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PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII MOBIL

RESIDENT EVIL 5

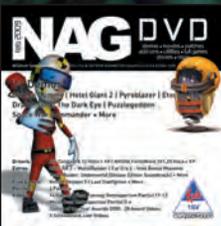
GOT ZOMBIES,
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TO DO LIST...

- + EXPERIENCE A PILE OF HOT REVIEWS including GTA IV (PC), Prince of Persia, LittleBigPlanet, Legendary, Tom Clancy's EndWar and much more as we mop up from December...
- + COWER IN FEAR AS YOU READ our preview on Silent Hill: Homecoming and Resident Evil 5
- + DOMINATE THE NAZI ZOMBIES using our unique survival guide!

If your DVD is missing, wait 24 hours (in case it comes home by itself) then call the police. Find a recent picture of the DVD and tell the cops what it was wearing and where you saw it last.



HARDWARE

- + THE FUTURE OF USB 3.0
- + THE N85: NOKIA'S MULTIMEDIA PHONE REVIEWED
- + MSI WIND U100



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of 2008
(remember to get them)



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90% - NAG



88% - NA



80% - NAG



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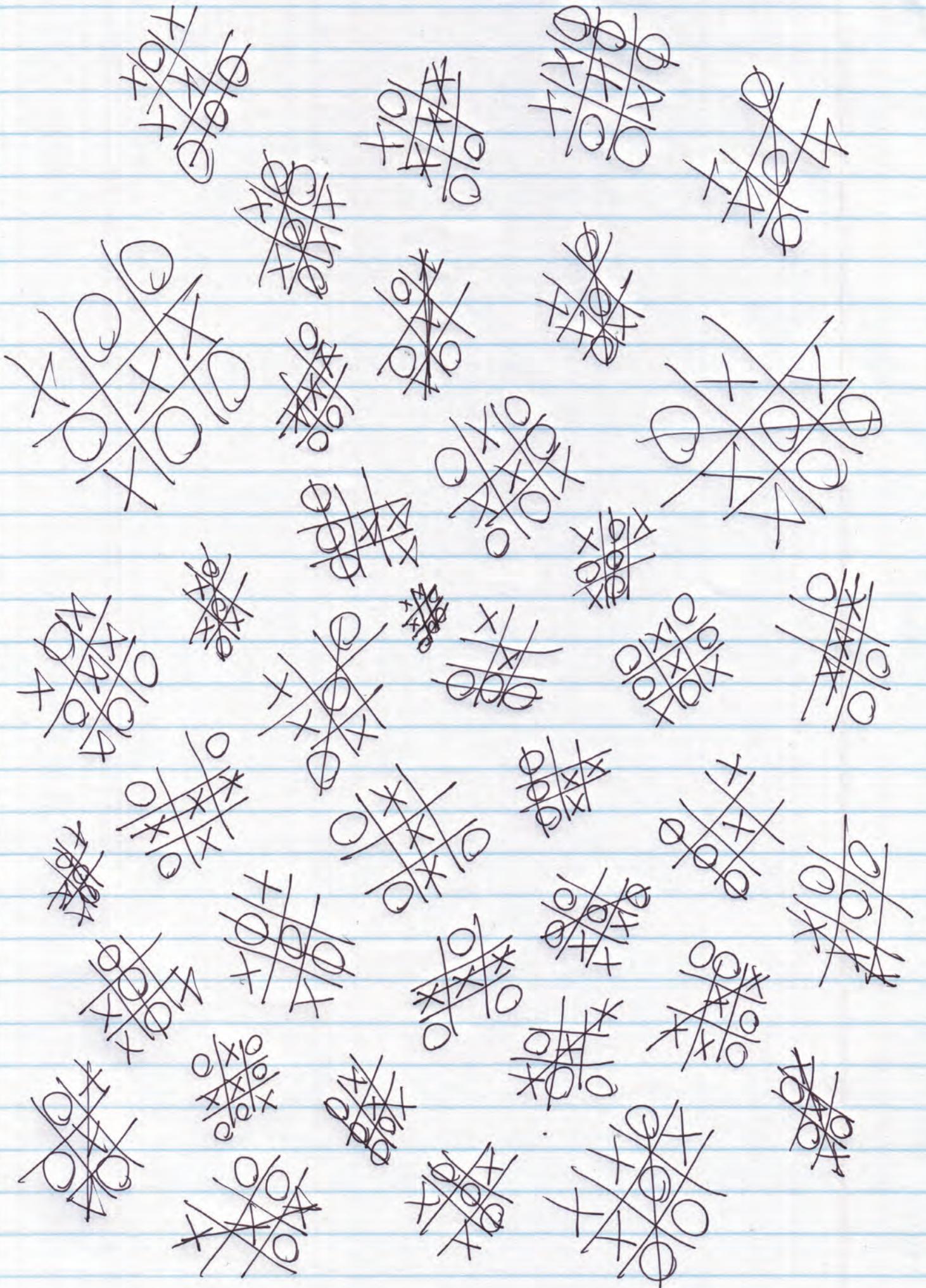
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ATI Catalyst Drivers 8.12 Vista | ATI Catalyst Drivers 8.12 XP | NVIDIA ForceWare 181.20 WHQL Vista | NVIDIA ForceWare 181.20 WHQL XP

EXTRAS

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FREE GAMES

La Mulana | Last Starfighter [Free Game] | Spelunky | Virtual Skipper 5 [Free Game]

PATCHES

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 v1.05 Patch | Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 v1.06 Patch | Race Driver GRID – v1.2 Patch | Sacred 2 v2.31 | Sacred 2 v2.34 | STALKER Clear Sky – v1.5.08 Patch [Retail]

VIDEOS

Black Mesa Trailer | Gears of War 2 Combustible Map Pack | Ghostbusters TVG Trailer | Guitar Hero Metallica Debut | Lord of the Rings: Conquest Battle Trailer | Prototype Reveal Trailer 2 | Rise of the Argonauts Majestic Trailer | SW The Old Republic Video Documentary | Tekken 6 Iron Fist Tournament | Tom Clancy's HAWX | Mirror's Edge DLC Time Trial Map Pack | Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena Debut | Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena Interview

EXTRA

NAG Field

GAMETRAILERS.COM GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2008

GOTY2008 Best Action Adventure Game | GOTY2008 Best Downloadable Game | GOTY2008 Best DS Game | GOTY2008 Best FPS | GOTY2008 Best Graphics | GOTY2008 Best Multiplayer Game | GOTY2008 Best Music & Rhythm Game | GOTY2008 Best New Franchise | GOTY2008 Best PC Game | GOTY2008 Best PS2 Game | GOTY2008 Best PS3 Game | GOTY2008 Best PSP Game | GOTY2008 Best Puzzle - Parlor Game | GOTY2008 Best Racing Game | GOTY2008 Best RPG | GOTY2008 Best Software Lineup | GOTY2008 Best Sports Game | GOTY2008 Best Story | GOTY2008 Best Strategy Game | GOTY2008 Best Third-Person Shooter | GOTY2008 Best Trailer | GOTY2008 Best Wii Game | GOTY2008 Best Xbox 360 Game | GOTY2008 Biggest News Story | GOTY2008 Biggest Surprise | GOTY2008 Game of the Year | GOTY2008 Most Disappointing Game | GOTY2008 Most Innovative Game

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THE ZOMBIE ISSUE...

YES I KNOW, ENOUGH with the damn zombies already. I promise not to use the word 'zombie' again for at least the next three issues. But in my defence, the zombies I'm talking about here aren't the kind you're probably thinking about... The zombies I'm talking about earn money, have conversations and drive cars. The zombies I'm talking about are the people who work at NAG.

You see, this issue was produced between the 5th and 16th of January. Everyone had just arrived back from a lengthy three-and-a-bit weeks of holiday, sun, fun and relaxation. The first week we had to deal with a lot of brain-dead moments, with almost everyone staring into space occasionally (blank expression on) and battling to get the work out on time. Week two was even worse, as most people figured out it represented the start of serious work again and there was nothing they could do to get out of it. It was a challenge to get this issue out I tell you, but the good news is that we're now all back at full operating temperature and looking forward to what appears to be the most interesting year for gaming in a long time.

For now, this somewhat slimmer February issue represents an extensive mopping up operation as we work our way through all the games that missed the tight January issue deadline. Next month we'll have a look at some of the more exciting titles coming early in 2009 and hopefully have a couple of new games in for review as well.

Just a reminder that April is our birthday issue, so make sure you get it. In the April issue, we'll be publishing the survey results (always interesting); it'll have a new look and some new ideas and hopefully a present for everyone - like always. We're also adding more ways for you to get extra NAG content... but not in the magazine and... Hang on - I can't talk about that right now... Anyway, it'll be awesome wrapped in cool with a dash of epic. Promise...

FAR CRY 2 MAP COMPETITION...

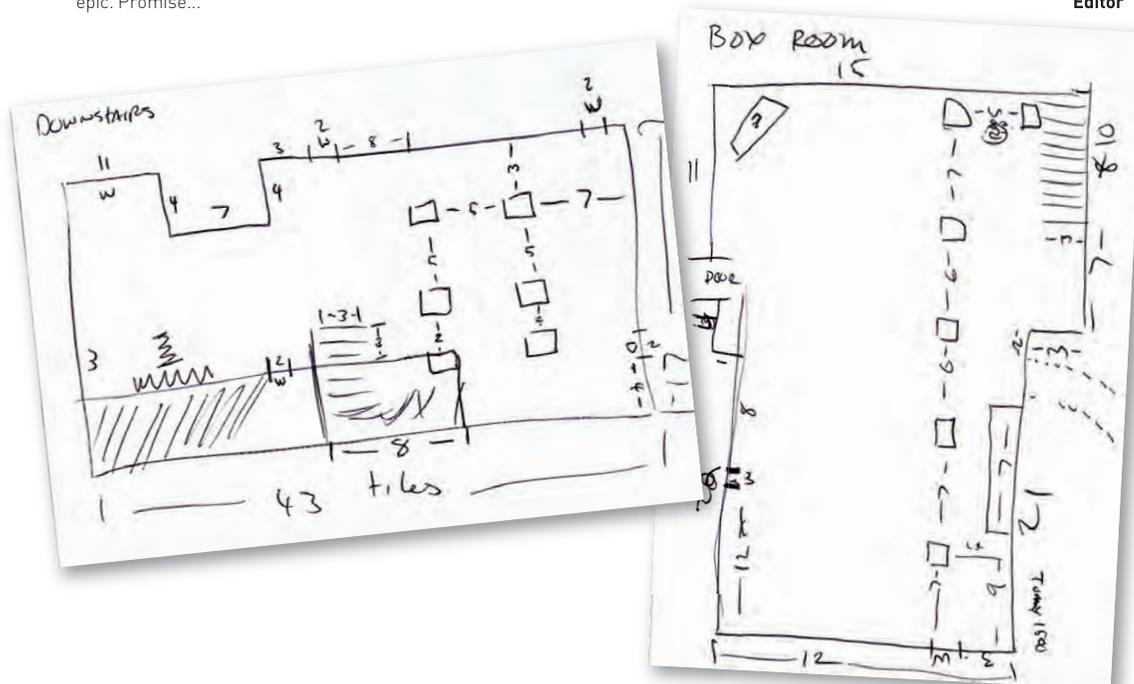
Firstly, thanks to everyone who sent in a map - your time and effort is always appreciated. Secondly, we have our winner. Congratulations to Wesley Botha for an awesomely well put-together, smart and detailed map - well done man, your hard work definitely paid off. There is a tipping of the hat to Tighe Barris for his exploding NAG logo barrels and also to Jaco du Preez and Simon Foord, who created two very nice maps (but they were just too big to be fun to play). We're going to put all the decent maps we received on the March DVD (they were too late for the February DVD).

LAST THING...

The Zombie Strategy Guide! I have to talk about this: we're obsessed and play it every day at the office. The actual guide is really a rough idea compared to the kind of detail we could have gone into, but once we started the mega-guide version, it stopped being about the fun and devolved into endless numbers and pointless information.

These four pages (68-71) also represent the biggest collaborative effort we ever have undertaken at NAG, with almost everyone involved - from taking screens, fighting zombies, getting artwork, creating the maps to complaining because the games got too loud. It got so bad last year that some of the non-gaming staff staged a stay away for a whole day. But guess what? That was the best day ever because we just shouted louder and ended up playing more games. It has to stop soon or the overall quality of NAG is going to take a serious dive (if this hasn't happened already). Enjoy it people!

Michael James
Editor



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Word to the wise: Zombies do NOT make good eating.

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ungry

It's always

ere!



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Tool-free
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Material	Aluminum + Steel mesh + SECC
Drive bays	5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (External) 3.5" x 6 (Internal)
Form factor	ATX / Micro ATX
I/O ports	USB x 2, 1394 x 1, HD+AC'97 x 1
Fans	12cm silent x 2

1020

Model no.	GZ-AX2CBS-SNS / SNG / SNB
Dimensions	185 x 410 x 480 mm (W x H x D)
Colors	Silver / Metallic gray / Black
Side panel	Intel CAG 1.1 fan duct
Material	Aluminum + SECC
Drive bays	5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (External) 3.5" x 5 (Internal)
Form factor	ATX / Micro ATX
I/O ports	USB x 2, 1394 x 1, HD+AC'97 x 1
Fans	12cm silent x 2

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Eric

SUBJECT: Casual gamer: Blessing or curse
"I WAS AIMLESSLY WANDERING THROUGH the shops one day looking for exciting or interesting games when a pair of people who were not 'hardcore' (I use this term lightly) gamers approached the games section of the store behind me and sadly the first thing that they approached was Transformers: The Game. I was very tempted to stop them maybe even deliver a few tactical slaps to bring them to their senses but decided they should learn the horrors of a license game first hand. My point is this, Transformers although a horrible game reached platinum status because casual gamers who have no idea what gaming is bought enough of them to make it credible. This is good for the gaming industry because it shows that there is growth in the industry and gamers are being taken seriously. It also however encourages developers to make substandard games based on movies or comics or some other entertainment medium while independent developers will struggle to survive because when the "casual" gamer goes to the stores he would rather buy a cheap rushed license sell-out instead of truly unique brilliant game and one day the brilliant will cease to exist because Joe Somebody wouldn't know a good game if it bit him in the face."

Well this is a mature way of looking at rubbish games. Hmm, I see the future... all games are made for morons, who become hardcore gamers (thereby ruining our current natural street credibility). Game companies stop making good games and all the real gamers find new hobbies. The morons get distracted by the next bright shiny object and the entire industry collapses. Not good. Seriously, it's fine for a game like Transformers to pay the bills, but all responsible development studios should also make sure they balance the field out evenly. Release one or two knock-off games and then one or two hardcore serious games. Activision / Blizzard does this, Electronic Arts is starting to do this, and Ubisoft also does it. Remember, the big shots at these companies are very smart and understand the dynamic that the hardcore market is very important for credibility while the casual market is very important for money. It's been said that up to ten people ask a hardcore gamer for advice when buying a game or gaming platform. Many big companies understand this relationship and therefore make sure us serious gamers are kept happy most of the time. Also, please remember that aimless wandering can get you into trouble. Ed



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

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

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Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za

Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



FROM: Jaco

SUBJECT: Bad PC port... Again?

"SO WE HERE AT SA as part of Europe, got Grand Theft Auto IV (PC) on the 3rd November, is it? A full 7 Months and some odd days later than the consoles, wow aren't we taking our time getting games around to all the platforms these days? I have always had the utmost respect for Rockstar because of their nothing short of spectacular GTA series. But today on 9 December 2008 I lost a lot of faith. I purchased the latest GTA instalment after waiting a gut-wrenching 7 months for it to "appear" on my platform. Now I didn't mind the waiting or the fact that it cost me R50 more than the average PC game [or have the prices gone up?]. Problems came right after the, what seemed to take forever installation, There I was trying the launch the game for the first time, only to get hit smack in the face with an error. At first I thought well, fine a quick trip to Google ought to sort it out. After I got that fixed the game attacked me with having to not only register on Rockstar Games Social Club, but also on Windows Live before I could save? What is this? Are we now forcing people to register in order to save? I was fine with the once off activation, but don't come messing with my right to save. Well After (Finally) registering on Live I had been told I had to Update Live, I wasn't very impressed, it being a 30mb download and me having a 384kbps line... After all this commotion, I got told that Live wasn't supported in my country. All of this I could handle, only because I was eager to play the game. Then it happened... I went into options;

clicked on controls [obviously wanting the control scheme I had with all the previous GTA titles] it stared right at me... No support for my Logitech Rumblepad 2... This was unacceptable; it would seem the only controller it supported was an Xbox 360 controller. This, coupled with the highest requirements I have seen since Crysis (even though this game runs fine on an Xbox 360) only told me one thing, another bad PC port. Seven months it took to make this port and this is the end result? I am sorry it can't go on like this, this is why PC gaming is suffering, not because we don't buy games, or because we pirate them, but because of bad ports. I think it's time developers started porting to the consoles, instead of from them. Great magazine, I can't wait to get mine every month keep up the good work."

Thanks for the mail. We did mention the fact that you were forced to 'connect' to 'save' in the review. It's a rubbish way of forcing people to join yet another stupid 'club', 'gang' or 'community'. As a game reviewer, I have about fifteen to twenty different logins and passwords to remember for various sites and propriety downloading software. Most of the game publishers are to blame. It appears that they're trying to make it as hard as possible for legitimate customers to enjoy their software. This fear of piracy is unwarranted because no matter how many hoops you force paying customers to jump through, the crackers and pirates find ways around the protection malarkey. Almost every gaming journalist knows this and probably all the developers. Sometimes big brother can be very shortsighted. Ed.

FROM: Daniel

SUBJECT: I thought you guys did game reviews?

"LET ME START OUT by saying, been a fan for a while, got all the issues, am a subscriber [hey, don't pull that card man, ;] Ed], love your work, etc, etc... Strangely enough, this is my first bit of correspondence to you during all these years, so you might be thinking, "okay, why the sudden need to write us?". [Yes, we've been waiting for your mail, Ed].

Two things really:

1. Your Dead Space 'Review'.

2. Your Sacred 2 'Review'.

Hmm, I've put the word review in inverted commas, what on earth could I mean? But I think you guys know where this is going. Now, I am all for this type of right-up, keeping things fresh and all that; discussing Dead Space in terms of a refreshing commentary between two friends and/or colleagues. But when you give said game a rating of 97% [one of the highest this year I believe], you have got to give your readership a bit more than just honest enthusiasm and a one line synopsis! What you did is truly just no cricket! ;)

Come-on guys, I was willing to give this game a miss and wait for it to show up in a bargain-bin somewhere, but you have truly de-railed that train of thought! I enjoy the survival horror genre and this games obvious inspiration [love Event Horizon, "Where we're going, we won't need eyes to see." Adore Alien & Aliens, especially. "What're we supposed to use, man? Harsh language?" Etc. Etc.], but we need a bit more of a detailed run-down. Review sites such as www.bit-tech.net, www.gametrailers.com and IGN rate the game well for sure, but there are some caveats, especially on the PC platform, where the game's controls are a bit 'sticky' apparently, can you confirm for us please? As a trusted advisor, you owe that much!

On to my next victim, um, err, concern... So when Alex came through to your throne-room Ed, and pitched this idea of a Holiday Destination brochure instead of a conventional review for Sacred 2, you were too busy playing Dead Space to care, right? Would go nicely with the unorthodox review of Dead Space, right? In between targeting the next Necromorph crotch area for dissection, and upgrading your suit, you retorted; "Sure, whatever, just leave quickly, your bright-eyed enthusiasm is spoiling the atmosphere! This ship is f*cked BTW!" This "review" [I did it again, damn inverted commas!] is truly disappointing! Mind you, it totally resembles a Holiday Brochure, so packed full of absolutely no useful information; it manages to give no opinion and to get the reader to do a double-take on the front cover of the magazine, just to make sure they didn't accidentally subscribe to The Getaway! Again, not cricket or any type of sport for that matter! So in closing, we want your opinions of these games and for you to qualify those opinions, you guys are professionals yes? That's a rhetorical question BTW! ;] For my third and final BTW, when are you guys contacting the winner/s of the RED HOT GAMING RIG competition? I am itching to buy a WHITE HOT Nehalem based rig, but will hold-off you I get your call."

Well, well, well. There's just no pleasing some people... Look, I'm standing by the Dead Space and Sacred 2 reviews because we were trying something new. Besides, they're printed already so there's no choice. Based on feedback [yours included], I'll decide if we should be more creative or not in the future. End of the day, what I'm after is really a mixture of the two. Innovation and tradition - making sure the reader gets an accurate review while presenting it in a new and interesting way. Fear not, we're really not creative enough to keep coming up with clever ideas, so tradition usually prevails - this is probably why it's called tradition. Thanks for the insights and I do take

NAG FAN ARTWORK

This is 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. In no order of importance:



Nicholas Franco: "This artwork was done in blender. Never let your NAG go without a fight!"

The reader who sends in the best NAG fan art each month will receive a copy of Guinness World Record Gamer's Edition 2008



Marco Cupido: "My friends pointed out today that the NAG magazine in the picture looks very 2D and parallel to the screen. I've attached the same picture only with a more 3D looking NAG, if you want, can you use this picture instead." [It's a good image but your dude from Crysis needs a shadow so he doesn't look like he's floating, Ed].

your mail seriously. Also, sorry, the gaming rig is gone and you didn't win it. Ed

FROM: Rory

SUBJECT: Sample

“WITH THE WAY THE gaming market has totally exploded in the last 2 or so years for the first time we as gamers can truly say that we are spoiled for choice in every sense of the word. One just has to look at the price drops when it comes to graphics cards, motherboards, and LCD screens to realise that the time for gaming is now. A few years ago 'gaming' was a word associated with geeks and 30 year old fat guys living in their mother's basements. In this day and age that very same word now is reserved for only the 'cool' kids, anybody from 13 to 30 and beyond is taking part in what could only be described as the best pastime ever! As far as the console war is concerned [yawn, snip, Ed]"

So, by your somewhat twisted and convoluted yardstick, gaming wasn't cool until everyone was doing it. Doesn't this mean that those of us who were gaming three to five to ten to 20 years ago were always cooler than everyone else, but just an undiscovered cool? Ed

FROM: Heinrich

SUBJECT: Some people are blind

“RECENTLY WHILE I WAS walking around a well know retailer that sells games, I overheard a nice lady talking to one of the staff members. She was probably in her mid 30s and she requested some games for her console. At first I was astonished, this lady is a gamer. But that was not the case - you see she didn't want a PS3, Xbox, Wii, PSP, etc. game. She wanted some really old video games that went into production when I was about 2 (I'm 15 now). The man looked at her with a confused face and told her that they don't sell such things. The lady couldn't understand why not. I explained to her that you would probably find older games on the Internet but certainly not here. I then told her she should think of buying a next generation [we're calling it current generation now, Ed] platform like the Xbox... again she didn't know what I was talking about. How in the world doesn't someone now about these consoles. I

mean you literally just have to look around you and see a pamphlet, add on the TV, newspaper, billboard... and see these things. I then realised that there are many more people in the world that don't know what I'm talking about. I'm not saying you have to be a fan of games and gaming devices but just take notice of these things... Anyway great job with the magazine... keep up the good work."

You sound like a nice, helpful and intelligent person, so I'll give you some insight. There are many morons and idiots around us. People who always wear hats while driving in their cars, people who can't read simple instructions and people who clog up queues buy paying for a packet of smokes with a credit card. In fact, for every normal person there are about 812 idiots and about 1,247 morons. This is why we have endless traffic jams, power cuts and sewerage in our rivers; this is why we're in an economic recession and this is why we have the Darwin awards, www.youtube.com and www.facebook.com. These people are also the same people who don't pay attention to what's going on around them, like giant billboards and front-page newspaper adverts. Laziness also goes hand-in-hand with stupidity [see above list of problems]. Now for the advice: learn to live with it. We need these morons to spend their money, get eaten first at the lion park and fumble around us, so we can make all the money, live a little longer and have something to laugh at. Besides, if the world were full of smart people there'd be less to go around for the clever people. Ed

FROM: Chris

SUBJECT: Extra paper

“I REALLY DON'T MEAN ANY harm, but I am just wondering what you guys are going to do with all the extra paper you left out of this month's NAG magazine? Hopefully something exciting, thanks for the great magazine though."

We're going to collect as much of it as possible and then build a very large paper boat. Then we're going to round-up all the wise-cracking clever dicks who write letter to NAG and send them to Australia via Japan [during the typhoon season. :] Ed. **NAG**

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SAVE ELECTRICITY, SAVE THE WORLD

AS A VIDEOGAME PLAYER, when you're not out on a murderous rampage or feeding your (now clinically-proven) addiction, you're also helping to destroy the planet, one carbon molecule at a time. The good people at the American Natural Resources Defense Council have put together a few rather alarming figures to help you choose which console to buy if you're eco-conscious or looking to save energy. Their biggest concern was gaming consoles that are simply left on all day, and have calculated that, in the US, over \$1 billion (that's just short of R10 billion at the current exchange rate) worth of electricity is wasted by leaving machines on while not in use.

In terms of power consumption, Sony's seven-core monster, the PlayStation 3, which consumes an average of 150W during game time, is the main culprit. The Xbox 360 isn't far behind with an average of 115W (although this may drop with the rumoured upcoming release of a new, smaller GPU and lower-rated PSU to match). The Nintendo Wii, on the other hand, consumes a meagre 16W of electricity. That means

that, according to current power costs in the States, a Wii will cost R300 to power annually (with the machine kept on at most times), the current revision of the Xbox 360 will cost R1,016 to power and the PS3, also using the most current revision, will cost R1,322 to keep gaming. Those figures plummet to R30, R108 and R118 respectively if they're turned off when not in use. The bottom line, folks, keep your consoles turned off when you're not using them.

Unfortunately, our researcher friends forgot to mention one tiny little detail about Nintendo: according to Greenpeace, in their latest quarterly *Greener Electronics Guide*, Nintendo scored zero out of 10, with Greenpeace claiming that the company "completely failed to show any environmental credentials". While Nintendo hasn't issued a formal response to the accusation, their Website does make an interesting point as to why they don't tend to bother: "Because old Nintendo products are still in high demand on the used market, we rarely receive requests for the recycling of older Nintendo products."

TITAN QUEST VETS FORM NEW STUDIO

The closure of Iron Lore, developer of the excellent action RPG *Titan Quest*, was a sad day. Thankfully the moping can end, as two enterprising blokes from the studio, lead designer Arthur Bruno and art director Eric Campanella, have picked up any lingering IP and opened up a new studio under the name of Crate Entertainment. With Iron Lore's dumped title *Black Legion*, which was heartily moving through the development phase when the studio closed, under their wing, Crate Entertainment is in search of a publisher to help revive this Xbox 360-based action RPG and bring back the sparkle that Iron Lore proved they had.



PS2 STILL ON TOP

We're not sure what sort of crazy voodoo Sony has been up to, but it seems that their time-defying PS2 still won't die. Nielsen, an analyst firm with a strong focus on the videogame market, has been doing some interesting research regarding what platforms American gamers are actually spending their time playing on. It turns out that the PS2 is right at the top of that list, accounting for 31.7% of gamers' precious hours. Trailing in a distant second and third place is the Xbox 360 with 16.2% and the Wii with 12.4%. Impressively, Nintendo's all-but-dead GameCube still manages to hold a rank (albeit right at the bottom) with a mere 4.6%.

OH, WHAT A JOYOUS OCCASION

Retro-gamers who like to dabble in the mystical art of emulation might find themselves struggling to get their new-fangled keyboards to perform exactly how they'd like. When playing classic games, especially on the venerable Atari 2600 platform, it's important for the discerning retro-gamer to be able to emulate every aspect of the console - input devices included. Now, thanks to the wonders of modern science and a surprising level of demand, Legacy Engineering (designers of the Atari Flashback system) is offering gamers the classic videogame joystick you all know and love with USB input. These gems are available at the rather reasonable price of \$15 each (R140 at the time of writing) with discounts for bulk orders. Including shipping, you could get yourself a pair for just over R400. Visit www.legacyengineer.com for more details.

Wiggle it just like you use to!

The classic joystick controller is back for the 21st Century!

USB - cable included - 10 internal contacts on the motherboard - classic design - great game control

LEGACY ENGINEERING

www.legacyengineer.com/atari.html



YET ANOTHER STUDY PROVES THE OBVIOUS

HANG ON TO YOUR hats. A new study by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has revealed that those who game show improvements in cognitive tests, reasoning and multi-tasking. Those who don't game, don't.

The study divided 40 adults randomly into two groups, with one group playing *Rise of Nations* about 23 hours a month and the other not. The findings suggest that videogames that keep players "on their toes"

might help older adults keep their brains sharp, report the researchers in the journal *Psychology and Aging*.

In other news, NAG would like to remind people that the age-old axiom of "use it or lose it" has been entirely forgotten by the research community of the world, and that gamers should take every opportunity to remind their seniors and peers to use that thing called a "brain" as much as possible, and not just for watching lolcat videos on the Internet.

"BOB" GOES BAT-GUANO INSANE

ROBERT "BOB" PELLONI is an interesting fellow who, according to his claims, has spent the last five years working on what he considers the "best game ever" (an old-school RPG for the DS). He uploaded some YouTube clips of it in action for the world to see and it certainly did have mild genius all over it. To turn his dream into full reality, Bob wants the official DS software development kit. However, Nintendo has denied his requests to purchase the development kit, citing various reasons related to his use of homebrew to develop the game, and that Bob must apply for an official Software Developer licence.

In response, Bob announced that he would lock himself in his room for 100 days until Nintendo gave in. One month into his solitary confinement, claiming he had a "headache likely due to a fractured psyche," Bob went off the deep end and started posting scathing rants directed at Nintendo as well as a heart-breaking farewell to his five-year project. "I really wanted to finish this game," he said. His Webcam

feed showed him trashing his room and collapsing in a corner.

Only a few days later, Bob was back on his Webcam once more, claiming that he would finish the game, if only to spite Nintendo. It's very difficult at this point to really decide if the entire thing is nothing more than a giant hoax, or if Bob really is the confused, psychotic crazy he's representing himself to be. In truth, we'd love to see "Bob's Game" completed and sold on Steam, or any other self-publishing service.

If you want to experience the madness of Pelloni first-hand, check out his Website <http://www.bobsgame.com/>.

"There is a good chance that this entire thing is one giant viral marketing campaign, heaven knows what for. If it is, hats off to the marketing company that orchestrated the entire thing. If it isn't, and we're really witnessing a mad genius go insane on the Internet trying to 'beat' the 'evil' Nintendo, it may actually be too frightening to contemplate fully." - Miktar



PUT SOUND IN ITS PLACE

The Razer Megalodon is a 7.1 surround sound gaming headset designed specifically to incorporate the Razer Maelstrom audio engine, making it the definitive headset for gamers today. Utilizing next generation HRTF technologies and a superb DSP with unheard of processing power. The Razer Megalodon is the most advanced gaming audio headset of its kinds.



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snippets

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW
IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!MASTER THE ART
OF PUSHUPFU

The idea that videogames can be good for you, recently bolstered by innovative titles such as *Wii Fit* and *Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training*, is finally gaining momentum. *PushupFu* for the iPhone is a unique game that takes advantage of the device's accelerometer to track gamers' movements while they perform pushups. It provides exercise plans, goals for the player to reach and even a rather sly online mode to make the most of video gamers' competitive natures. It should be available by the time you read this, and we're told to expect more Fu Apps for the mobile device. We'd gasp in amazement that this is actually happening if we weren't so busy flexing our newly-sculpted pecs in front of the mirror.



SHIVER THOSE TIMBERS

Aaarr, it really is a pirate's life. Well it was, in *Tropico 2* – the 2003 Caribbean-themed management title that gave players the chance to build their perfect island dictatorship, fill it with rich, drunk pirates and put the natives to work catering to their every desire. Now that Kalypso Media has bought the game's rights from Take-Two, however, the next title in the series is set to return to its pirate-free roots. *Tropico 3* is scheduled for release towards the middle of the year.

LARA CROFT GETTING
A MAKEOVER

DESPITE DECENT (1.5 MILLION) units sales of the new *Tomb Raider* title, *Underworld*, Eidos is convinced that the series and its leading lady, Lara Croft, are in need of a makeover. According to Eidos's Robert Brent, they aim to make the new Lara more "female friendly." "Look at how Batman changed successfully, from the rather sad character of the Michael Keaton era to the noir style of *The Dark Knight*," says Brent. Whether or not that means we should expect the lovely lass to break out her black lipstick remains to be seen, but we can't argue with the idea of a more 'with it' *Tomb Raider*.



