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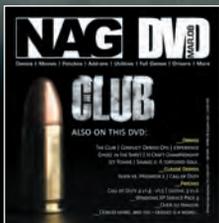
NINJA GAIDEN

ALSO...

- LOST ODYSSEY
- CONDEMNED 2
- BURNOUT PARADISE
- INTEL SKULLTRAIL
- BRAAAAAAINS!

INTERGALACTIC

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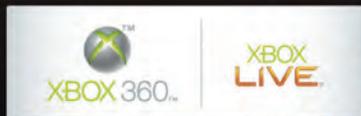
VOL 10 ISSUE 12 03.2008
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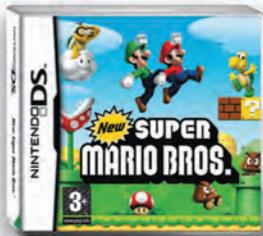
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• NDS - Lite Console Silver



- NDS - Mariokart
- NDS - Super Mario Bros.
- NDS - Brain Training



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• NDS - Lite Console Black



• NDS - Lite Console White

- NDS - Nintendogs Dalmatian
- NDS - Nintendogs Chihuahua
- NDS - Nintendogs Dachshund
- NDS - Nintendogs Labrador



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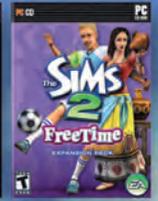
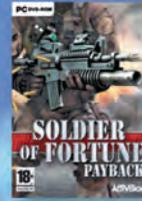
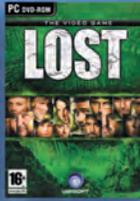


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PC GAMES

Play!

24
7



Assorted Games

- ▶ Frontlines - Fuel of War (65388)
- ▶ Dawn of War: Solustorm (65389) ▶ Lost (65392)

R299⁹⁵ EACH

Assorted Games

- ▶ Soldier of Fortune 3 (65393)
- ▶ Command and Conquer Kane's Wrath (65390)
- ▶ Sims 2 Free Time (65391)

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- ▶ Rubber grips for comfort ▶ Play longer, harder & cooler ▶ 2 Year warranty (62348)



Soldier of Fortune 3 (65404)

R399⁹⁵



R899⁹⁵

Guitar Hero 3 Bundle + Guitar (65485)



PS3 Steering Wheel + Controller (64384)

R599⁹⁵



Assorted Games

- ▶ Army of Two (63114) ▶ Lost (65403)

R599⁹⁵ EACH



Assorted Games

- ▶ GT5 Prologue (65407)
- ▶ Dark Sector (65410)



R499⁹⁵ EACH



XBOX 360



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R3999⁹⁵



XBOX 360 Wireless Controller
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XBOX 360 Wireless Network Adapter
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R999⁹⁵

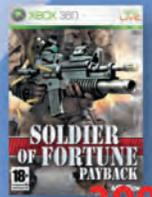


XBOX 360 Wireless PC Windows Adapter
 ▶ Take quality, wireless gaming from console to Windows gaming platform (61337)

R249⁹⁵



R599⁹⁵
 MX vs ATV (65395)



R399⁹⁵
 Soldier of Fortune 3 (65401)



Assorted Games
 ▶ Command and Conquer Kane's Wrath (65398)
 ▶ Battle for the Pacific (65256)

R299⁹⁵ EACH



Assorted Games
 ▶ Frontlines - Fuel of War (65394)
 ▶ Lost Odyssey (65396)
 ▶ Ninja Gaiden II (65397)
 ▶ Army of Two (63110)
 ▶ Lost (65399)
 ▶ Rainbow 6 Vegas 2 (65485)

R599⁹⁵ EACH

Wii



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 ▶ Bundled with the Wii console and a Wii Remote
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 ▶ Includes 4 ports for controllers & 2 slots for memory cards
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 ▶ Use the Wii Remote controller to mimic sport actions
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R2899⁹⁵

Wii Nunchuk
 ▶ Works together with the Wii Remote
 ▶ Contoured to fit perfectly in your hand
 ▶ Adds extra buttons, an analog joystick, and additional motion-sensing control (63222)

R249⁹⁵



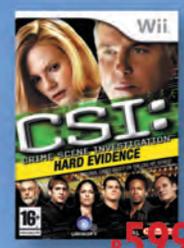
Battle for the Pacific
 (65414)

R299⁹⁵



Assorted Games
 ▶ Destroy all Humans 3: Big Willy Unleashed (65411)
 ▶ MX vs ATV (65412)
 ▶ Ninja Reflex (65413)
 ▶ Pimp My Ride (65264)

R499⁹⁵ EACH



CSI Hard Evidence
 (63570)

R599⁹⁵

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PLAYSTATION 3

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ON THE DVD

CHEATS

CheatBook Database 2008 | January CheatBook Update | February CheatBook Update

CLASSIC DEMOS

Alien vs. Predator 2 | Call of Duty

DEMOS

Conflict: Denied Ops | eXperience | Ghost in the Sheet | H-Craft Championship | Icy Tower | Savage 2: A Tortured Soul | The Club

DRIVERS

ATI Catalyst v8.1 (5.7.7.1.7) | NVIDIA ForceWare v169.21

BEST FREEWARE GAMES OF 2007

Art of Theft | Chalk | Colocoro | Dive | Emypreal Nocturne | Flywrench | Frozzd | Gesundheit | Iwanaga | Rider | Swarm Racer

FREE GAMES

Command & Conquer Gold | Passage | Crypt of Despair | Universal Combat

FREE MUSIC

Victims of Science - The Device Has Been Modified

FUN STUFF

Averaging Gradius

GAME.DEV

Dev.Mag (Issue 20)

MOD TOOLS

Call of Duty 4 SDK v1.0 | Enemy Territory Quake Wars SDK v1.4

PATCHES

Call of Duty 4 v1.4 - v1.5 | Gothic 3 v1.6 | Windows XP Service Pack 3

PSP

Firmware Update v3.90

TRAILERS

Alone in the Dark | Arcana Heart | Army of Two Boomblox | Bully (Scholarship Edition) | Chocobo Dungeon | Condemned 2 | Destroy All Humans 3 | Dungeons & Dragons: Tactics | Endless Ocean | Everyday Shooter | Highlander | Lost Odyssey | Lost | Ninja Gaiden II | Rez HD | Sam & Max: Night of the Raving Dead | Second Skin | Smackdown! VS. Raw 08 | Star Wars: Force Unleashed | Super Mario Galaxy | Super Smash Bros. Brawl | The Club | Tiberium | Turning Point

UTILITIES

Any Video Converter v2.5.3 | Display Fusion v2.0.1

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It's only weird if you do it with your eyes open.

FINALLY, MARCH IS DONE! There is no specific reason why this issue is always a slog. The games are starting to roll in and the post-December blues are receding. The game announcements are also starting to emerge and everything is on the verge of this year's gaming push. Then again, perhaps it makes sense that March is a drag. It's the issue before everything goes big (given that we produce it in February).

But to me the real culprit is because it precedes NAG's redesign issue. As has always been the tradition here, NAG gets a facelift every April, coinciding with its birthday. After a year, the look and feel of the magazine doesn't seem right anymore. Everything in and around it has evolved, so it needs a bit of a makeover to really get into the flow of things. Thus, secretly we all look forward to that redesign and it becomes a bigger deal the closer we are. By March all you can think of is, "Man, we need to make things look pretty again!"

So what do we have planned for April? Cake? Who knows? Personally I don't see the big deal. NAG is turning ten – and that's ten years of giving local gamers (hopefully) all they wanted about their favourite pastime. April will be no different – an issue packed with stuff to enlighten you all on gaming's ins and outs. Maybe we'll throw a party and blow out a decade's worth of candles...

Miktar has managed to join arms smugglers and shady money types by becoming an embargo breaker! As with a lot of features we do, NAG gets assets that are exclusive and secretive – only to be exposed after a certain date. But the man couldn't hide his excitement and dropped a few new *Ninja Gaiden II* screenshots on the Web. Before you know it, I received angry phone calls and I'm forced to kick Miktar's ass – literally. So there you go – this month's cover feature is not only crazy, but tainted by criminality as well!

James Francis,
Editor



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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Cavie

SUBJECT: Inbox Page? More Like Recycle Bin!

HHEY ED, CONGRATULATIONS ON your upcoming tenth birthday. I've been a NAG fanboy only half as long, but oh how far we've come... Nevertheless, I've just opened up a brand new copy of NAG - February, to be precise. Now, I wouldn't call myself a jaded hack, or for that matter a 'blind fanboy', but a thorough read-through of the letters section has led me to type out this letter to you to complain about letters. First off, a 15-year-old proudly shouts his support of GTA IV and Manhunt and you give him Letter of The Month! Don't get me wrong; I played San Andreas at age 15, but I didn't go and scream it out for the world to hear. Another letter states that some of us readers are in essence a waste of space in your magazine. Let me say that although there is a point somewhere in that letter, the thing is that readers are less surrounded by games, and so are less jaded in their opinions - but the problem comes when they become too subjective and start saying things like, "Quake Wars sucks because it isn't as good as Battlefield 2". If reviews were objective enough, then the Reader Review section would be a definite hit. Then there was another from Drake, who says that graphics isn't everything in games. Tell me sir, are you saying that if BioShock had Doom's graphics, that it'd still be the

cult classic that it is? Maybe Crysis on the Quake III engine? Please... The fact that games are even at the level of complexity they are today is because of that wanton lust inside us all to play a game, and not be reminded that it's fake, or rather 'virtual'. What better way than to pump up graphics? And it's not like the developers force maximum settings on you. Remember, there's a difference between graphics and art. Games like Crysis, BioShock and CoD4 are art forms powered by hardware to the point of surrealism. Crysis, by the way, was purposely built two years ahead of its time: in other words, in two years, mid-high-end PCs will gobble it up. So, stop your whingeing and go and play Half-Life! Again! And when GTA IV comes out, stay away from it, because its graphics may blind you. Ah the relief. My job is done. Oh, and one more thing: farewell dear Basilisk. May you enjoy your humid-less weather, match-days at Old Trafford and uncapped 14Mbps broadband. Until we meet next, or at least until you are deported... Happy birthday NAG!

Graphics really isn't everything in games, although it is a large part of how we interface with them. But graphics isn't the Alpha and Omega of gaming. The best visuals in the world cannot save a game that's no fun to play. The best gameplay in the

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

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TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH

Are there too many game consoles (including handheld) on the market?

world is no good if the graphics doesn't support it. If it was released in the same year as Doom (1993), BioShock would have done exceptionally well, even if it only had Doom's graphical quality. It's not about the graphics; it's about the experience. And experience isn't always tied to what you can see.

FROM: rHo

SUBJECT: Freeware: The way of the future?

FFIRST OFF, I WOULD like to start this letter by saying (like everyone else) that this is an awesome magazine. Keep up the good work. Anyway, moving on to the main attraction of this letter, I would like to make a point that freeware games have an excellent chance of taking over the gaming industry. Take for example the freeware game with the January edition of this year: Warmonger. The game had really good gameplay, topped with (I must say) excellent visuals. The only downfall is that the physics is extreme and makes your PC lag. Another fun and fast-paced freeware title is CellFactor. This was a fun game to play, plus there were even really cool powers (which added to the experience).

I want to close off by saying that these freeware games have beautiful graphics that could possibly be compared to games such as S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

We doubt that freeware will take over the industry, since most freeware is really just a playable advertisement for the retail product. Warmonger and CellFactor: Revolution are both really only free to get people's attention (and have them buying PhysX physics cards). Free stuff is always cool, so we don't mind. We're glad you enjoyed the games (we're fond of CellFactor: Revolution ourselves) and we'll try to keep putting cool free games on the Cover DVD.

FROM: Kundai Murapa

SUBJECT: Indrema? In your dreams!

I'M NOT YOUR TYPICAL sycophant, so forget the 'NAG rocks' opening. Has anyone ever heard the story of the 'Indrema L600'?

Well, this is a story that has remained untold an unknown for almost an entire decade. It is a tale of mystery, intrigue

and tragedy. It started eight years ago, 50 miles beyond the mythical Silicon Valley where, in an abandoned naval base, a secret guild named "Indrema" (if you're not a Linux tech geek or don't follow the device market, you won't know them) toiled to bring to life a product that would not only take the gaming console by storm, but also dominate the entire device market as a whole.

Known to an elite few as the L600, it ran on a Linux OS (ironic, given how Linux pretty much sucks when it comes to games) and was destined for a 2001 spring release amid the tempestuous corporate conundrum of the well-established market leaders such as Sony, Nintendo, SEGA and a powerful robust new entry by Microsoft in the form of the Xbox. Failing to heed the warning, Indrema pressed on. General logic would naturally deem this an insanely eccentric and foolhardy concept, but alas, logic was apparently not with the L600 camp.

One has to commend their bold foray into the open source/support movement, which means that anyone from the snout-nosed brat next door to Hideo Kojima had complete legal 'carte blanche' to design games for the L600. Aside from this, one has to merely look at the L600's spec sheet to see how most of today's consoles' tech was probably nicked from the L600 concept. Features such as a built-in hard drive, DVD/VCD playback, broadband Internet access, a personal TV application (PVR, anyone?), an MP3 player, open ISP support and the ability to record live streaming from antenna, satellite and cable services to the hard drive like DStv's PVR or TiVo.

As you can see, the L600 reeked with innovation, but due to poor, or in fact non-existent marketing strategies, they fell flat

on their asses before they got their boots buckled, thereby becoming another statistic in a pile of also-rans and has-beens left in the Sony, SEGA, Nintendo wake.

So that's it: the tragic tale of the little console that could have.

Fan Art by James Donaldson



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There seems to be an incredible lack of PS3 games out there – especially compared to the Xbox.

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Interest rates are up. Things cost more. The world is in a cash crunch. Does it mean you'll buy fewer games?

Azimuth: No. I'll eat less.

Domanskip: Nothing will stop me buying games!

FIRECAT: It means more time playing old games, free games or *cough, pirated, cough* time outside.

FreakKing: I am prepared for the future. I save. I saved too much actually...

-Stormcrow-: Stopped smoking and don't drink that much, so no! Will never buy fewer games!

dislekcia: More time making my own games.

Siphthegrey: Maybe, but I'll buy a few good games rather than a load of 'second-rate' titles.

dolfieman: Nope, they'll have to triple the prices and shoot me with a few tranquilizer darts!

Chevron: Yes, but that means I'll be able to get rid of my backlog.

BlazingNferno: No, it shouldn't stop me from buying the games I want, but perhaps it will force me to be more selective.

Fox9: I only buy games that NAG rates above 85 and 'exclusives'.

Gammaray: Money isn't the constraint - time is.

wisp: Unfortunately, the choice is between paying the bond or games.

Turk1sh: If interest rates cause gaming prices to increase then you'll see me buying fewer games.

infinitely_blue: I would not stop buying games even if it meant that I would have to take a second job just to have enough money.

CaViE: I wonder how interest rates affect games. Unless we're talking about hype... Nah, I'll still buy them...

Fredder: I'll buy less. Unless the budget games have decent titles, then I would still buy quite a few...

Jay: No. That is what credit cards are for!

BattleMoose: No. I don't buy many games, but I buy what I want - that won't change.

Sarg3: I only buy new games if they are really worth it.

Gambit: In reality that will just force a few more to piracy.

Bke: Normally it wouldn't, but since so many must-have games are coming out this year, I will have to make some very tough decisions.

dammit: All the more reason to use games to escape reality.

I-11Pp13: Less games. More Internet.

Splendid: Well no, but now I need to buy a generator to play the games.

Flangenimblick: The question is not "Where will I get money to buy games?" The question is, "Which game shall I buy with said money?" Gamers will just have to be more selective now than ever before.

Glenn: No, I will continue buying games. Maybe just not from local South African retailers. Online here I come...

needs2: I only buy top-rated games, so it doesn't affect me much.

Mickey: I would rather eat less and walk around naked.

Shadow Elf: Thank goodness for good titles that I've already purchased.

uRo-07: I cannot remember the last time I actually paid for my own game, so it's unlikely that I'm going to start cutting down on them.

Crash Run: Me buying fewer games. Never! I only started buying more games lately. No point in slowing down now.

BitterBoetie: Won't really buy fewer games at the moment.

Tryxst3r: I'll do what I've done in the past: game binge.

siemens: I know about the world being in a trouble, but it is not bothering me.

Mazgalor: No. I'll just keep on saving and buy the games that I know are good.

wrathex: Keep buying games. It's a way of life, it's a culture thing and it's one of the safest hobbies in South Africa, and worth every cent.

ShoGunSama: Don't buy many games anyway, only the ones that really interest me - and there aren't many.

ArtofDutch: Oh great! Now the already overpriced games are going to get even more overpriced.

TriggerHappy: When prices go up we just work harder to buy them.

blitz: Nah, I don't buy them anyway.

Have your say on the NAG forums: <http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>

The problem with Indrema it seems was not a poor or non-existent marketing strategy. In fact, Indrema is known for producing copious amounts of press releases, but they never actually delivered anything tangible. It seems that Indrema had big ideas and big words, but could never deliver anything that would convince investors. Later, due to a lack of sufficient capital, Indrema shut down and advised the next videogame start-up to "Finish the product before talking about it". SEGA, by the way, moved out of the hardware market due to the Dreamcast being squashed by the PlayStation 2.

FROM: Stef Gunther

SUBJECT: PlayStation support?

THERE SEEMS TO BE an incredible lack of PS3 games out there - especially compared to the Xbox. Now, I can understand that there are more Xbox titles because it's been out longer. I cannot understand why almost every shop I go into has almost no games for the PS3, and when they do, they are all the games we already bought when the console was released. If another salesman tries to sell me another copy of MotorStorm, I might just kill him!

It's not as if there is a shortage of games. Heck, there are games that were slated for a mid-December release and I still cannot find it anywhere! (Drake's Fortune for example - I had to import the game.) Looking at what is available overseas is amazing, and we just don't seem to get anything. When we do, we are lucky to find a store with more than a single copy! And then, when titles are released for the Xbox and PS3, the PS3 version takes a month longer to arrive! Or more! Again, I understand that there are other distributors locally; but surely, you can enforce some sort of rule that keeps them in line.

If there is some reason for this, we would appreciate an answer.

It's doubtful that anyone could enforce some sort of rule that keeps the distributors 'in line' with something that seems to be an arbitrary problem. We doubt that the PlayStation 3 is being left behind in favour of other platforms by the distributors, especially now that the PlayStation 3 is finally getting some solid titles. The PlayStation 3 has suffered from a games shortage, but that's about to change. As for finding titles, perhaps try looking at online vendors such as Take 2, BT Games, AnimeWorx, and Kalahari. Perhaps you'll have better luck.

FROM: Matthew Kraak

SUBJECT: Next-Gen PCs

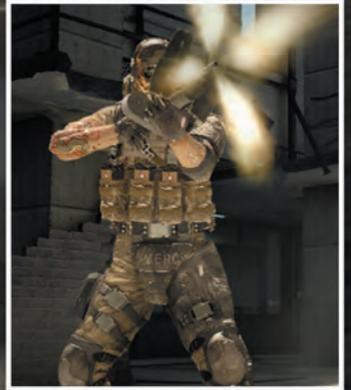
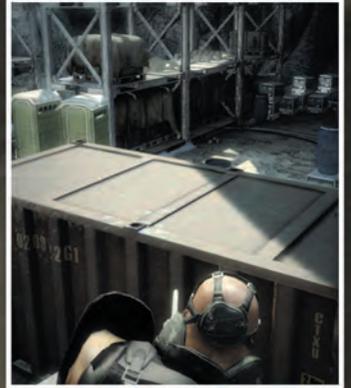
RECENTLY UPGRADED MY PC and spent quite a bit of bob doing it. However, a month (or two) has gone past and it's already out of date. PCI-X2.0 is out, new eight-pin power, plus countless other 'upgrades'. My question is this: Does this new technology (PCI-X 2.0) really make a difference? It might look good on paper, but I don't think that the transport architecture is the limiting factor for graphic card performance. A good example is the jump between AGP 8x and PCI 16x. I stumbled upon an article about identical cards with different architectures. They tested a 1950 Pro and the difference was 1fps or 2fps at most! How large will GPUs get? The size of a 9800 card is insane! When is enough, enough?

I've been playing games for many years and I love playing a game with a good story. Game designers are spending too much time developing graphics to keep up and neglect the story or gameplay. What is more important: great story or great graphics? Of course, a combination of both is the best, but too often graphics is favoured over the story and the story is what keeps us interested without getting bored!

So ask yourself the question: What is more important to you: gameplay and story, or graphics?

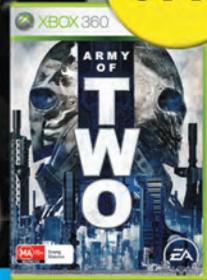
*What's more important in a car: the steering wheel, brakes or suspension? We think gameplay, story and graphics are all equally important (although in different ratios, depending on what the developer is trying to put across). It certainly seems that a large portion of game developers are focussing heavily on graphics these days (to the detriment of gameplay and story perhaps). But there are more than enough games being developed these days that provide ample gameplay, story and graphics. You just gotta know where to look. **NAG***

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R599⁹⁹

R599⁹⁹

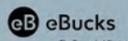


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90% OF NINTENDO DS OWNERS USE THE R4 CHIP?

WAIT, NO THEY DON'T.

STRATEGYINFORMER REPORTED THAT THE Sunday Post in Scotland reported that the R4 chip which allows Nintendo DS piracy via ROM files is now being used in Scotland. The newspaper also reported that "millions of people from around the world" are using the R4, then proceeded to quote John Hillier (Manager of ELSPA's Intellectual Property Crime Unit) having said, "The implications are massive. In America it's thought 90 percent of Nintendo users are playing pirated games because of R4s."

However, a spokesperson for the ELSPA told GamesIndustry.biz that, "[John] didn't quote The Sunday Post on any figures whatsoever". The ELSPA say the report is "a hatchet job" that bludgeons together facts from an article from Singapore, false quotes and a genuine conversation with Hillier.

"The quotes from The Sunday Post were ascribed to his name from another article which originates from a website in Singapore.



This, it appears, is where The Sunday Post first found out about the supposed R4 situation and for some reason unknown to John have quoted him on what this article said."

The spokesperson also mentioned that as far as Nintendo are concerned, the "facts are completely spurious".



FOX NEWS VS MASS EFFECT

STUPID PEOPLE BACK IN THE NEWS

LIKE MOST PANGALACTIC SCANDALS, it started with a blog post. In a magnificent display of wilful ignorance, ultra-conservative social commentator Kevin McCullough claimed that *Mass Effect* "allows its players... to engage in the most realistic sex acts ever conceived", adding with a hint of apocalyptic doom that "because of the digital chip age in which we live" the game could be customised "to sodomise whatever, whoever, however, the game player wishes".

Not to be outdone, the ever-controversial Fox News clambered aboard the moral crusade with a headlining feature about the *Mass Effect*'s "full digital nudity and sex", alongside allegations that the game was being specifically marketed to kids. The story included supporting commentary from a supposed expert, author and pop psychologist Cooper Lawrence, who brazenly declared that she'd not actually played the game.

Gamers looked on in stupefied horror.

Electronic Arts vice president of communications, Jeff Brown, promptly sent off a sternly-worded letter to the network,

refuting their lurid charges with Facts™, before concluding that "The resulting coverage was insulting to the men and women who spent years creating a game which is acclaimed by critics for its high creative standards. As video games continue to take audiences away from television, we expect to see more TV news stories warning parents about the corrupting influence of interactive entertainment. But this represents a new level of recklessness. [...] This isn't a legal threat; it's an appeal to your sense of fairness. We're asking FNC to correct the record on *Mass Effect*."

Cooper subsequently recanted her foolish testimony, admitting that "I recognize that I misspoke... I really regret saying that, and now that I've seen the game and seen the sex scenes it's kind of a joke. Before the show I had asked somebody about what they had heard, and they had said it's like pornography. But it's not like pornography. I've seen episodes of *LOST* that are more sexually explicit."

Fox News has yet to respond, but Jack Thompson stunned the universe by declaring the whole business "absolutely ridiculous".

18+

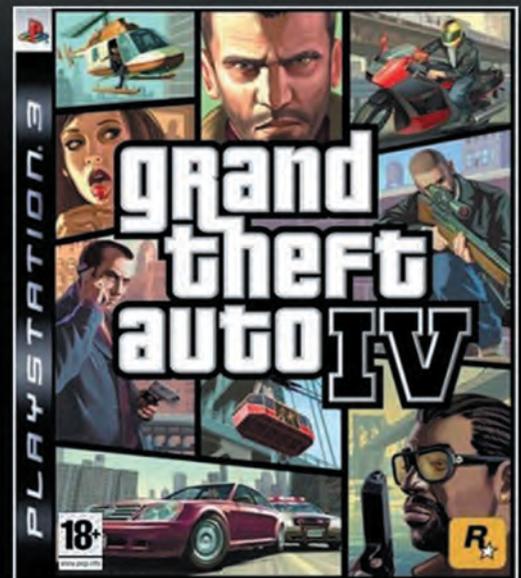
R

grand theft auto IV

COMING SOON

on

PLAYSTATION 3



SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

An unnamed German gamer has hit World of Warcraft's gold limit. He capped out at 217,748 gold coins and some change in other currencies. In the real world his fortune is worth around \$6000.



A British judge reversed the Video Appeals Committee's decision that Manhunt 2 shouldn't remain banned, ruling that the committee must reconsider its decision.



Futuremark, the force behind benchmarking tool 3DMark, has announced that it has opened its own game development studio. An unnamed game has apparently been in development there for a while now.



THQ has decided to stop working on the Juiced and Stuntman franchises. It also plans to shut down internal studio Concrete Games and won't do PS2 and PS3 ports of multi-platform games. This is all part of the company's bid to restructure itself.



A US Marine has gone missing after playing a bit of Call of Duty 4. He apparently told friends he's going and hasn't been seen since. The 24-year old soldier suffered from hallucinations and flashbacks after barely surviving a bomb blast in Iraq (which also decapitated his friend in front of his eyes).



GIZMONDO II: RETURN OF THE GIZMONDO

FAILED HANDHELD TO RETURN TO THE MARKET?

WHAT DO HANDHELD GAMING and organised crime have in common? Well, back in 2005, UK-based gaming company Gizmondo released a handheld device to rival the PSP and DS. Its subsequent success may be quite accurately measured alongside those six and a half people who actually remember the thing, but what put Gizmondo in the news was the scandal surrounding CEO Bo Stefan Eriksson.

Dubbed *Tjock-Steffe* ("Fatty Steve") by the Swedish police, Eriksson was arrested in 2006 on charges of embezzlement, grand theft auto, drunken driving, cocaine possession, and a weapons charge for lugging around an unlicensed Magnum – after wrecking a \$1

million Enzo Ferrari on a Californian highway. Gizmondo filed for bankruptcy, Eriksson was hustled off to prison for a few years, and Rockstar might've filched ideas for an upcoming game.

Anyway, *Tjock-Steffe* is now trawling the streets of Uppsala again, while his former business partner Carl Freer desperately rustles up renewed interest in the quirky little handheld. Powered by a 400 Mhz ARM9 processor and an Nvidia GoForce 4500 GPU, and designed by Rick "ZX Spectrum" Dickinson, the Gizmondo packs in a GPS, 3.0 megapixel camera, mp3 playback, Bluetooth connectivity for multiplayer gaming, and has "Over-ambitious failcakes" written all over it.

GAMING 2.0

IS PC GAMING SET TO BECOME OBSOLETE?

"WHEN CALL OF DUTY 4 came out, I heard some of our guys sitting around talking about the great game they'd had last night," Mark Rein told *The Guardian* in a recent interview. "And I'm like, 'Hey guys, what server are you playing on? I'd love to come and join you,' and they said, 'Just send us a friends request.' It was at that point I realized they were all playing it on console."

Yes, it's a console gamer's world out there these days, and stropy PC enthusiasts are scuffing metaphorical shoes in the dust of glories past. Market researched NPD Group reports that PC game sales are down 6% from

2006, *CoD 4* developer Infinity Ward is pointing witchfinder's fingers at software piracy, and the technology required to run *Crysis* on maximum probably hasn't been invented yet.

Undaunted, several major industry stakeholders (including Nvidia, Intel, and Microsoft) are doing a Volttron and forming their own megasyndicate, dubbed the PC Gaming Alliance, pledged to "keeping the PC alive as a gaming platform". And hey, Electronic Arts has just announced *Mass Effect* for PC, due in May.

In the meantime, however, we'll be playing *CoD 4* on Xbox LIVE because it's so awesome. Maybe we'll bump into Mark Rein.

BRAIN TRAIN PROF GIVES AWAY HIS ROYALTIES

Dr Ryuta Kawashima is, according to a report on AFP news site, entitled to an estimated 2.4 billion Yen (about \$22 million) and yet he is not keeping a single cent for himself. The brain behind the Nintendo brain training titles, which have since their debut sold over 17 million copies, can claim up to 50% of the royalties on the titles but, instead, prefers to live off the money he earns working at Tohoku University.

So where has all this money gone? He

has donated it, naturally, to the Institute of Development, Aging and Cancer in the University in which he works. And while this may be the best decision for himself, he believes that other researchers have the right to claim payment for their work.

"Everyone in my family is mad at me," Kawashima says, "but I tell them that if they want money, go out and earn it."



THEY SAID IT...

"As video games continue to take audiences away from television, we expect to see more TV news stories warning parents about the corrupting influence of interactive entertainment."

EA VP of communications Jeff Brown in letter to Fox

"Wii is a very unique platform. I have no projects yet, but I feel it's very unique. I'm a little bit anxious about Nintendo platforms, as Nintendo games are too strong. I'm a little bit worried about that."

Rez creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi chats to *Wired*

"It's not just 3D. It's also vector graphics acceleration... It's about the visuals. 2008 and 2009 are inevitably going to be the years of visual acceleration in the mobile field. No question about it."

Jani Karlsson, AMD, on new mobile graphics technology

"It was at that point I realized they were all playing it on console."

Mark Rein chats about gaming trends with *The Guardian*

"The GameCube controller is a product of us feeling that, without this or that, people wouldn't be able to play the games we make."

Shigeru Miyamoto talks to *Famitsu* about the GameCube controller

"It was a battle, the first few years, inside Maxis. It was referred to as 'The Toilet game'. It was the game where you clean the toilet."

Will Wright talks about *The Sims* during its early days

UNSMOOTH CRIMINALS

THE DARK UNDERBELLY OF GAMING STORIES

Things got ugly in the Russian city of Ufa when, after killing a member of a rival clan in a massively multiplayer game, the *Lineage II* player was later confronted by the player and beaten so badly he died of the injuries. The 33-year old man's sister, who also plays the MMO, and her family are still being harassed by the rival clan. The killer has been charged with murder.



On a much lighter note, a Japanese teenager was arrested after hacking into South Korean game company Nexon and stealing \$35,000 worth of virtual currency for the MMO *Nabongi*. Why would he do this? Perhaps to resell the money to other players? Maybe let his character live large a little? Not quite: "I originally wanted the dress worn by the princess, but I just ended up racking up a bunch of game points."



In Wisconsin, USA, a KMart employee was nabbed after what might have been a pretty clever scheme. Starting small, Nathaniel Gustafson packed stuff like games and movies into larger item boxes and then bought the larger product. He then returned the bought item a few days later and restarted his caper. Unfortunately he got greedy. While trying to walk out with, amongst other things, two PlayStation 3s, the store's alarms went off and he was nabbed. In total he stole over \$7,000 of K-Mart's stuff.



While raiding a man dealing in illegal PSP memory card and chipping business in London's Tower Hammer district, police took apart his consoles expecting to find chips. Instead they discovered over £12,000 stashed where the hard drives were supposed to be.



Still sticking to the UK, in Ayreshire a 61 year old man was arrested after he swapped copied games for a crate of crabs. The man approached the returning fishing fleet's men, but since they had no money on them he accepted the crabs to make a fresh supper with.



VALVE RELEASES STEAMWORKS

GAME DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS worldwide will be happy to know that Valve, the company responsible for *Half-Life* and various other titles, is now opening up its development tools to the public for free. The reason, according to Valve president Gabe Newell, is that developers nowadays spend too much time and money having to create their own tools and backend systems that they do not get to focus enough on the actual gameplay and story. By releasing Steamworks to them for free, developers should be able to create better games with smaller budgets.

This is a very convenient solution to many such as GSC Game World, the developer of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, which has decided to launch a digital version of the game's prequel exclusively on Steam.

Christmas has come early this year to the gaming world with Steamworks and hopefully we shall see the fruits of this very soon.

THE GTA IV HYPE SQUAD STRAPS ON ITS BRASS KNUCKLES

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS INCIPIENT CONTROVERSY

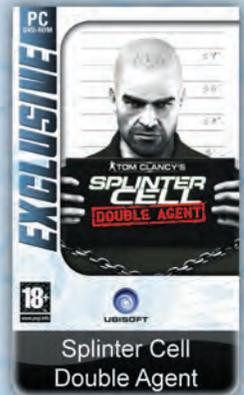
WITH *GRAND THEFT AUTO IV* nearing its April release, Rockstar's propaganda machine has shifted to top gear and begun its campaign to dominate the universe's attention. Hired drones have plastered Brooklyn's telephone poles with rather convincing Identikit-style wanted posters, featuring the grim visage of *GTA IV* protagonist Niko Bellic (and blandly suggesting he be shot on sight). The Liberty City Police Department email address printed on the poster returns an auto-responder, saying "We are all out to lunch at the moment, but will get back to you when we get around to it."

Of course, while gamers begin stockpiling Mountain Dew and chips, the tabloid press is doubtless stoking the coals of controversy and marinating the scapegoats in greedy anticipation. Asked whether he expected

trouble on release, Rockstar president Dan Houser replied that, "I expect it because we've had so much of it in the past," before adding that "I wish people would treat video games the same as other media. It's a convenient enemy for people." He also denied rumours of a *GTA* film adaptation starring Eminem. Ooh, dodged a bullet there.

In the meantime, those gamers who knowingly downloaded, installed, and actively played to its conclusion an unofficially-sanctioned mod minigame that showed some pixelated rumpy-pumpy (see: *Hot Coffee*) may now claim up to \$35 from a recent settlement fund if they felt "offended and upset" about it. Visit gtasettlement.com if you want to be part of the lamest thing in the history of the universe.

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A studio called Daletto is planning a free PC fighter called Street Fighter Online: Mouse Generation. It will be based on Street Fighter 3 Alpha and it will only require your mouse to play.



An environmental group has given a proposal to the New Mexico state legislature. It suggests that the U.S. state considers a 1% sales tax on televisions and games. The tax could then be used for "outdoor education programs."



Shane Kim from Microsoft has told press that even though Real Time Worlds has moved on to other games, Microsoft still owns the rights to Crackdown and a sequel is a good possibility.



Halo 3 was temporarily dethroned on LIVE when Call of Duty 4 took the top spot. But the former king of the hill regained its spot a couple of weeks later, with the award-winning war shooter snapping at its heels. Game number three is Guitar Hero III, beating Gears of War.

"Bullfrog, Origin, Westwood--all no longer exist today because something broke. ... and I'll simply state that EA blew it, and to a certain degree, since I was involved, I blew it." That's a confession from EA CEO John Riccitiello.



During the legal drama currently wrought between Epic and Silicon Knights over Unreal Engine 3, it was revealed that SK paid \$750,000 to license the engine. Epic meanwhile demanded access to investigate the Too Human source code.

TRAILER ON THE DVD



SECOND SKIN

A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE LIVES OF SEVEN MMO GAMERS

"SECOND SKIN TAKES AN intimate look at computer gamers whose lives have been transformed by the emerging genre of Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs). *World of Warcraft*, *Second Life*, and *Everquest* allow millions of users to simultaneously interact in virtual spaces. *Second Skin* introduces us to couples who have fallen in love without meeting, disabled players who have found new purpose, addicts, Chinese gold-farming sweatshop workers, wealthy online entrepreneurs and legendary guild leaders – all living in a world that doesn't quite exist." – secondskinfilm.com

It's rare to see such a serious yet still impassioned look at the effect of virtual

words on us as a species and as a sentient creature perpetually under the impression that somehow we've been short-changed into being *Muggles* when we should have been *Wizards*.

Directed by Juan Carlos Piñeiro (who is known only as a budding filmmaker on the festival circuit), the film lacks a distributor but will be premiering at the SXSW Film Festival (Austin, Texas, United States) in March this year. *Second Skin* began production late January, 2006 and it is studio Pure West's first feature-length documentary. Its executive producers, David Heilbroner and Kate Davis, have been producing award-winning documentaries for over fifteen years.

FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

COMMAND & CONQUER GOLD [ON THE DVD]

TO CELEBRATE THE 12 year anniversary of Westwood Studios' seminal RTS, EA has released the full game for free. Because computer hardware has changed so much since the game was first released, getting it to work on modern systems is a bit tricky. The .ISO files found in the "Command & Conquer Gold.zip" on the cover DVD need to be burned on to a CD using CD burning software such as Nero or Alcohol. After that, you insert the disc into your drive, right click on the "install.exe" or "setup.exe", select 'Properties', then the 'Compatibility' tab, then check the check box for "Run this program in compatibility mode for" and select Windows 95 from the drop-down menu. Click Apply, then OK. Double-click the .EXE file you just modified and install.

When you're prompted to update DirectX, uncheck the check box so it won't install it. **DO NOT** install the DirectX update, it's old!

After the game is installed, you need to unzip the "Gold Patch for Windows XP.zip" and put the "thipx32.dll" file in the install directory of the game, overwriting the old file.

Then, you need to set compatibility for the "C&C95.exe" in the same way you did for the install, with a few additional changes. Check the check box for "Disable visual themes" as well as "Turn off advance text services for the program", which are also on the 'Compatibility' tab.

If everything went right, you now have *Command & Conquer Gold* installed and ready to play!

NOTE: *Command & Conquer Gold* is not online compatible



THE EVOLUTION OF: GAMING CLICHES



Crates



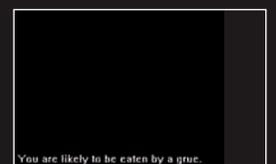
Exploding Barrels



JRPG Dialogue



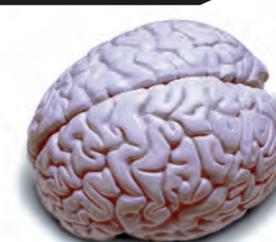
Nazis



Stealth



Stockholm Syndrome



BRAAAAAAINS!!!!



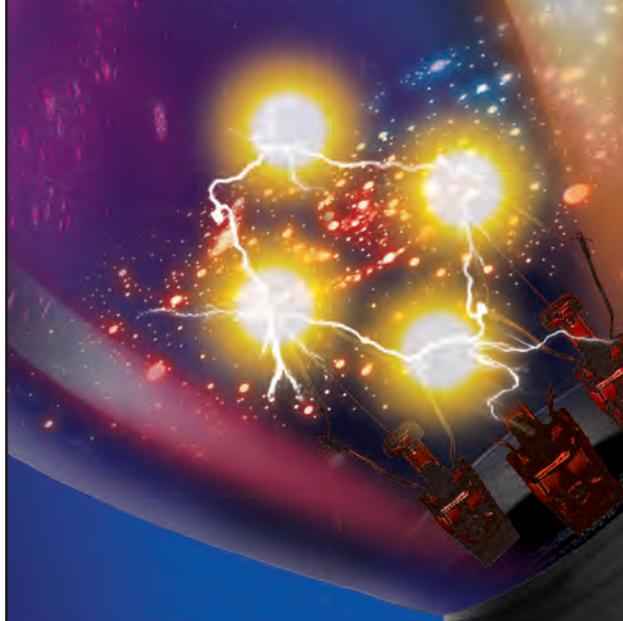
MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Finally, a **GTA IV** release date! Rockstar says expect the worldwide release on 360 and PS3 to be April 29. But rumors have it the PC version will only arrive in October. • A Hungarian magazine has broken the news that Red Alert 3 is going to be announced, including Tesla Boats. No, we don't know how that would work. • You might have to wait a while for more Kratos. An inside source at Sony told Games Radar that **God of War III** will only be out in December 2009. • **Haze** has been delayed again, this time to earliest April this year. • EA South Africa told local blog LazyGamer that **Battlefield: Bad Company** might be delayed to get some more spit and polish time. • As you might have noticed, **Mercenaries 2** didn't make its February release. EA reckons it will still take a few more months. • **BioShock** developer Irrational Games posted ads for looking for, amongst other things, PlayStation 3 programmers. Yup, the rumours of the game heading to Sony's console are all heated up again. But a mobile version of the game has been announced. • Want to get **LOST**? The game should be out by end of February, if sources inside Ubisoft are to be believed. • Funcom's online MMO **Age of Conan** has been delayed again – this time to late May. • Due to the developers wanting to focus on the "next generation" versions, 2K Games has announced that **Civilization Revolutions** for the Wii has been delayed indefinitely. • **Pandemic Studios** has got four unannounced games currently in development. If you want more details, they are called Projects B, Q, Y, and Z. Maybe they are spelling games? • Crash and burn! **Flatout: Head On**, the series' PSP debut, will hit shelves in March. • **Resident Evil** creator Shinji Mikami revealed on his blog that he's started work on his next game. His last title was 2006's **God Hand**. • A studio called Brash Entertainment has secured the rights to rubbish horror series **Saw**. Expect plenty of gore and blood in 2009. • A mistake on a UK retailer's site led to news that **Splinter Cell: Conviction** will appear on the PS3. But Ubisoft denied this, saying it remains a 360 exclusive. • **Gran Turismo Prologue** will FINALLY make the PS3 masses happy. Polyphonic reckons the game will be out by end of March. • "They say you can't keep a good man down, and that goes double for the ones with an insatiable hunger for brains." That's according to Wideload Games, so you can expect a **Stubbs the Zombie 2** announcement soon. • Rumours starting doing the rounds that **Halo Wars**, the RTS spin-off from the popular series, will also be coming to the PC. But Microsoft nipped that one, saying it remains a 360 exclusive due to the control system. So what was all that huff about 'Games For Windows' about, then? • **Lair** developer Factor 5 has left the PS3 platform to return to the familiar ground of Nintendo machines. Now fan sites are buzzing that the studio is working on a new **Kid Icarus** title. The last time that series saw a release was 1991.



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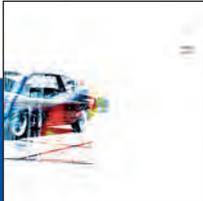
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Gaming blog Joystiq spotted an interesting similarity between the Burnout Paradise cover and U.S. rock group Karate's 200 album 'Unsolved'. EA says the similarities are coincidence, which we're willing to believe. Still, creepy.



Codemasters has started looking for the offspring of Mario Contasino, the taxi driver who nearly killed Winston Churchill in an accident in the Thirties. Codemasters' new game, Turning Point, plays off on this event in history.



skate, the new hot pro on the streets, has really turned one on the Tony Hawk franchise – the game apparently outsold Proving Ground by 2 to 1. The Tony Hawk developers have since promised 'innovation' in the next iteration.



A book called Starcraft English is teaching South Koreans, well, English. It uses phrases from English-only Starcraft and its manual, and use them as guides to explain the language in Korean. Since many Koreans are already familiar with the game's phrases, it makes things a lot easier. Yes, South Korea LOVES Starcraft.

Shadow of the Colossus and Ico developer Team Ico is working hard on its next game, so far unfitted but rumoured to be part of the games they have produced so far. But so far all that has surfaced is this mysterious image featuring a chain going into the ground.



11TH ANNUAL INTERACTIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

HELD AT THE RED Rock Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Annual Interactive Achievement Awards celebrates the greatest and most innovative games from 2007.

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, walked away with Outstanding Achievement in Online Game Play, Action Game of the Year, Console Game of the Year, and Overall Game of the Year. *Bioshock* was awarded Outstanding Achievement in Art Direction, Outstanding Achievement in Story Development, Outstanding Achievement in Original Music Composition, and Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design.

The Orange Box: Portal received Outstanding Character Performance, Outstanding Achievement in Game Play Engineering, and Outstanding Achievement in Game Design.

The Orange Box itself was Computer Game of the Year. Handheld Game of the Year, was *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*. Roleplaying Game of the Year, goes to *Mass Effect*. Adventure Game of the Year, went to *Super Mario Galaxy*. Sports Game of the Year, to *skate*. Family Game of the Year, to *Rock Band*. Massively Multiplayer Game of the Year, to *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade*.



BRAZIL GOES ALL BRAZIL ON BRAZIL

WHAT DO *EVERQUEST* AND *Counter-Strike* have in common? Well, according to Brazilian District Judge Carlos Alberto Simões de Tomaz, both games promote "the subversion of public order", and constitute "an attack against the democratic state and the law and against public security".

That's quite a tall order for an aging MMO and a dated shooter, both released in 1999. Maybe de Tomaz is just fed up with teenage thugs on his Favourite Servers list. Nonetheless, both games are now banned countrywide, and state police have descended upon local LAN venues and begun seizing the offending titles, while a daily fine of US\$3000 has been levied on anyone who refuses to cooperate. No word yet on whether *EverQuest 2* and *CS: Source* are to be blacklisted too, but given the delay on this one, we're expecting something to happen around 2013.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world is playing *World of Warcraft* and *Call of Duty 4*, because they're much better games anyway.

WII EXERCISE PLAN BLASTED

The Wii is getting a lot of attention at the moment, especially in the UK where trials in schools have led the Government to plan on implementing the use of Nintendo's console as part of the curriculum. But the proposal by the Department of Health to use the Wii for PE lessons has been slammed by the chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, Nick Seaton, who said proper competitive sport was the way to go.

And, luckily for Seaton, a recent experiment by Canadian students seems to support his view. The group of 28 students measured their heart rates in three different activities, including playing 30 minutes of Wii Sports boxing game, and concluded that although the game got players moving, it failed to make it to cardiovascular workout level. According to the experiment, however, you could do worse by only taking a walk in the park but a 30 minute workout with a boxing video is definitely the best of the three options. Pity the test didn't use the Wii Fit title for comparison.

GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES MP3 • ACCESSORIES

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Folklore
- 2 Battlefield: Bad Company (coming soon)
- 3 Army of Two (coming soon)
- 4 The Club
- 5 Condemned 2: Bloodshot

XBOX 360

- 1 Burnout Paradise
- 2 Turok
- 3 Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements
- 4 Mass Effect
- 5 The Club

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Tony Hawk's Proving Ground
- 2 Guitar Hero 3 (coming soon)
- 3 Rock Band (coming soon)
- 4 Torrente 3: The Protector
- 5 Devil May Cry 4

PC

- 1 The Sims Castaway Stories
- 2 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 3 Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer
- 4 Guild Wars: Eye of the North
- 5 Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat

PSP

- 1 Ben 10: Protector of Earth
- 2 Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow
- 3 Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command
- 4 WipEout Pulse
- 5 Virtua Tennis 3

WII

- 1 Super Mario Galaxy
- 2 Mario Party 8
- 3 Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games
- 4 MX vs ATV Untamed (coming soon)
- 5 The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess



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

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 2 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 3 FIFA 08
- 4 Motorstorm
- 5 Resistance: Fall of Man

XBOX 360

- 1 Assassin's Creed
- 2 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 Halo 3
- 5 Project Gotham Racing 4

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 2 FIFA 08
- 3 Gran Turismo 4
- 4 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 5 Need for Speed: Underground

PC

- 1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 2 Crysis
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 Hellgate: London
- 5 The Witcher

PSP

- 1 Sims 2 Castaway
- 2 FIFA 08
- 3 Daxter
- 4 Tekken: Dark Resurrection
- 5 Need for Speed: Carbon

WII

- 1 ATV Offroad Fury 4
- 2 Sims 2 Castaway
- 3 Ben 10: Protector of Earth
- 4 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 5 The Simpsons



CONSOLE WATCH

8bitjoystick claims to have an exclusive tell-all interview with an Xbox 360 designer who insists that **the current generation of 360 have around 10% failure rate.** • Media Create Co. reports that **38,907 PS3 units sold between Jan 7 and Jan 13 in Japan.** In the same week, they say 4,690 Xbox 360 units were sold. Also in that week, the Nintendo DS sold 97,369 units. The PSP sold 96,159 units in the same period. • The NPD Group Inc reports that **the Wii sold 1.35 million units during the month of Dec in the U.S.** They also say that the Xbox 360 sold 1.26 million units in the U.S. during the same period. The PS3 only sold 797,600 units in the U.S. during Dec. • **During the final five weeks of 2007, Sony shipped 1.2 million PS3 units to Europe.** Over 24 million DS units were sold in Europe between March and December 2007. Over 64 million DS units have been sold globally in total. • A study performed in the U.S. has shown that **playing Wii improves the performance of trainee surgeons considerably.** Those who played Wii achieved 50% higher scores in terms of tool control and overall performance than those who did not. • A Nikko Citigroup analyst says that Sony has cut PS3 production costs in half. Koto Ezawa estimates that **Sony Computer Entertainment will lose \$1.3 billion this year.** Last year SCE lost \$2.1 billion UDS. Ezawa does not expect the PS3 to be profitable until 2009. • SCEA denies any plans for a cheaper, \$299 PS3. • According to Amazon.com, **more people have pre-ordered Resident Evil 5 for PS3 than for 360.** • Rockstar's Jeronimo Barrera says that the **360 and PS3 versions of GTA IV are now identical,** and that the PS3 was a contributing factor to the game's delay. • Thanks to over 6 million 360 units sold, reduced manufacturing costs, and 4.82 million copies of Halo 3 sold in the first half of fiscal '08, **Microsoft is now turning a profit on the gaming system.** • Future MTV UMD movies for PSP will have an "all" region label, the speculation is that they will be region free. • **Xbox 360 has a seven game per unit attachment ratio,** claims Microsoft. A record for any console in history. • PaRappa the Rapper developer Masaya Matsuura claims that **"some people have said already that the DS software bubble has burst".** • Sony is apparently **working on a 65 nm migration of its Cell Broadband Engine to 45 nm.** Sony claims the chip area size will be reduced by 34% and will consume 40% less power than the current 65 nm generation. • A bunch of industry experts sitting around a table predict Sony's PSP2 will have a touch-screen, internal flash memory game downloads instead of a UMD and improved PS3 link-up. **NAG experts predict that the PSP2 will look like a unicorn.**



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THE NUMBERS



10 MILLION
World of Warcraft subscribers
(Source: Blizzard)

65 MILLION
Total DS handhelds sold
worldwide (Source: Nintendo)

500,000
Signs ups for MMO Age of Conan
(Source: Codemasters)

2 MILLION
Units of PSP game Daxter sold
in 2 years (Source: Sony)

4.84 BILLION
Dollars spent by U.S. gamers in
December (Source: NPD)



\$1 BILLION
Guitar Hero sales in just over 2
years (Source: Activision)

1.3 BILLION
Dollars spent by Australian
gamers in 2007 (Source: Gfk
Australia)

40
The number of Video Game
Live shows planned for 2008
(Source: VGL)

6.6 BILLION
Dollars spent by U.K. gamers in
2007 (Source: ChartTrack)

2.5 MILLION
Total Rock Band songs
downloaded from Xbox LIVE
and PlayStation Network
(Source: EA)



CALENDAR

MARCH RELEASES

Subject to change

Day	Game	Platforms
6	Buzz Junior: Dino Den	PS2
6	God Of War 2 Platinum	PS2
6	Iridium Runners	PS2
6	Persona 3	PS2
6	Pro Evolution 08	PSP
6	Samurai Warriors: Katana	Wii
6	Spongebob Atlantis Pantis	PS2
7	Frontlines: Fuel of War	PC, 360
7	Jenga	Wii
7	Lost	360, PC, PS3
7	Ninja Reflex	Wii
7	Silent Hunter	PC
7	The Suite Life of Zack and Cody	DS
13	Dynasty Warriors 6	PS3, 360
14	Army of Two	360, PS3
14	Bleach: Shattered Blade	Wii
14	Bleach: The Blade Of Fate	DS
14	Bully: Scholarship Edition	360
14	Command & Conquer: Kane's Wrath	PC, 360
	<i>Pre-order for only R172.76 (PC)</i>	
14	Destroy all Humans 3: Big Willy Unleashed	Wii
14	Guitar Hero III Rechargeable Battery Pack	PS2, PS3, 360
14	Guitar Hero III Standalone Guitar	PS2, PS3, 360, Wii, PC
14	Guitar Hero III with Guitar	PS2, PS3, 360, Wii, PC
	<i>Pre-order for only R775.76 (PS3)</i>	
14	Jamster Allstars	PS2
14	Jumper	PS2, Wii, 360
14	Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	PS2, Wii
14	Warrior of the Last Empire	PSP
19	ATV Offroad Fury 4	PS2
21	Chessmaster II	PSP
21	CSI: Hard Evidence	Wii
21	Monster Jam	360, PS2, Wii
21	Secret Files: Tunguska	Wii
21	Soldier of Fortune 3	PC, PS3, 360
27	Dancing Stage Hottest Party with Dance Mat	Wii
27	Everybody's Golf World Tour	PS3
28	Assassin's Creed	PC
	<i>Pre-order for R257.36 and stand a chance to win one of three limited edition figurines</i>	
28	Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	DS
28	Brain Assist	DS
28	Dawn of War: Soulstorm	PC
28	Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker	DS
28	FFXII: Revenant Wings	DS
28	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles	DS
28	Fish Tycoon	DS
28	Holly Hobbie	DS
28	MX vs ATV	360, DS, Wii
28	Nancy Drew	DS
28	Odin's Sphere	PS2

Day	Game	Platforms
28	Rainbow Six Vegas 2	PC, PS3, 360
28	SEGA Superstars Tennis	PS2, PS3, DS, Wii, 360
28	Spiderwick Chronicles	Wii, PC, DS, PS2, 360
28	Universe at War	360
28	Victorious Boxer's Challenge	Wii
28	Zoo Hospital	DS
28	Zoo Tycoon	DS
TBA	ATV Offroad Fury	PSP
TBA	Avatar: The Burning Earth	PS2
TBA	Big Catch Bass Fishing	DS
TBA	Blacksite	PS3
TBA	Bob the Builder: Festival of Fun	DS
TBA	Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	Wii
TBA	Bully Scholarship Edition	Wii
TBA	California Games	PS2, PSP
TBA	Caspar Scare School	PS2, DS
TBA	Castlevania: Dracula X Chronicles	PSP
TBA	Cooking Mama 2	DS
TBA	Cruisin	Wii
TBA	Crusaders	PC
TBA	Dark Sector	PS3, 360
TBA	Darstardly and Mutley: Pigeon Pursuit	PS2
TBA	Devil May Cry 4	PC, 360, PS3
	<i>Pre-order for only R492.95 (PS3)</i>	
TBA	Devil May Cry 4 Limited Edition	PS3, 360
TBA	Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness	PSP
TBA	Ferrari Challenge	PS3, Wii, DS
TBA	Forza 2 (Xbox 360 Classics)	360
TBA	Game Party	Wii
TBA	Gears of War (Xbox 360 Classics)	360
TBA	Heist	PC, PS3
TBA	Imagine: Figure Skating	DS
TBA	Jetix Puzzle Buzzle	DS
TBA	Johnny Bravo	PS2
TBA	Lost Planet Colonies	PC
TBA	Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	PS3
TBA	Megaman: ZX Advent	DS
TBA	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriot	PS3
TBA	Mr Bean	DS
TBA	NBA Ballers	360
TBA	New International Track & Field	DS
TBA	Ninja Gaiden	360
TBA	Postman Pat	DS
TBA	Prey the Stars	DS
TBA	Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	PS2
TBA	The Water Horse	PC, PS2
TBA	Turning Point	PC, PS3
TBA	Unreal Tournament 3	PS3
TBA	Williams Pinball	Wii, PS2
TBA	Winx Club: Mission Enchantix	Wii
TBA	Yugi Oh! World Championship 2008	DS

NINTENDO DS™ lite

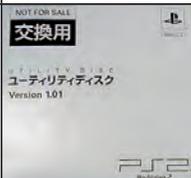
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GAMING HISTORY 101 - MARCH

1	9	17	
	10	18	26
3		19	27
4		20	28
5	13	21	29
6		22	
7	15	23	31
8	16	24	

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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



MARCH CONTEST NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT: "Look Mr Frodo! An oliphant! Mr Frodo? Mr Frodo!?"

vivendi GAMES



FEBRUARY WINNER
Due to the street lamps not working, thanks to load shedding, the "hardly have any light son" (not Harley Davidson) bike club decided to burn rubber and light up the city streets.
- *Adriaan Roux*

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



WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [**Heroes March**]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a copy of *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* for the Wii, plus a T-shirt, courtesy of Megarom!



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Dario Borrelli, p42





Only R379.76



Only R379.76



Only R379.76



Only R294.26

Q&A: EVERYDAY SHOOTER

Most of the time, 'big' games get all the coverage. However, scratch deep enough and you'll find independent developers hard at work on a new, groundbreaking project. Fortunately, the fortunes of the one-, two- or five-man studios of the world seem to be changing, especially thanks to online services such as Xbox LIVE and the PlayStation Network. One such developer is Jonathan Mak, the creator of *Everyday Shooter*, a game that blends rocking guitar music and a top-down shooter. With his game finally available for Windows and on PSN, he agreed to chat to us about the game and the hard job of indie game development.



Big-hitting developers and publishers are mostly concerned with FPSes, RTSes, and RPGs these days, with a heavy emphasis on multiplayer content. Yet, games such as *Geometry Wars* have proved immensely popular. Has the mainstream industry lost the plot a little?

I don't think so. The mainstream industry is just that - an industry. Moreover, like every other industry, its primary concern is making money so that it can employ tons of people and strengthen the economy. It really has nothing to do with games, and everything to do with the product, because at the end of the day, the person at the top has to justify the millions of dollars he's investing in the project or else people will lose their jobs. With that in mind, it totally makes sense for a company to just re-skin existing games - for example, a sports franchise or FPS sequel - and re-release it to keep costs low while maximising profits. This is why I think it's a waste of time to criticise the industry for something that isn't its primary focus.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that all mainstream games are worthless. I'm just saying that for those games and companies, saleability is probably the top priority.

***Everyday Shooter* is a somewhat difficult game to describe to someone who hasn't seen it. Care to do the honours?**

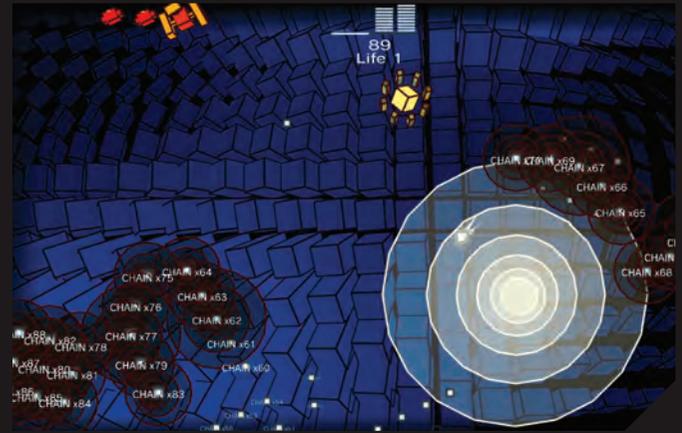
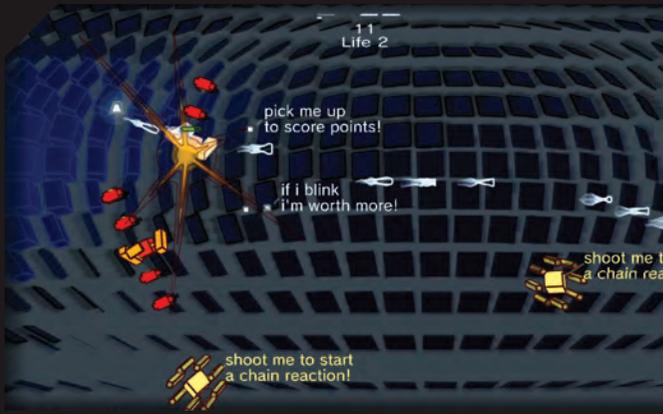
Everyday Shooter is like a music album; except, instead of it being a collection of songs, it's a collection of shoot-'em-ups. Each song/level is completely different visually, musically, and in terms of gameplay. Each level has a different chain reaction system that is not explicitly explained to you. Therefore, with each play-through you will discover each enemy's nuances and how they relate to form the greater chain reaction system. Although this gives the game a small puzzle-like aspect, it's unmistakably a shoot-'em-up and not a puzzler.

A popular aspect of *Everyday Shooter* is the way it treats audio. All the sound effects in the game are guitar riffs harmonising over an all-guitar soundtrack. Bigger reactions trigger bigger sounds/riffs. You'll feel as if you're playing along with the music, except that your instrument is the shoot-'em-up!

Games that incorporate music as a major element tend to prefer electronics or techno to rock. What made you stick with the guitar? What was your sound design philosophy?

Before the *Everyday Shooter* project, I was experimenting a lot with mixing guitars and synthesisers, and so I wanted a similar 'aesthetic' for the audio. There wasn't any reason really; it's just what I liked (New Order probably had a lot to do with the influence). In the end, I discovered that I was a terrible synth programmer. I just felt that the machine (synth/sequencer) was more of a barrier to me than a tool, because every time I had an idea, I'd spend more time gear-fiddling than actual music making. Then I remembered some guitar-overdub experiments I liked, so I decided to ditch everything but the guitar.

A lot of inspiration also came from Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* in which the soloist pre-records as many as ten guitars



and two electric bass parts and then plays the final eleventh guitar part live against the tape. Sometimes I like to think that the player in *Everyday Shooter* is the final eleventh guitar part played live against the tape. Of course, Steve Reich is a genius and I'm just some joker with a guitar, so there's no way my work can be compared to his without insulting him. It's just an influence or inspiration.

I also made a conscious decision to not beat-sync any of the sounds because I disliked the rigidity that syncing encouraged. In addition, I wanted to see what it would sound like to do something as blindly playing back musical sounds whenever something got hit. Would it end up in a random mess of noise?

In school, I took a music course for people who knew nothing about music, and during one of the lectures, the teacher talked a little bit about John Cage and his work, 433. It made me realise that nothing in the world is random. For example, when you step out onto the street, you're not hearing random noise but instead noise governed by loose rules like 'stop on red', 'honk when angry', 'don't run over pedestrians' and so on. In a similar sense, *Everyday Shooter*'s sound generation is governed by the rules of gameplay, and so the resulting soundscape doesn't turn into a random mess of noise.

There are apparently no fours or fives in *Everyday Shooter*'s code. Are you genuinely superstitious, or was this something you just really wanted people to ask about?

The fours-and-fives thing started off with me making fun of old Chinese superstitions a few years ago that, for some reason, I started taking seriously. I even started adding my own rules! Four is deadly because it sounds like death in

Chinese. When prefixed with a two, it becomes exceptionally deadly because two sounds like easy - so 24 becomes 'easy to die'. Five to me sounds like a negation (not) in Chinese. So 54 is okay since that's 'not dead', but 58 isn't very good because that's 'not prosperous'. I just treat all the other numbers as good but have the strongest preference for eight, seven and three. I prefer zero, which I may soon treat as an unlucky number for the next project, the least of all. Gonna have to sleep on that...

I know. It's sad, but I honestly do try to minimise the usage of fours and fives in the code. Sometimes, however, you can't get away with it. For example, there is a level four and I do use the fourth and fifth frets on the guitar.

***Gate 88* was a very underrated multiplayer experience. What did you learn from having done *Gate 88*?**

Gate 88 is not a game I'm particularly proud of. The game expects you to run through a fifty-screen tutorial before even playing your first game. Worse, everything you learn in Practice mode becomes useless the second you step into a multiplayer battle. Aside from the stupidly steep learning curve, the game itself had serious problems, especially with its scoring system. This game made me realise how out of touch I was with the medium. It made me think how, after nearly a decade of programming videogames, I still hadn't written something that I truly enjoyed playing myself. This is why I decided to go back to basics and write a shoot-'em-up.

Where did the idea for *Everyday Shooter* come from? Were there any games or other things that inspired it?

The project started off as an intense

dissatisfaction with *Gate 88*. I was angry that after so many years of programming videogames, I still hadn't made one that I was truly proud of. I mean, *Gate 88* was just a complicated mess of rules and controls, duct taped together using a design philosophy that was either non-existent or extremely confused with itself. Therefore, for my next project I wanted to simplify.

At that time, one of the simplest games out there was *Every Extend*. It caused me to become completely obsessed with chain-reaction-style games. I absolutely loved how one well-placed action from the player would result in a symphony of feedback. For several months, I tried to make a chaining game, but I couldn't do it. After several weeks of cursing, I decided to just clone *Every Extend* for the purposes of learning. I figured people played other people's songs to learn guitar, so why wouldn't that concept work for making games?

How the 'album of shooters' idea came about is a bit mushy now since it was such a long time ago. I remember that at one point I was going to reinterpret older shooter games - *Space Invaders*, *Galaga*, *Centipede* - as a way of learning. I was also playing *Lumines* at the time, and the way the game cycled through skins made it feel like playing an album. So, it definitely was influential. Around October 2005, I made what is basically the first level of the final game and that's when I started calling it *Everyday Shooter*.

As for the visuals - I already talked about the sound aspect in a previous question - a lot of the inspiration came from Kenta Cho's vector work, especially *Parsec47*, as well as many of the freeware shoot-'em-up games that were frequently released during that time. In fact, that's why I initially chose the name *Everyday*

Shooter, as it was to be nothing more. However, later it took on a different meaning, saying that anything, no matter how simple, can be personal and beautiful.

Anyway, I just like how modulating simple mathematical shapes can create such incredible imagery in the same way that synthesizers modulating simple mathematical waveforms can create incredible sounds. It becomes extra sexy when the morphing is connected to a gameplay interaction.

Being distributed on the PlayStation Network is quite a boon. Was it difficult? Was Sony receptive to the idea?

I think luck. Sony contacted my agent, Warren Currell, saying they were interested in the game. I was apprehensive about meeting them because I previously sat through many painful publisher meetings. Somehow, Warren convinced me to go, and I'm glad he had because the folks at the Sony Santa Monica Studio were cool enough to publish my game without messing it up. If they had said they would change things or what not, I would not have signed the deal.

What are your plans for *Everyday Shooter*? Are you aiming to distribute on any additional platforms like the Nintendo DS or mobile?

Given that it is a Sony exclusive, there's probably little chance that it will end up on a Nintendo platform. As for other platforms, we'll see.

What's it like being a one-man development team in an industry of giants? The *Aquaria* guys say its all guts and no glory. Do you agree?

Liberating - for the same reason as I stated in your first question. I don't feel like I'm related to them. I mean, it's less of a business and more of a means of expression, as corny as that sounds. Nevertheless, because of that I don't feel like I'm necessarily competing or fighting with someone. In fact, I'm mostly just fighting with myself in an effort to make something I truly believe in. In that regard, the size of a team just seems irrelevant to me.

How did you get into game development? Would you recommend it to anyone? Does it pay the bills? Got any nuggets of advice?

When I was in grade school in '97 or '98, I met someone named Pepin, who was a brilliant programmer. I remember bragging to him about how I could write DOS batch files. He just turned to me and said, "Oh yeah? That's cool. I code in Turbo Pascal." For the rest of that day I kept asking him, "So does that mean you can program videogames?" He taught me a lot about programming. Since then, I just kept writing games on my own while gleaning information from the Internet.

I entered university in 2000. Since I wasn't very good at school, I had to work extra hard to get the grades that I wanted, and so I put the games thing on hold. The day after graduating in spring 2004 was when I started making *Gate 88*.

Does it pay the bills? If you're lucky! I consider myself really lucky that I am in a position to write games - my own games - for a living. I mean, it was just chance that Sony happened to walk by the IGF booths and choose my game to publish. Now that I think

about it, I'm surprised that the game got so much attention. I thought nobody was going to like it!

Would you recommend it to anyone?

Choosing to write games isn't like choosing a TV to buy. It's something that if you like it, then go do it. If you don't, then don't do it. However, like many things involving personal expression, the reality is that people might not like what you have to say, and then you're out on the street. Still, if you truly have the passion for it, then you just have to find a way to make it work. Of course, if you're interested in game development from an industry point of view, then I don't really know, but based on the whole ea_spouse fiasco, it doesn't sound that great.

If you could work for any development studio in the world, is there one you would love to work for, or do you like flying solo?

Flying solo. Although, if the project is right, I might be open for a collaboration.

What has you excited out there? Which indie and mainstream games interest you and why?

I was so busy with *Everyday Shooter* work that I stopped playing games entirely! Now that I have some time, I have a lot of catching up to

do. I mentioned a few games in the previous questions, but the game I'm probably most excited about is *Braid*. I saw Jonathan Blow present the game at the 2006 GDC and was blown away. I remember I was supposed to present mine right after his and I kept thinking, "Oh gee, how the heck do you top a game like that?"

Recently I played *Battleships Forever*, which I loved because it felt like an unabashed orgy of battleship porn. *Digidrive's* multiplier rules are so satisfying, but it's such a letdown when you lose the big fuel stacks. I've been playing a lot of *PixelJunk Racers*. I love how all the dodging makes it feel like a bullet-hell shoot-'em-up game - but in a racing format. I still haven't played *Cave Story* yet.

I cannot wait for *World of Goo*, the next PixelJam Games game, and of course, I am eagerly awaiting any of Kenta Cho's, Omega's, or Hikoza'n-CHI X's new games, although I think they've already released some that I haven't played yet. And will I ever stop playing *Tetris* (1989 edition) for the original Game Boy?

Oh, and *Dishwasher: Dead Samurai* looks insane! I cannot wait to play that; so much style, and finally a no-nonsense hack-and-slash. Robotology - am I allowed to say that? So many games... **NAG**



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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

NAG MAGAZINE: A GUIDE FOR NON-GAMERS

(OR: SERVING SUGGESTIONS)

I T SEEMS WE HAVE a problem. There appears to be a level of misunderstanding or perhaps downright incomprehension with regards to *NAG* magazine and its function in the Universe. It's okay. There is no need to panic. These things happen all the time. **Certain** individuals or people (as they may be referred to) seem to have difficulty understanding our polysyllabic words. Or the godless French phrases that adorn our fine glossy pages. Don't worry. We will be more than happy to explain them. Worst-case situations involve an unhealthy insistence on balancing a rather large wafer of potato on a shoulder. Such an act requires immense concentration. It is with concern for their well-being that we wish to prevent any arterial ruptures. The issue of non-comprehension is particularly compounded when such people happen to be in the business of selling gaming stuff. The malady mercifully only afflicts an infinitesimal percentage of such persons. But we care about everyone equally. It's just how we are. It is gaming *stuff* that *NAG* magazine also happens to be in the business of selling albeit in a slightly different way. We like to think of all people involved in gaming stuff as our brothers. Such people sometimes do not clearly understand what it is they themselves actually do. Such people often subsist primarily on Marketing Directives fed intravenously. In the interest of continued amicable relations with the aforementioned people I have constructed a short guide which unravels the mysteries of the *NAG* Delusion.

1) WHAT IS NAG MAGAZINE?

NAG Magazine is a collection of glossed dead tree-shavings combined into a "magazine" for the sake of portability and production. Each leaf of tree-shaving contains on its surface words and images affixed by

means of a complicated industrial process. We charge a nominal fee for *NAG* Magazine as it requires many bio-survival tickets (money) to produce such a complicated product. *NAG* Magazine is produced by people who are themselves assisted by machines and an entity known as The Internet, which appears to be benevolent.

2) WHAT DOES NAG MAGAZINE DO?

Born out of the fires of a need, the magazine has a Prime Directive. These things often do. The Prime Directive of *NAG* Magazine is to provide to the people that enjoy the pastime or lifestyle of gaming all the things they could want. Through market research and dangerous experiments not to be repeated at home, we have established that such things often include:

- News that highlight happenings in the *gaming industry*. The *gaming industry* is a clandestine organisation fueled by greed and creativity.
- Features that detail information with regards to gaming products or the brave souls that harness the power of bits to provide said products.
- Previews that draw attention to imminent or pending products. We consider it neighborly to keep previews mostly impartial.
- Reviews that give our own special brand of opinion sauce with which to season such products to taste.
- Lifestyle articles that supplement gaming content because in spite of popular belief gamers have what is known as *lives*.
- The Funny because if you cannot laugh you are obviously a robot and must proceed directly to android hell.

3) NUTRITIONAL CONCERNS

NAG magazine is not the Final Word. While we certainly think we are, we believe that people are generally speaking intelligent. Intelligent people have intelligent habits. Such habits include Making Up Your Own Damn Mind which often is preceded by the understanding that *NAG* Magazine Is Just Another Opinion. For many years people have been handing over bio-survival tickets because they consider our additional opinion worth the transaction. It does happen on occasion that a client feels our opinion is no longer in line with their personal requirements. We are sorry to see them go. We understand that every person is unique and may have their own dietary requirements. As much as we would love to be able to feed all the starving children there is the matter of limited funds, resources and raw materials. As a result we fall back on the trade secret of trusting our judgement in that we are doing the best we can.

4) INGREDIENTS

Nicknames (*nom de guerre*): If you write for a gaming magazine it is par for the course to write under your nickname. Writing under your real name is just another way of saying you are a boring person. Since the first arcade machine crawled out of the primordial soup those that enjoy games have decided on nicknames for themselves.

Unique gaming lexicon (*lingo*): Because sometimes *televise speletjies* just sounds silly. :P **NAG**



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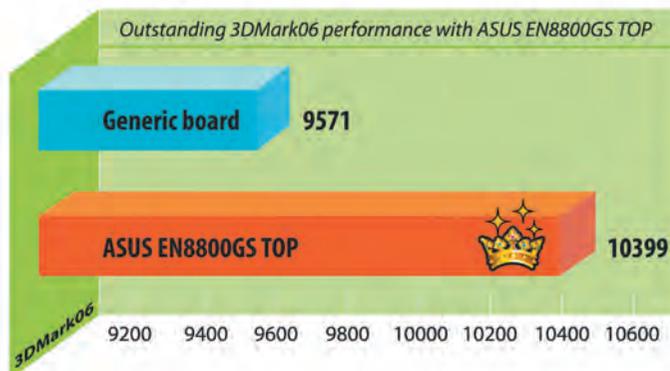
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DAMMIT!

AN EASTER STORY

SO, HERE WE ARE, in the Year of the Rat and already ankle deep in work, UPS's and generators. Good times. At least the horribly overpriced and overrated Valentines Day has been and gone, without too much hassle, and now we have a long weekend to look forward to at the end of this month. A long weekend, perfect for catching up on all the gaming time we have all been lacking because of aforementioned work, that comes loaded with the added bonus of the excuse to eat more than your weight's worth in chocolate. What could be better?

A lifetime supply of free games and paid holidays would be a whole lot better, sure, but that is about as likely as winning the lottery. And, besides, I am a realist. At least I know the long Easter weekend will actually happen. It would have been kinder, though, if the shops had not been tormenting us with the infamous chocolate Easter eggs since mid-January.

Anyway, with such an important weekend coming up on the gaming calendar (of course, in my mind, any long weekend with the potential for extended hours of gaming is definitely significant) I feel it is time I enlighten everyone on the true story behind Easter.

It all started a very, very long time ago, in a far off and distant land (the vagueness and repetition, of course, all underscore the authenticity of this particular story) where a young scientist was dabbling in genetics and cloning. One dark and stormy night (surprise, surprise), the scientist's lab was struck by lightning as the scientist was experimenting with cross species mutations between a bunny, a chicken and a slab of chocolate. The end result (thanks to said lightning bolt) was a man turned oversized chocolate-egg laying bunny.

Of course, the village folk got out their pitchforks and flamethrowers and chased the creature into the mountains where he found a group of Ninjas who taught him the ways of the Ninja. Wanting to exact his revenge on the people who has made him flee his own home, the man-turned-bunny decided to collect all the chocolate eggs he could lay and hide them in the villagers gardens. His evil master plan was to make all the children love him for bringing them such good chocolate. But because of his Ninja skills, he was never seen and the parents took the glory.

Realising that this plan had failed to make him the Pied Piper, he spent all of his time in the mountains with the Ninjas learning how to code. His revised evil master plan was to leave hidden messages, references and mini-games in computer software so that all the children would love him for making their games that much cooler. Of course, his plan failed again because all the children (and those who just never grew up) were too busy looking for these hidden bits of fun in their games to care much about the mutant bunny.

But, even to this day the scientist-turned-bunny (who's name, interestingly enough was Mr. E. A. Ster, hence the name Easter Bunny) still tries to get our attention with the Easter Eggs he plants in games.

One of his most infamous attempts, which even managed to make headline news, was the 'Hot Coffee' egg in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas which (just in case you missed those headlines) revealed a mini sex-game that started off a class action lawsuit against the game's publisher. Good times. Take-Two Interactive eventually decided to settle the lawsuit by offering to exchange copies of the game for cash. They also sent a thank-you note to the last known location of the Easter Bunny to thank him for all the publicity.

Mr. E.A.Ster also managed to stir up some scandal when he planted five minutes of a South Park Episode (entitled "The Spirit of Christmas"), which could be viewed using a PC, onto the original printing of Tiger Woods 99 PGA Golf Tour for the PS2.

Sadly, very few people recognise his efforts, even today. So celebrate this long weekend with copious amounts of chocolate and by seeing how many Easter Eggs you can find in your gaming collection. Who knows, you might even be the first to find some new scandalous egg.

Happy hunting. **NAG**





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RAMJET

by Walt Pretorius

COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT

OKAY, TO BE HONEST (which I try to be on principle at least once a year) this column has very little to do with gaming... except for the fact that gamers tend to complain about things. Everything, in fact. It irks me, it really does. Most times when I am around gamers (the majority of who seem to be little snot-heads half my age, which automatically qualifies them to know more than anyone over the age of twenty) I just want to bitch-slap the living crap out of them. But that's not what this column is about... that's just the lame-assed tie-in which might allow me to shunt this one past James without too much complaint from his side.

I am sick to death – and I really mean that – of people complaining about stuff. Living where we do, that happens a lot. Every day I hear people bitching about the power situation, the government situation, the traffic situation, the economy, the lack of this, the over-abundance of that, the cost of living, the crime... the list is practically endless. Sure, I complain. I get paid to. But to be very honest (twice this year already) I am more happy-go-lucky than most people expect. I roll with the punches that life delivers, because complaining is actually little more than a waste of energy (unless, once again, you get paid to do it.) What gets my back up immediately is hearing people bitch about living here in South Africa. Granted, the country has more than its fair share of problems, but in all honesty, it also has some wonderful aspects that these negative knob-noses always manage to overlook.

So what if our apparent future president thinks that a shower is enough to stave off HIV AIDS? So what if our power supply is interrupted more often than it should be? So what if we have maniacal drivers on our roads? So what if games are expensive? The truth of the matter is that we have generally bigger dwellings and gardens, generally cheaper food and a generally more appealing country than most places in the rest of the world have to offer. I love this place. I love the people (even the snot-headed little gamers.) I love the landscape. I love the nature. I love everything about it – even the guys selling useless crap on street corners.

So, I have a message to give to the complainers. Please ensure that the door doesn't hit you in the ass on the way out. If this is such a bad place to live, why don't you go live in a cramped flat somewhere in Europe, where the water supply has passed through at least five hundred people before it gets to you and the weather sucks completely. Or go to the States, and put up with the yanks. Or go to Oz and tolerate the Australians and spiders. Go. Now. Piss off. We do not need you. We do not want you. You are a total waste of space, air and skin.

For those that are left: South Africa is a country with great potential. Yes, it is going through difficulties but, let's be honest; compared to the rest of Africa, the governmental transition here has been silky smooth. It has a few issues to work out but, in the end – in the long run – there will be no better place to live. We will get there. Bet your bottom dollar. **NAG**



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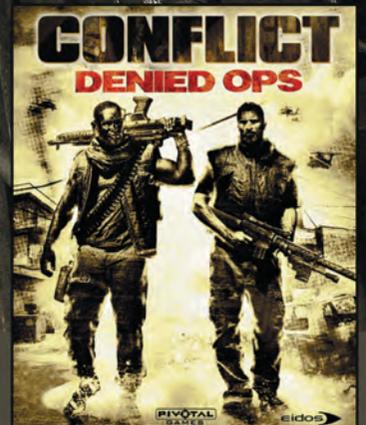
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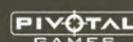
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KINGPIN

by Michael James

THE STATE OF THE NAG ADDRESS

WELCOME! WELCOME! WELCOME, THIS is the president of NAG. I'm sure this obvious analogy has been journalistically peddled elsewhere but I just thought of it right now so bear with me. It works like this... NAG is a state within South Africa, a gaming nation if you like and I am the president. You readers are loyal to the state [but not necessarily to the president] and you pay a tax of R39 each month for our governance and thick juicy newsletter [with free! DVD].

Now that we're well and truly eating through the meat patty that is 2008, it's time to address the gaming nation. Think of this as a political speech but with a difference – instead of it being mostly lies, it's mostly true. As readers you're important because you vote for this state / party / organisation every month and the way you vote [paying money] shows a very deep commitment because you choose to and don't have to. The benefit to you is that we have to keep up the standards or you'll stop voting – very much how the real world should work. This piece is here to convince you to do the following... be loyal to your party, force your friends to vote for us [if they benefit from NAG they must pay], defend your party against other parties [knife fights² in the parking lot are encourage – the state will protect you, convert friends and family to the cause and if you do not see your juicy thick newsletter where you live make your demands heard [there's nothing like a midnight firebombing of the corner shop to get a point across²]. But enough with the proper agenda and onto the fun stuff.

There isn't any bad news this year so happy day! We're not increasing the price of the magazine but it has and will, on average, keep getting bigger. We're going to be increasing our circulation to 29,000 copies soon because a few new major retailers want NAG on their shelves ASAP [we can't give you any details now but keep reading and we'll let you know where else you can buy NAG soon]. Last year we added two new sections [movies and mobile] to the magazine, these are important because both MTN and Nu Metro Home Entertainment have realised the power of the gaming market and want to help grow NAG. rAge 2008 [3-5 October – you heard it here first] is already looking to blast last year's event out of the water because we're adding more entertainment and more diverse retailers so you can actually buy memory for your camera or even a whole notebook. The magazine and rAge and also getting very involved with a new shopping centre initiative that will hopefully launch in 2008 with a single event and then next year form a nationwide three stop roadmap to rAge 2009 [top secret but keep reading]. We're also going

to be exploring a whole new medium [content delivery mechanism for those at the back of the class] for gaming [NAG] and technology [SACM] this year [top secret but keep reading]. Another noteworthy mention must go to SACM [SA Computer Magazine] – we're increasing the circulation and improving distribution for this magazine and in January achieve an increase of 500 odd new readers thanks to the hard work of our distribution channel. So, look for the magazine on the shelf, do yourself a favour and try a copy.

To wrap up, April NAG is our 10th birthday issue. Without hyping things up too much you're going to want to make sure you get a copy. Redesign, huge competitions and some free stuff for everyone is in the pipeline.

A little while ago I proposed a mandate to the editorial team that we keep the magazine fun, professional and efficient [in that order]. I was told that this is a tall order. Hmm, perhaps it's time for a few new faces in the house. :)) **NAG**

¹ We can say free because we're the government. At least we're better than most governments where you pay tax and then still have to pay for the use of your car. If NAG were like them then you'd have to pay us every time you played a game! Hang on a second...

² We do not approve of knife fights in parking lots and midnight firebombing so pick different locations and times.



Lifes' Good LG

PLAY TRUE COLOURS

 **10000:1**
Digital
Fine
Contrast



Play *WiDE* Play LG

LG FLATRON L7W Series Wide Colour Gamut
spreads out 100% precise description of colours without any distortion.
Feel what you see with **100% clear colour!**



 **10000:1**
Digital
Fine
Contrast



LG FLATRON L7W Series shows you more sensitive "Bright & Dark" images through industry leading unsurpassed Contrast Ratio of DFC 10000:1. Feel what you see now by every single fine vision!



NINJA DOG

MEETS

BOLD-FACED

NINJA

FOR ULTIMATE

DEATH BATTLE

IN TOKYO, HAI!

NAG RIDES THE GIANT METAL BIRD TO TOKYO TO PAY A VISIT TO TEAM NINJA AND ITS ENIGMATIC LEADER TOMONOBU ITAKAGI



Originally we were tempted to refer to him as *Itagaki-san*, like the rest of the European press. "San" is the most common honorific in Japan and a title of respect. The reason we decided against going with the status quo is because it felt presumptuous. Tomonobu Itakagi, leader of the Team Ninja game development studio under Tecmo publishing in Japan, did not seem to mind. He is a rather brazen and outspoken man himself. His *Master Ninja* moniker is ascribed to his actions and is not the self-aggrandisement one might expect it to be.

While visiting Tokyo we discovered that Tokyo is unexpectedly more foreign than imagined; that the Tokyo airport and Tokyo Park Hyatt hotel are 60km apart, which adds up to an unexpectedly expensive taxi ride, and that you can find a McDonalds anywhere but there is no guarantee the

menu will be in English. We were invited by Microsoft to the Land of the Rising Sun With a far-reaching preceding reputation, Itagaki may not be a household name in gaming. But that is not for lack of trying or lack of scandal. He wears sunglasses while gambling to "Stop people from reading his mind". His leather boots and leather jacket (with frills) make a regular appearance during interviews. They have become quite the *item* to have when dealing with the Western press. In 2006, a female former Tecmo employee filed a sexual harassment suit against Itagaki, claiming sexual advances since 2003. This issue was investigated. Tecmo found in favour of Itagaki claiming the accusations were "Solely the venting of the female employee's frustrations over personal affairs". It's enough to make *anyone* interested.

From the outside, Team Ninja is invisible. Nothing gives away that games are being produced in the office building where the studio hides. Team Ninja itself only takes up a single floor, almost modest in comparison to most studios of the same calibre. As we file in, we catch sight of Itagaki casting a worried glance at the journalists. Much how a museum curator looks at the next batch of school field-trip children arriving.

We are settled into a small room containing some couches, a big LCD screen with a 360 hooked up, some industry awards on a shelf and air that betrays Itagaki's smoking habit. The Master Chief figurine to one side looks oddly smug. An unassuming individual tries to sneak into the room (as we all watch him every step of the way) and ends up fiddling with the 360. He adjusts some settings in the debug menu of the *Ninja Gaiden II* preview we're scheduled to see, setting all the weapons to *Level 3*. Later we would find out that this was for demonstration purpose only, as the enemies have yet to be 'toned down'. Part of the process for play-testing and fine-tuning *Gaiden II*'s difficulty

levels is to restrict enemies to certain moves on the easier settings. Our wait is cut short by the news that Itagaki is having lunch but will be with us shortly. And so he was.

Introductions are made, an interesting process due to the addition of a translator. We are told that what we are to see is a game only 55% complete. Later during personal playtime with the game's full first level, the remaining percent is speculated to be the remaining levels and enemies. What we played looked 100% to us.

As Itagaki plays he annotates: saving your game now heals you; there are ample tutorials to ease people into the game; the game will be released with support for ten languages (mostly through subtitles); there will be four difficulty levels (two at start, two more unlocked via completion); and that they can confirm the game will have 14 chapters. Itagaki makes *Gaiden II* look easy but we're not fooled. Half of our group is given leave to go play the first level of the game in the other room, while the rest stay behind for the interview. We would swap in half an hour.



TRAILER ON THE DVD

OBLIGATORY GAME DETAILS

Name: *Ninja Gaiden II*
Developer: Team Ninja
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Platforms: Xbox 360
Release date: TBA 2008
Genre: Action-adventure



Arcades are still prolific in Tokyo, but highly specialised



ORIGINAL NINJA ORIGINS

The history of Tecmo starts with Tehkan Ltd. founded in 1967. It supplied cleaning equipment. In 1969 the company started selling pachinko "amusement machines" as well. Tehkan Ltd. changed its name to U.S. Tehkan Inc in 1981. One month later it released its first arcade game, *Pleiads* (which was by all accounts a *Galaxian* clone in Japan). Tehkan continued to release games, mostly clones of *Pac-Man*, *Battlezone* and *Galaga*. In the mid 1980s, Tehkan was renamed to Tecmo.

By 1987 Tecmo had released consecutive successive hit titles such as *Bomb Jack*, *Solomon's Key*, *Gridiron Fight* and *Rygar*. All except *Gridiron Fight* were the work of Yoshiaki Inose. All three games were hard enough to chip teeth. Yoshiaki Inose would later be titled as the mentor of Itagaki. *Tecmo Bowl* arrived in 1987 and became a huge success with its refinements on *Gridiron Fight*. The newly formed Team Strong, led by Suichi Sakurazaki, created *Ninja Ryukenden*: an arcade title and *Double Dragon* clone with a special button for jumping.

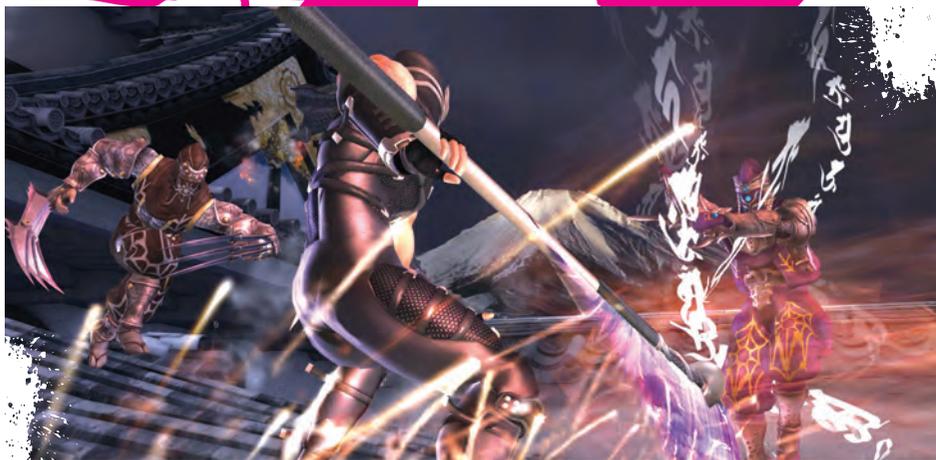
Hard doesn't begin to describe *Ninja Ryukenden*, which was made easier and renamed to *Ninja Gaiden* for its US debut. Tecmo also ported their arcade titles to the popular Nintendo Entertainment System back then. *Rygar* did especially well in a slightly modified form. When it came to porting *Ninja Gaiden*, Sakurazaki opted to change the game design. Instead of an arcade brawler with jumping, *Ninja Gaiden* became a tightly controlled action-platformer. Sakurazaki also created 20 minutes of animated cinematic cut-scenes for it, a first for any game on the NES. Seventeen months later, *Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos* was released.

But after three *Gaiden* games, Sakurazaki was done with the series. A designer on the first two NES games in the series took over writing and directing for the third game: *Ninja Gaiden III: Ancient Ship of Doom*. At this point, diminishing returns led Tecmo to licence the franchise. SEGA made the purchase but *Ninja Gaiden* for the Master system did badly. The plans for a Genesis version of the arcade original never made it past Beta. By 1992, SEGA gave up on the franchise.

After five years of no fiscal joy, Tecmo went public with less than 500 employees. Upper management caught wind of the success SEGA's *Virtua Fighter* was enjoying in arcades by 1993. Wanting some of the pie, they ordered that a clone be developed. By that time, Team Ninja (assembled to port the NES *Gaiden* trilogy to the Super Nintendo Entertainment system) had gained a reputation. The reputation primarily seemed to be the result of Tomonubu Itagaki (who got his claim to fame by working on the SNES port of *Tecmo Bowl*). Itagaki made a now-famous bet with the President of Tecmo that he could deliver a quality 3D fighter, so Team Ninja got the project. *Dead or Alive* released in arcades in 1996, running on the same SEGA-licensed hardware as *Virtua Fighter 2*. The game was a success, partly due to its innovations in the genre (such as a unique countering system) and partly due to the busty female characters. The game's title, *Dead or Alive*, was chosen by Itagaki to highlight his do-or-die attitude in game development. And the fact that if the game did badly, he would have lost his job. *Dead or Alive*'s menu option for adjusting the bounce in the chest-suspension systems of the female characters is worth a mention.

By 1999, Team Ninja considered revitalising the *Gaiden* franchise. It had been eight years since the last release of a *Gaiden* title. Released in 2004 and a "reboot" of the franchise, *Ninja Gaiden* represented Microsoft's premier Xbox console. Downloadable Hurricane Packs added new enemies, missions, weapons and combat techniques. These packs were later combined into the "Director's cut" version, *Ninja Gaiden Black*. *Gaiden* was remastered again for the more recent PlayStation 3 incarnation, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*. Itagaki's personal side-project, *Dead or Alive: Extreme Beach Volleyball*, is a constant source of various types of groans.

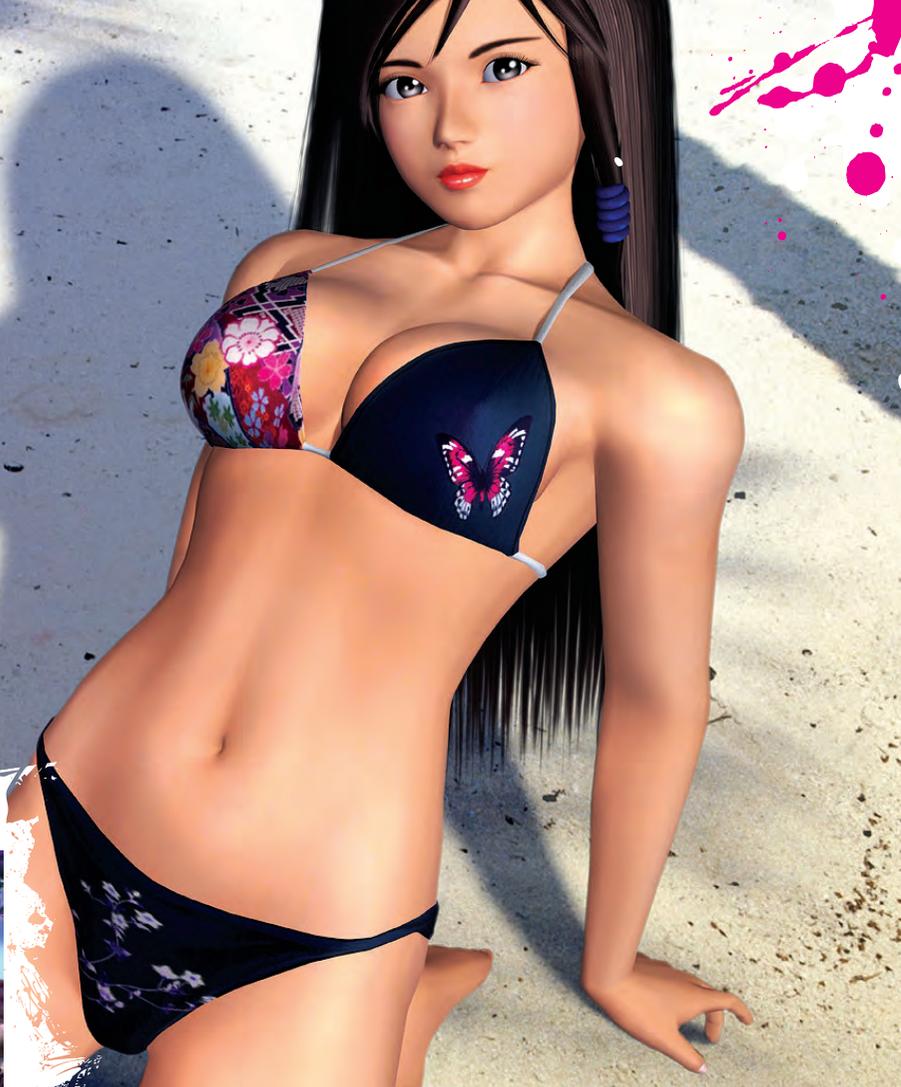
"A LOT OF DEVELOPERS TELL ME OFF THE RECORD, THAT THEY WANT TO DEVELOP GAMES FOR XBOX, BUT THEIR COMPANIES ARE TELLING THEM TO DEVELOP FOR THE PLAYSTATION 3"



OBLITERATION TECHNIQUE

In the first *Gaiden*, the Y button was primarily used to charge up an attack that would gain additional power from absorbed souls of the freshly fallen. By taking out a few enemies to provide the fuel, one could hold down Y and then unleash a devastating animation of Ryu going to town on a baddie. *Gaiden II* expands on this by giving the Y button a new purpose, namely the Obliteration technique.

