SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX   WII   MOBILE

FUN AND GAMES

+ PREVIEW MADNESS THIS ISSUE
with Singularity, PROTOTYPE
and X-Men Origins: Wolverine

+ REVIEW SILLINESS WITH
Halo Wars, Killzone 2, F.E.A.R. 2: Project
Origin, Silent Hill: Homecoming, Dawn of
War II, Street Fighter IV and Skate 2

Wolfenstein

WOLVERINE AND WOLFENSTEIN:
THE ONE'S NOT A WOLF AND
THE OTHER IS A CASTLE, SO THE
LUPINE JOKES GO NOWHERE.

HARDWARE

+ ÜBER GAMING MOUSE:
MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER
X8 REVIEWED

**+ WIN A WHITE-HOT
GAMING RIG...**

NAG DVD

7 Hot demos, including:

PLUS

VOL 12 ISSUE 1 04.2009   SOUTH AFRICA   R42.00

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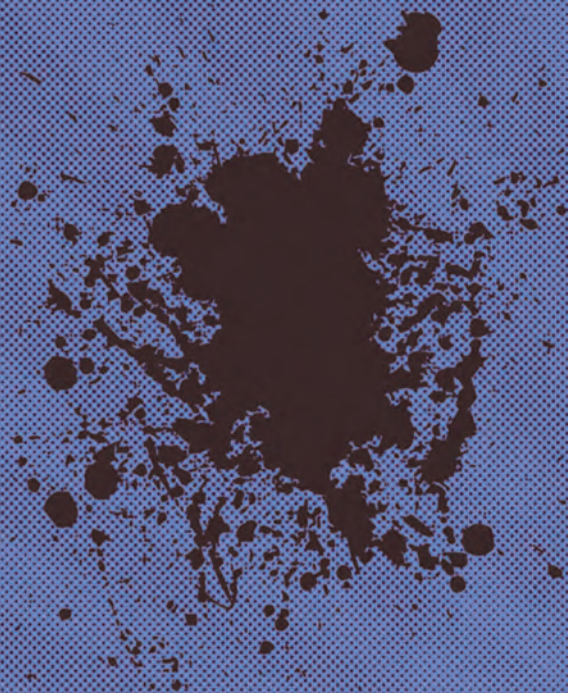
SOME THINGS MAKE *no sense* STUCK TOGETHER

Reggie's

OTHERS DO

vidamo

Sms 'HALO' to 33415 and stand a chance of
winning an Xbox360 console and gaming hamper.

Competition closes 30 April 2009. Sms charged at R1.50. Entrants need to be
13 years or older. Judges decision is final. Winners will be notified telephonically.

XBOX 360.
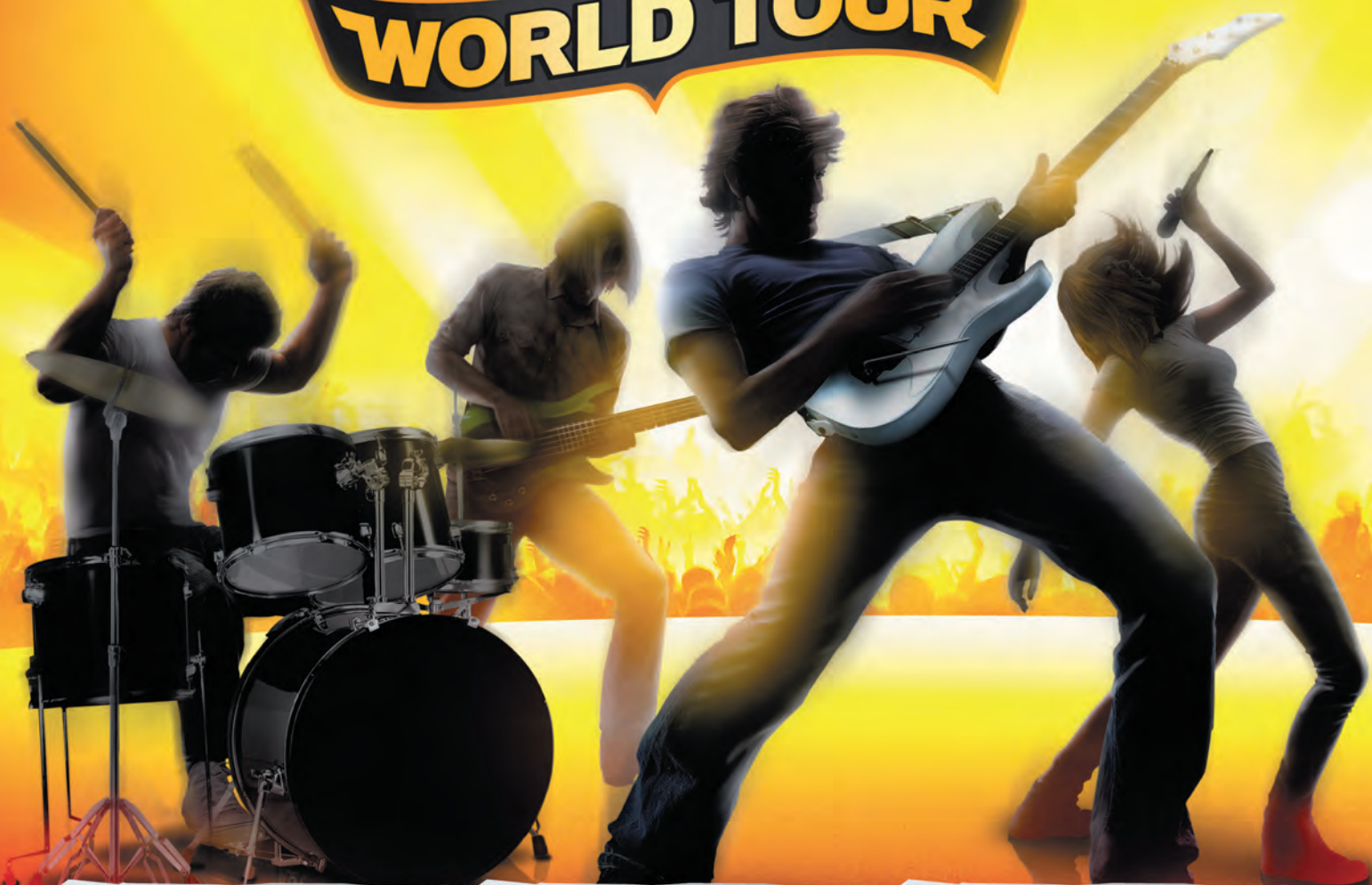
Create your own rocker, choose from your favourite Guitar Hero icons or take the stage as the biggest rock stars around.

Compose, record, edit, and share your own music online. Download and play community-created content for free!

Rock out solo, with another guitarist or with a band. Kick it up with 4 vs. 4 Battle of the Bands play.

Contents

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WHEN TO PULL? WHEN TO PUSH?

In the world of organized crime there's a time to get your hands dirty. And a time to let your crew do the talking. If you want to be a player in this city, you need to act like a mobster. If you want to own it, you need to think like a Don.

The Godfather II

ACT LIKE A MOBSTER. THINK LIKE A DON.

GODFATHER2.EA.COM

We're done!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US! Hip, hooray! Welcome to *NAG*. We've been around for eleven years. There's not much more to say about this, so I'll just move along.

WHO YOU ARE...

We conducted a survey in the January issue of *NAG* and we received a huge pile of returns. Just less than 8% of our entire readership responded, and in marketing terms, that's about 7% more than usual. There's a four-page article detailing some of the results in this issue. We've also listed the winners at the bottom of this page you're reading right now. Thank you to all of those readers who took the time and sent it back to us.

The results sparked an interesting discussion in the office about what kinds of gamers are buying *NAG*. I've chopped the different lines of thinking into four clear types. This is very rough, so please send me an e-mail if you think I'm way off on this. First up, we have the addicts or fanatics. These guys spend most of the day on the Internet reading about games and downloading demos and movies. They know everything about gaming before anyone else does. Statistically, many of them also pirate all their games and usually only have negative things to say about anything they don't like. These gamers make up a very tiny percentage of the people who read *NAG*. But for all their sins, we still love them. They're also the last to leave the forums at night. Next up, we have the hardcore gamers. For them, gaming is more than a hobby – it's a passion and a way of life (they play games almost every day). They also usually buy a new game every other month and new hardware every six months. They read *NAG* and visit a few Internet sites to supplement their interest in different genres or specific game franchises. They also own a current-generation console and a handheld gaming device. This is the typical *NAG* reader. Then we get to the serious gamers, who aren't as dedicated to gaming and perhaps only play on weekends and some evenings. They also usually only buy games during the holidays and then always get games for their birthday. They upgrade their computers every year to year and a half, and own an older generation console with plans to upgrade to a current-generation console. Lastly, we have the casual gamers. They usually play games that run on older computers (budget titles) and own a Wii console or DS. They don't always read *NAG*, but might eventually upgrade their hobby to something more serious; and once the gaming bug bites, many of them will become serious gamers.

This is the thinking we're going with for the moment. Please remember, don't be insulted if you feel that you've been unwillingly slotted into a category you don't exactly fit into – this is just a 'brush-strokes' idea that we'll refine over time. If you have any interesting insights into this categorisation, please send an e-mail to **letters@tidemedia.co.za** so that we can see if there's something we've overlooked – probably.

Before I forget, say hello to Miklós Szecsei – our new columnist – and say goodbye to Megan. She's off to conquer the world – too bad she forgot to take her battle elephants. Miklós ended up writing a column in *NAG* because he sent in a letter last year that made me laugh. Welcome aboard and good luck.

Enjoy the issue... we all agree that it's one of the best ever (obviously).

**Michael James
Editor**

PS: Don't forget to visit our new updated Website – **www.nag.co.za**.

RAVEN
8496

A word from Miktar

I'd like to hijack the Ed's Note here for a second to express my gratitude to Jason and Andrew at Megarom for sending me on the Activision press tour to Santa Monica, Wisconsin and New York to visit Neversoft and Raven Studios and look at *Guitar Hero: Metallica*, *Singularity*, *Wolfenstein*, *Wolverine* and *PROTOTYPE*, to name a few. Thanks especially to all the PR agents with Activision for making the trip a terrific experience. I'd also like to thank Neversoft for graciously letting me tour their studio and molest their dog (and I never even learnt its name), as well as the brilliant individuals at Raven Studios for their studio tour.

That's a lotta crap

Survey winners

Corner Café starter kit/Arcade machine	Brent Tromp
Big box of Crap from the *NAG* office	Charl Gous
Games for a year from Megarom	Marius Steyn
Toshiba Qosmio X300-130 Notebook	Ryno van der Bijl
Xbox 360 bundle	Shaun Wiesner

REDTIDE: Dammit, barkskin! Turn off your aimbots!

Inbox

All letters sent to *NAG* are printed more or less verbatim, so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors.

Letter of the Moment

FROM: Kelly
SUBJECT: Letter of the month!

"**DEAR NAG, THESE DAYS** when I flick through my NAG I realise that there is very little originality in the games of today. I see too many games being made from washed up TV shows in an attempt to make money and sequels to games that should never have made it out of the developer's office in the first place! Where did the games go that made us wake up at 6 in the morning to wait outside the shop to buy ourselves a copy and then fake some illness to get out of school so we could play! Is there future of gaming really that bleak or do you think something will save us?!"

You know what... putting 'Letter of the month!' as a subject line in your mail isn't going to automatically mean that your letter becomes the letter of the month - unless you really think that's how it works and somehow I'm going to mix it all up and send you free games. Not going to happen. In fact, trying to empower your mail like that will have the reverse effect. I'm ~~victimising~~ lecturing you here in the hope that everyone else will pick up on the futility of this practice. Starting your mail off with a good subject is half the work. Now, what were you saying about faking an illness? Ed.

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

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!
Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158
Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

FROM: Nicholas
SUBJECT: Damn Recession

"**I AM SO SICK AND** tired of this damn recession. Everywhere I go all I hear is bankrupt this and went under that. Okay so maybe a few banks, and the odd automobile company, and half the developed countries in the world's economies have collapsed. We are gamers. We can take it. We are the sort of people who take a situation like this and make lots of money off it in some amazing ninja entrepreneurial way. Stop worrying about the recession. Just use your brains and you'll be okay, I promise."

I couldn't agree more. In times like this, the strong survive and those who can't keep up will fall. It's all about choices: either you choose to fight or you give up and blame something else. Just look at this issue of NAG. Most of the companies we deal with are all still advertising new products every month and they're all still selling games and hardware and you're all still spending your money. Gaming is recession proof because it's beyond a simple hobby or pastime: it's a passion, a religion. It's much easier to stop spending money on those things you don't really care about, but you'll never stop spending money on the things you love. Ed.

FROM: Mac
SUBJECT: A nation expands

"**I'VE BEEN WATCHING THESE** two gaming shows on TV, even though they are not as fully insightful as our beloved NAG magazine, they do offer a tangible contribution to our local gaming community (since I feel that they fight boredom while NAG fights illiteracy), I really like these shows but as wise and seasoned gamers I need to know how you guys feel about it."

We've been talking to a few people about TV shows here and there, but nobody wants to cough up any money for our time, input and creativity. They all think that 'genius' like ours comes free – just kidding. No, really. I think they have their place in the market and because it's television, it's made for the masses. In terms of NAG, we're always looking for opportunities to do our own show (and you know how hot that'll be), but the time isn't right now. Keep watching this space. Ed.

FROM: Kevin
SUBJECT: COD 5 Zombies

"**IN THE RECENT JANUARY** issue there was a small insert on the NAG team reaching level 22 in the Nazi Zombie co-op mode. About two weeks ago I borrowed a copy of COD World at War from a friend for XBOX, after finishing it, decided to try and beat your level 22 effort. I enlisted the help of my gaming neighbour and although there were only two of us (playing on a split screen) we were confident of accomplishing our goal. After three evenings of Zombie killing we managed to reach level 17 but I had to return the game to my friend. Not a bad effort in my books and I was hoping you gaming gurus at NAG would agree.:

Umm... well, you didn't beat us, so I guess 'effort' is the right word. ;) Not bad... For some reason it took us ages to get further than level 12 when we first started. But once we broke that barrier, we were breaking records every other day. You might be interested to know that by the time you read this there should be new content for COD 5 for download on the Internet and XBLA (Xbox LIVE Arcade). It's going to have a new zombie level with a perk dispenser and three new multiplayer maps. So I think it's time that you buy the game and stop freeloading off your buddy. Ed.

FROM: Eric
SUBJECT: Graphics, Hmm.

"**I WAS PLAYING SOME NES** games on my PC the other day using an emulator when my brother walks in and goes on a long tirade about how bad the graphics are and that the games cannot be fun because of this. I invited him to play Contra co-op with me and after many hours of fun he seemed confused because he shouldn't enjoy a game that does not have HD graphics and is not one hundred

gigs in size. This made me realise that even though gaming is growing and becoming more popular the people who are being drawn into it are unfortunately being driven by the hype machine and feel that a game should always be bigger, better, prettier and more complex than the last. A game should be about fun and everything after that is just making it better. Fun should be the foundation that everything else is built around. If it is not you just end up with another Spore, it's pretty and has interesting characteristics but it's just not fun."

It happens a lot these days. Graphics, physics, complicated story, amazing cinematic sequences and just no game underneath all the fluffiness. If you want something different and simple, you need to look at independent studios and XBLA. World of Goo, Puzzle Quest, Peggle and Crayon Physics are just some examples of cheap and brilliant games. In all fairness, the big games aren't that bad. It's just a few bad apples here and there and you'll find that those are usually the most over-hyped. Haze (PS3) is a perfect example of this. Ed.

FROM: Louis
SUBJECT: Please help

"**I AM SORRY FOR BOTHERING** you with my request, but I could not find another NAG employee's email address. I have an idea for a racing game, but now I need someone to develop it. I have thought of getting someone at Game.dev to make it for me... but I need a real studio to make this. The whole point of my idea is: a racing game that contains pure racing fun, while having an excellent storyline and good cinematic sequences (real video). [Snip, Ed] I would really appreciate it if you could maybe give me an e-mail address, of someone that I could ask for a list of developers with their email addresses...

And I recall reading, about a year ago, that there was a Game developing studio in SA that made a racing game. I thought that they would, if they had a big enough budget, be the perfect studio to develop my game... It would be easy to stay in contact with them, making sure that the game gets made exactly like I planned for it to be, and it would help them to become noticed. I already have an idea for a sequel for the original game, but my main focus at this stage is to get a Studio to, at least, look at my idea..."

'I have this great game idea...' Of course you do, and so do thousands of other people. This is the advice I give to everyone who sends in 'game idea' letters:
It's best to direct your question to the forums [www.nag.co.za] or do your own research on the Internet. Many people have great ideas for games. I can't really help you with this kind of request...
Good luck.
Now for some reality. I'll never knock

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the *NAG* logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.
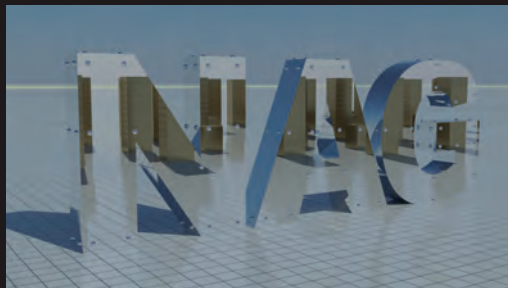
Chris Tazz: "My love for NAG magazine has prompted me to create a fan art submission of some sorts. I came up with this, a large chrome NAG logo which I created in 3D studio Max 2009 and edited in Photoshop CS3. I hope you guys like it."

anyone who has an idea for anything. Ideas and creativity are the lifeblood of everything and one day, if you work hard and make the right choices, your game might just be developed. The problem is that no idea will become a game by just telling a company "I have this great idea." Watch, I'll do it now. I have the great idea for a game... it must be an FPS with cool graphics, where your character becomes anything organic that he shoots. You know... like that old robot game on the Commodore 64. See, it's easy to cook up ideas. What you need to do is start small, get some guys together and use stuff like XNA and Game Maker to make games. When you're selling enough of those to finance a bigger project, do it; and eventually you'll be able to make the game you've always dreamed of making. Nothing is impossible if you just put in the hard work. Unfortunately, nobody is going to pay you for just an idea of a cool game. It doesn't work like that. You have to do it yourself. Ed.

FROM: Graeme
SUBJECT: Quick Question...
"**P**AGING THROUGH SOME OLDER issues of NAG recently, I was reminded of a statement made a short while back. In the Games Convention Supplement, Michael James wrote "... I must also mention that at the show we were invited to see a new title that we can only really talk about really next year. So keep an eye out for the January or February issue of NAG- it'll blow your socks off." Now my question is, has said footwear removing announcement been made without mention of this statement in the supplement, or are we still waiting for our feet to be severely injured by the sheer awesome of it? Or have I just missed something? Given my attention span the latter is highly probable. Anyway, keep up the stellar work there NAG Headquarters. And the news that NAG will return to its 132 pages of glory is very good to hear, even though page count isn't ultimately that critical, as the quality certainly hasn't dipped with the quantity. Now if only we could get those fantastic matte covers back."

Yes, umm... that game was supposed to feature on our cover in January, but the developers are holding off until it's where they want it to be. So you haven't missed anything – I do keep reminding them about it and soon I'll be on a plane to some far off place to get the scoop... Just hang in there. Then, getting NAG to 132 pages depends on advertising and game content. Both have been a little low and slow this year – must be this pesky recession thing everyone is trying to avoid dealing with. I'm keeping NAG stronger at a lower page count than weaker at a higher one. Ed.

FROM: Wayne
SUBJECT: Maybe I'm just getting old
"**I** GUESS YOU ARE USED to reading mails whereby readers have nothing but praise for you and I would like to do that as well but I want to ask you if you have ever tried reading your own magazine in anything but direct sunlight? The white on black background is nigh on impossible to read unless using a magnifying glass or you are blessed with 20/20 vision which would probably go the way of the dodo once you have completed reading those articles. Would it be too much to ask to increase the font size ever so slightly and refrain from using white script on a black background? Not all your readers are aged between 10 and 16 with excellent eyesight.

Now I understand that increasing the size of the characters will use up more paper and using more paper will drive the price of the rag up but surely you can drop or downsize some of the articles or columns and that will make reading your magazine a much more enjoyable and less frustrating experience." **NAG**

THERE... IS THAT BETTER? AD

FMA COMING TO WII

Fans of the popular anime series *Fullmetal Alchemist* will soon see their favourite characters come to life on the Nintendo Wii. Published by Square-Enix, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Prince of the Dawn* will be see players take on the roles of Edward Elric and his 'little' brother Alphonse as they journey through the RPG-esque game interspersed with Wiimote-waggling missions. Hiromu Arakawa, creator of the series, will be generating new characters specifically for the game, which is set for release towards the middle of the year (following the latest anime season).

The year of the PSP

Will Sony's new outlook on portable gaming earn them the crown?

WHILE IT MIGHT SEEM a little optimistic to some (Nintendo, for example), Sony is looking to make massive headway with their PSP and get the portable device into more sweaty gamer hands than ever before as a part of the platform's "reinvigoration" process. While the PSP has long been touted as a dumping ground for the PS2's massive library, the time has come for it to share the spotlight with its even bigger brother, the PS3 – starting with *LittleBigPlanet* and *MotorStorm*.

MotorStorm: Arctic Edge, which is also set for release on the PS2, should be hitting our shores towards November this year courtesy of *Pursuit Force* developers BigBig Studios, and will let players take their crazy racing to the snowy mountains and valleys of Alaska. Customisable rides make an appearance, which will allow players to trick out their vehicles with varying wheels, exhausts, spoilers, vinyl and stickers. Up to eight players can battle it out in the free-roaming, 'never two races the same' icy wastelands. *LittleBigPlanet* will also be getting its share of attention with an upcoming PSP version that's said to have all of the love from the selling-point level creation tool, albeit in a slimmed-down 2D package. The game is also set to include level sharing and Sony has been 'caught' saying that they're working on interfacing the PSP version with that of the PlayStation 3, although they're remaining tight-lipped on any details.

Another surprise for this year is the announcement of *Rock Band Unplugged* – no doubt to rival the DS's popular *Guitar Hero on Tour*. We're not sure quite how the multi-peripheral title will translate to the handheld, and details are stuck in the realm of rumour for now, but we're hoping the developers will find a brave way to get all four band members jamming together over a Wi-Fi link. Also on this year's PSP line-up is a mystery-shrouded *Assassin's Creed*. We've already seen this title make it to the DS alongside its 'big console' release, but you can no doubt expect the as-yet unnamed third-party developer to get roped into pulling off something unique for Sony's platform.

PS3 hard to program for on purpose?

Welcome to Sony, where ordinary things don't happen very often. PlayStation headperson Kazou Kirai has said (and we're not making this up) that the PS3 was intentionally made difficult to develop for so that developers wouldn't exploit its full potential straight away.

"It's not easy to program for the PS3. I wouldn't say it's endless in terms of what the console can do, but we pack so much depth into our consoles that it takes a while for anybody, including first-party studios, to really harness the power," said Hirai. "We don't provide the 'easy to program for' console that they want, because 'easy to program for' means that anybody will be able to take advantage of pretty much what the hardware can do, so then the question is what do you do for the rest of the nine and half years?," he explained.

"So it's kind of a - I wouldn't say double edged sword - but it's hard to program for, and a lot [of] people see the negatives of it, but if you flip that around, it means that the hardware has a lot more to offer," he told Official PlayStation Magazine. Yes, flipped it around you certainly did, Hirai.

EA: "WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY HITS IN 2008"

Chief Operation Officer for Electronic Arts, John Pleasants, has gone on record stating that the company failed to produce hits last year. "The biggest thing was that we didn't make hits," he said at a Goldman Sachs conference when queried about a 2008 performance that saw the publisher's stock drop to its lowest point in over seven years. Telling attendants that not enough gamers wanted to buy new games like Dead Space and Mirror's Edge, Pleasants did say that EA would focus on fewer, better games in 2009. EA has shaved the amount of potential games for the year by over 20 percent. "You can lose your way on basic execution when you have too many games," he said, according to *Forbes*.

Despite underwriting sales in the past, the PSP has been making a comeback since the release of the PSP Slim...

Sony wants more GTA on PSP

Sony and Rockstar Games were once inseparable lovers. Every tender game by Rockstar was almost exclusive to the PlayStation, but lately Rockstar has jilted all things Sony in the hopes of finding more lucrative suitors who like to nibble on toes. Since then, the 360 has got exclusive *Lost and Damned* DLC and even *GTA: Chinatown Wars*.

But perhaps the two will kiss and make up. In a recent interview with MTV's Stephen Totilo, PSP hardware marketing chief John Koller said that Sony isn't ready to let Rockstar go, admitting that there's "definitely continued conversations with Rockstar" regarding future Grand Theft Auto titles on the PSP.

RISK AN EARLY DEATH, JUST DO NOTHING

9 out of 10 kids risk growing up to have unhealthy amounts of fat in their bodies. Even if you think they look healthy today, adulthood could bring an early death from heart disease, Type 2 diabetes or cancer.

So make sure your kids are active for an hour a day. Reduce how much fat they eat.

For help and advice visit 4yourkids.org.uk

Left 4 Change

Because videogames are fattening

THE UK GOVERNMENT IS at it again, this time not only claiming that gaming is bad for you - they've gone as far as saying it could actually end your life prematurely. Backed by the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research and Diabetes UK, the UK Department of Health issued an advertisement emblasoned with the catchphrase "Risk an early death, just do nothing" accompanied by a photograph of a bored-looking child with a game controller in hand. The advert goes on to wave warnings in concerned parents' faces that nine out of every ten children grow up to have an unhealthy amount of fat in their bodies and the subsequent increased risk of contracting type 2 diabetes or cancer. This is the same Department of Health that last year launched the Byron Review, in which it was noted that there is no solid evidence to link obesity to videogame playing.

While it's certainly important to get your daily exercise, blatantly implying that the playing of videogames (excessively or not) will lead to obesity is quite simply not playing fair. Thankfully, the industry isn't taking this attack lying down. Tiga, an organisation charged with interfacing between the game development industry in Europe and governments in an effort to maintain the wellbeing of the industry,

has lashed out at the 'Change4Life' campaign. "This advert is absurd and insulting in equal measure. To imply that playing a videogame leads to a premature rendezvous with the Grim Reaper is a non-sequitur of colossal proportions. Alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, obesity and involvement in violent crime are forms of behaviour that risk an early death."

Countless publishers have also struck back, using every peripheral-based game in their arsenal as defence against the insult. Konami and Nintendo are using Dance Dance Revolution and Wii Fit as their weapons of war, while Codemasters is simply leaving it at "Governments have a unique ability to get it wrong." Sony has even announced that they're considering taking legal action based on the unauthorised use of what bears a striking resemblance to a SIXAXIS controller. The UK DoH isn't backing down just yet, however, "We are not saying that children shouldn't play computer games or eat treats, but parents and children need to be aware of the benefits of a balanced diet and an active lifestyle. The activities portrayed are examples of poor diet and lack of physical activity." By that account we should brace ourselves for an anti-book-reading campaign any day now.

WORLD IN CONFLICT FOR CONSOLES CANNED?

According to IGN, Ubisoft has decided that there's no point in releasing *World in Conflict* on consoles. Apparently, a game perfectly suited for console controls in both gameplay design and interface design wouldn't be a good investment on consoles. While Sierra (who originally held the Intellectual Property) were amped to release *WiC* on consoles, Ubisoft has released this statement: "*World in Conflict: Soviet Assault* will be released for the PC later this month. A console version of *World in Conflict* is not planned for release at this time."

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Gamers will soon be able to slip into their spandex tights and flash those shiny capes if promises from *Champions Online* publishers Atari are anything to go by. The MMORPG, which is a pseudo-sequel to the popular *City of Heroes/Villians*, will have players creating their ultimate superhero (or villain), complete with bone-crumbling weaknesses and incredible super powers, do battle against each other and become the ultimate champion. The game has now been set for a June release date.

Where's Waldo? Right here!

Don't call it a comeback: the striped hide-and-seek specialist is coming back to gaming after decades of being hidden behind a tower of midgets. Canadian developer Ludia has announced its series of games based on the *Where's Waldo* (*Where's Wally*) book series. The first game, *Where's Waldo? The Fantastic Journey*, will be released on PC, consoles and the iPhone later this year. If ever there was a good reason for HD, this is it. Up to four players will be able to hunt for Waldo and his missing objects cooperatively. Waldo hasn't been in a game since the NES/SNES era, and those were pretty bad. If anything, this will finally make one of our dreams come true: **Achievement Unlocked: I Found Waldo!**

Who watches the Watch... oh enough already

Watchmen is here; you've no-doubt watched the film and perhaps played the downloadable game or seen it in action. You may have even borrowed the graphic novel from a friend or bought it for yourself to do some catching up. Warner Bros, being the shrewd business that it is, has realised that people might not have had quite enough of the *Watchmen* after all that, however, and has teamed up with developers Last Legion Games to bring you the *Watchmen: Justice is Coming...* on the iPhone... as an MMORPG. Set in '70s New York (a decade before the start of the comic), players will take to the streets as a custom super hero to bring the smack down on both evil villians and each other *Watchmen*-style. Expect the game to hit the App Store any day now for both iPhone and the iPod Touch.

They said it...

"As hard as we tried, we were never able to have **one of our non-RTS prototypes greenlit**, largely because we were 'the RTS guys'."

David Rippy, formally of Ensemble Studios

"[Wii owners] buy the Wii games that they buy for the same reason that people go to McDonald's. **McDonald's doesn't win a lot of restaurant critic awards but they are approachable**, they're consistent, and you know what they're going to serve you."

Michael Pachter, industry analyst

"I think I can only get away with saying this now, but I really thought that the using **the Xbox was only way to break into overseas markets**, and I took that hypothesis all the way,"

Keiji Inafune, Capcom R&D chief

"This time, it's not really a port so much as it is a remake. **We made it from the ground up, from scratch,** basically saying 'This is what we had in the 360 version, and this is what we want to do, so we're just going to remake it from scratch.'"

Minoru Nakai, producer on
Dead Rising: Chop 'til you Drop

Microsoft's orders: Conform!

It may come as no surprise, but it always feels a little 'wrong' when these things finally happen. Microsoft is officially forcing players to move over to the New Xbox Experience, or NXE. This system update completely revamps the dashboard and other UI elements, adds in the (sometimes uncomfortably) cute avatars and a number of society-focused updates. They're all mostly of the good variety, so while there shouldn't be too much complaining from the gaming community, there are no-doubt going to be a stalwart few who refuse to play nice. If you're concerned that you'll be left out in the cold and rain because you still haven't got your Xbox up and running on LIVE, fear not. Just like with Sony's onslaught of mandatory updates for the PS3, Microsoft will be including the necessary update files on game discs for a quick, download-free installation. The first game to feature (and require) the updated operating system will be *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.*

Sony closes flagship store

While the Nintendo World Store in New York continues to be a focal point for obscene amounts of Nintendo revenue and Poke-paraphernalia, and Microsoft having recently announced that they're about to launch their own series of Xbox-themed retail outlets across the US, Sony has admitted it will soon close its flagship PlayStation store in San Francisco's Metreon shopping centre. The only retail outlet of its kind that Sony has was the venue for many system and key software launches. The lease for the store runs out this year, and Sony has confirmed it will not be renewing it. The PlayStation Store opened in 1999 and while Sony sold off its interest in the Metreon shopping centre in 2006 to the Westfield Group and Forest City Enterprises, this closure is said to have no effect on Sony's many Sony Style shops across the US (though those don't focus on the PlayStation at all, being more platforms for their TVs and music players).

PLAYSTATION PALMAR WHO WITH THE WHAT NOW?

If you're the type of gamer who's in the habit of playing controller-based videogames for extended periods of time, beware! You may be a candidate for a dreadful skin disease recently dubbed "PlayStation palmar hidradenitis" - or 'spotty red bumps on the hand'. These painful although otherwise harmless bumps are formed by subjecting gamers' fragile hands to extended periods of sweaty game controller clutching. The disease, which was named by the British Journal of Dermatology, has (no surprise) provoked the unimpressed face from a certain console manufacturer. Sony's official response is calm, however - "As with any leisure pursuit there are possible consequences of not following common sense, health advice and guidelines, as can be found within our instruction manuals. PlayStation was launched in 1995 and has sold hundreds of millions of consoles over the last 13 years. We would not wish to belittle this research and we will study the findings with interest, but this is the first time we have ever heard of a complaint of this nature." If you've been hogging a controller a little too long and have developed this rare disease, doctors recommend that you take a couple of weeks off the couch to give that damaged skin of yours a chance to rest - it should clear up in no time.

Oooo, sparkly

IF YOU'VE BEEN HOLDING out on buying that shiny Xbox 360 Elite, this may well be the news to sway your wallet. Riding the waves of recent rumours, Microsoft has announced the limited edition *Resident Evil 5* Elite package that includes a copy of the game and a sparkling red Xbox with matching controller, as well as all the usual Elite extras including a 120GB hard drive. Also thrown into the package is a *Resident Evil 5* theme that will only be available to owners of the red Xbox, as well as a copy of *Street Fighter II* Turbo HD Remix for good measure. Pricing is expected to be $399 – or R4,999 when purchased locally.

Riding the hype of this news is a rumour that Microsoft will be 'canning' sales of the Elite system in the next few months, reserving the unit for collector's editions like this *RE5* version or the previous green *Halo 3* edition. Now that the standard hard drive size is 60GB (which is also rumoured to increase) and all Xbox 360s coming out of the factory pack HDMI capability, it might make sense to cut the top-end fluff and focus on driving home the excellent Premium and Arcade packages.

STEAMED CLOUD

Square Enix has finally woken up and jumped onboard the Steam train. Kicking off with *The Last Remnant*, the company is hoping to further the reach of its tentacles into the Western world (in addition to buying Eidos) by teaming up with Valve's near-unstoppable digital distribution force. While the publisher hasn't yet announced any other titles heading for the service, we know there's a mile-long queue of obsessed gamers out there hoping for *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII* - although we expect Square will have their work cut out for them getting all the title's compatibility issues with modern systems down pat.

PARENTS SAY GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL

As part of the Microsoft's "Play Safe, Play Smart" study, surveying old people and young people across the UK, 74% of UK parents believe that "games are educational". The same study also revealed that 69% of children want parents to be "more involved in checking the games they play". The survey indicates that young gamers believe parents are not concerned enough with the games they play.

Just in case you missed out

The *Guitar Hero* rampage is set to continue in June with *GH Greatest Hits*. This standalone game features 48 of the top tracks from the entire *Guitar Hero* franchise, designed to work with the full four-piece band kit from *World Tour*, and is set to include *I Wanna Rock* by Twisted Sister, Queen's *Killer Queen* and everyone's favourite hand melter, Dragonforce's *Through the Fire and the Flames*. Each song is a master (original) track and has been carefully updated to fit with the style of *Guitar Hero*, including updated hammer-ons and pull-offs, three-fret chords, translucent gems for use with the slider bar and all the other bells and whistles.

Microsoft may be canning their Xbox 360 Elite system, reserving it only for special editions such as this one

Razors for gamers?

Gamers groom themselves? Gillette seems to think so, and they think there is enough of a market to release their own specially-branded gamer-centric razor. No, it won't improve your FPS or help with headshots, but it'll leave your chin smoother than a cryo-cooled *Crysis* frame rate. Not just "the best a man can get", Gillette now is also the best a gamer can get with the FusionPower Gamer razor. They claim it's better than the Mach3 (so you can brag to your dad about that). Using CG representations of Tiger Woods and other random sports people gamers apparently care about to promote it, the razor has five blades made from Adamantium or something. You can find out more at www.gillette.com.

Evolution of
SKATEBOARDING GAMES

Street Surfer (1986)

Skate or Die (1987)

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (1999)

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland (2005)
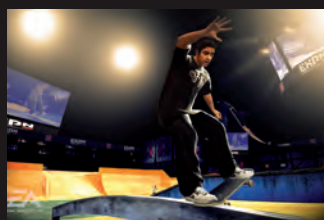
Skate (2007)

Skate 2 (2009)

Even further down the rabbit hole

While many may remember the psychotic adventures of *American McGee's Alice*, the third-person action adventure that took the id Tech 3 Engine to its limits, the twisted nature of the game might have had it relegated to the bargain bin a little sooner than it deserved. The sequel, announced recently by EA and currently named *The Return of American McGee's Alice*, will give players a fresh new looking glass to peer through. EA Partners chief David DeMartini says, "We've given him a blank canvas to go where he would like. There is nothing set in stone and nothing has been removed either."