WACKO BACA

Now that Jack Thompson is out of business, the road has been paved for all manner of political nut jobs to crawl out of the woodwork. Joe Baca, a US congressman and democratic representative, as put forward a proposal to institute health warnings like those found on cigarettes and alcohol on videogame boxes. If he gets his way, your next copy of *GTA* could contain the words "Warning: Excessive exposure to violent videogames and other violent media has been linked to aggressive behaviour" on its cover. Half blaming the parents and half the games themselves, Baca claims that "research continues to show a proven link between playing violent games and increased aggression in young people" and that parents and the game publishers have repeatedly failed to live up to their responsibility to protect the fragile youth from the scourge of gaming.

He continues, "I am proud to introduce the *Video Game Health Labelling Act of 2009*, and am hopeful my legislation can work to stop the growing influence of violent media on America's children and youth." We'd be proud to headshot him in a game of *Call of Duty*, to be honest.

THEY SAID IT...

"Movies, recorded music and TV - these are all stagnating or contracting entertainment sectors. Videogames are poised to eclipse all other forms of entertainment in the decade ahead."

Mike Griffith,
Activision | Blizzard
Executive

"Everyone understands getting a gun and fighting monsters, but when was the last time you played a game with a 50-foot prehensile tongue that you use to choke people?"

Chet Faliszek, producer on
Left 4 Dead

"As PS3 continues to evolve without the need for additional parts or expenses, expect the competition to continue peddling add-ons in an effort to keep up with the Joneses."

Sony Computer
Entertainment America's PR
department

"It's not a feature we get a ton of requests for. We really don't. When you ask people the list of things they want to see us spending time creating in Xbox, Blu-ray is way, way down on the list."

Robby Bach, head of
Microsoft Entertainment and
Devices

"While there is stuff in 2010 we can look forward to, off the top of my head I cannot think of anything [this year] that really excites me."

Peter Molyneux, head of
Lionhead Studios

SAY GOODBYE TO
TONY HAWK AS
YOU KNOW IT

Development studio Neversoft has decided that it's about time it gave up on the *Tony Hawk* brand to focus on *Guitar Hero* in the face of overwhelming competition from EA's *skate*. It's a pity, really: at least the first few *Tony Hawk* titles were rather good, but it's clear that the brand has become tired and stale. The series won't be completely dead, however: it's been rumoured that EA-breakaway developer Robomodo will be taking over.



BRÜTAL LEGEND

BRÜTAL PUBLISHER

IF YOU'RE ANYTHING LIKE us, you've likely been crying yourself to sleep every night in mourning of the loss of *Brütal Legend* from Activision | Blizzard's roster of games worth hanging onto. Well, dear whimpering masses, curl up by the fire and get ready for the most joyous news you can expect this side of *Diablo III*'s release. Mega publisher EA has swooped in and saved the day, putting Tim Schafer's (the brains behind classics *Grim Fandango* and *Monkey Island*) *Brütal Legend* officially back on the map. In a recent press release by developer Double Fine Productions, Schafer said, "This is

awesome news! The quality and creativity of the games EA Partners has been involved with make it a perfect home for our baby, *Brütal Legend*. Some people were starting to wonder if the saga of Eddie Riggs would ever see the light of day, but now I think it's clear that this game, like *Metal* itself, cannot be killed!" Eager gamers can expect to get their leather-clad paws on the title some time towards the end of the year, which should give Double Fine just enough time to make sure the title is polished to the sparkling perfection it so richly deserves after this long period of uncertainty.



RED ALERT 3: UPRISING

While most *Command & Conquer* titles were enhanced by their expansion packs roughly a year after the original title's release, *Red Alert 3: Uprising* will be seeing the light of day (or, at least, the light of RTS fans' computer screens) a mere five months after the release of the base title. What this might mean in terms of *Red Alert 3*'s success is unclear so far. Will this new title ride a wave of success, or is it an attempt at shoring up disappointing sales figures? Because we don't know EA's sales targets, we cannot say, but either way, this expansion must have been in development for some time now. Interestingly, much like *Kane's Wrath* for the Xbox 360, this PC exclusive will not require *Red Alert 3* to be installed (which seems to support the "disappointing sales" theory). While this is certainly welcome (particularly for those who gave *Red Alert 3* a miss), it may be a problem for South African gamers: the game will be distributed online, and being standalone means that it will be a larger download than it would have been had it been a traditional add-on pack. Given our bandwidth costs, this may well render the game effectively unaffordable to us. Unless, of course, EA decides to publish a boxed retail version...

GAMELOFT CHANGES COLOUR, KEEPS DIRECTION

Uno was (and to some people, still is) one of those truly great games of our time; the kind you could spend hours playing with friends and enemies alike. No longer will the joy of slamming your mate with a +4 be limited to the domain of those crude multi-coloured paper playing cards, however, as Gameloft has just procured the rights to develop this classic game for a variety of platforms. Destined for mobile, WiiWare, Nintendo's new DSiWare and the PlayStation Network (including PS3 and PSP), Gameloft's *Uno* marks the beginning of what the developers hope will be a long-lasting and fruitful partnership between them and the original licence-holders, Mattel. Whether this means we should expect something as exciting as a future *HotWheels* game or *Scrabble* has us grinning either way.



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high precision 3G infrared gaming mouse



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GREY'S ANATOMY VIDEOGAME COMING

While we're not really sure what to make of this, news that the popular medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* is coming to videogame land is bound to make someone happy. Ever-optimistic Ubisoft is the publisher behind this upcoming adventure/puzzle title that lets players take on the role of their favourite characters from the show and go about their business of balancing life-or-death situations with complex relationships in an all-new story filled with intrigue and tension. We, erm, can't wait.



SOLID MOBILE GAMING

Metal Gear Solid fans who don't own a PS3 might have been clutching their lucky rabbit's feet in the desperate hope that Konami's recent rumour-mongering was a hint at *MGS* coming to the Xbox 360. Unfortunately, that won't be the case. Rather, the next game in the line of successful tactical shooters will be appearing on Apple's tiny wonder device, the iPhone. Titled *Metal Gear Solid Touch*, the upcoming title will be set in the *MGS 4* universe and will consist of eight separate levels (although more are scheduled to be released later as DLC). Little other information is available, but screenshots are showing some impressive graphics and traditional tactic action for veterans to dig their hands into. The game will be released in Q2 2009.

OGRE BATTLE COMING FOR WIIWARE

If you've missed the fantastic *Ogre Battle*, you'll soon have a chance to redeem yourself. Coming to Nintendo's WiiWare channel, *Ogre Battle* is a classic SNES title that incorporated elements of an RPG with tactical strategy. The game's brilliant use of overland strategic control and innovative class-based RPG elements marked it as a true gem of classic gaming. While no release date has been confirmed, the ESRB has officially added it to its ratings list, so expect the game to hit WiiWare soon.



EVENMORE BURNOUT PARADISE DLC COMING OUR WAY

WHEN WILL CRITERION STOP releasing such fantastic add-ons for the ultra-popular *Burnout Paradise*? Perhaps never, which suits us fine. Coming up next on their list of already-impressive downloadable content is the *Legendary Cars* pack. This almighty collection will feature four (non-licensed) vehicles: the 88 Special, which is based on *Back to the Future*'s time-travelling DeLorean; the Manhattan Spirit, a *Ghostbusters*-inspired ride; the Carson Nighthawk (based on *KITT* from *Knight Rider*); and the *Dukes of Hazard* Cavalry Bootlegger. Sure, they don't have the original names, but they look like the real deal and each one will have a special something for those who dare press the L3 button [yes, the 88 Special can hover].



BUY THIS NOW, BECOME A BETTER PERSON

Gaming and home theatre chairs have steadily gained in popularity over the years. As gamers grow a little older and a little grumpier, perhaps we'd like a nice cushy place to rest our tired rumps. Perhaps we'd like to actually avoid lower back strain, not to mention the tedium of having to stretch our arms to reach that coffee mug. Behold - an almighty solution for your woes. The Emperor Workstation is an all-in-one throne of awesomeness, comprising three 19-inch LCDs, a fully-adjustable leather seat, 5.1 Bose surround sound speakers, natural light simulation and even an air-conditioning system. If that isn't convincing enough for you to break out the credit cards, then perhaps the fact that it can rotate a full 360 degrees to avoid any glare from that harsh African sun might raise your interest. Yes, it looks like a cross between a Stegosaurus and a Cylon raider; and yes, it's okay to think that's cool. What might damper your enthusiasm is the price, however, as the Emperor weighs in at a wicked \$40,000 (that's just over R400,000) excluding the likely ridiculous delivery charges. Still, a small price to pay for what is perhaps the best chair on Earth.



NO PSP2 IN THE WORKS

David Reeves, president of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, is adamant that Sony isn't working on a next-generation PSP. Even though Sony insists it doesn't "comment on rumour and speculation," when reports that a PSP successor was in the works surfaced, the company's European boss came out and denied the rumours.

"... There are currently no plans for a PSP2," Reeves told MCV. "I go to Tokyo quite a lot and no one has referred to it - I think they have their hands full at the moment. We've just launched the PSP-3000 so we are still focused on this generation of the platform."

Reeves did acknowledge that the PSP's "weakness" lay in its software, since developers seem more interested in taking their software to other platforms first. More PSP "games will come," he promised, "they just take a while longer."

"The PSP is as successful in numbers as PS2 - it tracks its numbers in a cumulative basis," he said. "Its weakness, however, is its software. And that's because developers, when it comes to placing their bets, have to choose PS3 and 360, then Wii, then DS, maybe even PS2 before PSP. It's the same at our internal studios, where the focus has been on PS3. They've also focused a lot on PS2 as well because we have to get the *SingStars* out for that format. So PSP games will come - they just take a while longer."



THE EVOLUTION OF: Need for Speed



The Need for Speed (1994)



Need for Speed II (1997)



Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit (1999)



Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed (2000)



Need for Speed: Underground (2003)



Need for Speed: Most Wanted (2005)



Need for Speed: Undercover (2008)



HAVING ALREADY ANNOUNCED PLANS to cut 8,000 jobs by 2010, Sony isn't stopping there and plans to close a number of its major divisions as well as some factories in Japan. According to a report, the company will restructure its business with fundamental changes to the manufacturing process as well as radical management changes. Sony Computer Entertainment Europe president David Reeves has gone on to say that Sony's priority in the short term is "to start making money." According to him, "This is a pledge that was made last March and is something that we are still very much on target to achieve. Once we have achieved this, I think it will be a very exciting time for PlayStation."

Sony Computer Entertainment America has revealed that the ageing PlayStation 2 has now sold over 50 million units in the United States, which confirms the Nielsen study that revealed the PlayStation 2 to be the most popular console in the country. Last year November, the PlayStation 2 sold 206,000 units. According to Sony's US marketing boss, John Koller, the system is appealing to consumers in the current economic climate. "The PS2 consumer is still actively purchasing games. Greatest hits, in a tough economic time like we're in now, which has a proven value message, at &19.99," he told Gamasutra.

According to Reuters, Sony is likely to announce an annual operating loss of around \$1.1 billion, the company's first loss in 14 years, due to weak sales and the impact of stronger yen. Sony had estimated a \$2.2 billion profit.

Analyst and general soothsayer Michael Pachter anticipates that Sony will cut the price of the PlayStation 3 to \$299 (roughly R2,999) in April this year. He also expects Microsoft to drop the price of the Xbox Pro to \$249 (roughly R2,490) before June. However, he expects the Wii to stay at \$249 until Nintendo sees demand slowing.

Nintendo has filed a patent application in the US for a system that's basically a big hint system for gamers who are stuck. Patented by Shigeru Miyamoto, the system details how a built-in hint system could take control of the player's character to show the right path through a specific game scene, or how to solve a puzzle.

Nintendo's boss man Satoru Iwata says there is still potential for the DS to grow. "Some say the market for the DS is saturated, but I disagree," said Iwata, speaking to the Daily Yomiuri. "In Japan, a country with a population of 127 million, we've sold 23 million DS units. The United States is inhabited by over 300 million people, and there are more than 490 million people in the European Union. Sales of the product could grow further in foreign countries considering their populations," he added. "I'd also like to focus on emerging markets such as Russia and India."

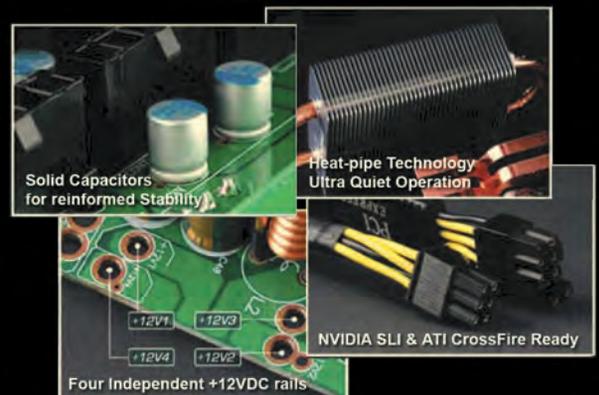
PlayStation Home, the online virtual-reality community application, has so far been downloaded by more than 3.4 million PS3 users, according to Sony. Over \$1 million in virtual goods have been sold via the service as well.

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**MC HAMMER AND
ACTIVISION TIME**

Do you remember MC Hammer? Catchy tunes, baggy pants and proclamations that there is certainly no feasible way you might under any circumstance make physical contact with "this"?

Well, he has a Twitter account (<http://www.twitter.com/mchammer>) and he's some kind of Twitter machine! Apparently, he's working on a secret project with Activision. Specifically, according to his Twitter, "I got one day to recover, then it's LA to Activision to get a glance of a top secret [sic] project."

After that, Hammer drops, "Activision was fantastic... action!" Nothing else is known about the project. Will it be a *Dance Dance Revolution* clone? Will it be a financial simulator that helps you mismanage your fortune until you can no longer afford your home? Who knows, but it sure is exciting!

E = MC

**UNDEAD REVIVAL**

For those PS3 owners who, for some reason, have been deprived of PSP ownership, you'll finally have a chance to own one of the coolest remakes available on the platform – *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. Coming to the PSN, this 2.5D remake has stood up to its 'impossible to play' legacy, but thankfully has multiple difficulty levels to make it at least moderately playable for those of us with a semblance of humanity.

**WATCHMEN GAME
STORYLINE MIGHT NOT SUCK**

In a recent interview, *Watchmen* artist Dave Gibbons has divulged that the upcoming *Watchmen* videogame, *The End is Nigh*, is completely on the ball when it comes to story. The game's story has been written by the book's editor, Len Wein, and is apparently something that's been on the cards for a while but it's taken this long for anything to happen.

Gibbons says "Alan and I have always resisted doing any sort of back-story to the *Watchmen* graphic novel. But the precedent is, at the time the original comics came out, Mayfair games did a role-playing game that Alan helped write bits of, and it's completely canon, so this game uses a lot of that less-well known material."



CLOSING TIME

Think the gaming industry is immune to the global economic crisis? Think again...

**R.I.P. ELECTRONIC
GAMING MONTHLY**

Publisher Ziff Davis has sold its 1UP division to UGO Entertainment. The sale includes 1UP.com, Mycheats.com, Gametab.com and GameVideos.com, as well as long-running print magazine, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*.

As part of the sale, the staff of *EGM* as well as some of 1UP Network's Web staff, including podcast and video producers, was laid off. The January 2009 issue of *EGM* was the final printed issue, as *EGM* had been shut down.

Electronic Gaming Monthly was started in 1989, and has been a mainstay of the gaming industry, practically a cornerstone of its media sector. During its 20-year run, *EGM* brought an awareness of consoles, something PC gaming fans had always taken for granted. The eccentric staff also brought a higher standard of critical opinions to software reviews by having a reviewer panel that clearly didn't always agree, and did not promote a party line for the magazine or publisher. *EGM* was also one of the first gaming magazines to include significant strategy and game-map sections, with complex breakdowns of games such as *Street Fighter II* and cunning mapping of action games like *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

"Along with GameFan and Nintendo Power, EGM was a staple media source for me growing up as a gamer, pre-Internet. Say what you will about the future of print publications in the face of the ever-advancing Internet, it's sad to see EGM go." - Miktar

**R.I.P. FACTOR 5**

Game developer Factor 5 has "officially" closed its doors, after initial reports of the company having credit issues and later laying off 57 employees. Now, according to IGN, the company has officially shut down. It is unclear if the staff has moved to other companies.

The company originally came to life in 1987 in Cologne, Germany, before moving to San Rafael, California, in 1994. Starting out developing games for the Commodore 64, Amiga and Atari ST, they had early success with their *Turrican* series. For most of its life, Factor 5 was an exclusive and prominent second-party developing partner with Nintendo, creating middleware for the Nintendo 64 and GameCube.

Factor 5 will be remembered for their exemplary visuals, and games such as *Lair*, *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* and *Turrican*.

R.I.P. FREE RADICAL (KINDA)

Staff arriving at Free Radical Design in Nottingham, England back in December were met with a note on the door that informed them to attend a meeting at a nearby motel at midday. Once there, they were told that the company had been placed into administration. According to sources, twenty former employees were offered different positions (possibly at Free Radical co-founder Steve Ellis's new venture, Pumpkin Beach) while others were laid off and redirected to representatives from Codemasters and Monumental Games. It is unclear if Free Radical will recover from their financial issues.

Adding insult to injury, it seems that the never-announced but highly desired title *Star Wars Battlefront III* was indeed in development at Free Radical. 3D artist Richard John Smith decided that his terminated employment meant he could add a number of renders boldly emblazoned with the *SWBIII* logo to his personal online portfolio. LucasArts was quick to pull them down, however, and rumours have now surfaced that the title has been taken over by Rebellion Software, developers of the PSP game *SWB: Rogue Squadron*.

Free Radical Design was founded by Rare employees worked on *GoldenEye 007* for the Nintendo 64, as well as *Perfect Dark*. They left Rare in 1998 to form Free Radical Design, which went on to create the critically-acclaimed *TimeSplitters* franchise and much later the not-so-critically-acclaimed *Haze*.



SONY BUMPS TOE, HAS A CRY

While the gaming world has been bravely fighting off the economic recession, it hasn't been without its casualties. Game development studios are closing all over, massive publishers like EA are cutting hundreds of jobs and now it's time for the behemoth known as Sony to share their despair with the world. What began as a year featuring a projected profit of 200 billion yen has turned out to be the biggest year of losses for the company ever. For the 2007-2008 period, the company will post losses of anywhere from 100 to 200 billion yen (\$1.1B to \$2B), marking their biggest loss ever and only the second time in their entire history they haven't made a profit. Sure, Sony is a huge organisation and they can soak up this kind of damage, but they can't afford to ignore their weakening electronics division, which, according to the report issued by the company, has been the major source of financial loss even though it has long been a steady source of profit.

ASPYR CUTS STAFF

During a recent interview with Kotaku, Texas-based developer Aspyr confirmed reports that it had cut staff. "The current economic environment has forced Aspyr to make some tough decisions."

Aspyr has made a name for itself by porting games from PC to Mac.

"The most difficult of which has been a reduction in staff and the loss of some very talented, valuable team members and friends. We have taken these steps in an effort to restructure to better meet the challenges ahead. No additional staff reductions are planned or expected, and operations will continue without interruption on all titles scheduled to ship in 2009 and beyond."

Apparently, as much as a third of the development staff has been laid off.

GAMING CHARTS

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LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 FIFA 09
- 2 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 3 Far Cry 2
- 4 Call of Duty: World at War
- 5 Pro Evolution Soccer 09

XBOX 360

- 1 Gears of War 2
- 2 Fable 2
- 3 FIFA 09
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 Far Cry 2

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009
- 4 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas - Platinum
- 5 Call of Duty: World at War

PC

- 1 Far Cry 2
- 2 Call of Duty: World at War
- 3 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 Fallout 3

PSP

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 4 God of War: Chains of Olympus
- 5 Midnight Club: LA Remix

Wii

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 Mario Kart & Wheel
- 3 Boogie Superstar
- 4 Sing It: Camp Rock + Mic
- 5 Super Smash Bros. Brawl

DS

- 1 More Brain Training from Dr. Kawashima
- 2 Super Mario Bros.
- 3 Pokémon Diamond
- 4 Mario Kart
- 5 High School Musical 3: Senior Year



November figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 Resistance 2
- 3 Call of Duty: World at War
- 4 FIFA 09
- 5 Far Cry 2

XBOX 360

- 1 Gears of War 2
- 2 Kung Fu Panda
- 3 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 4 FIFA 09
- 5 Battlefield: Bad Company

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 FIFA 09
- 2 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 2009
- 3 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 4 Ben 10: Protector of the Earth
- 5 Need for Speed: Carbon

PC

- 1 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 2 GTA IV
- 3 Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3
- 4 Far Cry 2
- 5 FIFA 09

PSP

- 1 FIFA 09
- 2 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 3 Medal of Honor: Heroes 2
- 4 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 5 Need for Speed: Underground Rivals

Wii

- 1 Wii Sports
- 2 Wii Fit with board
- 3 Wii Play
- 4 Mario Kart with wheel
- 5 Need for Speed: Undercover

DS

- 1 Brain Training
- 2 New Super Mario Bros.
- 3 Mario Kart
- 4 Nintendogs: Dalmations and Friends
- 5 Nintendogs: Chihuahua and Friends

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NVIDIA SHOWS US THE THIRD DIMENSION

One particular technology that computer engineers cannot seem to let go of is the concept of 3D goggles. Since the golden age of gaming, virtual reality headsets and all manner of neck-breaking headgear have been thrust upon gamers eager to soak up any chance of being 'inside the game'. Things are a little simpler (and lighter) these days, thankfully, as most wild ambitions have been reigned in and the possibilities draw nearer to the results. Now it's NVIDIA's turn to get their VR on, with these commercially available (yet rather pricey) goggles that feed off existing 3D displays without the need for any radical re-engineering of the game's code. Simply plug the \$200 set into any monitor or TV that supports a 120Hz refresh rate (not an easy thing to find), install NVIDIA's specially-designed software (meaning this is PC-only), and away you go.

Initial reviews of the product haven't been really mind blowing but definitely show some promise, with results varying according to the game played. Titles such as *Fallout 3*, with its wide expanses of open land and desolate surroundings, show that the goggles struggle to create depth when the distances in view differ greatly, but an up-close and personal game like *Left 4 Dead* provide for a powerful 3D illusion with its volumetric special effects and close-quarters combat.

FEBRUARY RELEASES

Subject to change
Release list and special offers provided by www.kalahari.net

Date	Game	Platforms
1	Ben 10: Alien Force	PSP, DS, Wii
1	Bomberman 2	DS
1	Castlevania: Judgement	Wii
1	Diabolik	Multi
1	Dragonology	DS, Wii
1	Eledees: The Adventures of Kai	DS
1	Heist	PS3, 360, PC
1	Jumpgate	PC
1	Killzone 2	PS3
1	Red Fracton: Guerilla	360, PC
1	Silent Hill: Homecoming	PS3, PC
1	Superbike: Racing Challenge	DS
1	The History Channel: Great Empire	DS
1	Wipeout Pulse	PS2
1	Wizardology	DS, Wii
6	Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box	PS3, 360, PC

Date	Game	Platforms
13	Godfather 2	PS3, 360, PC
20	Nerf N-Strike	Wii
20	The Sims 3	PC
20	The Sims 3 Collectors Edition	PC
TBA	Block Party	Wii
TBA	CSI New York	PC
TBA	Family Trainer: Outdoor Challenge (including mat)	Wii
TBA	Monkey Mischief	Wii
TBA	My Fitness Coach	Wii
TBA	Pirate: Hunt for Blackbeard's Booty	Wii
TBA	Pitfall: Big Adventure	Wii
TBA	Race Pro	360
TBA	Rapala Fishing Frenzy	PS3
TBA	Shrek Carnival Craze	DS, Wii, PS2
TBA	World Championship Sports	Wii



RELIC'S GENTLE APPROACH TO DRM

There are few things more irritating than buying a brand-new game, taking it home and having to fight with the DRM for hours just to get your new purchase activated. Digital Rights Management, the often infuriating software that prevents games from being pirated, forces legitimate players to jump through a hundred hoops before they can actually do anything with their game. At last, developers and their publishers are starting to wake up to the fact that it's better to reward legitimate players than punish them (often chasing them off down the naughty pirate route), and Relic is one of those developers. As part of *Dawn of War II*'s anti-piracy measures, the developers will give legal owners tons of free content.

According to John Ebbert, lead designer at Relic Entertainment, "We want to give out steady doses of free downloadable content because we believe in rewarding people who buy the game... We're going with the approach that Valve pioneered to just reward the people who actually bought the game with cool stuff. Free downloadable, regularly accessible stuff that enhances the game and then that's an incentive for the people who didn't buy the game to buy it."



CRIMINAL WONDERLAND

The suspiciously-named *CrimeCraft*, currently in development by Vogster Entertainment, will mark the entrance of the FPS into MMORPG territory. A persistent world next-gen shooter ('PWNS', we kid you not), *CrimeCraft* takes place in Sunrize City, an Unreal Engine 3-powered persistent world for gamers to gather in when they're not busy killing each other. Players will have to do all the regular MMO tasks - questing, gathering items, crafting and levelling up, but the action is held together by instanced battle grounds that function much like traditional FPS arenas.

This combination of MMO aspects with traditional FPS game types could make for a very interesting game if they can deal with the obvious latency issues. We're not sure if this game will ever hit our shores (or, if it does, will be successful with our internationally-unfriendly bandwidth), but it certainly looks interesting. Release date is pegged at 'sometime this year', but the information available is already quite extensive, so we're hoping it'll be sooner rather than later.

BURNOUT
Paradise
THE ULTIMATE BOX

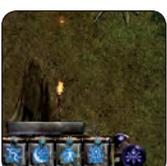
First time on PC-DVD!



Criterion games



THIS DAY IN GAMING: FEBRUARY

		17	25 (2005) <i>Master of Orion III</i> is released on PC - Space-based 4X titles are officially on the decline.
		18 (1984) <i>Wild Gunmen</i> blasts onto the NES. You know you practised your John Wayne pose for this game.	26
3	11 (1999) <i>Final Fantasy VIII</i> is released by Square. It spends its entire life under <i>FFVII</i> 's shadow.	19	27 (LAN) Frag - Battle of the Offices (Durban) www.langames.co.za
4 (2000) EA releases <i>The Sims</i> ; the gaming world could never have prepared for what hit it.	12 (1990) <i>Super Mario Bros. 3</i> is released on the NES. It goes on to sell over 17 million copies.	20 (LAN) The Nexus (Johannesburg) (LAN) Evolution LAN (Kempton Park) www.langames.co.za	28 (LAN) Mayhem Valentine's Event (Boksburg) www.langames.co.za
5	13	21 (LAN) Truth Retro LAN (Johannesburg) www.langames.co.za	29
6	14 (2003) The Gameboy Advance SP is released in Japan. Millions of Japanese gamers spend the day ignoring their significant others.	22	30
7	15		
8	16 (2000) <i>Nox</i> is released on PC. Millions of gamers secretly try to cast spells using complicated hand gestures.		

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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



FEBRUARY CONTEST NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:

"Dude... I laid some pipe."



JANUARY WINNER

"Single handedly the shotgun was proving troublesome to fire, luckily a helping hand was found."

Enayat Ally

RULES: [1] If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. [2] If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. [3] Obey all posted speed limits. [4] Never run with scissors. [5] There is no spoon. [6] Don't tell me what I can't do!

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Find the Badger! He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [February Badger]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a limited-edition Badger T-shirt from Gamer Gear. www.rudra.co.za



LAST MONTH'S WINNER Daniel Burnham-King, p96



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Miktar's Meanderings



by Miktar Dracon

Personal Gaming Highs and Lows - 2008 Hyper Edition

IN TERMS OF GAMING, the year of our Entertainment two thousand and eight was a very good year indeed. Retro legends returned, rhythm got its groove on, indie outfits became the season's fashion, *World of Warcraft* enthralled even more soccer moms, and *Wii Fit* became more popular than a gaseous vertebrate of astronomical heft.

"How goes the CONSOLE WARS, OMG, WTF, BBQ, like it matters? Well..."

The Xbox 360 (introduced on 22 November 2005) is now entering its fourth year. The Nintendo Wii (introduced on 19 November 2006) is now entering its third year. The Sony PlayStation 3 (introduced on 11 November 2006) is also entering its third year. In the United States alone, there are now more than 19.3 million Wii consoles, 14.8 million 360s and 7.02 million PS3s. Worldwide, there are over 42 million Wii consoles, 25.59 million 360s and 18.30 million PS3s. That's a lot of consoles! On average (per console), 360 gamers buy 6.6 games, Wii gamers buy 5.5 games (some you can play with your butt) and PS3 gamers buy 5.3 games.

Games! What about them? *Super Mario Galaxy* (which was released on 12 November 2007) has sold 7.56 million units. *Super Smash Bros.: Brawl* (released in March 2008) has sold 8.2 million units. *Mario Kart Wii* (released in April 2008) has sold 11.93 million units, each one with a little plastic steering wheel. Incidentally, *Mario Kart DS* (released on 14 November 2005) has sold 13.1 million units. *Wii Fit* (released in May 2008) has sold 12.51 million units and that's at a higher price tag since it comes with the butt-master peripheral. *LittleBigPlanet* (released on 27 October 2008) has sold 1.29 million units but only 90,000 units in Japan. *Gears of War 2* (released on 7 November 2008) has sold over three million units.

Newcomers on the scene: *Mirror's Edge* sold 330,000 units on the 360 and 240,000 units on the PS3, while *Dead Space* managed 660,000 units on the 360 and 470,000 units on the PS3. Bless their hearts.

But enough useless sales figures!

THE HIGHS

Do you want to know what rocked my world this year? Really? How odd. Oh well I, since you asked: *Audiosurf*, *Braid*, *BOOM BLOX*, *Burnout Paradise*, *Castle Crashers*, *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia*, *Chrono Trigger DS*, *Dead Space*, *Fable II*, *Fallout 3*, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles - My Life as a King*, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles - Ring of Fates*, *Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon*, *Galaga Legions*, *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2*, *Geometry Wars: Galaxies*, *Gears of War 2*, *God of War: Chains of Olympus*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *GRiD*, *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2*, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*, *The Last Guy*, *Left 4 Dead*, *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*, *LittleBigPlanet*, *LocoRoco 2*, *Mass Effect*, *Mega Man 9*, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*, *Midnight Club: Los Angeles & L.A. Remix*, *Mirror's Edge*, *Multiwinia: Survival of the Flattest*,

Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer, *Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword*, *Patapon*, *Penny Arcade Adventures*, *Portal*, *Professor Layton and the Curious Village*, *Pure*, *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*, *Rez HD*, *Rock Band 2*, *Sam & Max*, *Sins of a Solar Empire*, *Soul Calibur IV*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Super Smash Bros.: Brawl*, *Mario Kart Wii*, *Tales of Vesperia*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time*, *TrackMania Forever*, *Wario Land: Shake It!*, *Wipeout HD*, *Wipeout Pulse*, *Wild Arms: XF*, and *World of Goo*.

How hard did 2008 rock? This hard! Clearly the list doesn't represent every good title released in 2008, just what I personally played and heartily enjoyed. There's probably stuff I forgot, but that's how I am: a playa. What, you want me to pick my top three? That's cruel, I love all my babies equally. Okay, fine, but it's under protest. If I had to pick three:

- *LittleBigPlanet*: it's a platform game, has a brilliant campaign, four-player co-op and the best level-editor known to gamer-kind.
- *Braid*: games are supposed to surprise you.
- *Wipeout HD*: Anti. Gravity. Racing.

THE LOWS

What disappointed me? Thankfully, it's a short list, since I avoided most of the terrible games in 2008. The ones I couldn't avoid (since I had hoped they'd be good):

- *Alone in the Dark*: it's as if the game wants you to hate it. Buggy, difficult and likes to call you at 3am asking for money. Just not worth the emotional baggage.
- *Devil May Cry 4*: yeah, that one-trick pony has stopped being entertaining.
- *Fracture*: might have been a good game five years ago.
- *Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds*: when the Wii version is better than the PS3 version, you just know something's wrong.
- *Need for Speed: Undercover*: EA, stop sucking so hard, please. You were on the right track with *Most Wanted*, then screwed up with *ProStreet* and just kept going.
- *Ninja Gaiden II*: buggy and unfinished, which just makes it hurt so much more since it's a great game.
- *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood*: the 'Sonic Cycle' continues. BioWare must have spent ten minutes working on this.
- *Time Crisis 4*: should have been awesome, but came off kind of limp.

