

# NAG

Vol. 16  
Issue  
11

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO

# 11

**REVIEWS  
INCLUDING**

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL  
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA:  
A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS  
GRAN TURISMO 6  
ROCKSMITH 2014  
KNACK

**PLANTS vs. ZOMBIES**  
**GARDEN  
WARFARE**

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RAAAAGGGGHHHHH...  
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THE FUSS IS ABOUT



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## Features

### 24 HARD TO PORT!

Now that we're officially living in the next generation (of gaming consoles), we've dissected some games that straddle the line between past and future (or present) to discover whether or not it's worth handing over the extra cash it'll take to access all their next-gen-ness.

### 30 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE - SOWING THE SEEDS OF SILLINESS

Plants! Zombies! Zombies nomming plants! Plants needing zombies! There are a thousand different reasons to love PopCap's garden defence series, and now they're adding a thousand more with *Garden Warfare*. Grab some shears and we'll fill you in on the way to the frontlines.





# Valentine's Day

Over-Hyped, Over-Commercial, Over-Rated  
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so, all's fair in love & war, get your game on!

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# Look & Listen

Not all items are available in all stores - please call your local store to enquire. Availability and prices subject to change at the discretion of the supplier. While stocks last.

# Time flies...

How is it February already? It seems like every year we get here quicker and quicker; maybe it's one of those things about growing up – or older, at least; growing up is entirely optional. Whatever the cause of this phenomenon, sometimes I wish I had real time manipulation abilities – due to holidays and people going away, this issue of NAG was put together in half the amount of time that we usually have. You might be thinking right now “oooooh, that’s why this magazine is so skinny this month!” Nope, the truth behind that is, even though we’re down 16 pages from last month, you’re still getting as much content as you usually would – we just took out a bunch of those pesky ads! It’s a symptom of this industry’s ridiculous desire to release games at very specific times of the year – early Q1 being the most desolate. And this is on the back of the PS4 launch, which could desperately use a few more exclusives right now. We’re a silly business, sometimes. Thankfully, there are many very exciting titles set for release over the next few months.

Getting anything done this time of year is a pain because most people are still crawling their way back to work or are on a mental go-slow for the first couple of weeks. At least most of us have had a relaxing break from the stresses of playing video games all day (not really), but all that downtime has clouded our brains more than refreshing them. It’s likely

a mix of too much booze, sleeping and partying, and maybe a little bit of Alzheimer’s.

Perhaps ironically, then – given our decidedly zombie-like behaviour these last couple of weeks – we worked tirelessly to bring you some awesome coverage of the exciting, vibrant and downright bonkers *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare*, which so boldly sits on our cover. Having nice artwork and character renders to work with always makes our lives easier, and it keeps SAVAGE sane which usually means everyone else is a little happier.

## I AM JOB

We’ve decided to do something quite out of character this month: we’re looking for a sports game writer to help us fill a gap that, frankly, we’ve had for too long. You can find all the details on page 39, and I encourage you to read all those words very carefully if you’re keen on this position. Please, please note that this is not an in-house job; it’s a freelance, work-from-home gig that is likely to be as sporadic as game releases in this genre. I’m looking forward to reading your submissions so don’t be shy – let’s see what you’ve got.

Happy February!

Cheers,

- GeometriX



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# INBOX

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**\*Disclaimer:** Most of the letters sent to this fine publication are printed more or less verbatim (that means “we don’t edit or fix them” for you slow kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors. It’s not us... it’s you.

## Letter of the Month February 2014

**From:** Ellen Hurst  
**Subject:** Monkey in my pocket  
 I’ve often noticed a semi-automatic dismissal of mobile games for Android and iOS by some NAG contributors, and it’s not often that they get any serious coverage in the mag. I know the mag states its focus on the 3 major console brands and the PC on the front (under the logo), but to some extent cell phones are replacing handhelds such as the DS as serious gaming devices for on-the-move gamers. When Nintendo phased out the DS, I considered the 3DS upgrade, but around that time I also became interested in the booming Android app market for my new Samsung tablet. Since then I had my phone upgraded and have been similarly enchanted by some of the games available on the apple App Store. In the end

I just didn’t feel the need to invest in a separate handheld gaming device.  
 Not all mobile games are ‘generic 99c or free-to-play shovelware’ (dec issue pg.19) although I totally get that lots of them are, and I (mostly) actively avoid anything containing in-app purchases. But there are some jewels available.. Consider, for example, a game like ‘Year Walk’ (designed for iOS), the presence of Fighting Fantasy books like the legendary Forest of Doom as (fantastically well-made) iOS ports, or the opportunity to play Monkey Island while you’re waiting in the queue at the civic centre to pay your speeding fine (or is it just me that does that?). There are plenty of not free-to-play but inexpensive reasons to consider these portable devices as decent games platforms for those moments when your PC is

just too far away. So my question is - any chance of a little regular feature in the mag?

*You’re right, mobile gaming is not just growing as an industry but has become a genuinely solid way to get your fix, and we don’t really cover it nearly as much as we should (or as much as we’d like to). But we’re not automatically dismissive of it; in the piece you quoted we were specifically talking about the developer Marmalade Play, and we’re sticking to our words because that’s precisely what they specialise in (look up their catalogue).*

*But, I digress; mobile gaming is something that we plan to cover more, and it’s always good to hear from readers that this is something that they want. As a regular feature? Maybe. As an every now and then thing? Definitely. Ed.*

**From:** Carl Schildhauer  
**Subject:** The Robin Hood and the Prince John of gaming



Pirates are not the good guys nor do they stand for freedom and free sh\*t. They are plain thieves but they are certainly not worse than the greedy Prince John companies. These companies may not be stealing directly but they do it underhandedly, which it almost worse. They riddle their game with micro-transactions and still charge full price or they give you timeworn games with a new shiny packaging and call it the next big thing like Call of Money and Assassins Greed do.

This is not necessarily a bad thing it’s just not the hard working, under-appreciated lead Animator or Level Designer you are making richer, it’s the

shareholders who in no way care about innovation, originality or joy.

As soon as the company does not perform they jump the ship. So if you see it this way, pirates are more like Robin Hood taking from the rich and sadly not giving the gold to those who really deserve it, our beloved game makers like CD Project Red who in my eyes are some of the only ones with a moral. They show the finger to DRM and by doing so make us legitimate buyers happy, but sadly also invited pirates to have their share. This in my opinion makes them less like greedy bastards trying to protect their hoard and more like a true Robin Hood of Gaming who wants to give us, the fans, the best possible and unique experience without trying to rob us.

megarom

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The Letter of the Month prize is sponsored by the good folks at Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom of cleverness. Note: You can’t change the games or the platform they come on.

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

LAND MAIL: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158  
 BETTER MAIL: letters@nag.co.za  
 IMPORTANT: Include your details when mailing us or you’ll never get your prize if you win.

*The whole “piracy vs. publishers/ DRM” debate is one that has gone on since the industry was born, and it’s one that’s filled with massive grey areas between very little black and white. There is definitely something wrong with the way things are done these days, though, but thankfully with the industry being the size that it is, you’ve got a ton of choice of where to spend your cash. Sure, you can pre-order that latest AAA title and get some sweet day one DLC included for free, or you can wait until a Game of the Year edition comes out later, with a year’s worth of DLC bundled anyway. You can wait until a game goes on sale, or ends up in a Humble Bundle. Or you can decide to only buy indie games, or get all your game purchases through Kickstarter so you can follow the development process from beginning to end (and usually get a good deal on the game, too).*

*I like your analogy, though, in these strange times it’s good to have a few heroes, but remember that every company ultimately wants to make a satisfying product and take home a bit of dosh, so it’s probably best to forget about “greed” and just choose to spend your own money where you think it’ll be most appreciated/ useful/valued. Voting with your wallet is the best way to create a small but meaningful amount of change. Ed*

**From:** Dewan Brandt  
**Subject:** Moving soon  
 First of. Great Mag. Cant wait to see the spec list of the PC in the next issue. Were

moving to George soon, a nice little quiet town by the sea and I had a couple of small questions that I decided to jumble into one big(ish) Email. So here goes.

1. How can I make the long sluggish road trip, less long and sluggish using super gamer power's?(I won't be driving so I will have 1 and a half hands open, and 3/4 feet.

2. How's the gaming scene down there? I would love to go to a LAN every now and again so if there is a community please send me the Web link or director's Email.

3. How can I get maximum download speed from steam?(We might not have a working line for a bit so I'm trying to download everything as quickly as possible)

4. Do you send copies of the NAG Magazine that far away?(OK Stupid Question alert)

5. How do you find a good balance between studying and gaming? One would have been how do you get a good Gamer name, but I realized if I swap around my second name a bit it looks pretty cool.

*1) Use your laptop! I recommend games that won't tax your battery too heavily (like point and click adventure games). Alternatively, load up some games on your phone and get stuck in – there are a couple that are particularly suited to long trips (like tower defence games).*

*2) No idea! When I Googled it I got a list of GAME stores and something about farming. Maybe you should take up a nice hobby like hiking or frolicking in the meadow. They have meadows there, right?*

*3) Steam uses every bit of your available connection – there's no way to manually increase its speed. I guess your best bet is to make sure that you've either got a clean phone line (get Telkom to test it) or a good 3G connection (maybe look at getting one of those booster aerials).*

*4) Of course! We send NAG everywhere within Southern Africa.*

*5) I never did, which is why I've dropped out of two degrees and now run a gaming magazine. Don't tell that to your parents. Also, stay in school and don't do drugs. There's something about getting into cars with strangers but I don't see the problem with that because who could pass up a free ride? Ed.*

# ON THE FORUMS

Like the ancient Roman Forum, the NAG forum is a great place for arguments, debates, togas and sandals. [www.nag.co.za/forums](http://www.nag.co.za/forums)

Q: What spin-off would you like to see for an existing game franchise?

**"Mass Effect: Garrus! (The exclamation mark is part of the title)"**

Grasshopper

**"How about a visual novel spin-off of Bastion, considering how many people enjoyed the narrator having him narrate an entire visual novel would be awesome."**

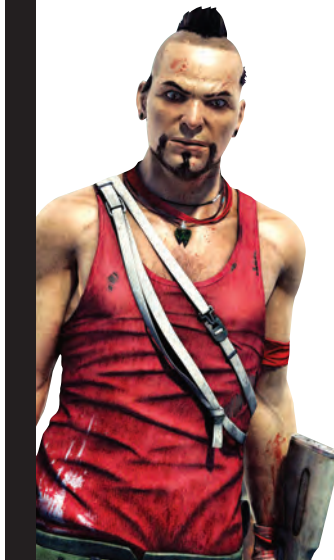
Demikid

**"I disagree. That game should be left alone because no sequel will be able to capture what that game did."**

ZoRPA

**"Vaas's story from Far Cry 3. So much was made of him during the run up to the game, and as a character he was absolutely brilliant...for all of his hour or so of screen time. He definitely needs his own story."**

Azraphael



From: Ethan Strydom  
Subject: Gaming (L)evolution  
You know the usual... Love your work, thanks for all your effort etc. Gaming has come a long way since Bomberman and Super Mario. With all this new technology and new designs aka "Next Gen Gaming" how do we keep up. Since I got my box of mysteries on the 13th of December I have had to do multiple updates on my PS4 and all these new apps such as The Play Room and Playstation Live, let's not forget Playstation Play Room (did I say that already?) Sadly one of my favourite games BF4 has recently started bugging out. Let's get back on topic. I still miss all those legendary cartridge games before Playstation or Xbox even existed now days games are so complicated and "into it" that we lose our selves in the game (or is that the point) I mean ask a 13 year old who just destroyed the tower in Siege Of Shanghai or just won a race and beat up some pesky cops in Rivals and just

took over an enemy ship in Black Flag, ask him if he wants to play a round of Pac Man (with out forcing him/her). PS. People at my local Spar where giving me looks when I went to purchase this magic book of wonders. Walking down the isles with my mothers pink Black Berry in one hand a Pink magazine in the other a bunch of flowers and wearing my Salmon baggies. PPS. I'm sure every one asks this but when will Watch Dogs come out!??

*Welcome to the next generation! With new bugs, new glitches and new problems! It's like the previous generation, but prettier – don't expect all that much to change, especially not immediately.*

*Looking back at those games that you grew up with is a great way to feel conflicted; gaming has come a long way since the days of Pac-Man but there's nothing quite like the pure, addictive experiences that those games offer. It's the essence*

Pieter de la Rey, "I drew this picture of mass effect 3 after I played the series for the first time this year."



This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the NAG logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.



This month's fan art winner receives *Fable Anniversary* for the Xbox 360, valued at R449. Sponsored by the awesome people at Prima Interactive.

of gaming without all the fuss and bother and worrying about XP and unlocks. Thankfully, it's entirely possible to have a balance, since there are many ways to play classic games online (legally), and you could always buy an old Atari or NES and take a trip back through time.

PS: Hahaha! Embrace the pink, it loves you!

PPS: Supposedly by the middle of this year at the latest. Ed.

From: Arno Crous

Subject: There is love!

As a student that has to live off of allowance I find it hard to be a gamer. I save money wherever I can f.e. waiting a couple of months for the price to drop to under R200, save up my allowance or work over the holidays for extra money. I was still stuck with a box TV and was very excited to get a new console by my next birthday only to discover that they do not work with AV and only with HDMI. After discovering that I decided to buy myself a monitor and speakers seeing as I only have a box TV. After doing so I realised I am totally bankrupt. I have no money for games, I am stuck with the 10 games (I trade in my old games that I have finished so that I can afford new ones) that I have all finished and all that I have left is Call of Duty. After surfing the internet for a while I discovered a bunch of free to play games to download such as f10w, Companion, Alien Swarm and Spelunky just to name a few. I find these f2p games a lot of fun and I learned that this is a great way to game for gamers on a budget.

Provided you have decent enough Internet, gaming on a tight budget today is far easier than it ever used to be. F2P games can be rewarding if you put in the hours, and if you have nothing else to play, well, you've got those hours! And there are loads of MMORPGs that can either be played entirely for free, or with a limit. Also be sure to keep an eye on Humble Bundle and its ilk; you can buy loads of games for very little money – usually a pledge of \$6 can get you the entire bundle (or pay less for fewer games). Ed.

From: Tsepo Matjaka

Subject: Game reviews

I've always wanted to write game reviews but have just never been sure where and how to start. I read the NAG mag all the time and your guys game reviews are always awesome, with a touch of comedy and sarcasm within them.. bottom line is I was hoping I could get a little bit of advice on how the whole game reviewing thing works

*We get loads of emails like this, so I figured it'd be a good idea to reply publically so everyone can receive some wisdom...*

*The best thing you can do is practise writing – specifically, forming your opinions of games into words. Once you feel confident enough to do so, send a couple of reviews or previews to local gaming sites or to us. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to find game writers that are both talented and dedicated enough to follow through with their goals. Ed.*

## THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"thanks for a very cool and utterly epic mag..have a nice day"  
- Donovan Lew

"Sorry this one just has better grammar and punctuation and Yes i know i have a stupid email address :(""  
- Leo Hyams

"Hey its carmen do you know where I can get god of war for pc?"  
- Carmen

## ON TWITTER

Quack like a duck @nagcoza 

Chad Simpson  
Cannot wait for @nagcoza @ rAgeExpo. This year!!!! Amping DGL so much!

Josh van Roodt  
#PS4 R800 for a game?! That's insane!!! [In the bad way]

Camrin\_aka #Cam0...  
So @nagcoza I'm stuck on what to buy ?? Who would win in a fight Between #SaintsRowIV & #Watchdogs ??

Nick Scheckter  
@nagcoza I just bought my last ever issue of NAG... Unless they have NAG in Canada.

Gian-Paolo Buffo  
Thanks to @nagcoza I've got myself a shiny new #Plantronics headset! Y'all are too kind <3

Jesse Stapelberg  
@nagcoza that moment when you've 100% completed a game, gotten all the achievements and don't know what to play...



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## Special-needs squad mate reporting for duty

I am tragically bad at online shooters. It's a pity considering contemporary gaming seems to be dominated by the genre, and if you're not at least seven Prestiges (or something) into the current iteration of *Call of Duty*, you're pretty much guaranteed an acute bout of FOMO. I've never really been one for playing military shooters against complete strangers online. Don't get me wrong – I have no problem hopping onto Xbox LIVE to blow through a couple of rounds of *Gears of War 3*'s Horde mode with friends, but there's no way in hell I'll hop on to play Horde with a bunch of strangers. I'm not sure why, but that seems a little silly.

Bizarrely, I used to love playing competitive FPS games when I was in high school, but back then the Internet was only accessible using dial-up, so we relied on good old LANs. I used to be pretty good – or perhaps that was relative to the group of friends I was playing with? As the Internet got faster in South Africa, LANs began to disappear and I found myself playing online shooters against strangers. Whatever thoughts I'd had about being "pretty good" were smashed by the endless pool of online foes that always seem to be just that much better. I became more inclined to play through the single-player campaigns and completely sidestep the multiplayer portions of the endless runs of *Call of Duties*, *Medal of Honors* and *Battlefields*. Then, as the single-player portions became less important, I just stopped playing mainstream shooters. The last *Call of Duty* I bought was *World at War*. I borrowed *Modern Warfare 2* from a friend but don't even recall finishing a campaign. Perhaps I did, but I can't remember; clearly it made a big impact on me.

Now, however, I've decided to make a concerted effort to give one of these online shooters a go. Maybe I'm subconsciously pre-conditioning myself for *Destiny* or *Titanfall*? Whatever the case may be, I recently threw myself into *Battlefield 4*. I started with the campaign because that's what you're supposed to do when you buy a new shooter, isn't it? While the single-player had promise thanks to kicking things off with a Bonnie Tyler song, it wasn't long before I realised it was an insufferable pile of wank, and that I didn't even know the name of the character I was playing as. So I gave the fumbling, cliché-riddled single-player the finger and skipped along to multiplayer.

I died. A lot.

You know that one guy who thinks it'd be fun to play as a sniper, and then proceeds to fall off the highest perch on the map because he tried to get too close the edge? Yeah, that suicide victim is me.

After the end of my first afternoon, I think I had a kill-death ration of 1:24 or something equally appalling. I was the special-needs soldier who got picked last and had to run after the tanks while the other soldiers laughed and pointed out the back as they barrelled towards the frontlines. Incidentally, is friendly-fire a thing in *Battlefield 4*? Because I just tend to shoot at everything that moves. I'm pretty sure I somehow managed to make a negative contribution towards team victory, but I still had a surprising amount of fun doing so. I remain hopeless at online shooters with strangers, but for the first time in a very long time, I'm having fun.

- Miklós Szecsei -

# SEGA and Creative Assembly unveil *Alien: Isolation*



The development team behind the popular *Total War* series of real-time strategy games is branching out and bringing us a first-person horror survival take on the *Alien* movie franchise. The game is called *Alien: Isolation* and it stars movie protagonist Ellen Ripley's daughter, Amanda. Set 15 years after the events of the 1979 Ridley Scott film entitled *Alien*, Amanda embarks on a mission to learn about the fate of her mother. Her efforts to learn the truth behind her mother's disappearance leads her into an encounter with one of the aliens.

The game is pitched to be nothing like previous *Alien* or *Alien versus Predator* games – Creative Assembly has its sights fixed resolutely on creating a survival horror rather than an action-heavy first-person shooter. It'll be the first time that the *Alien* franchise gets this kind of video game treatment, and after the lacklustre *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, we're willing to bet that a change can only be a good thing. Indeed, when the game was revealed, Creative Assembly likened their vision to something along the lines of Frictional Games' butt-clenching

*Amnesia: The Dark Descent*.

*Isolation* is poised to be an extension of the 1979 movie. As such, Creative Assembly has enlisted the aid of 20th Century Fox and has gained access to the film's archives. With footage and still pictures at their disposal, Creative Assembly is imbuing *Isolation* with an aesthetic that's identical to that of the original 1979 film. There's no clean, sterile future here; expect a low fidelity, retro future with chunky technology and monochrome ship monitors sporting scan lines. Even the in-game hacking mechanics are inspired by '70s dials and tuning knobs. And to round off the authentic art style, the film's iconic original score has been sourced and extended to 120 minutes for the game.

