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Alone in the Dark
R**699**⁹⁵
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THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

WELL. I'M BACK. AS you may have noticed, James (former Editor of *NAG*) is gone. Where? Off to clear landmines in Cambodia is what he said waving his passport around. He also mentioned something about fighting real-life zombies in Brazil. So who knows? I just want to say a large and hairy thank you for giving it your all while you were in the big chair and we hope to see you around again. Another ship jumper is Toby. Now his story is slightly different… Toby will be heading back to the USA because he cannot find decent burritos in South Africa, or bandwidth for that matter. You see, he's used to downloading a few hundred megabytes while he takes a sip of coffee… Now it takes him a lengthy lunch to achieve the same rate. So long Toby and thanks for all the excellent work during the short time you were here.

Right, now that's all out of the way we can get back to me! Time for some honesty… I'm completely and totally sick and tired of the corporate slash business world. All I'm doing these days is shuffling paper around, putting out fires and getting bored to death. There was actually even a whole day that went past the other month where I didn't even play a game. So instead of hiring a new Editor for this fine magazine, I've decided to take the wheel again and see where we can go with this whole thing. Already this issue was an amazing experience. I now feel like I have some purpose, actually doing something tangible again. I've already made a few changes by dumping the *Magic: the Gathering* page, increasing one of the reviews to three pages, changing the cover and cover story, writing a few captions, choosing some different artwork, tweaking here and fiddling there. I'm also going to start having some fun with the letters page again… I really do miss having the last word and ruffling feathers. I'm also looking for feedback on the main feature this month. We kicked tradition out the window a little by featuring a few pages on the upcoming *Indiana Jones* movie – I'm not sure if this is something you readers are looking for or care about. So give it a read and tell me what you think. Good idea or a waste of paper – send mail here: michael.james@tidemedia.co.za. Do keep the feedback coming as the issues go by this year and remember, if I get enough mail about something people don't like, I'll change it. At the end of the day, you are the people buying the magazine. So let me know what you think. Just don't ask me to be nicer to people who write letters addressed to the magazine – that's the price you pay for your 15 seconds of fame. So, now in keeping with the flavour of this particular bit of writing, enjoy the issue! Now you go, "yes master".

BUMP IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Unfortunately for those of you who suffer from heart conditions or are easily startled, rather avoid the next issue of *NAG*. No seriously. Don't buy it and if you do, don't show it to your grandmother. The June issue is going to be a bit of a festival of frightening, a carnival of carnage, a… okay, I'm out of ideas. At least these are better than what one of our freelancers came up with (name withheld), wait for it… the June Giblet Jamboree. At least she (oops) got the scary part right.

COVER STORY

No issue of *NAG* is complete without an epic 'what's on the cover this month' saga. Initially it was going to be *Alone in the Dark* to complement a large horror feature (see this feature in the June issue) but the artwork we received just didn't do it for us. Then some bright spark (me) thought we should rather run an *Indiana Jones* cover considering that the new movie is coming at the end of May. Next we rustled up a heap of bullwhipping content along with a preview of the new LEGO Indiana Jones game – also coming soon. I asked the distributor for some special new artwork because all we had was the same artwork that was on the cover of *Edge* magazine in the UK (thank you Candice)! We debated about removing the LEGO logo from the game logo and also where to put the logo because logos always cover up the nice artwork. So we ended up putting it at the bottom where it'll end up being covered up by that pesky cover DVD. Anyway… this is how it goes here. Some days are diamonds and others are coal! My opinion… it's probably one of the coolest covers we've ever done.

Michael James
Editor

This was the original Indiana Jones cover artwork (as used by *EDGE* Magazine)

Henry Jones: Those people are trying to kill us.
Indy: I know Dad!
Henry Jones: It's a new experience for me.
Indy: It happens to me all the time!

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Miklos
SUBJECT: The industry in SA

AFTER READING YOUR JANUARY 2008 edition and the preview article on Tomb Raider: Underworld, I was thinking to myself: What did this article tell me about this game that I already didn't know? I spend a lot of time browsing a lot of gaming Websites, and by the time the new *NAG* comes out there really isn't much in it that I haven't already read some incarnation of elsewhere. So why, then, do I continue to buy your magazine? I have been doing so for about ten years now and all it boils down to is the desire to contribute towards the gaming industry within South Africa. There is no doubt that *NAG* is the forerunner in South African gaming journalism and therefore an essential device for promoting the industry; and my monthly R39.00 in some way makes sure that the industry I love continues to flourish in SA. There, I said it.

I was fortunate enough to have spent 2006 living in the UK; a country that can be seen as a gaming Mecca (by SA standards at least). While there, I picked up the tail end of the advertising hype for *Oblivion*. Nearly every London bus had a Tamriel knight plastered to the side of it. My TV viewing was frequently peppered with adverts for *Gears of War*, *GTA Vice City Stories*, etc. I became an avid reader of *PC Gamer*, which was a great magazine that had a cover DVD (big deal for me because at the time of leaving SA, *NAG* still had cover CDs). And I used to spend a hell of a lot money in the franchised Game stores that were literally everywhere (not to mention Virgin Megastores and HMVs). I had free, blisteringly fast ADSL that was uncapped, which allowed me to play all sorts of MMOs that were not available back home. What was also great was that the Xbox 360 was very much available and the only thing that prevented me from buying one while in the UK was the knowledge that I would be going back to SA where, in all likelihood, there would be no Xbox 360 at all, seeing as how we never even got the original Xbox in the first place.

However, a lot changes in a year, especially in this industry and (as I was ecstatic to realise) SA had not been sleeping on the job while I was away.

I returned home only to be greeted at the airport by a massive advert for the Xbox 360. *NAG* had started putting DVDs on their covers (dual-layered – better than *PC Gamer*'s 4.5GB DVD offerings). And best of all, a South African gaming company had mushroomed franchises all over the country (I am of course referring to BT Games). On top of this, Telkom had begun advertising broadband for gaming purposes (I am not rooting for them, I still hate Telkom but at least they are getting involved in the industry). It seemed that while I spent a year frolicking in a country where gaming is firmly entrenched within the lifestyles of its citizens, South Africa was quietly shaping its own, similar (yet fledgling by comparison) gaming scene. I could not believe the difference that one year made. The gaming industry is very much alive and kicking in this country compared to years gone by (way back when Incredible Connection had one tiny little shop in Sandton City and their logo was a cutesy red kangaroo) and I only hope that dedicated groups such as *NAG* and BT Games continue to lead the way.

Of course, this newfound gaming patriotism of mine has made me a firm advocator of anti-piracy. The way I see it, the more of my money I put into the industry, the bigger it will get. So that is why I willingly spend R39.00 on *NAG* every month even though a large part of the content is stuff that I've already read online. Thanks for a great magazine and above all being the mouthpiece for our SA gaming industry. And no, I don't work for BT Games.

Well, you hit the nail right on the head, so much so that your letter defies shortening or editing for space. South Africa has a thriving gaming industry that's growing all the time and there isn't much out there that you cannot buy on a shelf here. Bandwidth is still a tripping point but that will eventually be resolved, and as the industry grows you'll start seeing more television adverts, billboards and probably another proper gaming magazine popping up eventually. In reply to your first point: yes, if you spend a lot of time Internet surfing, you're going to find out a lot about the same games we cover in the magazine. NAG *provides a condensed version of all this information and thanks to the amount of research we do, our articles are somewhat more detailed and informative than many Websites some of the time. Because we have plenty of contacts overseas, we often get what the industry calls "print exclusive" artwork or material that's often under embargo until a specific date. Part of the success of the industry is thanks to what we do at the magazine and with rAge and naturally we couldn't do any of this if it wasn't for all the support the industry and our readers gives us. Ed.*

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

FROM: Cavie
SUBJECT: March Letter of the Month – Thanks, but there's a Little more

THANK YOU FOR BESTOWING upon me your prestigious Letter of the Month award [*it's actually Letter of the Moment, Ed*]. However, I'd like to apologise for parts of it, as, in truth, it came across as a rant, and that wasn't what I was intending at all. Therefore, this letter can serve as a continuation of the last one.

Don't you think you've milked your moment in the limelight enough? We gave you the Letter of the Moment slot, sent you a prize, published your name in the magazine and gave you something to brag to your friends about. Don't push it or I'll set my spam filter to kill. Ed

FROM: Ninja / Declan
SUBJECT: NAG owns!

FIRSTLY, I'D LIKE TO thank you for a great magazine. I love it. I know it sounds clichéd, but honestly, it's a great magazine – not like all those crap magazines where all you see are celebs. I mean, what a waste of time. Who really cares if Paris Hilton goes to jail or if Brad Pitt is having an affair, but *NAG*... *NAG* is worth every damn cent. It has something for everyone: PC, console even the damn cellular phone. So thanks again. I love reading my *NAG* while my mom thinks I'm studying (evil laugh). I love the way you guys (and Tarryn) use slang and stuff. I know you were busy fantasising about *Pac-Man* in English class. Xbox 360 owns and I think *Assassin's Creed* is a great game... Who doesn't want to shove a blade into some random soldier's neck. All I can say is thanks for the great magazine. I love it and keep up the good work. *NAG* just keeps me nagging for more *NAG*s.

Gee thanks, I don't know what to say... you're welcome! Every now and then, we publish a letter like this to show everyone who doubts it how great we are. It's very self-promoting but it can be a double-edged sword. For example, this letter clearly shows us that some people should be paying more attention in school instead of daydreaming about Pac-Man. *Mr Ninja here didn't use a full stop until about halfway through his letter. We also know that he doesn't study and lies to his mommy and there's a strong possibility that when he grows up he might end up murdering someone with a blade. On the other hand, this is exactly the kind of reader we love: addicted to the magazine like a heroin junkie. The only real challenge left is to try and get people like this to buy two copies a month (evil laugh). Ed.*

FROM: Gordon
SUBJECT: Comment on quality of game reviews in NAG

YOUR GAMING REVIEWS ARE interesting but often do not contain a lot of necessary information. I would find it useful if, for every game review (especially FPS/3PS games), you indicate the circumstances under which the player can save the game. As you will be aware, some games let you save at any point. Others don't let you save while in combat or until you have completed a mission. Please also indicate whether the game can be played on different difficulty levels, and if the difficulty level can be changed while playing the game. For FPS/3PS games it would help to know whether the game shows you a map while you navigate each level. The combination of a fixed difficulty level and not being able to save a game until a mission is completed often results in the ruination of an otherwise perfectly good game.

In a perfect world NAG *would be 600 pages and each review would be around ten or more pages in length. But as we all know, this whole human experiment is far from perfect, so we must make do with what we have. Generally, a review is a summary 'experience' of playing a game. So the most pertinent things are highlighted. We'd really like to add more specifics but we cannot. Ed.*

FROM: N1ghtH4wk
SUBJECT: A ruined surprise

I RECENTLY WENT ON HOLIDAY a bit too early to receive my Tenth-anniversary Edition *NAG*. Therefore, I had to wait the entire duration of being away just so that my tenth-anniversary excitement could be squashed by the condition of my magazine. I have been reading *NAG* since December 2003, and I have never

had this problem. Firstly, the box I received it in was bent (they most likely tried to put it in the box), and secondly, the actual magazine was torn near the bottom. Maybe these will seem like small problems, but for a bunch of paper that I paid a bit under R40 (I am a subscriber) for I expect it not to happen. The tear must have been a problem in the packaging process because I don't see how the post office could have done it. Regarding to the bending, a few years ago you replied to a printed letter saying that you post yourself a copy each month and that you have a smaller than normal mailbox. I don't know if you still do that, but a box shouldn't be bent. So in future, if you package a magazine in a box, put a sign on the piece of paper reminding the workers at the other end that post boxes are too small for a magazine in a box. On a happier note, I love the content of the tenth-anniversary magazine and look forward to reading the reviews of the older games like *WarCraft*.

Sorry to hear about that… Here at NAG we're a slick, savvy, well-educated, talented bunch of multi-skilled equal opportunity honeybees. We work hard, stay up late and pour our very souls into every single element of this magazine. I just find it amusing (if I don't laugh I cry) that all of this energy and effort and your R39 go to waste because some moronic clod who was probably only hired because he/she/it has a face tried to stuff a carefully crafted cardboard designer box into a space it obviously wouldn't fit into. It's under these kinds of situations that the very fabric of society, dare I say humanity, starts tearing at the frayed lines. Fear not. Thanks to all this recent post office nonsense, we're cooking up a killer alternative that'll put you back in happy land. Ed.

FROM: Larry
SUBJECT: StarCraft II & C&C3
WHILE I WAS WATCHING the recent *StarCraft II* video on the *NAG* DVD, I noticed that a number of the new Terran units and support powers appear to have been copied from *C&C3* (e.g., instead of deploying zone trooper drop pods, Terran marine drop pods are called down, and the Terran's also have their own version of the GDI juggernaut from *C&C3*. This is highly ironic, since the *C&C* franchise borrowed a few concepts from *StarCraft* for *Red Alert 2* and *Generals*, in addition to the interface change adopted for *Generals* (which is a separate discussion in itself). Now Blizzard is copying ideas for *StarCraft II* from *C&C*!

Look, everyone borrows a little from everyone else every now and then. At the end of the day, there really are only so many different ways in which you can represent a tank and a repair facility, otherwise people buying the games won't know how to play them. Just look the other way and enjoy the game when it comes out – this is our plan. Ed.

GET CREATIVE…

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Someone is working on a game that plans to teach kids about the Nazi-orchestrated genocide. Should games just be about playing and fun or do we need more titles that explore and teach uncomfortable subjects, whether they are fair or biased?

Gen Wolf: Games are games. When you come home, you want to have a bit of fun, not really play a 'game' in which you learn about history. Yes, we need to learn about the blunders that have been made in the past, but could you not classify it under 'Educational Software'! To me, games have to be fun!

Magon: Since this game would be treading on very thin ice, it would have to carry a lot of depth, in gameplay and emotionally. The game should play like a good movie that helps you understand what is happening during this crisis, so you can relate to the events and characters (even though it's way back in WWII). Both sides had their motives and players need to know why, who, what, when and where.

dolfieman: A bit of both. A good example is the Total War series - quite accurate use of history, while still maintaining the fun. Imagine you could teach history in that manner! A+ for all the ppl!

Antharias: Teach us history at school. We have the Internet for education. We have games for escapism. There are already enough World War II games. Give the topic a break. I don't think it is a good idea as it is just kicking a dead horse of a topic.

Incognito: Games are a great and fun way to explore teaching the kids. I say go for it!

edg3: I think we need more titles to teach and explore subjects. I find that it is much easier to get messages and to understand the emotion through graphic representation (movies work well), but a more interactive method could help more. I'm a history student and for me, the more I can take part and see what happened, the easier it is to remember and form opinions on it.

GhOsT_828: The thing is, gamers want fun. Fun is the key. Educational values are nice too, but the education must be prioritised way below the fun and gameplay aspect. People will much rather play a fun game with little education than an educational game, which isn't fun.

Doom6197: I don't really care, but the game must be fun.

Splendid: It can work but it won't. It is a good idea but like most of these ideas, they are going to be low budget and a bunch of crap.

wrathex: Gaming is a rich, versatile medium and reaches a very large audience. So from that perspective, it is an obvious route to use the gaming medium as a vehicle for education. There is, however, a catch especially when including political or religious issues: you are no longer making a game for everyone. You will be dividing gamers.

Repline: Games have been used in the past as an educational medium. As to it being fair or biased, books and DVDs run the same risk as any other form of educational. The upside of gaming is that it could bring 'perspective' to both sides of the equation, allowing people to make up their own minds.

cov1e_stalker: If a game is not fun it will fail. It should also tell the truth about what happened no matter how uncomfortable it is. War isn't very comfortable, is it?

Karuji: Do we need them? No. We have schools to teach kids. Should we make them? Well yes, the education system fails, and you remember more things from playing a videogame than school.

RAVENBOI22: Games are not supposed to bore us with subjects (e.g., history) that we go to school for 12 years to learn. Games can include historical facts or incidents, but should focus on fun rather than learning. It's like asking a soccer coach to teach trig, instead of focusing on soccer. It's not right.

Micta: It's a good idea, but I hate having to do maths in my computer period at school. It could work if its still fun, but games and school never mixed well.

Jub Jub: Many games are educational. The most famous games that do this revolve around World War II , but Assassin's Creed was educational and many RTS games are too. Every game you play these days has something to teach you someway or another. This new game should be made and many more too. Thank History Channel games for beginning this already.

BattleMoose: I have learnt a lot from games. I definitely do not think that a game should attempt to teach the aspects of such a controversial issue such as the Nazi genocide. Game developers aren't required to be politically subjective but would have to be to responsibly approach such an issue. We already see vast amounts of propaganda in games. How many games glorify America and the American army?

CumaCuziCat: Games = Fun time… School = Education time…. That's just how it goes. It's normal for it to be that way. Anyway, who really even stops to think that a game is teaching them something or not?

Fredder: Nah, rather have spin-offs - like "what ifs?" - and then perhaps as an Easter egg, include some truthful facts/fact sheet. Both sides can then be told without hectic discrimination or scrutiny…

Telur: Give me a new game in the same spirit of Pharaoh. One that focuses more on the life of the people living in those cities you build. This will allow you to understand how the societies worked during those times.

Chevron: I think we need games that are more like art and less like TV sitcoms. The one makes you think, while the other makes you veg. Learning about history by 'living it' would be great.

Chuluka: Age of Empires I and II were both highly educational and fun and so was the Total War series. I'd say it does work if done properly.

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE NAG FORUMS: http://forums.tidemedia.co.za

THQ GOES BIG IN 2008

THQ RECENTLY HELD A press event where they showcased some of their upcoming releases. We'll take a quick look at some of them and a longer look at others. The most notable of these titles is **Red Faction: Guerrilla**. This new game is set 50 years after the events of the original Red Faction. Players will return to Mars but this time will view the action from the third person. The press release promises a massive world to explore, physics-based destruction and fast-paced guerrilla warfare-styled combat. So check, check and check again. Players assume the role of an insurgent fighter with a newly re-established Red Faction and must take it to the oppressive EDF (Earth Defense Force). Red Faction has always been famous for its destructible environments and this new game is promising all that and more. There is a competent multiplayer component promised with several modes focusing on destruction-based gaming. Guerrilla is being developed by Volition (the same guys who made the first two Red Faction titles as well as Descent) and is due for release on the Xbox 360, PS3 and PC sometime in 2009. For something very different, **de Blob** will be coming to the Wii and DS. Players must colourise a monochromatic town by splattering building and citizens with colour. Paint tins give you more colours when you run dry and remember to stay away from the water. The multiplayer mode looks like it'll be a race to see who can colour a location the fastest. Also from THQ is **Baja**, an arcade racing / racing simulation / off-road racing game that will include 50 licensed vehicles from VW beetles to trucks. Baja features cracking good visuals, ambient life (think rabbits darting across the road) and a smooth riding experience, and is probably setting itself up to muscle in on the recent flood of off-road racing titles. Another interesting addition to the line-up is **Deadly Creatures**. Prepare to pounce and sting using your Wii Controllers as you battle it out in a desert environment. Your tools of destruction are scorpions and spiders! Here's a little bit from the press release. "Deadly Creatures is a creepy, cinematic thrill ride, where the distinction between predator and prey can shift around every corner," said Nick Wlodyka, executive producer and general manager, Rainbow Studios. "With brutal motion-controlled combat, a dark compelling story and some of the best visuals to date on the Wii, we are excited to bring Deadly Creatures to a large core Wii audience that hungers for a new experience." The game is a third-person action thriller and is, unfortunately, only coming to the Wii. Now for something irreverent on the Xbox 360 and PS3, **Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon**. This one is all about weapons and destruction and a free open world to go wild in. Based on the screenshots, you just know this one is going to be fun. Wrapping it up is **Wall-E**. There isn't any useful information around about the game version of Disney and Pixar's new animated feature, but you can rest assured if it's in the movie it'll be in the game. As the year moves along we'll bring you more in-depth coverage on some of these titles, so hang in there.

TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.
Top Gun Tom Clancy style.

IT'S NOT A BIRD, it's not a plane - it's a H.A.W.X. Haw haw. Silly sounding name aside, *H.A.W.X.* (which will now be called HAWX) is the newest *Clancy* from Tom, set in 2012 and in the same universe as *GRAW*. "Primed to revolutionise the way players think about combat in the sky," the game is scheduled for release late this year. It turns consumers into elite pilots of the future, or so we're promised.

Set for release on the PS3, 360 and PC, *HAWX* is the first aerial *Clancy* game and features a nice "enhanced reality system" HUD (as iconic as the Cross-Com from *GRAW*), multiplayer including four-player jump-in-anytime cooperative and dogfighting deathmatch. Experience points and money gained from battle can be used to unlock more weapons.

HAWX will include over 50 planes commonly found in aerial warfare and an assist system to help people avoid turning oily burn smears on the terrain.

"We are confident that this new brand will become the new benchmark for flight combat games and will be, like other *Tom Clancy* based games, an instant online multiplayer hit," says Sebastien Delen, managing director of Ubisoft's Bucharest studio. "The player will experience all the action and excitement of modern air combat, from intense dogfighting to tactical strikes."

HOLLYWOOD AT THE GAMES

DIRECTOR GORE VERBINSKI (*PIRATES* of the Caribbean) is excited about gaming but wants to approach the medium from a completely different direction. "After working seven years straight on five movies back to back, I picked up my game controller and started playing. I just was blown away by the potential. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I feel that we are on the brink of something phenomenal," Verbinski told the *LA Times*. There's more rustling under the covers about a *Metal Gear Solid* movie.Producer Michael De Luca and Kurt Wimmer (director of Equilibrium) have been linked to the project but it's all a rumour at this stage. Solid Snake is just going to have to wait in line for some lights, camera, action... umm, action. In the heavyweight class, Peter Jackson and Steven Spielberg (as announced last year) will be directing a *Tintin* trilogy. Andy Serkis mentioned in a recent interview that Spielberg would definitely be directing the first one in the series, "In fact tomorrow I'm flying out to start on *Tintin*. Steven Spielberg is directing the first one, and then Peter Jackson is doing the second. The bulk of the shoot starts in September but things got a little bit moved around after the writers' strike." 2010 will hopefully see the release of the *Gears of War* movie. Everything is more or less signed and sealed on this one and fans of the game can expect a style of movie similar to *300*. Scriptwriter, Stuart Bettie said, "There's no way to build that world any other way really." Well, they used to do it all the time in the old days (back when there were no computers). Still in outer space, EA is producing an animated movie that will link the comic book plot and the beginning of their hot new game, *Dead Space*. Earning no points for originality, the game sees the crew of a spacecraft fighting off an alien presence they woke up from a remote mining site. You're probably safe missing the movie before playing the game. Lastly and most definitely not least, there's a very strong rumour confirmation that the mighty *Robocop* could be coming out of retirement, dust off his uniform and shove a banana up the tail pipe of ED209.

GTA MMO
Ooh! Yes! Want!

IT IS JUST WEEKS away until the next *Grand Theft Auto* title gets released but Rockstar Games is already talking about the future of the series beyond it and what they envision is an MMO-based game. This news comes straight from Dan Houser, a Rockstar VP in charge of creativity who feels that a *GTA* MMO would be a Rockstar equivalent to the Holy Grail. While he has made this statement, further proof that Rockstar intends to do an MMO of some sort has shown up on their Website where they have started advertising for network programmers. While it is not unusual for game companies to do this, the amount of jobs listed and what they are specifically raise rumours of an upcoming MMO title or at the very least a *GTA* game with network capabilities. At least gamers can think of it this way, the MMO, if created, will probably be a complete adrenaline rush with hijackings and riots happening on a daily basis.

snippets
YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

UBISOFT & STEAM
Ubisoft has announced that it will expand its videogame catalogue on Steam. More than 40 games, including *Assassin's Creed* will be available on Valve's leading platform for the distribution and management of PC games. As of 1 April 2008, *Assassin's Creed* is available for pre-purchasing via Steam. Ubisoft is bringing many of its award-winning brands to Steam, including the *Tom Clancy* series, the *Heroes of Might and Magic* series, *Far Cry* and many more. "Ubisoft will be delivering the largest library of titles available from any single publisher or developer to Steam," said Jason Holtman, director of business development at Valve. Besides previously released titles, future triple-A releases such as *Far Cry 2* will also be available. Gamers can visit www.steamgames.com for more information.

DISCOVER GUILD WARS
NCsoft has launched a new Website (www.discoverguildwars.com) specifically created to introduce new players to the world of *Guild Wars*. The Website is designed to be user friendly and goes to great lengths to ease newcomers into the MMORPG way of life.

GTA IV SNIPPED
To avoid an outright ban, Rockstar has confirmed that the Australian version of *GTA IV* will be cut. The game will carry an MA15+ rating (this is the highest rating in Australia) and a warning of "strong violence, strong coarse language, drug and sexual references". No details have been forthcoming on exactly what was stripped out of the game to satisfy the censors. In the UK on the other hand, the BBFC has cleared the game for release with an 18 rating. This isn't the first time Rockstar has been forced to edit a *GTA* game for sale in the land of spiders and snakes.

UNREAL CONTEST

THE INTEL AND EPIC Games "$1 million Intel make something Unreal contest" is up and running. Check out the site here: **www.makesomethingunreal.com**. This contest is a follow up to the original where development team Tripwire Interactive was awarded the grand prize for their *Red Orchestra* total conversion of *Unreal Tournament 2003*.

"A few years ago, we were just a group of fans with an idea to make a mod that we would all like to play," said Tripwire Interactive President John Gibson. "The Unreal Engine and its mod tools were perfect for the game we wanted to make, and with the hard work and determination of our team we used those tools to create *Red Orchestra* and win the mod competition. Winning the 'Make Something Unreal Contest' helped the Tripwire Interactive team realise our dream of founding our own development studio and bringing our game to retail. It is a real life 'Rags to Retail' story."

The prizes in the current competition include an Unreal Engine 3 licence, Intel Software Development Products, computers, processors and other cash awards. To participate, aspiring developers must create modifications for the PC version of *Unreal Tournament III*. Categories include vehicles, tools, environments, weapons and characters. As a bonus, the content created for this competition will be freely available to players of the PC version of *UT3*.

"To all you aspiring game developers out there – this is your chance to get in the big leagues. We have categories for all kinds of creatively talented people including programmers, artists, 3D modellers, designers and even aspiring film directors," said Mark Rein, vice president of Epic Games. "You get to use the same world-class Unreal Engine 3 toolset we used to create *Unreal Tournament III* and *Gears of War*. Unreal Engine 3 is used by many of the industry's leading game companies, so this is truly a chance to prove your worth and get your foot in the door of the game business while having your work potentially exposed to millions. To get mod-makers started, the collector's edition of *Unreal Tournament III* includes over 20 hours of 3D Buzz's professional-level video training materials for the Unreal Engine 3 toolset." The winners will be announced in 2009.

AND JUST WHEN YOU'RE DONE WITH GTA IV...
You can strap on your other gang bandanna and jump into the Stilwater sandbox in another *GTA* clone, *Saints Row 2*. Boldly promising the "most robust open-world feature set ever developed in the genre", developer Volition describes the sequel, set 15 years after the events of the first, as "a much darker and more sinister story that leads your character down a path of betrayal, revenge and redemption against the city that has left him for dead". And now with on- and offline two-player co-op, you can hit that path of betrayal, revenge, and redemption with a chum.

THEY SAID IT...

"After ten years of a highly successful collaboration which has seen the creation of blockbusters that set standards in the videogame industry, such as *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*, and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*, today, acquiring the perpetual property rights of the Tom Clancy name for videogames and related projects is a major event."
Yves Guillemot, Chief Executive Officer at Ubisoft talking about a deal to acquire all intellectual property rights to the Tom Clancy name.

"We never wanted to force consumers down any particular DVD playback route."
VP of Microsoft Interactive Entertainment Europe, Chris Lewis

"I really would love to redo a version of *Syndicate*. *Syndicate* was probably one of my favourites."
Peter Molyneux

"I hate videogames, on or offline. I hate the way they suck real people into fake worlds and hold on to them for decades at a time."
Giles Whittel

"This rule that we have to be a human in the game: we just have to throw that one away, right? You can be a speck of dust. Once you dispose of aspects of conventional logic and you start to explore dream logic, the field is wide open."
Gore Verbinski

THE SUM OF ALL FEARS

Game publisher Ubisoft buys Tom Clancy brand

OVER THE COURSE OF the last decade, gamers have been able to experience the world that Tom Clancy invented through various series of videogames. There has been *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Recon* and *Splinter Cell*. There is the upcoming title called *End War* and after recent events, it looks as though Ubisoft has begun the process of putting together an MMO based on these series as well. In fact, Ubisoft has invested so much into the *Tom Clancy* brand of games that it came as no surprise when they announced plans to buy out the brand completely. This deal has cost Ubisoft an approximate 60 million euros, which will be paid over three years. The potential profits that Ubisoft has paid out include up to an additional 15 million euros. This also includes all editorial content that Ubisoft has stated will allow them to cross over various series as well as expand the existing titles for many years to come.

Ubisoft has also begun to put in a lot of thought to an MMO based on the various *Tom Clancy* gaming which should boost their monthly income from subscribers significantly if done right. In fact, according to Ubisoft's chief executive Yves Guillemot, this MMO is one of their priorities.

It is not only gamers that will be benefiting from Ubisoft's decision, but also movie lovers. Ubisoft's chief executive, Yves Guillemot, has stated that his company has achieved the resources needed to produce cinematic features and that in the months to come (after it was revealed that sometime last year), a new studio called Ubisoft Digital Arts, was opened in Montreal. They will start work on a *Tom Clancy* movie. However, it has been confirmed that it will not have anything to do with the *Rainbow Six* series.

This deal should, in theory, save Ubisoft about 5 million euros in royalty pay outs every year from now on and if the brand continues to be successful, Ubisoft will have recovered after not more than 15 years.

STEPHAN KING: VIDEOGAME LUNACY

He wrote a lot of books people liked, too

"AND IF THERE'S VIOLENCE to be had, the kids are gonna find a way to get it, just as they'll find a way to get all-day shooters like *No Country for Old Men* from cable if they want. Or *Girls Gone Wild*, for that matter. Can parents block that stuff? You bet. But most never do. The most effective bar against what was called 'the seduction of the innocent' when this hot-button issue centered on violent comic books 60 years ago is still parents who know and care not just about what their kids are watching and reading, but what they're doing and who they're hanging with. Parents need to have the guts to forbid material they find objectionable...and then explain why it's being forbidden."

So says Stephen King in his pop-culture column on *Entertainment Weekly* (full article: http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20188502,00.html), where he speaks out against the politicians using the emotionally charged issue of videogame violence to further their own ends.

Hilary Clinton: Totally a cylon

PLANET AMERICA VOTES ON GAMING

IT IS A WELL known fact that games and politicians do not mix. However, the two have been pretty reliant on each other in recent years. Politicians rely on games to bring out controversial topics that they can use to boost their prominence, while games rely on politicians to keep to the statutes of law that enable free speech. This begs the question: How will the American elections affect gamers around the world?

The three major nominees in the running, John McCain, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, have all avoided the issue recently, but their track records show where they stand. John McCain, while not having taken a stance on the matter, has often sided with his long-time friend, Joe Lieberman, on many bills. Unfortunately, Joe Lieberman is one of the most prominent anti-gaming activists in the US senate and has been for many years. Hillary Clinton, a well known anti-gaming activist, has been known on many occasions to side with Joe Lieberman as well. However, she has also taken a more direct line with promises that if she becomes the next President, she will make sure that games and shops that sell them are held to extremely stringent laws. Barack Obama, on the other hand, would be the best of the three hopefuls as he still maintains that children's morale values are the responsibilities of their parents and not that of the government.

How this will affect us as foreign gamers is quite simple. Most developers have a major stake in the American market. If this market suddenly diminishes, it means fewer developers with less time to create new titles. It essentially would mean that the quality we enjoy at present would drop dramatically.

FREE FOR ALL AND FOREVER!

On 16 April, Nadeo will be releasing *TrackMania Nations Forever* as a free download (it will be on the June cover DVD). The original *TrackMania Nations* launched two years ago (also as a free download) has since captivated large swaths of (mostly European and French it seems) gamers. According to Nadeo, *TrackMania Nations* has been installed on more 30 million times and over four million players have created online accounts.

With a new 'Forever' version of the Stadium environment, new solo mode and 65 new tracks, *TrackMania Nations Forever* will also bring about the convergence of the greater community. Players of the free versions will be able to play against players from the retail version of *TrackMania United* (but only on the new Stadium environment featured in both games). *TrackMania United* players will get *United Forever*, a free extension pack that includes new tracks, new design blocks for the seven environments and a graphical update of the desert, snow and rally environment.

FREE AWESOME OF THE MONTH

THE BLOB

[ON THE DVD]

This month your free awesome is *The Blob*, a student-created game where you roll around as a giant gelatinous blob that changes colour depending on which hapless inhabitant of the world you absorb. A school project, the map is a recreation of the station area of the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands as it will be ten years from now. The game is being used to educate the locals about the proposed changes for the station area. As you roll around, you have to change the colour of certain buildings by absorbing a local of that colour and then ramming into the building. It's fun, quirky, entertaining and not bad at all for a student project.

THE EVOLUTION OF: GOLF GAMES
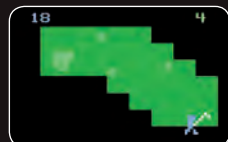
Computer Golf! [1978]

Golf [1980]
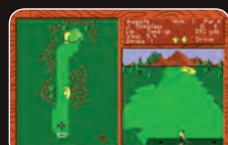
World Tour Golf [1985]

PGA Tour Golf [1990]

PGA Tour 96 [1995]

Microsoft Golf 2001 Edition [2000]

Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2005 [2004]

Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 08 [2007]

CONSOLE WATCH

SALES WATCH FOR THE week of March 24-30 in Japan: **Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G [PSP] sold 880,000 units**; the PSP sold 139,000 units while the DS only sold 57,000 units. During the same period, 49,000 Wii units, 13,000 PS3 units and 2,800 Xbox 360 units were sold. • **Sony Corporation will be cutting production costs** on its goods in an attempt to offset the reductions in export profits caused by the stronger yen. A strong yen means it is less likely Sony will offer price cuts on the PS3. • Former Xbox Europe executive, Sandy Duncan, believes that **consoles will disappear very soon as everything gets "virtualised".** Speaking to ThatVideoGameBlog, Duncan said, "The industry is fundamentally driven by technology. I think dedicated games devices, i.e. consoles and handhelds, will die in the next five to ten years." • **Resident Evil 4 will not be appearing on 360 or PS3**, says Capcom. • Chris Corry from **Electronic Arts believes that RTS on a console still has a long way to go** before it reaches the magical echelons of puritan stupidity. "Console RTS design has come a long way, but I don't know if you will be able to lead design of a true RTS, which is so inherently reliant on the mouse and keyboard combination, on the console," the Red Alert 3 producer told Eurogamer. • The Mission Bay Community **Church in San Francisco used a Jesus Mii on a poster** advertising its Easter celebration. The poster shows a Mii version of Jesus next to an Easter bunny, with the text, "Come and follow Mii". • Steve Nix, id Software's director of business development, told Eurogamer that he believes **many PC FPS gamers have moved to console**. Designer Greg Stone, who has been working on Quake Wars at Nerve Software, chipped in to agree. "You can't ignore the market realities and the size of the console market," says Nix. • The 360 saw a boost in sales after the Europe-wide price cut in March. "**Xbox 360 is up 35-40 percent** – that's from Friday, when the price cut came into effect, up to midnight Saturday," Chart-Track director Dorian Bloch told GamesIndustry.biz. • ASUSTEK-owned manufacturing firms Pegatron and Unihan are now producing Xbox 360 consoles in China. Both firms are also OEM producers of the PlayStation 3. • Vice President of Acer, James Wong, says that **Acer has plans to enter the console market with an open-platform console.** • PopCap Hits Volume 2 for the PlayStation 2 is on the way, featuring Heavy Weapon and Zuma. Volume 1 contained Bejeweled 2 and Astropop. It is unclear if these volumes will find local distribution. • Chris Lewis, an Xbox Europe executive, declared that **the 360 has the best games of all the current consoles.** Speaking to GamesIndustry.biz Lewis said, "We do, genuinely, I think, have the best games for both the core and the masses. • Seems Microsoft will be replacing the 20GB HDD in the standard Xbox 360 SKU with a 60GB HDD. If you're saving for an Xbox 360, it'd probably be a good idea to wait a little.

TAKE ME DOWN
If you're a fan of *Burnout Paradise* you might want to keep an eye on the Criterion Website (www.criteriongames.com) as the developer plans to keep fans updated on their future new content. Instead of naming their updates in the traditional fashion (v1.1, v1.2), they're going to be using codenames, so keep a lookout for "Cagney", then "Davis" and then "Eastwood". They had this to say: "What we're working on now goes way beyond conventional content updates, so we figured the usual 1.1, 1.2 version numbers didn't do it justice."

CRYTEK WARS?
Crytek has filed for trademark protection of the following names, "Crysis Warhead", "Crysis Wars" and "World in Crysis". Whether these are new games, console ports, sequels, prequels, spin-offs or expansions is anyone's guess, but at least now you know what to keep an eye out for.

MASS EFFECT 2 EXCLUSIVE TO 360
BioWare has confirmed that the next *Mass Effect* title will be appearing exclusively on the Xbox 360 despite rumours that the trilogy would end up going multiplatform after the developer was gobbled up by Electronic Arts. The good news is that once the exclusivity period is up, the game will be heading to the PC. Hooray.

ORANGE BOX EARNS MORE THAN 100 AWARDS
Valve has announced that *The Orange Box* – its multiplatform, multi-game offering – has earned over 100 first-place awards for both the compilation and the individual titles. Later this year Valve will be releasing *Left 4 Dead* on PC and Xbox 360.

HALO GETS REAL

GADGETMODELS.I4U.COM RECENTLY HIRED A real-life model to assume the role of Cortana from the *Halo* franchise. Cortana is a fictional artificial intelligence companion to Master Chief and mostly appears as a holograph in the games. The only thing real about the game version of Cortana is her voice, which is supplied by voice actor Jen Taylor. With a little body-paint, Photoshop and a *Halo 3* plasma rifle prop anything is possible.

CAPCOM LANDS MOTOGP LICENCE

CAPCOM HAS CONFIRMED THAT it has secured the exclusive multiplatform worldwide rights to create gaming content based on the *MotoGP* licence for the next five years. Capcom initially plans to release Xbox 360 and PS3 titles based on the 2008 MotoGP season as well as Nintendo Wii, PC, PS2 and mobile versions.

Commenting on the announcement, Mark Beaumont, executive vice president, officer and head of Capcom consumer software publishing in the Americas and Europe said: "We are very excited to have signed this long term agreement with Dorna Sports, which for the first time grants one publisher worldwide multi-platform rights to the adrenaline fuelled world of *MotoGP*. We feel this move to a single publisher will greatly benefit our ability to develop titles that deliver more authenticity and excitement to the consumer."

