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Amped

Like the hullabaloo of a thousand and one flightless birds trying to get airborne, 2012 has arrived, poked around and started moving along at a fair lick of speed. Welcome to the February issue of *NAG* magazine[1] and in reality our first proper issue of 2012. Seeing that we're quite possibly the best gaming magazine south of the equator and definitely the biggest gaming and technology magazine in South Africas we have to be seen to be making a decent effort each year.

More of an effort than anyone else really, or we'll be accused of resting on our laurels and not trying hard enough. Of course our loyal and long-time fans will say bah to this because they know we always approach each issue as though it was our first date. You know how it goes, spending too much time combing the turf, hosing on dad's Old Spice and brushing our tongues while trying to avoid going too deep and barfing up our lunch.

In this regard we're launching a few new projects this year, tweaking *NAG* a bit and of course rAge is going to be a monster as it's our tenth one! I can't say too much because when you lead the pack everyone is watching... ;)

THE MADNESS OF ME

So you know how I was talking about planning to play new games in December – well, I didn't. Like a tool sack I spent too much time playing what I had been playing during 2011 (*Modern Warfare 3, Terraria* and so on) – old stuff and nothing really new. I also ate my way back into heart attack territory, watched some cool movies and too much rubbish TV and socialised and so on, so it wasn't a total loss overall... I felt good and happy until I got back to work and spoke to Dane. During a random office insulting session he asked me what I really played in 2011 and I couldn't tell him anything other than the usual suspects. I was mocked and ridiculed while trying to defend myself using lies and bravado. Bottom line: I needed to break the addiction and broaden the horizons.

Long story short: I downloaded and played the brilliant *Bastion* that same night and loved it. I then got cracking on *Trine 2* and *Joe Danger: Special Edition* as well as *Skyrim* and *Serious Sam 3: BFE* and even *Universe Sandbox*. I loved every minute of not playing *MW3*. Of course I'll still play *MW3* and *Battlefield 3* but not as obsessively as I used to. Quick update, last night I gave *Choplifter HD* a quick spin (it's even got a zombie mode). This whole interesting but pointless (or is that pointless but interesting?) insight into my personal life serves as the foundation, and lead ups to the message I want to get across here. Seeing that 2012[2] is the last year for the human race, let's all try something different these next 10 months. If you don't like fighting games... too bad, go play some *Mortal Kombat*. Think you can't play shooters on a console... load up *Halo* and play it to the very end. RPGs never tickled your fancy... get *Skyrim* and toss a few fireballs at a dragon. Same goes with people who don't play shooters. Let's all make 2012 the year of trying something different. Hell, I might even load up *Zelda* on the Wii this week. Share your experiences this year at the usual address.

Enjoy it people.

RedTide
[Editor]

NEW DISTRIBUTOR

In some rare NAG business news we're saying goodbye to JMD as our magazine distributor and hello to On the Dot (OTD) this month. JMD ran into some difficulties and have decided to close that division of their business permanently. What this means to you: better visibility and availability of *NAG* in your area. We'll be on-shelf a day earlier in some parts of the country and overall *NAG* will just be easier to find everywhere. The new guys are putting their necks on the line and have offered all our readers a problem-reporting SMS service as part of the deal. Should any of our readers find there is no *NAG* in their regular retailer, they can send an SMS to 36485 (at a cost of R1.00) to report the problem. **[The shop name, address and area should be sent to 36485]**. If you don't want to SMS but would still like to report a distribution or availability problem you can call Stuart Dickerson on 011 401 5932 and let him know or call the *NAG* office line on 011 704 2679 or email jacqui@nag.co.za. The good news is that we'll pick a random SMS from the batch each month and give that person a free 12 month subscription to *NAG* so they'll never have to burn game time looking for *NAG* again.

1 We'll be back up to 100 pages in March.

2 I just heard *Avatar 2* is only coming in 2016 so I guess we'll never see it.





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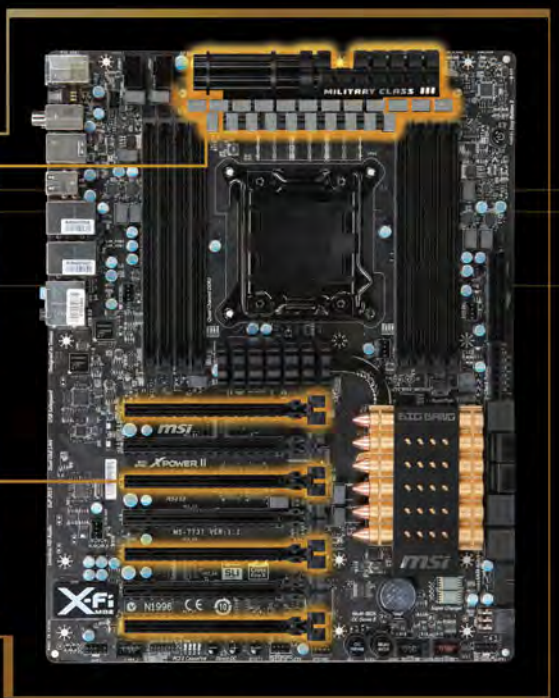
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***Disclaimer:** All letters sent to NAG are printed more or less verbatim (that's as we get them for you kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors.)

Letter of the Month February 2012

From: Justin
Subject: Game Addiction - Experience and Opinion

5 Days. I have finally kicked the habit – my addiction? Team Fortress 2, For the past 5 days, amid trying to study (and failing), I have been getting shot in the head, setting people on fire, spinning up my mini-gun and trading everything I could get my hands on. My arms ache, my neck hurts and my legs feel as though I have just completed the comrades. Was it worth it? At the beginning, yes, I would switch on the PC, join a server and not look away for a couple of hours, eventually stop, breath a deep breath and think, man, that was fun. As time went on though, that feeling of fun went away and I began to get bored and then I discovered the extent to which trading is conducted in TF2. The sheer amount of people willing to split with real money just to get a few hats that people could admire is astounding. It's scary and I had to get in on it. If you are familiar with the game, you will know that items are dropped randomly and people will use these to craft metal and trade this for more rear or exclusive items others may be lucky enough to find. For the last 3 days of my TF2 ride, trading was the focus, the result? Nothing worth bragging about, the amount of time taken to firstly get enough metal to even buy an item worth a lot to someone is in the order of months, perhaps years. I know the game has been out for a long time, so people have had time to slowly accumulate stockpiles of items, but it is not this that bothers me, it's the fact that it took me 5 days to realise that I was addicted to a game, a game that is not really known for that, at least to my knowledge anyway. This leads me to wonder, how badly are some people addicted? Notorious games like WOW come to mind, often mocked for the level of dedication practised by its players. Now I am not judging those who put real life aside to play games, in my opinion there is no better escape, but the aches and pains I felt were real and at times disconcerting, yet I would find myself in the chair, mouse in hand. I eventually began to hate the game, it became dark and I found myself thinking what am I doing here, I am like the only person on the server, just stop playing, get up, and go outside. 5 days later I did, and it feels good to feel normal again, the sun is shining and my body feels 22 and not 100 years old. This may seem like an exaggeration, but I know there are a few people who have felt this and perhaps you guys and NAG could do a special on game addiction and ways of playing a lot while remaining healthy mentally and physically and perhaps a critique on the extent to which the game makers are perpetuating this, by increasing level caps and dripping out new items or charging money for those in a hurry to get them. Only a lighter note NAG is a great magazine, the greatest in fact.

In a hundred years they'll look back and either laugh at us for spending money on things that don't exist or praise us for starting the revolution. One day in the future (near) we will eventually be 'living' in our virtual worlds and of course trying to keep up with the neighbour's fancy new galaxy-class spaceship. Human nature never changes, it only runs deeper. Also, who's to say we're not living in that game right now? Who out there owns a pair of Levi's jeans because everyone was wearing them and secretly wants a better car than Bob down the road? Addiction is a problem so we'll look at doing an article. Me personally, I don't buy little hats and trinkets, I just play for status and rank – just as pathetic I suppose but hey, I'm happy. Ed.





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: Luka
Subject: Letter

This is short. November NAG issue, page 34, top right, "enough random stuff at rAge this year to keep the entire population of Yugoslavia** glowing with glee" - I resent that comment. I'm from there and it's not as small as you might think (or whoever wrote this rubbish), but their values and manners make South Africa look like the 3rd world country it is.

Wasn't 'Yugoslavia' dissolved in 2006? Sorry for your loss and long live South Africa. Ed.

From: Ashleigh
Subject: A little bit of Nonsense

I've always been a nerd. Never been ashamed of it, made excuses or abided by society and their connotations with "geeks". I have always found intelligence to be very sexy. However, throughout my youth I was always liked by the majority of my peers but was never seen as the "Exceptional grades-Formulating the second theorem to the Newton Laws" chick.

So recently, some newly made mates of mine that didn't know much more about me further than my incredible ability to talk just tons of bullshit, came over. They found some NAG magazines and just couldn't/wouldn't believe that they belonged to me. In their attempt to prove their very generalised, asshole theory true and "put me in my place" they proposed I do the simple task of drawing 'NAG' in anything relevant to NAG magazines and ended their full of sh1t and extensive gag reel with "... And we don't mean flowers and smiley faces, this isn't Home & Garden." I've attached what I presented to them and although I used very basic PC knowledge it made it that much more yummy to have nailed them with such simplicity!

Needless to say, they shut up that day and our present conversations as well as their ignorant perceptions have improved drastically and all over something so simple. :)

I hope you've enjoyed the read as much as I enjoyed revelling in the moment of that day. I personally think that it'd be awesome if you'd feature or mention something in an upcoming issue about this still thriving stereotype; and yes I do mean an 8x16 bubble nearing the end hosting some babble about a reality PK! I also would just like to say: Congratulations on your exemplary work and level of epic each and every issue! Your efforts are greatly appreciated by more than just "Four-eyed, plaid-wearing, un-defiled nerds allergic to everything but potatoes." ;)

I'm both sad to hear stereotypes are still alive and well and happy that you smashed them flat. I'm getting more and more girl gamers writing in to NAG each month. Keep it coming ladies. I've also been hearing strange rumour of people who play sport now also play games!? Ed.

From: Matthew
Subject: 3DS stall at rAge?

Great mag and keep up the good work. Have my babies. Blah... Not that the formalities are out of the way, I can get to my point/slash question. I recently bought myself a Nintendo 3DS during the festive season and I've been astounded at the lack of a 3DS community in South Africa. I take my 3DS with me everywhere, always on stand-by yet when I open it up I have no StreetPass notifications. Maybe I just live in the wrong part of S.A. and all the 3DS users live in the Karoo. Is there a 3DS community in SA? Are there places or events that 3DS users can go to swap Mii's and other StreetPass app data with other users in SA? And one last thing, will there be a Stall at rAge this year where 3DS users can get together and do the above mentioned swaps? If it is possible I think it would be a good idea because playing StreetQuest with hired level 1 kittens just sucks. Oh, and you really are doing a superb job with the magazine.

Thanks for the kind words. I don't know if Nintendo will be at rAge this year... There is a very good chance they will be considering thousands of people come to the show each year and rAge is the biggest technology event in the whole country and it's experiencing a major growth spurt. ;) So, bring your 3DS to rAge. We'll make sure we mention wherever we can that people must bring their portable devices and get their wireless on. Ed.

From: Grant
Subject: Overdue Letter

I have no clue why it has taken me so long to send these pictures through to NAG. I have been a very avid gamer (ever since the NES days), and been reading your magazine when it was NEW AGE GAMING (remember those days). I married a wonderful woman in 2010, who gave me one choice for the wedding. The cake! Oh yeah. So we found a baker who was willing to make the cake and we ended up with this awesome cake.

Best cake I have ever eaten. Everyone at NAG, you do a super job to release the best mag ever; it's the highlight of my month. I also hope my four month old daughter picks up on the greatest hobby on the planet.

I don't think you're supposed to eat the cake, Grant. Most people keep it forever until it gets so dirty and dusty they have to toss it out for health reasons. Regardless, I wish you and your lovely wife all the best. Keep on gaming

Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"I know you're on a deadline so I'll make this quick. How did you become editor (take your time)"
– No name

"Is it possible that I just saw the girl from the rAge the quest video buying an Arkham city sweater (the one with cat woman on it) at Musica? I wanted to ask her but if I was wrong I'd look weird. LOL"
– Zaheer

"The only reason why we are friends is because of the fact that we both play rugby or else he would have killed me long ago in one of his roidrages."
– Luca

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.



Grant Webster, *Mario* cake

and when your daughter is old enough to read, get her a NAG subscription. Ed.

From: Calvin
Subject: Late reviews

Look, don't get me wrong, I'm a fan of your magazine. I buy it every month, usually on the day of release, and typically finish it in one sitting (and yes, I do actually read everything). The artwork is great, especially the last few covers (kudos to whomever is designing them, they've been spectacular), the writers are smart, knowledgeable and eloquent (mostly…), and the internal layout is crisp, clean and neatly designed (unlike some other gaming magazines which are so cluttered and noisy you can't hear yourself read).

My only problem is with the game reviews themselves. I'm starting to wonder what the point of including them at all is. Let's use Skyrim as an example, shall we? Skyrim was (famously) released on 11.11.11. I've just finished reading the December edition and there's no Skyrim review, which means that it will be in the January 2012 edition, which hits the shelves on the last Friday of December. This means that your review of one of the biggest games of the year will be published a full month and a half after the release of the game.

What's the point?

I understand what the point of a review is, (to review something is to make a careful examination of a subject {book, film, game etc.} in order to formulate and state a judgment of said subject, usually for the benefit of a consumer contemplating a purchase), but I just don't see the point of your reviews. They just seem like such a waste of effort.

Who are they for?

I'd postulate that the vast majority of the people who were curious about, or interested in, Skyrim would have bought it, played it, and if not finished it, at least put in dozens upon dozens of hours of playtime. All of them would have formulated their own opinions on the game's merits and shortcomings by the time your review comes out. This means that the only reason for the majority of your buyers to actually read your Skyrim review would be so they can say "Yup, that's pretty much what I thought" or "No, that's not how it was for me at all" only a tiny minority will read the review and go "Hmm, maybe I should check out this here game".

There must be a way for you to get the reviews out on, or as close as possible to, the release date. I understand the deadlines you work under, and the lead-time needed to get the magazine to print, but surely you have access to preview builds or unfinished versions of the games you review. Can't you write a review using these, with a disclaimer that the review is based on an unfinished version, possibly with a follow-up mini-review outlining the changes and improvements since you last played the game in its pre-release form?

If you can't find a way to get the reviews out when the games come out maybe you should eliminate them entirely from the magazine and save that space for previews, interviews, opinion pieces and retrospectives. Maybe you should only publish game reviews on your website. This way you won't be beholden to print deadlines and you can get them up as soon as they're ready. I know the reviews are available online before the magazine is published, but maybe that's the only place they should be available.

Barring a little drama and exaggeration, nothing you say is wrong. I say exaggeration because you're not the majority of the people reading the magazine. Being able to buy all the latest games, be plugged into the Internet all day, get NAG and have a PC, Xbox and PS3 is not the picture of the typical gamer. I know I'm painting an extreme picture here but it's just to make a point. Everyone that reads NAG gets something different out of it: news, previews, reviews, hardware, humour and opinions and whatever and etc. When we do surveys in NAG, among the positives are our reviews including a large percentage of readers asking for more review space. It's a careful balance that aims to keep everyone happy. An example, I'm a movie lover and I buy a particular movie magazine for exactly the same reasons I'd buy a gaming magazine. In there I look for news, upcoming movies and I always read the reviews for some of the reasons you pointed out. The bottom line is I can't tell you how many times I've read a review of a movie I haven't seen and then gone to watch it. The system works and I trust in it. Also, our policy is not to review unfinished products because it's dangerous recommending things that aren't final. Thanks for the support and I do hear you, Ed.

From: Robert
Subject: Choices

I am a father for the second time and I really have useful advice for younger gamers and was thinking about writing in more often to give advice to the youngsters. Good idea, "my darling the little one is crying can you please clean the nappy this round and I promise I will do the next". Bad idea, "babe the little one has a dirty nappy, sort him out I'm gaming." With chicks wording is the key to having kids and still being able to game.

Also handy hints on how to game and take care of kids:

KFC (kangaroo father care) take of shirt, take off kids shirt (leave nappy on) put him skin on skin contact and wrap him to you. Sit back and start gaming, baby will be happy, wife will be happy and you will be gaming

While doing KFC and you need transport use a tank rather than a LAV as tank rounds have a lower dB rating and will not wake the baby, the 30 mm rounds in LAVs make a higher pitch and you will notice they start to squirm. I have tried every avenue to keep gaming while being a stellar dad, some work, some don't. I am also blessed as my wife is a gamer too so she understands.

I wonder if the dB rating of different weapons and keeping baby quiet while gaming will ever show up in a parenting book one day. Ed.

On the Forums

Why won't the chickens breed? We can assist, but bring your own cooler box. Most are welcome: http://www.nag.co.za/forums/

Question: Is it time for the next generation of consoles?

Tigman_1: No! My wallet is going to burst into flames if I have to buy another console. (Even though I don't own a console. :/)

Gammaray: No. There is no new omgmusthav!1 technology that new consoles need now imo.

Toxxyc: Nope. Something like the PS3 features exactly what is currently being sold in the mainstream visual department anyhow (Blu-ray, 1080p, etc.).

CyniKill: No. Next-gen needs to be exactly that: next generation. There isn't any new technology that raises the bar yet.

echo: Nope, too much potential still left in this generation. Master that and you can move on.

Shaderow: No, we have a lot of juice left in our machines and I still need to buy a PS3 to experience inFamous before it vanishes.

ZoRPA: Negative. I am still happy with what we have now. Also, the library of games available for current consoles is massive. No need to start all over again.

Fredder: Nope, rather innovate on and improve the existing interfaces - stuff like full blown web-browsing & downloading should be standard on all consoles by now.

D3zmodos: No, I'd think that it will only be time for a new generation of consoles when the games being developed for the current generation are consistently being restrained by the hardware on which they need to function to a noticeable level when compared to the same/similar games on PC.

CaViE: With the PC eleven generations ahead, the time is fast coming. But current generation console gaming can still hold out for a while.

charly: Not Yet, The PS3 is only just beginning to reach its Maximum Potential.

Chevron: Hell yes. Current gen consoles are 6-7 years old. Where's my Uncharted in 1080p? Where's my load times that can be measured in milliseconds?

Changsta 187: Nada. We just recently had a beating from motion sensing technology for this generation, why bring in the next generation so soon?

Xperimance: We have so many potentially good games coming out this year so what's the point of having next-gen consoles coming out soon?

DaveSlab: Hope not, just got an Xbox 360 for Christmas! So far all the new games look good and I can't wait for the games releasing this year!

5h@un13: Here's the thing about new consoles: they come with new, expensive gimmicks, and we don't need any more of them anytime soon.

The Wolf: It certainly depends on your point of view. Current generation consoles are still great and has a lot of potential. Especially the PlayStation 3. Personally I don't think it's time, but who knows? Maybe the next generation of consoles will wash our dishes while we are playing "Uncharted 5: Drake's Retirement Party Gone Horribly Wrong".

Jerkydarkstar: Yes. Would you play games on a 6 year old pc?

Cranky: Yes. As a pc gamer we are being held back by developers making due with "OLD " tech to help the consoles keep up and we are stuck with sh1tty console ports. Get a new console so we can get better looking games please. :D

Book by its cover



This might come as somewhat of a shock to many, but I am a terrible person. I mean a really, very totally terrible person with a tendency to pigeonhole people – grossly unfair as it may be. In my defence, however, I think this mostly happens subconsciously as it only came to light after an attitude adjusting encounter with a bloke at gym. Oh yes I, uh, go to gym as regularly as I can; I think it has to do with the fact that I spend about nine hours a day behind a desk and then feel the need to do something physical before I spend the evening with a controller in my hand. Anyway, I kind of get in there, keep my head down, try not to make eye-contact with the people who could bench-press me with one arm, and get out as soon as I feel I've released enough endorphins to counteract my indolent daytime activities – or whatever the opposite of "activities" is.

The fact that I'm partaking in this decidedly un-gamerish activity is something I offset by wearing those crappy video game T-shirts I've accumulated via "pre-order bonuses" and gaming conventions. So in order to surreptitiously fly the gamer flag amongst the creatine-imbibing masses, I don whichever geeky thread is sitting at the top of the pile before commencing to "klap mad gym, boet". It's not like anyone in there would even recognise a gaming t-shirt anyway.

"It was kind of like deer-in-the-headlights stuff: my seemingly covert gamer cover had been blown by someone who I would have considered to be the most unlikely observer – a gym instructor. "

And so, a few weeks back, I walked into gym wearing a t-shirt with a massive *Halo: Reach* logo on it. That's when it happened: one of the instructors stopped whatever it was he was doing with an intimidating, large stack of weights and asked me whether I was into video games. At first I was a little dumbstruck – something he must have realised because he immediately followed up the question with another, this time asking me whether I played *Reach* online. It was kind of like deer-in-the-headlights stuff: my seemingly covert gamer cover had been blown by someone who I would have considered to be the most unlikely observer – a gym instructor. Not in a million years would I have believed a "jock" (a moniker he'd readily prescribed to himself I might add) would be the one to spot my game-referencing apparel. I now realise that preconception was pretty stupid.

After swapping favourite game titles and opinions on the merits of owning multiple platforms, he must have seen my badly hidden disbelief at the exchange because he said, "So many people think all of us instructors are just jocks." I had done exactly that. The Kilimanjaro-sized irony of this occurrence was not lost on me, although it took a few hours before it lolled into my consciousness to point out what a monumental ass-hat I'd been. Not so long ago it had been me fighting against the misconception that gamers could be nothing more than socially awkward nerds, and yet here I was believing a jock could be nothing more than a gym-obsessed beefcake. I now consider my attitude thoroughly adjusted and I am completely ashamed of myself.

It turns out the group of instructors are *NAG* readers, so on the off-chance of them seeing this, I apologise: prior to this experience I'd had you pigeonholed as jocks, although I hope I'd at least had the courtesy to not let that on. Hope to catch you all on Xbox LIVE soon. [*I say you should still-bench press him with one arm, gym instructors, Ed*]

Miklós Szecsei

Rebinding Isaac



True story: *The Binding of Isaac* may have accidentally managed to worm its way onto a NAG staffer's "most played games of 2011" list. Don't judge him/her – it's a damn fine game packed with so much stuff to unlock and such an infuriatingly addictive set of mechanics that this particular person couldn't stop playing. The game already grew fairly substantially with last year's Halloween update – and now it's getting a full expansion.

The expansion is dubbed *The Wrath of the Lamb* and will cost just $3 on Steam. According to creator Edmund McMillen, it'll add about 50% new content and should arrive sometime within "the next 2-4 months." Your $3 gets you over 70 new items to find, unlock and use in your deranged quest, including a new item category called trinkets, which will provide passive bonuses. There'll be a new playable character, as well as the game's final boss (for real this time). Basically, "more of everything" is what they're going for here, including more bosses, enemies and new mechanics. McMillen says that, once this expansion is done, nothing else can be done with the game, and he'll let it lie.

In other exciting *Binding of Isaac* news, it seems McMillen is attempting to port the game to the 3DS – which seems like a perfect platform for this arcade-style roguelike. There's no solid news regarding this 3DS version yet, but McMillen did let loose a few choice words about it:

"The only news I have on the 3DS is that it seems possible but it's still going through higher ups to make sure there won't be an issue with the 'religious' aspect." With regards to the expansion, McMillen says: "If we land the 3DS port, it will include the expansion for sure." Even if the 3DS version doesn't work out, there are apparently other avenues to explore. "If we don't land the 3DS, the publisher I'm talking to has expressed interest in other digital platforms and is currently contacting them as well about the port."

Microsoft and Sony to reveal their next consoles at E3 2012?

Are you sitting down? Got your "Rumour Reading Glasses" on? Gaming industry website MCV reported that the next Xbox as well as the PlayStation 4 will be revealed at this year's E3. Sadly, a mere week after MCV's speculation, Sony stepped up to the microphone and said, "Nuh-uh!" The Japanese console manufacturer affectively squished MCV's rumour with Sony's Kaz Hirai pointing out, "we are not making any announcements at E3. I've always said a 10-year life cycle for PS3, and there is no reason to go away from that."

So, scratch the PlayStation 4 from E3 2012 then, but what about Microsoft's Xbox 360 successor? MCV claims to have confirmation of the next Xbox reveal via third-party publishing sources. Furthermore, it's believed that Microsoft is deliberately planning to reveal their next console so as to dampen Nintendo's supposed E3 2012 announcement of a concrete release dates for the Wii U.

Interestingly, Microsoft has yet to follow Sony's lead in denying MCV's rumour about E3 2012 reveals. Read into that as much as you'd like – either way, this year's E3 is shaping up to be pretty exciting.

Yay, another zombie game...

...this time it's from Naughty Dog



The *Uncharted* series has been wrapped up with *Uncharted 3*; now it's just the western release of *Golden Abyss* on the PS Vita and whatever other bits and pieces developer Naughty Dog is expected to deliver. What that means is the studio needs a new big project, and with that, we present you with *The Last of Us*, which, as it turns out, has been under development by a secret team of over 80 developers in the studio for the last two years.

Set at some point in the near future, *The Last of Us* tells the story of an older man named Joel (the player character) and a young girl named Ellie. The two struggle together to survive in a world in which humanity has been all but wiped out by a deadly fungus inspired by the *Cordyceps* parasitic fungus that infects insects and drives them to what looks like madness until they explode in a shower of spores. Tell that to the next person who tries to get you to eat mushrooms.