THE UNDECIDED

- *Prince of Persia*: I like it, I really do, but it's just so gosh-darn easy. It's pretty. It's boring. It's funny! It's cheesy. It's boring. Damn it!
- *Far Cry 2*: haven't played it yet.
- *Spore*: can you believe I haven't played it yet?
- *Tomb Raider: Underworld*: still haven't played it. But that's what 2009 is for!

Thanks for reading, children! **NAG**

How hard did 2008 rock? This hard! Clearly the list doesn't represent every good title released in 2008, just what I personally played and heartily enjoyed.



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Dammit



by Megan Hughes

The time has come

IT HAS COME TO my attention, of late, that my most loyal companion in my technology trials and tribulations was not weathering the recent storm of gaming well. Not even two years old and she was already in need of a hip replacement and several upgrades to keep up with the 'younglings'.

But they would not be forthcoming from me because the truth is that I am tired of trying to figure out why some days she gets stuck on the Windows start-up screen when viruses have already been ruled out. I am tired of attempting to fathom her motivation for occasionally completely shutting down without warning and for no apparent reason. Bringing her flowers and chocolates has not seemed to cool her temper, nor solve this problem.

I no longer have the energy to spend three days figuring out why a perfectly functional microphone refuses to work in game, or why an otherwise functional DVD reader cannot even 'see' the *Evil Genius* CDs and refuses to acknowledge its ability to LightScribe. I do not have the expertise, the patience or the endless funds to continually crack the clues and solve these puzzles. I give up. I am tired of fighting the never-ending war with this lump of metal, wires, plastic, and stuff that I love dearly. I am buying an Xbox. She is not going to be pleased.

More specifically, I plan to purchase the Xbox 360 Pro bundle (with secret ingredients of *Kung Fu Panda* and *LEGO Indiana Jones*) I have seen advertised at a few places near here. At the time of writing (but if rumours are to be believed, not so at time of going to print), this console is still the cheapest of the three consoles vying for pride of place in a home near you. That is the sole reason the Xbox has been chosen. I'm fickle that way.

The task of acquiring such a 'box' should be straightforward and simple enough. Locate funds; locate store; locate product; locate till; purchase product; leave store with product. Funnily enough, it wasn't.

In fact, the first thing that had to happen was a trip to the bank to move the necessary funds from an account with a very limiting limit to one without such constraints. And while this task did not take very long, nor was it at all complex, it was possibly the most difficult. One does grow quite attached to the idea of having available funds in one's account. Oh well.

The next step was to locate the store – a nice and simple task to complete considering they are generally exactly where you left them. But the Xbox was nowhere to be found. Clearly, I was not alone in my intentions as store after store were sold out completely. The series of events brought to mind the idea that the only thing worse than buyer's remorse is not being able to purchase it.

I came home exhausted and empty handed, but not defeated. Just because the 'real' shops couldn't supply me with an Xbox did not mean that the virtual stores would have the same problem. It wasn't long before an online search brought me to a page advertising the bundle at a better price than I had seen anywhere else. Maybe the world was on my side after all. Unfortunately, they were out of stock too and one could only pre-order the console and hope they didn't change the price before it arrived.

A few clicks and some credit card details later, and the confirmation of the pre-order was sitting happily in my inbox. The whole process was so painless that I decided to add *Guitar Hero III* to my basket as well. Now there was nothing left to do except play *Team Fortress 2* and wait for the goodies to arrive.

[Sound of clock ticking] **NAG**



I give up. I am tired of fighting the never-ending war with this lump of metal, wires, plastic, and stuff that I love dearly. I am buying an Xbox.



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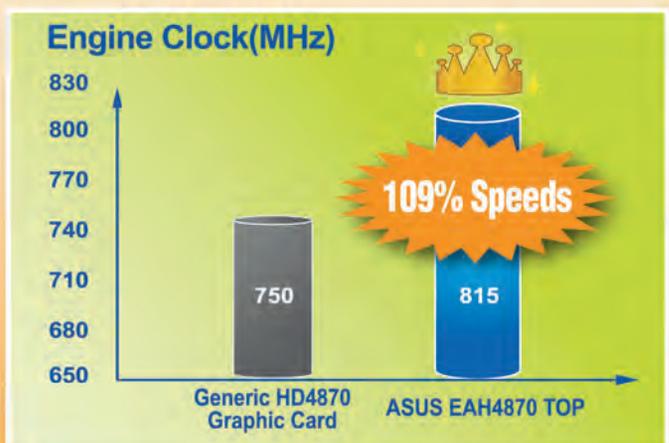
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level. This not just applies to gaming though, as the ASUS EAH4870 TOP will allow you to watch Blu-ray movies and play HD content with incredible visual fidelity and breakthrough efficiency - all without compromising performance.



▲ ASUS EAH4870 TOP Provides Enhanced GPU Performances

Ramjet



by Walt Pretorius

Self abuse

I AM OFTEN QUITE CRITICAL of the hardcore crowd out there. No, really, I am – I have the hate mail to prove it. However, at this time, I am thankful to them. Regular readers are probably going to take a quick look out of the window to see if any pigs are flying past, but it's the truth. At this moment, and for a little while to come, at least, I'll be thankful to the hardcore gaming crowd. Here's why.

There are a few guys around the world who specialise in analyzing stuff. Conveniently, they are called analysts. Two of these guys get a lot of respect from me, largely because they're occasionally right. They are Michael Pachter and Billy Pidgeon, both prominent US business analysts who take the videogame industry very seriously. And they have both said that, in the current economic conditions, it is the hardcore gamers that are keeping things afloat.

Now I am a major champion of casual gamers. I think casual gamers are the next evolution of the industry, and that the growth potential held by the industry stems directly from them. They are the future of video gaming. And I am not alone in this belief. Anyone with half a brain can see that the industry is driving towards a more casual, consumer-driven approach, and anyone with a bit more than half a brain can understand that this is a good thing. Larger demographic, higher earnings, larger install base, and so on and so forth. The problem with them, though, is that games have not yet become important enough to them. I say not yet because you and me both know that once the bug bites, it bites hard. These people haven't been bitten yet, and it will take various degrees of mastication to get them hooked. In other words, they will see games as a secondary consideration for purchase, often opting to buy less important stuff like food, clothes and toilet paper. Yes, their priorities are messed up, but they can't help it yet.

Gamers, or the hardcore ones, to be precise, will buy games. A hardcore gamer will buy games whether he has money or not, although in the later case they will probably just download what they want from less-than-legal sources, particularly here in South Africa.

Despite a nasty economic climate, the videogame industry grew in 2008. Not by a lot, but when you're talking billions, a few percentage points add up to a truckload of cash. This, according to Pachter and Pidgeon (sounds like a folk band, doesn't it) is because the hardcore gamers out there are shelling out their hard-earned cash to buy games, even games that don't carry the 'heavy weight' hardcore appeal that this particular demographic may be looking for. And despite the closure of developers and the laying off of staff that we saw in the last few months, the industry is strong because of them. The companies may be consolidating and rethinking finances, but they are still strong.

And so, I would like to thank the hardcore gamers out there. I would like to wish them well. I would like to see them lead full, fruitful and game-filled lives.

Right, now I feel violated. I am off for a steel wool shower... **NAG**

[Dear Ed: Perhaps we should consider going back to paying Ramjet by the word. It seems his columns are shrinking by about 50 words a month. AD]



And so, I would like to thank the hardcore gamers out there. I would like to wish them well. I would like to see them lead full, fruitful and game-filled lives.



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WHAT WE WANT



Why can't it still be December? The holidays were so nice. No work. No responsibility. Just time to play games... sniff... Of course if we spent all of our time just playing games, you wouldn't have your favourite gaming magazine to read anymore. And if you didn't have a magazine to buy, we wouldn't have jobs... and therefore we'd have no money to buy games... Life is hard.



Rank	Game
1	More sleep
2	More money
3	More time
4	More peace and quite
5	A magic 'do the magazine' button on my desk
6	skate 2
7	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
8	StarCraft 2
9	Diablo 3
10	Freelancer 2
11	Dead Space 2
12	Resident Evil 5
13	Transformers Combat (Soul Calibur 5 engine)
14	Decent track pack downloads for GHWT!
15	For my damn PC to work again! Dammit! MOM!
16	More roguelikes on DS
17	Puzzle Quest: Galactrix
18	Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2
19	More Nazi Zombie Maps
20	Rock Band 2
21	The Sims 3
22	Demigod
23	Def Leppard DLC for Rock Band
24	Mass Effect 2
25	PROTOTYPE
26	Iron Maiden DLC for Rock Band
27	Final Fantasy XIII
28	Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.
29	The Oddworld games ported to XBLA
30	Brütal Legend
31	Star Wars: Battlefront III
32	New content for Left 4 Dead



JOB ISLAND

Developer → Hudson | Publisher → Hudson | Genre → Simulation | Release Date → Q2/3 2009

YOU KNOW WHAT THE problem is with the world today. Kids. Kids don't work hard enough – there's no work ethic anymore. What we need is some sort of videogame to teach our youth that doing your daily grind is part of life. Kids are into videogames, right? Yeah, we need a game with, like, meteors or something. Meteors that are crashing towards the Earth and will destroy the planet if we don't get those kids working again; that makes sense, right?

Even if it doesn't, Hudson Entertainment thought it would be an excellent premise on which to base a game. Quite simply, *Job Island* requires players to perform no fewer than fifty different jobs to, as we understand it, save the world from impending doom courtesy of the aforementioned meteor. The job titles vary greatly and include chef, deep-sea explorer, stunt person, haunted house monster and even clown. If this sounds rather silly to you, you're not alone; but thankfully this series of mini-games will be powered by the cuties

graphics we've come to expect from Hudson (who is also responsible for the rather popular *Sports Island*) to ease the pain of the daily grind and get those lazy kids into this whole 'work thing'.

The gameplay is expected to be of the quirky variety, but will likely require you to have a fair bit of coordination to get anywhere close to good. Thankfully there's a training mode available, so you can 'wet your toes' without the fear of certain earthward death in the event of failure. Players can also square up against their friends (or enemies) in head-to-head mode in 15 of the jobs, and will have access to a full 30 jobs right off the bat in single-player mode, with the remaining 20 accessible once you've unlocked them in Career Mode.

If it manages to be a combination of *Rayman Raving Rabbids* and *Sports Island*, we're so there. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

ALL NAG CONSOLE PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS ARE VISUALISED USING THE SAMSUNG LA46M81B LCD TV

SPECS

- SIZE: 46" (117cm)
- RESOLUTION: Full HD 1080p (1,920 x 1,080)
- CONTRAST RATIO: 15,000:1 (dynamic)
- RESPONSE TIME: 8ms
- VIEWING ANGLE (H/V): 178/178
- POSTPROCESSOR: DNIe
- INPUTS: HDMI x 3, Composite x 2, Component x 2, S-video, VGA

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RESIDENT

EVIL

ARE YOU TRAPPED IN a remote African region; all alone, shivering from the blood loss-induced fever, in desperate need of someone with a large gun to dispatch the hordes of angry villagers at your front door? Are you concerned that these villagers are a little angrier than usual; that, perhaps, they've been infected with a parasitic virus that blocks out all consciousness and replaces their natural instincts with an unstoppable bloodlust and near super-human strength? If you've answered yes to any of the above, don't hesitate to call in the big guns – you need the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance.

Chris Redfield, the valiant hero from the first *Resident Evil*, is back in action after his departure from S.T.A.R.S. As a member of the B.S.A.A, it is his responsibility to investigate and stop any potential terrorists with biological weapons. A worldwide organisation, the B.S.A.A spreads its influence into West Africa, where top investigator and general kicker-of-asses Sheva Alomar performs her duties with extreme prejudice. Here, in the fictional region of Kijuju, a new kind of terror is breaking out – the locals are becoming increasingly more violent and nobody can explain why. It's time to send in reinforcements. The B.S.A.A needs someone with experience, someone who's seen this all before – someone like Chris Redfield.

As Chris, you'll team up with Sheva to uncover the truth behind this destructive force – here lies the origin of the Progenitor virus, this is where it all started. But why is this happening all of a sudden? How did Jill Valentine die two full years before the events in

the game take place and what is that scoundrel Wesker up to? There's more to this outbreak than a simple parasitic virus. The infected are almost sentient; they have a sense of their surroundings and can communicate with each other. They use weapons such as crossbows and scythes and move with resolve seen only once before with the Los Ganados of Spain.

What can Chris and Sheva do to combat this seemingly unstoppable force? Attack it with loads and loads of weapons, of course. Continuing the break in tradition found in *Resident Evil 4*, the gameplay in *RE5* is heavily action orientated. The long-lost fixed cameras aren't making a comeback, some may be sad to find out. *RE5* features a third-person camera that follows the player through the action just as its predecessor. Players hold a button to raise their characters' weapons and fire at the enemy just as before, but the scope offered by this free-form movement system allows players to explore and experience the world in a manner that just makes sense for this generation of gaming.

The main new feature in the game is the inclusion of two-player co-op gameplay. Designed as a co-op game from the ground up, *RE5* will always have Chris and Sheva working side by side. Even when there's just a single player behind the controls, the console AI will take over Sheva and lend you a hand. When one of you has a crazed zombie gnawing on your neck, your buddy can run in and bail you out. If you need access to a rooftop or out-of-range ledge, get your friend to give you a boost. In fact, this type of gameplay



Who's who in Kijuju

Chris Redfield: Originally from the first *Resident Evil* and a member of S.T.A.R.S. Alpha Team, Chris survived 'The Mansion Incident' with co-zombie-slayer Jill Valentine. They discovered that former teammate Captain Albert Wesker is a traitor. He later joined up with Jill again to put an end to the evil Umbrella Corporation in the Wii title *Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles*. Soon thereafter, the Corporation began its decline.



With Umbrella destroyed, groups of international terrorists vied for any leftover technology and it was soon evident that their influence was still spreading. Chris, together with his partner Jill, joined the B.S.A.A in an attempt to stop the Las Plagas virus and its derivatives from getting into the wrong hands.

Sheva Alomar: Sheva is a tough soldier with combat skills equalling Chris's and athletic ability unmatched by anyone in the organisation. When she was young, her parents were killed in a horrific factory accident; angry and alone, she joined a militant anti-government group. Because of her fiery potential, she was sent to the Americas. She settled down quickly and went on to graduate from university, after which she joined the B.S.A.A and was sent back to her home as a high-ranking West African operative. Sheva is part of the taskforce sent to handle the Kijuju situation when Chris arrives.



Jill Valentine: Chris's long-time partner and ass-kicker in her own right, Jill has seen more zombie action than most members of S.T.A.R.S. Little is known about her role in *Resident Evil 5*, but one thing is for sure: Chris has been spotted standing over a grave marked with Jill's date of death (two years prior to the start of *RE5*).



Albert Wesker: A general troublemaker and possibly the main protagonist in *RE5*. A young genius, Wesker joined the Umbrella Corporation at the age of only 17. In 1996, he supposedly left Umbrella and formed the S.T.A.R.S. unit in Raccoon City's Police Department (which he later betrayed in an attempt to use the S.T.A.R.S. members for his own twisted experiments). Since then, he's spent time in a number of evil organisations, plotting and scheming and seizing any opportunity to gain power through the destructive force of the T-Virus. He has recently been seen working with Excella Gionne and the TriCell Pharmaceutical Company, which may be responsible for the viral outbreak in Kijuju.



Excella Gionne: Heir of the founders of TriCell and a gifted intellectual, Excella is a genetic engineer and has a penchant for the Las Plagas virus—the derivative of the Progenitor virus that is plaguing the region of Kijuju. After she founded TriCell in West Africa, things took a turn for the worse. It's unknown what her ultimate plans are, but if her involvement with Wesker is anything to go by, there might be a hint of world domination on the cards.



y Raccoon

★★★



Monsters in my pocket

Navigating through the levels arm in arm with a buddy is one thing, but it's the zombies that really spice up the gameplay. The Majini (a Swahili word meaning 'evil spirit') are the infected masses that Chris and Sheva need to fight through, and they come in an assortment of terrifying flavours. The basic Majini (which I'll call zombies for the sake of tradition) are the thousands of infected natives of the Kijuju region. Farmers, townsmen, craftsmen and traders, these zombies aren't the usual slow-moving, leg-dragging variety you might be used to: they move with speed and determination and aren't afraid to grab hold of the nearest weapon to take you down. Pitchforks, pangas, axes and shovels are just some of the tools you can expect the zombies to wield in their hunt for fresh blood, with the occasional

projectile weapon (flying sickles are no laughing matter) if the need arises. The more innovative zombies will grab bigger and more dangerous weapons. There's a particularly nasty mini-boss who swings about a giant (and recently bloodied) executioner's axe and another who's managed to work out which is the cutting end of a chainsaw. Be prepared for anything. Of course, just killing human-type zombies gets a little stale after a while. To mix things up a bit, you can expect all manner of vicious, deformed beasts to keep you occupied. Infected dogs will be on the prowl. Massive, disgusting bat-like creatures swoop down onto unsuspecting travellers, and gooey masses with dozens of tentacles will lay down the pain any way they can.



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is common in *RE5*. Often Chris and Sheva will need to split up to conquer a particular puzzle. Sometimes it'll just be the traditional 'pull two levers at the same time', or sneaking Sheva through a gap in the wall to open a door from the inside. Other times it'll be a little more involved, requiring Chris to boost Sheva across a chasm where she deals with the enemy threat in close-quarters while he snipes any incoming zombies from across the way. Other handy features of two-player gameplay are the ability to heal each other with a healing spray concocted from the customary green herb, or swapping weapons and ammo when the need arises (be careful though, popping open the inventory screen won't pause the game). If you're in single-player mode, Sheva will even toss you a grenade or ammo clip when

she sees you're getting a little low. It's an interesting system and a massive departure from anything we've seen in a *Resident Evil* game before. It adds a sense of security that someone always covers your back and you cover theirs. It's not just a simple addition though; it truly marks the game's departure from its roots and ushers in the new *Gears of War*-inspired era of *Resident Evil* gameplay. All worries aside, the idea of playing a *Resident Evil* game with a friend through split-screen couch co-op or online play is an exciting one. If you're concerned that *RE5* has ditched its roots to become an all-out action game, don't panic. The developers have made sure that the game is still scary; you'll still leap out of your comfy couch at three in the morning when something hideous pops



Touch 'n go

When Chris and Sheva don't have their hands full juggling the needs of a thousand bloodthirsty zombies, there's plenty to see and do in the Kijiju environment. Deep mines, dusty shantytowns and arid plains are just a few places the duo can expect to visit. Instead of just running around the environments, however, there will be plenty for you to actually do, as interaction with the game world is a key element in the design of *RES*. Players will be able to move around in and interact with the environment in all three dimensions: climbing atop platforms or jumping down from them, desperately shoving bookshelves in front of doors

to keep the hordes at bay and leaping across rooftops and chasms. You'll also find all sorts of goodies stashed away in piles of fruit, surprisingly fragile barrels and cupboards. Ammo might be more plentiful in *RE5* than in previous games in the series, but that doesn't mean it'll be raining down from the skies. It's also important for players to be on the lookout for any environmental pieces they can use to their advantage in dealing with the enemy. Explosive barrels are conveniently placed and precariously balanced transformers are just begging for a bullet to loosen them for their plunge to the rampaging hordes beneath.



Pack your sunscreen

You may be surprised, after experiencing the dark recesses of previous *RE* titles, to find that this new game is set under the harsh African sun. The game world is bright; so bright that Chris's eyes sometimes take a few moments to adjust to the light if he's been indoors for a while. With the power of current-gen consoles, the developers can finally take advantage of 'real' lighting, and

are using it extremely effectively to create a stark contrast between light and dark areas - after all, with light comes shadow. Inside buildings or underground you'll have to deal with the traditional dark conditions you may be expecting from a *Resident Evil* game, but under the blazing sun, massive gunfights and swarms of Majini await anyone brave enough to step outside.



its head around the corner, and you'll spend the entire game blissfully lost in the intrigue and conspiracy. *Resident Evil 5* will cover and tie up many aspects of the series' storyline and is sure to keep anyone familiar with the series on the edge of their seats. While it is possible to play the game without having played any of the previous titles,

be aware that *RE5* continues directly from where *RE4* left off, approximately ten years after the horrors that took place in Spain. It'll be interesting to see how the market perceives this title: while it enforces the split in the series in terms of certain gameplay elements, its look and feel are undoubtedly still *Resident Evil*. **NAG**

KONAMI

SILENT HILL HOMECOMING



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Look & Listen
For the Fans



Right. Drop your pants and cough.

DEVELOPER DIARIES

Towards the end of 2007, Foundation 9 Entertainment gave its studio in Irvine, California a name. They dubbed it Double Helix. Aside from having a brand new, awesome moniker (it has something to do with DNA – ask your chiropractor), the studio is a mix of developers pulled from Shiny Entertainment (creators of titles such as *MDK* and *Messiah*) and The Collective (*Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). Double Helix Games is the studio behind *Homecoming*. You can visit their Website at www.doublehelixgames.com.



SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING

THE SILENT HILL FRANCHISE has always focused more on psychological terror rather than cheap scares. The series has always tried to get inside the player's head, slowly creating tension through masterful use of audio, gory (or sometimes just plain unnerving) visuals and emotionally engaging stories. The protagonists that starred in each of the titles were never experienced fighters, something that greatly enhanced the feeling of helplessness that players felt when journeying through the misty streets of Silent Hill or the rusted, decaying passageways of the Otherworld. All of the games' elements blended together to ensure that the player's nerves were never truly calmed, even in the most seemingly mundane situations, until eventually the scares were unleashed in a crescendo of terrifying sights and sounds that left players reaching for their tranquilisers before heading back into the virtual nightmare that is *Silent Hill*.

To be completely truthful, the preview code for *Silent Hill: Homecoming* that we

received only featured a tiny portion of the game, so there isn't really much to discuss regarding the game's story and mid/late-game mechanics. Here's a small slice of what we did get a chance to experience:

The game casts players as Alex Shepherd, a recently discharged soldier who has been having disturbing visions (many of which involve his younger brother Joshua) and is compelled to return to his hometown of Shepherd's Glen (a town not far from Silent Hill, which begs the question: how far does Silent Hill's influence reach?). What he finds isn't exactly to his liking. Upon first arriving in Shepherd's Glen (after hitching a ride with Travis Grady, the protagonist from the PSP title *Silent Hill: Origins*), Alex discovers a warped and twisted version of what he remembers. The town is mostly deserted, a strange mist (fans of the series will understand) blankets the area, and several of the town's roads have fallen into disarray or have sunk into the depths of the earth. He heads on home, only to find his mother catatonic and his father and

HANDS ON



TESTED

brother missing. It's around here that Alex encounters his first creature and has his first taste of combat against the twisted and macabre beasts that are a staple of the *Silent Hill* franchise. Here's where *Homecoming* starts to differ from the past titles. It may be Alex's first time battling enemies of the supernatural variety, but it's not his first time using a weapon. Whereas the previous titles placed gamers in control of a character who hadn't had any combat experience prior to their experiences in the town of Silent Hill, Alex was a soldier before heading back home and as such has at the very least had training with various types of weaponry. He can also dodge and perform counterattacks that make combat simpler this time around. What this could mean when South African gamers finally get a chance to give the game's final build a whirl is that combat may take a far more prominent role in the game. While this may appeal to action junkies, fans of the series may have a few complaints if this is in fact the case. Part of any *Silent Hill* title's appeal



WTF?!



WTF?!

SOMETHING DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT HERE...

The history of Silent Hill is as twisted as the creatures that *sometimes* inhabit it (I'll explain later). The town's exact location is unknown, but various clues have been given throughout the series. The town is surrounded on three sides by Toluca Lake, a lake that actually exists in California in the USA. Before people began settling in the area (back in the seventeenth century) that would eventually become known as the town of Silent Hill, the region was inhabited by a Native American tribe who used the land to perform sacred rituals. A short time after the first settlers founded the town, an epidemic broke out and people started to die (Brookhaven Hospital was built to treat those affected). The town's inhabitants eventually abandoned the town for nearly a century, but in the early nineteenth century, it was re-established as a penal colony. Following another epidemic, the settlers again fled the town in 1840, but in 1850, coal was discovered in Silent Hill and it became a boomtown (which is why the town is so self-sufficient). During the American Civil War, the town was used as a prisoner of war camp. Later, Silent Hill became a resort town. It was around this time that a group of religious zealots founded small doomsday cults based on their study of the beliefs of the Native American tribe that previously inhabited the area. Collectively known as "The Order," each cult worshipped a different sub-deity and practiced human sacrifice and necromancy in an effort to resurrect "The God" - an ancient deity who they believed would usher in an age of paradise by killing all humans. However, founding and maintaining a religious cult costs money, so The Order dealt a drug dubbed White Claudia, which was manufactured from a plant indigenous to the area. The drug trade was eventually snuffed due to an ongoing conflict between the cult and the local authorities (during which members of The Order murdered several police officers). The town exists in three different parallel forms: a normal populated town; a quiet, seemingly abandoned ghost town shrouded in thick fog; and a dark, horrific place known as the "Otherworld." Creatures only roam the streets in the latter two forms. Characters in the games will occasionally traverse between the two forms and sometimes the forms will collapse on each other, creating an incoherent space known simply as "Nowhere." The town's forms are made manifest from the fears of characters (though not necessarily the protagonists' fears). The manifestations may be shared between characters, or exclusive to only one of them. Throughout the franchise, it has been implied that Silent Hill has always had a supernatural presence, but its violent history has twisted this presence to be more evil in nature. It's almost as if the town is itself a character in the franchise and knowing the history of the place is important in order to understand why strange and frightening happenings are commonplace in this little town.

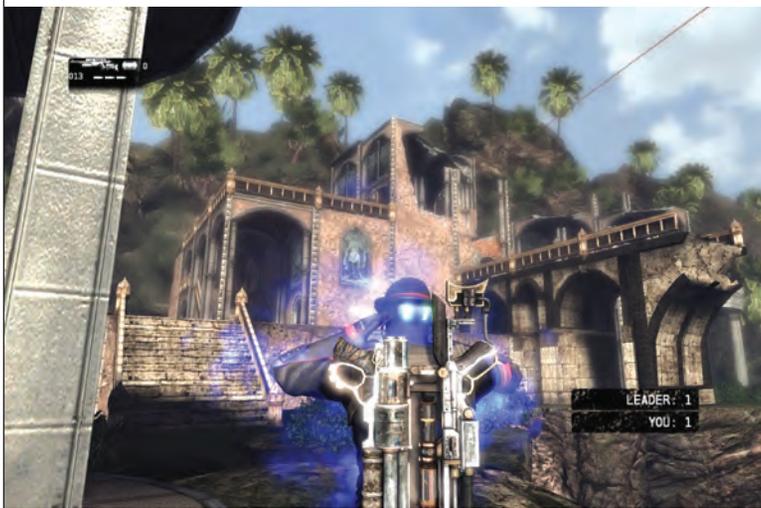
is the unease created when you know that any encounter with the creatures is going to be a struggle for survival. Shifting the focus in a more action-orientated direction could greatly decrease the tension and the feeling of helplessness that fans crave. Hopefully the developers realise this and have compensated for Alex's proficiency in combat by throwing in a few twists.

This title is the second game in the series that wasn't developed by series creators Team Silent (the other being the aforementioned *Silent Hill: Origins*, or *Silent Hill Zero* as it is known in Japan). From what little I've played, I can tell you that the game is looking decent graphically, the audio is as great as it has always been (composer Akira Yamaoka is back doing what he does best - scaring the pants off of hapless gamers...) and the story is looking intriguing. It'll be interesting to see how the shift from a Japanese developer to a Western one influences the series, if at all. **NAG**

Dane Remendes



Okay seriously, WTF?!



DAMNATION

WITH MANY PLAYERS IN the shooter market having the tendency to play it safe with endless sequels when they're not reshaping old ideas into new IPs, it's often the little guys looking to make their mark who decide to do something new. Small development studios, well-organised modding teams and student projects are a great source of inspiration for the genre. One only has to look at games such as *Counter-Strike [No! Please. Ed]* and *Portal* to realise that with plenty of hard work, small, informal projects can turn into something big enough to make it on their own in the retail space. *Damnation* is one such project. Originally developed as an *Unreal Tournament 2004* mod for Epic's *Make Something Unreal* competition, the *Damnation* team scooped up second place and a cool \$40,000 for their troubles. Soon after, with Codemasters to back them up, work continued on the game with the ultimate goal of releasing a full standalone package; eventually morphing into the full Unreal Engine 3-powered title it is today.

The game takes place during an alternate

version of the American Civil War. Steampunk is the order of the day, and there's more than a healthy dose of *BraveStarr* influence in this third-person adventure/shooter. Cowboy hats pulled down low, three-barrelled shotguns, pressure-propelled rocket launchers and steam-powered twin Gatling cannons are just some of the sights you can expect to find in the world of *Damnation*. Don't expect much time during firefights to marvel at the scenery though – the developers have promised us that they're setting players up for straightforward, action-focused combat with no luxurious cover system, elaborate squad controls or fancy HUD (or rather, any HUD at all) to distract your attention during battles.

Taking on the role of Rourke, a former soldier of the Nationalist Army, players will team up with all manner of strange characters under the flag of the Peacemakers. Hell-bent to save the world no matter how, the Peacemakers are out to put a stop to the conflict between the good people of *Damnation* and bring William Dean Prescott and his evil arms company, PSI,

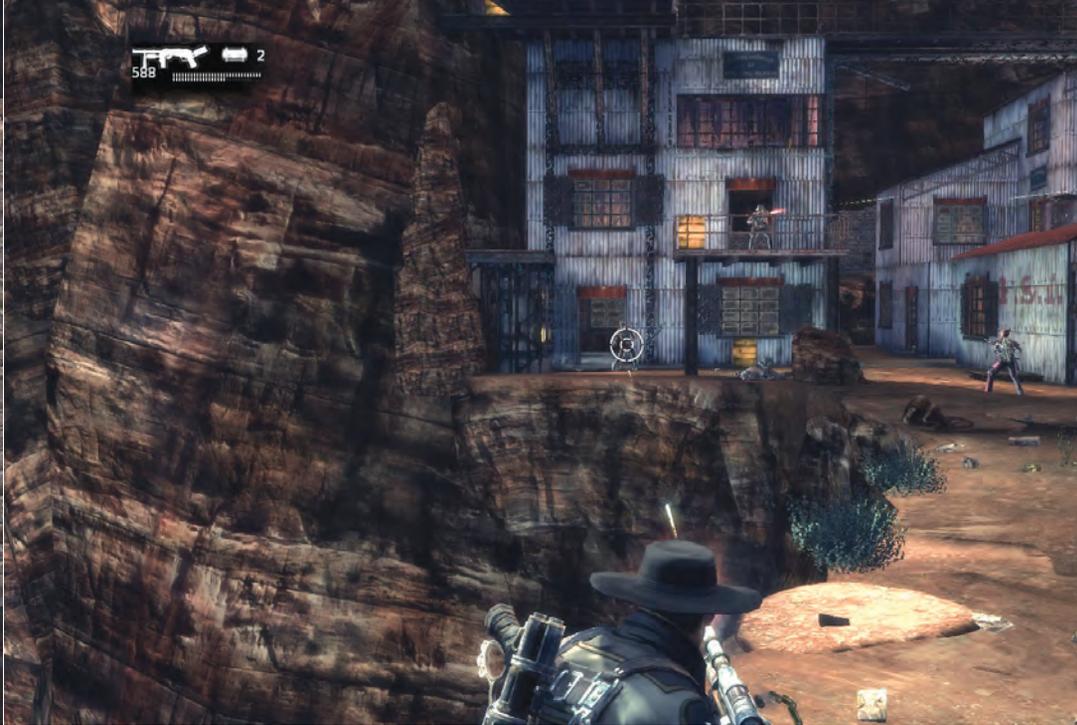
down. But Prescott has more than a few tricks up his sleeve to ensure that doesn't happen easily. Thankfully, Rourke is no stranger to trickery. His Spirit Vision allows him to see through walls and hiding places to seek out vengeful auras. This Native American-inspired X-ray vision can only be used while Rourke stands still, however, but the onslaught of weaponry he and his squad-mates bring to the battle should more than make up for that minor irritation.

