

NAG

Vol. 16
Issue
12

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO

**NINE
REVIEWS
INCLUDING**

**ASSASSIN'S CREED:
LIBERATION HD
BRAVELY DEFAULT
BROKEN AGE ACT 1
THE BANNER SAGA**

HANDS ON

SOUTH PARK: THE STICK OF TRUTH

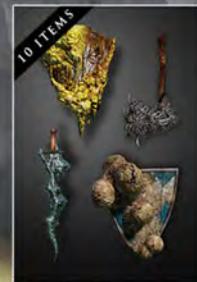
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DARK SOULS II™

GO BEYOND DEATH

14 MARCH 2014*

NAG

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Humans. Robots. Humans shooting robots. Robots stomping humans. Humans using robots to shoot other humans. And robots. In the face. And in turn being shot in the face by them. Also, you know... jetpacks and stuff. Everything about Respawn's first game has inescapably grabbed us right by our attention sockets and is refusing to let go, promising us a future full of evolved multiplayer mayhem. Let's dissect it together, shall we?



The Elder Scrolls Online is set roughly 1,000 years before the events in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim and the coming of the Dragonborn, and just before the rise of Tiber Septim, the first Emperor of Tamriel. Three Alliances have emerged across the continent, each struggling for supremacy over the land. As these great powers battle one another for control of the Imperial City – and with it all of Tamriel – darker forces are moving to destroy the world.



The Elder Scrolls

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4.4.14* JUNE 2014*

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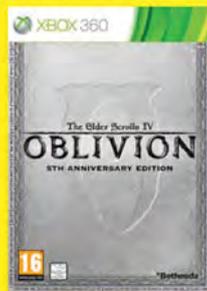


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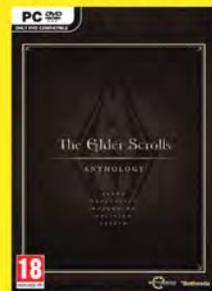
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Hump month

At the time of writing, it's 12 'o'clock on Valentine's Day. The Internet is rife with passive resentment, gooey messages to loved ones and funny fake cards themed on video games. It's also the day we go to print, which means I've got to stop stuffing around on Twitter and get this Ed's Note done.

This month we're back to our regular page count and, with the next few months set to be an awesome time for gamers, we aim to keep it that way. Or, who knows, maybe bump it up even further. We're finally pulling out of a horrible dry spell in terms of game releases, which is the exact opposite of what one would expect following the release of two next-gen consoles. Sadly, it's been a slow start to the year for the whole industry, but then again, this has made room for some of the less well-known games to shine, like Double Fine's *Broken Age* (Act 1), which I loved and reviewed this month. Otherwise, our reviews are a little on the short side but there were a couple of gems among them – most notable *Bravely Default*, so be sure to have a good look in its direction. To make up for it we've thrown in a couple of big previews like *Dark Souls II* and *South Park: The Stick of Truth*.

Of course, our epic cover feature is the real star of the show here, with *Titanfall* promising to be the next COD

killer, or whatever. We don't really go for that sort of thinking but what we do enjoy is innovation, and *Titanfall* looks like it at least plays around with the established norm and that's a damn good thing. The beta comes out today and I can't wait to get my hands on it because it has giant robots.

In other news, we've made a few small changes to our roster of writers. I'd like to welcome Delano on board as our "mobile game guy". Delano has been writing on NAG Online for a while now and his unique style and bizarre personality are a good fit for the magazine. If things go well, we'll move him onto grander things like picking up pizza for us or cleaning the toilets. There are likely to be more writers joining us over the next few months, so please feel free to send us emails slagging them off or singing their praises. We do all of this for you so obviously if you're not happy (or if you are!) then we'd like to know about it.

Oh, and next month is our birthday issue which means we're going to mix up the design and layout a bit (or a lot, we haven't really decided yet). If there's anything you absolutely love or hate about the mag, now is the time to let us know.

That's all for now, you lovely people. Here's to a great second quarter!
- Geoff Burrows
Editor



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

Letter of the Month March 2014

From: Henrico du Plessis
Subject: Gamer rage
 Hey guys, first things first: thanks for making the best magazine EVER on the face of the earth and the history of all mankind. Secondly: I was just sitting here thinking about all my gamer friend and how much they rage when playing their game (online and offline) when I thought, I have never met a gamer that has not raged at a game or something or someone in the game. And I wondered, what is it that makes us gamers rage almost every time we play. Why do we rage in the first place? Mindless zombies killing all our friends and you can't

revive them in black ops 2? Or maby some troll online that just keeps hunting you and killing or destroying your base in some cases (I know that's kinda the point but still) is it something specific for all gamers or different to some people. What makes you rage in your favorite games.

I've touched on this a few times but I think it's always worth coming back to: raging in games can be considered both good and bad. Let's do what my homeboys Bomfunk MC's do best and break it down.

Good: The game is

immersive; you're sucked in; it's taken over your brain.

Bad: You have anger issues and they're manifesting through video games.

Result: Who knows!? Games are fun but sometimes they're frustrating, just like much in life. Sometimes we get angry in StarCraft when we've been cheesed three games in a row and SAVAGE's cannon rush was scouted and RedTide just walked into their siege line with a group of un-stimmed marines on his own. That's usually followed by a lot of shouting. We get weird looks from the rest of the office. Ed.

From: Daanyaal Matthews
Subject: Piracy the TRUTH!
 I am Daanyaal Matthews a huge fan of Your Company (obviously).
 Now a days almost every developer is talking about how there games are getting pirated and being exploited on torrent sites and so this has lead them to putting there games on Steam and Origin .
 The truth is the only reason people pirate games is because they just cannot afford them in their country. The exchange rate is so high that nobody in their right mind could afford them. This is currently happening in our country since every body these days are striking the dollar has increased, It is not just the peoples fault but also the developer , DLC's are over priced extras that should just be put into one expansion and now people are resulting to piracy.

In conclusion piracy will always be here so the best thing is to find away to get peoples attention away from

piracy by giving hem a reason to buy your game legally (maybe a few extras that can only be found legally) and you should find a better way to make sure they are doing it legally that does not take a huge amount of data (IN SHORE DRM SUCKS!).

If only people in their wrong minds are buying games, then that would explain why there are so many crazies on the Internet. So, yeah, I don't agree entirely with your first bit there, but you're right on the money (so to speak) with your conclusion.

Publishers keep trying to find ways to punish the pirates and end up hurting their legitimate customers. It should be entirely the other way round: reward your buyers, laugh at the pirates, and we'll all get along just fine.

With regards to the huge amounts of data, that's only going to get worse. Sorry! Ed.

MEGAROM
and more...




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

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF
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BETTER MAIL: letters@nag.co.za
IMPORTANT: Include your details when mailing us or you'll never get your prize if you win.

From: Luke NAG rules
Subject: ghost watcher
 Dear awesome people at nag
 I am a young boy age 13 I love your magazines as much as I love playing call of duty ghosts
 But the problem is that I can only play my xbox 360 on weekends and Fridays because of my school
 Work I love playing ghosts and I begged my parents to preorder the hardened edition from BT games
 For Christmas I got the game and it was the coolest thing ever but now that imp not allowed to play it during week days Imp falling behind with my online profile with ghosts and it really sucks because people call me a noob in lobbies and it got really annoying
 But I was always top of the lobby and than they swore at me and hacked me it was really annoying because they kept on bringing my Rank down so is there anything I can do about this!!!!!!
[Remaining seven million exclamation points removed for space-saving reasons. Ed]

*The fact that you're 13 and playing COD online is a little worrying, but I'm sure your parents have explained the dangers of the Internet and how all those silly-billies are really just normal people who turn into savage beasts when put behind a monitor.
 Anyway, there's not much that can be done about the hacking thing, although to be honest it seems unlikely anyway. Maybe you should change your passwords and stuff just in case.*

If you really are being hacked because you're top of the lobby, then good for you. You're skilled enough that people are getting angry about it, and that's hilarious. Don't give in to the haters; play your heart out and laugh when they attempt to insult you. Ed.

From: Phillip Barnard
Subject: Next-gen Hype

Wow, time flies, it still feels like the next-gen consoles were announced yesterday, but in fact they have already been released! We've seen arguments over which console is better, and luckily they have subsided after their release. Everyone seems so anxious to get their sweaty paws on these beasts, but once you have them, you start noticing that they just aren't worth while at this point in time. There are almost zero games available, the consoles themselves are a bit shaky, and they cost an arm and a leg... I've tried to convince myself to buy one, but the facts just seem to bring it down. So imagine my joy knowing there is still a lot of time for saving and improving until the Xbone releases here in this colourful nation of ours! Until then I'll be rocking games on my 360, and saving up the gorgeous games for the gorgeous console. Is this feeling of hype unnecessary, or am I just being delusional?

Hype can be a dangerous thing. Obviously the developers of hardware and software want you to be super excited for their next big thing (and throw all your money at it), but every person has different circumstances, so don't fret too much about it.

When the Xbone launches locally you'll be in a much better position to make a decision: sure, set aside some money now because these new consoles sure aren't cheap, but I'd say you're better off enjoying the games that are coming out now, without worrying too much about the future. Ed.

From: Adam Lehmann

Subject: The Media and gaming

So for a good couple of months I have been pondering what would be best to write to you good folks at NAG magazine, or rather to you Geometrix. I have very recently had an epiphany concerning gaming in its current state today and have thus come up with a theory: Instead of promoting games the media has dropped the quality of them.

Allow me to explain the substance behind my outrageous theory. If we are to look back only over a decade or so (back when the best internet connection was dial-up -queue nostalgic groans-) and we were to look at the quality of games concerning depth, consistency, fun, character and

ON THE FORUMS

Every now and then we throw a piece of meat to the forumites and see which one emerges stronger. It's a test of will and strength. www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: Replayability! How important is it to you?

"Replayability is nothing to me, there are too many games out there for me to play games twice!"

tarisma

"I like my games like I like my coffee. Bottomless."

nukehead

"A short game can be replayable if it's really good. A 100+ hour game can bore me in the first 10 hours simply because 80% of that "replayability" is collecting pointless trophies - Ubisoft have gotten really "good" at padding their games to ridiculous levels."

Squirly

"Its not important really. As long as the game is great, you'll want to play it again anyway. Its not important really. As long as the game is great, you'll want to play it again anyway. Its not... Oh nvm, you get it."

ToshZA

equal challenge for all, the things that made old games fun and in their own right competitive without the need for multiplayer are somewhat lacking in today's gaming industry.

I theorize the reason behind this is that so much work is going into new-age graphic based promotion such as trailers or playable demo's that less is going into the actual game itself. Now you may argue that there are different teams for different things such as game design and trailer making but they still work under the same budget.

Further proof (take note I use the term quite loosely) would be the indie scene. Very little advertising is created for indie games but character and charm are very evident in the actual game itself. (I do realize this is could also be attributed to the lack of corruption created by the "main stream" of gaming)

I do realize that gaming has risen in quality in other ways but to me it just

seems that part of the core of gaming has fallen away and been replaced by hype creation. All too often i see people buying games because that is what the other masses of "sheeple" do (Call of Duty for instance) instead of buying the game under the expectancy that it will fulfill a desire for fun.

You've got a great point there. Access to information and media through the Internet means that sometimes we're overrun with the stuff. It's practically impossible for a company that aims to make money (so really any company) to ignore that massive conduit of information as a means to promote their products, and what you're left with is a significant amount of time, money and energy being spent on marketing. Just how much that detracts from the actual production of the game is the key issue here, though, and you'll be pleased to know that it's very seldom

Mpho Ledwaba, "This cool artwork was done with 3dmax then i did the rest in photoshop..is just to say thanks for the hard-work you put in making a great MAG with 0% disappointment."



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

that development budget is pulled to market a game. Generally, publishers bank on how many sales of a game they can expect, and market accordingly – factoring in increased marketing as a means to increase sales. It's a very wobbly science and one that they often get wrong. Sadly there's very little chance of a AAA game's marketing budget being allocated to development in order to let the game speak for itself entirely.

Indie games are testament to the fact that many gamers still prefer quality gameplay over anything else, but unfortunately with the ever-increasing spread of gaming in the mainstream, there's bound to be a watering-down of the quality of some AAA games.

We're in a constant state of flux in this industry, waves crashing down on us and receding to make way for the next one. We're definitely in a low tide right now, though, but here's hoping that between the indies and the next-gen AAA studios, we'll reach new heights before too long.

Yep, we're a bit of a broken industry sometimes! Ed.

From: Brent Cox

Subject: How does it work?

This letter is for the guys that review games. I just have a few questions about the whole process. If you are given a game to review, do they give you the game permanently or do they just lend you the game until you are finished with the game review OR do they give you the game and you just give it back when you want to give the game back. Or maybe you must buy the game with your own money. Once you have the game that you are reviewing(hope that's a word!), do

you only review the game once you have completed the game or whenever you feel like reviewing the game. One more question, (just using an example) if you buy GTA 5 for PS3 and you don't want to rush through the game, you want to play the game slowly and do everything there is to do in the game. Then they tell you to review GTA 5 and they give you a week to do it(causing you to rush through the game) then what do you do. Can you answer my questions as well as other things involving the process of reviewing games. Thanks in advance!

Reviewing is definitely a word. It's what's called a present participle, with its root word as "review". Your English teacher should've taught you that.

Anyhoo (that's not a real word), onto your actual questions. Review games are usually provided by the local distributors as physical copies or digital codes. In the case of codes, those games are registered by the reviewers with their personal Steam/Origin/etc. accounts, so they get to keep the games forever. Physical copies sometimes float between any interested people once the reviewer is done with it. Sometimes, reviewers will buy their own games if review copies can't be arranged for whatever reason.

We try to give reviewers enough time to get through everything but sometimes that simply doesn't happen. Either way we'll at least complete the core story and do as many side quests as possible within the given time frame. It's not always a walk in the park, but we try to emulate the "ordinary" game playing experience as much as possible. Ed.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"Hey ED,I see that nag is trying to lose some weight after the festive season. damn,looking good!"
- firehazard2

"My birthday is coming up. Hubby was lucky enough to be able to secure Fable Anniversary for me while we are saving up for rage 2014"
- Simone

"I have an Xbox One and I'm not sure what to do with it."
- Calvin Harris

ON TWITTER

Quack like a duck @nagcoza



Waleed Magic Majiet

I remember reading @nagcoza DIY features and wishing I had @Dremel_SA rotary tool to bring my #creativeideas to life, like a DIY batarang!

Rudolf Aerofare

I've already stockpiled so many @nagcoza mag issues that it takes up as much space as my video game collector's editions. :-O

Marco Cocomello

My word! What a day!! Finally time to chill! Got the latest @nagcoza and @StuffSA smoking a hubbly with my feet up and reading!

Thusabantu

Two days ago #MartyMcfly was supposed to arrive...still waiting for my hoverboard...@nagcoza

Altamish Mahomed

Hahahahaha "Super Candy Force Online"... Nice, @nagcoza

Luke da man

@nagcoza sup my favourite magazine

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A heart and candy crushing saga

As much as Spock's persistence to champion logic is an appealing quality that I like to imagine myself favouring, it becomes an indisputable pain in the ass when that logic begins to override an emotional response I feel very strongly about. Nothing works on my tits faster than when somebody or something throws its weight around. It makes me want to punch babies. So when King.com came forward and said they were trademarking the words "candy" and "saga", and that they were acting in the interests of those trademarks when they opposed Stoic Games' trademarking of *The Banner Saga*, I found myself instinctively reaching for the nearest infant.

Here is a mobile game company that has gotten exceptionally lucky in generating mountains of cash off a very derivative game, having the gall to think themselves important enough to block other game developers from ever utilising the words "candy" and "saga" in a game title. On the surface it seems an injustice: a small indie team that gambled everything on a Kickstarter campaign to create an original game, being punched in the teeth by a wealthy, bloated mobile game company that has made all its money on games that don't even exhibit a scrap of originality.

I was fuming. And then the more I read about the *saga*, and the more I read up on US trademarking laws, the more Spock's voice began talking in the back of my mind with that infuriating, matter-of-fact tone he has that makes you want to slap him and agree with him all at the same time.

You see, I can now see where King.com is coming from. And it pains me to admit that because I hate King.com and I hate all their games and I hate the fact that there are enough stupid people out there that have helped to make a company like this so nauseatingly wealthy. King.com isn't saying that Stoic Games has to change the name of their game, *The Banner Saga*. They are, however, opposing Stoic's application for a trademark out of fear that should they not, then it will set a precedent for actual copycat developers wanting to ride on King.com's coattails. As we've seen so many times in the mobile gaming scene: with great financial success comes a proportionally higher risk of being copied. King.com moving to trademark "candy" and "saga" is their attempt to cut off *Candy Crush Saga* copycats from the get-go. It's just unfortunate that Stoic Games' *The Banner Saga* has to be the game that's used to set an example. Of course, King.com's innate fear of copycats is so deliciously overflowing with irony that it isn't even funny.

This entire tornado of effluent is, I would argue, a product of the get-rich-quick mentality that permeates the mobile market; the copycat *modus operandi* of many "developers", and the lack of proper curating on behalf of the likes of Google and Apple.

The indie-loving, cheer-for-the-little-guy part of me wants nothing more than to continue rooting for Stoic, but that pesky, logic-driven voice in my head is continually asking whether or not the condemnation and scorn would be as readily levelled were it a small indie company blocking a larger company's trademark instead. I think we all know deep down that if the roles were reversed, we would be revelling in the fact that a small company was making life difficult for a large one, and in that situation we would be allowing emotion to override logic.

- Miklós Szecsei -

Capcom casts all eyes forward



While many of the big industry players have already dipped a few toes into the next-gen pool, Capcom has been mostly standoffish about the whole thing, and have recently made a few announcements to let people know what's going on behind the Japanese publisher's doors.

In a public letter, CEO Kenzo Tsujimoto outlined the company's five year plan, which includes significant focus on "(1) downloadable content (DLC), (2) mobile contents, (3) online operations, and (4) brand contents," after which the publisher will attempt to "provide to as many people as possible a variety of products that take full advantage of Capcom's vast amount of content."

That's a little concerning, but it's clear that Capcom's recent AAA console/PC offerings didn't bring home as much bacon as they anticipated. Much of that apparently has to do with the huge amount of resources being spent on building teams capable of delivering these

products, and much of *that* has to do with ongoing inefficiencies with their MT Framework engine, which powers everything from *Street Fighter* to *Resident Evil*. To make the jump to next gen, the company needs something that's both more powerful and more efficient.

Enter Panta Rhei, the tech behind PS4 game *Deep Down* and hopefully Capcom's stepladder up to the next generation.

"We believe 'MT Framework' is a powerful rendering engine, but it's clear that heightened game quality leads to a rise in the number of man hours," said Capcom's senior tech manager Masaru Ijuin. "The amount of work involved in making games for next-gen consoles is eight to ten times greater than what is required for the current generation of consoles."

Hopefully once the publisher's many studios are familiar with the software we'll start to see more big games coming from them. Ideally showing off either new IP or that return to *Resident Evil*'s roots they've talked about before.

What's that thing they say about dynamite?



Cast your mind back to the December 2012 issue of NAG and you might recall our review of the potential-filled but ultimately painful experience that was *Of Orcs and Men*. While the game was let down by shabby execution and poorly-conceived gameplay mechanisms, we're always open to the idea of developers moving forward from bad games and getting it right – especially when the underlying premise is good.

And that's what developers Cyanide Studios are up to in the return to the setting with *Styx: Master of Shadows*. You'll play as the centuries-old goblin Styx, an utter rotter of a character who'd sooner steal from his own mum than do a day's work. He's also delightfully sarcastic, and we hope that the humour will carry over to his own game which mixes together stealth, assassination and RPG mechanics in open-ended levels.

There's no release date currently confirmed but we'll rather wait however long it takes than have Cyanide rush this one out the door. Get it right, people. Or Styx will plug up your kidneys with pointy things.

Ghost town: Ghost Games hits rough seas

It seems that Ghost Games (developer of the latest entry in the long-running *Need for Speed* series) has ambled its way into tough times following the release of *Rivals* late last year. EA recently confirmed with website Polygon that the UK branch of the studio has entered "a consultation period for some positions", following rumours that Ghost Games staff had been laid off, contractors had been let go and employees had been offered the choice to either leave the company or join Visceral Games' new project, which is rumoured to be a new police-themed *Battlefield* title.

EA's Gothenburg studio became Ghost Games back in 2012. *Rivals* was its first title under the new banner, and the game's proven a bit divisive among critics and fans since launch. It's unclear what prompted the UK wing's turbulent times, but apparently an unannounced *NFS* project has been put on hold as a result. We'll have to wait for the dust to settle before we discover what this means for the venerable racing franchise, but we wish all the best to those affected by this.

GTA V ships 32.5 million copies across PS3 and Xbox 360

Take-Two Interactive, the parent company of Rockstar Games, has revealed that *Grand Theft Auto V* has sold-in (in other words shipped) 32.5 million copies worldwide. The game launched in October last year and had sold 29 million copies by the end of that month. Clearly the sales are slowing down somewhat, but that 3.5 million extra copies in three months is still a massive number that thousands of other games would be extremely happy with.

The staggering sales of *GTA V* have obviously had a big impact on Take-Two's profits for the third quarter, with the company reporting \$1.86 billion in net revenue. This time last year they were reporting a net revenue of \$415 million; that's quite a hefty jump in revenue. We're pretty sure all Take-Two shareholders have framed photographs of Trevor, Michael and Franklin on their bedside tables which they stroke and kiss goodnight every evening.



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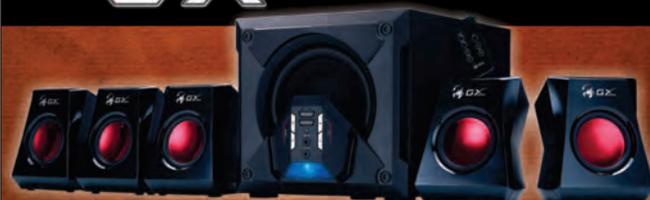
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Replayability

I remember when I was a kid I often used to go back to games I had already finished and replay them for the pure joy of it. I used to spend hours and hours playing the same level repeatedly if I was stuck, or even if I'd passed it, just to go back and collect every last little glowing orb/ring/artefact I could until I had 100%.

Trying to collect all the hidden bits and pieces, exploring different conversation options if they were offered, playing as a different character class, this was maximum game enjoyment for me and I probably played through *Neverwinter Nights* about four times because of this. I spent long hours nurturing skills on different character classes, cultivating different party members, building relationships. Then even longer hours playing the expansion packs. In fact, remember when it wasn't DLC and you had to buy it on a disc?

Somehow very few games still hold this same appeal for me. After a single playthrough, even of an exceptionally good game, it's rare that I have the desire to go back and try it again. Didn't get all the collectables? Meh. I'll go back and do it later. Missed a couple of hidden areas? Maybe when I get a chance.

The only games I have consciously gone through multiple playthroughs in recent years is *The Witcher* and *Mass Effect* series. Oh and *The Elder Scrolls*. All of them RPGs to be sure, but the campaign length is not the reason I feel this way. Sure many of them have multiple endings, but this is not uncommon today. The real issue is that I just have no real desire to play through some of them more than once. These games drew me in, kept me coming back for more.

I'm also under no illusion that just because I like these games, it means that everyone will find them appealing. Perhaps the game that draws you in is *Crysis 3*, or *Call of Duty: Ghosts*. That's cool, personal preference and all that. But these games are becoming few and far between for me.

And I have to ask myself why? What changed? Is it the way we play video games? Is it the fact that I've become an adult? Or is it the fact that so many games nowadays don't have the same replayability as their predecessors?

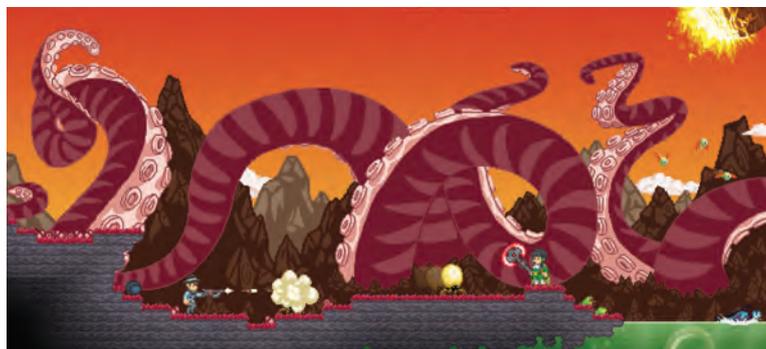
Honestly I think it's a combination of these factors. As adults the responsibilities of work and family don't allow for as much time as we used to dedicate to all night gaming sessions. Combine this with the fact that the average playtime of a game is becoming shorter and less complex, means that for me the appeal of going back to a game that I finished in what amounts to less than a day, isn't high at all. The likelihood that I missed something along the way isn't particularly high because there are only limited scenarios to play through. A complex game (this does NOT equate to game length) that offers multiple scenarios, thought provoking puzzles and different outcomes is more likely to get me playing through again in order to see the outcome.

And cost? Yes, games have become more expensive, but they've also become more disposable, and as a consequence I think we don't feel the need to go back and leech maximum enjoyment from them.

Thanks goodness *The Witcher 3* is on its way... I'm preparing for hibernation.