BLOODY COUNTER-STRIKE SAUCE
Because art breaks down communication barriers

RILEY HARMON CREATED A "sculpture" that ~~shoots~~ leaks "blood" down a wall every time a player is killed on a specific *Counter-Strike: Source* server. Harmon describes it as the "physical manifestation of nebulous kills". Players connected to the CS:S server (which was 129.15.76.103:27015) became part of the sculpture on display at the University of Oklahoma School of Art, which remained on display until 4 April.

According to Harmon, most of "us" kill a lot of people in digital worlds, thinking nothing of the consequences of death. Harmon addressed the topic with, "What it is without the hand that wields it," which is the name of the leaky sculpture.

NEW MAD MAX MOVIE AND GAME

GEORGE MILLER, DIRECTOR OF the *Mad Max* films, has confirmed that a videogame tie-in will be released alongside the latest instalment in the series. *God of War II* director Cory Barlog will be handling the game development side of the equation. The next *Mad Max* movie will be called *Fury Road*. The plan is to release the game and the movie at the same time even if it means delaying the movie. "I'm delaying the movie in order to do a really good game," said Miller. "Normally what happens everyone's scrambling to finish a game so it can coincide with the release of the movie. In this case, because I've got another couple of movies to make, we can wait and do it properly. That's the theory."

GUITAR HEROES, ASSEMBLE!
More rock-shaped awesome rolling your way

GUITAR HERO IS PACKING its gear and going on the road in *On Tour*, headlining on a DS near you, sometime soon. Unleash the beast on the train, in the office, or up on the table in the middle of your local Spur! Featuring the natty new four-button Guitar Grip controller add-on and a plectrum-shaped stylus, *On Tour* plies its own roster o' rock with five locked venues and more than 20 new tracks, including songs by Nirvana, OK Go, and No Doubt. There's a single-player campaign mode as well as local wireless two-player co-op and competitive play for twin-axe mayhem on the move.

"We're designing *Guitar Hero: On Tour* from the ground up to take full advantage of the DS platform by integrating signature gameplay with fresh new content and DS specific features," said Karthik Bala, CEO of Vicarious Visions (previously responsible for the Wii port of *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*). This includes having to blow into the DS microphone to extinguish flaming guitars, and quickly scrawling autographs for delirious fans with the DS stylus in new in-game challenges. It's the dizzy stuff of super-stardom, in a convenient pocket-sized package. "We've taken all of our learning on the DS platform to date and pushed it to the limits to create a truly innovative *Guitar Hero* experience."

Meanwhile, veteran rock wrinkles Aerosmith don't want to miss a thing with this explosive franchise, and are booked for their own exclusive *Guitar Hero* release later this year on the Xbox 360, PS3, PS2, and Wii. "We've put a lot of ideas into the game so that fans can have fun interacting with our music, getting inside our body of work and learning about the band's history," says string-strangler Joe Perry, while Activision/Red Octane PR drone Dusty Welch adds that, "This partnership will give Aerosmith, a band that has sold more than 150 million albums worldwide, a powerful and innovative platform to reach their fans and new audiences."

MICROSOFT DOMINATES NEXT-GEN SALES

The Xbox 360 has always been, without a doubt, a very sturdy and successful console and Microsoft recently released their sales figures and made the claim that they are the market leaders in the next-gen console war with an incredible 42% share. A figure which gives Microsoft a total of 17.7 million Xbox 360 units sold worldwide. However, while they are the leaders at the moment, sales figures in Europe for March show that the PS3 has been outselling the 360 by about 20,000 units. While the 360 is still in front, only time will tell if they can keep up the momentum.

MAINSTREAM GAME DEVELOPMENT

David Perry's MMO project, code named Top Secret, has, since its commencement in February last year, signed up 60,000 would-be game designers, according to Acclaim. The idea behind the project is having the community of designers, who have been divided into 11 teams, develop it, with the winner being appointed director and signing a development contact. The winner will also be paid $100,000 and have $1 million to spend on engine licensing to build their game. Everyone else will receive credit for the work they put in.

Mark Skaggs of EA Irvin Studios and Command and Conquer titles has been put in the position of advisor because of his experience with large teams.

Developmag.com quotes Perry as saying "... I'm positive [Skaggs] will find amazing talent on this team that he will want to work with in the future. I certainly have been hiring people directly out of the forums, so the system is already working..."

Skaggs added: "Maybe this is the future? I'm sure there's a lot to be learned here and there's no sign of the Internet's influence on gaming even slightly slowing, so I'm looking forward to rolling up my sleeves and helping out."

MICROSOFT DOES BLU-RAY

After having previously denied being in any talks with Sony, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer has finally confirmed that the company is planning on supporting Blu-ray technology.

At the recent Microsoft Mix08 Internet Conference, Ballmer spilt the beans on the subject: "We've already been working on, for example, in Windows, device driver support for Blu-ray drives and the like, and I think the world moves on."

He also added, speaking about Toshiba's announcement of the death of the HD DVD (a device which Microsoft previously supported), "Toshiba has moved on. We've moved on, and we'll support Blu-ray in ways that make sense."

And while a senior executive at Sony has confirmed that the company is in talks with Microsoft and Apple about offering Blu-ray technology for their devices, it has yet to be seen whether Microsoft will opt for a Blu-ray add on or an integrated feature.

MAY RELEASES

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

Date	Game	Platforms
2	**Metropolismania**	PS2
2	**The Dog Island**	PS2
8	**Emergency Mayhem**	Wii
8	**Monster Madness: Grave Danger**	PS3
8	**NBA Ballers: The Chosen One**	360
8	**Pool Party with Cue**	Wii
8	**Warriors Orochi**	PC
9	**High School Musical: Work This Out**	DS
11	**Boom Blox**	Wii
11	**Mass Effect** *Pre-order for only R299.95. Save R50 off RRP!*	PC
16	**Death Jr: Root Of Evil**	Wii
16	**Dragon Quest Swords**	Wii
22	**Roogoo**	PC
23	**Ferrari Challenge**	PS3, Wii, DS
30	**Age of Conan** *Pre-order for only R257.36*	PC
30	**Age of Conan Special Edition**	PC
30	**Age of Conan Timecards**	PC
30	**Alone in the Dark**	PS2, 360, Wii, PC
30	**Alone in the Dark Limited Edition**	360, PC
30	**Hannah Montana: Music Jam**	DS
30	**Hannah Montana: Spotlight World Tour**	Wii, PS2
30	**Monster Jam**	360, PS2, Wii, DS
TBA	**ATV Offroad Fury PRO**	PSP
TBA	**Big Catch Bass Fishing**	DS
TBA	**Bob the Builder: Festival of Fun**	DS
TBA	**Civ Revolutions**	360

Date	Game	Platforms
TBA	**Cooking Mama 2**	DS
TBA	**Dancing Stage Supernova 2**	PS2
TBA	**Darstardly and Mutley: Pigeon Pursuit**	PS2
TBA	**Don King Boxing**	360
TBA	**Echochrome**	PSP
TBA	**Everybody's Golf 2**	PSP
TBA	**Haze** *Pre-order for only R599.95. Save R100 off RRP!*	PS3
TBA	**Jetix Puzzle Buzzle**	DS
TBA	**Johnny Bravo**	PS2
TBA	**Lost Planet Extreme Condition: Colonies**	360
TBA	**Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies**	PC
TBA	**Mr Bean**	DS
TBA	**Play TV**	PS3
TBA	**Postman Pat**	DS
TBA	**Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice**	PS2
TBA	**Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords**	Wii
TBA	**Race Driver GRID**	PC
TBA	**Race Driver GRID**	DS
TBA	**Race Driver GRID**	PS3
TBA	**SBK 08**	PC
TBA	**Secret Files: Tunguska**	Wii
TBA	**Singstar Summer Party**	PS2
TBA	**Singstar Summer Party with Mics**	PS2
TBA	**The History Channel**	PC
TBA	**Topspin 3**	360
TBA	**Warriors Orochi**	PSP

THE NUMBERS

17.7 MILLION
Xbox 360 install base [source: Microsoft]

100,000
iPhone SDK downloads in the first four days [source: Apple]

6 MILLION
Rock Band song downloads [source: Harmonix]

100
Awards received by Orange Box [source: Valve]

$1 BILLION
Toshiba's loss on HD DVD [source: various]

1.3 MILLION
People who play COD 4 every day [source: Infinity Ward]

66 MILLION
GTA series units sold to date [source: Take-Two]

28,000
games seized in a Mexican raid [source: ESA]

2 MILLION
RS: Vegas 2 sales [source: Ubisoft]

EA BIOWARE

MASS EFFECT™

THIS DAY IN GAMING: MAY

1
(1984) Nintendo releases Golf for the NES, which goes on to inspire a real sport.

2
LAN: MPLD (Pretoria) www.langames.co.za

3

4

5
(1992) Apogee Software releases Wolfenstein 3D for the PC.

6

7
(1946) Sony is founded.

8
SONY

9
(2002) Sony ships its 30,000,000th PS2. Go PS2!

LAN: Evolution LAN (Kempton Park) www.langames.co.za

18
(1973) Hudson Soft is founded in Sapporo, Japan. Hudson was the first third-party vendor for Nintendo.

19

12
(1989) Konami releases Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles for the NES in Japan. It was very, very hard.

21

22
(1998) Epic Games releases Unreal (PC).

23
LAN: Organised Chaos (Cape Town) www.langames.co.za

LAN: The Merriment (Meyrspark) www.langames.co.za

16
NY

24
LAN: Mayhem (Boksburg) www.langames.co.za

25

HUDSON

27

EA

28
(1982) Eletronic Arts is founded by Trip Hawkins, who invests $200,000 of his own money into it.

29
(2008) NAG June issue on sale!

30
(1979) Japan Capsule Computers is founded in Osaka, Japan. But you may know it better as Capcom

31
(1997) Interplay releases MDK, which remains one of the sexiest games known to man.

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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

APRIL CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT: "On your marks, get set, GO!"

MARCH WINNER
"Hey Mel, there's something crawling up your... Nevermind, I'll get it!"

Michael Pote

vivendi GAMES

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

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Ahoy, land lubbers! We lost the badger a few years back whilst trolling a BitTorrent site. His love for *NAG* brought him back to us, but to escape with his life, he had to become the Dread Pirate Badger! He's gone off to sail the Seven Seas again, and we need your help to find him. He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [**May Badger**]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a box of old GameBoy crap that's been collecting dust in our storeroom! Yeah, we need a sponsor. Shut up.
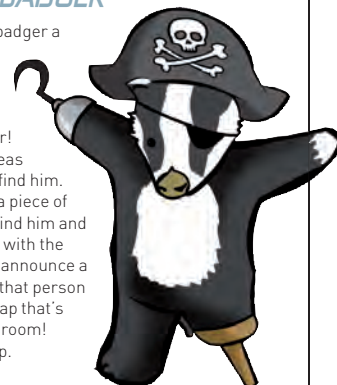
LAST MONTH'S WINNER
Elsa White, p113

Miktar's Meanderings

by Miktar Dracon

Ars longa, vita brevis

(or just trust me and go with it...)

TO CELEBRATE TEN YEARS of Miktarliciousness, we have a special surprise this month: an unprinted Miktar's Meandering from 1999! Being the enigmatic half-man, half-beast all-gamer sage of the soliloquy, master of the monoweb blandspace and bounty-hunting intergalactic dance champion that he is, it is easy to see why few would have ever heard of this unprinted technological marvel of the written word. Originally scheduled to premiere in the special New Year gold-foil cover issue before Y2K, the column was unfortunately shelved due to Freemason pressure. Thankfully, all that is sorted out and now and we're legally in the clear to print the following:

The following text was found on an abacus buried some forty metres under the Paideia landfill where Atari attempted to hide thousands of E.T. *game cartridges for the Atari 2600. It is believed that the text predates postmodernist civilisation, having evolved from the ideographic mnemonic proto-writing usually attributed to early Sumerian cuneiform script. The original document was translated by D. Jackson, PhD. Archaeology, Anthropology and Philology. His best (educated) guess as to what it says, give or take a few synonyms:*

Hi **Earth**.

Like a kaleidoscopic, new-age, 'transhumanist' homage to **Doc Savage**, I am a soldier, engineer, diplomat, lawyer, novelist, civic leader, and war hero – a renaissance man. A team of scientists (assembled by my father) trained my mind and body to near-superhuman abilities practically from birth, giving me great strength and endurance, a photographic memory, mastery of the martial arts, and vast knowledge of the sciences.

More importantly: I am a space dinosaur. I come from space.

Over nine-thousand (!) years ago, a culture of seven or eight humanoid species was formed. This culture had a vast and complicated history and to quote galactic archives, "has seen its waves of empires, federations, colonisations, die-backs, wars, species-specific Dark Ages, renaissances, periods of mega-structure building and destruction, and whole ages of benign indifference and malign neglect."

In case you're wondering, there are a few major space-faring civilisations, hundreds of minor ones, tens of thousands of species who **might** get into space and an innumerable lot who have "been there, done that" to the point where they either go insular for the sake of Zen-contemplation on **who-knows-what**, or disappear from the normal universe altogether to cultivate lives even less comprehensible.

Being a baseborn from space, my transferral to this mortal whorl had a decidedly downward motion.

Since then, inexorably gilded, metaphysical inertia (and indolence) has kept me forever in silent contemplation until I **sing the song that ends the Earth**. Excuse the Jerry Holkins. However, in all honesty, if some people consider opinion columns self-aggrandisement, and there are those who **do** irrespective of actual content, what would they think of **this**? Everything written here is true.

Not to trifle with tropes, but metonymy defines my actions and thoughts as 'actions of the *NAG* – if you swing that way. The synecdochic 'gamer' by itself attaches/detaches me to/from more conceptions, constructs and contraptions than most of the witting would care to admit. Haw. It is through a parallelised syncretism of metaphors that I keep my selfish ballast. Games are more than just games, but a 'game' is more than just a structured piece of entertainment.

It doesn't escape me that attempting edification of this nature usually doesn't bode towards the side of wellness, but there it is. Just in case, here is the core synclinal assertion: Does it matter what is written, or is it more important where the writing is found?

Wilson's Tenth Law: No matter how many times a writer proofs a book, hostile critics will always find at least one error that he missed.

Miktar's Billionth Law: No matter what you write, how you write it or what you write about, hostile critics will always presume that what is written is worthless or wrong.

Life's Law: Hostile critics will.

There is not much time. Everything in the universe arises partly from my conscious design and partly from suspicious accidents. You don't have to be a Hopkins to appreciate the words, "Did you know you can make fire out of ice? You can, you know. Fire out of ice. Think about it. Fire out of ice. Think. Think."

Not to be a Nietzschean yes-man, but who was that Prometheus guy and why did he give us fire in the first place? Fire out of ice. Think.

On 3 October 1903, I was run over by a horse-drawn wagon while crossing Sixth Avenue in New York City. I died eight days later.

Signed: Yours truly and Co.

Publisher's Notes and Addendum:
It appears that the author of the original document is:
a) An alien;
b) Obfuscatory verbose;
c) The most handsome man alive;
d) From the future;
e) Involved in something relating to primitive forms of education called "games";
f) Able to make fire;
g) Never finished Milon's Secret Castle (NES); and
f) The 40,100th visitor and has won free Viagra.

While Mr Jackson may have done an exemplary job in translating this old writing, it is the opinion of the government that the writing is worthless and probably a practical joke played on some unsuspecting caveman scholar. Further investigation into the document has revealed nothing except that Jeff from Acquisitions doesn't wash his hands after eating something greasy. Thanks Jeff.   **NAG**

> More importantly: I am a space dinosaur. I come from space.
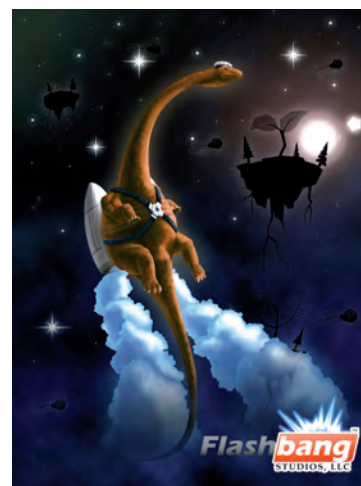
www.jetpackbrontosaurus.com

Dammit

by Megan Hughes

A little less conversation...

PEOPLE ARE FASCINATING CREATURES – they really are. The fact that they have been studied from so many different angles by a large (and growing) number of individuals is testament to it.

Take a moment to think about the last time you were completely alone. Perhaps you were home alone for a few hours. How did you (or how would you) pass the time? Your options are probably vast. You can choose to put your play list on shuffle and listen to your favourite music on your computer or iPod or flick through a hundred or so television channels. If nothing is on, there's always the Internet or a game or two to keep you busy. The Internet is loaded with things to read, watch and listen to or you could communicate with people using e-mails and video calls. And you can poke. Your cellphone offers several options, allowing you to call, SMS, MMS, or MXit friends (and other random people).

With everything available to you, would you choose to be alone with your thoughts? Unlikely. And the interesting thing is that we like it that way. Technology saves us time. This means that we have more time to do what we want. However, technology can also consume time. Ironic, isn't it?

Of course, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The idea of keeping yourself busy is not wrong. Modern technology, with all its wonderful inventions and gadgets, is ideal for this purpose. Unfortunately, it is abused on at least two levels.

It is a problem when all this brilliant and useful technology is being used out of fear. And it appears that most people, at least on a preconscious level, are afraid of being alone with their own thoughts. Many people are incapable of taking even a short car journey without the distraction of a radio DJ or a CD. These people move from one distraction to the next: morning news or television, music in the car, work, lunch break with MXit, work (while constantly updating their Facebook page and messaging 'friends' and chatting on Google Talk), music in the car, television, eating in front of the television, sleep. The illusion of social interaction that certain programs and gadgets offer leaves people without any real interaction with other humans, which is both sad and unhealthy.

People also become obsessed with technological offerings, especially social ones. I my opinion, most of Facebook and MXit's success is because a huge number of people simply became addicted (even in their own words). These people often become obsessed about the conversations they have or the messages they receive from people by using these services. Checking your Facebook page every ten minutes or having anxiety attacks because you cannot connect to MXit is not healthy or even normal, though it is unfortunately becoming the norm. (It is, however, okay to become agitated should you be unable to reach the *NAG* forums. This is perfectly acceptable behaviour, so no need to call the white coats just yet).

While I am thankful to be coming of age in this technological age, there is a massive social problem we shall have to face someday if we don't curb our addictions. Technology supposed to be a tool for us. Unfortunately, we become technology's fool when it's us who are being used. **NAG**

> "With everything available to you, would you choose to be alone with your thoughts? Unlikely.

Ramjet

by Walt Pretorius

What we already know

I HAVE BOUGHT SOME POPCORN and a new, comfortable chair. I am preparing to watch the next instalment of that popular and hilarious sitcom, 'Videogames are turning my kid into an axe murderer'. You know the show: it's the one starring Jack Thompson as the small but very aggressive yapping dog, and Hilary Clinton as the absurdly controlling mother. The reason for the next season of this absolutely side-splitting show is quite simple: *Grand Theft Auto IV*. It hasn't been released at the time of writing, although it might have been at the time of reading (in which case, please put the hate-mail on hold for a little while – I am busy watching the show).

There's a new character in the comedy, though, and she might actually be making a bit of sense. Her name is Dr Tanya Byron, and she recently completed a 226-page report – commissioned by the UK government – on the effects that digital media have on children. Her conclusion: "the evidence is inconclusive." Wow. We didn't know that.