By pressing Y near an enemy who is missing a limb that isn't the head, Ryu will automatically start ripping that enemy a new one. The camera moves to give you a more cinematic cut of the action, essentially making it a mini ass-kicking vignette served in a thick sauce of blood. It's an instant-kill and a damn fine way to get rid of that one ninja hobbling towards you, but even limbless enemies still want you dead. An enemy who is missing an arm or a leg can still and will fight. A single poke from them unbalances Ryu and opens up a world of hurt. Enemies are quick to take advantage of a disadvantaged Ryu. One might start to suspect it was designed that way. The Obliteration Technique heightens the choreographed feel of *Gaiden II* and provides a much-needed breather from the action. What it doesn't do is make the game any easier. It's just handy for the disposal of the handicapped.



Casual and easygoing, Itagaki asks as many questions as he is asked. He maintains a genuine interest in those asking the questions, never afraid to drop an anecdote or comment. We know Japanese developers have the odd inability to really utilize next-gen hardware, something that leaves Team Ninja as a bit of an anachronism. We queried Itagaki on this. Always ready to talk about studios other than his own, Itagaki admits that he feels that a lot of Japanese developers started work on the PlayStation, later moving to the PlayStation 2. "They don't have the experience of working on new architectures again and again. I've worked on tens of machines. It's all about going and looking at the bit of hardware and trying to find ways to run at its fullest", Itagaki comments without a trace of hubris. Itagaki is known for his harsh appraisals of gaming hardware and when Microsoft shipped the first Xbox dev kits to Tecmo in the closing months of 2000, he took to the platform immediately. On the subject, not many Japanese developers are working on 360 titles. Considering the global market changes in the 360's favour, we ask Itagaki if he considers this a mistake on behalf of the developers. "There are many factors involved", he muses, but continues, "A lot of developers tell me off the record they want to develop games for the Xbox, but their companies are telling them to develop for the PlayStation 3". Industry speculation aside, Itagaki has an answer for every question asked. On the topic of why his ninja aren't

as stealthy as the ninja the western world is familiar with, he remarks that "The stealth tree-jumping Ninja, the secret shadowy image, is not popular in Japan". "The high-level ninja are out in the open, they talk, and that's the cooler image", he remarks while grinning. "If you kill every person you meet, stealth is not a problem". Itagaki admits to playing a lot of games but being unimpressed with their slow animation. "I think that's good, but it's so slow." Games he personally enjoyed in the last few years include *Chibi Robo* (GameCube), *Earth Defense Force 2017* (360) and most surprisingly, *Pikmin 2* (GameCube). "I might be in the top three people who played *Pikmin 2* versus mode", he boasts after having just confided that he enjoys a bit of a drink when he plays his own creation, *Dead or Alive 4*, online against the world. It's time to swap with the other journalists, so we are given hands-on time with his creation while a few surreptitious employees take notes behind our backs. They occasionally swap a comment in Japanese, which leads to performance anxiety. We almost managed three successive play-throughs before being led on a tour of the studio. The game plays as well as one could hope and is violent, bloody, demanding yet mercifully devoid of that impression of somehow being cheated when the inevitable death occurs. *Gaiden II* then should succeed where *Gaiden* itself failed: being accessible to mortal men.

"ITAGAKI HIMSELF HAS ADMITTED THAT HE IS THE SOLE CREATIVE FORCE BEHIND TEAM NINJA, AND WE'RE INCLINED TO BELIEVE HIM."

The outside of Team Ninja



ITAGAKI CHRONICLES

Like most mortal men, Tomonobu Itagaki was born. In 1967, Japan. From there Itagaki graduated from Waseda University Senior High School in 1985. Then from Waseda University's School of Law in 1992. He is now married, his daughter born in 1997. He joined Tecmo in 1992 as a graphics programmer, getting his career breakthrough with *Dead or Alive* in 1996. He became leader of Team Ninja in 2001, heading up the newly formed Tecmo development team. Then he gained the title as Executive Officer of Tecmo in 2004. General Manager of the high-end production department followed in 2006.

Itagaki claims to be one of the few in the Japanese videogame industry to establish communications with the Western world. With an obsessive insistence on holding his games and his gamers to a higher standard, he likes to say that in other action games the enemies exist for you to kill. In *Ninja Gaiden*, the enemies exist to kill you. Yoshiaki Inose mentored Itagaki. Known as the man behind the *Solomon's Key*, *Bomb Jack* and *Rygar* methods of torture, Itagaki continues Inose's gospel of finely-tuned controls underlying a bouquet of unnervingly adept homicidal enemies.

NINJA SIDE-STORY

Ninja Gaiden, originally released in 2004 on Microsoft's Xbox platform, is a stunning yet tragically flawed game. With a purpose, we dusted off Microsoft's big black monolith, an experimental first foray into the gaming console market. We took another look at *Ninja Gaiden* just to be sure it really was as good as we remember it and as most publications painted it.

Ryu controls like a razor on ice. Lightning fast and responsive almost to a fault because it demands equal perfection from the user. The game gives no quarter and remains especially demanding after the likes of *God of War* (PS2), which only seemed challenging. The fatal flaw to this otherwise unparalleled action title lay in the sum of exacting demands but unwillingness to guide. *Gaiden* simply expects players to either step up, or get left behind.

Even Itagaki now admits it is an oversight based on personal proficiency. "I'm a hardcore gamer, so I made a hardcore game", Itagaki jokes. But perhaps with humble chagrin, he makes a big deal about *Gaiden II*'s tutorial system. It has videos showing what the move looks like, text explaining how to do the move, as well as an Achievement for doing the move correctly for the first time. The Achievement may be overkill, yet it is not out of place considering how Western developers love handing out natty achievements for the most trivial things.

The first *Ninja Gaiden* by Itagaki's hardcore hand was built to demand more from his gamers. As such, while the game gathered a lot of attention for many good reasons, it also left a limited personal impression on most who tried it. The game was simply too hard for the common proletariat. But even four years later, *Gaiden* rings as clear as a bell when struck with the gavel of inspection. And that's no simple feat.



"IN NINJA
GAIDEN, THE
ENEMIES EXIST
TO KILL YOU."





もつと魅せてあげる。

The only photo of the studio we were allowed to take



FEATURE: Ninja Garden II



遠町ビル
Kojimachi building : kudan minami 3-3-6

みらい国際特許事務所

飯田・栗宇・早稲本特許法律事務所

エフネス&アソシエイツ

キャラクター／トラベルビジョン／スカイパトラー／トラベルアイ

テクモ株式会社

株式会社 クラブメッド Club Med K.K.

株式会社 エス・シー・エム S.C.M. corporation

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BILINGUAL GROUP Ltd.

仰星監査法人

株式会社 CSリサーチ NET

株式会社 ブランネル

Somewhere on here it says Team Ninja, we're sure of it

The studio is room shaped like an L-shaped Tetris block. It contains near one hundred people sitting in neat tightly-packed rows. No dividers. No cubicles. Standing in a huddled group near the door and hushed with the warning to be quiet as "people are working", the entire operation is visible from our vantage point. Except the few employees sitting around the corner at the toe of the L-shape. We're not allowed to see what they're working on, actually. That's not part of the tour.

The entire operation has an almost audible hum of efficiency. If a programmer suddenly dies at his workspace, a claw will replace the spent cartridge with a fresh one dropped in from the ceiling. We're sure of it. At the head of this development column is Itagaki's table, flanked only by a table for his second in command. From his table he looks straight down the rows of employees. There is a giant Japanese naval flag behind him that represents the letter Z. It has greater context, we are told. In a specific Japanese battle, the flag was waved to symbolise the point of no return - win now, or forever be dead. There may be finer nuance lost in translation. Our guide and translator tells us that Itagaki likes to patrol up and down the isles dropping a comment here and there. It reminds us of the kitchens in *haute cuisine*: a pressure-cooker of underlings under the strict eye of the chef who has no margin for error. The hope of the underlings, in cuisine at least, is to be subjected to enough stringent punishment so as to be tempered with the required

discipline needed to succeed at cooking. The chef, incidentally, also leaves no room for doing things any way but his way. Itagaki himself has admitted that he is the sole creative force behind Team Ninja, and we're inclined to believe him.

Here is a man with the drive and required chutzpah to elbow his way to the top. It's not all just hot air either: Team Ninja delivers. It may only be our professional suspicion, but we also consider that Team Ninja probably delivers on time and on a dime. On time, most definitely. Team Ninja is a consistent Microsoft launch partner, delivering games at launch that other systems only manage a few generations along in their software line. As an example, *Dead or Alive 4* launched with the 360 and remains unsurpassed in terms of what the game offers in both function and visual fidelity. Very few studios can pull off this particular hat trick as consistently. The studio itself looks like the type of lean development engine that is practically unknown to the Western market.

After that, it was just the small matter of a traditional Japanese Grill aimed at impressing tourists, experiencing the horror that is full-body-contact karaoke, admiring the Konami building smouldering across the street as the Toyko fire brigade gesticulated to us wildly to move back, and trying to find our bus to the hotel while a Japanese pimp told us of his room full of girls. We extricated ourselves politely by pretending to be ignorant tourists looking for our bus. **NAG**

LAUNCHING PAD

BY THE TIME YOU read this, 2008's Game Developer Conference (GDC) will have taken place. Our coverage will only be in the next issue, but it's a fair bet that by now a few new games have been revealed and demonstrated. GDC has become a bit

of a gaming launch pad, being the first major game event of the year and the place where Microsoft unveiled the Xbox. With E3's more muted presence, GDC is likely to pack even more of a punch, as it's been doing for the past two or three years.

HIGHLANDER

Developer → Widescreen Games | Publisher → Eidos | Platforms → 360, PS3, PC | Genre → Action | Release → 2008

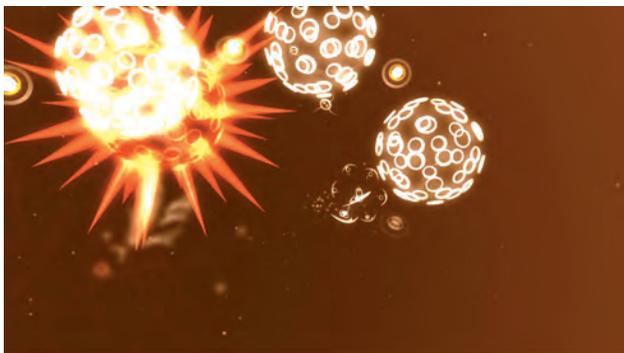
IT'S ABOUT TIME! WHILE there have been many rumors about this or that *Highlander* game, even a proposed MMO, the cult movie about immortals chopping off each other's heads to become 'the one' has rarely seen a game version. There have been two games – from 1986 and 1995 respectively – so it's about a decade later and a new one is due. Oddly enough the movies after the first sucked, so more games based on the series might seem dumb, but the premise is great. Widescreen Games hope to exploit this, featuring 77 characters and various quickening powers, though '2000 years of conflict' featuring only four regions (New York, Pompei, the medieval Highlands and feudal Japan) seems a bit limited. Still, it sounds like it has a lot of potential.



FLOW PSP

Developer → SuperVillian Studios | Publisher → Sony
Platforms → PSP | Genre → Zen | Release → 2008

SUPERVILLIAN STUDIOS, WHICH WAS responsible for the PlayStation 3's *flow* expansion, has been put in charge to port the calming game to the PSP. Naturally this is good news for anyone who has played *flow* and own a PSP. Nothing was quite as relaxing as floating around in an ocean, leisurely devouring lesser creatures and descending deeper to find larger prey. Sure, it lacked depth, but that's like saying *Rez* lacked rockets. Unlike the PS3 version, on the PSP *flow* will be controlled by the analog stick, which won't take away any of its appeal. Strangely enough, even though SuperVillian was responsible for the expansion, the PSP game will not feature that content. This seems a bit like a short-change scenario, especially if *flow* is going to be sold on a UMD and not some other means. The PS3 version was pretty cheap already, so will less content be alluring to the PSP owners? Then again, perhaps *flow* is worth getting anyway. There isn't anything else remotely like it on Sony's portable.



FAITH AND A .45

Developer → Deadline Games | Publisher → TBA
Platforms → Next Gen | Genre → Action | Release → TBA

THE TEAM THAT GAVE the world fun-if-flawed shooter *Total Overdose* has revealed its next project: an action-epic based during the Great Depression. Luke and Ruby are two outlaw lovers who have landed on the wrong side of a corrupt oil baron and his army of thugs. No real details take that further, but the developer's release calls *Faith and a .45* "a gritty, cross-country epic – a road journey with guns, a dark army of steel-plated vehicles, and armour-clad pyromaniacs." Further details from the developer talk about heavy co-operative gameplay, right down to Jack and Ruby applying a kiss of life if one of them keeled over during a fight. Yup, we can hear the sniggers over the game's chat channel already. But it sounds inventive and the style of the era certainly lends itself nicely to games. This should be good, providing Deadline can avoid the problems that other recent co-op games have suffered in the control department.

BATTLEFIELD HEROES

Developer → PAM | Publisher → 2K Sports | Platforms → 360, PS3 | Genre → Sport | Release → Q2 2008

PUBLISHERS ARE RUSHING AROUND to find more revenue streams – that much is obvious. You can deduce this simply by looking at the blooming stack of mobile releases and the way ‘casual gamer’ is being thrown around like it was a map to King Solomon’s mines. Then there is the innovative model pioneered by latter-day MMOs where micro-payments do most of the talking. Finally, we have in-game advertising. Now EA wants to experiment and throw the last three together in *Battlefield Heroes*. Yup, ramping off a major franchise, the game will be aimed at a casual crowd, thus sporting a more cartoonish *Team Fortress 2* look (we must admit, the increasing use of these art styles in games is great!). It will also be free to play, making its money from advertising and micro-payments. Players will be able to buy things to enhance their characters (mostly cosmetic), but EA has mentioned it expects 90% of the game’s players won’t buy stuff. That means the ads will do most of the work. If EA can spawn a mass-player phenomenon, it just might do the trick in that regard. Alas, this looks bound to only be available for U.S. and British gamers.



THIS IS VEGAS

Developer → Surreal | Publisher → Midway | Platforms → 360, PS3, PC | Genre → Sandbox | Release → 2008

WHEN MIDWAY REVEALED THAT *Stranglehold* cost around \$30 million to make, the publisher also added that a chunk of that change went into modifying the UE3 engine to its specs. The fruits of that labor are now becoming clear with *This Is Vegas*, Midway’s new action title and part of its quest to get more original IP under its name. The press release calls it a “lifestyle action game”, which is probably a pretentious attempt at skirting the ‘GTA-clone’ label. But that connection is inevitable, as players will be able to drive and party around Vegas, gambling, drinking, fighting and getting into all sorts of trouble. No plot has been revealed, but there’s bound to be some yarn making excuses for the action the game will deliver. The screenshots definitely look very good and the engine is starting to shine (not that it was shabby at all in *Stranglehold*).



WHAT WE WANT

WII LIGHTGUN GAMES

The Wii is great, the games aren’t. When Nintendo recently released a list of games that have sold a million or more units on the console, the absolute majority were from Nintendo’s own studios. The third-party stuff is generally weak and not that abundant. Sure, the studios need time to get to grips with the console’s new paradigms, but should things really be going this slowly? One genre that freakishly has seen very little action on a machine that would perfectly for it is the Light Gun group. You know, *Time Crisis*, *House of the Dead* and anything else that boils down to ‘point and shoot’. Yeah, sure, a Wii lightgun peripheral is on its way, but the Wiimote needs no help to do this. The problem is that, given its strength and ability, you’d think there would be tons of shooter titles in the works for the Wii.

360 CUSTOM THEMES

NAG loves the 360, probably because *NAG* loves the PC and the 360 is a gaming PC that doesn’t crash or cost you a bundle. So it’s ironic that the PlayStation 3 is much better at adapting to certain PC concepts, specifically user modification. You can upgrade its hard drive without a problem and with a drive of your choosing, the PS3 version of *Unreal Tournament III* supports user mods and, best of all, the PS3 supports user-made themes. You can download them off the web to a flash drive or directly to your console. The 360, on the other hand, expects you to pay for a rather dismal collection of themes on LIVE; the free ones can be counted on one hand.

A BETTER PS3 CONTROLLER

We play it fair here at *NAG* towers, so the PS3 also gets a slap on the wrist. The platform is settling in quite nicely and looks like it will, indeed, be a serious contender. But it is time for Sony to address its last remaining major folly: the controller. Yes, okay, rumble is returning. But the SIXAXIS is still the Dual Shock, which is still to a large degree the same controller that shipped with the original PlayStation. In terms of technology it has improved, but its form and design has not. For starters, it could be a little bit bigger. At the very least, a bigger model as an extra purchase won’t be a bad move. Then there are those two ‘triggers’, which are frankly just rubbish. Sony should bite the bullet and adapt to the triggers Microsoft and Nintendo prefer, because they are much more complimentary to your finger’s sense of pressure. Finally, how about a long, loose cable with the USB connectors on the end? A cheap one, please, or maybe just a chorded version of the Sixaxis. Not everyone adores wireless.

AN END TO THE WRITER’S STRIKE

Can someone go and pay the American Writers Guild (Writers’ Guild of America, whatever) people the money they want? At the time of writing, the negotiations for the strike were at a certain important point. You know, that period where the men in suits say an agreement is imminent. Usually that means that they are not. We wouldn’t normally care – we can sit through plenty of *Weeds* and *Dexter* re-runs for the time being, but because of the strike only half of *LOST*’s 16 episode fourth season have been made. The show’s producers already promised that the new seasons will now be continuous with no break in the middle (probably because of all the death threats they received when the breaks kicked in). Now the strike might derail that and Season 4 could pause between episodes 8 and 9. Sigh. See? Jack looks like he’s verging on a mental episode again.

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

SPECS

SIZE

46" (117cm)

RESOLUTION

Full HD 1080p (1,920 x 1,080)

CONTRAST RATIO

15,000:1 (dynamic)

RESPONSE TIME

8ms

VIEWING ANGLE (H/V)

178/178

POSTPROCESSOR

DNLe

INPUTS

HDMI x 3, Composite x 2,

Component x 2, S-video, VGA

www.samsung.co.za

SAMSUNG

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The mudbath did wonders for his skin

BOGWASHED!

Condemned 2 is proud to introduce environmental kills, the hottest thing in human disposal. You'll be able to drag your squirming prey over to a toilet, crack his head against it, and drown him in effluent. Smells a bit like *Manhunt*, but developer Monolith remains blithely unconcerned about the looming certification. "It's a toilet," said a representative in a recent interview. "When you do it, you'll laugh." We're totally reassured.



ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON

When he isn't bashing faces with spades, Ethan Thomas likes to dabble in a spot of casual crime scene investigation. Just because the planet is apparently overrun with the rotting, zombieified monsters is no reason to abandon the worthy ideals of the FBI Special Crimes Unit – and determining that the body lying in a nearby dumpster oozing bullets is likely the victim of a gun-related attack might be all the difference between now and then.

Using an array of *CSI* gadgetry (mostly a UV light), Thomas must poke and prod cadavers for clues, and answer a series of multiple choice questions afterwards. So it's a bit like a biology prac, but with more dead humans.

CONDEMNED 2: BLOODSHOT

LIFE JUST HASN'T BEEN kind to Ethan Thomas, the lead character from Monolith's excellent horror game *Condemned*. But what else did anyone expect? He had to do a lot of intense fighting and surviving while tracking down the creepy Leland Vanhorn, leaving a broken man who has taken to alcohol and living on the street to ease the pain. But the horrors of the first game are not going to let him go and a year later, Ethan has to go looking for his former partner, Darcy, who has gone missing. Leland is back as well, but it's not likely he's the main drive behind this new dose of horror.

Suitably, *Condemned 2* starts with you slapping away a bum's helpful hand as he wakes you in the alley you chose to sleep in. The following few minutes of interaction act as a mini tutorial. Ethan can now choose to respond to certain comments with the press of a button, but he can ignore them as well. It's a small thing, but a nice touch especially

since the reactions are pretty good. Soon enough he's caught in an enclosed area and crazy people are climbing the fences. Enter the combat tutorial. Like the first game, fighting is in your face and incredibly violent. You can drop combinations of punches on an opponent or arm yourself with a pipe, plank or other blunt instrument. Firearms are, as always, rare and extremely lethal.

Condemned 2 is really tough and a lot of time was spent clawing through the preview code. But it showed enough. The atmosphere makes your skin crawl, the enemy confrontations are intense, the new environment kills are as functional as they are extreme and you can cut the air of unpleasant mystery with a knife. This sequel boosts interaction with the environment and turns everything else about the first game up a notch. *Condemned 2* left us with a very bad feeling, which means it's going to be really good. **NAG**

James Francis



TRAILER ON THE DVD

SPATTERING A BIG SCREEN NEAR YOU

Yes, there's going to be a film! Well, not so much "based upon" and more "inspired by", and it's going to be called *The Unforgettable* instead of *Condemned*, but Ethan Thomas (or a reasonable facsimile thereof) will be bashing tramps (or perhaps something less controversial, like Afghani terrorists) at your local cinema courtesy of Warner Bros. *Cell* director Tarsem Singh has signed on as director, so it's probably going to be a box office bomb with some nice visuals. Unless it's cancelled. You read it in **NAG** first.





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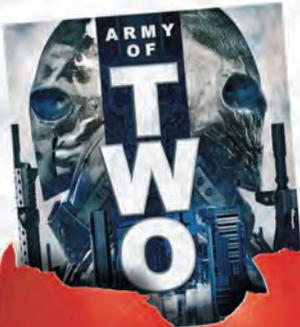
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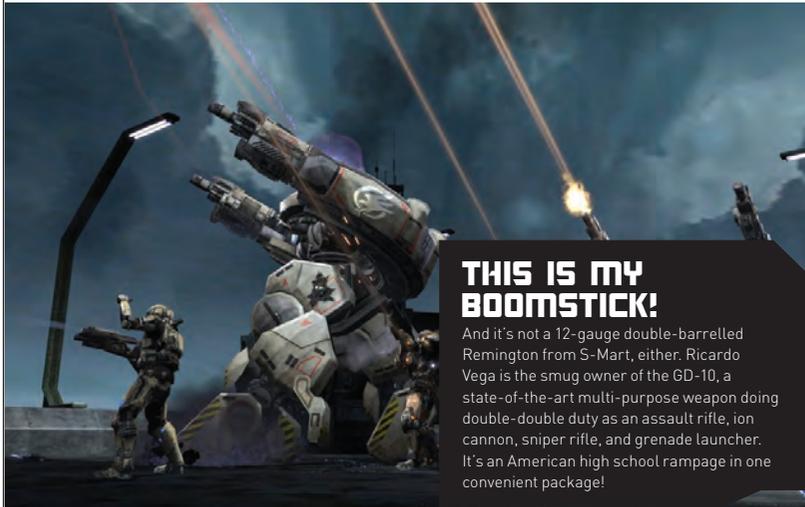


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Paper! NO! Scissors!

TIBERIUM

SINCE ITS INCEPTION BACK in 1995, the *Command & Conquer* machine has belched out some fifteen games, expansions, and spin-offs in a franchise frenzy of *Star Wars* proportions. It's really only a matter of time until we find Brotherhood of Nod-scented candles for sale over at commandandconquer.com. In the meantime, however, EA's development drones are buzzing busily around sixteenth instalment *Tiberium*, a tactical FPS based on characters from the novel *Tiberium Wars*, inspired by the *C&C* entry of the same title. Which isn't actually really as confusing as it sounds.

Anyway, it's now eleven years following the Third Tiberium War. Somewhere out in the dusty wastes of the Mediterranean floor, Forward Battle Commander Ricardo Vega is doing his bit for the Global Defense Initiative. Having been rudely yanked out of retirement, Vega is assigned a crew, a mission, a jet pack, some sort of fancy shapeshifting gun,

and a big invisible sign over his head saying "SCRINBAIT". Mounds of flyblown corpses lie rotting just beyond the metaphorical horizon.

Because it's all the rage these days, *Tiberium* is powered by Epic's Unreal Engine 3, and much like recent UE3 *l'enfant horrible* *Gears of War*, trots out one of those rad cover systems that make games without cover systems feel lame. There's no urban warfare like urban warfare with a concrete block to cower and cry behind. Your brutal forward offensive, meanwhile, relies on your expert command of up to four squads, including infantry, armoured, and airborne units. Think *Ghost Recon* with sci-fi texturing and evil aliens.

Multiplayer specifications are still scarce, but will apparently provide happy fragging for eight players, and include the same squad-based action featured in the single-player campaign. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl



TRAILER
ON THE DVD

LOUD AND CLEAR

Tiberium features ASX (or "adaptive surround experience"), an advanced predictive audio system that uses hard sums to determine what sort of sound to play. If you find yourself embattled and hopelessly outnumbered, you can at least bleed out to the mournful lament of a violin.

IF THIS SMELLS FAMILIAR

It's because, contrary to what lesser publications might have you believe, *Tiberium* is not the first shooter in the *C&C* saga. In 2002, Westwood released *Renegade*, a first- and third-person shooter set during the First Tiberium War. Storywise, the game follows the boots of GDI commando Nick "Havoc" Parker, who is deployed to rescue a bunch of scientists from the Brotherhood of Nod. Westwood had intended to do a *Renegade 2*, but the project was cancelled when the company was eaten by EA.



LOST ODYSSEY

LIFE CAN BE A pain if you are an immortal. It sure didn't seem to do much for Kaim Argonar, a melancholy warrior who seems rather nonplussed that he won't die easily. He discovers his immortality when, during a massive battle staged in *Lost Odyssey's* opening sequence, a meteorite comes plummeting down, obliterating most of the feuding armies. Kaim walks out without a scratch. Later we discover that other happier immortals are also around. The plucky and sexy female warrior, Seth Balmore, seems much more up-beat, but she wrestles with the same problem as Kaim: general amnesia about their individual pasts. After the rock fell to Earth, the rulers of the land in this age of magic-meets-industry send the two, along with magician thief Jesper, to Grand Staff, the be-all-and-end-all of the kingdom's magic defence, to check if something is wrong there.

Since this is a traditional Japanese RPG, to get through the above plot takes a few hours, especially since a lot more happens. Kaim's memories come back in dreams. The kingdom council are in defiance of each other. Seth used to be a pirate. Basically, big things are afoot.

To uncover those big things, we enter the world of *Lost Odyssey*, the first real JRPG from *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi since he left Square-Enix. Granted, his new studio Mistwalker already produced *Blue Dragon*, but that project was really handled by Artoon with Mistwalker supervising. Powered by the Unreal Engine 3, this is the one that plans to make the studio's mark on the 360 audience (and hopefully boost flagging Japanese console sales).

The bad news is that if you wanted something new (and you were giddy about the chances *Final Fantasy XIII* took with its Gambit system), *Lost Odyssey* won't impress. It stays very close to the genre line. The good news is that you shouldn't expect your JRPG earth to tremble. Mistwalker's new game looks exactly like what you'd enjoy. There is

plenty of walking around to find out where to go and what to do, culminating in dramatic in-game cut-scenes that push the story forward. These can be quite extensive: one of the first bosses you encounter, a worm thing at Grand Staff, has no less than three cut-scenes preceding it back to back. Fortunately the game works that UE3 magic quite nicely. While it would be nice to add more animations to walking through doors or characters' lips moving during combat, during cut-scenes faces are expressive and the models are nicely detailed. While playing, things look good as well, but *Lost Odyssey* doesn't really push hard and in the end it still feels like a PS2 game made pretty. That said, JRPG fans prefer substance over style and this game has that.

The combat system is also fairly generic, but it has a few surprises. Using formations, you can select where party characters stand. This impacts how they affect each other and also determines how well defended they are (the front characters give back ones a defence bonus). Immortal characters are unable to learn skills, but they can link to the skills of mortals – something worth remembering for battles as well. Finally, *Lost Odyssey* has a new ring system: through the game there are rings, recipes for rings and components to make rings. Rings enhance attacks and have a variety of effects, while the recipes promise to allow a wide range of combinations (providing you can find all the components). Rings also introduce a timing mechanism for fights that is simple to learn and really effective once mastered. One annoying aspect is that Mistwalker opted to go back to random combat encounters, so you don't see the enemy coming and your journey is frequently interrupted by battles. It would also have been nice if we could start seeing all your party characters while running around.

Lost Odyssey will be an epic game,

spanning 4 DVDs. It won't break the mould and it certainly won't give non-fans a reason to get into JRPG titles. But it's the closest thing to a traditional *Final Fantasy* experience and should appeal to the loyalists. **NAG**

James Francis



TRAILER
ON THE DVD





DON KING PRESENTS: PRIZEFIGHTER

Developer → Venom Games | Publisher → 2K Games | Genre → Sport | Release → 2008

WELL, THERE IS GOOD news and bad news here. The bad news is that Don King is making waves again. The good news is that this time it involves a certain videogame that will be named in his honour and it looks to be a complete knock out!

Don King Presents: Prizefighter promises to be one of the most challenging and in-depth boxing simulations to date with an emphasis on what real boxers would face in and out of the ring. The game is set to be a documentary-style game, which is where Don King lends his name and opinions. It is being developed by one of 2K's development houses in the UK called Venom Games, which just so happens to also be also responsible for the various Rocky games.

The game features more than 30 of the world's top boxers along with various pugilists like Larry Holmes and James Braddock. What makes this game interesting is that players will be faced with dilemmas which Don King thinks real boxers are faced with (such as greed or skills). This means that players will have to make a choice whether to hit the gyms and train for their next match or hit the presses, gain notoriety, and earn more money for each fight. The former would of course make the matches easier while the latter will increase prize money. It is an interesting combination that sounds like it might revolutionise the boxing genre. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



JUMPER

Developer → Brash Entertainment | Publisher → Eidos Interactive | Genre → Action | Release → Q1 2008

Jumper (n): Human featuring genetic abnormalities enabling instant global teleportation.

ACCORDING TO THE NOVELS of the same name by author Steven Gould, on which both the film and the game are based, Jumpers have been around for centuries. Hunted down by the Paladins, a secret group of people under the impression that the world would be a better place without them, the number of adult Jumpers is dwindling fast. An all-out war has erupted between the two sides and everything is about to get very messy.

While the movie, directed by Doug Liman (director of both *The Bourne Identity* and *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*), follows the story

of Jumper David Rice (played by Hayden Christensen), the game is a prequel to the film and tells the story of his co-star, Griffin (Jamie Bell).

Having made his first Jump at age five, and having been on the run since he was nine, Griffin has a bone to pick with the Paladins who were responsible for his parents' demise. From his undiscovered lair in the Sahara Desert, Griffin is planning to take out his arch nemesis, the leader of the Paladins, Roland. But taking on the Paladins will not be a simple task, especially as they have developed the sixth sense to know when a Jumper is about to Jump in the vicinity as well as a whole range of weapons specifically designed to capture and kill Jumpers.

The game is claiming to come packed with a whole bunch of features that your character can use in those sticky situations. Griffin's Jump Ability is a given, and players can make use of this special talent to either teleport enemies to deadly locations or teleport themselves instantly within fighting range of foes. There are also more skills and combination moves that can be unlocked through gameplay within the five locations around the world, including the Coliseum, Tokyo and Griffin's Sahara Desert lair.

Both the film and the game are set to be released within the same month, and with both holding a lot of promise, let's hope neither disappoints. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB



TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY

Developer → Spark Unlimited | Publisher → Codemasters | Genre → Action | Release → March 2008

TRAILER ON THE DVD



THINGS COULD HAVE GONE bad – really bad. Apparently, during the thirties, a young diplomat named Winston Churchill was hit by a taxi in New York. He survived, but walked with a cane ever since. What if Churchill was killed? He did end up becoming Prime Minister of the UK and had a lot to do with the Nazis not taking over England. In *Turning Point* that small bit of history is twisted for a what-if scenario. Basically it's an excuse to put Nazis in New York – any excuse to shoot at them, really.

Judging by the preview code sent to *NAG*, though, this battle is not going to have the flash and bang that *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* brought to the table. Then again, is it really going for that market? Things are a

bit more fantastical, but for the brief bit we were able to play before a bug stopped the action short, *Turning Point* is going to be a more mechanical FPS where shooting is emphasised over ducking behind cover.

The idea is pretty novel and the game's intro is well done. The controls need work though: the difference between medium and high sensitivity is literally a matter of whether you prefer sluggish movement or something on ice. The guns also don't seem to move as you walk around, an animation oversight we hope gets fixed. Clambering around using a Riddick third-person camera is nice, but it jerks in and out of the character far too frequently (annoying when you climb two or three things right



after each other). Objectives are also not quite obvious and there seem to be little investment in indicators to help players into the right direction, (but this could be because of the unfinished status of the code). So there's a lot of work to be done, but judging by a statement from Spark Unlimited after players balked at the demo, quite a lot is being refined and fixed for the final release.

That might just do it. *Turning Point* doesn't appear to be a terrible shooter, but it has a few problems that could cost it dearly in the pedantic FPS market. A lot of the ideas are quite nice, but this looks to be more of a gap-filler until the next big thing comes along. **NAG**

James Francis

- PC
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ROBERT LUDLUM'S THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

Developer → High Moon Studios | Publisher → Vivendi Games | Genre → Action | Release → 2008

I F YOU SOMEHOW MANAGED to crawl into a hole and disappear long enough to miss the epic trilogy, *The Bourne Identity*, *Supremacy* and *Ultimatum*, it is time for a quick education. In a nutshell, Jason Bourne, a "30-million-dollar weapon" thought up by author Robert Ludlum and brought to life by Matt Damon on screen, is a Treadstone agent (read: CIA spy and assassin) who has lost his memory and is on the run from his own agency, which is rabidly hunting him down. Bourne, however, is hardly about to allow himself to be caught and is using every piece of his training to stay on the run and figure out what the hell happened to him.

Being based on both the novels and *The Bourne Identity* film, the game

doesn't intend to follow on from the movie franchise but, instead, start its own in a somewhat prequel fashion. High Moon Studios was, thankfully, intelligent enough to not attempt to fix what isn't broken and so have used both the fight coordinator from the films, Damon Caro, as well as the main writer, Tony Gilroy, to give the fans just what made them love the movies in the first place. Matt Damon's likeness, however, is not being used simply because he has already spoken about moving away from the *Bourne* titles.

To allow players to truly "experience the very moment [Bourne] became a malfunctioning weapon," the developers have set the game sometime before the beginning of *The Bourne Identity*. Played in

the third person, *The Bourne Conspiracy* is promising loads of action with the character switching seamlessly between loaded weapons and hand-to-hand combat. An Adrenaline Meter, filled by pulling off successive hits or headshots, has been added to the mix for those impressive final moves from our hero, as well as an Awareness System which highlights parts of the environment that can be used on the oncoming enemies (of which there will be many).

With Escape and Evade missions, timed levels that Bourne needs to complete, and a 'shaky camera' (included to give the game a more immersing effect), it is probably a safe bet to look forward to this title. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB



FIFA STREET 3

Developer → EA Canada | Publisher → EA Sports | Genre → Sport | Release → March 2008

T HE LAST FIFA STREET game was released two years ago. It was a bitter disappointment to some who thought it was too repetitive and buggy with a less-than-average framerate. EA Canada has just finished the third instalment, which should bring life back to the series. The game has many of the old aspects that made the series fun, such as the Gamebreaker. This ability allows players to blast through any defence after they have built up power by completing

various tricks. Unfortunately, players will not be able to do many of the more flamboyant tackles. The reason for this is that EA didn't want to see its best players being tackled hard on cement pavements. This doesn't really look as if it will affect the gameplay, as the game is fast and action packed.

FIFA Street 3 also seems to be taking a different approach in terms of graphics compared to previous titles. EA hired caricature artists to design the various

players, and while they will not really look like their real-life counterparts, players will quickly be able to spot the familiar doppelgangers.

The game will also feature a variety of online and offline modes to sweeten the deal. But will it bring the series back on track and attract fans? Hopefully. After all, you have to make mistakes, but it's usually best to only make them once. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

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Q&A: LOST

THE VIDEO GAME

Egads, it's another license game. But let's not be hasty. Some of these franchise table-droppings have not been bad, especially when it comes to the television front. The *CSI* games weren't spectacular, but fans were occupied. The *24* game turned out to be pretty solid, even garnering a *NAG* cover. Now it is time for *Lost*, the popular mystery/sci-fi/character drama series, to jump to the virtual stage. Fortunately, *Lost: The Game* looks to be in good hands – the skilled crafters at Ubisoft Montreal – who took the time to answer a few questions in this syndicated interview. Giving fans some insights are producer Gadi Pollack, creative director Nicolas Eypert and writer Kevin Shortt.

Does the game take place at any specific point in the television series, or is it a standalone experience set in the *Lost* "universe"?

We begin our story with the plane crash of Oceanic Flight 815, the same plane crash that brought Jack, Kate and the castaways to the island. From there, our game takes its own unique journey. But along the way, players will experience many of the memorable moments from the TV show.

It was important to us that fans be able to play the game and figure out where they are in relation to the storyline of the TV series. It won't always be immediately apparent, but then part of the fun is putting the pieces together to determine exactly where the game fits with the television series.

Tell us about the sort of gameplay we can expect – is it first-person, third-person, point-and-click...?

LOST is a 3rd person adventure/survival game featuring a first person observation camera. We wanted to make sure that the character can be controlled easily in 3rd person, and also that when you want check details and look for clues you can do it easily using the first person view.

You, the player, must use your flashbacks to help you on the island. You search for clue that will help you find a way off the island. All the while, you have to confront the many threats on the island such as the Black Smoke and the "Others".



23

4

Who are you playing in the game?

You are playing a castaway from Oceanic Flight 815. You've crashed with the other *Lost* castaways. Rather than go the usual route of playing the characters of the show way, we introduced a new character with his own mysterious past. We did that so that while playing the game you get the feeling of discovering your character like you did when watching the TV show when you discovered the characters from the cast.

You soon realise that you seem to be on this island for a reason. But what is that reason? Just like other characters on the show, the player will need to explore his past (in the form of flashbacks) to understand why he's on the island and what he must do if he's to survive the island and maybe find a way home.

Please give us some examples of some tasks players can expect to perform in *Lost*. How will they unfold for the character? What will the gameplay element be like?

The game content is similar to the TV show, there is interaction with the Losties in dialogues, there is intense action and of course mysteries and puzzles.

Discussing with the Losties (and Others!) will be your primary way of discovering clues and making things happen. In the game, the Losties won't always be kind to you; sometimes they will be suspicious, threatening and possibly even violent. You'll have to convince them and yourself that your actions are honourable.

The action of the game often comes from the Island itself. Your tracking skills will be put to the test as you cross jungle, exploring your surroundings and discovering locations. But remember this is *LOST* so there are threats around every Yucca tree.

Interior locations on the Island will offer you some cover but it doesn't mean the player won't be challenged. You'll be faced with puzzles, some timed, like repairing gear under pressure and accessing computers...

What can you tell us about the player's character and his journey (assuming it has to be a "he")? Why did you choose this path?

Flashbacks are a signature of the *LOST* TV series. So it was important to us to include flashbacks in the game. Like the TV show, we wanted flashbacks to reveal layers of the character's flawed past, glimpses that offer insights into who he was before the island and why he is on this island now.

If Elliott, our main character, hopes to find a way off the island, he must first understand his past and what brought him to the island. He must learn from his past mistakes and apply what's learned to events on the island.

In *LOST*, the creators of the show and our development team decided to make our hero amnesiac when he first crash lands. We've seen this before in video games and at first we were hesitant to go this route. But we realised it was a particularly good fit for *LOST*.

On the TV show, flashbacks reveal events from the characters' past. It's new information to the viewers, but it's not new information to the characters. They are simply remembering a moment from their past.

But for the game, we wanted players to experience events alongside Elliott, to discover things as our main character does.

He acts one way on the island, but we see a different side to him when we meet him in flashbacks – a side he's forgotten.

We wanted the player and Elliott to have the same journey through the game.

Will players discover any extra information relating to the show's big secrets, or perhaps completely uncover them?

I'd love to say that all will be revealed in the *LOST* video game, but it's probably best to let the show reveal those secrets. However, everything that happens to the player will add a layer to the *LOST* universe. The *Lost* game isn't a tangent from the show. It does fit within the world of Kate, Jack and all the Losties. The game might help fans with their many theories and hypotheses about the mysteries of the island.

The player will be able to visit familiar locations on the island, explore the hatches, access the computers, search the underground caves, and survive in the jungle.

With the first-person observation camera, you are free to closely inspect the details of the world of *Lost*, looking for clues. And there's a few interesting Easter Eggs and locations that fans will be surprised to see.

How involve are the *Lost* TV show team in the development of the game? What has been the best idea for the game that the *Lost* TV show people have come up with? What's the best/worst thing about working with them?

The team at ABC has been collaborative since the beginning, which isn't always the case. I've worked on several license titles and this is the first time I've seen such great input from the creators.

We brought on a writer from the show, Dawn Kelly. Together with Dawn, the Ubisoft writers came up with a story idea we then presented to the series producers. Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, *Lost's* Executive Producers, provided a lot of great feedback and suggestions on the story. They are not only fans of videogames but have also done their own analysis of the differences in games verses television. Any time we needed to make adjustments for gameplay, they were always ready to help us find that right balance. This was a great help to the development team.



They came with a great idea for the end of the game, that I obviously cannot reveal but it is pure "Lost style." (That's also why we are making sure everybody will be able to finish the game, so that all players get the full experience).

The best thing about working with the *Lost* team is their positive environment. When you get in the room with them, the energy's palpable. There are no bad ideas. They're open to everything. It helps you arrive at a place where great ideas are allowed to percolate to the top. When we present them out new ideas, they bounce back on them instantaneously.

The worst thing about working with the *Lost* team? They have too many good ideas ;-). And that we don't have meetings with the producers and writers in Hawaii—but our bags are packed just in case.

What game engine does *Lost* use? Were there any interesting technical challenges?

LOST uses the *GRAW2* engine. The first challenge was to decide on which Engine to use. We chose the engine used for *GRAW*. It had a proven track record for delivering next-gen quality graphics; it worked on Xbox360, was easily adapted to PC, and was at the time being ported to PS3 for *GRAW2* and *Beowulf*.

The next biggest challenge came from the *Lost* Island itself. Even though the engine had a great feature set, it was really designed for flatter urban environments. For *Lost*, we needed something more organic – beaches, water, and of course, lots and lots of trees. We developed tools for our artists to create these environments quickly and painlessly. On the engineering side, we are working very hard to optimize every bit of the engine to handle large maps full of very life-like foliage. The Island is a character in both the show and in our game so we think players will really appreciate how alive it feels.

Were you fans of *Lost* before you started work on the game?

The show is quite popular among gamers everywhere so it was easy to find people interested in working on the game. The core team has re-watched all of the episodes countless times and every new member of the team is given access to the DVDs of past seasons for reference and inspiration. During the regular season, the day after an episode aired, the studio was generally charged with discussions, theories and reading messages boards – actually it's a good thing the season has ended so we can get back to the business of making the game.

What did you consider to be the vital elements of the *Lost* TV show formula that you had to maintain to ensure the game felt faithful?

At its core, *Lost* is about the castaways and their lives on the island. So it was important for us to allow players to interact with many of their favourite characters from the show. A signature of the show is the flashback where we learn past secrets from the castaways' lives. We will be including playable flashbacks in the game and players will need to use these to help them solve problems on the island and to understand what happened to them before landing on the island. So some parts of our story will be happening off the island – and if you look carefully, you may spot some familiar castaways in those flashbacks.

Overall, we felt it was vital that we kept to the rules of the TV show. The Black Smoke Monster has to follow the same rules as the show uses. The Dharma Initiative hatches should look as they do on the series. Anything we put in the game needs to fit with the show. Along with the producers of *Lost*, we agreed from the start that the game can't be viewed as a little side project that doesn't count. The game does count and things you learn in the game can be applied to fans' theories about the *Lost* universe. **NAG**

16





WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 08 [360]

Chris, the art director, finally broke down and decided he needed a sports game for his 360. He opted for golf, probably because doing the real thing in Jo'burg these days makes you an excellent target for a lightning bolt. Training his rookie from the ground up, he soon tried out a feature where a 3D face is built from a photo you sent in. He was so impressed, he did George Dubya next. Now he's planning to create his private collection of historical dictators. Did Stalin ever play golf? He will soon. Unfortunately we can't find a photo of Julius Ceasar, even on Google.

TUROK [360]

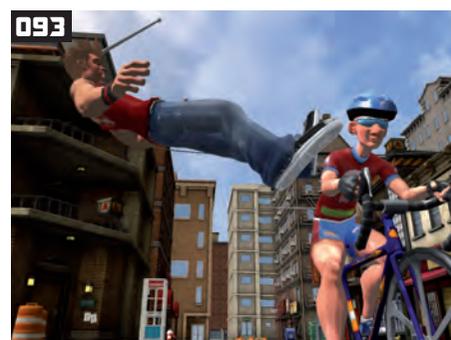
Dinosaurs, jungles, mercenaries, guns, choppers, bows, arrows, knives... it's a tough world when you are assigned to help hunt down your former commander, who has suitably gone rogue and now hides on a terraformed planet filled to the brim with crazy lizards intent on eating you (or anyone for that matter). So far it's a mixed bag of not-so-solid gameplay implementation, graphics that scale from mundane to blowing you away and rather stupid, if very aggressive, enemy AI. But we're still giving it our best, hence no review for the game in this issue. After all, running around and killing dinosaurs with your bow is fun!

PAIN [PS3]

Pain might have only been played by one guy in the office, but it certainly attracted the most spectators. Every now and then you would hear cries of thudding torment and torture as the game's hapless slingshot civilian gets shot into cop cars, buildings, pedestrians and whatever else can be dislodged. The various attempts to try and derail the trains using the giant round water tank perched on a building started a steady consulting session as people tried to spot the best angle. Isn't it funny how the hilarious misfortune of others brings out the best in us?

SINS OF THE SOLAR EMPIRE [PC]

"By combining the *Master of Orion*-style 4X genre with something a little more *Pax Imperia*-style RTS, *Sins of the Solar Empire* pulls off an impressive intergalactic skirmish of Wagnerian proportions. Space skirmishes give way to plotting on a grand scale, and the price is right too." That's what Miktar said. What he doesn't add is that this game rejects anti-piracy systems and yet it is also one of the hottest selling games currently in the States. Surely, if you can pirate it, then nobody would buy it... reality just doesn't make sense anymore.