- Pippa Tshabalala -

A future beyond the stars



Where some indie developers fail, others succeed – massively. Such is the current story of *Starbound* creators Chucklefish, who recently shared their plans for the future of their game and the studio as a whole.

In terms of *Starbound*, Chucklefish is well aware the end game is likely to be where most of the players will spend the majority of their time in the long run, and to deal with the threat of eternal boredom exploring the galaxy, they will create Sector X. This location will be entirely dedicated to PvP, and will require players to team up with others to form organisations that will have to vie for very limited territories – planets – within this sector, build a space station as a central hub for themselves, and attempt to deal with the game's toughest enemies and environments all while fighting off opposing players.

There's also the interesting

Director Mode planned. This tool will give admins the ability to play god by controlling the entire game – monsters, items, quests, blocks – everything. Chucklefish liken this to the role that a Dungeon Master has in D&D, creating potentially unlimited adventures for players to take on and putting the responsibility to create new gameplay experiences in the hands of the players.

Then there's the studio itself, which will continue to function as a publisher for other small indie projects from their new office space in London. Once they've settled in, the company will begin to expand its own staff to begin early work on their next title. There's no clue as to what that game could be, but we're pretty sure that Chucklefish has sufficient funds to make it happen. You know, because of that nearly \$5.3 million that they've pulled in for *Starbound* so far – just on pre-orders.

Nintendo DS games hitting Wii U Virtual Console

We're actually baffled as to why this took so long considering the somewhat slow trickle of Wii U games since launch, but Nintendo has finally announced that they are bringing certain Nintendo DS games to the Wii U via the Virtual Console application. Games belonging to previous Nintendo systems, like the old Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and its later Super NES upgrade, are already available on the Wii U Virtual Console. Nintendo announced that there had been certain technical issues that needed to be overcome before DS titles could begin populating the Virtual Console's library – surprising



considering how well-suited the Wii U's hardware configuration (a dual screen-type set up with touchscreen controls) is for DS ports.

There is no indication of how long it will be before we begin seeing DS games on Wii U. Company president Satoru Iwata also gave no indication as to which titles would be getting ported.

It's cold out there



There's nothing quite like a turn-based, role-playing tactical strategy game, right? Hello, is this thing on? Oh you're still finding your seats, that's okay, come on in.

When you're seated comfortably, listen up: Paradox Development Studio – aka those Swedes with a passion for making hardcore strategy titles like *Europa Universalis*, *Hearts of Iron* and *Crusader King* – announced at the recent Paradox Con their next upcoming project: a turn-based tactical RPG set in the deep space that is Norse mythology.

It's called *Runemaster*, and it'll see players create a character and explore six worlds from throughout the spectrum of this rich lore (that's Midgard, Asgard, Jötunheimrand and all those lovely places). The game will feature procedurally generated worlds and quests for players to conquer through their use of tactics in combat and exploration of the lands. It also looks rather pretty, which is a far rarer thing in this genre than we're happy to accept.

Players will be able to choose their character's race from one of the six available worlds, and can additionally choose from three classes (Berserker (melee), Skald (healer), and Runemaster (magic)). You'll upgrade your character as you progress in a typical RPG fashion, and you can also improve the quality of your loyal (i.e.: not dead) troops through an XP system.

You can expect *Runemaster* to hit the shelves later this year for PC.

Bluepoint Games developing Titanfall for Xbox 360

Respawn Entertainment's *Titanfall* just might be one of the most anticipated titles of this year. It's out this month, but the Xbox 360 version isn't being developed by Respawn. Instead, Bluepoint Games has been given development duties by publisher Electronic Arts. Bluepoint has done recent work on PlayStation ports, such as the HD collection releases for the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise and the Team ICO collection, which saw *ICO* and *Shadow of the Colossus* ported to PlayStation 3.

Further news on the Xbox 360 version of *Titanfall* is that the release date has slipped back by two weeks. While the game was supposed to arrive alongside the PC and Xbox One versions on 13 March, it will instead arrive on 28 March. The delay is to allow Bluepoint a little extra time to polish things up.

Carmack left id because he couldn't work on VR tech

When id Software (developer of such influential titles as *Doom* and *Quake*) co-founder John Carmack departed the lauded development house last year to work full-time at Oculus Rift creators Oculus VR, there wasn't much of an explanation as to why. Now, speaking with USA Today, Carmack has finally revealed that he left because he saw no opportunity to work with VR at id. At first, Carmack attempted to split his time between working at both id and Oculus. Seeing the potential in Rift, he attempted to broker a deal between the companies, hoping that the tech would be used in upcoming titles like *Doom 4* and *Wolfenstein: The New Order*.

Sadly, parent company Zenimax decided against this. "It would have been a huge win," explained Carmack. "It seemed like a sensible plan for me. I would have been content probably staying there working with the people and technology that I know and the work we were doing. But they couldn't come together on that which made me really sad. It was just unfortunate. When it became clear that I wasn't going to have the opportunity to do any work on VR while at id Software, I decided to not renew my contract."

Obviously, this doesn't mean that games like *Doom 4* will never use VR tech. Carmack calls his decision to leave id "bittersweet", and it seems a powerful loss to id to lose a mind like his.

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The Indie Investigator



Survival kit: marketing

Over the past few years, game development has found enough momentum to become a competitive, sometimes saturated industry depending on which platform and audience you aim for. Even the local biz has grown to the point where you can't just stick a well-intentioned prototype together and hope that your game's greatness kicks the relevant people in the face.

A good promotion strategy relies on the game being impressive across many fronts and these skills don't always overlap with the requirements of developing the game itself. If you're a dedicated coder and shoddy at everything else, your product will look terrible unless you put the right effort in the right places.

Don't stress too much, though. To get by on your own, you'll need only a smattering of core skills from various media disciplines to keep your head above water. If you can learn the following, you can promote yourself simply and effectively, at least until a specialist comes along to help!

1. Brush up on your colour theory. This already assumes that you know how to use something like Photoshop or GIMP (though really, you could make a difference with as little as MS Paint). Learn about colour wheels and how you can use them to pick good colour matches. Learn about contrast, saturation, hue and opacity. Brush up on your understanding of file formats and know what lossy versus lossless means. In short, make sure that whatever you produce is as clear and simple as possible, so that you can produce crisp and striking visuals for things like screenshots.
2. Pick up and learn Audacity. Get confident with recording audio and putting it through the four-step process: noise removal, compression, normalisation and equalisation. This adds the opportunity of using foley to make sound for your games (learn what that is, too), but more importantly lets you start recording voiceovers for gameplay videos.
3. Get a free movie maker and a free screen recorder. Windows Movie Maker is pretty reliable nowadays. Try your hand at capturing game footage, giving it a title card and audio track, and uploading it to YouTube (after you've done it once, you'll understand how easy this actually is). Understand how file formats, streaming and conversion work and what's important about compression values.
4. Learn how to use correct punctuation, spelling and grammar. You don't have to be a language professor about it, but running any public announcement through a spell checker or even just proofing it once makes a huge difference to the players and journalists who see your work. This is easier if you also learn how to write succinctly. And on that note: search advice on writing to game journalists specifically.
5. Finally, equip yourself with some basic business savvy. Understand what SEO is about. Learn about a few of the more accessible financial avenues for small-scale games. Develop a realistic understanding of the market, the promotional angles you need and who needs to be on your press list (video casters are the hot ticket right now). And learn how to communicate with people – consistently!

Tick these five boxes and you can rest easy in the knowledge that you have a diverse and valuable set of skills to cover basic marketing.

- Rodain Joubert -

King.com moves to trademark the words "Candy" and "Saga", Internet implodes



King.com has attracted a lot of negative press over the last few weeks thanks to news of some new trademark filings hitting the Internet. The company responsible for the incredibly lucrative mobile game *Candy Crush Saga* has moved to claim the words "candy" and "saga" as trademarks with respect to video game titles and other entertainment offerings. The trademark applications were filed in February 2013 and approved in January of this year. The result is that a number of software developers have begun receiving legal letters accusing them of infringing on King.com's newly acquired trademarks.

One such software developer is Stoic Games – the small indie start-up behind the rather lovely real-time strategy and role-playing hybrid, *The Banner Saga*. Because Stoic's game has the word "saga" in its name, King.com's legal team has moved to block Stoic's trademark filing for the game name "*The Banner Saga*". As can be expected, the Internet exploded with severe backlash levelled at King.com.

King.com, however, has since said that they do not want Stoic to change the name of their game; they simply don't want to allow Stoic to register

The Banner Saga as a trademark. If they allow Stoic to register *The Banner Saga* as a trademark, then King.com fears that this will set a precedent for other software companies. King.com claims to be acting like any other company would in its pursuit to protect its immediate and future interests. Their argument is that there are a number of copycat games cropping up that seek to gain popularity by "confusing" audiences through utilising deliberately similar names with the words "candy" and "saga" in them. King.com actually has a vast library of titles, all of which have the word "saga" in their names: *Bubble Witch Saga*, *Pet Rescue Saga* and *Farm Heroes Saga* are but a few examples.

Stoic Games, however, has vowed to put up a fight in order to get their name trademarked. "We won't make a viking saga without the word Saga," they said in a statement, "and we don't appreciate anyone telling us we can't. King.com claims they're not attempting to prevent us from using *The Banner Saga*, and yet their legal opposition to our trademark filing remains."

At time of writing, the matter has still not been resolved.

The dragon will rise again



Dean Evans, the driving force behind 2013's absolutely mental '80s cheese fest *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon*, is at it again, and this time he's managed to convince the purse holders at Ubisoft to extend his budget. They've given him the chance to assemble what he calls a "dream team", as well as a nice big office in which he's free to be as insane as his newfound co-workers will allow him. Which will probably be quite a lot.

And that's an excellent thing. With *Blood Dragon*, Evans claims his goal was to tear down traditional boundaries to the medium for non-typical gamers with his recognisable themes and daring presentation, and he's set to continue doing that with whatever his next project is. All we know for now is that he's got some decent talent from within Ubisoft on board, including a secret art director with credits on AAA stealth and third-person shooters and a supposed flair for '90s aesthetic. We're already excited, and you should be too!

Oh Amazon, what are you up to?



Well here's something few would've expected: Amazon has bought *Killer Instinct* developers Double Helix Games.

The studio, which is also behind the soon-to-be released *Strider* reboot, was purchased outright by Amazon in a deal that sees all staff and intellectual property transfer to the online retailer. Thankfully no messy relocations will be necessary, as all 75 members of the team will remain in their office in Orange County.

This move comes soon after the rumours that Amazon has plans to enter the living room with its own Android-based home console, and it's been reported that the company has previously scooped up industry veterans including *Halo* writer Erik Nylund to fit in with their own in-house game development team. Expect big things soon.

EVE Online's largest battle ever to be commemorated by enormous ship graveyard

No matter how you may feel about *EVE Online* and its spacefaring MMO stylings, there's no denying that it's an utterly fascinating video game. It's recently grabbed attention and rewritten its own history again by staging the game's largest ever battle. The gist of it is this: when one of the game's most powerful coalitions failed to pay a bill on time, it left a crucial sector in the *EVE Online* universe open for capture. And this prompted some of the game's other influential factions to make a move and attempt to wrestle control of the sector from their enemies.

The result was an enormous space shootout that lasted 21 hours, in which a total of around 70 Titans (the game's largest, most powerful, most valuable ships) and thousands of smaller ships were destroyed across all factions. To provide some perspective, each Titan is worth approximately \$3,000 in real-world currency. When all other losses in the battle are accounted for as well, the result is around 11 million ISK (the in-game currency) worth of damages - which translates to roughly \$300,000 in real-world terms.

To commemorate the catastrophic conflict, developer CCP has added a graveyard of sorts, which players can visit to witness the remains of those ships that were destroyed floating in space. It's a grand gesture, especially considering how focused CCP is at adding real weight to the actions of *EVE* players. In other *EVE* news, Oculus VR (they behind the Oculus Rift) and CCP are joining forces to co-publish spin-off *EVE Valkyrie*.

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Miktar's Meanderings



Free to play to play

Man, I just don't know how I feel about the gaming industry right now. It's easy to stick my head in the sand. Pretend nothing is out there. Just, enjoy the things I enjoy. Very easy. I could keep doing that forever too. But the kind of bliss you get from ignorance always feels... irresponsible to me. And I won't abide by irresponsible bliss. My mom raised me better than that.

And so, to the news sites! Read gaming news! Keep abreast of the best of what's currently the kind of breast that the best employ. Because, y'know. Half of gaming is all about boobies, right? Or so the gaming news tells me. I have to take their word for it, because I bat for the other team anyway. And so I read, and keep tabs on, investigate, follow up, do that thing that I'd be doing anyway because gosh darn it gaming is really awesome and it's all I'm really interested in anyway.

It's such a drag though. There's the good, yes. Great games being made, talented people talking about their creative pursuits in the arts and crafts of the gaming developments and designs. Lots of fun stuff. Lots of interesting stuff that goes places these things rarely go. Occasionally these things even get noticed enough to make waves. Suddenly a game about a girl's secret that becomes revealed as you explore a house - no gunplay whatsoever actually becomes a big hit. Incredible stuff.

But then *Plants vs. Zombies 2*. Completely and utterly ruined. The publisher squatted, grunted, and ruined it even more. All in the name of money. *Paying per lawnmower?* That's not "giving players choice". Not fooling anyone. And don't get me started on the mobile *Dungeon Keeper*. Makes Zynga look like the most talented and ethical developer in the history of interactivity. The concept of free to play can be done in an ethical way. A better way. Some games do just that. But the majority do not. And they set the tone for the market. A tune of "do it our way or you'll fail anyway because we'll just keep undercutting you in ways you can't even imagine." It's a red ocean out there. All those hungry sharks eating each other so they can be the last shark standing.

Kids are growing up in this climate, thinking this is okay. That this is "how things are". That a game has to be free. That paying for a game is so lame, and hey, who cares anyway because these free games are crap anyhow right? "But if they're having fun, where's the harm?" someone says. Irresponsible bliss. It's a bad habit. Don't teach kids such bad habits, it's bad for all of us.

It's easy to tell myself that people will always want real experiences. Challenges, games that respect them as intelligent, thinking creatures that have evolved to the point where play and learning are so synonymous it's borderline magic. How malleable and infinite we are when we exist in and pull from that wonderful and iterative conceptual space that exists inside well-designed games. I think to myself... We've actually been to the moon. We've landed a thing the size of a car on Mars. We've shot something out into interstellar space, and it's *still talking to us*. We deserve better games, so we can be better as a people.

- Miktar Dracon -

Gunpoint creator is working on new things



Tom "I used to be a games journalist but now I make games for a living" Francis made *Gunpoint*. It was enormously successful, and generated enough cash that he could quit his job at *PC Gamer* (and, as he explains, quit jobs in general) and do nothing else but work on making more video games for us to play. To that end, he presently has two projects in development. One is about a grappling hook, and that's its only bullet point at present. The other is called *Heat Signature*, and it's an excellent idea.

In it, a randomly generated galaxy randomly generates ships that randomly fly about random space. You play a randomly generated character who must use your "breacher" ship to dock with these other ships in order to complete randomly generated tasks based on your character's role - which is randomly generated each

time you spawn as a new character. Ships' internal layouts are random, and guards (who can currently be shot noisily or knocked out quietly) randomly patrol their space hallways. To dock with ships, you have to manage the heat generated by using your breacher's thrusters, which can be detected by heat detection systems of varying sensitivity housed within the ships you're attempting to breach.

At the moment it's very skeletal, but in future Tom plans to implement hack-able subsystems, ship-to-ship combat and more to make things meatier. It's designed as a stealthy experience, and players will be tasked with a variety of objectives upon spawning. Spawn as a thief and you may be tasked with stealing a piece of technology from a particular ship in the endless galaxy, for example, and you'll have to follow clues to discover that ship's location.

Steam Music will bring your PC music library to your Steam games

Valve has announced an upcoming beta for a new Steam feature called Steam Music. The new extension will allow you to import your entire music library so that you can play audio files directly through Steam. You'll be able to control playlists and skip tracks without having to leave the game you're playing.

The beta will first be made available to those using SteamOS

and others who choose to utilise Steam in Big Picture mode. The standard Steam client will get Steam Music at a later stage. If you want to be part of the Steam Music beta, then head onto Steam and join the Steam Music Group for a chance to be granted beta access.

Soon we'll all be able to listen to the sweet, soothing tones of Barbara Streisand while we shoot n00bs in the face.

I'm on a boat!



You can bet your last Rolo that there'll be another *Assassin's Creed* title, but according to Ubisoft's Darby McDevitt, it might not feature boats. It might not even have pirates!

Okay, you say... who cares? Well you should, because as it turns out, the original inclusion of boats did a lot more for the series than simply taking it out to sea.

"One of the things that made *AC3's* naval combat possible – and then of course *AC4* – is that we were able to have characters climb and walk around on dynamically moving objects," McDevitt told Edge in a recent interview.

"We always build on technology, nothing ever gets set aside. So all of this technology, it might appear in future games – it might just not be on boats. It might appear in a completely different way."

What that appearance will be exactly remains a secret locked away in Montreal, but we'd expect that there'll be some hint-dropping coming round the mountain relatively soon. If we were to place bets, we'd hazard to guess that something a little more modern – say early 20th century – wouldn't be entirely unlikely given the progression of technology present in the series so far.

Also – aerial combat. Just saying.

The Elder Scrolls Online won't need PlayStation Plus, will need Xbox LIVE Gold

With the release of the PlayStation 4, Sony has made PlayStation Plus a requirement should you want to play online games on their latest console. *The Elder Scrolls Online*, however, will circumvent this PlayStation Plus requirement: developer ZeniMax Online has revealed that a Plus subscription won't be necessary on PlayStation 4. For Xbox One, however, things are completely different: you have to have an Xbox LIVE Gold account in order to play the game. This discrepancy seems bizarre, however it was actually Sony who first approached Bethesda and pushed to get *The Elder Scrolls Online* onto the new generation of consoles to begin with.

Sticking with *Elder Scrolls Online* news: publisher Bethesda has unveiled a collector's edition dubbed the Imperial Edition. The version comes with an illustrated guide book, statue of Molag Bal, a map, special packaging and a host of exclusive digital content like pets and horses.

Cuphead hops in time machine, travels back to the '30s

Isn't it weird to think that in 16 years, we'll be in a whole new '30s? That's the future right there. StudioMDHR – a development studio comprised of two brothers, Chad and Jared Moldenhauer – is more interested in the '30s of the past. Case in point: *Cuphead*. It's their first game, and its most attention-demanding feature is its aesthetic. It looks and sounds like an early Mickey Mouse cartoon pulled straight out of a 1930s-era Disney catalogue. Watercolour backgrounds, hand-drawn animation and live jazz recordings empower its unique style – and it looks absolutely adorable.

Cuphead's actual gameplay is inspired by classic run and gun platformers like *Contra*, *Gunstar Heroes* and *Mega Man*. Instead of having players rely on memory to defeat the game by memorising enemy movement and attack patterns, however, with *Cuphead* the developers want to reward quick reaction times by introducing loads of variety in enemy behaviour. Here's how the developers describe their game:

"*Cuphead* is a classic run and gun that centers around 1-on-1 fights (2-on-1 in two player mode). With *Cuphead*, we aim to evolve the genre by adding new features such as: super arts, infinite lives, a playable world map and hidden secrets. In addition to that, we will have refined controls, additional boss patterns on harder modes and balanced weapons to equip (that you don't lose!). We plan to release 10-15 bosses per episode and end up with over 30 bosses."

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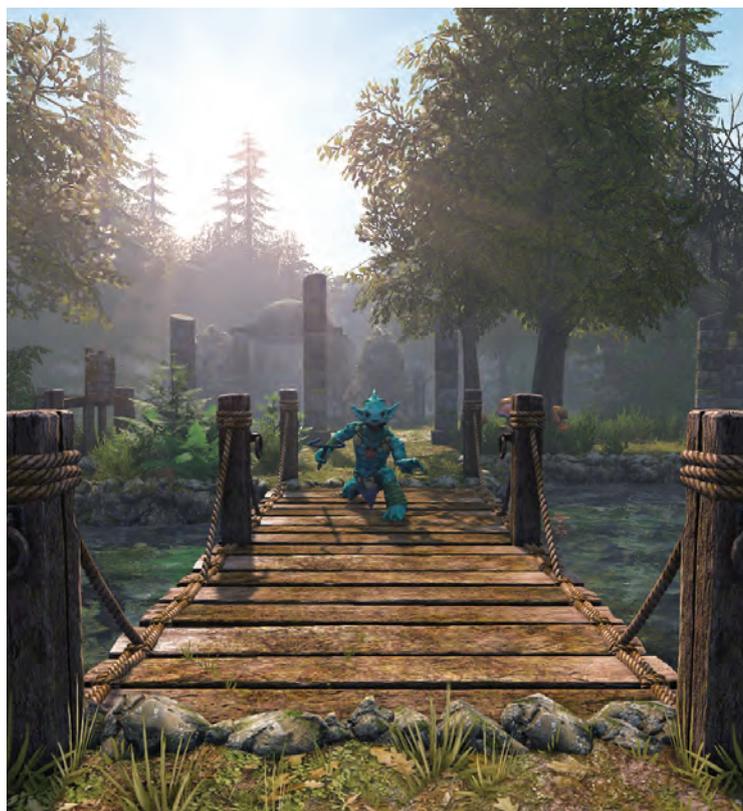
Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

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Almost Human lets slip some Legend of Grimrock II info



If, like us, you couldn't help but fall in love with *Legend of Grimrock's* classically-inspired tile-based role-playing and are impossibly excited for its secretive (until now, at least) sequel, then you should perhaps lock your attention to this spot of news. Developer Almost Human has divulged details on the title, which is set on the Isle of Nex, and will this time not be confined to the inners of a dark, dank dungeon. Indoor and outdoor locations will star in this sequel, with Nex home to "dark woods, misty swamps, underground tunnels and ancient ruins", all ripe for you to explore.

Once again, the game tells the tale of four prisoners, exiled on the island against their will. Narratively, *Grimrock II* won't be a continuation of the first game, instead being a whole new story tied to a whole new group of characters in your control. *Grimrock's* brilliantly tricky puzzles will return, with Almost Human promising a fine selection of new puzzle mechanics. Anyone who felt that monster

AI was a weak point of the original game will be happy to hear that the developers are hard at work refining monster behaviour, completely rewriting their AI systems. "As a result monsters are now smarter and they know how to use their larger numbers to their advantage," they explain. "The repertoire of tricks they know has been expanded greatly. For example, some monsters can call other monsters for help and can use group tactics against you. Of course the behaviour of monsters depends on their intelligence so the most stupid and most fierce monsters are still, well, fierce and stupid as they should be."

The skill system has been reworked to be more flexible and meaningful. You'll be able to mix potions without visiting the inventory, even in the middle of combat. Spells can be cast by using new mouse gestures. In addition, there'll obviously be the expected list of new-ness. Stuff like new monsters, new spells, a new playable race, a new character class and more.

US and British government allegedly used apps like Angry Birds to spy on users

In the next *James Bond* film, we will hopefully see Q using harvested *Angry Birds* data to locate the movie's antagonist. It sounds dumb, but according to documents leaked by Edward Snowden, both the US National Security Agency (NSA) and the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) have been implicated in using mobile phone apps like *Angry Birds* to spy on users. The secret security reports, which were compiled in 2012 but only recently leaked, claim that both US and British security made use of apps that track player location and other personal data. That "mined" data was then compared to lists of known intelligence targets.

In addition to apps being mined for data, the report stated that the GCHQ utilised the profiles and data obtained by advertising companies that are often found inside games like *Angry Birds* and other free mobile games. That data ordinarily contains a lot more information, such as user gender, sexual orientation, home address, phone ID and household income.

Rovio, the company behind *Angry Birds*, released a statement vehemently denying any knowledge of this. They chalked up the articles to pure speculation and noted that if government agencies were utilising advertising networks to spy on users, then *Angry Birds* would definitely not be the only app affected. Interestingly, Rovio did not respond to the allegations that *Angry Birds* user data had been obtained by government agencies.

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Another one bites the dust?



We should all know by now that running a successful Kickstarter campaign in no way guarantees the success of the game itself. Some projects have failed outright, but it looks like American McGee's hack-and-slash RPG *Akaneiro: Demon Hunters*, might just slowly bleed to death.

In a recent post on their KS campaign, McGee explained that the development team for the game has been cut down drastically to just two people. McGee's Shanghai-based Spicy Horse Studios has also suffered severe staff cuts and all resources from there have been diverted to their mobile game *The Gate* which is practically their only source of revenue.

So what happened to the \$200K+ that they pulled in from their Kickstarter? It's long gone – as well as the extra hundred grand they earned from in-game purchases and Steam Early Access buyers. This is caused by what is likely

PC	
The Elder Scrolls Online	April
Grand Theft Auto V	2014
The Sims 4	2014

360	
Titanfall	March 28th
Destiny	2014
Wolfenstein: The New Order	2014

PS3	
2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil	April 18th
Prey 2	2014
Watch_Dogs	2014

to be a far more common occurrence going forward: over-reaching on goals and therefore over-spending on development. McGee explains that more than \$2 million has been spent to get *Akaneiro* to where it is now.

If you're on the receiving end of this bad news, rest assured that this is by no means the end for McGee or Spicy Horse. They've done this as a measure to prevent further financial damage, and McGee seems confident that they'll eventually pull themselves back up. As he explains, it's not the first time he's had to make a decision like this since he went fully independent eight years ago.