Before I get too nasty about the good doctor, she does raise some ideas that will probably have the Jack Thompsons of the world crying into their cornflakes. She says that videogames are good things. She says that children are individuals with different reactions to different stimuli (not the homogenous grey blob certain people would have us think they are). She says that parents need to have a better understanding of the games that their kids are playing. Gee, you think so Doc? Not meaning to be nasty here, but the level of parenting (and this is a generalisation, so don't get all uppity) is on an apparent decline. I see kids getting away with stuff these days that would have had me hung, drawn and quartered back in the day. My dad always used mowing the lawn as recovery therapy after a good hiding, because I couldn't sit anyway.

Byron also suggests that a unified age-rating system should be used globally, and that parents be correctly educated as to what it means and how it works.

Of course, there are detractors to this report, which casts a surprisingly favourable light on gaming (the Brits tend to be less reactionary and more reasonable than the Yanks on these matters). They're the kind of people who use the "No, you're wrong because I say so" argument, citing dubious personal experience as a qualification rather than extensive study and appropriate degrees... the kind of people who will tell you that dogs cannot look up because they haven't never seen no dog looking up. Oh, hi Jack. I didn't see you coming in. Is Hilary with you?

What surprised me though, is the amount of criticism coming from the gaming sector, despite the fact that this is probably the most pro-gaming report to ever come out at such a high level. Investigation did indicate that these critics are the kind of reactionary, anti-establishment zealots who think everyone working for 'the Man' is out to get them. The types who read between EVERY line (oh, and she used the word 'rating', which is a synonym for 'censorship' if you squint your eyes and tilt your head like this), while adjusting their tin-foil helmets to prevent the aliens from Blogabon V from stealing their superior intellect.

Dr Byron's ideas aren't new, but her report might make people actually think about stuff instead of just reacting to stuff. If somebody pushes you, do you immediately punch him or her in the teeth, or do you consider that you might be standing on their foot? It's a long read, but you can find it in a few places on the Internet. (Googling *Byron Report* would be a good place to start.) Get it. Read it. Formulate your own opinion... something that, in this debate, people desperately need to do. **NAG**

> "You know the show: it's the one starring Jack Thompson as the small but very aggressive yapping dog, and Hilary Clinton as the absurdly controlling mother.

INDIANA JONES™

THE
ORIGINAL ADVENTURES

BRICK BY BRICK: BUILDING THE YEAR OF LEGO GAMES

The toys that created yesterday's engineers are back to mould today's game addict. Yes, that might seem like a step backwards, but you'll be far too busy whipping, swinging and laughing your way through the next two *LEGO* epics: *Batman* and *Indiana Jones*.

These days, the toys have become a bit of a luxury, but for several generations, LEGO's humble plastic blocks entertained millions of children and adults. If you had the pieces, you could build anything. Well, nearly anything. Often the only limits were your imagination and that your parents just wouldn't get you that airport set so that you could get access to the jet wings for your planet-destroying robot to 'fly'. But over the years, LEGO has attracted a lot of competitors and pretenders to the throne. This has put the company in a tough spot. There is only one LEGO, but every other knockoff was cheaper.

This kick-started a wave of merchandising deals. In 1999, LEGO released its first *Star Wars* range, bringing the iconic ships and characters from the movies to a plastic brick set near you. Obviously, the hardcore fans bought it immediately, seduced by the prospect of their own LEGO Death Star, but this was just the beginning. Inside the company, a push started for LEGO games. The idea took root and in 2002, LEGO approached veteran UK developer Traveller's Tales to create a prototype game. The result: a short *Star Wars* demo where plastic incarnations of movie characters ran around a space station. LucasArts, when shown the demo,

quickly saw the potential and signed on. The rest is virtual-plastic history. The first *LEGO Star Wars* game found a market among older gamers, catapulting the game from a niche title to one of the biggest of 2005. *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* sold a million units in its first week. TT was sold to Warner Bros., making the developer's founder one of the richest men in Britain. Clearly gold has been found, so let the mining begin...

Work on the next *LEGO* game started just days after the second *Star Wars* title was released. At first, the studio started toying with *LEGO Batman*, but LucasArts wanted more and was quick to propose *Indiana Jones* as a candidate. Then again, perhaps the suggestion came from LEGO itself: both games were preceded by LEGO sets. Batman sets appeared in 2006, while the first bits of Indy LEGO were released this year. But it makes sense: apart from each launching their next movie this year, both are beyond iconic. *Indiana Jones* is arguably to a lot of fans as big as *Star Wars*, while *Batman* is quite simply beyond an icon – a cultural institution. Besides, everyone wants to play as LEGO Joker!

Both games represent TT's evolution of the *LEGO* games, so separating them makes little sense. The studio knows it has something that has a lot of potential.

Obviously, Indy's adventures are taken from his successful trilogy. In the same style as the *Star Wars* games, the three movies are split into six chapters each, totalling 18 levels to complete. If you want to know what they will feature, simply start listing your favourite Indy moments. Was it the race on the train at the start of *Last Crusade*? Was it fighting cult members on a burning bridge in *Temple of Doom*? Or perhaps the beginning: a giant boulder chasing our hero out of jungle caves after he 'liberated' a golden idol in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. These and more will appear, touched up by the zany parodies that have become part and parcel of TT's series. For example, when using the staff in the map room during *Raiders*, Indy apparently manages to set the place alight.

Batman, on the other hand, isn't going after movie terrain. Well, just a little. TT is using everything behind this major comic book icon: comics, movies, TV series and their own nostalgia. This has allowed the studio to craft an original plot, which has been approved by WB and DC Comics. Batman and his sidekick Robin are about to get very busy when all the major villains break out of Arkham Asylum and split into three groups, thus creating the three chapters TT's *LEGO* games use. But instead of 18 levels there will be 36. After finishing the Hero campaign, players will unlock the same levels from the villain's perspective. With *Batman* there is a big push for authenticity, with lots of in-jokes for fans. But more importantly, it gives TT the chance to show off *LEGO* games in more original terrain.

I f you have played *LEGO Star Wars*, you'll know how it works: running around in a hub area, you select the episode you want to play. Indy's base of operations will be Barnett College, where the good doctor plies the more mundane side of his trade. By contrast, Batman resides in the Bat Cave, surrounded by his high-tech machinery and museum of past heroes and villains. Meanwhile, The Joker and company will make Arkham Asylum their home. Big casts are good. In the *LEGO* games, players solve puzzles and get past obstacles by swapping between characters. Each has different skills that one will need. The *LEGO Indy* contingent will feature no less than 60 doppelgangers from the movies: apart from Indiana you can expect his younger incarnation, his dad, Temple's chatty sidekick, Short Round, as well as the long list of good and bad guys and girls the tomb raider has encountered. Unfortunately, Indiana's iconic nemesis, the occult-seeking Nazis, have been replaced with a more generic "genocidal, occultist, trench coat-wearing master race," but the reason is not censorship. Instead, the game is based on the LEGO toy line and LEGO certainly doesn't want to make headlines by selling LEGO Nazis to kids. It makes sense, but Indiana's brushes with the Nazis have been so frequent (including a hair's breadth encounter with Hitler in *Last Crusade*) that this will probably irk some fans.

Batman doesn't fight any Nazis, but Bruce Wayne's darker side has plenty of mindless evil to combat. While TT is quiet on how many characters there will be, *LEGO Batman* is set to feature the dynamic duo as well as the top villains. The Joker, Catwoman, Scarecrow, Mr. Freeze, Harley Quinn and Killer Croc are confirmed, while many expect Two Face, Bane and the Riddler to show up as well. In *LEGO Batman*'s Hero mode, players will always control Batman and Robin. So to keep things spicy, the heroes will unlock special suits to give them new abilities. For example, Robin's Magnetic suit walks up walls, while Batman's Glide suit really explains itself. These will be used in the same way previous games required players to switch to characters with specific abilities whenever a certain obstacle or puzzle presented itself. Batman's opponents don't have suits, but they are more traditionally endowed with special powers. So far, we know that The Joker has a special Uzi assault and a hand-buzzer that can disable characters; Harley Quinn can seduce the enemy from attacking her.

Indy's approach maintains the status quo. The various characters will be able to do certain things that others cannot. Satipo, the short-lived guide from the beginning of *Raiders*, is equipped with a shovel to dig out treasures, weapons and other bonus items. Indy is obviously really handy with a whip, using it to reach high spots, snap distant switches and disarm opponents. He also has a mean right hook (as well as his phobia for snakes – we can expect his dad to have a thing about rats too).

Even though the theme is important, the staples of the series bring fans back for more. Apart from the very funny cut-scenes, the *LEGO* games allow two players to jump in together and use their collective noggins to figure out the trademark puzzles, and use piles of blocks to construct a working platform or machine. (And don't forget to collect all the LEGO studs that spew out of everything that can be broken.) Both games will stick to this tradition, but not without a tweak or two. The camera has been adjusted to pull out farther, so you won't have characters linger off-screen, and it won't be necessary to stand alongside a character if you want to switch. The puzzles have also been made more difficult, and the arrival of LEGO Technical pieces suggests that a lot of building tasks will be more detailed and complicated. Indy and Batman also have the luxury of not being scaled up from lesser platforms: though both games will have PlayStation 2 and Wii incarnations, the next-gen platforms will deliver visuals worthy of their reputations.

The new games are more focused on combat, but here the road splits. Fitting to his style, Indy's action is all about using chairs, bottles and whatever else you can get your plastic claw on. When being fired upon, the characters can dodge behind cover, and unlike *LEGO Star Wars*, the ammo count is limited, so shooting wildly isn't going to work. Certain objects will also give characters limited abilities (for example, a wrench will let you repair things such as airplanes).

Batman can rely on his arsenal of gadgets to get the job done. Both he and Robin are equipped with Batarangs, which will initially take out up to five targets, but can be upgraded to ten. TT has been mum about what else the two can get up to, but there is really little end to Bruce Wayne's money, so the Batman world has plenty of crime-fighting devices to choose from. It's anyone's guess which TT prefers. But the studio has mentioned that vehicle levels, an area of the series perfected in the second *Star Wars* game, will feature and Batman will use the Batmobile, Batboat and Batwing. Indy can be expected to chase around with his dad on a bike and dodge cultists in insane mining-cart chases – both games have plenty of material to allow vehicles into the action, so don't expect TT to hold back.

This is just the start, though. With *LEGO Indiana Jones* due in June and *LEGO Batman* skulking around the shadows of the upcoming movie's release date, it won't be long before Traveller's Tales starts working on something new in the series. Thanks to being acquired by WB, the studio has access to other properties like Superman, but it is casting its sights wider than that. One of the ideas mentioned is *LEGO Lord of the Rings*: though not confirmed by any means, it's clear that the guys at TT would love to adapt Peter Jackson's trilogy. They have also mused about the potential of the LEGO brand itself, so ideas like LEGO City are being thrown around. What we do know is that the studio knows what it's doing and everyone else now understands that LEGO is gaming gold. It's already entertained three of pop culture's royalty. The future is wide open and made of plastic bricks. **NAG**

INDIANA JONES AND THE VIDEOGAME COLLECTION OF FABLED AWESOMENESS

1. RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (1982)

Remember the Atari 2600 console? If you do, then you may remember playing *Raiders of the Lost Ark* on it. It had chunky graphics, offered limited fun and generally stank, but it was Indiana Jones and he rocked, so you loved it.

2. INDIANA JONES IN THE LOST KINGDOM (1984)

Indiana Jones in the Lost Kingdom was a title released for the Commodore 64 (and, naturally, was supplied on a four-track cassette). Featuring only six levels, with exits guarded by monsters and puzzles, *Indiana Jones in the Lost Kingdom* told the story of the hero seeking a lost civilisation in a platform format.

3. INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM (1987)

This title enjoyed wide platform support at its time of release, including the Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, Atari ST, Amiga and DOS. Based on the film of the same name, Indy had to save Indian slave children from brutal Thuggee guards, and do battle with a fireball-slinging Mola Ram. The game also included the famous mine-cart chase scene, which tasked the player with finding the right path through a maze of rail tracks.

4. INDIANA JONES IN THE REVENGE OF THE ANCIENTS (1987)

This game, which was released for DOS and the Apple II, had Indiana Jones exploring the tangled jungles of Mexico. As usual, the bad guys were Nazis, and Jones had to stop them from unleashing the awesome power of the fabled Mazatec Power Key. It was a text-based adventure game.

5. INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE (1989)

This version of the game (two were released) was a more pedantic, thought-provoking title than *The Action Game* counterpart, and was based on the film of the same name. It used static graphic representations of locations and a word-based, mouse-driven interface. Although most of the game used this system, some action scenes were also included. A NES version was released in 1991.

6. INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE ACTION GAME (1989)

To counterbalance the more cerebral nature of *The Graphic Adventure* version of this game, *The Action Game* featured a four-level arcade adventure that demanded exploration and puzzle solving, but was far more reliant on action than the other title. The four levels were taken from the film that the game was based on, featuring the Colorado caves, The Circus train, the Zeppelin and Castle Grunwald.

7. INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS (1992)

Indiana Jones once again faced off against the Nazis, this time in search of an ancient statue. This game featured some action scenes, as well as static graphics combined with a text-based, mouse-driven interface. The expected action and puzzle-solving game dynamic was available in three flavours: Adventure, Action and Co-op (featuring a character called Sophia).
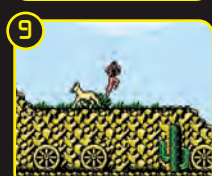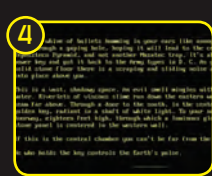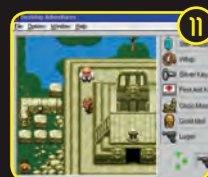
8. INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS: THE ACTION GAME (1992)

More brawn than brains was required in this isometric action adventure. Indy was looking for ancient discs to open a door to the lost city of Atlantis. To break up the action bits, there were some puzzles and a nifty inventory system, but nothing too cerebral.

9. YOUNG INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES (1992)

Based on the television series of the same name, this game (for the NES) was a side-scrolling action-platform title. Several levels made up the story, during which the young Indiana Jones could collect various weapons and perform a few different moves, all the while fighting off bad guys and pursuing lost treasures. An interesting aspect came in the form of hat power-ups, which gave Indy the ability to take more damage.

10. INDIANA JONES' GREATEST ADVENTURES (1994)

Developed for the Super NES by JVC (of all companies), this title featured platform-style levels from all three of the *Indiana Jones* films. Collectable weapons could be found and used in the various levels, which included famous scenes such as running from the giant boulder (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*) the mine-cart chase (*Temple of Doom*) and flying a biplane (*The Last Crusade*). The game also featured snippets of John Williams' original score and digitised speech, and showed image captures during cut-scenes.

11. INDIANA JONES AND HIS DESKTOP ADVENTURES (1996)

Released for Windows, Windows 3.x and Macintosh, *Indiana Jones and his Desktop Adventures* was a top-down, casual version of the popular series. Its simplified game model allowed players to determine the world size. The game would then randomly generate the various tasks, challenges and enemies the player needed to defeat. Set in Mexico in the 1930s, this game featured a massive amount of replay value, due to the random nature of its levels.

12. INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE (1999)

The 1999 release of *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine* was the first to see the *Tomb Raider*-inspired game dynamic of the later titles in the series. The 3D world had to be negotiated on foot, via ladders and ropes and aboard a dinghy. Featuring 17 locations around the world, *Infernal Machine* was the most ambitious Indy title to date and made use of a modified Jedi Knight Engine. A version for the Game Boy Colour was also released.

13. INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB (2003)

The second fully 3D (and most recent) *Indiana Jones* game saw the hero going to Asia to fight against (you guessed it) Nazis and recover (once again) the most powerful artefact in the world. This title featured a similar game style to *Infernal Machine*, with lots of whip cracking, platform jumping and puzzle solving. Hand-to-hand combat and a variety of weapons were also at the player's disposal. **NAG**
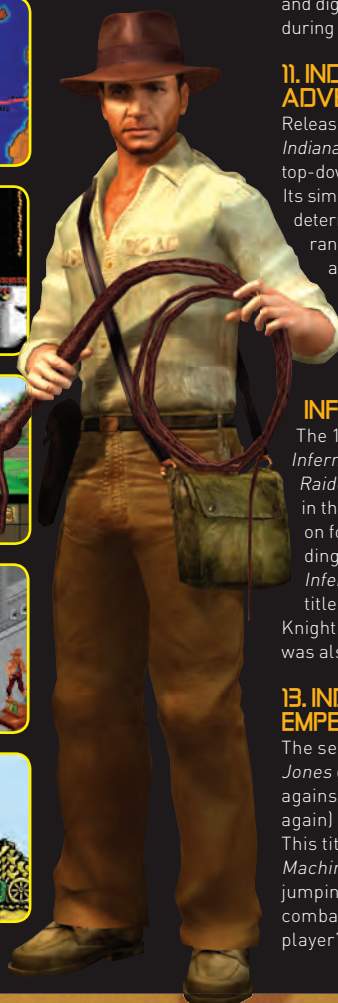
KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

Y ou'd think that with all the advances in special effects over the past decade or so that the first *Indiana Jones* movie in 19 years would OD on CG just to keep up with the likes of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Spider-Man*.

There are actually only a couple of hundred special effects shots, which are "very low" according to the movie's producer, Frank Marshall. "We're completely in the style and tone of the first three movies," he stated. George Lucas's legendary ILM outfit is of course handling special effects again. But it seems that they don't have as much work this time round as they did with George Lucas's *Star Wars* prequels. Instead, traditional special effects and stunt work will

be used, and only 30% of the visual effects will actually be CGI - mostly for backdrops. Not only are there a lot fewer special effects shots, but director Steven Spielberg didn't even shoot the film in the digital format adopted by George Lucas.

Surprisingly, Lucas approved, seeing that *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* looked like it was shot three years after *Last Crusade*. "You'd never know [that] there was 20 years between shooting," Lucas said. Spielberg's regular cinematographer, two-time Oscar-winner, Janusz Kaminski, who worked with him on everything from *Schindler's List* to *Munich*, filmed the movie. Like the original films, *Crystal Skull* was shot on film using anamorphic Panavision lenses.

"We're not cheating with CG at all," Marshall said. "It keeps the B-movie feel." So if *Crystal Skull* were trying to keep up with any other movies, then it would be the previous films in the Indy series, namely *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). "We have all the iconic elements we had in the first three," producer Frank Marshall explained. So which of these movies does it most resemble? "I would say it's closest to the third one. It's all adults. I mean, you have the sidekick in Shia (LaBeouf), but you don't have a short round, and I think the banter between the characters is as fun as it was in the third movie."

The movie's set about 19 years after the

events in *Last Crusade*. "Indy is a bit older and wiser now. He's been a professor at Marshall College for the last 15 to 16 years, so he's learnt a few things. You're going to see the results of what he has learnt over these past few years."

WILL THERE BE FLYING SAUCERS IN IT?

"Steven thinks we can keep the whole thing a secret," George Lucas said of the plot details behind the new movie. "I explained to him that it's impossible nowadays."

Still, they did give it a good shot though, even going to the bother of registering several phoney movie titles with the Motion Picture Association of America to throw rabid Internet news sites off the scent. (The titles were *Indiana Jones and the City of Gods*, *Indiana Jones and the Destroyer of Worlds*, *Indiana Jones and the Fourth Corner of the Earth*, *Indiana Jones and the Lost City of Gold*, and *Indiana Jones and the Quest for the Covenant*.)

