SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

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ON THE DVD

10TH ANNIVERSARY BONUS

NAG Volume 1: Complete Archive
NAG Volume 2: Complete Archive

DEMOS

Classic Demos: Deus Ex
Indie Demos: Astro Avenger 2 | Path Of Magic | Runes Of Avalon | Spandex Force
PSP Demos: Space Invaders Extreme | Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command
Hot New Demos: ArmA Combat Operations | Imperium Romanum | Jack Keane | Sam & Max Season 2, Episode 3: Night of the Raving Dead | SpaceForce Captains

DRIVERS

ATI Catalyst 8.3 (Windows XP)
NVIDIA ForceWare 169.21 (Windows XP)

FREE STUFF

Free Full Games: Crayon | Gravitation | Katakijin | Phun! | Sam & Max Season 1, Episode 4: Abe Lincoln Must Die | ShootEm | SpaceHulk | Syobon Action
Free MMOs: Dofus | Gunz | The Endless Forest
Free Music: Super Mario Galaxy: Wind Garden (8-bit)

GAME.DEV

Platinum Arts Sandbox (v2.1)

MAPS

Silent Hunter 4: Tokyo Express
Team Fortress 2: Map Pack 1

MISC

Squid's DEFCON Strategy Guide

MODS

Crysis: Natural Mod (v2.0.2)
Empire At War: A Galaxy Divided (v3.0)
Half-Life 2: Flipside (v1.0) | Gary's Mod (v9.0.4)
Quake: Qonquer (v1.0)
Quake III: Threewave CTF (v1.6 + v1.7 update)
Unreal Tournament III: LEGO Deathmatch (v1.0)

PATCHES

Crysis (v1.2) | Gears of War | Universe at War (v2.0) | Unreal Tournament III (v2.0) | World in Conflict (v1.007)

UTILITIES

Foxit Reader v2.2 (PDF Viewer) | DivX video codec

VIDEOS

Game Trailers: Age of Conan | Alone in the Dark | Army of Two | Assassin's Creed (DS) | Audiosurf (Rollercoaster of Love) | Battlefield: Bad Company | Bourne Conspiracy | Bully: Scholarship Edition | CryENGINE 2 | Dark Sector | Dead Space | Dungeon Hero | Elf Online | FF Chrystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates | flOw | Frontlines: Fuel of War | Castle Crashers | Prototype | Puzzle Quest: Galactrix | Star Wars: Force Unleashed | Gears of War 2 | God of War: Chains of Olympus | GRAW 2 | GTA4 | Guitar Hero III | Haze | Heavy Duty | Hot Shots Golf: Out Of Bounds | House of the Dead 2 & 3 (Wii) | Left 4 Dead | LEGO Batman | LOST | Mana Khemia | Metroid Prime 3 | Mirror's Edge | Monkey King | Monster Hunter Portable 2nd | Monsterlab | Mushroom Men | Naruto: Ninja Destiny | NBA08 | ObsCure: Aftermath | Opoona | Patapon | Persona 3 | Rainbow Six: Vegas 2 | Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters | Red Alert 3 | Sacred 2 | Saga | Sam & Max: Memory Erasing | Samurai Warriors 2: Extreme Legends | Secret Agent Clank | Somabringer | StarCraft 2 (Terran) | Stargate: Worlds | Stronghold Crusaders: Extreme | Super Smash Bros. Brawl | Supreme Commander (360) | Team Fortress 2 (Gold Rush) | Triggerheart Exelica | TWTPB | UFC 2009 | Undertow | Universe At War (Masari) | Wipeout: HD | Worms: A Space Oddity | X3: Terran Conflict
Movie Trailers: Hellboy 2 | Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull | Ironman | Rambo | The Dark Knight
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FINALLY, IT IS DONE! Ten years of *NAG* have arrived and we decided to celebrate the event by looking back at the decade that passed. That culminated into a massive twenty-plus pages of history, which turned out to be much more than just a festival of gloating. Plenty of nostalgia came through as well and the *History of NAG* also reads like a history of the gaming industry. I hope you enjoy the trip down memory lane! Personally I find it a bit staggering that despite ten years passing, *NAG* happened AFTER the movie *Titanic*, which to be honest, still feels like it was released just the other day. It just goes to show how quickly time actually passes by!

You might notice that the magazine itself is quite a few pages short of the number we boast on the box it's in. Firstly, nice box, isn't it? Well, I wouldn't know: at the time of writing this I've not seen it. Michael just went around showing a box and saying: "We're putting *NAG* in this!" We'll take his word that it looks good. But back to the page count: because we used the box packaging, the cover had to be done a week earlier than usual, which means we judged the pages on what we knew then. Well, a week later and we had a more realistic page count, which obviously falls short of the reported number. Sorry about that, but this is still a cracker of an issue.

So here we are. A new year for *NAG*, a new design (the designers are quite proud of it) and a new journey down the halls of gaming. What can you readers expect this year? We'll see. Content decisions at *NAG* are really made by the skin of our teeth, but that's the way we like it. Besides, this industry moves too fast to get too stuck on the long term. Best we go with what's right here, right now. If it's good enough for Fatboy Slim, it's good enough for us. *NAG*, you've come a long way, baby!

James Francis
Editor

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The magazine is late on the shelf this month because we spent three days putting a peg-leg on the badger.

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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Clansman
SUBJECT: Multiplayer > Piracy

MULTIPLAYER > PIRACY. THIS fact was found out by accident, by a great multiplayer game called *CoD4*. The story was too short for my liking, but its multiplayer blew me away. Many a LAN I visited with my friends was spent playing *DotA*. Then a *cough* pirated *CoD4* floated around and everyone decided to play it multiplayer, and now *DotA* is forgotten. The level-up system, the gameplay, the classes, everything put together made an excellent multiplayer game. Most of these LAN buddies, even though they had *CoD4* pirated, still went out and bought the game... just so that they could play it online. Online gaming is the future (although I never want to lose my single-player campaigns). Who would want to pirate something when they will be unable to play it in the virtual world?

We've heard this before: a good game with features people want but are only accessible if you have a valid CD-key tends to inspire people to go buy the damn thing if they like it. Of course, the counter to this from the publisher side seems to be, "but more people would have bought it if they didn't pirate it". It seems impossible to reconcile the two camps concerning piracy, so the best we can do is hope that eventually some form of equilibrium will be reached – as it did with TV vs. VHS, Radio vs. Theatre and other timeless tales of greed vs. poverty.

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TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH
Are there too many game consoles (including handheld) on the market?

FROM: Shaun Scholtz
SUBJECT: Internet Gaming For The Win! OMG

OKAY LET ME START by saying I would to thank you, the *NAG* people, for this great mag. I can still remember the first time I bought this mag in 2003. It was great times then! Anyway, let's get to the point. Internet gaming? What the HELL! Last week I got *WoW* v1.5 with a private server from one of my friends. I knew that you would need a Net connection for this and a lot of updates, but I used the private server (although the private server is like huge BUG on its own) and it's not as fun in the LAN area as online (at least that's what I've been told!). Games like *WoW, BF2142, Hellgate, Halo 3* and my personal favourite, *COD4*, you've not actually played when you haven't yet played it online. Don't ask me how it's online because some of us don't have the BUDGET for a Net connection. Anyway, my point is that the Internet has been around for quite a long time now and Internet gaming is in its new era. Okay, now what about the poor chaps (like me) who don't have a working connection? Well, there are games out there for single players, but c'mon, everyone knows that playing online or on a LAN rocks. Well, I have nothing against Internet gaming. It's just that I hope that RPGs and FPSes would not totally shift to the Internet. I'm sure that won't happen but hey, you never know! I will be getting a connection soon but still my cap is limited. So tell me *NAG* people, what connection are you using and what's your cap? PS: Do one of you guys play *WoW* online? If so, what name and server are you playing on so that I'll know whom to PvP?

Everyone in the office plays WoW *and we all hang out on the Red Rust test-server that is only accessible to Blizzard friends and family members. Glad to hear you discovered the Internet. Be kind to it, and it will be kind to you.*

FROM: Chris Erasmus
SUBJECT: Money

HEY GUYS! GREAT MAG! I've been a loyal supporter for three years now, and I must say I'm impressed... I really don't know how you do it but every issue just gets better! Okay. Now to my problem. I recently bought a monster PC. I installed all my games just to see how they would run on my new baby. Bad idea. A week later and I was through my collection. So, I decided to install all the demos on the *NAG* CDs that I could only dream about playing. A few day's later I ran out of demos too. So here I am wanting a new game but don't have the money to pay for it. I did get *Crysis* from a cousin of mine but the game is impossible to make through without cheats! I'm really exited about the upcoming Lost game and *Assassin's Creed* for PC. But for now I guess the *BioShock* demo will have to do... Thanks again guys. Keep up the good work!

Sweet. Thanks.

FROM: Anton Pretorius
SUBJECT: The Brotherhood of gaming

YOU KNOW WHAT REALLY annoys me is how there's always this huge gap between console gamers and PC gamers. To me, gaming is more then a pastime. It's an event, a gathering if you will. How can you have a gathering without the gatherers? We are little gamers in this big gaming universe, so a word of advice: shut up about how much cheaper a console is or how a PC is able to be upgraded. Do yourselves a favour and hug a console/PC fanboy (insert girl if you wish) and together we can make gaming a much better place.

This was a paid service announcement sponsored by NAG.

FROM: yUDi
SUBJECT: NAG Reviews

I'VE BEEN READING NAG for many years, since before I had any form on the Internet. I've found the reviews and opinions well balanced and witty and the layout of the magazine neat and easy to read unlike imported gaming mags, which tend to have too many miniscule screenshots and bright, garish colour schemes. I prefer getting all my gaming news in one neat package and hate trawling through gaming Websites and their intrusive adverts. Recently, however, I've been a bit disappointed with the quality of the game reviews. I find them too short and not descriptive enough. A perfect example would be the *Hellgate London* review. It was fine except that it failed to mention the lack of LAN play, an issue that was criticised in the Feb 08 issue and helped earn it the award of being one of the worst games of 2007. The review was short with the remaining page just being screenshots. Screenshots I can get online – unbiased, intelligent reviews not always. I realise that space is an issue. As for the Wii, I think it's a great idea. It (like the DS) introduces new types of gameplay, which would not be possible with traditional controllers. There is a greater limitation with controls than there is with the lack of graphical prowess. Bowling in *Wii Sports*

This awesome piece of Miktar fanart comes from the talented Robin Date, who combined the best traits of Bowser with our favorite Minotaurus Rex to create the ultimate gaming creature.

> We are little gamers in this big gaming universe, so a word of advice: shut up about how much cheaper a console is or how a PC is able to be upgraded. Do yourselves a favour and hug a console/PC fanboy (insert girl if you wish) and together we can make gaming a much better place.

will always be better than photorealistic bowling using dual analogues.

We've taken Tarryn out the back and had her put down for forgetting to mention the lack of LAN play in the Hellgate: London *review. We've resurrected her zombie corpse and tied her to a typewriter where she will be writing longer reviews from now on.*

FROM: Christo Jansen van Rensburg
SUBJECT: Feb 2008 Letter of the month

DEAR NAG, I DO not have a next-gen console because I am happy with what I have. I play most games offline and I always try the new games that come out. But before I even try the gameplay, there is the lowering of the graphics, which I'm not so fond of. It's strange though, all I could think of was excellent graphics when I had my über FX5200. I guess playing games at 20 frames per second you crave for better graphics. However, I'm happy to now have a graphics card that run games at an average of 30fps. Who cares how many lights shine on the AI when you blow them to bits? I get to run around and kill people! This is the part where you attempt to make a comeback and/or statement of your own

As far as letters go, this offering from indie developer Christo isn't half bad, but it lacks spark. We're not talking spark like in Shia LaBeouf in Transformers, Indiana Jones, Constantine *or any other movie he can sexually-favour his way into. It lacks the kind of spark that separates the mediocre from the great, the average from the awesome, the zero from the hero. It lacks jeu d'esprit, which is vital in saving the letter from the bargain-bin pile where underachieving letters go. Sure, financially challenged people love the bargain bin, but they're poor and nobody cares about them.*
Bottom line: there are better letters out there – no need to read this one.
Score: 60/100

FROM: Cornelius Verwey
SUBJECT: Dying PCs?

WITH EVERY NEW-GENERATION GAME console, rumours of the demise of PC gaming spiral out of control. The fact is (according to data presented by a new group called the PC Gaming Alliance) that PC gaming is actually growing and makes up about 30% of the overall gaming market.

The goal of the PCGA, a non-profit consortium of game developers and publishers (Epic, Activision), hardware manufacturers and OEMs (Dell, NVIDIA, AMD, Intel, Acer), and the mighty Microsoft itself, is to make the user experience easier and to advocate the PC as a solid and superior gaming platform.

According to the PCGA's press release, research firm DFC Intelligence calls PC gaming "one of the fastest-growing segments of the interactive entertainment market," so its demise is an apparent exaggeration (as it always turns out to be when a new wave of consoles triggers speculation of its untimely death).

The PCGA wants to help both game developers and PC gamers to enjoy an easier, less-confusing experience. It plans to tackle issues such as the messy tangle of system requirements to make them easier for consumers to understand, among others.

While you shouldn't expect anything like a PCGA logo to appear on game boxes, what it does provide is a common forum for the many competing publishers and manufacturers to get together to push PC gaming. However, the PCGA doesn't have any concrete plans at the moment: discussions during the announcement indicated that it planned to offer "guidance" to developers, OEMs, consumers and other parties with interest in the PC as a gaming platform, but the presentation didn't say how it planned to get the word out.

The PCGA is off to a strong start, but it needs more of the industry's players to join before it has a chance at being taken seriously. It also needs to get a method of promoting its cause. Will it use the media (e.g. *NAG*) or print or Web ads? Not much is clear on that subject. PC gaming certainly does need a unified voice, and the PCGA is an idea long overdue.

That was one hell of a PC gamer rant. Over 400 words of unadulterated steaming-hot 'fanboyism' hefted using a golden shovel. It was longer than your standard one-page NAG *review, without all the pretty pictures. We haven't seen such blatant, self-righteous grunting and heaving in a long time. That being said: we agree. The PC Gaming Alliance (PCGA) is a good idea, with its emphasis on trying to promote the growth of PC gaming via sharing of information, research, cooperation and exchange among members of the group, related industries and consumers. And they have a lovely PowerPoint presentation too. It's nice to see Activision, Microsoft and Epic playing along with Acer, Dell, Alienware, Gateway, AMD, Intel and NVIDIA. It's like all the rich bullies on the playground having suddenly decided on a truce, and are now working together to better extract lunch money from the rest of the school. We're all for growth in the PC gaming market. We love the PC. The PC gave us* Doom, Quake, System Shock 2 *and* Outcast *(just to name a paltry few). Go PCGA! (PS: We're not against the PC, Cornelius. We just don't make love to it as if there were nothing better out there.)* **NAG**

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Did you buy a Wii? Is there enough software? Are you tired of it yet? What about the DS?

Gazza_N: No. I've played on it with a family member who has one and it's a fun system, but there just aren't enough games yet that interest me enough to justify a purchase.

Cleric: Yes. I bought one. I really love it. I'm happy with the games library as I've been keeping busy with the games I have (mainly Mario and Zelda) and still have MANY great ones to play (Metroid, Resident Evil 4, No More Heroes, and Smash Bros. when it's released) when I have the cash.

brazed: No. A friend has, and the little time I spent with it was fantastic. I've been meaning to get a DS for ages now, but I just haven't gotten around to it. So no, I don't own any Nintendo products, but I sure as hell want to.

Gammaray: No. Won't buy one either. Played on it with a family friend who has one and it just couldn't keep me entertained. It is a nice little console, but just not my cup of tea. My PS3 and 360 tower way above it in terms of entertainment and fun. The DS looks nice from vids I've seen, but I'm not into portable/mobile gaming either. So in short: no Nintendo for me.

Aval4nche: It was a choice between my PC and a Wii, and Spore overruled all. My friend has it and it is excellent. Two words: Wii Boxing.

Turk1sh: No. I already have a PC and Xbox 360, which cost me a lot.

xcal: No. The Wii is a great thing for a friend to have, but to own one yourself is not justifiable just yet.

Chippit: I bought the very first Wii I could get my hands on and it's not a purchase I regret. To be honest, as long as we have Super Smash Bros. and Metroid Prime - as late as it is - on the horizon, I'm satisfied.

Bonezmann: Wii? No thanks, not for me.

T_Kill3r: Nope, I got my Xbox taking up all my limited gaming time. It (the Wii) is great fun to play at a friend's house, but not on a regular basis.

Glenn: My friends are coming over on weekends to play and get together. I am far from tired of my Wii but the Wii does make me tired *wink*. I have not even looked at the DS at all.

-StormcroW-: Not yet... but four words: Super Smash Bros. Brawl.

Cloud_Ratha: The Wii is awesome, but having to order the games online isn't fun (but they will eventually have a selection here). They have made a spin-off of Final Fantasy XII for the DS, which I will soon have.

Cha0s: No. I've played it a few times. It's fun, but I wont buy one. It gets boring too quickly

Guardian: No. I didn't buy a Wii. I didn't have a choice as I don't have enough money to support two platforms - so it was either a Wii or a PC. Guess what I chose...

wisp: No. Won't ever buy it. If (and that's a big if) I go console, it will be Xbox.

stephen: Yes. I played on it. I feel that it doesn't have lasting appeal, and the number of titles out there for it is not worth the time. I'll never get a DS as I already have a PSP.

CaViE: We are most impressed by the Wii. Hoping for a fusion of the PC and Wii. P-Wii, Wii-riffic, absolute-Wii, Wii-tacular... We love Wii.

Silent Mist: Don't have a Wii yet but planning on getting one soon. The DS is a godsend. It's gotten me through so many load-shedding days that it has become one of my constant companions.

InVaderZIM: Don't have time for cheap party tricks like the Wii. I'm an avid PC and PS fanboy.

samwise: Yea! I got one for Christmas and I'm sharing it with my bros. I'm tired of it at the moment, but that's because of the lack of proper games here. Getting Metroid Prime soon, so that should deal with the problem.

dieseldragracer: Considering the price of console games and the range, it's just not worth it. I'll stick to my trusty PC.

DELL THE HARDCORE

Major PC company turns to high-end gaming

BRINING MEMBERS OF THE mediatogether at the CC Club in London, Dell unveiled its latest XPS desktop – the 630 – as well as some details on the next model in this hardware line. But unlike previous incarnations, which leaned more towards catering for households and multimedia features, the 630 is a gaming beast that will appeal to the high-end PC gamer. This is supported by monster specs, which include a top-end Core 2 chip from Intel, up to 4GB of memory, a GeForce 8800 graphics card (also available in SLI) and up to four hard drives in a very slick and well-designed chassis.

Dell's timing might seem strange, given the raging debate around the current state of the PC. The platform has fallen on hard times recently and while supporters of the platform are quick to point out the success of games like *World of WarCraft*, it's debatable whether the market for high-end gaming machines is as robust as it used to be. But Dell is undeterred. Joined by partners Intel, NVIDIA and its own brand Alienware, and supported by game developer Ascaron and publisher Ubisoft, the company made it clear that it believes the PC still has a solid future in gaming.

To support this, it cited numbers from a survey done by analyst firm Forrester. The report claims that 48% of European gamers are now between the ages of 25 and 44, while 26% are over 45. Thirty-two percent of gamers in Europe fall in the high-income bracket and nearly half the gamers there are female. Desktop PCs account for 72% of usage among gamers, with consoles following at 55%. Well, they have to check their mail somewhere... Thus, concludes Dell, the PC is the strongest gaming platform in the world and more people play games on PC than on consoles. During the launch, the group panel discussing the PC also asserted that older gamers prefer to play on a PC; since consoles are identified with younger gamers. That might be contrary to what the market is indicated: younger PC gamers tend to be fiercely supportive of the platform while older players appear to expand to consoles. But Dell is confident about this market segment, and it might not be wrong if you consider the huge success that games like *The Sims* and *World of WarCraft* have had. Of course, neither of those franchises require a high-end PC: *WoW* doesn't even support DirectX 10 yet. On the other side, Ubisoft was on hand to demonstrate *Assassin's Creed* on PC while Ascaron gave the audience a good look at the upcoming *Sacred 2* – both good reasons why you shouldn't shelf your machine just yet. NVIDIA's Phil Wright also argued that if the PC gaming market was in decline, why is NVIDIA selling more graphics card than ever before?

But while its success is up for debate, the XPS 630 is an impressive machine that has seen a lot of thought put into it. It was designed with overclocking in mind (though it is unlikely that Dell's warranty supports any tinkering beyond BIOS settings, so don't pull out the dry ice just yet) and the ATX motherboard standard means it will be simple to keep the machine on the cutting edge. But do hardcore PC gamers buy one-stop solutions, as opposed to the tradition of building your own machine? Given that the XPS 630 isn't going to be available locally any time soon, that is probably a moot point. But if one can take anything from this, it's that big companies like Dell are not shying away from PC gaming, which suggests that the market is much healthier than people tend to believe.

SERIOUS PRICE CUTS FOR THE XBOX 360

The Xbox 360 has been proving very popular in South Africa so far and because of this, Microsoft has finally decided to cut the price .

The new retail prices bring the entry-level 360 Arcade down to R1,999. This is R700 less than the previous price. The Pro version, which ships with a hard drive and wireless controller, also costs less and will retail for R2,999. Finally, the eloquent black Elite will retail for a R3,999.

Price cuts are common in larger markets, thanks to the decreasing cost of making components. But these price cuts, which are the first for both Europe and South Africa, are nonetheless intended to boost sales figures. Already into its third year on the international market, the 360's slowing momentum in recent months shows that it has begun to tackle the more stoic side of the gaming market. Fortunately, well-timed price cuts is a sign of a healthy console and this should convince more people to move into the next generation. Now if only the games would get cheaper...

DEAD RISING: TOO MUCH LIKE DAWN?

CAN ONE REALLY CLAIM intellectual ownership over a shopping-mall zombie battle? We aren't too sure, but MKR Group is doing its very best to find out for us. According to *Hollywood Reporter Esq.*, MKR Group, who owns the rights to George Romero's 1979 (and 2004 remake) *Dawn of the Dead* film, has decided to sue *Dead Rising*'s publisher, Capcom, as the game features a human vs. zombie showdown in a shopping mall (as the movies did). Of course, Capcom is counter suing, arguing that the game and the films have "vastly different storylines" and share "only the very general, unprotectible [sic] idea of zombies in a shopping mall".

Capcom has documents, however, detailing unsuccessful attempts at discussing and deciding on the issue in question with the MKR Group. The game also features a disclaimer that reads: "This game was not developed, approved, or licenced by the owners or creatures of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*", so it is unlikely that MKR Group will get very far with this law suit. MKR Group has also mentioned that it will no longer turn down interviews about the parties' dispute if things are not resolved soon.

RATINGS DEBATE RATED T FOR TEDIOUS

Next stop, Nineteen Eighty-Four

WITH THE IMPENDING RELEASE of the Byron Report on violence and videogames set to ruin everyone's Christmas, the UK government is rumoured to be looking to scrap the voluntary and independent PEGI ratings system and turn over classification control to its own BBFC (previously responsible for banning *Manhunt 2*, lest it create an unstoppable army of psychopathic teens). Censorship in the hands of the government? Vanguarding vice and vouchsafing the violently vicious and voracious violation of volition, indeed.

Anyway, UK Xbox overlord Neil Thompson has spoken out against the potential shift. "We made it very clear to the Byron Report team, both as an industry and as Microsoft, strongly believe that PEGI has a lot more benefits for customers, parents and for everyone involved in the industry really," he said. "PEGI has been established for quite a few years now as the industry standard, so the industry has got behind it and invested a lot of time and effort in it, and it offers a level of in-depth information as well as a level of expertise to be honest, that the BBFC doesn't."

In related news, Australia is re-examining its own games ratings system, but with a happier (bloodier, sexier, ****ing) ending for all in mind. Having previously refused classification (and effectively therefore banning) anything that couldn't fall under a 15+ rating, government officials are now considering the much-needed inclusion of an R18+ rating so Aussie gamers can finally play the good stuff.

snippets

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

Masaya Matsuura, creator of the enigmatic music games **Vib Ribbon** and **Parappa the Rapper**, has said he thinks **Guitar Hero III** should let you use your own music and called on developers to look at such features. Fortunately, if you own the PC version of **Guitar Hero** 3, you can use the utility Feedback to create songs. Find out more at http://www.dotblip.com/feedback/downloads.htm.

A gamer has figured out a new way to propose to his girlfriend, without going into the clichés of MMO weddings and such. Instead, he created a new version of **Bejeweled** for the Nintendo DS, a game his girlfriend loves to play. When she reached a certain score on it, though, the game sprites created a wedding ring and the proposal. The gamer was on hand with the real thing to formally pop the question.

Valve's Doug Lombardi has revealed in an interview that the company's **Steam** service might evolve to include video and music content. He said "pilot material" would appear later this year on the service.

The creator of **Metal Gear Solid 4**'s opening movie, Alexis Tylevich, has revealed the CG bit has been in production for over a year now. Then again, those MGS clips are very long to begin with... This might explain it: according to Hideo Kojima the game had to be cut down in size in order to fit on the 50GB Blu-ray provides. We guess a 360 version is off the cards then.

TITAN QUEST DEVELOPER CLOSES ITS DOORS

THQ blames piracy

IRON LORE ENTERTAINMENT CLOSED shop this February, citing "several unrelated events which resulted in Iron Lore being unable to secure funding for its next project". Iron Lore was formed in 2000 and released its first game, *Titan Quest*, in 2006. The *Diablo* clone scored well across the board and is a *NAG* favorite as well. The expansion pack, *Immortal Throne*, was additional awesome for the game. Iron Lore then started work on a *Dawn of War* add-on titled *Soulstorm* which was completed.

Michael Fitch is THQ's creative director and he had a few things to say about the closure – blaming piracy, hardware vendors, gamers and reviewers. Fitch blames pirates for poor sales and propagating damaging word-of-mouth complaints about the copy protection routines that caused the game to crash. He blames hardware vendors who don't adhere to standards. He blames idiot gamers who don't defrag or update their drivers. He blames reviewers who were too stupid to play the game, scoring it low.

The reality is probably closer to this: the game rocked, did well, but somehow Iron Lore just didn't make enough money to stay afloat and got saddled with making a Dawn of War expansion while looking for funding. *Titan Quest* & Co are still available on Steam.

TWO BILLION DOLLARS FOR GRAND THEFT AUTO?

TAKE-TWO INTERACTIVE, THE STRUGGLING publishers behind games like *Civilization*, *Grand Theft Auto* and the *2K Sports* franchise, has recently been offered a lifeline by EA. The world's second-largest publisher has offered to buy Take-Two for $2 billion. But Take-Two refused the offer, stating that EA's proposal substantially undervalues Take-Two's various gaming franchises. But the company did indicate that a deal was negotiable. Some analysts consider the move strange, adding that it is a more expensive option than competing outright and forcing Take-Two out of the games industry. Thus, many instead see this as EA's attempt to buy out the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, while others feel it has more to do with Take-Two's various sporting games, which rival EA's Sports division.

In other news, Epic (*Unreal Tournament III*) has put talk of a potential buyout from Microsoft to rest stating that it prefers staying independent. A rumour spread that Microsoft had offered the Unreal Engine 3 company $1 billion, but Epic VP and gaming legend, Mark Rein, has countered with, "We're not that cheap."

THEY SAID IT...

"We at EA blew it, and to a degree I was involved in these things, so I blew it."
John Riccitiello, CEO of Electronic Arts, admits that buying companies like Bullfrog and Westwood didn't work that well.

"This is what young boys have always done: rage against their powerlessness by splatting things smaller than them. Nowadays they can do it virtually."
Jim White's column in British paper *The Telegraph*, attacking that government's plans for an inquiry into violent gaming.

"I think that we are optimistic that PlayStation 3 will continue to expand its base beyond the hardcore gamer as more and more games come out for it"
Insomniac Games CEO Ted Price talking to GamesIndustry.biz about the PS3.

"$1bn? We're not that cheap."
Mark Rein's response to a rumour that Microsoft offered $1 billion to buy Epic.

"Maybe Mario could wear an Italian suit and have a machine gun. But Nintendo probably wouldn't like that idea."
Killer 7 developer Suda 51 tells *ONM* UK the plumber should become more mature.

"I don't think *Wii Fit*'s purpose is to make you fit; what it's actually aiming to do is make you aware of your body."
Shigeru Miyamoto admits *Wii Fit* won't actually make you fit.

"[The big publishers] can't move fast enough – they're too busy on the treadmill trying to get to their next billion dollars.""
Atari CEO David Gardner takes a stab at his peers.

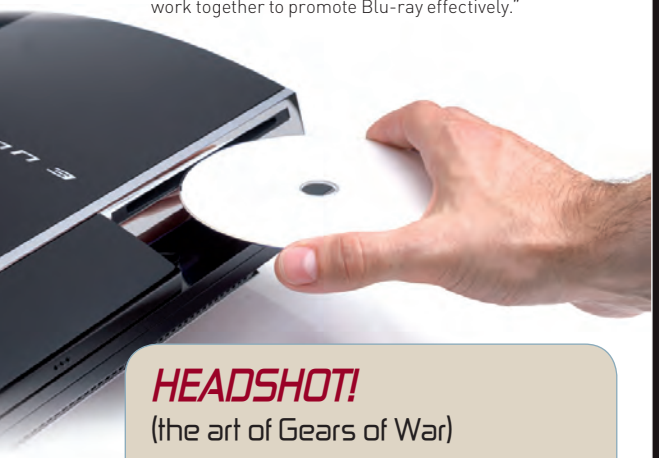
BLU-RAY WINS THE FORMAT WAR

Polls indicate that 0.0002% of planet cares

TOSHIBA CORPORATION HAS UNPLUGGED its big HD DVD manufacturing machine, and effectively declared an end to the high-definition format wars.

"We carefully assessed the long-term impact of continuing the so-called 'next-generation format war' and concluded that a swift decision will best help the market develop," said Atsutoshi Nishida, President and CEO of Toshiba. Sony is crowing in triumph, but Microsoft isn't especially bothered. "As we've long stated, we believe it is games that sell consoles and Xbox 360 continues to have the largest next-gen games library with the most exclusives and best selling games in the industry." Then, just to spite everyone else, they slashed the price of all Xbox 360 models.

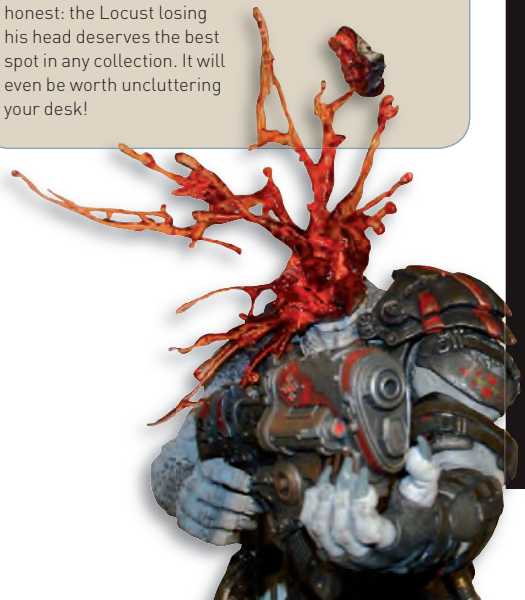
Meanwhile, analysts predict that Blu-Ray has won the war, but not the consumer. "Blu-ray Disc has passed its first real test by beating HD DVD, but a much bigger challenge now lies ahead if Blu-ray is to become as successful as DVD," says principal analyst at Strategy Analytics, David Mercer, "and content owners, retailers and manufacturers must now demonstrate that they can work together to promote Blu-ray effectively."

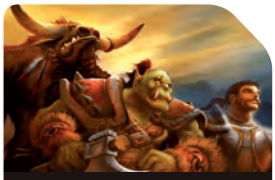


HEADSHOT!

(the art of Gears of War)

Isn't it funny how figurines went from the things we tried to blow up as kids to non-moving, statuesque characters that litter our desks? Sure, we might never grow up, but we do know art, and what can be more artistic than this excellent head-shot figurine from the upcoming *Gears of Wars* collection? Judging by photos from **ActionFigureInsider.com**, nothing, really. Though not final, this explosive fellow makes up part of the series that features some mean-looking versions of Marcus and other game characters, as well as Locust snipers and Drones. They all look really good, but let's be honest: the Locust losing his head deserves the best spot in any collection. It will even be worth uncluttering your desk!





A BILLION TO BEAT WOW (AND OTHER FUN STUFF)

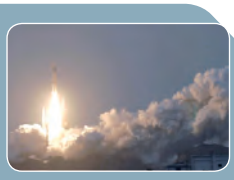
Activision CEO Bobby Kotick believes it would take an investment of half a billion dollars to take on *WoW*. Former online chief at EA, Lars Buttler, believes such claims are a bluff and a pretty wild one at that, to "suggest that only one team could ever realise the potential of the connected era".

Jack Emmert, chief creative officer of Cryptic Studios, who recently suffered the cancellation of its *Marvel Universe Online* MMO, claims that the "industry is sick" and blames *WoW*'s success. Cryptic will be releasing its own superhero MMO (again), titled *Champions Online*. David Perry expressed shock Microsoft cancelling the cross-platform *Marvel Universe Online*. The Shiny Entertainment founder believes "Marvel, as a property, is more mass-market than *World of WarCraft*". Perry is currently working on free-to-play MMO titles at Acclaim Games. He believes Microsoft felt the game was "probably just becoming too expensive... It's like spinning the wheel, are you going to get that money back?"

Halifax Bank of Scotland in the UK ceased automatic payments to Blizzard on the grounds that *WoW* has unusually high credit card fraud. The bank doesn't blame Blizzard, just people who steal credit cards to pay for *WoW* subscriptions.

Meanwhile, NCsoft has reported that studio layoffs of up to half the team is normal after an MMO launches: this announcement came just after the news that the Tabula Rasa team would be reduced by half and amidst rumours that the online sci-fi game isn't doing well financially. Producer Starr Long admits the game is having a slow start.

In other MMO news, a recent study revealed that 70% of women and 54% of men swap genders when they play online games. PONG creator Nolan Bushnell let slip that he's getting in on the MMO pie, but no concrete details have yet emerged. EA have renamed *The Sims Online* to *EA Land has* made it free and allowed players to buy in-game currency directly from Maxis using real money. *Wired* reports that the US has made plans to watch for "terrorist" activities in online games like *WoW*. No more suicide dwarfs.



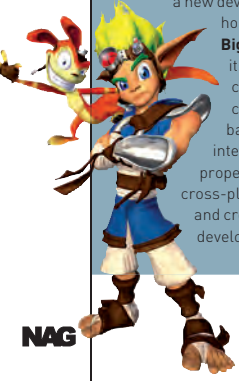
Japan has launched a satellite that brings a **new broadband technology** to the skies. If successful, the WINDS satellite will let users with small dishes on the ground get speeds of up to 1,2 gigabytes per second.

A bunch of homebrew programmers have managed to **port Quake II to run on Nintendo's DS**. The port includes the entire game, but since Quake II demands more memeory than the DS has, you'll have to invest in some kind of RAM expansion to get it to work. More info at http://quake.drunkencoders.com/index_q2.html.

Australian gamers have to once again make do without a new violent game. The country's authorities have decided to refuse classification for **Dark Sector**, saying the game is too violent for a MA15 rating. The publisher plans to appeal the decision, since this effectively bans the game from the country.

Sony stalwart **Phil Harrison** has left the publisher, emerging a bit later as Infogrames' new CEO. The company then made a bid to buy Atari shares. Interesting times?

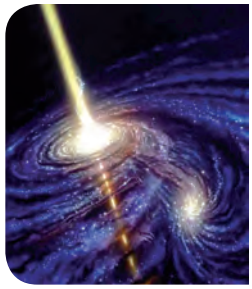
Two former staffers from **Naughty Dog**, the studio behind **Jak & Daxter** and **Uncharted**, have opened a new development house. Called **Big Red Button**, its aim is "to create original character-based intellectual properties for cross-platform and cross-media development."



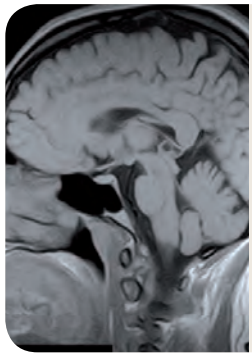
SCIENCE!

Or: How games are saving the world

How do you feel when you get killed in a first-person shooter? According to a group of researchers from Finland, gamers tend to feel bad when killing someone else and better when they die themselves. What? Yes, we all know how you are ready to throw six fits of rage whenever you get shot – again – just as you got the rocket launcher. But the tests, which tracked players' emotional and facial responses, found that their anxiety heightened after killing opponents. Then again, they were playing *James Bond 007: NightFire*. Perhaps we tend to be more gleefully psychotic during an intense match of *Call of Duty 4*?



Gamers are reaping the benefits from more powerful console hardware – as have scientists. It's been common news that researchers have been wiring together machines like the PS3 to take advantage of the powerful chips traditionally used to fuel our graphics. But instead of pondering polygons, they are solving the universe's puzzles. The latest participant is University of Massachusetts astrophysicist Gaurav Khanna, who connected 16 PS3s together to simulate the effects of two black holes colliding with each other. It's not clear if the team plays games between collisions.



Teams from the King's College London and the University College London are working on a new, better and cheaper way to improve magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). The traditional method involves a patient lying still and holding their breath during multiple scans that build an image of a person's internal organs. But this is uncomfortable and accurate scans require patience. So scientists have figured out a better way: an algorithm that compensates for the movement. Alas, this piece of maths requires a bit of computing power: fortunately the scientists found that the 128-bit GPUs on graphics cards are great for the job. Forget DirectX 10 – your new GeForce 9 can figure out if you have heart problems!

SID MEIER DOESN'T PLAY STRATEGY GAMES!

DURING A Q&A SESSION at the annual Game Developers Conference held earlier this year, Sid Meier admitted that he doesn't play other strategy games. Meier explains that this is not down to a superiority complex but rather the fact that he works with strategy games "all day" and so they aren't his first choice of gaming escapism when he gets home. In fact, according to Eurogamer, Sid has been spending his free time playing racers like *Forza* and *PGR*.

The same Q&A session also revealed that Meier has yet to play *Portal*, though he assured everybody that it was definitely "on my pile of games", but is enjoying working on *Civilization Revolution* (due out later this year for the Xbox 360, PS3 and Nintendo DS), adding that the work "puts you back in the 'king' spot".

Interestingly enough, Meier also apparently authenticated the legend that he once locked himself in a room with the *Gettysburg* engine and emerged with *SimGolf*.

THE EVOLUTION OF: THE NAG LOGO

1998

1998

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

FREE AWESOME OF THE MONTH

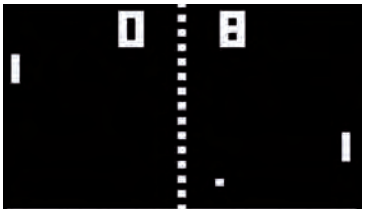
SCREWATTACK.COM'S VIDEOGAME VAULT: COMPLETE

[ON THE DVD]

Remembering videogames exactly how we remember them, Videogame Vault is all about what made those classics we love such damn fine games in the first place. Alternatively, if you've ever wondered what the fuss about a certain often-remembered game was, let the overly American host of Videogame Vault enlighten you because the dude rocks. To celebrate this month's auspicious *NAG*, we've included the entire archive of Videogame Vault on the cover DVD. That means two-minute long videos covering over 100 spectacular (or sometimes terrible) games. Translation: three whole hours of bite-sized gaming nostalgia wrapped up in delicious halcyon sauce - just like this month's *NAG*. Enjoy responsibly and remember to share.

CONSOLE WATCH

EA REVEALED PLANS TO release a **Nerf gun peripheral** (that still shoots foam projectiles) for the Wii, in conjunction with the upcoming Nerf-branded "N-Strike" game for the Wii. • Nintendo CEO Satoru Iwata is encouraging the development of non-gaming software for the DS, and **wants more people to use the DS in public**. • Microsoft expects sales of the 360 to be strong in 2008, or at least that's what they told the Dow Jones. • Using a hacked Zelda: Twlight Princess save file, hackers have managed to run unsigned code off an SD card on the Wii. • Warranty company SquareTrade reports that the **360 failure rate now sits at around 16.4%.** Microsoft has refused to comment on internal repair figures. • The PlayStation 3 sold faster than the 360 in 2007, in Australia at least, according to the Sydney Morning Herald. But they got it wrong – **the 360 actually outsold the PS3 in Australia in 2007**, moving 159,000 360s compared to 155,00 PS3s. • Sony announced that the **PS3 has sold over a million units in the United Kingdom**. The PS2 took 50 weeks to reach a million, whereas the PS3 managed it in 9 weeks. The Wii reached one million in 38 weeks while the 360 took 60 weeks. • Sony has detailed **PlayTV, an accessory that turns the PS3 into a full digital TV recorder**. Users can record, rewind, pause and check out the electronic TV guide. Not while gaming, though. • **The top-ten best-selling games in the US** for January 2008: Call of Duty 4 (360), Wii Play with Wiimote (Wii), Guitar Hero III (Wii), Rock Band (360), Guitar Hero III (360), Super Mario Galaxy (Wii), Burnout Paradise (360), Call of Duty 4 (PS3), Mario Party (DS) and Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games (DS). • According to Media Create, the **Wii is still the top-selling console in Japan**. Sales of the 360 have fallen 49% in Japan. PS3 sales dropped 43% in Japan. PSP and DS sales are up, strong and constantly battling each other. • Sales of PS3 consoles have surpassed 10.5 million globally, four months sooner than the 360 did comparatively. • Nintendo believes that the Wii will surpass the total install base of the 360 by June this year. • Rumours have surfaced that Microsoft has begun work on the **next iteration of Xbox LIVE**. • Microsoft is offering the XNA development software to students for free: if you're in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Switzerland, Canada or the US. • **Microsoft has also cut royalties to indie developers** published on LIVE Arcade in half, but now offer more services for free such as game localisation. • Raph Koster, president of Areae, says that "**the Web is kicking the console industry's ass**". He means those Flash games that people play online during work hours.



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www.rudra.co.za
GAMER GEAR
overclocked apparel
Tired of wearing the same old tees? Always wanted gaming shirts but never found a place which sells anything good? Well we've got the answer - Gamer Gear! It's the new label by RudRa Clothing, offering the finest gaming tees and hoodies at pwned prices.
Tees - R100
Hoodies - R200
GamerTag Printing
- Have your nick/alias printed along with any of our designs for an additional R40
pwned
Wanna play with my joystick?
Java developers do it on any platform
iShirt
I'm with n00b ->
Register at rudra.co.za and stand a chance to win 1 of 10 limited edition Tees!
OVERCLOCKED APPAREL

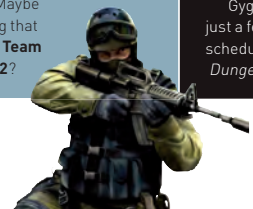
Bethesda revealed that **Fallout 3** will be big, but not as big as **Oblivion**. According to Peter Hines, the game map is around fifty to eighty percent the size of Oblivion, though he added that quality over quantity is the focus. That and Oblivion was pretty big already, so this isn't a bad thing.

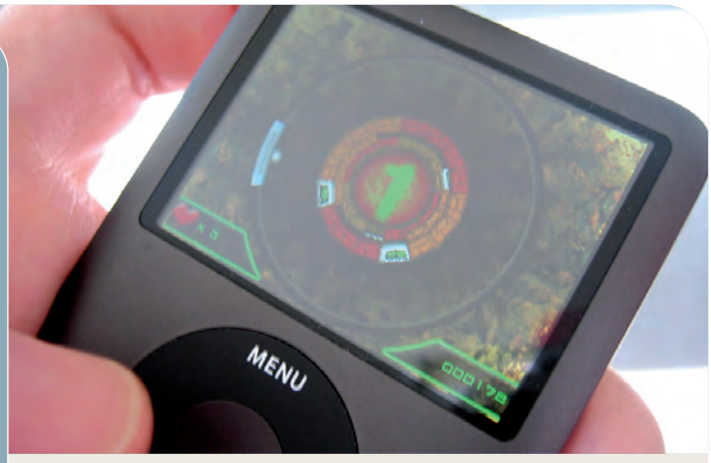
An obscure Atari 2600 game called **Gamma Attack** has surfaced on eBay. Apparently only twenty copies of the game exists, so the person selling wants a cool $500,000 for it. But would you pay that much for crap just because it's rare crap?

Can a Wii game looks as good as a PS3 one? Sure, according to **Factor 5** president Julian Eggebrecht. The **Lair** developer says its new engine and game for the Wii rivals what we've seen on the PS3 so far.

Casual portal **WildTangent** has unveiled **Orb**, a PC gaming service that plans to deliver games digitally and will give players the choice to buy a game, pay for it by watching ads or even have the game burned to DVD and shipped to them. So far THQ and Sierra have signed on for the service.

Counter-Strike will always have its support. That's the word from Valve, which says that it doesn't plan to abandon the game. But a sequel is not planned yet and there is apparently a lot of debate on where to take the mighty CS next. Maybe something that looks like **Team Fortress 2**?





IGAME: IS APPLE ENTERING GAMING?

THERE HAS BEEN A lot of rumours and speculation regarding Apple's stance with games and gaming-related devices. Tongues began wagging even more when Apple recently filed an extension to its trademark that includes gaming-related devices. Apple also recently introduced a software development kit for the iPod. While this might not be specifically gaming related, it does allow for developers to create mobile games for the iPod. The iPhone SDK also lets developers make use of the phone's accelerometer (a 3D mapping device), which opens many doors for game developers. This function was demonstrated by Apple with a game called *Touch Fighter*, where the player controls a spaceship by tilting the phone in various directions to move the ship. Other demonstrations shown included EA's *Spore* and SEGA's *Super Monkey Ball*.

Need even more speculaitve material? Apple recently posted a job ad on its notice boards, specifically searching for a game producer/designer.

GARY GYGAX DIES

Ernest Gary Gygax, best known as one of the co-creators of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game, died at age 69 in his home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, on 4 March. Having suffered two strokes in April and May 2004, Gary almost suffered a heart attack from medication he was given to prevent more stokes and was diagnosed with an inoperable abdominal aortic aneurysm putting him into semi-retirement. According to his wife, Gail, Gary had experienced poor health since then, although he continued to remain active in the gaming community. In a 2004 interview with GameSpy.com, Gary mentioned that he "... would like the world to remember me as the guy who really enjoyed playing games and sharing his knowledge and fun past times with everybody else."

Gygax's untimely death comes just a few months before the June scheduled release of the 4th Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*.

REEL GAMING

IN HOLLYWOOD, IT HAS always been a risky move to turn a game into a movie. It has, however, been quite popular doing the reverse. Many games have sprung up based on movies and the latest involves two serial killer yarns: *Saw* and *Dexter*. The good news for gore-loving *Saw* fans is that the story for the game is being written by the original scriptwriters and will be using the Unreal Engine 3. *Dexter*, on the other hand will be made by Marc Ecko Productions, the group responsible for *Getting Up*. While you could probably play a cop in *Saw*, *Dexter* is very likely to let you play as the 'good' serial killer from the hit show. Game-based movies, however, are also on the increase. *Max Payne*, (possibly) starring Mark Walhberg, has just started production, while the *Gears of War* project is being penned by Stuart Beattie, the man responsible for the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. A recent leaked treatment of the script revealed that Dom might now be hitched to a lass named Maria. One other big project worth mentioning is the new *Street Fighter* movie, which has recruited veteran actor Micheal Clarke Duncan (*Green Mile*) and rising star Chris Klein (*American Pie*) into the fold. These crossover titles do sound promising. Let's hope that history doesn't repeat itself.

GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES — MP3 • ACCESSORIES

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Army of Two
2	GTA IV
3	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock
4	Rainbow Six Vegas 2
5	Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

XBOX 360

1	The Club
2	Turok
3	Condemned 2: Bloodshot
4	Bully: Scholarship Edition
5	Devil May Cry 4

PLAYSTATION 2

1	God of War II Platinum
2	MX vs ATV Untamed
3	Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters
4	Alone in the Dark
5	Ben 10: Protector of Earth

PC

1	Frontlines: Fuel of War
2	The Sims 2 Free Time
3	LOST: The Videogame
4	Assassin's Creed
5	Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath

PSP

1	God of War: Chains of Olympus
2	MX vs ATV Untamed
3	Pro Evolution Soccer 2008
4	Need for Speed: ProStreet
5	Final Fantasy II

WII

1	SEGA Superstars Tennis
2	Super Mario Galaxy
3	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 3
4	Mario Party 8
5	Disney Princess: Enchanted Journey

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

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Assassin's Creed
2	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
3	Burnout Paradise
4	Need for Speed: ProStreet
5	Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

XBOX 360

1	Assassin's Creed
2	Project Gotham Racing 4
3	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
4	Dead or Alive 4
5	FIFA 08

PLAYSTATION 2

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

PC

1	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
2	Need for Speed: ProStreet
3	Crysis
4	Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth
5	Age of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties

PSP

1	The Simpsons Game
2	FIFA 08
3	Sims 2 Castaway
4	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08
5	Tekken: Dark Ressurection

WII

1	Wii Sports
2	Super Mario Galaxy
3	Wii Play
4	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess
5	Table Tennis

IS PC GAMING DYING?

Mixed signals mean mixed tidings for the platform

AT THIS YEAR'S GAME Developer's Conference, an unlikely debate raged. Based on recent NPD figures the PC gaming market has slipped back by 6%, a contrast to the growth spurts enjoyed by the console market. This has led a lot of commentators to worrying about the continued existence of the PC as a gaming platform; a situation that is problematic for at least one good reason. While consoles are currently boasting powerful chips and impressive graphics, the PC has always pushed the technology frontier and allowed gaming to stay at the cutting edge of delivering the fastest and most powerful hardware to do the job. Without the PC, chances are that we'll see fewer and fewer new chips and software advancements that benefit games in the long run.

But the real state of things depend who you talk to. Recently several major companies formed the PC Gaming Alliance (PCGA), a group that plans to promote the PC as a gaming platform and address the issues that appear to keep players away. Created out of the likes of NVIDIA, Microsoft, Blizzard and Alienware, the PCGA plans to focus on piracy, cheating, consumer satisfaction and other areas where it feels PC gaming could use a helping hand. Piracy is arguably at the forefront of this strategy: a lot of the blame for the PC market's declining sales is put on rampant copying of games. But the PCGA is reluctant to say that anything is actually wrong.

"We believe that the PC gaming industry is strong when you look at everything together," said Mike Morhaime, president of Blizzard Entertainment, another PCGA member. The argument is supported by Valve, which says that statistics on PC sales don't reflect ad revenue from Web-based games or the tons of cash brought in by online game subscriptions. Valve also refers to its own service, Steam, which boasts 15-million registered PC owners and does a roaring trade in delivering PC games digitally.

But it is not simply a matter of tallying those scores as well. Some people, like Gas Powered Games' Chris Taylor, argue that the old model for PC games is outdated and needs to go. Instead, he sees a different future of server-based game and online authentication: "Secure PC gaming is the future – it's going to thrive and we've all got to get on that."

Ironically, Epic's own Cliff Bleszinski took a swipe at PC gaming before the developer made him change his tune. At first he said that he thinks, "the PC is just in disarray... What's driving the PC right now is *Sims*-type games and *WoW* and a lot of stuff that's in a Web-based interface. You just click on it and play it. That's the direction PC is evolving into." But later he changed his tune. When asked in another interview if PC gaming is coming back, he responded: "Abso-frigging-lutely."

Crossed signals? Definitely. Even though many of the companies who stand to lose as PC gaming declines are very optimistic, there's disarray in what the actual problem is. Also speaking at GDC, Lionhead's Peter Molyneux accused *The Sims* and *World of Warcraft* of "sucking all the air out of the PC market." That would be the same markets that Blizzard's president claims is saving it. Another issue remains: even though Web-based games and digital downloads are popular, they are hardly the titles that push the technological frontier of the platform. Despite the success of *Crysis*, such games are far and few between, bringing the argument back to the original issue: even if PC gaming survives, will its high-end nature continue? So far the PCGA and all the pro-PC advocates have skirted the issue and aren't commenting on the higher costs involved with game development (and how that adversely affect PC game studios). It is convenient to blame piracy, but in reality gamers might be becoming fed up with the costs involved in maintaining a decent rig. Instead, the new consoles have been eating away at that base, specifically taking a lot of developers into its enclosure. Unfortunately, until all the players in the market can agree on (a) what is actually hurting PC gaming and (b) where it is supposed to go in the future, it's likely that the platform's woes will continue. Fortunately, the same is not true in the PC's middle and lower end, where indie and casual games have grown steadily, finding a new audience not too worried about things like quad-core support or DirectX 10.

EVERYBODY DIES

Congratulations to our top ICMB-fu contenders!

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO participated in our "Everybody Dies: *DEFCON*" competition, which recently ran on our *NAG* Online forums [http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/showthread.php?t=2810]. Congratulations to our two winners: Chainsaw Dude nabbed himself a free copy of *DEFCON* and Awsomemic walks away with a free copy of *Darwinia*.

1st Place: Chainsaw Dude [http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/showpost.php?p=56662&postcount=16]: With a surprisingly to-the-point strategy for 1-vs-1, Chainsaw Dude's strat also comes with two alternative edits: one for taking into account radar vulnerability and the other putting more emphasis on fighter reconnoitring and proper bomber commitment.

2nd Place: Awsomemic [http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/showpost.php?p=59691&postcount=25]: Taking into account the often-overlooked power of diplomacy (saying "nice doggy" until you find a big enough rock), Awsomemic elaborates on the benefits of making beneficial alliances. Fleet interactions and ICBM defence are top priority here. A good strategy.

Runner-up: Squid [http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/showpost.php?p=63606&postcount=26]: Honourable mention goes to Squid who wrote a stunning *DEFCON* strategy guide that you can find online [http://www.squidcor.co.za/uploads/SquidDefconGuide.txt] and on the *NAG* DVD this month in the "Misc" folder. It's pretty damn concise with a start-to-finish look at every game element and the thinking behind them.

APRIL RELEASES

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

Date	Game	Platforms
4	**Bubble Bobble Double Shot**	DS
4	**Naruto Uzumaki Chronicles 2**	PS2
4	**Turning Point**	360
11	**Assassin's Creed** *Pre-order and stand a chance to win one of three limited-edition figurines*	PC
11	**Assassin's Creed**	DS
11	**Chessmaster 11**	PSP
11	**Ferrari Challenge**	Wii, DS, PS3
11	**Settlers: Rise of the Empires - Eastern Realm Expansion Pack**	PC
11	**Victorious Boxers Challenge**	WII
17	**ATV Offroad Fury**	PSP
17	**Buzz : Big Pop Quiz**	PS2
17	**Buzz : Big Pop Quiz WITH Buzzer**	PS2
17	**God of War: Chains of Olympus**	PSP
17	**Pool Party with Cue**	Wii
17	**Ratchet & Clank Size Matters Platinum**	PSP
18	**Rainbow Six Vegas 2**	PC
18	**UEFA EURO 2008**	PS2, PS3, PSP, 360
24	**Time Crisis 4**	PS3
25	**MX vs. ATV**	Wii
25	**Ninja Gaiden 2** *Pre-order for R504.86*	360
25	**Nitrobike**	PS2
25	**The Suite Life of Zack and Cody**	DS
29	**Grand Theft Auto IV**	360, PS3
29	**Grand Theft Auto IV Special Edition** *In metal safety deposit box and duffel bag. Pre-order for only R959.95*	360
29	**Grand Theft Auto IV Special Edition**	PS3
TBA	**Avatar : The Burning Earth**	PS2
TBA	**Dark Sector**	360
TBA	**Destroy All Humans 3**	PSP
TBA	**Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness**	PSP
TBA	**Donkey Xote**	PSP, PS2, PC, DS
TBA	**Heist**	PS3, PC
TBA	**Hellboy: The Science of Evil**	PS3, PSP
TBA	**Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops**	PSP
TBA	**Midnight Club 4**	PS3
TBA	**Monster Madness - Grave Danger**	PS3
TBA	**NBA Ballers**	360
TBA	**Persona 3**	PS2
TBA	**Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords**	PS2, Wii
TBA	**Samurai Warriors 2: Extreme Legends**	PS2
TBA	**Sid Meier's Civilisation Revolution**	PS3, DS
TBA	**Yugi Oh! - Duel Pass Dinosaur Roar**	PC
TBA	**Indoor Sports**	Wii
TBA	**Moorhuhn**	DS

THE NUMBERS

8 MILLION
PSN downloads in January (source: Sony)

600,000
Units of The Witcher sold in 3 months (source: CD Projekt RED)

1 MILLION
PS3s sold in UK (source: Sony)

1 BILLION
Number of 360 achievements served (source: Microsoft)

1.65 MILLION
Units of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. sold (source: S.T.A.L.K.E.R. forums)

10.5 MILLION
Total number of PS3s sold worldwide (source: Sony)

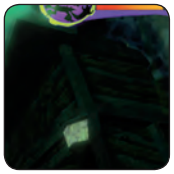
2 MILLION
Units of Devil May Cry 4 shipped (source: Capcom)

5 MILLION
Units of Sonic and Mario at the Olympics sold (source: SEGA)

18 MILLLION
Total number of 360s sold worldwide (source: Microsoft)

THIS DAY IN GAMING: APRIL

9
(2001) Nintendo releases Dr. Mario 64 for the N64 in the US. Mario thinks drugs are cool.