No gameplay details are available just yet, but the game is set for release on the PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 with the possibility of a Wii version coming some time later. EA has also gone on record saying that if things turn out well for this new *Alice*, players could expect even more titles from the series.

Smile for the camera

When it comes to arcade racing titles, it's difficult for developers to triumph over Critereon's all-powerful and constantly-updated Burnout series... until now. *Pure* developer Black Rock Studios is about to make the attempt with *Split/Second* – a balls-to-the-wall all-out destruct-a-thon with a couple of tricks up its sleeves. What can only be described as a combination of *Burnout*, *Need for Speed* and the classic SNES title *Smash TV*, *Split/Second* will feature players dicing through windy streets and ploughing through destructible terrain pieces to rain down steel and mortar upon their pursuing opponents, all to nab those television ratings and stay ahead of the pack. Stay tuned for more details as they happen - this is definitely one to keep an eye on.

The Queen's finest

IT'S A WELL-KNOWN FACT that gamers know how to handle a weapon better than any soldier. We have, after all, experienced almost every doomsday, military and post-apocalyptic scenario possible in this world. Thankfully, Her Majesty's Royal Air force has cottoned onto this idea and has begun enlisting some of gaming's greatest joystick wielders to serve as pilots for their unmanned (but nonetheless heavily armed) spy and attack drones. Sure, it

sound ridiculous; we're fairly certain that the Afghani countryside isn't exactly littered with breakable ammunition crates and locked achievements, but the idea does make a bit of sense. Gamers have this notorious habit of having excellent hand-eye coordination and an ability to effectively process 2D imagery into 3D thoughts, making them great candidates (once they've had their share of minimum flight training) for drone operators.

Blizzard beefs up StarCraft II visuals

Posting on the official *StarCraft II* forums, a developer on the game has unveiled some major improvements recently made to the *StarCraft II* graphics: the units now look more detailed and much shinier!

"The *StarCraft* art team has been making massive updates to the Zerg faction, adding various new animations and improving even further on the textures of Zerg units and buildings. Throughout the development process, the team is constantly reiterating and improving on the game in every way. As mentioned before, the Infestor, too, is getting a makeover, becoming much creepier and intimidating – you definitely don't want to end up helpless at the will of this thing!"

ONE SMALL STEP FOR GAMERS

Budding astronauts should pay attention to this – NASA is in the process of developing a realistic, simulation-focused MMO as an aid to their Learning Technologies project. The as-yet unnamed MMO will give players the opportunity to tinker with chemical reactions and operate all manner of expensive space-faring machinery in a number of engineering fields and has Virtual Heroes of America's Army veterans at their side to provide a guiding hand. According to NASA, "MMOs help players develop and exercise a skill set closely matching the thinking, planning, learning, and technical skills increasingly in demand by employers." Whether or not that means you should start putting your WoW-raiding experiences down on your CV remains to be seen.

Sony prepares for war

The rumours have been on the loose for a while now about Sony making some drastic corporate changes, especially with their under-performing entertainment division drawing all the wrong kinds of attention. Finally bringing some 'peace' to the rumour mongerers, Sony CEO Howard Stringer has booted president Ryoji Chubachi from the role and taken it for himself. Chubachi, who's been with the company for over 30 years, has been relegated to chairman in charge of safety, quality and environmental issues. As part of the restructuring, Sony is looking to consolidate the bulk of its companies into two main divisions - the Networked Products & Services Group nabs PlayStation, Walkman and VAIO while the New Consumer Products Group will be given CyberShot, Bravia and the other audio and visual operations to watch over. With a new shift to inter-gadget operations, Sony is hoping that they'll be able to boost sales and pull themselves out of the worst slump to hit the company since its formation. Whether or not that means your PS3 will be able to stream data to your Walkman in the near future remains to be seen, but it's likely you can expect some big news to come from Sony to bring in a wider audience.

Starbreeze cashes in

In this world of crashing economies and closing game development studios, it's always refreshing to hear some good news. *Chronicles of Riddick* developers Starbreeze Studios has recently released its Q4 2008 earnings, claiming a 54% increase over the same period the year before. What this means for the Swedish development team is that people are playing their fantastic games and are likely getting quite seriously prepared for the upcoming *Riddick* sequel/remake, *Assault on Dark Athena*. While it's likely that Atari, who recently pulled the game from the trash can by securing the publishing rights, has a lot to do with this news, it means more funds for Starbreeze and, hopefully, more games to come from them in the future.

Gaming Charts

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

PLAYSTATION 3
1	Resident Evil 5
2	Killzone 2
3	Silent Hill Homecoming
4	Afro Samurai
5	Street Fighter IV

PLAYSTATION 3
1	MotorStorm
2	FIFA 2009
3	Need for Speed: Undercover
4	Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe
5	Call of Duty: World at War

XBOX 360
1	Halo Wars
2	The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
3	Gears of War 2
4	Fable II
5	50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

XBOX 360
1	Kung Fu Panda
2	LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures
3	Gears of War 2
4	Stranglehold
5	Need for Speed: Undercover

PLAYSTATION 2
1	Ben 10: Alien Force
2	Tomb Raider: Underworld
3	Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2009
4	Monsters vs. Aliens
5	Pimp my Ride 2

PLAYSTATION 2
1	Burnout Revenge
2	Need for Speed: Undercover
3	Kung Fu Panda
4	FIFA 2009
5	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Platinum Edition)

PC
1	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
2	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
3	Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.
4	Empire: Total War
5	Grand Theft Auto IV

PC
1	FIFA 2009
2	Hitman: Blood Money
3	MX vs. ATV Unleashed
4	Tomb Raider: Legend
5	Conflict: Desert Storm II

PSP
1	Ben 10: Alien Force
2	Resistance: Retribution
3	Tenchu: Shadow Assassins
4	Buzz! Brain Bender
5	Need for Speed: Undercover

PSP
1	FIFA 2009
2	WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008
3	Need for Speed: Undercover
4	Ridge Racer 2
5	Buzz! Master Quiz

WII
1	Sonic and the Black Knight
2	My Fitness Coach
3	Family Ski & Snowboard
4	MadWorld
5	Animal Crossing

WII
1	More Game Party
2	Wii Sports
3	PopStar Guitar
4	Wii Fit & Balance Board
5	Wii Play

DS
1	Littlest Pet Shop: Spring
2	MySims Party
3	Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars
4	Pimp My Ride 2
5	Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training: How Old Is Your Brain?

DS
1	TouchMaster
2	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!
3	New Super Mario Bros.
4	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!
5	Mario Kart

NOT LEFT FOR DEAD JUST YET

It's not often that Valve is forced to take a back seat, but it seems that's what's been happening with their zombie-smashing title *Left 4 Dead*. It's unknown if *Call of Duty: World at War*'s popular Nazi Zombies are to blame, but many see it as a likely cause. To combat this, Valve has been hard at work on developing Survival Mode for *L4D*. This mode, which is to be included in the upcoming free DLC pack for PC and Xbox owners, will put the fearsome four against the undead hordes in a manner very much like that of Nazi Zombies. There will likely be a few key differences between the two, but it's certainly a good sign to see a company like Valve learn from their competition and fight back. *L4D*'s new downloadable content pack will also extend the versus mode to the previously missing chapters, Dead Air and Death Toll. The pack should be available before the end of April, running ahead of the upcoming Critic's Choice Award edition of the Xbox version.

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a 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 copy of *Rise of the Argonauts* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [April Caption].

THIS MONTH'S CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
It's tough to get ahead in the world these days...

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
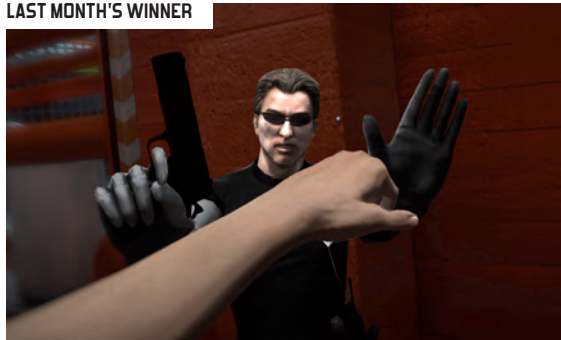
"Don't point that at me... I will rip it off and hit you with the wet end" – *Paul van Oldenmark*

Insert 'patching' joke here

"This is Softwear by Microsoft. A clothing line that taps the nostalgia of when PCs were just starting to change our lives" reads the MS Softwear story. Essentially this is just Microsoft catching up with the last ten years of retro-geek T-shirts and other clothing, but it's nice of them to contribute their official stamp to this phenomenon. The product range includes DOS shirts, a picture of Gates' youthful mugshot and a collage of early Windows icons. Microsoft, if you're reading this, we want a shirt of Windows 98 crashing in the middle of Bill's global unveiling.

Events

THE BAGINATOR

So we all know the history of the poor badger, stomped by a demon and then resurrected, lost to the Internet torrents, only to return as the Dread Pirate Badger. All of this left him with a peg leg, an eyepatch and a healthy respect for demons.

And so his story continues...

On the weekends, the badger likes to run free in the long savannah grass near the highway by the airport. Often he dashes across the road (you know... to get to the other side). The peg leg and eyepatch have robbed him of his usual nimbleness. Too bad he didn't spot that truck carrying cybernetic body parts, which was luckily followed by an ambulance full of cybernetic doctors and scientists, which was luckily followed by a military jeep on its way to Vicinity 42 in Kempton Park (they do advanced experiments here in an underground lab). They worked for days on the battered remains of our poor badger and finally produced what you see on this page. He's still hiding (they wanted to use him for nefarious purposes) in the magazine – go get him. Remember, it's not going to be easy anymore – he's more advanced.

Send your sightings to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'April Badger' and stand a chance to win a limited-edition T-shirt from Gamer Gear.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
Tyler Ford, p80

MODERN WARFARE OUTDOES SUCCESSOR

The British Academy Video Game Awards, which broke away from the regular BAFTA Interactive Awards in 2003, are over and the results are in. Scooping up four of the prestigious awards was *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* – securing the award for Gameplay, Story and GAME Award, the last of which is open to a public vote. The game to take the top position of Best Game was Super Mario Galaxy, with Fable II awarded Best Action/Adventure and Sony's *LittleBigPlanet* grabbing the Artistic Achievement award. This is hardly new territory for BAFTA and their dedication to bringing videogames into the public eye and put them on equal footing with film and television has proven to be a successful formula.

iPhone games dominate App Store

There are now over 6,000 games available for download, either free or purchased, for the iPhone. Using the highly successful App Store as a point of distribution was obviously a good choice by Apple, and marketing their device (as well as the iPod touch) as a serious contender for domination in the mobile gaming world obviously holds more weight than many initially thought. The 6,000+ games account for over 30% of the entire App Store library, followed by the rather ambiguously titled 'Entertainment' category at 20%, with books coming in at third place at 15%.

BT Games Release List

Release dates subject to change

WEEK 1 – 3 APRIL

TITLE	PLATFORM
Broken Sword	Wii
Tenchu 4: Shadow Assassins	Wii, PSP
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	360, PS3
Yu Gi Oh 5D's Stardust Accelerator	DS
Ben 10: Alien Force	DS
The Godfather 2	PC, PS3, 360
Trauma Center Second Opinion	Wii

WEEK 2 – 10 APRIL

TITLE	PLATFORM
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	360, PS3
Guitar Hero World Tour plus guitar	PS3, 360, PS2,Wii
Guitar Hero World Tour standalone guitar	PS3, 360, PS2,Wii
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2009	PS2
Rock Revolution	PS3, Wii, DS
Singstar Vol. 4 plus mic	PS3
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	PC, 360, PS3
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	Wii, DS
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	DS

WEEK 3 – 17 APRIL

TITLE	PLATFORM
Damnation	PC, XBOX 360, PS3

WEEK 4 – 24 APRIL

TITLE	PLATFORM
Guitar Hero World Tour plus drums	PS3, PS2, 360, Wii
Demigod	PC
The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena	PC, PS3, 360
Pimp My Ride	PS2, DS
Animal Crossing	Wii,DS
Pokémon Ranger	DS
Warioland: The Shake Dimmension	Wii
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution	Wii
Marbles! Balance Challenge	Wii
Dragonology	PC, Wii
Championship Manager 09	PC

WIN

COMPONENTS

Processor: Intel Core i7 920
Motherboard: EX58 Extreme
Graphics card: GeForce GTX295
Power supply: Odin Pro 1.200 watt
Memory: Corsair Dominato TR3X3G1600C8D 3GB
Case: Cooler Master Cosmos Sport
Hard Drive: Western Digital Caviar GP WD5000ACS hard drive

Sound card: Creative X-Fi Titanium Fatal1ty Professional series
Monitor: Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD
Keyboard: Microsoft Sidewinder X6 keyboard
Mouse: Logitech G9 Laser mouse
Cooler: Thermalright Ultra 120 LGA 1366 clip
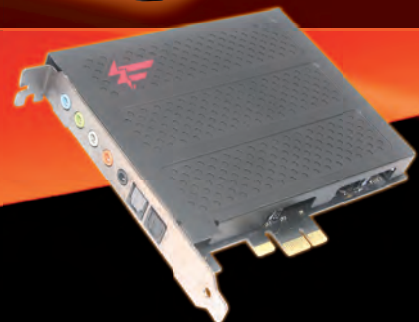
- SMSes will be charged at R5 each
- Winners will be notified by telephone
- Judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into
- You'd also better get permission from the person who pays the cellular phone bill
- Competition closes 30 April 2009

CREATIVE

DCC
DRIVE CONTROL
CORPORATION (PTY) LTD

Microsoft®

intel Core™2 Extreme inside™
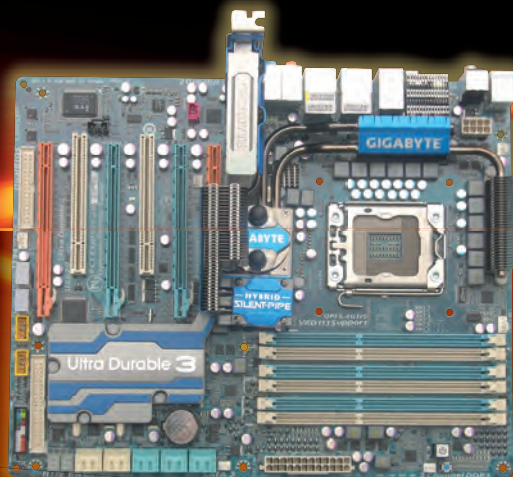
MIKTARS MEANDERINGS

BY MIKTAR DRACON

Hi, I'm Miktar!

THE GAMING INDUSTRY IS just so gosh-darn fraking interesting right now, isn't it? Square-Enix has bought Eidos; there's actually visible penis in *GTA IV: The Lost and Damned*; the Game Boy has turned 20; the iPhone and iPod touch are completely disrupting Nintendo's DS market (hence their DSi reply with its wireless download service for applications and games); the Wii continues to annoy the self-professed hardcore to no end by **not failing**; while the HD twins (PS3 and 360) battle for second place. More game development studios have opened and closed doors in the last six months than in the last decade of gaming, thanks to the 'economic crisis' that half the world doesn't even want to admit exists. We live in Interesting Times!

While on a recent press trip to various locations around the United States, I was sitting at the Madison (Wisconsin) airport, watching a man with a shaven head, cropped goatee, and pair of sunglasses on his brow, crouched by an outlet, charging some kind of device. He looked like the type of guy who rides a Harley Davidson, and for fun likes to punch people in the face. Walking past him nonchalantly to get a better look, since my gamer sense was tingling, I noticed that he had been charging a jet-black Nintendo DS. If only I could have seen what game he had in the chamber.

Waiting at the Los Angeles International Airport for my next connection, I was chatting with a bunch of European gaming journalists, there for the same event. Shooting the breeze with a fellow gamer from Portugal, we're swapping war stories from the 8-bit, 16-bit, 32-bit, Next Gen, Then Gen and Next-Next-Next Gen Eras. We're basically **geeking out**, talking about games, platforms and recent conquests. One of the journalists, an Israeli who writes for a casual gaming Website, asked (in what I thought was a rather snotty infliction) if we're "fanatics." We just laughed at him, having just discussed our decades of work in the industry on top of additional decades of loving, enjoying and playing games since we were kids.

Fanatics, they come in all shapes and sizes. Some defend their brand or platform of choice with such fervour that they're practically incapable of reason. Those are the very narrow-minded fanatics, I would hazard. If you think gaming can only exists on **your** platform of choice, and that all other platforms are inferior by default, you shame yourself, your family and all who know you. Some fanatics such as me actually watch the stock prices of various publishers rise and fall with each announcement they make as they try to mould the future in their favour. Is that a little too technical? Perhaps, but it's still gaming – it's still as much a part of the System as the box that plays the games itself.

You don't think that kind of stuff is important? You don't care what the publishers are doing or saying? You just care about games? Great! Me too! So, have you played *Street Fighter IV* yet? Isn't it totally sweet? Yeah, it is way better than *Tekken*. I don't even think *Tekken 6* can compete. Heck, even my love for *Soul Calibur IV* has waned, thanks to the distilled brilliance of *Street Fighter IV*. What, you think *Tekken* is better than *Street Fighter IV*? You're crazy. *Tekken* is just another command-string Hell where people with no lives go to spend hours upon hours learning a single character's move set. It's like *Killer Instinct* all over again. You've never played *Killer Instinct*? Oh, it was sweet – it started the whole 'learn this command input consisting of 20 buttons and various joystick wiggles' so you can air juggle an opponent from first hit right up to the KO. No, I'm not being derisive, just stating the facts, Jack. You can appreciate something without actually liking it, you know.

It's funny, but *Street Fighter IV* is having the same effect on the 'hard-core' Street Fighter Third Strike fans as *Counter-Strike: Source* had on CS 1.6 pundits. "No," they cry. "*SFIV* is for the n00bs! It's too easy to pull off a fireball! It doesn't have Custom Combos! You can't Air Block! It's totally nerfed! It's diluting the market by bringing in n00blets! It wasn't made by people who **understand** fighting games!" Yadda, yadda, yadda. They sure do come up with a bunch of interesting lies to tell themselves, when they can't actually think of any good reasons.

It never ceases to amaze me to what lengths those who have dedicated far too much time to mastering a single system will go to prevent themselves from having to learn something new, fresh and interesting because it'd put them back at Level 0. It's natural to want to defend your turf, sure, but you can't deny that it's kind of lame to fight the future just because you want to defend your mastery of a tiny speck of the gaming universe.

Have you ever noticed how people tend to only like music that they associate with a social group that **they** are a part of, or at least **perceive** themselves to be a part of? Music is social in the way it is presented to us. It seems as if people hate music, not because of the music, but because of whom they associate the music with. They hate techno because they hate rave bunnies, they hate rap because they hate blacks. Because people are like this, they tend to be mostly ignorant of music. Weird, huh? **NAG**

> If you think gaming can only exists **on your platform of choice, and that all other platforms are inferior by default**, you shame yourself, your family and all who know you.

RANT

BY WALT PRETORIUS

The Annual Islamabad Goat Derby (and other tales of marketing stupidity)

HERE'S A THOUGHT, BUT it's just a thought, mind you, and one that probably would be useless in the hands of the average *NAG* reader. No offense meant, but this is written in the hope that some really powerful people in the video gaming industry (a) read this magazine, and (b) actually think my opinion is worth spit. So, in other words, here goes nothing...

How about, maybe, releasing videogames at a time when other people are not releasing videogames? During one of those utterly annoying dry patches when there just aren't any new games coming. I am no student of economics and marketing, but it seems a little more logical to me than the current situation.

Let's create an extended metaphor to illustrate my point. Johnny, a young goatherd from Islamabad, has enough space within his frail body for two apples a day. Every day, he goes down to the local fruit market, which is next to a large brothel that he has never had the money to visit, and looks for two apples. But most days, there aren't any apples. Johnny (whose name has been changed to protect the innocent of Islamabad, particularly the goats) peruses the stalls filled with bananas, peaches, mangos and kumquats, but finds no apples. Every now and then, he finds one mealy apple that he grudgingly buys because he is hungry and chasing goats is hard work – these goats are particularly athletic goats bred for the annual Islamabad Goat Derby. He dreams of beautiful, firm, bright red apples – the kind everyone likes to eat, except for doctors. Apples, after all, are to doctors what citronella is to flies. And so, day in and day out, Johnny finds no appealing apples, despite the fact that the apple farmers produce big, 3D posters of their apples, and hold press conferences about how good their apples taste.

And then, every now and then, the apple sellers arrive at the market with large wagons full of apples – big, shiny, juicy, scrumptious apples. The tables in the market are heaving with apples.

But Johnny can still only fit two apples in his body and, because he is a hard-core apple eater, he doesn't buy apples for tomorrow. Besides, by tomorrow, the apples wouldn't look as good, having been eclipsed by the apple farmers' promises of next-generation apples to come. And so, of all the heaving tables of apples, only two are sold. *[The apples are the games right? Ed]*

The apple farmers, distressed by the fact that their wonderful apples have gone largely unnoticed, and that they have lost money, go back to their farms, burn their orchards and fire their apple 'developers' in an effort to save money. What they don't do is make a plan to deliver their apples in a more paced way. It's all or nothing with apple farmers, as I am sure you can understand. And so, Johnny gets his two beautiful apples when he can, based on his ability to consume them, and has to listen to the apple farmers complaining that they haven't made enough money.

Okay, it's a rubbish metaphor. So let's break it down like this: Hey, Mr Big Game Publisher. Try to release a triple-A or two at the time when your opposition is not releasing anything. July is good. Because, Mr Highly Educated in the Field of Marketing Game Publisher, releasing all the good games AT THE SAME TIME means that the market becomes weak, and your sales will suffer. It's obvious. Perhaps you should put "not the sharpest spoon in the knife drawer" on your CV. **NAG**

> The apple farmers, distressed by the fact that their wonderful apples have gone largely unnoticed, and that they have lost money, **go back to their farms, burn their orchards and fire their apple 'developers'** in an effort to save money.

I. GAMER

BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

Rock and Roll Generation X

CONTEMPORARY GAMING IS OFTEN referred to as this generation's rock and roll, because it started out on a small scale and was only appreciated by a select few. As with rock and roll, gaming was initially considered something too removed from the norm to be taken seriously. Whereas rock and roll didn't take too long to develop a massive fan base and was turned into a lucrative genre by record labels, gaming took a little longer. I suppose that's where the analogy ends; unless you want to start getting overly analogous and begin referring to *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* as the cash-cow children of the two industries shacking up... But I digress.

What's interesting for me is that this slow-to-take-off label applies, quite aptly, to our gaming scene in our wonderful South Africa. I honestly relish noticing every sign that my favourite pastime is becoming every second person's favourite pastime as well. When I was teaching at a high school in Cape Town (at my old high school, which made the difference among the students even more noticeable), the corridor hubbub between classes was less sport related and more game related. Instead of posters of cricketers and rugby players in my classroom, my students chose posters of *Warcraft*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, and *Midnight Club*. It wasn't surfing pictures or football club logos neatly pasted onto new workbooks, but rather pictures of Kratos, Mario, and Lara Croft.

The most poetic example of this rise in popularity happened to me two months ago while I was browsing through the gaming section in a Look & Listen.

When I was in high school, the amount of proper gamers could be counted on one hand. We were desperately in the minority in a school that seemed to teem with sporty types (read: jocks) and people who would sooner take a bullet than ever be seen as a gamer. Come to think of it, I don't even think the term "gamer" even existed back then as an accepted label: we were just called nerds even though most of us were failing maths and science and had no clue how to program at all. The mentality back then was: you play games; you are a nerd. But back to the Look & Listen incident: there I was, browsing around a large Xbox 360 display, when I noticed two guys from my year at school doing the same. This is where the "poetic example" comes in: these guys were two of the biggest jocks. They had played first-team rugby, they were into their gym, and above all, they loved reminding us of our nerdy status. It seemed to me, at that instant, that not even the mightiest first-team jock was immune to the rise of gaming popularity. The two of them stood arguing for a while about which game to get for their consoles, and in the end they walked out with a copy of *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* so they could "go home and rock out hard, bro." (I kid you not; their exact words) Two things happened to me at that point (three if you count the bouts of hysteria I had about their exchange, which seemed to merge both jock and nerd into some new, hybrid stereotype): firstly, I smiled inwardly, fighting the urge to smugly exclaim to them, "Oh how the mighty have fallen"; and secondly, I had another one of those 'gaming is on the rise in our country' moments. I love the latter moments; they remind me that this industry has become a very big part of many people's lives, and it's not going to stop growing any time soon.

Despite the fact that the world is in an economic recession, the gaming industry continues to be a lucrative one (it made $21.3 billion in the USA alone for 2008). Yes, many game developers have shut shop and a lot of employees have been booted in order to cut costs, but the fact remains that the consumer base for the industry continues to grow globally. In a time when people are supposed to be saving their money and cutting their spending, it seems that their austerity campaign mentality doesn't extend to their love of gaming. If our favourite pastime is continuing to soar during an economic crunch, then I think it's pretty safe to assume that there are big things ahead for gaming in our country. **NAG**

> Come to think of it, I don't even think the term "gamer" even existed back then as an accepted label: **we were just called nerds even though most of us were failing maths and science** and had no clue how to program at all.

Wolfenstein

Does Wolfenstein still matter? *Sieg Heil* - yes!

Genre→ First-person Shooter

PC   **360**   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

ANOTHER *WOLFENSTEIN*? **WELL, TO** be fair, this would only be the fourth game in the series. It's not as if we're dealing with *Call of Duty* here, which gets a new sequel every four seconds.

To be honest, it was initially hard to muster up enthusiasm for this attempt at a "retro cash-in" as some of our peers in the industry have already decided to call it, but we know better. The question remained, however, what could Raven possibly do to make the series seem fresh and interesting? *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, while a decent enough first-person shooter romp through Nazis and mutants, was still run of the mill, by the numbers.

The solution they came up with, it seems, was to take the series back to its occult roots and bring back the weirdness that made the original set such an interesting experience. While 'realistic' World War II shooters may be a perpetual stale trend, taking a more fantastical approach, while throwing in copious amounts of mysticism and magic, breathes some genuinely brisk and invigorating air back into the old horse.

B.J. Blazkowicz is back, and this time he can step between dimensions for double the fun.

BEING B.J. BLAZKOWICZ

We sat down in front of an Xbox 360, were handed a controller and told that what we're about to play is a pre-Alpha. Fair enough, no complaints here... let's go shoot stuff. The game opens with a stunningly rendered cut scene by the esteemed Blur studios (who may as well be Raven's personal CG team), showing B.J. kicking serious ass aboard an aircraft carrier about to nuke London. Our hero does the sneaking mission thing, snaps a few Nazi necks,

B.J. Blazkowicz is back, and this time he can **step between dimensions for double the fun.**

History Nazi: **Eins**

Late to the Nazi Party? Do not worry *mein Freund*; we'll get you up to speed on what's been happening in the colourful history of the *Wolfenstein* series. Spoiler alert: Hitler!

Wolfenstein 3D (released on 5 May 1992, created by id Software and published by Apogee Software) was inspired by the late 1980s Muse Software game *Castle Wolfenstein*. Allied spy and generally square-jawed, shifty-eyed hero, William B.J. Blazkowicz got captured by the Nazi regime while he was trying to infiltrate Castle Wolfenstein to find plans for the mysterious Operation *Eisenfaust*.

Imprisoned in Episode One, *Escape from Castle Wolfenstein*, but able to escape (surprise!) by overpowering the guard, B.J. set off with a knife and gun obtained from the guard. Originally he just wanted to escape from the prison, but by taking out SS guards, attack dogs (or attack rats, depending on which country you lived in), stealing machine guns and ultimately getting a chain gun, B.J. found himself facing the ultimate prison guard (and Episode One boss), Hans Grosse. After taking down Grosse and escaping the castle, B.J. discovered that Operation *Eisenfaust* was real, and that the Nazis were creating an army of undead mutants over in Castle Hollehammer.

Not one to stand idle while Nazis do Nazi things, B.J. infiltrated Episode Two, *Castle Hollehammer*, taking out mutants (with third arms grafted onto their chests for holding pistols and presumably to free up both hands for saluting or drinking coffee) and finally defeating scientist Dr Schabbs, the creator of the mutants.

Episode Three, *Die, Führer, Die!*, was the final episode, with B.J. fighting Nazi soldiers in the bunker under the Reichstag until finally confronting Adolf Hitler himself, who appeared in a robotic suit while wielding four Gatling guns - you can't fault the Führer's style.

Incidentally, there were three additional prequel episodes titled *The Nocturnal Missions*. These focused on the Germans' plans for chemical warfare. The first episode, *A Dark Secret*, dealt with the initial pursuit of the scientist responsible for the chemical weapons. B.J. entered the weapons research facility and hunted down Dr Otto Giftmacher. The second episode, *Trial of the Madman*, took place in the ornate Castle Erlangen, as B.J. snuck around looking for maps and plans for the chemical war. These were guarded by Gretel Grosse (Hans's sister). Drawing the prequel story to a close in the final episode, *Confrontation*, which took place in Castle Offenbach, B.J. took the final battle to the leader of the chemical war, General Fettgesicht.

History Nazi: **Zwei**

Spear of Destiny (also released in 1992, and developed by id Software but published by FormGen Corporation) is a prequel to *Wolfenstein 3D*. This time, B.J. went on a mission to try to recapture the Spear of Destiny (also known as the Lance of Longinus, believed to have been the lance that pierced Jesus' side in John's account of the crucifixion). Nothing is sacred to the Nazis!

Defeating Trans Grosse (older brother of Hans and Gretel Grosse), Barnacle Wilhelm (a chief general involved in obtaining the spear), the Übermutant (the greatest creation of Dr Schabbs), and the Death Knight (the missile-equipped commander responsible for guarding the spear), B.J. obtained the Spear of Destiny and lanced the last boss, the Angel of Death.

History Nazi: **Drei**

Return to Castle Wolfenstein (released on 19 November 2001, developed by Gray Matter Interactive, and published by Activision with id Software credited as executive producers) is a direct sequel to *Wolfenstein 3D*. Taking place in Nazi-occupied Europe during 1943, the game followed US Army Ranger B.J. and Agent One as they investigated rumours surrounding one of Heinrich Himmler's personal projects, the SS Paranormal Division.

Both agents were captured and imprisoned in Castle Wolfenstein, so it's no surprise that B.J. (already quite familiar with the place) managed to escape the castle and investigate the SS Paranormal Division (which did research on resurrecting corpses, biotechnology and super-secret, seriously gross weapons). Taking out Waffen-SS soldiers, elite *Fallschirmjäger* (paratroopers), legions of undead creatures, and horrific Übersoldaten (super soldiers) – created through a heinous blend of surgery and chemical engineering conducted by Wilhelm "Deathshead" Strasse - B.J. finally confronted the undead Saxon 'warrior-prince' Heinrich I. The fight was epic... but you had to be there.

> Playing the game is a fun experience that **rewards creative use of the Amulet's powers.**

but ends up triggering an alarm that sets the fury of the Führer loose on him. Just when all hope is lost, he pulls out a medallion he found during earlier escapades, which reduces everyone on board to dust. Nuke strike averted, but the Allies want to know more about this strange medallion B.J. has. As such, the game starts with B.J. sent to a city in Europe where crystals resembling those on his medallion are found, tasking him to also follow up leads regarding a mysterious new power source the Nazis may have.

The first level (one of a few we looked at), set in a Nazi-controlled train station where B.J. arrives incognito thanks to rebel assistance, makes it clear that *Wolfenstein* is all about running, gunning and finding treasure. Right off the bat, there is a clear *Call of Duty* 'vibe' here with how your objectives are laid out, displayed and in the way you're funnelled from one area to another with plenty of action around your ears to keep you pumped. Finding treasure isn't just for score either, as we discovered. There is a weapon and power upgrade system via the Black Market on the City Map (accessed after a level is done), while certain upgrades to specific weapons require you to find Intel Blueprints hidden in a level. Gun upgrades come in the form of improved ammunition capacity, recoil, silencers, and you can sell back upgrades for their full price, letting you tailor your arsenal specifically for each mission if your funds are limited.

The run-and-gun mechanics are

polished to perfection. The guns feel good, the movement is fluid, and you can toss back grenades thrown at your feet. It all looked pretty standard until a nearby train explodes - its mysterious blue crystal contents reversing gravity for everyone but you, thanks to your Amulet. Flailing, floating Nazis litter the sky until you turn them into dead meat balloons, and we're told that the contents of the train later return as objects in the environment you can use for tactical advantage. That's something different right there - all right.

The Amulet not only protects you from random occult phenomena, but it also has four powers you can command at any time as long as you have enough charge, though we were only given access to two. The main function of the Amulet lets you step into The Veil on command, the mysterious 'other-worldly' dimension that exists parallel to reality. Inside The Veil, you move faster than those outside it, and you can see things that aren't apparent in normal reality. It's really creepy inside The Veil: clouds move rapidly overhead, everything is cast in a green/blue pallor, and sounds almost play in reverse. Enemies are highlighted, while certain walls suddenly no longer exist, allowing you to appear behind entrenched soldiers without them expecting it. Black Sun symbols scrawled on walls indicate such tactical points, which make exploring worthwhile.

The second power of the Amulet is Mire, which is really just a fancy bullet

Under the Engine's Veil

The hot topic surrounding id Software right now is their new id Tech 5 Engine being used in their upcoming vehicular combat game, *Rage*. It's therefore a little surprising to see that *Wolfenstein* uses the older id Tech 4 Engine (albeit heavily modified), which is the engine under the hood of *Doom 3, Quake 4, Prey* and *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. Each game uses a slightly modified version of the engine, but the 'slight' age of the engine can be clearly seen in *Wolfenstein*, as the character models seem blockier than they should be. It all still looks good, but it has an almost 'retro' feel to it, which may or may not suit the person playing the game.

It's history Jim, but not as we know it

This new *Wolfenstein* draws inspiration from real-world Nazi regimes, but differs from historical reality in more than a few ways (as if the blatantly obvious super-occult supernatural entities in the game aren't indication enough). The game aggrandises the Kreisau Circle to be "an extensive resistance network of paramilitary fighter and informants that aids and abets B.J. in his exploits," when in reality it was more like three guys on an estate holding long meetings about how Hitler was getting it wrong. The game depicts the Thule Society as a "powerful nest of Nazis who 'stole' the Black Sun and are deeply entangled in the Reich's paranormal research efforts," when, in fact, they were a Germanic study group interested in the occult (which would later become the Nazi party - but that's a different matter). Originally, the Black Sun only had a symbolic use to Himmler, but the game turns it into a "limitless energy source" for the Nazis. Game history is way cooler than real history. Fact.

History Nazi: **Vier**

Wolfenstein (to be released this year) continues where *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* left off. It's still 1943, the Second World War is reaching its peak, and while Allied forces have stalled the expansion of Hitler's Third Reich, the Nazi war machine is still stomping down on the throat of mainland Europe. Demanding nothing less than global domination (and some slick, sexy uniforms), the Führer brings in Heinrich Himmler's feared SS and their plans to master an occult force known only as the Black Sun.

This mysterious power source will make the Nazis a force no army on Earth can withstand. But a guy, who single-handedly shut down the Übersoldat programme and escaped from Castle Wolfenstein not once, but twice, might just be able to do it. Yet again, the world requires the particular talents (and amazing ability to quick save and quick load) of B.J. Blazkowicz.

This mysterious power source will make the **Nazis a force no army on Earth can withstand.**

And multiplayer?

There will be multiplayer, but Raven couldn't commit to anything at the time of writing. Therefore, we don't know how, if at all, the Amulet will be incorporated into the multiplayer dynamic, or if there would be vehicles during matches. We're hoping for a game type that involves lich Soldaten from the Unterwelt.

Swastika

In the early days of *Wolfenstein*, developers sure had a lot of fun with their level design. One particular level from *Wolfenstein 3D* (Episode 6 Level 3) was built using swastikas (which, in today's politically-correct culture, would be a bit of a faux pas) - still cool, though.

