bear in mind that this is all speculation, so if, when the game's eventually announced, you find that it's not set in China, don't be too heartbroken.



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"10 out of 10"

Review scores are meaningless. We like to *pretend* they have meaning, because it suits our needs. Marketers and managers use it as a metric to judge the performance of their product or development team. Some use it to determine Christmas bonuses. Gamers use it to validate their confirmation bias. Everyone wants to know they were right all along, and get angry when the numbers disagree with them, because they take it as a personal attack.

Except the scores are *meaningless*. It's not possible to make a standardized metric. An 8 out of 10 for a racing game is not the same as an 8 out of 10 for a shooter. An 8 out of 10 from one reviewer is not the same as an 8 out of 10 from another reviewer. You don't know what the 8 out of 10 means to an individual person. One might argue "that's where the review text comes in", but in the bigger picture the review text is generally ignored. You don't see full reviews on the front of game boxes or in their ads, or on the various aggregate score sites like Metacritic. The score is given the stage, front and centre. It's easier to consume, and people are lazy.

"Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect."

Because scores are meaningless, it has forced people to cope by creating a series of shorthand interpretations of what the scores mean. For instance, right now, a 9 out of 10 – no matter the game or genre – means "this game is amazing and everyone should play it". So anything less than a 9 makes people instantly freak out, thinking it's not as good as it could be. All because it got an 8.9.

This situation undermines everyone's ability to be honest about games, because they're stuck playing by the unwritten rules of the score-driven industry. Publishers may pull advertising if their product doesn't get good scores. Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect.

One might argue that the aggregate score sites like Metacritic give a "more accurate picture" because it averages out the scores from multiple reviewers. Ignoring for a moment that Metacritic gives arbitrary or unfair weights to certain publications, making their scores "matter more" than another score, there's also the two problems of "junk data in, junk data out" and that reviewers have become a monoblock.

Quantity of a certain opinion doesn't make it more right, especially not when the situation creating that quantity of opinion tends to create the *same kind of opinion*. Arbitrary numbers are the best friend of passing trends and fads. Many reviewers as a whole could be receptive to a particular kind of game this year, but not next year. So they'll be nicer to the trendy game, and hostile to the untrendy, which makes their scores meaningless. And don't get me started on games designed to abuse the scoring system and manipulate reviewers by giving them exactly what they crave. Heroine always scores high to the junkie.

The obsession with numbers also gives reviewers a powerful memetic weapon. Without the numbers, a reviewer intent on stirring the pot would be left writing reviews that contain the word "poopy" repeated. But thanks to the industry's overemphasis on numbers, he just needs to give a game a 6 out of 10 and sit back to watch the world burn.

Miktar Dracon



Who's yer daddy?

Activision CEO Bobby Kotick does not seem the least bit threatened by *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, BioWare's hotly anticipated first foray into the grind-filled lands of MMO gaming. At least, he doesn't think it's going to be as big a money maker for publisher Electronic Arts (Activision's chief rival) as they think it'll be. Instead, he believes that the majority of profits will go straight to *Star Wars* license holder LucasArts.

"Lucas is going to be the principal beneficiary of the success of *Star Wars*," said Kotick at the Reuters Media Summit. "We've been in business with Lucas for a long time and the economics will always accrue to the benefit of Lucas, so I don't really understand how the economics work for Electronic Arts."

And then, not one to pass up an opportunity to gloat, Kotick later added: "If you look at the history of the people investing in an MMO and achieving success, it's a small number." Which is really just a slightly less boastful way of saying "we have *WoW* LOL."

Electronic Arts has previously stated that all they'd need to make the massive investment they've placed in *SW: TOR* worthwhile would be half a million subscribers. With BioWare's lauded name at the helm (not to mention the immense legion of *Star Wars* fans out there), 500,000 subscribers does not seem an unreachable target. But time will tell if Kotick's right, or if Electronic Arts has a true contender for the title of world's most popular MMORPG on their hands.

Deadly foursome

Here's yet another EA-related rumour to concern your rumour-obsessed brain with. According to an anonymous insider, *Army of Two* is getting another sequel (the previous one being *Army of Two: The 40th Day*). The big news is that this time it's called *Army of Four* and – you guessed it – it'll allegedly feature four-player cooperative play as opposed to the former two player co-op.

Apparently it's being built in the *Battlefield 3*-powering behemoth Frostbite 2, but from the sounds of things developer EA Montreal is not having a good time with DICE's engine. Development of the game is supposedly quite troubled, to the point where DICE might swoop in to provide hands-on help with the title. As always, until we get official word regarding all this, try not to take this rumour too seriously.





A typical example of a prisoner. Ahem.

Spot the new fish

Darwinia devs at work on something special

Introversion Software, the British studio behind the weird and wonderful games *DEFCON*, *Uplink* and the award-winning *Darwinia*, has a new game on the way, entitled *Prison Architect*. That means two things: **1)** Their prison breakout game *Subversion* has been cancelled and **2)** Simulation/management fans will soon have a dark, serious prison management game to look forward to.

The idea was born when studio lead Chris Delay was on holiday in San Francisco. After visiting Alcatraz and spending two hours chatting to a taxi driver who used to be a guard at the world-famous prison, Delay had the idea formed in his mind. It didn't take long to convince his fellow founders Mark Morris and Thomas Arundel that it was time to put *Subversion* to bed and begin production of this new game. They gave themselves six weeks to put together something playable, and in that time managed to build more of a game than Subversion gathered in its six years of on-and-off development.

Prison Architect is a partially story-driven sandbox prison building and management game. The player will be required to organise the construction of everything you'd expect to find in a prison: cells, showers, yards, eating areas, guard houses, electrical subsystems, sewerage, armouries and even execution chambers. It doesn't pull any punches, but its cartoon-like visuals should help to keep things from getting too heavy. Players will be able to build with as much attention to detail as they wish, with even small decisions like window placement having an effect on inmates and guards, as will the placement of amenities like libraries and exercise equipment. This being a prison, you'll also have to keep an eye out for inmates who are up to no good by concealing poisons and possibly dangerous items.

There's currently no date set for *Prison Architect*'s release, but from the way it looks now, we'd hazard to guess it'll be mid- to late 2012 on PC only.

Notch hands over the reins for Minecraft

// Markus "Notch" Persson, the creator of *Minecraft* and the game's lead developer, has given control of all future development of the title to Jens "Jeb" Bergensten. Bergensten has been working at Mojang for some time and co-developed *Minecraft* with Notch. He will be in charge of Minecraft from now on and will, as Notch writes, "kinda sorta become [his] boss". Of Jeb as the new lead developer for *Minecraft*, Notch said: "he's truly a great person to work with, and I feel very confident handing over the leadership of *Minecraft* to him".

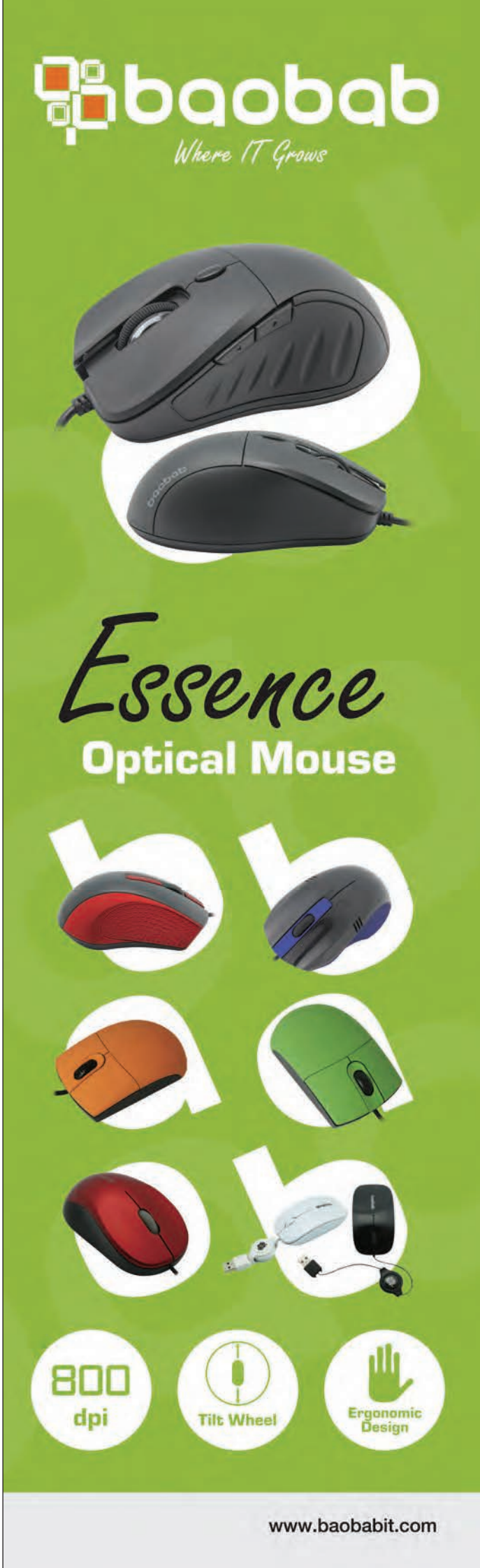
Now that the game is officially out (you can read our review in this edition), Notch plans to take a break before coming back to Mojang to start work on "some new project". It was revealed some time ago that the development team's next game will be called *Scrolls*; a card collecting, fantasy combat game. Whether or not this is what Notch was referring to remains to be seen.

Expect more digitally distributed games from Ubisoft

French publishing giant Ubisoft is pretty chuffed with the performance of Eric Chahi's download-only *From Dust*. The god-sim game managed to shift more than 500 000 copies via Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network alone. This excludes the sales through Valve's digital distribution shopfront, Steam.

According to Ubisoft, digital distribution is where it's at for releasing new intellectual properties. "There is less risk releasing a new game digitally. At retail, if you don't have a 90 Metacritic score and millions of fans, it's very risky to launch a new game. Look at *From Dust*: we sold half a million units on XBLA and PSN. Why? Because the prices were lower, but also because it was a new experience and people using digital platforms are more willing to test a new IP."

At present, Ubisoft has ten download-only titles in production across a myriad platforms including console, mobile and iOS. Upcoming *I Am Alive* has gone from download-only to full retail and back to download-only again. Expect to see more new IP from Ubisoft hitting the digital shopfronts in future.



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Support Lines

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

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E-mail: support@xtrememes.co.za
Number: 0861 987 363

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

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

Obsidian announces next title

Come on down to South Park



We've long maintained that Obsidian Entertainment is better at working with other IPs than creating their own, so it's rather good to hear that their next game won't be based on an original creation, but rather an existing one. But then, that existing IP is *South Park*.

You read that correctly: *South Park*. The studio has teamed up with Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators and producers of the show, to develop a *South Park* RPG built on their *Dungeon Siege III* engine. Players will take on the role of a new kid in town and will find themselves trying to balance becoming accepted by the existing kids and joining in a number of adventures. If it sounds weird to you, you're not alone, but there are some pretty interesting facts emanating from this announcement that have us intrigued enough to not write this off just yet.

The studio has access to 15 years worth of assets from the cartoon. That means it'll be every bit *South Park* as you could imagine, right down to the paper cut-out visuals and licensed voices. Players will use the town of South Park as a quest hub that expands and unlocks as you progress through the game, which turned into its own unique challenge as Trey and Parker realised that they've never actually had a full map of the town. As this is a role-playing game, players will be able to select their class from a list of five (warrior, rogue, wizard, paladin and a fifth, we're told unconventional, class made up by Eric Cartman), and players will be able to equip their character with all manner of strange weapons and equipment items, as well as elemental augmentations for weapons and will even have the ability to summon creatures. Combat will be similar to that of *Final Fantasy* (actually, it seems as though a lot will be similar to *Final Fantasy*), in that it will be turn-based, but with mid-combat options and interruptions to keep up the pace. Expect every old *South Park* staple to make its way into the game, including the gang of kids who you team up with, and the various other "factions" in the game including Girls, Gingers, Hippies and Goths.

There's no word yet on a release date or even projected platforms, but stay tuned for further details as they emerge.

Modders unite!

The modding scene for *Skyrim* on PC is surprisingly big, given how new the game is. Bethesda has always been quite happy to support this scene and made their games equally open, and they're not set to stop any time soon.

The studio has announced plans to release its development tools for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* for free on PC this month. This means there will be better support for modders, easier access to mods and easier installation processes (ideally, a standardised process too). In addition, the software will make use of Steam Workshop, which you may already be familiar with thanks to *Team Fortress 2*. This system will enable mod makers to share their creations on a unified platform which players can use to browse available mods, download them and flag them if they're particularly worthwhile.

Turns out EA's Online Pass codes can expire

// The one-use Online Pass codes that come bundled with new EA published games can expire. This came to light when a NeoGAF user reported having issues entering the activation code that came with his brand new, shrink-wrapped copy of *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit*. The code is required for all multiplayer modes and social networking features through the game's Autolog system.

Soon after posting about his experience with the expired code, a number of other NeoGAF users began reporting similar scenarios. This prompted some investigation on behalf of website Joystiq – they contacted EA's support desk for clarification. It turns out that the End User License Agreement in EA's games has a clause that notifies users that the Online Pass codes do in fact expire. *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* is just over a year old, but the bundled codes have already expired. Further investigation showed that the once-off codes for *Dragon Age II* will expire on 31 March 2012.

According to EA, getting a new code is free and simple; all you need to do is contact their customer support and they'll point you in the right direction. So be warned, if you pick up a first-hand copy of an EA game that has a bundled once-off pass code, and if it's more than a year since the game came out, don't be surprised if you're told your code has expired.

Killzone devs go indie



Breakaway indie development studio Might and Delight, which is made up of former *Killzone*, *Mirror's Edge* and *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* developers, has announced its debut title: Pid. This side-scrolling platform adventure game takes place on a strange world, and players take on the role of Pid, a young boy who finds himself trapped there.

Pid has a couple of neat tricks on his side to help him overcome the many typical platforming challenges and armies of giant robots that want him dead. In particular, he can "manipulate a powerful force that can be used to manoeuvre around the levels in thousands of unique ways," according to the developers. This force creates a motion tunnel similar to that seen in *Portal 2* that will allow Pid (and an optional co-op partner) to move about the level and alter its flow to suit him. The game will feature a number of locations that are presented in a hazy, dream-like manner, including attics, space stations, cities and castles.

Pid is due out sometime this year for PC and as-yet unspecified consoles. As with many indie titles, it'll be available for digital download only.

A new way to pay for Tetris



Activision has shown its rival publishers that annual subscription-based services like Call of Duty Elite are desirable and profitable, and now EA wants a piece of that pie. Well, it's quite a different pie, actually. EA has launched T-Club, which, for $29.99 (R245) a year or $2.99 (R25) a month, players will get access to a lot of stuff for *Tetris*.

The service includes access to new mobile challenges and content, exclusive discounts, "premium Tetris Log challenges", and the ability to boost player rank faster than the scrubs that aren't prepared to cough up the cash. T-Club has been launched in conjunction with an updated release of *Tetris* for iOS, which currently boasts over 100 million sales across all mobile platforms. That's a surprisingly large player-base, but we're not quite sure if milking those players for $30 a year is the best way to treat them. Still, time will tell just how successful this new service is.

Look & Listen



CHART TOPPERS / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

The Darkness II	February 10th
Syndicate	February 25th
Diablo III	March

Xbox 360

Final Fantasy XIII-2	February 3rd
Street Fighter X Tekken	March 1st
Mass Effect 3	March 9th

PS3

FIFA Street 4	March
Max Payne 3	March
Silent Hill: Downpour	March 1st

Wii

Pilotwings Resort	Available now
Nintendogs + Cats: French Bulldog & New Friends	Available now
The Sims 3	Available now

3DS

Metal Gear Solid 3D	February 1st
Resident Evil: Revelations	February 1st
Rayman Origins	March 16th

DS

New Super Mario Bros.	Available now
Super Mario 64 DS	Available now
Mario Kart DS	Available now

Kinect

Sports Champions	Available now
Racquet Sports	Available now
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	Available now

Move

Kinectimals: Now With Bears!	Available now
You Shape: Fitness Evolved	Available now
UFC Personal Trainer	Available now

Official LEGO Minecraft could be coming soon

// In case you haven't realised by now: we at NAG HQ absolutely adore *Minecraft*. Seriously, there may or may not have been a totally expensive international phone call between GeometriX and RedTide during which the merits of paying obscene amounts of foreign money for foam *Minecraft* pickaxes was discussed. This may or may not have happened at last year's Gamescom in Germany; you'll never know. (It SO happened).

All of that's irrelevant because word has reached us that Mojang is spearheading a drive to get official *Minecraft* LEGO sets produced. Seeing as *Minecraft* is practically digital LEGO to begin with, this holiest of creativity crossovers makes so much sense it's frightening.

LEGO has a public suggestions platform known as LEGO CUUSOO. Anyone can submit ideas for new LEGO sets, and once it's supported by 10,000 people, the proposed set is taken up to the LEGO bigwigs to discuss. Mojang has started their own CUUSOO drive for *Minecraft* LEGO and at the time of writing this it had already received 4,670 supporters in less than twenty-four hours. We think it's safe to say this might happen.

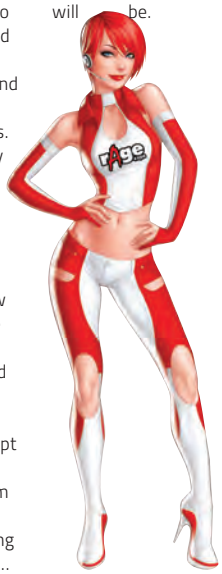
Any CUUSOO suggestion that actually makes it through to development and retail, earns the person or group who did the initial suggesting 1% of all of the profits. In the case of *Minecraft* LEGO sets, Mojang has confirmed that the 1% will be donated to charity if the LEGO sets are given the go-ahead.

What's that noise?!

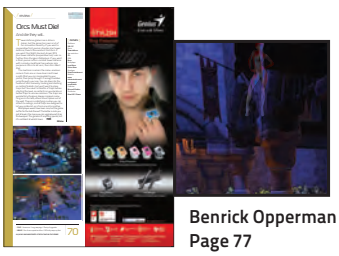
Thanks to the redesign we were rushed for time to come up with a new story for the badger. So, instead, we'll just tell you the truth. We're sick of him; we stole him from a stupid flash video like years ago and kept modifying him with more and more ridiculous ideas and stories. We've effectively washed away everything that was good and wholesome with our plagiarised garbage and now it's time to move on. Whoa! That felt good. Instead we're going to whore out a marketing concept and make you find Scarlett from rAge. See if you can find her hiding in the magazine...

Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere.

Send your sighting to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line **'January Scarlett'** and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



December Winner



Benrick Opperman , Page 77

Win!

A CTA Xbox 360 Carry Case valued at R479.99, sponsored by CTA and Bowline.



Games and console not included.

bowline distribution & logistics

CTA DIGITAL

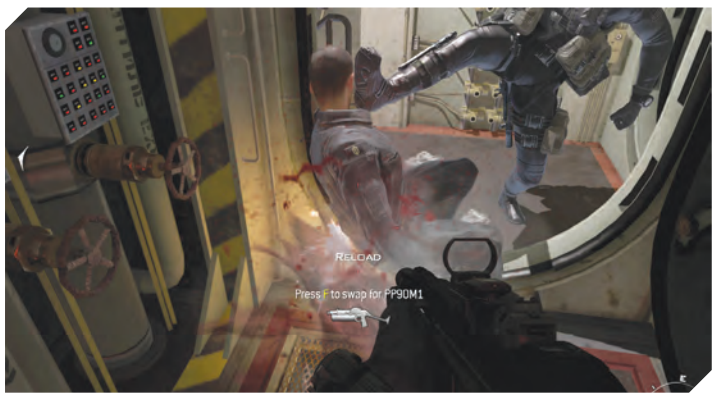
Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Saints Row: The Third* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'January Caption'.





NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / Must... not... look... at... boobs... eyes front.



LAST MONTHS WINNER / "FACEBOOT!".

- Matthew Visser

iBraaaaaains

More zombies! This time, they're on your iOS device, again. *Call of Duty*'s Zombies mode is a hit on PC and console (you may notice that we don't shut up about it), and now iPhone, iPad and iPod users will be able to get their hands on this scaled-down version of the game mode. This game is a sequel to 2009's *Call of Duty: World at War Zombies*, in case you're experiencing bouts of *déjà vu*.

If you have $6.99 (R55) to spend on a mobile game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops Zombies* will give you access to a single survival map (Kino Der Toten, with more to come in future updates), support for up to four-player co-op, and 50 levels of undead slaying action in the overhead twin-stick shooter Dead Ops Arcade. It's available right now, so buy it so that you never have to be more than a reach into your pocket or handbag away from terror and panic.

PlayStation Vita update

// Sony's handheld monster hits South Africa on 22 February, which is mere weeks away. Let's take a quick look at recent reports on the latest portable out of Sony's stables.

The PSV will use a new proprietary storage medium similar to Sony's old SD card range. The new PSV-only sticks are pretty pricy with a 32GB option setting you back about $120 or just less than R1,000. Ouch. Sony is insisting that the lofty price is for good reason: to combat piracy so as to ensure "an equal user experience for everyone". If you're planning on making full use of Sony's push for digital distribution on the new PSV, then you're going to need to fork out quite a bit for extra storage. The flip side of all of this is that rumours are circulating about digitally distributed games being reduced in price by as much as 40%. So for argument sake: while a boxed, physical copy of a PSV game might set you back around R500, the digital equivalent might only cost you about R300. This has not been officially confirmed by Sony, but the rumours seem to echo the company's desire to push digital distribution and focus on a tiered pricing structure for games.

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Pre-order the Diablo 3 Collectors edition which includes the standalone game, official soundtrack, a 208 pg artbook, behind the scenes DVD, exclusive in-game content and a 4GB USB soul stone & skull base
R100 deposit required to secure a pre-order.



End of days for Evolution Studios?

MotorStorm Apocalypse was good fun, people played and enjoyed it, but commercially, the game is cited as a failure. At least, that's according to developer Evolution Studio's group game director Matt Southern, who's concerned that the game's poor market performance and the current low level of interest for the game could mean the imminent death of the studio.

"It's been quite a tough year for us, especially early on in the year," said Southern. "We made a game we're really proud of and for some really heartbreaking reasons things didn't go so well. In perspective we've got nothing to complain about.

"I was worried it might be the end of Evolution," he added. "Racing has had a very tough time, even without extraordinary circumstances like the ones we went through."

He's not wrong, two racing-focused studios, Black Rock and Bizarre Creations were closed in 2011 due to poor market performance.

It looks as though the company has one last shot to keep themselves alive: *MotorStorm RC* for both PS Vita and PS3, which was recently confirmed by Sony. The studio will dedicate a portion of its staff to the project, with one other portion working on continued support for Apocalypse and DLC, and the remaining employees developing new ideas.

Blast from the past

Everyone knows that grid-based first-person dungeon crawling games are awesome, but if you were to ask us why exactly, we'd have no real answer for you. In a seemingly bold move, then, indie developer Almost Human Inc. Is preparing to release *Legend of Grimrock*, a grid-based, first-person tactical dungeon crawling RPG with all the bells and whistles of a modern title.

From the gameplay trailer currently available, we can see the classic movement system and mouse-driven interface combined with modern-day visuals that works very well. Combat will require some tactical thinking, and players will be able to kit out a party of four adventurers who will presumably follow the warrior/rogue/mage/cleric archetypes that we all know and love. Everything else from this humble era of gaming will be present including paper doll equipment screens, interactive environments and plenty of challenging looking puzzles.

If you're a fan of classic games like *Lands of Lore, Ultima Underworld* or *Eye of the Beholder* (which you should be), then keep an eye on Steam's upcoming release list around March.













Spec Ops: The Line

Beneath the desert sands

hands on tested / hands on tested / hands on tested

[details]

Release Date:
TBA
Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Third-person shooter
Developer:
Yager Development
Website:
www.specopstheline.com
Publisher:
2K Games

[trivia]

// Sand in the magazine bag probably wasn't the best idea. Just sayin'.

The last time we featured *Spec Ops: The Line* in this lovely little magazine, we put sand in the bag it shipped in. Don't judge us. It seemed like a great idea at the time. In a way, it's good that the game all but disappeared in the two years that have followed since I last saw it in Berlin, because it allowed us time to forget the poop storm that that tiny bit of sand carried with it. Seems you can't hide from your awesome mistakes forever, because the game has resurfaced in a big way – and we've finally got some real hands-on time with it.

First, let's run a brief recap on this whole "Dubai in peril" thing. The famously extravagant city is besieged by an incessant wave of devastating sandstorms, leading to a large-scale evacuation. The Damned 33rd, a US Army battalion renowned for its outstanding record both in combat situations and humanitarian efforts, volunteers to help with the city's evacuation, led by decorated veteran Colonel John Konrad. When the call comes in from command that it's a lost cause and the 33rd should just GTFO, Konrad and his troops disobey their orders in an effort to safely escort the last civilian caravan out of the city. They probably shouldn't have done that, because they'd barely made it out of the city before the sandstorm that all other sandstorms fear engulfed them.

Six months have passed since then, and it's assumed that there are no survivors in the ruined city. It's essentially been cut off from the rest of the world – until a distress signal from Colonel Konrad is intercepted, broadcast from within the city. This is where you come in, as Captain Martin Walker – leader of a three-man Delta Recon Team (who is also voiced by Nolan North, obviously) sent into Dubai to survey the situation, locate any survivors and report back. Joining you are Lieutenant Alphonso Adams and Sergeant John Lugo. It won't be long before you and your squad realise that there's something very, very wrong with this entire situation, and that Dubai has become a horrific microcosm of human nature, wrought with bloodshed and desperation.

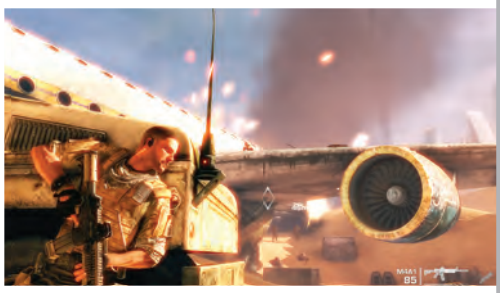
Inspiration for the game's story comes from Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness,* which also inspired Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now.* Anyone who's experienced those tales should know what to expect from the



game's narrative – which plays a huge role in separating this title from the third-person shooter pack. It's a tactical military shooter with a very mature theme, almost as if someone spilled a bit of horror in the blender while attempting to make an action-packed smoothie. Dubai has become a gruesome pit of human atrocity, with desperate refugees warring against mutineers from the 33rd battalion, set against a backdrop of simultaneous opulence and destruction.

Dubai as a setting for the game is certainly unique. Interestingly, the developers won't be taking us to any of Dubai's iconic locations, like the Burj al Arab. Instead, the game's world is simply inspired by Dubai's distinctively magnificent architecture. As such, real-world Dubai is pretty much out – but that doesn't make the developer's version of it any less impressive or instantly recognisable. Obviously, sand is everywhere following the storms, and scripted placement of the stuff lets you take advantage of it in a number of ways. Enemies standing on sand-obscured glass rooftops can suddenly find themselves in a very precarious situation if you shoot the glass out from beneath them. Sand piled up against enormous glass windows can quickly bury enemies within a bullet's notice. A nice touch comes by way of frag grenades: toss one of them on sandy ground, and the explosion will not only murder enemies in the immediate vicinity, but also kicks up a dust cloud that blinds and disorients









"Inspiration for the game's story comes from Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, which also inspired Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*."



enemies further away. Be warned: enemies are also able to use these sandy pitfalls against you. Those sandstorms also tend to be a massive thorn in your side. When they appear, the effect is both beautiful and terrifying. Vision is obscured, movement is hindered and you can almost feel the unnatural power of this natural phenomenon. They look and sound excellently monstrous as they turn shootouts into anxious scrambles for shelter.

Spec Ops' core gameplay is rooted in traditional, but solid cover shooter mechanics. It's satisfying, and the levels are designed in such a way as to allow for some choice in how you approach each skirmish. Flanking and high-ground opportunities are almost always on offer. The AI that governs both the enemies and your squad mates seems particularly polished, constantly acting and reacting to each other's actions as well as your own. Moreover, you're able to give your squad mates basic, context-sensitive orders, telling them which enemies to target so you're free to focus on others, or occasionally giving you the option to order them to stun foes. The developers are adamant, however, that this is not a squad-focused game – you're free to order your squad around as much or as little as you wish, and they seem entirely capable of taking care of themselves if you prefer a hands-off approach. The goal is to make you feel like you're truly this squad's leader, that your actions and orders affect them and alter their perception of you. It ties back into the narrative, which forces you into difficult situations in which difficult choices must be made. There's no morality meter, however, no good or evil statistic. Just harsh decisions trapped firmly in the moral grey area, often making you feel like an ass no matter your choice.

I've purposefully left out many of the particulars and story details I witnessed, because again: it's the narrative that's going to set this game apart and as such, it's best if you experience it for yourself. It's immediately intriguing, both because of the horrors you'll witness and because of the mature manner in which it handles the subject matter. *Spec Ops: The Line* is a tactical military shooter with a difference, one that has a ton of potential to be something special. **NAG**

Barkskin







Binary Domain

One to keep a close eye on...

[details]

Release Date:
Q1 2012
Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Third-person tactical shooter
Developer:
Yakuza Studio
Website:
www.sega.com/binarydomain
Publisher:
SEGA

[trivia]

// Producer Jun Yoshino worked on the under-appreciated *MadWorld*, *Resonance of Fate* and *Vanquish*.

// His father Nobuo Yoshino is a former CEO at Kawasaki Robotics.



The year is 2080, sea-levels are rising, and Tokyo is being overrun by intelligent robots called "hollow children". Only one man and his international peace-keeping squad can save the world. Playing as Dan Marshall, you're going to have to treat your squad with respect or suffer the consequences.

At the core, *Binary Domain* is a third-person cover-based shooter with all the trimmings like blind-fire and high-impact rifles. Smelling like *Vanquish* and playing like *Gears*, it'd be easy to dismiss *Binary Domain* as derivative. But that might be premature. There's a pedigree behind its development, and a lot of fresh ideas under the hood.

According to producer Toshihiro Nagoshi, creator behind the critically acclaimed *Yakuza* series, enemies are running off an entirely never-before-seen AI system. It's unclear right now if his words are hyperbole, but enemies will apparently flank, communicate and attempt to kill you in entirely new and intelligent ways. Your squadmates are running off the same advanced AI, except you have some control over it.

You'll be able to issue commands to your squad-mates either by buttons, or via voice-recognition through your headset. Trust is a huge part of the story, and in how your squad will react to your commands. The Ripple Link System (renamed to Consequence System for the International Release) governs how your team treats you and responds to your requests. "We wanted to create human drama in the action moments," says Nagoshi. Your choices, actions and words both on and off the battlefield influence your relationship with each individual member – if you're aggressive, courageous, cowardly or just a douche, it all matters. Put your team in difficult situations, speak to them badly (like calling them idiots via commands or voice), and they'll not want to put themselves in the line of fire for you. Conversations can even be divisive, setting one character off against another. They'll be less proactive and disregard commands.

Play intelligently, and you'll raise their trust. They'll act smart, offer strategies, talk to you more and provide cover fire even if you didn't ask for it. Your team dynamic changes your path through the story too. Different characters see different things in the environment, and will suggest different tactics or alternate routes.

You're going to need their help, because like *Vanquish*, there are plenty of killer robots and some are three stories tall. Enemies are detailed and kinetic; shooting their joints causes them to fall and claw towards you. Giant robots have huge armour plates that need to be knocked off with rocket launchers before you can go for their weak links. The trailers released so far show detailed environments, huge enemies, fast and agile humanoid robots, plenty of gunplay and even some jet-ski action. It's taken Japanese developers some time to catch up to the Western proficiency with the genre, but they're clearly not trailing anymore. **NAG**

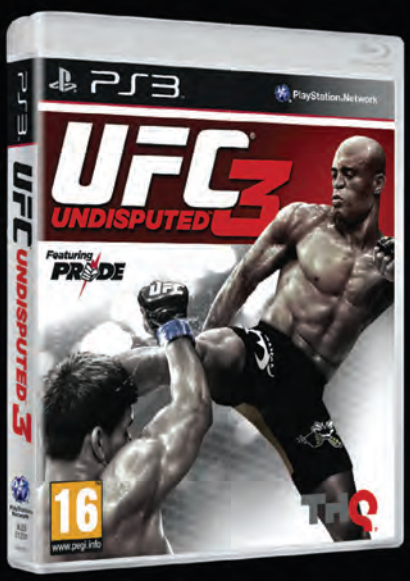
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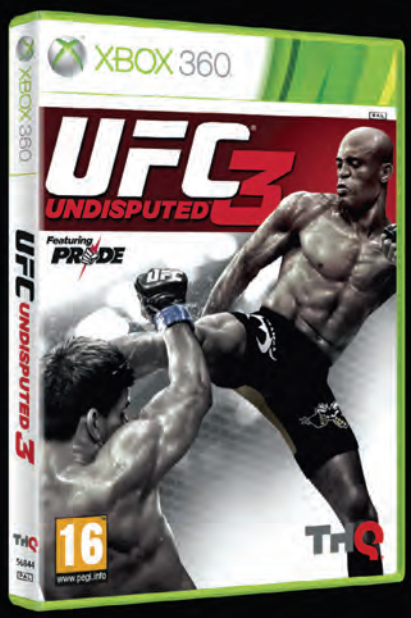


"Excuse me, shopkeeper, I'd like to return this avocado."

"There's a pedigree behind its development, and a lot of fresh ideas under the hood"







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Top 8

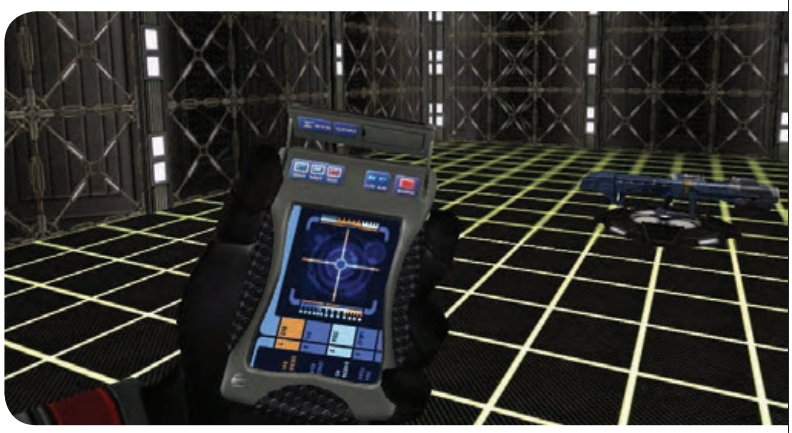
futuristic inventions that would make gaming better

Newsflash! Gaming is the greatest invention in humanity's history. It's better than the invention of writing, the Internet, medicine, television and infinitely better than those trashy *Twilight* books. It might even be better than Jelly Babies although some would argue that's pushing it. No matter how great gaming is, it can always get better. That's why we're turning our attention to the top eight futuristic inventions that would elevate gaming from "Awesome" to "More Awesome". And everyone knows that there's nothing more awesome than "More Awesome".

Take a deep breath and get ready to bask in the glory of science-fiction technology, which we've shamelessly lifted from more fertile minds than ours! Be amazed as we apply technology from the future to our present day obsession with gaming!

8 Star Trek's Holodeck

Alright let's get the obvious out of the way first. The Holodeck from *Star Trek* (or the X-Men's "Danger Room" if you prefer the slightly less geeky version) would transform gaming more than anything else. It'd also herald the collapse of graphics card manufacturers NVIDIA and ATI. It would also put Neo out of a job at NAG because there'd be nothing better for him to test. I mean seriously: how would being placed *inside* the game you're playing possibly get any better? There are a bunch of titles that would be obvious contenders for Holodeck awesome-sauce: pretty much any FPS, *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Super Mario Galaxy* spring to mind. There are obvious no-go titles as well: *Dead Space* and *Amnesia: the Dark Descent*, mainly because you'd be changing your pants every five minutes, and that would totally cut into your gaming time.



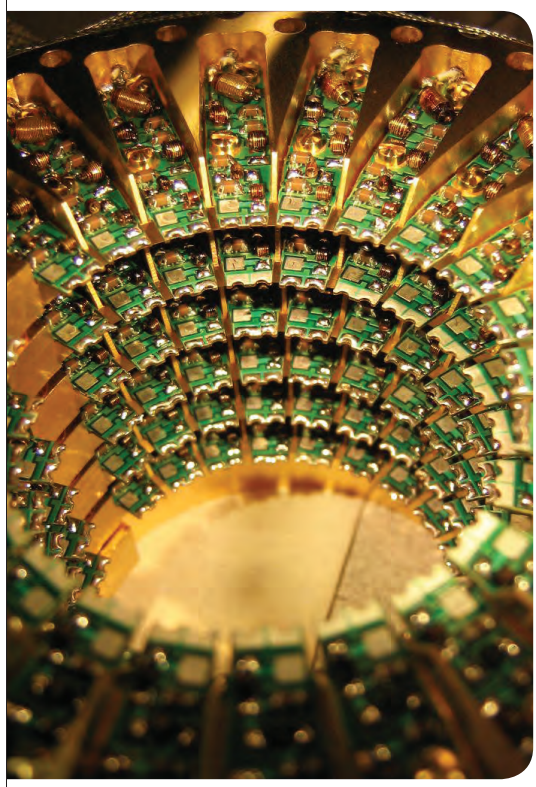
7 Teleportation

Not only would personal teleportation devices make your everyday commute so much easier, it would also give you no excuse for missing midnight launches at retailers, LANs or even expos like rAge. Heck, while we're at it, we may as well teleport to E3 every year, as well as the Tokyo Game Show and Gamescom.



6 Quantum computing

Computers with limitless resources? Do you really need this one explained? Obviously the first thing that anyone would do with a quantum computer would be to build a Holodeck, which renders this entry in our list completely meaningless. Why did we include this one again?



5 Cryo chambers

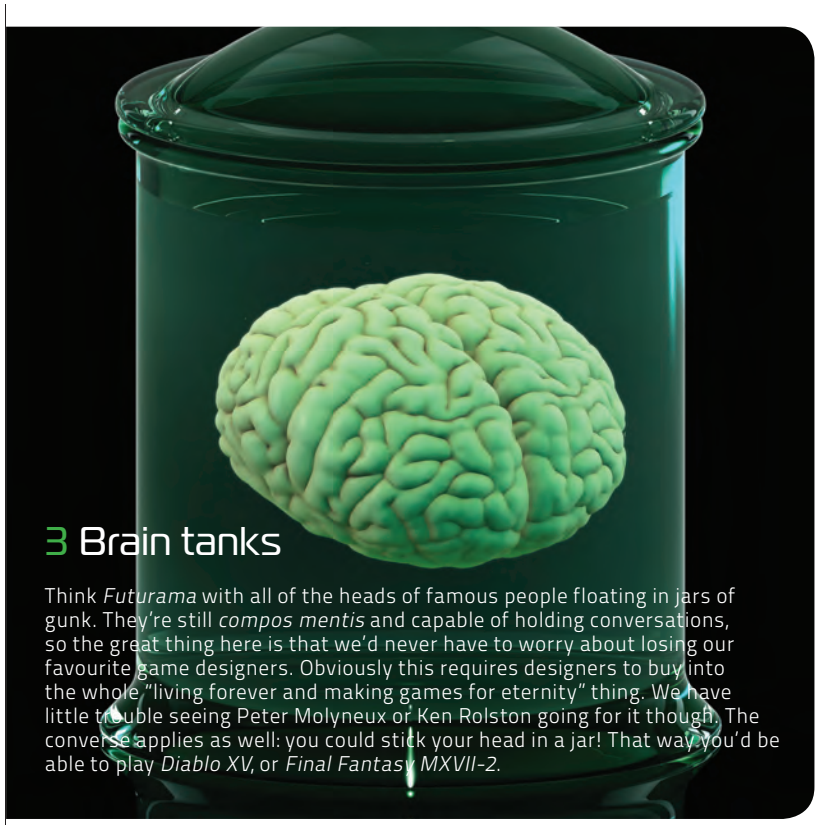
Gaming goes hand-in-hand with waiting. No really, it does. How long have you been waiting for *Diablo III*? How long was that wait for *Skyrim*? Exactly. With cryo chambers there's no need to worry about developers announcing must-have games four years before they're scheduled for release. What's that? *The Elder Scrolls VI* is coming out in 2016? No problem, that's "4" on the Cryo-Dial and the next thing you know, it'll be release day.



4 Memory wipes

The brave doctors and nurses from MemorYou labs now bring you GameAway™ tablets! With GameAway™ tablets you're free to erase any memory of games you've played, right from the comfort of your own home. Relive the legendary *BioShock* "would you kindly" scene for the first time, every week! See package insert for dosage; do not exceed recommended daily dose; do not take while breastfeeding.





3 Brain tanks

Think *Futurama* with all of the heads of famous people floating in jars of gunk. They're still *compos mentis* and capable of holding conversations, so the great thing here is that we'd never have to worry about losing our favourite game designers. Obviously this requires designers to buy into the whole "living forever and making games for eternity" thing. We have little trouble seeing Peter Molyneux or Ken Rolston going for it though. The converse applies as well: you could stick your head in a jar! That way you'd be able to play *Diablo XV*, or *Final Fantasy MXVII-2*.

2 Real Portal co-op

Portal is a great franchise. *Portal 2* introduced multiplayer to the series and in doing so ushered in a new level of co-operative gameplay. Obviously the next step involves real portal guns. They'd be sold in double packs dubbed the "RL Portal Co-Op Bundle". These would come packaged with a massive, inflatable Test Chamber complete with GLaDOS voice-over sound effects! Paintball *Portal* turrets and Weighted Companion Cubes would be sold separately.



1 Memory implants

How often has an amazing looking game comes out in a series that you know absolutely nothing about? You're dying to play it but you know all too well that the odds of you understanding what they hell is going on are slim to none. You need Memory Implants (patent pending)! No need to play a series' entire back catalogue before jumping into the latest instalment. Just set up an appointment at your nearest MemorYou Clinic to have hundreds of hours of gaming memories implanted safely inside your brain thanks to the breakthrough technology of laparoscopic-retinal-needle-memory-sowing!



THERE'S ALWAYS A LITTLE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

The Darkness was one of *those* games. It walked into a crowded room, barely saying a word to anyone, waiting for people to naturally gravitate towards it. Those that worked up the courage to approach it walked away with a new friend, one that was immediately likable and instantly cherished. The majority of them didn't even take notice of this quietly intelligent, unfamiliar thing standing in the corner of the room, opting instead to busy themselves with stuff that probably didn't deserve their attention anyway. What I'm trying to say is that the original *Darkness* should have been loved by all, but instead was largely ignored by... well, pretty much everyone. Shame on you, everyone. Shame on you.

The Darkness is based on the Top Cow comic book series of the same name. This sequel takes place two years after the original, time enough for protagonist (and wielder of the titular Darkness) Jackie Estacado to have used his otherworldly abilities to become Don of the Franchetti family. Life's good on the surface: but Jackie can't suppress the memory of his deceased girlfriend, Jenny. With a bit of help from occultist Johnny Powell, as well as fervent study into "Dark Essence," Jackie has managed to keep his unnatural powers contained: until an attempt on his life leaves him no choice but to unleash The Darkness once more, kicking off the sequel's story with a monstrous bang.

A new developer at the helm means a few changes are incoming, even though the game still feels oddly familiar. The most immediately noticeable change comes by way of the visuals. Textures are now cel-shaded to give the game comic book-style flair, with the artists foregoing digital cel-shading methods in favour of hand painting the majority of the assets. The result is a bit jarring at first, given the original's more





Release Date: **Q1 2012**
Platforms: **360 / PC / PS3**
Genre: **First-person shooter**
Developer: **Digital Extremes**
Website: **www.embracethedarkness.com**
Publisher: **2K Games**

realistic, even disturbing take on visuals – but the more I played, the more I came to appreciate its distinctive look.

While the visuals initially took some getting used to, I instantly felt at home with the gameplay, even though it's been years since I played the original, and even though a few changes have been thrown into the mix. There's a huge push for this whole quad-wielding thing, which allows Jackie to use dual-wielded firearms in a variety of combinations, while simultaneously having access to each individual Darkness tentacle (both of which have their own specific purpose). The control system is pleasantly intuitive: the left and right triggers control your left- and right-hand weapons (the left trigger allows for traditional aiming down the sights when not dual wielding), while the bumpers control the tentacles in a similar fashion. It feels brilliantly natural while at the same time adding a sense of chaotic glee to the action thanks to the sheer number of options you literally have at your fingertips. The left tentacle is used for grabbing objects, enemies and various other things that need grabbing, while the right tentacle is used for hacking and slashing at stuff. The direction of the right tentacle's slashing is determined by your movements of the right analogue stick – hold right bumper and push upwards on the stick for an upward slash that launches enemies into the air, for example.

The quad-wielding has been implemented in more interesting ways as well. Pick up a riot shield with the left tentacle, for example, and the tentacle lowers the shield in front of Jackie for extra protection, while he's still able to fire over it with one or both of his weapons. If you suddenly don't feel the need for the extra armour it provides, tap the left bumper again to have the tentacle hurl the shield at an enemy, potentially slicing them in half. Grab a long metal pole and the tentacle wields it like a spear, ready to be thrown at a moment's notice when you run out of bullets or get tired of wildly swinging with your free tentacle. It becomes second nature to instinctively grab enemies and just leave them dangling there, upside down, simply to keep them out of the way while you continue firing your guns at his buddies. You might feel the need to turn your dangling captive into a human bowling ball, or you might want to perform one of the gruesome executions on offer. You might simply want to slash at his helpless form with the free tentacle – the opportunities in each situation are satisfyingly numerous. It amounts to more than just making you feel like the super-powered badass you're meant to be: performing stylish, brutal kills earns you Essence. The more stylishly brutal (or brutally stylish) the kill, the more Essence you're rewarded with. Essence is then used to buy Talents at set points in the game. These Talents augment your abilities within one of a handful of Talent trees, each one focusing on a different skill,

The Darkling can be picked up and used as a projectile weapon that explodes on impact. Amazing.









V FOR VENDETTAS

New in *The Darkness II* is a narrative-driven, four-player cooperative mode called Vendettas. Its story runs parallel to that of the single player, allowing you and your buddies (although it's also playable solo) to choose between four unique characters, each with their own defining weaponry, Darkness abilities and back story. It's divided into a number of missions with varying objectives and will help enhance the game's storyline. Hit List mode allows you to replay choice moments from the campaign, or go wild in specially crafted scenarios. It's every bit as brutal and violent as the single player, now with added friends. These are the four playable characters:

1. Shoshanna: This no-nonsense agent of Mossad (the Israeli Intelligence Agency) lives to destroy evil wherever it may lurk. Fiercely loyal to her superiors, Shoshanna has access to the "Arm of the Night", a devastating weapon powered by Dark Essence that can fire multiple rounds at the same time.

2. Inugami: Wielder of the mythical "Kusanagi" samurai sword, Inugami seeks revenge for the slaughter of his family. He's forced to spill the blood of the wicked to feed his powerful blade in order to ensure his own survival. Can summon a swarm of miniature demons to attack and stun foes.

3. J.P. DuMond: Formerly a doctor from New Orleans, DuMond is burdened by guilt brought on by the side effects of the dark magic he once used. Brandishing his powerful Midnight Stick, he can throw his "Box of Tricks" into open areas to pull enemies into a deadly vortex.

4. Jimmy Wilson: This angry Scotsman hates the English, but loves slapping them around whenever the opportunity arises. A devout alcoholic, Jimmy's weapon of choice is the powerful "Dark Axe" and can also summon multiple Darklings – which he calls Little Jimmys – to inundate opponents.













officially adding "light RPG elements" to the list of the game's features.

Joining you on your gruesomely mature adventure is a single Darkling – an impish critter that'll help you out in a number of ways. In the original game, there were four different Darkling types to summon. There may only be one here, but he's got a distinct personality and presence that'll hopefully make you feel more attached to him. He can't be summoned either, instead seemingly appearing at will whenever the opportunity arises. That, and he can also be directly controlled (similar to the way the Creeping Dark tendrils could be) at certain points to traverse areas that Jackie cannot, with his own set of mechanics that govern the way you'll play when he's under your control. When he's not, he's surprisingly useful in a pinch, able to at the very least, keep enemies distracted, while at best he can be a totally devious miniature killing machine as he grabs bits and bobs from around the environment (like drills) to up his threat level.

Just in case the title didn't clue you in, darkness (and light) play a significant role in the game. If you step into the light, your Darkness tentacles retract (leaving you with only your guns to rely on) and you become weaker, while your vision gradually blurs and whitens until you're barely able to see your surroundings and whoever it is that keeps shooting you with angry bullets. Most lights can be destroyed (via gunshot or a quick swipe of your right tentacle) to bathe areas in shadow and keep you and your Darkness-fuelled companions feeling comfortable, but certain light sources aren't so easy to extinguish. For example, in one area I was forced to hunt down generators to shut down particularly troublesome lights. Certain enemies also carry light grenades (or something), which are massively disorienting when they go off right in front of your face. Just as the darkness/light dynamic was in the original game, it's another layer of depth in an already deep FPS.

So, is there reason to be excited for The *Darkness II*? Put simply: yes, there most certainly is. It's looking to be a gruesome, gratifying and extremely fluid first-person action experience, one that hopes to do the source material proud once again. With the announcement of the Vendettas cooperative mode (which you'll find described somewhere on these pages), the deal keeps getting sweeter. If all goes according to plan and the game comes out the other end as good as the preview code I played leads me to believe it will be, then this series might finally get the recognition it deserves. **NAG**

Barkskin

The reviewers

Question: This is a cliché but it's also the end of the year... What is your noblest New Year's resolution for 2012 that is most likely to fail?

RedTide



I will spend less time playing games and more time doing everything else.

Miktar



I resolve to not give a bullcarp about idjits with ignorant and uninformed proclamations about games. Hah.

Azimuth



I don't fail my New Year's resolutions. I just change my mind about them. It's a female class skill.

Mikit0707



I resolve to try and get into Japanese Role Pla- ha! Yeah right, I can't even type that without knowing it's a brazen lie.

GeometriX



To come up with more imaginative answers for these ridiculous questions.

Barkskin



To survive the apocalypse. Sure, it's not particularly noble – but if games have taught me anything, it's that the real fun only begins when the world ends.

Ramjet



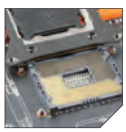
To finish writing my novel... it has failed for seven years running now, so odds are...

SAVAGE



I will try to figure out why I really need nine e-mail addresses.

ShockG



Finding a CB-Free, 2600+ IMC and 6.2 Ghz+ LN2 3960X with the next sample.

Anatomy of a review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

/1/ Totally interesting stuff: Developer, publisher, platform, random junk and more. The number of players listed under multiplayer is the maximum number you can have in a game at one time. Local means "couch", not LAN.

/2/ Obligatory words (i.e. a review): This is the stuff you probably won't read before ogling the shiny pictures, glancing at the score and then flipping the page. We don't blame you – word-reading is hard.

/3/ Screenshots: These are the pretty pictures you'll probably stare at before peeking at the score, ignoring the wonderful review and then flipping the page. You should probably ask your mom to make your sandwiches too. Just to be on the safe side. You might cut yourself.

/4/ Captions: Funny. Informative. Touching. The captions are usually none of these things. Except maybe touching, when we put some innuendo in there.


/ review /

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds 5

An amazing dog saves the universe. Woof.

6

details

1

2

3

4

7

90

/5/ Game name: The most reading you'll do will likely happen in this bit right here.

/6/ Award: Comes in three delicious flavours. See below for maximum info.

/7/ Those things with extra info: These things have extra info.

THE AWARDS

Editor's Choice: If a game gets this award, you know it's more than just good. It means it pulled the editor away from *Call of Duty* for long enough to actually play another game – and we can't think of anything more remarkable than that.



Must Play: It means exactly what it says: you must play this game. Beg your parents for cash, dole out sexual favours, etc. – fight past the pain and do whatever it takes to get your sweaty paws on it. You'll thank us for it later.



Pony: You know how everyone wants a pony? Yeah, that's not the case here and we're not just being mean. We're trying to protect you from the horror of being punched in the nether regions by thoroughly rubbish games.



THE SCORE BOX

/1/ Plus: These are the great things that make us happy.

/2/ Minus: These are the rubbish things that make us sad.

/3/ Bottom line: The waffle stops here. Hundreds of words distilled into a tiny bit of text that can either damn a game to the depths or shower it with praise.

/4/ The Score: It's a number out of 100. It lets you make an informed decision as to whether or not you should spend money on this game. This isn't rocket science, people.

1 / **PLUS** / Very detailed / Enthralling setting / Amazing graphics
2 / **MINUS** / Not enough detail / Boring setting / Rubbish graphics
3 **BOTTOM LINE GOES HERE; KEEP IT UNDER 15 WORDS, 15 WOULD BE IDEAL. THANKS.**
4 69

QUICK HITS

Dead Rising 2: Off the Record

There are only two good reasons to play a re-release or "gold edition" of a game: if you hadn't played the original, or if the re-release has enough good content to warrant those who had played the original to come back. At first glance, *Off the Record* seems like a shameless cash-in to ensure the Capcom executives who missed out on last month's Ferrari binge at least get a Porsche, but it's more than that. There's enough content that's new, and importantly, enough that's changed, to give even those who have played *Dead Rising 2* to completion a reason to return and slay the same zombies in different ways.

The only letdown here is that, other than his not-at-all-missed photography skills, there's functionally nothing that separates Frank West from Chuck Greene. At least the story has been mixed around a bit to accommodate the new character, and it even manages to feel natural to have a completely different protagonist.

// Worth your time, even if it's just for sandbox mode.

Farming Simulator 2011 Platinum Edition

Farming games *are* fun. Well, they can be if they're called *Harvest Moon*. We guess *FarmVille* counts as well, but only begrudgingly. The point is that this title is not fun. It's as boring as real farming, but without the slap-up farmhouse breakfast to start the day or a pack of awesome dogs that eat crows and shoot laser beams out their eyes. That's still farming, right? I'm sure it is.

This is the game that ignorant people think you're playing when they see you having a great time with *Harvest Moon*. It includes a variety of sponsored, official equipment that you'll struggle to use because you're a born and bred city boy/girl, and the tractors do that slight swaying thing like in *Desert Bus*, because *that's* super fun. If you do happen to know a thing or two about farming, then maybe this will appeal to you due to the familiarity involved in sitting on a noisy tractor for two hours, or the feeling of complete loneliness where your only interaction with the outside world is when you sell them corn every second week. The only advantage to playing this game over actually going out there and doing it is the lack of sunburn.