Of course, what would a shooter be these days without a strong multiplayer component to back it up? Although *Damnation* was originally developed as a single-player mod, one can hardly argue against the charm of shooting at your mates from 100 feet below or manically gunning your way down a canyon-spread zip line in pursuit of a hapless camper. Thankfully, *Damnation* will offer players all of that, and more. Shipping with four modes and a host of maps for players to wage war on, *Damnation's* multiplayer gameplay is set to include all the ups and downs of its fast-paced single-player combat, including the wicked



Developer → Blue Omega | Publisher → Codemasters | Genre → Action shooter | Release Date → Q1 2009

PC
360
PS3
Wii
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



GOING UP

Slated as a "vertical shooter," *Damnation* makes use of some interesting level design and an almost puzzle-like approach to game progression. Each environment the player is thrust into is set to take anywhere up to three hours to complete, sometimes with the goal in sight, but just far out of reach. It's up to the player to run, jump and climb their way through the massive crumbling buildings, vast iron scaffolding, perilous cityscapes and clockwork-powered underground mining facilities, all while being pummelled by enemy fire from every direction. Players will make use of bridges, zip lines, ladders, wall-jumps, dive rolls and all manner of acrobatic apparatus and abilities to get around the game world. Oh, and there's a bike that can ride up walls. In an interview with Blue Omega, lead designer Jason Minkoff said that "fast and furious combat is what it's really about, albeit without the stop-start cover system used in *Gears of War*," insisting that this now-beloved battle system is simply not appropriate for this type of game. Instead of the strategic elements taking place in a localised, 'cover-to-cover' scope, players will be expected to get to terms with the lay of the land and all the intricate ways and means through the huge and complex battlegrounds if they plan on surviving 'til tea-time, as enemies are definitely not of the bog-standard 'stand-here-and-fire-infinite-ammo-until-you-die' variety. The bad guys will chase the player down, using all the environmental tools that they have at their disposal. Enemies will climb up walls, swing across chasms and flank the player and their sidekicks in a manner that gives them life-like characteristics and ultimately leads to a more engrossing combat experience.

Spirit Vision and intense vertical combat. Combat arenas will have players high-tailing up ladders with pistols ablaze, wall-jumping themselves into sneaky vantage points or slinking under walkways to avoid detection altogether, giving players of all styles their chance to shine in battle.

While *Damnation* certainly has all the right ingredients to be a success, and our initial impressions have our appetites keenly whetted, it's going to be tough for any new action shooter to stand its ground in this fierce market. It's tough to say whether it will hold a niche appeal for a while and drift under most people's radar (as is the fate of many games that try to stand out a little too much), or actually settle down amidst the might of *Gears of War*, *Halo* or *Resistance*. But if Blue Omega gets its polish out and makes sure this potential gem is sparkling by time it hits the shelves, it might just prove that innovative level design and a beautiful Steampunk setting is enough to make its mark on the map. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows





The DS version will be the same as the Xbox and PC game.



PUZZLE QUEST: GALACTRIX

LAST YEAR'S *PUZZLE QUEST: Challenge of the Warlords* was the little game that could: a genre-bending sleeper that wowed gamers with its addictive gameplay, charming characters and deep-as-you-want-to-go RPG elements. So it's not surprising that developer Infinite Interactive is hard at work on a sequel, but don't expect the same medieval setting and continuation of the original story.

Instead, Infinite Interactive is looking into the future... way into the future. *Puzzle Quest: Galactrix* is set 20,000 years from now when humans have explored the galaxy and encountered many alien races, some friendlier than others. One particularly nasty group wants to wipe out humanity, so naturally it's up to you to save the human race by kicking their butts in jewel-swapping puzzles.

At first glance, the new board in *Galactrix* looks like a *Hexic* clone with hexagonal jewels arranged in a circle. However, instead of rotating jewels like *Hexic*, you swap adjacent positions just like in *PQ: CotW* to clear a straight line of three jewels or more. The twist is that jewels no longer drop from the top down; instead, they move in the direction of your movement thanks to the zero gravity of space. So, if you move a piece towards the top left, more jewels will be pulled into the board from the bottom right. This innovative added dimension will require fresh new tactics and planning as you will now have to consider all angles instead of just one.

As before, you will accumulate various colours to power special attacks, but

with spaceships replacing the original's magical spells. There are about 30 ships in the game that you can collect and customise as you progress through the story. Each ship has various attributes in Computer (green), Energy (yellow), Shields (blue) and Weapons (red), so you will need to plan ahead to choose the ship best able to tackle the opponent at hand. Experience points are earned by clearing white Intel jewels, while attacks are made by lining up space mines.

It's not just about blowing the fudge out of bad guys, however. Each ship has different cargo capabilities, and delivering desirable cargo to needy aliens will put you in their good graces to earn much-needed cash and maybe a few allies. You will navigate the galaxy through your huge star map, which links several solar systems together. Jump gates allow you to travel to new sections of the galaxy, but you will need to complete a mini-game to pass through each gate.

One of the biggest attractions of the original was the ability to take your character online and smack your buddies in the 'jewels'. *Galactrix* will continue to support multiplayer battles across all platforms: online for XBLA and PC, and local for Nintendo DS.

Puzzle Quest: Galactrix is coming early next year and that's both good and bad news for fans of the original. Good news because puzzle-questing in space should be an absolute blast; bad news because that means more sleepless nights as you feed your gem-swapping addiction.

NAG
Chris Bistline





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ELEMENTAL: WAR OF MAGIC

ONCE UPON A TIME, the world of Elemental was laid in ruin as warring titans marched through the hills, unleashing celestial hubris and wild retribution upon one another. The land buckled beneath their feet, and storm-whipped seas licked shores red with the blood of innocents. Seeking to overwhelm their adversaries and claim ultimate supremacy, the titans marshalled all the 'magics' of the world, and imbued great crystals with the extraordinary potencies of earth, air, fire, water, and life. Finally, upon some cloudy, broken battlefield, the titans met in terrible cataclysm, destroying each other in jealous fury and bequeathing a gasping, barren land to those left behind. The elemental crystals were rent asunder in the apocalypse, their shattered remnants cast to the snow and winter winds.

Now, many decades later, the world has begun to mend, its wounds grown over with mosses and memories. The people rebuild their cities and till their fields, telling their great, great, granddaddies' tales of the war to wide-eyed children. The haunted forests shrug off their blackened mantles and green leaves, and white blossoms venture out upon their twisted branches, as falcons wheel about the sky, screeching stubborn defiance into the Sun. The 'magics' of old have vanished, sleeping in their glassy prisons, until men of strange power discover that the energies of the crystal shards may be channelled and released back into the world – to heal it, or devastate it once more.

As sovereign and fully accredited Crystal Channeller (you did a correspondence course), you must decide whether to harness the might of the crystal shards for good or for ill. Will you lead your nation against this gathering tide of darkness, or wreak suffering under a scorched banner of fear?

Elemental: War of Magic is a '4X', turn-based, fantasy strategy game from the old school of '4X', turn-based, fantasy strategy games. "There's stuff in *Civilization* that we've taken, there's stuff from *Master of Magic*, *Heroes of Might and Magic*, *Risk*, *Populous* - you name it," says Stardock CEO and *Elemental* lead designer, Brad Wardell. "I have no shame when it comes to borrowing and being inspired by other games." In fact, the game was first conceived as a potential *Master of Magic* inductee, whose franchise rights Stardock tried in vain to acquire from Atari. After negotiations collapsed, Stardock redrafted its design document with a fly page that read "ATARI SUX" and added in a whole bunch of stuff about user-created content just to be really innovative. The game will integrate modification support directly onto the main interface with the company's Impulse back-end service, allowing users to quickly share maps, items, units, and other custom content through a central server (similar to *Spore's*). While a release date is still a long, long way off, a public Beta is scheduled for June 2009. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

EXPLORE, EXPAND, EXPLOIT, EXTERMINATE

The '4X' designation was first used by Computer Gaming World hack, Alan Emrich, in his September 1993 preview of *Master of Orion*. Since then, the term has been adopted to describe games of similar design, including *Civilization*, *Master of Magic*, *Imperium Galactica*, and Stardock's very own *Sins of a Solar Empire*. Just in case you didn't know.



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WHAT WE'RE PLAYING



It's baaaaaaack! You didn't really think we'd just stop playing *Quake III* altogether, did you? After a month on the sidelines while we slaughtered Nazis and zombies, the King of Shooters returns to its rightful spot on the throne. Don't worry, we still like shooting zombies too.



Rank	Game
1	Quake III Arena
2	Call of Duty: World at War Nazi Zombies
3	Call of Duty: World at War Multiplayer
4	Fallout 3
5	Guitar Hero World Tour
6	GTA IV
7	007 Quantum of Solace
8	Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer
9	Battlefield Bad Company
10	Spider-Man: Web of Shadows
11	Rock Band 2
12	Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath
13	Guitar Hero III
14	Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter
15	Castle Crashers
16	Burnout Paradise
17	Age of Mythology
18	Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe
19	Scene It
20	Time Splitter
21	Persona 4
22	Halo 3
23	Racedriver: GRID
24	Gran Turismo: Prologue
25	Sudoku
26	Freelancer
27	Sacred 2
28	Lips
29	Tomb Raider Underworld
30	LocoRoco 2
31	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time
32	Dead Space
33	Need for Speed: Undercover
34	LittleBigPlanet (Metal Gear DLC)
35	Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Where to get it, what it costs and who you need.

PC SPEC: Our rating for the hardware requirements of games is space age. Check the box on the other page.

GAME NAME: This end up. The bit you tell your friends. The bit you remember – with your brain!

AWARDS: Our awards mean something: it means we agreed on a game, which is rare, trust us.



THINK INSIDE THE BOX

ICONS: It's just like a super-ultra mini-review: you just glance and learn!

BOTTOM LINE: Too many words, not enough pictures? Don't worry – we'll bottom-line it for ya.

PLATFORMS: Check it: new coloured-tabbed system showing which systems the game appears on and which one we reviewed it on.

LIKE, Y'KNOW, STUFF: We try to keep things in perspective using these two blocks.

SCORE: Sometimes it's a number (usually it is). Sometimes it's a picture, or something snarky. We like to mix things up a little.

WEB SCORES

PRINCE OF PERSIA [360]



NAG	88/100
METACRITIC	82/100
GAMERANKINGS	81/100

LITTLEBIGPLANET [PS3]



NAG	96/100
METACRITIC	95/100
GAMERANKINGS	94/100

GTA IV [PC]



NAG	90/100
METACRITIC	89/100
GAMERANKINGS	87/100



THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like.



ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.



BORING: Grab your blanket and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.



BUTTON MASHER: Using only the power of your manly thumb, you can beat this game, Button Masher.



CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



CO-OP: It is dangerous to go alone. Take this. A friend. Water with cooperation for Co-op Attack.



COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.



FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? It's Foreign!



MULTIPLAYER: The maximum number of people who can play per copy of the game.



ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

- Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual/quad-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**
- Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**
- Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**
- Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**
- You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

NAG AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE: If a game boasts this award, it means everyone in the office agrees that the game rocks. Serials.

MUST PLAY: The thing about the Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.



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TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR [360]



NAG	75/100
METACRITIC	77/100
GAMERANKINGS	79/100

BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS [360]



NAG	85/100
METACRITIC	79/100
GAMERANKINGS	80/100

MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE [PS3]



NAG	76/100
METACRITIC	75/100
GAMERANKINGS	78/100

THE REVIEWERS

Tonight, on the Secret Lives of Game Reviewers, we peek into the personal lives of your favourite "game-testers" to see what they like to get up to when they're not busy being awesome at "testing games". Be warned, what you're about to see may upset you.

MIKTAR DRACON

Reclusive and shy, Miktar manages to keep his personal life hidden from the prying eyes of the press and fanatic fans. We tried to sneak into his mansion, but were attacked by guard dragons. Nevertheless, we managed to get this exclusive photo.



WALT PRETORIUS

If you thought Walt was sexy in words, wait until you see him in the wild! To unwind and get back in touch with nature, Walt likes to traverse the open veldt and bask in the glorious southern sun, before being chased up a tree by lions.



DANE REMENDES

If you thought Walt was sexy in words, wait until you see him in the wild! To unwind and get back in touch with nature, Walt likes to traverse the open veldt and bask in the glorious southern sun, before being chased up a tree by lions.



TARRYN VAN DER BYL

Prowling the streets of London, Tarryn spends her free time going from pub to pub chatting up the locals. If you manage to get her in a good mood, she may even let you stroke her soft luscious fur, but most days she'll just punch you in the face.



CHRIS BISTLINE

The magnanimous Chris likes to work part time at a puppy orphanage when he's not busy testing games. He's become something of a local legend, due in part to his uncanny ability to somehow know exactly what it is a puppy is thinking.



MICHAEL JAMES

While it is rumoured that Michael likes to eat babies, nothing could be further from the truth. On weekends and holidays, the head reviewer of the team teaches kids about fire safety, following their dreams and proper grooming.



ADAM LIEBMAN

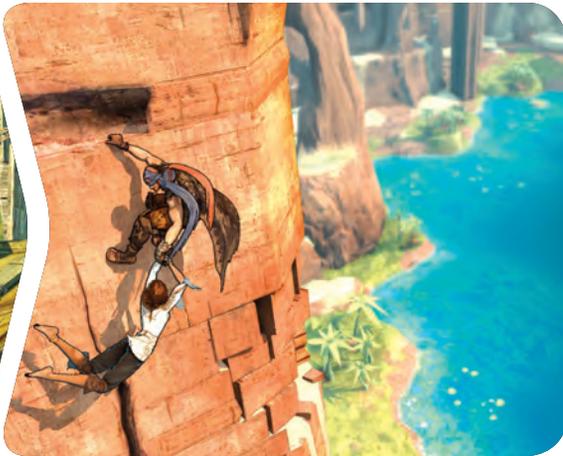
Even when not on the job, Adam just can't stop doing what he does best: giggling. From morning until night, Adam is a giggle machine. Come rain or shine, sleet or snow, you can always rely on Adam for a good giggle, especially if you know where to tickle.



GEOFF BURROWS

After a hard day's work, this reviewer is walked down to the park and let off his leash for hours of fun and frolicking. The pride and joy of his handler, Geoff is an especially good-natured breed of ball-balancers. Just look at him go!





RRP → R699 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Action Adventure | Age Rating → 12+

Look Listen
FOR THE FANS

PRINCE OF PERSIA

A FEW FRANCHISES OUT THERE are truly synonymous with and indicative of video gaming. Whether they are great games, or have just been around since Noah looked out the porthole and said it looked like it might be clearing up, these titles are cornerstones of video gaming. *Prince of Persia* is one of those.

However, that doesn't mean that things cannot change. In fact, smashing the familiar is probably a good thing, and it's exactly what Ubisoft Montreal did when they brought everyone's running, jumping, climbing hero to the current generation of consoles. This first Xbox 360 outing for the prince is a new and unique take on the franchise, and one that sets the future tone for this long-running series.

This is a most welcome change. Don't get me wrong, the previous titles were great fun, but by the time we got to *Warrior Within*, things were starting to feel a little similar. The largely linear play dynamic was only broken up by combat, and the unforgiving requirements of the game had many people throwing controllers aside in disgust... there are

only so many times you can stand missing that crucial handhold, after all.

This time around, the player is faced with a game that is challenging but forgiving, open and far more entertaining than ever before.

The first big change comes in the form of the character the player controls. The dark-haired, brooding Prince of the previous titles (who was, let's be honest, a major-league whiner) has been replaced by a witty, happy-go-lucky thief with some pretty amazing skills. The story begins with the thief looking for a lost donkey in a sandstorm. Instead of the beast, he finds another major change in the game. It comes in the form of a sexy new character, the magically powerful princess Erika. From that point on, Erika becomes the player's constant companion, an aide in battle, an angel of mercy and, more importantly, a way to explain all those weird and wonderful things that games have allowed us to do in the past, but never explained - a double jump, for example. There is no explanation for those... except for in this



game. A well-timed button press has Erika teleport over the player and fling him farther on. Okay, so why she doesn't just use her magic to levitate the guy over the long gaps is probably a good question, but we still need a bit of challenge.

When the challenge gets too much, Erika steps in again. If the player begins falling to his doom, Erika will rescue him, and deposit the prince on the nearest solid platform. If he goes down in combat, Erika will blast the enemy back and rescue him - the enemy will also regain some health. In other words, she explains reloading and checkpoints perfectly. She also ensures that the player's character cannot die. That doesn't mean that the game cannot be frustrating or challenging - there is even an achievement for being rescued less than 100 times - but the 'bite' is taken out of things to a large degree.

More challenge is stripped away when the player realises that the movement paths within the game are fairly obvious. To be fair, though, they have to be. The previous titles relied on linearity to make



them plain, but this game has moved away from restricting the player in that way, and so where the player can get to needs to be made plain. Moving through the vast levels is a simple procedure, thanks to controls that are simple and largely context sensitive. The player's character performs the most obvious move when the correct button is depressed and, for the most part, moving through levels at a good pace and with bucket-loads of style is a snap. Occasionally a camera angle may result in the character doing the wrong thing, but these events are rare and easily overcome by repositioning the camera.

The player is presented with a story that is quite predictable, but thoroughly enjoyable. Elika's people have been guarding the prison of Ahriman (the god of darkness and a thoroughly nasty chap) for centuries. However, due to events that would constitute a spoiler, he has been released, and the player's character volunteers to help Elika set things straight. His motivations are quite clear too... he is very obviously trying to

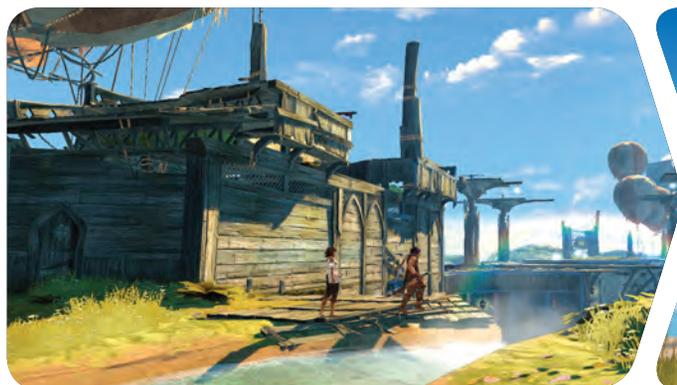
get into her pants. The interplay between the two characters is what gives the story its spark, with excellent voice acting delivering very solid (and often very funny) dialogue for the player to enjoy. This, along with the simple control scheme, would seem to indicate that Ubisoft Montreal has moved away from relying on excessive challenge, rather opting for an enjoyable, entertaining experience.

Much of the game's character comes from the levels. There are several restrictions, the player is free to go through them in almost any order. Once a boss is defeated in each level, Elika 'heals' the land, turning the blasted and depressing landscape into a flowering oasis. It is at this point that the free-form nature of the game becomes completely apparent, and it is in healed lands that the player will be spending the most of their game time. The reason: glowing orbs called light seeds. These magical items appear dotted around every healed land, and by collecting them, the player can activate new powers. These powers are

needed to unlock access to certain levels, and to augment the way the character moves through them at times. They are not powers belonging to the character, but rather a set of ancient abilities granted to magical plates scattered around the landscape. Buying the power reactivates the plates, and adds another little bit of plausibility to the game's setting.

The levels are huge, and a player just moving through them to defeat bosses, which requires little exploration, is doing the experience an injustice. Not only are they big, but they look good too. The graphics in the game are crisp and imaginative. The characters are presented in a cell-shaded style, which is a little jarring at first but soon feels completely right and appropriate to the game, the setting and the story.

There has been some complaining from hardcore gamers about this game, though, chiefly because it is a bit on the easy as pie side. The game can be played through with relative ease by experienced gamers, which many people have found disappointing. The



ease of movement and simple controls mean that spectacular movement sequences are easily achieved, taking the 'glory' of looking good away from elitists and putting it in the reach of everyone who attempts the title. But at its core, the game is very entertaining, which is exactly what games are supposed to be. Sure, it may have been 'simplified' a little, but the attractiveness of this title to a broader market is an essential evolution within the gaming industry. This is the kind of game that captures the hearts and minds of a wider audience than most 'hardcore' titles, and ultimately helps stimulating the industry by bringing new blood into the hobby.

Prince of Persia is a gratifying game, because it has struck a solid balance between story, play dynamic and challenge. The overall entertainment value of this title is massive, and I for one welcome this kind of title onto the shelves of game retailers around the

world. Ubisoft Montreal did a fantastic job by creating a world and characters that are engaging and interesting, and bringing the fun back to the series. The move to a more free-form dynamic is also laudable, bringing a new element of exploration into the series that has been sorely lacking before. The overall experience is mostly relaxed and laid back, something that is mirrored in the way that the game is presented. Like it or not, Ubisoft Montreal achieved what they set out to do with this title: it shows in every element of the game, from the characters right through to the setting.

If you are the type who likes games to be near impossible, don't play *Prince of Persia* – not because you may not enjoy it, but because you will probably end up unfairly criticising a game that doesn't deserve it, because of some elitist duty. You will enjoy it. It's almost impossible not to. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Any previous Prince of Persia title

As Good As

Having a princely time

For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A great reinvention of a true gaming classic.

88
OUT OF 100

FEAR ALMA AGAIN

F.E.A.R. 2

PROJECT ORIGIN™

available end february 2009



PLAYSTATION 3



Games for Windows LIVE



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1/1 Character
Organise

In mom's sewing box nobody can hear you scream



LITTLEBIGPLANET

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS when an indie developer is given an unlimited budget and told, "Make our platform a success." If there was ever a reason to buy a PlayStation 3, apart from *God of War 3*, a true *Wipeout* sequel (*Wipeout HD* is brilliant but still just a remix) or *Uncharted 2*, it's beyond a doubt *LittleBigPlanet*. That is, if your superego can handle the cute handcraft look, bouncy sack poppits and the fact that the game is a platform game. Remember those? You run, jump and don't kill any hookers whatsoever. No guns here, no open-world sandbox where all you do is drive over pedestrians. Nope, *LBP* is about as pure a platform game as you can get, but set in the most creative and involved universe since a plumber ate some mushrooms.

The main component of *LBP* is the campaign that takes place across a huge variety of levels. Up to four players can gallivant through interesting, exploding, shifting, changing, bouncing, rotating areas that push the boundaries on what

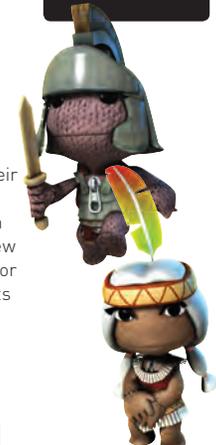
we've come to expect from the genre. It helps that the levels themselves are full-physics simulations, and as such, contain many unexpected surprises (or sometimes failures, as the thing you're supposed to drag from A to B to open a door gets stuck in the physical world).

Each level is very much an encapsulated experience with little repetition. Through clever use of design, there are puzzles, enemies to tackle, boss fights and often surprisingly creative contraptions to navigate. One could say that *LBP's* campaign is a continual example of what a little ingenuity in the level editor can achieve, since each level was created using the same tools the player has at their disposal.

Levels contain Gift Bubbles, which can have Objects, Stickers, Decorations or new Body Parts in them. The Body Parts are for customising your poppit, while the Objects you find are usually elements used in the level itself.

To break the level up into manageable

NAG
MUST PLAY



chunks, Gates act as spawn areas. Activating one makes it a checkpoint. Die and you pop out of the last gate you touched. Gates are also where friends appear if they decide to join in, and it's in the two- to four-player co-op where *LBP* really shines. There is peril however. Gates have a limited amount of charges: die too many times, and you have to restart a level from scratch. The more players you have, the faster the charges run out.

Certain levels have specially-marked co-op areas where you need two or four players to complete the 'puzzles' in such areas. It's nice that these co-op challenges aren't mandatory - you can enjoy *LBP* to its fullest by yourself. But to collect 100% of the Gifts in a level, you'll have to make some friends or invite some people into your game online. You can have any mix of offline/online players in your game.

Branching off the main storyline levels are challenges that unlock if you find the keys hidden inside the level they are attached to. Most challenges have multiple



GAME 2.0

The level editor of *LBP* is a work of art. It's easy to use, difficult to master, but you can put out a respectable level in minutes regardless.

Any object you create, you can take a photo of to turn it into a sticker, or capture it into an Object template so you can reuse it anywhere, or place it in a Gift Bubble to share with others.

Every type of switch, bolt, advanced material and concept has a tutorial complete with video and voice over that requires you to understand the fundamentals of how they work before you can progress (although you can just skip the tutorial, but they're very handy).

As you progress through the campaign, you get more and more objects to decorate or populate your level with. You can start with a blank level, or a template that has hills, moats, walls, castles or more. Basically, you can make an entirely new level just by slapping together components you've found in the campaign. Nice.



difficulties, unlocked if you complete the lower difficulties with sufficient score.

LittleBigPlanet has global-level high score tracking, so every level you play records your score, which you can compare to online high score charts. Self-published levels you create in the editor also track high scores, so the entire system just works.

If you're looking for something fresh to play, having completed the campaign or you want to take a break, there is a Cool Levels option on the main menu that serves up the more popular levels published online. You can download, play and then submit feedback on levels via a five-star ranking, pre-set tags and comment system. Custom levels may also contain Gift Bubbles if the author decided to place some in the level, which can reward players with complex Objects, Stickers or Decorations. It's a fine thing when a level author decides to share one of their more complex creations with other players.

The main campaign itself contains a lot of replay value in each stage. Collecting 100% of the Gifts in a stage can be tricky, especially since some Gifts are hidden behind Sticker Switches. These require you to find stickers in the level (or another level, so backtracking does happen after you've explored more of the campaign), which when placed on the Sticker Switch, will drop down some goodies.

Because the action in *LBP* takes place on three planes, Media Molecule has opted for an auto-plane shifting mechanic while you're running around. You can manually move in and out across the three depths, but the game will also attempt to automatically divine which plane you're supposed to be on if you're jumping from platform to platform. Sometimes that works beautifully, and sometimes it fails epically.

All said and done, *LittleBigPlanet* is a shining example of what a game can be. Beyond a doubt, this is a must-have for PlayStation 3 owners.

NAG
Miktar Dracon



Having Your Cake and Eating It

Kinda Like

Gloating Over Exclusives

For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Bold, creative, entertaining, silly and fun. Everything they promised.

96
OUT OF 100



BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS

IT'S BEEN A WHILE since Banjo and Kazooie went on their last grand adventure. With Gruntilda the witch (the series' antagonist) out of the way, all the downtime that the beloved bear and breggull have been faced with has resulted in far too many pizzas and soft drinks finding their way into the constantly inflating guts of the duo, leaving the pair dreadfully unfit as they lounge around their home. All that's about to change, however, as Gruntilda has managed to worm her way back into the lives of gamers everywhere, along with a lot of other familiar faces and a few new ones...

Nuts & Bolts is a difficult game to review. It's basically a platform romp, but at the same time, the game manages to be so much more. As mentioned before, Gruntilda is back, but she's not what's driving this new title. A new character, the Lord of Games (or L.O.G.), has shown up and wants to mix things up a bit. Rather than sending the game's protagonists on one of their usual platform-filled adventures, they're going to be doing something else: competing in a number of challenges and tournaments to try to best the witch. The prize is Spiral Mountain. Kazooie has been stripped of all

her abilities and L.O.G. instead presents her with a magical wrench that can be used for everything from smacking enemies around to building vehicles (more on those later), activating certain in-game objects and lifting heavy items scattered around the game world.

The protagonists are initially thrust into the game's central hub, Showdown Town. Many random NPCs as well as a few familiar characters from the series' past populate this town and you'll spend a lot of time running (and driving) your way around the streets of the town looking for secrets and musical notes (the currency of the game). It's here that players learn about building their own vehicles. You see, each challenge requires a vehicle in order to complete, whether the vehicle is one chosen by L.O.G. specifically for that challenge, or one built by the player. A character named Humba Wumba (fans of the series will recognise the name) also provides blueprints for her own pre-built vehicles, sometimes as a gift to the main characters, but you'll have to give up some musical notes if you desperately need a specific vehicle from her in a hurry. When a challenge is completed

within the time limit, players are awarded Jiggies, jigsaw pieces that can be deposited in the Jiggy Bank in Showdown Town. The challenges take place in numerous game worlds that are reached from portals in Showdown Town. The colourful game worlds (which come in a variety of flavours – from the farmlands of Nutty Acres to the technological world of Logbox 720) are further divided into smaller levels, each with a set number of challenges within them. Travelling to levels requires that you have a certain number of Jiggies stored in Showdown Town's Jiggy Bank. It's not easy to describe the basic mechanics of the game, but that's all you really need to know to discern what type of play dynamic *Nuts & Bolts* offers.

As mentioned, players can create their own vehicles and this is undoubtedly one of the main features of the game. Mumbo Jumbo's (another familiar character) workshop is where the magic happens, providing players with a mountain of parts from which to create some incredibly impressive contraptions. The parts aren't all readily available in the beginning of the game. You'll have to scavenge around





WHOA... SOMEBODY JUST BROKE OUR FOURTH WALL...

Nuts & Bolts tends to poke fun at gaming culture (and itself) every opportunity it gets. As mentioned in the review, Banjo and Kazooie have quite literally gotten a little bulgy around the midriff in the years since their last adventure, because without a videogame to star in, what else is there for videogame characters to do other than binge on fast food while they wait for their next appearance. Other quips involve gamers and how they're not interested in games without copious amounts of blood and big guns anymore. There's even an all-girl gaming clan in the Logbox 720 game world called the Hag Trolls...



Showdown Town to find crates containing parts and then use the magical wrench to carry them back to Mumbo's Motors. Parts are also occasionally awarded when enough Jiggies are deposited into the Jiggy Bank. Parts range from engines, ammunition canisters (for all those weapons you've placed all over your vehicle), fuel pods, wings, propellers and bits that will aid in the construction of an outrageous chassis. The vehicles that you can build are limited only by the availability of parts and your imagination. Logistics also plays a major role in vehicle construction, because placing too much weight in the front or rear of your nimble new vehicle could throw off the vehicle's balance and cause all kinds of mayhem. Thankfully, you can test your helicopters, planes and boats on the test track over at Mumbo's to ensure that they're roadworthy. The vehicles you build can be used in challenges that allow you to use a vehicle of your choice, or you can simply drive them around the game worlds in search of hidden musical notes and other secrets. However, when you're in Showdown Town, you're restricted to driving a rickety trolley with an

engine strapped to it.

Right... down to the bit where I'm supposed to chat about what makes the game either lame or great. The truth is, there isn't much wrong with *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*. If the type of play dynamic that the game offers is to your liking, then you're guaranteed to have a lot of fun with the title. The game is visually incredible: the gorgeous and colourful graphics are truly a beauty to behold. The audio isn't particularly impressive and there's no voice acting to speak of, since all the speech in the game is relayed textually. The complexity of the vehicle creator is likely to scare some folk away and others simply won't like the pace of the game, since there isn't much platform action - challenges are often put on hold while you try to create the perfect vehicle for the job. Fans of the series may be a bit disappointed by the shift in focus that the series has undergone. All I can really say is that if the brief description I've given above sounds like something you'd be interested in, by all means, take the game for a spin. You may be pleasantly surprised. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

You'd think

Better Than



Building LEGO vehicles

Kinda Like

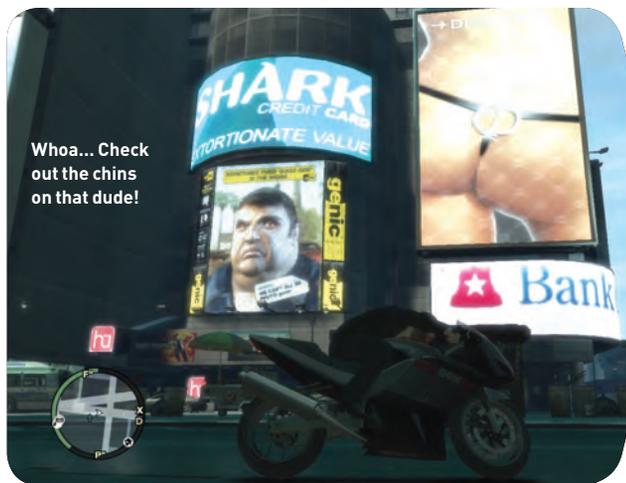


Bottom Line

This game isn't for everyone, but it's worth a look if you want to try something different.

85
OUT OF 100

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

THE *GRAND THEFT AUTO* series 'started' on the PC, and in my humble opinion, *Grand Theft Auto* is simply better on the PC. When you're cruising down Dillon Street in Broker and you decide to whip out your piece and mow down some pimps and innocent bystanders, would you rather use the mouse and keyboard for some precision aiming, or an imprecise console controller with auto aim tacked on?

