NAG

PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX

REVIEWED

Need for Speed: <
Hot Pursuit

Assassin's Creed: <
Brotherhood

James Bond 007: <
Blood Stone

Fallout: New Vegas <

+ MORE!

DEAD SPACE 2

WHAT WAS THAT!?
My aunt always used to comment on how important it is to arrange your furniture to eliminate dead space in your home. This game is nothing like that.

PREVIEWED

The Last Guardian <

Junction Point Interview <

HARDWARE

ROUNDUP: 5 gaming keyboards <

HOW TO: Build an arcade controller <

BENCHMARKED: SAPPHIRE HD 6850 TOXIC Crossfire <

MOUSE REVIEWS: Roccat Kone[+] and Thermaltake BLACK <

0 1

9 771028 053002

Your DVD went into space with a message for the aliens. However, there was a spelling error which changed a friendly, 'hello' into something entirely different. Your address is on the back – pray for a smooth and slender anal probe.

STARCRAFT II
WINGS OF LIBERTY

R99
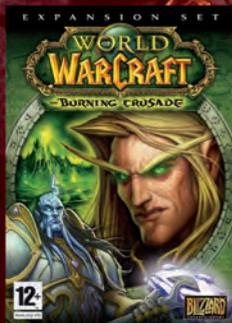
R99

R99

R99

R99

fpb 16V

BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

ALL**ABOUT**GAMING

What is Gaming Inc?

Gaming Inc is quite simply a club where anyone who has an interest or passion for gaming can reap the benefits of discounts and join in our discussions and forums. Gaming Inc members have a platform to tell us what they want, and to use this portal as a way to find out more information about the local gaming scene.

Why Should I Join Gaming Inc?

Gaming Inc has been created to give gamers a voice, where you can tell us what you are looking for and what you are interested in! This is a community driven portal for South African Gamers. But what exactly do you get? Let's look at the nuts and bolts.

- Gaming Inc will provide every user with a unique Gaming Inc card and welcome pack.
- Weekly Midweek Madness Promotions exclusively on our website
- For every game that you Pre-Order through Gaming Inc, we will give you 10% off the recommended retail price once the game is released!
- Trends, product reviews, latest releases in the form of weekly newsletters and on the GamingInc website itself!
- Exclusive monthly specials to GamingInc members only.

What Does It Cost To Register?

Nothing. All you have to do is visit **www.gaminginc.co.za** and give us your details.

www.gaming**inc**.co.za

- Register / Join / Experience
- Forums / Discuss / Ask
- Game Reviews / Pre-order
- Product Reviews / Specials
- Weekly specials

Game Reviews

Indepth game reviews of all the latest current / upcoming games, as well as the opportunity to pre-order.

Forum

Stuck in a game? Let us help you! Join in our forums and get your questions answered, give us your view, or just join in the discussions.

Product Reviews

We review the latest technology, with the aim to help you make the best decisions when it comes to your next hardware purchase.

It's what gamers in South Africa have been waiting for.

gaminginc
all about gaming

Contents

JANUARY 2011

"Weird to think that this time next week, we'll all be balls-deep in Black Ops."

Dane Remendes

On the DVD

<DEMOS>

Castle Vox | Create | Engine of War | King's Smith 2 | Racers' Island Crazy Racers The UnderGarden
[UDK]: Bounty Arms | Sanctum The Ball | Whizzle

<EXTRAS>

[Free Games]: BossConstructor | Crystal Wave | Dash and the Stolen Treasure Monsters in My Backyard Beta SystemShock Portable v1.2 | Trials Legends | **[Game Add-ons]:** 5 Unreal Tournament III maps | Gladget V1 I2 November 2010 | **[Home grown]:** KiD v1.1 | Last Minute Geoff Dremel stuff PlayStation 3 update | Batman Wallpapers 3 Website Kits

<DRIVERS>

Catalyst (v10.10 Vista & Windows 7 & XP 32-bit & 64-bit) | GeForce (v260.99 Vista & Windows 7 & XP 32-bit & 64-bit)

<126 VIDEOS>

100 Game Trailers | 17 GT Anthologies | 1 Pop Fiction | 5 Retrospectives | 3 ScrewAttack Video Game Vault videos

It must be love...

Some band sang, 'I know that it's you I need, to take the blues away'. I'm not sure how that fits in with what I'm about to say now, but it's the first thing Google spat out when I did a quick search on the phrase heading of this paragraph.

Yes, it really is that simple sometimes and sorry if I shattered anyone's carefully constructed fantasy about me and my non-existent superhuman abilities. I'm just like everyone else only slightly better here and there. But, enough of all that and to the point...

The topic for discussion here in this New Year's issue is developer credit or brownie points. Are there some game development studios that you will forgive anything? We were having this discussion in the office the other day about how some game developers have a certain license to mess you around but others don't. Is this 'license' to dick you around based anything real, something you can label or put in a bottle and sell. Think about Blizzard or id Software. Blizzard can delay a game for years without any excuse and everyone's happy because they just know deep down inside that Blizzard must have a good reason because their games are mostly close to perfect. Another good example is id Software — they did coin the phrase, 'when it's done' after all. When it's done is good enough for me because I know they're the fathers of 3D gaming as we know it and therefore they get the license to treat me as they wish.

This whole thing also swings the other way. Take a company like Electronic Arts — there's this perception that they treat developers poorly and that their movie-to-game efforts always stink like a money-making scam. Correct or not, this perception reduces the gaming community's level of acceptance and patience for anything they do. This perception effectively replaces the rose coloured spectacles for muddy brown ones. Having said all that, it's also possible for companies like Blizzard, id Software or Valve to make a few judgement errors and find themselves on the wrong end of the angry mob. We certainly are a fickle bunch us gamers – discuss here: **letters@nag.co.za**.

THINNER
Yes, *NAG* is thinner this month, but don't panic too much – it's mostly advertising that's missing. You see, many companies seem to think that the world stops revolving around the sun (and rotating/wobbling around its axis) during the festive season. No new games are due in January and apparently nothing is happening on the hardware front. The joke is, this issue you're holding is one of the biggest sellers of the year because it sits on shelf for an extra week (again, festive holidays are to blame). There's a strong chance the February issue will be the same and then watch out for March – things are going to be different.

NGL
So we're starting a league for *Black Ops*. This is a status thing and fame and maybe fortune (if we can get all our sponsors to cough up some dough). Check it out on page 61, and if you feel that you and your clan ~~monkeys~~ buddies have what it takes then sign up and let's see.

Also, cool announcement from NASA the other week. Life will find a way, apparently. **NAG**

Michael James
[Editor]

Sad farewell

In most situations when people leave a company nobody really cares. Everyone appears sad that you're leaving and even gets you cake but secretly they're all thinking about what it means for them. A covered parking spot, claiming your annoyingly health pot plant or in extreme cases joy that they don't have to look at your fat, stupid face anymore.

For me it's very different... I'm losing one of my best commanders. Chris senior (the art director of *NAG* for the last six years) is heading off to Egypt to run his own platoon. I'm using army terms here because we've fought zombies together and aimed down the sights at each other on more than a few occasions. Army terms, so I can say stuff like he's the kind of guy you can leave in charge of anything, will always have your back and can trust with your sack, and not sound too weird. You will definitely be missed and just know that *NAG* will always feel a little less complete now that you're gone. So, enough with the mush – good luck and hope to see you again soon – you're always welcome here.

Letter of the Moment

From: Avinash
Subject: Gaming – The Great Leveller

NOT SO LONG AGO there was a debacle concerning a certain Roger Ebert and his remark that video games can never be art. I think the volatility that ensued can be directly attributed to his esteem (in America anyway) as a film critic and the attention his remarks would naturally garner. Gamers the world over decided to enlighten the decrepit Ebert and challenged him to actually PLAY a game before passing judgment on this, our most sacred of activities. His reluctance in taking up the challenge has probably more to do with arthritic prevalence than a dogged determination to stand his ground. Personally, I don't see how games can be anything but art. You are literally interacting with a living, breathing painting. Here, I think the old adage of 'Life imitates art' is wholly reversed and you have a situation where art imitates life, and is well on its way to digitally replicating it.

My letter has little to do with him or, for that matter, the whole "Are games art?" drama. Ebert's comments about gaming are but flatulence in the wind. My focus here is on the gaming naysayers that actually matter – our beloved friends and family. I am fairly positive that every single reader of your magazine has at least one friend or family member that simply cannot understand the earnestness with which we enjoy our gaming. I have at least seven. I thought of another old saying and realised that charity does indeed start at home. So I undertook a completely unnecessary quest to try to 'reach out' to the ignorant and maybe change their perspective a bit. The results were rather pleasing. An example:

Relying on, or rather manipulating, an uncle's passion for post-apocalyptic wastelands and Mad Max movies (I think the latter has more to do with his fetish for Mel Gibson – but that's something we don't really talk about), I one day cornered him, sat him down and showed him *Fallout 3*. After 20 minutes of playing I checked for a response and what I received was akin to the ole glimmer in the eye, "you mean you can actually go to anyplace you can actually see?" Homerun baby! The vastness of our digital playground, the beautiful brown wasteland, the freedom to explore – all-in-one check – it didn't get him buying a PS3 or Xbox, but the perspective changed.

For my father I had to prey on his weakness for life's little gimmicks, so I showed him *MotorStorm* and Six-Axis Motion Controls (wasn't the failure everyone made it out to be after all). Since 2007, my dad has been an active online player.

I think the toughest was changing my girlfriend's perspective. I tried it all, even *Uncharted 2* (thanks for nothing Kevin Butler). But there was just no give. To be honest it was by complete accident that I got her interested. I was playing *Dragon Age*, engaged in one of the many, many conversations in the game, and realised that she was sitting behind my shoulder (sinister much?) and quite intrigued. And then it hit me – she likes to read! And there's quite a bit of reading to do in *Dragon Age*. I didn't comment on it, but the seed has been planted.

And so it went on – a friend has a penchant for dissecting frogs, so I showed him *God of War*; an accountant buddy, showed him *StarCraft 2*; a pastor acquaintance, showed him *Dante's Inferno* (okay, that one did not work out well); a fifteen year old cousin who likes playing with dandelions and counting ants, showed him the back side of my hand, kicked him in the crotch and then showed him *Flower*.

I have only one last person whose perspective needs changing – dear old mum. She is addicted to undertaking the most tedious and grinding of tasks. Obsessively. Compulsively. Disorderly? (Tsk). Really, once she gets into it, there is simply no stopping her. She laboriously plods along, a vague glaze in her eyes, as she sets about her self-designated tasks. There is only one game that I can show her, and with Ed willing, I think I'll show her *Demon's Souls*. Who knows, she might even play it... Thanks for the awesome magazine."

Keep up the good work, our cause needs more believers. Nice letter dude. You win. Ed.

From: Ezio
Subject: Unreal Hype

I'M ALL FOR HYPE, especially if it concerns a game I'm really looking forward to. But recently hype of arguably the most anticipated game of 2010 really let me down. This game released was hailed as a milestone in the South Africa Gaming community. Me being a relative newcomer to the wonders and excitement of gaming (read: still play Farmville) sucked it up like a sponge. I couldn't wait to get the game, and for most part the game will rock the socks of... well a rock (If they indeed did wear socks). The hype around a certain game mode had me literally awake at night. But then when I finally got a chance to experience this mode, it was a bit of fail in the sense that in fact I couldn't experience it. Okay enough mystery. The game is obviously Call of Duty: Black Ops and the mode is Combat Training. When I first heard of it I was ecstatic because I could have my own multiplayer experience offline. Me being on a tight budget and not able to afford Xbox live and NAG each month."
[Snip... What? You don't buy NAG? Ed]

From: Hugo
Subject: Game Difficulty

WISH I COULD START off with how great your magazine is but at the moment I am so angry that even my partner ran out of the house. You see, lately I've been playing Metal Gear Solid Peace Walker. I have played the previous Metal Gear games on PS1 and PS2 except for Metal Gear Acid or MGS4. What I always liked about MGS was the storylines and how they have some basis of historic truth intertwined in them. But the difficulty of the games is another story and this is the basis for my letter.

What is the purpose of creating a game that is so difficult that you want to take your PSP or controller and smash it against the wall? Why are they creating games that take ages just to finish one level? I'm not saying that a game should be so easy that you complete it within a day but what this shows me is that the creators and designers only cater for the hardcore gamer out there and don't give a <beep> about gamers like me and my partner who plays games for the fun of it? Where is the fun in games? Lately it's all about realism, graphics, physics and so on. What got left behind is the fun! Where is the fun in getting so upset and mad that you want to run down the street with a double barrel shotgun and shoot anyone that looks at you because it is their fault that the game is so <beep> difficult. Not everyone is so good enough to finish a game without dying once. Hell dying a million times is quite irritating and if the trend continues then I am sorry, I will not play another game. Don't get me wrong, I like playing games. I just don't see the need for games to be so difficult that one can't finish them. I would really love to complete Peace Walker a 100% like I did with the other Metal Gear games that I played, but games like Peace Walker will lead me to an early grave and I am only 28 years old. I could go on about this for ages [oops, too late, Ed] but I would really like to hear your opinion on this."

I sense great anger in you. I know this might sound obvious, but is there a difficulty setting you can change? Also try looking online for a walkthrough for the section you're stuck in (but do resist the temptation of reading the whole thing). As for help... let's see, I always tell people to just calm down and take it easy – it is just a game after all and getting all uptight isn't going to solve anything. I also suggest seeking professional help if these homicidal and destructive urges continue to occupy your thoughts. This letter is a little odd because from my perspective it seems that games are going the other way – becoming too easy to cater for the 'casual' market. Ed.

From: Jonathan
Subject: Why?

FIRST OFF, I WOULD like to thank everybody at NAG for all your hard work that you put into the magazine each month. Secondly, I would like to apologise in advance for all the punctuation errors that will be made throughout the duration off this email. Now for the main point of the email, what is it that drives us to play video games? Is it the need to take a break from everyday monotony? Is it to satisfy our desire for creation and destruction? Even more simply, could it be the want to have a significant effect on the world, fantasy or otherwise. In my humble opinion, it is a conglomeration of all these and more (which I did not mention for brevities sake). It is my belief that video games gratify more human desires than many other forms of entertainment. Where else can you become the predator instead of the prey, or be the emperor of an arising civilization? I could go on for ages asking these questions, but there is little need I think, because no matter whether or not

< Inbox >

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can 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. We went with non-rendered images this month.

Justin Williams: "This picture is a tribute to Mortal Kombat 1 with a 'hidden' message about NAG's hidden mascots. This picture was hand drawn, taken a picture of and given colour in Gimp 2.0."

Wesley Steenkamp: "If at first you don't succeed, try, and try again... I did this in paint at school. An hour a day for a week equals 5 hours in total."

they are considered to be art; video games are always going to give something that most other forms of entertainment are unable to."

Congratulations! You just figured out what we've all known for years. I recommend you buy this great magazine call NAG too! ;) Ed.

From: Wihann
Subject: Game Recordings

"FIRST, I WOULD LIKE to say thanks for the great mag each month. I Love getting my copy of NAG each month and reading it with in the first week. I would like to ask you about an article you had in the magazine a few months ago about those bandwidth monitors. I found this to very interesting and actually went and downloaded one of the mentioned programs. Anyways I want to ask you guys if you wouldn`t mind doing a similar article about programs that can record your gaming in video format (like Fraps). The reason for this is it's a lot more fun showing videos rather than telling a whole story about one screenshot and basically my experience with Fraps is horrible, because it lags my game, when you play it back the resolution is horrible and it usually it would make a one minute recordings about the size of 1GB – which is completely too big to do anything with. So if you people there wouldn`t mind looking into this, other gamers and I will really appreciate it. Thanks NAG. Keep doing what you guys do best!"

Nice idea actually – I'll get someone on that right away. We'll also need to look at video converters and how to get stuff onto YouTube and so on. Someone make this happen. Ed.

From: Viktor
Subject: Boiling point

"FIRST OF ALL I would like to thank all the NAG staff and personnel for piling up such a great magazine,getting better every month.I go just 2 problems i would like to address to you.First is the loads of racing games reviews/previews you guys put in.I mean like who plays that crap.There might be a few exceptions like GT5 or Blur which are the only good titles that came out of that genre.The second problem i have was troubling me for quite

a while now,namely Tarryn van der Byl.Just to make things clear i know im a nobody to judge your personnel or the way you guys do stuff but for the last few months it has been sitting like a thorn in my shoe. Judging by what i saw,the opinion was formed that Tarryn can't write a good and a sensible review(Her sentence structure and vocabulary are great but it really takes a learned person to understand whats going on in her reviews.).Secondly,she writes about abstract stuff that no1 is interested in.Maybe a few exceptions but rarely.And last but not least,the review we got on MoH from Tarryn van der Byl on the NAG website.It's abominable.It's a review a 15-year old girl that dosen't like fps games will write.I mean,if you don't like the game why do you review it?It was not an official review and you are not forced to do it(correct me if im wrong).Let the pros like Geoff Burrows(My favourite reviewer,<3 Geoff) take care of it.I might be very wrong in my judging,correct me if so.Im writing this in no way to insult any of the NAG staff,I love you guys and what you do.This is just a customer complaint. If you feel this e-mail is worthy to take into consideration,please e-mail me back."

We'll just cut all the reviews and previews you don't like out of NAG forever. Do you have any other requests or things you don't like? Just for the record Tarryn is most definitely a more hardcore gamer than almost anyone else in this office (Dane might be the exception – he's a principled hardcore gamer.) Also, next time put spaces after your full stops so people will take you seriously. Ed.

From: Gordon
Subject: None

"HI, MAY I JOIN in on with the Call of Duty Black Ops Multiplayer? What does the caption mean on page 40 with the NAG Servers saying that "We're considering banning anyone we find Camping"?"

You (and anyone for that matter) are welcome to join our servers. On the NAG servers you might be banned for life for camping so move around a little, and if you've been in the same exact spot for longer than a reload, you're camping. We don't like campers or tubers. Snipers are tolerated but not enjoyed. Ed. **NAG**

On the Forums

QUESTION: What is the least important piece of hardware on which you've spent the most amount of money?

dammit: The entire Xbox360 :P It's definitely not vital and was probably one of my biggest expenses. I suppose it depends what you define as important. It's more important for me to have working computers that'll let me type up big ass documents and connect to the internet (i.e.: I don't need much in the way of serious hardware there) than to play games endlessly, but for others their consoles are their livelihoods.

EndKreator: Headphones that weren't even that good quality , curse my rash decision making and money-in-hand.

Chevron: A few years ago I spent over 3 grand for my 2 gigs of DDR2 Corsair Dominator RAM. :sad face: Spending almost 2grand on my Creative X-Fi Fatal1ty soundcard is also right up there.

CaViE: I, have a penchant for buying, case fans. It's a weird and unnecessary expenditure habit of mine.

vii: Screens, most pieces of my computer I tend to buy mid-range. But when it gets to screens, when I upgrade, I buy the best one I can find even if a slightly smaller one would've cost 40% less. I like having a pretty picture maker:3

nukehead: Well I would have to say the drum-set for Guitar Hero. Not that it was a waste, just not important ;)

Fredder: Both my PC upgrades (2002 & 2006 I think), did both about 3 months before new CPU's and motherboards were released and I ended up behind again and again . . . still can play the latest games but man, the rig I could have had . . . sigh . . . patience is virtue people!

Chuluka: I bought a R600 CPU fan about four years ago when I broke my original one when cleaning the dust out of it with a screwdriver. I was shit scared of my dad finding out and I bought the only fan I could find. Right now, it's just sitting in a cupboard.

M2K: Head phones which broke about a month after I bought it. It looked so tempting that I couldn't resist.

Wesley: I'd have to rank my long-dead Transcend 8GB flash drive as the one thing which was totally unnecessary at the time. All R500 of it :-(.

Machine: R250 mouse pad was probably a waste. What really takes the cake are my passive studio speakers worth R2000 but I have a crappy little amp that can't handle them.

spjt07: I once bought a new network card. R100 later and discovered it was a software problem rather than a hardware problem.

GhOsT_828: My G35 headset. Totally unnecessary, but hey, when does that stop you?

Ro$hi: I bought a R120 left-handed mouse, but I'm right-handed.

FEN1X: Technically/relatively speaking, my G15 Keyboard, but I would still buy it if given a second chance.

bullet: The PS3, it's just a Blu-ray player now.

KraMGarD: Probably my Thermaltake Armour MX chassis. One can just smack your motherboard and PSU on a wall really and open the window for airflow. ;P

Nferno: My previous mouse: Razer Naga. I'm not going to tell you how much it cost, it's shameful.

FreddyAintDead: Item: Modern Warfare 2 Night Vision Goggles. Price: Pint of Virgin blood.

Suck it up or blow it out – everyone is welcome: http://www.nag.co.za/forums/

I, Gamer

by Miklós Szecsei

I resolve to...

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS ARE terribly dull. They require all sorts of dedication in areas that make you feel inadequate. Of course, I always try to apply New Year's Resolutions to the boring, real-life side of things. The thinking goes that if I apply a few resolutions to a far more entertaining side of life, like gaming, then I stand a better chance of keeping them.

The first, and I can already see myself failing dismally at this one, is to stop caring about Achievements. Case in point: at the time of writing this, Exclusive Books (of all retailers) had an insane online sale on selected games. I could have bought the latest *Medal of Honor* for PC and *Dead Rising 2* for PlayStation 3 at R50 each! I didn't, because neither would have added to my Gamerscore. There is something wrong with me.

Perhaps deviating from my gaming

> *I could have bought the latest* Medal of Honor *for PC and* Dead Rising 2 *for PlayStation 3 at R50 each! I didn't, because neither would have added to my Gamerscore. There is something wrong with me.*

comfort zones would be a less ambitious resolution to try and maintain? I need to take a leaf out of Rodain's book and shirk mainstream in favour of indie. Bizarrely, one of my gaming highlights for 2010 was the indie title ...But That Was [Yesterday]. It's a browser-based game that can be "played" from beginning to end in less than five minutes. What blew my mind is how it managed to convey more emotion with 2D flash animation than the whole of *Heavy Rain* was able to, despite having the power of the PS3 behind it.

Indie isn't the only area I need to pay more attention to; the smaller downloadable games are just as deserving. I think Tim Schafer will be the one to get me into this. His deliberate middle finger to mainstream schlock is like a William Wallace speech in the face of *Call of Duty* franchises and other AAA titles. I've had *Costume Quest* on my Xbox since the game released and I still haven't played it. It's apt, then, that Double Fine's next downloadable game is called *Stacking*, because that's exactly what these titles are beginning to do.

See? Gaming resolutions are a hell of a lot more interesting than "I promise to get my fat ass to the gym" or "I promise to be nicer to others". God, those are so passé.

COD online will remain free-to-play

RUMOURS HAVE BEEN DOING the rounds for some time now, and Activision has finally decided to speak up about the issue of potentially charging players monthly fees for *Call of Duty*.

"Are we going to be charging for multiplayer? The answer is no," states Activision Publishing CEO Eric Hirshberg. " The experience you have out of the box, connecting with the online community to play *Call of Duty* is absolutely integral to the experience and we'll never charge for that. It's not going to be something we'll attempt to monetize; it's part of the package."

As for the reasons behind this decision, a couple of ideas present themselves. Some believe that Activision is behind the recent Xbox LIVE Gold subscription price increases, with the company receiving $5 per 12-month subscription from each user. This is following from Activision CEO Bobby Kotick's recent claim that *COD* is responsible for 60% of XBL Gold subscriptions, and that the publisher

deserves a slice of the pie. Whether that's true or not remains to be seen, and it's uncertain if a similar system will carry over into the PlayStation Network or even PC market to further "compensate" Activision for their troubles. Either way, the increase in XBL subscription prices has arrived incredibly shortly after Kotick's initial statements, and before the company's sudden change of heart.

The other, less conspiracy-laden reason behind this change is the fact that Activision can charge $15 for a map pack, and expect a large number of people to pay. We certainly did for MW2.
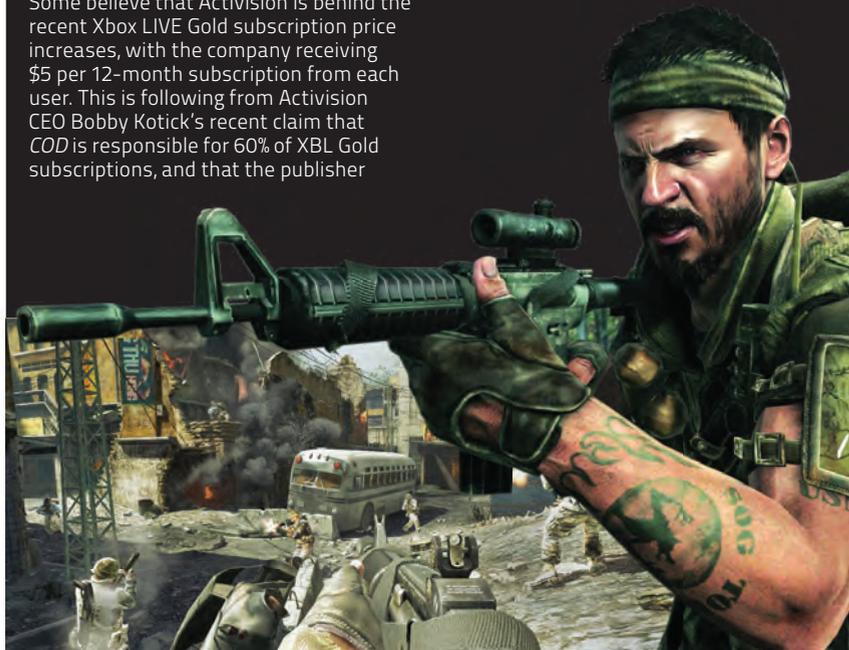
Alan Wake with arm flapping?

REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT (CREATORS OF *Alan Wake* and *Max Payne*) might be in the business of developing a Kinect-enabled game, if a recent job listing is to be believed. They've put out a request for programmers with "experience on motion-control technology (e.g. Kinect)" and who would like to work on an upcoming "AAA console project." If you happen to meet those criteria and are serious about the position, go ahead and apply while the rest of us speculate as to what this all means.

Remedy's next game is supposedly being built on the same engine that powers *Alan Wake*. It's not clear yet if this new game is a sequel or something else entirely, but the fact that this job listing is a thing that exists in the world leads us to believe that Remedy is either working on what might be Kinect's first must-have game, or they're creating their first mini-game compilation. We really, really hope it's the former.
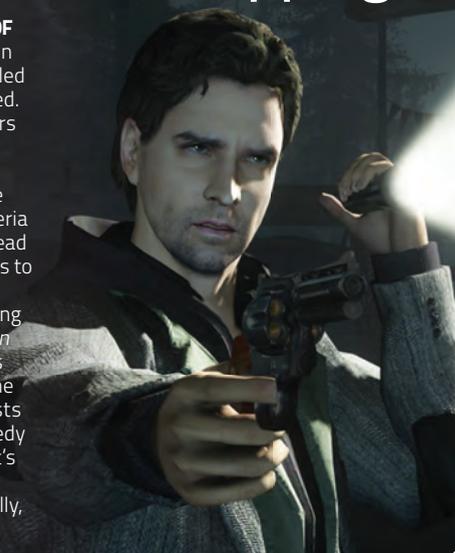
OH HEY LOOK – A S.T.A.L.K.E.R. TV SERIES

Ukrainian developer GSC Game World is attempting to unleash a TV series based on their popular *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series of games. They're paying for the production of a pilot episode and from the looks of things the TV show aims to be as faithful to the creepy, post-apocalyptic FPS as possible. The show is being put together by a group known as Transvision. Negotiations are currently underway with Russian and Ukrainian TV networks. If said negotiations go smoothly a full TV series will be produced for those markets. But what about the rest of the world? "We are interested in licensing the distribution rights to other territories, such as Western Europe, North America, etc.," says GSC Game World. If you bring us a TV series that makes frequent excursions into The Zone, we'll be all over it.

COIN-OP FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR COUCH

Microsoft's *Game Room* is pretty neat, but the project has been plagued by troubles with developer Krome Studios suffering layoffs. Of course, this is what happens when you keep a staff of 400+ when you don't have work for over quarter of them. Now, studio CEO Robert Walsh aims for a much smaller, more dedicated and less worried team of 40-100. Despite the problems, the company continues to operate and release game packs for *Game Room*. The studio is now busy on the 12th pack of games, and rumours are flying around that we cannot ignore. *Twinbee, Detana!! Twinbee, Sunset Riders* and *Warlords* top the list.

Bay of Perverse Propaganda for Sociopaths

CUBAN LEADER FIDEL CASTRO plays a role in a certain story arc in *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. If you don't want to know what that role is, you should stop reading this news post right now, because there are spoilers here.