// A boring simulator that doesn't even try to be fun.

WEB SCORES

How do we measure up? We scour the 'Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.

NAG / Metacritic average / Game Rankings average

Assassin's Creed: Revelations



90
80
81

Minecraft



90
94
95

Sonic Generations



82
78
79

Super Mario 3D Land



91
90
90

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim



90
95
96

Uncharted 3



94
92
93

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Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Drake's irrepressible stubble returns for another epic adventure



Fortune hunter Nathan Drake returns for a third outing in Naughty Dog's latest PS3 exclusive, and the result is a glossy and polished blockbuster in the truest sense. *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* sees our protagonist searching for a legendary lost city, the Iram of the Pillars, which is said to be found amidst a vast Arabian desert. Of course, such an endeavour can hardly be expected to be a straightforward one, and Drake's quest sees him making stop-overs in places as diverse as France, London and Colombia, all the while solving puzzles, despatching enemies and hiding from clandestine organisations with agendas that are less-than-noble at best. Making return appearances in *Uncharted 3* are Drake's mentor Sully, roguish and reckless adventurer Chloe Frazer, and Drake's on-again off-again love interest Elena Fisher. Naughty Dog have also skilfully seized the opportunity to flesh out the back-stories for their now well-known characters and their relationships with each other, paying particular attention to the origins of the Drake/Sully partnership. It's a refreshing and even touching diversion from the breakneck pace at which the main story progresses and it helps to develop the emotional connections players have with these already familiar characters.

The overarching plot itself is replete with the Hollywood-inspired twists that have become a hallmark of the series, and it manages to progress at a fast enough pace and with interesting enough characters that even its plot holes can be easily overlooked. *Uncharted 3* really is the video game counterpart to the typical "popcorn movie" action film – it's fast, flashy and exciting, even if that comes at the price of logic and plausibility. It's a formula that worked well for its predecessors, and it works well here too, ensuring that even those with the shortest of attention spans probably won't find *Uncharted 3* becoming tedious.

When it comes to direct comparisons between *Drake's Deception* and its predecessors, the changes initially seem quite subtle. Anyone who's played the previous games will be instantly familiar with the game's fundamental concepts of climbing up walls, leaping across gaps and generally shooting at anything that moves, but that's not to



[details]

Platforms:
PS3
Genre:
Action-adventure
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 10 players
Developer:
Naughty Dog
Website:
www.unchartedthegame.com
Publisher:
SCEE
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment







suggest that their hasn't been some improvement made. The most significant change comes in the form of refined melee combat – Drake's hand-to-hand confrontations have historically felt somewhat clumsy and tedious, requiring little finesse and relying extensively on button-mashing. This time around, melee combat has been overhauled to include environmental attacks, smarter counter attacks and more challenging opponents. Hand-to-hand combat is a now a fluid and intuitive affair. Sure, you can continue to wail away at your opponent with punches and kicks, but you can just as easily pin him against a wall, or slam him into a table, or even take a swing at him with the broken bottle you found lying at your feet. It's an impressive refinement of the game's combat system, and one that makes the overall experience feel far more spontaneous than it ever has in the past.

As was the case with its forerunners, *Drake's Deception* benefits greatly from intelligently designed levels that allow you to play through the game according to your own personal proclivities. If you favour the element of surprise, you can pop out from cover with guns blazing as you sprint through the environments mowing down your foes. If you prefer a slower and stealthier approach, you can sneak up behind your enemies and silently grapple them into submission. You can swing from ropes and make death defying leaps as you race for the nearest exit if you'd rather flee than fight. Whichever way you choose to play the game, you'll find that the action blends seamlessly into a fast-paced and incredibly entertaining experience. Continuing the tradition of the series, the action segments are punctuated by puzzles that need to be solved. None of them are especially complex, but should you find yourself stuck on any particular one for a prolonged period of time, the game will offer you progressively more explicit suggestions to help you solve it. It's clear that the developers wanted the game to flow as smoothly as possible from beginning to end, and they skilfully manage to gently push players in the right direction without becoming heavy-handed.

If one had to pick three fundamental aspects that comprise the gaming experience in any *Uncharted* title, they would of course be the combat, the puzzles and the epic set-pieces. *Drake's Deception* honours the franchise's well established tradition, providing a liberal-sprinkling of flashy and exciting set-pieces that could put most movie studios to shame. They're memorable, surprising and undeniably cool, the kind of "oh snap" moments that showcase precisely why *Uncharted 3* is at the top of its genre.

Another area where *Uncharted 3* has taken some significant forward strides is its multiplayer offering. Once again, there are both competitive and co-operative modes of play available. The adventure mode lets you team up with friends to take on some sequences cut from the campaign mode, and the result is thoroughly entertaining. The segments have been modified to remove their puzzle components, so what players are left with are pacey action sequences that reward teamwork and co-operation. Two other co-operative multiplayer modes round out the offering, though the game's biggest multiplayer attraction is likely to be the competitive offering that, owing to the inherent agility of the *Uncharted* characters, forces players to stay on their toes should they wish to survive. The game also implements its own adaptation of the "Perks" mechanic seen in various FPS titles, giving players upgradeable "Boosters" and "Kickbacks" that grow as you garner online

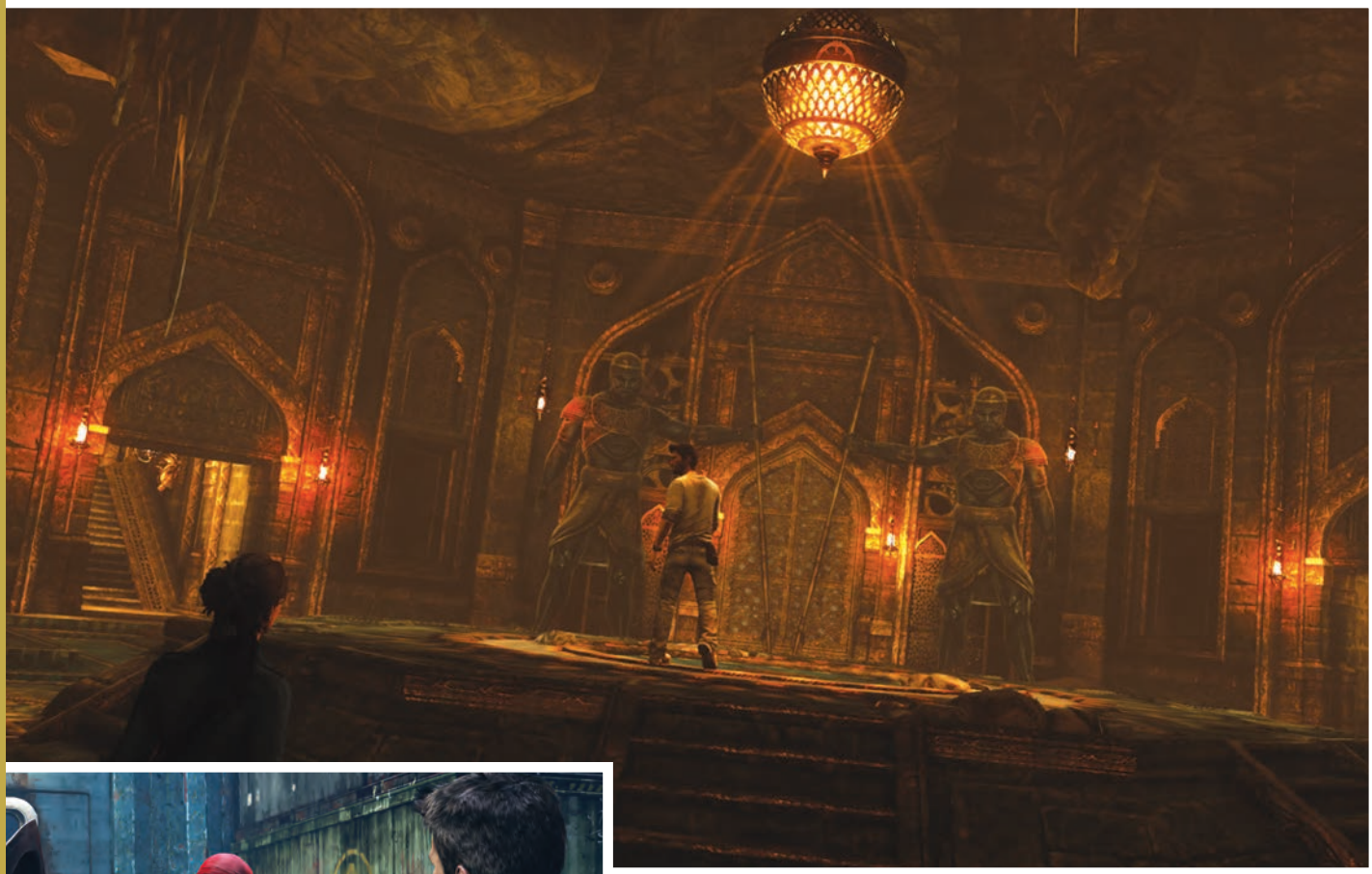




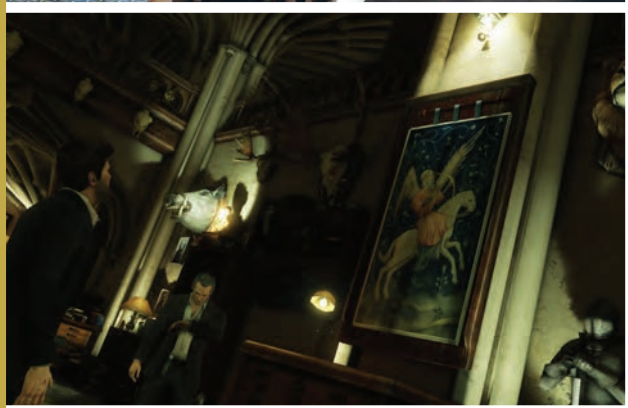




/1/ When asked about their plans for the next title in the *Uncharted* series, game director Justin Richmond said this: "We've always said that there are a ton of Drake adventures out there and we haven't told all of them yet, and as long as fans want the games and as long as we find something that's interesting and will push the medium forward, we'll continue to make them. But we haven't decided what the next thing is."









experience, providing a fulfilling sense of accomplishment even if you're not the winning player.

In terms of presentation, *Uncharted 3* pushes the envelope, setting a new standard not just for the franchise, but the genre as a whole. The sweeping soundtrack deftly shifts its focus to complement the action at every turn, and the aural experience is bolstered by convincing sound effects that accompany every gunshot and explosion. The voice actors do wonderful service to the well-crafted script, and Drake's infamous one-liners make a welcome reappearance. The diverse landscapes are all beautifully detailed, and fluid character animation is combined with dazzling visual effects to put *Drake's Deception* firmly at the top of its class.

Of course, for all the praise that *Uncharted 3* deserves, it is not without its flaws. The AI, though improved from the previous title, is still subject to some erratic behaviour, and the game offers little in the way of replay value, except possibly to collect those pesky hidden treasures that populate each of its varied levels. Fortunately, the deficit of single player replay value is mitigated by the game's strong multiplayer offering. Perhaps when all is said and done, *Uncharted 3*'s deepest weakness is quite intimately related to its greatest strength. With the *Uncharted* franchise, Naughty Dog have always set out to craft games that offer an almost cinematic experience, and *Drake's Deception* comes close to realising that ideal. The game's whirlwind story, explosive action sequences, swift pace and glossy finish evoke exactly the kind of response that a silver-screen blockbuster would. Of course, the side effect to this is that players might find themselves feeling like a spectator to the whole ordeal rather than a participant in it.

Although you'll spend the game controlling Drake's actions, you'll remain tethered to the game's precisely crafted script of events throughout, that same script of events that keeps the action flowing and the game's energy so persistently high.

It's an unfair criticism to level at the game since it is, after all, an action title rather than an RPG, and it's supposed to be first and foremost about the spectacle. And to that end, it's hard to fault *Drake's Deception*; it's quite literally a lustrous thrill-ride of a game that never lets up on the action, and it does so with gorgeous visuals, stirring sound, a colourful cast of characters and some truly impressive production values. It's a step forward for the series in almost every sphere, serving to further refine the already winning formula employed by its predecessors, and it's a game that is sure to find a place in every PS3 owner's library. **NAG**

Madman

/ **PLUS** / Beautiful visuals / Exciting combat / Stunning set-pieces / Strong multiplayer offering
/ **MINUS** / Feels occasionally restrictive

MASTERFUL IN ITS EXECUTION, *DRAKE'S DECEPTION* DESERVES ITS PLACE AT THE VERY TOP OF THE ACTION-ADVENTURE GENRE.

94

New Year's Resolution:

• Keep Playing ☑

PlayStation Portable

PSP Bundle

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1 x PSP 3000 Console, Avatar: The Legend Of Aang game & Secret Agent Clank game

R1 599

Exclusive to Look & Listen

NINTENDO 3DS

3DS Bundle

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1 x White Nintendo 3DS Console & Super Mario 3D Land game

R2 399

XBOX 360

Xbox 360 Bundle

Bundle includes:
1 x 250GB Xbox 360 Console, 1 x Wireless Controller, Forza Motorsport 3 game, Batman Arkham City game, Crysis 2 Full Game Download & 3 Months Live membership

R2 999 Save R300

Exclusive to Look & Listen

PS3 PlayStation 3

PS3 Bundle

Bundle includes:
1 x 320GB PS3 Console, 2 x Wireless Controllers, Blu-ray remote, Gran Turismo 5 Platinum game & Killzone 3 Platinum game

R4 199 Save R200

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

FUS RO DAH!

How does one describe a game that only barely manages to stay focused long enough to define itself? Oh, sure, this is a role-playing game; that's the easy part: it has a story and important characters and places to visit, and you get to be the hero and all that good stuff. But it's so much more than that. *Skyrim* is epic; not in the sense that someone who spends too much time on the Internet would use the word, but in the sense that there's nothing insignificant in this game. The world; the characters; the quests; the equipment selection; the dungeons; the magic; the crafting; the meta-gaming you'll find yourself doing. Everything about *Skyrim* is huge, and if you're prepared to lose yourself to its 100+ hours of wintery delight, then get ready to kiss your free time goodbye.

Skyrim begins with a familiar scene: you are a prisoner being transported, and you'll be required to describe yourself (through the character creation screen) to a questioning guard. This time, an executioner's block is your destination, and just as you're about to have your neck become close friends with a blood-stained axe, a dragon arrives in town and causes all sorts of chaos. In a typical fantasy game, that might be a common occurrence, but this is the first appearance of a dragon in Skyrim since they were declared supposedly extinct many years before. As it so happens, the re-emergence of this dragon (and many others) forms part of the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy that will spell doom for the world of Tamriel. And if you think that your character will play a big part in this prophecy, you've obviously been paying attention so far.

Here's the funny thing about *Skyrim*: even with an entertaining main quest line that takes you to many interesting places in the province, its scope pales in comparison to the rest of the game's content. This is its greatest asset and, depending on the player, possibly its biggest flaw (it has a few others, but they're more on the technical side). *Skyrim* has ADD. It's almost impossible to go anywhere or talk to anyone without being in some way subjected to a side quest. Sometimes NPCs will practically ambush you on your way to unload a backpack full of trinkets at the general store, desperate for your assistance because they like the way you hold a sword or are impressed

must play / must play / must play / must play /

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Role-playing game
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Bethesda Game Studios
Website:
www.elderscrolls.com/skyrim
Publisher:
Bethesda Softworks
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment









/1/ *Skyrim* retains the series' free-form class system but takes it a step further by removing class titles altogether. Now you can be that cannibal battle mage arrow-slinging paladin you've always wanted to be.

/2/ Another new feature is dual-wielding. Two one-handed weapons, a one-hander and a shield, two spells (different or identical), or any logical combination of the above is possible, which speeds up the bulky interface and makes battle mages all the more versatile.

/3/ As always, a few sim-like elements have made their way into the game. You can buy and kit out a house in each of the province's major cities, and can even take a spouse (heterosexual or homosexual, which is perhaps a tip of the hat to *Fable*) to keep the bed sheets warm.

/4/ *Skyrim* looks good on console and great on PC, but it's there where gamers who like to tinker will be even more spoiled for choice. A huge modding scene has already bloomed, so be sure to visit www.skyrimnexus.com and peruse the options that include visual improvements, interface adjustments and even additional content.







by your heroic swagger, or whatever it is. Fair enough, your character *is* a Dragonborn after all – one of the last remaining mortals with the power to channel Dragon Shouts that do all sorts of fantastic things mere magic wishes it was capable of. Just like this paragraph, *Skyrim* finds itself side-tracking constantly, and if you're not painfully linear in your approach to quest completion, you might feel bogged down by the amount of content that begs for your attention. Of course, that all depends on you and how you approach games like this. The way to fully enjoy *Skyrim* is to just let go; allow yourself to become completely immersed in the world and do absolutely *everything*. Forget about finishing the game. There's a civil war tearing apart the province? Didn't notice. A lady who six months ago asked me to find her son is still waiting in her house for a response? I'll get to it later; too busy catching butterflies and stealing farming supplies. My house in real life is falling down around me; dogs are barking; neighbours screaming? I'll just turn up that volume and get back to the important business of trying to pickpocket the Jarl.

Let's take a break from this unapologetic boot-licking to chat about the problems in *Skyrim*. Actually, let's take a moment to ask Bethesda why, in all their knowledge, ingenuity and years of experience, do they still find it so difficult to make a game that just *works*? Bugs and glitches are everywhere: characters and equipment clip through each other and the environment; physics bugs cause woolly mammoths to perform incredible feats of acrobatics; NPCs tell you the same damn thing over and over and over again. "Yes, thanks, I got the message." "Okay, great, Steve, just trying to get through here, actually." "Really? Oh, that's fascinating! Why don't you tell it to my Staff of Eyeball-melting Pain?" The AI is awful. Your character will usually have a companion/follower of some sort, gained permanently through an exchange of cash or completion of quests, or temporarily assigned for certain tasks. These companions are handy to have around for the more challenging battles (and for hauling the 300 pounds of looted Dwemer crap you refuse to give up), but that's assuming that they're not stuck at the bottom of a mountain, bobbing repetitively against

AZIMUTH'S OPINION

So everything just kind of started off and suddenly there was this dragon and I was a fugitive but that must've been sorted out somehow because then I was in this little town somewhere and the shopkeeper asked me to find this golden claw that had been stolen from his store so I went off and followed a winding path up into the mountains across the river but I saw that there was another cave somewhere just off to the east so I thought I'd check that out quickly beforehand so I did and found some sort of bandit hideout and killed everybody inside and read a bunch of books and when I came back out I noticed that there was a landmark or something nearby so I figured I'd go and take a look there and on the way over I was attacked by a bunch of wolves and when I discovered I could skin them and sell their pelts for cash I decided to do that for a bit but then I found out that I could actually turn the pelts into leather and make armour and sell that for even *more* cash and you know I don't even remember what I was supposed to be doing but about 30 hours have passed and this one time I ate a sabre-toothed cat's eye just to see what would happen.

85











a foot-tall rock, attempting to melee attack a brigand archer on the other side of town through a wall, or attacking you because they freaked out when you transformed into a werewolf. And, if you're really lucky, they'll only block doorways half the time. Plenty of other bugs have been reported on the console versions, with texture issues, messy frame rates and broken quests at the top of the list. Bethesda is working on fixing those, so hopefully, by time you read this review and decide to buy the game because it's totally awesome despite its technical hitches, it'll be pleasantly playable on your platform of choice. Two other quick irks: the inventory/magic system is a bulky set of lists that make me miss simple icons and mouse selection, and the character screen has been streamlined to the point of over-simplification, although it's still quite serviceable. Just bear in mind that those people hoping to page through reams of character stats might be sad.

Enough nay-saying, back to the good stuff! When your character isn't completing important quests and stalking through the game's 120+ dungeons and discovering its 100+ points of interest (including shrines, cities, bandit camps, abandoned forts, villages and farms), he or she can spend time doing what every good adventurer does best in their spare time: crafting. The alchemy, smithing and enchanting skills give you access to a huge selection of weapons, armour, potions and poisons, and are fuelled by a massive selection of ingredients to be found all over the province and obsessively collected by anyone who understands the advantage of a bag full of healing potions.

Skyrim has succeeded. Not only is it a worthy sequel to *Oblivion*, but it's the next logical step in the series. It's a fantastic blend of action, quest-driven role-playing and sandbox exploration. It's not perfect, but it's exactly what it promised to be and is everything you'd expect from an *Elder Scrolls* game. NAG

GeometriX

/ **PLUS** / Massive world filled with interesting content / Open class system / Plenty of side tasks
/ **MINUS** / Lots of small bugs / AI sucks / Interface could be better

***SKYRIM* IS ABOUT TEN TIMES MORE THAN WHAT YOU HOPED IT WOULD BE.**

90



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Minecraft

Achievement Get! Lost the last 15 hours of your life!

Minecraft has been a *NAG* office staple for a year now thanks to the game's very public and very lengthy beta phase. How do you review a game that's already been publically available for over a year? The chances are that many people have already played it and formed an opinion about it. Let's assume that you haven't played *Minecraft* or that you might have dabbled in it but never really sunk your teeth into it.

Minecraft is a tricky beast to describe. It could quite easily be the poster child for the sandbox genre because there is no right or wrong way to play the game. That being said, you will feel overwhelmed during the first few hours of play unless you have a Minecraft Wiki in front of you (there's no shame in doing that, by the way).

The game is about mining and harvesting resources, and then constructing whatever it is your imagination allows. The world around you is made up of uniform, pixelated blocks, each representing a different material: wood, stone, dirt, iron and more. It's up to you to work out what combines with what in order to create

editor's choice / editor's choice / editor's choice

[details]

Platforms:
Mobile / PC
Genre:
Sandbox
Age restriction:
Not Rated
DRM:
Internet connection required [once-off activation]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 64 players
Developer:
Mojang
Website:
www.minecraft.net
Publisher:
Mojang
Distributor:
Mojang







the tools and sub-materials needed to build whatever it is you want to build. There are imposed limitations through a fixed set of building materials, but the room for creativity is still vast. Don't expect to build working space ships to fly to the cube-shaped moon however – there are certain rules that govern the world, but they never feel restricting.

In order to build, you need to find the resources, and for that you need to explore. This is one of *Minecraft*'s shining achievements: its level of exploration is rewarding and utterly captivating. Your game world is practically infinite and procedurally generated, so you'll effectively never run out of places to explore.

Minecraft is a game of layers; not only in the physical terrain, but in the gameplay and interactivity as well. One thing leads to another; stone pickaxes lead to diamond ones. Diamond pickaxes allow you to mine obsidian which, when arranged in a specific structure and set alight, opens a portal to The Nether – a dangerous, hell-like dimension full of unique crafting materials. Once there you can find a Blaze Rod that allows you to make a Brewing Stand, which unlocks an entire new section

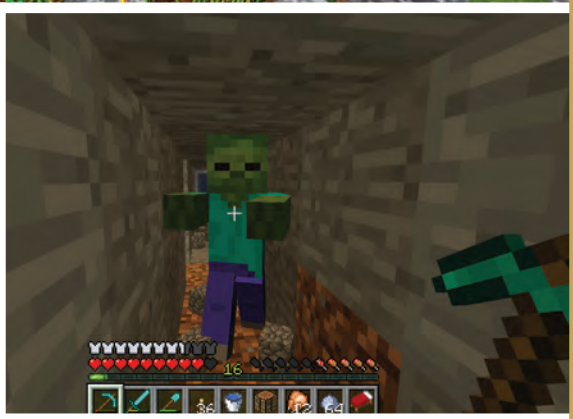


/1/ **Advanced users can establish automated facilities using Redstone – a sort-of electrical system in the game that has yielded some truly incredible inventions from players around the world.**









of crafting through brewing potions. To the uninitiated, those last few sentences probably sounded terrifying – indeed starting a game of *Minecraft* is somewhat terrifying because there's just so much to take in. But this again is where the game comes into its own: despite the almost infinite possibilities and layer upon layer of gameplay, the entire package is undeniably accessible. Spend a few minutes punching trees and making wooden Crafting Tables, and all of a sudden a little more of the game peaks out from behind the veil of obscurity, beckoning you to continue cautiously tugging until the entire offering is revealed.

There are three modes available in the final version of *Minecraft*. Survival mode drops you into a world in which you need to build, mine, farm and forage in order to survive. Once the sun sets, hostile mobs descend and if you die you will respawn, but you'll have to return to the area of your demise in order to reclaim everything you were once carrying. Hardcore mode is the same as Survival mode only if you die then the world and everything you've built is lost for good. Anyone who has spent days constructing an automated sugarcane farm will tell you that that outcome is terrifying. Creative mode is what it sounds like: there is no damage from enemies; you have access to every type of material in infinite proportions; and you're free to fly around the world constructing anything you can.

With three different game modes to choose from, and the ability to set up custom multiplayer servers with persistent worlds, there's enough to ensure that the price of admission becomes a no-brainer. Because the game has no overall goal or objective, multiplayer servers can be set up for just about any type of game you can think of. *NAG* has a *Minecraft* server that's still in the early testing stages, but already those involved have created entire cities with working economies and factions, not to mention some of the most detailed machines and buildings imaginable. And once again, this is one of the greatest aspects to the game: you're free to make things as complex or as simple as you like. You can build intricate, automated machines using switches, pistons and logic circuits, or you can completely bypass all of that and stick to more simple constructions and activities like farming or blacksmithing. You get out exactly what you put in, and in that *Minecraft* enjoys a unique triumph.

Minecraft is a patchwork canvas on which you're encouraged to create your own adventure. There's no hand-holding and no tutorial save for some very basic journal entries to get you going. It is possible to "finish" the game if you satisfy a number of criteria and defeat a final boss, but that's not the ultimate goal. The goal of *Minecraft* is for you to create, explore and discover. Many would argue that it's a game you could spend years playing, and with the promise of new (and free) content from developer Mojang, I'm inclined to agree. **NAG**

Mikit0707

/ **PLUS** / Deep but accessible gameplay / Unique and charming presentation / Pretty much digital LEGO
/ **MINUS** / Regular crashes to desktop / Iffy network connectivity for multiplayer

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT; PREPARE TO LOSE HOURS OF YOUR LIFE.

90

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Assassin's Creed: Revelations

The end of Ezio

We have spent some time with that dashing Renaissance Italian assassin, Ezio Auditore. But now, that time has come to an end with the release of *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*. In fact, it's not only Ezio's tale that draws to a close, but that of the first game's main character, Altaïr, also gets wrapped up. But don't expect a quick resolution to matters... *Revelations* is at least as long as *Brotherhood*, and it offers the player a ton of stuff to do while working through the long plot.

Those that finished *Brotherhood* – and if you didn't, shame on you, go do it right now – will know that things have seemed to go very wrong for Desmond Miles, the man who is reliving the genetic memories of his ancestors via the Animus system. Now, Desmond lies in a mysterious coma, with his consciousness trapped in the machine. He must access the final memories of Ezio to free himself and avoid having his personality deleted.



[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3 / PC
Genre:
Action adventure
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Ubisoft
Website:
www.assassinscreed.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom







/1/ Multiplayer returns in *Revelations*, expanding on *Brotherhood*'s online basics with new characters and locations, as well as improved UI and matchmaking. You're able to customise your appearance, weaponry and abilities, and can even start a guild with its own coat of arms.

That's the first layer of the game. Using Desmond, the player can explore his own memories in first-person style sections that remind a little of *Portal*, largely because they're a bunch of movement puzzles and obstacle courses. The second layer lies in the memories of Ezio – even though Desmond is technically not hooked up to the Animus, his consciousness resides there, and he can access his ancestor's memories. The third layer are memories of Altaïr that Desmond experiences through Ezio making use of five mysterious keys... memories within memories, as it were. These five Altaïr missions are relatively simple, but fans of the story will love them for the illumination they provide.

From the get-go, *Revelations* feels different. Even the presentation of the game has been altered, leaving the bright, near white Animus interface behind for a darker, more sinister feel. This may not sit well with purists initially, but when you get into the meat of the game, the feel makes absolute sense. Another aspect that fans may find a little disconcerting (I know I did) is the fact that you're now controlling Ezio in what appears to be his late middle-aged years. His beard is longer and greying, his voice gruffer. There are numerous quips in the game about his age, too. But it seems that the years have been kind to the assassin, because he is as capable as ever.

The bulk of the game, which is set in the massive, labyrinthine city of Constantinople, is very similar to *Brotherhood* in terms of dynamics. The player will go around doing a myriad of missions, while purchasing businesses and renovating landmarks on the side. He will also train a squad of assassins, although this aspect of the game is a bit deeper than before, with cities that can now be liberated and managed. Assassins can also be tasked to oversee assassin dens within the main city, which are basically liberated Templar towers.

This brings up a new addition to the franchise: when the player manages to build up enough notoriety, a Templar attack on these dens will be triggered. The player will then undertake a mini-game not unlike tower defence to keep the attackers at bay. It is a bit clunky, with overall nasty camera controls, but it can be quite fun none the less.

Another new addition brings a change to the control scheme. The











player can now equip a main and secondary weapon at the same time... for example, a sword and throwing knives. This speeds things up; with less visiting weapon selection being necessary, but the new controls may take getting used to. Speaking of weapons, bombs make an appearance in this title, with the player able to craft a variety of different explosive devices to help them go about their business.

Added challenge comes from the fact that Constantinople is an unfriendly city. There are two factions hunting the player this time round, and even buying a shop will add notoriety... which is a little more difficult to get rid of now. Witness assassination and bribery are the only options, and as witnesses now come with guards, bribery of heralds is the simplest – but most expensive – solution.

This culmination of both Ezio and Altaïr's tales is the best *Assassin's Creed* game we have seen so far, but not by very much. The changes here are subtle and, given the high quality of the *Assassin's Creed 2* line, it is quite challenging to see what is different. But with smoother free running in a city very conducive to the activity, not to mention generally better mechanics, *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* continues the trend of improvement that Ubisoft have been setting with this franchise. If you are a fan of the previous games, advising you to get this one is a waste of breath... you probably already have it, and are wondering where the franchise will go after the game's stunning conclusion. But if you have never tried this franchise before, you should probably consider starting at the beginning, rather than dropping in here. This game assumes that you have played the others, and does little to explain the situation. But that's okay... we're pretty sure you have played the others. You would be missing out if you haven't.

NAG

Ramjet

/ **PLUS** / Tons to do / Great story
/ **MINUS** / Takes some getting used to / More of the same

A GREAT FINALE FOR EZIO, BUT NOT WHERE YOU WANT TO START WITH THIS FRANCHISE.

90

Rayman Origins

Get this music out of my head!

If you thought that it's been a while since you've played or even seen a game from the core *Rayman* series, you'd be right. *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* was the last home console game to feature the armless exploits of Rayman sans packs of ferocious rabbit things since 2003. The developers obviously thought it was time to get back to it and, boy, have they gone back. So far back that this game, as the sleuths among you might gather, attempts to tell the story of how the series began. Then it sort of loses interest, and there's lots of running and jumping and rescuing girls in cages and scoring points for getting gold things. The motivation for doing anything will be confusing for people who haven't played any games in the series, and only slightly less confusing for those who have. Thankfully, this is a platform game, a genre that historically hasn't required much effort to be made in the story department. "Origins", then, is possibly a more fitting description of how this game fits in with classic titles more so than modern ones.

[details]

Platforms:
3DS / 360 / PC
PS3 / PS Vita / Wii
Genre:
Simulation
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft Montpellier
Website:
raymanorigins.uk.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom



/1/ You won't play many games that look and sound quite like this. The beautifully animated sprites and lush, hand-drawn backgrounds remind us of the good old days of gaming. The visuals and peculiar soundtrack come together to deliver an experience that's so attention-grabbing it's almost overwhelming.

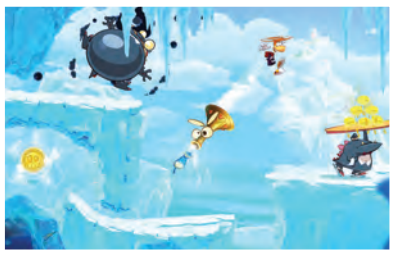












Platform game junkies will be in their element with *Rayman Origins*. It acts as fan service to both the series and the genre, featuring characters from throughout the series and every single feature you could imagine finding in such a game. As such, it has a difficulty curve that follows along the progress of the story, introducing new abilities as you unlock new worlds and challenging you to use them immediately. At first, your character (or characters; the game supports four-player co-op that is more insane than an LSD party at the local nut house) only has a few basic abilities like running and sliding, but will soon gain a basic attack, underwater swimming and other abilities. Each world is themed around a particular ability, and, as such, each behaves quite differently.

"Challenge" is perhaps the biggest theme in the game; while it's fairly easy to simply complete each level (and the game itself, which could be finished in a single sitting), finding all of the hidden collectables and lums (coins, essentially) is incredibly difficult. That's where the game's replay value lies. As the levels become more difficult they also become more frustrating (especially the later twitch-platforming levels), and it'll take a gamer with more patience than what I have to sit down and dedicate themselves to 100% each level in the later parts of the game. Unfortunately, the rewards for such completion amount to little more than access to a few "racing"-type levels and extra costumes for your characters. The most stoic of all players will gain access to an entire new world, however.

NAG GeometriX

/ PLUS / Fantastic visuals / Bizarre and inventive soundtrack / Controls are tight and responsive
/ MINUS / A bit repetitive / A few frustrating levels / Story what now?

THOSE LOOKING FOR A PLATFORMER THAT LAUDS PRESENTATION AND CHARACTER MOVEMENT OVER STORYLINE AND MENTAL HEALTH WILL FEEL AT HOME.

82

DIRT CHEAP



Gotta-have games at gonna-have prices!

SAVE 100



PlayStation 3
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Xbox360

metacritic rating:

Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit feels like 2.5 games in one as the game can be played as either a cop or racer. Plus the online component is a must!

89/100

SAVE 100



PlayStation 3
Crysis 2

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Also available on:
Xbox360

metacritic rating:

This is Crysis 2 – a magnificent first-person experience that's wholly engaging, at times highly challenging and often very memorable!

85/100

SAVE 240



PlayStation 3
FIFA 11

now 159.95

Also available on:
Xbox360 & PS2

metacritic rating:

A large portion of FIFA veterans, as well as new players, will undoubtedly be blown away with FIFA 11's realism and satisfying gameplay.

89/100

SAVE 100



XBOX360
Gears of War 2

now 199.95

metacritic rating:

As a sequel, you'd be hard-pressed to find a game as brilliantly evolved. With a ruthlessly enthralling pace it is effortlessly superb.

93/100

SAVE 100



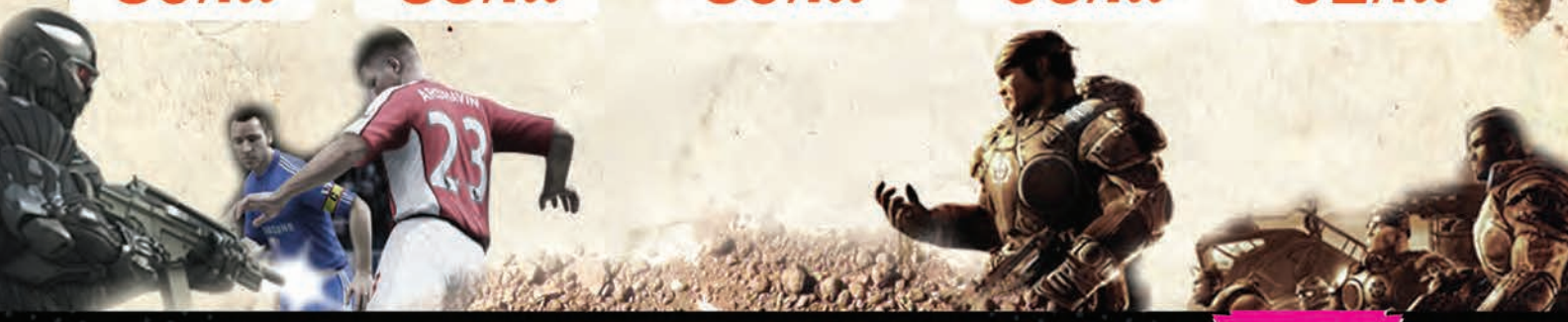
XBOX360
Forza 3

now 199.95

metacritic rating:

This is one of the finest driving games around. It is a celebration of the car, but even more a celebration of the joy of driving.

92/100



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MUSICA
A WORLD AWAITS

Super Mario 3D Land

One of the best reasons to own a 3DS



There's this bad metaphor roosting in my brain. It looks a bit like a raccoon, and it goes like this:

The *Mario* franchise is like a cousin that you see regularly, but not *too* regularly. So you're not tired of him yet, but you're very familiar. He tells a lot of the same stories, he thinks they're your favourites, and he's right. Princess, another castle, it never gets old. Thankfully, he travels a lot, so he always has new stuff to tell you, and new ideas to share.

Stupid raccoon, not only are you a bad metaphor, you're a bad metaphor for yourself. Raccoons don't roost [*I do hope that someday I'll start getting your jokes, Ed*].

Super Mario 3D Land is the sequel to *Mario Bros. 3* on the NES. That's what I'm calling it anyway. It draws a lot of its set designs, art and music from the definitive NES game. It's just lacking the little curtains that draw back at the start.

Everything pops in *3D Land*. The level design is imaginative, fun and challenging. When you finish the initial eight worlds, each with roughly six levels, you're only halfway through, and then it gets really difficult but never unfair. There's Star Medals to collect, three per level, hidden in cunning places. The entire game's narrative is played out in pantomime, no text, no voices (except for Peach saying "Mario" and pretending to mean it).

There is a 3D View Mode toggle on the directional pad. Cycling between Normal and Extended Depth lets you swap the focal point for the 3D effect from near to far. Normal mode works best in most levels and Extended in some, like the *Zelda*-inspired top-down levels, depending on your personal preference and eye-balls. *Pilot Wings Resort* needed this option badly.

Mario's portly physics are slightly different compared to *New Super Mario Bros.* or *Galaxy*. His forward momentum drops off faster, making longer jumps (without using the long-jump) require more skill. You can now roll, break chest-high walls, and long-jump from the roll.

When you complete a Mystery Box, found on the level select screen, it sends it out via Street Pass (that magical thing two 3DSs do when they're in range of each other and exchange hot data). The Mystery Box, a little square arena with much variety, may contain Star Medals or 1-UP mushrooms. StreetPass also shares level par times, if you like to race.

There are new items, like the Propeller Box, bringing back the mechanics of the awesome Prop Hat from *New Super Mario Bros.* The Tanooki Suit returns from *Mario Bros 3*, saving us all from a lot of falls to our deaths.

This is an excellent game. Short levels perfect for the portable system, excellent use of the 3D effect through intelligent level design, and plenty of fun crammed into every corner. **NAG**

Miktar

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
3DS
Genre:
Platform
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Nintendo EAD Tokyo
Website:
supermario3dland.nintendo.com
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Gaming Systems



/1/ A number of (sometimes hidden) mini-challenges exist in the game worlds that will reward you with bonus coins, extra lives or even power-ups.





/ PLUS / Excellent in every way / Second Quest brings real challenge / No dialogue anywhere.
/ MINUS / Dudebros may laugh at you for playing it.

DON'T LET THE PORTABLE FORMAT FOOL YOU; THIS IS A PROPER MARIO ADVENTURE.

91

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Look & Listen
For the Fans



Disney Universe

If by "Universe", you mean "five"

So you want a kid's game? That's cool; we're not here to judge. Maybe you're looking to buy your child or younger sibling a gift, or just feel like unwinding with a low-effort game after your significant other threatened to leave you over your excessive time spent playing *Skyrim*. Whatever your reason for wanting one, *Disney Universe* is everything you'd expect from such a title.

The game makes a weak attempt to string together a storyline: you're a test subject in "Disney Universe" – whatever that may be exactly – and get to safely explore Disney franchises. Then, for some unknown reason, the entity controlling everything – Cube – becomes possessed by an evil force called Hex. The robotic players in these worlds become evil (you can tell because their eyes turn red), and now you're trapped in the Universe and have to smash your way through each level collecting gold, acquiring new costumes and saving other trapped guests. That's it, really; no more details, no more reasoning; just smash things and complete each of the game's five worlds, each with three locations made up of three stages.

Each stage plays out with a variety of one-button-mashing combat and simple puzzle solving. There's very little challenge to either, but the whole package is delivered in such a charming and quite visually appealing way that it's difficult to be unimpressed. Each stage also features a number of collectables and unspoken objectives that help you to earn more gold or unlock bonuses like concept art, and getting to those objectives can be pretty tough. I'm not ashamed to admit that on more than one occasion I spent what could be termed as "too long" trying to 100% each level. Achievement/trophy hunters should have fun with this one.

With great looking and well designed levels, it's a shame that the gameplay becomes so formulaic and progressively easier the more you play. Still, this would probably be thoroughly entertaining for children, and the added features like hidden collectables and basic co-op puzzle-solving will do wonders for Operation Turn Younger Sibling into a Gamer. NAG

GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Simulation
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Eurocom
Website:
disney.co.uk/universe
Publisher:
Disney Interactive Studios
Distributor:
Prima Interactive







/1/ Players can find experience orbs in each stage that upgrade their current costume's weapon to increase damage. Sadly, these upgrades are almost identical across all costumes.

/2/ In co-op mode, players can attack each other to steal gold from other players. Players can infinitely respawn so this never becomes too much of a problem.







/ **PLUS** / Great visuals / Catchy soundtrack / Well designed levels
/ **MINUS** / Becomes repetitive / Weak narrative / No online co-op

PERFECT FOR KIDS, AND YOU'LL HAVE A FUN TIME PLAYING ALONG WITH THEM.

73

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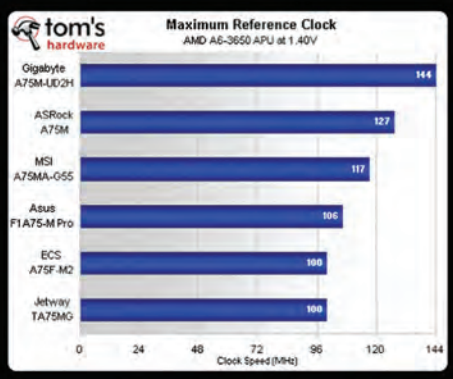


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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Might & Magic Heroes VI

The more things change...

The *Heroes of Might & Magic* series belongs to that sect of gamers that enjoys complex, tactical mechanisms over the accessibility and streamlined interactions that modern games tend to celebrate. It's for hardcore gamers that like to spend hundreds of hours developing perfect strategies (which they'll probably call "stratagems") and training their armies of minions to save kingdoms or destroy them. The *HOMM* series is for steadfast classic PC gamers, and *Heroes VI* continues that tradition.

Might & Magic Heroes VI (spot the name swopping, perhaps to usher in a new era) is what you'd expect from a sequel. It ticks all the boxes: hours upon hours of game time split across multiple campaigns and infinite skirmishes; busy fantasy worlds for your heroes and their armies to explore; role-playing mechanisms like inventory management and character development; and tactical battles. This is definitely a *HOMM* game, one that fans of the series will enjoy because of its familiar feeling and classic gameplay, but it throws in enough novelty and changes to remind you that it's new. About half of the spells and buildings from previous titles have been replaced with new options, the most notable of which is the absence of the Magic Guild in settlements. Instead, access to higher tier tech is gained simply by upgrading the city, and higher level hero spells are granted by gaining character level. Those spells are divided between those of Tears and those of Blood, which forms a morality system in the game that encourages you to stick to a chosen path (being merciful or wrathful) for combat and the few character interactions that pop up during the campaigns. It's a welcome addition that doesn't break the formula too much, and you might even find yourself occasionally caring about a few characters in the game.

As you guide your lead characters through the game's seven campaigns, you'll gather artefacts that can be carried over from one map to the other. A new item type, Dynasty items, are powerful items only available to those who chose to play the game using Ubisoft's "always on" UPlay DRM. You'll also have access to a host of online socialising features and leaderboards, bonuses to your characters and cosmetic upgrades like custom titles.

There's no lack of content for those who are willing to invest the time to discover it. Each of the game's five factions is different enough to encourage you to play through all of the campaigns, but not so wildly varied that balancing them would be a challenge. This is perhaps alleviated by the low number of unit types per faction, but the many variables that affect how each game plays out helps to stop even that becoming much of a problem. There are only two noteworthy issues with *Might & Magic Heroes VI*, and that's its incredibly slow pace in quest mode during the earlier maps in the campaigns, and the sad fact that later battles come down to pure army numbers rather than tactics. The latter is especially true when fighting against the AI in long skirmish games.

NAG GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Role-playing tactical strategy game
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Internet connection required [uPlay]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Black Hole Entertainment
Website:
www.might-and-magic.ubi.com/heroes-6
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom





/1/ **There are five playable races in the game: two good-aligned, two evil-aligned, and one neutral. Each has its own unique and familiar units that are just diverse enough to be interesting.**





/ **PLUS** / Blissfully familiar / New features / Challenging / Tons of replayability
/ **MINUS** / Inconsistent pace / DRM might be an issue / Battles become predictable in late-game

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80

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Sonic Generations

Gotta go fast

You may have heard that *Sonic Generations* represents the Blue Bomber's return to greatness (the animal one – not the robot). In truth, Sonic's return to form was kicked off by last season's *Sonic Colors* for Nintendo Wii. *Generations*, produced by much of the *Sonic Colors* team, builds on that foundation with good but not pitch perfect results.

Generations is the tale of two Sonics – due to shenanigans with time, the short, fat Sonic of 16-bit past meets the modern *X-treme* attitude hedgehog. Their campaign to solve this Time Crisis (the temporal anomaly, not the game) sees shorty Sonic attacking purely 2D versions of each game's zone while attitude Sonic gets a mostly 3D, racing into/away from the camera version.

The zones, pulled from each game in Sonic's console history, are amazingly realised and translated into a new look. Really, it's one of the outright prettiest games of the year. A boggling selection of Sonic fan service goes along with it, including dozens of remixed music tracks and the ability to assign a favourite track (besides the default) to each level. The hub world deserves special mention, being an ever-growing "level" of its own with secrets, gates, and challenges that unlock, putting plenty of meat on *Generations*' bones.

There is a problem here, and it originates with the entire premise: since retro Sonic's stages are 100% side-scrolling fun, it would have seemed weird for the modern stages to depend on too much 2D platforming. *Sonic Colors* struck a better balance, with approximately 70/30 2D-to-3D ratio within each level. 3D was only used where it actually fit, and was fun. Here, we see 3D Sonic gameplay stretched thin, meaning that retro Sonic's stages inevitably feel meatier and as if they have more depth.

There's still a lot to like in *Sonic Generations* and at this point, Sonic Team can be said to be back on track. *Generations* is, above all, polished in a way Sonic games between the Mega Drive and today have sorely lacked. Sonic is, once again, the best way to go fast.

SH**TY FRIENDS

The worst thing about *Generations*? Compared to *Colors*' wonderful, back-to-basics approach of Sonic and Tails vs. Eggman in a battle to the death, *Generations* brings back modern Sonic's huge stable of questionable associates to cheer from the side-line. Mostly, they stand at Zone entrances, offering blithering platitudes and frequent hints on where to find hidden coins. You'll have to suffer a full bore opening and closing cut scene where they do their worst, however. Hell is listening to Charmy Bee's voice. It makes us want to kill. **NAG**

Miktar

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
360 / 3DS / PC / PS3
Genre:
Platform
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Sonic Team
Website:
www.sega.com/sonicgenerations/
Publisher:
SEGA
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive









/1/ **The 3DS version of the game (not pictured), developed by Japan-based Dimps, is similar to *Sonic Rush* and features unique levels.**





/ **PLUS** / Lots of content / Stunning visuals / Fantastic music
/ **MINUS** / Modern Sonic action sections can be wonky / Final boss is such a let down

A WORTHWHILE GOTTA GO FAST.

82



'TIS THE YEAR

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Look & Listen For the Fans

The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn

No secrets here

Tintin is a well-loved franchise that many of us have fond memories of... many were the days lazing around, reading about his adventures as he travelled the globe, solving one mystery after another. Now, as with everything great, Tintin has been given the silver screen treatment and, as to be expected, a video game release has accompanied the film. Naturally no one ever thought of doing a Tintin game before the film, but that's just the way these things work.

The Tintin game borrows heavily from the film for its visual style, but homage to Hergé's original comics can be seen in both. The characters just look a little more real and, overall, the game looks pretty good. It sounds good, too, with fairly decent voice acting (even though Tintin himself is incredibly annoying).

The story told in the game is pretty much that of the film, with some embellishment and extra elements added. But the story really is secondary in this title, which seems to be aimed at a younger audience while occasionally making allusions towards being a more mature title. The game is incredibly simple, for the most part, with no real challenge to be had. But, much like the Tintin comics, there is more than meets the eye with it, and occasionally a tougher bit will crop up.

The action is, for the most part, side-scrolling platform gaming. Although the game has been done in 3D, there are very few sequences that move away from the flat, 2D idea that drives it on. The player will do a lot of running, jumping and careful timing, combined with a little combat that is so easy it hardly bears mentioning. Every now and then the game will shift perspective, presenting the player with a third person view in a more fully realised 3D environment. These missions will see Tintin doing everything from running away from vehicles to tracking evil-doers. Snowy also features in these missions, and the side-scrolling ones, with the player able to control Tintin's canine companion from time to time. Players will also be faced with some extremely easy puzzles here and there.

The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn is a real mixed bag. Visually great, the game doesn't do enough to challenge players at all. Rather, it seems as though the player is more of an observer than a participant... that's how easy the game is. It might strike a chord with fans, who may appreciate seeing the characters brought to life, and youngsters will surely enjoy it, but it doesn't seem to be quite enough to be a good homage to the boy-reporter. NAG

Ramjet

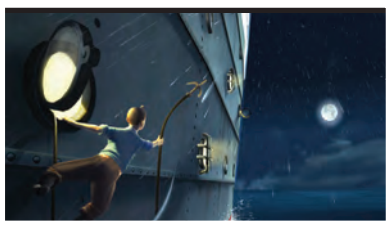
[details]

Platforms:
360 / 3DS / PC
PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Platform
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft
Website:
www.ubisoft.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom





/1/ The game was developed alongside Paramount Studios as a part of the film production company's continued move into games publishing under the Paramount Digital Entertainment lable.









/ **PLUS** / Nice visuals / Fun for the whole family
/ **MINUS** / Too easy / Short

IT'S A PRETTY ENOUGH GAME, BUT MORE COULD HAVE GONE INTO IT.

60

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

GoldenEye 007: Reloaded

Remaking the remake

Last year's Wii remake of the Nintendo 64 classic *GoldenEye 007* was well received: its reimagining of the film and the Rare-developed game it spawned was much appreciated by Wii owners, with many heralding it as one of the console's best shooters. It brought the essence of this beloved title to a new generation of gamers, updating its mechanics to mimic today's shooter trends (i.e. to put it on a wavelength that *CoD* players would actually appreciate). It's now been updated once again for the bigger, meaner consoles, where the FPS market is much more crowded and therefore demanding.

Does it succeed in creating an experience that can be enjoyed by the modern gamer? For the most part, it does, but it'll obviously depend on said gamer. Anyone who has to mention hyper-realistic graphics when talking about their games would do well to stay away, for example, because while the game is supposedly built on a new engine to take advantage of the extra horsepower of the PS3 and 360, it still can't hold up to the powerhouse franchises out there. For those unfamiliar with the Wii version, the gameplay and story have been updated from the N64 classic, having been retooled to match contemporary paradigms. As such, regenerating health, a heavy increase on the action and a few other tweaks are all present, while Daniel Craig replaces Pierce Brosnan as Bond.

There are sequences that'll be familiar to fans of the original, sure: but they've been adapted as well. It's all quick-time events and constant explosions here, and throughout the single-player campaign, there are some impressive movie-style set pieces. The gunplay is solid, with various weapon attachments and an impressive arsenal ensuring that it remains enjoyable throughout. You've got access to your smartphone as well: a multipurpose gadget that lets you do everything from identifying a contact amidst a crowd of people to hacking sentry turrets and taking photos of Intel. Stealth and action are nicely interwoven in each level, and you're able to complete entire sections without making a sound if that's your preferred style of play.

In addition to the story mode, there are also the MI6 challenges: a sizable set of extra missions with varying objectives, from killing X number of enemies to defending key positions. Unfortunately, in these levels, the enemy AI is found to be lacking in a way that the more heavily scripted campaign missions don't reveal. Still, these challenges offer a decent distraction when you're done with the story.

Multiplayer is where the real meat of the game is though. It too has been updated, offering fashionable additions like persistent stats, equipment unlocks and various customisation options. The online multiplayer is a blast, offering a number of game modes and an increased player count relative to the Wii version.

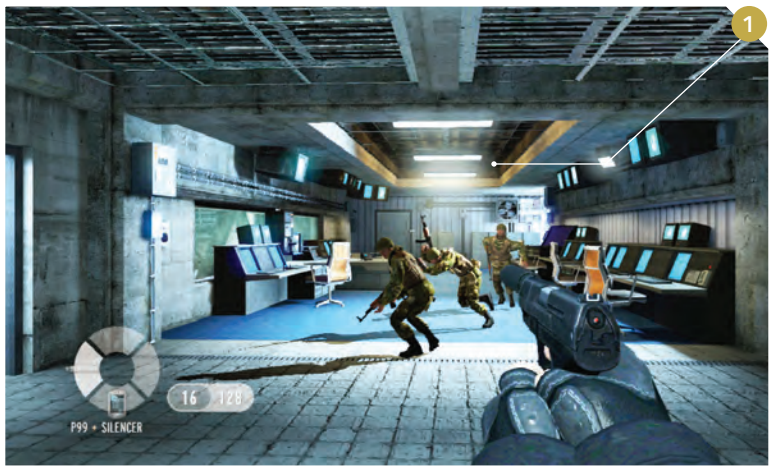
All in all, this is a sound shooter. If you played the Wii version, there's no real reason to bother with it. But it's certainly worth playing if you're looking for something to keep you busy, or if you're yearning for a decent title starring Mr Bond. **NAG**

Barkskin

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: 16 players
Developer:
Eurocom
Website:
goldeneyegame.com
Publisher:
Activision
Distributor:
Megarom





/1/ If you'd rather play this port of the Wii game the way it was originally designed to be played, PS3 owners can make use of the console's Move accessory.





/ **PLUS** / Good, fun multiplayer / Decent single-player campaign / Solid action
/ **MINUS** / Sometimes rubbish AI / Looks iffy at times

THERE'S NO REASON TO PLAY IT IF YOU PLAYED THE WII REMAKE, BUT IT'S A SOLID SHOOTER.

77

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3

IT'S MAHVEL BABY!