The PC version of *GTA IV* doesn't add much to the already amazing game. A few added features (see box out), enhanced graphics (thanks to higher resolutions, a greater draw distance and drastically reduced pop-in of textures and objects in the distance) and the benefits of being able to use your trusty mouse and keyboard for some long-distance headshots are really the only things that enhance the PC version. However, before we get stuck into the meaty bits of the review, let's take a step back and go back to the beginning...

Getting *GTA IV* installed and ready to go is a bit of a mission. First, you'll have to sign up with the Rockstar Games Social Club (that is, unless you already have an account),

which is sort of like Steam, without Gabe Newell. Once you're done with all that, you'll have to create a Games for Windows - LIVE account (again, only if you don't already have one), because the game doesn't allow you to save your progress unless you're logged in with a LIVE Gamertag. It's not a huge hassle, but when you've just paid hard-earned cash for a game that you've been waiting ages for and you're told to "just hang on for a little while longer while we make you press all these flashy buttons," it can be irritating. Nevertheless, while going through all of these motions can be a chore, it does set you up to be able to simply use the in-game mobile phone to host or join multiplayer matches quickly and easily. There's also an option to link your LIVE Gamertag and your Social Club account, which means that any achievements that you may get while playing will show up on your Social Club profile so you can brag about your awesome pimp-shooting abilities to friends and people you don't know. When the game first loads, a clean and uncluttered menu screen greets you and shows you the top user-created videos (made using the new video editor) of

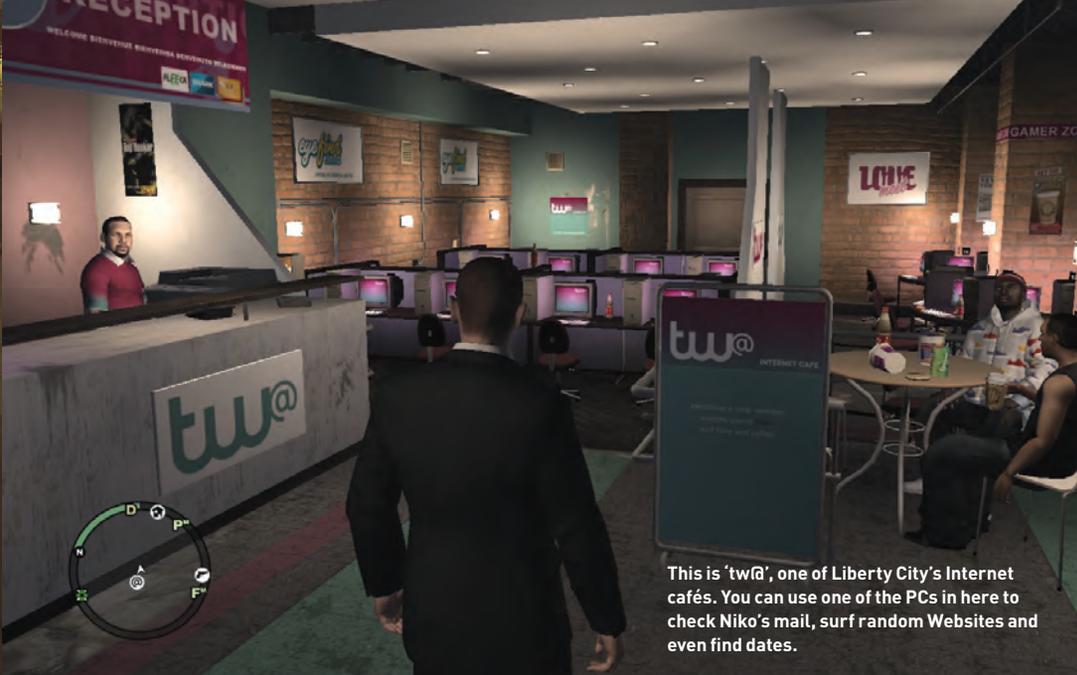
the moment, allowing you to simply hit the link to watch them. However, the magic truly starts when you hit the 'Start Game' button and you're thrown headfirst into Liberty City.

The PC version of *GTA IV* is no direct port. Rockstar North has enhanced the controls and interface to be more PC friendly. The game plays exactly as the console version does, and the story, characters and locations are no different. However, if you weren't able to give the console version a go, then you're in for a treat if you're a fan of the series. The game is a bit more realistic than previous iterations. Players take control of Niko Bellic, an immigrant who has come to Liberty City in search of the elusive American dream. Lured by the wild tales woven by his cousin Roman, Niko is shocked to learn that escaping his past will not be as easy as his cousin promised it would be, and naturally Niko winds up having to do all manner of odd jobs for all manner of shady characters. In short, Niko gets his hands very, very dirty. The game is fun and amazingly addictive. There's so much to see and do in Liberty City that you're sure to spend many hours of your

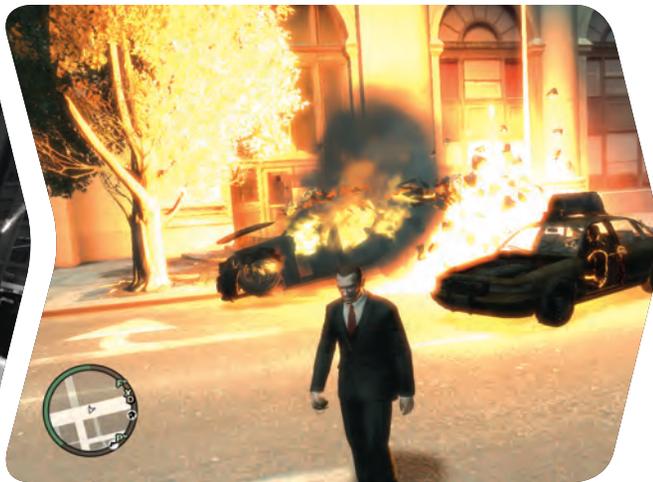


RRP → R399 | Publisher → Rockstar Games | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Action | Age Rating → 18+ | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

Look Listen
FOR THE FANS



This is 'tw@', one of Liberty City's Internet cafés. You can use one of the PCs in here to check Niko's mail, surf random Websites and even find dates.



life glued to your computer monitor taking part in all of Niko's misadventures. As mentioned earlier, Niko has a mobile phone which the player can use to call friends and potential girlfriends to organise [begin bad Russian accent] good times in America [end bad Russian accent]. They can also call you, and much like having friends/girlfriends in real life, this can get annoying when you're trying to drive a truck filled with explosives and someone calls you to ask if you're available for a night out. Missions are found all over Liberty City by visiting certain characters who will pay top dollar to have Niko handle their dirty work. The characters in the game all have their own unique personalities and the voice acting is truly top notch. You'll start becoming quite attached to Niko and his cohorts throughout your travels in Liberty City.

The gameplay may not have changed, but new to the PC version is the myriad of bugs and problems that many users have been experiencing since the game hit shelves. The major problems include memory leaks and the game suddenly crashing to the desktop seemingly at

random. Other bugs come in the form of minor quirks and problems that all games are plagued with. The performance of the game is also an issue at times, with random frame rate drops happening every once in a while for no apparent reason. Be sure to check the system requirements before buying the game. Thankfully, it seems as though Rockstar is tackling all of the problems quickly and efficiently, and at the time of writing, a patch has been released that increases performance and squashes a few of the bugs that users are experiencing.

Despite its quirks, all I can really say is that the PC version of *Grand Theft Auto IV* is an amazing game. The open-world nature of the title may not appeal to everyone, but the game is a lot of fun and you could easily spend hours just cruising around the city, leaving all kinds of mayhem and destruction in your wake. You can even change a setting on the in-game mobile phone that will disable all story stuff and stop people from calling you as long as the setting is enabled. This one is highly recommended. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

NO BABY... I PROMISE I WON'T PUT THIS HOME VIDEO ON THE INTERNET...

The developers have seen fit to grace the PC version with a few new features. Let us tell you about them.

VIDEO EDITOR

Grand Theft Auto has always been one of those games where awesome things happen every once in a while that you wish you could have recorded at the time, but for some reason weren't able to. Well, now you can. At any time while you're playing, you can simply hit F2 and a video recording of your last 30-40 seconds of play will be dumped on your hard drive (the game is constantly recording while you play, so you don't have to initiate the recording). From there, you can bring up the in-game mobile phone to launch the video editor, providing you with a few essential tools that will allow you to do all sorts of fancy things to your favourite home videos. You can also watch your clips from any angle you want, giving you a 360-degree view of the action.

ENHANCED MULTIPLAYER

It's now possible to use the custom-match feature to quickly find only the games that match your specifications, without having to sift through hundreds of matches you wouldn't want to join.

INDEPENDENCE FM

As with the PC versions of some of the previous *GTA* titles, you can now have the game read from your own personal music collection, allowing you listen to it by tuning into your own personal in-game radio station, complete with ad breaks. Aside from these new features, the Rockstar Games Social Club is worth checking out. It's a meeting place for fans of the PC version of *GTA IV* [and other titles developed by Rockstar] complete with online leader boards and persistent stats.

The console version

Better Than



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

For Fans of



Bottom Line

Aside from some annoying bugs, *Grand Theft Auto IV* for PC is simply amazing.





LEGENDARY

THERE ARE SOME GAMES that I will do anything to play, and will often resort to nagging, cajoling and even boot licking to get the review (*my shoes have never looked this good, Ed*). This was one of them, because the premise of the title is so enticing. However, after playing the game, I realised that the sour taste in my mouth didn't come from the Editor's shoes. Rather, it came from a disappointing experience.

The idea behind *Legendary* is a great one. A thief, naturally being the player's character, is sent into a New York Museum to open a mysterious box. The box, it turns out, was the same one given to Pandora by Zeus on her wedding day, with strict instructions not to open it. When she did, all hell broke loose, and it does the same when the player's character makes the identical mistake. The result is a massive magical explosion, hordes of mythical beasts unleashed on the world, and the player's character granted an ability to absorb magical power, called Animus.

It sounds thoroughly exciting, but the person who came up with the idea must have explained it poorly to the team that developed

it. The developers at Spark Unlimited have missed the point, or rather the opportunities, that the concept provided, leaving the game decidedly flat and rather painful to play at times.

The first and most obvious problem that *Legendary* presents as a game – and specifically as a first-person shooter – is the vast amount of scripting and triggers it contains. These lead to a nasty linearity that the developers try to hide in a few, almost free levels, but the straight line through this game is all too obvious. The player is steered, rather than gently prodded, through a story that is far less compelling than it should be, towards a goal that screams sequel.

The levels are unimaginative, with lots of trigger points driving things along. This means that the player feels more like an actor in a carefully scripted action film than a hero trying to save the world. It also means that the player can start predicting the action – most of the creature attacks are linked to these triggers and, while the action initially seems intense, getting too familiar with the

game can make even the most forgiving player a little jaded. This is exacerbated by an AI that varies between brutally savage and dully predictable, and movement that feels a little stiff. Jumping, for example, feels really nasty, and the player will resort to it only when absolutely necessary.

Getting into fights is what first-person shooters are all about, but the action in *Legendary* soon descends into sequences that are all too familiar. The werewolves need to be separated from that statement, though, because these guys are the epitome of nasty. They can be hurt, but can only be killed by being beheaded with the trusty fire-axe. Their tactics vary too, and they will almost always look for a blind side from which to attack. The fact that the player will be lulled into a sense of security by predictable, script-driven combat makes them even nastier, because they will catch you a little unawares. And beheading them is a little more difficult than it might seem, because the detection for the axe swing is too precise. It has to be done just right, making a room full of werewolves quite a challenge.

RRP → R679 | Publisher → Atari | Distributor → Megatrom | Genre → FPS | Age Rating → 18+

Look Listen
FOR THE FANS

NAG

What came first, the chicken from hell or the ghoul?



Other enemies from the mixed mythological bag that the game presents the player with are easier to deal with. Fire-spitting lava beasts (or whatever they are actually called), for example, are most effectively dealt with by dousing them with water, and so on. There is a puzzle element to the combat at times, but like the other puzzles in the game, they're too simple. In fact, the entire game feels a little on the simple side. When that is combined with a story line that is flat, the game lacks a lot of excitement.

A nice array of weapons mitigates this a bit, with the usual approach of "the right tool for the job" being applied to most enemies. However, getting the iron sights up eliminates all recoil from the weapon. Sure, this might not exactly be realistic stuff, but guns kick.

Graphically, *Legendary* holds a few surprises. For the most part, environments are similar and plain, but every now and then, a creature model will just look really good. The Minotaur springs to mind as an example. However, these graphics do more to illustrate

the repetition and graphical blandness of the game than mitigate it. Repeated textures are just the beginning, with rips and other issues showing up quite often. The blandness of the levels and repetition often make things a bit confusing too, even in a game as heavily scripted as this one.

And then there's the Animus. This magical power, collected from fallen enemies, allows the player to heal, perform a pulse blast and solidify certain objects. That's it. None of these powers can be upgraded, and no new powers can be acquired. A mechanic like this power could have been used to much greater effect, but for the most part the player will only use Animus when absolutely necessary. There just aren't enough reasons to make use of it, although having a 'built-in' health pack is quite handy at times.

Ultimately, *Legendary* is disappointing. The hype it got was unbalanced – these things always are – and the end result is a lacklustre gaming experience that will leave the player wanting so much more. It's Sad, but true. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

A frontal lobotomy

Better Than



Worse Than



- PC
- 360
- PS3
- WII
- PS2
- PSP
- DS
- MOB



Bottom Line

A great idea, but too flawed to be anything other than a filler.



Oh John, I love the way you tease me with those tight shorts. Yummy!



WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2009

AFTER A RATHER DISMAL showing last year, THQ's *WWE SmackDown vs. RAW* makes its return and, to their credit, the developers have made some definite improvements with the series' 2009 iteration. Bearing a roster of more than 50 different wrestlers, and in excess of ten different match types, *SVR 2009* is every bit as expansive as fans have come to expect of the series. Although there are far fewer 'legendary' characters on offer, fans will be pleased to see the inclusion of perennial favourites like Batista, The Undertaker and Shawn Michaels, among many others. And of course, the 'Create-a-Wrestler' mode offers more than sufficient depth to fill any gaps in the vast line-up.

The vast rosters and deep character creation tools are standard issue for the *SVR* franchise. Where *SVR 2009* departs from its predecessors, though, is the new 'Road to WrestleMania' mode. Gone is last year's horrendous '24/7' mode, which shoehorned characters into generic storylines that never quite felt authentic. Instead, 'Road to WrestleMania' gives players the opportunity to control one of seven wrestlers in the three-month period leading up to *WrestleMania*. Each of these characters (Triple H, John Cena, The Undertaker, CM Punk, Chris Jericho, Rey Mysterio and Batista) has an entirely unique storyline, scripted by WWE writers, and are all amusingly melodramatic in typical WWE style: Chris Jericho has to hunt down a mysterious masked wrestler who continually interferes with his matches,

while Triple H will have to choose whether to reform D-Generation X, or side with his former Evolution partners in a bid to go after the World Championship. Although the mode is limited to only the handful of available characters, it's undoubtedly a better attempt at storytelling within a wrestling game, and one that fits in well with the WWE environment.

For created characters, there's no attempt made at storylines – instead, there's a new Career mode available, which allows you to pursue each of the various WWE championships in turn. After selecting which title to go after, you'll have to fight four different characters in a bid to win enough 'Stars' to go after the title. After each match, you're ranked according to categories such as 'Excitement' and 'Technical Skill', which in turn determine how many of the five maximum stars available for each match are earned. Once you've accumulated enough stars and successfully challenged for the title, new championship paths are unlocked, and you begin chasing after the next belt until you've eventually worked your way up to the World Heavyweight titles.

The real incentive to play through the lengthy Career mode, however, is that it's the only way to raise your created superstar's attributes. You begin the mode with a rather dismal ranking of 30, but by playing through matches, you'll boost your attributes until your character is eventually strong enough to go toe-to-toe with main-event wrestlers.



RRP → R699 | Publisher → THQ | Distributor → Sier-Kinekor Games | Genre → Sport | Age Rating → 16+

Look Listen
for the fans

NAG

And now for my next trick, I'll make the Undertaker levitate. ALAKAZAM!



Attribute points are awarded in a dynamic fashion: for instance, spend most of a match running around the ring, and you'll see a significant increase to your speed attribute; if you pound your opponent with weapons, it'll be your hardcore rating that shoots up. It's an innovative way to assign attribute points, though it does have the drawback of making it more difficult to boost your character's abilities in some areas than in others.

In addition to attribute points, your character will also be able to earn up to six 'Fighting Abilities', SVR 2009's replacement for last year's 'Fighting Styles' idea. Each wrestler (both created characters and real ones) has six different 'Fighting Abilities' that range from being able to stack multiple tables for devastating finishers to being able to lean against the ropes for leverage when pinning an opponent. Most of the top-shelf characters, like Cena or Shawn Michaels, have abilities that let them regenerate health when they're hurt, or offer them instant boosts to their Momentum Meters. While playing through the career mode, you'll be able to earn the same abilities for your created wrestlers, as soon as you've fulfilled the criteria for unlocking them - for instance, if you defeat three opponents who have the 'Dirty Pin' ability, your character will be given that ability. It's another good incentive for playing through the Career mode, but its implementation is somewhat shortsighted, since you're not actually given any choice about which abilities your character earns. As soon as you've fulfilled the criteria

for an ability, it's added to your character's list until all six slots are filled, and there's no way to change or remove these abilities once you've earned them.

SVR 2009 also sees the removal of last year's iffy 'GM' mode, as well as the 'Create-a-Championship' mode. In their place, players now have access to the 'Highlight Reel', an instant-replay mode that allows saving, editing and uploading of clips from matches. There's also a new 'Create-a-Finisher' mode that lets you string bits and pieces of different moves together in order to create new finishing moves. It's a fantastic idea, though one that's in need of some polish still, as it's somewhat restrictive in terms of choice, and it occasionally results in some very disjointed animation sequences.

Visually, SVR 2009 offers some very well detailed character models that do well to resemble their real-life counterparts. The arenas too are faithfully recreated, though spectators still appear washed out and unrealistic. The game is also occasionally guilty of clipping and collision-detection issues that detract from its realism, as well as some significant slow-down in matches with more than four participants. Voice acting from the wrestlers themselves adds much to the 'Road to WrestleMania' mode, as does the commentary that's customised to fit the storylines, but outside of that mode, the commentators are as repetitive and mixed-up as they've ever been.

SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 goes a long

way towards setting right the things its predecessor did wrong, by trimming its dead weight and replacing it with better storylines, refined creation modes and other new features that, although lacking polish, are a significant step towards bringing the SmackDown vs. RAW series back to the heights it once enjoyed. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

The last one

Better Than



PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Real sport, but not quite

Kind of like







Bottom Line

SmackDown vs. RAW returns to form this year, thanks to improved storylines and promising new features.





RRP → R699 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → RTS | Age Rating → 16+

Look Listen
FOR THE FANS

TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

LET'S ANSWER THE BIG questions first. Yes, the voice recognition works like a charm. In fact, it's rather surprising how well it works, once you've got the hang of which commands are available depending on the previously issued command. An on-screen expanding, branching menu helps with this. Depending on the type of person you are, you may feel like a complete and utter tool for the first few hours, speaking commands into your microphone and pretending not to feel like a tool. Playing multiplayer helps with not feeling like a tool, since you know someone else has to do it too. The big question though: is it a good real-time strategy? The answer to that is a solid yes. Ubisoft may have whittled the formula down to the fundamentals, but in doing so, they ensured that the foundation for proper strategy is all there.

EndWar has more in common with the seminal *World in Conflict* than, say, *Red Alert*. Taking charge of a limited number of squads, it's all about position, battle tactics, upgrade choices and understanding the seven-way unit interaction. It's because the game has been 'polished down' to fundamentals that the voice-command system works so well. The maps are designed with key points of interest (usually designated Alpha, Bravo, etc.), while your squads and enemy squads are assigned numerical values. "Squad Seven, Move To, Bravo," seems like a simple command and it is. You guys, move there. "Squad Four,

Attack, Hostile One," again represents a very simple idea. You guys, attack them. The real point of the voice-command system, though, shouldn't be considered as a new way to play RTS games, but rather as an elegant solution to what is a common problem in console RTS games: point of presence.

The voice-command system enables you to issue orders quickly and effectively to units that aren't where you are, and more importantly, tell them to go to places you aren't physically at. Point of presence is a big factor in RTSs, even on the PC. Where you as a player are looking is a handicap in terms of tactical motion. The PC-traditional RTS gets around this by allowing you to issue commands to grouped, hot-key squads, telling them where to go outside your own point of presence thanks to the mini-map. On a console, mini-map solutions have been attempted (like in *Universe at War*), but they generally seem cumbersome or are woefully ineffective. What the voice-command system replaces in essence is the mini-map and the hotkey. It works, and may well represent a breakthrough in console RTS control.

Visually, *EndWar* could have done with a bit more punch, but it gets the job done. The 20-hour single-player campaign serves as a good primer for the main course: the online persistent war. Much like *Chrome Hounds*, the online war is a three-faction, global-territory-capture metagame where smaller battles between players affect the bigger

picture. Recently, four-on-four battles were added via a patch.

If anything, *EndWar* is a good example of an RTS done right on the console, trying something new instead of trying to force another system's conventions into ill-fitting shoes. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

World in Conflict



Kinda Like

Armchair Coaching

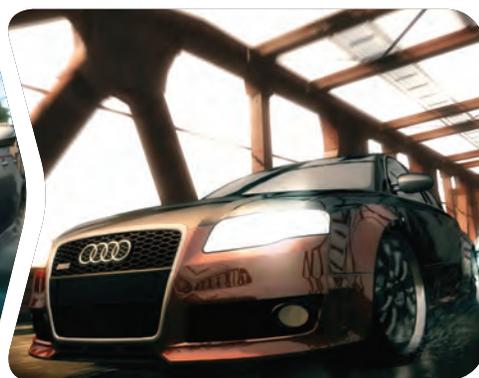


For Fans of

Bottom Line

The start of a new era in console RTSs perhaps, but still good on its own merits.





NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER

THE *NEED FOR SPEED* series has come a long way over the last 15 years. Some games in the series, such as *Hot Pursuit* and *Underground*, ushered in an entirely new play dynamic, while others, like *Most Wanted* and, sadly, *Undercover*, only served to fine-tune the existing system and made little effort to stand on their own. In *NFS: Undercover*, players take on the role of an undercover agent sent to Tri-City to infiltrate and take down a smuggling syndicate. The infiltration, you'll be pleased to know, involves driving ridiculously hot cars at ridiculously fast speeds through some of the best looking city and country roads I've ever seen in a racing title. While *Undercover* adds little to the series apart from 'more NFS', almost every aspect of the game is oozing with care and polish. The cars look fantastic and they're fun to drive, and the tracks are designed in such a way that you are often forced to take the adventurous route. There are more shortcuts to be on the lookout for, more alleyways to soar down at blistering speeds, and more tight turns and daredevil stunt opportunities to get the blood pumping.

For all its technical competence, the game does tend to feel lacking in the actual 'game' department. It's soulless: players might feel there's no need to play other than to satisfy that need for speed. Which is fine - this is a racing game after all and the racing element is undoubtedly the most important aspect. But the weak, disjointed and purely-infused storyline combined

with an uninspiring upgrade system leaves those who fondly remember *Underground* realising the series might have lost its way. Despite all of that, the game does manage to remain fun to play once you grow accustomed to the almost complete lack of mission briefings and settle into the game's pace. Of course, half of that fun might come from the fact that winning races is fun, and winning is something that comes with ease for a large portion of the game's progression. *Undercover's* difficulty curve is one of the gentlest I've encountered in an NFS title, but that's not to say the game is without challenge. When you reach the higher-tier vehicles, you'll need to be able to keep a level head while travelling at speeds in excess of 300km/h - a crash can often lose you the race.

This technical wonderland isn't without its hiccups, unfortunately. The game suffers from frequent dips in frame rate and has some ugly lighting and shadow issues that crop up every now and then. The interface, when kitting out your car, is one of the poorest I've seen in a while, and the mini-map that guides you during free-form events (like Hot Car and Wheelman) could do with a makeover. On top of all of that, lengthy load times are sure to provide their share of aggravation (although this problem is reduced greatly by installing the game onto your hard drive).

So, is *Undercover* worth your hard-earned cash? Sure, it's great fun despite

its flaws and is sure to keep most arcade race fans happy for a while. The problem is competition; not just from other racing titles, but also from other games in the series. If you've recently played an NFS title, you might want to give the series a break for a while. Apart from improved graphics and a few tweaks to the race modes, there's nothing new to see here. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Every other NFS title

Just like



For Fans of

Winning



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Plenty to keep you entertained if you can look past the unoriginality and minor technical flaws.

74

OUT OF 100



DUDE! I can see your house from here!

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING is the champion of Xbox 360-based games of this genre, but only because it is the only title in the genre represented on the platform. It is a 'pretender' to titles such as *Amped 2* and *1080*, but it doesn't quite get close to the experience that those games offer. Still, it's a fun, socially orientated action sports game that can provide players with many hours of fun.

Initially, this title is all about realism, which is great and something that many people demand from this kind of game. While the *SSX* series may have been fun, they are to snowboarding what *Wipeout* is to motor sports, and fans of the activity want something that's a little truer to reality. *Shaun White Snowboarding* presents that player with four mountains around the world, and the ability to experience them freely. The player can spend many hours exploring the slopes.

The first issue that crops up is that the controls are very simple. It's easy to look good in this game, and landing a very dodgy trick is more often than not successful. Sure, looking good is fun, but the challenge of the title is slightly removed when it is fairly easy to complete a trick that should take hours (at the very least) to master. This makes running the slopes a little boring after a while, and will invariably lead

the player to take part in the numerous challenges that dot the mountains. These vary widely in theme and difficulty, and add a lot of value to the experience. The scoring system used by the challenges is quite strange and more than a little confusing, but that doesn't matter too much.

As a reward for completing challenges, the player can 'work' to acquire specialised moves, such as super speed or impossible jumps. That's where *Shaun White Snowboarding* loses the plot, and realism flies out of the window. It lends the title a confused feel, as though the game is scrabbling for an identity without success.

The story is driven by the collection of coins on the four mountains, a task that varies from really easy right through to excruciatingly difficult. Collect all the coins and you get to compete against Shaun himself, and that, dear reader, is as deep as the story gets.

Still, while it may seem all doom and gloom, *Shaun White Snowboarding* is a great way to spend a few hours, particularly in online play. In fact, the game almost demands it. It can be played as a multiplayer experience – even the challenges – and the title lends itself to a more social experience than a single-player challenge.

If you're looking for a super-realistic snowboarding title, crammed to the brim

with challenges, you may want to continue searching. If you're looking for a game that will allow you to relax and spend some 'quality' time with online friends, it's perfect. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

SSX

Better Than



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

1080

Worse Than





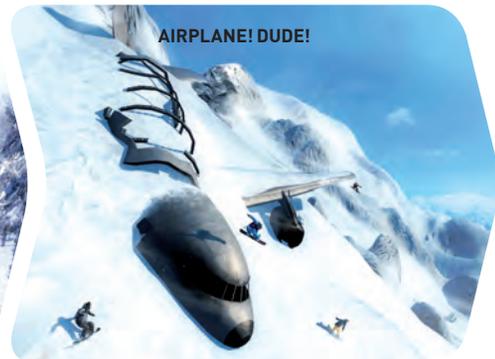


Bottom Line

A good way to kill some time, but the game does lack a little direction.

75

OUT OF 100



RRP → R699 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Sports Simulation | Age Rating → 3+

Look Listen For the Fans



MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC Universe set the Internet on fire when it was first announced. Confusion and at times dismay (at the thought of a toned-down *Mortal Kombat* title) resulted when fans first caught wind of the announcement. It's not all doom and gloom, though, because the game surpasses the expectations that people had for it, but it does fall short in some areas.

The game offers a few ways to get down to the business of beating the crap out of one of the game's 22 characters. There's the story mode, which explains the circumstances behind this unlikely collision of worlds and allows you to pick one of the sides (either *Mortal Kombat* or DC). The basic theory behind the story goes something like this: Following Cataclysmic Event A, Temporal Rift X opens up and the two universes start to merge. This cosmic event causes energies within the two universes to realign and the balance of power begins to shift. As an example, Superman's power begins to dwindle as it is transferred to Scorpion. This explains how Batman is able to go toe-to-toe with Captain Marvel and so on and so forth. The story mode (both sides of it) can be completed in less than six hours, making for a very short outing. Then there's the Arcade Mode, which allows you to pick a character and go through the usual ladder filled with opponents that get increasingly tougher as you move up the roster. Also available is Practice Mode and the Kombo Challenge

mode (the latter offers ten tiers of insane combos that you can complete with each character).

The combat is somewhat slower than that in previous *MK* titles and heavily focused on combos and Super Moves. New to the game is the concept of Rage, which you'll build up as you go through the motions of blocking, punching and freezing your opponents. Your Rage meter sits below your health bar and is divided into two tiers. When the first tier is filled, pressing toward and block will perform a Breaker, which will break your opponent's combo and allow you to counterattack. With two tiers filled, pressing L2 and R2 at the same time will make your character glow red and your opponent will not be able to block your attacks. His/her attacks won't slow you down, allowing you to smack him/her around to your heart's content.

The visuals are decent, the audio is adequate and the characters are quite detailed and well animated (that is to say, most of the Super Moves look awesome!). The biggest problem with the game is its replay value: it doesn't have much of it. Once you're done with the Story and Arcade modes, there isn't much left to do (although there is an online component). Only two locked characters and pieces of artwork that are unlocked for each character that you complete the Arcade Mode with is not a lot of incentive to keep playing, which could be a problem considering the price you'll pay for this game. It's not quite *Mortal Kombat*,

since the brutality and excessive violence of the previous titles in the franchise are absent in this title (largely thanks to tamer Fatalities and the new Heroic Brutalities). It's not perfect and caters more to the casual player than the die-hard *Mortal Kombat* enthusiast, but it's still a lot of fun and it's, you know, got Batman in it...

NAG

Dane Remendes

RRP → R850 | Publisher → Midway Games | Distributor → Star-Kinokor Games | Genre → Fighting | Age Rating → 15+

Mortal Kombat, but not.

Kinda Like



PC
360
PS3
WII

For Fans of



PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



Bottom Line
A fun brawler with a great premise, but it lacks in the longevity department.

76

OUT OF 100

Look Listen
for the fans

NAG



Fruit getting out of hand



RRP → R699 | Publisher → 2K Games | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → FPS | Age Rating → 18+

Look & Listen
FOR THE FANS

BIOSHOCK

APPROXIMATELY A YEAR AFTER its release on the PC and Xbox 360, the critically acclaimed first-person shooter, *BioShock*, has finally made its way to the PS3, without losing any of the charm that made it so successful in the first place. For those still unfamiliar with the story behind *BioShock*, the game thrusts you into the role of a young gentleman in the year 1960, who stumbles upon the underwater city known as Rapture when the plane he's travelling in crashes into the ocean. Originally intended as a haven for those who were too 'enlightened' to live on the war-torn surface world, the once-idyllic Rapture has become a decaying wasteland, populated by genetic aberrations fighting for survival. As you progress through the game, you'll uncover various audio-logs that give clues as to how Rapture's downfall came about, and what your character's exact role in the greater scheme of things is.

Although the PS3 incarnation of *BioShock* is largely identical to its predecessors, there are one or two differences worth noting. Perhaps the most significant change is the addition of a new Survivor difficulty level, which places heavy emphasis on both the ammunition and currency available to you through the game, making for a much more challenging experience than *BioShock* has ever offered before. The game also offers a couple of new plasmids (released as downloadable bonus content for the original versions), which are the genetic

modifications available to your character that act either as weapons or as support skills, and which are responsible for the great complexity of *BioShock's* game dynamic. This is especially true of the new Survivor mode, where one is forced to rely much more on genetic abilities than on rare munitions.

The PS3 version also offers Challenge Rooms - downloadable puzzle-style levels that will be available from the PlayStation Store shortly after the game's release - which could add significantly to *BioShock's* replay value. Aside from these one or two aspects, however, the game has been ported to the PS3 virtually unchanged. Everything from the hauntingly detailed environments to the sublime lighting effects of the original game is present, and they bring the eerily dilapidated art deco-style city of Rapture to life. An engaging score, convincing sound effects, and impeccable voice acting make the experience all the more immersive and enthralling.