State-run news site *Cubadebate* has dubbed *Black Ops* "perverse propaganda for sociopaths." This is some of what they have to say about the game:

"What the United States couldn't accomplish in more than 50 years, they are now trying to do virtually," writes the outlet with regards to an in-game assassination attempt on El Presidente. They go on to call *Black Ops* "doubly perverse" because it "glorifies the illegal assassination attempts the United States government planned against the Cuban leader" and "stimulates sociopathic attitudes in North American children and adolescents."

We're all for loyalty to your leader. The Loyalist faction in *Tropico 3* is one of our favourites, because its members will normally unwaveringly worship us no matter how much of an in-game ass we may be. This, however, is just ridiculous. Calm down guys. It's a game, not an assassination attempt.

EA Sports announces their first ever M-rated title

THE EXCELLENT *FIGHT NIGHT* series is adding another game to its repertoire. It's called *Fight Night Champion* and Ian Cummings, *Madden NFL 11*'s creative director, called it "f*ing amazing" after getting the chance to play it. The dude's a part of the EA Sports team, so it's a given that he'd want to hype the game. What has us intrigued, however, is that *Fight Night*'s upcoming entry aims to bring the true brutality of the sport of boxing to the forefront. Here's a short description from the game's official site:

"As the first-ever 'M' rated EA SPORTS title, *Fight Night Champion* showcases the truest graphical representation of the sport, lifestyle, and culture of boxing with authentic and dynamic blood, realistic body damage and deformation, and mature content throughout. Experience the violence and brutality that is true to the trade."

So, you'll still be able to punch things in the face, but those things and faces will now deform all realistically and stuff. Good times.

》

HIRAI FOR [SONY] PRESIDENT!

According to a Bloomberg report, Sony plans to relieve Sir Howard Stringer of his position as company president. PlayStation boss Kaz Hirai is apparently in the running to inherit the role if this news turns out to be true. Stringer, who became Sony's president in 2009, will retain his role as CEO and chairman, but it's believed that bringing in someone new to help Stringer out will make his job easier, while simultaneously giving whoever's appointed a chance to show that they've got the chops for the position when Stringer eventually moves on. According to Bloomberg, the two men in the running for this position are Hiroshi Yoshioka and Kazuo Hirai. Hirai is boss of Sony's Networked Products & Service division, but gamers simply know him as being the head of Sony's PlayStation division. A representative of Sony Computer Entertainment has dismissed the Bloomberg report as "pure speculation."

》

DO YOU FEEL THE NEED?

With *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* wowing gamers the world over with its high-speed, arcade-racing action, Electronic Arts would like you to know that your next *Need for Speed* fix will arrive in March next year. Dubbed *Shift 2: Unleashed*, this sequel (which is being developed by Slightly Mad Studios – the same folks who created the original) promises to expand on the gameplay and features of 2009's *Shift* in many ways. Fans of *Hot Pursuit*'s Autolog feature will be happy to know that it'll make its way into this new title.

The IGF is coming!

IN LIEU OF AN engaging or creative headline for this column, I went with a simple announcement about what's invariably an exciting time on my personal indie gaming calendar: the annual Independent Games Festival in San Francisco.

At some point or another, in some written form upon some sort of parchment in some recorded format (be it inked or electronic) I take the greatest pains to remind anybody who reads my half-crazed drivel that the IGF is the most important yearly event that any independent games enthusiast can possibly look forward to. Ever. It's not just a conference: the major selling point of this event is a prestigious round-up of top indie games from all over the world, hand-picked from hundreds of entries by a panel of industry veterans who ultimately decide which teams of developers get those prestigious finalist awards and a truckload of dollar-money in prizes.

The details are generally of more

> *The IGF is the most important yearly event that any independent games enthusiast can possibly look forward to. Ever.*

interest to actual developers, I admit, but for the discerning end-user (ie. the average player) this means at least one thing: the hoary gods of the Internet have gathered for us a feast of several dozen amazing games vying for top honours in a competition well-known by the indie community. Some of these entries are usually ready for purchase, or even turn out to be freeware.

It's a delicious fruit basket of indie gaming for anyone to pick from, and even if you have no care for the competition itself (or the festival it stems from) it's hard to turn down the opportunity to take a look at some of the competition's hundreds-strong entrants (or even the cherry-picked finalists, depending on when your eyes ogle these printed words).

Many stunning titles have emerged from – or been through – the IGF judging process, including greats such as *Gish, Braid, Super Meat Boy, World of Goo, Crayon Physics* ... the list goes on, but this column has a word limit.

Head on over to http://www.igf. com/ if you want to learn more. And if you feel like being horribly patriotic (and horribly biased towards yours truly), you can digitally cheer for the success of *Desktop Dungeons* in this year's event!

Halo Wars has its head lopped off

BARELY TWO YEARS AFTER the release of *Halo Wars*, swansong of the now defunct Ensemble Studios, Microsoft has decided to axe the game's leaderboards, stat tracking and forums. This was scheduled to happen on December 15th, so by the time you read this, *Halo Wars* should already have gone dark. Naturally, this has annoyed all the avid fans of the game who still spend their time playing it.

"Possibly the most close-knit video game forum community is going to be tossed with a bunch of *Reach* junkies," said one particularly irritated forum member in response to the announcement. The *Halo Wars* community were informed that they'd be "transitioning... to *Halo Waypoint*'s forums" – which was essentially a nicer way of saying that the game's website would be completely shut down and its community members would be left out in the cold with no officially dedicated area on *Waypoint*.

Halo Wars sold one million copies in its first month on sale and became the best-selling console RTS to date. Players will get one final, fifth title update that'll officially sever the link between the game and the website. "Unfortunately, it won't include many of the fixes that we all wanted it to include," said the mod. Community members will at least be given an "exclusive forum avatar" at *Halo Waypoint*. "Enjoy the time you have here on HaloWars.com and print-screen or copy-paste any of your favourite old posts and/or game history data, since that will all be taken offline on December 15th. We won't be carrying over accounts, posts, or anything else between the two forums," added the moderator.

Halo Wars was (and still is) a phenomenal game – it's easily the best console RTS ever created. We're sad to see the online component of Ensemble's excellent game take such a huge knock, but we suppose Microsoft's gotta do what they gotta do.

Ubisoft not convinced about motion controllers

BOTH SONY AND MICROSOFT believe that their current generation of motion controllers will extend the life-cycle of their consoles by at least five years. In Sony's case, looking at their consoles' history and promises of the PS3's ten-year life-cycle, they're expecting six. Ubisoft's Alain Corre, MD of the publisher's European division, doesn't think this is possible.

"Yes, it's a good extension of the life-cycle for a certain length of time and it's also a good way to capture some consumers they didn't have on the casual side, because Microsoft's 360 and Sony's PlayStation 3 do not have the casual customers," Corre explained. "So it will bring in a new category of customer for them. Now, will it prevent them from releasing brand new technology in the next five years? I don't think so."

There's no doubt that both Move and Kinect will bring in a portion of the lucrative casual market that Nintendo has so delicately captured over the years, but between the Xbox 360's limited storage medium and the PS3's comparatively high manufacturing cost, as well as both companies' lower install bases compared to Wii, Microsoft and Sony are going to need to pull something out of their hats between now and 2016 if they hope to reach that goal.

NEW *ASSASSIN'S CREED* NEXT YEAR

Well, that's about as surprising as a hidden blade to the face in a crowded multiplayer street. In July this year, the Associate Producer for Ubisoft, Jean-Francous Boivin went on record to say that there would be no new *Assassin's Creed* for some time, citing the necessity to let the franchise "breathe a bit". Now that *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* has sold over a million copies within its first week in Europe alone, that statement has been silenced with a not-so-hidden blade... to the face.

Boivin has admitted that "business can come back and override everything I say because at the end of the day it's about selling games". The sales have spoken, and Ubisoft will be steamrolling the fourth *Assassin's Creed* game in 2011. It won't, in all likelihood, feature Ezio but when it will be set is still up for debate. Geoffroy Sardin, Ubisoft's head of marketing and sales for Europe, had this to say regarding a setting: "If you've read the comic books you will see that we took *Assassin's Creed* to the USSR, or Caesar's Rome – that's a good example of what we could do in the coming years in the next video game".

What Boivin is certain of is that the new multiplayer component of *Brotherhood* will be carried over to future *Assassin's Creed* games. The first dose of free DLC for *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* will be arriving at the beginning of December.

Kinect opens up

KINECT MIGHT BE A success already in Microsoft's eyes, shipping over 1 million units during its first ten days, but for some, this is only the beginning of what the device is truly capable of. The device has recently been opened up to anyone with a PC, thanks to the release of an open-source USB driver. Simply install the drivers, plug in that Wall-E lookalike and get stuck into your very own weird experiments.

A few neat results have already been produced, both by users of the hacked drivers and other people with IQs higher than any number we can even count to. As an example, an MIT student attached a Kinect sensor to his very own robot to give it the ability to build an accurate 3D model of any room it's in. He goes a step further by programming in simple gesture-based commands, allowing him to control his little creation by simply waving his arms around, because, as you well know, he *is* the controller.

In a surprising move, Microsoft isn't being completely unreasonable about this "hacking", and even refuses to classify the open-source driver as such.

"Hacking would mean that someone got to our algorithms that sit on the side of the Xbox and was able to actually use them, which hasn't happened," said Microsoft's director of incubation, Alex Kipman. "Or it means that you put a device between the sensor and the Xbox for means of cheating, which also has not happened.

"That's what we call hacking, and that's why we have put a ton of work and effort to make sure it doesn't actually occur."

Kipman went on to explain that it was Microsoft's intention all along to allow users to open up the platform for tinkering, and that nobody using the drivers and inventing clever ways to utilise Kinect will get in trouble. We consider this to be an incredibly smart move on their behalf: what better way to cultivate a generation of motion controller-obsessed engineers than to give them free rein over your hardware?

» SONY PSP2

Well, it's a PSP2 dev kit, at least. It's supposedly due to be released late 2011. This iteration of the PSP2 dev kit boasts a similar design to the PSP Go, with its sliding screen that reveals the controls beneath. Some time ago EA revealed that they've had "exposure" to the PSP2, while developer Netherrealm flat out confirmed that they're working with the unit.

The proposed specs for the PSP2 are impressive at this stage. It's rumoured to have twice the RAM of an Xbox 360, for example. It's got an HD screen. Rear- and front-facing cameras feature on the dev kit. Sony has supposedly sent out a new dev kit, one which is a single, non-sliding block like the original PSP is. This was apparently done to cool down the unit following rumours that the slider design suffered from overheating issues.

Kinect sales not looking good in Japan

ADMITTEDLY, MICROSOFT HASN'T HAD the best luck with the Xbox 360 in Japan, and it looks like that bad luck is going to continue with Kinect. The motion-sensing peripheral managed a worldwide launch of over a million units within the first week of going on sale. Japan, however, accounts for 26 000 of that million. This includes the Kinects sold as bundles with new Xbox 360 consoles. Sure, one could argue that the Xbox 360 install base was already low so what did you expect, but new console bundles as well?

Additionally, the Kinect launch titles didn't do so well either; none of them made the top twenty sales chart in the land of the rising sun. The best selling title was *DanceMasters*, but even that only sold about 6 000 copies. Perhaps there's something to be said about the average size of apartments in Japan after all? There is no better time than now for Microsoft Japan to release a Kinect-enabled dating sim.
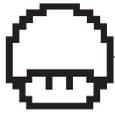
Miktar's Meanderings
by Miktar Dracon

2010 Wrap-Up

GOOD GAMES GOT OVERLOOKED, terrible games got perfect scores. Dudebros shot other dudebros with virtual bullets online. The world of gaming churns on. Before 2011 gives us more of the same, here are some thoughts about what's passed:

Sonic 4 is terrible. Broken physics (arguably the most important part of a platform game) ruin the experience. It's not nostalgia speaking, the gameplay is broken. These two videos, a detailed look at *Sonic 4*'s physics and a comparison to *Sonic 1*, sum it up best: http://youtu.be/f6-1cGzPn3E and http://youtu.be/tpWhRF9szgQ.

Resonance of Fate was my sleeper hit of the year. As a Japanese RPG, all the vapid dialogue and belt-buckle-infused fashion is there but easily ignored in favour of the most important part: the battle

> *Playing* M.A.G. *with Move is great, and should shut the "mouse is better" idiots up.*

system. Kinetic tactical quasi-real time "Aerial Rave" inspired gunfights with solid system designs underpinning your actions: super-fresh. Not sure why this one got overlooked or misunderstood by the lame-stream media.

Bought a set of Move controllers – *Sports Champions* isn't bad; the Disc Golf is pretty nice. Playing *M.A.G.* (which got a great patch recently) with Move is great, and should shut the "mouse is better" idiots up, since it's basically like playing an FPS with a mouse *and* the benefit of an analogue movement controller (which beats out a keyboard). Beyond that... it gathers dust in the corner.

Kinect is not on my wish list. It's not something I want. And you thought I was an Xbox fan boy. Who looks stupid now? The failed EyeToy was a good enough indicator of the problems with motion-captured input, Kinect doesn't do anything different enough to set it apart. Better fidelity in its capture, the same limiting factors. Spent some time with it and its various games at E3 last year, wasn't impressed. What's selling Kinect now is hype, and a misunderstanding of what it is by consumers.

If you can't finish *Super Meat Boy*, you're pretty weak sauce, you know that? That's what you get for playing those easy casual shooters like *Halo* and *Call of Duty*. U mad bro?

Why there's no *Brütal Legend* for PC

DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS FOUNDER Tim Schafer began his game development career working on PC-based games, but 2009's *Brütal Legend* was oddly missing a release on the platform. According to Schafer, it's not for lack of trying.

"We have much of the technology in place to produce PC versions of all these games, but there is still some more work required to make them shippable and that costs money. So far, our publishers have not elected to fund that work. Not because they hate PC gamers, but because they don't see enough financial reward."

Schafer also claims that he'd love to support the Nintendo platforms, but once-again blames publisher disinterest. This disinterest from THQ at the time of *Psychonauts* development was what kept the game off the GameCube, despite an appeal from Schafer.

Double Fine is currently working on their second XBLA and PSN-only title, *Stacking*. Due for release in Q2 2011, *Stacking* is a puzzle adventure game based on living versions of the Russian matryoshka (or babushka) dolls, in which players take on the role of the smallest doll, name Charlie Blackmore, who is attempting to reunite his family during a time of oppressive industrialism. The game will be played in a manner reminiscent of *The Nomad Soul*, allowing Charlie to jumping inside larger dolls and control them, gaining new abilities and access other areas of the game world.

Poo-flinging, intrigue and possibly jealousy in the racing-game world

WITH LONG-AWAITED, MUCH-ANTICIPATED *GRAN* Turismo 5 finally making its way onto store shelves, the obligatory smacktalk from its competitors quickly made its way onto gaming news sites. Patrick Soderlund, a senior VP of Electronic Arts, believes that newly announced *Shift 2: Unleashed* is in direct competition with *Gran Turismo 5*. He knows that *GT* offers a different experience than *Shift* does. Nevertheless, he thinks EA's game is the better one.

"I think they have a very sterile, almost car collecting type of product where that's mainly what we do and I think we can offer something different," said Soderlund in an interview with CVG.

EA aren't the only contenders in this smacktalk extravaganza either. Codemasters (who recently released *F1 2010*) wants in as well – which is no surprise considering how serious Codemasters is about its racers.

"You can have a technically phenomenal game, but you can also have a game concept that doesn't really appeal [to some racing fans] and could be accused of - and you have to be careful how you write this - of being boring," said Rod Cousens, Codemasters CEO. "We don't have that problem. We feel the adrenaline rush that we'll always provide in *F1* will not be matched by anyone else. You're going to have all the cars, all the tracks and all the worldwide locations - not to mention the best strategy, and the best damage, as far as we can."

Nothing like a little industry competition to put a smile on your face.

Gaming Charts

Look & Listen

Look & Listen recommends

PS3

Gran Turismo 5

FIFA 11

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

MOVE

Move Motion Controller

Sports Champions

The Fight

XBOX 360

Halo: Reach

Fable 3

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

KINECT

Sports

Sports Island Freedom

Sonic Free Riders

PS2

FIFA 11

WWE Smackdown vs Raw 20100

PES 2011

PC

Call of Duty: Black Ops

World of Warcraft: Cataclysm

The Sims 3 Ambitions

PSP

God of War: Ghost of Sparta

Bakugan II

Football Manager 11

WII

Donkey Kong Country Return

Epic Mickey

Sonic Colours

DS

Sonic Colours

The Sims 3

Penguins of Madagascar

PS3

FIFA 11

Medal of Honor

Sports Champions

F1 2010

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

XBOX 360

FIFA 11

Medal of Honor

Forza Motorsport 3

Halo: Reach

Halo 3

PS2

FIFA 11

FIFA 09

Need for Speed: Most Wanted

Rugby 2008

The Sims 2: Castaway

PC

Medal of Honor

Crysis: Maximum Edition

The Sims 3 Late Night

The Sims 3

Need for Speed: Undercover

PSP

FIFA 11

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

Burnout Dominator

Ben 10: Alien Force

Need for Speed: Carbon

WII

Wii Sports

FIFA 11

Wii Sports Resort

Wii Fit + board

New Super Mario Bros. Wii

DS

New Super Mario Bros.

Mario Kart DS

Littlest Pet Shop 3: Purple Team

Super Mario 64x4

Despicable Me: The Game

Bye bye baby, baby don't cry

Emergent Game Technologies, the creators of the Gamebryo engine, which powers many Bethesda titles like *Fallout 3, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and most recently *Fallout: New Vegas*, will soon close their doors. It's sad news, but as is so often said: every cloud has a silver lining. In this case, maybe this means Bethesda will finally start building their games on a newer, better engine. Also, Harmonix – the original creators of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* – is being sold by parent company Viacom. *Rock Band 3* somehow managed to perform dismally from a sales perspective, despite the game's excellence.

»

STOP RIGHT THERE, CRIMINAL SCUM!

This is part rumour and part "well *obviously*": There's a new *Elder Scrolls* in the works. Reported by Eurogamer Denmark, courtesy of a magical source, we know that *Elder Scrolls V* will be a direct sequel of *Oblivion*. The game will reportedly be once-again set in a fantasy environment; and with terms like "Dragon Lord" and "The Blades" being bandied about, it looks like we can expect the same type of *Elder Scrolls* content. Voice recording for the game has reportedly recently begun.

Bethesda executive producer Todd Howard has spoken recently on the matter, telling eager journalists at QuakeCon that the game will be announced soon, but that when it is announced, a release date will be right around the corner.

"One thing I can say is that from when you first hear about it to when it's out will be the shortest it's been for us. It's pretty far along. When we show it, we want to show a lot, because there's a lot of game there to play right now.

When asked how more advanced that game will be compared to its predecessors, despite the fact that it's still using the Gamebryo engine, Howard said "*Fallout 3* technically does a lot more than *Oblivion*. The new stuff is an even bigger jump from that."

The Evolution of...
James Bond games

1983 – James Bond 007

1989 – 007: Licence to Kill

1997 – GoldenEye 007

2002 – 007: Nightfire

2008 – Quantum of Solace

2010 – James Bond 007: Blood Stone

Bizarre Creations heads for the door

Microsoft could be waiting outside

WE ENJOYED *BLUR*; A lot of people did too. Sadly, that enjoyment didn't translate into the sales that Activision hoped for, and now it looks like the studio behind the game – Bizarre Creations – is on its way to the big gaming expo in the sky. The company is also responsible for the recently released *James Bond: Blood Stone*, which you'll find reviewed in this issue. Apparently, *Blood Stone*'s poor reception, and subsequent sales figures, was the last straw for the publisher.

"Over the past three years since our purchase of Bizarre Creations, the fundamentals of the racing genre have changed significantly," said a spokesperson for Activision.

"Although we made a substantial investment in creating a new IP, *Blur*, it did not find a commercial audience.

"Bizarre is a very talented team of developers, however, because of the broader economic factors impacting the market, we are exploring our options regarding the future of the studio,

including a potential sale of the business."

The rest of the industry is, unsurprisingly, a bit bothered by the whole ordeal, including *LEGO Star Wars*, *LEGO Rock Band* and *LEGO Indiana Jones* developers Traveller's Tales, who narrowly avoided signing up with Activision in early 2000.

"Sad Day for games developers. Really glad I didn't sell my company to Activision," tweeted TT boss Jon Burton.

Employees at Bizarre have been handed a three-month notice period, but inside sources claim that the studio isn't ready to pack up its bags just yet. Following a management meeting, one staff member claims that a number of parties are interested in picking up the studio, including Microsoft.

"We are still on consultation for ninety days," the source said, "but things look much better than they did last night or this morning. Microsoft aren't stupid, they know we're talented and have spoken to Activision about us."

No vehicles in Arkham City but we might get Robin

The no vehicles bit might be a blessing or a spot of depressing news depending on which way you look at it. According to Sefton Hill, one of the founding members of Rocksteady Studios, there won't be any vehicles of any sort in the upcoming sequel *Batman: Arkham City*. When the game was announced, there was much speculation as to whether an expanded playing area would necessitate a number of Batman's vehicles. It won't, and Hill has said that Batman himself is all the vehicle we'll ever need.

With the ending of one lot of speculation comes the beginning of another: Robin might be making an appearance in *Arkham City*. According to those who have played through some preview code for Arkham City, one is able to glimpse in-game posters for the Flying Graysons – the family trapeze troop that Robin comes from.

When Hill was pressed for clarity on this matter he responded saying: "there's a chequered past for [Robin], but I really feel that some of the latest iterations (of the character) in the comic book universe are really interesting and exciting. I don't really want to say much more than that, but I definitely feel that – if done right – he can be a fascinating character."

So no vehicles, but maybe Robin – not sure whether this is good news or bad.

≫
BILLY BOB THORNTON: MOVIES SUCK BECAUSE GAMES SUCK

Wait... What? Billy Bob Thornton recently shunned Hollywood for what he believes is a downturn in the quality of the movies we're given to watch. He says that recent years have given rise to the "worst movies in history." Maybe he's got a point, so we'll totally respect the guy's opinion – at least until he starts blaming videogames.

"In our current state of affairs, especially in the entertainment business, we're living in a time when we're making – in my humble opinion – the worst movies in history. They're geared toward the video game-playing generation. And these videogames, which I'm on my son about constantly, these games are people killing for fun, and I think traditionally in movies, there's always been some kind of lesson in the violent movies."

Thornton's starring in a new movie called *Faster*. In it, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson kills a bunch of people. Billy Bob says that's different, because Faster has a story and a point it wants to get across. Apparently videogames are devoid of story and meaning. We think *BioShock, Enslaved, Deus Ex* and about 17 million other games have a bone to pick with you, Mr Thornton.

< Bytes >

Geralt prepares for some pirate hunting

Have you played *The Witcher*? You really should - it's a fantastically engaging, wonderfully rich RPG. Also, it's filled with nudity. If that doesn't make you want to play it, nothing will. *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* is due out next year. Once again, it's an RPG which focuses solely on creating a compelling single-player experience. It's got no online component. Developer CD Projekt has also opted to release the game free of DRM, with no online activations, no limits on the number of installs and basically no irritations – which makes it a prime target for those dodgy types who aren't willing to pay for their games.

CD Projekt is signing with legal firms and torrent sneaking companies to combat this. They plan to track down the people who pirate the game and slap them with hefty fines. "In quite a few big countries, when people are downloading it illegally they can expect a letter from a legal firm saying, 'Hey, you downloaded it illegally and right now you have to pay a fine.'"

It works like this: law firms contact torrent sites to get the names of the ISPs used by the offenders. They then threaten those ISPs with legal action if they don't provide the account details of the illegal downloaders. Letters are then sent out to those pirates and the natural order of things is balanced once more.

"I'm sure you've heard about stories in the US when recording companies were chasing people," said Iwiński. "We don't want to be so harsh, but there is a chance that this might happen to some people if they download illegally. There will be an initiative." Don't pirate *The Witcher 2* kids – it's bad for your financial situation.

» PUT ON YOUR WARFACE

While Crytek central in Frankfurt and their Nottingham-based counterparts busy themselves with the upcoming *Crysis 2*, the South Korean wing of the company (Crytek, Ltd.) is busy on something entirely different called *Warface*. The bizarrely-named title will run on CryENGINE 3, just like *Crysis 2*, but will trade an elaborate single player campaign for a focus on multiplayer – both co-op and versus. *Warface* will be set in the near future, and will run on a free-to-play model, with micro-transactions for weapons, customisation and other goodies. Warface is currently destined for Korean and "other Asian" markets only, but a success over yonder could translate into Western availability.

Another Notch in the belt

Some developers like to keep quiet about their sales figures. Perhaps they're worried that anything less than 10 million sales will make them appear to be underperforming. On the other hand, if you're an indie developer, you want people to know the success you have – either to pull in potential investors or to spur on fellow developers.

Minecraft creator Markus "Notch" Persson has, since the beginning of *Minecraft's* commercial endeavours, been completely open about the sales figures of his game – you can visit www.minecraft.net right now and view the exact number of sales the game has received.

"Personally I like sharing that information, because I'm generally an open guy," Notch told GamesIndustry.biz in an interview. "But it feels a bit sometimes like it's a bragging page.

"That wasn't the intention, because originally it was for the people who had brought the game could see like a number increase on a webpage or something. I think it's a good sign, if you're actually open with your development and you're also open about the sales, it feels like you're genuine in some sense."

When asked about other possible sources of revenue, Notch admitted that he's thinking about premium DLC.

"I know I enjoyed some DLC before, when it feels like it's an expansion to the game which wasn't just there. Like when I was playing M*ega Man 9*, and I have bought content that I have already downloaded, that felt a bit weird. But the *Fallout 3* expansions, I enjoyed those. If you do it right, you can do it in a good way, I think."

Not everyone is good at their job...

>>> At NAG magazine we're good at what we do because we only hire the very best free range writers. Fed on a rich diet of coke and pizza, these crack journalists know everything there is to know about the gaming industry and aren't afraid to tell it like it is. Trust in NAG. Good at what we do since 1998. <<<

on sale every month

The Beavatar

I'm in ur jungle, hiding from ur doods

The story so far: Our poor badger has disappeared (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights... so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of *NAG* has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere... Get going. Send your sitings to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'January Beavatar'.

December Winner

Janine van der Westhuizen, p58

WIN!

One person who finds the Beavatar will win an Elmo Starter Kit for Nintendo DS. We really wish we were kidding, but we're not.

Welcome to the Rose garden

GUITAR HERO III MIGHT be old news to everyone with better things to do than complain, but apparently Guns N Roses frontman Axl Rose didn't get the message. The rock star is suing Activision over the use of the song *Welcome to the Jungle* because the company breached a contractual condition that the game contain no references to GnR guitarist Slash or his current band Velvet Revolver. However, as many of you may be aware, *GH III* does indeed contain a character based on the top hat-toting guitarist, but here's why exactly Axl is so upset:

The reason behind his contractual requirements for using *Jungle* are to avoid users associating Slash and, dare we say, Velvet Revolver, with GnR's original classic. We're sorry, Mr Rose, if people think that the co-writer of one of your band's most popular songs takes a little credit for his hard work, despite the fact that he's gone off to form a band not filled with the political whining you're so miserably famous for.

Rose is suing the publisher for a whopping $20 million in damages, based on what he calls "a web of lies and deception to conceal its true intentions to not only feature Slash and VR prominently in *GH III*, but also promote the game by emphasizing and reinforcing an association between Slash and Guns N Roses and the band's song *Welcome to the Jungle*."

Stay a while and press A to continue

Job postings can tell a lot about what a game developer is working on, and, if a recent help wanted by Blizzard is anything to go by, we can expect *Diablo III* to make its way to consoles at some stage.

The post, on Blizzard's official site, notes a career opportunity for a "Lead Designer, Console" to work on *Diablo III*. As well as all the required skills and responsibilities you'd expect to see, it mentions "The ideal candidate has prior experience in console game development, proven experience in game design ... extensive knowledge of *Diablo*, and a longstanding passion for playing games."

Blizzard was quick to respond with a press release.

"We're exploring a *Diablo*-related concept for consoles and are currently looking to fill a few senior console-related positions on the Diablo III team. As we've said in the past, with proper care the gameplay could suit the console platform, and we're interested in seeing what talent out there might be interested in such a project. Please note that this is not an announcement of a console title. We are first and foremost developing *Diablo III* for Windows and Mac PCs and don't intend to allow any possibility of a console interpretation to delay or affect the release of the game."

< Bytes >

Distributors

AMD	[044] 384-0225
Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
Asbis	[011] 848-7000
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
BT Games	[011] 462-7441
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Comztek	0860 600 557
Core Gaming	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640
Drive Control Corporation	[011] 201-8927
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
Esquire	0861 700 000
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142
Evetech Solutions	[012] 326-6547
ESET	0860 313 872
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530
Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Megarom	[011] 361-4800
Microsoft	0860 225 567
Nology	[012] 657-1317
Nu Metro Interactive	[011] 340-3000
Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Phoenix Software	[011] 803-5437
Prima Interactive	[011] 799-7800
Rectron	[011] 203-1000
Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Sapphire Technology SA	[011] 656-9087
Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Ster Kinekor Entertainment	[011] 445-7700
Syntech	0861 274 244
TVR	[011] 807-1390

If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679

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 WRC FIA World Rally Championship for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'January Caption'.

