SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX

Previews
UFC Undisputed 2010 ‹
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Reviews
God of War III ‹
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Über Win!
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STARCRAFT II
WINGS OF LIBERTY™

12 years since the last StarCraft. 12 years since NAG started. The universe works in strange ways. We gaze lovingly into the awesomeness of the StarCraft II multiplayer beta.

Hardware
Reinventing the GPU: GTX480 technical preview ‹
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APRIL 2010

Heard at the NAG office this month... Come guys, we need some bush to hide the beaver!

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Happy rainbows and love

It was suggested to me (about five minutes ago) that I make this Ed's Note very positive. Rainbows are great. You see, it's our 12th birthday issue and birthdays are supposed to be all about the happy times (unless you're pushing 70 of course). Teddy Bears are happy in the forest of love. So, with this in mind I will be positive about everything here and see how it goes. Love and joy are good.

THE THING IS... WHERE TO BEGIN?

A few years back I remember not having anything important to say on this page. Perhaps I had been doing it for too long, or I really didn't have anything important to say, or I was just tired on that particular day (each month) – who knows. The thing with this kind of page in a magazine is that you have to say something. The rules of the world dictate that saying nothing is not allowed. If you really don't have anything worth saying here you're left with two options. Say nothing anyway using a lot of words (like I've been doing up to this point) or simply pick a few articles in the current issue and talk them to death. I can do the former for as long as you like, but I cannot do the latter easily. I mean what is the point of talking about what's inside the issue you're about to read.

As a reader of other magazines I'm always interested in the reality of the magazine publishing world, which is why I'm sometimes too honest about what goes on behind the scenes here. The other problem is that most of the stuff can be 'read' as negative if it's written like that, and it has (after all) been suggested that I make this birthday issue a positive experience. As if the amazing *StarCraft II* feature with its delectable dust jacket cover and huge poster and sheer awesomeness isn't positive enough. Or how about the awesome developer Q&A sessions with the people working on *Blur* and *God of War III* – how cool is that! We actually sent Geoff to the UK to get a look at the new shiny version of *Blur*. It's crazy! Who gets sent overseas just to look at a video game? Well we do actually. Oh, go have a look at page 80, that's our specially commissioned gamer babe for rAge 2010 – that's right you saw her here first. How's that for excellent? Hang on, what's that? There are eight game previews in this issue as well, and how many reviews? Well there're nine insightful reviews including *God of War III* and *BioShock 2*. Wow! This has to be the best issue ever! Rainbows!

Hmm, that just doesn't feel right. In truth, it feels a little fake and overcooked trying to sell *NAG* on this page. I can almost hear the rustle of all those raised eyebrows and feel those sad shaking heads. Now I remember why I don't try and flower things up in the Ed's Note or take suggestions from people about what I should write here... You're not going to fall for it. ;)

THE REAL ED'S NOTE

Here's a quick, brown-pants rollercoaster tour of the 'improved' *NAG*... First up, it's bigger. It's bigger because we have extra advertising and don't want to cut content for adverts. It might not stay this big for the next issue or it might get a little bigger – I can't predict the future. This issue is also bigger (physically). It's now a proper A4 magazine – this means bigger screenshots and overall more sweet awesomeness. Despite all the incorrect rumours about the second DVD appearing in this birthday issue the idea is still under consideration. It's a big step so we have to be careful, and to be honest we had to deal with the sell-out problem first before adding another DVD. The sell outs: The good news is that we've increased our print run by 10% this month to forever. The reason: there have been a number of stores that are reporting sell-outs each month and we undertook a six month long process of removing a few issues from those stores that weren't performing well and adding to those stores that were. This is step 1, now we have to wait 2-3 months to see if it was enough to go around and then make more adjustments. Just know that the *NAG* community is growing bigger by the second. A lot of content has been tweaked this issue based on what we think will amount to a better read for you. We also took into account feedback we have been getting from you since our last reader survey, so if you have an opinion on what we got right or wrong please send me a mail: ed@nag.co.za. We'll still be tweaking here and there for the next few months, so have your say.

Enjoy it!

Michael James
Editor

Cover Story

Go on. Bask. The mighty *StarCraft II* is here. Well it will be soon. My guess is June/July. Getting our BETA keys in time was a monster challenge, so here's my huge and personal thanks to Jonnie at Blizzard for making it all happen – I owe you a beer (I'll even spring for the bar snacks). ;) So yeah – *StarCraft II* – don't really know what else to say – it's finally here.

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Inbox

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

Letter of the Moment

From: Darren
Subject: Xbox – the cure to everything!

NAG, YOU GUYS (AND girls) are awesome, and if it wasn't for your awesomeness in this magazine, then I probably wouldn't have finished it so fast, and then I probably wouldn't have broken my arm, but don't get me wrong, that's probably the best thing I could have done! Let me start from the beginning. I'm in Grade 10 and I normally have a mountain of homework every day. When I'm not doing homework I'm either eating or sleeping and if I do have any free time, I can only "play outside". What has the world come to? But on the last few days of holiday, my mother decided to take us to our friend's beach cottage. What made it endurable was the fact that my friend had his Xbox and I had my trusty *NAG*. At the cottage we were only allowed one hour of Xbox a day, that left me with 24 [*Umm, perhaps you should try school. Ed.*] excruciating hours of waiting for our next *Halo* battle (where I have now become a master of the Hornet) and so I spent the time reading the *NAG* and going to the beach which eventually got boring (the beach not the *NAG*, LOL) until I had read everything – even the adverts.

So, without my *NAG* magazine or Xbox, I became increasingly bored and depressed until eventually even the news that someone had caught a 30kg Barracuda (apparently that's big) on the beach excited me, and I care very little for fishing so I must have been really far gone. And so, for a quick rush of adrenaline I took out my two-wheeled skateboard and set off down the hill. But this was not a Tony Hawk game where the roads are perfect and you don't get hurt when you fall, so when I fell at 30kph on a South African road it hurt. But that's not what worried me, it was the angle my hand was twisted. I was scared for my Xbox playing abilities, so after the operation, when my mom came up with the idea that I should be forced (you heard me) to play the Xbox everyday for "therapy" for my broken wrist, I

must have blacked out because the next thing I knew I was in front of the TV ready to play *MW2*. When I went to physiotherapy they confirmed this belief and ordered me to play for an hour a day or else... When I went for my next appointment two weeks after the crash they were amazed at how much I could do!! So there you have it, a true story that Xbox really can cure anything including boredom!"

Nice one. I salute your courage for staging such a violent 'accident' just to get more game time in – you're a credit to our community. Well done for taking a big risk so that perhaps one day the medical community might just publish a paper on how playing games can heal bones. Have some free games for your trouble, soldier! Ed.

From: Isma-eel
Subject: Sorry No Escapism Here

WHILE PLAYING MODERN WARFARE *2*, I had to stop and take a break, not because my hands were sore or because my eyes needed a break, but simply because the realism of the title caused me to take a breather and get my focus back. In the break I played *LittleBigPlanet*. So I now needed escapism from this virtual reality. This got me thinking about why I play games, and the answer was that I needed to escape reality, but instead, I find myself getting stressed due to the sheer realism that certain titles possess. The stakes are getting higher and the blood is getting more real. What would be the apex of this obsession with reality? I do not think that we as gamers want things to get so real that it would be hard to separate the two. I am not saying that I prefer *Pac-man* or *Tetris* but I do feel that the game industry needs to ask itself where it is going. If it's striving to create a virtual reality, then I feel it is defeating the purpose for which it was created. I may be wrong, but after a hard day's work, I need them stress levels to come down so that I can recharge my nerves for another slog in the real world. And no, I don't need a Wii."

I don't believe we're in any immediate danger of confusing gaming with reality and, even if it was as real as something out of a science fiction movie (or television series), you would always be aware that it's just a game. Unless... unless, you were tricked into thinking it was real life and perhaps right now you are living in a game, a game called real life and your body is being used as an energy source for the robots... oops, hang on. Ed.

From: Xander
Subject: Music and Bullets

HEY GUYS AT NAG I just want to start off saying you are... Ineffable (look it up), and keep up the great work. I don't know if it is just me but when I'm busy owning n00bs on *COD4* (I'm saving for *Modern Warfare 2*) I usually listen to music. I have a large soundtrack. So when pop comes up I take cover and aim for head shots. But when rock is on I spray bullets at anything that moves and when its metals turn I run and gun, but when my favourite song comes up I'm pure bad ass, military edition. Not everybody listens to music though. But this is an interesting theory. This is my first letter to *NAG* so I hope it is in the right format."

Interesting... there is some research around about driving a car and playing loud music. Something to do with young males (because they're always the number one guinea-pig demographic) tending to drive faster when loud rock music is played. It's called research for a reason, and I guess there must be some proper medical science words and stuff to it after all. You should try some classical music and see what happens. Ed.

From: Andre
Subject: Command & Conquer

LOVE THE MAGAZINE. ANYWAY let me cut to the chase..."

If you think that insincere attempt at worthy praise is going to get your drivel into NAG *magazine you are mistaken. Ed.*

From: Jinx
Subject: Review Suggestion

I'VE JUST PAGED THROUGH *NAG* February 2009 and *NAG* April 2009. I don't have March 2009, so I don't know what I missed between the two above mentioned additions, but can you please tell me why the "Will it run? – PC game specifications" have been removed? I don't exactly have a Dream Machine, but my computer isn't bad: XP Professional, Service Pack 2, Intel Pentium 4, 3.06 GHz CPU with 1.25 GB of RAM all on a DDR1 (which is the real problem) Foxconn motherboard. I still have problems playing higher-end games. Isn't it at all possible to include PC-specifications in reviews in future additions?"

Yeah, those specifications... I actually forgot all about them. You see, like the issue you're holding in your hands now, we do tend to mix things up a little/lot every April when we re-design or tweak the whole magazine. This would explain the timing part of your question. As for the specifications – I believe we decided a while ago to drop them due to relevance (or is that irrelevance). Most games these days can be run at very low settings in terms of resolution and shadows and bullet impacts and so on (they're essentially fail-proof scalable). Therefore, if your computer can't run a game turned all the way down then I guess you have no business playing games in the first place. Also, you can always look at the back of the box before you buy the game. Ed.

From: Wynand
Subject: The best

I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING THE 'which is better' argument for more than a decade. You know the whole PC or console, PS2 or Xbox and PS3 or Xbox 360. Frankly this is becoming very boring, because in the end the better one is the one that you prefer. It's like arguing which is better, rugby or soccer. Maybe we should start a new argument. Who is the tougher game character, Lara Croft or Jill Valentine, Snake or Sam Fischer, Dante or Kratos?"

Nice idea. My votes are for Lara, Sam and Kratos – obviously. Ed.

From: Kyle
Subject: Oh dust, thy art thou heartless B!tch

HELLO ED. I RECENTLY experienced problems with my graphics... as I started playing a game all would seem fine and after about 2 to 3 minutes black lines would float across my screen. After trying everything I could imagine to solve this problem I decided to open up my case and evaluate the situation from a physical perspective. My once silver graphics card was a dirty grey colour, and looked like a fuzzy bunny that had jumped into a pit of rabies infested ash. Using my wolf-like lungs I blew away the grey substance which proceeded to enter my throat causing me to cough and splutter. Guess what, after that, all was fine and I was finally able to get my geek on and play *Modern Warfare 2*. Please note, dust is a pain in the ass and causes your computer to overheat!"

I've always said you must treat your computer with love and care and it'll give the same back. Dust is a killer, although many people argue against this fact of life. It also helps (I've found) to keep your PC on your desk and off the floor. Ed.

< Inbox >

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.

MaD_DoT.: "Check this out! Made with Magic Set Editor 10/02/2010."

Laren Nel: "Hey guys, awesome magazine! Keep it up! I was just driving around (*GTA San Andreas*) and came across this – I didn't make it but Rockstar Games did!" *[We have friends in high places. Remember, we've been in this business for over 12 years now. ;) Ed]*

On the Forums

QUESTION: Which DLC has made you felt the most justified in your purchase?

GhOsT_828: CoD 4's map pack was more fun than playing with puppies. Yes, it was that awesome.

Falafel: Well the free ones are easily justifiable. :P

vii: Weaksauce internet precludes me from buying DLC. It sucks! :<

Graal: The Zombie Island of Dr Zed. If you can't understand why just go back to your padded room.

ShellShok: I don't really like the idea of DLC... It makes me feel as if the developers kept their ideas aside to make more money out of a game to me. :P but free DLC on the other hand... ;)

Cleric: The Gears of War 2 - All Fronts pack provided hours of added entertainment. Too bad I had to jump through VPN hoops to get it. Oh, and the Trials HD map pack... pure unadulterated win.

Dead!Raven: Well, the only DLC I ever bought was the Fallout 3 GOTY pack. Fallout 3 was such a massive game with so much variety it didn't feel like the devs were holding back the good stuff for after release due to some uncontrollable loathing for the consumer market.

Mic: I don't believe in DLCs.

Wolfskunk: The free ones that came with Mass Effect 2, I'm never one to turn a gift down from BioWare. Then of course Dragon Age DLC are all awesome. The Borderlands DLC is also great... and Yoda for my PS3's Soul Caliber.

Shadow_Con: I prefer DLCs that come out in stores as well like Fallout 3 and GTA4 cause it's so much easier than downloading for me.

Brunch23: Only DLC purchased so far were a few more tracks for Guitar Hero, which was awesome! Paying for this kind of extra content is great, but buying DLC that you feel should have been included in the original game would be irritating.

Rah_Skill: What's DLC?

.:Enigma:.: Operation Anchorage for me, amazing story and an amazing addition to an amazing game. Yes, it's amazing.

Marry0+LewyG: WipeOut Fury, you can shake and bake in the future. One of the most overlooked pieces of DLC out there. So good in fact you can get it with the original WipeOut HD on Blu ray for only R300.

Turk1sh: DLC = Devs Loves Cash!

[Come move your disgusting meat flaps over at http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/]

From: Irish
Subject: Revelation

I STILL RECALL FONDLY THE first ever issue of *NAG* that I bought. I had some spare cash left over when I bought *Quake II* on that fateful Saturday, just enough in fact to pick up a rather impressive looking South African gaming magazine *[At Sandton City right? This is where I also discovered NAG for the first time – at a Quake II competition. ;) Ed].* That was the launch issue of *NAG*, and I've been hooked ever since.

Being a pastor and a gamer, which are two things that one might have difficulty bringing together, any title with a vaguely religious concept intrigues me from the word go. Especially so with *Darksiders*. I've been looking forward to this title for a while now, hoping (and praying, I might add :P) that it would live up to its reputation. After reading the review I'm really looking forward to picking it up. While I'm on the subject of the review, I would like to give a word of praise to its author, Dane Remendes. I've sat through many a church service (they rather force that upon you in Bible College), where the speaker refers to the book of Revelation as "Revelations", note the "S". This really gets my goat, and if the writers of Supernatural (which is one of my favourite TV series) misses this fact, not to mention some members of the clergy, I must take this time to congratulate Dane on getting it right. So once again thanks to *NAG*, it's Editor and its staff, for delivering a top notch publication, and through one little word, bringing a smile to my face."

OMG (for the record – oh my goodness)! The church has found us! Hide the games before the lightning comes. ;) Just kidding. You know what, if you had of been running a church near me when I was a young lad I'd have been in there every Sunday. It's always good to see gaming gets everywhere these days. Thanks for the kind words too BTW, we do try hard to make everything perfect each month. Ed.

From: Gian
Subject: Stuff!

A RE THE GAMES YOU show under the 'Letter of the Moment' the prizes that you win for the next month, or what the current month's winner has won? Thanks for the great magazine!"

Good question. I really have no idea to be honest. Maybe I should check with Jacqui, she'll know what's going on. Ed.

The letter published as the winner in the March issue won the prizes that were shown in the February issue. This is how it works every month. Jacqui.

From: Ciaran
Subject: Prizes

I UNDERSTAND AS NAG MAGAZINE caters for all sorts of gamers, you must cater for all. I noticed that the Caption of the Month prize was for PS3, which is perfectly understandable. I was wondering if you had ever received a letter of complaint that the prize winner doesn't have that specific console and, if so, what do you do?"

I've never received any complaints like that. I'd expect the winner would just be happy he's getting something for free and not whine about it like a little camper b1tch. That all said, if I did ever get a mail like that I would tell the person to go and get fudged. Ed.

From: Ruben
Subject: Frog up pc

I 'VE BEEN WORKING AS an IT technician for quite a while and the amount of nonsense you have to deal with is amazing. I understand that IT technicians are there for the specific reason that people know nothing about PCs, but really. The weirdest thing I've seen was a client's PC that came in that, "just stopped working". Open it up and out jumps a frog the size of my fist. The client comes back and asks what was wrong. "There was a frog in your PC". Client, "yes I know, but what was the problem?" Me, holding up the frog, "there was a frog in your PC". I think there should be a computer licence or something, the same way you need a car licence, for your own safety. Thanks for the awesome magazine."

Ah yes, there isn't a month that goes by where I don't get a disgruntled, amusing or irritated mail from someone in the IT business. I agree with you on the license thing though – stupid people really shouldn't be using computers. It's a lot like children – anyone can have a baby but not everyone should. Ed.

>> "Tell Tarryn to never compare Sci-Fi with Fantasy. They're both good. Star Wars (which is Sci-Fi) has a prophecy and a chosen one [*it's actually science fantasy, Ed*]. Also, there are usually horses and not ponies. If you compare Shadowfax (read/watch LOTR) with a pony you would have hundreds of angry LOTR fan boys trying to kill you." **– M@**

From: Travis
Subject: The shocking truth...

G 'DAY NAG AND THE rest of the South African gaming community! It has been some time since I last wrote in and an article in the July issue has prompted me to write in this month. I guess you probably all know me as Travis or the author of "Nicole (Isaac's girlfriend) with postal address? Ah, what a subject title... You might also know me as DragonMaster64 or Yoda or Midget Boy (okay, well not those last three – they are just a random quote from a movie I watched lately). Anyway, I bet you all didn't know that I am actually an Australian! *[Snip, Ed]*

There's nothing a sheep lover can tell us that we don't already know. ;) Ed. **NAG**
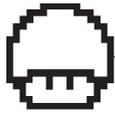
Kayfabe Meaty-for

IT WAS THE TV ad for WWE NXT that made me go on wiki-about, researching the colourful history of World Wresting Entertainment. I can't help it: Vince McMahon talking over some grungy nu-metal rock is practically part of my DNA. Growing up in the 80s and 90s, I was exposed to the finest cartoons, the best in cheesy sitcoms, and the Golden Age of professional wrestling. It didn't take me long to realize that the WWE is an entertainment corporation that sells its unique brand of simulated sport, and I appreciate its fun, videogame-style drama. I'm always wary of the self-professed gamer that poo-poos 'wrasslin, because it feels disingenuous.

The feuds, angles and gimmicks

> *"Instead, the WWE and its staff actively talk about story lines and what they thought of them, and society has settled into a gentleman's agreement: don't ruin it for the kids; they're having fun with the make believe."*

are even acknowledged as "kayfabe" or staged by the WWE and its sports actors. In the past the company tried much harder to preserve the illusion, though these days with the Internet, why bother? Instead, the WWE and its staff actively talk about story lines and what they thought of them, and society has settled into a gentleman's agreement: don't ruin it for the kids; they're having fun with the make believe.

Of course, there's always the smart-ass who has to run around screaming 'it's fake!' as if they've just stumbled across a Great Secret and can't wait to 'educate the simpletons'. I've often wondered if such people were told 'it's fake!' by a smart-ass, or if they actually figured it out for themselves. The former only seems to propagate 'smart-ass', while the latter builds what I feel is good foundation for rational discourse.

In a way, gamers remind me of wrestling fans: a surprising number of them don't realise that their theatre, is theatre. They think that the most visible figures are actually making the games, when it's all just art, marketing... public relations entertainment for the shareholders and media. From here, I construct a nice big metaphor for how the WWE and the gaming industry are much the same, but you're just going to have to imagine it. *NAG* can't afford any more of my expensive words.

Lack-o-vision
Infinity Ward heads given the chop

It's the morning of March the 2nd, 2010: Security personnel are stationed in and around Infinity Ward at Activision's request. Described as "big bouncer types," they refuse to explain their presence to the staff. IW leads Vince Zampella and Jason West have been in a meeting with Activision all morning.

"Everyone is on edge," says an anonymous employee. "We just wanna make games."

The Internet explodes with speculation. Many think this is just a PR stunt to announce new DLC or future game in the *COD* franchise. The reality, sadly, is far from that. Shortly after the meeting is adjourned, Zampella and West are escorted off the premises. West updates his Facebook status to "Jason West is drinking, also unemployed."

As the facts slowly start coming forward, it turns out that Activision had made an SEC filing the day before, outlining a whole bunch of business stuff that means little to most of us, with the exception of this part:

"The Company [Activision] is concluding an internal human resources inquiry into breaches of contract and insubordination by two senior employees at Infinity Ward. This matter is expected to involve the departure of key personnel and litigation. At present, the Company does not expect this matter to have a material impact on the Company."

We already know that Activision has been doing some reshuffling of its *COD* franchise, but it's now been announced that Sledgehammer Games – a studio formed last year by former Visceral head Glen Schofield – is being pulled in to work on "a *Call of Duty* game that will extend the franchise into the action-adventure genre."

Speculation arose that this is all just an evil plot to break up Infinity Ward: cut off the head and hopefully the rest

MW2 DLC HAS BEEN DATED
In related news, Activision has confirmed, in a very strange way, that the first DLC for *Modern Warfare 2* is on its way. It's due for release on the 30th of March for Xbox 360, with PC and PS3 coming a little later (likely a full month). The news comes from www.mapathy.com, a spoof site that details the effects of mapathy: a state of indifference to the same old maps one has been playing for the last several months. According to the site, this DLC is going to bring an end to this problem that plagues over 20 million people worldwide.

> "Shortly after the meeting is adjourned, Zampella and West are escorted off the premises. West updates his Facebook status to 'Jason West is drinking, also unemployed.'"

will scatter, surrendering any chance of severance pay. But that's just nasty rumour. Thankfully, West and Zampella aren't just taking this lying down, and have filed a 16-page complaint that goes into some dirty details about the way Activision was running things.

The biggest point of contention was that Activision supposedly granted IW creative freedom over the entire *Modern Warfare* brand, as well as freedom to work on original IP once *MW2* was out the door. But Activision CEO Bobby Kotick and his army of lawyers wanted more *MW* to make up for lagging sales in the *Guitar Hero* franchise; this is apparently the reason why this whole thing went down.

"Despite assurances by Activision that West and Zampella would have complete freedom to run Infinity Ward as an independent studio, Activision had begun to intrude upon Infinity Ward's ability to create quality games," reads the complaint. "For example, Activision forced Infinity Ward's employees to continue producing the games at a break-neck pace under aggressive

schedules, and West and Zampella were concerned that Activision was emphasizing quantity over quality. Given Activision's insistence that Infinity Ward continue to focus on sequels to *Call of Duty* games instead of new intellectual property, West and Zampella were also concerned that Activision's demands risked 'burning out' the Infinity Ward employees' creativity."

So here's what we're left assuming, if all the facts are straight enough (bear in mind we haven't had a full response from Activision yet): West and Zampella own the creative rights to develop *MW* content. Activision wants those rights, but doesn't want the two to be involved. Activision will do anything to discredit them, likely in an attempt to win back those creative rights and possibly avoid paying up royalties for *MW2* sales. In short, the future of *COD* is rather uncertain at this point. Activision has been chopping up studios and franchises all over the place, so stay tuned for more as this situation develops; something massive will arise from this one way or the other.

I, Gamer

by Miklós Szecsei

WTF happened to my column? And who moved my chicken?

I RECENTLY MENTIONED THAT CHANGE is an inevitable part of the gaming industry. Looks like it's an inevitable part of the print industry too because my column felt obese and became bulimic. The result? I'm going to have to stop the flowery language, extended metaphors and useless parenthesis in the interest of brevity (I can hear you all cheering already – oh wait, this is parentheses – ok I'll keep doing these). It's going to be straight to the point from now on.

Hollywood must be freaking out. Games are taking over as the preferred medium of entertainment. The position Hollywood finds itself in now is akin to the position radio stations found themselves in as films and TV started taking their audiences. Directors have to be rocking themselves in corners and the less astute actors are covering up their acceptance

> "Nobody in Hollywood is safe from the behemoth that is the Gaming Industry... Nobody except James Cameron that is!"

of impending unemployment by developing expensive drug addictions or adopting babies from foreign countries. The more astute actors have seen the writing on the wall and begun doing voice-over work for games. Nobody in Hollywood is safe from the behemoth that is the Gaming Industry (which from now on must be capitalised and said in a very deep, *Unreal Tournament* announcer voice). Nobody except James Cameron that is! He's only safe because he figured out how to make gamers gush over his film and consider it as another means of explaining to non-gamers just what it is we find fascinating about gaming as escapism. So has James Cameron created Hollywood's swan song? That's probably premature, but he has definitely raised the bar. From now on directors have to make films equal to or better than *Avatar* in terms of escapism if they hope to stand up to the Games Industry Monster Release (*UT* voice please) titles like *Modern Warfare 2*.

Remember, you heard it here first: the demise of Hollywood. It might take another fifty years or so (totally hedging my bets), but when you're old and cinemas have gone the way of stage theatres, you'll think to yourself: "hey, I read about this in that I, Gamer column. Man, that guy was right on the money".

Ubisoft cracks down on pirates

Time to upgrade that 'Net connection?

NO MATTER HOW POPULAR a game is, it will almost always be pirated. This is especially true for PC releases, which has encouraged publishers to engineer some pretty tough Digital Rights Management solutions. When Half Life 2 was launched, it presented the world with a clean, but possibly problematic solution: Steam. Now Ubisoft has taken that concept to the next level with their DRM system: it not only requires that you validate the game online when you start playing, but you need a constant Internet connection to keep playing.

Failure to maintain that connection (if, say, your dialup Internet times out, or your 3G connection mysteriously drops) stops the game in its tracks and presents you with a friendly error screen. The game will continue to look for an active Internet connection indefinitely; the only

thing you can do is wait for it to reconnect or click quit. That's not "save and quit," by the way, just "quit." All progress made since your last save will be lost. Currently, the only games to be affected by this DRM are Assassin's Creed and Silent Hunter 5.

As one would expect, the piracy community has retaliated with claims that the system has been cracked. Of course, Ubisoft denies these claims.

"You have probably seen rumours on the web that Assassin's Creed II and Silent Hunter 5 have been cracked," a spokesperson told MCV in a recent interview. "Please know that this rumour is false and while a pirated version may seem to be complete at start up, any gamer who downloads and plays a cracked version will find that their version is not complete."

Civilised gaming

Sid Meier's excellent *Civilization* series has proved to the world that hardcore strategy/management games can survive in the current gaming environment. *Civ Revolutions* took the series to the console, and turned out to be a success, boasting a Metacritic score of 85. With *Revolutions*' reasons for success in mind, Firaxis Games is preparing for the next in the series: *Civilization V* (*CivV* or "*Civvy*" as it's already being called).

While the basic gameplay mechanics will, thankfully, remain the same, there will be a number of tweaks to the system to make it more accessible to the mainstream. The developers have been sure to mention that this won't involve dumbing down the gameplay for the veterans, however. The plan is that the all-important advisors will make a return; combined with the previous game's automated settings, it should make for quite a customisable experience. Movement will now take place on a hex grid, and there are promises of "vast, realistic and diverse landscapes" on which the battles will take place, as well as additional tactical options and the like.

Firaxis also mentions "new ways to play and win, new tools to manage and expand your civilisation, extensive modding capabilities, and intensely competitive multiplayer". There's talk of new diplomatic tools that will allow you to deeper manage your relationships with your opponents, and an in-game community hub for multiplayer games (LAN is supported), sharing content and social networking.

Civvy is looking for a release date some time towards the end of the year.

Welcome back to Rapture (again)

While you've probably only just picked up *BioShock 2*, most likely based on our awesome review, there's already a DLC pack available for download for all platforms: PC, Xbox 360 and PS3. Entitled Sinclair Solutions Test Pack, the DLC will cost 400 MS Points, or $4.99, and will provide a number of multiplayer extras. The maximum rank has been increased to 50; there will be two new playable characters, Louie McGraff and Oscar Calraca, 20 new trials to beat, a third upgrade for each weapon and five new masks.

More DLC will arrive over the coming months, hopefully with more story elements for the single player campaign.

»
SOME PEOPLE HAVE TOO MUCH MONEY

Most gamers will agree that hoarding is part of the gaming geek's collection of obsessions. It feels great to have a shelf full of games, let alone an entire bookcase or even room, as is the case with some collectors. With that in mind, it still seems crazy to spend the kind of money that some folk spend on a really old game. eBay recently saw the record for most expensive NES game shattered with a sealed and forgotten copy of *Stadium Events* sell for a whopping $41,300 (a little over R300,000). 155 bids were made for the game, which seller vals2girlz paid only $30 for when it was released. Before this, the highest selling NES game was *Nintendo Campus Challenge*, which sold for a not-so-insignificant $20,100 in August last year. Is it time to dig out those ancient Atari carts yet?
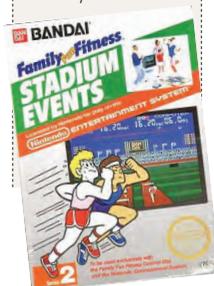
The Indie Investigator
by Rodain Joubert

Everyone's thinking in Portals

VALVE IS ONE OF those entities which can spin gold from straw, sell snow to an Eskimo and make honest people out of politicians. In fact, aside from the Great Jarate Incident of 2009 (during which several *Team Fortress* fan base members quite firmly knotted their knickers over a glass of virtual urine), Valve seems unable to do wrong in the eyes of the gaming public. They just keep churning out brilliant titles left, right and centre in their effort to enthrall – and eventually enslave – humankind.

A while back, the independent game development community sat up and took notice of this. And like all good artists, they looked at *Portal* and wondered how they could play with its concepts in their own work. As a result, the Internet occasionally coughs out some independent tribute to this fantastic first-person puzzler which not only doesn't get sued to hell and back (because Valve aren't complete dicks), but also manages to enjoy the occasional bout of success.

> *Some people may be tempted to call these tributes "hack jobs", but most of history's greatest game successes have drawn their inspiration from the titles which came before them.*

Some of these recreations are blatant enough. Games like *Portal: The Flash Version* are pretty much what they say on the tin, while other titles like *ASCIIpOrtal* take the core concept, add something quirky or gimmicky, hype themselves into the stratosphere and then explode onto the market like a giant cat balloon filled with TNT and candy.

Then there's the for-profit *Grappling Hook,* a game with a somewhat different premise which is nonetheless quite frequently compared to Valve's classic in terms of genre and overall approach (replacing the oh-so-cool portal gun with an almost-as-cool grappling hook).

Some people may be tempted to call these tributes "hack jobs", but most of history's greatest game successes have drawn their inspiration from the titles which came before them. Heck, *Portal* itself spawned from a lesser-known indie creation called *Narbacular Drop*, so it seems wonderfully fitting that a design concept that began with indies has since come full circle to flood the indie market again, all thanks to a mainstream catalyst.

Seeing Valve inspire a wave of new indie titles is food for thought, especially when most of those games happen to be pretty darn good.

Next Tomb Raider is not Tomb Raider
You're thinking "what?" aren't you?

LARA CROFT AND THE *Guardian of Light* is the newest outing we can look forward to with the iconic Ms. Croft. This is the series reboot that has been rumoured for some time now, hence the omission of the "Tomb Raider" label. *Guardian of Light* will be a download only arcade-type game that will feature two player co-op and a high score system. It will also drop the over-the-shoulder camera, which has been used in every *Tomb Raider* game to date, in favour of a fixed isometric camera. Think *Lego Indiana Jones* but with less plastic and more boobs.

Players can look forward to a more light-hearted type of gameplay with a focus on platforming, shooting anything that moves and puzzle solving. A Mayan tribesman called Totec is being added as a second, playable character to aid Lara in her quest to stop an evil spirit called Xoxolt, who was released from a powerful artefact called the Mirror of Smoke. As ever, Lara will wield her signature dual pistols (with infinite ammo) and a grappling hook, while Totec will be able to hurl spears at enemies and walls so that Ms. Craft can get to those hard-to-reach places. Certain puzzles will require two players to solve them, however developer Crystal Dynamics has assured all that the game is playable as a single player as well. The game will be available for download sometime between June and August 2010.

The Black & White Knight

Peter Molyneux has become Project Natal's champion once again. He has attempted to dampen fears concerning lag in the project by pointing out that numerous revisions have already occurred to the hardware, even before release.

He spoke to non-specialist media recently, and expressed his frustration at not being able to show the latest iteration of the motion sensing technology.

"It's always a huge frustration as a designer when you see somebody play a version when you know it's been exceeded many times over," he said in an interview with GamesIndustry.biz.

"It so often happens, because you do a version for a show and then you don't do another version because you're too busy developing the game.

"So very often you get a position that what a person's looking at is two, three, four months, a year old and you kind of want to go, 'no, no, it's 10 times better than that!' So it is very, very frustrating; it always is - there's just countless revisions of cameras since the one at X10 and countless revisions of software."

IT'S A PSYCHOBILLIY FREAKOUT

As rhythm games take a beating in the market, new developer Seven 45 Studios is stepping up to the plate to take over where *Guitar Hero* seems to be leaving off, or at least fading. The idea has been around for some time, but there's been little commercial success with taking a real electric guitar and plugging it into a *Guitar Hero*-like game. That's pretty much what Seven 45 is doing, however. The game is called *Power Gig: Rise of the SixString*, and it's currently in alpha.

Power Gig will ship with a specialised, 3/4 scale electric guitar that can function almost as well as a regular guitar when plugged into an amp. But, slide in a little piece of plastic and flip a switch, and it transforms into videogame mode. The game will still require the player to play the strings, however – there are no little plastic buttons here. Depending on difficulty, players will need to play on anywhere from one to all six strings, and there will training modes to teach them how to actually play. It sounds a little ambitious, but this genre has to go somewhere; it might as well be closer to reality.
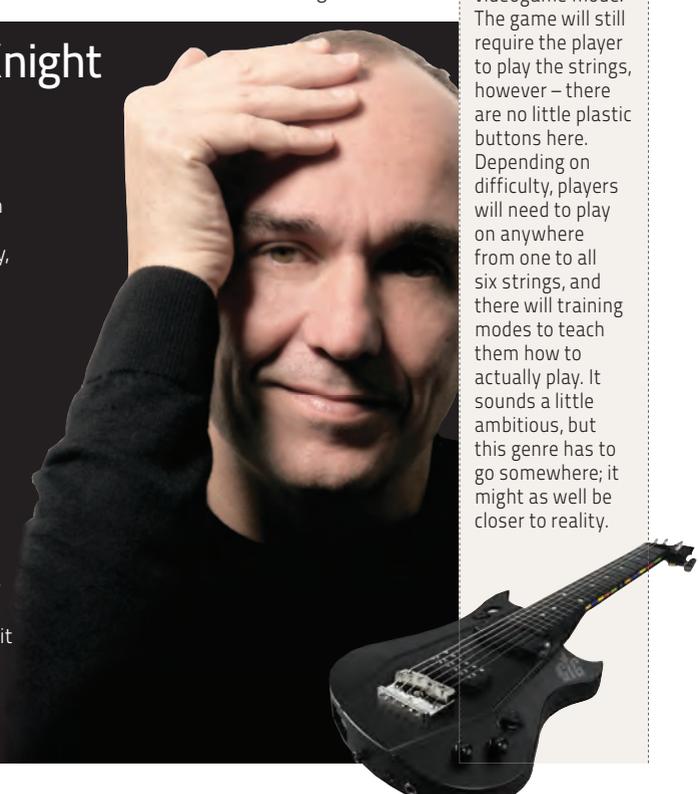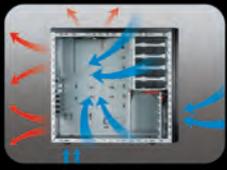
New game from Jonathan Blow

The insane, time-bending mind of Jonathan "I make games that make you want to kill yourself" Blow, creator of *Braid*, is busy churning up a new game, called *The Witness*. Little is known of the title as this stage, but it's clear that the man has some money to play with from the huge success of *Braid*.

In related news, Blow has teamed up with other successful indie developers to create Indie Fund, a venture capital initiative that will provide funds to indie developers to help them reach the level of quality that Blow could afford with Braid.

"The success of *Braid* has allowed me to undertake more-ambitious projects like *The Witness*." Said Blow, on his blog for *The Witness*. "At the same time, I felt that I wanted to do something with the profits that would help other indies with their own games."

Quick to acknowledge the timing of this announcement with the recent Activision news (which you'll find elsewhere in this section), Blow asks and answers a question that will cut the publisher deep.

"If Infinity Ward can't be treated with respect, then who can? Independent developers can. That's one answer, at least. Indie Fund is here to help make that independent existence a reality for as many talented developers as we can."