2

10

3
(1993) Capcom releases Breath of Fire for the SNES in Japan, proving that Final Fantasy actually sucks.

19
(2005) Majesco releases Psychonauts for the Xbox. It also had a PC release. Did you buy it? No? Shame on you.

4

12

28
(1993) Hudson Soft releases Super Bomberman for the SNES in Japan. Childhood memories are made.

13
(2004) Nokia releases the N-Gage QD, a fart nobody smelled.

21
(1984) Nintendo releases Duck Hunt for the NES in Japan. The dog is still laughing, AND YOU CANNOT SHOOT HIM!

29
(1999) SEGA splits Sonic Team into three seperate development teams, to help with rising costs. Obviously it didn't help.

22

30
(1997) Interplay releases Redneck Rampage in the US, which rocked. LucasArts released X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, which rocked.

7
(2003) Nintendo is forced to lower its quarterly profit projections due to the GameCube sucking. Obviously things have changed.

23
(2001) Microsoft partners with Taco Bell to promote the Xbox – only because Bill likes chalupa.

8
(2004) Activision and Nielsen Entertainment team up to measure the impact of in-game advertising.

nielsen

24
(2008) *NAG* May on sale
(2000) SEGA promotes Peter Moore to president and chief operation officer due to his success with the Dreamcast launch.

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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

APRIL CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT: "Now be honest: Do these pants make my butt look big?"

MARCH WINNER
"Fetch Dumbo, fetch... That's a good boy!"
Jaco Malan

vivendi GAMES

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

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Ahoy, land lubbers! We lost the badger a few years back whilst trolling a BitTorrent site. His love for *NAG* brought him back to us, but to escape with his life, he had to become the Dread Pirate Badger! He's gone off to sail the Seven Seas again, and we need your help to find him. He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [**April Badger**]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win three Blu-ray movies from Ster Kinekor Home Entertainment! Arrrrr!

LAST MONTH'S WINNER (HEROES)
Ricardo Mulqueeny , p118

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STERKINEKOR HOME ENTERTAINMENT

SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Q&A: HAZE

Guns, drugs and rock 'n roll? Not quite – there isn't much time for getting groovy during a rebellion, especially when you are trying to squash it. But what if the good guys turn out to be the bad ones? Perhaps the extremely powerful performance-enhancing drug they have all their mercenaries hooked on was a sign... That is the premise behind *Haze*, the latest first-person shooter from the experienced team behind *Timesplitters*. We chat to **Derek Littlewood** (Team Leader and Creative Director) and **Rob Yescombe** (Screenwriter) at Free Radical about the new PlayStation 3-exclusive action romp.

We filled in an application form over at mantelglobalindustries.com, but we've not had any response and it's been several days already. Are you making all of this up?
[RY] I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I don't think you made the grade. Mantel doesn't let in people with flat feet and webbed toes.

So what's with the bumblebee suits?
[RY] It's part of that 'hive mind' mentality that large gangs of people have. You gotta love metaphors, man. Also the colour system is there to help the player understand the Nectar system. It's pretty simple really: the Mantel guys are a dull yellow when they're on a small dose of Nectar, bright yellow when they're on a big dose, and their armour flashes red when they're overdosing. So, if you see a Mantel guy turning bright yellow, you know he's about to start getting highly aggressive, but if he's overdosing, you should be able to get up nice and close for a Weapon Steal or some other flashy finishing move.

[DL] In case anyone doesn't know, Nectar is a bit of a double-eged sword. When you're playing as a Mantel soldier, taking Nectar makes you able to take more damage, move faster, shoot straighter, see hidden enemies, and punch them ten times harder than normal. But the flip side is that if you take too much Nectar at once, you'll overdose – and that means you'll uncontrollably start shooting all your squad mates! Really, Nectar is a weapon for the Mantel guys because of all the obvious benefits, but it's also the rebels' best weapon against Mantel, because they have several weapons that cause the Mantel guys to overdose and kill each other. There's a lot of one-upmanship in FPS games. Everyone wants to have the biggest, craziest weapon. So, we decided to shift in a different direction. Nectar is an all-purpose combat enhancement, so your Nectar abilities really will be all you ever need. They aren't some sort of gimmicky, tacked-on feature: we went right in and looked at the very core of the FPS experience, and you'll find your Nectar abilities really enhance the game at this fundamental level.

Are you at all concerned about possible repercussions because of a game that may be perceived as promoting drug use?
[RY] Well, actually Nectar turns out to be a very evil thing with no moral upside,

and it will eventually kill you. So, I doubt that could be seen as glamourising drugs. Sure it enhances your killing ability – but killing is painted as being a poor solution to a problem. It's like people saying that Trainspotting glamourizes heroin. It's patently obvious to anyone who's actually seen the movie that that's simply not the case. I appreciate that drugs are a touchy subject, but in order to decry something, you first have to explain what it is.

Why is everyone so convinced that the world of the future is going to be in a state of perpetual warfare at the hands of insidious multinational megacorporations? Do we just drink too much coffee?

[RY] What do you mean 'the future'? It's been like that for the last decade: we just happen to be lucky enough to live in a place where we can ignore it. There were more Blackwater soldiers in the Middle East conflict zones than US Army troops, and that scares the living shit out of any sane person.

With everyone and their granny licensing Epic's Unreal Engine 3, why did Free Radical opt to develop their own game engine?

[RY] As one of the last few truly independent developers, it makes financial sense for us to create and own as much of what we do as possible. It's part of the reason why we're still in business eight years on. Having our own engine has allowed us to custom-build it to do the things we need it to do specifically for the game.

***BioShock* apparently started out on a tropical island with Nazis. How much has *Haze* changed during development?**

[RY] Well, it actually started off being a lot more political, and being very edgy – too edgy, in fact. There were things in there that simply were too dangerous to try and include in a commercially-minded product. I mean, we're all for being edgy n'all, but there's a line that once crossed, will sentence your game to 'cult hit' rather than 'hit'. The undertone of all that stuff is still in there, and keen-eyed gamers will understand what we were saying. However, that's not a bad thing because it meant we spent a hell of a lot more time getting the gunplay and multiplayer aspects as good as possible. It was a smart tradeoff. As well as that, we naturally keep an eye on the competition. When we saw *Gears of War* for the first time back at E3 many years ago, it motivated us to up the ante visually. *Half-Life 2* was a big influence too – we knew we wanted to stream the whole game, but seeing something similar in *Half-Life 2* was inspiring.

How important is the inclusion of split-screen cooperative play these days? Do you see this becoming as standard a feature for FPS titles as online or LAN multiplayer?

[RY] It's odd that more games don't have it. I mean, not everyone is online. Personally, I don't play much online. I'm Old School like that, and I don't think I'm alone. So we wanted to cater for both kinds of people.

[DL] The game supports two-player split-screen play, and that will be available in both multiplayer and co-op campaign modes. Our engine was built from the ground up to support multiple players and to allow easy drop in and drop out for those players, so it hasn't presented us with a lot of problems really.

What other multiplayer features does Haze offer? With no built-in map editor, are you planning on releasing additional content at some point in the future to promote longevity?

[RY] Four-player co-op in the main campaign, and you can play it split screen or on a LAN or hot-swap in and out online. As for multiplayer, we'll have 16 players in a series of assault maps. The really cool thing about the maps is that the objectives are narrative driven. So, the events in the multiplayer maps will enhance or even change your perspective on things that happened to you in the single player, and vice-versa, like playing the deleted scenes on a DVD. We're still in discussions about what sort of downloadable content we could provide, but it looks pretty likely.

Korn has written a song inspired by *Haze*, scheduled for a fully-fledged market release. Is the rest of the entertainment industry finally starting to take this gaming stuff seriously?

[RY] Well, the rest of the entertainment industry is eventually going to be made up of the current generation who, on the whole, appreciate games. So, as the old folks are phased out, games will have more clout across the board.

If we gave you a carton of Jaffa Cakes, would you reconsider your cancelled plans to port *Haze* to the Xbox 360 and PC?

[RY] Yes. If you send me a box of Jaffa Cakes, I will personally port an Xbox 360 version. However, on the assumption that you won't get round to it, we're a PS3 exclusive. After all, our heritage with the *TimeSplitters* series started with PlayStation 2, so we have a lot of love for Sony.

[DL] If you've spent two years working hard on something, you want to make sure it has a great chance of being noticed by gamers. The PS3's a cracking machine, and I think *Haze* will be one of the first titles to really show just what it can do.

Tell us what you're doing with LucasArts! We're from South Africa. We still use smoke signals and Morse code. The rest of the world will never know.

[RY] Jaffa cakes. Then we'll talk. **NAG**

Miktar's Meanderings

by Miktar Dracon

Sexy Prediction Time 2008

(Including Miktar's report card for 2007)

IT'S 2008. IN THE February 2007 issue of *NAG*, I made a few haphazard predictions for 2007. For the fun of it, you know. Nobody wants to seriously be an 'analyst'. Anyway, let's see how I did:

Prediction #1: The PS3 launch in the EU and SA will be delayed until September

Mercy be, the PS3 launched locally and in Europe in March after all. Congratulations to everyone who made this happen. Of course, the only worthwhile stuff to play on the PS3 – such as *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* – was only released in November. It certainly took the first-party developers long enough to release a true hit. Still, this was a failed prediction. Bad Miktar.

Prediction #2: WoW's popularity will start to wane and *WoW* will start competing with *LotR:O*

This never happened, and I really underestimated how many housewives wanna be Elves. In fact, the *WoW* subscriber figures keep arcing up in a beautiful bell curve. It currently sits at over ten million... supposedly. We only really have NewBlizz's word on that though.

Still, that's a lot of subscribers, so they must be doing something right. Many of the hardcore *WoW* players seem to be annoyed at *WoW*'s recent move towards more casual play. Even so, bad call on my part. No cookie for me.

Prediction #3: DVD will win the format war

Nailed it. Toshiba has given up on HD DVD because Blu-ray 'won'. All the big-name publishers (Warner Bros. being the only important one) are backing Blu-ray, with HD DVD the fat kid on the playground nobody wants to pick. Meanwhile though, DVD continues to dominate and looks set to keep the lead until the next generation of format (which is digital distribution, methinks). Blu-ray hasn't won squat other than the love of early adopters and hardcore 'videophiles'.

Prediction #4: Three more *Final Fantasy* games

So, three upcoming *FF* games – *Final Fantasy XIII*, *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, *Final Fantasy Agito XIII* – all part of the 'Fabula Nova Crystallis Final Fantasy XIII project'. There's also *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers* for the Wii. That's a lot of *FF* right there, although they're taking their sweet time releasing any of it. Not sure how to call this one.

Prediction #5: No Wii launch

And there wasn't. Not from Futronic, the distributors of Nintendo products at the time. A new Ninty distributor had yet to be announced back then. Actually, Futronic cancelling their distribution came as a shock to most of us. Now that Core Group is running the franchise locally, a lot has changed. And changed fast. The Wii launched and is allegedly doing well. Even I need to eat crow here and admit that it's doing better than I thought it would. In all honesty, Core has done an exemplary job marketing the Wii. I'm just shocked that so many people were willing to pay that price for the Wii. But hey, South Africa voted with the wallet and I lost. Core has also recently launched the Nintendo DS. In the short span of under a year, South Africa has gone from no-Tendo to totally in-Tendo. Sweet. I don't mind being wrong here. I'm this country's biggest Ninty fanboy after all.

Result: C-

Teacher's Note: Miktar is a bright child with incredible talent. He will do better in his subjects if he applies himself. [Should be considered for the special class nonetheless - Ed]

TIME FOR THE SEXY 2008 PREDICTIONS!

So far, 2008 is looking nebulous at best. There's a lot to look forward to and I'm personally holding thumbs that *Prototype* ends up being 'GOTY'. Bill Roper may actually have more success with his MMO, *Mythos*, than he did with 'sorta-MMO' *Hellgate*. The PS3 is finally getting *MGS4*, which looks to be the prettiest real-time cut-scene ever. I hope it's fun to play. The Wii really needs to ramp up with some good third-party titles now that *Galaxy*, *Prime 3* and *Brawl* are out. The PS3 and 360 just need to keep at it – nothing wrong there. PC gaming needs to find a focus and stick with it: this isn't 1996 anymore. Saying your gaming rig is also good for Excel spreadsheets just isn't convincing... if you know what I mean.

It's actually looking to be a quiet year, which is not unexpected considering that the three next-genners are out. Now it's just the prolonged popularity contest on the software side.

ADDENDUM

So, *NAG*'s ten years old. I'm going to admit something here that I've never admitted in print before (I think). When I picked up the first issue of *New Age Gaming* (which was incidentally at the Quake II Carnival in Sandton back in 1998), I thought it was trash. It looked ugly, the people didn't know what the hell they were talking about and I just didn't like it at all. This attitude remained unchanged for the better part of five years (mostly because *NAG* gave *Outcast* a score far lower than I personally would have). Then, somehow, *NAG* decided I was right for the job and let me rampage around these parts for the better part of five years. Epically karmic.

Happy birthday, *NAG*. Puberty's next. **NAG**

> "Teacher's Note: Miktar is a bright child with incredible talent. He will do better in his subjects if he applies himself.

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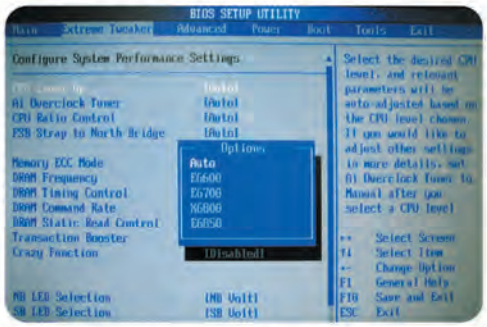
* Please check the official ROG website for a complete CPU support List for this function



▲ CPU Level Up for a host of overclocking options

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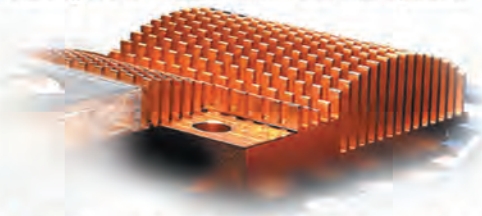

▲ Efficient Heat Dissipation with Pin-Fin Thermal Module

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

Dammit

by Megan Hughes

Then and Now

TEN YEARS AGO, A bunch of South African gaming enthusiasts got together to produce the very first *NAG* (then known as *New Age Gaming* magazine). And boy, are the rest of us damn thankful they did. Imagine what our world would be like without our monthly prescription of gaming culture and complaining. How tragic it would be. So let's not dwell too long on these thoughts.

Instead, let's get the formalities over and done with:

Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy tenth birthday dear *NAG*,
Happy birthday to you.

Congratulations and all that. And since I know that an issue celebrating such an important occasion would hardly go by without someone writing a feature on the last ten years of *NAG*, I thought I might as well take a quick stroll through the important (or at the very least, mildly interesting) events of the last decade. Bear with me for a moment. It isn't often that I get an excuse to reminisce.

Although a year is likely to be filled with various events worth mentioning, 1998 is important for one reason: the first issue of *New Age Gaming* was published. A little less important, Manny took his four-year trip through the underworld in the legendary *Grim Fandango*. In 1999, *Age of Empires II: Age of Kings* was released and SA got a new president, Thabo Mbeki.

By comparison, 2000 was fairly exciting. While a number of our cricket players were accused of match fixing, Nintendo sold its millionth Game Boy and Will Wright's *The Sims* took the world by storm.

2001 came loaded with *Black and White*, *Grand Theft Auto III* (for the PlayStation 2) and the world held its collective breath when the Twin Towers and Pentagon in America were attacked. In 2002, Rockstar was entangled in the controversy surrounding the *Grand Theft Auto* series, while *The Sims* overtook *Myst* as the "all-time, best-selling computer game" after selling 6.3 million copies.

In 2003, Nokia released its reasonably successful N-Gage, while Sony showed off the PlayStation Portable prototype. *Need for Speed: Underground* and *The Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* also made their way into our gaming collections.

In 2004, Nintendo announced the development of its third-generation console, "Revolution" (later to be renamed the Wii), while launching the DS in the United States. *The Sims 2* was released, followed shortly by *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (bringing with it the 2005 Hot Coffee scandal that landed Rockstar North in hot water) and the launch of Facebook.

2005 saw Microsoft announcing the Xbox 360 on an MTV show hosted by Elijah Wood, while Sony revealed the PlayStation 3 to the media at a pre-E3 conference. *Quake 4*, *F.E.A.R.* and *Age of Emipires III* all made their appearance during the year, with varying degrees of success, and the South African Constitutional Court ordered parliament to amend the laws governing same-sex marriages.

In 2006, South Africa became a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. The year also saw the Xbox 360 launch at rAge in Johannesburg, while *LocoRoco* and *Hitman: Blood Money* made their way onto our shelves.

The Wii finally became available locally in 2007, not long after the PS3's release. *Halo 3*'s release distracted everyone from their daily lives until we won the Rugby World Cup.

Now, just having passed safely through the first quarter of the year, we're all already anticipating the release of *SPORE* and *Guitar Hero IV*, which is great so long as the gaming gods don't plan on disappointing us. In the meantime, let's celebrate everything that's gone right and wrong and be glad we made it through. **NAG**

"Although a year is likely to be filled with various events worth mentioning, 1998 is important for one reason: the first issue of *New Age Gaming* was published.

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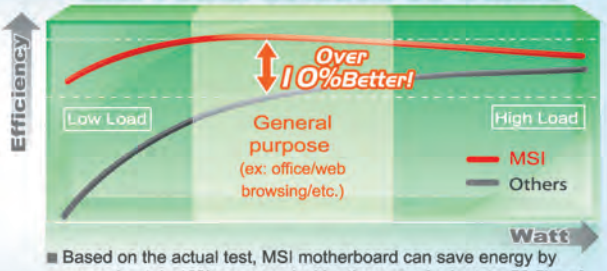

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Ramjet

by Walt Pretorius

Growing Old Disgracefully

I HAVE BECOME A NICE guy. No really, I have. I know this because I have just finished writing my bit for the nostalgic look-back at the last ten years of *NAG*. While flipping through the Volume 3 issues, which date back to around 2000, I started reading my old Rampage columns. All I can say is that I seem to have mellowed with age. And that, boys and girls, just won't do. See, this column was always meant to do one thing. It wasn't meant to provoke thought or dialogue. It wasn't meant to be a diatribe about the state of the industry. It wasn't even meant to be an accurate depiction of the world of gaming. Nope. It was meant to piss people off and, in the old days, it did.

"But no," all the varsity student readers, who are all overly-philosophical and under-experienced in the school of hard knocks, say, "we are all meant to grow and evolve and change." I say crap! I don't have a good reason for saying it, but I'm going to because I can and because I am supposed to. At our core, we always remain the same in any case, and at mine, I am a bitter and twisted SOB that thrives on negative reactions. Go stick that in your pipe and smoke it, college boy!

"But why?" the same mob, who seem to think that pacifism is a good choice, ask. "Why do you need to be so aggressive? Can't we all get along?" I need to be aggressive because, in the greater scheme of things, gamers deserve it. They're generally all spoilt brats who do nothing but complain (and manage to, like a kicked dog, never actually learn that the hype machine is the hobnailed boot of a multi-billion dollar industry.) And no, we can't get along. Get off my lawn... I am afraid that I might hit my attack dogs while firing my shotgun at you.

"Oh, but wait, maybe you're just misunderstood..." Here, this is my middle finger. Understand that!

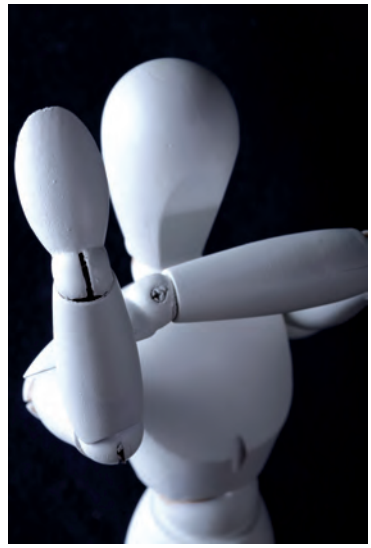
Yes, it's time for the old me to come raging to the surface in a fit of MPD-fuelled anger. It's time for the venom to come back... I miss getting hate mail from fifteen-year-olds whose balls have just dropped (granting them a spurt of inspired wisdom and knowledge that last up until the time that they realise they are just full of crap and don't actually know anything about the world, usually around the age of 30). I miss saying what I like, the consequences be damned. I miss the irrational explosions that used to be the hallmark of my columns. I miss the rage, and the outrage, which would be sparked at the slightest provocation – or lack of provocation. I miss the fact that I used to be taken so very seriously, no matter how ridiculous my position was. I miss being angry, because anger is the clearest of emotions. But most of all, I miss venting my frustrations in this publication purely because I can.

"But you've been aggressive in the last few months" comes the last-ditch effort from the people who are supposed to be studying, not reading gaming magazines. Sure, I have had my say, but I haven't let loose like I used to in the good old days. Older readers (people who work for a living and pay tax, and therefore qualify as relevant human beings) will remember the way I used to be. They probably won't like it, but they'll remember.

And so, as I slowly start building up the bile and get ready to spit it out, I would like to let you know that this was the last 'nice guy' column I am ever going to write. It might seem irrelevant to the world of gaming, but that's the thing. I get paid to write this, and you pay good money to read it. In fact, you have just read this entirely pointless column, which takes up valuable space in your favourite magazine...

See, it feels good to be angry. **NAG**

> I say crap! I don't have a good reason for saying it, but I'm going to because I can and because I am supposed to.



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Kingpin

by Michael James

Can you feel the wind in your farce?

IT WOULD APPEAR THAT all the other columnists in this issue are peppering on about the birthday issue, birthday this, nostalgic blah that and yawn, bore and snooze. Me, I don't care. I've had my little birthday talk already so the pressure is off to cook up something insightful about a decade of churning this chum out to all the little fishes in the great big sea for the last good-grief-has-it-been-that-long. The other unfair advantage I have is that I've already read all the other columns and if I were preparing something suitably birthday related I sure as hell wouldn't do it now. You've already been through three of these birthday tributes, so thank me for sparing you a fourth. Okay, the truth. There was pressure to write this column, pressure to make it great, pressure to write something here that's deep, thoughtful and worthy of a tenth birthday issue. However, as many a scribe will attest, the problem with pressure like this is that it can either make you or break you. It broke me, so going in don't expect too much and that way you won't be disappointed. My plan is to go with something simple that smartly looks back in time but has nothing to do with this whole birthday issue stuff. Here goes, wish me luck.

COLUMN PROPER

Think back in time. Spare a thought if you will for all the trapped alter egos, avatars and characters left in games you didn't finish, think about how they now wander around aimlessly (or aimlessly wander), and think about how they must feel. I know it's a stretch for the imagination and I sometimes like to think that our version of the human-reality project is really just a game that someone got bored of. But back to you. How many have you left behind in your gaming history? Consider how many marines, fighter pilots, and perhaps even the odd plumber (yes, you Miktar) you've left behind in unfinished games. Some of them will perpetually face an end-level boss, some will be all alone in a dark corridor, a trillion light years from home, and others will be doomed to wade through a sewer system looking for the red key card. There they stay, waiting to go on, waiting for someone to guide them to safety, someone to finish it all for them so they can enjoy the end-game cut-scene (the one where they're showered with praise, money and blonds). But alas, most will remain trapped in the digital amber of an unfinished game.

Dramatic, isn't it? I clearly remember the first game I didn't finish. It was some text-based adventure game (bear with me this is long ago), that I know I'll never remember the name of (I asked my friend Brett to see if he could dig it up so maybe one day...). In the game you entered a house and became trapped. There was an empty pool in the back yard and a snake on a staircase that prevented you from climbing upstairs. I didn't get very far into the game despite spending plenty of time on it and I never did figure out what that snake wanted. It still haunts me when I think back to my early gaming days. It's been over 20 years since I gave up on that game and I still think of my virtual self, stuck in that house after all these years wondering how to get past that damn snake. I really do wish I could find that game again and actually finish it – no matter how long it takes. That was the first and there've been countless others. (Oops, I'm out of space for this so I'm zooming to the point). I guess the message here, at the end of the day, is to make sure you finish your games or you might end up regretting it... Deep!

INNOVATION IS A TEN-LETTER WORD!

Some business. For this issue in particular we must sincerely thank Samsung and Rectron for making this whole slick, stylish issue of *NAG* work so well. Samsung actually sponsored our whole cool magazine box (Samsung is therefore our new best friend) and Rectron kindly allowed us to move their advert off the back page of the magazine and put it on the back of the box so we could do the whole special edition white cover wraparound with the fancy embossed logo on the front (this is a first in the history of this magazine; probably any magazine for that matter). Someone said we should have made the cover black to support the new South Africa (black as in the black darkness from the load-shedding you fools), but we didn't like that idea and had the clown thrown in a hole. It all looks so lovely doesn't it? Just a pity there's no big ticket demo on the DVD... We also made a mistake on the page count. We said 164 pages on the box, but the actual magazine is only 148 pages. So it looks like we're starting this volume off with a little false advertising. Sorry folks but we're only gamers. PS: Did you actually count all the letters in innovation? **NAG**

> Some of them will perpetually face an end-level boss, some will be all alone in a dark corridor, a trillion light years from home, and others will be doomed to wade through a sewer system looking for the red key card.

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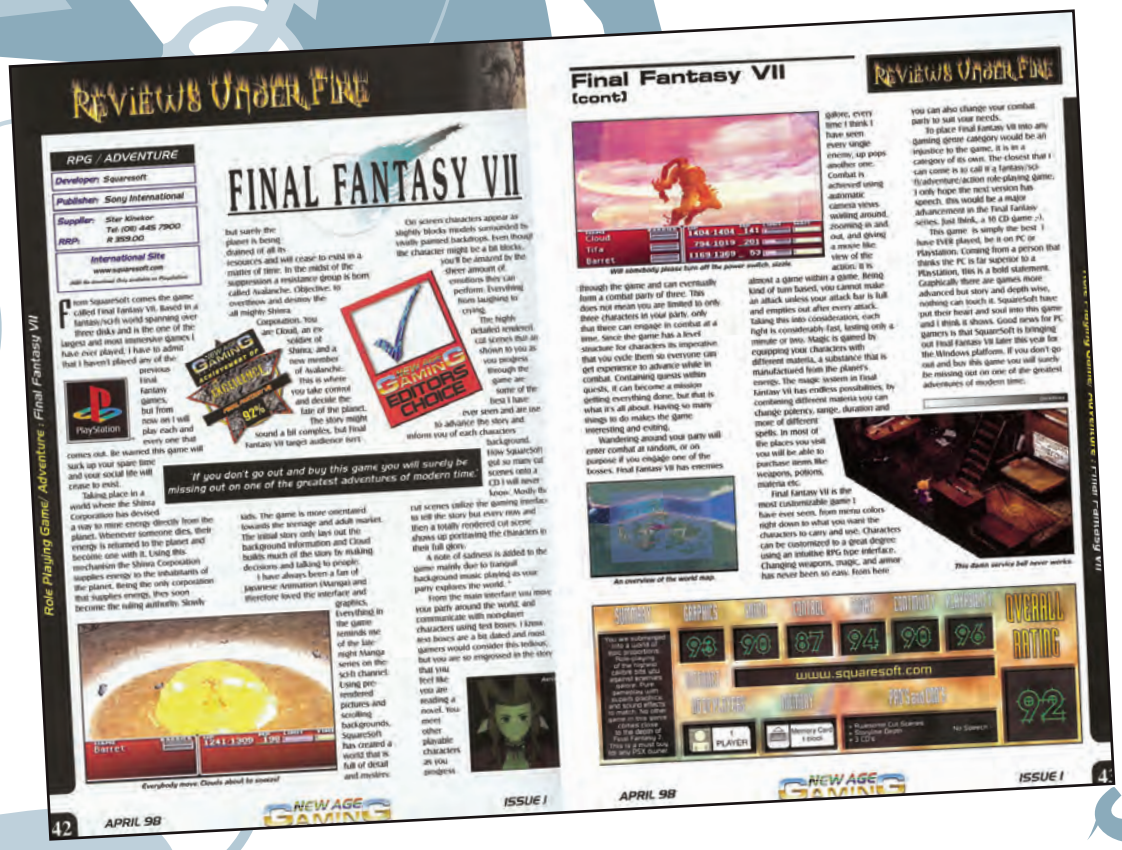
It's been a decade of blood, sweat and tears. It's been a decade of struggle. It's been a decade of learning lessons and finding humility. But while everyone else was busy with that, we've been playing games. Occasionally the *NAG* staff would set aside their mice and controllers, and churn out a magazine – just to pay the bills and to boast how we make a living playing games. Well, what do you know? After ten years all those bits and bops of work actually formed a bunch of stuff to look back on! So, without further ado, to celebrate its tenth birthday here is...

A DECADE OF NAG

NAG vol.1

April 1998 - March 1999



REVIEWS UNDER FIRE

RPG / ADVENTURE

Developer: Squaresoft

Publisher: Sony International

Supplier: Ster Kinekor Tel (011) 445 7900 RRP: R 359.00

International Site: www.squaresoft.com

FINAL FANTASY VII

Role Playing Game / Adventure : Final Fantasy VII

From SquareSoft comes the game called Final Fantasy VII. Based in a fantasy/sci-fi world spanning over three disks and is the one of the largest and most immersive games I have ever played. I have to admit that I haven't played any of the previous Final Fantasy games, but from now on I will play each and every one that comes out. Be warned this game will suck up your spare time and your social life will cease to exist.

Taking place in a world where the Shinra Corporation has devised a way to mine energy directly from the planet. Whenever someone dies, their energy is returned to the planet and become one with it. Using this mechanism the Shinra Corporation supplies energy to the inhabitants of the planet. Being the only corporation that supplies energy, they soon become the ruling authority. Slowly but surely the planet is being drained of all its resources and will cease to exist in a matter of time. In the midst of the suppression a resistance group is born called Avalanche. Objective: to overthrow and destroy the all mighty Shinra Corporation. You are Cloud, an ex-soldier of Shinra, and a new member of Avalanche. this is where you take control and decide the fate of the planet. The story might sound a bit complex, but Final Fantasy VII targets audience here kids. The game is more orientated towards the teenage and adult market. The initial story only lays out the background information and Cloud builds much of the story by making decisions and talking to people.

I have always been a fan of Japanese Animation (Manga) and therefore loved the interface and graphics. Everything in the game reminds me of the late night Manga series on the SCI channel. Using pre-rendered pictures and scrolling backgrounds, Squaresoft has created a world that is full of detail and mystery.

On screen characters appear as slightly blocky models surrounded by visually pumped backdrops. Even though the character might be a bit blocky, you'll be amazed by the sheer amount of emotions they can perform. Everything from laughing to crying.

The highly detailed rendered cut scenes that are shown to you as you progress through the game are some of the best I have ever seen and are use to advance the story and inform you of each characters background.

Now Squaresoft got so many cut scenes onto a CD I will never know. Mostly the cut scenes utilize the gaming interface to tell the story but every now and then a totally rendered cut scene shows up portraying the characters in their full glory.

A taste of sadness is added to the game mainly due to tranquil background music playing as your party explores the world.

From the main interface you move your party around the world, and communicate with non-player characters using text boxes. I know text boxes are a bit dated and most gamers would consider this tedious, but you are so engrossed in the story that you feel like you are reading a novel. You meet other playable characters as you progress.

If you don't go out and buy this game you will surely be missing out on one of the greatest adventures of modern time.

Final Fantasy VII (cont)

Cloud 1404 1404 141
Tifa 794 1019 201
Barret 1169 1369 92

Will somebody please turn off the power switch, sizzle.

through the game and can eventually form a combat party of three. This does not mean you are limited to only three characters in your party, only that there can engage in combat at a time. Since the game has a level structure for characters its imperative that you cycle them so everyone can get experience to advance while in combat. Containing quests within quests, it can become a mission getting everything done, but that is what it's all about. Having so many things to do makes the game interesting and exiting.

Wandering around your party will enter combat at random, or on purpose if you engage one of the bosses. Final Fantasy VII has enemies almost a game within a game. Being kind of turn based, you cannot make an attack unless your attack bar is full and empties out after every attack. Taking this into consideration, each fight is considerably fast, lasting only a minute or two. Magic is gained by equipping your characters with different materia, a substance that is manufactured from the planet's energy. The magic system in Final Fantasy VII has endless possibilities, by combining different materia you can change potency, range, duration and more of different spells. In most of the places you visit you will be able to purchase items like weapons, potions, materia etc.

Final Fantasy VII is the most customizable game I have ever seen, from menu colors right down to what you want the characters to carry and use. Characters can be customized to a great degree using an intuitive RPG type interface. Changing weapons, magic, and armor has never been so easy. From here you can also change your combat party to suit your needs.

To place Final Fantasy VII into any gaming genre category would be an injustice to the game, it is in a category of its own. The closest that I can come is to call it a fantasy/sci-fi/adventure/action role-playing game. I only hope the next version has speech. this would be a major advancement in the Final Fantasy series. Just think, a 10 CD game :-).

This game is simply the best I have EVER played, be it on PC or Playstation. Coming from a person that thinks the PC is far superior to a Playstation, this is a bold statement. Graphically there are games more advanced but story and depth wise, nothing can touch it. Squaresoft have put their heart and soul into this game and I think it shows. Good news for PC gamers is that Squaresoft is bringing out Final Fantasy VII later this year for the Windows platform. If you don't go out and buy this game you will surely be missing out on one of the greatest adventures of modern time.

An overview of the world map.

This damn service ball never works.

OVERALL RATING 92

www.squaresoft.com

1 PLAYER

APRIL 98 42

NEW AGE GAMING

ISSUE 1

APRIL 98

ISSUE 1

THE RISE OF NAG

THE FIRST ISSUE OF New Age Gaming was rather coy about why the magazine came to being. The real explanation only came a few years later when *NAG* co-founder Warren Steven explained it all. Not too long before *NAG*, *PC Format South Africa* was launched, but Warren felt it wasn't really a gaming magazine and wasn't an alternative to buying the expensive international publications that riddled CNA's shelves. So *NAG*, then *New Age Gaming*, came to being. Originally put together by Warren and his close friend Leonard Diamond (with a helping hand from Warren's wife, Stacey), it was a labour of love, sweat and tears. But the magazine knew what it wanted to do; support games. That meant all games and *NAG*'s first issue nailed its colours to the mast by running a *Gran Turismo* cover, thus declaring that it's not a PC-exclusive publication. But the PC would dominate its pages, boasting top games like *Unreal* and *Half-Life*, covering-cutting edge technology like the RIVA TNT and Voodoo 3, and pushing hard to promote multiplayer gaming with local LANs and events. The content mainly consisted out of reviews, previews and hardware, with multiplayer coverage and cheats at the back. Features didn't exist yet, but there was some extra meat in the popular Demoscene and Archives set-pieces. By the sixth issue, the cover CD was launched, boasting a whopping 10 demos (not a lot has changed, really) and all kinds of goodies. By the end of its first year, *NAG* had proven that it was delivering what gamers wanted and by the January/February 1999 issue, demands on Warrens' time allowed Michael James to take over as the Editor, starting his reign over the magazine until 2004.

The first volume had nine issues, growing from 64 to 76 pages. The first large poster appeared in issue 6, featuring the art of *SiN*. A copy of *NAG* would then set you back a whopping R11.95, well below the near-hundred bucks imported magazines would cost. Ironically the name of the magazine caused a lot of controversy, with people accusing the 'New Age' bit of carrying some deeper, darker meaning.

April

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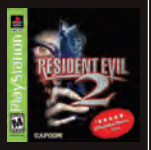
IN THE NEWS

TAKING A CHANCE ON CONSOLES
Thrustmaster, traditionally a PC joystick manufacturer, decided to take a chance and start making third-party controllers for the new-fangled PlayStation. A few months later, Sony made Dual Shock controllers standard for all PlayStations.

SEGA FEELS THE SATURN PAIN
After clocking up a massive $309 million loss in the US (my, how times have changed), SEGA decided to pull the Saturn console from the US market. Later it would unveil the Dreamcast (codename: Katana) to the world. As we all know, SEGA would eventually exit the hardware race completely.

ZOMBIES ARE HOT, HOT, HOT!


Resident Evil 2 claimed a new record, selling three million units in six weeks. *StarCraft* moved one million units in two months – possibly a bigger deal back then than it is today.

THE 3D WARS BEGIN
S3 sued NVIDIA for trademark violations, but NV figured the case had got no legitimacy and said its own RIVA cards were original developments. NVIDIA also launched RIVA TNT cards in 1998.

YOU'LL ONLY NEED 98
Microsoft launched Windows 98. No details on sales, but the *NAG* staff made a point of mentioning the good food at the local launch event.

IS THAT A PLAYSTATION 2?
The PlayStation 2's existence was acknowledged and a dodgy-looking picture of a prototype made the rounds. We are so happy they didn't stick to that look. Rumours of developers getting PS2 dev kits started emerging.

ROMERO R.I.P.?
A mock photo showing John Romero lying in a morgue, with a bullet hole in his head, sparked rumours that the famed developer was dead. It was only revealed as false a day or so later, since no-one had heard from John in a few days.

ROGER? WILCO!
A game called *Fireteam* promises the first 'real-time voice' technology for online gamers.

LICENCING THE FINAL FRONTIER

Activision signed a deal with Viacom to create *Star Trek* games. A few years later it would sue Viacom for making rubbish *Star Trek* movies.

BEFORE THE PSP
Sony announced the PocketStation, a small 'console' that used the PS memory card and would get games from PS discs. Unfortunately the idea never took off, but you can consider it the PSP's daddy.

500MHZ!!!
Intel announced the Pentium III, which boasted clock speeds of between 450 and 500Mhz.3DFX also announce VooDoo 3 specifications, complete with bump-mapping technology.

HOT / COLD

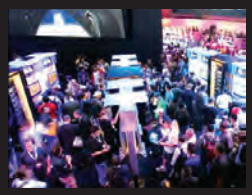
FIFA 99 (PC)	94
Grim Fandango (PC)	93
Baldur's Gate (PC)	93
Half-Life (PC)	93
Unreal (PC)	93
The Fifth Element (PS)	59
Victory Boxing 2 (PS)	53
Power Move Pro Wrestling (PS)	52
Spawn the Eternal (PS)	49
Simon the Sorcerer Pinball (PC)	47

HOT STUFF

HALF-LIFE
In hind-sight it is hard to tell how much hype came before the milestone that was *Half-Life*. Valve had to put up half the cash before publisher Sierra signed it on, kick started Gordon Freeman's adventures in late 1998. But perhaps the biggest trump card for the game, apart from taking on *Quake II* and *Unreal* with a solid single-player experience, was the impressive graphics delivered by the software renderer. *Half-Life* delivered graphical effects that gamers only expected to see on accelerated hardware, especially the multi-coloured lights from the reactor sequence at the start.

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR
It was nearly ten years ago when Fox decided to give another stab at the *Aliens vs. Predator* franchise. There had been titles in the series before, the last appearing on Atari's ill-fated Jaguar console. But even the bad reputation movie games had managed to build up didn't diminish the cool factor of these monsters and fans were eager to play the game. Apart from letting you play as an Alien or Predator (or marine), the game features cutting-edge graphics that rivaled *Unreal*'s polygons. Best of all, it featured different viewing effects (such as the Predator's thermal vision) and the first flamethrower in a 3D first-person shooter.

COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN
Has a title ever seen more hype before its release? Probably, but *Tiberian Sun*'s unbelievable amount of anticipation remains a vivid memory. What makes it stand out more sharply is how disappointing the game turned out to be, but this is perhaps because it was released close to the revolutionary *StarCraft*. It's interesting that the plot appears to be the same as *C&C 3*: Earth is in shambles, Tiberium is replicating like mad and NOD wants to bring about the end of everything. *Tiberian Sun* did well, selling lots of units, but fans weren't too pleased with the lack of innovation when it came to gameplay.



THE E3 TRIBUNE
NAG's editor Warren Steven secured a trip to the glorious E3, bringing back what would eventually evolve into the *E3 Tribune*. The coverage was massive for its day, spanning two issues and totaling 18 pages. Sure, the later *Tribunes* were bigger, but this was all written by one guy! The E3 coverage highlighted games that would later become classics - *Diablo 2, Homeworld, Thief* and *Metal Gear Solid*. It also mentioned *Prey* and *Duke Nukem Forever*. But let's not forget all those games we've actually forgotten (or never saw), like *KKND 2, Thrill Kill, Daikatana* and *Gabriel Knight*.

UNREAL
A game of such awesomeness that it was previewed twice – in the first AND second issues of *NAG*. The second issue even punted it as "South Africa's First Look"... yes, spot the mistake there. Prophetically DarkSkies writes that "*Unreal* will be a *Quake* killer" and added that he "hasn't seen a game as graphically advanced". There was no end to *Unreal*'s good points – a story-driven single-player experience, large, open maps and detailed interiors, not to mention pretty advanced character AI that ducked and dived out of the way of your bullets.

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NAG vol.2

April 1999 - March 2000

THE MATRIX HAS YOU, NEO

IT'S THE YEAR OF the *Matrix* and like Mr Anderson, it was during volume two that *New Age Gaming* finally started to believe. It's incredible how much growth occurred between '99 and '00: both in gaming and for the magazine itself. The magazine upgraded from being saddle-stitch bound (yucky staples) to perfect bound (non-sniffable glue). This finally ended the premature page loss *NAG* suffered, as pages would no longer attempt to escape. A few readers complained that the magazine still "smells bad", so fragrance was added to the ink. To avoid pilfering of the 600MB Cover CD, *NAG* started being shipped bagged. Walter Pretorius (a.k.a. Shryke) joined the team part time, and upgraded to full-time employee two months later. Shryke would continue to entertain and delight for years (but we never let him forget the *Enter The Matrix* incident). Esteemed supreme Editor RedTide went to his first E3. He returned a changed man. The Gamers League of South Africa was created. The GLSA had been resting in peace since the end of 2003. Nobody could have foreseen the cataclysmic result of *NAG* increasing its price though. The increase from R18.95 to R24.95 in September '99 resulted in widespread panic and months of angry e-mails, which eventually subsided. The smash-hit comic "A NAGging suspicion" and high-calibre column "Ramjet's Rampage" both launched in the October issue. *NAG* introduced two more categories into the review scoring system in December: Originality and Judgement. In hindsight, a move now considered to be lacking in both. But those were the crazy days! Crazy-awesome, because *NAG* interviewed Peter Molyneux in his office. The super January/February '00 combination issue had a gold foil cover of the *Quake III* logo. It remains shiny to this day. The "Developers Blueprint" how-to-make-your-own-game section also launched, scheduled to run for 12 months.

Eleven issues of *New Age Gaming* ran this volume, each containing 82 pages of child-like enthusiasm. It is a well-known fact that at the time, *New Age Gaming* was powered by the smiles of orphans and these games: *Heavy Gear II, Aliens vs. Predator, System Shock 2, Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver, Nox, Dungeon Keeper II, Outcast, Diablo II, Black & White, Sacrifice* and *Dungeon Siege*.

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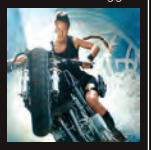
IN THE NEWS

DIRECTX 7 COMING SOON
Scheduled to debut in July 1999 (but arriving very late), DirectX 7 promised to provide "hardware-accelerated support for transformation and lighting". It also boasted "predictive texture loads" and "sub-level texture cache managing". AGP 4 X wasn't supported until later in DirectX 8, interestingly enough. This was the year everyone expected 1,024x768 to become to the standard resolution for games.

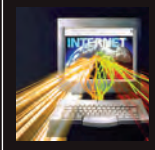
TEAM FORTRESS 2 DELAYED?
A Sierra Representative said, "We haven't made any official announcements on the ship date [of *Team Fortress 2*]. I believe we've only stated we are targeting the second half of this year". Talk about egg on your face: they missed the target by eight years.



LARA CROFT MOVIE FINALLY UNDERWAY
Before Angelina Jolie was cast in her role as the "big-titted bitch from hell" (as Lara Croft is colloquially known), Paramount said "gamers, we are making the *Tomb Raider* movie". Many rejoiced.

QUAKE III TEST RELEASED
And there was much LANning! Even though it only had two deathmatch maps and five weapons, it supported LAN and Internet play that totally rocked. Longest Yard, anyone? RedTide, get off the rail platform, camper.

BIG INTERNET

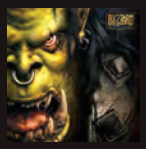


"This year another 35.2 million people around the world will go online, bringing the total number of active Internet users to a staggering 130.6 million". The same report predicted that the number would grow to 350 million by the year 2003 (a 267 percent increase from the 95.4 million using the Internet in 1998). Just so you know, the current estimated number of total active Internet users is 1.3 billion.

56 MILLION FOR SONY PLAYSTATION
Culmulative global shipments for the PlayStation (launched in 1994) rose above 56 million by May 1999.

QUAKING ALICE IN WONDERLAND
In September 1999, American McGee (former id Software level designer) announced he would be cooking up a Lewis Carroll classic (*Alice in Wonderland*) for FPS junkies. Kick-ass game, shame about the ending.

WARCRAFT III SOON!
Blizzard promises *WarCraft III* in early 2000. They were two years late.



DVD ENCRYPTION CRACKED
By September 1999, the DVD encryption scheme CSS (Content Scrambling System) was cracked, allowing people to dump movies to hard drives for all sorts of evil.

MORE FROM ID SOFTWARE
Graeme Devine, project leader for id Software at the time, was inspired by *Diablo*. Talks of a "*Quake III* meets *Diablo II*" never went anywhere, sadly.

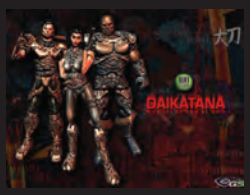
SACRIFICE
Surrealist developers Shiny announced their upcoming real-time strategy game, *Sacrifice*. We liked *Sacrifice*. A lot.

HOT / COLD

Unreal Tournament (PC)	92
Jack Nicklaus: Golder Bear Challenge (PC)	93
Nocturne (PC)	93
Quake III Arena (PC)	93
The Nomad Soul (PC)	94
PGA Golf: European Tour (PSX)	25
Peacemaker (PC)	31
Might & Magic VII: For Blood and Honor (PC)	41
Pro 18: World Tour Golf (PSX)	44
Savage Arena (PC)	45

HOT STUFF

PLAYSTATION 2
Even now, it is still possible to feel the raw power pulsating from the PlayStation 2's "Emotion Engine". Although it would only be released in Japan over a year later (and much later than that in South Africa), Sony was already hyping till the cows came home back in March '99. Terms like "gigaflops" suddenly started to matter to gamers. Already the "PC vs. Console" debate was tying its shoelaces for a decade-long run. But it all worked out in the end, once people forgot about the "real-time *Final Fantasy VIII* cut-scene" debacle.



JOHN ROMERO'S DAIKATANA
"Anyone who has a game like *Quake* to their credit needs little introduction. John Romero left id Software a while back and started his own company called Ion Storm, and ever since, he has become completely consumed by a game called *Daikatana*. Anticipation dulls the senses, and the last few days before receiving the first demo of this game was spent in a constant state of aimless wonder, nothing received any attention other than the front gate - a portal from which the true sequel to *Quake* would arrive" - RedTide. But as we know now, this was not meant to be.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT
Back when people still attempted to make every new game release the "killer" of whatever popular game predated it, *Unreal* was deathmatching *Quake II*. There could be only one, in the eyes of both developers and gamers. The rivalry between the *Unreal* and *Quake* series remains legendary to this day, albeit clear now just how sheepish an indulgence the whole idea was. Regardless, *Unreal Tournament* hit the scene and as is evident by *Unreal Tournament III* (2007) it certainly made a lasting impression. But nobody could have foreseen the juggernaut that is *Halo*.

HOMEWORLD
"No Hype All Game" was the hype for *Homeworld*, a game which now seems to have been a touch too ahead of the curve back then. Looking back, even for 1999 the idea of a fully 3D real-time strategy that allowed for epic space battles with complete unit freedom of movement was perhaps a bit ambitious. But Relic Interactive pulled it off and the series got an expansion (externally developed) and a true sequel. Yet, the revolutionary advancements made in *Homeworld* just didn't take, probably because the game was a bit complicated.

THE SIMS
Admit it: when you first heard about *The Sims* you fell into one of two camps. Either you thought it was the dumbest idea ever, to control the lives of these little virtual people cannot possibly be any fun, or you started planning exactly how you were going to torment your virtual recreations of friends/family. We know now that even its creator Will Wright never anticipated the resounding success *The Sims* would turn out to be. At the end of the day, however, *The Sims* taught society a valuable lesson: if you give enough back massages they'll eventually love you.

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NAG vol. 3

April 2000 – March 2001

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

WHEN THE DUST SETTLED after the biggest New Year's Party in roughly 100 years, it was time to get back to the serious business of gaming. There was no time to breathe a sigh of relief because the Big Computer Crash never happened; the PS2 was on the way, and both Nintendo and Microsoft had announced new gaming consoles (the GameCube and Xbox, respectively). Now entering it's third year, *NAG* was becoming stronger by the month.

Still sporting the garish logo of yesteryear, *NAG* was preparing for some of the most revolutionary gaming releases seen in a very long time. Aside from the new consoles, a number of new titles (set to be released during 2000) had gamers the world over abuzz, and the tiny staff working on the magazine knew that they would have their hands full. The establishment of a new local game developer I-Imagine – was also creating a stir, and the company received a lot of coverage from the *NAG* team (and also became a regular *Quake III* opponent).

The look of the magazine did a few sidesteps during the period, moving from a softer, less mature look to a more serious one around the middle of the year, before moving back to a softer look again (the yearly redesign policy hadn't been established yet back then). Articles ranged from game development and level design right through to interviews and the usual reviews and previews.

By the end of the year, *NAG* had covered some very exciting titles, and had acquired a PS2 (which proved to be a big hit around the new offices that the company had relocated to). *The Sims, Diablo 2* and *Alice* had all made an appearance in the office, as had *Red Alert 2*, which, along with a short *Counter-Strike* stint, had kept the work at bay. The magazine's involvement with the highly successful WorFaire 2000 had earned the crew kudos of the highest degree and as 2001 rolled around it appeared as though gaming was set to boom in South Africa, taking *NAG* right along with it.

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IN THE NEWS

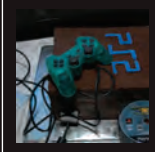
AGE-RESTRICTED CYBERATHLETES?
The CPL announced that it was considering complying with the ESRB's age regulations after the Razer CPL event in Dallas in April of 2000. The CPL's self imposed minimum age of 15 would be brought in line with the ESRB's rating, meaning that competitive players of *Quake III* would have to have been a minimum of 17 years old.

JOLIE GIVES LIFE TO LARA
Eidos interactive and Paramount Pictures announced that Angelina Jolie would play the part of Lara Croft in the upcoming *Tomb Raider* movie. She beat actresses including Denise Richards and Liz Hurley to snag the part.

NO MORE PC, SAYS PETER

Peter Molyneux, the head of Lionhead Studios, announced that he would no longer be making PC titles, concentrating rather on the consoles of the day (like the original Xbox.) According to Molyneux, *Black & White* would be his last PC title. (In subsequent years, *Black and White 2* and *The Movies* were both PC titles...)

PENTIUM 4 BORN
Intel's new chipset, codenamed "Willamette," was finally confirmed as being the Pentium 4. Boasting a starting speed of 1.4 GHz, the Pentium 4 chip was the continuation of a line that Intel first started producing in 1993.



PS2 STAGGERED RELEASE
Despite plans to release the PS2 simultaneously around the world, Sony announced that the PlayStation 2 would arrive in Europe a month after the US release, citing insufficient production to meet launch demand.

FAKK 2 – R99!
Brett Smith, the senior product manager at MMW, announced that *Heavy Metal: F.A.K.K. 2* would retail for R99. It was also going to be the first game distributed in South Africa in the now familiar DVD casing. Smith hoped that the move would energise the market, and prompt other distributors to rethink their pricing strategy.

SEGA CANS DREAMCAST
SEGA announced that all production of the revolutionary DreamCast console would end by March of 2001, citing huge losses as the reason for the change. SEGA promised to keep producing games for use on other consoles, despite its exit from the hardware arena.

HOT / COLD

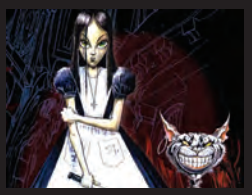
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (PS2)	94
Red Alert 2 (PC)	92
Enemy Engaged	92
In Cold Blood	92
Resident Evil Nemesis	91
Might and Magic VIII (PC)	42
Hardcore ECW Revolution (PS)	42
Y2K (PC)	42
Cricket 2000 (PC)	41
Panty Raider (PC)	31

HOT STUFF

THE SIMS
The Sims arrived early in the year, turning many of the *NAG* staff into addicts (in the short term at least). The revolutionary game changed at simulations and introduced AI behaviours more complex than before. It would, of course, go on to become one of the biggest games ever. The unique blend of construction and micromanagement, as well as the overall idea behind the title was an exceptional combination that would keep the franchise running for several years, with a large number of expansions to keep the ideas fresh.

DIABLO 2
Diablo 2 was one of the most-anticipated games of the year (and previous years, too). Its arrival marked a new ambition in computer gaming, but brought with it a massive amount of disappointment. Many of the features promised by the developers of the game just weren't there, and a patch released around the time that the game hit the shelves was one of the largest ever at that time. Regardless, *Diablo 2* went on to become a firm favourite that is still being played some eight years later.

THE XBOX
Microsoft's announcement that the company would enter the console market created quite a stir. The hype surrounding the Xbox continued for most of the year, fuelled by rampant speculation as to the nature of the machine, as well as its apparently exemplary performance. When the unit finally arrived, it was met with mixed response; although the performance was good, criticism was leveled at a number of aspects of the machine. Nevertheless, it performed well overseas (having never enjoyed a local release) and set the "Great Console Wars" in motion.



ALICE
American McGee's Alice was a much-anticipated adventure game that presented a darker version of *Alice in Wonderland*. The game's characters soon became icons of the gothic set, and the game garnered a lot of praise. Featuring compelling game dynamics, great sound and graphics and a truly twisted story, *Alice* proved to be the game that players with darker tastes had been waiting for. The game's creator was catapulted into the spotlight after the success of the title, and many are still hoping for a sequel.

BLACK & WHITE
Peter Molyneux's revolutionary god game turned the industry upside down. It featured top-notch graphics and a very clever game dynamic... but most of all, it featured the most-advanced learning AI to date. The hype surrounding the title was truly massive, with demonstrations at shows like E3 drawing incredible amounts of attention. *Black & White* was a great success, and would make Molyneux's name a household one for gamers around the world. It spawned a sequel several years later, and is still considered by some to be a defining moment in the progress of in-game AI.

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NAG vol.4

April 2001 – March 2002

REVIEWS UNDER FIRE

The Settlers IV

REVIEWS UNDER FIRE

WWW.PROPHECY.CO.ZA

OMG, IT'S ALL IN THREE-DEE!

NOW FAR ENOUGH INTO the new millennium to be reasonably certain that the world wasn't going to end after all, Volume 4 marked a happy-go-lucky year in gaming. Windows XP and *World of WarCraft* were announced, the Pentium 4 2.0Ghz arrived from Asgard borne upon the wings of a meteor storm, professional misanthrope Anton "The_Basilisk" Lines successfully infiltrated the *NAG* ranks, and everybody and their dead granny wanted a GeForce 3.