It sounds like we're in for quite a drastic departure from previous *Alien* games. With players needing to choose hiding or running over physical encounters with the game's single alien, we're pretty sure you can expect some tense moments.

*Alien: Isolation* is heading to PC, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360 and Xbox One towards the end of 2014.

## Larry creator is done with the series



Replay Games' re-remake of *Leisure Suit Larry* came and went without so much as a hello how's your mom, and when it was announced that the game's legendary creator Al Lowe would be slinking back into retirement, not much was thought of the decision. As it turns out, Lowe's move to leave the industry (again) wasn't based purely on his desire for more time spent drinking G&Ts on the sofa, instead it was largely fuelled by the sex scandal (oh the irony) in which Replay CEO Paul Trowe found himself.

As it goes, showing sex tapes to a minor is a bad idea, to which Trowe recently pleaded guilty. The man landed himself a misdemeanor and two years' probation, as well as sex offender counselling.

With Lowe out of the picture, Replay still retains the rights to *Leisure Suit Larry* (we're surprised that Lowe gave it up in the first place), but he insists that he'll no longer have anything to do with the studio and the licence going forward.

## EA hit with three high-level departures

Over the past couple of years, Electronic Arts has been buying up a number of companies and development teams. Chillingo, the mobile game publisher responsible for bringing the world the original *Angry Birds* and *Cut the Rope*, was one such company. Developers such as Criterion (of *Burnout* fame) and PopCap (*Plants vs. Zombies* as well as *Peggle*) were two developers swallowed by the ever ravenous maw of EA. All three companies have recently lost their co-founders, with a string of departures hitting Electronic Arts within a week of each other.

PopCap's CEO Dave Roberts and chief game designer Jason Kapalka were the first to announce their resignation from the company they'd co-founded. Their departure from PopCap and EA happened on 02 January 2014. Shortly after that, Alex Ward and Fiona Perry, the co-founders of Criterion Games, left their company and EA to pursue something new. Three days later, Chillingo's co-founders Chris Byatte and Joe Wee left EA as well, bringing the total number of co-founder departures up to six within a week.

At the time of writing, Electronic Arts has not released any official statement regarding these departures.

## Back in my day

Classic games have this habit of disappearing, but luckily we have smart people and the Internet, which means you can now play a ton of old Magnavox, ColecoVision and Atari games through the power of the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine.

The organisation, which typically gathers and archives snaps of websites from the day the Internet was born, recently added the Console Living Room to its massive collection of cool stuff from yesteryear, which allows you to play emulated versions of hundreds of classic games in your browser. It all seems above-board, too, since there have been no claims about copyright violation from any of the console owners. Now get out there and play some classic games!

## Sony and Microsoft release sales figures for new consoles

Both Sony and Microsoft have released global sales figures for the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One respectively. When the PlayStation 4 launched on 15 November 2013 in the US and Canada, it sold 1 million units in the first 24 hours. Sony has since revealed that they've sold 4.2 million PlayStation 4 consoles across the globe; this figure represents a sales period from 15 November to 28 December 2013.

Meanwhile, Microsoft announced that the Xbox One sold just over 900,000 units within the first nine days of availability; the console launched in 13 countries on 22 November 2013. Microsoft has since announced that the Xbox One sold 3 million units before the end of 2013.



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## The Game Stalder



## Help! I've been swallowed by my couch!

This past festive season was a good one. I spent the holiday clad mostly in my pyjamas (there's no sense of urgency to go anywhere so why not be as comfortable as possible!) ensconced in my house, vying with my husband for play time on our new Playstation 4 (a welcome early Christmas present). We re-explored the wonders of *Assassin's Creed IV* in all its next-gen gloriousness, were pleasantly surprised by the quirkiness (if somewhat formulaic gameplay) of *Knack*, and enjoyed hours of "Hulk SMASH!" co-op in *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes*. In fact I can't remember the last time I was able to spend so much of my time on uninterrupted gameplay.

But let's take a step back and examine the whole PS4 aspect of this equation. Because of the fact that there are still limited titles for the PS4, once you've finished the launch titles there isn't really much more to do other than wait for the new releases. I'd already played *Ghosts*, *Need for Speed Rivals* and *Battlefield 4*, although I can't deny it was a thing of beauty to see some of these on this new console but let's face it, there's only so many times you want to start a new campaign of a game once you've already played it. The one launch title I didn't do much but give a cursory play was a franchise I've never been able to summon up much enthusiasm for though goodness knows I've tried hard enough over the years. *Killzone: Shadow Fall*. Yes I know that *Killzone 2* and *Killzone 3* were excellent games. I can see this on an intellectual level, but I've just never managed to engage with them meaningfully. I can see why people enjoyed them, but they just didn't appeal to me. Unfortunately *Shadow Fall* not only just doesn't appeal to me, but it's actually not as good as its predecessors, which means as a launch title, it wasn't the most amazing game in the Playstation's arsenal.

Launch titles play an incredibly specific role in demonstrating the capabilities of a new piece of hardware, but they should of course also offer a good overall gameplay experience. The idea should be that they are designed to show off the capabilities of the console, in all respects, both visually and performance-wise, but of course developers want their games remembered as really good launch titles as well. *Killzone* certainly does this in terms of the first two, but ultimately it's somewhat unmemorable. This is not a review of *Shadow Fall*, it's merely an attempt to point out that of the five launch titles that came in the "For The Players" review pack, only two of these were truly new, PS4 only titles. *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes*, *Assassin's Creed IV*, *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, *Knack* and *Killzone: Shadow Fall* were these titles, and only the last two are new properties that haven't been released on other platforms already.

*Knack*, which I surprisingly enjoyed for its light-hearted gameplay, is still a somewhat easy and formulaic game that doesn't really showcase many of the capabilities of the PS4. This leaves *Shadow Fall*, which shows off the hardware capabilities of the console but which falls short in its unmemorable narrative.

This isn't to say I'm not impressed with my new piece of hardware, I'm just hoping that upcoming titles will do more to show us what the Playstation 4 can actually do.

- Pippa Tshabalala -

## Telltale nabs two big 'uns



Modern adventure game developers Telltale Games seem to have finally hit their stride in the recent times, and thanks to that have secured two very big licences: *Game of Thrones* and *Borderlands*.

Called *Tales from the Borderlands*, this return to Gearbox's beloved universe will see players take on the roles of new characters, but interacting with very familiar ones (Handsome Jack, for starters). There's little to go by the release trailer but it looks like you won't be playing as traditional vault hunters, but rather wannabes who might just be in over their heads.

Telltale's take on the practically cursed *Game of Thrones* franchise will hopefully fair a little better

than the two previous and separate attempts, but we think they've got the potential to make something that actually plays to the strengths of this series (human interaction) better than a hack-and-slash RPG or plodding strategy game ever could. They're teaming up with HBO to make this happen (as opposed to the book publishers), and the trailer features the TV series' iconic opening theme, so take that as you will. We're cautiously optimistic for now.

Both games are expected to launch on next-gen platforms beginning this year. They'll follow Telltale's standard episodic format, and we think it's a safe bet to expect a similar gameplay arrangement to that of their *Walking Dead* series.

## More info on the Star Control reboot



If you can't hear the words *Star Control* without breaking into fits of panicked yearning, we're sure the upcoming reboot – in development at *Galactic Civilizations* developer Stardock Games – has your brain caught in a loop of endless meltdown. Stardock's Brad Wardell revealed to Ars Technica that this reboot of the venerable spacefaring series is a prequel, and will feature multiplayer that greatly expands on previous multiplayer components in the series.

Stardock has formerly said that they're most heavily influenced by *Star Control II*, which is undoubtedly

the series' most beloved entry. However, given that Stardock's pedigree largely revolves around 4X strategy games like *Galactic Civilizations* and *Sins of a Solar Empire*, some have expressed concern at their ability to pull off *Star Control*'s "space exploration RPG" style of play.

In response to this, Wardell assures that, while it's true that they typically focus on 4X titles, they have loads of experience with space-based game development, and Stardock has assembled a mighty force of rabid *Star Control* fans to work on the game, with veteran developers from Firaxis, Big Huge Games and Stardock all striving to deliver a reboot that fans of the series can be proud of. Wardell says that they'll only start considering a possible release date in 2015, so the game's still a long way off – but it sounds as though Stardock's headed in the right direction with *Star Control*.

## Respawn announces 12 player limit for Titanfall



Respawn's Vince Zampella revealed over Twitter that the *Titanfall* team has decided to cap the multiplayer player count at 12 – that means you can expect to be playing 6v6 encounters. "6v6 is max player count. Turned out to be the best balance with AI for us," the Tweet read. This was followed up by a series of Tweets that attempted to explain the decision a little further. This, however, didn't stop a vocal minority from voicing their disdain on the forum NeoGAF. The displeasure became so heated that *Titanfall* producer Drew McCoy responded on the forums.

"Lots of armchair game designing going on in here," McCoy chided. "I'd suggest playing before judging something as insignificant as a number in a vacuum... We tried a huge amount of playercounts (all the way down to 1v1 and up quite high) and designed the maps, gameplay mechanics, and entire experience around which played best."

According to McCoy, there is already a huge amount of action happening on each map, so having a higher player count proved to be detrimental to the overall experience. Each level features a number of AI entities interacting with both teams of players. That, coupled with the fact that each of the 12 players can have a Titan at the same time, means that matches are guaranteed to become action-heavy and somewhat chaotic.

"I literally have to stop playing every few rounds because my heart just can't take it sometimes," McCoy admitted. "Remember, you can get out of your Titan and let it roam on AI mode - meaning there can be 12 Pilots wallrunning around, 12 Titans stomping below, and dozens of AI doing their thing."

*Titanfall* will be out next month in March; it's heading to PC, Xbox 360 and Xbox One.

## Oculus receives huge investment

What began as a seemingly humble Kickstarter fund of \$2.4 million for Oculus Rift soon grew by another \$16 million, but that's nothing compared to the company's latest cash injection. \$75 million has now come in through investment firm Andreessen Horowitz, putting Mark Andreessen on the Oculus board and securing the company a future well into the years ahead. Andreessen is the co-founder of Netscape and also sits on the boards of Facebook and eBay, so you know he's not messing about.

## Ex Mafia / Arma devs reveal Kingdom Come: Deliverance

Warhorse is a development studio founded by former veterans of *Mafia* / *Mafia II* creator 2K Czech and *Arma* developer Bohemia Interactive. The studio has announced its first project. It's called *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, and it's a non-linear, open-world role-playing game. Unlike most non-linear, open-world role-playing games, however, this one isn't grounded in fantasy and magic and unicorns and the like. Instead, it aims to be a heavily realistic, historically accurate medieval RPG set in the last days of the Holy Roman Empire.

All of the preceding words of this news piece should have you decisively donning your excitement pants. The development pedigree alone is enticing, because *Mafia*. Kotaku managed to write a few droplets of additional info out of a Warhorse-branded info-towel, and discovered that the game promises "expansive, strikingly detailed locales" to be traversed and a wealth of period-accurate combat shenanigans to engage in, including "horseback combat, open-field sieges and large-scale battles". They call the combat revolutionary, and it'll play out from a first-person perspective.

You'll develop a reputation in the game world and forge relationships with its characters to gradually unravel the overarching narrative. And just to reiterate, here's the bit that's unique compared to the majority of RPG experiences: "it draws its inspiration instead from historically authentic characters, themes, and warfare." The game's been in development for a year and a half, and is due out in 2015. Warhorse promises more info soon, so stay tuned.

# Excitement ON THE GO!

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The Indie Investigator



Game presenting:  
forum edition

A little less than a year ago, I wrote a column about presenting in-development games to the masses at fleshy-bloody type gatherings like dev meetups. I never returned to the subject when in fact I should have been considering other types of presentation platforms, such as the MakeGamesSA forum.

When you want to present a project online, there's a common pool of indicators which developers look for. Some of this advice overlaps with general dev/marketing wisdom and you may have heard bits and pieces of it before. So if you start a forum discussion about your new project, check for the following:

1. Supporting media. Does your first post contain screenshots and videos? Are there a lot of different ways for people to learn about your game? The easier you make it for your core idea to be absorbed, the more comments you'll attract.

2. Brevity. If you can describe your game concisely (short video, one or two paragraphs of text, a few key screenshots), you won't burn out anyone's attention span before they decide to try your project.

3. Clarity. Don't under-describe your work. Being brief is not the same as describing your game with two senseless grunts and a shrug. Figure out which information is the most important and present that first. Less important stuff comes lower down in the post. Everything else? Cut.

4. Goals. Tell your audience what you're looking for and where you're going. Do you need an artist? Ask if anybody is interested in prototyping a small set of resources and work from there. Are there specific bits of feedback you need for your game? Ask one or two key guiding questions about those areas.

5. Something playable! Lots of developers are huge fans of testing projects which can be opened and tested quickly, since there are often a lot of prototypes to pay attention to. It's a lesson worth reinforcing from time to time: games which can open in a browser and load up their own data earn big points. Every step you add to the process – through archiving, downloading, queuing or formatting – deducts value.

5b. Something playable but not invasive. No installers, no startup shortcuts. No downloadables that depend on uncommon software. You have a work in progress, here – in most situations, it's too early to load extra crap onto another person's computer. Make sure that whatever you build can be tied up inside a neat little zip file and exist inside its own digital eco-bubble.

6. A good attitude. If you disagree with someone's advice or POV, you don't have to engage with all of it. At some point, a line will be drawn based on creative preferences, or you'll be asked to make a change now that you've got scheduled for later. Pick the most relevant matters to address and deal with them honestly and politely. Remember that providing clear goals and questions about specific areas can help you filter out potential dead ends and unnecessary conversations. So remember: be bold, be concise, be clear, be inspiring, be accessible and – most of all – be nice!

- Rodain Joubert -

# Biding their time



While Remedy Entertainment continues to not work on a new *Alan Wake*, we'll have to make do with a strategy game on iOS. Wait, what?

*Agents of Storm* is an iOS-exclusive that Remedy's business development manager Johannes Paloheimo describes as a "reverse tower defense action-strategy game" in which players build up their base and fleets of ships (the sea-faring kind), and attack cities through multiple paths. He also says that this is "something that hasn't been done on the platform before",

which we assume requires that you pretend that the *Anomaly* series doesn't exist. Unless he specifically meant that it's never been done before with ships. We guess that counts for something.

Paloheimo also recently gave a bit of detail about Remedy's other not *Alan Wake* game, XBO exclusive *Quantum Break*, explaining that it will feature two playable characters, a cover system and time travel mechanics. It probably won't feature tormented writers, offensive flashlight usage and packs of shadow crows, however.

# Outrise is like Shadow of the Colossus, only with 16 players and set in the future

A team of developers, who collectively have worked for companies like Ubisoft and Crytek, have begun working on a project in their spare time. That game is called *Outrise*, and project lead James Wearing describes it as *Shadow of the Colossus* meets *Left 4 Dead*.

Set in a dystopian, sci-fi setting in the year 2094, society is controlled by a single entity called the United States Federation. Society itself is entirely dependent on the currency system called CryptoCoin, and whoever controls the currency, controls society. Opposing the USF's chokehold on freedom is the rebel group called *Outrise*. This ragtag group plans to topple the USF government and take control of the CryptoCoin currency. Unfortunately for them, the USF has massive war machines that obliterate entire armies of enemies in a single move, and this is where the game gets interesting.

Up to 15 players will take on the role of the *Outrise* group in any one online match; a single other player



will play as one of these colossal war machines. You can see where this is going, can't you? Wearing describes the overall vision as such: "The core of it is about creating the sensation of there being one against an army, and it all being multiplayer. We haven't experienced anything like that before."

Naturally there are plans for there to be multiple boss types that are randomly assigned to each level. As for the *Outrise* players, each player will be a specific character rather than a class. Each will have a specific role to play and all of them will have a backstory that's fleshed out in an expanded universe fiction.

At time of writing, no release date or platforms have been announced.

## Oops! TV series Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D caught using Mass Effect 3 artwork



Are you watching the ABC TV series *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*? There's an episode coming on South African TV (if you're fancy and you've got satellite that is) entitled *The Bridge*. During the opening scenes you'll see an outdoor setting that features a building surrounded by some dense vegetation. That building is straight out of *Mass Effect 3*. To be exact, it's the Earth Alliance HQ artwork that could be found on a limited edition lithograph that BioWare released. What ABC has done is lift the building out of the artwork and green-screen it into the TV series. And they probably would have gotten away with it too if it weren't for that meddling fhweufhewiu BioWare Forums member, who happened to spot it while watching the episode. At time of writing, neither Electronic Arts or ABC had released a statement. We're pretty sure lawyers are donning their battle gear though, because litigation is awesome.

## Look & Listen

Pre-orders [www.lookandlisten.co.za](http://www.lookandlisten.co.za)

### PC

Dark Souls II	February
Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare	February 21 <sup>st</sup>
Thief	February 28 <sup>th</sup>

### 360

Fable Anniversary	February
Wolfenstein: The New Order	2014
Prey 2	2014

### PS3

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII	February 14 <sup>th</sup>
Watch_Dogs	2014
Destiny	2014

## Dark Souls II and the quest for zero DLC

While most games these days come preloaded with all manner of cut content, digital haberdashery equipment and other assorted crap labelled as DLC, *Dark Souls II* (which is out this March) won't be so greedy upon launch, instead releasing a game that's actually complete and doesn't dangle a selection of costly, meaningless garbage in front of your face when you first access the game's menu. *How novel*. In an interview with Edge, From Software's Takeshi Miyazoe explains the developer's DLC approach with this hotly anticipated sequel:

"For *Dark Souls II*, we don't even expect any additional downloadable content because we want to deliver a full game, the full experience, to fans who purchase the package from day one. We did do additional content for *Dark Souls*, but generally downloadable content for *Dark Souls II* is not really being considered. Buy the package and you'll get the full experience, and you'll have as much fun as anybody else. Spending a couple dollars on certain items does not help the experience. So no free-to-play yet!"

There's more good news for PC gamers as well, as Takeshi promises that the PC version of *Dark Souls II* won't be as annoyingly clumsy as its predecessor's PC port is. He confessed that the first game was rushed to PC without proper optimisation for the platform, but that the sequel has been developed with PC in mind from the beginning.

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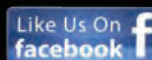


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## Miktari's Meanderings



## 2014: Year of change

*"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."*  
Mahatma Gandhi

The Gregorian calendar has ticked over to 2014, so while we're pretending the difference between 31-12-2013 and 01-01-2014 means something, let's make the most of it. Let's use this new year to change gaming, for ourselves, and for others. I can think of two important issues:

### UNDERSTAND THE ENTHUSIAST GAMING PRESS

We all have positions we defend because we believe in them. Myself and all my lovely partners-in-crime here at NAG and in the wider world of the gaming enthusiast press, all have opinions. We argue about them among ourselves, behind the scenes, quite often. Some of us are critical by nature, and that comes across in *how* we write about games, and *what* we write about them.

But what we do is only half the puzzle. The most important piece, *more important than those who are paid to write about games*, is you. Only you know what you like, and what matters to you. Because only you know you. And if you don't know yourself, you should be introduced. You're quite fascinating.

We of the enthusiast gaming press aren't the gatekeepers of taste or quality. We're enthusiasts, after all, and not beholden to rules of impartiality. We're just opinions, ma'am. More importantly, we don't determine what's good or bad. We might think something is good or bad relative to ourselves and our experiences. But a better way to look at the gaming press is to see us as Sherpas: guides that want to help you explore the vast mountains of gaming. Some of us prefer certain routes or methods, while others chase different kinds of thrills. Find the guides that suit your tastes.

We're all on the same team, even if we don't like the same games.

### NO MORE MANICHEAN THINKING

Manichaeism is a Gnostic religious view that things are basically light or dark, good or evil. It's a moral dualism, and an overly simplistic view of the world. Basically, Manichean thinking implies that if you're not actively participating on the side of "good", or for the betterment of "good", you're being "evil". You've probably heard this variant: if you're not with us, you're against us.