Son of Man

Teeny-tiny fun trivia bit for you: in the Official Hint Manual for *Wolfenstein 3D*, it actually claims that the lead character of the *Commander Keen* series, William Joseph "Billy Blaze" Blazkowicz II, a.k.a. "Commander Keen" or "Keen", is none other than the grandson of Allied war hero, William Joseph B.J. Blazkowicz. No wonder Billy manages to single-handedly save the universe from alien invasion eight episodes in a row. Kicking ass is in his genes.

time, but just as much fun as you'd expect. To keep things balanced, the Amulet has limited charge - so you need to find locations on the map where you can stand to recharge the crystals. Something fun we discovered with Mire is throwing a grenade into a group of Nazis: before they can scatter or throw it back, stepping into Mire and shooting the slow-motion grenade so it explodes in their shocked faces, pops off body parts rather satisfactorily.

We asked if we'd ever fight monsters that exist only in The Veil, but Raven were coy about giving too much away, insisting *Wolfenstein* is about the experience and story. We're inclined to agree: playing the game is a fun experience that rewards creative use of the Amulet's powers. One level involved stepping into The Veil so we could see the weak points on a Super Soldier's augmented armour, which made dispatching him much easier than if we had just used brute force.

Wolfenstein will have a linear plot, but because of the use of a City Map where you choose which location to go to next (which includes side-missions unlocked by completing certain objectives or reaching certain goals), there is a lot more freedom than we've come to expect from the series. Completing these side-missions will give you more treasure with which to upgrade the guns and Amulet or Intel for bigger, better things that go boom. You're going to need it, because you've never quite seen Nazis like this before. If Raven can keep up the creativity, Wolfenstein is going to be a fun ride. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

It *looked* like a urinal...

Singularity

There is no single thing to Singularity, just grand ideas and their time to shine

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THERE IS A BEAUTIFUL symmetry here. Singularity, as a noun, generally means "the quality of being one of a kind." As the title of Raven Software's new game, known for their exceptional work with *Heretic*, *Hexen*, *X-Men Legends* and *Quake 4*, to name a few, it also represents the studio's first original one-of-a-kind intellectual property since the late 1990s.

CONCEPTUAL SINGULARITY

With work having been completed on *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* back in 2006, Raven Software founders and dynamic brother team, Brian and Steve Raffel wanted the company to pursue a new IP, something fresh and interesting. The idea behind *Singularity* came from Steve, who grew up during the Cold War in the '50s and has memories of his parents building a fallout shelter in the backyard. Coupled with a love for science fiction and scary, abandoned facilities that house creepy mystery, *Singularity* was conceived.

Having started work on the game three years ago, *Singularity* is currently in pre-Alpha and is being shown to the press with much enthusiasm.

SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE

Sitting in a darkened room in a hotel in Madison, Wisconsin, the demonstrator admits that what we're about to see is a level from "about halfway through the game." The player already has access to the Time Manipulation Device (TMD) and its four powers; though we're assured that initially the player has to find the TMD and uncover its various powers.

Right from the start, comparisons to the *Half-Life 2* Gravity Gun are appropriate: a separate weapon that can be switched to instantly regardless of what other gun you're using, the TMD easily picks up small objects and shoots them into the distance using the Pulse function. *Singularity* is built using the Unreal Engine 3, and as such sports all the graphical fidelity and physics we've come to expect from high-quality games using the engine. With the pre-Alpha running on the Xbox 360, we can't help but notice just how smoothly everything is running, even during the more complicated scenes where metal unbends itself back into shape as the TMD is used to Rewind time on a broken walkway.

Because the TMD is used as a weapon and as a puzzle-solving device, the team had to limit which physical objects the TMD could effect. As such, the story goes that certain objects on the island are impregnated with the fictional element E-99 - either accidentally or in some cases intentionally. To demonstrate which objects in the environment can be interacted with, he switches to the Chronal Flashlight (another item part of the research done

Plotting it Out

Without giving too much away, the story centres on a mysterious island: Katorga-12. During the height of the Cold War era, Russian experiments were carried out there - strange experiments, delving into awkward realms of science and physics. This is exactly the kind of *verboten* science that makes for a great game premise.

The player, in control of an Air Force recon pilot flying over the island, only to be shot down, spirals into a temporally-charged adventure, as the island itself, unstuck in time, flickers back and forth between the present-day abandoned research facility and the 1950s, complete with Russian soldiers and sunlight. As the island swings backwards and forwards through time, various entities from beyond time are dragged along with it and deposited into the "present-day" time zone, making things extra creepy. One such trans-temporal thing is a little creature that when shot, rapidly ages anything around it into dust within seconds.

on the island), which in itself has multiple functions. Using its Pulse function, it sends out a shockwave of energy, and items in the world that have E-99 in them glow an eerie green as if radioactive. As an example, he picks up a green, glowing, rusty oil barrel husk on the other side of a fence, currently blocking his path, and Rewinds the barrel until it looks as good as new. He drops it, backs away, and shoots at it with the pistol. The explosion rips the fence apart. In another scenario, simply using the Age function on a door lock causes it to rust and disintegrate, granting you access.

Aside from highlighting objects you can use the TMD on, the Chronal Flashlight also lets you see objects outside of time. Shining it on a nearby wall, it reveals a message written sometime in the past, or perhaps future, sending a warning that death is nearby.

After exploring a bit farther into the seemingly abandoned and weathered husk of a research facility, buffeted by the rain, rotting Russian banners and decorations flapping in the wind, a Time Wave cascades across the landscape towards us. In its wake - even before it

hits - a pristine and alive 1950s version of the facility can be seen, complete with wandering guards and sunlight flowing out of the cascade wave until it passes right through us - suddenly leaving us in the 1950s and under assault by confused Russians. These Time Waves are scripted into the story to occur as specific times. There are also times when you manually jump through a Time Portal to go make changes in the past, so that you can progress in the future. One example involved opening doors and moving objects in the past, thus opening a path in the present when these elements are no longer in a state to be manipulated.

VICTIMS OF TIME

Singularity is all about exploring abandoned areas, discovering the secrets behind what occurred on the island, and surviving its violent swings back and forth through time. One could argue that *Singularity* has been influenced by the likes of *Half-Life, System Shock*, and *BioShock*. In essence, *Singularity* contains a cacophony of great ideas from a great many sources.

With the pre-Alpha running on the Xbox 360, **we can't help but notice just how smoothly everything is running, even during the more complicated scenes where metal unbends itself back into shape** as the TMD is used to Rewind time on a broken walkway.

TMD. Check. Rewind on. Check. Let's see how we can fix this walkway.
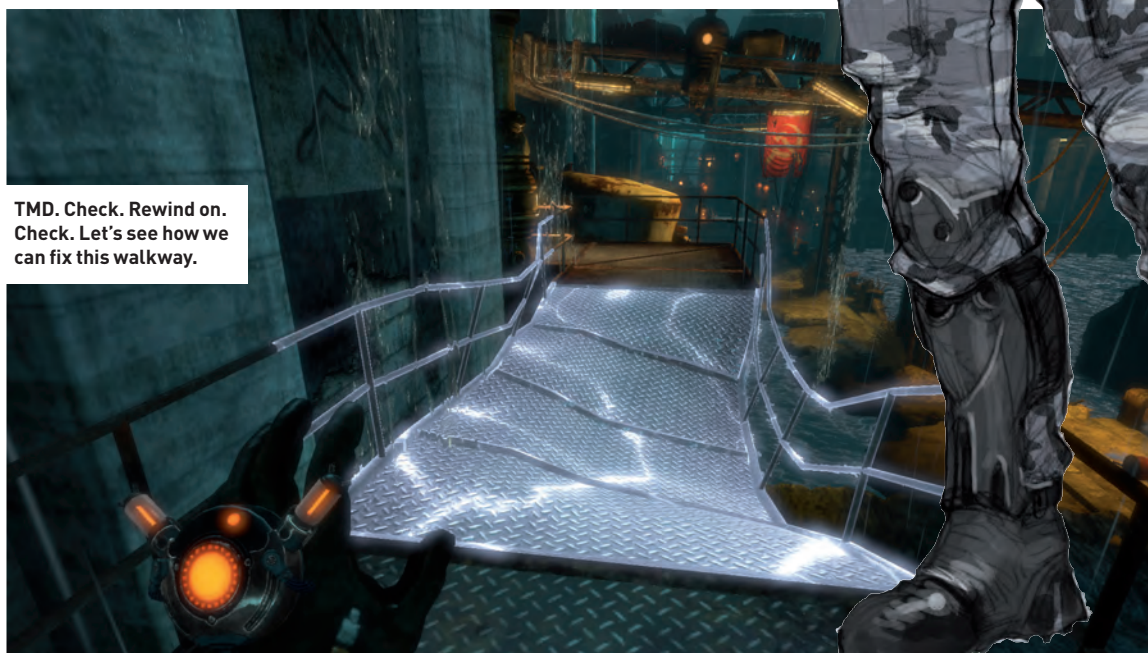
Just flick a switch, pull this trigger thingy, and time stands still!
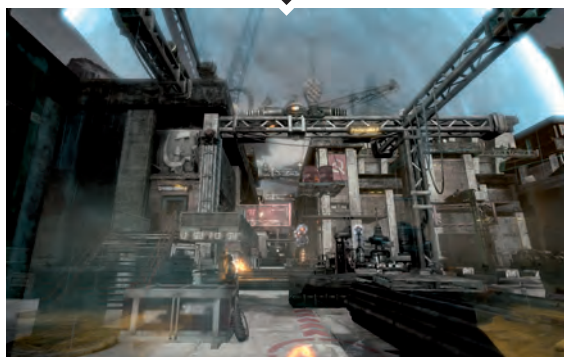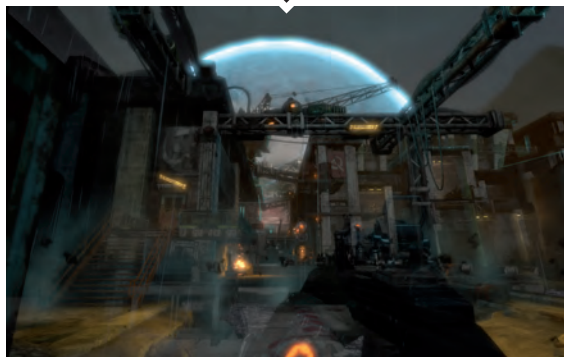
Time is on Your Side

As much of the game dynamic revolves around the Time Manipulation Device, the TMD has been given a variety of features that serve offensive and defensive purposes, depending on how you opt to use its four functions: Rewind, Age, Stasis and Pulse. These functions can even be upgraded, allowing you to pick up heavier objects or increasing its speed.

Much like the *Half-Life 2* Gravity Gun, the TMD can pick up or pull an object and hold it in front of you using its Stasis function. It doesn't just hold the object in place; it also holds it static in time, meaning that you can grab an incoming grenade from the air and hold it indefinitely as time has stopped for the grenade. You can launch objects using Pulse, sending the target object flying away violently into the face of an unsuspecting enemy.

The more exotic Rewind function is perhaps the most exciting, allowing you to rewind an object or enemy backwards in time. When used on broken walkways, the metal bends back into shape, knitting itself into a previously unbroken state. Used on living entities, such as people, it rewinds them into a placental mess - a fleshy mass of puking horror as its insides are squeezed out.

The opposite of Rewind, Age allows you to fast-forward an object or enemy through time. Aiming at a cable holding a metal container, it rusts the cable until it snaps, crushing the enemies below. If you use it on an enemy, they age rapidly and visibly, turning old in front of your eyes before becoming bones and then dust. You can use Age to rot a door blocking your path, or a crate concealing enemies.

This Phase Tick ate my labrador…

One scene we were shown involved using a giant device platform that amplifies the effects of the TMD; in this case used to Rewind time on a huge ship docked in the harbour, but partially submerged, rusting and broken. As the ship is being rewound back through time, its metal girders unbend violently, paint flakes back onto the sides, and the whole thing rises from the depths of time and the ocean. However, the effects are temporary, and as we explore the ship farther, it starts to decay again. Walking down its corridors, we watch as the walls rust right in front of us... stairs buckling and bending behind us as we barely make it out in time.

Aside from the player, there are other victims of time on the island. Dubbed "Echo Events," occasionally you run across playbacks of people caught outside time - ghostly replays showing you people from the past, often right before their grizzly demise. Players interested in more back-story than what is immediately presented can search for notes left behind by the scientists, or recordings that play back as you continue exploring.

TIME FOR ACTION

It's not all exploration, though: when combat happens, it happens with intensity. It's a first-person shooter and it's not afraid of gunplay. Because *Singularity* doesn't do the health-regeneration thing, opting for a more traditional health-bar system, you can use the TMD to Rewind old food you find scattered around for extra health, or even spent ammunition boxes for more bullets. The TMD is a powerful device in battle (we're told it will have limited power before needing a recharge), and can be used to age bridges under soldiers or even on the soldiers themselves. However, be warned: it doesn't work on organics as you would expect. You really don't want to revive dead soldiers.

Another item from the research carried out on the island we were shown was the Deadlock Sphere: a grenade-like item that freezes time around it but allows you to pass through. Throwing it into a room and then using it for cover, you can see enemy bullets freeze right before entering the sphere. Tactical use of the Deadlock and the surreal Phase Ticks - creatures brought from outside time by the island's time travelling - can mean the difference between life and death. Enemies aren't stupid either: they'll shoot at Phase Tick nests near you, releasing the deadly little critters that rewind time when they explode, an event you don't want to be caught in.

Even at this early stage, *Singularity* already has all the style, substance, and content ready for what may be the birth of a new franchise. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Multiplayer

While we weren't given any solid details on the multiplayer, other than confirming it **will** be present in the final product, it does beg the question of how the Time Manipulation Device will be incorporated into the various multiplayer modes one can expect - if at all. It's also unclear if the multiplayer levels will incorporate the time-shifting element present in the single-player levels, where the island cascades from the 1950s to the present day and back.

I'm in your base... eating your dudes
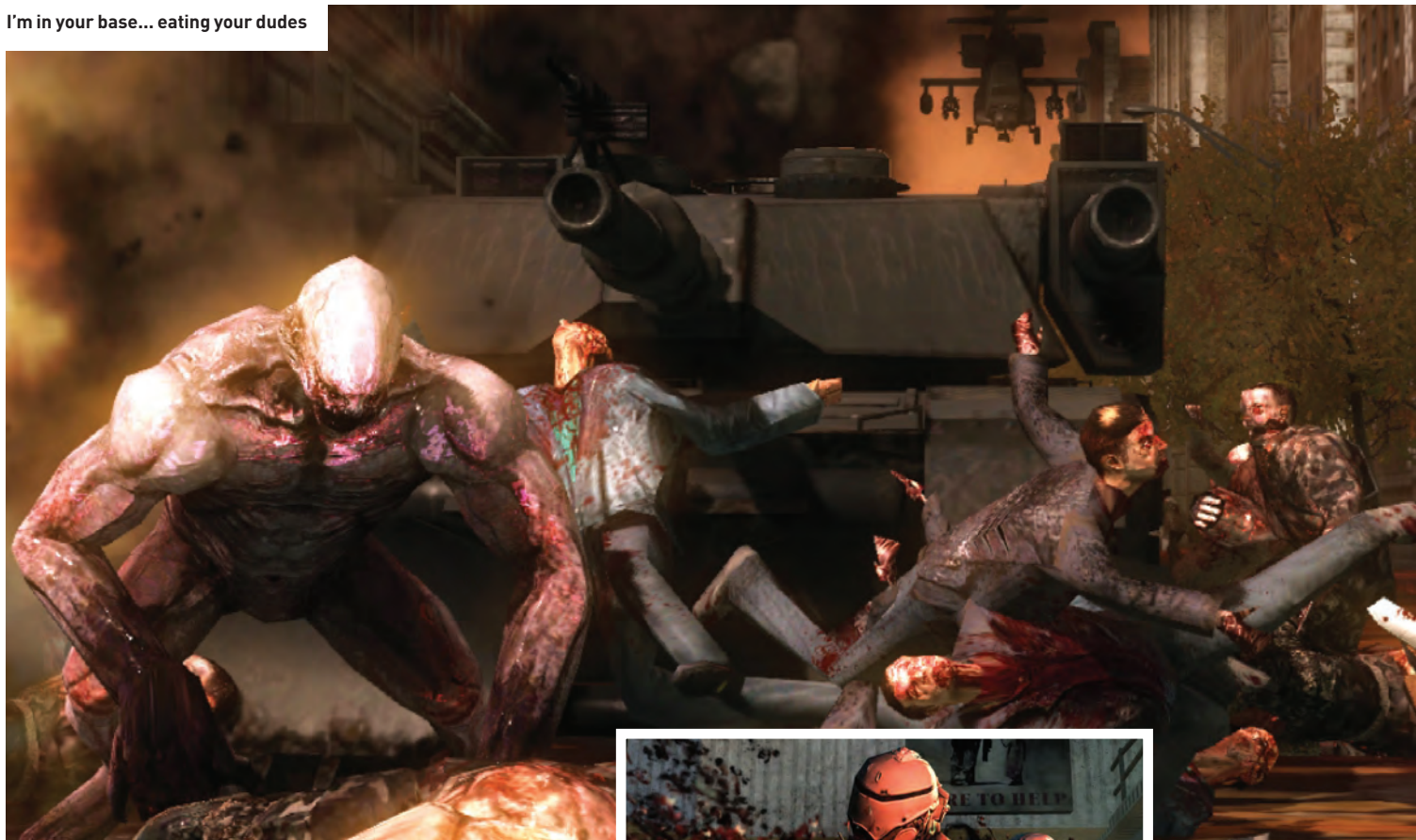
PROTOTYPE

Screw dating, bowling or delivering cars:
this is about bloody violent mutant action

Genre→ Sandbox Action
PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS
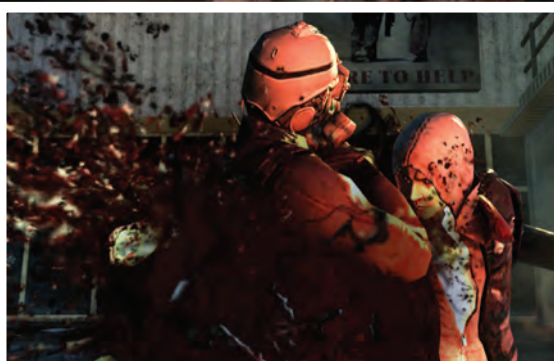
THE VIEW FROM THE fortieth floor of the ritzy hotel suite overlooking Times Square and the greater Manhattan Island beyond was indeed stunning, but what I really wanted to do was play the damned game already! Curse my infuriatingly genial kindness: I suggested that the other European journalists play first. By the time a controller was handed to me, I had already watched several other journalists play through the specially set up scenario in *PROTOTYPE*, so I had a good idea of what to expect. And I knew exactly what I wanted to do differently from the other journalists in terms of approaching the carnage on offer inside the virtual recreation of New York. There was no way in hell I was going to be shepherded from one objective to the next by a handler (each booth had one, trained to prevent the casual press from getting too confused) while the controls were explained to me as if I wrote for *YOU* magazine. When my handler asked if I needed help, I politely waved him away, suggesting he get some lunch. "Don't worry," I assured him.

"I'm a professional." Free, I set about monopolising the Xbox 360 for the next few hours, exploring every corner of the game available in the limited presentation demo - the objectives designed to best show off the game. While not a true recreation of the Big Apple, it was still enough to give that eerie surreal sense when you realise you could see the building you're sitting in playing the game, from within the game itself. That was enough to make me run up the side of the building in the game, past the fortieth floor where the demo room was set up, so that I could leap on top of a nearby attack helicopter and eat the pilot. While the view outside the hotel room window was that of a bustling Times Square, inside the game the view would have been one of thousands of explosions ripping up and down the Square, sending cars, yellow taxicabs, people, infected military personnel and tanks flying into the air. Radical Entertainment knows how to create stunning open-world cityscapes, as is evident in their rendition of *Scarface: The World Is Yours*. They also know how

to let you rip that open-world cityscape a new one, as *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* clearly shows. Combine the two, throw in a real 'power plot' as the one lead protagonist Alex Mercer finds himself in, and you've got the makings of something good. Basically, Alex wakes up on a slab in the morgue: New York is overrun with infected zombie/mutants; the Blackwatch military are trying to keep the viral outbreak in check; and best of all, you're a total badass who doesn't care about anything other than trying to figure out who turned you into this one-man, walking nuclear explosion of armour-piercing tentacles. For the demonstration, the game was put into 'all hell broke out and then some' mode, so there was constant military action, explosions, tanks shooting into crowds of Infected and pedestrians and just pure chaos. Impressively, even in post-Alpha

the custom-built Titanium engine kept a smooth frame rate with zero slowdowns. Running around as Alex was tight: he controls very well and when you hold R1, you sprint, which allows you to run up the sides of buildings as well as kick off and flip over cars - very Parkour influenced. Just as in *Hulk: UD*, there is pure joy just in moving around, leaping from building to building and power slamming into the crowds below. To help manage the action, Alex has an auto lock that prioritises targets based on proximity and threat, but you can also manually cycle through targets easily enough. While sprinting, you can also pick up and throw objects in one smooth motion. It was impressive to see Alex sprint up to a car, flip over it and while upside down, grab the car by the roof, then throw it into a military base. Looking at the game map, aside from plot-progressing Mission locations,

> You cut people in half and you **smash them into a bloody smear on the sidewalk.** It's violent, messy and fun.

there are Events dotted around the city: sub-missions in which you get ranked in Bronze, Silver or Gold depending on how well you perform the various tasks involved. Each rank gives you a certain amount of Evolution Points, which are used to upgrade your skills and stats. Events involve killing a certain amount of Infected in a specific amount of time, or driving 'this tank over there while killing X amount of Y along the way' - if you're thinking of the *Grand Theft Auto* Rampage Events right now, you wouldn't be far off, but try to imagine more blood and carnage. There is a caveat to vehicles, though: before you can drive a tank, you need to consume a Tank driver. To fly a helicopter, you must consume a Pilot. There are several vehicle types, each with a corresponding character to eat before you can use them, as well as other interesting options that open up when you consume, say, a Commander that can call in air strikes. While the 'consume and camouflage' element wasn't really on display in the demo, the principle extends beyond just acquiring skills. To bring down the heat (if you've stirred up too much trouble for yourself), you can disguise

yourself as a pedestrian or military personnel by consuming them and taking their form, making sure not to be spotted doing so. This has the added benefit of allowing you to lead Infected from an Infected base into a military base to keep the two preoccupied while you go about playing anti-hero. It is actually possible to wipe an Infected or military base off the map with enough force and cunning, which makes your life easier in that part of the city. At his disposal (although they'll have to be acquired through skill upgrades in the final version), Alex has several weapon types, ranging from a whip-like tentacle, dual arm swords, and the hyper-dense "Hulk Hands" as we call them, each with their own brand of destruction to be wrought. Each has multiple attacks, and each attack can be charged up for even more damage. You cut people in half and you smash them into a bloody smear on the sidewalk. It's violent, messy and fun. The 30-minute demo was not nearly enough. While this may be chutzpah on my part, I'll stand by it: *PROTOTYPE* is going to be one of the hottest games of 2009, without a doubt. **NAG**

I want my arms back!

Miktar Dracon

Developer→ Raven Software   **Publisher→** Activision   **Web→** www.uncaged.com   **Release Date→** Q2 2009

Wolverine prepares a kebab

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

Manly Adamantium, manly regeneration,
manly feral instincts, manly mauling

Genre→ Action

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THERE IS SUBTLE GENIUS involved when a game is able to make every journalist in the room suddenly shut up and take notice. When the demonstrator started playing *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, everyone was expecting a movie tie-in licence game. We all know such games usually come in two flavours: terrible, or moderately good, with the rare exception being **sheer brilliance**.

While it is known that the utterly capable *X-Men Legends* and *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* development team from Raven is behind the game adaptation of the upcoming *Wolverine* movie, which ensures at the very least that it won't suck, nobody expected to see this level of violence. You have been warned: this is not the kind of game you want to play in front of your parents. Even *God of War* looks a little tame next to *Wolverine*'s utter disregard for the sanctity of human life.

The game goes beyond the movie's story, winding in and out of key plot points to present a wider backdrop to the events in the film. Using the Unreal Engine 3 (very popular with Raven right now), the most immediate visual effect is that of the procedurally-applied damage to Wolverine, right down to his shiny Adamantium skeleton becoming visible if he takes enough damage, bullets ripping chunks of skin off his body. Taking a shotgun blast to the chest will literally let you peer through a hole in his chest and
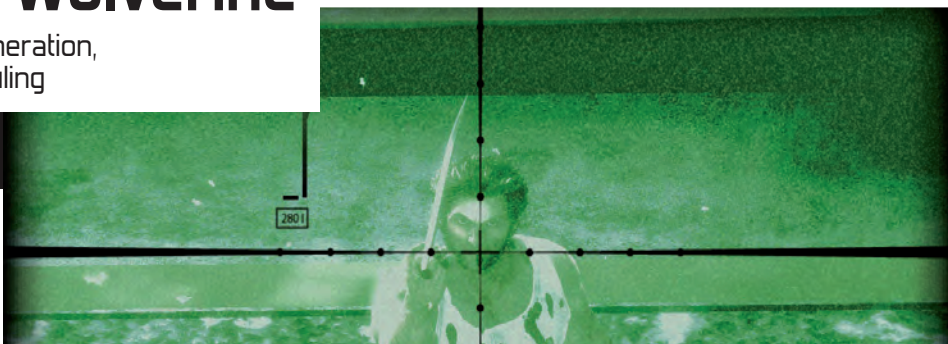
Wolverine's version of bullet-time: blade swish!

... smash the windshield, **grab the pilot and thrust his head up into the rotor blades**...

watch his internal organs knit themselves back together before the skin heals over. It's mesmerising, as we discovered when we were given hands-on time.

Playing like a cross between *God of War* and *Ninja Gaiden*, but not nearly as technical as either, the game involves cutting up your enemies (you can lop off arms and legs) with Light or Heavy attacks, while a Lunge Attack lets you cover great distances quickly, often triggering a cinematic kill-cam focused on the hapless target. Mashing buttons works, but combination strings do add more style. There is a lot of cinematic flair slathered all over the combat, making the experience very satisfying. You can use the environment to impale enemies, throwing them into spikes and such - the more of a certain type of enemy you kill, the more Wolverine's 'Combat Reflexes' upgrade against that enemy, making them easier to kill.

As you progress you level up, learn new moves and can upgrade moves to do more damage (a lot of *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* influence here). You can activate Feral Senses that highlight platforms you can hang onto, and it even shows you a blue 'scent' trail indicating which direction you need to go. There are Quick Kills when you grab a guy and hit attack as the screen flashes, and you can reflect projectiles back at enemies by timing your block button presses.

Hidden in levels are Mutagens, which can be put into one of three slots, customising your play style as each Mutagen influences Wolverine in specific ways (such as more damage to certain types of attacks, or better health regeneration). It is all-out action bathed in ridiculous amounts of violence, blood and gore, like when you leap onto an attack chopper, smash the windshield, grab the pilot and thrust his head up into the rotor blades, leaving a red circular smear on them. It doesn't get better than this. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Developer→ Eugen Systems   **Publisher→** Ubisoft   **Web→** TBA   **Release Date→** TBA

R.U.S.E.

Deception is the name of the game

Genre→ Real-time Strategy

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

BLUFFING, FEIGNING MANOEUVRES AND deceiving your enemy are critical components in warfare - we all know that. What we also know is that the act of deception has never really been fully implemented in an RTS title before. Sure, you can finagle your way into misleading your enemy in most RTS titles out there, but with *R.U.S.E.*, developer Eugen Systems (who previously developed the RTS title *Act of War: Direct Action*) is attempting to make it one of the game's most prominent features. Set during World War II and built on the IRISZOOM game engine, *R.U.S.E.* promises to give players control over massive armies that'll be used to turn the tide of pivotal battles of the era in which the game takes place. The IRISZOOM engine grants the developers the tools with which to craft massive battlefields (we're talking **hundreds** of kilometres in real time here) that aren't only restricted to one small corner of an epic battle. Operation Overlord, for example, has been handled before in RTSs, but usually players only ever see the battle of Omaha beach – a relatively small part of a much greater conflict. However, in

R.U.S.E., players will direct units throughout the entire battle for Normandy in real time on one massive map. Promising an engaging single-player campaign which will be played through the eyes of famous military commanders of the time period, *R.U.S.E.* will also offer intense multiplayer in which various strategies can be employed to deceive other human players. You'll use decoys, camouflage and abilities such as radio silence to keep your enemies in the dark, while utilising recon units and your network of spies to uncover the enemy's movements and weaknesses. Each unit in the game is said to have their own unique special abilities, while six factions will be available in the game (from both the Axis and Allied fronts) and each will have their own play style and exclusive units. This may all sound pretty confusing, but have no fear: the developers promise that the game will be easy to pick up and play once we get our hands on it.   **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The maps look truly epic in scale

NAG READER SURVEY 2009

IN THE JANUARY 2009 issue of NAG, we conducted a reader survey. You might remember it. It was that piece of paper you promised yourself you'd fill in but didn't (some of you were too busy playing games. We understand)...

To those of you who did send it in – thanks! We received a huge amount of entertaining comments and positive suggestions. It was a nice confirmation for us that most of what we do here at the magazine, you like. For all the things that you don't like, we're going to be making some changes, starting with the issue you're holding in your hands right now.

Not many companies conduct surveys of their customers - they prefer to guess. This is why we have vibrating razors with five blades. The plan here is to turn rational people paranoid as they peer at their skin in the bathroom mirror. They stand there and wonder why their beard doesn't look anything like the beard in the adverts. Therefore, one must assume that these razors are a product of the 'more is better so they'll buy it' school of thinking. Soon we'll have six blades, then seven. We'll also justify the purchase because the marketing was so good. They'll use CGI sequences of a man shaving while sitting on a giant lily pad in a jungle pond after battling inky panthers and scaly iguanas. But that's really enough about unrelated products and their failings.

Marketing curricula teach students about the value of determining a need before producing a product. We can't really do that, so our survey simply tests the existing readership / market so we can shape our product into more of what you want. However, before this introduction ends up reading like a marketing pitch, let's get to some of the results*. Just something we'd like to share... our female gamer percentage has increased since the last survey. So, welcome ladies, it's really nice to have you onboard.

There's a lot from our survey that we can't really share with you. There are eyes on us all the time. Eyes connected to brains that wonder how we do it - what magical bean soup they toil over at the NAG office? Why can't we be like them? The trick, of course, is very simple...

We love what we do, and this love and passion are poured into every page in this magazine. Yes, even the adverts are checked and must be in line with our 'vision' before we accept them. All of this good energy is then transferred to everyone who reads the magazine. It's all really very technical, see. Love and passion aside, we also have a team of quantum physicists who perform weird rituals on the ink we use in each issue. Hold the magazine up to your nose and give it a good sniff. See... nothing smells like a new NAG.

This is a very high percentage when

HERE ARE SOME OF THE INTERESTING FACTS. NOW YOU CAN SEE IF YOU'RE NORMAL OR NOT. ;)

* About 8% of everyone who reads the magazine sent in a completed survey. This is a very high percentage when compared with similar efforts by most other companies.

How many hours do you play games during a week?

Range	Percent
< 4	5
5-10	24
11-15	27
16-20	19
21+	25
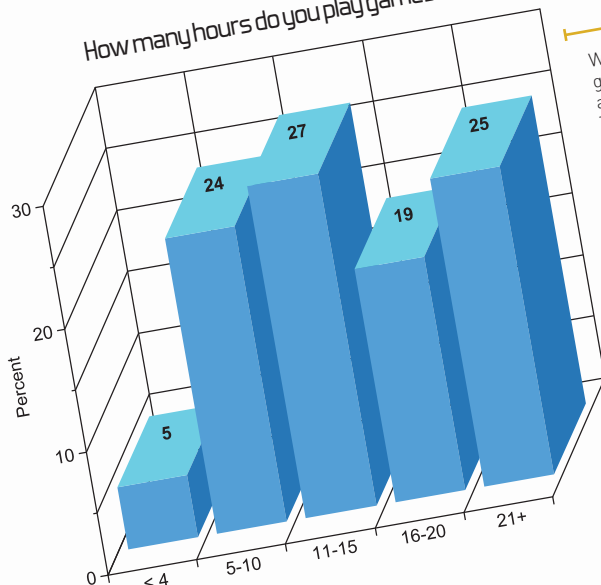
What does it all mean? Well, if you're playing games for 21 hours a week, that's three hours a day; and 14 hours a week is two hours a day. Two to three hours a day! That's a lot. Don't you people have work / homework to do? Don't you sleep, or eat? Forget all that - keep up the good work.

I keep having dreams of zombie outbreaks, in wich I take my girlfriend and my german sheppard dog to the Nag office since you guys know the drill

What do you have at home?

Bar chart — Percent:
- PC: 90
- PS2: 37
- 360: 24
- PSP: 18
- Laptop: 18
- PS3: 11
- Wii: 10
- DS: 5
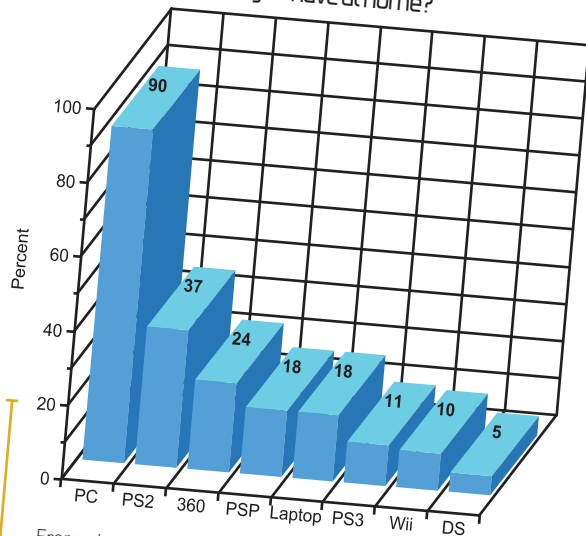
From what we can tell, almost everyone has a PC that can play games (how well is not clear). Interestingly, almost everyone has a console of some kind in their lounge / bedroom. This should end any debate about which is the better platform, because most of you have the best of both worlds – a PC and a console. It's also remarkable to see the growth of the current-generation consoles over the last three years. Well done to everyone for supporting gaming as a whole in South Africa.

Where do you find out about new game titles?

Bar chart — Percent:
- Magazine previews and reviews: 88
- Internet browsing: 40
- Magazine advertising: 32
- Word of mouth: 26
- In-store browsing: 25
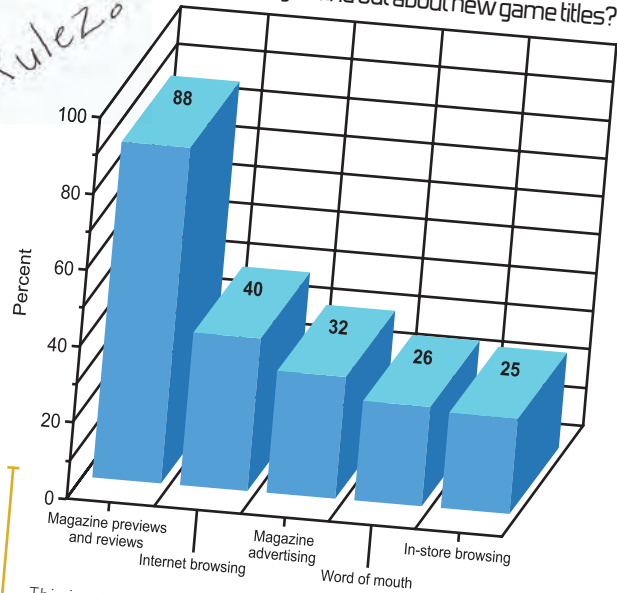
This is a little biased in our favour, considering that everyone who completed the survey buys NAG (except for Mr Jenkins, who was obviously terminally bored in a doctor's waiting room one day). It's good to know that most of you actually read the magazine instead of just laughing at the pictures while you wait for your demos to install. We would have liked to see the advertising percentage a little higher. End of the day, no advertising means no magazine and that 88% would simply disappear.

How many games to you buy a year?