Is nine months sufficient time to allow a fighting game to bake in the competitive oven before deploying the first update? *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* attempts to answer that with new content and core changes to the game that debuted in February 2011. It also has *Rocket Raccoon*.

On paper, there's more than you'd expect. A full dozen new characters, including the massively requested fan favourites like Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney and Marvel's Ghost Rider. The vanilla game is practically new; air X-Factor, revamped aerial character exchanges, a complete rebalance for the returning cast, more than half of whom have new abilities and moves. A few see their play style almost completely altered. Not to mention eight new stages, a new UI for greater clarity of meters, and a free DLC mode that's a whole game in itself. And finally; spectator capability for online battle rooms, along with at least modestly optimised net code.

Whether that's enough for you depends on who you are. Did you already get your 600 hours of play out of vanilla *MVC3*? If so, *Ultimate* is a no-brainer. Its reduced retail price is less than one would have paid had the original plans to add all the new characters via DLC not fallen through (due to a few small issues that upset publisher operations, such as an earthquake.) A full balance tweak based on a year of hardcore competitive play results in the game feeling newer than it has a right to. Suddenly, the same three characters aren't on every top team.

What's here is quality; there can be no doubt, along with increased depth due to cheap cheesy tactics being rendered less effective. Is it for you? That may depend on just how much you want to knock people out with Wright's *gigantic psychic finger of the law*, and rub road rash over faces with Ghost Rider's hell-powered chrome hog.

P.S. If you're interested in some straight-up commentary and advice for *UMVC3* (or *Modern Warfare 3* for that matter), check out *The Online Warrior* by Maximilian on YouTube - **www.youtube.com/user/Miles923**

NAG Miktar

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3 / PS Vita
Genre:
Fighting
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 2 players
Developer:
Capcom
Website:
www.marvelvscapcom3.com
Publisher:
Capcom
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment













/1/ **Strider returns with even more menacing speed and combos.**

/ **PLUS** / New roster and character reworks / Phoenix Wright is a blast / Finger Lasers
/ **MINUS** / Heroes and Heralds mode not included

IT'S A WORTHY UPDATE, ADDING JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF NEW CONTENT AND BALANCE TWEAKS.

75

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Raving Rabbids: Alive and Kicking

Needs a kick

Mini-game themed party titles seem to be something that every game publisher wants in on, and they will use every excuse in the book to do it... even releasing a title that is virtually devoid of merit, just to get in on the action. With the fairly extensive library of Rabbids games that Ubisoft have released in the past, you would think that the Kinect only *Raving Rabbids: Alive and Kicking* would be a laugh riot from beginning to end. But you'd be wrong, and sorely so. See, the combination of crazy characters and motion control is a good start, but they it isn't enough to create a game that is going to get people going crazy.

You may do so at first, with this title. It offers a bit more than thirty mini-games to play, and there appears to be quite a variety to start. But many of the games are very similar in execution, and many are far too short. In fact, some of them have longer loading times than play times. And, to add insult to injury, the games aren't going to do anything to make you feel good. They're bland, repetitive and often lacking in imagination.

There are games that can be a lot of fun and are almost satisfying to okay, but they tend to be the exception, rather than the rule. And even those that are satisfying are only mildly so...

The game lacks the charm that the Rabbids offer, even if they are twisted little critters. And to make matters worse, controls just don't cut it. The Kinect is unresponsive – which was a problem a while ago, not now – and menu navigation is a massive pain. Playing the games almost isn't worth the effort, particularly if you need to struggle your way through menus and loading screens only to experience a brutally short mini-game that leaves you wanting.

When you take a step back and look at this title, it feels like a cash-in, on both the Rabbids franchise and the massive push of party games hitting the shelves this year. This is pretty unusual for Ubisoft, who tend to make sure their titles have some merit. But it is what it is... this title feels rushed out and incomplete, based on a good idea that went wrong during the execution. And that is more than a little sad, because the Rabbids, with all their zany ways and bellowing, are a great source of entertainment, generally speaking. This time around, though, they fail to impress as the developers rely on tastelessness and quick hits for this title.

NAG
Ramjet

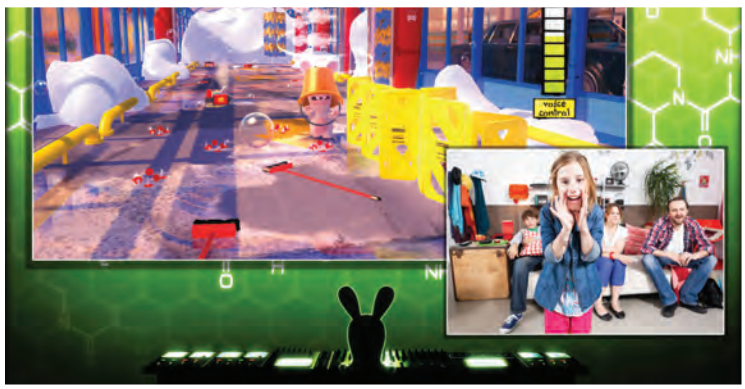
pony award / pony award / pony award / pony award

[details]

Platforms:
360
Genre:
Party
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft
Website:
rabbids.us.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom









/ **PLUS** / One or two good games / Lots of BWAAA!
/ **MINUS** / Poor controls / Nasty menus / Lots of poor games

TAKING A FRANCHISE LIKE RABBIDS AND HAVING THIS AS THE RESULT IS A POOR PERFORMANCE.

45

FIFA Manager 12

Bossy!

If you are a fan of football and of management games, this one is perfect for you. In *FIFA Manager 12* you will get to be the boss, making all the decisions necessary to take your chosen football club to the top. It sounds easier than it is, though, and the game can get just a little dry, thanks to a lot of statistics and numbers that need to be analysed by the player. That all said and done, it is a rather intriguing title. The player will be responsible for virtually every aspect of the team, as well as their home club (including building structures and so forth).

And then, of course, there is the football. The simulated games that the player gets to watch and strategise from the side-lines are possibly the weakest aspect of the title, with AI that is often disappointing and animations that could have been much, much better.

This game is only recommended for those that really love the business side of modern football. It's complex and sometimes quirky, but if you can wrap your mind around it – and forgive it the odd little things it does strangely – then you'll probably enjoy it. Just don't expect tons of action. NAG

Ramjet

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Management
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
EA Sports
Website:
www.fifa-manager.com
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
EA South Africa







/ **PLUS** / Detailed / Engaging
/ **MINUS** / Some AI issues / Not for everyone

A GOOD GAME IF YOU LIKE FOOTBALL AND MANAGEMENT, AND CAN GET PAST ITS ODDITIES...

78



Know your technology

/ PCH /

This is what has essentially replaced the old chipset that existed in the days of the original Core 2 CPUs and platforms before. The **Platform Controller Hub** is a family of Intel chips that have combined what used to be in the southbridge with the remaining functions of the northbridge. That means your low speed PCI Express lanes that are not from the CPU will be controlled by the PCH in addition to your USB, SATA and internal gigabit Ethernet devices.

/ ICH /

This is essentially the southbridge of last generation microprocessors and platforms from Intel, but it is still in use on AMD platforms even today. The **I/O Controller HUB** does exactly what the name implies and controls some input/output components of the system. It usually contains silicon for controlling the SATA ports, USB ports, gigabit Ethernet along with an HD audio controller.

/ AVX /

Advanced Vector Extensions are extensions to the x86 instruction set that provide new features for supporting programs. AVX introduces several new instruction formats, coding schemes and actual instructions. All these make for vast improvements in floating point heavy calculations in both scientific and multimedia applications, by increasing parallelism in floating point SIMD calculations and optimizing instructions that would previously require several more cycles to complete. It is to be noted however that AVX are only supported in Windows 7 with SP1 and Server 2008 (Linux as well as Snow Leopard are supported).

/ AES /

The Advanced Encryption Standard that has superseded DES in most recent computing platforms. It is a symmetric-key algorithm which uses the same key for both encryption and decrypting of data. It is a highly efficient encryption method that while not impervious to being broken through brute force methods would require an incomprehensible amount of time to actually decrypt (millions of years on super computers). This has been added as an extension to the x86 instruction set and is supported on AMD Bulldozer-based CPUs and on specific CPUs from Intel from the Clarkdale to the Sandy Bridge-E CPUs.

By the Numb3rs

28 nm

The next generation NVIDIA and AMD GPUs are going to be built on Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's (TSMC) brand new 28 nm process, which allows for a 45% increase in clock speed over the current 40 nm process.



ORB Magnetic Induction Charging Disc for Xbox

The easiest way to recharge your Xbox controllers evaaar! All you need is two batteries and a USB port.

www.megarom.co.za | R299



Trendnet 450Mbps Concurrent Dual Band Wireless N Router

This router supports 450Mbps speeds on both the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands at the same time.

www.trendnet.com | TBA

Cooler Master Elite Series

We were sent three Cooler Master Elite 431 cases to take a look at this month. All are mid tower offerings, can accommodate large CPU coolers and support long graphics cards such as the HD Radeon 6990. If you're looking for a decent gaming case at a very affordable price then one of these will definitely fit your needs.

Pricing for the cases are:
CM-RC431K-KWN1 – R 499
CM-RC431K-KKN2 – R 499
CM-RC431P-KWN2 – R 599
www.sonicinformed.co.za



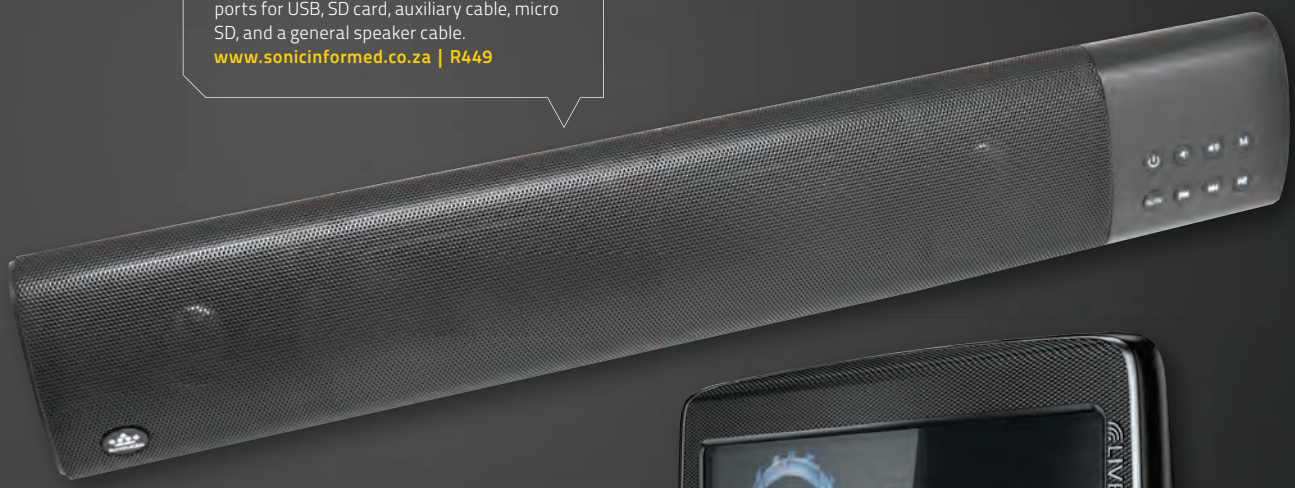


Logitech Rumble Gamepad F510

A vibrating gamepad for your PC. It's slightly smaller than a regular Xbox controller but still feels comfortable in your hands.
www.logitech.co.za | R340

Royqueen Katiusha H3000

A funky little multimedia audio player that has ports for USB, SD card, auxiliary cable, micro SD, and a general speaker cable.
www.sonicinformed.co.za | R449





Tom Tom Top Gear GO Live

The most fun we've had listening to directions in the history of forever! Its Jeremy Clarkson's voice with all the cool stuff that Tom Tom has to offer. This is a must have.
www.tomtom.com/topgear | R2,399

YAMA USB 3.0 cases

Three gaming chassis, all with USB3.0 support and two that come with a power supply included. The W1 comes in either black or red (very sexy).

Pricing for the cases are:
YAMA W1 USB 3.0 Full Tower – R1,599
YAMA 715 USB 3.0 ATX
(includes 750W PSU) – R1,099
YAMA 918 USB 3.0 ATX
(includes 550W PSU) – R799
www.superchannel.co.za







Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure starter pack

[specs]

RRP:
Starter pack:
360 & PS3: R799.00
PC & Wii: R699.00
DS: R599.00
Individual pack:
R129.00
Triple character pack:
R239.00

Platforms:
360 / DS / PC
PS3 / Wii

Website:
www.skylanders.com

[Summary]

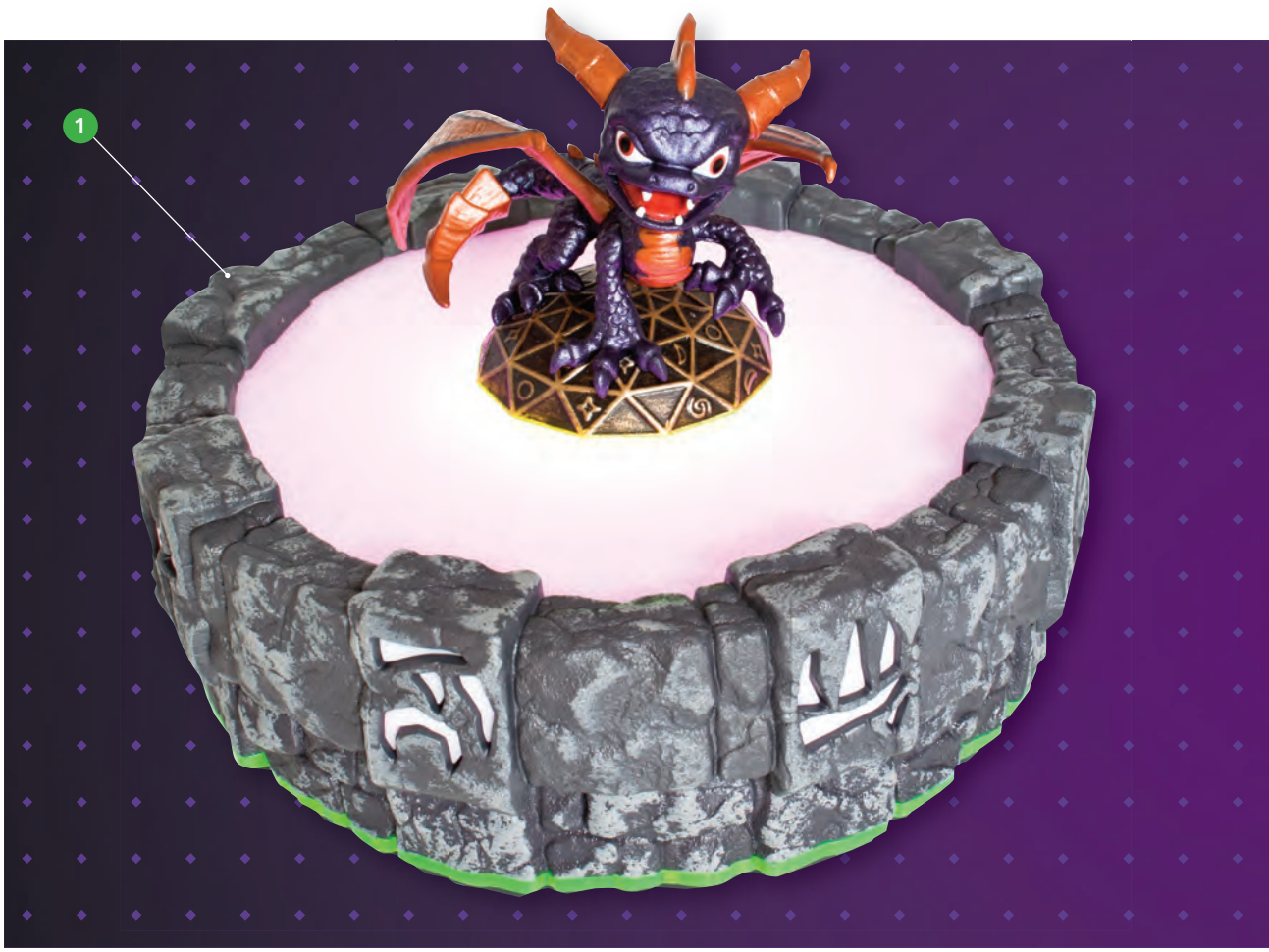
/ Pros:
Innovative concept; puts real toys in a video game; works exceptionally well; engages young gamers.

/ Cons:
poor website functionality; nagging kids; might get expensive; very simplistic game dynamic.

/ Alternatives:
Bakugan/Pokémon (toys/concept); *Ratchet & Clank* (game).

Activision had a real rock 'n' roll run with the *Guitar Hero* franchise a few years back, selling millions and gaining unprecedented mainstream fame. New songs were released almost every week, six core versions came and went; *Guitar Hero* even featured in movies and at some point a few crazy guys threw hundreds of these plastic guitars into the mouth of a live volcano from an airplane. The success of this unique peripheral phenomenon must have left them with a taste for 'hardware' because now they're getting into the collectible toy figurine market aimed squarely at the kids. Yes, it is technically hardware and you'll see why now.

In this edition of the *NAG* lazy gamer's guide, we're looking at the starter pack (*Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure*), which comes with the game, Portal of Power, elemental chart, trading cards, stickers, online codes and three figures, Spyro, Trigger Happy and Gill Grunt.



Older gamers beware – this is not the *Spyro* you might remember from 1998 by Insomniac Games, but a whole new *Spyro* that's aimed directly at the 6-12 year old market. It's an uncomplicated platform romp similar to *Ratchet & Clank* or any action adventure game where you smash open barrels and find shiny things. You play as the portal master and must defeat the evil blah before he/she/it does blah that and blah this (unimportant when you're nine). The video bits, voice acting and characters are all top notch and plenty of effort has been lavished in all the right places when it comes to the digital product. The real hook is the portal device that comes with the starter pack. Plug it into an open USB slot (Xbox and PC) and place one of the thirty-two different figurines on it and that figurine will instantly appear in the game for you to play with. Changing characters can be done at any time and is quick, easy and fast. There is some incentive for changing characters as some areas of the game are easier to play through using specific character types over others. This is tied to their particular elemental class. The other hook is that some areas of the game are inaccessible unless you have the right kind of character (again, based on their elemental class). Fear not, it is possible to complete the game without buying anything more than the starter pack. In the single-player campaign there are plenty secret areas to find, hidden treasure chests with new hats and abilities to uncover and unlock. The levels are bright and cheery and the range and diversity of the bad guys is impressive. Overall it's long enough to make it worth the asking price and challenging enough for the target age group. Besides the campaign there is a player vs. player mode consisting of three types of play – Arena Rumble, SkyGoals and SkyGem Master. A nice touch is that friends can bring their own Skylander figurines to each other's houses to play with or against regardless of platform.

/1/ PORTAL

- Using the science of electricity and plastic the portal will instantly detect the figurine placed on it. Up to two figurines can be placed on the portal at the same time.











- Lights up with different colours and is lightweight but sturdy.
- Long USB cable – The PS3 and Wii versions are wireless and battery-powered
- Rubber feet keep the portal secure.

/2/ FIGURES

- There are 32 total figures to collect.
- The figures store data and work on any platform so all experience points, upgrades and hats travel along with the toy. Taking a figurine to a friend's house for the afternoon means any progress made there will come home with the figurine.
- There are eight different elemental classes (water, fire, earth, magic, etc.) with four different characters each. In the game, some areas are only accessible using specific classes and some are better suited for certain areas. So a fire inclined character will be less effective in a water-based environment.

/3/ EXTRAS

- For a little help in the game you can place items like this on the portal for bonuses like winged boots, that'll give you a speed boost when you need it. They are time based per level so choose wisely.

/4/ WEBSITE

- **www.skylanders.com/start** – this is where the instructions send you to further 'enhance' your Spyro experience. Too bad the site falls somewhere between painful and pointless. It's pretty and there is a little game you can play using your Xbox portal or the online code that comes with each figurine. The problem is the site is slow, doesn't always connect and getting the Xbox Portal of Power to talk to the game is a technical hoop-jumping festival of aggravation that'll have even the most hardened IT professional crying into his leftover meatloaf. The weakest part of the experience – rather just don't bother.
- **Workaround:** if you can't/don't want to connect your portal to your PC then you can use this code card to access your figurine on the site. NAG



Dream Machine

If you are confused by the change that you see in the NAG Dream Machine, do not be alarmed. We have decided to spec not one but two machines that should cater to both AMD and Intel fans alike. Naturally, the AMD machine is cheaper, but at this price point, it still offers incredible performance and remains a machine for those with an uncompromising affinity to AMD but have deep pockets as well. The Intel machine features similar components but differs only in the choice of memory, motherboard and CPU obviously. Going forward, these newly specced Dream Machine machines will more closely reflect the rigs we would build for ourselves in accordance to the hardware we get to test and play with. As always, this is not the ultimate machine, but it is our "Dream Machine" and our criteria for including a component here is not only performance, but quality, functionality, value and aesthetics. Our objective is not to build the fastest machine money can buy, but the most balanced system possible with few to no shortcomings.



PSU
ANTEC HCP 1200
R2,399 / www.evetech.co.za



Graphics
MSI GTX 580 Lightning
R5,499 / www.covex.co.za



OS Drive
Kingston 240GB HyperX SSD
R5,699 / www.kingston.com



Storage drive
Seagate Barracuda 3TB
R1,999 / www.seagate.com



Chassis
Coolermaster HAF-X 942
R1,799 / www.sonicinformed.co.za



Display
ASUS VG278H 3D Monitor
R8,999 / za.asus.com



Keyboard
Logitech G19
R1,899 / www.logitech.com



Mouse
Roccat Kone +
R899/ www.sonicinformed.com



Mouse Mat
Roccat Alumic
R319 / www.roccat.org



Sound
Asus Xonar Essence STX
R1,399 / za.asus.com



Speakers
Logitech Z-5500 Digital
R3,699 / www.logitech.com



Headphones
CMStorm SIRUS
R1,199/ www.sonicinformed.com



NEW

Intel

Intel Core i7 3960X
R11,999 / www.intel.com

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme
R4,999 / za.asus.com

8GB Quad Channel DDR3 2400 MHz memory
R2,000 / www.gskill.com





NEW

Intel Dream Machine Price:

R56,806



AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150
R2,699 / www.amd.com

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7
R3,499 / www.gigabyte.com

Corsair Dominator GT DDR3 2000 MHz 8GB Dual Channel
R1,999 / www.corsair.com





AMD Dream Machine Price:

R44,305

Looking good



In the last 20 years or so, graphics on computing devices have made strides we could not have imagined in our wildest dreams. I remember having "fun" at some point playing an ATARI 5200, but I was always aware of just how much was lacking in what was presented in front of me. As computing platforms get ever more powerful, we in turn are given the power to visualize our most fantastical ideas. When we imagine fictitious worlds, be they in our dreams, creative expressions on canvas or through the written and spoken word, what we try and relate is as real in our heads as everything else immediately around us.

Through ever more powerful tools we are able to not only visualize these thoughts but actually make them a reality of sorts in a digital space. Technology then becomes a way of expression as well as that of doing the more humdrum but important tasks of simulating weather patterns and other modeling exercises. It's like a pen, a box of pencils, and other

"Much like in this day and age we don't discuss the quality of pencils and brushes as much as the work done with them, technology will one day reach that stage where the underlying technical wizardry is irrelevant but the finished work is what matters."

such tools regularly used in artistic circles. Much like in this day and age we don't discuss the quality of pencils and brushes as much as the work done with them, technology will one day reach that stage where the underlying technical wizardry is irrelevant but the finished work is what matters.

As annoying as it is to some that we have had at least ten different DirectX versions since 1997, we have to appreciate that we actually spend less time talking about the underlying technology these days than we did before. It may not seem like it but it's true. In 1997 and even more so in 1998, any hardware review of any graphics card would invariably delve into the actual rendering mechanics of the game that is being used to test said piece of hardware, or how the hardware's architecture is well suited or not to the task at hand. How well a specific graphics processor dealt with multi-texturing literally affected not only how the gaming environment looked but the performance as well. The sacrifices one had to make if the hardware was not capable were great and would render a vastly different experience depending on what hardware you had, which isn't the case today.

As a result of this, said developers and their artists could only realize worlds that could be rendered and coloured properly using 256x256 size textures for instance. Add that to the absence of any meaningful standardized texture compression algorithm for example and you have blurry, washed-out worlds that rely more on your imagination to impress rather than what is actually being rendered.

These days however, any comparison we make between game visuals is significantly less technical. For those interested in such it may still be a technical discussion but for the most part, its people debating aesthetics and not mip-mapping, filtering techniques and mini-drivers. With titles such as *Battlefield 3* or *Crysis 2*, we can look at a scene, be aware of how brilliantly it mimics reality and how mathematically correct the lighting model is without necessarily discussing anything technical about it. It may seem to some that this leads to a lesser imagination on the user side, but that isn't true, for the same reason that the artists are able to express themselves better, we are able to better imagine ourselves in said world in even greater detail than ever before. One can only be excited about what the future holds and what might the game worlds of 2022 look like, assuming the world doesn't end yet again in 2012.

Neo Sibeko

Intel Core i7 3960X

Supplier: **Intel** / Website: **www.intel.com** / RRP: **R11,999**

Intel can seemingly do no wrong of late. Well actually that isn't true; the company has not set a foot wrong since they introduced their tick-tock strategy back in 2006 when the Core family of CPUs was introduced. Sure enough, despite having to pay out both AMD and NVIDIA for anti-competitive practices in excess of USD 2.5 billion in total, the company keeps reporting record revenue quarters even in these dire economic times. Besides savvy business decisions by the powers that be, it is really the sound engineering principles that have given Chipzilla an unquestionable lead in the CPU world.

ARM is gaining strength and is likely to pose a real and tangible threat to Intel on the desktop in future, but for now, Intel remains unchallenged in the x86 world, and with the 2nd generation Core i7 CPUs, the company has further stretched what was an already impressive lead between it and what remains of the competition.

Intel once again can claim the largest CPU die to date, or at least the densest CPU die in desktop history. Manufactured using the same 32nm High-K process of the Sandy-Bridge, SB-E contains a massive 2.2 billion gates. Now keep in mind that AMD had claimed their Bulldozer cores to contain roughly 2 billion gates, but it turns out this number is actually closer to 1.2 billion (the company uses a different process though which isn't as efficient as what Intel is using to pack gates into a CPU die). This easily dwarfs any other processor to date. What isn't clear however is if this number included the fused-off areas of the die that contain the two additional cores and 5MB of L3 cache that is found in SB-EP (Xeon/server parts) CPUs or not. Regardless, it's a testament to the company's engineering brilliance.

To summarise SB-E in a meaningful manner, one has to draw parallels between it and the SB processors released in early 2011. Essentially these are very similar, offering an instruction set but with a few differences in the PCH for starters. SB-E supports PCI Express 3.0 and has a single QPI link (being derived from a server CPU this makes sense) which is absent in the Sandy Bridge CPUs. It obviously has a higher TDP (130W), being a larger die, but most importantly to the end user, it commands a price three times that of the Intel Core i7 2700K. However right now you may still see prices higher than what we have stipulated simply because of the rarity of these CPUs. At the time of writing, the entire world had less than 20,000 CPUs and that led to the eye-watering prices.

With that you get two IMCs that are improved over what was available before. That means we have more memory multiplier options than before and the CPUs run the dual IMCs in tandem for quad-channel memory bandwidth figures. Our AIDA 64 benchmarks do not show the gains of the additional two channels of memory, but in SB-E aware benchmarks, the new platform can easily achieve figures about 44GB/sec in raw bandwidth. Significantly better figures than what the Core i7 990X was capable of in triple-channel configurations.

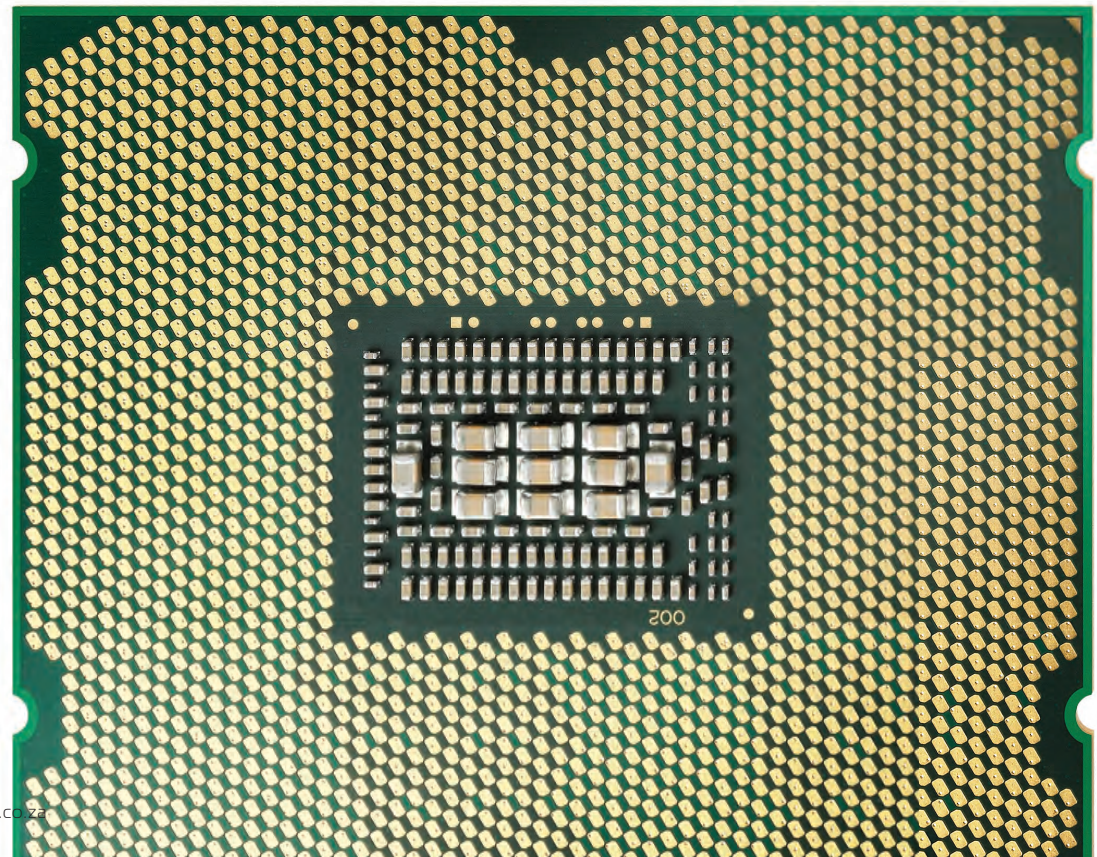
As great as this is, it's important to note that, in gaming tests, there will be no difference between dual and quad channel performance. In fact even in our beloved benchmarks such as the 3DMark series, moving from dual channel to quad channel at the same

dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

[specs]

Cores:
6 (12 Threads) 32nm
Cache:
15MB L3
Frequency 3.3 GHz
(3.9 GHz Turbo)
Socket:
LGA2011

" Those who work with massive volumes of data will benefit hugely from not only the bandwidth, but the increased amount of RAM these CPUs are able to support. "





Benchmarks

3DMark Vantage	/ 35792 /
CineBench 11.5	/ 9.68 /
Crysis 2 DX11	/ 58.34 /
3DMark11	/ 10,470 /
Resident Evil 5 DX10	/ 156 /

speed yields no gains whatsoever. However there are benefits to be had from other more professional and bandwidth-dependant workloads. Those who work with massive volumes of data will benefit hugely from not only the bandwidth, but the increased amount of RAM these CPUs are able to support.

As for IPC, it really hasn't changed much from what we saw with the Sandy Bridge CPUs. Interestingly enough though, despite the 200 MHz clock disadvantage this CPU has as compared to the 2700K, the gaming results are actually on par and sometimes better on the 3960X. We aren't entirely sure why this is so, but right now we are inclined to believe that the additional cache per core (in order of 512KB in the L3) is responsible for this increase in performance.

Regardless, if you already own a 2600 or 2700K based system you'd be hard pressed to upgrade to the X79 platform. If you do, however, you can rest assured that like the P67 and Z678 chipsets for the current LGA1155 CPUs, most X79 boards will support Ivy Bridge-E which is due around Q4 2012, so there's a lot of life left in this platform and it could actually be a worthwhile investment (at least as far as the motherboards are concerned).

For the enthusiasts and the semi- to non-competitive overclockers amongst us, if you were hoping for some incredible overclocking headroom on these CPUs as compared to the LGA1155 counterparts, you'll be disappointed. In fact by and large SB-E CPUs clock a good 200 to 400 MHz lower than the average 2600 or 2700K. The average CPU will reach 5.2 GHz, the good ones 5.3 to 5.5 GHz, but those are very rare and on average you should expect 5.1 GHz at the most. The odd thing is that using what is now the reference cooler for the Extreme Edition CPUs (the Asetek LCS as used by AMD for their FX CPUs as well) you may reach anything between 4.5 to 4.9 GHz, but with more exotic cooling gain anything from 100 to 200 MHz at the most. So these CPUs are a far cry from the 990X CPUs which were easily taken to the 5.8 to 6.2 GHz regularly. With that said, the 3960X at 5 GHz will still offer better performance than a 990X at 5.6 GHz in certain benchmarks. So it's not as bad as one may think initially.

Overall we are impressed with the direction Intel has taken with the 3960X, with improvements in the stepping and manufacturing process things can only get better, and while it may not be the killer CPU everyone expected, the Core i7 3960X is the fastest CPU money can buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / AVX instructions / PCI-Express 3.0 / Native 4-way graphics support / 12 threads
/ MINUS / Expensive / Overclocking llama

THE MOST POWERFUL DESKTOP CPU TO DATE.

8 OUT OF 10

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: **za.asus.com** / RRP: **R4,999**

Let's cut to the chase shall we? This board may be a ROG member, but it's in no way geared at gamers or the so-called power user. Sure enough, you can't really go wrong with this board regardless of what vendors refer to you as in their marketing materials. However, it would be a waste of time and space to tell you about the new audio controller on this board, the competent USB 3.0 support and such things. Let's leave those for the lesser boards, and we can comfortably say this because as it stands, this motherboard is peerless. In fact it's easily the most impressive thing that's ever come from ASUS (that includes being better than the original REX board).

Not surprising though because this is Shamino's first authentic attempt at a pure overclocking board at ASUS that isn't crippled by the platform limitations (Sandy Bridge/ 2nd gen i7 CPUs). This board has his fingerprints all over it and it's damn impressive. In fact it's the only purpose-built board after the X58A-OC to overwhelm in this manner. It is truly humbling to those capable of appreciating its exhaustive BIOS and features list.

Let's be clear, anybody can overclock SB-E CPUs north side of 4,800 MHz; it's easy and in fact on this board it will take you less than two minutes, depending on the quality of the silicon in your CPU. It's not rocket science, but to merely achieve such an overclock is to miss entirely what this board is about. ASUS will no doubt release a Black Edition of sorts with whatever "gamer orientated" gear featuring magnificent audio processing capabilities and a passable and equally useless gaming NIC, but even that can't detract from what the Rampage IV Extreme (RIVE) has brought to true overclockers.

It's safe to say that ASUS hit the ground running with the X79 chipset.

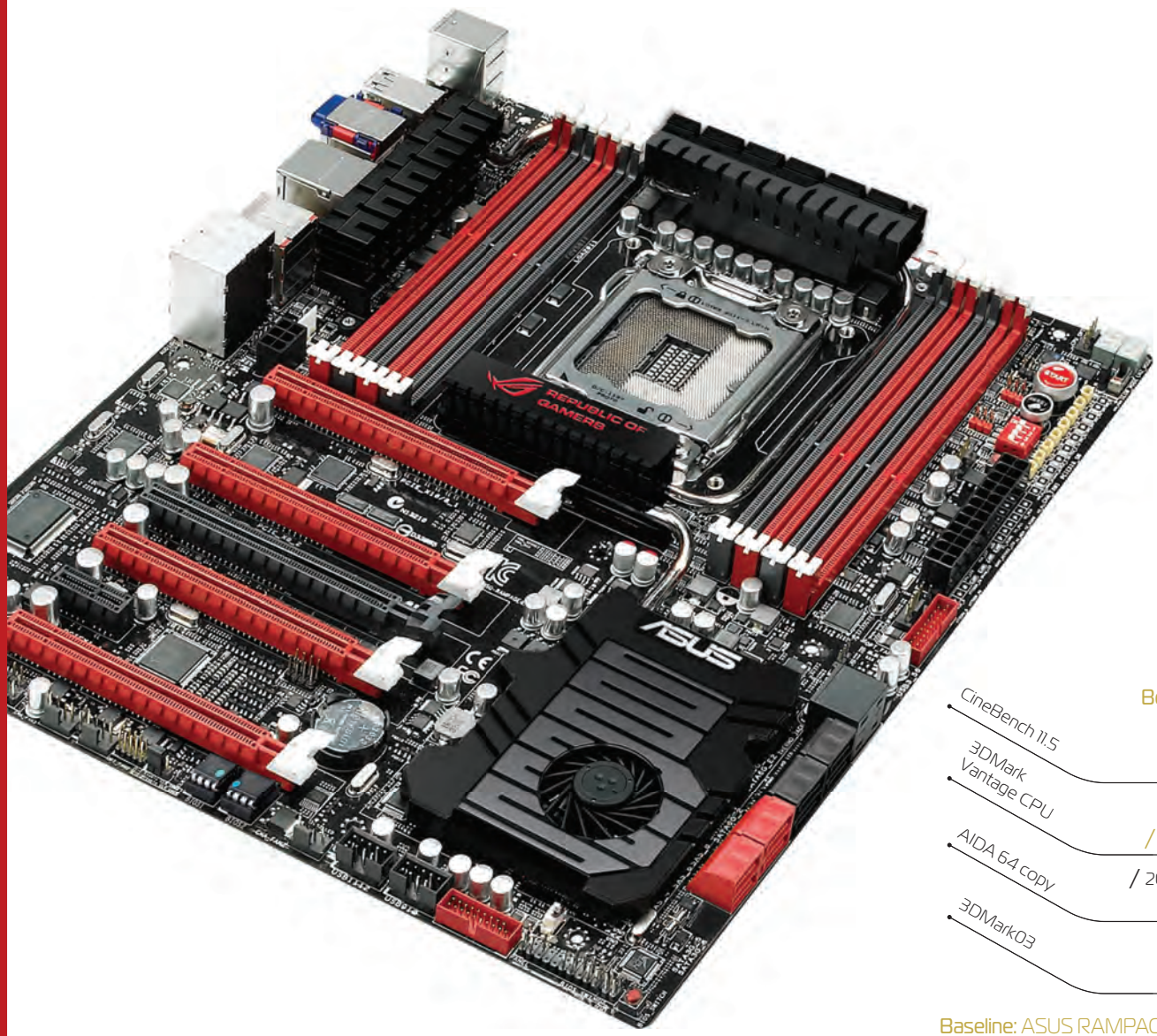
dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
8x240-pin DDR3
CPU Support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots:
4xPCI Express 3.0 16x, 1xPCI Express 8x, 1xPCI Express 2x

The first board from ASUS we had experience with (the X79 SABERTOOTH, reviewed next issue) was head and shoulders above everything else we had at the time from competitors, and this was with a pre-release BIOS. Since then things have only improved.

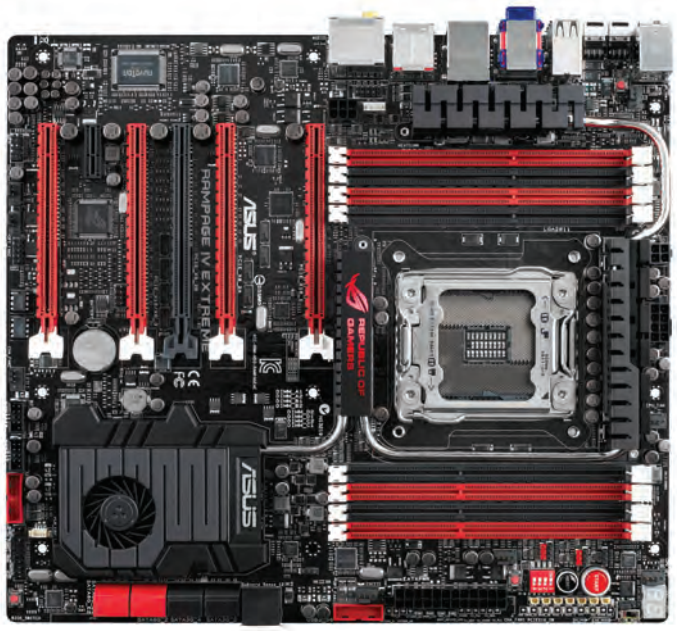
Back to the RIVE though, upon entering the BIOS, you'll be presented with easily the most comprehensive BIOS we have seen to date. This isn't like the old BIOS interfaces of the now defunct DFI, where you had more settings than you could actually make use of, paired with little to no explanation whatsoever. The Rampage IV Extreme UEFI BIOS has more options than any other board to date and it does a respectable job at explaining what each major option does. This doesn't mean that anyone and everyone will become an expert overclocker overnight. No, if anything, it'll just encourage those with little knowledge but a keen interest to start their learning experience using one of the



Benchmarks

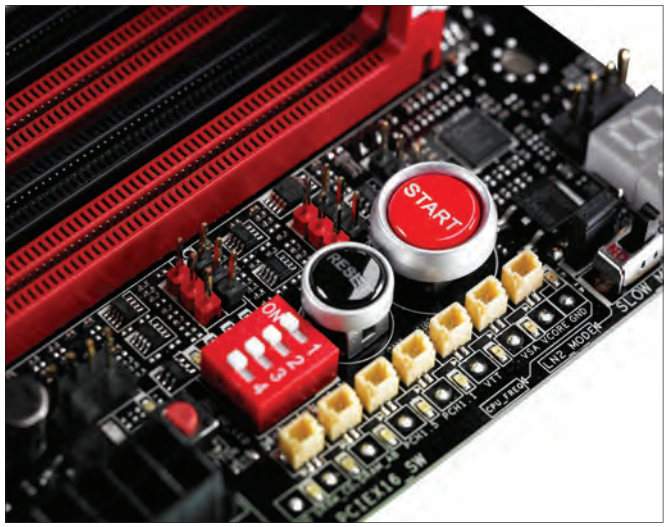
CineBench 11.5	/ 13.60 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 47,480 / / 33,737 /
AIDA 64 copy	/ 20396MB/s / / 16,441/
3DMark03	/ 156,407 / / 49.1 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE



" Gamers and power users will appreciate it, but its true value comes across when mounted on a benching table with subzero degree cooling for both graphics cards and CPUs. "





pre-configured overclocking profiles.

These are not based on some cheesy "Turbo OC" program that reboots your machine several times in a misguided attempt to configure your PC for optimum performance. While that option still exists, the profiles we are talking about are what an actual overclocker would use to test a system for stability at various CPU speeds. These profiles even include starting points for those who will be overclocking on this board using Dry Ice, phase change or liquid nitrogen.

If that's not enough for you, in the memory settings sub-menu there are more pre-configured options for memory based on different ICs from ELPIDA, HYNIX and other commonly found ICs on DRAM modules. Your mileage on these settings may vary, but with our particular memory and CPU combination, all these settings worked as stipulated.

To go into meaningful detail of each option in the BIOS would lead to a 30 page write-up at the least and since we don't have 30 pages for that, we will just say that for what is being offered here, the local pricing is more than fair. We usually don't talk about price and most likely never will again, but an exception must be made for this component. Any other competing board that attempts to retail at this price will have a hard time toppling the Rampage IV Extreme, as this is likely the best consumer motherboard to date. It isn't a half hearted attempt at making an overclocking board while still being conservative enough to make it appeal to the DIY masses. The packaging may be deceitful in that it's an ROG board, but since ASUS does not have a line/SKU dedicated to overclockers (and rightly so) ROG will have to do.

The only annoying aspect of this board is that using the first PCI Express slot is frustrating because there's a heatsink right next to it, which makes it impossible to remove a graphics card without some screw driver or appropriately long tool to unlatch the locking mechanism. The DRAM slots are also located too close to the PCI Express slot so if you use a full length card like the GTX580, you'll have a hard time using one of those RAM coolers that is sold with high speed enthusiast grade memory without some modifications first. A surprising oversight on what is otherwise a perfect board.

Barring that, we have nothing but praise for the Rampage IV Extreme. Gamers and power users will appreciate it, but its true value comes across when mounted on a benching table with subzero degree cooling for both graphics cards and CPUs. We suspect that the other major manufacturers may have to go back to the drawing board if they have any hope of beating what ASUS has.

It may still be early days for the X79 platform, but if you're looking at investing in this socket and only the best will do for you, there just isn't anything remotely close to this board out right now. NAG

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Features / Performance / Build quality
/ MINUS / 1st PCI Express slot is too close to NB

EASILY THE BEST MOTHERBOARD FROM ASUS TO DATE.

10 OUT OF 10

Krator Neso 04 N4-21U26

Supplier: **Frontosa** / Website: **www.frontosa.co.za** / RRP: **R435**

[specs]

Power output:
26 Watts RMS
Impedance:
20 ohm
Frequency response:
20~40 kHz



Unless you're one of the lucky few who own high-end notebooks that come packing more than just a rudimentary audio solution, you'd do well to pay attention to this review. If you've grown tired of your notebook's crappy sound output, or if you simply want a decent set of speakers to play music from your portable media device, the Krator Neso 04 2.1 speaker set might be just what you need.

Your appreciation of their design is going to come down to personal preference, obviously, but it's certainly unique, if a tad gaudy. The satellites and subwoofer are surprisingly light (but a bit too big to be truly portable), and while they don't feel particularly rugged, we're sure they'd withstand a fair amount of wear and tear. What makes this set so suitable for notebook use is that it's powered via USB 2.0. The left satellite and subwoofer are connected to the right satellite (where you'll also find knobs to adjust volume and bass level), which is then connected via USB and a single 3.5mm audio jack to your notebook. It's quick and easy – but the sound quality matches the price you pay for the set.

At almost all volumes, the mid and low ranges are almost completely drowned out by the set's tendency towards higher frequencies. Moreover, the sound produced is quite tinny and lifeless, and the satellites tend to render the subwoofer – which works well enough, but is nothing amazing – almost completely inaudible. Powering the set via USB also results in a small, but noticeable amount of signal interference. Still, we weren't expecting miracles from a set in this price range, and it certainly provides better sound with much higher volume than most basic notebooks. Those looking for a more meaty 2.1 solution to dedicate to, say, their desktop PCs, should probably look elsewhere. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

/ PLUS / Unique design / Cheap / Great for notebooks/media players
/ MINUS / Sound quality isn't amazing

GREAT FOR NOTEBOOKS AND PORTABLE MEDIA PLAYERS, BUT NOT AS A DEDICATED AUDIO SOLUTION.

7 OUT OF 10

NaturalPoint TrackIR 5

Supplier: **Landmark PC** / Website: **www.landmarkpc.co.za** / RRP: **R2,085**

[specs]

Raw sensor resolution:
640x480
Reporting resolution:
96,000x72,000
Field of view:
51.7°
Sample rate:
120 fps
Response time:
9ms



Today's console gamers have access to a plethora of peripherals that allow them to wave their bodies in front of their TVs to control in-game characters, but what do PC gamers have? Well, they've got this, the NaturalPoint TrackIR. If you look at the price at the top of this page, you might assume that this is a niche product for those with very special needs, and you'd be right. This is a techie gadget, not a casual gaming accessory.

The kit includes two tracking devices; one is designed to be mounted to a peak cap, and the other to a headset. If you have neither, then you need to find another creative way to strap the carefully arranged IR reflectors to your head. Once one is over the fact that there is absolutely no way to wear this contraption while retaining a semblance of sophistication, opening the software reveals both simple and highly advanced tuning options. We found the standard settings to be fine so only minimal tweaking was required. While the preview window showed the device to be extremely accurate without being twitchy (thanks to adjustable smoothness), we were disappointed to find an extremely limited list of games with native support. Flight Simulators ruled the pack, and from our testing proved to be the best way to enjoy this device, but those hoping to use the TrackIR in their favourite (or at least, current) first-person shooter will be disappointed: the most recent game updates came over a year ago.

For non-supported titles, one can use mouse emulation through a separate application. While it's a kind effort, the software isn't capable of delivering the same performance as natively supported games offer, and we were unable to find a comfortable way to use the device in contemporary first-person games like *Modern Warfare 3* and *Skyrim*. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

/ PLUS / Extremely accurate / Highly customisable
/ MINUS / Niche appeal / Limited list of supported games / Mouse emulation is no good

IF YOU'RE A DIE-HARD FLIGHT SIMULATOR PLAYER, THEN THIS IS FOR YOU. IF YOU'RE ANYONE ELSE, STICK TO YOUR KEYBOARD AND MOUSE.

7 OUT OF 10

Roccat Kova[+]

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: **www.sonicinformed.co.za** / RRP: **R599**

Roccat's Kone[+] gaming mouse took us by surprise, so we were eager to see what the Kova[+] offers gamers looking for a mouse that finds a balance between cost and performance. The result is a mouse that neither excels nor fails if it's a mid-range device that you're after. It takes a few cues from its big brother but doesn't do enough to stand out from the massive crowd.

Like dozens of mid-range gaming mice, the Kova[+] is capped at a resolution of 3,200 dpi. While that's certainly acceptable, one can't help but feel that this has too-long been the standard, and something closer to 4,000 would benefit this mouse by helping to sharpen up its accuracy when used during short-distance precision tasks. Thankfully, the [+] isn't wasted here, as a few other improvements have been made that will benefit those who tend to make rapid mouse movements.

The included driver software is as familiar as you'd expect if you're used to Roccat devices, although a number of features will be absent if those devices are of the high end. Windows commands can be assigned to each mouse button, or you can assign a macro from the impressive selection of game-specific key combos or create your own. Everything is well laid-out and simple to use, and for that, we're grateful.

The Kova[+]'s design is ambidextrous, and while that tends to create uncomfortable mice at times, this is not the case here. It's simple design is complimented by a few stylish LEDs (with customisable colours according to your chosen profile) and rubberised coating. The only thing that doesn't really make sense is the angled scroll wheel. Since it doesn't tilt to the sides, it seems like a needless feature. Finally, the device is quite light, which adds to the difficulty in precision aiming. NAG

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Max resolution:
3,200 dpi
Customisable buttons:
Seven + EasyShift[+]
Max speed:
130 inches per second
Max acceleration:
30Gs
Polling rate:
1,000Hz



/ PLUS / Comfortable / Ambidextrous / Macro assignments
/ MINUS / Limited resolution / Too light

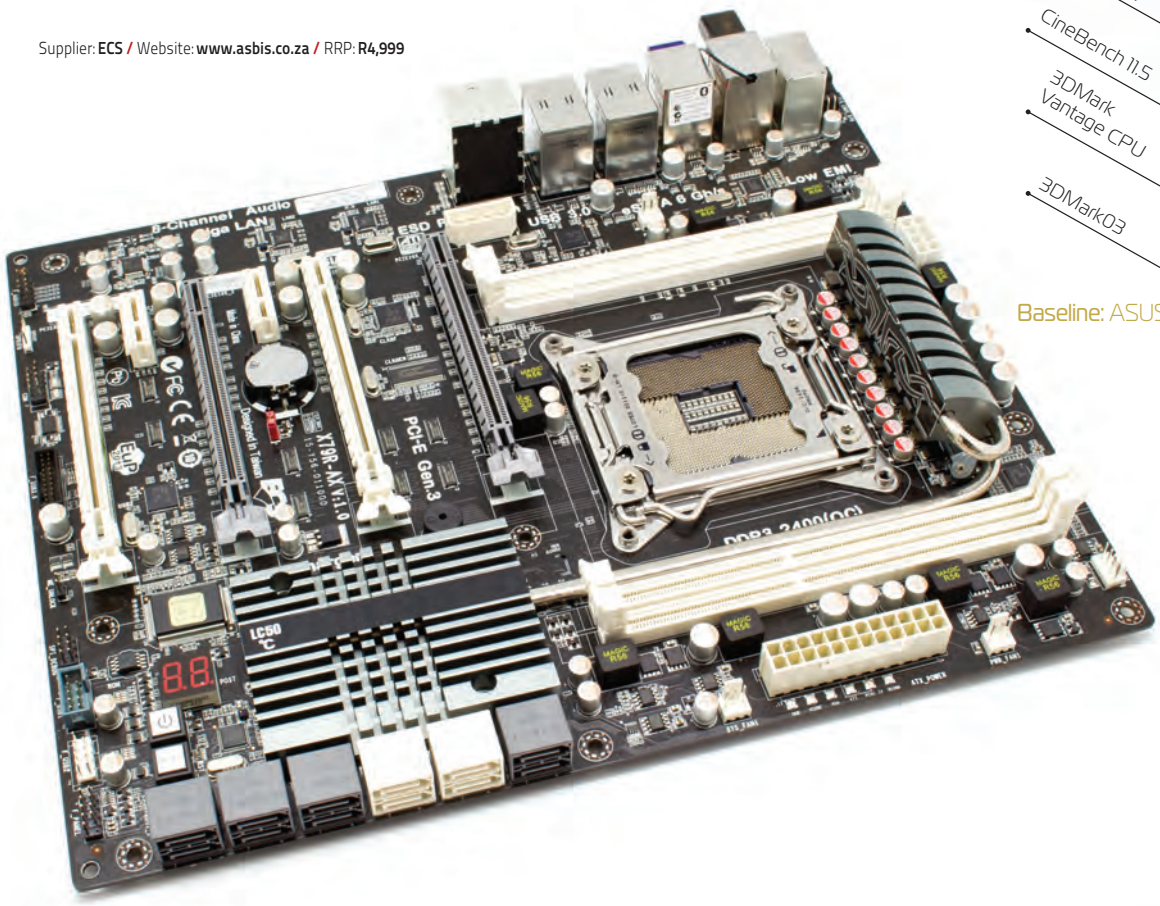
A SOLID YET UNSPECTACULAR MID-RANGE OFFERING.

7 OUT OF 10



ECS X79R-AX

Supplier: **ECS** / Website: **www.asbis.co.za** / RRP: **R4,999**



Benchmarks

AIDA 64 copy	/ 20246MB/s / / N/A /
CineBench 11.5	/ 13.57 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 47,388 / / 33,737 /
3DMark03	/ 155,025 / / N/A /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

Despite what ECS may call their enthusiast line of boards, the company has very rarely, if ever, produced a board worthy of the "Black Edition" name. The issues were always too numerous to list and at some point we had even resorted to not scoring the boards. Despite being a favoured brand for low-end systems, the last thing any self-respecting power user, let alone overclocker, would buy is an ECS board. Compared to what the competition was offering, the company was far off the mark and if you compared the company's best X58 efforts to what Gigabyte offered, the difference was night and day.