This way of thinking does more harm than good. It is inflexible, and lumps things into two piles, when reality just isn't that tidy. And it is super-prevalent in gaming culture. You often see this thinking in the console wars. *If you're playing PlayStation, that means you're against Xbox!* And so on. The people who think this way get angry at those who aren't "with them" because they see those people as actively working against them. It's the thinking that says, albeit subconsciously, *if you support the brand I don't like that means you're attacking the one I do*.

Let's stop it. Even using it jokingly. This kind of thinking is memetic: it propagates in society by being an attractive idea. It's convenient, and easy, and sometimes fun, to label all those who don't like what you do, as "wrong" or "evil". And because it's so easy, convenient, and sometimes fun, the thinking spreads. Those who are subjected to it, often adopt it in defence. And so the cycle continues. But it doesn't have to.

We're gamers. We're on the same team.

- Miktari Dracon -

## Hack, hack and slash



It seems like Double Fine Productions announces a new game or project every month, and despite the fact that we'd much rather just have them be done with *Broken Age* thank you very much, it's great that they refuse to stagnate. Their most recent announcement comes in the form of a new RPG called *Hack 'n' Slash*, which features the correct use of apostrophes in its title, and that makes us very happy.

Okay fine, here's the gameplay slowdown, if the apostrophe usage wasn't enough to sell you on the game: You'll take on the role of a young elf who uses her hacking abilities to cheat her way through a classic action/adventure game. It's a fourth wall-breaking experience filled with clever jabs at real-life cheating in games.

"I've always loved games with lots of secrets in them, and when I first discovered a hex editor in an emulator,

it dawned on me that I could be a kind of digital treasure hunter," explained game designer Brandon Dillon. "No game could keep even its deepest secrets from me if I adventured long enough in its code and memory."

The game was first born during Double Fine's 2012 Amnesia Fortnite internal game jam, and later made it through rigorous public voting to be turned into a two-week prototype. Apparently that wasn't enough and the studio secured funding through Indie Fund, Humble Bundle and a ton of external sources (so you know they're not spending any of that (practically non-existent) *Broken Age* budget) to turn it into a complete product.

*Hack 'n' Slash* should be delivered during the first half of this year, but knowing the studio's almost Blizzard-like ability to laugh off release dates, you shouldn't consider that to be a promise.

## There's always time for a makeover

If you thought that the PC version of 2013's *Tomb Raider* was the definitive one, think again, because Square is readying what they're actually calling *Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition*. Take that, your opinion!

The game is set for release on PS4 and Xbox One, and is a collaboration between *TR* creators Crystal Dynamics, *Sleeping Dogs* developers United Front Games, and Dutch Nixxes Software, which had a hand in porting *Tomb Raider* to the PS3 and PC.

*Definitive Edition* will feature enhanced visuals across the board, including AMD's TressFX fancy hair technology (helpful that AMD handles the internal hardware on both next-gen consoles). The port will also feature all of the previously released multiplayer DLC,



Brady Games' digital artwork book and the documentary *The Final Hours of Tomb Raider*.

*Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition* should be available by time you read this.

## Left 4 Dead creators unveil 4v1 multiplayer title, Evolve



California-based Turtle Rock Studios is the team responsible for bringing us the most excellent four-player co-op game, *Left 4 Dead*. Once work with Valve wrapped up, the team went on to work on their new IP, but it was supposed to be published by THQ. We all know how that story ended (THQ went bankrupt, remember? Pay attention, please). Happily, publisher 2K Games picked up Turtle Rock Studios and their new IP, and thus we have *Evolve* to look forward to.

The science-fiction shooter pits four alien hunters against one player-controlled alien called a Goliath. Each of the four hunters has unique skills and weaponry based on their specific class. There's an Assault class, Medic class, the Support class and the Trapper class. The four-player team will have to work together if they hope to bring down their opposition. While this all sounds a little unfair for the alien, as the game progresses, so the alien will evolve through three different levels to become more powerful. Eventually, the Goliath becomes extremely formidable and stands 30 feet tall.

The alien won't be the only one who gets to improve as the match continues. Each level will also have AI controlled enemies for the alien hunters to take on; defeating these enemies will grant XP of sorts that can be used to unlock better skills. Obviously the Goliath can do the same.

For all you antisocial types, the game can be played on your own with AI filling the roles of the remaining four players if you so wish. The game is heading to PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One sometime during our spring 2014.

## My kingdom for a horse!

In what seems like an eternal debacle, *Kingdoms of Amalur* creator 38 Studios has finally been sliced and diced into itty-bitty pieces by a pack of over 20 bidders at an auction in December.

Since 38 owned Big Huge Games, they had the *Rise of Nations/Legends* franchise up for grabs, which was snatched up by an unknown party. *Amalur* itself and the remaining *Project Copernicus* licence and assets remain unsold because no "acceptable offers" were made during the auction – probably because nobody wants to pick up the dregs of a half-cooked MMO.

There's still some legal faffing that needs to be carried out by the courts to bury the studio once and for all, but once that's done, that'll hopefully be the last we hear of it.

## Hitman goes full zombie

IO Interactive hasn't exactly been having a great time since the release of *Hitman: Absolution*. While it's by no means a bad game, *Absolution* strayed too far from the *Hitman* series' core ideals, and as a result it was critically shunned and wasn't the commercial success Square Enix hoped it'd be. This meant that, last year, IO Interactive had its workforce halved. Then, early in January, a report surfaced that *Absolution's* sequel had officially been axed.

Square Enix quickly arrived on the scene to quell the rumour, stating that IO Interactive is still developing a new AAA *Hitman* game for PC and next-gen (current-gen?) platforms, and that Square Enix Montreal is hard at work on mobile games that tie in to the *Hitman* franchise. So, to sum up, for a brief moment *Hitman* was dead, but then it wasn't. Despite their reassurances, it's pretty sad that a series once so uniquely attractive as this one has fallen so far afield of its former glory.

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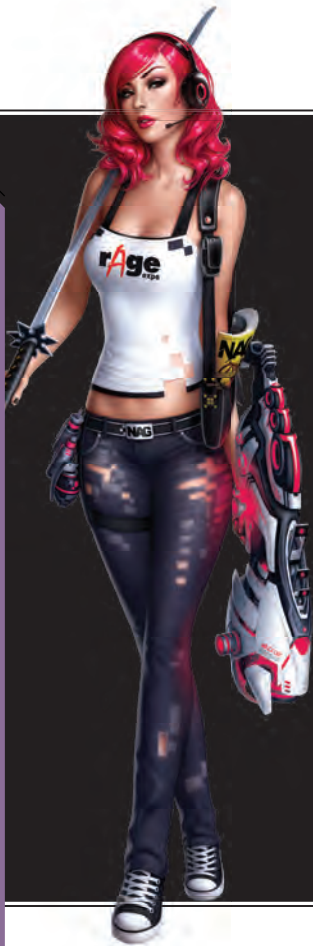
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# Foxy Roxy

Some call her the ultimate gamer grill. Then we smack them and tell them that Roxy isn't food (this is what eating too much of mom's meatloaf will do to you), she's the official rAge/NAG mascot. She was lovingly created in 2012 by South African illustrator Warren Louw for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of rAge. Seeing that we (much like the gaming industry) like to squeeze the blood out of every IP we create, we've got her working it hard in NAG each month. Her job is to hide somewhere in the magazine for you to find. Go, do it now!

Send your sighting to [letters@nag.co.za](mailto:letters@nag.co.za) with the subject line "February Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.

## JANUARY WINNER



Ruan Bouwer, page 47

### THIS MONTH'S LOOT

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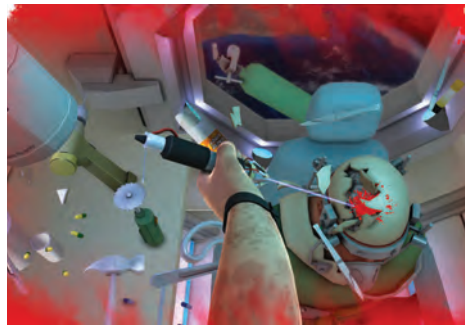
## EXCLUSIVE BOOKS

# CAPTION OF THE MONTH



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption

for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of **Payday 2** for Xbox 360 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to [letters@nag.co.za](mailto:letters@nag.co.za) with the subject line "February caption".



**NAG's lame attempt at humour**  
Luke's training with the precision Lightsaber didn't go quite as well as Yoda expected.



**Last month's winner**  
"Nothing good happens when your friend says 'here hold my drink.'" - Rowan Miller

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# Patriots gets a fresh start



Hey, remember that game *Rainbow 6: Patriots*? Yeah, you better remember it – we had it on our cover a while back and everything! Well, it seems like there’s been a ton of trouble over at Ubisoft, and the game has essentially been canned and started again.

It was recently revealed by Ubisoft North America’s big boss Laurent Detoc that “*Rainbow* had to be remade.”

“We had a core team. They had a good vision. They got started, and then the game wasn’t working. So [they had] to start again,” Detoc explained. “There’s an editorial

group in Ubisoft, a big group, very influential. If the game is not good enough, they say it’s not good enough. Most of the time, the team will say, ‘yeah, I know.’ But sometimes they want to continue in a direction where you say, ‘no, it’s not going to work.’”

There’s even been speculation that the game could drop the *Patriots* subtitle, possibly shifting narrative focus altogether. At least there’s some hope: it’s now being aimed at next-gen consoles which means there’s immediately more appeal for customers (and less chance of it being outdated the day it launches).

“People are so tired of the last 15 years of the game industry, hearing about ‘greater visual fidelity’. No one cares about greater visual fidelity anymore. It’s already good enough. We don’t need things to look even better; we need the experience to fundamentally change, and the Oculus platform is a fundamental change to how people will experience games.”

– Former EA executive David De Martini has joined Oculus VR as head of worldwide publishing, and he was quick to let GamesIndustry.biz know just how excited he is about it.

## RELEASE LIST

Dates subject to change without notice

### February week 1

Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition	PS4
Fable Anniversary	360

### February week 2


Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII	360 / PS3
---------------------------------------	-----------

### February week 3

Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze	Wii U
LEGO Marvel Super Heroes: Universe in Peril	DS
Disney Infinity Anna/Rapunzel/Violet	360 / 3DS / PS3 Wii / Wii U
Rambo	360 / PC / PS3

### February week 4

Thief	360 / PC / PS3
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2	360 / PS3
Tales of Symphonia Chronicles	PS3
Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare	360 / PC



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**14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014**

# HARD to PORT

*We round up a posse of PS4 ports to see if there's more to the next generation than a few leaves and rain drops.*

## BATTLEFIELD 4

One of the biggest issues with the release of *Battlefield 4* on previous generation consoles was the fact that the multiplayer component of the game featured graphics that were far below the standard of those in the single player game. That's one area in which the PS4 version has improved. The multiplayer graphics may not be quite as impressive as those in the single player campaign, but they are certainly very close.

In addition, the multiplayer limit has increased quite substantially – from 24 players on Xbox 360 and PS3 to 66 players on PS4. This, combined with better visuals and the ability that the console has to handle much more complex situations, makes *Battlefield 4* extremely enjoyable when played as a multiplayer game. The battles are potentially huge and extremely chaotic, and great fun.

As for the single player campaign – well, it's the same story over again, but the graphics have been treated to a spit-shine, so it all looks a lot better. Additionally, improved hardware performance seems to have an impact on the title, adding things like more impressive special effects and an overall more enjoyable experience to the mix. It's the same game, obviously, but there seems to be more of it.

**BOTTOM LINE:** It's the same game, but with better graphics, bigger explosions and more players online – meaning more addictive, chaotic *Battlefield* action.



## NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS

Every console needs a fun racing game and the PS4 has *Need for Speed: Rivals* to fill that gap. While the more realistic *Gran Turismo 6* wasn't developed for the PS4 (for some obscure reason), *Need for Speed: Rivals* allows players to get an adrenaline charged, arcade-like speed fix, battling with cops and other racers in online environments.

Putting the PS4 version next to the PS3 version shows a lot of what the newer console is capable of. While the game looks – at a glance – to be the same, there are little nuances and effects in the PS4 version of *Rivals* that make it a visual treat. The graphics are, needless to say, superior, but effects like water droplets running over the surface of the car, or condensation collecting on the bodywork, all make for a visual feast.

Under the hood, improved processing means that the game feels a bit better, too, and the environment is far livelier, with extra elements added to make the world far more realistic (even if the racing isn't, really).

It's the same game, once again, with no real additions to speak of – but the overall experience is much better on the newer PS4.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Increased power means increased awesomeness – *Rivals* on the PS4 looks and feels much better, and the world around the speeding cars is lively and convincing.



# CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

As with most titles that were released on the older consoles, when the Xbox 360 or PS3 version of *Call of Duty: Ghosts* is compared to the PS4 release, the most obvious change is in the graphics. But unlike titles like *Battlefield 4*, which take more advantage of the PS4's power, *Ghosts* seems to just add a lot of polish to the looks. Sure, the game handles better, but it doesn't feel like the developers went out to really try and leverage the abilities on Sony's new console.

It does, however, look a lot better in multiplayer than *Battlefield 4* does. The amount of detail in the game is pretty impressive, but that could also have to do with the fact that while DICE was ambitious with player numbers in *Battlefield 4* (almost tripling the number of players online for the next gen consoles) *Ghosts* only ups the number by four – from 12 to 16. Such a small increase is almost negligible.

Still, the overall experience is better than on the Xbox 360 or PS3, purely because more power means more performance – better graphics, at the very least, make *Call of Duty: Ghosts* more worthwhile on the PS4.

**BOTTOM LINE:** *Infinity Ward could have taken better advantage of what the PS4 has to offer. Still, the game looks and feels generally better than it does on older consoles, so there's that.*



# FIFA 14

*FIFA 14* is one title in which the player will definitely be able to distinguish a clearly discernible difference between the new consoles and those that came before them. It's primarily got to do with the increased power that the PS4 delivers. Sure, the graphics are much better, with livelier stadiums and improved player modelling and animations... but *FIFA 14* is one game where many of the benefits of being on PS4 lie under the hood.

These come in the form of a host of physics and collision models that elevate the game beyond being a football simulation and into the realms of being as realistic a soccer game as we have ever seen.

It comes down to a lot more calculations for the system to perform, which the PS4 is perfectly capable of. The end result is a game that is not only stronger in terms of player physicality, but also contains the slight bit of chaos that makes football so exciting. It does present the player with a bit of a learning curve, because the more realistic game is a bit more demanding. But after the first few games, the differences are hardly noticeable, and the football is more exciting than ever.

**BOTTOM LINE:** *It's arguably the best FIFA game to date thanks to a higher degree of realism made possible by the PS4's power.*



## ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

Edward Kenway's Caribbean adventures were great when we reviewed them on PS3. *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* presented the player with a massive world and an engrossing story on the older platform, and none of that has changed in the PS4 version. In fact, everything feels so much more real on the PS4, thanks largely to the fact that the environments are so much more lush and detailed.

The story and action doesn't change at all, really, but the fact is that the added effects and extra polygons make a huge difference to the experience. Now waves washing over the deck of the *Jackdaw* leave sheets of water drifting away, and acrid cannon-smoke obscures vision. Landscapes are filled with life – even more leaves can be seen on the trees, and cities truly bustle with all kinds of people.

So while on a technical level the game is largely unchanged, the experience is greatly enhanced because it is better at sucking the player in to the rich, diverse and lush setting that the game takes place in. So while the developers might have been able to squeeze more out of the PS4, they really didn't need to... *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* is an awesome experience without that.

**BOTTOM LINE:** While the game dynamic is largely unchanged, the PS4 offers a richer experience for PS4 players, thanks to a much more lush and detailed environment.



## LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES

There aren't too many family friendly launch titles on the PS4. Most games are all about shooting or stabbing people, leaving a massive gap for the two notable kid-oriented titles to make a run for it. Those are *Knack* and *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes*. While *Knack* is a PS4 exclusive, the *LEGO* game is available on pretty much everything but the kitchen sink [*I heard a rumour that a version for the kitchen sink is on the way, ed.*] The result is that while the PS4 version does have some better elements to it, it really presents the same experience on all the platforms.

OK, "some better elements" might be pushing it. In fact, the only real difference is that the PS4 version has a bit more to offer on the graphics front, and that mainly comes in the form of richer and more detailed textures. Other than that, it doesn't offer too much extra and, with the target market for this title assumedly not being massively concerned with how many bricks make up a wall in the background, it doesn't feature as a console-seller.

But it does make a handy kid-friendly addition for those that got the console for all the adult-aimed titles. And, to that end, it is worthwhile, if not particularly different from any of the other versions. And it's still a great game...

**BOTTOM LINE:** While not very different from other versions, *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes* is still a great game, and fills a bit of the kid-friendly game gap that currently exists for the PS4.





# Starbound

Your sandbox in the final frontier

Who doesn't want to fly freely around the universe, exploring strange new worlds, going into the black like a leaf on the wind, while living on a ship full of strange alien life forms?

*Starbound* is a love letter to everything endearing about science fiction, and that which is appealing about exploring the unknown. While still very early in beta

(available to buy via Steam's Early Access) and thus prone to radical changes and data wipes, there is already a lot to like about the game.

The basic premise is the same no matter which of the seven playable races you decide to be. After fleeing your homeworld, you

**"Your personal spaceship lets you teleport down to the procedurally-generated planet, where you must gather resources, craft better equipment, and defend yourself against the native fauna."**

run out of fuel near an unknown planet. Your personal spaceship lets you teleport down to the procedurally-generated planet, where you must gather resources, craft better equipment, and defend yourself

against the native fauna. Creatures are randomly pieced together *Spore*-style, which can end up with amusing results. Different planets look and behave differently,

with their day/night cycle, foliage, gravity and weather able to be radically different from each other.

By improving your armour and weapons, finding hidden technology in randomly-generated temples, prisons and other structures, you can tackle more difficult quests and eventually gain the means with which to explore more of the galaxy. You can customize your spaceship somewhat (with the ability to expand the available space coming in a future update), and just like in *Minecraft* or *Terraria*, you can build giant structures on the planet surface. But be warned: certain planets are prone to meteor strikes.

In its current state, *Starbound* has a lot to offer. Multiplayer lets you explore and

Weapon types and names are randomly generated, a bit like how *Borderlands* does it.



build together, and much of the basic game structure is fully formed. The main storyline quests aren't in yet, just some placeholder objectives that gate your travel somewhat until you're ready to handle the more dangerous planets. For example, without the right equipment you run the risk of instantly freezing to death on an ice planet. And if you don't have enough reserve fuel, you might find yourself marooned somewhere dangerous. Planet topography is random, but the general shape of the universe is fixed, so you can tell friends about interesting planet coordinates that hide advanced technology.

Once the PC version is finished, there are Mac, PS3, Vita and PS4 versions planned.

**NAG**  
- Miktar



## ISN'T THIS TERRARIA 2?

*Terraria* was developed by Re-Logic, composed of programmer Andrew Spinks and artist Finn Brice. After *Terraria* was complete, Brice went on to form his own studio, Chucklefish Games, and started work designing *Starbound*. Spinks is still at Re-Logic, and has confirmed that *Terraria 2* is planned. So while *Terraria* and *Starbound* share similarities in how they look and play, they are not by the same developer.



You can dual-wield one-handed weapons/items, like using a pistol and a flashlight at the same time.

RELEASE DATE / 2014  
 PLATFORM / PC  
 GENRE / Action  
 DEVELOPER / Vlambeer  
 WEBSITE / nuclearthrone.com  
 PUBLISHER / Vlambeer

# Nuclear Throne

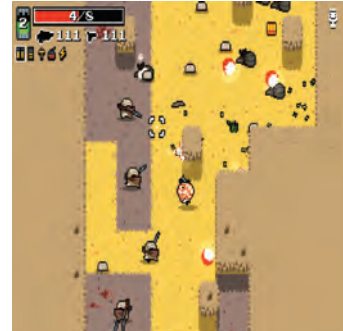
## This bear is on fire!

Dutch two-man studio Vlambeer has made a name for itself by producing quirky, high-energy boutique games like *Super Crate Box*, *Radical Fishing* and *Luftrauser*. Their newest experiment, *Nuclear Throne*, expands upon a Mojam prototype the group produced in early 2013, called *Wasteland Kings*.