Final Fantasy goes back to basics

Final Fantasy XIII has just arrived at the *NAG* offices, and we can't think of anything else. If you're unable to play this game or like your *Final Fantasies* from the old school, then perhaps the iPhone ports of *Final Fantasy I* and *II* will be more to your liking. Both games have recently hit the AppStore, and can be had for as little as 7 Euros (R70) a piece. The games have been optimised for touchscreen, and even include a few new dungeons for you to wander around in search of random encounters and hidden chests. Perfect for that boring Easter holiday. Unable to contain itself, Square Enix continues to roll out content for its aging *FFXI* in the form of three new addons. The packs will be released throughout 2010, presumably to help drum up support for the eventual release of *FFXIV*, which will also be an MMORPG. Speaking of which, *XIV* is hitting closed beta soon, which is earlier than we expected; perhaps they're further along with development than we thought. The beta will be for PC only for the moment, with no mention of Xbox anywhere.

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COMING OUT

The Xbox LIVE Code of Conduct has been updated to allow gamers to include their sexual orientation in their Gamertag. Gamers can now classify themselves as lesbian, gay, bi, transgender or straight on their Xbox LIVE profiles. GayGamer has labelled the move as "fantastic".

"Under our previous policy, some of these expressions of self-identification were not allowed in Gamertags or profiles to prevent the use of these terms as insults or slurs," Microsoft's Mark Whitten wrote when announcing the change. "However we have since heard feedback from our customers that while the spirit of this approach was genuine, it inadvertently excluded a part of our Xbox LIVE community. This update also comes hand-in-hand with increased stringency and enforcement to prevent the misuse of these terms."

The Evolution of...

Blizzard

1991 - RPM Racing

1994 - Warcraft: Orcs and Humans

1996 - Diablo

1998 - StarCraft

2004 - World of Warcraft

2010 - StarCraft II

Mac gaming, Valve style

Steam will support multi-platform gaming

GAMING ON A MAC is a bit of a joke in the industry, but the only thing really getting in the way is software, now that pretty much every Mac runs PC hardware. Blizzard has been aware of this for a while – the majority of their titles happily run on both platforms – and many studios make their games available to other companies to port over to Mac. Valve is now jumping onto the bandwagon, and will be extending Steam to the platform in a big way.

Portal 2 will be the first simultaneously-released multi PC platform (does that sound right?) title from Valve, but very soon players will be able to download and play any Valve game through Steam, on either platform, regardless of which platform they originally bought the game for, thanks to the new Steam Play feature. They're taking it one step further, however, and adding cross-platform Steam Cloud support. That means that you can buy and install, say, *Half Life 2* on your home PC, play for a bit and save your game, then continue playing from where you left off on your Mac at work. Hello convenience.

Similarly, *Left 4 Dead 2* will soon be the birthplace of something truly impressive: cross-platform multiplayer between PC and Mac.

MORE LIES, CAKE, ETC

After a brief but intriguing viral marketing campaign involving some mysterious updates to the Portal game files, Valve has confirmed that *Portal 2* is on its way. Few details are available at this stage, but we know one huge bit of info: the game will feature co-op play in two new playable areas. Artwork shows the world to be overrun with plant life, possibly mixing the outdoors with gameplay within the Aperture Science Labs. Sadly, that's about all we know at this stage.

The day the PS3 stood still

If you were unlucky enough to turn on your non-slim PS3 on the 1st of March, you no-doubt would have encountered a bizarre problem. For some insane reason, certain models of the original PS3 with a particular system version were programmed to think that every even year was a leap-year, and thus happily assumed that that particular day was the 29th of February. The result? An unusable system. The OS and system clocks conflicted, resulting in a console so stubborn that it refused to boot up, because it existed in a day that wasn't real. Of course, there was no handy error message to help at the time. The reason why this wasn't a problem in 2008 is rather simple: it was a leap-year. While the entire planet scrambled for a solution, including formatting their consoles, fiddling with internal batteries and threatening the black behemoth with a sudden case of free flight syndrome, the only real solution was to wait until the 2nd of March, when the machine would happily boot thinking that it was the 1st. By time that happened, Sony already had a software update ready and waiting.

FEBRUARY

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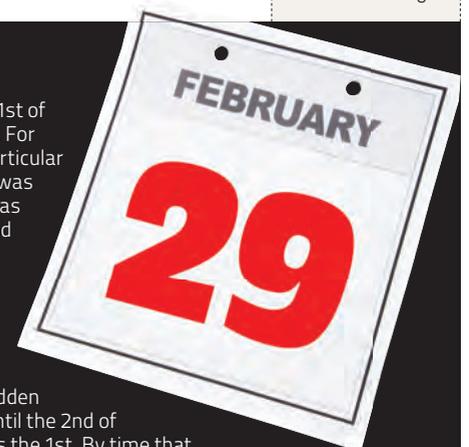
A Shiny New Apple

Despite a lot of controversy and a few raised eyebrows, Apple has announced that the iPad will hit shelves in the US in early April, while UK consumers will be able to get their hands on the device later in that same month. Initially, only the WiFi model will be available in the states, with the 3G model becoming available later in April. Europe will get both models at the same time.

"iPad is something completely new," said Apple's Steve Jobs. "We're excited for customers to get their hands on this magical and revolutionary product and connect with their apps and content in a more intimate, intuitive and fun way than ever before."

Pre-orders for the iPad opened in the US on the 12th of March, with a price tag starting at US$499.

DDO rakes in the dosh

MMOs have a hard time keeping up subscriber numbers, but one thing that people like is free stuff. So much so, in fact, that they're more willing to spend money if you give them something for free in the first place. In this case, that free thing is *Dungeons and Dragons Online Unlimited*, which has been free-to-play for some time now.

"The response from players to *DDO Unlimited* has been nothing short of phenomenal," said Jim Crowley, president of Turbine. "We've known all along how great this game is and by implementing an innovative new model that put the players in charge of how they pay and play *DDO Unlimited*, we've successfully expanded our reach and injected new energy into the game."

It's been so successful that the company's revenue has actually risen over 500% compared to the regular model that requires players to pay a monthly fee. Go figure.

LITTLEBIG BUYOUT

Xbox owners hoping to one day get a taste of *LittleBigPlanet* are in for a surprise – Sony Computer Entertainment has recently bought up developers Media Molecule. Despite the company only having one game under their belt (okay, two, if you include their work on the PSP version), Sony has a keen eye for these kind of things and no-doubt sees a future in the *LBP* brand. This buyout won't change much for the immediate future of Media Molecule, but Sony says that the team has some "exciting projects in the pipeline," which will be announced in the near future.

CONTROL FREAK

It's always interesting to dig up patents developed by electronics manufacturers. The latest one of interest was filed recently by Sony, on the 18th of February, and details the designs for a universal motion controller that can be used for the PS3, Xbox 360 or Wii.

The device will have an LCD touchscreen, shoulder buttons and motion control. The touchscreen will change depending on which system is in use (or which game, which is an awesome idea). While the screen can't provide the kind of tactile feedback one would like when playing a videogame, we can't help but be impressed by the kind of forward-thinking Sony is showing; if anything, it's clear that they're taking this whole motion control thing very seriously.

Explosions, death and shredding

IT'S BEEN KNOWN FOR a little while now that some former *Black* developers are working on a new title, and now finally the information has been revealed. The game is called *Bodycount*, due for release in Q1 2011. Nope, it doesn't appear to be a remake of the *Wolf3D* clone *Operation Bodycount*, but it looks like it'll play like a spiritual successor to *Black*.

Creative director Stuart Black, who was the co-creator and designer on *Black*, is taking the helm with *Bodycount*, and has plenty to say about the game and how it's all about "genre-defining gun play." It's not the first time we've heard such marketing speak, but he does have a pretty cool way of explaining it

"If *Race Driver: GRID* was all about the purity of racing, then everything in *Bodycount* is absolutely centred on the bullet and its impact on the world."

The game will feature a technology called "shredding," which is just about the coolest tech term we've heard so far this year.

"Our shredding tech enables us to create a different kind of gameplay, where players and AI can't hide behind indestructible cover and rely on whack-a-mole mechanics," said *Black*. "Here the environment is constantly changing as the game world is shot to hell; it's going to be a huge amount of fun."

The return of Lord British

Richard Garriott did some awesome things, like working on the entire *Ultima* series and *City of Heroes/Villains*. He also did something terrible – working on *Tabula Rasa*. He also went to space for a bit, which is possibly where he picked up a terrible brain parasite. Anyway, he's back now on Earth (physically, at least) and ready to do more stuff with computers.

Garriott has founded Portalarium, a new social media company, which will release online games and applications with the intention of expanding content including learning, health, science and environmental sciences. All of these will be contained within an online social space.

"The Portalarium mission is exactly what I want to be doing next in games," said Garriott. "This really takes me back to my roots in the game business – small development teams, low barriers to entry, affordable budgets for quality projects, and unlimited new interactive frontiers to explore together with our customers."

The company's first game is out already; it's called *Sweet @$! Poker*. Oh how the mighty have fallen.

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LOOK BEHIND YOU, ANOTHER REMAKE!

Mmmm, there's nothing like the smell of fresh gaming news the day after a Game Developers Conference, especially if that news is laced with the smell of bananas and grog! A remake of *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* is on its way for nearly every platform under the Caribbean sun. Ron Gilbert and Tim Schaefer, the duo behind the creation of the original, were present at and took part in Lucasarts' announcement. In June last year *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition* was announced at E3. Last year's remake did very well and went down a treat with fans of the original, so it makes sense that Lucasarts would do the same with *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*. This special edition remake will feature enhanced graphics, full voice-over, a hint system and a fully re-mastered musical score. In addition to this news, Lucasarts also announce that last year's *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition* will be available on the Playstation Network very soon. *Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge* will be released on the Xbox 360, PS3, PC, Mac, iPod Touch and iPhone sometime during winter in South Africa. We cannot wait!

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 has more players on PC

Make of this what you will, but the PC version of *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* accumulated more players during its week of release than either of the console versions. This was recently announced over the official *Bad Company 2* forums by Barry Tingle, the Associate Producer for Dice. This begs the question: is the larger amount of players due to *Battlefield* having its original home on the PC, or is it because of the inclusion of dedicated servers? It's certain that many will use the latter probability as ammunition to call out Activision and Infinity Ward on their decision to drop dedicated servers from *Modern Warfare 2*. Many point to this as the reason behind the relatively poor sales of *Modern Warfare 2* on PC. Regardless, it seems that for now the PC version of *Battlefield Bad Company 2* is getting more love online, which is good news for those who frequently panic about the death of PC gaming. So if your online military shooter itch is not already being scratched on PC, *Bad Company 2* is a good option. Perhaps the lower player count on the console versions is due to *Modern Warfare 2* catering to that particular market already.

Two down, seven million to go

What comes out every six months and then sits on top of PC game sales charts for weeks and weeks? Yeah, that's right: *The Sims* expansion packs. *The Sims 3* already has one expansion (*Sims 3: World Adventures*) so it's high time they add another to the burgeoning list of additions to this lucrative franchise. The next one up is called *The Sims 3 Ambitions* and it looks set to expand on the career elements of your Sims. Not only will it feature a host of new career options for your digital denizens, but you will now be able to directly control them while they are at work. In other words, you as the player will no longer be shut out of office buildings and left alone to nurse a growing sense of separation anxiety as your Sim gets on with his or her daily grind. Now you too will get to follow your Sim into a burning building to help him do his job as a fireman; or perhaps the two of you will explore creepy rooms hunting down pesky spirits as a ghost hunter. Other confirmed career paths include becoming an investigator or architect, the latter allowing you to alter the look of the entire town. One of the best parts of *The Sims* games is the career options and the perks that each provides, so an expansion pack that not only adds new careers but thoroughly fleshes out this particular game mechanic is quite exciting. Your Sims can expect a career altering moment sometime around June this year.

» BATTLEFIELD 3 DEVELOPMENT IN THIRD YEAR

Battlefield Bad Company 2 is doing its best to take back some of the multiplayer shooter market that's been dominated by *Call of Duty* for some time, but this is just the tip of the comeback iceberg from DICE. In a recent interview with Gaming Union, DICE Canada studio manager Fredrik Liliegren confirmed that *Battlefield 3* has been in development at their Swedish studio for the past three years.

"I know what they were talking about on the PC side for [the next] *Battlefield*, and they haven't announced any of that yet, after three years," Liliegren said. "So I know what's coming, and I still can't talk about it because I'm still under NDA.

"What the PC version is going to be, *Battlefield 3*, I think it's going to absolutely blow everyone away, but I can't tell you what it is, but it will blow people away... because it's not *Modern Warfare 2* PC, it's not that experience," he said.

The Beavatar

Introducing the avatar beaver

The story so far: Our poor badger disappeared last night (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights... so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of *NAG* has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere... Get going. Send your sitings to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'April Beavatar'.

Last Month's winner

(as the Badginator...)

Daniel Campbell, p63

WIN!

The person who finds the Beavatar this month will win an iKonik RA x 10 Liquid Chassis, valued at R3,999 sponsored by Sonic Informed.

Gaming Charts

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

PS3
God Of War III
Battlefield: Bad Company 2
Final Fantasy XIII
Heavy Rain
GTA: Episodes from Liberty City

XBOX 360
Army of Two: 40th Day
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Dead to Rights: Retribution
MX vs. ATV Reflex

PS2
Ben 10: Vilgax Attacks
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories
Bakugan
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2010
FIFA 10

PC
Mass Effect 2
Assassin's Creed 2
C&C 4: Tiberian Twilight
BioShock 2
Splinter Cell Conviction

PSP
Ben 10: Vilgax Attacks
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories
Army of Two: 40th Day
MX vs. ATV Reflex
LittleBigPlanet

WII
Scene It! Twilight
Alice in Wonderland
How to Train your Dragon
Red Steel 2 with Motion plus
Racket Sports Party

DS
Sonic and Sega All Star Racing
Mario & Sonic at the Winter Games
How to Train your Dragon
Alice in Wonderland
Percy Jackson and the Olympians

GfK January 2010 figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za
Sales by game genre

ACTION
Darksiders PS3
Black PS2
Bakugan Battle Brawlers PS2
GTA San Andreas PC
GTA Vice City PSP
GTA Vice City PS2

SPORTS
Wii Sports Wii
FIFA 10 PS2
Wii Sports Resort Wii
WWE Smackdown vs RAW 2010 PS2
FIFA 10 PS3
FIFA 08 PS2

RACING
Burnout 3: Takedown PS2
Need for Speed: Underground PS2
Need for Speed: ProStreet PS2
Need for Speed: Most Wanted PS2
Need for Speed: Underground PC
Burnout 4: Revenge PS2

SHOOTER
Medal of Honor Vanguard PS2
Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare PC
Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare PS3
Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare 360
Call of Duty Deluxe Edition PC
Army of Two: 40th Day PS3

SOCIAL GAMING
Wii Fit + Board Wii
Wii Fit Wii
EA Sports Interactive Wii
Band Hero Super Bundle PS3
Guitar Hero 5 + Guitar PS3
DJ Hero PS3

ROLE PLAYING
The Sims 3 Wolrd Adventures PC
The Sims 3 PC
The Sims 3 Collectors Edition PC
The Sims 2 Pets PS2
Dragon Age Origins PC
Mass Effect 2 PC

Not every cloud

Sierra's classic *Quest* games might have ended a long time ago, but that hasn't stopped a number of fan-filled indie development groups from springing up in the attempt to continue the name. While some of these groups have been successful, like AGD Interactive and their remakes of *Quest for Glory 2*, and *King's Quest 1* and *2*, others have fallen by the wayside due to poor management, lack of resources or legal battles. The most recent title to suffer this fate was a King's Quest sequel from indie group Phoenix Online Studios, called *The Silver Lining*. They had been working on the title, which was to be a five-part episodic affair, for eight years.

This isn't the first time the studio has had to stand up to the corporations. In 2005, they fought off a cease-and-desist order from Vivendi Universal, dropped the *King's Quest* part from the game's title and were granted a non-commercial licence to continue work. Recently, however, Activision (which owns VU) has clamped down on the company and once again called for work to stop, except this time they're not letting go. Previously, VU gave up the rights to work on the game due to an outcry from the gaming community, so if you'd like to see *The Silver Lining* ever see the light of day, be sure to drop Activision an email stating so.

One man... one desire... one missile

Game-to-film adaptations have a tough time working well for the most part. Certain aspects, like story and characters, can carry across well. Others, like gameplay mechanics, tend to do a little less well... or terribly, as is usually the case. Why on Earth 20th Century Fox would be interested in a film adaptation of *Missile Command* is anyone's guess, but that's the licence that the company recently bought. It's possible that nothing will happen, and they just scooped it up for a good deal (free, ideally), but we can't imagine a movie about shooting things out of the sky all that exciting. Might as well make a film based on *Duck Hunt*.

< Bytes >

Distributors

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a prize from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'April Caption'.

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR: When card tricks go horribly wrong...
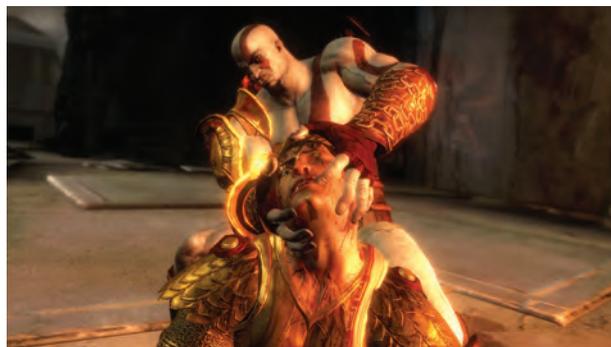
LAST MONTH'S WINNER: "Righty, Tighty" – Darren de Waal

BT GAMES™ Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

APRIL: WEEK 1

Super Street Fighter IV	360, PS3
Batman: Arkham Asylum GOTY	PC, 360, PS3
Just Cause 2	PC, 360, PS3
Nier	360, PS3
Resonance of Fate	PS3

APRIL: WEEK 2

Dead to Rights: Retribution	360, PS3
Pro Evolution Soccer 2010 Platinum	PC, 360, PS3, PS2
Way of the Samurai 3	360, PS3
Scene it! Twilight	PC, Wii, DS
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010 Platinum	360, PS3, PS2, PSP
Splinter Cell Conviction	PC, 360

APRIL: WEEK 4

Red Dead Redemption	360, PS3
FIFA World Cup 2010 South Africa	360, PS3, PSP, Wii
Monster Hunter Tri	Wii

EA to publish Shank and Deathspank

EA has just announced that they have made two deals that will see the company publishing Hothead Games' *Deathspank* and Klei Entertainment's *Shank*. Both games have garnered a good amount of attention over their development period and it's fantastic to see a publisher as big as EA picking up the two of them.

Deathspank is currently in development under the creative guidance of Ron Gilbert. For those who don't know, Gilbert is well known for his integral role in the creation of the first two *Monkey Island* games and *Maniac Mansion*, amongst others. While *Deahtspank* will be rather different to the classic point-and-click adventures from Gilbert's past, the game will feature his trademark wit and humour. Players take on the role of *Deathspank*, a "Hero to the Downtrodden", in an action RPG adventure – think *Diablo* meets *Monkey Island*.

In *Shank* players take on the role of titular character *Shank*, a chainsaw wielding and dual pistol flourishing 2D hero on a mission for revenge. The game has been nominated for various awards for artistic achievement, and it really does look stunning. The game features classic 2D, side-scrolling action with both ranged and melee combat.

Neither of the games have release dates as yet, but both will be heading to Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network at some point this year. *Shank* will also be released for digital download on PC.
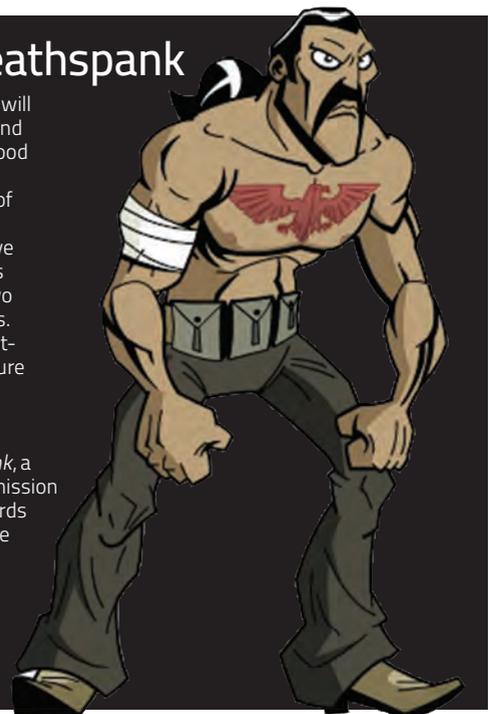
DEVELOPER > Blizzard Entertainment   PUBLISHER > Activision Blizzard   RELEASE DATE > TBA 2010   WEB > www.starcraft2.com

StarCraft II

GENRE > Real-time strategy   PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

The return of the king

It's been twelve years since *StarCraft* landed on planet RTS. Most sane people consider that to be a long time, and they'd be right, but Blizzard has their own special way of doing things that we just can't argue with. When the *StarCraft II* beta was announced, we pretty much went crazy. An opportunity to play the game we've been waiting over a decade for could not be passed up. In these pages you'll find an account of our experience with the beta. There are a few things that need to be mentioned first: the beta is not the final version; Blizzard has been updating the game on a regular basis throughout the beta, so expect things to change a bit at least. There's also no single player campaign available in the beta, nor any sign of the map editor (for now, at least).

TERRAN UNITS

Banshee: These gunships can be cloaked and are only able to attack ground units. They're particularly effective when backing up ground units (with some anti-air units to protect them) and taking the fight to the enemy base. Basically, best used as part of a mixed force.

Battlecruiser: The pride of the Terran air force, the Battlecruiser is an all-purpose behemoth that can cause a heap of trouble – especially when they travel in packs. The Yamato Cannon upgrade allows them to fire a single, high-charged shot that deals massive damage to its target. It's pretty much the same Battlecruiser we saw in the first game.

Ghost: Ghosts seem far more powerful than they were in the original and have new abilities. Aside from their ability to cloak, Ghosts can call in Nukes built at the Ghost Academy, they can fire a focused shot that does increased damage and they can unleash an EMP shot that drains shields and energy while also revealing cloaked units.

Hellion: This very fast, very nimble buggy is outfitted with a flamethrower that can damage multiple units at the same time. It's great for hit-and-run tactics (especially against weaker units).

Marauder: The Marauder is a new unit that replaces the Firebat. Its attack slows enemy movement speed and they're quite effective against heavier, armoured units.

Marine: They're back and they remain the Terran's most basic unit. They can use Stimpaks to improve their combat effectiveness at the expense of health.

Medivac Dropship: A hybrid of the Medics and the Dropships from the original game, the Medivac Dropship can heal biological units and transport troops.

Raven: It's basically the Science Vessel from the original in a new form. This support aircraft can drop Auto-Turrets, fire a slow moving Hunter-Seeker Missile that will home in on enemies for a limited time and drop a Point Defense Drone that will destroy incoming enemy fire. Also acts as a detector.

Reaper: This infantry unit is equipped with a jet pack and can move up and down cliffs. They're great for hit and runs.

SCV: Basic worker unit. Gathers resources/constructs buildings/repairs stuff.

Siege Tank: These tanks are back and they retain their ability to deploy into siege mode, which increases their range, damage output and cool down time of their shots.

Thor: This hulking, powerful ground unit can hold its own against pretty much anything that comes its way. It can focus its 250mm cannons on a single unit, stunning said unit and dealing massive damage.

Viking: This versatile unit doubles as an anti-air aircraft and a ground-based assault unit. This is because it can be transformed from an aerial unit (Fighter Mode – in which they can only target air units) to a ground unit (Assault Mode – in which they can only target ground units). This means that if they're outmatched in either form, they can transform to reduce the damage inflicted on them depending on their attacker's capabilities.

TERRAN GAMEPLAY

The Terrans are arguably the most versatile faction in the current build of the multiplayer beta. Like the Protoss, they've got a more traditional way of doing things (compared to the Zerg). The Terrans are able to get units out fairly quickly after the start of a game and they also don't have any limitations as to where they can build (as with Zerg Creep and Protoss Pylons). Terran production cost falls somewhere between that of the Protoss and Zerg. Their production buildings can have Reactors attached to them – which adds an extra build queue to double unit production but limits your tech progression (attaching a Reactor to a Barracks, for example, will only allow you to produce Marines - but twice as fast). In order to build the higher tech tier units, you've got to attach Tech Labs to the buildings you'd like to produce those top tier units.

Supply Depots can now be raised or lowered. This means that if you're one of those players who likes to use Supply Depots as a cheap wall to keep enemies out of your base (or at least slow their advance), that wall can now be raised or lowered at will - which will restrict or allow passage over them. A few of the Terran buildings can lift off and take to the skies - useful for when the enemy attacks with units that have no anti-air attacks, or for when you need to take a few buildings over to your forward expansion.

Upgrading your Command Centre to an Orbital Command

Previously, on StarCraft...

"Howdy, folks! I'm Jim Raynor, Marshall of these parts."
Terran colony at Mar Sara overrun by Zerg. Confederate government abandons colony. Duke: "Y'all have a nice day, now."
Sons of Korhal, under Arcturus Mengsk, evacuate colony. Evidence of Confederate experiments with Zerg. Protoss fleet arrives and sterilises planet.

Mar Sara refugees arrive at Antiga Prime.

Kerrigan: "You pig!"
Raynor: "What? I didn't even say anything."
Kerrigan: "Yeah, but you were thinking it."
Raynor: "Ah, right, you're a telepath... Look, let's just get this over with."

Conferderate flagship Norad III goes down under Zerg assault. Mengsk's forces rescue it.

Raynor: "I'm positive I didn't hear THAT right!"
Mengsk: I'm not asking you to like it – I'm asking you to DO it."
Kerrigan: "Yes, SIR."
Duke is just as surprised: "What's your angle?"
Raynor: "Our angle?! I'll give you an angle, you Confederate son of a-..." "I can't believe you're going to trust that snake."
Mengsk: "Don't worry, Jim, he's OUR snake now."
With Psi Emitter, rebels lure Zerg to Antiga Prime. Again, Protoss arrive to sterilise.

Mengsk targets Confederate capital world Tarsonis; using another Emitter, again lures in Zerg.

Kerrigan: "The Confederates on Antiga were bad enough, but now you're going to use the Zerg against an entire planet?!" Protoss opt to spare human population, take on Zerg on the ground. Mengsk abandons Kerrigan on planet's surface as it is overrun. Raynor parts ways with Mengsk, disillusioned. Mengsk founds Terran Dominion.

Zerg Swarm leaves for planet Char. Kerrigan did not die on Tarsonis, was captured and metamorphosed into free-willed servant of Overmind.
Raynor: "Kerrigan, is that you?"
Kerrigan: "To an extent..."

Protoss forces assassinate Cerebrate Zasz. Zeratul's mind touches Overmind's, revealing location of Protoss homeworld, Aiur. Zerg invade Aiur, Overmind manifests there.

While defending Protoss city of Antioch on Aiur, Praetor Fenix falls in battle. Executor ordered to arrest Tassadar. "You travel all this way to arrest ME?!"
Raynor: "Don't let it get to you, man. It happened to me, too, once."

Executor and Tassadar instead rescue Zeratul of Dark Protoss. Fenix reincarnated as Dragoon. Judicator Aldaris brands Tassadar and Executor as traitors, forcing them to fight against Conclave. Tassadar eventually gives himself up. His comrades slip away, come back to break him out.

Protoss determine Dark Templar

"Plenty of new tools will be available for modders, including a separate application called Startools that will allow for the easy creation of custom doodads for virtually unlimited possibilities"

provides access to a few useful support powers and introduces one of the Terran's most surprisingly useful new units: the M.U.L.E., which is a Mineral-gathering unit (think SCV) that can be commissioned to gather minerals for a limited time, after which it will self destruct. It gathers Minerals much faster than an SCV as well. You can also upgrade your Command Centre to a Planetary Fortress, which puts a giant gun on the roof of the building (but prevents it from lifting off). Terran players will immediately feel at home with their favourite race, because like the rest of *StarCraft II*'s multiplayer, the Terrans still play exactly how you remember.

PROTOSS UNITS

Archon: Since Dark Archons are out, any combination of two Templars (Dark or otherwise) can be shoved together to make a single Archon. These units have no special abilities, but do lots of damage and their shields can soak it up just as easily.

Carrier: Not much has changed with this super-unit. It's just as terrifying when twenty descend upon your base, and just as satisfying to do the same to your opponent.

Colossus: Like the name implies, this unit is huge but can only attack ground units with its splash-damage sweeping beam. Perhaps ironically, its huge size means air units can target it, meaning you need to have sufficient anti-air backup.

Dark Templar: The perfect assassin; the Dark Templar is permanently cloaked and does huge amounts of damage, although they are a bit on the squishy side.

High Templar: This spell-casting unit has no standard attack, but its Psionic Storm ability is devastating against air units, and can be set to autocast. Can use the feedback ability, which drains energy from a friendly unit in exchange for damage inflicted on an enemy.

Immortal: Dragoons are out; Immortals are the new awesome. These units are tougher than their predecessors against heavy damage, but their unique shields don't activate when the damage dealt to them is below a certain threshold.

Mothership: This massive, and expensive, support unit doesn't do that much damage directly, but its ability to cloak nearby allies and mass teleport them makes them a serious threat in the right situation. Can also lock down units with the Vortex ability, in case things aren't quite going its way.

Observer: This tiny unit makes a return without much in the way of change. It's permanently cloaked and can detect enemy cloaked and burrowed units.

Phoenix: Great versus light units, this air-to-air fighter can use its Graviton Beam ability to temporarily lift enemy units up into the air to be attacked by its friends, as it can't attack while channelling the ability.

Probe: Standard peasant unit. Retains all of its abilities from *StarCraft,* including its super-quick construction.

Sentry: This spell-casting support unit does a bit of damage, but its greatest ability is the creation of a movement and attack-stopping Force Field. They can also create false duplicates of allied units, as well as offer them an aura that reduces incoming ranged damage.

Stalker: An early-game unit similar to the Dragoon that can attack ground and air units. It offers decent damage and

> "The Protoss have some of the hardest-hitting units in the game and a late-game, fully upgraded Protoss force makes for a terrifyingly powerful foe."

energies needed to harm Overmind. Zeratul kills two Cerebrates, opens way for assault on Overmind. Conclave admits error and pardons Tassadar, who together with Raynor's forces attacks Overmind. Tassadar channels psionic energies into Flagship Gantrithor, flies it into Overmind, destroying it. With Overmind dead, Kerrigan is freed from its control…

Aiur plagued by mindless Zerg rampaging across it; Protoss contingent withdraws to Shakuras, Dark Protoss home planet. Executor finds Zerg there. Artanis: "They must have taken control of the Warp Gate on Aiur."
Raynor and Fenix offer to stay back to seal Warp Gate. Artanis: "…once the gate is closed from the other side, there will be no one to save you…"
Raynor: "Yeah, well, I'm a man of action – what can I say?"

Protoss forces kill two Cerebrates; Kerrigan arrives: "The Cerbrates you've killed were my enemies, too." She tells of new Overmind forming, proposes alliance of convenience.
Executor's forces leave for Braxis, to retrieve Uraj crystal; Kerrigan helps. United Earth Directorate fleet, from Earth, arrives in orbit, blockades planet. Artanis uses small task force to pierce blockade. Khalis crystal is retrieved from Char; new Overmind growing on Char.

Judicator Aldaris turns coat, Dark Protoss Matriarch orders his summary execution.
Zeratul: "Something doesn't feel right…"

Executor's forces fight to Xel'Naga temple, hold it while Zeratul and Artanis channel energies of the two crystals. Massive explosion scours Char, Zerg with it.

UED fleet arrives to take control of Koprulu Sector, heads for Braxis. Lieutenant Duran offers his services.
Vice-Admiral Stukov: "Lieutenant, you have absolutely no idea who we are or what we have come here to do. What makes you think you want to side with us?"

Admiral DuGalle: "However useful he may prove to be, Alexei, he will always be a traitor in my eyes. And you know I cannot abide a traitor."

UED infiltrates Dylarian Shipyards, stealing 18 battlecruisers, turning them against local garrison. Confederate Psi Disrupter located, Duran advises its destruction. Alexei Stukov argues to take control of it; DuGalle overrules. Duran clears way to Disruptor. "Lieutenant, we've come to … facilitate the disassembly of the Psi Disrupter."

Fleet attacks Dominion throne world Korhal. Mengsk defeated, but during arrest is whisked away by Raynor and Protoss.

Mengsk: "Jim Raynor! What the hell are YOU doing here?!" UED gives chase, tracks fugitives to Aiur. DuGalle: "Why would the Protoss harbour these men?" Duran lets Zerg forces slip through flank, claims technical malfunction.

Stukov disappears, found to have rebuilt Psi
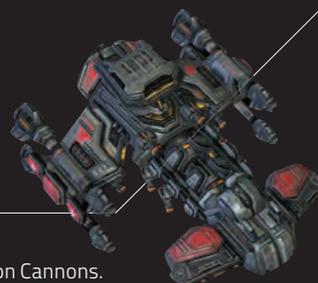
the Blizzard classic Blink ability, which makes for a deadly guerrilla unit.

Void Ray: It doesn't do much damage initially, but when all three firing guns have sufficiently charged up and locked on to the enemy, the damage output increases over time.

Warp Prism: The Protoss transport unit. It can even carry massive units, and can deploy to form what is effectively a temporary Pylon, which can be used to teleport units directly from production.

Zealot: The Zealots are as awesome as ever, and make for a great way to hold off an early game rush (or perform one yourself, if that's your thing). Can be upgraded with a charge ability.

PROTOSS GAMEPLAY

The Protoss have some of the hardest-hitting units in the game and a late-game, fully upgraded Protoss force makes for a terrifyingly powerful foe. Protoss players will be happy to see all the familiar units (like Carriers and Zealots) making a return in the sequel's multiplayer. Protoss base construction is the fastest in the game, but their buldings and units also have the highest resource cost associated with them. Probes (basic Protoss workers) merely have to start construction on a building, then you're free to reassign them and the building will continue to be warped in without supervision. The only downside is that, like the Zerg, the Protoss are limited to where they can build in that structures (aside from the Nexus - the Protoss' main building - which is not affected by this limitation) must have a Pylon (which increases population cap) or a deployed Warp Prism built nearby in order for them to function. If the nearby Pylon is destroyed, that building will be out of commission until another Pylon is built. The Protoss also cannot repair units and structures - instead, every one of their units and stuctures is outfitted with a shield which regenerates between battles.

Protoss Photon Cannons (the race's defensive structure) are able to attack both ground and air (and they act as stealth detectors), unlike the Zerg and Terrans, who have two seperate defensive structures for ground and air, only the latter of which is a detector. Every Nexus you build is able to use a support power called Chrono Boost which will improve the production rate of any building it's placed on by fifty percent. Another awesome Protoss ability can be accessed if you transform your Gateway (which produces infantry units) into a Warp Gate. Warp Gates can warp one unit at a time to any location within range of a Pylon or deployed Warp Prism. However, that unit will be vulnerable to attack while it's being warped in (as it is with Protoss structures while they're warping in) and there is a cooldown period between Warp Gate uses. The Protoss are technologically advanced, extremely powerful (while still providing plenty of opportunities for sneaky tactics) and are set to have some of *StarCraft II*'s most intimidating units when the world first joins in on the game's multiplayer action.

ZERG UNITS

Banelings: Mutated from Zerglings, these balls of fun are packed full of corrosive acid and will gladly sacrifice themselves for the good of the hive. It makes for a lovely surprise when you've got about a hundred of these guys burrowed around the map.

Brood Lord: Just like the Guardian on which it's based, the Brood Lord has a long range, ground-only attack. Instead of regular projectiles, however, it fires off pairs of Broodlings that can continue to do damage for a few seconds after they

land. Perfect for tearing through a wall of Photon Cannons.

Corruptor: This late-game air-to-air unit is much like *Starcraft*'s Devourer, but it lacks its armour-shredding ability. Instead, the Corrupter can temporarily disable enemy structures, which makes it an excellent side-kick for Brood Lord base-squishing attacks, which is convenient as they can mutate into Brood Lords.

Drone: Nothing special here. This is your basic worker unit that will sacrifice itself to the construction of a building.

Hydralisk: So far, this is the most disappointing part of the new Zerg army. They don't seem to be as powerful as they used to be, and the ability to mutate into the awesome Lurkers has been dropped.

Infestors: A spell-casting unit that can move while burrowed. The Infestors have the ability to temporarily seize control of an enemy unit, or quickly spawn packs of Infested Terrans that don't last too long, but can cause a lot of chaos in the short time they're alive.

Mutalisk: Since Corruptors can be built directly, the Mutalisk no longer serves as the base air unit. It's still quite powerful, however, and is perhaps the most versatile unit the Zerg have. The bouncing glaive attack returns, which is great.

Overlord: The Overlords have taken a bit of a knock, since they can't detect stealth units any more. They can still transport units, however, and gain an ability to rain down creep to temporarily expand the organic blanket on which the Zerg must build.

Overseer: Mutated from an Overlord, the Overseer is much faster than the Overlord and can detect units, but it loses its ability to excrete creep or carry units. Can spawn Changelings, which make for excellent spies.

Queen: Drastically different, this new ground-based Queen has the ability to charge up nearby Larva-spawning buildings with four additional Larvae. She can also spawn Creep Tumours, which are the best method of expanding your creep without spending any resources.

Roach: Super-important early-game unit, and great for irritating the opposition later on. It can attack ground only, but does loads of damage. Roaches regenerate health at a ridiculous rate while burrowed, making for a deadly guerrilla unit if the enemy lacks sufficient detection units.