Here's what we do know however:

- *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* has its usual share of exotic locales such as the jungles of Peru, but the entire movie was filmed within the United States because director Spielberg didn't want to be too far away from his family. (Hawaii had to double for the jungles of Peru and New Mexico for Morocco.)

- The movie is set in the 1950s. According to George Lucas, just as the original films paid homage to 1930s action serials, this one will pay homage to 1950s B-movies such as *The Blob* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. This has led to quite some speculation on the Internet. Does this mean that there will be aliens in it? One rumour had it that the storyline steals from Erich von Daniken's 1968 book, *Chariots of the Gods*. This non-fiction

book claims that ancient civilisations such as the Mayans and Aztecs were given their technologies and culture by alien space travellers who were consequently welcomed as gods. If this is true, it probably means that Indy won't be battling aliens, but chasing after the remnants of alien visitations. Producer Frank Marshall has confirmed this in the meantime: "The theory is [that] they [the crystal skulls] are shaped by higher powers or alien powers or came from another world, or an ancient Mayan civilisation had the powers."

- The whole alien thing - and that teaser trailer - also reinforced rumours that the opening scene will feature Indiana Jones trying to prevent Soviet agents from stealing an alien artefact recovered from the notorious Roswell UFO crash site in Area 51. The villain in the film is a Russian female agent named Irina Spalko, played by actress Cate Blanchett (*Elizabeth*, *Lord of the Rings*). "She's very… severe," Marshall said of the character.

- The "MacGuffin" in the movie is the so-called, real-life "crystal skulls." A MacGuffin is a term invented by British director Alfred Hitchcock to describe the plot device in a story that motivates the characters or advances the story. The MacGuffin in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was, well, the lost Ark of the Covenant, the one object that all the characters in the movie wanted for themselves. The MacGuffin in the new movie actually really exists: they are models of a human skull made out of clear quartz crystal that were allegedly found by archaeologists buried inside a

Mayan temple in the 1920s. Some claim that the skulls have supernatural healing powers, while others believe that they bring bad luck to whoever owns the skulls.

- It took a decade and half for screenwriters to come up with a screenplay George Lucas was finally happy with. "Most filmmakers don't realise how important it is to have a MacGuffin that is both supernatural [and which] people can actually believe in. The only [film that] has duplicated that idea and made it work is *The Da Vinci Code*. It's basically *Last Crusade*. They upped the ante, put in more conspiracy and bigger issues, but it's still with the same mythology. It shows [that] it's the MacGuffin that really carries the thing, not the action. I think [that] *The Da Vinci Code* would have been helped by a little more action."

- Shia LaBeouf, the 21-year-old star of *Transformers* and *Disturbia*, plays Indiana Jones's sidekick – and might actually be Indy's son! All this speculation has been fired up by the fact that actress Karen Allen from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* will be reprising her role as Indy's ex-girlfriend

Steven Spielberg on the set of Crystal Skull

and one-night stand, Marion. Is she Mutt's mother? Has Mutt been named after the family dog? (Indiana is the name of producer George Lucas's dog by the way.) No one wants to confirm or deny these rumours. All producer Frank Marshall had to say about LaBeouf is that, "he brings a youthful arrogance that Indy can play off and there's a lot of banter between the two of them. Think *American Graffiti*. There's a hot rod and there's a greaser on a bike."

- Sean Connery won't be back as Indiana Jones's father. Connery was actually approached to make a small a cameo appearance, but he turned it down claiming, "retirement is just too much damned fun." By the way, Harrison Ford joked that he was getting old enough to play his own father, so Sean wasn't needed anymore.

- Speaking of which, Harrison Ford is back as Indiana Jones. Even though he is 64, Ford will still be doing a lot of the stunts himself. "He's doing them," co-producer Kathleen Kennedy revealed. "He just has a few more ice packs and a few more massages." Besides, Ford is in "premium shape," according to co-star Shia LaBeouf. "You don't want to be standing next to Harrison Ford and not be jacked also… I'll run for an hour and then I'll do two hours of weights. I have definitely not trained like this for anything in my life. I'm preparing like I'm going into battle."

- There's going to be lots of action – obviously. "The chases are more suspenseful than speedy," said Lucas. "Like the rolling ball in the first film, it's not that he's running that fast, it's that there's a giant ball coming at him. And he [Indy] will get beaten up, which is a tradition for us."

And tradition is why we'll be queuing for tickets on 23 May when *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* opens in South African movie theatres. **NAG**

NAG magazine is hiring...

we're looking for someone:
young [18 - 26]
male or female
exploitable
smart
knows gaming and/or hardware
can write well
good sense of humour
creative thinker

someone who will work for
close to nothing...

someone who can take a joke ;)

someone who can test new and exciting
software, games and hardware...

someone who is good at research

someone who can be sent
to events and launches
without throwing the
company's name away...

someone who will go quietly
if things don't work out

someone who is easily excited and
overly enthusiastic about doing
lackey and mundane jobs with
no thanks and little reward

Important instructions [so don't screw this up]:
Send a 500-word preview of the game *Far Cry 2* and / or a
500-word article on the Logitech G9 Laser Mouse to: michael.james@tidemedia.co.za.
No snail mail is acceptable - if you cannot send e-mail, you cannot work at NAG magazine. End of story
The subject line should be [Pick me!] - get this wrong and the spam filter will eat your mail
Try to have your own e-mail address | own transport is useful | don't expect a reply
If you have any, add a few credentials to your mail, i.e. experience, qualifications, age you started gaming
You must know gaming inside and out | you must be able to write good!

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ORIGINS OF THE LOST ARK

What a thought: this month you could have been watching *Indiana Smith and the City of the Gods*, starring Tom Selleck! James O'Ehley looks at the history of the original *Indiana Jones* movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

It was May 1977, and George Lucas was convinced that his latest movie, Star Wars, would be a huge financial flop. After all, the first preview screenings of the film were met with a lot of negative criticism. After a screening for 20th Century Fox (the studio that financed the movie), a woman asked Lucas why they couldn't give C-3PO some lips because she couldn't understand how the robot could be talking without any moving lips! A screening for some of his friends didn't go well either. His friend, Brian De Palma (who later directed movies such as The *Untouchables*), kept on ribbing him about the "almighty Force" and hinted that *Star Wars* was the worst thing he had ever seen.

"They were all my real close friends and

"We named the dog Indiana."

Is that a snake in your pants or are you just happy to see me?
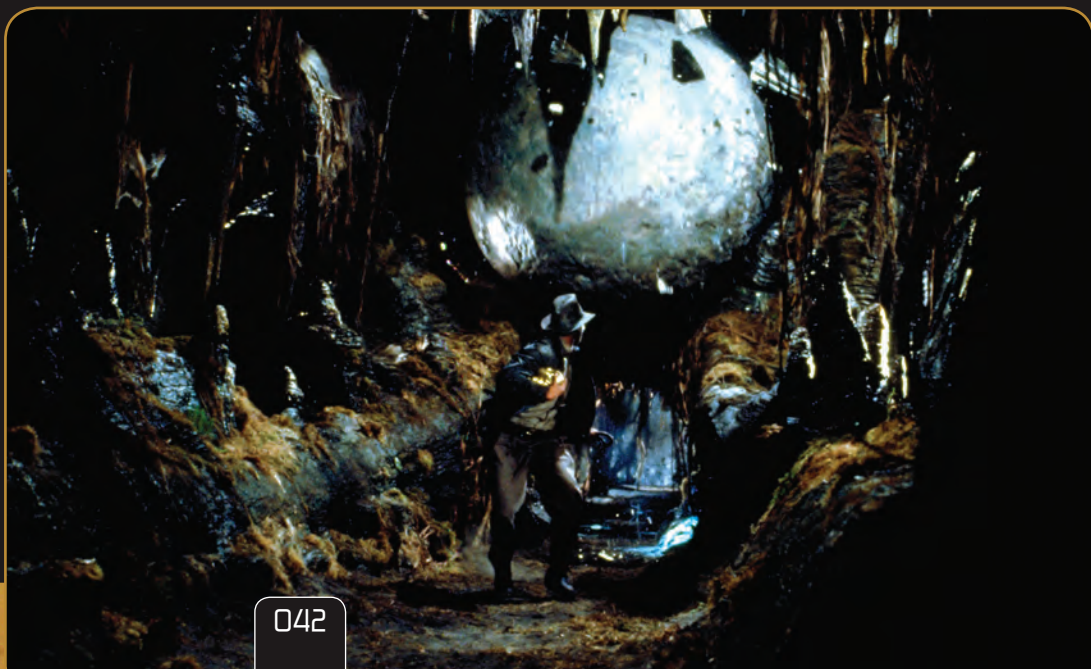
they felt sorry for me more than anything else. There were a lot of condolences, which is even worse than saying you didn't like the movie," Lucas recalls. So, with the impending release of *Star Wars*, Lucas packed his bags and went off to Hawaii for a holiday to lick his wounds. "I figured, well, it's just a silly movie. It ain't going to work." Lucas's friend, Steven Spielberg, who had just completed *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, accompanied him on his holiday. Incidentally, Spielberg liked *Star Wars*... a lot.

While building sandcastles on the beach one day, they came up with an idea for a new movie, *Indiana Smith*, a James Bond-like playboy adventurer. As Lucas said, it'd be based on the type of movies he had loved as a kid. "Action movies set in exotic locales with a cliffhanger every second. I wondered why they didn't make movies like that anymore. I still wanted to see them." So did Spielberg.

However, the character still had some way to go. "In my version, he was an international playboy, vaguely like James Bond without the 007 part. A guy who went to [casinos], went to nightclubs and had lots of girlfriends. Steven didn't like it, Harrison didn't like it and there wasn't any room in the script for it anyway," Lucas recalled years later in an interview. *Indiana Smith* was changed to *Indiana Jones* because Spielberg felt that Smith was too common a surname. (Indiana, by the way, was the name of Lucas's dog, an Alaskan malamute.)

When it came to casting, Harrison Ford's name was mentioned. However, Lucas thought that he would be too typecast as Han Solo following the huge success of *Star Wars*. Lucas wanted Tom Selleck, a then-unknown actor who actually auditioned for the part. However, CBS wouldn't give Selleck any leave of absence to star in *Raiders* as they were busy launching the *Magnum, P.I.* television series at the time. Spielberg was happy with Ford. "He's a remarkable combination of Errol Flynn from *The Adventures of Don Juan* and Humphrey Bogart as Fred C. Dobbs in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*..."

Spielberg and Lucas may have wanted to see the first *Indiana Jones* produced, but Hollywood didn't necessarily want to. Spielberg and Lucas had just produced three of the most successful movies of all time, namely *Jaws, Close Encounters* and *Stars Wars*, collectively grossing about $850 million in the US alone! They also had a tough time finding someone to finance *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. "*Raiders* was turned down by practically every studio in town," Lucas said. "They thought it would

be a successful movie but didn't trust the budget - $20 million. I was asking for a very tough deal; it broke a lot of precedents that no one wanted to break. Its definition of profits upset their apple cart. The other part was [that] I would develop it and turn it over to them, which gave them little control. They didn't like that. I had licensing. I controlled sequel rights."

Paramount finally relented, but included all kinds of penalty clauses. Spielberg and Lucas had to bring the movie in on budget. Lucas and Spielberg were given a $40 million budget and 87 days to shoot the film. (Inflation affects everything: the new *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* movie cost an estimated $125 million!) With Lucas keeping tight control over Spielberg's spending, the movie was finished in only 73 days at an eventual cost of $20 million – half the budget! This was quite a record for Spielberg who went way over budget on his previous three movies before *Raiders*. It was "the fastest I've ever shot next to my experience on television," Spielberg admitted.

Tales of stinginess on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are legendary today. The Flying Wing, which the Nazis intended to use to transport the Ark, had four engines instead of two.

Lucas, however, made them remove two propellers from the design. It saved them $250,000. One thousand snakes used in the film somehow managed to escape captivity from the British studio where the "Well of Souls" scene was being filmed (legend has it that the studio is still infested by snakes to this day, hiding away in the nooks and crannies). When Spielberg asked for more snakes to finish the sequence, Lucas only gave him a few hundred and a lot of bicycle tubes to double as snakes!

The most famous cost-cutting shortcut employed in the movie resulted in one of the movie's funniest moments: Indiana Jones shooting an Arab swordsman without so much as a fight. Actually, the script called for Ford to use his whip to get the sword out of his attacker's hands, but Ford suffered from diarrhoea because of food poisoning and was too sick to perform the stunt. According to the stuntman who played the Arab swordsman, "Everybody was fed up – Harrison had the shits and it was very hot. In the end, Steven just said, 'Oh, just shoot him!' And it turned out to be the funniest thing in the film..." **NAG**

previews

GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE

Developer→ Polyphony Digital | Publisher→ SCE | Genre→ Racing | Release Date→ Now

WE RECEIVED *PROLOGUE* LITERALLY moments before going to print, so here is a quick 'prologue' if you will, before our review in the next issue. In the area of 'simulation' racing, *Gran Turismo* may not be the most technically accurate title available, but in the eyes of fans, it "has it where it counts." A prelude to *Gran Turismo 5, Prologue* is the replacement of *Gran Turismo HD Concept* and possibly the only way to stave off the rabid *GT* fans until *GT5* is complete. While still a 'demo' for all intents and purposes, *Prologue* is no slouch, bringing plenty to the table: 16-player online racing, six tracks, over 70 cars and it runs at a silky 60fps in full HD at 1080p. There is a new exacting 'professional' physics mode a step above and beyond the 'standard' the series is known for, completely new racing opponent AI and some truly slick visuals. New to the series, the in-car cockpit view comes complete with functioning speedometers, odometers, rear-view mirrors, wing mirrors and real-time in-car lighting effects. Drift events are also new, taking advantage of the new physics engine and bringing a little pizzazz to the event roster. There has already been a patch release (required for online play) that fixes a few things, but the real excitement is in the promised future updates that'll add in a vehicle damage model as well as full weather effects. Beyond that, *Prologue* is racing as usual: earning credits with which to buy cars with which to earn more credits for more cars. A viciously vehicular cycle of enthusiast racing deliciousness.   **NAG**

Miktar "Double Clutch" Dracon

SCORE
00000000

TIME
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99

SPEED
RING 000 / RING ENERGY

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

SONIC UNLEASHED

ORIGINALLY THESE SCREENSHOTS (AND the trailer) for *Sonic Unleashed* were leaked, found on a SEGA FTP server and then spread around the Internet with a healthy dose of speculation. Just before going to print, however, SEGA announced that the game is indeed real and currently in development by the Sonic Team (who we hope have learnt their lesson). The game "will take players on an unforgettable high-speed journey around the globe in a way never before experienced in the world of Sonic."

Based on the new Hedgehog Engine, players can expect Sonic to move seamlessly from 3D to the classic 2D camera, which makes this very much a *Sonic* game in line with the seminal games in the series. The game will feature multiple paths through levels, high-speed running and jumping and "all new combat, movement and functional abilities."

"By combining rich and vibrant scenery with dynamic viewpoints, *Sonic Unleashed* will provide an immersive 3D experience whilst keeping alive the 2D gameplay

TRAILER ON THE DVD

elements and fantastic worlds that *Sonic* fans know and love," commented Gary Knight, Marketing Director for SEGA Europe.

The matter of "werewolf Sonic" is still nebulous, but it seems that the gameplay will change from day to night, which may also affect the combat part of the game.

While the prior Sonic titles have left quite a bit to be desired, this new one looks very promising and may well be the reprise Sonic fans have been hoping for. **NAG**
Miktar "NOWAI!" Dracon
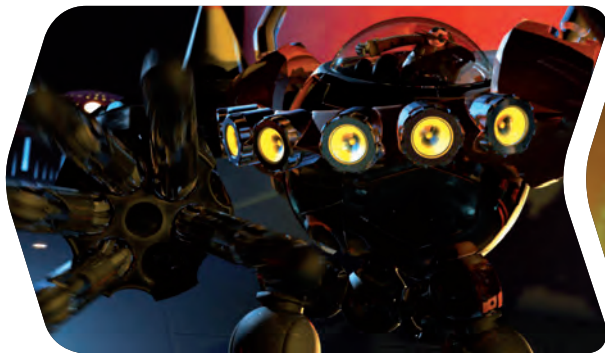
IN GAME

It looks a little *Sonic and the Secret Rings* (Wii) inspired, but with a much more *Sonic Rush* (DS) feel. Classic loops – check. Beautiful vistas – check. Stunning, catchy, cool music – check. Motion-blurred streaking blue hedgehog – totally check.

NAG

JUST A LITTLE RUSH...

The city in this scene looks a little like Water Palace Zone from *Sonic Rush* (DS), which was developed by Dimps in cooperation with Sonic Team (but Dimps did most of the real work, obviously). *Sonic Rush* is the successor to the *Sonic Advance* series, and the best Sonic game since *Sonic the Hedgehog 3* (and *Sonic & Knuckles*). The inspirations may be indicative of Dimps being involved somehow, but this is pure speculation.

CUT-SCENE

These shots appear to be from a cut-scene. Dr. Robotnic – check. Super Sonic – check. Robots and an odd demon-looking thing – check.

I like my eggs hard boiled

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

SOMETIME DURING 2122 (THERE aren't really any identifiable seasons out in the sombre perpetuity of deep space), while floating slowly back to Earth, the interstellar-class tugboat, *Nostromo*, intercepts a transmission from a small, seemingly abandoned moon somewhere nearby. Her crew is awoken from 'hyper-sleep' and dispatched to investigate. During the course of what would soon turn out to be a rather ill-favoured extra-vehicular excursion, Executive Officer Kane finds himself playing startled, unscheduled host to an apparently affectionate creature with a bit of a thing for his face. The crew member is quickly ferried back to the *Nostromo*'s medical bay, where all attempts to remove the interesting new facial accessory prove largely unsuccessful. A short while later, however, the critter appears to rot and fall off... Everyone rejoices, and a celebratory meal is laid in the mess. During dessert, demonstrating scant regard for social niceties or conventional dinner etiquette,

a hideous monster erupts from Kane's chest, spraying red stuff and chunky bits all over everyone else and ruining the crème brûlée-flavoured Taste-E-Foam™. Panic ensues, an insidious corporate conspiracy is revealed, and eventually someone explodes with great, ropey spatters of what looks suspiciously like milk all over the nice synthetic wallpaper.

Three sequels, several Academy nominations and awards, countless novelisations and comic books, a deluge of videogames, a merger with the *Predator* franchise, a McFarlane *Monsters* series, a cabaret homage in *Spaceballs*, and more than $557 million in gross revenue follow. You love *Alien*, and *Alien* loves you (but with, like, acid and death and stuff). Not too shabby for a film that very nearly ended up with the blithely unimpressive and totally 'fail' title, *Star Beast*.

The latest entrant into a franchise bloated to roughly the size and shape of the Alien Queen in *Resurrection* is Gearbox Software's

(*Brothers in Arms*) *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. Set shortly before the popcorn-chugging events portrayed in David Fincher's magnificent *Alien*[3] (which anyone who knows anything about everything knows is the best film of the 'quadrilogy'[1]), and featuring an original story penned by *Battlestar Galactica* hacks, Bradley Thompson and David Weddle, this Unreal Engine 3-powered survival-horror shooter follows the (mis)adventures (and probable deaths of a search-and-rescue squad tasked to investigate the dilapidated remains of the USS *Sulaco*[2]). Considering the calibre of writing, we can doubtless expect marked emphasis on the soulless corporate subterfuge angle (a planted android? YOU READ IT IN *NAG* FIRST) and at least one hardcore female lead (voiced by Katee Sackhof - YOU READ IT IN *NAG* FIRST).