Although the one-year delay hasn't seen the introduction of any revolutionary new features to the PS3 version of *BioShock*, it's worth noting that the game is still every bit as riveting as it was one year ago. The inclusion of an additional difficulty level is a welcome addition, as is the prospect of additional downloadable content, although neither of these features will hold much appeal for anyone who's already conquered

NAG
MUST PLAY



BioShock on either the PC or the Xbox 360. For anyone who has not yet played *BioShock*, however, there's no longer any reason to miss out: this version is every bit as good as its predecessors, and it's a game that absolutely should not be missed. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

BioShock on PC or Xbox

As Good As



PC
360
PS3

For Fans of



WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB



Bottom Line

Last year's must-play shooter makes its way to the PS3, and it's as good as the original.





SPORE CREEPY & CUTE PARTS PACK

RRP→ R180 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ Electronic Arts | Genre→ Simulation | Age Rating→ 12+ | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

WILL WRIGHT'S *SPORE* MAY be the world's most pirated game, but sales of the "everything simulation" have been pretty solid despite that fact. And so, it's hardly surprising that the first expansion in what will be a business approach much like the *Sims* (in other words, a hell of a lot of add-ons for the title) has been released. What is surprising is that the pack became available so soon after the original release. But then again, EA and Wright have used this approach before, so this probably fits into their schemes quite nicely. They probably have the next six expansions all mapped out already.

The *Creepy & Cute Parts Pack* is pretty much just that: new bits to stick onto the hideously divine creatures you create. Mouths, eyes, hands... all that kind of stuff

for a total of a few more than 60 parts. So, essentially, the expansion applies – in terms of the game – to the creature phase almost entirely, although the new bits can obviously be used in the Creature Creator. This includes new colour schemes and finishes, which add quite a lot of variety to the final look of your creature. In fact, that's what this pack is all about – variety. It is there solely to ensure that people creating creatures have some new looks to play with. It does nothing to change the fundamentals of the game, although finding parts while playing the Creature Phase just got even more random. Going for a specific look, thanks to this pack, is even harder.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, because many people prefer putting their

lovelies together in the Creature Creator anyway, and the added variety means a little boost to the creature uploads from around the world. This is an expansion for people who like creating creatures. If that's you, go ahead and get it. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS MOB

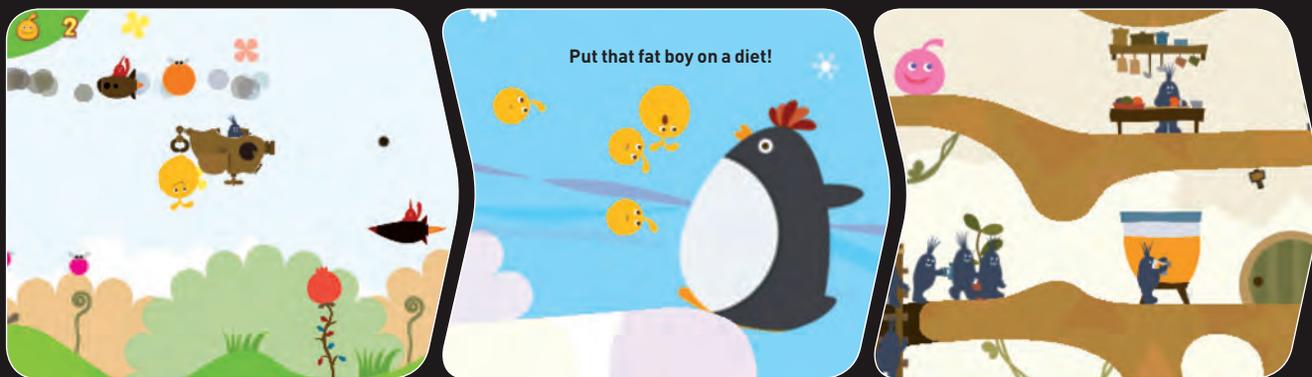
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Bottom Line

A good expansion for those who enjoy creature creation.

70
OUT OF 100

Look Listen
For the Fans



LOCOROCO 2

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ SCE | Distributor→ Ster-Kinekor Games | Genre→ Platformer | Age Rating→ 3+

YOU JUST WANT TO sing and dance along with the cute little bastards, but you don't because you're an adult and adults don't do stupid things like that.

The first *LocoRoco* game may as well have been a proof of concept, compared to its sequel. *LocoRoco 2* features much more variety, ingenuity and creativity (not to mention replay value).

The charm of *LocoRoco 2* is undeniable: using the shoulder-buttons, you tilt the game world, rolling the squishy, singing LocoRoco through crisp, colourful environments. Holding down both buttons and then letting go 'bumps' the game world for a jump.

As you progress, you are taught new moves by little Mui Mui. These moves

grant you access to different areas, especially in previous levels. Replaying areas gets you more Picories (the in-game currency) and raw materials with which to improve the Mui Mui house (among other things). For this you are rewarded with interesting things. It's a small thing, but even the loading screens reward you with stuff. There are distraction-worthy mini-games, some with multiplayer. Levels 'level up' the more you play them, with each level changing the game in some way – such as making it easier to collect Picories, or by providing you with a map.

If one had to look at it critically, *LocoRoco 2* is a wonderful platform title and on some levels, it vaguely resembles

a long-lost *Sonic the Hedgehog* game due to its emphasis on momentum.

Play long enough, and you'll swear you can understand what the LocoRoco are singing. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

NAG
MUST PLAY

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS MOB

業

Bottom Line

The 'cute' isn't for everyone, but the game is what games should be about: fun.

90
OUT OF 100

Look Listen
For the Fans



RESIDENT FRANCHISE

Since its inaugural PlayStation release back in 1996, Capcom's premier survival horror series has seen a veritable viral outbreak on every available host, alongside novelisation, a rash of comics, vinyl collectibles, and four feature films. The original *Resident Evil* was recently ported to the Wii, but released only in Japan with no current plans to let the rest of us play it. Lead titles and original release platforms:

Resident Evil [PlayStation, 1996]
 Resident Evil 2 [PlayStation, 1998]
 Resident Evil 3: Nemesis [PlayStation, 1996]
 Resident Evil: Code Veronica [Dreamcast, 2000]
 Resident Evil: Survivor [PlayStation, 2000]
 Resident Evil Gaiden [Game Boy Color, 2001]
 Resident Evil: Survivor 2: Code Veronica [Arcade, 2001]
 Resident Evil Zero [GameCube, 2002]
 Resident Evil: Dead Aim [PS2, 2003]
 Resident Evil: Outbreak [PS2, 2003]
 Resident Evil: Outbreak: File #2 [PS2, 2004]
 Resident Evil 4 [GameCube, 2005]
 Resident Evil: The Missions [Mobile, 2005]
 Resident Evil: Confidential Report [Mobile, 2006]
 Resident Evil: Deadly Silence [DS, 2006]
 Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles [Wii, 2007]
 Resident Evil: Genesis [Mobile, 2008]
 Resident Evil: Degeneration [N-Gage, 2008]
 Resident Evil 5 [PS3, 360, PC, 2009]



RESIDENT EVIL

THE SUMMER OF 1998 was the worst ever on Raccoon City's tourism records. Well, before the entire place exploded in a mysterious thermonuclear detonation a few months later, effectively costing the city its already tenuous, two-star budget holiday rating in the 'Rough Guide to the Midwest Middle of Nowhere' and its prized status as the cinder capital of America. But that's jumping a little too far ahead for the moment. The trouble in May 1998 was the nearby Arklay Mountains' increasingly alarming propensity for chucking up dead bodies on its hiking trails (dead bodies that had apparently been gnawed by humans, no less). Clearly, not suspecting the impending atomic annihilation of his constituency, and anxious in the meantime to avoid some sort of lurid tabloid incident, Mayor Warren calls up the Raccoon City Police Department, and requests that the Special Tactics and Rescue Services (S.T.A.R.S.; it's like S.W.A.T. but more glitzy) be deployed to make nice. S.T.A.R.S. Bravo Team is dispatched to investigate, but in a wildly unpredictable turn of luck, B Team disappears.

And so, on 24 July 1998, Alpha Team superstars Chris Redfield, Jill Valentine, Barry Burton, Albert Wesker, Brad Vickers, and Joseph Frost strap on their killing stuff, and go in to do the job properly. Joseph Frost is eaten by a hideously malformed and mutated dog a few minutes later, and pilot Brad Vickers abandons his pals, setting something of a gloomy outcome for the rest of the mission, while their erstwhile teammates hide in a nearby biological weapons research facility that's pretending to be a derelict spook house. Obviously, they don't know this yet, despite the fact that their pal has just been eaten by a hideously malformed and mutated dog; apparently S.T.A.R.S. aren't selected for their extraordinary prowess in circumstantial syllogism [*I'm afraid (like me) you'll have to look it up, Ed*]. Anyway, it's up to the four remaining Alphas to uncover a dastardly plot of the Umbrella Corporation, realise that one of the team is a corporate double agent, battle a biogenetically engineered super soldier, and blow lots of stuff up. **NAG**



SHELLSHOCK 2™

BLOOD TRAILS

Coming February 2009

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PLAYSTATION 3



CALL OF DUTY WORLD AT WAR NAZI ZOMBIE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Transcript of transmission from NCO R.A.V.E.N TO Commissioned Officers RedTide, GeometriX and Barkskin, all M.I.A.

Begins

[radio static] Hello! Hello? Is anyone receiving me on this frequency? (long pause) Hello! Now broadcasting on all frequencies... [radio static] I'm not exactly sure how to put this, but we're holed up at the airfield building facing Nazi... [radio static]. Repeat, Nazi zombies. Is anybody out there? [shouting in the background]. (long pause) If you can hear me, don't try to come for us... (pause) It's already too late, we're done for... [erratic gunfire and shouting]. [radio static] ...are four of us here in this [radio static] death trap, I've been badly mauled, and can't fire my weapon (long pause) [erratic gunfire]. I'm sending this transmission out in the hope that it will save [radio static]. These... (radio static) zombies came out of nowhere. We're trying to defend this building. We boarded up the windows, and hope

the magic box that makes guns doesn't let us down. They just keep coming... [erratic gunfire]. We're hoping our ammo will hold out... (long pause) damn! This is exactly the problem... [loud shouting], the... [radio static] ammo is running out, and when it's finished, so are we... (long pause) [radio static]. My three comrades are bravely fighting on and, as my lifeblood trickles out of me and runs the floor red, I'm... (long pause) ...will I become one of them!? [radio static] I'm relaying their frantic thoughts on how we could have survived. There is no [radio static] time to go... [radio static] details, just give you the gist. But hopefully that will be enough... Good luck - you're going to... [radio static] (long pause) [loud shouting, gunfire, a scream, explosions] [radio static].
Ends

SINGLE-PLAYER TACTICS

Here's the thing: no matter what people may say about single-player zombie bashing being easier than with four players thanks to a decrease in the number of zombies, it's just not the case. One person facing a horde of zombies makes for an insanely stressful field trip, since there's no one there to watch your back. Here's how I like to handle the stress...

Starting off in the spawn room, the first thing you're going to want to do is get to work on those zombies until you can afford the M1A1 Carbine to replace your pistol. Remember to focus on headshots for quick, easy kills that'll reward you with 100 points when those suckers go down headless. By round three or four, you should have enough money to open the stairs in the main room, so go ahead and move upstairs. Do not open the door to the adjacent room. Once upstairs, buy the M1897 Trench gun when you can afford it and hold out upstairs for a few rounds until you have enough points racked up to open the stairs down into the lottery room. Once in here, focus on the stairs because this is where most of the zombies will be flowing down to you. Remember to keep an eye on the windows and the tunnel when you have some downtime, so you can efficiently put an end to any possible break-ins before they occur. A good place to stand when employing this strategy is at **Position 3**, because you should be able to see all of the entry points from that location. The earlier rounds will be relatively easy, because most of the zombies will be moving

fairly slowly, giving you time to keep all the points of entry in check. Remember to play the lottery box between rounds and when you have sufficient downtime, because in the later rounds the Trench gun just won't cut it. Ideally, you're aiming for a combination of the Ray Gun and either the MG42 or the Browning M1919. This combination is vital if you plan to get to the later stages when none of the other weapons does sufficient damage to the zombies to take them down easily. If you get the Ray Gun early on, be sure to conserve your ammunition, only using it in the direst of situations. In the later rounds, you'll have to start using the Ray Gun exclusively, because those zombies will be coming thick and fast, breaking down the boards on windows, smashing up that tunnel wall and storming down those stairs. If the undead manage to overwhelm you and start breaking in, try to move as nimbly as possible and lead the stream of zombies chasing you around the pillars in the lottery room. In these situations, it's important to focus on your movement rather than on killing the zombies. Be careful not to get caught on any obstructions or objects in the room and try to hold out until almost every zombie on the map is following you. Then start picking them off with your Ray Gun. Once they're all one big pile of goo on the floor, rebuild the barricades and start the process again.

That's it. Good luck, and remember to pray for those Max Ammos...

- Barkskin



QUICK TIP: AMMO CONSERVATION

Try for headshots. When that's not possible, a direct torso shot is the next best thing; shooting arms and legs will just waste ammunition. If you have the Ray Gun and are still fighting the zombies at the windows, three zombies standing abreast at the windows will go down with a single shot to the zombie in the middle thanks to the weapon's splash damage.



Points 72480 Kills 640 Headshots 31

GAME OVER
You Survived 31 Rounds

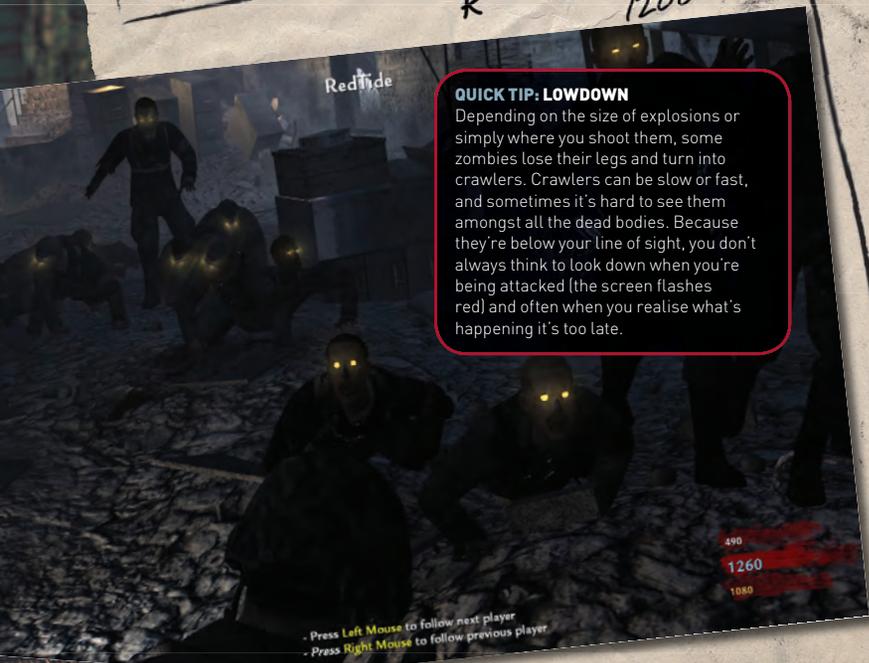
QUICK TIP: FACT OF LIFE
You're going to die eventually so make peace with this. :)

31



UPSTAIRS

BAR
1800



QUICK TIP: LOWDOWN
Depending on the size of explosions or simply where you shoot them, some zombies lose their legs and turn into crawlers. Crawlers can be slow or fast, and sometimes it's hard to see them amongst all the dead bodies. Because they're below your line of sight, you don't always think to look down when you're being attacked (the screen flashes red) and often when you realise what's happening it's too late.



QUICK TIP: EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF
Here's a crazy idea we accidentally tried while taking screenshots. If possible, get the Ray Gun and then either of the heavy machine guns or even the flamethrower. Open up all the doors and stairs and hope for the best. :) You're going to need a highly trained and nimble bunch of guys to get far using this strategy, but it has tremendous potential. Interestingly, there's less pressure on single entry points and individuals as everyone is always running around, and this also seems to confuse the zombies sometimes as they occasionally stop and run away. The flamethrower works very well here (you don't have to stop running to shoot), but unfortunately darkens the level with soot, making it hard to navigate.



MULTIPLE-PLAYER TACTICS

PART 1

Part 1 of the strategy involves defending the lottery room. For the first four rounds, keep yourselves busy defending the main room. Purchase a rifle once, but avoid buying a second rifle or extra ammunition if possible – you'll want to save your cash for the lottery box when the time comes.

Once you've reached level five at the latest, the person with the most money opens the door marked "Help Me". Do not open the stairs inside the lottery room or the spawn room. Move two people into the lottery room and keep two people at **Position 1**. In the lottery room, one person should watch the tunnel and occasionally provide support to the other two while the last person keeps an eye on the windows (there are two of them). Be very careful with the tunnel – it's impossible to tell when zombies are incoming while the wall is fully built-up. Until about round ten, it's usually safe to keep two people at **Position 1** as long as they keep the window at **[A]** boarded up; these two should have the most powerful weapons. Everyone should be playing the lottery box at every opportunity until they have a Ray Gun and a secondary heavy machine for use during the 30 seconds of Insta-Kill. Trench guns and Magnums also serve their purpose until about level 12 or 13.

If those in the main room start to run low on ammunition, don't be afraid to swap places with the two in the lottery room. However, when things start heating up and they can't ensure the zombies are staying out of the lottery room, it's time for them to move inside.

By this point, you should ideally have one or two Ray guns in the group. Have three people at **Position 2** firing at any zombies that come near the door, occasionally making valiant runs for any Max Ammo or Insta-Kill pick-ups, and the remaining person watching the room itself from **Position 3**. One person with a Ray gun can easily manage the two windows and the tunnel if they stay sharp and don't get too caught up with any zombies that manage to break through into the room.

- GeometriX

PART 2

Over the last month or two, we've tried various strategies. Part 1 outlined the lottery room strategy because it was the most successful most of the time. However, since then we've tried the following alternatives with varying degrees of success. Here are three quick guides. **Grenade room strategy (most fun)**. Open the lottery room door and defend that room until everyone has a Ray Gun and heavy machine gun (Browning or MG42). Now open the stairs in the lottery room and get everyone into the grenade room (do not open the stairs here). One person watches the window (there's only one window), two on the entrance and the last person buys and throws grenades *all the time*. Note that your own grenades can hurt you if they bounce back at you (usually off the head of someone in front of you). You can alternate this between two on the grenades and one watching the door with the window guy as backup for stray zombies.

Remember to throw the grenades so that they detonate in the doorway. **3 lanes strategy (last resort)**. Do the same as with the grenade room strategy except instead of everyone holding in the grenade room, everyone falls back to the 3 lanes area and defends from there (one guy exclusively on the window). With this strategy, you'll need a lot of power-up drops to survive. Our most recent and seemingly successful strategy is the **spawn room strategy**. As in part 1, leave all the stairs alone and open the lottery room. Once everyone has a Ray Gun and heavy machine gun, divide up the two rooms as follows: In the spawn room one person covers windows C and D, another covers windows B and E. Now one good player needs to cover the whole lottery room with the last man backing him up and keeping an eye on window A. The reason this strategy works so well is that there's always a solid and safe retreat option (instead of running around like headless chickens) should things fall apart (you can fall back to the lottery room or spawn room). The other reason why this works is that each person has a more or less equal number of zombies to handle, and they're mostly behind barricaded repairable windows. End of the day, you need to figure out what works best for your specific team because as we keep refining our strategy, the further into the game we get. Hopefully this guide will give you some overview insight. But the one thing you're really going to need a lot of is luck. **NAG**

- RedTide

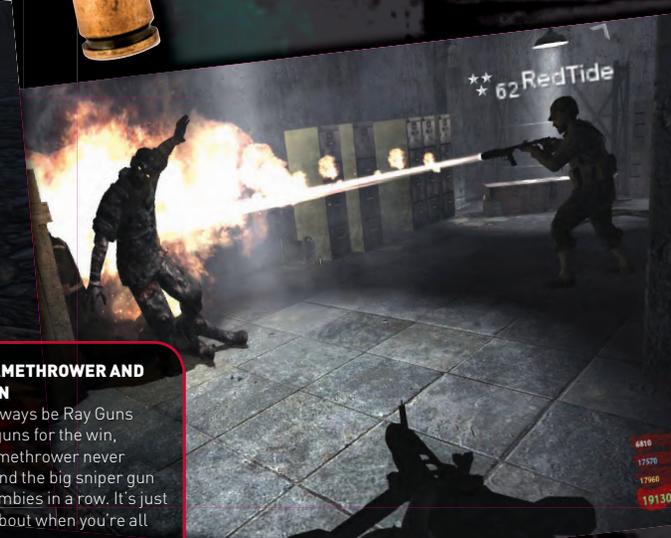


QUICK TIP: HERE, NOT THERE...

- HEAD:** shoot them in the head for maximum damage. As you progress through the levels, the zombies get much tougher.
- CHEST:** secondary to the head, the chest is a bigger target but not as effective.
- ARMS AND LEGS:** just like in the movies, shooting a zombie in the arms and legs is a waste of time.

QUICK TIP: THE FLAMETHROWER AND THE BIG SNIPER GUN

Although it should always be Ray Guns and heavy machine guns for the win, consider that the flamethrower never needs ammunition and the big sniper gun will drop multiple zombies in a row. It's just something to think about when you're all out of ammunition.



LOGITECH'S NEW G13 GAMEBOARD

WITH THREE GAME MODES, 25 programmable keys and a programmable analogue stick, the G13 gameboard offers up to 87 ways for you to control your game. And you can set up custom button-profiles for each one of your favourite titles. You can even create macros on the fly without having to pause your game. The 160 x 43-pixel GamePanel LCD shows live game stats, system info and messages from other players.

The G13 gameboard also sports backlit keys that help you easily locate the right key in low-light conditions or lights-out play. You can select from hundreds of available backlight colours, so your gameboard looks just the way you want it.

A handy solution for the laptop gamer, the G13 gameboard includes onboard memory, letting you program up to five ready-to-play profiles and take them with you to your next LAN party. The G13 gameboard has pre-configured settings for many popular games, including *World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade*, *Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar*, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and many others.

With its sturdy weight and strategically placed feet, the G13 gameboard won't move during play, giving you rock-solid support all the way to victory.

Pricing and availability: The Logitech G13 advanced gameboard is expected to be available in South Africa early in 2009 for a suggested retail price of R999 including VAT.



STREAM ON SAPPHIRE

Latest driver unlocks potential of Stream Processors

SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY HAS ANNOUNCED that AMD Catalyst 8.12 (to be released) will unlock the potential in all recent generations of SAPPHIRE graphics cards to use the on-board stream processors for a wider range of computing tasks.

The new ATI Stream is a set of open AMD technologies that allows the hundreds of parallel stream processors inside the recent generations of GPUs to accelerate general-purpose applications, resulting in PCs capable of delivering dramatically higher performance than using the CPU alone. For example, the recently announced SAPPHIRE HD 4870 and SAPPHIRE HD 4850 series of graphics cards each feature 800 stream processors resulting in a massively parallel computing architecture that can now be harnessed for applications outside of graphics - a technique sometimes known as GPGPU.

Several software companies are already developing applications that will utilise stream processing to accelerate digital image processing and multimedia solutions as well as gaming and productivity tools.

To illustrate the power of this technology, a new version of the ATI AVIVO Video Converter utility has been made available as a free download. This will enable users of SAPPHIRE video cards to transcode HD video between formats - for example, for viewing on a PDA or portable video player - many times faster than was previously possible.

ATI's Catalyst 8.12, once installed, will automatically turn on the ATI Stream-acceleration capabilities of SAPPHIRE graphics cards. This will have the immediate effect of allowing any ATI Stream-enabled application to run faster, with no special effort required by the user to enable this technology.

Catalyst 8.12 includes significant performance enhancements and support for the latest SAPPHIRE products including the new HD 4850 X2.



XFX INTRODUCES ATI POWERED CARDS

From being an NVIDIA-only partner, XFX, a brand favoured by gamers and enthusiasts the world over, announced that it had struck a deal with AMD and would start producing and selling ATI-powered graphics cards. Time will tell if XFX will produce special-edition ATI powered VGA cards like they do with their NVIDIA series, but as it stands, XFX is offering a full range of ATI Radeon 4000 series-based VGA cards using the reference design. These include the 4870, 4850, 4830, 4650 and 4350 which are all currently based on the ATI reference models. These cards should be available in the country shortly.

UNLEASH WII ONLINE GAMING WITH AIRLIVE AND NOLOGY

AirLive's new EtherWe-1000U Adapter will enable South African Nintendo Wii owners to easily connect to the Internet and become part of the global community participating in online Wii games.

To be distributed by Nology, the USB 2.0 10/100Mbps Ethernet adapter is an easy-to-use, cost-effective enabler of Wii online gaming. The EtherWe-1000U is connected to the USB port of the Wii, and the adapter can then be connected directly to an ADSL 4000 series-based router to gain access to the Internet. With a transfer rate of up to 100Mbps, the AirLive EtherWe-1000U is about twice as fast as the built-in Wii Wi-Fi connection.

AMD MOBILITY RADEON HD 4000 SERIES GPUS

AT THE 2009 INTERNATIONAL CES, AMD announced the new ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4000 series graphics processors, its next-generation series of notebook graphics processors, bringing leading gaming and multimedia technology from the desktop to notebooks. These feature-rich graphics processors redefine mobile gaming with advanced capabilities including support for the latest Microsoft DirectX 10.1 games, a home theatre-quality HD multimedia experience, and energy-efficient features for long battery life to help users get the most out of their notebook. The ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4800 series supports ATI CrossFireX technology to deliver up to one teraFLOP of performance power. All ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4000 series graphics processors feature powerful 3D engines derived from the popular ATI Radeon HD 4800 series architecture and are capable of up to twice the gaming performance of the predecessor ATI Mobility Radeon HD 3000 Series at their respective power levels. The ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4800 series graphics processors are the industry's first to support GDDR5 memory technology, providing nearly twice the memory bandwidth of GDDR3 and GDDR4, contributing to improvements in gameplay and performance. "We're proud to highlight ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4870 as the first notebook GPU to support specially designed, ultra-high bandwidth GDDR5 graphics memory to unleash the full-throttle gaming experience normally reserved for the high-end desktop gaming rigs," said Rick Bergman, senior vice president and general manager of AMD, Graphics Products Group. "Now, notebooks equipped with one or a pair of these speedy graphics processors can take on just about any PC game and run them smoothly at their maximum option settings. The ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4000 series graphics processors have been designed into quality notebooks from many leading notebook manufacturers such as ASUS, MSI and others, with models planned for availability beginning in Q1 2009."



CYBER SNIPA WARBOARD

The Cyber Snipa Warboard is designed for elite gaming enthusiasts. Sporting intelligent macro programmable keys for custom-designed gameplay, the Warboard gives the player the tactical support needed to defeat any opponent. Apart from ten dual-mode (20x) macro programmable keys, the Warboard also features ten multimedia hot keys for Windows applications, an 'on target' button to lock the 'Windows key,' interchangeable 'combat keys', and a responsive tactile key feedback. The Warboard is ideal for FPS, RTS, MMO and RPG gaming, and comes with intuitive, easy-to-use software.

RRP: R339 (excl. VAT) | Stockist details: Axiz

HARDWARE Q & A

HAVE A 450W PSU that keeps frying the fuse and diods. Do you by chance know why this keeps on happening and how to fix it?

Ian Erasmus

NAG: That could be caused by any number of reasons, including sub standard power from the wall socket. However, chances are that the Power Supply is faulty and there's not much point in attempting to fix it. The next time it blows it could destroy the rest of your hardware. It seems your best option is buying a new unit, preferably one with a 1 to 3 year warranty.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Hardware Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Age, weight, favourite drink and sexual orientation.

PRODUCT NAME: Good to know when you wake up in bed with this hardware.

AWARDS: Check out her hot sister below!



UNDER THE HOOD, YO: Ghetto flava, kicking it with the pow-wah.

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SPEC-TACULAR: This is where your buddy hooks you up with the nfo, yo.

SCORE: Gold-star treatment, only the best for our hardware.

SPECS	
CORE	R680 x 2 (857MHz)
PROCESS	666 million gates x 2 (55nm TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit 512MB GDDR3 x 2 (900MHz)
ROPS	16 x 2
SHADERS	320 x 2
SCORE	
★★★★★	

NAG AWARDS

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.



HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5 The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, we probably already have.
- 4 A good deal, worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.
- 2 This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.
- 1 The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

THE STUFF OF DREAMS

A new addition to the hardware reviews presents itself in the form of a "Stuff of Dreams" boxout. When a product has deemed itself worthy of our Dream Machine award, we think you should know why the previous title-holder got booted out and replaced with something even hotter. The table shows the Champion (old) and the Challenger (new) – we're sure you can work the rest out for yourself.

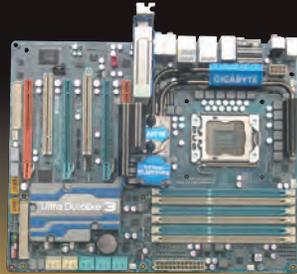
DREAM MACHINE

There are no changes to our Dream Machine this month, but don't despair... change is coming! We have our eyes on a few new products that could have an impact on our über rig. In particular, we're looking forward to testing the new range of NVIDIA GTX295 graphics cards. Peripheral giant Logitech is also making waves with its new input devices. Stay tuned for reviews of the G19 keyboard and G9x mouse in future issues. And we'll try to replace the igloo with a real cooler, too.



PROCESSOR

Intel Core i7 Extreme 965 (\$1,300)
Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530



MOTHERBOARD

GIGABYTE EX58-Extreme (TBA)
GIGABYTE



GRAPHICS CARD

SAPPHIRE HD 4870 X2 (R6,400)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



MEMORY

Corsair TWIN3X2048-1800C7DF G (R4,699)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038



CASE

Cooler Master Cosmos S (R1,818)
Sonic Informed [011] 314-5800



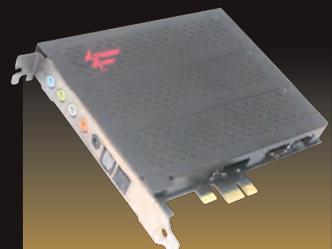
STORAGE

WD Caviar SE16 500GB (R755)
Drive Control [011] 201-8927



POWER SUPPLY

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU (TBA)
IKONIK



SOUND

Creative X-Fi Titanium Fatal1ty (R1,799)
Creative



MONITOR

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD (R5,499)
Samsung 0860 726 7864



KEYBOARD

Microsoft SideWinder X6 (R859)
Microsoft



MOUSE

Logitech G9 Laser (R999)
Logitech [011] 656-3375



COOLING

Coming soon: No compatible cooler currently available



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Hardwired



by Neo Sibeko

My Ultimate Rig! (Part 3)

THIS IS THE LAST write-up about my dream machine, and as expected, it's based on AMD's Dragon platform – or at least it was supposed to be. While the Phenom II CPU was kept along with a 790GX-based motherboard, the VGA card was changed in favour of the GeForce GTX295, which was released last month and managed to oust the Radeon 4870X2 as the fastest graphics card on the market.

The AMD platform presented several challenges, because at the time of writing, not all the components were available for purchase and some were not final production samples (945 CPU for example), but in terms of performance, there should not be any difference between the pre-production and the retail samples.

By the end of 2009, there may very well be a further improved core, chipset, better compatibility between memories or a combination of all the above; so in terms of how long this machine will remain a high-end gaming and enthusiast PC, it should take everything that 2009 will bring in its stride.

Motherboard: ECS Black Series A790GX-AD3

Yes, it's a motherboard with integrated graphics and by the time you read this, there should be better motherboards from Tier-1 manufacturers. However, at the time of writing this, it was the only motherboard that was certain to support AMD's Phenom II X4 945 CPU with DDR3.

CPU: AMD Phenom II X4 945 at 4.0GHz (200 x 20)

The Phenom II is more than just an improvement over the original Phenom in terms of IPC – its massive overclocking headroom over the previous generation parts makes it truly remarkable. The overclock may only be 1GHz here, but that is huge compared to what was available before. The high clock speed and microarchitecture improvements make the 945 a very capable CPU, with no cold bug to speak of, even at temperatures lower than -170°C.

RAM: Buffalo 4 x 1GB DDR3 2,200MHz Memory (2.1V @ 2,000MHz CL8-7-7-21)

Buffalo RAM is only available in 2GB sets, so two sets will have to be used so that the system can make use of 4GB of RAM and a 64-bit OS. The latency may not be great, but the IMC in the Phenom II CPUs is still a relative mystery at this time, particularly when dealing with DDR3.