Ultralisk: Looks a whole lot more deadly, and can now burrow. Otherwise, not much has changed.

Zergling: Everyone's favourite rushing unit; these little critters are much the same, but can now mutate into Banelings.

ZERG GAMEPLAY

Most Zerg players know that being a sneaky bastard is the single most important factor for survival. Sure, you can rush your opponent in the first three seconds of the game, but that's not how we roll around these parts; we like to mess with people. Thankfully, the Zerg faction has been given a serious overhaul that increases their abilities to do just that, but they do lose out on a bit of versatility.

Just like in the original *StarCraft*, Zerg buildings can only be built on Creep. For the uninitiated, Creep is a purplish organic material that spreads across the ground, connecting all Zerg buildings and units as one giant mass. Everything the Zerg create is organic, from the buildings to the ground that they walk on. While

v

Disrupter. Duran smears Stukov's loyalty, DuGalle orders he be "dealt with". Killing Stukov, Duran disappears; Zerg overrun Psi Disrupter's location. DuGalle realises mistake, orders forces to defend Disruptor. UED heads for Char, attacks Overmind, subjugates it.

Kerrigan requests another alliance with Raynor, Fenix, Mengsk, plays on fears of UED imperialism. "Still suspicious of my motives, Jimmy?"

Raynor: "Always." In exchange, she promises to help Mengsk retake Korhal. "Alright, I'll lend you some Emitters, but this had better be worth it!" Mengsk helps her destroy Psi Disrupter. Kerrigan betrays allies, attacks. "General Duke. You know, I always wanted to have you killed. This is kinda exciting for me."

Kerrigan wants to destroy UED's "pet" Overmind, needs Dark Protoss. To coerce Zeratul's cooperation, she kidnaps Dark Protoss Matriarch. After Overmind has been killed, Matriarch chooses to remain with Kerrigan. Zeratul realises she has been corrupted, covertly gets her back. Kerrigan hunts them down, but Zeratul gets away.

About to consolidate power, Kerrigan finds three fleets converging on her: Mengsk's, Artanis's, DuGalle's. Kerrigan: "When it rains, it pours."

Mengsk: "You sound worried, Kerrigan. Have I caught you at a bad time? You'd be amazed how many special interest groups in the sector want you dead." Kerrigan's forces defeat all three armies, chase down and eradicate DuGalle's fleet. The others make it home, beaten...

And now...

Wings of Liberty is the first of three StarCraft II games, each of which will focus on one of the three main races. The first will focus on Terrans, specifically a jaded and hard-drinking Raynor, disillusioned after previous events. The action takes place some four years after the end of Brood War. This title offers a non-linear campaign with a linear story, with the structure of missions being of a mercenary nature, taking on jobs to finance the on-going operation. The following two games will each offer a somewhat different feel: Heart of the Swarm (Zerg) will feature role-playing elements, with players advancing Kerrigan throughout the game, while Legacy of the Void will require the player to engage in diplomacy, much like in a 4X game.

StarCraft II is set, however, to more heavily emphasise its multiplayer aspect. We wonder how this will affect the single-player experience, given that the original provided excellence in both departments. Among the things that made StarCraft and Brood War great were the length of the missions (typically an hour each in the former, considerably longer in the latter), the eventful story, missions with alternative objectives (affecting the nature of subsequent missions), and units acquiring targets more intelligently than they do in many a more modern game. ∎

< StarCraft II >

Tech Trees

Zerg

Extractor	Hatchery
	Drone
	Overlord
Evolution Chamber	Spawning Pool
	Zergling
	Queen
Spore Crawler	Roach Warren / Baneling Nest / Spine Crawler
	Roach / Baneling
	Lair
	Overseer
Hydralisk Den	Infestation Pit / Spire / Nydus Network
Hydralisk	Infestor / Mutalisk Corruptor / Nydus Worm
	Hive
	Ultralisk Cavern / Greater Spire
	Ultralisk / Brood Lord

Protoss

Pylon	Assimilator / Nexus
	Probe
Forge	Gateway
	Zealot
Photon Cannon	
	Cybernetics Core
	Stalker
	Sentry
Twilight Council	Stargate / Robotics Facility
	Phoenix / Observer
	Void Ray / Warp Prism
	Immortal
Templar Archives / Dark Shrine	Fleet Beacon / Robotics Bay
High Templar / Dark Templar	Carrier / Colossus
Archon / Archon	Mothership

Terran

|	
Supply Depot / Refinery	Command Center
	SCV
	Barracks / Engineering Bay
	Marine
	Marauder
Bunker / Orbital Command	Reaper
	Planetary Fortress / Sensor Tower / Missile Turret
	Factory / Ghost Academy
	Hellion / Ghost
	Siege Tank
	Starport / Armory
	Viking / Thor
	Medivac
	Raven
	Banshee
	Fusion Core
	Battlecruiser

the basics remain the same hatching units from a central building like the Hatchery or Lair, based on what other buildings you've constructed (Spawning Pool for Zerglings, Roach Warren for Roaches, etc), it will take even experienced players some time to adjust to the new unit mutations and tech trees. Some units can be morphed or mutated into other units, which means that entire armies can change in the field in a relatively short amount of time, although they can't change back.

Perhaps the biggest change to Zerg building is the two main defensive buildings, which can now be uprooted (much like the Night Elf buildings from *Warcraft III*) and replanted on any surface with Creep. This means that more contentious expansion bases can be fortified very quickly if you've taken the time to build up an army of defence buildings back at home base. The Nydas Canal has also been given a bit of an overhaul, and benefits heavily from the new unit selection limit of 255, as your entire army can now be stuffed into this underground network of tunnels. Creep can now be rapidly expanded, at almost no cost, with the use of Creep Tumours dropped by the Queen. This is most useful as many units gain movement speed boosts while travelling on Creep.

While the Zerg have very few seriously powerful units, they make up for this with units that benefit heavily from micromanagement. Perhaps the best example of this is the Roaches, who can fully heal, while burrowed, in about five seconds. Queens can also be used as medics for both units and buildings, although expendability has always been a common concept when dealing with Zerg, especially when it comes to those lovable Zerglings.
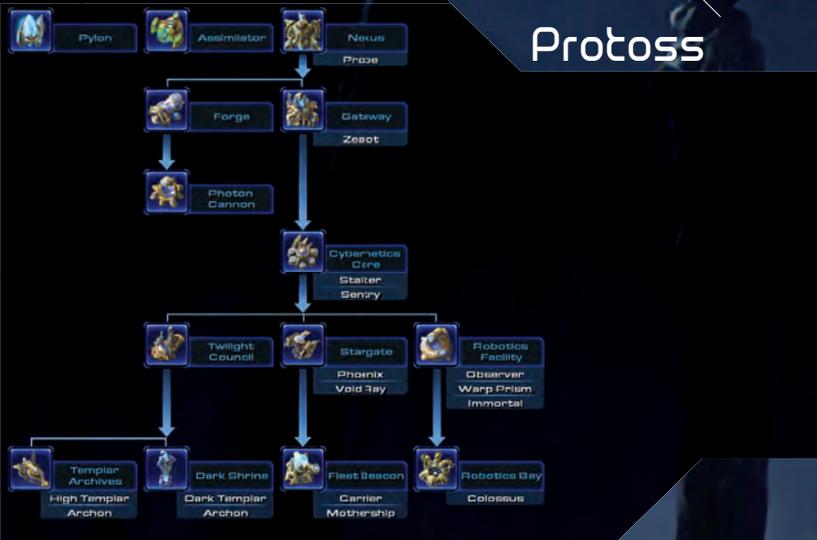
BATTLE.NET 2.0
StarCraft II's lack of LAN support is a sore point for many gamers, but thankfully, the soon to be updated Battle. net service adds so many useful features that it ought to alleviate that crushing pain. The service is looking to feature improved matchmaking (which promises to accurately rate your skill level and pair you up with other players of similar skill), with persistent characters/stat updating and a number of features that will be integrated with *StarCraft II*. Social-networking options will be altered to make managing friends a more user-friendly affair while improving functionality.

Everything you do in the game - all your achievements, win/loss record, that sort of thing - will be saved to your online profile for all the world to see. The service will fully support user-created mods - which means that you should never be bored with the massive amount of content that the huge modding community will surely provide. "Improved" is the keyword for the updated Battle.net.

LOOK AND FEEL
StarCraft has come a long way since its release twelve years ago. Looking at *StarCraft II*, you'd think that this is some fantastic new engine that Blizzard has obviously been working on all this time, but it's actually just a beefed-up version of the excellent *Warcraft III* engine. Of course, that means you can expect loads and loads of highly-detailed and interesting custom maps through the Galaxy Map Editor, likely including the next iteration of *DotA* and (we're hoping), a new onslaught of Tower Defence maps. Plenty of new tools will be available for modders, including a separate application called Startools that will allow for the easy creation of custom doodads for virtually unlimited possibilities, when combined with the freedom that Galaxy will offer. For the tech-junkies out there, rest assured that this version of the engine fully supports DX10 for additional visual effects, but will still run happily on DX9 hardware. Additionally, the Havoc physics engine has been brought in to provide realistic physics simulations on the battlefield.

A bit surprisingly, there are quite a few maps available for play in the beta, including the return of an old friend: Lost Temple. The most notable changes to the maps are the inclusion of rich mineral fields. These yellow minerals are usually quite rare but allow units to harvest additional minerals per trip. Another new feature is the neutral observation towers that appear in most maps; units stationed nearby gain the towers huge sight radius, but this is lost as soon as they get too far away. **NAG**
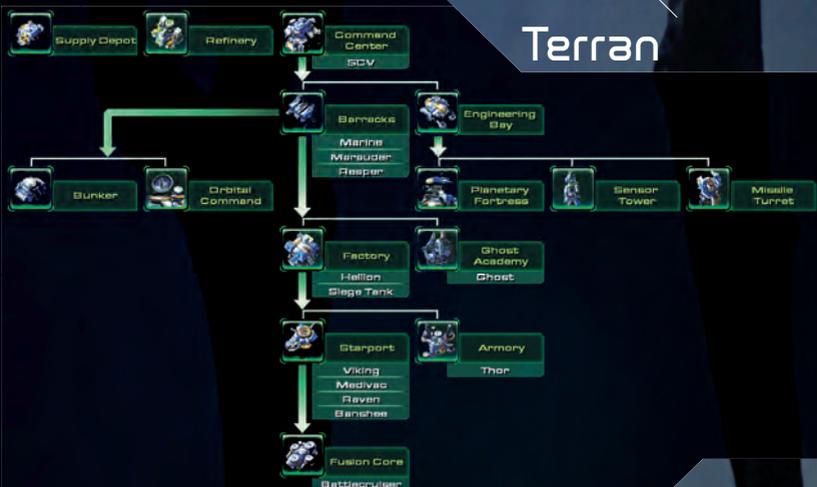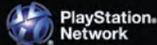
Don't fancy using any powerups? Disable them completely or selectively. Nitro-only makes for a crazy race.

Blur   HANDS ON
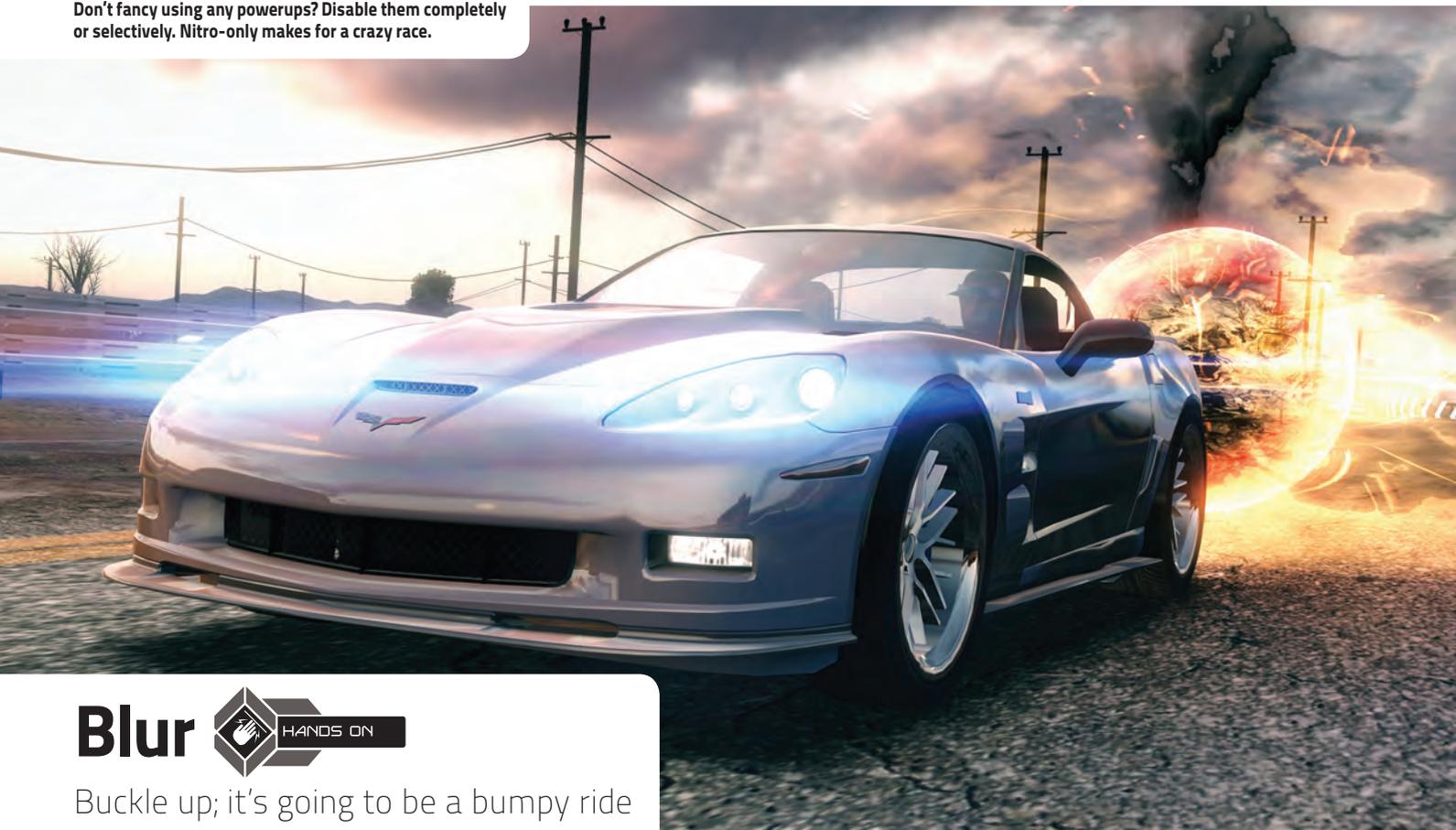
Buckle up; it's going to be a bumpy ride

GENRE > Racing

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

IT TAKES A LOT for a racing title to really stand out these days. It seems that every second racer available has some little quirk to pull in the crowds: *NFS* went super-sim and added things like camera physics and highly-detailed interiors; the next *Gran Turismo* will boast more than 1,000 selectable vehicles and 70 tracks; the *Wipeout* series continues to offer crazy techno-fuelled sci-fi racing to its arcade-loving fans; and *Forza* is doing its darnedest to ensure it hangs on to the Xbox-toting sim crowd. Thankfully, all of this is great for those of us who enjoy racing games, as it's no longer considered okay to release "just another racing title" without paying careful attention to the all-important hook. With that in mind, I jumped on a plane to Liverpool – the birthplace of The Beatles, angry LFC fans after a lost game against Man U., and of course, Bizarre Creations – to see what the studio has been up to since its acquisition by Activision, and what exactly has them almost six months overdue with *Blur*.

If you haven't paid attention to our coverage of this arcade racer, here's the low-down: *Blur* will see up to twenty cars race against each other in a number of modes, gathering powerups as they drive and unleashing all hell on the enemy in a variety of colourful and entertaining ways. If it helps, think of *Wipeout* with licensed, contemporary vehicles, in realistic settings. The game was originally due out for release in Q4 last year, but was pushed back to May of this year to add a few tweaks and give the game the polish it deserves. And boy has it paid off. While *Blur* will no-doubt feature an

interesting and exciting single player mode, the focus of the press event (and, arguably the majority of development) was that of the multiplayer side of things, so it's only fitting that we harp on about that for the next couple of paragraphs.

The main driving force behind the multiplayer mode is the acquisition of fans, which, to us simple folk can be called XP. You gain fans every time you race, depending on your racing performance and achievement of track or vehicle challenges; those fans are then used to increase your rank up to level 40. Every time you gain rank, you unlock new vehicles or mods. These aren't your typical mods, however; every car in the game comes pre-pimped, so there's no time wasted with custom bonnet scoops

>> Powerup usage will change depending on your situation, and many of the powerups can be used in reverse as well. Since enemies can see which powerup you currently have selected, a sneaky strategy is to select a powerup usually used in one direction, and fire it off in reverse. Dropping a reverse Shunt on a corner, just as your opponent is ready to overtake you, is a great way to make friends.

< Blur >

Keep on riding

Over 50 vehicles will make their way into the game on its final release. The cars are separated into categories such as Drift, Muscle, Off-road and the imaginative Rat, the last of which is a class for '60s-style hotrods with a beat-up, but highly-tuned look to them that takes us back to the days like *Street Rod*. Each car is rated according to its grip, acceleration, speed, health and driving difficulty, and is assigned a class to keep things as fair as possible in a game like this. It's not uncommon to find a Land Rover happily trundling alongside a Focus RS, or a Renault Megane Sport, safe in the knowledge that its superior wreck-resistance gives it as much of a winning chance as any other car on the track.

>> Getting four friends together to play some split-screen madness is one thing, but taking the effort to think of which track or vehicle class to play can be so boring. This is no problem for Blur players, however: just jump into split-screen mode and go. After each race, you're presented with a vote between for the next track. Everyone expresses their democratic rights and it's away you go. Zero downtime guaranteed.

>> In the single-player mode, you can send challenges to your friends to beat certain parts of the campaign based on the settings you choose: which car to use, which powerups are available, and more. Bluffing plays its part along with every other dirty trick in the book. Knowing when to use which powerup is the key to success.

and brake callipers. These mods are used in a similar way to perks in *Call of Duty*. Before each race, you can customise your "loadout" to give you a number of benefits, the combination of which will be tailored to your preferred driving style. Loners will benefit from the cloaking device, speed freaks will love the mod that gives them nitro for every successful drift, brawler-style drivers can improve their chances of survival with the upgraded shield and vampiric repair mods, and those who just love to toy with their opponents will relish in the idea of the explosive decoy pickups. The concept of mods adds a tremendous amount of depth to what could otherwise be thought of as a simple arcade racer. Each mod provides a huge benefit, and the loadouts that people

choose will set them apart from every other racer in the field.

If there's one thing that could be said for *Blur*, it's that it takes existing ideas from all over the place and squishes them together in a most satisfying manner. The inclusion of powerups in an otherwise very tight and entertaining arcade racer creates a level playing field that anyone – aside from the sim junkies – will be able to enjoy. Everything that we've seen about the game screams of polish and a determination to put *Blur* on the must-have racer list of 2010 – a goal that we admire and most certainly hope Bizarre will be able to achieve. At this rate, they're certainly off to a good start. **NAG**
Geoff Burrows

Q&A

Blur

> **This is your first game under Activision. How has the move been from Microsoft?**

The move from Microsoft to Activision has been largely smooth and painless. I have to say that working with Microsoft was a great experience, and looking back on it, the memory of it gets better and better. I'm really glad that we did it, and that we did *PGR* with them. But we were ready to do something new with a new partner with fresh ideas that added to our ideas. I think that really worked and came at just the right time for us.

There are always changes that occur when you change partners. There are always tasks that become challenging. That's been the case here, but largely it's been a very painless situation. It feels like we've got a new group of supporters, working with us and working for us, rather than just the other way round. We don't really feel as if we're being told what to do by them.

> **So they give you plenty of creative freedom?**

Yeah, they do. That's not to say that they don't have avenues or ways of getting their own ideas into the game and stuff like that. We have quite a strong communication line with them; we speak to them on a daily basis. They know what we're doing; we know what they want and what they think. It seems to be working really well for us. I'm happy, and I know the rest of the team is happy as well.

> **Are you going to miss *PGR*, or is this the way forward?**

Maybe if the worst thing happened and we didn't sell a single copy of *Blur*, then I would look back at *PGR* and want to make that again. But as things are, I'm really happy that we made *PGR*, I'm really proud of what we did there, but we've moved on. I think the team has moved on as well. In the beginning, there was discussion about whether we should do another *PGR*, or something different. But once the decision was made, I think everybody jumped on board. So we are where we are now. I look back on *PGR* with a little bit of nostalgia, but that's all.

> **Between *PGR*, *The Club* and even *Geometry Wars*, there are a lot of different gameplay ideas. Do you think they've all come together in *Blur*?**

It's really interesting in that there really was no conscious decision to kind of blend what those games were. The decision to make *Blur* was to take what made *PGR* so great, which were the

visuals, the car handling and the physics, and the gameplay, and add to that all the new ideas – powerups, twenty car races and battling. It just so happens that the lighting style for the powerups is reminiscent of *Geometry Wars*, but there really was no decision to make them the same. I think it was all just a happy accident, really.

> **The delays have some people a little upset, but we understand that you're working on things and refining them. Was that your call or was it Activision's?**

We work for Activision, so at the end of the day they have to make the call, but they worked with us on making that decision. They knew that we weren't happy with the game just before it was ready for release. They knew that we felt that there was much more that we could do in terms of polishing it. The ethos of

> "The decision to make *Blur* was to take what made *PGR* so great, which were the visuals, the car handling and the physics, and the gameplay, and add to that all the new ideas – powerups, twenty car races and battling."

< Blur: Q&A >

> "You don't have to be the best racer (it helps); you don't have to have the fastest car (it helps); but what really matters is how you use the powerups."

the game was there, but it wasn't quite working on the track. They understood that we needed the extra amount of time and they gave it to us.

I'm not sure who asked who, or who told who, but it seems to me that when the decision was made that it was as upsetting for us as it was for everyone else – we had been working on it for ages. The good side of that was the confidence that we could work on it for another six months and that it was the right thing to do. Some other games might have been canned at that time, but *Blur* was looking good enough and everybody recognised that. We're grateful now that we had that opportunity.

> **Bossy PR person:** Sorry, but we've only got time for one more question.

> **Okay, I better choose an important one then. The multiplayer is obviously a big part of the game, and a lot has changed since I last saw *Blur* about six months ago. Is multiplayer the most important thing to you; is it more important than single player?**

I don't think you'd find anyone that would want to say that it's **more** important, but one of the things that we recognised when we started *Blur* was that, while multiplayer is **part** of every racing game, a lot of the time it isn't the biggest part of it, and a lot of the time players don't focus on the multiplayer aspect of it because, really, they just don't want to lose. They feel that they don't have the skill to compete online. A lot of the reasons about making *Blur* were reducing the fears that people had about playing a racing game and not having enough skill. We didn't want to dumb the game down, so we decided to add powerups which would add another element that players could become skilled in and that they could master. You don't have to be the best racer (it helps); you don't have to have the fastest car (it helps); but what really matters is how you use the powerups. Making the decision when to pick up, or which one to pick up, or when and how to use it: that became the big pull for us. Players who don't really feel that they can compete in a simulation-type environment do feel as though they can compete in an action environment. We think that multiplayer benefits from that more than any other element. **NAG**
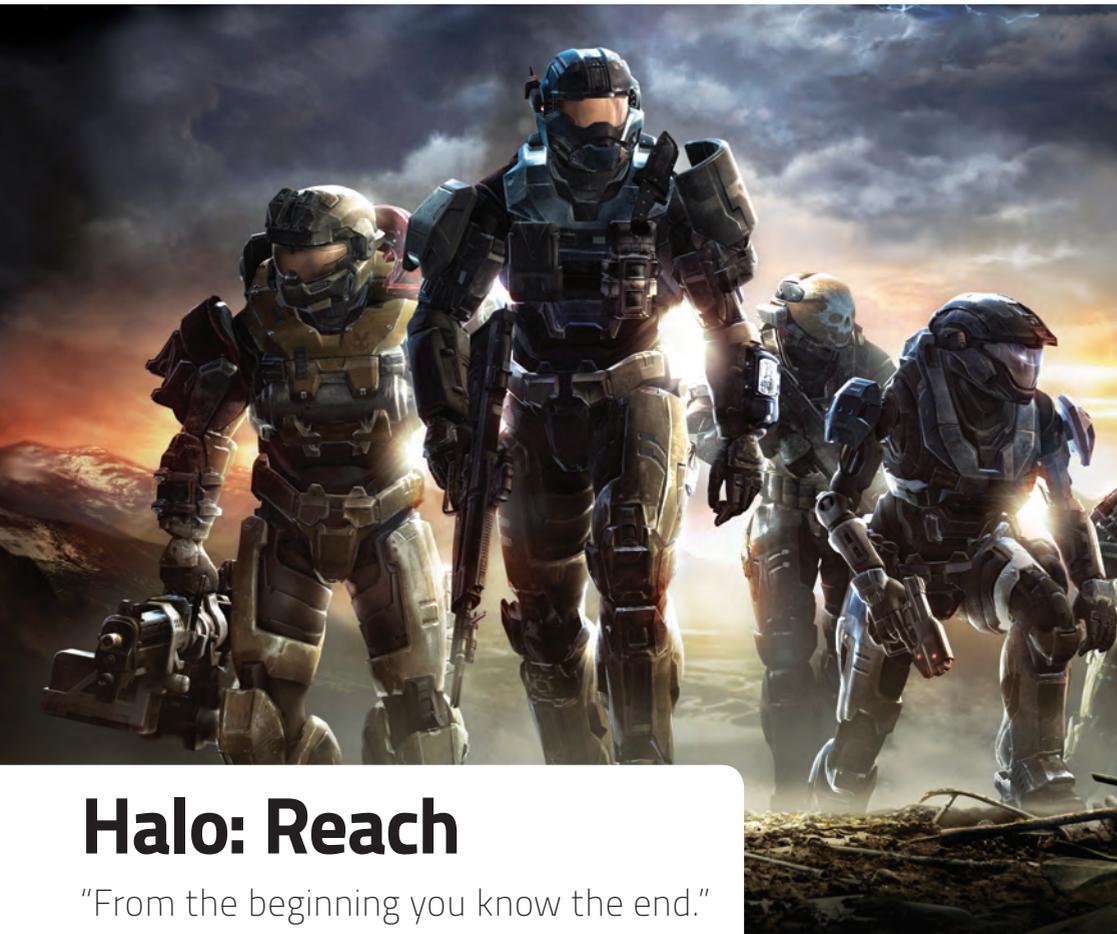
The Fall Of Reach

While it does cover the same area of lore, *Reach* is not the game version of the book *The Fall Of Reach*. Instead, it compliments it by taking place during and after the events in the book, from a different perspective (since you're not playing as Master Chief). Written by science-fiction author Eric Nylund, *The Fall Of Reach* is the official prequel to *Halo: Combat Evolved*, narrating the events which lead up to Evolved, explaining the origins of Master Chief.

Halo: Reach

"From the beginning you know the end."

GENRE > First-person shooter

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

"**H**ALO: REACH FOR US** is not *Halo 4*," says Executive Producer Joseph Tung, who was originally *Halo 3*'s Multiplayer Producer. "It's not a continuation of the Master Chief story, nor is it the start of a new trilogy. For us, it's a completely standalone game."

Gone are the bright greens, luminescent blues, neon purples and glow-in-the-dark pinks. The little Grunt aliens don't squeal jokes or make pratfalls. Don't expect that Gregorian choir Bungie has on retainer to chant the all-too-familiar theme during the title sequence. It's gritty, moody and far more alien than any preceding title in the franchise. Master Chief is busy kicking Covenant ass elsewhere in the galaxy, and has no time for you.

REACH ORIGINS

With *Halo 3* complete, Bungie (a company that started with just 3 programmers, an artist and a level designer) split it's now 130-person strong development team into two groups. One group worked on *Halo 3: ODST*, while the other started work on a project that would eventually become *Reach*. Headed by creative director Marcus Lehto, originally the art director on *Halo 1* through *3*, the team brainstormed ideas until they hit upon doing a prequel that takes place before the first game, *Halo: Combat Evolved*. According to Lehto, "*Reach*, as a fictional planet, was just a great candidate to play around with. It's such a rich world, with such a great fiction surrounding it."

The planet of *Reach*, before its destruction, saw the massacre of over 700 million people by the invading zealot alien

force known as the Covenant, as detailed in the prequel novel *The Fall Of Reach*. With Master Chief off-planet by the time the game starts, the story introduces a new team of Spartan super-soldiers. The six-man Nobel Team is a group of Spartan Mark IIIs. Where the Spartan-Is were kidnapped children, raised and bio-manipulated to be bad-ass soldiers, the Spartan-IIs (like Master Chief) were vat-grown to be giant, disproportionate, super-strong, albino super-soldiers (albino, because they never left their suit - ever). The Mark IIIs however, represent a whole new production line of "fire and forget" bad-ass, Spartans that are expected to get the job done but never make it back alive. They also have less effective armour, thus cheaper to produce than a Master Chief. Unlike Mr. Chief, Nobel Team can take their helmets off. "We intend to show Spartan faces for the first time in one of our games," says Tung. "That speaks to one of the major investments

>> Thanks to the inclusion of jetpacks in multiplayer, you can give someone an atomic tea bagging. Just snipe them from 50m away, jetpack up into the sky, then Hulk Smash your virtual sack on their face. Be sure to scream 'Atomic Teabag!' over voice.

< Halo: Reach >

we've made in the game, which is to have truly believable human performances in *Reach*."

NOBEL AMBITIONS

"It's very important for us to connect with the human under the armour, to show that these Spartan-IIIs are vulnerable; they're not just super humans capable of doing anything," adds Lehto. "Due to their tenacity and tactics they've been able to adapt to the environment and survive, but they are human to the core and they suffer the same things that humans suffer."

The player controls a new member of Nobel Team, while the rest of the team fight along like the Arbiter or *ODST*s did. To facilitate a much more dynamic experience, the A.I. team-mates (which includes a Heavy Weapons guy, Sniper, Assault Specialist and female Stealth Expert with a robotic arm) now have scripted behaviours. Instead of

Reach is very different from what came before. Every enemy and weapon has been redesigned. Everything has higher-resolution textures, more polygons, more individual details.

just snapping into pre-designed actions for story, they can decide for themselves if they should react, or follow through on a specific animation. For example, once formed up on a door for the breach animation, the squad can automatically react to the sudden appearance of an enemy, dispatch it, and then return to the door-breach animation, all without missing a beat.

"We think it's really interesting, because it allows us to do the things we haven't done so well, like craft these little moments without them being really heavy-handed," says Chris Opdahl, Campaign Lead. To facilitate this new animation system, and the entirely new visual style of the game, the entire Halo 3 engine was gutted, no component left untouched.

COMBAT REVISITED

Reach is very different from what came before. Every enemy and weapon has

53 Industries

While Bungie continues to make *Halo* games, the franchise itself is now overseen and published by a Microsoft-created subdivision called 343 Industries. This sub-division is also in charge of the recently released Halo: Legends anime/CG short-movie compilation, the comic books and all tertiary products, like the upcoming animated television series based on the machinima comedy shorts, Red vs. Blue.

been redesigned. Everything has higher-resolution textures, more polygons, more individual details. "Understanding it [the Elite] was our nemesis for *Reach* - we wanted to re-visualise it, rebuilding it from the skeleton up. We're also hearkening back to *Combat Evolved* and some of the things we loved about it. The way the Elite moved and looked - what we built almost a decade ago." says Lehto.

The weapon set has been slimmed down, grenades limited to only frag and plasma. Human weapons are now hitscan instead of there being a frame of projectile travel time. Player appearance, changed via customisation, will be consistent across single player, multiplayer and co-operative modes. Instead of once-off ability items, like the bubble shield, players now don persistent equipment (found on enemies or in supply kits) that grant special abilities like active-camo or speed-boost. Bungie is keeping much secret for now. The radar now shows targets in 3D space. The visor highlights environmental features and overlays information, bringing with it *ODST*'s useful night-vision mode.

There are new dynamic lighting techniques, atmospherics and revamped explosions that leave dirty clouds in the air and hail clods of earth around you. The animation system can now smoothly blend between standing, walking, jumping, running, grenade throw and firing animations. "Animation was one thing we gutted and revamped because it never took that generational leap forward from Combat Evolved all the way through to *ODST*," says Lehto.

IN YOUR FACE

Reach is Bungie's first game to use motion-capture, though Lehto is quick to say that animators still edit and art-direct performances. While voice actors record their lines, video captures their facial movements, which is transferred to their in-game models.

"This is definitely a story in the trenches, so we wanted it to feel very real," explains

cinematic lead Lee Wilson. "We made the decision early to remove some of the helmets. Doing that dictated the style of how we would tell this story - we wanted to feel that these images were captured rather than shot."

The new Assassination move, executed by holding the melee button when behind a target, gives you a third-person animated kill sequence, which will also be in multiplayer. The number of enemies that can be active in a scene is now 40, or 20 vehicles, to returned focus on wide-open vistas teeming with battle. Even though this is a revamped *Halo 3* engine, better tools, better workflows and more experience has given the team the means to improve the engine until it's almost unrecognisable. "We are definitely bending the Xbox as far as it will bend," claims Lehto. "It's getting a wider breadth of characters, vehicles, weapons, all effects and vistas and the environments. We don't short-change the environments."

REACH VERSUS GRASP

From the beginning, because of the novel, we know how it ends. It's the part in the middle which Bungie is going to have to blow people away with, and make sure the player feels like their time on the titular planet was worthwhile. "It is a challenge overall to ensure the player feels they're doing the right thing all the way to the end," says Lehto.

On the multiplayer side of things, it's difficult to speculate pre-beta just how much Bungie intends to compete with its own Halo 3 online fan base. *ODST*'s online mode, Firefight, was sufficiently niche to exempt it from splitting the user base between the two titles. With *Reach*, it's expected that Bungie will roll out a larger, more detailed team-based versus setup which, if given sufficient attention, would become a second pillar to Bungie.net, though it remains to be seen if Bungie can handle the added weight. And what of *Halo 4*, since Bungie recently admitted Reach is not their final *Halo* game? Our guess, Microsoft will use *Halo 4* to sell their next console, whenever that happens. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

UFC Undisputed 2010

Get ready to tap or snap!

GENRE > Fighting

PC **360** **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

THE ASCENDANCE OF THE Ultimate Fighting Championship over the past several years has been nothing short of astonishing. What started as an exhibition match between varieties of fighting styles to try to determine which one was best, has become a global phenomenon. Its creators had no idea when they organised the first fight in 1993 that they were creating a new sport.

The proof of the UFC's success is in the bottom line. In 2007, UFC fights earned more money on pay-per-view channels in the United States than profession boxing or professional wrestling. Still think it's a minor-league sport? Guess again.

Building on the success of *UFC 2009 Undisputed*, the new game promises to offer a host of improvements on its predecessor. Most notably, developer Yuke's Osaka (veterans of a decade's worth of WWE games) claims the control system has been vastly improved over the last edition, which was criticised for having an exceptionally steep learning curve. Fighter animations and transitions between moves and positions also will receive a major upgrade, making the action feel more smooth and natural. Yuke's has implemented what they call a new sway system that allows for full upper body control and head movement to help dodge attacks. While on the ground, a new posture system lets the player deliver strong, fight-ending strikes from every position. The developers have also added new strikes, submissions, transitions, cage moves and the ability to switch to

a southpaw stance anytime during the fight. With all these changes to the way the game moves, it's hard to imagine the control system becoming any easier, but it certainly sounds more robust.

At THQ's press event in Las Vegas in February, we got to see a brief bout between welterweights Mike Swick and Paulo Thiago. From what we saw, the game looks exceptionally smooth and photo realistic. UFC president Dana White was effusive with his praise for the new game.

"All of the fighting in *UFC 2010* is as realistic to ultimate fighting as it could possibly be," White said. "We've reached a level in everything you see in the game that's so much higher than last year's game. All the guys in the office won't even touch *UFC 2009* anymore."

< UFC Undisputed 2010 >

» The major thing that separates MMA from boxing is the ground game, and the most exciting part of the ground game are the moves that end fights, the ones called submissions. They're generally very technical moves involving choking an opponent to the point they pass out, or twisting an extremity to the point a fighter either "taps out" or risks a broken bone. And while they're far to technical to explain here, we'll list a few of our favourites, mostly because they just sound cool: anaconda choke, guillotine choke, rear naked choke, Kimura, Omoplata, and flying scissor heel hook.
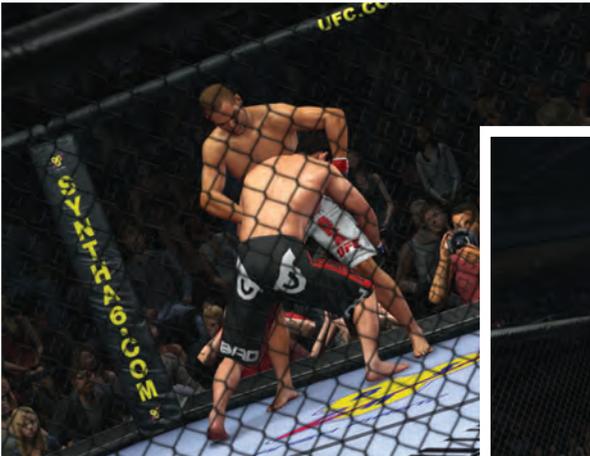
"We've reached a level in everything you see in the game that's so much higher than last year's game. All the guys in the office won't even touch *UFC 2009* anymore."