WEB SCORES

SUPER MARIO GALAXY [WII]



NAG	100
METACRITIC	97
GAMERANKINGS	97

BURNOUT PARADISE [360]



NAG	80
METACRITIC	88
GAMERANKINGS	88

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III [PC]



NAG	86
METACRITIC	83
GAMERANKINGS	83



078



082



076



086



072

MEET THE PSYCHOS...

To be a game reviewer, you need to be a little crazy. At NAG we maintain the strictest interview standards, so we only settle for the maddest of the bunch. A penchant for gruesome, regular slaughter of the innocent is a big plus.

Toby Hudon

Apart from stealing dead people to populate an alternative dimension, Toby also likes going for Sunday drives in his hearse.



Justin Slabbert

Justin doesn't stalk and kill cute babysitters because they rejected him. He just likes killing. Keep an eye out for a blank expression and butcher's knife.



Miktar Dracon

Whenever he finds himself amongst adolescent or student drinkers, Miktar dons a cloak and sets a trap by the garage door. Known to work in a team with himself.



Tarryn van der Byl

Tarryn will crawl through your TV, suck out your soul by scaring you to death, and then eat all your ice-cream. She's evil like that.



Walt Pretorius

Not that we want to make Walt seem like some kind of pervert only interested in the young and nubile, but it is highly recommended that your teenage daughter does not dream of him. Dating is a definite no-no.



Eddie Francis

He will show you things you could never imagine. Then he'll demand your soul for it. In his spare time, Eddie wears PVC outfits that make Goths look like nuns.



Ryan Kalis

Say his name three times and he will arrive, ready to exact revenge and take over your couch. Unfortunately the hook-like appendage that used to be his right hand limits him to playing Bejeweled.



James Francis

After drowning as a kid and returning from the dead to slaughter many campsite dwellers, James moved on Editorship. But his methods remain the same: bashing people into walls and stuffing their corpses into desk drawers.



Chris Bistline

It's a little known fact that designers enjoy wearing masks made from other people's faces. The chainsaw is just for show, though, to scare the juniors into working.

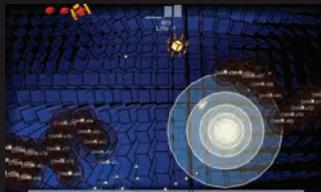


STUNTMAN: IGNITION [360]



NAG	71
METACRITIC	75
GAMERANKINGS	75

EVERYDAY SHOOTER [PS3]



NAG	82
METACRITIC	84
GAMERANKINGS	NA

SYPHON FILTER: LOGAN'S SHADOW [PSP]



NAG	90
METACRITIC	85
GAMERANKINGS	85

mmm... SHINY!

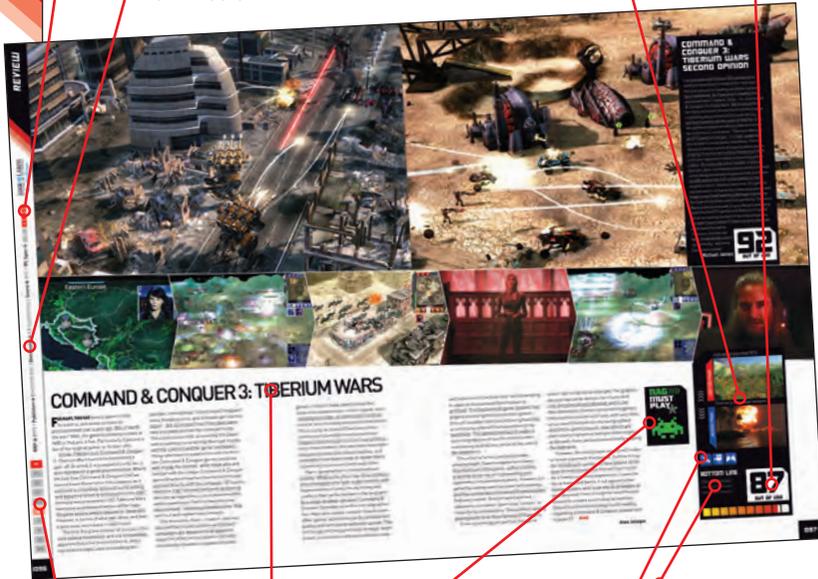
A quick guide to the NAG Review section

PC SPEC: Will this game rape your machine, or make it fly? Check the box at the bottom right for an explanation on our fancy hardware rating system.

BETTER THAN/WORSE THAN: Everything is relative, right? Because of that, we keep making comparisons between games in this space, and try to be funny about it.

SCORE: You only care about this number, we know that. But try to pretend you read the reviews because they're so insightful and informative. Thank you, we love you.

VITAL INFO: A game can't survive without these vitals, so you should probably pay attention to them.



PLATFORMS: The brightest block is the platform on which the game was reviewed. Dimmer blocks are platforms on which the game also appears. Simple.

AWARDS: You won't find these NAG awards given to games of merit anywhere but in NAG. Truth.

GAME NAME: This is the important bit, and you might want to write it down somewhere just in case you need it later.

ICONS: Check the list on the right for our frikkin' sweet icons, distilling the essence of games even further, just for you.

BOTTOM LINE: It all comes down to this, and the words written here will shape the future, moulding it towards gaming excellence.

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THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like, while giving us less work to do in the review. Everyone wins, so best memorise this list below and look out for them in the Review score box.

-  **ACTION:** When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.
-  **BABYSITTING:** Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.
-  **BITCHIN':** When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.
-  **BORING:** Grab your blanket and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.
-  **BUGGY:** Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.
-  **CASH-IN/LICENSE:** Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.
-  **CINEMATIC:** Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.
-  **CLONE:** We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.
-  **COMPETITIVE:** You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.
-  **FOREIGN:** No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? Careful, it might be Foreign!
-  **ONLINE:** For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.
-  **PARTY:** Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.
-  **PIECE OF POO:** Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.
-  **STUPID PEOPLE:** Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.
-  **ALL AGES:** These games contain no violence, immoral acts or anything that might narrow the demographic, but they may still be diffi cult.
-  **KID FRIENDLY:** Kids can play this game without needing an adult every fi ve minutes to explain to them what button to press.
-  **16+ RESTRICTION:** If you're 16 or over, you are well within your rights to play this game.
-  **18+ RESTRICTION:** If you are not yet 18, please put down this game and back away slowly before the police come and arrest you.
-  **MULTIPLAYER:** The number on the controller icon indicates the maximum number of people who can play at the same time.

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

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

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

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BURNOUT PARADISE

WELCOME TO PARADISE CITY, where the grass is green and the girls are pretty. Agh, sorry! We stooped to a cliché! What would be more obvious to this game's name than the Guns 'n Roses classic rock anthem? The game feels the same, as is the very song used for the menu. But the similarities end there. *Burnout Paradise* probably has green grass, but you're too busy swooping around at high speeds to take notice. Also, the song seems to be about a killer, culminating in his execution. There are no killers or pretty girls in *Paradise*, just high-speed madness.

So here we have it – Criterion's *Burnout*

to trump all *Burnout* games that came before. That's a tall order. The *Burnout* games have a special place in gamer hearts, regardless if you prefer the orthodox first two games or the insanity that prevailed when *Burnout 3* came out. Of the latter group, *Burnout 3* and *Burnout Revenge* are arguably considered the crown jewels. *Paradise* goes after both tiers: it aims to deliver a game with solid handling and a sensation of speed-driven arcade racing not experienced before, while it also amps up the crashes that bring your speeding frenzies to an abrupt halt.

IT'S SHOWTIME!

Almost incredibly, Criterion decided to forgo the popular Crash Junction event (which was found in previous *Burnout* titles and remains a firm favourite around the NAG office) in *Paradise*. Crash Junction involved hurtling a car at full speed into a busy intersection in the hope of causing a cascade of car-nage, with bonus pickups along the way adding spice. The Crashbreaker explosion gained from multi-car pileups was always a crowd-pleaser.

Instead, *Paradise* features Showtime which can be activated at any time (especially mid-event when all hope of placing First is lost, thus quitting the event). Activation causes your car to instantly roll and flip, the goal being to hit as many cars and buses as possible as you bounce down the road by hitting X for Groundbreaker as you touch the ground, which bounces your car back into the air. Successfully hitting cars charges your Groundbreaker. Every road you activate Showtime on records your best score for both online and offline rankings. It's mostly mindless but acts as a good way to "do something else" when you're bored of the other events or just need a break from the more serious racing.



PLAYSTATION PARADISE

Despite a rather long string of PlayStation 3 games from EA that were well below their 360 versions, *Burnout Paradise* does not fail the platform. The PS3 game is virtually identical to what you'd find on the 360, literally leaving your choice down to which controller you prefer. But any talk about the PS3 version being superior is wrong as well, or an argument best left for fans blasting each other on a forum. As such, both versions of *Burnout Paradise* deserve the exact same praise, criticism and score. The good news is that, finally, we have a triple-A multi-platform game that doesn't suck on the PS3. Hopefully those dodgy ports have become a thing of the past.

In an attempt to redefine this game as a new benchmark, quite a lot has changed. Most notable is the new free-roaming city: you don't skip from event to event any more. The good side to this is that you won't get stuck on a specific track, since you can try any of the others on the map. The downside is that *Paradise* expects you to learn its roads, so you can't respawn at the start if you mess up an event. Fortunately, there is an event at nearly every intersection, thus you can swoop straight into something else if you don't win. Initially the open roads mean you get lost and take many wrong turns, which cost you the race. But since start and finish points are pretty set, you soon learn the routes and after not too long you'll know the basics of getting around town. The navigation system, which

brings up street names (and flashes them if you need to turn) also works very well once you get used to it.

Thus, it's not fair to criticize *Paradise* because of the new dynamic and forced driving that the free-roaming brought. Once understood, it works very well and the series can definitely stay on that road. It might be anal, but it's implemented properly. The car selection has also been trimmed down. Though there are forty-odd cars to unlock, they fall into three classes: stunt, aggression and speed, with some models transcending two or all classes. The right type of car works with the right event: race, marked man, road rage, burning lap or stunt run. The cars are solid, stick to the road, are highly responsive and deliver every ounce of *Burnout* adrenaline you'd want.

Mach 10

KINDA LIKE

Burnout Dominator

FOR FANS OF

BOTTOM LINE

It's the awesome of *Burnout*, but not for *Crash Junction* fans.

80

OUT OF 100

CHOOSE YOUR EVENT

Races involve going from point A to B and usually involve at least one other car. Any route can be taken to the finish line. Road names will flash at the top of the screen when it is advisable to turn.

Road Rage is a staple of the series, requiring the player to meet a takedown target within a time limit by forcing opponents to crash.

Marked Man is a tense battle to the finish in which opponents try to stop the player from reaching. The player can crash or be taken out but will lose the event if the car is totalled. Repair Shops along the way will repair the car to full health.

Stunt Run involves reaching a target score, with points being earned by using boost, jumps and other stunt moves such as barrel rolls. Knowledge of the city layout helps in this event.

Burning Route requires the use of a specific car (as indicated by the event) and is a lone race against the clock to a specific location. Winning these events grants an upgraded version of the car used, usually with extra boost power, extra durability or more speed.



SECOND GEAR

The new *Burnout* format does the job, but you have to prepare for an up-shift in the paradigm gearbox. Essentially what they've done here is replacing all the event and race menus with an elaborate sandbox called Paradise City. Having a fabricated virtual city to explore is a double-edged sword, and while it looks stunning and works perfectly, getting around can become a repetitive and annoying chore. The various junctions you must drive through to start an event are inadequately handled as they're randomly scattered around the city, and there's always this nagging worry that somewhere in some dark alley of Paradise City there's an event you'll never find. Equally disturbing is not having a traditional checklist of races you can cross off, leading to some uncertainty when it comes to your progress through the game and what you should be doing next.

Getting lost is also something we can all do without in a racing game. The racing 'tracks' in Paradise City are really just specific locations in the city you must race between and are often a tad complicated (especially if they're on opposite ends of the city), forcing you to keep checking the map. Now if you add high-speed racing to this equation, you're in for a lot of nasty crashes and frustration while trying to find the finish line. Naturally if you play the game long enough you're going to start learning the 'tracks', but this will take time and might put quick-fix arcade racing junkies off their game. But remember this is all coming from someone who doesn't like change and loved the previous Xbox 360 title (*Burnout Revenge*).

The good news is that the control system, responsiveness and overall feel are spot on. Despite technically scrapping the entire engine and guts of the game that was *Burnout Revenge*, the developers have managed to remain steady at the helm and have retained the slick feel of control – one of the best in the arcade racer genre. It also looks very polished and, if you can believe this, the soundtrack selection is better than ever. Critically, what is missing in this new game are the Crash Junction events. Instead, you're presented with a fun but eventually dull bouncing car event which you can activate anywhere on the city streets, but it's no Crash Junction. Leaving this excellent and fun event out of Paradise City is a puzzling choice that has really hurt this game. The real problem with Paradise City is that they removed a few of the really excellent parts of *Burnout Revenge* and didn't put anything worthwhile in to replace them.

Long story short, it does all work out in the end and the game is a crackerjack, but it feels lacking no matter how much you try and love it.

Michael James

86
OUT OF 100



Technically, *Paradise* is a great *Burnout* game. But it's not the new watershed. One big missing piece is the Crash Junction event. These don't exist at all anymore, unless you can please yourself with the limited Showtime mini game. But it's not nearly the same thing. While the accidents in *Burnout* are spectacular, the heavy aggression found in the *Burnout 3* era of the series is not all present. The Stunt Mode is underwhelming and feels like an afterthought: stunts are fun to do, but the city itself feels pretty limited in delivering opportunities to flip your car around. The stunt controls are equally limited and really not that interesting after a few runs. Takedowns feel diluted and you are limited to taking down one opponent

at a time (even if another driver hits the wreckage during the takedown). Forget about moving your wreck into traffic after a crash – Aftertouch is not present. Rival drivers also don't seem to remember that they hate you. Finally, despite its myriad online gaming options, there is no split-screen or system link support.

If you like high-speed arcade racing, *Burnout Paradise* is good. Really good. But from a *Burnout* perspective, it's removed some of the more hardcore elements, fumbled aspects of the gameplay and delivered a game that won't stop you from going back to the other *Burnout* titles. It could have been, but *Paradise* is not all the *Burnout* you'll need. **NAG**

James Francis





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EASY, CHALLENGING, HARD, HARDCORE

The purpose in *Galaxy* is to collect Power Stars. Once the player has collected 60 Power Stars, they can opt to "end" the game by accessing the galaxy that unlocks at that star count. Endgame does the usual endgame things, such as a final stage, final boss battle and rolling credits. However, the game doesn't actually end there.

If all 120 Power Stars are collected they unlock *Super Luigi Galaxy* where the protagonist is instead Mario's brother Luigi, who jumps better but has worse traction. There are marginal changes that occur while playing as Luigi and if you complete as the Green Powerhouse, two new Power Stars are opened up, making the grand total 242 Power Stars.

What makes *Galaxy accessible* is that the first 60 or so Power Stars are actually extremely easy to get, almost leisurely, which lets one enjoy the game without fear of being kicked in the teeth. The remaining 60 from that point forward are extremely challenging and aimed at the more advanced players who have either played *Mario 64* or who enjoy the uphill battle. The first 60 as Luigi are tricky in their own way while the remaining 62 from that point on are for those gamers who like to sit on a bed of hot coals while being bitten by vipers. Insanely hard, basically.

Galaxy, to its credit, is extremely staid in keeping the player informed about exactly which goal to go for, which goals are completed and how many goals are left. It cannot be stressed enough just how well-implemented this convention is.

Something for everyone, which in our books is called *value for money*.



SUPER MARIO GALAXY

SUPER MARIO GALAXY is an idiosyncratic game. It is also the best *Mario* game to date with due respect to the progenitors of the series. While not as technologically pioneering as *Mario 64*, it more than makes up for it in staid confidence. *Galaxy* is now, without a doubt, the seminal title for the series. While most titles on the market are nothing more than mountebank entertainers, *Galaxy* is a no-holds-barred *tour de force* through originality, innovation and creativity. It is also, above all else, a near-perfect game filled with ample challenge and depth.

That doesn't mean it will cure cancer or convert naysayers to the Nintendo way of life. What it does do is make the Nintendo

Wii worth every cent paid for it. If the delicate superego cannot handle bright colours or round-edged cute creatures, there is no love lost.

The game contains forty-two galaxies (levels), mostly split across six themed domes. Some galaxies require discovery, while most require a certain amount of Power Stars collected to unlock. Every single galaxy is unique in both application and in terms of level geometry. The economy achieved is astounding. Wiimote usage is reserved and polished, free of superfluous waggling but taking advantage of the functionality in tidy ways to give players a fresh experience. **NAG**

Miktar "Zombie" Dracon

TRAILER
ON THE DVD



NAG >>>
EDITOR'S
CHOICE



STEALTH SUPER MARIO BROS. 3 SEQUEL?

There are more than a few elements in *Galaxy* that hint at it being a stealth sequel to the critically-acclaimed *Super Mario Bros. 3* (Nintendo Entertainment System) from the 8-bit year. *Super Mario World* (Super Nintendo Entertainment System) was much more leisurely and open, and *Mario 64* (Nintendo 64) and *Super Mario Sunshine* (GameCUBE) mostly had wide, centralised 3D stages where one wandered in all directions. But most of the stages in *Galaxy* are like short, old-school Mario "courses" built in 3D.



CO-STAR CO-OPERATIVE JOY

Galaxy features a form of cooperative play that's actually quite unique. While the primary player uses the Wiimote and nunchuck to control Mario and a Star Pointer, a second player can join in any time by picking up a second Wiimote. This gives the "Co-Star" his or her own Star Pointer (which is moved around the screen by aiming the Wiimote at the screen) and is useful in several ways:

The Co-Star can collect Starbits by using the Star Pointer, which is used to feed Hungry Lumas or to stun enemies. Since the Co-Star doesn't have to worry about their own morality as they cannot be damaged in any way, this frees the Co-Star up to focus on collecting Starbits. The Starbits can also be shot at enemies, which stuns them, something the primary player can also do.

More importantly, the Co-Star can influence certain enemies in ways the primary player cannot. Pointing their Star Pointer at an enemy, the Co-Star can "hold" an enemy in position for Mario to jump on (or to save Mario from an incoming projectile). The Co-Star can also destroy certain projectiles outright, such as the fireballs Bowser throws at Mario during certain boss battles.

There is also a special type of Co-Star jump that the primary player and Co-Star can do together, which is a higher-than-normal jump for Mario. This requires a bit more timing but can be very helpful if the two players work in cohort.

The Co-Star can also annoy the primary player by making Mario jump at any time. This may lead to a younger sibling receiving a black eye.



This takes 'dirty old man' to a whole new level



DEFYING GRAVITY WHILE LOOKING GOOD

The most remarkable aspect of *Galaxy* - while not a new innovation in gaming but certainly perfected here - is running around the various planetoids that pull with their own gravity. It is a confident implementation and poignant in several ways. It is much harder to get lost thanks to the unity of connected surface and it removes the need to move the virtual camera. The camera has always been the biggest drawback to 3D platformers and *Mario 64* players will no doubt remember the frustration of a missed leap thanks to obstinate camera angles.

Galaxy makes a point of ensuring that the

camera is always at the best possible angle for what you are attempting to do. On the planetoid play fields the camera simply remains behind the player as it should, while the more directed areas that funnel Mario into a more constrained play field have pre-set camera positions masterfully crafted to provide a proper view of exactly what you need to see.

Suffice to say, *Galaxy* has redefined the level of camera quality expected in a 3D third-person title while at the same time giving gamers creative and innovative new play fields filled with surprises to explore. But this is something best experienced personally, not spoiled by reading about it in a magazine.

Words do not convey the child-like wonder these galaxies provide.

PRANKSTER COMETS

Once 12 Power Stars have been collected, Prankster Comets appear on certain levels periodically. When one appears in orbit around a galaxy, a special challenge leads to a Power Star. These challenges represent about a fourth of the game's total star count. There are five types of comets:

Speedy Comets involve a race against the clock to complete a specific previous star already earned. The Co-Star can be useful here, especially on runs with enemies that slow Mario down.

Cosmic Comets are a race against a cosmic form of Mario (or Luigi) to reach a Power Star first and often require the player to discover shortcuts through a specific part of the level. Sadly (but not unexpectedly) the Co-Star cannot influence the cosmic opponent in any way.

Daredevil Comets are mean ones, restricting Mario to one hit-point instead of three and usually involve re-battling a boss. Thankfully Mario is usually placed right at the boss battle, so no need to tip-toe through the level to reach it.

Fast-Foe Comets let you replay a specific part of the level with foes moving twice as fast, which doesn't sound like much until you get crushed by a Thwomp block.

Purple Comets seem to be a throwback from the *Mario 64* 100-coin challenge and thus involve collecting 100 purple coins scattered throughout the level. These are some of the most difficult comets in the game.



Mario 64



Super Mario Sunshine



BOTTOM LINE

There should be a 1 in front of the score, but we couldn't fit it in.

00
OUT OF 100





What some people do to avoid replacing worn tyres



STUNTMAN: IGNITION

WHILE BEING FORGIVING TOWARDS games is a good thing at times, I am not prone to do so when the game doesn't cut me the same kind of slack. It is one thing when a game is challenging, but quite another when things get so difficult that it's easier to shove a greased pig through a chain link fence than complete the next level.

Okay, so *Stuntman: Ignition* isn't all that tough to get through, but it is highly frustrating. The game requires lightning quick reflexes as the player drives a stunt vehicle for a movie. A "co-pilot" of sorts shouts out orders mere split-seconds before the player needs to perform them, which gets kind of tough. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the vehicles themselves just don't want to be put through the paces that are required from the sequence.

But let's start at the beginning. *Stuntman: Ignition* is a great idea. The player pilots a stunt vehicle through a variety of situations, all of which require

some very precise driving techniques to finish successfully. Unlike a real movie set, these sequences are long and quite chaotic, leaving the player feeling almost lost as all the action goes off around him. The levels are very busy and very full of ways to mess up. Added to that is the fact that the player gets a number of 'strikes', or forgivable mistakes. Exceed that number and you fail the level. Not even the pretty graphics help: the game gets so incredibly frustrating after a while that it's probably unhealthy to play. That said, successfully completing a level leaves one with a massive sense of accomplishment.

The challenge is slightly offset by a pre-level run through the major stunts that need to be performed. However, these are not a complete rundown of what will be required from the player, and even missing out the minor stunts results in a strike against your name.

Stuntman: Ignition features a variety of vehicles for the player to use, all of which

have very different capabilities. Some are slower and cumbersome while others are fast and agile, and so on. The level design takes this into account, though, and just because a vehicle is nimble doesn't mean that the player is going to have an easy time.

The best part of the game is the custom stunt-courses that can be built. Successfully completing missions means that new items are unlocked, and the player can (in a stadium environment) construct some very enjoyable trick courses to play.

Stuntman: Ignition would have been a better game if it weren't so damned difficult. Sure, a game needs to be challenging, but the balance of frustration and reward needs to be right for the game to be truly enjoyable. If you like your gaming to be full of masochistic frustration, go right ahead and play it. Otherwise (if you prefer to relax while playing games) it's just too tough to get through. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

The anti-car theft crew got hardcore



NAG >>>
MUST PLAY ★



Trying to push a greased pig through a chainlink fence



Frustrating racing games and other masochism



KINDA LIKE >>>

<<< FOR FANS OF



BOTTOM LINE

A game that might have been better if it was less frustrating

71
OUT OF 100



SECOND OPINION (PS2)

RRP → R445 | Publisher → THQ | Distributor → Ster Kinekor Games | Genre → Racing

OKAY, HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED. Picture Jeff, a well-dressed father of four. It's his day off, he is relaxing at home. Jeff has not heard from the office today - this means all is well and Jeff, well Jeff doesn't need to go in. The front door opens. It's Sammy, the youngest of the four. Always striving to make his father proud and not waste those genes his father fought so hard to keep going, Sammy has brought home a young lady of similar age. We'll just call her Tapanga. The usual "Hi dad", "Hi son, how was your day?" doesn't happen. But that's because this family is normal. After formal introductions and idle chit-chat, Jeff is pleased with Sammy's Friend, the one we call Tapanga. But Tapanga, always on the hunt, needs to gauge Sammy's worth, and boldly asks Jeff what he does for a living. Jeff, standing in a manly pose, loudly and proudly exclaims that he is a stunt driver. Silence.

A dog butt-races himself across the lounge. "Oh," says Tapanga, "you are a driver."

Things get a bit ugly from here. Jeff locks himself away for months to develop *Stuntman: Ignition*, so that never again will people look down on him. The game, made in secrecy, is the perfect educational tool for those who want to crash and burn for a living, and you get some funky tunes too.

For the rest of us, it's like a driving game, where someone tells you what to do and when. Make no mistake: it is fun. You get to do some really cool stuff. You actually do feel like a stunt driver for a bit. If you like repeating the same level to get better and better scores (or just finish it), then this is your game. Providing, of course, that you can handle the frustration of learning from your mistakes. And learning from them. And learning from them again. Jeff's job, as it turns out, is really tough. Well, *Stuntman: Ignition* is. Don't buy it for your grandmother.

Oh, Tapanga dumped Sammy.

Eddie Francis

85
OUT OF 100

"It's obvious. Just carry the 2 to the x value and compare it to Pi over the speed of light"



WWE: SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2008

SHOULD ANYONE BE SURPRISED? When the biggest superstars in sports entertainment fill the grandest stage of them all, the video game is going to be a sure seller. In fact, the *Smackdown vs. RAW* games outsell all other fighting games combined (in other words, the likes of *Dead or Alive*, *Soul Calibur* and so on). At least, that's what THQ claims. But it makes sense. The WWE is a franchise and thus its games are essentially of the licensed variety. All the fans want are detailed models of the wrestlers, the ability to do the finishing moves and come close to emulating the real thing ('real' in a figurative sense, of course).

From a fan's point of view, the *2008* iteration brings a lot of the goods. The various fighters are present in detailed

models (some, like Triple H, are even a bit exaggerated), plus getting to their special moves is a breeze once you know what you are doing.

As far as getting the job done, *2008* is the first game in the series I've played. It uses a very basic control system: left analog moves around while the right one – depending on what position your opponent is and where you stand relative to him/her – does various power moves targeting different parts of the body. Pound away at a wrestler with enough variation and you quickly charge up your power bar. When this fills and starts flashing, you can do one of your character's special moves. *2008* comes with new fighter styles, which really just enhance some of your character class' strengths. Brawlers

[Batista, Kane] tend to get stronger and perform unbreakable submission holds, high fliers (Rey Mysterio, Jeff Hardy) become more acrobatic, etc. Wrestlers can have more than one class, useful if you opt for the create-a-wrestler feature.

Alas, the styles are useless in the normal game, thanks to pretty simplistic AI. You really just need to do lots of pounding and bruising in order for them to stay down long enough for a pin, climb a cage or to get onto a ladder. The AI's rabid interest in certain tasks (getting the briefcase, finding a weapon) can make things interesting, but usually only if there are at least three wrestlers in a fight.

All of this magic is much more potent when you play with friends. Then *2008* is a really fun game – at least, to a degree. Despite the



"You're right, there is something growing out of your belly button"

SECOND OPINION

THQ's *Smackdown vs. Raw* series has always enjoyed an immense fan following, though after its 2008 iteration, one might be slightly puzzled as to why. Probably the most publicised change in this instalment is the inclusion of "fighting styles", such as brawler, powerhouse or showman. Each style has exclusive abilities, ranging from automatically reversing attacks to stealing finishers. It's nothing dramatically new; if anything, it simply reduces the number of characters who can perform certain techniques. Another misstep is the 24/7 mode: 2008's career mode which is bogged down with loading times, extraneous cut-scenes that often make no sense, and feels generally unpolished and unfulfilling. The controls rely largely on use of the analog sticks, which simplifies matters, though the removal of a targeting button makes matches involving more than two combatants exceedingly frustrating; in fact, these matches would hardly be winnable at all were it not for the dismally hopeless AI controlling your opponents. Furthermore, it is now more difficult than ever to get characters to set up tables or climb ladders, a requirement in many of the matches you'll participate in. The commentary again becomes quickly repetitive and often wholly inappropriate – by now, it's not unreasonable to expect the developers to have made improvements here, and it's disappointing that they haven't. Another letdown is the roster of only 50 characters, down from about 70 last year. Though the game isn't broken, and is still enjoyable at times, too few improvements and too many mistakes make it a disappointing addition to the series.

Adam Liebman

60
OUT OF 100



TRAILER ON THE DVD

series being so popular, the implementation is rubbish. For some reason you can't target a specific wrestler, making crowded matches haphazard and causing the simple act of picking up a chair or getting on something a tormented experience. Sometimes your wrestler simply won't do something because he is locked onto another fighter behind him (and far away enough not to be of interest).

The best way to play *WWE Smackdown vs. RAW 2008* is to bash at it repeatedly, not to look for any fine nuance and completely tolerate the worst auto-target system ever devised. But if you like wrestling, you have a few controllers lying around and you didn't pay full price for this, it's not a bad way to spend a few hours with friends.

NAG
James Francis



An ECW pay-per-view

BETTER THAN

Edge at a Ladder match

WORSE THAN

BOTTOM LINE
All slam, no technique. You Can't Wres-tle! [SIC]

65
OUT OF 100

Attack the Prime Node!



Bishop



35



CHARGE OF THE LIGHT ORB BRIGADE

Unreal Tournament III has fused the former *UT Assault* and *Onslaught* modes to produce the monstrous new *Warfare* mode, a strategic node-control game type, with a few daring twists. Much like *Onslaught*, each team must bravely defend their Power Core from destruction, and this is mostly accomplished by destroying the enemy Power Core. Seizing control of the intervening nodes grants players access to new selectable spawn points, but this is a squabble of constantly shifting battlelines. There are also now unlinked nodes that may be captured to provide additional exclusive vehicles. Further complicating matters is the new respawnable Orb, an item that hands over instant total control of any neutral or enemy node on the map. There will be tears.

The loss of the *Domination* mode, however, is a criminal catastrophe.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

I AM A SHAMELESS, UNREPENTANT *Unreal Tournament* whore. Since my best friend and I used to spend entire weekends sniping one another's faces off on DM-LavaGiant back in the original, the series has been my LAN game of choice. That's because *Unreal Tournament* is totally awesome and totally the best LAN game ever. Now onto my entirely objective and unbiased review, because I'm all professional like that.

Unreal Tournament III is totally awesome, and totally the best new LAN game ever. Which is not to say it's flawless (because it isn't), but it's hyper-fast, relentlessly brutal, ultra-violent, and absolutely nothing whatsoever like *Counter-Strike*. If you aren't immolated by a great fiery ball of supercharged fun playing this, then you must be either dead or a *Counter-Strike* player (and *Counter-Strike* players are dead inside, anyway).

That said, *UT3* is really just *UT2004* with pretty new textures and a rubbish single player campaign. Aside from the new Warfare mode and hoverboards, there's really nothing much innovative going on here. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but I'd really

rather hoped to see sticky grenades or *Team Fortress*-style vendettas. *UT* modders, here's looking at you. Unless you loathed or grew desperately bored of *UT2004*, however, there's really no compelling reason not to buy this, and it remains absolutely non-negotiable essential playing for first timers. It may not be a bold revolution, but the game excels convincingly in its own frag-flinging arena. **NAG**

Tarryn "The Flak Menace" van der Byl



INTERTRONS REQUIRED

The manual's installation guide advises that, "Before you can access the online features in the game, you'll need to use the Create Profile option." Please note that these "online features" include the "Create Profile option". In the meantime, Epic can eat a big piece of failcake for being so First Worldist!

¹ **First Worldist**: technically speaking, it's not a real word, no. But c'mon. Ditto "failcake", which is the greatest non-word ever.

UT2004

LOOKS BETTER THAN

UT2004 with frills

BUT IT'S REALLY JUST

16+

BOTTOM LINE

Seriously, we want a Darkwalker of our own, or the penguin on page 71 gets it.

86
OUT OF 100

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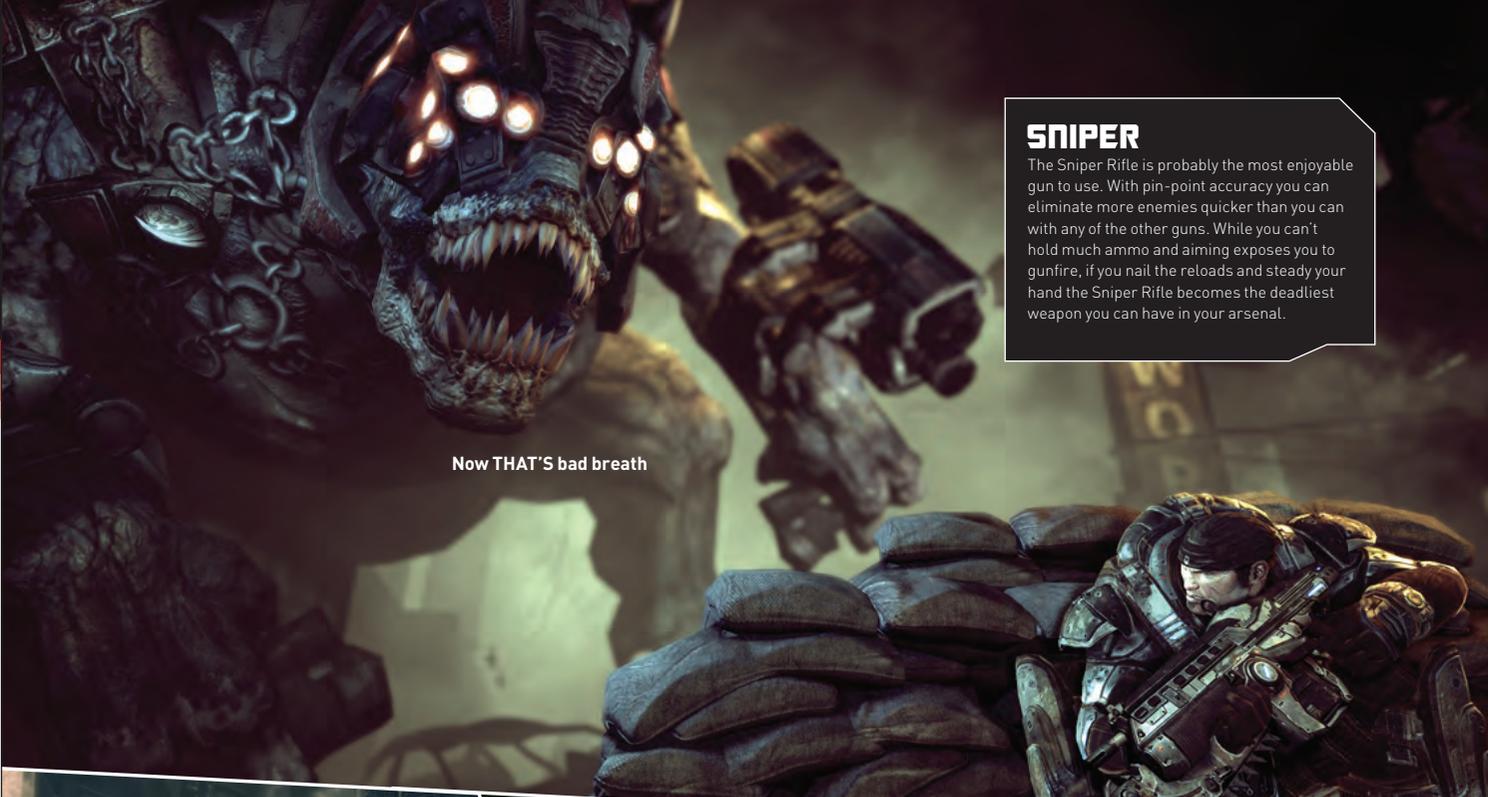


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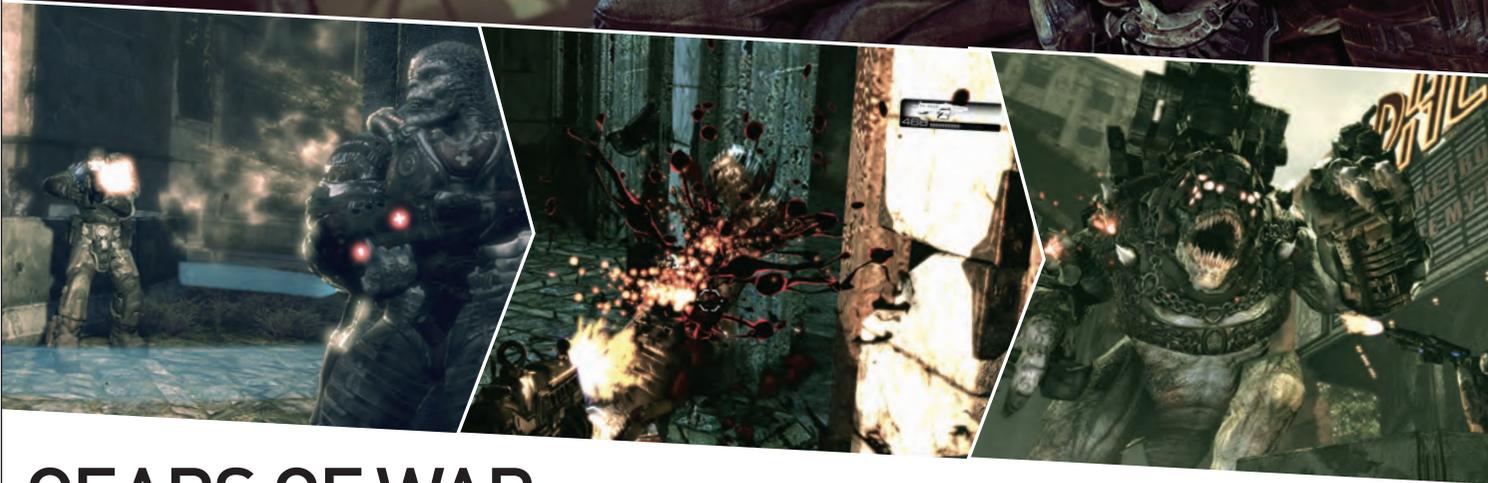




Now THAT'S bad breath

SNIPER

The Sniper Rifle is probably the most enjoyable gun to use. With pin-point accuracy you can eliminate more enemies quicker than you can with any of the other guns. While you can't hold much ammo and aiming exposes you to gunfire, if you nail the reloads and steady your hand the Sniper Rifle becomes the deadliest weapon you can have in your arsenal.



GEARS OF WAR

YES, IT'S NEARLY TWO years old, but that doesn't make *Gears of War* any less fun than it was back then. It is, in fact, even better now that it has arrived on the PC under the "Games for Windows" banner. One must add that it is one of the better titles out now on the PC. If you happened to have been under a rock for the last two years, then here is what *Gears of War* is about: You play Marcus Phoenix, an incarcerated and discharged war veteran who, for reasons that will be revealed, fell out of favour with the powers that be. Thus he (you) finds himself in a small prison cell waiting for his life to come to an end. However, as luck would have it, things on the outside are not great as an underground life form known as the Locust is causing havoc on the outside. All of this means that you get to go out and save the world, or at least attempt to do so (once again).

Gears of War plays like a third-person shooter with a first-person element to it. Simply put, there is no other game that plays like it. That's a pity, since where gameplay is concerned, this one is near perfect in execution. The play dynamics are so good that you don't realise how linear this game is with

no room for exploration at all. There are two things that you will notice while playing *Gears of War*. The first one would be how good it looks. The technical wizardry behind the Unreal 3 Engine features high-dynamic range lighting, detailed textures advanced parallax mapping among some other nifty shading texture and shading effects. Artistically the game is beautiful.

Yes, it mostly looks the same in its post-war setting and the game by and large is heavily stylised, leaning towards a more fantastical setting than any recognisable place. However, it's all put together stunningly.

This game has been polished graphically from the Xbox version. Not only that, but it plays close to perfect using a keyboard and mouse, particularly for aiming at aggressors (of which there are plenty). This game features massive set pieces, gorgeous graphics and for the most part is simple to pick up and get to grips with. *Gears of War* is an excellent title that, despite it being a 2006 title on the console, makes a welcomed appearance on the PC. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Pacifism

FOR FANS OF

BETTER THAN

FOR FANS OF

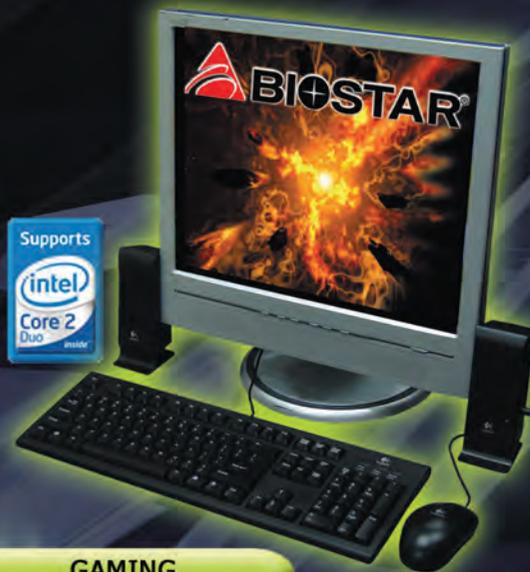
BETTER THAN

BOTTOM LINE

Non-stop action shooter with perfect execution

90

OUT OF 100



GAMING

ENTERTAINMENT

OFFICE



TF7150U-M7 **HDMI**

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- > MEMORY: DDR2 800 MHz, 2 x DDR2 DIMM Slot Max. Up to 4GB Memory
- > INTEGRATED VIDEO: NVIDIA GeForce 7150 GPU, Memory Share Up to 512MB (Under OS By Turbo Cache) GPU Frequency @600MHz+



TF7100P-M7 **HDMI**

- > Socket LGA 775
- > Chipset: NVIDIA GeForce 7100
- > FSB 800/1066/1333MHz
- > MEMORY: DDR2 800 MHz, 2 x DDR2 DIMM Memory Slot Max. Up to 4GB Memory
- > INTEGRATED VIDEO: NVIDIA GeForce 7100P GPU, Max. Memory Share Up to 512MB (Under OS By Turbo Cache) GPU Frequency @600MHz



GF7050V-M7

- > Socket LGA 775
- > Chipset: NVIDIA GeForce7050 / NForce610i Single Chip
- > FSB 800/1066/1333**MHz
- > Memory: DDR2 667/800**MHz, 2 x DDR2 DIMM Memory Slot Max. Supports up to 4GB Memory
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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TACTICS

THE "TACTICS" MONIKER USUALLY implies turn-based, grid-based tactical battles and this holds true in the case of *Dungeons & Dragons: Tactics*. The game remains faithful to the *D&D* 3.5 rule-set; all the core races and classes are available including Psionics. Play takes a party of six adventurers into a series of environments while following an original story. Surprisingly, character alignment has a strong bearing on the eventual outcome of the story.

The game plays out as a series of maps, which are traversed in turn-based fashion: actions such as attack and spell-casting use up turns, which enemies don't hesitate to take advantage of. Attacks have a grid-pattern to them; selection of an attack highlights which squares will be affected. It's a surprisingly slick system that seems to complement the *Dungeons*

& *Dragons* directive. The grid itself keeps things straightforward and even if those who have never played *Dungeons & Dragons* (game or table-top) should find the system intuitive enough. The dialogue is sufficiently cheesy and ill-suited for playing in a quiet area because some bits of character tit-for-tat is laugh-out-loud silly.

The game can be played cooperatively with other *Tactics* players, (always a nice touch). There is also an adversarial battle mode if you feel like laying down some fantasy smack. While on the subject of wireless play, the highly customisable custom-created characters can also be traded wirelessly. Downloadable content adds some depth in the form of extra missions. In terms of PSP titles, one could do much worse than this. **NAG**

Miktar "I Attack The Darkness" Dracon



Dungeons

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

BOTTOM LINE

Solid title with real appeal to those who Magic Missile in their spare time.

75

OUT OF 100

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MG00673

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CHINESE NEW YEAR IS COMING, KING OF GOD ASSIGN FIRE BOY TO DESTROY ALL THE "NIAN" MONSTERS.



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OPERATION CRITICAL
OPERATION CRITICAL IS A UNIQUE ACTION GAME WITH MANY FEATURES THAT COULD BE SEEN ONLY ON PC GAMES.



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MAGIC WAS A COMMON THING IN ELHALYN WHERE MAGIC IS STUDIED AND PRACTICED ANCIENT ARCAE FREELY.



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RRP → R387 | Publisher → Codemasters → SK Games | Genre → FPS

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CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

SOMETIMES A BIT OF hindsight can be a good thing. *Clive Barker's Jericho* was slammed in many reviews when it first appeared last year. Our copy of the game somehow got lost, so we only got around to the review now. However, this may be a good thing, because now that the hype subsided, *Jericho* seems to have something worthwhile to offer.

While not exactly revolutionary, the mechanic of allowing the player to jump from one character to another on the fly keeps things rather interesting. The concept is introduced rather slowly, which can be frustrating for those who want to just jump in and start blasting. Each team-member will suddenly decide to let you possess them at some point in the early plot, and after that, you can do it any time you want. We only wish it happened a bit quicker, as it's frustrating once you have the hang of the idea but half the team is still run by the AI. Nevertheless, once you have access to the entire team, there's a lot of strategy in choosing whom to use for each situation. The game will often try to handicap you in this regard by splitting the squad up, so your options are more limited. Fortunately, it's really easy to revive team-mates, which essentially becomes your health. As long as someone else is alive, you have a backup; so if you're good you can weather even the really, really, really long boss fights the game presents at times. If you've played *Republic Commando*, *Jericho*

will seem somewhat familiar.

While *Jericho* is fun, parts get a bit tedious after a while. The enemies are not that varied and some sections are plain frustrating due to endless hordes of spawning foes. The maps appear to be a rehash of the same hallway, and for the most part they are. In addition, we had a bit of a control and slowdown issue on the PS3. The aim would often feel slightly 'lagging', and this would get worse in areas where it would drop frames (if you use intensive abilities like the Fire Ward, the game would chug, which got a bit annoying). The load times were also a bit lengthy, but fortunately the gameplay sections between them were long enough to make up for the wasted time.

Unfortunately for horror fans, we didn't find the game all that scary. Clive Barker definitely tried to add a nice atmospheric touch to the game, and it pulls that off reasonably well. However, the plot seems to fall a bit flat. It's there, it has some interesting elements, but it just feels like a tacked-on addition to explain why a squad of paranormal marines are shooting their way through various nasty creatures. (Not that you need a plot for that, but given the game's pedigree, we were hoping for a little more.) Still, it doesn't detract from the basic fun, so those who are just in it for the shooting will be fine.

If you can overlook its flaws, *Jericho* is

not a bad game. It would have benefited from some form of multiplayer, so the short campaign isn't really worth the high price. **NAG**

Toby Hudson

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six

KINDA LIKE

Clive Barker

FOR FANS OF

🔫
👁️
💰
🎮
18+

BOTTOM LINE

While it has its faults, *Jericho* is still worth a look.