If it sounds like a zombie game, that's because it is. The two will have to do all the zombie game things you're no-doubt accustomed to by now: scavenging for supplies, hiding, shooting zombies and doing their darndest to survive in numerous cities across the US, but the in-engine trailer shows a pace and narrative that sounds more like the almost sedate yet dangerous world in Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic book (and movie, if you're lazy) *The Road* than anything like *Left 4 Dead* or *Dead Rising*.

The game will be played from a 3rd-person perspective, but not much else is known about the gameplay. Will it be open world, linear or a mix of both? Are Joel and Emmie immune to the fungus? Will there be multiple types of infected, or even boss infected? What caused this catastrophe? There are many questions, but not many answers. The only other details we can confirm for now is that *The Last of Us* will be for PS3 only, and that Naughty is currently aiming for an end-2012 / early-2013 release date.



Avian addiction

// **This is ridiculous. Rovio's insanely popular, time-killing mobile bird-tosser, *Angry Birds*, was downloaded 6.5 million times on Christmas Day last year. This number includes downloads of both the free and paid versions of the game, and is a combination of *Angry Birds*, *Angry Birds Seasons* and *Angry Birds Rio*. It's been pointed out that those 6.5 million downloads are nearly equivalent to the estimated number of smartphone activations that happened over Christmas.**

Naturally, Rovio are ecstatic. "We're really excited to have such a massive number of new people get acquainted with *Angry Birds* over the holidays – we have exciting new releases lined up for 2012, and can't wait to introduce them to the public," said Rovio's Ville Heijari.

// **Social network-based games might not appeal to everyone, but there's no denying how big the industry is. EA's no fool about this, either, and has employed the Germany-based EA Phenomic to develop *Command & Conquer: Tiberium Alliances*. If you're interested in this simplified, global-domination version of *C&C*, head over to alliances.commandandconquer.com**



Achievement not unlocked



Most of the time these columns are based on things I've read or experienced that *gasp* I have an opinion on! Given the nature of my job, that's mostly game and sometimes tech and social networking related.

So, on that note, I recently read an article by Stephen Totilo about Gamerscore and the fact that, as opposed to the rather hubristic nature of trophies and achievements, *Super Mario 3D Land* instead applauds you for a job well done.

I'm not going to expand too much on his discussion but it got me thinking. People often ask me what my Gamerscore is. Because that of course is the only way I can prove I am a true, 'hardcore' gamer. (That's sarcasm. Just in case you missed it). Contrary to popular belief what it in fact proves is that I play on an Xbox (I also own a PS3 and a PC), that I try out many games even if it's for five minutes (which I do) and that I care about these things (which I don't).

> **"The fact that you can get achievements simply for completing the most basic tasks, immediately makes them less valid as indications of how 'hardcore' a gamer you are. "**

Totilo remarks that, "I'm a video game reporter. I get lots of free video games. I pop many of them into my Xbox 360 to try them out. Achievements are earned. Points are tallied, inflating my own Gamerscore into a number unequal to my actual passion for good video games." (*Kotaku* 17/11/2011)

Many people don't understand the nature of a game reporter's job. They think we just sit around and play games all day. There's actually a miniscule element of truth in that, but it's really not as glamorous as it all sounds. We sometimes play games that are really bad. And whilst we might not play those games for hours on end, they do ultimately land up on our Gamerscores.

I disagree strongly with the fact that my Gamerscore and collecting achievements or trophies or whatever the various platforms call them, is what validates me as a gamer.

Yes, I am in the fortunate position to be able to have access to a variety of games that I don't have to save up for and hope that I haven't wasted my money. It doesn't make my opinion any less valid however when I say to the trolls who claim that I'm not a gamer that I don't know my Gamerscore.

I don't play and enjoy every single genre of game and neither do you. Nevertheless I'll try anything once. On occasion the game is so good it even changes my mind.

I play games because I love playing games. I play games for the enjoyment of exploring a world. I play games for an opportunity for some friendly competition with some friends. I play games to experience the narrative. I play games to zone out when I'm tired and need to relax. I play games when I want to vent some frustration after a hard day.

The fact that you can get achievements simply for completing the most basic tasks, immediately makes them less valid as indications of how "hardcore" a gamer you are. I noticed whilst playing Batman that I was awarded a trophy for becoming *Batman*. Yes, well done. You became the character around which the game is based.

I have NO idea what my Gamerscore is. Not even vaguely. I don't know how many trophies I have collected. And I honestly do not care.

Achievement not unlocked. Do not pass GO. Do not collect 1 miiiiiiiillion dollars!

Pippa Tshabalala

Bethesda and Interplay settle their differences



Wow. This legal battle between Bethesda and Interplay over the *Fallout* MMO has been shambling onwards for so long that it's difficult to tell if anyone even gives a cap anymore. Still, according to... well, all of the Internet really, a settlement has been reached between the two parties, and Bethesda basically walks away with all the best toys.

First, a brief history lesson. Way back when the original owners of the *Fallout* brand, Interplay, sold the license to *Elder Scrolls* developer Bethesda, Interplay managed to retain the rights to develop a *Fallout* MMO, so long as they started work on it within a certain timeframe and with a certain budget raised ($30 million, to be precise) to finance the project. Bethesda eventually claimed that these conditions had not been met, and got to work trying to regain the rights to the MMO and stop Interplay from making it.

Supposedly there was a hearing back in December, and *Duck and Cover* reported that resulting court documents and anonymous sources revealed that both parties had agreed to finally put a stop to the legal back and forth and reach a settlement. A short while thereafter, the exact details were released, and this is what we now know: Interplay will not be creating *Fallout Online*, because the license to create a *Fallout* MMO now belongs to Bethesda. Meanwhile, Bethesda owners ZeniMax are required to pay a sizable fee of $2 million to Interplay. Interplay are also free to continue selling *Fallout*, *Fallout 2* and *Fallout Tactics* until December 31st, 2013, at which time Bethesda gains sole rights to all of the games. Basically, Bethesda now controls everything *Fallout*. At present, it's not clear if they'll use their newfound MMO rights to actually make a *Fallout* MMO. All we know for sure is that we'll hopefully never have to write about this legal fiasco ever again.

Back to basics

The *Tony Hawk* series seems to have all but faded into obscurity, so what better way to revive it than by re-releasing all the good content from the earlier games in the series with updated visuals? *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD* will be more than a mere port, but will be an HD amalgamation of the first two games in the series. It will also return to the gameplay of the first two games, so that means your floor-scratching *Tony Hawk: Ride* accessory will be useless here. Activision is calling this a reboot of the franchise, and will be making it available as a downloadable title only for PSN and XBLA. Currently, the only confirmed levels are Woodland Hills, School and Downhill Jam from the first *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* (although no-doubt more will be available), and Tony Hawk, Riley Hawk and Nyjah Huston as playable characters.



Firaxis joins in the fray



XCOM – the upcoming first-person shooter from 2K Marin – is now not the only title heading our way to bring this humble franchise into the future. Firaxis Games (the studio behind the *Civilization* series) recently announced that they too are working on a game entitled *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*.

This is the *X-COM* title that fans of the series have been waiting for, and will be true to the franchise's gameplay mechanics by combining a real-time global map with turn-based engagements. Players will be able to build and upgrade bases, research alien technology, customise and level-up their squad members and direct transport ships called Skyrangers to combat zones.

The game won't be a simple remake of any of the original titles, however. Firaxis is keen to eliminate the "tedium and uninteresting mechanics" while keeping the gameplay challenging and recognisable. And, unlike 2K Marin's FPS, *Enemy Unknown* will take place in the middle of an alien invasion on Earth, rather than the first attacks experienced in the '50s. With that said, we expect no correlation between the two titles, or any form of canon that either will respect from the other teams. Both games should be considered entirely separate entities.

There is currently no confirmed release date but rumours say that it'll be out before 2K's XCOM. As for release platforms, we can't promise anything, but the screenshots include Xbox 360 "Y" and "X" icons, so take that however you will.

In the darkest hour

We still have no idea what, if anything, has happened to the true sequel (or, "next season") to *Alan Wake*, but Remedy seems to think that a standalone spinoff is enough to keep us entertained while we wait, and we're inclined to agree.

Alan Wake's American Nightmare is due for release any day now (it may even be available by time you read this) for XBLA only. The game features Mr. Wake who is trapped somewhere in Arizona. He's also caught in one of his *Night Springs* episodes, in the middle of a battle between light and dark, and his mind is caught between a padded cell and reality. Pretty standard fair, really.

PC-only owners who have yet to taste the sweet horror/action-survival that is the first *Alan Wake* will finally be able to do so. Remedy Entertainment has again estimated a release date for the PC version, which will include both *The Signal* and *The Writer* DLC: mid-2012.

XBOX LIVE

Call of Duty wins top most played XBL games for 2011

// The *Call of Duty* franchise; you might have heard of it. Xbox 360 gamers certainly have because Xbox LIVE's Major Nelson just released a list of the top twenty games played on Microsoft's console throughout 2011. Try to act surprised: taking the top three positions were various iterations of the Activision FPS franchise with *Black Ops* coming first followed by *Modern Warfare 3* and *Modern Warfare 2* scooping second and third place respectively.

If three FPS titles in the top spots weren't enough, positions four and five were held by further shooter franchises with *Halo: Reach* beating *Battlefield 3* for fourth place. So much for EA's "*COD* killer" then.

It's not all about multiplayer however as Bethesda's *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* came in at six; it was the only game in the top 20, however, that doesn't feature any multiplayer. Oddly enough some old favourites managed to creep their way onto the list, with the likes of *Halo 3*, *GTA IV* and *Red Dead Redemption* all taking spots on the top 20 as well.



Keep games fit



Flabby game developers are the worst. Seriously. Not the physical build bit, of course, since that's really none of my business. They can spend their entire lives wallowing in a basement eating deep-fried dassie corpses for all I care. But if, between rodent mouthfuls, they decide to crank out a bloated, superfluous mass of a game with no regard for the entertainment diet of a healthy and active player base ... well, screw them. They just aren't treating their audience properly.

I call a game "bloated" when it's delivered with a whole bunch of extra content that adds little to the experience beyond forced longevity. They're those inane titles which attempt to push the "countless hours of fun" ticket by forcing you to kill boars in a forest for six hours after doing something interesting for approximately two minutes. They're those "100+ puzzling levels of enjoyment" with only half a dozen well-considered experiences among the lot of 'em.

> **"I call a game "bloated" when it's delivered with a whole bunch of extra content that adds little to the experience beyond forced longevity. "**

When presented with a choice between creating a lean, short, thoroughly enjoyable experience and a tepid magnum opus that's diluted its fun content to homeopathic levels, they're keener to appeal to people who apparently have nothing better to do than buy electronic time sinks.

Now, I enjoy throwing my life into games just as much as the next socially maladjusted wordsmith, but I don't do this because my spare time is somehow a gaping, meaningless void that needs to be filled with mindless button-mashing and occasional shouts of FUS RO DAH at my cat (though the latter IS amazingly fun). If I set aside some of my ever-so-precious time to sit down and play something, I expect it to cram as much reward as possible into every moment and not bog me down with throwaway crap.

Although every developer can be guilty of this problem on some level, beginners in particular often fall into the "more is better" trap when it comes to making a fun experience – as if throwing stuff at a wall and seeing what sticks is really the best way to entertain an audience. It's hard to blame people for this thinking, especially in an era where players whine extensively about games being too short, or shipped without multiplayer mode, or somehow lacking one hundred completely unnecessary timewasters (I may never see my character's head again after he puts on his first helmet, but I'll be damned if I'm not going to be able to spend five minutes adjusting his eyebrow colour).

If you ever make something of your own, however, understand that there will always be a pruning process. There are too many games in existence today. If people aren't hooked in the first five minutes, they're not going to keep playing. And any bloat after that is just cheeky and disrespectful. It may sound tempting to try make something that people will play forever, but try starting with just ten minutes. Less really is more, especially if you're an indie developer cast afloat in a sea of other aspiring hopefuls. If you're struggling to get anywhere with your passion, drop the MMO in progress and make something slimmer and fitter.

Short-term passion is, after all, superior to long-term tedium.

Rodain Joubert

Half-Life fans grow impatient, commence "Operation Crowbar"

If you've been keeping an eye on NAG Online over the last two months or so, then you'll know that *Half-Life 3* or *Half-Life 2 Episode 3* or whatever *Half-Life* iteration Valve is probably working on, has been featuring a lot in the news. There have been rumours whizzing about that all seem to stem from a Valve employee being spotted wearing a *Half-Life 3* T-shirt, as well as eager fans dissecting Valve's Spike TV Video Game Award videos. A few weeks ago Valve finally broke the silence and told everyone to get a grip – the *Half-Life* rumours were nothing more than fans trolling fans.

That, however, seems to have not been enough for a group of *serious Half-Life* fans. This group has grown tired of waiting for Valve to talk about Gordon Freeman's next outing and so they've initiated "Operation Crowbar" via the official Steam Forums. Operation Crowbar is simple, albeit a little insane and slightly creepy: they're ordering actual, real, proper crowbars online and having them delivered to Valve HQ. They intend to continue sending Valve real crowbars until "Valve is up to their nipples in crowbars."

The group has picked a particular crowbar on Amazon, which sells for $7. Realising that not all fans are willing to fork out $7 for the crowbar (and probably more for delivery!) they've pointed the more frugal types to Valve's Facebook page to post pictures of crowbars on the developer's wall. If you head over to **facebook.com/valve** the chances are you'll find a bunch of pictures of crowbars – unless Valve's grown tired of the fan shenanigans and deleted all of the posts.

Operation Crowbar aims to continue sending Valve crowbars (both physical and digital) until such time as the developer breaks its silence regarding the next *Half-Life*. Man, gamers can be really loopy. Creative, but totally damn loopy.

14 days later



Another developer that's just wrapped up their biggest franchise, Epic Games, has decided to step outside of its comfort zone. The studio is currently working on *Fortnite*, a horde defence game that draws inspiration from *Team Fortress 2* and, oddly enough, *Minecraft*.

Epic has been tight-lipped about the confirmed details, but what we can gather so far is that it will be a team-oriented game with a day/night cycle in which players break down city structures, gather building materials and build up their defences during the day, and defend themselves against waves of enemies in the night. According to lead designer Lee Perry, there's a good chance that the game will include "weapon crafting/traps, level system, underground exploration, boss fights, team survival mode," and "rare loot," all of which sound like fantastic elements to include in a game like this.

The *Minecraft*-inspired gameplay will come in the form of free-form building, but won't be quite as limitless as Mojang's title. Perry described *Fortnite*'s building system as "not scripted or just boarding up existing structures," and it will focus specifically on building structures.

Fortnite is currently in development and no platforms or release window have been pinpointed just yet. The company is still searching for a publisher but we can't imagine that Microsoft isn't at least a little bit interested, given the two companies' history together.

Kid doesn't say a word. Just stands there in quiet appreciation



Beautifully affecting (and affectingly beautiful) action-RPG *Bastion* was easily one of last year's best games. We may not have reviewed it, but we'll just tell you right here: you should own it, because it's fantastic. Greg Kasavin of developer Supergiant Games had many excited words to say to *Eurogamer* regarding the studio's future, as well as letting us all know that their excellent debut title has now sold more than half a million copies.

"Our stance around what we want to do in the future hasn't changed in light of *Bastion*'s success," said Kasavin. "Thankfully *Bastion* has performed well enough to give us the resources to create another game on our own terms, meaning we can self-fund the project and take the time we need to get it right." Apparently for this new game, the "core team" will remain the same.

"We always intended for *Bastion* to be a standalone game though we did aim to create a rich world for it that could potentially support other stories."

"I don't know if we'll ever go back to the world of that game, though if we do it will be at a time when the team wants to do that more than anything else. It can't just be a financially motivated decision because that's not how *Bastion* was created in the first place."

Steam sales increase 100% for seventh year in a row

So PC gaming is "very obviously dead" – don't ever forget that. The fact that for seven years now, Valve's digital shopfront has doubled its sales revenue indicates that the platform where gaming started is going nowhere. A few weeks ago, during those obscenely attractive Christmas specials Steam was running, there were more than 5 *million* users online at once, which set a new record for the digital sales platform.

In total there are more than 40 million registered users making use of Steam, which kind of explains why the platform had to transmit more than 780 petabytes (a petabyte is 1,000 terabytes) of data during 2011.

Valve bossman Gabe Newell has further plans for Steam, which include getting the platform into your lounge area (which it is partially already thanks to Steamworks on the PlayStation 3). The company is currently looking forward to "the launch of Big Picture UI mode, which will allow gamers to experience Steam on large displays and in more rooms of the house."

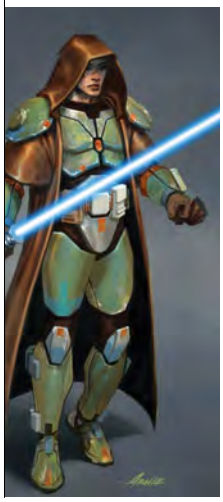
How long do you think it'll be before Sony ships their TVs with Steam software built in already?

Star Wars: The Old Republic breaks a Guinness World Record

// EA and BioWare's newest money printer, *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, has claimed a Guinness World Record. The MMORPG officially holds the record for "Largest Entertainment Voice Over Project" ever produced. This is thanks to the game's more than 200,000 lines of recorded dialogue.

One of the oft-repeated bullet points for the MMO's features prior to its December 2011 launch was how every line of dialogue would be voiced – a first for an online game. This was made possible thanks to several hundred voice actors performing the 200,000 lines. BioWare's decision to make true on this feature has paid off in the form of shiny Guinness World Record certificates, which were presented to BioWare co-founders Dr. Ray Muzyka and Dr. Greg Zeschuk at the game's official midnight launch party in New York.

To put this into perspective, there isn't a feature length movie on the planet that features this many lines of dialogue.





Discourse: lag switches



So I found out about the lag switch. Once you know about lag switches you think *everyone* is using one.

Simply put, a lag switch is a little device you buy or build. You attach it to your network between your PC/360 and your router/modem. When you activate the Lag Switch it cuts off your upstream for a short while based on a timer. Modern lag switches even come with a ring you can wear on your finger to trigger the lag. When used during an online multiplayer game the lag switch is used to cheat. The person using it appears frozen to opponents when in fact they're still playing locally. When the timer ends the cheater's local data resynchronizes with the online server in a burst. So from their point of view they were able to run around the corner and shoot you easily. From your point of view they instantly teleported to right in front of you and shot you.

Most of the time this method of cheating is undetectable. From the point of view of the server, the cheater just had a little bit of lag. From a programming perspective, there is little one can do about it. Games *could* tighten the tolerances on lag detection and kick those that lag too often. But the tighter that gets the more false positives you'll have. Legitimate players with random lag spikes would find themselves disconnected from the server. Servers could be programmed to look at a player's lagspike history to detect cheaters, but I've yet to see a single online game implement such a system. At the rate things are going, it may not be long before we see a developer try such a method.

> **"It makes me miss the LAN Party culture. At a LAN it is much easier to figure out if someone is cheating. "**

According to Google, before 2008 there were no searches for "lag switch". Since then, searches for the term have increased steadily. Clearly a lot of people either want to know what they are or how to build one. Most searches for "lag switch" come from the United Kingdom, with the United States second. There are hundreds of videos on YouTube showing how to make a lag switch. There are hundreds of companies online that sell lag switches.

And there's the psychosomatic element that emerges once you know about lag switches. Someone teleporting all over the place in *Modern Warfare 3* and killing you as a result. You totally want to believe that bastard is cheating. Thanks to lag switches, it's difficult to presume someone innocent by default.

It makes me miss the LAN party culture. At a LAN it is much easier to figure out if someone is cheating. And to then exact revenge by throwing their computer out of the room.

Cheating has always been a problem in online gaming. Hacks that let people see through walls, always know your location, give them god mode, etc. The lag switch is just one of many technologies that cheaters can use.

As to why people cheat, that's a college-level thesis all its own. Some people think winning is just *that* important. Such people are, of course, broken and pity-able automatons. Some people considering cheating part of the game itself. They think you're the inferior player if you're not using all the tools available and deserve to lose. Such people are, of course, just self-righteous assholes.

Is the cheater a part of life, a natural symptom of any complex enough system?

Miktar Dracon

Welcome back, general



During last year's Video Game Awards, EA finally put an end to the rumours of *Command & Conquer: Generals 2* by confirming its existence with a teaser trailer. While the game has long been expected, few could have guessed the rest of the details.

The project will be developed by BioWare, but before you get too excited, bear in mind that this company is one of the largest in EA's stables, and actually consists of six different studios. Among those studios is BioWare Victory (which in itself is split over three locations: Austin, Los Angeles and Shanghai), formally known as Victory Games, which will be the team responsible for the game's development. The studio was formed in 2010 and has been working on *Generals 2* since then, as far as we can tell.

The game will use EA's Frostbite 2 engine, so expect a lot of destruction, physics-driven encounters and massive battlefields (heh). The presence of three factions has been confirmed (we're fairly certain that the GLA and US are in, and China is likely to return), with no word on subdivisions among them, but EA claims that a long line of DLC will be released after the game's launch that will include new factions, maps and campaigns. Pay only for those generals that you want to play? Sounds like a fair deal, as long as they're balanced.

Other than those drops of information, little else is solid than a release year – 2013. According to Victory's MD, John Van Caneghem (formally of Trion Worlds), the game will see "a return to the roots of *C&C* gameplay," complete with all the good stuff – "bases, resources and giant armies" – that made the series what it was until *C&C4* popped in and sort-of turned everything on its head.

LEGO Batman 2 wants your attention, please

A short while ago it was leaked that *LEGO Batman 2* is a thing that might eventually exist, but not much else was revealed at the time. We've now got a few more things to tell you about the upcoming title, which has now been officially announced as a thing that will definitely eventually exist.

The full name of it is *LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes* and, as that oddly grand title implies, will feature more DC superheroes than just the titular hero. In addition to Batchap and sidekick Robin, you'll bash bricks with such characters as Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and the obligatory bunch of Justice League types, as well as the expected list of DC super villains like Lex Luthor and the Joker. Other stuff to get excited about involves Batman's Power Suit, Robin's Hazard Cannon, the Batwing and the Batmobile. It's coming to PC, 360, PS3, Wii, 3DS, DS and PS Vita and will be available later this year. Oh, and if you're wondering what it is that made this sequel possible: 11 million copies of the original *LEGO Batman: The Video Game* sold. That's how.



The 3DS: it's in the clear



Apparently Nintendo's 3DS (and, by extension – somehow – Nintendo themselves) isn't about to crash and burn in a glorious blaze, as so many naysayers would have you believe. A bunch of industry analysts, including Michael Pachter and Jesse Divnich, believe that the 3DS' rough patch is over, and that its bumpy beginnings will soon give way to money and rainbows.

"It's very successful, but ran into a headwind given its relatively high price – which I incorrectly thought was the right price – and lack of third party software support," said Captain Pachter. "Now that we are seeing more first-party titles at a lower price point, sales have increased. It's definitely turned the corner. I was surprised that it sold so few at the $249 price point, and its sales to date are exactly what I originally forecast at that price."

Mr Divnich then added to Pachter's words, saying this: "With the strong rebound in 3DS sales, I think Nintendo is clear of the woods for now. Going forward, however, we will closely be paying attention to software attach rates. Selling hardware is great, but it is only the first step. The health of any hardware is directly correlated to the amount of software consumers buy."

Piers Harding-Rolls of *Screen Digest* said that in 2012, Nintendo needs to make serious competitive moves and must not grow too complacent if they want to remain in such a strong position.

Guild Wars 2 will mesmerise you



Guild Wars 2 should be released, er... sometime this year, we hope, but to keep you busy until such a time, ArenaNet have confirmed the final character class in the game – the Mesmer.

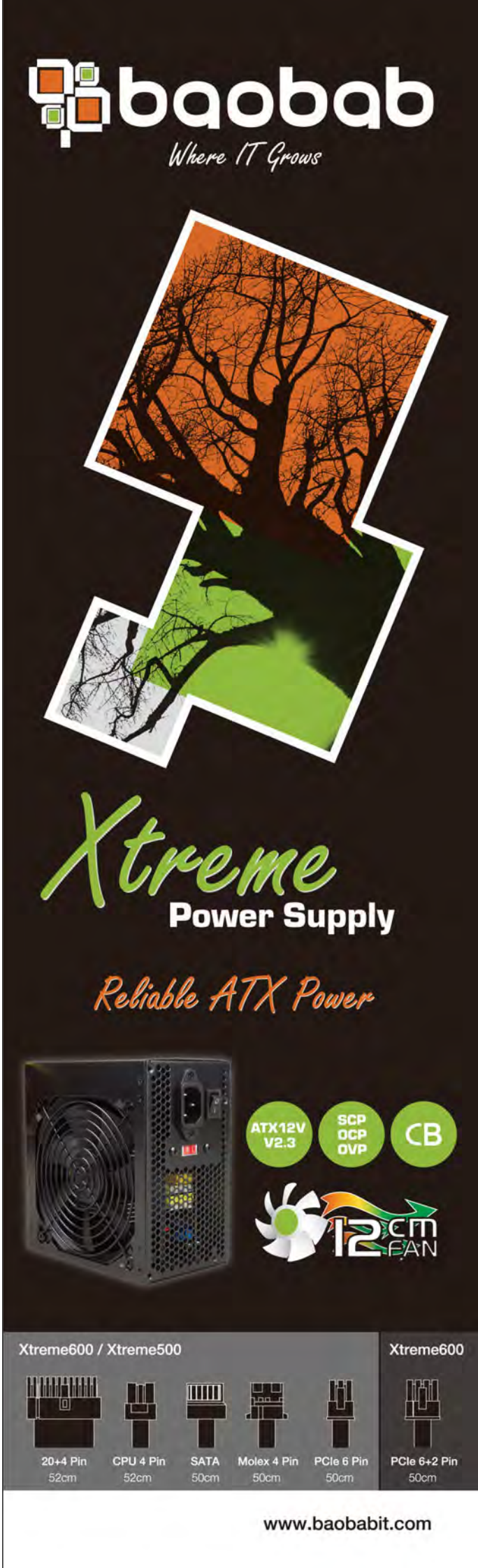
Much like the Mesmer from Guild Wars, this is an advanced spellcaster that prefers to rely on guile and sneaky tricks to defeat their enemies. While we don't have the details on all the Mesmer's abilities, we know that they will make heavy use of Illusions – physical representations of the caster that can deal damage, harass enemies and draw fire away from the group. These Illusions can be "Shattered" by the Mesmer to dispel them and apply a secondary effect to enemies. These secondary effects include Mind Wrack (damage-dealing), Cry of Frustration (confusion), Diversion (stun), and Reflection (protects the caster against enemy projectiles).