UFC President Dana White
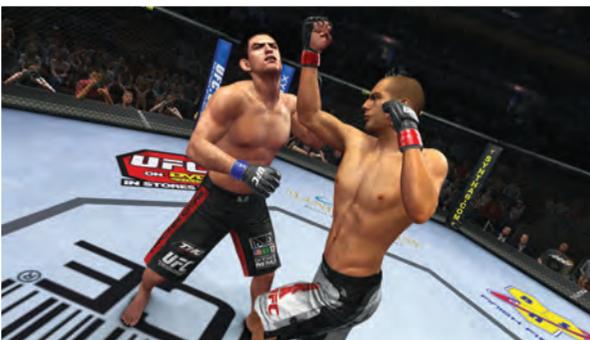
With the authenticity of the combat taken care of (and let's be honest, that's what will make or break this game), *UFC 2010* aims to recreate the atmosphere of a live UFC television event. In addition to a roster of over 100 realistically-rendered fighters, the game will also feature commentary from UFC announcers Mike Goldberg and Joe Rogan. Introductions will be handled by the "veteran voice of the Octagon" Bruce Buffer. And the Octagon girls will parade around between rounds in all their physics-defying glory.

The single-player game will feature a career mode where you can create a custom fighter and try to pummel your way to the UFC Hall of Fame. When putting together your new fighter, you'll be able to choose and combine moves from different mixed martial arts disciplines. In addition to boxing, kickboxing, Muay Thai, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, judo and wrestling (which were available in *UFC 2009*) players will also be able to choose from Sambo, karate and Greco-Roman wrestling this year. Along the way you'll be encouraged to join a fight camp, spar online and taunt your opponents during weigh-ins and interviews

in order to increase your image and popularity. Based on all that showmanship, and presumably how well you do in the actual fights, you can land sponsorships and endorsements.

New game modes in *UFC 2010* include a title mode, where you fight through a weight class to earn and defend a belt; title defence, in which you complete milestone challenges on your road to stardom; and a 16-player individual and team tournament mode.

There will of course be online play, and the developers promised fights wouldn't be hindered by the often lagged response that was widely experienced in the previous game. (That all sounds well and good, but I wonder if they did any testing on South African internet connections.) The online component of the game will be more expansive than simple match-making and will include fight camps, leagues and a ranked championship system.

If Yuke's and THQ can deliver on the features they've promised, *UFC Undisputed 2010* will be one of the most technical, deep and realistic fighting games ever created. **NAG**

Chris Bistline

K&L: Dead Men

As a third-person shooter with plenty of chest-high walls to blind-fire from, *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* (2007) was truly hit-or-miss with the public. You either hated it for being clunky, rough and seemingly uninspired beyond the story, or you loved it for the interesting story and characters, glossing over its gameplay faults. During the game, Lynch would occasionally have a psychotic episode where all enemies suddenly show as police, some with animal heads. Freaky. The co-operative play was nice either way. There is a movie in the works based on the game, with Bruce Willis as Kane.

Kane & Lynch: Dog Days

Lynch, do this, Lynch do that, Lynch stop murdering the hostages!

GENRE > Third-person shooter

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THE FAKE, CHEAP DIGITAL footage style is invoked not because the team is incapable of slamming out high-resolution textures and super-shiny shader-filled scenes, but because it leaves more to the imagination. It hints at human presence, dutifully covering up the sterility of virtually recreated locations. Also, it makes it look a hell of a lot more violent, real and nasty.

Bullets fly, heads explode and a litany of swearwords rattles a staccato rhythm over the Chinese pop song bleating from the jukebox. Lynch, a "self-medicated psychopath" ducks for cover behind a table that explodes into a shrapnel bouquet of wood splinters. The grainy, unsteady footage shudders as if the cameraman just browned his pants. *Dog Days* looks like amateur footage of a Shanghai shoot-out, defiantly not pretty in that low-light cell phone-camera kind of way, the type of clips that would make a YouTube legend, were they real.

LIFE AND DEATH

With regards to realism and violence, are there limits to what can be comfortably shown in a video game? "Sure there are," says game director Karsten Lund. "And we're probably close to them this time. But great drama is all about life and death, and stuff that's important to you."

What's important to Lynch, now the main protagonist, is his newly acquired kind-of life. Got a girl, got a job. Naturally, it doesn't last and soon he's back to doing what he does best: being violent and shooting people until they die, while Kane watches. And helps, by shooting in the same direction Lynch does. In the first game, Lynch bounced back and forth between borderline insanity and full-scale hallucinatory psychosis, though Lund says they've "toned down a lot of the more psycho thingamajigs and stuff from the first game" because they wanted to have an experience of believability.
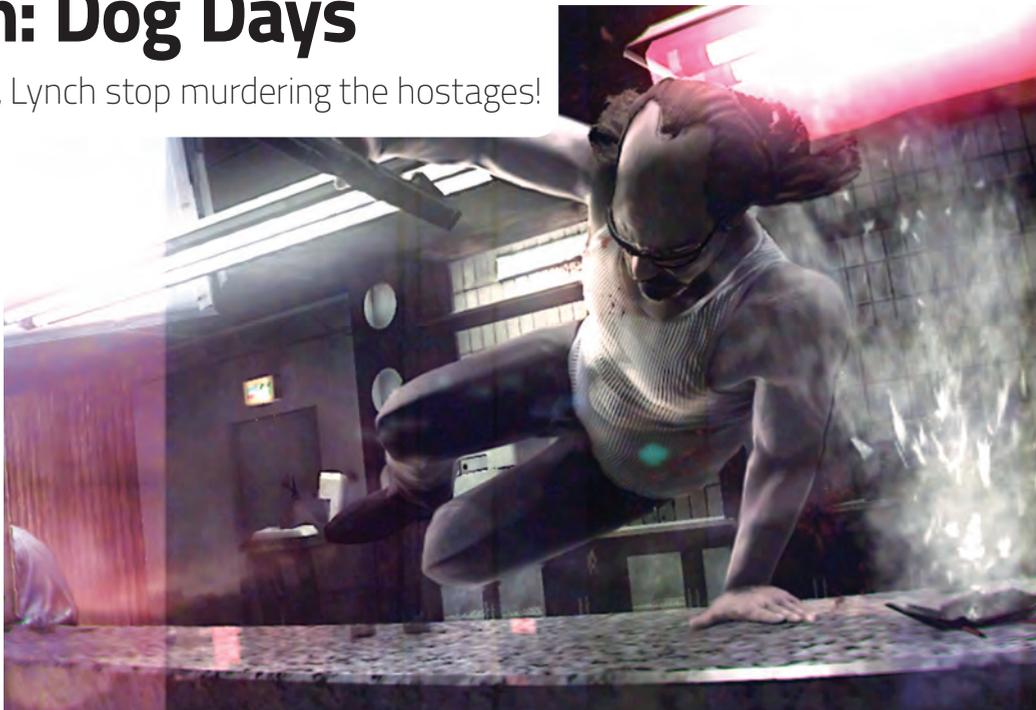
While the believability is very much heightened by the subject-matter and its presentation, the blurry, jerky camera does know when to stand aside and let the gamer do what needs to be done. "When you have a crucial need for gameplay feedback, we have to be solid. We have this shaky cam, but when you aim and shoot it needs to be tight. It's there to support the player experience,

>>
Kane & Lynch takes place in the same universe as the *Hitman* series. In *Hitman: Blood Money*, you can find newspaper articles that reports on Adam Marcus (Kane's real name) and Mr. Little (Lynch).

after all, not get in the way."

In a game where a single shot can send you back to the last checkpoint, the last thing you want is a player frustrated at the visual presentation. New to the series is a down-but-not-out mechanic to smooth over surprise shots to the head: if a stray bullet or hidden enemy takes you down, you're knocked to the floor and the camera focuses on your attacker. Gun him down or crawl to safety, and you can recover.

"THE UPPER REACHES OF THE SEA"

And what better place to almost bleed to death, crawling out of a fire-fight, than Shanghai: the largest city in China, and one of

< Kane & Lynch: Dog Days >

the largest metropolitan areas in the world, with over 20 million people. Like a science-fiction city, Shanghai is a blend of rusty dilapidated and neon high-tech, new towering developments and old crumbling slums. "You have Warsaw-like rubble piles next to busy urban developments; charcoal tea-kitchens, iPods and electric bicycles all in the same place," says Lund, explaining the teams amour with the locale. "One of the biggest issues they have in skyscrapers are bonfires on the balconies, because people make tea over charcoal. I don't even know how many skyscrapers they build a week. It's like being in a contemporary version of *Blade Runner*."

Running from cover to cover through the city-streets, the pedestrians and cars react to the gunfire. When you return fire, all the audio becomes softer and slightly muted, like it would on a cheap video camera when it's trying to compress the sound because it's too loud. Once the shooting stops, the sound slams back up and fills the scene with audio of the real Shanghai cityscape. "We don't have any thematic music playing in the game at all." explains Lund. "The only music we

> "The only music we have are 25 Chinese pop songs, especially composed for us, that will be playing from various sources in the game."

have are 25 Chinese pop songs, especially composed for us, that will be playing from various sources in the game. And then we'll have ambient tracks, which are sort of musical, consisting of recordings of the cityscape. There aren't any violins playing when something sad happens to you in real life - I hate it when you are told how to feel in that way in a game. This is your experience - we'll emphasise the tones but we're not playing the full orchestra."

EVERY DOG HAS IT'S DAY

Where the first game fell due to rushed development, leading to rough gameplay that scratched against the uncommonly sincere movie-like plot, it's clear the sequel is getting more funding and focus put on its interactive bits, while the rest continues the franchise trend of having a surprising amount of chutzpah. Where *Grand Theft Auto IV* is a cartoon satire of the culture it exploits, *Dog Days* doesn't try to hide its nature behind parody.

"You need to strike that balance." explains Lund with a little chutzpah himself. "We're trying to portray the bad guy, but in playing that character you realize that they have motivations and driving forces like the good guys. Lynch has a girlfriend, so he's got something to lose now and reason to do what he's doing. That should make sense to everybody. It's just that the way they solve their problems is usually the wrong way - and the game is about dealing with that consequence, exploring that point of no return. Everybody can turn criminal, they just need to be pushed over that boundary. And it's not really about good or band in the end, it's about trying to play somebody other than your usual special elite tactical forces, or space marines, or assassins. It's time for something else." **NAG**

Miktar Dracon
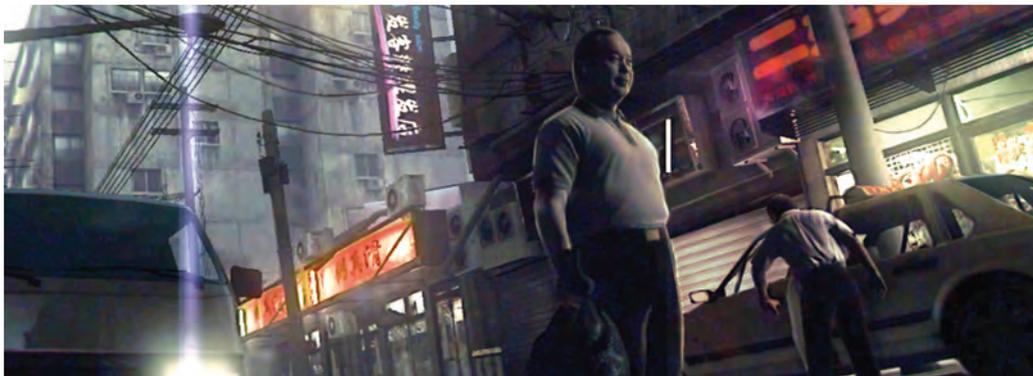
Multiplayer

While the first game had no online co-op, it did get an online multiplayer mode tacked on later via DLC, called Fragile Alliance. The interesting twist of it was that it used your Xbox Live TrueSkill rank to determine what you look like, and if you get to play as Kane or Lynch in the multiplayer mode. *Dog Days* will include new Fragile Alliance multiplayer modes, expanding on the hybrid cooperative/competitive gameplay from the first game's DLC multiplayer. Presumably, it will also feature the same offline co-op of the first game, and probably on-line co-op as well.

Metro 2033

"It doesn't matter who started the war. It's a terrible mistake for which the entire mankind is responsible."

GENRE > First-person shooter

PC   **360**   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THE MOSCOW METRO IS one of the busiest underground railways systems in the world, second only to Tokyo. It spans the entire Russia and forms the backbone of its transit system. It's also the largest civilian nuclear shelter in the world. During the Cold War, communist paranoia fuelled its expansion and construction. The Russian government intended that, were the nukes to fly, that it could move almost its entire nation's population into the Metro.

"You don't have to invent anything when writing about Moscow Metro," says author Dmitry Glukhovsky, who uses the bizarre subway as a central theme in his book, *Metro 2033*. "It's one of the weirdest things in this country and in Europe. What's formally considered to be a transportation infrastructure is not. From the beginning in the 40s, 50s and 60s, it's been planned and constructed as a nuclear shelter – hence the depth of the stations; 50 meters minimum. They're linked to the real bunkers, the 200 state objects that are located in Moscow. That's already, like, what? Can you imagine such a thing in Paris? And this is to say nothing of the fact that each station cost millions in marble and granite. And then there's the legendary separate Metro 2, linking the KGB building, the ministry of defence, Moscow State University and the great library where all the students will be if something happens."

SUBWAY STALKER

Glukhovsky's best-selling book is the basis for Ukrainian-based developer 4A's next game. You may know them better as the team behind the Chernobyl-themed open-world quasi-RPG shooter, *STALKER*. While the Moscow Metro may not be science-fiction, the game will most certainly have mutants. You'll play as Artyom, a young survivor who doesn't remember life before the bombs fell. Travelling the Metro system, he visits small pockets of surviving human civilisation while under constant attack from bipedal mutants that psychically torment their prey with paralysing, insanity inducing visions.

"I understand that every genre has its format and every genre has its limitations," says Glukhovsky. "For me the most important thing was that the game conveys the uniqueness of the setting, the spirit and the atmosphere and the visual climate. People should feel more or less what they feel when they read the book". To that end,
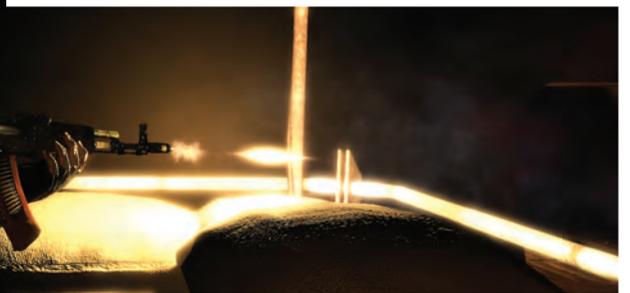
>> The same development team that made S.T.A.L.K.E.R. are developing Metro 2033, but instead of an open-world sort-of RPG, they're trying their hand at a cinematic, linear shooter with some mild mission-driven quests.
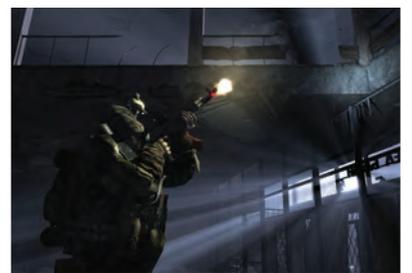
< Metro 2033 >

4A has simplified the script and plot to fit, all with Glukhovsky's blessing. The lead character also had his voice removed, to fit the genre.

In *Metro 2033,* life has banded together into microcosmic station-states, each subway station run on its own political climate and principles. Some are communist, others are fascist. The game explores these ideas even-handedly, showing the failures of these systems while also showing the people in them with understanding. As a linear shooter, between missions Artyom visits these living hubs to pick up light RPG-style quests. You interact with the traumatised people and do favours. These areas are filled with incidental conversations, people arguing, bartering, elders telling stories, mothers comforting children. The developer is aiming for a credible atmosphere.

POPULAR SURVIVAL

"Most importantly for me," explains Glukhovsky, "the computer game, being a simplification of the book, makes the idea a hundred times more popular than a book can be initially. The simpler it is the greater masses it will reach. A song by Lady Gaga will reach millions, while a book by William Burroughs will be something that only

hundreds of thousands of people in the entire world will ever read."

So in the interest of simplicity, the game's format is that of a linear, cinematic shooter, filled with thematically exciting ideas. As you explore the dilapidated tunnels connecting the stations, corrupted life forms, mutants and human bandits assault Artyom physically and mentally. With their acute sense of the eerie, 4A is well suited to crafting the hallucinations that plague Artyom. What suits their style even more, is the game's economic conceit: currency is the bullet. Playing off the survival horror spirit, a complex economy trades pistol rounds for weapons, items, and other kinds of bullets. You don't want to shoot all your money into enemies.

Irradiated areas require you to replace your mask's filters, which must be scavenged or bought. There is little in the way of a HUD. To check the time left on your air filter, you must look at your watch. The fold-out paper map is physically lifted before your eyes. In a nod to Rambo: First Blood, the flame of your cigarette lighter flickers in the direction you must go.

REALISTIC RUSSIAN

When the first trailer for the game went up on Russian blogs, there was a bizarre
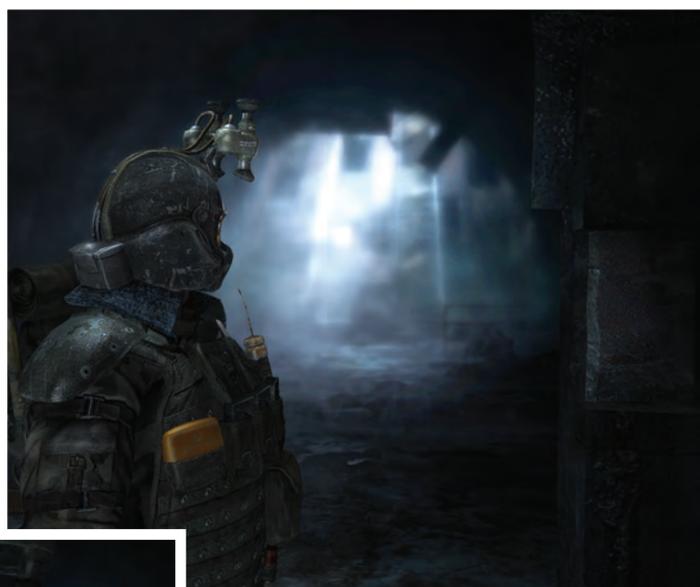
"In *Metro 2033,* life has banded together into microcosmic station-states, each subway station run on its own political climate and principles. Some are communist, others are fascist."

backlash. "What's this idiotic Russian accent again, why do they have to portray us as morons", wrote one commenter. Originally, Glukhovsky had wanted the Russians to speak with perfect American accents. He wanted to show that the Russians aren't just the stereotype, that they're human, with the same fears and same hopes. Unfortunately, he didn't win that one and THQ insisted on the rolling-R Russian accents. What Glukhovsky did manage to do, is convince THQ not to replace the R in the *Metro 2033* logo with the Cyrillic backwards 'R', which is actually a vowel.

In a gaming industry where Russians are regularly portrayed as extremists, doing all sorts of bad things on American soil just because it's cooler that way, it's refreshing to see a rich and distinctly Russian setting, with its secretive subterranean constructions, that doesn't involve America being the hero. It may have fantastical elements, but according to Glukhovsky, the game echoes a more realistic concern for the future. "When the apocalypse comes, it comes to everyone - it's too late to understand who caused it, who was the first to strike. Probably it was just an initial error, a computer bug. It doesn't matter who started the war. It's a terrible mistake that the entire mankind is responsible." **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

'Ello beastie... You've got desert in my icy wasteland.

HANDS ON

Lost Planet 2

Trapped in ice

GENRE > Third-Person Shooter

PC **360** **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

IT'S BEEN TEN IN-GAME years since the events that transpired when Capcom first lost their planet. The fight for T-ENG (Thermal-ENerGy) rages on as a number of factions (we're told there will be six playable factions in the final game – all of which are at war with each other) battle the Akrid (basically giant bugs – think *Starship Troopers*) on the planet E.D.N. III. This perpetual feud (along with all the bullets and grenades that accompany it) has had an interesting side effect: pockets of vegetation (read: lush jungle environments to shoot giant bugs in) are starting to pop up all over the once ice-covered planet. It's not quite clear why – some believe it is caused by the activity of Category G Akrid (Japanese for "even bigger giant bugs"), while others seem to think it's caused by T-ENG deposits buried underground. None of that matters, because we're all just here to pilot mechs and shoot giant bugs anyway.

We were given the opportunity to take *Lost Planet 2* for a test drive recently, and things are looking good. If you enjoyed the first game, the sequel is looking to offer up more of the same, with some extra awesome-sauce thrown in for good measure. The game won't focus on the tale of a single character this time. Instead, you'll create and customise your own character's look, weapons and abilities and join up with different factions throughout the game, with the story being told from the perspective of each group, rather than that of the individuals within. The biggest new feature is the four-player co-op, which will let you play through the game with
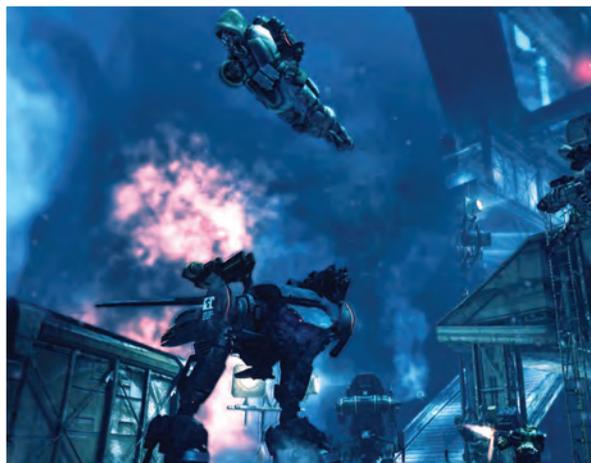
friends or a bunch of strangers online (you can also choose to have the characters joining you be controlled by the AI, if you're more of a one-man wolf pack). The game will be filled with numerous, crazy boss battles against gigantic enemies. These bosses will require teamwork to take down in whatever manner you choose. Traditional weapons, Vital Suits (mechs, baby!) and journeys into the gross, fleshy intestines of massive creatures – all these will be methods of taking down the spectacularly huge boss critters. Another change is that your stored T-ENG (which was constantly siphoned away to keep you alive in the icy wastelands of the first game) will now not be drained constantly in all areas of the game world – when you're travelling through the jungle for instance, your T-ENG stores will not be gradually depleted (at least, not as drastically as it is in the ice- and snow-filled zones). Versus multiplayer will accompany the cooperative play, with game modes from the original game

making a return, together with a few new modes to mix things up a bit.

Our time with the preview build was short, but fun. Even in its incomplete state, the version of the game we played was polished and solid. The game looks to be filled with a number of unique ideas and gameplay mechanics, and we're looking forward to seeing what comes of this second outing into the world of *Lost Planet*. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

>> Marcus Fenix and Dominic Santiago from *Gears of War* will make guest appearances in *Lost Planet 2*. Joining them in this little game-universe crossover is Albert Wesker from the *Resident Evil* series.

>> Keiji Inafune (often referred to as the father of *Mega Man*) is credited as executive producer on *Lost Planet 2*. He's also one of the creators of *Dead Rising*.

HANDS ON

Striding?

Walt: sending now
Walt is offline and can't receive messages right now.
Sent at 6:07 PM on Thursday
Michael: \o/
Sent at 6:54 PM on Thursday
Michael: ...
Walt: what?
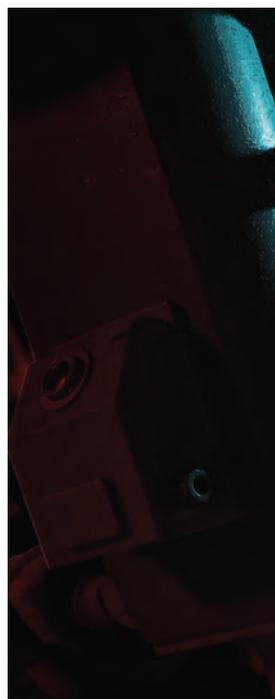**Michael:** Striding? "The idea of striding through a submerged U-Boat that is prowling for enemy vessels during World War 2 certainly has a macabre allure to it."
Walt: A captain strides. Never seen a war movie?
Michael: Oh - LOL
Never mind I read it wrong. Well in U-boats it's more sweating and hunching. ;)
Walt: unless it's a short captain
Michael: LOL
Walt: 'Ja, Heinz, Kaptain Flugeler might be a midget, but look at zat stride...'
Michael: LOL. Okay... I give up.
I'm using this little chat in the preview - you mind?
Walt: nope, go ahead...

Silent Hunter 5: Battle of the Atlantic

Rising to new depths?

GENRE > Simulation

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THE IDEA OF STRIDING* through a submerged U-Boat that is prowling for enemy vessels during World War II certainly has a macabre allure to it. So much so, in fact, that Ubisoft are releasing the fifth game in a series that is exactly about that. This time around, though, *Silent Hunter* promises to be less niche-market-oriented, giving all players a chance to launch a few torpedoes and send massive ships to their watery graves.

At least, that's what they're saying. The truth is that this franchise has, historically, appealed to a smaller market, simply because it is a pedantic, complex series, requiring a lot of patience and quite a lot of technical skill. But *Silent Hunter 5* is going to be a more personal experience, with the player even able to navigate the U-Boat in the guise of a captain persona. Crew interactions will even be possible, and a simpler game dynamic will be available for newcomers to take advantage of. Naturally, those that enjoy the technical side of sinking ships will still be able to enjoy the nitty-gritty bits. It's all a matter of option settings.

The player will feel like a captain more than ever in this game, thanks to a crew of 11 characters that range from first mate through to ship's cook *[I recommend making friends with him. Ed]*. An advanced order system will be part of the realism, as well as the depiction of tension and fear felt by the crew.

The game will make several U-Boat models available to the player, complete with variable, upgradeable weapons. These will form the stage for a game that is far more cinematic than before. The improved

environment graphics look pretty good already; although we're assured that they're getting a little more spit and polish. The improved enemy AI will add to the realism brought on by the environments. Enemies will react to the player's presence now, meaning that he will have to be extra careful on his stealthy mission of oceanic destruction.

When all is said and done, the promises we have been made for *Silent Hunter 5* look impressive – one can only hope that the team delivers on what they have hyped up.

»
BAFTA winning classical composer Jason Graves will be responsible for the music behind *Silent Hunter 5: Battle of the Atlantic.* "I thought the German perspective of the story would permit more musical liberty than my previous World War II scores," said Graves. "I drew on classical composers such as Mozart and Wagner to instil a dramatic, operatic sensibility to the score and I utilized choir to the same purpose, especially in the main themes."

As a U-boat captain, you peer through the periscope. Peer, not look. You also have to grow a beard.

The difficult thing that this fifth instalment faces is appealing to a wider market. Sure, the developers have put the work in, but will the general, more casual gamer be interested in picking it up? Time will tell, although we suspect the '5' latched on to the end of the name may make it a bit of a difficult sell in the end. Still, fans will love this one, for sure – it looks like it will deliver exactly the kind of improvements the series requires. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

* See box (if you read it wrong).

Nemesis Mode (Score Attack)

Newly revealed is the "Nemesis" score-attack mode. Racing down a track, trucks veer ahead of you and drop exploring barrels in your car-face. Blue barrels take away seconds from your timer, while red barrels bring delicious instant-death followed by a respawn. Overtaking a truck adds precious seconds to your timer. Enemy cars randomly appear and try to get all up in your grill, because they're a-holes like that. Drive fast, and the timer stops counting down. Run out of time, and it's Sudden Death: enemies get nastier with extra emphasis on how much they hate you and your attempt at getting a high score.

Split/Second: Velocity

Now with added velocity!

GENRE > Arcade Racing

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

WE TOOK AN EARLY look at the combat-racing explode-a-thon that is *Split/Second* last year (August Issue, Page 44). What we got to see and play at E3 in 2009 left a positive impression. With its release right around the corner, we take a peek to see what's changed.

Split/Second now has "*Velocity*" added to its name, giving it an extra vector into our hearts. The track is still your weapon: instead of gaining boost by drifting and close-calls, you build up a "power-play" meter that can be used to blow up specific targets ahead of you, either dropping bombs on opponents or changing the track layout permanently by dropping an ocean-liner on them. Certain triggers reset each lap, like the helicopters that carry bombs. The HUD has remained sexy and minimalistic: everything you need to know is positioned behind the car like the world's most useful bumper.

As the power-plays are the core concept that the game's fun hinges upon, it's been revealed that the tracks have more granularity to them than initially thought.

Driving a track twice doesn't show you the same thing each time, as the career mode gradually unlocks more power-play triggers in a track to keep them fresh through repeated races. The career mode is still structured around a TV-episode theme, each episode being five events and a finale. The game is designed so that each episode is roughly a half-hour in length and when finished, you even get teasers and trailers for upcoming episodes. Perfect for the busy gamer who wants a more measured chunk of distraction.

It remains to be seen if 'dropping a bridge

>>
The new score-attack mode seems very much inspired by a certain scene from Terminator 2, don't you think?

on your opponent' will take off with the same kind of nitrous-fuelled fervour that 'driving fast and ramming your opponent off the road into a slow-motion pan-around crash' did with the *Burnout* series. While it may be obvious to compare *Split/Second: Velocity* to Criterion's "risk equals reward" franchise, the comparisons will undoubtedly be made. Just a casual glance at *Split/Second* reveals the kind of polished visuals that scream *Burnout*. Will *Split/Second*'s ability to drop a 747 on someone give it enough punch to stand on its own merits? We think so. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

DEVELOPER > Dimps/Capcom   **PUBLISHER** > Capcom
RELEASE DATE > April 2010   **WEB** > www.streetfighter.com

Super Street Fighter IV

The best 2D Fighter ever just got better

GENRE > Fighting					
PC	**360**	**PS3**	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

HANDS ON

IT'S BEEN OVER A year since the original *Street Fighter IV* game was released and the general consensus at the time was that it was the most balanced *Street Fighter* game in the history of the franchise, and also the most visually appealing. The only negative about the game was that it was slightly easy and, even on the most difficult game settings, the AI was somewhat disappointing. However, these criticisms could not detract from the overall great game that it was.

Super Street Fighter IV goes a long way to address the issues with the game. Most importantly, the game is more challenging than before and that alone should yield many more hours of play. The game also seems to move faster and requires much more attention, especially on the higher difficulty levels. All of this makes for a better game that caters more to the hardcore *Street Fighter* fans than the original game, which was a little more welcoming to a wider range of players.

Visually the game has not changed much; there are new intro animations which have swopped out the inked effect in favour of an etched drawing style. Capcom has not been lazy with in-game video either because all videos are new including character specific ones. Gone are the anime-like prologue and ending videos. In their place are still shots and voiceovers.

With ten new characters from previous games, including classics like Matoko, T. Hawk, Adon and several others, the game caters to almost every single style of fighter in the *Street Fighter* universe. To date, this is the largest roster the franchise has ever had in any single game that is not a crossover title. *Super Street Fighter IV* looks to be better than the original in every way. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

>> Only nine new characters have been named, but there are actually 10 in total, each with new background stage and theme music. Costume colour changes and such that previously had to be bought are now readily available, and word has it there will be bonuses for owners of the original *Street Fighter IV* game.

The Reviewers

In the spirit of our *StarCraft II* obsession, we can think of nothing else but *StarCraft II*. Obsessively. Is this enough words yet? How about now?

Adam Liebman
Medivac. When he's not playing games, he's saving lives/babies from burning buildings.

Alex Jelagin
Roach. Able to hide away for prolonged periods of time, only to pop up and "harass" anyone nearby!
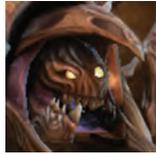
Chris Bistline
Planetary Fortress. When all else fails, when the fronts have collapsed, you always turn to Chris.

Dane Remendes
Larva. Not much to look at, but can turn into just about anything. Except a PS3 fanboy.

Geoff Burrows
Archon. Has two personalities: Geoff and Geoffrey. Geoffrey's mean. Geoff likes tea.
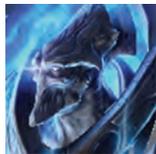
Michael James
Siege Tank. Likes to stand in one place and fire off orders. Looks like a mean piece of work, but needs backup to get the job done.

Miktar Dracon
Dark Templar. You know he's always somewhere. You never can tell when he's going to strike, but you know it's going to ruin your day.

Neo Sibeko
SCV. Could build a go-kart out of a paperclip, some mouldy bread and a feisty old duck. Hardware gets him hot and sweaty.

Tarryn van der Byl
Infestor. Sneaky, painful to deal with but incredibly useful. Can also summon a group of infested fanboys to bail her out of tough situations.
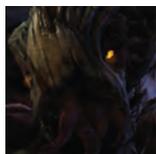
Walt Pretorius
Marine. Venerable mainstay. Versatile and reliable. Does all the grunt work that nobody else wants to. Likes winter and the Olympics.

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

The Review: These are words that make up our opinion on the game. You didn't really need us to tell you that, did you?

Box Outs: More good stuff. Just in a box.

Genre and Platforms: What kind of game is it and what will it run on? All available platforms are bolded. The one we reviewed it on is red.

Game Name: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. There's also a summary line for added spice!

Screenshots and Captions: A picture's worth a thousand words. The captions are mostly just fart jokes...

The Score Box

Age Rating: Lets see some ID, son

Multiplayer Icons: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

DRM: Applies to PC games only: Internet connection required, disc required, or no DRM beyond a serial key

Online Services: Is the game distributed/available over an online service, or does it gain additional features such as multiplayer by connecting to said service? Required services are bolded.

Plus/Minus: What we liked and didn't like, in convenient bullet-point format

Bottom Line: Here's where we boil down the entire review to one sentence. Because reading is hard...

Award: See below for details

Score: Further simplifying the bottom line to a number out of 100

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 worst garbage.

Quick Hits

THE SIMS 3: HIGH-END LOFT STUFF

The Sims 3 franchise is rocking already, with one game changing expansion (*World Adventures*) released a few months ago, and a new Stuff Pack newly arrived on the shelves. Like with the Stuff Packs for the *The Sims 2*, *High-End Loft Stuff* doesn't do anything to change the game dynamic. Rather, it adds a truck-load of new things to cram into your sims' home. This time around, it's all the classy kind of stuff you would find in a loft apartment, from corner bath-tubs through to game consoles and glass coffee tables.

Bottom Line: *High-End Loft Stuff* pack doesn't change the game, but it does change the virtual décor.
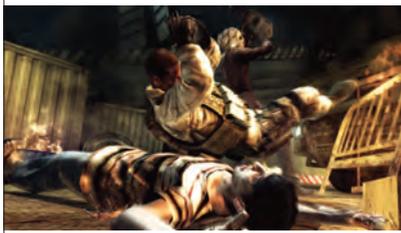
RESIDENT EVIL 5: GOLD EDITION

If you somehow missed out on the action horror Uruboros fragfest that was *Resident Evil 5*, then this is the perfect opportunity to redeem yourself. *Gold Edition* gives you the full game as well as a handful of additional content that's also available as separate DLC in case you already own the game.

There are two new story chapters, an updated Mercenaries mode with new characters and combat moves, eight new figures for you to ogle at, and a few other cosmetic extras. *Lost in Nightmares* follows the events that lead to Chris and Jill becoming separated in the field during an inspection of Wesker's mansion, some time before the events of *RE5*. It has a brilliant oldschool *Resi* feel to it that's sure to please veteran fans. The second story mission, *Desperate Escape*, takes place right after Chris and Sheva face off against Jill and Wesker. Jill teams up with West African BSAA member Josh Stone to escape the Tricell facility. It's an action-packed story that will be perfect for those who enjoyed the faster pace of *RE 4* and *5*.

Bottom line: The perfect way to play *RE5* for the first time.

Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.
NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

GOD OF WAR III

PS3

96
94
95

BIOSHOCK 2

PC

88
89
88

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR
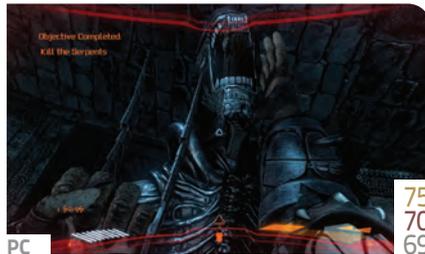
PC

75
70
69

DANTE'S INFERNO

360

85
72
73

HEAVY RAIN

PS3

89
88
90

STAR TREK ONLINE

PC

62
65
60

Resist the fart joke!

God of War III

The end of Greek myths

GENRE > Action

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

I WAS GOING TO SAY something here about epic proportions, epic scale, epic enemies, epic stuff, epic etc., to start things off, but this just made me realise that these words will not be adequate to describe just how entertaining, how grandiose, how creative, how in your face *God of War III* is. All that you really need to know is that if you were planning on buying, or have already bought a PS3 specifically with *God of War III* in mind, that purchase has been justified by the tremendous force with which the game has entered the action-game scene.