You start by picking a mutant from a menagerie of interesting characters, like a fishman that can dodge roll, a chicken with a katana and Bullet Time, a *Little Shop of Horrors* style plant that ensnares enemies, or a crystal dude that can reflect enemy bullets. Level layouts are randomly generated and populated, making each short play session unique. There's incredibly strong feedback on your actions, giving the whole thing that unique punch and crunch that Vlambeer is known for. Death comes quick: enemies are relentless and health pickups are rare.

As you progress, you're given the option to mutate your character, improving them in some way from a handful of randomly-chosen options. Right now, nothing is permanent in

The game's soundtrack (by Jukio Kallio) is an interesting mix of harmonica, dance, western and house.



*Nuclear Throne*. Every time you start, it's from scratch, keeping in line with the "Roguelike-like" ethos the team is going for. Vlambeer admits, "We have no clue where we're going to end up on this project and that's really fine with us." You can buy the Early Access version on Steam right now, with Mac, PS4 and Vita versions planned for much later. **NAG**  
 - Miktar

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RELEASE DATE / 28<sup>th</sup> February 2014  
PLATFORM / 360 / PC / XBO  
GENRE / Third-person shooter  
DEVELOPER / PopCap Games  
WEBSITE / [www.popcap.com](http://www.popcap.com)  
PUBLISHER / Electronic Arts

# SOWING THE SEEDS OF SILKINESS





**A**lmost five years ago PopCap released *Plants vs. Zombies* to a market that was just starting to embrace the idea of “casual” gaming on a large scale. But, as it turned out, the major differentiating factor between casual and core gamers – the amount of time you spend glued to your screen – would soon mean diddly-squat. No longer could you call your aunt a filthy casual, because her Zen Garden puts yours to shame and that makes you genuinely upset.

It’s fair to say that PopCap has a true success with *Plants vs. Zombies*, but the company seems confident that they can push that success even further by bringing it to new audiences, and getting the old audiences to try new things. And thus the idea of *Garden Warfare* was born: a third-person multiplayer shooter that pokes mockingly at games like *Call of Duty*, *Battlefield* and *Team Fortress* while drawing inspiration from them, and laying on the PvZ humour in thick, cheesy globs.

*Garden Warfare* is primarily a multiplayer game, and we’re currently aware of three main game modes: Team Vanquish (classic team deathmatch), Gardens & Graveyards (a competitive objective-based mode), and Garden Ops (horde defence).



## SOLDIER

Your standard-issue, all-round sort of chap, the Soldier carries a Z-1 Assault Blaster to dish out medium damage at an average rate. Strapped to his back is a ZPG (an RPG, but for zombies) which he can use to rocket-jump or fire at the enemy for big splash damage, and he can chuck around a Zombie Stink Cloud to cause confusion and create a bit of cover when out in the open.



## ENGINEER

Sporting a mean butt crack and a love for buildin' stuff, the Engineer is armed with a Concrete Launcher that does decent damage, but his real power lies in the ability to build and upgrade turrets and teleporters at specific spots on the map. He can also deploy a remote-controlled drone which annoys enemies with its lower-powered laser attack, or rains down explosive death with a Zombomb barrage.



## SCIENTIST

This sneaky bugger does high damage at close range with his slow-firing Goo Blaster, and to get into range he uses his Warp ability to teleport short distances. He's also the healer of the group, able to deploy a Zombie Heal Station to keep his fellow undead in prime condition (or something) during a fire-fight. And when things get too much for him, there's nothing that a Sticky Explody Ball can't handle.



## ALL-STAR

Bigger and dumber than your average zombie, the All-Star carries the Gatling-like Football Cannon to dish out low damage at a high rate-of-fire, and enjoys blindly charging into pesky plants with his Sprint Tackle ability. Explosives are deployed in a most imaginative way: by strapping a couple of sticks of TNT to the head of an imp and booting him into the middle of a crowd. It's not all offence for the All-Star: he can deploy a Dummy Shield if he needs a spot of cover.



## PEASHOOTER

The plants' go-to guy, the Peashooter is armed with a face that shoots bullets and a mean attitude. He's capable of boosting his movement speed and jump height temporarily, and throws out Chilli Bean Bombs to do big damage in an area. He can also transform into a stationary turret to increase his rate-of-fire dramatically, but being unable to move could put him in a tricky position when big exploding things start flying in his direction.



## CACTUS

This lass plays the role of the sniper on the plants' team with her extended zoom function and low-falloff spike projectiles. She's also kitted out with a couple of defensive abilities like the Walnut Barrier (it's a nut wall) and Potato Mine, and can deploy a remote-controlled Garlic Drone to take to the skies and dish out damage with a Corn Missile Strike.



## SUNFLOWER

Beaming with flowery radiance, the Sunflower doesn't do much damage in her standard attack mode, but can change to Sunbeam mode to blast away zombies at the expense of mobility. She's the healer of the group, too, and can deploy a Marigold Pot which perpetually heals nearby plants to help lock down an area against all but the most coordinated of attacks.



## CHOMPER

Feed me Seymour! The Chomper is loaded up with tons of hit points but lacks a standard long-range attack. Unperturbed, he can tunnel under the ground to his target and leap up, devouring the unsuspecting zombie in one gulp which renders it unable to be revived. For those foes who are a little too wily, the Chomper can fire a purple Goop attack which dramatically slows them and shuts down any special abilities for a brief time. Finally, the Chomper can drop a Spike Weed trap to temporarily immobilise any zombie unlucky enough to step onto it.



“THE FRENETIC ATMOSPHERE SHOWS US THAT POPCAP IS GUNNING FOR THAT POTENTIALLY ENTHRALLING LINE BETWEEN ARCADE AND TACTICAL SHOOTERS.”



Vanquish and G&G both allow up to 24 players to take to the battlefield as either plants or zombies, and Garden Ops is designed for up to four players as plants to fight against waves of zombies, occasionally encountering boss zombies that include returning favourites from PvZ like the Disco Zombie and all-new members of the undead horde. We suspect that Gardens & Graveyards will be where most gamers hang out, with its familiar concepts given a fresh (or rotten, depending on your perspective) spin with wacky combat and semi-asymmetrical character classes. Like *Battlefield's* Rush mode, G&G will see the zombie team attempt to capture progressive territories across a linear map within a certain amount of time – there doesn't appear to be any limit to the number of respawns they can have. It also shares a bit with Conquest mode: each point (a garden) can be captured by having more zombies than plants within the area to eventually transform it into a graveyard, opening up the next point. The final capture point will be unique to each map: at the seaside location of Driftwood Shores zombies will attempt to launch themselves at the Mega Flower Lighthouse, which reminds us of the first wave in *Unreal Tournament 2004's* Mothership Assault map, while the plants attempt to shoot them down with AA cannons.

The moment-to-moment gameplay in the competitive modes mixes together elements from just about every shooter you can think

## PIMP MY ZOMBIE

As you capture positions, vanquish opponents and do helpful things like build turrets and revive allies, you'll be rewarded with coins (XP, essentially) which can be spent on customising your characters with new hats, ornaments and weapon attachments. You can also unlock class variants (there's one for each so far – more are likely to pour in over time), which affect your overall appearance and modify your primary

weapon's function. For example, the Engineer can change to a Welder kit, which effectively turns his weapon into a grenade launcher, and the Cactus can be an Ice Cactus which fires needles that slow and eventually freeze enemies. Between the variant classes, weapon attachments and aesthetic customisation options, it looks like *Garden Warfare* is getting set up to compete with *Team Fortress 2's* hat madness.

## TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE

*Garden Warfare* will initially launch exclusively on Xbox 360, Xbox One and PC, but PopCap has stated that they plan on ultimately bringing the game to as many platforms as they can (as if you expected otherwise). The XBO version will have a few exclusive features such as split-screen play and a unique Boss Mode, which allows one player per side to take on the role of Dr. Zomboss or Crazy Dave and command the battle from overhead, giving orders, deploying aid or turrets and dropping artillery strikes. Yup – it's *Battlefield's* Commander Mode.



**“A THIRD-PERSON MULTIPLAYER SHOOTER THAT POKES MOCKINGLY AT GAMES LIKE CALL OF DUTY, BATTLEFIELD AND TEAM FORTRESS WHILE DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THEM, AND LAYING ON THE PVZ HUMOUR IN THICK, CHEESY GLOBS.”**



of, but things have been smoothed out to accommodate for more casual players. Every character has unlimited ammo capacity for their main weapon, but you'll have to reload between clips. Each character also has three special abilities, also unlimited, which require a cooldown between uses to restrict spamming. The result is a combat experience that is constantly shifting; it's alive with sneaky tactics and quick, punchy take-downs that would be at home in *Team Fortress 2*. Players bounce through the air, fire off area-of-effect damage or control abilities, heal one-another and push hard at objectives. It might look like a kid's game, but the frenetic atmosphere shows us that PopCap is gunning for that potentially enthralling line between arcade and tactical shooters.

For all its attempts at parody and grinding down of a few hardcore staples, *Garden Warfare* looks set to be a solid multiplayer shooter that brings new toys to streamline the experience and challenge players to adapt in this stuffy subgenre. There could well be a complex and dynamic game hiding beneath the quirky presentation, and if that turns out to be the case, you can bet all your silly hats that you'll see us on the battlefield... er, garden.

- GeometriX



# INTERVIEW with producer Brian Lindley

**NAG: Will knowledge of the original games help anyone play *Garden Warfare*?**

**Brian:** It certainly doesn't hurt! There are numerous characters and even some mechanics inspired by the original game that fans of the original will find familiar.

**NAG: Can we expect any content from *PvZ 2* make it into the game, like pirate zombies?**

**Brian:** Definitely, there are some characters from *PvZ 2* in the game, such as the Yeti Zombie, Gargantuar and Bonk Choy, but we don't want to spoil them all just yet.

**NAG: How much will players be able to customise the look of their plants and zombies?**

**Brian:** There is quite a bit of depth here, and it may be cliché to suggest it, but I believe they will find it pretty easy to make their characters stand out from the crowd. There will be persistent unlocks in the game as well as a challenge system for players to level and progress their characters.

**NAG: Your audience is made up of a good chunk of casual players who don't typically play this sort of game; how much are you attempting to appeal to that market?**

**Brian:** Casual players will be able to jump into *Garden Warfare* for a fun and accessible experience by choosing their side – plant or zombie – grabbing some friends and jumping online to engross themselves in the franchise with these all-new locations and customised characters.

**NAG: What was the process for the new team to capture the classic *PvZ* elements from the original team?**

**Brian:** The process is relatively straightforward; we've primarily focused on characters as they are arguably the most memorable elements of the original *PvZ*. Beyond that, humour is also one of the core tenets of the *PvZ* universe, so our rule on the team is that if something doesn't make you laugh or smile, then it wasn't something we shouldn't be putting in the game. It is hugely important that we inject humour and charm into everything we do with a *PvZ* game.

**NAG: How many maps are you looking at having at launch? Will this be followed up with DLC, season passes and the like?**

**Brian:** We're not really giving out the full number yet but players will have a variety of maps and modes to have a fun experience in the game. We will continue to support with content



after launch but there will be more about that later.

**NAG: What has been the most challenging part of developing *Garden Warfare*?**

**Brian:** I think the first challenge was being clear in our goal, which was not just to make a tower defence game in 3D, but actually create a fun and unique shooter experience in the *PvZ* universe inspired by the original game. Beyond that, our next biggest challenge was getting the characters right, we especially spent a lot of time iterating on our zombie designs to make those characters fun to play whilst still feeling like the game fits within the broader universe of *PvZ*.

**NAG: How many zombies does it take to screw in a light bulb?**

**Brian:** I don't know, but I'm guessing several because zombies are generally kind of dumb! **NAG**



# Reviews Intro

In any body of water all unpleasant things tend to float to the surface, initially. This is what we scooped off the top of the last rank pond we came across. Meet your reviewers.

What is the most pointless thing you've done while playing a game?  
This must be a task you've performed inside the game world itself.



## RedTide

Because of my OCD nature I simply MUST FIND ALL SECRETS in games that I'm emotionally invested in. *Legend of Grimrock* comes to mind; I spent far too long side stepping along walls tapping the E key to find secrets.



## Miktar

Delivering a letter from one NPC to another, who were only standing about 4m apart, in *World of Warcraft*. And all I got was a shirt.



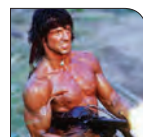
## Azimuth

My *Sims 3*... "experiments". Maybe not completely pointless, though, because I learned some things about myself. Disturbing things, but things nonetheless.



## Mikit0707

Collecting apples to make a pie in *World of Warcraft*. Me, the mighty Orc warrior picking apples. That's when I knew MMORPGs were shit.



## GeometriX

I spent hours grinding monsters before the end bit in *Quest for Glory III* to get as much cash as possible to import into *QFGIV*, only to find that you lose all of your inventory when you start the game.



## Barkskin

Collectables. I'm obsessive about collecting each and every piece of miscellaneous garbage that any game contains – even if the game itself is awful. This means it takes an obscene amount of time for me to finish games, and I kind of hate myself for it.

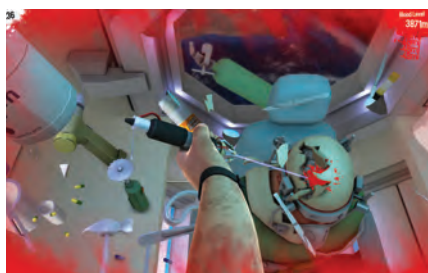
## Mini reviews

Kinda like regular reviews, only bite-sized and with less of those pesky words.

### SURGEON SIMULATOR 2013

It's almost unbelievable that *Surgeon Simulator 2013* is a game for which you can pay money. Originally an experiment created in 48 hours for a Ludum Dare game jam, it became an overnight hit thanks to the ridiculous physics-based comedy it empowers. The premise of the original prototype is simple: perform a heart transplant. To do this, you're given a disembodied hand. Five keys on your keyboard control each of its five fingers. The mouse moves the hand around, and the two mouse buttons let you lower and rotate it. Using these controls, you grab scalpels, saws, hammers and anything else you think would be useful in snipping arteries and removing vital organs. The result is hilarious.

Now the team's made it into a full game, and it's every bit as gruesomely comical. New kidney and brain transplants add additional ways to ruin your patient's day, and there's a set of ambulance levels that see you performing surgery while the motion of the ambulance sends equipment crashing around to make your already tough job even more laughably



arduous. As much as we love that it exists, the comedic novelty wears off quickly, which makes recommending the game at its full price of \$9.99 difficult. Maybe wait for a sale.

70



“We were doing fine until Michael shot me into the sharks!”

- Geoff



### Ramjet

Everything I do is pointless. I'm not even sure why I'm on this Earth. I can't even reply to simple mail requests for the text that goes here.



### SAVAGE

Nothing I do is pointless.



### ShockG

Emptied out all my ammo clips in an FPS purely because I was frustrated, needless to say it didn't help at all.

## REVIEW SCORES GUIDELINE

**1-39** This game is broken. Even if you get it to run, playing it is a painful experience that you wouldn't wish upon your worst enemy.

**40-49** It barely functions, but there's little real game here. Maybe you'd play it for a bit if you got it for free, but it's not something you'd recommend to friends.

**50-59** Acceptable, but nothing special. It's generic or uninspired, but playable, and might be worth spending some time hunting for achievements.

**60-69** Now we're getting somewhere. This game has something interesting about it, and fans of the genre or series should enjoy it, but something significant holds back this game from greatness.

**70-79** This game is very good. Anyone who enjoys this type of game will have a great time and could finish it without too much aggravation. It shows care and polish, but falls short in a number of areas.

**80-89** An excellent game; one that you'd happily play through multiple times and recommend to friends. It adds interesting, if imperfect, advancements to the genre or series.

**90-100** As close to perfection as possible. This game is highly innovative; it has incredible visuals; it plays like a dream and you can't get enough of it. You have to look for faults just to avoid giving it a perfect score.

## home\_coded

Exposure for South African indie developers...

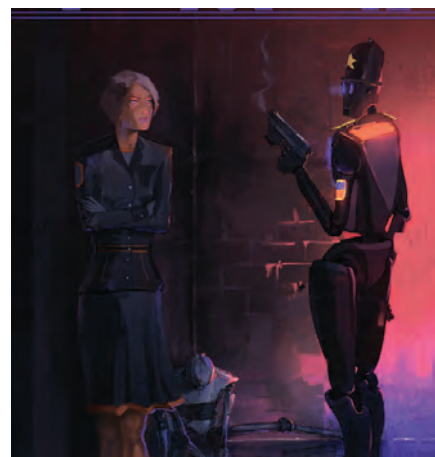
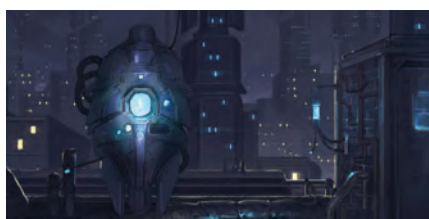
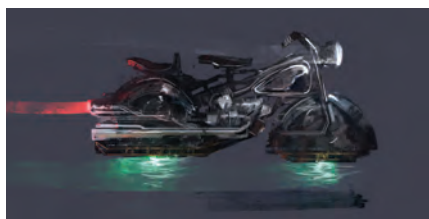
# Screwy Lightbulb Entertainment

[WWW.SCREWYLIGHTBULB.COM](http://WWW.SCREWYLIGHTBULB.COM)

As suckers for point-and-click adventure games, our interest was immediately piqued when local game development team Screwy Lightbulb announced their first-person adventure game *The Maker's Eden*. Combined with its cool comic book illustrations and *Bladerunner*-esque setting, there's very little that they can do wrong with this title.

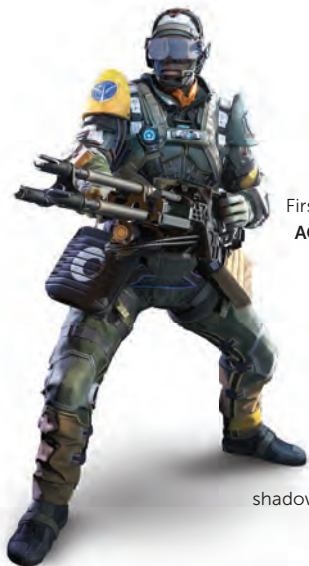
Screwy Lightbulb initially attempted to gain crowd-funding for *The Maker's Eden* through IndieGoGo (a site similar to Kickstarter), but failed to reach its target of \$10,000. Thankfully, the team elected to go with flexible funding which means the \$4,487 that was pledged could be taken home, which was enough to cover a few software licences at the very least.

The game is set to be an episodic affair, with the first act to be released round about the time you read this, at a cost of \$4.50 (or \$9 if you want the awesome soundtrack,



too). It tells the story of an android who finds itself on the run, with no idea of what it is or its purpose. Everything plays out in a series of comic book panels and includes dialogue, item usage and all the regular things you'd expect from a game of this genre.

*The Maker's Eden* is aimed for release on PC, Mac and Linux, with a mobile port being likely thanks to the portability of Unity-based development. There's a demo available on the website if you'd like to get your hands on some gameplay.



**PLATFORMS**  
PS4  
**REVIEWED ON**  
PS4  
**GENRE**

First-person shooter  
**AGE RESTRICTION**  
18

**MULTIPLAYER**  
Local  
None  
Online

32 players  
**DEVELOPER**  
Guerrilla Games

**WEBSITE**  
shadowfall.killzone.com

**PUBLISHER**  
SCEE

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Sterkinekor Games

Reviewed

# Killzone: Shadow Fall

More than just a pretty face



1

1 During the campaign, quite a few missions throw multiple objectives at you and you're free to tackle them in any order you please. The environments get quite large, with impeccable detail.

If nothing else, *Killzone* is a testament to Sony's perverse tenacity. The series has never really found the kind of success and market presence that everyone dreams of for their first-person shooter. But rather than abandon it to yet another flavour-of-the-week shooter, credit where due, Sony has continued to develop the series.