Mesmers can also cast Mantras, which are sequential spells that come in two parts. The first part requires a long casting time (about three seconds), but the second part can be cast instantly, even while channelling other spells.

These spellcasters will wear light armour and can wield a one-handed sword, sceptres, pistols, a staff, and even a two-handed greatsword which will apparently allow for ranged attacks, although we're not sure how that will play out.

Expect details on Crystal Dynamics' new IP this year

// Exciting news everyone! Crystal Dynamics revealed a while ago that they're planning to unleash an all-new IP on the world once they're done with the upcoming *Tomb Raider* reboot – but we now have confirmation that we'll learn more about it this year. What, you want proof? Here's a collection of words spouted forth from Crystal's community and communications manager Meagan Marie: "Not only will our team be eating, sleeping, and breathing *Tomb Raider*, but we'll also be hard at work preparing to reveal exciting new intellectual property to the world." And there you have it.



Distributors

Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
BT Games	0861 4 GAMES
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Core Gaming	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
Evetech Solutions	[012] 326-6547
ESET	0860 313 872
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530
Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Megarom	[011] 361-4800
Microsoft	0860 225 567
Musica	0860 687 422
Nu Metro Interactive	(011) 340 9300
Phoenix Software	[011] 803-5437
Prima Interactive	[011] 799-7800
Rectron	[011] 203-1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Ster Kinekor Entertainment	[011] 445-7700
TVR	[011] 807-1390

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@xtremems.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

Now you're just making up words



Fans of the *Metal Gear Solid* series should have followed the news of the upcoming *MGS* title starring Raiden – the sword-wielding adopted son of Solidus Snake – but in a surprise twist, franchise creator and lead designer Hideo Kojima canned the game his studio was working on and handed over development to an outsider – Platinum Games.

Two big shocks there, so let's take this one at a time. First, the cancellation of the game originally titled *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* came from Kojima after he took a good look at the game's progress and wasn't happy with what he saw. Apparently left to their own devices while Kojima lead the development of *Peace Walker*, the team within Kojima Productions was deemed too young and inexperienced to properly blend action and stealth sequences to the degree that Kojima had hoped they could. Eventually, he terminated the project and decided to sit down with Platinum lead Shinji Mikami to set up the guidelines for a new take on the idea.

The result is *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, which, aside from being one of the silliest named games we can think of, ditches the notion of stealth entirely in favour of the all-out action that Platinum Games is famed for delivering. With *Bayonetta*, *Vanquish* and *MadWorld* behind them, the studio decided to concentrate on what they know best and got to work on a game within the *Metal Gear* world that doesn't follow the series' stealth-action roots. The game also does away with *Rising*'s previous "interquel" setting between the events of *MGS 2* and *4*, and will take place entirely on its own storyline after the events of *Guns of the Patriots*.

Revengeance is set for a TBA 2012 release for 360, PS3 and PC.

King of Nintendoland steps down

// **Shigeru Miyamoto, the grandfather of Japanese gaming and creator of *Mario, Donkey Kong* and *The Legend of Zelda*, is starting to get on a bit and recently announced his plans to scale down his involvement at Nintendo. Of course, when an icon like Miyamoto tells people he wants to scale down, shareholders and about half of the Internet read it as "I'm retiring," which isn't the case. Nintendo's already struggling share prices dropped 2% overnight and the company's PR ninjas were forced to deploy press releases that quickly refuted the rumours and misunderstanding.**

What Miyamoto is actually doing is stepping down as project lead for any of Nintendo's big name games in the future and moving to run smaller teams within the company. For *Mario/DK/Zelda* fans, that might put a damper on your favourite titles, but the idea of a great mind like Miyamoto's given greater freedom to experiment (and fail – an important concept in creative freedom) on smaller titles has us eager to see what turns up in the coming years.

// **Capcom's success on Xbox LIVE Arcade will soon see the retail release of eight of the publisher's top arcade games. This pack will include *1942: Joint Strike, Bionic Commando Rearmed 2, Final Fight Double Impact, Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* and others. The pack will be available towards the middle of 2012 and will sell for an estimated local retail price of R400.**

The Cube World is yours (well, Mojang's)

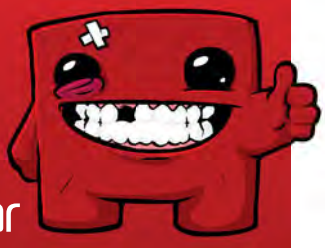


Here's a curious bit of information for that brain of yours to digest. *Rock, Paper, Shotgun* recently brought word of a new cuboid game with obvious *Minecraft* inspirations, innocently dubbed Cube World. It's all voxels and cubes and a world that's yours to explore. So far, so *Minecraft*. Where it differs from that indie megahit is in its primary focus, which is less on crafting and mining, and more on the RPG aspect of things. As such, there are swords and shields and axes and quests and experience points and other such stuff. Not only that, but the game is impressively pretty, with strange, but attractive enemy design and a world so colourful and cute that it'd melt the heart of even the coldest cynic.

Then, in what is either a stunning display of coincidence or a reactionary move by *Minecraft* developer Mojang, the one-man development team behind *Cube World* was snatched up by Markus "Notch" Persson and his team of Minecraftians. The news came swiftly and unexpectedly, with Notch writing this: "Our current plan is to plug his brain directly to a keyboard and sell whatever comes out."

The developer behind *Cube World* (a person who goes by the handle of "Wollay") simply states that he is "so excited!" and Notch has assured everyone that development on *Cube World* will continue and it will remain an independent game. Still, Wollay will now also be working on something new at Mojang. "I'm used to work on multiple projects so I don't think it will impact *Cube World* development," he says.

Beefcake: Super Meat Boy's sales soar



If there's one thing *Super Meat Boy* does astonishingly well, it's making people want to murder themselves out of sheer frustration. Sure, there's a ton of glorious reward to be had at the end of each tough-as-nails level – but up until that point, you'll want to kill yourself. Multiple times.

Despite that, it seems this excellent little platformer has received all the love it so justly deserves, as has been proven by a tweet from two-man developer Team Meat. The game has surpassed 1.1 million sales at the time of writing this, which is a truly phenomenal achievement for a game made by a core team of just two people. One half of this team, Edmund McMillen, has revealed that around 20% of those sales figures was made up by the XBLA version, with the rest of the sales coming from the PC version. Apparently people can't get enough of watching that unfortunate little cube of meat repeatedly fling himself into angry buzz saws.

Look & Listen



Pre-orders / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

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

Xbox 360

Street Fighter X Tekken	March 1st
Ridge Racer Unbounded	March 2nd
Mass Effect 3	March 9th

PS3

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

3DS

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

Not to worry people: S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2 is still happening



In December, GSC Game World (developers of the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series of creepy first-person semi-RPGs) had supposedly been shut down, leaving development of previously announced *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2* hanging in limbo. Following this sudden, unexpected news was a torrent of misinformation, with seemingly nobody outside of GSC having any clue as to what was really going on.

It all came to a head when 1C Ukraine's Sergey Galenkin blogged about the studio's closure, stating "GSC is closed, a fact confirmed by all. The team is almost completely dissolved, the state has only a few people." He blamed the cost of developing a PC-only shooter for the European market, as well as a failed console publishing deal, for the closure of GSC.

Then, as the new year dawned, GSC updated their Facebook page, saying that "the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* team is extremely happy! Why? Because we are continuing work on *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* 2 after the holidays."

We're not sure what's happening with GSC, but we're glad that *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2* is still on its way.

Feed your addiction



// Do you love gaming? Do you love cooking? Do you stare hungrily at in-game food, wishing that you could feed your face with every nourishing pixel? Well now you can, sort of! Gourmet Gaming (www.gourmetgaming.co.uk) is a relatively new blog-style site that includes recipes for many in-game food items so that you can make them on your very own! Some of the recipes are *Bastion*'s Leechade, *Diablo*'s health potion, *Skyrim*'s Black-Briar Mead, grilled leaks and Elsweyr fondue, *Costume Quest*'s pizza sundae and even a *Minecraft* cake! And here's another exclamation mark because this excites us! The site is updated every Wednesday and includes a difficulty rating for each recipe as well as a delicious looking photo of the finished product and an image of the in-game item, and every meal on Gourmet Gaming is designed to be entirely edible.

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...

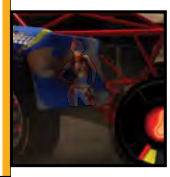
Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere.

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



January Winner





Jandre, Page 23

Win!

An iWorld – Digital FM transmitter for Ipod/Iphone/Mp3 valued at R249.99. Sponsored by Bowline and iworld.



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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 *UFC Undisputed 3* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'February Caption'.





NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / "Stop being a pansy, it's time... for your manicure!"



LAST MONTHS WINNER / That epic moment when you realize that you and your friends hand and leg movement are in sync when walking **- Rowan Miller**

We may experience some slight turbulence and then... explode

Fans of *Firefly, Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and pretty much everything Joss Whedon should probably read this here bit of news. It's been expected for ages that the pair of MMOs based on those two franchises (if you can even count *Firefly* as a franchise, given its short-lived status) would never see the light of day after being announced years ago and then fading into obscurity at the hands of developer Multiverse.

The death of these two titles has now been officially confirmed, as a post made on Multiverse's website in early December revealed that the company had to shut its doors due to lack of funding, after failing to achieve profitability with its Multiverse platform (which was used as a proof of concept for Facebook games *Battle, Team Battle* and *Battle: Realms at War*, in addition to being used in web games made for McDonald's and Coca-Cola).

Japanese game market saw overall decline in 2011



// As reported by Japanese gaming mag *Famitsu*, Japan's gaming market saw quite a substantial decline in 2011. While the year brought a 2.4-percent increase in hardware sales (up to ¥179,740 million, or $2.3 billion) thanks to the 3DS and the Japanese launch of the PlayStation Vita, software sales dipped by 14% (a total of ¥274,640 million, or $3.5 billion). This means that, on the whole, the Japanese game market saw a decline of eight percent.

There is a silver lining for Nintendo's 3DS though, which was Japan's best-selling console in 2011, with more than four million units sold. The PS Vita, meanwhile, which went on sale in Japan mid-December, moved over 400,000 units before the end of the year: a relatively paltry number which immediately instigated much debate as to whether or not Sony's powerful new handheld is already treading water.



Yu Suzuki wants his Shenmue back



We'd not be surprised if you've never before heard of the *Shenmue* series, but there are many out there who would happily sell their own families into slavery just to see the series brought back from limbo. Yu Suzuki, the original creator of *Shenmue*, believes that his studio might be able to get the rights to the series back from original publisher SEGA, and he could finally get on with making *Shenmue III*.

"*Shenmue*'s license is an IP that belongs to SEGA," said Suzuki in a lengthy interview with Shenmue fansite *Shenmue Master*. "We can obtain the license from SEGA." It seems that Suzuki knows exactly what he'd want out of the third title in the series too, having gone into surprising detail regarding future story plans, character details and more. Basically, he knows exactly what he wants to do – but he needs that pesky license before he can actually do it. Best of luck to him, because if we shut our eyes and listen closely, we think we can actually hear the drool from the mouths of a thousand die-hard *Shenmue* fanboys slowly dribbling to the ground at the mere mention of this.

Gotham City Impostors moves to February



There's a good chance you know this already, because a) you live in the future (!), and b) if you're genuinely excited about downloadable Batman-'em-up *Gotham City Impostors* and plan to play it on launch day, then you likely have some form of Internet connection and will already have discovered the news that the game was going to miss its January 11th release date. Still, we feel it's our duty to inform all those of you who might not know (because you're being held against your will/are currently on Dagobah visiting your good pal Yoda/have horrible parents who won't splurge on decent Internet) that the game will instead release sometime this month (February) on XBLA, PSN and PC. The reasons for the delay are unknown.

Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

February: Week 1

Petz Fantasy 3D	3DS
Monster 4X4 3DS	3DS
Puzzler Crosswords	3DS
Final Fantasy XIII-2	360 / PS3
Magic: The Gathering: Dark Ascension	Trading Card Game
Soul Calibur V	360 / PS3

February: Week 2

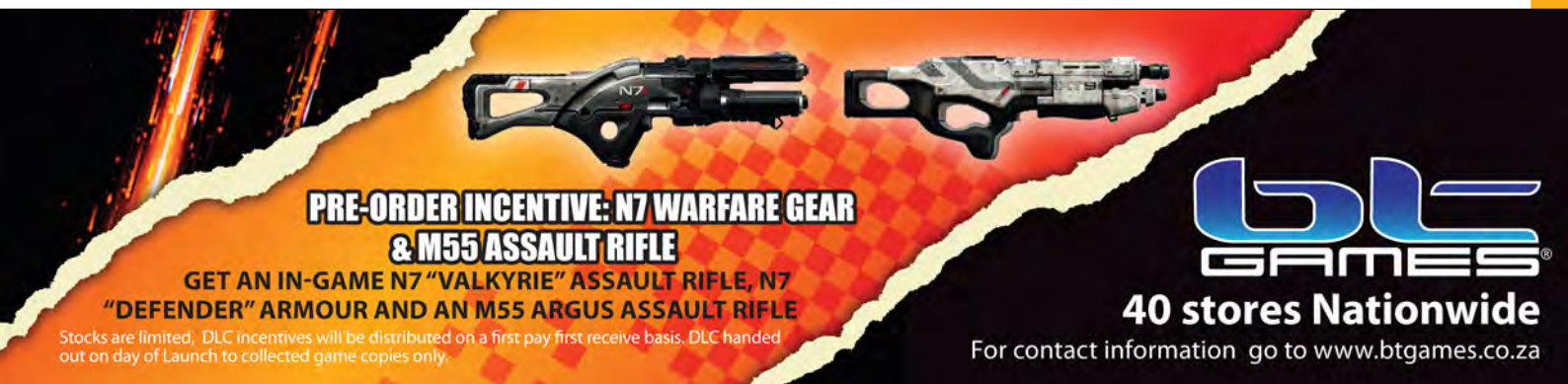
Inversion	PC / 360 / PS3
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	PC / 360 / PS3
The Darkness II	PC / 360 / PS3

February: Week 3

Grand Slam Tennis 2	360 / PS3
SSX	360 / PS3

February: Week 4

Asura's Wrath	360 / PS3
NeverDead	360 / PS3
Resident Evil: Revelations	3DS
Shinobido 2: Revenge of Zen	PS Vita
Syndicate	PC / 360 / PS3
Touch My Katamari	PS Vita
Twisted Metal	PS3
UFC Undisputed 3	360 / PS3
Uncharted: Golden Abyss	PS Vita
Dragon's Dogma	360 / PS3
New Little King's Story	PS Vita
Little Deviants	PS Vita
Dungeon Hunter: Alliance	PS Vita
Everybody's Golf	PS Vita
Rayman Origins	PS Vita
ModNation Racers	PS Vita
Ridge Racer	PS Vita
Slient Hill: Book of Memories	PS Vita
Unit 13	PS Vita
Wipeout 2048	PS Vita



Top 11

list of 'Just a list'

This is more of a disclaimer than an introduction really. We were originally going to call this 'The Top 8 Xbox LIVE Arcade games of all time'. But then someone said "just make it the top 8 from 2011 because 'of all time' is too definitive; people will complain and fight and argue." Others said "but what about PlayStation and PC, we can't leave them out or [see above]." Then we decided to just make it a list of games without the numbers, because if you put things in a list with numbers next to them and the word 'top' appears on the same page it's automatically assumed that whatever is at number 1 is the best. But then we were worried SAVAGE would have a poop because doing the 'Top 8' and breaking from the template is like committing design apocalypse or something. After all this backwards and forwards it was decided that this paragraph would explain it all away and people will just have to understand. So here goes: This is a list of highly recommended XBLA games that you should try in no particular order because it means nothing. It's also more than 8 because LOL.

11 Limbo

This title sat with me for months after I finished playing it. With minimalism pervading every corner of this game, I felt the need to fill in the narrative gaps and by doing so became infinitely more bound to the events on screen. I loved the near perfect mix of platform, puzzles and exploration, and would be thrilled if I could force everyone on the planet to play this game just once. I consider it a title that can quite easily be used to justify games as art. **– Miklõs**



10 Castlevania: Symphony of the Night

With its bold combination of action, platforming and role-playing, *Symphony of the Night* on XBLA is the definitive version of the Sega Saturn cult hit. Every enemy is a challenge to be conquered, every new area an exciting space to explore. This game defined its genre, and still does. **– Miktar**



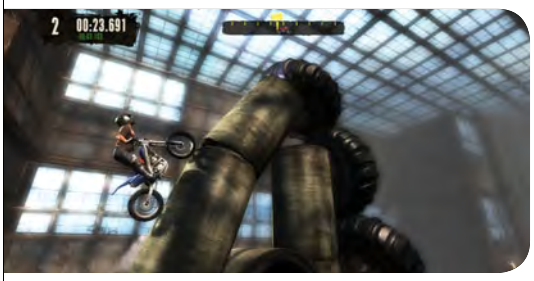
9 Bastion

Smooth voice-over narration, rich gameplay, and beautiful artwork combine to make *Bastion* one of the most lauded games of this generation. It's a genuine serene yarn spun from the hard work of its developers and their keen understanding of what makes an action-adventure game great. **– Miktar**



8 Trials HD

I'm not that into motorbikes, as a growing teen I had a clear grasp on momentum and soft tissue damage and the fact that my brain was important to me and needed protection – so the idea of doing an activity that required a helmet by law was terrifying. Motocross was even less appealing largely due to all the dust. So imagine my surprise at how much I loved *Trials HD*. It's the perfect balance of luck, physics and skill meeting challenging tracks and some of the most amazing challenges ever. Add this to seeing how much better you can do against your friends online and you have a winner. **– Michael**



7 Puzzle Quest 2

The first *Puzzle Quest* was great, but I found *Puzzle Quest 2* to be far more refined. The fact that they removed the massive overworld map from the first game and zoomed in for a more character-focused experience is a plus as well. Basically the fluff between the puzzle battles was improved ten-fold. **– Miklõs**



6 Braid

On the surface, *Braid* is a simple platform romp with a complex mechanic: time. Each level implements a time-bending conceit that turns the genre on its head, while the subtle yet intellectually stimulating narrative tells a story rarely seen in games. **– Miktar**



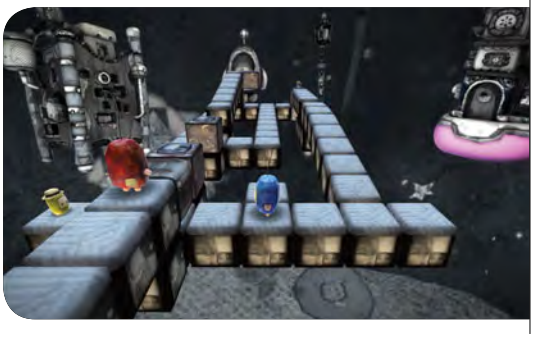
5 Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved

This is a frantic shooter with no equal. It starts off slow and easy to get you going with the pace picking up after each cleared wave. Before you know what's happening there are thousands of things on the screen and you're on a lucky roll only to die because, let's face it, you're just a slow stupid human. Amazing game types round off this stellar experience. **– Michael**



4 ilomilo

This game won me over with charm alone. If you don't smile and go all mushy inside while playing *ilomilo* then it's likely you've lost some basic humanity. Beneath its adorable façade lies a bitch-hard puzzle game. While the premise seems simple (reunite ilo and milo who begin each level on opposite ends of the stage) the persistent trickle of new puzzle elements eventually combine into a hulking mass of brain-pulverising trickery. This one turned my thinky bits to jelly as it progressed. **– Miklős**



3 Peggle

PopCap really know how to put a game together. Bright cheery graphics and simple addictive play hooks are what they're best at. *Peggle*'s simple premise of 'shoot a ball at pins to make them all disappear' is easy to play but hard to master. There are different characters that each feature special powers you unlock when hitting special pins. It's all really about getting ridiculously high scores and riding the rainbow of love. Compelling and fun with plenty extra content. **– Michael**



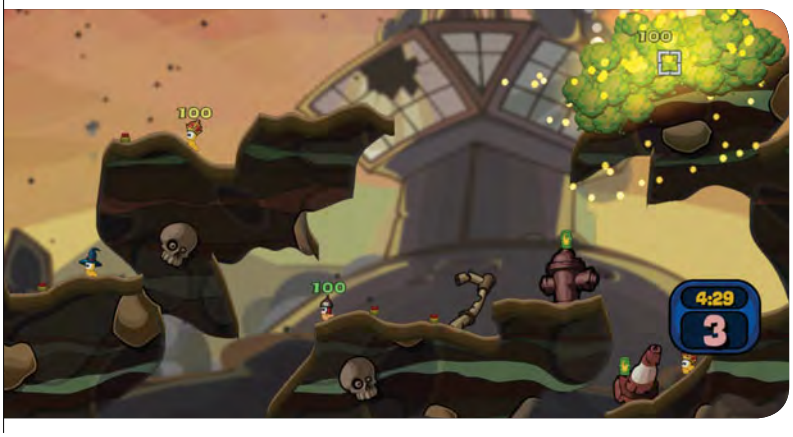
2 Plants vs. Zombies

Prior to the *Angry Birds* phenomenon, this is the game that satiated the needs of the casual gaming masses. For me it's the tower defence genre at its finest: simplified, addictive and humorous. *Plants Vs. Zombies* managed to weasel its way into the hearts of core and casual gamers, and is probably responsible for turning developer PopCap Games into a household name. **– Miklős**



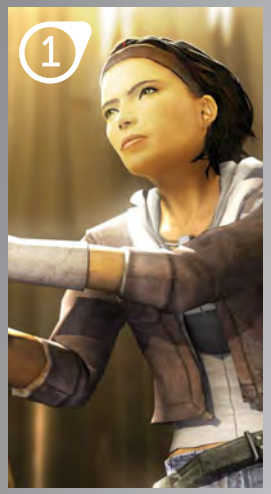
1 Worms 2: Armageddon

Worms has been around for a very long time (since 1995 actually) but amazingly not everyone knows just how much fun it can be. There are a few versions of *Worms* on the Xbox but *Armageddon* is by far the best. There are enough game modes, voices and tombstones to keep most people happy and it offers some of the most intense multiplayer battling of all time. If you like the idea of taking a concrete donkey to the face then this is the game for you. **– Michael**

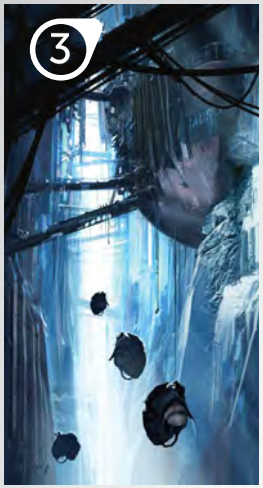


DUDE, WHERE'S MY HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE?

Half-Life was released in 1998. Six years later it got a sequel. Two years after that, the first of three planned 'Episodes' that continue the story started in *Half-Life 2* was released. It was a year between *Episode One* and the release of *Episode Two*. It has now been almost **five years** since the release of *Episode Two*, almost as much time as it took for *Half-Life* to get a sequel. Where the hell is *Episode Three*?







SO WHAT DO WE KNOW?

1

JUNE 2006

In an interview with Eurogamer [**www.eurogamer.net/articles/i_valve_060606**] after the release of *Episode One*, Gabe Newell confirmed that there were indeed three *Episodes* planned: "There are three that are in this arc. There are three that are worked out, and those are the ones that we've been talking about so far."

With perhaps a lot of irony in hindsight, he also made a comment about *Episode One*'s delay, its release having been almost a year later than originally planned, saying "...sure beats waiting six years."

Why did Valve adopt the episodic model? Newell explained: "The original *Half-Life* took us two years to develop. With a considerably larger team *Half-Life 2* took us six years to develop, so we thought if we were going to continue our trend with *Half-Life 3* we would basically ship after we had all retired."

NOVEMBER 2007

PC Gamer ran what they claimed was the first ever piece of *Episode Three* concept art, showing a group of Combine Advisors floating about. They speculated that based on the ending of *Episode Two*, that *Episode Three* "will most likely take place aboard the Borealis, where you'll be sent to retrieve the tech before the Combine get to it".

SPOILER: At the end of *Episode Two*, Gordon and Alyx watch a video recorded by Dr. Judith Mossman (who worked with Eli Vance and the resistance). Mossman reports of the discovery of a lost cargo ship, the Borealis, which supposedly carries a dangerous new technology developed by Black Mesa rivals Aperture Science.

2

JULY 2008

The *Into The Pixel* winner, an art exhibit dedicated to showcasing videogame art, was a piece of concept art from Valve artists for *Episode Three* titled "Advisor". No other information was presented in concert with the piece.