The first half hour of this much-anticipated final game in the beloved trilogy makes for what are possibly the creatively loudest, most impressive opening moments that you've ever experienced in a game. It picks up right where the second game left off, with Kratos hitching a ride on the back of the Titan, Gaia, as she makes her way up the side of Mount Olympus to reach (and maim) Zeus - the man himself, the King of the Gods. You're not prepared for what these early moments have to throw at you. Gaia is a living level, with you controlling Kratos as he fights off enemies while attempting to traverse Gaia's

gargantuan form as she tries to swat the Greek gods assailing her out of the sky with swipes of her massive hands. The two of you are not alone, either. Other Titans join Kratos and Gaia as this ridiculously imposing army makes its way to the top of Mount Olympus. Bear in mind that all of this happens in-game and all of this is happening while you continue to fight off gods and monsters. Gaia's

writhing when she is attacked by a Leviathan from the sea below sends you flying through the air. Her climbing motion changes the layout of the level in a Titanic heartbeat. You've never seen anything quite like this before, and what's even more absurd is that the game continues to throw phenomenal moments like this at you throughout. It helps that this is easily one of the best looking, best

< God of War III >

sounding and most technologically mind-blowing games out there.

This is the thing about *God of War III*: like its fury-filled protagonist, the game never backs down even for a moment. The pacing is impeccable and the game struts its stuff flawlessly. Even though the story is, in essence, as simple as it could possibly be (vengeance, anger – that sort of thing), it's the way that it's presented that puts this game above and beyond any action game that came before it. It's as entertaining, as breathtaking and as over the top as we always imagined the series could be, but never thought it would. Don't get me wrong: the first two titles were fantastic, but this final act in the trilogy puts them both to shame. I won't divulge any story details (other than the fact that you're out to kill Zeus – this much you know already), because I'd rather you experienced them for yourself, but know this: the set pieces that the Greek-mythology inspired story allows for could rival those of big-budget Hollywood blockbusters.

In terms of gameplay, there aren't any revolutionary changes – just heaps of polish. *God of War III* falls somewhere between the action-heavy focus of the first game and the more cerebral elements of the second (which embraced the game's adventure elements), offering up a mixture of both which makes for boredom-free pacing and gameplay that never feels old or overused. It's clear that this

game was crafted with love and even the puzzle elements (which are not the game's focus) are expertly done. There's even a brain-bending, *Echochrome*-style puzzle in the game. Don't expect revolutionary changes in the combat system either, because the developers clearly knew that the combat system was already as great as they needed it to be. Instead, expect a highly polished reworking of the combat, which now flows more gracefully, feels much smoother and is easier to keep track of than in the previous titles. The new ranged grapple is much appreciated and highly effective, and the rest of the combat system will surprise you with just how well-animated, meaty and powerfully efficient it is. In addition to Kratos' trademark blades on chains (the Blades of Chaos in *God of War*, the Blades of Athena in *God of War II* and the Blades of Exile for this third game), you'll gain access to a number of different, very powerful weapons like the Cestus (a pair of fist gauntlets, which are slower but more powerful than the Blades of Exile), each of which has a magic power associated with it. In addition, you'll gain a number of items along the way (none of which I'll name for fear of giving away part of the story) which allow you to perform certain special abilities (like one which provides a ranged attack, and another which lets you dash and run up walls). These items are powered by a third meter (you've got health,

>>
Each game in the *God of War* series has had a different director at the helm. David Jaffe (creator of the game) was the main person responsible for the first. Cory Barlog (also a huge part of the first game) took over when Jaffe exited the scene. When Cory left Santa Monica Studio after finishing the second game, Stig Asmussen stepped up to the challenge of directing the third game's development.

magic and item meters) that is depleted when they are used, but automatically recharges rapidly when not in use. These new weapons and items never stop being relevant and you'll find yourself switching between them on the fly quite often. This is augmented by the fact that holding L1 and tapping X during combat will switch to the next weapon in the queue, a system which makes taking full advantage of every trick you have up your sleeve a seamless, painless affair. Each weapon also follows the same button presses for combos (the more powerful of which are unlocked by upgrading each weapon), meaning that you don't have to study a thousand different button combinations for each weapon to get the most out of them.
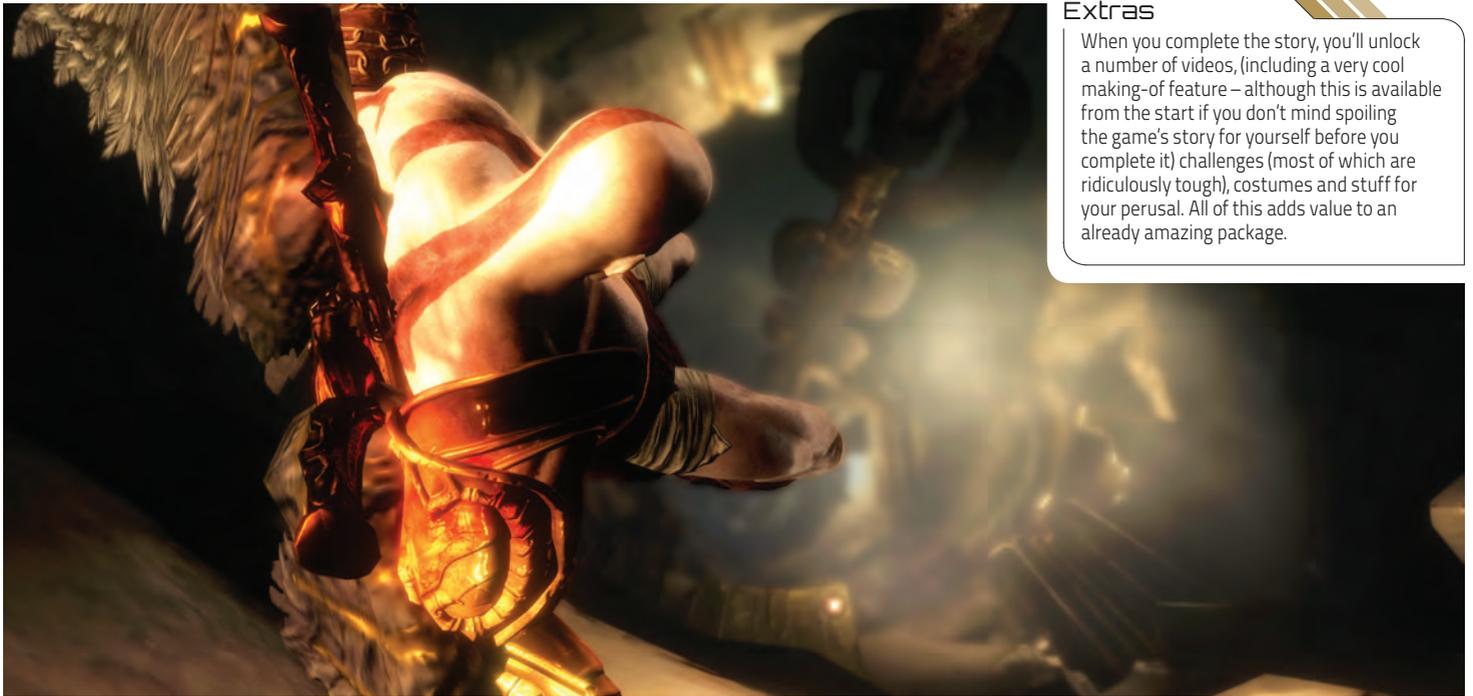
Extras

When you complete the story, you'll unlock a number of videos, (including a very cool making-of feature – although this is available from the start if you don't mind spoiling the game's story for yourself before you complete it) challenges (most of which are ridiculously tough), costumes and stuff for your perusal. All of this adds value to an already amazing package.

God of War III is astounding in every way. Kratos may be an archetypal angry anti hero, who forces you to loathe him for his unsympathetic, unrelenting pursuit of vengeance, but at the same time you'll grow to love the character as you spend more time with him. More so than in the previous titles, you'll grow attached to the character for what he is: a tragically broken man who simply seeks atonement for his past mistakes. The game's ending is very sudden and will leave your jaw loosely flapping about, but it is extremely fitting for the character of Kratos. The game is one hell of a ride. The gameplay, the technology on display, and the scale of it all will leave you breathless. David Jaffe said it best back in

2007: "*God of War* explains, or ultimately will explain, why there are no more Greek myths". *Dante's Inferno, Devil May Cry, Bayonetta, Ninja Gaiden*: all of these are great action games (some even best *God of War III* in certain areas), but none of them can hold a flaming sword to the sheer brute force with which *God of War III* has punched the action genre in the groin and proved that there can be only one true God of War. Not only does it excel within the confines of its genre, but as a complete game, as a true piece of high-quality entertainment, *God of War III* stands among the greatest ever made. You can complete the game in ten hours. Its impact will resonate far longer. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

18 www.pegi.info   1   N/A   N/A

ED'S CHOICE

›Plus
+ Technologically incredible
+ Excellent action
+ Impossibly over the top

›Minus
- Nothing really

Look & Listen
For the Fun

›Bottom Line
If you bought a PS3 specifically for *God of War III*, your purchase was just justified a thousand times over.

96

NIER

NOTHING IS
AS IT SEEMS...

APRIL 2010

ÜBER COMPETITION OF THE GODS!

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1 x God of War III PS3 250GB bundle
1 x T-Shirt

PS3
PlayStation.3

Q&A

God of War III

> The franchise seems caught between trying to be fresh and innovative, yet ensure the loyal fans get the staple features they've grown to love (like the sex minigame). Has it been difficult walking the line between that?

No. We are major fans of the game as well, and I guess if it feels good/right to us, the fans will like it as well. Of course we always welcome feedback from the fans to help us develop new ideas.

> One strong point of the franchise has always been it's animation: do you use any motion-capture for the character animations?

Our animators are fantastic and because of this we try to use as little Mo-Cap as possible. However, due to the size of the project, we ended up using Mo-Cap on some of the cinematic portions of *GOW III*. In these cases we made sure that the Mo-Cap got us part of the way there before having the animator polish the data to ensure that it stays consistent with the other animations found in the game.

> There have been rumours of online cooperative play for years, in spite of the franchise being grounded in a solo experience. Do you think God of War needs buddy action?

I don't think this particular game needs it. I actually think it could hurt *GOW III*. We started telling a story two games ago that was a single player experience and it would be disruptive to add it in the final chapter. I have to say though; from a gameplay standpoint it is intriguing. I can see this game working in co-op...

> What was the reception to the "remastered" *God of War* collection like?

Fantastic! It was great to be able to get those game out to the old fans in the 'ultimate' form while at the same time gain some new fans. I am really proud of how that turned out.

> What was the biggest challenge during the development of *God of War 3*?

There were several challenges. Getting the PS2 game up and running so we could design things on the PS3 took some time. We lost some key people on the team, which was tough as well. Managing such a large team which almost tripled since *GOW1* was a learning experience. However, the single biggest challenge was going from the alpha stage to the final stage. The game was so large and complex and getting it all together and polished required a particularly special effort from the team. I am very proud of what we have done, and from my perspective we were up for the challenge.

> Will the challenge rooms make a return in God of War III, and if so, will there be leaderboards or any other PSN integration?

You can expect the challenges to return. We won't be doing PSN integration though. This is something I really wanted but we had our hands full getting the 'regular' game done.

> "I think people are really going to appreciate how we are doing weapon switching in *GOW III*. The fact that you can switch through so many weapons without a pause menu is very elegant."

< God of War III: Q&A >

> **Do you think Kratos, as a character, is as popular as he was at the start of the franchise? Do you think he needs to be refreshed or renewed, or do you think people are happy with him as he is? Why would he need to be refreshed?**

There is more to him than what we have shown up to this point and hopefully this comes across when you play *GOW III*.

> **How was the transition of developing for the PlayStation 2 to the PlayStation 3?**

Bigger than the jump from PS1 to PS2. The whole art pipeline changed. The team doubled in size, which emphasized a bigger strain from a management standpoint. Understanding the technology and what we could do with it from a design perspective was quite a learning experience.

> **While developing *God of War* III, what has been your favorite action games that you've played since the release of *God of War II*?**

I liked *Heavenly Sword* quite a bit. I thought there were some really neat emotional experiences in the game that helped drive the story. I liked *Batman* as well. It had very good pacing and the sequences with the Scarecrow were amazing.

> **Do you see *God of War* as a core Sony franchise in the eyes of the fans, as in, when they think Kratos, they think PlayStation?**

I don't think we are there quite yet, but it is approaching.

> **Would you ever consider a spin-off in the *God of War* universe, or do you think *God of War* is too dependant on Kratos being the protagonist?**

I would consider it, but we need to be very careful. The world of Greek Mythology is a rich backdrop, but it is really important to develop the character in the right way to make that world believable.

> **Why is Kratos so angry?**

Because he was tricked by the Gods into killing his family in *GOW I*. I would be pretty mad about that...

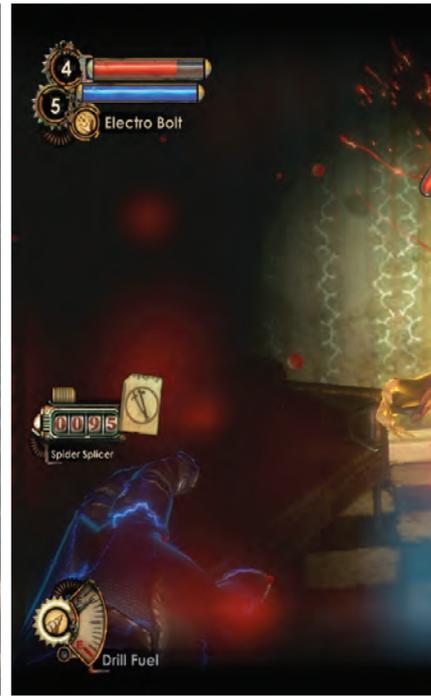> **Is there a Mrs. God of War?**

Yes, and Kratos was so mad that he killed her in *GOW1*.

> **If I've never played a previous *God of War* game, how is *God of War III* going to ensure that my play experience is as rich as that of a long-time veteran of the series?**

That is a tough one. We have put several tools in place to help ease newcomers into the game, ways of teaching the controls and learning the back-story. The intention is that it is done in a way that is 'under the hood'. The old-school fans won't feel like they are being given a history lesson and the new players will get caught up.

> **You've successfully combined new ideas with myths that are thousands of years old. What was the process for designing Kratos and his interactions with the ancient gods?**

I think we always start with source material that is interesting. The Colossus of Rhodes is one of the 'Ancient Wonders of the World'. People find it intriguing. Incorporating it into the game gives a greater level of authenticity. Having Kratos bring it down in an epic battle and turning history on its head - - what is more Badass than that?

> **What efforts have you made to include SIXAXIS support in the game? Is SIXAXIS something that you'd like to see used more often, or do you feel that it's already a bit overused?**

We are not using SIXAXIS. To be honest it is not something we are against, we just ran out of time in the end.

> **There have been a lot of developments with control systems in recent beat-'em-ups. Where do see the future of the God of War franchise in this regard?**

I think people are really going to appreciate how we are doing weapon switching in *GOW III*. The fact that you can switch through so many weapons without a pause menu is very elegant, and allows the game to be more flexible/free-form. I imagine that we will continue to use this type of system on future products.

> **We've already seen Helios decapitated and a Chimera impaled with its own horn. How violent is *God of War 3* going to get? How much more epic can the boss battles be?**

I wouldn't say it is going to get more violent, but there are several more scenarios like the ones described above to sink your teeth into.

> **Swords on chains are cool, as are guns on boots and horses on fire. What plans do you have to keep the gameplay and weaponry fresh in future games in the franchise?**

We are focused on *GOW III* right now and have no plans on future weapons/games.

> **What is your greatest achievement in the development of this game?**

Pulling off the 'Titans'. These guys were a major challenge and I really think people are going to dig playing these sections of the game.

> **Is there anything important you'd like to add that we haven't asked?**
No, that was a very thorough Q and A.

> **Thanks for the time!**

"I wouldn't say it is going to get more violent, but there are several more scenarios to sink your teeth into."

Review

DEVELOPER > 2K Marin   PUBLISHER > 2K Games (SP) | Digital Extremes (MP)   DISTRIBUTOR > Megarom   WEB > www.bioshock2game.com

BioShock 2

A man chooses... A slave obeys...

GENRE > First-Person Shooter

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

IT'S 1968. EIGHT YEARS of in-game time have passed since we joined Jack (the protagonist from the original *BioShock*) on his descent into the tragically doomed underwater city of Rapture. [Spoilers deleted], you awaken from your ten-year slumber to discover a Rapture that has slipped even further into chaos. The ocean has continued its relentless assault on the city's foundations, consuming whole parts of the city, left with nobody to maintain its delicate undersea infrastructure. The Splicers have found new purpose in following the leadership of a psychiatrist who goes by the name of Sofia Lamb. Lamb is devious, intelligent and has risen up to govern almost the whole of Rapture since the fall of Andrew Ryan (Rapture's founder). She also wants you out of the picture. This deadly new foe will make life difficult for you, but you're up for the task – because this time, you're "Delta", a prototype in the design of the Big Daddies, and, unlike your tinny brothers, your free will has been restored.

To say any more about *BioShock 2*'s story would ruin what is a harrowing second journey through the ill-fated submarine city. All you need to know is that you're not Jack this time around. This time, you're one of those terrifyingly powerful Big Daddies. As is the nature of things, however, you're no longer at the top of the food chain, because new threats have risen during your absence. The whole game feels instantly familiar when you first load it up: the atmosphere, the controls, the game world – it'll feel as though you never left Rapture. The eerily charming 50s-inspired soundtrack will make you feel at home while at the same time making you feel uneasy with its perfect fit in this terrifically detailed, heartbreakingly broken world. The presentation of it all

is just as (if not more) slick than the first game's already mind-blowing depiction of a dream gone awry. It's highly likely that the numerous similarities between the original and this sequel will irk many gamers. Even the story is similar, both in the way that it's told (through voice recordings found scattered throughout Rapture and through communication with some of the last few semi-sane residents of the city) and in its structure. The only thing that's missing from the story is a jaw-dropping revelation to rival that which was born of your confrontation with Ryan in the first game. Regardless, the story is still shockingly powerful, moving and will leave you pondering for some time to come.

Even the gameplay is very similar, with 2K Marin having done little to change the game's formula. They didn't need to change it much anyway, because it's already rock solid. Plasmids (like magic powers, but with genetics and science and stuff – which

New Year's Eve, 1959

It is on this fateful night that *BioShock 2*'s story-driven multiplayer component begins – together with the start of the civil war among Rapture's citizens which began the end of Rapture's reign in the depths of the ocean. You choose a character, select your load out from a number of Plasmids, weapons and Gene Tonics, and head off to play your part in the Sinclair Solutions Consumer Rewards Program by testing out the latest Gene Tonics and Plasmids on other players. All of your matchmaking and character customisation can be done from within your in-game apartment, and each game you play will reward you with ADAM with which to gradually unlock new stuff to kill things with. The multiplayer (which was developed by a separate studio – Digital Extremes) is actually quite good and has a number of interesting takes on familiar game modes. A number of memorable Rapture locations (like Arcadia) from the first game worm their way into the multiplayer's map listing, and a lot of the single-player mechanics are present, like environmental hazards (such as oil spills that can be ignited with the Incinerate Plasmid) and controllable security (like turrets). Even the research camera makes an appearance: capturing dead enemies on film will give you a damage bonus against that particular player-controlled foe.

< BioShock 2 >

Smile!

The research camera has been changed up a bit for this second outing. Rather than requiring you to snap still shots of enemies to earn you research bonuses, this time around you can plan your research a bit better than simply haphazardly taking thousands of photos during combat. Focusing the camera on an enemy and clicking will initiate a research run: during this time you're free to dispose of that enemy in any way you see fit, with you gradually earning research points. Mix things up by using different weapons, Plasmids and combinations of both, and by taking advantage of different environmental hazards (like Electro Bolting a pool of water the enemy is standing in) will score you points faster. It's less intrusive than the camera from *BioShock* (it doesn't require you to collect film either) and the bonuses provided (like movement-speed bonuses when researching Spider Splicers) by researching different enemy types are very useful.

you're able to wield, unlike your Big Daddy brethren) and weapons can now be wielded at the same time, allowing you to quickly fire off Plasmids while still training a steady stream of lead on enemies. Plasmids can now be combined to create different effects, like combining the Incinerate and Cyclone Trap Plasmids to create a fiery vortex. As a Big Daddy, you've got access to weapons exclusive to the lumbering, diving-suit wearing brutes – like the rivet gun and a powerful, very manly drill. You'll still be able to purchase first-aid kits, EVE hypos (EVE powers your Plasmids), ammo and other stuff from vending machines. ADAM (used to buy Plasmids and Gene Tonics, as well as improve them) remains a valuable commodity and the primary means of obtaining it (rescuing or harvesting Little Sisters) has been tweaked in a cool new way. No longer will you simply choose to harvest or rescue the exploited little ADAM gatherers – as a Big Daddy, you can choose

to adopt them and have them gather ADAM from corpses for you. This takes time and will attract Splicers, so you'd better be prepared by laying traps, mini turrets and the like. This new mechanic also incorporates the newly introduced Big Sisters – ridiculously powerful new foes who take offense at your interrupting the Little Sister's gathering process. They're like stupidly agile Big Daddies and you'll need to throw everything you have at them to survive.

BioShock 2 didn't need to happen, but we're very glad it did. It supplements the already rich story of Rapture greatly. The improvements to the combat and gameplay make the experience much smoother, the game is filled with genuinely interesting characters that aren't simple cardboard cut-outs, and the visuals and audio (the voice acting in particular) drive the game's brilliance home. Any trip to Rapture is a trip we'll gladly make. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

18			
www.pegi.info	1	2 - 10	N/A

MUST PLAY

> Online services
Games for Windows LIVE

> Plus
+ Enthralling setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

> Minus
- Doesn't change much

> Bottom Line
Our second trip to Rapture is every bit as captivating as the first.

88

...and then he says, pretentious? moi? HA HA HA Thank you, Thank you I'll be here all week
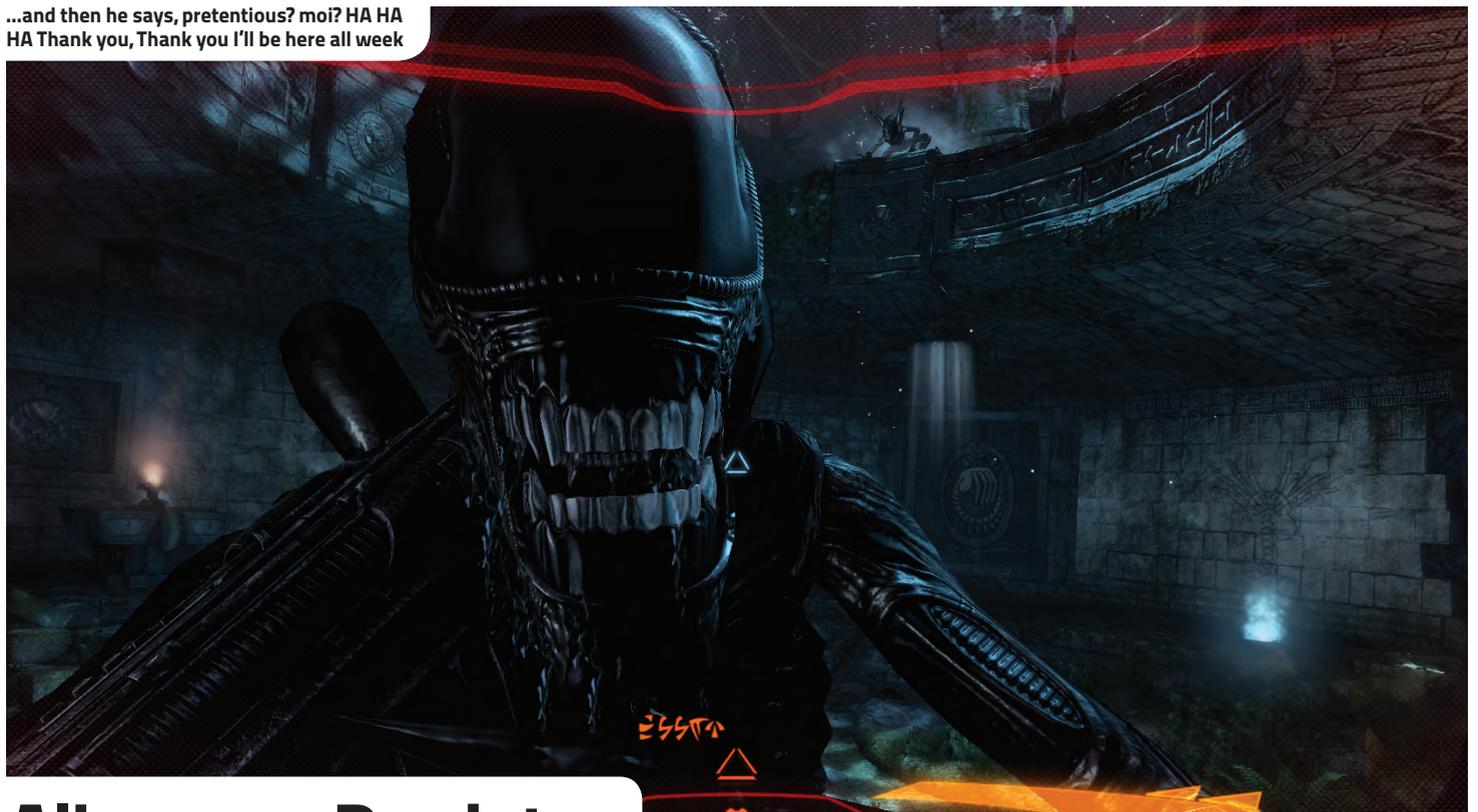
Aliens vs. Predator

They're coming outta the walls!

GENRE > First-Person Shooter/Action

PC **360** **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

SO, **REBELLION ONCE AGAIN** has their white-knuckled hands gripped on the steering wheel for *Aliens vs. Predator*. They were responsible for the brilliant (and terrifyingly tough) 1999 PC title, *Aliens versus Predator* (spot the difference). Things have changed a lot since then, so let's take a look at how the small, Oxford UK-based studio has kept up with the times.

SINGLE PLAYER

It's pretty much exactly how you remember it. Each race requires its own specific play style and each has its own campaign, which ties into the game's overarching plot. All you really need to know about the story is that there are Aliens, Predators and Marines, and Weyland-Yutani Corporation is messing with stuff that they shouldn't be messing with... again. We've got alien queens, predaliens, facehuggers, screaming Marines and all the other ingredients you need to make an *AvP* title in here.

The Marine missions play like your typical first-person shooter. You've got your gun and your motion tracker, and the goal is to shoot things before they get the chance to eat your face. The atmosphere of the Marine campaign is appropriately tense and it's also the campaign in which most of the game's story is revealed. All of the old scares are back: Facehuggers will still have you freaking out every time you hear that familiar shriek and you'll still fire thousands of bullets into nothingness every time your motion tracker makes the slightest noise. Flares and your torch help out when things get a bit too terrifying, and you've got access to some iconic weapons (like the M41A/2 Pulse Rifle)

to keep yourself alive.

Predators are hunters – and that's exactly how their campaign plays. It's kind of like *Hitman* in first person. You're pretty squishy for such a big dude, so you've got to cloak, use the environment and create distractions to stay alive. As the Predator, you've got access to some kick-ass tech (like your cloaking device) and weaponry (Plasma Caster and such), but most of the weaponry drains energy, which you have to recharge by interacting with energy sources. You're also able to jump great distances – useful for traversing the environment and stalking prey.

The Alien is like a walking weapon. Almost every part of the thing's body could be used to eviscerate, dismember and make other living things pretty unhappy. They're killers that can move at ludicrous speeds, not only on the ground, but also on walls, ceilings and pretty much anything they lay their eyes on. As the Alien, it's your chance to be the terror in the air vents, the horror in the darkness. Melee attacks dominate the Alien campaign, while stealth also plays an important role (both the Alien and the Predator have access to brutal stealth kills and finishing moves). Much like the Predator campaign, it's all about singling out your prey, hunting them down and finding a way to take them out in the most cinematic way possible.

The single-player portion of the game is decent: there's not much else to it. It's quite atmospheric (thanks to the mostly impressive visuals and instantly recognisable sound effects) and it does make you feel like you're trapped in the movies (the *Alien and Predator* movies, together with their sequels – not those *AvP* disasters) from which the game borrows its characters – but it's also very bland. Occasionally you'll engage in a memorable set piece that'll bring a smile to your face, but it's never truly exciting. It's

< Aliens vs. Predator >
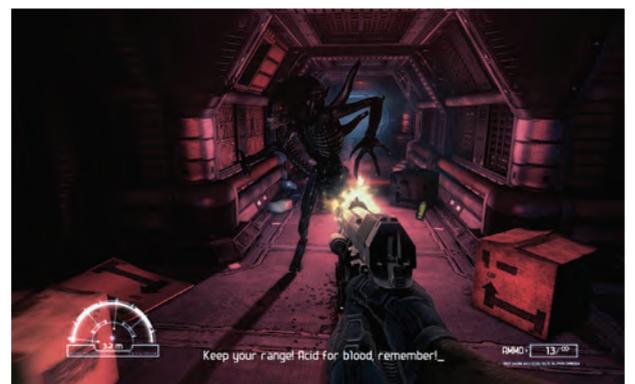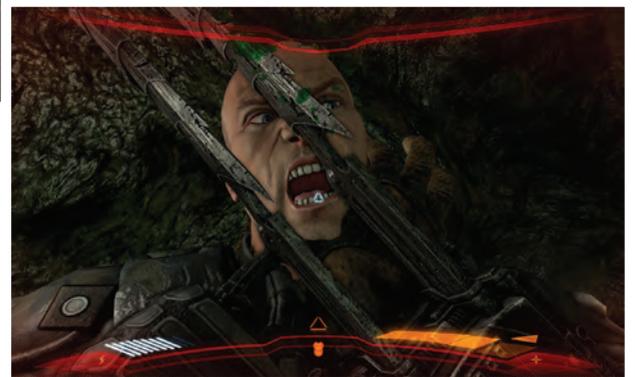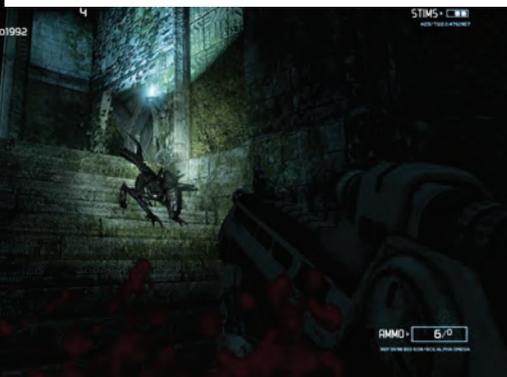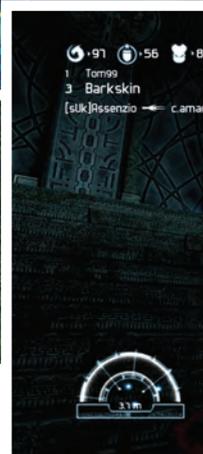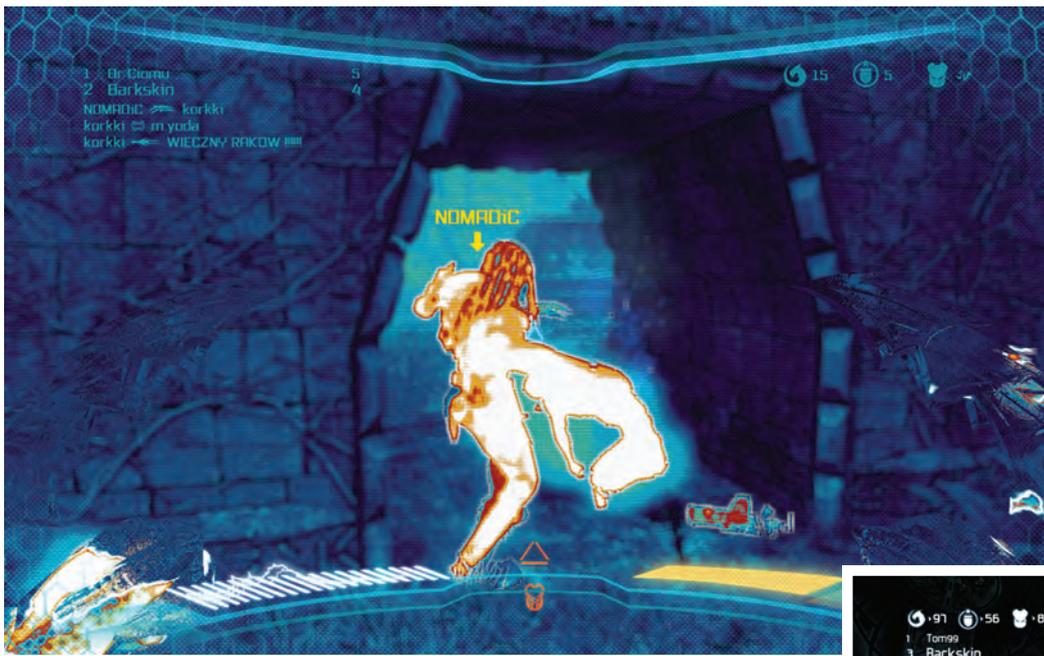
definitely worth playing through if you enjoy the series, however, and aside from some minor technical issues, the single-player component provides a fun romp through familiar territory.

MULTIPLAYER

AvP's multiplayer is a lot of fun – when you eventually manage to find a game, that is. The PC version's recently introduced dedicated servers have helped alleviate that minor niggle and since then we've come to appreciate the multiplayer's interestingly paced action, surprisingly rich atmosphere and vicious finishing moves (finishers and stealth kills also feature in the multiplayer). It's not really that there are no games to be found – instead, it's a problem that the only populated games to be found are internationally hosted (resulting in high pings for us unlucky sods – which makes for especially lousy melee combat), with no South African players to be seen. It's a real shame, because the multiplayer side of the game really is a great experience. It's let down a little by technical issues, most of them perhaps caused by sloppy network code, but this is made up for by the three-way madness that the game's numerous game modes provide.

There's something supremely (and somewhat disturbingly) satisfying about sneaking up on a real-life player as an Alien and head-biting him/her without them ever having known you were there. Similarly, there's a kind of morbid beauty to be found in standing silent, still and completely invisible as a Predator while watching a group of terrified Marine players run through the thick undergrowth below before you leap in and pick them off before they can let out their collective scream. Even the Marine (who basically has to huddle in a corner with all the other Marines on the server and hope

that their motion trackers stay silent while desperately trying to hold off the deadly assault of the game's meaner races) makes for a wonderfully horrifying and atmospheric look into the implications that this type of messy, three-sided conflict would entail.

The multiplayer's got some interesting game modes on offer. Infestation, for example, starts out with every player on the server as a Marine, but soon one player is picked to become the first Alien and start picking off the Marines. Each time a Marine is killed, they join the Alien swarm until the numbers are switched and you're left with a handful of marines trying to hold off against impossible odds. Predator Hunt is a bit like Mutant – one player is chosen to be the Predator and hunts down Marine players. If a Marine kills the Predator, that Marine becomes the Predator. Domination is a capture-the-point style game mode, but with Aliens, which automatically makes it awesome. Mixed Species DM divides the players into two teams and each player is free to choose any of the three races, while Species Team DM is true three-sided lunacy. Then there's standard Death Match (any race can be chosen, everyone punches everyone else), and Survivor, which is a cooperative mode in which four player-controlled Marines face off against never-ending waves of Xenomorphs.

The somewhat slow, methodical pace of the multiplayer might not be for everyone, but the different races are surprisingly balanced and once you've gotten used to the nuances of the melee combat and discovered the best way to play each race, you're sure to have a blast. If you can pull yourself away from *Modern Warfare 2* for a bit, give *AvP*'s multiplayer a spin. It's worth trying it out, at the very least. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

18 www.pegi.info

| 1 | 2 - 18 | 2 - 4 |
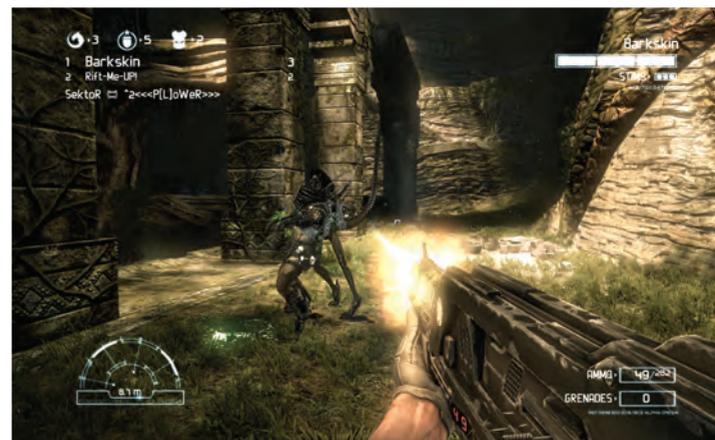
> Online services
STEAM

> Plus
+ Unique, fun multiplayer
+ Three campaigns
+ Feels like *AvP*

> Minus
- Some technical problems
- Uninspired single player

Look & Listen
For the Few

> Bottom Line
Despite being bogged down by some annoying, but minor technical issues, *AvP*'s multiplayer and single-player components still make for good times.