With the X79 platform, ECS has a chance to try again and, while it is still carrying over some of the peculiar designs from their previous attempts, things are looking better, in fact significantly better with the X79R-AX. The naming scheme however hasn't improved and throughout this entire review we had to check the model number at every turn as there's no consistency in their naming scheme.

Admittedly when this board first arrived it had issues and it was even pointless testing it, as some parts of the BIOS just didn't work at all and as such it was an incomplete product. Through various revisions, things started to improve and by the time this review was written, the X79R-AX was well ahead of some competing boards from far more reputable brands. Physically the board didn't change obviously and some issues were as annoying as when we first looked at the board. However the work the engineers have done has transformed what could have been yet another passable if not lamentable board into one that we would not hesitate to recommend to most users and, dare we say, even power users.

The UEFI BIOS is much improved over previous motherboards, it not only has more features but it is better organized and the description of options is better. The addition of BIOS profiles that you can name is hugely appreciated, even though one is still not able to update the BIOS from within, a feature all enthusiasts will miss to say the least, given that this has been a function on motherboards from tier one vendors for years. However, other than that it's a pretty useful BIOS with some advanced options which we've not seen on an ECS product before.

Overclocking the X79R-AX is actually very easy, thanks to the vastly improved stability and build quality of the board. Performance is right up there with the best in the business and should you decide on this model you'll not be sacrificing anything in terms of performance, memory compatibility or stability for that matter. Overclocking the 3960X to a healthy 4.62 GHz was a breeze and there was no discernible difference in performance between this board and the ASUS X79 SABERTOOTH in any benchmark we ran.

This is yet another major step in the right direction for ECS for the Black series boards. In addition to providing solid performance, the board comes equipped with dual gigabit Ethernet ports, Bluetooth support, wireless LAN, a plethora of SATA ports and USB 3.0 Support. ECS has not skimped on any feature really and it even has 4-way SLI support. For a gaming station it's hard to fault. It may not be ideal for serious overclockers but then again it's not targeted at that market. For what it is it's a great board and no doubt better than all other previous attempts at making a board for the mid- to high-end market. With some improvements in layout, design and BIOS tuning, ECS could be in the running with the bigger manufacturers for a place in power user and overclocker's radars. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU Support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots:
4x PCI Express16x, 2x PCI Express 2x

/ PLUS / Packed with features
/ MINUS / LED positioning / No built-in BIOS flashing

ECS HAS OUTDONE ITSELF WITH A REALLY COMPETENT AND COMPETITIVE MOTHERBOARD.

8 OUT OF 10

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Roxio Game Capture

Supplier: **Phoenix Software** / Website: **www.roxio.com** / RRP: **R1,299**



Roxio Game Capture has one purpose: to provide an affordable solution to anyone looking for a device that'll capture footage of their impressive console-based exploits. Furthermore, editing software is provided so you can fine tune your masterpiece before uploading it to the Internet and showing everyone that not only are you pretty handy with a rocket launcher, but you're no slouch when it comes to making home movies either.

The most appealing part of this package is how easy it is to get it up and running. It's basically just a box through which you pass audio and video component cables from your Xbox/PS3 to your TV. You then connect it to a PC or notebook that meets the minimum system requirements (although you'll need a machine that surpasses them to get the best results) via USB 2.0, install the bundled software and get down to the business of capturing moments worth bragging over. There's no external power required, and while it would've been great to see HDMI support, it's not a huge issue. The capture software takes some fiddling with to get everything working perfectly, but it's nothing too annoying.

From there, things get a bit dodgy. The device doesn't support 1080p, meaning that you're forced to play games at a maximum output of 1080i while capturing video. Recorded video only outputs at 480p, resulting in videos that pale in comparison to those recorded using true HD capture components. Roxio's VideoWave editing software provides a range of options for editing, trimming and adding various (mostly garish) effects, but it's slightly obtuse and not as friendly as other video-editing suites. It's also prone to hanging/crashing unexpectedly. Still, it'll work fine for basic editing and allows for uploading of videos directly to YouTube.

There's more praise to be given, and more things to whine about, but all you really need to know about the Roxio Game Capture device is this: at an RRP of around $100 elsewhere in the world, it's more affordable than higher-end capture methods and it's therefore easy to overlook the device's niggles. At R1,299, however, affordability goes out the window, making it difficult to recommend. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

[specs]

Minimum requirements:
Windows 7/Vista/XP
Intel Core 2 Duo 1.8GHz/AMD Athlon x2 64 2GHz
DirectX 9.0c compatible graphics card
2GB RAM
Internet connection required

/ PLUS / Easy setup / Works adequately
/ MINUS / Expensive / Software is buggy / Some video capture niggles

AT A LOWER PRICE POINT, ROXIO'S CAPTURE DEVICE WOULD BE WORTH CONSIDERING.

7 OUT OF 10

TRENDnet 450Mbps HD Media Bridge

Supplier: **Trendnet** / Website: **www.trendnet.com** / RRP: **R1,499**

[specs]

Standards:
IEEE 802.11a/b/g/n
Interface:
4 x 10/100/1000Mbps Auto-MDIX LAN ports
Power:
12V DC 1A power adapter



Hypothetical situation here: let's say your router is set up in your home's study, because that's where the phone line is. You find yourself running network cables from there to the living room, where all your expensive consoles, Blu-ray players and smart TVs live. One day, grandma's walking to the kitchen from her bedroom. Her arduous journey is set to take her through the very same passageway where your mess of dangerous cables rests. Grandma's vision ain't what it used to be, and it's not long before you hear a crash, a crack and the groans of an elderly woman. This, and all manner of accidents involving elderly folk around the world, can be avoided using TRENDnet's Dual Band Wireless Media Bridge. Probably.

Waffle aside, this device acts as a sort of wireless switch, to put it simply. You can connect four network-capable gadgets to it via Ethernet cable, and this media bridge will then connect wirelessly to your router via Wi-Fi, instantly connecting all four devices to your network without the need for Wi-Fi adapters and such. What makes this particular media bridge special, is the high speeds with which it can send/receive data across the network, as well as its dual band functionality.

It's theoretically capable of reaching transfer speeds up to 450Mbps (+-56MB/sec) on each wireless frequency – but you'll likely never actually reach transfer rates this high because of all the debilitating factors involved when connecting via Wi-Fi. Dual band wireless means you can either connect via the more popular 2.4GHz frequency, or the 5GHz frequency.

Naturally, performance will depend on distance from your access point and other such factors, but we found that the transfer rate is definitely good enough for streaming HD media with very little hiccups. For best results, you'll need an 802.11n wireless access point also capable of up to 450Mbps – TRENDnet offers a router that does just that, the 450Mbps Concurrent Dual Band Wireless N router. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

/ PLUS / Setup is quick and easy / It works
/ MINUS / Needs complementary hardware for peak performance

IT DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SHOULD, AND IT DOES IT WELL.

8 OUT OF 10

Toshiba AT100

Supplier: **Mustek** / Website: **www.toshiba.co.za** / RRP: **R4,999**



With almost every vendor releasing a tablet, more competitors are entering the market in an attempt to fill the gap created by the demise of netbooks.

The Toshiba AT100 is not Toshiba's first attempt at a tablet, but it is their first Android-based tablet and, as expected, it ships with Android Honeycomb and is built around NVIDIA's SOC Tegra 2 solution. With that comes a 1280x800-resolution screen, a 5MP rear camera and a front facing 2MP camera. Connectivity is mainly via Wi-Fi as there is no GSM network support whatsoever, but given that in most markets where it will be sold, Wi-Fi networks are everywhere, this is unlikely to be an issue.

Another great feature that you won't find on many tablets is the full sized USB and HDMI ports which make it easy to connect a real keyboard or mouse to the unit and use it as a computer of sorts. Full size connectivity extends to SDXC cards as well so you will need no adapters. Best of all however is that this tablet has a removable battery.

So on paper this device looks good, however in practice it falls a little short of the market leading tablets from Apple, Samsung and even ASUS with their Transformer offerings. The AT100 is nearly twice the thickness of a Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1. It's about 160g heaver and at a meaty 775g, it's a lot of weight to carry around with you, however one can eventually get used to it. The colours on the display are dull and are nowhere near as bright as what Apple and Samsung offer, it has no scratch protection of any kind and just looks dated. The interface has some lag as well making the entire process of using this tablet somewhat annoying.

Overall, if you're looking for a feature-packed Android-based tablet with a more affordable price than some of the other high-end offerings, then the AT100 may be what you're after. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Chipset:
Dual ARM Cortex A9 1GHz, GeForce GPU Tegra 2 T20
Memory:
1GB
Storage:
1GB Internal, 16GB storage expandable
OS:
Android Honeycomb 3.0
Screen:
800x1280 IPS Capacitive Touch screen
Camera:
5MP rear autofocus camera, 2MP front camera
Connectivity:
Wi-Fi b/g/n, Bluetooth

/ PLUS / Full size USB/HDMI and SD slots / Changeable battery
/ MINUS / Poor display / 1GB internal memory

A TEGRA 2 BASED, ANDROID 3.X TABLET FROM A MAJOR VENDOR THAT INCLUDES MOST TABLET FEATURES.

6 OUT OF 10

CM Storm Quick Fire Rapid

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: **www.sonicinformed.co.za** / RRP: **R849**



If you're after a gaming keyboard that identifies you as the unique snowflake you know you are, then this is the next best thing after that attempt to spray-paint your flea-market PS/2 board neon pink. There are two main reasons why this keyboard stands out: it's tiny, and it uses mechanical keys. If you've ever experienced typing on a keyboard from the early '90s or prior, you'll know the feeling and iconic sound that mechanical keys offer. It'll come down to personal taste whether or not this technology appeals to you, but the smooth, linear button presses and gentle springing back feel fantastic while gaming and typing. On the flip side, that iconic button squeaking and clacking, and deep button depression might irritate those used to quiet, light-touch gaming boards from the likes of Logitech and Razer. The squeaky space bar, in particular, sounds like a gossiping budgie during heavy typing sessions.

The size of this board is due to the lack of a num pad, and again, that may or may not bother you based on your personal preferences. Personally, I miss it, but for gamers on the go or those with limited desk space, you'll probably be glad to have that chunk of keyboard absent. I suspect that the other reason the num pad is missing is to keep down costs. With each key using a dedicated spring-loaded mechanical micro-switch, this keyboard gets significantly more expensive as you add more keys, which could account for the lack of dedicated macro/gaming keys. While we appreciate the driver and hassle-free installation, it's almost unheard of for a gaming board to exclude such functionality, and we know that some gamers will feel short-changed. At least a few basic multimedia functions are present courtesy of a function key. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Interface:
USB (PS/2 adaptor included)
Advanced keys:
Multimedia control, Windows key disable, volume control
Simultaneous key presses:
Six
Dimensions:
356.6x135.5x30mm
Weight:
940g

/ PLUS / Keys feels great for gaming and typing / Replaceable WASD keys
/ MINUS / Noisy / No num pad / No gaming keys

7

Unfinished business



It's 2012, which means it's also almost the end of the world[1]. I'm not much for anything so tawdry[2] as New Year's resolutions, but if this really is the end of days, I've got some stuff to resolve before being devoured by cyborg vampire lizards from outer space or whatever it is that's supposed to happen.

Starting with *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, which is one of only two Zelda games I've ever played.

... And I haven't finished it.

The other one is *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*.

... Which I haven't finished either.

I also haven't finished about half of the games I've downloaded from the Xbox LIVE Arcade, I've finished only about half of my *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* Veteran playthrough, and I've not even *started* any of the *Mass Effect 2* DLC I bought almost a year ago.

And I never played the original *Half-Life*[3]. Or *Minecraft*, for that matter.

It's kind of an occupational hazard, though – I mean, when your job is playing games, you don't always find the time to play the games you *want* to play, and instead, you have to stay in playing some sort of railway simulator while all your friends play Awesome IV: The Super Mega Ultra Awesomer in the park outside. True story.

And maybe it's because I'm getting older, but it's like time got dialled up to hyperspeed or something[5], and every moment is passed by in just a moment and gone forever, kbai, what's next. If somebody asked me what I've been doing the last six months, I'd tell them that this one time, I went to the V&A Aquarium with my twin sister, only I think that might actually have been six years ago because she lives in London now, and I've not even seen her in two years, and I feel super-sad.

So much for unresolved stuff. And honestly, I'm probably not even going to get around to any of that because *Mass Effect 3* is out in March already, and that's practically next week. NAG

Tarryn van der Byl

"If somebody asked me what I've been doing the last six months, I'd tell them that this one time, I went to the V&A Aquarium with my twin sister..."

[1] Well, that's if you're the sort of person who thinks astrology is a real thing. I'm not, but I'm also not going to disregard the possibility of a cataclysmic asteroid impact sometime around mid-April either, just because.

[2] Or personally accountable.

[3] Although I have an excuse for that – pretty much every FPS released before 2000 or so gave me such dire motion sickness, I'd be dry-heaving my snackwich in two to the minutes, max[4].

[4] So no, I've not played *Doom*, *Quake*, or *System Shock*. I'm such a fraud, etc.

[5] Or maybe it's just because I'm going a bit mad. I sing '80s pop songs to my cat sometimes too. Quite often. Okay, I just did it.

Extra Life

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NAG

HARDWARE

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme blows us away

THE DARKNESS II

There's always a little light in the darkness

REVIEWS

Skyrim

Uncharted 3: Drakes Deception

Minecraft

Assassin's Creed: Revelations

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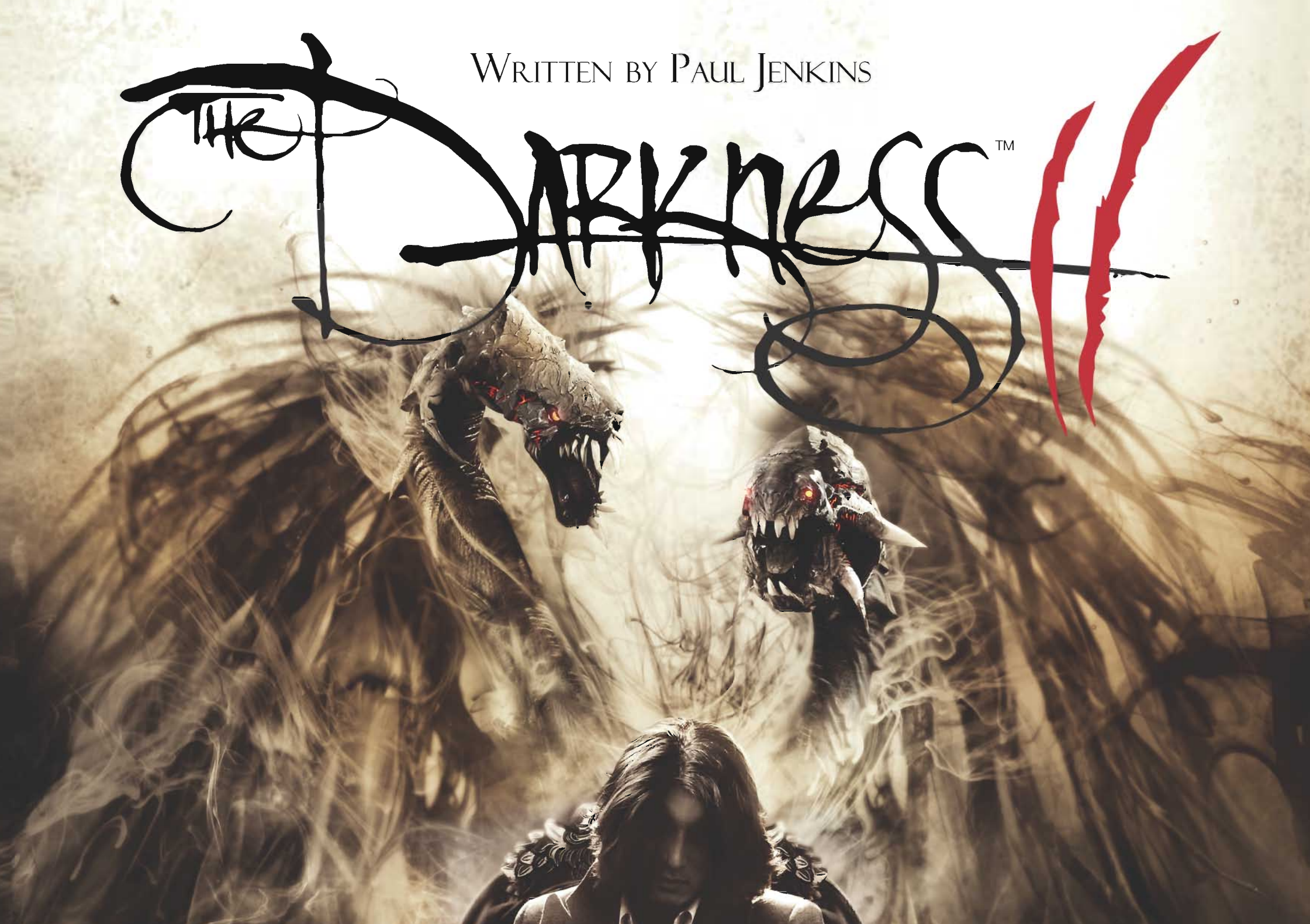
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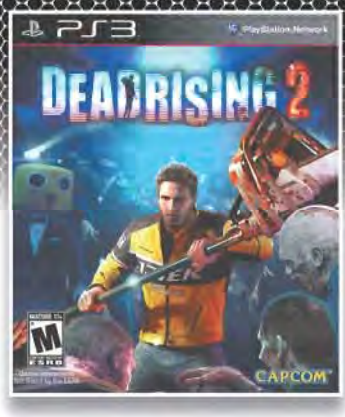
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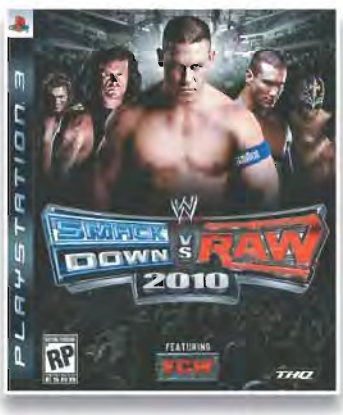


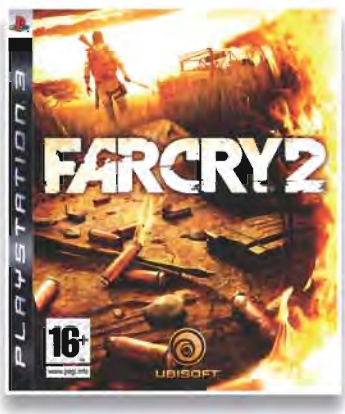




















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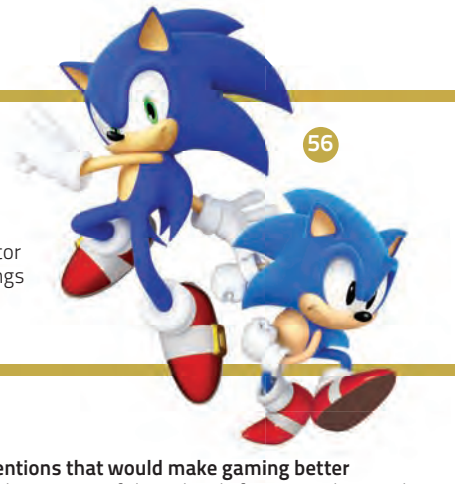
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I've come to talk with you again...



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Happy honest year

Well here we are again, another year gone and a new one starting. I'm just going to quickly grab last year's January *NAG* to see what I was on about then... Hold this magazine for me, I'll be right back.

...

Oh, never mind. I thought I wrote some predictions in there for 2011 and was now going to see how wrong or right I was. Damn. There goes my whole plan for this bit of the magazine...

Now what?

While I feel it's important to point out something I mentioned in that issue that I must also mention now in this one. As you can feel the magazine is thinner this month. Most other magazines do a combined January and February issue because advertising is notoriously low this time of year. It's a nice, lazy idea that we can't really do at NAG because there's just too much happening in the word of gaming all the time. That being said, most of the missing pages would have been advertising anyway, so you're not really missing out on any gaming or hardware content. Win.

But enough with the padding and word-count stuffing – I still don't really have a good topic and there is some pressure to get this done before we're off to print for the holidays. Forgive me; it's right at the end of the year (at time of writing this) and the imagination, inspiration and drive need a little refuelling on a beach somewhere. Some of you might be shaking your heads thinking what a tonsil I am, all I have to do is play games all day and write about them – what's so hard about that? All true I won't lie, this is without a doubt one of the greatest jobs on the planet, but sometimes you hit a creative dry patch.

I'm going away for a bit now, some coffee and a quick *Minecraft* session, maybe even some *MW3*... I should have something when I get back.

Nope, that didn't work. On the plus side I am exactly 345 words in now, which helps.

I asked around the office and the vote was just be honest. So here goes. I'm tired right now, I can't think of anything too smart or relevant to write here even though it's a 'fresh new year' and I just can't fake it, besides you wouldn't respect me in the morning right. ;) Tarryn has a cute new cat that looks how I feel in this picture right now. On a more positive note, 2012 is going to be a hot one but I'll get excited about it when I get there okay. Later, love you all and goodbye.

INSIGHT INTO NAG...

So, we asked Tarryn to write the Top 8 feature this month but she forgot – I mean really! So as of now she's dead to us, a useless thing, like an appendix. But not the good kind of appendix that bursts suddenly overnight and leaves you cold and stiff by morning, but rather the kind that forces you to be in the hospital on Christmas day. You know, while everyone else is laughing and drinking and opening gifts you're writhing in pain and going under the knife. But if that's not bad enough your whole family is there too, giving support and faking sympathy when they'd rather be... see above. So, special thanks to doctor Miklós for helping us and boo to Tarryn whose other employers are obviously more important to her. ;) NAG

RedTide
[Editor]



I shot this with a Canon Rebel T1i / 500D, 18-55mm lens, ARROWSTORM OF LOOOOOOVE.





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***Disclaimer:** All letters sent to NAG are printed more or less verbatim (that's as we get them for you kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors.)

Letter of the Month January 2012

From: Andreas
Subject: I-Rate PS me

Bearing my last mail in mind [*look, I get a lot of mail each month so I don't remember your last mail exactly – it was something about buying Dead Space 2 because we recommended it right, Ed*], I thought long and hard about how right your November Ace Combat: Assault Horizon review was, but then, I also finally realised (like finding the right word to use in Space Quest II to cross the river safely by "RUBBING" berries on you), you come to these conclusions (usually) at the end of the game... every game has its air of expectation (otherwise, who would buy it), and it is not until it is (thoroughly) played finished, that your expectation is satisfied... or let down... however, it takes finishing a game to fully understand it, and base your opinion on it...

I know now why I didn't enjoy the first few missions as much as I'd have liked (or perhaps could have), I already knew it'd get monotonous, so I looked out for it in every mission, and thus, experienced it. I knew there wasn't much more to come in terms of gameplay, you (and the Internet) already clarified that for me, and so I had that involuntary mind-set going into every mission - very anti-climax. Thus, I reiterate the very important, very basic rule for my fellow 'disheartened' gamers to consider when/before reading a review: If you don't want the gaming experience of your favourite title spoilt before even giving it a chance, don't read the review. Chances are, you, 1, won't be able to handle a bad review as well as you'd like (like me, apparently), 2, could've enjoyed the game in ignorant bliss, forming an opinion that contradicts the review - another's opinion, or 3, would eventually find out the game was 'bad' (as published) anyway, but experienced it the right way, on the way. Reviews aren't there to restrain you. If I remember correctly, they were better served broadening your gaming horizons to alternative genres, not turn you away from those you already support. It's a double-edged blade.

NAG; keep fighting the good fight...

You have a good point (even though you're telling people not to read a large section of the magazine each month). It's true what you say and I have my own example (because this is really all about me end of the day), I love, (love) the* Command & Conquer *series (*Red Alert *too) and was super excited to play number 4. In fact the original* Command & Conquer *rocked my world so hard it might have actually altered my path in life. For some reason or the other I didn't get and play it (*C&C 4*) on release weekend and came to the office on the Monday to poor, mixed and mostly negative reviews. I still have the game – in plastic. I never installed it because I heard so many bad things about it. In my case I guess I didn't want to ruin my good memory of the series. I'll get to it someday but it'll have dated by then and that'll probably make things even worse. So yes, 'reading' reviews is a double-edged sword which is why all the guys at NAG try and find the silver lining in everything we look at. That said, it's still fun ripping apart a rubbish game – those that really deserve it anyway. Ed.

This month, the winner can choose from any 2011 game release on the platform of your choice from Megarom.

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness.

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From: Brandon
Subject: The Passion...

Right NAG, I'll be copping out the bullsh1t and get straight to the point. Yes your magazine is awesome blah, blah, blah... But I'm going to ask you something personal. As I was playing MW3 multiplayer a few days ago shooting a camper's head off, I realised something. What am I doing? What are we as gamers doing? Am I wasting my life's time in front of a computer or am I doing something important in my life? What leads me to paying R400 for a game that's the same but with a different storyline? All I can say is that I don't have a cooking clue. Is this just what we do for fun or is it a fire that burns. That... that passion as we follow Captain Price. So please answer me this. Am I wasting my time, my life, in front of a screen to bring, me, what...?

Umm, Echo team we have a teal warning light over at Brandon's house, I repeat, a teal warning light. We might lose this one to another hobby like collecting belly button fluff or making those scrunched up balls of Easter egg paper. Be on the lookout for genre apathy and take along a copy of something different like* Minecraft *for him to try. Also get a FPS apathy specialist in to check his FPS selection for anything interesting or different besides* Call of Duty. *This is a teal warning over. Ed.

From: Brendan
Subject: The big one has landed-and it can sod off!

Yup, they're here. MW3, Battlefield 3. OMG moment – but wait, am I going to buy them? Nope and here's why. You see, as an FPS fan I find it hard to believe that so much hype can be generated around a "good" game Yes, Call of Duty is a well renowned franchise but it begs the question, what makes it so special. It's not as if it has mind blowing graphics, or an intense twist and turn storyline, or even overboard amazing game play. It's just an FPS, with slow-motion scenes and dramatic musical scores. So why spend more money on it then say, a game that scored a much higher rating. Traditionally, game developers bring out their big releases around Christmas time so that they can get the sales up. And this year, we are swamped with great games. So why not, instead of buying more of the same, FPS, 4 hour campaign, online abusing junk, find something new? *audience gasps* "Oh no, not our beloved COD!" but they forget something. Over the years, Call of Duty's storyline has gotten weaker, and weaker, and weaker. From the epic plot of COD4, to now, MW3. It's over used – great inventiveness there Activision *mock applause*. The only reason COD sells is thanks to online warfare. That's all fine and dandy, but what happened to FPS where story came first? Take Borderlands for example, interesting story, RPG elements and the online side falls away. Brilliant! Now it may seem like I'm being snooty, which I am, but this is because I have 4 COD games, all of which cost around R500, and now after completing their four hour campaign lay in my drawer collecting dust, as there are no longer people playing World at War online, the only COD worth playing. It may seem like I'm a COD-hater but I'm not. I'm just someone who says, instead of being a sheep and following everyone else in buying MW3, why not, choose your own path? The end of this year promises great releases, such as Skyrim. I just find the repetitiveness of killing random online people with different guns, just plain dull but maybe that's just me. That is why I shall be buying Batman: Arkham City and Saints Row: The Third. And maybe I'll buy COD again someday, when they make a decent single player. But until then, story based FPS only for me, because if the breed dies out, the fans die out too.

I think we just found a new leader for Echo team. You're right and wrong depending on perspective. Right, because the single-player experience is getting flashier and more Hollywood by the year but shorter and shorter (a consequence of all the expensive flash). Wrong, because this kind of game drags gaming into the limelight and grows the industry. It's the Michael Bay of gaming and we need it. On the multiplayer side – you either enjoy killing people online or you don't. I've logged hundreds of hours in* Call of Duty *and as each year passes I just move onto the next one and blow hours of my life away on that. I enjoy it because I enjoy killing humans versus the AI. You either get a kick out of this or you don't. I like to find balance and you'll just as easily find me playing* Dead Space, Minecraft *or* Terraria *in equal measures on any given night. Ed.

From: Adam
Subject: The Advert

Thank you, thank you, thank you... I'm really glad you took out that add (fat guy in jeans, you probably don't remember but I sent an email about it) and replaced it with that beach side beauty. You have my eternal gratitude (or you have it until the blood stops going to my head from hours stuck on the couch playing videogames). This add got my attention in way more pleasant means than the last one (don't put it back I'm begging you). So I want to know if you're going to put it back in the January issue beforehand... and later if possible what page it's going to be on so I can keep my eyes away from the horrific site.

I'm not really entirely sure what you're talking about here so I'll try and answer you in your language. There is a good chance

Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"Not that the Xbox is a bad product, hells no the Xbox is one of the cornerstones of society and the civilization would crumble if it were ever to vanish."
– Shaderow

"My console of preference is the PC, and it will always be the PC."
– Sebastian

"It seems like Bethesda has been too busy trying to sue Minecraft for a word that is in the dictionary already, and forgot what they should've been doing."
– Ruan

NAG Fan artwork

This is the cream of the crop that we received at NAG this issue. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Remember, don't just stick the logo on a picture – use the logo in a picture or you win squat.



George Safi, "A little tribute to the NAG office. Not sure if this is the right department to send fan art to."

what you're talking about will be in the January issue on a page in the magazine somewhere. It might not be the one you're looking for so keep an eye out for it on the page anyway. On another note, try taking a break from gaming every eight or so hours and let the blood move around the rest of your body – like your brain – before sending me mails like this that make no sense and annoy everyone that reads them. Ed.

From: Zaheer
Subject: I know it sounds dumb but...
What details should I include for the letter of the month prize?

A good start is sending me an actual letter. It should make sense and be about what we do in NAG. Try reading it once through before sending it – that helps with spelling and the making sense bit above. It should be in English with grammar and stuff. I do read all the mail that comes through that ancient system called the post office but I'll never reply because I don't know where to buy stamps or how they work – also writing with a pen is yuck. If you win we'll get hold of you so use a proper email address when sending it in. Now that you understand how the world works a little more get cracking. Also there is no 'system' for getting the letter of the month prize. Also remember Miklós, a regular writer for NAG now (also someone we send overseas to see new games), started his whole career with NAG by sending me a letter – true story. ;) Ed.

From: Ruan
Subject: Beta Gaming
Hey guys. I recently had an idea, whether it's genius or retarded is for you to decide. Some of the games that people work the hardest on are often finished, or at least in final beta, are thrown out and the developers start them from the beginning because of some trivial nonsense or because they suddenly want it to go in a new direction. The problem is that sometimes the first path was a better one than the one that's released, and we are disappointed again. Like DNF, a lot of people loved the early trailers and the demo that came out around 2001. But the developers just didn't think it was perfect enough and kept starting from the beginning, even though what they had was probably better than the re-reboot by Gearbox. So here's an idea. When we buy a game like DNF, that's been remade over and over again why not include the other versions of the game that were disposed of by the creators as well. Even if the graphics are a bit outdated, if the game is solid give us a chance to appreciate their hard work. We get more game and the developers know that at least their endless toiling away counted for something.

This is a great idea, but a little impractical. It's just like planning to travel to space using nothing but cereal boxes, a snorkelling kit and can of lighter fluid (true story this one time). These early alpha versions usually only work on a few development machines at the developer and for everyone else will be buggy and unplayable. The effort required to get them into a working state will take too long and eat up too many resources to make it worth the effort. The better idea would be to make the development code and files available to the gaming community and let people with nothing better to do finish up these half-baked efforts. Ed.

From: Hard to say
Subject: Bible as a Videogame
This pretty much something that I have been thinking would make an awesome game and yes some of the questions that the editor asks come into play, but one thing that we need to remember is that the game should not be based on interpretation but as exact and it will excel on a Wii console as most stories need interaction and the Wii mote is perfect for such an epic story... So that's my two bits to the whole thing of The Chronicles of the Bible.

I can't get the image of Moses parting the Red Sea while holding up two Wii remotes out of my head now. Ed.

From: Someone
Subject: Questions
Is there such a career as a game tester? What is an OS Drive? And what is it used for?

There is no career as a game tester in this country – sorry to ruin your bright future. When we say OS drive we mean a small SSD drive that you run your operating system from/off/etc. Also, when you send in mail to us do the following: say hi, say what you want to say and then say goodbye leaving your name... We're not savages. Ed.

On the Forums

Too many cows in the same pen, speak to us – we know. Most are welcome: http://www.nag.co.za/forums/

Question: What magical, wonderful, totally-doesn't-need-to-be-likely announcement in the gaming industry would you like to hear in 2012?

nukehead: TimeSplitters sequel... again

Gammaray: Microsoft and Sony work together to bring one console with one service. All fanbois die painful death after the announcement. World peace reigns as a result.

echo: Black Mesa Source releases in 2012.

Xperimance: The release date of Metal Gear Solid Rising.

The Wolf: BioShock Infinite has a release date! :D

ZoRPA: Rocksmith availability/release in South Africa.

Fredder: All future games at most only needs internet connectivity for activation and fully LAN friendly . . . *Cough*Diablo 3*Cough*.

ShawniF: Whatever Respawn are working on at the moment.

Jodez: A PS3 Digimon game, and it should be a mixture of Monster Hunter and Pokémon.

Acinixys: A full 3D Pokémon MMO, as well as the abandonment of ALL forms of DRM.

Jerkydarkstar: A Skyrim PS3 patch that works!

Toxxyc: Duke Nukem's non-sucking sequel.

S7wede: The return of Bullfrog and all their epic franchises. Theme Hospital, Dungeon Keeper and a real Syndicate sequel.

wisp: In-store activation , no more need for a internet connection at home -coming soon to store near you.

pArkEr: FIFA 13. What, you said it doesn't have to be likely!

spjt07: An offline version of Diablo 3. :)

Deaththekidd: A anti-camping system.

Wherewulf1: The Guild Wars 2 release date.

Changsta 187: The introduction of mind-control gaming.

5h@un13: Easy: World of Warcraft fully Free to play. And another Prince of Persia.

"A good start is sending me an actual letter. **It should make sense and be about what we do in NAG.** Try reading it once through before sending it – that helps with spelling and the making sense bit above. It should be in English with grammar and stuff."

Fus-Roh-DAH!



One of the many interesting things about *Skyrim* is the one aspect of the game that's polarized gamer opinion. That aspect's name is Lydia, the "Housecarl" (read: enslaved bodyguard) that gets assigned to you as an NPC companion near the beginning of the game.

I live in a dual-copy-of-*Skyrim* household: I play it on PC and my wife plays it on Xbox 360. We spend romantic evenings in different rooms of the house, both laughing maniacally while we slaughter dragons, and squealing with excitement when we Fus-Roh-Dah an NPC off a mountain; our future children are so, so screwed. We've agreed on ninety-nine percent of the game, but have realised that our feelings towards Lydia will always clash. I love Lydia – my wife hates her with the searing intensity of a million exploding hydrogen bombs. While I'll turn to Lydia after each dicey encounter with a Hagraven and tell her "good job" (don't you dare judge me), my wife's playtime was frequently interspersed with colourful language in response to Lydia's questionable AI. I say "was" because Lydia is dead in her game, and there might have been a cackle of delight as she met her demise.

> **"The good news is that I'm not the only nerd besotted with Lydia"**

My Lydia is also dead; this adds a morbid element to my adventures through *Skyrim*. I miss her and her constant inane commentary: no Lydia, that's the cave we just **came out of**... no use wondering what's in there. Perhaps it was her glaring stupidity that made her endearing? The fact that she doubled as a pack-donkey was also a bonus. So she triggered every trap and constantly ran in front of my arrows; I didn't care because she was always at my side and always bitching about being sworn to carry my burden. And I loved her for that.

Lydia had survived worse, but it seems the business end of a Blood Dragon is not to be trifled with. Once the dust had settled, I looked around for her. She was dead, and I was mortified. I couldn't leave her body all twisted up like a pretzel, so I tried my hardest to give her a proper burial. To this day her body lies in the mountains north of Whiterun, her Dwarven Helmet tucked under her arm and her sword resting quietly next to her. I routinely leave flowers by her side whenever I'm in that area. And yes I'm aware I probably need therapy for doing so.

The good news is that I'm not the only nerd besotted with Lydia. A few days after my public mourning (via Tweeted screenshots of her enshrined corpse – I'm totally claiming the label of "First *Skyrim* Undertaker for Deceased Companions") John Walker of website Rock, Paper, Shotgun posted a similar experience regarding Lydia. So what is it about this NPC companion who, honestly, epitomises everything we ordinarily hate about stupid AI partners?

I still have no idea, but I know I miss her canned responses to random events during the game, despite them being hit or miss. If this "staged organic interaction" between player and NPC is the reason, then I'm looking forward to *BioShock: Infinite* for a whole new reason. Ken Levine and company are putting a lot of effort into making Elizabeth the NPC companion against whom all future companions will be judged. All I'm really concerned about is whether or not Elizabeth will fill the void Lydia left in my pixelated heart.

Miklós Szecsei

Rumour: multiplayer Dragon Aging and first-person Dead Spacing



Well, here's an interesting bit of news-type stuff. *Kotaku* has unleashed a delightful pair of rumours, crediting an anonymous insider as the source of the alleged info. It pertains to two of EA's biggest franchises: *Dead Space* and *Dragon Age*.

Let's deal with *Dead Space* first, shall we? Although the series has already proven quite lucrative for EA, the anonymous insider states that the publisher wants to "make the series bigger and better." With this in mind, EA allegedly aims to create a first-person shooter, a "flight game" and an "*Uncharted*-like game," all set in *Dead Space*'s horrifying universe. In addition, the insider reveals that *Dead Space 3* was almost cancelled, when EA's management shift back in August "brought in new brass that nearly killed off *Dead Space 3*." Thankfully, the game is alive and well; it's set on an icy planet called Tau Volantis, and it'll feature cooperative play.

Next up: *Dragon Age*. Like the surprise addition of multiplayer in *Mass Effect 3*, the insider's claims that the *Dragon Age* series will receive a multiplayer offering comes as a bit of a shock. Supposedly this multiplayer offering will be powered by the almighty *Frostbite 2* engine, the very same engine that powers the beauty and destruction of *Battlefield 3*. Now, this could be part of an all-new *Dragon Age* title, or it might be a downloadable thingamajig: it's not clear yet. But it'll apparently be an arena-based multiplayer offering, with both PvE and PvP, as well as... wait for it... playable dragons OMG.

Time will tell if these rumours prove true, but they sure are titillating. It's a bit odd that EA feels the need to pimp *Dead Space* in so many new ways, but hey: we love the series so much that we refuse to believe it could result in anything but awesome.

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We love *Total War: Shogun 2* here at clan *NAG*, so we're delighted to hear that the game is soon to receive its first standalone expansion. Dubbed *Fall of the Samurai*, its premise deals with the fast-approaching industrial age that threatens to devour the way of the samurai in the face of British, American and French encroachment upon samurai ideals. So, basically: it's *The Last Samurai*, minus Tom Cruise.

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Ho ho holy bananas would you look at these sales figures



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Bear in mind that the above figures are only for the US, and don't represent worldwide holiday shopping which will likely match or beat these sales. It seems like many more people are realising that this is a good season to be a gamer.

Garriott puts his prediction cap on

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He's predicted that console gaming will buckle under the weight of portable devices. Now, he's not the first to make predictions of this sort, but hey: anything to get back in the news, right? In addition, Garriott believes that MMOs will lose market share and give way to social and casual games. It seems he believes that the MMO era (the height of which ran from 2000 through to 2010) has reached its twilight years, and that social gaming is here to stay.

Now, bear in mind that Garriott's current company, Portalarium, is specifically devoted to the social gaming side of things, so we can't help but point and scream "biased!"

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Fan fiction foibles



How obsessive are you *really* about your games? Would you consider yourself a 'hardcore' gamer – and what does that mean to you?

Are you one of those people who collect all the associated paraphernalia related to a specific game – the figurines, the coffee mugs, the platinum, exclusive, collector's edition that cost you most of your salary and means your family can't eat for the rest of the month?

Do you complete a game and then forget about it as you advance towards your subsequent conquest, or do you fantasise a little about what it would be like to engage with your favourite characters in that game?

Surprisingly, despite the opening line, this isn't a speech about what defines a hardcore gamer but rather about the obsessive immersion that for many of us comes with the territory of being gamers. Including that enigmatic beast: fan fiction.

I'll even admit to having indulged in this pastime. Once.

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Right, moving on.

My point is that for many gamers, particularly those with a somewhat overactive imagination, fan fiction is a way for us to further our enjoyment of certain games. I will admit to trawling (not trolling!) certain fan fic sites at times in order to explore the perceptions others have of the characters in a specific game – and there is some awesome fan fic out there.

There is also some complete and utter garbage.

Which I recently stumbled upon. My favourite site of the week is **badfanfic.tumblr.com** – an online archive that mocks the 90% of bad fan fiction out there.

It is a place where you can find gems such as this, titled "Of Roses and Cookies, a *Dragon Age* fanfic". The summary reads, "In this one, Alistair gives Helen his rose with rather unexpected results. Also, Alistair learns about women and their cycles when Leliana, Morrigan and the PC all PMS at the same time."

Seriously? Bad sexual innuendo aside, if I wanted to read fan fiction about *Dragon Age* PMS... Oh wait, no I never want to read that. Ever.

Whilst I applaud the writing of original and interesting fan fiction, I must wonder at the wisdom of some people spewing stuff like that out on to the Internet. Did it sound like a good idea in your head? Did you write it on a whim? Or did you sit down and think long and hard about your story?

Hmmm, possible plot ideas... I want to include Alistair because he's so cute and innocent. Oh if he's innocent then not only will he be a virgin, but he also won't understand the inner workings of a woman's body. What's the best way to write about this... I know! Why don't all the women in the party all get grumpy and PMS-y at the same time! That will confuse him and yet teach him about women all at the same time!

Googling the title I was rewarded with this gem, courtesy of *Benevola* on FanFiction.net,

Alistair waved his arms in the air. "Helen is crying about being fat, even though she isn't fat at all. Morrigan has stolen Sten's cookies and eaten all of them. And Leliana..." he shuddered. "Leliana is MEAN, Wynne. Really, really MEAN."

Yeah, I see he hasn't gotten less whiny, even in someone else's imagination.

Pippa Tshabalala

CD Projekt's piracy problem



The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings: a phenomenal PC-exclusive (for now, at least) RPG that deserves to be played by as many people as possible. It'd just be nice if the majority of the people who've played it weren't filthy pirating douchewads. Marcin Iwinsky, CEO of Polish developer CD Projekt RED, has revealed that the game has been pirated approximately four and a half million times. And that number is reached via optimistic estimation.

"I was checking regularly the number of concurrent downloads on torrent aggregating sites, and for the first 6-8 weeks there was around 20-30k people downloading it at the same time," said Iwinski. "Let's take 20k as the average and let's take 6 weeks. The game is 14GB, so let's assume that on an average not-too-fast connection it will be 6 hours of download. 6 weeks is 56 days, which equals to 1344 hours; and with 6h of average download time to get the game it would give us 224 downloads, then let's multiply it by 20k simultaneous downloaders."

"The result is roughly 4.5 million illegal downloads. This is only an estimation, and I would say that's rather on the optimistic side of things; as of today we have sold over 1M legal copies, so having only 4.5-5 illegal copies for each legal one would be not a bad ratio. The reality is probably way worse."

Regardless of these shocking numbers, CD Projekt is sticking to their no DRM guns, with Iwinski stating that they're still completely against obtrusive DRM. The company doesn't want to punish legitimate purchasers of their titles by adding DRM. It's a noble gesture, one we hope makes every pirate out there feel incredibly guilty. Then again, who are we kidding: they're probably too busy shooting kittens and harvesting organs from children to worry about piracy guilt.

The DS isn't dead yet

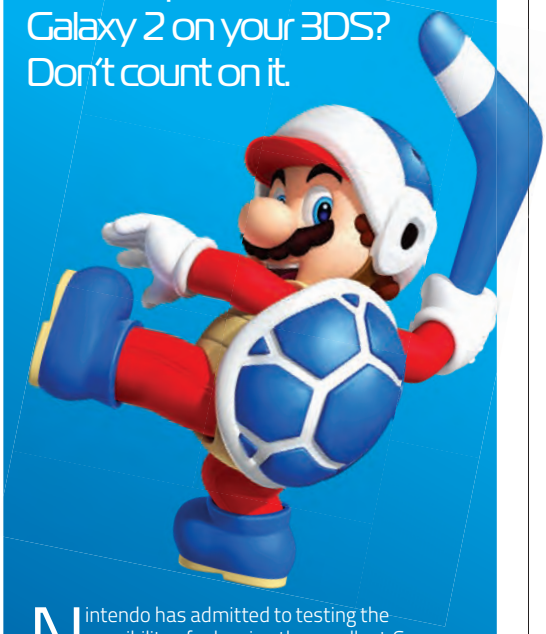


The 3DS is finally gaining steam, and the Wii U is right around the corner, so what does that mean for the humble DS and original Wii? Nintendo has no intention of scraping either, which is probably a wise decision given the huge user-base each has. It's probably also pertinent given that Nintendo is gunning for the core market with Wii U, so they aren't too concerned about giving existing players too few reasons to upgrade to the next platform. Finally, it speaks strongly about their plans for quality content for both the 3DS and Wii U.

Nintendo's super-duper leader of America Reggie Fils-Aime didn't go into any specifics, but he's adamant that both previous-generation platforms will have a place in the market for at least the whole of 2012. He claims that the DS (and, by implication, the new stripped-down PSP – whoops!) is perfect for the young crowd whose parents will be happy to spend $99 on a handheld.

Sony managed to keep a decent line-up going for the PS2 when its successor launched, so we see no reason why this couldn't work. The important factor will be whether or not Wii games are high-quality standalone products and not shameless SD ports of the Wii U's titles.

Want Super Mario Galaxy 2 on your 3DS? Don't count on it.



Nintendo has admitted to testing the possibility of releasing the excellent *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on the 3DS. They ditched the idea when they realised that it was far too difficult to play the game on the handheld's small screen (relative to a television, at least).

"When we started developing [*Super Mario 3D Land*], we displayed *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on a small TV monitor and found that Mario looked like a speck and that the game was difficult to play," said Koichi Hayashida, director of *Super Mario 3D Land*. "This led us to look into the camera and terrain types that would be conducive to playing on a portable screen with a relatively large Mario. If we were making a console game, from the very start, we wouldn't have been thinking about any of those things, and I think the game would have probably been a lot different."

So, while 3DS gamers who don't own a Wii will miss out on *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, they can at least rest assured that the game helped to provide them with the good times to be had in *Super Mario 3D Land*. Yay!

Battlefield 3 drops some sales figures

If you followed all that *Modern Warfare 3* versus *Battlefield 3* malarkey, you're likely very interested in finding out how EA's *COD* killer fared against its primary competitor. Well, according to the sales figures for the month of November 2011, everything went down exactly as was expected: *BF3* sold a whole bunch of copies, but not enough to hold out against the brute force of Activision's behemoth.

November saw another three million copies of *BF3* find their way into the hands of gamers eager for large-scale warfare. These numbers were revealed by EA CFO Eric Brown at the Baird Technology Conference in San Francisco. This put the game's end of November lifetime total at eight million sold out of the total of twelve million shipped. Those are impressive figures: but *Modern Warfare 3* still trounced that number, having broken the five-day sales records for any movie, book or game in history by making $775 million in just five days worldwide. *MW3* even managed to sell 6.5 million copies within 24 hours of going on sale. Looks like this ridiculous battle to topple the mighty *COD* is going to continue a while longer.

Last Guardian lead allegedly quits Sony

// Anyone who's been following the development of Team Ico's (*Ico, Shadow of the Colossus*) latest (ridiculously enigmatic and oft-delayed) title *The Last Guardian* should pay attention to this rumour: because if it proves true, this intriguing game might take even longer to finally reach your PS3. *Eurogamer* reports that Fumito Ueda, the game's creative lead and (former?) head of Team Ico, has left Sony and is working on the game as a freelancer.

The Last Guardian was already removed from the "holiday 2011" release window earlier this year, and a few months back the development team reportedly moved offices, relocating to Sony's headquarters in Japan. On top of that, Ueda's departure is allegedly putting even more strain on the title's already lengthy development cycle, which means we'll have to wait even longer to finally get our hands on the thing. Sony responded to the rumour, simply stating that "Sony doesn't comment on rumours or speculation."

// *Deus Ex* has now made it into Square Enix's list of stable franchises, which means that **we can expect to see a lot more content from this brand**. It now sits alongside the likes of *Final Fantasy, Tomb Raider, Hitman* and *Kingdoms Hearts*. The series will continue to be developed by Eidos Montreal, which will soon be expanded to accommodate simultaneous development of a new *Thief* title, an unannounced game, and further *Deus Ex* properties.



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Seriously? Bad sexual innuendo aside, if I wanted to read fan fiction about *Dragon Age* PMS... Oh wait, no I never want to read that. Ever.

Whilst I applaud the writing of original and interesting fan fiction, I must wonder at the wisdom of some people spewing stuff like that out on to the Internet. Did it sound like a good idea in your head? Did you write it on a whim? Or did you sit down and think long and hard about your story?

Hmmm, possible plot ideas... I want to include Alistair because he's so cute and innocent. Oh if he's innocent then not only will he be a virgin, but he also won't understand the inner workings of a woman's body. What's the best way to write about this... I know! Why don't all the women in the party all get grumpy and PMS-y at the same time! That will confuse him and yet teach him about women all at the same time!

Googling the title I was rewarded with this gem, courtesy of *Benevola* on FanFiction.net,

Alistair waved his arms in the air. "Helen is crying about being fat, even though she isn't fat at all. Morrigan has stolen Sten's cookies and eaten all of them. And Leliana..." he shuddered. "Leliana is MEAN, Wynne. Really, really MEAN."

Yeah, I see he hasn't gotten less whiny, even in someone else's imagination.

Pippa Tshabalala

CD Projekt's piracy problem



The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings: a phenomenal PC-exclusive (for now, at least) RPG that deserves to be played by as many people as possible. It'd just be nice if the majority of the people who've played it weren't filthy pirating douchewads. Marcin Iwinsky, CEO of Polish developer CD Projekt RED, has revealed that the game has been pirated approximately four and a half million times. And that number is reached via optimistic estimation.

"I was checking regularly the number of concurrent downloads on torrent aggregating sites, and for the first 6-8 weeks there was around 20-30k people downloading it at the same time," said Iwinski. "Let's take 20k as the average and let's take 6 weeks. The game is 14GB, so let's assume that on an average not-too-fast connection it will be 6 hours of download. 6 weeks is 56 days, which equals to 1344 hours; and with 6h of average download time to get the game it would give us 224 downloads, then let's multiply it by 20k simultaneous downloaders."

"The result is roughly 4.5 million illegal downloads. This is only an estimation, and I would say that's rather on the optimistic side of things; as of today we have sold over 1M legal copies, so having only 4.5-5 illegal copies for each legal one would be not a bad ratio. The reality is probably way worse."

Regardless of these shocking numbers, CD Projekt is sticking to their no DRM guns, with Iwinski stating that they're still completely against obtrusive DRM. The company doesn't want to punish legitimate purchasers of their titles by adding DRM. It's a noble gesture, one we hope makes every pirate out there feel incredibly guilty. Then again, who are we kidding: they're probably too busy shooting kittens and harvesting organs from children to worry about piracy guilt.

The DS isn't dead yet

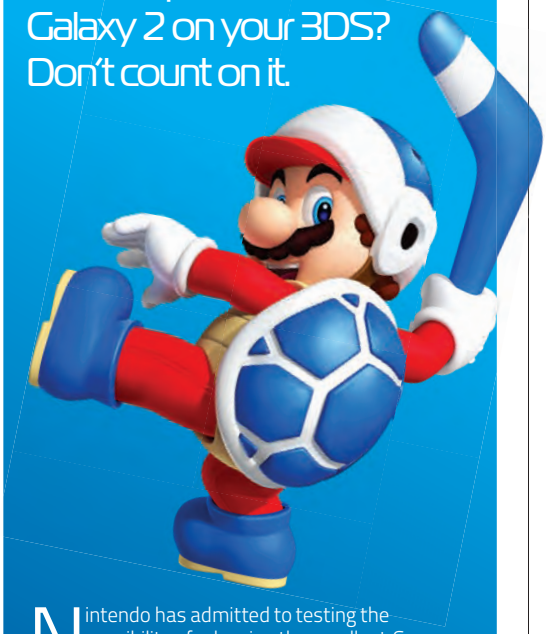


The 3DS is finally gaining steam, and the Wii U is right around the corner, so what does that mean for the humble DS and original Wii? Nintendo has no intention of scraping either, which is probably a wise decision given the huge user-base each has. It's probably also pertinent given that Nintendo is gunning for the core market with Wii U, so they aren't too concerned about giving existing players too few reasons to upgrade to the next platform. Finally, it speaks strongly about their plans for quality content for both the 3DS and Wii U.

Nintendo's super-duper leader of America Reggie Fils-Aime didn't go into any specifics, but he's adamant that both previous-generation platforms will have a place in the market for at least the whole of 2012. He claims that the DS (and, by implication, the new stripped-down PSP – whoops!) is perfect for the young crowd whose parents will be happy to spend $99 on a handheld.

Sony managed to keep a decent line-up going for the PS2 when its successor launched, so we see no reason why this couldn't work. The important factor will be whether or not Wii games are high-quality standalone products and not shameless SD ports of the Wii U's titles.

Want Super Mario Galaxy 2 on your 3DS? Don't count on it.



Nintendo has admitted to testing the possibility of releasing the excellent *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on the 3DS. They ditched the idea when they realised that it was far too difficult to play the game on the handheld's small screen (relative to a television, at least).

"When we started developing [*Super Mario 3D Land*], we displayed *Super Mario Galaxy 2* on a small TV monitor and found that Mario looked like a speck and that the game was difficult to play," said Koichi Hayashida, director of *Super Mario 3D Land*. "This led us to look into the camera and terrain types that would be conducive to playing on a portable screen with a relatively large Mario. If we were making a console game, from the very start, we wouldn't have been thinking about any of those things, and I think the game would have probably been a lot different."

So, while 3DS gamers who don't own a Wii will miss out on *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, they can at least rest assured that the game helped to provide them with the good times to be had in *Super Mario 3D Land*. Yay!