3

JULY 2008

Soon after the *Into The Pixel* piece, Games Radar ran a story [**www.gamesradar.com/the-first-concept-art-from-half-life-2-episode-three/**] in which they proudly boasted that they had a really exclusive piece of Episode Three concept art, showing a group of Advisors floating near what is clearly an icebound Borealis.

AUGUST 2009

During an interview with Geoff Keighley on Game Trailers TV [**www.gametrailers.com/video/episode-220-gt-tv/53915**] Gabe Newell was asked if Valve was still doing *Episode Three*. "Yes, of course we're doing *Episode Three*," said the exec in response. Keighley pushed a little and asked if it's still being worked on right now, and got "Oh, absolutely" as an answer.

MARCH 2010

In an interview with MTV Geek [**multiplayerblog.mtv.com/2010/03/26/valve-wants-their-next-half-life-to-scare-you/**] Newell spoke of "broadening the emotional palette" of the series, and how they want the next *Half-Life* game to "genuinely scare the player".

MAY 2011

Newell spoke with Develop Online [**www.develop-online.net/features/1184/The-Valve-manifesto**] and talked about what makes Valve different. He also mentioned that their games "will no longer be cut into slices" and will instead "become their own platforms that Valve can continually evolve and updated through Steam". Did that spell the end for an *Episode Three*? He went on to say "We went through the episodes phase, and now we're going towards shorter and even shorter cycles."

JULY 2011

IGN ran a speculative piece on *Episode Three* [**ps3.ign.com/articles/118/1182276p1.html**]. Right in the middle of the piece, with no sources cited, with no reason for saying so, IGN proudly proclaimed that "*Episode Three* is no longer the project name. Now it's *Half-Life 3*." This got picked up by the blogs and the copy-paste news sites, spreading like wildfire for a short while before people remembered that IGN loves to make stuff up.

AUGUST 2011

Two brave fans set up a "protest" on the lawn outside Valve's Vancouver office. A police officer on a Segway came over and asked what was up, but since the cop was a *Half-Life* fan too and waiting for *Episode Three*, he didn't ask the protesters to leave. Newell came out and told the two guys that he's got nothing to tell them, and then sent down some soda and pizza.

SEPTEMBER 2011

Intrepid geeks started dissecting the raw code for the *DOTA 2* beta, and found among other random files, a folder named "EP3" that contained alleged references to *Episode Three* weapon types, like "Ice Gun" and "Flame Thrower", but also some "weaponizers" for concrete, liquid and metal.

Around the same time, a fan emailed Newell with a haiku, and got a cryptic haiku response.

DECEMBER 2011

During a game developer event, a marketing representative for Uber Entertainment snapped a photo of a Valve employee wearing a *Half-Life 3* shirt and tweeted it [twitter.com/#!/Ekanaut/status/142476850931834880]. Most likely the Valve employee was trying to be funny.

DECEMBER 2011

Even though *Portal 2*'s Wheatley didn't win "Best Character", Valve still made an acceptance speech. Fans dissected the speech and found what they believed to be hidden *Half-Life 3* hints in the video. We covered it on NAG Online, which you can read here: **www.nag.co.za/2011/12/13/half-life-3-hints-hidden-in-wheatley-vga-video/**

But, co-writer for *Portal 2* and the last two *Half-Life* games Chet Faliszek, went on the Steam Forums [**forums.steampowered.com/forums/showpost.php?p=27654778&postcount=30**] to state explicitly that all the speculation was false, and that "this is the community trolling the community nothing more".

2012

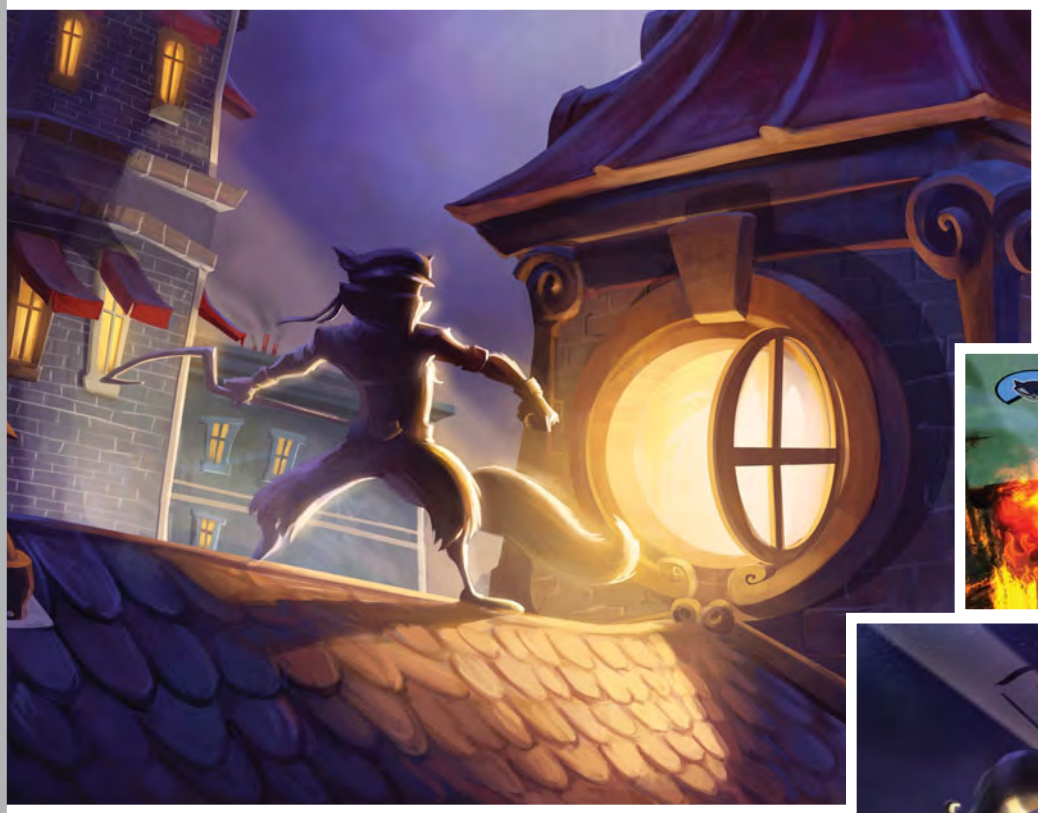
Will Valve unveil a surprise *Half-Life 3* at this year's E3? Will the next Half-Life be a micro-transaction platform, like *Team Fortress 2*, so we can buy Gordon a variety of new glasses? Will the world end this year? Stay tuned... **NAG**

Miktar



RELEASE TIMELINE

1998: *Half-Life*
1999: *Half-Life: Opposing Force*
2001: *Half-Life: Blue Shift, Half-Life: Decay*
2004: *Half-Life 2, Half-Life 2: Deathmatch*
2005: *Half-Life 2: Lost Coast*
2006: *Half-Life 2: Episode One, Half-Life 2: Survivor*
2007: *Half-Life 2: Episode Two, Portal*
2011: *Portal 2*







Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

Time-travel without the 28:06:42:12...

[details]

Release Date:
2012
Platforms:
PS3
Genre:
Stealth y Platformer
Developer:
Sanzaru Games
Website:
N/A
Publisher:
Sony Computer Entertainment

[trivia]

// Rioichi Cooper is voiced by famed voice actor Steven Blum.

// Ego-centric war general tiger El Jefe is voiced by more famed voice actor Nolan North.

It seems 2012 may become known in gaming for the return of long-lost franchises. It's been nearly six years since *Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves*. Retaining the series' trademark cartoon style and stealthy platform gameplay, *Thieves in Time* is sneaking into some interesting new territory: time-travel.

At the end of *Sly 3*, things seemed pretty much wrapped up. The hero got the girl, the turtle built a time machine and the hippo became a professional race car driver. New series developer Sanzaru Games couldn't resist that innocuous time-machine reference and decided to run with it. Thanks to use of the time machine, the Thievius Raccoonus (a book that chronicles the history and techniques of the Cooper family) has been lost in time, with pages disappearing right before Bentley's eyes before the book itself vanished. And so, like it or not, Sly has to reform the team and hop through time to recover it, meeting some of his ancestors along the way.

Players will be able to play as various Cooper members throughout time, though only one descendant has been revealed so far: Rioichi Cooper. Fans of the series will recognize the name as the ancient Japanese master thief who invented the Ninja Spire Jump, which lets Sly perch atop pointy bits. Each ancestor has their own move-set, such as Rioichi's impressive Leaping Dragon technique for clearing long distances. Sanzaru is being secretive about which ancestors and eras Sly will visit. Feudal Japan has been shown during demonstrations, while concept art hints at Ancient Egypt and the Wild West.

Staying true to the series, the return of Clue Bottles and Coins have been confirmed. There are Costumes, inspired by the Disguises introduced in *Sly 2*, but with more gameplay-altering properties. Costumes will change how Sly reacts to attacks, such as an over-sized set of armour negating the effects of fire and incoming projectiles.

While little is known about the plot, it's been confirmed that the hub areas much larger than anything the series has ever seen; a compass had to be added, guiding you to your next objective. The cel-shaded visuals look crisp, the animations fluid and detailed (Sly has a tiny reflexive cat-like tail-twitch right before he steals something off a guard). The series seems in good hands. **NAG**

Miktar

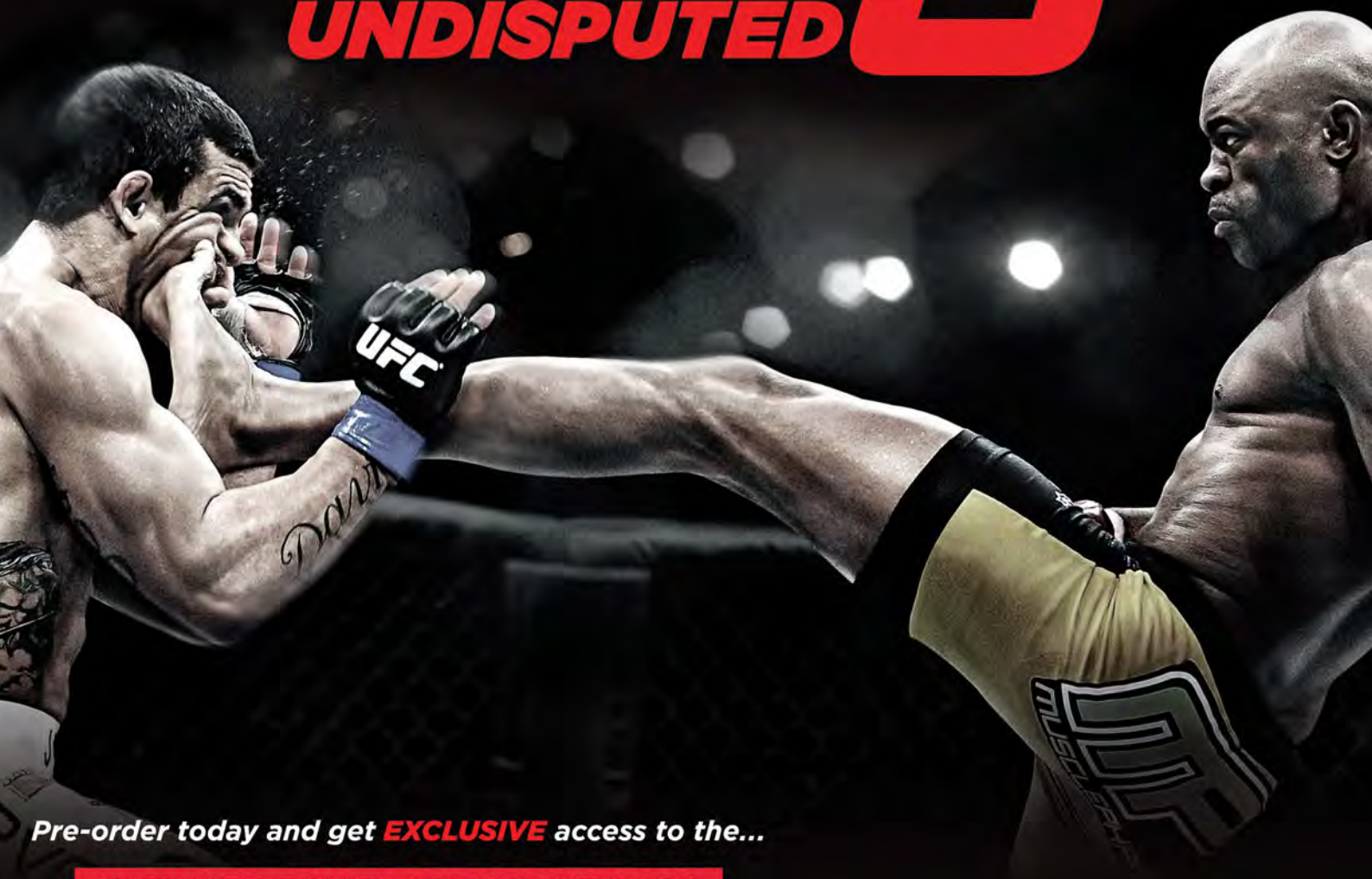


"And so, like it or not, Sly has to reform the team and hop through time to recover it, meeting some of his ancestors along the way."

SANZARU GAMES?

Thieves in Time is being developed by Sanzaru Games, and not series originators Sucker Punch Productions. California-based Sanzaru was responsible for 2010's high-definition collection of the original PS2 trilogy, the PS2 port of *Secret Agent Clank* from the PSP, and their first game in 2008 called *Ninja Reflex*, an oddball multi-platform party game ninja-festival.

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THQ



SOUNDTRACK

Unofficial series theme "It's Tricky" by Run DMC is back, along with the new Pretty Lights remix which you can listen to on YouTube: **http://youtu.be/mGEJMmzKviY**

The game uses a new remixing technology called "Harmony" that lets players use custom soundtracks, without losing the turntable-scratching and flange effects the game applies during grinds or huge jumps.

Other confirmed tracks include "Hot Like Dimes" by Las Ketchup, "Lifeline" by Bob Bradley ft. Nick McEnnally and "Into the Clouds" (Fear of Tigers Remix).









SSX

Hello beautiful, long time no see...

[details]

Release Date:
Q1 2012
Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Sports
Developer:
EA Canada
Website:
www.ea.com/ssx
Publisher:
EA Sports

[trivia]

// The last game in the series, Wii-only *SSX Blur*, sold less than 320,000 copies.
// You can watch the Elise reveal "motion comic" online: http://youtu.be/SU2O-VMuSSg

Critically acclaimed, *SSX 3* was released in 2003 and is estimated to have sold over five million copies. That's as much as *Gears of War 3*, *Grand Theft Auto IV* and *Battlefield 3*.

Yet somehow, it has taken EA this long to bother making a *proper* sequel.

Using data from NASA, EA Canada built exaggerated versions of iconic mountains like the Alps, Himalayas and the Rockies. You'll be able to race against the ghost replays of friends, shared via the Autolog-inspired RiderNet. There's a full suite of online multiplayer tools, like community-driven Global Events for up to 100,000 players.

SSX veterans like Elise Riggs, Griff Simmons, Moby Jones and Eddie Wachowski make a return alongside some new characters and X-Games winner Travis Rice.

MOUNTAIN MAN

This new *SSX* reboot began with a proprietary program called "Mountain Man" that let EA Canada quickly build levels based off NASA geotagging data of actual mountains. Earlier games in the series had walls and fences to prevent players from straying off the built path, but because the new *SSX* has open terrain you're allowed to go anywhere via chopper drop and trick off any reasonable debris or bump, reminiscent of *Amped 3*.

GRITTY 2010 ANNOUNCEMENT TRAILER?

You might recall the 2010 announcement trailer, where everything was all gritty and "realistic" and totally *Call of Duty* inspired. That "Deadly Descents" vision of the series was totally scrapped.

"*SSX* has never been that way in any way, shape, or form in the past." says Todd Batty. And so the game was returned to its more over-the-top bright-and-colourful roots. The negative fan-reaction to the trailer probably had nothing to do with it.

RPG-LITE

There will be a simple levelling-up system which determines which tier of gear you can access. Gear will have stats that influence your play style and perks called "boosts" that give bonuses to things like speed or spin. Certain areas will require specific gear, like high-altitude runs will need you to equip an oxygen tank, while big-jump tracks will necessitate using the game's new wingsuit. NAG

Miktar

"You'll be able to race against the ghost replays of friends, shared via the Autolog-inspired RiderNet."

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[1] 1GB = 1 billion bytes: actual formatted capacity less. Availability and prices subject to change at the discretion of the supplier. Not all items are available in all stores - please call your local store to enquire on availability. iPad availability is subject to supply constraint.

Release Date: **2012**
Platforms: **360 / PS3**
Genre: **Action**
Developer: **Grasshopper Manufacture**
Website: **www.lollipopchainsaw.com**
Publisher: **Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment**



Oh lolli, lolli, lolli lollipop! Song stuck in your head?

Goichi Suda (or Suda 51 as some might know him) has a knack for making weird videogames. If you've played through *No More Heroes* or the more recent *Shadows of the Damned* you'll know exactly what we're talking about. His penchant for giving convention the finger has earned him cult developer status. When it comes to injecting disproportionate amounts of insanity and balls-out absurdity, Suda 51 and the crew at Grasshopper Manufacture know how to get the job done. But so what? Loads of other development studios have created bizarre titles that turn heads, so what separates Grasshopper from the rest? How about their uncanny ability to hit home with some pretty edgy content while managing not to take themselves seriously? This they pull off effortlessly and the results are often games with a bizarre mix of sexual innuendos, genuine witty humour, unremitting gore and shock-tactic violence. Take last year's *Shadows of the Damned* as an example: the one moment you're laughing at dick-jokes while head-shotting giant demons as they lumber down the streets of an underworld red light district, and the next you're watching the protagonist's girlfriend getting dismembered again and again. Intersperse this with endless references to cult movies like *Army of Darkness* and *The Evil Dead* and you get a game that's been made by a team that just "gets" their target audience. The fact that they're unapologetically focused on the twenty-something-and-up male demographic, coupled with their tenacious pandering to nearly every guilty pleasure that demographic adores, means that they've netted themselves a sizable, devoted fan base.

With games starring protagonists like otaku rookie assassins and take-no-crap Hispanic demon hunters behind him, it seems like as good a time as any for Suda 51 to introduce a new oddball hero, only this time it's a heroine. Enter *Lollipop Chainsaw*, the next action brawler from the Grasshopper Manufacture stable. The game stars eighteen-year-old Juliet Starling, a student from San Romero High School who also happens to come from a long line of professional zombie slayers. To her peers in school, Juliet is the popular girl and the idolised cheerleader; none of them know about her secret skills in zombie slaying. When a massive zombie outbreak turns the majority of San Romero's pupils and staff into the undead, it's up to Juliet to find the source of the epidemic. It's not long before she realises that the zombie hordes are merely a precursor to a relentless zombie rock lord attack against Juliet herself. So with half of her school mates becoming brain-craving monsters, and a legion of rock 'n' roll zombie lords out to expunge her from existence, it would seem Juliet has a pretty lofty task laid out before her. Fortunately this lollipop obsessed, hyper girly-girl knows her way around an undead slaughter fest.

Juliet's mentor is a crass, Mr. Miyagi rip-off known as Morikawa. Prone to dropping four letter words and fixating on his young female protégée, Morikawa has trained Juliet in his own martial art style; when he's not busy being a sushi chef that is. Thanks to Morikawa providing training, Juliet has been able to develop her own blend of martial art and cheerleading dance moves with which to decimate the undead. The fact that she carts around a hot pink chainsaw complete with heart cut-outs and a built-in boombox also helps – after all, a girl's got to maintain her image, even if it regularly gets splattered with bits of rotting flesh.

Juliet has four basic moves at her disposal. Her light attacks are Cheer Moves that make use of her pompoms and gymnastic abilities. By hitting enemies with Cheer Moves, Juliet will be able to herd zombies together into



> Juliet will have a selection of special moves to unlock, like the "Lollipop Split". This finishing move sees Juliet perform the splits in front of her target before casually chainsawing the poor dope in half... from the groin upwards.

> There's quite a team of contributors working on *Lollipop Chainsaw*. The music is being handled by Akira Yamaoka (of *Silent Hill* fame) and Juliet's voice is being done by Tara Strong, who recently voiced Harley Quinn in *Batman: Arkham City*.



















larger groups before dispatching them with a chainsaw heavy attack. Juliet's Chainsaw Moves are her primary means of dealing damage to enemies, which will result in severed limbs, disembowelments and geysers of blood. In order to avoid more powerful attacks and larger groups of zombies, Juliet will be able to perform a High Dodge. This move sees her leapfrogging her attackers before landing safely out of the way – the caveat is that this cancels any combos you might have started. Finally, with limbs being severed left, right and centre, odds are that Juliet will have to dispatch some crawling zombies during a fight. Low attacks will see to any floor-bound stragglers, but this particular move can also be worked into combos to unleash powerful, spinning low attacks in the middle of an encounter.

Throughout combat, killing enemies adds Star Power to a meter; once full you can activate Star Mode to power-up Juliet's attacks. This temporary, currency dependent power-up mechanic is nothing new to action games, but the visual results in *Lollipop Chainsaw* are definitely unique. If you manage to kill three zombies in one move, you'll activate a special mode that's been dubbed "Sparkle Hunting". With Sparkle Hunting active you'll net yourself a bonus score as well as buckets of on-screen sparkles, neon pink hearts and rainbows, which is kind of what we imagine it'd look like if you took a meat cleaver to a *My Little Pony*.

No Suda 51 game would be complete without some seriously twisted boss battles, and while *Lollipop Chainsaw* definitely skimps on protagonist outfits, it certainly doesn't on grungy boss encounters. With a plethora of zombie rock and roll lords bearing down on Juliet, the stage is set for some unique boss fights. So far only one has been revealed: a fight on a concert stage against a punk rock zombie called Zed. While Zed makes liberal use of his microphone stand to attack Juliet, he's also able to hurl verbal abuse at our lithe heroine – the words literally forming in front of him before rushing towards Juliet like a projectile attack. As for the insults themselves, well, they're even more colourful than the glitzy rainbows and sparkles that are jettisoned from hacked up zombie corpses.

Despite Grasshopper Manufacture being firmly rooted in Japan, their games have become steadily westernised; a result of what many are claiming is a shift in targeted audiences by Japanese developers. This desire for western appeal has been growing with subsequent Grasshopper titles: while *No More Heroes* was still entrenched in Japanese culture and anime references, *Shadows of the Damned* was so far removed from traditional Japanese zeitgeist you had to look quite hard to spot the eastern influences. This shift continues with *Lollipop Chainsaw*, so much so in fact that the story has been developed by American script writer James Gunn. Add to that the Grindhouse film overtones and the all-American girl we get with Juliet Starling, and you've got a Japanese brawler saturated by western influences. This might end up making a lot of local gamers happy; when it comes to action brawlers nobody nails the gameplay quite like the Japanese, but they're often chockfull of culture specific nuances that turn off many non-Japanese gamers. It looks like Grasshopper Manufacture is hoping to present you with the best of both worlds with *Lollipop Chainsaw*.

We could have a lot to look forward in *Lollipop Chainsaw* as it's shaping up to be a heady mix of zombie violence, sex, pop art, punk rock, B horror influences and rainbow sparkle glitter fountains. The sexploitation might raise a few eyebrows, but this is no *Onechanbara – Bikini Zombie Slayer*. While Tamsoft's Wii title also fused sexploitation with zombie gore, it did so while trying to maintain an air of legitimacy. While you could argue that *Lollipop Chainsaw*'s appeal hinges on identical setups and psychology, you cannot say that it takes itself seriously. Suda 51 and Grasshopper Manufacture are all too aware that what they have with Juliet and her ridiculous entourage of supporting characters is something that cannot ever hope to be taken at anything more than face value. So why not at least give it a pretty face and have fun with it instead? **NAG**

Mikit0707

> Goichi Suda's nickname, Suda 51, derives from the Japanese words for "five" and "one" which are "go" and "ichi" respectively. In Japan it's customary to refer to a person by their surname first, hence "Suda 51".

INTERVIEW

Suda 51
lead designer
Grasshopper Manufacture



LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW







NAG: Could you give us some background on the project? How long has Grasshopper Manufacture been working on *Lollipop Chainsaw*?

Suda 51: It was when President Yasuda had just established Kadokawa Games [back in 2009]. I visited him to congratulate him and show him some pitches, and the discussion regarding *Lollipop Chainsaw* kicked off. It's been about three years since the time the idea for this game was born, from the pitch to the development. *Lollipop Chainsaw* was conceived as a videogame interpretation of a B horror series.

NAG: When *Lollipop Chainsaw* was announced in Famitsu, it was met with really positive initial reactions all over the world. Were you surprised by this response, especially from western countries that immediately started hoping for a western release?

Suda 51: I was very happy. Zombie games have been made many times and this game has a pop art style and comedy so I was worried a bit, but people's reactions abroad were more than what I hoped for.

NAG: Tell us about Juliet. She's quite a departure from previous Grasshopper heroes like Travis Touchdown and Garcia Hotspur.

Suda 51: I felt that a new heroine was needed in the video game world. Yes, I wanted to create a character that superseded the typical persona of a videogame heroine. Juliet is an active girl, and is very popular in school. She's enjoying her high school life as cheerleader at San Romero High. And she has the heritage of a zombie-hunter. She's gone through strict training from when she was little to become an expert at zombie killing.

NAG: Juliet's cheerleading background obviously allows her to be very agile in combat. She's been seen using her cheerleader pompoms against enemies as well. What are some of her other combat abilities?

Suda 51: You can see her do a bit of movements from lucha libre, such as grappling and throwing, but her unique style is seen in her acrobatic movement. She's light and can move quickly, creating an enjoyable battle for players.

NAG: It's been mentioned that Juliet's pompoms are mapped to light attacks, while her chainsaw is for heavy attacks. Could you elaborate on the game's combat system?