75

Heavy Rain

More than just a game

GENRE > Adventure

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THE IDEA OF AN interactive drama isn't really a new one. In fact, it's one that has been around for quite some time. There have even been other titles released in years gone by, like *Fahrenheit*, which clung to the ideal. In fact, people have even speculated about the inclusion of viewer-controlled content in movies and TV shows for years. The thing is that these ideas generally don't leave the drawing board (because figuring out how to make them work is tougher than you might think) and the games that have been released before didn't quite hit the mark.

Heavy Rain is different, for a number of reasons. The advance of technology certainly has something to do with it, allowing the developers to create a more solid, more believable title that ever before. But there is more to *Heavy Rain* than just more power in platforms. The game takes on a new kind of thinking, one which drives it far beyond similar efforts made in the past.

It would be good to note that *Heavy Rain* is almost not a game. While the player can earn trophies and has some control over the actions of the four characters they will control during the course of this story, there is no score, and there is no 'game over' screen. In fact, there is no way to fail at all in this title. The game is less about getting things one hundred per cent right, and more about telling a story. So, even if you miss things completely in terms of the game's rather different control scheme, the story will continue – although maybe with a slight change in the plot.

The game tells of four people who are hunting a serial killer that drowns his victims

I'm laughing at clouds

and leaves them on abandoned lots. The victims are always young boys, and they are left with an orchid and an origami figure in their hands. And the killer only strikes during the rainy season.

The four people are all characters that the player will have control over. The game dictates which character the player controls at specific times – the player is not able to choose. Ethan Mars is a father who is desperately seeking his missing son. Scott Shelby is a private eye with a heart of gold looking for clues that others may have missed. Norman Jayden is an FBI agent struggling against the twin yokes of

I'm Ron Burgandy?

< Heavy Rain >

addiction and uncooperative authorities. And Madison is a photographer who accidentally gets involved with the investigation, only to find herself in over her head before long.

Each character adds a different perspective to the long and twisting plot. The player has a similar influence. Through a series of control functions that are based on a quick-time principle, the player will have them perform actions or make statements and comments when applicable. This doesn't happen all the time; a fair amount of the game is spent watching the results of these decisions as the story unfolds. *Heavy Rain* has a branching plot line – some decisions result in little deviations that soon return to the main plot stream, while others have more drastic results. Some of them may not even have obvious results, but will affect the game's outcome, leading to one of several alternate endings.

A good example of this idea is a fight scene. The player will have to respond with applicable control inputs, as prompted by the game. Missing these prompts will result in the fight going badly. At the end of the fight, the player might knock the bad guy out, or the bad guy might get away… the story will continue either way. However, further down the line, the end result of the fight may come back to haunt the character. And yes, characters can die. Even if they do, though, the story will be pushed forward by the remaining characters, and no character will shuffle off of the virtual mortal coil unless it's as part of a plot device – no cheap deaths and constant reloads here, folks.

The control scheme the game uses has raised a few eyebrows. It's very simple, and rather revolutionary in some ways, but does have a few clunky elements. The controls, as said before, are based on quick-time principles, requiring the player to press buttons, hold down multiple buttons, move the analogue sticks or even the whole controller (yes, it uses the SIXAXIS system) according to screen prompts. Some are timed, others are not. In fact, the controls are quite varied, considering. But, as an example of clunky, the player needs to hold down the R2 button to make the character walk. Not nasty-clunky, but not slick either. They do, however, remain fairly non-invasive, adding to the idea of an interactive drama rather nicely.

A lot of hype surrounded the game's presentation and, quite frankly, it is top notch. The graphics are great, and the voice acting is very well delivered. But the graphics aren't perfect – hands and some instances of cloth, for example, sometimes leave a bit to be desired. The voice acting also has a few issues, most notably that the actors (who are playing Americans but certainly aren't Americans) sometimes let their accents get away from them. One or two of the dialogue lines also feel a little stiff. But these are minor issues, hardly deal-breakers at all.

In fact, *Heavy Rain* is a triumph, albeit one that will appeal to a more specific market. It's not fast paced action – the first few hours of the game are almost painfully slow – but it's a gripping thriller that will hook the player before long, and anyone getting to that point will push through to the end regardless. The story is deep and masterfully crafted, and seeing as this game is more about story than anything else, that's really all that matters. *Heavy Rain* will please any fan of the thriller genre, and is more than well worth the effort. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Looking good girl! Perkiness galore, let's do this

THE SCORE

| 1 | N/A | N/A |

MUST PLAY

Look & Listen
DVD · CD · GAMES · MP3 · ACCESSORIES
For the Fun

>Plus
+ Excellent story
+ Good graphics
+ Good voice acting

>Minus
- A bit slow in the start
- Not a flawless package

>Bottom Line
Heavy Rain deftly demonstrates that interactive dramas can be excellent forms of entertainment.

89

Review

DEVELOPER > Visceral Games   **PUBLISHER** > Electronic Arts   **DISTRIBUTOR** > Electronic Arts South Africa   **WEB** > www.dantesinferno.com

I need that kidney more than you do. Don't worry – you'll get by just fine with only one.

Inferno +1

The first DLC for the game has already been revealed. *Dark Forest* will add a prologue level to the game, while *Trials of St Lucia*, due for release on April 29th, will change things up a bit by adding cooperative multiplayer (in which another player controls St Lucia, who is supposedly Dante's Guardian Angel), a mission editor and the ability to share user-created levels. From the sounds of things, it's kind of like a customisable horde mode. We love co-op horde modes in our games, so bring it on.

Dante's Inferno

"Abandon all hope, ye who enter here"

GENRE > Action

PC   **360**   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

Hell-sanctioned Olympic Baby-Tossing Event: only legal in 16 of Inferno's provinces.

"Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,
Who cry out each one for the second death"

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT that Pick 'n Pay was running a special which stipulated that if you bought your groceries exclusively from them, you'd never have to worry about ever getting another speeding fine ever again [*Yeah! Ed*]. What would you do? If you're like me, you'd probably never bother with checking the speed limit ever again and just go nuts with the accelerator. What happens when you realise that Pick 'n Pay actually never had the authority to make such bold claims and you find a thousand speeding fines neatly tucked into your post box when the time comes? It's a pretty lame analogy, but something similar is the cause for everything that goes down in *Dante's Inferno*. You're Dante Alighieri. You're a veteran of the Third Crusade, and a bishop promises you that in return for joining this holy crusade to reclaim the holy land from Saladin, you will be absolved of all your sins. So you go on a wanton binge of depravity and immorality, but, as in that analogy above, it turns out that the totally trustworthy bishop is, after all, just a Pick 'n Pay [*so where do I take my fines now? I'm confused. Ed*]. Long story short (and spoiler free), there's screaming, anger and your betrothed, Beatrice, is dragged down to hell by Lucifer himself because of your lapse in judgement. You'll have none of this, so you descend into the Inferno to chase down Lucifer and get your lady back.

Dante's Inferno is based (very loosely) on the 14th century epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, which was penned by Dante Alighieri and is divided into three parts:

Inferno, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. To be more accurate, this game is based on Inferno. Being a game, a lot of creative liberties are taken here, so if you happen to be a fan of the poem and expect an exact replica of your beloved literature – don't. This game is all about the action, which the poem is without. Don't despair though: the story is still surprisingly engaging, interesting and, perhaps, may even leave you emotionally invested in Dante's harrowing journey.

Like the poem, *Dante's Inferno* is filled with disturbing imagery that is likely to offend many, many people. You'll battle babies that are trapped in Limbo (the first of Hell's nine circles) because they weren't baptised (and therefore the path to Paradise is forever closed to them). You'll fight demonic ladies

< Dante's Inferno >

that feed on the pain of fornicators in Lust (the second circle) and have scorpion-like stingers that emerge from their naughty bits. There's nudity, there are scenes of torture, pain and suffering, and it's really just an unsettling game that definitely isn't meant for the young ones or the easily offended. The religion factor is also likely to offend many, but I recommend that they simply stay away.

The game is a blatant *God of War* clone (there, I made the *God of War* reference – happy now?), right down to the control system. Light/heavy attacks, dodges (mapped to the right analogue stick), aerial juggling, light adventure elements, quick-time events, an angry anti-hero – almost everything you love about *God of War* can be found in *Dante's Inferno*. Simply replace Greek mythology with that of the Christian variety. It also happens to be a **very good** clone. The game's combat system is tight and impressively fluid, with Dante having access to both Death's scythe (which you'll acquire early in the game after battling Death himself) and Beatrice's holy cross (which is used for ranged attacks and to absolve the damned – should you choose to do so – that you encounter along your journey to the ninth circle of the Inferno) to take on hell's minions. There's an upgrade system that'll let you unlock new magic powers (and improve them), new abilities and better ways to kill enemies efficiently by spending souls
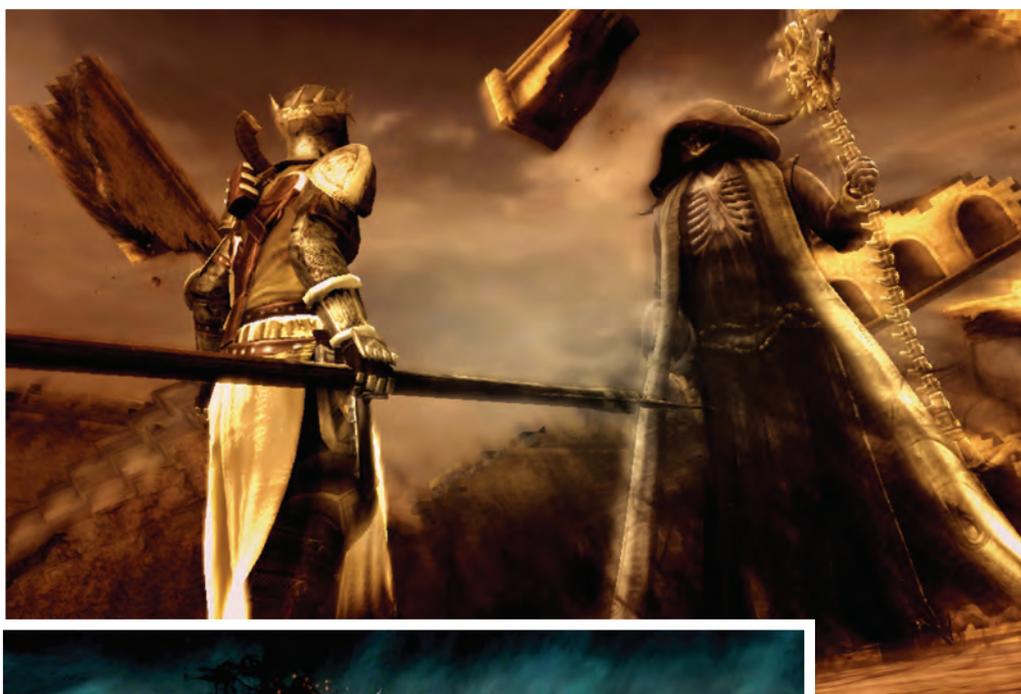
Holier than thou

Dante's Inferno employs a very basic, but functional moral choice system that leaves players with a choice: will you allow Dante to continue on his path of sin and debauchery, or will you turn it all around and show that you are truly repentant for your sins? It's pretty straightforward and is divided into Holy (which makes Beatrice's cross more powerful) and Unholy (which increases the power of Death's scythe) paths. Absolving the damned of their sins (by using Beatrice's cross) will increase your Holy-o-meter. Punishing them (by taking away their favourite toys) will fill your Unholy-o-meter. Gain enough points in either and you'll rank up that particular path, allowing you to upgrade skills on the skill tree (which is different for each) associated with said path. It's a simple system, but it does make you wonder about the religious implications of your actions.

(currency) on unlocking them. Your abilities can be augmented and altered by using relics that you'll find scattered throughout the Inferno (and will be given to you by Virgil, a poet who aids Dante on his quest), which you can equip a limited number of to provide bonuses like decreasing the amount of damage that Dante takes from enemies. You've got a health bar and a mana bar – keep the health bar filled and keep using that mana to fuel magic powers that'll aid you in the former. It'll all be instantly familiar to those that have delved into Kratos' own anger fest before. It can get repetitive and the static camera sucks (it's fairly common for enemies or environmental hazards to be blocked from view by the fixed camera), but the gameplay remains fun and incredibly fluid.

Visually the game is no slouch, spitting out enemies that are (disturbing though they may be) nicely detailed and animated, environments that are epic in scale (as too are some of the enemies) and a game world that is well crafted. On the sound front you've got good voice acting and a decent musical score. Add onto that sound effects that pack the required punch, and the game is without much fault on the technological side of things.

Dante's Inferno is not original. It doesn't innovate much. What it does do, however, is use the elements it borrows to create a wonderfully fun romp through hellish environments. It's got a good combat system, high production values and a story that is compelling. At the very least, try it out – it may not be for everyone, but we dig it. **NAG**
Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

18 www.pegi.info | 1 | N/A | N/A

>**Plus**
+ Tight, fluid combat
+ Interesting story
+ Polished and slick

>**Minus**
- Unoriginal
- Dodgy camera

Look & Listen
For the Film

>**Bottom Line**
It's not original or innovative, but *Dante's Inferno* sure as hell is impressively polished and a lot of fun.

85

Luge: with the sled

Without

Vancouver 2010

Some like it cold

GENRE > Sports

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

ANY KIND OF WORLD sporting competition gets a lot of coverage. Recently, those so inclined managed to watch the Winter Olympics held at Vancouver. People from all around the globe tuned in to watch athletes ply their chilly prowess in a number of events… although the investment in the Winter Olympics cannot possibly be as high as in the Summer Games. I mean, think about it… sunny South Africa is a great example. The last decent snow-fall in Johannesburg was in 1981, and even then it was still puny by international standards. Sure, we get snow on some of our mountains, but this is a country of summery sports – rugby, cricket, soccer and that kind of thing. We're not known for our alpine skiing or bobsled team. [*I'm into that one where they pushing a giant cheese on the floor while two janitors clean around it. Ed*]

So, realistically speaking, we're not particularly highly invested in the Winter Olympics, although I have no doubt that there were a lot of couch athletes following the games keenly on TV while the summer sun blazed outside.

So a video game version of these games isn't exactly a mass appeal product for our market. We understand the summer games, but the vast majority of this country wouldn't know a ski pole from a luge (and probably think the latter is something a proctologist uses.)

Still, the game is a fairly enjoyable one, particularly for those sports junkies out there who watch everything from major world events right through to pygmy hippo tossing regional qualifiers.

The game does many things right and the player will be able to put up a good show as the representative of an adopted virtual nation – no South African team, remember? The graphics are good, and the sound track pumps through the 14 different events (all of which seem to involve hurtling down an icy slope at breakneck speeds, relying on bits of brightly coloured wood to keep you from becoming a red stain on the pristine white snow.) The impression of speed is great and the rumbling of the controller (you'll want to hook an Xbox 360 controller up to your PC for the best results here) adds to the frantic musings about how hard snow might actually be when hit at super-sonic velocities.

Some of the controls are a bit weird, although none even match up to the strange phalange gymnastics required by *Beijing 2008*. For the most part, they break down to 'aim that way' and 'go faster', so they're easy enough to learn.

The strange thing is that, unlike *Beijing 2008, Vancouver 2010* seems to lack any kind of fanfare. It's almost a case of "you won? Oh, ok. Let's go home."

This game won't appeal to everyone, but those that enjoyed *Beijing 2008* will see a welcome return to good quality Olympic action. It's not a perfect title, but it is rather fun, none the less, provided you're willing to forgive it a few times. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

| 3 | | 1 | 2 - 4 | NA | |
www.pegi.info

>Online services
Games for Windows LIVE

>Plus
+ Good graphics
+ Great impression of speed

>Minus
- Little fanfare
- Little relevance

Look & Listen

>Bottom Line
It's not perfect, but it is fun… although the sports presented aren't very relevant to South Africa.

65

Borderlands: The Secret Armory of General Knoxx

Now with 100% more midgets riding skags like ponies

GENRE > Action RPG

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

MIDGETS RIDING SKAGS LIKE ponies*. I mean, it's not like this DLC really actually needs anything else, does it? BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE. And that's about 12-15 hours more! New places to go! New things to do! New jetpack, pyro, medic, and chemical Lancer troopers! Ninja assassin squads! Mechs! Big creepy things that look a little like the Combine Striders in *Half-Life 2*! A completely new ultra-rare tier of weapons! New vehicles, including a four-man APC with a laser cannon, mines, and a proximity blast! New quick-booster pickups! The most outrageously overpowered and totally impossible secret boss ever! Increased level cap! The World's Largest Bullet! Scooter's mama's girl parts!

Atlus Corporation's all about strategic expansion, its current strategic expansion agenda includes taking everything on Pandora for itself. Smoking cigars and directing this strategic expansion is General Knoxx of the Crimson Lance, a guy armed up with pathological cynicism and a gigantic mech suit. But this strategic expansion isn't going to plan, and a rogue agent enlists YOU! to shoot stuff, blow stuff up, and remind Atlus who the real boss of Pandora is (Bloodwing, obviously).

There's everything to love about *The Secret Armory of General Knoxx*, and one thing to hate – no fast travel stations. This DLC includes a bunch of substantial new areas, and those long drives in between them quickly become a drag even when you're making them in a neon pink tank with homing missiles. Although the neon pink tank with homing missiles helps. That's just 10 points off then, and if you've managed to hold out and say no to *Borderlands* DLC until now, it's only because you've been saving yourself for The One. *General Knoxx* will make you feel special and he likes to cuddle afterwards. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

That's second only to midgets in spaceships [I do worry about you sometimes. Ed].

THE SCORE

18 www.pegi.info | 1 - 2 | 2 - 4 | 2 - 4 |

MUST PLAY

Look & Listen — For the Fun

>**Plus**
+ More *Borderlands*!
+ Lots of new stuffs

>**Minus**
- No fast travel

>**Bottom Line**
A fully featured expansion pretending to be cheap DLC. Your mom warned you about this stuff.

90

Now you can make all the "pew-pew laser" noises you want, and only feel slightly silly.

The U.S.S. Banana. Our mission: to save the universe from potassium deficiency one solar system at a time.

Star Trek Online

Boldly going nowhere particularly interesting

GENRE > MMORPG

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

I'M NOT A TREKKIE. Sure, I've watched most of the *Star Trek* films, and won't immediately change the channel if I happen to glimpse an episode of *Voyager*, but that's pretty much where it ends for me. Cryptic's latest attempt at an MMO tries to please everyone, but when you embark on a mission as grand as this, you're bound to fail somewhere.

Right from the start, it's clear that things are not well. You're given a huge range of choice for character generation, including the ability to create a "previously undiscovered yet mysteriously part of the Federation" alien species, complete with perks and other traits, but there's not even a whiff of those bad guys with the bumpy foreheads (they are available later on, but the Klingon content isn't nearly as fleshed-out as the Federation). Once you've got over that, and the lengthy loading times, you jump into the game to discover yourself as a new recruit, stuck in the middle of a Borg attack in the depths of space. After completing the tutorial missions, killing some poorly animated Borg and usurping control of the ship, you're on your own. As is typical of an MMO, the documentation is poor, and you're basically dumped with a ton of nerd memorabilia, a million options and some quests that require you to kill lots of things. Thankfully, much of the community is as confused as you are, and is only too happy to help a floundering noob.

Combat and exploration takes place in two ways: space-based and away missions. The space combat is perhaps the best part of *STO*. It's fast-paced and action-oriented, but still has plenty of room for tactics. Trekkies: set phasers to OMG; this is where the homage peaks. You'll be diverting power, engaging Impulse engines, battling for tactical dominance in 3D space and all the other things that you'd expect. Every class of ship from the shows is on display, and you can even choose to captain a ship of a type not usually suited to your character class

(Science, Engineering and Tactical). The result is loads of customisability, but the lack of emphasis on specialisation means that it's easy to explore the depths of space alone – hardly a desirable MMO trait, but one that many will appreciate nonetheless.

Of course, the goal of the Federation is not just the complete annihilation of anyone with the wrong bump-to-forehead ratio; these folk are all about peace and diplomacy, right? Not here, unfortunately. Few current MMOs can claim to have missions as repetitive as this. There's little reprieve with the story missions (which are interesting, to be fair), as the majority of them feel as though they're also randomly generated. It feels like *Anarchy Online*, minus years' worth of expansion content. At least it feels kind of cool to explore newly discovered planets and interact with the surprisingly humanoid inhabitants. Mostly, though, you'll beam down, kill a bunch of loitering Romulans or Klingons, download the data / beam up the scientists / scan for anomalies, and beam yourself and accompanying Bridge Officers back to your ship. Wash, rinse, repeat and yawn and so on.

All of the typical MMO fluff is present, but the game is restrained by its instanced missions that leave the vastness of space feeling like a lonelier place than it ought to be. You'll spend much of your time at Earth Spacedock, where you'll perform all the

generic MMO milling: there's the ~~auction house~~ Exchange, ~~blacksmiths and tailors~~ Requisitions, places to hire Officers, take on grind quests, craft things and chat to the locals. While it's painfully clear that Cryptic cut corners to rush *Star Trek Online* out the door, one place where they didn't was in the development of the story and background. Every NPC that you talk to is delightfully '*Star Trek*', and, if you squint your eyes and hold your head at just the right angle, it kind of feels like you're in the *Star Trek* universe for real.   **NAG**
Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

>Online services
Monthly subscription required

>Plus
+ Space combat
+ Good Trekkie content

>Minus
- Very repetitive
- Poor visuals
- Generic

Look & Listen
PCs • CDs • GAMES • MP3 • ACCESSORIES
For the Fun

>Bottom Line
There are a few glimmers of hope for the future. Serious fans can beam down right now, but everyone else should give this some time.

62
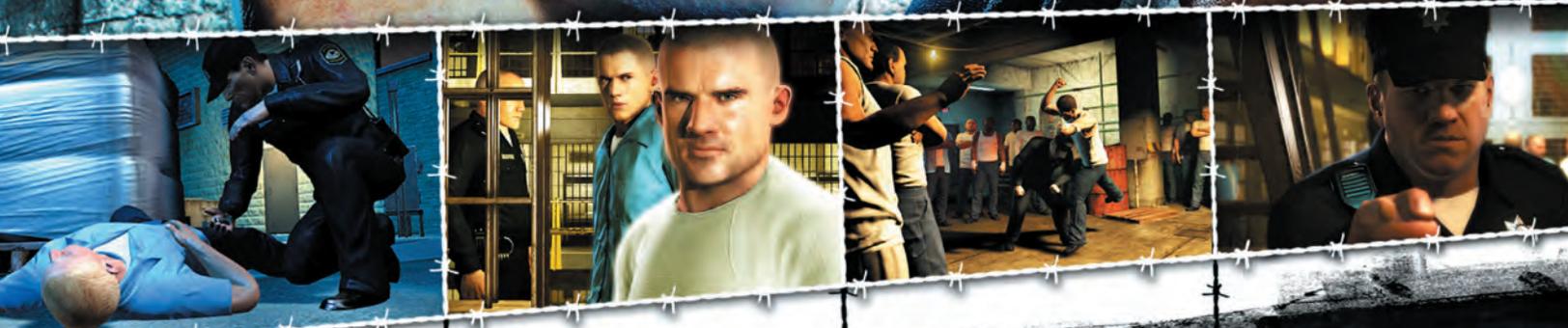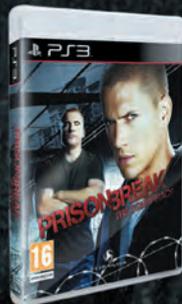
Anno 1404 Venice

More things to make Anno even more complex

GENRE > Management strategy

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

ANNO 1404 IS A fantastic game in its own right, but it was missing a couple of features that could have taken it from excellence to, err... more excellence. *Venice* is here to deliver that little boost; it adds the much-needed multiplayer mode, as well as a number of expansion-typical extras to add another layer of complexity to an already very complex game.

Aside from the multiplayer mode, two of the biggest additions are Sabotage and City Councils. Sabotage allows you to plant one or more spies in the enemy cities to perform various dastardly operations: incite rebellion, poison the local well, and commit arson and more. You can also become the victim of subterfuge; it's important to keep a constant watch on your own buildings and route out any unwelcome visitors when the need arises. City Councils are for those who like to conquer through financial prosperity; they allow you to take control over an entire island, including all local troops and economies, by buying three of the five Council seats and eventually the key to the city, at a great cost. To avoid such takeovers, owning the majority of seats in your own cities is important.

Along for the ride is a decent collection of new buildings, mostly in the form of decorative items, as well as 15 scenarios to play through. The scenarios are standalone, fragmented affairs, however; there's nothing like the original's story mode, which is a disappointment. Thankfully, the addition of the Bailiwick and its Reeves Book partially makes up for the game's previous lack of businesslike charts which I mentioned, but it's not as detailed as I'd have hoped.

Venice is just an expansion, so you really can't expect massive additions. It adds a decent bit of content to the game but doesn't change the core gameplay too much. It accomplishes what it sets out to do, but I'd have liked more additions to the resources chain and more real buildings. Regardless, there's no reason for *Venice* not to become the new standard for *Anno*.   **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

7 1 2-8 2-4

>**Plus**
+ More stuff
+ Multiplayer

>**Minus**
- No story mode
- No economy changes
- Combat still sucks

>**Bottom Line**
It's lacking some of the stuff you'd expect in an expansion, but there's still enough to make it worth the purchase.

76

Codename
Scarlett

APPROXIMATELY 18,642,911 LIGHT YEARS, 24 days, 16 hours, 59 minutes and 2 seconds away from here is a planet call LC24T – a grey-green marble orbited by eight moons and one alarmingly large (but benign) asteroid. But this story isn't about there, it's about here.

2051 | EARTH | SOMETIME IN JULY

Somewhere in between the amalgamation of Intel and Microsoft (who formed Mint-Soft) CLOUD went online – Internet 3.0[1] Many years later, almost every electronic system on the planet was a dumb CLOUD terminal and everything happened in the CLOUD and was controlled by the CLOUD[2]. Thanks to its redundant self-healing automated backup matrix various attacks against CLOUD failed over the years. It was considered infallibly foolproof and 'watertight'. Many saw this as a challenge, especially Dr. Tide. From his secret dome-base he began developing the rAge virus. Split into x number of unrelated items of code that, when put together, would bring CLOUD to its knees. Dr. Tide was plotting the digital downfall of mankind[3]. This plot has been discovered by a team of game developers, and right now they're testing some software that should save the day.

Enter our heroine, Scarlett. A professional game tester, who by some quirk of fate, destiny and a loud crack of thunder, finds herself part of CLOUD, trapped, and a smidge ticked off.

What began as a simple play test session would change her life forever...

Scarlett Q&A

> What have you been up to?
Kicking butts and taking names, don't look so worried you're safe... for now.

> What will you be doing ten minutes from now?
Probably answering a stupid question. How many are there anyway?

> What is your favourite position?
Tip of my barrel to the back of your skull, but not touching I don't want grease or dandruff on my piece.

> What is the airspeed velocity of an unloaded swallow?
Do you really want to find out if you can still use a straw without lips?

> What 3 things do you have in your handbag?
Lipstick, a half empty tube of K-Y Jelly, 2 tickets to the Russian ballet.

> Turn on?
Classic style, high calibre and berets.

> Turn off?
Campers, snipers and tubers.
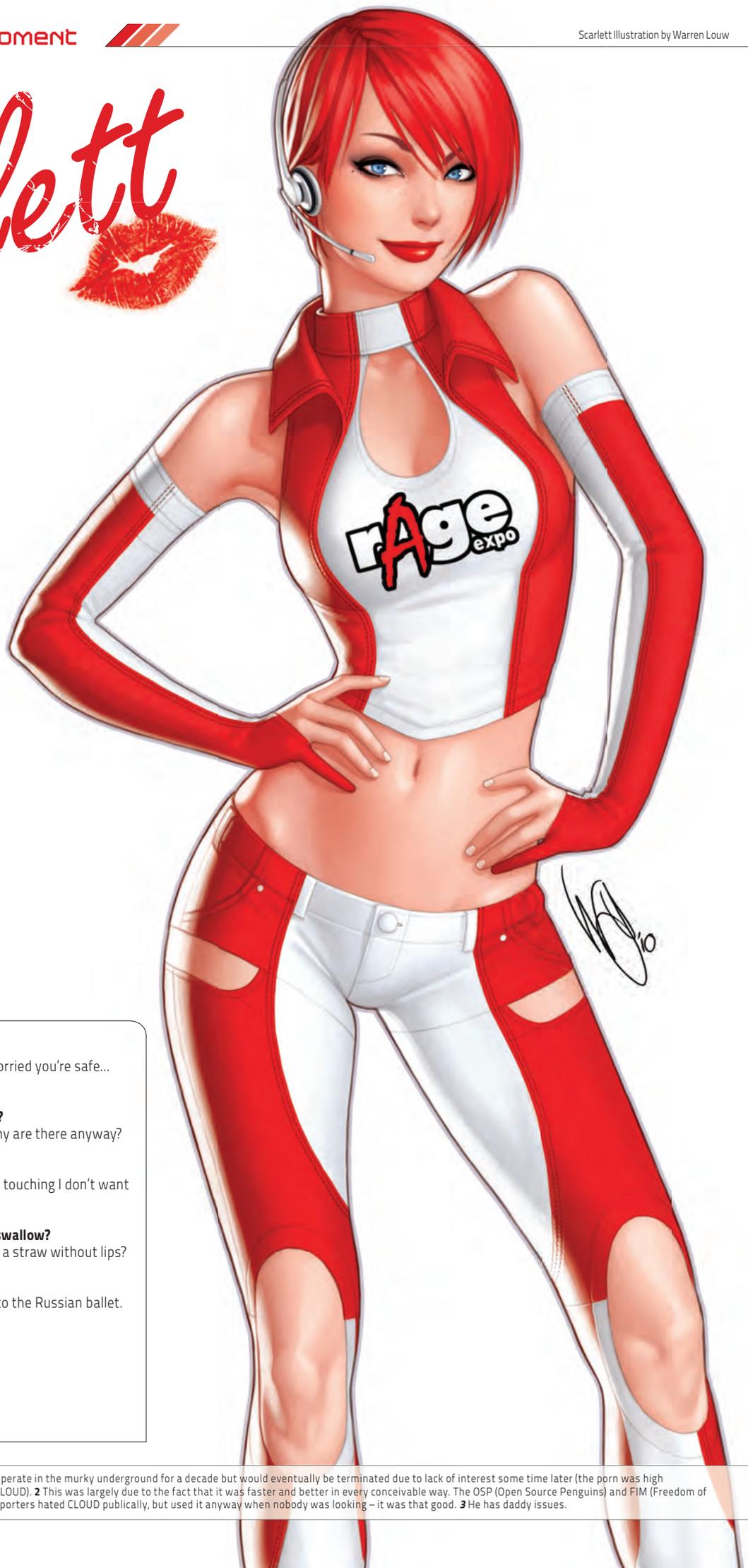
1 The old Internet would still operate in the murky underground for a decade but would eventually be terminated due to lack of interest some time later (the porn was high definition holographic in the CLOUD). **2** This was largely due to the fact that it was faster and better in every conceivable way. The OSP (Open Source Penguins) and FIM (Freedom of Independence Movement) supporters hated CLOUD publically, but used it anyway when nobody was looking – it was that good. **3** He has daddy issues.

Razer expands to consoles and gesture control for PC

RAZER HAS RECEIVED PRELIMINARY approval from Microsoft to develop the Razer Onza Professional Gaming Controller for Xbox 360.

"Just as we did for PC gamers, we are really looking forward to revolutionizing the world of console gaming by creating a controller and gaming headset that gives console gamers the same level of quality, precision and accuracy that they know and expect in our PC products," said Robert Krakoff, president, Razer USA.

Features of the Onza include Razer Hyperesponse buttons which will give faster actuation and a crisp tactile feel; analog sticks with customizable tension and a programmable multi-function button (MFB) that can be mapped to act as one of the action buttons, the analog stick buttons or an auto-fire button by using a sliding selector switch on the bottom of the controller.

Razer has also announced a co-development partnership with Sixense Entertainment to develop a revolutionary true-to-life, next-generation motion sensing and gesture recognition controller for PC gaming.

Krakoff stated, "The magnetic motion sensor technology combines precision and speed with the freedom of other motion sensing technologies to fill the gap between consoles and PC in terms of human interface devices."

Razer and Sixense scientists and engineers along with select PC OEM partners have been working on ultra-precise one-to-one motion sensing controllers that use electromagnetic fields to track precise movements along all six axes for use in current and future generation PC games.

LG launches gaming monitor

LG's new 3D gaming monitor will be available locally this month. The W23633D features full HD 1920 x 1080 display resolution, Tru-Surround HD, dual HDMI interfaces and 3 ms response times. No pricing was available at time of going to print.

Snippets

Rectron has launched a new **budget-priced PC graphics card** range. The new Gigabyte GV R545SC 1GI will retail for around R999 and the GV 5450C-512I for R799.

ECS has launched their latest AMD 890GX chipsets based motherboard family supporting AMD next generation **6-Core CPU**.

Freecom and ASUS have partnered to produce a **USB 3.0 motherboard**. The P7P55D-E series motherboards will utilise Freecom's USB 3.0 technology to enable the latest SuperSpeed data throughput rates.

Charles Thacker, a Microsoft researcher, has won the $250,000 Turing Award, for designing and building the first modern personal computer. Thacker was also the **co-inventor of the Ethernet** networking technology.

ASUS unveiled the ASUS VG236H and PG276H at CeBIT in March. These **full HD 3D displays** are set to blow gamers away with eye-popping visuals with sights previously exclusive to the cinema.

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*"If you want a netbook with the horsepower to play HD video and PC games, your only choice is ION. **The new ION netbooks deliver an unbeatable combination of performance and battery life.** We continue to raise the standard for what a netbook should be."*

Drew Henry, General Manager of NVIDIA GeForce and ION GPUs. *NVIDIA's next-generation ION platform, previously referred to as ION 2, has officially launched. NVIDIA has confirmed more than thirty different products coming by the middle of this year with next-generation ION.*

Green Philips

Philips has just launched a LCD monitor with a 'people sensor'. The Green Philips 225B detects user presence via its PowerSensor technology (by transmitting and receiving infrared signals), and will adjust its power consumption accordingly. This will result in up to a 50 percent reduction in energy usage.

3D TV ready to make its local debut

With the 2010 FIFA World Cup just around the corner, some of the major LCD and Plasma manufacturers are gearing up for the release of their 3D technologies in SA. Samsung, LG and Sony will all have 3D capable models ready for release in the next few months. Sony has confirmed that the PlayStation 3 will be forwards compatible with 3D content via a firmware update once their 3D product range has been released.

Did You Know?

ASUS U Series Bamboo notebooks take advantage of bamboo's regenerative and resilient characteristics, reducing plastics usage by 20 percent

< Tech News >

Know Your Technology

ISA: Instruction Set / Architecture is a list of instructions that a processor can understand and execute. This instruction set however does not dictate how these instructions are executed at a hardware level. For instance AMD and Intel CPUs share the same x86 instructions set, but go about executing those instructions quiet differently.

Ray-Tracing: A technique that traces the path of light through pixels, simulating the effect of various materials each pixel/photon would encounter. This technique produces a very high level of realism for rendered scenes and offers realistic shadows that are mathematically accurate. Works best for offline content as it's extremely slow and thus not suitable for interactive games.

Memory Crossbar: A Memory configuration that usually makes use of two or more memory busses for simultaneous and independent reads and writes. These can be collated into reading a single large data set or smaller sets which can fit into individual channels determined by the number of busses available.

Vertex Shader: Vertex shaders transform coordinate information from a 3D space or a 2D space which is then displayed. Vertex shaders traditionally passed processed vertices to pixel shaders but of late processed vertices can be passed on to newer processing units such as geometry processors. Vertex shaders change basic vertex properties such as position, colour and texture coordinates. (Vertex shaders perform all functions previously associated with a vertex translations and lighting).

By the Numbers

8 Mbps

Telkom has been actively trialing its 8 Mbps ADSL service, and is expected to launch before the 2010 FIFA World Cup (or sooner depending on network upgrades that must be done to support the higher speeds), according to Telkom CEO Reuben September. Current 4 Mbps ADSL users' speeds will automatically be increased to the highest possible speed without the need to apply for the service, and it will be free, provided that their exchanges have been upgraded with the latest DSL2+ equipment and software.

Hardware Scoring System

1 > Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.

2 > Hardware turns on/ installs but doesn't do much else.

3 > This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.

4 > Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.

5 > Middle of the road product that does not stand out from the competitors, performs and works exactly as advertised.

6 > Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.

7 > Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.

8 > Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.

9 > Excellent product, near perfect.

10 > The stuff of dreams, the best in the market par none.

Hardware Awards

HARDWARE

This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.

DREAM MACHINE

The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.