*Shadow Fall* represents Guerrilla attempting to refine the multiplayer element yet again to find some one-of-a-kind balance to make it stand out. And whether or not this is a good or bad thing for fans of *Killzone's* multiplayer history, is something open to debate. It could be argued that *Shadow Fall* is even more like *Call of Duty* in terms of fundamental gameplay and pace, if not in presentation, but it'd be a weak argument. For the lack of a more eloquent way of phrasing it: multiplayer in *Call of Duty* feels like laser tag. Fast movement, quick kills, rapid back-and-forth scoring. By contrast, *Shadow Fall* feels like rugby. Player movement is slow, heavy and deliberate. Portable shields can make any area defensible. A cohesive group moving forward is an unstoppable force until it meets the same on the opposing team. When a scrum breaks out to try and get through a room the enemy team is holding, you'll know exactly what I mean. The multiplayer does get one demerit. While

the *Killzone* series has always benefited from a good deal of developer support post release, where the multiplayer is expanded upon, tweaked and overhauled, right now the current state of *Shadow Fall's* multiplayer is very much a beta. There's a lot of work yet to be done.

On the other hand, the single player campaign does benefit from Sony's commitment to the franchise. At this point, *Killzone* has developed a fairly comprehensive, nuanced narrative and ongoing story. *Shadow Fall* attempts to directly leverage this, in the sense that the game has ambitions of elevating the series beyond just an excuse for a multiplayer shooter client into a dramatic science-fiction epic. It does not entirely succeed in this though: the campaign feels disjointed and spotty as the narrative leaps around sharply and harshly from place to place. But it does manage a few things that are more interesting than the average throwaway first-person shooter. Yet ironically enough, it's less successful at it than the portable *Killzone Mercenary*, which may have one of the better campaign modes of the last several years.

*ShadowFall* does get points for scope and a surprising amount of characterization, for everyone but the protagonist who remains a forgettable gun camera. **NAG**

- Miktar

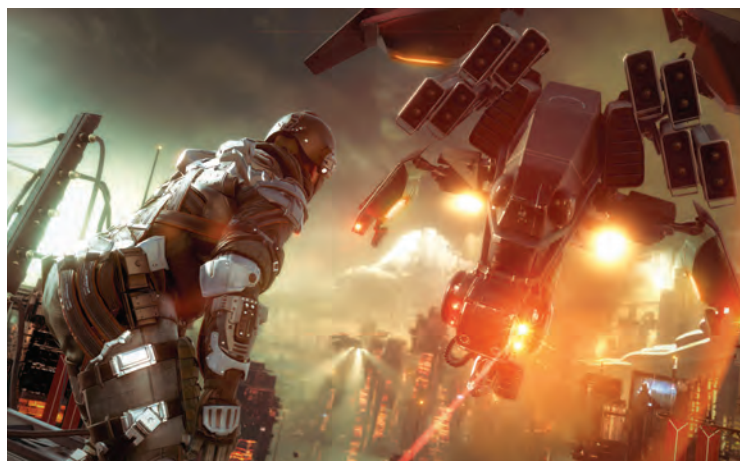
79 As launch games go, *ShadowFall* is not unimpressive. There's a little more meat, a little more polish, and a bit more content than we've come to expect from games whose primary purpose in existing is to convince people to run out and buy a new game console.

**PLUS**

Great visuals / Mission variety

**MINUS**

No online splitscreen / Frame-rate issues / Half-implemented multiplayer



## PLATFORMS

PS4

## REVIEWED ON

PS4

## GENRE

Shoot 'em up

## AGE RESTRICTION

7

## MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

2 players

## DEVELOPER

Housemarque

## WEBSITE

www.

housemarque.

com/games/

resogun/

## PUBLISHER

Sony Computer

Entertainment

## DISTRIBUTOR

Digital Distribution

## Reviewed

## Resogun

Defender for a new generation

The classics never die. But updating them to use modern conventions and hardware doesn't hurt either.

*Resogun* is a take on *Defender*, the hard-as-balls 1980s arcade classic. The core loop is roughly the same: you pilot a fighter ship on a horizontal playfield, shooting down aliens, saving little humans that appear, and trying to rack up a high score.

As in *Defender*, the playfield wraps around so if you keep going left or right you'll end up where you started. Except in *Resogun*, you can see almost all the playfield at any time as it wraps around cylindrically. This has an added benefit of giving you a huge viewing area, making it easier to spot incoming danger. Even more impressive: the environment and all enemies are made up of voxels (little cubes), millions of them. As you shoot, bomb and boost your way around, the environment becomes increasingly torn up, broken down and pock-faced. When a level completes, you're treated to an "Armageddon", where everything explodes. All this, while maintaining a solid 60 frames per second. It's jaw-droppingly glorious, and such a cheeky abuse of the PlayStation 4's power. But it's utterly worth it.

There's two-player online play, and *Resogun* supports Remote Play to a Vita, although the framerate locks at 30fps. This is a game high-score junkies and shmup fans won't want to miss. **NAG**

- Miktar



89

The game starts. "SAVE THE LAST HUMANS" scrolls across the screen, narrated by an unemotional synthesized female voice. Music starts pumping, and you have a full stock of screen-clearing bombs. Your friend's high-score, which is higher than your best, taunts you. *Resogun* is pure arcade gaming at its finest.

## PLUS

Incredible visuals / Easy to learn / Complex to master / Great music

## MINUS

No local co-op

## NAG

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Send your submissions to [geoff@nag.co.za](mailto:geoff@nag.co.za) with the subject line "I love to SPORTS GAME". Reviews must be no more than 400 words and can be submitted in .doc, .txt or .pdf format. Include your CV and a covering letter – tell us a bit about yourself. Deadline is the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 2014.



Double-check your work before submitting it!



PLATFORMS  
PSV  
REVIEWED ON  
PSV  
GENRE

Action role-playing game  
AGE RESTRICTION  
12

MULTIPLAYER  
Local  
None  
Online  
None

DEVELOPER  
Nihon Falcom Corporation

WEBSITE  
worldofys.com/celceta/

PUBLISHER  
NIS America

DISTRIBUTOR  
TBA



Reviewed

# Ys: Memories of Celceta

Putting the action in action-RPG

Since 1987, the Ys series has maintained a proud vigil against slow-paced, turn-based, menu-driven Japanese role-playing games. Fun, super-fast-paced action, combined with tight boss encounter designs, role-playing elements, and charming stories, has kept the series going for nearly 30 years with no signs of slowing.

This latest instalment, *Memories of Celceta*, is technically a replacement for Ys IV. The existing Ys IV games, of which there are two, were made by other developers who had licensed the property at the time, causing many conflicting plot elements. Falcom

decided it was about time to set things straight, using *Ys Seven* as the template. In most previous Ys titles, you controlled one Adol Christin – the human blender – and fought, jumped and magicked your way to victory and plot resolution. *Ys Seven* mixed things up by giving you three playable characters at the same time, as you switch between them on the fly to use their unique benefits. *Memories of Celceta* continues this idea, giving each party member a different attack type (like strike, slash or pierce), each working best against certain enemies. The party members you're not directly controlling at that moment will run and do their own thing, attacking enemies or gathering resources, but you can set them to be evasive at any time.

The setup for Adol's adventure remains straightforward: stumbling out of the forests of Celceta with amnesia, you must help the nearby towns with monster problems all while trying to regain your memories. As you map out the forest, you uncover more story elements, tougher enemies, and a deep appreciation for mowing down creatures with a flurry of blades. There's a lot of backtracking, but the way that combat feels (and that monsters drop things you need) keeps even this enjoyable. The combat system is a bit more nuanced than before: if you use the right combination of attack types, skills, and launchers that air-juggle enemies, they'll drop more and better items. If you dodge at the last minute to avoid an attack, you'll get a Flash Dodge which slows enemies down for a while.

Resources you collect out in the field can be used to upgrade weapons and armour you purchase from shops. There's a day/night cycle, with time only progressing when you're out in the field, which gives each area two distinct looks and danger levels. Boss encounters will test your skill and ability to notice patterns, but overall the experience is enjoyable and frustration-free.

- Miktar



1 Enemies are weak against specific types of attacks, so you need to cycle between party members on the fly to do the most damage and get more items.



89 While perhaps not as refined an experience as *Ys: Origins*, which kept things straightforward and on rails, *Memories of Celceta* does benefit from feeling like a real adventure as you map out a mysterious forest, while discovering more about your past. And what that means for your future.

PLUS

Much combat / Wow music / Such story / Very fun

MINUS

Spotty frame-rate in towns



# GAME OF THRONES<sup>SM</sup>

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PLATFORMS  
PS4  
REVIEWED ON  
PS4  
GENRE

Platformer / Beat-'em-up  
AGE RESTRICTION  
7

MULTIPLAYER  
Local  
2 players

Online  
None

DEVELOPER  
SCE Japan Studio

WEBSITE  
uk.playstation.com

PUBLISHER  
SCEE

DISTRIBUTOR  
Sterkinekor Games

## Reviewed

# Knack

### It's tough being a launch title

It feels like I should be inserting all these retro '90s references – like *Knack is Whack* – because the game is so much a throwback to the likes of *Crash Bandicoot*, except with contemporary graphics, cinematic presentation, a lot more polygons, and not as much “cool dude attitude”, thankfully. You play as a size-changing robot of a sort, navigating levels, punching things hard, and finding upgrades. The story involves humans versus *Warhammer*-style orcs and goblins, obvious but inevitable betrayal, and the secrets of a lost civilisation. The plot barely keeps it together, yet is enjoyable all the same.

A lot of people will end up finding *Knack* bland. There just isn't that much to the game, aside from a strong foundation of precisely metered platforming and enemy placement. But what the game does have is surprisingly authoritative. *Knack* is the kind of game where, if you like this stuff, you may really like it more than the game has any right to expect considering what it offers. *Knack* is unfortunately positioned

as a premium platform launch title. It's not the kind of game that should be bearing the weight that's being placed on it, but Sony needed its sacrificial lamb.

Marc Cerny, creative director on *Knack* and much lauded Naughty Dog alumnus, once said in an interview that because it was a small, low-budget project, the origin of Knack as a character came from a desire to make a character international – one without the idiosyncrasies of any one region or culture. So they made the character an effect, in and of itself. There's a long, proud history in games of gimmick characters that exist only to promote a special effect or demonstrate hardware, yet *Knack* is one of the few times such a character manages to rise above the idea. The character is not completely boring, just a little underutilized.

The game does deserve some credit for avoiding being just a tech demo. It's lengthy, built around replayability and unlocking a variety of different ways to tackle the scenarios. **NAG**

- Miktar



### KNACK'S QUEST

A free app for Android and iOS, *Knack's Quest* is a basic match-three puzzler that awards you pieces of the various power-ups and alternate Knack skins you can make in the PS4 game. Usually you'd find these pieces in chests in the game, which you can then swap for different pieces based on what people on your friends list have found. But if you lack friends, or friends playing *Knack*, this app is a more than sufficient surrogate.



1 Knack's size is a part of the level design: certain areas require you to get bigger, so you do, while others require tiny Knack, so some contrivance makes him small again.

77

Everything about *Knack* screams mediocre, and yet its execution – everything from the carefully designed encounters to the half-hearted

story that looks great but never tries to be ground-breaking – results in a kind of charm we've not seen since the early days of *Crash Bandicoot* and *Jak & Daxter*.

### PLUS

Super-high image quality / Well-designed encounters / Replayability

### MINUS

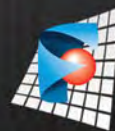
Mild frame-rate issues / Plot feels unfinished

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WD  
**BLACK<sup>2</sup>**

Introducing the WD Black2 dual drive, a revolutionary storage device that is specifically designed for the modern enthusiast whether you are a creative pro, gamer or PC builder. WD Black2 is the fusion of a fully accessible solid-state drive for your operating system and a generous capacity hard drive for personal data and large files.

**WD**  
absolutely

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As used for storage capacity, one gigabyte (GB) = one billion bytes, and one terabyte (TB) = one trillion bytes. Total accessible capacity varies depending on operating environment.

2178-800033-A00 Nov 2013



**PLATFORMS**  
3DS  
**REVIEWED ON**  
3DS  
**GENRE**  
Action-adventure  
**AGE RESTRICTION**  
7  
**MULTIPLAYER**  
Local  
None  
Online  
None  
**DEVELOPER**  
Nintendo EAD Group No. 3 / Monolith Soft  
**WEBSITE**  
zelda.com/link-between-worlds  
**PUBLISHER**  
Nintendo  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Core Group

Reviewed

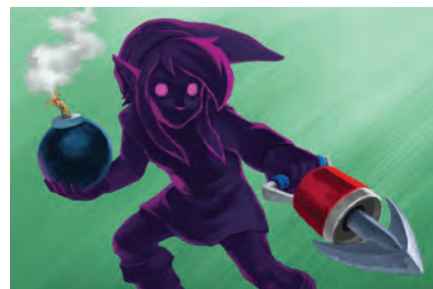
# The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds

Biggest shake-up in Hyrule's history since news Zelda cross-dresses

There's been a lot of chatter about what *A Link Between Worlds* means. Is this a sign that Nintendo has begun a process of critically re-evaluating the *Zelda* franchise and experimenting with its fundamentals? Is it an attempt to appease retro *Zelda* fans who have never really been happy with any game past the post-3D era, even the much vaunted *Ocarina of Time*?

Mostly, *Between Worlds* kind of seems like it's not a direct indicator for the future of *Zelda*, as it is the impression that Nintendo has decided to stop, take a deep breath, and ask itself if the series should be experimented on drastically. *Between Worlds* ends up being a safe place to experiment, because it's grounded by adhering closely to the framework of *Link to the Past*. Within this framework, which at first glance looks like it's a remake or reboot, there is a great amount of experimentation going on with the execution – more so than any *Zelda* game since the off-the-wall *Majora's Mask*.

You still explore an open world, delve dungeons and solve puzzles using a variety of tools, what with that being the series' *raison d'être*. But instead of a dungeon rewarding you with a tool that is then used to beat the next dungeon down the list, *Between Worlds* gives you access to all the tools and all the dungeons, and lets you decide.

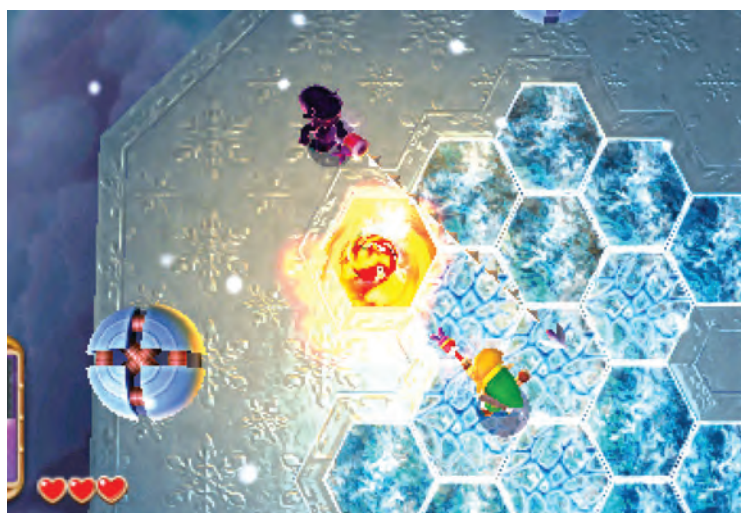
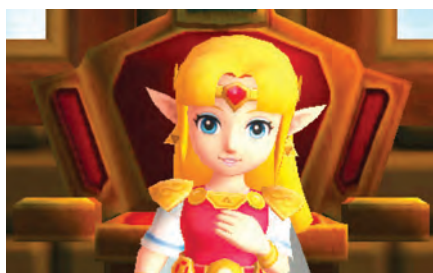
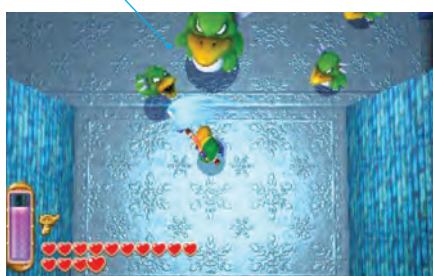


By the end of the game, the biggest negative is that much of the experimental nature of the game doesn't quite come together, because it's too easy. It's not as easy as some of the worst offenders in *Zelda* history, like the initial version of *Wind Waker*. And because of its action-oriented gameplay, easy should not be mistaken for boring. The pace never lets up and the player, in spite of the fact that the game over screen will not be seen much, will see a lot of close calls, mostly from developing a cavalier attitude.

But the fact is the game is designed to be replayed. There's a lot of *Mega Man* in the DNA of the game. There are many alternate strategies on the order in which to approach dungeons, and which permanent items and upgrades to collect first. But it takes reaching Hero Mode, only unlocked upon finishing the game, for *Between Worlds* to be what it was designed to be. Though it can't be held against it for wanting to give first-time players a "safe" way to experience the story from start to finish, and only then give them the real game. It just wastes some time for those who'd benefit from starting Hero Mode right off the bat. **NAG**

- Miktar

1



1 Even with the 3D effect on, *Between Worlds* maintains a decent 60 frames per second, which aids the effect greatly.



**93** *Between Worlds* highlights something which has become a kind of trademark of Nintendo game design: that you can't take stock of what a Nintendo game is

the first time you play it through. Sometimes years have to go by before the real design of the game comes into sharp relief, revealing why people keep playing Nintendo games over and over through the years.

**PLUS**

Orchestrated music / Puzzle variety / Good use of 3D

**MINUS**

Initially too easy

## PLATFORMS

PSV

## REVIEWED ON

PSV

## GENRE

Platformer

## AGE RESTRICTION

7

## MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

None

## DEVELOPER

Media Molecule

## WEBSITE

tearaway.

mediamolecule.com

## PUBLISHER

SCEE

## DISTRIBUTOR

Sterkinekor Games

## Reviewed

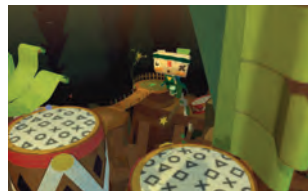
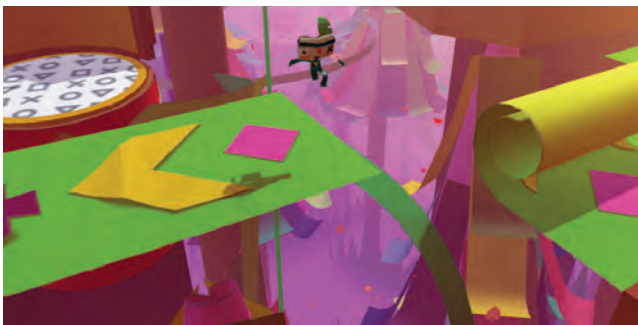
## Tearaway

Artsy and crafty

**T**earaway is the first game to really encapsulate all of the Vita's features into a cohesive experience. As you guide your little letter-headed friend through vibrant papercraft environments, you'll push things around using the rear touchpad, adjust things in the world by tilting the device, take photos of the real world to give texture to elements in the game, and more. While it may sound like a collection of gimmicks, everything comes together wonderfully thanks to the game's meta-narrative, of the world you're playing being literally in your hands, inside the device.

And like an over-eager kindergarten teacher, Media Molecule will get you doing arts and crafts. Occasionally the game will ask you to make things using a simple papercraft system, drawing lines and cutting bright paper into shapes. These things, like a hat for a squirrel, then appear in the game world, or on creatures. As the game progresses, and more of it becomes tailored due to your creations, the experience becomes very personal. You can take photos in-game at any time, using a variety of filters and lenses, sharing them to the game's social site (tearaway.me) or Twitter. While the core game is a decent platformer with creative use of the Vita's sensors and touchpads, it's the quality presentation that does the heavy lifting. **NAG**

- Miktar



79

It's a pretty good platformer with a lot of interesting design ideas that incorporate the Vita's many hardware features. But the real worth of *Tearaway* lies in how it slowly becomes a personalized experience, your many little papercraft creations filling up and changing the world in small ways.