In the throes of post-millennial "OMG, we totally didn't die in some sort of angry celestial holocaust" euphoria, however, it was also a year of wildly incautious optimism. Approximately 85% of the upcoming games announced in the News and Previews sections of NAG didn't made it through development, including at least six "next big thing" MMORPGs, and Black Isle's next-gen (*three-dee!*) S.P.E.C.I.A.L. system RPG, BIS: Torn.

In May 2001, *NAG* awarded a budget reissue of now-cult-classic super-deluxe *System Shock 2* just 7/10 (letters of outrage to the usual address, folks), and in November, one reader suggested that women aren't into the competitive gaming thing because "for a girl, the only thing that is important is to look pretty and smell nice" and that the only reason anyone with boobies would play a game is "to beat the guys, and break down their huge egos". B.I.D., if you're reading this, please let us know if you're still a sad, lonely, single virgin.

Also in November, *NAG* ran its semi-annual Dream Machine hardware feature. Packing two 1.7GHz Intel Xeon processors, 2GB of DDR RAM, and a 64MB ATI Radeon 8500DV video card, this pixel-pushing behemoth was valued at an awe-inspiring R84,057.00. The two 73GB harddrives alone cost over R24,000. That's quite a lot for something that probably wouldn't run Vista's Aero theme.

The mag's pice was increased by R10 to R44.95, as a second cover cd was packaged with the mag.

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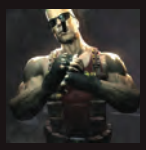
IN THE NEWS



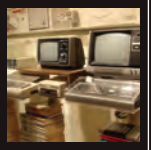
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER DELAYED

This catastrophic piece of news was delivered with crushing brutality in October 2001, after four long years in development. No new release date was supplied. Grown gamers wept, while time-travelling tourists from 2008 pointed fingers and snickered ruefully.

PS3 RELEASE "IMMINENT"

In January 2002, it was reported that Sony was scrambling for an earlier-than-scheduled release of the PS3, fearing that the newly-released and significantly more powerful Xbox would shorten the PS2's lifespan. Now this is one for the "What if..." books.

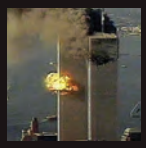
COMPLEMENTARY VICTORY CAKE NOT INCLUDED



On 12 August 2001, the PC turned 20. Even Bill Gates went to the party. The first PC shipped from IBM Corporation featured a 4.77MHz processor, 64KB RAM, and a 5½-inch floppy disk drive, and retailed for around R22,000 without a monitor. Seriously, how did it ever manage to take off?

THOSE DASTARDLY TERRORISTS

Apparently throwing airplanes at America wasn't enough – they had to interfere with the game release schedule too. Following in the wake of the September 11 attacks, several prominent releases were delayed in order to remove depictions of the World Trade Center. These included *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002*, *Spider-Man*, and *Tom Clancy's Rogue Spear: Black Thorn*, while existing copies of *Red Alert 2* were pulled off shelves and repackaged with box art that *didn't* show New York on fire.



XBOX LIVE 1.0

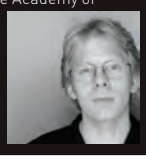
This item appeared in the January 2002 edition of *NAG*. We're reprinting it verbatim, for the lulz:

"A group of software developers have created a Linux-based application that they claim lets Xbox users play system-link games over the internet. The so-called Xbox Gateway (www.xboxgw.com) program works like an ethernet bridge by splitting up Xbox game data packets and delivering them to the right players. It requires that each player have an Xbox, a PC with a broadband connection, and system-link games such as Halo and Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x. According to the developers, head-to-head games are generally lag-free, but the addition of a third player can slow down the play, but they are working on improving this."

Microsoft launched the Xbox Live service in November. It was quite a lot better than the Xbox Gateway.

DOOMED!

On 22 March 2001, id Software's resident brain John Carmack was inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' Hall of Fame. This subsequently gave gaming credibility or something.



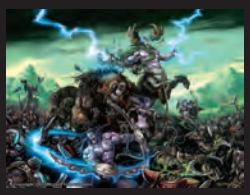
HOT / COLD

Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec [PS2]	94
Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000[PC]	93
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon [PC]	92
L-2 Sturmovik [PC]	92
Battle Realms [PC]	91
Evil Dead: Hail to the King [PC]	55
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone [PC]	54
Star Wars: Battle for Naboo [PC]	54
The Bouncer [PS2]	51
Arctic Thunder [PS2]	41

HOT STUFF

MICROSOFT ENTERS THE CONSOLE ARENA

On 15 November 2001, the Xbox was released Stateside, followed by subsequent releases in Japan, Europe, and Australia in February and March. Despite jumping up and down like toddlers on a jellybean high, however, South Africa enjoyed no local release, and could only look on in ill-disguised envy while everyone else played *Halo: Combat Evolved*. Denied! In 2005, Microsoft would announce losses of of $4 billion incurred – prompting gleeful doom-mongering among Sony and Nintendo fanboys. Most of them have since shut up.



WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Marking the franchise's first tentative foray into 3D space, and featuring some dramatic gameplay changes including Hero units and two entirely new playable races, *WarCraft III* was never going to be anything less than a gargantuan, pangalactic success of largely unprecedented. Of course, this was before *World of WarCraft*, when every sensible gamer knew that Blizzard was the greatest videogame company since forever. Nearly six years after its release, the game still boasts some of the finest in-game cinematics ever produced.

UNREAL II

Although its 2003 release date was still quite a way off, the Great Games Industry Hyperbole Machine was already whipping gamers into a gnashing frenzy for Epic Games' *Unreal II: The Awakening*. A preview in the May 2001 issue of *NAG* declared it, "the most anticipated title of the future", citing in particular its astonishingly sophisticated visuals, as well as issuing a cautionary recommendation that readers finance themselves a GeForce 3 post-haste. *Unreal II* went on to enjoy only modest success.

DUNGEON SIEGE

Following its initial revealing at E3 2000, Gas Powered Games' debut release about a luckless farmer whose kingdom is under a rather rude assault by hoards of goblins managed to churn up a lot of publicity and anticipation. Too much, as it turned out – *Dungeon Siege* just couldn't live up to its hype. The pack-mule was rad, but the AI was pig-stupid at the best of times, there weren't any teleporters, and the whole thing eventually just collapsed into an interminable series of drab fetch quests.

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE

Yes, everyone has forgotten about it now, but back in 2001, the long-awaited *Dune 2000* successor *Battle for Dune* was hotter than a mid-summer holiday on Arrakis. In April 2001, *NAG* described the game in a preview as "shaping up to be the next huge smash-hit for Westwood". In the August review, however, it was then claimed that the game was "always going to receive more attention than it deserved". Approximately 18 months later, Westwood closed up shop.

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Command & Conquer: Renegade

TWELVE ISSUES OF REAL-TIME CORPORATE TURMOIL

FROM A BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE this was a tough end-level boss for *NAG*, one that almost saw the demise of the magazine. The first issue of Volume 5 (April 2002) arrived on the shelf at R24.95 without a cover CD (a reduction from R44.95) we did this for 5 issues because we couldn't afford to produce the double cover CD anymore. We immediately saw a huge drop in sales, got a new publisher and then quickly added a single CD and bumped up the price up to R35.00 (September 2002). Since then, we've never looked back. Incidentally, this was also the first issue we squeezed out without the guidance of one of the founders of *NAG*, Warren Steven. The August issue also marked an exit for Leonard Diamond (the other founder of *NAG*). The September 2002 issue was published under the banner of a new publisher, and from that issue onwards we've been rocking and rolling while going from strength to strength. Overall, an unpleasant roller-coaster ride for everyone involved, but the one thing that made all the difference was that our readers (well most of them anyway) and all of our advertisers stood by us through this difficult period. April 2002 to September 2002 was by far the most significant time for the magazine since the addition of the first cover CD and then later upgrading that to a DVD. All said and done, it just goes to show that you should never say die and adversity, no matter how insurmountable, only makes you stronger. Volume 5 was the heyday of the RTS game with *Dune Generations*, *Command & Conquer: Generals*, *Age of Mythology* and *WarCraft III* all either reviewed, previewed or speculated about. In terms of hardware, other than the launch of the GeForce 4, Creative Labs buying 3D Labs and Matrox entering the 3D market with the Parhelia and the usual backwards and forwards between NVIDIA and the then ATI, nothing really exciting happened in 2002/3 other than a few new toys, bigger hard drives and so on. If there was anything major then we must have missed it (which is highly likely considering how the year started).

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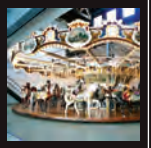
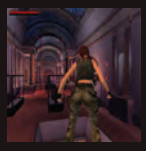
IN THE NEWS

Just a note here, starting a while back and then all through this year and into the next we were practicing platform apartheid by listing the news under the different headings of 'PC News' and 'Console News'. How things have changed, and looking back, it's easy to see why we were often accused of favouring the PC.

PLAYSTATION 3 GROWS A BRAIN
In the October 2002 issue, IBM announced that its new Cell processor was nearly designed. This was of course for Sony's entrance into the new console war with the PlayStation 3. There wasn't much news about the PlayStation 3 and the IBM article was something of a confirmation of an announcement that Sony hadn't exactly made yet.

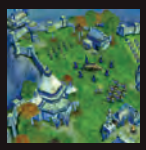
LOCAL BOYS GO BIG

Gamers Gate had their first event at the Carousel [15-16 July 2002], and *NAG* only supported it because Len Nery said we'd get free accommodation and a big breakfast on Sunday. We honestly can't even remember how it all went but the beds were as soft as the eggs. Same thing goes here for Worfaire 1K. It also happened that year. To be honest these events really did a lot of the ground work that makes rAge the raging success that it is today, so hats off to everyone involved in these groundbreaking events. Since then, the GLSA [Gamers League of South Africa] shut down, Gamer Gate folded up and became Arena 77, The 1,000-man LAN disaster came and went and in 2003 the first rAge kicked off.

IF ONLY WE KNEW...
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness was announced. It all seemed so exciting and full of promise back then... until we played it! This chapter of the *Tomb Raider* story is best left closed.



WARCRAFT III
The August 2002 issue had four different covers, Undead, Orc, Elves and Human.

DECEMBER 2002... WHOA DUDE!
December 2002 was a big issue and saw us run three different covers for *Age of Mythology*. December was also the issue where we published screenshots from the leaky Alpha version of *Doom 3* [elaborate marketing stunt or genuine leak, history will never know for sure]. Finally, in the same issue we ran an article about the launch of the Nintendo GameCube in South Africa along with the Gameboy Advance and Gameboy Colour.



SHORTS

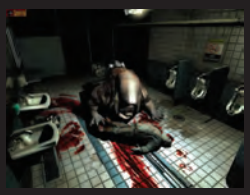
The latest build of the *Unreal Tournament 2003* engine was also shown off at GDC, *StarCraft: Ghost* was announced for the Xbox... very exciting, hot girl; too bad it never arrived and *Unreal II* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost* were also both announced.

HOT / COLD

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (PS2)	96
Ratchet & Clank (PS2)	93
Mafia (PC)	92
Super Mario Sunshine (GCN)	92
Virtua Fighter (PS2)	91
James Bond 007: Nightfire (PS2)	42
The Mummy Returns (PS2)	40
Delta Force: Task Force Dagger (PS2)	38
Archangel (PC)	30
K-Hawk: Survival Instinct (PC)	10

HOT STUFF

COMMAND & CONQUER EVERYTHING
This certainly seemed to be the time for the *Command & Conquer* series with C*ommand & Conquer: Generals* previewed in the October 2002 issue as well as the FPS version; *Renegade*, which got a score of 73. Interestingly, the next *Command & Conquer* FPS; *Tiberium* is due for release in late 2008, making it around six years later. Even though it doesn't count we also looked at *Dune Generations*, not quite specifically *Command & Conquer* but related to the history of the series. In recent news, *Red Alert 3* is also coming soon... whoop!



DOOM III
Monster anticipation brewed in the July 2002 issue with a four-page feature on *DOOM 3: The Legacy* (they would eventually drop this whole 'The Legacy' bit for the final release). It looked so juicy and exciting back then and all things considered, the final game didn't do too badly – except for the great flashlight fiasco. Leave it up to hardcore gamers to crucify a legend of gaming because of a flashlight. Oh well... an interesting side note is that the speculated ideal 3D card requirement at that stage was a GeForce 3 – no joke.

E3
Equally noteworthy and something that harks back to the introduction of this volume/year/whatever, is that our E3 coverage took place inside the pages of *NAG* (15 pages in total) in the July 2002 issue – this was a budget decision and a far cry from the thick 48-page supplement *NAG* readers get to enjoy these days. July 2002 was also the same issue where Electronic Arts sponsored us with a free cover CD in an effort to make up for the lack of the usual *NAG* CD.

THE ONE
Okay, so it wasn't 'hot stuff' but needs a mention. In the February 2003 issue we got all excited about *Enter the Matrix*. Our reviewer, the fool, eventually got so caught up in the hype, he ended up giving this bad game a good score. The excuses ranged from not enough play time to starvation, considering we had to lock him in a room and slide pizza under the door until he was finished. This whole incident was huge news back in the day – if you can remember that far back.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS
The November 2002 issue was historic for South Africa because we featured a locally developed game, *Chase: Hollywood Stunt Driver* (developed by I-Imagine), and chatted with Dan Wagner the brains behind the game. A year of big RTS games started off in the May 2002 issue with a preview of *Age of Mythology*. We also looked at *The Thing* [amazing game] and in the July 2002 issue we reviewed *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*, [it got 70% for those details people]. To cap it off, *Black & White II* was also previewed this year.

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INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

This man can use a whip better than a hill billy on a Sunday, he visits all kinds of exotic locations, and his back-up job is flying the Millennium Falcon or being a Tom Clancy character. Some guys just have it all...

Indiana Jones games will always have a level of nostalgia for me. I remember the first game I played from the series, which was The Temple of Doom. It was also the first Indiana Jones movie I saw (and then subsequently Raiders of the Lost Ark and The Last Crusade). So it was quite something climbing around the Thugee mines, freeing prisoners and eventually racing along the railroad tracks and finding the missing stones. The game that still remains fondest to me, though, is the excellent Fate of Atlantis, the first non-movie episode in Indiana's elaborate career. It was the unofficial sequel to the Last Crusade game, and made for adventure gaming at its best. In fact, I'm tempted to play it again now...

At some point, though, LucasArts decided to generally abandon their excellent line of adventure games, but obviously not the movie license, though Dr. Jones pales in comparison to the hordes of Star Wars games churned out every year. Good thing, though, since LAE tend to produce rubbish at the best of times.

Sadly, the same legacy carried over with The Infernal Machine, the last Indiana Jones game before the release of Emperor's Tomb. It was a paltry effort marred by bad controls and a pretty annoying camera. It's rather odd that in the age of post-Tomb Raider and Soul Reaver most developers can't seem to get the platforming formula right.

Thankfully, The Emperor's Tomb is a major improvement in the game series, and bar the adventure games, which are irrefutable classics, it's the best Indy game to date. Dr. Jones is approached to find three pieces that will open the first Chinese emperor's tomb, which contains the Black Pearl, a jewel of supposed mystic power that will allow someone to control the minds of men. Mysticism aside, you know our beloved Doctor can't resist the chance and he's off to Prague to find the first piece.

Of course, before the actual game begins, you first have to finish a jungle level, representing the traditional pre-quel story at the beginning of each movie, usually where you meet the villain and get things rolling. The jungle level is quite impressive, since it contains a lot of green – something that starts going amiss later in the game. Your enemy units are also rather rudimentary, and you get introduced to crocadiles, the second most-hated unit (personally) in the game. The first has to be the Nazi flame trooper.

Yes, the Nazis are back too (would it be Indy otherwise?) as well as a rival explorer and some sort of philanthropist with ulterior motives. You quickly disclaim the Nazi involvement with the Prague level, which will remind you a lot of Wolfenstein.

There are also settings in the desert city of Budapest, a fed underground city full of water and sharks, Hong Kong, a mountain top Chinese fortress and finally the tombs themselves. It's nice and varied, and the biggest significant difference to the levels is the enemy units, which actually rotate pending on where you play. Sadly, each level seems to have two types of enemy – at most – and ones such as the Prague level only had one. But to give an example, in Budapest you tend to fight cloaked warriors, who are very skilled at using their swords. In China you encounter kung-fu artists, in the Lagoon level Nazis with machine guns are common and so on. Each reacts differently to combat. For instance, shoot Nazis and don't take on an Arab with a sword.

LucasArts' best move in making Emperor's Tomb was to give the development honours to The Collective, the team behind the underdog title DS-5, epicomic Xbox brawler Wrath and the brilliant Buffy the Vampire Slayer. In fact, I'd wager that the engine used in Indy is the same as Buffy. It eyes a similar brawling system, though not as polished as Buffy. In the latter, if you were surrounded, you'd give kicks to guys on the sides and behind you while fighting. Not so with Indy – you'll spend a lot of time running in circles to thin out the pockets of thugs attacking you.

The other problem is that some sections are unbelievably precise, which means that if you release your whip just too early or time your release from a chain just at the wrong time, you'll be tumbling to the ground instead of grabbing the ledge/chain/ladder. This is complemented (?) by a non-save system. A level saves once you've completed it, and though each level is mercifully short and intense, it's still tough (and it gets tougher). Nothing is quite as frustrating as dying near the end and having to start all over again. Thankfully enemy movements are predictable and once you've fought against someone once, odds are he'll be an easy pick when you get there again.

I have a pet annoyance though, with Emperor's Tomb – it's once again another console port, and one of the poorer ones. Thankfully we're not talking Wolverine's Revenge levels of stupidity here (that game does not even have mouse support), but it is still painfully obvious that this game was intended for consoles. More annoyingly, the developers seem to have made the PlayStation 2 their primary platform, instead of porting the Xbox version. I haven't seen that, yet, but I'll assume that it has proper bump-mapping and texture support. See, the PC has the memory and power that is capable of handling high-res textures and bump-mapping, but instead we are left with grimy, blocky textures and generally uninspiring environments. The levels are nice-looking, though, with a lot of detail, transparent areas (the water levels are very impressive) and the enemy units are nicely animated.

As per usual (and I can rarely fault LucasArts here) the music is great, and it appears that the original John Williams score has been used. The music morphs from event to event, and this makes the game very edgy, especially if you are running around a clock tower on a Prague castle, knowing that at any moment you might slip...

It's a nice game, but it's painfully obvious that Emperor's Tomb is a port. Its saving graces, though, are that it's Indiana Jones and that the Collective seem to have given some thought to a varied play dynamic.

Summary

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DOOM 3 VS. HALF-LIFE 2

THEN-EDITOR, NOW-EVIL EMPEROR MICHAEL "RedTide" James began the new volume with a bold promise that, "When we get to 10 years, we'll throw a party and invite everyone we know." Party details to follow shortly, we're sure.

Strategically reapplying sorcery learned playing *Diablo 2*, *NAG* secured some sort of mutually beneficial distribution arrangement with Pick 'n Pay supermarkets, and James "Priest" Francis was promoted to Features Editor, only to begin plotting what would later prove to be an immensely successful coup for the Editor's Crown. The malignant and maligned Ramjet "Ramjet" Ramjet (who totally wasn't actually secretly Walt "Shryke" Pretorius) returned to the *NAG* bunkers, PC hardware finally abandoned its increasingly unfashionable beige standard and began a migration towards more aesthetically pleasing pastures, and the Nintendo Wii suffered a minor identity crisis as the GameCube 2 and the N5, before finally settling on the Revolution. LAN gaming was hotter than molten lava on just-toasted toast, and the EyeToy arrived amid a flurry of razzle-dazzle corporate spin, but actually nobody really liked it that much. Just about every person writing to the magazine seemed either curiously preoccupied with their social acceptance among their peers, or just really, really wanted a tour of the *NAG* offices, while current freelance menace Tarryn van der Byl's twin sister submitted one of her 3D renders, and was promptly mistaken for a guy because girls totally don't do computer stuff. This has subsequently been proven untrue.

To celebrate Christmas 2003, *NAG* turned down the following reader review, printed verbatim for your erudition:

"vroom,vroom,vroom,screech. This is what you hear when you start up Midnight Club 2,*at this point the game looks promising,But does it deliver?Well im glad to say it does,of course it could have been a little more interesting but it's still very fulfilling. The basic lowdown on the story is that you're a street racer looking do get some respect and to try win some car's,you go upon youre task in numerous cities Tokyo,Paris and (oh dear, we've run out of space)."*

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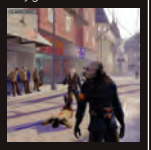
IN THE NEWS

FILE UNDER "MISSING IN ACTION"

Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel, Deus Ex 3, StarCraft: Ghost, Riftrunner, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, The Chronicles of Ny, Phase: Exodus, Riot Police, Wartime Command: The Battle for Europe 1939-1945 (formerly *Battlefield Command*), *The Fall: Last Days of Gaia, Enclave 2, Sphinx, Black9, Wish, Mythica, Echelon: Wind Warriors, Ballerium, Rise of Power, BoomTown, The Lord of the Creatures, Monster Truck Fury, Novus Ordum, Against Rome, Etrom: The Astral Essence, Castle Strike, KnightShift, Plague of Darkness*, a new *Carmageddon*, and the Lionhead title *codenamed Dmitri*.

HALF-LIFE 2 DELAYED

In August 2003, Valve's hot-hot-hotly anticipated *Half-Life 2* was delayed until Christmas. The following month, the game's source code was filched by the perennially lame myg0t rabble via a security hack in the developer's internal network, and released into the wilds of the BitTorrents. Gabe Newell had an apoplexy, and *Half-Life 2* was again delayed just in time to ruin Christmas.



Undaunted, the elusive title went on to pull a hat-trick, absconding its rescheduled April 2004 release, and finally re-emerging in the middle of November borne upon a triumphal host of ceremonial headcrabs. The dusty skeletons of gamers rattled and clacked with unbridled joy, only to discover that the game required lengthy online activation, just in time to ruin Christmas.

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER DELAYED

The February 2004 issue of *NAG* was the bearer of these unhappy tidings. Not altogether bleak, however, as a release date sometime during the following year was confirmed by developer 3D Realms. Hurrah!

XBOXIN' ON THE INTERTRONS

In April 2003, Microsoft reported that its newly-launched Xbox LIVE online gaming service had already attracted 350,000 subscribers. The world scoffed, but *NAG*'s Chief Augur dissected a unicorn, and prognosticated that this number would soon increase. We were totally right - at last head count, the LIVE service boasted some 10 million subscribers. We're so awesome like that. Send us stuff.

PS3 RELEASE IMMINENT. AGAIN.

Spurious industry rumours suggested that Sony would release the PS3 two years ahead of schedule, sometime around mid-year 2004. Lol k.

ESRB MAKES EVERYTHING MORE COMPLICATED

In September 2003, the Entertainment Software Ratings Board introduced a new ratings guide for videogames, featuring detailed information about the brand of violence a product was peddling. These included "Cartoon Violence", "Fantasy Violence", "Intense Violence", and "Sexual Violence". In addition, the "Mature" and "Adults Only" classifications were replaced with minimum recommended ages. Then everyone sat back and waited for *GTA3*'s "hot coffee" mod.

HOT / COLD

Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker [GC]	96
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time [PC]	95
Metroid Prime [GC]	93
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down [PC]	93
Sly Raccoon [PS2]	93
Rugby 2004 [PC]	40
Hyper Rails [PC]	37
Space Channel 5 Part 2 [PS2]	32
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines [PC]	26
Knights of the Cross [PC]	20

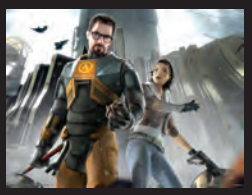
HOT STUFF

RAGE 2003

This year played host to the very first rAge – Really Awesome Gaming Event - expo in Johannesburg, now an annual fixture on the *NAG* calendar, and a much-anticipated opportunity for readers to stare at James Francis with a mixture of envy, lust, and terror.
Exhibitors included Nokia, Nintendo, Intel, Sony, Megarom, Musica, Microsoft, BT Games, Mindsgate Solutions, Sapphire, Proton Technology, Light Edge, Axis, Philips, ASUS, Vivendi Universal, Rectron, and Outer Limits. We're sure it was all tremendously successful, but we've somehow misplaced the supplement that proved it.

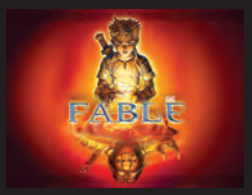
DOOM 3

Doom 3, DOOM 3, Doom III, or DOOM III? These things were exceedingly important. First glimpsed at E3 2002, most of 2003 and 2004 were spent gawping at screenshots of id's upcoming survival-horror splatterfest, itself a re-imagining of the company's cult classic, *Doom*. Following some sort of instantly regrettable laboratory blunder, a Union Aerospace Corporation research centre on Mars is overrun with crawling nightmares from the inky bowels of Hell. To make matters worse, load-shedding in Delta Labs is playing havoc with the damned lights.



HALF-LIFE 2

If anything, three delays served only to crank up the Thrill-O-Meter till it clanged relentlessly at breaking point, constantly reminding everyone that Gordon Freeman would return, and that Valve's shiny new Source engine was going to trample everything the *DOOM 3* engine had and then throw stones, bottles, tins, barrels, and cinder blocks at it. The game was finally released towards the end of 2004 to thunderous acclaim and a blizzard of GOTY awards, before going on to inspire a range of adorable plushie headcrabs.



FABLE

Lionhead's revolutionary new game for the Xbox was going to change the world. But lead designer Peter Molyneux talked up the game too much, prompting an avalanche of bitter disappointment when it failed to deliver many of its promised features. The repentant 'Neux went on to post a public *mea culpa* on the company's forums, saying "If I have mentioned any feature in the past which, for whatever reason, didn't make it as I described into *Fable*, I apologise." He didn't learn his lesson, however (see: *Black & White 2*).

FAR CRY

Crytek debuted in *NAG* magazine way back in April 2001, with a report that the German company was developing a sci-fi strategy game called *Silence Space*, and two shooters, *Engalus* and *X-Isle: Dinosaur Island* – all for the Xbox. They subsequently disappeared through a crack in time and space, only to re-emerge many years later (well, two), seemingly out of nowhere, brandishing some sort of jungly South Pacific adventure with guns, genetically engineered monsters, and a virulent mutagen, and their proprietary pixel shader*ific* CryENGINE.

Oct

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Dec

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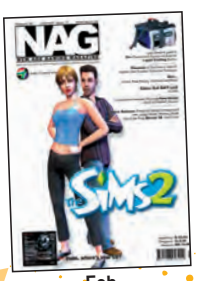

Feb

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NAG vol. 7

April 2004 – March 2005

review

Final Fantasy X-2

When dealing with a game of this particular type, one must look at it from two different perspectives. Firstly as a piece of interactive entertainment, and secondly as a work of literature. In the first category, merely mentioning the name of the game should be enough to set the highest of graphical expectations, and they are indeed met with splendour.

The in-engine animation has been refined drastically since FFX, adding a range of new facial and bodily expressions to the characters, and correcting most of the "jumpiness" that had been a major irk in the past. The pre-rendered video sequences are stunning, as usual, and their integration into the engine is seamless, adding extra flair to pivotal plot points. The emphasis has been put on the characters this time, as opposed to "special effect" and establishment shots that we saw predominantly in FFX.

However, there is not much new content in terms of locations and monsters, and people who played the original in depth may become frustrated with the lack of fresh visual stimuli. Essentially, things have been improved, not re-invented. FFX-2 is less of a 'sequel' and more of a continuation of the previous game.

The play dynamic itself is the most impressive aspect. Usually I find myself hurrying through the battles to get to the story, but this time it was the other way around. The battle system has been given a speed boost like never before, and can take a little getting used to. The learning curve is well worth it though, as it is ultimately more skill-based and thus more rewarding. A variety of new features such as timed attacks and player-controlled counter-attacks have also been introduced into the mix, which makes for a dynamic and exhilarating combat experience. The optional sub-quests are challenging, original and provide plenty of arcade-style fun as a sort of "intellectual break" from the main story. While the game is relatively short and quite easy, it has extensive re-playability in that it contains a large amount (over 50%) of hidden content.

It is also especially important to make mention of the soundtrack. Nobuo Uematsu's absence from the credit list has made a huge impact on the overall feel of the game. The industry legend opted not to undertake the project, leaving it to two "junior" composers, who have given it a far livelier, J-Pop attitude. This ties in strongly with the game's stark changes in emotional focus, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

We resume the story of Yuna, the high summoner who defeated Spira's (her world's) greatest enemy, two years after the fact. She has since become a treasure-sphere hunter, teaming up with her cousin Rikku (from the original) and newcomer Paine. Yuna's interest in spheres stems from a movie sphere she found, which appeared to contain the image of her ex-lover, Tidus, who supposedly died at the end of FFX. Unfortunately, this is where the plot falls apart. It's sentimental and unconvincing – the emotional sincerity we have become accustomed to is gone. The game is obviously aimed mainly at a female audience, and the developers took this idea too far, forgetting that women are not merely dumber versions of men.

There is one redeeming factor in that the sub-plot concerning Meyrin Noos, Baralai and Gippal (the three political leaders of Spira) is actually immensely intriguing, but they only play a very small part in the story. This is a gross shame, since they have far more potential than the flat caricatures of Yuna, Rikku and Paine. The game is light-hearted as a whole, and can even sometimes become painfully cheesy.

A series with a history as rich and impressive as Final Fantasy will naturally fall under harsh criticism. X-2 has its flaws, and is probably one of the poorer games that Square have released, but it is still leagues ahead of the average console game and has proved to be the most enjoyable overall single-player gaming experience I have had for quite some time.

"Essentially, things have been improved, not re-invented. FFX-2 is less of a sequel and more of a continuation of the previous game."

X-2 is significantly above average and will keep the player thoroughly entertained.

86

Evolution

One of the main ways in which the game changes from instalment to instalment is the Character Advancement System. What we see today is the result of more than a decade of evolution, having its origins way back in the 1988's. However, Final Fantasy 7 was the first to make a huge leap from its predecessors by introducing the Materia System (most popular to date), where players attached gems to their equipment, and this allowed them to learn new abilities. Final Fantasy 8 saw probably the most detailed development, the Junction System, where the characters' abilities were linked to the creatures they summoned. FFX again introduced something entirely new; with the Sphere Grid System, which had the characters progress along a path of nodes which were filled by spheres collected during battle. FFX-2 has opted to combine the sphere idea with the concept of FFT, to create the Dressphere System. Dress-spheres must be found and equipped, allowing the character to adopt the class of the dressphere (e.g. Warrior, Black Mage, Samurai) and learn its unique abilities.

THE BIGGEST YEAR IN GAMING

(MORE OR LESS. QUITE POSSIBLY. MAYBE?)

April

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Sep

Oct

ANOTHER APRIL ISSUE, ANOTHER re-engineering of the layout and design of the magazine. In an attempt to add more interesting content to *NAG*, in the April 2004 issue, we syndicated seven pages of content from UK magazine, *Games TM*, primarily their interview double-page spread and five pages of retro gaming content, specifically the Atari 2600 VCS in that issue. The same issue was also rather meaty and weighed in at 124 pages. This issue was also when Miktar officially started working here and we still can't get rid of him. Overall, this was a big time for gaming with *Far Cry*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, *Black & White 2*, *Deus Ex 2: Invisible War*, *Painkiller*, *Doom 3*, *Quake 4* [previewed], *GTA: San Andreas*, *Dungeon Siege II*, *Evil Genius*, *Battlefield 2* [previewed] and who can forget *Half-Life 2*. We also started seeing more case modification hardware than ever before and we actually ran a roundup where we looked at all the various options on the market and even did a few how-to articles. This phenomenon has now become part of what we do and accept, but just remember it wasn't too long ago when the beige box was state of the art. Another worrying trend in 2004 was overzealousness when it came to cooling a computer – from a hardware point of view; it's safe to describe 2004 as the year of heat paranoia. The July 2004 issue of *NAG* saw a rare change of pace where we used a real-life picture from the *Catwoman* movie. This was really because we simply had nothing else to put on the cover, but not all was lost because with that issue we included the 2004 E3 supplement. Hooray. This was also the second year of rAge and probably even more significantly, the March 2005 issue was the first issue we did without Walt Pretorius (he has stuck around however and now we can't seem to get rid of him at all – he's just like a cockroach infestation really.) This period also saw *NAG* get a sister as the company added *SA Computer Magazine* to the line-up. Busy year all around it seems.

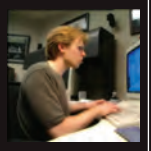
IN THE NEWS

SONY PREDICTIONS

Now this is rather interesting. In the May 2004 issue of NAG [incidentally the 10th birthday of the PS2] we reported that Andrew House, Executive VP of SCEA told an audience at GDC that the PS2 would continue to sell into 2010. I guess this is one prediction that might actually come true considering the current comparative price points of both the PS3 and the PS2. We were also still calling the Xbox 360 the Xbox Next back then and at the end of this timeline we also saw the arrival of the PSP [in the March 2005 issue].

CARMACK SPEAKS

At GDC 2004 John Carmack had the following to say, "In the future game generations there will be simulations of weather, simulations of liquids, simulations of dust motes going through the air and transferring through the environment. It's now 2008 and we can safely say check, check and check again. We wonder if he knew the 'future' he was talking about was only four years away.

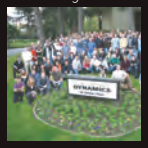


VERSUS AND SUING

Throughout this entire look back into the dark bowl of NAG, two things have become very clear. One, ATI and NVIDIA have always been trying to outdo each other [more so than AMD and Intel actually]. Two, gaming companies are always suing each other, themselves and random people. Throughout all the news articles in NAG over the years these two topics seem to pop up the most. Sad thing is it hasn't really changed in ten years.

TOMB RAIDER... AGAIN?

In the news in the October 2004 issue began the first rumblings of the next *Tomb Raider* game. After *Angel of Darkness*, Core had been fired as the developer and Toby Gard [originator of *Tomb Raider*] brought on to oversee the new project with Crystal Dynamics in charge of development, we all know that this Tomb Raider story actually has a happy ending.



TO DVD OR NOT TO DVD

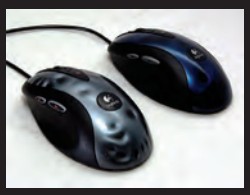
Significantly the March 2005 issue was a turning point as we finally came to the realisation that a single CD on the cover of the magazine wasn't going to cut it anymore. At that stage some demos were just too big to fit [example: the Half-Life 2 demo was a whopping 751.2MB back then]. Gulp. To find out if our readers wanted us to go to DVD we ran a referendum and you know how that all turned out. The good thing was that well over 98% of you back then thought it was a good idea.

HOT / COLD

GTA: San Andreas (PS2) 95
Half-Life 2 (PC) 96
DOOM 3 (PC) 94
Far Cry (PC) 92
Chronicles of Riddick (Xbox) 93

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude (PC) 38
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown (PS2) 34
Jackie Chan Adventures (PS2) 32
Wrath Unleashed (Xbox) 28
Ford Racing (PC) 27

HOT STUFF

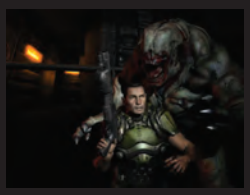


LOGITECH MX 510

"... making it faster than a pig covered in butter sliding down a greased pipe." is what we said about this mouse when it first arrived. Fortunately for us we did eventually get better at this whole journalism thing – right? Some say this is where it all began for Logitech and their rapid ascent to dominate the gaming industry [in the mouse department]. Each of these mice is unique thanks to the flowing design of their casings and most of the people working at *NAG* use a Logitech mouse.

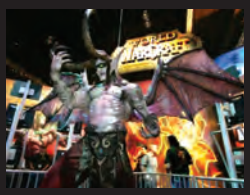
RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Well this should stir up a few memories and needless to say, if you haven't played this game you've missed out on an important slice of the gaming history pie. It was previewed in the May 2004 issue and the only thing we got wrong was saying that the game would only be available for the Xbox. Vin Diesel was heavily involved in this project as he is reportedly a hardcore gamer and didn't want to make some dross everyone hated. *Escape from Butcher Bay* was also the first time the gaming press rated a 'movie licence' game so highly.



DOOM 3

In the September 2004 issue of *NAG* we ran a double cover for the biggest game release that year. Doom 3. Michael James was flown to the UK for an exclusive three-day reviewing event where he dined with Todd Hollenshead and Tim Willits from id Software, and was one of only three journalists [nine were invited] who actually finished the game while there and for the record didn't really care that he couldn't use the torch and the gun together. The game eventually scored 94, so clearly the PR people and UK trip bought a good review.



BEST OF E3 2004

These were our 'hot game' predictions for 2004 based on what we saw at E3. *Half-Life 2* – Michael James, *Paper Mario 2* – Miktar, *Battlefield 2* – Lauren das Neves, *Warhammer 40, 000: Dawn of War* – Walt Pretorius, *Destroy All Humans* – James Francis. Runners up: *Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-earth, Splinter Cell 3*, and *The Punisher*. It looks like Michael had it right all along with *Half-Life 2* scoring 96. Nova Prospect [one of the levels in this game] is still one of the finest sequences in gaming history.

NEW LOOK PLAYSTATION 2

Most people thought this was some kind of trick, but late in 2004 Sony released a slim version of the PS2 – almost a quarter of the size of the original and half the weight. They also added a broadband port and changed the front-loader DVD with a top-loader. This new model sold for R1,800.00 and was really the hot item when it was launched. This is something Sony does very well and many people are looking forward to the day when the PS3 is the size of a box of matches.

Nov

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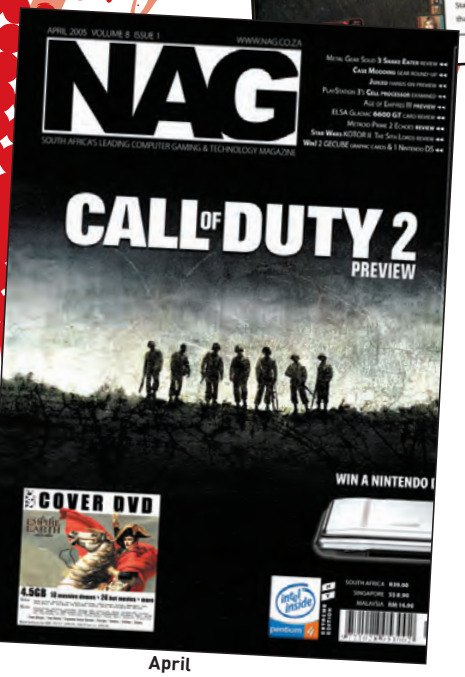
NAG vol.8

April 2005 - March 2006



April

RADIAL SYMMETRY OF GAMING LOVE

WE CONSTANTLY ARGUE OVER which gaming year was better. RedTide thinks it's 2004. Miktar thinks it's 2005 (and anything pre-1996). The rest of the office quietly pretends to be working, not listening to the argument. Regardless of which year truly represents gaming excellence, the 2005 to 2006 volume of *NAG* was an exemplary time for everyone. Volume 8 was a time of beginnings and false-starts (we like to call it "experimentation"). The back-page comic Sprite & Malice ran for three issues before being dropped in favour of 2-Bit. 2-Bit managed to run until June 2006, practically a record for *NAG* back-page comics. Female columnist Shivonne Londt handed out her special brand of Twisted Logic for three issues. The start of the volume also marks the start of the *NAG* cover DVD. The cover DVD was still only single-layer back then - 4.5GB of delicious gaming. When it worked. Like a train wreck in slow motion, our glee at finally switching from CD to DVD was marred by technical issues. The cover DVD persisted in being a problem for practically 12 months since launch. We've since managed to beat it into submission. The popular "make your own game now" section Game.Dev started in September 2005. This was also the first year pro-gamer Fatal1ty appeared at our rAge expo. Playing *Painkiller* against all challengers, we offered R20,000 in prize money to whoever could best Fatal1ty. We're still sitting with that R20,000: we've made a blanket out of it for those cold winter nights. It was in this year that *NAG* also started writing for the local newspaper *The Citizen*, providing gaming news and information. By November, *NAG* had grown to its largest size yet: 148 pages. The final issue of the volume marked the start of our short matte cover run. The matte cover, while utterly beautiful, had to be returned back to glossy after *NAG* had to find a new printing company. The March issue featured the last Ed's Note by Michael James (a.k.a. RedTide). RedTide (to focus on Tide Media Publications) promoted James Francis (a.k.a. Priest) to Editor of NAG.

Games *NAG* totally had the hots for: *Hellgate: London, Call of Duty 2, GTR, Age of Empires III, The Godfather, Titan Quest, Black, Daxter, King Kong, Supreme Commander, Too Human, Gun.*

May

Jun

Jul

Jul

Jul

Aug

Sep

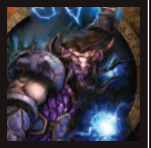
IN THE NEWS

BETHESDA SOFTWORKS LANDS STAR TREK
And look what they did with it! We're still trying to wash our hands after handling *Star Trek: Encounters* and *Star Trek: Legacy*. Seriously sloppy job Bethesda.

JOHN CARMACK GOES MOBILE
Totally in love with the mobile platform, Carmack announced he'd been working on some serious gaming love for the handsets. Both *DoomRPG* and *Orcs & Elves* proved how much Carmack still loves us.

CRYSIS?
Crysis was announced this year, promising "the next step in FPS gaming". Was it? We're still not sure.

OVER FIVE MILLION CUSTOMERS: WOW!
Only a year in and *World of WarCraft* already boasted five million "active players". The number would double in less than two years.



PROBLEMATIC RATANGA LAN
Gamers must never forget. Lan2k partnered with Ratanga Junction to host a promised R70,000 in tournament prizes for *Quake 4*, *Counter-Strike*, *WarCraft III*, *DotA* and *Battlefield 2*. Promises were not kept.

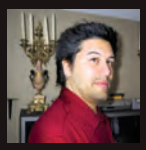
100 MILLION PLAYSTATION 2 CONSOLES
The fastest-selling computer entertainment platform in history, this year saw the PS2 hit 100 million units shipped.

NOKIA GIVES UP ON N-GAGE
The handset at least, since it "did not prove as popular as originally hoped". The new N-Gage service, however, looks to be a step up.

FIFA SOCCER 2006 GETS CHIEFS & PIRATES
Adding Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates to *FIFA Soccer 2006*, EA attempted to make the game "locally relevant". Very cool.

SONY'S RELIGIOUS FAUX PAS
One of many, actually. A full-page ad for the 10-year anniversary of the PlayStation got some Catholics in a tizzy because the dude wore a crown of thorns made up of PlayStation button icons.

JOHN ROMERO LEAVES MIDWAY



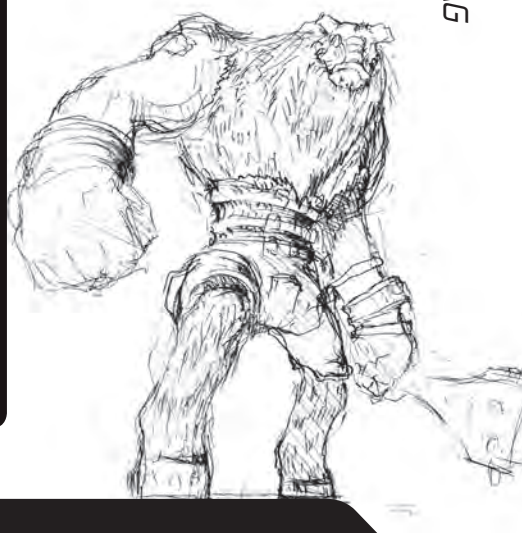
Project lead for *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* at the time (which ended up being terrible), Romero left Midway to once again chart his own course to nowhere. Let's face it, Romero can't seem to get anywhere without his buddy, Superfly Carmack.

ANIMEWORX TEKKEN 5 & GOD OF WAR LAUNCH
Awesome gaming and anime store AnimeWorX in conjunction with Ster-Kinekor Games launched two hawt titles. Over 700 people attended and some came dressed as Kratos. Awesome!

PC, VIDEOGAME SALES TOP $7 BILLION IN US
That's 5.2 billion in console game sales (over 160 million units), 1.1 billion in computer game sales (45 million units) and one billion in portable games (42 million units). The genre breakdown in order of popularity: action, sports, shooters, children's, racing, role-playing and fighting. At the time, the film industry (in the US) totalled 9.4 billion.

HOT / COLD

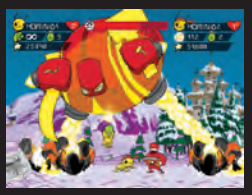
Darwinia (PC)	97
Shadow of the Colossus (PS2)	97
F.E.A.R. (PC)	96
The Movies (PC)	96
GTA: San Andreas (PC)	95
LA Rush (PS2)	46
Domination: Massive Assault (PC)	42
Death by Degrees (PS2)	40
Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder! (PS2)	30
Resident Evil Outbreak: File #2 (PS2)	30



HOT STUFF

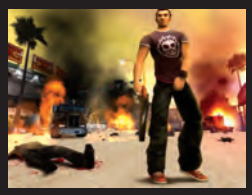
WAR OF THE MACHINES
The July 2005 issue of *NAG* came in three flavours: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Revolution (which would come to be known as the unflappable Wii). Three powerhouse consoles covered, which would later become the triumvirate of gaming in 2006. The 360 was considered "A New Hope", the PS3 as "The Empire Strikes Back" and the Wii as "The Return of the Jedi". We thought the *Star Wars* reference was quite clever. The GBA Micro was also unveiled at the time, but that didn't make much of a splash.

THE MOVIES
A game where you run a Hollywood studio that produces dynamically generated movies. A utility where you can construct your own movies by piecing together the various sets, scenes, actions and actors. Peter Molyneux. All the ingredients were there for a really delicious cake filled with movie-making and management-simulation, yet *The Movies* failed to really capture the audience. An elite few (Miktar) still consider it one of the best management games since *Theme Park*.



ALIEN HOMINID
Cute and cuddly (not to mention neon-yellow in colour), the Alien from *Alien Hominid* continues to entertain and delight the *NAG* office with his innocent trickery. One day we'll find Shryke's head, if only we could figure out where it was buried. While the game itself was a niche action-platformer (with a difficulty curve from Hell), it managed to capture the essence of the greats such as *Metal Slug*, presenting it in a colourful stylish package. Originally a flash game on Newgrounds.com, the developer is currently working on *Castle Crashers* for XBLA.

OKAMI
Back then still only the whisper of action-adventure bliss, *Okami*, would quickly become one of those games that appears on practically every must-play list this side of the Milky Way. Lush visuals, sterling design and true artistry elevated *Okami* above and beyond conventional gaming fodder. Much like *Shadow of the Colossus*, our "dog-with-a-flaming-frisbee-on-its-back" remains one of those games that every PS2 owner should have. As it were, *Okami* just didn't get as much page space as it deserved due to a variety of reasons. But it will always remain in our hearts.



TOTAL OVERDOSE
We're still not sure how this failed to make the impact we expected (so our gaming divinity may come under scrutiny). Guns, bullet-time, sexy Mexican sass, chickens and combo-counters for stringing acrobatic combat tricks together, should have ensured runaway success and a hot next-gen sequel. It didn't, but sometimes we like to pretend it did if only to sooth our burning desire for more Robert Rodriguez-inspired tequila-bender fuelled action.

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April 2006 - March 2007

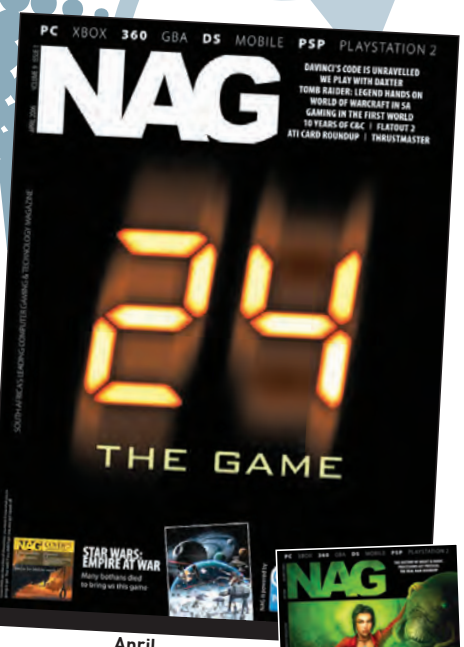
THE CONSOLE WARS

APRIL 2006 MARKED THE grand culmination of James "Priest" Francis's insidious scheming, as he wrested the Editor's Crown from Michael "RedTide" James, flung him into a dank oubliette, and seized the *NAG* throne for himself. Mothers hid their children, dogs howled at the moon, and James delegated tasks, ordered executions, and smoked cigarettes like a third-world tyrant. In the interests of maintaining an illusion of benign and democratic benevolence, this edition also included a Reader Survey. Tellingly, this has not since been repeated.

StarForce stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy with its copy protection system amid users' claims of system instability, the NVIDIA 7 series arrived upon a lightning bolt from game heaven, and in July 2006, *NAG*'s long-serving hide-and-seeker Badger mascot escaped custody and was subsequently replaced with the Dharma sign. The short-lived *360 Insider* accompanied *NAG* for three months of delirious courting glee, only to tank in the wake of slack advertising support (Damn you, damn you all to that really bleak place in the final stages of *Diablo II*). Iron Lore's *Titan Quest* just sort of popped up out of nowhere, and promptly gnawed everybody's productivity down to a raw stump, before Epic's vaunted Unreal Engine 3 appeared in a fiery blaze of HDR-rendered locust-infested glory, engulfed the world, and combat-rolled home covered in awards.

In and around the local Xbox 360, and international PS3 and Wii releases, the Letters page was dominated by implacably tedious console versus PC debates. Our favourite, a classy, erudite, and eloquent submission from reader "Overlord", included the following insightful comments:

*"Let us not forget that gaming was created on the PC and now just because Sony and Nintendo seem to think that console gaming can ever be competitive and absolute bull****! I spit on consoles, they are merely toys for little poor kiddies! GAMING MUST STAY ON THE PC! [more rambling] ...I'm sure I speak on behalf of most NAG readers and request that you review more PC games and stop that k**-ass console wars you are busy with, because no-one reads that!"*



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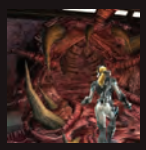
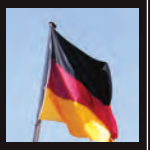
IN THE NEWS

STARCRAFT: GHOST DEVELOPMENT HELL



Originally begun sometime in 2001 and first announced in 2002, Blizzard's tactical action console spin-off of its grossly popular RTS monolith simmered on the edges of gamers' dreams for a seemingly interminable and tempestuous development period through at least six official delays, including the *en masse* exodus of one entire dev squad. Finally, on 24 March 2005, Blizzard threw up its hands and declared the troublesome title "indefinitely postponed". Nobody was especially surprised or anything, and the game is now generally believed to have been quietly canceled.

EVERYTHING IS BANNED IN GERMANY (CONT.)

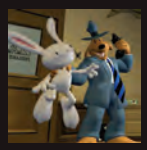


Maybe it's all that sauerkraut they eat, but those Germans simply cannot and will not abide video game violence. The *Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle*, Germany's equivalent of the ESRB, has an interesting track record that includes banning just about every game that shows any of the red stuff. Capcom's zombie holocaust romper, *Dead Rising*, fell luckless prey to the censors' claws when they refused to rate the game, effectively prohibiting its sale anywhere in the country. Following a June 2007 decision in Hamburg, selling the game in Germany is a prosecutable offence. We'd make a tasteless joke about Nazi Germany, but we're better than that.

HALO 2 DETHRONED ON XBOX LIVE

Epic's guns 'n' gutsy *Gears of War* exploded onto Xbox Live on 7 November 2006, and toppled *Halo 2* from its gilded perch the very same day - a spot it had aggressively maintained since its November 2004 release. Master Chief and the UNSC had their revenge a year later, however, when Halo 3 sticky bombed *Gears*, and reclaimed its franchise's former throne. Until *Call of Duty 4* clambered aboard several months later, anyway. *The ciiiiircle of liiiiiiiiiiife.*

THE FREELANCE POLICE RETURN!



This was probably lost on anyone under the age of 20 or so, but all the crumblies over at NAG HQ rattled their walking sticks and lost their suppositories when Telltale Games announced their upcoming episodic Sam & Max games, the first of which appeared on GameTap in November 2006. For all those whippersnappers who missed it the first time around, Sam and his "hyperkinetic rabbity thing" pal Max debuted in the 1993 cult LucasArts SCUMM adventure game, *Sam & Max Hit The Road.*

JACK THOMPSON VS ROCKSTAR (ROUND 2)

After unsuccessfully tackling the New York-based developer for *Grand Theft Auto III* in 2003, Thompson returned for yet another spectacular litigation failure against *Bully*. The presiding judge would later declare Mad Jack's behaviour "inappropriate by a member of the bar, unprofessional and contemptible".

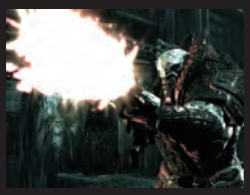
HOT / COLD

Prey [PC]	96
Gears of War [360]	94
Resident Evil 4 [PS2]	94
LocoRoco [PSP]	92
Tomb Raider: Legend [PC]	92
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter [PS2]	39
Crusty Demons [PS2]	34
World Series of Poker:Tournament of Champions	34
Ducati World Championship [PC]	25
The Da Vinci Code [PC]	15

HOT STUFF

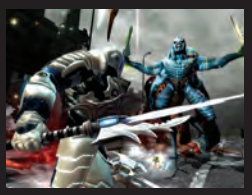
CONSOLE WARS: ACTIVATE!

During this period, the Xbox 360 was *finally* released locally, while the PS3 and Wii saw international releases that prompted riots, tears, and massively inflated prices on eBay. With all three 'next-gen' consoles now hissing and circling one another in the great gaming arena, brand-loyal gamers swiftly broke ranks and divided up into fortified camps, thence to fling rocks, disseminate propaganda, and spit at everyone else. It's all a bit silly, really, since everyone knows the Xbox 360 is the bes- [WE'VE BEEN INFILTRATED!]



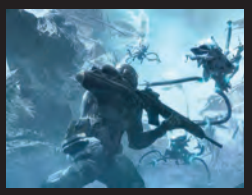
GEARS OF WAR

It may well have been the very first game in the history of forever to actually live up to (and surpass) its dizzying hype, and *Gears of War* remains one of the hottest, grittiest gaming experiences this side of an emergence hole. Delta Squad's relentlessly violent excursion through the devastated remains of urban Sera introduced gamers to an entirely new brand of console shooting. The "drop in, drop out" cooperative gameplay showed other developers how it should be done, and Marcus Fenix jostled Master Chief as the 360's poster boy.



HELLGATE: LONDON

Following the 2003 departure of Bill Roper and his goblin horde from Blizzard Entertainment, long-standing hopes for another *Diablo* sequel were rudely shattered. Gamers shed wistful tears, clutched beloved set items to their bleeding hearts, and wished upon the stars. When Roper later reappeared as CEO of Flagship Studios, alongside former Diabolists Max Schaefer, Erich Schaefer, and David Brevik, touting the upcoming click 'n' slasher RPG *Hellgate: London*, there was much happiness and festive cheer throughout the kingdom. The tremendous disappointment came only much later.



CRYSIS

Well, it wasn't just *Crysis*, it was *Crysis* and its powerhouse *CryENGINE 2*, a technological marvel comprising over a million lines of code, 85,000 shaders, and 1GB of texture data that sent squealing gamers scrambling for overdraft applications to upgrade their PCs with the recommended DX10-capable GeForce 8800GTS. In the meantime, much gasping, ogling, and dribbling over photorealistic screenshots of palm trees and corrugated iron shacks ensued. When you stop and think about it like that, perhaps it's not all that surprising that hardcore gamers are shunned by polite society.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

NAG was very excited when GSC Game World's sandbox survival shooter, first announced back in 2001 and delayed so many times it was hitting the vaporware lists with grim radioactive determination, finally turned up again with a pulse and a real, live release date. *NAG* was so excited, in fact, that we ran anbright and shiny eight-page extravaganza about the game in March 2007. *NAG* would later be disappointed when the game was game-breakingly buggy and didn't really live up to the hype. *NAG* never learns.

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NAG vol.10

April 2006 - March 2007

IMPRESSIVE!

AS A NON-GAMER AND Mac user the period between April 2007 and March 2008 stands out for several reasons. Microsoft Vista, with DirectX 10, had already made a massive impact on the gaming scene. With this new API, developers started developing games with visuals, gameplay mechanics and other improvements never seen before. Suddenly, PC games looked better and played better (depending of course on your CPU, MOBO, GPU and other components), and the PC was 'cool' again. It also made us Mac users realise that we aren't better than PC users. We don't really have good games for OS X, our Macs are underpowered (even though we can run Vista in Boot Camp) and frankly, Open GL 2.0 cannot compete with DirectX 10 (where are the bloody games for Mac we were promised?) .