Battlefield 3 drops some sales figures

If you followed all that *Modern Warfare 3* versus *Battlefield 3* malarkey, you're likely very interested in finding out how EA's *COD* killer fared against its primary competitor. Well, according to the sales figures for the month of November 2011, everything went down exactly as was expected: *BF3* sold a whole bunch of copies, but not enough to hold out against the brute force of Activision's behemoth.

November saw another three million copies of *BF3* find their way into the hands of gamers eager for large-scale warfare. These numbers were revealed by EA CFO Eric Brown at the Baird Technology Conference in San Francisco. This put the game's end of November lifetime total at eight million sold out of the total of twelve million shipped. Those are impressive figures: but *Modern Warfare 3* still trounced that number, having broken the five-day sales records for any movie, book or game in history by making $775 million in just five days worldwide. *MW3* even managed to sell 6.5 million copies within 24 hours of going on sale. Looks like this ridiculous battle to topple the mighty *COD* is going to continue a while longer.

Last Guardian lead allegedly quits Sony

// Anyone who's been following the development of Team Ico's (*Ico, Shadow of the Colossus*) latest (ridiculously enigmatic and oft-delayed) title *The Last Guardian* should pay attention to this rumour: because if it proves true, this intriguing game might take even longer to finally reach your PS3. *Eurogamer* reports that Fumito Ueda, the game's creative lead and (former?) head of Team Ico, has left Sony and is working on the game as a freelancer.

The Last Guardian was already removed from the "holiday 2011" release window earlier this year, and a few months back the development team reportedly moved offices, relocating to Sony's headquarters in Japan. On top of that, Ueda's departure is allegedly putting even more strain on the title's already lengthy development cycle, which means we'll have to wait even longer to finally get our hands on the thing. Sony responded to the rumour, simply stating that "Sony doesn't comment on rumours or speculation."

// *Deus Ex* has now made it into Square Enix's list of stable franchises, which means that **we can expect to see a lot more content from this brand**. It now sits alongside the likes of *Final Fantasy, Tomb Raider, Hitman* and *Kingdoms Hearts*. The series will continue to be developed by Eidos Montreal, which will soon be expanded to accommodate simultaneous development of a new *Thief* title, an unannounced game, and further *Deus Ex* properties.



A fractured community



Something that I wrote about a little while back was the frustration involved in getting local investors to back game development projects. While challenges like this are always likely, the situation isn't helped in a country where there's no widespread understanding of this niche industry. Even the success stories are still making things up as they go along – albeit with some care.

More recently, however, I've noticed people complaining about a slightly different stumbling block: the scattered and oft-bewildering local game development scene. Locally, the community of people interested in making games is far larger and more diverse than most people imagine. However, I like to think I'm excluded from "most people" in that particular regard. After working for years in what I consider a reputable group of communities and companies, I often like to imagine that if something significant was being done by South Africans in the field of game development, I'd know about it.

> **"I'm proven wrong considerably more often than I'd like to admit."**

I'm proven wrong considerably more often than I'd like to admit.

In game development communities everywhere, there's a frequent problem of members coming in out of nowhere after developing a new prototype or even a fully functional game. Their sudden presence in the community – their transparent attempt at "engagement" – is difficult to meet with anything but scorn. Arriving at a community and using it as a place to flog your hot new idea without contributing anything to the existing structure is something of a social *faux pas*, and with good reason. You've become that kid who arrives late to the birthday party – too late to engage in any meaningful activities, but curiously just in time to eat some of the cake.

You know; THAT guy.

In South Africa, however, that problem seems to be taken one step further by groups who seem determined to work in isolation from beginning to end: they're either unwilling to communicate with the local industry or they're unaware of its existence, and I can't help feeling that this limits our potential as a whole.

On the one hand, it's obviously a breeding ground for new ideas and approaches to common problems. South Africa hasn't become very rigid yet in the way it approaches game development and it is lovely seeing people break out of nowhere and occasionally getting somewhere.

But on the other side of the fence, there are too many cases of people who proceed with poor ideas and easily-avoided mistakes, crashing and burning and somehow telling other people in the process that, well, this is what can be expected from the local industry – not very good for the overall image of local developers. More significantly, the organised community is earning more favour and attention from journalists both locally and internationally. Actually achieving something in your isolated dev venture without letting the right people know is nothing short of a waste.

What causes this isolation and fracturing? Is it shyness? Is it not knowing where to go? Is it a lack of faith in the existing system? Perhaps the future industry will need its mavericks and revolutionaries to shake up the status quo, but in this tentative era of pioneers, we'll need every developer that we can to stand up and stick together. You know, for the greater good and stuff.

Rodain Joubert

Check out some tease-tastic art for Ron Gilbert's next game



So, we've known for over a year now that funny man Ron Gilbert has been working at funny man Tim Schafer's development studio Double Fine. Why is this pairing of random people important, you ask? Well, young one, this pair of legendary developers were essential ingredients in the brewing of the *Monkey Island* series of classic point and click adventure games: a series which holds a special place in our cold, dead hearts. Moreover, both of them were extremely influential in the creation of many beloved LucasArts adventures, with Gilbert having designed such titles as *Maniac Mansion*, while Schafer designed *Grim Fandango* – arguably the last truly high-profile adventure game before the genre's decline.

Since then, Gilbert went on to engage himself in a number of projects, most recently having headed up development of hilarious action RPG *DeathSpank* before leaving Hothead Games to dive back into bed with his old mate Schafer. Meanwhile, Schafer most recently gave us *Brütal Legend*, thereafter helping his team create a number of excellent downloadable titles for XBLA, like *Costume Quest* and *Stacking*.

Now that we've got a brief history embedded in that youthfully ignorant brain of yours, let's get down to business. It's not been known what Gilbert's been busying himself with at Double Fine, but we now have some art from the game he's working on (which is based on an idea he's had for a long time) to assure us that he's definitely doing something, even if Schafer isn't directly involved in the project. You'll find that art somewhere on this page. Here's a juicy quote from Captain Gilbert:

"Here are a couple of fine pieces of concept art from the game I'm making with the amazing folks at Double Fine. I'm so excited. This is an idea that has been in my head for a long long long time. It predates *Maniac Mansion* and *Monkey Island*. It's a game that needed to be made... That's all I can say right now, but more will follow later."

BioWare puts on a friendly face

EA continues to eat up social game development studios, this time adding Facebook-based games developer Klicknation to their ever-growing BioWare label. This purchase comes just months after the publisher acquired mega-studio PopCap Games.

The publisher claims that Klicknation is "known for combining in-depth storylines with high-quality graphics," and that their "expertise in building innovative and compelling RPGs for social platforms makes them a seamless tuck-in with the BioWare team at EA."

From the above, it seems as though EA won't be tinkering too much with the formula that Klicknation has put together to achieve their success. At the very least, expect more Facebook snin-offs of BioWare franchises, and with *Mass Effect 3* right around the corner, we're fairly sure where the studio is going to begin.





IO Interactive plans to move to new IP after Hitman: Absolution

That's pretty much all you need to know, conveniently placed right there in the headline. More words must be written, however, and here they come.

IO Interactive, original creators of the *Hitman* franchise, told *Gamasutra* that, once the latest title in the acclaimed series (*Hitman: Absolution*) finally sees the light of day, the IO team will split its focus. They'll be developing a totally new IP, while collaboratively working on a new *Hitman* title with Square Enix Montreal. Three IO employees will move from Copenhagen to Montreal to provide direction and assist in communication between the two studios, hoping to create a title that remains "faithful to the *Hitman* experience."

Not much is known about what we can expect from IO's new IP, but they have revealed that it'll share the same dark humour and antiheroic direction that they've become known for. Hopefully their split attention won't affect the quality of this new project. And hopefully it's better than *Kane & Lynch*.



NeverDead lands this month

Konami's *NeverDead*, the game in which losing limbs is merely a gruesome inconvenience, has had its release date pushed forward. Originally due this February on PS3 and 360, the game will now see release on January 31st.

The game is developed by Rebellion Developments, and the concept was born in the mind of Shinta Nojiri, game designer and director who's worked on several *Metal Gear* titles. The game sounds absolutely bonkers: if rolling around as a severed head, trying to collect all your freshly amputated limbs so you can, erm, reassemble yourself and continue your demon killing spree sounds like a fun time, be sure to save the date.

Resident Evil: China

// There's a rumour going around (which seems to be an incredibly popular thing right now) that *Resident Evil 6* might be set in China. This is according to *The Silent Chief*, who spotted the game listed on the East West Players profile of voice actress Wendy Mok. Her profile reveals that she's playing a Chinese villager/zombie in the upcoming *Resident Evil* title – which hasn't even been announced yet, but we assume to be in development. The listing has since been removed, but *The Silent Chief* managed to capture an image of Wendy's profile before it disappeared. Bear in mind that this is all speculation, so if, when the game's eventually announced, you find that it's not set in China, don't be too heartbroken.



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"10 out of 10"



Review scores are meaningless. We like to *pretend* they have meaning, because it suits our needs. Marketers and managers use it as a metric to judge the performance of their product or development team. Some use it to determine Christmas bonuses. Gamers use it to validate their confirmation bias. Everyone wants to know they were right all along, and get angry when the numbers disagree with them, because they take it as a personal attack.

Except the scores are *meaningless*. It's not possible to make a standardized metric. An 8 out of 10 for a racing game is not the same as an 8 out of 10 for a shooter. An 8 out of 10 from one reviewer is not the same as an 8 out of 10 from another reviewer. You don't know what the 8 out of 10 means to an individual person. One might argue "that's where the review text comes in", but in the bigger picture the review text is generally ignored. You don't see full reviews on the front of game boxes or in their ads, or on the various aggregate score sites like Metacritic. The score is given the stage, front and centre. It's easier to consume, and people are lazy.

"Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect."

Because scores are meaningless, it has forced people to cope by creating a series of shorthand interpretations of what the scores mean. For instance, right now, a 9 out of 10 – no matter the game or genre – means "this game is amazing and everyone should play it". So anything less than a 9 makes people instantly freak out, thinking it's not as good as it could be. All because it got an 8.9.

This situation undermines everyone's ability to be honest about games, because they're stuck playing by the unwritten rules of the score-driven industry. Publishers may pull advertising if their product doesn't get good scores. Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect.

One might argue that the aggregate score sites like Metacritic give a "more accurate picture" because it averages out the scores from multiple reviewers. Ignoring for a moment that Metacritic gives arbitrary or unfair weights to certain publications, making their scores "matter more" than another score, there's also the two problems of "junk data in, junk data out" and that reviewers have become a monoblock.

Quantity of a certain opinion doesn't make it more right, especially not when the situation creating that quantity of opinion tends to create the *same kind of opinion*. Arbitrary numbers are the best friend of passing trends and fads. Many reviewers as a whole could be receptive to a particular kind of game this year, but not next year. So they'll be nicer to the trendy game, and hostile to the untrendy, which makes their scores meaningless. And don't get me started on games designed to abuse the scoring system and manipulate reviewers by giving them exactly what they crave. Heroine always scores high to the junkie.

The obsession with numbers also gives reviewers a powerful memetic weapon. Without the numbers, a reviewer intent on stirring the pot would be left writing reviews that contain the word "poopy" repeated. But thanks to the industry's overemphasis on numbers, he just needs to give a game a 6 out of 10 and sit back to watch the world burn.

Miktar Dracon



Who's yer daddy?

Activision CEO Bobby Kotick does not seem the least bit threatened by *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, BioWare's hotly anticipated first foray into the grind-filled lands of MMO gaming. At least, he doesn't think it's going to be as big a money maker for publisher Electronic Arts (Activision's chief rival) as they think it'll be. Instead, he believes that the majority of profits will go straight to *Star Wars* license holder LucasArts.

"Lucas is going to be the principal beneficiary of the success of *Star Wars*," said Kotick at the Reuters Media Summit. "We've been in business with Lucas for a long time and the economics will always accrue to the benefit of Lucas, so I don't really understand how the economics work for Electronic Arts."

And then, not one to pass up an opportunity to gloat, Kotick later added: "If you look at the history of the people investing in an MMO and achieving success, it's a small number." Which is really just a slightly less boastful way of saying "we have *WoW* LOL."

Electronic Arts has previously stated that all they'd need to make the massive investment they've placed in *SW: TOR* worthwhile would be half a million subscribers. With BioWare's lauded name at the helm (not to mention the immense legion of *Star Wars* fans out there), 500,000 subscribers does not seem an unreachable target. But time will tell if Kotick's right, or if Electronic Arts has a true contender for the title of world's most popular MMORPG on their hands.

Deadly foursome

Here's yet another EA-related rumour to concern your rumour-obsessed brain with. According to an anonymous insider, *Army of Two* is getting another sequel (the previous one being *Army of Two: The 40th Day*). The big news is that this time it's called *Army of Four* and – you guessed it – it'll allegedly feature four-player cooperative play as opposed to the former two player co-op.

Apparently it's being built in the *Battlefield 3*-powering behemoth Frostbite 2, but from the sounds of things developer EA Montreal is not having a good time with DICE's engine. Development of the game is supposedly quite troubled, to the point where DICE might swoop in to provide hands-on help with the title. As always, until we get official word regarding all this, try not to take this rumour too seriously.





A typical example of a prisoner. Ahem.

Spot the new fish

Darwinia devs at work on something special

Introversion Software, the British studio behind the weird and wonderful games *DEFCON*, *Uplink* and the award-winning *Darwinia*, has a new game on the way, entitled *Prison Architect*. That means two things: **1)** Their prison breakout game *Subversion* has been cancelled and **2)** Simulation/management fans will soon have a dark, serious prison management game to look forward to.

The idea was born when studio lead Chris Delay was on holiday in San Francisco. After visiting Alcatraz and spending two hours chatting to a taxi driver who used to be a guard at the world-famous prison, Delay had the idea formed in his mind. It didn't take long to convince his fellow founders Mark Morris and Thomas Arundel that it was time to put *Subversion* to bed and begin production of this new game. They gave themselves six weeks to put together something playable, and in that time managed to build more of a game than Subversion gathered in its six years of on-and-off development.

Prison Architect is a partially story-driven sandbox prison building and management game. The player will be required to organise the construction of everything you'd expect to find in a prison: cells, showers, yards, eating areas, guard houses, electrical subsystems, sewerage, armouries and even execution chambers. It doesn't pull any punches, but its cartoon-like visuals should help to keep things from getting too heavy. Players will be able to build with as much attention to detail as they wish, with even small decisions like window placement having an effect on inmates and guards, as will the placement of amenities like libraries and exercise equipment. This being a prison, you'll also have to keep an eye out for inmates who are up to no good by concealing poisons and possibly dangerous items.

There's currently no date set for *Prison Architect*'s release, but from the way it looks now, we'd hazard to guess it'll be mid- to late 2012 on PC only.

Notch hands over the reins for Minecraft

// Markus "Notch" Persson, the creator of *Minecraft* and the game's lead developer, has given control of all future development of the title to Jens "Jeb" Bergensten. Bergensten has been working at Mojang for some time and co-developed *Minecraft* with Notch. He will be in charge of Minecraft from now on and will, as Notch writes, "kinda sorta become [his] boss". Of Jeb as the new lead developer for *Minecraft*, Notch said: "he's truly a great person to work with, and I feel very confident handing over the leadership of *Minecraft* to him".

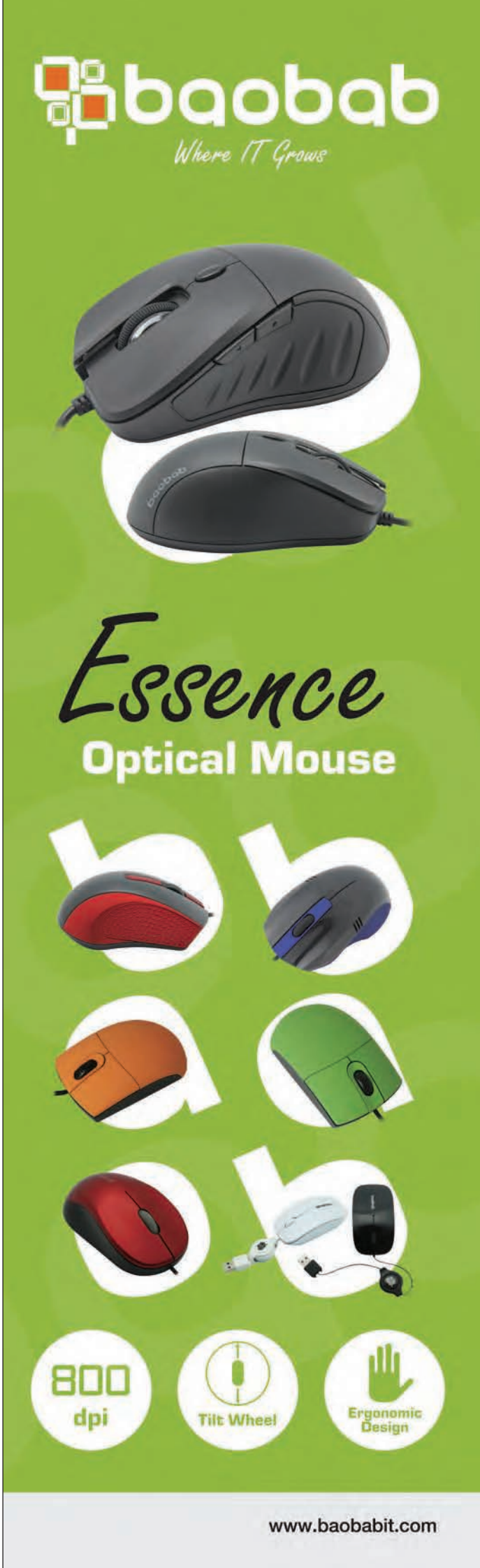
Now that the game is officially out (you can read our review in this edition), Notch plans to take a break before coming back to Mojang to start work on "some new project". It was revealed some time ago that the development team's next game will be called *Scrolls*; a card collecting, fantasy combat game. Whether or not this is what Notch was referring to remains to be seen.

Expect more digitally distributed games from Ubisoft

French publishing giant Ubisoft is pretty chuffed with the performance of Eric Chahi's download-only *From Dust*. The god-sim game managed to shift more than 500 000 copies via Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network alone. This excludes the sales through Valve's digital distribution shopfront, Steam.

According to Ubisoft, digital distribution is where it's at for releasing new intellectual properties. "There is less risk releasing a new game digitally. At retail, if you don't have a 90 Metacritic score and millions of fans, it's very risky to launch a new game. Look at *From Dust*: we sold half a million units on XBLA and PSN. Why? Because the prices were lower, but also because it was a new experience and people using digital platforms are more willing to test a new IP."

At present, Ubisoft has ten download-only titles in production across a myriad platforms including console, mobile and iOS. Upcoming *I Am Alive* has gone from download-only to full retail and back to download-only again. Expect to see more new IP from Ubisoft hitting the digital shopfronts in future.



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Support Lines

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

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Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

Publisher: Electronic Arts
e-mail: zasupport@ea.com
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Obsidian announces next title

Come on down to South Park



We've long maintained that Obsidian Entertainment is better at working with other IPs than creating their own, so it's rather good to hear that their next game won't be based on an original creation, but rather an existing one. But then, that existing IP is *South Park*.

You read that correctly: *South Park*. The studio has teamed up with Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators and producers of the show, to develop a *South Park* RPG built on their *Dungeon Siege III* engine. Players will take on the role of a new kid in town and will find themselves trying to balance becoming accepted by the existing kids and joining in a number of adventures. If it sounds weird to you, you're not alone, but there are some pretty interesting facts emanating from this announcement that have us intrigued enough to not write this off just yet.

The studio has access to 15 years worth of assets from the cartoon. That means it'll be every bit *South Park* as you could imagine, right down to the paper cut-out visuals and licensed voices. Players will use the town of South Park as a quest hub that expands and unlocks as you progress through the game, which turned into its own unique challenge as Trey and Parker realised that they've never actually had a full map of the town. As this is a role-playing game, players will be able to select their class from a list of five (warrior, rogue, wizard, paladin and a fifth, we're told unconventional, class made up by Eric Cartman), and players will be able to equip their character with all manner of strange weapons and equipment items, as well as elemental augmentations for weapons and will even have the ability to summon creatures. Combat will be similar to that of *Final Fantasy* (actually, it seems as though a lot will be similar to *Final Fantasy*), in that it will be turn-based, but with mid-combat options and interruptions to keep up the pace. Expect every old *South Park* staple to make its way into the game, including the gang of kids who you team up with, and the various other "factions" in the game including Girls, Gingers, Hippies and Goths.

There's no word yet on a release date or even projected platforms, but stay tuned for further details as they emerge.

Modders unite!

The modding scene for *Skyrim* on PC is surprisingly big, given how new the game is. Bethesda has always been quite happy to support this scene and made their games equally open, and they're not set to stop any time soon.

The studio has announced plans to release its development tools for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* for free on PC this month. This means there will be better support for modders, easier access to mods and easier installation processes (ideally, a standardised process too). In addition, the software will make use of Steam Workshop, which you may already be familiar with thanks to *Team Fortress 2*. This system will enable mod makers to share their creations on a unified platform which players can use to browse available mods, download them and flag them if they're particularly worthwhile.

Turns out EA's Online Pass codes can expire

// The one-use Online Pass codes that come bundled with new EA published games can expire. This came to light when a NeoGAF user reported having issues entering the activation code that came with his brand new, shrink-wrapped copy of *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit*. The code is required for all multiplayer modes and social networking features through the game's Autolog system.

Soon after posting about his experience with the expired code, a number of other NeoGAF users began reporting similar scenarios. This prompted some investigation on behalf of website Joystiq – they contacted EA's support desk for clarification. It turns out that the End User License Agreement in EA's games has a clause that notifies users that the Online Pass codes do in fact expire. *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* is just over a year old, but the bundled codes have already expired. Further investigation showed that the once-off codes for *Dragon Age II* will expire on 31 March 2012.

According to EA, getting a new code is free and simple; all you need to do is contact their customer support and they'll point you in the right direction. So be warned, if you pick up a first-hand copy of an EA game that has a bundled once-off pass code, and if it's more than a year since the game came out, don't be surprised if you're told your code has expired.

Killzone devs go indie



Breakaway indie development studio Might and Delight, which is made up of former *Killzone*, *Mirror's Edge* and *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* developers, has announced its debut title: Pid. This side-scrolling platform adventure game takes place on a strange world, and players take on the role of Pid, a young boy who finds himself trapped there.

Pid has a couple of neat tricks on his side to help him overcome the many typical platforming challenges and armies of giant robots that want him dead. In particular, he can "manipulate a powerful force that can be used to manoeuvre around the levels in thousands of unique ways," according to the developers. This force creates a motion tunnel similar to that seen in *Portal 2* that will allow Pid (and an optional co-op partner) to move about the level and alter its flow to suit him. The game will feature a number of locations that are presented in a hazy, dream-like manner, including attics, space stations, cities and castles.

Pid is due out sometime this year for PC and as-yet unspecified consoles. As with many indie titles, it'll be available for digital download only.

A new way to pay for Tetris



Activision has shown its rival publishers that annual subscription-based services like Call of Duty Elite are desirable and profitable, and now EA wants a piece of that pie. Well, it's quite a different pie, actually. EA has launched T-Club, which, for $29.99 (R245) a year or $2.99 (R25) a month, players will get access to a lot of stuff for *Tetris*.

The service includes access to new mobile challenges and content, exclusive discounts, "premium Tetris Log challenges", and the ability to boost player rank faster than the scrubs that aren't prepared to cough up the cash. T-Club has been launched in conjunction with an updated release of *Tetris* for iOS, which currently boasts over 100 million sales across all mobile platforms. That's a surprisingly large player-base, but we're not quite sure if milking those players for $30 a year is the best way to treat them. Still, time will tell just how successful this new service is.

Look & Listen



CHART TOPPERS / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

The Darkness II	February 10th
Syndicate	February 25th
Diablo III	March

Xbox 360

Final Fantasy XIII-2	February 3rd
Street Fighter X Tekken	March 1st
Mass Effect 3	March 9th

PS3

FIFA Street 4	March
Max Payne 3	March
Silent Hill: Downpour	March 1st

Wii

Pilotwings Resort	Available now
Nintendogs + Cats: French Bulldog & New Friends	Available now
The Sims 3	Available now

3DS

Metal Gear Solid 3D	February 1st
Resident Evil: Revelations	February 1st
Rayman Origins	March 16th

DS

New Super Mario Bros.	Available now
Super Mario 64 DS	Available now
Mario Kart DS	Available now

Kinect

Sports Champions	Available now
Racquet Sports	Available now
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	Available now

Move

Kinectimals: Now With Bears!	Available now
You Shape: Fitness Evolved	Available now
UFC Personal Trainer	Available now

Official LEGO Minecraft could be coming soon

// In case you haven't realised by now: we at NAG HQ absolutely adore *Minecraft*. Seriously, there may or may not have been a totally expensive international phone call between GeometriX and RedTide during which the merits of paying obscene amounts of foreign money for foam *Minecraft* pickaxes was discussed. This may or may not have happened at last year's Gamescom in Germany; you'll never know. (It SO happened).

All of that's irrelevant because word has reached us that Mojang is spearheading a drive to get official *Minecraft* LEGO sets produced. Seeing as *Minecraft* is practically digital LEGO to begin with, this holiest of creativity crossovers makes so much sense it's frightening.

LEGO has a public suggestions platform known as LEGO CUUSOO. Anyone can submit ideas for new LEGO sets, and once it's supported by 10,000 people, the proposed set is taken up to the LEGO bigwigs to discuss. Mojang has started their own CUUSOO drive for *Minecraft* LEGO and at the time of writing this it had already received 4,670 supporters in less than twenty-four hours. We think it's safe to say this might happen.

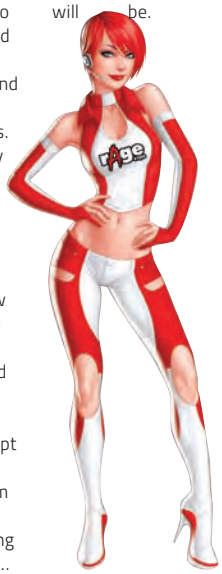
Any CUUSOO suggestion that actually makes it through to development and retail, earns the person or group who did the initial suggesting 1% of all of the profits. In the case of *Minecraft* LEGO sets, Mojang has confirmed that the 1% will be donated to charity if the LEGO sets are given the go-ahead.

What's that noise?!

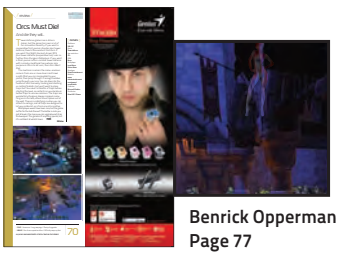
Thanks to the redesign we were rushed for time to come up with a new story for the badger. So, instead, we'll just tell you the truth. We're sick of him; we stole him from a stupid flash video like years ago and kept modifying him with more and more ridiculous ideas and stories. We've effectively washed away everything that was good and wholesome with our plagiarised garbage and now it's time to move on. Whoa! That felt good. Instead we're going to whore out a marketing concept and make you find Scarlett from rAge. See if you can find her hiding in the magazine...

Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere.

Send your sighting to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line **'January Scarlett'** and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



December Winner



Benrick Opperman , Page 77

Win!

A CTA Xbox 360 Carry Case valued at R479.99, sponsored by CTA and Bowline.



Games and console not included.

bowline distribution & logistics

CTA DIGITAL

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Saints Row: The Third* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'January Caption'.





NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / Must... not... look... at... boobs... eyes front.



LAST MONTHS WINNER / "FACEBOOT!".

- Matthew Visser

iBraaaaaains

More zombies! This time, they're on your iOS device, again. *Call of Duty*'s Zombies mode is a hit on PC and console (you may notice that we don't shut up about it), and now iPhone, iPad and iPod users will be able to get their hands on this scaled-down version of the game mode. This game is a sequel to 2009's *Call of Duty: World at War Zombies*, in case you're experiencing bouts of *déjà vu*.

If you have $6.99 (R55) to spend on a mobile game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops Zombies* will give you access to a single survival map (Kino Der Toten, with more to come in future updates), support for up to four-player co-op, and 50 levels of undead slaying action in the overhead twin-stick shooter Dead Ops Arcade. It's available right now, so buy it so that you never have to be more than a reach into your pocket or handbag away from terror and panic.

PlayStation Vita update

// Sony's handheld monster hits South Africa on 22 February, which is mere weeks away. Let's take a quick look at recent reports on the latest portable out of Sony's stables.

The PSV will use a new proprietary storage medium similar to Sony's old SD card range. The new PSV-only sticks are pretty pricy with a 32GB option setting you back about $120 or just less than R1,000. Ouch. Sony is insisting that the lofty price is for good reason: to combat piracy so as to ensure "an equal user experience for everyone". If you're planning on making full use of Sony's push for digital distribution on the new PSV, then you're going to need to fork out quite a bit for extra storage. The flip side of all of this is that rumours are circulating about digitally distributed games being reduced in price by as much as 40%. So for argument sake: while a boxed, physical copy of a PSV game might set you back around R500, the digital equivalent might only cost you about R300. This has not been officially confirmed by Sony, but the rumours seem to echo the company's desire to push digital distribution and focus on a tiered pricing structure for games.

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R100 deposit required to secure a pre-order.



End of days for Evolution Studios?

MotorStorm Apocalypse was good fun, people played and enjoyed it, but commercially, the game is cited as a failure. At least, that's according to developer Evolution Studio's group game director Matt Southern, who's concerned that the game's poor market performance and the current low level of interest for the game could mean the imminent death of the studio.

"It's been quite a tough year for us, especially early on in the year," said Southern. "We made a game we're really proud of and for some really heartbreaking reasons things didn't go so well. In perspective we've got nothing to complain about.

"I was worried it might be the end of Evolution," he added. "Racing has had a very tough time, even without extraordinary circumstances like the ones we went through."

He's not wrong, two racing-focused studios, Black Rock and Bizarre Creations were closed in 2011 due to poor market performance.

It looks as though the company has one last shot to keep themselves alive: *MotorStorm RC* for both PS Vita and PS3, which was recently confirmed by Sony. The studio will dedicate a portion of its staff to the project, with one other portion working on continued support for Apocalypse and DLC, and the remaining employees developing new ideas.

Blast from the past

Everyone knows that grid-based first-person dungeon crawling games are awesome, but if you were to ask us why exactly, we'd have no real answer for you. In a seemingly bold move, then, indie developer Almost Human Inc. Is preparing to release *Legend of Grimrock*, a grid-based, first-person tactical dungeon crawling RPG with all the bells and whistles of a modern title.

From the gameplay trailer currently available, we can see the classic movement system and mouse-driven interface combined with modern-day visuals that works very well. Combat will require some tactical thinking, and players will be able to kit out a party of four adventurers who will presumably follow the warrior/rogue/mage/cleric archetypes that we all know and love. Everything else from this humble era of gaming will be present including paper doll equipment screens, interactive environments and plenty of challenging looking puzzles.

If you're a fan of classic games like *Lands of Lore, Ultima Underworld* or *Eye of the Beholder* (which you should be), then keep an eye on Steam's upcoming release list around March.







IO Interactive plans to move to new IP after Hitman: Absolution

That's pretty much all you need to know, conveniently placed right there in the headline. More words must be written, however, and here they come.

IO Interactive, original creators of the *Hitman* franchise, told *Gamasutra* that, once the latest title in the acclaimed series (*Hitman: Absolution*) finally sees the light of day, the IO team will split its focus. They'll be developing a totally new IP, while collaboratively working on a new *Hitman* title with Square Enix Montreal. Three IO employees will move from Copenhagen to Montreal to provide direction and assist in communication between the two studios, hoping to create a title that remains "faithful to the *Hitman* experience."

Not much is known about what we can expect from IO's new IP, but they have revealed that it'll share the same dark humour and antiheroic direction that they've become known for. Hopefully their split attention won't affect the quality of this new project. And hopefully it's better than *Kane & Lynch*.



NeverDead lands this month

Konami's *NeverDead*, the game in which losing limbs is merely a gruesome inconvenience, has had its release date pushed forward. Originally due this February on PS3 and 360, the game will now see release on January 31st.

The game is developed by Rebellion Developments, and the concept was born in the mind of Shinta Nojiri, game designer and director who's worked on several *Metal Gear* titles. The game sounds absolutely bonkers: if rolling around as a severed head, trying to collect all your freshly amputated limbs so you can, erm, reassemble yourself and continue your demon killing spree sounds like a fun time, be sure to save the date.

Resident Evil: China

// There's a rumour going around (which seems to be an incredibly popular thing right now) that *Resident Evil 6* might be set in China. This is according to *The Silent Chief*, who spotted the game listed on the East West Players profile of voice actress Wendy Mok. Her profile reveals that she's playing a Chinese villager/zombie in the upcoming *Resident Evil* title – which hasn't even been announced yet, but we assume to be in development. The listing has since been removed, but *The Silent Chief* managed to capture an image of Wendy's profile before it disappeared. Bear in mind that this is all speculation, so if, when the game's eventually announced, you find that it's not set in China, don't be too heartbroken.



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"10 out of 10"



Review scores are meaningless. We like to *pretend* they have meaning, because it suits our needs. Marketers and managers use it as a metric to judge the performance of their product or development team. Some use it to determine Christmas bonuses. Gamers use it to validate their confirmation bias. Everyone wants to know they were right all along, and get angry when the numbers disagree with them, because they take it as a personal attack.

Except the scores are *meaningless*. It's not possible to make a standardized metric. An 8 out of 10 for a racing game is not the same as an 8 out of 10 for a shooter. An 8 out of 10 from one reviewer is not the same as an 8 out of 10 from another reviewer. You don't know what the 8 out of 10 means to an individual person. One might argue "that's where the review text comes in", but in the bigger picture the review text is generally ignored. You don't see full reviews on the front of game boxes or in their ads, or on the various aggregate score sites like Metacritic. The score is given the stage, front and centre. It's easier to consume, and people are lazy.

"Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect."

Because scores are meaningless, it has forced people to cope by creating a series of shorthand interpretations of what the scores mean. For instance, right now, a 9 out of 10 – no matter the game or genre – means "this game is amazing and everyone should play it". So anything less than a 9 makes people instantly freak out, thinking it's not as good as it could be. All because it got an 8.9.

This situation undermines everyone's ability to be honest about games, because they're stuck playing by the unwritten rules of the score-driven industry. Publishers may pull advertising if their product doesn't get good scores. Millions of rabid fans may burn an effigy if you dare score their darling less than perfect.

One might argue that the aggregate score sites like Metacritic give a "more accurate picture" because it averages out the scores from multiple reviewers. Ignoring for a moment that Metacritic gives arbitrary or unfair weights to certain publications, making their scores "matter more" than another score, there's also the two problems of "junk data in, junk data out" and that reviewers have become a monoblock.

Quantity of a certain opinion doesn't make it more right, especially not when the situation creating that quantity of opinion tends to create the *same kind of opinion*. Arbitrary numbers are the best friend of passing trends and fads. Many reviewers as a whole could be receptive to a particular kind of game this year, but not next year. So they'll be nicer to the trendy game, and hostile to the untrendy, which makes their scores meaningless. And don't get me started on games designed to abuse the scoring system and manipulate reviewers by giving them exactly what they crave. Heroine always scores high to the junkie.

The obsession with numbers also gives reviewers a powerful memetic weapon. Without the numbers, a reviewer intent on stirring the pot would be left writing reviews that contain the word "poopy" repeated. But thanks to the industry's overemphasis on numbers, he just needs to give a game a 6 out of 10 and sit back to watch the world burn.

Miktar Dracon



Who's yer daddy?

Activision CEO Bobby Kotick does not seem the least bit threatened by *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, BioWare's hotly anticipated first foray into the grind-filled lands of MMO gaming. At least, he doesn't think it's going to be as big a money maker for publisher Electronic Arts (Activision's chief rival) as they think it'll be. Instead, he believes that the majority of profits will go straight to *Star Wars* license holder LucasArts.

"Lucas is going to be the principal beneficiary of the success of *Star Wars*," said Kotick at the Reuters Media Summit. "We've been in business with Lucas for a long time and the economics will always accrue to the benefit of Lucas, so I don't really understand how the economics work for Electronic Arts."

And then, not one to pass up an opportunity to gloat, Kotick later added: "If you look at the history of the people investing in an MMO and achieving success, it's a small number." Which is really just a slightly less boastful way of saying "we have *WoW* LOL."

Electronic Arts has previously stated that all they'd need to make the massive investment they've placed in *SW: TOR* worthwhile would be half a million subscribers. With BioWare's lauded name at the helm (not to mention the immense legion of *Star Wars* fans out there), 500,000 subscribers does not seem an unreachable target. But time will tell if Kotick's right, or if Electronic Arts has a true contender for the title of world's most popular MMORPG on their hands.

Deadly foursome

Here's yet another EA-related rumour to concern your rumour-obsessed brain with. According to an anonymous insider, *Army of Two* is getting another sequel (the previous one being *Army of Two: The 40th Day*). The big news is that this time it's called *Army of Four* and – you guessed it – it'll allegedly feature four-player cooperative play as opposed to the former two player co-op.

Apparently it's being built in the *Battlefield 3*-powering behemoth Frostbite 2, but from the sounds of things developer EA Montreal is not having a good time with DICE's engine. Development of the game is supposedly quite troubled, to the point where DICE might swoop in to provide hands-on help with the title. As always, until we get official word regarding all this, try not to take this rumour too seriously.





A typical example of a prisoner. Ahem.

Spot the new fish

Darwinia devs at work on something special

Introversion Software, the British studio behind the weird and wonderful games *DEFCON*, *Uplink* and the award-winning *Darwinia*, has a new game on the way, entitled *Prison Architect*. That means two things: **1)** Their prison breakout game *Subversion* has been cancelled and **2)** Simulation/management fans will soon have a dark, serious prison management game to look forward to.

The idea was born when studio lead Chris Delay was on holiday in San Francisco. After visiting Alcatraz and spending two hours chatting to a taxi driver who used to be a guard at the world-famous prison, Delay had the idea formed in his mind. It didn't take long to convince his fellow founders Mark Morris and Thomas Arundel that it was time to put *Subversion* to bed and begin production of this new game. They gave themselves six weeks to put together something playable, and in that time managed to build more of a game than Subversion gathered in its six years of on-and-off development.

Prison Architect is a partially story-driven sandbox prison building and management game. The player will be required to organise the construction of everything you'd expect to find in a prison: cells, showers, yards, eating areas, guard houses, electrical subsystems, sewerage, armouries and even execution chambers. It doesn't pull any punches, but its cartoon-like visuals should help to keep things from getting too heavy. Players will be able to build with as much attention to detail as they wish, with even small decisions like window placement having an effect on inmates and guards, as will the placement of amenities like libraries and exercise equipment. This being a prison, you'll also have to keep an eye out for inmates who are up to no good by concealing poisons and possibly dangerous items.

There's currently no date set for *Prison Architect*'s release, but from the way it looks now, we'd hazard to guess it'll be mid- to late 2012 on PC only.

Notch hands over the reins for Minecraft

// Markus "Notch" Persson, the creator of *Minecraft* and the game's lead developer, has given control of all future development of the title to Jens "Jeb" Bergensten. Bergensten has been working at Mojang for some time and co-developed *Minecraft* with Notch. He will be in charge of Minecraft from now on and will, as Notch writes, "kinda sorta become [his] boss". Of Jeb as the new lead developer for *Minecraft*, Notch said: "he's truly a great person to work with, and I feel very confident handing over the leadership of *Minecraft* to him".

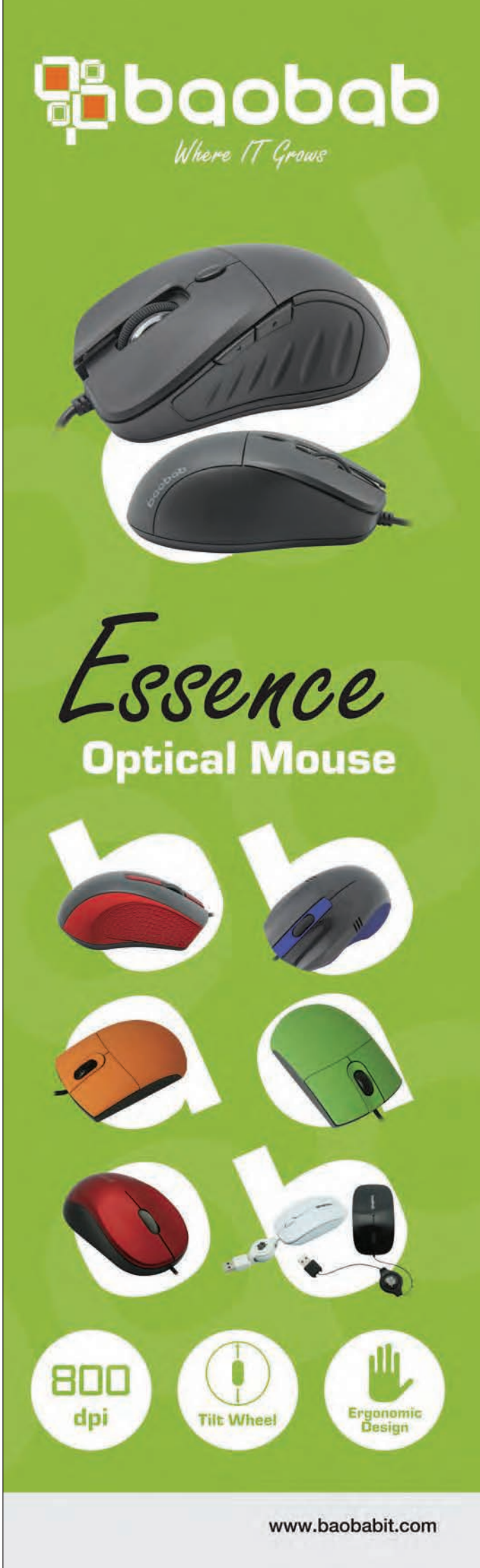
Now that the game is officially out (you can read our review in this edition), Notch plans to take a break before coming back to Mojang to start work on "some new project". It was revealed some time ago that the development team's next game will be called *Scrolls*; a card collecting, fantasy combat game. Whether or not this is what Notch was referring to remains to be seen.

Expect more digitally distributed games from Ubisoft

French publishing giant Ubisoft is pretty chuffed with the performance of Eric Chahi's download-only *From Dust*. The god-sim game managed to shift more than 500 000 copies via Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network alone. This excludes the sales through Valve's digital distribution shopfront, Steam.

According to Ubisoft, digital distribution is where it's at for releasing new intellectual properties. "There is less risk releasing a new game digitally. At retail, if you don't have a 90 Metacritic score and millions of fans, it's very risky to launch a new game. Look at *From Dust*: we sold half a million units on XBLA and PSN. Why? Because the prices were lower, but also because it was a new experience and people using digital platforms are more willing to test a new IP."

At present, Ubisoft has ten download-only titles in production across a myriad platforms including console, mobile and iOS. Upcoming *I Am Alive* has gone from download-only to full retail and back to download-only again. Expect to see more new IP from Ubisoft hitting the digital shopfronts in future.



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If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679.



Support Lines

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

Publishers: Activision / Blizzard 2K Games / Rockstar / Ubisoft Codemasters / NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai
E-mail: support@xtrememes.co.za
Number: 0861 987 363

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

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

Obsidian announces next title

Come on down to South Park



We've long maintained that Obsidian Entertainment is better at working with other IPs than creating their own, so it's rather good to hear that their next game won't be based on an original creation, but rather an existing one. But then, that existing IP is *South Park*.

You read that correctly: *South Park*. The studio has teamed up with Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators and producers of the show, to develop a *South Park* RPG built on their *Dungeon Siege III* engine. Players will take on the role of a new kid in town and will find themselves trying to balance becoming accepted by the existing kids and joining in a number of adventures. If it sounds weird to you, you're not alone, but there are some pretty interesting facts emanating from this announcement that have us intrigued enough to not write this off just yet.

The studio has access to 15 years worth of assets from the cartoon. That means it'll be every bit *South Park* as you could imagine, right down to the paper cut-out visuals and licensed voices. Players will use the town of South Park as a quest hub that expands and unlocks as you progress through the game, which turned into its own unique challenge as Trey and Parker realised that they've never actually had a full map of the town. As this is a role-playing game, players will be able to select their class from a list of five (warrior, rogue, wizard, paladin and a fifth, we're told unconventional, class made up by Eric Cartman), and players will be able to equip their character with all manner of strange weapons and equipment items, as well as elemental augmentations for weapons and will even have the ability to summon creatures. Combat will be similar to that of *Final Fantasy* (actually, it seems as though a lot will be similar to *Final Fantasy*), in that it will be turn-based, but with mid-combat options and interruptions to keep up the pace. Expect every old *South Park* staple to make its way into the game, including the gang of kids who you team up with, and the various other "factions" in the game including Girls, Gingers, Hippies and Goths.

There's no word yet on a release date or even projected platforms, but stay tuned for further details as they emerge.

Modders unite!

The modding scene for *Skyrim* on PC is surprisingly big, given how new the game is. Bethesda has always been quite happy to support this scene and made their games equally open, and they're not set to stop any time soon.

The studio has announced plans to release its development tools for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* for free on PC this month. This means there will be better support for modders, easier access to mods and easier installation processes (ideally, a standardised process too). In addition, the software will make use of Steam Workshop, which you may already be familiar with thanks to *Team Fortress 2*. This system will enable mod makers to share their creations on a unified platform which players can use to browse available mods, download them and flag them if they're particularly worthwhile.

Turns out EA's Online Pass codes can expire

// The one-use Online Pass codes that come bundled with new EA published games can expire. This came to light when a NeoGAF user reported having issues entering the activation code that came with his brand new, shrink-wrapped copy of *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit*. The code is required for all multiplayer modes and social networking features through the game's Autolog system.

Soon after posting about his experience with the expired code, a number of other NeoGAF users began reporting similar scenarios. This prompted some investigation on behalf of website Joystiq – they contacted EA's support desk for clarification. It turns out that the End User License Agreement in EA's games has a clause that notifies users that the Online Pass codes do in fact expire. *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* is just over a year old, but the bundled codes have already expired. Further investigation showed that the once-off codes for *Dragon Age II* will expire on 31 March 2012.

According to EA, getting a new code is free and simple; all you need to do is contact their customer support and they'll point you in the right direction. So be warned, if you pick up a first-hand copy of an EA game that has a bundled once-off pass code, and if it's more than a year since the game came out, don't be surprised if you're told your code has expired.

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Diablo III	March

Xbox 360

Final Fantasy XIII-2	February 3rd
Street Fighter X Tekken	March 1st
Mass Effect 3	March 9th

PS3

FIFA Street 4	March
Max Payne 3	March
Silent Hill: Downpour	March 1st

Wii

Pilotwings Resort	Available now
Nintendogs + Cats: French Bulldog & New Friends	Available now
The Sims 3	Available now

3DS

Metal Gear Solid 3D	February 1st
Resident Evil: Revelations	February 1st
Rayman Origins	March 16th

DS

New Super Mario Bros.	Available now
Super Mario 64 DS	Available now
Mario Kart DS	Available now

Kinect

Sports Champions	Available now
Racquet Sports	Available now
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	Available now

Move

Kinectimals: Now With Bears!	Available now
You Shape: Fitness Evolved	Available now
UFC Personal Trainer	Available now

Official LEGO Minecraft could be coming soon

// In case you haven't realised by now: we at NAG HQ absolutely adore *Minecraft*. Seriously, there may or may not have been a totally expensive international phone call between GeometriX and RedTide during which the merits of paying obscene amounts of foreign money for foam *Minecraft* pickaxes was discussed. This may or may not have happened at last year's Gamescom in Germany; you'll never know. (It SO happened).

All of that's irrelevant because word has reached us that Mojang is spearheading a drive to get official *Minecraft* LEGO sets produced. Seeing as *Minecraft* is practically digital LEGO to begin with, this holiest of creativity crossovers makes so much sense it's frightening.

LEGO has a public suggestions platform known as LEGO CUUSOO. Anyone can submit ideas for new LEGO sets, and once it's supported by 10,000 people, the proposed set is taken up to the LEGO bigwigs to discuss. Mojang has started their own CUUSOO drive for *Minecraft* LEGO and at the time of writing this it had already received 4,670 supporters in less than twenty-four hours. We think it's safe to say this might happen.

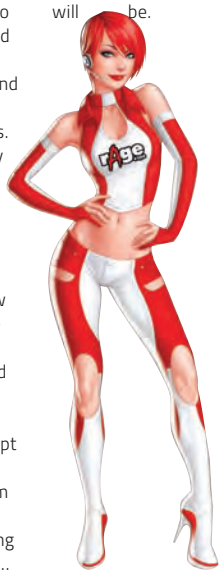
Any CUUSOO suggestion that actually makes it through to development and retail, earns the person or group who did the initial suggesting 1% of all of the profits. In the case of *Minecraft* LEGO sets, Mojang has confirmed that the 1% will be donated to charity if the LEGO sets are given the go-ahead.

What's that noise?!

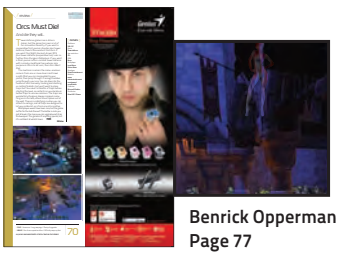
Thanks to the redesign we were rushed for time to come up with a new story for the badger. So, instead, we'll just tell you the truth. We're sick of him; we stole him from a stupid flash video like years ago and kept modifying him with more and more ridiculous ideas and stories. We've effectively washed away everything that was good and wholesome with our plagiarised garbage and now it's time to move on. Whoa! That felt good. Instead we're going to whore out a marketing concept and make you find Scarlett from rAge. See if you can find her hiding in the magazine...

Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere.

Send your sighting to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line **'January Scarlett'** and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



December Winner



Benrick Opperman , Page 77

Win!

A CTA Xbox 360 Carry Case valued at R479.99, sponsored by CTA and Bowline.



Games and console not included.

bowline distribution & logistics

CTA DIGITAL

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Saints Row: The Third* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'January Caption'.





NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / Must... not... look... at... boobs... eyes front.



LAST MONTHS WINNER / "FACEBOOT!".

- Matthew Visser

iBraaaaaains

More zombies! This time, they're on your iOS device, again. *Call of Duty*'s Zombies mode is a hit on PC and console (you may notice that we don't shut up about it), and now iPhone, iPad and iPod users will be able to get their hands on this scaled-down version of the game mode. This game is a sequel to 2009's *Call of Duty: World at War Zombies*, in case you're experiencing bouts of *déjà vu*.

If you have $6.99 (R55) to spend on a mobile game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops Zombies* will give you access to a single survival map (Kino Der Toten, with more to come in future updates), support for up to four-player co-op, and 50 levels of undead slaying action in the overhead twin-stick shooter Dead Ops Arcade. It's available right now, so buy it so that you never have to be more than a reach into your pocket or handbag away from terror and panic.

PlayStation Vita update

// Sony's handheld monster hits South Africa on 22 February, which is mere weeks away. Let's take a quick look at recent reports on the latest portable out of Sony's stables.

The PSV will use a new proprietary storage medium similar to Sony's old SD card range. The new PSV-only sticks are pretty pricy with a 32GB option setting you back about $120 or just less than R1,000. Ouch. Sony is insisting that the lofty price is for good reason: to combat piracy so as to ensure "an equal user experience for everyone". If you're planning on making full use of Sony's push for digital distribution on the new PSV, then you're going to need to fork out quite a bit for extra storage. The flip side of all of this is that rumours are circulating about digitally distributed games being reduced in price by as much as 40%. So for argument sake: while a boxed, physical copy of a PSV game might set you back around R500, the digital equivalent might only cost you about R300. This has not been officially confirmed by Sony, but the rumours seem to echo the company's desire to push digital distribution and focus on a tiered pricing structure for games.

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COLLECTORS EDITION
Pre-order the Diablo 3 Collectors edition which includes the standalone game, official soundtrack, a 208 pg artbook, behind the scenes DVD, exclusive in-game content and a 4GB USB soul stone & skull base
R100 deposit required to secure a pre-order.



End of days for Evolution Studios?

MotorStorm Apocalypse was good fun, people played and enjoyed it, but commercially, the game is cited as a failure. At least, that's according to developer Evolution Studio's group game director Matt Southern, who's concerned that the game's poor market performance and the current low level of interest for the game could mean the imminent death of the studio.

"It's been quite a tough year for us, especially early on in the year," said Southern. "We made a game we're really proud of and for some really heartbreaking reasons things didn't go so well. In perspective we've got nothing to complain about.

"I was worried it might be the end of Evolution," he added. "Racing has had a very tough time, even without extraordinary circumstances like the ones we went through."

He's not wrong, two racing-focused studios, Black Rock and Bizarre Creations were closed in 2011 due to poor market performance.

It looks as though the company has one last shot to keep themselves alive: *MotorStorm RC* for both PS Vita and PS3, which was recently confirmed by Sony. The studio will dedicate a portion of its staff to the project, with one other portion working on continued support for Apocalypse and DLC, and the remaining employees developing new ideas.

Blast from the past

Everyone knows that grid-based first-person dungeon crawling games are awesome, but if you were to ask us why exactly, we'd have no real answer for you. In a seemingly bold move, then, indie developer Almost Human Inc. Is preparing to release *Legend of Grimrock*, a grid-based, first-person tactical dungeon crawling RPG with all the bells and whistles of a modern title.

From the gameplay trailer currently available, we can see the classic movement system and mouse-driven interface combined with modern-day visuals that works very well. Combat will require some tactical thinking, and players will be able to kit out a party of four adventurers who will presumably follow the warrior/rogue/mage/cleric archetypes that we all know and love. Everything else from this humble era of gaming will be present including paper doll equipment screens, interactive environments and plenty of challenging looking puzzles.

If you're a fan of classic games like *Lands of Lore, Ultima Underworld* or *Eye of the Beholder* (which you should be), then keep an eye on Steam's upcoming release list around March.













Spec Ops: The Line

Beneath the desert sands

hands on tested / hands on tested / hands on tested

[details]

Release Date:
TBA
Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Third-person shooter
Developer:
Yager Development
Website:
www.specopstheline.com
Publisher:
2K Games

[trivia]

// Sand in the magazine bag probably wasn't the best idea. Just sayin'.

The last time we featured *Spec Ops: The Line* in this lovely little magazine, we put sand in the bag it shipped in. Don't judge us. It seemed like a great idea at the time. In a way, it's good that the game all but disappeared in the two years that have followed since I last saw it in Berlin, because it allowed us time to forget the poop storm that that tiny bit of sand carried with it. Seems you can't hide from your awesome mistakes forever, because the game has resurfaced in a big way – and we've finally got some real hands-on time with it.