Bar chart — Percent:
- None: 1
- 1-5: 36
- 6-10: 36
- 11-15: 14
- 15+: 13
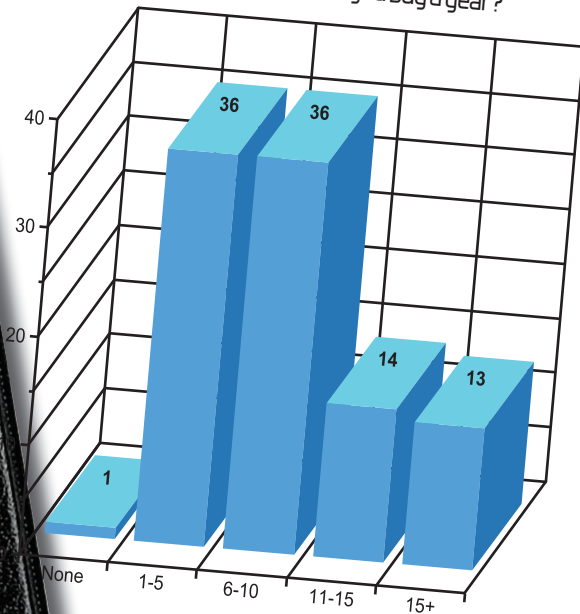
Interesting... If you take the low averages for game pricing and how many games the collective NAG readership buys (five games per year at R400 per game multiplied by our audited ABC sales), in a year we get to a whopping number of R47,500,000 (yes, that's R47.5 million). Go on... pat yourselves on the back. This is a significant number. Also, remember that it was calculated using the lower average numbers and doesn't even include the hardware (consoles, computers, peripherals and all the upgrades). Now add another R20 million for each current-generation console, and who knows how much for PC hardware and upgrades. See where we're going with this...

Have you ever upgraded your PC to make it compatible with a game you wanted?

Bar chart — Percent:
- Yes: 73
- No: 27
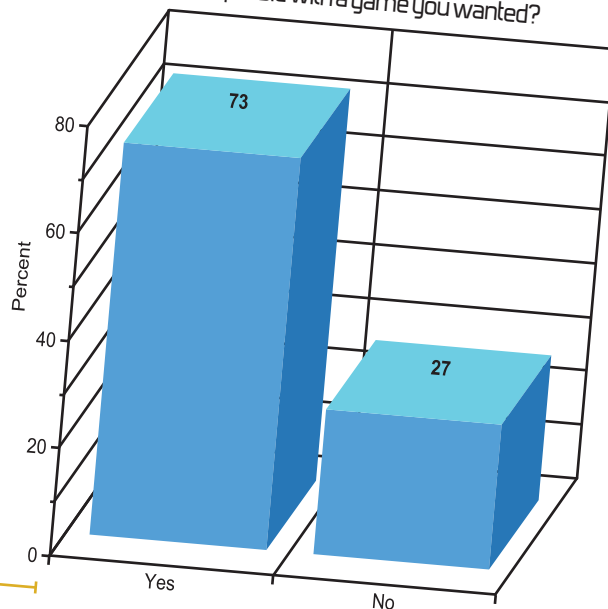
Excellent, now you know why we love you! You're just like us. ;)

What types of games do you enjoy?

Percent

Game	%
FPS	74
RPG	69
Adventure	64
Racing	47
RTS	43
Sport	21
MMO	21
Sim	21
Arcade	17
Puzzle	16
Music	12
Management	9
Card	8
Board	7
Indy	6
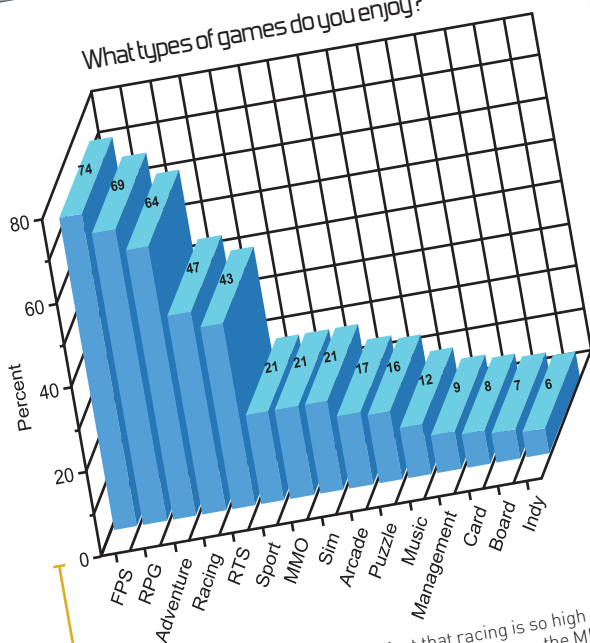
No surprises here... except for the fact that racing is so high and RTS so low. The biggest surprise was the MMO percentage. Really, 21% of you play these games despite our local bandwidth limitations. Just goes to show: if there's a will...

Where do you play multiplayer games?

LAN still dominates, but it's nice to see couch co-op so high these days. Keep it up people and soon we shall rule the world.

Percent

Location	%
LAN	57
Online	27
Couch Co-op	26
I don't	20
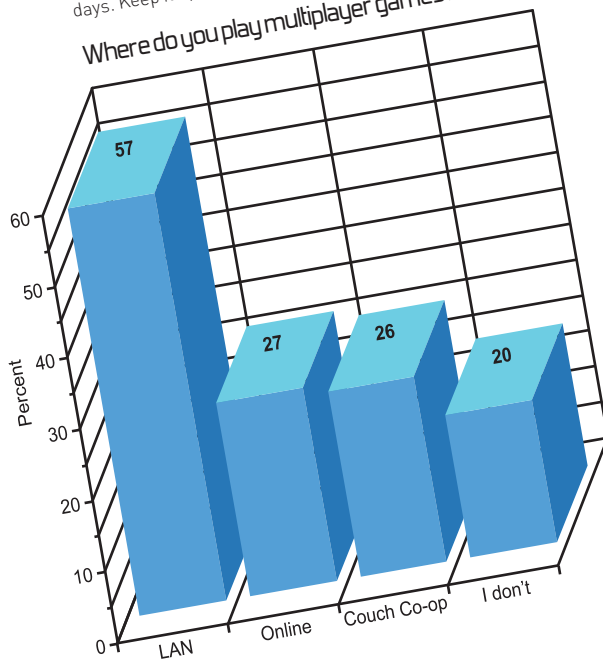
How many other people read your copy of NAG?

Percent

People	%
Just me	36
1-2 people	44
3-4 people	15
5-6 people	2
More than 6 people	3

How many other people use your NAG DVD?

Percent

People	%
Just me	54
1-2 people	35
3-4 people	8
5-6 people	1
More than 6 people	2
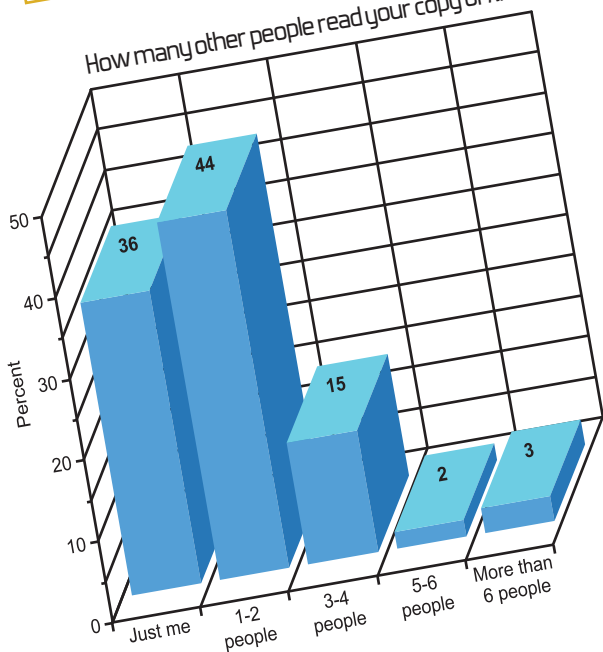
Hey! Those of you at the bottom end of the scale – the 5-6 and more than 6 - what the hell? Tell those freeloaders to buy their own copy of NAG! This is bordering on magazine piracy, and if it doesn't stop, we're going to be introducing some of our own DRM. Starting now, if more than two people read this issue, the ink will fade and you'll have to connect online to top up (for a small fee).

Do the right thing, support girl gamers! lol. You guys Rock! :)

You all ROCK!

Now, a word from some of our biggest fans!

Please pick me as life would suck without this box of stuff.

NAG

As a game enthusiast at the ripe old age of 54 I can only add — "NAG's the mag" of choice. Personally I would like to see more insights into the production of the games eg, as in Diablo 3; & interviews with the "brains" behind the great games – let's face it..there are hundreds of them. (Games, that is!)

Before NAG, I never used to read anything. Now I've gotten 85% for English as my final Matric result! Thank you NAG for making reading fun!! (And helping me with my not-so-bright future)

Introducing this survey is a good gesture in involving the customers with NAG.
I think you should try to involve your customers in a design project, making them send their ideas and designs of what they think the ultimate NAG should look like

How about looking at the autorun feature of the May 2003 NAG cover CD and adding some of todays 'looks' to improve it and maybe use it for NAG 2009; and make it shiney

BiG THANKS TO NAG

Sorry about my writing

You guys are the bomb, you rock. The only south af-rican magazine I will read

Sorry for spelling I did it when I was lying down

Great Mag!
It's even better than the bible!! No really, it is.

your magazine is the best magazine ever in whole history Thank you so much

I'd really, really like to win. I'd be a nicer person if I won, I'm already nice but I could be a whole lot better. I could even ditch the anti-depressants well maybe. (lol)

I also really appreciate having a female in the opinions section, now all you need are some curtains and flowers.... or not.

I'm out of space and a zombie asked to borrow my brains so ciao

the NAG magazine rocks

YEAH YEAH

NAG is the best gaming forum EVER!!! keep it up guys!

NAG RULES!

Make more jokes on pictures of games.

Be more focused on video games with the emphasis on video games.

You guys ARE Doin *1. HELL of A Job KEEP it UP

"MONOPOLY"
100 100
100 100

Yes, we actually got sent Monopoly money as a bribe

The Reviewers

Who watches the NAG-men? Who keeps tabs on the superheroes of our time? You do! Keep up the good work by reading these famous quotes from your famous favourites.

Regardt van der Berg: Life is a joke... ha, really. I know this because I was born without the ability to smile. That's what makes me a superhero. I can't laugh in the face of danger.

Miktar Dracon: I have an un-tethered quantum consciousness and I experience reality in non-linear flow, but all people ever remember about me is my big blue pecker.

Walt Pretorius: When you look at me all you see is your own dementia reflected in the nondescript patterns of my visage. This is my "I farted" face.
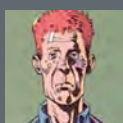
Dane Remendes: Dude, life is totally like a comic book, y'know? Everyone is just characters and they all do their part in the story, except people drawn in the background.
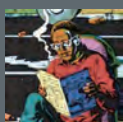
Tarryn van der Byl: Now don't get me wrong, I'm all against the exploitation of women - but have you ever felt what tight spandex is like? It's like you're being hugged by condoms. It's nice.

Chris Bistline: Once, I was like you. I had a job, a family, two dogs that would play with little squeaky toys. I paid my taxes; I played my part in society. Once, I was like you.
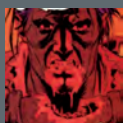
Michael James: Not long ago I tilled these fertile fields with my own hands. I fertilised them with my own poop. And from it, I grew this magnificent empire you see before you. It smells funny, but it's mine.
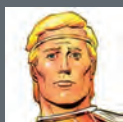
Adam Liebman: I see things. That's what I do. I see things all around me, I see how things are, and I see how things go. I see you reading this. I see your thoughts. Stop it.

Geoff Burrows: Unless I wear this suit, this mask and fight crime, I'm just a middle-aged man who fixes cars and stares wistfully at the sky longing for when I can once again become The Foul.

Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

GAME NAME: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. Now it comes with a short summary, too!

BOX OUTS: More good stuff. Just in a box.

GENRE AND PLATFORMS: What kind of game is it, and what platforms does it come on. All available platforms are in white, the one we reviewed it on is in yellow.

CAPTIONS: A picture's worth a thousand words. Here's 20 or so...

SCREENSHOTS AND ARTWORK: The game looks something like this, presumably

The Score

Breaking down the box

AWARD: Is this game worthy of our praise? If so, it gets an award. See details below.

MULTIPLAYER ICONS: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

PLUS/MINUS: What we liked, and what we didn't, in concise bullet-point format

THE BOTTOM LINE: Here's where we condense the entire review into 20 words or less. Because reading is hard...

AGE RATING: Let's see some ID, son

SCORE: Further reducing our bottom line to a number out of 100

Plus
+ Simple yet deep
+ Balanced
+ Challenging

Minus
− Lacks better instruction
− Medals only awarded for online play

Bottom Line
A true evolution for the series that knows what to keep and what to cut.

97

Editor's Choice Award
If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right – pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.

Must Play Award
Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.

Pony Award
This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the best garbage.

What We're Playing

Here are the top 20 games we're currently playing at the NAG office

#	GAME NAME
1	Halo Wars
2	Unreal Tournament III Titan Pack
3	Call of Duty: World at War
4	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
5	Quake III Arena
6	Battlefield: Bad Company
7	Colin McRae DiRT
8	CSI: NY
9	Destroy All Humans: Path of the Furon
10	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
11	Grand Theft Auto IV
12	GRID
13	Killzone 2
14	Prince of Persia
15	Prinny
16	Puzzle Quest: Galactrix
17	Sacred 2: Fallen Angel
18	Silent Hill: Homecoming
19	Street Fighter IV
20	Tom Clancy's HAWX

Distributors

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

Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

NAG // **Metacritic** // *Game Rankings*

HALO WARS

360
88
82
82

F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN
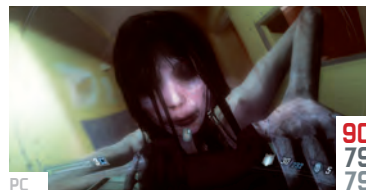
PC
90
79
79

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

PC
89
85
85

KILLZONE 2

PS3
92
92
91

SKATE 2

360
92
84
84

STREET FIGHTER IV
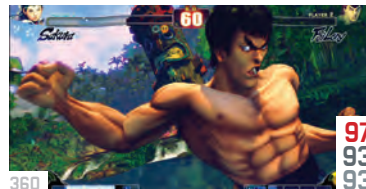
360
97
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SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING
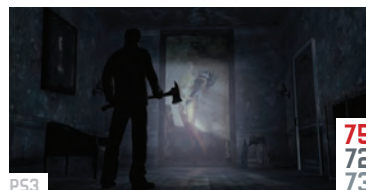
PS3
75
72
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Developer→ Ensemble Studios **Publisher→** Microsoft **Distributor→** MiDigital **Web→** www.halowars.com
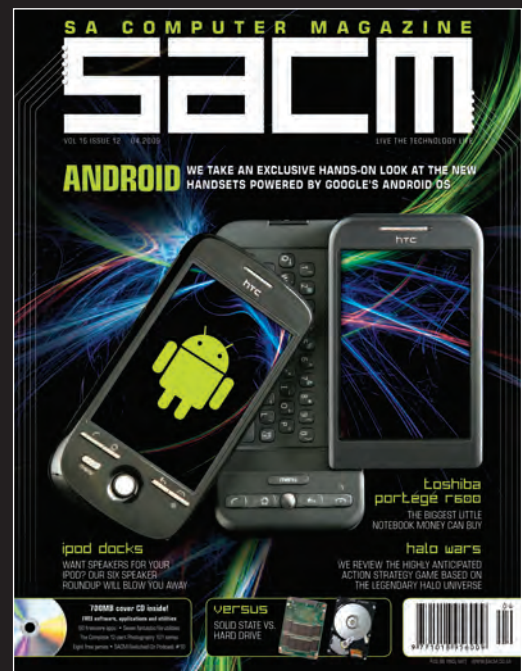
Covenant Banshees harassing a group of UNSC Warthogs and Hornets

Halo Wars

Look! Over there! It's Halo, minus Master Chief!

Genre→ RTS

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

This is the Vulture, the UNSC's über Unit. This flying fortress delivers some pretty devestating firepower, especially when its secondary ability is fired, smashing its target with a barrage of Great Big Missiles ™

IT'S THE YEAR 2531, *20 years before the Halo incident. Sergeant John Forge, perched safely atop a sniper tower overlooking Blood Gulch Canyon, scans the horizon... his eyes searching for any sign of enemy forces. The sunlight wreaks havoc with his vision as the rays of the morning sun reflect off objects in the distance. Intel reports that the Covenant are preparing to attack the UNSC stronghold behind him, the closest thing to a home the Sergeant has had in months. It's going to happen. The only question is when...*

Forge - alone but never afraid - rests at his vantage point for what seems like an eternity before he hears it. The familiar sound of Wraith engines working furiously in the distance. He reaches for the field binoculars beside him, focusing his ears on the soft hum. He tries to discern the sound's point of origin. Lifting the binoculars to his sweat-drenched face, he methodically studies the landscape, eventually spotting the familiar silhouette of far-off grunts - a lot of them, all providing lacklustre protection for the Locusts and Wraiths that follow. A wry smile forms across his lips, as his mind is lost to thoughts of the inevitable skirmish that will follow between these alien forms and his battle-hardened troops. Something calls for his attention elsewhere, as the lenses of the binoculars catch the light of a peculiar object to the west of the Covenant forces. His smile morphs into a vicious snarl, as his mind slowly calculates what his eyes are witnessing: a massive rectangular shape,

its curvaceous form shimmering brilliant white in the distance. Forge's bellow is so menacing that the Grunt's hearts grow cold with fear at the thought of the enemy they now face.

"Professor Anders! What the hell is that Xbox doing on my RTS battlefield?"

The answer to your question is simple, Sergeant Forge: that Xbox is rocking the hell out of your RTS battlefield. To put it simply, *Halo Wars* is a success in almost every way. Ensemble Studios has taken the *Halo* universe and given it their own personal touch. As an RTS title that has been adapted specifically with a console controller in mind, it has been somewhat simplified to suit the requirements imposed by the controls - but whether you perceive this negatively is your choice. The fact of the matter is: the game just works. It has some great game mechanics, it's

a faithful recreation of the *Halo* universe, and it's astoundingly fun.

Halo Wars serves as a prequel to *Halo: Combat Evolved*. As such, there's no Master Chief and the whole gigantic-doughnut-in-space thing hasn't happened yet. As usual, the Covenant are searching for 'stuff' (i.e. ancient relics) that'll do 'things' (i.e. destroy all humanity, systematically steal candy from babies across the galaxy, bring the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man to life – you know, the usual). Naturally, the UNSC (United Nations Space Command) is hot on the heels of the Covenant. The story isn't particularly revolutionary, but it's exciting and the pre-rendered cut scenes that portray *Halo War*'s suitably epic tale are well crafted. It would have been nice to see a separate campaign geared at giving players control of the Covenant forces, but I'm just nitpicking here. The

A good mix of different unit types (vehicles, aircraft and infantry) is often the key to victory

Fans of the FPS versions of *Halo* will be happy to know that the Warthog physics in *Halo Wars* are as whacky as they've always been. If you listen closely, you can hear the squeals of glee emanating from the Warthog's occupants...

Life after Single Player

The game offers two-player co-op in which players simply share control of bases and units. It's always enjoyable to tackle a game with a friend by your side, and the cooperative play in this title is no different. The skirmish and multiplayer game modes work a bit differently from the single player. Players choose their faction and a leader (of which there are six available, three for each faction), pick a map, and dive into some online (or offline against the AI or another human over system link) mayhem. The multiplayer provides good times, but there are some balance issues between the two playable factions (the UNSC and the Covenant). The leaders have their own unique super powers, unique units that they can train, and in the case of the UNSC, special bonuses (such as Professor Ander's bonus of all research being cut down to half price) and Super Upgrades (Sergeant Forge gets Grizzly tanks, a modified version of the Scorpion tank). Players start out with a base and can capture new base sites over the course of a match. The maps are well designed and most of them feature special buildings that can be captured by garrisoning them with infantry. Doing so usually provides bonuses such as extra resources, but some of these buildings have a more nefarious purpose, like allowing you to unleash the flood on your opponent. Some maps also feature portals that'll dump your units in key locations. The multiplayer and skirmish modes aren't terribly complex: most problems can be solved by simply having more (although not necessarily bigger) guns than the other guy and steamrolling over him.

story takes players to some interesting locations, and each mission played is as well constructed as the last. The objectives that you'll be completing are varied, and a couple of the missions even have light puzzle elements thrown in.

Getting down to the business of actually playing the game, it has to be said that some RTS veterans are highly likely to throw their toys at the simpler-than-usual nature of *Halo Wars*. As with some other console RTSs, the cursor sits at the centre of the viewing area, with camera control dedicated to the left (for scrolling) and right (for rotation and zooming) sticks. Selecting and directing units involve pressing the A and X buttons respectively, while almost every unit in the game has a satisfying secondary ability that is fired off by simply choosing a target and pressing Y. Certain complexities that we have become accustomed to in our RTS games

As in most RTSs, infantry can be garrisoned in buildings and behind cover to make them slightly less squishy when the bullets start flying.

Goodbyes and Stuff...

Ensemble Studios, developer of the *Age of Empires* series and *Age of Mythology* (together with its expansion), has officially been shut down following the release of *Halo Wars*. It's going to be weird never again seeing the studio's logo on the packaging of any new releases, but fans can rest assured that the people behind the games are still very much involved in the gaming industry. Two new development studios (Robot Entertainment, who will be overseeing *Halo Wars*' community support, and Bonfire Studios, who are working on new IPs at the moment) have risen from the ashes of the Ensemble closure. Bonfire Studios is comprised entirely of ex-Ensemble employees, while Tony Goodman - the founder of Robot Entertainment and co-founder of Ensemble - has extended invitations to his former colleagues to join him at his new studio.

The Covenant's über Unit, this Scarab fires a White Hot Beam of Death Dealing +2 that tears through everything in its path. If you're playing as the UNSC, be sure to hijack one of these (using a Spartan) to gift yourself with a really expensive gadget... and then crush your opponent with it.

(such as control groups) are missing from the game, but the controls are intuitive enough and you'll soon find new ways to quickly and efficiently move around the battlefield. The D-pad, for example, is used to quickly jump to key locations around the map and to access the Leader Menu to activate super powers. The left and right bumpers are used to select all of your units across the map, or all of the units onscreen at any given time. The left trigger enables fast scrolling around the map, while the right cycles through units in your current selection. All of these controls work together brilliantly, and while they do take some getting used to initially, Ensemble has created a great control system that utilises radial menus and easily memorised button presses. The game is definitely geared less towards micromanagement, which works in the game's favour.

The prefabricated bases (like those seen in the first *Battle for Middle-earth* title) require some strategic decisions from the player. Devoting too many of your base's nodes to resource gathering (the game has only one resource – supplies which are gained by building Supply Pads when playing as the UNSC and Warehouses as the Covenant) will hurt your unit production. Tech level is determined by constructing technological structures (Reactors for the UNSC and the temple for the Covenant), which grant access to new units and upgrades. Turrets can also be built on certain nodes situated around bases to provide dedicated base defences. *Halo Wars* works on a rock-paper-scissors combat system: aircraft smash vehicles, vehicles demolish infantry, and infantry dominate aircraft. Specialist units such as the Covenant Hunter, an infantry unit that is efficient against vehicles, serve to mix things up a bit. Units gain experience in battle and become veterans, meaning that they hit harder and can take more punishment. The units are all recognisable and most of them tout kick-ass secondary abilities (like the Warthog's Ram ability, which is useful for taking down infantry in tight situations). On the technical front, there isn't much to complain about. Ensemble has developed a good-looking game, and the audio - like the rest of the game - is very *Halo*... if you know what I mean.

Halo Wars is by no means perfect. The campaign doesn't last very long, but replay value is enhanced by collectible Skull and Black Boxes in each mission. Some will argue that the game is an oversimplification of the genre. I say, this is not the case: it's merely a streamlined RTS experience. Take the game out for a spin and decide for yourself. To finish off all the rambling, I'd just like to say, farewell Ensemble - you will be missed. Thank you for the great games that you have treated us to over the years. Thank you especially for delivering to gamers one of the greatest parting gifts that we could hope for. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Score

16+
www.pegi.info

| 1 | 1 - 6 | 2 |

Plus
+ Great controls
+ Fun beyond description
+ Halo, with more RTS

Minus
- Some RTS veterans may find the game overly simple and easy to beat

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Bottom Line
It's not perfect, but Halo Wars is fun and a prime example of how an RTS on console should work.

88

Developer→ Monolith Productions **Publisher→** Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Distributor→ Nu Metro Interactive **Web→** www.whatisfear.com

Occasionally, you'll be joined by a few friendly characters who'll accompany you on your excursions into the unknown. They don't really help much, but they do enhance the atmosphere.
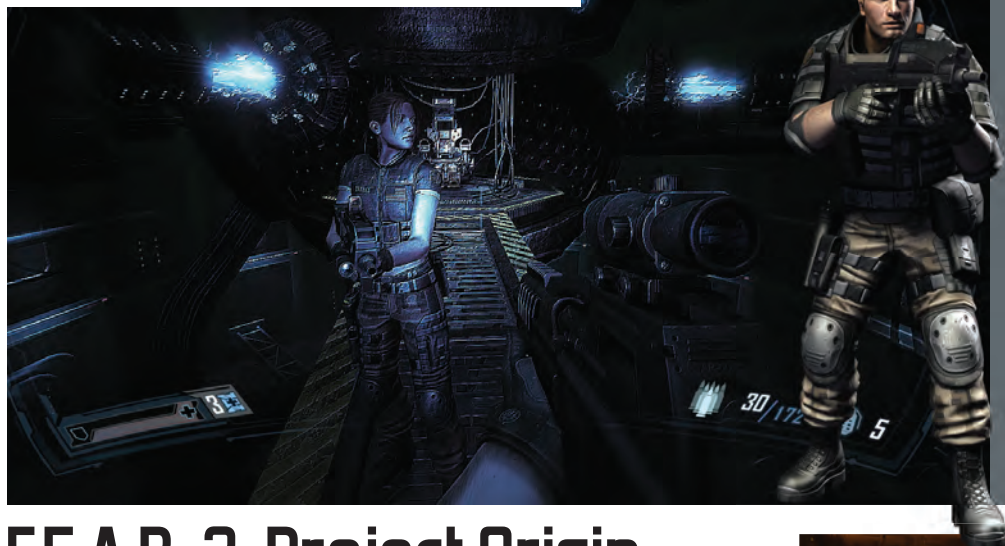
Out of Order

Unfortunately, due to some factors that were out of our control at the time of writing this review, we didn't get a chance to test *Project Origin*'s multiplayer component. We'll list the game modes here for you instead. Aside from Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Blitz (a variant of Capture the Flag), the game offers Control, Failsafe and Armoured Front game modes. Control is a simple capture-and-hold-the-point-style game mode with three nodes to capture on each map, while Armoured Front has more nodes to capture and features mechs, which players can pilot and/or shoot at. Failsafe involves one team planting a bomb at a strategic target while another defends said target. Unfortunately, the Slow-mo game modes present in the original are nowhere to be seen in the sequel.

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin

Learn to fear the dark... again...

YOU ARE MICHAEL BECKET. As part of an elite Delta Force squad, you've been sent to retrieve Genevieve Aristide and take her into protective custody. Unfortunately, Aristide is an employee of the Armacham Technology Corporation and anybody who played the first *F.E.A.R.* knows that any special-ops mission that requires getting involved in Armacham's shady business is likely to go belly up very quickly.

Just note: disregard those two expansions to the original game, because they have no bearing on the *F.E.A.R.* universe. *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin* is the true continuation of the series and it starts shortly before the first game ends. The city of Auburn has yet to be devastated (read: levelled by a spectacular nuclear explosion) by the course of action taken by the Point Man (the protagonist in the first *F.E.A.R.* title, who is unfortunately completely absent from this new title), and the second title's protagonist has no idea what twisted world he's about to become a part of. *Project Origin* attempts to shed more light on what exactly went down in the first title, while at the same time expanding on the tale told therein, mostly by using collectable Intel documents that players can peruse in-game. The story is better experienced than explained, so I'll leave it up to you to judge the story's worth.

It doesn't take long for the action to kick in once you've started the single-player campaign. Much like the first title, the combat in *Project Origin* can get very hairy very fast, and the action movie feel is still there with all of the exaggerated special effects that fire off during combat. Sparks fly, dust clouds your vision and scenery is torn to shreds every time that you trade bullets with foes. Melee combat (in the form of scissor kicks, roundhouse kicks, sliding tackles and simple punches to the groin, all of which are one-shot kills if you land them on an enemy) serves to make the action even more cinematic and intense. The Slow-mo effect makes a triumphant return and although I was under the impression that the heightened reflex thing was exclusive to the Point Man, Becket gains similar superior reflexes through a series of events that I won't go into detail with here. Some may complain that the slow-mo ability is clichéd and makes the game too easy, but I beg to differ. It simply serves to make you feel like even more of a badass, only to be pummelled down to earth when Alma shows up and scares the manliness out of you.

Speaking of Alma, the game's ad campaign that touted the tagline "Fear Alma Again" could not have been truer. It may just be me, but Alma has always come to the fore of my mind when scariest-game-characters-of-all-time conversations pop up. She's back to her old antics, appearing and disappearing at will right before your eyes, throwing objects around with her mind and getting a lot more 'hands-on' this time around (something which my fickle nerves don't take kindly to). She's not the only one providing the frights either – when that explosion at the end of the first game occurs in *Project Origin*, all of Alma's psychic energy is released on the city and supernatural occurrences become commonplace when travelling through the game. Ghosts, zombie puppet
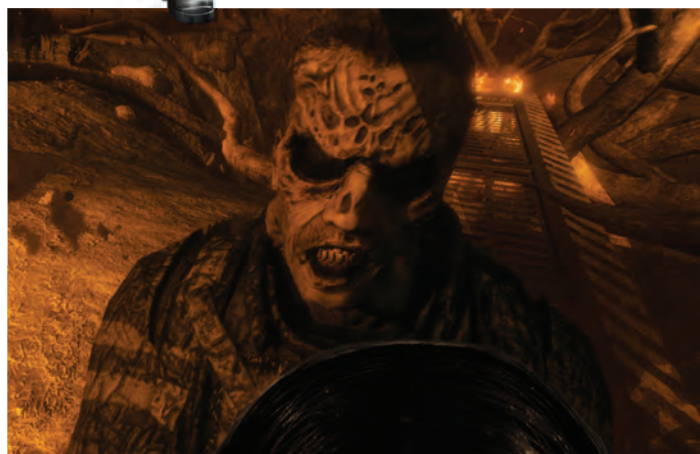
Alma's come to grave eyes

Don't confuse this mech with the Elite Powered Armour. This guy doesn't hold a candle to the behemoth you see in the screenshot below

masters and mutants created through Armacham's experimentation with gene therapy are all let loose on the city, and they're all in your way. Some memorable fright-inducing set pieces are scattered throughout the game (the elementary school level will forever be etched in my mind) and they do their job to great effect. It has to be mentioned that the conflict between feeling sympathetic towards Alma and hating her for simply being so damn creepy is an unsettling theme throughout the game.

The real question is whether *Project Origin*'s main elements (action and horror) blend together well enough for the game to not feel disjointed, and I have to say that, in my opinion, they function together perfectly. The pacing is broken up in such a way that you'll go from feeling like an action hero one moment to whimpering in the corner in the foetal position in a heartbeat. Sure, you're armed with some pretty powerful weapons in the game and this may detract from some of the game's fright factor; but the fact is that when Alma shows up, that gun you're holding might as well be a soft, fluffy towel (an overly threatening soft,

fluffy towel, but a towel nonetheless) for all the good it'll do you.

The game doesn't look as great as some of the other titles out there, but the developers have made admirable use of the first title's engine to bring it up to today's standards. The visuals can be a mixed bag, gracing players with some awesome scenery at times, while at other times throwing up washed-out textures and drab backdrops. The audio and voice acting are both quite well handled and the musical score definitely enhances the atmosphere of the game.

Project Origin stays very true to the original game, offering up an almost identical experience. Whether you view this in a positive or negative light is up to you, but from my point of view, this sequel is worthy of its namesake. The story isn't enhanced much, and there are times when the AI somehow manages to drop below the standard set by the first game - but it remains an action-packed, phenomenally atmospheric and frightfully fun experience. Be sure to play this one all the way through: the ending sets the scene for some pretty insane stuff... **NAG**
Dane Remendes

The Score

	1	2 - 16	None	18+ www.pegi.info
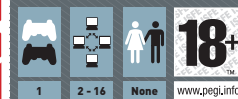
Plus
+ Great action sequences
+ Mechs = Amazing
+ Alma is back!

Minus
- Where's the Point Man?
- AI stumbles at times

Bottom Line
F.E.A.R. is back, baby! A few minor issues mar project Origin, but overall it's a terrifyingly fantastic experience.

90

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ Relic Entertainment   **Publisher→** THQ   **Distributor→** Ster-Kinekor Games   **Web→** www.dawnofwar2.com

Stairs! We wish there was a giant Slinky unit
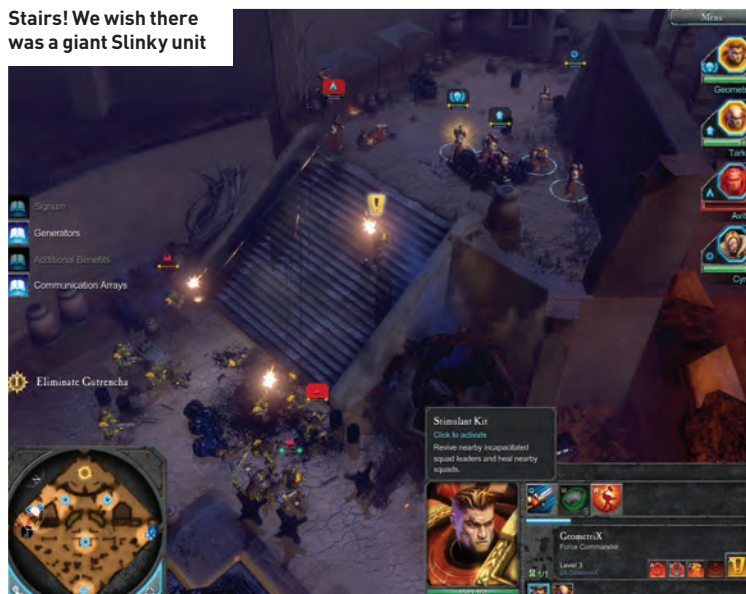
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II

More dakka, dakka!

Genre→ Real-time Tactical Strategy

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

WHEN RELIC ENTERTAINMENT KICKED off the *Dawn of War* series in 2004, it changed the way gamers looked at *Warhammer*-based videogames forever. No longer were these titles stuck in the trenches of their tabletop parents' vast rulebooks, nor were they such wild departures from the rich lore that they were unrecognisable. *Dawn of War* not only paid homage to the tabletop original, but also took it to a completely new level that was accessible to the RTS crowd, looked fantastic and played like a dream. It's not easy, then, to just go ahead and create a sequel to such a legacy. Perhaps this is why Relic opted instead to focus on releasing three weighty expansions before finally packing it in. Now, five years later, Dawn of War rises once again, and once more it's chucked all the rules before it into the blender and produced something that isn't simply different from its predecessors: it takes the genre itself to a whole new level.

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II divides itself quite neatly between the campaign mode and multiplayer, with both game types being almost completely different genres. Taking the tactical strategy game approach, the Space Marines-only campaign mode (which is available for one or two players) sees the player taking control of a Force Commander – a recently promoted high-ranking Space Marine with a few small squads to control for a somewhat defter approach to warfare than marching through a city with guns blazing. Controlling no more than four squads at a time from a pool of troops

not much larger, you'll be responsible for customising load-outs, utilising the surprisingly efficient RPG mechanic and deploying to zones through a semi-linear campaign that comprises over 80 missions, less than half of which are mandatory.

Gamers familiar with the first *Dawn of War* and its expansions might recognise a few of these tricks, but much has changed with this sequel. Base building is 'out of the picture': you'll only have access to those few troops you've chosen from pre-mission selection, but the micromanagement has made a drastic shift from build-order and perfectly-timed research tiers to a more hands-on approach that requires quick thinking in the field and the careful use of unique unit abilities. Selecting your troops' load-outs is almost as important as how you perform on the battlefield – do you sacrifice your jump-jetting Assault Squad's slot for an infiltrator with

the ability to plant remote-detonated explosives, or do you opt for a heavily armoured but slow-moving selection of Terminators backed by a fierce Dreadnought? Decisions like this will have you spending ages in the screens between missions, tweaking your squads, mixing up their equipment and planning your next move (as many of the missions are time dependent), while the your sergeants argue over military tactics and their contribution to the Empire's mighty war machine and dig deep into the vast *Warhammer 40K* lore.