Either way: good luck chap. And to *Akaneiro's* backers: hang in there!

Minecraft still making all the money

In case anyone's still counting, *Minecraft's* now surpassed 14 million sales – and that's on PC alone. This comes soon after news that the PlayStation 3 version of the game (which was released on December 17th last year) has already sold over a million copies on Sony's previous-gen platform, which developer Mojang's Daniel Kaplan happily inquired "has to be some kind of record on PSN, no?" That's on top of over 10 million sales on Xbox 360, and a whole jaw-drop of sales on mobile platforms as well. Next up on *Minecraft's* to-do list are releases on PS Vita and PS4. As a quick bit of added info: at the time of this writing, in the last 24 hours the game has sold 16,668 copies on PC. That's over five million rand in sales in the space of a single day.

Wii U sales still floundering, Iwata halves his salary in response

Nintendo has released its latest figures for both hardware and software sales, and while handhelds like the Nintendo 3DS continue to sell exceptionally well, the Wii U remains a problem thanks to its slow uptake in the global market. During the company's third quarter financial report, Nintendo revealed a 36% decline in Wii U sales compared to the same time one year ago. This report covered figures for the period of October to December 2013.

To date, Nintendo has sold 5.86 million Wii U consoles worldwide; 1.95 million of those were sold over this previous holiday period. Despite the low hardware uptake, Nintendo showed a 19% increase in software sales. This was largely thanks to the release of anticipated first-party titles like *Super Mario 3D World* and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD*. To date, 29.37 million pieces of Wii U software have been sold since the console's launch on 18 November 2012.

Taking into consideration all of



Nintendo's hardware and software sales, the company recorded a 30% drop in profits between April and December 2013. In response to this, company president Satoru Iwata has halved his salary. Further

Nintendo executives will be taking a 20% to 30% salary reduction as well. Nintendo is anticipating an overall operating loss of ¥35 billion for the 2013 fiscal year, which equates to just less than R4 billion.

The city is my mask

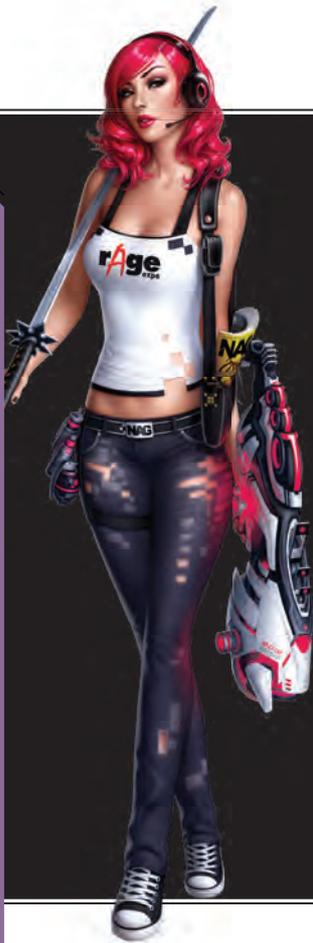
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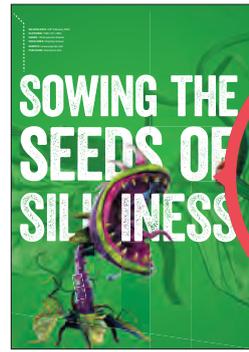


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Some call her the ultimate gamer grill. Then we smack them and tell them that Roxy isn't food (this is what eating too much of mom's meatloaf will do to you), she's the official rAge/NAG mascot. She was lovingly created in 2012 by South African illustrator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

Send your sighting to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "March Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.

FEBRUARY WINNER



Isa Davie, page 30

THIS MONTH'S LOOT

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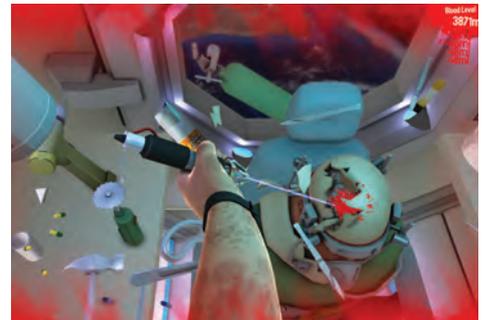


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Saints Row IV for Xbox 360 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "March caption".



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Ya don't say? BioShock and Gone Home take place in the same universe



Did you play the very lovely indie game *Gone Home* by The Fullbright Company? Perhaps you've played *BioShock* as well? The two games are practically polar opposites and seem to only share a common player perspective, but it turns out they share a game world as well.

Steve Gaynor wrote the story for *BioShock 2*'s "Minerva's Den" DLC. He then left 2K Marin to eventually co-found indie outfit The Fullbright Company. Within the "Minerva's Den" DLC, Gaynor added a character by the name of Charles Milton Porter, who invented the first video game in the *BioShock* universe. That game, which was called Spitfire, was discoverable and playable in "Minerva's Den". In *Gone Home* you can find a Super Nintendo cartridge (or at least

something that looks like an SNES cartridge due to legal reasons) for a game called Super Spitfire. That game is published by a fictional in-game company called CMP Interactive, or Charles Milton Porter Interactive.

Furthermore, the aeroplane that *Gone Home* protagonist Katie uses to fly home in the beginning of the game, is part of an airline of planes belonging to a company that also made an appearance in *BioShock*. That airline, which remains nameless, is the same airline that owned the plane that *BioShock* protagonist Jack was in when it crash-landed into the sea above Rapture. You can tell they're the same airline due to the company's logos found in both *BioShock* and *Gone Home*.

It's a small digital world, is it not?

StarCrawlers presents space-based dungeon crawling

Juggernaut Games has announced a grid-based role-playing game in a similar vein as *Legend of Grimrock*. They describe it as "an endless first-person RPG adventure with procedurally generated levels, enemies, events, and loot". They also say that it features "deep character customization and a tactical time-unit based combat system to create an endless dungeon crawling experience". And it's set in space!

While the out-of-context quotes above may make the game seem super serious, the team seems to be embedding a welcome dollop of humour in the game. Your team of space pirates (created from a selection of races and classes) will have to embark on missions set aboard abandoned spaceships, battling what's left of their security systems (and other foes) to venture ever deeper in the pursuit of cash, glory and powerful item drops.

RELEASE LIST



Dates subject to change without notice

March week 1

Skylanders: Swap Force	PS4
Civilization V: Complete Edition	PC
XCOM: Enemy Unknown Complete Edition	PC
South Park: The Stick of Truth	360 / PC / PS3
Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures	360 / 3DS / PS3

March week 2

Dark Souls II	360 / PC / PS3
Yoshi's New Island	3DS
The LEGO Movie Videogame	360 / 3DS / PC / PS3 PS4 / PSV / Wii U / XBO

March week 3

Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	360 / PS3 / PS4 / XBO
Infamous: Second Son	PS4
Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster	PS3 / PSV

March week 4

Diablo III: Reaper of Souls	PC
Titanfall	360
Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	3DS
The Smurfs 1 & 2	DS / Wii

March week 4

Don Bradman Cricket	360 / PC / PS3
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RELEASE DATE / Q1 2014
 PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
 GENRE / Role-playing game
 DEVELOPER / Obsidian Entertainment
 WEBSITE / www.stickoftruth.com
 PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

South Park: The Stick of Truth

Meet some friends of mine

I feel it's safe to assume that *everyone* knows *South Park*. Or at least vaguely remembers somebody once maybe mentioning it this one time at a dinner party / political rally / ski resort / outrageous orgy somewhere. Trey Parker and Matt Stone's intentionally crudely drawn and animated cartoon chronicles the lives of the hilariously dysfunctional inhabitants of the titular town of *South Park*, Colorado – and following its first airing in August of 1997, it's consistently been one of the most-watched shows on television throughout its 17 seasons and 247 episodes. It's great for a laugh even if you don't intend to read into the deeper meaning lurking behind the ludicrous veneer of many of its episodes, but look a

"It all looks exactly like you'd expect *South Park* to look, with its crappy cutout animation and iconic unsophisticated art style..."

little closer and you'll find that *South Park* has always been happy to stare down very real issues and blatantly criticise the state of this mad world in which we live. And while it uses an extensive menagerie of absurd characters to get its point across, the real stars of the show have always been the children of *South Park* – specifically the mascot quartet of Stan, Kyle, Kenny and Cartman. And the kids are back to take another crack at video game success. You're likely aware that this isn't the first time *South Park*'s tried to transform itself into a video game that doesn't suck. And thus far, it's failed miserably at achieving that goal. Even its creators agree, and that's why they've now taken a much more hands-on approach



The Stick of Truth was originally meant to be published by THQ. When THQ was reduced to nothing more than a hissing, steaming puddle of publisher goo, Ubisoft swept in, grabbed *The Stick of Truth* off THQ's game shelf and quickly disappeared, howling, into the night.



in supervising the game's development at Obsidian Entertainment. Having now had a chance to rub my hands and eyes all over the game's face, I feel pretty confident that it's helped. Sh*tloads.

What's most immediately striking about it is that it's practically a mirror image of the show. Except you're actually playing it and engaging with it and poking and prodding it rather than just idly watching. It all looks exactly like you'd expect *South Park* to look, with its crappy cutout animation and iconic unsophisticated art style, and it sounds exactly like you'd expect it to sound, with all the characters being given life by the appropriate voices. Instead of putting you in the cartoonish shoes of one of *South Park*'s many beloved, long-time citizens, *The Stick of Truth* casts you as a character of your own creation: a kid who's just moved to town and is destined to become a part of its overwhelming malfunctions. Your first act in the game is to create this character using a selection of skin colours, hairstyles, clothes and accessories. Want a hipster kid with thick-rimmed glasses and

an eye-catching mole? Or would you prefer to channel your inner Cartman and design a freckle-covered ginger kid, presumably with no soul (obviously)? You're free to do whatever you'd like with this nicely simplistic character creation system.

Then, you're dumped into the familiar town and ordered by your parents to go make friends. And this is where the game proper begins. It's not long before you discover that all of *South Park*'s children are involved in a town-wide game of make-believe – the kind that's often been seen in the show, like the episode *Good Times with Weapons*, in which the kids pretend they're all buff anime warriors. In *The Stick of Truth*, the stick is the game, in that all the kids are fighting for control of the titular Stick of Truth. And so you're presented with an imaginary fantasy world full of children being elves and wizards and blacksmiths and other fantasy archetypes, and you start playing this game as well, choosing your class (from a selection of four: Warrior, Mage, Thief and Jew) and learning the game's *Paper Mario*-style turn-based combat.

The combat system shows surprising depth and challenge, with your character and any followers fighting by your side having access to a number of different

There's a Facebook-style social network in the game, and friends you make in South Park will post messages that often (hilariously) relate to your actions in the game. Some denizens will only be friends with you when you reach higher levels of popularity, and once you've gathered enough friends, you'll unlock perks that will augment your character's abilities.



attacks and abilities to use against the variety of opponents you'll face. Your involvement is made more active by button prompts that you're required to match at key moments to initiate attacks or defend yourself from damage.

You might have to mash a button to power up an attack before it hits to do maximum damage, for example, or you may be told that pressing one button or the other whenever your weapon glints will initiate either a single power attack (good for damaging enemies with lots of armour) or multiple weaker attacks (useful for destroying shields that enemies may carry). Items (like health potions that replenish the life-giving goopy stuff that's been smacked out of you) can be used during combat, and so can class-specific special abilities like the Jew's Sling of David.

Enemies have their own abilities, strengths and weaknesses as well. Some can adopt stances that reflect projectiles or counter your attacks. Others can heal their allies and apply annoying debuffs to you and yours. Various debilitating status effects also make life difficult; if your character is bleeding, for example, expect extra damage to be applied to you each turn.

When you're not in combat, you're free to explore the town at will (and there's a fast-travel system to facilitate this), completing side quests, hunting down collectables and

just soaking in the cleverly captured look and feel of *South Park*. It looks like there'll be loads of exploration to be done, and the game world can be manipulated in various ways to do things like unlock new paths

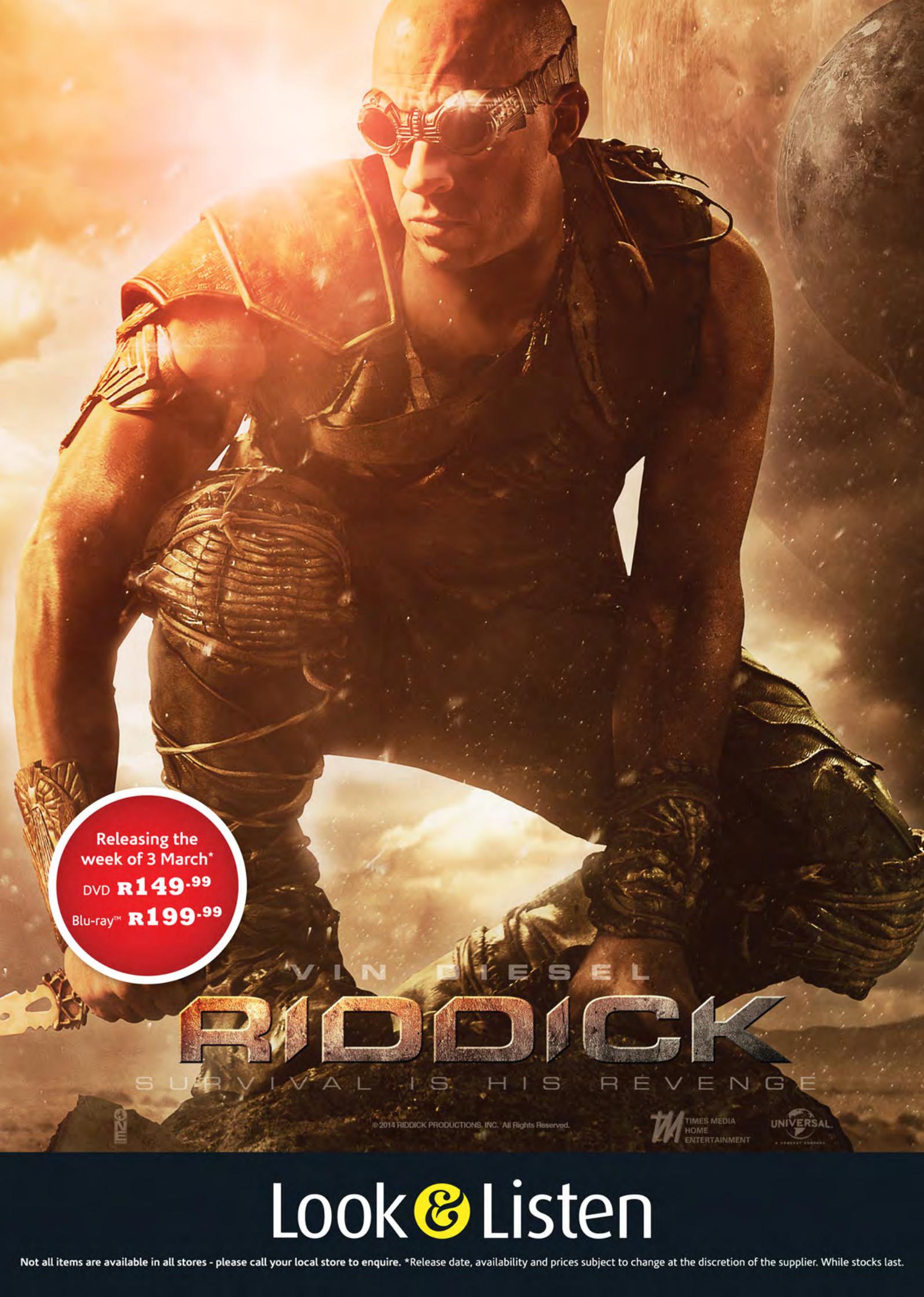
and defeat enemies without entering combat. There's a ton of stuff to collect, sell and buy, with characters having access to a range of gear to equip that'll change their appearance and proficiencies.

I've purposefully tried to refrain from discussing perhaps the game's most important feature: its humour. It's embedded in every facet of the game, from the junk you collect and the personalities you encounter to the attacks you can do and the quests you can choose to complete. There's a smorgasbord of delicious stuff in here that fans of the show will absolutely adore, and I've been consciously battling to avoid mentioning anything that'll spoil that for you. I messed up a bit with the mention of the Sling of David (and the fact that the Jew is even a character class to begin with), but I couldn't help myself. *I'm sorry*. Obviously, given that this was preview code it's not entirely possible to tell if the game can sustain its humour and the novelty of its combat quirks for the entirety of its length, but I had a blast, both watching other people play it and playing it myself. *South Park's* legion of fans is in for a treat.

NAG

- Barkskin

"The combat system shows surprising depth and challenge..."



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Dark Souls II

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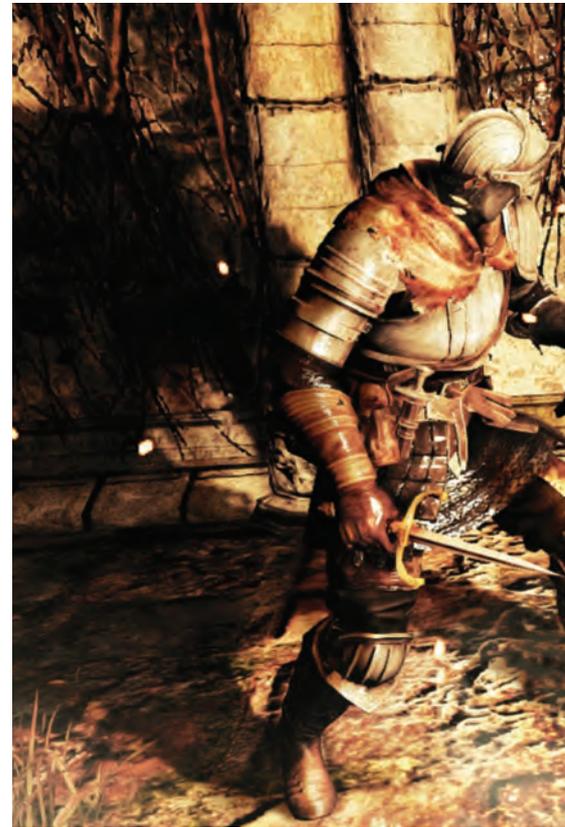
Hidetaka Miyazaki served as the director on *Demon's Souls* and *Dark Souls*. There is very little in either game untouched by Miyazaki's vision of the way the games needed to play, from the perspective of the player, and how they needed to feel in those moments where the player was most engrossed. Both *Demons* and *Dark Souls* are very, very good at getting the player's attention. It's a simple trick: they both punish inattention. Harshly. I recall having said something along these lines before in my review of *Dark Souls* (NAG December 2011), in that *Dark Souls* is a game that knows when you've stopped playing, stopped paying attention. And once it notices, your

death comes quick. Never unfair, but very unforgiving. But while you're there, and playing, the world around you is rich with lore, full of art and emotion.

There's a passage in the excellent

"Our aim is not to develop a difficult game, our aim is to tune the difficulty to a level for players to be able to overcome and sense the highest sense of accomplishment possible." - Co-director Yui Tanimura

companion book *Dark Souls: Design Works* that stood out to me. "I remember when I was drawing the Undead Dragon" it began, the speaker being the voice of art designer Masanori Waragai. "I submitted a design draft that depicted a dragon swarming with maggots and other gross things." *Dark Souls* is a dark, near-gothic fantasy game. Much ado is made about how "hard" it is, but people tend to gloss over the vibe, the atmosphere the game manages to invoke. "Director Miyazaki handed it back



to me", continues Waragai. "He said, 'This isn't dignified. Don't rely on the gross factor to portray an undead dragon. Can't you instead try to convey the deep sorrow of a magnificent beast doomed to a slow and possibly endless descent into ruin?'"

Miyazaki will not return as director for *Dark Souls II*, but does stay on as supervisor. In his stead, Tomohiro Shibuya and Yui Tanimura act as game directors. They are unfamiliar names, unless you really, really liked the obscure PlayStation 2 series *Another Century's Episode*. While this doesn't pose an immediate problem, it will be interesting to see how *Dark Souls II* is affected by this change. "Our aim is not to develop a difficult game," says Tanimura. "Our aim is to tune the difficulty to a level for players to be able to overcome and sense the highest sense of accomplishment possible."

It is true that *Dark Souls* was difficult, especially to players unaccustomed to its style of rigid, almost chess-like combat that quickly killed players trying to jackass button-mash their way forward. But if you played as if your life depended on it, making rational, considered choices, death was usually only a threat. So what Tanimura says sounds almost like they want to "water down" the experience. However, he continues, "In *Dark Souls II*, the AI will be

While *Dark Souls* had a problematic and rushed PC port, *Dark Souls II* has a proper PC version in development.



The first *Dark Souls* had a slightly convoluted system for jumping. The sequel makes it easier: you click the left stick while running.



tuned to react more naturally to the player's actions. But at the same time, the player controls and motions will be more natural and fitting. I hope players will continue to learn from their mistakes and carry out multiple trial-and-error to conquer the challenges that await." The goal is not to water the experience down to the point where it loses all flavour, thankfully, but to fine-tune the challenge so it results not from a player's reflexes or ability to use a gamepad, but is based more on their ability to learn from mistakes, strategise, and pay attention to what's going on around them.

Based on information released thus far, *Dark Souls II* will have a steeper learning curve than its predecessors, but blend the best qualities from previous games so that the learning curve doesn't feel as insurmountable. There will be no Easy Mode: you either play the game on its terms or you don't. Blood messages – glowing hints that players can leave each other to help or deceive – make a return, along with bloodstains that let you view the final moments of someone who died near where you are now. Blood messaging is now a system command so you no longer need special items to leave your marks. Other various straightforward improvements include the ability to have two types of arrows

equipped at the same time, voice chat that functions in very specific co-op situations, three-player co-op, dedicated servers that increase the number of players that populate a game instance, and a complete reworking of the Covenant systems to better structure player vs. player, and to give those invaded by others a fighting chance. Summoned players will no longer automatically exit once a boss is defeated. Instead, different sized White Soapstones give different amounts of time for them to be in your world.

There is nothing quite like *Dark Souls*. I'm reminded of a part early in the game in which you're attempting to reach a bell tower. It's a hard fight, climaxing in a dramatic battle atop the roof of a church. While you fight, you might hear the toll of the bell, an indication that somewhere else, another player has reached and rung the bell. A sign that yes, it's possible. In *Dark Souls II*, which is trying to keep much a secret to avoid spoilers, there is one scene we're aware of. A long corridor leading to a fearsome boss, the Mirror Knight. Along the walls, light sources guide your way: but these lights are terrifying. Each light represents a player, recently killed by the Mirror Knight. A player who, if they're still around, may be summoned by the Mirror Knight during your battle. To kill you. **NAG**
- Miktar

Mario Kart 8

Can the mighty Mario Kart rescue the Wii U?

Mario Kart is the best-selling racing franchise in the world. *Mario Kart Wii* alone sold 34 million copies (and counting) since 2008, double that of the best-selling *Gran Turismo* (which was *Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec* for the PS2, if you're curious). The secret to *Mario Kart's* success may be due, in part, to its universal appeal. From college students to families, hardcore gamers to soccer moms, *Mario Kart's* meticulous attention to design and that elusive "fun factor" has paid off. So where then is the successor to arguably one of the biggest money makers in the video game industry? Late to the starting gate.

Not much is known about *Mario Kart 8*, other than information gleaned from last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo and the

occasional Nintendo Direct presentation. Motorbikes return, along with the hang-gliders and underwater sections added in the more recent portable editions. Being on an HD console, *Mario Kart 8* will sport HD

"So where then is the successor to arguably one of the biggest money makers in the video game industry? Late to the starting gate."

visuals. Even during two-player split-screen, Nintendo promises 60 frames per section (something everyone else seems to

have trouble with in this "new" generation). The split-screen will be vertical instead of horizontal, something that was in the *Mario Kart 64* beta but has never made it into the series before. Local and online multiplayer will allow up to 12 racers on the track, and a new "Mario Kart TV" lets you share race clips to the online Miiiverse community.

All the regular racers return, along with fan-favourites Toadette and Waluigi. Of



course, the real draw to *Mario Kart 8* is the new anti-gravity mechanic whereby certain sections of the track take on a *Wipeout* or *F-Zero* look, allowing racers to cling to the surface of the road while it spirals up, loop-de-loops, and goes all over. The tracks seen so far include Mario Circuit, which races between floating islands around Peach's Castle, Sunshine Airport complete with Mario Sunshine trimmings, a race through broken-down ruins, a residential track that looks a little like San Francisco, the obligatory haunted mansion, and a sky course with beanstalks and *Super Mario Bros.* 3 airships. A few retro courses are confirmed: Dry Dry Desert, Music Park and Piranha Plant Slide.

Mario Kart 8 should have been out Christmas last year. It's been in development since 2012, but for reasons known only to Nintendo, the game was delayed and spun out until rather late into the Wii U's lifecycle. Problematically so, considering the console's failure to gain the traction Nintendo expected. There's no way of predicting if *Mario Kart 8* can pull the crowds Nintendo needs to bring its newest console back up to speed. Even so, the racer remains one to watch just in case something spectacular happens. **NAG**

- Miktar



Just like in *Mario Kart Wii*, up to twelve racers can compete in a regular event.