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR: "You can pick your friends, and you can pick your nose…"
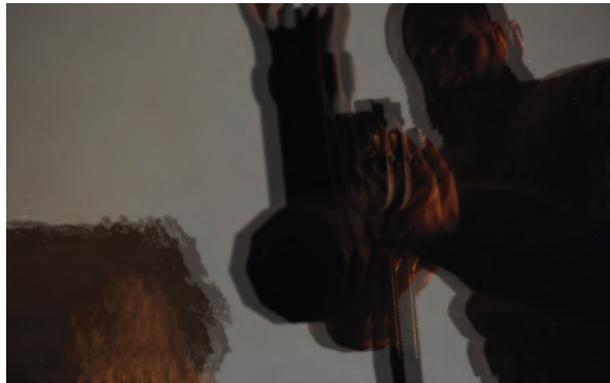
LAST MONTH'S WINNERS: "That's the last time I watch a 3D movie drunk."
– Caleb Rudnick

BT GAMES Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

JANUARY: WEEK 2

DC Universe Online	PC, PS3

JANUARY: WEEK 3

Tangled	PC, Wii, DS
LittleBigPlanet 2	PS3
Mass Effect 2	PS3

JANUARY: WEEK 4

Dead Space 2	PC, 360, PS3

JANUARY: TBA

The Sly Trilogy	PS3
Ferrari: The Race Experience	Wii
Crossboard 7 (Kinect)	360
Dance Evolution (Kinect)	Xbox 360
Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's Master of the Cards	Wii

Star Wars game for Move?

While in the process of tearing into Microsoft's Kinect, one of PlayStation Move's top engineers might have inadvertently revealed a Move-enabled Star Wars game.

"I'm usually not very aggressive," said Anton Mikhailov in an interview with Eurogamer. "But I will say [Move's Star Wars game will] be damn better than Kinect could ever do." When Eurogamer began hunting for details, Mikhailov backed off a little. "I'm not in the product planning division so unfortunately I can't tell you much more about that," Mikhailov said.

Competition winners

November AVG subscriptions: Wayne Buys from Cape Town; Marc Mostert from Cresta; Thinus Swart from Somerset West; Akshay Maharaj from Phoenix; Elizabeth Groenewald from Brackenfell; Sergio Mendes from Rustenburg; Kyle Schindler from Cresta; Nathan Nadler-Nir from Glosderry; Massimo Meneghetty from Mountain View; Christie Vorster from Noordbrug; RJ Cornelissen from Vredendal; Dewald Havenga from Wierdapark; Al Schnepel from Pretoria; Ellen Hurst from Sea Point; Neil Steenkamp from Cape Town; Barbara Theron from Camps Bay; Howick High School; Steven Barclay from Kloof; Hilton College Library; Amori Struwig from Tableview; Jessica Salmon from Northcliff; Gordon Robertson from Deibaelle; Bror Hijner from Middelberg; Dr. Berezowski from Cape Town; Alyson Samson from Linden; Stephen Koekemoer from Pretoria; Michael de Beer from Midrand; Lucas Gerber from Bloemfontein; Joshua Adams from Mulbarton; Dorette Adams from Lyttleton; Daniel Pestana from Durban North; Aidan Graham from Cramerview; Francois Haupt from Bellville; Cheryl Dunwoody from Durban; Dirkus Matthee from Bonnievale; Dean Tyson from Cresta; Burt Van Wyk from Pretoria; Darryl Smith from Randjesfontein; Jade van Bergen from Kibler Park; Lee York from Lonehill; Marcell van Zyl from Bethlehem; Jaco du Preez from Pretoria; V Mattana from Flamwood; Morne Hills from Port Elizabeth; Ruan Etsebeth from Verwoedpark; Andrew Bramhill from Northriding; Adam Stokes from Rivonia; Gustav Puchert from Durbanville; Douglas Greyling from Randburg; Mrs Hussey from Linmeyer; Shanil Valab from Lenasia South; Christopher Sanderson from Bryanston; Sheri-Ann van Heerden from East London; Mark Coetzee from Bloemfontein; Luke van Schaik from Newlands; Roland Venter from Jeffreys Bay; Mick Milligan from Sunningdale; Sean van der Merwe from Langerhovenpark; Arthur Lahanis from Honeydew; Chantal Young from Pretoria; Hannes Burger from Flamwood; Ryan Hill from Ferndale; Sebastian Lasevicius from Lorraine Manor; Jaco Jooste from Eldoraigh; Barry Templer from Port Elizabeth; Carol Buckland from Beacon Bay; Christiaan Swanepoel from Rensburg; Robert Moore from Bedfordview; Ross Oosthuizen from Randpark Ridge; CJ Farquharson from Roggebaai; WJ Van Der Merwe from Somerset West; N Linguori from Randburg; David Sullivan from Onverwacht; Nicolaas Kruger from Centurion; Matthew Law from Benoni; Lelo Pereira from Swaziland; Janis Van Tonder from Rondebosch; Graeme Harding from Knysna; Ruan Gouws from Randpark Ridge; R Cosgrave from Lyttelton; Marthinus Beets from Montagu; Werner Barnard from Gezina; MH Van Der Merwe from Kempton Park; Garrit Nightingdale from Paarl; Cameron Hendricks from Zimbali; Warren Foxley from Bryanston; Shaun Bugler from Edgemead

DEVELOPER > Visceral Games   **PUBLISHER** > Electronic Arts   **WEB** > deadspace.ea.com   **GENRE** > Survival Horror   **RELEASE DATE** > January 2011   **PLATFORMS** > Xbox 360 | PC | PS3

DEAD SPACE 2

Make us whole again...

IT'S BEEN LITTLE OVER two years since *Dead Space* swooped in and became a sleeper hit at the *NAG* office. It was by no means the most original game out there, with many of its characteristics borrowed from survival-horror titles that came before it. What the game lacked in originality, however, it made up for with pure, horrifying attitude, showering us with superb gameplay, horribly atmospheric audio and a massive dollop of polish. It took every element that it had borrowed from other games, streamlined it and launched it into space to live among the Necromorph-riddled stars. Now, *Dead Space 2*'s release date slowly crawls toward us, teeth gnashing and twisted claws slashing, eager to tear into us once more, and holy s**t – you are not ready for what this sequel plans to stab you with.

That's really just an elaborate way of saying that we have an excellent preview build of *Dead Space 2* right here with us and then gleefully rubbing that fact in your eager faces because you can't say the same. Sorry guys. If it's any consolation, you've only got to wait another month by the time you read this. Our preview build kicks off in the game's second chapter, dumping us unceremoniously on the "Sprawl," space station extraordinaire and setting for this sequel. From the moment I picked up the controller, it was like getting reacquainted with an old friend. A friend I stopped speaking to because the last time we saw each other there were many terror-induced screams, gasps and yelps from my end. There are only so many pants I can change before enough is enough, you see. So what does this bastard do now that
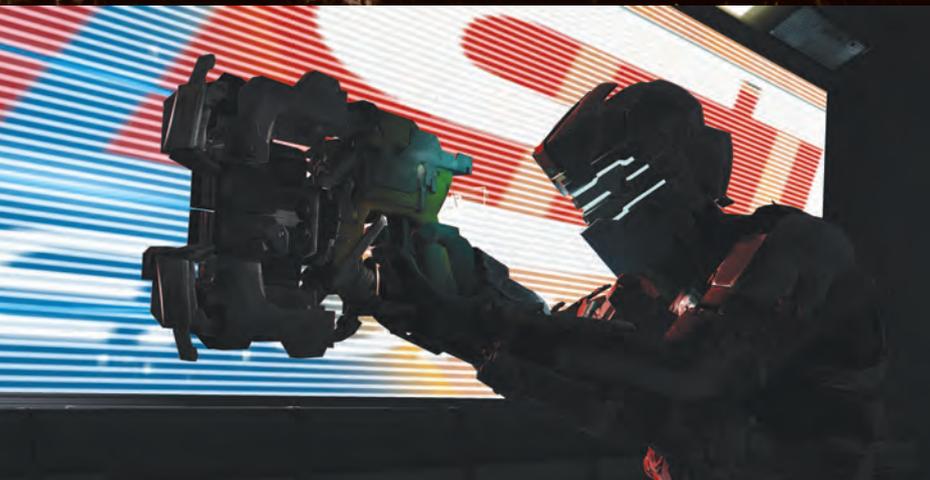
THEY MOSTLY
COME AT NIGHT
MOSTLY

FRIENDLY SCARES

Unfortunately, the preview build we received did not include the much-anticipated multiplayer component of *Dead Space 2*. This is what we know though: there will be multiplayer in *Dead Space 2* and that multiplayer lets you play as either the humans or the Necromorphs. Trailers show game modes where the humans attempt to complete objectives while the Necros try to slow them down. Seems kind of like *Left 4 Dead*'s versus mode, but in space.

"...holy s**t – you are not ready for what this sequel plans to stab you with..."

we're on speaking terms again? Exactly the same thing, of course – and I didn't expect any less.

Dead Space's gameplay is pretty straightforward survival-horror fare. You progress through your environment, collecting ammo (along with schematics for new weapons, items and armour), killing enemies, and feeling scared and basically just trying not to die. Scares usually come in the form of monster closets, but these complement the nature of the game perfectly. There are specific areas on the Sprawl where you can save your game. These areas typically also boast a store (for buying new weapons, items and more) and an upgrade bench (used to upgrade your weapons and your RIG – Isaac's signature suit/space armour). Where the game differs from everything else out there is in its presentation. The futuristic space setting turns the game into the unofficial

Event Horizon videogame. The lack of an always-on HUD serves to expertly immerse you in your surroundings. Instead, your inventory, tutorials, any audio/video diaries you may find, video calls with friendly characters and other UI elements are all projected like holograms from Isaac's RIG. This also means that performing actions like rustling through your inventory happen in real time, leaving you vulnerable to sharp Necromorph teeth. Another of *Dead Space*'s most alluring factors is its story. It's a fascinating journey you're sent on as you uncover the truth behind events and fight to keep Isaac in one piece.

It seems like *Dead Space 2* is attempting to pack its gameplay with more action. It's understandable, since Isaac is no longer a simple engineer. His experience on the Ishimura has turned him into a battle-hardened badass. Melee attacks are faster (as is Isaac's foot stomp),

THE SPRAWL

Dead Space 2's new location, the Sprawl, makes for a reasonably different affair than what the Ishimura offered. The Ishimura was massive, but the Sprawl puts it to shame. Look out the windows on one of the Sprawl's decks and you see what was once a hive of activity – a station filled to bursting point with people. At the start of the game during all the chaos of the infestation, you see escape shuttles being jettisoned into space and entire ships desperately trying to make their way into the relative safety of open space amidst all the chaos. This larger location brings with it larger play areas, so you can expect to fight in a greater number of large, open spaces than you did in the Ishimura's claustrophobic corridors.

The world around you isn't as lifeless as it was on the Ishimura either. The Sprawl has areas that are awash with colour, like a miniature shopping mall complete with obnoxious advertising and colourful signage. It's made very clear that people spend their lives here – or did, before this nasty Necro business. This makes allowance for more interesting levels like the Church of Unitology, although you can still expect to see dark, dingy maintenance areas and the like. It's just nice to see that things will be more visually varied for the sequel.

< Dead Space 2 >

"...it's like hanging out with an old friend. And then strategically dismembering him..."

DIRTY NECROS
All your favourite *Dead Space* beasties make a return for the sequel, but Isaac's found himself some new friends to play with as well. A new *Dead Space* obviously means new enemies, designed with the same disgusting, pus-filled ideology that birthed the first game's enemies. The preview code showed us a few of these new enemies and we come to you armed with this fresh knowledge as well as all-new, nightmarish stories to tell.

THE PUKER
This filthy bugger doesn't know when to put that bottle of booze away and is thus able to vomit on demand. However, this isn't just gross, regular vomit that pisses you off when it splashes onto your shoes: this is gross, irregular vomit that will peel the flesh from your face. Naturally this means that Pukers generally don't have many friends (even their Puker brethren find them a bit uncouth) and aren't invited to many house parties, but the Puker is an expert in its field - a field which involves spewing corrosive bile all over its enemies and turning them into puddles of gross stuff you probably shouldn't step in. As if that wasn't bad enough, severing their limbs unleashes a torrent of toxic Puker gunk that was just aching for an outlet. It's best to take these guys down from a safe distance. And don't get any on your shoes, because that's still pretty much as annoying as with regular vomit.

THE PACK
We're guessing these are the reanimated corpses of children, because only the reanimated corpses of children could be this ridiculously energetic. They're fast, brutal and relentless – much like regular children, but, um... deader. They tend to travel in packs (hence their name) and it's easy to be overwhelmed by their sheer numbers. Thankfully, they're very squishy, so any rapid-fire weapon works wonders against them. Also, remember to put them in Stasis to slow them down and keep them out of your hair for a while.

THE SLASHER MONK
These cuddly blighters can be identified by the Unitology robes that hang tattered and torn from their misshapen bodies. Other than that, they're pretty standard Necromorphs and slicing off their limbs will bring them down. Just be sure they stay down – it's common in *Dead Space 2* for seemingly dead Necros to not seem so dead anymore when their giant spear-like limbs are protruding from a gaping hole in your stomach that you're sure wasn't there when you woke up this morning. A particularly effective tactic to use against Slasher Monks is to cut off one of their sharp limbs and then use Kinesis to pick it up and impale them with it. Works every time.

THE STALKER
It's like a bull got down and dirty with a velociraptor and squeezed out this thing. Stalkers hunt in packs and will try to use misdirection and flanking manoeuvres to get you facing in the other direction. Once they've got you where they want you, they'll charge at you and proceed to pummel you into oblivion. Their heavily armoured heads soak up damage as they charge, keeping their limbs safely tucked away behind them and making strategic dismemberment difficult. Use Stasis to slow them down, then try to hit them from behind. Just pray that one of its buddies doesn't interrupt your little Stasis-fuelled dance.

THE TRIPOD
I didn't really fight this thing, to be honest – it was much too busy dragging me across the bloodied floor of a creepy Unitologist church for me to fight it. All I did was scream lots while shooting at glowy bits on the Tripod's body until it let me go. This is scary stuff people. The Tripod lives up to its name. It's a huge Necro that walks on three legs, or leg-like appendages, at least. Shoot the glowing yellow stuff. That seems to at least irritate the Tripod. I also went toe-to-toe with a boss Necro that's being called the Tormentor. I won't spoil this new foe. You'll learn all about it when you finally get your hands on the game.

ZERO-G WARRIOR
Space allows for some awesome zero-gravity puzzles and combat situations. The first game was fairly limiting in its zero-g environments, with Isaac's magnetic boots not allowing for much freedom of movement. You couldn't do much more than point at a desired location, then watch as Isaac automatically floated over to it after launching him from his starting point. In *Dead Space 2*, you're given full control over your zero-g movement thanks to the new thrusters built into Isaac's RIG. You can hover, strafe and control your speed in midair. We're interested to see more of how the developers are going to utilise this change to the zero-gravity gameplay.

SPOILERS INCOMING

If you haven't completed the first game, do that before reading this box out. If you have, here's a refresher. It's 2414 and the USG Ishimura, an enormous, planet-cracking starship, has just sent out a distress signal to the Concordance Extraction Corporation (CEC) while in the process of mining operations on the planet Aegis VII. The CEC dispatches the USG Kellion to assess the situation. Isaac Clarke, the player character, is a member of the Kellion's crew. Cue a guidance system malfunction and the Kellion crashes into the Ishimura's dock, leaving the Kellion all busted up. At first, the Ishimura appears to be abandoned, but while searching for an alternate means of escape from this massive steel coffin, you and your crewmates are attacked by Necromorphs – former humans who are now much less pretty (or more ugly) than before. The screenshots on these pages should provide an adequate description of the Necros. Isaac gets separated from the rest of the survivors of the Necromorph attack and so the quest to escape the Ishimura began. What followed involved some light puzzle solving, a bit of weapon/armour upgrading and lots of terror and action as you walked in Isaac's shoes throughout his entire ordeal. Boss fights, religious fanatics, government conspiracies, horrific encounters, stunning revelations, devious betrayals, a dubious reunion with Isaac's girlfriend Nicole (who is a member of the Ishimura's crew), a brief trip to the surface of Aegis VII and approximately six billion Necros later, *Dead Space*'s story came to a close, leaving us begging for more.

Dead Space 2 picks up where the original left off. The Marker (an alien artefact of immense religious importance) that Isaac was exposed to in the first game has had a lasting effect on the guy's mental health. Visual and auditory hallucinations have become a part of his everyday life, which leads right into the start of *Dead Space 2*: you begin in a hospital on the Sprawl, a gigantic, densely populated space station. Unlike the first game, where you joined the Necromorph party a bit late, you'll be right there as the Necromorph infestation spreads through the Sprawl this time around. The Church of Unitology and EarthGov are up to their old tricks and you're caught right in the middle of it.
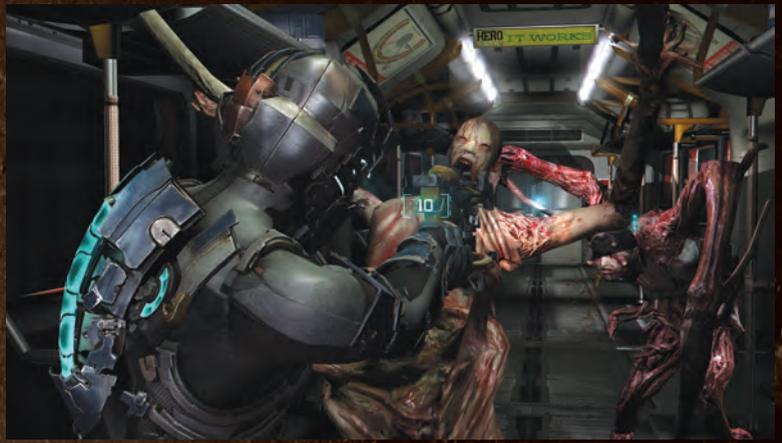
"...Isaac is no longer a silent protagonist..."

AUDIO AND ATMOSPHERE

These two components were the most highly praised aspects of the original game and justly so. The audio and ambience of the first game were absolutely phenomenal. The sequel looks to do the same. Even in the preview build, the audio sets the mood excellently. From the screeching of enemies to the eerie sounds that echo through the Sprawl as if the space station itself is horrified by the happenings unravelling within its innards, there's no shortage of threatening atmosphere here. Sometimes it's the distinct lack of audio that is most frightening, such as when you find yourself in a soundless vacuum. The soundtrack is once again being composed by BAFTA award-winning composer Jason Graves. Oh, and speaking of audio – Isaac is no longer a silent protagonist. You need an example of bone-chilling audio? There's a segment in the preview code where a toilet suddenly automatically flushes itself when a sensor catches you leaving a bathroom. The unexpected sound of that flushing toilet was almost enough to make me crap myself. Almost.

< Dead Space 2 >

"...his experience on the Ishimura has turned him into a battle-hardened badass..."

enemies are more numerous and even the new weapons and armour on offer point towards a greater focus on action. That's not to say it's any less freaky. You'll still fill your pants the moment you hear the familiar sound of a Necromorph that's suddenly appeared behind you. It's definitely not on the same level of sheer psychological terror as something like *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, but it still manages to keep you wary of rounding that next corner or opening that next door. Much of this is brought on by the finite resources available to you. Ammo is scarce and inventory space is limited, so choosing between taking extra ammo or a valuable medpack makes something as simple as inventory management a very tense affair.

During my time with the preview code, I screamed and shot things in the face, only to be rapidly reminded that shooting things in the face in *Dead Space* isn't as effective as shooting things in the face is in other games. I screamed and walked through blood-splattered hallways plagued by disguised monster closets. I screamed and watched as Visceral Games displayed their impressive penchant for coming up with new and disgusting ways of having returning protagonist Isaac Clarke die

horribly. I screamed and ran in any direction that wasn't filled with things trying to eat me. I did all this while getting a taste of the incredibly intriguing continuation of the story. Fans of the first game can safely quell any doubts they may have – *Dead Space 2* is going to rock your boxers right the hell off.

Everything is instantly familiar here. The controls are as fluid and responsive as I recall. The atmosphere is every bit as chilling and wonderfully oppressive as I remember. Those Necromorph scum are still perfectly fine with leaving you no respite from danger. The location may be new, but the gameplay, the protagonist and the general feel of the game remain faithful to the original. I'll put it this way: my ammo counter was once again as worryingly, perpetually empty as it always was in the first game. Like I said - it's like hanging out with an old friend. And then strategically dismembering him. More details on the game are scattered elsewhere throughout these pages, but all you really need to know is this: I played a small portion of *Dead Space 2*, and I would happily sell your mom for the chance to play the rest of it. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Junction Point – Epic Interviews

LAST MONTH WE VISITED Junction Point in Austin, Texas to take a look at Epic Mickey. Here are two interviews we didn't have space for in last month's issue.

PAUL WEAVER

> **Vital Statistics**
> **Start:** Broke into the industry in 1992 as a tips writer for several UK videogame magazines.
> **Credited on:** *Donkey Kong Country 3, Deus Ex 2: Invisible War, Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer, Crazy Taxi.*
> **Worked for:** Rare, Acclaim, Ion Storm, Breakaway Games, Visual Concepts Entertainment Inc.

> **Hi! What do you do?**

I'm the Director of Product Development here at Junction Point, essentially Warren's right hand man. He comes up with the ideas, the vision, the high-level mythos, fiction and backstory, and I'm the execution guy, turning those dreams into reality. Obviously there's a huge amount of production and design work that goes on, and because Warren's not always here I have to get in there and make sure people hold to the vision that he set out.

> **Do you have to interface with Disney often?**

Yeah, it's the standard developer/publisher relationship. As you can imagine, Mickey Mouse is the corporate mascot and icon, so obviously he is very well cared for. We've had many an update along the way to make sure that we're holding true to "what is Mickey Mouse".

> **Was the additive/subtractive nature of the Paint and Thinner, from a technological standpoint, tricky to pull off?**

That was probably the riskiest tech challenge of the game, there's really nothing out there that we could reference. Many games have destructible environments, but the curve-ball of giving the player the ability to restore it… One thing we're not afraid of is the unknown, and we used all of our experience and frankly, took some risks along the way. But that's one of the things about Disney; it is okay to take risks: when they pay off something special can happen.

> **What has been, personally, the most enjoyable part of working on *Epic Mickey*? I mean, Warren's totally geeking out about Mickey of course…**

[Laughs] Honestly, it only happened for me a few weeks ago. We're wrapping it up, everything's coming together and we were all watching one of the story moments of the game. The combination of the story, visuals and music all came together at that moment and – like an epiphany – we realised we've created a *Disney* product. Something I think people are really going to put alongside the great feature animated movies of the past.

> **Something timeless?**

Exactly. It was very emotional. I don't want to be completely sappy about it, but yeah. That was the moment I knew we'd pulled it together and the magic had gone in.

> **Was the choice of platform Junction Points's choice, or did Disney have input on that?**

You know, I don't recall. I think we always did that "thing" (makes a painting gesture with his hands), I'm going to paint and stuff, and that suited the Wii best.

> **If someone is thinking "Eh, it's *Mickey*, it's the *Wii*, why should I care, I'm a *hardcore gamer*", what would you tell them?**

[Laughs] My son is in middle-school and he came home last week, saying he'd been talking to some friends in school about the game and they were like – it sounds like all you do is wander around and make friends with people! Is that what the game is, dad?

[Laughs] Not at all! I think the thing that people need to understand with this game is, that *is* an element, we support it, but there are consequences. And if you play in the Thinner playstyle, that has consequence too. I think people will be surprised by the amount of humour and depth.

> **Anything I didn't ask, that if I *had* asked you would have had a great answer for?**

Hah! Great question! One of the most wonderful things about Junction Point, is the vast amount of experience that's been pulled in from around the world. Warren has brought in the mantra of "Playstyle Matters", and we have a wealth of experience with platform games. Former Ion Storm people are here; it's rare you get that kind of fusion of styles that compliment and come together, through the experience and effort of the team… I'd like everyone to know that this company put their heart and soul into this game.

< Q&A: Junction Point >

WARREN SPECTOR

Start: Began as Associate Editor at board game company Steve Jackson Games in 1983, moved to Dungeons & Dragons publisher TSR in 1987.
Creator of: *Deus Ex, System Shock, Ultima Underworld, Crusader: No Remorse.*
Worked for: Origin Systems, Looking Glass Studios, Ion Storm

> **Hi Warren! Huge fan. Listen, the music for Epic Mickey?**
Yes?

> **It's wonderful.**
Thank you! It's all done by a name you *should* recognise. I'm so proud of the music for this game, it is no overstatement to say it is the best music I have *ever* had in a game I've been involved with. I will go on record saying I think it is the *best* game music ever. In any game, anywhere, from anybody. I couldn't be happier.

> **Not that you're biased about Disney music, of course...**
[Laughs] It's interesting you say that. I interviewed and auditioned about a dozen composers. I told them the whole spirit of this game is "familiar but strange"; write me a piece of music that "sounds" like Disney. If you listen to a Mickey cartoon from 1930, and a Disney feature cartoon from 1943, and a Disney live-action film from 2010, there's *something* there. You can close your eyes and know you're watching, *hearing* a Disney thing. And I'm enough of a musician to be dangerous, but not enough to know how that works. Is it orchestration, something melodic, I have no idea, but a 1930 Mickey cartoon does not sound like the movie Enchanted, but they both sound like Disney to me. Really talented composers, one after another, couldn't pull it off.

One of the art directors at Disney Interactive sent me a demo CD, I popped it in and went, *oh my god* – this stuff is incredible. Jim Dooley, he won an Emmy for best original score for Pushing Daisies. I thought the show was okay, but my wife loved it, and I'd just be sitting there totally getting off on the music. Called him up, gave him the test, 24 hours later he sent me back perfection. He is a fantastic composer, and I love the music. The endgame music in *Epic Mickey* is spectacular. I'm sorry, I should stop - I'm just so glad you noticed that because the music is just... yeah.

> **Well, there are always options to release an Original Sound Track album?**
I will go on record to say I am promoting that idea *really* hard. She's going to tell you not to print that (points to PR representative), but I really, really want a soundtrack CD. This one so deserves it, if nothing else, 99c a track on iTunes. We've already got it remixed and in listenable format...

> **So, the music's good. [Laughter] Are you enjoying working on something that is, in terms of "texture", a little different to what you're used to?**
I'm thrilled. You know, at some point I will regret what I'm about to say, but if I have to make another game about a guy wearing a trench coat and sunglasses at night and

carrying two guns, I will just destroy myself. It's only recently that Mickey became associated with kids. I hope we can show those guys [older male gamers] that there's gaming goodness galore... Mickey as your avatar is fine, get over your egos.

> **Separate content from container a little...**
Exactly! Here's my shame-based tactic for getting people to play the game. You'll be a fat little plumber with a moustache, you'll be a blue hedgehog, but you're not going to be a mouse? What's up with you?

> **The people who'd be the plumber and the hedgehog would probably give this more of a chance than the guy who insists on being a space marine...**
That's certainly true, it's an easier sell. There are a lot of people who sort of followed the games I've worked on throughout my career; the folks who started playing Ultima... you're not probably old enough to have played those games I worked on...

> **Hey, I started with *Ultima Underworld* and *The Black Gate*...**
Okay, that was second or third, that I worked on. But those early *Ultima* games were all about empowering players. How creative are you, what do your actions in the game say about you as a person, not necessarily about your character. When I hooked up with the guys at Looking Glass, I was so thrilled to find a whole other group of people who believed in how important it was to empower players to tell their own stories, so the *System Shock* games, *Ultima Underworld, Thief*... those were all about the

same thing. How creative and clever are you, how do you want to approach problems. Also you had the consequences of those problems. Maybe you could take what you learn from these games into your real life. And *Deus Ex* was certainly about that. The choices in this, the consequences may be different, but the core philosophy that drove all of those games, is in *Epic Mickey*, if you can get past your embarrassment, or whatever it is, for a few minutes.

In all my games though, I try not to judge. Morality is an emergent system, not a weighted scale. It's what *you* think defines a hero. I will show you what I think are reasonable consequences for your choices, but I'm not going to judge. You and I are going to have a dialogue, when you play the game. Platforming, role-playing – we get that. But a dialogue, that's the magic of games for me.