Suda 51: First, she takes on enemies with her pompoms and finishes them with her chainsaw; this is her main flow. Sometimes she also performs flips and jumps to add some dynamics to her actions. She is a zombie hunter and is recognized by a divine existence. Her chainsaw is her special weapon that can only be used by her and she does not feel that much weight when she lifts it. She is also a trained martial artist thanks to her sushi chef mentor, Morikawa. With her abilities as a cheerleader, she has created her own danceable martial art with a unique rhythm. Her fighting uses all of that with the destructive cutting power of her chainsaw.

NAG: Can you tell us more about Juliet's power-up metre that was shown at Gamescom 2011? Does it have a name yet?

Suda 51: We have a Star Mode. You can collect power by beating enemies and when it reaches its maximum your attack power becomes so strong that one hit can finish the zombie. Also, when you kill three zombies at the same time, a special event called Sparkle Hunting starts and you'll receive a bonus score.

NAG: Will Juliet get access to further weapons? Is there an upgrade system like in previous Grasshopper Manufacture titles?

Suda 51: I can't give out too much detail, but we're planning for some upgrade elements.

NAG: The zombie outbreak starts in Juliet's high school, San Romero High. Will the game feature further settings or is the narrative bound to the high school?

Suda 51: San Romero High is not just a series of classrooms. In the game, there are some other places you can go along with a shop for customization. Please stay tuned for more updates on locations!

NAG: Speaking of narrative, you've collaborated with James Gunn on the script for the western release. How much of an influence has he had on the Japanese version of the game, if any? What made you approach James Gunn? His involvement in the *Dawn of the Dead* film?

Suda 51: It was an idea from Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. Based on the scenario written by Grasshopper staff members, James re-wrote and re-directed them, providing us with precise feedback based on his method of creating drama, and with his famed writing style the story has become very fun and attractive. The Japanese version is the same as his re-write of course, but we also converted his unique sense of humour into our own language.

The completion of this was a bit later than we planned, but the result was more than enough to make up for it.

NAG: What were some of the influences when developing the game? The trailer that came out for *Lollipop Chainsaw* during October 2011 was just like a grindhouse movie trailer.

Suda 51: True, it's kind of like a preview for a grindhouse movie, like *Machete*, yes? This game is influenced by American culture as well as their pop music.

The mixture of splatter and pop art style is the biggest attraction of *Lollipop Chainsaw*. By the way, the first thing we purchased for our reference was the replica chainsaw model from one of our favourite zombie movies.

NAG: Tell us about the art style. The pink sparkles, rainbows and splashes of colour amidst the usual gore found in a zombie outbreak; what was the decision behind this? Was it just to stand out amongst the crowds?

Suda 51: We have not seen a light and fun zombie game. *Lollipop Chainsaw* is the only zombie game that offers hearts and rainbows! Relax and enjoy it while you have some popcorn.

NAG: Can you tell us about Nick, the head of Juliet's boyfriend that's attached to her skirt? Does he double as a weapon, like Johnson from *Shadows of the Damned*?

Suda 51: I guess I have characters without a body in my games often... it is really a coincidence. However, Nick's role is still a secret.

NAG: One of the funniest aspects of *Shadows of the Damned* was the banter between Garcia and Johnson. Will Juliet and Nick share the same kind of relationship?

Suda 51: Of course. At the same time, it's a bit different from the relationship you see with Garcia and Johnson, so please check it out.

NAG: At this stage, is development still on track for a 2012 release on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3?

Suda 51: Yes, it will be released in 2012 for Xbox 360 and PS3 as planned. Please look forward to it! **NAG**

Mikit0707

The reviewers

Question: Now that we're really into 2012, here's the predictable 'what game are you looking forward to and why in 2012?' Go! The editor guesses the average score...

RedTide



BioShock Infinite... Elizabeth, I think I love you. Not forgetting the amazing setting, floating things, rollercoaster transport, cool toys and heaps of intrigue.
www.metacritic.com guess: **92**

Miktar



The only game I'm really looking forward to is *Guild Wars 2*, because I need a good MMO in my life.
www.metacritic.com guess: **86**

Azimuth



Mass Effect 3. Because spaceships. And lasers. And Commander Shepard's bum.
www.metacritic.com guess: **92**

Mikit0707



BioShock Infinite! So I can rescue a pretty lady and kill crazy people using a Murder of Crows! \:D/.
www.metacritic.com guess: **92**

GeometriX



Diablo III (please), *BioShock Infinite*, *Heart of the Swarm* (PLEASE), and oddly enough, the new *Syndicate*, just to see how much it's not like the original.
www.metacritic.com guess:
88 / 92 / 82 / 78

Barkskin



Dishonored. Because I refuse to believe that it could be anything less than a combination of *Deus Ex*'s / Arx Fatalis' *depth*, *Dark Messiah's* melee combat and *Thief*'s evergreen intelligence. Also, rats.
www.metacritic.com guess: **62**

Ramjet



Diablo III, just like everyone else. Because it's *Diablo III*. There's no way it won't be awesome.
www.metacritic.com guess: **88**

SAVAGE



The Dark Knight Rises and *The Hobbit* movies – don't judge me. [*Sigh, Ed*]

ShockG



We think it's Lord of the Dance: Kinect. We don't ask questions.
www.metacritic.com guess: **31**

Anatomy of a review

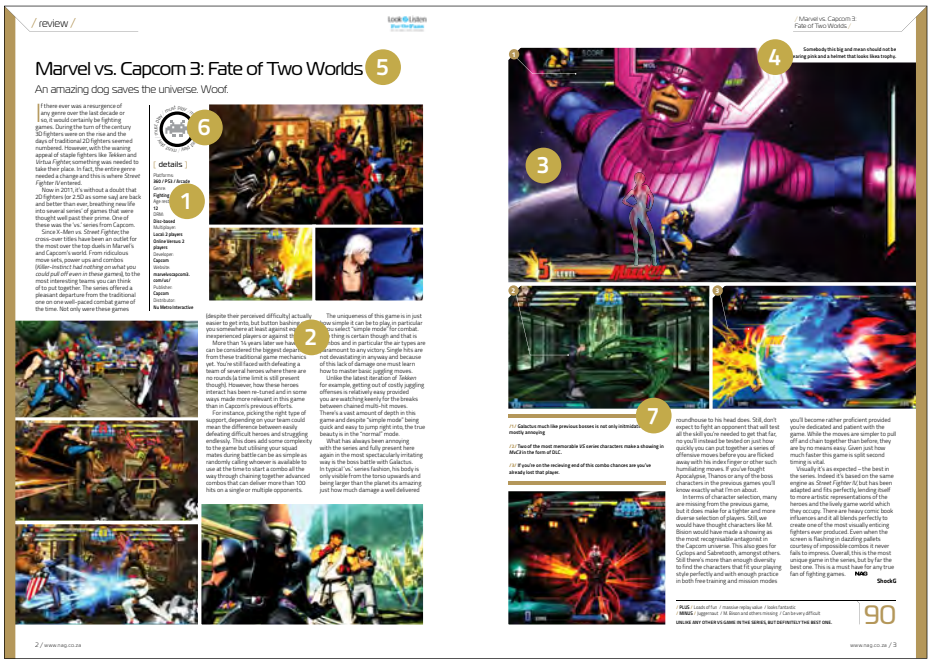
A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

/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.



/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

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7

Traveller's Tales have found a winning formula with their LEGO series of games, dating back to the 2005's *LEGO Star Wars*. Thanks to their universal accessibility, light-hearted humour and a generous serving of "cuteness", the games have found adoration with players of all ages. *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7* tells the tale of the final three books of the Harry Potter series and it does so with the same finesse that made its predecessor so successful. The story is told across six levels, with Hogwarts Academy serving as their connecting hub. As with all the *LEGO* games that preceded it, *Years 5-7* offers a myriad of collectables, and each level has its share of hidden areas that only become accessible with repeated playthroughs. For perfectionists, there are 200 gold bricks, 20 unlockable cheats and a multitude of playable characters that can be unlocked. Of course, many characters and locations will be familiar to those that played *Years 1-4*, but a handful of new spells and a new "duelling" system which sees characters facing off in 1-on-1 magical combat keeps the game feeling fresh. Just as charming and quirkily humorous as we've come to expect from the series, *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7* is a satisfying and fitting send-off for the boy wizard, and one that won't disappoint fans of the much loved LEGO videogame franchise. **79**









// **Accessible but engaging, and every bit as charming as its predecessors.**

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

The Lord of the Rings: War in the North



65
62
67

Saints Row: The Third



78
82
84

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword



94
93
93

Mario Kart 7



91
84
85

Anno 2070



86
84
85

Need for Speed: The Run



58
67
69

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The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Flies the franchise higher than it has ever flown before...

The Wii Problem: In an alternate reality, *Skyward Sword* would represent merely the latest in a long series of triple-A quality motion control epics. Small control quirks would be taken for granted, like how reviewers seem to ignore how *Batman: Arkham City*'s camera can fart out and get stuck in a corner. Sadly, we do not live in that world, so Nintendo's reinvention of *Zelda* stands judged in a harsher light than may be fair.

This may surprise some people, but *Skyward Sword* is a *real* game. It represents Nintendo bringing their own conventions into the 21st century their way: for all its progressive ideas, the game never deludes itself about the fact that it's a videogame. Mr. "ShortPants" Link brazenly adopts his classic "ITEM GET" pose as a new trophy spins overhead, only now it's used for comedy; interrupting moments otherwise dramatic or romantic.

SKILLS BEFORE KILLS

Where the typical triple-A blockbuster games struggle to devise ever-more impressive scripted sequences that are triggered by pressing "A", *Skyward Sword* incorporates many of their ideas while remaining a real game. Every jump, climb, swing, twist, and turn is earned by skill, in a game that will only get better as time goes by and is replayed again and again. You'll never see a speed run in *Uncharted* that amounts to much, but you will in *Skyward Sword*.

It's the best 3D *Zelda*, finally stepping out from under the shadow of *Ocarina of Time* and boldly creating a brand new progression structure for the series. With such a wealth of new ideas, it's not always pitch perfect; the sky overworld is actually too focused on existing purely as a hub for the complex, dungeon-like underworld below and feels empty outside of its central city. Fi, your pseudo-Cortana helper, is too eager to jump out and explain even the most trivial thing, Nintendo being afraid that players will feel lost and confused by all this newness. She needs an off switch. Even so, the amount of shake-up the classic dungeon-item formula has been given is astounding. There is almost zero downtime, flying sections (which represent very little of the total game-time) aside. The addition of a simple stamina bar that dictates how long Link can run, or hold on, has huge gameplay implications.

PRETTY PRINCESS

Calling *Skyward Sword* an "SD" game does an injustice to the sheer effort applied to its world construction, animation, and subtle detail. Truthfully, were the game rendered at a native 720p, there would be no complaints about its visuals. A cunning paint-daub effect provides a depth of field where the game world fades into brush stroke impressionism in the distance, negating any sensation of a sparse environment due to lack of hardware power. Proof that design trumps all, it's a gorgeous game and taken as a whole, the single best looking thing Wii has ever hosted.

It's tough, especially if you're slow to learn a new control paradigm. Some enemies you can kill with an easy flick of the Wiimote. Hitting pesky bats into next week is fun. Some enemies will watch where you're holding your sword, predicting your strike and blocking it. To get in past their guard, you have to learn not to telegraph your intent. The combat system shines in *Skyward Sword*, a testament to good design and fresh ideas. Unfortunately, hating motion controls has at this point for many people attached itself into the module in

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

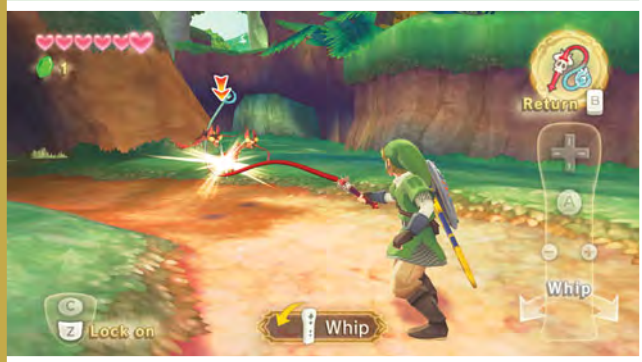
[details]

Platforms:
Wii
Genre:
Action-adventure
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Nintendo EAD / Monolith Soft
Website:
www.nintendo.co.uk
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Gaming

















/1/ Boss fights, like this giant scorpion, are less about doing damage and more about figuring out exactly which bit you're supposed to damage and how. Angle of attack, timing of strike and pattern recognition are all key.

the brain that governs religious beliefs. They see motion controls as nothing but a failure, and it's a cornerstone certainty that doesn't have to share a connection to objectivity. Pity, because the combat in *Skyward Sword* is every bit as special and skill-based as when *Skate* first hit the scene with its Flick-It controls. It's *not* easy. Learning how to use the various weapons and tools – even rolling bombs with skill – has a learning curve.

Skyward Sword carries an odd burden. It's what everyone *asked* for, but now don't want: a hardcore, professional action game built around the Wii interface, and a *Zelda* game that breaks the series mould.

WARNING: SONG OF THE HERO GLITCH

Late in the game, you must collect three parts of the "Song of the Hero". Don't go to the Lanayru Desert first: it causes a game-breaking glitch that makes it impossible to get the other two parts of the song. There is a "Skyward Sword Save Data Update Channel" you can download from the Wii Shop Channel for free that will patch the game and fix your save if it happened to you, and prevent it from happening.



HYRULE HISTORIA

Only available in Japan, the recently-released *Hyrule Historia* is a huge in-depth bible of the series. It shows (for the first time) an official timeline for the series even more convoluted than we could have guessed.

While the story now officially starts in *Skyward Sword* and continues into *Minish Cap*, thanks to *Ocarina of Time*'s time-travel shenanigans three divergent timelines are created. Yes, Link is Marty McFly. The various *Zelda* games slot into one of these three, based on how they describe events from their history. All three timelines do happen, depending on which one you choose to follow. Think of it as a choose-your-own-adventure book. [*Now I get it, Ed*]

1. *Skyward Sword*
2. *The Minish Cap*
3. *Four Swords*
4. *Ocarina of Time*

Timeline A: Link fails to defeat Ganon in *Ocarina of Time* (having vanished in the Temple of Time)

5A. *A Link to the Past*
6A. *Oracle of Ages/Oracle of Seasons*
7A. *Link's Awakening*
8A. *The Legend of Zelda*
9A. *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*

Timeline B: Link defeats Ganon in *Ocarina of Time*, lives out his life from boyhood.

5B. *Majora's Mask*
6B. *Twilight Princess*
7B. *Four Swords Adventures*

Timeline C: Link defeats Ganon in *Ocarina of Time*, lives out his life from adulthood.

5C. *The Wind Waker*
6C. *Phantom Hourglass*
7C. *Spirit Tracks* NAG

Miktar

/ PLUS / The best end-game dungeon of any *Zelda* / Hero Mode provides a fresh second-quest
/ MINUS / The flying parts feel overly empty / Some side-quests feel unresolved even when completed.

AN AMAZING GAME; A GREAT STARTING POINT FOR NEWCOMERS; A STRONG ADDITION TO THE FRANCHISE; A FRESH START.

94

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Saints Row: The Third

What just happened?

When the Third Street Saints rose to the top of their game (robbery, murder, mayhem, etc.), they relished in their success. Their rampant gangsterism was supplemented with advertising deals, clothing lines and product endorsements. Held-up bank tellers asked for an autograph before handing over bags of cash. Life was good for the Saints, but while they messed about with public relations and penthouse suite parties, a criminal organisation known as The Syndicate subversively muscled its way into the city of Stilwater. When the Saints attempted to rob what was unknowingly a Syndicate bank, they brought down a world of hurt and soon after find themselves forced to rebuild their empire in the nearby city of Steelport.

For a game as outrageous as *Saints Row: The Third*, story and character development form a surprisingly large part of the package, although for a while you won't even have time to stop and try to figure out what's going on. This game is crazy from the beginning. I'd like to say "beginning to end" but unfortunately *Saints Row* suffers from a massive flat spot in the middle that begins at coinciding moments of one no longer being amused by giant floppy dildo bats (ask your mom), and story missions that feel as lifeless as a blow-up doll (ask your dad). As much as *Saints Row: The Third* tries to entertain you – to remind you that there are practically no consequences for your actions and that the city of Steelport is there to be played in like a jungle gym with eighteen-wheelers instead of monkey bars – it also has a nasty habit of throwing that freewill in your face for a good portion of the game. Soon enough, driving through the all-too-similar city streets to get to a mission start point feels repetitive; modifying a city dumpster truck and testing how many street poles you can drive through loses its appeal after the first time; the activities run out of charm when you realise that you actually *have* to complete some of them. However, when you manage to scramble over that hurdle (if you do buy this game, it deserves the chance to impress you, so push through), you'll realise that this is a title that has more depth to it than first meets the eye, and suddenly everything becomes more enjoyable.

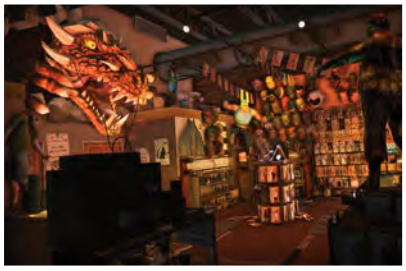
To help you stay entertained between the core story missions,

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Action
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 2 players
Developer:
Volition Inc.
Website:
www.saintsrow.com
Publisher:
THQ
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment













/1/ The game looks great on console but will delight PC owners who like to pamper their desktop. DirectX 11 features light up the city of Steelport, and the built-in video recording mode should see you gain much fame and fortune on the Internet.

/2/ The driving controls feel horrid at first but after a few hours in the game you should have them down. Just remember: braking is for chumps, *hand*braking is for champs.









there is a large variety of optional activities that will help the Saints to gain control over territories within Steelport to increase your regular income and slowly gain control over the entire city. Money means everything in *Saints Row* and can be used to buy new income-generating properties, upgrade your vehicles and weapons, and customise your appearance. The character customisation options are vast, and while it's great to have the option to play as a male or female character (both with three fully-voiced options, or a zombie speech pack that, bizarrely, is also fully-voiced), it's even better to have the option to make that character metallic lime green, obese, and dressed as a super hero. That's what *Saints Row* offers you: the choice to play the game as seriously or jovially as you'd like, but you're never rewarded or punished for playing one way or the other. You can even completely re-customise your character at any point in the game.

Saints Row: The Third's soundtrack deserves a special mention, not just because it's a great collection of classics, genre anthems and modern tunes, but because it does a stellar job of echoing everything that the game represents. If you want to gallivant along the highway while blasting *Ride of the Valkyries* because it makes you drive better (an established scientific fact), then go for it. While you're at it, leave the classic radio station playing because every song in there is one that you'll recognise. If you'd rather spend your time listening to RnB classics, you too are catered for, and should pump up *Return of the Mack* whenever it comes on so your angry neighbours / understanding parents / worried significant other can't hear that you only know the words to the chorus.

Despite being what many would call a competitor to the *Grand Theft Auto* series, *Saints Row* does quite a few things differently. For one, the role of driving is diminished mainly due to the relatively small world size. There are no windy country roads, truck stops or hilltop mansions: the game's entirety is packed into Steelport. For the most part, you'll spend your time behind the wheel simply driving to or between mission objectives, but there are a number of activities that make better use of your legendary power-sliding abilities. The majority of the story missions involve moving about on foot and generally shooting people in the head (or crotch, which works too) until there are no more people in your way or you've reached the next checkpoint. The formula is occasionally mixed up, but for the most part, it's pretty repetitive. Not that that's bad; the funny thing is that you won't even have a chance to predict that the next thing you'll do will be just like the last 17 things you did because you'll be too busy having a great time while doing it. Between the wonderfully voiced characters and the downright wacky settings for the story missions from about two-thirds of the way in, you'll have plenty of chuckles, chortles, genuine LOLs and generally, a blast often literally. NAG

GeometriX

/ **PLUS** / Filled with silly fun / Caters to all sorts / Great characters / Fantastic audio
/ **MINUS** / Repetitive / Mid-game is weak

CATERS TO THE BUS LANES ON THE HIGHWAY OF LIFE...

78

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Mario Kart 7

If it isn't broken...

One might say that what *DOOM* did for multiplayer PC gaming in the '90s, what *Halo* did for Xbox multiplayer gaming in the early 2000s, is what *Mario Kart Wii* did for the Wii. It's the go-to online and local multiplayer game for the system, evergreen in sales, with a universal appeal that gives it a wider audience than what most first-person shooters can hope for.

Only Nintendo enjoys a specific unique position among software publishers: the ability to create a single game that lasts an entire generation. This is the strength of tailoring a game to hardware of one's own creation: *Mario Kart* is a series where one game per platform is enough; designed not as disposable entertainment, but as a gift that keeps on giving and becomes iconic, even defining, of the Nintendo hardware that hosts it.

ONLINE MATTERS

Mario Kart 7's true focus is not, as one might think, on the 3D effect of the 3DS screen. That part is excellent, the game running at a rock solid 60 frames per second even in 3D mode. But *MK7*'s real focus is on putting console multiplayer into a portable package. The multiplayer options in *MK7* are staggering, approximately equalling or exceeding *Mario Kart Wii*. Before even getting to its online suite, download play allows a single owner to become the life of the kart party, serving up a nearly unrestricted 8-player multiplayer game to all (download players are restricted to selecting Shy Guy as their character). Online, the benefit of universal friends registration on 3DS is severely augmented by a wholly new community system which lets you create a persistent community that up to 100,000 players can join and be matched up within, replete with its own leaderboard. If you see a friend playing *MK7* online, you can join them straight from your 3DS friends list with a single button press.

Past all this, *MK7* brings innovation in track design. Multi-section point-to-point racing appears for the first time, and some tracks are broken up by vertical or underwater sections that show off the new ability for a cart to sprout gliding wings or a propeller tail. Cute enough segments at first, one eventually discovers subtleties that give a competitive edge to mastering

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
3DS
Genre:
Racing
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 8 players
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Nintendo EAD / Retro Studio
Website:
mariokart7.nintendo.com/
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Gaming









/1/ The new Lucky 7 power-up in action, spinning several items around you like a roulette wheel, every choice sure to make someone hate you.







them. The underwater sections seem simple, but hide a lot of amazing tide-turning manoeuvres one can make. The returning 16 classic tracks have been overhauled slightly, while the 16 all-new tracks fit in thematically just fine.

GAMEPLAY MATTERS

Competitive is a word *MK7* enjoys, as the "snaking" that spoiled the last portable entry has been nerfed and even the infamous blue shell has had its behaviour modified – the further back in the pack one is when launching it, the less likely it is to reach first place before going off. The entire item roster has been shaken up and rebalanced, a few new ones mixing things up while others have been cut. While the changes to the items and their balance won't please everyone, they do represent a solid attempt at fixing some of the more gregarious failings of *Mario Kart Wii*.

Mario Kart 7 doesn't have as many characters as *Mario Kart Wii* (16 plus your Mii) or as many racers on the track (8 instead of 12), but even so it remains the definitive portable experience and will likely stay the top-selling racing franchise for the foreseeable future. There *are* issues: the two Wuhu Island tracks have known exploits in which falling off the track at specific points will catapult you to the front of the race, and online play can be spotty if your network setup is behind too restrictive a router.

For all the additions, removals and changes, *Mario Kart 7* is a conservative affair. It tries to not fix what isn't broken, while also giving players more agency in the chaos that is a full-bore 8-player power-up-laden race.

CUSTOMISATION MATTERS

As you collect coins scattered around each of the tracks, you unlock new customization parts for your kart. These are split into three categories: body, wheels, glider. The body is the main bulk of your stats, impacting your speed, acceleration, handling and more. Wheels act as a major modifier to your handling and off-road capability, while the glider part impacts your weight and speed.

Customisation plays a huge part in *MK7*. In Time Trials it can mean the difference between first and last place, in regular Versus it impacts how well you recover from setbacks or how agile you are through tighter sections of the track. There is no "winning" combination of parts; how you set up your kart is highly dependent on your racing style. If you prefer to be a juggernaut, slow to start but fastest on track when going, there is the hard choice between longer drifts or being able to cut across off-road terrain without losing speed. If you prefer to be nimble, quick to accelerate but slower top speed, your weight and wheels are going to have to suit your particular cornering and battle style.

STREET & SPOT PASS MATTER

Time Trial records and ghost data is shared silently via Street Pass locally, while Spot Pass keeps you filled up on ghosts to race against. You can choose to fill a track with seven random ghosts (some faster than you, some slower), or just pick one you want to try to beat. Both systems work well, acting as constant content generators.

NAG Miktar

/ **PLUS** / Solid driving model / New additions keep things fresh / Fun to play
/ **MINUS** / Exploitable track glitches / AI drivers may cheat at higher difficulty

YOU'RE NOT A MAN UNTIL YOU'VE WON YOUR FIRST MULTIPLAYER MARIO KART RACE.

91

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Anno 2070

Where's Kevin Costner when you need him?

Unless you're some sort of fun-hating monster, it's easy to enjoy the *Anno* series. Like its nearest rival in the 4X sub-genre, *The Settlers*, the *Anno* series has had its ups and downs, but currently seems to be stronger than ever. *Anno 1404* showed us that this series still has plenty of life left in it with a spectacular visual overhaul, and now *2070* continues where it left off, and takes a leap into the future while it's at it.

As the name implies, *Anno 2070* takes place in the year 2070. Wars have come and gone; global warming has caused the polar ice caps to melt and submerge a great number of coastal settlements and islands. Two main factions exist in the world; both are playable: the Ecos, from the environmentally-friendly Eden Initiative, and the Tycoons, from the industrial company Global Trust. If you trust the back of the box, that's all you'll get to play, but for some unknown reason the developers decided to hide the fact that there's a third faction, the Techs, who have their own buildings, industries and units. The Techs are a neutral faction, and both the Ecos and the Tycoons have access to them in the free-form continuous play mode.