Players will take executive command of the four luckless grunts assigned to locate Ellen Ripley and the *Sulaco*'s surviving crew. Each marine represents a different combat

class, distinguished by their predetermined weaponry load-out. One squad member, for example, provides close infantry support courtesy of the M56 Smart Gun bug-blatter, memorably wielded by bitch-slap, rappin' Private First Class Jenette Vasquez, while the M240 Flamethrower and M14A Pulse Rifle have been confirmed as additional class primary weapons, alongside the standard issue X-tremely Volatile Alien MotionTrakka™. According to widely copy-pasted press releases, this bristling arsenal, as well as additional (New! Exclusive!) skills and equipment, will be employed to "face an alien assault more intense and horrific than ever before" in "claustrophobic environments," behind which lurks a "multitude of surprises and shocks." Oh, without a HUD, mind you, because you totally don't need it. Ripley didn't have one, and she was so hardcore, she shaved her head when it was really quite unfashionable.

Colonial Marines will also feature bold exploration of the frozen moon, LV-426, featured in the original film and the *Derelict*, its conveniently derelict, crash-landed xenian spacecraft – both recreated, apparently, with meticulous attention to detail – as well as other (New! Exclusive!) environments, including an as yet-unidentified urban area. The series' titular Xenomorphs, meanwhile, come in four bile-flavoured flavours of their own: the unreasonably aggressive Warrior; the slip-slithering Scout; the formidable Boss-class Queen; and her scuttling servant Drones. The development team has even lured original *Alien* and *Blade Runner* technical designer Syd Mead onto the project with promises of small edible treats and everlasting fame. And just when it couldn't possibly get any more awesome, it also has four-way drop-in/drop-out cooperative multiplayer. We're dribbling corrosive all over the carpets in hungry anticipation. **NAG**

Tarryn "She mostly comes at night... mostly" van der Byl

[1] Yes, it is. (I actually preferred *Aliens*, Ed)
[2] The troop carrier seen in *Aliens* and *Alien*[3] that looked sort of like an oversized pulse rifle actually modelled on a pulse rifle. *NAG* FACT!
[3] (Nothing to see here folks, the little 3 at the end of *Alien*[3] is supposed to be small like that, largely because it knows it'll never be as good as *Aliens* and it's trying to keep a low profile, ;) Ed)

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

BY THE TIME YOU read this, odds are that the fact that Electronic Arts is far along in the development of *Command & Conquer: Red Alert*. But odds are also that you have been able to find precious little in the way of details about what this upcoming game will bring us. So, let us rectify that situation forthwith…

EAST VS. WEST

Those of you familiar with the *Red Alert* games will recall the basic premise of the series – a fictitious version of Albert Einstein (he of the relatives) figures out how to time travel, and goes back in time to assassinate Hitler (quite unlike Einstein's real-life behaviour and philosophy!) before he makes a nuisance of himself in Europe. Thus is the Second World War averted, and history unfolds differently. As a result, the Soviet Union rises as a superpower with almost "Hitlerian" dreams of world conquest, and the fight is on against the Allies (consisting of pretty much the rest of the First World).

In *Red Alert 3*, these factions once again return. The story once again features time travel as a major plot element. After the events in *Red Alert 2*, the Soviet empire finds itself backed into a corner and licking its many wounds. Soviet scientists come up with a desperate plan: in a move that mirrors the event that kicked off the *Red Alert* story, the Soviets go back in time and alter the past. They find that events have unfolded much as planned – at least

on the surface. The Soviet war machine is trundling happily across the world, and the prize seems in reach – and then suddenly another superpower emerges. The Empire of the Rising Sun in the Far East…

FARTHER EAST

The tampering with the time line has (inevitably) caused unforeseen and unforeseeable results. Japan has had the unfettered freedom to rise as superpower to not only rival, but likely dominate, the existing ones. Left out of the conflicts that history as we know it had the nation previously embroiled in, the Rising Sun's feudal mentality and hard-working drive have resulted in a society with super-advanced technology. This new faction, in game terms, will have a strong science fiction feel to it, and will combine elements of Samurai, ninja, anime and all manner of things Japanese. As an example, picture stealthy ninjas with super-sophisticated weapons… This third faction will be playable in multiplayer, and there is talk at Electronic Arts to make a locked campaign segment, to become available to players who have completed both the Allied and Soviet campaigns (much like the Scrin mini-campaign in *Tiberium Wars*).

WET AND DRY

As veterans of the *Command & Conquer* games will recall, in terms of game mechanics the major difference between

the *Tiberium* universe and the *Red Alert* universe is the fact that action in the former is almost exclusively on land (barring the occasional scripted story element that is not player-controllable), while the latter has, from the beginning, included naval warfare. This trend continues, with the latest *Tiberium* game, *Tiberium Wars* playing out on land, and with the upcoming *Red Alert 3* featuring both land and sea battles. In fact, this is truer than ever before in this upcoming chapter, with the design team "blurring the coastline" somewhat, as they like to say. What they mean by this is that many units will be amphibious, able to operate on land or water, though being generalists they will suffer somewhat by being less powerful. Thus, players are offered a trade-off to make: power versus versatility. Interestingly, construction yards will be amphibious, able to deploy a base on land or on water. Furthermore, there will be resources available in the seas, so ignoring the ocean altogether will be unwise, though players will be able to decide where they want their focus to lie.

OVER THE TOP

True to *Command & Conquer* tradition, the game will feature cinematic sequences, something that we, sadly, see all too little of these days. Also in keeping with the franchise's style to date, the entire flavour of the game will be campy over-the-top – a little bit of cheese, not enough to

sicken the lactose intolerant, but enough to provide humour. Besides instances of hammed up acting in the videos, this flavour will permeate into the game dynamics themselves. For example, the Bullfrog amphibious transport is able to fire troops, such as trained armoured bears, onto the battlefield using a "man-cannon", and these will then parachute into the action.

DRAWING FROM THE PAST (OR IS IT THE FUTURE?)
Fans of the previous *Red Alert* games will be happy to hear that, by and large, the concepts from the previous titles are largely intact. Consequently, you can expect to see Tesla Troopers charging up Tesla coils, or Mirage Tanks to disguising themselves as other objects. But these concepts are taken further, too. For example, there will now be Tesla Boats (please do not even ask about the implications of gigantic electrostatic generators floating on water! We've been through them all here at the office, and our general, if tentative, consensus is that there is some serious insulation tape involved somewhere!) And Mirage Tanks will now be able to project a cloaking field for adjacent friendly units.

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE
The design team at Electronic Arts is implementing a mechanic that gives most units two abilities, a primary and a secondary. The primary will, for example,

be its main gun, while the secondary will generally be a special-purpose weapon or device. The Allied Peacemaker infantry pack shotguns to mow down enemy infantry, but because these have a short effective range, they also carry, as their secondary, a riot shield that they can raise while getting into firing range. Soviet Conscripts have an AK-47 (no way!) as their primary gun, and a Molotov cocktail (that's a petrol bomb to those of you unfamiliar with this fiery little wine that travels well) as their secondary.

The number "2" also plays another role in this game – it features campaigns designed for two players. While real-time strategy games have, on occasion, previously included cooperative scenarios, here there will be entire story-driven campaigns designed with two players in mind. Of course, not everyone will be able to play with a friend, so the designers have developed artificial intelligence co-commanders that you can draft to your side. There will be three of them per faction, each with a unique personality and play style, so you may opt for one that will complement your own play style best. Not all of them will be available right from the start of the campaigns, as some will not be suited to the earlier missions, but later on players will be able to choose. Players will have some degree of control over their AI allies' actions. For the first time in a

Command & Conquer game, players will be able to share (some of) their resources with their team mates – it will be possible to hand over units to an ally's control, but not money. While some may find this a tad limiting, it is still a great way to help a team mate who is up against the ropes.

FINAL NOTES
One unfortunate fact is that the developers have decided to return to the "grid-based" base construction model – buildings are placed "snapped to grid". The reason given for this is that it will avoid poorly placed buildings from causing obstructions. However, it can also be argued that this eliminates a skill element – some might say that if you don't know how to build a base properly, or simply couldn't be bothered to, then you deserve to be punished for it.

The resource model in *Red Alert 3* will resemble that of previous games in the franchise, but will be slowed down somewhat from that in *Tiberium Wars* (pre-patch 1.09 *Tiberium Wars*, at least) to result in matches that last some 20 to 30 minutes, as opposed to the usual 10 to 15 minutes in *C&C3*.

Anyone who owns *C&C3* can apply to the *Red Alert 3* Beta test later this year by purchasing the *Kane's Wrath* expansion pack, which includes a Beta test key. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

IT'S 2011, AND THE United States has allied with the European Union (which later becomes the European Federation) to co-develop shield technologies that protect them from all space, land and air missiles. Russia, left out of the treaty, develops its own shield. In 2014, the shields are activated, tested and strategic nuclear war ends. Peace and security for everyone! However, in 2015, the price of oil reaches $200 per barrel and everyone has an energy crisis, except Russia (because of massive natural gas and oil reserves). By 2020, the US launches "Freedom Star" - a space station in high orbit for civilian research purposes. It also contains a contingent of US Marines who can deploy to anywhere on Earth in 90 minutes. A terrorist attack on the launch of the final module of the "Freedom Star" suddenly has the US, European Federation and Russia at odds. Global war is imminent. That's what we like to hear!

As with most *Tom Clancy* titles, there is a lot of cross-pollination in *EndWar*: elements from *Ghost Recon, Rainbow Six* and *Splinter Cell* all appear in the early information about *EndWar*. Ubisoft has been oddly coy to remark on several coincidences (such as the mysterious "President Fisher").

It's reasonable to expect that *EndWar* will have the usual *Clancy* flair for military dramatics and sweet high-tech gadgets that make war all that much cooler. According to Lead Designer, Michael de Plater, the *Ghost Recon* team is the Special Forces team for the US, *Rainbow Six* characters become European Federation commanders and Third Echelon is there for battlefield intelligence and special units.

The real tickler, however, is that *EndWar* is the first RTS (if you ignore *Kingdom under Fire* - Xbox) to be developed specifically with console sensibilities in mind. It's an RTS, but not quite a traditional one. There is more emphasis on smaller-scale battles; something the online multiplayer is taking advantage of. Players choose a faction and duke it out. Wins/losses influence the current global situation and change the front lines.

The issue of control, something always at the forefront of every gamer's mind, is being addressed via a surprisingly advanced voice-command system. The entire game can be played using only voice: players speak into the headset and give troops orders via specific commands (the game actually unfolds an on-screen
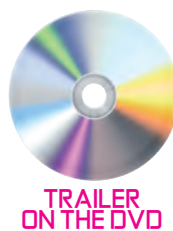
TRAILER ON THE DVD

list of available commands as you speak, showing you your context-specific options). Online videos of the Frag Dolls (the Ubisoft-sponsored, all-girl gaming team) playing the game look exciting. "Alpha team, move to foxtrot!" If one had to make a comparison, it's like being a manager on the sidelines, shouting tactics to your squad. It sounds a little like the voice-command system from the *SOCOM* series, just more geared towards precise control of your squads on the battlefield. The game is viewed from the perspective of one of the players' units, and the camera can be panned around and hot-swapped between units, so battlefield awareness isn't an issue.

If this is the future of RTS on the console, we're all for it. **NAG**
Miktar "RTSONCONSOLEHAHA" Dracon

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

RESISTANCE 2

IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT Insomniac Games would develop a sequel to *Resistance: Fall of Man*, despite all the noise that was made about the game and its depiction of certain significant religiously structures in the UK. Resistance was a popular game. As a launch title, it obviously filled a gap, but, for the most part, it was a fun game to play.

Resistance 2 is a sequel to *Fall of Man*, with the player once again taking control of that super soldier, Sergeant Nathan Hale. The enemies will be more or less familiar too. Despite the fact that Hale managed to suppress the Chimera invasion in the UK at the end of the first title, the aliens are ready for more carnage, this time taking on the US. Time advancement places the action in the 1950s, after the end of the Second World War (which saw the first Chimera invasion in *Fall of Man*).

In the new game, Hale is part of a new task force called the Sentinels, specifically trained to fight the Chimera menace. The US government knows that a full-scale invasion is imminent, and takes steps to counter it before it happens. When the invasion does occur, it is a large-scale aerial offensive on both coasts of the US, and the Sentinels are sent in to deal with the situation.

The introduction of the Sentinels takes *Resistance* from being pretty much a one-man show to a much grander place. Insomniac has become ambitious after the original title, and has decided that two-player co-op missions just aren't big enough. *Resistance 2* will feature eight-player co-op missions. Using the PlayStation Network, up to eight players can join up for a cooperative campaign that is sure to be intense at the very least. And it won't just be a rehash of the single-player campaign either. The co-op missions are specifically designed for the game, and will feature subtle changes when replayed, enhancing the replay value of the game.

The co-op mode will allow players to take on one of three roles: Machine Gunner, Sniper or Medic. These roles will extend into the squad-based, competitive multiplayer games as well, which will allow up to 60 players to get in on the action at a time. Each squad in the battle will have specific roles, which add a nice, real-world flavour to the title, and make the game infinitely more interesting than the old, run-around-and-do-your-own-thing style of competitive multiplayer games we have seen in the past.

The single-player game seems to be shaping up nicely as well. It's bigger than *Fall of Man*, with vast battles forming the backdrop to what the developers claim is a "gripping, atmospheric" storyline. Whether they deliver on that remains to be seen, but one has to remember that Insomniac will have three PS3 titles under their belts with the release of *Resistance 2*. Aside from the original title, they also did *Ratchet & Clank: Tools of Destruction*, which was a great game.

If they deliver what they're promising, *Resistance 2* will be a good game. The eight-player co-op alone makes for an interesting and potentially great idea. At the very least, fans of the series will be able to enjoy a definite advancement in the game dynamic. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

R-TYPE COMMAND

IT NEVER CEASES TO be both strange and exciting when a series, known for its sterling implementation of a specific genre, suddenly enters a different genre entirely. It usually doesn't do well. The *R-Type* series started life as a side-scrolling arcade shooter back in 1987. It was pretty standard even for the time: you took your ship (the "Arrowhead") and blasted your way through a "mysterious but powerful" alien enemy known as the Bydo. It's a classic with over ten titles in the series, and provided shoot-'em-up fans with two decades of quality blast-a-thon action.

R-Type Command is nothing like any of the previous *R-Type* games. It's a tactical role-playing game, mission-based with a hexagonal grid. Played over a series of 58 levels, the player engages in turn-based battles. The battles retain a little *R-Type* legacy: the player's units start at the far left, and the objective is always at the far right. Player units always face to the right, which has an impact on the game dynamic as it influences the nature of attacks. Enemy units always face left.

The campaign consists of two parts: first, you play as the forces of Earth, then as the Bydo. There will be multiplayer via Wi-Fi for some sweet one-on-one versus. It may seem a little surreal for fans of the series to suddenly find themselves playing something very different from what they're used to, and yet the surprisingly deep *R-Type* universe seems well suited for this genre. The game will feature more than 100 different units, mostly ships from other *R-Type* titles. Every unit has its unique abilities, movement and attacks. New units and upgrades to existing units are purchasable, and certain units will only be available if you meet certain mission objectives.

The Force units (a staple of the *R-Type* series) will also be available, suggesting that Irem is taking this seriously. The Force units can either be controlled by themselves, or attached to *R-Type* fighters on the battlefield. As in the *R-Type* series, the Forces work as a unidirectional shield and provide additional attacks.

Fans of the shoot-'em-up genre shouldn't disregard this new *R-Type* prematurely, or at least just consider it a spin-off if it really offends the inner puritan. There is a kind of synergistic parallel between the fast-paced, seat-of-your-pants bullet-ballet of the shoot-'em-up genre and the more cerebral, slower-paced, yet equally seat-of-your-pants tactical dance of the Tactics genre. However, it's a little lateral. Considering the departure the series is taking, lateral seems par for the course. Suffice it to say, it's exciting when a developer tries something new and we're curious to see how it'll turn out. We're very optimistic though, since Irem has earned our respect over the years with its solid games. **NAG**

Miktar "OF-1 Daedalus" Dracon

R-TYPE LEGACY

R-Type (1987)
R-Type II (1989)
Armed Police Unit Gallop (1991)
Super R-Type (1991)
R-Type Leo (1992)
R-Type III: The Third Lightning (1993)
R-Types (1998)
R-Type Delta (1998) / US version (1999)
R-Type DX (1999)
R-Type Final (2003)
R-Type Tactics (2007)

Developer→ Irem Software | **Publisher→** TBA | **Genre→** Strategy Hybrid | **Release Date→** May 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

You just don't see high-flying action scenes like these anymore

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: BOX OFFICE BUST

LEISURE SUIT LARRY FANS, who are probably some of the oldest active gamers around (considering how old the series is), were shocked and dismayed when Sierra Entertainment released *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* in 2004. The spirit of the title was gone, along with the bit of class the series had. Instead, *Magna Cum Laude* was a crude and crass title that had little place in the long-term legacy of the series.

Sierra Entertainment recently announced that Larry would be back, this time in a title called *Box Office Bust*. As the title implies, it takes place in a Hollywood-styled setting, crammed full of glitz, glamour and (naturally) girls. The hero of the story is the original Larry Laffer's nephew, Larry Loveage (just like in *Magna*), and he takes a job at a movie studio for the summer. He soon discovers, though, that an industry mole has infiltrated the studio. It is up to the story's misnamed hero to uncover the mole's dastardly plot and, naturally, get the girl (or girls, to be completely accurate).

While fans of the original games might all be uttering a groan of dismay, a few things might prove to be the redeeming feature for this new instalment in the *Leisure Suit Larry* series. Most importantly, Sierra has

handed the development of the game to a new studio, namely Team 17 Software. How these experienced developers (they have been at it for around 17 years) will deal with the game remains to be seen: they are famous for the well-loved *Worms* franchise (another project they have on the go currently) and are newcomers to this series. This might be exactly what the series needs to recover from the innuendo-strewn, mini-game-ridden *Magna Cum Laude*.

Not that there won't be innuendo in this new game. In fact, this whole series is based on it. Hopefully, the developers will avoid the more crass humour of *Magna* and go back to the slightly more subtle jokes used in previous titles. A quote from a Sierra press release, which states that the game will "feature sophomoric comedy," doesn't fill us with too much hope, though.

As far as game dynamics, not too much has been revealed. It has been said that the game will feature an open world with lots of opportunities for exploration, as well as platform action, racing and puzzle solving. They don't say anything about mini-games, so time will have to reveal how many are included in the final version of *Box Office Bust*. It has been described as "the most

amusing and immersive *Leisure Suit Larry* videogame yet," by a senior Sierra executive, and has already earned an 'M' rating in the USA.

A good vocal cast has been assembled for this title, including Carmen Electra, Shannon Elizabeth and Nikki Cox. The wide platform spread and use of next-gen technology imply that it will be the best-looking *Larry* thus far (a far cry from the blocky graphics and text-driven gameplay of the original game), and the new developer does generate a modicum of hope for this title. A lot will be determined by the scriptwriter, Allen Covert, whose credits include writing the script for the film, *The Benchwarmers*. Whether Sierra is going to try to steer the game away from the mistakes made by *Magna Cum Laude* remains to be seen. Let's hope the global average rating of 61.3% that it received inspire them to do so (www. gamerankings.com for the PC version). The game is due for release in the last quarter of this year. *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust* will be available for the PC, PS3 and Xbox 360. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Iron Man wears his underpants on the inside...