Storage: Intel X25 160GB SATA 3Gb/sec SSD + 2 x WD Caviar Black 1TB Drives

No changes from the last two dream machine builds. The Intel SSD drive is still blazingly fast, but I would use the newer 160GB drive instead of the older 80GB drive.

VGA: XFX GeForce GTX295 XXX Edition (Speeds yet to be determined by available GPU coolers)

I would use one VGA card for now, as it's the fastest single VGA card money can buy presently. Had there been an nForce-based motherboard for the AM3, I probably would have used that motherboard and run the graphics cards in quad-SLI.

PSU: IKONIK Vulcan 1200 Watt

Still the best PSU I have used. The 120A, 12V rail makes it a very capable PSU.

Monitor: Samsung SyncMaster T260

The best-looking monitor I have ever had the pleasure of working with. There may be bigger monitors out there, but this one is just right and the quality is spectacular.

Cooling: Swiftech Triple Radiator (MCR320), OCZ HydroFlow HF-MK1 (CPU), Pump (MCP655), Reservoir (MCRES Micro Rev2)

Only the best cooling components are used, and best of all, they are easily available from several online stores. VGA blocks will have to be added later when they are available for the GTX295.

Chassis: IKONIK RA-X10 SIM

Not the cheapest case around, but you get what you pay for. The built quality is incredible as is the attention to detail. Best of all, it looks brilliant and has plenty of room to fit all the components.

This machine concludes the dream machine builds. This may be the only AMD machine, but it's just as capable as the other machines for games and sometimes the competitive benchmarks. The best thing about this particular machine is that it has huge growth potential. AMD has still to announce the FX CPUs for the platform, and those should provide even better performance and overclocking headroom than the 945 Black Edition CPU. By the time the FX series is available, the CPU revisions should be even better and there should be much better motherboards from several manufacturers. A four-way SLI or even a four-way CrossFire configuration with an appropriate motherboard should provide a high-end gaming machine that is equally comfortable under liquid nitrogen as it is when liquid-cooled.

Obviously, the best situation would be for one to own all three rigs, but that is not practical for most people, so one would have to do. In my opinion, any of the rigs presented over the last three months would be more than up to the task of handling any game that will be released in 2009. Even if you're not a gamer but more of a power user and enthusiast, the only component you'll need to turn any of the machines into serious overclocking rigs would be one CPU POT and you would be ready to compete on HWBOT internationally for top honours. **NAG**



The Phenom II is more than just an improvement over the original Phenom in terms of IPC – its massive overclocking headroom over the previous generation parts makes it truly remarkable.



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COSMIC COMICS - HEATHWAY CENTRE NAKED IT - HILLCREST CENTRE

NORTHWEST BT GAMES - RUSTENBURG VALUE MART MPUMALANGA BT GAMES - WITBANK - HIGHVELD MALL PORT ELIZABETH BT GAMES - WALMER PARK

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DLA GROUP (PTY)LTD



Reviewer's Diary



by Derrick Cramer

Worth the price?

WITH MOBILITY BECOMING AN ever-increasing need in today's PC society, we are now seeing more and more desktop replacement notebooks flooding the market, sporting features on par with their desktop brothers, and a price that would make grown men shed pay cheques with heavy hands. The question practically asks itself: are they worth it?

Imagine pitching up at a LAN with one small backpack. In said backpack, you would have your headphones, LAN cable, charger, mouse, mouse pad, and most important, your desktop replacement notebook (or gaming laptop for those who haven't quite caught on). Setting up is over in a minute or two, and you can get on with the important part. Compare this to lugging your 22kg case through the door; checking that the bumpy car ride hasn't broken anything important off; going back and fetching your 22-inch LCD in one arm and your bag of goodies in the other; setting up your PC hoping the table doesn't collapse; plugging in all the cables and wires you may need – power, mouse, keyboard, monitor etc. – and finally, ten minutes later, sitting down to rest before starting anything else. The thought going through every gamer's mind is simple: how quickly can I flog my desktop to get a gaming notebook? Hold on a minute while we throw out some numbers and see what we get.

The MSI Mega Book GX720 reviewed in the December '08 issue has the following specifications:

- Intel Centrino 2 P9500 (2.53GHz);
 - Intel PM45 chipset;
 - 2GB of DDR2 800MHz RAM;
 - 17-inch LCD;
 - NVIDIA 9600M GT;
 - 4.1-channel audio system;
 - 320GB SATA hard drive.
- Total cost: Just shy of R22,000

A real beauty no doubt – everything you would need to make the above scenario complete. At present, it will handle most games on high settings and will be sufficient for another year of gaming goodness. However, let's compare its price to the price of a desktop equivalent:

- Intel E8400 (slowest locally available 45nm 6MB cache dual-core chip);
- ASUS P5Q MOBO;
- 2GB of DDR2 1,066MHz RAM (same price as DDR2 800MHz);
- 19-inch LCD (costs R100 more than 17-inch equivalent);
- NVIDIA 9600GT;
- 5.1-channel audio system;

- 500GB hard drive (R75 more expensive than a 320GB HD);
 - DVD writer;
 - Generic case;
 - Logitech keyboard and mouse;
 - 600W PSU.
- Total cost: R10,500

As you can see, you pay around R11,500 for the mobility that the GX720 offers. Is a small bit of comfort and ease in very few situations worth the price of an entire new PC? The total idiocy of the price tag becomes apparent when you see what sort of desktop R22,000 can get you:

- Intel E8600;
 - ASUS P5Q Deluxe MOBO;
 - 4GB of DDR2 1066MHz RAM;
 - 24-inch LCD;
 - AMD/ATI 4870X2;
 - Two 500GB hard drives;
 - Two DVD writers;
 - CM 690 case;
 - Logitech G15 and G9;
 - 750W PSU.
- Total cost: R22,000 (rounded off)

Is there even any debate here? Can you justify R11,500 for mobility? The short answer is no, you cannot. While it may be the dream for any LANner to rock up with a gaming notebook, this is an idea best left to the wealthy. Because to be honest, how long will a 9600M GT last you before newer games come out and you're stuck playing at low resolutions with even lower quality settings. It's not as if you can just upgrade the graphics card (possible, but costly and one hell of a schlep) or move to a bigger screen. Upgradability is very limited, and soon you will want more hard drive space, more RAM, more power, but instead you're stuck with a gaming notebook that's hard to sell for anything near the price you paid for it, and a very big upgrade price tag for a newer gaming notebook. The bottom line: if you have R22,000 burning a hole in your pocket, and you have a monster desktop PC sitting at home, by all means go for the GX720, or any other high-end gaming notebook. If not, let common sense prevail – get yourself a desktop PC and sacrifice a small bit of mobility for a lot of power. **NAG**



Is a small bit of comfort and ease in very few situations worth the price of an entire new PC? The total idiocy of the price tag becomes apparent when you see what sort of desktop R22,000 can get you.



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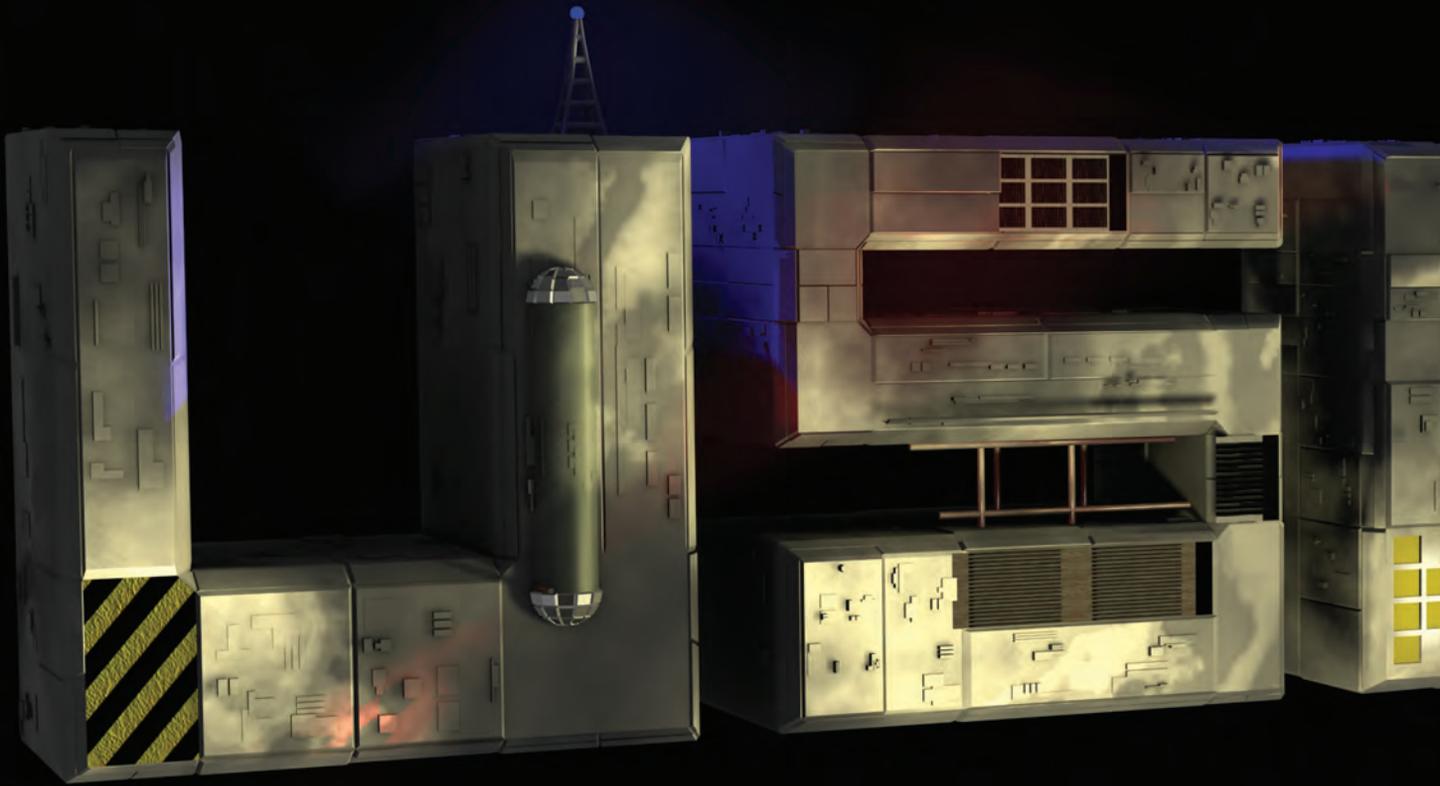
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3.0 GIANT STRIDES FORWARD...

Russell Bennett looks at the release of the USB 3.0 specification and the implications this may have for gaming-orientated input devices

IT'S INTERESTING HOW QUICKLY technological innovation becomes baseline standard in our game. In fact, it tends to happen so fast, that the transition is barely noticed by the user.

A scattergun short list of examples here: how quickly do each few inches you add to your monitor size lose their impact? Which is to say, how quickly does the new 19" simply become the standard, and the old 17" unusably cramped, in our minds? How quickly did we get used to (well, we're still getting there, but the world, I mean) fat Internet pipes measured in megabits per second instead of the old dial-up kilobits? And how rapidly did 2,000-plus dpi gaming mice become essential to pinpoint accuracy in the latest online shooter?

FROM 115.2KBPS TO 600MB/S

That last one is what interests me for the purpose of this article. If you think about it, the way that the current-standard USB interface has impacted how we use our computers is unbelievably substantial, considering how little we actually think of this tiny, flat connection. While its introduction back in '99 was greeted with some fanfare, almost ten years along now this easiest-interface-ever by which to connect something - anything really - to

your PC is something you couldn't think of being without.

Technologically speaking, what the USB standard brought to the party over the PS/2 or absolutely archaic RS-232 port was speed, monstrous connection scalability, and let's not forget a dead easy-to-use, hot-swappable physical connector. Everyone was happy and all was well, yet the PS/2 port remained incorporated on just about every motherboard you bought, allowing for a slow and seamless migration.

When USB 2.0 suddenly boosted this remarkable interface to a bandwidth of 60MB/sec (theoretically), the device market really exploded. Today everything useful is USB, from printers to portable storage, through an extensive range of gaming-oriented HIDs (Human Interface Devices) in the middle, all vying for those A-type connection ports. The four on a regular board aren't enough anymore, you've most likely got another four at least by using the auxiliary USB connectors. I've got a total of 12, and I still use a four-port USB hub in one of those...

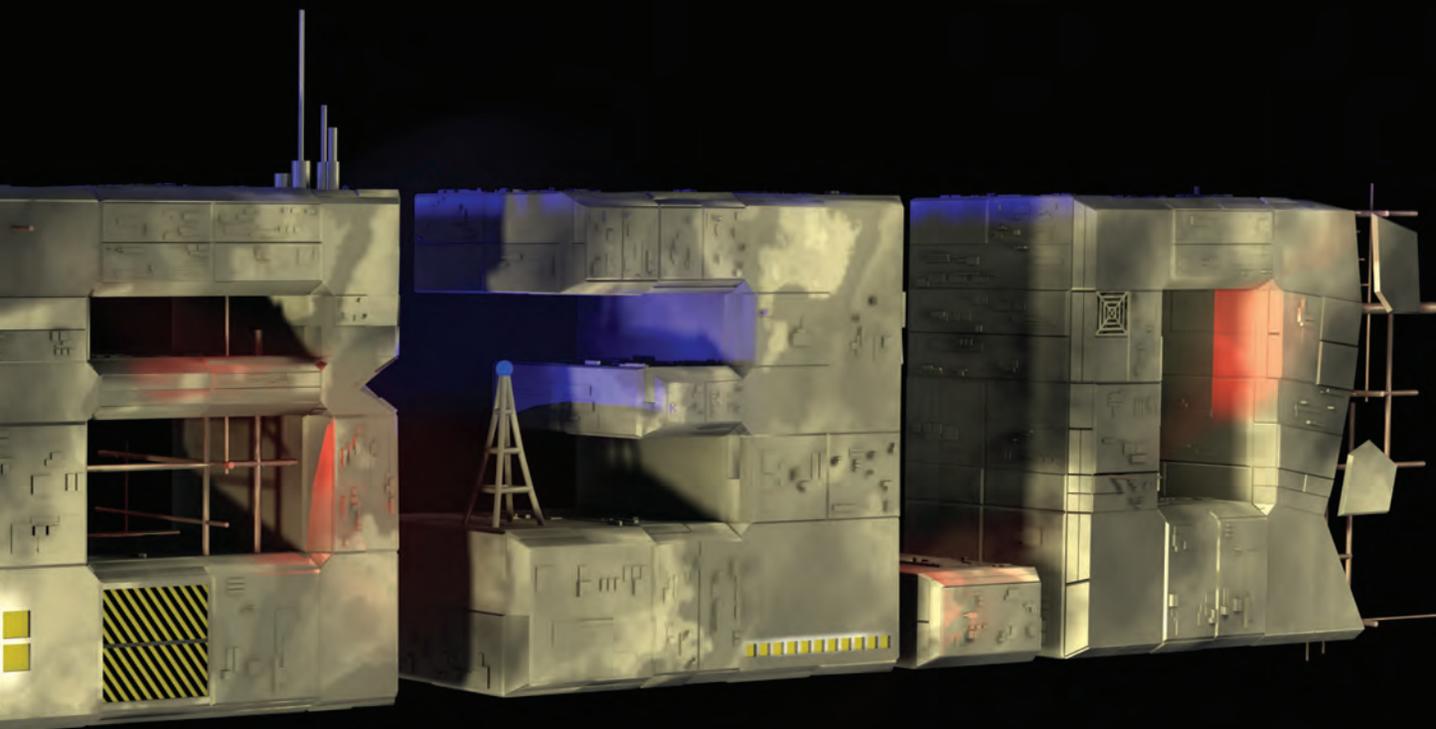
It's not only hassle-free, but an affordable comms standard to build a device onto. Uncomfortable with wearing headphones for VoIP telephony? Pop a USB VoIP handset which incorporates

its own audio processing in and you're Skyping in minutes. Need to move several gigs of data to a machine not on your network? These days less than 500 bucks will get you way more than 10GB of instantly portable storage capacity.

RAW SPEED - ALWAYS THE GAMER'S CHOICE

From a hardcore gamer's perspective, it's an absolute dream. I have my gamepad, FF steering wheel, flightsim-grade joystick, a pair of mice (one for Windows and the other for fragging) and a keyboard plugged into my USB ports, all active at once, no hassles. Beyond the scalability though, is the actual technological advancement within these devices which really impact our use of the system, and a lot of what we enjoy today is only possible with a suitably sizable pipe back to the system supporting it.

In just the mouse, it freed up manufacturers of this ubiquitous pointing device to concentrate purely on developing the tracking itself, moving over the years to optical, and now laser-based systems transmitting locational data at rates way beyond the 40Kbps limit of PS/2 connections. Today it remains the optical sensor quality which limits further leaps in this field, and not interface speed



– yet. Already, though, gaming products like Microsoft's Habu have moved to a 16-bit datapath polling 1,000 times a second for greater response.

TAKE 3

However, the transfer rate is not going to be a problem in the foreseeable future, not with the powers-that-be announcing the release of the first USB 3.0 specs to the hardware industry at large. Like the specs that precede it, the highlight performance leap is exponential, by a factor of 10. But with the base figure already being quite meaty in its own right, this translates into a massive jump in the overall theoretical bandwidth of the bus, to a wholesome 600MB/sec – close to 5GB/sec in old money!

So, that's substantially faster than the fast-Ethernet networking we're largely still using today. In fact, it's almost five times faster than blazing Gigabit Ethernet speeds. It's quite a bit more than any hard-drive can access its data, and as fast as system RAM was just a generation or two ago. Translate the same performance bump into that gaming mouse from earlier, and you're looking at 20,000-plus dpi, easily, and a 32-bit and even 64-bit data path will quickly become reality. In fact, with the latest USB standard,

that monster mouse could even be embellished with a glittering, sparkling fibre-optic cable transporting the chunky data stream. How cool is that going to be? Fiber, the heart of any enterprise architecture, now carrying the comms of peripherals.

THE HID REINVENTED?

Anyway, it isn't only the mouse and keyboard which will evolve to take advantage of this enormous pipe. Of course, the next generation of portable storage and comms equipment will get there quickly, but I'd put money on the options in gaming input devices just exploding on the back of this endless capacity.

Consider the Nintendo Wii, and what its innovative approach to input has done to the console market. By utilising a single three-axis accelerometer and making use of 802.11 WLAN protocols to transmit this data back to the console itself, well, everybody just loves the Wii, which speaks for itself, really.

Nintendo's original implementation may have been pretty good to begin with, but a company called InvenSense more recently took it a step further still, with the Wii MotionPlus. The original version had proven somewhat inadequate in fast-paced precision activities like sword fighting, but

the InvenSense think tank came up with little short of a scientific marvel, offering levels of accuracy and outright response speeds beyond rational levels of thought thanks to the incorporation of a small, cost-effective gyroscopic chip into the mix, realising full six-axis control for near 1:1 interaction with the 3D environment. And perhaps most crucially of all, they claim that they're still scratching the surface of what they can do with this, all at a cost-effective price point for mass-market appeal.

Now back to the PC realm, and you can just see that with 600MB/sec of bus to play around in, this type of multi-dimensional input device will have all the headroom it needs to achieve its most evolved state. And there are more such revolutionary devices out there, currently on the fringes as it were, which will be unshackled as the USB 3.0 standard starts to roll out in earnest, such as those zany headset systems perhaps?

Either way, the USB 3.0 specification is likely to be another of those sleeper technological revolutions. We might not notice it as it happens, but in a few years we're going to be saying "How did we control our GUI before multi-axis motion-sensitive controllers became the standard input device anyway?" **NAG**



Impressive 1.3MP Webcam proves to be a very useful feature on the U100



MMC/SD/CF reader

MSI WIND U100

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT the ultra-mobile PC market has grown significantly over the last year or two. Although this boom is largely due to the cost benefits of having an ultra-mobile PC (compared to a fully-fledged notebook), the impact the Eee PC from MSI's competitor has made cannot be ignored. The Eee PC made the ultra-mobile PC accessible to all and has become somewhat fashionable for people to have and to use.

The MSI Wind U100 we had for testing is an interesting piece of hardware. We weren't too fond of its pink colour, as pink is not the most popular colour when it comes to hardware. Once you get over the colour, however, the U100 proves to be an impressive piece of technology, and definitely an impressive ultra-mobile PC. It is available in other colours though, so don't let the pink be a deterring factor for you.

The model we reviewed features Intel's N270 Atom processor clocked at a respectable 1.6GHz, which is more than enough for the typical workload the U100 will be dealing with.

The most amazing thing about the U100 is the power it packs into such a small package weighing in at about 1kg. With an extra 512MB of RAM, the system will be capable of handling Vista Basic instead of Windows XP Home (which was pre-installed on the test unit).

Using the U100 may seem a little awkward at first as one gets used to the 10-inch, 1,024 x 600 widescreen LCD, the slightly cramped keyboard and the touch pad. However, once you are accustomed to

these, the U100 is easy and natural to use. If you really feel that the U100 is confining and you may be using it for extended periods, connecting a USB mouse, keyboard and LCD screen (via the VGA port) will turn the U100 into a 'full' PC of sorts. It would be great if the U100 had a better graphics controller, as it struggles with some video content on larger external displays. However, this should not put anyone off, especially considering that the U100 is meant to be used on the move and not necessarily as a desktop replacement of any type.

The particular unit we received was already set up to use the built-in 1.3MP Webcam, and the quality was surprisingly better than expected. The wireless Ethernet controller was easy to set up and within minutes, we had the U100 connected to the Internet. Speed is another impressive aspect of the U100. Booting Windows and performing Windows tasks were snappy with the U100 and opening office documents was equally as quick.

The large drive capacity was welcome, even though we had the unit with a 120GB drive - the 160GB drive is an option for those who need the extra 40GB of storage. In terms of battery life, the U100 may be a little disappointing with about two hours of battery life, but that is under heavy use watching video and using USB-powered devices. With more conservative use, the battery life could be as long as three hours - not a major increase in battery performance, but certainly better than the two hours we recorded.

The MSI Wind U100's magic lies in its



portability and functionality. For the most part, there is absolutely no difference between using a fully-fledged notebook and the U100. Many will miss the optical drive, but with 120GB of hard drive space, one can connect a USB optical drive and store programs and CD/DVD images on the drive.

With the recent introduction of NVIDIA's ION platform, hopefully we'll see a Wind unit featuring this platform, which should bring proper 3D acceleration to ultra-mobile PCs. Until then, however, the integrated Intel UMA accelerator will have to do. Nonetheless, the MSI Wind U100 is a fantastic unit that we have to give full marks to. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CPU	Intel Atom @ 1.6GHz
MEMORY	512MB DDR2 (upgradable to 2GB)
HARD DRIVE	120GB (160GB optional)
CONNECTORS	4 x USB 2.0, VGA, multi card reader
WIRELESS	802.11b/g/n wireless LAN, Bluetooth
OS	Windows XP Home

SCORE



NOKIA N85

NOKIA'S N85 IS WHAT one might call their 'something for everyone' phone. It's a combination of every good innovation Nokia has brought to the market over the last couple of years, but unfortunately brings with it a few of the less-desirable ones as well.

When you first open the N85 using its spring-assisted sliding mechanism, you're greeted by a bright and vibrant display on the device's luxurious 2.6-inch OLED screen. Six customisable shortcuts await, while upcoming calendar entries, wireless connectivity status and currently running media are kept updated below. Beautiful, flowing screen transitions, which are a part of the new S60v3 Feature Pack 2, and animated navigation through the system are, oddly enough, disabled by default – accessible only through some serious digging in the control panel (much like the screen brightness setting, which really should be maxed by default for the best image quality possible).

Where the screen succeeds in every department, the rest of the device is a little slack in terms of ergonomics. Revealed by operation of the two-way slider mechanism, which is a little squeaky but otherwise holds its own under a bit of pressure, is the keypad; perhaps one of the N85's biggest weaknesses. A single piece, the keypad is home to fiddly, flat keys that seem to encourage mistyping from anyone with anything but the daintiest of thumbs.

One of the device's greatest assets is its camera. Capturing at a resolution up to 5MP, the Carl Zeiss lens is paired with a dual LED flash to provide an excellent camera solution that's more capable than

almost any other cellphone camera you've seen before. While its ability to handle low-light situations is better than most phones (certainly other Nokia devices), images captured without bright or natural sunlight come out rather grainy and washed-out. Another excellent feature is the N85's ability to capture full-motion video at 'TV quality', or in this case 640 x 480dpi at 30 frames per second. While it's not quite TV quality, the crispness and fluidity of the video are virtually unmatched in this segment.

The N85's appeal will obviously depend on what you want from a phone. The N85 performs every trick in the book, but some of its basic features just aren't up to standard. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

SPECS

CONNECTIVITY	Quad-band GSM, Wi-Fi, HSDPA, Bluetooth, USB 2.0
DISPLAY	2.6-inch 320 x 240 OLED
OS	Symbian S60v3 with Feature Pack 2
BATTERY	Li-ion 1,200mAh (up to 7 hours talk time)
CAMERA	5MP - Carl Zeiss optics with autofocus and dual LED flash

SCORE

★★★★★



N-GAGED GAMING

Nokia's N-Gage gaming platform has come a long way. Originally developed as dedicated hardware, N-Gage allows for high-spec 3D graphics at smooth frame rates, impressive audio and, on certain models such as the N85, dedicated gaming keys. Nowadays, N-Gage is so much more. While the N-Gage hardware chip is present in some models, it's not required. N-Gage is now a dedicated software platform, similar to XBLA or PSN, which is a central launch pad for N-Gage games and a hub for social networking, chatting and organising multiplayer games.

Some of the games available include Nokia's self-published 3D fighter *One*, EA's *FIFA 09*, THQ Wireless's *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* and Glu's *World Series of Poker*. At present, there are almost 30 high-quality titles available, and Nokia is working closely with developers to bring more games to the closed, highly exclusive platform over the coming years.

The gaming keypad offers copies of the WASD keys, some surrounding keys, and other frequently used keys such as Shift and Tab. However, the non-standard arrangement does little to make these keys more accessible



XGR GAMING DESKTOP

IT SOMETIMES SEEMS THAT companies try to get on bandwagons for the sake of moneymaking, without really putting actual thought into how they do it. Sadly, half of this product smacks of that. The idea is almost sound: have a keypad at the side that can be used by the 'non-mouse' hand, and which provides a convenient grouping of frequently used keys. The problem here is the fact that the definition of 'frequently used keys' changes from game to game. Yes, most first-person shooter titles, and some others, do use the WASD keys for movement – but there's more to gaming than those four keys. All right, so the keypad includes some surrounding keys, as these are often used in games for various functions. Shift, Ctrl and Space are all often used, and are represented here, but in unfamiliar and uncomfortable positions. The F key, which normally sits right next to D, is mysteriously absent (even though many games use it), and is instead replaced by a copy of the T key. Now, this would all be fine if the keys could be re-programmed, but it seems that the keys are 'hard' copies of their original counterparts, which is to say that they are simply wired together.

The keys are somewhat smaller than normal, which makes this keyboard

somewhat awkward for people with normal-sized or larger hands, but should prove fine for the early teens. The duplicate WASD keys are normal-sized, however. Oh, there is no NUM-pad, by the way – this may not be a problem for some, but for others is definitely a factor, so take it into consideration. It is odd that the 'gaming keypad' (the reproduced WASD and surrounding keys) was placed on the left side of the keyboard, instead of where the NUM-pad would normally be – surely doing so would make playing more comfortable by bringing the hands closer together? The packaging claims that the keyboard is waterproof, and we are taking this on faith. Unfortunately, because this keyboard connects via PS/2 (this, in itself is quite a surprising anachronism), risking shorting out the keyboard would be risking damaging the motherboard, so we didn't test this. However, assuming it is the case, this is a very nifty feature (I can't count the number of times I have spilled something on my keyboard at a LAN!). Another nifty feature is the fact that the Windows key can be disabled – very useful when playing games!

While the keyboard is, overall, very mediocre, the mouse is pretty good. Again,

it is a bit on the small side, so this product is definitely intended for younger gamers, but the shape and responsiveness are both quite good. It is a five-button model, and also has a sixth button for on-the-fly adjustment of the mouse's sensitivity. Unlike the keyboard, the mouse connects via USB.

Overall, it seems that this product is aimed at the young teenage gamer, both in terms of styling and due to the small size of both the keys and the mouse. Older users will likely find this desktop too cramped, and the lack of a NUM-pad may be an issue for some. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

SPECS

Multi-mode gaming keypad

Waterproof keyboard

On-the-fly mouse sensitivity (500, 1,000, 2,000dpi)

SCORE



EARTHQUAKE SOUND NOVA SN-51

RRP → R2,999 | Supplier → Audiotel | Website → www.earthquakesound.co.za | Brand → Earthquake

THESE DAYS, A 5.1 surround-sound setup is as common as a DVD player. In fact, the market is saturated by 5.1 speaker systems ranging in price - from the ridiculously cheap to the most expensive KEF reference units. The Nova set, despite being marketed as an audiophile's speaker system, is more for the average to above average user who appreciates low bass notes and a relatively loud but solid sound.

Do not be put off by the above, however. Although most sets in this category aren't great, the Nova SN-51 is a good offering. You can customise the sound to your preference, because each satellite can be adjusted independently, which should give those who don't have uniform or symmetrical speaker distribution better control over the sound.

All the satellites, as in many similar units, plug into the rear of the 10-inch subwoofer, which features a built in 500W (peak power) amplifier, making it an ideal unit to use with just about any device that can output an audio signal.

This set performs best when playing back rock, hip-hop or any other bass-heavy music, and this is where the SN-51's ported 10-inch subwoofer really stands out. The subwoofer delivers an impressive low grunt that is accurate even at the highest volume settings. When watching video on a suitable source, the surround effect is good, with the subwoofer delivering window-rattling bass

without any obvious distortion.

Aesthetically, the unit doesn't really impress. In black, the unit would have looked better, but the metallic silver the unit is finished in is probably better suited to more environments than a black finish is. Overall, the Earthquake Sound Nova SN-51 is exactly what you would expect. It does a little more than enough to impress you, but at no point does it blow you away by its finesse or how it handles the intricate sounds of various music types. If you will be using this unit for the abovementioned music types and anything similar, playing games or watching action movies, the SN-51 will not disappoint you at all. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



SPECS

AMPLIFIER	500W
SUBWOOFER	10-inch (ported)
SATELLITES	4
CENTRE	2 x drivers + 1 Silk Dome tweeter

SCORE



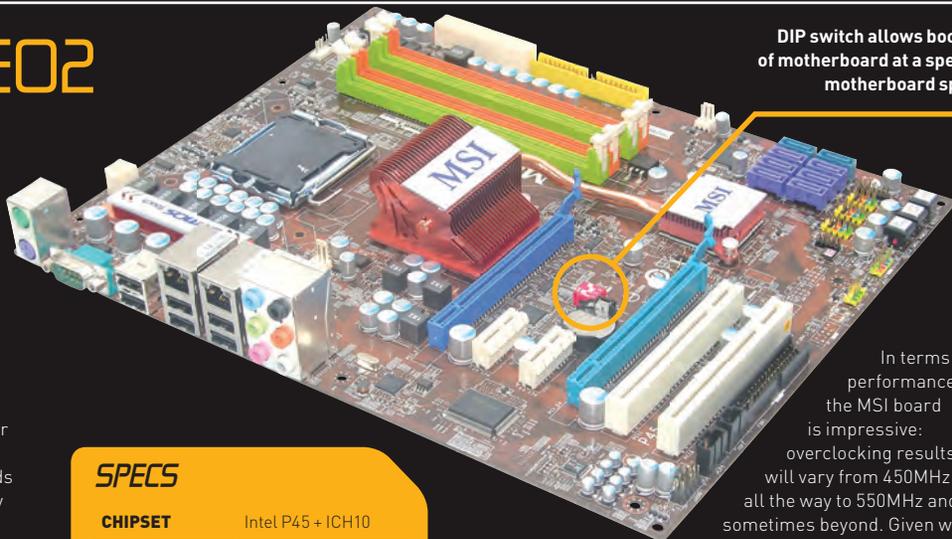
MSI P45 NEO2

RRP → TBA | Supplier → Pinnacle Micro
Website → www.pinnacle.co.za
Brand → MSI

NOW THAT THE HYPE surrounding the X58 motherboards and the Core i7 CPUs has subsided, it's clear that the LGA 775 platform still has some life in it - at least until the P55 and LGA 1156/1160 CPUs are released later this year.