The PS3 was finally released in South Africa and we were 'impressed'. Not only did it feature a new processor, Cell, but also brought Bly-ray to the masses (or the few who own a PS3 at least). Does anyone remember HD DVD, anyone?

NVIDIA and AMD/ATI developed more and more impressive graphics cards with better and better technologies, and 1kW PSUs started appearing to power our electricity-chomping computer components, leading to massive rolling blackouts all over SA (a loose bolt in Koeberg's one reactor and sabotage were ruled out - finally).

Intel, oh Intel! With its new Core architecture, Intel amazed us and gave the competition the one-up.

And Lara, every teenage boy's pixel-babe wet dream, came back from the tomb she was hiding in and brought us hours of joy in *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*. Lara, we love you!

Oh, yes. Volume 10 was given a massive makeover and a 'facelift', giving it a new, sophisticated look (the April 2007 issue of *NAG* was a whopping 172 pages). We did BPR but that didn't work, so we opted for CPI and are making constant tweaks to the mag to keep it looking fresh and exciting. Len also decided that a lap-dancing (for reasons only known to him and his inner circle of hardcore whores) award should be given to computer components that are so over the top and cutting edge that they should make up our Dream Machine. And readers all over SA celebrated.

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IN THE NEWS

CORE TO MAX

What can be said about the processor wars? Intel won it hands down and its latest Core 2 Extreme processors are making waves all over. Intel's QX9775 and QX9650 are the stuff of dreams. In fact, one QX9650 can apparently (discussed in a 'classified' CIA communiqué, handed to the team at the *X-Files* to investigate and possible reverse-engineer, and leaked to *Übergamer*, forcing the umlaut-happy magazine to lay low for a while) replace the entire US administration and run the US, Mexico, Iraq, a war on Iran and with its fourth core, Canada. All hail Intel!

YOU'RE PWNED N00B!

The big January 2008 story in the graphics card world was the introduction of the Radeon 3870X2. With two Radeon 3870 GPUs working in unison on a single PCB, the X2 is, on average, the fastest single graphics card that money can buy. However, NVIDIA won't surrender the "fastest graphics card on the planet" title easily. So, expect an 8800 GX2 in the near future and let the 'card wars' begin.

CRYSIS A CRISIS FOR GAMERS

Called the "prettiest tech demo/benchmark of the year" by Miktar, *Crysis* had gamers' knickers in a knot because of its huge demands on systems. Our solution: upgrade your rig.

STARCRAFT II

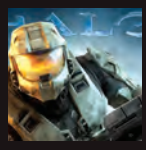
We had to work overtime and add a piece on *StarCraft II* when Blizzard Entertainment suddenly announced the release of the game on 19 May last year. Big hype, but only *StarCraft* fans will know what the fuss was all about.

WIIWARE

On 27 June last year, Nintendo announced Wiiware, a service similar to Xbox LIVE Arcade that allows developers to release original downloadable games onto the Wii.

GAMING BOX-OFFICE OPENING RECORD

On 25 September, *Halo 3* was released and grossed $170 million in a 24-hour period - the record for the highest grossing opening day in videogame history. Then *No Country for Old Men* won the Oscar. Where's the justice?



AND IN OTHER NEWS

Here's the list of the best-selling videogames in the US for 2007 (just to show you that gaming is alive and kicking and that we do our research):

Title	Units Sold
Halo 3 [X360]	4.82 million
Wii Play [Wii]	4.12 million
Call of Duty 4 [X360]	3.04 million
Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock [PS2]	2.72 million
Super Mario Galaxy [Wii]	2.52 million
Pokémon Diamond [DS]	2.48 million
Madden NFL 08 [PS2]	1.90 million
Guitar Hero II [PS2]	1.89 million
Assassin's Creed [X360]	1.87 million

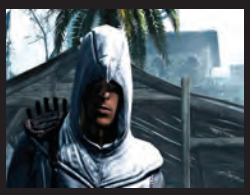
HOT / COLD

Super Mario Galaxy [Wii]	100
Guitar Hero II [360]	97
The Orange Box [360]	96
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare [PC]	96
Crysis [PC]	94
Sonic the Hedgehog [PS3]	19
Dead or Alive: Xtreme 2 [360]	27
Harley Davidson Motor Cycles: Race to the Rally [PS2]	28
The Arcade [PS2]	30
Cabela's Big Game Hunter [PS2]	35

HOT STUFF

THE ORANGE BOX

How can you go wrong with *The Orange Box*, an über-videogame compilation produced and published by Valve, which contains *Half-Life 2*, *Half-Life 2: Episode One*, *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, *Portal*, and *Team Fortress 2*. Five games for the price of one. Gamers all over couldn't believe their luck. At *NAG*, we gave The Orange Box rave reviews and Miktar stated that, "Every game in this collection deserves (nay, demands) the garish orange spine." You go Miktar! Our conclusion: *The Orange Box* is worth every cent and resurrects the 'classics'. Nuff said!

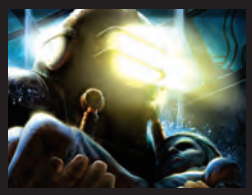


ASSASSIN'S CREED

It's 1191, and the Third Crusade is underway. You play as Altaïr, a member of the Hashshashin sect, whose objective is to slay the nine historical figures who are the force behind the Crusades. As the player finds and kills these targets in a 'fully interactive' world, the conspiracy is unveiled. Probably one of the best games of the year, *Assassin's Creed* made our dreams of being assassins come true. C'mon, who hasn't secretly dreamt of taking out his or her boss (James you're still okay – we're still planning how to).

HALO 3

Holding the record for the highest grossing opening day in videogame history (with sales of $170 million in just 24 hours), *Halo 3* was probably the most-anticipated game of the year. You know the story: the genetically enhanced Spartan soldier known as Master Chief made his highly anticipated Xbox 360 debut in *Halo 3*. Picking up where *Halo 2* abruptly left off, The Covenant is continuing its plans to activate the Halo super-weapon and obliterate the galaxy. Your mission: save the Earth and stop the Covenant. Gripping stuff!



BIOSHOCK

Big Daddies and Little Sisters. ADAM and EVE . What's up? *BioShock* is set in 1960, in Rapture, a fictional underwater dystopian city built by business magnate, Andrew Ryan. Rapture was envisioned as the solution to an increasingly oppressive political and religious authority, and populated by those Ryan believed exemplified the best in humanity. Ryan wanted to create 'Eden', but because of humanity's inherent flaws (refer to the previous sentence) things started going 'bump' in the night. Creepy!

GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK

This game is here by default. Never before (well, since *Guitar Hero* and *Guitar Hero II*) has playing air guitar been so much fun. Featuring Battle Mode (players trying to beat each other at playing) and Co-op Career Mode, *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* consumed millions of hours of productive time. Who cares? It's fun and features a soundtrack of note. Kick your bud's ass playing hits such as *Anarchy in the U.K.*, *Barracuda*, *Black Magic Woman*, *Cities on Flame with Rock and Roll*, *F.C.P.R.E.M.I.X.* and some wickedly difficult other songs. Need we say more?

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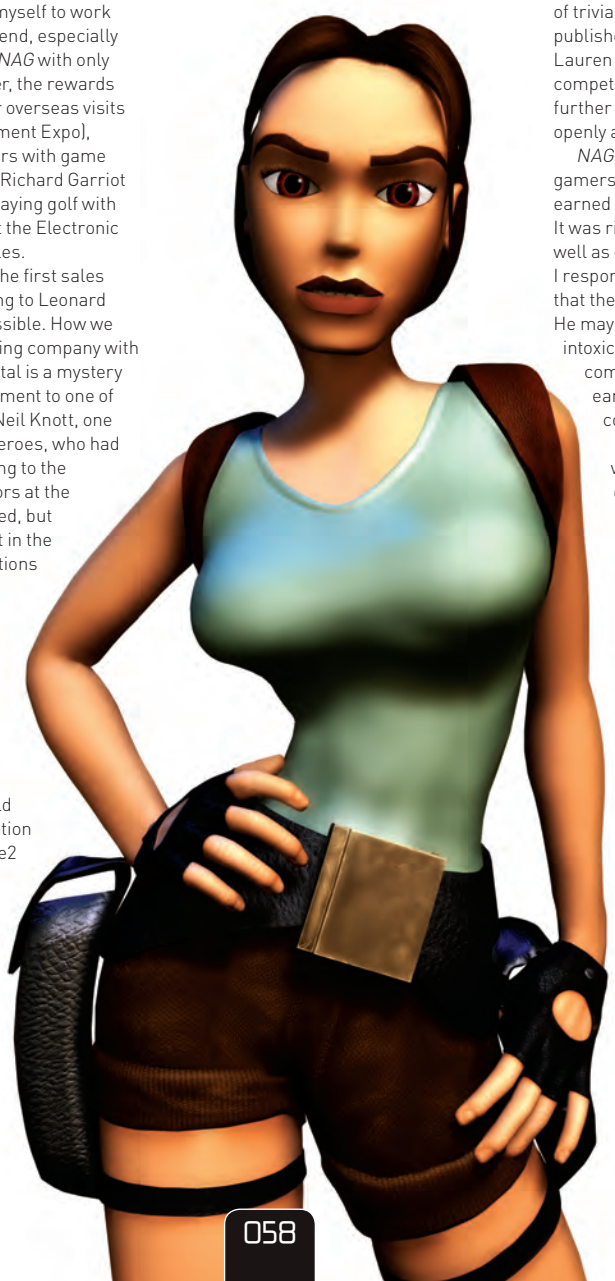
CAPTAINS LOG: Supplemental

THE ORIGINAL ED'S NOTE

I THINK BACK TO THE times of *NAG*'s inception and I can vividly remember the trials and tribulations of getting the first issue onto the shelves in April 1998. It was without a doubt a labour of love and not uncommon for Leonard Diamond and myself to work 18-hour days for weeks on end, especially the first year of publishing *NAG* with only a three-man team. However, the rewards were plentiful, with regular overseas visits to E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo), allowing me to rub shoulders with game developer legends such as Richard Garriot and Peter Molyneux, and playing golf with Gil 'Buck Rogers' Gerard at the Electronic Arts Golf Days in Los Angeles.

I can still recall getting the first sales figures from CNA and saying to Leonard that we had done the impossible. How we managed to start a publishing company with such a puny amount of capital is a mystery to most. However, it's testament to one of *NAG*'s first shareholders, Neil Knott, one of *NAG*'s original unsung heroes, who had a knack of selling advertising to the unwilling gaming distributors at the time. His stay was short lived, but he gave us more than a foot in the door, which laid the foundations for the years to come.

One of my favourite memories was an invite to the unveiling of the Creative SoundBlaster LIVE! in Singapore, and somehow coming home with two Creative Voodoo2 SLI graphic cards, quite a scoop in those days. It would be remiss of me not to mention the Creative Carnival Quake2 LAN Competition held in June 1998 at Sandton City, run by *NAG* and hosted by Creative Labs and Mustek. It was the first 1v1-LAN-based competition of its kind where we gave away a top-of-the-range PC to Uwe 'Viper' Venter from the then-notorious Damage Clan. An interesting bit of trivia from the event was that the current publishers of *NAG*, Michael James and Lauren das Neves, were contestants in the competition. Lauren was able to progress further than Michael, but he will never openly admit that.



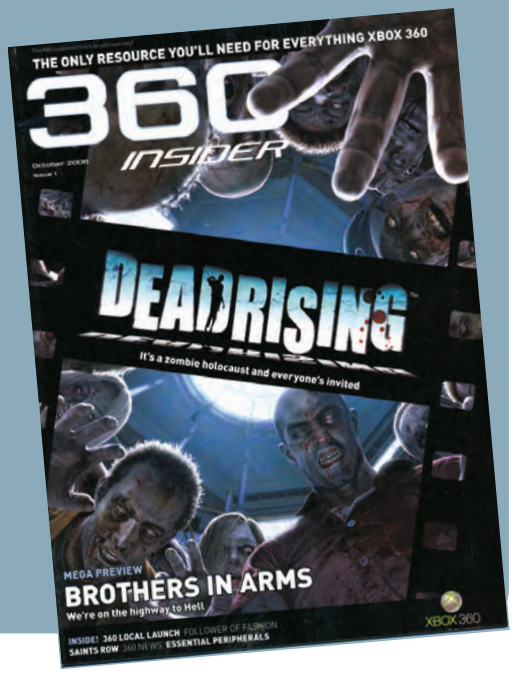
NAG would have been nothing without the gamers who religiously paid over their hard-earned R11.95 for their copy of the magazine. It was riddled with spelling mistakes as well as grammatical errors, and one letter I responded to rather harshly even stated that the paper we printed on smelled bad. He may have had a point. I had become intoxicated many times as I watched *NAG* come off the printing presses in the early years, but we thought it a trivial complaint nonetheless.

Though I have moved on and now work outside of South Africa, my *NAG* days were without a doubt some of the best of my working career. We were able to take something that we would have done for free, and found a way to make money out of it - though very little in those days. Today, *NAG* has exceeded my expectations, and all credit must be given to the current publishers of *NAG* for growing and evolving the publication into something more than just a magazine. It's a brand. Gaming is evolving rapidly in South Africa, and it is safe to say that *NAG* will be there every step of the way. I'm proud to have been a part of its beginning. May its legacy continue to grow in the years to come.

Warren Steven

360 INSIDER

LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER 2006 to coincide with the booming popularity of the Xbox 360 console in South Africa, *360 Insider* started life as a free *NAG* supplement. Using syndicated content from *X360 Magazine* as well as original locally-produced content from the *NAG* staff, the supplement was edited by Miktar. With close to 40 pages of dedicated and enthusiastic 360 game and lifestyle coverage, it was planned that *360 Insider* would evolve into fully fledged magazine if it appeared that there was a market for such a targeted enthusiast publication. Sadly, the young and vibrant supplement only ran for three months until December 2006. A lack of advertiser interest made it impossible to continue printing the supplement. And so, the supplement was cancelled and with it, any hopes of it one day becoming a real boy.



E3 TRIBUNE, E3 SUPPLEMENT, LEIPZIG GAMES CONVENTION SUPPLEMENT...

THE TWENTY-SIX HOURS INSIDE the belly of a Boeing is almost as bad as the hours waiting at the airport to get onto the plane and when you get there, the jet lag eats away at your mind until three in the morning while you watch the bugs take over your hotel room, knowing that soon you'll have to visit the bathroom again to finish liquid-purging last night's four-day old vending machine meat pie. It's a tough job and we do it because we just love trawling the gaming conventions of the world and reporting back on them. Needless to say, the editorial staff of *NAG* would pretty much do anything to get to the various gaming events each year and here's a very brief look at what we've done over the last decade.

The first time anyone from *NAG* went to E3 was way back in 1998. The lucky pioneer was none other than the co-founder of *NAG* magazine, Warren Steven. He went to E3 (in Los Angeles), wasn't quite sure what to expect and returned to write a feature for the magazine: it took about two months for the grin on his face to completely disappear. Then, in 1999, Warren returned to E3 but this time took along Michael James and based on that trip, in the July issue of the same year, *NAG* squeezed out the first proper E3 supplement (the mighty *E3 Tribune*). Again, in 2000, we went to E3 and in the July 2000 issue produced another supplement (*E3.2K*). You can rinse and repeat this whole process for 2001. Now comes the interesting part (more or less), the July 2002 issue had 15 pages of E3 coverage inside the magazine instead of a separate supplement and this was due to various financial constraints we had at the time. Fortunately, in 2003, we were back in business and produced a meaty 32-page E3 supplement, and then did it all again in 2004. Incidentally, 2003 was also the year we launched rAge, the South African version of a scaled-down E3. 2005 was a little different because we ran an extra-large 48-page E3 supplement, and in 2006 we finally took Len Nery with us to E3 and produced a monster 76-page E3 supplement (this was to be the last time we went to Los Angeles thanks to the collapse of E3 and that year's supplement was a more than a decent send off to nine years of E3 attendance – good times!). But that's not all for 2006. Later in the year we also went to the Games Convention in Leipzig (an investigative expedition to see if this event could replace E3 as our yearly destination). Finally, in 2007, we actually did end up at Leipzig again and produced a new 32-page supplement (technically an E3 supplement replacement). From here on in there's a good chance the Leipzig Games Convention will be the place to go every year until that gets cancelled or E3 reboots back into something viable. We're secretly hoping for the E3 reboot because there's just something special about Los Angeles that we love.

WHAT A RIDE...

BY NOW YOU'VE JUST finished ploughing through the last ten years of this magazine. I took my time checking this feature and surprisingly, although it was written by six different people, it more or less reads like one person wrote the whole thing. For me it shows the high calibre of our writers and also, more importantly, that as a magazine that's been around this long, we're rather consistent.

In the last ten years there have only been three Editors of this magazine, and I was one of them. I'm not sure what that means in the grand scheme of things, and here I'm supposed to summarise almost nine years of experience in 300 words – tough job, never going to happen.

The only thing I really want to say is thanks to everyone at the magazine (now and then) and every single person who has ever been to rAge or read an issue of *NAG*. Without all of you none of what we've been doing for so long would be possible. The other group of people who deserve an equal amount of hat tipping are our advertisers and clients, suppliers and distributors. Essentially over the years we had good relationships with all of our clients and have managed to keep them all more or less happy regardless of how we scored their products or made statements they might not have liked. It's always been our policy to never bend to the will of anyone for any reason and I am happy to report that since this magazine started we've never sold out (much ;)). The key reason for this is that the various gaming and hardware companies in South Africa have always been good enough to never to put *NAG* in that position. So hats off to everyone and thank you from the barrel of my rocket launcher.

Well... it's been one hell of a ride and I'm looking forward to the next however long it takes. If I'm still doing this job when the magazine turns twenty, it's because it really and truly is the best job in the world.

Playing games for a living... who would have thought. **NAG**

Michael 'RedTide' James

WHAT WE WANT

POW! KER-NAG!!

ECHOCROME [PSP]

It's quirky, it's Japanese-y and it's rather strange. *Echocrome* uses Escherian concepts for puzzle mechanics, if you can't see a hole because it is obscured by a pillar, then the hole isn't there. Stairs connect whereever you can make them connect by rotating the level. Yeah, pretty strange, yet the minimalist feel is appealing. We checked out the tiny three-level demo that hit the PlayStation Store recently and it left an impression on us. We're just not sure if the impression is concave or convex. It's unclear how *Echocrome* will do considering that it's not only off-beat, but it practically requires you to stand on your head to see what it's doing.

BATTLEFIELD: HEROES [PC]

C'mon, EA is totally trying to capitulate to the success of *Team Fortress 2*. The only difference is where *Team Fortress 2* is very American in its applied cartoon style, *Battlefield: Heroes* is incredibly British in its pastel-tone cartoon styling. Nothing wrong with that, but it's still quite obvious where EA got the idea from. Anyway, it looks great (check the trailer on the DVD) and there is something indefinably cool about being able to sit on the wing of an airplane while dropping grenades. The fact that it's going to be free is tasty, but we're entirely cautious. We've been burned by "free, but if you really love it you're gonna have to pay" systems before.

MIRROR'S EDGE [360/PC/PS3]

They want to put the 'person' back in First Person Shooter. Isn't that what *Dark Messiah*, tried to do? Unlike *Dark Messiah* however, the lead female protagonist of *Mirror's Edge* knows pakour and can totally leap from tall buildings in a single bound. Screenshots and trailers are practically nonexistent so we can't really tell how it'll turn out, but hopes run high (pun ha ha) and what little we have seen speaks of a game that dares to be different. Bleached, stark cityscapes where important acrobatic bits of the environment are tinted bright red against the white backdrops. Looks great, hope it plays as well as it looks.

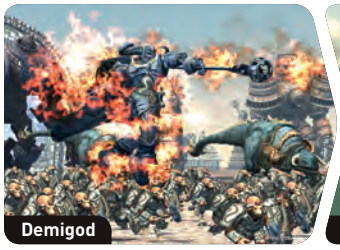
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR [PC]

We want it. We really want it. We're huge *Battlefield* fans and nothing sounds cooler than what the *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* mod creators (Kaos Studios) have in store. We've written giant previews, we've watched all the trailers, we've even gotten a bit of paws-on time with preview code and such. But we're still waiting. Always waiting. Yes, we could just run down to the store and buy it like everyone else, but then we wouldn't be special. And we'll be damned if we're going to do this job and not feel special. On our birthday.

SUDDEN DEATH IN TEAM FORTRESS 2 [PC]

We're not sure what happened to Sudden Death, the awesome equaliser mode, on the SGS *Team Fortress 2* servers. One minute it was there, the next, gone. In its place is Stalemate, which we call Failmate, because both teams literally just stand around doing the emotes at each other. If you've never played *Team Fortress 2* locally, this is what it's like when Failmate kicks in after a satisfying battle cut short by the timelimit: KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM! BONK! CHEERS MATE! WHOOPS THAT WAS NOT MEDICINE. MMPH MMMPF MMMMP! HOW'D THAT PLAN WORK OUT FOR YA DUMMY? MAGGOTS! YARRG! CRY SOME MORE!

Damnation



Demigod

Battlestations: Pacific

Grimm

Back-flippin' Cowboys!

READY FOR SOME GUN-TOTING, rope-swinging, wall-running Wild West action? Blue Omega, the team that won the Make Something Unreal contest held by Epic, has signed up with Codemasters to develop **Damnation**, a game that sounds a bit like **Uncharted**'s mix of acrobatics and **Gears**-style combat. But instead of a **Tomb Raider** take on things, this Wild West-themed title will follow the manic jumps of **Prince of Persia**. If you prefer your combatants bigger and bulkier (with hordes), Gas Powered Games' take on **DotA**, **Demigod**, will be out by the end of the year. That's according to lead designer John Combs. Speaking to Eurogamer, he said it's fully playable and that the team was just cleaning up. Expect a demo in the next few months... Also due before the end of the year is **Motorstorm 2**. A developer revealed to the BBC that the sequel has moved away from the desert and now takes place on a nice tropical island. And to think they took all those HD photos... The sequel will also feature four-player split-screen. Also heading for the beach, **Battlestations** is taking things to sunnier shores with **Battlestations: Pacific**. The sequel to Midway will now include controlling the Japanese fleet (this was left out of Midway because of time constraints) and a play area four times the size. It's being developed for the 360 and PC and should take less time than a certain other title. No, it's not a release date, but Scott Miller from 3D Realms did provide some details on **Duke Nukem Forever**. Apparently the game will feature most of 3D's weapons and will be highly interactive – you'll even be able to play pool. Cute, but seriously – finish the game! Keep things simple, as Valve can tell you. Another quick moment of obvious energy here: the developer has revealed that **Portal 2** is indeed in development. More underground chambers? Bizarre Portal gun adventures in the suburbs? Who cares? It's more **Portal**!

Finally, **American McGee's Grimm** finally showed itself. The episodic game definitely retains the Alice designer's taste for the cutely macabre and should make for an interesting story. Is Tim Burton talking about the movie rights yet?

MORE GENERAL RUMBLINGS FROM THE GAMING WORLD:

Indiana Jones is going LEGO and he'll be cracking his whip on shelves by mid-June this year. • Much delayed FPS MMO, **Huxley**, will hit US PCs later this year, with the 360 version following six months later. • **Assassin's Creed** slipped a little – it will now be released for PC in early April. • In case anyone missed it, **Metal Gear Solid 4** will be released on June 12 in Europe. • 4DRulers, developer of **Gore**, has put the word out that it seeks investors for a horror shooter title in development. • PC owners can get ready for **Mass Effect** by early May. • The **Puzzle Quest** series continues with the announcement of **Puzzle Quest: Galatrix**, a sci-fi themed RPG/puzzle tale. • An expansion is planned for **Eye of Judgment**, which will bring over 100 new cards to the game. • **Gears of War 2** has now officially been announced. So it's official that there will be a sequel. • Konami's PSP game, **Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil**, featuring the tiny, cute bringer of demise, is being ported to the Wii. Nice! • Game Informer revealed that Gearbox's first person-shooter, **Aliens: Colonial Marines**, looks damn nice and will be out by the end of this year. • Break stuff! **Red Faction: Guerrilla** is coming and it will feature an open world that will be very, very destructible. **NAG**

ALL OUT BATTLE!

Name:
Army of Two

Description:
It will take an Army of Two to stop the corruption of rogue private military corporations. Fight along side your team-mate to become the deadliest two-man military outfit a government can buy. The breakthrough gameplay in ARMY OF TWO™, with a live or adaptive AI partner, enables you to take advantage of two-man strategies like customizable weapons, vehicles, and tactical shooting. If you're going to survive, you'll have to bring down a vast conspiracy in which the line between 'good guys' and 'bad guys' has been obliterated.

Available on:
PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360

Name:
Battlefield Bad Company

Description:
Battlefield Bad Company's non-traditional single player story and sandbox gameplay with Frostbite's destructible environments combined with continued innovation in online multiplayer delivers a genre-leading package for next-gen console shooter and Battlefield fans.

Coming Soon on:
PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360

Name:
Command & Conquer 3 - Kane's Wrath

Description:
In the name of Kane! The Command & Conquer series continues to thrive with Command & Conquer™ 3: Kane's Wrath. As the expansion pack to the critically-acclaimed and fan favorite, Command & Conquer 3 Tiberium Wars™, this Real-time Strategy (RTS) game returns to the Tiberium Universe with Kane at the center of an epic new single player campaign spanning 20 years - from the rebirth of the Brotherhood of Nod after the Second Tiberium War through the dramatic events of the Third Tiberium War and beyond. This story will be told through a new set of high-definition, live action video sequences starring a celebrity cast including Joe Kucan, playing the megalomaniac leader of the Brotherhood of Nod, alongside new talent Natasha Henstridge and Carl Lumbly. With your help, Commander, the Dark Messiah may rise again!

Available on:
PC DVD ROM XBOX 360 (Coming June 2008)

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THROW ME A FRICKIN' BONE

Unless you've been dead since 2006, and only recently reanimated by means we'd really rather not delve too deeply into you should know by now that *Fable 2* introduces your very own furry four-legged friend. This trusty AI-controlled pup enters the game early on, and will accompany you throughout the remainder of what should doubtless prove to be an immensely remarkable and eventful life. That's one long-lived pooch.

The point, however, is to evoke emotion in players. And not just any emotion. It's easy enough to coax controller-flinging rage out of most gamers, but the 'Neux isn't settling for anything less than the heady, ponderous stuff of Byronic sonnets. As he revealed in a widely publicised interview last year, "What I came to realize was that the feature that *Fable* lacked and *Fable 2* needed was drama," he said. "Yeah, we could make an impressive and incredible story with baddies, but we needed something else. The thing we really needed - and this is the one you may not get - is love."

Well, we totally get that. Everyone loves dogs. The sort of people who don't love dogs (psychopaths) probably wouldn't play *Fable 2*, anyway – they're into *Counter-Strike*. Anyway, apparently these adorable fleabags come in a colourful assortment of shapes and sizes, and will change subtly in accordance with the player's alignment. So if you're scurrying around Albion blowing chunky, wet holes in everybody else's faces, then expect your dog to resemble something that trotted out of *Nightbreed*. Or possibly a French poodle. Molyneux has also suggested that custom critters may be available via DLC.

In addition to looking cute and tugging insistently at your heartstrings, your canine pal serves double-duty as most of your HUD and mini-map, as well as your battle buddy. He'll guide you from place to place, alert you to potential threats by growling, and attack anyone who menaces you. That's way better than those rubbish donkeys in *Dungeon Siege*.

And just when you love that mangy mongrel so much your heart could burst, it'll fall over and die. Maybe. "I'm not going to talk about when the dog dies, how the dog dies," Molyneux said. "But I won't

FABLE 2

Developer→ Lionhead Studios | **Publisher→** Microsoft Game Studios | **Genre→** Action RPG | **Release Date→** TBA 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

FABLE WAS A CONTROVERSIAL game. Yes, some people loved it, but those same people probably wouldn't know a good RPG if it lobbed a pike into their spines. It's not that *Fable* was especially bad. Quite the contrary, what made *Fable* such a wretched game was that it had so much flagrantly wasted potential. It might've been phenomenal, but instead it was a mostly tedious humdrum of fetch quests on ostensibly meaningful pretexts that were really nothing more than an XP grind for a drab, hollow character paradigm. Even developer Lionhead officially conceded its misadventure by releasing a 'New! Improved! Now with more stuff!' version a year or so later. Unfortunately, however, a handful of new (fetch) quests and a roster tabulating your sexual conquests and failed marriages did little to redeem the game that was supposed to change the world.

So Peter Molyneux was sent to sit in the corner without pudding to ponder his crimes, while his handlers and dev squad convened a meeting. It was agreed that Peter should say sorry ("If I have mentioned any feature in the past which, for whatever reason, didn't make it as I described into *Fable,*" he posted on his company's forums. "I apologise."), and that they had better get it right the second time around. These secret events consequently conspired to bring us *Fable 2*: Probably just more of the same, but better, or *Fable 2*: What *Fable* was supposed to be, but we sort of ran out of time, Lol. Whatever, apparently it has guns and more than 15 million poppies. Epic. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

MY LOVE FOR YOU IS LIKE AN OX-DRAWN CART

The best thing about 2006 monolith, *Gears of War*, was:

a. The gore guzzlin' chainsaw bayonet ;
b. Making Berserkers explode with the Hammer of Dawn;
c. Grenade-tagging General RAAM twice without dying, despite his roiling swarm of Kryll chums, to win the game on Hardcore difficulty; and
d. The cooperative gameplay.

Now, while (c) is obviously an enormously attractive option, anyone who doubled-up with Dom knows that playing *Gears* with a friend was the coolest thing since the last Ice Age. Co-op play is the new black, and *Fable 2* is fastidiously fashionable.

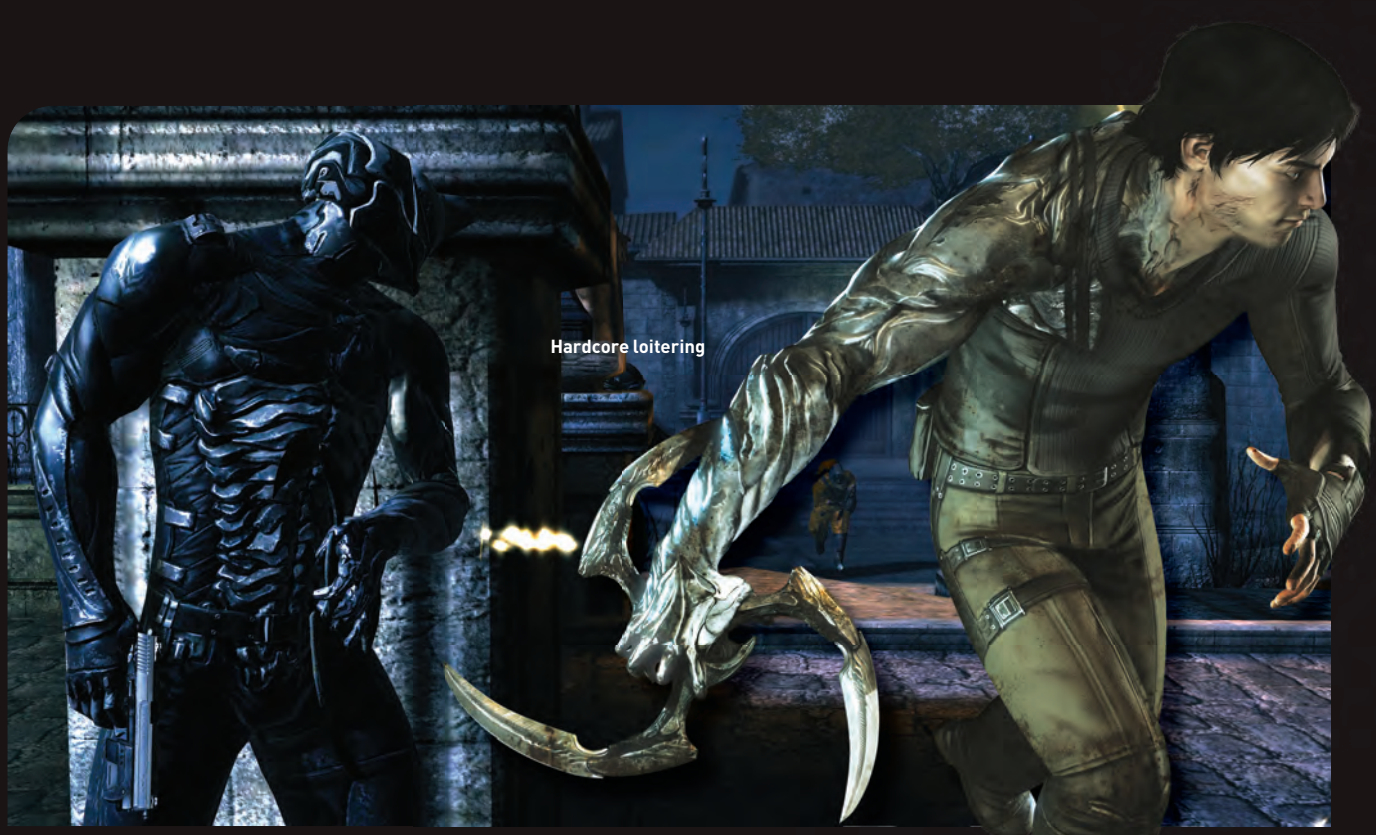
At the recent GDC industry show-and-tell in San Francisco, Molyneux revealed that the game will feature drop-in, drop-out co-op play very much along the same lines as Epic Games' gritty shooter. In typical Lionhead style, though, "cooperative" is merely a nominal formality subject to personal interpretation. During the demonstration, Molyneux's sidekick casually butchered his ally's in-game husband, effectively rendering the couple's wailing toddler an orphan, since mum's always out on business. We recommend resolving any lingering 'issues' you and your gaming crony might have before teaming up, lest that forgotten birthday creep up on you with great vengeance.

Molyneux is being uncharacteristically cagey about whether this "couch co-op" feature will be additionally available for online play, but has confirmed that any XP, cash, and items acquired during co-op play will be transferred to the visitor's own game world upon return.

POPPIN' SPROGS

There's no legacy like a legacy of flesh, and *Fable 2* presents dapper heroes with opportunities to make itty-bitty heroes with other consenting adults. Before doing the wild monkey dance, players can choose whether or not to use protection (like, maybe a sheep's bladder or something), and – consequently – whether or not to produce ankle snappers. Bearing in mind, of course, that – just like Real Life™ - you'll have to financially support the brats thereafter. For those of you hoping to see your pixel-rendered heroes and heroines bumping bits with the locals, however, you're all out of luck - sexy time in *Fable 2* is a fade-to-black.

No pr0n then, but Fox News might still have something to gleefully misrepresent, as Molyneux has dropped dark hints about some sort of gruesome family incident. "There will be a moment six hours into a game where you walk into the room and someone will ask you to do something and you will have to sacrifice something precious to you as a gamer. You will put down the controller and ask, what am I going to do?" Murder? Slavery? Selling your Xbox 360 to buy a sensible family car? Oh Peter, you're such a cruel tease.



Hardcore loitering

DARK SECTOR

Developer→ Digital Extremes | **Publisher→** D3Publisher | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** March 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

THE LIFE OF A special operative is certainly not an easy one. Even in the realm of the fantastic, where special agents are an attractive lot with a steely grin and piercing but fair eyes (as opposed to roughshod looks and borderline psychotic personalities), things are not easy. Take the case of the guy in *Dark Sector*, sent into a difficult situation to plant explosives and stop some kind of infection from reaching the rest of the world. The contamination seems to be the work of a rogue military type, intent on reshaping society to his own ambitions. The bad news, for us, is that this seems to include him as god and plenty of monsters to back him up. This seems to be the role of the infection – to create these creatures that do his bidding.

Even though our trusty agent gets his explosives planted (and removed certain liabilities in between), he gets caught, interrogated and infected. Fortunately he was injected with a special serum that should stop the virus. Yet, since he was stabbed rather violently by an infected monster, he can't escape the virus's clutches. But he can make it work to his advantage...

This advantage, and *Dark Sector*'s special trick, is a modified arm that spawns a lethal disc that can be thrown around. The arm also gains the abilities to grab objects from a distance and charge up with electrical currents. The disc can be given a power throw, guaranteed to chop the limps off the target if it hits. This makes a rather slick union with a shooter very much from the *Gears of War* school of violence. The main character can run from cover to cover, ducking behind walls and shooting at the enemy by peering around and over edges. In fact, the control scheme is virtually identical to *Gears of War*'s – usually games like to display their independence of thought by torturing users with a 'unique' interface, ignoring the virtues of 'tired and tested', but *Dark Sector* has no shame in taking a working formula and making it tick some more.

HANDS ON TESTED

TRAILER ON THE DVD

The similarities don't end there. While *Dark Sector* doesn't support *Gears*' co-op standard (it's a single-player game, though multiplayer does feature), it does look very similar. That's not too incidental – both are powered by Unreal Engine 3 – but as many gamers have noticed, UE3 games don't always look the same. That's not the case in *Dark Sector*, which leans heavily into the rain-soaked, crumbling building environments that *Gears* also lavished around. In the case of *Dark Sector*, though, the theme is much more a decaying industrial one, with plenty of pipes, rust and tormented concrete all over the place.

But as much as there are plenty of similarities between the two games, *Dark*

Hardcore breakdancing

Sector also has its own personality. Action and guns play a big role in the game, but they're not the main focus. Before gaining the specialised arm, our agent is a crack shot, but doesn't collect ammo for anything other than his handgun. The reason for this becomes evident after he gets 'anointed'. Normal firearms only work for a limited time if held by the special hand, resulting in a plasma puff of a demise. But the handgun, which is held by the left hand, isn't affected. This essentially means you will dual-wield the special blade and a handgun. It's surprising how well this works – throw your blade at an opponent and as he staggers from the blow, put a few bullets into him for added effect. This is consistently lethal with most of the monsters.

Fortunately it won't push players to become 'pistol+arm-of-certain-death' purists – *Dark Sector* certainly packs a punch when it comes to enemy numbers – at quite a few points it felt as if the enemy just kept coming. While they are not the smartest bunch of AIs in games, the enemy do adjust to where you are and how they can flank you, giving each other cover and shooting blindly to keep you away from a nice headshot.

The same can't be said for the actual monsters. In the preview code we only really started to scratch the surface of this – early on a giant monster rampages through an area, giving players a chance to try out the more acrobatic abilities of the lead character (ie. Dodging), while a bit further the smaller bastards come out to play. These are not inclined towards taking cover and prefer to rush towards the player. Considering that *Dark Sector* has a nice cover system working for it, this feels disjointed and one certainly hopes the game keeps the melee freaks on a leash and provides far more shooting opportunities. Not that they are hard to kill, but it does show the combat system isn't designed around taking care of things man-to-mutant. Range is key, especially if one plans to make real use of the blade's lethal abilities. Another quirk became a itching nuisance while playing – unlike *Gears* you can't rush into cover. Instead, you bluntly stop against it and need to tap a button again to drop out of harm's way. This is probably something that can, and will, be fixed by the final build, since it's a bit of an oversight.

Dark Sector is a bit of a mixed bag. It is clearly a competent but lacking imitation of *Gears of War*, if only in how it plays, but that is not a bad thing (unless you insist on constantly comparing it to Epic's masterpiece). It isn't a broken game – it plays well and is a lot of fun, but some design choices might leave less forgiving players with a bad impression that isn't entirely undeserved. **NAG**

James Francis

Right! That poodle won't be bothering you again

STREET FIGHTER IV

"SOMETIMES, YOU REMEMBER THINGS as looking cooler than they did. Since it's been 15 years since *Street Fighter II* came out, you might envision something that looks better. What we're trying to do with *Street Fighter IV* is to build a game that looks like your ultimate memories." says Yoshinori Ono, producer of *Street Fighter IV*.

In arcades around the world, *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* (1991) fascinated gamers young and old. Back when you saw it, *Street Fighter II* was bold, colourful, and full of personality. However, thanks to the march of progress and ever-rising expectations, it doesn't look that way now. Now it looks limited and small.

Ono has made it clear that *Street Fighter IV*'s design goal is to make it appear like people remember their first impression of *Street Fighter II*. As such, it has the aesthetic of an old-school game when the Japanese would sit there and handcraft this surprisingly detailed manga-like world with stuff crammed into every pixel. Every character has a stage. Their stage is intentionally nationality themed. Their stage is jam-packed with stuff down to every last centimetre. They're idealised, over-the-top representations of their locality. Every character has a real facial expression: they're not polygon robots. The positions of fingers and toes adjusted by hand for every movement, every hit. Every character has a versus cut-scene intro. Everyone has between-round win poses and phrases. Everyone has unique match-win cut-scenes. Every scene of presentation is seamless, with a unified aesthetic that entirely knows what it wants to look like.

In truth, Capcom hasn't put this much effort into every detail of a game since the days of classics like *Darkstalkers*.

Little has been revealed about the story, other than that it falls between *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter III*. Even though the game features 3D characters and backgrounds, the playfield is still the traditional 2D plane. A new system known as "Saving" (tentative) has been introduced, while Ultra Moves make a return from the later titles in the series. The Parry System from *Street Fighter III* has been dropped. The 'Saving' system is a four-segment 'Revenge' guage that builds up as you take damage. A player can use one segment (strong punch + strong kick) for a special instant-damage stun attack. Holding the buttons down charges an unblockable attack, using three quarters of the full gauge. A full stock of the gauge fuels EX Specials: stronger versions of regular special moves. Ono wants the gameplay to shift away from combos, more towards a realistic system he compares to bosing. "The skill is in reading your opponent's move before he starts moving... We haven't forgotten about combos and linked moves, but saving makes it so that you have to read your opponent".

The car-smashing bonus rounds, ever popular from the earlier *Street Fighter* titles, will return. Ono has claimed, "They'll be in there if I have to program them myself!". **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Developer→ Capcom (Japan) | **Publisher→** Capcom | **Genre→** Fighting | **Release Date→** 2008 (tentative) | **Platform→** TBA

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

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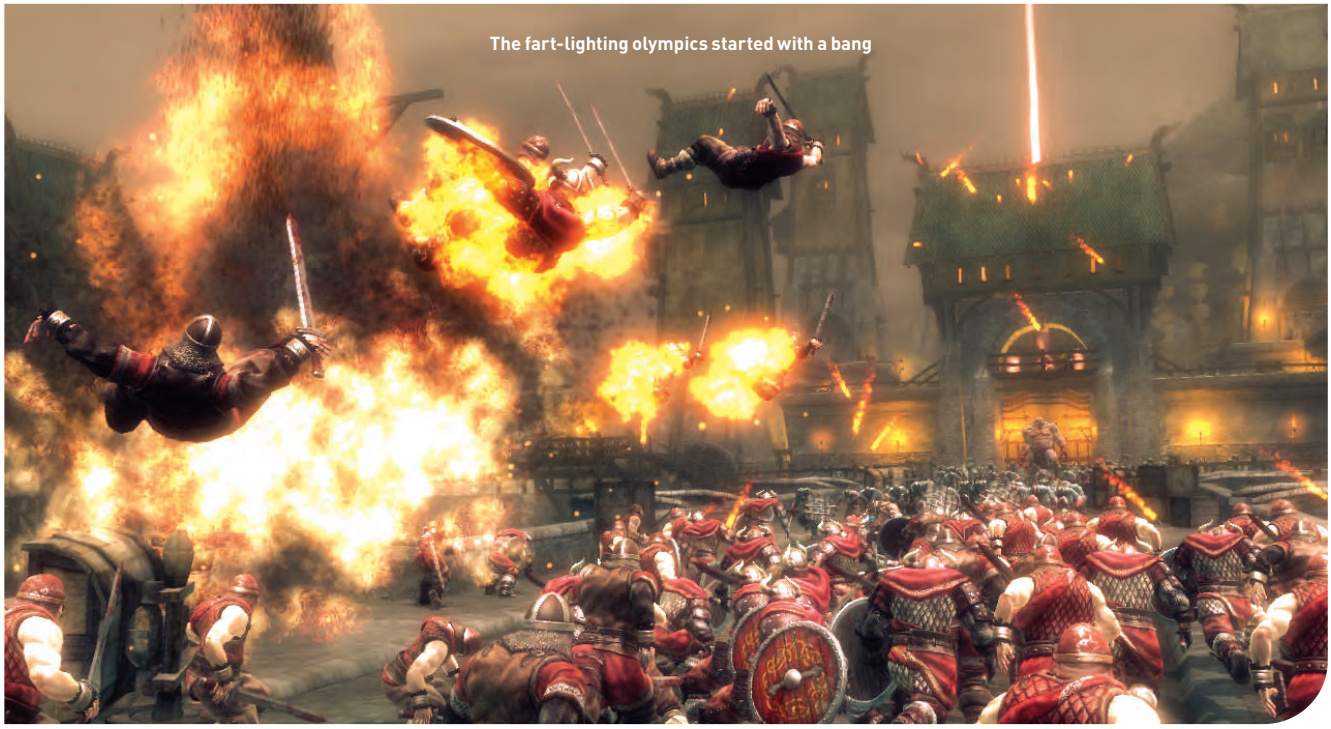

The fart-lighting olympics started with a bang

VIKING: BATTLE FOR ASGARD

Developer→ Creative Assembly | **Publisher→** SEGA Europe | **Genre→** Fighting | **Release Date→** TBA

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

ONE WOULD ASSUME THAT someone might think twice before messing with any god, let alone the leader of all the other gods, but the Norse goddess Hel, daughter of the god of Mischief and Mayhem (Loki), has decided to do just that. Of course, Odin, being the chief god and the god of both War and Wisdom, had her banished from Asgard, the realm of the gods, to the realm of mortals, Midgard.

More than mildly peeved at being exiled and intent on bringing about Ragnarok, the legendary war that will destroy both Asgard and the gods that inhabit it, Hel has set out to release her Wolf-god half-brother, Fenrir, who is destined to devour Odin during Ragnarok. The goddess is also building up an army of resurrected Viking warriors to destroy and claim all three islands of Midgard, namely Nilfheim, Galcliff and Isaholm.

Not one to take the threat of apocalyptic annihilation lying down, but unwilling to actually do any work himself, Odin has appointed his daughter, Freya, goddess of Love and Magic, to put an end to Hel's deadly rampage and defend mankind against her reign of terror. Naturally, Freya has chosen to resurrect you, Skarin, a great Viking warrior whom Hel had already slain, to be her champion in Midgard. Just in case, she has also endowed Skarin with magic powers and the ability to use the power of the gods in battles.

After training with the ghost of Valhalla, who will teach you skills for battle (including the ability to dual-wield weapons like swords and axes) as well as allow you to practice combination moves on him, Skarin must explore the three vast islands to build up an army for Freya. Being approximately one square kilometre each, the islands are best traversed using the Leystones, portal stones which allow for quicker travel. Each island holds a number of quests that can be completed in a variety of ways (stealth or aggressive strategies for example), which will liberate fellow Vikings, thus encouraging them to join forces with you. Some quests will also lead to the capturing and taming of dragons (which are vital in the epic battles this title boasts).

Although there will be many opportunities to fight and win throughout the game, it's the idea of 1,000-soldier battles against the six bosses that makes this title impressive. During these battles, dragon attacks can be summoned (provided you have already captured and trained some dragons) through collecting Dragon Runes (tokens) that become available through defeating larger enemies, including warlocks and giants. Your own Shamans, healers that sit at the back of the battlefield and who continually resurrect fallen warriors, must be protected vigorously while your opponents' Shamans should be sought out and killed to gain the upper hand during the battle. Skarin can also boost the morale of allies and, though he cannot level up, he can gain new equipment and moves through battle.

A notable feature of the game is its atmospheric fog that transforms into an evil veil of dark and stormy weather when enemies are nearby and returns to clear and sunny weather once they have been removed from the area. Slow-motion replays also offer a second look at special moves pulled off during battles.

Unfortunately, *Viking: Battle for Asgard* doesn't offer any multiplayer mode. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

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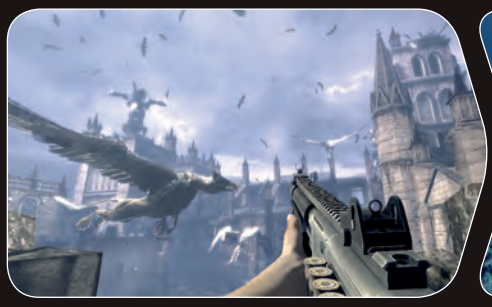
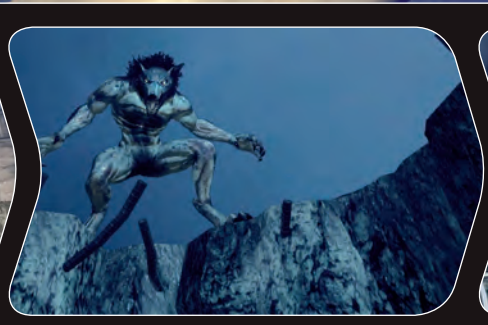
Maybe you need something bigger?





LEGENDARY: THE BOX

EVER WONDERED WHAT HAPPENED to Pandora's Box? According to Spark Unlimited, it has been sitting in a New York museum waiting for the right thief to come and open it. This thief has finally arrived and his name is Charles Deckard. What he unleashes is something of mythical proportions.

Players will be play as Deckard as he learns just how powerful the box really is and that by opening it, he is also destined to be the one to stop it. Deckard inherits a signet on his hand that allows him to draw animus from fallen creatures. This essentially means that he can suck out their life force once they are defeated and use it to heal himself. Apparently, this is a very big part of the gameplay mechanic, because without this ability, the player wouldn't stand a chance in hell of defeating them.

Unfortunately for Deckard, there is also a secret organisation that is trying to gain control of the creatures for its own diabolical purposes. A man known only as LeFey leads this organisation. Could this be a play on Anton LeFey, the old head of the satanic church? Deckard will have to face him and his organisation as well as the vast battalions of creatures, which will come in the form of all your favourite mythological beasts such as werewolves, gryphons, golems, minotaurs and much more. Spark has also promised that these creatures will be very different from each other and that no two battles will be alike. Some will be more on the passive side while others will be completely on the offensive, using the environment around them to defeat the player. They will also be divided into two groups: Alpha and Beta. The former is a more powerful adversary as well as a lot more aggressive.

The game seems to have some truly awe-inspiring features and action sequences. This is evident from the start: the intro level will require the player to face a titanic golem created out of the very stone and steel of New York itself. There are even scenes involving people trying to escape the clutches of gryphons as they swoop down at them from overhead, while still trying to dodge the regular New York traffic.

Legendary: The Box will be released for the Xbox 360, PS3 and PC. While the release date is unknown, it certainly seems like it will be one of the must-have titles of 2008.. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

Developer→ Spark Unlimited | **Publisher→** Gamecock Media Group | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

THE GODS WILL HAVE A WARRIOR

MANKIND WILL HAVE A HERO

HE WILL HAVE HIS REVENGE

VIKING

BATTLE FOR ASGARD

A merciless army of undead soldiers sweeps through the realm of men. Every village is burned. Every person enslaved, or murdered. And when they're fi nished with your world, the realm of gods will also fall.

You are Skarin, a vengeful Viking warrior and all of creation's last hope. Now, to turn the tide of war, you must strive to raise your own army and drench the battlefields with the blood of your enemies.

fspb 18 V

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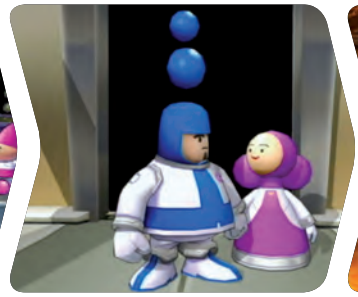
OKAMI

Developer→ Ready at Dawn | **Publisher→** Capcom | **Genre→** Action/Adventure | **Release Date→** March 2008

EVEN THOUGH CAPCOM STATED that there were "no plans for *Okami* on Wii" and Clover Studios felt the game would "not translate well to the console", a Wii version is on the way. In charge of porting and developing the Wii version is developer Ready at Dawn who have proven themselves incredibly capable with the likes of *Daxter* (PSP) and *God of War: Chains of Olympus* (PSP). Originally the game was going to be a straight port of the PS2 version, but Wii-centric enhancements have been confirmed: the motion-sensing of the Wii Remote will be used for Celestial Brush segments and cut-scenes will be skippable (thank the gaming gods).

Originally released on the PlayStation 2 in 2006 by Clover Studio (responsible for the feisty *Viewtiful Joe* series and hilarious *God Hand* parody action title), *Okami* takes place in an unspecified period of classical Japanese history. Combining several Japanese myths, legends and folklore into an epic story, *Okami* was one of the last PlayStation 2 games released before the PlayStation 3 bullied the system into premature retirement. Essentially a *Zelda*-clone but with a god-like white wolf instead of eternally henpecked elf, *Okami* Incorporated unique gameplay elements and quality design in ways rarely seen in today's games. Charismatic, engaging and atmospheric with over 60 hours of flawless gameplay, expectations are high for the Wii version. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



OPOONA

Developer→ ArtePiazza | **Publisher→** Koei | **Genre→** Adventure | **Release Date→** 2008

IT STARTED OUT JUST like any other ordinary day for Opoona and his family, taking a nice little trip with his parents through space, when everything goes extraordinarily wrong and Opoona is flung into the greatest adventure of his life (so far). When his family's spacecraft runs into trouble, Opoona and his siblings (Copoona and Porina) are forced to make an emergency exit using the escape pods, which take them to a nearby planet called Landroll.

Now our main character has to find out where his siblings landed and what happened to his parents. To be able to travel between colonies on Landroll, Opoona needs a licence that he can only obtain by getting a job (anything from a hotel manager to detective and some more mundane options in between) and performing the duties that the job requires. The job that the player chooses also earns the character cash, which can be spent purchasing items that could come in handy on the way. Opoona also needs to develop relationships with the characters he encounters – especially as some can become allies on his journey - through performing his job and entering into conversation.

However, the game is not a lifestyle simulation. Landroll is a dangerous place filled with Dark Rouges and other monsters that Opoona will face. Luckily, our main character is a Cosmo Guard descendant, which gives him Energy Bonbons (floating above his head) that can be directed with the nunchuck to attack enemies. The trajectory as well as the power of the Bonbon attack can be controlled, along with every other action in the game, through the nunchuck remote. And Opoona won't always have to fight alone as he finds NPCs to join him and his siblings (each with their own Bonbons).

Although it boasts 70 hours of gameplay to do everything, *Opoona* might fall short in its translation for the Western market.

TRAILER ON THE DVD

Interestingly enough, *Opoona*'s sales in Japan were poor despite the positive reviews it received. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

SECRET AGENT CLANK

Developer→ High Impact Games | **Publisher→** SCEA | **Genre→** Platformer | **Release Date→** 2008

NOT TO BE OUTDONE by *Jak and Daxter* wise-cracking, ottsel sidekick, Daxter (who starred his own eponymous PSP game), Clank finally gets his own spin-off title also for the PSP. In his role as secret agent complete with tuxedo, helpful gadgets and devices, Clank has to prove Ratchet's innocence after being framed for a crime he didn't commit. Unfortunately for Ratchet, the trial is a farce and he's found guilty. To save his friend, Clank adopts his Secret Agent Clank persona and investigates.

This actually slightly ties in with *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*, where Clank was given a job as the starring role in the "Holovision" series, "Secret Agent Clank".

Sticking to the *Ratchet & Clank* franchise's shooting/platforming blend, *Secret Agent Clank* also touches on stealth and melee elements, keeping in line with the 007 parody theme of the title. Stealth sections involve button-sequence mini games and are mainly a diversion, which should hopefully avoid the annoyance usually associated with stealth. Weapons include bow-tie boomerangs, cuff-link bombs, a flame-thrower pen and jet boots. Instead of upgrading weapons in the traditional *Ratchet & Clank* way, Clank can upgrade his 'Clank-Fu' fighting moves, learning new techniques and various finishing moves.

Idiot-superhero (and all-round favourite character) Captain Quark also appears in *Secret Agent Clank*, albeit only for boss-battles. Curiously, Clank doesn't tackle bosses himself. In essence, Quark is embellishing the tale of how he followed Clank around the galaxy, taking credit for Clank's actions while Clank defeats the bosses off camera. Quark has limited offensive abilities, as boss-battles involve a more cerebral approach of identifying what you're supposed to do to take the boss down.