## PLUS

Inventive and creative / Charming environments / Quirky music

## MINUS

Bit short / Fussy trophies

## PLATFORMS

PC

## REVIEWED ON

PC

## GENRE

Action

## AGE RESTRICTION

7

## MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

None

## DEVELOPER

Endless Fluff Games

## WEBSITE

www.valdisstory.

com

## PUBLISHER

Endless Fluff Games

## DISTRIBUTOR

Digital distribution

## Reviewed

Valdis Story -  
Abyssal CityAn old-school adventure  
with modern trimmings

**V**aldis Story is very much a "metroidvania", but part of the charm of games in this genre is how they represent a true peculiarity of gaming culture intersecting with design. The game is a solid, well-designed metroidvania, and yet has nothing to do with *Castlevania*, and even less to do with *Metroid*. In fact, "metroidvania" doesn't really mean a damn thing, but everyone knows what you mean when you say "it's a metroidvania". Provided you've played at least one game in the genre before.

*Valdis* presents an excellent example of the genre's ideals, hitting every single good design point, not forgetting anything, and to its credit even adds a few ideas. The plot is functional: two warring gods, human souls fuel the fight by being turned into either demons or angels, resulting in a dwindling humanity. You play as a character from either side (with more to come later as free DLC). Wyatt (demon) has a big sword and bad attitude, while Reina (angel) uses her fists and more powerful magic. The brawling combat is pretty deep, with combos and juggles.

As you explore the large, interconnected zones you level up, unlock new skills, find/craft accessories and fight challenging bosses. Everything's wrapped up with a nice bow of charming music that really sets the mood. If you've missed games like *Symphony of the Night*, give this a shot. **NAG**

- Miktar



86

This is a gem of a game that's going to fly under a lot of people's radar. The combat has style and technical depth, the story holds it together, while the mild RPG elements allow for variety in how you approach things. As far as 2D "metroidvania" games go, *Valdis Story* ranks near the top.

## PLUS

Stunning artwork / Solid combat / Interesting story

## MINUS

Sharp difficulty curve / Lots of backtracking

PLATFORMS  
PS3  
REVIEWED ON  
PS3  
GENRE  
Racing  
AGE RESTRICTION  
3  
MULTIPLAYER  
Local  
2 players  
Online  
16 players  
DEVELOPER  
Polyphony Digital  
WEBSITE  
www.granturismo.com  
PUBLISHER  
SCEE  
DISTRIBUTOR  
Sterkinekor Games

Reviewed

# Gran Turismo 6

One for the road

When *Gran Turismo 5* arrived a while back, it was rife with problems. Not least of which was a massive update that needed to be downloaded... at the time it was one of the largest day one updates we had seen. And despite it, *GT5* still failed to deliver the goods as it should have.

A few years down the line, the "Real Driving Simulator" has a new iteration (oddly enough released as a PS3 exclusive mere weeks before the release of the PS4). *Gran Turismo 6* also requires a large day one update to unlock certain aspects of the game but, even without it, the title already feels miles ahead of its predecessor. The developers

have managed to take the entire franchise to a new height with this instalment, thanks to some additions to the game dynamics that one would have thought obvious.

Some of the biggest impact on the performance of cars in the game comes from the improved tyre physics. Grip plays a massive part in the game now, and different tyre compounds now make a big difference to player performance. Ultimately this and other changes have taken a driving game series that was becoming more and more arcade-like, and skidded it back into the idea of realistic simulation. For the first time in a long time *Gran Turismo* can now compete on a level with games like *Forza*, which have never let the realism slip (with the exception of *Horizon*, which was a spin-off).

That realism does come with a price, though. *Gran Turismo 6* is so realistic at times that it becomes almost impossible to play with a standard PS3 controller – which is likely what most players who buy the game will use. It moves away from being more accessible and into the realms of "enthusiast", requiring a driving wheel to really be played properly at higher levels. The earlier front wheel drive cars are all fine and well, but once other configurations come along – particularly mid-engine designs – things get very tricky to control with analogue sticks.

Still, it is an extremely fun experience. The graphics look great (although there are still some cars that look worse than others – that's the price of including over 1,200 vehicles in a PS3 game). The environments are beautifully rendered, too, with great lighting and special effects. The sound, on the other hand, still suffers from that horrid, synthetic quality that has plagued the series; it's better than before, but it's still there.

There are other benefits to *Gran Turismo 6*, though – with classic performance challenges, less-annoying licences, prototype challenges and even a set of moon-buggy missions, it really is a celebration of the automotive arts. It's the best *GT* title to date and shows great promise for when this franchise shifts to the PS4. **NAG**  
- Shryke

1 Looks awesome... pity it doesn't sound that way



80 With vast improvements over *GT5*, *Gran Turismo 6* is most certainly the finest game in the series. It's not perfect, though, and you may require a wheel to get through the later stages.

**PLUS**  
Better physics / Great looks / Fun extras

**MINUS**  
Really tough later on / Sound is still nasty / Some cars have less detail

PLATFORMS  
PS3  
REVIEWED ON  
PS3  
GENRE  
Platform  
AGE RESTRICTION  
7

MULTIPLAYER  
Local  
None  
Online  
None

DEVELOPER  
Insomniac Games

WEBSITE  
www.insomniacgames.com

PUBLISHER  
SCEE  
DISTRIBUTOR  
Sterkinekor Games

Reviewed

# Ratchet & Clank: Nexus

The darker side of platforming

The PS3 has come to the end of its reign as Sony's flagship console and, because of this, many series may not appear on that long-lived and celebrated platform ever again. At least, that's the assumption, and it is one that is being applied to *Ratchet & Clank*. This franchise has been a stalwart for the PS3 from the word go, was one of the first to make use of the Sixaxis motion system and generally delivered great experiences for pretty much all of the PS3's mainstream lifespan. It seems fitting, then, that one of the last PS3 exclusive games (once again, working on the assumption that PS4 is pretty much stealing the show from here on out) is a *Ratchet & Clank* title.

*Ratchet & Clank: Nexus* sees our plucky Lombax hero and his miniscule robotic sidekick embark on their darkest adventure to date. And one of their shortest – which really is a pity, because *Ratchet & Clank: Nexus* is one of the finer titles in the franchise.

What makes it so fun is, well... there are a number of reasons, to be honest. But paramount are the new traversal methods given to players. These include Grav Boots, which adhere to specific surfaces and see a number of zero gravity missions taking place, as well as a limited-fuel jet-pack and a rather



nifty Grav Well system that is somewhat reminiscent of some of the levels in *Portal 2*. All of these add up to making getting around the expansive levels not only fun, but also challenging.

Speaking of gravity, Clank is involved in several 2D side-scroller mini-games, in which the player can manipulate gravity in four directions. These are immense amounts of fun, with each holding the possibility of great puzzling challenge as Clank makes his frantic dash through them.

And, of course, there are a collection of odd and enjoyable weapons for Clank to use. These can be upgraded in terms of firepower, ammo capacity and the like. In addition, unlocking specific upgrade blocks also unlocks new, extended abilities. And the weapons level up with use as well, unlocking more upgrade options as they do so.

The game visits a limited amount of locations, due to its sadly short nature. However, each of these environments holds its own character, appeal and set of challenge. So do the varied enemies that the duo run into, including particularly tough creatures called Nethers, from another nightmarish dimension.

Overall, *Ratchet & Clank: Nexus* is an extremely enjoyable title, filled with the kind of action, humour and exploration that fans would expect from this franchise. If it didn't end quite so abruptly, it would have been much better, but as it stands it is still a very fitting finale for *Ratchet & Clank's* PS3 adventures. **NAG**

- Shryke



1 It's much darker... but still bright, colourful and crazy.



**80** *Ratchet & Clank: Nexus* manages to deliver the goods as the last outing for this franchise on PS3, but it is unfortunately just too short.

PLUS

New traversal options / Great weapons / Clank's mini-games

MINUS

Far too short / Limited environments to visit

**PLATFORMS**  
360 / PC / PS3  
**REVIEWED ON**  
PC  
**GENRE**  
Music/rhythm  
**AGE RESTRICTION**  
12  
**MULTIPLAYER**  
**Local**  
2 players  
**Online**  
None  
**DEVELOPER**  
Ubisoft  
**WEBSITE**  
rocksmith.ubi.com  
**PUBLISHER**  
Ubisoft  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Megarom

Reviewed

# Rocksmith 2014 Edition

Call me... the shredder

When it comes to learning to play a musical instrument, no saying is truer than "practice makes perfect". But in an increasingly attention-deficient age, taking the time to learn how to play an instrument can be super boring when you could spend your precious spare time sniping helicopter pilots or ganking noobs instead. The idea, then, of a game that teaches you how to play an instrument, is a compelling one.

*Rocksmith 2014 Edition* is a standalone update to 2012's *Rocksmith*. If you're unfamiliar with *Rocksmith*, it aims to teach you how to play the guitar by allowing you to connect any semi-acoustic or electric guitar or bass to your PC/console using the Ubisoft Real Tone cable.

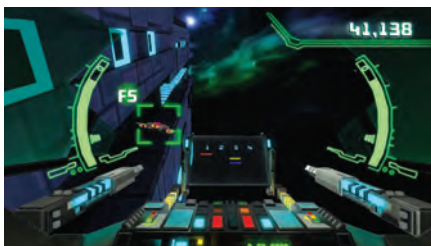
This new version packs in a ton of improvements: the menus are far easier to navigate and organised in a logical way; the system's detection of notes and chords is more accurate; a new free-play mode has been introduced called Studio Mode; and bass support comes out-of-the-box. You could also argue that the track selection is superior, but that comes down to personal preference. In general, *2014* is better in every technical way to its predecessor.



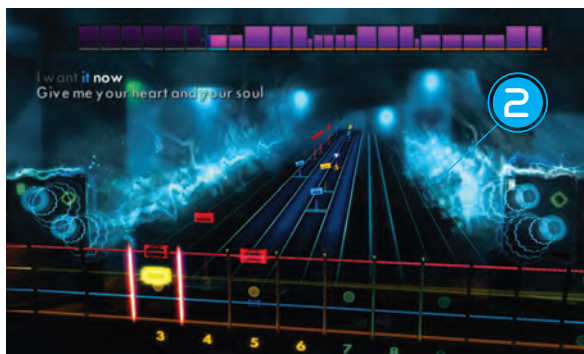
Where it falls short is also a matter of personal preference, but it's something that can't be overlooked. The original *Rocksmith* had a tough time finding itself a market: gamers thought it too technical or even too expensive (especially if you didn't already own a guitar), and musicians found its game-like features to be silly, never expecting that one actually could learn to play the guitar using a game. For *Rocksmith 2014*, Ubisoft apparently decided to shift its approach to cater more towards the music crowd, as there's very little "game" here: there's no career to play through – all songs are unlocked from the start, much like the amps, pre-amps, cabinets and pedals which you can use to create your own tone for free-play or Studio Mode. While this decision will probably suit many people, I found myself often bouncing off *Rocksmith 2014* because there was little to keep me coming back. With the entire track list available to me I simply ambled through it, choosing songs I know and like and avoiding the rest. Sorting by difficulty gives you a little bit of guidance but even then, there's nothing urging you to play through any songs – something which any music game player will acknowledge as one of the best ways to discover new music (and learn to play it, in this case).

Again, just how important that is will depend on what you plan to get out of *Rocksmith*. I can't help but feel that excluding a career mode is a poor choice, however; it should have at the very least been an option for those who enjoy the challenge. **NAG**  
- GeometriX

1 The popular Guitarcade has returned with 11 mini-games designed to teach you various playing techniques and improve your speed and accuracy. They're a great way to warm up or just kill a few minutes.



2 If you prefer the track offering from the original *Rocksmith*, you can import the lot (minus a couple of songs trapped in licencing hell) for about R100.



**84** *Rocksmith 2014* improves upon the original game in almost every way, but the lack of a career mode means those players without the discipline to stick to a lesson plan might find themselves losing interest.

**PLUS**  
Useful mini-games / Tone detection accuracy improved / Technical enhancements all-round

**MINUS**  
No career mode

# CORSAIR VENGEANCE 2100

DESIGNED for PERFORMANCE GAMING

**Wireless freedom  
with uncompromised  
7.1 audio quality  
and comfort**



The new Vengeance 2100 lets you enjoy high-performance Dolby 7.1 multichannel gaming audio without worrying about wires. The 50mm drivers deliver accurate audio reproduction for amazing sound quality and a competitive edge, and you'll be heard loud and clear with the advanced noise cancelling microphone. And, it's built from the ground up for durability, with a tough structure that's designed to stand up to the abuse of long gaming sessions and a real brushed metal finish that makes you look like a pro.

We've created the Vengeance 2100 for one simple reason: gaming audio matters. Whether you choose the 2100, or one of our other professional-grade Vengeance headsets, or one of our Raptor line of gaming essentials, you'll enjoy wide frequency response, accurate sonic imaging, and a comfortable design that will make you want to play for hours.

  
Wireless



CHECK OUT THESE OTHER CORSAIR GAMING HEADSETS



RAPTOR HS30



RAPTOR HS40



VENGEANCE 1400



VENGEANCE 1500

Guess what you'll find here?

Well, almost everything.

# EVERYTHING ELSE

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

## DC COMICS VARIANT PLAY ARTS KAI NO.1 BATMAN

Last month we featured a similar styled Isaac Clarke figurine, and now we have The Dark Knight. The style of this figurine is a reimagined "variant" of a shadow dwelling ninja and the iconic Batman, a mash-up of both old and new, incorporating design elements of ancient Japanese armour and a traditional Japanese "hanya" demon mask. The figurine stands at nearly 28cm and ships with a versatile stand, three sets of hands, a grapnel gun, katana sword and Batarang. This is one of the best looking reimagined figurines we've had to date and you can also find Green Lantern and Wonder Woman in a similar style.

**Supplier:** AWX  
**Website:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)  
**RRP:** R1,150



### STAR WARS MINTS (DARTH VADER / STORMTROOPER / R2D2 / DEATH STAR)

It is written somewhere that just a fistful (that would be a Rancor fist) of these *Star Wars*-themed, *Star Wars*-shaped, peppermint-flavoured mints can tame the foul winds coming out of a Sarlacc pit. Things to know: the mints come in a keepsake metal tin, are manufactured in China and include the anti-caking agent magnesium stearate, which is considered safe for human consumption provided you stick to recommended daily

allowances you have to look up on the Internet. Anyhow, just think how cool you'll be when that pretty lass leans in for a kiss and you whip out your 7.5cm R2D2 tube with matching Death Star ball and offer her a refreshing mint. Ah, yes... she doesn't stand a chance, you romantic charmer you.

**Supplier:** AWX  
**Website:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)  
**RRP:** R70 each



### POP! HEROES DC UNIVERSE BATMAN

You know those Pop! Vinyl figurines we said we weren't going to talk about anymore because they were getting a bit silly? Well here is a giant version of the exact same thing standing just under 25cm. This larger version is just as pointless as his smaller cousins, less so actually because big isn't cute. The head turns so that's something and the whole thing is recommended for ages five and up and of course a must for the serious collector (but isn't everything).

**Supplier:** AWX  
**Website:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)  
**RRP:** R665



### LEGEND OF ZELDA TWILIGHT PRINCESS CREST OF HYRULE LOGO REPEAT FITTED HAT

It's a licensed baseball cap featuring the Crest of Hyrule logo repeated all over it as well as the same framed embodied logo across the top. It has one of those built-in elasticated band fabric things so it fits snugly around most normal shaped heads. Of course, if it doesn't fit on your dome you should probably just keep

living in the basement and avoiding outside contact, people are naturally suspicious of oddly shaped heads. This is a well made, good looking cap that says "gamer" with a dab of style.

**Supplier:** AWX  
**Website:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)  
**RRP:** R245



### ASSASSIN'S CREED EDWARD KENWAY FIGURINE

This McFarlane figurine is not just a figurine but also an elaborate DLC delivery mechanism. If you buy this figurine you'll also get a code to unlock the Kenway family sword to use in the game *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (not for PS4 or Xbox One). For those of you wondering, Edward here is Connor's grandfather, a feared young pirate with 27 points of articulation. The figurine comes with two swords, two sets of smaller hidden blades and features Edward in his dashing pirate assassin outfit.

**Supplier:** AWX  
**Website:** [www.awx.co.za](http://www.awx.co.za)  
**RRP:** R355



# TECHNEWS

## KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

### RAID 0

The most common form of RAID found in systems, it comprises of striping (but no parity or mirroring). This RAID level provides no data redundancy or fault tolerance. However, it improves performance through parallelism of read and write operations across multiple drives. RAID 0 has no error detection mechanism, so the failure of one disk causes the loss of all data on the array.

### RAID 1

Uses mirroring without parity or striping. Data is written identically to two (or more) drives, thereby producing a "mirrored set". The read request is serviced by any of the drives containing the requested data. This can improve performance if data is read from the disk with the least seek latency and rotational latency. Conversely, write performance can be degraded because all drives must be updated; thus the write performance is determined by the slowest drive. The array continues to operate as long as at least one drive is functioning.

### RAID 5

This configuration uses block-level striping with distributed parity. Parity information is distributed among the drives. It requires that all drives but one be present to operate. Upon failure of a single drive, subsequent reads can be calculated from the distributed parity such that no data is lost. RAID 5 requires at least three disks.

### RAID 0+1

A RAID level used for both replicating and sharing data among disks. The usable capacity of a RAID 0+1 array is the same as a RAID 1 array where half of the total capacity is used to mirror the other half. The minimum number of disks required to implement RAID 0+1 is three. Two independent volumes are striped across the three drives and mirror each other, but it is more common to use a minimum of four disks as the stripe pattern is simpler for an even number of drives.

SteelSeries and Tobii Technology are in partnership to launch the world's first mass-market consumer eye-tracking device for gamers.

"The integration of eye tracking into the game experience is literally a game changer - not only

**DID  
YOU  
KNOW?**

for the gamers themselves but also for developers," said Bruce Hawver, CEO of SteelSeries. "Eye tracking capabilities offer game developers a new, creative approach to game development. It becomes a truly immersive experience for players."

### ADATA DASHDRIVE DURABLE UD311 16GB

It's small (the size of your thumbnail), it's elegant, it's water and impact resistant, its USB 3.0 ready, it comes in 16 and 32GB variants, and it has a strap hole for easy attachment to a lanyard, keychain or necklace. Portable storage has never looked this stylish.

[www.adata-group.com](http://www.adata-group.com) | R220



### SHARKOON GSONE PROFESSIONAL PC GAMING STEREO HEADSET

Features of this headset include 53mm speakers, adjustable headband, volume dial on the earcup, self-muting microphone, and a stereo jack.

[www.esquire.co.za](http://www.esquire.co.za) | R549



## # 14

### BY THE NUMBERS

Valve announced in early January that 14 Steam Machine designs are now in production and will be released sometime this year. The makers of first generation Steam Machines are Alienware, Alternate, CyberPowerPC, Digital Storm, Falcon NW, GigaByte, iBuyPower, Maingear, Material.net, Next Spa, Origin PC, Scan, Webhallen, and Zotac.

Every Steam Machine includes an innovative Steam Controller designed for use with a wide variety of game genres, and is powered by the SteamOS, a custom OS built atop Linux.

# Mosh Pit



## STEELSERIES 9H GAMING HEADSET

Two things in particular stand out with this headset. It ships with a swappable cable system that has in-line audio controls for use with PC, Mac, tablets and iOS and Android phones, and the 9H uses Dolby Surround sound technologies which include Dolby Digital and Dolby Prologic IIx.  
[www.megarom.co.za](http://www.megarom.co.za) | R2,199

## RAZER KRAKEN 7.1 USB GAMING HEADSET

This headset features an advanced 7.1 virtual surround sound engine and an enhanced omnidirectional digital microphone.  
[www.razerzone.com](http://www.razerzone.com) | R1,199



## ASTRUM KB-027T KEYBOARD

This super slim (6mm) 2.4GHz wireless touchpad keyboard has a 6-10 meter operation range. Its unique two-in-one number pad/touch pad located on the right of the keyboard makes it ideal for use with an iPad or tablet.  
[www.astrum.co.za](http://www.astrum.co.za) | R449



“Project Christine is a new concept design that will revolutionize the way users view the traditional PC. This is the first gaming system that is able to keep pace with technology and could allow consumers to never buy another PC, or gaming system, again.”