Each of the game's factions feels well-balanced and whole, with deep chains of industry for all and progressively more challenging requirements that must be met to further each faction and unlock new technologies and ultimately military units. *Anno* isn't a war game – it focuses on the fine balance of dozens of industries, the goods they provide and the requirements to keep them going – but there are enough military units (mostly ships, as well as the new air and submarine units) that operate in a relatively simple rock-paper-scissors system to add another layer of complexity to the game. The combat isn't as deep as what you'd find in a dedicated real-time strategy game, but has just enough tactical variety to make it not entirely about using overwhelming forces to win each battle. Mercifully, *2070* also does away with that silly system of land-based military operations from *1404*.

During the main campaign, players will get a chance to control all three factions (sometimes at once – a difficult but highly rewarding balancing act), and even though you ultimately have to choose an allegiance to either Eden Initiative or Global Trust, the presence of the Techs means you never really feel restricted by your choice, although the Techs' way of going about their business does favour harmony with the Ecos a bit more so than the Tycoons.

Each faction has its share of challenges to overcome. The Ecos' buildings tend to require more space (their farms in particular) to operate effectively, and their need to achieve a positive or at least neutral "eco-balance" – a new resource that can harm the output of farms and affect your citizens' mood – will have you scrambling to put up counter-measures like weather control stations where-ever possible. The Tycoons aren't too bothered by eco-balance, but do like their stuff, and as a result you'll be forced to provide a steady supply of goods (more so than the Ecos) to your citizens to avoid any frowning faces and lost tax revenue. The Tycoons' industrial buildings are generally

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Management strategy
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Uplay]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 5 players
Developer:
Blue Byte / Related Designs
Website:
www.anno.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom





// Those who chose to play the game using Ubisoft's Uplay service (the only way to play multiplayer) will have access to a number of social networking tools that have gameplay implications, even single-player missions. Uplay might irritate some people with its "always on" requirement, but it's really starting to show its usefulness and we can't wait to see where the publisher takes it in the future.

/1/ Each faction starts with an Ark – an artificial floating island that can be used to deliver emergency supplies to your islands and store high-level upgrades that provide passive benefits.









more effective, and they rely on the consumption of non-renewable natural resources to provide power and build almost everything. The Techs tend to use a combination of renewable and non-renewable resources, and will almost always be able to balance out an overly destructive Tycoon or struggling Eco player. They're also the only faction that can build underwater. From a gameplay point of view, underwater operations aren't all that different from regular island settlements, but the presence of a whole faction dedicated to it, as well as the beautiful underwater visuals, makes them a welcome addition to the island-hopping formula.

There has certainly been plenty that's been added to *Anno 1404*'s gameplay, but it does sometimes feel like *2070* is simply a re-skinned version of its predecessor. At least, it feels that way in the beginning missions of the campaign, and perhaps that's for the best as the basic systems work well and don't necessarily need to be changed just for the sake of change, but once you encounter the Techs, the underwater construction, the revamped combat, and all the small features in between, you'll realise that there is enough that's new and interesting to allow *2070* to stand on its own. Unfortunately, an issue that occurred in *1404* is still a problem: managing large economies becomes tedious when you need to make any adjustments to production. The game is missing those very useful charts and overlays that help management game veterans squeeze out every drop of productivity, and making changes to your industry chains requires a lot of manual hunting for and clicking on the right buildings, and on a crowded island it can become difficult to differentiate many buildings. And, if one were to be even fussier, it wouldn't be unfair to say that the concept of eco-balance is over-simplified. We can understand the desire to slowly introduce these mechanics to players who might not fully appreciate them, but in that regard we'd love a "hardcore" mode to really ramp up the complexity and reward players who are willing to put in the effort. Perhaps the inevitable expansion will grow that aspect of the game. **NAG**

GeometriX

/ **PLUS** / Great visuals / Complex industrial chains / New features are well implemented
/ **MINUS** / Combat still too simple/ Late-game becomes difficult to manage

***ANNO 2070* DESERVES YOUR ATTENTION IF YOU ENJOY ANY SORT OF MANAGEMENT GAME.**

70

Need for Speed: The Run

Well "The Drive", really

The more *Need for Speed* changes, the more I wish it'd just stay the same. It seems that every new game in the series has to have its "something special", and the result is a series that, aside from the *Shift* spinoff, has been getting increasingly worse as the years go on. And now we have *The Run*, which tries to do its own special thing by shoving together a weak story, inconsistent physics, heavily scripted sequences and very little that is recognisable as "distinctly *Need for Speed*".

As a concept, *The Run* is quite exciting: a lawless race across the US – west coast to east; 3,000 miles and only one winner who walks away with a ridiculous sum of cash. You play as street racer Jack Rourke who's in The Run because he wants to pay off his mob debts, and his totally plutonic lady-friend Sam offers to get him in. There are other characters among the 200+ roster with which the game will attempt to familiarise you during loading screens and a few cinematics, and there's even an opponent that you're supposed to believe is Jack's arch nemesis. None of the characterisation is terribly believable.

On top of all of that, the racing isn't up to the standards (however high or low you perceive them to be) of the *Need for Speed* franchise. Depending on how much you love or hate circuit races, here's some good or bad news: there are none in *The Run*. As a straight race, every event is a variant of the sprint, and while the few modes available offer barely sufficient value, one can't help but feel that there should be more. All too often you'll be faced with a long highway and eight positions that need to be gained by the end of that leg. There's also absolutely no leeway: you have to win every single race, which is quite doable because of the game's reliance on the many scripted events (police barricades, tumbling debris, intersecting civilian vehicles, etc.); you need only get through them and the AI opponents will slow down to let you pass. Obviously higher difficulty levels improve the AI (or give them unfair advantages), but getting through each scripted event is the most important part of each race.

Here's a quick list of things that have benefited previous *NFS* titles but aren't in *The Run*: vehicle upgrades; vehicle customisation (above a few colour selections and at most three full body kits per vehicle); police tactics like spike strips, PIT manoeuvres and helicopters; slow-motion Speed Breaker controls; Pursuit Breakers; manageable police heat levels; the need to change vehicles based on event type (they tell you otherwise, but it's a lie); AI that can tie its own shoe laces without reading a how-to guide; meaningful experience level unlocks. There are more, but in place of those here's the best thing about *The Run*: it does look rather fantastic. Frostbite 2 is very comfortable with a racing title. NAG

GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
3DS / 360 / PC PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Arcade racing
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None Online: 8 players
Developer:
EA Black Box / Firebrand Games (Wii/3DS)
Website:
www.needforspeed.com/therun
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
EA South Africa





/1/ If you wreck your car or go too far off the track, you'll have to reset, but resets, or "Rewinds" are a limited commodity in *The Run*. Most races allow you to Rewind at most five times on normal difficulty, which can be frustrating if you're struggling to nail a particular scripted event.





/ PLUS / Good concept / Looks fantastic / Multiplayer offers decent replayability / No circuits races!
/ MINUS / Too few race modes / Missing a lot of Need for Speed "stuff" / Relies too heavily on scripted events

A SAD ADDITION TO THE SERIES.

58

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A WORLD AWAITS

The Lord of the Rings: War in the North

Substitute snore/bore/sore/hoar as necessary

While Frodo and his gang of merry fellows took the arduous journey to Mount Doom to cast The One Ring into the fires that forged it and thus stop the evil plans of the dark lord Sauron (whoops, spoiler alert), who do you think was on the other side of Middle-Earth, battling monsters and keeping the rest of Sauron's army of Uruk-hai, goblins, trolls, giants and other nasties at bay? These guys: Farin the dwarf Champion, Eradan the human ranger, and Andriel the elf mage.

Farin, Eradan and Andriel will travel to familiar and not-so-familiar locations in the north of Middle-Earth (North-Earth, surely?) to put a stop to Agandaûr, Sauron's right-hand man thing and the rest of his army. They'll do this together, like a little fellowship of their own, and thus cooperative play is the name of the game here. It's highly recommended that those without online functionality (or human friends with which to use said functionality) get both quick to avoid the painful experience of teaming up with the AI partners who will make it their goal in life to get in your way, cast spells according to rigid scripting (nothing resembling strategic thinking), and do less damage than a blunt cheese grater.

This is a role-playing game, but only by definition. It has everything that you'd expect from such: experience levels and skills trees, branching dialogue, collectable loot, set items, item durability, a few side quests; but every single RPG function feels lifeless and poorly hashed together. Even functions like crafting are so limiting to the player that it's not really worth the bother (and you can only gather ingredients when playing as Andriel; for some reason she's unwilling to harvest on her own). The RPG elements come together with the weak AI to even further cheapen the illusion of a deep and complex game because, no matter how you've assigned skill and stat points during level-up, when you switch back to another character (which you can only do between certain chapter parts or before starting a game), the now AI-controlled character will revert to a predefined (and often technically impossible) character build. Whether this is from lazy programming or a desire to create more definition in the characters, we'll leave up to your speculation, but the end result makes *War in the North* feel like it so desperately wants to be a simple action game but the developers didn't know how to break away from their RPG history.

If it wasn't for the genuinely satisfying (although painfully repetitive) combat and deep lore the game manages to muster, there wouldn't be much reason to play *War in the North*, even if you have a couple of friends to share the journey. Its RPG elements are too simplified for hardcore fans but at the same time too invasive for those who want an action experience, which results in a muddled and wishy-washy, but not *entirely* unpleasant, experience from beginning to end.

NAG GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Action role-playing game
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 3 players
Developer:
Snowblind Studios
Website:
www.warinthenorth.com
Publisher:
Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive

















// **Towns offer a slight break from the linear adventuring, and allow you to visit shops to buy and sell randomly generated items with too few special abilities, chat to NPCs and even pick up a few uninspired and easy side quests.**

/1/ **Most combat instances revolve around arena-style combat where you must defeat X number of enemies before you can progress. As boring as it becomes, you'll never be without a challenge, and the combat evolves into something with a decent level of complexity as you unlock new skills.**

/ **PLUS** / Plenty of lore / Combat is gritty and intense
/ **MINUS** / Terrible AI / Shallow and poorly-implemented RPG elements / Extremely repetitive

SUITABLE FOR DESPERATE FANS OR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER BEFORE PLAYED AN ACTION RPG.

65

Look & Listen For the Fans

Trine 2

Three's company

must play / must play / must play / must play

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Puzzle platformer
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: 3 players
Online: 3 players
Developer:
Frozenbyte
Website:
www.trine2.com
Publisher:
Atlus
Distributor:
Apex Interactive

There are very few games that I'd readily call "beautiful", and even fewer still that I'd nominate as the most beautiful game of its time. Actually, there's only one game that I'd dare name as such, and that's *Trine 2*. The art direction is so carefully thought-out and pervades throughout the entire game, from the characters to the platforms that you bounce along to the backgrounds that you'll only notice if you take the time to do so.

With those killer looks, you might expect that *Trine 2* doesn't have much upstairs, but you'd be wrong. As a puzzle platformer, *Trine 2* ticks all the boxes, and, while it never feels innovative, it has solid elements of both platforming and puzzle-solving. It's not an incredibly difficult game if you just want to complete it, but those who want to go for achievements or simply can't bring themselves to move on until they've found every secret in a level will find this to be a challenging game, sometimes to the point of frustration.

While the gameplay elements haven't progressed massively from the first *Trine*, the biggest change is the addition of co-op. Simply put, it changes the game dynamics completely. With three characters on-screen at the same time, puzzles can be solved entirely differently than the single-player experience. Sometimes the puzzles are easier (and a little bit cheatable), but the task of getting all three players to the next area can be quite challenging. Add to that the complexity of dealing with three genius-level puzzle-solvers and you have a team dynamic that sometimes has room for heroes, but other times requires teamwork and careful timing. NAG

GeometriX





/ **PLUS** / Visually stunning / Co-op is a hoot / Solid platforming
/ **MINUS** / Lacks gameplay innovations / Combat is a bit weak

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Cities XL 2012

If you build it, they will come

It's been a while since we saw a new *Sim City* game. Oh, there's been *Sim City Societies*, which we (the royal "we") don't consider to be hardcore enough, but between 2003 and 2009 there wasn't much that appealed to the city building simulation crowd. Then *Cities XL* came along and, while it hardly tore up the charts upon release, filled a gap in that very small market. Two years later and we have *Cities XL 2012* – a continuation of the original game, sans multiplayer, that you can buy as a standalone title or expansion to *Cities XL 2011*.

This is a pure sandbox title: there are no scenarios or campaigns to play through. There is a tutorial, however, but it's so badly implemented that you're better off flipping through the manual for a few minutes during installation and then jumping straight into one of the game's 62 maps – organised according to difficulty and the availability of natural resources. When you first start up a game, you'll be shocked by the interface. The icons are tiny and difficult to differentiate; other parts are huge and cumbersome; some buildings are organised into seemingly random categories; and text fails to align properly on most occasions. It's a mess, but by the time you've inevitably run your first city into the ground, you'll have the hang of it.

Much like the *Sim City* series, *Cities XL* has you lay down zones for various residential, commercial and industrial properties. These zones are populated as the need arises (and it's your job to ensure that it does), but you can also place specific structures like civil services, utilities and, very importantly, roads. Transportation will be a continual obstacle for you to overcome. As cities become denser, so will the number of vehicles on the roads, so you'll have to add new roads, replace existing ones or assign one-way passes. And the road tool, bless its heart for trying so hard and building some really nice suburbs when it feels like it, is a pain to use and prone to breaking intersections and leaving certain buildings disconnected from the road network.

It's clear that the developers set out to build a deep and complex game, and they've achieved that admirably. Along the way, however, they forgot to pay attention to the things that make games fun: challenge and reward. Aside from your own meta-gaming, there is very little to do in *Cities XL 2012* than build a city. Thankfully, the sandbox gameplay on offer is fine, but some good old "gaming stuff" would be more than welcome here. And, despite the challenges offered by the variety of map types, it's not actually that difficult to build a sustainably profitable city of acceptable size. It only really becomes tricky when you, as the player, decide to do something silly like lay a 20-stop underground rail system, only to find that its maintenance costs more than double your current net profit. Despite the potential pitfalls of running a large city, your citizens only become more demanding as the population rises, which unlocks access to new buildings. The result of this is cities that are only as manageable as you want them to be. NAG

GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Management simulation
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
Online activation
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Focus Home Interactive
Website:
www.citiesxl.com
Publisher:
Focus Home Interactive
Distributor:
Apex Interactive

// ***Cities XL 2012*** **is buggy, which we assume is a result of simply adding more stuff onto an already inefficient engine without making sure that everything works first. Among many other problems, terrible slow-downs and low frames-per-second will plague even the beefiest of PCs thanks to a memory leak issue and the ridiculous fact that the game only uses a single CPU core.**









/ **PLUS** / Serious management simulation tools and options / Looks good at times
/ **MINUS** / Sandbox play lacks purpose / Shoddy interface / Buggy / Becomes too easy

CITIES XL 2012 GETS A LOT RIGHT, BUT LACKS REFINEMENT.

70

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Dawn of Fantasy

In this day and age?

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Strategy
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
Internet connection required
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: MMORTS
Developer:
Reverie World Studios
Website:
dof.reverieworld.com
Publisher:
505 Games
Distributor:
Apex Interactive

Dawn of Fantasy is not the biggest name out there, not when it comes to strategy gaming. The game is based on a great concept, with humans, elves and orcs duking it out for dominance of a fantasy empire, but developers Reverie World Studios managed to lose the plot somewhere along the line.

The action is siege-based, working on the more-or-less accurate principle that controlling a stronghold will enable a player to control a given area. Fair enough. But the game gets too complex for its own good at times and, with no real tutorial to speak of, it leaves the player scrabbling.

That's when the player isn't screaming at the title for being buggy, or restarting their computer after one of the game's far too frequent crashes. Add to this lacklustre presentation, including dated graphics, and you have a title that is more frustrating than fun.

The strategy side of the game can be pretty cool, when you get to grips with the overall concepts of the game. That is its only saving grace, that despite all its problems it can still deliver an engaging experience. But the player will need the patience of Job to draw enjoyment from this title. At very best, it will become a cult classic... but we doubt if it will get even there. **NAG**

Ramjet





/ **PLUS** / Can be engaging / Nice idea
/ **MINUS** / Huge bugs / Lots of crashes
THIS IS A CASE WHERE AN EXERCISE IN STRATEGY BECOMES AN EXERCISE IN FRUSTRATION.



Look & Listen
For the Fans

WWE '12

Billed as being bigger, badder and better- but is it?

The tag-team of THQ and Yuke's has been releasing wrestling games under the WWE brand for well over a decade now (of course, it was still known as the WWF when they started) and their annual *Smackdown! vs. RAW* instalments have had an unbreakable chokehold on the genre. That's not to suggest that the games themselves have been flawless; on the contrary, each successive entry has had its fair share of problems, but a lack of competition in the genre has left the developers comfortably resting on their laurels. Dropping the *Smackdown! vs. RAW* branding, *WWE '12* has been touted by its makers as a total retooling of the ageing franchise but despite its innovations, it still falls disappointingly short in several key areas.

The biggest change is a reworked control scheme. The ambitiously dubbed "Predator Technology" now makes use of the face buttons rather than the analogue sticks to initiate attacks, which gradually increase in power as your opponent's energy is worn down. The system also aims to make submission holds and pin attempts more realistic, as well as streamlining the reversal system. The simplified controls make the game more approachable, as players no longer need to memorise multiple different combinations to pull off successful attacks. Unfortunately, the overhauled reversal system is more frustrating than it is rewarding – although reversals are now mapped to only a single button, the window of opportunity to successfully perform one is mercilessly brief. Although many of the animations are smoother this time around, the game is still prone to collision-detection inconsistencies, and these become especially apparent in matches involving weapons.

The Road to Wrestlemania mode has also been overhauled, and now features a single storyline divided into three chapters, each of which revolves around a particular character (namely Sheamus, Triple H, and a created character). The plot is sufficiently melodramatic and convoluted to stand amongst the best of WWE story arcs, but the mode feels lacking, not just because of its reduced scope, but also because many match sequences end with scripted cut-scenes over which the player has no control. It's a disjointed and restrictive affair that isn't as rewarding as it could be. Fortunately, the WWE Universe mode makes a welcome return, offering as engaging and immersive an experience as it did in last year's release.

All told, *WWE '12* is less of a reboot than it is a sequel. An updated roster and improved visuals are welcome improvements, as is the simplified play dynamic, but the game is plagued by an underwhelming story mode, inconsistent controls and repetitive commentary. It's the best in its genre at the moment, but it's far from perfect – let's hope that the developers cover some of that ground before the next inevitable release. **NAG**

Madman

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Sports
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: 12 players
Developer:
YUKE'S
Website:
wwe.thq.com
Publisher:
THQ
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment









// The moves in no particular order: The man-toss, the raging bull, the boot kiss, the 'is that a banana in your tights', the reverse love handle and the feel my groin with your elbow.





/ **PLUS** / Simplified mechanics / Expansive roster
/ **MINUS** / Disjointed story mode / Unforgiving reversal system / Inconsistent AI

DESPITE ITS INNOVATIONS, *WWE '12* STILL FEELS FLAWED – IT'S A CASE OF TWO STEPS FORWARD AND ONE STEP BACK.

65



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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Go Vacation

Time off

We're not sure if it has to do with attention spans or whatever, but there seem to be more mini-game collections on the Wii than any other console. And, sad to say, the vast majority of them are rubbish. With few notable exceptions, they feel like rushed-out cash-ins on the popularity of the Nintendo console.

Go Vacation is one of those notable exceptions. While it does feel like a clone of things we have seen before, the game takes an interesting approach to the whole affair. Rather than just allowing the player to jump to unlocked mini-games via a menu system (which it does allow, mind you) the player has the option to travel to the various locations where the fifty activities on offer are hosted.

With numerous ways to travel the island, ranging from roller skates to water bikes, the travelling itself becomes a game, although don't expect to scatter holiday makers *Carmageddon* style as you zoom from place to place. They are immune to vehicular damage.

Or you can just resort to the menu system to get your mini-game fixes. There are a wide variety of games, ranging from things like skydiving through to table hockey. For the most part, they are lots of fun and fairly easy to learn. Some, though, are poor, like the beach volleyball, and others are just plain boring, like the skydiving. Still, with so many to choose from, there are bound to be more than a few that everyone will enjoy.

And, as you might have guessed, the game lends itself more to a multiplayer experience than a single player one. It is a party game, as so many of these mini-game collections are, and you're going to have a better time with it if there are others playing as well. Strangely, though, the developers decided to keep the multiplayer gaming local. There are no online options for this title, which is probably better considering how much online support Nintendo gives the South African market.

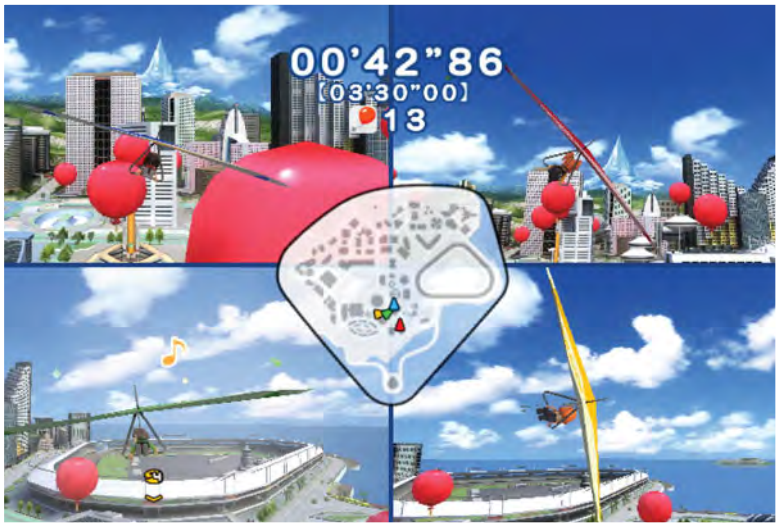
Go Vacation is just about as much fun as you're going to have with a mini-game collection on the Wii. It doesn't do a better job than the various games with "Wii" in their title (like *Wii Sports Resort*) and it often feels like a clone, but it's a good clone none-the-less.

With so many rushed–out Wii games out there, it's good to see that some developers take at least a modicum of pride in their work. *Go Vacation* is great fun for the whole family, because of its simplicity and variety. NAG

Ramjet

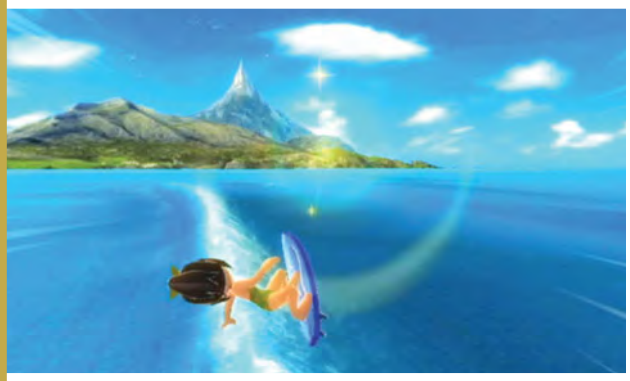
[details]

Platforms:
Wii
Genre:
Party game
Age restriction:
PG
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: None
Developer:
Namco Bandai
Website:
www.nintendo.co.za
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Gaming











/ **PLUS** / Lots of variety / Almost a sandbox
/ **MINUS** / Some of the games are poor / No online options

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A NEW WII MINI-GAME COLLECTION, THIS IS A GOOD OPTION.

75

Unstable. Volatile. Dangerous. And that's just the chemistry.

35 Breaking 56 Bad



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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Blackwater

Please, no...

The idea of an FPS using Kinect controls has some solid appeal to it. The idea could result in a truly great game. Or it could go completely the other way, giving you a product that would still probably be better than *Blackwater*.

Blackwater bounces the player between four characters who work for the real-world Blackwater PMC. As such, the player moves through this on rails shooter from area to area. When they get there, they have to shoot all the bad guys. And then they move on.

The implementation of the Kinect control scheme in this game is almost as bad as the thoroughly broken AI. The player will battle with the controls, and will suffer numerous cheap deaths as the game flings them into stupid situations that no real soldier would enter. And if you die, it's back to the start of the level with you. Check points would not have cured this game's ills, but they would have helped a bit.





Just in case you cannot live with the game's truly terrible Kinect controls, there is a controller option. It is even worse, with poorly thought out controls hampered by bad design.

Blackwater feels old and broken, like a racehorse five years past retirement. It might have been good on paper, but that's as far as it goes. **NAG**

Ramjet

pony award / pony award / pony award / pony award

[details]

Platforms:
360
Genre:
First-person shooter
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Zombie Studios
Website:
www.505games.co.uk
Publisher:
505 Games
Distributor:
Apex Interactive

/ **PLUS** / Umm... / Nice shiny disc / Makes your Xbox collection look bigger
/ **MINUS** / Broken, broken, and broken.

THIS GAME IS THE CLOSEST THE KINECT WILL PROBABLY EVER GET TO SADOMASOCHISM...

20

Michael Phelps: Push the Limit

Not so Wet

Summer is a time for outdoor living, and here in South Africa swimming makes up a large portion of that idea. Pools are common in cities like Jozi. But not everyone has access to a pool...