TRAILER ON THE DVD

High Impact Games did a stellar job with *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*, which bodes well for *Secret Agent Clank*. Personally, we're just curious what the secret code Secret Agent Clank found in the IRIS Supercomputer in *Ratchet & Clank: Tools of Destruction* does. According to developers, if you have a *Size Matters* save file, you'll also get special bonuses in *Secret Agent Clank*. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

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OVERLORD: RAISING HELL

Developer→ Triumph Studios | **Publisher→** Codemasters | **Genre→** FPS | **Release Date→** Q3 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

RESTORER OF THE DARK Tower, Exploder of Melvin Underbelly, Grinder of Goldo and Ravager of Rollie, Destroyer of Elves, Oppressor of Spree – his name is legion, but his friends call him "Overlord". Having recently vanquished the Fallen Heroes previously responsible for his rude and abrupt demise, the great lumbering bully isn't given a moment's respite from his campaign of casual tyranny and unicorn slaughter. Just as he's wiping his wrought-iron boots on the hearth, the Overlord's perennially devoted advisor Gnarl informs him of some sort of preternatural disturbance down the village. Upon arrival at Spree, Not-Sauron and his scuttling host find the local peasants flinging themselves into a mysterious portal. Apparently they've still not forgiven him for trampling the sunflowers and firebombing the sheep, and are petulantly seeking their fortunes elsewhere. As fickle fate would have it, however, the gormless fools find themselves stranded in the Abyss, a hellish parallel dimension where everything is rather worse than back home. Oh, reckless folly and the irrepressible pride of man.

Still, land is land, and no demonic pumpkins or hideously resurrected Heroes are going to stand against the Overlord and his five-year plan to rule the world. As the sage and ever-insightful Gnarl says, "Evil will always find a way". Usually with an axe. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

MORE EVIL THAN YOU COULD SHAKE A DUNGEON FULL OF RUBORIAN RAIDERS AT

In addition to the *Raising Hell* expansion, Codemasters is also releasing the Challenge Pack and Split-Screen Multiplayer Pack as premium and free DLC respectively. The former offers seven new multiplayer maps, as well as the new Legendary difficulty. The free update includes split-screen multiplayer for all original maps, and features a new cooperative map – Rocky Race – where Overlords must combine their nefarious forces to tackle a rampaging rock giant.

A PS3 bumper pack containing the original *Overlord* bundled with all this new stuff and tricked out with enhanced visuals is due sometime later this year.

BATTLEFIELD HEROES

Developer→ EA | **Publisher→** EA South Africa | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF *Battlefield 2* and *Battlefield 2142*, it was inevitable that another game in the series would be released. However, it's not what you would expect from the series or even Electronic Arts for that manner. The reason for this is that the game will be completely free. EA plans on capitalising on this game with a new advertising system in which they will sell ad space on the loading screen and on the game's Website to cover the costs of development, while at the same time also allowing players who want to drastically alter the appearance of their characters a chance to purchase these 'alterations'. However, This won't affect the game at all and everyone will be on level playing grounds with the new ranking system that has been implemented. Another unique fact about *Battlefield Heroes* is the graphics, which unlike before is cartoonish and will run on lower-spec'd machines.

In terms of gameplay, there will be three playable classes: Commando, Soldier and Gunner. Each of these will be unique and essential to the overall team play that the game promotes. In addition, in terms of vehicles, there will be a few added skills, such as wing walking on planes. However, while this might be an added bonus, planes now take damage from everything. There will also be an achievement and abilities system that will allow players to work towards specific goals.

Whatever you might think of EA or *Battlefield*, this is truly a turning point in the series, especially considering that *Heroes* will be free. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

BOOM BLOX

Developer→ EA Los Angeles | **Publisher→** EA | **Genre→** Party
Platforms→ Wii | **Release Date→** May 2008

STEVEN SPIELBERG IS WORKING with his old pals at EA Los Angeles – the Dreamworks part. We're just guessing, but it makes sense. He was also involved with *Medal of Honor*, a game Dreamworks developed, so it makes sense. How much of a role he actually plays in the games his name gets tied to is a different matter. But if it's a lot, judging by *Boom Blox*, the famed director can certainly take a few more stabs at it. *Boom Blox* looks fun, the kind Wii owners have really been craving since they bought the console. Using an impressive physics engine, it's really a mix of block-based party games – from traditional *Jenga* to blowing cannons into stacks and seeing how many fall down. Throw, grab or blow blocks up. It opens up a lot of possibilities and looks like a lot of fun.

ASSASSIN'S CREED

Developer→ Ubisoft Montreal | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Genre→** Action
Platforms→ PC | **Release Date→** April 2008

AFTER TAKING THE CONSOLE world by storm a few months ago, everyone's favourite Arabian ninja is getting ready to show us his stuff on the PC. But this isn't a port, given that the game has been in development for a while and most likely got delayed to prioritise the console versions before December. Still, if you missed the hype, *AC* tells of Altair, a medieval assassin taking care of business during the Second Crusade, visiting ancient cities Jerusalem, Damascus and Acre, as well as the castle Masyaf. Here you get to climb everywhere, kill many guards and act just plain badass – in a restrained manned. You are an assassin, after all. The PC version is sweetened with additional mini missions to keep you busy. But best get a controller to play it.

FACEBREAKER

Developer→ EA Canada | **Publisher→** EA | **Genre→** Sport
Platforms→ PS3, Wii, 360 | **Release Date→** TBA

PETER MOORE, WHO PIMPS this in the press release, says it takes him back to his roots in the industry. We're not sure what arcade boxing title he's referring to (*Prize Fighter*?), but 'arcade' is the operative word here. On the other side, EA has a rather damn fine boxing system in the *Fight Night* series. Perhaps *Facebreaker* will use a bit of this and a bit of that. It's certainly going for the funnier side of things with exaggerated cartoon characters, but brings in new stuff like face deformation and adding your face using a camera. So far, two characters have been revealed: a sassy Latin lover and an ex-KGB demolitions expert. Apart from their charm, each character also brings a different type of boxing style. So, is this *Outlaw Golf* for boxing? If it plays like *Fight Night*, who cares?

JUST CAUSE 2

Developer→ Avalanche | **Publisher→** Eidos | **Genre→** Action
Platforms→ 360, PS3, PC | **Release Date→** 2008

THE GAME CALLED *JUST* *Cause* either describes a noble motivation or explains the only real reason you need to do anything in this manic island republic sandbox: "just 'cause". Rico is back, but this time he's not doodling around on the last-gen machines. While *Just Cause* did have a 360 release, it definitely wasn't built for newer hardware. Apart from the extra spit, shine, physics and blooming explosions this game promises, developer Avalanche says we can also expect a much bigger island. Called Panau, situated in South-East Asia, Rico has to destabilise the reign of dictator Baby Panay. The island also brings new environments, like snow-peaked mountains, but who the other faction(s) will be remains a secret. Apparently, though, there will be no sub-missions. How will that work? No idea. If anything, *Just Cause* didn't have enough variety in that field. Having none doesn't seem like a fix.

CASINO

Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 2

VEGAS: BECAUSE TERROR NEVER SLEEPS

It seems that those nuke-toting terrorists are a bit too hot for one Rainbow Six crew to handle. Even though everyone tried their hardest to remove the threat in *Rainbow Six Vegas*, clearly there was much more going on. Thus enters the second Rainbow Six team, this time taking care of business in the back alleys and car parks of the world's biggest gambling mecca. It might seem like just yesterday when we all gunned through the tricky situations of the first game, but the second will show that with a little polish and some reflection, the second time around things are much better.

Developer→ Ubisoft Montreal | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Genre→** Action, Tactical | **Release Date→** April 08 | **Platform→** 360, PS3, PC

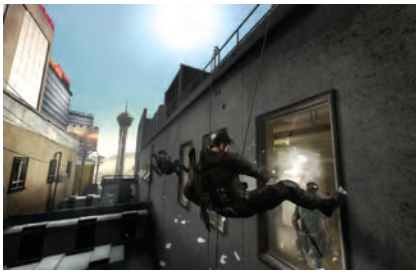
VEGAS! NEVER LEAVE HOME without it! No, that's not right. The city that never sleeps? No... crime capital of the world. Nope, that one is a bit closer to home. Ah, wait, it's 'What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas'. Well, that's not quite true. After a successful trip to the city of sin, the *Rainbow Six* crew are back to tag more terrorists and flashbang unsuspecting rooms. After the tremendous and well-deserved success the first game enjoyed, pulling the series out of a quagmire of sorts, the top terrorist hunters are active again. But the second game, which as you might notice wasted little time in appearing after the first *Vegas*, isn't quite picking things up where they were left in the first outing. In fact, you don't play the same character at all, for good reason.

Vegas 2 runs more or less along the same timeline as the first game, but with a different unit. As the first game established, South American terrorists are running amok in town and need to be shut down before they detonate their nuclear payload. It's an interesting fact that before Las Vegas became a gambling mecca, its main attraction was for families to come through and hold picnics while watching the US government test its atomic bombs in the desert. Sure, people were more naïve back then about the dangers of fallout, but it does beg the question that, of all the cities in the world, surely Vegas can handle a surprise detonation the best. You could probably buy the crater and transform it into the world's first day-glow casino, complete with cool mutations for the kids.

But back to the plot. Terrorists want to blow up Vegas and it will be your job to stop them. The break from the first game's cast has a more practical motivation. The developer has decided to bring *Vegas*' persistent character statistics all the way into the game. While in the past you could only upgrade your character by playing online matches, in *Vegas 2* it is a persistent feature. There are basically three areas that are boosted by your specific performance (see play like an ACE(s) box-out) and they are influenced by how you play the game. Head shots, for example, add to your markmanship, while Close Quarters gets boosted if you take down targets in smoke or when they are blinded by a flashbang.

Perhaps we should call the first skill 'Markpersonship', because *Vegas 2* also doesn't discriminate because of race or sex. You can create a character using the variety of facial profiles in the game that accommodate the spectrum of different human races, while your sex can be male or female. If you choose the latter, your voice becomes that of a strong, sex lady – think Michelle Rodriguez.

So, locked and loaded you are sent in with two squad mates to take care of business. Following the first game's path, it all starts with a prequel. Your new character, Bishop, has to take care of a hostage situation in France, but as expected things go pear-



PLAY LIKE AN ACE(S)

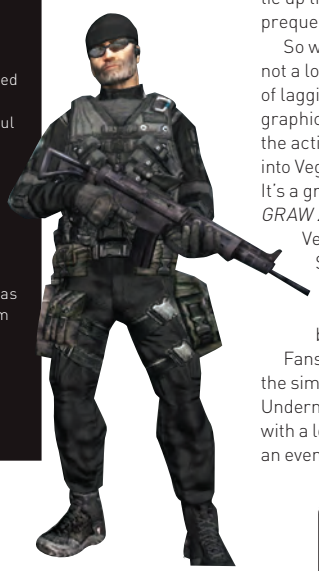
Called the *Advanced Combat Enhancement and Specialization system*, ACES will track players and reward them for how they play. Basically, the better you do at certain things, the more guns and armour you will unlock for your character. This was introduced so that single and offline players can experience the same persistent character benefits that those hoarding on the *Vegas* ladders have been loving since the start. ACES has three areas to excel in:

Marksman: Shoot people in the head or kill them from a long distance. You should get better sniper rifles and assault weapons.

Close Quarters: Kill the bad guys shrouded in smoke, blinded by a flashbang or who just dared to come too close to you. Helpful to get shotguns and sub-machine guns.

Assault: Shoot the enemy through cover (thanks to the new bullet-penetration system) or knock them off with explosions. Your rewards will come in light machine guns and assault rifles. Co-op only supports two players (as opposed to just replacing the two AI team mates with real players). But that's the only problem we had – the rest is better than ever.

HANDS ON TESTED



shaped near the end. It's not quite the tale of dramatic betrayal of the first game, but *Vegas 2* doesn't seem intent on being of the same epic cut. Instead, it's about bringing fans a better and more refined *Vegas* experience. Five years after the prologue, Bishop is pulled into Vegas. Another Six team, the squad from the first game, is busy hunting terrorists and you are sent in to take care of bad guys in other parts of the city. This gives a new angle on the events of *Vegas*, exploring new territory and taking things further near the end – presumably to tie up the ambiguous 'To Be Continued...' the prequel finished with.

So what is new? To the causal observer, not a lot. *Vegas 2* might even be accused of lagging a bit behind its predecessor's graphical flair. But that is thanks to moving the action away from the glitzy casinos and into Vegas' seedy streets and dark buildings. It's a gritty experience more reminiscent of *GRAW 2*'s urban sprawls and the parts in Vegas where you fight in parking lots. So, on the one hand the flash isn't quite there. But on the other, this is still a damn fine shooter. In fact, it's better than *Vegas*.

Fans of the series won't be caught by the similarities between the two games. Underneath *Vegas 2* is quite an upgrade, with a lot of tweaking and polishing creating an even better experience than the first game delivered. For example, now you can direct team mates to throw grenades at specific spots. Your squad members are also smarter, covering each other and you. In fact, they seem a bit too good, but the game will only take advantage of that. The enemy in *Vegas 2* also has their heads screwed on right, ducking for cover, shooting blindly and trying to outsmart your precision firing. If you relished the cat-and-mouse antics of *Vegas*, the sequel delivers a lot more.

Graphically, things might not seem that big a change. Exchanging the blooms and neon of casinos for morbid concrete and off-colour paint jobs really does take the shine away. But it rubs enough grit in to soon make you appreciate the environments. Meanwhile, the models are more detailed and the bad guys drop in a way that would make *Call of Duty 4* proud. It takes a keen eye to spot though. The changes in *Vegas 2* are very subtle, but highly effective.

Vegas was one hell of a ride, enough to warrant fan comparisons to the other big kid of the day, *Gears of War*. *Vegas 2* is not going to disappoint: after exposing the preview code to several players, they all gave it their thumbs up. The good news is that all the tactical shooter junkies (and their buddies, thanks to a full-campaign co-op mode) will get their fix. The bad news is that it's still just as chaotic and manic as *Vegas* was. Duck! Cover! Fire! **NAG**

ONE FOR THE MONEY, TWO FOR THE KILL

Co-op play is one of the reasons why everyone played *Vegas* in the first place. First off, it did the most sensible thing imaginable: split screens that are side-by-side, not on top of each other. The second appeal, and the obvious clincher, is the chance to play a really tactical game with a friend. So it's a given that *Vegas 2* wasn't going to mess things up here. One new refinement to the ACES system is also persistent in co-op play, so everything you do will boost your character stats. To make things easier, drop-in play is supported if a friend wants to join you during a match. Finally, the biggest issue with *Vegas*' co-op has been fixed: the campaign mode is complete, so both players will experience the story stuff like picture-in-picture videos and any fancy stuff the game story thinks you'll need to see.

RUSSIAN ROULETTE!

Q&A: RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

Since we are generally lazy, because we prefer to play games instead of thinking about stuff to write, the *Vegas 2* team will enlighten everyone with the pesky details that will make *Vegas 2* stand out. No, no missions in strip parlours or the chance to win a car if you hit three identical terrorists in a row. But there will be plenty of chances to test your luck (or even better, the luck of the AIs you send in to the clear the room).

We like spoilers! How does Vegas 2 end?
I don't want to spoil the ending, but what I can say is that it doesn't take place in Las Vegas. Bishop goes against his orders from Six, and chases Gabe after he leaves the Nevada Dam at the end of the first game.

Gabe flees the country, heading for a hideout in Central America. When Bishop arrives there, Gabe will play a dangerous game of cat and mouse that leads to a fight far larger than Bishop anticipated. In order to win, Bishop will need help, and that help will come from an unlikely source.

***Vegas 2* retains a bit of the old, but also has some new added in. What are some of the major changes in the sequel?**
One of the more immediate improvements in the gameplay is the addition of the Sprint. Players can now use a short burst of speed to escape the blast radius of frag grenades or to sprint to a safe cover in the middle of a firefight. This makes the character feel more agile and fluid in action.

We improved the Tactical Interface to provide the player with more options. You will have more control over your team with the addition of commanding your team mates to throw grenades wherever you want. Depending on the rules of engagement, you will be able to command your team to throw one of two types of grenades in a specific area. So, if you are infiltrate mode, your team will have flash and smoke grenades available at your command to throw. In assault mode, you can command your team to throw either frag or flash grenades. This new feature comes in very handy in a multi-level area where you need your team mates to throw specific grenades and clear that area while you are doing something else. It just makes collaboration with your team that much stronger.

You can also call Thermal Scans. A Thermal Scan is activated by Sharon (the Intel officer), and allows the player to see hostiles around his position on the tactical map for a certain duration. This is really useful to see what's up ahead so you and your team are better prepared.

We enabled Bullet Penetration depending on the material the player is shooting through (for example: wood is penetrable but cement is not). Each weapon has a penetration value linked with the ballistic properties of each individual weapon, so a 9mm weapon packs less punch then a 7.62mm. We also completely reworked the Shotguns, LMGs and pistols. Now they feel more realistic then ever before and this really opens up the choice of weapons to the players, because they are not limited to assault rifles and SMGs to be successful in the game.

We like clever bad guys. How has the AI been improved?
We worked very hard to expand the possibilities of enemy AI tactics. Some enemies now carry shields, thermal/night vision goggles and laser sights attached to their weapons. This changes how you play the game, because you can no longer storm a room and expect to flank everyone quickly. You will have to make sure you use good tactics to defeat those enemies. For example, if the enemy is holding a shield, it's way more effective to order your team mates to flank the enemy than simply trying to use brute force.

The team AI has also been improved. Ordering your team to a specific location feels more realistic because they will cover each other from cover to cover available in the environment before going to the ordered location; (instead of running a straight line). They will gauge the intensity of the enemy threat before moving forward.

Can you elaborate on the new co-op features?
The online co-op system was rebuilt from the ground up. So you can choose to play the SP story alone or with a friend and still experience everything, including scripted events and character progression.

In addition, your friend can jump in and jump out of your game to help you progress in your campaign at any time in the game. The game seamlessly transitions from solo to co-op and it can be of great use if you need some help during a big firefight or to complete a mission. When playing in co-op both players receive all the points for kills, so it's a true co-op experience. You won't need to compete for points and rewards.

Why would an *R6V* player buy *R6V 2*?
If you liked *RSV*, then you will love *RSV2*. The game mechanics have an added layer of refinement. We added much more to the team-based shooter experience by pushing team tactics, improving the AI, and allowing for a seamless cooperative experience to create what we consider an even more compelling package for the players. **NAG**

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

DUNGEON RUNNERS [PC]

What if someone made a MMO of *Diablo*. But they injected it with self-parodying humour. And then they made it ultra-simple to group with your friends by just teleporting to them whenever you want with a simple click. And then they let you just buy any skill from any class so you can customise your character as you see fit. And then they made it free to play. And then you woke up, right? Well, actually *Dungeon Runners* is all that. The game is free, the catch is that there's advertising, and if you want that to go away and get first in line at the server queue and use some of the extra spiffy items you find in game, you need to open an account. Which is a whopping $5 (about R40) per month. Worth it? Try the free version first and see.

AUDIOSURF [PC]

The first independently developed game published on Steam has arrived. It's *Audiosurf*, which is exactly what its name implies. The game generates a track from a music file and then you surf along it at high speed. Along the way you can avoid, collect, or sort blocks depending on which of the various game modes you choose. So you can just relax and cruise along in the easier modes or challenge your reflexes and skill in the harder ones. The variety is limited only by your music collection, and to sweeten the $9.95 deal via Steam, it comes with the *Orange Box* Soundtrack to get you started.

PATAPON [PSP]

Patapon is portable like a portable game should be. There is an interesting nuance to the level design in *Patapon* which caught our eye: they adjust their length in response to things. It appears to respond to army size and ka-ching (cash. The smaller your army and the less ka-ching, the more you'll squeeze out of the levels where you hunt for meat or ka-ching. Once you hit the 'sweet spot' of a level, you become very familiar with exactly how long it takes you to finish that level, so you can learn to really nail the hunting levels and boss-battle levels during a break. The reason for hunting and boss-battling over and over: to improve your army for the hard level that prevents you from progressing. Quite ingenious.

TEAM FORTRESS 2 [PC]

We're still playing *TF2*. Aren't you? Why aren't you playing *TF2*? Unless the servers are full there's no excuse! P.S. SAIX, we need more servers! And bring back Sudden Death dammit! The release of the new Badlands map has everyone eager to play again, and will probably hold us over until the Gold Rush map comes out. In the meantime, several balance patches have appeared to level the playing field a bit better, and everyone is still having a blast on an almost daily basis. If you haven't picked up *Orange Box* yet, give it another look. Also, you could just buy *TF2* separately, but then you'd miss out on *Portal*, and that's just a crime.

EXTEEL [PC]

Those of you who still don't think NCSoft would release something like *Dungeon Runners* for free can marvel yet again as another free MMO from them has appeared. *eXteel* is a free MMO where you pilot giant anime-style mechs against each other in various types of combat scenarios ranging from deathmatch and last stand to the ever popular capture the flag. Using credits you earn in game, you can buy better robots in parts or wholesale, as well as weapons and even finishing moves. Or if you're impatient (or rich), you can 'cheat' and use their new NCCoin micropayment system to buy some of the best stuff without the wait.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

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

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

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

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

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

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

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

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

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

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

WEB SCORES

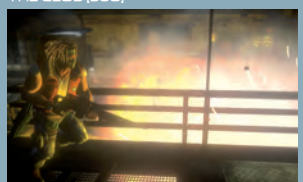
AUDIOSURF [PC]

NAG	
METACRITIC	87/100
GAMERANKINGS	87/100

THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT [PS3]

NAG	61/100
METACRITIC	75/100
GAMERANKINGS	76/100

THE CLUB [360]



NAG	85/100
METACRITIC	76/100
GAMERANKINGS	78/100

THE REVIEW ICONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

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

5 Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual/quad-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**

4 Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**

3 Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**

2 Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**

1 You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee fi rst thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

NAG AWARDS

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

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

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

Aleet Distribution	[011] 888-8916	Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Apex Interactive	[012] 347-9956	Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Asbis	[011] 848-7000	Megarom	[011] 361-4800
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450	Microsoft	[011] 265-3000
Axiz	[011] 237-7000	MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
Comstar	[011] 314-5812	MobileG	[021] 982-4606
Comztek	0860 600-557	Nology	[012] 657-1317
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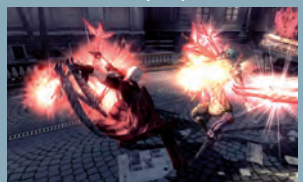
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640	Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Creative	[011] 849-2021	Proton Technology	[011] 466-8888
Devon	[041] 365-0258	Rectron	[011] 203-1000
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300	Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Esquire	0861 70 0000	Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142	Sonic Informed	[011] 805-3800
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300	Ster Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7700
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038	Syntech	086 127 4244
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530	The Outer Limits	[011] 482-3771
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817	WWE	[011] 462-0150

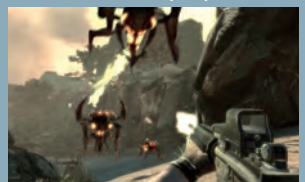
If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679

DEVIL MAY CRY 4 [PS3]



NAG	B-
METACRITIC	84/100
GAMERANKINGS	84.3/100

BLACKSITE: AREA 51 [360]



NAG	70/100
METACRITIC	62/100
GAMERANKINGS	62.4/100

ACE COMBAT 6 [360]

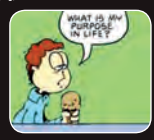
NAG	90/100
METACRITIC	80/100
GAMERANKINGS	81/100

THE REVIEWERS

* **Now talking in #nag.co.za**
* **Topic is 'How is babby formed?'**
* **RedTide (wnkhawhaw@SF-4A32E99C.whoohooisp.co.za) has joined #nag.co.za**

<MIKTAR DRACON>

Hey RedTide, you're never on IRC - what's the occasion? Wait, don't tell me: you wanted to see what all this newfangled "raw internets" thing is, right?



<CHRIS BISTLINE>

How do we even know it's the real RedTide? It could just be some kid pretending. Is there any way to actually tell, online? Someone we could call?

<ALEX JELAGIN>

We could just call RedTide on his cellphone. Crazy, I know – but crazy enough that it might just work. Anyone got the number?

<WALT PRETORIUS>

I do, I've been forwarding him these SMS jokes I keep getting. Have you heard the one about the photographer and the horse?

<TARRYN VAN DER BYL>

Too often, it's practically obviate. I'd rather continue with my putsch, be it via my legerdemain vis a vis lackadaisical farce.

<EDDIE FRANCIS>

u mad that sheet up, iSwear. Nbdy tlks laik that on intertubes. serials. gg. hf. woot.

<JAMES FRANCIS>

aren't you people supposed to be working? this is teh 10th anniversary issue of NAG, we dn't have time to dck around here. miktar back to work.

<JUSTIN SLABBERT>

They need to do way instain mother> who kill thier babbys. becuse these babby cant frigth back? it was on the news this mroing a mother in ar who had kill her three kids. they are taking the three babby back to new york too lady to rest my pary are with the father who lost his children ; i am truley sorry for your lots

* You have left #nag.co.za

Tree felling done the pro way

THE EYE OF JUDGMENT

AS AN AVID COLLECTIBLE card gamer, I was quite excited about *The Eye of Judgment*, a hybrid computer/card game. However, being a fan of CCGs also meant that my standards in judging (if you'll pardon the pun) *The Eye of Judgment* would be rather high.

First off, let's look at the game's mechanics. The box contains the disc, a play mat, a PlayStation Eye camera with a special stand, and a starter box of randomly assorted playing cards. The initial setup requires the mat, which is divided into a 3 x 3 grid of squares, to be laid out on a horizontal surface such as a table, and the camera to be mounted on its stand, 'looking down' on the mat. In the game's Options menu, you'll find a calibration tool that helps you to adjust the camera to 'look' at the board correctly, and to calibrate its recognition of the playing cards. The cards have bar codes along their edges, which enable the hardware and software to recognise the cards and to determine their orientation on the playing field.

At this point, it would be a good idea to go through the tutorials, as this game is rather complex. Unfortunately, here the game is found wanting somewhat. Players of CCGs like to have paper manuals to refer to during the course of a game, and in this regard, *Eye of Judgment* is woefully inadequate: the paper documentation is very scant, with the publisher relying on players to go through the tutorials and remember everything, without having to refer to it later. This is unrealistic, and makes the learning curve much more difficult. Furthermore, there are some subtleties that don't appear to be documented anywhere, and it's up to the player to discover these (often purely by accident).

The game plays out on the aforementioned board, with players seeking to control five of the squares to win. This is done by summoning creatures onto the battlefield, having them attack others and, hopefully, kill off the opponent's creatures in order to set him or her back. Each turn, the active player draws a card (except for the first turn of the player who starts, much like in *Magic: The Gathering*), gains two mana (a resource used for summoning creatures and for using their abilities), and then gets to act. Each creature may turn and attack once (each of these actions requires mana, though). The player may play any number of spells (each of them with an associated mana cost, of course), and summon one creature to the board. When a creature is summoned, it attacks a target within its range (different creatures have different targeting rules, though most attack only in the square directly in front of them). Summoning a creature ends the player's turn and should only be done once all other desired actions have been taken. Whenever a creature dies, its controller gains one mana, and this is something that must be factored into the game plan.

Despite the fact that the game contains some novel concepts, it unfortunately falls short of any experienced CCG player's expectations. The gameplay is linear and one-dimensional, and has much of a 'tug-of-war' feel to it, even though there is some

SECOND OPINION

WHEN I HEARD ABOUT The *Eye of Judgment*, I could hardly contain my excitement. As a long-time *Magic: The Gathering* player, the idea of playing a collectable card game with animated, next-gen minions battling it out on our giant 42-inch LCD sounded like, well... just about the coolest thing ever. There's an inherent problem with having such high expectations for a game though: they're almost never met.

Don't get me wrong, from an artistic and technological point of view, The *Eye of Judgment* is a good game: the *Final Fantasy*-esque battle animations are brilliant and creative; the playing cards are exceptionally well made with stunning artwork and packed full of information; the intense metal soundtrack really gets your blood pumping; and the PlayStation Eye interface works like a charm.

Where *Eye of Judgment* falls short is with the actual card game. This game has a very limited target market: people who enjoy CCGs. The rules of the game are rather complex, so it won't appeal to someone who just wants to pick up and play. A lot of time has to be devoted to learning the game mechanic, understanding the subtleties of the card interactions and then constructing a deck.

The game, as it's sold, comes with a 30-card starter deck and an eight-card booster pack. With so few cards to choose from in deck construction, the game becomes repetitive rather quickly. Furthermore, you're forced to throw cards into your deck that may not interact well with other cards simply because you have nothing better to put in. A significant additional investment in cards would be required to make the game more playable. (An eight-card booster pack sells for R35). Since the core game retails for R999, you'll have already made a substantial investment, and it's not unreasonable to want a more complete game.

To be fair, other CCGs such as *Magic* can be similarly criticised for being too expensive. (I should know, having spent thousands of rands on cards). At the end of the day, for *EoJ* to be successful it needs to be at least as good a card game as Magic and it simply isn't. The gameplay is linear and simplistic, and the number and variety of cards are limited. (*EoJ* has a measly 110-card pool to pull from, while *Magic* boasts almost 10,000 cards). While it's not entirely fair to compare a game in its infancy to a game that's had 15 years to evolve, it's hard to see *EoJ* surviving long enough to improve to a point where it's worth the investment.

69 OUT OF 100

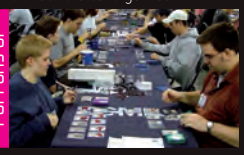
Chris Bistline

variety to the cards. The outcome is heavily influenced by who plays first (a randomly determined factor) and by the element of chance, making this more of a game of luck than a game of skill. You can be ahead, having carefully crafted your position to end up with control of four squares, your opponent only holding two or three, your creatures virtually 'unkillable' (in the short term), and yet end up drawing no fifth creature, or only ones that are too expensive to bring out in time. Granted, skilful deck construction can reduce the chances of this, but it's still too dominant a factor. Furthermore, it's possible to randomise the board, but this just means that it's almost guaranteed that one player will get an unfair advantage by the board suiting his or her creatures, or harming his or her opponent's.

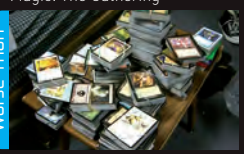
On the upside, the game boasts some very pretty animations. However, these drag out games considerably, and if you want to play 'seriously' (a dubious prospect, sadly), then you'll do well to turn them off. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

For Fans of: Collectible card games



Worse Than: Magic: The Gathering



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

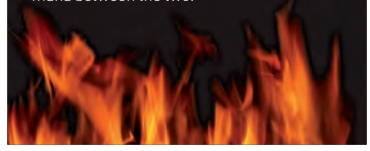
Bottom Line

An interesting idea with potential, but the execution leaves much to be desired.

61 OUT OF 100

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON

Those of you who are familiar with *Magic: The Gathering* will be familiar with its five colours, which determine the nature of a deck being played. *The Eye of Judgment* features something similar: elemental affinities. Each creature (with a couple of unique exceptions) is aligned with a certain element. The five elements that are present in the game are Stone, Wood, Fire, Water and Biolith. The first four are defined in opposed pairs. Whenever a creature is summoned onto a square of its matching element, it immediately gains two hit points (or health), while being summoned onto an opposed square immediately deals it two points of damage. Each element also has a god, or incarnation. These very powerful creatures can be summoned onto a square occupied by one's own creature of the same element, and only costs the difference in mana between the two.



Modern dance evolved in Iraq

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

THE FIRST *DEVIL MAY Cry* redefined the action genre. Capcom gets a gold star for that. The second *Devil May Cry* gave fans what they wanted but didn't really push the envelope. That's perfectly fine. The third *Devil May Cry* had the charm: it pushed the genre into new territory, looked good, played great and lead protagonist Dante continued his badassery to Hell and back. You even got an electric guitar that shot out bats. Rock.

The fourth instalment follows the formula down to the last detail. Stunning real-time cut-scenes filled to the brim with over-the-top, damn-that-is-cool fights? Check. Solid yet surprisingly demanding combat system that excels under player perfection? Check. *Boobs*? Check. Chicks with guns and insane *Matrix*-style moves? Check. A Dante that makes the previous title's devil-hunter look like a pansy in the daisies? Check.

It's all there, everything that made *Devil May Cry 3* such a cornerstone title in the series. Fans will adore it, but they know that.

However, while *DMC4* does every trick we've come to expect from the series with flawless execution, that's about as far as it goes. Beyond that, *DMC4* hits every branch of the idiotic-game-design-choice tree on the way down. It doesn't just fall out of the tree, it swan dives.

Box-shoving puzzles that were never fun, ever, except in *Sokoban*? Check. Idiotic *Resident Evil* style camera angles suited for a horror game but not for action game? Check. Copy-and-paste graphics from previous Devil Crying that doesn't even attempt to hide how blatantly copied it is? Check. Backtracking through half the game when you get halfway? Check. 20 minute install time on the PS3? Check. Antiquated genre conventions that are no longer appealing because *God of War* proved it could be done better? Check. Jumping puzzles with a fixed camera where enemies spawn and re-spawn every time you fail the sequence? Check.

It's understandable that such sadism seems apt for *Devil May Cry*, a series defined by its incessant need to make you its bitch, but it feels like Capcom didn't really try. The game whips you relentlessly, but there's no passion, no sultry taunting about what a bad boy you are.

It does throw a bone to series virgins with an auto-upgrade feature that automatically kits you out with new unlocked moves and combos based on the play style template you select. You can even swap between templates after a mission (a little meat on that bone).

But is it enough to attract anyone who isn't already a series veteran, considering how far this particular genre has come in the last few years? There is no doubt that *DMC4* appeases the exacting demands of the fans. There is doubt that the series will curry favour in an increasingly populated genre. **NAG**

Miktar "Yatzhee Iz Funnier Me" Dracon

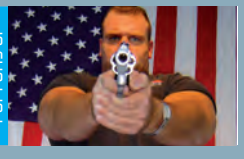
OUR FAVOURITE DMC4 MOMENTS

POW! AER-NUNG!!

- Fighting Sanctus in the weird-looking room.
- Fighting Dante because Dante is coooool.
- Unlocking Dante because Dante is coooool.
- "Tonight, We Dine in Hell" Achievement.
- The secret anime-music-video ending.

Better Than: Devil May Cry 3

For Fans of: Badass



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Dante and Nero are already kissing in a fan-fiction online somewhere, and you know it.

13- OUT OF 100

RRP→ R529 | Publisher→ Capcom | Distributor→ Ster Kinekor Games | Genre→ Action | Age Rating→ 16+

Look & Listen For the Fans

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The trick is to hit the chopper in the eye

OH, THOSE TERRIBLE LIZARDS

Seriously, the dinosaurs in this game are phenomenal. You'll shed tears of unbridled joy when the colossal Tyrannosaurus Rex lumbers into your swampy bolthole, snatches you up in her gargantuan jaws, and crunches down on your puny man bones while raptors gnash and leap at her grizzled thighs unnoticed. Mama, I'm comin' home.

While most of these Cretaceous critters will eventually fall over if you chuck enough lead into them, *NAG* recommends reserving your ORO P23 Combat Knife for these special occasions. There's really nothing quite like stabbing a Dilophosaurus in the eyes. Oh, and they thrash around before dying. You'll want to lick that knife in delirious triumph.

They're also marvellously stupid. Using the shotgun's alt-fire, you can stick a flare onto one of these overgrown lizards, and sit back nibbling coconuts while its erstwhile chums descend upon it – and everything else - in cold-blooded fury.

TUROK

EXPENSIVE SCIENTIFIC STUDY HAS unequivocally determined that stuff with dinosaurs is better than stuff without dinosaurs[1]. So when Joseph Turok (mercenary with a shady past, protagonist) crash lands on a hostile jungle planet while commissioned to apprehend Roland Kane (Turok's former commander, antagonist), what might otherwise have devolved into a drab and entirely unremarkable shooter is transformed – with the calculated inclusion of dinosaurs – into something significantly better.

Having said that, *Turok* isn't the meteoric success it might've been. For starters (well, and enders), it's brutally, relentlessly difficult[2]. Your Xbox controller surviving the first few missions of this game unscathed is potent, court-admissible testament to your indomitable fortitude and preternatural temperance. Just getting through the MG Facility will make you want to run into your local high school with an ion cannon and a handful of napalm grenades, and it's only the first proper mission of the game. Most of this tremendous difficulty might have been substantially mitigated with the placement of additional checkpoints, but apparently Propaganda Games is still waiting on that all-important "Entertainment without rage" memo. One simple patch, and *Turok* might've been a comfortably smug 80-percenter.

Despite this, however, the game somehow manages to save itself from critical extinction, mostly because it offers approximately ten hours of clambering around and killing dinosaurs. The story is somewhat hackneyed, but the visuals aren't too shabby at all. There are flamethrowers, and, well, you kill lots of dinosaurs. And everyone loves killing dinosaurs (see box out). **NAG**

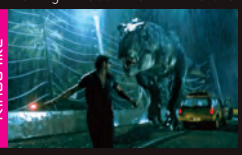
Tarryn "CONTROLLER SMASH!" van der Byl

[1]x > y, where x = stuff with dinosaurs, and y = stuff without dinosaurs (New Scientist Supplemental, June 1954).

[2]James usually hogs all the Xbox games for himselfish, but passed this one along because:
Tarryn: *it's harder than it looks :/*
James: *it is that's why I gave it to you (GoogleTalk, March 2008)*

Visiting Jurassic Park with a chain gun

Kinda like



Recreational masochism

For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Frustrating, infuriating, but inexplicably compelling. Includes dinosaurs.

73 OUT OF 100

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Tel: +27 82 705 5905, Fax: +27 86 679 3679

SEEING RED

Army of Two introduces a remarkably innovative gameplay dynamic. Basically, playing aggressively generates masses of intangible red stuff dubbed "Aggro". While you're soaking in red, your partner becomes virtually invisible, as everyone turns their indignation and hand grenades upon you and your outrageous audacity. While you keep them all conveniently distracted, your unseen pal can creep about stabbing everyone in the neck (and vice versa). Surprisingly enough, even the AI can pull this off without prompting a weepy quick-load.

ARMY OF TWO VERSUS ARMY OF TWO

The game offers a substantial multiplayer package, featuring two-on-two objective-based team operations. "The biggest challenge was to convey the co-op experience in a multiplayer match," says senior producer Reid Schneider. "We didn't want to go with the typical deathmatch mode. We have a variety of modes that really capture the essence of co-op gameplay. You'll have to watch each other's backs and work together to defeat the opposing team."

Unfortunately, until EA decides to stop forcing players to route matches through their servers (whyyyyyyyyyyyyyy?), this really isn't a viable option for local gamers as the lag is absolutely insufferable.

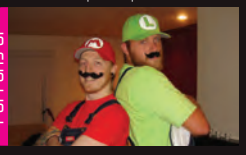
ARMY OF TWO

ELLIOT SALEM AND TYSON Rios are contract killers. Not the shady, illicit sort of contract killers employed by crime lords, underworld mobsters, and disgruntled spouses, mind you, but contract killers for the government-sanctioned PMC (that's Private Military Contractor to civvies), Security and Strategy Corporation. They travel the world, killing all sorts of troublesome people for money. It's an honest living or something. When they become inextricably entangled in some sort of elaborate but predictable action movie plot that inevitably leaves itself open to at least two sequels, they blow stuff up and Get Even for about five or six hours. Throw popcorn, farm Xbox Achievements, and roll credits.

The thing is, all FPS games are in fact structured around an identical core premise: get from A to B and blow bloody, ragged holes in everything in between. The real measure of any FPS's intrinsic success is squarely dependent on the game's ability to somehow disguise this. Most people would not, for example, have noticed it while stalking Big Daddies in *BioShock*, crawling through an unscheduled nuclear fallout in *Call of Duty 4*, or breathlessly dodging Kryll swarms in *Gears of War*. And this is where *Army of Two* stumbles, if only momentarily. For all its brash Hollywood swagger, post-millennial neo-noir butch, and undeniably rad slow-motion back-to-back sequences, it's still just a frag-and-clear shooter. Ultimately it's all enormously fun (and it really is, despite what those cynical hacks on the intertrons would have you believe), but you'll never quite shrug off the brooding spectre of unclaimed potential. **NAG**

Tarryn "Make Stuff Die" van der Byl

For Fans of
Over the top co-op



Gears of War

Worse Than

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

No, it's not *Gears*, but it's an exceedingly entertaining romp nonetheless.

80 OUT OF 100

RRP→ R545 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ EA South Africa | Genre→ Action | Age Rating→ 18

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When 'Fetch' goes bad

BLACKSITE: AREA 51

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Midway | **Distributor→** Ster Kinekor Games | **Genre→** FPS | **Age Rating→** 16+

THE CONSOLE-BASED, FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER market is getting stimulated nicely by a strong influx of games, and is being helped along (locally, at least) by the fact that many gamers are finally taking to the genre on a platform other than the PC. Just like the PC shooter market, the Xbox 360 is enjoying many FPS titles, but not all of them are good.

BlackSite is good, but it falls into the lower range of the category. In fact, it treads the line that would make it average more often than not, with odd excursions in either direction. The idea is good, although not particularly original.

The player plays as a Special Forces operative who is sent into a small town in America to try and put a stop to some very strange events... events that look very similar to what he experienced during a tour of duty in Iraq many years before.

The first part of the game details that Iraqi tour. Yet another game with a Middle Eastern flavour... it seems that the Iraqi theatre is becoming the new World War II of gaming (every second game these days is set in Iraq or the Middle East, rather than World War II as they were a few months ago). The second part of the game takes the player to a small town in Nevada, and reveals a story of governmental conspiracy and betrayal. (Yeah, we've never seen that before.)

Once you get past the storyline, the game is not bad. Ostensibly, it's a first-person shooter with team-based elements. However, the control of the player's two-man sidekick squad is overly simple. It's a case of context-sensitive button pushing. Context sensitivity worked in titles such as *Brothers in Arms*, but there just aren't enough options in *BlackSite*. Go there, open that, get into that vehicle, shoot that... those are roughly the only things you're going to get your squad to do. Despite the fact that the AI is pretty clued up, your squad will be taken out more often than not, leaving you with a one-man run-and-gun option that proves difficult at times.

A few elements have been added to spice things up (like driving around in vehicles every now and then), but they prove more invasive than fun most of the time. Driving is particularly painful, because the controls are poorly designed.

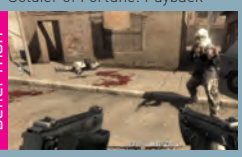
The FPS portion of the game is great fun though, with excellent graphics and great control, making shooting hybrid-soldier-alien-monsters a lot of fun. There are not a huge number of weapons, but using the ones you get can be great fun.

If you can look past the few problems that the game has, *BlackSite* is a fun shooter. It's not the greatest, but it certainly is better than some others. It's not a must-play title, but it's fun nonetheless. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

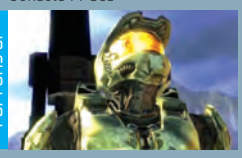
Better Than

Soldier of Fortune: Payback



For Fans of

Console FPSes



PC
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Bottom Line

Not a terrible shooter, but not a must have.

70 OUT OF 100

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Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War (2006)
Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception (2006)
Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation (2007)

Images: www.mobygames.com

ACE COMBAT 6 : FIRES OF LIBERATION

FIGHT OR FLIGHT? AH, what a silly question, but when else are we going to ask it? In most games it's all about the fight and 'flight' involves strafing in backwards circles while bouncing bullets off a nearby adversary's head. But in *Ace Combat 6*, it's 'fight AND flight'. Obviously because you are strapped into an expensive piece of flying hardware designed to take down other pieces of flying hardware, not to mention quite a few hapless ground targets. Forget the *Top Gun* references – that movie is too old anyway – and *Stealth* was a bit too futuristic to fit into the *Ace Combat* mould. The series has indeed tried that path before, but the fans didn't like it. Since its inception in 1995, *Ace Combat* has been about bringing arcade and realistic air combat as close together as possible.

You might have noticed a small change in the crosswinds, though. *Ace Combat* has always appeared on Sony platforms, gracing the PlayStation, PlayStation 2 and PSP. But Namco has opted to put *6* on the 360, perhaps because Microsoft waved a nice cheque for the honour. The game did end up making a little headway for the 360 in Japan. But perhaps the real reason was to put a nice flight combat game on the platform. That has certainly been successful. *Ace Combat 6* is really an ace in its field.

Let's gloss over the obvious bits. The game looks good, with stunning vistas, realistic smoke trails, intense sound and really nice terrain (provided you don't fly too close to it). The fighting craft are all very detailed, while the story cinematics are rich and carry an interesting tale. The Russian-esque Estovakia has decided to invade its more Western neighbour, Emmeria. At first you, as a pilot, try to help to fight off the invaders. But when that fails, you get involved in taking the country back.

This means lots of combat missions, each awarding you with cash so that you can unlock new planes and equipment. You are joined by a competent wingman, though for some reason you need to decide what he uses up in the air (as opposed to an auto-equip option). So there you are, in the sky, facing lots of people eager to shoot you down. Thankfully, you are always joined by some small force and the battles are highly kinetic, swooping, diving and dodging fighters while you look for that elusive missile lock-on (or an opportunistic burst from your cannons). The aircraft control well – you can opt for an arcade control scheme or the more purist simulation version – and the battles are large affairs, continuously changing as you play. Multiple things happen during a mission and you rarely feel like you are painting by numbers. That said, it's not an easy game, so most of the time your mind is on keeping your tail intact.

The story takes a departure and doesn't tell your tale. Instead, it focuses on several other characters and how they react to (and survive) the events of the invasion. It's a reflection on the state of things on the ground and might seem detached, but it contrasts the action in the air quite nicely. A brave step that comes across much better than you'd think.

There's a lot more worth covering, but let's stick to the outcome here: if you love dogfights and taking metal birds into combat, this is well worth the money. Even newcomers will find it engaging, though *Ace Combat 6* doesn't pull punches. You won't breeze through it, but it'll make you feel like the aerial top dog. **NAG**

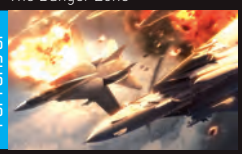
James Francis

NAG MUST PLAY

Ace Combat Zero

Better Than

The Danger Zone



For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
Wii
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Perfectly balancing simulation and arcade, *Ace Combat* does what it knows best.

90 OUT OF 100

RRP→ R599 | Publisher→ Namco Bandai | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Action | Age Rating→ 12+

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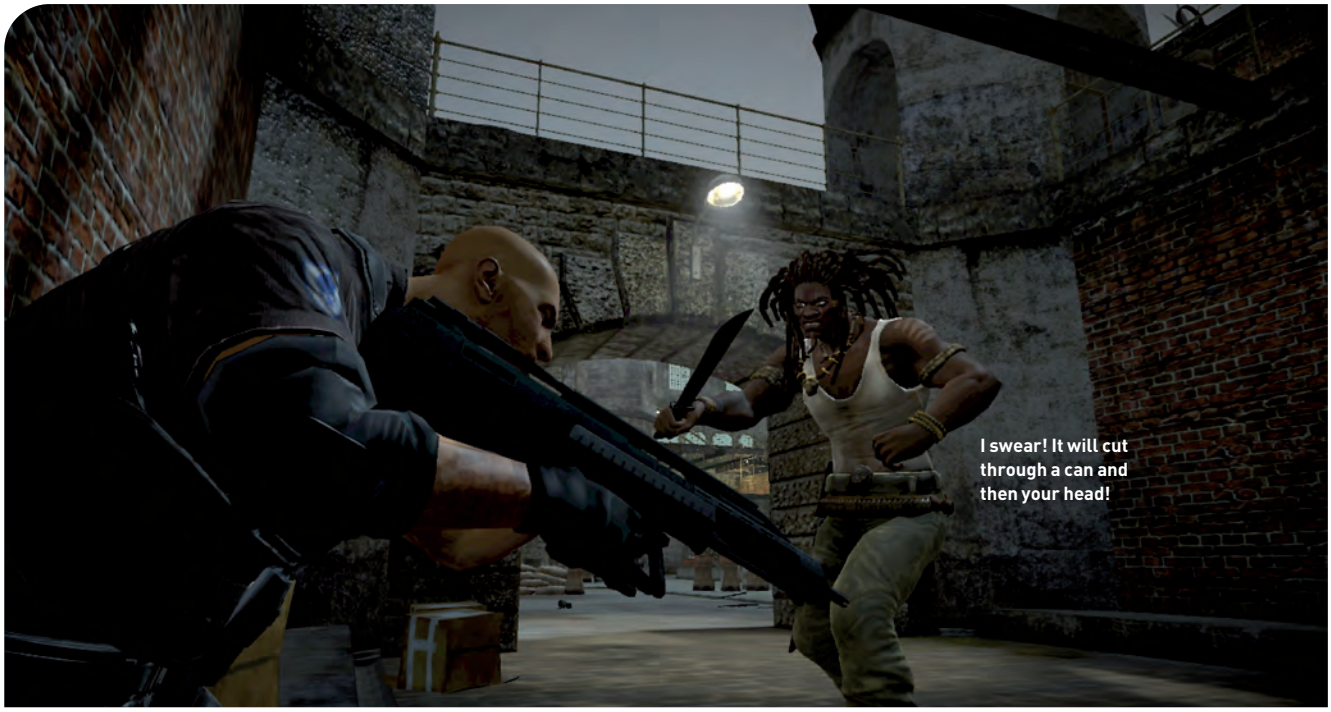


I swear! It will cut through a can and then your head!

THE CLUB

THE FIRST RULE OF *The Club* is "You do not talk about *The Club*". Or maybe you can. In fact, if you are the kind of person who can talk about The Club with authority, reason leads one to believe you are not to be trifled with. You are a stone-cold killer. And you probably have a cool name. Welcome to *The Club*, Bizarre's foray out of the racing scene and into the world of gunrunning. No, you don't smuggle weapons. There's no hope here for any Viktor Bout wannabes. But potential Rambos may apply. All you need is a keen eye, a quick hand and to kill, kill, kill!

The intro movie pretty much tells you all you need to know. A motley crew of dangerous types are rounded up from all over the globe – an AK-wielding dreadlocked combatant, a hardboiled cop, a luckless gambler, a super-smooth Japanese gangster, a madman in a mask... these are a few of the colourful characters you get to choose from. They are all enlisted in *The Club*, a game where the participants take turns running through gauntlet-like stages, competing in various games. Most of these games require you to rack up the highest score, but others require you to beat a timer. Do both or simply just stay alive. The main objective is to gain points and you do this by killing the multitude of aggressive gun-wielders skulking around the level. Bonus points are awarded for special kills, like a head-shot or snapping around quickly to hit an assailant behind you. Kill someone and you get a multiplier. Kill another person and the multiplier goes up. Fumble around too long, though, and the multiplier decreases. You can shoot special targets in a level that will boost the multiplier, though in some matches you have to shoot markers to keep your clock from running out. Not all matches are timed and in some you have to stay in one spot and survive beyond a time limit.

It's all surprisingly simple, really. Each part of the competition takes place in a new arena, such as an abandoned prison or an ageing steel factory. The matches take place in the arena, but each with their own custom path. Imagine a racing game where you have lots of tracks, but the different races use specific layouts. Thus, each match feels fresh, but you have the advantage of learning the terrain and recognising parts of the level. This becomes useful as you reach the later events in an arena, since you know where health or booster markers might be.

Each character takes a go at it and the one with the highest overall score for an arena wins. Usually most characters lag behind you, but there is always one or two snapping at your heels (that is, if you are actually in the lead). The characters have different stats, affecting their speed, accuracy and health, plus what weapon they start with.

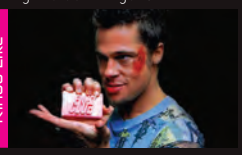
Technically there is nothing wrong with *The Club* and if it is your kind of game, you would probably enjoy it a lot. But it's a gun-toting sports game, not a free-for-all like *Unreal Tournament* or a third-person soap opera like *Gears of War*. Because of this a lot of people will misunderstand *The Club* and buy it for the wrong reasons. This is one game where you should try the demo first. The good news is that, apart from a hellish difficulty curve, if you like what you see, the game has plenty more of that to offer. But please, if the camera control in a game still demands to be mastered by you, *The Club* will chew you up and spit you out without shame or conscience. **NAG**

James Francis

NAG MUST PLAY

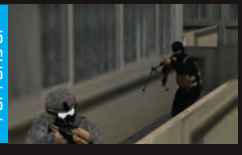
Fight Club with guns

Kinda Like



Frags

For Fans of



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A bit too different for traditionalists, but *The Club* packs a special kind of action punch.

85 OUT OF 100

RRP→ R699 | Publisher→ SEGA | Distributor→ MiDigital | Genre→ Action | Age Rating→ 18+

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AUDIOSURF

IT FEELS ALMOST LIKE cheating when someone develops a game that generates its levels based on the music you give it. People will naturally want to experiment, throw their collection at it and see what music the game makes fun to play and what music makes the game impossible to play. *Audiosurf* has that same addictive quality: you show it to friends and they'll want to try *their* music on it to see what happens. That's a good thing and *Audiosurf* does a good job at being as much a game as it is a toy.

The price is right, coming in cheap only on the digital delivery service Steam. It has an online high-score list that isn't without flaws, but at least contains decent verification to know if someone played the same song as you. You even get a nice e-mail when someone breaks your high score. The ranking uses MP3 tags, so a lot of people play "unknown: unknown". The level-generation is fair and no matter what you throw at it, will always give you something you can beat, (for varying definitions of the word "beat"). The game is vibrant, energetic and quite slick. It makes a point of making the music look good. There is variety in the game modes, which provide for most sensibilities and music styles.

It could have done with a more polished interface. There should have been a bit more pizazz when you complete a song, such as the 'You Rock' from *Guitar Hero*. But even without these things, *Audiosurf* manages to cross the finish line with sufficient gusto, giving it quite a bit of staying power. It's interesting how most rhythm games pull their gameplay and 'texture' from the predefined patterns of notes that accompany the music (like *Dance Dance Revolution* or *Guitar Hero*), whereas *Audiosurf* gives texture to the entire scope of the level based on the music it is given. One quickly learns what causes what, such as which styles of music contain more smooth, downward, slalom-style slopes and which styles create nauseatingly bumping tests of reflex.

Herein lays what makes *Audiosurf* a much better contender for capturing the casual eye compared to the more focused music-centric titles already on the market: *Audiosurf* is as interesting as the music you play, which insists on a certain amount of *player participation* with regards to eliciting the required amount of fun one expects from playing a game. In short, *Audiosurf* can pull off a very coy act of submission to the player, tailoring itself to taste. A bit like ice-cream that changes its flavour to match the flavour of ice-cream you're thinking about. Just don't think about something you'd really rather not eat. **NAG**

Miktar "ABBA DABBA DOO" Dracon

NAG MUST PLAY

TRAILER ON THE DVD

SONGS WE ENJOYED WITH AUDIOSURF

POW! AXER-NAG!!

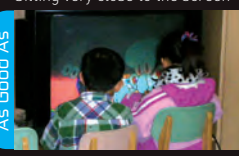
- Red Hot Chilli Peppers – Rollercoaster of Love
- Victims of Science – The Device Has Been Modified
- Modeselektor – Black Block
- Alter Ego – The Rocker (Stanton Warriors remix)
- D.O.A. – Pound Down on your Brain
- Coburn presents Dumb Blonde – We Have the Technology
- Fear Factory – Zero Signal
- Scott Brown – Boomstick
- David Bowie – Space Oddity
- Tenacious D – Master Exploder
- ABBA – Dancing Queen

Non-interactive visualizers

Better Than

Sitting very close to the screen

As Good As



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

If you love music, and love games, and want them to have babies...

NAG

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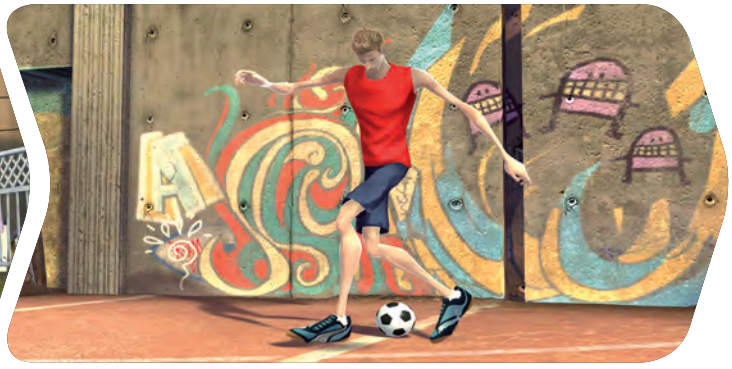


FIFA STREET 3

THE EA SPORTS BIG range has always managed to deliver titles that are a little different from run-of-the-mill sports simulators. The *FIFA Street* series is a great example, and it has just become a lot better with its entry into the next-gen market.