*Min-Liang Tan, Razer co-founder, CEO and creative director.*

Project Christine was unveiled in early January at CES in Las Vegas. It's a modular design that will allow you to build your own PC by selecting and installing modules on the fly. Project Christine will also be able to run multiple operating systems and be perpetually customisable.

# DREAMMACHINE

This month doesn't see any changes to the Dream Machine, as most of the new technology is likely to show up in the second half of the year. Unfortunately though, because of the extremely weak rand, both gaming rigs have gone up in price considerably, so if you didn't get either PC last year, perhaps you may consider substituting some parts to keep the costs manageable. Next month we should have a new PSU and memory for both platforms, in the form of the new Corsair AX1500i and some fantastic G.Skill memory.



**PSU**  
**Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU**  
R3,999 / [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)



**GRAPHICS**  
**GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD**  
R11,799 / [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com)



**OS DRIVE**  
**OCZ Vector 256GB SSD**  
R3,799 / [www.ocz.com](http://www.ocz.com)



**STORAGE DRIVE**  
**WD Black 4TB FZEX**  
R3,299 / [www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)



**CHASSIS**  
**Corsair Obsidian 900D**  
R3,999 / [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)



**DISPLAY**  
**ASUS VG248QE**  
R6,099 / [www.asus.com](http://www.asus.com)



**KEYBOARD**  
**GIGABYTE Aivia Osmium Mechanical Gaming Keyboard**  
R1,299 / [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com)



**COOLER**  
**Cooler Master Nepton 280L**  
R1,499 / [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)



**MOUSE**  
**Razer Ouroboros**  
R1,399 / [www.razerzone.com](http://www.razerzone.com)



**SOUND**  
**Creative Sound Blaster ZxR**  
R3,499 / [www.soundblaster.com](http://www.soundblaster.com)



**HEADPHONES**  
**Plantronics GameCom Commander**  
R4,569 / [www.plantronics.com](http://www.plantronics.com)



**MOUSE MAT**  
**Razer Ironclad**  
R599 / [www.razerzone.com](http://www.razerzone.com)



Intel

Intel Core i7 4960X  
R12,999 / www.intel.com

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme Black Edition  
R7,799 / www.asus.com

16GB quad channel DDR3 2,666 MHz memory  
R6,999 / www.corsair.com

Intel Dream Machine:  
**R73,755**



AMD

AMD FX 8350  
R2,699 / www.amd.com

ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z  
R3,599 / www.asus.com

Corsair Vengeance Pro  
2,666MHz C11 16GB Kit  
R4,999 / www.corsair.com

AMD Dream Machine:  
**R57,255**



## HARDWIRED

Once and for all

I've said this several times before in this very column and I find myself writing about it again in 2014. For some reason there's a misconception that at some point in the past, consoles were more powerful than PCs. This is untrue and has never been. Even if you don't necessarily know the hardware used inside previous consoles or current ones, logical deduction and reasoning should make it very obvious how improbable this would be. Simply stated, a console that has to sell for \$400, or even \$1000 USD, could never be comparable to a platform where any one component may retail for that amount. Regardless of how the console model works, it is still tied to manufacturing costs and the advancement of technology at any given time.

If for example, one compares the original PSX from 1994/1995 to the average gaming machine of the time, you'll find that you're already comparing graphics cards with 1MB of video memory and a dedicated 4-8MB of system memory to a console that has significantly less memory, a slower graphics processor and host CPU with the PSX using a circa 1988 33MHz RISC CPU. One may even say that the consoles of the time were not bound to making use of off the shelf rendering techniques and hardware. However, the fact remains that on the PC, the most powerful mass producible CPUs and graphics processors were found. Thus whatever had to go into the console would have to be cheaper and by virtue of that alone it would have to be less powerful. One could even argue it from a pixel density point of view. The PSX along with the Saturn and Nintendo 64 were designed for CRTs where resolutions rarely, if ever, were higher than 480 lines (especially within NTSC regions). While it's true that PAL regions, or at least the standard, have provision for 576 lines, there was no game that targeted that resolution or anything close to it. At the same time, games on the PC were supporting resolutions up to 800x600 (3Dfx Voodoo for example) and screens were capable of 1024x768.

After that period and at the turn of the century with the PS2 and Dreamcast, GPUs on the PC had full transform and lighting capabilities, basic pixel programmability, and plenty (for the time) of bandwidth and high clock speeds. Many rendering effects that were rather rudimentary on the PC were impossible to use in real-time on any of those consoles. This difference in power was more pronounced with the host CPUs where the PC industry was making a transition from traditional CISC based CPUs to ones that closely resembled high performance RISC CPUs found in the industrial computing spaces, courtesy of DEC and such vendors.

Fast forwarding to the previous generation consoles, it was very obvious why desktop parts were more cost effective and more powerful than custom ASICs. In 2006 when the Xbox 360 showed up with a unified 48 compute processor for the graphics, on the desktop we had the GeForce 8 with 128 processors, which were not only unified in their capability to render fragment and vertex programs, the functionality of the processors surpassed what the Xbox 360 could pull off. With this generation of consoles, the difference in processing power is significantly expressed and yet this is the closest consoles have ever been to PCs.

So once and for all, the notion that at any point consoles were more powerful than desktop computers should be laid to rest, or at the very least it should be qualified. In pure numbers, this has never been true. The argument of how accessible that power was however is a different one, a difference which may have resulted in the perception that the closed box systems were always ahead of the desktop. This however never was true at any point.

- Neo Sibeko

# ON-BOARD AUDIO

**PRICE:** Pricing is probably one of the biggest advantages to using the built-in motherboard audio controllers. Since you've paid for it with the purchase of the motherboard, you free up funds for more "important" things like a better keyboard, mouse screen or graphics card. The catch here however is that while most on-board audio solutions are acceptable, very few are noteworthy. The ones that are can be quite pricey as illustrated by the GIGABYTE Sniper 5 family (and more recently the Sniper Z87) or audio as rendered by the ASUS Rampage IV Black Edition. For the most part, these motherboards cost upwards of R3,000 and a large portion of that cost is the superior audio circuitry which is meant to ensure high quality audio playback. So you may choose to go with a cheap motherboard and a mid-range sound card, but do keep in mind that you may end up

paying more for the very same experience.

**FEATURES:** There's not much that on-board audio solutions do not support anymore. Most of the processing, be it encoding or decoding, is performed by the host CPU. So it's expected that you will have surround sound decoding and encoding with the latest audio standards. From 7.1 to regular stereo output, it is all supported. What you may not have are ASIO drivers, but that is mostly suited to people who create music or are into content creation. For gaming, there's no feature that's absent in on-board solutions that would lead to a less than optimal experience.

**AUDIO QUALITY:** This is where there will always be the biggest point of contention. Motherboard solutions have traditionally

suffered from the electronic noise caused by other components. Recently this has changed and some boards offer completely separate power planes, grounding and signaling from the rest of the board. Not only does this result in a cleaner signal, but it allows previously unviable usage scenarios for on-board solutions such as amateur audio production. The signal integrity and clarity has improved dramatically to the point where it would be challenging for most people to tell the difference between a high-end integrated audio solution and a dedicated sound card, short of the inherent audio rendering characteristics.

**COMPATIBILITY:** There are almost no compatibility issues with on-board solutions as they are part of the board and support is guaranteed.

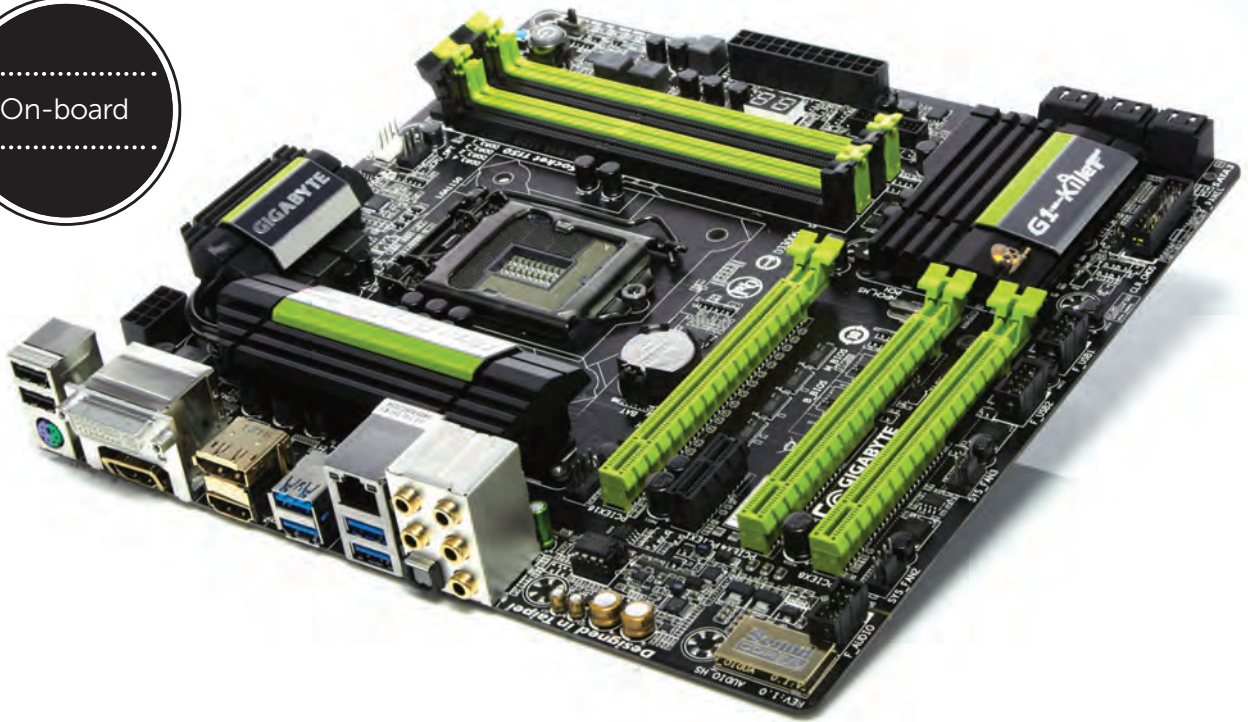
## On-board audio

VS

## Discrete audio



Discrete audio



While the popularity of sound cards, or at least their importance in the mainstream, has diminished significantly, they have been gaining popularity again for the last four to five years. The need for better audio quality has seen an increase in the demand for sound cards to the point where even built-in audio solutions have had to improve to keep up. Long gone are the days of an ALC 650 powered generic AC'97 audio being good enough. Right now in 2014, we expect not only better audio fidelity, but high bit-rate formats as well such as FLAC, and high quality recordings courtesy of Blu-ray and other HD media which are pushing for better audio equipment.

## DISCRETE AUDIO

**PRICE:** Discrete audio cards vary in cost and quality of course. For the most part, it is not worth buying the cheapest sound card you can get your hands on, as it's unlikely to be much better than what most modern motherboards provide. Not only that but you'll just be adding clutter and noise to your system unnecessarily. However when looking at mid- to high-end sound cards, the pricing for the most part is very fair especially with the ASUS audio cards. You can pick up fantastic audio cards for as little as R1,400 which, in reality, blow away almost every single on-board audio solution money can buy.

**FEATURES:** Discrete cards feature many more features than on-board solutions such as the ability to playback and record several audio sources at once. Internal playback audio recording and obviously very good ASIO drivers are the norm here. You'll also get many more connectivity options than

you typically would on an on-board solution. The software features are also usually more numerous if only because the use of custom DSPs and controllers allows more flexible or creative software implementations.

**AUDIO QUALITY:** This is the biggest selling point for discrete audio. As much as on-board sound has improved, it just isn't at the level that a mid- to high-end sound card can achieve. The difference may be academic, but you have to appreciate sound cards that not only have several PCB layers and shielding for the purest audio signal but separate power sources as well. Most high-end cards allow you to change the audio characteristics by changing out several socket mounted op-amps. The component list on discrete cards, especially at the high-end, is usually incredible, featuring electronics found in some of the most expensive audio equipment on the planet. At the very high-end when

you consider USB DACs there are simply no competing on-board solutions at all since that is audiophile territory. Discrete cards will also tend to last much longer as they can be taken from one machine to the next as you upgrade the rest of your system, provided they are PCI Express.

**COMPATIBILITY:** Many people have found themselves stuck with ISA and PCI cards in the past that they can no longer use because of the PCI Express standard. This is a physical incompatibility but even when that isn't the case, there are situations where there are driver issues between an OS and your particular configuration. This rarely, if ever, happens with on-board audio but it is a possibility with sound cards. It hardly happens in this day and age but it may be something worth checking for, especially if you buy one of the rarer, very high-end sound cards from the non-mainstream vendors.

**CPU**  
Intel Core i7  
4700HQ  
**GPU**  
NVIDIA GTX 765M  
2GB  
**MEMORY**  
16GB DDR3  
**STORAGE**  
256GB SSD (RAID 0)  
+ 1TB Storage drive  
**OPTICAL DRIVE**  
DVD-writer  
**GPU**  
NVIDIA GTX 765M  
2GB

**SPECS**



**BENCHMARKS**

3DMark  
Fire Strike **2,606**

# GIGABYTE P35K Notebook

Supplier Rectron Website [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com) RRP TBA

In the December issue of NAG, we looked at GIGABYTE's P25W gaming notebook and found it quite pleasant to use. It wasn't a top of the range device but it did a good enough job to justify its price for the most part.

What we have here then is the P35K. The model name is higher but that doesn't necessarily mean it's a more powerful notebook. Once again this is a problem with numbers for names, as you can't know by the SKU name where this notebook lies. Much like the P25W it is powered by NVIDIA graphics through the NVIDIA Optimus technology, so you'll be able to use the integrated Intel GPU for the desktop and more basic computing needs and switch to the dedicated GPU for your gaming. A technology that has proven itself time and time again and it works just as well here on the P35K.

Looks-wise, the P35K isn't as stylish as the P25W, it is just gunmetal grey all over with no accents or anything at all to suggest that it may be anything more than a modern slim line business notebook. This is a pity, especially since it's in the gaming range, or at least it should be with a GPU like the GTX 765M.

Performance, much like with the P25W, is great, especially with Windows 8.1. Boot-up and shutdown times are phenomenal and the entire experience is smoother than it is on many desktop computers. GIGABYTE

has once again put together a solid package on that front that delivers reliable performance. The 3DMark Fire Strike score isn't anything to be impressed about, as it's more than 1,000 points lower than on the P25W, but that has everything to do with the GTX765M not being remotely close to the 770M in processing power. Everything else for the most part however is very similar in specifications, including the use of dual 128GB SSD drives in RAID 0.

One thing that we found really impressive about the P35K is the screen quality. It's crisp and precise, producing vivid colours and detail that many notebooks can't really claim to compete with. Even though it's only a full HD resolution, the 15.6" IPS display is a pleasure to work on and GIGABYTE deserves full praise on picking such a great display.

This large display however would have been better driven by the GTX 770M. Then you can truly take advantage of it while playing the latest or at least the most demanding titles available today at consistent frame rates. That aside, much like with the P25W there is no external mouse included. At a lower price point we do acknowledge that opting for an expensive professional gaming mouse isn't an option, but a cheaper one would do, even outside the context of gaming. The touch pad may feel great but it's not really user friendly. Knowing when you've pressed a button is hard as there's no tactile

feedback as to when you're at the base of the track pad where you can press the buttons or not. Often you are not as precise as you may be with other track pads and that can be frustrating where simple things like moving a window can prove to be challenging. That aside we find again that the audio is something that GIGABYTE needs to do some serious work on in their next generation, as it's far from acceptable for such a brand or a notebook at this level.

Overall, this is a solid device that has some quirks that should be ironed out in due time. Until then, if you're looking for a business-like gaming notebook, then you may want to look at the P35K. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



**In some ways the P35K is a decent notebook that performs well enough to play most games on low to medium settings.**

**PLUS**

NVIDIA GTX 765M GPU / 256GB SSD in RAID 0  
Great display

**MINUS**

Mushy keyboard / Audio quality is not up to scratch / Looks rather bland



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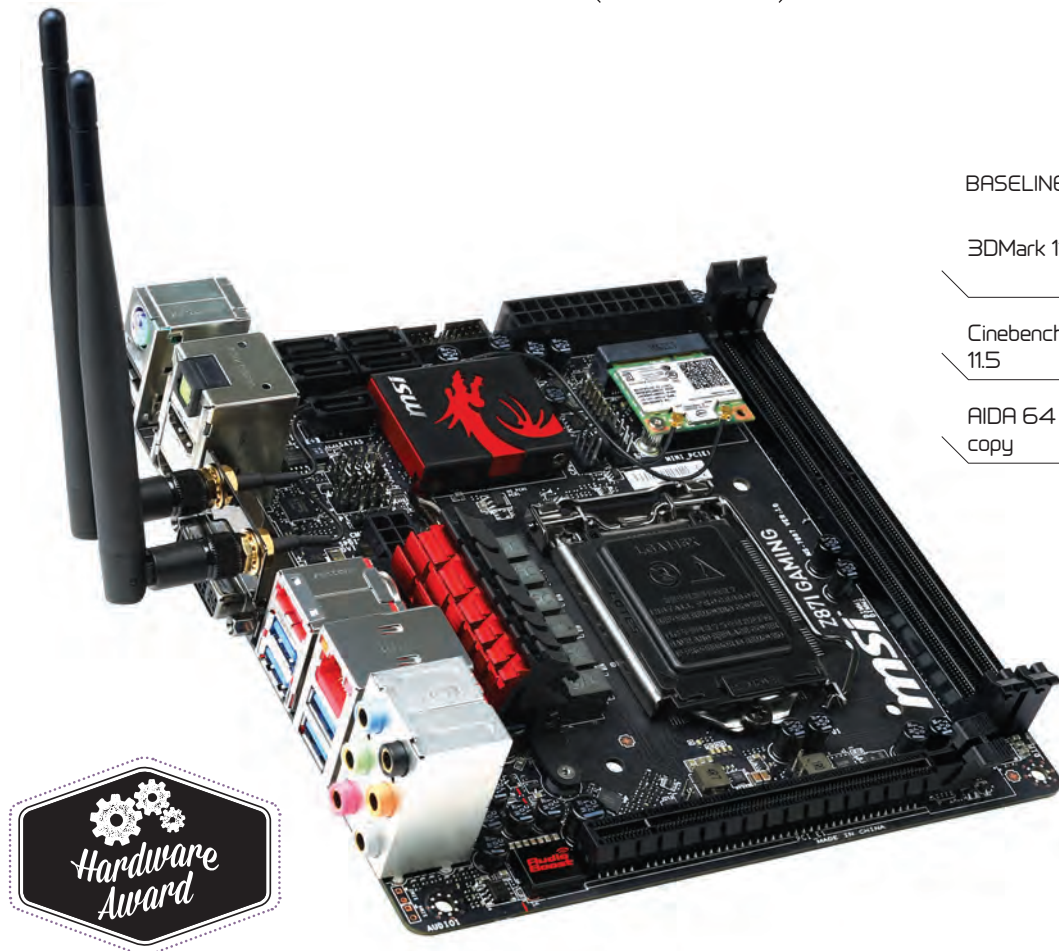
**BENCHMARKS**

BASELINE: **ASUS MAXIMUS VI EXTREME**

3DMark 11 12,799  
**13,258**

Cinebench 11.5 10.10  
**10.17**

AIDA 64 copy 30,411MB/s  
**32,112MB/s**



**SPECS**

**CHIPSET**  
Intel Z87

**MEMORY**  
2x 240-pin DDR3

**CPU SUPPORT**  
LGA 1150

**EXPANSION**  
1x PCI-E 16X

**SIZE**  
mini-ITX

# MSI Z87I GAMING AC

Supplier **Corex** Website **www.msi.com** RRP **R2,999**

The combination of Haswell CPUs and the up-surge in mini-ITX cases seems to have created new enthusiasm for small form factor PCs. Moreover, for the first time in DIY history, these systems are capable of catering to not only the most discerning high-end gamers but overclockers as well. We have seen the likes of the ASUS Maximus VI Impact deliver phenomenal performance before, and with the MSI Z87I GAMING AC we expected much of the same, at least where performance was concerned.