75

OUT OF 100

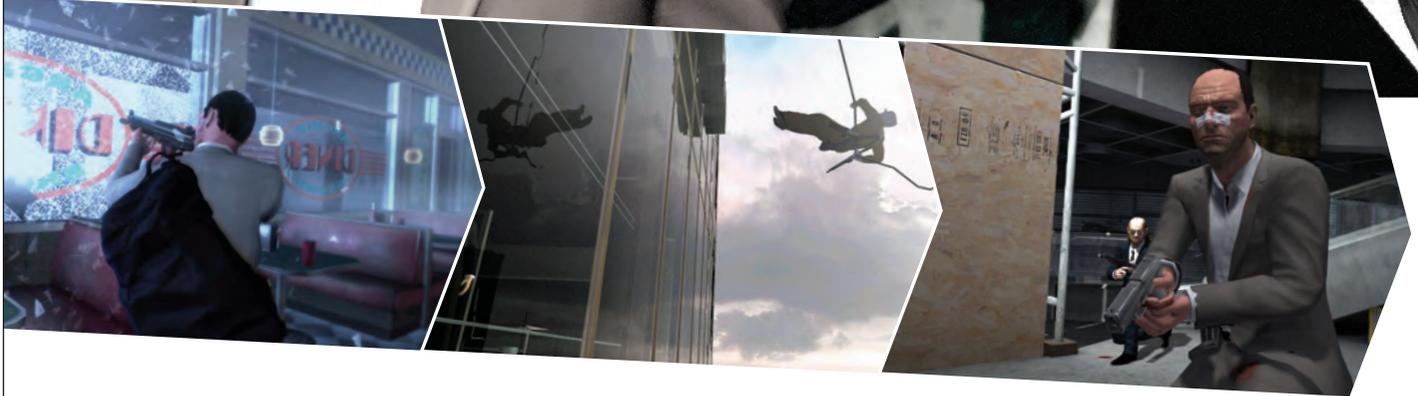
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KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN was probably one of the most anticipated games of last year. Although it was heavily advertised, we feel that all the money spent on ads could rather have been used to improve gameplay.

The game starts off with a bang when Kane, who is on his way to death row, escapes custody with the help of Lynch, a seriously disturbed psycho. It's no coincidence that Lynch is employed by The Seven, an organisation that Kane once worked for. Because Kane knows the location of something The Seven wants back, they plan to kill him once he has turned it over. To ensure that he does what they ask, his wife and daughter are being held hostage. While Lynch is technically on Kane's side, his psychosis often makes a bad situation worse. For example, in an attempt to rob a bank, Lynch suddenly breaks down and kills all the hostages. Ultimately, he's the demented sidekick that allows the game's co-op play. Fortunately, he's also not half-bad as an AI character.

The rest of the game's characters are not nearly as bright. They tend to come hard and fast, rarely taking cover and often just overpowering you with numbers. Tactically, it's hard to plan ahead since the enemy movement can be erratic and plain stupid.

While the cut-scene graphics is decent, once in the actual game, visuals lose substance and become dull and repetitive. Still, the game has a certain style to it that works. The story, voice acting and design work very well together, giving it an edgy movie atmosphere. What pulls this game down is the control scheme.

Directing fellow combatants around, be it Lynch or the cameo AI characters joining the action, is painful and feels out of place. Worse, when left to their own devices, AI team-mates aren't good at covering your back. Neither is the décor. Player characters automatically use cover. That means that if you lean out to shoot and you overdo it, Kane or Lynch gleefully pop out from behind cover into the sights of enemy cops/thugs. Surfaces to attach to aren't very easy: ducking and weaving from cover is much less fluent than in a lot of third-person shooters.

In the end though, despite being an average run-of-the-mill shooter, *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* still has a decent storyline and it's no wonder that Lionsgate Films has already snatched it up for a feature-length movie. However, the game lacks solid controls and only really patient players will get a decent experience out of it. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

TAKE COVER!

These games show that there's no excuse for bad cover systems anymore:

- Gears of War;
- Rogue Trooper;
- Uncharted: Drake's Fortune;
- Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas;
- Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter;
- Stranglehold; and
- kill.switch.

Good Bad guys

FOR FANS OF



Gears of War

WORSE THAN



BOTTOM LINE

Who said that violence never solved anything?

57
OUT OF 100





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DOMINATE





Homer's apiphobia gets the better of him



NAG MUST PLAY



WII OPINION

Let's put aside the usual frolicking around licence games and the flaws they all seem to inherit. Despite a legacy of games behind it, you can't expect *The Simpsons* to break the mould with the series' latest game. But EA's attempt is by far the most ambitious and really is not bad at all. It revels in the clichés of platform games and there's even a mini game for discovering the various familiar tricks being rehased in the game (like double-jump or grabbing a ledge). Basically *The Simpsons game* takes the sting out of being a licence property by making fun of games in general. Boosted by new footage and stories written and produced by the TV show's team, it's definitely a gem for the fans and a fun platform game for people not expecting the next *Jak & Daxter*. Except, that's the game with a traditional controller. On the Wii's nunchuk combination it's a mess. The camera is controlled with the D-pad and the character with the analogue stick. This makes timing jumps hard and moving the camera a big annoyance. If instead the Wiimote's motion sensor moved the camera, this could have been a lot better. Instead, you keep falling into the chocolate pools of the tutorial level or drop down from a high platform only to try and climb it all again. A good game ruined by very frustrating controls...

THE SIMPSONS GAME

READING THE GAME'S MANUAL, Bart discovers that the Simpson family each has special powers (notwithstanding the ability to break the fourth wall like wet tissue and go all self-referential at the drop of a hat). Bart can become "Bartman", Homer can become a huge "Homer Ball" with unstoppable eating power, Lisa can meditate and Marge can influence crowds. Aliens attack and the next thing you know it, the family is trying to save itself from becoming obsolete when the next "Simpsons Game" comes out. They fight through four separate "Simpsons" games currently in development: *Grand Theft Scratchy*, *Big Super Happy Fun Fun Game*, *Medal of Homer* and *Neverquest*. It's all utterly as absurd as *Simpsons* fans could desire, which is not unexpected considering three prolific *Simpsons* writers wrote the game's original storyline.

Players control four of the five family members through the 16 "episodes". Each episode requires specific skills related to the characters in that episode, and there are plenty of parody mini games scattered throughout the game. Most of the game has you switching between two characters and allows the same kind of hot-seat cooperative play that made *LEGO Star Wars* so much fun. Just like an actual *Simpsons* episode, the game has its highlights and its failings but manages to get it right where it counts. **NAG**

Miktar "Wiggum" Dracon

Previous Simpsons games

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

The Simpsons: Road Rage

BOTTOM LINE
A remarkably sensible license game that tries despite its flaws.

THE SIMPSONS ♥ GAMES

- 1991**
 - Bart Simpson's Escape from Camp Deadly
 - The Simpsons: Bart vs. the World
 - The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Space Mutants
 - The Simpsons: Bart's House of Weirddness
 - The Simpsons Arcade Game
- 1992**
 - Krusty's Fun House
 - The Simpsons: Bartman Meets Radioactive Man
 - The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Juggernauts
- 1993**
 - The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare
- 1994**
 - Itchy & Scratchy in Miniature Golf Madness
 - Virtual Bart
 - The Simpsons: Bart & the Beanstalk
 - The Itchy & Scratchy Game
- 1996 - 1997**
 - The Simpsons Cartoon Studio
 - The Simpsons: Virtual Springfield
- 2001**
 - The Simpsons: Road Rage
 - The Simpsons Wrestling
 - The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror
- 2002 - 2003**
 - The Simpsons Skateboarding
 - The Simpsons: Hit & Run

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METAL SLUG 3

RRP → 800 points | Publisher → SNK Playmore Corporation | Distributor → XBLA | Genre → Platformer

THAT NEFARIOUS VILLAIN GENERAL Morden, may have been swatted into inglorious retreat [see: *Metal Slug 1*, *Metal Slug 2*], but hushed whispers of his continued meddling in the affairs of global domination suggest some sort of impending renewed insurrection. SEQUEL SLUG: ACTIVATE! Peregrine Strike Force commandos Marco Rossi, Tarma Roving, Eri Kasamoto and Fiolina Germi are dragged away from their retirement application forms and once again deployed to make nice (or dead). Lots of big, bad, boom-boom ensues.

The *Metal Slug* series is one of those that bring great, sloppy tears of sentimental affection to the eyes of old-school cabinet bashers throughout the galaxy. Why? It's not the sexy hand-drawn 2D sprites. It's not the outrageously eccentric boss battles. It's not the bristling arsenal of weapons, including flame throwers, depth charges, and laser rifles. It's

not the multiple paths through levels granting the sort of replayability most games can only dream hot, fevered dreams of. It's not even the loping camel with the omni-directional blaster cannons bolted onto its bum.

It's not that *Metal Slug 3* is probably one of the best ever side-scrolling arcade platformers, alongside *Gunstar Heroes* and *Streets of Rage*, and it's not that this fiendishly tough game has been magnanimously ported with an unlimited credit freeplay mode for feeble-fingered people like me, and support for two-player co-op carnage.

No. It's because, should you find yourself the luckless victim of a zombie attack, you don't die. You stagger back to your feet as a shambling recruit in the legions of the undead. And – picture this very carefully, now – instead of your standard alt-fire grenade tossing attack, your jaw flops open, and an immense gout of fire engine-red blood spurts



forth in a tremendous arc spanning the width of your television, eviscerating everything in its soggy path – including helicopters. If that doesn't slap a fat, dripping capital E onto Epic, then the world must be ending or something.

And all this for only 800 Microsoft Points. Go, go, go! **NAG**

Tarryn "GO SLUG GO" van der Byl

BOTTOM LINE
A thrombosis-inducing nostalgic blast-o-rama.

90
OUT OF 100

- PC
- PS2
- PS3
- PSP
- XBOX
- 360
- DS
- Wii
- GBA
- MOB

TALES OF THE WORLD: RADIANT MYTHOLOGY

RRP → R399 | Publisher → Namco | Distributor → SK Games | Genre → RPG

LIKE THE JAPANESE. I mean, I don't actually know any, but if I did, we'd probably hang out because I like ramen and sushi and stuff. But I've never quite managed to reconcile myself with Japanese RPGs. By my reckoning, JRPGs fall into the same category as anime: most of it is unadulterated pig vomit, but fans will defend and extol its imagined significance to the death because it's so cool (excuse me, *DESU*) to be an elitist *Naruto* fan among ten billion other elitist *Naruto* fans.

Radiant Mythology is just another drab JRPG in what appears to be a long line of other drab JRPGs in the *Tales* franchise. You control a gaggle of androgynous, precocious pre-adolescent brats in hotpants with names inscrutably and ineptly misappropriated from Western mythology, and send them off on an apparently interminable cycle of fetch quests. There's a plot partially nicked from *The Neverending Story*, some sort of secret adventurer's club called Ad Libitum, and an abundance of cretinous dialogue, but it's all really just a spotty pretext for the fetch quests. And there are only so many meatballs you can harvest from the bushes with an expensive single-use sickle before wondering if the remainder of your life might be better spent falling off a mountain into a helicopter rotor.

There is no real character development to speak of, the inventory, crafting, and party management systems are a shambles,



the combat is repetitive, and everything is being eaten by merciless clichés. According to the Internet, the "skit" sequences are rib-crackingly hilarious, but they're actually just really, really stupid. Esoteric "insider" references to rubbish games are still rubbish.

There's probably no dissuading the hard-line JRPG militia from buying, loving, and 10/10-ing this abysmal game, but to the rest of you, avoid it.

NAG
Tarryn "I think my editor hates me" van der Byl

BOTTOM LINE
Quickly becomes excruciatingly tedious.

38
OUT OF 100

- PC
- PS2
- PS3
- PSP
- XBOX
- 360
- DS
- Wii
- GBA
- MOB



YAHTZEE

RRP → \$19.95 | Publisher → Zylom | Distributor → www.reflexive.com | Genre → Puzzle | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

ONCE UPON A TIME, long before the Dark Wizard Bill Gates created computers, the Xbox and the Internet, people used to play games. These games did not come on a PlayStation. They did not use Direct X. In fact, they didn't require a machine or electricity at all! No, people used to play these ancient games on a table top. Some of these games used a colourful game board and little bits of wood to represent the players. Some still were even simpler, requiring only a handful of dice, a pad of paper and a pencil!

Back in this Golden Age of gaming, some 50 years ago, a faerie named E. S. Lowe created a little game called *Yahtzee*. The object of the game is to score the most points by rolling five dice to make certain poker-esque combinations (three-of-kind,

four-of-a-kind, straight, full house, etc.) The player can roll the dice up to three times in a turn to make one of the thirteen possible combinations. Once a combination has been used, it can't be used again in the game.

Eventually acquired by Milton Bradley, then Hasbro, this little gem migrated to the PC. Its latest incarnation, distributed by Zylom, features three variants: traditional Yahtzee; Triple Yahtzee, where you can score on any one of three scorecards in the same game; and Power Yahtzee, where you earn points for winning matches that you can spend on power-ups like and extra roll or guaranteed five-of-a-kind (creatively called a Yahtzee). The game can be played solitaire, versus the computer or versus friends (though there's no online play). The game also has a trophy room to keep track

of your accomplishments in the game, such as scoring more than 500 points in a game.

After 50 years, *Yahtzee* still stands the test of time. If you're looking for a fun little time-waster, *Yahtzee* is your game. **NAG**

Chris Bistline

- PC
- PS2
- PS3
- PSP
- XBOX
- 360
- DS
- Wii
- GBA
- MOB

🍷 🎮 ⌨ K A

BOTTOM LINE

75

OUT OF 100

Grab a handful of dice, a pencil and hit "PrtScn" and you can keep playing even during load shedding!

MOTO GP 07

RRP → R245 | Publisher → THQ
Distributor → SK Games | Genre → Racing

WITH ALL THE BIG titles coming out on the Xbox 360, the PS3 and the PS2, it becomes a bit hard staying objective. Especially when you play a game on the PS2 that you've already played on the Xbox 360. The jump is just too big, and I don't just mean graphically. *MotoGP 07* on the PS2 has this problem. Would it be fair to compare the PS2 and Xbox 360 versions? I mean, it's meant to be the same game. Then again, is it fair to compare the two when a lot of people still only have a PS2 and would thus only play this version? *MotoGP 07* is a great PS2 racing game, especially if you are a MotoGP fan. And as far as game content, it is the same game as the Xbox 360 version. Only the music and menus have changed, while the racing and challenge modes are still there. Sadly, it doesn't seem that you can create your own racer, which, in my opinion, has made the *MotoGP* games that much more fun than the F1 games. It doesn't take to long to load and the loading screens give you oodles of information about your favorite racers. What is important to mention is that the loading time are roughly the same as the Xbox version. Graphically it's all there, but with the obvious PS2 shortcomings (you know: short draw distances and blocky models). But that doesn't stop the game from looking realistic enough to fool you. The tracks and



surrounding areas look as good as you're going to get on that little black fun box above (or under) your TV. The thing that hits a sore spot, though are the controls, or the lack thereof. The PS2 controller, minus triggers, really doesn't give you the realistic feel that the graphics try so hard to create. The sound doesn't help much in this department. I don't think bikes are meant to sound like over eager lawn mowers. With a small sound track, there is not much to cover the sound up. But in all fairness, it is the best bike game on the PS2, so if you are a fan, well then, stop reading and go get it. **NAG**

Eddie Fancis

🔫 🐘 🎮 A

BOTTOM LINE

The best bike game on the PS2.

75

OUT OF 100

1090



SYPHON FILTER: LOGAN'S SHADOW

RRP → R375 | Publisher → SCEA | Distributor → SK Games | Genre → Third-person Shooter

WHEN THE EXCELLENT *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* was released on PSP last year, many worried whether it could ever be equalled or surpassed. We're pleased to announce that this has, in fact, happened, and this latest *Syphon Filter* title is easily one of the best PSP games you'll ever play.

This game is very strong on story. The action starts on a ship in the middle of the ocean. This particular vessel was carrying something that several world powers are now after. The plot is quite sophisticated, transcending the linear nature of most action games' story lines. It's full of twists and betrayals, and the suspense is heightened by the fact that the protagonist's boss is not telling everything he knows... This story is conveyed during the course of the game by radio dialogue, as well as between missions during briefings and debriefings.

The action is very varied. As well as traditional shooter elements, there are occasional simple key-press sequences, as well as 'rail-shooter' elements. Players find themselves using a broad array of weapons. Players also need to frequently change visual modes (different goggles that the protagonist has at his disposal) in order to be fully aware of the environment and the entities populating it.

From a graphical point of view, this title truly excels, getting more out of the PSP's hardware than just about any other game we've seen. This is evident in rendered cut-scenes and the in-game action. The sound is also excellent: the musical score is moody and atmospheric, while voice acting is clearly audible and convincing.

Logan's Shadow has two difficulty levels: Normal and Hard. The Normal setting is perfect for anyone who wants to play the



game, have fun, be challenged from time to time and enjoy the story. The Difficult setting is for the hardcore player. It also serves as adequate training for multiplayer, which in this title has been implemented for up to eight players. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Icons: Gun, Hand, Camera, Gamepad, 16+

BOTTOM LINE

A perfect balance between action and story. One of the best PSP games ever.

90
OUT OF 100

Progress bar: 10 bars, 9 filled.



SOCOM: US NAVY SEALS TACTICAL STRIKE

RRP → R399 | Publisher → Sony Computer Entertainment | Distributor → SK Games | Genre → Strategy / Action

SOMEWHERE IN THE FLY-BLOWN slums of Panama City, rebellion has simmered into revolt. A gang of insurgents, known only as La Mano los Gente, has breached the local government offices, shot holes in the furniture, and dragged off the Interior Minister and the visiting US Ambassador in something resembling a rather ramshackle coup attempt. These insolent whippersnappers and their unhappy detainees are quickly located in a dockside bolthole, and the intrepid men of the US Navy SEALs are deployed to neutralise tangos and save the day through a brutal gauntlet of nine daring missions.

Although, *actually*, you've got the pick of nine international spec ops teams, including the British SAS, German KSK, French GIGN, and South Korean 707th Special Mission Unit. It's really just an aesthetic choice, however, as all teams default to a basic load-out of one sniper, two assault riflemen,

and one heavy machine gunner. Once you've chosen the avatars of your vicarious third world subjugation, you can stuff all sorts of stuff in their pockets like extra ammo, hand grenades, and special scopes. As you complete missions, moreover, you'll cash in some XP, which you can distribute among your team to beef things up a bit and skew the performance stats to complement your playing style.

Despite having passed hands to a new developer, the latest addition to the handheld *SOCOM* roster sports the same high quality sound and visuals we've come to expect from the series. Environments are complex, packing in more geometry than you could shake a loaded M16 at, including multiple paths to navigate from A to B. Load times are somewhat heavy, although each scenario clocks in at around 40 minutes of play, so that's not really too much of an issue. **NAG**

Tarryn "Breach and Frag" van der Byl

SQUADSENSE

SOCOM: Tactical Strike features a rather foxy squad management model that maximises speedy efficiency without becoming mired in all that unnecessary finger-tangling complexity to which so many lesser games have fallen prey. Using quick button combinations, you can switch between the two-man Fire Teams Alpha and Bravo, as well as individual members. Your available orders will depend on your team / member selection and context – pick someone with a scoped Dragunov strapped to their back, for example, and you'll see a Snipe option in the targeting order array. While you might conceivably run 'n' gun your way through this game in a hotfooted blaze of glory, the intended idea is deliberation, planning, and cautious execution. While the interface is initially somewhat daunting, you'll be nimbly scuttling your itty-bitty operatives around the map within fifteen minutes or so.

Another nifty feature is a sort of ghost preview of your squad's destination positions, that you'll see in the movement skimmer before hustling them off. The neatly removes those nail-biting "Is one of them going to end up slouching gormlessly in a blizzard of enemy grenades" pre-maneuver jitters we've all come to dread in games of this sort.

Icons: Gun, 16+, Gamepad

BOTTOM LINE

A tactical team-based treat for the patient strategist.

76
OUT OF 100

Progress bar: 10 bars, 7 filled.



NHL 2K8

RRP→ R579 | Publisher→ 2K Games
 Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Sport
 Platforms→ PS3, PS2, X360

FOR OVER A DECADE now, we have seen NHL titles hitting our shores where hardly anyone actually knows the rules of ice hockey. However, it did not stop playing these games from being a fun and addictive. *NHL 2k8* is the latest in the series and features an all-new gaming engine dedicated to emulating the sport. It is because of this new driving force that many have claimed *NHL 2k8* to be the most realistic simulation out to date – an opinion I find myself agreeing to. Even though I have never actually played ice hockey, I have been to a few matches and the action seen on the rink feels well-imitated on-screen.



One particular realistic aspect of the game is the new AI system, which allows for the computer to learn from the players actions and counter their tactics. This makes it very challenging to keep ahead of the game and holds the promise of a whole new experience with every match. In fact, a new strategy needs to be used in almost every encounter. *NHL 2k8* makes it feel like you spend more time devising attacks and defenses than your usual skate-and-shoot approach encouraged by previous titles.

On the control front, not much has been added since the previous title, but it does have a pretty unique puck handling system. Holding in certain buttons allows you to move the puck around with the analogue stick for better control and accuracy.

NHL 2k8 is a worthwhile game for any hockey enthusiasts out there or those just simply looking for a good sports title.

NAG
 Justin 'Iceman' Stabbert



BOTTOM LINE

Virtual sports games just reached a new level.

88
 OUT OF 100



PREMIER MANAGER 08

RRP→ R285 | Publisher→ ZOO Digital Publishing
 Distributor→ Apex
 Genre→ Sports Management | Platforms→ PC, PS2
 PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

PREMIER MANAGER 08 is a bad game. Fact. Whereas titles such as *Football Manager* or *Championship Manager* are jam-packed with clubs, players and stats, *PM08* is just an overflowing cesspit. However, ZOO Digital, the creator of this atrocity, hasn't stopped at just producing a pile of twaddle. You see, the dear fellows at ZOO Digital have taken one look at their abomination and clearly decided that no one in their right mind would ever buy their product. After all, who wants to play an inaccurate and uninspiring title with a broken game engine to boot? So what have they done? They are trying to insult our intelligence by masking the mess they have created as a "Pick up and play experience." In fact, we don't know if we should congratulate them on their audacity or simply laugh out loud. Yes, perhaps there's a little brilliance in it... There's just one problem: the market for pick-up-and-play soccer management sims is pretty much saturated. Gamers who play soccer management sims are interested in in-depth tactics and taking their time to build up powerful teams. If it doesn't really matter who is in your squad or what your formation is, or whether you're playing home or away, then really, what is the point? And in *PM08*, intentionally or not, none of that stuff is of consequence. Home games, away games, star players or youth players – nothing matters. *PM08* is horrible. Don't pick it up and definitely don't play it.

NAG
 Ryan Kalis

BOTTOM LINE

If you're having trouble sleeping try this game.

35
 OUT OF 100



PHYSICAL	GOALKEEPING	OUTFIELD
STAMINA: 94	HANDLING: 17	TACKLING: 17
STRENGTH: 89	POSITIONING: 15	PASSING: 73
SPEED: 86	REFLEXES: 17	HEADING: 88
FITNESS: 37	AGILITY: 15	MARKING: 19
	BALANCE: 18	CONTROL: 83
	CATCHING: 18	DRIBBLING: 66
		SHOOTING: 87
		FINISHING: 81

MILAN 0-0 ROMA
 DATE: MON. 27 AUG. 2007
 STADION MILANESE
 ATTENDANCE: 741

BOTTOM LINE

BOTTOM LINE

Well worth it if you like rummaging through stuff.

80
 OUT OF 100



The flesh-eating bunny takes a bite

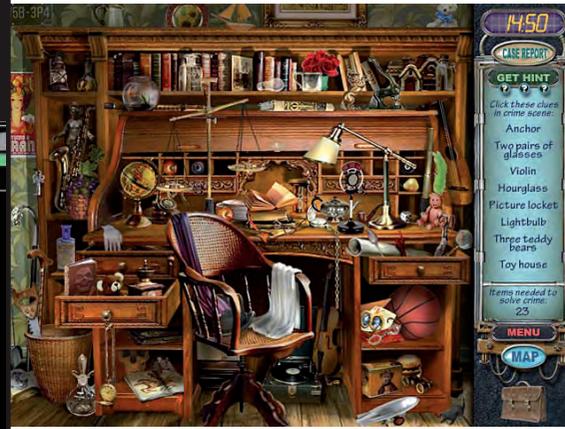
MYSTERY CASE FILES: MADAM FATE

RRP→ \$8.99 | Publisher→ Big Fish Games
 Distributor→ www.bigfishgames.com
 Genre→ Puzzle | Platforms→ PC
 PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

A POPULAR GENRE IN THE casual games arena is where you have to look for hidden objects in a scene. Presented with a room that looks like the target of garage sale carpet bombing, you have to scout out a list of objects before the clock runs out. There are numerous such scenes and often you revisit a familiar place to look for a new list of items. Basically, if you enjoy peering at the screen, trying to establish if that curve is indeed the 'roasted duck' on your list, it's a lot of fun. Each of these games are wrapped with a story to establish a theme – in this case you are a P.I. trying to find out which of a carnival owner's employees plan to kill her at midnight. To do this, you have to find hidden objects on a variety of colourful and detailed screens, not to mention uncover several hidden locations.

In a big way, *MCF* doesn't do much differently to most of these games, but it has some clever twists and the various locations have seen a lot of attention from the developers. Two difficulty levels will test your 'I Spy' talent and the presentation is solid, entertaining and, above all, colourful. It's obvious why this has been so popular.

NAG
 James Francis





CABELA'S BIG GAME HUNTER

RRP→ R181 | Publisher→ Activision
 Distributor→ ApexInteractive | Genre→ Sports
 Platforms→ PS2

SEEING THAT I AM most definitely not going to pay any thing by becoming a professional hunter, I thought, well, why not do it digitally? Really, how bad can it be? Surely, FPS games have moved on beyond *Rise of the Triad*. They must have: everything else has improved. Imagine the possibilities – sent particles filling the processor as all the animals down-wind pick up your man-musk; the distinctive texture of mud and grass filling your digital sweat glands as you crouch behind non-sprite grass and rocks. You know, *Doom 3* meets *Zoo Tycoon*. Wouldn't that be grand. There could even be a slaughtering game for the DS. Pretty groovy. But sadly it seems, as with fishing games, that developers just don't know how to make games out of these 'manly' endeavours. *Cabela's Big Game Hunter* manages to deliver everything you want, providing you want something more than *Snake* on your old Nokia. Truthfully there is nothing in this game to make it worth playing. Except if your idea of solving the plight of the polar bear is hunting them. That's right, digitally speaking there are no endangered animals. Okay, so the game is good for a laugh, but trying to sneak around with ridiculous controls in outdated graphics to hunt enemies that don't shoot back isn't overrated. It just sucks. **NAG**

Eddie Francis

BOTTOM LINE
 More 'point and click' than anything resembling real hunting

35
 OUT OF 100

PIYOTAMA

RRP→ \$2.99 | Publisher→ Sony Computer Entertainment
 Distributor→ PlayStation Network
 Genre→ Puzzle | Platforms→ PS3

POSSIBLY THE MOST UNOFFENSIVE game ever conceived (except if you have a phobia for brightly-coloured, duo-tone cartoon chickens), *Piyotama* is a "Match Four" style game where you attempt to manoeuvre four like-coloured eggs next to each other in diagonal or horizontal lines. After the match is made, the eggs highlight and, if no other matches are made, will pop after a time. Making successive rapid matches creates a Combo counter. When the eggs pop, eggs stacked above them will bounce down into the new gap below. You can only shift a row of eggs left or right by three, then rotate the three eggs now "offside" through the three possible permutations so as to move them back into the playboard on any row. It's a fairly straightforward if shallow game, although the online rankings and two-player battle-mode do add some depth. "Plump Eggs" appear at higher difficulty levels, which prevent a row from being shifted, and can only be removed via a match with like-coloured eggs. It's fun for a while, but ultimately there are better games of similar ilk. **NAG**

Miktar "Chirpie Egg" Dragon

BOTTOM LINE
 Seen it all before and seen it done much better.

68
 OUT OF 100



SPIDER-MAN 3

RRP→ R399 | Publisher→ Activision
 Distributor→ Megarom
 Genre→ Action/Adventure | Platforms→ Wii

THERE SEEM TO BE quite a lot of older games being ported to the Wii lately. *Spider-Man 3* is such a game, having originally been released for other consoles (read PlayStation 2) some time ago.

The only difference between this version of the game and previous releases on other platforms is the control system, which is fairly frantic. Flicking the Wii Remote either left or right will result in a left or right attack, for example, while breaking things requires a two-handed (using the nunchuk) scrabbling motion. If nothing else, this game will make you tired.

Spider-Man 3 works well on the Wii, although some movement and camera issues do come up from time to time, while some things require precise timing. On the whole, it's a fun game, but not spectacular. At very least, the humour is good, with Bruce Campbell delivering some corks as the narrator. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

BOTTOM LINE
 Not bad, but certainly not brilliant

74
 OUT OF 100





SWARM

RRP→ \$19.99 | Publisher→ Reflexive Entertainment
Distributor→ www.reflexive.com | Genre→ Arcade
Platforms→ PC | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

IT'S THE FUTURE AND prison convicts have a choice: rot in prison, or pilot a powerful space fighter against insectoid aliens for a year and if they survive they're free to go. Bit of a no-brainer, really. Originally released in 1998 by Reflexive Entertainment in its fledgling days as a developer, *Swarm* is top-down shooter with slightly antiquated controls by today's standards: spacebar is for go while left-mouse fires primary and right-mouse fires secondary. The goal is to collect special minerals. Each level consists of a finite wrap-out area filled with asteroids, weapons, enemies and EZT (the stuff you need to collect). There are three types of levels: grab all the EZT, kill all the enemies, and grab-bag bonus levels filled with weapons and ammo. The different weapon types range from standard to interesting and overall it's still a solid game even ten years down the line. Even so an old game is old and those with more modern sensibilities might turn up their noses at the low resolution and dated graphics. **NAG**

Miktar "1998" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE
 Old, but still good, but still very, very old. Too expensive.

69
 OUT OF 100

EVERYDAY SHOOTER

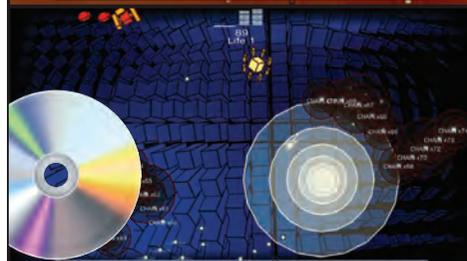
RRP→ \$9.99 | Publisher→ SCE Studios Santa Monica
Distributor→ PlayStation Network
Genre→ Shooter | Platforms→ PS3

WE'VE INCLUDED THE TRAILER for *Everyday Shooter* on the DVD specifically because the game is rather difficult to explain properly. Essentially, *Everyday Shooter* is an 'album' of games, abstract yet familiar. Every level has unique nuance and style, filled with modulating geometric shapes that react to your actions and the music. The gameplay itself is of the traditional dual-analogue shooting variety where the left stick controls position and the right initiates shooting in the direction the stick is pressed, albeit constrained to eight directions. All actions are punctuated by guitar riffs harmonising over the all-guitar soundtrack. Particular to *Everyday Shooter* is how a level lasts as long as the music track for that level takes to finish, indicated by a progress bar at the bottom. Progression is simply a matter of surviving until the song is done - easier said than done. The song itself is a cue for what happens in the level, so one learns when to expect a difficult section (usually the bridge or chorus). It's very arty and abstract, yet enough of a game to merit being called one. **NAG**

Miktar "Riff" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE
 Procedurally generated music based on shooting action. Neat.

85
 OUT OF 100



TRAILER ON THE DVD



PAIN

RRP→ \$9.99 | Publisher→ Sony
Distributor→ PlayStation Network
Genre→ Puzzle | Platforms→ PS3

PAIN IS ONE OF those cheap little games that is a must-have for every PS3 owner. It's only available by download, which limits its market a bit, but definitely worth it if you have a broadband connection. It's almost certainly going to entertain as long as a similarly priced DVD movie.

While the game itself seems a bit simple, being only one level and a few modes, it's actually quite involved. There are hundreds or even thousands of objects precariously perched to be brought down in a rain of destruction. To do this, you must fling your character out of a giant slingshot into the city, and hope that as much falls apart as possible. The fact that you can either keep things as they are or quickly reset the scene each time actually adds a lot to the game, as it makes specific goals more achievable.

There are a couple alternate game modes and some unlockable content, but basically *PAIN* is little more than a toy similar to a stack of blocks. You knock it down and set it up again, yet it remains unusually fun despite the repetitiveness. **NAG**

Toby Hudson

BOTTOM LINE
PAIN is limited but priced less than most DVDs, and great fun with some friends.

85
 OUT OF 100



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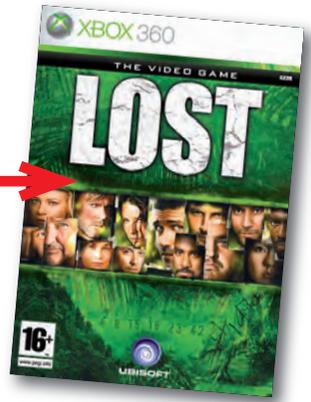
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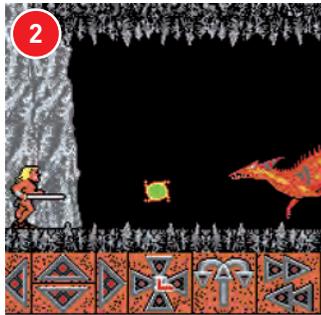
MARCH EDITION



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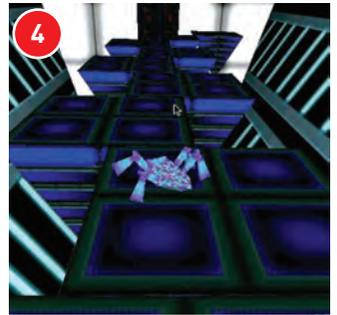
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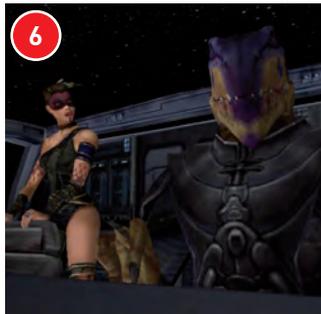
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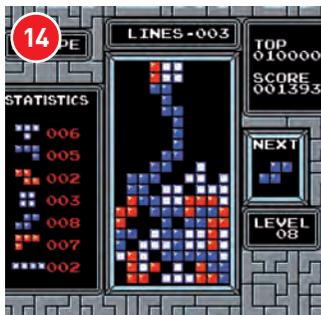
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LAST MONTH'S GAMES: 1. Arcanum; 2. Battlefield Vietnam; 3. Carmageddon; 4. Caveman Ugh-lympics; 5. Counter-Strike; 6. Daggerfall; 7. Duke Nukem 3D; 8. Golden Axe; 9. Planescape Torment; 10. Prince of Persia; 11. Psychonauts; 12. Super Metroid; 13. The Bard's Tale; 14. The Dig; 15. Thexder; 16. Viva Piñata

NAG

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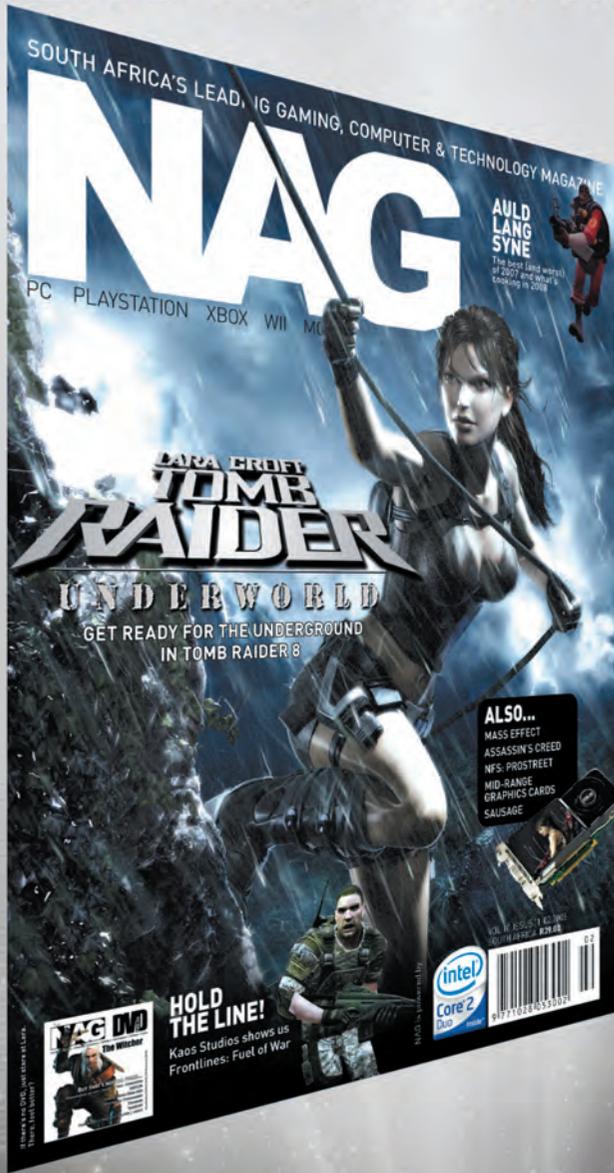
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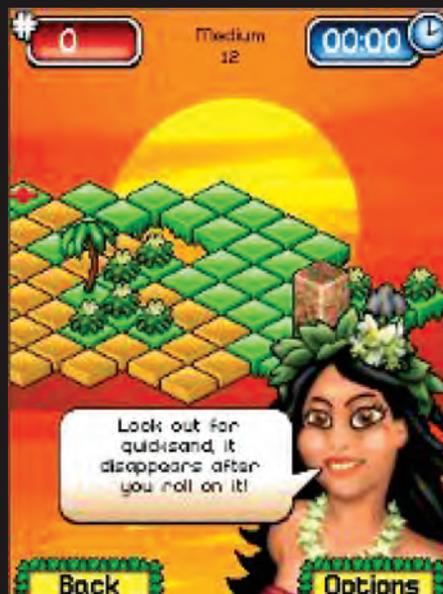
TIKI-ROLA

Developer→ Teazel | Publisher→ TBA | Genre→ Puzzle | Release→ TBA

ONE OF THE JOYS of the mobile game market is that so many independent developers get to try their hand at making games, and are faced with multitude of distribution options. The coding on most mobile games is very simple when compared to other platforms, allowing new players (with new ideas) to constantly stimulate the market. One such company, UK based Teazel, is coming out with a nice new mobile challenge called *Tiki-Rola*. The name of the game implies exactly what it is... the player has to roll a representation of the stone god Tiki around a board, avoiding edges and other pitfalls, to get him "home."

It's a simple concept, really, but with more than 80 levels that range from really simple to extremely difficult, *Tiki-Rola* will consume a huge amount of time. Secret levels and trophy awards can also be unlocked while playing the game.

Tiki-Rola features clear, professional graphics that add immensely to its look and feel. The game is, at the time of writing, nearing completion, and Teazel are looking for a distribution deal. **NAG**



PARK OR DIE

Developer→ HandyGames | Publisher→ TBA
Genre→ Stunt | Release→ TBA

THERE ARE A HOST of games on the mobile platform that raise an eyebrow. Some of the silliest games imaginable have appeared, featuring the likes of tossed chickens and waiters and a whole lot of other silliness that makes us shake our heads and bemoan fate.

Park or Die may be such a game, but we suspect that it's actually far more intelligent (read as "tongue in cheek") than all that. Here's a game that seems to poke fun at the industry as it promises to deliver "wild speed parking action with an illegal underground atmosphere." Care to take a guess who the butt of the joke is here?

25 missions require the player to slalom, drift and, yes, park their way to victory. Extreme parking isn't really a huge sport, or a sport at all, for that matter, but the game seems to be more about the fun of it, rather than trying to be too serious.

And hey, maybe we'll learn a few tricks for nabbing those rare spots in crowded parking lots while we're at it. **NAG**

DIAMOND TWISTER

Developer→ Gameloft | Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Puzzle | Release→ 2008

PUZZLE GAMES ON THE mobile platform are a dime-a-dozen. There's a good reason for that, though; they are popular, because they work very well on the platform, and provide a quick, fun and easy gaming fix. However, there are so many of them that seeing another one on the horizon doesn't fill us with great amounts of glee.

Except, of course, for the fact that this is a Gameloft title, and Gameloft generally produce top titles. *Diamond Twister* will therefore, in theory at least, be a good puzzle game... a category which is much smaller than the overall puzzle-game group.

The play dynamic is simple: rotate groups of gems to match three or more of the same type of gem, and the set is removed from the board. It's similar to titles like *Jewel Quest*, even down to the fact that it has a story line (which is probably far from necessary.) We'll reserve judgment on this one, and wait to see what the final product looks like. **NAG**

mobile
game

BROTHERS IN ARMS PART OF WAR



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REVIEWS

LEGO STAR WARS 2

Publisher → TT Games | Genre → Action/puzzle
 Reviewed on → Nokia N81 | Rating → 70
 Download → SMS NAG033 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

THIS GAME STARTS WITH the hugely recognizable theme song as a *Star Wars*-style introduction scrolls up the screen (though not off into the distance – that would be rather tricky on a phone's screen!) Cutely, the intro ends with the Death Star following the text onto the screen, much as in the movies and several of the computer games. The story in this game loosely follows events in *Episode IV*, with the player starting off with control of Luke Skywalker, and with the aim of rescuing Princess Leia and R2D2. Luke can shoot his blaster and push some of the LEGO blocks around. The blaster can destroy certain blocks, as well as computer terminals, (some of which yield a "LEGO stud"), and kill Imperial stormtroopers, whose heads go flying off when shot. The LEGO studs can be found lying around or, as mentioned above, released from some computer terminals by shooting at them, and present the opportunity to unlock a bonus game mode.

While the game starts off fairly simple, eventually one finds R2D2, along with the ability to switch between characters. R2 can remotely open or close doors, and operate elevators. This is not optional – from here on, the game cannot be completed without R2's ability. R2, however, can't cross certain surface types, so here the puzzle elements start to really come into their own. Another strong puzzle theme is the fact that Luke must often push blocks around to bridge gaps in order to continue on his quest. Once Leia joins the party, she gets the blaster, leaving Luke to do all the heavy pushing. She handles the shooting, and will automatically fire on enemies while not selected, so in a sense she can be used as a "turret" of sorts.

The game has charming sounds, and the graphics may not be hyper-detailed, but they are more than adequate, and somewhat amusing. Overall, the game is of surprising and impressive complexity,

though not excessively so. Also, the fact that it automatically saves your progress means that if you struggle with a specific mission, you can always come back to it another time (though you will not progress until you have completed it.) The fact that the missions get saved also means that you can pick up the game, play for a few minutes, complete a level, and then put it down again. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin



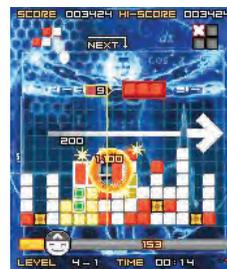
TETRIS

Publisher → EA | Genre → Puzzle
 Reviewed on → Nokia N81 | Rating → 90
 Download → SMS NAG037 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

IS THERE MUCH POINT to explain *Tetris* anymore? It's probably the most recognised game name in the world and it has appeared on more platforms than any game or series could ever shake a stick at. It's also one of the simplest and yet most addictive puzzle games created. Of course, back then it was a little bit easier. Someone had to come up with the 'arrange dropping blocks and eliminate them before you run out of space' idea. It's the cornerstone of many puzzle games today, even far-flung relatives like *Bejeweled*.

Tetris is also a natural pick for a mobile phone, which license holder EA obviously knows. It also knows not to mess with something that has stood the test of time, so *Tetris* is exactly what you expect. The main mode is Marathon, which lets you stack and destroy blocks until the game outwits you (or, more likely, you make a few fatal mistakes). This is complemented by 40 Lines, where you have to clear 40 lines as quickly as you can, and Ultra, where you attempt the highest score in a 3 minute game. Little has been done wrong here. Hey – you can always rely on the classics. **NAG**

James Francis



LUMINES PUZZLE FUSION

Publisher → Gameloft | Genre → Puzzle
 Reviewed on → Nokia N81 | Rating → 70
 Download → SMS NAG034 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R20

HERE IS A TITLE that has been ported across from older generation game consoles. It is something like a different sort of *Tetris* – pieces consisting of several blocks fall from the top of the screen, and come to rest either on the "floor", or atop other blocks. The pieces consist of blocks of different colours, and the idea is to match at least four in a square or rectangle, the bigger the better. Early in the game, the falling pieces contain only two colours, but this eventually increases to include special function blocks. Unlike *Tetris*, when pieces fall, they do not leave gaps underneath them, so the blocks will settle to fill any such gaps. This gives the player an extra option to consider, but requires fast thinking.

What made the original versions of *Lumines* unique was the audio-visual experience: dazzling and intricate backdrops accompanied by wee mixed music, all of the above combining to deliver a unique experience. Sadly, most of this is lost in the port to mobile, not necessarily through any fault of the developers, but rather as a result of the mobile medium – mobile phones simply do not have the visual and aural capabilities required to successfully deliver this game. The game dynamic itself has ported across successfully enough, and is well suited to the control interface of a handset. Unfortunately, however, the accompanying accoutrements, even though ultimately cosmetic, are lacking, and so many people will find the overall experience rather humdrum. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

SKATE

Publisher → EA Mobile | Genre → Sport
 Reviewed on → Nokia N81 | Rating → 79
 Download → SMS NAG035 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R50

WHEN SKATE HIT THE Next generation consoles, a lot of people got very excited. Here was a game that took skate-boarding to a whole new level, with a unique viewpoint and control system accentuating the act of skating, rather than the flashiness around top skaters. It was, in a word, fantastic.

So it's little surprise that a mobile version has made its way to pockets around the world. The question is: how does the game translate from the revolutionary ideas introduced in the console versions to the relatively basic controls and small screen possessed by mobile phones. In a phrase, it doesn't. *Skate* on the mobile phone is almost nothing like the console version, which is hardly surprising. The only things that the two games have in common are the name, and the fact that they are about skate-boarding. If you're expecting anything like the console game on your phone, you're expecting far too much from technology as it currently stands.

Skate on the mobile is great fun, though. It's a side-scrolling game with limited mobility up and down as you steer your



skater to avoid various obstacles in the road. The controls are dead simple, with simple button pushes achieving tricks – provided your timing doesn't suck. When it does, the bails are almost as funny as those on the console version: bone crushing hits that make you laugh and cringe at the same time.

With good graphics and fair sound, *Skate* on the mobile phone is not a bad option. It's not revolutionary, nor is it anything really like the free roaming console game. But it is fun, and well worth a few tries. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

AMERICAN GANGSTER

Publisher → GAMELOFT | Genre → Action
 Reviewed on → Nokia N81 | Rating → 74
 Download → SMS NAG036 to 083 123 686 | RRP → R40

THIS GAME IS LICENSED from the film of the same name, and places the player in control of a wannabe gangster plying his trade in Harlem. Taken under the wing of a true gangster, the player has to perform a variety of missions in a *Grand Theft Auto* style game. The player must travel on foot or drive to various locations. Vehicles can be hijacked, and gun fights entered into. It's pretty much what one would expect from this kind of game, presented in an isometric view style.

One criticism comes in when the controls are investigated. The controls while on foot are simple enough, but driving a car gets a little tricky. The turning direction is relative to the car, not to the screen. In other words, driving towards the bottom of the screen means hitting the left button when you want to turn right. It's not

a huge obstacle, but it is a bit of a curve-ball when first playing the game.

Upgraded weapons and the like can be bought from various vendors within the game, using cash earned by completing missions.