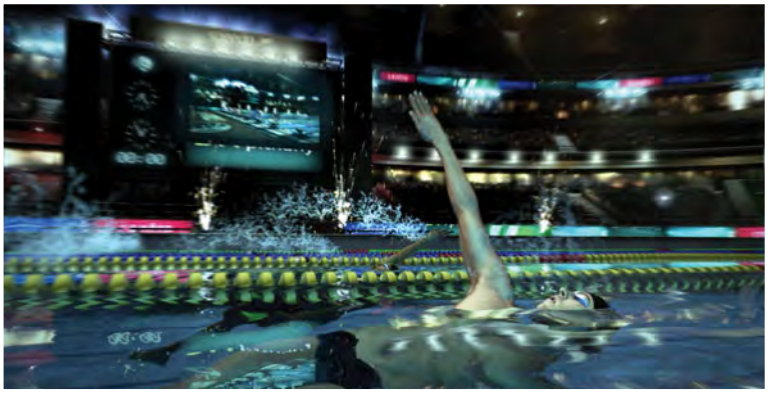
Not that *Michael Phelps: Push the Limit* is going to cool you down on a muggy day... unless you flood your living room, in which case your Kinect will probably go on the fritz. Rather, this game looks at the fitness aspect of swimming, and can provide the user with a great upper body workout. But it doesn't feel like a fitness game, either... rather, it seems a bit more like a rhythm game, set to the tune of lots of splashing. Playing the game is all about stroke rhythm, pretty much. Most gamers should be good at stroke rhythm... [*Thanks for sharing, Ed*]

It's a fair amount of fun, though, and the great water effects make it worth trying, at least. It offers a fairly long career mode, with numerous swimming strokes on offer. But it's doubtful whether you're going to be putting masses of time into this title. It's not particularly tiring, but it can get old fairly fast. Shorter gaming sessions will make it more bearable. And it works really well with the Kinect, which is a bonus. **NAG**

Ramjet

[details]

Platforms:
360
Genre:
Sports
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 8 players
Online: None
Developer:
Blitz Games
Website:
www.505games.co.uk
Publisher:
505 Games
Distributor:
Apex Interactive







/ **PLUS** / Great water effects / Works well
/ **MINUS** / Can get a little tiresome

IT'S A SWIMMING SIMULATOR. NO, SERIOUSLY.

70



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Look & Listen For the Fans

Men of War: Vietnam

War. What is it good for?



Men of War ditches its usual World War II setting in favour of something a little more jungle-y and helicopter-filled in *Men of War: Vietnam*. If you've never heard of the series, it's quite popular among armchair commanders who like their tactical action to show no remorse and offer a constantly satisfying challenge.

It's split into two single-player campaigns (one for the US forces, the other for the North Vietnamese Army), and sees you taking control of everything from four-man assault squads to small armies (depending on the mission), and it's up to you to control every single aspect of the tiny military folk under your command. You tell them what weapons to use. You tell them when to crouch or go prone. You tell them where they should be facing. You decide when they throw grenades, when they should switch weapons, how fast they should move and whether or not it's a good idea for them to hitch a ride in an abandoned vehicle. It's deeply tactical, and incredibly daunting given the initially dizzying array of options and its real-time, perpetually intense nature. You're constantly working to outsmart the enemy without getting your men shot in the face because of a stupid decision. It's immensely rewarding at the best of times, particularly in multiplayer, but it's definitely the type of game not everyone will fall in love with.

NAG Barkskin



[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Real-time tactics
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
Internet connection required [one-time online activation]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Best Way
Website:
www.menofwargame.com/games/vietnam
Publisher:
1C Company
Distributor:
Apex Interactive

/ **PLUS** / Satisfyingly tactical / Loads of depth
/ **MINUS** / Tough as nails and totally obtuse, with no tutorial

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT THIS ISN'T FOR EVERYONE, BUT IT'S A GOOD, CHALLENGING REAL-TIME TACTICS TITLE.

75

Professor Layton and the Spectre's Call

What the dickens



The word "charming" tends to get thrown around to describe games with well-presented, simple visuals and a fun premise, but never before has it been this fitting. *Professor Layton and the Spectre's Call* might be for the aging DS (and we look forward to the first 3DS release soon), but it comes from a line of games that pride themselves in delivering great puzzles over technical wizardry, so we'll forgive its overstayed presence on the outdated device.

You'll take on the roles of Professor Layton – renowned archaeologist, gentleman and lover of puzzles – as well as his assistant Emmy and young friend Luke as they attempt to unravel the mystery of a giant spectre that's taken up residence in the foggy town of Misthallery. As you journey through the game, you'll encounter over 170 puzzles that span the full range from simple logic puzzles to those that require out-of-the-box thinking, to those confounded sliding tile things. The puzzles have been designed, or at least supervised, by members of the Tago-Akira Research Institute, which doesn't mean much to us but we're sure someone out there will be impressed. At the very least, you know that a professional puzzle-making institute has got their hands on this game, so expect a challenge.

For those who aren't too keen to have their minds turned to mush within minutes, there's a hints system that gives you gradually more specific hints as you spend coins found hidden throughout the game world. Unfortunately, moving around that game world is a bit of a chore, as the touch-only interface isn't really designed for quick play. The game is also a bit stingy with the adventure elements for a "puzzle adventure game" – there's no dialogue selection, very little branching or non-linear progression and an inventory system that is only barely used. At least it shares the hand-drawn art and animations of its adventure cousins (twice removed).

NAG GeometriX

[details]

Platforms:
DS
Genre:
Puzzle adventure
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Level-5
Website:
professorlayton.nintendo.com
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Gaming

/ **PLUS** / Lots of puzzles / Good range of difficulty / Plenty of bonus content
/ **MINUS** / Missing some adventure game elements / Navigation is a bit of a pain

GO ON, GIVE YOUR BRAIN SOMETHING TO DO.

80

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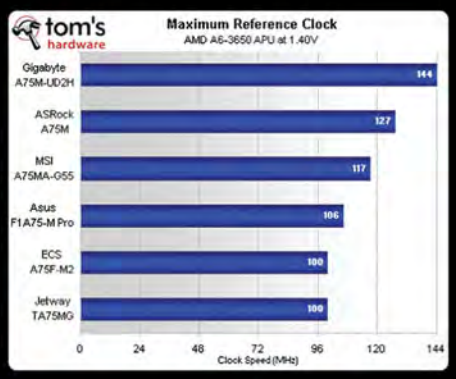


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Know your technology

/ IVY BRIDGE /
INTEL's 22nm die-shrink of the Sandy Bridge microarchitecture, which features a new tri-gate transistor technology that allows power consumption up to 50% less than traditional high-k nodes, and allows for 37% faster switching speed and many other enhancements. Ivy Bridge will support PCI Express 3.0, DDR memory speeds up to 2,800 MHz and Intel HD4000 graphics.

/ PILEDRIVER /
AMD's enhanced Bulldozer core which is due for release after Q3 2012. It's based on the 32nm SOI (Silicon on Insulator) process and will be built at Global Foundries like all other CPUs from AMD. This new revision will feature Radeon 7000 graphics and a DDR3 IMC officially supporting 2,133 MHZ memory frequencies. IPC improvements are said to be in the region of 10% over the current Bulldozer cores.

/ DDR4 /
DDR4 is the successor to the common DDR3 memory standard in use today. DDR4 has a wider range of clock frequencies from 2,133 MHz to 4,266 MHz, and has a significantly lower operating voltage between 1.05 and 1.2V. One of the key changes in the specification is that it discards multi-channel memory approaches, and instead features point to point connections with the memory controller in the CPU.

/ PCI EXPRESS 3.0 /
The 3.0 specification of PCIe increases bandwidth in each direction to 8GT/s (1GB/s) and is available on Intel CPUs starting from the Sandy Bridge-E onwards. The 3.-0 spec has optimizations for enhanced signalling, better data integrity, PLL improvements and clock data rate recovery. All of which are not present in the previous iterations. The PCIe 3.0 specification also features a better scrambled encoding scheme which allows it to be more efficient than the 2.0 spec even at the same transfer rate. New graphics cards from both AMD and NVIDIA in 2012 will be PCIe 3.0 compliant.



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R220 | www.logic3.com



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R499 | www.sonicinformed.co.za

By the Numb3rs

1.2 billion
The number of app downloads on iOS and Android devices tracked between 25-31 December 2011. A record-breaking 6.8 million iOS and Android devices were activated on Christmas Day.
Source: Flurry

Quote

"3DMark for Windows 8 will be our most wide-reaching 3DMark ever, able to accurately measure and compare gaming performance across all devices and graphical feature sets available with Windows 8."
Jukka Mäkinen, CEO of Futuremark

Futuremark recently announced development of a new version of 3DMark, the company's flagship benchmark for gamers. 3DMark for Windows 8 (working title) is designed for gaming performance measurement and comparison across all Windows 8 devices from tablets and notebooks to high-end desktop gaming systems.



Genius DVR-GPS300
A GPS recording device that can be used on bicycles and vehicles. It can record latitude and longitude coordinates, directions, and driving speed.
R1,110 | www.geniusnet.com

Energizer XP18000 Power Pack
The Energizer Energi To Go power pack external battery is great if you're travelling. It can deliver up to six hours of power to a laptop and can also be also be used to charge netbooks, portable DVD players, digital cameras, smartphones and more.
R1,759 | www.portablepower.co.za

Hed Kandi _Discotheque
Glam up your tech lifestyle with these stylish music headphones. The ear cups are soft making the headphones super comfy to wear.
R199 | www.musica.co.za

DID YOU KNOW?

Splashdata, the makers of a password management app, sifted through millions of passwords that were dumped online during 2011 and came up with a list of the 25 passwords used most often by hacking victims. It's interesting how none of them contain upper case letters:

password; 123456; 12345678; qwerty; abc123; monkey; 1234567; letmein; trustno1; dragon; baseball; 111111; iloveyou; master; sunshine; ashley; bailey; passw0rd; shadow; 123123; 654321; superman; qazwsx; michael; football.

Dream Machine

No changes in the Dream Machine this month, but next month there are a few surprises which we have on our test bed. Look forward to the awesome Radeon HD 7970 which is pure bliss even with such early drivers. Pricing hasn't changed much if at all on the current machines, but if you're still interested in the MSI GTX580 you better buy one sooner rather than later as we've heard from a reliable source that these have reached EOL and no more will be manufactured. Look to the new Cosmos II as well from Coolermaster which has everything the HAF-X has and more, including some of the best design queues ever seen on a case.



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R2,399 / www.evetech.co.za



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R5,499 / www.covex.co.za



OS drive
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Storage drive
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R1,999 / www.seagate.com



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



Display
ASUS VG278 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



Intel

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

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

16GB Quad Channel DDR3 2400 MHz memory
R3,999 / www.gskill.com



Intel Dream Machine price:

R58,805



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

Glad that's over with!



Now that 2011 is over, one can reflect upon it in earnest and say without a doubt, it was one of the worst years for entertainment as a whole, especially on the technological front. I generally dislike lists but this has to be broken down as a random list of annoying things about 2011.

1. Stereoscopic movies and consoles with 3D support: This is at the top of the list not because it deserves to be but because the last horrible movie experience I had was with a 3D movie, *Immortals*. This has nothing to do with the movie but the fact that the 3D only served to make sure the experience was dark, slightly out of focus, strained my eyes and overall made the entire watch tiring, underwhelming and expensive. It added nothing to the movie but risked ruining what was otherwise an okay two hours or so. Movie studios and their inability to comprehend that movies converted to 3D are hurting rather than helping their business is baffling.

> **"How do you misplace 800 million transistors? They may be tiny, but that's embarrassing."**

Even worse is that, with every fantastically bad 3D conversion, the more convinced the general public is that everything 3D is terrible including the current gen consoles which have had 3D support added via firmware updates. I mean what could be more fun than an otherwise enjoyable game suddenly rendering at a dim 24FPS? 3D FTW!

2. The absence of original IP in entertainment: Is it me or have Hollywood and game studios (not counting indies which have been doing very well) run out of original material and hit rock bottom in 2011? Why would a remake of a tragically average '80s movie fare any better today than it did then? Why is it we are still watching remake after remake in mortifying 3D and worst of all paying a premium for it? There wasn't a single memorable movie in 2011 and you know it was a bad year if one of the highlights was *Transformers 3*. As for games, more sequels; some being patches that retail for full price (*F1 2011* for example). *MW3* may have sold more copies than there are people on earth and it's possible that I'm in the 0.005% of people who actually buy a game hoping for a compelling single player campaign, but it was a story even more improbable than the one in *MW2*, which was in turn... enough said. For the record, the Monopoly biopic is not a great idea actually, how is this not obvious to everyone?

3. AMD FX: Yes this CPU was going to get it as well. AMD's APUs are fantastic, the new HD7000 series pure genius, but their FX CPUs are inexplicable to say the least. AMD had told all journalists and everyone that their CPU housed around 2BN gates, only to turn around and apologize for that weeks later stating that it's closer to 1.2 billion gates. How do you misplace 800 million transistors? They may be tiny, but that's embarrassing. Even more so is the reduction in performance from the previous generation. If it's lost to you how silly this entire thing was, it's tantamount to Nintendo releasing the N64 as the Wii HD and hoping we don't notice.

4. Games that still need DVDs to run: In 2011, we had games (Games For Windows LIVE titles mainly) that required the original disc to be in the drive, even though you must validate and register this copy online to play it. This double DRM is doubly annoying to say the least because I thought we were passed the days of using disc based DRM which has proved itself numerous times to be useless at best and downright aggravating every other time.

Neo Sibeko

Dell XPS L702X

Supplier: **Dell** / Website: **www.dell.com** / RRP: **R19,999**



Dell's XPS series has always given rise to slick, powerful multimedia notebooks. Their L702X continues this tradition, offering up a notebook that you'll know, just by glancing in its general direction, is something impressive. It's a chunky beast, heavy and sturdily built, packed with hardware that ranges from decent to praiseworthy.

Aesthetically, it's an elegant machine. The Chiclet-style keyboard is a pleasure to use, although the layout of some of the keys does take some getting used to. Special mention has to be made of the 3D-capable display, because it's excellent – vibrant, colourful and bright. It exudes quality, which is mighty important if you plan to shell out the R19,999 it costs to get your hands on it. The audio is also incredibly potent, and will make for a satisfyingly good experience (with a surprising amount of volume as well) whether you're gaming, watching movies or listening to music.

Now, let's get down to the sort of performance you can expect on the gaming side of things. The *Resident Evil 5* DirectX 10 benchmark at the native resolution of 1920x1080 with 4X AA and 3D disabled produced an average frame rate of 41.3. It's not the best result, but it's definitely playable with all settings maxed out. Unigine Heaven, with no AA and 4X AF at native res in DirectX 10 mode chugged along and gave a final score of 491. With DirectX 11 enabled, that score dropped to 319. 3DMark Vantage with the performance profile selected awarded the L702X 6193 3DMarks. We expected a higher score here, because the CPU is quite beefy – but it seems the NVIDIA GeForce GT 555M serves to bottleneck the whole system. Still, you'll be able to play most games today at low or medium settings without much difficulty.

Unfortunately, the rig's 3D gaming performance is a bit disappointing, as is to be expected when taking the above numbers into account. At the same settings as above, the *Resident Evil 5* benchmark achieved an average FPS of just 13.8. Playing in 3D at such a low frame rate is likely to make your eyes bleed, so if you're looking for a notebook that you plan to game in 3D with, this might not be your best option. With that gorgeous display though, viewing 3D photos and watching 3D movies is a pleasure, so if that's all you want to do, go for it.

It comes packing a range of Dell-exclusive software as well, some of which is pretty useful (like the Dell Audio hub, which lets you control various sound and microphone-related doohickies). The Blu-ray player is much appreciated (and pretty much expected these days) and you'll find all the usual features like a webcam and various connectivity options (including USB 3.0).

All in all, Dell's XPS L702X is a good all-round notebook with a range of multimedia features. The only thing you'll have to consider is whether you're willing to hand over such a huge wad of cash for a 3D notebook that can't really handle 3D gaming. If you don't actually care about gaming in 3D and you've got the cash, then you'll be happy with it. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

[specs]

CPU:
Intel Core i7-2720QM (2.2 GHz)
GPU:
NVIDIA GeForce GT 555M (3GB GDDR3)
RAM:
8GB DDR3
Display:
17.3" 3D LCD (1920x1080)
HDD:
1.2TB 5400RPM
OS:
Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit

/ **PLUS** / Sturdy, attractive design / Packed with features
/ **MINUS** / Poor 3D gaming performance

DELL'S XPS L702X IS A WELL-DESIGNED MULTIMEDIA NOTEBOOK.

8 OUT OF 10

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intel inside™ CORE™ i7

ASUS VG278H

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: **za.asus.com** / RRP: **R8,999**





"Not only is the picture sharper and more vibrant, the display supports more display options, or rather it has more relevant connectivity options like HDMI 1.4a support."

Without question, 3D is probably one of the most loathed technologies amongst enthusiasts, and with good reason. The cinema experience put together with the first generation of 3D capable monitors made sure that the technology was regarded mostly as a gimmick at best, and every other time just another annoying marketing ploy.

While we've been fans of 3D Vision for a while, we must admit that there is some merit to these claims, and end-users are right to feel that they've been short changed by the entire 3D hype. In the gaming context the limitations of HDMI 1.4a displays ensures that frame rates are capped at 24 FPS which is hardly playable. This isn't much of an issue for movies, but for games it's hardly appropriate or useable, as it takes away more than it adds to the entire gaming experience.

With so-called gaming notebooks, 3D is further given a bad name because active 3D solutions require significantly more graphics processing power to generate essentially double the frame rate. Obviously this is a lot to ask from parts that are inherently underpowered, so anybody who's used a 3D gaming notebook will attest to just how tragic the entire experience is.

As impressive as the original VG236H was, it can still be considered amongst the first generation screens and, while it's more than capable of holding its own with newer displays, compared to this new model, it's truly a generation behind.

When we started up the VG278H, the most immediate difference between this and the earlier model is the sheer brightness and colour richness of the display. The white LED backlit display really makes for a very comfortable viewing experience, which goes a long way into making 3D displays much more appealing than before. As a result of several advances made in display technology in the last couple of years, the VG278H is not only thinner than the original model but it's surprisingly light as well.

Not only is the picture sharper and more vibrant, the display supports more display options, or rather it has more relevant connectivity options like HDMI 1.4a support. This means that it can support the frame packing mode used by Blu-ray players and the Sony PS3, which is fantastic news for those who use a single display between multiple devices. Sadly however, the component input has been removed, but this shouldn't be much of an issue because whatever you can do with a component connection you can do now via HDMI.

Above all however, this display is the first commercially available display that supports NVIDIA's Lightboost technology, which aims to solve the problem of the heavily reduced lighting levels of active shutter glass systems as employed in the first generation of products. How this technology works is that it turns off the back lighting when it's not needed but overdrives it when necessary (between screen draws), allowing it to output much brighter or more intense light levels. It's more complicated than we have made it out to be but what is important to note is that it means the rendered image in 3D mode is perceptually twice as bright as it was in first generation displays. Gaming on the monitor is nothing but blissful and the strain on the eyes is significantly reduced and, if anything, it compels one to play every supported game in stereoscopic mode.

There's a lot more one could say about this display, but overall it's definitely the best screen we've tested here, not only in regular 2D mode, but it's light years ahead in stereoscopic mode as well. If you're fortunate enough to see a demo of this screen in action, you'd do yourself a great injustice by not indulging yourself in its incredible visuals. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

[specs]

Size:
27"
Native resolution:
1920x1080
Refresh rate:
120Hz (2ms)
Inputs:
dual Link DVI, HDMI (1.4a), D-Sub
Backlight technology:
White LED

/ PLUS / Lightweight / Lightboost technology / HDMI 1.4a support
/ MINUS / Pricey

THE BEST 3D VISION SUPPORTING DISPLAY TO DATE AND ARGUABLY AMONGST THE BEST GAMING LCDS IN 2D MODE AS WELL.

9 OUT OF 10

NAG GAMING LEAGUE

NGL 2012

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

ONLINE LEAGUE 2012



Platform: PC online

Game mode: Summoners Rift

Players: 5 vs. 5 [+3 subs allowed per clan]

Registrations: 1 January – 27 January

Seeding Tournament: 3 February – 24 February

Online League: 9 March – 31 May [Leg 1] // 15 June – 31 August [Leg 2]

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CM Storm Trooper

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: **www.cmstorm.com** / RRP: **R1,899**

Coolermaster has a reputation for building high quality computer cases, peripherals and cooling devices, and while their signature level of quality is certainly present here, there are a couple of design decisions that come off as a little odd, although not altogether bad.

As expected, the build quality of the Trooper is right up there with the best of them. The matte black colour scheme is echoed throughout the interior, right down to the screws on the fans, and every surface inside has been well smoothed over and powder-coated to ensure no rough edges can be found. The oddities begin inside the case, where you'll notice a 2.5" HDD/SSD bay that sits quite out of place at the bottom of the case. To correctly install a drive into this bay, the entire unit has to be removed, which requires accessing the bottom of the case and removing the dust filter. It seems unnecessary to create that much legwork for a simple drive installation. Thankfully, the rest of the drives can be installed with minimal fuss thanks to the tool-less brackets that do also support 2.5" drives (although that will require a screwdriver).

Perhaps the strangest feature of the Trooper is the concealed tool box at the bottom of the HDD bay cage. While you need a screwdriver to get to it, once you're in, it's a handy place to store your valuables during a LAN or just keep any important tools and software. Another odd but welcome feature is the ability to turn the HDD cage 90 degrees, to allow the dual 120mm intake fans to pull air into the rest of your case, across your drives. Depending on your cooling solution (water or otherwise), it's nice to have the option. Top off all of the irregular features with a rubberised handle that's only going to be balanced if your case is packed full of drives, and you have a range of great features, a few strange but interesting ones, and just a slight hiccup to put a damper on this otherwise fantastic case. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



[specs]

Gross weight:
13.7kg
Dimensions:
240 x 605.6 x 578.5 mm
Included fans:
2x side/front 120mm, 1x rear 140mm, 1x top 200mm
Additional fan mountings:
2x side 120mm, 2x bottom 120mm, 2x top 120mm
Supported motherboards type:
Micro-ATX, ATX, XL-ATX
Front panel:
2x USB 3.0, 2x USB 2.0, e-SATA, audio

/ PLUS / Great build quality / Customisable interior / Built-in fan controller / XL-ATX support
/ MINUS / SSD drive bay placement / Handle placement

A HIGH-QUALITY OFFERING FROM COOLER MASTER THAT ONLY JUST MISSES THE MARK.

9 OUT OF 10

WD TV Live Streaming Media Player

Supplier: **Western Digital** / Website: **www.westerndigital.com** / RRP: **TBA**

Most current-day TVs and projectors are released with built-in networking and USB support, but for those of you who sit with something a little older, there's a simple way to get streaming media in your living room. Media players come in all sorts of specifications, but this WD model follows the basic idea: no built-in storage (admittedly odd, for a Western Digital device), but with connectivity options to allow for a range of media to be streamed across the Internet or your local network to the device and played on your TV.

This is a full HD capable device but oddly doesn't include any HD cables in the box – HDMI or component. Setting up the WD TV Live is a simple matter of plugging it in, turning it on and either connecting an Ethernet cable or configuring a Wi-Fi connection. The latter is a welcome feature. The rest of the settings are defined as you go along, such as your region choice and media server selection.

All of the device's core functions – streaming video, music and images from a network location – work perfectly. Unfortunately, the Internet streaming is a bit of a mixed bag as it relies on applications (which we assume are built by a variety of in-house and third-party developers) to get the job done. While apps like the video streaming service Flingo and the podcast / Internet radio service Deezer work flawlessly (even allowing for background streaming of audio while you flip through your photos), the YouTube app is the worst we've ever encountered. It's so bare-bones that it's not even worth your time. The AccuWeather app also disappoints, but only because it doesn't seem to feature any local cities – particularly strange given that the AccuWeather service itself does indeed support them.

Aside from the lacklustre YouTube support, the software on this device is excellent. As is the case with 90% of media players, browsing through the interface is a somewhat sluggish experience (although not terrible), but that comes down to keeping the hardware costs as low as possible, and the balance struck is fine, so we can't criticise it too much in that regard. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



[specs]

Supported video formats:
AVI (Xvid, AVC, MPEG1/2/4), MPG/MPEG, VOB, MKV (h.264, x.264, AVC, MPEG1/2/4, VC-1), TS/TP/M2T (MPEG1/2/4, AVC, VC-1), MP4/MOV (MPEG4, h.264), M2TS, WMV9, FLV (h.264)
Supported image formats:
JPEG, GIF, TIF/TIFF, BMP, PNG
Supported audio formats:
MP3, WAV/PCM/LPCM, WMA, AAC, FLAC, MKA, AIF/AIFF, OGG, Dolby Digital, DTS
Inputs:
2x USB 2.0, Ethernet, Wi-Fi
Outputs:
HDMI, composite A/V, optical audio

/ PLUS / Wi-Fi support / Wide range of supported file types / Impressive apps
/ MINUS / Somewhat sluggish interface / Terrible YouTube app / No bundled HD cable

ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU NEED IN A MEDIA PLAYER.