Despite its diminutive size, the Z87I board actually packs a number of features that you'll find on the bigger boards in the GAMING family. Keep in mind however, that this is not for overclocking and the price is lower than that of the Impact board so there will be some things missing. For the most part however this is a fairly interesting board that leaves little to nothing to complain about.

The Z87I features four USB 3.0 ports, eSATA support, five SATA ports, 802.11ac Wi-Fi support (where the AC in the name comes from) and full length PCI Express 16X support. These are but a few of the features on the board. The larger micro-ATX or standard ATX can't claim to have many more features than what you have here, which is a good thing as you do not want to sacrifice too much when you consider just how expensive mini-ITX boards are in general.

Aesthetically, the bright red and black work

very well, just like on the other GAMING products from MSI, so there'll be nothing to frown upon there. As far as the BIOS is concerned, it's again the typical MSI OC-Touch BIOS which we've stated before is very well presented visually and fairly easy to navigate.

A nice feature that MSI has with the Z87I is the ability to boot straight into the BIOS without using a dedicated button like you find on many other competing boards from other vendors. On the Z87I you simply hold in the power button for four seconds and the board will boot into the BIOS from a cold boot. Unfortunately though, there are no dedicated buttons for power or reset and thus you're going to need to buy your own switch if you'll be using this board outside of a case. Another aspect of this board to be aware of is that the CPU socket is fairly close to where the graphics card would be. As far as heat is concerned this isn't ideal but certainly not the biggest pitfall of this design decision. It becomes an issue because it limits significantly the type and size of CPU cooler you can use with this motherboard with several popular CPU coolers proving to be incompatible with the CPU socket location. This is however, nothing an AIO cooling solution can't fix, so it isn't a major problem.

Concerning performance, you'll find that the Z87I performs just as well as the bigger

boards. Your overclocks will work equally well and most likely with the same settings, thanks in part to Haswell's fully integrated voltage regulator and the solid PWM provided by MSI. You'll find there's no difference in maximum overclocks between this board and any other regardless of the benchmark, thus it proves what we said in the beginning of this review and that is mini-ITX systems can be just as powerful as ATX or even E-ATX based ones.

The rest of this board is standard affair then. MSI has proved as equally adept at manufacturing a capable mini-ITX board as they are at making high-end gaming and overclocking boards. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

**8** The Z87I GAMING AC is a great motherboard to build a system around.

**PLUS**  
Performance / Audio solution

**MINUS**  
Pricing could be an issue / CPU socket location

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[info@imagnet.co.za](mailto:info@imagnet.co.za)  
7 days a week



**SPECS**

**MATERIAL**  
Polymer, steel

**COLOUR**  
Black

**SUPPORTED MOTHERBOARD TYPE**  
E-ATX, Micro-ATX/ATX/Mini-ITX (915R)

**FRONT PANEL**  
2x USB 3.0,  
2x USB 2.0

“The biggest gripe we have with the HAF Stacker 935 though is that the 915F has no USB or power/reset buttons.”

# Cooler Master HAF Stacker 935

**Supplier** Cooler Master **Website** [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com) **RRP** R2,299

After years of little to no innovation in the PC DIY case industry, Cooler Master has come up with a very interesting concept in the 935. The HAF family isn't new and neither is the Stacker series. They have, however, for the first time been put together into the world's first stackable PC chassis. The need or appeal of this isn't obvious at first, but consider a situation where you want more than one desktop PC but don't want an additional or separate case.

Or imagine you want to water cool everything in your system, with plenty of radiators and the cleanest look possible. The HAF Stacker 935 allows just that with its modular design and expansion capabilities.

Although it is sold as two separate parts, the HAF Stacker 935 is really meant to work as one unit. This is because by default, Cooler Master sells the 915F and the main tower chassis together. You may opt not to use the 915F expansion if you prefer, but then you're not making use of what it is that makes this case interesting to begin with.

As far as cases are concerned, the main unit is a standard mid-range tower chassis. It obviously has some very basic modifications to allow for its unique features, but in general it's nothing you've not seen before. So you should expect three screw-less 5.25" exposed drive bays, nine 3.5" internal bays and obviously

multiple radiator support to name but a few of the features. The chassis, even though large in size, does not support the XL-ATX standard. Not too much of a train smash as these boards are far and few between lately, but it's something worth being aware of if you were looking to buy this. As mentioned earlier, everything else is standard affair.

The 915F expansion chassis is where you would ideally build a second mini-ITX based system. It is constructed of the same material as the main unit, but is obviously smaller in dimensions. It's very long for a mini-ITX case but that is expected as it had to match the main unit and thus Cooler Master doesn't have much of a choice there. Having said that, it does not utilize this space efficiently at all as cooling for the system here would be limited. The PSU is mounted at the top of the 915F and because of its low profile, there's a shallow limit to how big or effective a CPU cooler one can provide. PCIe graphics card support is great however as you can install a full length card in there. Cable management wise, you're not going to fair well because there simply isn't a way to hide cables at all in the 915F, but this is in line with the main HAF chassis it sits on top of. There really isn't much room to route cables around the back of the motherboard tray because you have about 2cm of depth at most to play with.

The biggest gripe we have with the HAF

Stacker 935 though is that the 915F has no USB or power/reset buttons. That means you can't use it separately from the main unit. Fortunately Cooler Master does offer the 915R which addresses this issue and then some, so you can have two truly independent systems within that same body. Other than these few oversights, the Cooler Master HAF Stacker 935 is a true innovative case and well worth your consideration, especially when paired with the 915R, as it really does make all the difference here. At the right price this may very well prove to be a popular case amongst power users and high-end gamers alike.

**NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



**Cooler Master has done well with the 935, but it would have been better paired with the 915R.**

**PLUS**

Stackable design / Tinted window looks great

**MINUS**

No XL-ATX support / Not really dual system capable without the 915R



**SPECS**

**CORE**  
GK110B (28nm)  
1,020MHz  
(1,085MHz Boost)

**PROCESSORS**  
2,880

**RENDER OUTPUTS**  
48/240

**MEMORY**  
3,072MB GDDR5  
7GHz (336GB/sec)

**API**  
DirectX 11.2  
OpenGL 4.4  
OpenCL  
PhysX  
CUDA



# MSI GTX 780Ti GAMING 3G

Supplier Corex Website [www.msi.com](http://www.msi.com) RRP R10,999

NVIDIA's GK110B GPU, as used in the latest 780 Ti cards and exclusively on all 780 Ti cards, has proved to be particularly good in overclocking. This is, however, only under liquid nitrogen where it seems just about every 780 based on this newer silicon can reach 1,800MHz and higher.

One would expect this to be true as well for the 2,880 CUDA core 780 Ti, but alas there are some complications with that GPU that necessitate that a very complex PCB be built to circumvent those limitations. We also see this under regular air cooling as well, with most 780 Ti cards limited to around 1,300MHz for maximum overclocks, which is anything up to 100MHz lower than what was possible with the original 780 and the GTX TITAN. The reasons for this are probably related to whatever changes NVIDIA made to the B revision, but for the most part these changes shouldn't make any difference to the regular end user.

To that end we now have cards such as this one, the MSI GTX 780 Ti GAMING, which is arguably one of the fastest graphics cards money can buy. It certainly has the most powerful rendering GPU on the market and for that you should expect to pay a premium, which you most certainly will. Thus, careful consideration is a requirement before you purchase such a GPU because it is largely wasted when gaming at 1080p. This graphics card is really at home at 1440p and higher

resolutions where its massive memory bandwidth puts it far ahead of anything else on the market and in particular the GTX TITAN which, for the most part, still retails for more than this card.

Once you have committed to this particular GPU however, you'll find that it is one of the quietest GPUs you can find on the market thanks to the Twin Frozr cooler. Not only does it keep this GPU quiet but it keeps it relatively cool as well with load temperatures rarely over 74°C in our testing environment. Overclocked you'll be pleased to find that the temperature doesn't go up by more than 2-3°C which is mighty impressive, especially since we added not only VDDC to the core but 100MHz as well.

What impressed us the most about this graphics card though, and in fact this is the second MSI card to achieve this feat, is the 8GHz memory clock. Once again MSI claims the highest memory clock we've seen on a graphics card. We were able to complete a few benchmarks with the GDDR5 SDR speed at an incredible 2,085MHz (SDR rate) and play games at a stable 8GHz memory clock with no FBVDD voltage increase. To put that in perspective, the fastest and most impressive GTX 780 Ti we have tested here only managed 7.6GHz. Yes that card is still faster than this one because of the high GPU clock speed, but this incredible memory bandwidth that the MSI card provides is still worth noting as it results in a huge 384GB/s

**BENCHMARKS**

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	11,147 <b>9,116</b>
CATZILLA - Tiger	15,156 <b>13,483</b>
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 74.95 fps <b>(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps</b>

of memory throughput. This is up from the shipping 336GB/s which is already impressive courtesy of the Hynix 7GHz GDDR5 memory. You will however find that this additional tweaking headroom is not necessary as this graphics card has more than enough memory bandwidth to begin with and packs heaps of performance just as it is from the box.

It's unfortunate that we don't get any meaningful software bundled with the card, but we can overlook that given just how well this card performs and its phenomenal memory overclocking. The MSI GTX 780 Ti GAMING is a very good card for sure and may very well be worth a purchase. **NAG**  
- Neo Sibeko

**8** The MSI 780 Ti is a viable alternative to the reference model. It has a better cooler, performance and shouldn't cost much more.

**PLUS**  
Very good memory OC / TwinFrozr cooler  
Good performance

**MINUS**  
PCB is not much better than reference /  
No bundled games

**BENCHMARKS**

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	9,324 <b>9,116</b>
CATZILLA - Tiger	10,503 <b>13,483</b>
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 71.65 fps <b>(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps</b>

"... the PowerColor AXR9 290 OC is probably the best reference R9 290 card you can buy."



**SPECS**

- CORE**  
Hawaii (28nm)  
975MHz
- PROCESSORS**  
2,560
- RENDER OUTPUTS**  
64/160
- MEMORY**  
4,096MB GDDR5  
5GHz (320GB/sec)
- API**  
DirectX 11.2  
OpenGL 4.3  
OpenCL 1.2  
Mantle

# PowerColor AXR9 290 OC

Supplier PowerColor Website [www.powercolor.com](http://www.powercolor.com) RRP R5,499

AMD's 290 series graphics cards arrived late last year with loads of performance and a keen price. With that, sadly, there was also lots of noise or the potential for excessive noise levels and heat. There are numerous reasons for this, but basically, AMD's cooler was and remains not up to scratch on the reference models such as the one we have here from PowerColor.

Fortunately, this can be remedied with either an aftermarket cooler or some manual tuning of the fan profiles to some degree. You won't be able to do much about the high load temperatures, but at least you won't disturb the people around you while you game or, in some cases, your neighbours should you opt for a CrossFire configuration.

The exact details of the Hawaii GPU we will leave for another review when we have a custom card with us. Until then, you should know that the PowerColor AXR9 290 OC is probably the best reference R9 290 card you can buy. This isn't for any other reason but the slight GPU overclock, consistent performance and the current price (at least at the time of writing). One would expect a graphics card to have consistent performance, but as it turns out AMD's press samples of the Radeon R9 cards performed very differently from the retail products. Drivers have been coming out to remedy this situation, but essentially, AMD's press samples were consistently faster than retail cards. We aren't sure why this is the case as

it could be AMD attempting to make a false impression upon end users, or more likely driver differences. Suffice to say it is something that caused our review to only show up now in February instead of December or January. With that said, the PowerColor card is exceptional in that it had performance higher than that of a reference model. There was no throttling experienced as a result of the high temperatures and the 975MHz GPU clock was maintained throughout all the benchmarks.

How PowerColor achieved this is beyond us right now; it could just be a lucky sample but suffice to say with this card you're guaranteed a 975MHz GPU clock under load unless something goes seriously wrong with the thermal conditions. Speaking of which, you should be aware that this GPU runs very hot. Load temperatures will reach 94°C but fortunately all that heat is exhausted outside the case so it shouldn't affect the surrounding components much.

When we tested this graphics card we found that it performed just a little slower than the NVIDIA GTX 780, however it was much cheaper with an MSRP of \$399 USD versus \$499 for the 780. However, the situation has changed and because of the demand or lack of supply, both prices have soared and most R9 290 cards are at \$500 USD and above. Add the incredibly weak rand to the mix and you have a situation that does not bode well for any graphics card,

especially the R290 which just can't catch the GTX 780. This particular card though is available locally for the given price and while it's still at that price it's an absolute steal. If you're even considering getting a high-end graphics card for less than R6,000 you shouldn't look anywhere else other than here, as it represents exceptional value for money. There aren't any games you'll not be able to play at maximum graphics fidelity and you also benefit from having one of the fastest mining GPUs on the planet, something that no NVIDIA GPU can muster at all.

PowerColor's AXR9 290 OC may run hot, but it has the performance to match and an attractive price at least for now. **NAG**  
- Neo Sibeko



The PowerColor AXR9 is possibly the best reference model R9 290 you can buy.

**PLUS**

Value for money / Slight factory OC / Consistent performance

**MINUS**

Runs hot / No bundled games



## AOC I2769VM 27" LED

**Supplier** Esquire Technologies  
**Website** www.aoc.com  
**RRP** R4,995

**A**OC's I2769VM is part of the manufacturer's "value" range of monitors – although, at this price, you'd not think so. Still, it's an excellent performer and at 27 inches (with 68.6cm of that being actual visible screen size), it offers plenty of visual real estate.

You're presented with a variety of connectivity options. One VGA/D-sub (but no DVI unfortunately – you'll need an adapter for that) port, one DisplayPort and two HDMI ports are available, and one of those HDMI ports is MHL certified, meaning it can be used to connect mobile phones, tablets and the like to the screen, which is a cool feature. It's got speakers for rudimentary audio as well.

It's a slim, reasonably light display, and the image it produces is fantastic. Colours are rich, text is clear and there's a range of different image correction options available within its customisation menu, letting you adjust the image to your liking. While it could perhaps be a bit brighter natively, you'd be hard-pressed to find anything that's really wrong with this monitor. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



### SPECS

**BRIGHTNESS** 250 CD/M<sup>2</sup>  
**DYNAMIC CONTRAST RATIO** 50,000,000:1  
**RESPONSE TIME** 5ms  
**MAX RESOLUTION** 1,920x1,080



If you're hunting for a larger screen, this one's worth considering.

### PLUS

Strong colour production / Wide range of image options

### MINUS

No DVI

## Sharkoon Drakonia Black

**Supplier** Esquire Technologies  
**Website** www.esquire.co.za  
**RRP** R479

**A**s if we're not already spoilt for choice by the endless procession of gaming mice that bombards store shelves, Sharkoon's gone and provided yet another option: the Drakonia Black. Its price makes it a budget offering, but it boasts many of the features of a high-end gaming mouse.

Personally, I don't like the look of its dragon-scale aesthetic, but you may feel differently. It boasts a fairly conventional shape, and is plenty comfortable to use in either palm or claw grip. The LED that pulses with the Sharkoon logo can have its colour and pulse speed changed from within Sharkoon's proprietary software.

From within that same software you're able to adjust the usual selection of sensitivity settings, polling rates and more. The software is functional, but isn't very clear about certain options. I couldn't figure out how to save multiple DPI settings for on-the-fly DPI switching, for example. Hopefully Sharkoon updates the software in future to make it a bit more clear in its presentation. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



### SPECS

**SENSOR** Up to 8,200 DPI  
**BUTTONS** 11, programmable  
**ACCELERATION** 30 G



Sharkoon's Drakonia Black is a solid gaming mouse. Brilliant if you're on a tight budget.

### PLUS

All the features you'd expect / Cheap

### MINUS

Software can be a bit obtuse



## Skullcandy SLYR

**Supplier** Luksbrands  
**Website** www.luksbrands.co.za  
**RRP** R1,599

**I**f there's one thing that concerns us about the SLYR, it's the price tag it carries. It's listed as costing \$79.99 – yet it's sold locally for almost double that at R1,599, thanks to the weak rand/dollar exchange rate. Despite this, the SLYR is a worthwhile sonic choice.

At first glance, the strangely elongated shape of the ear cups (which results in them sitting snugly around the ears rather than loosely cushioning them) gives the impression that the SLYR is bound to get really uncomfortable, really quickly. Thankfully this isn't the case at all, and even after extended use, the SLYR remains comfy.

Audio production is excellent, delivering well-rounded audio with powerful volume that's easily controlled via the in-line mixer. Three equaliser presets (each of them specifically tuned for games, music and movies) can be easily toggled between using a switch on the mixer, and chat and game volume can be independently adjusted as well. The headset will work with your PC, 360 or PS3, as well as with your mobile devices. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



### SPECS

**COMPATIBLE WITH** 360 / PC / PS3 / mobile phones / tablets / MP3 players  
**CONNECTIVITY** RCA / USB / Xbox chat cable



The SLYR is an excellent headset from Skullcandy.

### PLUS

Well-balanced audio / Comfortable

### MINUS

High price



# Games behaving badly

Okay, so let's just be honest about it – gamers have a bit of a reputation and it's not an entirely... excellent one. I know, you're probably reading this and thinking that totally doesn't apply to you because REASONS, but if it's not you, I'll bet you a bag of jelly beans it's somebody you know. *Everybody* knows *somebody* who embodies at least some of that stuff the daily tabloids claim about games and in-training serial murderers, even if it's just breaking things after losing at a game<sup>1</sup>.

So lots of gamers can and do behave like brats, but what about the games that actually encourage it? No, this isn't a FOX News Special Moral Panic Edition controversy, but here's something to think about.

Because I hate having time and money and no legitimate excuses to avoid otherwise obligatory family events over the holiday season<sup>2</sup>, I recently imported an Xbox One and a copy of *Call of Duty: Ghosts*. Now, the thing I love about *Call of Duty* is that it's more or less exactly the same game every year, but with a bunch of new features added to obfuscate that. It's also the same thing so many other people hate about *Call of Duty*,

but I'm over 30 and it's not like I remember anything before last week anyway. Or even last night, for that matter, because "what happens on New Year's Eve stays in New Year's Eve" takes on a whole new meaning at my age.

One of the new features added to *Ghosts* is a system of so-called "Field Orders" – these are like bonus objectives you can complete during a multiplayer match for extra dogs or something<sup>3</sup>, and one of these is (I'm quoting verbatim here) to "humiliate the next enemy you kill". I'll get back to the humiliation aspect in a moment, but just to clarify, "humiliate" in this context means specifically to squat over another player's dead body and pretend to do a, um, sex thing.

You know which one I mean.

Since we're being so honest here, I'll own up to doing this once or twice before in other games. Maybe even more than once or twice, but the important thing is, I've only ever done it in private matches with my boyfriend, and then only for the laugh-out-louds<sup>4</sup>. It's not something I'd ever do to a random person on the Internet, because that would be exceedingly vulgar and definitely

**1** If you skimmed over the "just" in that sentence without stopping to consider the implications of it, then perhaps stop to consider the implications of it.

**2** "Sorry, I have to... work."

**3** It's all about the dogs.

**4** This is not an elaborate metaphor, but it should be.

**5** E-sports? ESPORTS? Even the stupid name is working against us.

unsporting. So why is *Call of Duty* advocating vulgar and unsporting behaviour, explicitly recognised by the game itself as "humiliation"? It's not like the game's community doesn't already have one of those not-excellent reputations I was talking about before. Except, no, it does, and now being gross is worth more points.

Gamers want to be taken seriously by the world (see also: "IT'S TOTALLY ART" and eSports<sup>5</sup>), but it's not going to happen when simulated sexual assault on complete strangers is still part of the promotional packaging. GG, Infthinity Wtharhd.

- Tarryn van der Byl

"Since we're being so honest here, I'll own up to doing this once or twice before in other games. Maybe even more than once or twice, but the important thing is, I've only ever done it in private matches with my boyfriend, and then only for the laugh-out-louds."

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