The Mosh Pit

CD/DVD WALLET
Official FIFA World Cup licensed CD/DVD wallet that holds 24 discs. **R60**

DIVOOM IRIS-02
These funky USB powered speakers can be plugged into your laptop and also connected to any other audio devices you may have such as an iPod or MP3 player. **R80**

MINI PORTABLE SPEAKERS
The Genius SP-i150 and SP-i160 mini portable speakers can be plugged into your MP3 player, handheld console, iPod, CD player or notebook. The built-in LI-ON rechargeable battery will ensure your music can be enjoyed wherever you go. **R160 | R200**

VIBRATION GAMEPAD FOR PC/PS3
The Genius MaxFire Blaze3 gamepad can be used with your PC or PS3. It has a turbo function that can be used for auto fire, 8-way D-Pad, and real vibration effects. **R260**

DREAM MACHINE

The Dream Machine

Sound: It can haz be faulty

IF YOU REFER TO the Tech Q&A letters in this issue you will see a letter from Vinko Soldo with the subject title "Dream Machine: G35 & Xonar Essence". It turns out that the G35's aren't actually compatible with the Xonar Essence XT. Oops! Our bad! You see, when we first tested the G35, we didn't actually review them on a PC with a Xonar Essence ST installed. What we should have pointed out to you back then was that the G35s would be the best headphones for you to buy if you didn't have a Xonar Essence ST sound card in your PC.

Basically what it boils down to is this: you can either have the Xonar Essence ST sound card or the G35 headset. They unfortunately won't work in unison with each other.

We apologise for our tardiness and hope you can forgive us!

The Damage…

COMPONENT	PRICE
CASE	R2,699
PROCESSOR	R10,157
MOTHERBOARD	R5,000
MEMORY	R1,399
GRAPHICS	R8,499
STORAGE	R3,699
SOUND	R1,799
POWER	R4,200
COOLING	R2,507
DISPLAY	R3,577
HEADPHONES	R1,316
KEYBOARD	R2,001
MOUSE	R1,076
TOTAL	R47,929

NOTEBOOK
ASUS ROG G51J-3D
rog.asus.com

System Specs:
CPU: Intel Core i7 720M (1.6GHz)
RAM: 4GB DDR3
Graphics: NVIDIA GTX260M
HDD: 2x 320GB SATA2
OS: Windows 7 Home Premium
Mouse: Razer Abyss
Extra: NVIDIA 3D Vision pack

CASE
Cooler Master Cosmos S
www.coolermaster.com

PROCESSOR
Intel Core i7 Extreme 975
www.intel.com

MOTHERBOARD
GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD7
www.gigabyte.co.za

MEMORY
OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com

GRAPHICS
ASUS EAH5970
za.asus.com

STORAGE NEW!
Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
www.seagate.com

SOUND
ASUS Xonar Essence ST *
za.asus.com

* Does not work with Logitech G35 headphones

POWER
IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W
www.ikonik.com

COOLING
Thermaltake BigWater 780
www.thermaltake.com

DISPLAY
Samsung Syncmaster T260 LCD
www.samsung.co.za

HEADPHONES
Logitech G35 Surround Sound *
www.logitech.com

* Does not work with ASUS Xonar Essence ST

KEYBOARD
Logitech G19
www.logitech.com

MOUSE
Logitech G9x Laser
www.logitech.com

Tech Q&A

DREAM MACHINE: G35 & XONAR ESSENCE
From: Vinko Soldo

HI NEO. I NORMALLY don't write in to magazines as I have way too many opinions but this time I felt I had to. Your Dream Machine has had two components in it for a while now, namely, the Logitech G35 and the Asus Xonar Essence ST. After having seen it in NAG for a few months running, I splashed out and bought both. Installed them and off I went like a happy camper. Then I noticed that when changing effects, etc in the Xonar software, nothing happened. I played around with it a bit more and no joy. So out of desperation I e-mailed Logitech's support guys, after more than a month of ups and downs, this was their final response:

"Thank you for contacting Logitech Customer Care. I would like to inform you that I have consulted your case to our specialist and informed me that the G35 is specifically designed for native sound cards and have not been tested with other soundcard specifically Xonar soundcard, I apologize but we cannot push thru the support since it is not designed to work with the said sound card."

That is the first problem, the second problem is the fact that you have put the Xonar Essence ST into a machine pretty much geared at gamers and gaming. The Essence ST is the Xonar card for audiophiles, the correct card to put into the Dream Machine would be one of the following: Xonar D1 / DS or DX. Even though the quality of the Essence ST is awesome, it won't do the trick for most headsets without purchasing an add-on card.

If however, you have managed to get the Xonar Essence ST and G35 to work together could you please share the secret with me. Right now my Xonar is just taking up space and power in my case."

Neo: *I've always been against the G35 headset and I did not like the idea of a headset in the Dream Machine, in particular that set because it has its own audio processor which is inferior to the one on the Essence ST, making it a waste in the machine any time that particular headset is used. When the G35 came in for review it was tested by a few of the guys in the office and they raved about it and said it was Dream Machine worthy. What we probably should have mentioned at the time was that the headset and the soundcard could not be used in conjunction with each other. So essentially you could/should buy one or the other.*

As for the Essence ST, it supports digital audio out in full surround sound, so surround gaming is still possible and actually great at it (provided you use H6 expansion card). The reason we replaced the Creative card with the Essence ST is that you're not always playing games on your PC. When watching movies, or listening to music the Essence ST is unmatched, supports all the game standards (EAX, DirectSound, OpenAL etc.) and the other professional standards like ASIO 2.0 with very low latency. Yes it's true the H6 Surround sound expansion (H6) is a separate addition that you buy, but it's still the best sound card par none.

Lastly, it's the "Dream Machine", not the

"Ultimate Gaming Machine" and as such it's the best components available in all spheres suitable for power users and gamers.

CPU CORE CLOCK
From: Cobus Herman

HI NEO. I REALLY enjoy the Hardware Q&A and of course the rest of NAG. My friends and I have been arguing about the core clock speed of CPU's. According to them the "total" core clock speed of a CPU is calculated through multiplying the given core speed with the number of cores, which in turn delivers ridiculously high core clock speeds. Now is this true or is the given core clock speed (without calculation) the true core speed of a CPU? Thanks and keep up the great work!"

Neo: *The clock speed of the CPU is only given by the operating frequency not by multiplying the number of cores by the frequency. Your friends are incorrect in their assumption.*

HELP!!!
From: NAG Fan

I'M LOOKING TO BUYING a new PC and I'm on a budget of R5,000, and I don't care about playing the stuff on full graphics, and I would like to be able to play the new stuff for at least a year or two. So it would be really cool if u could just help me out with some tips for when buying hardware. Cause I'm useless with that stuff, I mean the motherboard that I bought just held a year and it screwed itself this weekend. So what hardware would last me a while without having to upgrade?"

Neo: *R5,000 will allow you an ok machine, but obviously with some sacrifices. Your best bet would be a tri-core AMD Athlon II X3 or a Phenom II X3 if you can stretch the budget that far. As for motherboards, any AMD 780*

or 790 AM3 motherboard would do (avoid micro-ATX form factor) from ASUS, Gigabyte or MSI. Try to get at least 4GB of RAM, but if not possible 2GB of DDR3 1333MHZ is dirt cheap these days. As for the graphics card consider getting a Radeon 5570, then spending the rest of your budget on a good power supply to power it all. All this should cost you less than R5,000.

OVERCLOCKING
From: Warren Chong

FOLLOWING YOUR ARTICLES ON overclocking, could you recommend reputable people who would be willing to do small OC's for us in the JHB area? Not the hardcore stuff, just like 10% or so would be sufficient."

Neo: *There are some overclockers here in Johannesburg but they are unlikely to want to dabble in anything that isn't at least Dry Ice overclocking, because 10% overclocks everybody can do these days as the BIOS has such options built in. Those that don't want to use the BIOS can use tools such as Gigabyte's Easy Tune 6 which can give you 10% overclocks via slider. As that doesn't provide much of a challenge and is more tinkering than actual overclocking, it will be hard to get any ranked overclocker to take part in that.*

MONITOR
From: Thomas Witte

I'M LOOKING TO UPGRADE my monitor but I need your help choosing one... I have three choices. They are all Samsung monitors - I can either get the XL2370, T260 or the P2770."

Neo: *Picture quality wise the XL2370 is much better than all the others and offers a full HD resolution as well. However if you want the size, definitely the P2770. I personally would choose the XL2370.* **NAG**

BlackBerry App World

GAMES
At the time of writing there were over 1180 games available for download. Games range from frivolous time-wasters to intense strategy. The downside is that you can only download free games, as paid applications are not yet available in SA. Some of the more addictive and fun games include Bubble Defense, Pixelated, Ka-Glom and Labyrinth.

WHAT THE APPLE iTUNES Store is to the iPhone user, the recently launched BlackBerry App World is to the BlackBerry user. The on-device application store brings together a broad mix of free personal and business applications that can be accessed over both Wi-Fi and cellular networks. This month we got to play around with the new App World using the very slick BlackBerry Bold 9700.

IM & SOCIAL NETWORKING
Apps include blogging software, social networking and instant messaging. Some very handy free apps are WordPress, Google Talk, ICQ, Windows Live Messenger, and of course Facebook and Twitter.

UTILITIES
Some must-have utilities for a phone geek include:
- RandomPasswordGenerator: Creates highly secure passwords that can be used for any sort of password-based login
- DriveSafely: Reads your text messages and e-mails out loud so you can concentrate on the road
- Mobile Minutes Tracker: Calculates how much money your family spends on mobile minutes, texts and data.

ENTERTAINMENT
There are some quirky but cool little apps here. Speedtest can be used to evaluate the speed of your 3G, Edge, and Wi-fi connections. If you're a fan of the universe you can use the Hubble Image Viewer to look at NASA images from the Hubble space telescope.

Hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

The frame rate is DEAD

WITHOUT QUESTION IT'S BEEN a tough twelve months for NVIDIA, made even harder by the fact that things didn't go exactly according to plan with regards to their architectures and such. Add the fact that ATI was executing surprisingly well, which made the situation even harder for the biggest discreet graphics company around.

However, as usual in these columns, I find myself dealing with internet rumours' illogical thought process and general bandwagon ignorance. I will admit that in some ways, the general ill feeling towards the green company is understandable. Indeed, almost every situation can be explained away with sound and logic reasoning. However, once you have to do this too many times, it becomes apparent that something is not right, or at the very least, things could have gone a lot better than they did.

With that said, by the time you read this, the GeForce GTX480 should have appeared and it will have either impressed the vast majority of people and hopefully fulfilled many of the promises, or it will have left many slightly disappointed. The question is not if it will be faster than the competitors products or not - that's a given that it will be. What many don't seem to realize is that the GF100 architecture is not about pure speed, but more about ushering in a new way of computing, or at least speed through a different way of computing.

This may be hard to understand, but as explained in the feature this month, the flexibility that is designed into the GF100 core is unlike any other GPU before it. In fact, this is the closest the GPU has ever been to the general processor without sacrificing what the GPU is inherently best at, which is pushing pixels. It's not enough to only measure this power in Gigaflops or Teraflops if you prefer, but in how much of that power you are able to access and use for a wide variety of tasks, and more importantly how much that power enhances your user experience.

While it is true that no graphics card can match the dual GPU Radeon 5970 (our Dream Machine graphics card) with a theoretical computational power over 2 Teraflops, this number is purely academic because the effort required to extract this level of performance or even half of it where it matters is near impossible. The tools aren't there at a software level, and the architecture of the GPU doesn't support several features required for this power to be useable – aside from being a great number to use in marketing slides.

As a result, we sit with the inventor of the GPU (NVIDIA) unable to explain the relevance of their behemoth of a GPU to the end users (gamers in particular) without the GPU being made to look like a purely scientific tool with very little relevance to games.

This, however, is far from the truth, as what has happened is that the computational capabilities of the GPU are more revolutionary than it has pixel pushing power. In fact, many of the technologies employed that make the GPU powerful in rendering are a direct result of the GF100 having unique computational abilities that are transparent to the end user.

More than that, right now graphics are at an inflection point in particular on the personal computer, which runs the risk of losing any real advantage it ever had over the competing console platforms.

Ever increasing frame rates are meaningless, as I have stated before. Being able to use 16xAA at 1,920 x 1,080 is useless when the vast majority of people play on a console, which natively renders the game at a significantly lower resolution (Modern Warfare 2 on the Xbox 360 for example displays at 1,024 x 600) and with no AA at any HD resolution. From an enhanced visual experience point of view, a powerful graphics card like the 5970 offers absolutely nothing over the console at more than twice its price.

However, technologies such as PhysX, 3D and enhanced Tessellation capabilities are game changers. Making the GF100 this flexible and this powerful from a gamer's point of view makes these enhancements viable. The computational power required to have realistic physics

> *"This is great for some, like competitive overclockers, but for gamers and anyone interested in a fundamentally better experience on the PC, frame rates are dead!"*

interactions with highly detailed models and many times the sub divided surfaces (tessellation) compared to consoles is why this graphics power is required. Even more power is required if all of this is going to be rendered in stereo vision, which effectively doubles the front end workload on any GPU.

This is the way forward and, while many may not like it, it's the only way for the discreet graphics card, and subsequently the PC, to remain the leading platform where visual fidelity is concerned. Diversification and getting the GPU into other markets is the only way that these ever-increasing advances in GPU technology can be funded. API compliance in the form of DirectX11 is great, but that is only in the short term, because next generation consoles will likely be hybrid DirectX11/11+ combinations rendering that advantage useless for computer GPUs.

So whether we are in favour of it or not, such large products and GPUs spanning billions of gates and costing billions of dollars in R&D are necessary if the PC is to remain at the forefront of visuals in this day. As good as the ATI 5000 series is, fundamentally it's nothing significantly different other than API compliance and insanely higher frame rates for games that are being developed at an even faster rate for consoles that will be five years old soon. This is great for some, like competitive overclockers, but for gamers and anyone interested in a fundamentally better experience on the PC, frame rates are dead! **NAG**
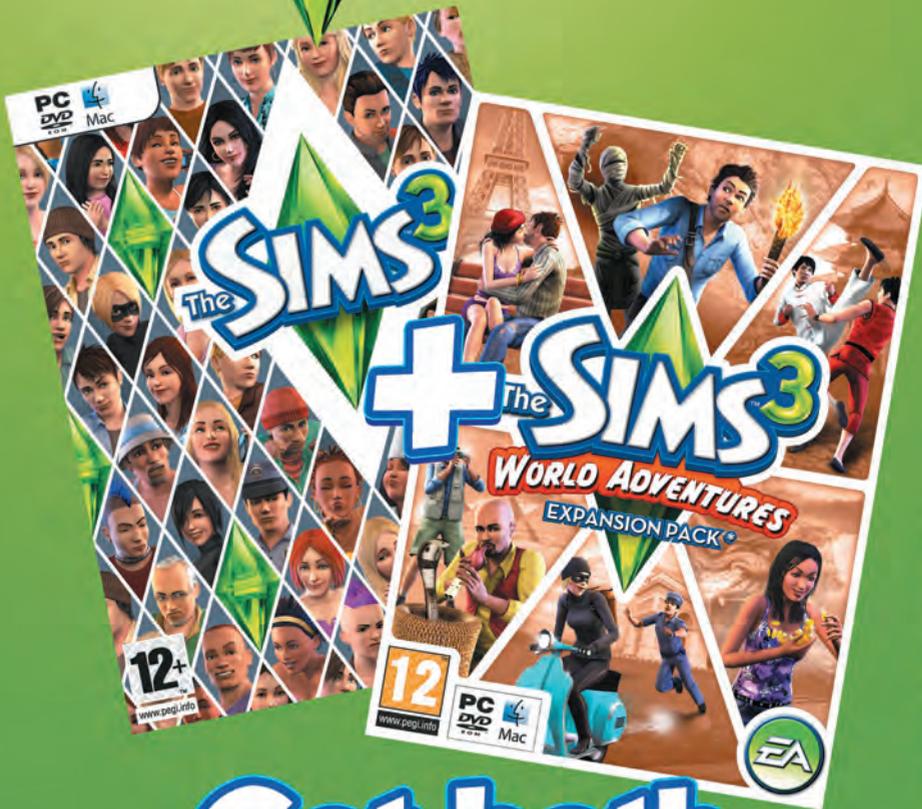
Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

By Derrick Cramer

Like sands through the hour glass…

THIS IS THE DUST in my PC. Who would have thought something so small could cause so much frustration! Let me take a step or two back and explain to you the situation I have been facing for the last two weeks.

Through no fault of my own, I found myself faced with a task: stripping around 150 ATX towers of their components, testing said components and then cataloguing them. Not so bad, I get to spend the next few days shut in my office with nothing but hardware to keep me company, a typical techie's dream. No one to bug me with complaints of "The servers are down!" or "My mouse has died!", no need to attend boring staff meetings or deal with pesky teenage hackers who think they are the next Jonathan James (yes it is a dorky name for a role model). As you can imagine, it was 8:10 AM on Monday and I was already having a good week.

And then I saw what my 150 towers looked like. On the outside they appeared normal in every way: Dull white and black cases which had seen too many hours around high school kids and had never once known the soft touch of a wet rag. Simply put, they were filthy. Normally a clean freak (untidy sure, dirty never), I opened one of the cases marked "No longer working" and knew immediately what the problem was. This case surely held enough dust to fill most of the Grand Canyon, maybe even all of it. The components weren't components so much as small hills forming an extra terrestrial landscape similar to the moon.

Now in all fairness, leaving on a PC with one or two case fans 24/7 almost every day for two years will accumulate quite a bit of dust, but this? I hoped, prayed even, that the other cases would hold far more PC and far less dust, but it seems hope was in vain. Dust, dust everywhere, in every nook and cranny, on every component, no space was free from it. And so the cleaning started.

After gearing up in goggles and a dust mask I borrowed from the woodwork shop, I set to work and a week later we have a new mountain in Randburg,

as yet unnamed. But that's not all. Out of those 150 PCs I managed to salvage working components for around half that number. The odd PC here and there was struck by lightning, and one in every ten had water damage, but the main killer of these PCs remained dust.

This got me thinking, I need to clean my own PC. Did I get a shock when I opened my Mothership.

> *"Dust kills hardware, and no one wants dead hardware. So take my advice, give your PC a good clean regularly."*

I have an ATCS 840, which is adorned with three 230mm high flow fans, four 120mm high flow fans, a radiator with two 120mm high flow fans, my graphics cards with high flow fans, and a 70mm high flow fan on my northbridge cooler. That being said, you can understand why it doesn't take two years to accumulate quite a pile of dust.

Enough of story time though, because believe it or not, the above has a point that every techie should bear in mind. With modern PCs generating as much heat as they do, we all need fans to help keep the temperatures within normal limits. Unless you're part of the five or so people with totally silent cooling solutions, you will accumulate dust. Dust kills hardware, and no one wants dead hardware.

So take my advice, give your PC a good clean regularly, and especially if you attend LANs often, more so if most of those LANs happen to take place in a garage. It's a slow enjoyable process that serves as a relaxing break away from the hustle and bustle of gaming. **NAG**

NVIDIA GF100
Reinventing the GPU

GTX480 technical preview **by Neo Sibeko**

THERE'S BEEN A LOT of talk surrounding NVIDIA's next generation GPU. Most of this talk has been negative simply because the product is late, however we will deal with that issue when we do the review of the GTX480, which should have officially released by the time you read this. As such, we will be looking at the GPU with more emphasis on its GPGPU capabilities rather than it's rendering performance. That analysis we will leave for the actual product review.

For several years now, in fact one could argue since the inception of Cg+ (C for graphics) around 2004, the company has been looking to extract more than just pixel pushing power from their graphics cards. While Cg+ was purely concerned with shading in a graphics environment, the flexibility and programmability of the language aimed to leverage some advantages of what common languages like C had and as such Cg+ shared some common traits with the programming language (syntax for example).

However, many years later and as GPUs grow increasingly more powerful and more importantly - flexible, better tools are needed to harness this power, and this is where CUDA (Compute Unified Device Architecture) comes in. CUDA is a parallel computing architecture which in theory could be applied to any GPU but as it is, is closely tied to NVIDIA GPUs, and it serves in a way to extract or make accessible the massively parallel processing power that is available on modern day GPUs.

With older architectures however, there have been some limitations with just how much of this power could be accessed, and in fact even when you did access these capabilities, in an HPC environment such as used in computational biology, particle behaviour analysis and cryptography for example, the lack of proper or limited IEEE754-1985 compliancy meant that the use of GPUs was limited to areas where such precision was not as important. With the GF100, this is amongst many of the issues that NVIDIA have successfully changed within the GPU.

While Double precision floating point was available on the GT200, the performance hit was rather steep and over and above that, FMA (Fused Multiply Add for both single and double precision) for example was not available without resorting to multi-instruction emulation sequences, and hardware limitations caused rounding off at each stage and subsequently resulted in less accurate results (traditional MAD instruction). These are but a few examples of the limitations that NVIDIA and subsequently their customers were dealing with prior to the GF100.

While some impressive work had been done with the GT200 (in particular the professional TESLA and QUADRO range) based GPUs, it was clear that their customers in these fields were not only impressed with the performance that these GPUs were delivering, but that they had greater potential with some changes in which data sets and types are supported and how they are supported. This has a lot more to do with flexibility rather than speed, because all these processes are inherently slow and the speed up from being performed
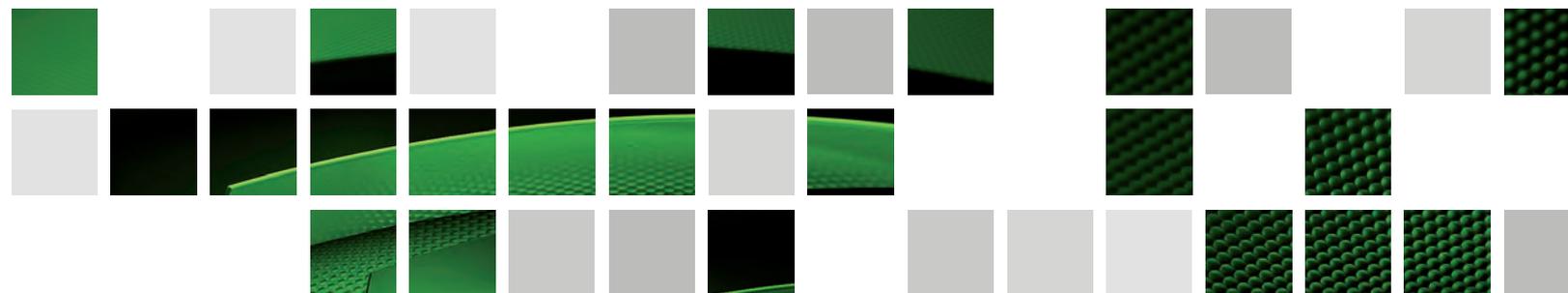
< NVIDIA GF100 >

"Another feature added by NVIDIA to the GF100 is a cache hierarchy with configurable cache allocation"

on GPU's is sometimes in the order of 100X in certain applications.

ECC support is one of the features that is required in the HPC market, as used in medical and financial fields. Protection from memory errors proves pivotal to relying on data outputted by GPUs. Another feature added by NVIDIA to the GF100 is a cache hierarchy with configurable cache allocation, shared memory access and significantly faster context switching. This last change should benefit end users in a gaming context as well (up to 10X faster switching), because the speed with which switching occurs between graphical and computational contexts is increased and as such it is even more viable to run physics simulations on the GPU.

All the above however is concerned with the new found flexibility of the GF100 GPU, however in raw computing horsepower some significant changes have been made as well. What we used to refer to as Stream Processors, NVIDIA now calls CUDA cores and those have been more than doubled when compared to the GT200 GPU. It is

worth keeping in mind that these are not equal and the capabilities of each core are different enough in the GF100 to make direct comparisons hard, suffice to say everything that each stream processor was capable of in the GT200, each CUDA core in the GF100 can perform faster and more efficiently. These new CUDA cores are now housed in what NVIDIA calls Streaming Multiprocessors (SM) and collectively they offer more than 8x the peak double precision floating point performance when compared to the GT200.

Of very high importance as well is that, for the first time on a GPU, there's a unified address space which enables full C++ ISA support and a full shared and coherent global L2 cache (768KiB). IEEE754 support is complete and, for the first time as well, so is IEEE 754-2008 32 and 64-bit precision. Unlike in the GT200, we now have concurrent kernel execution, which means that more of the GPU is useable than before at any given time. These kernels can be completely unrelated (some computational and some graphical for example) and are now handled by an advanced global thread dispatch unit.

Even more impressive is that within SMs the GPU is able to run computational and graphic calculations concurrently and share results across other SMs via the unified addressing space. The granularity of this is unknown at present but even if it's only at an SM level, it's impressive.

What we have highlighted above are but a few of the changes that NVIDIA has made to the GF100 which resulted in a 3BN gate die.

With regards to the rendering aspect of the architecture however, unlike older rumours suggested, the GFG100 does feature hardware tessellation, and in fact it is significantly faster than anything else that is out there on the market right now. With 8X the geometry performance of the GT200, the GF100 will lend itself very well to rendering highly detailed models spanning millions of polygons.

There is so much more to the GF100 though and we will cover that next month when we have actual silicon on hand. Until then, rest assured that there are enough changes in the GF100 to affectively label the GF100 the re-invention of the GPU. **NAG**

DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

Part 2: Optical Drive LED mod

IN THIS TUTORIAL, WE'LL focus on the visual side of modding and completely neglect the idea of extending functionality. In short, this is a pure "bling mod". The idea is that we install three LEDs into an optical drive so that whenever the drive is open, a cool blue glow will emanate out. It won't break your drive, and it won't affect its performance, but adds a little something to set your rig apart from all your LAN buddies'.

STEP 1: PREPARATION

Get all of your tools ready: cut the lengths of wire (about 20cm) and strip off the ends, warm up your soldering iron and cut the resistor and LED legs shorter. Bend the LED legs to right angles, as close to the LED itself as possible. Don't forget to identify which side of the LED is the anode and cathode (positive and negative terminals): the anode's legs are usually longer, but there are other markings, dependant on manufacturer, that you'll be able to spot.

Open up your optical drive. This usually requires that you remove the facade first, then push in the retaining tabs located on the sides and bottom of the drive, near the front. Unscrew the four screws holding the housing together to expose the circuit boards.

STEP 2: SOLDERING

It's time for science! Before we begin, a quick primer: circuits flow from positive to negative. In this case, that's the 12v pin to the ground pin. If you're as useless at soldering as I am, I strongly recommend that you practice on an old motherboard or video card before trying this out.

Look at the underside of the optical drive; locate the molex power pins and identify which pin is for 12v (above where the yellow cable connects to the back of the drive), and which is for ground (black cable). That's our power source.

Once you've soldered the wires in place, you'll need to find a way to route them round to the other side of the drive to place the LEDs where we need them. You can either drill or cut your way through. Have a look at the accompanying photos to see how I did it for my drive - yours may well be different.

To achieve our desired resistance of 1.5K ohms, we're going to wire two 1K resistors in parallel, followed by one in series. Once you've got that done, wire up the three LEDs in series. To solder these connections, I twisted the wires together and popped a blob of solder on top. It might look a little messy, but it works. And since this is all going to be hidden from view, I'm willing to let it slide if you are.

Make sure you've got all your positives and negatives in order, and attach the resistor and LED components to the circuit. Trim off as much excess wiring as possible before soldering the connections. I highly recommend that you test everything at this stage. If the LEDs do not light up, go back and check your soldering for any dry joints: characteristically dull or crystalline-looking joints that aren't making the connection.

STEP 3: FITTING

This is the easiest part, but no less fiddly. Lay down sufficient silicone to the inside back of the optical drive. Stick the completed circuitry in place and hold it down for a few minutes. Make sure that it's out of the way of the drive tray when closed. This stuff tends to take an hour or so to dry to the touch, and up to 24 hours before its completely cured.

Once the silicone is sufficiently dry, close up the drive and screw the housing in place. If everything went smoothly, you should now have a super cool glow radiating from your drive every time you open it. If it's not behaving itself, there's probably a component touching the metal of the housing. Open it back up and adjust the components before the silicone sets completely, and try again.

Disclaimer: *Performing this (and likely any) mod will invalidate the warranty of your optical drive. If you have any doubt about something mentioned in these pages, do some research before you start melting solder onto things: ask your science teacher, read a book, use the Internet or drop us a mail.*

What you will need

- An optical drive
- 3x 3.5v LEDs (any colour)
- 3x 1000 ohm (1K) resistors (or 1x 1.5K)
- Soldering iron and solder (we're using the Dremel Versatip, which is great for both soldering and heat-shrinking)
- Approximately 40cm of wiring (most thin wires will do; we're using some telephone wiring)
- A drill with 2mm drill bit (you can also use a knife if you're not in the mood for drilling)
- Philips screwdriver
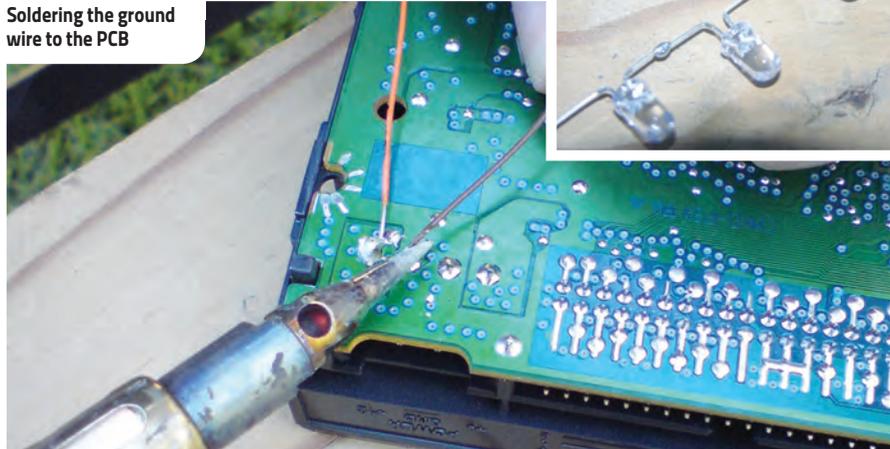- Sharp-nose pliers
- Silicone sealant

The optical drive opened and ready for torture
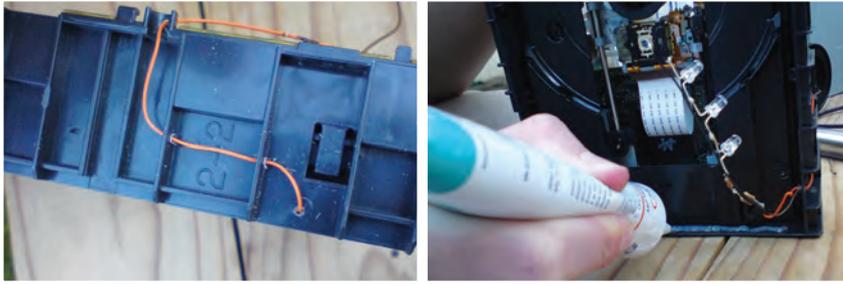
The resistors and LEDs
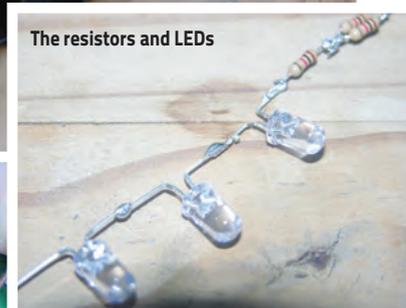
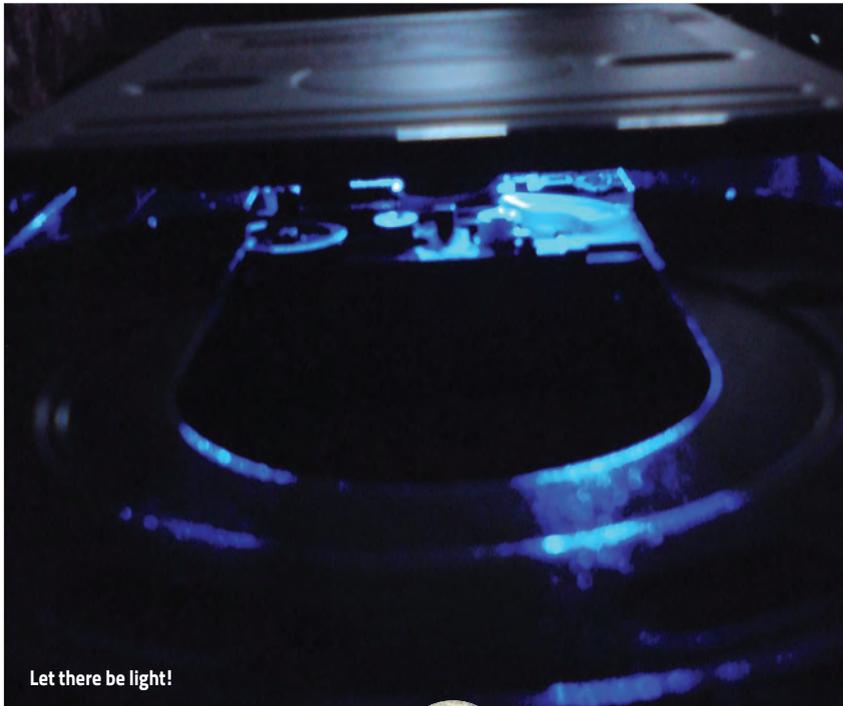**Soldering the ground wire to the PCB**

Be careful where you drill: don't forget that you need to close the drive up again, and install in back in your PC

**Everything is in place.
Now's a good time to test.**

Let there be light!

Tips from the experts

Dremels VersaTip combines a multitude of applications in one tool. It is the perfect tool for soldering, melting, shrinking and more. Powered by butane-gas, the VersaTip offers the cordless freedom that allows you to work everywhere you want. The pencil-shaped design and pinpointed soldering tip make precise soldering possible. The variable temperature setting allows work on circuit boards (low temperature) as well as soldering thicker wire or more heavy components (high temperature).

For most electronics work, use rosin core solder with an alloy of 60/40. For smaller joints, solder with a diameter of 0.75mm to 1.0mm is ok.

Soldering tips need to be "tinned". Warm up the VersaTip and put some water into a sponge box provided. Coat the complete tip with solder, and then clean the tip on the sponge to remove all flux residue. Also lightly clean your PCB with an industrial cleaning pad before you start soldering. Having done that, wipe the PCB with a clean dry cloth.

The next step is to place the components

on the board. Then lay the tip of the VersaTip against the component lead and the board until they are hot, otherwise the solder doesn't stick. Apply a small amount of solder to the heated tip of the VersaTip. The little bit of solder you applied to the tip will help make contact between the board and the lead.

Touch the tip of the strand of solder to the component lead and PCB, not on the tip. If everything is hot enough, the solder should flow freely around the lead and PCB. Continue to add solder to the joint until the joint is completely coated and the solder forms a small mound with slightly concave sides. When the surface of the PCB is coated, stop adding solder and remove the VersaTip. Avoid overheating the component as this will damage it. The soldering of each joint should only take seconds. Let the solder cool and resolidify. If you move the joint too quickly, you will get a "cold joint", which often can be fixed by reheating and applying a little bit of solder. Finally, clean the excess flux residue from the board with a cloth.

HP TouchSmart IQ540uk Desktop PC

WE'VE REVIEWED A COUPLE of touch screen computers, and while they're nice to use, they usually leave a lot to be desired, especially when it comes to the hardware limitations.

For the most part, these are limited to ATOM CPUs which are fine for netbooks and very low end machines, but in a desktop machine the ATOM CPU just isn't enough.

Fortunately, the HP TouchSmart series, in particular the IQ540 that we have here, it is powered by a much better Core 2 CPU operating at a healthy 2.16GHz. This may not seem to be important, but it is worth noting since the multimedia features of this unit make a speedy CPU a must.

Before we get to the performance, it is worth mentioning that the aesthetic qualities of this machine will be a hit with some people and a complete miss for others. The mostly black finish with accents of silver isn't very stylish by today's standards, but this reserved design makes it appropriate in an office and at home. With that said, we would have preferred a more lively design or colour scheme.

Using the HP TouchSmart IQ540 is amongst the most pleasurable experiences one can have using a single touch pointing device. Still, there's nothing that can perform better than a multi-touch pointing scheme, but given the current state of affairs, this is about as good as it is going to get, unless some significantly better technology is introduced to the mass market.

As with all touch interfaces, smudging the screen is unavoidable especially when dragging items across the desktop. Those tasks should be performed with the mouse (which is included along with a matching keyboard). When it comes to text, typing on a screen that's standing upright isn't comfortable, but writing using your finger or stylus is fantastic, especially with the hand writing recognition programs built into the operating system. You can save notes this way and even search for files on your computer by writing in the search fields.

The enhanced usability of the PC with a touch interface cannot be denied, and this is particularly impressive when using HP's TouchSmart interface for video, music library browsing and such. The unit has some great video functions like direct video recording via RF, S-Video and composite inputs. All these connections are neatly tucked away behind the unit eliminating clutter on the front.

This same area has additional USB connections in addition to the ones available on the left side of the unit. Between HP's own interface and Media Centre there are few things you cannot do on the IQ540. It may not be able to do much gaming and lack full HD support to make it the ultimate touch interface media centre PC, but other than that there isn't much to fault this unit on. If you need more and are willing to pay the price premium, the IQ600 is what you may be looking for. It costs more but with it you get better components such as a better graphics processor (G200) which opens up the PC to some more modern games and has full HD 1080p support via the 23-inch LCD that the unit features.

For everything else though, the IQ540 is more than enough and definitely the best touch screen PC we have tested thus far. **NAG**.