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4th gen
Intel® Core™
i7 processor.

Crypt of the NecroDancer



RELEASE DATE / 2014
 PLATFORM / PC
 GENRE / Roguelike / rhythm
 DEVELOPER / Brace Yourself Games
 WEBSITE / www.necrodancer.com
 PUBLISHER / Brace Yourself Games

Just a jump to the left, and a slash to the right

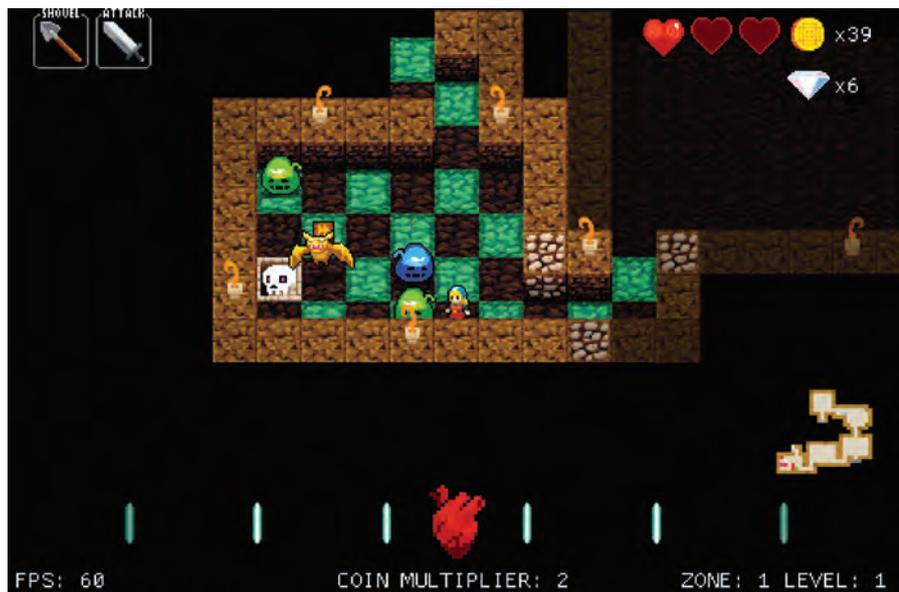
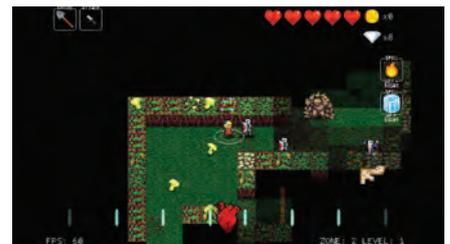
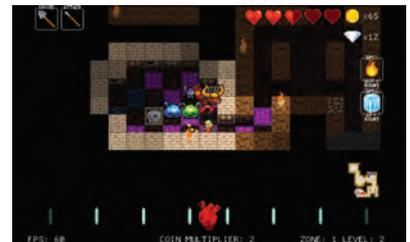
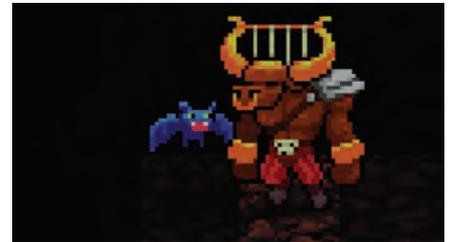
Crypt of the NecroDancer is half turn-based dungeon crawler with randomly-generated dungeons. The other half of the game is rhythm: each dungeon floor has a unique music track with a visually emphasized steady beat. Your moves are (ideally) made to that beat. Enemies also move to the beat, so the pace at which things happen is determined by the music. Having a steady rhythm locks the participant into a timeframe in which to act, not unlike speed chess or the rate at which a block lowers in *Tetris*. By removing the infinite time in which a player could decide which move is most optimal in your traditional turn-based dungeon excursions, the game becomes one of relying

“Having a steady rhythm locks the participant into a timeframe in which to act, not unlike speed chess or the rate at which a block lowers in *Tetris*.”

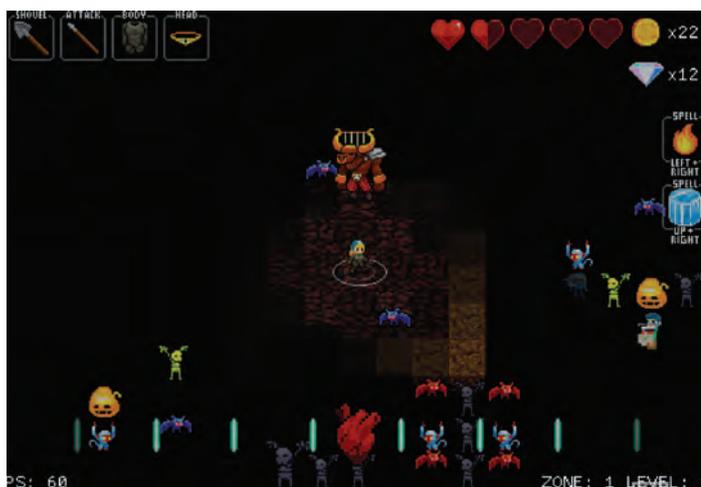
almost wholly on experience. After a while, experience becomes instinct, leading to creative leaps of strategy made entirely in the moment, in the space between the game’s figurative and literal heartbeats.

You play as Cadence, a headstrong delver who – through an unfortunate combination of a terminal fall and an evil NecroDancer

stealing her still-beating heart – must now travel down multiple dungeon floors, fighting monsters and finding useful items. You technically don’t have to move to the beat, but not doing so will cause you to lose a vital multiplier that increases how many coins you earn from defeated monsters. The higher the multiplier, the more likely you can



The music is being provided by the excellent Danny Baranowsky (*Super Meat Boy*, *Canabalt*, *Binding of Isaac*, *Desktop Dungeons*).



afford powerful weapons and items found in dungeon shops. You know when you’re moving to the beat, because the dungeon floor starts pulsing with light, making it your very own little dungeon rave.

There is very little randomness to the combat in *Crypt of the NecroDancer*; everything behaves according to very set rules. You move into a monster to attack it; different weapons change the shape of your attack. If an enemy moves into a square you were trying to move to, you’ll take damage instead. Certain enemies take advantage of your urge to rush in, waiting a beat before moving, or moving in interesting patterns. Monsters have unique little dance animations, their movement sounds become a part of the melody of what’s happening on the screen. These sounds are often a clue to defeating them. As you delve deeper, the music becomes faster and the monster patterns more complex. The game is ingenious, fun in ways indescribable unless you’re there, in the moment, taken by the rhythm and amazed at how well you’re doing.

You can use your own MP3s for the soundtrack, and there’s even a DDR mode for use with a dance pad. The DDR mode makes the game a bit easier so you don’t kill yourself. There’s permanent progression via character upgrades, like a health increase and magic spells, unlocked by collecting diamonds. **NAG**

- Miktar

PREVIEW



RELEASE DATE / TBA
PLATFORM / PC
GENRE / First-person role-playing game
DEVELOPER / Chad Alan Cuddigan
WEBSITE / www.delvergame.com
PUBLISHER / Chad Alan Cuddigan

Delver

Funky chunky dungeons

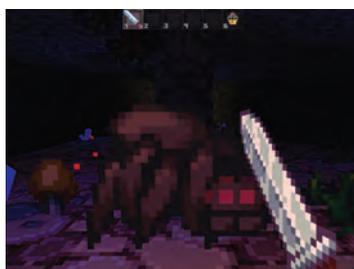
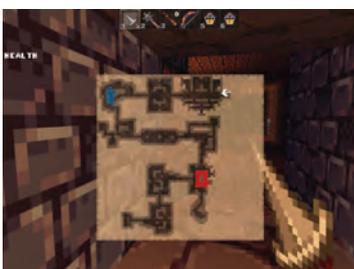
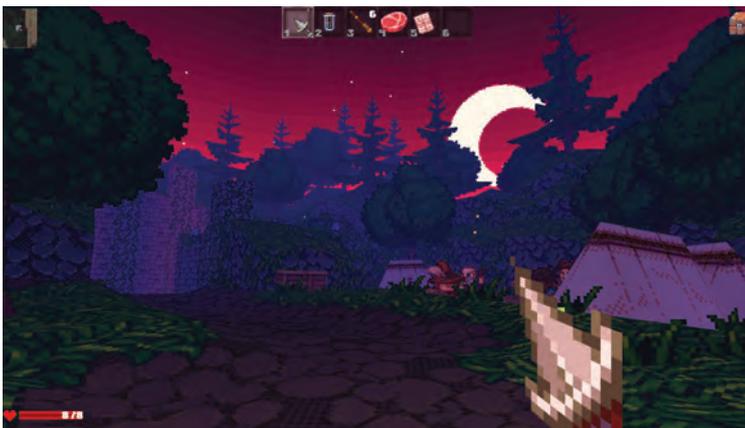
There's chunky graphics, and then there's salsa-thick, punch-your-eyes chunky.

Delver's colourful "retro" aesthetic that seems to borrow character designs from *River City Ransom* (1989), is... almost offensively chunky, if that's even possible. Usually I find throwback styles like these charming, but here the problem may be that almost everything in *Delver* is clearly placeholder art. That's the risk with these Early Access games on Steam: pay now, up front, and hope the developer delivers on all their promises later.

The core game is fine, if overly simplistic at the onset. An action role-playing game (very light on the stats, when you level you put one

point into attack, speed, health, etc.), with permadeath and randomly-generated dungeons. When you die, a new dungeon is generated and you only keep the gold you had on you. You can spend some gold to improve your chances, buying items and weapons up front, but you'll lose them if you die. There is mod support planned so players can expand the experience, and the developer says they want to increase the depth of the RPG system, add special effects and minibosses, implement full gamepad support and "add a ton of new content." It's a bit expensive at R80 up-front, especially with it being so very, very rudimentary right now. **NAG**

- Miktar



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RELEASE DATE / March 2014
PLATFORM / 360 / PC / XBO
GENRE / First-person shooter
DEVELOPER / Respawn Entertainment
WEBSITE / www.titanfall.com
PUBLISHER / Electronic Arts

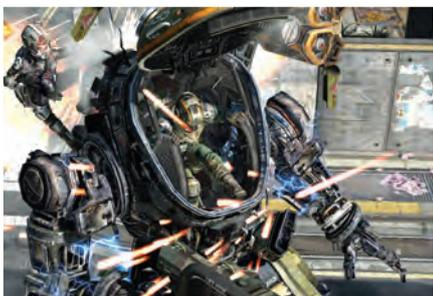
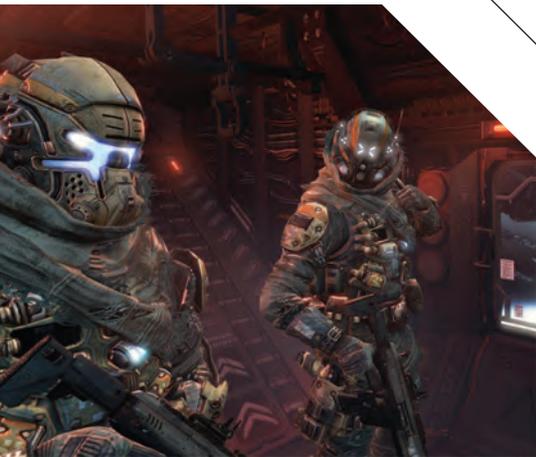
INTRODUCING THE RO-BRO SHOOTER

TITANFALL



Titanfall is shipping on PC, Xbox 360, and Xbox One, but Respawn's studio head has subtly hinted that any hypothetical sequels could launch on other platforms, saying the game is "exclusive at launch" only.

It is the future. As previously predicted by tens of thousands of straight-to-paperback sci-fi primers, humanity has colonised the deepest reaches of space – bringing fast food, Styrofoam, toilet paper, and the other accoutrements of so-called civilisation to the stars of Earth's night sky. Oh, and mining, obviously, because sucking every exploitable resource out of every planet is kind of our thing. Under the auspices (and shareholder cash) of the Interstellar Manufacturing Corporation, commercial industry is booming and the galactic shipping lanes between here and there and everywhere else are crammed with freight. Enter the inevitable Militia, a mostly lawless confederacy of homesteaders, mercenaries, bandits, and pirates who've decided they don't much like the way the IMC is doing business in their backyards, ostensibly because NOBLE REASONS AND OTHER VAGUELY-DEFINED POLITICAL AGENDAS but probably actually because they're not getting a cut of the profits.

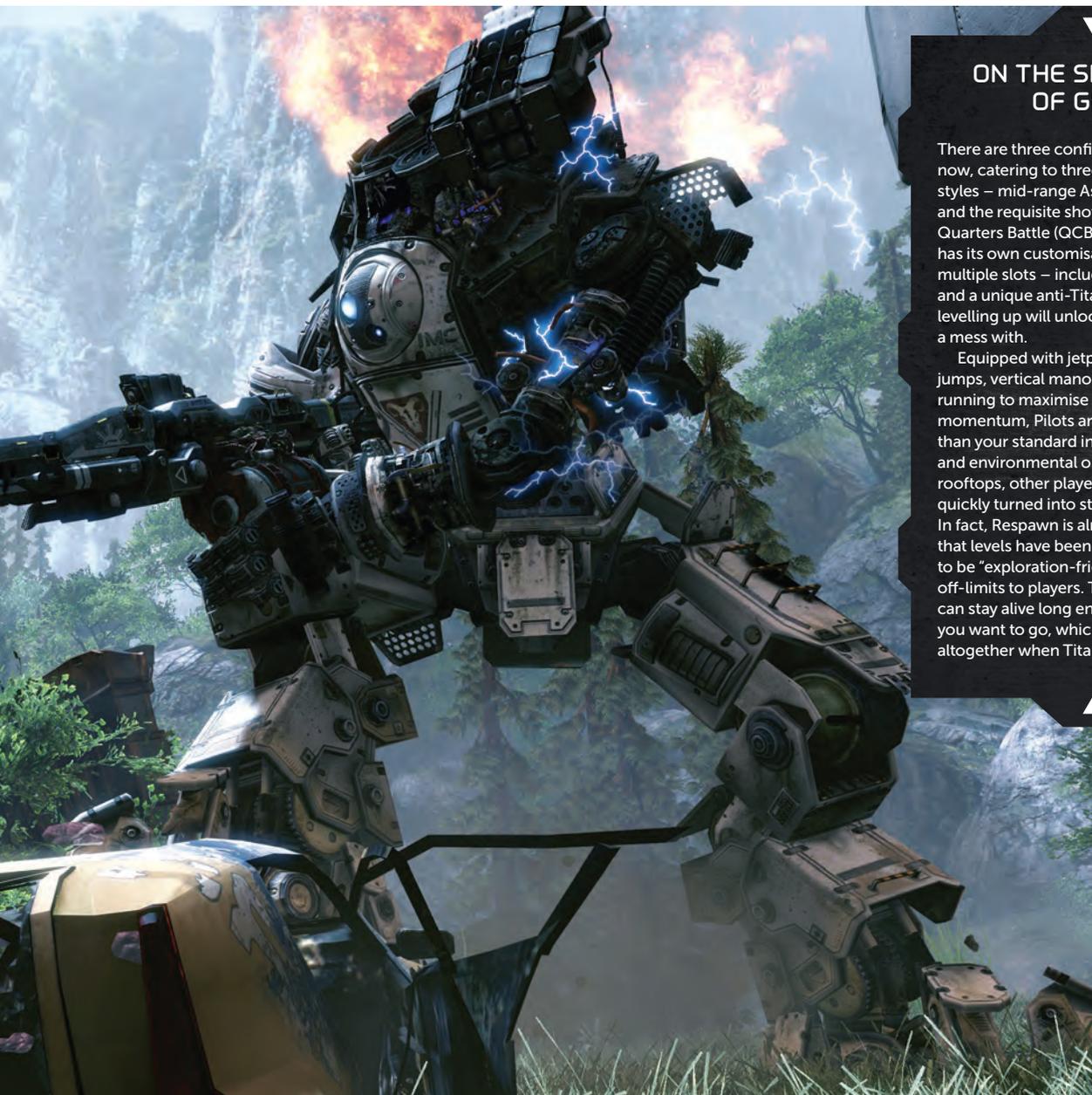


PROPAGANDA MACHINE

AI-controlled NPCs come in two categories – Grunts and Spectres. The former are first-in, first-out redshirt troopers, but the latter arrive alongside Titan deployments, and are somewhat more hazardous and much harder to kill. Using a Data Knife, human players can hack enemy Spectres and reprogram them to switch teams. Remember, loyalty and conviction are only as strong as Boolean values, and that's why AI soldiers will probably never be a real thing.

It's basically Weyland Yutani versus the Browncoats [*Ooh, an Alien and Firefly reference in one – nice! Ed*], but with huge robots added to keep things interesting.

Full disclosure first, then – *Titanfall* has occupied the prestigious #1 position on my "Most Anticipated Shoot Things With Guns Games" since it was revealed at E3 last year. I'm a shoot-things-with-guns kinda gamer, so I suppose it makes an obvious sort of sense, but in a genre currently dominated by copy-pasted military FPS clones set in Middle Russiastan, *Titanfall* is something special. And with more than 75 awards on Respawn Entertainment's office shelf before the game's even launched, there are already loads of reasons to be excited.



ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

There are three confirmed Pilot classes for now, catering to three distinctive FPS play styles – mid-range Assault, long-range, and the requisite shotgun-toting Close-Quarters Battle (QCB) guy. Each Pilot class has its own customisable gear loadout with multiple slots – including a cloaking ability and a unique anti-Titan weapon – and levelling up will unlock new things to make a mess with.

Equipped with jetpacks for double-jumps, vertical manoeuvring, and free-running to maximise mobility and maintain momentum, Pilots are much more versatile than your standard infantry grunts, though, and environmental obstacles – walls, rooftops, other players' startled faces – are quickly turned into strategic opportunities. In fact, Respawn is already on record saying that levels have been specifically designed to be "exploration-friendly", with no areas off-limits to players. That's assuming you can stay alive long enough to get where you want to go, which is another matter altogether when Titans start dropping in.

After experimenting with different numbers, Respawn Entertainment finally decided to go with two teams of six human players, plus an additional 12 AI-controlled characters on each side, totalling up to 48 competitors per match. Responding to criticism, Respawn defended the decision saying simply that six on six was the "most fun".



ROCK 'EM, SOCK 'EM ROBOTS

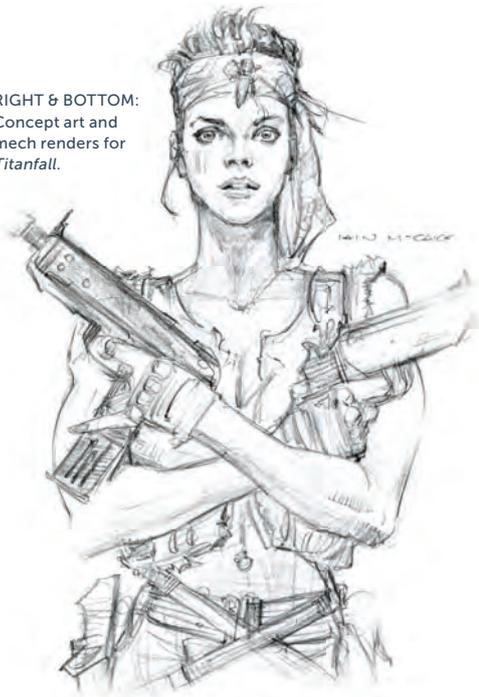
You get a giant robot! *You* get a giant robot! Everybody gets a giant robot! Each player has their own Titan timer that ticks away the seconds until they can call in their own mega fighting machine, and that timer can be reduced by performing specific actions like killing enemies or completing mission objectives. Once your timer reaches zero, your Titan will be dropped onto the battlefield by orbital deployment platforms whenever you're ready for it. And it'll sit there, waiting for you to jump inside and assume control.

You'll also be able to choose between three different Titan classes – the slow-moving, heavy-hitting Ogre; the recon bot Stryder, built for speed; and the multi-purpose Atlas, which is somewhere in between. Titan gear includes a Vortex Blocker, a kind of stasis field

that intercepts and suspends incoming projectiles (including regular bullets), and then reflects them back at the enemy, and an electrically-charged smoke screen that zaps any Pilot stupid enough to get too close.

If you don't like handling heavy machinery, Titans can also be set to guard mode and will follow you around, providing backup and extra firepower. Standing at about five metres tall, a Titan also makes pretty effective mobile cover for you and your teammates, or even a convenient diversion for enemies. Hey, it's not like it has feelings. And to ensure that the Titans aren't too overpowered, certain areas of the maps can't be accessed by the hulking behemoths – you'll have to decide if it's worth abandoning your mech to enter those areas on foot (or in flight, as it were).

RIGHT & BOTTOM:
Concept art and
mech renders for
Titanfall.



BURN, BABY, BURN

At the end of every match, players are awarded a number of so-called "Burn Cards" for completing challenges. These are like supplementary one-shot perks that you can equip in a pre-game lobby (up to three, depending on your level), and choose to add to your loadout before respawning. The card will remain active only until the next time you're killed – so if you're killed instantly, boo for you and better luck next-next time. Confirmed Burn Cards so far include:

Amped Mag Launcher: This replaces your usual anti-Titan weapon with a high-capacity Mag Launcher that fires multiple explosive rounds. Just like Grandpappy had on the farm.

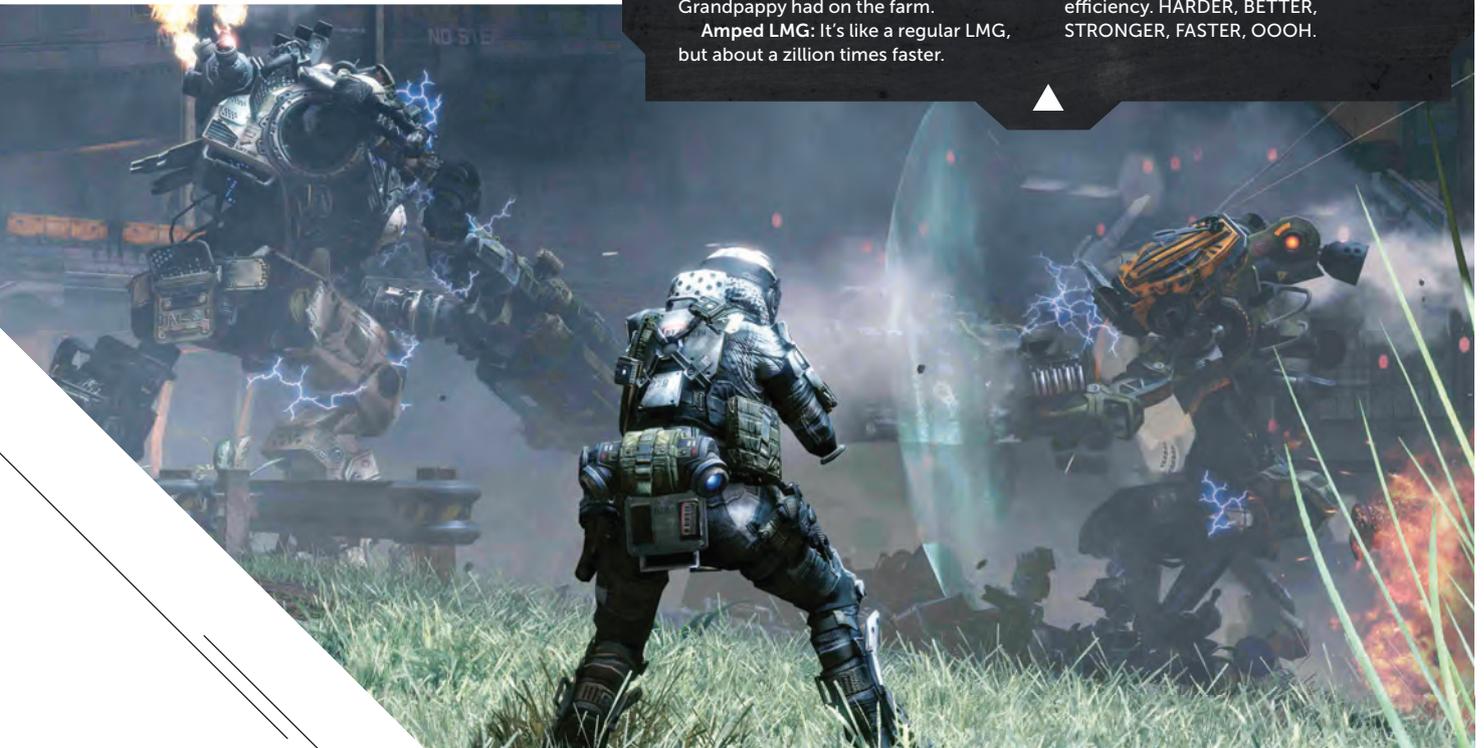
Amped LMG: It's like a regular LMG, but about a zillion times faster.

Decisive Action: Time is money, or – in *Titanfall*, anyway – the wait before you can get your mech o' murder. With this Burn Card, that wait is reduced by 40 seconds.

Prosthetic Legs: Increased movement speed means increased frag speed. At least in theory.

Pull Rank: Who wants to wait 40 seconds less with a Decisive Action Burn Card when they can wait 80 seconds less instead with a Pull Rank Burn Card? Exactly nobody, that's who.