FIFA Street 3 brings a fast-paced, five-a-side version of street football (that's soccer, not gridiron) to the player, and it does so with style. This third instalment in the series shows a wonderful maturity and progression that make it a lot of fun to play: even non-*FIFA* fans will be able to get to grips with the rules and regulations of the game easily, and the well-paced, energised dynamic of the title holds a tremendous amount of appeal.

FIFA Street 3 is a great-looking game, with slightly cartoon-like representations of real-world football greats, presented on pitches in a variety of strange, vibrant and busy locations. Play a game on an oilrig, on a rooftop or a host of other locations. In fact, a large number of teams are available at the start of the game, although they are all national teams. More specialised street teams can be unlocked by completing a variety of challenge matches.

These challenge matches are as close as *FIFA Street 3* comes to having a Career mode. While I understand that the game comes down to individual matches, it would have been nice to see something like a season to play through.

Speaking of playing, it's really easy to pull off impressive moves. The control scheme is simple and uncluttered, with a nice implementation of the right-hand analogue stick allowing any player to look like an expert. Playing well also increases the player's Game Breaker boost bar. When it's full, Game Breaker mode can be activated, turning the player's team into experts in their various roles for a short time. The AI will use Game Breaker to maximum effect though, making the game quite challenging at times.

However, this isn't a game designed to be played against the console: its true, fun-filled brilliance comes out in the multiplayer mode. Naturally, the game can be played online, but it also allows two players on the same system to enjoy a game unhampered by split-screen graphics.

Fans of more serious *FIFA* simulations may well enjoy the less-serious, casual nature of the football played in this title, while other gamers will find appeal in the simplified version of the game. *FIFA Street 3* is a great game for friends to enjoy together, and offers many hours of multiplayer enjoyment. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

FIFA STREET 3 ON THE PS3

There's very little difference between the PS3 and Xbox 360 version of this game. However, for some reason (and I am not sure what that is) I enjoyed the title more on Sony's console. It handles beautifully on the PS3, with no performance issues that have sometimes plagued multi-system releases for the PS3. *FIFA Street 3* is a safe bet on either system.

80 OUT OF 100

FIFA 2007

Kinda Like

PC
360
PS3
Wii
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

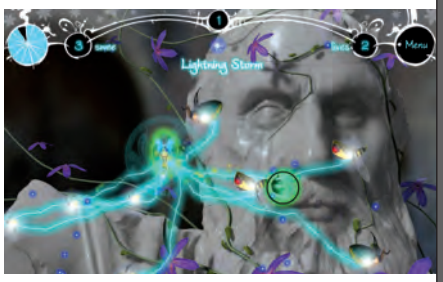
Casual sports sims

For Fans of

Bottom Line

A great game for people who enjoy an 'easier' soccer sim.

80 OUT OF 100



THE GREAT TREE

RRP→ $19.99 | **Publisher→** Reflexive
Distributor→ www.reflexive.com
Genre→ Puzzle | **Age Rating→** 3+
PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

FAIRIES? EEW. BEST GIVE this to some girl or something. But let's just play it. Just to see what it's about...

That pretty much is how I lost a Saturday. While trying to avoid the mounds of writing that awaited, I figured a quick stint in *The Great Tree* would be good for a few minutes. Instead I nearly finished the game in one sitting. Yes, it's very addictive. The idea is simple: you control a fairy with the mouse. Moving her around, you collect pollen, which you deposit in a crystal suspended from above. Grab enough pollen before depositing and you have a single charged attack. You'll need it: insects are flying left and right – dodge them to survive and use your attack to clear some of them (and get a points multiplyer). Collect enough pollen and go onto the next level. It's a simple-enough concept, but *The Great Tree* executes it well. The mouse movement is very responsive, the upgrades you can buy or unlock add a nice twist and the power-ups dropped by insects make for some interesting twists and turns. Round it off with nice art and musical design – viola! You lose a whole day playing it. That's always the sign of a great puzzle game. **NAG**

James Francis

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

A fun and very addictive mouse game.

80 OUT OF 100

SHREK THE THIRD

RRP→ R499 | **Publisher→** Activision
Distributor→ Megarom
Genre→ Action Adventure | **Age Rating→** 7+

ALTHOUGH THIS TITLE ISN'T exactly new to the world of videogames, having been released before on other platforms, and despite the fact that it is what many would consider an obvious cash-in based on the fact that it is 'inspired' by the film of the same name, *Shrek the Third* is well worth giving it a spin on the Wii. The control system has been kept very simple (although movement sometimes gets a little tricky due to a camera that, on occasion, is a bit uncooperative). This easy control scheme is doubtlessly due to the game's appeal to a younger market, and is enhanced by the fact that the title almost constantly instructs you on the finer aspects of using one of the six playable characters.

Don't expect a lot of depth when playing this game. It's basically a brawling platform title, with more emphasis placed on the brawling. The various characters have different attacks and powers, but in the end it's pretty much the same thing. A few fun multiplayer games have also been included.

If you have played *Shrek the Third* before on another platform, don't expect anything new. The only real change has been the control scheme. That said, it is good fun for young and old. It isn't ground breaking by any means, but it does equate to good, fairly mindless fun. **NAG**

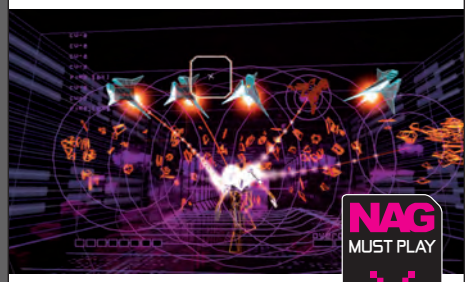
Walt Pretorius

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

It isn't ground-breaking by any means, but it does equate to good, fairly mindless, fun.

78 OUT OF 100



REZ HD

RRP→ 800 Microsoft Points
Publisher→ Microsoft Game Studios
Distributor→ Xbox LIVE Arcade
Genre→ Rail shooter, Music | **Age Rating→** 3+

BEFORE THE ORIGINAL *REZ* (Dreamcast) the idea of combining music intrinsically into gameplay in such a way as to simulate 'synesthesia' was unheard of. The concept was ground breaking but difficult to understand, resulting in the original title being critically acclaimed but not quite a runaway success. However, it is thanks to *Rez* that the concept is now practically a genre in itself. The heart of *Rez* is a standard on-rails shooter: you cannot control your character, you can only choose which targets to shoot. If it sounds simplistic, that's because it is. The complexity happens in your head where the incredible music mixes idiosyncratically with your experience of the game.

Remastered into high definition with surround sound, this really is the definitive version to have. Online rankings give validation to score-junkies, the original low-def version is included for puritans and there is even a mode for people who believe that being good at a game isn't compulsory to enjoy the experience. Fence-sitters can check the demo on XBLA to see if it speaks their language. **NAG**

Miktar "aren't you afraid?" Dracon

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Remastered HD version of a game that tried something never done before.

87 OUT OF 100

BRAIN CHALLENGE VOL. 2

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Puzzle
Reviewed on→ Nokia E81
Download→ SMS NAG406 to 083 123 686

YOU KNOW, WE WERE all a pretty smart lot, going around with our big brains and building all kinds of stuff. Then along came that brain-training game on the DS and declared us all idiots. Now a whole cottage industry has spawned around titles that keep our grey matter in check and push our abilities up an IQ point or two. In the bigger scheme of things, these brain-training games are little more than logic puzzle games, but perhaps we like the idea that we're 'training' and not just playing fun games. Because that is all these games consist of: various mini games based around more logic and less inane activities.

Gameloft's *Brain Challenge* series has clearly been there before, since this is Volume 2 of the offering. After the expected evaluation of how good (or terrible) your brain is, the game presents you with a variety of activities to stimulate your noggin. The usual maths puzzles are there, as well as memorising things, spotting the odd one out, etc. A daily game mode lets you practice one thing every morning, while other modes vary on the types of games you can play and how they are implemented (such as time limits). Overall, there isn't much new here, but these kinds of games do tend to follow a certain rule set. And there is no way of telling if it's actually going to im*prove your mind. But it certainly won't hurt and Brain Challenge Vol. 2* is about as good as you can expect from the brain-train genre. **NAG**

James Francis

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Nothing really new for a brain-train game, but nothing broken either.

80 OUT OF 100

DEVIL MAY CRY

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Capcom
Genre→ Action
Reviewed on→ Nokia E70
Download→ SMS NAG401 to 083 123 686

IT SEEMS ALMOST ENTIRELY unlikely that a stalwart *Devil May Cry* aficionado would waste their time with the mobile version of *Devil May Cry 4*. And yet, the mobile version is surprisingly robust and even ambitious considering the subject matter. Using your standard four directions alongside two buttons (jump and attack), *DMC4* mobile capably distills the combat system down into something manageable. Oddly enough, you play Dante and not Nero. This isn't a problem, of course. Missions are small bite-sized affairs, usually encapsulated in an objective, such as killing X amount of creatures, collecting X amount of orbs or staying alive for X amount of time. The framerate stays smooth, and you unlock more moves as you collect orbs. There are a lot of missions, and not enough objective types. There is enough variety and challenge in the combat, but mileage may vary depending on taste. Tiny Dante maintains the badass swagger even as a small piece of pixel art, yet the backdrops are remarkably uninspired. It's a good game, it does mobile gaming proud and it's also quite tough at points, doing the series proud. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

You might not think so, but Dante rocks the mobile world.

80 OUT OF 100

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: LOVE FOR SAIL

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Vivendi Mobile Games
Genre→ Adventure
Reviewed on→ Nokia N70
Download→ SMS NAG404 to 083 123 686

***LEISURE SUIT LARRY* IS** a firm favourite with older PC gamers, who still remember the classic titles that were released before *Magna Cum Laude* ruined the show. *Love for Sail* on the mobile platform is a recreation of one of those classics, and the transition from PC to mobile was well handled by the developers (although a few errors in the description text do mar the end result slightly).

Being in control of Larry Laffer, the player's main goal is to get him laid. The results are generally quite hilarious, as Larry has terrible luck with the ladies.

The game feels a lot like the PC version, at least in terms of the way that missions are completed. It's a sort of a 'go there, find that, combine it with something else, use it on the guy' kind of game, with some of the action sequences required to overcome obstacles being quite obtuse.

It doesn't deliver the humour that was crammed into the computer version (at least not as effectively), but fans should enjoy the reprise that this classic game is seeing on the mobile platform. It has a fairly complicated control scheme thanks to the inclusion of Larry's all-important and often-dodgy inventory, and it features better than average graphics. *Love for Sail* is worth the effort. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

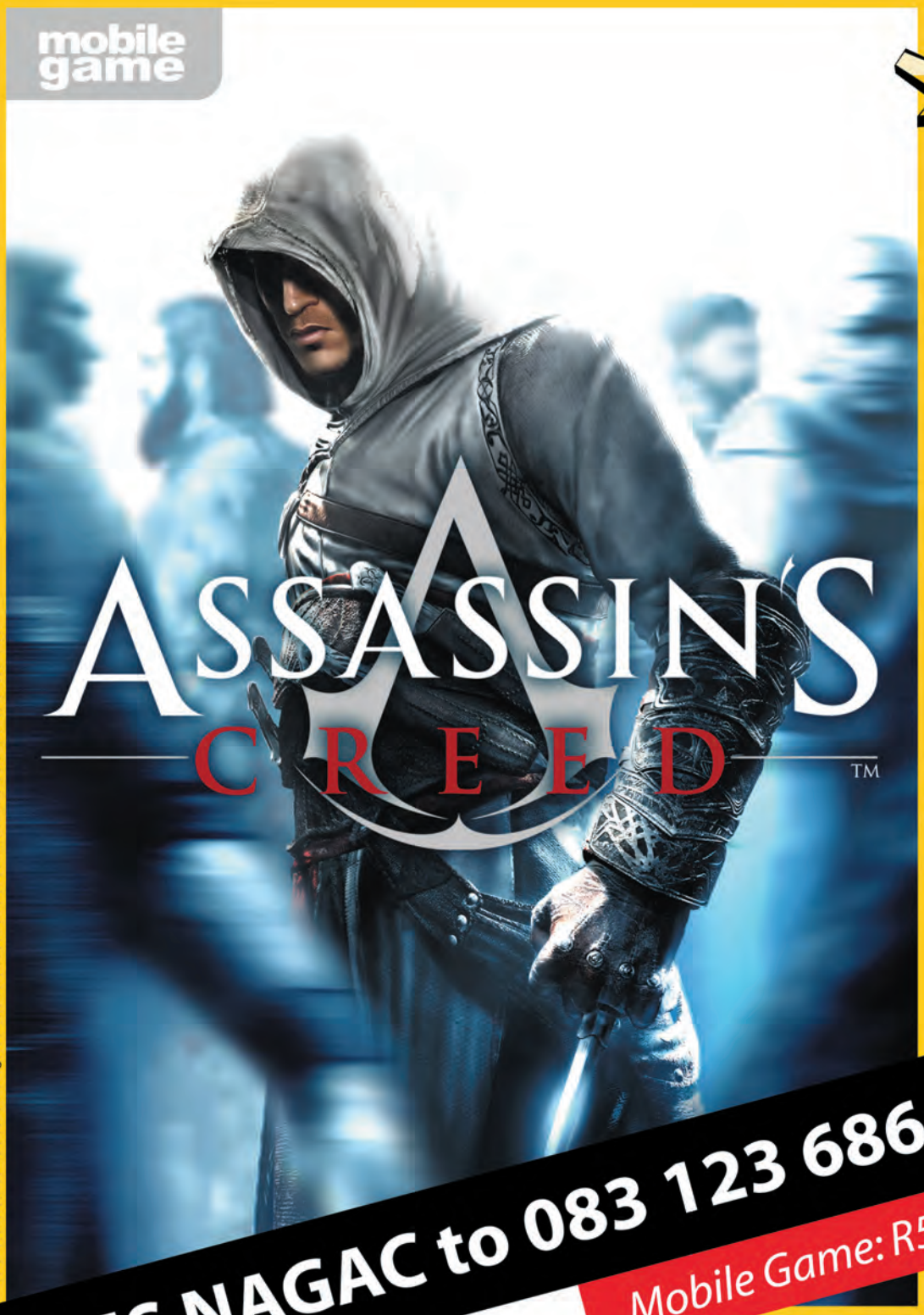
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Not as funny, but still the quintessential Larry Laffer.

78 OUT OF 100

mobile game



GAMES

MY PHONE

LIFESTYLE

SMS NAGAC to 083 123 686

Mobile Game: R50

www.mtnloaded.co.za

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MTN Loaded

gameloft

MTN

OFFICE WARS

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Vivendi Mobile Games
Genre→ Simulation
Reviewed on→ Nokia N70
Download→ SMS NAG403 to 083 123 686

ADVENTURE GAMES ON THE mobile phone platform are a bit of a strange beast. They work very well, of course, but they don't have the complexity that similar games would have on the PC (obviously) and yet don't hold the advantage of offering a quick gaming fix. These are not games for soccer moms who want to pass a few moments while waiting for the kids to finish school (and yes, they do that... I have seen the stats). These are longer games, but their very nature dictates that they will generally only be played once.

Office Wars falls into this category very firmly. In this game the player needs to get to the top of the pile in the office through goofing off and getting other people into trouble (a lot like the real corporate world). In fact, the in-jokes and quips that the game makes are probably going to be funnier for people who actually work in that kind of environment.

Playing *Office Wars* is easy enough, and the 'missions' are enjoyable (although sometimes a little frustrating). A few mini games are also on offer, to add a little spice to the mix.

On the whole, it's not a bad game, but it isn't stunningly fabulous either. It's a pretty run-of-the-mill adventure title: enjoyable, but not a 'must-play' game. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Waste time at the office wasting time at the virtual office.

70 OUT OF 100

SWAT ELITE

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Vivendi Mobile Games
Genre→ Tactical
Reviewed on→ Nokia N70
Download→ SMS NAG405 to 083 123 686

A "TEMPLE OF THE COMING Ages" is attacked and taken over by terrorists, who have demanded that several 'political prisoners' be released. They are holding the members of the order hostage, pending their demands, and your elite SWAT team is called in to defuse the situation. The incursion begins through the building's basement, and progresses in a series of stages through the various parts of the temple. Your team consists of three SWAT operatives, with the leader under your direct control and the other two backing you up. You can order them to scout ahead, and they auto-engage any enemies you come across. As you are in a building, there are various actions that you can take: you can open a door, or you might choose to break it down instead (when it is locked, for instance). You can lob flash bang grenades into rooms to disorientate your enemies. Before you enter a room, you can make use of a special spy-cam on a wire, which will allow you, for a limited time, to see what lies behind that door.

Overall, this game bears some similarity to the *LEGO Star Wars 2* mobile title that we reviewed last month, but is rather less focused on puzzle elements. Instead, this is a tactical adventure that is highly focused on action, and is fairly straightforward, so you're unlikely to tear out your hair in frustration as you try to figure out some complex sequence of actions – you gotta blow away them terrorists, it's that simple! The soundtrack is fairly impressive (though still somewhat shy of what most handsets are capable of), and the graphics is fairly basic, but easy to distinguish and very responsive. The game is divided into several stages, making it easy to pick up and play whenever the opportunity arises. It is fairly amusing and can help kill some time, but I have doubts about its replay value – a common issue with mobile games at the moment. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Another competent mobile entry for tactical shooters.

70 OUT OF 100

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Vivendi Games Mobile and Sierra
Genre→ Puzzle
Reviewed on→ Nokia N70
Download→ SMS NAG402 to 083 123 686

AS A KID, DID you ever gather up an assortment of random items and strung them together to chain-react in interesting ways? Well, maybe you did, maybe you didn't, but regardless, many years ago, *The Incredible Machine* made its debut on the PC, and its basic premise was as described above, but with outlandish items like lasers and anti-grav pads interspersed among the more common ones like candles, torches, magnifying glasses, scissors, various balls, cheese, fireworks, and so forth. The idea here is to accomplish some desired end result by having all these components interact in 'credibly farfetched' ways. The game was quite fun, and this version is one of the most faithful translations onto the mobile format that we have seen to date. The graphics is simplistic enough to lend itself well to the small screen and relatively low processing power of a mobile phone. This title boasts an impressive 80 stages, with the early couple of dozen being really simple to figure out. But thereafter, rising in complexity and difficulty. The actual manipulation of the pieces is surprisingly simple, given that a phone's keypad is all the developers had to work with. The visuals and sound in this game are pretty much perfect for a mobile game, and the nature of the game lends itself well to pick-up-and-play models, and to sporadic play. The only pity is, like with most mobile games so far, that replay value is somewhat limited. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Perfect for the lazy engineering type

85 OUT OF 100

NOKIA N81 8GB

Supplier→ Nokia
RRP→R4,500

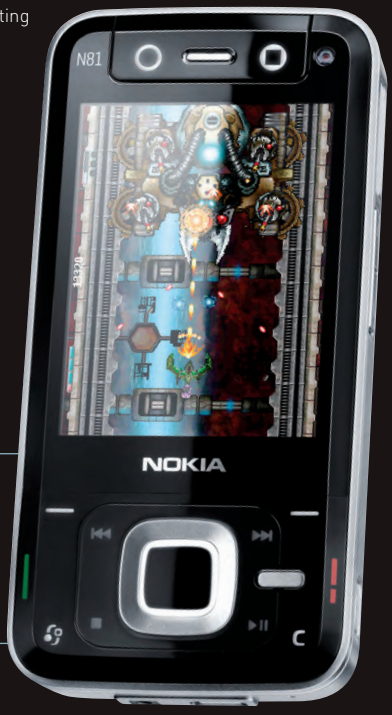
MOBILE PHONES COME AND go. Before you've blinked your eyes, a new model is on the market and soon after a competitor will follow with something similar. In no time your phone might seem like an outdated piece of junk, even though it's probably only lacking a few software updates. This whole cycle can be frustrating, especially as phones take a bigger and more important space in our everyday lives. Yes, we need them to make calls, but as the other technologies that have been merged into phones mature, they are becoming quite robust. Music players, game features, cameras, large storage space, Internet access... what were once oddities that didn't work that well are now functional parts of a new phone's arsenal.

Basically, your phone is more part of you than ever before, so it's important to choose the right one. Sure, it might just be around for a year or two until you upgrade, but it could be around for longer. Regardless, if it can't do what you really want, it will be a frustrating two years to slog through.

Nokia has always had its fingers more or less on the pulse of these things, thus its phones are known for doing the job. Still, the N81 Music Edition is a big winner in this category. It ships with 8GB of internal storage space, a music player capable of a respectable camera and more. The camera has a nice, if limited, selection of modes to help take the best picture in any conditions. The photos came out with mixed results, but they were well above the usual rubbish quality you tend to get from a mobile, while the video recorder isn't too shabby either. Music-wise the N81 is excellent, with the player easy to access and a completely standard headphone jack, so you don't need to stick to the supplied headset (which also includes a detachable remote control). Uploading files is a breeze with the data cable and the N81 will show up as an external volume automatically (at least in Vista). If you want Internet browsing, it's a joy on this phone (especially because it has built-in Wi-Fi), though an on-screen keyboard would have been a nice touch.

On the gaming side, the N81 isn't an ideal design, opting for a blocky navigation button instead of a thumbstick. But it does come with an N-gage chip and the games that play on it look awesome. You might be able to find a better phone to play games on, but the N81 has enough bang to make using it worth your while. This is definitely a keeper. **NAG**

James Francis



SPECS

Screen Size→ 240 x 320 pixels
Colour Depth→ 16 million colours TFT
Battery Standby→ 410 hours (claimed)

ALL NAG MOBILE REVIEWS ARE DONE ON THE NOKIA N81

Landscape gaming with dedicated game keys • Digital music player for high-quality music playback • High-quality stereo speakers • 3.5mm stereo headphone plug • Bluetooth technology • New 3D multimedia menu • 2-megapixel camera

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MTN Loaded

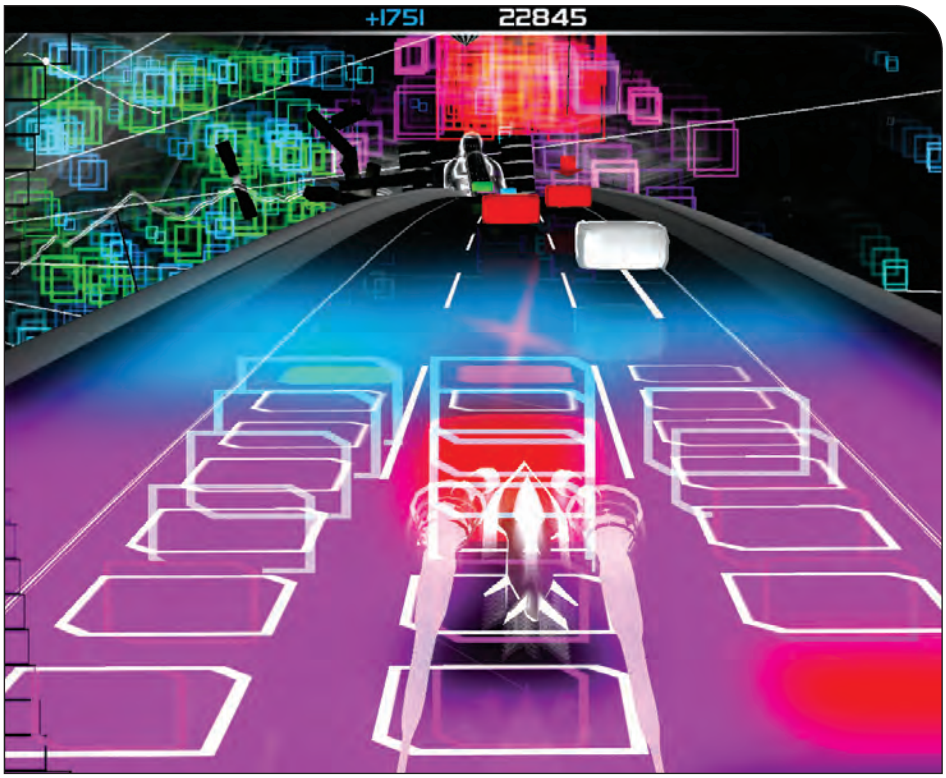
MTN

MTN Loaded

Q&A: AUDIOSURF

SURFING THE GNARLY AUDIO

Part visualiser, part *Klax*, very *Amplitude* and utterly addictive to music lovers: Independent Games Festival Finalist Audiosurf exploded onto Steam like a block-rocking beat. Using the music you select as the basis for both atmosphere and level generation, *Audiosurf* adjusts itself to the sensibilities of the player and their taste in music. With a variety of game types: some for speed freaks, others for puzzle enthusiasts, *Audiosurf* is a rare sparkle in an otherwise monotone industry. We caught up with *Audiosurf* creator Dylan Fitterer to ask him about the game, his success with it and if he has any pets.



How did the project come about, and why did it end up being *Audiosurf*?
Audiosurf is my attempt to combine gameplay and music in a new way. It went through many phases, mostly variants on shooters. Working on a casual match3 at my day job gave me the idea of bringing colour matching to *Audiosurf*. It sounded like a terrible idea to me, but I tried it anyway and it ended up fitting perfectly.

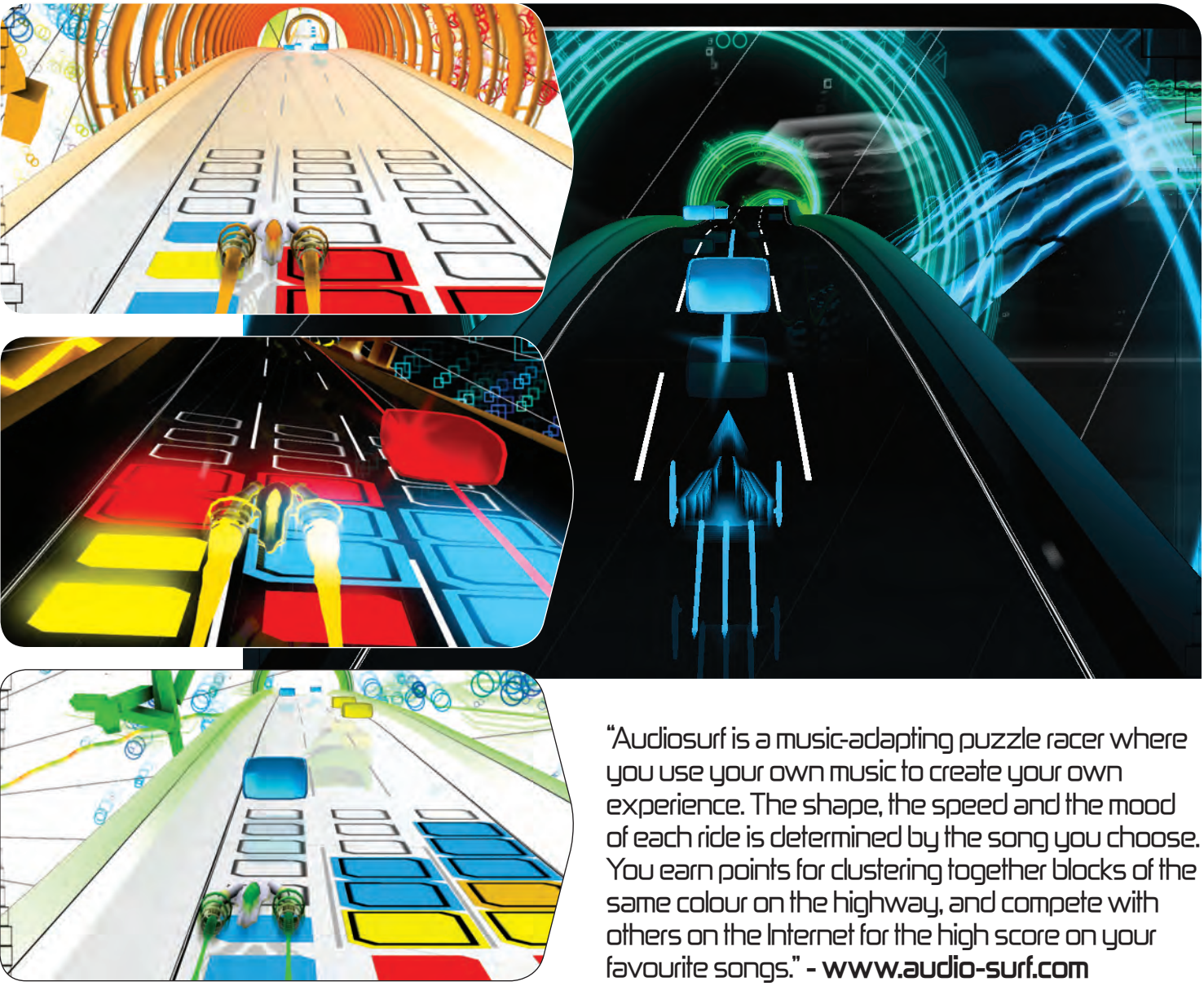
Is this your first self-published game?
This is the first game I've released commercially, but I've published several freeware prototypes too.

Which way around did this inspiration happen: Was it a desire to create a music game that necessitated a music interpreter, or did the interpreter create the game?
A bit of both. The first time it looked like *Audiosurf* was when it was a WinAmp plug-in that turned a song into a roller coaster. The tech was interesting, but didn't support gameplay very well. The music synchronisation had to happen way out in front of the player (in a fog), since the song was not pre-analysed. Trying to organise traffic patterns for the game led to the song-scanning that's at the heart of *Audiosurf* now. It allows you to see and anticipate upcoming changes in the music because it knows what's coming.

***Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* brought rhythm gaming out of console obscurity and into the mainstream. *Audiosurf* has brought in a rhythm-puzzler. Where can rhythm games go from here?**
Hard to say. I designed a rhythm first-person shooter and it sucked - so cross that one off. I'll be experimenting.

How did the entire *Orange Box* soundtrack come to be included with *Audiosurf*?
That was Jason Holtman's idea. [Jason is Valve's director of business development and works with outside entities pursuing Steam distribution and/or game development atop Source]. Still, *Alive* was already one of the most played songs in the *Audiosurf* Beta weekends, so we knew players would like having the *Orange Box* soundtrack.

Were you originally planning on publishing on Steam or did Valve's Steamworks technology present an opportunity?



"Audiosurf is a music-adapting puzzle racer where you use your own music to create your own experience. The shape, the speed and the mood of each ride is determined by the song you choose. You earn points for clustering together blocks of the same colour on the highway, and compete with others on the Internet for the high score on your favourite songs." - **www.audio-surf.com**

I'd hoped to publish on Steam already and getting access to Steamworks was icing.

With the new Steamworks development and publishing suite and XBLA's recent allowance for indie XNA-developed games in the Marketplace, do you think indie development is the next big thing?
I do. Many games got too linear for their own good and most of them just demand too much of a player's time. Now we seem to be moving in the right direction. Small developers are in exactly the right place to deliver what players want.

How has working with Steamworks been?
Easy. Valve is awesome.

Why the name-change from Invisible Handlebar to BestGameEver?
It seems that I'm trying to attach myself to as many odd names as possible. I don't know why though. BestGameEver.com is my devlog. A while back I was releasing a seven-day prototype every Friday and one of those eventually grew into *Audiosurf*.

What exactly triggers a barrel roll in the track?
That's a secret. I'm thinking of making it trigger more often, but then would it be as cool?

How important was it for users to be able to browse and play their own music collections, instead of a provided soundtrack like *Guitar Hero***?**
It's vital to *Audiosurf*. The more you can put the player in control of their own experience, the better.

What's your personal favourite music track to play in *Audiosurf*, and what mode?
I've been playing *I Never Want To* (on Audiosurf Radio) with Pusher Elite to try and reclaim that throne.

Where do you want to take *Audiosurf* **from here?**
To more people. It has found a home with gamers, but I think music fans will get into it too once they know it exists.

What do you think of Valve's Steam service?
I buy nearly all my games there now. It's great to see Steam thriving when everyone thought PC gaming might be over.

Any plans to take *Audiosurf* to XBLA?
It's possible, but no. There are no plans right now. The PC is my favourite place to play and work.

What are you working on now?
Expanding *Audiosurf*! It's a big hit on Steam and that's just the start. I want to bring *Audiosurf* to music fans who aren't necessarily gamers (yet).

Any advice for future indie developers?
It's pretty standard advice: iterate. Try stuff and seek the fun. Get rid of things that aren't fun no matter how long they took to create.

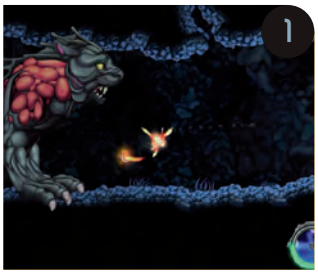
Do you have any pets, and why?
We adopted a Border Collie. I wouldn't say she's a hard worker, but she does chase the deer off. **NAG**

NAME THE GAMES AND WIN A PRIZE FROM MEGAROM

WIN THIS! APRIL EDITION

NAME THE GAME AND WIN! It's so easy, we even provide the little lines for you to write on. You don't need to know them all to stand a chance of winning, just e-mail in what you have and try your luck! E-mail your answers to **nagcomps@tidemedia.co.za**, subject line "NAME THAT GAME APRIL" and be sure to include your full name, phone number and postal address in the mail or we can't send you your prize!

Congratulations to our February winner, Geoff Burrows. Your copy of *Eternal Sonata* (360) is on its way!



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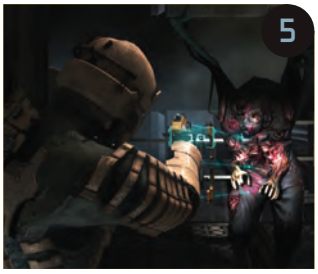

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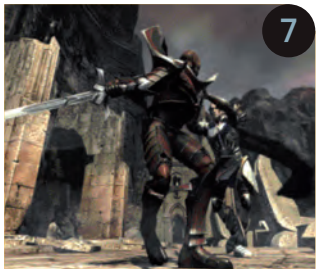

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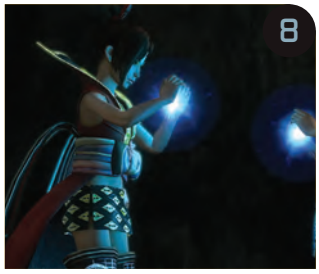

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LAST MONTH'S GAMES: 1. Alien Breed; **2.** Barbarian; **3.** Bubble Bobble; **4.** Galapagos; **5.** Hero Quest; **6.** Jedi Outcast; **7.** Lethal Enforcers; **8.** Mortal Kombat; **9.** Outcast; **10.** R-Type; **11.** Samurai Showdown; **12.** Super Mario Land; **13.** Tekken; **14.** Tetris; **15.** Wing Commander; **16.** X-COM: Apocalypse

WIN!

a hamper which includes the following:

1x Dark Messiah of Might and Magic Xbox360

1x Silent Hunter 4 and 1x Silent Hunter 4 Add On (Xbox?)

1x Rainbow Six Vegas 2 Xbox360

1x Guitar Hero PC Bundle

1x Lost Xbox360 Game

1x Assassin's Creed PC Game

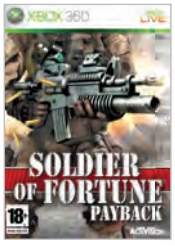
1x World Series of Poker Xbox360 Game

1x Soldier of Fortune 3 Game Xbox360

1 x Assassin's Creed Xbox 360 collectors edition

1 x Exclusive RSV2 Limited Edition tin (includes exclusive DVD bonus, lithography & two in one game content)

1 x RSV2 limited edition faceplate

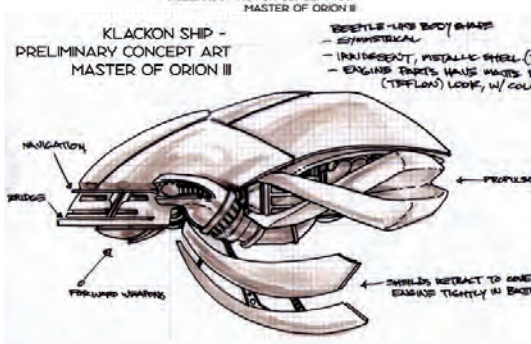


To enter sms keyword 10years to 34110

- Smses charged at R2 each
- Winner notified by phone
- No correspondence will be entered into, the judges decision is final
- Competition closes 30 April 2008

Prizes sponsored by Megarom

megarom interactive



MASTER OF ORION II: BATTLE AT ANTARES

RELEASED IN 1996 AND winner of the Origins Award for Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Computer Game of 1996, *Master of Orion II* is still wholly regarded by fans as the pinnacle of the series and perhaps even the genre. The Origins Awards celebrate outstanding work in the game industry and is presented by the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts and Design at the Origins Game Fair each year, one of North America's most prominent annual gaming conventions. Its sequel *Master of Orion 3,* was released in 2003, but didn't go down well with fans or attract much new attention to the series.

In spite of its age, *MOO2* still fosters a strong online community that plays regularly, and one group of fans has developed a patch [http://masteroforion2.blogspot.com/2005/11/master-of-orion-ii-mods-overview.html] that fixes bugs and adds more game setup functionality. There are also a few game balance mods available.

MOO2 is a 4X turn-based strategy title. The "4X" refers to the specific genre of strategy game that emphasises four primary goals: eXplore, eXpand, eXploit and eXterminate. The term "4X" was first used by Alan Emrich in the September 1993 issue of *Computer Gaming World* in his review of *Master of Orion*. Incidentally, Emrich later became involved in the design of *Master of Orion 3*. What exactly constitutes a "4X" game is often debated, but MobyGames' criterion that there must be victory conditions other than total conquest for a game to be '4X' is generally accepted.

MOO2 as well as its predecessor determined the outcome of battles more by technological level than by battlefield tactics or weight of numbers, which forms the foundation of the series and also contributes to what makes *MOO2* such a quality title even ten years later.

The basic premise of the game is to manage your civilisation across multiple planets, using diplomacy, trade or warfare to survive and grow. The slick and functional interface design of *MOO2* makes management easy, while the right-click contextual help menu answers most if not all questions as they happen. Multiplayer games were (and still are thanks to *MOO2* running near-flawlessly under Windows XP) possible via hot seat and LAN. Online play was supported via the Total Entertainment Network, which shut down in 1999, so now online play is done predominantly using the MS-DOS version in combination with Kail and the #MOO2 IRC channel on Quakenet.

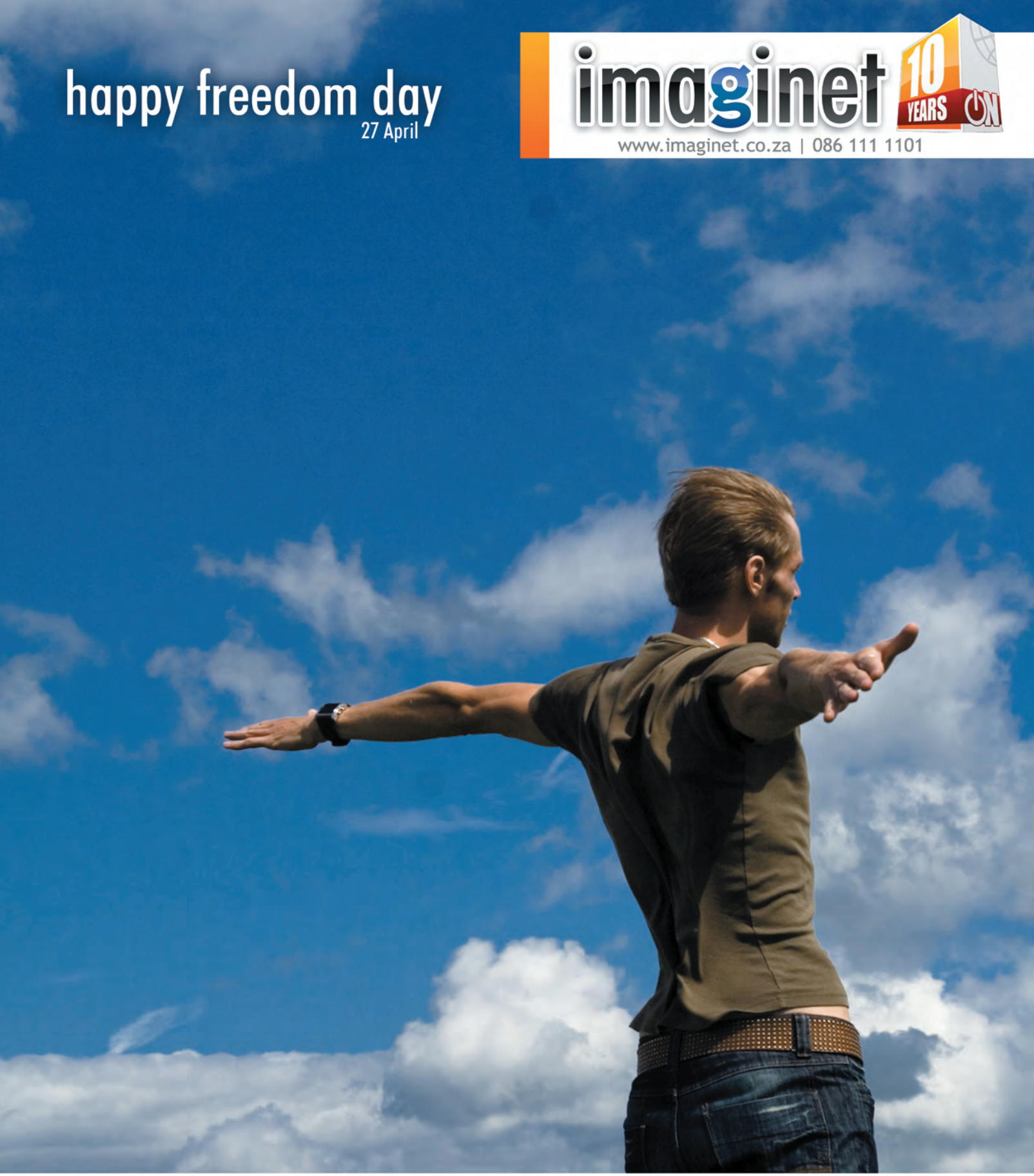
Even today, *MOO2* still plays like a dream and somehow manages to avoid the frustration of lacking modern conventions, possibly because it remains very modern for its own era. The '4X' genre no longer gathers the attention from developers it once did and seems to be all but extinct for now. Times change, trends change and the mass market certainly does steer gaming into specific directions at times. However, much like fashion, the 4X may return in strength one day once developers notice a revenue stream. **NAG**

THE HISTORY OF 4X

EARLY YEARS:
Reach for the Stars (1983)
Anacreon (1988)
Empire (1990)
Spaceward, Ho! (1990)
VGA Planets (1990)
Sid Meier's Civilization (1990)
Master of Orion (1993)

GOLDEN AGE:
Colonization (1994)
Master of Magic (1993)
Ascendancy (1995)
Master of Orion II (1996)
Imperium Galactica I (1997)
Into the Void (1997)
Alpha Centauri (1999)
Star Trek: Birth of the Federation (1999)
Imperium Galactica II: Alliances (2000)
Civilization III (2001)
Haegemonia: Legions of Iron (2002)
Master of Orion 3 (2003)
Galactic Civilizations (2003)

TODAY:
Galactic Civilizations 2 (2006)
Civilization IV (2005)
Sword of the Stars (2006)


happy freedom day
27 April
imaginet
10 YEARS ON
www.imaginet.co.za | 086 111 1101
ADSL from R49/mo
3G from R114/mo
Hosting from R19/mo
www.imaginet.co.za | 086 111 1101

TOTO, I'VE GOT A FEELING WE'RE NOT IN AZEROTH ANYMORE

MMO gaming isn't all grinding badgers, plotting pangalactic intrigue, and farming phat lewt and XP. It's just mostly grinding badgers, plotting pangalactic intrigue, and farming phat lewt and XP. *NAG* decided to take a bold trot down the information superhighway less travelled, and see the sights. We still wake up screaming.

HABBO

Monthly cost: Free / $5
Website: www.habbo.com

PART MMO, PART SOCIAL networking service, *Habbo* is a browser-based, Shockwave-powered, hotel-themed metaverse inhabited by teenagers and the people who like them. While most of the content is free to anyone, there is a basic subscriber package. For $5 a month, subscribers join the mega prestigious Habbo Club, get a shiny badge next to their names, and rub virtual shoulders with people pretending to be Ville Valo. Sweet. As of January this year, *Habbo* claims eight million unique visitors each month, as well as tens of millions of dollars in microtransaction revenue each year.

For all intents and purposes, however, *Habbo* is really just an elaborate chat room with pixel art vaguely reminiscent of *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders*.

On 12 July 2006, notorious ramble rousers, 4chan.org's /b/ forum members, staged a mass raid on Habbo, to protest the alleged racism of the site's moderators – or what /b/ deemed an "outbreak of AIDS". The subsequent flooding of Armani-suited /b/ users and blockade of the hotel's pool areas, and the ensuing administrative level panic, led to the now Internet-famous expression, "pool's closed", while the word "AIDS" was temporarily blacklisted by *Habbo* and replaced in all instances with the word "bobba".

THE ENDLESS FOREST

Monthly cost: Free
Website: www.tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest

IT'S A SOCIAL MMO game that works like a screensaver, and it's probably the only game we've ever seen described as a "deer simulator". Everyone's a deer, albeit a deer with a creepy humanoid face. There are no classes, no skills, no treasure raids. You can't even speak, because deer don't speak, and all interaction with other deer is done through a series of largely inscrutable manoeuvres, like lying down, standing up, and rubbing yourself against trees. You don't grind your deer for XP, or join a deer guild. You mostly just sort of clip-clop around a forest and look at stuff. Here's an excerpt from our *Endless Forest* diary:

I got the giggles when I danced for another deer, and his antlers got all glowy, and made my antlers go blue. Somewhere along the way, I got tiger stripes too. Rad.

Although the game is live, and already includes several sun-dappled sylvan parlours for you and your ruminant pals, *The Endless Forest* is still in development and players are invited to make suggestions for additional content on the community forums. The project is hosted and partially funded by the Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art in Luxembourg.

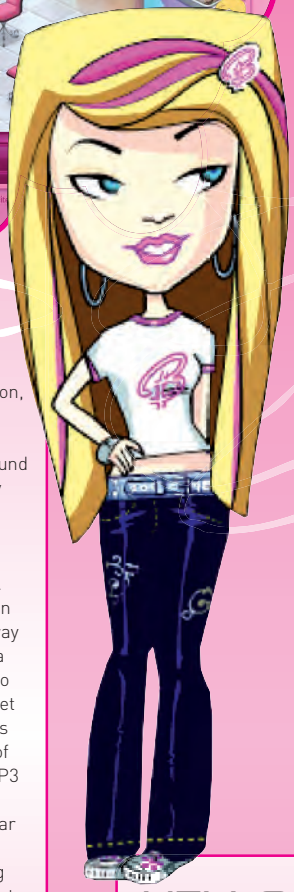
YOHOHO! PUZZLE PIRATES

Monthly cost: Free / $9.95
Website: www.puzzlepirates.com

AS ANY THREE-YEAR-OLD TODDLER can tell you, anything with pirates is, by infallible universal law, better than anything without pirates. And what better way to celebrate this than an open-ended, community-driven puzzle-orientated 'mmoarrrrpg' with scallywags, scurvy dogs, and swabbies? Batten the hatches and shiver those timbers – thar be piratey puzzlin' to do!

In *Puzzle Pirates*, everyone's a pirate, and players are encouraged to be 'piratey' and talk piratey. The game's documentation even includes an introductory pirate vocabulary. While all the swaggering about and quaffing grog are played out in an isometric world much like most of the other games on this page, game objectives, ship duties, and many interactions are achieved through puzzle mini games. When one ship has grappled another out on the high seas, for example, a Rumble is initiated. This mini game resembles Taito's arcade and console classic, *Puzzle Bobble*, with a few buccaneer-flavoured twists.

As of late last 2007, and now entering its fifth year online, *Puzzle Pirates* boasts three million registered rapscallions. While most of the game is playable for free, subscribers have access to several exclusive oceans and dont' have to pay for in-game purchases.



BARBIEGIRLS

Monthly cost: Free, but parental permission is required
Website: www.barbiegirls.com

ACCORDING TO MATTEL VICE president, Chuck Scothon, *BarbieGirls* "represents the first global online virtual world exclusively for girls". Basically, you create your very own blonde hussy, and flounce around 'hangouts' meticulously designed to reinforce every vomit-inducing girly stereotype imaginable. And everything is being eaten by pink.

In February, it was reported that the site has, somehow or other, attracted some 10 million users. Paedobears, assemble! But seriously, the security in this place is so tight, you can't so much as ask the way to the nearest pillow fight without tripping through a security gauntlet filled with angry cobras. There's no free chat option, and users must make do with preset macros that are mostly limited to vapid observations about how gross boys are. Oh, unless you own one of those grotesque and overpriced BarbieGirl®©™ MP3 players. Then, alongside all sorts of totally radical bonus stuff like new nail and lipstick shades to smear across two pixels of nails and lips, you can become Best Friends with someone, and talk about anything you like as long as the words are on Mattel's whitelist. According to the official documentation:

Best Friends are girls who have physically connected their Barbie Girl™ devices into one another's docking station.

K.

DOFUS

Monthly cost: Free / $6.90
Website: www.dofus.com

ITS SOMEWHAT UNCOMFORTABLE SIMILARITY to the word "doofus" notwithstanding, French developer Ankama Studio's *Dofus* is a Flash-powered, isometric MMORPG in the grand swords 'n' sorcery 'n' stuff tradition of *Ultima Online*, and looks a bit like *The Gummi Bears*. While it is primarily a subscriber-based enterprise, feature-restricted free play is available in the village of Astrub (constituting approximately 5% of the game's total area).

For paying members, the game is set in and around the rustic borough of Amakna, which is Ankama written backwards. Actually, this sets a sort of general trend for the game's nominal system, where names of things are often words written in reverse. The time-manipulating class Xelor, for example, is named for Rolex, while the treasure-sniffing god of the Dofusian Pantheon is called Enutrof. We're sure that's really ingenious.

Since its 2005 launch, *Dofus* has pulled some three million players, launched a dedicated UK service, prompted the almost inevitable deluge of trashy spin-offs including an animated show, a bunch of Web comics that are either only funny to insiders or just really stupid, and led to the development of two sort-of-sequels – *Dofus Arena*, a tactical tournament incarnation, and the upcoming *Wakfu*, currently still in Beta.

HELLO KITTY ONLINE

Monthly cost: Free
Website: www.hellokittyonline.com

CURRENTLY IN A CLOSED Beta, and scheduled for a "soon" release, *Hello Kitty Online* is all ready, set, meow for some sort of pastel-coloured MMORPG experience. Ten thousand romping dachshund puppies with plushie Xmas antlers wish they were this excruciatingly adorable. At any rate, the *Kitty* moguls are so busy huffing fairy dust that they took the following statement from cynical game blog Kotaku seriously:

Only one MMO could possibly release *World of WarCraft*'s death grip on the massively multiplayer gaming market – *Hello Kitty Online*.

It's proudly displayed alongside the usual host of drab press statements drummed up from drab news websites you've never heard of. Apparently the *Hello Kitty* factory hasn't manufactured a range of sarcasm-detecting bubble gum yet.

Fight monsters (presumably with heart-shaped candy shrapnel or something), dig for treasure, or cook stuff. There'll be guilds, and skill systems, and even a virtual economy. *Hello Kitty Online* promises all this and more – like, maybe an incoming merchandise payload three times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. Look out, flea market shoppers. While the game will be free to download and play, phoreals cash monies will be required to buy character upgrades and special items.

Sponsored by SAPPHIRE ATI Radeon GRAPHICS

TOYS, TOYS AND MORE TOYS... I WANT THEM ALL

WORKING WITH NEO IS like being Arnold Schwarzenegger and training with Reg Park (Mr. Universe, The Legend – King of bodybuilding).

During March, he phoned to tell me that he had broken the South African overclocking record and annexed the tenth place in the world with a 3DMark03 score of 109,234 points!

Neo is the first person in South Africa to score over 100,000 points in 3DMark and thus my hero, my king of overclocking. (No, I'm not gay; I love the guy in a non-gay way.... metrosexual, if you know what I mean.)

A pair of ATI Sapphire Radeon HD 3870X2 cards that made Eskom shift their load-shedding plans kicked off the hardware list of this lap-dancing crowd pleaser. The board he used was the magnificent GIGABYTE GA-X48T-DQ6, which is by far outpacing all the others. And to top it all off, it's incredibly stable. As far as power supplies go, there was only one choice for 'The One' called Neo: the incredible GIGABYTE OdinGT 800W PSU.

Then there was the CPU, an Intel Core 2 Extreme X9650. Anyone said yum?

So, here's your question: Is there any difference between a dancer at ******* (name censored to protect the innocent – little Jonny, stop counting the stars!) and the hardware Neo used to beat the rest of SA to a pulp?

FURTHERMORE...

Bring out the candles, cake and Lara Croft!

I have been with *NAG* since August 1999, and am pretty much part of the rotting stains on the carpet in front of the editor's desk.

I have to take my hat off and say thanks to Warren (Storm) Steven, Leonard (Assassin) Diamond, Tracy Steven, Michael (RedTide) James, Lauren (Guardien) das Neves, James (Newcastle) Francis, Walter (Shryke) Pretorius and Alex (Raven) Jelagin for making the first few years of *New Age Gaming* magazine an unreal experience where *Quake III* was our game of choice and I-Imagine was our mortal enemy.

Hope you guys enjoy this birthday issue as much as we did putting it together.

Cheers!

Len Nery
Hardware Manager

LCDS START TO PUSH CRT OUT

EVEN THOUGH CATHODE RAY tube (CRT) monitors are rated higher in performance, the increasing quality of liquid crystal displays (LCDs) and cheaper access to higher resolutions has swayed the market. This has been heralded by a great increase in the sales of LCD screens, while CRT monitors are on a decline. Statistics show that out of over 60 million television units sold at the end of 2007, 47% were LCD screens. While CRT still had a 46% share, it shows a great shift in trends, which favour LCD. The remaining market share went to plasma displays.

This recent rise in sales of LCD screens , which generally support high-definition visuals, is excellent news for both Sony and Microsoft and their respective consoles. Certain countries have even stopped the sale of standard TVs completely due to the rise in high-definition broadcasting on their various television networks.

But this may not be the end of CRTs, which are still a more durable and higher quality displays. Engineers at several technology labs have been experimenting with thin CRT displays, capable of very high resolutions.

ATI RELEASES CATALYST 8.3

For those of you using multiple graphics cards in your system or who are currently contemplating obtaining more cards, read this very important announcement!

The ATI Catalyst team has just released Catalyst 8.3 drivers that enable CrossFireX, meaning that from this point onwards you will be able to use any combination of R680- and RV670-based AMD/ATI graphics cards to achieve triple- or quad-GPU performance as well as ATI Hybrid graphics support within Windows Vista. This is the first certified support for DirectX 10.1. To date, there has never been a more important driver download for your graphics cards.

ESC SHOWCASES NATIVE BLU-RAY SOLUTION INTEL 4-SERIES CHIPSET AT CEBIT 2008

Elitegroup Computer Systems (ECS) announced its brand-new 4-series motherboards during CeBIT 2008, which was held in Hannover, Germany, from 4 to 9 March. Features including ECS Qooltech II silent colour, Intel XMP DDR3 1,600 memory and PCI Express 2.0 were shown to visitors at the expo. Also launched were the new A780GM-A Black-series motherboard supporting ATI Hybrid graphics technology and the latest AMD Phenom quad-core processors.

FOXCONN TAKES OVERCLOCKING BY THE HORNS

DURING FEBRUARY 2008, FOXCONN released a preview of its highly anticipated BLACKOPS motherboard designed, specifically with overclocking in mind. Based on the Intel X48 chipset, it has three PCI Express 16x slots, support for PCI Express 2.0 and a heap of bells and whistles bringing tears to our eyes. The board is designed to run passive cooling, water-cooling, dry ice or even liquid nitrogen on the Northbridge! Sounds insane, doesn't it? We'll most certainly be attaching our DICE block to this baby!

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* Hardware Reviews section

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

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

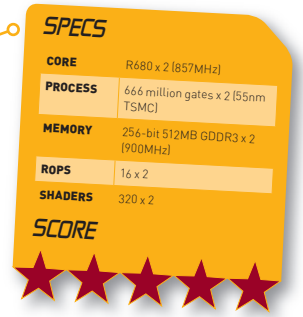
AWARDS: Check out her hot sister on the right side of the page!