> **If you could revisit one of your previous games one day, could you actually pick one?**
That's easy. I will go to my grave, not understanding why Electronic Arts does not just upgrade the graphics and UI on *Ultima Underworld*. This is a sad commentary on the state of gaming today, but in my heart I believe that *Underworld* with no designed changes, except modern graphics and a modern UI, would be state of the art in role-playing. And that's a game we did in 1991. That's *pathetic*.

> **Why has nobody attempted to surpass it yet?**
Sci-fi writer Theodore Sturgeon said: "Ninety percent of everything is crud." I think that's pretty much it. **NAG**

The Last Guardian

A Boy and His Giant CatBird

GENRE > Action-adventure, Puzzle

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

HITOKUI NO ŌWASHI TRICO, literally translates into "Man-Eating Giant Eagle Trico" or "Trico the Man-Eating Giant Eagle". Man-eating isn't as harsh as it sounds, the term has a children's book fairy-tale monster connotation in Japan. Something that *looks* dangerous, but is actually kind of cute and just wants love.

Team Ico decided to name the big cat/bird in *The Last Guardian* "Toriko" because it can mean prisoner, baby bird, or is a hybrid (portmanteau) of the Japanese words for bird (tori) and cat (neko). What better way to describe a giant animal that initially thinks you're a snack, but later becomes a friend you can rely on.

The player controls an (as of yet) unnamed boy who can run, jump, climb and interact with the environment. The boy can also climb up Trico, using the giant feathers has handholds, to take advantage of the creature's natural behaviour. As an example, sometimes you'll have to throw a barrel up on to a ledge to make Trico curious as to what's up there, and then climb up the creature's back as it inspects the ledge.

When Team Ico originally designed *Shadow of the Colossus*, one of the greatest games on the PS2, it was an independent concept and not related to their first game, *Ico*. It was only near the end of development that lead designer Fumito Ueda connected the two titles. Ueda has yet to confirm if there is a real connection between *The Last Guardian* and its predecessors, but it's easy to speculate that perhaps Trico is like one of the creatures you fought in *Shadow of the Colossus*.

The game uses a full physics engine (a first for Team Ico), detailed enough to calculate a barrel being crunched down in Trico's jaws, and each and every feather on Trico's body is affected separately by the wind. As the two explore the crumbling castle around them, puzzles get more complex. Ueda hints that there might be other creatures like Trico, but like on most details surrounding the game, Team Ico is being tight-lipped so as not to spoil anything.

So while there aren't a lot of hard facts right now, the beautiful imagery and subtle body-language of the two characters speak volumes, whispering at The Last Guardian becoming a defining title of its generation. **NAG**

Miktar Hurrdhurr

The interplay between Trico, the boy and the guards they have to get past changes based on situation – sometimes Trico will have to save the boy by smacking a guard, other times the boy will have to save Trico from the guards and their spears. Trico won't always obey the yells from the boy to get his attention, until the boy gains its trust. Rather than use a fictional language like in *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Ico*, the boy shouts Trico's name, or gets its attention with food.

Initially, Trico is confused by the boy and doesn't know what to make of him. After the pair form a bond by the boy helping feed and protect Trico, the catbird will repay the favour by saving the boy from falling to his death, provided Trico is close enough to help. To emphasize the co-dependency between the pair, the boy isn't completely self-sufficient but is strong enough to cling to Trico's feathers.
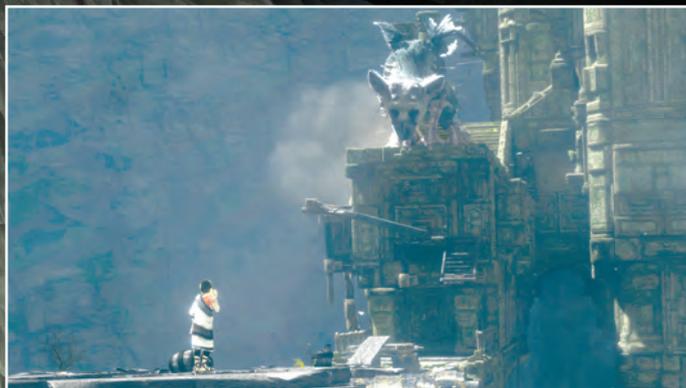
According to Team Ico, the levels weren't built to accommodate Trico's size, but rather Trico was designed and programmed so he could squeeze through small places that the boy would explore, and also make giant leaps in the open-air sections. Originally the designs for Trico had him look more like a dog and in one case, a camel. Ueda said that the cat and bird combination was the most effective: it's more agile, can jump higher and fit through smaller openings.

The Reviewers

It's the New Year! Give us a resolution.

CHRIS
I resolve to never again try to slip foul language into the magazine just to see if our dipshit editor really reads anything. Oh, and I quit.

MICHAEL
To mean the nice things I say to people and have less ulterior motives for everything I do. *[And yes, I do read everything, Ed]*

ALEX
To make it into StarCraft II Platinum League before my birthday and Diamond by year's end.

MIKTAR
To continue not paying full retail price for games: only buy games second-hand or when they've been discounted.

TARRYN
To ride a unicorn over a rainbow.

MIKLÓS
I resolve to – wait, are you serious? Just read my column; you can resolve a lot more in 370 words than you can in 25.

GEOFF
I resolve to finish at least half the games in my Steam library.

DANE
My resolution is to fulfil all of my resolutions from last year. I had no resolutions last year, so this is going to be easy.

WALT
To play more games for fun.

JUNIOR
To be nicer to n00bs online.

NEO
To reply to Michael's emails asking me for something to put in the Reviewers list...

Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

Vital Info: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

Box Outs: More good stuff. Just in a box.

The Review: These are words that make up our opinion on the game. You didn't really need us to tell you that, did you?

Enslaved: Odyssey to the West
Press "A" to everything

Genre and Platforms: What kind of game is it and what will it run on? All available platforms are bolded. The one we reviewed it on is red.

Game Name: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. There's also a summary line for added spice!

Screenshots and Captions: A picture's worth a thousand words. The captions are mostly just fart jokes...

The Score Box

THE SCORE

Age Rating: Lets see some ID, son

Multiplayer Icons: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

DRM: Applies to PC games only: Internet connection required, disc required, or no DRM beyond a serial key

Online Services: Is the game distributed/available over an online service, or does it gain additional features such as multiplayer by connecting to said service? Required services are bolded.

Plus/Minus: What we liked and didn't like, in convenient bullet-point format

Bottom Line: Here's where we boil down the entire review to one sentence. Because reading is hard...

>Online services
Games for Windows LIVE

>Plus
+ Enthralling setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

>Minus
- Doesn't change much

>Bottom Line
Our second trip to Rapture is every bit as captivating as the first.

88

Award: See below for details

MUST PLAY

Score: Further simplifying the bottom line to a number out of 100

ED'S CHOICE

Editor's Choice Award
If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right – pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.

MUST PLAY

Must Play Award
Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.

PONIES

Pony Award
This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the worst garbage.

Quick Hits

MONOPOLY STREETS

It's *Monopoly!* You know this game – roll dice, buy properties, screw over your friends and family. It's the game that every good little capitalist played while growing up and now you can relive those memories, or experience them for the first time, without having to worry about who can be trusted to play as the bank.

Every bit of classic *Monopoly* is left intact, and a few new ideas make their way into the game. The biggest feature is the 3D board, of which there are several to unlock, that will show a visual representation of the game as it progresses, with your XBL friends walking around in the background; but the classic board is still around if that's how you prefer to roll (chortle). The only real issue with *Streets* is the lack of hotseat multiplayer; each human player has to have their own controller.

Bottom line: *It's every bit of* Monopoly *that you remember, with cool new stuff and cutesy visuals.*

GUARDIANS OF GRAXIA

Petroglyph Games, a studio founded by former members of Ye Olde Westwood Studios (the original creators of *Command & Conquer*), isn't only working on upcoming MMORTS *End of Nations*. Turns out they've also been working on *Guardians of Graxia*, a board/card game that's now been brought to the digital world.

It's fairly simple. You and your chosen Guardian (i.e. leader) are dumped on a floating map that's divided into a number of different tiles. Each tile has various attributes – such as the amount of mana it'll provide you with while under your control. You then use that mana to summon more units and cast spells – all of which are done using cards that are randomly dished out to you. There's no deck construction, but the tactical variety here is decent enough, especially on bigger maps. Most objectives involve holding a specific tile for a certain number of turns. There's not much to it and the lack of multiplayer leaves little incentive to keep playing, but it's only $9.99 and there's sufficient turn-based fun to be had here.

Bottom line: *No multiplayer and random bugs tarnish an otherwise decent download-only game.*

Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.
NAG // Metacritic average // Game Rankings average

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

360

94
89
91

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

360

90
87
87

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

360

72
84
84

JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE

360

67
62
67

CREATE

PC

67
65
68

SAW II: FLESH & BLOOD

PS3

35
44
48

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

Not just a lazy add-on...

GENRE > Third-person action

PC **360** **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE in the videogame industry who pull fast ones. These generally come in the form of a second-rate semi-sequel to a popular title, an obvious attempt to cash in on the previous release's success. It's annoying, exploitative and just plain nasty.

But there are some folks out there who don't do that. Either they don't release stop-gap titles at all, or (in the rarest cases) they produce games that are actually really worthwhile. The team behind *Assassin's Creed* fall into the latter category, particularly with the release of *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood.*

More than a few rumours started up when this game was announced. It was known that there would be a multiplayer element to the title, so the tall tales ranged from no single player through to limited single player. They were all wrong...

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood does have a multiplayer element (something that the franchise sorely needed) but it also has an extensive single-player campaign that carries on the story of the second game's protagonist, the roguish Italian assassin Ezio Auditore. In fact, the story kicks off more or less exactly where the last one ended, so if you're going to draw the best experience from this title, it's a good idea to have finished *Assassin's Creed 2.*

In the single player mode, the player will once again control both Ezio and his descendant, Desmond Miles, who is reliving his experiences through the weird, time-warp-mental-connection Animus machine. Ezio's successes are short-lived as the Borgia clan assault his home town. He decides to head to Rome to put an end to their tyranny once and for all.

The campaign is set exclusively in Rome, a massive, sprawling Renaissance metropolis that will have the player spending lots of time travelling between various points. To this end, horses are now a lot more accessible, with Ezio able to summon one at the push of a button. Under the influence of the Borgias, Rome has fallen into misery and disrepair, and part of what the player will get to do is restore shops and landmarks in the city. This not only adds to their accomplishments, but also generates much needed income for the mission at hand.

The campaign is long and very challenging at times. The story is of the

< Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood >

expected high quality, and returning characters add a sense of continuity and nostalgia to the game. A few new ideas and toys have been thrown into the mix, to help the player traverse the dangers of Rome. These include new equipment, like the awesome poison dart and crossbow (making stealthy long-range assassinations possible) as well as assassinations from horseback, to name but a few. Naturally, the plot premise means that the player has to build up their collection of deadly devices and armour once again. There is also another suit of special armour that the player can unlock by collecting keys in six side quests.

Speaking of side quests, there are many. As in the second title, the player is granted massive amounts of freedom to explore the awesome setting. Side quests vary from beating up people through to completing quests for shops (in order to unlock even more, better equipment). A series of side quests given Ezio by his long-time friend Leonardo Da Vinci will provide the player with excellent, challenging missions, too.

As if there wasn't enough to do in the campaign, the player is also tasked with putting together a team of assassins. This group is populated by those that Ezio rescues from the merciless Borgia guards, and the player will need to send them on missions and equip them, in order to have them reach full assassin status. On the upside, the player can summon available assassins to help him out when in a pinch, which is always handy.

With so much more to do, and such a long story to work through, the multiplayer almost becomes secondary. As a side note, it is very gratifying to see a game that touts its multiplayer so heavily still presenting a decent, long single-player campaign. But the multiplayer forms a big, enjoyable part of the title.

The basic premise of the multiplayer section of the game (which is worked into several different modes) is that the player needs to hunt down their target, while avoiding other players that are targeting them. It's like an assassination round-robin, really, and is great fun to play. There are a few catches that make it even more challenging, of course.

First of all, there are limited characters to choose from. More get unlocked as you level up, but the real thing is that these characters are repeated in the game world. Some of them will be players, while others will be AI controlled. This means that you need to keep an eye on the behaviour of those who look like your target. Sure, there is some guidance in finding them, but if two identical characters stand together, the player will have to judge carefully.

Also, you have no idea which character is hunting you. The game will warn you when an attacker is close, but that's about it. The end result is a mad mash of people chasing each other around levels. It's great fun.

What Ubisoft have done here is prove that a "filler" title can still be a great game. The value in this is not just for the multiplayer, but also for the awesome single-player campaign. Sure, it's not *Assassin's Creed 3*, but the short-fall is in the name alone. In all other aspects, this might as well be a full release. The only dependency it has on the previous title stems from the story line, which can be pretty messed up if you haven't played the previous games. Other than that, it's awesome.

There are many developers around the world that can learn a thing or two from the team behind *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Any fans of the franchise cannot afford to miss it. It's that good. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

ED'S CHOICE

18 www.pegi.info	1	6 - 8	N/A

>**Plus**
+ Awesome new weapons
+ Multiplayer
+ Tons to do

>**Minus**
- Need to have played *AC2*

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>**Bottom Line**
A great addition to the franchise, and worth far more than just the multiplayer modes.

94

Log me in

Racing games are only so much fun when you're sitting in a dark room, disconnected from the rest of the world. That's why *Hot Pursuit* has Autolog – a Facebook-styled communication system that tells you exactly how well your friends are doing. Every time you complete an event in the career mode, your time will be automatically logged (ooh) and shared with your friends, and if they manage to beat your time, they'll receive bonus bounty. It's a simple, but incredibly effective system that will have you constantly competing with your friends to see who's on top.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

To protect and swerve

GENRE > Arcade racing

PC **360** **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

EA HAS FINALLY FIGURED out what to do with the *Need for Speed* series. Since *Carbon*, the series began its descent into boring, repetitive and irritating gameplay, culminating with the utterly lacklustre *Undercover*. Then those people in gray suits figured out that people are bored of acting like gangsters with about as much street cred as Barney the Dinosaur, and gave the world *Shift*. It sold well and people enjoyed it, but it was too far from what *NFS* had become to make people feel at home. So here we are with *Hot Pursuit* – not *Hot Pursuit 3*, but a reboot of the same concept from 1998 with a whole lot more than a lick of paint. EA has hurled Criterion Games – the studio responsible for crash-racer *Burnout* – at their franchise to see what a penchant for destruction can do for *Need for Speed*.

As it turns out, handing over development to Criterion was a smart move. *Hot Pursuit* is slick – it's incredibly well-presented and, from the menus to the racing itself, feels polished and is easy to both navigate and control. That may have a lot to do with the removal of just about every bit of fluff you could imagine – there's no vehicle customisation or upgrading apart from selecting a colour before each race; the free-roam has been all but made useless since there are no stores or garages to visit, and all races are accessed from the map; there's no story or characters; and every car that you unlock is simply handed to you without the need for a purchase. This might sound all rather terrible to you, if that's why you play *Need for Speed*, but the result is something pure that focuses on what really matters in a racing game – the racing.

Hot Pursuit, as the name might imply, is about high-speed street racers competing against each other and the pursuant police. You'll compete in a number of different event modes as either the racers or the cops, work your way up either the career ladder or the wanted list of the Seacrest County Police Department, and unlock new vehicles as you increase your bounty rating. You earn bounty by ranking high in events, driving with skill, reaching the top of the online leaderboard and generally playing well. As you progress, you'll also unlock access to equipment such as spike strips, helicopters, EMP blasts and road blocks. Both racers and cops have access to their own set of equipment, which means that the Hot Pursuit modes in later games and especially against

< Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit >

Things to see and do in Seacrest County

Since you won't be bogged down with frivolous story elements and hours of car tuning, you'd hope that the events are interesting and varied enough to keep things fresh. If you did, you'd be right.

As a racer, you have access to the following modes: Duel (1v1 as rival cars); Hot Pursuit (a race mode with full damage, equipment and cops enabled); Preview (a race event in which you get to try out a new car); Time Trial (a sprint mode in which you compete against your friends' times); Race (a simple race with no cops, equipment or damage); and Gauntlet (a sprint mode with cops waiting for you on the road).

As a cop, you'll get similar modes, with a few changes: Interceptor (1v1 Hot Pursuit); Rapid Response (sprint mode with penalties for taking damage and hitting traffic); Hot Pursuit (same as above, but on the other side of the fence); and Preview, which is a sprint version of the racer event.

There are no circuit events, and for that, we are extremely grateful.

online opponents turn into a mad frenzy of explosions, death and shrapnel. It never gets quite as crazy as the action in a title like *Blur*, because the number of times you can use the equipment is limited, but the carnage is more than you've ever experienced in a *Need for Speed* game.

If you hadn't guessed by now, *Hot Pursuit* is definitely an arcade racer, but that doesn't mean that the cars don't feel "right" – they most certainly do. Of course, I've never drifted a Maserati around a hairpin corner at 250kph, and I imagine there's a fair bit more required to perform such a task than tapping shoulder buttons and slamming down on the nitro at the apex, but for the purpose of having tons of fun, the controls, cars and physics behave exactly as you'd want.

It's difficult to find more ways to say "*Hot Pursuit* is a solid, fun arcade racer," but if you really need more detail, then here's a bit to keep you happy: the tracks are well designed, combining fast bits with challenging corners that require a deft hand if you want to make the most of them. For all the shortcut-takers out there, your driving skills will be put to the test by all sorts of obstacles and awkward driving lines, but if you can handle them, then the shortcuts are almost always a good idea. It's a good toss-up: smooth sailing on the

roads or a high risk/high reward situation on the many shortcuts dotted around Seacrest County.

Criterion have gone and made a great arcade racer that combines some of the best elements from *Burnout*, classic *Need for Speed* titles and even a bit of *Blur*. As a result, it's a better arcade racer than *Blur*, a more entertaining racer in general than *Shift* and, as long as the missing fluff isn't a big deal to you, the best non-simulation racer of the year. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

18 www.pegi.info

1   2 - 8   N/A

MUST PLAY

Look & Listen
For the Fans

> **Plus**
+ Solid, fun racing
+ High-end cars
+ Brilliant presentation

> **Minus**
- No customisation

> **Bottom Line**
No frills mean it's all about the racing, and that racing is fantastic.

90

It's the headless bacon mutants you have to watch out for.

Fallout: New Vegas

Without a dream in my heart

GENRE > First-person RPG

| PC | 360 | PS3 | WII | PS2 | PSP | DS |

IF YOU'RE THE SORT who'd classify yourself as an old-school RPG gamer, then you're probably aware that this game represents an important point on the timeline of RPG classics. If you're not aware of the intricacies behind *New Vegas*, then here's a brief rundown: The developers of *Fallout: New Vegas*, Obsidian Entertainment, were formed from the ashes of Black Isle Studios – a company renowned for making excellent RPGs around the end of the '90s and early 2000s. The most notable of those games was the original *Fallout* and its sequel. Since their reformation, Obsidian has produced a number of games that ranged from excellent to terrible, with *Knights of the Old Republic II* and *Neverwinter Nights 2* occupying the upper end of the scale, and *Alpha Protocol* on the lower end. Obsidian was fast losing their reputation as "the go-to guys for a quality RPG sequel" and trading it for "they used to be good." Now, with their beloved *Fallout* franchise back in their hands, albeit under the rule of a new publisher, Bethesda, this is their chance for redemption.

Fallout: New Vegas is a spinoff of the franchise, and as such cannot be considered a "core" game in the series. And, just like its distant cousin, Ernie "*Fallout Tactics*" McGee, doesn't need to stick to the rules of *Fallout*. That means: you don't play as a vault dweller; your story hasn't been ordained by the elders; and you don't need to retrieve something to help all those back home who are too useless to venture into the Wasteland on their own. Nope; *New Vegas* is about

getting to the bottom of the mystery of some berk who decided to put a bullet in your head, conspiracy, revenge and power.

Its departure from the series grants Obsidian the freedom to craft a story however they see fit, and as a result, the main story of *New Vegas* is quite interesting once you've pushed through an initial flat spot. To help it along, there are loads of side-quests, ranging from quickie courier-style quests to long chained and/or branching affairs that will have a profound impact on how you're treated in the settlements of the Mojave.

If you're a sucker for questing, then *New Vegas* has got you covered. In fact, don't even look at the score at the end of this review, just go out and buy the game right now. There are dozens of hours to be spent in-game; solving people's problems and either helping right every injustice committed in Sin City and its surrounds, or furthering the misery in exchange for personal gain. And, in a typical *Fallout* manner, the wide grey area between good and bad is as blurry as it's ever been

< Fallout: New Vegas >

Yummy, just the way I like them. Close the door Dane.

Good stuff is mentioned here!

If you're ready to pack in and give up on Obsidian forever – don't! Here are a few good things worth mentioning.

The crafting system is immense, and makes a lot of sense. Players can make their own chems using plants, animal leftovers and other bits and pieces found throughout the Mojave. You can also make your own ammunition by recycling lead, powder, casings and primers from used or other types of rounds, and you'll be able to make explosives, mod your weapons and repair equipment.

There's a hardcore mode for those who like a challenge. You'll need to keep an eye on your food, sleep and hydration levels, ensuring you receive a steady supply of clean, healthy food and water. It's not incredibly difficult, but does add a layer of complication that requires a bit of attention.

There's a deep and delicate faction system made up of small and large families, clans, gangs and entire armies. Attempting to find a balance between them all will prove difficult, which makes a diplomatic character a powerful character.

The non-combat skills are more useful than ever before. Skills such as Science, Barter, Medicine, Survival and even Sneak will be used on a regular basis in conversations and crafting.

thanks to the well-written and excellently crafted quests.

Not everyone is able focus on the good stuff and ignore a game's obvious problems, and if that's you, then pay attention. It's become obvious that Obsidian has too much on their plate, with both *Alpha Protocol* and the upcoming *Dungeon Siege 3* overlapping *New Vegas*' development cycle. As a result, much of New Vegas feels empty and devoid of life. I know, I know – it's a post-apocalyptic game, it's *meant* to be barren, but this is different. The environment itself is incredibly detailed: small holdings, bandit camps, trading posts, and dangerous prospecting sites dot the wasteland; and small towns and villages are over almost every hill. It feels like the team of environment artists spent a long time making the world look and feel not just like *Fallout*, but like something believable and very much lived-in. But the team responsible for populating that world clearly missed the memo entitled "don't

screw this up." What few NPCs can be found in the settlements are boring. Their movements around town are illogical; they don't convey a sense of purpose or life at all. This even affects the quest-givers, as interesting as their (sadly, still horribly-animated) conversations may be, very few of them will actually do anything interesting outside of dialogue. NPCs sit on the floor and stare at nothing for hours, or stand in their dark kitchens staring at the door, waiting for the moment when The Hero will come inside in search of medical attention.

In one instance, I rescued a couple of captured locals from the neighbourhood bad guys, right in front of their eyes, with only as much as a "hey, how's it going?" in response from the supposedly terrifying bandits. There really aren't many NPCs in the world; it's noticeably desolate, making it a shame that Obsidian couldn't squeeze in the effort to ensure the few characters that do hang around provide the player with something believable to look at.

Then, there's the issue of Bethesda's implementation of the Gamebryo Engine. It's old, outdated and clearly a limiting factor. Thankfully, plenty of optimisations have gone into *New Vegas* to ensure that the game looks decent even on consoles, but it's showing its age and hopefully this will be the last game to use it. While Obsidian has obviously put in some effort to make the game's models and textures look better, the same old animation and control problems have returned, as well as a plethora of ugly visual glitches. The animations in the game are laughably bad, and the controls have been so clinically smoothed-over that moving your character through the rocky Mojave feels like you're gliding along in an ice rink while covered in lubricant. Combat, once-again is handled by VATS, which strikes a perfect balance between real-time and turn-based combat.

The control issues, the terrible animations and regular visual glitches, along with the aforementioned desolation, give *New Vegas* an air of incompletion. It feels like Obsidian spent 90% of their development time building 70% of the game to the level of quality that we'd expect from them, and then rushed to push out the remaining chunk while the publishers banged at their doors. With sufficient DLC, a few months of patch releases and a good deal of forgiveness from players, *New Vegas* could be the *Fallout* that we've all been waiting for, but right now, it isn't. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ It's definitely *Fallout*
+ Great story
+ Fun quests

›Minus
- Buggy
- Feels incomplete
- Dated visuals

›Bottom Line
A potentially great game that's let down by inconsistent quality.

72

Atomic double "no kids for you" breaker!

WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2011

Does THQ's latest beat the 3-count?

GENRE > Sport

| PC | 360 | **PS3** | WII | PS2 | PSP | DS |

OVER ITS NOT INSIGNIFICANT run, THQ's *Smackdown! Vs. RAW* series has seen its share of ups and downs. With the 2011 title marking the series' fourth outing on the PS3, no one could reasonably argue that the developers haven't had enough time to really refine their product. Thus, while *SVR 2011* does introduce some promising innovations to the series, one can't help but feel a little disappointed that the game is still rough around the edges in places.

Probably the most significant change introduced compared to last year's iteration is the replacement of the perennially lacklustre Career mode with a new "Universe" mode. Serving as a hub for everything that takes place in the game, the Universe mode tracks not only statistics rankings and abilities of both custom and WWE characters, but also keeps track of their relationships and feuds, fitting everything together into the framework of the WWE TV programming schedule. Story elements and cut scenes are added in dynamic fashion, and since the mode also supersedes the old "GM Mode", you're able to modify any of the game's suggested match cards however you see fit.

Road to Wrestlemania makes its return as the game's primary "Story" mode, allowing you to explore 5 different storylines, each with branching paths. This mode has also been fleshed out by adding some segments that allow you to explore the backstage areas with your character, which gives you the opportunity to talk to other characters and also to buy some rewards for your hard earned experience points,

but the entire backstage concept feels very shoddily implemented – it's nowhere near as seamlessly polished as one might have hoped.

One area where the *SVR* series has never disappointed has been with its creator modes, and the latest iteration is no exception. As always, the options for creating a character are expansive, and everything from clothes down to move sets can be customised to the player's whim. What's new to the 2011 version, however, is the expanded storyline creator, which now allows those players prepared to invest sufficient time to create storylines with multiple branching paths. It's an impressive addition to the series, and one that, combined with the online sharing & download centre, is sure to extend the game's lifespan.

Visually, *SVR 2011* also sees a minor graphics overhaul, with new skin textures and more detailed characters being the order of the day. Sadly, however, thanks to the still-wonky collision detection and sometimes stilted animations, the characters still feel and look less than human at times.

There can be little doubt that *Smackdown! Vs. RAW 2011* is a step forward for the perennially popular series. The innovative Universe mode is complemented by fleshed out Road to Wrestlemania stories, and expanded creation options. However, in spite of all these improvements, *SVR 2011* still feels somewhat lacking in some of its basic areas, like collision detection and the inconsistent controls. There's nothing specific that's wrong with it, it's just not as refined as it should be by now, and after so many years, some of these basic shortcomings are becoming difficult to overlook. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Chicken impersonation or just constipation?

THE SCORE

PEGI 3 — www.pegi.info

| 1 - 4 | 2 - 12 | 2 - 4 |

>Plus
+ Improved Career mode
+ Extensive character roster

>Minus
- Basic bugs not yet ironed out

Look & Listen For the Fans

>Bottom Line
Smackdown! vs. RAW 2011 does well to expand on last year's new features, and introduce some worthwhile innovations of its own.

77

pre-orders

Bulletstorm
(Q1 2011)

Big guns, tons of interesting ways to kill bad guys and a development team led by Chris "Dude Huge" Bleszinski; there's no reason for this game not to rock.

PC R349⁹⁹ + R50⁰⁰ Gift Card
PS3/Xbox R499⁹⁹+ R75⁰⁰ Gift Card

Crysis 2
(Q1 2011)

With better visuals, more action, more stealth and support for PS3 and Xbox 360, Crysis 2 is going to set the benchmark for sci-fi shooters for some time.

PC R349⁹⁹ + R50⁰⁰ Gift Card
PS3/Xbox R499⁹⁹ + R75⁰⁰ Gift Card

F.E.A.R. 3
(Q1 2011)

Action? Check. Panic? Check. Plenty of ammunition? Damn straight. Proving that you can't keep a good terrifying little girl down; F.E.A.R. 3 is ready to once-again strike horror right into your heart.

PS3/Xbox R699⁹⁹ + R75⁰⁰ Gift Card
PC R399⁹⁹ + R50⁰⁰ Gift Card

Killzone 3
(Q1 2011)

Continuing from Killzone 2, players will play as Sev once more, fighting Helghast Imperials across all manner of terrain. Jetpacks, an improved melee system and destructible environments await.

PS3 R599⁹⁹ + R75⁰⁰ Gift Card

Brink
(Q1 2011)

Brink is an immersive class-based first-person shooter developed by Splash Damage (also famous for Enemy Territory: QUAKE Wars and Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory). Brink offers a unique and seamless blend of action between single-player, co-op and multiplayer modes.