Super Charger: Your Titan comes loaded with a pre-charged Titan Core ability for maximum battlefield efficiency. HARDER, BETTER, STRONGER, FASTER, OOOH.



For starters, Respawn has decided to dump the otherwise obligatory (and often superfluous) single-player campaign and instead focus on making an online-only multiplayer game. The emphasis here is on "focus" – and with a bunch of ex-Infinity Ward staffers (including founder Vince Zampella) on the team, you know *Titanfall* has had the best of the *Call of Duty* series backing it up from the get-go.

The developer has, however, created a "single-player feeling world" in the game, adding drama with a narrative wrapper throughout multiplayer missions. That includes prologue and epilogue sequences, set piece moments, AI-controlled NPCs supporting your team, contextual comms chatter and status updates, and more. It's everything you love about single-player campaigns, now in multiplayer. *And now also with 100% more jetpacks.*



READY, FIGHT

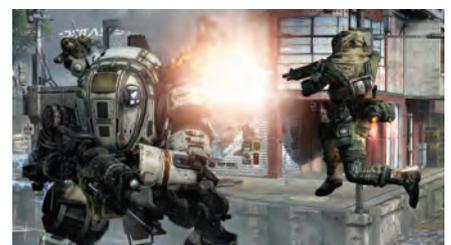
In keeping with an ongoing trend of things happening in threes, there are at least three confirmed multiplayer modes in *Titanfall*. First up, Attrition is the prerequisite standard, kill 'em 'til they're dead team deathmatch, because everybody loves team deathmatch and a game without team deathmatch wouldn't be a proper game. With the mix of human players and AI-controlled NPCs, however, points are awarded on a scale with AI kills on the bottom and Titan kills on top. Go for the Titan every time, boys and girls.

Next, Hardpoint Domination has teams squabbling over three preset "hardpoints" on the map, scoring for each zone captured and held over time. You know how this one works.

Finally – so to speak – Last Titan Standing starts every player in a Titan, and whoever manages to maintain body integrity the longest wins the game. No respawns or replacement Titans allowed, just like real life, although you can eject from a Titan and hide behind a crate somewhere if you want to play hard to get.

There's been a lot of talk lately about next-gen gaming (which, with the launch of both the PS4 and Xbox One already last year's history, is technically now-gen [We haven't all imported Xbox Ones, you know. Ed]), but *Titanfall* is one of the first games that really fits the part. It's not just the ultra-buffered giga-pixel visuals (or whatever), mind you, but much more significantly it's also an entirely new game where everybody starts off at the bottom. Next to annual iterations of the exact same *Call of Battlefield: The One with the Snipers*, that's something quite extraordinary. I don't want to suggest that Respawn has "reinvented" the genre, but oh, I sort of just did. **NAG**

- Azimuth



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Reviews Intro

They say everything around us, including the atoms in our bodies comes from star dust. Reviewer star dust comes from one of the dirtier corners of the cosmos. Meet your reviewers.

What entertainment thing/franchise/idea in any medium needs to be a game right now and what genre and why. Go, quick – think!



RedTide

Get ready for reality paparazzi simulator. It would be a little bit like GTA but all you'll ever be armed with is an ever increasing range of cameras, high power lenses and camera drones and freelance pay-outs. You'd follow the in-game news and entertainment channels and then go stalking celebrities looking for the ultimate up-skirt shots.*



Miktar

There's a manga called *Hunter x Hunter* that's been going since 1998. The premise and setting would be amazing for an MMO or even just a straight-up RPG. The series is practically designed like one already, with interesting types of magic, a vast world to explore, and likeable characters.



Azimuth

Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series adapted as an open-world, third-person co-op adventure/shooter, set prior to or concurrently with the novels. This is the only correct answer.



Mikit0707

Pacific Rim! A third-person action/fighting game using the Frostbite engine for incredible environment destruction. Game will play out a lot like *Shadow of the Colossus* in that it'll essentially be a series of boss fights. Maybe throw in some *Mass Effect* styled character development and conversations when not piloting Jaegers.



GeometriX

An *Always Sunny in Philadelphia* point-and-click adventure game. Swap between characters like *Day of the Tentacle*, trying to accomplish seemingly simple tasks in the most bizarre way possible. Charlie occasionally chooses random dialogue options and there's nothing you can do to stop him. Wildcard!



Barkskin

That's a tough one, but if you handed me a worthy *Evil Genius* sequel masquerading as *Despicable Me: The Minion Management Game*, I'd weep joyous tears for at least 24 hours.

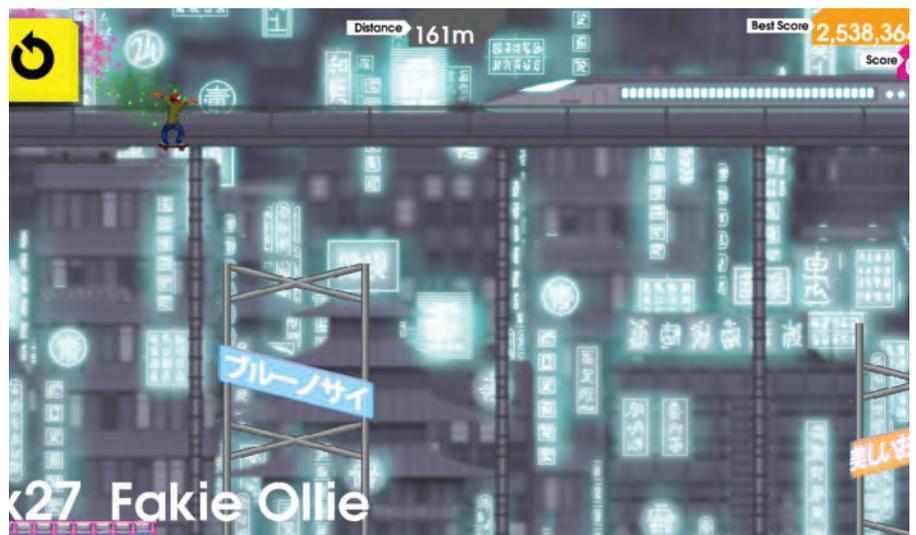
*Michael hasn't played *GTA V*, so when I told him you can actually do this in the game he was quite surprised. Spooky! Ed

Mini reviews

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

OLLIOLLI

What we have here is a side-scrolling 2D skateboarding game that relies on dexterous timing, a little muscle memory and plenty of patience. It's a decent stab at the somewhat neglected skateboarding genre, but the game feels like it'd be a little more at home on a mobile phone than the powerful and dynamic Vita. For control you only use the shoulder buttons, X and the left analogue stick; combinations of these and good timing will see you pulling off anything from a salad grind to a 360 flip. Players use the analogue stick to launch a trick and then the X button to time the landing; grinding is handled by pulling down on the stick when you're above a rail or other suitable surface. It's entirely possible to break all the bones in your body by not tricking over stairs and similar obstacles, and making contact means an instant restart. Graphically the game barely passes on the Vita and definitely looks more like a mobile game; it is however functional and moves at a decent speed – perfect for the skateboarding experience. If you're craving any skateboarding gap filler



or just enjoy this kind of controlled falling in your games, *OlliOlli* has heaps of playability and even features a Daily Grind where you get the a chance to set world leading high score.

81

“Dane, you’re very handsome.”

- Michael

“That’s not how this goes.”

- Dane



SAVAGE

A movie adaptation game that’s actually good. Maybe *Man of Steel*, or Michael Bay’s *Transformers*, you know there’ll be explosions and mass destruction in either of those.



ShockG

There needs to be a game/simulation where you simulate running a game publishing company in the current climate across multiple platforms. It’s fairly obvious how the game would critique itself indirectly and on a larger scale its performance in real life would determine how realistic its simulation model is.

REVIEW SCORES GUIDELINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

home_coded

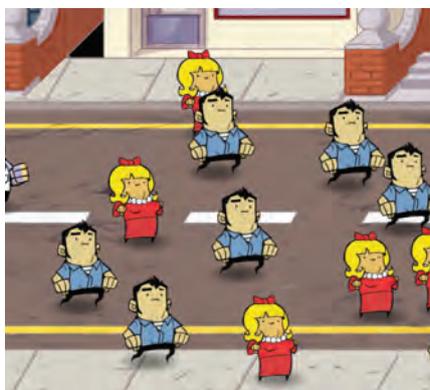
Exposure for South African indie developers...

Global Game Jam

4 8 hours, one big room, lots of PCs, discussions, songs, huddles, cheers of joy and tears of anguish. Game jams require a very special, dedicated sort of person, but when you leave that venue with a completed game, you can be proud of your accomplishments. That’s what happened between the 24th and 26th of January in three official Global Game Jam venues around South Africa, comprising 126 participants who collectively produced 28 games. Globally, the jam saw over 23,000 game creators come together for one weekend.

Our local events, organised by Make Games SA, produced a number of high-quality (but obviously quite simple, given the time limit (that’s half the fun)) games from the mysterious and thought-provoking theme of “we don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are”. An interesting theme, for sure, one that can be interpreted in a number of ways without dictating gameplay in any real way.

It’d take the next ten pages to cover all the games submitted, so instead we’ll highlight just a few.



Fist of Patience, from Free Lives’ Evan Greenwood, is a side-scrolling anti-brawler in which you’re tasked to get bread from a store, but with so many people in your way you might be tempted to simply punch your way through. It’s like, meta... man.

Echo: A Journey Within, Without presents the player as a blind character, forced to use echo-location to navigate a hostile world, consuming some creatures



and avoiding others. It’s suffocating and a little anxiety-inducing, yet oddly peaceful at the same time.

Under a Glass Bell, from QCF’s Rodain Joubert, is a four-player, competitive co-op, room escape game (yup) in which players cannot communicate directly but must work together to choose two players to die, and two to live. It’s a great way to make new friends and enemies!



PLATFORMS

360 / PC / PS3

REVIEWED ON

360

GENRE

Action adventure

AGE RESTRICTION

18

MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

None

DEVELOPER

Ubisoft Sofia

WEBSITE

www.assassinscreed.ubi.com

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR

XBL / Steam / PSN

Reviewed

Assassin's Creed: Liberation HD

The little AC that could

It was inevitable that Ubisoft would port the PlayStation Vita exclusive *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation* to platforms with a wider install base. Rebranded *Assassin's Creed: Liberation HD*, this is exactly the same game that graced the PSV in 2012, albeit with upgraded textures and support for higher resolutions.

The game's inherent portable design is apparent, but not in a bad way: *Liberation HD* is still a very good looking game for one that initially hit a handheld platform. The mission structure remains intact, which means the typical, lengthy *Assassin's Creed* Memory Sequences are further broken up into numerous bite-sized missions that last a few minutes. That doesn't translate into a short game; in fact I spent a good 20+ hours on *Liberation HD*, and I still have a couple of side quests and collectibles to mop up.

Liberation follows the exploits of Aveline de Grandpré, the first female assassin that the series has seen in its seven year tenure. She is one of the franchise's more interesting protagonists and brings to the table new

mechanics unique to her particular outing. As a young woman in mid-eighteenth century New Orleans, Aveline is able to exploit the societal *status quo* by adopting three different personas when needed: the assassin persona, the lady persona and the slave persona. Each persona brings with it distinct advantages and disadvantages, and you'll be switching between them in order to progress through the narrative. At times it's superficial, but it serves the purpose of mixing up the traditional *Assassin's Creed* formula.

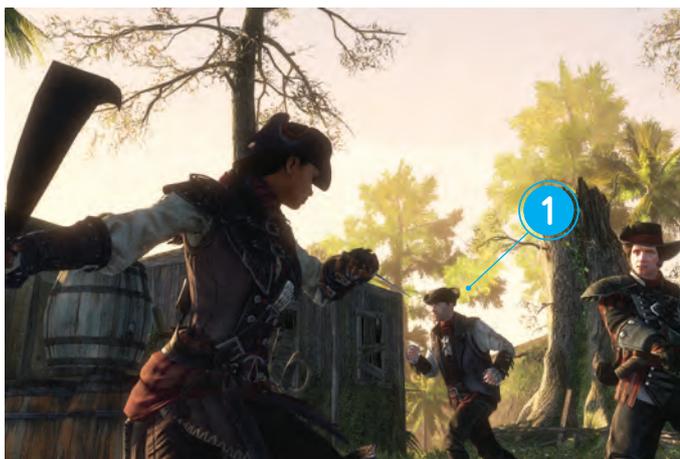
Liberation takes place across two large areas and two smaller areas that act as mission-specific locales. The main areas are New Orleans and its swampy, bayou outskirts. The latter is an unusual location for the series and brings with it some interesting terrain for free-running despite the *Assassin's Creed III* DNA peeking through. It does, however, get tedious when you miss jumps and end up wading or swimming through a large body of water.

The game is presented as an Abstergo Entertainment release; that means there isn't any present day gameplay in *Liberation*. That element of Ubisoft's series is woven into the game in a very clever way that I won't spoil here. Suffice it to say that the method does a good job of keeping you the player as part of the extended game world's fiction.

Assassin's Creed: Liberation HD is a solid entry into the series. Aveline makes for an interesting character in one of the more personal plotlines the franchise has seen. The PlayStation Vita isn't exactly a household item, and it would have been a shame to limit the game's audience – this is an *Assassin's Creed* that is worthy of your attention. **NAG**
- Mikit0707



1 *Liberation* integrated the PSV's touchscreen by introducing the "chain kill", which allows Aveline to dispatch multiple enemies at once. This is perhaps the least impressive element of the original that has made the jump.



80 What started out as a PlayStation Vita exclusive has been given a facelift and brought to bigger platforms. *Liberation* is a very capable *Assassin's Creed* game and if you're a fan of Ubisoft's franchise then there's no going wrong here. At times it's a little curt, but it's still a very enjoyable romp from start to finish.

PLUS

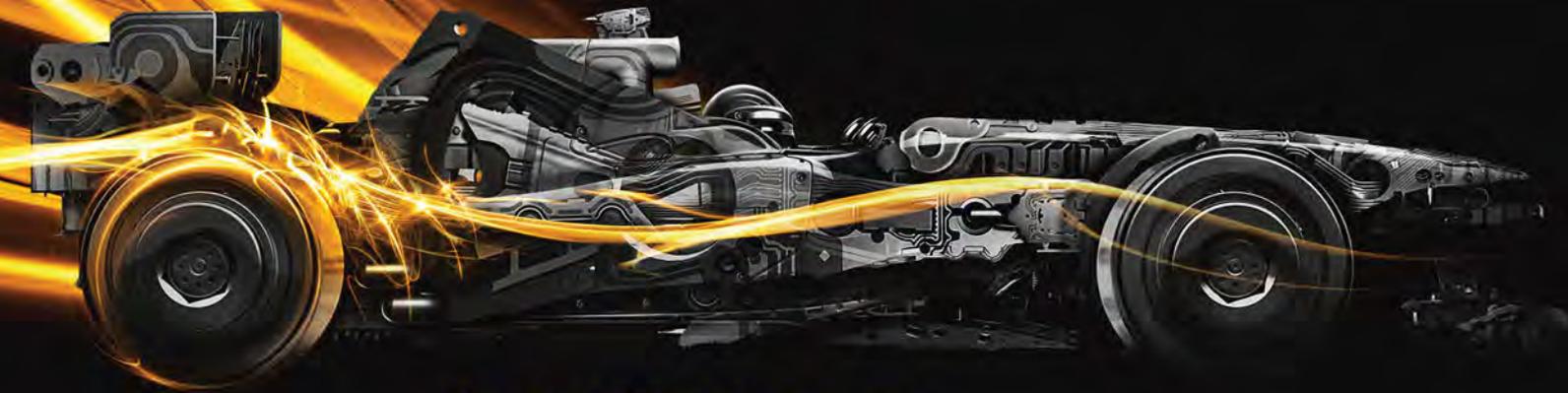
Great mission variety / Some truly memorable characters / Bang for your buck / Very good writing

MINUS

Bad collision detection / Some dull side missions / Boring ship trading management / Sporadic animation glitches

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2178-800033-A00 Nov 2013



Reviewed

Bravely Default

Final Fantasy returns

PLATFORMS
3DS
REVIEWED ON
3DS
GENRE

Japanese role-playing game

AGE RESTRICTION
12

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None

Online
None

DEVELOPER
Silicon Studio / Square Enix

WEBSITE
bravelydefault.nintendo.com

PUBLISHER
Square Enix

DISTRIBUTOR
Nintendo

The original blueprint for the Japanese role-playing game didn't originate in Japan. In the early 1980s, young game designer Yuji Horii took the turn-based battle system from *Wizardry* and combined it with the overworld design of *Ultima*. The result was *Dragon Quest*, a series that would inspire and shape a genre, which would come to include *Final Fantasy*. Fast forward a few decades and, in spite of the series' immense success, even the *Final Fantasy* template isn't followed very much anymore. Not even by *Final Fantasy* (see: *Lightning Returns*). The genre has changed much, yet is often perceived as being formulaic.

Popular gaming culture hasn't really caught up to the fact that role-playing games by Japanese developers are now as varied as anything out of the West. *Dark Souls*, being a good example. It's now to the point where

the "*Final Fantasy*" stereotype no longer has to be a negative cliché. The linear, character-driven role-playing focused on story and a strategic battle system is at this point just one flavour of RPG. And it doesn't get more flavourful than *Bravely Default*. The game structure is uncomplicated. You manage a party of four heroes, exploring the overworld and dungeons, completing quests and following the story. Your heroes can learn different "Jobs" that change the skills at their disposal. Monster encounters are random, but if you'd rather not be attacked you can lower the Encounter Rate. This stunts your growth however, as you gain less experience.

When still early in development, *Bravely Default* was to be a spiritual successor to *Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light*. The team opted for creating a new property instead, the freedom to experiment resulted in the game's Brave/Default combat system. A simple idea that simultaneously reinvigorates yet stays true to the roots of the turn-based combat the genre is known for. During your turn in battle, the menu-driven interface lets you choose which attacks to make, spells to cast, or if you want to use items. Your actions play out, then the enemy takes a turn. Or, you could "Brave", which lets you "borrow" up to four future turns. If you're confident in the outcome, Brave speeds things along dramatically, removing a lot of tedium. But fail to kill the monsters, and they'll get four uncontested turns. You can "Default" instead, skipping a turn to just defend, banking that turn for future use. It's a good risk/reward system that really impacts the nature of battles.

Beyond that, unique touches abound: there's a time-based village building sim; you can summon a friend's heroes to help; you can customize your special attacks. Straightforward by design, *Bravely Default* emphasizes a charming story, cute characters, and engaging combat. **NAG**

- Miktar

90 Once a staple, this particular flavour of character-driven, story-focused role-playing game is rare these days, even from Square Enix themselves.

Bravely Default manages to be "classical", staying true to the origins of its genre, but tells it in a contemporary voice that brings out the best in this type of game.

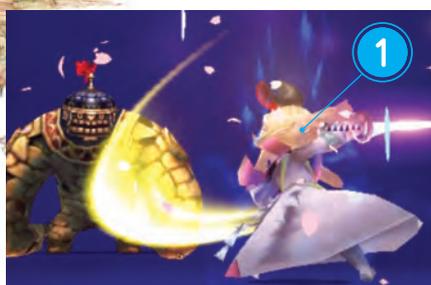
PLUS

Wonderful environments / Lush orchestrated music / Likeable characters

MINUS

Very traditional / Only four party members

1 While there's no visible armour pieces beyond the type of weapon a character has, each Job (class) has a unique outfit for easy identification.



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PLATFORMS
PC

REVIEWED ON
PC

GENRE
Role-playing game

AGE RESTRICTION
16

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
None

DEVELOPER
Limbic Entertainment

WEBSITE
might-and-magic.ubi.com

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

Reviewed

Might & Magic X: Legacy

Ghosts of yesteryear



1 Your party of four adventurers can be custom built from a selection of four races, each offering three character classes – or you can choose a pre-built party.



Hands up those of you who remember the original *Might & Magic* series. No, not *Heroes of Might & Magic* or *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic* or *Spin-Off of Might & Magic XIV: The Magicking* – I'm talking about the original, tile-based role-playing games. I don't blame you if your hand's not presently stretched upwards. I can barely remember them either, because the mid-'90s were a long time ago, and that was really when the *Might & Magic* RPGs shined brightest before fading into relative obscurity in later years. Now, 12 years after the series' last release and perhaps spurred on by the well-deserved popularity of similarly tile-based dungeon crawler *Legend of Grimrock*, Ubisoft's seen fit to revive this venerable series. And while it's hampered by a shaky start that may put people off long before they ever get to the real meat of the game, stick with it and you'll find that it's actually a lovingly crafted ode to a lost era of computer role-playing games.

But! First you've got to get through the chore of a starting area and overlook the game's unattractive overall presentation. From the off it's clear that, despite mighty Ubisoft serving as publisher, *Legacy* has been made on a strict budget. Speech is sparsely voice acted, and when it is you'll quickly find

yourself wishing that it wasn't. The party of four adventurers you're guiding through this fantasy realm insists on spouting inane, repetitive garbage at every opportunity, and it grows tiresome pretty much the moment it starts. Almost every cardboard NPC you meet fires off meaningless, uninteresting world lore. The visuals, while functional, aren't exactly eye-catching. The starting town and its surrounds are mighty restrictive, and the quests and combat are initially oppressively dull.

Gradually, as you complete quests and your characters grow stronger, *Legacy's* world carefully broadens its boundaries, and at some point the game suddenly morphs into an addictively rewarding loop of exploration and advancement. Each member of your party behaves differently in their skill set and attributes, and prudently managing their level gains to build the strongest possible company of adventurers is nicely gratifying. It's an intensely unforgiving game, making you work hard for every bit of newly explored ground.

The tile-based movement is quietly tactical, and you've got to watch your step to ensure that you don't abruptly amble into a space on the movement grid that alerts more enemies to your presence than you can handle. Combat is riveting because every victory is hard-won, and you'll often find yourself barely scraping through encounters. New areas are cordoned off by the toughest enemies, but it's a good feeling knowing that eventually you'll be powerful enough to defeat them and progress to new zones. There's a distinct appreciation for the retro approach to role-playing shown in *Legacy's* design, and while its plodding, turn-based attitude may not appeal to fans of more cinematic, action-packed contemporary RPG mechanisms, it'll have huge appeal to fans of this style of gameplay or anyone looking for something a bit different. **NAG**

- Barksin

70 It's pretty awful at first impressions, but *Might & Magic X: Legacy* slowly transforms into a wonderfully addictive role-playing romp that's firmly fixated on scratching that old-school itch. It may seem a bit pedantic compared to modern RPGs, but it's nonetheless highly recommended for anyone who enjoys this type of tactical adventuring experience.

PLUS
Gameplay eventually becomes compelling / Satisfying retro flavour

MINUS
Really slow start / Budget presentation



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OPINIONS, FEATURES, PREVIEWS

PLATFORMS
PC
REVIEWED ON
PC
GENRE

Point-and-click adventure

AGE RESTRICTION
TBA

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None

Online
None

DEVELOPER
Double Fine Productions

WEBSITE
www.doublefine.com

PUBLISHER
Double Fine Productions

DISTRIBUTOR
Steam

Reviewed

Broken Age (Act 1)

We've only just begun

Here it is: the legendary Tim Schafer's return to the point-and-click adventure genre. It's even more than that, though: *Broken Age* was the game that raised Kickstarter to the next level; it told the world that the game industry is ready for change. With all that pressure to perform, Double Fine made a call late last year to split *Broken Age* into two acts – one now, and one in a few months. It was a money thing, a time thing, a "there was simply no other way of doing it" thing. What this means is that right now you're reading a review of what amounts to little more than an extended demo – a polished proof-of-concept that represents maybe half of the total game. If you buy Act 1 now, you get Act 2 when it's available at no extra cost.

Broken Age tells two stories: one of a young village girl who is to be sacrificed to the demon god Mog Chothra; the other of a young boy who is trapped aboard a space ship in search of a new home. You're free to switch between the characters as desired, which is handy if you get stuck on a puzzle and need a fresh perspective to help jog the old noodle into action. Not that this is likely to happen too often: if you're at all familiar with classic adventure games you'll likely find most of the puzzles to be pretty straightforward. Almost everything can be solved by following logical steps, grinding dialogue tree options or simply item-mashing until you get a result. And most of the time, the item usage is logical – there's not much rubber chicken pulley stuff here.

But that's *Broken Age's* only significant issue – and it might not even be considered a problem if you're willing to let your problem-solving brain take the back seat. Everything else about this experience is so utterly charming that any person with even the tiniest of souls will find themselves overwhelmed by the artistic achievements the game champions in place of its technical ones. The writing is witty; the artwork is unique, vibrant and mostly well executed (a few low-res background images and lazy animations do pop up occasionally, but many of these were fixed with a large day one patch); the voice acting is near perfect. No doubt the experienced cast, including Elijah Wood, Jack Black, Masasa Moyo and Wil Wheaton, has much to do with this.