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

DROP YOUR ROCKS AND READ THIS BOX

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

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



HARDWARE Q&A

HI, I'M LOOKING TO buy a new computer but I'm having a problem with choosing the right graphics card. The computer I'm getting has 2GB of RAM, an AMD Athlon 5200+ (2.7GHz), a 160GB SATA hard drive and an Isonic 350W PSU. What I want to know is which graphics card is better for playing games such as *Gears of War*, *Crysis*, *Call of Duty 4*, *UT3*, etc. at the highest resolution with no lagging.

Which of these two cards would be the best: the Chaintech 8800GT or the GeCube ATI Radeon HD 3870XT? I'm not going to overclock my graphics card, so can you please tell me which would be better non-overclocked.

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Kevin Elliott

Hi Kevin. Thanks for your mail. The 8800GT is your best option but we suggest that you get at least a 400W PSU.

Due to your letter being printed, courtesy of Sapphire ATI, you'll receive a prize shortly.

Len

Remember, simply send in your question or suggestion to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za with the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' and your letter may be printed too.

SA OVERCLOCKING LEAGUE 3600

Ever since the launch of the 3870X2, there's been some turmoil in overclocking circles regarding the classification of the card. All this seems to stem from the surprise decision by HWBOT to allow the 3870X2 onto single-card listings, which has resulted in the card sweeping up the top 20 positions. It also doesn't help that the new (at the time of writing) 3DMark records in 06, 05 and 03 were attained using four GPUs in the form of two 3870X2 cards in CrossFire, meaning that to get anywhere near that score, competitors will have to use at least three GPUs in whichever format. Others have said that the 3870X2 should be considered a CrossFire configuration even though it uses a single slot and PCB. There is some merit in this argument because the 7950GX2 was also a single card but considered SLI, even though it had two PCBs. A point worth taking note of is that OCL prizes are awarded on the 15th of every other month, which means that the winner for this month will have already been announced by the time you read this. With the increased number of submissions that tend to take place just before the deadline, be wise and submit your results in time. If you wait until 23:59 on the 14th, you may find that that someone else has beaten you to the mark and managed to take the prize for that month.

AQUAMARK 3
1. Shogan85 – 220,841
2. VoodooProphetII – 215,691
3. 1Day – 214,174
4. Trax – 213,892
5. seth – 210,383

3DMARK2001 SE
1. 1Day – 72,525
2. VoodooProphetII – 70,793
3. seth – 70,040
4. Shogan85 – 69,867
5. UncleBob- 69,299

3DMARK03 (BUILD 360)
1. 1Day – 53,084
2. seth - 51,296
3. VoodooProphetII - 50,225
4. UncleBob - 50,102
5. TraX - 45,742

3DMARK06
1. VoodooProphetII - 23,519
2. seth - 23,309
3. 1Day – 23,240
4. Shogan85 - 22,516
5. I34z1k – 22,173

3DMARK06
1. VoodooProphetII - 17,382
2. seth - 17,231
3. 1Day – 16,528
4. GTXVorteX - 15,620
5. Neosteve - 14,703

SUPER PI 1M
1. Shogan85 - 12.782
2. Wik1d – 12.812
3. Viceroy - 12.813
4. Blatt - 13.109
5. VoodooProphetII - 13.859

SUPER PI 32M
1. Shogan85 - 13:08:094
2. Viceroy - 13:08:406
3. Trax - 13:08:625
4. VoodooProphetII - 13:24:484
5. rra - 13:32:391

SISOFTWARE SANDRA 2008
1. Anakha56 - 11,349MB/sec
2. Trax - 9,663MB/sec
3. Shogan85 - 9,613MB/sec
4. rra - 9,373MB/sec
5. VoodooProphetII - 9,346MB/sec

GLOBAL RANKINGS
1. VoodooProphet - 55
2. Shogan85 - 48
3. 1Day - 41
4. Seth - 37
5. Trax - 30
6. UncleBob - 14
   rra – 14
   Viceroy - 14
9. Anakha56 – 10

NAG AWARDS

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

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

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

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

5 The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, we probably already have.

4 A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.

3 About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.

2 This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.

1 The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

Ground Zero

by Toby Hudon

Cheap pipes

THIS MONTH'S ~~RANT~~ COLUMN is about that bane of the motherboard industry: heat pipes. Contrary to popular belief, these are not necessarily a good thing. In fact, in most cases they're quite bad. I'm sure some people see them as the Holy Grail of cooling and assume they somehow magically make heat disappear, never to be seen again, much like the misguided beliefs surrounding the Peltier effect a decade ago. But this isn't true. To quote the great Homer Simpson, "In this house, we obey the laws of thermodynamics!"

Heat doesn't just vanish into thin air: it takes thick air, preferably moving, and even then, it's a pain in the ass. If the air isn't moving, it becomes even worse. Early Stone Age cave engineers realised this, and came up with simple devices called fans, which move air around and help transfer heat from things like hot blocks of aluminium or copper to the air, which can then be moved away.

However, such arcane arts seem to be lost on the modern motherboard industry, which becomes more heat pipe-crazy with each passing generation. Oh, they'll claim all sorts of things about the cooling performance on the box, but in reality they're not putting these big copper pipes on the board to improve cooling, because they don't. They're putting them on the board because they're cheap. I've talked to several motherboard manufacturers' representatives about possibly getting a decent fan back on the board so we can stop cooking chipsets, or at least an assembly that can be removed and replaced by a third-party version of the same. However, I was told this would never happen, as they'd never go back to using fans again because they're too cheap to support the RMAs that fans can generate when they fail.

Fans constitute moving parts, and moving parts are bad – particularly if you have to supply warranty support for a product. So, rather than using cheap, effective, high-performance fans, it's much easier to slap an expensive, less-efficient solid-state pipe on the board and then claim anything that goes wrong is not your problem. This is really great especially when things keep going wrong. For the cheaper heat pipes, 'wrong' may be something as simple as laying the board flat like in a ~~desktop~~ (sorry, nobody knows what that is anymore) home theatre PC, or mounting it upside down, which is all the rage in high-end cases these days. This can impede the flow of fluid inside some of the cheaper heat pipes and make them less conductive. Considering there's no guarantee which end of the motherboard (if any) will be up in a case these days, this can be a problem.

However, most of the time, the real problem comes when people start trying to improve their cooling on the CPU - particularly when they switch to water-cooling. You see, all the heat pipe really does is moving heat from point A to point B. Sometimes it may gather more heat from points C, D and E along the way. In general, most motherboard heat pipes are moving heat from the Southbridge and Northbridge towards the CPU, and possibly getting some from the power MOSFETs on the way. The reason for moving the heat here is so that the cheap motherboard manufactures can leech off the CPU cooler that Intel or AMD has to fork out for to keep your chip from overheating. Hey, why bother cooling your own hardware when someone else can shoulder that cost!

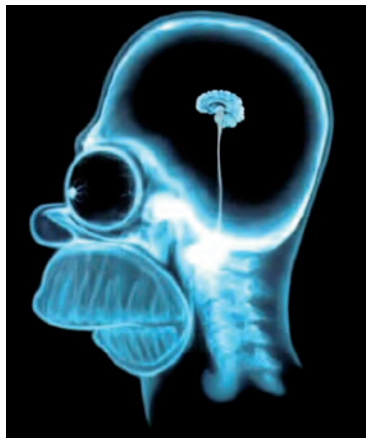
I know some people are going to argue that your better air coolers all use heat pipes. Not quite all. The Swiftech MCX series comes to mind. In general, heat pipes can be used fairly effectively to distribute heat to a large surface area on a CPU heatsink. That's fine. Usually a big fan is also involved to then cool the fins the heat pipe just brought all the heat to. That's cool, literally. It works fine. However, the problem is that these motherboard pipe setups have bad surface areas and no fans of their own. And to add insult to injury, they're almost impossible to remove and replace with standard heatsink and fan systems.

So, when you swap your stock air cooler for a water block, guess what happens to the airflow on the heat pipe. That's right, it goes away. Then, what happens to the heat? It doesn't magically disappear, so it has to go somewhere. Well, when the one side of the pipe is hotter than the other, it transfers heat to the cooler side. Normally the Northbridge is hotter than the power regulators, so it moves that way. But when the power regulators heat up, the heat will back up and head the other way, which will result in your Southbridge 'cooking'. Normally this will manifest as fairly predictable errors. Either you'll see it in a diagnostic code (if your board is fancy like that), or you'll see errors with devices on the SB, particularly your SATA controllers. This can be tough to track down as the system may only become unstable during heavy disk operation, and most temperature monitors only care about the Northbridge.

When is this most likely to happen? When you have a combination of water-cooling on the CPU and high-end graphics cards running hot right over the Southbridge. All this could be solved with a couple of R4 fans on the chipset, but no, that's too expensive for a R4,000 motherboard.

We need to stop putting up with this situation. There are a couple of boards left that use standard heatsinks. Anyone interested in performance should be buying these and replacing the cooling, not spending twice as much for "Super, ultra-mega circu-hexa extreme cool™" that's more likely to overheat the board in a high-end setup than a sink and fan from ten years ago. **NAG**

> To quote the great Homer Simpson, "In this house, we obey the laws of thermodynamics!"



FPSGUN GAMING MOUSE

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

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ZALMAN
COOL INNOVATIONS

Hardwired

by Neo Sibeko

At the end of the rainbow lies a brilliant game

THE 3D-GRAPHICS SCENE IS changing. There are so many factors that are contributing to this that it would not be possible to highlight them all within this column. There's something to be said about engaging in something that you know will have a detrimental effect on everything associated with it should it actually work out. How odd it is then that you can win the battle and ultimately lose the war. The beginning of the end could be said to have been when SLI and CrossFire came into being.

These two technologies increased 3D processing power temporarily, while we still had titles that were not doing so well with single cards. Instead of games receiving further optimisations, what happened is that the graphics processing power was doubled and once that started, things started to spiral downwards (even though it wasn't apparent at the time).

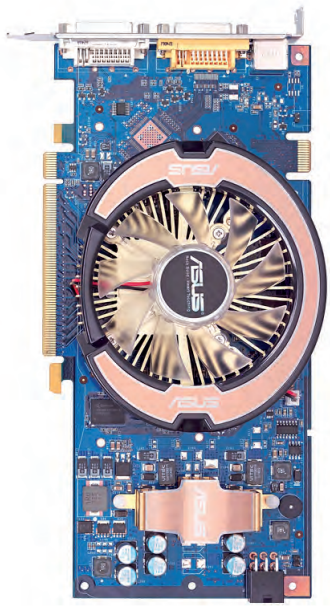
At this point, it may not be clear what I am on about. However, allow me to explain. The graphics card market in its current state cannot and will not survive. There is no possible way for things to move at the pace they have been for the last two or three years, and that has to do with the diminishing excitement concerning graphics cards. This is not because the graphics cards are less capable than they used to be, but because more people are finding themselves buying a high-end graphics board and then, past the synthetic tests, are wondering, "What next? " SLI and CrossFire had the 'wow' factor when first released. Now they're almost looked upon with distaste.

Finally having the option of using AA on an older title is not compelling enough to replay it. Newer games are so few and far between on the PC that we really are in a situation of having super cars and no roads to drive them on.

While the list of PC-exclusive developers dwindles, the graphics cards get ever so powerful and ever so expensive. Right now we sit with not only two dual-GPU graphics cards, but for the first time the difference between high-end products and the midrange exists mostly in theory rather than practice. If you take for example the 8800GT and compare it to the 9800GTX, they're basically the same cards as they share the same G92 GPU, same 256-bit bus and the same PCB even. The only thing differentiating them besides price are 14 stream processors and clock speeds. If that sounds like much, consider that the one has 112 stream processors while the other has 128 - a meaningless difference in the grand scheme of things.

The same applies to AMD/ATI's Radeon HD3XX range. The highest performing part is the 3870 X2, but it has two mid- to entry-level GPUs on a single board. Could this be that both AMD and NVIDIA are realising that investing several hundreds of million dollars over years on end in R&D for a single horribly expensive GPU no longer makes financial sense? The drive behind the market cannot be the technology or hardware itself. There may have been a time when people bought VGA cards because of the promises of a better gaming experience, but after this didn't materialise in DirectX 8, 9 and 10, most seem to have finally realised that (or come to believe that it will never happen). With the situation the VGA market finds itself in, something has to give and it will not be the consumers deciding not to play games at all. They will simply move to consoles. **NAG**

> The graphics card market in its current state cannot and will not survive. There is no possible way for things to move at the pace they have been for the last two or three years, and that has to do with the diminishing excitement concerning graphics cards.



ASUS recommends Windows Vista® Ultimate

New Innovation

Unstoppable G-Force

ASUS G1Sn and G2Sg laptops lead the charge in mobile gaming with enhanced displays, smart ergonomics and plentiful brawn

For the corporate warrior who is also an after-hours fighter on the electronic battlefields, game on the latest Intel® Centrino® Processor Technology, G1Sn/G2Sg gaming laptops are the machines of choice, custom-made solutions for those who play as hard as they work.

Sensory Experience

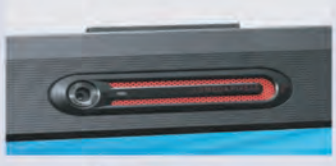
Mere processing power is not enough; being engineered for gaming means the G1Sn and G2Sg are sensory maestros. It begins with two sizes of ASUS Color Shine LCD (15.4" G1Sn/ 17" G2Sg wide aspect) for stunning visuals in fine detail, side and front speakers, as well as game-activated (DirectX 9/10) Direct Flash sidelights that come on during game play. Together with distinctive, brushed surface of the unique LCD cover to the carbon-fiber effect of the keyboard surround, the gaming series is a mobile entertainment powerhouse given a sci-fi makeover.

Raw Power

Engineered for fun, the G1Sn/G2Sg is also a full-functioned, wireless-capable laptop able to breeze through the workday's computing needs. Powered by the most demanding action games, G1Sn/G2Sg laptops' arsenal include the latest Genuine Windows Vista® Ultimate operating system, up to 4GB of DDR2 memory and a choice of the most powerful graphics processing systems: the NVIDIA GeForce 8700M GT GPU, each graphics engine stocked with 512MB of physical VRAM for unparalleled performance.

ASUS Direct Messenger
Information side display updates IM, system status and reminder alerts with zero distraction.

Gaming Hot Keys
The A, W, S and D key are especially marked for convenient access at one glance.



Wireless Video Communication
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The in-mold decorated cover surface provides sturdy protection to the LCD screen and also prevents the paint from chipping off.

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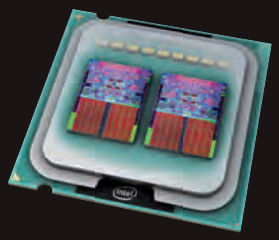
DREAM MACHINE

I heard a story about a laboratory whose staff cut out the heart of a rat that had died four days earlier and scraped as much of the dead cells out as possible (I thought there would be nothing left to work with, but anyway). They proceeded to inject the cold, rotting heart with cells procured from a baby rat. I'm not sure if the baby rat was alive when they stole the poor thing's cells, but the cool thing is that the new cells started multiplying. One day later, the heart started beating on its own!

What are you waiting for? Take that piece of rubbish you call a GPU, CPU, RAM or MOBO out of that rotting carcass you call a case and replace it with the best you are able to afford. In our Dream Machine section you'll see what we believe is the current cream of the crop. In other words, the living rat section.



Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650
Intel Corporation
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Enermax Aurora
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[011] 466-0038

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

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Frontosa
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Saitek GM3200 Laser Mouse
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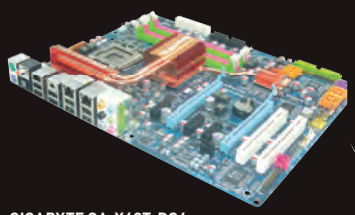

GIGABYTE GA-X48T-DQ6
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Silverstone Strider 1000W-ST1000
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MSI R3870X2-T2D1G-OC
Pinnacle Micro
[011] 265-3000

WD Caviar SE16
Drive Control
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Corsair XMS3 CM3 X1024-1066C7
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Lian-Li PC-V2000B Plus II
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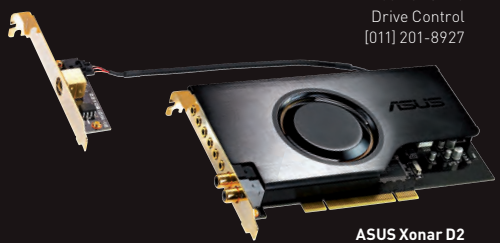

ASUS Xonar D2
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Samsung 2232GW Monitor

image quality so real, you can feel it

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

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

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

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

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

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SPARKLE SF-PX96GT512D3-HP

FOR THE FIRST TIME in the history of NVIDIA, they have used a midrange card to launch a new series. Not only is the 9600GT the first midrange card from NVIDIA to offer a 256-bit memory bus, but it's also the first to offer the same number of render outputs as its high-end counterparts. This may not sound like much, but it's something gamers and developers have been hoping for, for several years. Previously we had high-clocking GDDR3 memory on 128-bit buses, which, while good for lower resolutions, would fall apart when high data-rate effects like HDR, parallex mapping and high polygon count shadows were used. Despite the move to a 256-bit bus, the 9600GT happens to be the smallest of the DirectX 10 midrange, discreet cards in the market, housing a smaller transistor footprint than the G80. At 504 million gates, it runs very cool, even though it uses the same cooler found on the 8800GT.

With the change to the 256-bit bus, one may be expecting the price point of the midrange market to shift above the $199 mark, which has always been the limit for this segment. However, NVIDIA gave a $179 MSRP for the 9600GT and many online retailers have been keeping to that price point. This means that the 9600GT is not only cheaper than the 'poor' 8600GTS that came before it, but is also significantly faster.

The 9600GT is more than just the first in the 9-series: it's the only 9-series card that's using a different core than the 9800GTX, 8800GTS, GT and 9800GX2. The 9600GT is based on the G94 core, which has further improvements to the core and at present has 64 stream processors. This may seem like a low number of stream processors, especially when compared to the AMD/ATI parts in the same price range, which feature 320 stream processing units. However, despite the significantly lower stream units compared to the HD 3850, the 9600GT is faster in both synthetic tests and games. This is largely because of the much better texturing abilities of the 9600GT.

More than that, the G94 core seems to be better balanced as it scales in a linear fashion with increasing resolutions and graphics complexity. What is quite interesting about the G94 core is that it has the highest shader clock speed of all the GeForce cards available. Clocking in at an impressive 1.62GHz, it really does excel in shader-intensive scenes; provided that the scene doesn't lean too heavily on the number of render outputs and texture samplers. In pure mathematical calculations, it's faster than the 8800Ultra.

It would have been nice to say that the 9600GT plays *Crysis* smoothly at insane resolutions and settings, but the truth is that you'll likely be limited to medium or high detail at 1,280 x 1,024 at best. With

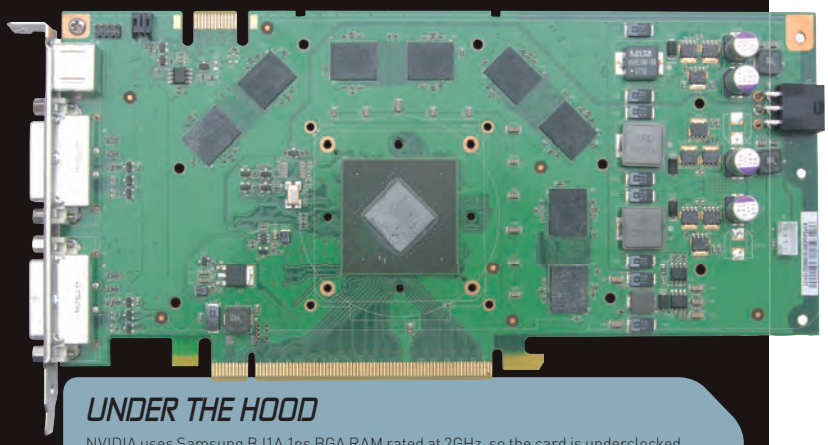
NAG HARDWARE

SPECS

CORE	G94 (650MHz/1,650MHz Stream Processors)
PROCESS	754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (900MHz)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	64

SCORE

RRP→ R2,399 | **Supplier→** Eurobyte | **Website→** www.eurobyte.co.za | **Brand→** SPARKLE



UNDER THE HOOD

NVIDIA uses Samsung BJ1A 1ns BGA RAM rated at 2GHz, so the card is underclocked. Fortunately, PCB quality, power circuitry and other things determine the overclock. If you are willing to spend some time on it, more than 2GHz should be possible (which comes in handy when dealing with higher resolutions or AA).

The 9600GT PCB happens to be the same one that is used on both the 8800GT and the 8800GTS. This not only makes it cheaper to manufacture the cards, but the 9600GT should be able to clock to the same levels as the 8800GTS (which is capable of over 800MHz without any voltage modifications at all).

Right now, this is the best-value-for-money card available on the market.

some overclocking, high detail at 1,280 x 1,204 is playable, but it wouldn't be a performance we would call spectacular by any stretch of the imagination.

In a practical sense, the 9600GT is the one card that performs closest to the incredible 8800GT but costs less (which may make it just cheap enough for those who felt that the price of the 8800GT was too far a stretch from the average price of the 8600GT or HD 2600 XT).

More than the technical wizardry of the 9600GT, the SPARKLE card features built-in HDCP keys and can play protected content over either of the dual-link DVI ports. This means that the card can be used for anything from a home theatre setup to a respectable gaming rig. As for future proofing, it would have been even better if it supported the newer DVI standard or included a DVI to HDMI adapter. That would have completed the package, but in a market that is ultra sensitive to pricing, these additions would probably add too much to the selling price (which would eventually result in the card competing with the 8800GT).

If you're sitting with an SLI motherboard but are unimpressed by the graphics cards out there that can take advantage of SLI, the 9600GT may be the card you want. Two of these cards in SLI will outperform any single graphics card, save for the 9800GX2. Two 9600GTs in SLI will outperform the 8800Ultra and the impressive AMD/ATI HD 3870X2 in every single resolution and every single setting supported by SLI. This represents great value: two of these cards are likely to cost you less than a 3870X2 and most certainly less than an 8800Ultra.

If you're concerned about power consumption, two of these graphics cards won't consume much more power than an 880Ultra and about the same as a single 3870X2. Those who may not be looking at two graphics cards can rest assured that the 9600GT overclocks quite well and is capable of a stunning 750MHz on the core and a 2GHz memory clock. This overclock not only makes the 9600GT faster than a standard 8800GT, but it means that the 9600GT will do well in synthetic tests (a huge bonus for enthusiasts). **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

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Extreme Performance
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Corsair DOMINATOR DHX - for DDR2 & DDR3 Memory
The DOMINATOR family of memory represents the ultimate in performance technology engineering from Corsair. The DOMINATOR was designed to have the highest performing IC maximum over-clocking capability and efficient DHX cooling – all the while being stable and reliable.
Dual-path Heat Xchange
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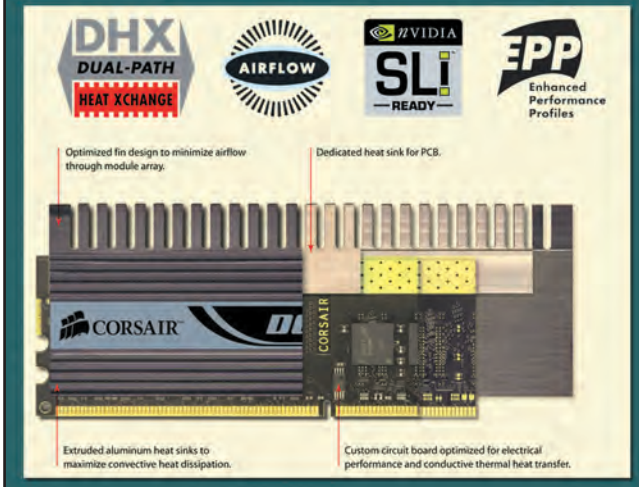

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MSI R3870X2-T2D1G-OC

THIS IS THE SECOND 3870X2 we've had for review. The first was a brilliant card and we are pleased to say that the second one is just as good for the most part. AMD/ATI has been on the right track ever since the release of the HD 3000 series cards. They have not only provided the best Catalyst drivers starting from Catalyst 8.1, but the price of the cards has dropped considerably, making high-performance graphics affordable to more people than ever before.

Just when it seemed that AMD/ATI was on its way out with the less-than-stellar performance of the HD 2900 XT and PRO, the company came back and rescued the situation with the R680 cores, which are based on the original R600 but are a little more efficient, smaller, cooler and cheaper to manufacture.

Seeing how impressive the new cores were, AMD/ATI decided to stick two of them on a single PCB, giving us the most-elegant multi-GPU configuration to hit the market from an IHV. The X2 is the most-powerful, most-convenient multi-GPU setup money can buy. It works on every single motherboard that has a PCI-E 16x slot and it performs very well. There are some titles that have an issue with the card because they're not able to utilise both GPUs on the card, but those are far and few in between, and for the most part the newer Catalyst 8.3 driver fixes this issue.

The impressive thing about the 3870X2 is that it runs much cooler than NVIDIA's previous dual-PCB, dual-GPU, single-connector 7950GX2, which happens to have the same configuration as the 9800GX2. The 3870X2 has all the benefits multi-GPU rendering can bring without the physical drawbacks. AMD/ATI has been smart to make sure that both GPUs have independent memory and GPU clocks (which can be set in the Overdrive part of the Catalyst Control Center).

The performance of the 3870X2 is on par with two individual 3870 cards running in traditional CrossFire mode, but in some instances, the 3870X2 pulls ahead.

The most interesting thing about the 3870X2, however, is that with Catalyst 8.3 it's possible to run interesting combinations of GPUs in the system provided that you have enough PCI Express slots. Catalyst 8.3 not only supports traditional dual-GPU rendering, but you can make use of three or four GPUs. This is the true difference between normal CrossFire graphics and CrossFireX, which has been a mystery of sorts to many ever since the label started appearing on the boxes of the 3000-series cards.

Not content with just knowing that CrossFireX is supported, we tried the technology with two 3870X2 cards and the system picked up four GPUs and enabled CrossFire.

At the time of writing, CrossFireX only worked in Widows Vista - much like NVIDIA's Triple SLI. Given the slightly lower

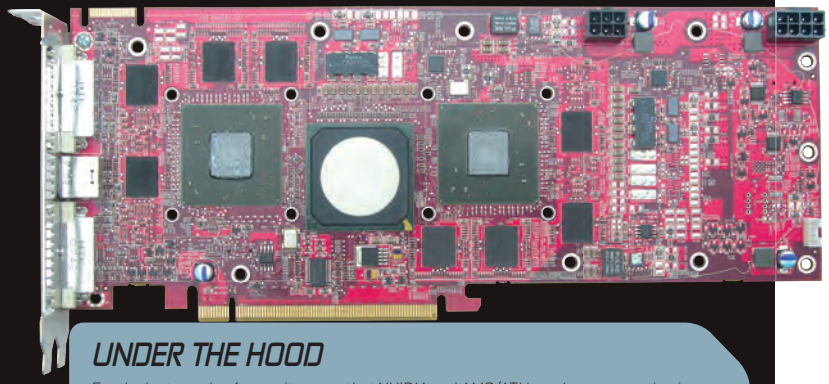
NAG HARDWARE

SPECS

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

SCORE

RRP→ R5,359 | **Supplier→** Pinnacle Micro | **Website→** www.pinnacle.co.za | **Brand→** MSI



UNDER THE HOOD

For the last couple of years it seems that NVIDIA and AMD/ATI have been competing in the process wars more intensely. It's obviously not as grand as the one that Intel and AMD have simply because both AMD/ATI and NVIDIA are Fab-less. Even though both use TSMC to manufacture almost all their GPUs, NVIDIA has chosen to avoid the Low-K process that AMD/ATI has always used for its GPUs, resorting instead to a traditional unstrained lithographic process. This has made sure that the AMD/ATI parts are always clocked higher and for the most part run cooler. The R680 core is much smaller than the competing G92 core or even the G94 core (which has 160 million or so fewer gates). So what we have with the 3870X2 is two GPUs running very cool with the secondary one even under load peaking at a cool 45°C.

A bridge chip is used to enable CrossFire on the card to enable the two GPUs to operate independently of motherboard or chipset support. This bridge chip also controls data flow between the two GPUs. Because of how multi-GPU graphics works in DX9 programs and in particular XP, only 512MB of RAM is available for rendering as data is copied to both memories, which means only 512MB is addressable instead of the total 1GB on the card.

performance Vista has compared to XP (depending on driver version), we expected minimal gains over a single 3870X2 card. However, we achieved a score that was 40% better in 3DMark03, which is excellent given that all current benchmarks still rely heavily on CPU efficiency and frequency. With a sufficiently fast enough CPU, this score could have easily increased by 50%, which would be the expected margin in Windows XP when moving from a single graphics card to two. Synthetic tests (other than 3DMark05, which is the most CPU-centric benchmark in the entire 3DMark series) indicated impressive gains when using four GPUs instead of the normal two that come with the 3870X2.

If we had to count in numbers what four R680 GPUs mean in a single system, we would arrive at an impressive 230GB/sec memory bandwidth, a collective 1,024-bit bus, a 54.4GPixel/sec pixel and Texel fill rate, but most importantly, 1,280 stream processors delivering over 1.5 teraflops of computing power per cycle. These are purely synthetic numbers, but they do help to highlight the kind of computing power that is available with two 3870X2 cards in a system.

The MSI part we used for the quad-CrossFire configuration is clocked higher than reference samples, but the overclock is so small that it hardly made a difference to games or synthetic tests. Clocked at 857MHz, the MSI OC edition is pretty much a standard 3870X2 with a slight boost in clocks to set it apart from the others.

What is different with the MSI card (which is both a blessing and a curse) is that the reference fan speed is 40%, which makes it run cooler than other cards, but this change in the BIOS means that it's not possible to configure the fan speed of this particular model using RivaTuner or other fan-controlling software.

With slight modifications though, fan control can be returned to normal and further clock increases can be achieved.

The AMD/ATI 3870X2 is an excellent card and the MSI OC is given a slight edge with an overclock on clock speed. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

MSI T2D512E-OC 8800GT

RRP→ R2,799 | **Supplier→** Pinnacle Micro | **Website→** www.pinnacle.co.za | **Brand→** MSI

THE G92 CORE THAT powers the MSI 8800GT represents a great leap in performance when compared to the G80-based GeForce 8 cards that preceded it. Not only is the G92 faster because of process shrink, but NVIDIA made further improvements to the copper to make instruction fetch and decode much more efficient. All this makes the G92 the most-efficient graphics-processing core available today.

The MSI 8800GT is much like any other 8800GT: it's a reference model card but has the newer BIOS, which makes the fan spin a little faster. This in turn means better temperatures than the first batch of 8800GT cards, which ran very hot because of the low fan speed. There isn't much to say about the MSI model other than that the relatively modest overclock is appreciated especially in *Crysis*, where the standard GT card is just enough for high detail at 1,280 x 1,204. The MSI OC version makes the whole experience smoother and this allows slightly higher resolutions or even 16x AF (which is usually not recommended for 8800GT cards).

As far as overclocking headroom is concerned, the MSI is like any of the other recent cards: you can get a stable 720MHz on the core and 1,950MHz on the memory with the fan set to 70% or more. This extra overclock looks good in the synthetic tests, but doesn't improve gaming that much as the boost in most games is purely academic – nothing worth getting excited about nor something that will add to the gaming experience, but good to have for the enthusiasts and overclockers.

If you are looking for a new graphics card and the new 9600GT isn't to your liking, the MSI T2D512E-OC is the card to consider. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CORE	G92 (660MHz)
PROCESS	754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (950MHz)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	112

SCORE

COOLER MASTER M1000

RRP→ R2,150 | **Supplier→** Prophecy | **Website→** www.prophecy.co.za | **Brand→** Cooler Master

1,000W PSUS ARE NOT new. This kind of power no longer causes us to go wow, as there's already a 2kW unit available. However, as we always state, the amount of power isn't the most important thing – it's the quality of that power that counts most. As always, a single, powerful 12V rail is better than multiple smaller 12V rails, but finding such power supplies is very hard unless you're willing to spend on PC Power & Cooling products (which are not available locally). What we do have locally, however, is the Cooler Master M1000. This is an upgrade to the previous 1kW model. It features an even better modular system that not only has PCI-E 8-pin support on the two most powerful 12V rails (putting out a respectable 28A per rail), but it also looks good. The remaining four rails deliver 18A, which should be fine for most graphics cards, except highly overclocked high-end graphics cards.

When we tested the Cooler Master M1000, it was able to power everything we threw at it without any issues at all. It even managed to power Intel's Skulltrail with two 8800GT graphics cards without issue. The M1000 is finished in a glossy black with the front of the unit featuring colour-coded connectors. It sounds dull but it looks stunning. Even if Cooler Master had released the exact same PSU as they had before but with this kind of finish, it would be sufficient.

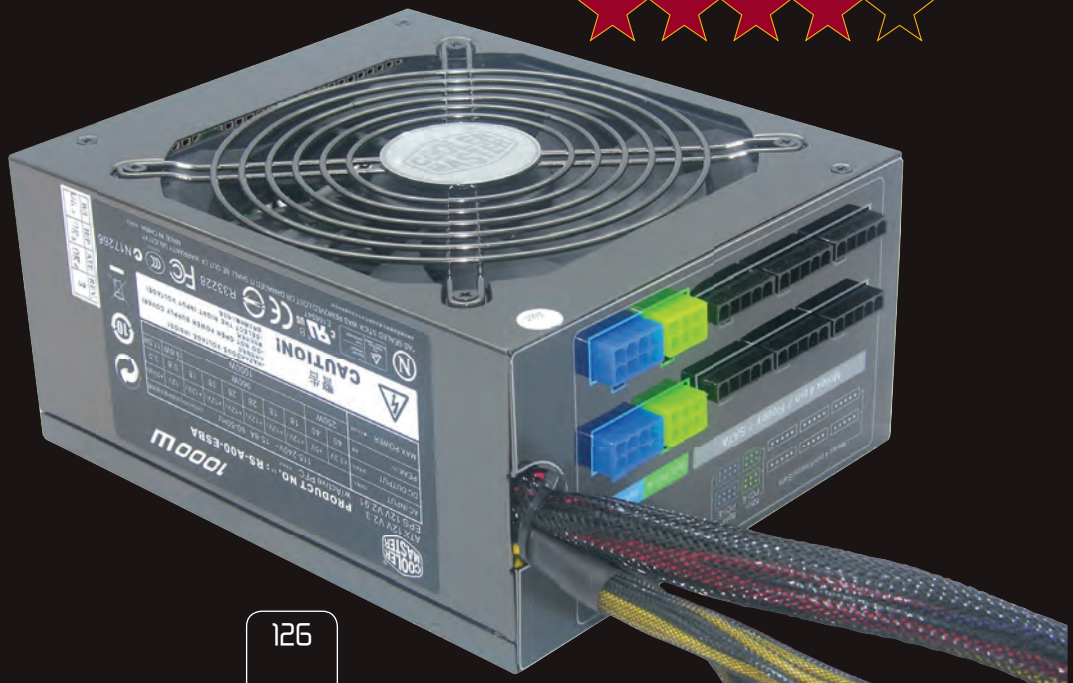
There really isn't anything to fault this unit on: it has ample connectors and supports just about every single standard a PSU should support. The Cooler Master M1000 is one of the better PSUs around. If you need power and need a good-looking PSU, the M1000 is the PSU for you. **NAG**

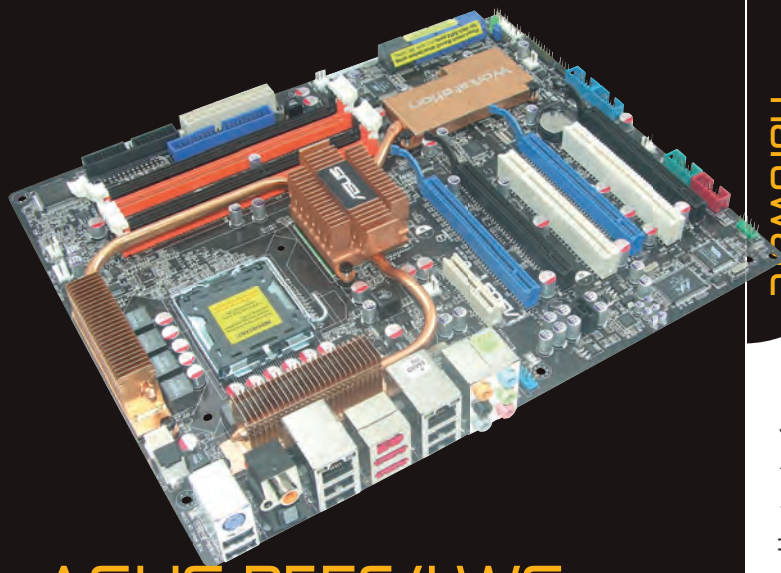
Neo Sibeko

SPECS

TOTAL POWER	1,000W (1.2kW Peak)
12V RAILS	4 x 18A; 2 x 28A
EFFICIENCY	82% continuous (820W)
FEATURES	Quad CrossFire, Quad SLI support, ATX 2.2

SCORE





ASUS P5E64 WS PROFESSIONAL

RRP→ R2,200 | Supplier→ Axiz | Website→ www.axiz.co.za | Brand→ ASUS

THE ASUS P5E64 WS Professional is a bit different than most of the motherboards we review here at *NAG*. It's a 'professional-grade' workstation motherboard, which means... well, we're not really sure what it means.

At first glance, the WS Professional looks like most other X38 chipset boards. At second and third glance, this similarity remains. This is because it's an X38-chipset board, and there's actually relatively little diversity in motherboards based on the same chipset these days. The days when low-end, midrange, high-end, professional, and gaming motherboards were all built around the same chipset are pretty much gone. Intel diversifies the chipset line-up to reduce costs at the low end and provide more features and performance at the high end. So, things like the number of slots, ports and connectors, and feature set are pretty much determined by the selection of the chipset. Since the X38 is currently the top-end 'enthusiast' chipset, the rest of the board's specs are rather predictable.

In this case we have all the top-end goodies: eight SATA ports, two more eSATA ports on the back, tons of USB ports, and four PCI Express 16x slots supporting CrossFire. LiWe were a bit confused as to what constitutes the 'professional' quality of the board. Perhaps it's the serial port breakout, since we can't think of any use for an old-style serial port except obscure things like CAD dongles. Maybe it's the diagnostic card that plugs into the TPM header and gives you a two-digit POST code as well as power and reset buttons. This is useful, but when installed it either sticks past the bottom of the board, or when the right-angle adapter is used, sits perpendicular to the board on the bottom of the case, neither of which is an ideal placement. That this is a separate piece is odd since we've seen other X38 boards that have this feature or even a four-character matrix POST code on the board itself.

Unfortunately, we really started having problems once this board was installed. First, it didn't seem to like our Core 2 Quad 9650, and kept trying to set it to 4.05GHz by default, which was not going to happen with the stock air cooler. We updated the BIOS, and this changed the default clock to somewhere closer to 3GHz but still overclocked by default. In addition, the overclocking settings in the BIOS were both extensive and confusing. It kept trying to overclock our RAM by default, and would set all kinds of strange frequencies even when we just tried to get standard clocks.

This would simply be a nuisance on an overclocker's board, but this claims to be for professional use. Having overclocking options at all is like putting nitrous and a spoiler on an ambulance. It may go faster but that's not necessarily the best idea. Moreover, the fact that it was overclocked and unstable by default and hard to get the system to run appropriate clocks was anything but professional. Therefore, from a professional standpoint, we cannot really recommend this motherboard at all. But if you're trying to sneak enthusiast hardware under the radar as a business expense, perhaps this is the board for you. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X38
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Socket 775 Core 2 Quad/Core 2 Extreme/Core 2 Duo/Pentium Extreme/Pentium D/Pentium 4
MEMORY SUPPORT	4 x DIMMs supporting DDR3 1,800/1,600/ 1,333/1,066/800 (Max. 8GB)
EXTERNAL PORTS	6 x USB, 2 x eSATA, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, HD audio, 1 x FireWire
INTERNAL PORTS	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 1 x IDE, 4 x USB, 1 x FireWire
SLOTS	4 x PCI-E 16x, 1 x PCI-E 4x, 2 x PCI 2.2

SCORE

ZALMAN

Trimon
2D/3D Convertible
LCD Monitor

ZM-M19 - 19" LCD

Main Features
* Ultra clear 2D/3D imaging
* No ghost imaging
* Best choice for 3D media and 3D based applications
* Easy 2D/3D convertibility
* The widest viewing angle
* Rapid response time and high contrast ratio
* Elegant design
* Rotatable (90), Tiltable, High adjustable

ZM-M220W - 22" Wide LCD

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TEAM FORTRESS 2 STRATEGY GUIDE PART 1

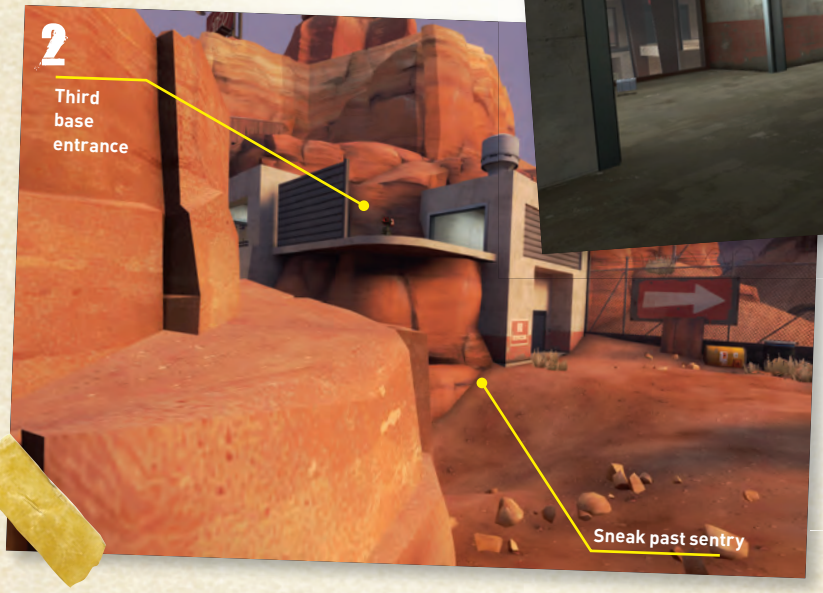
Confidential

BADLANDS

Badlands is the latestt map in the game, and is quite popular. It has a bit more emphasis on vertical movement than the other maps. Because of this, scouts, soldiers, and demomen are the biggest threat as they can get up and down the easiest. The capture points on the spires can be particularly difficult to defend.

POINT 1

Note that you spawn on an upper level in Badlands, whereas most enemies will have to enter from the bottom. This means you can literally get the drop on them, which is crucial for pyros and heavies. The railing near the front of the base can see both entrances, but because the doors close quickly, a turret here may not be as effective as on the ledge close to the capture point.



POINT 2

This ledge is popular for both incoming and outgoing traffic, and most classes can make the jump from the spire to it. Some engineers may build turrets here to defend the spire, but they can be easily picked off by soldiers or demomen, and possibly ignored by pyros and scouts if they run past. This is the only practical entrance to the base on the upper level, so beware of attackers trying to get in here and avoid lower-level defences.

POINT 3

This window overlooking the middle point makes a good sentry location. The window will hide it a bit so the sentry may not be obvious until it has already targeted enemies. Soldiers and demomen will still be able to hit it though. The main problem is that since this point is so far from the primary spawn, it is difficult to get a teleporter, dispenser and turret up here before the central point is captured. If the enemy takes it first, they will likely push forward and keep you from building in this area. Note the big health pack just inside the building. It's one of the few sources of health on the map and both attackers and defenders will want to get hold of it.

POINT 4

Soldiers can jump from this ridge on the left to the top of the spire easily for capturing. It's also useful to scouts. Demomen can actually perform a two-sticky jump from all the way at the back to either the spire top or into the enemy base, depending on air control. A one-sticky jump is possible from the wooden ledge on the right. Sentries have a hard time covering this large area, but keep in mind that sentries in the open can still deter many enemies who only have short-range weapons or those with slow fire times, like pyros, heavies, snipers and scouts. But the first soldier, demoman, or spy to come along will probably make short work of it. Despite several nice ledges, this area is not well suited to sentry defence.

POINT 5

Getting into the final capture point will be difficult if the base is heavily defended by sentries. This is one of the reasons scout rushes are popular on Badlands, as once the defences are up here, it's hard to penetrate. It will probably take the combined effort of several spies, demomen, soldiers and medics to break through. One tactic is to use an über-charge to draw the sentries' fire while a scout runs past and stands on the point. Final points always capture quickly so if there are no defenders blocking the capture, this may work. Also, the point is pretty enclosed by the tube around it, so there may be a blind spot in sentry coverage that doesn't actually allow them to hit a player at the back of the point despite covering all the approaches. A single spy could take it in this case.

PATH OF THE FLAME

The pyro is one of the more difficult classes to master, but mastered, can be a big asset to any team.

The flamethrower is not so much a spray-and-pray weapon as a precision instrument of chaos. Be aware of its short range. Despite the pyro's speed, chasing most classes is a recipe for respawn. You must learn to ambush enemies. If they see you coming, the odds are against you. Also, the flamethrower has a slight lag. If you run sideways, the flame will bend, so learn to lead targets, and listen for the crackling sound that indicates a hit. Also, switching to your shotgun when burning enemies try to run or counterattack from out of range is critical.

The pyro will set enemies (except other pyros) on fire, so use hit-and-fade tactics. This also applies to disguised spies, making you the best spy defence there is. Flame teammates often discourage spies. Burning does about 60 damage over time, but more importantly it will send players running for health. This can disrupt the enemy's group assault. Prioritise medics since preventing them from building up an übercharge or at least using it prematurely is critical to defending.

The most effective pyro strategy is to use surprise and attack from behind or the side. If enemies see you before you get in range, it's better to retreat and try to set up another ambush. Map knowledge is critical, as corners to hide in until an enemy passes by are the most effective spots. For single targets, circle-strafing at close range works best. This can even work on sentries if you can get close enough before they fire. Remember, your flame cone spreads, so if you can approach a sentry around a corner, you may be able to take it down with the spread if you aim carefully. The best tactic if you surprise a group is to spend no more than a second or two on each one, and change targets randomly. This will usually keep them confused and result in the maximum damage. If possible, let a teammate go in first to draw fire and keep their attention off you.

GRAVELPIT

Gravelpit is one of the more interesting map designs. So far, it's the only map that uses a three-point A-B-C capture system. Blue attacks and red defends. Blue must take both points A and B before they can capture the final point, C. This gives the map a fairly predictable flow.

One thing to note is that B is harder to take/easier to defend than A. Many defensive teams will ignore A completely, since the game cannot be won if B is still held. Attacking teams need to take B before defenders can fully entrench, and that may mean ignoring point A until B is taken or the clock runs out. Otherwise, the divided team will have a hard time capturing point B.

POINT 1

If you're on blue, beware when your doors first open after the setup phase. Demomen, soldiers, and scouts can get up into the tunnels may be waiting to ambush you immediately. Expect sticky bombs. It may require someone to sacrifice themselves to clear the bombs and get the team out. If possible, do this and save any über-charges for an immediate push on point B. The best case for blue is if red splits their defense to try and defend A, as this leaves B less defended. The best case for red is if blue rushes A, since that gives them far more time to properly entrench at B, which will then be nearly impossible to capture. Don't rush A. Don't defend A. Leave A alone. Send a single scout or pyro as a decoy, but don't waste a sentry or heavy on it.

POINT 2

Defenders will find many good sentry points around B. They're include in the building, in front of the tunnels attackers come out of, and various places around the map. The front ramp of the building is a popular place for a sentry, with the engineer inside and his dispenser behind. Note that this position may be vulnerable to snipers in the other tunnel, so use the dispenser as a shield.

Getting defenders back to B after respawning is critical to defence on this map. Teleporters are an absolute must. The best placement is inside in the back corner, but if you have multiple engineers, spread teleporters out a bit so they're not all taken out by a single skirmish. Expect lots of grenades and rockets to come in the windows, and beware soldiers and demomen that get on the roof and fire down from above.

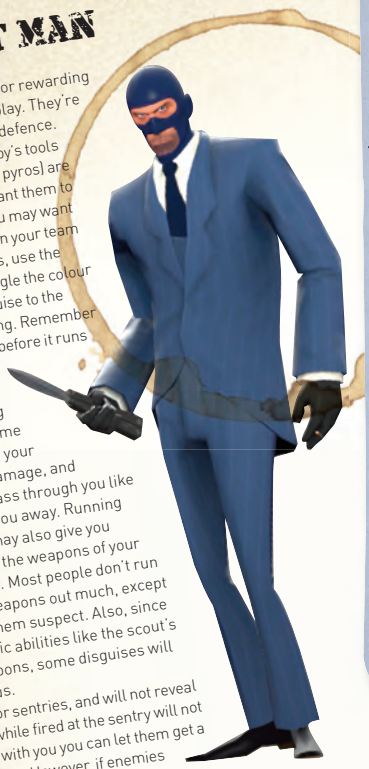
POINT 3

The roof of B is a hotly contested area. Soldiers can jump up from the floor, demomen can jump up from either the ridge from C or the tunnel from blue's spawn, directly to the roof. Scouts can get up by jumping from the big rock. It is possible for an engineer to get on the roof, but it involves building a dispenser on the ramp, standing on it, jump-building a teleporter exit on the awning, teleporting up and building a dispenser on the awning, and then jumping from the dispenser to the roof.

The roof is not as effective a sentry position as the normal placements due to the limited range of sentries. The best placement on the roof is to use it to guard the rear of the building overlooking the entrance from point C, where attackers will try to flank from. However, teleporters and dispensers on the roof could enable red demomen and soldiers to keep attackers away more effectively.

NO. 03
NAME Agent# 79346

SECRET AGENT MAN



The spy is one of the most frustrating or rewarding classes, depending on how well you play. They're essential to overcoming any serious defence.

It's important to use each of the spy's tools effectively. Most enemies (especially pyros) are suspicious. Ideally, you don't even want them to know there's a spy on your team. You may want to disguise them as another class on your team before leaving the spawn. To do this, use the disguise kit and hit – (minus) to toggle the colour of the disguise. Then change disguise to the enemy later while cloaked or hiding. Remember that your cloak can be turned off before it runs out of charge, so conserve it.

Keep in mind that teleporters will leave a glowing trail that gives you away for some time after you use them. Also, your cloak will flicker if you take damage, and enemies will not be able to pass through you like friendlies, which also gives you away. Running around with your knife out may also give you away. Your disguise mimics the weapons of your target, so keep that in mind. Most people don't run around with their melee weapons out much, except engineers, which makes them suspect. Also, since you can't use class-specific abilities like the scout's double jump or their weapons, some disguises will make you more suspicious.

The sapper is useful for sentries, and will not reveal your disguise. Note that while fired at the sentry will not fire, so if teammates are with you you can let them get a shot in to destroy the sentry. However, if enemies see the sapper appear, it will be obvious someone nearby is a spy. If you continually sap a sentry that's being repaired, you will win (eventually). But chances are another enemy will come along first. It is difficult but possible to backstab the engineer and take out the sentry before it kills you, provided the sentry is facing away from you at the time. Keep in mind that jump-crouching can get you on top of sentries or dispensers, and top-stabs often count as a backstab.

NO. 02
NAME Agent# 78962

BUILDING TO VICTORY

The engineer is one of the most interesting and fun classes to play, and the class of choice for those with laggy connections or poor aiming skills. But one must remember that the engineer's main function is support.

This means that a good engineer will always prioritise teleporter and dispenser placement over building a sentry gun. While the sentry is a powerful tool for defence, teleporters are critical on most maps if your team is going to prevail. Also, the dispenser is important for both keeping the team healed and supplying classes like heavies, soldiers, and demomen with ammo. Medics can heal a team, but who heals the medic? Keep this in mind when placing dispensers. Good spots are usually where the team will build up before an assault. If the enemy tries to counterattack, it may be a good idea to build a complete forward base with teleporter, dispenser and sentry.

Sentries are not invulnerable, and finding a good spot requires experience with the map. The red zone when placing it indicates maximum range. Enemies beyond that line will be able to attack it with impunity. Also, the dashed lines indicate the sentry's field of vision. Use your secondary fire to rotate it to get the best possible facing and placement. Rotation also affects the way players face when appearing in a teleporter exit, so rotate those accordingly too. Rotation has no practical effect on dispensers or teleporter entrances.

One of the engineer's best tactics is to place himself behind his sentry with the dispenser at his back. This allows him to continually heal the sentry by hitting it with the wrench, while the dispenser heals him and provides metal to repair the sentry.

Spies are a threat, so be alert. If the spy saps your buildings, kill the spy first if there are no teammates nearby. You can rebuild easy enough. Respawning is a bigger problem as it leaves your equipment vulnerable and the position undefended.

POINT 4

Be aware of the routes from A to B, A to C, and C to B. Attackers may try to flank these routes, and may take out teleporter entrances and teammates running from C to B on their way, especially right after A is captured. Spies can use these routes effectively to get behind either attacking or defending teams.

POINT 5

While there are many possible sentry positions to defend C, one of the best is shown here, on the ramp just to the left of the red spawn. An engineer in the corner next to a sentry and dispenser is very tough to take out. Spies are the best bet, or if a demoman can get in position long enough to place four stickies and detonate the sentry. Even then it can often be quickly rebuilt as the engineer may survive the attack. The sentry is vulnerable from long-range attacks from soldiers and snipers at the A to C entrance and the far side of C. It also doesn't have perfect view of the capture point so it can be evaded. However, it wil lassist in taking out most attackers attempting to climb the tower. **NAG**

TETRIS IN PICTURES

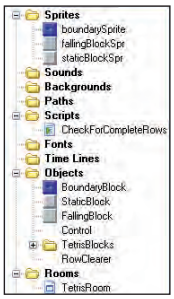
Instead of printing raw source code, like the magazines of yore used to, we're giving you a series of pictures and a challenge. The challenge is to make Game Maker (obtainable on the DVD) look just like these screenshots and you'll have yourself a game.

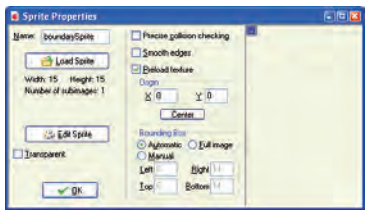
EVER SINCE THIS GAMES in Pictures series started, one game has always been requested above everything else. Anyone finds out you're showing people how to make games step by step and they go "Cool! Make *Tetris* next!", that and this month's cover theme have finally combined to make *Tetris* in Pictures a reality. You've been warned!

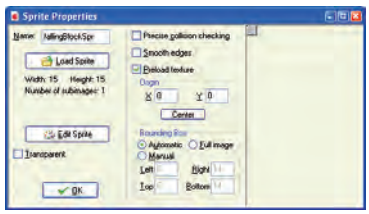
Tetris, besides being the single-most-played game after *Solitaire*, is actually rather complicated... Despite trying to find a way to compress it down to a single feature, we're going to have to bite the bullet and let this one continue on to next month. That said, *Tetris* is a highly rewarding project. Once the game starts coming together, you end up playing it for hours on end. Our hats go off to Alexy Pajitnov for producing such an awesome mechanic.

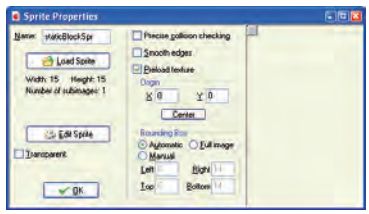
The theory behind this implementation is that *Tetris* blocks are made up of four FallingBlocks, which turn into StaticBlocks when they come to rest at the bottom of the screen or on top of other StaticBlocks. The logic that handles all the rotation, movement, etc. is all in TetrisBlock, which we're saving for next month (because it's nicely complicated) along with the room layout.