American Gangster is, for all intents and purposes, a standard mobile action adventure. No surprises (good or bad) await the player. **NAG**

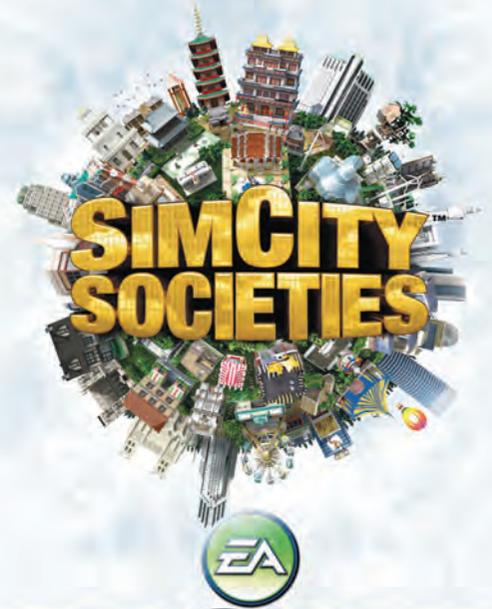
Walt Pretorius



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CAME, COMMANDER, CONQUERED

COMMAND & CONQUER WAS AMONG THE FIRST REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAMES TO HIT THE SCENE, AND WHILE IT DIDN'T INVENT THE GENRE, IT WAS CERTAINLY INSTRUMENTAL IN SHAPING IT. THE ORIGINAL GAME WAS SO SUCCESSFUL THAT ITS CREATORS, WESTWOOD STUDIOS, BRANCHED OUT THE FRANCHISE IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION, GIVING RISE TO THE *COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT* SERIES. OTHER DEVELOPERS INTRODUCED SEVERAL CLONES, BUT THESE WERE MOSTLY OBSCURE VERSIONS. MORE RECENTLY, AFTER EA HAD ACQUIRED WESTWOOD, *C&C: GENERALS* WAS INTRODUCED, INCORPORATING ELEMENTS OF BLIZZARD'S RTS GAMES. WHILE THESE WEREN'T UNSUCCESSFUL, THEY WERE MET BY CRITICISM FROM TRUE FANS.

C&C INNOVATED ON SEVERAL fronts. It was graphically superior to any similar game of the time (e.g. *WarCraft: Orcs & Humans*), and made unusually heavy (for its time) use of live-action video to deliver its story. During missions, players got to enjoy vocal unit responses (which were not entirely new, but had not been universally adopted in games yet), and a very upbeat house-techno soundtrack. However, the most important element to this game's success is the fact that it supported network play for up to four players, who could play free-for-all or in teams. *C&C* put RTS games on the multiplayer map...



THE FIRST TIBERIUM WAR >

1995

Command & Conquer released. The game introduced command groups of unlimited size. Graphics and sound took an evolutionary leap. Support introduced for multiplayer for up to four players. Dual story lines for the two factions.

1996

Command & Conquer: The Covert Operations expansion pack released.

1997

Command & Conquer: Sole Survivor.



1995

Tiberium meteor crashes in Tiber river valley.

1999

First Tiberium War begins.

2002

First Tiberium War ends with the apparent death of Kane (in the primary story line).



THE SECOND TIBERIUM WAR >

1999

Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun released. The game made use of a faux-3D isometric view, and introduced deformable terrain. Many of the units changed from the original, with the introduction of extensive hover technologies for GDI and subterranean vehicles for Nod. Control enhancements included a patrol mode of a visual nature, allowing bases to be meticulously defended.

2000

Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun Firestorm expansion released. It introduced some new units, such as the GDI Juggernaut, and addressed some holes in play balance.



2030

Anton Slavik reunifies Nod, and the Second Tiberium war begins. The Tacitus, an alien repository of knowledge, is found. Within the year, the war ends and Kane once again apparently dies, but is kept in stasis by the artificial intelligence, CABAL.

2031

The AI CABAL rises as a threat. GDI and Nod are forced to cooperate in order to defeat CABAL. Tiberium decontamination methods learnt from the Tacitus.



THE THIRD TIBERIUM WAR >

2007

Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars released. The game returned to the roots of the series, with the original's units and high-paced play dynamic. The game evolved into full 3D with the use of the SAGE Engine (first used in *Command & Conquer: Generals*). Alternative story lines abandoned for a more integrated approach – the stories were still dual, but no longer contradict each other.



2047

GDI's Philadelphia space station is destroyed and the Third Tiberium War erupts. After the apparent defeat of Nod at Sarajevo, the Scrin invade after a liquid Tiberium explosion in the final battle between GDI and Nod.

2048

The Third Tiberium War ends with the Scrin repelled, Kane's goal achieved and GDI holding onto its territories. **NAG**



HE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST TOYS STILL WINS!

NOT SO LONG AGO, in a land not so far away, the NAG floor sweeper (Len) strolled through the pearly gates and into the magical Intel offices. Whilst looking at all the elves building brains for computers, he accidentally tripped and fell over a Skulltrail D5400XS motherboard and landed on two identical Core 2 Extreme Edition QX9775 processors! You can imagine his surprise when one elf called Frans helped Len up with a smile and said, "It is destiny... take these items and play." There's something magical about a computer worth more than two low-cost housing units and brighter than Eskom's mainframe; a real chance at breaking the world CPU speed record; and dry ice and liquid nitrogen.

Read in this issue how Neo took this baby to gigahertz heaven with his superior knowledge of overclocking.

P.S. Dear Mr/Ms/Dr/Professor Intel. Your R11,234.89 (each) CPUs are ***** insanely brilliant! Thank you for showing us what heaven feels like. Sniff, we love you guys so much!

P.P.S. Do you want them back?

NEWS FROM LAST MONTH

You guys know by now that we started the Dream Machine section with the purpose of showing what we believe, based only on actual products reviewed by NAG, what the best of the absolute best is. We came up with an award logo and rested on the seventh day whilst pondering what people may think of our creation. After perusing the NAG forums, Toby came across the following post by "dangarratt":

"... One more thing - lose the 'lap-dancing award' for the dream machine. It's lame. Degrading to women. Very PC Format. I stopped reading PCF to get away from 30-year-olds thinking like 14-year-olds with raging hormones... KEEP THE FAITH NAG! Don't follow PCF!"

In my opinion, millions around the world adore the lap dancer. She is a goddess and worth a lot of money. (See the synergy?)

This, however, is your magazine and the last thing we want to do is offend people, especially the beautiful female gender. Write to us by addressing e-mails to len.nerly@tidemedia.co.za with the subject heading, 'NAG Dream Machine'. Cheers. Enjoy the read.

-Len Nery, Hardware Manager

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 3870 X2

SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY HAS INTRODUCED a new dual-GPU graphics accelerator based on the successful HD 3870.

The SAPPHIRE Radeon HD 3870 X2 comprises two complete HD 3870 graphics systems on a single PCI Express card. Each GPU has 512MB of GDDR4 memory for a total of 1GB on-board memory. The two GPUs are connected onboard via a CrossFire bridge that can be enabled in the driver to provide a choice between separate dual-link DVI outputs or a single, accelerated output, delivering comparable performance to two separate HD 3870 cards in CrossFire mode. In this mode, the new SAPPHIRE Radeon HD 3870 X2 is the fastest performing card available using this generation of technology.

NAG will have a full review in the April issue. Damn, these cards are heavy!



HIGH-CAPACITY USB IS HERE

TRANSCEOND RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THE launch of its JetFlash V20, Transcend 8 and 16GB USB flash drives. Early March (after the Chinese New Year celebrations) we will see the launch of the 32GB USB V20 flash drive. Yes, you read correctly... 32GB!

Samples are on their way to our offices and we will have the reviews in April, showing you the throughput speeds before you decide to spend your cash.

Further news is that Transcend has also unveiled its fashionable keychain flash drive, the V90C.

Not only does this unit look cool, but it only weighs seven grams, measures 33.8mm long, 13.1mm wide and is 4.5mm thick. Crazy to think that all of this packs a massive 4GB capacity!

LATEST INTEL NAS SYSTEM READY FOR HOME STORAGE MARKET

THE INTEL SS4200 FAMILY, an entry-level Network Attached Storage (NAS) system developed by Intel, is now available through Annex Distribution, local distributor of Intel-based products.

This solution is aimed at the SOHO, small business environment and digital home, and works with multiple operating systems and software applications. It connects to a Gigabit Ethernet network and supports up to four SATA hard drives.

One of the key features of this line of storage solutions is flexibility, emphasised through aspects such as expandability through eSATA ports and USB, as well as a customisable shell.

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

HARDWARE Q&A:

HI GUYS. WE ARE two teens modding computer cases for cash and we would just like to know what you think of this older case we modded. It has the following components: an MSI G31 M2-F motherboard; 4GB of Corsair DDR2 800MHZ RAM; an Intel Pentium dual-core processor, overclocked to a steady 2.25GHz; two SATA 250GB hard drives; an MSI 8600GT 512MB GPU; and a 500W Linkworld PSU. Please tell us what you think.

Albie Faul

Hi Albie, thanks for your mail. The picture you sent in wasn't great and therefore I am not able to show our readers what you have done. However, let me make a few comments.

The case you used looks like an AOpen chassis and is around six or seven years old. In other words, the cooling of all the components isn't optimum. Sadly, you didn't include a picture showing the inside, so I have no idea if you have modified the airflow. Remember that your case was designed with the Intel Pentium CPU in mind. It's always a good idea to upgrade your chassis when making major changes to your innards. For example, the new Core 2 Duo processors don't give off as much heat as its predecessors, and as such, the newer cases will focus on the heat dissipation of your graphics cards, your memory modules, your hard drives and, naturally, your power supply (which is most likely going to top 500W and therefore generate more heat). This means that cases with a side fan focussing on the CPU is no longer serving the needs of owners of Core 2 Duo CPUs. The bottom line is this: your modded case doesn't look bad at all, but there is more to case modding than having a cool picture on the side without considering the components inside. Due to your letter being printed, courtesy of Sapphired ATI you will receive a prize shortly.

Remember, simply send in your questions or suggestions to len.nerly@tidemedia.co.za with the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' and your letter may also be printed.

ASUS ROG Striker II Formula

Just Click for Instant Upgrades

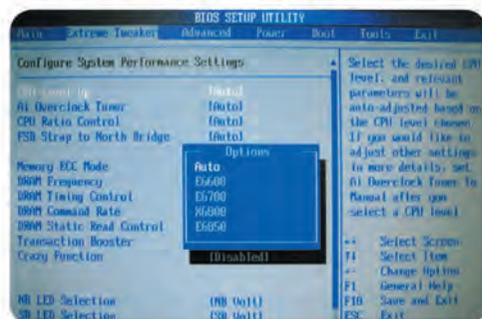
Easy Upgrades with CPU Level Up

Need an ultimate solution for overclocking and gaming platforms? Then the ASUS ROG Striker II Formula Series of motherboards is the perfect choice for you. Supporting NVIDIA's nForce® 780i SLI™ Chipset for exceptional overclocking speeds, it is equipped with innovative technologies for superior graphical and thermal performance; as well as a huge collection of features that include device protection - making it your premium choice for overclocking.

Versatile Overclocking Options

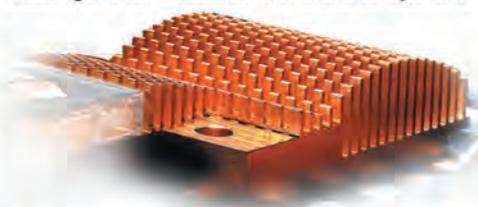
The ROG Striker II Formula Series comes with two unique features for flexible CPU upgrading without extra costs. The CPU Level Up* feature lets you easily upgrade CPU performances without prior overclocking knowledge in just three easy steps. Firstly, users need to enter the BIOS. Next, they simply need to choose the processor they wish to overclock to. Finally, all they need to do is reboot. With ASUS' innovative technology, the motherboard will now do the rest, and users can instantly start enjoying higher performances and better frame rates. Overclocking has never been easier! The other feature, Extreme Tweaker, will fine-tune systems for optimal performance with a vast array of options to tweak frequencies, over-voltage or memory timing settings.

* Please check the official ROG website for a complete CPU support List for this function



Quiet Cooling with Pin-Fin Thermal Module Design

When playing games constantly for more than a couple of hours, you might find the fan noise irritating. The new Pin-fin thermal design results in better overall thermal performance when compared with traditional stacked-fin heatpipe solutions - lowering system temperatures at a lower fan speed and thus reducing the fan noise. It also features an enlarged "heat-exchange" surface area and breaks the "Boundary-layer" phenomenon for effective airflows; making it the most efficient thermal system.



Device Protection with Voltminder LED and COP EX

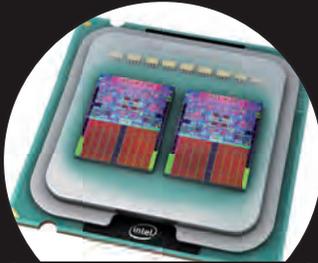
To obtain the highest level of performance, overvoltage adjustment is crucial. However, this practice can cause damage to expensive PC components. Acting as the "red zone" of a tachometer, the ROG exclusive Voltminder LED displays the voltage status for the CPU, NB, SB, and Memory in an intuitive color-coded fashion - allowing quick voltage monitoring vital while overclocking. The innovative COP EX feature also allows you to overclock with confidence and increase chipset voltages without worrying about overheating by monitoring and actually saving an overheating GPU. With the Voltminder LED and COP EX as protection mechanisms, more overclocking freedom and maximum performance can be achieved.

▲ CPU Level Up for a host of overclocking options

▲ Efficient Heat Dissipation with Pin-Fin Thermal Module

NAG DREAM MACHINE

We have a brilliant relationship with the 'shorter-than-us' people living six hours ahead of South Africa and to them we wish a very happy Chinese New Year! May the Year of the Rat be prosperous, prosperous and safe. Yes, I said that twice because it is really, really important. In fact, I made sure I had pork chops for supper on the last night of the Year of the Pig (6 February) and took down all my rattraps inside my roof on the morning of the Year of the Rat so that I can afford to upgrade my PC this year... I hope you have done the same. If I see a crappy PC at any LANs during this year, we will all know... you are a rat killer! Be gone with you, infidel! I kill you!



Intel Core 2 Extreme Edition QX9775
Intel Corporation
[011] 806-4530



Acer AL2623W 26" Widescreen LCD
AXIZ
[011] 237-7000



Lian-Li PC-V2000B Plus II
Frontier Electronics
[011] 608-1809



Enermax Aurora
Frontosa
[011] 466-0038



Zalman Reserator XT
Frontosa
[011] 466-0038



Saitek GM3200 Laser Mouse
The Prophecy Shop
[011] 888-5564



INTEL Skulltrail
Rectron
[011] 203-1000



Silverstone Strider 1000W-ST1000
Aleet Distribution
[011] 888-8916/26



ASUS EAH2900XT/G/HTVDI/512M
AXIZ
[011] 237-7000



Patriot DDR2 PC2-9200
Syntech SA
[021] 593-0304



ASUS Xonar D2
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WD Caviar SE16
Drive Control
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FPSGUN is a revolutionary mouse specifically designed for first person shooter gamers. It boasts ultra-fast response (1ms), stylish design and five programmable buttons. The gun's unique ergonomics virtually eliminate extended gaming session fatigue, and its versatility and resolution of up to 2000 DPI will give you that all-important edge over your gaming rivals. Try one and see you'll wonder how your enemies ever died without one!



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GROUND ZERO

by Toby Hudson

THE FUTURE OF STORAGE

LAST MONTH I MENTIONED a few ideas about storage near the end of my column, and said I might expand upon them. I have other things I really want to rant about, but I think I'd better cover the storage subject first, lest I never get back to it. Moreover, I could use another positive-sounding column or two. So anyway, storage...

Storage is increasing exponentially, along the same Moore's Law curve as CPUs. At least flash is. Hard drives had a sudden bump up around 1997 when the first Giant Magneto-Resistive (GMR) head technologies appeared. However, they've since slacked off. One terabyte drives are now available, but going back, 500GB drives were available early in 2006, 250GB drives in mid-2003, and 120GB drives late in 2001. Flash meanwhile has gone from slow to fast. It took a while to get from 2GB in mid-2003 to 4GB in mid-2005. Then, 8GB drives were available by the end of 2005, 16GB drives in late 2006, and now 32GB drives have appeared at reasonable prices. Sixty-four gigabyte drives are already available and 128GB drives aren't far off.

Flash drive capacity is doubling every 9-12 months. Doing some simple maths, at this rate it will take about five years for flash drives to overtake HDDs in capacity, assuming that neither technology has a breakthrough or falters (i.e. hits a hard limit or new material). Thus, we'll probably see 32TB drives by 2013. What are we going to do with 32TB? How about another ten years after that with 32PB (petabyte) drives?

Well, let's say we want to store all the videos a person could ever watch. Uncompressed at four times the current HD resolution, quadruple the framerate (120p), and more than double the bit depth (4:4:4 16bpc HDR), how much space does that take? $1,920 \times 1,080 \times 4 = 8,294,400$ pixels per frame. Okay, times six bytes per pixel (48-bit) and 120fps and we get 5,971,968,000 bytes/sec (let's call it 6GB/sec with audio). Now, how many seconds do we need to store? Well, people live about 70-80 years, but some of those years are spent sleeping, growing up, and (hopefully) doing other things than staring at a screen: $60 \times 60 \times 24 \times 365 \times 75 = 2,365,200,000$ seconds. Figure in a third of the time sleeping and that brings us down to 1,576,800,000 seconds. That's 16 hours a day. Still probably a bit high. Let's assume you watch ten hours a day on average (still probably way too high) during your lifetime. That's about a billion seconds. A billion seconds times 6GB/sec = six billion-billion bytes. That's 6×10^{18} : six million terabytes, 6,000 petabytes or six exabytes!

How long will it take us to get there? Well, we said that we add three zeros every ten years, and 8GB drives were available in 2005. We need to add nine zeros from there: 2015, 8TB; 2025, 8PB; and 2035, 8EB. Even if we're being overly optimistic about flash doubling every year, by 2050 we should get close to that.

Now, some people are going to jump up and start arguing whether such density is even physically possible! Even if Moore's Law doesn't falter by then, can we even possibly store that much data in a pocket-sized USB device? Good question. Let's build one and find out!

Let's say we move to a different memory technology: maybe MRAM or phase-change or bubble RAM or one of the other promising upstarts. We're already making devices now with layers of materials as thin as five atoms (this is why Intel had to switch to hafnium-based processes - five atoms of silicon dioxide don't cut it). Let's say we go for a magnetic memory, and need ten atoms of iron to form a detectable bit. Really small, but hey, we're talking years of improvement. Okay, now let's assume we need a hundred times as much silicon to form transistors to read/write/maintain those ten atoms of iron. Therefore, we need about 1,000 atoms of silicon per bit: 1×10^3 . And how many bits do we need? $6 \times 10^{18} \times 8$ (those were bytes, remember?). That gives us 4.8×10^{22} atoms. Sounds like a lot. Well, if we break out Avogadro's Constant, which tells us that a fixed number of atoms equal a substance's molecular weight in grams, that's 6.022×10^{23} . We know silicon has an atomic mass of 28 so we get $4.8 \times 10^{22} / 6.022 \times 10^{23} \times 28$...

The chip weighs about 2.25 grams. I think that'll fit in your pocket. Heck, compared to most thumb drives we have a factor of ten (vs. a desktop HDD it's a factor of 300+) to play with in case it takes 100 atoms of iron, or we need more silicon to control it, etc.

The point is, within our lifetime, we'll have a device that fits in a pocket that can store an entire lifetime's experience - uncompressed. What's going to happen to the demand for storage after that? In addition, given advances in compression and CPU power, chances are we can hit this point at least ten years earlier (maybe even 15-20). What are people going to do when their movie collection is literally unwatchable in their remaining lifespan? How do you choose which parts of our history and culture to see when you have all of it but know you don't have time? **NAG**





Samsung 2232GW Monitor

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By intuitively adjusting the backlight brightness a contrast ratio of 3000:1 is achieved. This innovative technology dynamically optimizes images, delivering deeper, richer, more vivid colours. Bright and dark images are dramatically enhanced for great gaming viewing.



Fast Response Time 2ms

The super fast response time of 2ms guarantees seamless viewing of motion pictures. No ghosting, no blurring, just perfect, fluid clarity. It is ideal for games, movies, multimedia or streamed media via the internet, so you can be sure that you will enjoy the highest quality images at all times.

Crystal Clear Screen

Enjoy crisp, clear images and richer, brighter colours. Even in the brightest light conditions the screen remains crystal clear due to the MagicClear coating on the Glossy Panel. This ensures that external light sources do not affect the purity of the picture or the quality of your viewing.

HDCP Enjoyment

Enjoy perfect quality video images displayed at the highest resolution when using the DVI (Digital Visual Interface). Enjoy pure digital contents and a sense of security with HDCP (High Definition Content Protection); enjoy more security, more quality, and more entertainment.



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With a wide screen that supports multi-media functions and multi-window applications, these monitors are the perfect viewing environment for Windows Vista Premium. Their super fast response time, high contrast ratio, and high glossy black bezel enable Windows Vista to work, and be viewed at its optimum level.

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HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

WHY YOU SHOULD ENTER THE OVERCLOCKING LEAGUE

COMPONENT MANUFACTURERS ONCE TOLD people not to engage in the forbidden art of overclocking. However, that was a long time ago when people still read system specs and bought games that came in cardboard boxes. Today things are very different. We have quite a handful of manufacturers (DFI and Foxconn to name a couple) who are active advocates of overclocking, some going as far as hiring renowned and respected overclockers to help them bring out the best in their products.

Manufacturers would like to have us believe that every single person who partakes in overclocking is running a dual-cascade system or has several hundred litres of liquid nitrogen at their disposal for overclocking. However, it simply isn't true: the majority of overclockers still use reference coolers that came with their CPUs. This is where the OCL 3600 enters the picture. Yes, it's competing using scores; yes, it's reliant on synthetic benchmarks. The difference, however, is that it's not just high-speed, highest-score benchmarking and stabilising your PC at insane speeds for a quick blitz. It's about competing against people using a system and parts that are easy to find, negating the need for an unlocked multiplier chip or excessive cooling.

Speaking to a number of people, I have realised that some believe it to be easier than it actually is, while others have not even had a second look at it because they believe it is too hard or impossible to enter. Both these two opposing views are not without a little bit of merit. Indeed, 3.6GHz is easy to reach with today's CPUs and you will be hard-pressed to find any Core 2-based CPU that would not reach such a speed. Only looking at the CPU clock speed denies the competition of what it's ultimately about.

This point is relevant to those who also believe the League to be far easier than it is. If you are fortunate enough to own an Extreme Edition or FX CPU, reaching 3.6GHz is as easy as selecting the right multiplier. However, for most people it involves increasing your FSB/HT speed, selecting the right dividers, memory timings and the like. With AMD-based platforms, it can be just as tricky as it is with the Intel CPUs. So far, 97% of entrants have used Intel CPUs and that has made it rather interesting seeing how 3.6GHz is managed. The most obvious configuration is 400 x 9 (for E6600 and Q6600 owners especially), then 450 x 8, 515 x 7 and the least used combination of 470 x 8.5. Depending on the motherboard and chipset employed, the results can vary by thousands of points in AquaMark and the 3DMark series of tests. Super Pi, a sure favourite, is also sensitive to many other factors over and above the FSB.

The greatest thing about the OCL 3600, apart from winning prizes and being crowned 'king' for however long you manage to hold onto your position, is that unlike any other speed above it, 3.6GHz is relatively easy to maintain for 24/7 use. So, not only is your system likely to be very stable at that speed, but through all the tricks employed and used to reach the number-one spot, you end up with an incredibly fast everyday system that no retail CPU can match.

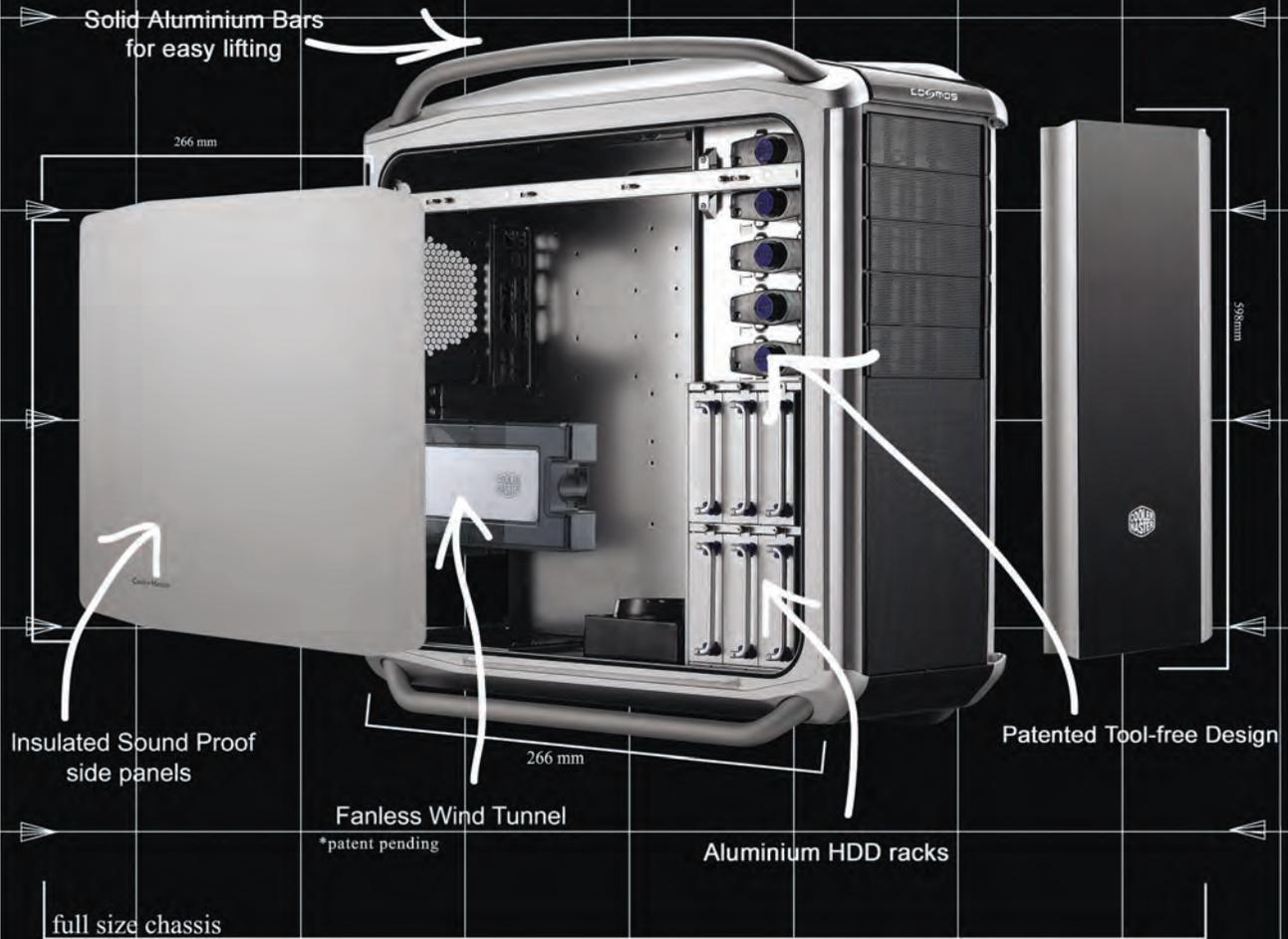
With the rules explicitly forbidding multi-GPU configurations, it's impressive to see just what has been achieved by the entrants since the start of the League in July 2007. We moved from a top 3DMark2001 SE score of 56K to 73K this year, while maintaining the same CPU speed of 3.6GHz. That's a massive jump in scores and certainly not the end of it. By July this year, the scores should be approaching the

80K mark, which used to be dry ice territory not that long ago. In 3DMark05, scores moved from the 19K range to almost 24K. For a relatively CPU-dependent benchmark, this is fantastic as it shows real progress in not only memory technology, but also the different chipsets that have been introduced since then.

If you ever wanted to push your system harder than you normally would, but don't want the risk associated with non-traditional cooling methods like water, ice or LN2, then the OCL 3600 is for you. Besides the possibility of winning high-end, cutting-edge computer components, you get to compete in probably the most level playing field you will find anywhere else. With the OCL 3600, it's not really the size of your pockets that counts - it's the size of the overclocker in you. **NAG**



Performance Concealed in Silence



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<http://www.coolermaster.com/microsite/cosmos>

Specification	
Materials	Chassis: Steel, Aluminum
Expansion Slots	7
5.25" Drive Bay	5 exposed
3.5" Drive Bay	6 (Hidden)
Motherboard	Extend ATX, ATX
Weight	37.2 lbs
Dimension W/H/D	10x23x24
Fans	4 included



RC-1000
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The Blueprint to silent Pleasure

Ever wished you could take pleasure in the performance of your system without having to sacrifice a good night's sleep? Well after years of design, the engineers at Cooler Master have created a blueprint that incorporates soundproof materials, superior cooling systems, and innovative features to create the case you've been longing for. With this 2007 Dream Machine as named by Cooler Master, performance truly meets Silence.



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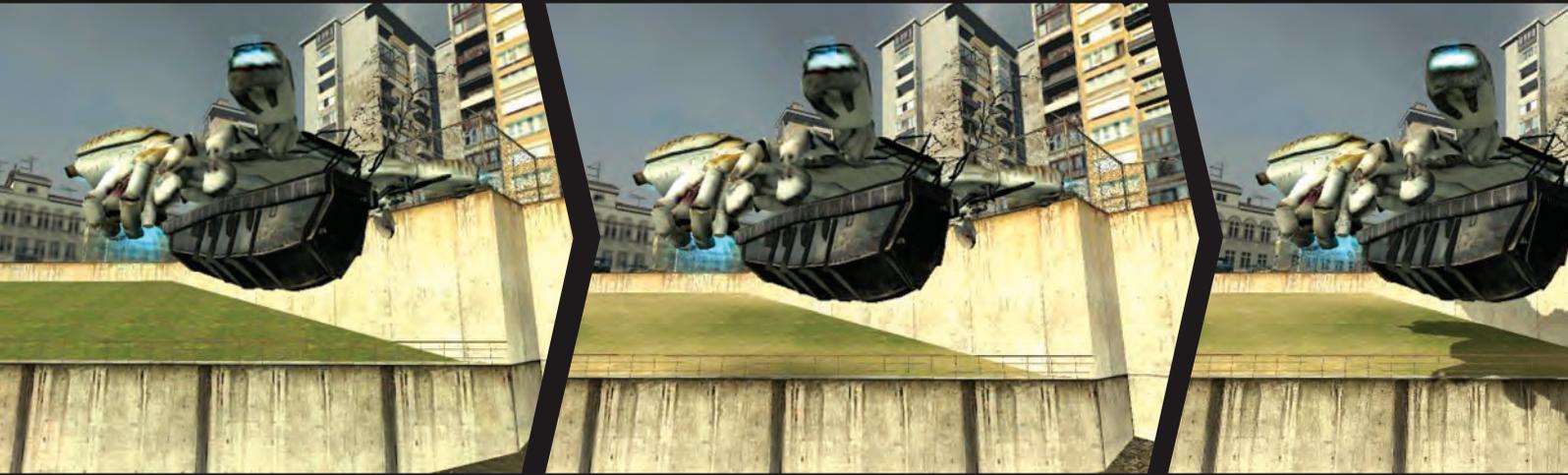


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THE HISTORY OF DIREX



LAST MONTH WE COVERED the evolution of DirectX from 1.0 until the last fixed-function version, 7.0. The reason why it makes such a good break point for the series is that with the arrival of version 8 of DirectX3D, the focus shifted to what are known as shaders. We'll jump back to the history of the API in a minute, but before we go on we should probably give a brief explanation of what shaders are and why they're important.

Shaders 101

In a traditional 3D pipeline, the system used to be what's known as "fixed-function". This means that every piece of geometry and texture goes through the same process to wind up generating the final scene. Shaders introduced the concept of a programmable pipeline, where decisions could be made on the card itself, which affected how the scene was rendered. Shaders come in several types.

Pixel Shader

The first type of shader most people became familiar with was pixel shaders. The pixel shader basically manipulates the raw pixel or texture data the card outputs. It has no concept of geometry or how objects are shaped or their positions. Pixel shaders are ideal for a number of effects, such as simulating material textures (like wood grain), or doing post-processing effects such as distortion from looking through water.

Vertex Shader

Vertex shaders work on vertices, which are points in space that are used to define an

object. The main difference between vertex shaders and pixel shaders is that vertex shaders affect the actual geometry of an object, whereas pixel shaders just affect the appearance of a surface. A triangle, which is the most basic 2D polygon, has three vertices - one at each point. Older 3D systems used to handle objects as triangles, quads, strips, or fans. However, these days most things are done as a vertex buffer, which is just a list of points. The vertex shader can manipulate properties of vertices to produce several effects. These include things like mesh deformation, which is used for 'tweening' animation so that transitions are smooth. It can also be used for calculating things like motion blur, and has some application for constructing real-time shadows.

Geometry Shader

Geometry shaders are relatively new and only appeared in DirectX 10. So we'll discuss them a bit more there. Their main difference from vertex shaders is that they can actually create new geometry. A vertex shader has the restriction that it can only alter an existing vertex - not create a new one. Geometry shaders allow creation of new vertices, which makes it possible to do new things such as smooth models with tessellation or more efficiently generated shadow volumes.

Unified Shaders

Unified shaders are a concept in GPU technology where a pipeline can process any type of shader operation. Until recently, most GPUs had separate pipelines for different

types of shaders. This often led to a problem where part of the chip would be idle due to a bottleneck caused by heavier processing of one type of shader. Unified shader pipelines can process multiple types of shader instructions so that all of them can work at the same time regardless of which stage the 3D pipeline is executing. This leads to higher performance and more efficient use of GPU transistor budgets.

DirectX 8.0

DX8 cleaned up a lot of things. The process of setting up everything to get going was simplified from about 20 different function calls in a specific sequence to just two. Several parts of the API were dropped and merged: for example, DirectDraw was completely absorbed into DirectX3D as there hadn't been any major improvements to 2D since version 5.0. Likewise, DirectMusic was incorporated into DirectSound, and in general things were made far less of a headache for programmers.

At the time, DX8 was considered to have finally achieved parity with or even slightly surpassed the then-current version of OpenGL, 1.2. Many of the complaints of DirectX3D being harder to use than OpenGL were addressed with the simplification of many things. In addition, the addition of shaders as a mandatory part of the API was one up on OpenGL, which allowed it as extensions specific to each particular card.

The shaders of Shader Model 1.0 were fairly primitive by modern standards. Vertex shaders could only be 128 instructions long,

DX

PART 2



These screenshots show shadow quality at different rendering levels, ranging from none to soft, dynamic shadows

and pixel shaders only eight. There were no branch instructions or a lot of the more flexible capabilities that are now taken for granted. Nevertheless, they still allowed an unprecedented level of control over the 3D pipeline, which enabled lots of innovation in games once hardware penetration began to catch up.

DX8.0 launched in November 2000, and about a year later there was a refresh with version 8.1. The significance of this version was that it was the one to ship with Windows XP by default, as well as the one supported by the original Xbox. Version 8.1 updated the shader model to support a few new things in versions 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4, which were supported in varying combinations by the hardware at the time.

DirectX 9.0

Version 9.0 is the longest-running version number, having been released in December 2002 and most recently updated in November 2007. The reason for this is that Microsoft seems to be re-classifying changes as sub-versions instead of full 1.0 releases. DirectX 10 didn't appear until Windows Vista, and between the first version of 9.0 and that point there were many updates to the 9.0 specifications, although none of them were called 9.1 etc.

DirectX 9 added a number of things, but the first version was not really as revolutionary as DX8. The maximum instruction count for shader operations was doubled, but remained quite limited. The big changes were things such as displacement maps. A displacement map





is like a texture: the values are used to adjust the height of vertices instead of the colour of a surface. This means that a basic model can be used, and differing displacement maps are used to create fine detail so that the same geometry can be recycled efficiently. It's also good for creating detailed terrain more cheaply than high-resolution geometry, because the map can usually be scaled and filtered to reduce detail at a distance, which is less complex than the traditional level of detail systems.

Version 9.0 also introduced new high-bit depth modes, which were eventually used for HDR. Floating-point modes for representing colour channels were added, although there was a bit of a fuss over the specification at the time, which used 24-bit precision and not 16 or 32. This caused a bit of a fight between NVIDIA and ATI fans as the former supported 16- and 32-bit formats and the latter 24-bit. Eventually newer cards made the distinction moot.

Version 9.0 also brought high-level shader language (HLSL), which is more like a traditional programming language such as C.

With the 9.0c revision in mid-2004, the shader model was bumped to version 3.0. This added new capabilities to shaders, the most significant of which were branching and flow-control instructions. This allowed shaders to make decisions in the pipeline and render many things that used to require several passes as one pass. Much like the bit-depth argument, this also started a debate between NVIDIA and ATI supporters, as the former had shader 3.0 hardware out long before the latter. Microsoft released bimonthly updates to DirectX 9 from October 2004 to August 2007. After that, releases changed to quarterly. Since the API was updated so frequently, most games would bundle the specific version of Direct3D9 they were written for, rather than risk compatibility issues with a centralised DLL. This is why some games may 'complain' about a missing d3d9_xx.DLL file, even though DirectX 9 has been installed on the system. It also goes against the design philosophy of DLLs in general, but few people noticed or complained about it since the files were not overly large.

DirectX 10

Finally we come to the current version, DirectX 10. There's been a controversy



surrounding this revision because it's only available on Windows Vista. Some have accused Microsoft of conspiracy, saying that there's no reason that DX10 could not be released for Windows XP and that it's just a ploy to force people to buy Vista. They may even point to hacks distributed online that claim to run DX10 apps on XP.

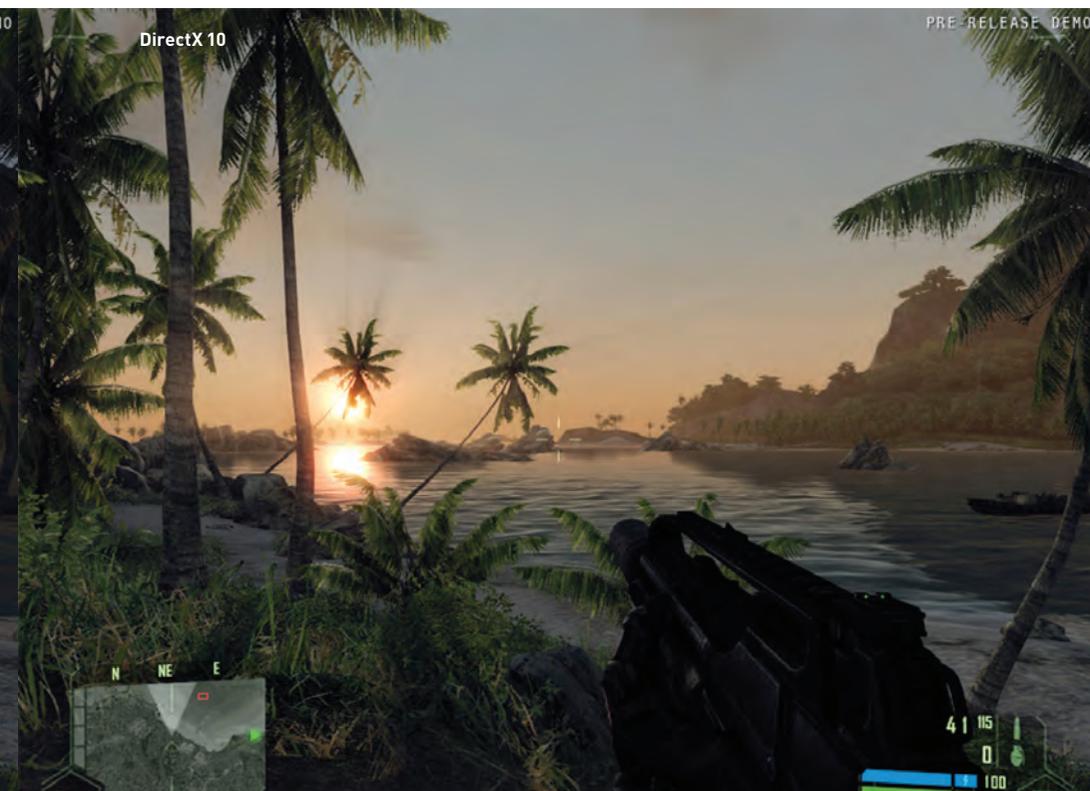
In reality, there are significant changes made in DX10 that are just not feasible under XP at any reasonable speed. They may be possible, but only if you enjoy slideshows. This is because the display driver model has changed drastically from XP to Vista to allow for new capabilities that weren't possible under XP. To patch XP to implement these changes, you'd need to change the driver model, which means changing the kernel. This basically means that you're rewriting the entire OS

anyway, and MS would wind up selling it as Windows XP 2.0. Since they've already rewritten the OS and packaged it as Vista, there's not much point in doing it again.

There are several features in the new Windows Display Driver Model (WDDM) 2.0 under Vista, which were required to make Vista's GUI work, as well as implement new features in games. First, video memory is now virtualised and can be paged. This is a concept that John Carmack was talking about way back in the day as being inevitable. Since application windows in Vista are 3D surfaces, and there is no telling how many windows there are, it's possible that they may not all fit in video memory. Thus, video memory can be directly paged to system RAM for additional storage, and then swapped back when needed. This requires some very low-level modifications to the OS to handle this kind of



These screenshots demonstrate displacement map texture blending, directional lightmaps and cubemapped then reflective water



memory virtualisation, and would probably need a rewrite of XP's kernel.

The new driver model allows the GPU to be interrupted so that it can be switched to another task and back. This allows multi-threading for the display driver so that many 3D applications can run simultaneously. Obviously, it wouldn't work so well if only one window could be active at a time, so this feature is crucial and would probably be difficult to implement properly under XP.

This allows for direct sharing of 3D data between applications. This basically lets an app pass geometry to be drawn to another application, or Vista itself for display in the GUI. This means allowing one application to access another's memory, which is tricky and needs to be tightly controlled, usually arbitrated by the kernel. So this would also likely mean an XP kernel rewrite.

Vista comes with three different DX drivers: an emulated version of 9.0c for legacy applications; a WDDM enhanced version of D3D9 called 9Ex or WDDM 1.0, which has 9.0's features but allows the memory tricks of 10 that enable the GUI to work; and DX10 itself, which is also called WDDM 2.0. DirectX 10.1 will be WDDM 2.1 when it's released. The reason for the sudden reappearance of .1 version upgrades as opposed to letter suffixes is that MS has gotten a bit more stringent about how DirectX works. Previously there were cap bits (capability bits) that programs used to see what features a GPU had. This made it a nightmare for game developers who had to deal with different cap bits on every card. MS said that with DX10 there will be a mandatory feature set imposed, and cap bits would be done away with. However, the GPU industry

progresses quickly, so now new features will be incorporated directly into DirectX instead of as independent add-ons.

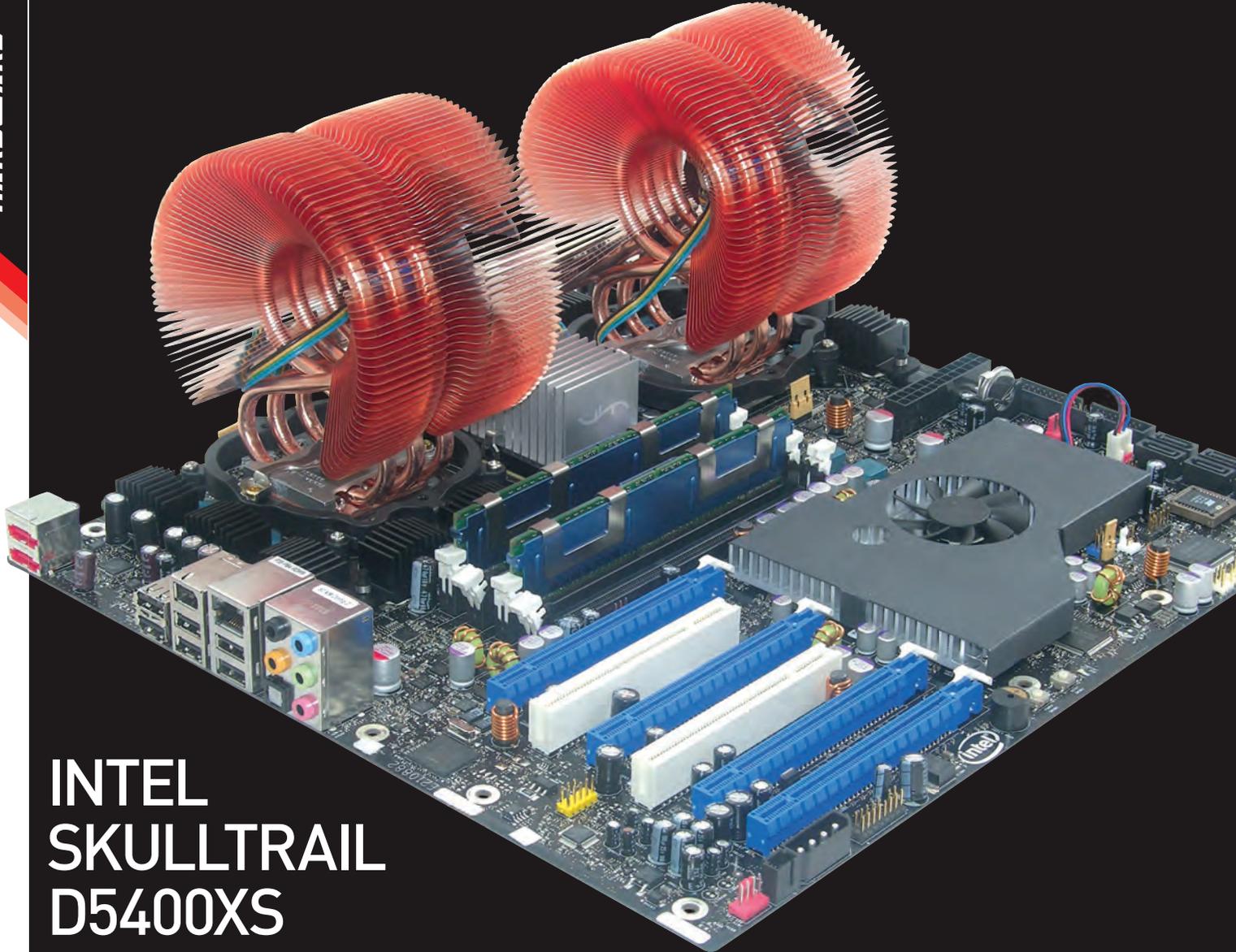
So, what do we get for all this hassle? DX10 removes many previous restrictions on things like the number of object per scene by reducing overhead, and shader model 4.0 removes or greatly increases almost all limits on shader programs. This combined with memory virtualisation and threading mean there's a lot more freedom for developers to implement things on the GPU, instead of burdening the CPU.

The major improvements are things like unified shaders and the new geometry shader (as mentioned previously). The geometry shader adds new abilities to the pipeline, such as the ability to create new geometry. This means that things like tessellation (smoothing with more polygons) and shadow volumes can be done in hardware. There are new blending modes for better HDR precision and an overall increase in precision throughout the system. It's difficult to list the actual new effects possible, because the expansion to the shader model with v4.0 means there could be thousands of new possibilities.

The Future

DirectX 10.1 has already been announced, and it's rumoured that version 11 may not be far behind. We already know 10.1 will include improvements to threading, allowing applications to switch faster, and better handling of page faults, which occur when data isn't immediately available to the GPU. Under 10.1, it will be possible to switch tasks instantly, even mid-shader, to continue working while data is fetched. There will also be new methods of filtering for things like shadows, and improvements in control over antialiasing.