The multiplayer does away with the troop selection and load-out customisation for a slightly more conventional approach to the RTS genre. The focus moves from four squads to a maximum of around ten (a few more if you're playing as the Tyranids). Squads are still somewhat customisable, but the system takes after the first *DoW* in that you can, for example, equip an

The skill system actually manages to one-up most action-RPGs. Simple and efficient.

Second opinion

At first, I was concerned about this game's lack of base management, as for me that is an art in itself. However, I soon got used to a philosophy of focusing entirely on units and territory control. Additionally, the campaign and single/multiplayer custom games offer two complete game experiences, which is great. So, it was with great sadness that I discovered that Games for Windows Live has not yet been 'fixed' in this country. Unless you previously managed to 'create' a Live account registered in a different country (a practice, by the way, which is a violation of Live's terms of use), you will not be able to play online, or earn achievements. The latter is a fairly minor complaint, but the former is quite a problem. For starters, the Internet has made multiplayer gaming much more accessible, and LANs are declining; so to not have the online mode available means it will be much harder to hook up a game. Secondly, the cooperative campaign mode is only accessible through Live – fail! So here is a word of warning: if you are content to play the dingle-player campaign [*I guess you meant single-player, Ed*], and/or expect to have access to other players on a LAN, by all means go out and get this game - it is excellent! But be aware that you will not be getting the complete package. If online play is something you look for, perhaps look elsewhere.

Alex Jelagin

Ork Slugga squad with a flamethrower but not much else. Base building is expanded upon slightly from the campaign mode, with each player getting a single unit-production/research facility and a couple of turrets. Players must expand aggressively into the battleground to conquer strategic locations for the requisition and power resources that fuel their war efforts. While there are a couple of extra buildings that can be placed depending on the commander chosen from a pool of three for each race, that's pretty much the extent of it. The real challenge lies with the units themselves; while their skills have been simplified from the campaign mode, it's not uncommon to find a unit with more than two abilities that range from tossing stun grenades to stampeding through the enemy to unleashing a barrage of missiles. This approach to the genre leads to an emphasis on quick thinking, offensive tactics, and adaptability of your strategies rather than sitting back and fine-tuning your troops and tech trees for a steamroller army that can deal with any situation. Such units simply don't exist – every soldier on the battlefield is effective if used correctly and even the most powerful units, the godlike Eldar Avatar for example, can be taken care of with careful thinking, an ambush, a couple traps and a willing decoy.

While it's certainly possible that *DoW II* won't be enjoyed by all RTS veterans, the fresh approach to the genre and sheer class delivered by this game should seduce more than it repels. Sure, it's not a 'traditional RTS', and the tactical options in the campaign can't compare to the likes of *Jagged Alliance* or the *X-Com* series, but this middle ground the game achieves and the diversity between the campaign and multiplayer should give all strategy gamers something to think about and a hell of a good time while they're doing so. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

The Score

1	2 - 6	2	16+ www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Innovative
+ Great story
+ Varied factions

Minus
- Few multiplayer maps
- Occasionally daft AI
- LIVE issues

Bottom Line
A game for veterans and newcomers alike that offers variety and encourages thinking on your feet and diverse strategy.

89

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ Guerilla **Publisher→** SCEE **Distributor→** Ster-Kinekor Games **Web→** www.killzone.com

Killzone 2

Guerilla's much-touted shooter is back… with a vengeance

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

THE ORIGINAL *KILLZONE,* RELEASED on the PS2 in 2004, was one of Sony's most disappointing releases; not because it was a terrible title, but rather because it was simply a mediocre one that failed to live up to the massive hype that surrounded its release. While the original *Killzone* may have been far from the "*Halo*-killer" it was billed to be, developers Guerilla have ensured that its PS3 exclusive sequel is everything the first game should have been, and more.

Set two years after the events of the original, *Killzone 2* puts players in the role of Sev, a sergeant in the ISA (Interplanetary Strategic Alliance). Having successfully repulsed two invasion attempts by the evil, alien Helghast, the ISA launch an assault on Helghan, the alien home world, in a bid to put an end the Helghast menace once and for all. Expecting to encounter very little resistance, Sev and his teammates of the elite Alpha Squadron soon find that the Helghast forces are far stronger than the ISA had initially presumed, and that they've come to possess new nuclear weaponry powerful enough to decimate the ISA. Thus, Sev and his associates (including Rico from the original title, making a return appearance) find themselves outnumbered and outgunned in a desperate bid to stop the schemes of the nefarious Helghast ruler.

As far as storylines go, it's a fairly generic one for an FPS title, pitting a band of stereotypical military grunts against odds that are at best improbable and at worst impossible. The way in which the story is told doesn't make matters any better, with the poorly scripted narrative segments only barely redeemed by the impressive acting. Of course, in the FPS genre, storylines are hardly a priority, and *Killzone 2* never lets its lack of a cohesive plot impair its worth as a shooter. It's worth noting at the outset that *Killzone 2* never really attempts to introduce any revolutionary changes to the FPS genre – rather, it's an amalgamation of the best aspects of FPS titles that melds together almost seamlessly to create one of the most refined shooters ever released.

One of the prerequisites for a successful FPS is a formidable arsenal of weaponry, and in this regard, *Killzone 2* doesn't disappoint. In spite of the science-fiction setting of the game, the vast majority of the weapons are generic variants of present-day military hardware, including sniper rifles, flamethrowers, rocket launchers, assault rifles and, of course, a shotgun. That's not to say that the weapons aren't fun to use – they may be realistic (with the exception of the alien lightning gun, which unfortunately isn't available for too long anyway), but they pack a significant punch. If anything, the familiarity of the weapons serves as an almost tangible reminder of just how alien the planet of Helghan actually is.

The actual single-player campaign spans ten missions, and incorporates all the typical hallmarks of any FPS title. There are massive battles, turrets to operate, as well as scattered vehicular sequences, all of which serve to keep the game moving along at its fast pace. While it might be true that *Killzone 2*'s single-player campaign is formulaic, it's the precision with which that formula is executed that makes the game really shine. The levels are all exceptionally well designed, offering a variety of
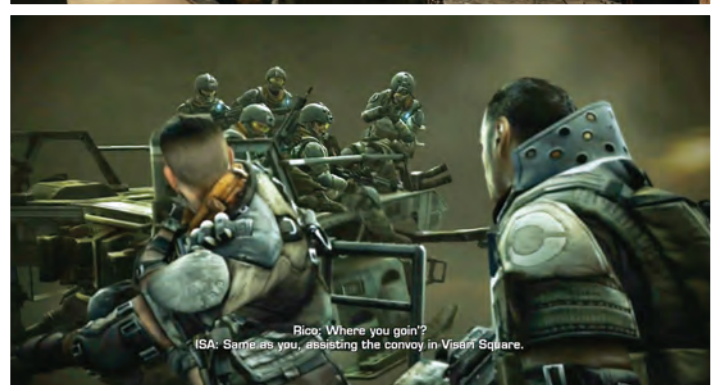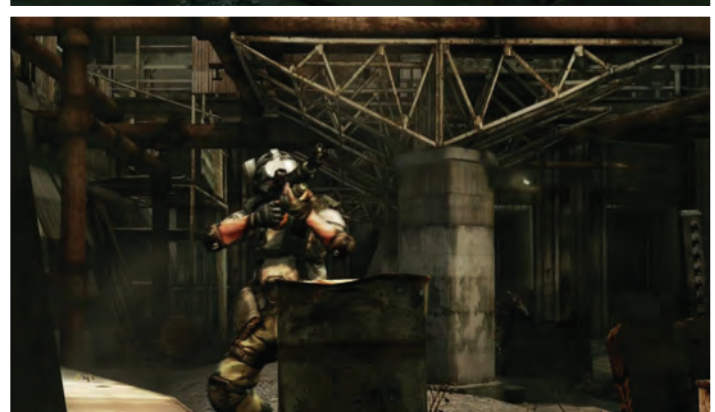
Rico: Where you goin'?
ISA: Same as you, assisting the convoy in Visari Square.

routes through them, each with its own advantages and pitfalls. The set-pieces, when they occur, manage to perfectly convey the magnitude and scale of the war underlying all the action, while the turret segments make you feel like you're actually in control of an incredibly powerful piece of weaponry. The game even goes so far as to put players in a mech suit at one point. It's moments like these that reflect the careful design that obviously went into making *Killzone 2* as enjoyable an experience as it is.

Although throughout the game you'll fight only a few different kinds of Helghast enemy, your opponents never feel generic or tedious, thanks mostly to the superb artificial intelligence that governs them. Although there are odd moments where your enemies, especially on the easy difficulty setting, might do strange things like running towards a grenade, they become downright fiendish on the higher difficulty levels. Enemies will quickly duck behind cover while they're being fired upon, only to aggressively charge your position while you're reloading your gun. A group of foes might toss grenades at you in order to flush you out from cover, while one of their teammates stealthily sneaks around to pounce on you from behind. There's little doubt that *Killzone 2* features some of the smartest and most challenging opponents seen in an FPS.

Given how formidable your opponents can be, it's fortunate that during most of the segments of the game, you'll be accompanied by at least one of your teammates, who, though also prone to the odd moment of madness, are nearly as capable as the opposing forces. This, however, also makes apparent one of *Killzone 2*'s few shortcomings: although virtually the entire campaign is played with an AI-controlled teammate at your side, there is unfortunately no option to play through the campaign cooperatively with another player, which feels like somewhat of a missed opportunity.

Though it might lack a cooperative campaign mode, that's not to suggest that *Killzone 2* isn't a capable multiplayer title. In fact, its multiplayer mode is where *Killzone 2* shines brightest. The game offers five different modes, including such basics as a Team Deathmatch (dubbed Body Count) and a Capture-the-Flag mode (known as Search and Retrieve), as well as the slightly more inventive Assassination mode, wherein one player is a marked target who must be protected at all costs from the opposing team's bullets. One aspect that does set *Killzone 2*'s online component aside from other games is that after a match, you needn't return to the lobby to set up another match – the game simply awards points to the winning team before seamlessly

switching over to a different match-up between the two teams. Thus, each 'match' can consist of up to five different 'rounds', each one leading smoothly into the next, without a myriad of server screens and menus disrupting the pace of the game. Of course, before each match, you'll be able to customise various options that will let you exclude certain game modes, or impose weapon restrictions on your matches, allowing you to fine-tune games to your liking.

Killzone 2 offers a total of seven different multiplayer character classes, though at the outset you'll start off with a simple grunt, with access only to an assault rifle and basic grenades. As you play more of the multiplayer mode, you'll start racking up points for earning kills or completing certain objectives. These points eventually allow you access to other character classes and weaponry, and even allow you to upgrade your existing character's abilities. The twist is that once you've garnered sufficient proficiency in your skills, you'll be awarded a 'badge' that allows you carry certain skills over into a new class. Thus, you can fashion characters in whatever way best suits your play style – whether you want a demolitions expert who has the added ability to heal his teammates, or a sniper who can set up sentry guns, you'll be able to tailor a character to suit your own desires, which makes for an incredibly engrossing multiplayer experience.

The multiplayer matches support up to 32 players simultaneously, within eight superbly designed maps that offer a variety of strategic opportunities. Further

good news is that if you find yourself short of players, Killzone 2 allows you to play with up to 15 AI-controlled bots, either in an offline practice match that will allow you to get to grips with the style of Killzone 2's multiplayer mode, or using them to fill up empty slots in a live, online match. Bots are something that PC gamers have had access to for years, and it's good to finally see a console title employing this concept, especially considering how formidable Killzone 2's AI can be.

Another area in which Killzone 2 stands out significantly is its visuals. The dank and desolate setting of Helghast is brought beautifully to life, courtesy of crisply detailed environment textures and particle effects that do well to convince you that you truly are in the midst of a warzone. Characters are animated fluidly and smoothly, almost disturbing in their realism, while the developers haven't skimped on attention to detail either. Such minutiae as dust swirling or flags blowing in the wind can prove to be just as awe-inspiring as watching buildings around you crumble as they're pelted by legions of troops – it's all testament to just how polished Killzone 2 is.

Despite not doing anything to revolutionise its genre, Killzone 2 makes major strides towards perfecting it, offering a deep single-player campaign as well as a rich multiplayer experience, all of which is complemented by stunning visuals easily among the best seen in any console title. There's no doubt that Killzone 2 should be on any console FPS fan's wish list. **NAG**

Adam Liebman
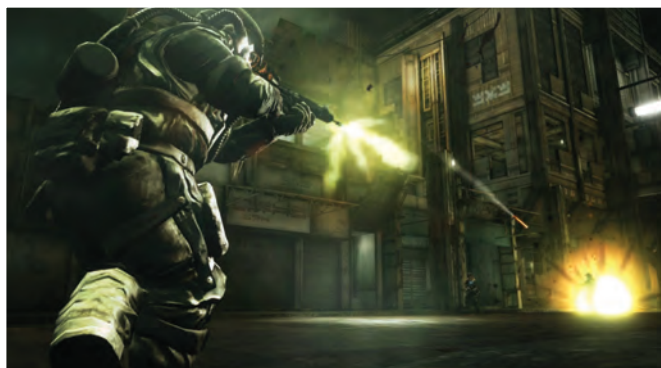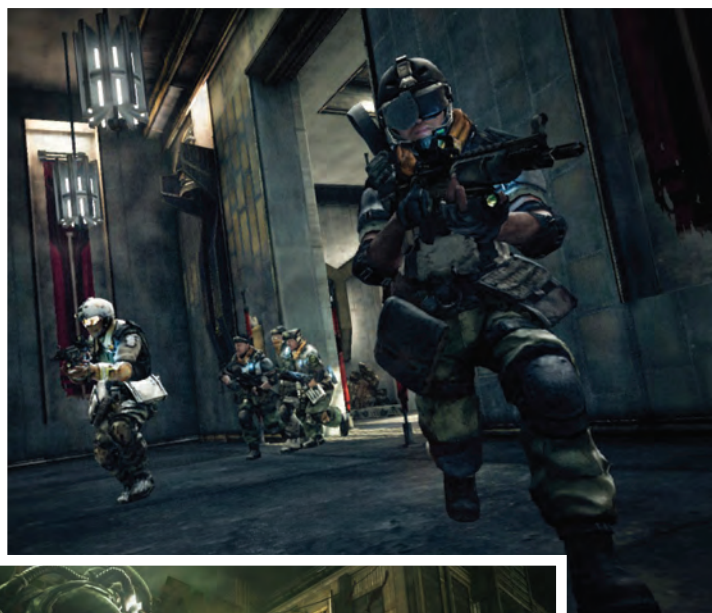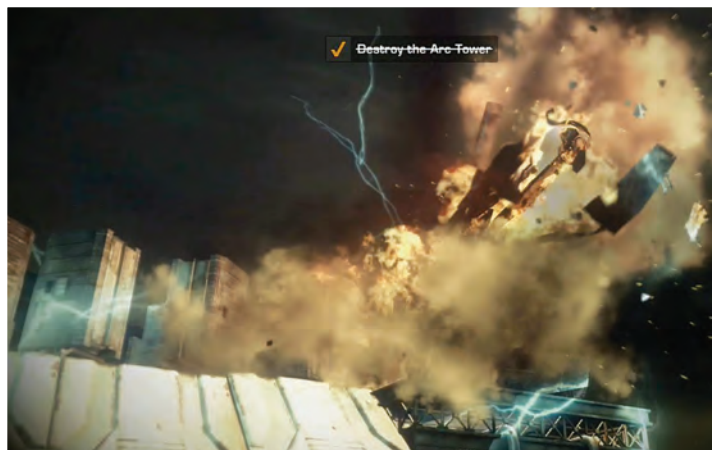
The Score

1	1 – 32	None	18+ www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Gorgeous visuals
+ Engrossing campaign
+ Superb multiplayer

Minus
− No co-op campaign

Bottom Line
Killzone 2 succeeds everywhere that its predecessor failed, proving itself one of the most polished shooters currently around.

92

There's nothing like some big-wave surfing... hang on, wrong game
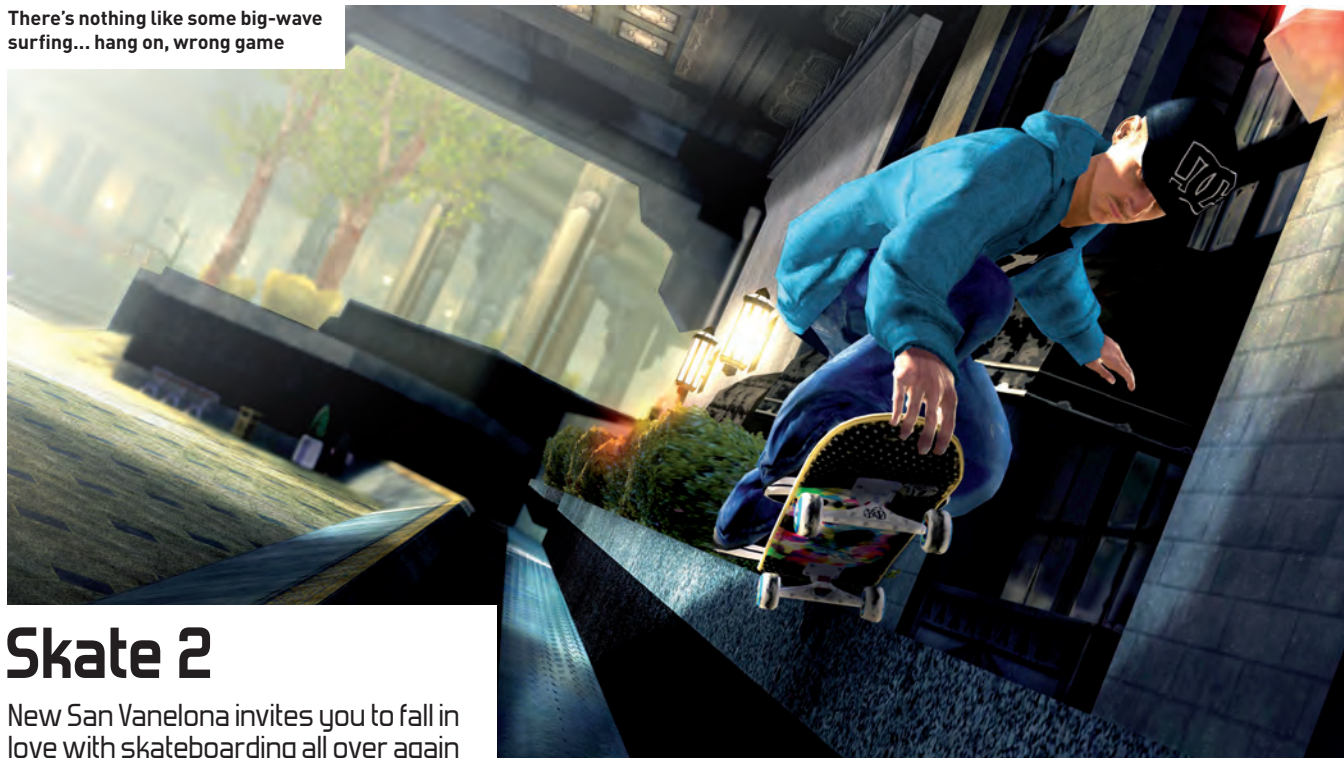
Skate 2

New San Vanelona invites you to fall in love with skateboarding all over again

Skull-plant: Leaping with no landing plan

Genre→ Sports

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

AS FANS OF THE first game could tell you, there was very little that *Skate* did wrong. As a wonderful disruption to a stale *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*-dominated genre, *Skate* brought with it a fresh and completely functional new way of interfacing with your skateboard, along with a handful of cultural tropes such as the fish-eye lens view of the world, a more down-to-earth approach to the act of skateboarding, and an overall sense of personal achievement when actually pulling off a difficult trick.

If anything, there were only a handful of issues *Skate 2* needed to address to instantly be everything a fan would want from the sequel. Being able to get off your skateboard was one, which *Skate 2* provides. Moving around on foot is a bit clumsy, but dragging around objects to create your own lines for tricking off is remarkably easy. The other issue was a lack of hand-plant tricks on the edges of ramps. Here again, the sequel delivers and even keeps it all logical within the context of the control scheme that *Skate* innovated. Beyond that, all one could hope for is better visuals, more tricks to attempt, more areas to explore and more events to participate in. *Skate 2* is all that, and then some.

Welcome back to San Vanelona, which is now shiny New San Vanelona, as the city has been rebuilt after a natural disaster and given a visual facelift. The city itself comes across as much more realistic now. There's also been some attention given to the skater model, which can now bruise and bleed if you're not

careful (though, this doesn't influence ability in any way, and the visual damage fades over time). This new and improved city is huge: roughly four times as big as the map from *Skate*, four times as detailed and with far less 'dead space' between key areas (so you won't see as many featureless low-detail passages between suburbs or city areas). There is a bigger variety in the pedestrians walking around (who still get in your way when you least expect it and even throw things at you ineffectually), more types of cars driving around (which you can hang onto, 'skitching' your way around the city) and plenty of highly detailed skate parks dotted around the city.

Each skate park (six being available initially) is unique in appearance, texture and appeal. You could spend hours in just one, learning high-scoring lines or attempting wicked technical feats such

as doing foot-plant jumps over gaps. You don't even need to explore the city to reach these skate parks or any of the other locations of interest, as *Skate 2* dispenses with the Subway system from the first game. The entire 'Challenge

Skate and Share

To share your exploits with others, the replay, recording and editing functions have been vastly improved. There is an additional Filmers Pack (Downloadable Content) you can purchase for added online storage space and replay value, but it's really not needed unless you seriously like to fiddle with replays. Uploaded videos or photos are stored on Skate.reel, which can be accessed via the game or via its Website (http://skatereel.ea.com), where they can be rated by the community.

Online play is as fully featured as one could expect: ranked and unranked play of the various event types, as well as a new Freeskate mode where you can team up to complete cooperative objectives, earning all sorts of experience points and medals to proudly display on your personal profile page. Party Play makes a return, so grab some friends and get ready to have fun again.

New San Vanelona is much more detailed and pretty

Hand-plant tricks are now possible in *Skate 2*

Map' of the city is open from the start, and you can select where to teleport to from a list of subdivided-by-category items. This doesn't remove the element of exploration, however, as there is a lot to discover for yourself in between teleport locations. Plot progression adds new items to the list, while a quirky in-game 'blog' updates with tales of your exploits.

Some things in the city do need to be adjusted to make them more navigable on a skateboard, which is where the Services menu on your in-game cellphone comes in. You can spend your cash on new clothing, decks and accessories or on these new Services. These including draining pools, hiring Big Black as muscle to keep guards in check while you trick in protected areas, or getting a guy with a crowbar to come remove anti-skateboarding clamps from rails. Often, new events are tied to these adjustments of the city.

Being able to get off your board and walk around does a lot for finding new areas to explore, letting you reach rooftops, climb up stairs and generally helps with assessing an area more calmly since you're not constantly trying to avoid falling. There are a few things tied to this new functionality: the first is that you can now mess up a trick and not bail since you simply land on your feet. For example, if you attempt a kick flip onto a ledge but you time it wrong and the board hits the edge,

there's a good chance your skater will just land on his feet on the ledge. There is an added sense of realism to tricks now, since you're not inexorably tied to the fate of your skateboard.

As mentioned before, walking around also lets you drag objects around to tailor a spot. You can save your newly created spot and upload it via the Create-A-Spot feature, which is a meta-game all on its own. You set a score on your Created Spot, upload it and your friends and the general *Skate 2* public can try to best your score. Each Created Spot maintains its own high-score list, and you can watch a ghost replay of whoever currently 'owns' the spot by having the highest score on it. You browse Created Spots via the in-game browser. Downloading Spots places them in your city and in the Challenge Map list so you can teleport to them.

The final part of not being tethered to your board is the range of new tricks available. *Skate 2* has almost four times as many tricks as its predecessor. While in the air, you can now finger flip your board by grabbing hold of it and flicking it in a direction. Hippie Jumps involve jumping over obstacles while your board goes under them (you can switch your stance by turning your body in mid-air while hippy jumping), and as noted earlier, you can lip-trick on edges. There's too much to list here, actually. All the new

tricks keep in line with the 'natural' feel of the control scheme, making them incredibly easy to learn, yet retaining that element of mastery needed to execute them without disastrous results.

Even the disasters have been made into a more integral part of the experience, as bails form part of the Hall of Meat meta-game where you complete objectives the more you mangle yourself, earning cash from it. You can bail on command, pull off various poses while free falling in an attempt to break specific bones, or rack up enough damage with your mangled crunchy mess of a skater. It's as if they thought of everything. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

The Score

1 - 4	2 - 8	none	16+ www.pegi.info

Plus
+ More of what you want
+ More tricks
+ Getting off your board

Minus
- Bad walking movement
- Skitching doesn't work all that well

Bottom Line
Nearly flawless, this is the sequel everyone wanted.

92

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ Capcom **Publisher→** Capcom **Distributor→** Nu Metro Interactive **Web→** www.streetfighter.com

Street Fighter IV

Don't call it a comeback or retro-revival: this is fighting redefined

Genre→ Fighting

| PC | 360 | PS3 | WII | PS2 | PSP | DS |

IT'S THE '90S. WE love techno and hip-hop. It's the end of the Soviet Union. Michael Jackson's latest hit *Black or White* rules the airwaves. *Sonic the Hedgehog* is the game of the moment. Arnold Schwarzenegger's eyes are popping out in *Total Recall*, and Michael J. Fox is an awesome cowboy in *Back to the Future 3*. Good times.

THE OBLIGATORY FEATURE LAUNDRY LIST

But it's not the '90s. Simple hand-drawn characters don't cut it anymore, as gamers expect more from their visuals these days. As such, *Street Fighter IV* presents its characters in glorious 3D; every visual element bolstered with more style and substance than previously thought possible in a fighting game. It's not just about polygons per second, but also about artistic expression. Sorry, but you have to play it to really get what's being said here.

The 25 characters are highly detailed and animated with a surprising amount of expressions and actions. The backdrops for every stage react to your fights in unexpected ways - all this at the smoothest, most solid 60 frames per second.

Every character has an animated intro and ending - their voices can be set individually to English or Japanese (after you finish Arcade mode once) - and each has a Rival Battle where they actually talk to each other during the fight while a remix of their theme plays. There isn't a single piece of music in the game that isn't in some way catchy, brilliant or inspiring.

Aside from standard Arcade mode and online ranked/unranked battles, there is a Challenge Mode with Normal and Hard challenges in Time Attack, Survival and Trial modes. Trial exists to teach you each character, from the basics through to more advanced move combinations. Progressing through the Challenge Mode nets you new Titles (little bits of text under your name when you play online) and Colour selections for character costumes.

Interestingly enough, even when playing by yourself in Arcade mode, you can switch on Arcade Request, which lets players online see you playing and challenge you, as if they're sitting down at the arcade machine and throwing down the gauntlet: or maybe better. A grading system awards you medals in specific categories, depending on how you play. Defeat an enemy with chip damage (whittling health away against

a blocking victim), and you get a Chip medal. These are shown online when people play against you, so they can at a glance tell what kind of player you are based on the amount of medals you have in each category.

THE REVIEW FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER PLAYED STREET FIGHTER

It's true: you don't need to know anything about *Street Fighter* or the fighting game genre to enjoy *SFIV*. Designed specifically with newcomers in mind, *SFIV* is the most accessible entry point to both the series and the genre.

Contemporary fighting games, such as *Tekken 5*, *Soul Calibur IV*, and *Virtua Fighter 5*, cater to the collective hardcore of each particular series. They represent the most complicated, technical, and advanced form of their respective combat

Lighting farts just isn't the same in fighting games

The feared toe-jam face kick

systems, tailored to meet the demanding needs of their faithful followers. This is by no means a bad thing, but it does carry with it a steep learning curve if you enter such a series late.

SFIV upends the tea table of fighting game technical progression in terms of the game system, by removing almost all of the complications added to the series over the course of the last eleven or so core games. In essence, Capcom seeks to bring clarity to the difference between advancements in the system, and complications added to create a perception of sophistication.

The result is a kind of lucidity to skirmishes that has long since been missing from the genre. This in turn makes *SFIV* all the more approachable if you've never enjoyed the series before or attempted to learn the mechanics behind a fighting game only to be confounded by the sheer technical overhead required. As an example of this: some of the more powerful moves in recent fighting games require you to memorise a series of 20 or so button presses and directional inputs to execute the move. Not knowing this complicated 'input string' puts you at the mercy of those who do.

Each character in *SFIV* has, on average, four special moves (usually executed with a simple input motion and one button), one super combo, and one ultra combo. Super combos are charged by attacking and ultra combos by being attacked. It is because there are so few moves that it allows these key moves to be strung together creatively, making them building blocks with which to construct more complicated strings. Trial mode in Challenge demonstrates more complicated applications of the basics, while even the most nuanced new idea in

the game - the Focus Attack system - is dead easy for beginners to execute and use effectively at its basic level, requiring only a press of the same two buttons for every character.

Simply put: you can pick up *SFIV* and within half an hour be every bit as confident of the fundamentals as someone who has played the series since day one almost twenty years ago. From there, your journey through the game depends on your practical experience and developing keen instincts - not on rote memorisation or grappling with convoluted theory.

THE REVIEW FOR STREET FIGHTER FANS, FANATICS AND THE HARDCORE

It's fantastic! It's very different! It appears to be, dare we say it so early, balanced. Air Blocks and Custom Combos are out, sorry *Alpha 2* fans. The Super Meter now doesn't charge if you hit empty air. Somewhere between *Super SFII Turbo* and *SFIII: Third Strike*, the pace of the game is aggressive. Capcom said that they might release Dee Jay and T. Hawk as DLC if the fans want it.

Finally, the newest addition and biggest change to the series: Focus Attack. FA can be charged up for three levels by holding down the buttons longer, and represents the most complicated aspect of *SFIV*: don't be fooled because Focus Attack is beginner friendly. Mastery of the FA is where the technical depth of *SFIV* presents itself - a multi-use tool and simultaneous offensive and a defensive move.

Most of all, *SFIV* achieves what half the fighting game community swore was impossible: merging 3D visuals with 2D gameplay effectively. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon
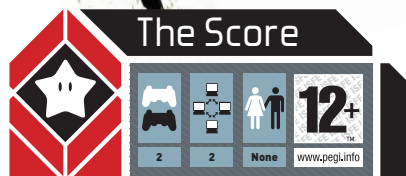
The Score

2	2	None	12+ www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Simple yet deep
+ Balanced
+ Challenging

Minus
- Lacks better instruction
- Medals only awarded for online play

Bottom Line
A true evolution for the series that knows what to keep and what to cut.

97

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

You want to do WHAT while I cough?

Silent Hill: Homecoming

The scare has left the building

Genre→ Survival Horror

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THE THING THAT MADE – notice the past tense here - the *Silent Hill* series of games so damned scary is that they always featured an average Joe who stumbled into the mysterious, mist-filled town at the edge of Toluca Lake. The characters were hapless and helpless. They didn't know about guns, they weren't fighters, and they were afraid. This helped make the player afraid. Along with the disturbing visuals, the charged musical score and the overall creepiness of the games, the puny characters the player got to use made things very scary indeed.

This time around, the player doesn't get to play a hapless weakling who doesn't know which end of a gun the bullets come out of. Instead, they are placed in control of Alex Shepherd, a recently discharged soldier who would be as at home in an action-packed first-person shooter as he is in this title. More so in fact, because the truth is that Alex is far too good a fighter for the shambling denizens of Silent Hill. The character's ability with weapons, as well as the large number of modifiable weapons he comes across, makes his trip to Silent Hill a bit of a breeze, and nowhere near as scary as the previous games. The developers seem to have forgotten that survival horror games are all about making the player fear for the survival of their in-game alter ego. Strapping a ton of guns, with bountiful ammunition and lots of health packs to the character diminishes this concern just a little. And it's not just the guns – Alex is equally handy with all manner of blunt instruments and blades, too.

Another part of the scare punch is stripped away by the game's visuals. The developers didn't make things lighter – they made them darker. The flashlight that Alex carries couldn't illuminate a tool shed, let alone a scary scene of mass mutilation, and a lot of the effect is lost. Of course, this does mean that the monsters tend to pop out of shadows a bit more effectively, but let's refer back to the fact that Alex doesn't have too much of an issue beating the tar out of them. Also, the developers got lazy: the monsters popping out are pretty predictable in this game... they might as well have programmed signposts into the environment.

Still, the game does make the player uneasy, at the very least, and it's not too bad a showing for the series' first outing onto the current generation of consoles. The music helps, in this regard, because it is that same eerie stuff that fans of the series are used to. It almost seems a little out of place, though, because the rest of the game has slipped from the level of, "I just soiled my trousers" to, "Is that sweat

The Town on Toluca Lake

Silent Hill: Homecoming marks the sixth trip that players can make to this mysterious and often terrifying place. The town is what ties the games together, with its strange connection to Otherworld and the monsters that walk its mist-filled streets.

The first game, *Silent Hill*, was released for the PlayStation in 1999, and told the story of Harry Mason attempting to find his daughter in the mysterious town. His discoveries indicated that his daughter Cheryl had a disturbing past.

Silent Hill 2 was released for the PlayStation 2 in 2001 (with later PC and Xbox releases) and told the tale of James Sunderland, who was investigating a letter he had received from his wife. In the letter, she claimed that she was waiting for him in her special place, and the trail led him to Silent Hill.

Third off the mark was *Silent Hill 3*, which saw a simultaneous PC and PS2 release in 2003. The protagonist was a teenager called Heather this time around, and as the tale unfolded, she learnt of her own past and her links to the town on Toluca Lake.

Silent Hill 4: The Room marked the first major 'departure' for the series. Released for the PS2, Xbox and PC, the title hit shelves in 2004. Although it was originally not intended to be a *Silent Hill* title, the decision to include it in the franchise had been taken early on, and the story of Henry Townsend, mysteriously locked in his apartment until a strange hole appeared in his bathroom, had to be heavily reworked to accommodate the change.

The fifth *Silent Hill* game, subtitled Origins, was a prequel to the series, and was originally released for the PSP in 2007, with a PlayStation 2 release following in 2008. Featuring a trucker, Travis Grady, the plot unfolded as he tried to learn the fate of a burnt girl he had rescued from a fire.

Silent Hill: Homecoming is the sixth instalment, and... well, read the review.

2006 also saw the release of the *Silent Hill* movie, which was based on the games. *Homecoming* makes several nods towards the film, which is probably one of the finest videogame-to-movie conversions ever made. [*Couldn't agree more... just don't let your mommy catch you watching it. Ed*]
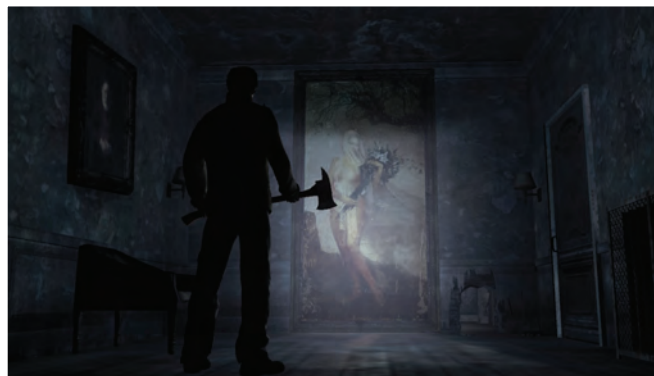
Mom! You didn't rinse the tub after your bath, again!

on my lip because it's warm in here?"

Graphically, things are pretty good this time around. While there are a few texture issues, the game does show a nice conversion between the 'normal' town and the Otherworld version... a bit of a nod to the film. It's a pity the flashlight is too weak to display that properly. The real gem, though, is the modelling. The creatures are wonderful, as always, and their animations are unique and believable. They even show damage as Alex goes all Chuck Norris on them.

The story is solid enough, although we're not going to talk too much about that here, for fear of being accused of spoiling stuff. We'd never do that.