PS3/Xbox R699⁹⁹ + R75⁰⁰ Gift Card
PC R399⁹⁹ + R50⁰⁰ Gift Card

Homefront
(Q1 2011)

The US has been invaded by an allied Korea of the future. Be prepared to take back occupied California by any means necessary from within a small rebel force.

PC R399⁹⁹ + R50⁰⁰ Gift Card
Xbox/PS3 R599⁹⁹ + R75⁰⁰ Gift Card

Motorstorm: Apocalypse (Q1 2011)

Extreme racing in a mid-apocalyptic future Earth. Watch the world fall apart as you speed through it, promising diverse, challenging races where anything can happen.

PS3 R599⁹⁹ + R75⁰⁰ Gift Card

Dragon Age 2
(Q1 2011)

Every oldschool RPGer knows that Bioware rules the roost, and with DA2 promising an even longer campaign than Origins, be prepared to sink every last waking hour into this title.

PC R349⁹⁹ + R50⁰⁰ Gift Card
PS3/Xbox R499⁹⁹+ R75⁰⁰ Gift Card

More Pre-order titles for 2011

- NFS Shift 2
- Fight Night 5
- Sims Medieval
- Dues EX

- Moto GP 2010
- Rage
- Little Big Planet 2
- Ben 10 Ultimate Alien

- Socom Special Forces
- Dawn of War 2 Retribution
- Dawn of War 2 Complete
- Killzone 3 Hellgast Special Edition

Look & Listen is NAG's Preferred Gaming Retailer

The choice is yours
Look & Listen For the Fans

Get a Look & Listen Gift Card up to the value of R75⁰⁰ against your pre-order, or for you to spend on your favourite CD, DVD or Digital Product.
* Terms &Conditions apply.

DVD • CD • GAMES • DIGITAL • ACCESSORIES
Shop online or visit our 30 stores nationwide. For product and store information contact us on: 011 467 3717 or at www.lookandlisten.co.za.
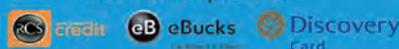
Look & Listen
For the Fans

THE LAST GUARDIAN

Subscribe to NAG

Subscribe now and stand a chance to win one of six WWE Smackdown vs RAW 2011 hampers from Ster Kinekor Entertainment

Renewals also qualify.
Offer expires 31 January 2011.

Offer 1 tick	Offer 2 tick	Offer 3 tick	Offer 4 tick
12 month subscription with cover DVD at R420.	**6 month subscription with cover DVD at R210.**	**12 month subscription without cover DVD at R300.**	**6 month subscription without cover DVD at R150.**

SEND MY COPY OF NAG TO:

Full name: _____

Postal address: _____

E-mail: _____   Tel: _____

PAYMENT METHOD (PLEASE CIRCLE): Bank deposit / Cheque / Credit Card / Postal Order

Credit card number: _____

Expiry date: _____   CCV number: _____

Signature: _____

- Order by fax: (011) 704-4120   • Order by e-mail: subs@nag.co.za   • Order by post: NAG, P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158

Bank account details for direct deposits: NAG, Nedbank Fourways, Account number: 1684170850, Branch code 168405

Once you have paid the money into our account, fax a copy of the subscription form plus the bank deposit slip to [011] 704-4120. No deposit slip = no subscription. Please make cheques and postal orders out to NAG and then post the completed form to NAG Subscription Department, P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

*Please Note: No refunds will be issued for this subscription offer.

Must... not... smile...

James Bond 007: Blood Stone

Like drawing blood from a stone

GENRE > Third-Person Shooter

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP **DS**

EVER SINCE DANIEL "CAPTAIN" Pouty-pants" Craig entered the picture, James Bond has gone from gadget-heavy superspy to stern-faced, super-serious Bourne-alike. There's nothing wrong with it and we'll always love Bond no matter how hard he tries to keep up with the times (i.e. tries to offer audiences the same experience Jason Bourne offered them). I do kind of, sort of miss the cheese though – the debonair flair with which filmmakers used to approach Ian Fleming's everlasting, iconic British secret agent. I miss wristwatches that double as high-powered lasers that can cut through metal. I miss vanishing Aston Martins. I miss henchmen with mouths full of unnervingly sharp steel teeth. Having said that, New Bond is badass, so I was pretty excited about *Blood Stone*.

Then I actually played the game. It's not that it gets everything wrong. It actually gets a lot of stuff right – it's polished, it controls well and it's got a distinct Bond feel to it. The problem is that it doesn't actually bring anything new to the third-person shooter. In terms of gameplay, it's just very average. You duck behind cover. You pop out. You shoot. Someone shoots you. You get hurt. You duck behind cover again. You wait for the screen to stop flashing red and then you pop out and shoot again. You do this over and over until either you or everyone else is dead. You then proceed to the next area to start the process all over again. It gets mind-numbingly boring after a while. It's a pity, because the game starts picking up a bit about halfway through – a point in the game which you might eventually give up on reaching because you're just so tired of repeating the same thing over and over again. The AI (which, for the most part, manages to make things fairly challenging) also manages to make an ass of itself by occasionally doing idiotic things like moseying right on over to your piece of cover to make your job of killing them ridiculously easy. It's not all bad – I enjoyed the fact that missions are a mix of explosive fire fights and subtle stealth and that these two elements are intertwined quite nicely. Takedowns – close-range instant kills that vary depending on whether you're taking the stealthy or guns-blazing approach – are wonderfully brutal and well animated, but it's crazy how easily these can be performed in the middle of gunfights.

Thankfully, the game employs a great method for reducing the monotony that plagues it. It comes in the form of vehicular segments strewn throughout that usually see you chasing down bad guys in vehicles like speedboats, flashy Aston Martins and humble tow trucks. Given that the developer, Bizarre Creations, has extensive experience with racing titles (this is the studio responsible for *Project Gotham Racing* and *Blur*, after all), it's no surprise that these action-packed vehicular segments are a blast. They're also not overused, so you'll find yourself looking forward to the respite that they offer from the standard cover-shooter gameplay.

Other than that, you shouldn't expect this game to change your life in any way whatsoever. It borrows a few elements from other games (Mark & Execute from *Splinter Cell: Conviction* and detective vision from *Batman: Arkham Asylum* immediately spring to mind), but never forges its own identity. It's cool to see the likenesses and voices of Daniel Craig, Judi Dench and Joss Stone in the game, and the story is interesting enough that it kept me intrigued all the way through. Every now and then the gameplay throws a wonderfully inventive moment your way, but it's not enough to make *Blood Stone* stand out from the third-person shooter pack. It's a good effort from Bizarre, but there's wasted potential here. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

16 www.pegi.info		1	2 - 16	N/A

>Plus
+ Cool vehicular segments
+ Decent gunplay
+ True to the franchise

>Minus
- Occasionally poor AI
- Gets repetitive fast
- Nothing revolutionary

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line
You won't find anything groundbreaking here, but *Blood Stone* manages to be decent fun despite its shortcomings.

67
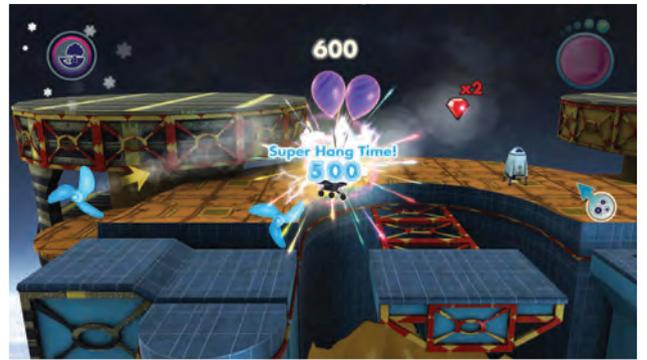
Create

Your creativity and patience put to the test

GENRE > Puzzle

PC   **360**   **PS3**   **WII**   PS2   PSP   DS

GAMES LIKE THIS ARE important for digital arts and culture (think *LittleBigPlanet* and *Crayon Physics*). They give gamers tools, toys and a random physics-enabled sandbox environment in which to unleash their creativity. Some let you share your creations with the world while others will ban your giant penis-made-out-of-uncooked-spaghetti sculpture. The thing games like this need to be is flexible, and they must contain all the 'potential' to make a scale model of the USS Enterprise out of jelly beans and liquorice. It's this unlimited scope that truly sparks the imagination and has people proudly tinkering with their creations for hours.

EA's *Create* gets a lot of these things right, but the game could have done with a few more weeks in quality control. As it is now, it's really only a great platform on which to build *Create 2* – maybe.

The game presents players with 14 worlds, each containing 10 challenges and other opportunities to earn Create Sparks – collectible tokens that unlock successive worlds. As you complete challenges you also unlock new stickers and props and things to decorate the worlds.

The challenges are solved using various objects such as balloons that can be attached to things and fans that can then blow the balloons around to get the attached thing to the goal. Initially you're given only one or two objects to solve the puzzles, but eventually you'll unlock many more, sometimes resulting in an overwhelming number of choices. This is then further complicated by challengers that require the building of contraptions using wheels, hinges and connecting bars. These challenges then offer more points if you use as few pieces as possible.

Besides the challenges you can also complete Create Chains (tasks requiring you to place flowers or props or even texture the landscape) to earn more Create Sparks. These tasks are mundane and require no skill or imagination or creativity. You can simply stick a toilet down in an inappropriate place ten times to earn the reward. A little more thought around theme and position might have helped here.

Other problems include a very limited camera, we have 3D these days so why not let the player zoom around and view the world from any angle instead of only left to right with three levels of zoom. The menu is a little clunky (definitely designed for the console market) and isn't laid out in a logical fashion. There is no fast forward button so watching your balloon-hoisted rover navigate a maze of fans and spikes for two minutes before it crashes for the hundredth time can be annoying. The graphics are the cheap and cheerful kind but the music makes up for this a little. Oh, it could have also done with much better community tools and a more fleshed out 'Free Create' mode. Phew.

The gamer's role here is to encourage and support games like this, because their potential is important for the future of our little hobby. Having said that, the developers' role is to make sure they think before they build a game and to also make sure the basics are polished and work without any effort on the player's side. Regardless of the score at the bottom of the page, *Create* is something you should try – if you don't like it you can always give it to your little brother or sister (or parents) to play with. **NAG**

Michael James

THE SCORE

3 www.pegi.info	1	N/A	N/A

> Online services
EA Download Manager

> **Plus**
+ Accessible
+ Fun
+ Varied

> **Minus**
- Controls
- Camera
- Limited 'create' mode

Look & Listen
For the Fans

> **Bottom Line**
This is a nice addition to the very short list of creative puzzle solving 'games'. All said and done, one can't help thinking there could be so much more to this.

67

Objects remaining: 0

600 Super Hang Time! 500 x2

DEVELOPER > Zombie Studios   **PUBLISHER** > Konami Digital Entertainment
DISTRIBUTOR > Ster Kinekor   **WEB** > www.konami.com/games/saw2
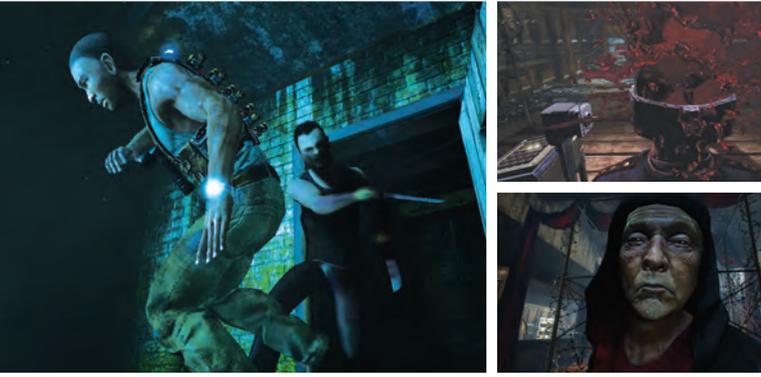
Saw II: Flesh & Blood

Terrifying, but for all the wrong reasons...

GENRE > Action

PC   **360**   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

KONAMI THEMSELVES HAD **ORIGINALLY** tipped their burgeoning "*Saw*" franchise to become the spiritual successor to the now-legendary *Silent Hill* survival-horror titles. And while last year's debut for the series was not without its shortcomings, it was clear that the series had some potential to improve significantly. Unfortunately, not only has *Saw II* failed to improve on its predecessor's shortcomings, but it's even taken some significant backward strides.

As with the first game, *Saw II* incorporates many characters and plot elements that fans of the long-running film series will find familiar. Fitting into the *Saw* timeline somewhere in between the events of the second and third films, the game revolves around Michael Tapp, the son of the original game's protagonist. Michael is trapped in the labyrinth of the demented Jigsaw Killer, and has to survive a string of gruesome life-or-death challenges if he is to come out alive.

As with last year's iteration, the game's levels are littered with a variety of traps, some of which hold instant death, whilst others simply do a minor amount of damage. What's changed this time around, however, is that triggering a trap now initiates a Quick Time Event, where the correct button taps will allow you to escape Jigsaw's diabolical contraptions unscathed. And once again, in between the various traps you'll encounter on each level is an assortment of puzzles, ranging from the mundane "complete the circuit" challenges to some slightly more complex tasks. Unfortunately, even the more inventive puzzles are repeated to the point where they become horribly tiresome.

Making matters worse still is the game's combat. The original *Saw* game was panned for its cumbersome and unresponsive controls, and its dull combat system. Instead of going back to the drawing board, developers Zombie Studios have opted to replace the combat dynamic entirely with Quick Time Events. Not only does this make you feel more like an observer than an actual participant in the combat sections, but it also detracts from the scary atmosphere that the game tries to create – instead of the suspenseful anticipation of enemies lurking in every dark corner, you can now simply run up and down the game's various corridors waiting for a not-so-intimidating button press prompt.   **NAG**

Adam Liebman

THE SCORE

18 www.pegi.info

PONIES

x – x   x – x   x – x

›Plus
+ It's better than ancient Chinese torture...

›Minus
- ... but only marginally. It just plain sucks

Look & Listen
For the Fans

›Bottom Line
This is an uninspiring and utterly terrible excuse for a survival horror title.

35
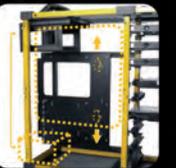
Walkabout

During some missions, you'll have to infiltrate buildings by going in on foot. It sounds like a great idea – juxtaposing massive Wanzer destruction with deft, stealthy ground combat – but the reality is that the ground combat tends to play out in the exact same fashion as the repetitive Wanzer battles: mindless fun, but without much in the way of tactics. It ultimately becomes yet another example of a game trying to provide diversity to the player, but instead only manages to offer separate watered-down features.
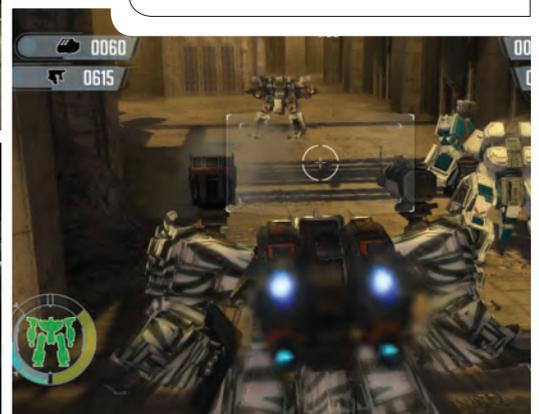
Front Mission Evolved

More like, "Devolved", right?

GENRE > Action

| **PC** | **360** | **PS3** | WII | PS2 | PSP | DS |

IN THE YEAR 2171, mankind reaches for the stars with massive space elevators built in the hubs of civilisation. At the same time, border skirmishes between factions take place on the surface of Earth; war is never officially declared, but tensions are high and all-out warfare is imminent. Enter the Wanzers – which is derived from the supposedly German *Wanderpanzer* and absolutely has nothing to do with that rude thing you're thinking of.*

The *Front Mission* series dates back to a 1995 birth on the Super Nintendo, but isn't as popular to Western audiences as *MechWarrior*. Why, I'm not sure; *Front Mission* has traditionally offered players deep, tactical role-playing strategy games filled with interesting characters and cool cut scenes, until now. *Front Mission* "*Evolved*" is the breaking-down of 15 years of tradition into an uncomplicated action game with cheesy (but not in a loveable way) characters, repetitive missions and very little in the way of tactics.

In *FME*, you play as scientist Dylan Ramsey – Wanzer engineer, free spirit and smart-ass. Shortly into the game, Ramsey, together with his high-tech Wanzer called Wiz, get pulled into the middle of a war between the U.C.S. (good guys) and the O.C.U. (bad guys). I don't want to spoil too much for you, because the story is already brittle enough that the impact of a passing-by Christmas beetle would send it crashing down, but the reasons why Ramsey joins the U.C.S. Army are predictable, and you'll have most of the script figured out within ten minutes of playing.
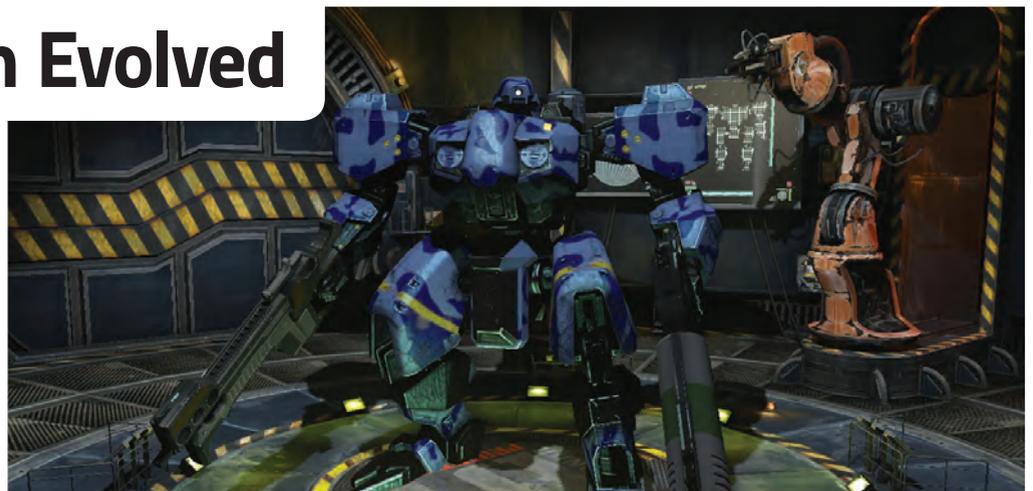
Once you realise that storytelling is not *FME*'s strong point, you can settle in for some good ol' giant robot smashing chaos. Each mission plays out in the same way: get from point A to E, passing points B through D by obliterating anything with a red outline, and collecting ammunition, money and health packs. Usually, important bits of the story are punctuated with a boss fight that ends in the irritating retreat of the foe in question. It's most unsatisfying, but thankfully the boss fights require a bit of pattern recognition and tactics to make them somewhat interesting. The rest of the combat is straightforward, but not boring, requiring the player to use their Wanzer's armaments, which include giant Gatling guns, homing missiles, shotguns and melee weapons, to destroy the various enemy Wanzers that sit around waiting for you to come along.

The only part of the *Front Mission* series that hasn't been too badly messed with is the customisation. During combat, you'll earn cash that can be spent on upgrading your Wanzer between missions, which is arranged into the legs, body, backpack, left arm and right arm components. Each arm can hold a weapon (corresponding to each trigger on your controller), as well as each shoulder (cleverly, corresponding to the shoulder buttons or bumpers). The result of this customisation and associated control scheme is that at the very least, you'll have fun while destroying stuff and you'll do it with a natural-feeling control system. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

16 www.pegi.info | 1 | 2 - 8 | N/A

>Plus
+ Good controls
+ Fun and simple action

>Minus
- Repetitive
- Poor ground missions
- Weak storytelling

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line
Even without the embarrassment of ruining a great series, *Front Mission Evolved* offers little worth making it more than a weekend rental.

55

DEVELOPER > EA Bright Light   **PUBLISHER** > Electronic Arts
DISTRIBUTOR > Electronic Arts   **WEB** > harrypotter.ea.com

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1

Why? Why? Why?

GENRE > Walt never puts these in

PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

IT'S BEEN SAID BEFORE: games based on movies generally suck. And while we try to point out when those games aren't horrible, every now and then a game comes along that just makes us cringe and consider giving up gaming forever.

When that game is associated with one of the biggest movie releases of the year, it's worse still. And if the movie manages to mess up what it was based on, it's yet another few notches down the rubbish scale.

Harry Potter and the Massacred Plot... err... I mean, the *Deathly Hallows, Part 1* (the movie) did enough to destroy JK Rowling's carefully crafted finale to the famous series. The game just makes things worse.

Harry and his pals have left Hogwarts and are on the run from Voldemort's followers, all the while trying to find the final Horcruxes that will enable them to put an end to the Dark Lord. By implication, it's a far more action packed story, and the game compensates for it... overcompensates, actually. This new *Harry Potter* game is essentially a third-person shooter with a cover system. Not that the cover system really works.

The player will learn new spells as Harry levels up, but it's perfectly possible to get through the whole game with just the weak Stupefy spell, and a few tossed potion bottles. One reason is that the learned spells aren't all that, and another is that it's a pretty smart idea to run as much as possible from the never-ending stream of Death-Eaters and Snatchers that plague the player. It's unlimited respawn. Literally.

The game will rudely yank the player into a first-person view when they take on stealth missions. This means that the player has no peripheral vision to sneak past stuff, making it incredibly frustrating.

Those that tire of the campaign and its redundant side quests, there's an extra Kinect-based set of challenges. These are on-rails shooters that are actually the most fun this disappointing title has to offer. But you'll probably feel like a hyperactive baboon hopped up on crystal meth while you play them. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Did you just say "Got your nose"?

THE SCORE

12	1 - 2	N/A	2	PONIES
www.pegi.info				

>Plus
+ Graphics aren't bad
+ Some Kinect fun

>Minus
- Cover system
- Repetitive
- Generally broken

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line
A disappointing start to the end of *Harry Potter* games.

35

Jagged Alliance 2

DEVELOPER > Sir-Tech Software   **PUBLISHER** > Strategy First   **PRICE** > $9.99 on gog.com

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 IS the best turn-based tactical RPG I've ever played. It kicks twelve shades of banana out of anything in the *X-COM* series, and despite my love of all things *Fallout*, not even *Tactics* can stand up against *JA2*. It really is that good. Let me tell you why…

In *Jagged Alliance 2*, you play as a mercenary, hired by the escaped former king of Arulco following an assassination attempt, following a massive frame-job. It's an ugly affair: King Enrique Chivaldori's wife, Deidranna, has taken over the country, stripped its people of all human rights and instated a strong military presence. Chivaldori gives you a bunch of money and you give him a promise to return Arulco to its former glory. The way you do this is not by running around, blasting people in the face and raining down death on everyone you see, but by hiring other mercenaries, planning, strategising and generally being smart about things.

The game is broken down into two components: the laptop view and the tactical view. From your laptop, you'll manage the major points of liberating Arulco: hiring new mercs; organising local militia; assigning your mercenaries to duties like repairing equipment, training, or healing the injured; plotting travel routes through the island; and ensuring that you have enough cash to continue to employ the troops you need

to stay alive. The tactical view is where all the action happens. Here, you'll direct your troops on an individual basis, using a turn-based combat system dependant on a variety of mercenary statistics including action points, marksmanship, health, energy, morale and strength. The combat is highly tactical; running in guns-blazing is a sure way to die a quick and horrible death. You'll need to make use of cover, stealth, line-of-site, and lighting conditions to move your units into position without getting a mouthful of buckshot.

That's the basic idea, but if it were left there then *Jagged Alliance 2* would be just another tactical strategy game from the late nineties. *JA2* adds in a whole lot more than just a solid tactical system: there's a storyline that actually matters; side-quests; a simple emotion-based dialogue system similar to those you'd find in modern RPGs; and plenty of humour and Easter eggs. It also manages to give the player a reason to really care about the land they're trying to free. Get the locals on your side (by, for example, not letting them die in battle) and they'll work harder in the silver mines scattered around the island – silver mines that, of course, need liberation from the oppressive regime. They'll also be disinclined to feel that you're not just the new oppressive regime. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Where to from here?

Since the release of *JA2*, a huge community of modders emerged to create total overhaul mods, new campaigns, weapons, mercenaries and anything else you can think of. Those communities are still running today, but what people really want is a sequel. A few expansions, however entertaining, simply weren't enough. The development of a potential *Jagged Alliance 3* and *JA 3D* were plagued with legal issues, closures and ultimately cancellation. Since then, a number of spiritual sequels and re-releases have been developed, the most notable being Game Factory Interactive's *Hired Guns: The Jagged Edge* and *Jagged Alliance DS* (which is based on the first game) from Empire Interactive. Currently, we have *Jagged Alliance 2: Reloaded* and *Jagged Alliance Online*, both in development by bitComposer Games, to look forward to.

StarCraft II Strategy Guide

Part 4: Teamwork

WELCOME TO THE FINAL part of our guide to better *StarCraft II*. This month we will tackle arguably the most entertaining way to play this game: teamed up with friends. We will also wrap up some other details (like who orders the pizza and beers and then who pays for them).

MULTI-STEP THINKING

There's a very good reason why chess is considered *the* definitive strategy game: it requires multi-step thinking. This is the ability to mentally outmanoeuvre your opponent by both anticipating and influencing his moves. Having a plan is all good and well, but not adapting it in response to your opponent's actions is "zero-step" rigid thinking that is easily exploited and defeated.

Firstly, learn to anticipate. For example, if you are playing on Scrap Station or Desert Oasis, there is a good chance that your enemy will come flying at you, literally. Of course, do expect the unexpected – your opponent might do something else. Secondly, learn to control information in order to lead your opponent into an unwise course. For instance, churning out a couple of Phoenixes to scout with, and letting your opponent see them, may well suggest to him that you are planning to hit him with Void Rays, thus encouraging him to build anti-air units – while you come at him with a large ground assault. Thirdly, expect your opponent to be trying to do the same to you, so try not only to divine his apparent motives, but also what trickery he might be attempting. Ultimately, psychology is half of any contest, and when a game has an element of bluff, you need to get inside your opponent's head (and, if possible, under his skin!)

A QUESTION OF TIMING

"Timed pushes" are at the heart of *StarCraft* (and many other RTS games.) In its simplest sense, a timed push is an attack with a particular combination and number of units, reached at a particular critical time. The peculiar thing about a timed push is that if you launch it either too early or too late, it loses effectiveness – if too early it is not strong enough to do damage, if too late it gives the opponent time to grow too strong. The timing and composition of a particular race's timed pushes will depend on the race it faces, and the strategy being employed by the enemy; two common timed pushes involve zealots or roaches. Consequently, there is no way to go into detail about them

Hallucinatory Colossi and zealots help keep the real ones alive by drawing fire

here. Using *Google* for "timed push" will yield plenty of hits for you to dig into.

LIVE TOGETHER, DIE ALONE

Alright, enough with that and onto the fun stuff – the team tactics. First and foremost, understand that a team game is an exercise in cooperation and communication. If you don't work together, you most likely have already lost. Before you even contemplate playing competitively, make sure your team is equipped with two-way headsets. Typing is too slow, and takes time away from controlling your forces – and it's quite likely your allies will miss the little text pop-up anyway.

You should also start the game with a plan. In this case, it is certainly a lot easier if your arranged team consists of players who choose their races, each with a predetermined role. Your team can develop and practise a game plan. (Playing as 'random' in a team is more difficult, as

< StarCraft II Strategy Guide >

A nasty Protoss drop, consisting of 2 Immortals in a Warp Prism, and some ground hackers warped in from Warp-gates

ADVANCED MASONRY

We've previously discussed the Terran "wall-in". The examples we gave incorporated bunkers, which is a popular design with novices. However, experienced players prefer to use only productive structures (Barracks, and sometimes Factories) and Supply Depots. The reasons for this: only economically productive structures are being built, so these are being used efficiently by serving two purposes – infrastructure and defence at the same time; also, it is harder for an attacker to single out the repairing SCVs from among the infantry. However, since a recent patch buffed the range of Roaches, using a Bunker is now somewhat more viable, because marines behind a Supply Depot can't reach roaches shooting at the Depot from the other side. Alternatively, get Marauders sooner – these handle Roaches very effectively.

FAST INFESTING

As mentioned last month, Zerg likes to be aggressive. However, this doesn't mean that every game should start with a Zergling rush. The Zerg early expansion strategy channels that speed mentality into accelerated infrastructure growth. Expand to your natural expansion when you are at 14 supply, build a Spawning Pool at 15 or 16, and then start seriously *pumping*! This approach not only provides faster income growth, but also grants you a second unit training facility.

it requires a high degree of flexibility, and very quick thinking – as soon as you all know what races you're playing, you need to identify the strategy that is best suited to your team's composition. This also implies having enough experience to know what works in each possible combination.)