First, let's run a brief recap on this whole "Dubai in peril" thing. The famously extravagant city is besieged by an incessant wave of devastating sandstorms, leading to a large-scale evacuation. The Damned 33rd, a US Army battalion renowned for its outstanding record both in combat situations and humanitarian efforts, volunteers to help with the city's evacuation, led by decorated veteran Colonel John Konrad. When the call comes in from command that it's a lost cause and the 33rd should just GTFO, Konrad and his troops disobey their orders in an effort to safely escort the last civilian caravan out of the city. They probably shouldn't have done that, because they'd barely made it out of the city before the sandstorm that all other sandstorms fear engulfed them.

Six months have passed since then, and it's assumed that there are no survivors in the ruined city. It's essentially been cut off from the rest of the world – until a distress signal from Colonel Konrad is intercepted, broadcast from within the city. This is where you come in, as Captain Martin Walker – leader of a three-man Delta Recon Team (who is also voiced by Nolan North, obviously) sent into Dubai to survey the situation, locate any survivors and report back. Joining you are Lieutenant Alphonso Adams and Sergeant John Lugo. It won't be long before you and your squad realise that there's something very, very wrong with this entire situation, and that Dubai has become a horrific microcosm of human nature, wrought with bloodshed and desperation.

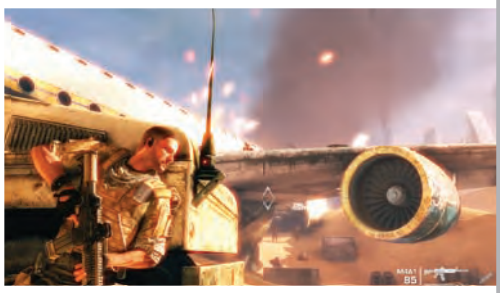
Inspiration for the game's story comes from Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness,* which also inspired Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now.* Anyone who's experienced those tales should know what to expect from the



game's narrative – which plays a huge role in separating this title from the third-person shooter pack. It's a tactical military shooter with a very mature theme, almost as if someone spilled a bit of horror in the blender while attempting to make an action-packed smoothie. Dubai has become a gruesome pit of human atrocity, with desperate refugees warring against mutineers from the 33rd battalion, set against a backdrop of simultaneous opulence and destruction.

Dubai as a setting for the game is certainly unique. Interestingly, the developers won't be taking us to any of Dubai's iconic locations, like the Burj al Arab. Instead, the game's world is simply inspired by Dubai's distinctively magnificent architecture. As such, real-world Dubai is pretty much out – but that doesn't make the developer's version of it any less impressive or instantly recognisable. Obviously, sand is everywhere following the storms, and scripted placement of the stuff lets you take advantage of it in a number of ways. Enemies standing on sand-obscured glass rooftops can suddenly find themselves in a very precarious situation if you shoot the glass out from beneath them. Sand piled up against enormous glass windows can quickly bury enemies within a bullet's notice. A nice touch comes by way of frag grenades: toss one of them on sandy ground, and the explosion will not only murder enemies in the immediate vicinity, but also kicks up a dust cloud that blinds and disorients









"Inspiration for the game's story comes from Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, which also inspired Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*."



enemies further away. Be warned: enemies are also able to use these sandy pitfalls against you. Those sandstorms also tend to be a massive thorn in your side. When they appear, the effect is both beautiful and terrifying. Vision is obscured, movement is hindered and you can almost feel the unnatural power of this natural phenomenon. They look and sound excellently monstrous as they turn shootouts into anxious scrambles for shelter.

Spec Ops' core gameplay is rooted in traditional, but solid cover shooter mechanics. It's satisfying, and the levels are designed in such a way as to allow for some choice in how you approach each skirmish. Flanking and high-ground opportunities are almost always on offer. The AI that governs both the enemies and your squad mates seems particularly polished, constantly acting and reacting to each other's actions as well as your own. Moreover, you're able to give your squad mates basic, context-sensitive orders, telling them which enemies to target so you're free to focus on others, or occasionally giving you the option to order them to stun foes. The developers are adamant, however, that this is not a squad-focused game – you're free to order your squad around as much or as little as you wish, and they seem entirely capable of taking care of themselves if you prefer a hands-off approach. The goal is to make you feel like you're truly this squad's leader, that your actions and orders affect them and alter their perception of you. It ties back into the narrative, which forces you into difficult situations in which difficult choices must be made. There's no morality meter, however, no good or evil statistic. Just harsh decisions trapped firmly in the moral grey area, often making you feel like an ass no matter your choice.

I've purposefully left out many of the particulars and story details I witnessed, because again: it's the narrative that's going to set this game apart and as such, it's best if you experience it for yourself. It's immediately intriguing, both because of the horrors you'll witness and because of the mature manner in which it handles the subject matter. *Spec Ops: The Line* is a tactical military shooter with a difference, one that has a ton of potential to be something special. **NAG**

Barkskin







Binary Domain

One to keep a close eye on...

[details]

Release Date:
Q1 2012
Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Third-person tactical shooter
Developer:
Yakuza Studio
Website:
www.sega.com/binarydomain
Publisher:
SEGA

[trivia]

// Producer Jun Yoshino worked on the under-appreciated *MadWorld*, *Resonance of Fate* and *Vanquish*.

// His father Nobuo Yoshino is a former CEO at Kawasaki Robotics.



The year is 2080, sea-levels are rising, and Tokyo is being overrun by intelligent robots called "hollow children". Only one man and his international peace-keeping squad can save the world. Playing as Dan Marshall, you're going to have to treat your squad with respect or suffer the consequences.

At the core, *Binary Domain* is a third-person cover-based shooter with all the trimmings like blind-fire and high-impact rifles. Smelling like *Vanquish* and playing like *Gears*, it'd be easy to dismiss *Binary Domain* as derivative. But that might be premature. There's a pedigree behind its development, and a lot of fresh ideas under the hood.

According to producer Toshihiro Nagoshi, creator behind the critically acclaimed *Yakuza* series, enemies are running off an entirely never-before-seen AI system. It's unclear right now if his words are hyperbole, but enemies will apparently flank, communicate and attempt to kill you in entirely new and intelligent ways. Your squadmates are running off the same advanced AI, except you have some control over it.

You'll be able to issue commands to your squad-mates either by buttons, or via voice-recognition through your headset. Trust is a huge part of the story, and in how your squad will react to your commands. The Ripple Link System (renamed to Consequence System for the International Release) governs how your team treats you and responds to your requests. "We wanted to create human drama in the action moments," says Nagoshi. Your choices, actions and words both on and off the battlefield influence your relationship with each individual member – if you're aggressive, courageous, cowardly or just a douche, it all matters. Put your team in difficult situations, speak to them badly (like calling them idiots via commands or voice), and they'll not want to put themselves in the line of fire for you. Conversations can even be divisive, setting one character off against another. They'll be less proactive and disregard commands.

Play intelligently, and you'll raise their trust. They'll act smart, offer strategies, talk to you more and provide cover fire even if you didn't ask for it. Your team dynamic changes your path through the story too. Different characters see different things in the environment, and will suggest different tactics or alternate routes.

You're going to need their help, because like *Vanquish*, there are plenty of killer robots and some are three stories tall. Enemies are detailed and kinetic; shooting their joints causes them to fall and claw towards you. Giant robots have huge armour plates that need to be knocked off with rocket launchers before you can go for their weak links. The trailers released so far show detailed environments, huge enemies, fast and agile humanoid robots, plenty of gunplay and even some jet-ski action. It's taken Japanese developers some time to catch up to the Western proficiency with the genre, but they're clearly not trailing anymore. **NAG**

Miktar

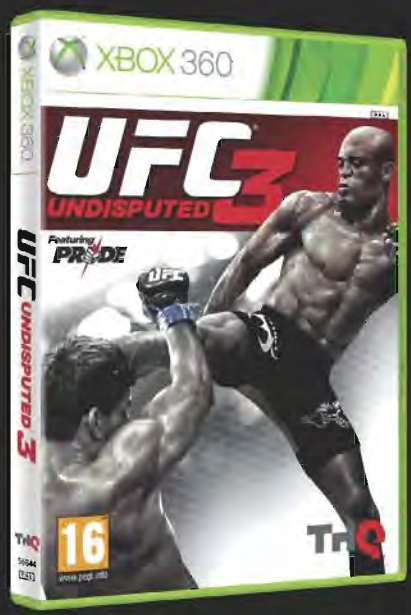


"Excuse me, shopkeeper, I'd like to return this avocado."

"There's a pedigree behind its development, and a lot of fresh ideas under the hood"







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Top 8

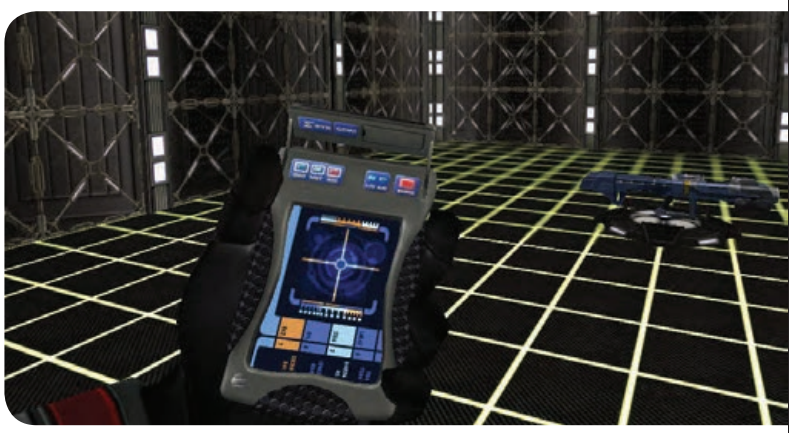
futuristic inventions that would make gaming better

Newsflash! Gaming is the greatest invention in humanity's history. It's better than the invention of writing, the Internet, medicine, television and infinitely better than those trashy *Twilight* books. It might even be better than Jelly Babies although some would argue that's pushing it. No matter how great gaming is, it can always get better. That's why we're turning our attention to the top eight futuristic inventions that would elevate gaming from "Awesome" to "More Awesome". And everyone knows that there's nothing more awesome than "More Awesome".

Take a deep breath and get ready to bask in the glory of science-fiction technology, which we've shamelessly lifted from more fertile minds than ours! Be amazed as we apply technology from the future to our present day obsession with gaming!

8 Star Trek's Holodeck

Alright let's get the obvious out of the way first. The Holodeck from *Star Trek* (or the X-Men's "Danger Room" if you prefer the slightly less geeky version) would transform gaming more than anything else. It'd also herald the collapse of graphics card manufacturers NVIDIA and ATI. It would also put Neo out of a job at NAG because there'd be nothing better for him to test. I mean seriously: how would being placed *inside* the game you're playing possibly get any better? There are a bunch of titles that would be obvious contenders for Holodeck awesome-sauce: pretty much any FPS, *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Super Mario Galaxy* spring to mind. There are obvious no-go titles as well: *Dead Space* and *Amnesia: the Dark Descent*, mainly because you'd be changing your pants every five minutes, and that would totally cut into your gaming time.



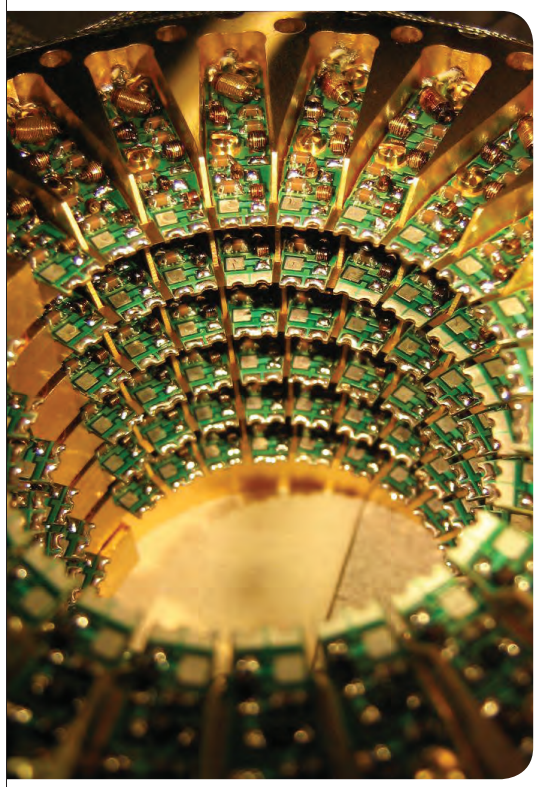
7 Teleportation

Not only would personal teleportation devices make your everyday commute so much easier, it would also give you no excuse for missing midnight launches at retailers, LANs or even expos like rAge. Heck, while we're at it, we may as well teleport to E3 every year, as well as the Tokyo Game Show and Gamescom.



6 Quantum computing

Computers with limitless resources? Do you really need this one explained? Obviously the first thing that anyone would do with a quantum computer would be to build a Holodeck, which renders this entry in our list completely meaningless. Why did we include this one again?



5 Cryo chambers

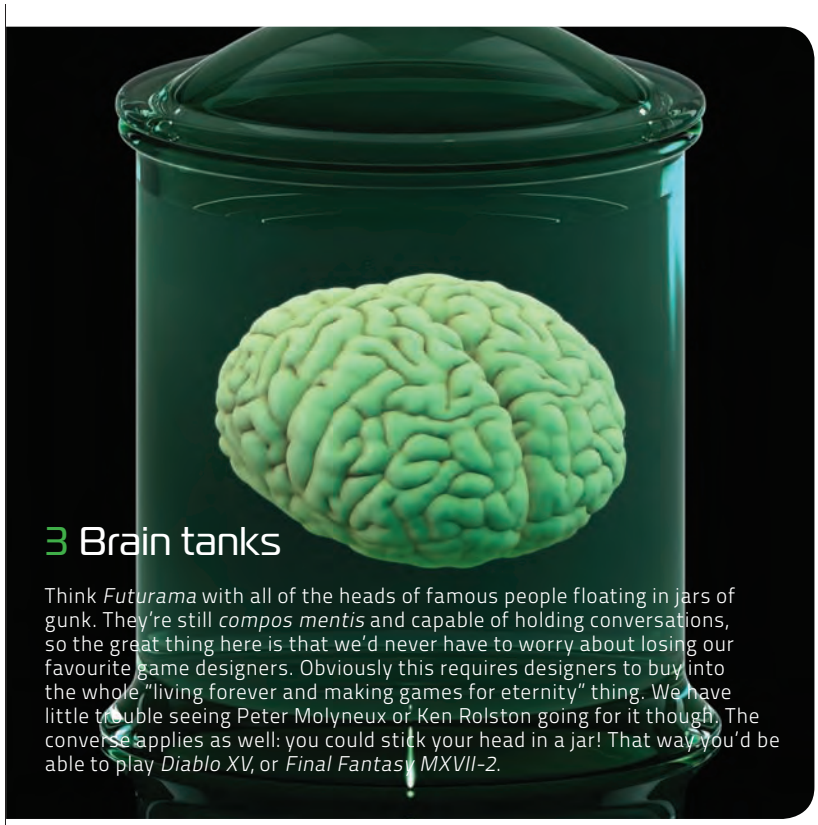
Gaming goes hand-in-hand with waiting. No really, it does. How long have you been waiting for *Diablo III*? How long was that wait for *Skyrim*? Exactly. With cryo chambers there's no need to worry about developers announcing must-have games four years before they're scheduled for release. What's that? *The Elder Scrolls VI* is coming out in 2016? No problem, that's "4" on the Cryo-Dial and the next thing you know, it'll be release day.



4 Memory wipes

The brave doctors and nurses from MemorYou labs now bring you GameAway™ tablets! With GameAway™ tablets you're free to erase any memory of games you've played, right from the comfort of your own home. Relive the legendary *BioShock* "would you kindly" scene for the first time, every week! See package insert for dosage; do not exceed recommended daily dose; do not take while breastfeeding.





3 Brain tanks

Think *Futurama* with all of the heads of famous people floating in jars of gunk. They're still *compos mentis* and capable of holding conversations, so the great thing here is that we'd never have to worry about losing our favourite game designers. Obviously this requires designers to buy into the whole "living forever and making games for eternity" thing. We have little trouble seeing Peter Molyneux or Ken Rolston going for it though. The converse applies as well: you could stick your head in a jar! That way you'd be able to play *Diablo XV*, or *Final Fantasy MXVII-2*.

2 Real Portal co-op

Portal is a great franchise. *Portal 2* introduced multiplayer to the series and in doing so ushered in a new level of co-operative gameplay. Obviously the next step involves real portal guns. They'd be sold in double packs dubbed the "RL Portal Co-Op Bundle". These would come packaged with a massive, inflatable Test Chamber complete with GLaDOS voice-over sound effects! Paintball *Portal* turrets and Weighted Companion Cubes would be sold separately.



1 Memory implants

How often has an amazing looking game comes out in a series that you know absolutely nothing about? You're dying to play it but you know all too well that the odds of you understanding what they hell is going on are slim to none. You need Memory Implants (patent pending)! No need to play a series' entire back catalogue before jumping into the latest instalment. Just set up an appointment at your nearest MemorYou Clinic to have hundreds of hours of gaming memories implanted safely inside your brain thanks to the breakthrough technology of laparoscopic-retinal-needle-memory-sowing!



THERE'S ALWAYS A LITTLE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

The Darkness was one of *those* games. It walked into a crowded room, barely saying a word to anyone, waiting for people to naturally gravitate towards it. Those that worked up the courage to approach it walked away with a new friend, one that was immediately likable and instantly cherished. The majority of them didn't even take notice of this quietly intelligent, unfamiliar thing standing in the corner of the room, opting instead to busy themselves with stuff that probably didn't deserve their attention anyway. What I'm trying to say is that the original *Darkness* should have been loved by all, but instead was largely ignored by... well, pretty much everyone. Shame on you, everyone. Shame on you.

The Darkness is based on the Top Cow comic book series of the same name. This sequel takes place two years after the original, time enough for protagonist (and wielder of the titular Darkness) Jackie Estacado to have used his otherworldly abilities to become Don of the Franchetti family. Life's good on the surface: but Jackie can't suppress the memory of his deceased girlfriend, Jenny. With a bit of help from occultist Johnny Powell, as well as fervent study into "Dark Essence," Jackie has managed to keep his unnatural powers contained: until an attempt on his life leaves him no choice but to unleash The Darkness once more, kicking off the sequel's story with a monstrous bang.

A new developer at the helm means a few changes are incoming, even though the game still feels oddly familiar. The most immediately noticeable change comes by way of the visuals. Textures are now cel-shaded to give the game comic book-style flair, with the artists foregoing digital cel-shading methods in favour of hand painting the majority of the assets. The result is a bit jarring at first, given the original's more





Release Date: **Q1 2012**
Platforms: **360 / PC / PS3**
Genre: **First-person shooter**
Developer: **Digital Extremes**
Website: **www.embracethedarkness.com**
Publisher: **2K Games**

realistic, even disturbing take on visuals – but the more I played, the more I came to appreciate its distinctive look.

While the visuals initially took some getting used to, I instantly felt at home with the gameplay, even though it's been years since I played the original, and even though a few changes have been thrown into the mix. There's a huge push for this whole quad-wielding thing, which allows Jackie to use dual-wielded firearms in a variety of combinations, while simultaneously having access to each individual Darkness tentacle (both of which have their own specific purpose). The control system is pleasantly intuitive: the left and right triggers control your left- and right-hand weapons (the left trigger allows for traditional aiming down the sights when not dual wielding), while the bumpers control the tentacles in a similar fashion. It feels brilliantly natural while at the same time adding a sense of chaotic glee to the action thanks to the sheer number of options you literally have at your fingertips. The left tentacle is used for grabbing objects, enemies and various other things that need grabbing, while the right tentacle is used for hacking and slashing at stuff. The direction of the right tentacle's slashing is determined by your movements of the right analogue stick – hold right bumper and push upwards on the stick for an upward slash that launches enemies into the air, for example.

The quad-wielding has been implemented in more interesting ways as well. Pick up a riot shield with the left tentacle, for example, and the tentacle lowers the shield in front of Jackie for extra protection, while he's still able to fire over it with one or both of his weapons. If you suddenly don't feel the need for the extra armour it provides, tap the left bumper again to have the tentacle hurl the shield at an enemy, potentially slicing them in half. Grab a long metal pole and the tentacle wields it like a spear, ready to be thrown at a moment's notice when you run out of bullets or get tired of wildly swinging with your free tentacle. It becomes second nature to instinctively grab enemies and just leave them dangling there, upside down, simply to keep them out of the way while you continue firing your guns at his buddies. You might feel the need to turn your dangling captive into a human bowling ball, or you might want to perform one of the gruesome executions on offer. You might simply want to slash at his helpless form with the free tentacle – the opportunities in each situation are satisfyingly numerous. It amounts to more than just making you feel like the super-powered badass you're meant to be: performing stylish, brutal kills earns you Essence. The more stylishly brutal (or brutally stylish) the kill, the more Essence you're rewarded with. Essence is then used to buy Talents at set points in the game. These Talents augment your abilities within one of a handful of Talent trees, each one focusing on a different skill,

The Darkling can be picked up and used as a projectile weapon that explodes on impact. Amazing.









V FOR VENDETTAS

New in *The Darkness II* is a narrative-driven, four-player cooperative mode called Vendettas. Its story runs parallel to that of the single player, allowing you and your buddies (although it's also playable solo) to choose between four unique characters, each with their own defining weaponry, Darkness abilities and back story. It's divided into a number of missions with varying objectives and will help enhance the game's storyline. Hit List mode allows you to replay choice moments from the campaign, or go wild in specially crafted scenarios. It's every bit as brutal and violent as the single player, now with added friends. These are the four playable characters:

1. Shoshanna: This no-nonsense agent of Mossad (the Israeli Intelligence Agency) lives to destroy evil wherever it may lurk. Fiercely loyal to her superiors, Shoshanna has access to the "Arm of the Night", a devastating weapon powered by Dark Essence that can fire multiple rounds at the same time.

2. Inugami: Wielder of the mythical "Kusanagi" samurai sword, Inugami seeks revenge for the slaughter of his family. He's forced to spill the blood of the wicked to feed his powerful blade in order to ensure his own survival. Can summon a swarm of miniature demons to attack and stun foes.

3. J.P. DuMond: Formerly a doctor from New Orleans, DuMond is burdened by guilt brought on by the side effects of the dark magic he once used. Brandishing his powerful Midnight Stick, he can throw his "Box of Tricks" into open areas to pull enemies into a deadly vortex.

4. Jimmy Wilson: This angry Scotsman hates the English, but loves slapping them around whenever the opportunity arises. A devout alcoholic, Jimmy's weapon of choice is the powerful "Dark Axe" and can also summon multiple Darklings – which he calls Little Jimmys – to inundate opponents.













officially adding "light RPG elements" to the list of the game's features.

Joining you on your gruesomely mature adventure is a single Darkling – an impish critter that'll help you out in a number of ways. In the original game, there were four different Darkling types to summon. There may only be one here, but he's got a distinct personality and presence that'll hopefully make you feel more attached to him. He can't be summoned either, instead seemingly appearing at will whenever the opportunity arises. That, and he can also be directly controlled (similar to the way the Creeping Dark tendrils could be) at certain points to traverse areas that Jackie cannot, with his own set of mechanics that govern the way you'll play when he's under your control. When he's not, he's surprisingly useful in a pinch, able to at the very least, keep enemies distracted, while at best he can be a totally devious miniature killing machine as he grabs bits and bobs from around the environment (like drills) to up his threat level.

Just in case the title didn't clue you in, darkness (and light) play a significant role in the game. If you step into the light, your Darkness tentacles retract (leaving you with only your guns to rely on) and you become weaker, while your vision gradually blurs and whitens until you're barely able to see your surroundings and whoever it is that keeps shooting you with angry bullets. Most lights can be destroyed (via gunshot or a quick swipe of your right tentacle) to bathe areas in shadow and keep you and your Darkness-fuelled companions feeling comfortable, but certain light sources aren't so easy to extinguish. For example, in one area I was forced to hunt down generators to shut down particularly troublesome lights. Certain enemies also carry light grenades (or something), which are massively disorienting when they go off right in front of your face. Just as the darkness/light dynamic was in the original game, it's another layer of depth in an already deep FPS.

So, is there reason to be excited for The *Darkness II*? Put simply: yes, there most certainly is. It's looking to be a gruesome, gratifying and extremely fluid first-person action experience, one that hopes to do the source material proud once again. With the announcement of the Vendettas cooperative mode (which you'll find described somewhere on these pages), the deal keeps getting sweeter. If all goes according to plan and the game comes out the other end as good as the preview code I played leads me to believe it will be, then this series might finally get the recognition it deserves. **NAG**

Barkskin

The reviewers

Question: This is a cliché but it's also the end of the year... What is your noblest New Year's resolution for 2012 that is most likely to fail?

RedTide



I will spend less time playing games and more time doing everything else.

Miktar



I resolve to not give a bullcarp about idjits with ignorant and uninformed proclamations about games. Hah.

Azimuth



I don't fail my New Year's resolutions. I just change my mind about them. It's a female class skill.

Mikit0707



I resolve to try and get into Japanese Role Pla- ha! Yeah right, I can't even type that without knowing it's a brazen lie.

GeometriX



To come up with more imaginative answers for these ridiculous questions.

Barkskin



To survive the apocalypse. Sure, it's not particularly noble – but if games have taught me anything, it's that the real fun only begins when the world ends.

Ramjet



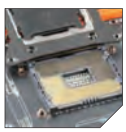
To finish writing my novel... it has failed for seven years running now, so odds are...

SAVAGE



I will try to figure out why I really need nine e-mail addresses.

ShockG



Finding a CB-Free, 2600+ IMC and 6.2 Ghz+ LN2 3960X with the next sample.

Anatomy of a review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

/1/ Totally interesting stuff: Developer, publisher, platform, random junk and more. The number of players listed under multiplayer is the maximum number you can have in a game at one time. Local means "couch", not LAN.

/2/ Obligatory words (i.e. a review): This is the stuff you probably won't read before ogling the shiny pictures, glancing at the score and then flipping the page. We don't blame you – word-reading is hard.

/3/ Screenshots: These are the pretty pictures you'll probably stare at before peeking at the score, ignoring the wonderful review and then flipping the page. You should probably ask your mom to make your sandwiches too. Just to be on the safe side. You might cut yourself.

/4/ Captions: Funny. Informative. Touching. The captions are usually none of these things. Except maybe touching, when we put some innuendo in there.


/ review /

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds 5

An amazing dog saves the universe. Woof.

6

details

Platforms: 360 / PS3 / Arcade

Genre: Fighting

Age rate: 12

Price: Disc-based

Multiplayer: Local: 2 players Online Versus: 2 players

Developer: Capcom

Publisher: Capcom

Distributor: Ster-Kinekor

1

2

4

3

7

90

/1/ Totally interesting stuff: Developer, publisher, platform, random junk and more. The number of players listed under multiplayer is the maximum number you can have in a game at one time. Local means "couch", not LAN.

/2/ Obligatory words (i.e. a review): This is the stuff you probably won't read before ogling the shiny pictures, glancing at the score and then flipping the page. We don't blame you – word-reading is hard.

/3/ Screenshots: These are the pretty pictures you'll probably stare at before peeking at the score, ignoring the wonderful review and then flipping the page. You should probably ask your mom to make your sandwiches too. Just to be on the safe side. You might cut yourself.

/4/ Captions: Funny. Informative. Touching. The captions are usually none of these things. Except maybe touching, when we put some innuendo in there.

/5/ Game name: The most reading you'll do will likely happen in this bit right here.

/6/ Award: Comes in three delicious flavours. See below for maximum info.

/7/ Those things with extra info: These things have extra info.

THE AWARDS

Editor's Choice: If a game gets this award, you know it's more than just good. It means it pulled the editor away from *Call of Duty* for long enough to actually play another game – and we can't think of anything more remarkable than that.



Must Play: It means exactly what it says: you must play this game. Beg your parents for cash, dole out sexual favours, etc. – fight past the pain and do whatever it takes to get your sweaty paws on it. You'll thank us for it later.



Pony: You know how everyone wants a pony? Yeah, that's not the case here and we're not just being mean. We're trying to protect you from the horror of being punched in the nether regions by thoroughly rubbish games.



THE SCORE BOX

/1/ Plus: These are the great things that make us happy.

/2/ Minus: These are the rubbish things that make us sad.

/3/ Bottom line: The waffle stops here. Hundreds of words distilled into a tiny bit of text that can either damn a game to the depths or shower it with praise.

/4/ The Score: It's a number out of 100. It lets you make an informed decision as to whether or not you should spend money on this game. This isn't rocket science, people.

1 / **PLUS** / Very detailed / Enthralling setting / Amazing graphics

2 / **MINUS** / Not enough detail / Boring setting / Rubbish graphics

3 **BOTTOM LINE GOES HERE; KEEP IT UNDER 15 WORDS, 15 WOULD BE IDEAL. THANKS.**

4 69

QUICK HITS

Dead Rising 2: Off the Record

There are only two good reasons to play a re-release or "gold edition" of a game: if you hadn't played the original, or if the re-release has enough good content to warrant those who had played the original to come back. At first glance, *Off the Record* seems like a shameless cash-in to ensure the Capcom executives who missed out on last month's Ferrari binge at least get a Porsche, but it's more than that. There's enough content that's new, and importantly, enough that's changed, to give even those who have played *Dead Rising 2* to completion a reason to return and slay the same zombies in different ways.

The only letdown here is that, other than his not-at-all-missed photography skills, there's functionally nothing that separates Frank West from Chuck Greene. At least the story has been mixed around a bit to accommodate the new character, and it even manages to feel natural to have a completely different protagonist.

// Worth your time, even if it's just for sandbox mode.

Farming Simulator 2011 Platinum Edition

Farming games *are* fun. Well, they can be if they're called *Harvest Moon*. We guess *FarmVille* counts as well, but only begrudgingly. The point is that this title is not fun. It's as boring as real farming, but without the slap-up farmhouse breakfast to start the day or a pack of awesome dogs that eat crows and shoot laser beams out their eyes. That's still farming, right? I'm sure it is.

This is the game that ignorant people think you're playing when they see you having a great time with *Harvest Moon*. It includes a variety of sponsored, official equipment that you'll struggle to use because you're a born and bred city boy/girl, and the tractors do that slight swaying thing like in *Desert Bus*, because *that's* super fun. If you do happen to know a thing or two about farming, then maybe this will appeal to you due to the familiarity involved in sitting on a noisy tractor for two hours, or the feeling of complete loneliness where your only interaction with the outside world is when you sell them corn every second week. The only advantage to playing this game over actually going out there and doing it is the lack of sunburn.

// A boring simulator that doesn't even try to be fun.

WEB SCORES

How do we measure up? We scour the 'Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.

NAG / Metacritic average / Game Rankings average

Assassin's Creed: Revelations



90
80
81

Minecraft



90
94
95

Sonic Generations



82
78
79

Super Mario 3D Land



91
90
90

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim



90
95
96

Uncharted 3



94
92
93

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Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Drake's irrepressible stubble returns for another epic adventure



Fortune hunter Nathan Drake returns for a third outing in Naughty Dog's latest PS3 exclusive, and the result is a glossy and polished blockbuster in the truest sense. *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* sees our protagonist searching for a legendary lost city, the Iram of the Pillars, which is said to be found amidst a vast Arabian desert. Of course, such an endeavour can hardly be expected to be a straightforward one, and Drake's quest sees him making stop-overs in places as diverse as France, London and Colombia, all the while solving puzzles, despatching enemies and hiding from clandestine organisations with agendas that are less-than-noble at best. Making return appearances in *Uncharted 3* are Drake's mentor Sully, roguish and reckless adventurer Chloe Frazer, and Drake's on-again off-again love interest Elena Fisher. Naughty Dog have also skilfully seized the opportunity to flesh out the back-stories for their now well-known characters and their relationships with each other, paying particular attention to the origins of the Drake/Sully partnership. It's a refreshing and even touching diversion from the breakneck pace at which the main story progresses and it helps to develop the emotional connections players have with these already familiar characters.

The overarching plot itself is replete with the Hollywood-inspired twists that have become a hallmark of the series, and it manages to progress at a fast enough pace and with interesting enough characters that even its plot holes can be easily overlooked. *Uncharted 3* really is the video game counterpart to the typical "popcorn movie" action film – it's fast, flashy and exciting, even if that comes at the price of logic and plausibility. It's a formula that worked well for its predecessors, and it works well here too, ensuring that even those with the shortest of attention spans probably won't find *Uncharted 3* becoming tedious.

When it comes to direct comparisons between *Drake's Deception* and its predecessors, the changes initially seem quite subtle. Anyone who's played the previous games will be instantly familiar with the game's fundamental concepts of climbing up walls, leaping across gaps and generally shooting at anything that moves, but that's not to



[details]

Platforms:
PS3
Genre:
Action-adventure
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 10 players
Developer:
Naughty Dog
Website:
www.unchartedthegame.com
Publisher:
SCEE
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment







suggest that their hasn't been some improvement made. The most significant change comes in the form of refined melee combat – Drake's hand-to-hand confrontations have historically felt somewhat clumsy and tedious, requiring little finesse and relying extensively on button-mashing. This time around, melee combat has been overhauled to include environmental attacks, smarter counter attacks and more challenging opponents. Hand-to-hand combat is a now a fluid and intuitive affair. Sure, you can continue to wail away at your opponent with punches and kicks, but you can just as easily pin him against a wall, or slam him into a table, or even take a swing at him with the broken bottle you found lying at your feet. It's an impressive refinement of the game's combat system, and one that makes the overall experience feel far more spontaneous than it ever has in the past.

As was the case with its forerunners, *Drake's Deception* benefits greatly from intelligently designed levels that allow you to play through the game according to your own personal proclivities. If you favour the element of surprise, you can pop out from cover with guns blazing as you sprint through the environments mowing down your foes. If you prefer a slower and stealthier approach, you can sneak up behind your enemies and silently grapple them into submission. You can swing from ropes and make death defying leaps as you race for the nearest exit if you'd rather flee than fight. Whichever way you choose to play the game, you'll find that the action blends seamlessly into a fast-paced and incredibly entertaining experience. Continuing the tradition of the series, the action segments are punctuated by puzzles that need to be solved. None of them are especially complex, but should you find yourself stuck on any particular one for a prolonged period of time, the game will offer you progressively more explicit suggestions to help you solve it. It's clear that the developers wanted the game to flow as smoothly as possible from beginning to end, and they skilfully manage to gently push players in the right direction without becoming heavy-handed.

If one had to pick three fundamental aspects that comprise the gaming experience in any *Uncharted* title, they would of course be the combat, the puzzles and the epic set-pieces. *Drake's Deception* honours the franchise's well established tradition, providing a liberal-sprinkling of flashy and exciting set-pieces that could put most movie studios to shame. They're memorable, surprising and undeniably cool, the kind of "oh snap" moments that showcase precisely why *Uncharted 3* is at the top of its genre.

Another area where *Uncharted 3* has taken some significant forward strides is its multiplayer offering. Once again, there are both competitive and co-operative modes of play available. The adventure mode lets you team up with friends to take on some sequences cut from the campaign mode, and the result is thoroughly entertaining. The segments have been modified to remove their puzzle components, so what players are left with are pacey action sequences that reward teamwork and co-operation. Two other co-operative multiplayer modes round out the offering, though the game's biggest multiplayer attraction is likely to be the competitive offering that, owing to the inherent agility of the *Uncharted* characters, forces players to stay on their toes should they wish to survive. The game also implements its own adaptation of the "Perks" mechanic seen in various FPS titles, giving players upgradeable "Boosters" and "Kickbacks" that grow as you garner online

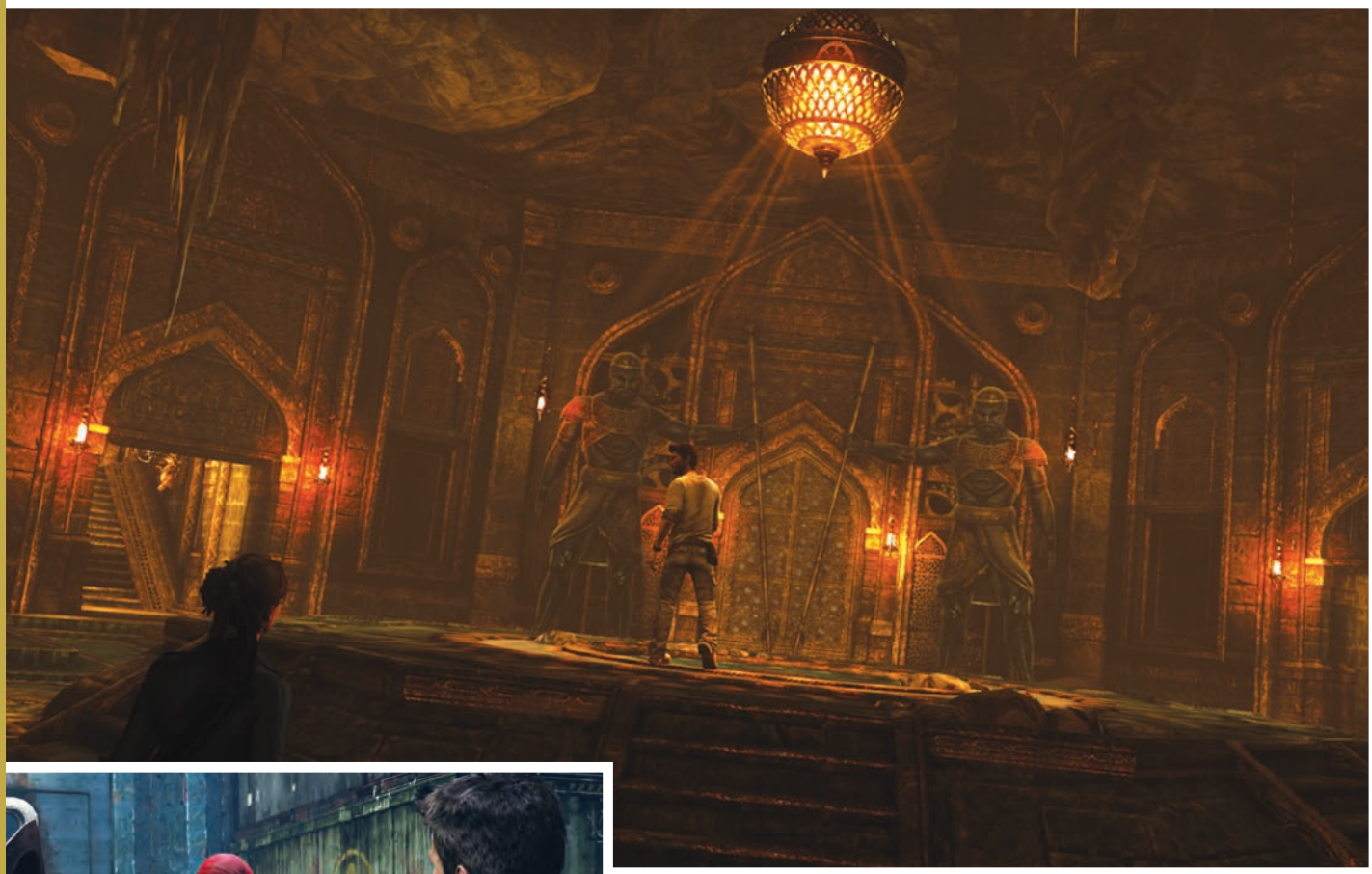




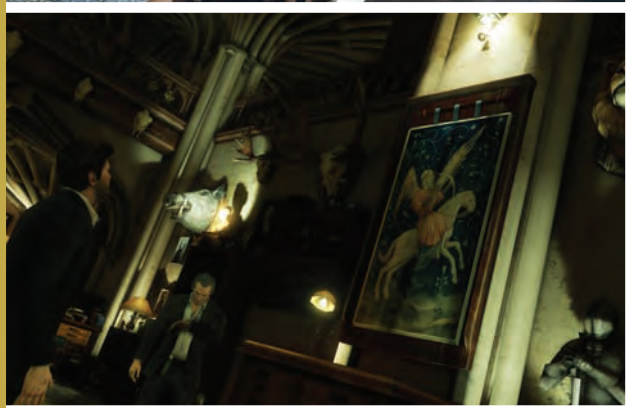




/1/ When asked about their plans for the next title in the *Uncharted* series, game director Justin Richmond said this: "We've always said that there are a ton of Drake adventures out there and we haven't told all of them yet, and as long as fans want the games and as long as we find something that's interesting and will push the medium forward, we'll continue to make them. But we haven't decided what the next thing is."









experience, providing a fulfilling sense of accomplishment even if you're not the winning player.

In terms of presentation, *Uncharted 3* pushes the envelope, setting a new standard not just for the franchise, but the genre as a whole. The sweeping soundtrack deftly shifts its focus to complement the action at every turn, and the aural experience is bolstered by convincing sound effects that accompany every gunshot and explosion. The voice actors do wonderful service to the well-crafted script, and Drake's infamous one-liners make a welcome reappearance. The diverse landscapes are all beautifully detailed, and fluid character animation is combined with dazzling visual effects to put *Drake's Deception* firmly at the top of its class.

Of course, for all the praise that *Uncharted 3* deserves, it is not without its flaws. The AI, though improved from the previous title, is still subject to some erratic behaviour, and the game offers little in the way of replay value, except possibly to collect those pesky hidden treasures that populate each of its varied levels. Fortunately, the deficit of single player replay value is mitigated by the game's strong multiplayer offering. Perhaps when all is said and done, *Uncharted 3*'s deepest weakness is quite intimately related to its greatest strength. With the *Uncharted* franchise, Naughty Dog have always set out to craft games that offer an almost cinematic experience, and *Drake's Deception* comes close to realising that ideal. The game's whirlwind story, explosive action sequences, swift pace and glossy finish evoke exactly the kind of response that a silver-screen blockbuster would. Of course, the side effect to this is that players might find themselves feeling like a spectator to the whole ordeal rather than a participant in it.

Although you'll spend the game controlling Drake's actions, you'll remain tethered to the game's precisely crafted script of events throughout, that same script of events that keeps the action flowing and the game's energy so persistently high.

It's an unfair criticism to level at the game since it is, after all, an action title rather than an RPG, and it's supposed to be first and foremost about the spectacle. And to that end, it's hard to fault *Drake's Deception*; it's quite literally a lustrous thrill-ride of a game that never lets up on the action, and it does so with gorgeous visuals, stirring sound, a colourful cast of characters and some truly impressive production values. It's a step forward for the series in almost every sphere, serving to further refine the already winning formula employed by its predecessors, and it's a game that is sure to find a place in every PS3 owner's library. **NAG**

Madman

/ **PLUS** / Beautiful visuals / Exciting combat / Stunning set-pieces / Strong multiplayer offering
/ **MINUS** / Feels occasionally restrictive

MASTERFUL IN ITS EXECUTION, *DRAKE'S DECEPTION* DESERVES ITS PLACE AT THE VERY TOP OF THE ACTION-ADVENTURE GENRE.

94

New Year's Resolution:

• Keep Playing ☑



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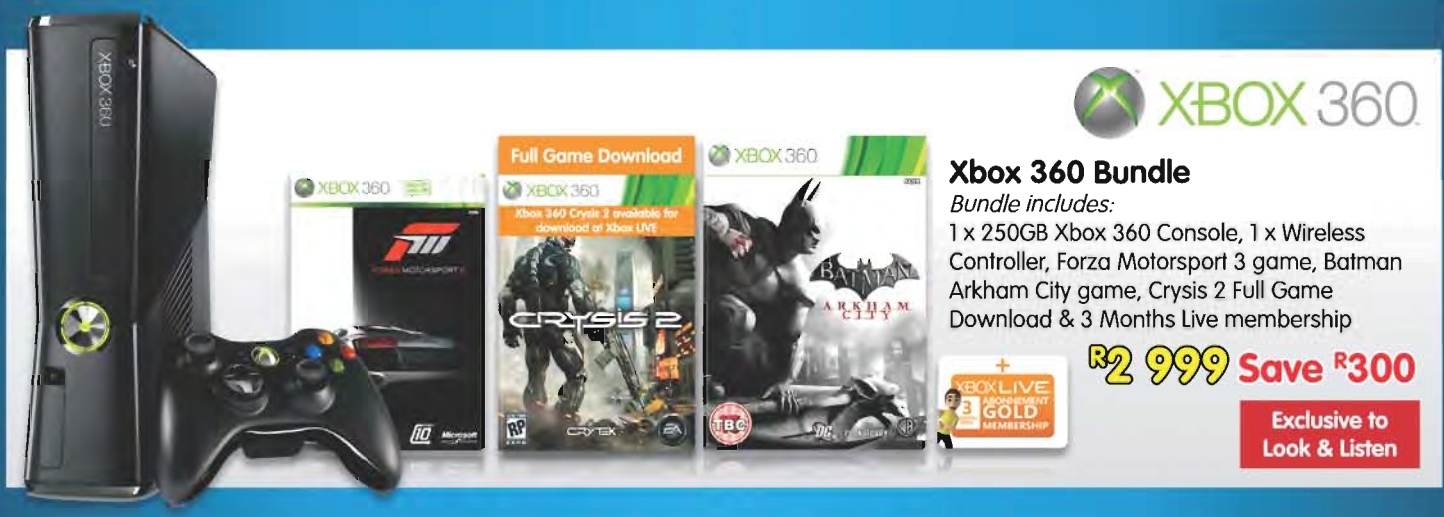


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Look & Listen
For the Fans

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

FUS RO DAH!

How does one describe a game that only barely manages to stay focused long enough to define itself? Oh, sure, this is a role-playing game; that's the easy part: it has a story and important characters and places to visit, and you get to be the hero and all that good stuff. But it's so much more than that. *Skyrim* is epic; not in the sense that someone who spends too much time on the Internet would use the word, but in the sense that there's nothing insignificant in this game. The world; the characters; the quests; the equipment selection; the dungeons; the magic; the crafting; the meta-gaming you'll find yourself doing. Everything about *Skyrim* is huge, and if you're prepared to lose yourself to its 100+ hours of wintery delight, then get ready to kiss your free time goodbye.

Skyrim begins with a familiar scene: you are a prisoner being transported, and you'll be required to describe yourself (through the character creation screen) to a questioning guard. This time, an executioner's block is your destination, and just as you're about to have your neck become close friends with a blood-stained axe, a dragon arrives in town and causes all sorts of chaos. In a typical fantasy game, that might be a common occurrence, but this is the first appearance of a dragon in Skyrim since they were declared supposedly extinct many years before. As it so happens, the re-emergence of this dragon (and many others) forms part of the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy that will spell doom for the world of Tamriel. And if you think that your character will play a big part in this prophecy, you've obviously been paying attention so far.

Here's the funny thing about *Skyrim*: even with an entertaining main quest line that takes you to many interesting places in the province, its scope pales in comparison to the rest of the game's content. This is its greatest asset and, depending on the player, possibly its biggest flaw (it has a few others, but they're more on the technical side). *Skyrim* has ADD. It's almost impossible to go anywhere or talk to anyone without being in some way subjected to a side quest. Sometimes NPCs will practically ambush you on your way to unload a backpack full of trinkets at the general store, desperate for your assistance because they like the way you hold a sword or are impressed

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Role-playing game
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Bethesda Game Studios
Website:
www.elderscrolls.com/skyrim
Publisher:
Bethesda Softworks
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment









/1/ *Skyrim* retains the series' free-form class system but takes it a step further by removing class titles altogether. Now you can be that cannibal battle mage arrow-slinging paladin you've always wanted to be.

/2/ Another new feature is dual-wielding. Two one-handed weapons, a one-hander and a shield, two spells (different or identical), or any logical combination of the above is possible, which speeds up the bulky interface and makes battle mages all the more versatile.

/3/ As always, a few sim-like elements have made their way into the game. You can buy and kit out a house in each of the province's major cities, and can even take a spouse (heterosexual or homosexual, which is perhaps a tip of the hat to *Fable*) to keep the bed sheets warm.

/4/ *Skyrim* looks good on console and great on PC, but it's there where gamers who like to tinker will be even more spoiled for choice. A huge modding scene has already bloomed, so be sure to visit www.skyrimnexus.com and peruse the options that include visual improvements, interface adjustments and even additional content.







by your heroic swagger, or whatever it is. Fair enough, your character *is* a Dragonborn after all – one of the last remaining mortals with the power to channel Dragon Shouts that do all sorts of fantastic things mere magic wishes it was capable of. Just like this paragraph, *Skyrim* finds itself side-tracking constantly, and if you're not painfully linear in your approach to quest completion, you might feel bogged down by the amount of content that begs for your attention. Of course, that all depends on you and how you approach games like this. The way to fully enjoy *Skyrim* is to just let go; allow yourself to become completely immersed in the world and do absolutely *everything*. Forget about finishing the game. There's a civil war tearing apart the province? Didn't notice. A lady who six months ago asked me to find her son is still waiting in her house for a response? I'll get to it later; too busy catching butterflies and stealing farming supplies. My house in real life is falling down around me; dogs are barking; neighbours screaming? I'll just turn up that volume and get back to the important business of trying to pickpocket the Jarl.

Let's take a break from this unapologetic boot-licking to chat about the problems in *Skyrim*. Actually, let's take a moment to ask Bethesda why, in all their knowledge, ingenuity and years of experience, do they still find it so difficult to make a game that just *works*? Bugs and glitches are everywhere: characters and equipment clip through each other and the environment; physics bugs cause woolly mammoths to perform incredible feats of acrobatics; NPCs tell you the same damn thing over and over and over again. "Yes, thanks, I got the message." "Okay, great, Steve, just trying to get through here, actually." "Really? Oh, that's fascinating! Why don't you tell it to my Staff of Eyeball-melting Pain?" The AI is awful. Your character will usually have a companion/follower of some sort, gained permanently through an exchange of cash or completion of quests, or temporarily assigned for certain tasks. These companions are handy to have around for the more challenging battles (and for hauling the 300 pounds of looted Dwemer crap you refuse to give up), but that's assuming that they're not stuck at the bottom of a mountain, bobbing repetitively against

AZIMUTH'S OPINION

So everything just kind of started off and suddenly there was this dragon and I was a fugitive but that must've been sorted out somehow because then I was in this little town somewhere and the shopkeeper asked me to find this golden claw that had been stolen from his store so I went off and followed a winding path up into the mountains across the river but I saw that there was another cave somewhere just off to the east so I thought I'd check that out quickly beforehand so I did and found some sort of bandit hideout and killed everybody inside and read a bunch of books and when I came back out I noticed that there was a landmark or something nearby so I figured I'd go and take a look there and on the way over I was attacked by a bunch of wolves and when I discovered I could skin them and sell their pelts for cash I decided to do that for a bit but then I found out that I could actually turn the pelts into leather and make armour and sell that for even *more* cash and you know I don't even remember what I was supposed to be doing but about 30 hours have passed and this one time I ate a sabre-toothed cat's eye just to see what would happen.

85











a foot-tall rock, attempting to melee attack a brigand archer on the other side of town through a wall, or attacking you because they freaked out when you transformed into a werewolf. And, if you're really lucky, they'll only block doorways half the time. Plenty of other bugs have been reported on the console versions, with texture issues, messy frame rates and broken quests at the top of the list. Bethesda is working on fixing those, so hopefully, by time you read this review and decide to buy the game because it's totally awesome despite its technical hitches, it'll be pleasantly playable on your platform of choice. Two other quick irks: the inventory/magic system is a bulky set of lists that make me miss simple icons and mouse selection, and the character screen has been streamlined to the point of over-simplification, although it's still quite serviceable. Just bear in mind that those people hoping to page through reams of character stats might be sad.

Enough nay-saying, back to the good stuff! When your character isn't completing important quests and stalking through the game's 120+ dungeons and discovering its 100+ points of interest (including shrines, cities, bandit camps, abandoned forts, villages and farms), he or she can spend time doing what every good adventurer does best in their spare time: crafting. The alchemy, smithing and enchanting skills give you access to a huge selection of weapons, armour, potions and poisons, and are fuelled by a massive selection of ingredients to be found all over the province and obsessively collected by anyone who understands the advantage of a bag full of healing potions.

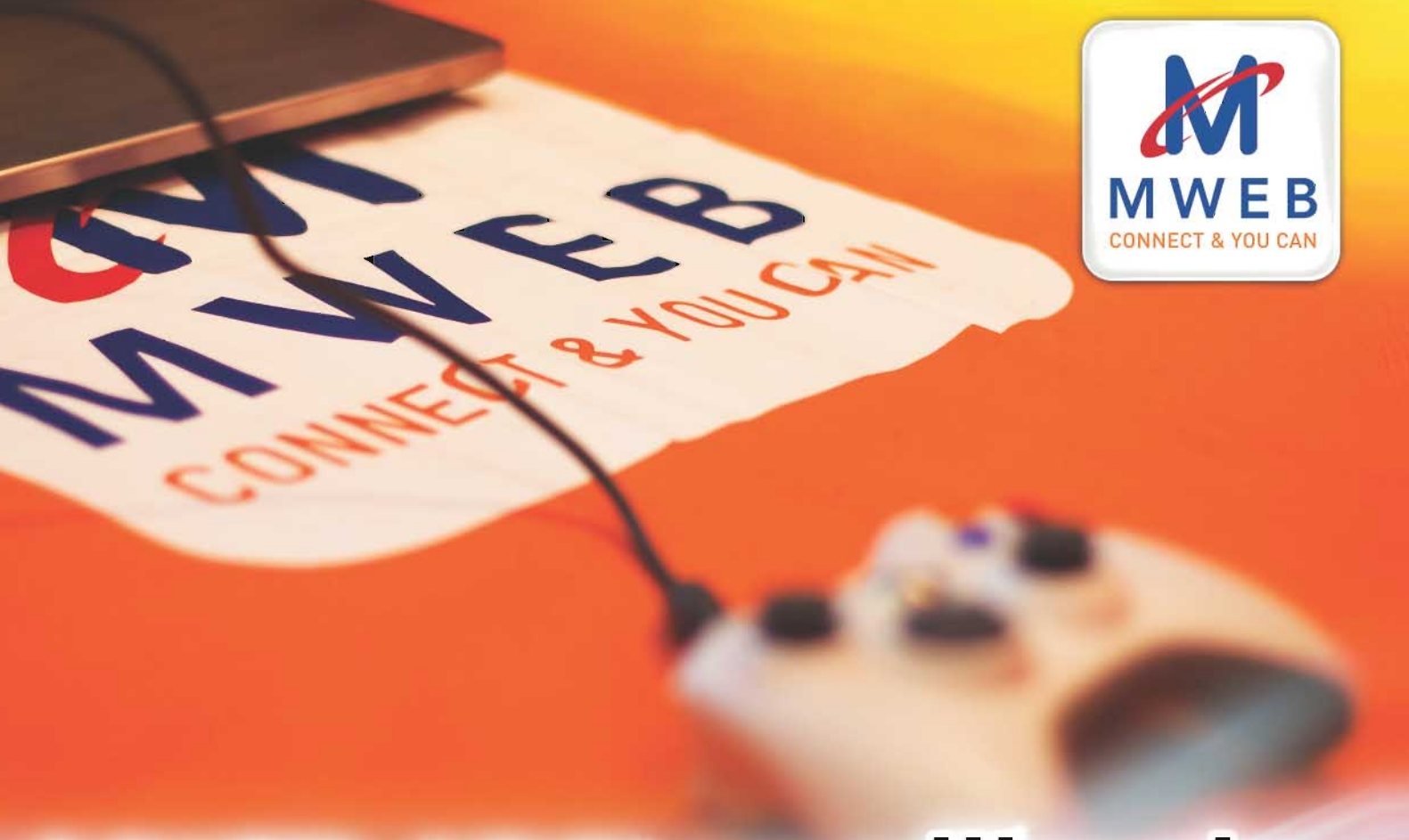
Skyrim has succeeded. Not only is it a worthy sequel to *Oblivion*, but it's the next logical step in the series. It's a fantastic blend of action, quest-driven role-playing and sandbox exploration. It's not perfect, but it's exactly what it promised to be and is everything you'd expect from an *Elder Scrolls* game. **NAG**

GeometriX

/ **PLUS** / Massive world filled with interesting content / Open class system / Plenty of side tasks
/ **MINUS** / Lots of small bugs / AI sucks / Interface could be better

***SKYRIM* IS ABOUT TEN TIMES MORE THAN WHAT YOU HOPED IT WOULD BE.**

90



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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Minecraft

Achievement Get! Lost the last 15 hours of your life!