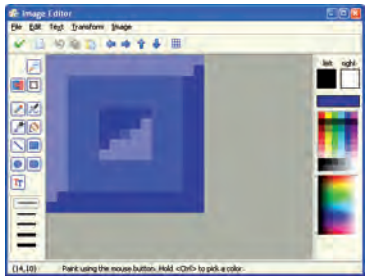
Feel free to try your hand at using the logic and objects provided this month to have a go at adding in your own TetrisBlock and building a finished game! One hint for those who try it: Inheritance is your friend! As always, any requests, questions and even criticisms should be sent towards the helpful people over at **http://www.gamedotdev.co.za**

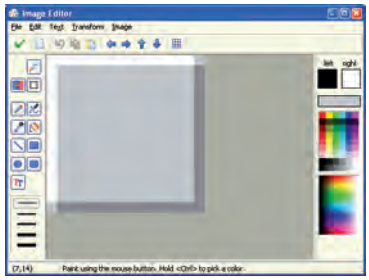


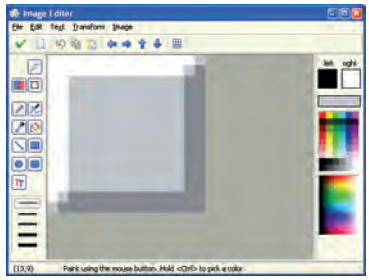


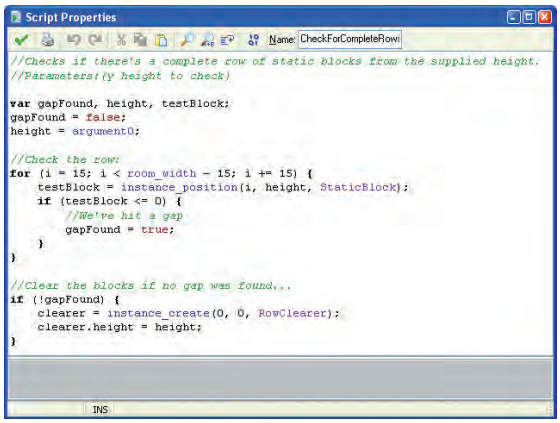


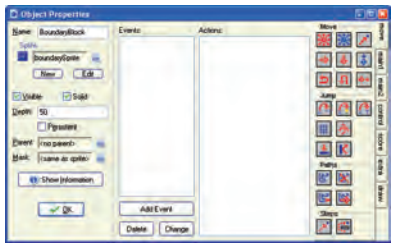


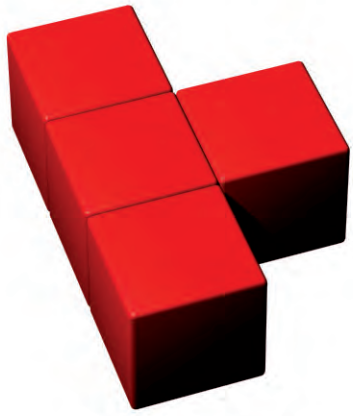


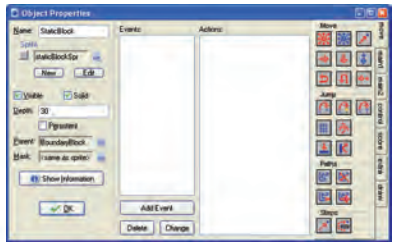


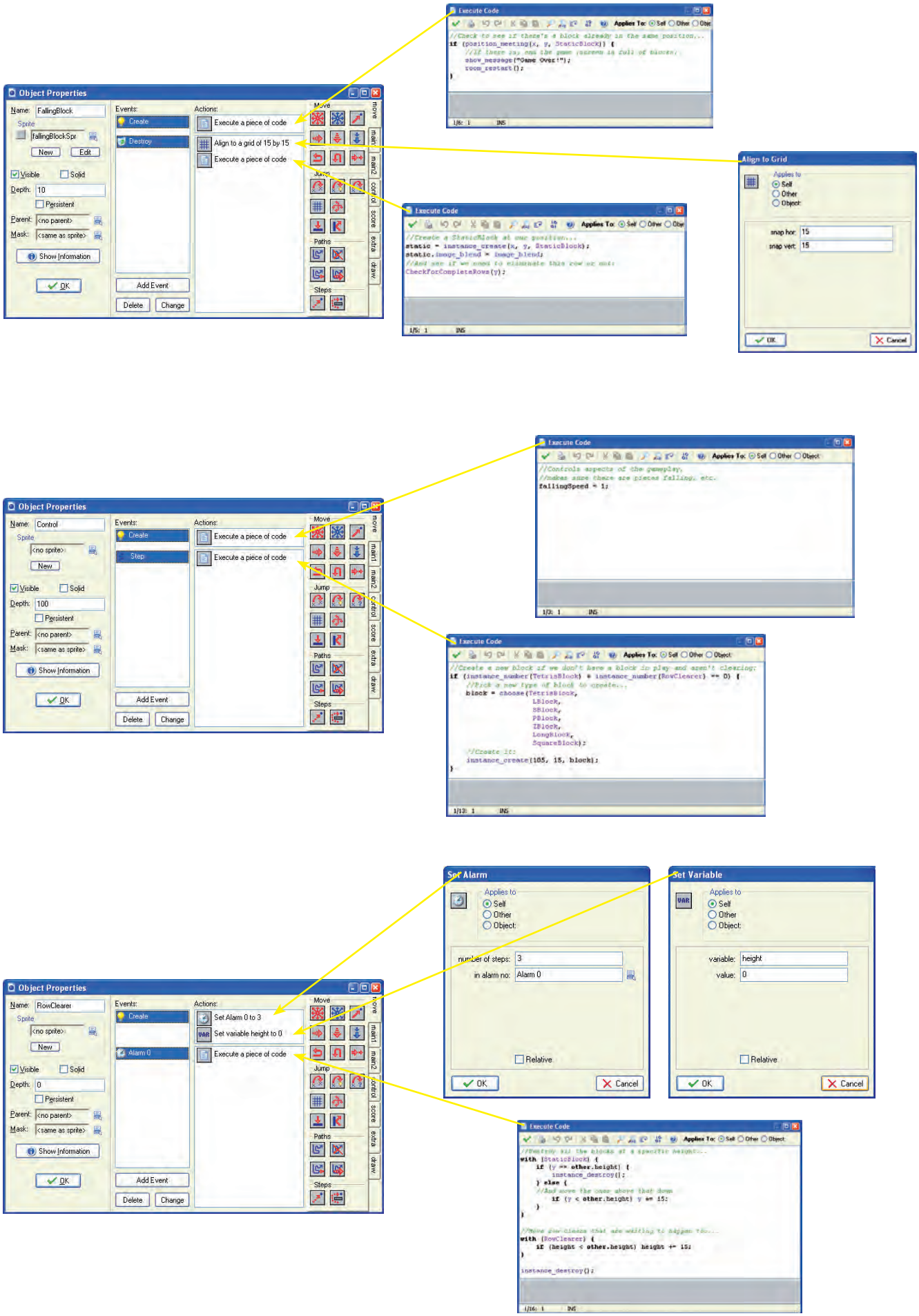











Object Properties
Name: FallingBlock
Sprite
fallingBlockSpr
New
Edit
Visible
Solid
Depth: 10
Persistent
Parent: <no parent>
Mask: <same as sprite>
Show Information
OK
Events:
Create
Destroy
Add Event
Delete
Change
Actions:
Execute a piece of code
Align to a grid of 15 by 15
Execute a piece of code
Move
Jump
Paths
Steps
move
main1
main2
control
score
extra
draw
Execute Code
Applies To: Self Other Object
//Check to see if there's a block already in the same position...
if (position_meeting(x, y, StaticBlock)) {
//If there is, end the game (screen is full of blocks)
show_message("Game Over!");
room_restart();
}
1/6: 1 INS
Execute Code
//Create a StaticBlock at our position...
static = instance_create(x, y, StaticBlock);
static.image_blend = image_blend;
//And see if we need to eliminate this row or not:
CheckForCompleteRows(y);
1/5: 1 INS
Align to Grid
Applies to
Self
Other
Object:
snap hor: 15
snap vert: 15
OK
Cancel
Object Properties
Name: Control
Sprite
<no sprite>
New
Visible
Solid
Depth: 100
Persistent
Parent: <no parent>
Mask: <same as sprite>
Show Information
OK
Events:
Create
Step
Add Event
Delete
Change
Actions:
Execute a piece of code
Execute a piece of code
Move
Jump
Paths
Steps
move
main1
main2
control
score
extra
draw
Execute Code
Applies To: Self Other Object
//Controls aspects of the gameplay,
//makes sure there are pieces falling, etc.
fallingSpeed = 1;
1/3: 1 INS
Execute Code
Applies To: Self Other Object
//Create a new block if we don't have a block in play and aren't clearing:
if (instance_number(TetrisBlock) + instance_number(RowClearer) == 0) {
//Pick a new type of block to create...
block = choose(TetrisBlock,
LBlock,
SBlock,
PBlock,
IBlock,
LongBlock,
SquareBlock);
//Create it:
instance_create(105, 15, block);
}
1/13: 1 INS
Object Properties
Name: RowClearer
Sprite
<no sprite>
New
Visible
Solid
Depth: 0
Persistent
Parent: <no parent>
Mask: <same as sprite>
Show Information
OK
Events:
Create
Alarm 0
Add Event
Delete
Change
Actions:
Set Alarm 0 to 3
Set variable height to 0
Execute a piece of code
Move
Jump
Paths
Steps
move
main1
main2
control
score
extra
draw
Set Alarm
Applies to
Self
Other
Object:
number of steps: 3
in alarm no: Alarm 0
Relative
OK
Cancel
Set Variable
Applies to
Self
Other
Object:
variable: height
value: 0
Relative
OK
Cancel
Execute Code
Applies To: Self Other Object
//Destroy all the blocks at a specific height...
with (StaticBlock) {
if (y == other.height) {
instance_destroy();
} else {
//And move the ones above that down
if (y < other.height) y += 15;
}
}
//Move row clearers that are waiting to happen too...
with (RowClearer) {
if (height < other.height) height += 15;
}
instance_destroy();
1/16: 1 INS

NAG

LONELY HEARTS

Director: Todd Robinson
Cast: John Travolta, James Gandolfini, Jared Leto, Salma Hayek
Genre: Thriller
Rating: 16 (LV)
Run time:103 mins
Score: ★★★★

THIS MOVIE IS BASED on the Lonely Hearts killers, a deadly couple who killed as many as 17 women in the United States in 1949. Their story took the country by storm, not only because of the brutality of some of the murders, but the circumstances around the crimes. This is the second movie adaptation on the duo's tale and also looks at events from the perspective of the two cops who caught them (played by John Travolta and James Gandolfini). Jared Leto plays the slick conman who wooed widows through personal ads and stole their money, while Salma Hayek plays his murderous lover, who instigated the killings due to her incredible jealousy. But both were equally involved, as this movie demonstrates. It's a gritty film-noir thriller with plenty of blunt violence and explicit scenery that go down well with serial killer films these days. But things never go over the top and the cast do a solid job, keeping pace with the story. It's probably not the deepest of crime films and the two perspectives don't actually meet until the killers are caught near the end. Still, a nice bit of Americana to keep you up at night. **JF**

THE DARK IS RISING

Director: David L. Cunningham
Cast: Alexander Ludwig, Christopher Eccleston, Ian McShane
Genre: Adventure
Rating: 10 (V)
Run time: 95 mins
Score: ★★★

A BOY'S LIFE IS TURNED upside down when he learns that he is the last of a group of immortal warriors who have dedicated their lives to fighting the forces of the dark. Sounds awesome, right? If you're 15 it should, or there is something wrong with you. If you're older, this plot should sound very familiar. You may have seen it before with minor alterations, like with kangaroo-style warriors or giant flying furry dogs. Regardless, the movie is based on a five-book series of children's novels by Susan Cooper, from the '60s and '70s. It's like every studio is digging through their boxes to find the weak fantasy books from their childhood to turn into movies ever since *Narnia*. If you're curious: the movie doesn't follow the book very well.

It's not a bad movie and the overall theme of "kid is different, kid gets power, kid hates foster parents, kid blows up things in anger, kid saves world" isn't too terrible, but it falls a little flat. The director's previous works include a war drama, a TV -musical, a history drama and a horror thriller about kids who explore buildings. Not quite Spielberg, but there are worse movies to watch with your kids or little brother.

The extra features include a Viking music video, which is sadly just a regular music video. There are some featurettes, a few deleted/extended scenes and not much else. A special secret bonus feature is watching the movie with the Polish voice track. **MD**

MR. WOODCOCK

Director: Craig Gillespie
Cast: Billy Bob Thornton, Sean William Scott, Susan Sarandon
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 16 (LV)
Run time: 87 mins
Score: ★★

ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE 'this-is-a-lot-of-crap-and-shouldn't-have-even-been-made', good-to-kill-an-hour-or-so-of-doing-nothing-anyway, so-called comedies, *Mr. Woodcock* tells (or rather attempts to tell) the story of (you guessed it) Mr Woodcock, the 'most evil man on the planet cum P.E. teacher. As an overweight seventh grader, John Farley (who battled to even do one pull-up) and his friends were terrorised by their P.E. teacher, the evil genius, Mr Woodcock.

Now, a few years later, John is as fit as a fiddle, well toned, successful and all that jazz and he returns to his hometown (where, of course, he was tormented by the abominable Mr Woodcock). And guess what, he returns to find that his mom, his ever so precious mom, is dating (you guessed it) Mr Woodcock (if you think it's getting a bit predictable and farcical by now, wait till you watch the flick).

As can be expected (read cliché), John vows to do whatever it takes to end this shocking, horrible and vomit-inducing (due to obvious reasons – watch the flick) relationship between sweet mommy and the 'beast'. However, Woodcock has plans of his own and so a battle of wits between John and Woodcock ensues. Watch at your own peril or if you're into this kind of thing, enjoy. **ND**

Look & Listen
For the Fans
NuMetro

THE KINGDOM

Director: Peter Berg
Cast: Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman, Ashraf Barhom
Genre: Action
Rating: 16 (LV)
Run time: 106 mins
Score: ★★★½

A BIT OF TRIVIA: THE largest petroleum producer of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and one of the leading oil exporters in the world, Saudi Arabia has reserves that represent one-fourth of the world total. And obviously, the US has a massive interest (oil, oil, oil – oh precious black gold) in The Kingdom (as Saudi Arabia is called in this film).

On a sunny, hot day in a secure compound in Saudi Arabia, normality turns into chaos as a group of terrorists gain entrance to the compound, mow down Americans (what will an action flick cashing in on 'The War on Terror' feature other than AMERICANS?) and detonate two massive car bombs, killing hundreds. Because the US government (doesn't it always) doesn't trust the Saudis and their investigative skills (among others), an elite (it's an elite this or that always sent to assist?) FBI counter-terrorism team is sent to The Kingdom to assist the Saudis in investigating the breach in security, the subsequent attack and finding and stopping the maniac behind the attack. And the team only has five days to wrap it all up.

The pace of *The Kingdom* is rather slow, the usual stereotypes are as clear as Saudi daylight and the acting is passable. Oh, and *The Kingdom* features a terrific shoot-out scene inside and outside a building. **ND**

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

Director: Guillermo del Toro
Cast: Eduardo Noriega, Marisa Paredes, Federico Luppi, Fernando Tielve, Íñigo Garcés, Irene Visedo
Genre: Thriller
Rating: 16 (LSV)
Run time:108 mins
Score: ★★★★

THE FIRST THING YOU need to know is that this movie is in Spanish with English subtitles, so as you might expect, it's not your usual ghost saying, 'boo' and the cheerleader taking off her clothes kind of thing. Set at the end of the Spanish civil war, a twelve-year-old orphan, Carlos, arrives at the Santa Lucia School and begins unravelling the dark history of the orphanage while he adjusts to his new life. *The Devil's Backbone* is really a ghost story that spends most of its screen time demonstrating that the crudeness of humanity and the trials of war far outweigh any perceived danger from supernatural sources. Director Guillermo del Toro is a master at taking the ordinary and presenting it as extraordinary: the drab stone walls enclose an unexploded bomb, the starkness of the dormitory is the perfect setting for ghostly apparitions and all the characters are very real and very flawed. The true stars of this movie, however, are the young boys. Besides the two main characters, all the smaller roles are directed and played to perfection and despite their youth, each of these actors gets it across that although they're still kids, the ravages of war and the loss of their parents are a constant reminder as smiles fade quickly and the dormitory chatter is of a more grown-up nature. As this tragic story plays out, the characters evolve and mature while darker motivations are uncovered, and finally the sad truth is revealed. Everything is so well played and timed that the climax of the move is satisfying and elegant. In more good news, the reviewed DVD [the special edition version] is packed with extra features including behind the scenes footage, deleted scenes and all the other goodness you'd expect to find in a quality

PLATOON: THE DEFINITIVE EDITION

Director: Oliver Stone
Cast: Charlie Sheen, Tom Berenger, Willem Dafoe
Genre: War
Rating: 18 (LV)
Run time: 115 mins
Score: ★★★★★

SO, YOU DON'T OWN *Platoon* yet. It's probably not going to disappear any time soon: in three years it will be 25 years old. Or perhaps you've not seen *Platoon*, Oliver Stone's war film based in Vietnam. Putting his own experiences and aggressive filmmaking together, he created one of the more striking films in the Vietnam genre, nicely weaved with a story of betrayal and revenge. It's also about the loss of innocence, which is pretty much the running message from the other war films from that period anyway. If anything, it has actors like Willem Dafoe, Tom Berenger, Charlie Sheen, Forrest Whitaker and even a very young Johnny Depp in it. This Definitive Edition is really just a two-disc set with a standard documentary, some extras and the film itself. Thus, it's not radically different from the normal two-disc set (which is becoming a bit rare again), except, it comes in a nice metal case and costs the same as a normal DVD. So unless you are willing to pay for an expensive collector's edition, this is not a bad buy. Oh, and *Platoon* is worth it. But that should go without saying. **JF**

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: RAZOR

Directors: Félix Enríquez Alcalá, Wayne Rose
Cast: Edward James Olmos, Mary McDonald, Katee Sackhoff, Tricia Helfer, Stephanie Chaves Jacobsen
Genre: Action/Sci-Fi
Age Restriction: 13 (LV)
Run time: 99min
Score: ★★★★

JUST FOR THE RECORD, not all *NAG* staff members are tree-loving *Lost* bunnies. The majority of us also enjoy *Battlestar Galactica*, one of the best TV series to have been released in the last couple of years. *Battlestar Galactica* tells the story of humans from a different galaxy than our own fleeing their home planets after a devastating Cylon attack. Only a few survived the attack and it's up to the crew of the *Battlestar Galactica* to find the survivors a new home – a planet called Earth.

Razor tells the story of how the *Battlestar Pegasus* survived the Cylon attack from the point of view of career-minded officer, Kendraw Shaw (who served on the Pegasus). While onboard the Pegasus, Shaw became totally loyal to Admiral Kane, the ship's hard-as-nails commander. Kane, later killed by a Cylon held captive on the Pegasus, became a role model for Shaw, and slowly but surely Shaw was transformed into a 'Razor' (a tool of war).

Razor is an action-packed sci-fi romp with an excellent cast, acting and plot. If you love *BG* or would like to find out what *BG* is all about, then *Razor* is for you. In the meantime, we're counting the days until the fourth series of *BG* starts airing in the US. **ND**

RATAOUILLE (TWO DISC SET)

Director: Brad Bird
Cast: Patton Oswalt, Brad Garrett, Janeane Garofalo
Genre: Animation, Comedy, Family
Rating: PG
Run time: 107 mins
Score: ★★★★★

REMY (A RAT) DREAMS of being a chef (in Paris) after being inspired by the philosophy of a legendary chef (who is dead). Remi hooks up with garbage-boy Linguini and together they become the Frankenchef: a being of incredibly culinary power.

As young as the company is, in retrospect, Pixar already has a reputation that borders on legendary. Every single movie they produce has been solid gold or in the case of non-fans of a specific movie (like *Cars*), decent-enough *faux* gold. From the Director of their last *solid* gold, *Incredibles*, Brad Bird gets another notch in his oddly empathic style of storytelling. *Ratatouille* is a movie about not just following your dreams but understanding why such dreams are important in the first place.

The double-disc Set comes in embossed foil (like the *Nemo* two-disc set) and looks awesome. The extras are, quite truthfully, delicious. There is a making-of featurette that forgoes the usual and instead makes comparisons between acclaimed Chef Tomas Keller and Brad Bird. It's not as aggrandising as it may sound- just interesting for the parallels.

There is also a new animated short done in the style of the ending credits of the movie, imploring humanity to love rats and hate fleas. The 'Lifted' animated short from the theatrical release is also included, along with a few videos on the geektech behind the movie as well as character profiles and a reel of "Do they really eat that?" style stuff. **MD**

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DAY WATCH

Director: Timur Bekmambetov
Cast: Konstantin Khabensky, Mariya Poroshina, Vladimir Menshov, Galina Tyunina, Viktor Verzhbitsky, Zhanna Friske, Dmitry Martynov
Genre: Thriller/fantasy
Rating: 13 (V)
Run time: 146 mins
Score: ★★★★

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, the conflict between light and dark came to such a fever pitch, that it was decided by the highest powers that a truce needed to be called, or all life would perish. And so the terms of a treaty were drawn up, whereby the forces of light would hold sway over the day, and those of dark over the night. Each would police the other's activities, to ensure that neither side acted 'unfairly', with the light side patrolling the sunless hours with the Night Watch, and the dark checking on the light during the day with the Day Watch. If you have been looking for a movie that doesn't conform to the Hollywood mould, then you should take a look at this story, which begins with *Night Watch* (*Nochnoy Dozor*, in the original Russian) and concludes (or does it?) with *Day Watch* (*Dnevnoy Dozor*). These films are best described as surreal, action packed, and somewhat macabre and dark, with a smattering of twisted humour. Some scenes are best described as cinematic poetry, conveying atmosphere and emotion. As mentioned above, these films (and it would be unfair to comment on the second one in isolation, as it is the second part of a longer story) are a welcome change from Hollywood fare, while not necessarily crossing over entirely into the 'art film' category. In brief, the story deals with this eternal struggle, which again climaxes, this time in contemporary Moscow, taking place 'behind the scenes' of day-to-day life. It borrows from Russian folklore, and introduces the concept of 'the Gloom', a spiritual dimension parallel to ours, which is inimical to humans. The "Others" are humans that have somehow become more than human, and have "magical" abilities, and they are aligned with the light or the dark. But this choice is individual, and not influenced by factors such as parentage, for instance, meaning that a "light Other" parent could conceivably have a "dark Other" offspring. As well as the feature film itself, the disc contains a trailer and a lengthy 'making of' reel. **AJ**

GROUNDHOG DAY
(15TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION)

Director: Harold Ramis
Cast: Bill Murray, Andie MacDowell, Chris Elliott
Genre: Romantic Comedy
Rating: All Ages
Run time: 97 mins
Score: ★★★★½

I WONDERED, BEFORE SETTLING DOWN to write this, whether, to do this movie justice, I should watch it several times in succession. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this classic, it deals with an ambitious but largely unrecognised TV weatherman (played by Bill Murray), who is tasked, every year, with covering some obscure small town's celebration of Groundhog Day. The proceedings are quaint and, to the weatherman, utterly ridiculous. He despises his enforced annual pilgrimage to this backwater, and wishes most of all for it be over with as quickly as possible. Alas, this year, this is not to be the case: a blizzard blows in, and he is forced to spend another night there with his television crew. When he wakes up in the morning, he is puzzled to find that everyone else either thinks it's Groundhog Day again, or is messing with him. To his horror, he soon (the 'following' morning) discovers that he is stuck in a time loop: this day is repeating itself, but only he is aware of this fact, reliving it over and over. He ends up exploring a variety of ways to spend this day, but I shan't spoil it for you. Suffice it to say, that Bill Murray's dry, wry humour, coupled with the bizarre underlying premise make this a must watch, even if you've seen it before! This special DVD also includes a wealth of bonus material, including deleted scenes (many of which would have portrayed the protagonist in a somewhat darker, more sinister light) and extensive interviews and commentary. Trivia fact: the basic concept introduced in this film has been adopted and explored in many sci-fi TV shows since, including: *Farscape*, *Stargate SG-1*, and *Star Trek*. **AJ**

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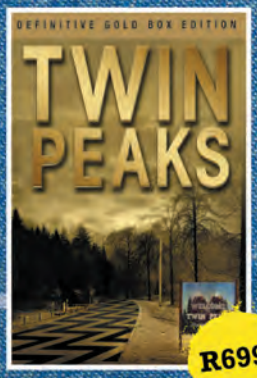

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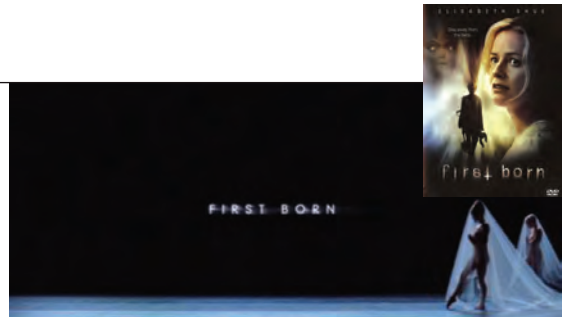
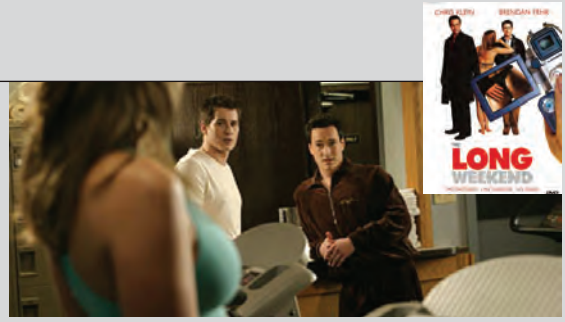
FIRST BORN



Director: Isaac Webb
Cast: Elisabeth Shue, Steven Mackintosh
Genre: Horror
Rating: 13
Run time: 95 mins
Score: ★

A DANCER FALLS PREGNANT AND happily awaits the new arrival in her life. Her husband is very supportive. They are financially sound and the future couldn't be better. But as the birth grows nearer, she starts feeling more anxious, growing anxious at strange problems that keep showing up. After the child is born, it gets worse and she starts to get suspicious that all is not well. The creepy babysitter her husband hired isn't helping her suspicions either. Eventually she starts going in a downward spiral of fear and delusion. This doesn't make for much of an interesting story no matter how you'd watch it. Unlike horror films that exploit this theme of 'new mother anxiety', *First Born* is really just about watching a rather annoying character become more and more annoying. She freaks out at little things and you can't help but feel she should visit the medicine cabinet more often. Boring stuff and a dull script. There's nothing really interesting about this film, except maybe some of the shots. Hell, even the box art isn't accurate about the movie's content. **JF**

THE LONG WEEKEND

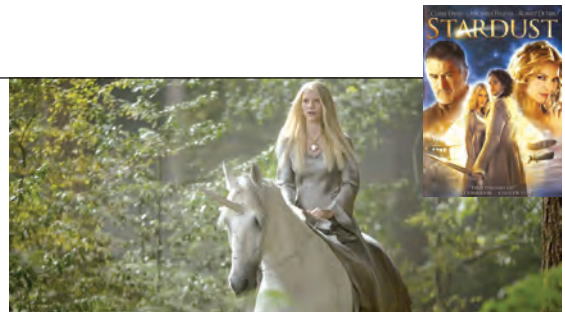


Directors: Pat Holden
Cast: Chris Klein, Brendan Fehr
Genre: Comedy
Age Restriction: 16 (LNS)
Run time: 87 mins
Score: ★★

ED IS A BIT of a geek. As a kid he started to videotape everything and anything. Over the ears he buildt up an impressive collection of video bloopers, like the stuff that gets sent to gag shows. Cat attacks baby in funny way, etc. His older brother, Cooper, is an aspiring actor, but really just a slacker. Still, he loves the ladies and they (apparently) love him. So when Ed finds his girlfriend cheating on him, Cooper decides to cheer the man up on Ed's birthday weekend and help him pick up women. Alas, Ed really can't: he needs to get an ad to his agency by Monday or he loses his job. Hilarity ensues!

This is really not a bad film. Well, it's not *really* bad. Really. It makes you appreciate how hard it is to do comedy and other stuff will definitely seem funny. At least *The Long Weekend* tries hard enough, but the jokes are really stale or predictable. It probably tries too hard and it tries anything that might work. Sure, there is some nudity and a bunch of early teens might get off on it, but if you have to do away with sophistication, at least make sure your gags are funny. **JF**

STARDUST



Directors: Matthew Vaughn
Cast: Charlie Cox, Claire Danes, Michelle Pfeiffer, Robert De Niro
Genre: Adventure
Age Restriction: 10V
Run time: 124 mins
Score: ★★★★★

WHEN A LAD JUMPS across a wall that separates his Earth-bound village with a magical land on the other side, he hooks up with a local crumpet and gets it on. Nine months later his son arrives at the wall and he raises the baby, who in turn become a young lad who also jumps the wall,this time to find a falling star for a girl he's wooing. Alas, the star in this magical world is a young woman, who he decides to take back to the girl. But a witch is also after the star girl: her heart can give longer life and beauty.

You can strap yourself in for this one: it's worth the ride. All too often superficial fantasy movies tend to play too much to one audience, either the kids or teenage girls. But *Stardust* manages to strike a more universal tone. On top of that, it manages to pull of fantastical without being too camp. Yet, it's not all that serious (and certainly no serious *Narnia*, but the special effects are well on par). It's pretty much a good fairy tale, with a bit more grit and a lot of humour. And Robert de Niro in a dress. Good stuff. **JF**

TOMBSTONE: HISTORY OF THE UNDERTAKER

Directors: Various
Cast: Big, sweaty men
Genre: Sport
Age Restriction: 18
Run time: 547 mins
Score: ★★★★

AMONGS THE BIG NAMES in pro wrestling today, The Undertaker stands pretty tall. The professional wrestler emerged at the start of the Nineties and steadily built a strong fan base around his anti-hero persona. People love the powerful bad guys and Undertaker has delivered a lot to show why he is one of the most feared opponents in the ring. His real name is Mark William Calaway and he started way back in 1984 on World Class Championship Wrestling before joining World Championship Wrestling in 1989. Then Calaway signed up with the then-WWF and the rest is history.

But that is not the kind of stuff you will learn in this collection. Instead, *Tombstone* illustrates Undertaker's long history with the WWE, starting with his early matches and working through some tremendous ones. Basically it's a highlights package featuring his best matches, starting with The Undertaker versus Hulk Hogan in 1991, working its way through the emergence of the Buried Alive, Casket and Last Ride matches, exploring a memorable set of feuds with Mankind, the introduction of Kane, Undertaker vs. Undertaker, all the way through a whole host of really great matches. Yes, it includes the match where Undertaker sends Mankind off a cage and through a table. This doesn't move its scope outside of the Undertaker matches and storylines, but it does go far to show why he is one of the most popular stars in the industry. **JF**

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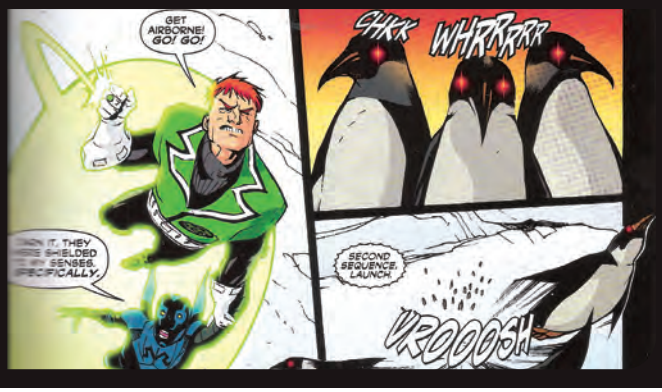
Written by Clive Burmeister

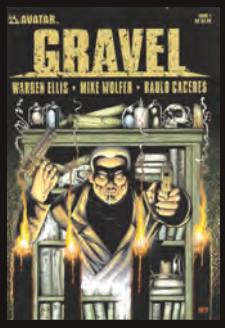
BLUE BEETLE
(VOL. 3): REACH FOR THE STARS

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: DC
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: R134.95

A TEENAGER NAMED JAIME REYES is the new Blue Beetle, and as he struggles to understand all of his strange new abilities, he finds himself in the middle of an alien invasion, and he's the only one who can see it happening. His world is turned upside down as he faces off against this new foe and their agents, while his own personal life is also going through a string of upheaval and drama. Strangest of all, some of the world's top superheroes look to him as their equal, and have faith in his abilities and personality, much more faith than Jaime has in himself. But when heroes like Green Lantern, Guy Gardner, the Teen Titans, and even Superman begin to believe in Jaime, he learns to face his doubts and embrace the mysterious scarab which has fused with his spine to bring him such power.



GRAVEL #1



Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Avatar Press
Writer: Warren Ellis
Artist: Raulo Caceres
Price: R39.95

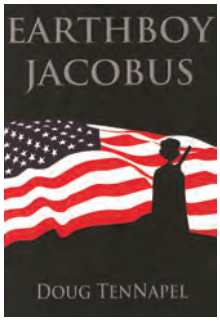
OCCULT DETECTIVE WILLIAM GRAVEL is on a mission to recover all the pages of an ancient manuscript known as the Sigsand. He journeys to the small town of Langton Green where some strange occurrences have the local inhabitants mystified as to the state of their lands, as plants die and birds fall dead from the sky, but the soldier-magician William Gravel sees the magical corruption spewing from the earth, which brings him one step closer to his goal of recovering the Sigsand. *Gravel* is a fast paced, action packed, violent and bloody cocktail with a perverse narrative and street-hard script. The artwork seems to complement this gritty tale in an inspired fashion, giving life to the demons and gore through which the story ploughs in a remarkably descriptive way, so that the journey through this dark plane of existence is, even to the more sheltered among us, entirely easy to imagine.

JTHM: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Slave Labor Graphics
Writer: Jhonen Vasquez
Artists: Jhonen Vasquez
Price: R199

AS ALWAYS, WE HAVE to draw a line in the world and declare the following: either you know *Johnny The Homicidal Maniac* or you don't. The creation of Jhonen Vasquez, who was also responsible for *Invader Zim*, *JTHM* has a long history among cult comic readers. Johnny's insanely depressive thoughts combined with unspeakable murders and worse (all the nice things you'd associate with a homicidal maniac), combined with the sketchy but heavy line art, not to mention the weird humor and even stranger stories, have created a big following for the series. This collection brings all of the *JTHM* comics together, as well as several really early *JTHM* strips, sketches, commentary by Vasquez on the early strips and *JHTM*'s evolution, plus more! Let's also not forget *JTHM* stalwarts Happy Noodle Boy and Squee. Hate it!

EARTHBOY JACOBUS



Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Image Comics
Writer: Dough TenNaple
Artists: Dough TenNaple
Price: R179

"CHIEF EDWARDS RETIRES FROM the Modesto Police Department a lonely man. On his way home, he hits a flying whale with his car, opening the beast's mouth to find a boy from a parallel universe named Jacobus".

This graphic novel reads like a giant science-fiction *Calvin and Hobbs* epic minus the tiger: big expressive panels with swift-moving action and apothegmatic dialogue. There is a strong anti-religion theme so if that isn't kosher, be sure to avert your eyes or it will offend your sensibilities.

More importantly: Dough TenNaple created *Earthworm Jim* (famous videogame character and later toy line and cartoon series). He was an animator on *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes: The Animated Series*. He created the game *The Neverhood* while working for Dreamworks. He's written and illustrated several graphic novels, children's books and cartoons. But more importantly, he created *Earthworm Jim*!

Comics, Graphic Novels supplied by outer limits (011) 482-3771
www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

PROJECT SUPERPOWERS #0

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Dynamite Entertainment
Writer: Jim Krueger
Artist: Carlos Paul
Price: R9.50

WORKING WITH LEGENDARY COMIC artist Alex Ross on the plot of *Project Superpowers*, Jim Krueger writes a tale of heroism and betrayal, which follows a classic-styled American superhero from his days fighting against Hitler in World War II, to his present day moral struggle with mistakes he made in his past. The story is well written, with intriguing and detailed characters, and a plot deep enough to have somewhere to drive at past the first issue. Alex Ross, who is world renowned for his beautifully painted and realistic artwork, also does the covers for this series, along with other famous artists doing alternate covers. Carlos Paul did an amazing job with the interior artwork as well, creating an attractive comic that you will find difficult to put down.

X-MEN (LEGACY) #208

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Mike Carey
Artist: Various
Price: R27.50

FOLLOWING THE RESCUE OF the first mutant born since M-Day from kidnappers, Charles Xavier is tragically shot in the head during a battle by Bishop, an X-Men traitor. Xavier's dying body is snatched away by a mutant with time-altering powers and brought to an unlikely source, who is trying his best to save Xavier's life. But as the professor struggles to face the reality in his gale of confused memories, his recovery begins to look less and less likely. This issue is the beginning of a new story arch in the long-running X-Men title, and if you haven't been collecting it, this is as good a point as any to jump in. Focusing on clips, memories from Xavier's past, regarding the *X-Men*, this issue gives the reader a lot of background, as well as insight to the character of Professor Xavier himself, and the moral struggles and power-related pressures through which he must constantly battle and guard against. This issue will mark a turning point for many things in the *X-Men* universe, but we will just have to wait and see what form these changes and revelations will take.

SPIDER-MAN: THE OTHER

Format: Graphic Novel (Crossover Collection)
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Writer: Peter David, Reginald Hudlin, J. Michael Straczynski
Artists: Mike Deodato, Jr., Pat Lee, Mike Wieringo
Price: R249

ORIGINALLY A 12-PART CROSSOVER plot running from October 2005 to January 2006, this graphic novel combines the entire arc into one book. Interestingly enough, the first five chapters follow the Kübler-Ross model of the stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. It's a grand plot that really tries to bring real weight and character to the *Spider-Man* universe. Ironically, by having the fictional character confront his own inevitable demise, Peter confesses to Aunt May and Mary Jane that he is dying, then starts both 'dealing' with the situation while simultaneously rebelling against it. Spider-Man does die, but much like *The Death and Return of Superman* there is a lot more to the tale than first impressions may suggest. It's not all dour, because essentially it's still the same wise-cracking Spider-Man who needs to think of a comeback to being 'Royally Screwed'.

BOOSTER GOLD

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: DC Comics
Writer: Geoff Johns & Jeff Katz
Artists: Dan Jurgens & Norm Rapmund
Price: R 32.00

***BOOSTER GOLD* STARTS OFF** much like any other superhero comic, mixing tons of superheroes from the stable's universe and featuring plenty of spandex. But it doesn't take long for this new series to assert why it is different. First of all, it's rather absurd. Booster Gold is another older superhero pulled out of the cobwebs. He was initially a member of the Justice League back in the Eighties, though the show-boating man from the 25th century didn't make a lot of friends. In this new return, Booster Gold tries to get back into the JL, but instead he ends up with a Time Master and has to chase down a stolen special costume that allows time travel. Basically, he polices the time/space continuum, so when Superman suddenly isn't born or Wonder Woman suddenly becomes a guy, he goes back to correct someone's intentional fiddling. The humour is pretty dry and *Booster Gold* has a lot of fun instead of taking itself seriously. In other words, it's a nice take back to when stories covered in spandex weren't such intense melodramas and is a nice change to what's on the shelves.

Raven's Loft

by Alex Jelagin

Knowledge is power!

MANY OF YOU HAVE heard this old adage, and it's particularly relevant in *Magic: The Gathering*. The game presents us with a combination of visible information, such as what is in play on the table and what is in players' graveyards, and invisible information – what your opponent is holding in hand, and what cards are in players' libraries. The more you know about the current game state, the better your chances of making correct decisions. Conversely, the more information you can withhold from your opponent, the more likely it is that he or she will make an uninformed play.

MANAGING INFORMATION: OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

The easier of the two types to manage is hidden information, because it's usually a simple matter to keep unseen that, which is unseen. Needless to say, keep your hand to yourself, but also manage your facial expressions: work on your poker face for starters, and then later you may work on manipulating your 'tells'. ("Tells" is the term given to the subtle clues of body language that give away your excitement or apprehension, specifically as pertaining to card games such as poker and *Magic*.) Relatively few players can read tells, and usually only after getting to know a player well enough to figure out their tells. However, this is very 'higher-grade' material – the kind of stuff that even high-level poker players struggle to get right!

One of the keys to making your opponent think you have something in hand, other than what he or she thinks you do, is 'representing' or bluffing. This means doing something that would be consistent with other cards in hand to those you hold. For example, when playing blue, in the early game you may choose not to play a two-casting-cost creature in order to keep two blue mana open to make your opponent wonder whether you have a counter spell in hand; and you might do that regardless of whether you do! Just the thought that you may be holding a Rune Snag or such is often enough to deter a player from risking a worthwhile card. Another example is attacking with a 2/2 into a 3/3 or 4/4. As long as you have untapped green or white mana, your opponent will often assume that you're holding some sort of combat trick in hand, and choose not to block. This is a dangerous gambit though, particularly against weaker players who might not think of the possibilities, and block based entirely on what is on the board. Furthermore, an experienced player may notice a tell, informing him or her that you are bluffing.

Whenever possible, try not to make 'transparent' plays (plays that give away something about what you're holding, by making sense only in one set of circumstances), except of course where it's to your advantage to let your opponent know (for psychological reasons, for example). In addition, over-committing resources to the table, as well as over-extending you and making you vulnerable to certain cards, also turn your 'grip' (your hand) into an open book. Before making a play, take a moment to consider whether it's truly necessary, or whether it may be better to keep your opponent guessing. The more cards you are holding in hand, the more variables you are presenting, and the less confidently your opponent can play. For example, let us say (again!) that you are playing blue, and are holding a card in your hand (it may be a counter spell or perhaps something else). You draw your card for the turn, and see that it's a land. Now, instead of plopping that land onto the table, you should rather hold it in your grip (assuming that, by this stage of the game, you already have enough lands in play that one more or less will not make a difference). Why? Because now your opponent no longer has the luxury of playing two spells with the confidence that one will resolve (dismal failure notwithstanding!). Now your opponent reasons that both of your cards might be counter spells, and may opt to wait until he or she has three cards in hand, whereupon you draw your next card and add it to your grip, once again making your opponent wonder.

Managing visible information is a more subtle matter, and one that goes hand-in-hand with managing the hidden variety. What you put onto that table speaks volumes to the trained observer about what you are holding or, often and more importantly, what you are **not** holding. There are no simple lessons here: this is a matter of experience. The best advice I can offer is to suggest that, as always, you pause before every play and ask yourself whether the move you are contemplating will have the impact that you desire, and whether it's strictly necessary. Also, attempt to try to divine your opponent's hand – he or she will be doing the same! Every time your opponent makes a play, think about it and ask yourself what the motivation might be. Often, it will be obvious enough: a turn 1 Llanowar Elves is a creature, and it accelerates the player's mana, for example, and a turn 2 Imperious Perfect suggests that inflated elves will be coming around to pay you visits. Other times it may be unclear why a player did something or, even more tellingly, why they did **not** do something.

In addition, sometimes puzzling plays are made for exactly that reason: to puzzle the opponent and to unnerve him or her with this unexpected and unexplained gambit. This is quite an important tool in your arsenal to keep your opponent off balance. However, don't overdo it. Often the unexpected play may not be the optimal one, thereby degrading your game position. And if the unexpected becomes your norm, then that makes you predictable. **NAG**

> The more you know about the current game state, the better your chances of making correct decisions. Conversely, the more information you can withhold from your opponent, the more likely it is that he or she will make an uninformed play.

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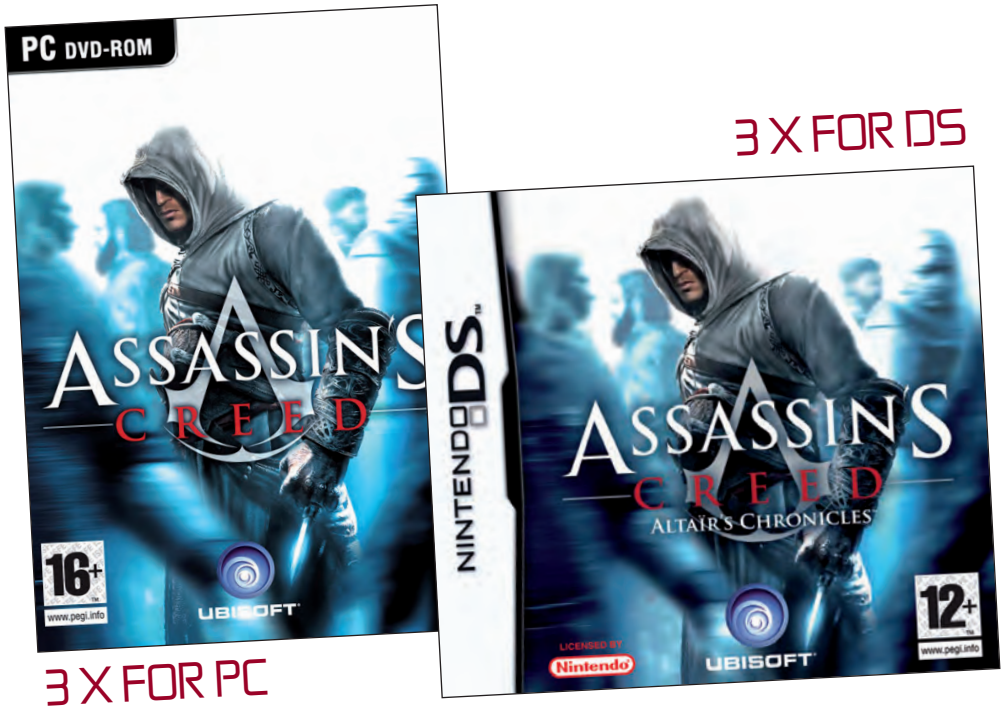

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Six lucky subscribers will win a copy of Assassin's Creed for Xbox 360 or PC, courtesy of Megarom

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CHEATS, TIPS AND EASTER EGGS

DISCLAIMER: All cheat codes come directly off the Internet. Direct all complaints to theinterwebs@theinterwebs.com.

DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI 2 (PS2)

Character Passwords: Enter one of the following passwords in the Data Center option to unlock the listed character:

Android 18 (Level 160): NzEr vcJO }Jlv kW@ N P@Wf hOIl $ABQ &@CG
Baby Vegeta (Level 160): ny!c Zp!! mVLg ilm@ $DOL hE[m ZQEK r@}!
Bardock (Level 160): pB%V txNK @mXL rGvz eBSU TjFV gAti pXNK
Broly (Level 160): xGM$ (PAX -ypv Zcp# aOj0 m*Ve Mf@S PExH
Frieza (Level 160): Ovc- kP-f jfj! iwQv VcNK AAbY PPu* ?KVI
Garlic Jr. (Level 160): E!pJ @&+F HrOV x?$y lUrX LtJM AbfR vcd@
Gohan (Level 160): @on% Tp*j h%%& arX* acG$ Iw+% OilB #eWU
Goku (Level 160): (fET BYbM sfY+ TdW& A+*a E}ft y+Uh iggw
Hirudegarn (Level 160): KT*l gKAM GKAj LCRT wSUF *%Ea jjWb HWUM
Janemba (Level 160): qpmQ eCON vtya mwM{ Z#*B lZ-o Svol Toy@
Kid Gohan (Level 160): Fenf @Jfh tUZX *cBJ Gjaq QKeq %kDp $yc?
Kid Goku (Level 160): %XYN }p[X f@vl v}fL jC$X fOFM wGFp msJ-
Majin Vegeta (Level 160): MG&k f#ds PNwD +S&S aNUv &FI% lCsC p+HK
Meta-Cooler (Level 160): u!hR +y-p N(?F kxT! !$xt GpCB -hXb Flh+
Pan (Level 160): MRl? qo@@ L%yd Zq?C @ dwp sLDs (yon pi+*
Pikkon (Level 160): E!HG #-qY KWbN AVFK !Gnp W(Rj KIsd -t*M
SS4 Goku (Level 160): DX}b &iF? bGQs XsCx BtiO VyX) w!mk CpTK
SS4 Vegeta (Level 160): Yi?o XhZb bgI@ uPO# x}AD Yr$X (CyI moMr
Super 17 (Level 160): !oed IS-v NaOz H-#r UFvZ HkEU ypcm Tdzk
Syn Shenron (Level 160): N*u* ?KTD WaB$ H&+j gj}* k+NN kNRy h%*R
Tapion (Level 160): !Vjs GBBF SGc* qxQL w-M% sH}d QjSL QlWd
Teen Gohan (Level 160): +[(D efKl AmEk *Xro %oMu BUEe sdXe alCD
Tien (Level 160): mt!x H$e? quEI %$zA R(jA co%y sh@ O #nVB
Trunks (Level 160): vlLB qLDA NTHD @TPa l}ED FjY! hPKu ySQI
Trunks with Sword (Level 160): FixJ Rd-R NkBA Zn?E ?uTZ ZDmI UbBp TgI+
Turles (Level 160): CvZG nbNb GspW XcXo LAsY %tw- vzo@ &erw
Ultimate Gohan (Level 160): gQVg }Gvl vDFX VStx iptI &&wb eNZQ pCVh
Vegeta (second form - Level 160): etap #$dw syrL sprt G}+Q SygK yMvY gwmn
Videl (Level 160): !auD jzHS vDTG }EUw yfwq eLwu einy zdXm

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (360/PS3)

Cheats: Cheats are unlocked by collecting enemy intel, which looks like laptop computers, that are hidden throughout the campaign. Note: using cheats disables Achievements.

2 Intel: CoD Noir: Simply turns all gameplay turns black and white, giving the game a classic war movie feel.
4 Intel: Photo-Negative: Inverses all of the colours of the game.
6 Intel: Super Contrast: Dramatically increases the game's contrast, making the darks much darker and the lights much lighter.
8 Intel: Ragtime Warfare: Gameplay goes black and white, dust and scratches fill the screen, it plays at 2x speed, and the music becomes piano music.
10 Intel: Cluster Bombs: After one of your frag grenades explodes, four more explode in a cross-shaped pattern.
15 Intel: A Bad Year: When you kill enemies, they explode into a bunch of old tyres!
20 Intel: Slow-Mo Ability: By using the melee button, you can change the game to slow-mo and play at half speed.
30 Intel: Infinite Ammo: Wepaons have unlimited ammo. You don't even need to reload! Doesn't work with single-shot weapons like C4 and Claymores.

NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET (PS2)

Cheats: Use the following cheat code passwords at the in-game codes menu:

CASHMONEY: Receive $10,000
CASTROLSYNTEC: Unlock Castrol Syntec Vinyl
COKEZERO: Unlock Coke Zero Golf GTI
ENERGIZERLITHIUM: Unlock bonus vinyls
HORSEPOWER: Unlock Chevelle SS
ITSABOUTYOU: Unlock Audi TT
LEIPZIG: Unlock Progressive Bonus Vinyl
MITSUBISHIGOFAR: Unlock Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution
SAFETYNET: Receive five Repair Tokens
UNLOCKALLTHINGS: Unlock Nissan 240 SX, Pontiac GTO, Chevy Cobalt SS, and Dodge Viper SRT 10
WORLDSLONGESTLASTING: Unlock Dodge Viper SRT10
ZEROZEROZERO: Unlock Coke Zero Golf GTI

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS (PS2)

Cheat Codes: Enter these during gameplay without pausing:

$250,000, full Health and Armour: R1, R2, L1 , X, LEFT, DOWN, RIGHT, UP, LEFT, DOWN, RIGHT, UP
All Pedestrians Are Elvis: L1, CIRCLE, TRIANGLE, L1, L1, SQUARE, L2, UP, DOWN, LEFT
All Taxis get Nitro + Jump up when you press L3: UP, X, TRIANGLE, X, TRIANGLE, X, SQUARE, R2, RIGHT
Makes any vehicle like a tank: L1, L2, L2, UP, DOWN, DOWN, UP, R1, R2, R2
Chaos Mode: L2, RIGHT, L1, TRIANGLE, RIGHT, RIGHT, R1, L1, RIGHT, L1, L1, L1
Beach Party Mode: UP, UP, DOWN, DOWN, SQUARE, CIRCLE, L1, R1, TRIANGLE, DOWN
Lock Wanted Level: CIRCLE, RIGHT, CIRCLE, RIGHT, LEFT, SQUARE, TRIANGLE, UP
Lower Wanted Level: R1, R1, CIRCLE, R2, UP, DOWN, UP, DOWN, UP, DOWN
Raise Wanted Level: R1, R1, CIRCLE, R2, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT
Max All Vehicle Stats: SQUARE, L2, X, R1, L2, L2, LEFT, R1, RIGHT, L1, L1, L1
Slow-Mo: TRIANGLE, UP, RIGHT, DOWN, SQUARE, R2, R1
Spawn Monster: RIGHT, UP, R1, R1, R1, DOWN, TRIANGLE, TRIANGLE, X, CIRCLE, L1, L1

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2008 (PS2)

Money Money Money!: Start a new game on 24/7 Mode with a created wrestler. He doesn't even have to be any good. On the Calendar, scroll down to Wrestlemania PPV and select it. Choose to simulate each and every match to this date. It will take a while, but at the end of simulation, you will have made hundreds of thousands of dollars. You can use this to buy new, better characters and other stuff, plus you can repeat this process as many times as you want.

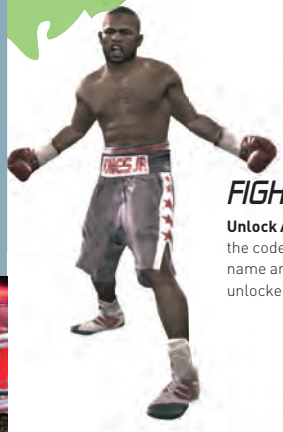
DX Costumes: Insert "DXCostume69K2" at the in-game cheats menu.

Kelly Kelly's Alternate Outfit: Insert "KellyKG12R" at the in-game cheats menu.

POKÉMON DIAMOND (DS)

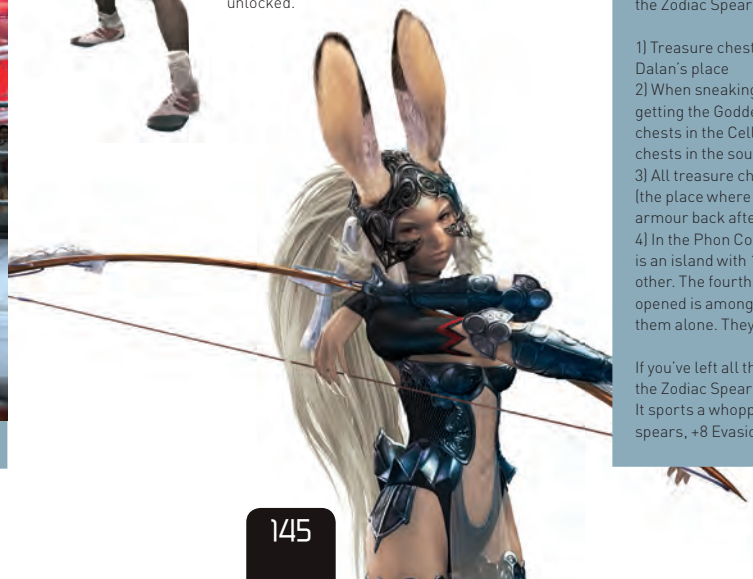
Get the National Dex: Complete your Sinnoh Pokedex by seeing all 150 Sinnoh region Pokémon. Go to Prof Rowan's lab and talk to him. Prof Oak will dash in and upgrade it.

Happy Birthday: If you set your calendar on your DS to your registered birthday and talk to Prof Rowan's assistant, they will wish you a happy birthday! This is only possible after you beat the elite four.



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 (PS2)

Unlock ALL Venues: In 'Create Champ' mode, enter the code 'NEWVIEW' without the quotes as a first name and ALL the venues in the game will become unlocked.



THE SIMS 2 (PC)

Cheats: To access the 'Cheat' window, press Ctrl + Shift + C and then enter the following codes:

Kaching: Get 1,000 Cash
Motherlode: 50,000 Simoleans
Aging on: Turn on ageing:
Aging off: Turn off ageing

DEVIL MAY CRY 4 (360/PS3)

Secret Ending: Protect Kyrie during the ending credits battle for one minute and 30 seconds for the secret ending featuring Dante, Trish and Lady.

FINAL FANTASY XII (PS2)

Zodiac Spear: The most powerful weapon in the game has a trick to it that those who have to open EVERY treasure chest would miss out on. There are four places with treasure chests that must NOT be opened in order for the Zodiac Spear to appear:

1) Treasure chest in Lowtown, outside of Old Dalan's place
2) When sneaking into the palace (before getting the Goddess Tear), there are several chests in the Cellar. Do not open the two chests in the southeast corner.
3) All treasure chests in the Confiscatory (the place where you get your weapons and armour back after being captured).
4) In the Phon Coast, later in the game, there is an island with 16 chests all near each other. The fourth chest that must NOT be opened is among these, so it is best to leave them alone. They only contain Gil anyway.

If you've left all these treasures be, you'll find the Zodiac Spear in the Necrohol of Nabudis. It sports a whopping +150 attack and, like all spears, +8 Evasion. **NAG**

10 UP

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