Silent Hill: Homecoming is an enjoyable gaming experience, once you've got through it, and worth the effort. It just isn't scary. It doesn't make the blood freeze in your veins, and the odd, tight sensation that previous titles in the series caused in player's chests is conspicuous in its absence. All things considered, the game feels a little out of place in terms of the franchise. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

The Score

			18+
1	None	None	www.pegi.info

Plus
+ A fairly decent plot
+ Awesome creatures

Minus
- Not particularly scary
- Too many guns

Bottom Line
This one only just barely feels like it belongs in the Silent Hill series.

75

A six-sided game board creates the potential for some epic cascades

Mine asteroids for minerals and gold, then fly around the galaxy to sell your loot

Puzzle Quest: Galactrix

Match gems, kill aliens, save the universe

Genre→ Puzzle / RPG

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

SPOOL UP YOUR FTL, set phasers to kill, and prepare yourself for hours of gem-swapping excitement: *Puzzle Quest* has gone intergalactic! *Puzzle Quest: Galactrix*, Infinite Interactive's sequel to the critically-acclaimed, puzzle role-playing game *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords* is here, and it was worth the wait.

Those familiar with the original will be pleased to see that most of the elements that made *Challenge of the Warlords* a success are back, but with a few new twists that keep the franchise fresh. Like *CotW*, battles play out essentially as a two-player game of *Bejeweled*, with you and an opponent taking turns swapping tiles on the game board. The biggest change, aside from the new space-age setting is the introduction of a new hex-shaped puzzle grid. The basic premise of the game is still to swap tiles around to make groups of three or more, but instead of boring old four-side squares, the tiles now have six sides, opening more options on the board, and making the puzzles more dynamic. Adding to the complexity, new pieces don't just fall in from the top, because there's no gravity in space. Now, if you move a tile from top left to bottom right, new pieces will slide in from the top left of the board. While this new dynamic requires more strategy, it also requires more luck to win battles.

Instead of playing a warrior, equipped with magical spells, armour and swords, you are now the pilot of a spaceship, which can be customised with different offensive and defensive systems. Each system on your ship, of which there are about 30 to choose from, requires different kinds of energy to power it. You collect energy for these systems

by matching various colours of gems: red gems power the weapons systems; green, the computers; yellow, the engines; and blue, the shields. There are also white gems that provide intel (XP) and purple gems that increase your Psi power, which allows you to avoid unwanted battles. Finally, there are explosive mine tiles that you must match to deal direct damage to enemy ships.

Like the original, there are several mini-games to keep you busy building up your character and fleet of ships. The most common of these is hacking LeapGates. In order to move throughout the galaxy, you use the special ability of one of your crew to create links between adjacent solar systems. The game involves matching a sequence of gems in a finite amount of time. Once hacked, you're introduced to an immense map of more than 70 systems to explore. Within each system, you can mine asteroids for resources that can either be sold for cash, or used to craft new systems for your ships. There are also mini-games to gather intelligence and haggle for better prices at shops. Each game has its own set of rules, but it basically boils down to the core premise of matching coloured tiles.

The game's storyline is quite epic, and we don't want to give too much of it away; but in a nutshell, it involves four, giant mega-corporations that control the galaxy, mind-controlling secret agents, reptilian pirates,

Vortraag VIII

You did not see this coming? Humans... humans... humans...

Click to Continue   *Skip*

Frakkin' surly toaster...

nefarious rodents and a super-human army of genetically superior clones hell-bent on the extermination of humankind. You know... your typical sci-fi puzzle game story.

The graphics and comic book-inspired illustrations are bright, vibrant and detailed. The soundtrack is engaging and atmospheric. Unfortunately, the multiplayer aspects of the game are poorly implemented. There's no matchmaking, in-game communication or leader boards.

While Ritalin-popping, button-mashing action freaks might find this game boring, puzzle and RPG fans should find *Puzzle Quest: Galactrix* to be a blast. **NAG**

Chris Bistline

The Score

1	2	None

3+ www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Huge universe
+ Cool new hex grid
+ Plenty of depth

Minus
− Poorly implemented multiplayer
− Requires a lot of luck

Bottom Line
Puzzle Quest joins the space age! This is a 'must-play' for all the 'hardcore' casual gamers out there.

(85)

What is it with rocket launchers and Third World countries?

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

Getting Fiddy in the Middle East

Genre → Third-person Shooter

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

I **CANNOT, IN ANY WAY,** get behind the premise of this game. See, to me, 50 Cent is a hip-hop star. He might be a bit of a 'gangsta', but I really don't see him charging around the Middle East, shooting up bad guys in an effort to retrieve a jewel-encrusted skull. Sure, I have seen lots of games with characters doing similar stuff, but they're characters, first and foremost. We don't see Vin Diesel playing Vin Diesel in an action game, nor do we see Bruce Willis playing himself in some high-action crusade – and I consider both of these guys to be far tougher than Fiddy. No, this is something I put down to supreme arrogance at best and a possible disconnection with reality at worst. Either way, it's a little silly. That's an opinion, of course, and I am sure that Fiddy's devoted fans around the globe like the fact that the virtual counterpart of the rapper is running around the world blowing stuff up. I think it is lame.

That said, the game itself, being the second *50 Cent* videogame outing, is not as lame as the premise. If you can ignore the fact that the hard-talking character is actually supposed to represent a living, breathing human being, then everything works much better.

When you get down to the nuts and bolts of the matter, the game's a rather enjoyable third-person shooter. The graphics are quite good, overall, although individual aspects of the game's look do leave a bit to be desired. The controls, too, are good, but nothing exceptional, and the game dynamic comes down to a basic drop-'n-pop shooter, with the player

using all sorts of cover to hide behind while lacerating hordes of rather stupid enemies. The AI that assists the player is thankfully not quite as thick as the bad guys are.

There is a handful of things that make this game just a little better than average. They include the 'spot challenges' - the 'shoot so many guys in this time frame', for example - that crop up every now and then, the taunts (which the player can activate at any time to add score bonuses and which are quite funny) and the exceptional sound track, which contains around 18 new Fiddy tracks.

What keeps it mired in mediocrity are elements such as the shoddy driving missions and the really nasty boss battles, which are either too easy, too repetitive, or both.

In the end, this is one for fans of the self-proclaimed tough guy at the centre of it all: 50 Cent. They're the ones who will lap this up. Other people... well, they probably won't. At very least, this is a better attempt than the previous Fiddy game. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

50 Cent goes for the world record in bullet holes

The Score

🎮	✛	👥	18+
1	None	2	www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Great challenges
+ Awesome taunts

Minus
- Driving sections
- Boss battles

Bottom Line
If you're a Fiddy fan, play it. If not, try before you buy.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

(**75**)

WANTED
WEAPONS OF FATE

coming soon
www.wantedvideogame.com

The makings of a cult classic, apparently

Mao

Interesting!
Let's see this power!

History lesson...

Disgaea has been around for a while, with two PS2 titles, a PSP title, and a DS title before this particular game. The first PS2 game in this series was released in 2004. While each of the games has a slightly different subject matter, there are certain elements that tie all of these titles together. First of all, they are all complex strategy titles. Secondly, they are all set in the mythical Underworld. And thirdly, they all feature a main character that is more of a villain than anything else.

Panic Laser

TOTAL DAMAGE   110

STAGE CLEAR

Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice

Even ugly games need love

Genre→ Strategy						
PC	360	**PS3**	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

AT FIRST GLANCE, *DISGAEA* 3: *Absence of Justice* is a turn-based strategy title, with a combat mechanic that is typical to JRPG titles such as *Final Fantasy*. But *Disgaea 3* is far more than just that.

To appreciate this, though, the player is going to have to get past the graphics. They are, quite simply, low grade - something that is even more apparent when viewed on the powerful PlayStation 3. On the PS2, the graphics may have been acceptable, but this comes nowhere near where a PS3 game should be. The graphics are sprite based, reminding one of much older games. Perhaps Nippon Ichi was trying to make a point: that graphics aren't the be-all and end-all of a good gaming experience. Perhaps they felt lazy when it came to creating graphics for *Disgaea 3*. Whatever the case, the below-par graphics hide a game that is quite complex and thoroughly enjoyable. We'll call the graphics "retro." That way everyone can feel a little better.

In *Disgaea 3*, the player controls Mao, the son of the Lord of the Underworld, who is hell-bent on destroying his father. It's a long story and fairly ridiculous, and the entire situation results in a few good laughs. Mao is joined by a number of other characters, of varying classes and abilities, to do battle on grid maps. These battles come down to the 'move and attack' turn-based system that appears so often in JRPG titles, but are supported by a strong back-end management system that allows the player to truly 'trim' things up exactly the way they want them to be – if the player is willing to put the time in.

Disgaea 3 is a long game with lots to do, but purely because it is fairly pedantic and mired in a lot of detail. Strategy fans will likely enjoy it more than anyone else will, because it allows them to indulge in 'that style of play'. It is unlikely to ever be a mainstream hit – even if only because of the weak graphics. This is the kind of game that cult classics are made of, though, and anyone who has played the titles will find the familiar mix of strategy and environmental puzzle gaming highly enjoyable. This game – and the series, in fact – is fairly unique within the genre, and deserves to do better than it likely will in terms of sales. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

The Score

12+
www.pegi.info

1   None   None

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Plus
+ Deep strategy
+ Funny

Minus
– Graphics
– Pedantic

Bottom Line
A good game with nasty graphics - will probably be a cult classic.
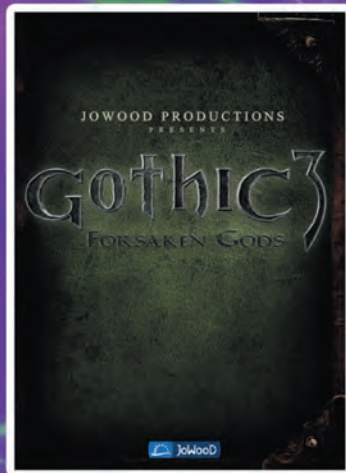
(78)

Everyone carries a rocket launcher in these countries...

See what we mean?
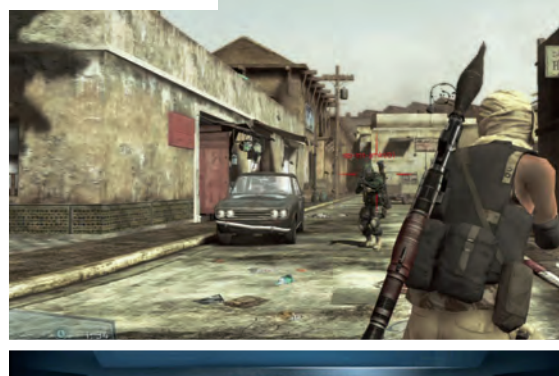
SOCOM: Confrontation

Average online-only SOCOM action

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

THE *SOCOM* SERIES ESTABLISHED itself on the PS2 as a pre-eminent entry in the tactical shooter genre, garnering a significant following. The development reigns have been handed over to Slant Six for the franchise's PS3 debut, and perhaps the latest release's most striking departure from tradition is that *SOCOM: Confrontation* is an entirely online, multiplayer-only outing.

Although previous iterations' multiplayer modes have often been regarded as the major draw card of the *SOCOM* series, the omission of a single-player campaign feels like an oversight, especially given the connection and server problems that plagued the game at the time of writing this review. Good news for South African gamers, however, is that by the time the game hits local shelves, the 1.41 update that promises to alleviate *Confrontation*'s network problems will be available as a 135MB download.

Of course, the technical faults that affect *Confrontation* are not ubiquitous, and fans of the series will find that when they do play through an uninterrupted session, it's every bit as tense and thrilling as its predecessors - if not more so. The game's focus is on tactical combat, and it seldom falters in its near-perfect execution thereof, striking the right balance between pace and precision. The selection of weapons on offer is varied, with an assortment of machine guns, assault rifles, sniper rifles, grenades, and even Claymore mines available. Weapons can be further customised by additions like scopes to improve accuracy, or silencers to allow for less conspicuous attacks.

SOCOM: Confrontation offers several cleverly designed environments, each of which has various strategic hiding places, though none of these is ever completely safe, maintaining an atmosphere of persistent tension. Respawns are usually limited, or sometimes completely absent (as is the case in ranked matches), forcing players to sit out the remainder of a round if their character is killed. This makes for a rich tactical experience, where every move made feels crucial, and typical run-and-gun tactics must be forsaken in favour of a more carefully considered approach.

Visually, *SOCOM: Confrontation* is mostly quite impressive, with some very well-detailed (not to mention expansive) environments, and a farther-than-one-would-expect draw distance that serves well to contribute towards the deadliness of weapons such as the sniper rifle. Detailed characters and more-than-tenable animations are occasionally thwarted by graphical hiccups, but *SOCOM* looks, for the most part, quite good indeed. A dramatic score and convincing weapon sound effects supplement the game's authenticity, making *Confrontation* an engaging experience - at least in the absence of connection problems.

SOCOM: Confrontation's lack of a single-player campaign is disappointing, but in terms of online play, *SOCOM: Confrontation* offers a tense and engrossing experience quite unlike any other shooter on the market. It's just a shame that the online stability is still shakier than it should be. There's no good reason for an online, multiplayer-only title to be beset by such network and connection woes, but there can be little doubt that lying beneath these occasional frustrations is an engaging and dramatic tactical shooter that upholds the *SOCOM* series' formidable reputation. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

PRIMARY WEAPON

The Score

🎮	✛	👤👤	16+
1	2-32	2-8	www.pegi.info
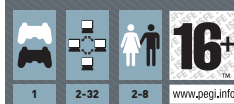
Plus
+ Great multiplayer tactical combat
+ Visuals

Minus
– Network stability needs patching
– No single player

Bottom Line
An amazingly engaging tactical shooter, sadly beset by technical flaws and the lack of a single-player mode.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

65

Developer→ CyberConnect2 **Publisher→** Namco Bandai **Distributor→** Ster-Kinekor Games **Web→** www.ultimateninjastorm.com

Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm

Naruto unpacks his orange pyjamas for the PS3

Genre→ Fighting

PC 360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

NARUTO IS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE of the best-known mainstream franchises in anime and manga, and so it's hardly surprising that there's been no shortage of games devoted to the diminutive, orange-clad ninja who shares his name with the title of the series. Now, Naruto makes his PS3 debut with *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm*, and the result is a pleasing, if occasionally frustrating one.

The game is spread over two modes, namely a story-orientated Ultimate Mission mode, and a head-to-head combat Free Battle mode, which offers players a choice of 25 different *Naruto* characters, including favourites such as Sasuke, Gaara, Kankuro, Sakura and others. The *Naruto* series has made a transition to full 3D combat, in a similar vein to the kind popularised by the *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi* series, where combatants have virtually free reign over the stages in which they fight. The combat itself is simplistic, with projectile attacks mapped to the Square button, while melee attacks and combos are performed by repeatedly tapping the Circle button. The other two face buttons are used for jumping and Chakra charging (i.e. 'powering up' for special attacks). That's not to say that the combat is entirely devoid of depth, however, as the correct timing for Substitution Jutsu moves (Naruto's equivalent of countering an attack) and Ultimate Jutsu techniques (each character's powerful special moves) do take some practice to master. On the whole, the combat is accessible, frenetic and fun, if slightly more simplistic than in most other fighting games.

The bulk of *Ultimate Ninja Storm* is found in the Ultimate Mission mode, which lets players explore the whole of the Hidden Leaf Village, while picking up collectibles, purchasing items from a number of stores, and acquiring various missions, some of which are mini-games like forest races, whilst others are momentous boss battles that serve to progress the story. The mini-games and the actual exploration of the massive village can become tedious at times, but the majority of missions involve thoroughly enjoyable battle sequences, especially the boss fights against some truly massive enemies that serve as some of *UNS*'s most striking showpieces.

Of course, the other aspect that stands out about *Ultimate Ninja Storm* is its visual prowess – the characters are all beautifully rendered and wonderfully animated, to the extent that they look as though they've been plucked straight from the anime. The environments, too, are spectacularly recreated, and thanks to the fluid animation and great lighting effects, the different characters' Ultimate Jutsu sequences are particularly impressive. A sweeping orchestral score and voice acting by the original actors (in both English and Japanese) make *Ultimate Ninja Storm* the most faithful recreation of the anime series to date.

Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm does well to offer accessible and enjoyable fast-paced combat, with some truly momentous boss battles that will no doubt greatly please fans of the series. It's a shame that the pace of the game is too often disrupted by tedious exploration sequences, but there can nevertheless be little doubt that this is Naruto's best videogame outing yet. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

The Score

			12+
1 - 2	2	None	www.pegi.info
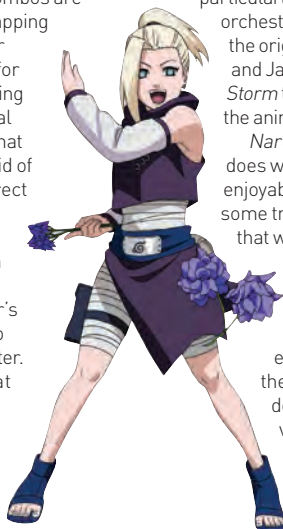
Plus
+ Stunning visuals
+ Epic boss battles
+ Fast-paced combat

Minus
– Mission mode can be tedious
– Lacks depth

Bottom Line

Accessible and fast-paced fighter with superb visuals that do justice to the anime.

71

AVAILABLE AT

Look & Listen
For the Fans

The whole game is an elaborate way of clicking 'next'
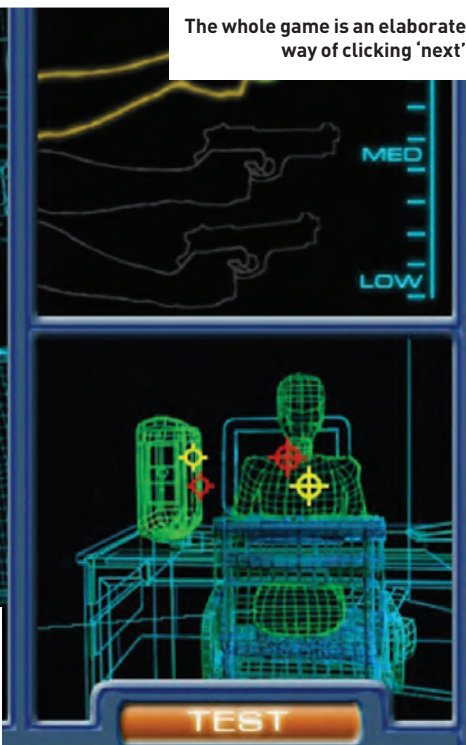
CSI: New York The Game

Pile on the pointless puzzles with this poor-performing point and clicker

Genre→ Puzzle Adventure

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

WITH POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE GAMES on a steady decline over the last decade or so, it's important for those that do manage to be published to be good. Not just because good games sell - and games that sell are likely to promote further publication - but also because thousands of gamers worldwide still hang onto this genre, with all its infuriating pixel hunting and nigh-impossible puzzle solving, as the dearest and most wondrous genre to grace the gaming world. The problem lies, then, when a game of this genre (loosely speaking) comes along as the sixth title in a series of fairly entertaining games and ruins everything the genre, the series and the *CSI* brand itself has built over all these years.

Of course, this is a likely occurrence when you give the development to Legacy Interactive – a company known for its multiple award-winning children's games. While making a kid's game is certainly a fine art, one that I'm sure Legacy has down to a 'T', they seem to have missed the point in making games for grown-ups. You see, *CSI: NY* isn't just a poor game; it's ridiculously easy 95% percent of the time, and nauseatingly frustrating the other five. The developers seem 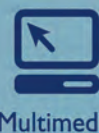to be under the impression that it's okay to take mini-games like 'spot the difference', dead-simple jigsaw puzzles, and 'find all the items in this list on the screen' and wrap them up in a gruesome murder investigation. If you're still wondering about this, it's not okay.

Every action that you take in the game has to be done in a particular order; the only non-linearity offered to you is found in the 8-10 age group mini-games (these being the more challenging ones) where you're allowed to assemble the pieces of a puzzle in any order you wish. It's easy to understand why the developers thought this 'mini-game marathon' method could work, because it's been done very successfully in the classic *Sierra Dr Brain* series. In fact, many of the puzzles almost mirror those found on the good doctor's island, but they're incredibly simple versions that have nothing to do with solving a murder mystery the way you'd expect a high-tech Crime Scene Investigator to do. When is the last time you witnessed a detective collect the following items from the same investigation scene: five live pigeons, one fire hydrant, a pot plant and a bottle of ketchup – none of which has anything to do with the crime and only serves to trigger an interview with a mobster while he waits for his hotdog? Answer: never.

Thankfully, it's not all terrible news for *CSI* fans desperate for their next fix. If you're willing to overlook the terrible drawings, unnecessarily low-quality video and animations reeking of 'last-minute syndrome', repetitive mini-games and mind-numbing mass clicking, you'll be treated to a storyline that's actually rather good. This is the game's only driving force and boils the ten or so hours you'll spend playing it down to an elaborate way of clicking 'next'. Unfortunately, the rest of the game just doesn't carry itself enough to warrant the story being its only meaningful strong point. **NAG**
Geoff Burrows

The Score

				12+
🐴	🎮 1	None	None	www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Surprisingly good story
+ Official voice actors

Minus
- Repetitive
- Too easy
- Too linear

Bottom Line
If you're easily amused and love the CSI series, you might find some joy here. For everyone else: stay far away.

43

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ Krome Studios   **Publisher→** Microsoft
Distributor→ MiDigital   **Web→** www.kromestudios.com

It looks like more fun than it is

Scene It? Box Office Smash

A movie trivia game not just for movie buffs

Genre→ Trivia

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

SCENE IT? BOX OFFICE *Smash* is a movie trivia game designed for the Xbox 360; it is also the sequel to the 2007 game, *Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action*. Interactive games such as these have become popular in recent years, even more so since the launch of the Nintendo Wii and its range of social console games. The game comes bundled with four buzzers that individuals or teams can use to select their answers. Not surprisingly, these controllers are built by Microsoft and feel every bit as solid as the game controller, but they are the same as the ones shipped with the first game. The box also contains an external IR receiver you place above your TV - this means that that the controllers require line of sight with the IR receiver.

This game arrived soon after the launch of the NXE interface, and we found the implementation of your Avatar as a playable character to be a very nice feature. As soon as the game starts, the announcer begins a slew of clichéd one-liners that are funny for all of two minutes before the voice becomes a little irritating. The mini-games are fun, but we felt that the game balance favoured weaker players with bonus points at the end of each round.

The game features more than 250 movies and includes a variety of quiz games, ranging from Pixel Flix, Crossword, and Movie Clips.

Generally, all games within *Scene It? BOS* give you points, based on the time it takes you to answer a question. In some of the rounds, the first person to hit the buzzer and choose the correct answer will get the points. In others, all players get points, but the faster you answer, the more points you get. One of the game's best features is its online play and downloadable content. While these are great value adds, there needs to be more regular quiz packs and a broader variety of movies featured in this game. Whether this will be the case is yet to be seen. So far, there has only been one add-on: Award Winners brings more than 800 new questions to the game with a new game type called Pop Quiz. The *Scene It? Box Office Smash!* Award Winners Game Add-on will set you back 560 gamer points.

Costing around R600, *Scene It? Box Office Smash* is an enjoyable game that loses its appeal far too quickly. Even multiplayer online games get boring quickly as most of the players online have played this game so many times that most of them don't get a single answer wrong – not something that makes for an enjoyable game. The custom game creator is also rather limited, but allows you to switch on score deduction for incorrect answers, which does put an interesting twist on the game. This might sound odd, but if you don't play this game too often, it is a worthy investment. If you plan to play it a few times a month, be prepared for repeat questions. **NAG**

Regardt van der Berg

The Score

1-4   1-4   1-4   **12+** www.pegi.info

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Pans

60

Bottom Line

If you love social gaming, then Scene It? might appeal to you. However, the limited selection of questions will result in many repeats.
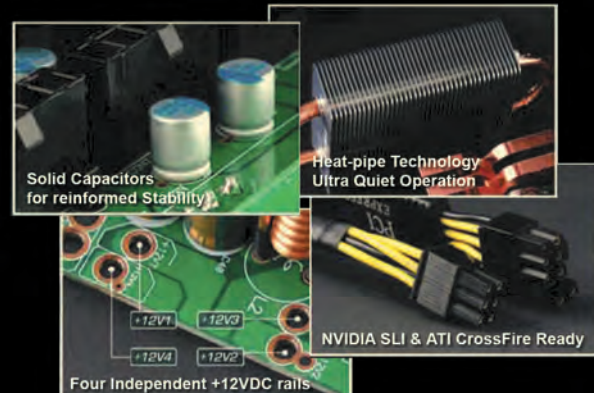
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night

FIVE LONG YEARS HAVE swept by on the Transylvanian storms since Richter Belmont, brave guy and 80s headband fancier, rescued his girlfriend and owned Count Dracula, bad guy and swishy cloak fancier, in the vampire's stylish, medieval fortress. Now Richter has vanished all mysteriously, and the ramparts of Castlevania have once again taken grim shape in the foggy mountain crags. The events are probably connected in some really obvious way.

Meanwhile, stirred from his damned slumber by the sudden tumult among the forces of good and evil, Dracula's wayward son and consummate pre-emo Goth, Alucard is compelled to investigate this strange and certainly apocalyptic manifestation of daddy's favourite winter chalet – a place so steeped in evil, that the collectible hearts aren't hearts at all, but ranged ammunition. Truly, this is a place abandoned by... convention.

Shortly after arriving and thrashing some zombies, however, Alucard is accosted by the spectre of Death, who spitefully takes away all his cool stuff. Divested of all his cool stuff, Alucard must now start over as a rubbish level one pushover, and grind himself back to

his former undead glory. It's going to be a long night.

Since its original 1997 PlayStation release, *Symphony of the Night* has claimed both critic and fan status as having some of the most abysmal and unintentionally hilarious dialogue and voice acting ever. It's also a total rock star of a game, with gorgeous 2D visuals, an extraordinary number of hidden collectible goodies, and side-scrolling, open-ended RPG-flavoured action adventure gameplay that encourages players to wander the halls of Castlevania back and forth at their leisure. In fact, a significant number of the game's more powerful items require the player to backtrack previously traversed areas once they've acquired certain skills - for example, double jumping. Somewhat unusual at the time, this non-linearity (originally ventured, on a somewhat smaller scale, with *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* in 1987) drew comparisons with contemporary SNES title, *Super Metroid*, leading to the portmanteau "Metroidvania" used to describe similar games, including most subsequent *Castlevania* iterations. **NAG**

Improved Metamorphosis!

If you missed out on the original version, you can still pick up and rock *Symphony of the Night* on the PSP (included as part of *The Dracula X Chronicles*, although most of the atrocious dialogue and voice acting have sadly been replaced) or an enhanced version from the Xbox LIVE Arcade marketplace (which happily retains all the atrocious dialogue and voice acting).

Literary Credibility

During its localisation for the Western market, many of the game's items were renamed for well-known or otherwise distinguished literary composites, notably from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Michael Moorcock's seemingly interminable cycle of *Elric* novels. These include the swords Crissaegrim and Narsil, and Mourneblade respectively.

And... they're making a film

Well, maybe one day or maybe never. The story of *Castlevania*'s big screen adaptation is almost as convoluted and inscrutable as the series' own (there are, for example, two different *Castlevania II*s, while the second game in chronological order was simply called *Vampire Killer*). Anyway, in November 2005, Crystal Sky Pictures acquired the film rights, with production scheduled to commence sometime around the middle of the following year, while Dimension Films was brought in as a distributor and Paul W. S. Anderson as director. A year later, with nothing to show for it, Dimension Films was replaced with Rogue Pictures, and commencement of principal photography was postponed until early 2007. Nothing happened. In June 2007, Anderson was swapped out with Sylvain White, and production was again rescheduled to begin towards the end of that year, for a 2008 release. In December 2007, all production on the film was halted indefinitely. In the meantime, that dreadful movie *Twilight* was made.
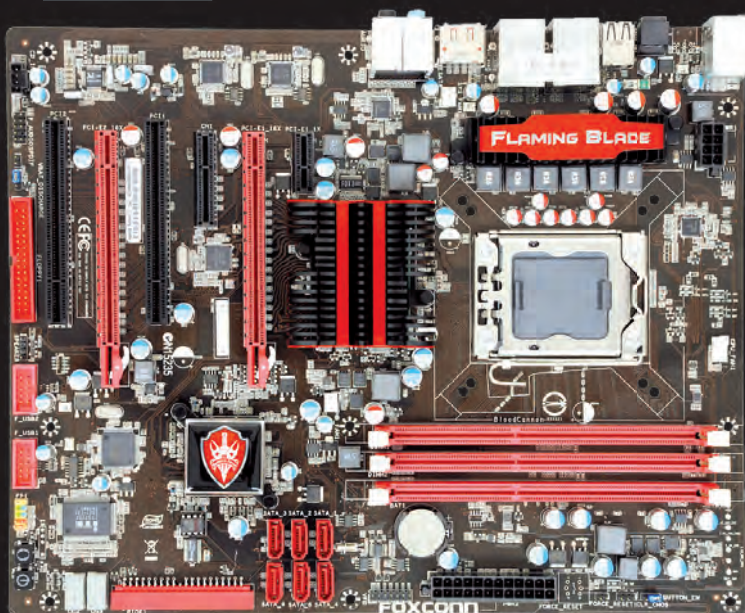
Foxconn Quantum Force Flaming Blade and Flaming Blade GTI

BASED ON THE INTEL X58 chipset, Foxconn's Flaming Blade (FB) and Flaming Blade GTI (FB GTI) motherboards support the new Intel Core i7 and i7 Extreme processor families and triple-channel DDR3 memory.

With support for Intel socket 1366 Core i7 processors, FB and FB GTI will unleash the latest eight-threaded CPU technology for outstanding multi-threaded application performance.

FB and FB GTI feature support for the latest triple-channel DDR3 memory (up to 1,800MHz), with a total of 12GB supported across three DIMM sockets.

Users no longer need to choose between SLI and CrossFireX technology before purchasing their motherboard. Flaming Blade's two PCI-E 2.0 16x slots support both CrossFireX and SLI, ensuring maximum flexibility for system configuration.

Other features of these new MOBOs include:
- Quantum Power - delivering the most stable power to components, whether under heavy load or idle. The six-phase PWM power-pack design provides the CPU with 'clean' and stable power, ensuring system stability and better heat dissipation.
- Quantum BIOS - a BIOS setting that is intuitive, user friendly and organised in groups of inter-related settings. Not only are there more voltage options, but they are arranged into groups relating to the different areas that they affect: CPU, memory, the Northbridge, QPI, etc.
www.quantum-force.net

#50 million

The ATI graphics processor codenamed 'Hollywood' becomes the most successful AMD game console chip to date in terms of unit sales. The 50 millionth GPU for the Nintendo Wii shipped on 11 March 2009.

Snippets

NVIDIA has released beta drivers for Windows 7. One analyst said the appearance of NVIDIA's drivers this early in the Windows 7 process might be a sign that Microsoft and its partners are working together better than they did during Vista's development. **NVIDIA's drivers for the Windows 7 Beta** can be downloaded from their website.

The **Wireless Headset for PS3** is a device that allows gamers to communicate from anywhere in the room, even when the PS3 is connected to up to four DUALSHOCK 3 or SIXAXIS wireless controllers, cable-free. Features include a volume level, mute button, high-quality sound, six-hour talk time, on-screen battery life indicator and its own charging dock that also acts as a remote microphone for when the headset runs out of power.

Creative's X-Fi GO is one example of what Creative is doing to make gamers' lives easier. This gadget is an external sound card that uses the X-Fi technology. It has a gig of memory, and can be plugged into any notebook.

ASUS-LAMBORGHINI VX5
Impassioned Power and Luxury

THE ASUS-LAMBORGHINI VX5 SPORTS a futuristic chassis, inspired by the revered Lamborghini Reventón. The VX5 is equipped with a 1TB solid-state drive (currently the largest capacity SSD available), and is powered by an Intel Core 2 Quad processor and 4GB of memory. The VX5 features a TwinTurbo mode that users can utilise to accelerate CPU and GPU performance via a speed key. A 16-inch, full high-definition display provides more-than-ample viewing space for documents, pictures or movies. Images are displayed in visual vibrancy and clarity, thanks to a dedicated NVIDIA GeForce GT 130M graphics card with 1GB of GDDR3 VRAM. The new illuminated 'chiclet' keyboard automatically lights up in low-light conditions, while a Blu-ray disc combo optical drive completes this comprehensive package of panache and power.

SAPPHIRE HD 4670 ULTIMATE Edition

A totally silent version of the SAPPHIRE HD 4670 is now available, branded as the ULTIMATE Edition. As it uses no fan, it must be installed in a case with good system ventilation. With its 320 stream processors and carrying 512MB of GDDR3 memory, the SAPPHIRE HD 4670 ULTIMATE is ideal for HTPC or general-purpose computers that are required to run quietly but can also be used for gaming. Clock speeds are 750MHz for the core and 873MHz (1.746GHz effective) for the memory. The SAPPHIRE HD 4670 ULTIMATE uses the PCI-Express Gen. 2 interface, and supports CrossFireX, allowing two or more cards to be used together on a CrossFireX-compatible mainboard for higher graphics performance.

ECS M.I.B. II Tweaking Utility

ECS has released the M.I.B. II (Motherboard Intelligent BIOS II) tweaking utility for their latest Black Series motherboards. This utility will enable better system performance by allowing you to enter certain numbers in the BIOS. Compared to the previous version of the M.I.B. tweaking utility, more options and a bigger range of voltage controls are added for power users to "reach the hardware limit."

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 already have.

4   **A good deal;** worth it if you're shopping for one.

3   **What you'd expect,** no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.

2   **This has some issues.** You should shop around for something else.

1   **The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.

Dream Machine

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome our two new Dream Machine award winners in the RAM and Motherboard categories - Patriot Viper 1,600MHz Triple Channel DDR3 and DFI LANParty DK X58-T3eH6! The 6GB Viper set comes striding onto the stage at a very high speed, while still operating at a low voltage. The DFI T3eH6 sexily saunters over in her X58 outfit, winking provocatively at all the overclockers as she goes by. As fellow enthusiasts, we're thrilled and excited. No, wait… excited and thrilled. T3eH6 and Viper have proven themselves worthy of steamy Dream Machine status. Now, please stop drooling. You're smudging the page.
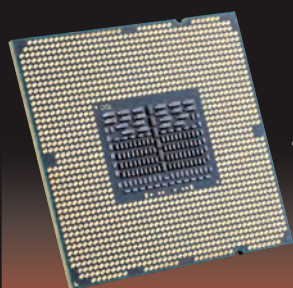
Processor
Intel Core i7 Extreme 965
www.intel.com
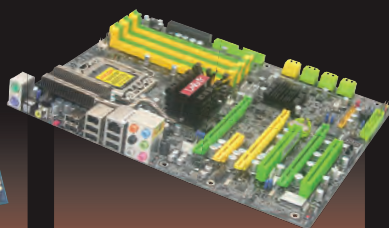
Motherboard
DFI LANParty DK X58-T3eH6
www.dfi.com.tw

Graphics Card
ASUS GEFORCE ENGTX295
http://za.asus.com
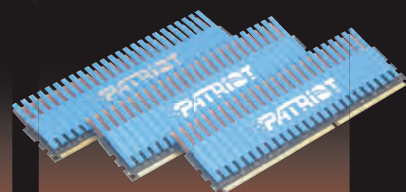
Memory
Patriot Viper 1,600MHz Triple Channel DDR3 www.syntech.co.za

Case
Cooler Master Cosmos S
www.sonicinformed.co.za

Storage
WD Caviar SE16 500GB
www.wdc.com

Power Supply
IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU
www.ikonik.com
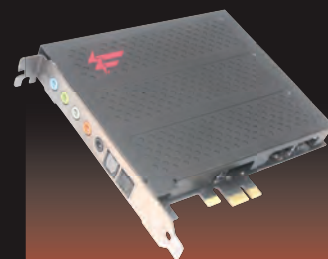
Sound
Creative X-Fi Titanium Fatal1ty
http://za.creative.com

Monitor
Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD
www.samsung.co.za

Keyboard
Microsoft SideWinder X6
www.microsoft.com

Mouse
Logitech G9 Laser
www.logitech.com

Cooling
Coming soon. We've evicted the badger.

HARDWIRED

BY NEO SIBEKO

ATI vs. NVIDIA: It's not Personal, but Financial!

SOMETIME TOWARDS THE END of last year, I started reading on many local and international forums that our beloved ATI finally had their chief competitor NVIDIA in a corner. This was backed up by various facts, but mostly driven by opinion – typical of fans of any brand or manufacturer. However, because we are talking about the only two remaining graphics giants in the industry, it's always best to look at the entire situation – past, present and future – before forming an opinion.