Putting a score on this page would be wrong. Without an option to buy the acts separately, the game that you can buy right now is simply not yet complete. But what is there right now is a joy to play. If you'd like to imagine an 85 or so, go right ahead, but let's take a moment to exercise a little patience and wait for the concluding act to be released while we all figure out this strange new age of gaming (!) together. **NAG**
- GeometriX

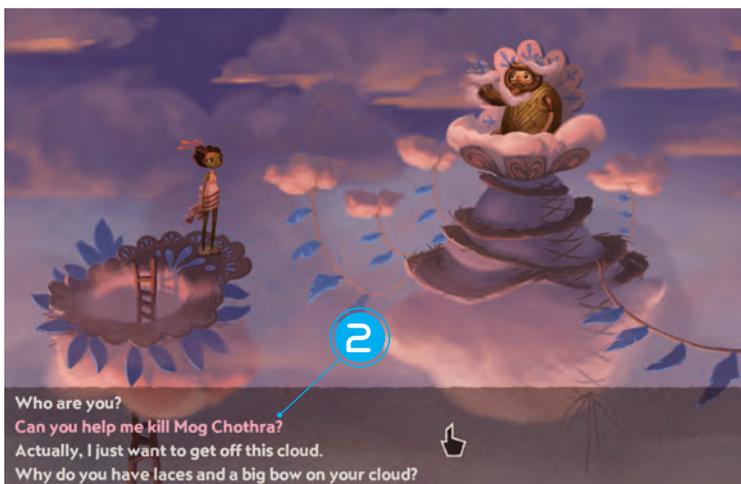
1 Despite being comprised of entirely 2D assets, the environments in *Broken Age* feel incredibly alive thanks to the many animations, particle effects and parallax backgrounds strewn about.

1



2 There's an impressive amount of voice work on offer; even some of the most arbitrary item combinations you might try will reward the player with an amusing response from the character.

2



A short but incredibly sweet taster. The first act of *Broken Age* shows plenty of promise, but we'll reserve final judgement until the second half

comes along and punches us in the face with more challenging gameplay and a conclusion to what looks set to be an incredible tale.

PLUS

Brilliant artwork / Great writing and voice talent / That cliff-hanger ending!

MINUS

Puzzles are too easy / It's not a full game yet

PLATFORMS

Android / iOS

REVIEWED ON

Android

GENRE

Platformer

AGE RESTRICTION

TBA

MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

None

DEVELOPER

Psyop / Against
Malaria Foundation

WEBSITE

www.psyop.tv

PUBLISHER

Psyop / Against
Malaria Foundation

DISTRIBUTOR

Google Play /
Apple App Store

Reviewed

Nightmare: Malaria

Get your blood boiling in this nightmarishly-hard platformer

Malaria remains a serious problem throughout the world, despite the fact that it is easy to treat with proper prevention and medicine. In an attempt to raise awareness of the disease and promote charities that combat it, developers Psyop have released this Malaria-themed game as a free download. Good intentions aside, is it fun to play?

The game casts players as a little girl whose sleep quickly devolves into a nightmare and she becomes trapped within her own body. Her blood vessels and brain are host to all manner of hostiles, and it's up to the player to navigate her to safety while collecting her teddy bears.

This title is, in a word, beautiful. Bright, attractive colours and dark shades are used masterfully to create a haunting, foreboding atmosphere. Creepy ambient music sets the tone even further, and exploring a stylized body is oddly enthralling without giving off a sense of squeamishness.

In-between levels, and when you die, you'll be treated to morbid tidbits of Malaria-related trivia appeals to donation. Unfortunately, dying seems to occur entirely too often [*Irony, maybe? Ed*]: slippery controls ensure that the experience is more frustrating than it should be. High difficulty I don't mind, but it shouldn't be induced artificially. Look at *Super Meat Boy* – it was tough but a joy to play because the control scheme was spot-on.

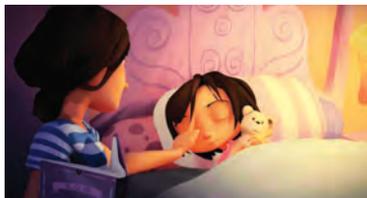
Nightmare: Malaria is a fantastic-looking game wrapped within an important message, but it comes recommended only for those looking for a solid challenge and anybody who may be interested in helping a charity.

NAG

- Delano



➤ Now this adds a whole new meaning to "bloody hell".



Pretty visuals and good intentions can't hide this game's high difficulty and wonky controls.

PLUS

Beautiful visuals / Challenging

MINUS

Slippery controls / Can get frustrating

*Whatever your
flavour we've
got you covered*



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Digital

www.zinio.com/NAG

PLATFORMS
PC
REVIEWED ON
PC
GENRE

Tactical role-playing game

AGE RESTRICTION
TBA

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None

Online
None

DEVELOPER
Stoic

WEBSITE
www.stoicstudio.com

PUBLISHER
Stoic

DISTRIBUTOR
Steam

Reviewed

The Banner Saga

Not Candy Crush Saga, in case you were confused

Sooner or later, it was going to happen. I mean, we'd been on the road for months already, and at every burnt-out village, at every forsaken Godstone, our caravan was joined by clanspeople desperate to escape the oncoming and inexorable legions of Dredge, and certain death. And so, we ran out of food. As each night turned into a bitter dawn, we lost more men, women, and children, starved to death in the cold dark.

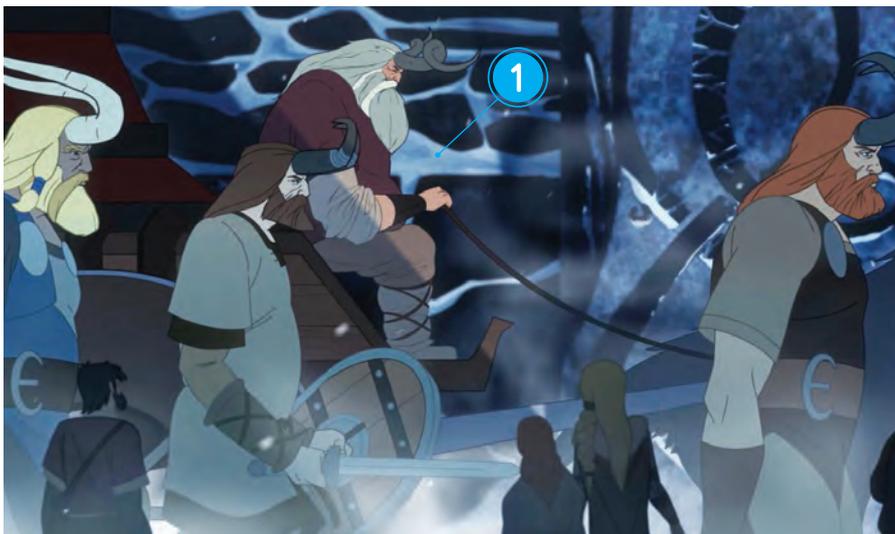
Except, it didn't matter. Their sudden absence had no discernible effect whatsoever on the game – and that lack of explanation or any real consequence is a persistent theme throughout *The Banner Saga*. In fact, even once we'd been entirely out of food for over a week, I was still getting random pop-up events that presumed we actually had any – food was being stolen, somehow, that didn't even exist. Perhaps it was a mass delusion brought on by fevered hunger, but... I don't think so.

After a mega-successful Kickstarter campaign (and a multiplayer-only version of the game, *Factions*), *The Banner Saga*



– a turn-based tactical RPG set in a world inspired by Norse mythology – is not exactly what I'd expected when I backed the project in 2012. One of the game's big marketing hooks was the importance of player decisions – a point reiterated on the launch screen, which promises that "the story in *The Banner Saga* changes based on the choices you make". But it doesn't *really*. See also: My decision to ignore the ongoing theft of supplies that weren't there in the first place. Apart from occasional "choices" like this one, the game is relentlessly linear.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, but the story exposition is also exceedingly over-complicated. For a game that spans just nine or ten hours, it features a bewildering number of characters whose significance to the plot is vague at best, and totally inexplicable at worst. Oh, you can add them to your ever-expanding roster of combatants, but it's not like most of them are anyone special – every character has only one extra ability apart from hitting stuff, and I didn't even use them that often because simply hitting stuff was usually more effective anyway. By the middle of the game already, every combat encounter had become the same sequence of hitting stuff, over and over – and from here, it was a tedious slog to the (completely unresolved) finish. **NAG**
- Azimuth



1 Maybe they ate the yellow snow.



65

With a classic, '80s Disney aesthetic that's quite unique in gaming, *The Banner Saga* is undeniably beautiful. But pretty looks can't save the game from the fundamentally flawed system underneath it. Hardcore turn-based tactics fans will probably love it despite the problems, but people looking for something truly epic are going to be disappointed.

PLUS

VIKINGS!! / Beautiful presentation / Something different

MINUS

Monotonous combat / Questionable design decisions

PLATFORMS

PC

REVIEWED ON

PC

GENRE

Action role-playing game

AGE RESTRICTION

7

MULTIPLAYER**Local**

4

Online

None

DEVELOPER

RobotLovesKitty

WEBSITE

www.robotloveskitty.com/LoD/

PUBLISHER

RobotLovesKitty

DISTRIBUTOR

Steam

Reviewed

Legend of Dungeon

All dungeon, no legend

Usually I'm all for indie games. But after some time with it, *Legend of Dungeon* leaves me feeling like the developers weren't all that interested in their own game, or they ran out of their Kickstarter funding too fast. It's decent, for what it is: a randomized dungeon romp for up to four players on the same PC, with nice real-time lighting and interesting weapons/magic. The music is well done, over 200 tracks that dynamically blend together based on what's going on. The pixel art pops out nicely due to the depth-mapping system they've got going, and each type of monster/boss requires slightly different strategies.

But there's no saving (coming soon says the developer), and if you're playing alone it's a little boring. The weirdness of the weapons/items can lead to screen-filling insanity. If you find a sword that summons skeletons each time you hit something, pretty soon you can barely find yourself in the mess. With four players, each with such weaponry, it can lead to issues. There's only one goal in *Legend of Dungeon*: go down, get the treasure, come back. No persistence whatsoever, which isn't really a negative, but it leaves the game very light on content. It feels unfinished, like a beta. It's also unclear if the developers are going to continue supporting it. **NAG**

- Miktar

1 The rooms you explore look great, but after a while they become a bit bland since not much changes from level to level.



65

There's a glut of indie-developed dungeon-centric games of late, practically a renaissance for the dungeon-crawling genre. While many attempt to refresh the themes or add something new, *Legend of Dungeon* takes a very basic idea and goes nowhere with it.

PLUS

Lovely visuals / Nice music / Fun with friends

MINUS

Flat gameplay / No online co-op / Gets boring fast

PLATFORMS

PS3 / 360 / PC

REVIEWED ON

PC

GENRE

Action hack-and-slash

AGE RESTRICTION

18

MULTIPLAYER**Local**

None

Online

None

DEVELOPER

Platinum Games

WEBSITE

www.metalgearsolid.com

PUBLISHER

Konami

DISTRIBUTOR

Sterkinekor Games

Reviewed

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance (PC port)

[CUTTING INTENSIFIES]

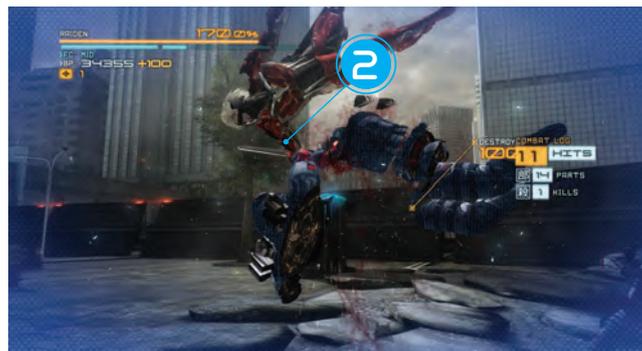
If you've ever played *Devil May Cry*, *Bayonetta*, *God Hand* or other games in this specific genre, then you'll understand *Metal Gear Rising*. The combat is incredibly well designed, it rewards thoughtful play and mastery with a true spectacle of flashy moves and high-scoring combination attacks. The "Zandatsu" system, in which you cut open your cyborg enemies exactly how you want and pull out their electrolytes, refills your health instantly. This lets you wade in deep, and if you're good, stay alive no matter what.

Once the dust settles and everyone around you is reduced to meaty chunks, there's the plot. An intentional trainwreck of bad dialogue, contrived situations, and characters that smirk so hard you'd think they developed new Smirk Technology just to accurately present such glorious goddamn smirking. It all combines into something you either *really* enjoy and laugh at, or something that grates on your nerves to the point of Quit > Uninstall. *Rising* does not take itself seriously, so I wouldn't recommend anyone playing it does either. And yet, in the middle of all the zany antics and stylish fighting, there is a little bit of heart to be found. While Platinum clearly mocks the source material, they do so lovingly and with a strong understanding of what makes *Metal Gear* the endearing franchise it has become. **NAG**

- Miktar



2 After an encounter, you get ranked, which earns you Battle Points. BP can be used to upgrade Raiden's weapons, buy new moves, and unlock outfits.



87

A glorious and intentional mockery of everything *Metal Gear*, *Rising* is a comedy only fans of the series will get, that just incidentally happens to feature one of the best, finely-tuned, combat systems found outside Platinum's other masterpiece, *Bayonetta*. Thanks to this PC version, now the hilarity and bloodshed can happen at 60fps.

PLUS

Fantastic combat system / Lots of replay value / Hilarious moments

MINUS

Steepish learning curve / Single playthrough is short / Large install due to HD cut-scenes

Guess what you'll find here?

Well, almost everything.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle



KOTOBUKIYA STREET FIGHTER BISHOUJO STATUE: CHUN-LI

Hang on, there's more to that name: Chun-Li has also been arranged by Shunya Yamashita. Isn't it a rule or something that we learn from an early age: to be suspicious of things with very long names trying to explain what they are? Anyway, this is Chun-Li from *Street Fighter*. The statue features no extras other than two transparent graphical discs for insertion in the base. The action pose is mostly likely her Hyakuretsukyaku signature move; and probably to the face of M. Bison. It's sturdy, well-made and stands at 24cm.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
RRP: R1,100

DONKEY KONG AND STAR WARS BACKPACKS

First up is the Super Mario Donkey Kong Plush backpack, it's officially licensed and in some places listed as something you'd take to a rave to keep your red bull and glow sticks in. Gamers fall into two distinct categories when it comes to publically showing their love for their hobby: subtle and not so much. Subtle includes things like caps and T-shirts and small logos on their lunch tins. Not so subtle includes things like this backpack. It's really only for show as the storage capacity is tiny and you'll battle to get anything more in there besides your energy drink and maybe a stick of gum. It's also not really for big adults as the straps don't extend that much. It's cute and fun and screams gaming in all directions.

The Star Wars backpack is the perfect subtle exclamation of your nerdy roots. This rather snappy looking carry-it all-features the imperial logo on the front and a small Star Wars logo on the strap (too bad if you're rebel scum). It has millions of pouches and zippers and places to put all sorts of things like your Lightsaber, thermal detonator and ewok brush. Show the love you geeks and get one of these.

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R470 (Donkey Kong), R995 (Star Wars)



PANDEMIC

Most board games like to reward players for being villains: robbing your friends blind with ridiculous trespassing fees or taking their whatsits just as they're about to get that thing that you just *know* will see them crowned winner and rub it in your stupid face for the rest of the evening. Gosh, friends can be asses. But this one's a little different. Pandemic, as you might guess from the name, is all about globe-trotting viruses and similar nasty things, and it's up to you and three others to put a stop to it. The game uses a number of rules to run itself at random, using cards and tokens to represent the global spread of mankind's demise. You'll have to research cures and attempt to control the spread of the pandemic, all while sharing information and generally being good allies.

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R535



BATMAN: HUSH

Hush is one of those comics that every person on the planet needs to read, even eleven years after its release. At least, that's what we were told by the people at Cosmic Comics, and, after demolishing this chunky graphic novel in a day (in the sense that it's unputdownable*, we didn't actually destroy it), we agree completely. *Batman: Hush* is a standalone story arc that sees Batman dealing with an enemy unlike any he's faced before. It's dark, moody and sombre – what you'd expect, really – and with the names Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee on the cover, you know it's a high-quality offering.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R299



*Yes, I used the word unputdownable. We had a discussion about it in the office and everyone thinks I'm mad for doing it but I'm a seatofthepants kinda guy. Ed.

MYSTERY MINIS

It says it all on the tin: mystery minis. Each box you buy is a mystery, so you never know what you're going to get. This is why it's important to make friends in life so you can swap the duplicates you will inevitably end up with. The four we have here are Domo DC, Disney, The Walking Dead and The Big Bang Theory. We got Amy Farrah Fowler in the Big Bang box so Dane was thrilled to death. He has a thing for... wait nobody needs to know about that. Sorry and LOL Dane. *[At Dane's request, I've been asked to mention that he has no idea where this came from and he's not sure if this is an insult or not. Ed.]* The minis feel solid and are heavy and Amy stands at 6.5cm as an example. There are plenty more in the range and you can go here for an idea of what to expect: www.funko.com. Thankfully on each box is a graphical list of what characters are available in that particular series so you freaky A-types out there have everything you need.

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R90 each



WORMS SUPER SHEEP PLUSH & WORM PLUSH

Where would Team17 Software be without their much loved but overly milked hermaphroditic annelid warfare simulator franchise? Well to be honest, not very far beyond the Commodore Amiga and *Alien Breed*. Back in the day they were dynamic and exciting and made some great original games, between that greatness and now they've focused all their guns, concrete donkeys and bazookas on the many, many versions of *Worms*. History lesson adjourned. These plush toys are officially licensed, collectible and very, very soft (well the sheep is, anyway). They come in different sizes and the two we're looking at here are classified as medium (at

about 16cm each). The worm is angry and carries a bazooka, and the sheep was flight tested in the office with varied and interesting results. Each throw saw the sheep tumbling through the air instead of gliding and upon impact there was – sadly – no explosion. If only they had a sound chip and a small speaker to bring them to life. They look like they could stand up to only a few washes, so keep them clean and don't give them to children – ever.

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R220 each



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TECH NEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

USB 3.1

USB 3.1 also known as SUPERSPEED+, is the successor to USB 3.0 which increases the signaling rate to 10Gb/s, double that of USB 3.0, and reduces line encoding overhead to just 3% by changing the scheme to 128b/132b. The USB 3.1 standard is backward compatible with USB 3.0 and USB 2.0. Using three power profiles of those defined in the USB power delivery specification, it lets devices with larger energy demands request higher currents and supply voltages from compliant hosts.

PCI EXPRESS 4.0

Based on copper connect technology, the PCIe 4.0 specification will supersede the existing PCIe 2.0 and 3.0 specifications enabling transfer speeds of 16GT/s per lane, and enhanced idle and active power optimizations. Compared to PCIe 3.0 it doubles the total performance from 128GT/s per 16X slot to 256GT/s.

DDR4

DDR4 is the successor to DDR3 and will be available on the desktop platforms beginning

with Intel's next X99 chipset for the Haswell-E CPUs. Specifications stipulate operating voltages between 1.05 and 1.2V. Initial speeds are said to be between 2,133MHz and 4,266MHz. DDR4 is developed to be more adaptable to mobile devices, thus it features more power saving technologies than previous DDR memory iterations through new command encoding schemes and calibration methods.

SATA EXPRESS

SATA Express provides multiple PCI Express lanes and two SATA 6Gbps ports, exposed through the same connector, allowing use of both PCI Express and SATA legacy storage devices. Exposed PCI Express lanes are providing a pure PCI Express connection to the storage device, without any additional layers of abstraction. As an additional benefit SATA express enables usage of multiple lanes for scaling up performance. For example, using two PCI Express 3.0 lanes provides close to 2GB/s bandwidth in comparison to the 0.6GB/s provided by the current SATA 6Gbps standard.

ASTRUM SYMPHONY BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

These portable speakers are great for listening to music from your phone, laptop or iPod. They connect via USB, AUX or Bluetooth 3.0 and give you 360° sound. www.astrum.co.za | R499



ICY DOCK EXTERNAL 3.5" SATA HARD DRIVE ENCLOSURE SUPERSPEED USB 3.0

A glossy ultra slim external aluminium HDD enclosure that has a hot swappable removable and interchangeable tray. www.frontosa.co.za | R899



DID YOU KNOW?

At the beginning of February AMD released their Catalyst 14.1 1.6 Beta drivers, which included the much anticipated Mantle API. The AMD

Mantle renderer for *Battlefield 4* was recently tested out by DICE to evaluate the performance difference between DirectX 11.1 and Mantle. Their three test-beds were entry-level gaming, mainstream gaming, and enthusiast gaming and they noted some interesting performance gains. Entry-level test-bed – 14% higher frame rates

- AMD A10-7850K APU
- Integrated Radeon R7 200 series GPU
- 1280 x 720 pixels resolution

Mainstream test-bed – 26% higher frame rates

- AMD FX-8350
- Radeon HD 7970
- 1920 x 1080 pixels resolution, with 1x MSAA and "Ultra" preset

Enthusiast test-bed – 58% higher frame rates

- Intel Core i7-3960X CPU
- Dual Radeon R9 290X (CrossFire) graphics
- 1920x1080 pixels resolution, with 4x MSAA and "Ultra" preset



75,000,000

BY THE NUMBERS

During day 1 of Valve's Steam Dev Days conference in January, the company revealed that Steam has now reached 75 million active monthly users. This number is up from 45 million in September 2013 and 65 million in October 2013.

Mosh Pit

RAIDMAX VORTEX GAMING CHASSIS

Features of this case includes support for 120mm radiators, removable plates for long VGA cards, and a special design side panel to allow for cable space management behind the motherboard. www.syntech.co.za | R499



ICY DOCK TRAY-LESS 3 IN 2 SATA BACKPLANE MODULE

If you need to put three 3.5" HDDs into two 5.25" device bays when building your next gaming rig, then the Icy Dock Tray-Less 3 in 2 SATA Backplane is what you need. It also sports two built-in USB 3.0 ports. www.frontosa.co.za | R1,455



ADATA PV100 POWER BANK

A portable, ultra-slim (8mm) and handy solution for charging all your mobile devices via microUSB. Charging is super quick thanks to the output of 2.1 amperes, so charging times will be cut in half. www.adata-group.com | R520



"By making TVs, Blu-ray DVD players and a wider range of gaming consoles available to our customers we are enabling them to stay on trend with the latest technology and move towards a more connected living experience which positions FNB as a lifestyle partner" "

Kartik Mistry, Head of Smart Devices at FNB Core Banking Solutions (CBS).

Qualifying FNB cheque account holders can pay off devices such as TVs, Blu-ray players and the PlayStation 4 over a 24 month period, with zero additional interest, fees or charges.

DREAMMACHINE

We may have promised several changes last month in the Dream Machine, but due to some delays in the product release schedules we were not able to feature that hardware in this issue. In the April issue however, we hope to have a new PSU, memory and possibly a new SSD drive courtesy of the OCZ Vector 150. Until then, do consider substituting some parts of the NAG Dream Machine for slightly cheaper alternatives, as the poor exchange rate has made these gaming rigs very expensive.



PSU
Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU
R3,999 / www.coolermaster.com



GRAPHICS
GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD
R11,799 / www.gigabyte.com



OS DRIVE
OCZ Vector 256GB SSD
R3,799 / www.ocz.com



STORAGE DRIVE
WD Black 4TB FZEX
R3,299 / www.wdc.com



CHASSIS
Corsair Obsidian 900D
R3,999 / www.corsair.com



DISPLAY
ASUS VG248QE
R6,099 / www.asus.com



KEYBOARD
GIGABYTE Aivia Osmium Mechanical Gaming Keyboard
R1,299 / www.gigabyte.com



COOLER
Cooler Master Nepton 280L
R1,499 / www.coolermaster.com



MOUSE
Razer Ouroboros
R1,399 / www.razerzone.com



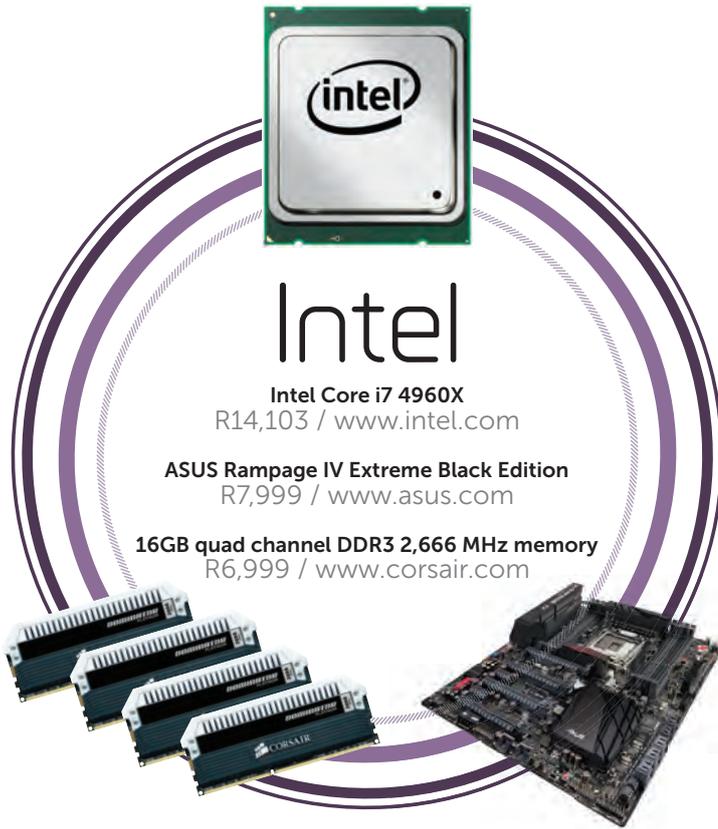
SOUND
Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,499 / www.soundblaster.com



HEADPHONES
Plantronics GameCom Commander
R4,569 / www.plantronics.com



MOUSE MAT
Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com



Intel

Intel Core i7 4960X
R14,103 / www.intel.com

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme Black Edition
R7,999 / www.asus.com

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

Intel Dream Machine:
R75,622



AMD

AMD FX 8350
R3,099 / www.amd.com

ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z
R3,999 / www.asus.com

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

AMD Dream Machine:
R58,618



HARDWIRED

Wasted opportunity

Valve's green light on several Steam Boxes has caused somewhat of a stir in the hardware industry. Many of the vendors I visit can in some way appreciate what the Steam Box is or, at the very least, are familiar with the word. This is a vast improvement from a year or two ago where I found myself greeted by blank stares and puzzled looks by uttering the word Steam. There's no need to go into how sad that was and remains so today, but I'm thinking that ignorance is what is once again undermining the industry.