Minecraft has been a *NAG* office staple for a year now thanks to the game's very public and very lengthy beta phase. How do you review a game that's already been publically available for over a year? The chances are that many people have already played it and formed an opinion about it. Let's assume that you haven't played *Minecraft* or that you might have dabbled in it but never really sunk your teeth into it.

Minecraft is a tricky beast to describe. It could quite easily be the poster child for the sandbox genre because there is no right or wrong way to play the game. That being said, you will feel overwhelmed during the first few hours of play unless you have a Minecraft Wiki in front of you (there's no shame in doing that, by the way).

The game is about mining and harvesting resources, and then constructing whatever it is your imagination allows. The world around you is made up of uniform, pixelated blocks, each representing a different material: wood, stone, dirt, iron and more. It's up to you to work out what combines with what in order to create the tools and sub-materials needed to build whatever it is you want to build. There are imposed limitations through a fixed set of building materials, but the room for creativity is still vast. Don't expect to build working space ships to fly to the cube-shaped moon however – there are certain rules that govern the world, but they never feel restricting.

In order to build, you need to find the resources, and for that you need to explore. This is one of *Minecraft*'s shining achievements: its level of exploration is rewarding and utterly captivating. Your game world is practically infinite and procedurally generated, so you'll effectively never run out of places to explore.

Minecraft is a game of layers; not only in the physical terrain, but in the gameplay and interactivity as well. One thing leads to another; stone pickaxes lead to diamond ones. Diamond pickaxes allow you to mine obsidian which, when arranged in a specific structure and set alight, opens a portal to The Nether – a dangerous, hell-like dimension full of unique crafting materials. Once there you can find a Blaze Rod that allows you to make a Brewing Stand, which unlocks an entire new section

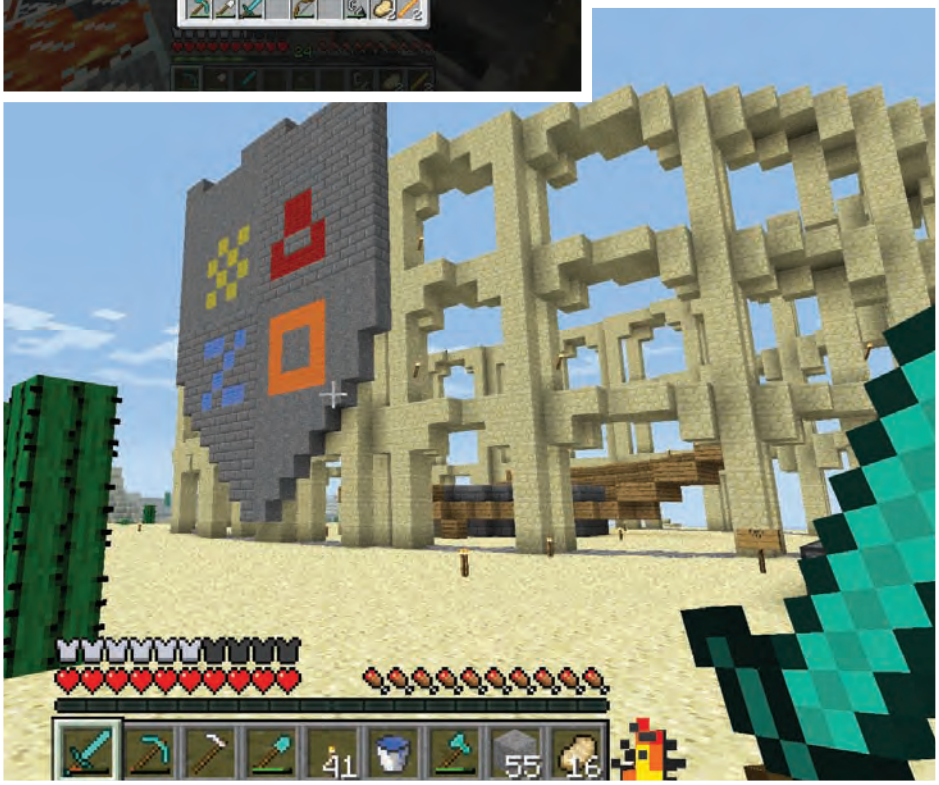
editor's choice / editor's choice / editor's choice

[details]

Platforms:
Mobile / PC
Genre:
Sandbox
Age restriction:
Not Rated
DRM:
Internet connection required [once-off activation]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 64 players
Developer:
Mojang
Website:
www.minecraft.net
Publisher:
Mojang
Distributor:
Mojang







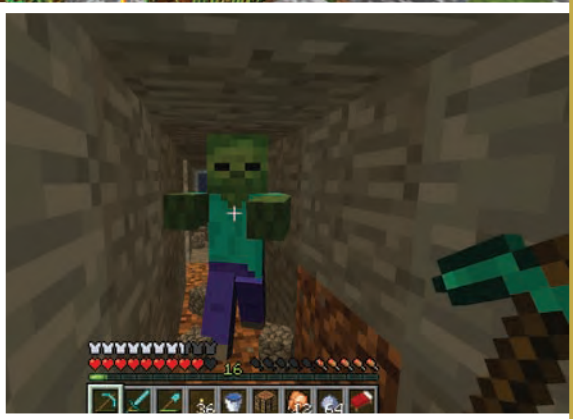


/1/ **Advanced users can establish automated facilities using Redstone – a sort-of electrical system in the game that has yielded some truly incredible inventions from players around the world.**









of crafting through brewing potions. To the uninitiated, those last few sentences probably sounded terrifying – indeed starting a game of *Minecraft* is somewhat terrifying because there's just so much to take in. But this again is where the game comes into its own: despite the almost infinite possibilities and layer upon layer of gameplay, the entire package is undeniably accessible. Spend a few minutes punching trees and making wooden Crafting Tables, and all of a sudden a little more of the game peaks out from behind the veil of obscurity, beckoning you to continue cautiously tugging until the entire offering is revealed.

There are three modes available in the final version of *Minecraft*. Survival mode drops you into a world in which you need to build, mine, farm and forage in order to survive. Once the sun sets, hostile mobs descend and if you die you will respawn, but you'll have to return to the area of your demise in order to reclaim everything you were once carrying. Hardcore mode is the same as Survival mode only if you die then the world and everything you've built is lost for good. Anyone who has spent days constructing an automated sugarcane farm will tell you that that outcome is terrifying. Creative mode is what it sounds like: there is no damage from enemies; you have access to every type of material in infinite proportions; and you're free to fly around the world constructing anything you can.

With three different game modes to choose from, and the ability to set up custom multiplayer servers with persistent worlds, there's enough to ensure that the price of admission becomes a no-brainer. Because the game has no overall goal or objective, multiplayer servers can be set up for just about any type of game you can think of. *NAG* has a *Minecraft* server that's still in the early testing stages, but already those involved have created entire cities with working economies and factions, not to mention some of the most detailed machines and buildings imaginable. And once again, this is one of the greatest aspects to the game: you're free to make things as complex or as simple as you like. You can build intricate, automated machines using switches, pistons and logic circuits, or you can completely bypass all of that and stick to more simple constructions and activities like farming or blacksmithing. You get out exactly what you put in, and in that *Minecraft* enjoys a unique triumph.

Minecraft is a patchwork canvas on which you're encouraged to create your own adventure. There's no hand-holding and no tutorial save for some very basic journal entries to get you going. It is possible to "finish" the game if you satisfy a number of criteria and defeat a final boss, but that's not the ultimate goal. The goal of *Minecraft* is for you to create, explore and discover. Many would argue that it's a game you could spend years playing, and with the promise of new (and free) content from developer Mojang, I'm inclined to agree. **NAG**

Mikit0707

/ **PLUS** / Deep but accessible gameplay / Unique and charming presentation / Pretty much digital LEGO
/ **MINUS** / Regular crashes to desktop / Iffy network connectivity for multiplayer

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT; PREPARE TO LOSE HOURS OF YOUR LIFE.

90

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Assassin's Creed: Revelations

The end of Ezio

We have spent some time with that dashing Renaissance Italian assassin, Ezio Auditore. But now, that time has come to an end with the release of *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*. In fact, it's not only Ezio's tale that draws to a close, but that of the first game's main character, Altaïr, also gets wrapped up. But don't expect a quick resolution to matters... *Revelations* is at least as long as *Brotherhood*, and it offers the player a ton of stuff to do while working through the long plot.

Those that finished *Brotherhood* – and if you didn't, shame on you, go do it right now – will know that things have seemed to go very wrong for Desmond Miles, the man who is reliving the genetic memories of his ancestors via the Animus system. Now, Desmond lies in a mysterious coma, with his consciousness trapped in the machine. He must access the final memories of Ezio to free himself and avoid having his personality deleted.

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3 / PC
Genre:
Action adventure
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Ubisoft
Website:
www.assassinscreed.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom







/1/ Multiplayer returns in *Revelations*, expanding on *Brotherhood*'s online basics with new characters and locations, as well as improved UI and matchmaking. You're able to customise your appearance, weaponry and abilities, and can even start a guild with its own coat of arms.

That's the first layer of the game. Using Desmond, the player can explore his own memories in first-person style sections that remind a little of *Portal*, largely because they're a bunch of movement puzzles and obstacle courses. The second layer lies in the memories of Ezio – even though Desmond is technically not hooked up to the Animus, his consciousness resides there, and he can access his ancestor's memories. The third layer are memories of Altaïr that Desmond experiences through Ezio making use of five mysterious keys... memories within memories, as it were. These five Altaïr missions are relatively simple, but fans of the story will love them for the illumination they provide.

From the get-go, *Revelations* feels different. Even the presentation of the game has been altered, leaving the bright, near white Animus interface behind for a darker, more sinister feel. This may not sit well with purists initially, but when you get into the meat of the game, the feel makes absolute sense. Another aspect that fans may find a little disconcerting (I know I did) is the fact that you're now controlling Ezio in what appears to be his late middle-aged years. His beard is longer and greying, his voice gruffer. There are numerous quips in the game about his age, too. But it seems that the years have been kind to the assassin, because he is as capable as ever.

The bulk of the game, which is set in the massive, labyrinthine city of Constantinople, is very similar to *Brotherhood* in terms of dynamics. The player will go around doing a myriad of missions, while purchasing businesses and renovating landmarks on the side. He will also train a squad of assassins, although this aspect of the game is a bit deeper than before, with cities that can now be liberated and managed. Assassins can also be tasked to oversee assassin dens within the main city, which are basically liberated Templar towers.

This brings up a new addition to the franchise: when the player manages to build up enough notoriety, a Templar attack on these dens will be triggered. The player will then undertake a mini-game not unlike tower defence to keep the attackers at bay. It is a bit clunky, with overall nasty camera controls, but it can be quite fun none the less.

Another new addition brings a change to the control scheme. The











player can now equip a main and secondary weapon at the same time... for example, a sword and throwing knives. This speeds things up; with less visiting weapon selection being necessary, but the new controls may take getting used to. Speaking of weapons, bombs make an appearance in this title, with the player able to craft a variety of different explosive devices to help them go about their business.

Added challenge comes from the fact that Constantinople is an unfriendly city. There are two factions hunting the player this time round, and even buying a shop will add notoriety... which is a little more difficult to get rid of now. Witness assassination and bribery are the only options, and as witnesses now come with guards, bribery of heralds is the simplest – but most expensive – solution.

This culmination of both Ezio and Altaïr's tales is the best *Assassin's Creed* game we have seen so far, but not by very much. The changes here are subtle and, given the high quality of the *Assassin's Creed 2* line, it is quite challenging to see what is different. But with smoother free running in a city very conducive to the activity, not to mention generally better mechanics, *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* continues the trend of improvement that Ubisoft have been setting with this franchise. If you are a fan of the previous games, advising you to get this one is a waste of breath... you probably already have it, and are wondering where the franchise will go after the game's stunning conclusion. But if you have never tried this franchise before, you should probably consider starting at the beginning, rather than dropping in here. This game assumes that you have played the others, and does little to explain the situation. But that's okay... we're pretty sure you have played the others. You would be missing out if you haven't.

NAG

Ramjet

/ **PLUS** / Tons to do / Great story
/ **MINUS** / Takes some getting used to / More of the same

A GREAT FINALE FOR EZIO, BUT NOT WHERE YOU WANT TO START WITH THIS FRANCHISE.

90

Rayman Origins

Get this music out of my head!

If you thought that it's been a while since you've played or even seen a game from the core *Rayman* series, you'd be right. *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* was the last home console game to feature the armless exploits of Rayman sans packs of ferocious rabbit things since 2003. The developers obviously thought it was time to get back to it and, boy, have they gone back. So far back that this game, as the sleuths among you might gather, attempts to tell the story of how the series began. Then it sort of loses interest, and there's lots of running and jumping and rescuing girls in cages and scoring points for getting gold things. The motivation for doing anything will be confusing for people who haven't played any games in the series, and only slightly less confusing for those who have. Thankfully, this is a platform game, a genre that historically hasn't required much effort to be made in the story department. "Origins", then, is possibly a more fitting description of how this game fits in with classic titles more so than modern ones.

[details]

Platforms:
3DS / 360 / PC
PS3 / PS Vita / Wii
Genre:
Simulation
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft Montpellier
Website:
raymanorigins.uk.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom



/1/ You won't play many games that look and sound quite like this. The beautifully animated sprites and lush, hand-drawn backgrounds remind us of the good old days of gaming. The visuals and peculiar soundtrack come together to deliver an experience that's so attention-grabbing it's almost overwhelming.













Platform game junkies will be in their element with *Rayman Origins*. It acts as fan service to both the series and the genre, featuring characters from throughout the series and every single feature you could imagine finding in such a game. As such, it has a difficulty curve that follows along the progress of the story, introducing new abilities as you unlock new worlds and challenging you to use them immediately. At first, your character (or characters; the game supports four-player co-op that is more insane than an LSD party at the local nut house) only has a few basic abilities like running and sliding, but will soon gain a basic attack, underwater swimming and other abilities. Each world is themed around a particular ability, and, as such, each behaves quite differently.

"Challenge" is perhaps the biggest theme in the game; while it's fairly easy to simply complete each level (and the game itself, which could be finished in a single sitting), finding all of the hidden collectables and lums (coins, essentially) is incredibly difficult. That's where the game's replay value lies. As the levels become more difficult they also become more frustrating (especially the later twitch-platforming levels), and it'll take a gamer with more patience than what I have to sit down and dedicate themselves to 100% each level in the later parts of the game. Unfortunately, the rewards for such completion amount to little more than access to a few "racing"-type levels and extra costumes for your characters. The most stoic of all players will gain access to an entire new world, however.

NAG GeometriX

/ PLUS / Fantastic visuals / Bizarre and inventive soundtrack / Controls are tight and responsive
/ MINUS / A bit repetitive / A few frustrating levels / Story what now?

THOSE LOOKING FOR A PLATFORMER THAT LAUDS PRESENTATION AND CHARACTER MOVEMENT OVER STORYLINE AND MENTAL HEALTH WILL FEEL AT HOME.

82

DIRT CHEAP



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SAVE 100



PlayStation 3
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Xbox360

metacritic rating:

Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit feels like 2.5 games in one as the game can be played as either a cop or racer. Plus the online component is a must!

89/100

SAVE 100



PlayStation 3
Crysis 2

now 199.95

Also available on:
Xbox360

metacritic rating:

This is Crysis 2 – a magnificent first-person experience that's wholly engaging, at times highly challenging and often very memorable!

85/100

SAVE 240



PlayStation 3
FIFA 11

now 159.95

Also available on:
Xbox360 & PS2

metacritic rating:

A large portion of FIFA veterans, as well as new players, will undoubtedly be blown away with FIFA 11's realism and satisfying gameplay.

89/100

SAVE 100



XBOX360
Gears of War 2

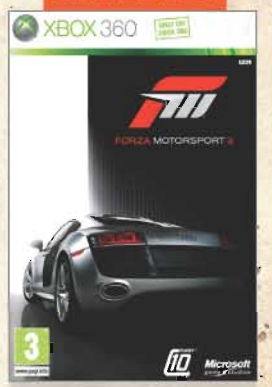
now 199.95

metacritic rating:

As a sequel, you'd be hard-pressed to find a game as brilliantly evolved. With a ruthlessly enthralling pace it is effortlessly superb.

93/100

SAVE 100



XBOX360
Forza 3

now 199.95

metacritic rating:

This is one of the finest driving games around. It is a celebration of the car, but even more a celebration of the joy of driving.

92/100



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MUSICA
A WORLD AWAITS

Super Mario 3D Land

One of the best reasons to own a 3DS



There's this bad metaphor roosting in my brain. It looks a bit like a raccoon, and it goes like this:

The *Mario* franchise is like a cousin that you see regularly, but not *too* regularly. So you're not tired of him yet, but you're very familiar. He tells a lot of the same stories, he thinks they're your favourites, and he's right. Princess, another castle, it never gets old. Thankfully, he travels a lot, so he always has new stuff to tell you, and new ideas to share.

Stupid raccoon, not only are you a bad metaphor, you're a bad metaphor for yourself. Raccoons don't roost [*I do hope that someday I'll start getting your jokes, Ed*].

Super Mario 3D Land is the sequel to *Mario Bros. 3* on the NES. That's what I'm calling it anyway. It draws a lot of its set designs, art and music from the definitive NES game. It's just lacking the little curtains that draw back at the start.

Everything pops in *3D Land*. The level design is imaginative, fun and challenging. When you finish the initial eight worlds, each with roughly six levels, you're only halfway through, and then it gets really difficult but never unfair. There's Star Medals to collect, three per level, hidden in cunning places. The entire game's narrative is played out in pantomime, no text, no voices (except for Peach saying "Mario" and pretending to mean it).

There is a 3D View Mode toggle on the directional pad. Cycling between Normal and Extended Depth lets you swap the focal point for the 3D effect from near to far. Normal mode works best in most levels and Extended in some, like the *Zelda*-inspired top-down levels, depending on your personal preference and eye-balls. *Pilot Wings Resort* needed this option badly.

Mario's portly physics are slightly different compared to *New Super Mario Bros.* or *Galaxy*. His forward momentum drops off faster, making longer jumps (without using the long-jump) require more skill. You can now roll, break chest-high walls, and long-jump from the roll.

When you complete a Mystery Box, found on the level select screen, it sends it out via Street Pass (that magical thing two 3DSs do when they're in range of each other and exchange hot data). The Mystery Box, a little square arena with much variety, may contain Star Medals or 1-UP mushrooms. StreetPass also shares level par times, if you like to race.

There are new items, like the Propeller Box, bringing back the mechanics of the awesome Prop Hat from *New Super Mario Bros.* The Tanooki Suit returns from *Mario Bros 3*, saving us all from a lot of falls to our deaths.

This is an excellent game. Short levels perfect for the portable system, excellent use of the 3D effect through intelligent level design, and plenty of fun crammed into every corner. **NAG**

Miktar

/1/ **A number of (sometimes hidden) mini-challenges exist in the game worlds that will reward you with bonus coins, extra lives or even power-ups.**





must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
3DS
Genre:
Platform
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Nintendo EAD Tokyo
Website:
supermario3dland.nintendo.com
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Gaming Systems

/ **PLUS** / Excellent in every way / Second Quest brings real challenge / No dialogue anywhere.
/ **MINUS** / Dudebros may laugh at you for playing it.

DON'T LET THE PORTABLE FORMAT FOOL YOU; THIS IS A PROPER MARIO ADVENTURE.

91

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Look & Listen
For the Fans



Disney Universe

If by "Universe", you mean "five"

So you want a kid's game? That's cool; we're not here to judge. Maybe you're looking to buy your child or younger sibling a gift, or just feel like unwinding with a low-effort game after your significant other threatened to leave you over your excessive time spent playing *Skyrim*. Whatever your reason for wanting one, *Disney Universe* is everything you'd expect from such a title.

The game makes a weak attempt to string together a storyline: you're a test subject in "Disney Universe" – whatever that may be exactly – and get to safely explore Disney franchises. Then, for some unknown reason, the entity controlling everything – Cube – becomes possessed by an evil force called Hex. The robotic players in these worlds become evil (you can tell because their eyes turn red), and now you're trapped in the Universe and have to smash your way through each level collecting gold, acquiring new costumes and saving other trapped guests. That's it, really; no more details, no more reasoning; just smash things and complete each of the game's five worlds, each with three locations made up of three stages.

Each stage plays out with a variety of one-button-mashing combat and simple puzzle solving. There's very little challenge to either, but the whole package is delivered in such a charming and quite visually appealing way that it's difficult to be unimpressed. Each stage also features a number of collectables and unspoken objectives that help you to earn more gold or unlock bonuses like concept art, and getting to those objectives can be pretty tough. I'm not ashamed to admit that on more than one occasion I spent what could be termed as "too long" trying to 100% each level. Achievement/trophy hunters should have fun with this one.

With great looking and well designed levels, it's a shame that the gameplay becomes so formulaic and progressively easier the more you play. Still, this would probably be thoroughly entertaining for children, and the added features like hidden collectables and basic co-op puzzle-solving will do wonders for Operation Turn Younger Sibling into a Gamer.

NAG
GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Simulation
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Eurocom
Website:
disney.co.uk/universe
Publisher:
Disney Interactive Studios
Distributor:
Prima Interactive







/1/ Players can find experience orbs in each stage that upgrade their current costume's weapon to increase damage. Sadly, these upgrades are almost identical across all costumes.

/2/ In co-op mode, players can attack each other to steal gold from other players. Players can infinitely respawn so this never becomes too much of a problem.







/ PLUS / Great visuals / Catchy soundtrack / Well designed levels
/ MINUS / Becomes repetitive / Weak narrative / No online co-op

PERFECT FOR KIDS, AND YOU'LL HAVE A FUN TIME PLAYING ALONG WITH THEM.

73

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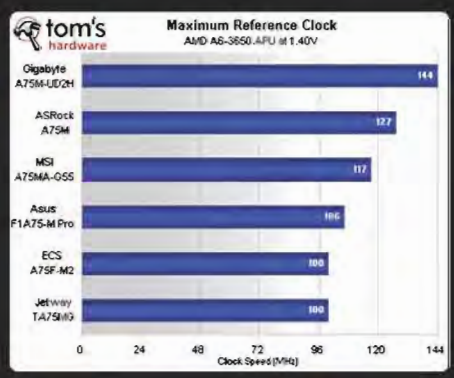
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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Might & Magic Heroes VI

The more things change...

The *Heroes of Might & Magic* series belongs to that sect of gamers that enjoys complex, tactical mechanisms over the accessibility and streamlined interactions that modern games tend to celebrate. It's for hardcore gamers that like to spend hundreds of hours developing perfect strategies (which they'll probably call "stratagems") and training their armies of minions to save kingdoms or destroy them. The *HOMM* series is for steadfast classic PC gamers, and *Heroes VI* continues that tradition.

Might & Magic Heroes VI (spot the name swopping, perhaps to usher in a new era) is what you'd expect from a sequel. It ticks all the boxes: hours upon hours of game time split across multiple campaigns and infinite skirmishes; busy fantasy worlds for your heroes and their armies to explore; role-playing mechanisms like inventory management and character development; and tactical battles. This is definitely a *HOMM* game, one that fans of the series will enjoy because of its familiar feeling and classic gameplay, but it throws in enough novelty and changes to remind you that it's new. About half of the spells and buildings from previous titles have been replaced with new options, the most notable of which is the absence of the Magic Guild in settlements. Instead, access to higher tier tech is gained simply by upgrading the city, and higher level hero spells are granted by gaining character level. Those spells are divided between those of Tears and those of Blood, which forms a morality system in the game that encourages you to stick to a chosen path (being merciful or wrathful) for combat and the few character interactions that pop up during the campaigns. It's a welcome addition that doesn't break the formula too much, and you might even find yourself occasionally caring about a few characters in the game.

As you guide your lead characters through the game's seven campaigns, you'll gather artefacts that can be carried over from one map to the other. A new item type, Dynasty items, are powerful items only available to those who chose to play the game using Ubisoft's "always on" UPlay DRM. You'll also have access to a host of online socialising features and leaderboards, bonuses to your characters and cosmetic upgrades like custom titles.

There's no lack of content for those who are willing to invest the time to discover it. Each of the game's five factions is different enough to encourage you to play through all of the campaigns, but not so wildly varied that balancing them would be a challenge. This is perhaps alleviated by the low number of unit types per faction, but the many variables that affect how each game plays out helps to stop even that becoming much of a problem. There are only two noteworthy issues with *Might & Magic Heroes VI*, and that's its incredibly slow pace in quest mode during the earlier maps in the campaigns, and the sad fact that later battles come down to pure army numbers rather than tactics. The latter is especially true when fighting against the AI in long skirmish games.

NAG GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Role-playing tactical strategy game
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Internet connection required [uPlay]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Black Hole Entertainment
Website:
www.might-and-magic.ubi.com/heroes-6
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom





/1/ There are five playable races in the game: two good-aligned, two evil-aligned, and one neutral. Each has its own unique and familiar units that are just diverse enough to be interesting.





/ **PLUS** / Blissfully familiar / New features / Challenging / Tons of replayability
/ **MINUS** / Inconsistent pace / DRM might be an issue / Battles become predictable in late-game

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80

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Sonic Generations

Gotta go fast

You may have heard that *Sonic Generations* represents the Blue Bomber's return to greatness (the animal one – not the robot). In truth, Sonic's return to form was kicked off by last season's *Sonic Colors* for Nintendo Wii. *Generations*, produced by much of the *Sonic Colors* team, builds on that foundation with good but not pitch perfect results.

Generations is the tale of two Sonics – due to shenanigans with time, the short, fat Sonic of 16-bit past meets the modern *X-treme* attitude hedgehog. Their campaign to solve this Time Crisis (the temporal anomaly, not the game) sees shorty Sonic attacking purely 2D versions of each game's zone while attitude Sonic gets a mostly 3D, racing into/away from the camera version.

The zones, pulled from each game in Sonic's console history, are amazingly realised and translated into a new look. Really, it's one of the outright prettiest games of the year. A boggling selection of Sonic fan service goes along with it, including dozens of remixed music tracks and the ability to assign a favourite track (besides the default) to each level. The hub world deserves special mention, being an ever-growing "level" of its own with secrets, gates, and challenges that unlock, putting plenty of meat on *Generations*' bones.

There is a problem here, and it originates with the entire premise: since retro Sonic's stages are 100% side-scrolling fun, it would have seemed weird for the modern stages to depend on too much 2D platforming. *Sonic Colors* struck a better balance, with approximately 70/30 2D-to-3D ratio within each level. 3D was only used where it actually fit, and was fun. Here, we see 3D Sonic gameplay stretched thin, meaning that retro Sonic's stages inevitably feel meatier and as if they have more depth.

There's still a lot to like in *Sonic Generations* and at this point, Sonic Team can be said to be back on track. *Generations* is, above all, polished in a way Sonic games between the Mega Drive and today have sorely lacked. Sonic is, once again, the best way to go fast.

SH**TY FRIENDS

The worst thing about *Generations*? Compared to *Colors*' wonderful, back-to-basics approach of Sonic and Tails vs. Eggman in a battle to the death, *Generations* brings back modern Sonic's huge stable of questionable associates to cheer from the side-line. Mostly, they stand at Zone entrances, offering blithering platitudes and frequent hints on where to find hidden coins. You'll have to suffer a full bore opening and closing cut scene where they do their worst, however. Hell is listening to Charmy Bee's voice. It makes us want to kill. **NAG**

Miktar









/1/ The 3DS version of the game (not pictured), developed by Japan-based Dimps, is similar to *Sonic Rush* and features unique levels.





[details]

Platforms:
360 / 3DS / PC / PS3
Genre:
Platform
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Sonic Team
Website:
www.sega.com/sonicgenerations/
Publisher:
SEGA
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive

/ **PLUS** / Lots of content / Stunning visuals / Fantastic music
/ **MINUS** / Modern Sonic action sections can be wonky / Final boss is such a let down

A WORTHWHILE GOTTA GO FAST.

82



'TIS THE YEAR

TO GET CREATIVE

and WIN

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn

No secrets here

Tintin is a well-loved franchise that many of us have fond memories of... many were the days lazing around, reading about his adventures as he travelled the globe, solving one mystery after another. Now, as with everything great, Tintin has been given the silver screen treatment and, as to be expected, a video game release has accompanied the film. Naturally no one ever thought of doing a Tintin game before the film, but that's just the way these things work.

The Tintin game borrows heavily from the film for its visual style, but homage to Hergé's original comics can be seen in both. The characters just look a little more real and, overall, the game looks pretty good. It sounds good, too, with fairly decent voice acting (even though Tintin himself is incredibly annoying).

The story told in the game is pretty much that of the film, with some embellishment and extra elements added. But the story really is secondary in this title, which seems to be aimed at a younger audience while occasionally making allusions towards being a more mature title. The game is incredibly simple, for the most part, with no real challenge to be had. But, much like the Tintin comics, there is more than meets the eye with it, and occasionally a tougher bit will crop up.

The action is, for the most part, side-scrolling platform gaming. Although the game has been done in 3D, there are very few sequences that move away from the flat, 2D idea that drives it on. The player will do a lot of running, jumping and careful timing, combined with a little combat that is so easy it hardly bears mentioning. Every now and then the game will shift perspective, presenting the player with a third person view in a more fully realised 3D environment. These missions will see Tintin doing everything from running away from vehicles to tracking evil-doers. Snowy also features in these missions, and the side-scrolling ones, with the player able to control Tintin's canine companion from time to time. Players will also be faced with some extremely easy puzzles here and there.

The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn is a real mixed bag. Visually great, the game doesn't do enough to challenge players at all. Rather, it seems as though the player is more of an observer than a participant... that's how easy the game is. It might strike a chord with fans, who may appreciate seeing the characters brought to life, and youngsters will surely enjoy it, but it doesn't seem to be quite enough to be a good homage to the boy-reporter. NAG

Ramjet

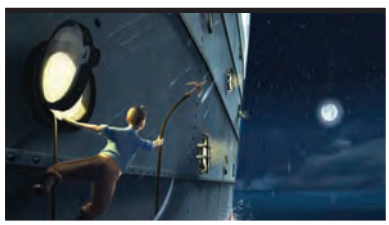
[details]

Platforms:
360 / 3DS / PC
PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Platform
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft
Website:
www.ubisoft.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom





/1/ The game was developed alongside Paramount Studios as a part of the film production company's continued move into games publishing under the Paramount Digital Entertainment lable.









/ **PLUS** / Nice visuals / Fun for the whole family
/ **MINUS** / Too easy / Short

IT'S A PRETTY ENOUGH GAME, BUT MORE COULD HAVE GONE INTO IT.

60

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS
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Look & Listen
For the Fans

GoldenEye 007: Reloaded

Remaking the remake

Last year's Wii remake of the Nintendo 64 classic *GoldenEye 007* was well received: its reimagining of the film and the Rare-developed game it spawned was much appreciated by Wii owners, with many heralding it as one of the console's best shooters. It brought the essence of this beloved title to a new generation of gamers, updating its mechanics to mimic today's shooter trends (i.e. to put it on a wavelength that *CoD* players would actually appreciate). It's now been updated once again for the bigger, meaner consoles, where the FPS market is much more crowded and therefore demanding.

Does it succeed in creating an experience that can be enjoyed by the modern gamer? For the most part, it does, but it'll obviously depend on said gamer. Anyone who has to mention hyper-realistic graphics when talking about their games would do well to stay away, for example, because while the game is supposedly built on a new engine to take advantage of the extra horsepower of the PS3 and 360, it still can't hold up to the powerhouse franchises out there. For those unfamiliar with the Wii version, the gameplay and story have been updated from the N64 classic, having been retooled to match contemporary paradigms. As such, regenerating health, a heavy increase on the action and a few other tweaks are all present, while Daniel Craig replaces Pierce Brosnan as Bond.

There are sequences that'll be familiar to fans of the original, sure: but they've been adapted as well. It's all quick-time events and constant explosions here, and throughout the single-player campaign, there are some impressive movie-style set pieces. The gunplay is solid, with various weapon attachments and an impressive arsenal ensuring that it remains enjoyable throughout. You've got access to your smartphone as well: a multipurpose gadget that lets you do everything from identifying a contact amidst a crowd of people to hacking sentry turrets and taking photos of Intel. Stealth and action are nicely interwoven in each level, and you're able to complete entire sections without making a sound if that's your preferred style of play.

In addition to the story mode, there are also the MI6 challenges: a sizable set of extra missions with varying objectives, from killing X number of enemies to defending key positions. Unfortunately, in these levels, the enemy AI is found to be lacking in a way that the more heavily scripted campaign missions don't reveal. Still, these challenges offer a decent distraction when you're done with the story.

Multiplayer is where the real meat of the game is though. It too has been updated, offering fashionable additions like persistent stats, equipment unlocks and various customisation options. The online multiplayer is a blast, offering a number of game modes and an increased player count relative to the Wii version.

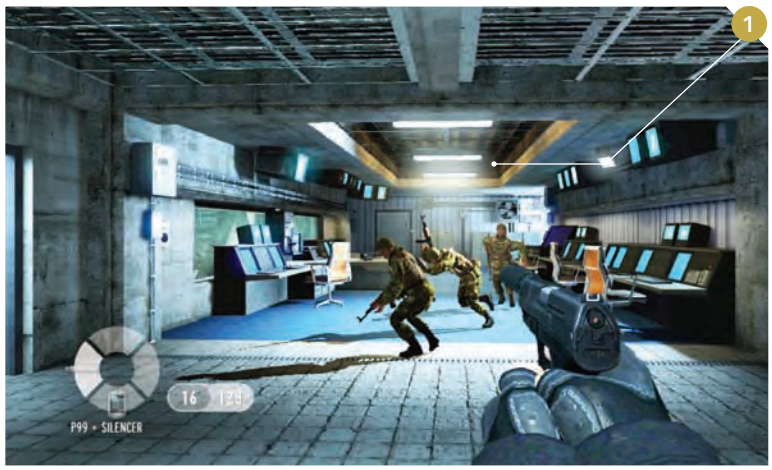
All in all, this is a sound shooter. If you played the Wii version, there's no real reason to bother with it. But it's certainly worth playing if you're looking for something to keep you busy, or if you're yearning for a decent title starring Mr Bond. **NAG**

Barkskin

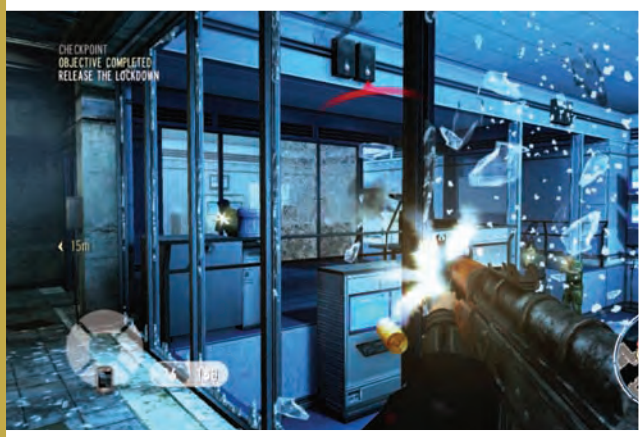
[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: 16 players
Developer:
Eurocom
Website:
goldeneyegame.com
Publisher:
Activision
Distributor:
Megarom





/1/ If you'd rather play this port of the Wii game the way it was originally designed to be played, PS3 owners can make use of the console's Move accessory.



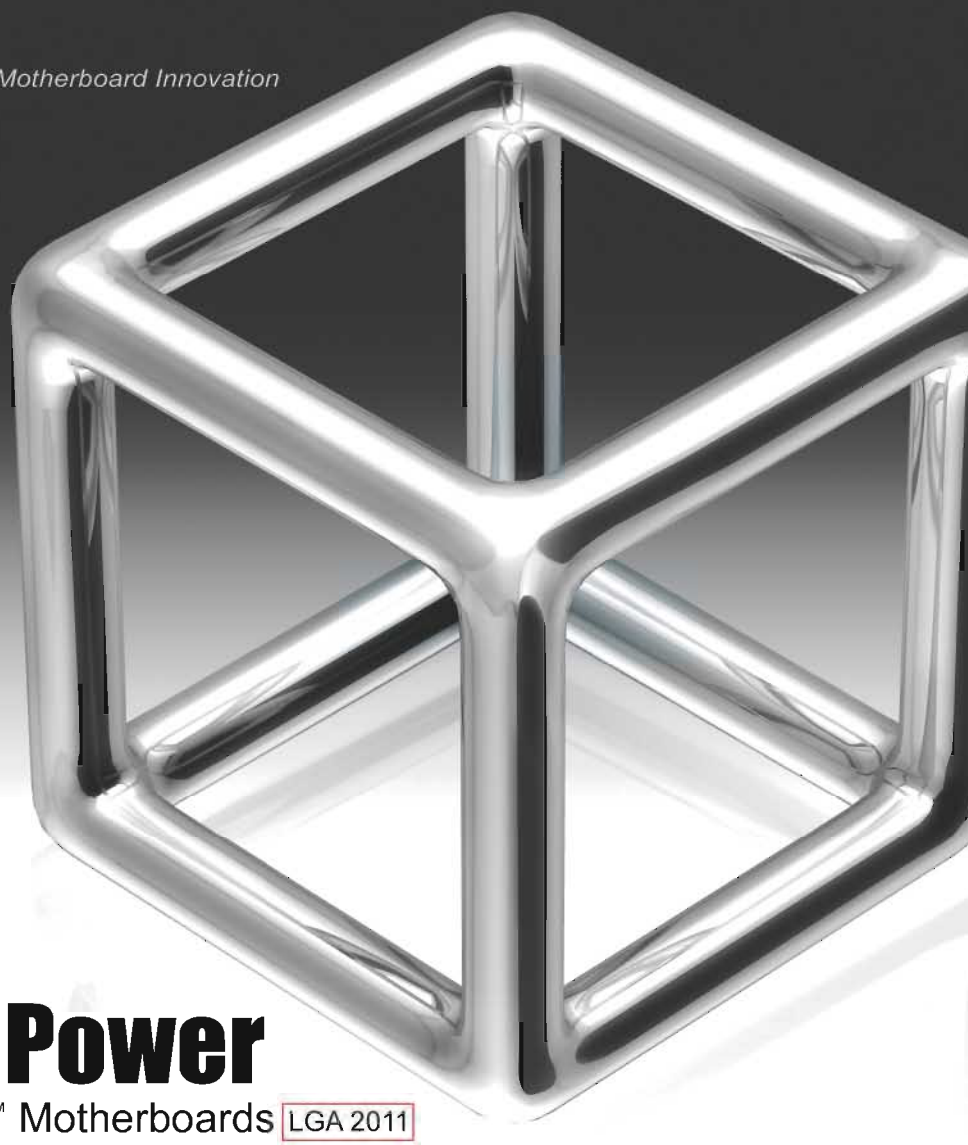


/ **PLUS** / Good, fun multiplayer / Decent single-player campaign / Solid action
/ **MINUS** / Sometimes rubbish AI / Looks iffy at times

THERE'S NO REASON TO PLAY IT IF YOU PLAYED THE WII REMAKE, BUT IT'S A SOLID SHOOTER.

77

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3

IT'S MAHVEL BABY!

Is nine months sufficient time to allow a fighting game to bake in the competitive oven before deploying the first update? *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* attempts to answer that with new content and core changes to the game that debuted in February 2011. It also has *Rocket Raccoon*.

On paper, there's more than you'd expect. A full dozen new characters, including the massively requested fan favourites like Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney and Marvel's Ghost Rider. The vanilla game is practically new; air X-Factor, revamped aerial character exchanges, a complete rebalance for the returning cast, more than half of whom have new abilities and moves. A few see their play style almost completely altered. Not to mention eight new stages, a new UI for greater clarity of meters, and a free DLC mode that's a whole game in itself. And finally; spectator capability for online battle rooms, along with at least modestly optimised net code.

Whether that's enough for you depends on who you are. Did you already get your 600 hours of play out of vanilla *MVC3*? If so, *Ultimate* is a no-brainer. Its reduced retail price is less than one would have paid had the original plans to add all the new characters via DLC not fallen through (due to a few small issues that upset publisher operations, such as an earthquake.) A full balance tweak based on a year of hardcore competitive play results in the game feeling newer than it has a right to. Suddenly, the same three characters aren't on every top team.

What's here is quality; there can be no doubt, along with increased depth due to cheap cheesy tactics being rendered less effective. Is it for you? That may depend on just how much you want to knock people out with Wright's *gigantic psychic finger of the law*, and rub road rash over faces with Ghost Rider's hell-powered chrome hog.

P.S. If you're interested in some straight-up commentary and advice for *UMVC3* (or *Modern Warfare 3* for that matter), check out *The Online Warrior* by Maximilian on YouTube - **www.youtube.com/user/Miles923**

NAG Miktar

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3 / PS Vita
Genre:
Fighting
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 2 players
Developer:
Capcom
Website:
www.marvelvscapcom3.com
Publisher:
Capcom
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment









/1/ **Strider returns with even more menacing speed and combos.**

/ **PLUS** / New roster and character reworks / Phoenix Wright is a blast / Finger Lasers
/ **MINUS** / Heroes and Heralds mode not included

IT'S A WORTHY UPDATE, ADDING JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF NEW CONTENT AND BALANCE TWEAKS.

75

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Raving Rabbids: Alive and Kicking

Needs a kick

Mini-game themed party titles seem to be something that every game publisher wants in on, and they will use every excuse in the book to do it... even releasing a title that is virtually devoid of merit, just to get in on the action. With the fairly extensive library of Rabbids games that Ubisoft have released in the past, you would think that the Kinect only *Raving Rabbids: Alive and Kicking* would be a laugh riot from beginning to end. But you'd be wrong, and sorely so. See, the combination of crazy characters and motion control is a good start, but they it isn't enough to create a game that is going to get people going crazy.

You may do so at first, with this title. It offers a bit more than thirty mini-games to play, and there appears to be quite a variety to start. But many of the games are very similar in execution, and many are far too short. In fact, some of them have longer loading times than play times. And, to add insult to injury, the games aren't going to do anything to make you feel good. They're bland, repetitive and often lacking in imagination.

There are games that can be a lot of fun and are almost satisfying to okay, but they tend to be the exception, rather than the rule. And even those that are satisfying are only mildly so...

The game lacks the charm that the Rabbids offer, even if they are twisted little critters. And to make matters worse, controls just don't cut it. The Kinect is unresponsive – which was a problem a while ago, not now – and menu navigation is a massive pain. Playing the games almost isn't worth the effort, particularly if you need to struggle your way through menus and loading screens only to experience a brutally short mini-game that leaves you wanting.

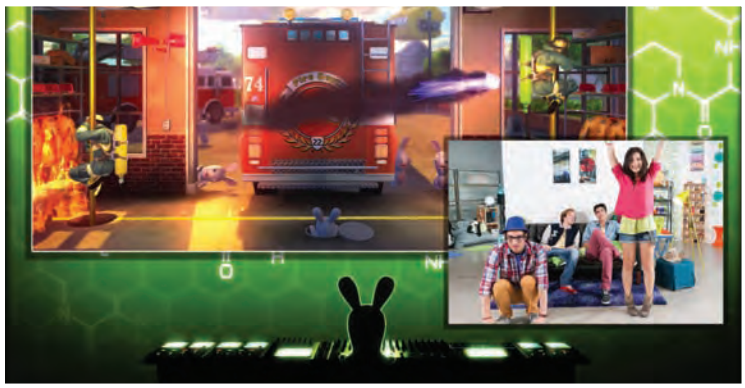
When you take a step back and look at this title, it feels like a cash-in, on both the Rabbids franchise and the massive push of party games hitting the shelves this year. This is pretty unusual for Ubisoft, who tend to make sure their titles have some merit. But it is what it is... this title feels rushed out and incomplete, based on a good idea that went wrong during the execution. And that is more than a little sad, because the Rabbids, with all their zany ways and bellowing, are a great source of entertainment, generally speaking. This time around, though, they fail to impress as the developers rely on tastelessness and quick hits for this title.

NAG Ramjet

pony award / pony award / pony award / pony award

[details]

Platforms:
360
Genre:
Party
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft
Website:
rabbids.us.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom









/ **PLUS** / One or two good games / Lots of BWAAA!
/ **MINUS** / Poor controls / Nasty menus / Lots of poor games

TAKING A FRANCHISE LIKE RABBIDS AND HAVING THIS AS THE RESULT IS A POOR PERFORMANCE.

45

FIFA Manager 12

Bossy!

If you are a fan of football and of management games, this one is perfect for you. In *FIFA Manager 12* you will get to be the boss, making all the decisions necessary to take your chosen football club to the top. It sounds easier than it is, though, and the game can get just a little dry, thanks to a lot of statistics and numbers that need to be analysed by the player. That all said and done, it is a rather intriguing title. The player will be responsible for virtually every aspect of the team, as well as their home club (including building structures and so forth).

And then, of course, there is the football. The simulated games that the player gets to watch and strategise from the side-lines are possibly the weakest aspect of the title, with AI that is often disappointing and animations that could have been much, much better.

This game is only recommended for those that really love the business side of modern football. It's complex and sometimes quirky, but if you can wrap your mind around it – and forgive it the odd little things it does strangely – then you'll probably enjoy it. Just don't expect tons of action. **NAG**

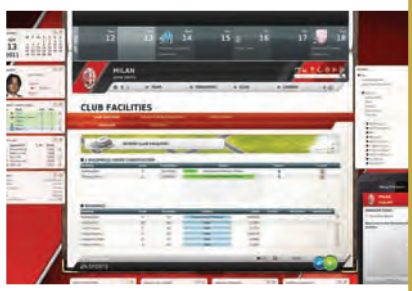
Ramjet

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Management
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
EA Sports
Website:
www.fifa-manager.com
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
EA South Africa







/ **PLUS** / Detailed / Engaging
/ **MINUS** / Some AI issues / Not for everyone

A GOOD GAME IF YOU LIKE FOOTBALL AND MANAGEMENT, AND CAN GET PAST ITS ODDITIES...

78



Know your technology

/ PCH /

This is what has essentially replaced the old chipset that existed in the days of the original Core 2 CPUs and platforms before. The **Platform Controller Hub** is a family of Intel chips that have combined what used to be in the southbridge with the remaining functions of the northbridge. That means your low speed PCI Express lanes that are not from the CPU will be controlled by the PCH in addition to your USB, SATA and internal gigabit Ethernet devices.

/ ICH /

This is essentially the southbridge of last generation microprocessors and platforms from Intel, but it is still in use on AMD platforms even today. The **I/O Controller HUB** does exactly what the name implies and controls some input/output components of the system. It usually contains silicon for controlling the SATA ports, USB ports, gigabit Ethernet along with an HD audio controller.

/ AVX /

Advanced Vector Extensions are extensions to the x86 instruction set that provide new features for supporting programs. AVX introduces several new instruction formats, coding schemes and actual instructions. All these make for vast improvements in floating point heavy calculations in both scientific and multimedia applications, by increasing parallelism in floating point SIMD calculations and optimizing instructions that would previously require several more cycles to complete. It is to be noted however that AVX are only supported in Windows 7 with SP1 and Server 2008 (Linux as well as Snow Leopard are supported).

/ AES /

The Advanced Encryption Standard that has superseded DES in most recent computing platforms. It is a symmetric-key algorithm which uses the same key for both encryption and decrypting of data. It is a highly efficient encryption method that while not impervious to being broken through brute force methods would require an incomprehensible amount of time to actually decrypt (millions of years on super computers). This has been added as an extension to the x86 instruction set and is supported on AMD Bulldozer-based CPUs and on specific CPUs from Intel from the Clarkdale to the Sandy Bridge-E CPUs.



ORB Magnetic Induction Charging Disc for Xbox
The easiest way to recharge your Xbox controllers evaaar! All you need is two batteries and a USB port.
www.megarom.co.za | R299



Trendnet 450Mbps Concurrent Dual Band Wireless N Router
This router supports 450Mbps speeds on both the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands at the same time.
www.trendnet.com | TBA

By the Numb3rs

28 nm

The next generation NVIDIA and AMD GPUs are going to be built on Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's (TSMC) brand new 28 nm process, which allows for a 45% increase in clock speed over the current 40 nm process.

Cooler Master Elite Series

We were sent three Cooler Master Elite 431 cases to take a look at this month. All are mid tower offerings, can accommodate large CPU coolers and support long graphics cards such as the HD Radeon 6990. If you're looking for a decent gaming case at a very affordable price then one of these will definitely fit your needs.

Pricing for the cases are:
CM-RC431K-KWN1 – R 499
CM-RC431K-KKN2 – R 499
CM-RC431P-KWN2 – R 599
www.sonicinformed.co.za



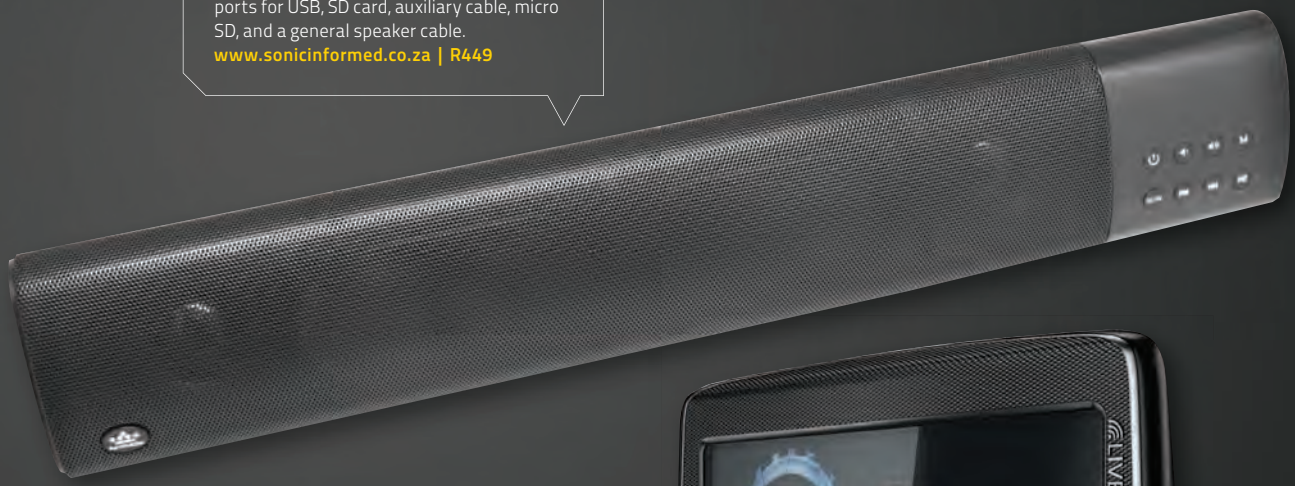


Logitech Rumble Gamepad F510

A vibrating gamepad for your PC. It's slightly smaller than a regular Xbox controller but still feels comfortable in your hands.
www.logitech.co.za | R340

Royqueen Katiusha H3000

A funky little multimedia audio player that has ports for USB, SD card, auxiliary cable, micro SD, and a general speaker cable.
www.sonicinformed.co.za | R449



Tom Tom Top Gear GO Live

The most fun we've had listening to directions in the history of forever! Its Jeremy Clarkson's voice with all the cool stuff that Tom Tom has to offer. This is a must have.
www.tomtom.com/topgear | R2,399



YAMA USB 3.0 cases

Three gaming chassis, all with USB3.0 support and two that come with a power supply included. The W1 comes in either black or red (very sexy).