When ATI introduced the 4800 series of graphics cards, the company not only destabilised NVIDIA's dominance, but they also beat their competitor in terms of pricing. Price decreases, re-issues, renaming schemes and everything that NVIDIA has done since then can be attributed in part to the surprisingly stellar performance of the 4800 series cards, and obviously the pricing. It would not be wrong to say that NVIDIA was caught off guard; much like what happened in 2002, when the ill-fated GeForce FX could not compete with the Radeon 9000 series (bar the 9200, which was still based on the DirectX 8.1 R2XX core).

ATI's release of the 4870X2, the 1GB 4870, the 4830, the recent announcement of the 4750, price reductions, and the release of the 4890 graphics card make the company more competitive than any other time before. As a result, it seems that NVIDIA is constantly reacting instead of leading the market as they previously did.

Everything stated above is true and makes for a very interesting time in the market. With that said, it is important to distinguish between the technical truth of the competition between these two companies and what is actually happening at the retail level.

Traditionally, NVIDIA has always been a step or two behind ATI. For example, when ATI was using the 90nm process, NVIDIA was still manufacturing 130nm parts. The reasons for this are design schedules, funds and other factors, but the truth is that these have never been significant factors in how the two companies relate to each other or how they relate to us.

A classic example is NVIDIA's original GT200 cores. With a cumbersome 1.4 billion gates, these were very large, quite hot, and without a doubt very expensive to manufacture. Therefore, price reductions, to compete with the competition's 55nm RV770 GPUs, were going to be costly. Unlike what we would like to believe, suddenly reducing prices isn't as easy as it seems and sometimes not feasible at all. The fact that the GTX280 was still faster than the Radeon HD4870 – by what many may consider an irrelevant margin – was enough for NVIDIA to keep the price high for as long as possible.

We can only speculate about the many reasons for this, but it's safe to assume that the ASICs were not 'ready' for the shift to the 55nm process. Any shift in manufacturing processes requires validation, test runs, and all sorts of preparations, which could take months. It is because of this that low- and mid-range parts – manufactured using the new process – are released before the high-end parts.

How this affected NVIDIA is rather simple: their GT200 core was significantly bigger than the competition's RV770 GPU. Since these GPUs were paired with PCBs made for 512-bit bus widths, to immediately change to a smaller process would necessitate PCB changes. However, there are significant costs associated with this change, unlike on the competition's 256-bit parts (which are much cheaper to manufacture).

So, when NVIDIA didn't immediately release 55nm parts after ATI had, it was not because the company was incapable: there were many other factors making it impractical to implement those changes as quickly as we would have liked. The same holds true for ATI's decision not to increase the number of render outputs on their GPUs (many consumers had been asking for this and thought it would be implemented with the release of the RV790). Since the RV790 is still based on the 55nm process, it should be clear that the company is not ready to commit to a 40nm manufacturing process for their high-end parts, which are far more complicated than the lower-end GPUs. Moreover, since render outputs are fixed-function parts, they have a large footprint, which outweighs the benefits they provide. To increase the render outputs on their GPUs would mean higher manufacturing costs; and lower yields versus performance gained might not be at a point where ATI feels comfortable making that investment.

Performance per millimetre is a very important metric for semiconductor firms, and what we may want is not necessarily in line with what is required to develop a successful part. So, before we point fingers and declare either manufacturer to be out of business, we should think past our wishes and look at the entire picture: it really is more than about our in-game frame rates in *Call of Duty: World at War*. **NAG**

> Performance per millimetre is a very important metric for semiconductor firms, and **what we may want is not necessarily in line with what is required** to develop a successful part.

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T190, T200, T220, T240, T260

Dynamic Contrast Ratio 20,000:1 (DC)   Response Time 2ms (GTG)

LIFE, HARDWARE, AND CHOPS

BY DERRICK CRAMER

Why you lose being first

IT SEEMS THAT PEOPLE too often jump on the hardware bandwagon as soon as it leaves the yard, buying the latest and greatest, because they can. Often, however, these people, in their race to have the best, lose out in many ways, and come to realise that being first really isn't what it's made to be.

It happens time and again: a new processor series is released, and those who can afford it buy everything they'll need for their new monster rig. They try to justify it to themselves, going on about how their rig is future proof, how the length of time it will last them justifies the second mortgage, how having the best makes them a better person, and while this may be true, the cons outweigh the pros tenfold. Let's look at some examples from recent memory.

DDR3 OVER DDR2 - BECAUSE YOU NEED IT

The P45 and X48 chipsets supported both DDR2 and DDR3, and many were tempted to upgrade. The lower voltage required and higher memory speeds (despite relaxed timings) seemed the logical way, which was until you saw the price tag. Hideously expensive, the only justification for spending close to R4,000 for 2GB of RAM was simple: "I won't need to upgrade for months." Four thousand rands will get you a matched set of Corsair C7 1,800MHz modules, blisteringly fast by any account, capable of overclocking even further - the logical choice for anyone seeking the best. Fast-forward maybe a year and a half at most, and Intel releases the Core i7, requiring new spec DDR3 for different configurations. Not only would you lose out on performance if you used the older DDR3, you could run the risk of damaging your new motherboard and CPU. And so we see: first to get DDR3 loses out.

INTEL CORE I7, BECAUSE YOU NEED IT EVEN MORE

Intel released Core i7 a few months ago, and ever since, new tech has been the way to go. Our 'bandwagoners' (now unofficially a word) just had to be first to get that shiny, new i7 920/965. Both these chips would have 'suited', both cost a fortune, both brought with them hidden costs. A new motherboard? You'll need one of those. Some triple-channel DDR3 RAM? Yeah, that too - your old DDR3 just won't cut it. A new CPU cooler? Well of course... it's a new socket after all. Once you're finished spending, you're riding a bicycle to work - but you have a Core i7. All is well, unless you own the 920, that is. A few months down the line and Intel

releases a new stepping of the 920, which makes it like your 920, only better - oh, and cheaper. The flagship 965 should be all right, though. Well, think again: Intel decided to release a 975 to replace the 965 as their flagship processor, which costs around the same as yours, performs better, and sound oh so much cooler. So, the first to get the i7... well, they lose out too.

NVIDIA 2XX SERIES GRAPHICS CARDS, BECAUSE YOU NEED THEM... A LOT.

And finally, we get to NVIDIA, everyone's favourite green graphics giant. They released the 280GTX not too long ago: the fastest single-GPU card out there. So what if the 4870X2 outperformed it and cost less? You have it, and you had it first. Fast-forward those few crucial months, and the 2850GTX launches, replacing the 280GTX: same price point, better performance. Not only that, but the 2950GTX pops up its ugly head. So now you're left with a card that depreciated faster than a new French-made car, and you've lost your flagship status, again. First to get the 280GTX joins the losers.

These are just a few examples of why the bandwagon is bad, and why you lose out in every way just for the sake of being first. Listen to reason, wait for technology to mature. You won't be first, but you'll be better off, happier, and a better person for it. **NAG**

> A new motherboard? You'll need one of those. Some triple-channel DDR3 RAM? **Yeah, that too - your old DDR3 just won't cut it.** A new CPU cooler? Well of course... it's a new socket after all.

MSI Master Overclocking Arena 2008

LAST YEAR SAW AN unprecedented number of international and national overclocking competitions. Even in South Africa, we had qualifiers for one of the international competitions. It seemed that 2008 was the year of the enthusiast, with almost all motherboard manufacturers hosting some overclocking event.

MSI's MOA was the last major competition of 2008, and while a little smaller than both AOCC and GOOC, some would say it was the most interesting and possibly the most fun out of all the competitions - not only because it took place at the beautiful Hua Shan Cultural Center in Taipei, but also because of the hardware used.

While the other major competitions used the then range-topping Intel QX9770, MSI chose to go with the enthusiast-favourite Intel Core 2 Duo E8600 on the MSI P45D3 Platinum - making for impressive and typically enthusiast-like setups. Not only was this welcomed by entrants and informed spectators alike, but in addition to that, 3DMark2001 SE and Super PI 1.5XS 1M were the only two benchmarks used (which everybody was very familiar and comfortable with).

MSI showed that they know what's going on in the overclocking world, as they managed to gather some of the most talented overclockers from all over the world - Moloko and Deanzo from Australia; Gprhellas from Greece; Alex Tan from Malaysia; and from the Western Cape, our very own Goddy Roodt and Seth Anderson representing South Africa (to name a few).

The competition, as it seems the norm with these events, was friendlier than it was anything else. One would have expected intensity from the competitors, but that was not the case. The event almost seemed like a gathering of friends rather than competitors. MOA may have been a little smaller than the other competitions, but certainly the most memorable.

Since there were only two benchmarks, all the teams were aware of what they needed to do, as any failure to submit scores in a timely manner would most certainly spell the end of the competition for the team. Our own team successfully managed a Super PI time of 7.968 seconds. Unfortunately, though, this was not enough to match the 7.5 seconds that Alva and Rekky from Team Indonesia managed, thanks to their attention to detail, perseverance, and a really great E8600 sample. At this stage, many of the teams were trying to stabilise their motherboards past the 600MHz mark, which proved to be quite challenging: while Super PI 1M was stable, 3DMark2001 SE continued to present problems.

Fortunately, Team SA managed to fight back in the second round and would have won the 3DMark2001 SE challenge had it not been for a last minute time extension, which allowed Team Greece to get the edge over Goddy and Seth, who managed an impressive 101,604, while Gprhellas and Gorrilakos outpaced them marginally with 101,711. As impressive as our score was, the disappointing Super PI run in the first round meant that we finished outside of the top three.

Despite the result, MOA certainly was the best that our South African team had done in any competition. We can only hope that 2009 brings better luck. With some better preparation, a top

Lite (left) and David Yang (extreme right) with SA Team representatives Seth Anderson and Goddy Roodt

It doesn't always work out like you planned. A motherboard on air behaves very differently when it's operating at sub zero temperatures

three finish is definitely within reach.

In the end, Team Indonesia walked away with the honours of being MOA 2008 champions. Not only that, but MSI handed the team a $3,000 cheque and a set of MSI ECLIPSE SLI motherboards. Second place went to Team Greece, who walked away with $2,000. Third place went to the Taiwanese team, who were awarded $1,000.

MSI, not content with just hosting a competition, did what no other manufacturer had and invited the competitors and journalists to their head quarters; not only to see the premises, but to sit with the respective marketing, manufacturing and BIOS teams. Not only did MSI receive a wealth of information from some of the best overclockers in the world regarding their products, but MSI employees also shed some light on many of their technologies and upcoming products - which looked

very impressive. Besides the overclockers offering technical advice to the relevant divisions that deal with graphics cards and motherboards, MSI managed to build relationships with many of the participants, whose suggestions and recommendations will most certainly be seen in upcoming products.

MSI's MOA 2008 was a resounding success - not only on the day of the competition, but throughout the entire event. MSI staff members were on hand, making it among the best trips ever for many of the competitors and journalists. With constant feedback and interaction with enthusiasts, and in particular extreme overclockers, MSI will soon be challenging for the top spot - as can be seen with the brilliant MSI ECLIPSE SLI motherboard we reviewed in our March issue.

Thank you to MSI, all the sponsors, and Pinnacle Micro for making this trip possible. **NAG**
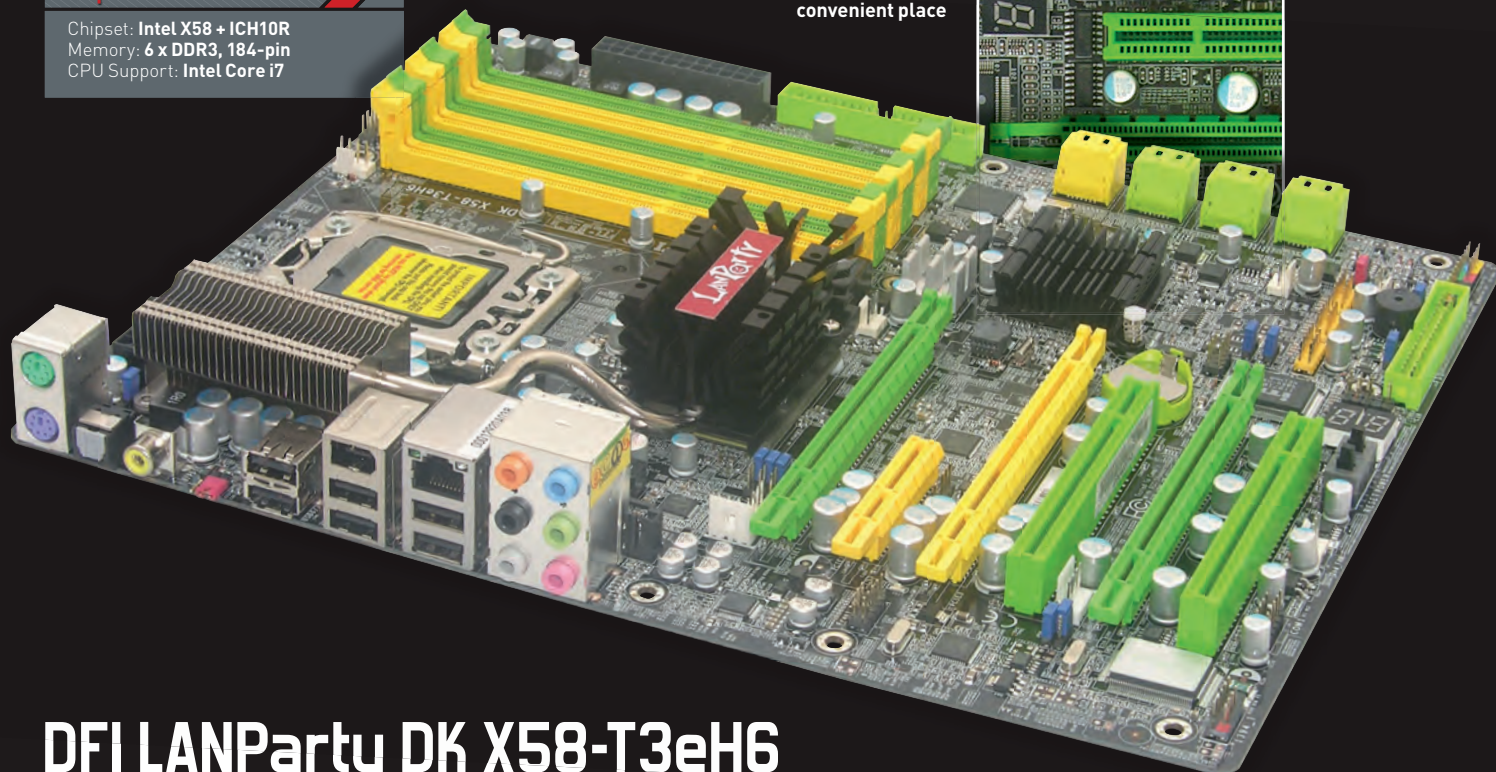
Left: First place winners, Alva and Rekky from Indonesia

Right: The ever famous Overclocking rock star, Josh better known as Moloko

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EZ-Switch allows power, reset and BIOS-clear functionality in an easily accessible and convenient place

DFI LANParty DK X58-T3eH6

IT'S BEEN SOME TIME since we last received any of DFI's products, and during that time, a number of impressive DFI products have been released. None has stood out as much as 2003's LANParty Ultra NF2, the NF4 SLI-DR and more recently, their various P35 offerings. The X48 and P45 motherboards were average at best. With the X58 chipset, however, DFI seems to be back.

The T3eH6 board is a cheaper version of the T3eH8, which is the premium X58 board from DFI and hence falls under the UT family. The DK is one class below and as such doesn't support 3-Way SLI and features a hybrid power system instead of the fully digital, eight-phase PWM circuitry found on the T3eH8 UT.

If it seems as if the T3eH6 is a 'cheap' motherboard, you would be gravely mistaken. While it features a more traditional six-phase analogue/digital power system for the CPU, it is programmable. The memory is powered by a two-phase PWM circuit and so is the Northbridge, which makes this board a 6+2+2 system (as DFI would prefer it to be called). This power system is - for the most part - just as efficient as any other, especially when looking at the voltages on this motherboard: they were stable and better than that featured by any other X58 motherboard we have tested.

Even without load-line calibration, the voltage readings were solid - not only in the BIOS, but in CPU-Z and when using a multimeter. The power circuitry on this board is simply outstanding and

outshines that of most motherboards that cost significantly more. This board proved itself. We used a particularly bad, sample Intel Core 7 i940 CPU. No other motherboard has been able to stabilise this CPU at 4GHz. The T3eH6 not only managed this, but allowed the CPU to clock a little further towards 4,100MHz. A significant achievement considering that the previous best was 3,900MHz on the very capable EX58-Extreme.

Not only did the T3eH6 provide a higher overclock, but the voltage drop control (commonly referred to as "Vdroop") under load was significantly better.

Base-clock overclocking is another impressive aspect of the T3eH6. On all other X58 motherboards, we usually had to fiddle with the settings in the BIOS to various degrees before we could stabilise anything above 166MHz. This was not the case with the DFI motherboard. A 200MHz BCLK was easily achieved with nothing changed in the BIOS other than lowering the system multiplier. The system was not only very stable, but the memory was automatically configured to operate at 1,600MHz. The SPD (Serial Presence Detect) seemed to have been read incorrectly, though, as the RAM was configured for CL10 operation instead of the standard CL8. Not a major issue in the end, as setting the memory to the CL8-8-8-24 was a simple BIOS affair. The maximum overclock achieved on this motherboard was 207MHz with the default settings, but we have no

doubt that with further tweaking, it could match or exceed the 220MHz we have managed to validate on an X58 motherboard.

Aesthetically, the T3eH6 is the usual DFI affair. The motherboard itself is the standard PCB colour and all expansion slots are in the usual UV-reactive yellow and green. The Northbridge cooler is relatively small and does get very hot. We would recommend a small fan over the Northbridge, especially for those who will be using a high-end graphics card in the first PCI Express slot, as it will give off additional heat that will in turn diminish the already-strained cooling abilities of the Northbridge cooler.

The DFI T3eH6 is truly a motherboard one would expect from DFI. It features sound design, great overclocking and comes in at a reasonable price (compared to other X58 motherboards). The DFI T3eH6 is a brilliant motherboard and finds a home in our Dream Machine. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

★★★★★

Bottom Line

Definitely one of the best X58 boards presently available, and certainly the fastest we have tested.

Plus
+ Performance
+ Overclocking headroom
+ Solid power circuitry

Minus
- Disappointing Northbridge cooler

Supplier→ Microsoft   Web→ www.microsoft.com

The play-and-charge cable means no more interruptions because of dead batteries

The redesigned thumb buttons couldn't be easier to use

Microsoft SideWinder X8 Wireless Mouse

IT'S A FACT: WIRELESS mice aren't good gaming mice. Poor connections can result in lag time between when you move the mouse or click the buttons and when the action happens on the screen. Even minute bits of lag can cause immense frustration. Another major drawback of wireless mice is battery life. Nothing can be more devastating than having your mouse 'die' in the middle of an intense firefight and having to rummage through your desk looking for a fresh set of batteries - or even worse: having to give up and wait an hour while the mouse recharges in its cradle.

Microsoft's latest SideWinder mouse, the X8, aims to solve these problems, and after a couple of weeks of play testing, we can gladly say that they've hit the mark.

The X8's wireless receiver operates at 2.4GHz and is completely lag free. The sensor uses Microsoft's new BlueTrack technology, which they claim will work "on virtually any surface – from a granite kitchen countertop to the living room carpet." We can attest that the mouse does indeed track on just about any surface we put it on, though we can hardly recommend playing *Call of Duty* on a shag-pile mouse pad. We got the best performance by placing the mouse directly on the desktop without any mouse pad. The sensitivity has been improved as well, now supporting DPI settings from 250 to 4,000.

To combat the problem of dead batteries, Microsoft includes a play-and-charge cable, similar to the one used with the Xbox 360 wireless controller.

Conveniently tucked away on the wireless receiver, the recharge cable can be quickly connected to the mouse via a magnetic clip when the battery starts to run low. An indicator on the X8's LCD warns you before the battery goes completely flat. Microsoft claims 30 hours of battery life on a single charge, and in a little more than two weeks of constant work and gaming use, we only had to recharge the battery once, seeming to support the claim.

The styling and feel of the X8 are similar to its predecessors: it's a large mouse that fills your entire hand; it sports a large, comfortable metal scroll wheel, three DPI adjustment buttons, macro recording features, a Games Explorer button and an LCD screen. The biggest design change is the side buttons, which are now set up more like a rocker switch for the right thumb, rather than two individual buttons.

This is a fantastic mouse, and worth the upgrade – particularly if you're a SideWinder fan.   **NAG**

Chris Bistline

Specifications

Operating System: Windows XP/Vista
Connection Port: USB
Connection: USB or 2.4GHz wireless
Image Processing: 13,000fps
Resolution: 250-4,000dpi
Response Rate: 500 reports/second
Weights: No
Warranty: 3 years

★★★★★

Bottom Line
This is quite simply the best wireless mouse ever made.

Plus	Minus
+ Convenient side buttons	**–** No weight system
+ Easy to recharge	
+ Good battery life	

Supplier→ ASUS / AMD   Web→ www.amd.com / za.asus.com

Specifications

Asus M4A79T Deluxe
Chipset: AMD 790FX + SB750
Memory: 4 x DDR3, 1,600MHz
CPU Support: AMD Phenom II AM3

Specifications

AMD Phenom II X4 925
Cache: 8.5MB total (6MB L3, 2MB L2, 512KB L1)
Cores: 4 (Deneb 45nm)
Speed: 2,800MHz
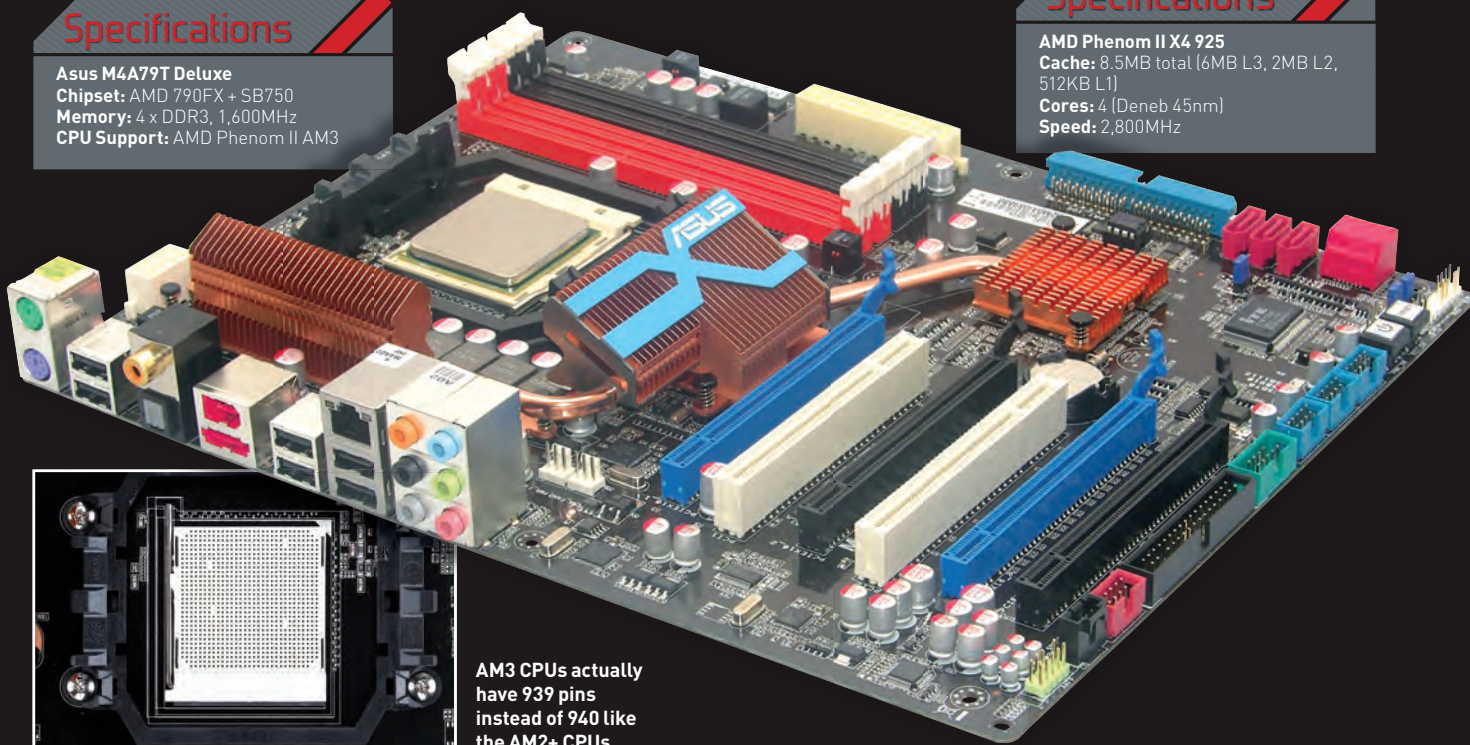
AM3 CPUs actually have 939 pins instead of 940 like the AM2+ CPUs

AMD Phenom II X4 925 and ASUS M4A79T Deluxe

BY NOW, IT'S NO surprise and not news to anyone that AMD's Phenom II is a great success, more than making up for the ill-received Phenom. The Phenom II has not only been shown to offer great value for money, but the performance to oust the competition is there, provided high enough clock frequencies can be reached.

Many will argue that any CPU with the right frequency could match another (in this case, the Core i7 Extreme), but it is important to know the following; the Phenom II doesn't suffer from the cold bug. Secondly, the IPC of the Phenom II is much better than that of original 65nm Agena-based CPUs. Last but most certainly not least, the new CPUs have spectacular scaling when compared to what was on offer from the company before.

It is not uncommon to find Phenom II X4 940 CPUs clocking in at speeds above 5.9GHz and some reaching 6.2GHz - truly unmatched frequencies by any other quad-core CPU available on the market.

The Phenom II X4 925 we had is based on the Deneb core and is the first CPU from AMD to support DDR3. The most interesting aspect about it, however, is that it functions just as well on any supporting AM2+ motherboard (provided the BIOS firmware is up to date) and will switch to DDR2 functionality. This virtually seamless upgrade path makes it a winner for buyers who have already invested in a high-end AM2+ motherboard with performance DDR2 memory: when the time comes to switch to DDR3 and the newer AM3 motherboards, the same CPU can be used, keeping the upgrade costs to a minimum.

We knew that the Phenom II X4 925 has a very good price\performance ratio, but we wanted to find out what benefits were to be had from the DDR3 memory. To this end, we employed the brilliant ASUS M4A79T Deluxe. This motherboard is, as the name suggests, based on the AMD 790FX chipset, but features the newer SB750 Southbridge with advanced clock control, or as it is commonly called, ACC. While ACC has recently demonstrated, in certain circumstances, the ability to unlock Phenom II X3 CPUs into full quad-core Phenom II CPUs, on this particular 925, it served to give better HT overclocks than on any other SB700-based board.

The M4A79T Deluxe has more overclocking options for the CPU than you can shake a stick at, and care had to be taken when dealing with the 925. As a result of a relatively low 14x, locked multiplier, we had to rely on HT overclocking to reach our desired clock speeds. The CPU has massive headroom for overclocking, as 3,500MHz required no additional voltage to the CPU. However, irrespective of the multiplier used, the motherboard refused to boot into Windows at anything higher than 253MHz. A respectable overclock on the HT bus, but not earth-shattering in any way, as some board and CPU combinations have managed in excess of 310MHz.

With that said, on the DDR3 ASUS motherboard, we managed an HT speed of 280MHz, which led us to believe that the HT clock limitation is directly linked to the IMC capability and not the motherboard necessarily. However, if a cutting-edge

AMD system is what you are after, then there is definitely no question about it: the M3A79T Deluxe is undoubtedly one of the best AM3 motherboards you can buy – if not the best. With CrossFireX support and powered by an unlocked Phenom II X4 945 CPU, it would make a very powerful gaming or enthusiast system. After all, at the time of writing the world record for 3DMark06 (35,806 by SF3D and Macci) was set on this motherboard. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

★★★★☆

Bottom Line

AMD Phenom II X4 925
A good showing by the first quad-core DDR3 CPU from AMD.

Plus	Minus
+ Price	− DDR3 compatibility isn't
+ Performance	as good as it should be

★★★★★

Bottom Line

Asus M4A79T Deluxe
One of the best, if not **the** best, AM3 motherboards currently available.

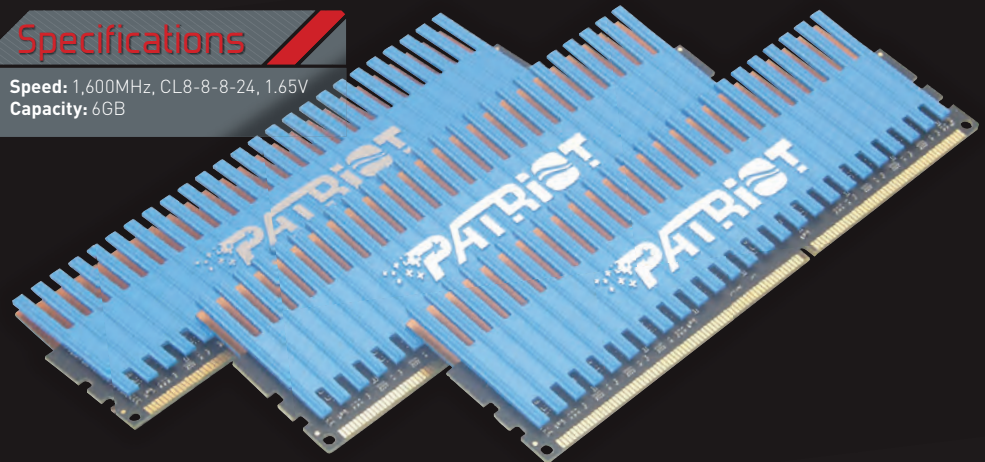| Plus	Minus
+ BIOS features	− Looks
+ Good overclocking board	

Patriot Viper 1,600MHz Triple Channel DDR3

LATE LAST YEAR, GAMING and enthusiast communities were reserved about the first few sets of triple-channel memory to enter the market when the i7 was introduced. However, since then a lot has changed: not only is DDR3 cheaper, but the operating voltages have sunk back closer to the JDEC-specified 1.5V (down from the stratospheric DDR2-like 2.3V of previous high-performance DDR3 dual-channel kits).

Strangely enough, this happened when most enthusiasts had figured out that memory voltages could be increased over and above the Intel-specified 1.7V maximum - provided that the VTT/QPI voltage is within a certain limit from the Vdimm voltage. This has obviously resulted in very high-speed sets operating at low voltages, such as this Viper set from Patriot.

This 6GB set has relatively tight CL8-8-8-24 timings at an impressive 1,600MHz. With a reference voltage of 1.65V, this is an enthusiast's set and doesn't attempt to be anything but that. To reap the rewards of this set, one is either going to need an Extreme Edition Core i7 965, or be willing and able to overclock the motherboard BCLK to 200MHz, because that is the only way to make sure the memory is operating at 1,600MHz on all the other locked-multiplier i7 CPUs. While we

managed to operate the RAM at CL7 at 1,333MHz, CL6 was definitely out of the question even at 1,066MHz as the system would not POST. Because it's a 6GB kit, it should be obvious that a 64-bit operating system will be required to reap the benefits of such a large memory capacity. So, if you're looking to build the ultimate gaming machine or extracting the best from your i7 system, the Viper 1,600MHz set is among the best sets available locally. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications
Speed: 1,600MHz, CL8-8-8-24, 1.65V
Capacity: 6GB

★★★★
Bottom Line
Above-average, triple-channel 1,600MHz kit, perfect for gamers and enthusiasts.

Plus
+ Performance
+ 6GB

Minus
- Price

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takeMS Dual Channel DDR3 1,333MHz 2GB Set

WE KNOW YOU'RE WONDERING who takeMS is, where they're from, what they make and what their name means. You're not alone... When we were presented with these memory modules, the name did not ring a bell. However, as we discovered, just because takeMS is not well known, it doesn't mean that the company is not a capable manufacturer.

takeMS is a German company, and they - like others - claim that they sell high-quality memory modules. But takeMS can back their claim, as they offer a ten-year warranty on their products, which makes their claims more than believable.

What we received for review is their fastest dual-channel memory kit, which is rated at the JDEC-ratified 1,333MHz. This may seem like a very low speed for most people reading this, but it is worth noting that most 1,333MHz sets can operate at 1,600MHz; and if not, they are capable of CL7 and sometimes CL6 memory timings.

In the case of the takeMS set, CL7-6-6-18 was the best that we could achieve at the reference voltage. Adding more did not help the situation, but did stabilise the memory at 1,600MHz. For most people, however, the balance will be somewhere in the middle. For the enthusiast who just needs a backup set of reliable memory to boot finicky motherboards, this set will do

just fine. Should it be used for overclocking, the best performance will certainly be from the higher frequency rather than the tighter timings. For gaming, however, considering that it is unlikely you would want to run the memory out of specification voltage for days on end, it is best to keep it at the standard 1,333MHz.

Two gigabytes may not be much these days, but at the price point that this set is being introduced, it's hard to fault it on much. This set performs well, overclocks to some degree and best of all, has one of the best warranties of any set of memory available. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications
Speed: 1,333MHz, CL8-8-8-24 1.5V
Capacity: 2GB

★★★★
Bottom Line
Entry-level DDR3 1333MHz set with 10-year warranty.

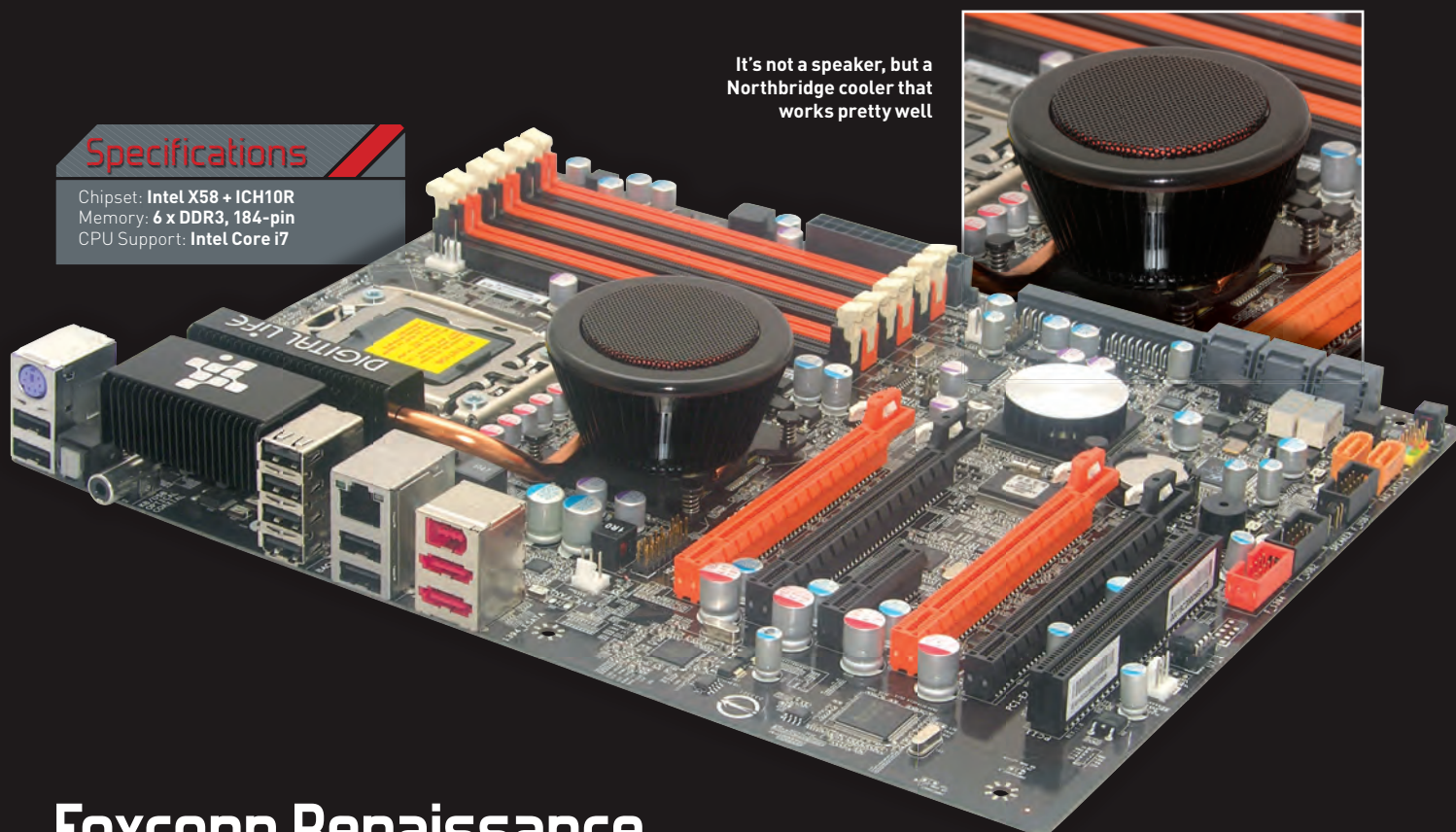**Plus**
+ Work flawlessly on all DDR3 boards
+ Capable of 1,600MHz

Minus
- Weak heatsink design

It's not a speaker, but a Northbridge cooler that works pretty well

Specifications

Chipset: **Intel X58 + ICH10R**
Memory: **6 x DDR3, 184-pin**
CPU Support: **Intel Core i7**

Foxconn Renaissance

THERE WAS A TIME when, if someone said Foxconn, one thought of low-end motherboards, graphics cards, and other OEM products. However, if you now ask most enthusiasts or gamers what names or images come to mind when you say Foxconn, you will hear names like Blood Rage, Dreadnaught, BLACKOPS, Mars, Avenger and sometimes - depending on who you are - even people such as Saaya or Shamino. These are all from Foxconn's Quantum Force family - one of the most well-known family of products for enthusiasts.