IRON MAN

Developer→ SEGA | **Publisher→** SEGA Europe | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** May 2008

THE BASIC PREMISE BEHIND the upcoming film of the same title is that Tony Stark, billionaire industrialist, sophisticated playboy and serious alcoholic, is captured by terrorists in Afghanistan and ordered to build a missile. Stark, played by Robert Downey Jr., decides, instead, to use his resources and build himself a suit of armour to help him escape his captors. Once back on home soil, Stark improves on the armour, creating a superhero suit, complete with superhuman strength, the ability to fly, and, of course, an array of dangerous weapons (including Repulsor Rays that shoot from his

suit's chest and hands).

While the *Iron Man* game will mostly be based on the movie, players can expect more characters and a plot line or two not seen in the film, as SEGA draws from the Marvel Comics Universe. And true to the nature of all comic book heroes, Iron Man will have his work cut out for him. Through an exploration of his environments, both on land and in the air, Iron Man is likely to find some enemies with whom to battle.

There are a number of ways in which our hero can take on the bad guys. The most interesting is turning an enemy's attack

TRAILER ON THE DVD

back on its originator by, for example, catching a missile and turning it around to go back to where it came from. Enemies also have a number of ways to take on Iron Man, and the ensuing multiple attacks, from the air to tanks on the ground, will definitely make for some exciting gaming. The actors from the movie will be supplying the voices for the game, so that's at least a step in the right direction. Let's just hope the final game will be better than the recent *Transformers* (and the less we say about the *Superman* game the better). **NAG**

Megan Hughes

PC
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PS3
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PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
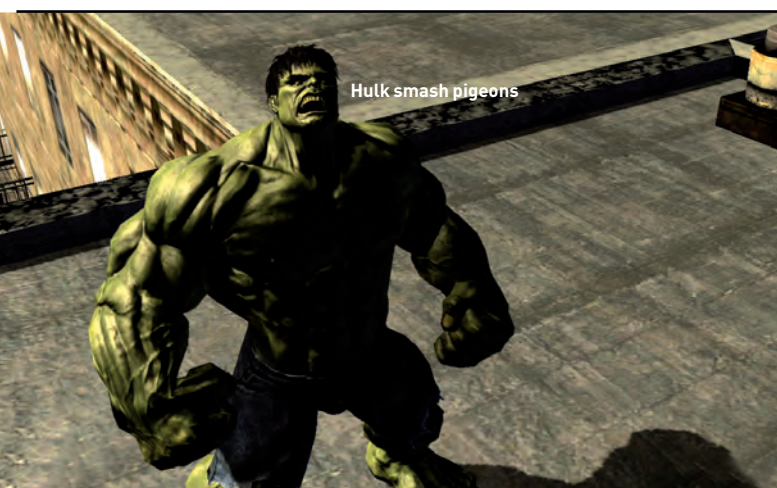
Hulk smash pigeons

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Developer→ Edge of Reality | Amaze Entertainment (DS) | **Publisher→** SEGA | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** June 2008

TO BE HONEST, SOME of us loved the Ang Lee interpretation of a more sombre Bruce Banner and his un-jolly green giant. Marvel obviously doesn't care much about art flicks, so they're making another *Hulk* movie with different actions and more of a Marvel-comic-book-movie-feel: which is either good or bad depending on your lactose tolerance. A new movie means more mighty, marketable munitions, which of course include a game that appears on everything but your watch.

Not much is known about the upcoming game, other than that it'll have key moments from the movie, additional plot

lines and characters and a suspiciously *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* smell. The game takes place in an open-ended New York City with many destructible things – buildings, cars, streetlights – and plenty of big enemies to smash. Story based missions – check. Side quests and mini-games – check. A 'rage' system that lets you upgrade the Hulk with more puny human squishing power – check.

We'd like to be optimistic about this one (*Ultimate Destruction* was cool, but made by an entirely different developer), but we've played the *Transformers* game based on the

TRAILER ON THE DVD

movie and sometimes what's written in the press release and what you end up playing just don't add up. Few assets have been released so far and information is sketchy: dubious for a game set to be released in a few months. We don't mean to nitpick movie-licence titles (especially since they've been on the upswing in recent years), but this thing smells bad right off the bat. With luck, it should still be a lot of fun to play. If not and it sucks, you can smash it into a thousand little pieces... you know... to calm your inner Hulk. **NAG**

Miktar "I liked Eric Bana in that other one" Dracon

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

NAG

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: CLEAR SKY

Developer→ GSC Game World | Certain Affinity | **Publisher→** Deep Silver | GSC World Publishing | **Genre→** FPS | **Release Date→** Q4 2008

SET ONE YEAR BEFORE the events in *Shadow of Chernobyl*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky* will take players on a journey leading up to the events in the original game. *Clear Sky* will also feature many new areas that were considered but left out of the original (notably the lost city of Limansk and the Pripyat underground). Additionally, the game will be more open ended than the original, as the player will get to choose which faction to ally with. The twist in the tale is that the protagonist you play in *Clear Sky* is a mercenary who must hunt down and kill Strelok, the main character from the original game!

Another new addition to the game will be DirectX 10 compatibility as well as an improved DirectX 9 renderer. While the previous game looked good, *Clear Sky* will offer more detail, depth of field, motion blur and a new animation engine, all thanks to the upgrading of the game engine (X-ray Engine 1.5). In the original, players were allowed to wield weapons while searching for artefacts, but now there's a handheld device required to locate them, meaning that only a pistol can be used when close to an artefact.

According to GSC Game World, the creator of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, the game's physics structures have also been vastly improved, which in essence will give everything a more realistic feel than before. They've also been working hard on improving the artificial intelligence that governs the game world, the PDA, HUD and overall interface.
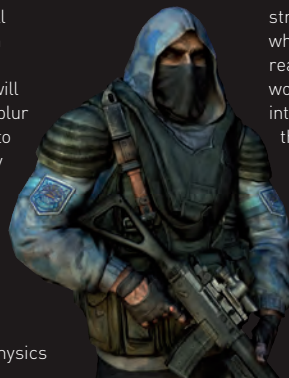
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky seems set to be a must-have prequel that will fill in the gaps left unanswered in the original, including how Strelok began the first game in the back of a death truck. The only question remaining is: Will it ship on time considering the track record of the developer? **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

WORMS: A SPACE ODDITY

Developer→ Team 17 Software | **Publisher→** THQ | **Genre→** Strategy | **Release Date→** TBA

WE DON'T THINK THAT Team 17 is paying any homage to either Stanley Kubrick or David Bowie in *Worms: A Space Oddity*, its new title specifically developed for the Nintendo Wii. It's no surprise that this title is making its way onto the Wii, with virtually every other developer clamouring for a share of this very popular console's title-pie.

However, while other developers haven't necessarily done the best job they could have with the Wii's control system, Team 17 is claiming an intuitive and interesting new way to play *Worms*. While that remains to be seen, it does seem that the game would work well using the Wii Remote. Different weapons will require different movements, for example: an idea that, if implemented properly, could prove to be a lot of fun.

Along with the control system, *Worms: A Space Oddity* will sport a new graphical style, moving away from the hand-drawn look that has been the hallmark of *Worms* for years. Additionally, more customisation options and a redesigned interface will make for a better experience.

Up to four players will be able to play the game - which takes place on one of six different planets - online. Each planet features different environmental settings, and consequently, different battle conditions.

The concept is great, and it should work particularly well on the Wii. Once again, implementation is critical. It will be interesting to see where this goes. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius
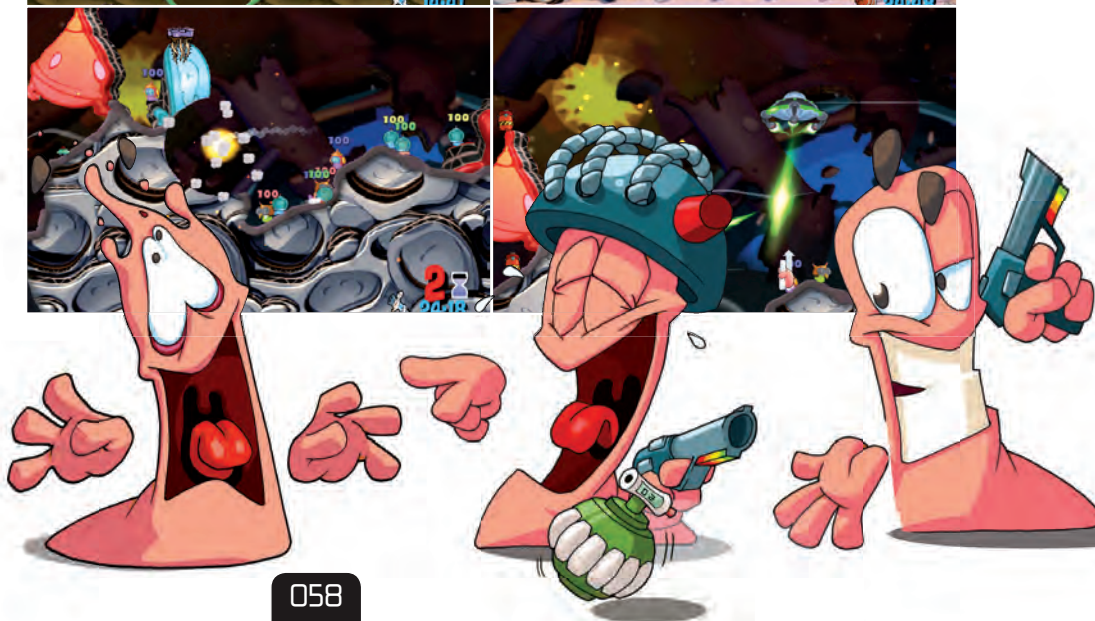
1942: JOINT STRIKE

Developer→ Backbone Entertainment | **Publisher→** Capcom | **Genre→** Top-down Shooter | **Release Date→** 2008

SHOW OF HANDS. WHO of you can remember Capcom's classic, top-down arcade shooter, *1942*, from the '80s? Hmm... only three of you. Well, you certainly look old enough to remember this classic. For those who cannot remember it (or won't, or weren't alive at the time), *1942* was one of the original top-down arcade shooters. It brought with it an addictive game dynamic that older gamers fawned over and spent countless 20c pieces on. The game was set in an alternative version of WWII, with

the player taking on the role of a pilot of a WWII-era fighting aircraft. The only goal was to survive while making it to the end of the various levels. It may sound easy, but trust us when we say, "Boom! You're dead." While the game may be around 24 years old, Capcom has certainly done a rocking job of sprucing it up with a 2D look and feel but rendered in HD 3D. This time around, players will still have to play top down, but with some awesome updated graphics and a new soundtrack enhancing the experience (Norihiko Hibino, famed

for the music in the *Metal Gear* series, has created a new musical score for the game). Players will also be able to join up cooperatively throughout the levels. If you consider yourself one of the elite few who have played games throughout the last two decades, then this will be a cakewalk down memory lane. *1942: Joint Strike* will be available on Xbox LIVE Arcade and the PlayStation Network shortly, and looks set to show players what games should be all about. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX

Developer→ Backbone Entertainment | **Publisher→** Capcom | **Genre→** Fighting | **Release Date→** 2008

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II *Turbo HD Remix* features a new balanced mode with new moves, combos and damage levels. The soundtrack has also been redone with direction lifted from what fans of the original game and franchise suggested. The most significant change in the game, as the title suggests, is in the visuals. All artwork has been redone by Udon Comics, publisher of the *Street Fighter* comic series. This change in direction is probably the single biggest difference between the 1994 version and this one. All characters available in the original game are present, drawn in a modern manga style. All artwork has been redone with smoother animation, new sprites and portraits for the characters. These changes make *HD Remix* the most

modern looking in the *Street Fighter* series, just behind *Street Fighter IV*.

With the full HD capabilities of the Xbox 360 and the PS3, *HD Remix* supports widescreen mode, which makes the game stage much wider than it has ever been in any other *Street Fighter* game. *HD Remix* is a refinement of a game that was already polished when it was released over a decade ago. The changes in the game that are not visual will most likely be appreciated by purists only, but people new to the game will get a chance to experience the most-balanced *Street Fighter II* yet. *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* seems set to be the best *Street Fighter II* ever. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

Developer→ Square Enix
Publisher→ Square Enix
Genre→ RPG | **Release Date→** 2008

CRISIS CORE, THE FOURTH instalment in the *Final Fantasy VII* Compilation series, is a prequel set seven years prior to the events of the first *Final Fantasy VII*. Through its monopoly of mako energy, and with the use of sheer military force, Shinra Electric Power Company is nearing complete world domination. The war with Wutai is not going well, however, and now a large number of skilled combat operatives, known as first-class SOLDIERs, have gone missing. Determined to find the cause for the mass disappearance, as well as concluding the war, Shinra Company is sending in more SOLDIER operatives, including first-class hero Sephiroth, second-class Zack Fair (who is prepared to work hard to become a first-class SOLDIER and a hero), and Cloud Strife, a Shinra Guard. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

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

AIRPORT MANIA: FIRST FLIGHT

Developer→ South Winds Games
Publisher→ Reflexive Entertainment
Genre→ Management | **Release Date→** April 2008

IS YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE simply not demanding enough for you? Want to spice things up with a little drama? Why not take on one of the world's most stressful jobs and become an air traffic controller right in the comfort of your own home.

After a brief visit to the Air Traffic Controller Academy, you will be off to manage your own airport in one of the eight stages and 84 levels this title offers. There will be in-flight emergencies, such as an unexpected visit from the president or a woman in labour on one of your planes, to keep you on your toes at all times, while the cash you earn from various activities can be used to upgrade your airport and your planes. Expect trophies, ribbons and lawsuits. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

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

HORSES ARE EVERYWHERE

Sidhe worked with Weta Digital (Peter Jackson's digital, visual effects company) to be the first to motion capture a horse at full gallop, for their horseracing game, *Melbourne Cup Challenge*.
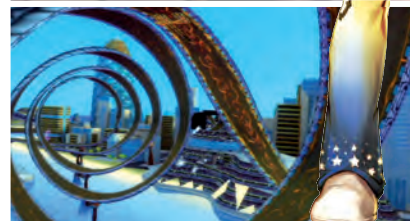
SPEED RACER

Developer→ Sidhe Interactive [PS2 | Wii]; TBA [DS]
Publisher→ Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment Inc.
Genre→ Racing | **Release Date→** May 2008

THAT'S RIGHT, NO NEXT-GENERATION version of the game of the movie due to a "short development schedule." In a way, this is preferable to the alternative (remember *Enter the Matrix*). To be more accurate, the Wii and Nintendo DS versions of the game will be released at the same time as the movie, but the PS2 version will only be released later with the DVD release. Sidhe Interactive is a New Zealand development studio known mostly for *GripShift* and *Jackass: The Game* – not exactly a list of groundbreaking achievements, but the studio is able to produce decent games.

"*Speed Racer* is an exceptionally creative property and teamed with the Wachowski brothers' vision, it makes for action-packed racing gameplay," said Samantha Ryan, senior vice president, development and production, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment Inc. "The game will capture the intensity of the racing in the film to give gamers and movie fans a chance to take the wheel after they experience the film." That's all we know, not much info has been released. **NAG**

Miktar "Go!" Dracon

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

Q&A:

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

We all know it already: Lara is back again, and has shaken off all that bad mojo she got stuck with a few years ago. Life couldn't be better for the first lady of gaming, and her new patron, the bustling team at Crystal Dynamics, is cracking the whip to make her true next-gen debut a memorable one. We had the opportunity to chat to Alex Jones, product producer of *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, about the game. In return, he made fun of our grandmothers.

Work on *Underworld* started soon after Legend was completed and before *Anniversary*. Is the team working on *TR8* the same that created *Legend*?
There is a great deal of continuity between the previous two teams and the *Underworld* team. Obviously, to staff a team as large as ours, we had to bring in some new faces, but there is more than a critical mass of veterans from both *Legend* and *Anniversary*.

Could you give us a bit more insight into the team? Who is producing the project and who are in charge of engineering, design, sound and level design?
I am the project producer, and have been with Crystal for over five years and have worked on three titles with the studio. Rob Pavey is the lead engineer, and was the lead engineer on the 360 version of *Legend*. Our lead designer is Harley Baldwin, who was the lead systems designer on *Legend*. Kyle Mannerberg is our lead level designer. Patrick Sirk and Dan Neuberger are the art leads and Kam Yu is our character modeller. Primo Navidad is on drums... Sorry, he's the lead animator.

Haven't you had enough of Lara? Is the idea of making a game featuring a pimply, slightly flabby guy doing the rounds yet?
Well, I actually pitched the idea of a game about a fat, lazy slob called Fridge Raider, but oddly enough, I didn't get much reaction. The *Tomb Raider* universe, and Lara in particular, is still a compelling, rich setting and we as a studio are not done exploring all that is possible within this world.

Is Cryptids a real word or did you guys make it up? Was Tombgres ever an option?
Well, cryptids is real and is a term for slightly fantastical animals that straddle the line of the real and the mythic, frequently with some sound zoological basis, but having been exaggerated by folklore and cultural myth. For us, this is right in the *Tomb Raider* wheelhouse because it represents an amplified reality that doesn't go all the way into the fantasy world of dragons, griffons or other sorts of chimeras, but it absolutely goes beyond the strictly real and provides texture and detail to the exaggerated reality of the *Tomb Raider* universe.

While *Underworld* follows on from *Legend*, the latter had urban environments and such, whereas *Tomb Raider: Underworld* seems largely destined for tombs (seriously, though, we have no problem with that). *Legend* opted for more cinematic flair. *Anniversary* had a real knack for using the series' fundamentals. Could you give us an idea of how each of the projects influenced *Underworld*?
Tomb Raider: Underworld will build upon the cinematic feel of *Legend*, and

to that extent we have put Lara in the middle of an epic story with a seriously dramatic payoff worthy of any big-budget Hollywood film. The game will also embrace the sense of exploration, discovery and a commitment to the tombs that *Anniversary* embodied so successfully. However, the new game engine in *Tomb Raider: Underworld* will allow us to do all manner of new things with the game.

Apparently, Lara will have to do a bit of exploring in the new levels and she'll even have access to her bike and, presumably, other vehicles. Does this mean that there will be multiple paths through a level, or is it more of a sandbox design? Will my grandmother get lost playing and eventually switch to *Hexic*?
First off, a *Hexic*-playing grandmother is a pretty 'with-it' chick, and you should be quite proud. My grandmother thinks a VCR is magical. While I think that my grandmother would eventually give up and head back to the quiet desperation of church bingo, your grandmother will find our levels challenging, yet fair. It is not a sandbox design in the sense of a *GTA*, but we do use some multi-path elements and some false paths, which challenge the player in fun and interesting ways to solve our traversal riddles.

How different is the new level design to traditional *Tomb Raider* games? Will pedantic fans feel unnerved?
Tomb Raider builds upon all the aspects the hardcore fans know and love: a sense of scale, grand visual payoffs and reveals, challenging movement setups and environment puzzles. There's a lot of new stuff going on too. There's a more pronounced skill aspect to some of our movement mechanics, new ways to approach and solve the puzzles, different combat mechanics plus an amped-up pace. However, there really is nothing anyone will feel unnerved about.

By the sound of it, the game has two different areas: above ground and the long-forgotten stuff underneath. Apart from the difference in enemies, how do these areas differ from each other?
We have a concept that we call "the Onion," which I now realise actually sounds quite silly, but it really is an appropriate metaphor. We think of our environments as layers - layers of an onion - where you begin a level in a relatively straightforward environment, but as you progress through the layers, you descend into progressively more fantastical realms until, without any huge single disjuncture, you find yourself in a comparatively unreal (in the best sense of that word) space. So, if you start in a lush jungle, where you encounter local wildlife, you end up in a mysterious tomb where you find yourself taking on cryptids, or Tombgres if you will.