We suspect that in the future there may be more expansions to DirectX. There have been rumours of Direct Physics for some time now, but so far no real evidence is available to confirm it. Still, with Intel now owning Havok and NVIDIA purchasing PhysX, it seems inevitable that physics will be added to the stable of standard hardware support. This means that Microsoft will likely implement a standard so that the cap-bits situation of DX9 doesn't repeat itself. **NAG**



INTEL SKULLTRAIL D5400XS

IT WOULD BE UNFAIR and untrue if the first thing we said about Intel's Skulltrail were that it's a platform every single gamer must have. It's not and chances are it never will be. It would also be untrue to say that there is a percentage of users out there playing some mysterious game that requires (or rather can take advantage) of eight cores – even if it did exist.

Therefore, what we have here is an exercise in excessiveness. Currently, the only application that gets a boost in performance is 3DMark06 (and obviously 3DMark Vantage when it's finally released). Save for those, there isn't really much else that will take advantage of eight cores.

Having said that, this is an extreme platform. Not only for gamers and enthusiasts, but also for videographers, graphic designers, animation studios, labs and the like. In this space, a number of applications are multi-threaded and the performance gained from using a platform such as this usually justifies the cost of both buying and running such a system. Paired with the right software, the Skulltrail will without a doubt pay for itself in full.

We wanted to see how fast it could go, particularly in synthetic tests like the Futuremark suite. Yes, we know it'll play *Crysis* at maximum detail at ultra-ridiculous resolutions if you paired it with two 8800 Ultra or HD2900XT cards. The

game will look amazing and play extremely well. That was never in question, but what we wanted to know is how fast it could go. While 3.2GHz may have been impressive years ago, it's hardly earth shattering now. Even though it has four cores per CPU, we wanted to go faster – much faster – and that we were able to do.

Cooling was taken care of courtesy of two Zalman 9500 Copper CPU coolers. We set the multiplier for the CPUs in the BIOS to 10x, since the reference FSB is 400MHz. This resulted in a respectable 4GHz clock on each CPU. Without any voltage adjustments, we were able to boot and go through a few loops of Super Pi on each of the eight cores. The system was stable, but not quite stable enough to handle 3DMark06's CPU test, which caused the system to reboot. Convinced that 3DMark06 should be stable, we increased the voltage on each CPU to 1.42V, which is quite a bit higher than the reference 1.25V. With such an increase in voltage, CPU temperatures increased dramatically, but our attitude was, "All or nothing." Therefore, we increased the FSB to 425MHz, which gave us a 4.25GHz clock on each CPU. Once again trying 3DMark06, it passed and spit out an incredible score of 23,000 with two 8800 GT cards in SLI. This score was untweaked and the graphics rendering quality was not fiddled with at all.

HAG HARDWARE
ALLIARD



SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel 5400
PROCESSOR SUPPORT	2 x Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9775
MEMORY SUPPORT	4 x DIMMs (8GB 800MHz FB-DIMM)
EXPANSION SLOTS	4 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI 2.2
STORAGE	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec
CONNECTIVITY	6 x USB 2.0, 1 x 1394a, 1 x Gigabit LAN, 2 x eSATA
AUDIO	Intel high-definition audio codec (8.1 channel)

SCORE





As ridiculous as it may sound, it was hard to contain the sheer excitement when looking at the 3DMark06 CPU test peaking at 6fps, which is something you would only see with a Core 2 Extreme close to 6GHz. While 3DMark06 was doing more than well, the others didn't take so well to being in a true multi-CPU configuration. 3DMark05 produced passable numbers as it's heavily influenced by CPU frequency and doesn't feature a multi-thread test, while 3DMark03 is heavily graphics card bound. Where the Skulltrail platform excels though, is in multitasking. We were able to encode a movie while playing a game and experienced no hitches at all. Although the Skulltrail won't perform better than a single X9770 or X9650 quad-core CPU in gaming, encoding movies with this platform is a thing of beauty.

Full DVD-resolution double-pass encoding took a maximum of 30 minutes using UltraDVD and the system was still responsive and useable while doing this in the background. We also managed to run CINEBENCH on the platform and the CPU score was off the charts, rendering the image in exactly half the time it would take a single quad-core CPU at the same speed to do. It's the

fastest platform you can buy by far.

Not all is perfect though. The BIOS looks a little dated and the features are far and few between. And yes, you do get enough settings to control CPU voltage, memory voltage, NB voltage and the like, but it's not as comprehensive as something you would get from ASUS for example and most certainly not from DFI. This in itself, however, is forgivable seeing as the board is based on a server platform, which usually doesn't need any of these tweaking options. What is also immediately apparent on this board is that Intel has decided against solid capacitors and has opted for the older electrolyte type, but surprisingly enough, around the sockets the board is very clean, making it ideal for mounting DICE/LN2 ports.

So, Intel's Skulltrail is much like supercars of old mixed with the new – something like the Lamborghini Countach with an LP640's power. It's impractical for the most part, requiring at least a 1kW PSU to function and 1.4kW if using four graphics cards. With that impracticality, though, you get break-neck performance. It's one of those things you'll either absolutely love or loath. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



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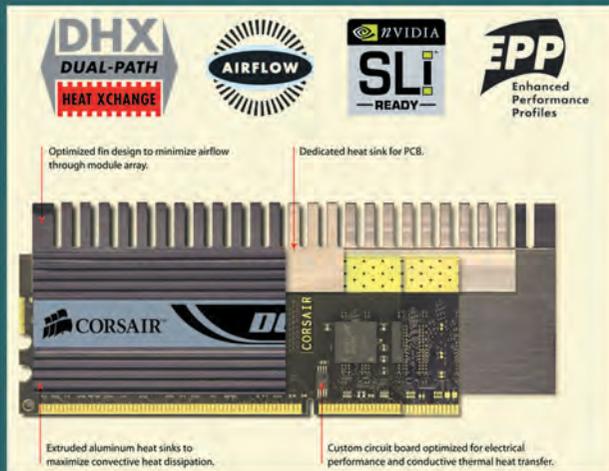
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MSI P35D3 PLATINUM

THE P35D3 PLATINUM IS MSI's latest Intel-chipset enthusiast offering, and has been well received in the gaming community because of its excellent performance right out of the box. The P35D3 on test here differs only in that it includes DDR3 RAM slots, which have a different keying to DDR2 modules. Nevertheless, the underlying P35 Express chipset from Intel supports both RAM standards, making it even more of a hardcore enthusiast's board!

Of course, even the most committed seeker of pulverising PC performance is unlikely to be keen to jump into DDR3 yet, due to the astronomical prices of the modules available at the moment. A more measured approach to the transition - such as that practiced by GIGABYTE on its latest DDR3-capable offering of including four DDR2-compatible DIMM slots as well as two DDR3-compatible ones - might be preferable.

Anyway, we happened to have two gigabytes of OCZ's latest DDR3-1800 modules, so we slipped them into the corresponding slots on the MSI P35D3, installed a bit of an interesting processor for our first foray and a graphics card and booted up.

So how does it run? Well, we were keen to explore some overclocking theories on this purported king of the 'black art', which is why we began the testing with a rare Intel Extreme Edition 955 CPU installed. This forerunner to Core 2 Duo, clocked by default to 3.43GHz per core, had always hit board limitations under air-cooling at around the 4.2GHz mark, so we were interested to see if the higher FSB and faster RAM options allowed us to break this barrier.

The Cell submenu in the BIOS

incorporates all your manual 'tweaker' and manages to provide all the options an overclocker could need without cluttering the interface with useless, confusing techno-babble. CPU host frequency can be adjusted by upping the FSB base frequency or adjusting the clock multiplier (alternatively, the auto-overclocking facility can be called into play). Voltage ranges on all components are more than adequate, with the only peculiar thing being the high timings and low voltages at which DDR3 operates: 5-5-5-24 at 1.5V-1.8V according to our OCZ sticks, although SPD sets them more conservatively at 6-6-6-36 at the stock 1.5V and 1,066MHz.

The experiment with this strong but dated CPU only worked partially. The MSI topped out at the minimum clock multiplier of 12x and 360MHz for a fairly impressive total of 4,320MHz, with the RAM running at a comfortable 1,440MHz. Still, a solid overclock albeit at the end limited by the CPU itself and not due to excessive heat.

In went the Q6600 at 2.40GHz per core at default. Apparently, the quad-core architecture is the ideal thing to take advantage of the increased system bus bandwidth. With the multiplier lowered to 6x and the voltage upped marginally to 1.35V with 1.6V on the DDR3 and 1.4V on the Northbridge, we managed to achieve a stable clock of 428MHz. Online reports have suggested that 500MHz+ was achievable, but we thought that a 2,568MHz result on the CPU with the RAM at 1,712MHz was more than enough for achieving top-notch potential from this rig.

We haven't left a lot of space for final benchmark scores, so we're not going to

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P35
PROCESSOR SUPPORT	Socket 775 for Intel Core 2 Quad/ Core 2 Extreme/ Core 2 Duo/ Pentium 4 (Prescott, P4EE)/ Pentium D/ Pentium XE/ Celeron D processors in LGA 775 package
MEMORY SUPPORT	4 x DDR3 DIMMs officially supporting up to 1,066MHz (Max. 8GB)
FSB	800/1,066/1,333MHz
ETHERNET	Gigabit Ethernet
EXPANSION SLOTS	2 x PEG slots supporting CrossFire (1 x PCI-E 16x and 1 x PCI-E 4x)/ 2 x PCI-E 1x/ 2 x PCI
CONNECTIVITY	12 x USB 2.0/ 2 x IEEE1394/ 4 x SATA 3Gb/sec/ 2 x eSATA 3Gb/sec
AUDIO	Realtek ALC888T 8-channel with integrated VoIP support via headers
DIMENSIONS	ATX form factor - 30.5cm x 24.5cm

SCORE



through them all here. Suffice it to say, the P35D3 was consistently faster in all our tests (namely 3DMark06, SiSoft Sandra Pro X11e, PCMark05 and the Crysis CPU timedemo) than the regular (admittedly not the fastest) 975XB2 we usually run this CPU on - and that's running stock clocks! Add to that the excellent overclocking potential and you have one seriously desirable board for the hardcore, performance-hungry enthusiast.



THE FEATURES

MSI has gone legacy-free on the P35D5, so rather than LPT and COM ports, we have an additional four USB slots (for a total of six on the back panel), two eSATA connections as well as one FireWire port. That's in addition to the standard pair of PS/2 ports and the audio jacks (including SPDIF). The chipset supports twelve USB 2.0 ports with the rest available via headers on the motherboard.

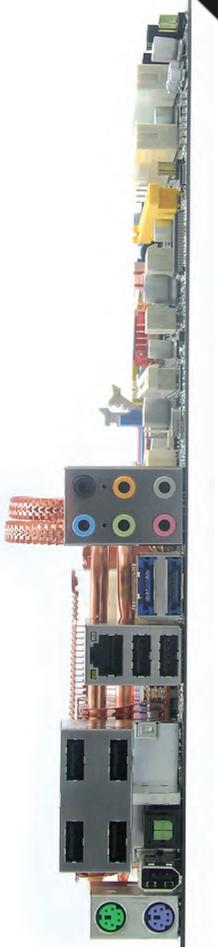
It also offers six SATA 3Gb/sec ports but no IDE channel, so MSI has implemented IDE using an external controller for the sake of optical drives. Then there are two PCI-E 16x slots (16-channel and a 4-channel supporting CrossFire GFX cards), an extra two PCI-E 1x slots and a pair of regular PCI slots.

Surrounding the LGA775 CPU socket - now capable of supporting the latest 45nm processors codenamed "Penryn" as well as the required 1,333MHz FSB - is a highly complex cooling affair dubbed "Circu-cool". It looks very much like a little copper roller coaster, with heat pipes looping grandly into the air and running from the Northbridge above and below the CPU socket as well as to the new ICH9R Southbridge. Moreover, the capacitors used everywhere on this product are of the latest solid-state variety, which ensure excellent board longevity as they're inherently more durable than fluid-filled caps.

This elaborate Circu-cool setup allowed the installation of our Arctic Cooling Freezer 7 Pro, but larger CPU coolers could cause some issues. The Southbridge cooler is also slightly too prominent, getting in the way of the stock cooler on certain large, high-end graphics cards. Not terminally in the way, but enough for them to not feel entirely securely seated. The heat pipes also obscure the 4-pin ATX 12V motherboard connector, which is a bit silly, but with the Deluxe MSI has included the optional extender, which makes it bearable.

In addition to providing the extra USB and SATA functions (I/O), the ICH9R development also incorporates support for a new technology called "Intel Memory Boost", which ostensibly allows for the turbo-charging of system performance using flash-memory devices for fast-paging capabilities.

Finally, a row of diagnostic LEDs light up the board in red and green, flashing through the POST sequence and glowing in a certain pattern to indicate specific problems detected in your setup.



Yes, it's quite expensive and in fact crazily costly if you factor in the price of the 2GB DDR3 as well, but considering its potential this is worth the money if you're looking to build the fastest rig possible today.

In terms of cost, we'd rather go for

the vanilla MSI P35 Deluxe with DDR2 slots right now until the newer RAM reaches a more palatable price point. And remember, the latest Intel X38 chipset has just started hitting the market. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

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- * RCA audio input
- * Frequency Range: 25-20,000Hz (+/-2.5dB 40-18,000Hz)
- * Total system power: 300W RMS

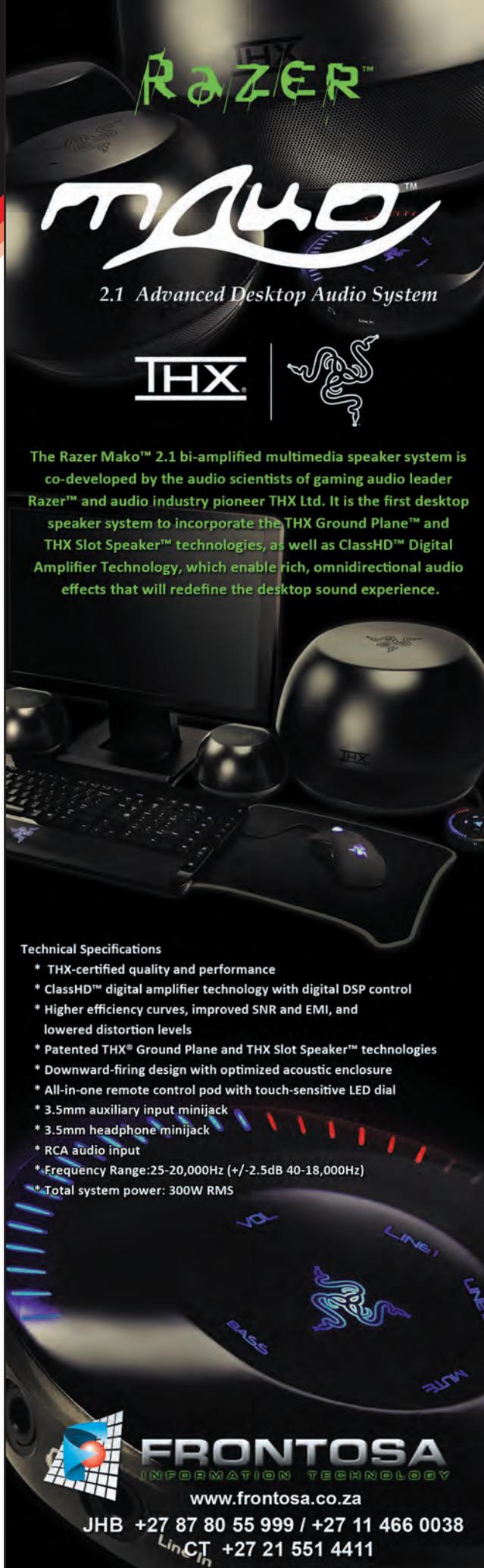


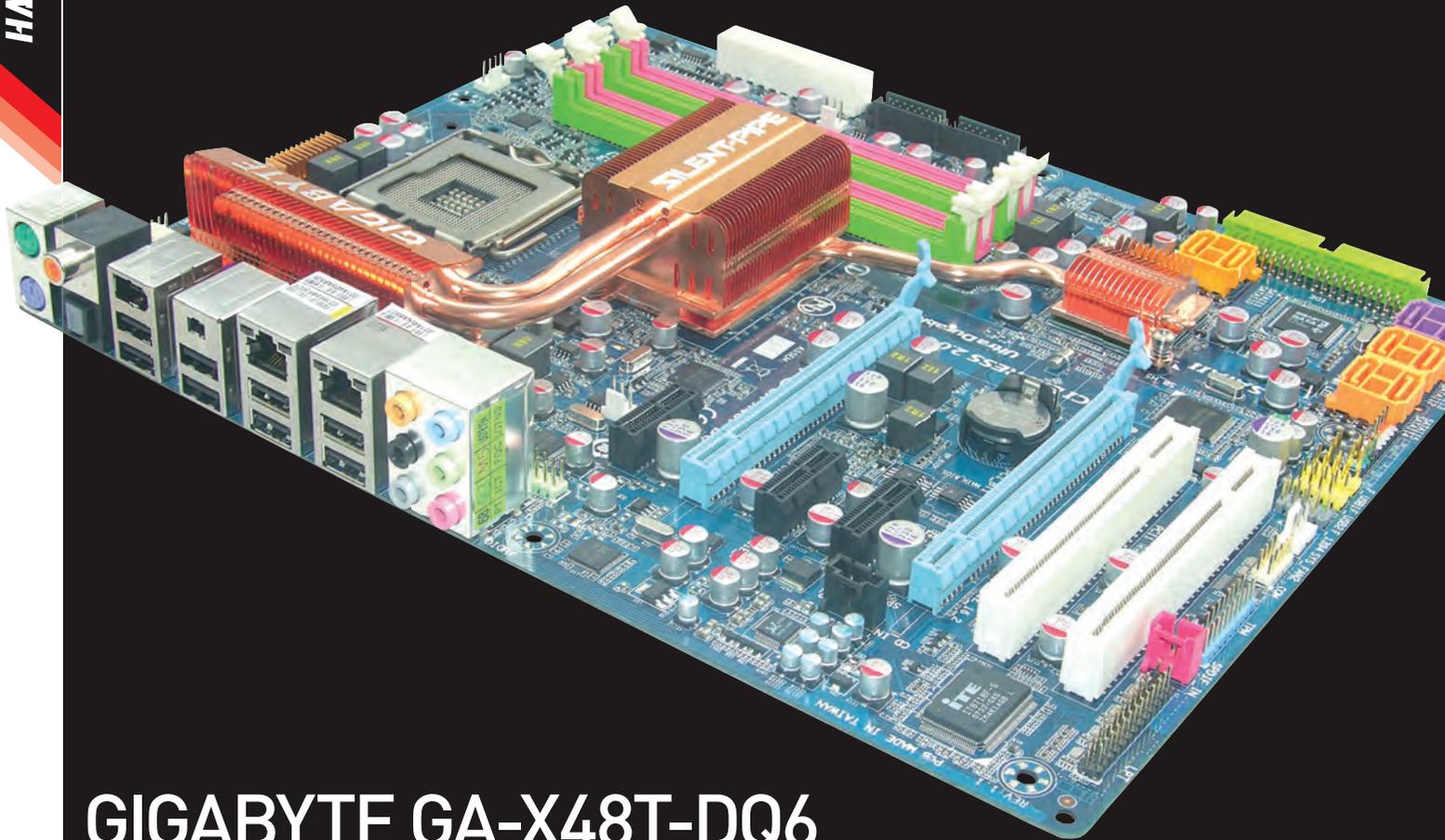
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GIGABYTE GA-X48T-DQ6

WE ARE FIRMLY INTO 2008 and 45nm CPUs are everywhere. All is well and we are at the pinnacle of what Intel's GTL architecture can offer us. However, the aforementioned isn't really true, thanks to the X38. It's not that the X38 was bad, but it wasn't as good as we'd expected. Nevertheless, it introduced support for the PCI-E 2.0 specification, official 400MHz FSB support and a largely refined MCH that enabled better support for DDR3 than what the P35 offered.

However, all of these were supposed to complement the seemingly better overclocking and clock-for-clock advantage the X38 was to bring. For the most part this turned out to be untrue. The X38 was no FSB champion and the P35 bested it in this regard, reaching speeds a good 30MHz to 50MHz and sometimes higher than what the X38 could manage. Thus, enthusiasts greeted the X38 with a lukewarm reception, despite many IHVs trying their best to sort out these issues in the chipset by implementing all sorts of voltage control options and advanced BIOS settings. All of this helped the situation somewhat, but only managed to make the X38 an acceptable chipset rather than a great one.

As you'd know by now, the X48 chipsets are actually X38 chips that turned out well unlike the others. Therefore, in reality the X48 is an exact replica of the X38 in terms of features and support. The key difference,

however, is that clock for clock it is actually faster than the X38 (and the P35). More than that, it clocks much better than the X38, especially where quad-core CPUs are concerned.

With a bit of trepidation about the X48 chipset, we set about comparing the GA-X48T-DQ6 to the GIGABYTE GA-X38-DQ6, which while being a DDR2-based motherboard, was among the better X38-chipset-based motherboards, offering a solid 450MHz on the FSB. With 45nm quad-core CPUs having a relatively low FSB, we had not expected the X48 to perform much better. However, it did... by an entire 30MHz maxing out at 480MHz. This improvement was marked with much better memory bandwidth, greater stability and massive gains in 3D benchmarks. This is probably the first chipset since the i975 to have worthwhile and easily measurable gains over everything else that followed before.

GIGABYTE had produced an exceptional motherboard with the GA-X38-DQ6. However, it seems that they have ramped up the quality of the BIOS in the X48T, with even more features than the X38, including the very useful half-multiplier option, which gives an added degree of flexibility (especially when trying to maximise the FSB, which has a direct impact on memory speeds). The changes between the X38-based board and the X48 are not cosmetic or visible, but they are certainly there in



SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X48
PROCESSOR SUPPORT	Intel Core 2/Core 2 Duo/Core 2 Quad/Core 2 Extreme
MEMORY SUPPORT	4 x DDR3 184-pin (8GB Max.)
EXPANSION SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 3 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTIVITY	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 8 x USB 2.0, dual Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x 1394, 2 x eSATA
AUDIO	Realtek ALC889A DTS 8.1 Channel

SCORE



performance and in the BIOS.

There are several features of the GA-X48T-DQ6 that we've not covered here and which deal with energy efficiency and the like. However, rest assured: the GA-X48T-DQ6 is a near perfect board. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

XFx 8800 GT ALPHA DOG XXX EDITION

THE 8800GT WILL PROBABLY be remembered as the GPU that brought life back to the mid-range after the sadness that was the 8600 series.

Not only is the card small, but the 8800GT is also an immensely fast card. It may only have a 256-bit interface, but that doesn't mean anything when gaming at 1,280 x 1,024 or lower resolutions. At these settings, the XXX Edition can outrun an 8800 Ultra, which is no easy feat. Clocked at a respectable 670MHz, the XXX Edition managed to clock even further to 720MHz, delivering even better performance in all games and benchmarks. The one game that received a significant gain was *Crysis*, which happens to be the most demanding game on PC.

While air cooling allowed us a useful overclock of 720MHz, employing water cooling allowed the card to go much further (almost making the 800MHz mark). 786MHz was the most stable speed and at that speed, it even managed to outperform an 8800GTS 512MB, clocked at its reference speeds.

XFx has not included a game with the package and has decided to go with the reference cooler, which isn't all that great. However, that doesn't take away from the great card the XXX Edition is. If you're in

the market for an 8800GT, you may as well start with the XFXXXX Edition, as it's one quick graphics card that may be thin on package contents, but packs a mighty punch in performance. If you are the owner of an SLI-capable motherboard but don't want to spend a fortune on an SLI configuration featuring the new GTS or Ultra graphics cards, two XFx 8800 GT Alpha Dog XXX Edition cards in SLI will provide brilliant performance at a reasonable price. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CORE	G92 (670MHz)
PROCESS	754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (950MHz)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	112

SCORE



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SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 3870

THE LAST QUARTER OF 2007 without a doubt belonged to mid-range graphics cards. While the HD2900 and the competing 8800 Ultra ruled the synthetic benchmarks, for most people the mid-range made a welcome return with a higher price point but much better performance. The new graphics cards provided better value than anything else did out there.

There are a number of things worth knowing about the HD 3870, which make it a very interesting GPU. Using a Low-k 55nm TSMC process, the HD 3870 manages to run very cool, especially when compared to the original R600 chip on which it's based. Besides it resulting in a very small 192mm² GPU, it's also faster because of the shorter trace length. With the changes in the core, the GPU is faster than the R600 core clock for clock.

Making the HD2900 the faster card overall, however, is that the HD 3870 features only half the memory bit-width: a 256-bit memory bus on the HD 3870 as opposed to the 512-bit bus on the HD2900. While the R600 never lacked available memory bandwidth, the use of a 256-bit bus gives the HD 3870 just over 72GB/sec in bandwidth, which is adequate for most applications but not when employing higher resolutions and AA levels (of which the HD

3870 features plenty of).

SAPPHIRE has put together a nifty package that includes a full version of 3DMark06 Advanced Edition and *Half-Life 2 Black Box*. Yes, we are fully aware of the fact that this package was available on the HD2900 last year already (without 3DMark06).

Interestingly enough, the HD 3870 did very well in 3DMark06, delivering a score above 17,000 on a quad-core system. When you are running two cards in CrossFire, you are able to overclock each card independently, making it possible to max out each card separately to get the highest framerate possible.

What is still missing, however, is more freedom in clock-speed control in the Catalyst Control Center, as the slider only allows you to clock up to 880MHz, which may seem ample until you realise that the card is already clocked at an impressive 775MHz. The same can be said for the memory speed as well, which tops out at 1,050MHz.

That aside, the HD 3870 is a fantastic card. The visual quality is superb and the card runs cool and quiet. There isn't much to fault this card on. Every game played on it was smooth with the exception of *Crysis*, which required a little tweaking to

HAG >>>
HARDWARE
AWARD ★



SPECS

CORE	RV670 (775MHz)
PROCESS	666 million gates (55nm Low-k TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit 512MB GDDR4 (1,125MHz)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	320

SCORE



increase performance levels. Other than *Crysis*, everything else played beautifully and without any problems. This is by far the most impressive card to come from AMD/ATI in a very long time.

With the Radeon HD 3870, SAPPHIRE has a winner. DirectX 10.1 support may not be a fundamental feature set right now, but it's good to have; and with everything else that comes with the HD 3870, it will be very hard not to recommend this card. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

TG LN2+DICE BLOCK

IT'S HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT you'll see this product on a computer store shelf or in a PC distributor's brochure. The reason for this is that this product is squarely aimed at the enthusiast and gaming market, making it ideal for dedicated teams and individuals who compete for top spots locally and internationally.

The TG LN2+Dice Block is South Africa's first commercially available liquid nitrogen and dry ice (or DICE as it's called) block. It's indeed possible to have one made for you, if you have those sorts of contacts, but what is most certain is that it will likely cost you far more.

In essence, it's just a hollow tube of copper with a base and you just fill it up with ice or liquid nitrogen. But that is oversimplifying things: a block needs to do several things besides keeping the top of the CPU cold. It needs to hold temperatures (or, if you want, it needs to have some sort of stability as far as temperatures go). What usually happens with self-made blocks is that they will allow you to get the CPU core to -40°C (which is good), but that is with the CPU idling at a low voltage. As soon as you up the voltage and increase the frequency, you get a temperature swing that results in temperatures increasing dramatically from a comfortable -40°C to -10°C .

The brilliance of this block is that it was designed with the sole intention of maximising surface area and minimising temperature swings when the system is under load, or when more ice or nitrogen is poured into the block. As far as maximising surface area is concerned, the block features a drilled base that increases surface area tremendously. Because of the sheer volume of the block, it means that the same -40°C achieved with a generic homemade block can be held for literally hours on end. When we tested the block on a mighty quad-core CPU-powered machine, the temperature swing was a mere 10°C at most, and this allowed us to

SPECS

MATERIAL	Copper
VOLUME	800cc
DIMENSIONS	23cm x 8cm
MASS	1.7kg
BASE SURFACE AREA	300cm ²

SCORE



add voltage as and when we wished.

The TG Block sports a good mounting mechanism that allows you to fasten and mount it in the same way you would a regular LGA775 aftermarket heat sink with a back plate. The TG Block also comes packaged with insulation for your motherboard socket, which minimises water condensation. If it isn't obvious by now, that is the last thing you want to form on your motherboard, particularly around the CPU socket.

With a proper mount and some good thermal paste like Akasa's AK-450 (AS5 or Liquid Metal Pro will not work well at all at sub-zero temperatures), the CPU core can reach an impressive -70°C (reading from motherboard), which is about the limit for dry ice. Anything colder than that will require liquid nitrogen, which gets a little complex.

The first commercially available extreme overclocking block in the country also happens to be among the best you will find anywhere else. Yes, there are specialist blocks that are larger and far more aesthetically pleasing. However, they will cost at the least twice as much, and if you're using dry ice, won't give you much better temperatures at all.

TG's first block is, in one word, brilliant. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



THE MAG FIELD GUIDE TO GAMING

(SUPPLEMENTAL)

WE'VE JUST GOT ALL THIS JUNK RIGHT HERE IN THIS TRUNK, SO WE FELT LIKE SHARING. THINK OF THESE AS VITAMINS. VITAMIN GAMING. TAKE THESE SIX AND IF YOU DON'T FEEL MUCH MORE INTELLIGENT, THEN YOU'RE FREE TO ASK FOR YOUR MONEY BACK.

EGO ON TAP: ID SOFTWARE ORIGINS

Founded by four members of the computer company Softdisk in 1991: (rogrammers John Carmack and John Romero, game designer Tom Hall, and artist Adrian Carmack), id Software is an American game developer based in Texas.

Considered one of the most influential game development companies in history, id Software was responsible for the *Commander Keen* series, *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom* and *Quake*.

Pronounced 'id' as in 'did' or 'kid', the company name is a coincidental reference to the id as a psychological concept developed by Sigmund Freud. Originally, however, the company name has deeper roots: the team that later founded id Software took the name

"Ideas from the Deep" (a company created by Romero and Lane Roathe in 1989), shortening their self reference of "IFD guys" to "ID".

[Commander Keen (1990)]

A platform game using one of the first smooth side-scrolling game engines for the PC, responsible for bringing id Software into the gaming mainstream. The game was successful and spawned an entire series, and is also incidentally the series that designer Tom Hall is most affiliated with.

[Wolfenstein 3D (1992)]

The company's breakout product, *Wolf 3D* was a First-person shooter with unprecedented smooth 3D graphics and violent gameplay.

[Doom (1993)]

Setting new standards for graphical quality and graphic violence, *Doom* popularised the genre and became a cultural phenomenon for its violent themes and multiplayer functionality.

[Quake (1996)]

The second milestone in id history, *Quake* combined cutting-edge, fully-3D graphics with an excellent soundtrack by Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor. *Quake's* main innovation, the ability to play deathmatch over the Internet, cemented the title into history.

Required reading: *Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture*, Kushner, David (2003). ISBN 0-375-50524-5.



[Commander Keen (1990)]



[Wolfenstein 3D (1992)]



[Doom (1993)]



[Quake (1996)]

LOVE TO HATE: THE IMMORTAL COUNTER-STRIKE

Commonly abbreviated to CS, *Counter-Strike* is a "tactical first-person shooter" videogame that originated from a *Half-Life* modification. Created by Minh "Gooseman" Le and Jess "Cliffe" Cliffe, the game was expanded into a series since original release and includes *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, *Counter-Strike: Source*, *Counter-Strike: Anthology* and *Counter-Strike* on Xbox.

The premise of the game involves a team of counter-terrorists fighting a team of terrorists in a series of rounds. Each round can be won either by eliminating the opposing force, or completing the mission objective.

The first public Beta of *Counter-Strike* was released June 18, 1999.

Each round starts with both teams spawning (entering the game world) simultaneously, usually at opposite ends of the map. A player can then purchase a variety of weapons and equipment, although at the start of the game players have limited funds. As the game progresses, players gain more money based on performance. If a player is killed during the round, they are unable to respawn until the round is complete.

The main draw to *Counter-Strike* is its quasi-realism: the weapons are modelled after real-world counterparts and dole out mostly realistic damage (a single shot from a sniper rifle will kill a player if shot in the head, or chest if the player does not purchase body armour).

Counter-Strike gained mass appeal due to competitive events and its entry into the various cyber-sports leagues, and remains extremely popular to this day.



Epic Pinball (1993)



One Must Fall 2097 (1994)



Unreal (1998)

SCAN MY CAT: THE EPIC OF EPIC

Originally founded under the name Potomac Computer Systems in 1991 by Tim Sweeny. During the later portion of the same year, they changed names to Epic MegaGames. Their first title was ZTZ, a text-based game that allowed players to develop not only their own level terrain with the built-in editor, but also script new functionality into the game. Gradually the Epic brand grew thanks to its shareware games, including *Epic Pinball*, *Jill of the Jungle*, *Jazz Jackrabbit* and *One Must Fall: 2097*.

In 1998, Epic released *Unreal*, a first-person shooter with stunning 3D visuals. The company also began to licence out its core technology, to other game developers. In 1999, the company changed its name to Epic Games. In 2006, Epic released the best-selling game, *Gears of War* and completed work on *Unreal Tournament III*.



Jazz Jackrabbit (1994)



Jill of the Jungle (1992)

[SOME UNREAL ENGINE 3 TITLES]

Aliens (2009), Gearbox Software
Army of Two (2008), Electronic Arts
BioShock (2007), 2K Boston
BlackSite: Area 51 (2007), Midway
Dead Space (2008), Redwood Shore Studio
Frontlines: Fuel of War (2008), Kaos Studios
Halo Wars (TBA 2008), Ensemble Studios
Mass Effect (2007), BioWare
Tom Clancy's EndWar (2008), Ubisoft
Turok (2008), Propaganda Games

SCUMM <3: AND SCUMM HEARTS YOU TOO

LucasArts' revolutionary verb-object-based Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion might have been originally created for a singular purpose, but it went on to power a number of games that feature prominently on most reliable Best Of Ever lists.

[SCUMM HALL OF FAME]

Maniac Mansion (1987)
Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders (1988)
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989)
Loom (1990)
The Secret of Monkey Island (1990)
Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (1991)
Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis (1992)
Day of the Tentacle (1993)
Sam & Max Hit the Road (1993)
Full Throttle (1995)
The Dig (1995)
The Curse of Monkey Island (1997)
SCUMM was succeeded by *GrimE* in 1998, with the release of *Grim Fandango*.

IT'S A ME, MARIO: THE HISTORY OF A PLUMBER

Mario was first seen in *Donkey Kong*, but was called "Jumpman" and was a carpenter, not a plumber. He was named after Mario Segale, the landlord of Nintendo of America's office (who barged in on a company meeting demanding an overdue rent). Mario has appeared in over 200 videogames so far, has sold over 193 million games and has even had his own TV cartoon show. In a 1990 poll by Marketing Evaluations, Mario was found to be more popular and recognisable among children than Mickey Mouse.



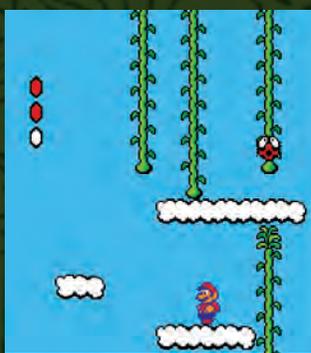
Donkey Kong (1981)



Mario Bros. (1983)



Super Mario Bros. (1985)



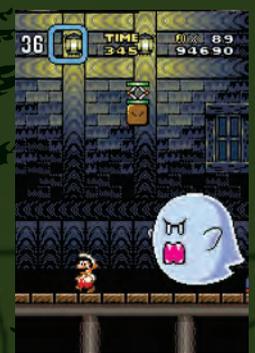
Super Mario Bros. 2: The Lost Levels (1986)



Super Mario Bros. 3 (1988)



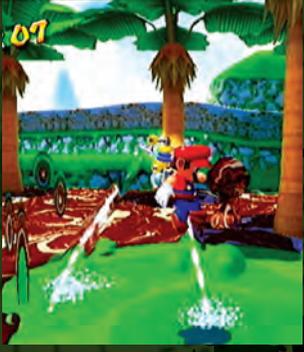
Super Mario Land (1989)



Super Mario World (1990)



Super Mario 64 (1996)



Super Mario Sunshine (2002)



New Super Mario Bros. (2006)



Super Mario Galaxy (2007)

HALO ASPLOSION: HOW THE XBOX CHANGED GAMING

Frequently scorned by "hardcore" gamers (=ignorant peasants) for having too many bright colours or something, the *Halo* franchise is almost singlehandedly responsible for the state of console FPS games as we know them today, and launched Microsoft's then-new Xbox to widespread popularity. The series documents a future period of intergalactic warfare between humanity and an alliance of alien bullies called the Covenant, and the grand adventures of a cybernetically-enhanced supersoldier called Master Chief.

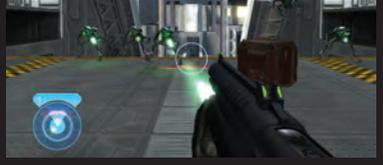
As of late last year, the series has shifted more than 20 million units, and expanded its merchandising empire to include novels, action figures, a tabletop battler, and even a short-lived edition of Mountain Dew.

HALO ACTIONCLIX

A collectible miniatures game by Wizkids, it's based on the *Halo* series and the first set featured more than 80 unique miniature figures from the *Halo* universe.



Halo Combat Evolved (2001)



Halo 2 (2004)



Halo 3 (2007)

[HALO NOVELS]

Adapted into five novels with two more on the way, *Halo: The Fall of Reach* is a prequel to *Halo: Combat Evolved*. *Halo: The Flood* is an adaptation of *Halo: Combat Evolved*, while *Halo: First Strike* serves as a prequel to *Halo 2*. *Halo: Ghosts of Onyx* is a supplemental side-story while *Halo: Contact Harvest* is a prequel to the events in *The Fall of Reach*. **NAG**



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THE END

HELLO THERE. YES, IT'S me again. What you're reading now is my last article for NAG. As a final farewell, I invite you to join me on a brief tour of the last seven years in South African e-sports. Far too much has happened for me to cover all of it, and as such, I will try to discuss only the most influential events.

2001

Everybody was talking about an organisation called the World Cyber Games (WCG), which would fly the winners of a qualifying tournament to the finals in South Korea. This coincided with the rise of *Counter-Strike*, replacing *Quake III* as the premier competitive title, and with it the fall of the old-school 'super-clans.'

The WCG *Counter-Strike* qualifier was won by an ambitious group of youngsters called XTC. Their fortunes had changed completely when Garth "Brute" Jones had forcibly taken over leadership. Under his charismatic and dictatorial rule, XTC earned their tickets to South Korea. At the grand finals, however, they were dismantled by every other team in their group, introducing a trend that has plagued South African *Counter-Strike* teams ever since. Meanwhile, Stephen "Ph4ntom" Cloete more than made up for the failure of his counterparts by finishing in the top twelve in *Quake III*.

2002

Three pivotal new teams were formed in 2002. The first, Damage Control, made a small piece of history at the Mayhem Offline League when they destroyed previous champions XTC, but were disqualified for fielding an underage player named Riaan "Style" van Niekerk. The second was Tainted Mentality, which kick-started the careers of several important players: Nico-Louis "Mielie" Joubert, Karl "Mburr" Buys, Chris "Apocalypse" Lautre, Tyrone "Explicit" Lautre, and Harry "Incin" Apostoleris. It was also in this year that the *WarCraft III* community was born, and team Nightfall, founded by Chris "Swoop" Barter, would go on to dominate South African strategy gaming for the next four years.

At the WCG grand final, Ph4ntom went from strength to strength, defeating the USA's Jason "Socrates" Sylka 17-0 and eventually finishing seventh overall.

2003

Tainted Mentality had by now split into two separate groups. Damage Control had picked up the Lautre brothers and Incin in order to form a secondary team. Not long afterwards, Warren "Storm" Steven, former owner of this magazine, created team Evolve and attracted both DC teams to his new label. Meanwhile, the *Quake III* division of Tainted Mentality had reformed as Team 42 and switched to the newly released *Unreal Tournament 2003*.

Quake 4



This was the year of the introduction of the Electronic Sports World Cup. Evolve mopped up the *Counter-Strike* tournament, Team 42's Mielie and Mburr took first and second place respectively in *UT2003*, and Nightfall's Swoop won *WarCraft* comfortably. At the finals in France, South Africa's international performance reached the very bottom of a deep trough. Only one player – Mielie – managed to win a single game.

2004

The ESWC grand finals were again uneventful for our local team. The main point of interest instead came before the tournament itself – a scandal surrounding the *UT2004* Masters tournament. The ESWC organising committee had selected Jonathan "Zero-1" Attwell, the runner-up at WCG 2003, over the actual champion, Mburr. It was then discovered that Zero-1 had misrepresented his achievements on the application form and his invitation was revoked. Mburr was ultimately awarded the place.

At the WCG there was more drama. Damage Control had risen out of the ashes

of Evolve's second team. They had worked harder than anyone else over the intervening months and, in the end, finally dethroned Evolve. In *UT2004*, the contest was no less intriguing, with a fierce rivalry developing between Team 42 and the old *Quake III* champion, Ph4ntom. However, this was to be Mielie's tournament. After comfortably defeating Ph4ntom in the upper-bracket semifinal, he demolished Zero-1 in the upper final, winning one map 16-0 after only four minutes. Mielie's momentum continued into the WCG global final, where he won his group in the round-robin stage, losing only in the elimination stage to third-place finisher Roman "Chip_Mask" Verenko (Ukraine).

Meanwhile, rAge - NAG's Really Awesome Gaming Event - held its inaugural tournaments in *Counter-Strike* and *Doom 3*.

2005

Another year of transition lay ahead of us. Four members of Damage Control left to start Identity Gaming, but the new team was unable to overcome Evolve at the ESWC qualifier. In a shock *WarCraft III* result, Travis

Counter Strike: Source



WarCraft III



Gran Turismo 4



"Shase" Weedon, virtually unknown in the real-time strategy community, knocked out defending champion Swoop in the group stages and went on to win the tournament.

By the time the WCG came round, Identity had made another crucial change to their line-up. Andrew "Cent" Hadjipaschali had an immediate impact on the team's performance. They crushed their opponents at the WCG qualifier and went on to win at rAge in the same fashion. Then, Cent announced that he was leaving Identity to start a new team. Three of the remaining Identity players - Apocalypse, Explicit and Incin - joined forces with Evolve's Style and Hellhound, creating a new super-team. They called it Damage Control. Again.

2006

While the new-look DC ran amok, *Quake 4* had finally been released and the legendary Ph4ntom came out of retirement. At the ESWC grand final he delivered the goods again, beating Poland and France's representatives and losing narrowly to Sweden's. He was unable to progress

through the second group stage, but making it that far was another impressive achievement. Local *Gran Turismo 4* player Jacobus "DunnoHate" Volschenk also wowed onlookers by finishing fifth.

Back at home, the company that had acquired the World Cyber Games license had underestimated the financial resources required, and the 2006 qualifier was called off. This set the tone for a string of disappointments over the next year. rAge 2006, thankfully, was not one of them. It became South Africa's first internationally recognised event, attracting renowned players such as FatalIty (USA), Lost-Cause (USA), Garpy (UK), Tritto (Sweden) and Ms.X (Canada).

2007

Last year was the bleakest in South African gaming's history. The news that the trips to France for the ESWC had been cancelled was only told to some players moments before they played their final matches at the qualifier. The *Trackmania Nations* winner only found out the following day. Amidst all

the debate, one thing is clear: the organisers could have warned the players beforehand about the possibility of a cancellation. rAge 2007 went ahead, but after the fallout from the ESWC qualifier, not even a new Arena 77 tournament director (Louis "Chronic" van der Bijl) could restore the confidence of the players.

LOOKING AHEAD AND FAREWELL

There are promising developments that could bode well for South African e-sports in 2008. For starters, Arena 77 has never had a more dedicated director at the helm. However, there is a limit to what Chronic can achieve if she doesn't receive the right support on a corporate level.

I leave you all with both nostalgia and a heavy heart. The community I love is in tatters, but that can still be turned around. I urge everyone to attend the next major competitive event, take the organisers to task if they don't deliver on their promises, and be vocal about your passion for the sport. It's worth fighting for. **NAG**

Anton "bsk" Lines

RAPID PROTOTYPING

DESIGNING A GAME CAN OFTEN BE A TIME-INTENSIVE AND EVEN COSTLY PROCEDURE. ADOPTING A RAPID DEVELOPMENT APPROACH CAN ALLOW YOU TO FIND OUT WHAT'S FUN AND WHAT ISN'T VERY EARLY ON AND EVEN HELP YOU REACH THE BEST FINAL GAME YOU COULD DEVELOP. HERE'S HOW...

THE GOAL OF PROTOTYPING

A PROTOTYPE IS A TEST, nothing more, nothing less. You're testing to see if a small subset of your game is going to work the way you imagine it... You might want to find out if a particular graphical effect is going to be doable or if it will take too much time to be perfect. You may be prototyping a control mechanism that you've never built or used before. You could even be thinking of doing something completely radical with your gameplay and need to know how well people are going to relate to what you want to do.

In all the above cases, your goals with a prototype remain the same: Build a low-cost, low-investment, quick and dirty system that lets you find out in the shortest possible time what you want to know. You have to hone in on what you want to test with a razor-sharp focus. Anything that's going to waste your time should be pared away by the simple question "Is this going to help me test X?"