Pricing for the cases are:
YAMA W1 USB 3.0 Full Tower – R1,599
YAMA 715 USB 3.0 ATX
(includes 750W PSU) – R1,099
YAMA 918 USB 3.0 ATX
(includes 550W PSU) – R799
www.superchannel.co.za







Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure starter pack

[specs]

RRP:
Starter pack:
360 & PS3: R799.00
PC & Wii: R699.00
DS: R599.00
Individual pack:
R129.00
Triple character pack:
R239.00

Platforms:
360 / DS / PC
PS3 / Wii

Website:
www.skylanders.com

[Summary]

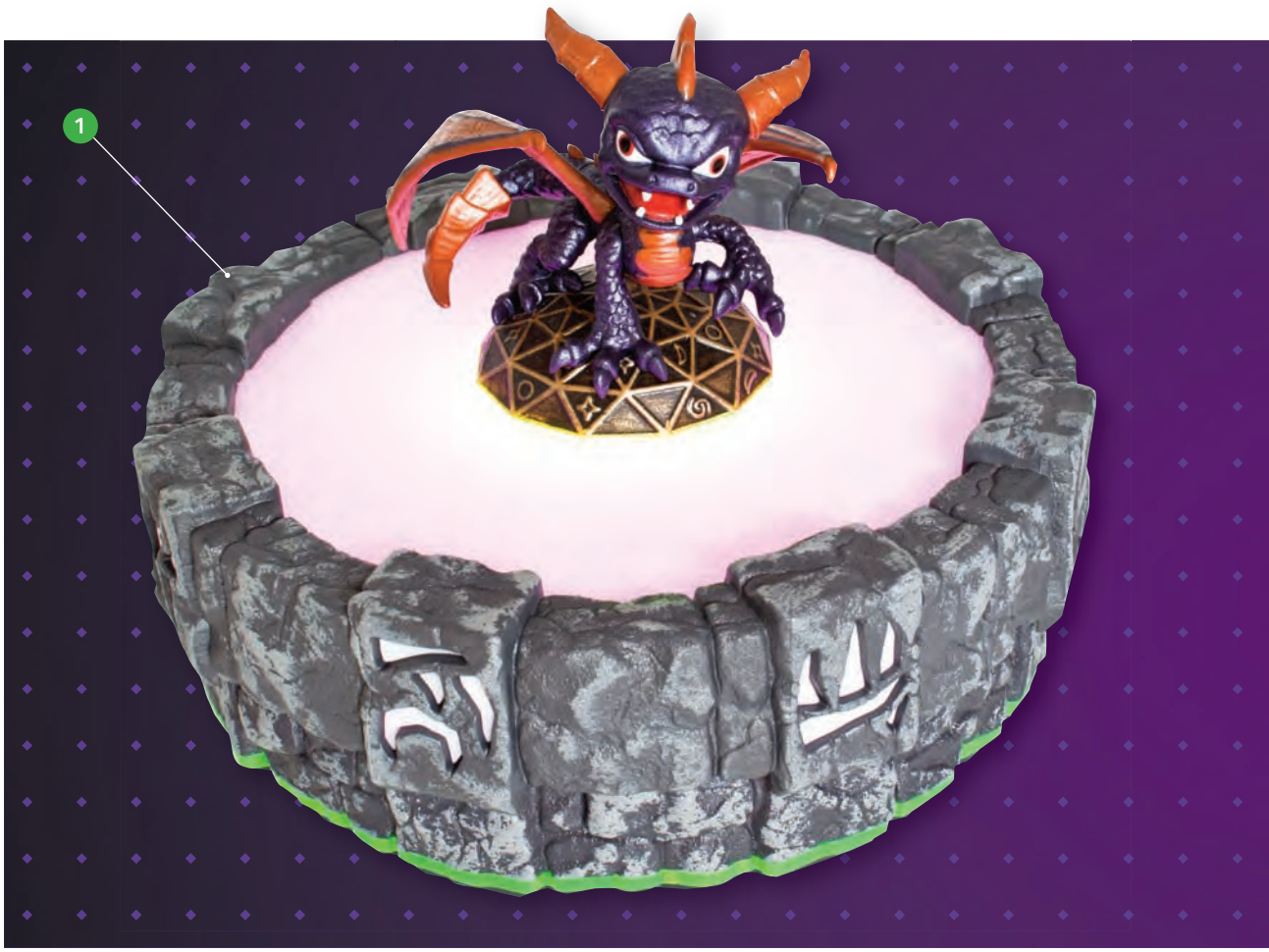
/ Pros:
Innovative concept; puts real toys in a video game; works exceptionally well; engages young gamers.

/ Cons:
poor website functionality; nagging kids; might get expensive; very simplistic game dynamic.

/ Alternatives:
Bakugan/Pokémon (toys/concept); *Ratchet & Clank* (game).

Activision had a real rock 'n' roll run with the *Guitar Hero* franchise a few years back, selling millions and gaining unprecedented mainstream fame. New songs were released almost every week, six core versions came and went; *Guitar Hero* even featured in movies and at some point a few crazy guys threw hundreds of these plastic guitars into the mouth of a live volcano from an airplane. The success of this unique peripheral phenomenon must have left them with a taste for 'hardware' because now they're getting into the collectible toy figurine market aimed squarely at the kids. Yes, it is technically hardware and you'll see why now.

In this edition of the *NAG* lazy gamer's guide, we're looking at the starter pack (*Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure*), which comes with the game, Portal of Power, elemental chart, trading cards, stickers, online codes and three figures, Spyro, Trigger Happy and Gill Grunt.



Older gamers beware – this is not the *Spyro* you might remember from 1998 by Insomniac Games, but a whole new *Spyro* that's aimed directly at the 6-12 year old market. It's an uncomplicated platform romp similar to *Ratchet & Clank* or any action adventure game where you smash open barrels and find shiny things. You play as the portal master and must defeat the evil blah before he/she/it does blah that and blah this (unimportant when you're nine). The video bits, voice acting and characters are all top notch and plenty of effort has been lavished in all the right places when it comes to the digital product. The real hook is the portal device that comes with the starter pack. Plug it into an open USB slot (Xbox and PC) and place one of the thirty-two different figurines on it and that figurine will instantly appear in the game for you to play with. Changing characters can be done at any time and is quick, easy and fast. There is some incentive for changing characters as some areas of the game are easier to play through using specific character types over others. This is tied to their particular elemental class. The other hook is that some areas of the game are inaccessible unless you have the right kind of character (again, based on their elemental class). Fear not, it is possible to complete the game without buying anything more than the starter pack. In the single-player campaign there are plenty secret areas to find, hidden treasure chests with new hats and abilities to uncover and unlock. The levels are bright and cheery and the range and diversity of the bad guys is impressive. Overall it's long enough to make it worth the asking price and challenging enough for the target age group. Besides the campaign there is a player vs. player mode consisting of three types of play – Arena Rumble, SkyGoals and SkyGem Master. A nice touch is that friends can bring their own Skylander figurines to each other's houses to play with or against regardless of platform.

/1/ PORTAL

- Using the science of electricity and plastic the portal will instantly detect the figurine placed on it. Up to two figurines can be placed on the portal at the same time.





- Lights up with different colours and is lightweight but sturdy.
- Long USB cable – The PS3 and Wii versions are wireless and battery-powered
- Rubber feet keep the portal secure.

/2/ FIGURES

- There are 32 total figures to collect.
- The figures store data and work on any platform so all experience points, upgrades and hats travel along with the toy. Taking a figurine to a friend's house for the afternoon means any progress made there will come home with the figurine.
- There are eight different elemental classes (water, fire, earth, magic, etc.) with four different characters each. In the game, some areas are only accessible using specific classes and some are better suited for certain areas. So a fire inclined character will be less effective in a water-based environment.

/3/ EXTRAS

- For a little help in the game you can place items like this on the portal for bonuses like winged boots, that'll give you a speed boost when you need it. They are time based per level so choose wisely.

/4/ WEBSITE

- **www.skylanders.com/start** – this is where the instructions send you to further 'enhance' your Spyro experience. Too bad the site falls somewhere between painful and pointless. It's pretty and there is a little game you can play using your Xbox portal or the online code that comes with each figurine. The problem is the site is slow, doesn't always connect and getting the Xbox Portal of Power to talk to the game is a technical hoop-jumping festival of aggravation that'll have even the most hardened IT professional crying into his leftover meatloaf. The weakest part of the experience – rather just don't bother.
- **Workaround:** if you can't/don't want to connect your portal to your PC then you can use this code card to access your figurine on the site. NAG



Dream Machine

If you are confused by the change that you see in the NAG Dream Machine, do not be alarmed. We have decided to spec not one but two machines that should cater to both AMD and Intel fans alike. Naturally, the AMD machine is cheaper, but at this price point, it still offers incredible performance and remains a machine for those with an uncompromising affinity to AMD but have deep pockets as well. The Intel machine features similar components but differs only in the choice of memory, motherboard and CPU obviously. Going forward, these newly specced Dream Machine machines will more closely reflect the rigs we would build for ourselves in accordance to the hardware we get to test and play with. As always, this is not the ultimate machine, but it is our "Dream Machine" and our criteria for including a component here is not only performance, but quality, functionality, value and aesthetics. Our objective is not to build the fastest machine money can buy, but the most balanced system possible with few to no shortcomings.



PSU
ANTEC HCP 1200
R2,399 / www.evetech.co.za



Graphics
MSI GTX 580 Lightning
R5,499 / www.covex.co.za



OS Drive
Kingston 240GB HyperX SSD
R5,699 / www.kingston.com



Storage drive
Seagate Barracuda 3TB
R1,999 / www.seagate.com



Chassis
Coolermaster HAF-X 942
R1,799 / www.sonicinformed.co.za



Display
ASUS VG278H 3D Monitor
R8,999 / za.asus.com



Keyboard
Logitech G19
R1,899 / www.logitech.com



Mouse
Roccat Kone +
R899/ www.sonicinformed.com



Mouse Mat
Roccat Alumic
R319 / www.roccat.org



Sound
Asus Xonar Essence STX
R1,399 / za.asus.com



Speakers
Logitech Z-5500 Digital
R3,699 / www.logitech.com



Headphones
CMStorm SIRUS
R1,199/ www.sonicinformed.com



NEW

Intel

Intel Core i7 3960X
R11,999 / www.intel.com

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme
R4,999 / za.asus.com

8GB Quad Channel DDR3 2400 MHz memory
R2,000 / www.gskill.com





NEW

Intel Dream Machine Price:

R56,806



AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150
R2,699 / www.amd.com

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7
R3,499 / www.gigabyte.com

Corsair Dominator GT DDR3 2000 MHz 8GB Dual Channel
R1,999 / www.corsair.com

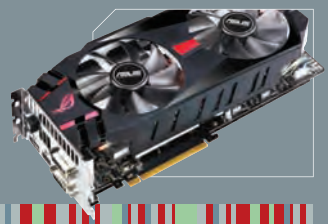




AMD Dream Machine Price:

R44,305

Looking good



In the last 20 years or so, graphics on computing devices have made strides we could not have imagined in our wildest dreams. I remember having "fun" at some point playing an ATARI 5200, but I was always aware of just how much was lacking in what was presented in front of me. As computing platforms get ever more powerful, we in turn are given the power to visualize our most fantastical ideas. When we imagine fictitious worlds, be they in our dreams, creative expressions on canvas or through the written and spoken word, what we try and relate is as real in our heads as everything else immediately around us.

Through ever more powerful tools we are able to not only visualize these thoughts but actually make them a reality of sorts in a digital space. Technology then becomes a way of expression as well as that of doing the more humdrum but important tasks of simulating weather patterns and other modeling exercises. It's like a pen, a box of pencils, and other

"Much like in this day and age we don't discuss the quality of pencils and brushes as much as the work done with them, technology will one day reach that stage where the underlying technical wizardry is irrelevant but the finished work is what matters."

such tools regularly used in artistic circles. Much like in this day and age we don't discuss the quality of pencils and brushes as much as the work done with them, technology will one day reach that stage where the underlying technical wizardry is irrelevant but the finished work is what matters.

As annoying as it is to some that we have had at least ten different DirectX versions since 1997, we have to appreciate that we actually spend less time talking about the underlying technology these days than we did before. It may not seem like it but it's true. In 1997 and even more so in 1998, any hardware review of any graphics card would invariably delve into the actual rendering mechanics of the game that is being used to test said piece of hardware, or how the hardware's architecture is well suited or not to the task at hand. How well a specific graphics processor dealt with multi-texturing literally affected not only how the gaming environment looked but the performance as well. The sacrifices one had to make if the hardware was not capable were great and would render a vastly different experience depending on what hardware you had, which isn't the case today.

As a result of this, said developers and their artists could only realize worlds that could be rendered and coloured properly using 256x256 size textures for instance. Add that to the absence of any meaningful standardized texture compression algorithm for example and you have blurry, washed-out worlds that rely more on your imagination to impress rather than what is actually being rendered.

These days however, any comparison we make between game visuals is significantly less technical. For those interested in such it may still be a technical discussion but for the most part, its people debating aesthetics and not mip-mapping, filtering techniques and mini-drivers. With titles such as *Battlefield 3* or *Crysis 2*, we can look at a scene, be aware of how brilliantly it mimics reality and how mathematically correct the lighting model is without necessarily discussing anything technical about it. It may seem to some that this leads to a lesser imagination on the user side, but that isn't true, for the same reason that the artists are able to express themselves better, we are able to better imagine ourselves in said world in even greater detail than ever before. One can only be excited about what the future holds and what might the game worlds of 2022 look like, assuming the world doesn't end yet again in 2012.

Neo Sibeko

Intel Core i7 3960X

Supplier: **Intel** / Website: **www.intel.com** / RRP: **R11,999**

Intel can seemingly do no wrong of late. Well actually that isn't true; the company has not set a foot wrong since they introduced their tick-tock strategy back in 2006 when the Core family of CPUs was introduced. Sure enough, despite having to pay out both AMD and NVIDIA for anti-competitive practices in excess of USD 2.5 billion in total, the company keeps reporting record revenue quarters even in these dire economic times. Besides savvy business decisions by the powers that be, it is really the sound engineering principles that have given Chipzilla an unquestionable lead in the CPU world.

ARM is gaining strength and is likely to pose a real and tangible threat to Intel on the desktop in future, but for now, Intel remains unchallenged in the x86 world, and with the 2nd generation Core i7 CPUs, the company has further stretched what was an already impressive lead between it and what remains of the competition.

Intel once again can claim the largest CPU die to date, or at least the densest CPU die in desktop history. Manufactured using the same 32nm High-K process of the Sandy-Bridge, SB-E contains a massive 2.2 billion gates. Now keep in mind that AMD had claimed their Bulldozer cores to contain roughly 2 billion gates, but it turns out this number is actually closer to 1.2 billion (the company uses a different process though which isn't as efficient as what Intel is using to pack gates into a CPU die). This easily dwarfs any other processor to date. What isn't clear however is if this number included the fused-off areas of the die that contain the two additional cores and 5MB of L3 cache that is found in SB-EP (Xeon/server parts) CPUs or not. Regardless, it's a testament to the company's engineering brilliance.

To summarise SB-E in a meaningful manner, one has to draw parallels between it and the SB processors released in early 2011. Essentially these are very similar, offering an instruction set but with a few differences in the PCH for starters. SB-E supports PCI Express 3.0 and has a single QPI link (being derived from a server CPU this makes sense) which is absent in the Sandy Bridge CPUs. It obviously has a higher TDP (130W), being a larger die, but most importantly to the end user, it commands a price three times that of the Intel Core i7 2700K. However right now you may still see prices higher than what we have stipulated simply because of the rarity of these CPUs. At the time of writing, the entire world had less than 20,000 CPUs and that led to the eye-watering prices.

With that you get two IMCs that are improved over what was available before. That means we have more memory multiplier options than before and the CPUs run the dual IMCs in tandem for quad-channel memory bandwidth figures. Our AIDA 64 benchmarks do not show the gains of the additional two channels of memory, but in SB-E aware benchmarks, the new platform can easily achieve figures about 44GB/sec in raw bandwidth. Significantly better figures than what the Core i7 990X was capable of in triple-channel configurations.

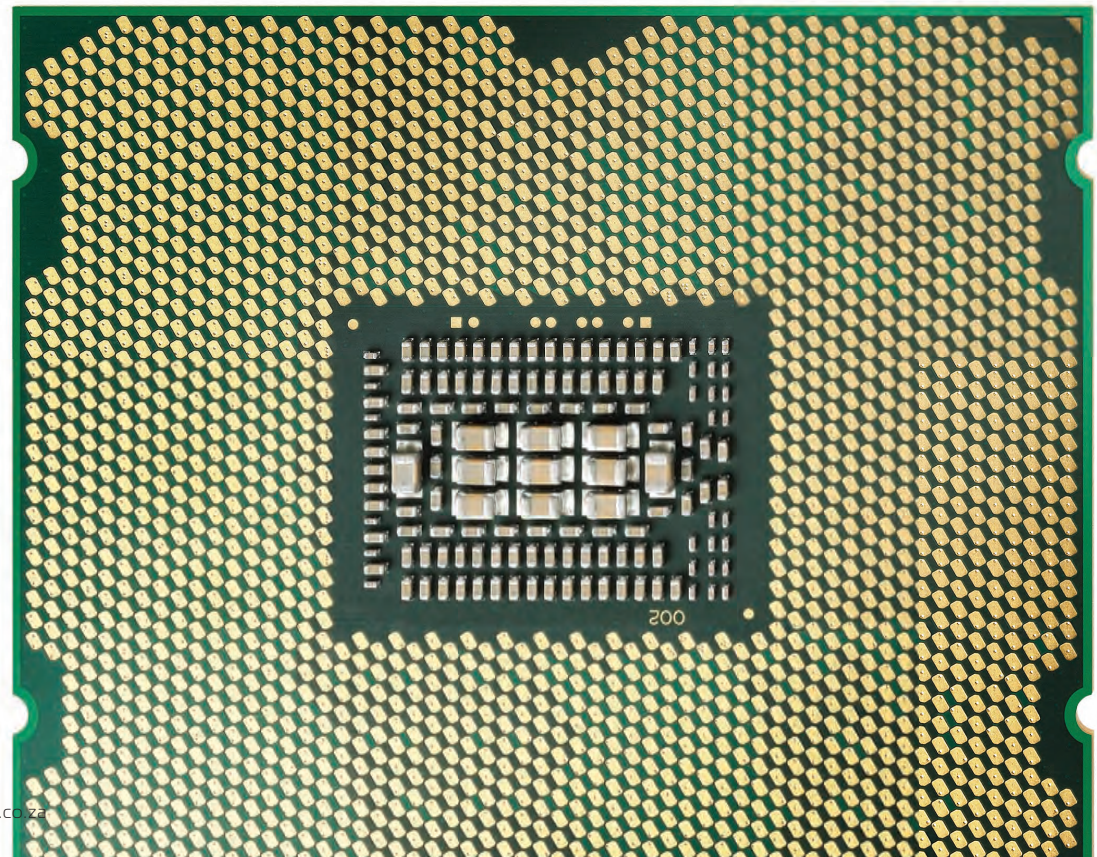
As great as this is, it's important to note that, in gaming tests, there will be no difference between dual and quad channel performance. In fact even in our beloved benchmarks such as the 3DMark series, moving from dual channel to quad channel at the same

dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

[specs]

Cores:
6 (12 Threads) 32nm
Cache:
15MB L3
Frequency 3.3 GHz
(3.9 GHz Turbo)
Socket:
LGA2011

" Those who work with massive volumes of data will benefit hugely from not only the bandwidth, but the increased amount of RAM these CPUs are able to support. "





Benchmarks

3DMark Vantage	/ 35792 /
CineBench 11.5	/ 9.68 /
Crysis 2 DX11	/ 58.34 /
3DMark11	/ 10,470 /
Resident Evil 5 DX10	/ 156 /

speed yields no gains whatsoever. However there are benefits to be had from other more professional and bandwidth-dependant workloads. Those who work with massive volumes of data will benefit hugely from not only the bandwidth, but the increased amount of RAM these CPUs are able to support.

As for IPC, it really hasn't changed much from what we saw with the Sandy Bridge CPUs. Interestingly enough though, despite the 200 MHz clock disadvantage this CPU has as compared to the 2700K, the gaming results are actually on par and sometimes better on the 3960X. We aren't entirely sure why this is so, but right now we are inclined to believe that the additional cache per core (in order of 512KB in the L3) is responsible for this increase in performance.

Regardless, if you already own a 2600 or 2700K based system you'd be hard pressed to upgrade to the X79 platform. If you do, however, you can rest assured that like the P67 and Z678 chipsets for the current LGA1155 CPUs, most X79 boards will support Ivy Bridge-E which is due around Q4 2012, so there's a lot of life left in this platform and it could actually be a worthwhile investment (at least as far as the motherboards are concerned).

For the enthusiasts and the semi- to non-competitive overclockers amongst us, if you were hoping for some incredible overclocking headroom on these CPUs as compared to the LGA1155 counterparts, you'll be disappointed. In fact by and large SB-E CPUs clock a good 200 to 400 MHz lower than the average 2600 or 2700K. The average CPU will reach 5.2 GHz, the good ones 5.3 to 5.5 GHz, but those are very rare and on average you should expect 5.1 GHz at the most. The odd thing is that using what is now the reference cooler for the Extreme Edition CPUs (the Asetek LCS as used by AMD for their FX CPUs as well) you may reach anything between 4.5 to 4.9 GHz, but with more exotic cooling gain anything from 100 to 200 MHz at the most. So these CPUs are a far cry from the 990X CPUs which were easily taken to the 5.8 to 6.2 GHz regularly. With that said, the 3960X at 5 GHz will still offer better performance than a 990X at 5.6 GHz in certain benchmarks. So it's not as bad as one may think initially.

Overall we are impressed with the direction Intel has taken with the 3960X, with improvements in the stepping and manufacturing process things can only get better, and while it may not be the killer CPU everyone expected, the Core i7 3960X is the fastest CPU money can buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / AVX instructions / PCI-Express 3.0 / Native 4-way graphics support / 12 threads
/ MINUS / Expensive / Overclocking llama

THE MOST POWERFUL DESKTOP CPU TO DATE.

8 OUT OF 10

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: **za.asus.com** / RRP: **R4,999**

Let's cut to the chase shall we? This board may be a ROG member, but it's in no way geared at gamers or the so-called power user. Sure enough, you can't really go wrong with this board regardless of what vendors refer to you as in their marketing materials. However, it would be a waste of time and space to tell you about the new audio controller on this board, the competent USB 3.0 support and such things. Let's leave those for the lesser boards, and we can comfortably say this because as it stands, this motherboard is peerless. In fact it's easily the most impressive thing that's ever come from ASUS (that includes being better than the original REX board).

Not surprising though because this is Shamino's first authentic attempt at a pure overclocking board at ASUS that isn't crippled by the platform limitations (Sandy Bridge/ 2nd gen i7 CPUs). This board has his fingerprints all over it and it's damn impressive. In fact it's the only purpose-built board after the X58A-OC to overwhelm in this manner. It is truly humbling to those capable of appreciating its exhaustive BIOS and features list.

Let's be clear, anybody can overclock SB-E CPUs north side of 4,800 MHz; it's easy and in fact on this board it will take you less than two minutes, depending on the quality of the silicon in your CPU. It's not rocket science, but to merely achieve such an overclock is to miss entirely what this board is about. ASUS will no doubt release a Black Edition of sorts with whatever "gamer orientated" gear featuring magnificent audio processing capabilities and a passable and equally useless gaming NIC, but even that can't detract from what the Rampage IV Extreme (RIVE) has brought to true overclockers.

It's safe to say that ASUS hit the ground running with the X79 chipset.

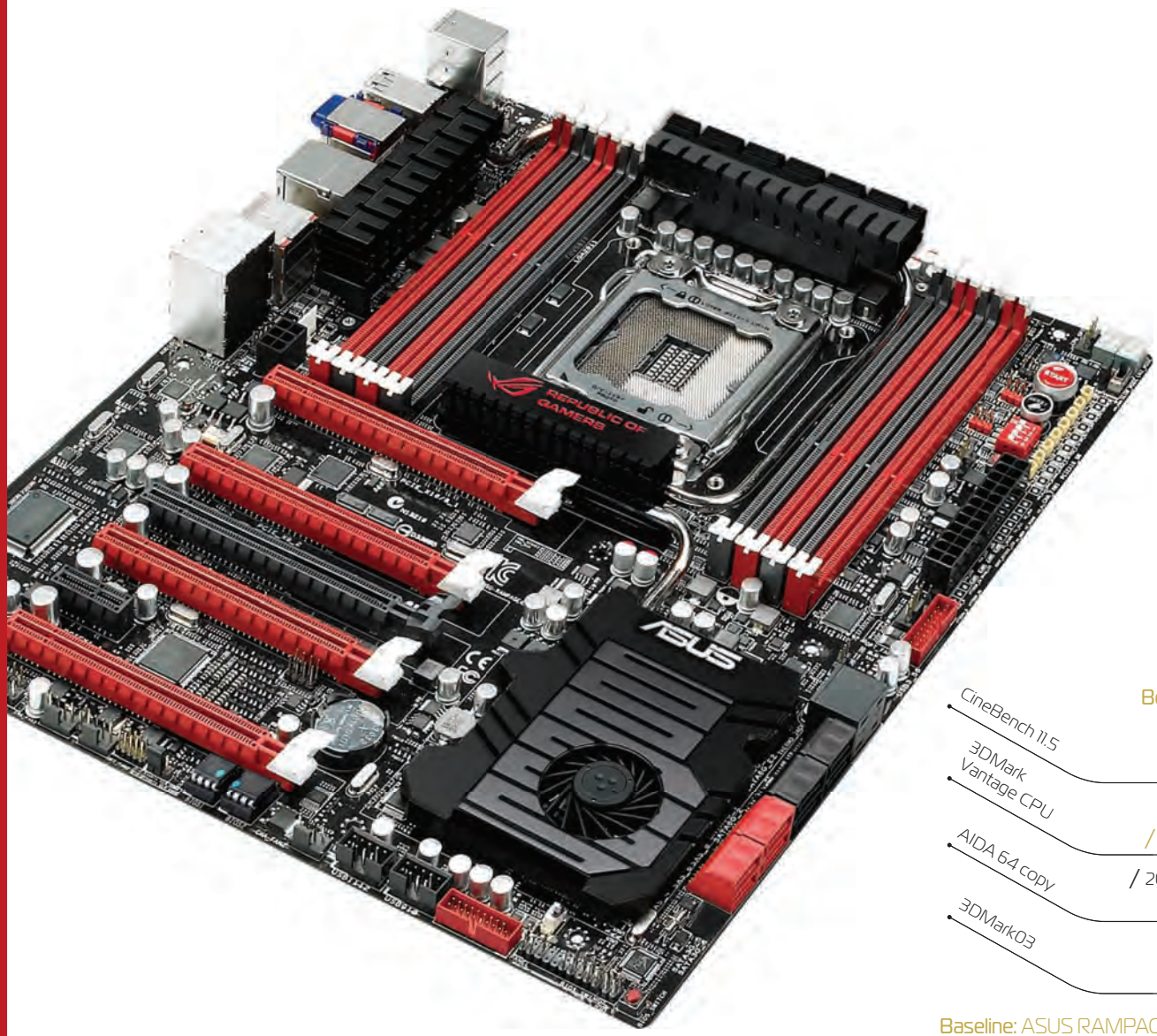
dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
8x240-pin DDR3
CPU Support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots:
4xPCI Express 3.0 16x, 1xPCI Express 8x, 1xPCI Express 2x

The first board from ASUS we had experience with (the X79 SABERTOOTH, reviewed next issue) was head and shoulders above everything else we had at the time from competitors, and this was with a pre-release BIOS. Since then things have only improved.

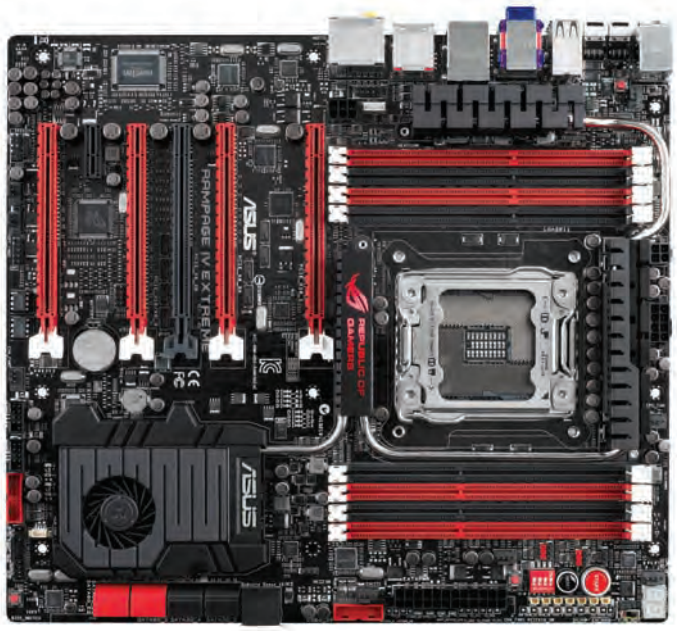
Back to the RIVE though, upon entering the BIOS, you'll be presented with easily the most comprehensive BIOS we have seen to date. This isn't like the old BIOS interfaces of the now defunct DFI, where you had more settings than you could actually make use of, paired with little to no explanation whatsoever. The Rampage IV Extreme UEFI BIOS has more options than any other board to date and it does a respectable job at explaining what each major option does. This doesn't mean that anyone and everyone will become an expert overclocker overnight. No, if anything, it'll just encourage those with little knowledge but a keen interest to start their learning experience using one of the



Benchmarks

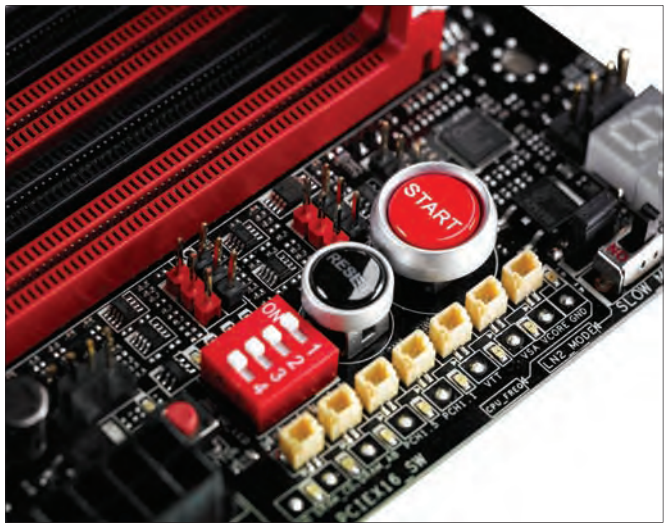
CineBench 11.5	/ 13.60 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 47,480 / / 33,737 /
AIDA 64 copy	/ 20396MB/s / / 16,441/
3DMark03	/ 156,407 / / 49.1 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE



" Gamers and power users will appreciate it, but its true value comes across when mounted on a benching table with subzero degree cooling for both graphics cards and CPUs. "





pre-configured overclocking profiles.

These are not based on some cheesy "Turbo OC" program that reboots your machine several times in a misguided attempt to configure your PC for optimum performance. While that option still exists, the profiles we are talking about are what an actual overclocker would use to test a system for stability at various CPU speeds. These profiles even include starting points for those who will be overclocking on this board using Dry Ice, phase change or liquid nitrogen.

If that's not enough for you, in the memory settings sub-menu there are more pre-configured options for memory based on different ICs from ELPIDA, HYNIX and other commonly found ICs on DRAM modules. Your mileage on these settings may vary, but with our particular memory and CPU combination, all these settings worked as stipulated.

To go into meaningful detail of each option in the BIOS would lead to a 30 page write-up at the least and since we don't have 30 pages for that, we will just say that for what is being offered here, the local pricing is more than fair. We usually don't talk about price and most likely never will again, but an exception must be made for this component. Any other competing board that attempts to retail at this price will have a hard time toppling the Rampage IV Extreme, as this is likely the best consumer motherboard to date. It isn't a half hearted attempt at making an overclocking board while still being conservative enough to make it appeal to the DIY masses. The packaging may be deceitful in that it's an ROG board, but since ASUS does not have a line/SKU dedicated to overclockers (and rightly so) ROG will have to do.

The only annoying aspect of this board is that using the first PCI Express slot is frustrating because there's a heatsink right next to it, which makes it impossible to remove a graphics card without some screw driver or appropriately long tool to unlatch the locking mechanism. The DRAM slots are also located too close to the PCI Express slot so if you use a full length card like the GTX580, you'll have a hard time using one of those RAM coolers that is sold with high speed enthusiast grade memory without some modifications first. A surprising oversight on what is otherwise a perfect board.

Barring that, we have nothing but praise for the Rampage IV Extreme. Gamers and power users will appreciate it, but its true value comes across when mounted on a benching table with subzero degree cooling for both graphics cards and CPUs. We suspect that the other major manufacturers may have to go back to the drawing board if they have any hope of beating what ASUS has.

It may still be early days for the X79 platform, but if you're looking at investing in this socket and only the best will do for you, there just isn't anything remotely close to this board out right now. NAG

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Features / Performance / Build quality
/ MINUS / 1st PCI Express slot is too close to NB

EASILY THE BEST MOTHERBOARD FROM ASUS TO DATE.

10 OUT OF 10

Krator Neso 04 N4-21U26

Supplier: **Frontosa** / Website: **www.frontosa.co.za** / RRP: **R435**

[specs]

Power output:
26 Watts RMS
Impedance:
20 ohm
Frequency response:
20~40 kHz



Unless you're one of the lucky few who own high-end notebooks that come packing more than just a rudimentary audio solution, you'd do well to pay attention to this review. If you've grown tired of your notebook's crappy sound output, or if you simply want a decent set of speakers to play music from your portable media device, the Krator Neso 04 2.1 speaker set might be just what you need.

Your appreciation of their design is going to come down to personal preference, obviously, but it's certainly unique, if a tad gaudy. The satellites and subwoofer are surprisingly light (but a bit too big to be truly portable), and while they don't feel particularly rugged, we're sure they'd withstand a fair amount of wear and tear. What makes this set so suitable for notebook use is that it's powered via USB 2.0. The left satellite and subwoofer are connected to the right satellite (where you'll also find knobs to adjust volume and bass level), which is then connected via USB and a single 3.5mm audio jack to your notebook. It's quick and easy – but the sound quality matches the price you pay for the set.

At almost all volumes, the mid and low ranges are almost completely drowned out by the set's tendency towards higher frequencies. Moreover, the sound produced is quite tinny and lifeless, and the satellites tend to render the subwoofer – which works well enough, but is nothing amazing – almost completely inaudible. Powering the set via USB also results in a small, but noticeable amount of signal interference. Still, we weren't expecting miracles from a set in this price range, and it certainly provides better sound with much higher volume than most basic notebooks. Those looking for a more meaty 2.1 solution to dedicate to, say, their desktop PCs, should probably look elsewhere. NAG

Dane Remendes

/ PLUS / Unique design / Cheap / Great for notebooks/media players
/ MINUS / Sound quality isn't amazing

GREAT FOR NOTEBOOKS AND PORTABLE MEDIA PLAYERS, BUT NOT AS A DEDICATED AUDIO SOLUTION.

7 OUT OF 10

NaturalPoint TrackIR 5

Supplier: **Landmark PC** / Website: **www.landmarkpc.co.za** / RRP: **R2,085**

[specs]

Raw sensor resolution:
640x480
Reporting resolution:
96,000x72,000
Field of view:
51.7°
Sample rate:
120 fps
Response time:
9ms



Today's console gamers have access to a plethora of peripherals that allow them to wave their bodies in front of their TVs to control in-game characters, but what do PC gamers have? Well, they've got this, the NaturalPoint TrackIR. If you look at the price at the top of this page, you might assume that this is a niche product for those with very special needs, and you'd be right. This is a techie gadget, not a casual gaming accessory.

The kit includes two tracking devices; one is designed to be mounted to a peak cap, and the other to a headset. If you have neither, then you need to find another creative way to strap the carefully arranged IR reflectors to your head. Once one is over the fact that there is absolutely no way to wear this contraption while retaining a semblance of sophistication, opening the software reveals both simple and highly advanced tuning options. We found the standard settings to be fine so only minimal tweaking was required. While the preview window showed the device to be extremely accurate without being twitchy (thanks to adjustable smoothness), we were disappointed to find an extremely limited list of games with native support. Flight Simulators ruled the pack, and from our testing proved to be the best way to enjoy this device, but those hoping to use the TrackIR in their favourite (or at least, current) first-person shooter will be disappointed: the most recent game updates came over a year ago.

For non-supported titles, one can use mouse emulation through a separate application. While it's a kind effort, the software isn't capable of delivering the same performance as natively supported games offer, and we were unable to find a comfortable way to use the device in contemporary first-person games like *Modern Warfare 3* and *Skyrim*. NAG

Geoff Burrows

/ PLUS / Extremely accurate / Highly customisable
/ MINUS / Niche appeal / Limited list of supported games / Mouse emulation is no good

IF YOU'RE A DIE-HARD FLIGHT SIMULATOR PLAYER, THEN THIS IS FOR YOU. IF YOU'RE ANYONE ELSE, STICK TO YOUR KEYBOARD AND MOUSE.

7 OUT OF 10

Roccat Kova[+]

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: **www.sonicinformed.co.za** / RRP: **R599**

Roccat's Kone[+] gaming mouse took us by surprise, so we were eager to see what the Kova[+] offers gamers looking for a mouse that finds a balance between cost and performance. The result is a mouse that neither excels nor fails if it's a mid-range device that you're after. It takes a few cues from its big brother but doesn't do enough to stand out from the massive crowd.

Like dozens of mid-range gaming mice, the Kova[+] is capped at a resolution of 3,200 dpi. While that's certainly acceptable, one can't help but feel that this has too-long been the standard, and something closer to 4,000 would benefit this mouse by helping to sharpen up its accuracy when used during short-distance precision tasks. Thankfully, the [+] isn't wasted here, as a few other improvements have been made that will benefit those who tend to make rapid mouse movements.

The included driver software is as familiar as you'd expect if you're used to Roccat devices, although a number of features will be absent if those devices are of the high end. Windows commands can be assigned to each mouse button, or you can assign a macro from the impressive selection of game-specific key combos or create your own. Everything is well laid-out and simple to use, and for that, we're grateful.

The Kova[+]'s design is ambidextrous, and while that tends to create uncomfortable mice at times, this is not the case here. It's simple design is complimented by a few stylish LEDs (with customisable colours according to your chosen profile) and rubberised coating. The only thing that doesn't really make sense is the angled scroll wheel. Since it doesn't tilt to the sides, it seems like a needless feature. Finally, the device is quite light, which adds to the difficulty in precision aiming. NAG

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Max resolution:
3,200 dpi
Customisable buttons:
Seven + EasyShift[+]
Max speed:
130 inches per second
Max acceleration:
30Gs
Polling rate:
1,000Hz



/ PLUS / Comfortable / Ambidextrous / Macro assignments
/ MINUS / Limited resolution / Too light

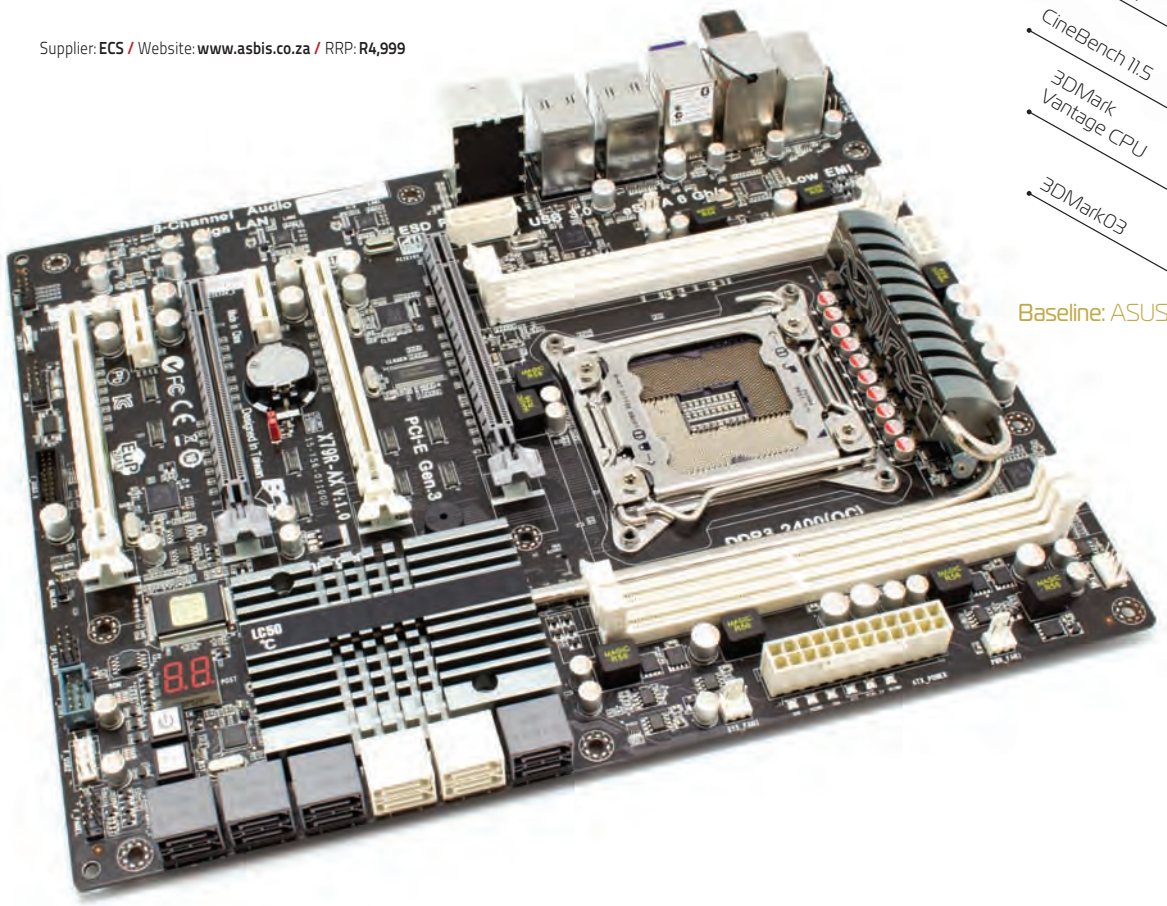
A SOLID YET UNSPECTACULAR MID-RANGE OFFERING.

7 OUT OF 10



ECS X79R-AX

Supplier: **ECS** / Website: **www.asbis.co.za** / RRP: **R4,999**



Benchmarks

AIDA 64 copy	/ 20246MB/s / / N/A /
CineBench 11.5	/ 13.57 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 47,388 / / 33,737 /
3DMark03	/ 155,025 / / N/A /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

Despite what ECS may call their enthusiast line of boards, the company has very rarely, if ever, produced a board worthy of the "Black Edition" name. The issues were always too numerous to list and at some point we had even resorted to not scoring the boards. Despite being a favoured brand for low-end systems, the last thing any self-respecting power user, let alone overclocker, would buy is an ECS board. Compared to what the competition was offering, the company was far off the mark and if you compared the company's best X58 efforts to what Gigabyte offered, the difference was night and day.

With the X79 platform, ECS has a chance to try again and, while it is still carrying over some of the peculiar designs from their previous attempts, things are looking better, in fact significantly better with the X79R-AX. The naming scheme however hasn't improved and throughout this entire review we had to check the model number at every turn as there's no consistency in their naming scheme.

Admittedly when this board first arrived it had issues and it was even pointless testing it, as some parts of the BIOS just didn't work at all and as such it was an incomplete product. Through various revisions, things started to improve and by the time this review was written, the X79R-AX was well ahead of some competing boards from far more reputable brands. Physically the board didn't change obviously and some issues were as annoying as when we first looked at the board. However the work the engineers have done has transformed what could have been yet another passable if not lamentable board into one that we would not hesitate to recommend to most users and, dare we say, even power users.

The UEFI BIOS is much improved over previous motherboards, it not only has more features but it is better organized and the description of options is better. The addition of BIOS profiles that you can name is hugely appreciated, even though one is still not able to update the BIOS from within, a feature all enthusiasts will miss to say the least, given that this has been a function on motherboards from tier one vendors for years. However, other than that it's a pretty useful BIOS with some advanced options which we've not seen on an ECS product before.

Overclocking the X79R-AX is actually very easy, thanks to the vastly improved stability and build quality of the board. Performance is right up there with the best in the business and should you decide on this model you'll not be sacrificing anything in terms of performance, memory compatibility or stability for that matter. Overclocking the 3960X to a healthy 4.62 GHz was a breeze and there was no discernible difference in performance between this board and the ASUS X79 SABERTOOTH in any benchmark we ran.

This is yet another major step in the right direction for ECS for the Black series boards. In addition to providing solid performance, the board comes equipped with dual gigabit Ethernet ports, Bluetooth support, wireless LAN, a plethora of SATA ports and USB 3.0 Support. ECS has not skimped on any feature really and it even has 4-way SLI support. For a gaming station it's hard to fault. It may not be ideal for serious overclockers but then again it's not targeted at that market. For what it is it's a great board and no doubt better than all other previous attempts at making a board for the mid- to high-end market. With some improvements in layout, design and BIOS tuning, ECS could be in the running with the bigger manufacturers for a place in power user and overclocker's radars. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU Support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots:
4x PCI Express16x, 2x PCI Express 2x

/ PLUS / Packed with features
/ MINUS / LED positioning / No built-in BIOS flashing

ECS HAS OUTDONE ITSELF WITH A REALLY COMPETENT AND COMPETITIVE MOTHERBOARD.

8 OUT OF 10

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Roxio Game Capture

Supplier: **Phoenix Software** / Website: **www.roxio.com** / RRP: **R1,299**



Roxio Game Capture has one purpose: to provide an affordable solution to anyone looking for a device that'll capture footage of their impressive console-based exploits. Furthermore, editing software is provided so you can fine tune your masterpiece before uploading it to the Internet and showing everyone that not only are you pretty handy with a rocket launcher, but you're no slouch when it comes to making home movies either.

The most appealing part of this package is how easy it is to get it up and running. It's basically just a box through which you pass audio and video component cables from your Xbox/PS3 to your TV. You then connect it to a PC or notebook that meets the minimum system requirements (although you'll need a machine that surpasses them to get the best results) via USB 2.0, install the bundled software and get down to the business of capturing moments worth bragging over. There's no external power required, and while it would've been great to see HDMI support, it's not a huge issue. The capture software takes some fiddling with to get everything working perfectly, but it's nothing too annoying.

From there, things get a bit dodgy. The device doesn't support 1080p, meaning that you're forced to play games at a maximum output of 1080i while capturing video. Recorded video only outputs at 480p, resulting in videos that pale in comparison to those recorded using true HD capture components. Roxio's VideoWave editing software provides a range of options for editing, trimming and adding various (mostly garish) effects, but it's slightly obtuse and not as friendly as other video-editing suites. It's also prone to hanging/crashing unexpectedly. Still, it'll work fine for basic editing and allows for uploading of videos directly to YouTube.

There's more praise to be given, and more things to whine about, but all you really need to know about the Roxio Game Capture device is this: at an RRP of around $100 elsewhere in the world, it's more affordable than higher-end capture methods and it's therefore easy to overlook the device's niggles. At R1,299, however, affordability goes out the window, making it difficult to recommend. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

[specs]

Minimum requirements:
Windows 7/Vista/XP
Intel Core 2 Duo 1.8GHz/AMD Athlon x2 64 2GHz
DirectX 9.0c compatible graphics card
2GB RAM
Internet connection required

/ PLUS / Easy setup / Works adequately
/ MINUS / Expensive / Software is buggy / Some video capture niggles

AT A LOWER PRICE POINT, ROXIO'S CAPTURE DEVICE WOULD BE WORTH CONSIDERING.

7 OUT OF 10

TRENDnet 450Mbps HD Media Bridge

Supplier: **Trendnet** / Website: **www.trendnet.com** / RRP: **R1,499**

[specs]

Standards:
IEEE 802.11a/b/g/n
Interface:
4 x 10/100/1000Mbps Auto-MDIX LAN ports
Power:
12V DC 1A power adapter



Hypothetical situation here: let's say your router is set up in your home's study, because that's where the phone line is. You find yourself running network cables from there to the living room, where all your expensive consoles, Blu-ray players and smart TVs live. One day, grandma's walking to the kitchen from her bedroom. Her arduous journey is set to take her through the very same passageway where your mess of dangerous cables rests. Grandma's vision ain't what it used to be, and it's not long before you hear a crash, a crack and the groans of an elderly woman. This, and all manner of accidents involving elderly folk around the world, can be avoided using TRENDnet's Dual Band Wireless Media Bridge. Probably.

Waffle aside, this device acts as a sort of wireless switch, to put it simply. You can connect four network-capable gadgets to it via Ethernet cable, and this media bridge will then connect wirelessly to your router via Wi-Fi, instantly connecting all four devices to your network without the need for Wi-Fi adapters and such. What makes this particular media bridge special, is the high speeds with which it can send/receive data across the network, as well as its dual band functionality.

It's theoretically capable of reaching transfer speeds up to 450Mbps (+-56MB/sec) on each wireless frequency – but you'll likely never actually reach transfer rates this high because of all the debilitating factors involved when connecting via Wi-Fi. Dual band wireless means you can either connect via the more popular 2.4GHz frequency, or the 5GHz frequency.

Naturally, performance will depend on distance from your access point and other such factors, but we found that the transfer rate is definitely good enough for streaming HD media with very little hiccups. For best results, you'll need an 802.11n wireless access point also capable of up to 450Mbps – TRENDnet offers a router that does just that, the 450Mbps Concurrent Dual Band Wireless N router. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

/ PLUS / Setup is quick and easy / It works
/ MINUS / Needs complementary hardware for peak performance

IT DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SHOULD, AND IT DOES IT WELL.

8 OUT OF 10

Toshiba AT100

Supplier: **Mustek** / Website: **www.toshiba.co.za** / RRP: **R4,999**



With almost every vendor releasing a tablet, more competitors are entering the market in an attempt to fill the gap created by the demise of netbooks.

The Toshiba AT100 is not Toshiba's first attempt at a tablet, but it is their first Android-based tablet and, as expected, it ships with Android Honeycomb and is built around NVIDIA's SOC Tegra 2 solution. With that comes a 1280x800-resolution screen, a 5MP rear camera and a front facing 2MP camera. Connectivity is mainly via Wi-Fi as there is no GSM network support whatsoever, but given that in most markets where it will be sold, Wi-Fi networks are everywhere, this is unlikely to be an issue.

Another great feature that you won't find on many tablets is the full sized USB and HDMI ports which make it easy to connect a real keyboard or mouse to the unit and use it as a computer of sorts. Full size connectivity extends to SDXC cards as well so you will need no adapters. Best of all however is that this tablet has a removable battery.

So on paper this device looks good, however in practice it falls a little short of the market leading tablets from Apple, Samsung and even ASUS with their Transformer offerings. The AT100 is nearly twice the thickness of a Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1. It's about 160g heaver and at a meaty 775g, it's a lot of weight to carry around with you, however one can eventually get used to it. The colours on the display are dull and are nowhere near as bright as what Apple and Samsung offer, it has no scratch protection of any kind and just looks dated. The interface has some lag as well making the entire process of using this tablet somewhat annoying.

Overall, if you're looking for a feature-packed Android-based tablet with a more affordable price than some of the other high-end offerings, then the AT100 may be what you're after. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Chipset:
Dual ARM Cortex A9 1GHz, GeForce GPU Tegra 2 T20
Memory:
1GB
Storage:
1GB Internal, 16GB storage expandable
OS:
Android Honeycomb 3.0
Screen:
800x1280 IPS Capacitive Touch screen
Camera:
5MP rear autofocus camera, 2MP front camera
Connectivity:
Wi-Fi b/g/n, Bluetooth

/ PLUS / Full size USB/HDMI and SD slots / Changeable battery
/ MINUS / Poor display / 1GB internal memory

A TEGRA 2 BASED, ANDROID 3.X TABLET FROM A MAJOR VENDOR THAT INCLUDES MOST TABLET FEATURES.

6 OUT OF 10

CM Storm Quick Fire Rapid

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: **www.sonicinformed.co.za** / RRP: **R849**



If you're after a gaming keyboard that identifies you as the unique snowflake you know you are, then this is the next best thing after that attempt to spray-paint your flea-market PS/2 board neon pink. There are two main reasons why this keyboard stands out: it's tiny, and it uses mechanical keys. If you've ever experienced typing on a keyboard from the early '90s or prior, you'll know the feeling and iconic sound that mechanical keys offer. It'll come down to personal taste whether or not this technology appeals to you, but the smooth, linear button presses and gentle springing back feel fantastic while gaming and typing. On the flip side, that iconic button squeaking and clacking, and deep button depression might irritate those used to quiet, light-touch gaming boards from the likes of Logitech and Razer. The squeaky space bar, in particular, sounds like a gossiping budgie during heavy typing sessions.

The size of this board is due to the lack of a num pad, and again, that may or may not bother you based on your personal preferences. Personally, I miss it, but for gamers on the go or those with limited desk space, you'll probably be glad to have that chunk of keyboard absent. I suspect that the other reason the num pad is missing is to keep down costs. With each key using a dedicated spring-loaded mechanical micro-switch, this keyboard gets significantly more expensive as you add more keys, which could account for the lack of dedicated macro/gaming keys. While we appreciate the driver and hassle-free installation, it's almost unheard of for a gaming board to exclude such functionality, and we know that some gamers will feel short-changed. At least a few basic multimedia functions are present courtesy of a function key. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Interface:
USB (PS/2 adaptor included)
Advanced keys:
Multimedia control, Windows key disable, volume control
Simultaneous key presses:
Six
Dimensions:
356.6x135.5x30mm
Weight:
940g

/ PLUS / Keys feels great for gaming and typing / Replaceable WASD keys
/ MINUS / Noisy / No num pad / No gaming keys

7

Unfinished business



It's 2012, which means it's also almost the end of the world[1]. I'm not much for anything so tawdry[2] as New Year's resolutions, but if this really is the end of days, I've got some stuff to resolve before being devoured by cyborg vampire lizards from outer space or whatever it is that's supposed to happen.

Starting with *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, which is one of only two Zelda games I've ever played.

... And I haven't finished it.

The other one is *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*.

... Which I haven't finished either.

I also haven't finished about half of the games I've downloaded from the Xbox LIVE Arcade, I've finished only about half of my *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* Veteran playthrough, and I've not even *started* any of the *Mass Effect 2* DLC I bought almost a year ago.

And I never played the original *Half-Life*[3]. Or *Minecraft*, for that matter.

It's kind of an occupational hazard, though – I mean, when your job is playing games, you don't always find the time to play the games you *want* to play, and instead, you have to stay in playing some sort of railway simulator while all your friends play Awesome IV: The Super Mega Ultra Awesomer in the park outside. True story.

And maybe it's because I'm getting older, but it's like time got dialled up to hyperspeed or something[5], and every moment is passed by in just a moment and gone forever, kbai, what's next. If somebody asked me what I've been doing the last six months, I'd tell them that this one time, I went to the V&A Aquarium with my twin sister, only I think that might actually have been six years ago because she lives in London now, and I've not even seen her in two years, and I feel super-sad.

So much for unresolved stuff. And honestly, I'm probably not even going to get around to any of that because *Mass Effect 3* is out in March already, and that's practically next week. NAG

Tarryn van der Byl

"If somebody asked me what I've been doing the last six months, I'd tell them that this one time, I went to the V&A Aquarium with my twin sister..."

[1] Well, that's if you're the sort of person who thinks astrology is a real thing. I'm not, but I'm also not going to disregard the possibility of a cataclysmic asteroid impact sometime around mid-April either, just because.

[2] Or personally accountable.

[3] Although I have an excuse for that – pretty much every FPS released before 2000 or so gave me such dire motion sickness, I'd be dry-heaving my snackwich in two to the minutes, max[4].

[4] So no, I've not played *Doom*, *Quake*, or *System Shock*. I'm such a fraud, etc.

[5] Or maybe it's just because I'm going a bit mad. I sing '80s pop songs to my cat sometimes too. Quite often. Okay, I just did it.

Extra Life

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