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Team-based maps can be divided into two main categories: those where each team shares a base area (and a common choke point, or two), and those where the team members are split up into separate starting areas.

Let's first look at the latter case. A good example of this in a 2v2 map is Arid Wastes. While at first glance it appears that the allied base entrances are close to each other, in reality it's quite a roundabout trip to go help out your team-mate if he has unwelcome guests. This is an aspect of such maps that can be exploited. The idea is to build aggressively for an early rush, and time it so

that your team-mate and you arrive at one enemy's base simultaneously. 2-vs-1 means you will overpower your chosen victim, as long as you can deliver a crippling blow before his ally's reinforcements arrive. One of your opponent's viable responses is for the other player, instead of coming to his team-mate's direct aid, to counter-attack one of the aggressors. Consequently, you don't want to set rally-points to the targeted base, but rather keep your reinforcements back for defence. On the other hand, if your strike-target's team-mate heads to support his beleaguered ally, you and your team-mate should simultaneously take your defensive units and move to block the reinforcements. Even if your blockade is broken, it should buy you enough time to cripple or eliminate your initial target. How do you choose your initial target? It should, ideally, be the one closest to both you and your ally, so that it is easier to arrive together. However, you generally want to avoid a walled in Terran player. Alternatively, if you know which of your

< StarCraft II Strategy Guide >

SPIKE THEIR DRINKS

One of Hallucination's simplest applications is to make 4 fake probes, and send them out scouting in various directions. If you are about to engage the enemy, you can create a few extra "units" to mix into your army. They will draw some of the enemies' fire, prolonging the lives of your real troops. Make sure that you counterfeit units that you could realistically have at that point in the game – if make bogus Archons too early, your opponent will simply ignore them and attack your other troops. Other uses are more psychological: you can inflate the apparent size of your defenders if about to be attacked, or make your opponent think you are using air units while building a ground army, for example. Just be sure to always create the hallucinations out of your enemy's sight, or he'll see right through them.

To avoid this embarrassing situation, make sure you have at least one sensor sweep available at any time

opponents is the stronger player you may want to single him out first.

When your team is together behind a single choke, such as on Discord IV, early rush tactics become less effective, as your opponents are close together and the time to travel there works against you, so their combined army will be larger. On maps like this, it usually comes down to either timed pushes, or specific strategies. For example, two Terran players might wall in and both go with fast Reapers, hitting an enemy's economy in concert. Alternatively, one or both players may rush to Banshees, for a similar economy-crippling attack. A Protoss-Terran alliance could hide behind a Terran wall, perhaps enhanced by a couple of Photon Cannons, with the Terran making lots of tanks and Marauders, and the Protoss player rushing out Void Rays (two Protoss players can try a similar strategy, one building Cannons and rushing to air units, while the other builds a heavy ground force.

OF ONE MIND

Regardless of the map type and the strategy in play, it is vital to move as one. If, for example, your armies arrive and attack at different times, your opponents will be able to simply gang up on one, then the other, leveraging a 2-vs-1 advantage twice. This sort of "unity" isn't achieved overnight – you have to play together a lot to learn each other's patterns. It is particularly important to be in sync with regards to when to press and when to retreat: if one player presses and his team-retreats, then the first player's units are going to get

ripped apart without support.

Coordination doesn't necessarily mean both armies move together all the time – it means that planned moves are carried out in concert. For instance, you may execute a frontal (and primarily diversionary) assault, backed up by a portion of your ally's forces, while he executes a sneak attack on the enemy's rear. Ultimately, the key to successful team-play is effective communication, both during the game and outside it – cook up strategies beforehand, and try them out. Some will work, some will fail. Refine the ones that work and either modify or scrap the ones that don't. Remember that a plan can only work if all those involved understand it.

FINAL WORDS

We have but barely scratched the surface in this 4-part series – there is so much depth to the game that a mere dozen pages or so could never hope for more than that. If you want to improve your game, and are reading this, you have the right idea: seek the knowledge of others. Search, read, play and talk. Don't be afraid to try new things (rigid thinking is one of your greatest enemies.) Also understand that every guide you read will be coloured by its writer's experience, impressions, and biases – so take everything you read with a pinch of salt. Now go back and re-read this series from scratch, find those points that you disagree with and question them – you may be right. Accept the wisdom of others, but always think for yourself! **NAG**
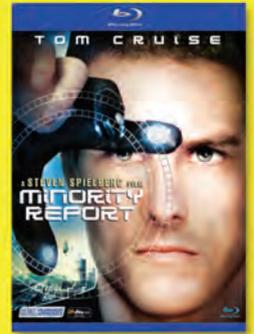
Alex Jelagin

Crucial C300 128GB SSD

THE CRUCIAL REALSSD C300 drive is one of the fastest SSD's out there. Offering 128GBs of unformatted capacity, the C300 is compatible with both Sata II and Sata 3 and gives some stellar numbers. With over 260mb/s read and 135mb/s write on Sata II, this SSD is blisteringly fast. The drive also has 4k read and write speeds far higher than the first generation of SSD's, which means greater performance in real world applications, windows and loading games. If you have not yet made the jump to an SSD, the C300 from crucial is worth your consideration.

Supertalent Pico 8GB

The 8GB Pico from Supertalent comes in gold and silver colour schemes and redefines the term small flash drive. The size of two thumbnails, and featuring a hook that allows you to attach the drive to a keychain, the Pico has an answer to all you could ask for it. Small, sturdy, offering a high capacity, and high transfer rates, all at an affordable price.

Sapphire 950w

Best known for their ATI graphics cards, Sapphire have entered the PSU market with the Pure 950w modular power supply. Offering 950w of power with 79A on the 12v rails, this PSU should provide enough power for most mid to high end systems today. With a variable speed 140mm fan keeping it cool and ample connectors for all your PC components, the Pure 950 provides everything competing power supplies do. Lastly, with an internal white light and gold fan, the Pure 950 brings a certain "bling" factor to your PC and stands out astatically from the competition.

"Customers have been asking for outstanding overclocking memory with a lower price tag, and we have been listening. **I believe that our users will love both the exciting new look and the overclocking results they are able to achieve** with our new Vengeance memory."

Thi La, Vice President of Memory Products, Corsair.
The Vengeance series of high performance DDR3 memory modules for enthusiasts has just been announced by Corsair.

Snippets

With the year coming to a close a slew of new product announcements hit the web:

- Thermaltake announced the **tt eSPORTS AZURUES optical gaming mouse**;
- Antec will be releasing a complete series of PSUs aimed at gamers and high-power users, called the **High Current Gamer series**;
- Coolermaster have two new NVIDIA-themed cases: the **HAF-X NVIDIA Edition** and the **CM 690 II Advanced**;
- Huntkey launched their **1200W 80PLUS Gold-certified power supply** aimed at overclockers;
- Razer come to the party with their **Nostromo gaming keypad**;
- ASUS introduced the **Maximus IV Extreme** motherboard based on the new Intel P67 chipset;
- Samsung released their **Galaxy Tab** tablet device;
- and GIGABYTE is set to unveil their new premium motherboard product range at CES in January, currently referred to as the **G1-Killer**.

Hardware Scoring System

1	Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.
2	Hardware turns on/installs but doesn't do much else.
3	This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.
4	Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.
5	Middle of the road product. Performs and works exactly as advertised.
6	Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.
7	Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.
8	Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.
9	Excellent product, near perfect.
10	The stuff of dreams, the best in the market, bar none.

Hardware Awards

HARDWARE

This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.

DREAM MACHINE

The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.

Know Your Technology

Wafer: A thin slice of semiconductor material used for the fabrication of integrated circuits. The wafer acts as the substrate for microelectronic devices. All CPUs and GPUs are made from wafers. Today most foundries use 300mm wafers which refers to the size. The larger the size the cheaper it is to manufacture as for the same doping, etching and deposition process you can prepare many more dies than on a smaller wafer.
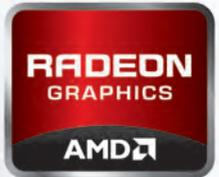
Photolithography: Process used in micro fabrication which selectively removes parts of a thin film or the bulk of a wafer. Uses light (hence the Photo part of it) to transfer a geometric pattern from a photo mask on to the substrate (wafer). A series of chemical treatments engrave the exposure pattern into the material underneath the photo mask. Modern wafers go through this process several times before they are ready.

Leakage: A quantum phenomenon where electrons channel through an insulating region. Leakage increases exponentially as the thickness of the insulation region decreases. This leakage can also occur across junctions. This leakage can also occur between the charges and drain terminals of transistors. Leakage increases power consumption and as such also increased heat output.

ALU: The fundamental building block of CPU logic. This unit performs all arithmetic and logical operations which was first proposed by the founder of modern computing John Von Neumann. Most ALU's can perform basic operations such as integer arithmetic, Bitwise logic operations (AND, NOT, OR, XOR) and bit-shifting. All CPU enhancements in modern computing usually include increased execution speed in the ALU at the very least.

## The Dream Machine

If your dreams turn to dust... vacuum

WE GET A LOT of questions about the Dream Machine. All the time. This one has to be my favourite though. Is the Dream Machine like, real? Umm... Right, listen up people. The Dream Machine is like an actual computer, with actual parts that exist, that actually do work and do all sorts of computing stuff when you put them into a case and plug it into the power thingy that lives in your wall. We wouldn't lie about this, honestly. We know we talk a lot of nonsense a lot of the time but this time we're being all truthful and stuff.

And while we're baring our souls and being human-like, now would be a good time to mention that we don't like pie. So please stop asking.

Oh, and we have a new mouse in the Dream Machine this month. Woot!

The Damage...

COMPONENT	PRICE*
CASE	R3,585
PROCESSOR	R9,199
MOTHERBOARD	R6,199
MEMORY	R2,199
GRAPHICS	R11,999
STORAGE DRIVE	R1,699
OS DRIVE	R1,699
SOUND	R2,699
POWER	R3,699
DISPLAY	R4,999
KEYBOARD	R1,899
MOUSE NEW!	R899
TOTAL	R50,774

* At print time

NOTEBOOK
Alienware M17x
R29,999 | www.dell.co.za

System Specs:
CPU: Intel Core i7 720QM (2.8GHz)
RAM: 8GB DDR3 1066
Graphics: 2 x ATI Mobility RADEON HD4870 CFX
Display: 17-inch LCD (1920x1200)
HDD: 320GB SATA2
OS: Windows 7 Ulitimate 64-bit
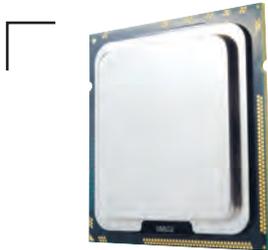
PROCESSOR
Intel Core i7 980X
www.intel.com

MOTHERBOARD
GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD9
www.gigabyte.com

MEMORY
Corsair Dominator GT 2000C8
www.corsair.com

GRAPHICS
ASUS ARES Limited Edition
za.asus.com

STORAGE DRIVE
Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
www.seagate.com

OS DRIVE
OCZ Agility 2 60GB SSD
www.ocz.com

POWER
Thermaltake Toughpower 1.5KW
www.thermaltake.com

CASE
Ikonik Ra X10 LIQUID
www.ikonik.com

DISPLAY
Samsung P2770HD
www.samsung.co.za

KEYBOARD
Logitech G19
www.logitech.com

MOUSE NEW!
Roccat Kone[+]
www.roccat.org

SOUND
ASUS Xonar Xense
za.asus.com

*Disclaimer: all letters sent to NAG are printed more or less verbatim, so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors.

Hardware

Tech Q&A

MID-RANGE GRAPHICS CARDS & MODDING
From: Danelle Vivier

"HI, AM LOOKING THROUGH all the new DX11 graphics cards. I am considering a ATI 6870, or a NVIDIA GTX 465. The cheapest 6870 is about R300 more expensive than the GTX 465. Which of them are the best bang for your buck? Without taking power consumption into account. My PSU is good enough for 2 of them. Do the ATI cards have PhysX of some sort? If not, what difference does it make? Can it play games the same as the NVIDIA cards?

Another side-note; How is the Case-modding industry here in SA? I have seen DAE_JA_VOO's work, but that is the only one except me. I have won in the Mod of the Month competition of September 2010 over at Bit-Tech, but it really sucks not to have support on your project, locally. I don't know of any place that sell proper modding supplies here. All of them overseas. Do you think there might be a potential gap in the local market for this?"

Neo: *GTX465 was EOL a long time ago, so 6870 is the card to buy. ATI does not have a physics hardware accelerated library at present and doesn't seem like they will be in some time. It makes no difference other than in the games that support PhysX, like Batman, Mafia II etc. As for the case modding supplies and such I'm not sure if there's a central place that just deals with that, you can try NakedIT as they seem to stock allot of the stuff, other than that you'll have to go overseas.*

Geoff: *The case modding scene in SA is relatively small, mostly due to the costs associated with importing the high-end modding stuff that people tend to want. Locals who are into modding tend to gather around tech forums like Systemshock, and a few local online retailers are starting to get on board with the idea. LandmarkPC and Prophecy are two such examples. I definitely think that there's a gap in the market, but the key word needs to be "affordable." Very few local techies and gamers can afford to buy the right products, but if there's a retailer willing to secure large quantities and pass the savings on to the consumers, then I think people will come. Also, if you want to get into the scene and be taken seriously, be prepared to work your ass off. Ettienne (DJV) has recently quit his day job to do case modding full time, and he still doesn't have enough hours in the day to do everything he needs to.*

HOW IS THE FUTURE LOOKING
From: Anton Engelbrecht

"HEY NAG. I AM looking to upgrade my pc this festive season and I want to know whether I should wait. I am not in serious need of an upgrade, but I have seen some of the signs. I want to know whether there is going to appear some marvellous and revolutionary leap forward in computer technology immediately after I have bought the new parts for my computer and when. Also, I would please like to know which manufacturer is producing the best graphics card that uses the GTX 580 core? Thank you very much for your help. Have a nice day."

Neo: *If it can wait, then wait it out, if however it's starting to annoy you, then go right ahead and upgrade, but not to 1156 P55 platform as that's dead now, but rather the X58 or P67 platform. Right now the graphics cards are all the same reference models, so they are all equal, at least in theory.*

POWER PROBLEMS
From: Connie van Zyl

"I HAVE A PROBLEM PICKING the correct power supply for my new pc. It also doesn't help that some manufacturers mislabel their PSU, stating MAX OUTPUT CAPACITY, instead of CONTINUOUS OUTPUT CAPACITY! But that is not the big burden, it just means you have to do more unnecessary home work. You see, I have bought a Evetech bundle consisting of: Rampage 3 Extreme, Core i7 950 and 12BG(6x2 GB modules) G skill Trident memory. I would like to purchase two new Radeon 6870's and run them in Crossfire. According to the PC FORMAT, these cards don't consume more than 150w each. I want to run this rig as stated above, with the i7 950 at around 3.8-4 GHz. What would be the minimum continuous wattage I would need and can you perhaps recommend some models. I have been looking at the Antec High Current Gamer HCG-900, which provides 900 watt CONTINUOUS OUTPUT. I am not too sure about the quality of the Unit, since you can pick it up for R1500. Any help would be greatly appreciated."

Neo: *That Antec unit will do just fine and it's a great PSU. For the machine you have you could probably use a 750W unit as well without issue, go ahead and buy it as it really does seem like a great PSU."*

OPERATING SYSTEMS AND HARD DRIVES
From: Pieter Ross

"FIRST OF ALL, WANT to say, great magazine. Love the hardware reviews. Anyway, I was wondering, which Operating System do you recommend in terms of optimal game performance and compatibility? Windows 7 Ultimate 32 bit or 64 bit? Secondly, which of the following two drives would you rather recommend? The Seagate 1TB Barracuda 7200.12 SATA300 32MB 7200RPM Hard Drive, or the Western Digital 1TB Caviar Black SATA6 64MB 7200RPM Hard Drive, and will neither of them risk corruption of data etc.?"

Neo: *Windows 7 64-bit and the WD 1TB*

Caviar Black. You should always back up your data as all drives eventually do break.

TECH Q&A
From: Jason Quirk

"I'M LOOKING AT BUYING another monitor for use with my Xbox and I'm thinking of investing in a Samsung BX2450. My question is whether the Samsung P2770HD has a better gaming picture quality than the BX2450 which has LED backlit and a 2ms response time compared to the 5ms response time and no LED of the P2770HD?"

Neo: *The BX2450 is the better monitor and costs less. It is however smaller than the 2770HD and has no TV receiver. I would go with the BX2450.*

GRAPHICS CARD ON A BUDGET?
From: Siemeon Fourie

"I'M A STUDENT GAMER and cash is slow atm but I am a WoW addict. And my old rig is suffering with the current WoW patch just being launched. So it's time to upgrade my old 8600GT! Now I've got a budget of about R 1,500 to like R2,000 max. Just want to ask some advice about the best card I can get for that kind of money. I'm also upgrading the rest of my PC, but I'm starting with the graphics card since I can upgrade that without needing a new motherboard. Sigh baby steps."

Neo: *You should consider the Radeon HD5770, it should be less than R2,000 and many times faster than the 8600GT.*

OVERHEATING PC
From: Tinus Reinecke

"I WAS WONDERING IF YOU could help. My PC has been working fine for almost a year now, but I recently noticed an extreme increase in the heat level. Usually it would take a full day to get this hot, but now an hour is enough for it to heat up to the point where the system is slower than an ice-cream van going uphill. And don't even get me started on the hundreds of glitches and random images that appear during game play. I would appreciate any ideas as to why my system is suddenly so hot, as the two 200mm and two 120mm fans do not make any difference."

Neo: *Your CPU fan may be the issue and you just may need to re-mount it. That should sort it out, if not you may need to consider a new one but it's likely that the mount has gone bad and needs to be re-seated.* **NAG**

Hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

CP-GPU

SOME OF YOU MAY not remember and others may not have been around, but the divergence that happened between graphics and general processing that happened in the mid-90s resulted in the GPU as it is today. More accurately, what the CPU was striving to achieve and what the graphics vendors wanted to achieve were diverging.

The CISC-like x86 architecture had become dominant since the advent of modern consumer computing had resulted in what would inherently make the CPU an unsuitable processor for modern day graphics. The highly serial nature of the CPU and the pursuits of single thread performance at the time were partly responsible for making sure that GPUs pushed the other way.

Even the most basic 3D accelerators in the mid-90s were RISC based co-processors with rudimentary (by todays' standards) vertex manipulation and texturing capabilities. For a while we pursued fill rates over and above everything else, but to increase graphics quality and fidelity, more complex rendering methods were needed along with more complex APIs to make all this new power useable.

Oddly enough the quest for more complex rendering or rather more efficient rendering methods that don't rely solely on polygon counts and ever increasing texture sizes some significant changes had to be made. We ended up moving back towards the CPU. However approaching what used to be traditional rendering techniques from a parallel computing point of view. As it is now in 2011, we are as close to the traditional CPU as we have ever been, yet it seems we may never make that jump into having a GPU act as a host processor for the entire system (within reason, controlling basic IO busses is not something a CPU should be doing). Part of this seems to be because the CPU itself has in some ways given up trying to move towards the GPU with graphics dedicated SIMD extensions like MMX and 3DNow. Indeed AMD's Fusion technology is rather interesting that it will actually make use of what we would call GPU logic for general computing tasks with both the GPU and CPU parts on the same die sharing resources.

Still even with such a setup and going forward it will be hard to fully integrate the two without making some fundamental sacrifices on either fronts. The most troubling thing about our quest to render what we can term life-like or a more achievable "hyper-realism" in what we render is the computing power needed increases disproportionately. So, for Tessellation to be a viable technology to use, we had to invest billions of transistors into sub $200 graphics parts. The next step from that where we can have advanced photon tracing effects in real-time will only be available when our GPUs are housing near 10 billion gates or more. It sounds ridiculous to say this right now, but let's remember that 2005's G70 GPU (7800) housed only about 278 million gates on a 90nm node. Today, five years later, a single GF110 core houses more than 10 times that amount in about the same area.

> "As it is now in 2011, we are as close to the traditional CPU as we have ever been, yet it seems we may never make that jump into having a GPU act as a host processor for the entire system."

At the same time, this increased complexity will not make the GPU closer to a CPU than it is today. Multi core efficiency is what most CPU vendors will be perusing going forward. AMD's Bulldozer-based CPUs due later this year are a great example of this. AMD's Bulldozer has very tight integration between cores and bridging the gap between logic cores and physical cores, supposedly minimizing the cost of production by not repeating parts of the die that can be shared, but maximizing performance of multi-threaded programs.

There are very few technologies that any individual can see the beginning of and almost to their completion but the GPU just may be one of them. There's no doubt about it, there's still plenty to be done in all things visual and the challenges that lie ahead are at the least monumental, but we are making good progress and enjoying the journey a pixel at a time. **NAG**

BLACK OPS

ONLINE LEAGUE 2011

Game Mode: Search and Destroy
Number of Clans: 60 teams – 3 divisions of 20 [Premier; First; Second]
Players Per Team: 5v5 plus max 3 additional substitutes [International Promod Rules]
Entry Time: 11 December 2010 – 10 January 2011
League Dates: 30 January 2011 – July 2011

Brought to you by

NAG

For more information on how to register your clan go to the Steam Group Page: NAG Gaming League

Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

By Derrick Cramer

Why don't we get all the nice things?

GO TO YOUR TYPICAL public LAN, what do you see? Coolermaster HAF 932, Coolermaster Storm Scout, Raidmax Ninja, Antec 900, Coolermaster HAF X, Coolermaster CM690 II, Coolermaster HAF 922... Mainstream cases for every budget. But, have you ever seen an NZXT Phantom? Or the R3 from Fractal Design? There's a good chance you've never heard of these cases let alone seen them. Do yourself a favour and type the above into Google; you'll be gobsmacked at their beauty.

So why don't we have them here? Both are in the same price category as the mid-range cases from Coolermaster such as the Scout, both are relatively the same size and weight, and both appeal to gamers enough to be bestsellers. So what is the issue? We had this same problem a few years ago with Lian-Li cases. I remember reading *NAG* and seeing the review of the Lian-Li V2010 (at least I think it was the v2010?) and drooling at the thought of owning one. Do you think I could find it at any of the local PC shops, or online stores for that matter? Not a chance, so I settled for a high-end case from Coolermaster which was widely available at the time.

This issue isn't limited to cases; there are any number of examples. Take water cooling parts, and I don't mean the Corsair H50 or Coolit Domino A.L.C, I'm talking proper water cooling from the likes of Swiftech, DangerDen and XSPC. Perhaps 5% of all the lanners at rAge have items made by these companies. Here's another one for you, fans by Panaflo, Delta and Scythe, have you heard of them? There's a good chance you haven't, despite them being some of the best fan manufacturers out there.

I could go on all day listing brands and items you've never heard of, but hopefully by now you get the point. We're missing out on a lot of the good stuff in South Africa. Those with the custom water cooling, the super-exclusive cases, the high-performance or low-noise fans imported these products themselves, and paid the ridiculous shipping costs to get the items over here. With my latest order from Performance-pcs.com based in the US, my shipping charges were higher than the cost of the item plus tax put together, and this is the main reason we don't see more of the brands I've just mentioned in this country.

So here's an idea that I don't have the funds to implement myself. Do some market research among the gamers of this country, get a large shipping container, and fill it to the brim with custom cases, water cooling components, fans and all the other hard-to-get items that can address a demand. Once it's here, set up shop and watch the money roll in. I remember the NakedIT stand at rAge a few years ago

> "We're missing out on a lot of the good stuff in South Africa. Those with the custom water cooling, the super-exclusive cases, the high-performance or low-noise fans imported these products themselves, and paid the ridiculous shipping costs to get the items over here."

where they sold fans, cable-sleeving kits and custom thumbscrews. Gamers went wild, I spent most of my budget there and I was far from the only one. Perhaps they weren't the best example as you hardly hear about them nowadays, oh well.

The market is shifting. Gamers will now pay a price premium for high-end, high-quality or in-demand items. Gone are the days of R350 gaming cases – gamers want a bit of exclusivity and the price of the latest best sellers shows that. So use my idea, get rich, benefit the community and thank me later. **NAG**

Antec LanBoy Air

Specifications

- **11 drive bays:** 6 x internal 3.5" HDDs; 3 x external 5.25" HDDs; 2 x internal bottom-mounted 2.5" SSD bay
- **Water cooling support:** Top water cooling radiator fitting; Rear water cooling grommets
- **8 expansion slots** for triple graphics–card configurations
- **Advanced cooling system** - up to 15 fans
- **Unit Dimensions:** 518 mm (H) x 222 mm (W) x 4906 mm (D)
- **Weight:** Net 9.2 kg; Gross 11 kg

What is this?

Really?

I guess, but why would I care?

Well no, no I haven't.

I see.

Hmmm indeed.

It's a modular open-frame case.

Yes, don't you think it looks über cool!

Like seriously chick, have you ever seen anything this funky!

Exactly. Like if you put your face on one side of the case and I put mine on the other we could like totally see each other.

No, no you don't. This thing is like a Transformer dude. Like I would so score with Megan Fox if she knew I had one of these.

Handles: The LanBoy Air features two fold away handles on top. This is a dream come true for the lanner who is regularly lugging his PC around here and there.

Front panel: Sunken power and reset buttons means there won't be any accidental resets if you brush up against your case. A USB3 front panel connector is a nifty feature too.

Tricool fans: The LanBoy Air comes standard with five pre-installed variable speed tricool fans, with mounting room for more besides. Noisy? Yes. Cool? Definitely.

Light: An all aluminum construction makes the LanBoy Air feather light, perfect for transporting your case to and from LANs.
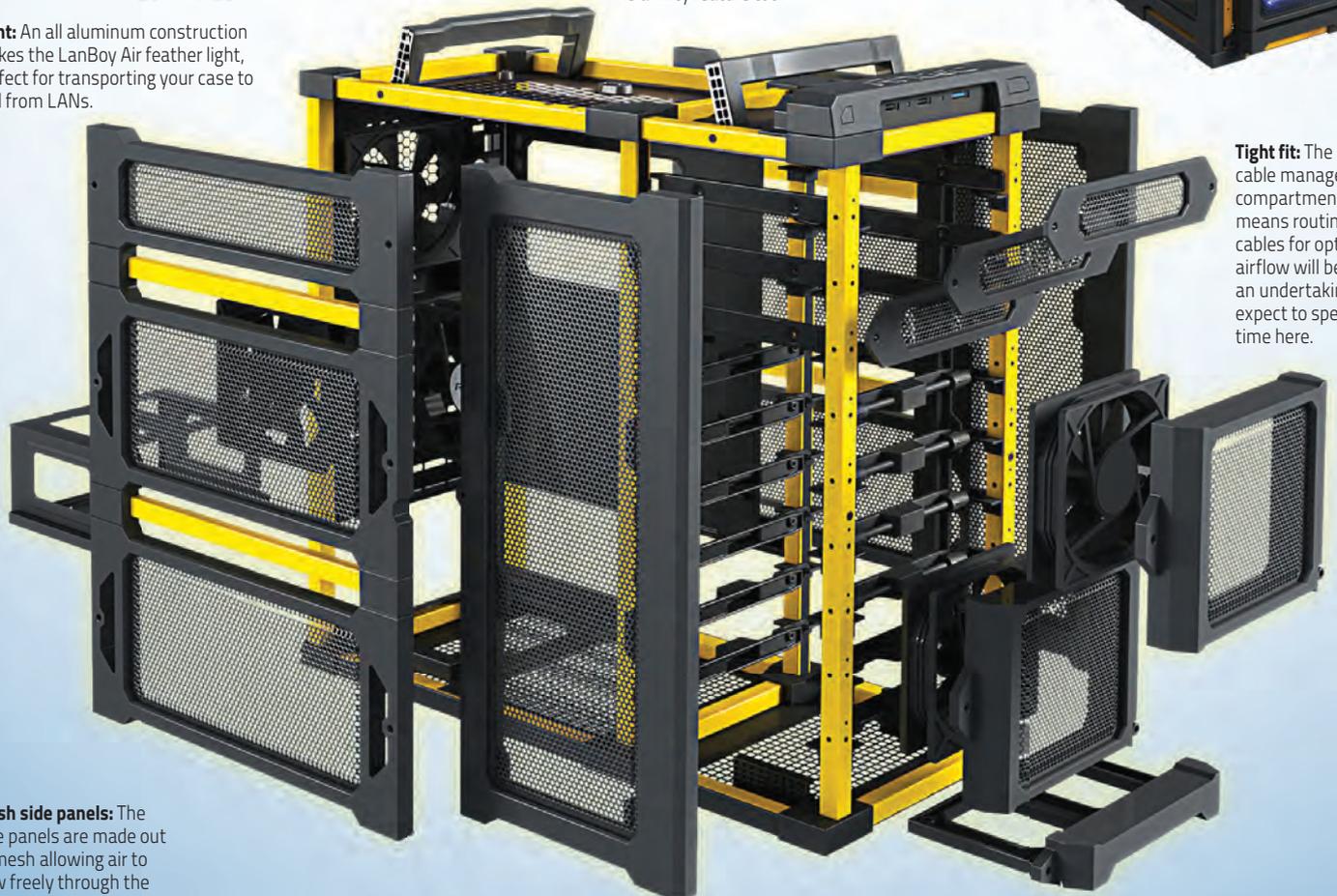
Tight fit: The small cable management compartment means routing your cables for optimal airflow will be quite an undertaking, expect to spend time here.