“There is an opportunity for hardware vendors to propel themselves to the forefront of PC gaming where they boost their brand image along with their core business as well.”

PC component sales are not doing well or rather there are minimal to no gains at all for most vendors if they are lucky. Most are seeing decreases in revenue and are supposedly looking for new avenues to pick up the slack of this dwindling market. Much of the issue with the state of this industry has everything to do with the refusal of vendors to adapt to an ever-changing landscape and usage model. The Steam Box is a classic example where we find system integrators making Steam Boxes that cost \$2,500 USD or more. At this price it misses the entire point of a Steam Box and all it gives you is an expensive PC with a badge at most. There isn't anything wrong with a \$2,500 USD PC in itself, but I would perhaps recommend you build yourself such a PC or at the very least pick its specification and have it tailor made instead.

There is an opportunity for hardware vendors to propel themselves to the forefront of PC gaming where they boost their brand image along with their core business as well. There should be no Steam Box that retails for more than \$1,000 USD. You're competing with the PS3/Xbox 360 and more importantly the PS4 and Xbox One. All of these systems cost \$500 at the most and for your \$1,000 budget you could buy both and some games. You could spend all this money and have something to show for it. You could buy games, a subscription to the respective network services and most of all have a great time actually playing games. There's no reason then why anyone should spend more than twice that amount and end up with a PC and nothing else. This is especially valid if you already own a PC and were looking for something to sit beside your consoles in your living room. A PC built around the Corsair 900D or any such monstrosity does not belong in the lounge, even if it has a Steam Box label on it.

I hear many of these vendors saying it's up to the system integrators to build these as they don't have the infrastructure to take care of RMAs nor the factories to build complete systems. Failing to realize that they could contract out that work and it's a market that is waiting to be exploited, where there's plenty of money to be made for them. I do understand though that after decades spent competing for bottom dollar, many of these companies are just not suited to a changing environment. However, that is a lamentable excuse at best because it doesn't change the fact that there'll be one company that isn't in hardware. They will do this and makes loads of money from it and it will suddenly seem so obvious when it's far too late for anyone else.

- Neo Sibeko

The Lazy Gamer's Guide

WD Black²

Website www.wdc.com **RRP** R3,999

Let's face it, there are only so many things that you can do with a hard drive: storing stuff being the most typical. Okay, that's the *only* thing you can do with a hard drive, aside from disassembling it and attempting to MacGyver the bits into some sort of decorative piece. Either way, storage manufacturers know that their options are limited when it comes to designing new products, and it looks like WD has gone with the old "two heads are better than one" approach with their latest offering to keep things interesting.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As it goes, quite a bit: the "Black" moniker tells us that this is a high-speed product; the "2" refers to the fact that there are two separate drives built into one platform: a 120GB SSD, and a 1TB HDD.



UNLOCK THE POWER

Included with the Black² is a USB "key" that, when plugged into a PC, will direct you to a web page to download the required partition software. Why they couldn't just put the software on the flash drive is baffling, and the site requires a bit of hunting through to find the actual download link, but once you've got it installed you'll be able to access the HDD portion of the drive – it doesn't show up at all without the software.

COMPATIBILITY

With this being a bit of an off-the-beaten-path device, you should know that there are a few limitations in the way you can use it – the HDD portion is software-locked and that software only runs on Windows. If you're a Linux or Mac user, don't bother. You also can't use the drive in a RAID configuration. And, while it's been suggested that you don't merge the partitions into a single one, we did so and it seemed to work fine in our testing – which part of the drive exactly it was using is anyone's guess, but we'd assume that the first 120GB will sit on the SSD and the remaining 1TB goes on the platter-based segment.

TARGET MARKET

The WD Black² is pricey: you'll spend nearly double on this than you would on buying two separate drives (or an SSD and an external HDD), which severely limits the target market to those who own a laptop or compact desktop with tight internal space. You'll also need to have some sort of severe phobia when it comes to external storage. Still, if you can afford the Black², then it's a great product that is both slick and performs well enough, boasting read/write speeds actually in excess of their estimated maximums in our testing. Sequential read/write clocked in at 414/145 MB/s and 4K random pushed up to 32/101 MB/s.

TECHNICAL

SSD
120GB
Max transfer speed
350MB/s read /
140MB/s write
HDD
1TB
Warranty
Five years

SUMMARY

PROS

- Small form-factor
- Good performance

CONS

- Unconventional software lock
- Price
- Limited compatibility

ALTERNATIVES

- Separate SSD and HDD



EXTRAS

In addition to the partition software, WD also provides access to Acronis True Image to help you easily clone your old drive to the Black². This is made even easier thanks to the bundled external SATA-to-USB adaptor.

AMD A10 7850K APU

FEATURES

The new Kaveri based APUs have an even better IGP than the outgoing Richland APUs that powered the 6000 series APUs. With the addition of the Mantle API, the gaming performance could very well be even better than what entry level graphics cards from either NVIDIA or AMD can provide. Also worth noting is that because of the slight improvements in the IMC that officially supports 2,400MHz memory, you can build an overall faster system where that high speed memory won't go to waste. Not as important but working as a tick box feature, the FM2+ Kaveri APUs have native PCIe 3.0 support, something that isn't available on any AMD CPU thus far. This should make it a great candidate for Steam Box units and the like.

VALUE

Right now the AMD APU is just under R3,000

which isn't cheap but still cheaper than what the alternative AMD FX 8350 will cost you. If you don't already have the game, this APU also comes with *Battlefield 4*. If you consider that you don't need an additional GPU with this APU for basic gaming, then there are few products that can offer the value that the 7850K can for this price.

PERFORMANCE

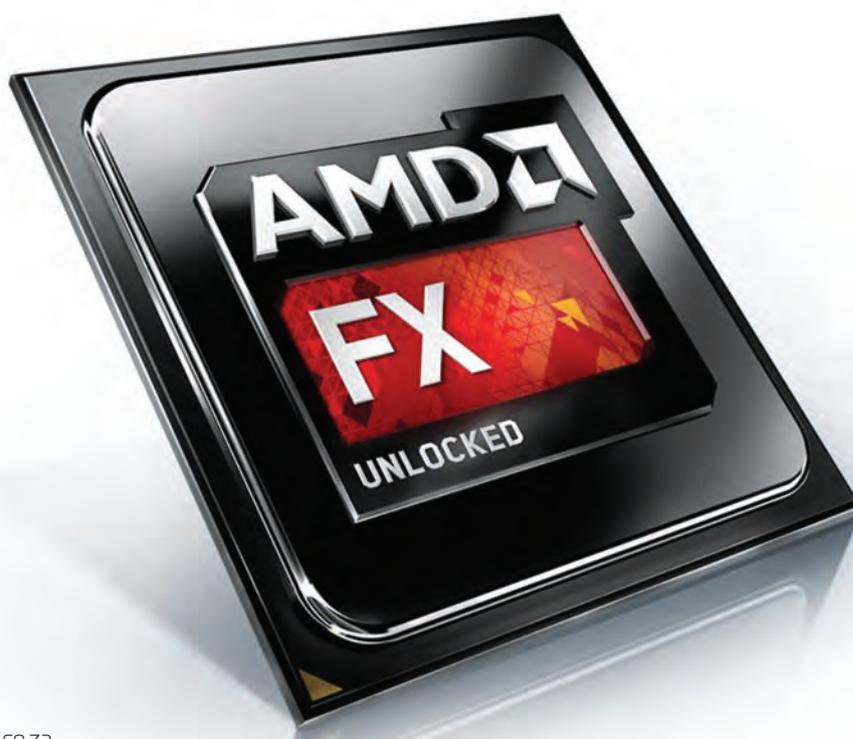
Based on the latest 28nm process and Steamroller cores, the A10 Kaveri based APUs, and in particular the 7850K, brings back the AMD family of processing cores to the levels we last witnessed with Thuban. Not particularly impressive given that we had this level of performance five years ago already, however it is worth noting that the APUs do not feature a 3rd level cache and have fewer computing threads available. Despite this,

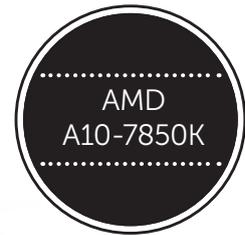
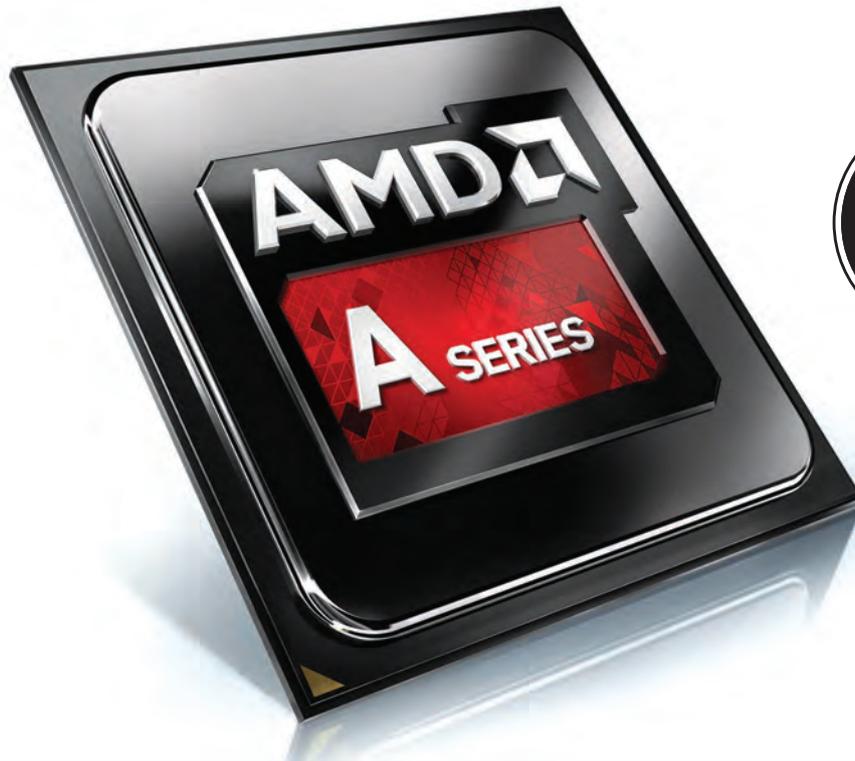
the 7850K matches the 1100T Phenom X6 in virtually every benchmark, but runs cooler and has more features. At 95W it's much cooler than the 220W FX 9590 which carries AMD's performance crown currently. More importantly for Kaveri though is the DirectX 11.2, Mantle and OpenGL 4.3 capable GPU which is the most advanced IGP available right now on the computing landscape. It is a good percentage faster than what Richland offered and certainly eclipses everything Intel has to offer on desktop or mobile platforms. This alone over and above what HSA allows in theory probably makes this AMD's most exciting product to date. Games actually work well with this IGP at 720p and some games such as *Battlefield 4* can be played at medium detail at 720p. Certainly something no other integrated solution can offer.

AMD A10 7850K APU

VS

AMD FX-9590 CPU





With AMD releasing the latest family of APUs, there is a real alternative architecture for users to pick from. Outright CPU performance isn't nearly as important as it used to be and it's put AMD in a unique position to offer incredible value and tangible performance at a fraction of the price. In light of this we decided to compare the latest AMD CPU against their APUs. Depending on your usage model you may find that you need the CPU power and thus forgo the APU, but for most users, the APU provides more than enough go to warrant a second look. This is our quick comparison of the two and should help you pick the right product for your needs.

AMD FX-9590 CPU

FEATURES

As result of using an older platform, the FX is locked to a chipset that only supports PCIe 2.0, USB 2.0 and SATA 6Gbps. Motherboard vendors use third party chips to address some or all of these issues with the chipset. Thus, care should be taken when selecting a motherboard for this CPU as you may find yourself with a motherboard that limits the performance of various components because it relies on the inherent 990FX chipset. On the up side, the Vishera CPU architecture has virtually all the instruction set support that Intel offers on their latest CPUs and in particular data encryption is incredibly fast on these CPUs. The IMC will support memory up to 2,400MHz unofficially, but we have seen speeds past 3GHz. For

normal users, 2,600MHz memory should be useable and provide some additional gains in performance.

VALUE

Retail pricing for the FX-9590 with the liquid cooler should be around R6,000 which makes it AMD's most expensive CPU right now. Moreover it places it in an unfavourable position when compared to what Intel offers for less money, so this is probably why it didn't sell well. Having said that, if you're a diehard AMD fan and looking for an upgrade to your existing FX-8350, this would be the most obvious choice.

PERFORMANCE

The FX-9590 is essentially a high binned or

a low leakage FX-8350 which we currently have in our Dream Machine. It is based on the very same 32nm Piledriver architecture and thus offers slightly lower IPC than (in the region of 10%) what the latest Kaveri based APU provide. However, because of the very high clock speed (up to 4.7GHz) the performance by and large is better than that offered by the APUs, especially if you're using a discrete graphics card. Outright computing performance is always going to be better on the FX-9590 than it is on the 7850K APU, but with that comes a 220W TDP which most CPU coolers (air based ones at least) may have a hard time coping with. If that's not a problem for you though, you'll not find better performance out of any other AMD CPU right now.

As AMD refines the drivers for all its GCN based GPUs, performance is sure to keep improving and with the vast amount of memory, bandwidth and ROPs, high resolution gaming is where the 290X is most comfortable.



GIGABYTE GV-R929XOC-4GD

Supplier Rectron **Website** www.gigabyte.com **RRP** R9,699

Last issue we looked at the Radeon 290 from PowerColor, promising to get into more detail about AMD's Hawaii architecture in our follow up-review. Fortunately, this is such a review and since we have what is a sublime showing of the Radeon 290X in the form of the GIGABYTE offering, it is only right that we take some time to appreciate at a slightly lower level what it is AMD is bringing forth with this generation of GPUs.

Logically, the Hawaii GPUs, or at the very least the GCN 2.0 GPUs, are not that different to their predecessors. If you will, you should consider them refinements of what we had before. The thoroughness of the GCN design from AMD has ensured that the company is able to scale up their GPUs for years on end without having to make significant changes to the core logic. The original GCN

architecture as presented in AMD's Tahiti GPUs is very analogous to that which is in Hawaii. Simply put, each compute unit has a branch and message unit, a scheduler, four SIMD units, a single scalar unit, four texture units and 16 load/store units. Rounding it up are four vector registers, a 16KB L1 cache, and a local data share cache accessible to each unit in the compute shader. This is the same VLIW4 SIMD engine you are familiar with, and Tahiti has an identical layout.

The significant difference here is that Tahiti had eight GCN clusters, if you will, each with 256 SIMD units for a total 2,048 compute cores. Hawaii scales this up to 11 for a full complement of the Hawaii core for desktop parts. It is most likely the actual silicon has 12 clusters in total for 3,072 compute cores, but one is disabled for redundancy or at the very least is reserved for the compute heavy

markets as used in products like the FirePro. Thus the total compute core count for the Radeon R9 290X is 2,816.

Computationally then there is very little that has changed, but the scaling has been vastly improved. AMD has made some design changes especially at the front end or at least at the fixed function part of the GPU. As the raster units are decoupled with the compute units, (not true of the texture samplers for these are contained within the compute clusters and go up proportionally) AMD has increased its geometry performance but kept the ROPs at 64. These were never saturated and there really was no need to make any change here especially because these days the limit in performance is texture, compute and bandwidth more than pixel fill-rate.

The memory bus was widened as well, to a full 512-bit GDDR5 bus. While there



shouldn't be a dependency reason for opting for such a wide bus, it does allow AMD to use much cheaper 5GHz GDDR5 chips than the more expensive 6 and 7GHz versions as found on NVIDIA's hardware and AMD's previous generation GPUs. While there's a real cost to having a 512-bit bus (termination points, ground pins, etc.), the core is still built on the same TSMC high performance 28nm process. Thus, the core had to be physically bigger, and mapping out pins for the memory bus around the GPU is simpler than what it would have been had the core been a lot smaller. The upside to this is that it has technically mitigated the increase in production costs for AMD while allowing the GPU even more bandwidth at a blissful 320GB/s. All of this has kept costs down, which AMD then passed on to end users. At least that was the theory before the coin mining craze reached the levels we see today and has caused the prices of AMD GPUs to shoot up significantly.

So in essence AMD is offering Tahiti 2.0 with the Hawaii GPU. This isn't a bad thing at all as you still get DirectX 11.2 hardware, OpenGL 4.3, OpenCL and, most recently, Mantle support. The performance gains of the new API are unquestionable, but the reasons behind it are still not compelling for us. That however is a different debate and not one for this review.

What do all these changes bring to the end user then? It's quite simple. In the form of the

GIGABYTE R929XOC you get a very quiet graphics card that has tons of performance where it counts. Once again we are in awe of the GIGABYTE Wind Force 450W GPU cooler which has proven to be more than up to the task of cooling any and all high-end GPUs. Our highest recorded temperature on the GIGABYTE card was 70°C under load and overclocked. This may seem like a high temperature, but consider that this was done with the fans producing far less noise than AMD's reference cooler. Not only was it significantly quieter, the temperature under load was a full 24°C lower. The reference R9 290X resulted in a load temperature of 94°C and more noise than what we would consider acceptable. With the GIGABYTE card you have none of this at all.

With the factory overclock, as small as it may be, there is a tangible performance difference in games. As has been shown already by numerous overclockers, the performance scaling of the R9 290X is very impressive. It's a pity that the cores are not lending themselves well to liquid nitrogen and hitting all kinds of limits in frequency scaling. Having said that, clock speeds as low as 1,300MHz allow you to break records that the previous HD 7970 needed 1,800MHz to set.

As AMD refines the drivers for all its GCN based GPUs, performance is sure to keep improving and with the vast amount of memory, bandwidth and ROPs, high resolution gaming is where the 290X is most comfortable. There is not a single game that is on the market today that you cannot play at 1440p with 4xAA. This may not seem like

SPECS	
CORE	Hawaii (28nm)
	1,040MHz
PROCESSORS	2,816
RENDER OUTPUTS	64/176
MEMORY	4,096MB GDDR5
	5GHz (320GB/sec)
API	DirectX 11.2
	OpenGL 4.3
	OpenCL
	Mantle

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	10,066
	9,116
CATZILLA - Tiger	10,870
	13,483
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 87.9 fps
	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps

much until you realize that the load placed on a graphics card at this resolution is similar to that which would be at 4K with no AA. AMD has produced a very powerful ASIC with the Hawaii GPU; GIGABYTE has then taken it and made it even better.

The package is devoid of the *Battlefield 4* coupon and you actually don't get much of anything in the box, but what you do get is more than impressive and should justify its price somewhat. We have not seen many custom design R9 290X cards to date, but it is fairly obvious that they are not going to get much better than this one. So if you're committed to the best AMD has to offer, there's little reason to consider any other GPU, as the GIGABYTE R929XOC delivers the goods in every aspect. If you have the money for this graphics card, do consider buying one – you will not be disappointed. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko



The best showing of the Radeon 290X we have seen thus far.

PLUS

Very good performance out the box / Quiet / Runs cool

MINUS

Tricky to overclock / Bitcoin inflated pricing

CORE
Kepler GM106
PROCESSORS
960
RENDER OUTPUTS
16/80
MEMORY
2,048
API
DirectX 11, CUDA

SPECS



PALIT GEFORCE GTX 750 Ti STORMX OC

Supplier TVR Computers Website www.tvr.co.za RRP R2,615

I've always taken particular interest in "high performance" mid-range cards. As much as we all enjoy ogling the latest dual-GPU monster or some other R10K+ video card, it's the mid-range, realistically, that gets the most love from our readers. It's here where bang-for-your-buck becomes the most important factor – where your entire build is under ten grand. It's also where the GTX 750 Ti fits in, but, in the prized R2,000-R3,000 bracket, it's got a lot of competition from the already budget-friendly red camp, from which you can nab an R9 270 or come in a little cheaper with the (perhaps better-matched) R7 260X.

But despite its pricing, it doesn't look like NVIDIA – or PALIT in this particular case – is out to compete with the baby R9s. Instead this is a card tailored for low-energy usage – perhaps even a Steam Box – since it requires no additional power above what it can draw directly from the PCIe slot (a maximum of 75W).

In that regard it seems unfair to directly compare the GTX 750 Ti to AMD offerings, but if you want the hard figures then the benchmarks speak for themselves. Offering only a 128-bit memory bus

at this price point is crippling, but with a bit of nudging using the included Thunder Master OC software, we were able to raise the memory speeds from the default 1,375MHz to 1,625MHz, just knocking the total memory bandwidth north of 100GB/s to assist with full HD displays. On the GPU front we took the frequency as high as it'd allow, right up to an impressive 1,220MHz for a total speed bump of 12%. As you'd expect, this speed increase translated directly into a performance boost, taking our *Hitman* run from an average fps of 46 to 52. A modest gain; but hey, it's free performance for practically no increase in fan noise, and GPU temps never peaked above 66° even with the single fan cruising at just 44%.

With so much competition in this price segment, you'd think it strange that NVIDIA would jump in with this Ti version of the GTX 750. For a little under 2K you can pick up the standard version with less RAM and overall lower speeds, so you'd have to think hard about how much you value the green benefits of this card over raw performance. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	4,142 9,116
CATZILLA - Tiger	4,643 13,483
	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 46 fps
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps



The GTX 750 Ti will get you good performance for its price, but the competition is stiff in this segment. It might be worth waiting for a price drop if you insist on sticking with NVIDIA.

PLUS

Very quiet / Good OC capabilities / Low power draw

MINUS

No SLI support / Performance doesn't quite match the competition

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SPECS

CORE
GK110B (28nm)
954MHz (1,006MHz Boost)

PROCESSORS
2,304

RENDER OUTPUTS
48/192

MEMORY
3,072MB GDDR5
6GHz (288GB/sec)

API
DirectX 11.2
OpenGL 4.4
OpenCL
PhysX
CUDA

ASUS ROG Poseidon GTX 780

Supplier **ASUS** Website www.asus.com RRP **TBA**

One thing that we can always be sure of when it comes to ASUS graphics cards is that they will always be innovative, at least when it comes to their ROG products. From the original Mars card to the Ares, regardless of how they fare in the real world, they always provide something to talk about. They are hardly cards made for the purposes of generating money as such but they do serve to keep the brand above all the others when it comes to perception.

The latest addition to that family in the form of the ASUS Poseidon is one such card, albeit with a difference. Unlike with the previous specialist cards, we've no reason to believe this card will be in limited quantities, or at least each Poseidon card is not numbered from one to one thousand. So these should be easier to come by when they eventually make their way to our shores.

The reason behind the name Poseidon is rather obvious as it is not only in keeping with the previous product names taken from Greek mythology. It is the name of the god of earthquakes, storms and more prominently the sea, symbolized most often through the trident.

As such this is the ROG's first liquid cooled gaming GPU. Rather and more accurately it is the first GPU to give you the ability to cool it using the regular air cooler and a liquid cooler simultaneously. This is done through an elaborate cooler that allows each cooling method to work independently or both in tandem via a full coverage water block. The

cooler is very complicated, as it needs to be to achieve each method of cooling in a proficient way. Ultimately, the Poseidon gives the end user options that are otherwise not available with any other graphics card on the market. Or at the very least, the Poseidon gives you these options right out the box only requiring you to have a pump and reservoir (obviously with tubing and barbs).

It seems a lot to ask for but it isn't as the water block, especially a full cover one, will likely cost you over R1,400. Then add the labour involved in installing it and the voiding of your warranty, then the ASUS Poseidon starts to make a lot of sense.

Other than the special cooler, as usual with such graphics cards from ASUS, they have used only the best components electronically and as far as we are concerned there aren't any graphics cards that can claim to use better components. This however does not translate to the memory which is ELPIDA GDDR5, notorious for being poor for overclocking. In our own testing we were only able to get to 6.8GHz up from the reference 6GHz. Not really impressive given that we've had 780 cards reach speeds above 7.5GHz. In addition to this, the GPU core isn't really dialled up at all, with a rather conservative 954MHz base clock. For such a graphics card we would have expected at least 1GHz, alas it was not to be. Nothing however prevents you from achieving this speed by using any one of the several

tuning tools available on the internet or the ones that ASUS provides with the card.

For such a special card though, we would have expected that ASUS would have gone with the GTX 780 Ti GPU, as that would make it a premium product not only in price only but in performance, offering near unmatched performance. Sadly this was not to be and despite the fact that we don't have final pricing on this card, it is likely to cost more than some GTX 780 Ti cards which may make it a hard sell.