So, you might think the Foxconn Renaissance is from the Quantum Force family, but it is not. It borrows many of the features that are embodied by the Quantum Force products, but this motherboard is, as Foxconn says, for the digital lifestyle. This is evident in not only the features that the motherboard comes with, but the design as well.

What you see where the X58 Northbridge cooler is supposed to be is not a speaker, nor is the silver knob on the Southbridge for volume control. No, these are coolers fashioned in such a way as to fit in with the whole digital lifestyle theme of the motherboard. Aesthetically, we're not sure if it works and it most certainly doesn't stand out like the Blood Rage, but given its apparent target market, it would be counterproductive for it to look like the Blood Rage.

The Renaissance motherboard features a six-phase PWM power circuitry for the CPU; not quite up to the levels of the 14-phase system found on the Blood Rage, but then again, these things tend to make very little difference for the vast majority of users. It's not fair to say this motherboard is a cut-down Blood Rage. It is priced very similarly, which begs the question: why would any person interested in a home entertainment computer spend so much on the motherboard? The truth is: it's more of an alternative than anything else.

It features 3-Way SLI, 4-Way CrossFireX, has a virtually identical BIOS to the Blood Rage, supports higher memory speeds and a higher capacity with a maximum of 24GB of memory that can supposedly operate at 2,000MHz. Therefore, in some ways, it can be said to be better than any other X58 board from Foxconn, but where it really stands out - and what probably warrants the motherboard its name - is the audio controller.

As with many other motherboards, it's based on the high-definition audio codec, but controlled via the aptly named "Harp" audio module, which supports DTS Connect, Dolby Digital surround and Dolby Digital Live! The most impressive aspect is not the features and connectivity options it allows, but the claimed 110dB SNR, which makes it 'better' than some high-end discreet sound cards and most certainly better than the vast majority of motherboard audio solutions.

Other than that, it is pretty much what one would expect from a high-end X58

motherboard, and especially a high-end motherboard from Foxconn. In terms of performance, it is what you would expect. Reaching the magical 200MHz BCLK proved to be a process in itself, but once there, the motherboard was very stable. Getting anything above that was unsuccessful - most likely because of the early BIOS more than the motherboard simply being incapable of reaching the speed.

Overall, the Renaissance is just as capable a motherboard as one would expect. It's unlikely to ever set any records, but then again, not many motherboards can boast an audio module with a 110dB SNR. This is a high-end motherboard, so those who may want to do some overclocking but are more concerned about having just about every single feature the X58 chipset provides and a little bit more, should seriously consider this one. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

★ ★ ★ ★

Bottom Line

X58 performance motherboard with the best on-board audio solution on the market.

Plus
+ Harp audio module
+ 3-Way SLI

Minus
- Looks
- Difficult to overclock

Genius Speed Wheel 3 MT

GENIUS'S SPEED WHEEL 3 MT is a USB racing wheel aimed at PC users who've grown tired of using a keyboard to race, and are looking for something to help immerse them in their game of choice. Needless to say, buying a peripheral dedicated to one specific genre of gaming is normally reserved for the enthusiast only - one who wants an experience as close to real life as possible.

At first glance there is nothing extraordinary about the speed wheel. The construction isn't ideal, the wheel has a tendency to be too sensitive in most games, the suction pads that are meant to hold the wheel in place might as well not be there, and the rear buttons are inaccessible to those with short fingers. In fact, when comparing lap times in *Need for Speed: Undercover* and *TrackMania Nations Forever*, on average, the times are three to five seconds slower. All of this should seal the Speed Wheel 3 MT's fate as a device to avoid. And yet, it doesn't... because I'm still playing. Paying little attention to the above gripes, using the wheel is actually a joy: *NFS: Undercover* was a lot more fun the second time around, and it's all thanks to this little wheel.

So, if you are a racing enthusiast and are looking to upgrade your existing wheel, this shouldn't be your first choice. However, if you're looking for a cheap way to enjoy your racing games more, the Genius Speed Wheel 3 MT is the peripheral for you. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

Specifications

Controller Type: Wheel and pedals
System: PC
Buttons: 14
Controller Features: Programmable buttons / vibration

★ ★ ★

Bottom Line
Worth the money as a game-enhancing peripheral, despite its 'cheap' feel.

Plus	Minus
+ Fun factor	- Cheap build quality
+ Good budget-buy	- Oversensitive
	- Some buttons inaccessible

PlayStation 3 Wireless Keypad

SURFING PSN OR ENTERING messages using the standard PlayStation 3 controller is as close to a nightmare as these things can be. So, to make everyone's lives a little easier, Sony has released an official piece of PlayStation 3 hardware- the PlayStation 3 Wireless Keypad.

This device snaps smartly onto any PlayStation 3 wireless controller, crowning the controller with a full keypad. It's massively convenient and very functional, but the keys are quite small. Additionally, the positioning does get in the way of the L1 and R1 buttons on the controller, but only a little. In fact, it only adds a light pressure to the top of the user's fingers when these buttons are engaged, but picky types (like me) may find it a little annoying.

The keypad doesn't draw any power from the controller – it is its own unit, and must be charged separately. Similarly, it must be paired with the PS3 on its own. The only reason it needs to be associated with the controller, when all is said and done, is so that it is close at hand.

The keypad allows quick access to

The keypad also acts as a mouse-style touch pad

friends lists and the PS3 message box, and a touch of a button toggles its use between an alpha-numeric pad and a touch-sensitive 'mouse' pad, for easier navigation.

The keypad does require a repositioning of thumbs to use, but it isn't exactly something that the player will use in the height of a firefight. Then again, it isn't exactly something that the player is going to use unless they make use of online PlayStation 3 services. It's not quite a gimmick, but it's very specific purpose means that it is not a 'must-have' PlayStation 3 accessory - it's a nice toy to have, pure and simple. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

The unit clips snugly onto any PS3 wireless controller

★ ★ ★ ★

Bottom Line
A handy device for those who spend a lot of time on PSN.

Plus	Minus
+ Convenient typing	- Small keys
+ Great functionality	- A little invasive

TR2N

DESPITE THE FACT THAT *TR2N* is at the very least a year from release (most likely two years), the film's hype machine is unstoppable and frankly, we're hooked. Details have been scarce up until now. We know that light cycles are back; we've been assured that there'll be a fair share of disc battles and very intriguing light jet battles - yes, there will be jets. But how will all these new-fangled things actually come together?

First up, Jeff Bridges is back. His character, Kevin Flynn, having survived the ordeal of the first film and defeated the Master Control Program, has moved on to better and brighter things. He's taken his arcade business to the next level, produced some of the best videogames in the industry with the help of his in-depth understanding of gaming, and 'produced' a child, Sean, who's five years old when the film kicks off in the year 1989. Things go horribly wrong (as they tend to do in interesting movies); Flynn is sucked back into the videogame world and never returns. Fast-forward 15 years - Alan Bradley has been put in charge of Flynn's business and Sean is left wondering just what happened to good old dad.

The likely events ensue - Sean hops back into the game world, has to defeat all sorts of baddies and rescue his dear father. He'll need to deal with a corrupt CLU (Kevin Flynn's digital counterpart) that's out to reprogram the game world into a utopian establishment by killing off programs called ISOs. The ISOs think young Flynn is there to save them and, well; things just get crazier from there.

While much of the technical information is still lost in rumour, we know that the director is newcomer Joseph Kosinski (who's also in charge of the upcoming *Logan's Run*) and a handful of other actors have been confirmed. Bruce Boxleitner is returning to the role of Alan Bradley (the original character Tron in the game world), and Olivia Wilde, who'd you most likely know as Dr Remy Hadley from the TV series *House*, will be making an appearance as well. Weepy-eyed Garrett Hedlund of *Eragon* fame is on the cast list as well; we're assuming he'll take on the role of Sean Flynn. It's also been confirmed that Daft Punk will be creating the musical score for the film - looking at their work on 2003s *Interstella 5555*, it seems the duo is perfectly suited for a film like this.

The real reason most of us will watch TR2N, Miss Olivia Wilde

Oh yeah... he's in it too, he has the lead or something...
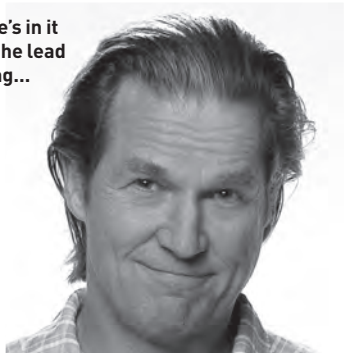
Pandorum

WHEN *EVENT HORIZON* HIT the scene in 1997, it showed the world just how creepy deep space could be. With a healthy dose of sci-fi and a more-than-healthy dollop of terror, it set the new standard for sci-fi horrors - which has seldom been met since. Now, *Pandorum* is here to challenge that crown. When two crew members awaken from hyper-sleep to find their ship incapacitated, most of their memory in tatters, and worse still, there's a tribe of rampant savages aboard the vessel, they must fight off the enemies, paranoia and the deadly effects of 'Pandorum' to save themselves and possibly the entire human race. The film is due out in September and is sure to keep the horror/thriller fans happy if the trailer is anything to go by.

Do not pass go

WE'LL GET THIS OUT of our systems first to save you from any disbelief - Ridley Scott is directing a *Monopoly* film; it's real, he's really doing it, we're not kidding. With the 'what?' (or perhaps, 'what the ponies?') out of the way, let's have a look at the 'why'. Because it makes sense, according to the veteran director, because it's something he "needs to do." The world's in such a panic over the recession at the moment that finance is topical - it's important. Monopoly has always been about simplifying the financial world into an easily digestible family game: why not perform the same duties with a film? Aside from the obvious "because it's bonkers, that's why not", Ridley Scott and lead writer Pamela Pettler (screenplay writer behind *Monster House* and *Corpse Bride*) have decided that this film will be a valuable contribution to modern society. They're not just making a movie about pushing little pewter pieces around a slab of cardboard, either. You'll be pleased to know that *Monopoly* (as yet untitled) will instead involve live action characters playing a sort of real-world game – a giant metaphor perhaps? At least that's the sense we can make out at the moment.

This is our unhappy face

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE AS sad as seeing a classic film or series of films crushed by modern times. It happens all too often: director had their heyday, couldn't stay with the times and falls behind, then tries a few desperate attempts to relaunch their career. This is almost the exact story of George Miller, creator of *Mad Max* (1979) and its two sequels. Since then, he's done titles like *Babe: Pig in the City* and *Happy Feet* - not exactly the same of calibre. He could have left it there, but no, Miller wants more Max. Since the false start in 2003 when a near production-ready script for *Mad Max 4* was shot down and the project cancelled, the man's been hard at work brainstorming his comeback and it seems he's finally settled on something: anime. That's right, folks, *Mad Max 4* will be an anime film - a 3D anime to be precise. "I've always loved anime, in particular the Japanese sensibility. It's something I've always wanted to do," claims the director. He's even dumping the film's iconic star, Mel Gibson; likely ditching most of the legacy that goes along with him and essentially freeing himself from the shackles of history.

Eagle Eye

Age Rating: 13 (LV)
Running Time: 113 minutes
★★★☆☆

Director: D.J. Caruso
**Cast:** Shia LaBeouf | Michelle Monaghan | Rosario Dawson
Genre: Action

SHIA LABEOUF PLAYS JERRY Shaw, a less than ordinary guy who is framed by what appears to be an evil organisation led by a mysterious female. He only has contact with this person remotely (cellular and electronic signboards). Soon he's forcibly teamed up with a woman, Rachel Holloman (played by Michelle Monaghan) who also has something at stake – her child's life. This evil organisation continues manipulating both of them until the movie reveals the truth and... Well, let's not spoil anything, shall we? In Hollywood, the movie is what they call a road trip - the actors race from one location to the next, never knowing what they're doing, why they're doing it or where they're going next. The trick with something like this is to keep the pace fast and frantic, something the director pulls off with style. There are amazing car chases (really amazing), exciting action sequences and literally a thrill a second. It's very good but there are a few buts. It's not entirely realistic, there are more than a few 'huh' moments, and the leading lady is very tame compared to Shia LaBeouf (who manages to 'do' the action hero rather well). If you suspend that pesky disbelief, for the most part, the movie is a rock-and-roll roller-coaster ride that will have any action fan wondering where the last two hours went.

The DVD has a grand total of two special features: delete scenes and a very short (three minutes and four seconds) making of – why even bother? Both aren't even worth watching and manage to actually take away from the experience.

Michael James

But you said she was a hot blonde...
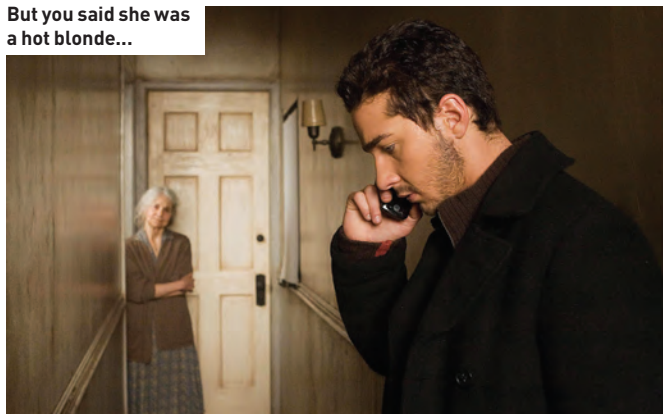
Pineapple Express

Age Rating: 16 (LVD)
Running Time: 112 minutes
★★★★☆

Director: David Gordon Green
Cast: Seth Rogen | James Franco | Danny McBride
Genre: Comedy

THIS MOVIE WAS A hell of a surprise. It's funny, has trippingly good chemistry between the two leads, and doesn't take itself seriously – even right at the end when it should. It's categorised as a comedy, but you should think more Kevin Smith (*Clerks*) meets Quentin Tarantino (*Pulp Fiction*) style funny. Dale Denton (Seth Rogen), a process server (a person who hands people court notices) witnesses a murder. In a panic, he seeks help from his drug dealer, Saul Silver (James Franco). Soon they're both on the run. The rest of the movie details one absurd disaster after the next, as they try to outrun and outwit the bad guys. It's technically a 'buddy movie' that replaces the violins and roses with dope and bullets. If you want to enjoy this one, you can't be a prude: against smoking marijuana or looking for anything resembling reality. It's a real trip in more ways than one. The true genius in this movie comes from the actors and their characters. Even the smallest talking part is filled perfectly and the whole movie feels like an orchestrated masterpiece. But... it's not really for everyone (see above). The movie gets a little wild towards the end and strange in the middle, but if you do end up enjoying it, it's going to stay with you for a long time. The DVD includes some funny documentaries and commentaries, deleted scenes, and a blooper reel, as well as the theatrical version and an extended version of the movie. It's pure class.

Michael James

Whoa, Dude...

Death Race

Age Rating: 16 (VL) ★★★☆☆
Running Time: 106 minutes

Director: W.S. Anderson
Cast: Jason Statham | Joan Allen | Ian McShane
Genre: Action

IN THE GRIM FUTURE of shattered economies and rampant crime, penitentiaries have been privatised and the corporations in charge have little use for their inmates aside from gladiatorial combat. That wasn't enough for the millions of viewers at home, however, and soon the Death Race was born – pitting teams of drivers and their crews against each other in a race to the finish line or their deaths, whichever comes first. When Jensen Ames (Jason Statham) is framed and sent to Terminal Island, he's forced to compete in the *Death Race* for his freedom or being stuck in the prison forever.

If you're into car chases or like a healthy dose of explosions with your action films, Death Race will be right up your alley. The premise is simple but functional; the story is holier than the Pope and packed with extremely convenient plot devices that beg for you to look the other way - but the film's undeniably good fun to watch. Vehicles are smothered in inches of hard steel and loaded up with enough weaponry to take on a small nation, sent onto the track and driven, at and through each other, at blistering speeds, while explosions fire off in the background and an adventurous camera bounces around the grungy racetrack – but it works.

The disc also includes a number of worthwhile special features: a making of, mini documentary on the stunts and an extended version of the cinema release.

Geoff Burrows
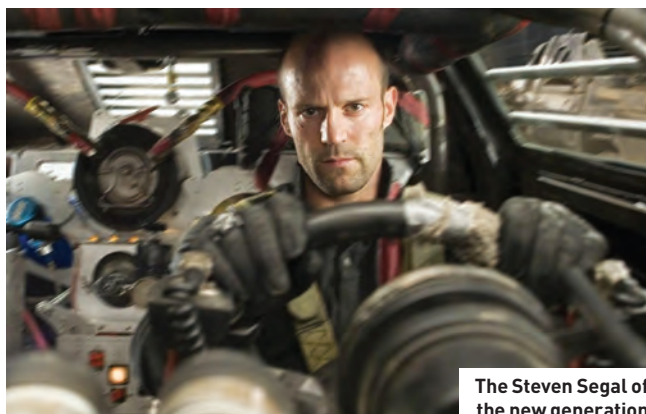
The Steven Segal of the new generation
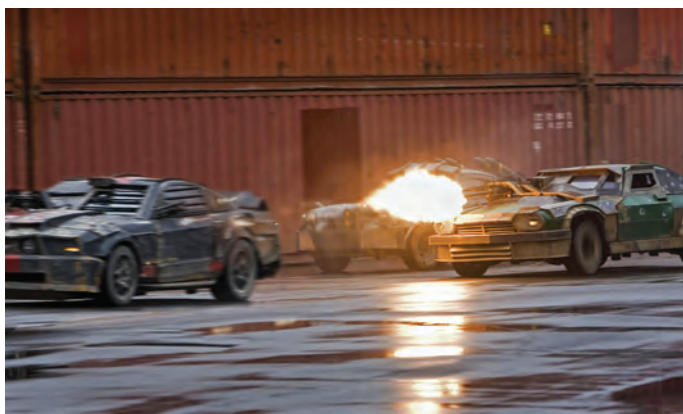
Step Brothers

Age Rating: 16 (LNS) ★★★★☆
Running Time: 98 minutes

Director: Adam McKay
Cast: Will Ferrell | John C. Reilly | Mary Steenburgen
Genre: Comedy

GROWING UP CAN BE hard sometimes. It's for that very reason that 39-year-old Brennan Huff (played by *Anchorman* Will Ferrell) and 40-year-old Dale Doback (*Talladega Nights* co-star John C. Reilly) decided that they'd rather not bother with the whole 'getting on with life' thing and mooch off their parents instead. Things get mixed up a bit then when those parents meet, fall in love and tie the knot with the hidden agenda of buggering off across the oceans and leaving their good-for-nothing sons behind. As the two newly acquainted stepbrothers soon discover, it can be hard getting on with someone you're forced to share a room with.

Where the story is laden with a genuine understanding of these kinds of family dynamics, the humour is there to back it up and gives Ferrell and Reilly an open floor for all the antics they get up to. It does tend to suffer a fair bit from toilet humour – to an almost cringe-worthy degree – but the good parts are so numerous and packed with the kind of comedy you can expect from this cast that the bad bits fall to the wayside. When all the chuckling is done, it still manages to deliver a unique charm for any viewer who's not easily put off by Ferrell's raw comedy.

The DVD comes loaded with a few special features to keep you entertained past the film's running time, but there's nothing groundbreaking. The Blooper Reel is certainly worth a watch, however.

Geoff Burrows
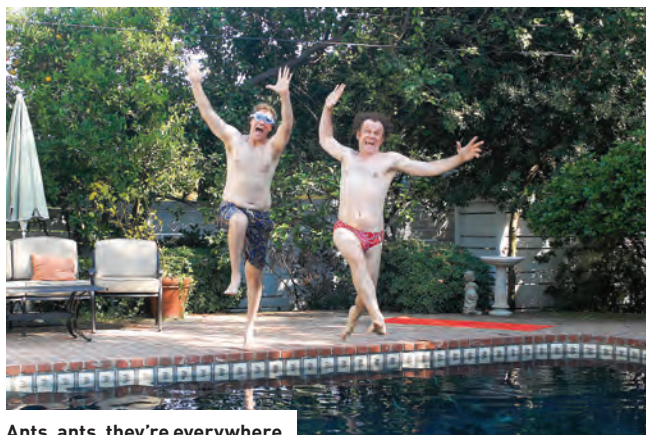
Ants, ants, they're everywhere

Kill Switch

Age Rating: 18 (VN)
Running Time: 92 minutes

★☆☆☆☆

Director: Jeff F. King
Cast: Steven Seagal | Holly Elissa Dignard | Michael Flipowich
Genre: Action

DISCLAIMER: THIS REVIEWER HAS a strong distaste for Steven Seagal – consider this as you read this critique. While I list this film's genre as "action," I think it would be more fair and honest to describe it as "mindless thuggery" and "shamelessly glorified brutality." Oh, that's right: it 'stars' Steven Seagal – say no more! Given that this is an appalling excuse for a movie, I have no qualms about spoiling the story. Seagal reprises the role of an 'unconventional' detective who rather fancies himself as Dirty Harry. However, he is apparently also very smart, good at his job, and even supposedly has a sensitive core. Did I neglect to mention that Seagal himself wrote the screenplay? Yes, that's right, and the self-aggrandisement is quite evident. His acting is, as always, far from Oscar material. And the story is just one long, predictable cliché. For a 'twist' that I suppose is intended to be a 'revelation' about his background, which somehow explains his character, we get a two-minute scene that is completely irrelevant and out of the blue. In short, if you are looking for an hour and a half of testosterone-laden scenes of Seagal beating people up, go ahead and rent or buy this, but otherwise you'd do well to steer clear of this one!

Alex Jelagin

The one and only Steven Segal

Paprika

Age Rating: PGV
Running Time: 90 minutes

★★★★☆

Director: Satoshi Kon
Cast: Megumi Hayashibara | Tôru Furuya | Kôichi Yamadera
Genre: Action Drama

PAPRIKA - A DREAM sprite - capable of traversing people's dreams through the help of a device called the DC Mini, finds herself dealing with a dream terrorist who has stolen the device and has begun trapping people in their dreams, amalgamating them into one massive nightmare that eventually renders them brain dead.

It is up to Paprika's real-life persona, Chiba Atsuko, and her colleagues to try to find the thief and save their friend, Tokita, from the nightmare within which he is trapped. Throughout the entire film, the effects of the DC Mini become more apparent, as the line between reality and the dream world is breached, eventually causing the two worlds to collide.

Paprika tells a very simple story, but in the most fascinating and visually appealing way - in much the same way as Satoshi Kon directed *Millennium Actress*. This time around, the story is a little more abstract, but is told through simple but convincing dialogue and great voice acting. The animation is great and sometimes even brilliant, and helps sell the story, as it always stays relevant with memorable parts that will stay with you long after the movie has ended. This won't be everyone's cup of tea, but if you enjoyed Millennium Actress or any of the more obscure titles like *Howl's Moving Castle*, chances are you would enjoy this title. The DVD comes with a bonus disc that has interviews and a mini story that will be appreciated by fans. Overall, *Paprika*'s a great DVD.

Neo Sibeko

Oh, ponies

Righteous Kill

Age Rating: 16 (LVS) ★★☆☆☆
Running Time: 96 minutes

Director: Jon Avnet
Cast: Robert De Niro | Al Pacino | Curtis Jackson
Genre: Crime Thriller

"**OMG! AL PACINO AND** Robert De Niro in the same movie! It's basically *Heat 2*! This is going to be awesome!" Repeat those words over and over in your head until you're so hyped to watch this film that you can no longer stand it... and then punch yourself in the stomach. That pain you're feeling right now - that's how it feels when you're done watching *Righteous Kill*. It isn't a terrible movie. It's just that it's not as great as you'd expect any movie that stars these two actors to be. The story involves two hardened members of the NYPD (De Niro and Pacino) who are inches away from retirement, but have one last case to solve before they do so. I don't want to spoil the plot for you, so all I'll say is that the reason they're so set on solving this final case is because they're both tied to it for their own personal reasons. What follows is a fairly average crime thriller, complete with the inevitable twist at the end (which you can work out pretty soon after the opening credits). The actors have done a pretty good job fleshing out their roles, but the rest of the movie is average in almost every way. Watch this if you're a fan of crime thrillers and don't have anything else to watch. The DVD has no special features, aside from a couple of trailers.

Dane Remendes

This is the biggest turd I've ever seen

The Strangers

Age Rating: 16 (V) ★★★★☆
Running Time: 111 minutes

Director: Bryan Bertino
Cast: Liv Tyler | Scott Speedman
Genre: Thriller

NORMALLY, I AM QUITE put off by the words (usually delivered in a portentous voice) "this film is based on real/actual events"; so it was with some trepidation, and limited attention, that I started watching this one. However, it pretty quickly seized my attention, in part due to little incongruous details at the start that didn't appear to make any sense at the time (but were explained soon enough). Because I quite enjoyed this motion picture (a term lifted directly from the copyright notice at the beginning!), my comments will be devoid of story details, other than explaining the basic premise. A couple arrive late one night at a house, to spend the night there and then get on with things the next day. A group of mysterious masked strangers then set about terrorising them. This movie has an unusual, almost claustrophobic feel to it, with a limited number of characters, and the action taking place in one place. It also has an almost real-time feel to it, very tense with suspense. I couldn't find fault with the acting, and while there is little in the way of story, this fact suits this particular production, as it is mostly about emotions (predominantly fear!) and the protagonists' responses to the situation. Bonus features consist exclusively of some deleted scenes. I was pleasantly (if that's the correct word in this context!) surprised by this thriller, as it is quite different to most, truly deserving to be called a "psychological thriller."

Alex Jelagin

Okay, two words... first word...

Bang! Tango #1 (of 6)

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Vertigo | **Writer:** Joe Kelly
Artist: Adrian Sibar | **Price:** R35.95

HOW FAR CAN VINCENTE run before his past catches up with him? Where can Vincente hide where his old demons won't find him? Will he ever escape the sins of his past? Three years after the incident, with a new girl at his side and a new city under his feet, with new hopes and new dreams, a new life, Vincente is found. Faces from his past, old friends needing favours, fears of being discovered by those he tried to escape from.. What else can he do but try to bury this as quickly as possible, and hope he's still dead to his enemies. *Bang! Tango* is a well put-together comic, with provocative imagery and an authentic gritty street feel to its characters and dialogue. Maybe not the most original plot to its beginning, but the comic still carries a fresh, new look as writer Joe Kelly kicks off the first issue of the six part miniseries. A little intriguing, a little naughty, *Bang! Tango #1* shows promise and is a good read.

Clive Burmeister

Battlefields Volume 1: The Night Witches

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Dynamite | **Writer:** Garth Ennis
Artist: Russ Braun | **Price:** R169.95

THE NIGHT WITCHES IS not just another Nazi Germany war story. Garth Ennis does a superb job by adapting a true story of Russia's female soldiers during the war in this gripping graphic novel. Life during the war was tough for anyone. The threat of the horrors and torture one might suffer if captured was always looming, and this was always on the minds of the female pilots of 599th Night Bomber regiment. What despicable acts might the hardened and hate-filled troops of the German army, who had to endure the bitter resistance of Russia's people and her unforgiving weather, commit against a captured female bomber pilot who had been harassing their lines every night? Added to the constant 'fear', they also need to prove themselves in a male-dominated army, flying sub-standard and outdated biplanes, which the enemy can hear from kilometres away before an attack. As these brave women fight to survive this war, even the lucky ones will be scarred for the rest of their lives.
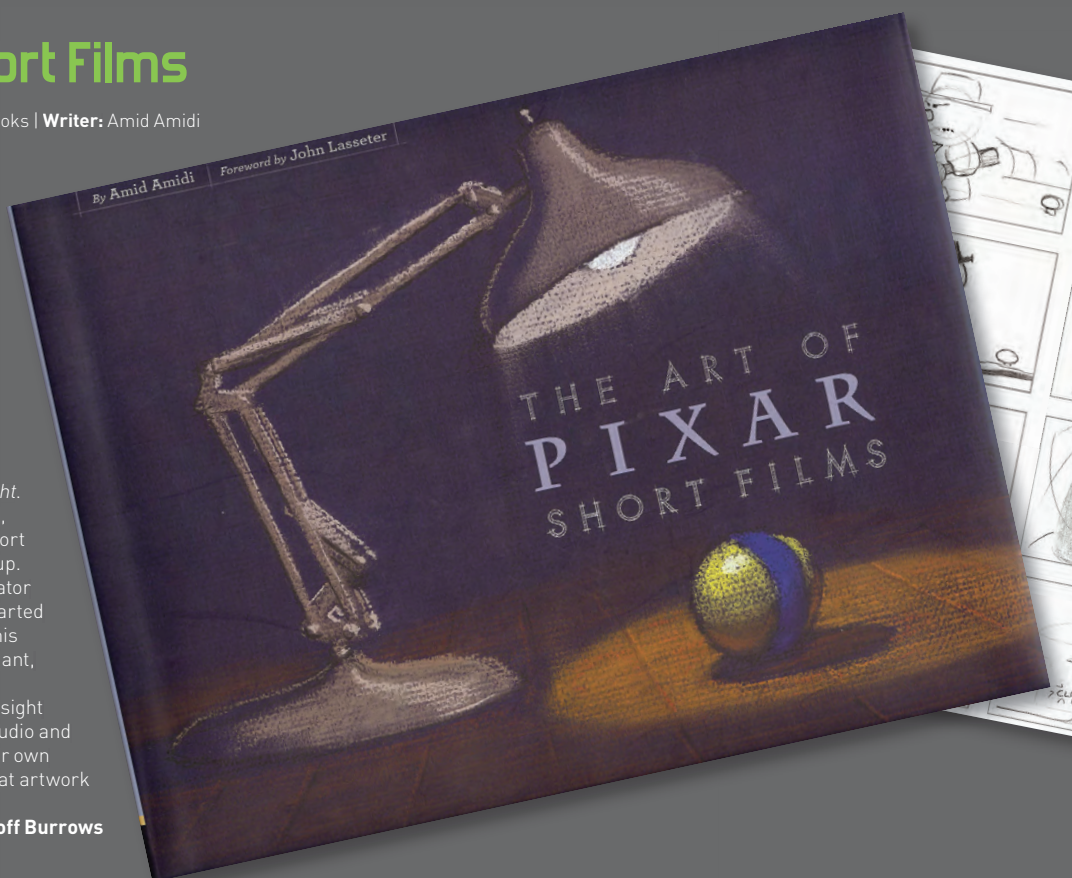
Clive Burmeister

The Art of Pixar Short Films

Format: Hard Cover Book | **Publisher:** Chronicle Books | **Writer:** Amid Amidi
Artist: Various | **Price:** R515

PIXAR IS A STUDIO with a rich history that spans dozens of productions across three decades. While many will see the name and immediately think of *Monsters Inc.* or *Cars*, it's important to understand where those legacies came from: the humble short film. The book, which was written by cartoonist and educator Amid Amidi, takes readers on the journey of short films that made Pixar what it is today, beginning with their one-minute-50-second film *The Adventures of Andre and Wally B*, which was a 3D-rendered piece from 1984, right the way up to 2006s *Mater and the Ghostlight*. It also discusses the history of the industry itself, enlightening readers on where the concept of short films all began, and ultimately where it's ended up.

Whether you're a film fanatic, a budding animator or just want something entertaining and light hearted for the coffee table, there's plenty to gain from this book. Conceptual art and storyboards are abundant, from simple stick figures to sketches of rigging, movement and bone setups. Readers will gain insight into the minds and production pipelines of the studio and its animators that can be used as a guide for their own creations or simply for the sake of looking at great artwork and reading the story behind it.

Geoff Burrows

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Berserker #0

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Top Cow (Image) | **Writer:** Rick Loverd
Artist: Jeremy Haun | **Price:** R34.50

WE ALL KNOW THE tales of the berserkers from Norse and Celtic mythology... mighty warriors who went into a dreadful rage during battle, granting them the strength and ferocity to rend their enemies limb by limb, and the insanity to endure it. But what happens when a US Marine has inherited the berserker's rage, but due to the trauma of the horrific things he's done, has blocked these experiences out of his mind? What terrors might be unleashed upon his life when he begins to remember what he is, and what he has done? Berserker is a bloodbath of a comic - gory and violent from the very first page - but 'pulls apart' from other comics (which seem to depict violence for the sake of violence), leaving the reader with a hint of expectation and a trace of suspense, as you can't help but wonder just what is going to happen next...

Clive Burmeister

New Avengers #50

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Brian Michael Bendis
Artist: Various | **Price:** R59.50

FOLLOWING THE VICTORY OVER the army of invading Skrulls, the Avengers, as we knew them, are no more. Tony Stark (a.k.a. Iron Man) took most of the blame for the invasion, and has been relieved of his command of S.H.I.E.L.D., and has had his fortunes and the Avengers' mansion stripped from him, essentially now a man on the run. Former super villain, Norman Osborn (a.k.a. The Green Goblin), having had a hand in turning the tide of the Skrull invasion, has won over the people, and has taken Stark's place, even to the point of making his own new team of Avengers (see *Dark Avengers #1*). Without a home, or their old leader, or even all the familiar faces of their team, the real Avengers now struggle for survival, trying to find a way to reveal to the people of the world what Osborn's true agenda really is. But with so many enemies, friends gone bad, and not knowing who to trust any more, can they pull together to overthrow this evil, and once more take their places as the Avengers, the world's greatest heroes?

Clive Burmeister

Ignis Jingai Makyo: Creators' Labo

RRP: R985
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Based on the character Ignis from the popular Japanese eroge visual novel/game, *Jingai Makyo*, this figure comes bundled with an Uzi and Katana that could probably be swallowed by small children, or at least poke out the eyes of bigger children. Don't say we didn't warn you. There's also a creepy tongue/tentacle thing that Ignis sits on. Yeah, we're not sure what's going on here either.

Slash Series: Guitar Hero

RRP: TBA
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

It's Slash! In 10-inch figurine form! Being a McFarlane Toys product, this figure is detailed and comes with a base modelled after the *Guitar Hero* logo, along with a miniature guitar. Put this one on your desk and pretend that he's rocking *Paradise City* while you play games.

Princess Leia and Wicket Series: Star Wars Bobble Heads: Series 2

RRP: R155 each
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

These aren't just *Star Wars* figurines. They're *Star Wars* bobble heads. These two are modelled after Princess Leia (in the slave bikini that all men aspire to get their girlfriends to wear) and Wicket W. Warrick (sure, he's an Ewok, but he could kick your ass...).

Patapon Series: Player Select

RRP: TBA
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Pata-Pata-Pata-Pon! These key rings/accessories for your phone come in five different flavours and are pulled from the PSP rhythm game, *Patapon*. Don't be too surprised if you constantly hear faint drum beats in the distance when you make use of these...

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