8 OUT OF 10

GIGABYTE™ *Leader in Motherboard Innovation*



All New 3-Way Digital Power

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Patent Pending
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3-Way Digital Engine
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Patent Pending
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Dual UEFI BIOS™

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X79-UD7



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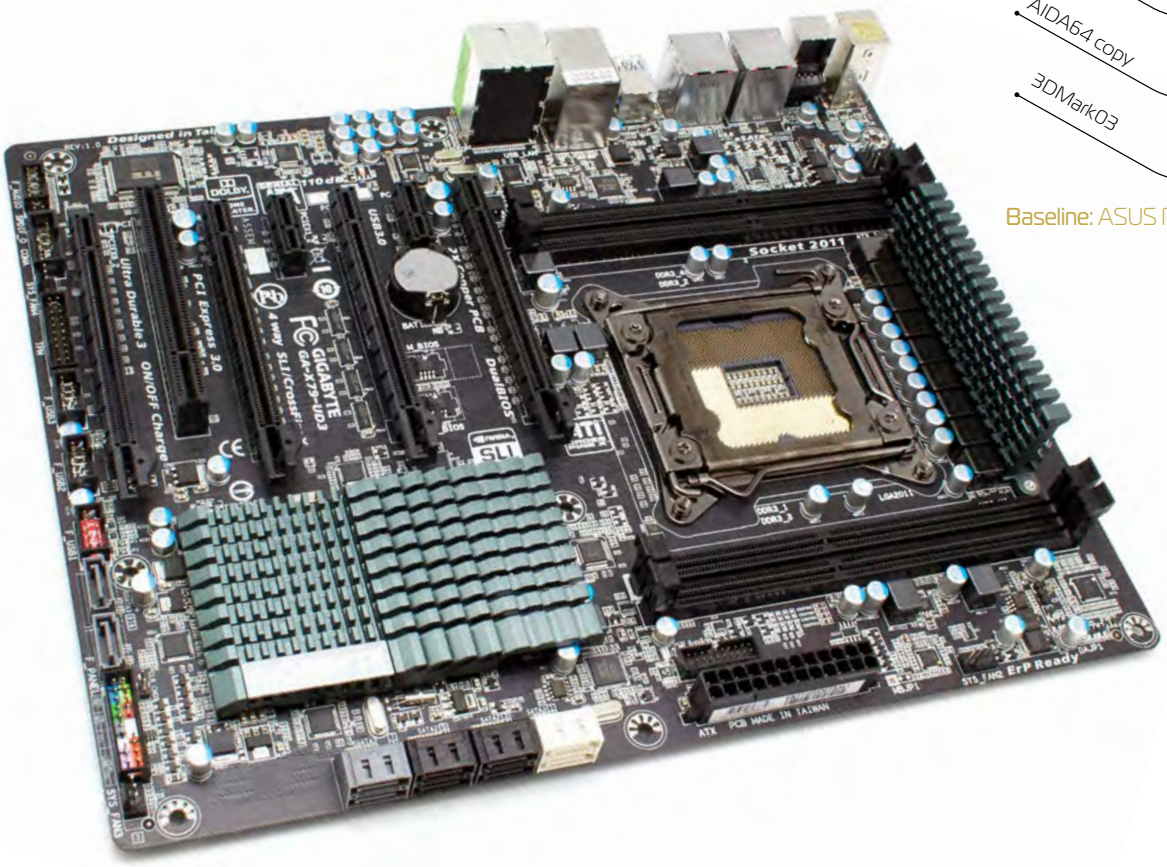
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GIGABYTE X79-UD3

Supplier: **Rectron** / Website: **www.gigabyte.com** / RRP: **R3,499**



Benchmarks

CineBench 11.5	/ 46,892 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 13.63 / / 33,737 /
AIDA64 copy	/ 20073MB/s / / 0 /
3DMark03	/ 154,327 / / 0 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

The X79 platform has arrived and for the most part, it's underwhelming. Despite that it powers the best motherboard the world has ever seen, by and large – the limited overclocking headroom and availability of the desirable CPUs in 2011 made sure that the 1155 platform was still the most desired. Indeed we have seen some new records from X79 motherboards but for the most part these are showcases more than they are a reflection of what the platform is truly capable of.

Having said that, GIGABYTE for the first time with X79 has moved to a digital VRM design, an American Megatrends BIOS and, more importantly, has shown their 3D BIOS which is what most people will notice. Just to make it clear, other than a graphical interface and somewhat larger BIOS sizes, there's nothing at present that UEFI offers to the end user that can't be achieved with a traditional BIOS. However, because of some changes in the industry there's but a single supplier of UEFI BIOS chips and everyone has to get on board.

As is tradition for GIGABYTE, the X79-UD3 is their entry level board of the series, so you'll not get many of the features found on the UD5 and their G1 gaming line. It may only have four DIMM slots but that means it can support a maximum of 32GB of DDR3 memory (provided you use 8GB DIMMS) which should be more than enough for now and the foreseeable lifetime of this platform. More importantly, for the first time ever, a UD3 product receives 4-way SLI and Crossfire support. That's right: you can use four graphics cards in tandem at 8X speed each for gaming bliss.

If you're venturing into 4-way extreme overclocking this board won't provide enough power and most likely won't suffice, but the demographic for that functionality is very small even in the extreme overclocking circles. So what you end up with is a board that ticks all the right boxes and in essence makes the X79 platform accessible to more people without sacrificing to the more expensive motherboards.

We tested this board with the latest F8d BIOS at the time and it must be said that GIGABYTE have made some massive strides in their development, turning what was essentially a disappointing product into a respectable one that delivers solid performance and stability. When we received this board with the F2 firmware, it was clear that GIGABYTE had not mastered the UEFI BIOS at all; it was slow, buggy and many features just didn't work as described, if at all. Then, as a result of some settings that were unchecked in some of the earlier BIOSs, a few users had failures with this board. However, after the F7 BIOS, things improved significantly and as it is, the X79-UD3 has just about every X79 platform overclocking world record, making the UD3 amongst the most impressive boards on the market. It's still not perfect, because while you can save BIOS profiles, you still can't label them and you have to remember the settings applied to each or alternatively check the applied settings before saving. A small issue, but a feature we had come to expect from every GIGABYTE motherboard for the last three to four years. Add to that the fact that this isn't an easy motherboard to overclock, and some time will have to be taken to get it to the ideal settings as well.

Overall this is a fairly competent board; it's been improving with every BIOS release and chances are by the time these boards hit retail, they will be even better. Right now we'd not hesitate to recommend this board to anyone wanting to dabble in the X79 platform but doesn't want to commit too much to it before Ivy Bridge shows up in a couple of months.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
4x240-Pin DDR3
CPU support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots:
4x PCI Express 3.0 16x, 1x PCI, 2x PCI Express 1x

/ PLUS / 4-way SLI support / Good performance / Great price for X79
/ MINUS / Can be tricky to overclock

WELL FEATURED ENTRY-LEVEL X79 MOTHERBOARD THAT PERFORMS WELL AND FEATURES 4-WAY SLI SUPPORT.

7 OUT OF 10

900Mbps Rock Star

Wireless Networking





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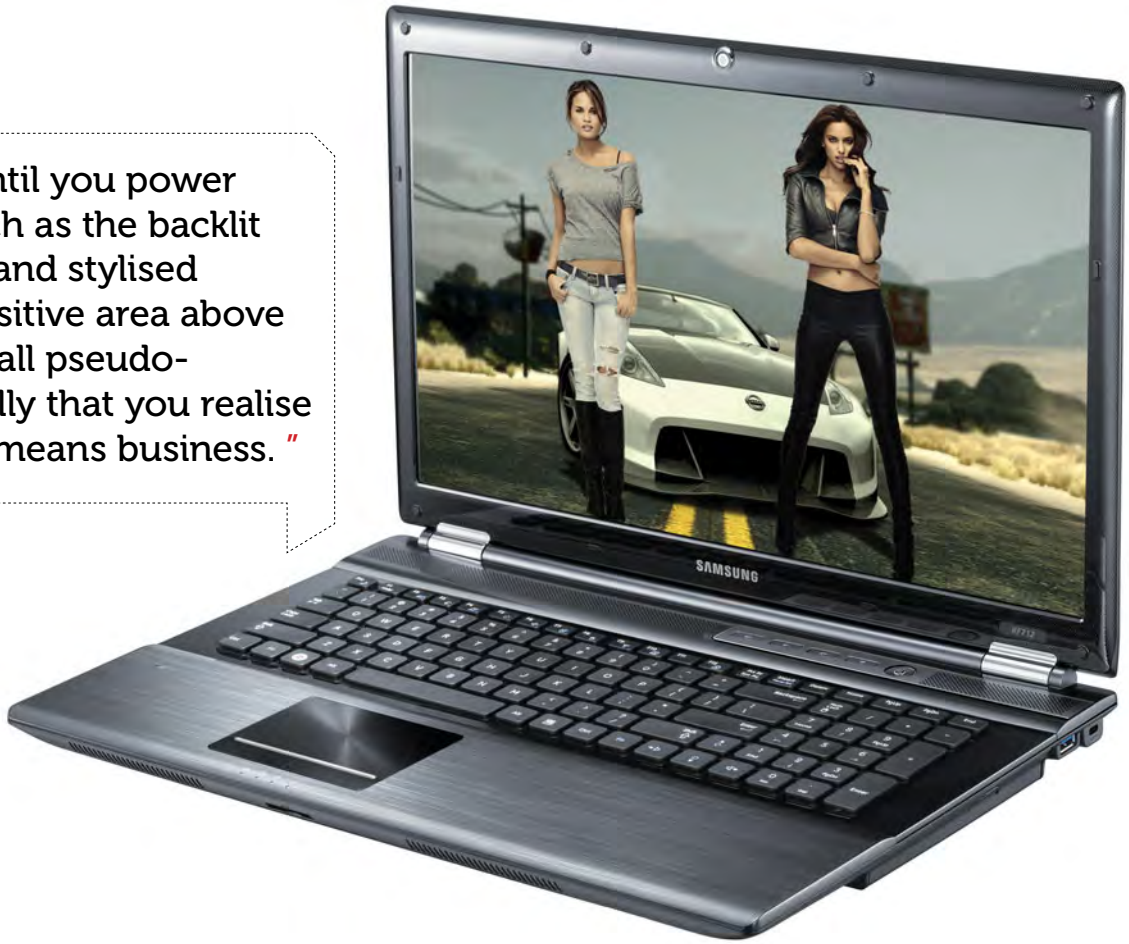
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Samsung Series 7 Gamer 700G7A

Supplier: **Samsung** / Website: **www.samsung.com** / RRP: **R19,875**

"It's not until you power it on, watch as the backlit keyboard and stylised touch-sensitive area above it light up all pseudo-futuristically that you realise Samsung means business."



I'd never even laid hands on a Samsung notebook before this one. So it was pretty surprising to suddenly see one sat beside my desk, awaiting my attention. What was more surprising is that it wasn't just a general-use notebook either. Instead, it's part of Samsung's new line of gaming-oriented notebooks. And it went beyond surprising when I discovered that this is the most powerful gaming notebook we've ever tested. I mean, these guys also craft washing machines and fridges. What the hell are they doing creating such awesome desktop replacements as well?

The 700G7A is a bulky beast, with a bit of an odd design. Angular and blocky, it doesn't look particularly menacing. If anything, it looks strangely retro. It's not until you power it on, watch as the backlit keyboard and stylised touch-sensitive area above it light up all pseudo-futuristically that you realise Samsung means business. First off, I must say that I don't really enjoy the touchpad. It's smoothly finished rather than boasting a slight grainy texture like most notebook touchpads do. It takes some getting used to, but since most gamers won't be using the touchpad anyway in favour of a dedicated gaming mouse, it's not a real issue. The keyboard, however, is excellent, providing satisfying keystrokes and modifiable backlighting. There's a small dial at the top-right edge, which switches the notebook between four modes: gaming, balanced, library and green modes. Switch to gaming mode and the laptop lights up spectacularly, altering the keyboard backlighting and stylishly switching to an alternately themed Windows desktop, as well as disabling the Windows key and highlighting the WASD keys. It's a nice touch, one that shows Samsung is eager to make you feel special about owning this extravagant piece of tech.

In terms of performance, there's no better desktop replacement that's passed through our office before. It powered its way through the *Resident Evil 5* benchmark. At native res (1920x1080) with 4X AA in DirectX 10 mode, it achieved an average frame rate of 90.9. Activate 3D using the same settings, and the notebook manages an average of 49.2 – which means that most games can happily be played in 3D without any hiccups here. 3DMark Vantage with the performance profile selected awarded the 700G7A with 12,486 3DMarks – a truly impressive score for a desktop replacement notebook. Unigine Heaven, running with no AA and 4X AF at native res gave the machine a final score of 1,070 in DirectX 10 mode. Switching to DX11 dropped that to 603. There's no doubt that this is an impressive device, easily capable of playing most games today at the highest settings, or at least with minimal graphics options tweaking if you plan to play the more demanding ones (especially in 3D). It seems opting for the Radeon HD 6970M paid off, because it significantly outperforms the more popular GTX 560M even though the two are at a similar price point.

Couple this with its wonderfully vivid and colourful display, and gaming on the 700G7A is a real treat. It's packed with all the usual features you expect to see, including a Blu-ray drive. The audio is also quite good, but not the best we've experienced. It doesn't boast the same high level of build quality and stylish design that some of its competitors boast either, but bear in mind that this is Samsung's first foray into gaming notebooks. And what an incredible entry it is.

NAG
Dane Remendes

hardware award / hardware award / hardware award

[specs]

CPU:
Intel Core i7-2670QM (2.2GHz)
GPU:
AMD Radeon HD 6970M (2GB GDDR5)
RAM:
8GB DDR3
Display:
17.3" Full HD SuperBright Plus (1920x1080) 120 Hz 3D display
Storage:
1TB (2 x 500GB) HDD / 8GB SSD
Audio:
Dolby Home Theatre v4
OS:
Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit

/ PLUS / Incredible gaming performance / Excellent display / Feature rich
/ MINUS / Iffy touchpad

THIS IS THE BEST GAMING NOTEBOOK WE'VE EVER TESTED IN TERMS OF PURE PERFORMANCE.

10 OUT OF 10

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Patriot Pyro SE 240GB SSD

Supplier: **Patriot** / Website: **www.patriotmemory.com** / RRP: **R4,999**



Benchmarks

Average read	/ 378.7 / / 471.4 /
Average write	/ 378.7 / / 234.7 /
IO Meter IOPS	/ 18325.66 / / 17166.33 /
4K read (QD32)	/ 22.45 / / 183.1/
4K write	/ 131.5 / / 238.4 /
PC Mark Vantage HDD	/ 61,900 / / 51,291 /

Baseline: OCZ Vertex 3 240GB

Patriot isn't new to the SSD market. They've produced some notable drives in the past, mainly the Torqx series in the early SSD days and more recently, the WildFire drives which offer phenomenal performance. So expectations were high when we initially received the Pyro drive. Unfortunately Patriot stopped manufacturing the original series shortly after release and replaced it with what we have now, the Pyro SE.

The reasons behind this are beyond the scope of this review, but suffice to say that there are some compromises made with the new drive, but together with that we have some improvements. So what we end up with is a drive that performs significantly worse in some areas, but offers much better performance in areas that are more likely to make themselves obvious in day to day use.

The sequential read and write speeds in particular have improved drastically. From the initial 218 MB/s read and 243 MB/s write speeds on the original drive, the SE drive delivers 378 MB/s and 302 MB/s respectively. That makes the Pyro SE the 3rd fastest drive we've ever reviewed where write speeds are concerned. In the PCMark Vantage benchmark, the drive actually performs better than the WildFire, delivering a blistering score of 61,900, which makes it the 2nd fastest drive to date in this particular test behind the Kingston HyperX SSD.

Further analysis in the less marketable numbers shows that the newer driver is much slower in 4K reads and writes, delivering about 20% of the performance of the original drive at a queue-depth of 32. We're not sure why this is, but it's likely related to the change in the NAND memory used and some other firmware optimizations which prioritize sequential data access above anything else.

This is further illustrated in the IOMETER results. The SE drive is much slower than the original drive in every discipline. However given that IOMETER numbers are not marketable it's not surprising that the numbers are much lower. However, if you own the original Pyro, it would be hard for us to recommend you change to the new drive, because you'll essentially be upgrading only for sequential operations but will take a knock in performance in almost every other discipline, so some careful consideration must be made if you were thinking of changing to the new drive.

The Pyro SE makes use of Micron 25nm 16GB NAND chips paired with the typical SF-2281-VB1 SDC controller and no cache as per usual for SF powered drives. So the performance difference between this drive and others of a similar configuration is purely down to the firmware tweaking on the part of Patriot.

While we were testing the drive, we heard that the pricing would get adjusted to better reflect its target market where price/performance is concerned, so even though we have the original price from late 2011, the drive should be cheaper by the time you read this.

Overall, the Pyro SE is a capable drive. It's not going to win any records and we are still very partial to the Patriot WildFire and Kingston HyperX drives because they retail for similar prices at present to the Pyro SE drive but provide better performance. This puts this drive in a relatively difficult place. However if you're not moved by either of those drives, the Pyro SE just may be the drive you're looking for. NAG

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Controller:
SF2281
NAND type:
MLC
Form factor:
2.5"
Interface:
SATA 6Gbps

/ PLUS / Great sequential write speeds
/ MINUS / Slightly cheaper than the Kingston HyperX SSD, yet slower

AN IMPROVEMENT ON THE ORIGINAL PYRO DRIVE MAKING IT A LITTLE MORE ATTRACTIVE.

7 OUT OF 10

TOP RATED GAMES

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G.Skill RipjawS Z F3 2400MHz Quad Channel RAM

Supplier: **G.Skill** / Website: **www.gskill.com** / RRP: **R3,999**



If it wasn't obvious to you before, it will be now in 2012. Intel defines what memory the industry uses and pretty much always has. The only time this wasn't so was when they dabbled with XDRAM from patent troll RAMBUS. Other than that, whenever Intel released a platform, the memory vendors would almost exclusively make memory for said platform and AMD support was secondary.

With the X79 chipset, it seems the new standard for high performance memory kits is 16GB. Significantly more memory than many gamers and enthusiasts need, but at the current DRAM prices and manufacturing processes, there's no incentive to go with 8GB kits. It's worth keeping in mind as well that, G.Skill has 32 and 64GB kits for the X79 platform. The prices are nothing short of eye watering but for those who want to build serious workhorse machines with multiple users there's no question about it, you'll want to go X79 with one of these kits.

As for the RipjawS Z 2,400 MHz set, well you'd be surprised but it's not G.Skill's fastest; they have, in fact a 2,500 MHz quad channel kit you can buy as well. However, if there's one pitfall to such kits, it's that not every X79 CPU can support 2,400 MHz. The CPU we tested with, for example, didn't have an IMC that could reach 2,400 MHz and as such the biggest selling point of this kit is not useful to us.

Despite this misfortune, ICs that are capable of 2,400 MHz are likely going to be good for tighter timings with reduced speeds. Indeed, both Sandy Bridge and Sandy Bridge-E are significantly less sensitive to memory timings than they are to frequency, but that doesn't mean there isn't anything to be gained from memory tuning. Given that the highest frequency our CPU could handle was 2,300 MHz we were able to tighten the timings to 9-11-8-24, which is impressive given that the reference timings are 11-11-11-31. Comparing with other systems at the reference settings and frequency we found that our settings were an exact match in performance and superior in SuperPi. So even if you have a CPU that isn't capable of these RAM speeds, not all is lost and this set is still worth buying if only because you can use them on the LGA1155 platform as well. When we tested on the ASUS MAXIMUS IV Extreme we were able to reach over 2,220 MHz at 8-10-8-24 settings with all 16GB installed.

The memory bandwidth was equally impressive and actually better than on the X79 platform; the reason for this is lost to us currently but it just may be that the benchmarks do not have optimized reading patterns that take advantage of the dual IMCs in the CPU. Having said that, Ivy Bridge will support even higher memory frequencies than Sandy Bridge, so you will be able to run 2,400 MHz on the LGA1155 platform, and as such a kit like this can be seen as an investment of sorts.

On the AMD platform, reaching 2,400 MHz was a breeze, while we were not able to do this with all four sticks installed, 8GB at 2,400 MHz was a breeze when using the FX CPU. This unfortunately though, will not be possible with the Phenom II as it has a vastly inferior IMC.

To sweeten the deal G.Skill includes two fan cooling modules which will guide air over the RAM. This doesn't really help the RAM directly but it does move air over the PWM area on X79 boards which is vital if you're running the system overclocked.

Overall this is a great set and you'll be hard pressed to find memory of this density and performance at this price. 16GB may be excessive for some, but given that Ivy Bridge, Ivy Bridge-E and Haswell in future will likely be DDR3, this RAM will last you well into 2014, and looking at it like that, it's a good investment for now and the future.

NAG

Neo Sibeko

dream machine

[specs]

Density:
16GB (4GBx4)
Voltage:
1.65V
Timings:
11-11-11-30
XMP:
Yes 1.2

/ PLUS / Cooling fans / 2,400 MHz
/ MINUS / Can be hard to come by

THE FASTEST 16GB DDR3 SET WE'VE EVER TESTED.

9 OUT OF 10

Evetech i7-3930K-based Gaming PC



Supplier: **Evetech** / Website: **www.evetech.co.za** / RRP: **R23,599**



This is quite an interesting build from the chaps at Evetech. It's billed as a high-end machine, and it certainly is, but instead of opting for the powerhouse that is the GTX 590, it's fitted with two GTX 560 Golden Samples in SLI. In terms of cost, that's a saving of almost R3,000, but in terms of power, this machine obviously doesn't deliver the frame rates you'd expect from one fitted with a GTX 590. Here's the treat, though: the inclusion of an Intel Core i7-3930K. That's a six-core, 12-thread monster second only to Intel's range-topping (and wallet-crushing) Extreme Edition of this CPU. The result of this combination of components is a high-performing system that manages to keep the cost at a reasonable level.

Above the great performance, the biggest thing with this prebuilt rig is the BitFenix Colossus case. New to our local market, BitFenix is a Taiwan-based chassis manufacturer that aims to bring cost efficiency and performance as close together as possible. It certainly has all the components you'd expect to find: dual USB 3.0 ports that use on the on-board headers; seven HDD drive bays (with 2.5" mountings) cooled by a mammoth 230mm front intake fan; plenty of cable management routes (that the techs at Evetech have done a fabulous job of using) – both inside and out; and a neat although somewhat unorthodox lockable compartment that houses all the front ports and power/reset buttons, for added security.

There's no doubt that this heavy machine is a beast in terms of both performance and looks, but it does have one small issue that comes down to personal preference: I would have preferred to see a single GTX 580 in place of the dual 560s, as one could more easily upgrade the graphics performance by adding a second 580 at a later stage. However, the immediate advantage in this case is better performance than a single 580, so you can't go terribly wrong either way. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

CPU:
Intel Core i7-3930K Overclocked to 4.6GHz
Motherboard:
ASUS Sabertooth LGA 2011 Intel X79
Video cards:
2 x NVIDIA GTX 560 Ti Overclocked Edition (2 x 1GB) (2x256bit) DDR5
RAM:
Corsair Vengeance 16GB Quad Channel (4x4GB) DDR3 1600MHz
Storage:
Corsair Force GT 120GB SSD, 1TB Seagate Barracuda
Cooling:
Corsair Hydro Series H100

[Benchmarks]

Unigine Heaven extreme:
2,055
3D Mark 11 extreme:
3,208
PC Mark 7:
6,095
AVP:
105 FPS

/ PLUS / Great performance / Uses new i7 CPU / Chassis features
/ MINUS / Dual GTX 560s / No Blu-ray drive

HIGH-END PERFORMANCE BUILT ON THE LATEST PLATFORM.

9 OUT OF 10



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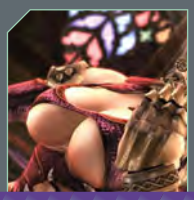
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Excuse me a moment, I just have to put on my serious hat quickly. In case you're wondering, it's a sort of black velvety cowly thingy, elegantly trimmed with crow feathers and dessicated wasp carcasses and some talon-shaped twigs stained a bloody red with clotted tomato sauce, and it looks way more intimidating than it sounds, okay.

So anyway, did you see the pre-launch promo ad for *Soul Calibur V*? If you didn't, hint, hint, this is a game rated T (for "Teen") by the ESRB, which perhaps does seem ironically appropriate but I'll get back to that, for its "large amounts of jiggling cleavage" and the option during character creation to "augment fighters' breast sizes and manipulate the camera to zoom in on their bodies."

Basically, it's a page prominently featuring Ivy's implausibly proportioned feminine assets, swelling – no, wait – *tumefying* around the text "Go big or go home". No, you don't even see her face, because whatever big boobs. It's about as classy as you'd imagine, or in other words, it's not.

Scientists in lab coats call this "objectification". Feminist scientists in lab coats would add that it's an example of appealing to something called the "male gaze", which is a phenomenon associated with the assumption that heterosexual men are always the primary target audience of any media, whether or not that's even true. Simply, it's men as watchers and women as the watched, and you can test this for yourself by looking at any advert featuring a woman, and seeing how it sells either the woman, or the idea that all women should be more like the woman in the ad. See it now? Exactly.

That's also why there wasn't a corresponding ad featuring an extreme close-up of Voldo's thong.

Sex sells, I get it. But maybe it's because advertisers have become too lazy, complacent, and stupid to come up with anything more sophisticated than OH, WOULD YOU LOOK AT THESE FINE GLANDULAR SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS IRRELEVANTLY JUXTAPOSED WITH THIS PRODUCT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT IT MAKES YOU A MORE SUITABLE CANDIDATE FOR UPCOMING REPRODUCTIVE OPPORTUNITIES.

What's perhaps most offensive about the ad, though, is the implication that this is a game marketed exclusively for hormonal adolescent boys and their penises, when, you know, gamers average out at around 30 or so, and women playing games is actually a real thing that happens. Just when we all thought we'd finally managed to rid ourselves of the stereotype, Namco Bandai decided to bring it back. NAG

Tarryn van der Byl

"Scientists in lab coats call this "objectification". Feminist scientists in lab coats would add that it's an example of appealing to something called the "male gaze", which is a phenomenon associated with the assumption that heterosexual men are always the primary target audience of any media, whether or not that's even true."

*** I said "tit", lol.**

Extra Life

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