Other than that, if you're looking for a truly special graphics card in the form of the GTX 780, they don't really get more special than the ASUS Poseidon.

- Neo Sibeko

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	9,542 9,116
CATZILLA - Tiger	4,789 13,483
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 Ultra Detail) 4xAA: 72.1 fps (DX11 Ultra Detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps



An all-in-one GPU and water block purchase that is convenient and performs well.

PLUS

Good full coverage waterblock / Hybrid cooling / Decent performance

MINUS

Should have been built around the 780 Ti GPU / Limited memory overclocking

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“What the Adora 24G brings with it is a flicker-free full HD LED backlit display. It may not seem like a big deal but this makes a tangible difference especially after using it for a few hours and going back to a regular LCD panel”

CPU
Intel Core i5 3220M
MEMORY
8GB DDR3
1,333MHz
GPU
GT740 M
STORAGE
1TB 5,400rpm drive
LCD
23.6" LED backlit
1080p display

SPECS

MSI Adora 24G

Supplier MSI Website www.msi.com RRP TBA

With every all-in-one (AIO) PC we test from MSI, it's clear that MSI is making strides in the right direction. We'll tell you right now that this may not be the most powerful AIO we have seen from MSI but it is by far the most impressive when it comes to an overall product that you should consider buying. That's not to say that it is without some shortcomings, but overall, it is certainly the most desirable out of the entire product line.

What the Adora 24G brings with it is a flicker-free full HD LED backlit display. It may not seem like a big deal but this makes a tangible difference especially after using it for a few hours and going back to a regular LCD panel. You immediately notice the eye strain when looking at your regular monitor. This is the only display we have come across that has this technology and it is something we would like to see monitor vendors and others adopt.

Other than that, the Adora is not only lighter than the previous AIO we reviewed from MSI but it is thinner as well at 21mm. Some sacrifices have had to be made to make it this thin, but it does make it a lot more elegant and worthy of sitting in your lounge for example.

In practical terms, despite featuring the familiar 10-point touch screen technology, the Adora ships with a mouse and keyboard

which you can obviously put away when not needed. This may seem insignificant but it is one of the things that make the Adora compelling. As we've said before, the touch interface for the Windows OS is still not ready yet as a primary means of interacting with your PC. Thus a mouse and keyboard are still going to be necessary. That MSI has admitted to this by virtue of packing these two peripherals in the box at no additional cost is testament to this. From where we stand this is a step in the right direction.

Everything about this AIO that makes it appealing is in how it is all presented. The specifications aren't anything to get excited about and for the most part they are on the weak side especially where storage and graphics capabilities are concerned. The GT 740M is really not up to the task of playing any of the latest games at a meaningful graphical fidelity or resolution. It is only marginally better than what Intel would offer with their integrated GPU solutions.

As for the storage, you get a single 5,400rpm 1TB drive. Not the worst drive you can get, but we were expecting an SSD and, after having used the SSD powered AIOs from previous units, the Adora did feel a little slow.

Despite all of this, we still believe this is the best unit MSI has right now for the usage model of AIO PCs. The ability to connect

your consoles to the unit and use it purely as a screen is a huge plus and goes somewhat into nullifying the point we made earlier about the weak GPU. Simply plug your PS4 or whatever console to the unit and it will instantly pick up the connection and allow you to game on the brilliant screen. Add some decent sounding speakers to it all and it's easy to recommend this for those who are looking for an AIO for the house that can genuinely be used by everyone for very different purposes.

The MSI Adora 24G is a wonderful AIO and probably the best we've used to date. This one is definitely worth your consideration. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



This is probably the most impressive all-in-one PC from MSI to date. It's pity about the relatively weak GPU however.

PLUS

Flicker-free display / HDMI-in functionality / Includes a mouse and keyboard

MINUS

GT 740M is rather slow for any kind of gaming

Astrum X733 2.1 speaker set

Supplier Astrum South Africa
Website www.astrum.co.za
RRP R1,199

The only reference point I have for Astrum's speakers is the company's X723U 2.1 set I reviewed in the past. And while we listed the price of those at only R100 cheaper than this X733 set, you'll be getting vastly superior audio should you choose to spend the extra bit of cash.

Taking it out its box, the X733 set feels solidly constructed, made from quality materials that lend it an air of premium value. The 6.5-inch subwoofer is housed in a sturdy wooden frame with a suspiciously small hole in one side for allowing air to pass through. Relative to other subwoofers that ship with 2.1 sets, this one is enormous. The bass it produces is surprisingly sedate considering its size, but that's not to say that it's not capable of producing thumping low-range audio.

The satellites aren't the most attractive we've seen, but they'll still blend in nicely wherever you choose to put them. Detachable cables connect them to the subwoofer, and on the sub is where you'll also find three dials for independently adjusting bass, volume and treble levels. This is the most annoying design feature of the X733, because it puts the controls out of convenient reach if, like most people, your subwoofer lives under your desk.

Audio production is brilliant, provided you take some time to tweak the treble and bass levels. You'll have to have some patience with this, especially considering that the controls are tucked away on the sub. Once you've got them perfectly adjusted, the audio is punchy and boasts exceptional clarity, although they're not the loudest set out there. As added bonuses, the X733 can play music straight from USB or an SD/MMC card, and has a built-in FM radio function.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



SPECS

TOTAL RMS 80W
SUBWOOFER 6.5-inch, 50W RMS
SATELLITES 2 x 3-inch, 15W RMS each
FREQUENCY RESPONSE 30Hz ~ 18kHz



The X733 is an excellent 2.1 speaker set, aside from a few sloppy design decisions.

PLUS

Outstanding audio clarity / Quality build

MINUS

Controls on the subwoofer / Achieving perfect audio balance requires fiddling

Huawei MediaPad 10 Link

Supplier Huawei
Website www.huawei.com
RRP R3,700

Huawei has made a name for themselves as a viable mid-range phone and tablet manufacturer, and it seems as though the MediaPad 10 Link follows the same path.

When you first see the MediaPad, you'll immediately be reminded of the original iPad. The thick black bezel is wide enough to allow you to hold the device without getting greasy paw prints all over the screen, and the device's thickness and weight mean it's comfortable to hold for reasonably long periods of time. The feeling is certainly a bit dated, however, with most modern tablets measuring thinner and weighing in lighter, but this is still leagues ahead of some equally-priced competitors.

The MediaPad's internals are a mixture of acceptable and disappointing. The quad-core CPU running the show keeps things moving at a decent clip, but in-game testing shows that the custom 16-core GPU isn't as capable as what you'd get with a high-end Qualcomm or NVIDIA-powered chipset, but you will at least get what you pay for.

Perhaps the biggest let-down on this device is the screen; at 1280x800 you'd expect a bit of pixel visibility but this IPS display falls behind even those expectations. Text is difficult to read at default sizes (the last thing you'd expect on a 10" screen), and any vaguely contrasting edges result in jagged, chunky lines that you'll struggle to ignore.

NAG

- Geoff Burrows



SPECS

CHIPSET Huawei K3V2, quad-core @ 1.2GHz
RAM 1GB
DISPLAY 10" IPS LCD @ 1280x800
CONNECTIVITY Wi-Fi 802.11 b/g/n, HSDPA up to 42Mbps
STORAGE 8GB internal, up to 32GB microSD



As mid-range as you can get, the MediaPad 10 Link won't win any awards for performance, but if your budget can only get this far, there are certainly worse devices to be had at this price.

PLUS

Decent performance in OS / Reasonable price

MINUS

Sluggish GPU / Low-res display

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: **ASUS MAXIMUS VI EXTREME**

3DMark 11 13,756
13,258

Cinebench 11.5 10.15
10.17

AIDA 64 copy 35,743 MB/s
32,112 MB/s



SPECS

CHIPSET
Intel Z87

MEMORY
2x 240-pin DDR3

CPU SUPPORT
LGA 1150

EXPANSION
1x PCI-E 16X

SIZE
mini-ITX

ASUS ROG Maximus VI Impact

Supplier ASUS **Website** www.asus.com **RRP** R3,999

Before we get into this review, it is to be noted that the Maximus VI Impact is expensive. It is disproportionately expensive especially when compared to the Gene which is a brilliant motherboard that features SLI/CrossFire support along with everything this board has (for the most part) for a lower price. That board doesn't have Bluetooth 4.0 and Wi-Fi support but consider everything else you get then you can see how this odd ASUS pricing structure could potentially ruin what is without a doubt the best mini-ITX board ever.

In addition to the preposterously weak rand you may want to carefully consider why you're looking at buying this board. From a financial point of view it has a very low value proposition. Simply put, the Impact makes no sense and if we were scoring for value for money it would be close to getting a zero.

Past that however, the Impact is by far the most impressive mini-ITX board the industry has ever seen. Even if this were a featured article, we could not list the extensive features the board has within the BIOS and mechanically as well. It is nothing short of brilliant and once again reminds us of how incredible the team at ROG is. There are full sized ATX and even XL-ATX boards on the market that pale in comparison to what the Impact offers. The specs sheet is unreal when you consider the size of the board, but it's all there just as ASUS claims. Some ingenuity was required to fit it all in,

but when all is said and done, it not only becomes the best performing and featured board for the standard, but the most well laid out as well. It really has to be seen in person to be appreciated as words can only do it so much justice and this motherboard is more than that. In its context it is just as impressive as the ASUS Rampage IV Extreme Black edition is.

On the Impact you'll find a power, reset, clear CMOS, MemOK, DirectKey, ROG Connect button and a POST LED. In addition, the board supports the ASUS OC-Panel as featured on the Maximus VI Extreme and the Rampage VI Extreme Black Edition. Pair that with a robust and impeccable 8+2 phase PWM design that features 60A BlackWing chokes and you have a board that will easily power any Core i7 CPU at any frequency and voltage. In addition to this you get LN2 and FastBoot jumpers which will come in handy for the competitive overclocker as well.

If you're concerned about audio, rest assured that the daughter board that houses all the components for the SupremeFX Impact audio solution will deliver a pristine experience. Driven by an ALC1150 controller, ELNA audio capacitors and TI LM4562 Op-Amps, the audio is solid and crystal clear. The 110-115 dB SNR doesn't tell the whole story. The board really does deliver surprisingly good sound quality from this configuration. As with all audio solutions these days, it also supports high impedance

headphones rated for up to 600 ohms. It's astonishing what the ROG team has been able to put together with this board, redefining what is possible with mini-ITX boards. Generally it doesn't make sense to invest this much on this platform, at least where the motherboard is concerned, but the argument presented by the Maximus VI Impact is so compelling that we are tempted to find reasons why this should be the only mini-ITX motherboard you look at when building a gaming machine. The best version of anything on this planet usually costs a lot and the Maximus VI Impact is no different. It is so far ahead of everything else, we have little choice but to award it a perfect score. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



ASUS once again builds the ultimate motherboard for the mini-ITX form factor.

PLUS
Performance / Features

MINUS
Far too expensive

Corsair Vengeance Pro 2,666MHz C12 32GB Kit

Supplier Rectron
Website www.corsair.com
RRP TBA

Large capacity DIMMS are inevitably going to be the future for all computer users. As manufacturing costs decline and with the point to point IMC/DRAM nature of upcoming platforms, multi bank sets for high capacities are increasingly less viable. More than that however, right now there isn't a more logical way to gain access to 32GB of memory other than using four sticks of 8GB memory.

If you use memory intensive applications, then this set and others like it are what you should be looking at. It will make working within your applications a significantly more pleasurable experience as you can load significantly more into memory than you can with 8 or even 16GB sets. For gamers however, such sets provide some challenges. Primarily because such sets needs some dedicated time to configure for best performance.

If you install this set and select the XMP profile, you'll get the right speed, but the performance will be far from ideal. For that you'll have to tune some tertiary memory timings such as TRDRD and latency boundary. As we found, you may be better served by selecting 2,400 or 2,600MHz instead of the given 2,666MHz. This is because using 32GB places a lot more strain on the CPU IMC which causes irregular timing changes that rob you of significant performance when paired with the very high speeds such as 2,666MHz. You will have to make sure that you not only have the right motherboard for this, but you are well versed with how memory configuration works.

If all this is too daunting for you then you are better off selecting the XMP profile, but setting the DRAM frequency to 2,400MHz. This should allow your IMC to configure the timings accordingly (secondary and tertiary) and net you better performance than you would at 2,666MHz. For those concerned with capacity above all else, this is as sensible a set as any. For those who demand performance though along with large amounts of memory, you will have to work a little to make the best of this kit. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



A decent set of memory that would probably be better sold as 2,400MHz rather than 2,666MHz.

PLUS

Large capacity DIMMS / Vengeance cooler works well

MINUS

Hard to tune / Out the box performance is not optimal

GIGABYTE H87N-Wifi

Supplier Rectron
Website www.gigabyte.com
RRP R1,999

Usually we would not review such a board here at NAG, as the H87 chipset and other similar ones from Intel are not really designed for gaming or enthusiast motherboards. However, with the advent of Steam Boxes and the sudden upsurge of mini ITX gaming machines, there is a real need to have such motherboards tested to see what they offer. The chipset offerings have not changed from what Intel originally offered, but vendors such as GIGABYTE have been adding third party components to make these boards a lot more appealing than before.

The GIGABYTE H87N-Wifi is one such board that benefits from a Bluetooth 4.0 and Wi-Fi dongle. These are starting to be standard affair on most motherboards, but they are still useful additions to have especially in an HTPC where such motherboards are most likely to find themselves.

GIGABYTE have also added dual Gigabit Ethernet to this board via a second Atheros GbE LAN chip along with the standard Intel chip you are familiar with. It is worth noting though that teaming is not supported here, so these are best connected to different networks.

The other standout feature that this motherboard has is the ability to output 4K video via its dual HDMI 1.4 ports. Keep in mind that the sync rate for this kind of output is 24Hz, so it's not going to be useful for much other than some specific 4K content playback. Certainly not for anything that resembles gaming. Given that the Intel IGP's are nowhere near 4K gaming capable this isn't an issue and video playback is exactly what you'll be using this display scheme for.

As this makes use of the H87 chipset, keep in mind that overclocking is not supported, so it is best to pair this motherboard with a non-K SKU CPU to get the best value from it. Other than that, this is a solid motherboard that provides some good value for a no frills HTPC built around the mini-ITX form factor. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



A solid board for building an HTPC around.

PLUS

Affordable in comparison to others / Wi-Fi and Bluetooth / Dual HDMI

MINUS

Bland design

G-Technology G-DRIVE Mobile with Thunderbolt

Supplier Syntech
Website www.syntech.co.za
RRP R3,599

There's something that needs to be clarified here before we get into the meat of this review: we don't have any Thunderbolt-enabled PCs in the NAG office, and therefore don't have any way to test the Thunderbolt support boasted by this self-powered external hard drive.

Despite the fact that we were limited to USB 3.0, this drive nevertheless managed to impress with its performance – which, with Thunderbolt's added bandwidth (10GB/s for Thunderbolt versus 5GB/s on USB 3.0) and better efficiency, would be even more remarkable.

Relative to other drives it's a really heavy device, and is also quite a bit larger in stature, which hurts its portability. Unlike most portable drives, however, it spins at 7,200 RPM as opposed to 5,400 RPM. The increased performance this provides grants it sequential read/write speeds of around 130MB/s via USB 3.0, which is fantastic. However, at R3,599 it's a great deal more expensive than other external drives, making it difficult to truly recommend it unless you plan to fully leverage its Thunderbolt capabilities. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



SPECS

CAPACITY up to 1TB
INTERFACE USB 3.0 and Thunderbolt
DIMENSIONS 127mm x 83mm x 18mm



A great product if you want blisteringly fast transfer speeds and you're willing to pay any price to get them.

PLUS
Incredibly fast

MINUS
Horribly expensive / Bulky size and weight

Leap Motion Controller

Supplier Phoenix Distribution
Website www.incredible.co.za
RRP R1,299

Leap's motion controller – with its finger tracking magicks that let you use gestures and finger movements to control various purposefully designed apps – is easy to disregard as being gimmicky. And it is, in a way. But it's one of those gimmicky devices that is immediately exciting for all its overwhelming potential.

The hardware is a surprisingly small sensor that you place in front of your PC screen, connected via USB. In use, it's impossible not to conjure up images of sci-fi movies like *Minority Report*, wherein characters use wild hand movements to command future computers to do their futuristic bidding. It's not perfect, and holding your hands/fingers in certain positions causes the Leap to lose its mind a bit. That said, it's often alarming just how accurate it can be when you don't need pinpoint precision.

Don't expect it to work with everything natively out of the box, however. You're not going to be able to navigate your OS of choice with it just yet. Instead, Leap's got an app store set up that lets you download tailor-made apps for your gesture-controlled toy. Some are free. Some cost money. And, as you'd expect, some do a better job of showing off the gadget's usefulness than others. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



It's an enticingly unique piece of tech with exciting potential, despite not being perfectly accurate.

PLUS
Massive potential / Small form factor / Surprisingly accurate

MINUS
Tracking obviously isn't perfect

Parrot Zik

Supplier SMAC
Website www.smac.co.za
RRP R5,399

The Parrot Zik is the best mobile-focused headset I've ever tested. The "mobile-focused" clarification is significant, because the Zik isn't meant for gaming and similarly stationary exploits. Instead, it's designed for your phones, tablets and other portable gadgets. It'll work with your PC via a 3.5mm audio jack, but that's doing it wrong.

For wireless use, it can be paired with devices either via Bluetooth or near field communication. There's a companion app available which lets you adjust various useful settings and monitor battery life. Changing the volume and switching between audio tracks is done by swiping your finger against the touch-sensitive right ear cup. Take it off your ears and the Zik automatically pauses your media.

Sound production is of fantastic quality across the sonic spectrum, and the Zik is brilliantly light, especially for a wireless headset. The cups are nicely padded, making for comfortable use. Active noise control does an excellent job of keeping ambient sounds at bay. Unfortunately, its fancy tech comes with an exorbitant price tag – but if you want the best wireless mobile headset out there, it's safe to say this is probably it. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



SPECS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE 10HZ – 20KHZ
IMPEDANCE 29 ohms
WEIGHT 325 grams



The Parrot Zik is an outstanding wireless headset.

PLUS
So many cool features / Great audio

MINUS
Really expensive

NiteCore EC25 Cobra

Supplier NiteCore SA
Website www.nitecore.co.za
RRP R1,550

The NiteCore EC25 Cobra is accurately described as a palm-sized searchlight. The 128mm body is rugged and lightweight, waterproof up to 2 metres, impact resistant to 1.5 metres and features snappy-looking radiator fins to improve cooling. The business end features a blindingly bright 860 lumens LED that annoyed almost everyone in the office and was even bright enough to fool two small kids into thinking random flashing into a treeline was lightning. The torch has a number of brightness settings that will see the supplied battery last up to 25 hours on the dimmest setting. It also has a strobe mode and an SOS mode, all of which can be accessed using the single button. As a bonus, the EC25 comes with an intelligent charger (NiteCore i2 Intellicharger) as well as protective holster that we think is nylon and a detachable clip and lanyard. The folks at NiteCore have also seen fit to include a spare O-ring in the packet. Overall, this is probably the best and only torch you'll ever need to buy and unless you're trying to signal a passing satellite, it's perfect for any job that requires light in a dark place. **NAG**

- Michael James



SPECS

- Features a CREE XM-L U2 LED
- Brightness: 860 lumens
- Throw distance up to 222 meters
- Waterproof two meters submersible

9 For its size, the EC25 is frighteningly bright, well made, easy to use and highly versatile. It's the only torch you'll ever need to buy.

PLUS

Rugged and compact / Comes with everything you need / Blindingly bright

MINUS

Price might put some off

NiteCore i2 Intellicharger

Supplier NiteCore SA
Website www.nitecore.co.za
RRP R260

The NiteCore i2 Intellicharger can automatically smart-charge almost all types of rechargeable batteries including (Li-ion: 26650, 22650, 18650, 17670, 18490, 17500, 17335, 16340 (RCR123), 14500 & Ni-MH/ Ni-Cd: AA, AAA, C). The NiteCore i2 can also detect and apply the appropriate charging mode to the inserted batteries, even if they are of different types. Included in the package is a 12V car charger as well as a standard wall socket connector. The charging mechanism features a rather smart spring loaded system that ensures good battery contact and three multifunctional LEDs per battery to show charging progress. The charging process is quick and easy, but do remember to read the instructions carefully as charging batteries incorrectly can lead to explosions. This charger does exactly what it says on the box, looks good and works well. **NAG**

- Michael James



SPECS

- Automatically identifies Li-ion, Ni-MH and Ni-Cd rechargeable batteries
- Three charging modes (CC, CV and Trickle Charge)
- LED displays charging progress for each battery
- Automatically stops charging when complete
- Features reverse polarity protection

8 The i2 Intellicharger solves the problem of having multiple rechargeable batteries by providing a charger that does it all quickly and easily.

PLUS

Car charger included / Automatically detects correct charging mode

MINUS

Nothing

Panda Global Protection 2014

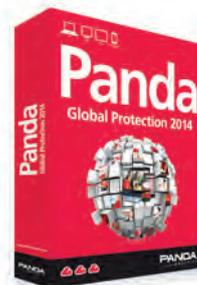
Supplier Panda Security
Website www.pandasecurity.co.za
RRP R399

Panda's flagship protection suite is packed with features designed to keep you and your tech safe from every kind of Internet harm imaginable. The usual list of defensive software is included: antivirus, firewall and anti-spam, as well as mechanisms to keep you shielded from identity theft, phishing scams and various other types of fraud.

Perhaps its most enticing feature is that a single Panda Global Protection licence can be used across multiple devices, so you're able to install it on your Android tablet or smartphone in addition to your PC or Mac. The Windows 8-themed PC interface is clean and fairly simple to follow, although some of its functionality is obscured behind layers of options and isn't located in places you'd expect. Getting the software to assume low CPU priority during system scans isn't conveniently located within the scan options menu, for example.

Unfortunately, my greatest issue with Panda's offering is that there's a definite impact on PC performance, even when not actively running a system scan. Browsing the Internet reveals noticeable sluggishness while web pages load, presumably because Panda's doing its thing in the background. Still, it provides fantastic all-in-one protection, so perhaps it's worth the performance hit. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



WORKS ON
 Android devices /
 Mac / PC

SPECS

8 Panda's antivirus software provides ample protection across multiple devices, but performance takes a knock for it.

PLUS

Great protection for multiple devices

MINUS

Noticeably detrimental to PC performance



You're stupid and you can't think for yourself

No no *no*, I didn't mean that. I don't even know you, but I bet you're totally mega-awesome because you're reading *NAG*. But "you're stupid and you can't think for yourself" is the not so subtle implication behind *Candy Crush Saga* developer King's recent application to trademark the word "candy" – effectively prohibiting other developers from releasing any game (or anything else, for that matter, but we'll get back to that) with the word "candy" in the title – because apparently consumers can't work out the difference between multiple series of words when one word is the same¹. Which is quite ironic coming from a developer whose game is otherwise mostly indistinguishable from *Bejeweled*, *Chuzzle*, *Puzzle Quest*, or any of the other zillion match-three games pretty much exactly the same as *Candy Crush Saga*, but that's another... saga² altogether.

Now, I'm not a legal expert but I don't need formal certification to point out that trademarks like this one serve no purpose except to legitimise cheap opportunism and frivolous litigation. The official explanation, of course, is that King is "protecting

its brand", but that would be a much more credible claim if they'd simply trademarked the game name "Candy Crush Saga", and not just one word that's already in common use all over the place. And it's a claim that becomes quickly *incredible* when the list of items secured by the trademark includes such random things as "exposed photographic film", "paper hats for use as clothing", and "baby monitors". You know, things that have nothing whatsoever to do with whatever app people are messing with at work when their bosses aren't looking.

With an estimated \$700,000-something banked every single day, it's not like King needs to safeguard *Candy Crush Saga*'s hoarded riches against anything except maybe a dragon, and I'm sure a large hose is the more practical option. It's also not like King can expect *Candy Crush Saga* to maintain its momentum for much longer, anyway – remember *Cityville*, the "most popular Facebook app ever"? Me neither. Years after the game should be forgotten, as nature and attention spans and The Next Big

1 Not that I'm implying any of you play *Candy Crush Saga*. The first rule of *Candy Crush Saga Club* is you do not talk about *Candy Crush Saga Club*, although registered professionals will treat you confidentially.

2 King has also attempted to preclude Stoic's own trademark of *The Banner Saga* because they've (allegedly) owned the word "saga" since 2011 already. Seriously, I couldn't make this stuff up, but perhaps it's time to blow everything up and start over instead.

Thing (Coming Next Week!) intended, King's trademark is a lifetime guarantee that it'll keep turning up and reminding people that it exists, like that creepy cousin who shows up uninvited at every family event. But then, I suppose a company that clones an already ubiquitous game type, makes a heap of cash, and then goes on to make sure nobody else can ever do anything even remotely like that to them is probably beyond such petty questions as "Should I?", "Isn't that a bit hypocritical?", and "What is integrity, anyway?". **NAG**
- Tarryn van der Byl

"Now, I'm not a legal expert but I don't need formal certification to point out that trademarks like this one serve no purpose except to legitimise cheap opportunism and frivolous litigation."

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