Mesh side panels: The side panels are made out of mesh allowing air to flow freely through the chassis. Stylish, and good for cooling too.

Individual side panels: The case is made up of several side panels, each allowing access to a certain area of the chassis depending on what you need to work on.

Direct drive cooling: Mounting your hard drives with the supplied clips behind Antec Tricool fans means cool and reliable operation.

Bee colour scheme: Yellow isn't a common sight at LANs, which means the yellow and black colour scheme of the LanBoy Air will stand out in the crowd. It dares to be different. It also comes in blue if yellow isn't your thing.

Xbox 360 Kinect

The final piece of this crazy motion-control scramble has finally come to the party (game). Kinect's fancy technology and controller-free shenanigans are here, ready to take on PlayStation's Move and Nintendo's Wii. The Big Three are finally on even ground, each offering its own take on motion-controlled gaming. We've had some time to stare long and hard at Kinect through a high-powered microscope (that doubles as a mini-game compilation) and we're here to tell you what Microsoft's device is all about.
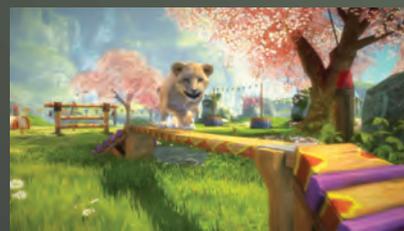
We have the technology

Possibly the greatest aspect of Kinect is the phenomenal tech. Starting up Kinect, proceeding through the surprisingly simple setup process and diving into these controller-free waters for the first time is undoubtedly exciting – not because of what Kinect is, but because of what it could be. When Kinect slowly tilts upwards to try and identify your face so it can sign you into your profile, it's difficult not to be completely astounded by the potential here.

Here's a brief breakdown of how the whole thing works, in case you don't already know: all Kinect is is a sensor bar that you connect to your Xbox. That's all you need. It's kind of like the Wii's sensor bar, but approximately 6,000 times more impressive. Resting on a motorised pivot, the sensor bar can be placed above or below your display. Crack open the device and you'll find an RGB camera, a depth sensor and a multi-array microphone.

The depth sensor is made up of an infrared laser projector combined with a monochrome CMOS sensor. This allows Kinect to see your world in 3D under any ambient lighting conditions. Kinect's software will automatically calibrate the depth sensor based on gameplay and your physical environment (i.e. it knows if you have furniture and will quickly set fire to it if it thinks it's in the way – isn't technology great?). Meanwhile, the multi-array microphone can conduct acoustic source localization and ambient noise suppression, making it possible to engage in things like headset-free chat on LIVE.

Now that the boring stuff is out of the way, this is all you need to know: Kinect is fully capable of spatial, voice and facial recognition. It'll capture full-body motion in 3D, it'll recognise advanced gestures and it'll enable you to play party games without putting down your drink to hold a controller – provided you don't mind occasionally splashing rum and coke all over your TV and Xbox.

Couch potatoes need not apply

All these fancy-pants gizmos mean nothing without a variety of good games – or at least one great game that's alluring enough on its own to make Kinect a must-have Xbox accessory. Sadly, this is where Kinect disappoints, because the games cannot compete with the device's extravagance. It's a combination of both the device's shortcomings and the quick cash-ins that the games available right now clearly are. They cater to the masses, but even the masses will get bored rapidly with what's on offer. We were provided with four games and one fitness-improving thing. We gave the latter to a homeless person. *Kinect Adventures* (which comes bundled with Kinect), *Kinect Joy Ride*, *Kinectimals* and *Fighters Uncaged* – these are games that exist and what we used to put Kinect through its paces.

KINECT ADVENTURES
It's essentially a compilation of five fun, silly party games. At the end of each session, Kinect spits out a number of photos of you and anyone playing with you looking like total asses. It's not particularly exciting and the novelty wears off fast, but it does a good job of teaching you the subtleties of Kinect control and proper use of the device.

KINECTIMALS
Kinectimals is that sickeningly cute cat-stroking simulator. You explore an island with your virtual pet to find secrets and gold, which can be used to buy new toys and furniture and stuff. It's great for kids and it's highly polished, but we don't see core gamers falling over themselves to play it.

You are the controller

Our time with Kinect has us excited and apprehensive at the same time. The software-based setup is surprisingly quick and easy, but you'll need a lot of space to get the most out of the device. Taking the time to perfectly calibrate the device will provide you with a pleasantly accurate experience (depending on the game – *Fighters Uncaged* is a prime example of how no amount of calibration can help you have a good time). The input lag is barely noticeable the majority of the time. We bet that the first time that you visit the Kinect Hub and kindly ask your Xbox to open the disc tray, or when you see Kinect actively tracking your movements and silently keeping its mechanical eye on you (even while you're not playing Kinect-enabled games), you'll undoubtedly feel excitement at the possibilities. You'll probably feel a little creeped out as well.

The biggest problems at the moment are Kinect's high price and its lack of games. The launch line-up will keep you occupied for a bit, but the games available right now are ultimately dissatisfying and shallow. Games like *Kinect Joy Ride* also highlight Kinect's greatest obstacle – the lack of a controller makes it difficult to see how future games could be anything but on-rails experiences where you're guided through a rigid world with little else to do but flap your arms and legs around wildly. It needs some form of controller to make it perfect. It's not as accurate or as versatile as Move or the Wii at the moment, but it's infinitely more exciting and unique. We just need another form of control to augment and improve the experience.

As it stands right now, we don't see Kinect as the future of gaming – but with its facial, voice and gesture recognition, it could very well be the first step towards the future of interactive entertainment and digital interaction. Now we just need a few developers to bring on the innovation – because the games on offer will decide Kinect's fate.   **NAG**

KINECT JOY RIDE
You race cars using your avatar. Hold your hands out like a steering wheel and steer in midair to control your car. You steer, but you don't actually accelerate or brake. Again, it's silly fun, but it gets old fast.

FIGHTERS UNCAGED
Currently the ultimate display of bad use of Kinect, *Fighters Uncaged* is annoyingly inaccurate and obnoxiously lame. Input lag and inaccurate motion tracking mean that punches become kicks, kicks become punches and headbutts become you getting punched in the groin.

DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

Part 11 – Arcade stick controller part 1

THE WORLD OF ARCADE stick controllers is divided up into two categories: the cheap stuff, and the good stuff. While it's possible to pick up an acceptable controller for R300–500, it won't be good enough if you're serious about gaming with it. It's often not possible or affordable to get the highest quality controllers locally, so for this and next issue, we're going to go through the process of acquiring the components and building your very own arcade controller.

STEP 1: A BIT OF CARPENTRY
First, we need to form the frame in which the control panel (with the buttons and joystick) will be mounted. This is done by building two frames, one smaller than the other, and then gluing them together for support and strength. The control panel will then be able to slot inside the outer frame, while resting on the inner frame.

Operating on the outer frame, mark and drill dowel slots on the ends of panels D and E. Place the dowel centre points into the slots and press the frame together with panels F and G to form a rectangle. The centre points mark the locations to drill holes on panels F and G. Once you're happy that everything lines up properly, drill, pour a little glue into each hole, insert the dowels, put plenty of glue on the ends of the panels, and press them together. Leave the frame to dry for a couple of hours. Once it's dry, glue the inner frame into place; be sure to leave 3.2mm of space at the bottom of the inner frame to allow for panel C to fit into place.

STEP 2: THE CONTROL PANEL
This is where we'll mount the arcade controls. Note that the buttons and their placement are entirely up to you; I've chosen to install eight main buttons (A, B, X, Y, LT, RT, LB & RB) and four control buttons: Back, Xbox Guide, Start and wireless sync. First, cut out and mount sheet 1 on panel B. First drill a pilot hole using your wood drill, then proceed to cut out each button hole using a hole saw – 30mm for the main buttons and 24mm for the smaller ones.
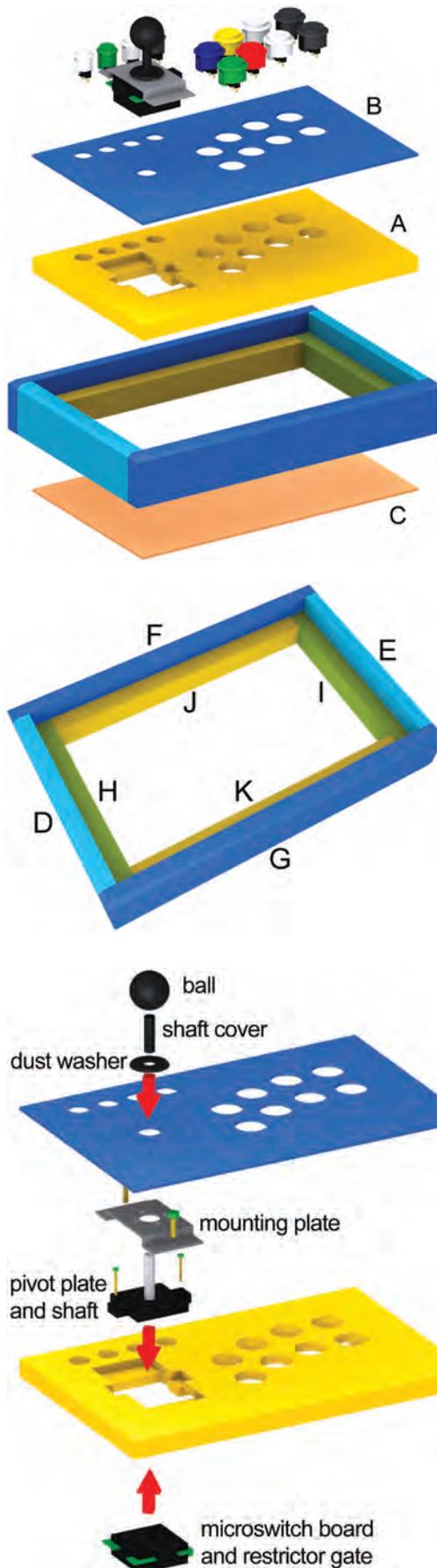
Now for panel A. Mount sheet 2 and perform the same tasks of drilling holes. For the joystick bay, cut out the rectangular shape using a utility knife, then trace along the inside with a pencil. Remove the leftover sheet, and use the Dremel Trio to route the shape at a depth of 12mm. Flip over panel A. Mount sheet 3 and perform the same tasks to cut out, trace and route the shape.

STEP 3: INSTALLATION
The buttons simply snap in place on panel B. To install the joystick, first dissemble it into its component pieces as illustrated. Insert the pivot plate from the top of panel A and screw it into place (drill a hole first). Next, place the mounting plate over it and screw that into place. Place the microswitch board underneath, and then clip the restrictor gate in place. Then place panel B on top of panel A. Finally, put the shaft cover over the shaft, drop the dust cover in place and screw the ball into the top of the shaft.

Cheat sheets

On this month's cover disc, you'll find printable pages illustrating the layout of panels A and B. However, at the time of the disc being finalised, I hadn't realised that I was going to use a single panel for A; it was originally designed as two. *[Tool, Ed]* Additionally, the circles don't have centre-points that you'll need for accurate drilling. Updated versions of the sheets can be downloaded from our website at **www.nag.co.za/arcade_panel_layout.zip.**

ball
shaft cover
dust washer
mounting plate
pivot plate and shaft
microswitch board and restrictor gate

What you will need

Arcade components:
- 1x Sanwa joystick JLF-TP-8Y (choose any colour)
- 1x Sanwa mounting plate JLF-P1-S
- 8x Sanwa button OBSF-30 (1x green; 1x blue; 1x red; 1x yellow; 2x white; 2x black)
- 4x Sanwa buttons OBSF-24 (2x white; 1x green; 1x black (not necessary if you're using a PS3 controller or Xbox 360 wired controller)

Wood panels:
You should be able to have the wooden panels cut to size at the store.
- 1x Pine (20x350x220mm) (panel A)
- 2x Fibreboard (3.2x350x220mm) (panel B and C)
- 2x Pine (20x220x60mm) (panel D and E)
- 2x Pine (20x390x60mm) (panel F and G)
- 2x Pine (20x220x30mm) (panel H and I)
- 2x Pine (20x310x30mm) (panel J and K)

Tools:
- A Dremel TRIO with TR800 edge guide, TR654 ¼" straight router bit, and TR408 ½" sanding band
- A power drill
- (Optional) Dremel rotary tool with sanding band
- Clamps and an elevated work surface
- 9x steel right-angle brackets (2cm)
- Hole saws: 24mm and 30mm. With arbour
- 1x 8mm dowel kit (8x dowels, 8mm wood drill bit, drill stop, 4x dowel centre points)
- 1x Packet 4x25mm wood screws
- 1x Packet 3x12mm wood screws
- 2x 5x30mm countersunk machine screws & nuts
- 2x 4x25mm mushroom screws & nuts
- 4x rubber buffers (rubber feet)
- Printouts of the template
- Varying grit sandpaper (120-600)
- Wood glue and wood filler
- Utility knife and right-angled steel ruler
- Spray paint: white primer and a colour of your choice
- Safety goggles and dust mask

Buying the components

If you want the best arcade components, you need those manufactured by Sanwa or Seimitsu. Both companies are known for their joysticks and buttons found in the toughest arcade cabinets in the world: Japanese tournament cabs. For this tutorial, we'll be using Sanwa components, which were ordered from **www.arcadespareparts.com.**

Cost-cutting

The total cost of this project is in the region of R1,200. It's not cheap, but there are a number of ways that you can save money on this project. The easiest way is to follow this tutorial with a friend, as you'll only need to pay once for the tool accessories, and the smallest wooden plank you'll find can easily cover two sets of panels. The cost of the arcade components, including shipping, was about R600. While it's possible to spend half that, you won't get the level of quality that Sanwa delivers.

Tips from the expert

Dremel just have recently launched their Dremel TRIO. Design-wise, it looks like a jig saw but it works with a spiral system (it rotates very fast instead of moving a blade up and down). The spiral system allows you to do completely different jobs with one tool: cutting into wood, tiles and even sheet metal, sanding and routing. Curved cuts in wood for your arcade controller can be done free-hand with a multipurpose bit – the spiral system allows you to immediately cut into any direction. For straight cuts, use the parallel guide that comes with the TRIO. The parallel guide can easily be turned in to a circle cutter. You pre-drill in to the center of your hole-to-be and then set the cutting diameter for your hole accordingly. It saves you buying hole saws for wood in various diameters. For clean edges or grooves, use one of the router bits available for the TRIO. In case you need to work with normal power tools, remember that you want to have the right accessories for the job. For example when using a jig saw for your controller project, make sure you use a HCS blade for clean cuts in wood. You can even use a blade with reverse tooth design as it gives you a clean surface. Check **www.powertool-portal.com** for comprehensive information about how to use the right tools and accessories.

Gaming
Keyboards

Gaming keyboards. Any serious gamer needs one, whether you're a hardcore MMORPG player, a die-hard FPS addict or favour an RTS title, a gaming keyboard is one of the most vital peripherals today. However, with so many established brands out there, and a host of new-generation keyboards releasing almost daily, it can be hard choosing which board is right for you. Well to make your life easier, we take a look at five keyboards in this roundup, all bringing something unique to the table, all targeting a different price point. Which one is right for you? Read on and find out.

Logitech G510

Supplier: Logitech | **Website:** www.logitech.com | **RRP:** R990

A **FEW YEARS AGO, LOGITECH** released the G15, which was met with praise all over the globe. Gamers loved it. With its programmable G keys, on-keyboard information LCD and backlighting, it provided gamers with a serious alternative to the old beige office keyboard. Some time later, the G15v2 was released, and while still a good board that added one or two innovative features, it had lost the appeal of the G15v1. Logitech followed this up with the G19, featuring a full colour LCD but requiring an external power supply. A sore point among gamers, particularly those who lanned a lot, this along with the high price tag made the G19 unpopular. Logitech learned from its successes and failures and has now released the G510, possibly the most complete gaming keyboard available today. It offers a programmable LCD, 18 assignable G keys with up to three profiles each, a gaming mode button that disables the windows key... but wait, there's more! Media keys with a new volume-scroll wheel, keyboard backlight with different colours and intensity levels, built-in USB audio with 3.5mm headphone and microphone jacks, headphone and mic mute buttons, the G15 has it all. Did we mention the non-slip matte black finish or the detachable wrist pad? The G510 has a feature list longer than most gamers' attention spans, and while its price tag is rather high, it is the most feature-rich gaming keyboard out there. Extremely responsive, the G510 is comfortable and an asset to any gamer. Those who don't own a G510 want a G510.

Bottom Line
The G510 is by far the most feature-rich keyboard but also the most expensive.

< Gaming Keyboards >

Roccat Arvo

Supplier: Rebel Tech | **Website:** www.roccat.org | **RRP:** R535

ROCCAT IS A FAIRLY new player to the peripheral market, and has a range of mice and keyboards to take on established players such as Logitech and Razer. The Arvo is a compact gaming keyboard with portability as its main focus, targeted at the gamer on the go. The Arvo doesn't offer much in the way of features, being limited to five programmable keys and a "mode switch button", with three of the programmable keys being "Thumbster" buttons. The "Thumbster" buttons are located below the space bar and are surprisingly easy to use after one or two gaming sessions. The mode button found at the top right side of the keyboard changes the number pad from your primary keys such as 1, 2, and 3, to your secondary mode keys, such as delete, end, and programmable key number four and five. While the keyboard lacks media keys or special features such as a built-in USB port, its emphasis is on portability and cuts out all the features Roccat feel are unnecessary at a LAN. The benefit of this is a very small price tag, making the Arvo perfect for a gamer on a budget or as a second keyboard dedicated to lanning.

Bottom Line
The Roccat Arvo is cheap and space conscious, but lacking a few features.

Thermaltake Challenger Pro

Supplier: Corex | **Website:** www.ttesports.com | **RRP:** R699

THE CHALLENGER PRO IS Thermaltake's new high-end keyboard. Featuring low profile keys, a backlight with variable intensity and 10 macro keys, the Challenger Pro has all the features the average gamer would need from a keyboard. As an additional feature though, the Challenger comes with a hand cooling fan that can slot in one of two power points at opposite ends of the keyboard and directed to cool down your keyboard hand while gaming. This may seem like a gimmick, but for those with sweaty hands the low power fan works well. The airflow is soft enough not to notice unless you're trying to, yet hard enough to cool down your hand during an extended gaming session. Offering power points on both sides of the keyboard is a welcome feature for left-handed gamers who are so often neglected in the world of peripherals. The base of the keyboard also extends out acting as a palm rest, something you wouldn't notice until after an extended gaming session. It works well, just like the rest of the keyboard. While not feature-rich or sporting the best build quality, the Challenger Pro is different and priced well enough to make it a viable option for gamers in the market for a new keyboard.

Bottom Line
The Thermaltake Challenger Pro has a fair list of features including the hand-cooling fan, and while build quality is low, it makes up for this in price.

< Gaming Keyboards >

Gigabyte Aivia

Supplier: Rectron | **Website:** www.gigabyte.com | **RRP:** R649

GIGABYTE IS ALSO FAIRLY new in the peripheral market and their new M8000X mouse put up a good show. The Aivia comes jam packed with features and interestingly enough, most aren't found on other gaming keyboards. The first is touch sensitive buttons at the top of the keyboard, used for muting and changing the volume level of music on the fly. One wonders though why Gigabyte added such an extravagant feature, and then followed it up with a lack of play/pause/song skip buttons. Another unusual feature is the use of an "Enhanced Ergonomic Gaming keyboard design." What Gigabyte has done is made often-used keys require less force than seldom-used keys. This has little impact on gaming as all of the keys used for gaming are in the "lowest force required" category and the only time you notice the different levels of force is while typing, and even then it doesn't become apparent unless you really do look out for it. While the different level of force on the keys screams marketing gimmick, the Aivia does come with some standard features which are actually useful. These include backlit keys, five programmable keys, braided cotton cord, two USB 2.0 ports on the side of the keyboard and a mode switching button. There is also an extended wrist-rest pad that is rather comfortable, however it makes the keyboard bulky and a pain to lug around to LANs. It's a good effort on Gigabyte's part, particularly if you're looking for a coloured keyboard as they are available in red, yellow or black.

Bottom Line

The Gigabyte Aivia is a good mid-range package, but it's size and gimmicks do detract from it slightly.

Razer Lycosa

Supplier: Rebel Tech | **Website:** www.razerzone.com | **RRP:** R620

A FAVORITE AMONG RAZER FANS, the Lycosa has many features one has come to expect from a gaming keyboard. Backlit keys, a detachable wrist rest, USB 2.0 port as well as headphone and mic jacks, and touch-sensitive media panel. The main selling point of the Lycosa is that most of its keys are fully programmable. A feature that makes sense: why add extra programmable keys onto the board when you can simply use the current unused keys during gaming sessions. Also making an appearance is a non-slip rubber finish allowing for excellent grip while gaming, and Hyperesponse technology. While the merits of Hyperesponse may be exaggerated in their Razer marketing material, there is no doubt the keys feel very responsive during gaming. The keys being low profile does help the Lycosa's responsiveness somewhat too. While not as feature-rich as some other boards on the market, the Lycosa is priced well and is a good keyboard for the gamer who wants to avoid unnecessary extras.

Bottom Line

The Razer Lycosa is a good all-rounder, and while it offers nothing unique or special, it is a solid keyboard at a competitive price.

Roccat Kone[+]
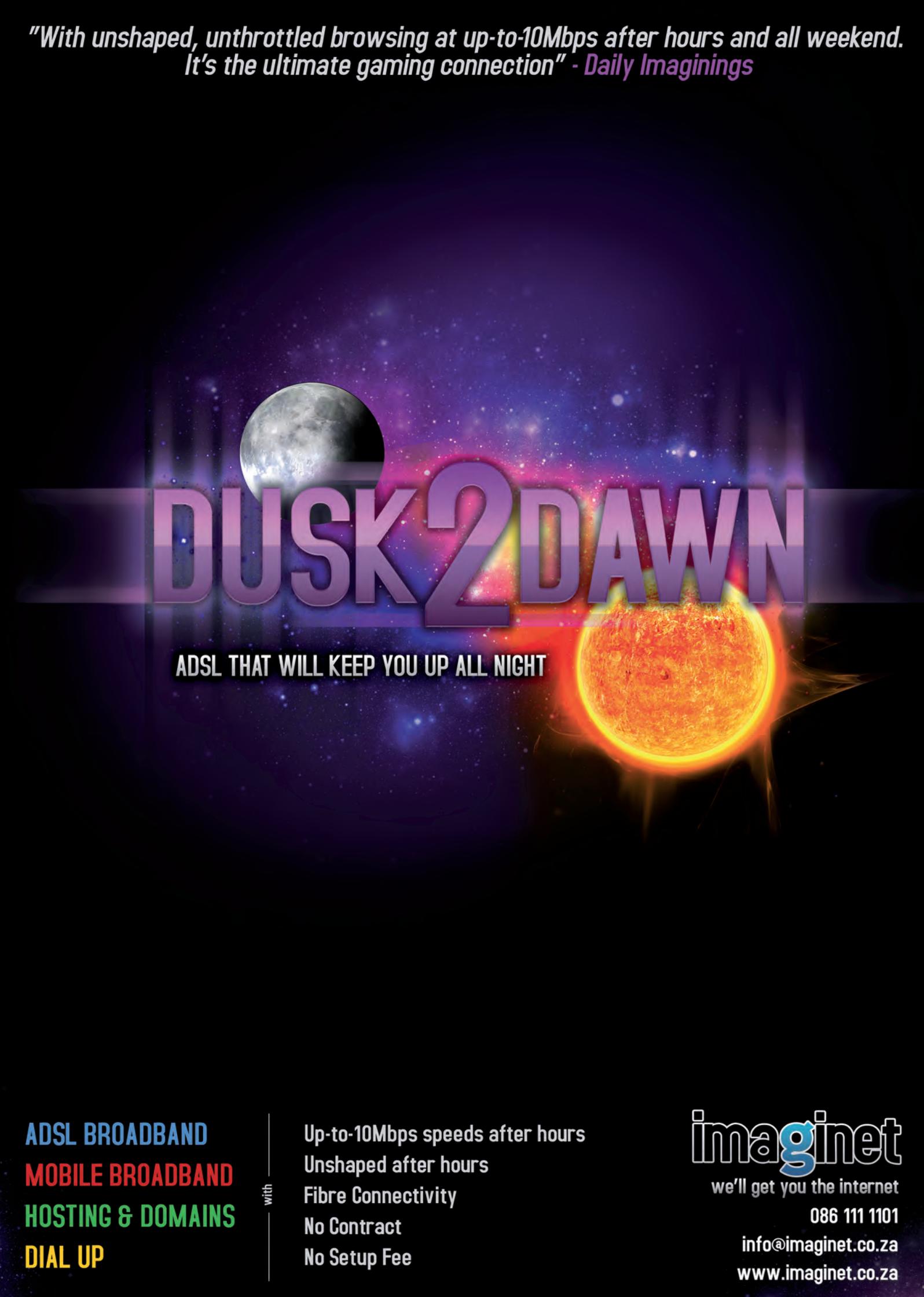
DREAM MACHINE

WHEN THE ORIGINAL ROCCAT Kone was released, it set out to take the gaming mouse crown from Logitech. Unfortunately for Roccat, my mousepad was home to the Logitech G9x at the time, which, when compared to the Kone, dominated in almost every way. Now, a year later, the Kone[+] has arrived for review. With nothing new to top the Logitech G-range, it's Roccat's turn to make the other guy feel insignificant.

The Kone[+] not only has a clever name (it looks like an aiming reticule, in case you hadn't noticed), but features a number of improvements over its predecessor, not limited to improved technical specifications. The biggest benefits are the drivers. Over time, Roccat have been fine-tuning their mouse software and now the Kone[+] is extremely usable out of the box, without the need to fiddle with any settings. As soon as you do start tinkering, the mouse becomes even more precise, and thanks to the Tracking & Distance Control Unit, will work at optimal performance levels on any mousepad.

A number of customisation options are available from within the Roccat software: Typical settings such as sensitivity (with optional separate settings for the X and Y axis), scroll and tilt speed for the wheel; and individual DPI settings for the five modes that can be selected from the mouse itself. You also have the option to change the colour of four LEDs that run along the sides of the mouse, as well as adjust their blinking/breathing speed and style (or turn it off altogether).

While some users might find it to be a little too big, the Kone[+] is comfortable used in both palm and claw grips thanks to its large surface area and hourglass shape. In addition, every inch of the mouse feels durable and well-constructed. Really the only part that doesn't ooze a sense of quality is the cable – I'd prefer the tangle-free variety that Logitech is so fond of.

If you've ever been tempted to buy a mouse with a lot of buttons, then the Kone[+] will be perfect. Not only can every button be assigned to a macro (programmable in the software) or Windows commands such as volume adjustment or media playback control, but the rear thumb button is a modifier to give each other button an additional function. In addition, the software includes pre-set macros for a number of popular games and applications. When you change volume, DPI or sensitivity, you'll receive audio feedback telling you exactly what button you've just pressed. Up to five profiles can be stored on the device itself, each with their own settings for macros, sensitivity and everything else, with the option of setting each profile to activate whenever a particular application or game is started. If you'd like, you can even set the LEDs to illuminate different colours based on your profile.

Specifications

Tracking: 6,000dpi
Polling Rate: 1000Hz
Storage: 567kb (five profiles)
Weight: 126g (excluding cable)
Weight adjustment: Additional 5-20g

It might come as a surprise to you (it's not what I was expecting when I began this review), but the Roccat Kone[+] is a better mouse than the Logitech G9x. It's not significantly better, and might not warrant an upgrade if you already have a G9x, but if you're coming from anything else, including the MS Sidewinder and the original Kone, then the R800-odd you'll spend on the Kone[+] will be well worth it. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Accurate
+ Comfortable
+ Customisable

>Minus
– Needs a better cable

>Bottom Line
This is the best mouse you can buy right now.

10 out of ten

ASUS ENGTX580

HARDWARE

NVIDIA'S GF100 FERMI CHIP has had a difficult life. Judged unfairly many times, it still managed to do what it set out to and that is be the fastest GPU on the planet. Unfortunately however, meeting this goal and given the problems TSMC had with their 40nm process, the GTX480 ended up much hotter and drew more power than it should have. Added to the delays, the entire experience and exercise was less than optimal for NVIDIA more so than for the end user.