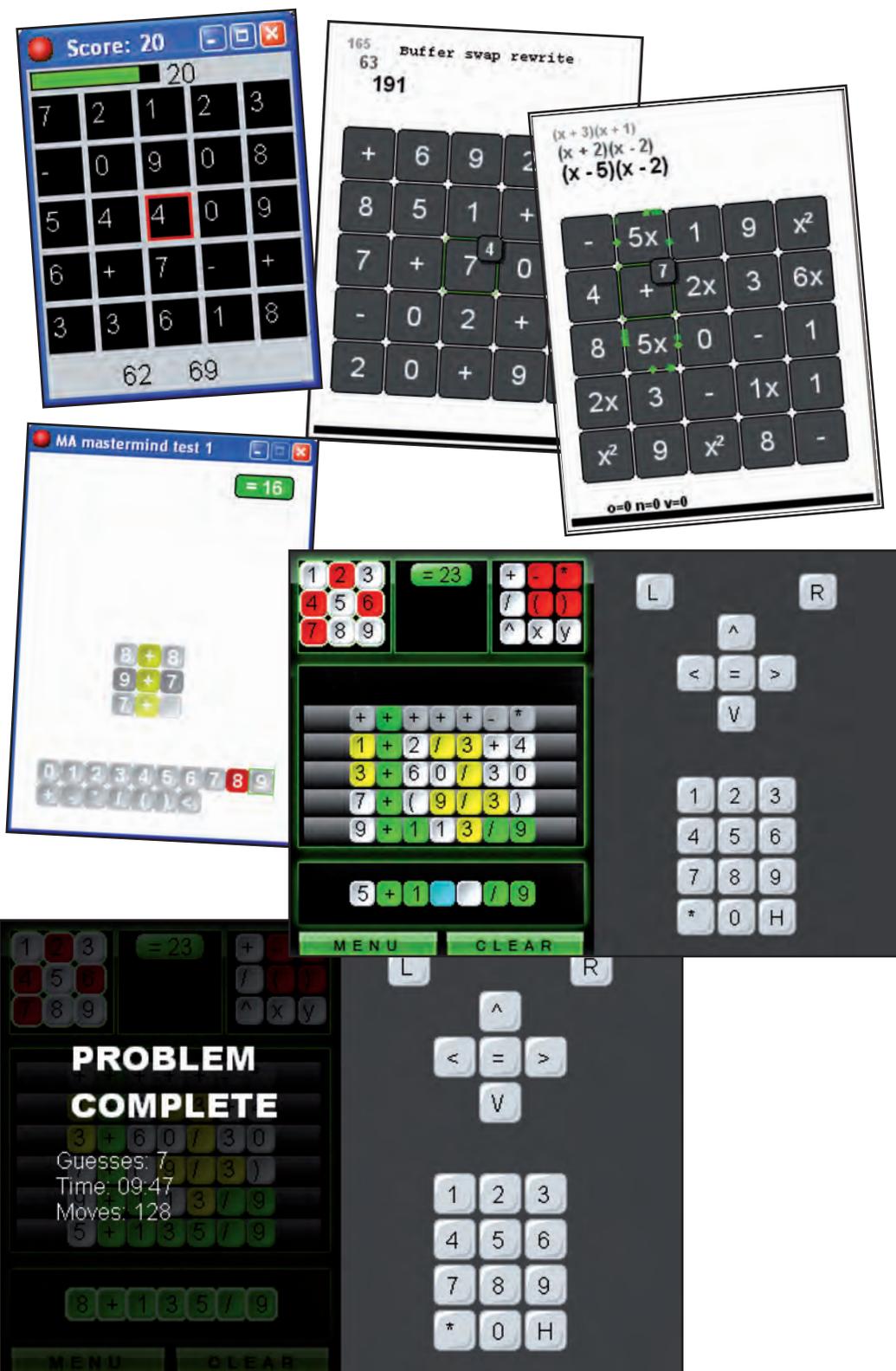
It's perfectly feasible to have multiple prototypes for a single project, each testing a specific aspect of what you're trying to do. Note that prototyping can also be an exploratory exercise: You may not be sure exactly how you're going to achieve something or what the best approach to solving a problem might be. Putting together a few prototypes is often a brilliant way to figure out how to go ahead.

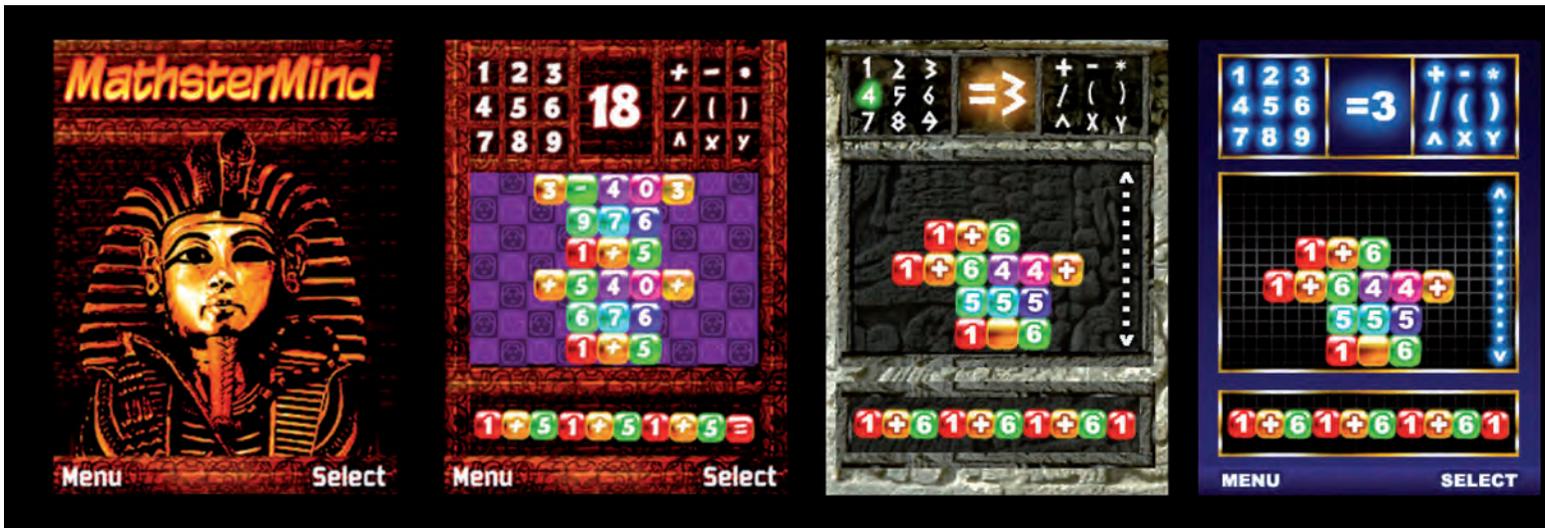
FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Due to time constraints, most of my own personal games begin life as a short prototype or two and grow from there. Often the best thing to do when you feel a killer idea coming on is to sit down for an hour and bang out something that might or might not be playable... If you can't tell if something's going to be fun in that sort of timescale, chances are it'll never be enjoyable or you're just not prototyping correctly. There are few things more gratifying than watching someone get really into playing something that you know is nothing more than the programmatic equivalent of duct tape and string under the hood.

That said, prototyping has recently helped turn what could have been a nightmare project into something rather enjoyable. The client wanted a game in a very, very tight timescale, on a platform I had little to no experience developing on. The project started with a prototype on PC to see if the core game ideas were feasible. Once they turned out to be rather good, we moved on to a structured prototyping system that would essentially become a "living design document" for the entire project. This allowed us to keep the client very much in the loop, meaning decisions could be made faster and we didn't have to worry about communication issues [that often plague game development projects: You might know what "FPS-like

THE EVOLUTION OF A PROTOTYPE





camera system” means, but many corporates simply don’t), we could just show what we were talking about. That, coupled with being able to test some of the complex algorithms we needed to sculpt in a “real” environment made life much easier.

PROTOTYPING TECHNIQUES

Paper prototyping is the easiest, quickest and most overlooked form of prototype. Often it gets discarded as “too quick and dirty”, especially by game developers who feel that programming is the core of what we do. But in a situation where time is limited or extremely costly, paper and a few pencils can be the perfect tools. Paper prototypes are mostly helpful in nailing down broad gameplay mechanics or even complex simulation/interaction systems, informing your game design long and often helping determine exactly how you’ll approach the development of the game itself. Don’t forget that many games we traditionally play on console or PC can be successfully translated to board or pen-and-paper games. As an exercise, try transferring your favourite game to paper and see how well you can make it play.

Horizontal/Broad prototyping revolves around building a broad subset of what a game/application does without going into any detail. A good example would be prototyping the look and feel of a game’s interface with simple placeholder art, or building just the core game mechanics in a very simple environment without any story, levels or player incentives. A horizontal prototype is there to see how well something works in the “big picture”. Most game prototypes tend to fall into this category.

Conversely, **Vertical/Narrow prototyping** is all about digging down into as much detail as possible, although usually only in one specific area. Say you wanted to test player reaction to a specific story event or a particular puzzle, level or setting. That would be a vertical prototype: Very little general gameplay, no “broad strokes”, just a very focused exploration of a single idea in the game’s setting.

And finally there are the two differing approaches to prototype longevity:

Throwaway and **Evolutionary** prototyping. A throwaway prototype is a short and sweet, once-off attempt to explore or understand a single idea. You don’t put a lot of effort into anything other than the single element you’re focusing on, plus there’s no reason to not cheat like crazy: You’re never going to see that code again, so don’t waste time worrying about efficiency or elegance, whatever gets the job done is good enough. In comparison, an evolutionary prototype is designed to go through several iterations before it is discarded and may even evolve into a system inside the final product. This makes evolutionary prototyping rather hard to do correctly: People tend to treat it like coding a full-blown game and get stuck in writing re-useable code; obviously that doesn’t follow the spirit of building a prototype. In general the best rule of thumb to follow to avoid spending too much time with an evolutionary prototype is to be even more focused and ruthless in paring down what you need to do. If it works, it’s good enough *this time around*.

BUT, RAPID PROTOTYPING?

Granted, prototyping is supposed to be rapid anyway, but there are a few things to keep in mind while you’re doing it in order to get the best results as quickly as possible. Note that the speed of your results really is very important: If you spend three weeks getting a prototype up and running, it’s a lot less likely to help you make decisions and it’s certainly not rapid! Here’s a general guide to staying rapid and ensuring that you’re on track with a prototype:

Don’t be afraid to say “Well, later will be a good time to rewrite that”. Chances are you’d waste time making something more general right now, plus you often won’t have to rewrite a quick and dirty approach later anyway – The prototype will be finished (and discarded) or you’ll realise that you should be spending time optimising another section of code that’s much more crucial.

Keep everything as self-contained as possible. As your prototype grows, try to isolate things from each other. It’s very easy

to just start throwing new variables into the mix wherever they’re needed and rely on things like global and public scoping to keep things running, but that’s the fastest way to make code complicated and difficult to read. If everything’s compartmentalised early on, it’s easy to go through and change everything around when you need to. Storing info in settings files is a wonderful idea.

Comment your code! Just because you’re not coding “seriously” with an eye to extensibility doesn’t mean you can get sloppy! Commenting helps you keep a mental flow of logic going, plus it always pays to not have to puzzle out what on earth you were trying to do over there.

Go with the flow... If you feel an idea coming on or you get an intuition that you should be following a specific path, trust those instincts. Prototyping is all about being as creative as possible in as short a time as possible.

Use an established system! You do not want to be writing collision detection or basic window handling while you’re prototyping... Using a system you know well that you can pretty much bend to your whim is very important. Personally I prefer Game Maker as a prototyping environment because there’s very little setup work required before you get something functional.

Be ruthless. Do not be afraid to axe 20 minutes of work if things aren’t where you want them to be. Continuously ask yourself “Is this absolutely necessary?” and avoid getting sucked into writing general systems. Be as strict with yourself as possible and never get bogged down in graphics. If a square won’t do, use a circle. Colours can come later.

And finally: Practice your prototyping. It’s a skill that takes time to develop and relies heavily on experience (with both your development environment and game design). Few activities can be as fruitful as giving yourself a couple of hours to prototype in every week. **NAG**



Hard Candy

James Francis: **JF** | Miktar Dracon: **MD** | Michael James: **MJ** | Toby Hudon: **TH** | Alex Jelagin: **AJ** | Chris Bistline: **CB** | Walt Pretorius: **WP** | Regardt van der Berg: **RV**

Director: David Slade

Cast: Patrick Wilson, Ellen Page, Sandra Oh, Jennifer Holmes

Genre: Thriller

Rating: 13

Score: ★★★★★

ELLEN PAGE IS GOING to be a very impressive actress when she is older. Hell, she's impressive already.

Hard Candy tells the tale of a 32-year-old photographer who takes a 14-year-old girl he met via the internet home. However, he gets more than he bargained for when it turns out his guest is an anti-paedophile vigilante intent on proving that he likes kiddie-fiddling.

Hard Candy could be called topical, I suppose, due to the supposedly high incidence of paedophilic stalkers on the internet. But the topical nature, or commentary passed by the film, is secondary to a truly creepy script featuring people that no-one can really like. On the one hand there's the big bad wolf in the form of the photographer, and on the other hand



there's the psychopathic version of little red riding hood out to even a score.

Hard Candy is a brilliant film, sound in every aspect of the process. Well directed and wonderfully filmed, the movie creates an impact on many levels. Whether



or not it is an "important" film is debatable – whether it should be watched is not.

The DVD version doesn't offer anything by way of special features, but the film is special enough not to need excuses for buying it. **WP**

Transformers: Two-Disc Special Edition

Director: Michael Bay

Cast: Shia LaBeouf, Tyrese Gibson, Josh Duhamel, Anthony Anderson, Megan Fox, Jon Voight

Genre: Action, Sci-Fi, Adventure, Giant Robots

Rating: 10V

Score: ★★★★★

LET'S FACE IT: WE all loved the 80s cartoon and when we heard about the movie we were excited but pensive. Would they ruin our childhood memories? Would they do it wrong? Will Optimus Prime retain his colour scheme? Is anyone going to die, like they did in the original Transformers animated feature-film? So, now that the movie is out (and on DVD), the answers appear to be Not Really, Perhaps, No and Yes. Some people wanted more robot action less human drama, some were okay with the human drama and obviously okay with the robot action, others didn't even see the



movie because they thought it was going to be lame like the cartoon.

Personally, any on-screen giant robot action with Michael Bay's flair for explosions is better than none at all.

The special features on disc 2 are where it's at.



Nice, long, detailed and spruced-up documentaries with the people involved, letting you get into their heads and understand their thinking. Practically every major design choice in the movie is given special attention with regards to why they decided to do what they did. **MD**

Reno 911!: Miami

Director: Robert Ben Garant

Cast: Carlos Alazraqui, Mary Birdsong, Wendi McLendon-Covey, Robert Ben Garant, Thomas Lennon

Genre: Comedy

Rating: 16LNS

Score: ★★★

THE ENTIRE POLICE FORCE of Miami gets quarantined due to a bio-terrorist attack. The only "police" still available – the Reno police and their unique brand of crime fighting. Which mostly involves getting drunk, un-pixelated boob shots and explosives. The Reno 911! series on Comedy Central is laugh-out-loud funny due to its compact nature and irreverent parody of shows like Cops. The movie follows roughly the same

formula but with drawn-out scenes in-between. Some of it's funny, some of it's stupid. The cameo by The Rock makes it worth it.

If you've never experienced the Reno 911! brand of humour then in all likelihood the culture shock alone should be worth a chuckle. A lot of the comedy quacks like the "oh no he didn't!" variety, but there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that. Parts of the movie have a distinct Police Academy as well, with a few rehashed jokes they must have thought nobody would notice was lifted from the 80s. At the end of the day however, one can only but salute the proud shorts of the Reno 911!

Special Features are the usual misfits:



deleted scenes, extended scenes with optional director and writer commentary, a making-of and some Easter eggs. **MD**



Shrek the Third

Director: Chris Miller

Cast: Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, Antonio Banderas, Julia Andrews, Jonh Cleese, Eric Idle

Genre: Animated/Comedy

Rating: A

Score: ★★★

THE FROG-KING IS DYING, the ogre is having parental anxiety, the wizard's frock doesn't completely cover his genitalia and the duo of kitty and donkey manages to entertain. The first time I watched *Shrek 3* I felt it was a half-hearted attempt at using leftover jokes from the first two movies: Mike Myers practically sleepwalks through his lines as *Shrek*. However, upon a second viewing via the DVD the movie appears to be growing on me, the candid jokes and situations seem slightly more interesting this time around, perhaps moved out from under the shadow of *Shrek 2* (which remains a firm favorite). The main problem with the 3rd movie seems mostly centered around Prince Charming just not being a good enough villain to keep things interesting: John Lithgow from the first movie and Jennifer Saunders in the second are big shoes to fill, and Charming just isn't up to the task.

To make matters worse, *Shrek the Third* constantly feels like a kids movie that really doesn't want to be one. The mature themes



of parenthood seem to clash with the rest of the story, but remains an interesting plot arc on its own. Eric Idle as the scrambled Merlin never ceases to be creepily entertaining.

The DVD extras include a humorous guide to parenthood from *Shrek*, tons of random things to keep you interested as well as a few technology featurettes on what goes into bringing the movie to life. **MD**

The Dead Girl

Directors: Karen Moncrieff

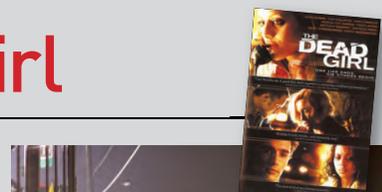
Cast (English): Toni Collette, Brittany Murphy, Marcia Gay Harden, James Franco, Josh Brolin

Genre: Drama

Rating: 16

Score: ★★★★★

WHEN A DEAD GIRL'S body is found in a field, it changes the lives of several people. Split into several mini-stories, *The Dead Girl* looks at these tales. It starts with the stranger who find the body. Suffering under the yolk of a mentally-abusive mother, reporting the body brings her all new kinds of attention that shake up her life. Then there is the tale of a girl who examines the body and suspects the girl was actually her sister, who disappeared years ago. There are two other stories worth keeping secret and finally the last story tells the tale of the dead girls' last few hours. It's an intense watch, but very sombre and sharply understated. While the stories don't have anything to do with each other, the body still links them together in a spooky way. It makes you think how once person's death can affect many people in



unexpected ways.

No features to speak of, though, which is a pity. The director's commentary would have been interesting. **JF**

BEST REVIEWED FILM OF THE YEAR



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Perfume

Director: Tom Tykwer
Cast: Ben Whishaw, Alan Rickman, Rachel Hurd-Wood, Dustin Hoffman
Genre: Period Thriller
Rating: 18
Score: ★★★★★

OCCASIONALLY A TRULY POWERFUL and moving film is released; one that succeeds perfectly in the suspension of disbelief and delivers a poignant and entertaining story. *Perfume*, based on the novel by Patrick Süskind, is such a film. It would not be inaccurate to describe this film as spectacular, despite the fact that it isn't a special effect driven piece of pop culture.

The film tells the story of the murderous perfumer,

Jean-Baptiste Grenouille who, during the 19th century, killed several women in France. The tale that the film tells explains that he tries to capture the essence of their scent by murdering them. Going into any more detail might be a bit of a spoiler though, so we'll stop right there.

The show is pretty much stolen by support actors Alan Rickman and Dustin Hoffman in this powerful art-house movie. Decisive direction and crisp editing combine with the excellent cinematography and production values to create a film that is true modern day masterpiece; thoughtful and thought-provoking, moving and charged.

Not everyone will enjoy *Perfume* – it doesn't have the mainstream appeal that lesser films provide. No explosions or car chases or space battles with poop-

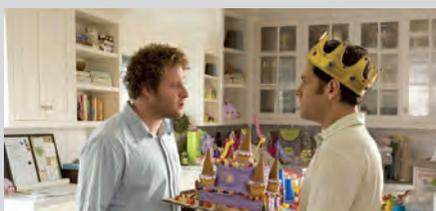


demons. Instead, it offers a truly artistic interpretation of the awesome novel on which it is based. Movies like this show that there is still hope for the medium as a form of artistic expression as well as entertainment. **WP**

Knocked Up

Director: Judd Apatow
Cast: Seth Rogen, Katherine Heigl, Paul Rudd, Leslie Mann
Genre: Romantic Comedy
Rating: 16LS
Score: ★★★★

A LOVABLE LOSER GETS LUCKY when he picks up a really hot career girl during a drunken night out. They end up having sex that neither can remember - it also turns out they were too drunk to take contraception too seriously. What do you think happens next? She's pregnant! It's not too often that a movie actually takes this topic on so boldly, but don't worry. Apart from showing how a slip-up could really mess up your comfortable stoner life, the rest makes up a sweet old romantic comedy



with enough funny bits and goofy characters to make things fun. Naturally the two of them do manage to get through this, fall in love and learn to grow, the movie ending with the birth of the baby. The girl's sister and her husband are especially



good, though the scenes featuring the two television executives take the cake. A nice, well-rounded comedy. The features are equally fleshed out, including bloopers, deleted scenes, commentary and other behind-the-scenes stuff. **JF**

Monty Python's Life of Brian: The Immaculate Edition

Director: Terry Jones
Cast: Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, Michael Palin
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 13V (Though you do have to endure seeing Graham Chapman's wobbly bits)
Score: Spam! Spam! Spam! Spam! Spam!

OVER THE YEARS, MONTY Python has taught us many useful things, among them: how to confuse a cat, how to discern who is and isn't a witch, and that lumberjacks are okay. Their timeless, epic biblical comedy, *Life of Brian*, endowed us with even more wisdom: how to conjugate Latin verbs, that

cheesemakers are indeed blessed, and to always look on the bright side of life. Educational viewing at its finest.

The film chronicles the life of unlikely Messiah Brian Cohen who was born in a manger just down the road from Jesus Christ and along the way the ensemble takes shots at just about everything, including Pontius Pilate, religious fanaticism, insane prophets, Roman centurions and ex-lepers.

The real reason to buy this edition, whether you've seen the movie before or not, is the special features disc, which includes long-lost deleted scenes, radio spots promoting the theatrical release in 1979, a documentary



on the making of the film, an audio recording or a first read-through of the script, audio commentaries from the troupe and a photo gallery. It's enough to make any Python fan drop to his knees and pray. **CB**

Death at a Funeral

Director: Frank Oz
Cast: Matthew Macfadyen, Keeley Hawes, Andy Nyman
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 13L
Score: ★★★★

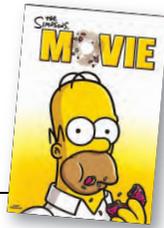
ANY COMEDIC PLOT THAT unfolds at a funeral and features a gay dwarf has the potential to go either way. Death at a Funeral: the name says it all really. But if you're thinking slapstick, you'd be wrong. Weak 'comedy' that eventually turns into romantic love story? Wrong again. This is one of those movies that'll have you wondering why it has never been made before and then it'll have you laughing out loud more than you'd expect. There are plenty of obvious gags and silliness (a grandpa in a

wheelchair that needs the toilet – right now and people unwittingly taking recreational drugs) intertwined with the finer plot subtleties, but solid acting, character development and well-timed directing throughout turn it into something unique and definitely very funny. All of the actors are instantly recognisable but you won't know them by name, which is something that gives the action credibility because you're not waiting for them to do a signature face or over-the-top slapstick – it's naturally funny if you will. The other important thing to know is that this is a British comedy from beginning to end, good news if you're a fan of British humour and bad news if you still think Hollywood makes funny movies. The movie also doesn't pull any punches; in fact, it revels in



poor taste and off-colour humour which is a refreshing change. Overall, if you're looking for some real fun, then *Death at a Funeral* is not to be missed, just don't expect much by way of extras on the DVD because they just plain suck. **MJ**

The Simpsons Movie



Director: David Silverman
Cast: Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, Nancy Cartwright
Genre: Animated comedy
Rating: PG
Score: ★★★★★

AFTER 20 YEARS, *THE Simpsons* finally have their own movie. Even though it was once said that such a thing would not happen until the series ended, we have it now even as the show enters its 19th season, making it the longest running American animated program, as well as the longest American sitcom.

The movie itself is much of what fans would hope it to be. It doesn't mess with the tried and true formula of the TV series much, which is for the best. The film makes good use of the extra time to do some jokes that would not have flown on

the TV show due to their length.

As in many of the TV episodes, several plots intertwine. Homer rescues the infamous Spider-Pig from a Krustyburger, which ties in with an environmental crisis in the lake, which results in the town being placed under a gigantic dome. Along the way, hilarity ensues, and if you've got any sense of humor at all you'll likely enjoy the movie for what it is. If you've ever watched and enjoyed *The Simpsons* on TV, the movie is a must see.

The die-hard nuts who have memorized the entire history of each character and have an extrapolated map of Springfield on their wall are likely to be the only ones left unsatisfied. But there's probably no pleasing such people anyway. **TH**



Shoot 'Em Up

Directors: Michael Davis
Cast: Clive Owen, Paul Giamatti, Monica Bellucci
Genre: Action
Rating: 16(SVL)
Score: ★★★★★

WHO SAID MOVIES NEED deep meaningful story lines to totally kick ass? *Shoot 'Em Up* is an unbelievable rollercoaster ride from the moment you press play. While hardened movie buffs will have quite a lot to find fault with here, we really enjoyed it for what it is.

The story, for what it's worth, starts with a man simply known as Smith sitting at a bus stop late one night. The story takes shape when a pregnant woman, chased by a man with a gun, runs past him. With a reluctant expression on his face, Smith decides to help the woman and follows pursuit. The movie sports an incredible array of action shots with even more incredible stunts being performed in almost every scene. There are quite a few memorable moments throughout the movie but the part where Smith delivers the woman's baby during a massive shoot-out with the bad-guys, made our top-10 list of most incredible-and-totally-over-the-top movie scenes.

Another thing worth a mentioning is that this movie features an impressive soundtrack, which includes music by Motorhead, Nirvana, and Paul Oakenfold to name a few. Sadly the



original OST omits many of the great songs that you hear throughout the movie.

Following a similar formula to that of *Crank* and *The Transporter* movies, *Shoot 'Em Up* is the type of movie you enjoy with a large bowl of popcorn and laugh at the numerous cliché's and cheesy one-liners. Just pop-it in the DVD player and switch your mind off. **RV**

DVDs for the fans...



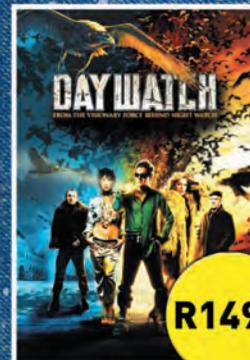
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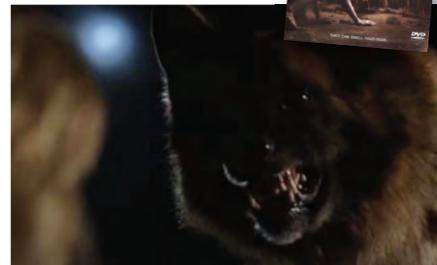
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The Breed

Director: Nicholas Mastandrea
Cast: Michelle Rodriguez, Oliver Hudson, Taryn Manning, Eric Lively, Hill Harper
Genre: Thriller
Rating: 13LV
Score: ★

WELL, IT'S A DOG. The marketing blurb is a pack of lies. The plot is worm-ridden and the performances are lame. Right, so we didn't like it but what's it about... Two brothers, two girls and a black guy arrive on an island for a weekend of fun in the sun. Said island is overrun with nasty [genetically engineered] dogs that seem to be intelligent enough to cut the five humans off from all means of escape and rescue. The meat of the movie involves the lead characters trying to escape their cabin while the dogs try and eat them. With Wes Craven on the box and Michelle Rodriguez starring in this [sort of] you'd be forgiven for thinking it might have

some budget, merit, decent gore and perhaps even a little intelligence. But you'd be wrong and left wondering what you could have better used those 87 minutes of your life for. In a movie like this you can forgive a poor plot, bad directing and terrible acting if you get to see some decent killings, a terrifying monster or even a blond cheerleader running around in underwear, but alas, *The Breed* has none of this and to make it worse it's just plain average dull and not even bad enough to warrant watching it just to make fun of. The dogs are not very interesting, menacing looking and much of the killing action is implied, there's also an awful lot of dogs growling, dogs running and dogs leaping across the screen at people. Stephens King's *Cujo* [made twenty-five years ago] puts this to shame. The one extra DVD feature is a short 'making of' where you learn the movie was shot in South Africa and had dogs in it. Yawn. **MJ**



Blood Trails

Directors: Robert Krause
Cast: Rebecca R. Palmer, Ben Price, Tom Frederic
Genre: Horror
Rating: 18
Score: ★

A COUPLE DECIDE TO MEND their wilting relationship by going back to their favourite countryside retreat and spend some time riding mountain bikes on the trail. They are both accomplished riders, so there are plenty of action shots where things swish by. But soon they are stalked by a crazy cop who she slept with when the couple were taking a break from each other. It turns out the man is a bit of a psycho and soon the bodies start to fall. Well, as many as you can squeeze out of a cast of, say, five characters. *Blood Trails* would love to make a new entry into the survival horror scene, sporting some standard blood and guts while it rides the suspense of a terrified woman trying to get away from a stalking killer. Sadly it doesn't come together at all and the



lead character keeps doing incredibly stupid things. Sure, we can accept she's freaked out, but seriously, can't she hold it together at all?

It's rare that you actually want the lead to die only a dozen or so minutes into the movie already, but this is the case. **JF**

Lost Season 3

Creator: J.J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber, Damon Lindelof
Cast: Naveen Andrews, Emilie de Ravin, Matthew Fox, Jorge Garcia, Josh Holloway, Daniel Dae Kim, Yunjin Kim, Evangeline Lilly, Terry O'Quinn
Genre: Sci-fi, Thriller
Rating: 18
Score: ★★★★★

IT'S PRETTY MUCH A given that by this time you are one of three people: those who watch *LOST*, those who are deeply annoyed by *LOST* and those who haven't heard of it yet. The last group should really go rent a few of the first season's DVDs and give it a try. Fans, though, have been eagerly awaiting the season 3 box-set, if only to relive the strongest season in the show yet. It would make perfect sense, then, if you already own this box set, but since season 4 recently started, perhaps it is a

good time to see what you missed if you didn't. The complete season ships on seven DVDs, the last one reserved for another nice stack of extra features. The featurette *The World of The Others*, delves into the strange group of people the *LOST* survivors have been fighting for the past few months. It doesn't really give anything away if you've seen S3, but it does give more insight to the characters and especially the actors (something that will be useful for S4's antics). Like previous *LOST* sets, it's got a lot of making-of stuff and arbitrary features about and around the show, complete with interesting menus. An obvious must for fans and collectors of fine television shows. **JF**



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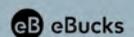
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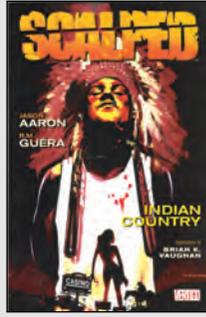


COMICS

Written by Clive Burmeister

SCALPED VOLUME 1: INDIAN COUNTRY

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Vertigo
Writer: Jason Aaron
Artist: R.M. Guera
Price: R\$4.95



AT AGE THIRTEEN, DASHIELL Bad Horse left his home at the Prairie Rose Indian Reservation. Now, fifteen years later, he returns to his old home, only to find things are even worse than he left them. Tribal leader Lincoln Red Crow, who was once an activist with Bad Horse's parents, is now a crime lord vying for control of the reservation and more power than anyone around him, and ropes Dashiell into a life of violence, death, and the whole world of 'Indian pride,' which Dashiell had tried to leave behind. But is Dashiell Bad Horse back in town at the same time as the opening of Red Crow's new casino a mere coincidence, or is he serving another purpose? Jason Aaron writes this story with such believability and in-touch dialogue that you can't help but get pulled into this tale of murky morals, race-driven politics, and the inbred spiritualism inherited in the Native American culture. *Scalped* is somewhere between a crime mystery and an action thriller, brilliantly portraying its characters and story.



HULK #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Jeph Loeb
Artist: Ed McGuinness
Price: R\$4.50

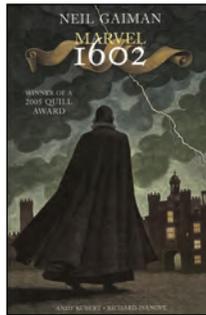


WHEN THE DEATH OF a super-powered person, The Abomination, in Russia, brings a team of experts and S.H.I.E.L.D. operatives to investigate, all fingers point to the Incredible Hulk as the culprit. However, there are just a few things that don't add up; like why the Hulk would use a gun. And with Bruce Banner safely held by the USA military, everyone is puzzled by this murder. Then things get strained between Russia and the American team, as Russia's own super-team, The Winter Guard, arrives on the scene and demands that the foreigners leave. Jeph Loeb sets up the story for this new Hulk title packing it full of intrigue and mystery from the first page, and now the same question is on everyone's lips, "Who is the Hulk?" Oh, and another question on my own lips, "Why is he red?"



MARVEL 1602

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Writer: Neil Gaiman
Artist: Andy Kubert, Scot McKowen (covers)
Price: R\$199

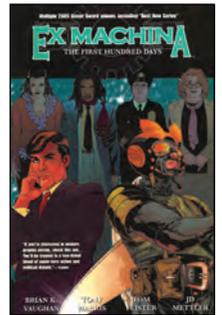


ENGLISH AUTHOR OF SCIENCE fiction and fantasy, Gaiman's most notable works include *The Sandman* comic series. To see his take on the Marvel universe in this eight-issue limited series (originally published in 2003) set in the year 1602 is nothing short of breathtaking. The story involves superheroes appearing 350 years early, initially unaware of their premature ascension. Embroiled in intrigue at the courts of Elizabeth and James while catastrophes take place all over seventeenth-century Europe, it falls to Dr. Stephen Strange, Virginia Dare and Sir Nicholas Fury to ascertain the reason behind the phenomena. Many of the staple Marvel characters appear, alternate or all-together entirely different from their more modern counterparts. It's a heady, wordy plot with more dialogue than is usually found in comics. Marvel fans might not actually enjoy this as it is such a departure from the wham, pow, biff - but it remains heartily recommended.



EX MACHINA

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Wild Storm
Writer: Brian K. Vaughan
Artist: Tony Harris
Price: R\$99



DESPITE QUITE A BODY of work on the subject, dramatic stories involving super-heroes still seem a bit odd. Not the soap operas that are the core of so many of today's comics, but proper, deep dramas in the tradition of *Watchmen*. *Ex Machina* is a very good example of this genre. This first novel covers the first few years of Mitchell Hundred, a civil engineer who is exposed to something strange during an inspection of the Brooklyn Bridge. He survives, now with the power to command any kind of machine. He can even tell a gun to jam. So he becomes The Great Machine, a jet-pack powered superhero. But his escapades lead him to look at things differently and after saving one of the twin towers on 9/11, he decides he can do more good as mayor of New York. *Ex Machina* is a mix of Hundred as mayor and flashbacks to his Great Machine days. It's a good read, but pretty dry and not intended as an action-packed afternoon filler.





EVIL DEAD #1 (OF 4)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Dark Horse
Writer: Mark Verheiden
Artist: John Bolton
Price: R24.50



WHEN FIVE FRIENDS HEAD out to a cabin deep in the woods, they discover a terrifying legend hidden in the area's past, and what's more terrifying, the legend is true. Using Sam Raimi's original characters from the classic movie *The Evil Dead*, writer Mark Verheiden uses this miniseries as an expansion to the events that took place in the movie, and for us to meet the characters before they are consumed by the tide of demons and death. Verheiden writes the script and dialogue superbly, using the permission received by *Evil Dead* creator Sam Raimi, to bring back this classic to new life. And who better to portray this world horror than artist John Bolton, whose vivid detail and haunting images capture every second of the original movie's presence. This isn't just another movie adaptation in word-for-word comic format; this is a new story in its own right, while keeping to the original.



YOUNGBLOOD (VOL. 4) #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Image
Writer: Joe Casey
Artist: Derec Donovan
Price: R24.95

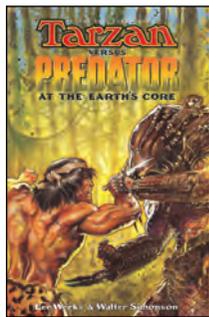


YOUNGBLOOD WAS ONCE A team of superheroes with military backing, taking on world threats with the public eating up all the action and excitement these heroes brought to the media. But staying on top in the public eye is never easy, and in time the team disbanded. They tried to bring it back, but the attempt failed, and the world forgot the hype which had surrounded them. Now the Youngblood team is being brought back to life, but this time rather than a military sponsor, the team is being backed by the media, with corporate advertising and a reality TV show to follow the heroes. Team leader, Jeffery Terrell, a.k.a. Shaft, has his doubts whether this will work, or whether it is even a good idea to try, but his sense of responsibility to his team and country leads him into the role nonetheless. But now when things heat up as combat situations arise, will Shaft prove his team is a force for good, or just a public relations scheme for the government?



TARZAN VERSUS PREDATOR: AT THE EARTH'S CORE

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse B
Writer: Walter Simonson
Artist: Lee Weeks
Price: R99



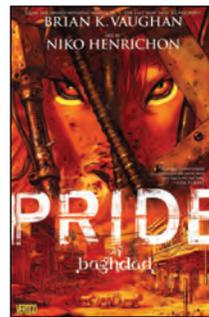
TARZAN RETURNS TO PELLUCIDAR, the kingdom at the centre of the Earth, after catching an urgent radio broadcast warning of murder, mayhem and the disappearance of Pellucidar's Emperor and Tarzan's friend, David Innes. A Government convoy with a senator join him, for other reasons, but they all soon find themselves in trouble when it becomes clear that a bunch of Predators have decided to go to the kingdom for a hunt.

Drawn in very traditional *Tarzan* art (and told more or less that way as well), this is an interesting mixture and a pretty good meeting of two big cultural icons. The plot goes much deeper, but it's really just a good jungle yarn. A yarn with predators, that is, and as you might expect, the hunters find much more competition from the jungle-raised Tarzan than anything they've encountered before.



PRIDE OF BAGHDAD

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: DC Comics' Vertigo
Writer: Brian K. Vaughan
Artist: Niko Henrichon
Price: R129



TRUE STORY: FOUR LIONS escaped from the Baghdad zoo after an American bombing in 2003. *Pride of Baghdad* is a fictionalised account of what the lions get up to, free of their cages and confinement. The story follows the lions (who can talk, anthropomorphised for the sake of character and narrative) as they explore the surrounding war-torn city. The story is tragic in many ways, tugging on the heartstrings as an impassioned commentary on the war in Iraq. It's not political commentary, far from it. As an extended metaphor crossed with a poignant real-life anecdote (that has consequence for the lions in the end), *Pride of Baghdad* is a literary masterpiece with equally stunning visuals. Henrichon's scratchy almost sketch-like style belies the strong characterisation he brings the protagonists. One line in particular captures the gist of what the book is about. When the bombs fall, releasing the lions from their cages, one remarks, "This isn't right. Freedom can't be given. It must be earned".



FIGURINES



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Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com



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RAVEN'S LOFT

THIS WAY!
NO, THAT WAY!

A WHILE AGO I DREW up a plan for the structure of the *Magic: The Gathering* strategy series that I have been running for a few months. Well, this month I am abandoning this plan (just temporarily!) for a brief digression: I would like to discuss the Two-Headed Giant team format. Depending on how much I get through today, and on your feedback, I may return to this topic at some later stage. So, if you'd like to sound off on this matter (or have any other suggestions or requests), please drop me a mail at alex.jelagin@tidemedia.co.za, with "Raven's Loft" as the subject line.

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN... NONE?

For those of you unfamiliar with the format, Two-Headed Giant (usually abbreviated to 2HG) is a format for teams of two players each, with two teams facing off in a match. What is unusual about this format is that each team takes its turns concurrently. In fact, individual players don't have turns, the entire teams do, sharing all phases within the turn. Each team has a single life total of 30, and it can be attacked via either 'head'. Attacks are joint, and so are blockers. However, when an attacking creature gets through, its controller nominates which 'head' it's hitting. This is usually unimportant, except when the creature has a "whenever it deals combat damage to a player" ability, such as that of the Specters and some other critters. As soon as a team's life total is zero or less, the game ends. Also, if either 'head' is defeated in another way, such as being unable to draw a card from an empty library, that team loses. Deck construction is subject to the usual restrictions, and a 2HG event can be in any format, such as Standard, Extended, or Legacy (most commonly Standard, in our local environment). 2HG is also subject to the Unified Team deck-building rule, which dictates that not more than four copies of a card other than basic lands can be present, not only per deck, but per team. So, for example, no more than four copies of Wrath of God can be played per team. This means that potentially cheesy or cheap tactics that spam a concept cannot be employed.

This doesn't mean that there aren't interesting and unusual strategies that can be employed, some of which take advantage of the unique properties of the format. One of the things to remember is that, while the initial life totals are higher than in the typical duel, other numbers remain constant (such as library minimum size!). Therefore, "milling" strategies (which aim to deplete an opponent's library) are somewhat more effective than usual, particularly in light of the fact that you will then be racing the same number of cards against an inflated life total for a more traditional strategy to get through (though, bear in mind, an aggressive opposing team will have double the usual creatures).

Of course, ultra-aggressive, creature-based decks can also be effective – it is easy enough to fill two decks with efficient threats, while the opposing team will still not be able to pack more than up four Wrath's and four Damnations at best.

A strategy that is particularly effective in 2HG is a combination of control or combo-permission, with heavy permission. (Permission is another term for a countermagic-using deck, while combo is a deck archetype that relies on finding several key cards and, usually, a specific amount of mana, then 'goes off' for an instant or almost-instantaneous win.) In a sense, a milling deck is akin to somewhere between control and combo, and next to a countermagic-heavy deck, can be devastating. In light of the strength of such a team strategy, it is worth paying attention to it even if you are not planning on playing this way because somebody else will be! So, make sure when building your decks that you have ways to handle such a team.

"TWO MANY" COOKS...

Of course, it goes without saying that the two decks should be built to work well together. Just picking two decks randomly and checking that there are no card conflicts (more than four copies of any cards for the team) is not going to yield the best results. Just as with building a duelling deck, you need to have a plan. It helps to think of the two decks as halves of a single deck, rather than separate entities. Try to have them either complementing or reinforcing each other. At its simplest, it is a good idea to have each head's deck taking care of specifics by playing to its colours' strengths (often, both heads playing the same colour/s only leads to their weaknesses being emphasised – not what you want!). Also, be on the lookout for cards that can specifically work together even across decks. For example, if you both play slivers, they can get very ugly, very quickly!

Okay, that's all the space I have. Drop me a mail if you would like me to take a deeper look into this format. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

SCRYING THE SYNERGIES

Here is a pairing of cards that is different to what you may be accustomed to. It is a match made in he-...hmmm. My 2HG team-mate and I ran these in our respective 'heads' decks recently, to take advantage of their beautifully synergistic abilities. Running the two in the same deck could also, conceivably, be effective.

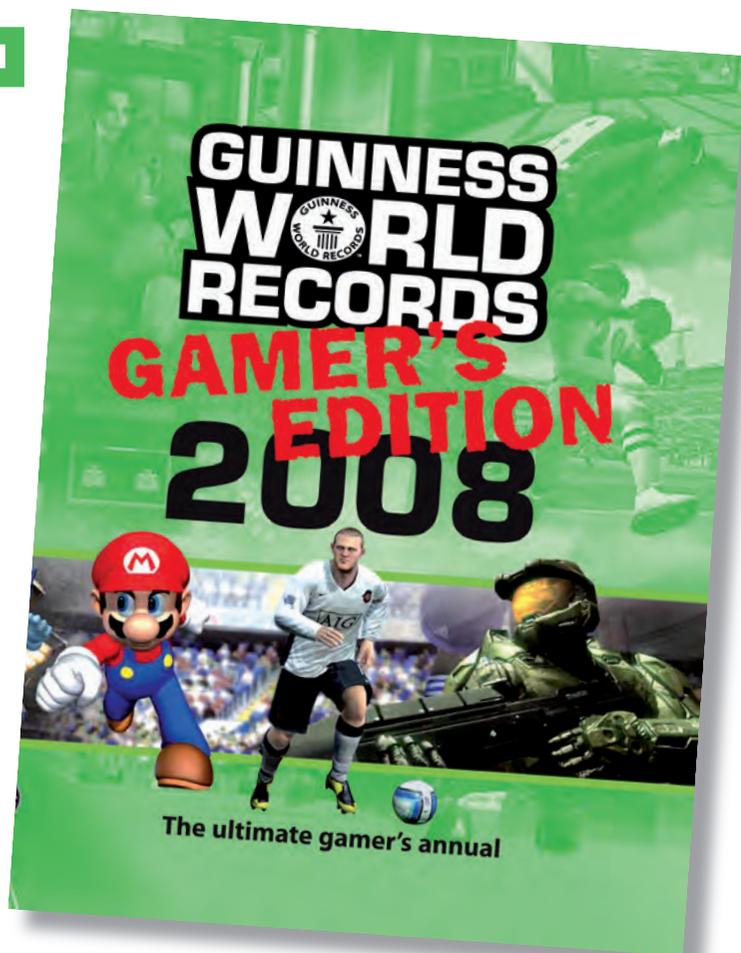


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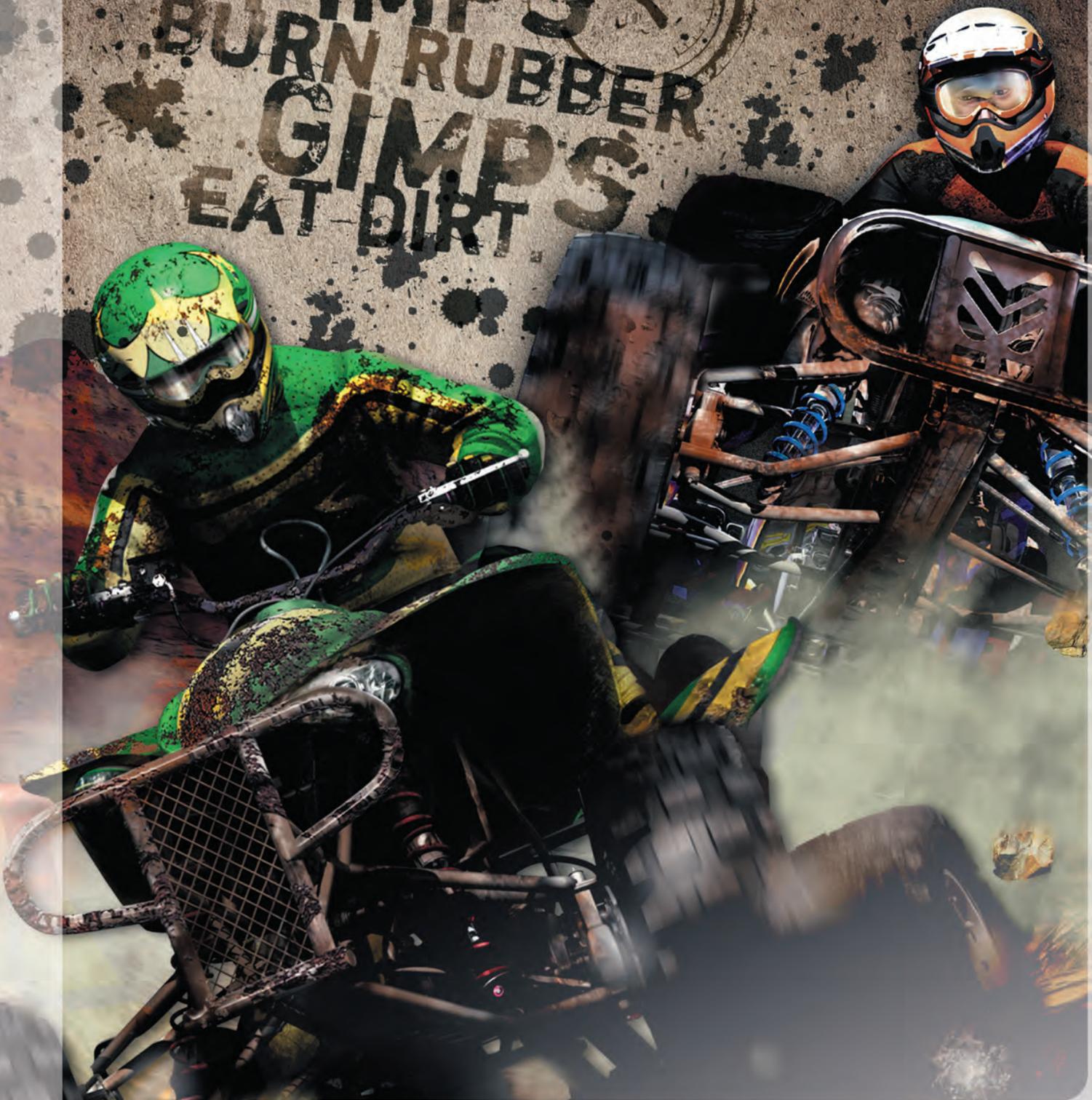
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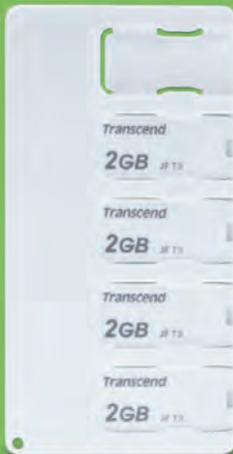
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