Right now, the P45 chipset is king of the hill for the mid-range performance segment in terms of getting the most for your money. The chipset is not new and we've seen many different motherboards based on the chipset. While it is unlikely that a new motherboard with the P45 chipset will set the overclocking scene alight, as the platform has matured, motherboards have improved and buying a new P45 motherboard now will not only result in fewer incompatibilities, but better overclocking, more features and all of this hopefully at a cheaper price.

The MSI P45 Neo2 is such a motherboard. It features two Gigabit Ethernet ports, supports just about any LGA 775 CPU available, can make use of up to 16GB of DDR2 memory, and everything you would expect from a high-end motherboard. However, this board features fewer power phases and isn't necessarily the best package money can buy.



DIP switch allows booting of motherboard at a specific motherboard speed

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P45 + ICH10
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin (max. 4 x 4GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Pentium 4, Core 2, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 6 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet

SCORE



In terms of performance, the MSI board is impressive: overclocking results will vary from 450MHz all the way to 550MHz and sometimes beyond. Given whom the motherboard is targeted at and where it fits in the P45 family of boards from MSI, it more than delivers.

With CrossFireX support and an eight-channel, high-definition ALC888 controller, there's very little the Neo2 lacks. The BIOS is very comprehensive and is on par with those of the majority of P45 motherboards on the market. If you're in the market for a solid P45 motherboard for a gaming machine, but would rather not spend a small fortune on a platform that seemingly has a limited future, the MSI P45 Neo2 is a board definitely worth considering. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



MOVIE NEWS

THE YEAR IS 20XX...

WANNABE FILM GOD AND amateur director Eddie Lebron woke up one day and decided he was sick of the world being without a *Megaman* film, so he's gone ahead and made it himself. Using a pack of wild actors fresh off the set of their local amateur dramatics societies, Lebron has combined some rather slick production with shabby acting and an adorably cheesy plot to bring the *Megaman* film to life - all in a strictly not-for-profit package.

Taking place in the year 20XX, the story follows the creation of two androids, Rock and Roll, by the Nobel Prize-winning roboticist Doctor Thomas Light. Light's fellow scientist, Albert W. Wily - a deranged and power-hungry man with the most serious moustache this side of Tom Selleck - doesn't think much of Light's goody two-shoes outlook on the potential of robotic slaves. Opting to steal the technology for himself, Wily now seeks to conquer the world and there's only one man who can stop him - Rockman (well, 'Megaman' for the confused). The film looks ridiculous in every possible way, but it'll no doubt be a hoot to watch. Its release date is pegged at 200X. While we're sure Lebron thought he was being very clever when he decided that, it's not really 'allowed' to go anywhere past this year, so expect the film some time soon. Until then, have a peak at the trailer at www.megamanfilm.com to see just how far your tolerance for bad acting will stretch.



WAX ON AND ON AND ON

REMAKES ARE GREAT. THEY'RE great because it means that you can make a new movie that's almost guaranteed to pull in the crowds without actually having to invent anything. Not that we mind, of course, because remakes give us the opportunity to relive a small part of our childhood for a couple of hours while still giving us the joyous chance to slag it off for not living up to the original. There are some things that should be left alone, however, and the already somewhat lame *Karate Kid* is one of them. Sure, the original has a place in everyone's heart; it's a wonderful story of a kid who overcomes his childhood woes with

his eccentric mentor, and we're not all cold-hearted violent gamers who long for bloodshed in every film, but the idea of seeing it all again just makes us cringe.

Produced by Jerry Weintraub (the man behind the original films), the new "re-imagined" *Karate Kid* film, which is currently unnamed, will star Jaden Smith (who you may have seen recently in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*) as a youngster struggling with a bully problem. Jackie Chan will take on the role of Mr Miyagi, although the actual character name may still change. Yes, Jackie Chan will be mentoring Will Smith's son in the ancient art of Karate... in Beijing.

READING WILL BE YOUR SALVATION

IF YOU'RE A LITTLE concerned that the upcoming *Terminator* film, *Salvation*, is leaving too much of a gap between the original trilogy and the new, IDW Publishing (which is also responsible for a number of *Star Trek* and *Transformers* comics) has something to plug that hole. A series of comic books will help tie together any loose strings and keep the story flowing nicely. The comics are penned by writer Dara Naraghi and inked by Alan Robinson.

The blurb reads, "The year is 2018. With John Connor as the voice of the resistance, the scattered remnants of humanity find themselves united against their common enemy - Skynet and its Terminators. Through a patchwork system of radio transmitters, hacked satellite phones, and encrypted computer networks, resistance leader Elena Maric in Detroit and Nigerian mining engineer Bem Aworuwa have formed an unlikely friendship and drawn up battle plans to take the fight to the Terminators!"





DVDs

For the Fans

FUZZY LOGIC

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS HAVE EMERGED regarding Steven Spielberg's new *Tintin* film. Simon Pegg and Nick Frost (*Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*) have been named as the actors behind the roles of the dim-witted Thomson and Thompson. The animated movie, which forms the first part

of a trilogy (later to be directed by Peter Jackson), is set to use the best motion-capture technology to bring the digital actors to life. We can't imagine why they wouldn't just make the film live-action if that's what they're after, but then again, we're not film producers.



DOUBLE WHAMMY

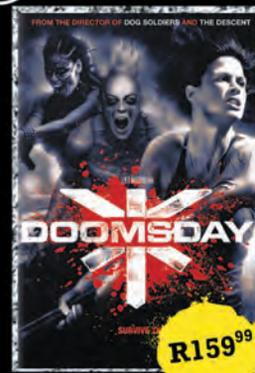
MORE REMAKES ARE IN the pipeline. This time it's about everyone's favourite judge, jury and executioner, Judge Dredd. While it's due out next year, few details regarding this remake/sequel/completely new film are available at this time. What we can tell you is that legendary comic book artist Jock (*2000 AD*) is working

behind the scenes to, as he says, redeem the *Dredd* concept from the disaster that was the 1995 Stallone film. While we didn't think the first film was necessarily 'bad', we're excited at the prospect of the *Dredd* brand making a gritty return under the guidance of *28 Days Later* producers DNA Films.

JACKSON: FURIOUSLY FIRED

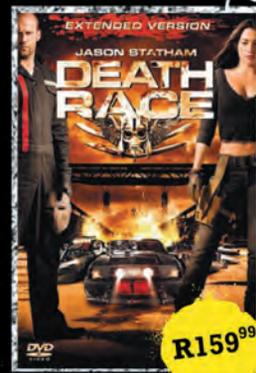
MARVEL'S RECENT SLEW OF comic-to-film adaptations has been going down a treat. However, not all is peachy in the land of living graphic novels. With the world's economies crumbling at every turn, it's not surprising that the film industry has been taking a few knocks, so much so that Marvel has been forced to count its pennies a little more carefully when it comes to the millions their actors demand for their roles. Things have sunk so low that it turns out Samuel L.

Jackson may no longer be playing the role of Nick Fury in the upcoming films *Iron Man 2*, *The Avengers* and *Captain America*. This might come as a shock to some considering we've already seen him in a sneaky clip at the tail end of *Iron Man* (it's after the credits, if you're wondering how you missed it), but apparently the fact that the graphic novel character was deliberately re-imagined to look like the actor means less than we originally thought.



Doomsday

R159⁹⁹



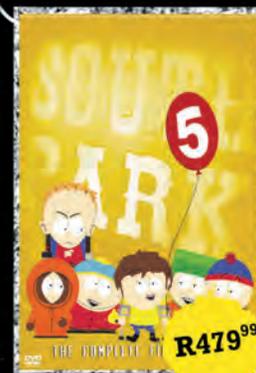
Death Race
Available from the 16th Feb

R159⁹⁹



Righteous Kill
Available from the 9th Feb

R159⁹⁹



South Park
Season 5 (3DVDs)

R479⁹⁹



Taken
Available from the 16th Feb

R159⁹⁹



Tropic Thunder
Also available on Blu-Ray

R159⁹⁹

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THE X-FILES: I WANT TO BELIEVE

Director: Chris Carter
Cast: David Duchovny | Gillian Anderson | Amanda Peet | Billy Connolly | Alvin "Xzibit" Joiner
Genre: Sci-Fi Thriller
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run Time: 103 minutes
Score: ★★★



I REALLY WANTED THIS MOVIE to be awesome. The TV series ended with a revelation, a shocking truth that I was hoping would be further chronicled in this film. Sadly, it isn't. The movie is good as a standalone project, but the whole time I was watching it, I couldn't shake the feeling that this film was used merely as a way for director Chris Carter and his cohorts to test the waters for a possible reinvigoration of the *X-Files* saga. In truth, if this movie had been an episode in the series, it

would have been one of the weaker episodes. The main plot (there are a few sub-plots) involves the kidnapping of an FBI agent, a psychic priest (who also happens to be a convicted paedophile) who offers his help in finding the missing agent and a pair of naturally sceptical FBI agents who request Mulder's help in investigating the case. David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson do a good job reprising their roles as Mulder and Scully, but the

movie seems to juggle too many random plot points for them to focus on doing what they do best: investigating the supernatural. It's worth watching if you're a fan of the series, but be warned: you may be disappointed with how loosely the film ties into the series. Special features include a couple of features on the making of the film, a few deleted scenes, a gag reel and a music video.

Dane Remendes

HANCOCK

Director: Peter Berg
Cast: Will Smith | Charlize Theron | Jason Bateman | Eddie Marsan
Genre: Action Drama
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run Time: 98 minutes
Score: ★★★



SUPERHERO-THEMED MOVIES HAVE LONG been in fashion, but here we have one that takes a completely different approach to the norm in this genre. Will Smith plays Hancock, a super human 'lacking people skills' (to say the least!). When he's not intervening in crime scenes, which he does with reckless abandon and causing multi-million dollar damage, he spends his time drinking and, we discover, feeling rather sorry for himself. Eventually, the city of Los Angeles has had enough of him, and issues a ludicrous warrant for his arrest – as if they could hold him! After all, he can fly, demolish walls with his hands, bullets bounce off him

– he is seriously hardcore! But in his adventures, he becomes acquainted with a publicist who is determined to turn Hancock's image around. The movie starts off as an entertaining action-fest, but gets a bit lost about halfway through, with sappy sentimentalism and excessive violins. It starts off being 'one for the boys' and seems to end as a 'chick-flick' – so, just like its protagonist, this movie appears to be suffering

an identity crisis. Still, it is not terrible, and being 'half-and-half' as described above means that it is adequate for a mixed audience. The pack includes both the theatrical and unrated versions – the latter includes a couple of hilarious extra scenes. Special features consist of some trailers, and a series of behind-the-scenes clips and commentaries.

Alex Jelagin

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: PRINCE CASPIAN

Director: Andrew Adamson
Cast: George Henley | Skandar Keynes | William Moseley | Anna Popplewell | Ben Barnes
Genre: Fantasy
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run Time: 143 minutes
Score: ★★★★



IN THE PREVIOUS *NARNIA* film, the Kings and Queens of Old, with the help of the lion Aslan, saved Narnia from the icy White Witch. Since then, the kids were returned to England, and have apparently aged in reverse, which is to say they have grown younger. Meanwhile, hundreds of years have passed in Narnia, and the Narnians have been driven into hiding by a race of humans who conquered the land. But the latest prince of this nation, Caspian, is unlike his ancestors and his compatriots, who are cruel and covetous, and who plot to kill him. He unwittingly sounds a magical horn that summons the Kings and Queens of Old back to Narnia, and another war for this world's future ensues. Despite

the fact that the protagonists are younger, the overall feel of the film is more adult. The tone is darker, with much use of greys and blues, in contrast to the previous title's bright colours. Interpersonal relations, even among the heroes, reflect more conflict, and even bitterness. Overall, this film is definitely a coming-of-age for the *Narnia* series, and well worth a watch. The two-disc

collector's edition reviewed here contains the movie itself (which is over two hours long, so good value for money there) on the first DVD, while the second disc contains a wealth of special features, which include deleted scenes, bloopers, background information, commentaries, and extensive behind-the-scenes footage.

Alex Jelagin

THE DARK KNIGHT

Director: Christopher Nolan
Cast: Christian Bale | Michael Caine | Heath Ledger | Gary Oldman | Aaron Eckhart | Maggie Gyllenhaal | Morgan Freeman
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 16 (VL)
Run Time: 146 minutes
Score: ★★★★★



IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY, go out and buy this right now. *The Dark Knight* is a masterpiece, pure and simple. *Batman Begins* weaved a tale dealing with the birth of a superhero. *The Dark Knight* deals with the long-term implications of having a man, who dresses up like a bat, bringing justice to the unjust and creating fear in the hearts and minds of the criminals of not only Gotham City, but also the world. At the end of *Batman Begins*, Jim Gordon briefly mentioned escalation – the more pressure that is placed on the criminals of Gotham, the harder they'll fight back. Well, things have escalated, in the form of The Joker. The Joker is the criminal underworld's answer to Batman, a role flawlessly handled by the late Heath Ledger (who has already won many posthumous awards for his role in this film). Harvey Dent (who becomes Two Face, another villain from the Bat-verse) also plays a major role in the movie. *The Dark Knight* is more action packed than *Batman Begins* and is much darker in tone, mostly thanks to The

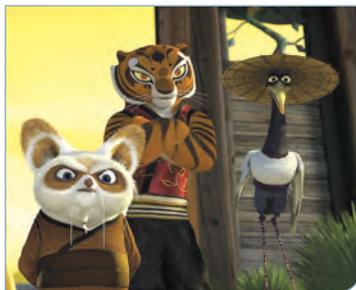


Joker's exploits. I don't have enough space here to ramble on about specifics, but know this: it's a joy to watch this film and you'd be a fool not to experience it.

Dane Remendes

KUNG FU PANDA

Directors: Mark Osbourne | John Stevenson
Cast: Jack Black | Dustin Hoffman | Angelina Jolie | Lucy Liu | Jackie Chan
Genre: Action Comedy
Age Restriction: PG
Run Time: 88 minutes
Score: ★★★★★



IT'S TIME FOR YET another CGI cutesy animal movie. This time it's DreamWorks Pictures and they're back in their comfort zone with some stylish new characters and an Oriental twist. *Kung Fu Panda* is directed by newcomers Mark Osbourne and John Stevenson and features the voice talent of Jack Black, Dustin Hoffman, Angelina Jolie, Lucy Liu and Jackie Chan.

When Po (Jack Black), an oversized Panda with a dream of becoming a Kung Fu master, is finally given his chance to prove to the world that there's more to him than dumplings and noodles, he must embark on a journey of the mind, body and spirit to discover his true self. It won't be easy, however, as he soon finds out. Evil is afoot and wants what Po has – the coveted title of Dragon Warrior, since it's no doubt been awarded to him as some sort of a joke.

If you're a sucker for a charming story or just like to kick back and be entertained by glorious visuals, amusing dialogue and face-kicking antics by the bucket load, *Kung Fu Panda* will have something for you. It

might seem a little contrived for the more cynical viewers, but the characters have an attractive depth to them that should keep even the grouchiest at ease. If that's not enough, the DVD is packed full of behind-the-scenes footage, interviews and trailers for those craving more *Panda* action.

Geoff Burrows

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DECEPTION

Director: Marcel Langenegger
Cast: Hugh Jackman | Ewan McGregor | Michelle Williams | Maggie Q
Genre: Thriller
Age Restriction: 16 (LNSV)
Run Time: 102 minutes
Score: ★★



HERE WE HAVE A film that tries to be very clever, but manages to degenerate into one big cliché. **WARNING:** because I found this movie so disappointing, I feel no remorse about dishing out plot spoilers! However, it is only fair that I warn you of this fact. An accounts auditor (played by McGregor) meets a powerful lawyer (played by Jackman), who befriends him. The latter appears wealthy and powerful, and lets the former taste

his lifestyle, including by arranging, apparently accidentally, for them to switch cellphones, and giving McGregor access to a 'sex club' contact list. The young beneficiary of this largesse spends a couple of intense weeks of blissful promiscuity, but falls in love with one list member (played by Michelle Williams). They start dating, but quite soon thereafter, she is kidnapped right from under his nose. It soon becomes apparent that Jackman's character is behind this, and is in fact not who he

pretended to be. McGregor's character is coerced, by threat of harm to his 'girlfriend', to embezzle a huge amount of money from an audit client. But it turns out that this girlfriend is in on it, and after the conman's plan falls into place, the all-too-predictable 'twist' comes around, whereupon the mark reveals that he was actually onto the scam. Yawn! Special features consist of a couple of deleted scenes, an alternate ending, and some commentaries.

Alex Jelagin

HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY

Director: Guillermo del Toro
Cast: Ron Perlman | Selma Blair | Doug Jones | Jeffrey Tambor | Seth MacFarlane | John Hurt
Genre: Action/Adventure
Age Restriction: 10 (V)
Run Time: 115 minutes
Score: ★★



THE FIRST HELLBOY was a decent film. It wasn't great, it was just... okay. *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* doesn't live up to those expectations. It starts leaning more towards the "don't ever make me watch that again" end of the spectrum, but it doesn't quite reach that point. It's worth watching, but don't expect too much of it. The movie once again follows the exploits of Hellboy on his quest to do 'stuff' to 'supernatural things', but this time there are Elves. The movie is pretty action packed, something which works in the movie's favour since most of the action sequences are surprisingly well done and do a good job of keeping viewers awake. The acting and dialogue are

incredibly cheesy and the special effects range from decent to downright awful. It seems as though the filmmakers were attempting to appeal to a younger audience with this one, so if you have kids, check this one out and see if they find it more exciting than I did. The two-disc special edition comes with a second DVD filled with special features, some of

which are worth a look. You'll find a massive feature on the making of the movie (which you may find quite enjoyable if you're interested in that sort of thing) and the usual set of deleted scenes and commentaries, but there is really way too much on the second DVD to make mention of it all here.

Dane Remendes

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Director: Eric Brevig
Cast: Brendan Fraser | Josh Hutcherson | Anita Briem
Genre: Action Adventure
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run Time: 90 minutes
Score: ★



BRENDAN FRASER, HIS NEPHEW and a tour guide accidentally journey to the centre of the Earth. They do this by 'falling' down an empty lava pipe. You have to forget everything you know about science and geology to enjoy the movie because they don't fall for very long and they don't vaporise. It's almost as if this 'perilous' journey is something you could do if you were bored on a Sunday afternoon. Eventually, they arrive 'at the centre of the Earth' and after even more stilted dialogue and contrived plot devices, figure out they need to leave quickly before the whole place burns up - like Fraser's career. The blurb on the back of the box details travelling "through a never-before-seen world, encountering creatures

and objects never imagined." If your idea of never-before-seen world includes a Tyrannosaurus Rex, giant Venus Flytraps and mushrooms, and flying piranha, you're in for a treat. For those of you who have read at least one fantasy or science fiction novel in their lives or have seen *Jurassic Park* and *Indiana Jones*, there's nothing wow or new about director Eric Brevig's centre of the Earth. In fact, the movie *steals* borrows ideas from everything else you've ever seen.

If you weren't already convinced, here's more ammunition: this dross has nothing to do with Jules Verne's story - it uses 3D for the sake of 3D and it's clearly made for kids who aren't looking for a decent story, plausible acting, passable science or actual entertainment. In a nutshell, if you're older than ten, avoid like the plague (too bad the age restriction is 13). The DVD comes with four pairs of cardboard 3D glasses and has a few uninspired extra features.

Michael James

THE BANK JOB

Director: Roger Donaldson
Cast: Jason Statham | Saffron Burrows | Stephen Campbell Moore | Daniel Mays
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 16 (VNSL)
Run Time: 105 minutes
Score: ★★★★★



FOR SOMEONE LIKE JASON Statham, movies about performing any sort of robbery, escaping with loot at high speeds or generally being the tough-talking British ruffian that he is are nothing new. This time, bringing a little more cerebral matter to the table, he teams up with long-running director Roger Donaldson, the man behind the '90s hit *Species* and more recently, mainstream films like *The Recruit* and *Thirteen Days*. Based on the great Baker Street Robbery that took '70s London by storm, *The Bank Job* sees Terry Leather (Statham), Martine Love (Saffron Burrows) and their partners in crime, Kevin, Dave and Guy take on the Baker Street Lloyd's Bank in a way that left more than a few coppers scratching their heads.

Faithfully recounting the famous story, the film follows the exploits of the group as they plot and scheme their way from simple thugs to pioneers in their field, all while a saucy royal conspiracy rages on around them. While there's no doubt it's 'just another heist movie', it stands above the rest by giving a deep insight into the political strife facing London in the 1970s, and is

sure to give attentive audiences plenty to think about. As for the extra DVD contents, the same unfortunately can't be said. Aside from a couple of trailers, there are no special features, which is a pity: a story like this could have greatly benefited from a few interviews or even a short documentary about the Baker Street Robbery itself.

Geoff Burrows

THE HAPPENING

Director: M. Night Shyamalan
Cast: Mark Wahlberg | Zoëy Deschanel | John Leguizamo | Spencer Breslin
Genre: Thriller
Age Restriction: 16 (V)
Run Time: 85 minutes
Score: ★★



DIRECTOR M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN has been responsible for some of the best thrillers in the movie industry, so it was with quite a bit of anticipation that we prepared ourselves for *The Happening*. The movie starts when a series of bizarre and freaky suicides plague New York City. This soon turns into an apocalyptic event and Elliot Moore (Mark Wahlberg) finds himself running for his life with his family, in search of a safe place away from the unknown threat that is causing this attack on the population. The movie, in true Shyamalan fashion, will have you sitting on the edge of your seat, as there are numerous scenes where you simply cannot take your eyes off the screen. As the movie progressed, and we started to figure out what is responsible for these attacks, we anxiously waited for the big finale, a scene where the story would be tied together and/or the big twist is revealed. Sadly, this moment never came and as the movie ended, we felt disappointed with all the loose ends still unanswered. *The Happening* features the type of plot that

could have had so many better elements in the movie, but in its current form leaves too many annoying questions unanswered and that kind of ruins the entire movie. The DVD includes a few interesting featurettes and some gruesome deleted scenes.

Regardt van der Berg



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2000 AD #1613

Format: Comic Magazine Series
Publisher: Rebellion
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: R66.95

2000 AD HAS BEEN running since 1977, and is probably one of the UK's longest running comics. It comes out weekly, and collects a few different stories every week, ranging from science fiction through to fantasy, mixing dark, adult humour with graphic violence all encased in a shell of dry British wit. *2000 AD* also features a story of the world-famous character Judge Dredd in every issue. This issue sees Judge Dredd up against a new mysterious murderer that seems to possess the secret to agelessness. *Prog 1613* also features an old favourite, the ABC Warriors, with acclaimed writer Pat Mills, as well as three other story segments. *2000 AD* has showcased some of the best writers and artists in its stories over the years, including such names as Simon Bisley, Kevin Walker, Mark Millar and one of the world's most influential comic writers, Alan Moore.

Clive Burmeister

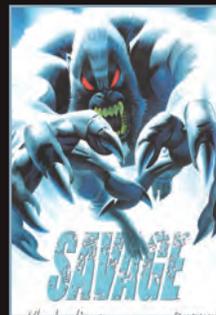


SAVAGE #3

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Image
Writer(s): Jeff Frank / Dan Wickline
Artist: Mike Mayhew
Price: R38.95

ONLY THREE ISSUES IN, and *Savage* is blasting out an intense monster-comic story, and is still picking up its momentum like a freight train. In a world where werewolves and other unexplainable evil creatures live unseen and thought unreal among the population, a man-beast hunter stalks and destroys this evil wherever he can. But the hunter's time is running out, and he must find another to take his place, one who is also cursed with the ability to become a savage horror, killing these evil nightmares that live among the masses. But for Peter, a shoe salesman from a small American town, being destined to become a monster that hunts evil beasts all seems a bit like a bad dream. Will he be able to accept his destiny, and will the hunter have enough time to pass on his knowledge and experience to Peter before his legacy catches up with him?

Clive Burmeister



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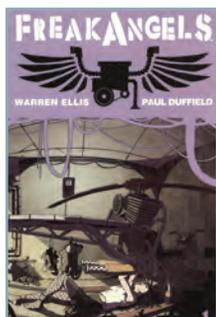
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OUTER LIMITS

NAG

FREAKANGELS VOLUME 1

Format: Graphic novel
Publisher: Avatar Press
Writers: Warren Ellis
Artists: Paul Duffield
Price: R225



EVERY NOW AND THEN, some of the best Web comics manage to make it into print. Of course, it helps to have talents like Warren Ellis (who's also responsible for the excellent cyberpunk title *Transmetropolitan*) and newcomer Paul Duffield backing them up, which is exactly the case with this dark, gritty and violent graphic novel, *FreakAngels*. Originally started by the pair to combine the glamour and polish of a published comic with the accessibility and release schedule of a Web comic, *FreakAngels* tells the story of humankind's survival during the Earth's flooded, post-apocalyptic future. Following the *FreakAngels*, a group of telepaths born at exactly the same time, and their interactions with each other and the rest of the world, Ellis's story and dialogue is rich and intriguing, bolstered by Duffield's dynamic artwork that combines relaxed linear art with muddy, washed-out and beautifully-textured colouring to great effect. For those interested in the Web comic, be sure to head over to www.freakangels.com. Ellis has promised his followers that the online version will stay up even though the printed book is available, but having the pages in your hands, as is often the case, is likely to give most readers a deeper appreciation for the artwork.

Geoff Burrows



FORGOTTEN REALMS: STARLESS NIGHT #1

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: DDP
Writer: Andrew Dabb
Artists: Juanfran Moyano
Price: R61.50



THE LATEST COMIC BOOK adaptation of the world-renowned book series, *Forgotten Realms: The Legend of Drizzt* by RA Salvatore, is book eight, *Starless Night*. The script by Andrew Dabb sticks close to the original novel, following the story of the legendary Drizzt Do'urden, a dark elf who rebelled against his evil heritage to become one of the world's most heroic champions for good. Trying to prevent more harm befalling his friends as the rulers of his people, known as the Drow, seek revenge on him, Drizzt decides to journey back into the Underdark below the surface of the world, where the Drow live, in an attempt to stop them seeking retribution. Meanwhile, chaos is brewing in the Drow city of Menzoberranzan, and Catti-brie, Drizzt's long-time friend, follows him into mortal danger in an attempt to keep him safe. *Starless Night* brings Salvatore's descriptive imagination to life with its vividly colourful pages and a story packed to the brim with adventure.

Clive Burmeister



THE ULTIMATES VOL. 3 - WHO KILLED THE SCARLET WITCH?

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Jeph Loeb
Artist: Joe Madureira
Price: R284.95 (HC)



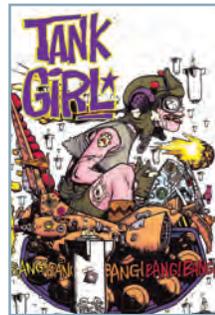
JEPH LOEB, WRITER OF the highly acclaimed TV series *Lost* and *Heroes*, brings the third saga in the *Ultimates* story line to life with his expert story telling and in-depth plot twists. Reeling from a sex scandal that could lead to a PR nightmare involving Tony Stark, a.k.a. Iron Man, the team is brutalised in a surprise assault. While they try to recover and piece it together, the Scarlet Witch is assassinated, and Magneto storms their base to recover her body. With too many questions and hardly any leads, the Ultimates find themselves in a three-way battle that could threaten the entire world. The book features most of the big guns in the Marvel Universe, including Captain America, Wolverine, Thor and Iron Man. The smooth, flowing artwork of Joe Madureira really brings out their characters while submerging Loeb's excellent writing in a complementary world of visual splendour.

Clive Burmeister



TANK GIRL: THE ODYSSEY

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Titan Books
Writer: Peter Milligan
Artist: Jamie Hewlett
Price: R185



SEEMINGLY-PSYCHOTIC ARTIST JAMIE HEWLETT, co-creator of the equally depraved *Tank Girl* series teams up with veteran Peter Milligan (*X-Statix*, *Bad Company*) to bring everyone's favourite post-apocalyptic, punk-rocking lass a little culture – kind of. Based on Homer's classic poem *Odyssey*, *TG: TO* follows the crazy adventures of our heroine and her fellow maniacs through death, resurrection, creepy hotels, a war on film producers and many other wacky adventures, all while rather cleverly following many elements found in Homer's original. It's the kind of series that most people already know that they'll love or hate, being as popular and as extreme as *Tank Girl* is. The plot runs the length from simply ridiculous to just about impossible to follow, but those who like their artwork Ritain-free will find Hewlett's versatile penmanship perfectly matched to Milligan's intense and witty scriptwriting. This book is bound to be a rewarding experience for anyone looking to compare it with Homer's original, on the hunt for hidden messages and implications dotted around the dialogue and artwork, or those just looking to expand their collection. While it's Milligan's first (and only) *Tank Girl* experience, his writing delivers exactly the kind of far-out insanity followers of the series would expect from anything bearing the name.

Geoff Burrows



SHINING WIND: MAO PVC STATUE

RRP: R510
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Series: Shining Wind
Scale: 1/8

This statue, based on a character from the *Shining Wind* series on the PS2, was sculpted by Hirotochi Nakamura. The figure comes bundled with a display base, and Mao's jacket is removable.



HELLBOY 2 - THE GOLDEN ARMY: ANGEL OF DEATH DELUXE FIGURE

RRP: R375
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Series: Hellboy II: The Golden Army Series 2

This 13-inch figure is from *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*. Arms and wings (the latter are adorned with lots of creepy little eyes) that can be posed finish off this sculpture.



TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD - LARA CROFT

RRP: R165
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Series: Player Select

This 7-inch figure of Ms Croft comes bundled with a display stand and her signature dual pistols.



DARK KNIGHT: JOKER POKER SET

RRP: R990
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Series: The Dark Knight

It's sort of like your traditional poker set, but with The Joker's scribbling and doodling all over it. It's not just for show, though, and comes with everything you need to get a game of Poker going: Fifty-four playing cards (together with an extra suit of prop-replica cards), 100 11.5-gram poker chips, five dice and an aluminium carrying case.



DARTH MAUL QUARTER-SCALE FIGURE

RRP: R1,170
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Series: Star Wars: Ultimate Quarter Scale
Scale: 1/4

Darth Maul is awesome. Place him on your display cabinet to prove that you are just as awesome. In the box, you'll find his lightsaber in two separate pieces (the magnets on the end of each piece allow you to complete the complex puzzle), a pair of electronic binoculars, a display case and an extra hand (you never know when you might need it). The figure's fully layered robes are made of cloth and this sculpture has many points of articulation.



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THE PRINCES OF FLORENCE

THERE ARE TYPES OF games that are better suited to computers and unfortunately *The Princes of Florence* is likely an example of this. The game has so much to keep track of, requires so much admin work ('paperwork' even) that it can become quite tedious to play. Upon opening the box, players are presented with an A4-sized game board, and then several 'player boards', which are actually where the action takes place – the game board is essentially for keeping track of in-game score.

The basic premise is that each player assumes the role of a prince heading a prominent family in Renaissance Florence, with the aim of gaining renown by becoming known as the leading patron of scholars and artists (a fairly 'pompous' premise, according to some.) This is achieved by having such 'professionals' create 'great works' under your patronage. The game

turn consists of an auction phase followed by an action phase. During the auction phase, players get to bid on various objects, which can include features and facilities for their 'palazzos', as well as human facilities (jesters and builders). Each object confers specific benefits to its owner. Each player's board includes a blank grounds map upon which forests, lakes, parks and the like, as well as buildings can be placed. There are restrictions and rules that apply to how these palazzos are laid out, and essentially this game can be considered to have a significant 'base building' element, which is rather unusual in board games.

The game dynamics are actually fairly intriguing, but it is a pity that the game requires so much administration – as stated previously, it would likely be more appealing on a computer, which would be able to keep track of all these variables, as well as

adjudicating and enforcing rule mechanics.

As is the case with other Rio Grande games, the production quality is good. Unfortunately, many of the pieces are cardboard cut-outs (albeit very sturdy, thick cardboard), but this seems to be the trend these days and is forgivable. The other pieces are made of painted wood, which lends this board game a certain class, in contrast to cheap and cheesy-feeling moulded-plastic figures often used in other games.

Overall, this is a game with the potential for considerable depth and subtlety, but is certainly not everyone's cup of tea. For starters, the setting and underlying premise will not attract many. In addition, this game requires a minimum of three players, and they all need to be conversant with the (fairly complex) rules, so a dedicated group of enthusiasts is needed.

Alex Jelagin



Bottom Line

Mainly for diehard strategy board-game enthusiasts willing to invest the hours to master this game – not a casual diversion!

60
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