Having said that, rumours of a fully enabled GF100 core had started making their rounds many months before the GTX580 was announced and true to the rumours, NVIDIA and TSMC (on the node front) had managed to significantly improve the yields, reduce leakage and all other factors that may have plagued the GTX480.

To that end, NVIDIA did some minor reworking on the GF100 core and as such it is called the GF110. This new core features 512 CUDA cores (as opposed to the 480 in the original GPU) so that adds some performance in the shader and compute department. As if that's not enough the core runs much cooler, and draws less power. These factors resulted in the GF110 core clocking in 72MHz faster than the GF100. May not seem like much, but given that there are clock-for-clock enhancements, and a full 512 cores to boot, the performance gains more than justified the new GPU code name and a new product.

Also reworked is the cooling solution that NVIDIA employed. As with SAPPHIRE, well known for using the vapour chamber coolers for their products, NVIDIA has employed a similar technology. This not only simplified the cooler design, but allowed a cooler graphics card and together with a new fan allowed lower noise levels.

So the GTX580 is not only faster, it's cooler and quieter and draws less power than the GTX480 it replaces. To further reduce power

consumption, NVIDIA has employed a power-gating scheme that limits the amount of current being drawn by the card. Fortunately, this can be disabled for the enthusiasts who will want excessive overclocks from the card.

Performance-wise it's further extended the lead that the GTX480 had. Of particular importance is just how much more efficient the GTX580 is in tessellation and very high workloads. In 3DMark Vantage it scored over 5,000 points higher than the GTX480, and even in the Heaven Tessellation benchmark it managed a score over 1,500 which is just unheard of for a single graphics card.

To add to the already impressive numbers, the GTX580 overclocks very well. We managed to reach 930MHz on the core still employing the air cooler. This kind of speed would have been impossible on the older GTX480 on any air or water cooler. More encouraging is that this particular sample we used isn't the greatest, and we've seen users recording up to 950MHz on the reference voltage.

When overclocked the GTX580 (at 900MHz+) manages to eclipse the Radeon HD5970 in every test and for the first time we have been able to see 3DMark Vantage scores above 30,000 on a single card using air cooling. This performance is nothing short of spectacular and makes this one of the most interesting times in GPU evolution history.

By the time you read this there will be special edition cards that offer custom power and cooling solutions. Some with very aggressive overclocks and there should be plenty of options for you to choose from. In the meantime you can take a look at the ASUS card as it really is a great product with voltage tweak software and just about everything else you would expect in an ASUS package. We were thoroughly impressed with the ASUS ENGTX580.   **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: 782MHz GF110 (40nm)
Processors: 512
Render Outputs: 64
Memory: 1536MB GDDR5 4.0GHz (192GB/sec)
API: DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.X

Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.1
1,548
1,298

3DMark Vantage
26,651
21,043

3DMark06
25,195
24,999

Crysis Warhead (1920x1080)
91.27
82.40

Resident Evil 5 (1920x1080 4xAA)
151.2
133.3

Baseline: NVIDIA GTX480

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Unmatched performance
+ Cooler than GTX480

>Minus
- Still runs relatively hot

>Bottom Line
Fermi finally comes right. The GTX580 is the most impressive DirectX11 card to date.

09 out of ten

Palit GTS430

MUCH LIKE THE COMPETITION, NVIDIA has managed to release a full top to bottom line-up of DirectX11 parts. While we traditionally don't expect low-end parts to be any good, the GTS430 is one such product that someone somewhere may be looking for. This is especially true if you are still using a 9400GT or something along those lines.

This is a pure HTPC graphics card, its dimensions and its price point make this very clear. The ability to play games is secondary to the display, and audio features it has. It is in this regard that it is attractive. It features a full-size HDMI port (with HDCP and audio pass through), a Dual-Link DVI output and a VGA output for legacy displays.

Game performance, as we stated earlier, is a bonus and so is DirectX11 support as it's utterly meaningless when dealing with such a graphics card. It's there solely as a tick-box feature and nothing else. However, if you do wish to do some gaming, it will handle most games, provided you stick to low resolutions like 1027x768 or 1280x1768 for those who use wide screens. This is in addition to you keeping the detail level low or medium at most in the more recent games.

There isn't much else to this graphics card past it being a sized down GF106 core made for OEMs and those who will make use of the extensive video acceleration playback features - in particular for Blu-ray and other HD media. Oddly enough, pixel sharpening has still not made a return to NVIDIA processors even though it was present in the GeForce 7 series of graphics cards many years back. Since this is a software feature, lets hope NVIDIA introduces it with the next major refresh of drivers.

If you're in the market for a low-end, half-height graphics card, this is the card for you. It's quiet, does just about everything you'd expect from such a card and should you want to play the odd game it is capable of that provided you keep the detail low. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: 700MHz GF108 (40nm)
Processors: 96
Render Outputs: 16
Memory: 1024MB GDDR3 (1.6GHz) 25.6GB/sec
API: DirectX11/OpenGL3.x, OpenCL 1.0

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Video processor
+ Full size HDMI port

›Minus
- None

›Bottom Line
It's hard to justify why NVIDIA made this GPU, as the GT220 and GT240 offer virtually identical features. However, the GTS430 does support DirectX11.

07 out of ten

Palit GeForce GTS450 Sonic Platinum

RIDING ON THE BACK of the hugely successful GTX460 it's obvious that NVIDIA wanted to cash in while everyone was interested. However things haven't gone accordingly as the GTS450 (and the 430) have left many users puzzled as to why NVIDIA waited almost an entire year to deliver what is mostly slower than what the competition has had for an entire year.

Indeed, the Tessellation performance of the GTS450 is significantly better than that of the Radeon HD5770, its direct competitor, however seeing as this tessellation isn't useable in any game it's hard to buy based on that performance promise alone. Oddly enough, it's rather easy to see why the GTS450 isn't as impressive as it could be. The memory bandwidth is pitiful by today's standards at this price point, with only 64GB/sec (the PALIT edition) courtesy of the very narrow 128-bit bus. While 192 CUDA cores isn't bad by any stretch of the imagination, feeding that many processors, and 16 ROPs with such a limited bandwidth was never going to work out well at all.

Having said that, Palit has gone some ways into trying to improve the GTS450 and fortunately it makes the 450 card bearable as an upgrade card for those on a tight budget. It has a healthy overclock out the box, but we found that you can improve it further and clock the card up to an amazing (by NVIDIA standards) 1GHz, which does help. However the problem is the memory bandwidth or the lack thereof. Since the bit-width is only 4-bytes wide, even with a memory clock of 4.2GHz it's only 67GB/sec, it's hardly worth the bother. In essence, the GTS450 had great potential but it was all wasted thanks to the narrow memory bus.

However, looking at the game test results, there are worse things out there, and for the right price this would not be a bad card to buy, especially if you're still using your old 9600GT or anything form that era. If you can find two of these cheap enough for SLI they do provide some really good performance. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: 930MHz GF106 (40nm)
Processors: 192
Render Outputs: 16
Memory: 1024MB GDDR3 (4GHz) 64GB/sec
API: DirectX11/OpenGL3.x, OpenCL 1.0

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Single PCI-E power plug
+ Overclocks well
+ Relatively quiet

›Minus
- Should have been faster than the Radeon 5770

›Bottom Line
Almost a year after AMD released the 5700 series of graphics processors, NVIDIA has an answer, but sadly it isn't any faster.

07 out of ten

Samsung GALAXY S

HARDWARE

WITH SO MUCH HAPPENING in the smartphone market, it's getting increasingly hard to find the right phone mated with the right operating system for the best user experience. We have yet to see a truly amazing Windows Phone 7 handset, so as it stands the competition is between the iPhone and the Android-based sets.

While Android may have had a few teething problems, in its current Froyo (2.2) guise it's nothing short of impressive (and finally gets Adobe Flash 10.1 support) improving what was an already solid 2.1 OS. However, an OS alone does not a phone make. After all, there are other phones that use the freely-available OS and they are not anywhere near what the GALAXY S can manage.

Part of this is the truly amazing Hummingbird CPU based on ARM's Cortex A8 CPU. This is the same CPU that can be found in the Wave. The GPU remains unchanged courtesy of the PowerVR SGX540, however paired with the new CPU delivers even better performance with a 90 million triangles/sec fill-rate. (Think Voodoo2/TNT2 like power, but with significantly better programmability.) So to sum it up, it's the most powerful phone you can buy today.

That's just the hardware, though, about which we can go on forever, but mating

this hardware with the Android OS in addition to the TouchWiz 3.0 UI is where the magic happens. Just using the phone and how intuitive it is sets it apart from all other phones. With Samsung's aggressive campaigning of their App store you can get just about any functionality you can think a phone to have and more, as there is a vast development community and even more software out there than you can imagine.

Overall, there isn't much we can fault this phone on. It's in every way better than the Wave (and that remains a fantastic phone) but much like the Wave, sadly, you will not be able to lock the screen orientation, so watching video's in panoramic mode may prove troublesome if you move. Other than that this is the best phone from Samsung to date and quite possibly the best on the market as well.   **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

CPU: Samsung Hummingbird (based on Arm Cortex A8 1GHz)
GPU: PowerVR SGX540
Memory: 8/16GB built in, up to 32GB SD
Display: Capacitive Super AMOLED 480x800
OS: Android OS v2.X
Size: 122.4x64.2x9.9mm

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Super AMOLED display
+ Impressive hardware
+ Android OS

>Minus
- Can't lock screen orientation

>Bottom Line
As far as smartphones go, the GALAXY S is only competing with the iPhone 4, better in some areas and equal in others.

09 out of ten

Corsair AX750

HARDWARE

CORSAIR HAS ONE OF the best reputations in the PC enthusiast community, and the AX750 is set to enhance that reputation even more. A fully modular cabling system including the 24-pin motherboard power cable and 4/8 pin CPU cable, 7-year warranty, 80-plus gold certification for over 90% efficiency at typical load, a single high amp 12v rail for even current distribution, a near-silent 120mm temperature controlled fan to keep the PSU cool, the AX750 is no stranger to an impressive feature set and is part of the professional series of power supplies for good reason.

Installation is painless thanks to the fully modular cabling system, and cable management is dream. Ample connectors for most modern day systems also comes as standard and for the most part all of the cables are long enough for most cases. The only gripe with the AX750 is the length of the 8-pin CPU power cable which may require an extender if you're using a full tower chassis and want a clean looking install. If you'll settle for nothing short of the best and "only" need 750w of power for your system, the AX750 from Corsair is the power supply to buy.   **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

Specifications

- Supports the latest ATX12V v2.31 and EPS 2.92 standards and is backward compatible with ATX12V 2.2 and ATX12V 2.01 systems
- Active Power Factor Correction (PFC) with PF value of 0.99
- Universal AC input from 90~264V
- 7 Year warranty
- Dimensions: 150mm(W) x 86mm(H) x 160mm(L)
- MTBF: 100,000 hours
- Safety Approvals: UL, CUL, CE, CB, FCC Class B, TÜV, CCC, C-tick

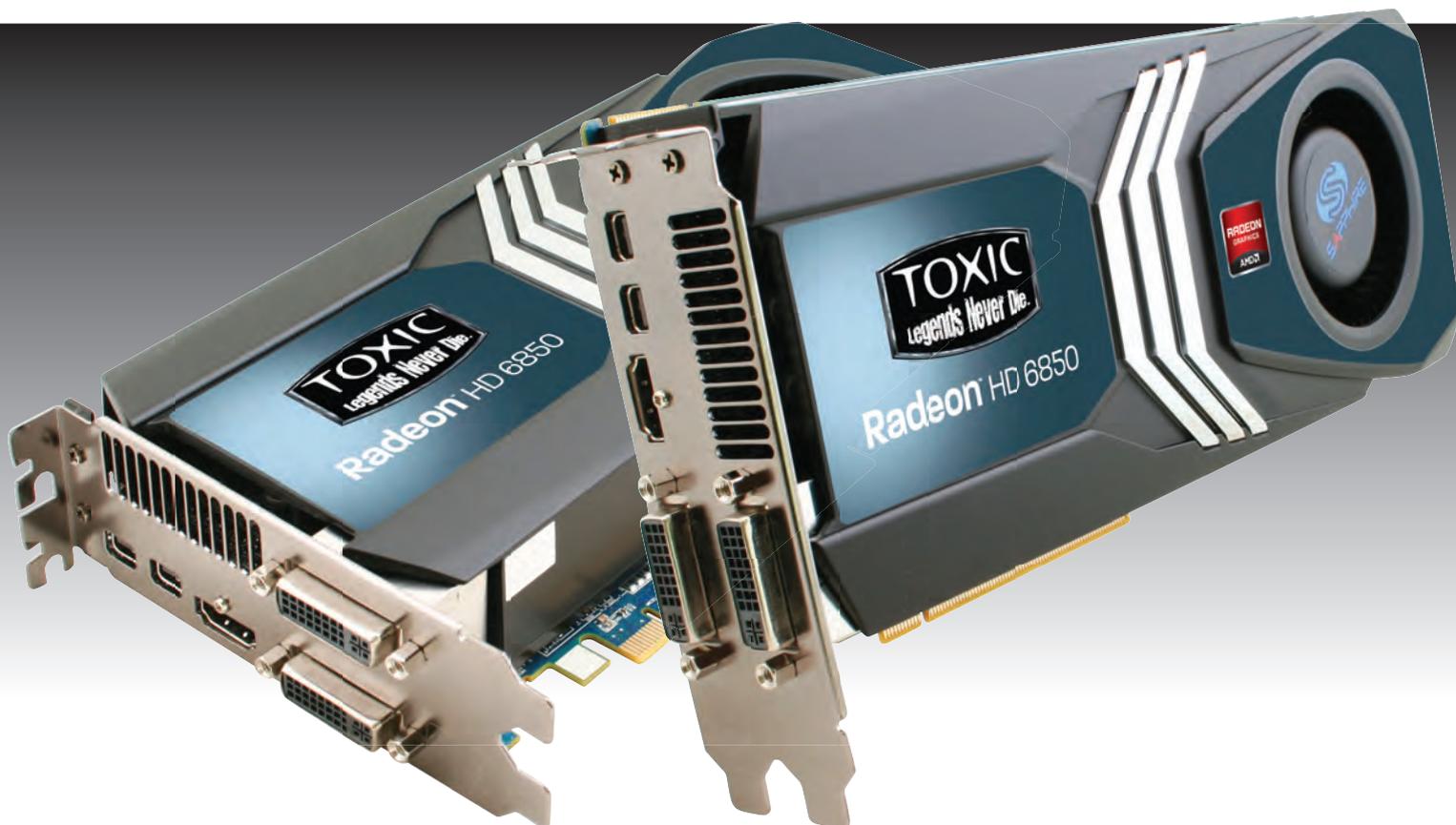## THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Build quality
+ Warranty

>Minus
- Short 8-pin CPU power cable

>Bottom Line
The new AX range from Corsair is set to be a best seller. One of the best PSUs available in SA.

09 out of ten

SAPPHIRE HD 6850 TOXIC Crossfire

UNANSWERED UNTIL NOW, THE GTX460 from NVIDIA has been a great success in the mid-range gaming segment, offering one of the best price/performance solutions available today. AMD's response to this impressive card from NVIDIA is the HD6850, but can it match up? At roughly the same price as the GTX460, the 6850 has an impressive price/performance ratio of its own and supports the latest technology AMD has to offer.

The SAPPHIRE cards we have in for review have quite a few nifty features on them, let's take a look. First off, these Toxic Edition cards have had their clocks increased to 820MHZ on the core, up from the standard 775MHZ, while the memory is seen running at 1100MHZ, a healthy 100 MHz bump up from the stock 6850 speed. In addition to the speed increases, the 6850 Toxic from SAPPHIRE has an impressive array of output options. With two DVI ports, two Mini Display ports and one HDMI port each, the Toxic can support up to 4 monitors using display port technology, an impressive feat for a mid-range gamers card.

Onto performance figures where the 6850 impresses right off the bat. Running in a Core i7 system clocked at 4GHZ, with RAM at 1600MHZ CL7-8-7-18 1T, and both QPI and Uncore at 3.6GHZ, a single Toxic 6850 managed to score 19191 in 3D Mark 06, P15247 in 3DMark Vantage, and 800 in Uniengine Heaven benchmark. These scores are absolutely mind-blowing for a single mid-range card in this price range and impressed us to no end. Crossfire scaling is if anything more impressive, as adding a second 6850 Toxic into the mix resulted in a 3DMark 06 score of 20546, a 3DMark vantage score of P23178, and a Uniengine Heaven score of 1573. While the

score increase in 3DMark 06 was only 7%, it must be noted that 3DMark 06 does not scale well with newer generation Crossfire and SLI technology, and it better suited to benchmarking single card setups. Moving to 3DMark Vantage, we see a 52% increase after adding the second card, now that's more like it. Lastly, an astonishing 96.6% increase in Uniengine Heaven benchmark really shows the advantage of the 68xx series cards over the 5xxx series with the 68xx series showing an impressive leap in DirectX 11 and tessellation performance which Uniengine relies on.

Overclocking was a breeze on the card and over 900MHZ on the core was achieved without any voltage adjustment. Toxic card users also have access to TriXX, new overclocking software designed by SAPPHIRE offering ease of use and control over your card. The cooler fitted on the 6850 Toxic cards managed to keep temps at around 43c during idle, and under 65c on load. Adding the second card saw idle and load temps increase to 48c and 67c respectively, well below worrying levels for this type of card. Another benefit of the 6850 is its power consumption which is fairly low for this class, meaning you can put off that planned power supply upgrade.

All in all the SAPPHIRE Toxic HD 6850 represents a true gamer's card. With great single card performance at a good price and impressive Crossfire scaling performance after adding the second card, the 6850 is good enough to give the GTX460 stiff competition in the mid-range gaming segment. If you're looking at upgrading your GPU, and the ridiculous prices of high-end cards put you off, be sure to consider the HD6850. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

Specifications

Core: 820 MHz 40 nm Chip
Processors: 960
Memory: 1024MB / 256-bit GDDR5
API: DirectX11/OpenGL 4.1

Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.1
Single card — 800
Crossfire — 1,573
— 1,298

3DMark Vantage
Single card — 15,247
Crossfire — 23,178
— 21,043

3DMark06
Single card — 19,191
Crossfire — 20,546
— 24,999

Baseline: NVIDIA GTX480

THE SCORE

> **Plus**
+ Great price/performance ratio
+ gGeat looking cards

> **Minus**
− None

> **Bottom Line**
The 6850 offers great performance for the price. Add Crossfire and you have an affordable setup that can max out settings on most games.

09 out of ten

RRP > R599   **SUPPLIER** > Corex   **WEB** > www.termaltakeusa.com

The lack of a second side mouse button may limit some gamers.

Thermaltake BLACK gaming mouse

HARDWARE

I'M NOT A HUGE fan of Thermaltake products, it must be said. I find that they're often lacking in build quality, overpriced, and just plain gaudy. However, the Thermaltake BLACK is different. While it does have a somewhat uninspiring name, the BLACK is actually a really good effort on Thermaltakes part. For one, it's gorgeous. No gaudy looks or odd colour schemes here, just a matte black mouse with subtle red lighting, something that would appeal to most gamers out there. Other than being the most comfortable mouse I have ever used (far eclipsing the competition from Razer and Logitech), the BLACK features a 4000dpi sensor, adjustable weight system, durable braided mouse cord, moulded plastic thumb grip and gold plated connectors. While these are all run of the mill features on high-end mice for the most part, that's not necessarily a bad thing as everything you need is there. The BLACK does miss out on one or two important features such as adjustable DPI sensitivity in the software, and provides only one side mouse button which might frustrate RTS and MMORPG users, but the general consensus among the FPS

Specifications

- Three mouse buttons
- Braided cable
- 4000dpi laser sensor
- Four DPI settings
- Five 4.5gm weights
- Gold-plated USB connector

players I introduced the mouse to was positive. The BLACK is also wired, which may be a deal-breaker for some, but personally I didn't find the cable to have an adverse effect while using the mouse. Furthermore, the braided cable is tough, I mean really tough, and the chance of snagging and breaking it is slim to none in most gaming scenarios. While these points detract from the BLACKs appeal, they are far from game breakers. As most will agree, comfort is the most important aspect of any gaming grade mouse, and the BLACK has that in boatloads. It is so comfortable in fact, that I will be retiring my old MX518 and buy a Thermaltake BLACK in coming months. If that isn't a testimony to an amazing product I don't know what is.   **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Weight system
+ Comfortable

›Minus
- Only one side button

›Bottom Line
A surprisingly great mouse, incredibly comfortable for long gaming sessions, with a good list of features to boot.

09 out of ten

The touch-sensitive quick-launch slider bar is a nice addition, but good old buttons haven't let us down yet

Audio enthusiasts should be pleased with the JBL-powered speaker system with Dolby Home Theatre V3 support

Lenovo IdeaPad Y560

FROM YOUR FIRST GLIMPSE of the Lenovo Y560, as you remove it from its box, the bold tribal design emblazoned on the cover makes it clear that this is a gaming laptop that takes itself seriously. Considering this point, you'd expect the Y560 to have the specs to match the big players' contenders – the likes of the Alienware M-series and MSI GT700s – and while some may feel that the GPU is a limiting factor in performance, it still manages to keep up with the rest of the pack, and throws in a few neat tricks while it's at it.

There are few gaming laptops that are really going to shine in terms of benchmarks. The Y560 managed to score an average FPS of 58.6 in the Resident Evil variable benchmark with all settings on high but AA (which was set to 2x). Unigine coughed up a meagre score of 290, and the benchmark was noticeably choppy throughout. It's worth mentioning that with tessellation disabled, the performance greatly improved, which leads us to conclude that most previous-generation games will run with little fuss, and only the newest titles will need to be knocked down to accommodate the comparatively low specs of the Radeon 5730.

Unfortunately, 3DMark Vantage refused to output a score due to the screen's resolution of 1366x768.

Ergonomics are an important consideration with any laptop, but those geared towards gamers are going to have to go a step further to ensure their users manage to frag (or be fragged) for extended periods of time. The keyboard is well laid-out, and features smooth, fairly quiet buttons that take a little getting used-to before you'll be typing or strafing at full speed. For those brave enough to bring a touchpad to battle, or for regular office work and browsing, you'll find that the touchpad is excellent: responsive, multi-touch enabled (pinch-to-zoom), and includes a differently-textured scrollbar. A small, almost concealed button sits between the buttons to enable or disable the pad. If you do plan on using the laptop for gaming, be sure that it's kept off your lap, as the powerful CPU ensures that the underside of this machine gets toasty. As much as the glossy surface makes the Y560 look like a sophisticated piece of technology, it loves fingerprints and will look like a smeary mess after a couple hours gaming.

Battery life isn't very often a concern with gaming notebooks, but for the record, the Y560 falls a bit short of similar products. Up to 90 minutes of battery-powered gaming is available. For office and Internet usage, you'll typically receive 2-3 hours of life from the 6-cell battery.

One last feature that should impress is the bundled software. It includes one-touch backup and recovery software called Cyberlink OneKey; YouCam, a nifty little webcam/recording application that gives users various options for tracking-based effects; Lenovo DirectShare, which is a simple but effective file synchronisation application; and a few other pieces of software including anti-virus, IM and connectivity. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Specifications

CPU: Intel Core i7 Q720M @ 1.6GHz
RAM: 4GB DDR3 1333MHz
GPU: ATI RADEON Mobility 5730 1GB
Display: 15.6" LED, 1366x768 resolution
Storage: 500GB 7200rpm
Optical drive: DVD-RW
Connectivity: Wi-Fi, Bluetooth 2.1, HDMI output

Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.1

290
1,024

■ **Baseline:** Evetech Core i5 Overclocked GTX470 Gaming PC
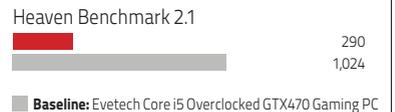
THE SCORE

>**Plus**
+ Good specifications
+ Bundled software
+ Keyboard and touchpad

>**Minus**
- Slightly weak GPU
- Unimpressive battery life
- No Blu-ray

>**Bottom Line**
An all-round good performer that can hold its own against the competition in all but a few areas.

07
out of ten

GIGABYTE GeForce GTX460-SOC

HARDWARE

WE'VE JUST ABOUT COVERED every possible GTX460 card available on the market by now and as you read this, NVIDIA is preparing a replacement for the 460 called the GTX560. It's still largely based on the same core as the GF104 that powers the GTX460 but dubbed the GF114 (with 386 cores). Anyway, if you want one of the fastest GTX460's on the planet you shouldn't need to look further than the GIGABYTE GTX460-SOC. This is part of the Super Overclock series from GIGABYTE (we reviewed the Radeon HD5870 SOC some time ago) and that means it differs from the reference model quite a bit.

For starters you get a binned GPU, a 7-phase power system, paired with their favoured NEC Proadlizer chip – it's rather well made for a mid-range $229 graphics card. However all of that isn't what makes this card fast – no that's the 815MHz core speed (up from 675MHz on reference units) and the 4GHz memory clock (up from 3.6GHz). With this level of performance and the new 262 drivers from NVIDIA, the GIGABYTE GTX460-SOC outguns the GTX470 in a number of tests, making it the best GTX460 we have tested to date.

If you are feeling adventurous, GIGABYTE has included an OC-Guru utility that will allow you to overclock the card even further. Our sample reached 900MHz before it produced rendering anomalies. Keep in mind we did not adjust the voltage so further tuning may be possible. The memory managed to reach 4.4GHz and with the overclocked speeds, it was better than the GTX470 and the reference Radeon 5870 in just about every test we could throw at it; truly impressive performance for a graphics card at this price point.

For those who want even more power

consider these in an SLI configuration and you'll have GTX480-crushing performance as shown by 3DMark Vantage where two SOC cards managed a score of P29,405 against the reference score of P21,043 on the GTX480. If you're in the market for a GTX460, and provided you can find the SOC at a much better price, we would suggest you take a look at the GIGABYTE GTX460-SOC. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.1
961
1,298

3DMark Vantage
18,105
21,043

3DMark06
23,480
24,999

Just Cause 2 (1920x1080)
51.24
82.40

Resident Evil 5 (1920x1080 4xAA)
104.8
133.3

▨ **Baseline:** NVIDIA GTX480

Specifications

Core: 815MHz GF104 (40nm)
Processors: 336
Render Outputs: 32
Memory: 1024MB GDDR5 4.0GHz (128GB/sec)
API: DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.X

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Incredible performance
+ Well made
+ Cool and quiet

›Minus
- None

›Bottom Line
One of the best GTX460s on the market, certainly the best locally.

08
out of ten

GG

By Tarryn van der Byl

Dumb and Dumberer Part II: Son of Dumb

THERE'S THIS FAMOUS CHINESE proverb: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

And there's this famous internet proverb: "Give a man a bunch of custom design tools, and he'll make a penis or a swastika. You don't even have to bother with instructions."

And so, deploying into *Call of Duty: Black Ops* multiplayer matchmaking for the first time, it was alongside an impression of something more or less exactly the same as blithe indifference that one of the first in-game emblems I saw was a penis. And much the same, several days later, when Xbox LIVE rule enforcement boss guy Stephen Toulouse announced that the 50 x 50 or so pixel square had been largely co-opted as a swastika display case. War, war never changes. And neither does humanity's apparently infinite capacity for terminal stupidity.

What does disappoint me, however, is Xbox LIVE's response: a permanent ban for anyone doing this. I mean, I get that it's obviously entirely against their terms of service and everything, but I suppose I'm disappointed by that particular clause itself. When did Xbox LIVE become the thought police?

It's not that I'm condoning fascism, mind you, but rather that we should let the planet's 12-year old fascists make themselves known to everybody. That way, I can more easily avoid them in future. Honesty,

as the aphorism goes, is the best policy, and Xbox LIVE – and everyone, everywhere else, for that matter - should exploit it for nothing less than the intellectual progress of humanity.

The inherent anonymity of the internet invests morons with the sort of extravagant scope of shamelessly candid expression that's otherwise entirely absent in reality. How many times, for example, have you been introduced to someone wearing a swastika-branded t-shirt at a dinner party? Unless *NAG* caters to a significantly substantial neo-Nazi subscriber demographic, I'm guessing never. Yet, it's the kind of thing you'd probably want to know about a person before wasting your time with them.

Some time ago, I received an Xbox LIVE friend request from a guy I kind of knew from a local gaming forum. A few months later, I noticed his status tag soliciting readers to orally accommodate a certain sub-section of his anatomy, presumably consequent to some sort of atavistic recognition of his superior button-pressing skills. Needless to say at this point of exposition, perhaps, but he was promptly and permanently excised from my acquaintance.

If there's a party at the gene pool, he's totally not invited. **NAG**

EXTRALIFE