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

CPU: Core 2 Duo T5850
RAM: 4GB DDR2 Memory
Operating System: Windows 7
Hard Drive: 500GB
Graphics: NVIDIA GeForce 9300M GS

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Good quality screen
+ Good speakers
+ Video tuner

›Minus
- Not full HD
- Very heavy

›Bottom Line
A powerful touch-screen media PC. It looks good and is packed with features; the only thing missing is multi touch.

07
out of ten

Buffalo DriveStation USB 3.0 HD-HXU3

HARDWARE

EXTERNAL STORAGE MEDIUMS HAVE been around for several decades, from tape drives and ill-fated IOMEGA ZIP drives to today's USB flash drives holding hundreds of gigabytes of data. Finding the perfect balance of storage size, performance and price isn't always easy, especially if you're looking for external storage you can use for backups regularly.

The truth is while flash drives are great for several reasons, they are slow, and the larger capacities which use faster NAND memory cost a small fortune. In fact, many of the 64GB performance drives cost more than the 1TB external drive we have here and they are certainly slower.

The Buffalo drive isn't much to look at, covered in a glossy black finish and featuring a few vents for air to get in. It's nothing special visually, but performance, which is what the drive is about, is truly impressive. In fact, the performance was better than any other magnetic storage drive we have tested before and certainly better than any flash drive.

Most of this performance comes from the drive being natively USB3.0 which allows the drive to reach peak performance with burst rates previously unattainable with a USB2.0 interface. Buffalo has included a utility that allows you to re-format the drive to different file systems (including MAC compatibility) and a turbo

program, which we assume works by data caching in some way. This feature works well enough to be worth using, but in the synthetic tests showed no significant performance gains.

Overall, the Buffalo HXU3 is a great drive and definitely worth purchasing if you're looking for a high performance external drive. It is worth keeping in mind, though, that all this performance is only available if you have a USB3.0 capable motherboard or add-in card, or else you will be limited to USB2.0 speeds. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Capacity: 1TB
Interface: USB3.0

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ USB 3.0
+ Speed
+ Quiet

›Minus
- Bulky power brick
- Slightly heavy

›Bottom Line
Fastest External hard drive we have tested yet, but it's not the fastest 7200rpm drive we've ever had.

08 out of ten

Benchmarks

Maximum Read Speed: 147Mbytes/sec
Maximum Write Speed: 153Mbytes/sec
Minimum Read Speed: 74Mbytes/sec
Minimum Write Speed: 71Mbytes/sec
Access Time: 13.5ms
Burst Rate: 168Mbytes/sec

Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB

DREAM MACHINE

AS ALWAYS WITH NEW standards, manufacturers seem to be more excited about the technology than end users. Sometimes this is because users are just not aware of how the new technology or standard enhances their computing experiences. However, sometimes it's because there's genuinely no benefit to what is being promoted.

This is true to some degree for the new SATA 6Gbps standard. It's great that we have doubled the theoretical bandwidth offered by the older SATA interface, however this enhanced bandwidth only benefits solid state drives which are still beyond most people's reach for various reasons. Even with solid state drives, very few of these are able to saturate the available bandwidth of SATA 3G and as such we will have to wait a few years before we see the real benefit of the SATA 6Gbps standard.

With that said, if any manufacturer is going to release a hard drive in this day and age, it may as well be a SATA 6Gbps, as this will become standard on all motherboards sooner or later. Besides the fact that SATA 6Gbps offers just a few advantages over the older standard, it also means that adoption of the standard will be quicker as more manufacturers move their drives to the newer standard.

The Seagate Barracuda XT was the first drive to embrace the SATA 6Gbps standard, but more than that it was, when released, the highest capacity drive and that meant

high density platters which guaranteed good performance. Packed with 64MB of cache, the XT is no slouch and, even at its slowest speeds, it offers better performance than some 500GB SATA 3GBps drives. While it may not be the fastest drive on the market today, it offers the best bang for buck when taking into account the capacity of the drive and as such deserves a place in our dream machine for mass storage. With NCQ support, 48-bit addressing support and just about any other drive standard you can think of, it's hard to fault the Seagate Barracuda XT drive at anything. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Capacity: 2TB
Interface: SATA 6Gbps
Cache: 64MB
Rotational Speed: 7200rpm

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Capacity
+ Performance
+ SATA 6Gbps

›Minus
- Could have been faster

›Bottom Line
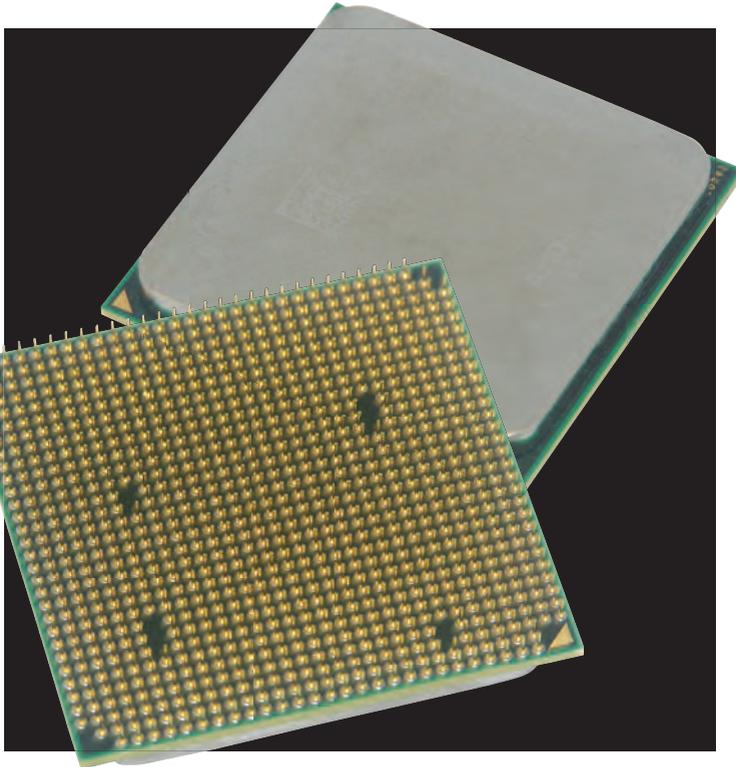Lots of space with fairly quick performance. It will be hard to find a better drive.

08 out of ten

Benchmarks

Maximum Read Speed: 139Mbytes/sec
Maximum Write Speed: 137Mbytes/sec
Minimum Read Speed: 65.4Mbytes/sec
Minimum Write Speed: 64.8Mbytes/sec
Access Time: 16.2ms
Burst Rate: 196Mbytes/sec

RRP > TBA   SUPPLIER > AMD   WEB > www.amd.com

AMD Athlon II X3 425

THE PAST FEW YEARS have been a very difficult time for AMD. A number of factors are involved, but for the most part, it's directly related to the less-than-stellar successor of their K8 architecture. As 2010 progresses, AMD seems to be doing much better, with better financials and resources not tied up in legal disputes with their chief competitor.

Technical advancements, though, are what we are interested in, and this is where AMD's resurgence has been most impressive. The Phenom II processors proved to be very capable and very well priced. Not content with having the best bang-for-buck high-end CPU, AMD has extended some of that performance to the low-end and budget space.

They may not have an ATOM equivalent CPU and chipset, but the Athlon II series of CPUs is hard to match at this price point. Not only are they incredibly cheap, they offer better performance for the most part than the competition at the same price. This does not hold true for all the parts, but the X3 425, for example, clocked at 2,700MHz with three cores, is a capable entry-level gaming CPU. Being a tri-core CPU makes it very attractive for those looking to make

their budgets go as far as possible, especially since most titles coming out this year going forward will be multi-threaded. The performance gain from having that additional core on the CPU when compared to the dual core CPUs is appreciable in both synthetic and real-world tests.

The Athlon II X3 425 also overclocks relatively well. We are fairly certain that almost every CPU out there will reach 3.6GHz (motherboard allowing) at just a little more than the reference voltage. With that said, there hasn't been a budget CPU with this kind of performance in a while, and it's definitely worth picking up.   **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: Rana 45nm 2,700MHz (13.5x200)
Cache: 1,728KB (L1 + L2)
Socket: AM3

Benchmarks

Cinebench: 11.5: 2.29
Wprime 32: 20.201 seconds
Wprime 1024: 625.28 seconds
3DMark06 Score: 3034

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ DDR3 1333 support
+ Cheap

›Minus
- No L3 cache
- Phenom II X2 would be better

›Bottom Line
Good budget CPU from AMD, will not unlock to X4, but worth the purchase if money is tight.

07
out of ten
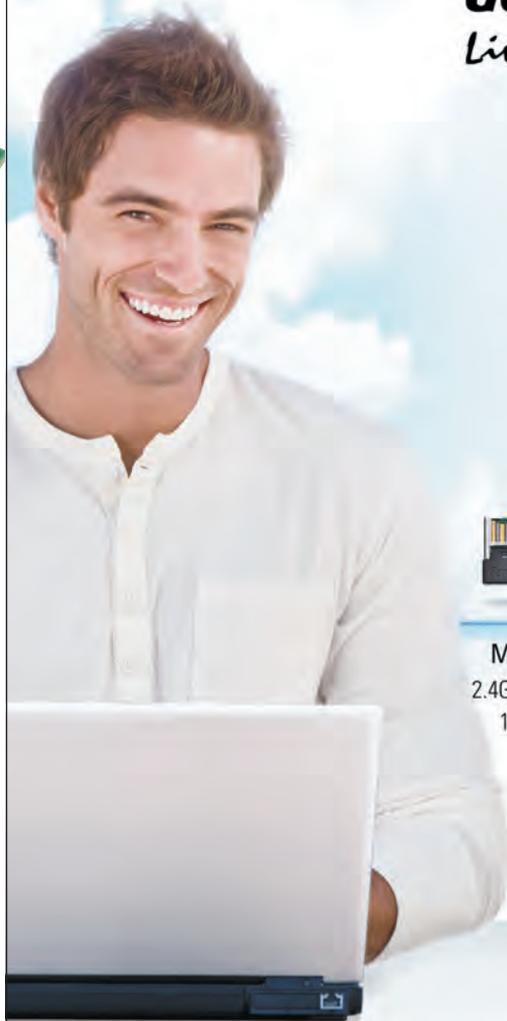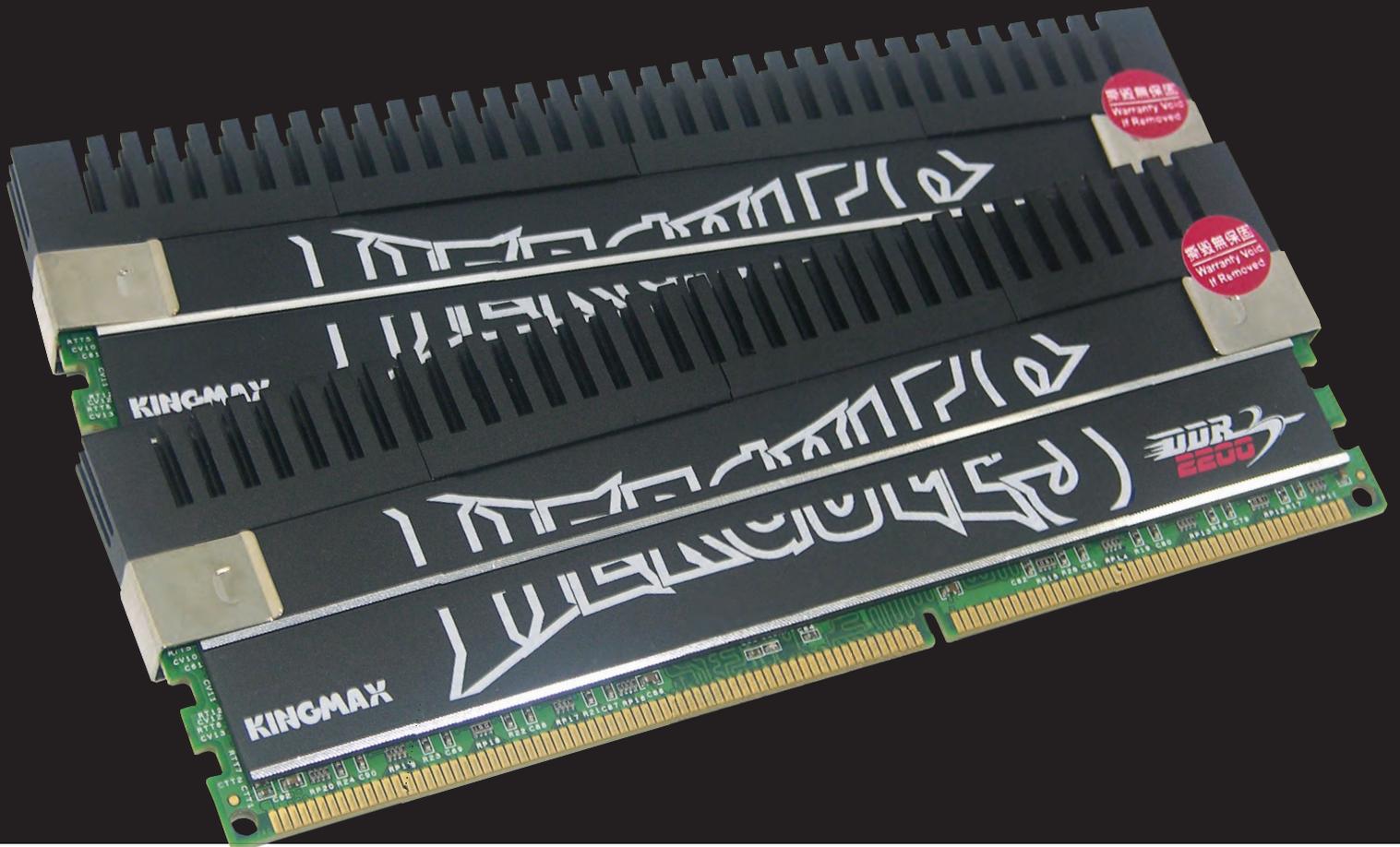
KINGMAX Hercules DDR3 2200

IT'S BEEN A LONG time since we reviewed a set of performance RAM from KINGMAX. In fact, not since the DDR500 MHZ Hardcore series has there been a set of memory from the manufacturer that has been worth talking about.

With DDR3 established as the RAM standard for the foreseeable future, the speeds are climbing at a phenomenal rate, matching GDDR3 frequencies but obviously with better latency. Even more interesting is that DDR3 may have started at stratospheric prices a couple of years ago, but now we have denser modules at higher speeds and significantly better prices. Today, DDR3 is the cheapest RAM type you can buy when considering the capacities and speeds.

The appropriately named Hercules set is the highest performing kit from the company, and is geared at power users, gamers and enthusiasts. The last group is hard to please because whatever a set of RAM is rated at will never be enough, for they, more than any other demographic, are guaranteed to try and push the frequencies even higher, which helps boost scores in competitive overclocking.

Where the Hercules set is concerned though, its design should be familiar to many of you, as it's generally reserved for performance sets from other leading memory manufacturers. This cooling mechanism not only allows the RAM to remain cool at high frequencies but makes adding active cooling simple, which further boosts its overclocking capabilities. While there are some other high speed modules rated at similar speeds that don't make use of this cooling scheme and

favour the more traditional heat spreaders, they tend to heat up much quicker and for aesthetic reasons are less preferred by the average case modder.

The Hercules set remained cool throughout testing, even with the voltage increased to 1.7V. The heat spreaders dealt with the increased load well, which should help the set last many years even when operating at the rated 2,200MHz. This, however, is where we are impressed but also left wondering why the Hercules set does little more than the rated speed. In fact, getting the RAM to operate at any setting other than the specified CL10-10-10-30 resulted in the system failing to POST, regardless of how much voltage was applied to the set. This could be on the specific motherboard we used for testing (MSI P55-GD85), but it's most likely a result of the DRAM used on the set. Reaching 2,196MHz was very easy, and all it required was enabling the XMP profile in the BIOS and restarting the machine. This is great because it removes the guess work from setting up the RAM optimally, however it also meant that we were pretty much forced into the timings, which hurt performance. If the RAM managed to operate at even CL8, the numbers would be significantly better, however this set was just not capable of CL8 or CL9 even at 1,800MHz. Without question, this is the best set from KINGMAX ever, but it's just not a match for most of the competition at similar speeds. The single biggest advantage this set will have over competitors is price: this is the cheapest DDR2200 set you will likely find anywhere.

Specifications

Frequency: 2,200MHz (2x2GB)
Rating: PC-17600
Voltage: 1.65V
Timings: 10-10-10-30

Benchmarks

Memory Read: 17,882MB/sec
Memory Write: 13,662MB/sec
Memory Copy: 18,661MB/sec
Latency: 42.9ns
Super Pi 8M: 2m 34.315 sec

Other sets may be able to reach the same speed, but they will be rated lower and likely won't have the profile that makes reaching 2.2GHz as easy as it is with this set. Overall, this is definitely a step in the right direction for KINGMAX, and if speed is what you need above all else, you should definitely consider the Hercules modules. **NAG.**

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ 2200MHz
+ Easy to overclock
+ Attractive price

>Minus
- Mostly limited to CL10
- Incapable of tighter timings

>Bottom Line
The Hercules set is the highest rated set you can buy locally. Worth a look if you're in the market.

07 out of ten

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NEW

NEW

Pure-Fi Anywhere II
Rich sound for your home – yet compact enough to take with you anywhere. Logitech® Pure-Fi Anywhere™ 2 combines active and pressure drivers for surprisingly deep bass and sports a built-in, rechargeable battery that lasts for 10 hours. Stow the speakers, adapter and remote in the included travel case.

Made for iPod / *Works with* iPhone

S315i
Logitech® Rechargeable Speaker S315i lets you listen to your iPod or iPhone music, at home or on the go. Easily take your music around your house or around town (up to 20 hours in power-saving mode) without missing a beat, and hear every note loudly and clearly.

Made for iPod / *Works with* iPhone

S125i
The Logitech® Portable Speaker S125i – ready to move, ready to groove. You can use it to play and charge your iPod. Feel the beat even more with bass boost. Unplug your speaker and enjoy up to 10 hours of battery-powered music.

Made for iPod

X-530
Pump up your PC surround sound with Logitech's 70-watt RMS X-530 5.1 wall-mountable speaker system. The ported subwoofer features a real-time equaliser that maximises punch while minimising distortion. Matching front and rear satellites deliver balanced surround sound.

NEW

Z323
Transport yourself into your music, movies and games with the 30-watt RMS Z323 2.1 speaker system. With 360-degree sound, the Z323 projects audio evenly in all directions for a great listening experience throughout a room, and features a dual RCA jack and a 3.5 mm jack.

LS11
To enhance your PC audio, the 3-watt RMS Logitech LS11 stereo speaker system delivers clear sound in a small size. The stylish 2.0 speakers offer 5.1 cm (2") precision metallic drivers for quality acoustics, and features an auxiliary input and headphone jack.

Express Plus
The Logitech® Pure-Fi Express Plus speaker dock for the iPod and iPhone features omni-directional acoustic technology, and includes the ability to run on AC or battery power (for portability), a clock with alarm and a wireless remote control.

Made for iPod / *Works with* iPhone

Pure-Fi Dream
The Logitech® Pure-Fi Dream™ is a premium music system for iPod/iPhone. It offers room-filling acoustics with intelligent controls that make it easy to use in any lighting situation. Wave your hand over the unit and the backlit controls light up, making it a breeze to adjust the controls without turning on the room lights.

Made for iPod / *Works with* iPhone

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HARDWARE

The full-HD display is bright, vibrant and easy to read, even in power-saving mode

At 4kg, it might weigh more than most notebooks, but the weight distribution is decent-enough to make up for this. Just make sure you get a decent backpack-type carry bag

Eurocom W870CU Cheetah

INTEL'S CORE I7 PLATFORM has been happily churning up the high-end desktop market for some time now, but its adoption by notebook manufacturers has been comparatively slow. The main reason is obviously cost, but these powerful processors also bring with them the notebook's worst enemy: high power consumption. Thankfully, that's rather moot when discussing desktop replacement notebooks – those beastly portables that put most gamers' desktops to shame – a fact that Eurocom is only too happy to ride all the way to high-end gaming notebook heaven.

The Eurocom Cheetah W870CU is incredibly powerful, as is clearly evident when you take a gander at the specs. Powering this mammoth (it really is quite large, but not overly heavy) is the Core i7-920XM. While it's not quite as sporty as the desktop equivalent, clocking in at only 2GHz, it's nonetheless deserving of the X in its title (for eXtreme), as it's currently the most powerful notebook CPU available. This is backed up by a hearty 8GB of RAM and two incredibly-quick Intel SSDs, as well as NVIDIA's ambiguously-labelled GTX280M. You'd be forgiven for thinking that this GPU is comparable to the desktop GTX280, but in terms of specs, it's more like a GTS250 with slower clocks. It features 128 CUDA cores (just like the GTS250) clocked at 1,463MHz (GTS250 is 1,836MHz), a core clock of 585MHz and VRAM clocks of 950MHz (GTS250 is 738MHz and 1,100MHz), for a total of only 61GB/s of

memory bandwidth to power the high-resolution, 1,920 x 1,080 17.3" display. Of course, that's hardly anything to sneer at, but do bear it in mind when you have a look at the benchmarks.

To put the Cheetah through its paces, we ran three separate tests to give you an accurate depiction of its in-game performance: *Resident Evil 5*, Unigine and 3D Mark Vantage. We ran *RE5* at close to full detail at the display's native resolution with no anti-aliasing, which resulted in an average FPS of 52.8. Unigine was set to DX10 mode and run at native resolution with AA disabled, resulting in a slightly disappointing average FPS of 22.4. Lastly, 3DMark Vantage was run in performance mode at default settings, to produce a score of P6259. While the Cheetah is a cut above most other gaming notebooks, certainly helped along by its powerful CPU, ample memory and speedy SSDs, we can't help but feel a little let down by the GTX280M when the inevitable comparison is made with a desktop machine. Regardless, there aren't many notebooks capable of surpassing the Cheetah.

Not that it really matters, since most users will have a notebook like this on mains power for the majority of its life, but the battery life is expectedly poor. To test the battery life, we ran Unigine non-stop with the machine in power-saving mode (the resulting frame-rate was a miserable 2); it managed to last only 45 minutes. However, for typical office work, you should expect at least 70-or-so minutes on the same power settings.

If you're interested in buying a notebook like this, the chances are that you either really need the portability (perhaps you LAN a lot, or are a video editor or 3D animator who operates out of hotel rooms most of your life), or you have piles of money that you're not sure what to do with. If either is the case, there's little reason not to buy the Cheetah above its competitors, but we do suggest that any prospective buyers weight the cost vs. performance factors; you could quite easily buy a high-end desktop and decent gaming notebook for this price, and have some spare change for a weekend getaway **NAG**.

Geoff Burrows

Specifications

CPU: Intel Core i7-920XM @ 2GHz. Quad-core with HT.
GPU: NVIDIA GTX280M 1,024MB
RAM: 8GB DDR3 @ 1333MHz
Display: 17.3" 1,920 x 1,080
Storage: 2x 160GB Intel X25-M SSD
Optical: 8x Multi DVDRW
Battery: 3-cell Li-Polymer 3800mAh

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Very powerful
+ Great hard drives
+ Good cooling

›Minus
- No Blu-ray
- Poor battery life

›Bottom Line
There are few other gaming notebooks capable of matching the Cheetah's specs.

09 out of ten

Elonex eBook 511EB

EBOOKS HAVE BEEN GAINING a lot of ground in the global market, but are still relatively new tech to our sandy Southern shores. All things eventually end up on this side of the world, however, but it seems as though names like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and the big electronics manufacturers are a bit shy, for now at least. Instead, we have this Elonex ebook reader, which, while providing the basic functions you'd expect from such a device, is otherwise a no-frills offering that unfortunately can't keep the price matched to the functions.

The elnk display performs decently in the right lighting, especially outdoors, but don't expect to get much reading done in low light without some eyestrain. This is due to the screen's poor contrast ratio that only offers eight shades of grey. So, at the very best, you're reading very dark grey on very light grey, which isn't ideal when the lighting is less than perfect. There's also a rather annoying refresh that happens between page turns. While it's not unbearable, it's noticeable, especially with properly formatted file types like EPUBs and PDFs (the latter of which is particularly sluggish).

The device itself feels sturdy enough, but the lack of any included carry pouch is bit of a sore point. For some odd reason, there's also a full QWERTY keyboard, but its functions are so limited it'd honestly be better to use a manual scrolling system instead of wasting all that space.

Specifications

Display: 5" elnk; 800x600 resolution @ 170dpi
Storage: 4GB SD card included, up to 32GB supported
Connectivity: USB
Battery: 1500mAh; up to 8000 pages per charge
Formats supported: TXT, HTML, HTXT, PDF, EPUB, DOC, Adobe Digital Editions for DRM.

The lack of wireless connectivity is also a let-down, as the only way to get files to the device is with a PC; there's no built-in shopping service offered. As an attempt to save the device, Elonex have included 100 free ebooks. These are all public domain publications and are poorly formatted, but it's a decent start to anyone's collection. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows
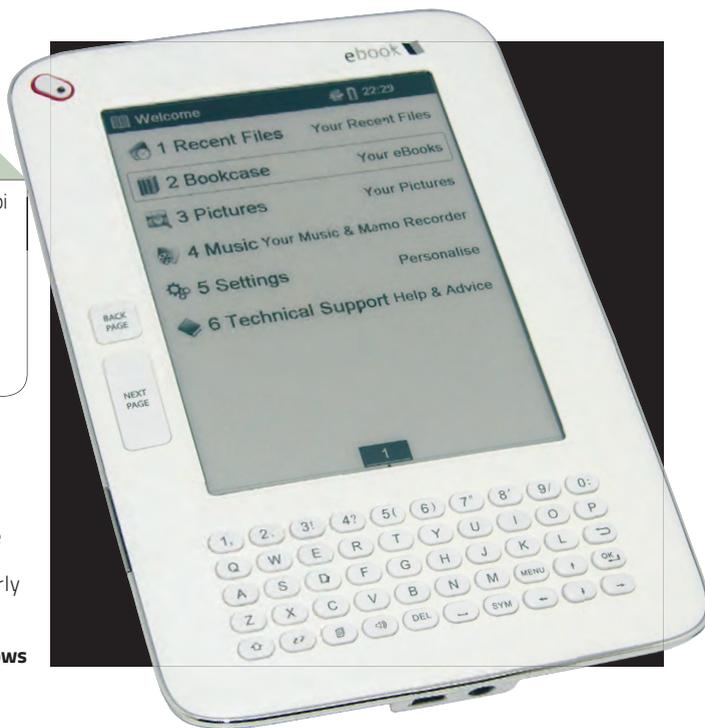
THE SCORE

>Plus	>Minus
+ Included books	- Poor performance
+ Very light	- No wireless
+ High geek appeal	- Expensive

>Bottom Line
If you simply cannot wait for competitive products to arrive, this should suffice, but we recommend you hang on for a bit.

05 out of ten

HARDWARE

Samsung 2233RZ 3D LCD

WITHOUT A DOUBT SOME of the most significant and impressive work that's being done in consumer technology is visual technologies, and one of the areas worth looking at closely is displays. This is proving to be even more important as technologies such as 3D for gaming and movies are moving into the mainstream.

While Samsung is not the first manufacturer to produce a 3D LCD, they are the manufacturer of choice it seems for NVIDIA's 3D VISION technology. Last month we used the Samsung 2233RZ exclusively in the 3D VISION feature and, after hundreds of hours with the monitor, it's easy to see why NVIDIA chose Samsung. It doesn't say much these days to say a Samsung LCD is great - it is expected and for the most part, the company by and large makes the best LCD screens on the market (Series 7 and 8 for example). However there are still models that stand out from the rest of the line up for one reason or another.

The 2233RZ is one such monitor. Besides the 3ms GTG response time and 20,000:1 contrast ratio, it has a great 120Hz refresh rate which makes it the perfect LCD for 3D

Specifications

Size: 22"
Native Resolution: 1,680 x 1,050
Refresh rate: 120Hz (3ms)
Inputs: Dual link DVI
Backlight technology: CCFL

viewing. (This also happens to be the monitor bundled with NVIDIA's kit). Not only is it great to look at, the 2D quality with the monitor at 120Hz is somehow easier on the eyes than traditional 60Hz units. This shouldn't be the case, but this is very apparent when watching video as it is seemingly smoother than it is on other 22" units. The only downside to this monitor is that it has a single interface in the form of a dual-link DVI input, which thankfully however is HDCP compliant. Lacking though is HDMI, VGA or display port inputs. If those inputs were made available this would be an unbeatable 22" LCD. With that said, if 3D is what you want, we would be hard pressed to recommend any other monitor right now.   NAG

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Video quality
+ 3D Vision certified
+ 120Hz

›Minus
- Single DVI input
- Only 1,680 x 1,050
- Price

›Bottom Line
Probably the best 3D monitor we have tested. It's just a pity about the number of inputs.

08
out of ten

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Sony Ericsson Aino

SONY ERICSSON'S AINO IS a handset built for mobile entertainment. It's also a pretty versatile mobile phone that merges impressive performance with an extensive feature list.

In terms of its physical build, it's a fairly heavy phone, weighing in at 134 grams without the battery. Its construction is solid, so chances are you won't need to worry about the phone smashing into millions of tiny pieces the moment it comes into violent contact with your kitchen tiles. It's a good looking phone that makes use of both a pleasingly responsive capacitive touchscreen and a traditional keypad (revealed by sliding the phone open) for user input. The touchscreen isn't used for conventional phone use (like messaging, browsing the phone's menu and the like), however. Instead, when the phone is slid closed you can use the phone's touchscreen to browse through the media (photos, music and videos, as well as turning on the built-in FM radio and using the camera) available on the phone. When coupled with the bundled desktop docking station (which works particularly well for watching movies), the touchscreen/keypad system works quite well, but it would have been nice if the touchscreen were put to use in other ways aside from just a few basic functions.

Another gadget that's bundled with the Aino that you very rarely see bundled with phones is a wireless stereo headset – the MH100. The 3.5mm jack on this headset allows you to plug in the phone's decent set of earphones and answer/end calls, control your

music playback and adjust the volume on the fly. It's even got LED indicators that indicate volume and battery levels. The wireless headset can be charged simply by plugging it into a slot on the docking station. It also acts as an antenna for the radio. It's a great addition that adds value to the Aino's package.

In terms of features, the Aino is no slouch. The 8.1-megapixel camera (with autofocus, LED flash, geotagging, face detection and video stabiliser) takes crisp, clear photos and is capable of capturing decent videos. The Aino features A-GPS support and a range of connectivity options, including Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and 3G. Accessing these features will immediately be familiar to anyone who has used a Sony Ericsson handset, thanks to the Aino's use of the recognisable user interface. For gamers, the Aino can be used as a Remote Play device in conjunction with your PlayStation 3, which is a cool addition.

The Aino is a great handset that anyone looking for a phone that excels on the multimedia front will be very happy with. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Specifications

Camera: 8.1 megapixel w/ autofocus, LED flash, videocalling and video stabilizer
Memory: 55MB internal; 8GB microSD card included (expandable up to 32GB)
Connectivity: GPRS; EDGE; 3G (HSDPA 7.2 Mbps); Bluetooth v2.1; USB v2.0

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Wireless headset/docking station
+ Responsive touchscreen

›Minus
- Limited touch control

›Bottom Line
The Aino is an interesting handset with some cool features focused on the multimedia/mobile entertainment side of things.

08
out of ten

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AVG Gaming Protection

TO BE HONEST, AVG Gaming Protection is a bit of a strange software package. It's marketed to gamers because of its small system-resource footprint, which makes it perfect for gamers who are looking to protect their data without sacrificing too much of their precious system resources by doing so.

The software is not meant to replace your anti-virus software – it's meant to complement it. If you're using premium anti-virus software, AVG clearly states that you will not need this software. For gamers who are using free anti-virus applications with somewhat limited functionality, AVG Gaming Protection will seal up all the cracks in the security without being a pain in the ass while doing so. It's meant to be a minimum fuss, maximum protection solution, and in that regard, it works quite well.

It doesn't store virus definitions and eliminate every virus that plagues your PC. Instead, AVG Gaming Protection searches for anything (like processes, files and the like) that may be behaving suspiciously and attempts to rectify the situation without causing a ruckus. The program marks files and processes as trusted (or not) and can be used to quarantine them if it seems like they're a part of a malicious attack on your machine. We've all heard the horror stories (perhaps you've even experienced it

yourself) of hacked game accounts, stolen passwords and general tomfoolery that tends to happen on the Internet, in this case when games are involved. We also know that anti-virus applications sometimes tend to get in the way of our online gaming (certain games, like *Aion*, even force you to disable your anti-virus applications before they'll allow you to play) by spitting out inane alerts, downloading updates and the like, which can either cause your connection to lag, cause your games to crash or simply get in the way of all the fun you're trying to have. In this regard, AVG Gaming Protection is brilliant because it'll allow you to disable your resource-hogging anti-virus software without completely endangering your machine's integrity.

Our biggest problem with the software is that not all gamers will find it useful. Unless you're trying to squeeze every last bit of performance out of your system or need to shave a few nanoseconds off your ping, AVG Gaming Protection isn't going to do you much good. If you're just looking to have fun and aren't too worried about that sort of thing, a simple, free anti-virus application (like AVG's own free anti-virus software – which is great, by the way) will be enough. For the most hardcore of the hardcore, however, this software works well. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Unobtrusive
+ Efficient
+ Good for certain gamers

›Minus
- It's not for everyone

›Bottom Line
AVG Gaming Protection is an intriguing piece of software that might be useful for some (but not all) gamers.

05
out of ten

Minimum Requirements
CPU: 600 MHz
HDD: 50MB free space
RAM: 256MB
OS: Windows 2000, XP 32/64, Vista 32/64, 7 32/64

GG
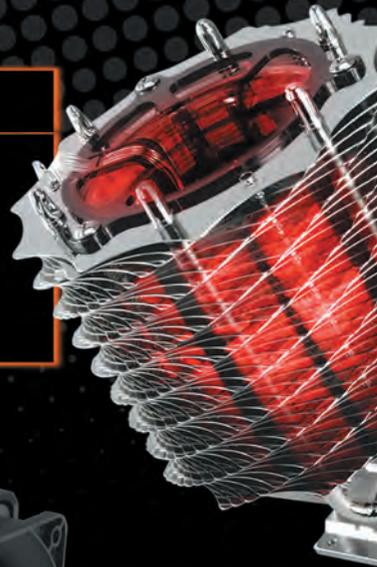
By Tarryn van der Byl

Gamer is a $#!& movie

THIS MONTH, I'LL BE taking a temporary sabbatical from my usual brand of intellectually irrelevant rubbish to bring you this exclusive review[1] of Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor's brand of intellectually irrelevant rubbish. Now, I realise the title I've given my review is probably a bit of a spoiler, and I'll warn you that the review is full of spoilers too. But that's okay, because the two or three minutes it'll take you to read this will save you wasting 90 minutes of time better spent impaled on a spike.

Gamer is a movie about a sort of virtual reality TV show, *Slayers*, invented by that guy from *Dexter*, where a bunch of death row cons get to murder each other in a desperate bid for parole[2]. The big, clever twist in this otherwise ethically untenable premise is that the cons are remotely controlled by players through some kind of nanorobotic peer-to-peer network wizardry that's actually completely implausible here but just plausible enough if you're going to assume nobody is going to stop and think about it for more than 0.2 seconds[3]. No, the gamers aren't responsible for all that murder either, because it's just a game. Or something. Actually, that's never really explained.

Anyway, this guy Kable[4] is the star of the show because he and his handler (the guy from *Percy Jackson*) have survived 27 episodes, and he'll win his free pass back to society at 30. Episodes are survived by reaching a "Save Point", a nebulous concept in the movie that's never really explained.

A bunch of stuff happens, and Kable contrives a daring escape from the show by establishing contact with and subsequently breaking control from his handler in a way that's never really explained, not least of all because the entire planet is hooked on the show, and nobody notices Kable talking to this guy the whole way through the episode. So he hotwires a truck with a bit of vodka-infused vomit and urine[6] and drives off beyond the game's operating parameters and into New York. Because the show apparently isn't filmed inside the sort of isolated, confined maximum security-controlled zone you'd expect considering its stars are death row inmates. That's never really explained either, although Percy Jackson is arrested because allegedly[7] aiding and abetting Kable's escape from a game show where he used him to murder other people is a crime.

Then Kable somehow infiltrates Dexter's mansion and manages to kill him. None of this is really explained, but Dexter does a bizarre song and dance number so it doesn't matter. The end.

1 It's more like a synopsis, I suppose, but it serves the same purpose. I don't need to explain why the movie is utterly abysmal when the movie does a perfectly good job of that all on its own.
2 It's totally self-referentially ironic – probably unintentionally.
3 Or that nobody has ever played a game on Xbox LIVE or PSN, or *Modern Warfare 2* on PC.
4 It's an otherwise bland word that's authentically hardcore because it's spelled with a K. Like Kupkake or Kolostomy Bag or Kan't Believe I'm In This Shit Movi3, Man From 300 To This, What Was I Thinking LOL[5].
5 Which is even more authentically hardcore because I've swapped out an E for a 3.
6 Vodka is mostly ethanol; petrol is partly ethanol; ergo vodka-infused vomit and urine is a viable substitute for motor fuel.
7 Nobody saw him talking to Kable. The arrest warrant is never really explained.

Experience Points

www.myextralife.com

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