The real reason we all play *Tomb Raider* is for the large set-piece puzzles where, inevitably, you'll get to the top and wonder, "How and why the hell did a bunch of ancient people build this." Can we expect even more of those?
Yes. Nothing so defines ancient societies in the *Tomb Raider* universe than needlessly complex machinery! And while that seems sort of a historical conceit, ancient societies frequently used these sorts of monumental puzzles and contraptions as symbols of their advancement and they were quite effective for awing one's more primitive rivals into submission. Like the way I use my VCR to awe my grandmother.

Apparently, the game is all kinds of pretty. What makes *Tomb Raider: Underworld* a new kind of pretty?
I can tell that you are dubious. Next-gen hardware pretty much guarantees a baseline level of visual fidelity, which makes it hard to stand out from the crowd. However, in addition to using a mix of high-end, obvious techniques, such as normal mapping and insanely high-resolution textures, we are also employing a range of more subtle techniques, which in combination really make the game sing visually. This mix of the flashy and the subtle combine to make *Tomb Raider: Underworld* an incredible game visually, and which will stand out among the high-end visual next-gen offerings.

When are you including the sunbathing level?
I've heard what can happen when one's fantasy life starts to encroach on one's real life. The results are tragic... and awkward.

Crystal Dynamics has had a lot of fun with physics in the past two games. Now it appears that the relationship has turned serious and Lara has even been motion captured. How detailed and complex is the physics engine?
The physics engine was substantially overhauled between *Legend* and *Underworld*, particularly on the authoring side. This means that we'll be able to generate some quite sophisticated physics setups. Lara has been 'mo-capped' and is packing about 1,400 animations. As a result, she has never had more detailed or nuanced movement that captures both athletic grace and sense of flair.

Lara has always been able to kick our ass, but now she's even better, especially with hand-to-hand/paw/claw combat. What are
some of her new tricks? Can we finally jump on a bear's back and race it around until it dies of exhaustion? (Or will that be in *TR9*?)
We are definitely evolving combat in general, permitting the player to engage in combat in situations that they could not previously, and definitely making combat a faster-paced, more micro-tactical experience than it has been in previous instalments.

Each of the past two games has added to Lara's general moves. The magnetic rope of *Legend* and the pole hopping of *Anniversary* come to mind. Are any more planned for *Underworld*?
For sure. Plenty. And we've extended the functionality of her existing move-set in ways that seem logical for a woman of Lara's skill and prowess.

In the past few years, *Tomb Raider* has retaken the crown for cinematic action-adventures, but recently *Uncharted* has issued a challenge. What do you think of Naughty Dog's game and do you feel that it has set a benchmark for the genre that you'd like to beat?
I think *Uncharted* is a very good game and I enjoyed playing it and seeing *Tomb Raider*'s influence on it. We will stack up favourably in the areas where a direct comparison is possible.

If Lara and Indiana Jones had a baby, would it be the greatest tomb raider ever or would it reject its parents' hopes and dreams, opting to become a beautician?
Neither. Like most children of the super-privileged, he or she would likely be a self-entitled, pseudo-celebrity media whore, shamelessly trafficking in his or her parent's fame and accomplishments, while hanging out with Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan in various Los Angeles dens of iniquity. Lara knows this and that is why she will remain single and childless.

Thanks for your time! Anything to add?
I must confess: I'm still fascinated that your grandmother plays *Hexic*. Has she tried *Bejeweled 2* yet? **NAG**

reviews

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE [PS3]

It's here, it's beautiful and it has cars. While *Prologue* is very much a 'demo' to tide *GT* fans over until the 'real' game arrives, it still contains enough content to make it worthwhile. The new Professional physics mode guarantees a wholly new racing experience for fans – and there is talk of a patch providing car damage and weather. No *Top Gear* content yet, though. Beyond that, it's racing as usual although the addition of in-cockpit views for all the cars is a nice touch.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III [PC]

Thanks to the Bonus Pack release, there is reason to play *UT3* again. Is it just us, or did *UT3* not really make the impact or leave the mark it should have? Perhaps we're just jaded. Either way, the new maps are interesting and new character models are starting to appear online.

KONGREGATE.COM [PC]

Nothing like a Flash game to tide you over while pretending to work. Kongregate (**www.kongregate.com**) has quickly become a firm office favourite thanks to the large variety of games hosted and the inclusion of Badges (like Achievements) you can win by completing objectives in certain games. There's a lot of junk on there too, so sort the genre lists by Rating if you want to avoid playing something that physically smells bad over the Internet.

SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE [PC]

The 1.03 patch fixed practically every major complaint with the game, and special attention was paid to the AI opponents. There is a future expansion in the works that will add a full campaign mode (seems people insisted). Beyond a doubt, this is one of the best new RTS games to have hit the market in a very long time. Instead of the usual copy-paste dynamics that practically every RTS insists on following for the sake of puritan idiocy, *Sins* does something new, fresh, interesting and it does it well.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR '08 [360]

After a little *Everybody's Golf*, our resident golfing expert and art director decided to "show us what a REAL man's golf game is like", and while it may not be much of a golf simulator, *Tiger Woods* is a lot of fun to play. The Michael Bay-style rapid-cut camera angles when you hit a power shot are pretty inspiring – more games should jazz up their respective sports like that. Soccer, for example, could do with a lot more explosions and destructable environments.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

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

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

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

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

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

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

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

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

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

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

World Poker Tour

Better Than

The WSOP Main Event without the $10,000 buy-in

For Fans Of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Good presentation and realistic AI make *WSoP 2008* one of the best poker titles around.

78 OUT OF 100
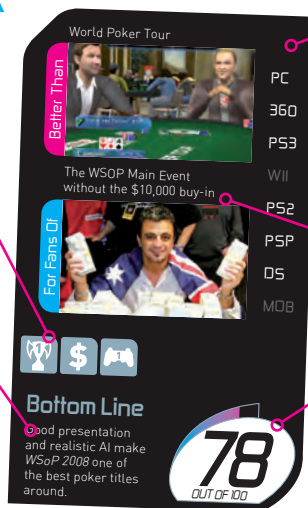
WEB SCORES

PATAPON [PSP]

NAG	89/100
METACRITIC	86/100
GAMERANKINGS	88/100

C&C 3: KANE'S WRATH [PC]

NAG	83/100
METACRITIC	78/100
GAMERANKINGS	77.8/100

CHAINS OF OLYMPUS [PSP]

NAG	90/100
METACRITIC	92/100
GAMERANKINGS	92/100

THE REVIEW ICONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

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

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

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

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

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

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

NAG AWARDS

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

MUST PLAY: The thing about the Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.
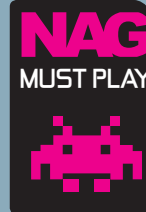
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If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679

THE REVIEWERS

The League of Nefarious *NAG* Reviewers are rarely seen outside the confines of the NAG-o-Plex cunningly hidden in plain sight by the bus stop down the road. To help you catch them all, here is a complete list of the villainous pencil pushers. You're gonna need an Ultra-Pokeball for this one.

MICHAEL JAMES
a.k.a. "Big Boss" Special powers include: Deadline Timeline, Editorial Veto, Mighty Marketing Power Sales and Penultimate Control Over Wood.

MIKTAR DRACON
a.k.a. "The Beast" Special powers include: Hyperkinetic Inflated Rat, Horns of Justice, Pants of Covering and Tail of Many Leagues of Reviewing.

TARRYN VAN DER BYL
a.k.a. "Azimuth" Special powers include: Pink Hammer That Looks Like A Gun, Bulletproof Bra, Cybernetic Legs of Xmas Past and Smirk of Death.

ALEX JELAGIN
a.k.a. "Binary Cyclops" Special powers include: Paradigm Horse, Sword of Vermillion, Silk Pants, Dimension Wings and Hypno Eye-and-Moustache.

CHRIS BISTLINE
a.k.a. "Steve" Special powers include: Nuclear Pants, Nuclear Pecs, Nuclear Specs, Nuclear Pokedex and Fig Jam.

WALT PRETORIUS
a.k.a. "Ramjet" Special powers include: Ka-ching Kannon, BDSM, Cosmic Hereditary Abrasive Skin and Creepy Smile.

SEAN JAMES
a.k.a. "Mighty Simulator" Special powers include: Real Chomping Action, Water Pistol, Thor's Mallet and Dubious Alligator Tie.

ADAM LIEBMAN
a.k.a. "Antlered Justice" Special powers include: Whiffle Sword of Nerfing, Glowstick Nunchucks, Robotic Ear Cleaners and Nuclear Heart.

JUSTIN SLABBERT
a.k.a. "The Schnozz" Special powers include: Big Red One All-terrain Automatic Rifle, Prehensile Tie and Glorious Pink Radiation Skin.

LOST ODYSSEY (360)

NAG	79/100
METACRITIC	78/100
GAMERANKINGS	79/100

LOST (PC)

NAG	67/100
METACRITIC	52/100
GAMERANKINGS	52.4/100

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2 (360)
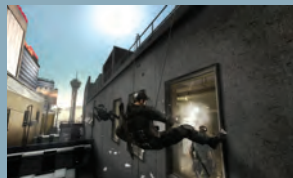
NAG	80/100
METACRITIC	83/100
GAMERANKINGS	82.9/100

NAG

Even the odds at the casino

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

WHEN WE GOT TO the end of *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, we found the worst cliff-hanger ever. Okay, maybe not the worst, but certainly one that ranks way up there in terms of nasty endings. So it was with great anticipation that the sequel got loaded into the DVD tray of the trusty old Xbox 360. But it wasn't just the story that made us want to play this new game from Ubisoft; the fact that *Rainbow Six: Vegas* is a fine game also helped.

As far as sequels go, *Rainbow Six: Vegas 2* ranges from truly sublime to "what the hell?" It features some elements from the original, and even improves on them, but takes some others and throws them out of the window.

The story in the single-player campaign is good, although one would expect something a little less simplistic from something with Tom Clancy's name latched onto it. It raises the question about how much Mr Clancy had to do with the script for the game, but that's not really a major question. What the story does do, thankfully, is tie up some of the loose ends left dangling by the previous game. It even goes so far as to expand on some of the characters from the previous outing, although the player doesn't get forced into the shoes of a pre-generated persona, as was the case in *Rainbow Six: Vegas*. Instead, the player gets

to use a fairly customisable character called Bishop. Bishop can be male, female, black, white, Asian... whatever. The character feels a little more anonymous than in the previous game, but it still allows the player to create something a little more personalised.

The single-player campaign is a bit short, but is great fun nonetheless. Some new control elements (which we'll get to later) make for a fantastic game dynamic. Another added bonus is the fact that the single-player campaign now earns the player experience and rewards, which are perpetual. In other words, experience and rewards gained in the single-player game also get applied to multiplayer gaming, which gives a bit of an advantage to people who finish the single player campaign before going online for multiplayer action.

In the single player campaign, the player makes use of the expected three-man team. One character is obviously under the player's control, while the other two are team mates who can be given orders via a context-sensitive control system. These two AI characters go from being effective combat machines, taking out enemies left and right with brutal efficiency, to being utter morons who stand in the middle of a room, getting absolutely lacerated by enemy fire, even though there is a bit of handy cover

a few feet away. It doesn't wreck the game, but having to run back to a fallen comrade who wasn't smart enough to figure out that enemy fire is harmful can get terribly annoying, particularly when you consider the fact that the AI isn't always stupid... just every now and then.

This AI issue extends to enemies too. Most times they're horribly efficient, making the player really having to consider tactical approaches and the like. At other times, though, they manage to catch a major case of stupid. It's not a fatal flaw in the game, but it does detract from the fairly

THE HISTORY OF RAINBOW 6

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six made its first appearance in 1998, developed by Red Storm Entertainment. Red Storm went on to make one further title in the series, called *Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear* in 1999, before the task fell to Ubisoft. Since then, a number of titles in the series, including *Raven Shield* (2003), *Athena Sword* (2004), *Iron Wrath* (2005), *Lockdown* (2006) and, of course, *Vegas* (2006), have hit the shelves, along with a number of mission packs intended for use with previous titles.
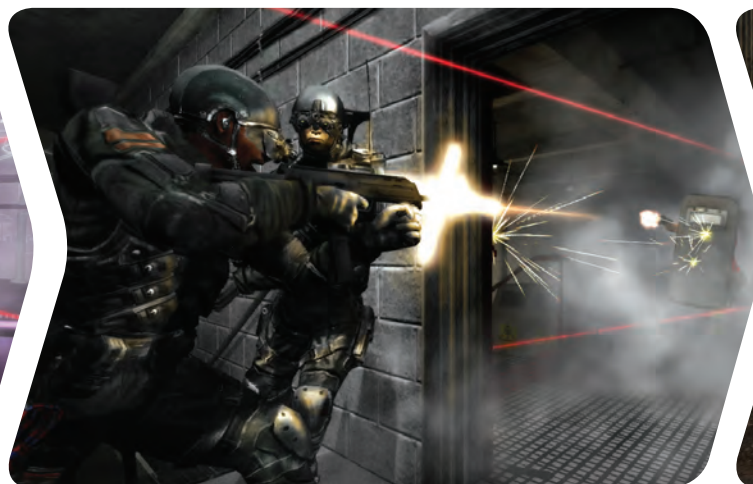
realistic feel generated by the title: standing a few metres away from a bad guy with a gun pointed at his head should elicit some kind of reaction after all.

The control scheme is exactly what one would expect, because it's pretty much the same as the previous title. Weapons and firing modes can be accessed from radial menus that pop up when a button is depressed for long enough, and the AI team is controlled with a combination of a one-button context system and D-pad orders (which generally come up after the context-sensitive control has activated some kind of activity, like rappelling). One addition to the controls that, while it may seem small, adds a lot of pace to the game dynamic is a 'sprint' function, activated by holding down the left shoulder button. It might seem like something almost inconsequential, but the fact is that a frantic charge from one set of cover to another not only adds to the game's realism, but can make the difference between completing a level and reloading from the last checkpoint.

A myriad of weapons are available to the player, with a large number of locked ones available as the game progresses. Once again, these unlocks are perpetual, meaning that a player who got hold of a trusty Deagle (a shortened word for Desert Eagle) during

As Good As

Rainbow Six: Vegas

For Fans Of

Tactical shooters

PC	
360	
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	

Bottom Line

A fitting, if cautious sequel.

80 OUT OF 100

the single-player game will be able to make use of it in multiplayer sessions. Clothing can also be customised, although this is a fairly pointless pursuit in the single-player game (unless you are a truly fashion conscious gamer and couldn't bear having your character deal out tactical destruction wearing just any old thing). Obviously, this has a purpose in the multiplayer arena, where being able to identify other players via their characters can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

The Unreal 3 engine holds its own in this graphically demanding game, with environments and characters that are beautifully represented. The occasional graphical oddity (like when the team uses stairs) still comes up, but, on the whole, this game looks fantastic. A few of the settings are a little anonymous though: parking garages in Las Vegas are no more glitzy or glamorous than parking garages in any other city. However, some of the settings have that fantastic Vegas feeling that was so effectively captured in the first title. Additionally, improved physics and more work have been put into the environments and the characters' interactions with them. Blood sprays from downed enemies are perpetual,

adding to the décor, while most windows (for example) can be turned into shattered renditions of their former selves with a few bullets. It's a pretty, dynamic game, with one or two settings that are so awesomely beautiful, they can be distracting.

This is a game that wants to be experienced in multiplayer to get a full appreciation of what it does. Several options are available, from competitive matches to co-op campaigns.

The competitive games come in a few flavours, including a great VIP mode called Team Leader. A few other multiplayer competitive modes that are more familiar are also available for play, including Total Conquest (much like the Conquest mode of the previous title) and demolition, which is a classic *Counter-Strike*-styled "one team has to plant the bomb, the other has to defuse it" sort of affair . The co-op modes, though, have taken a bit of a step backwards. The game now has a two-player co-op mode, as opposed to the four-player mode of the previous version. To add insult to injury, the AI team mates are only under the control of the host player. The other player sort of just fills in as an anonymous gun-toting character who has very little

impact on the game in terms of tactics. One might be able to get past this, except for the fact that should the host player be taken out, the AI team is useless until that player spawns again. A shared control system would have been nice but, as it stands, player two is a spare wheel, no matter which way you look at it.

You can still play this game in multiplayer mode if you're not connected to LIVE, making use of split-screen functionality. The split is a vertical one, not the horizontal split we saw in *Gears of War* or *Army of Two*. Why exactly the developers chose this format is unclear. It results in a narrower field of vision that hampers play terribly. And that nasty 'spare-wheel' element comes into the split-screen game too.

This is one of those games that is good, but could have been so much more. In terms of realism, tactical play, control and graphics, it's absolutely fantastic. The story is not bad. The AI and some aspects of multiplayer leave a lot to be desired at times. Assigning a rating to a game like this is tough, purely because it is a good game with problems. Fans of the previous title will definitely want to play this one, as well as lovers of good tactical action titles. It offers an excellent single player and online experience despite its issues, and could quite easily be called a definitive example of the genre. It's a little more cautious than the previous version of the game, and pushes fewer limits, but is still worth every minute. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

SECOND OPINION

Rainbow Six and I go way, way back to 1990s *Rogue Spear*, and a rubbish SiS Trio 1MB graphics card that couldn't push textures properly so my sister's arctic camo gear would render the sly bitch and her scoped Heckler & Koch G36K almost entirely invisible on the small slope behind the winter chalet. I'm not bitter. Anyway, Ding Chavez and I flash, frag, and cleared through the myriad sequels and expansion packs up until Vegas rolled out in late 2006, by which point I'd selfishly absconded with *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* and that really radical aerial drone thing. Ironically enough, however, it appears as though, in the interim, the *Rainbow Six* and *Ghost Recon* franchises have been gaffer-taped together into a sort of hybrid Rainbow Recon enterprise that plays more or less

exactly like a tactical version of *Call of Duty 4*. There's also drop in-drop out co-op play, an XP and ranking system, dozens of unlockables, bullet penetration, and fully customisable outfits for the fashion-conscious 21st century urban operative (like me). And if such formidable calibre still doesn't convince you, you can rappel down a building, invert yourself, and shoot the bad guys through the windows.

Tarryn "Does this digital camouflage make me look fat?" van der Byl

NAG
MUST PLAY

87
OUT OF 100
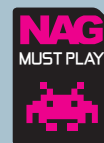
With over 1000 titles at each store, there is a game for every fan.

Look & Listen
For the Fans

COMMAND & CONQUER: KANE'S WRATH

A YEAR AGO, THE TIBERIUM segment of the *Command & Conquer* franchise made its triumphant return with *Tiberium Wars*. True to past form, twelve months after the base game, the inevitable expansion pack is upon us. I was, in the months leading up to its release, cautiously excited. I was concerned by the fact that sub-factions were being introduced, given the game's good balance (after patches!) and richness, afraid that throwing too much more into the mix might upset that careful balance. So, it is with great pleasure that I can, after having played this add-on, report that it doesn't disappoint. In fact, quite the contrary. I found that this title has exceeded my expectations...

MORE DEFINITION

In a similar vein to previous expansion packs (notably *Generals: Zero Hour*), this one brings with it 'sub-factions' for the three playable factions. However, instead of bombarding us with nine new sides, as in that title, we are being offered a more manageable six – two for each 'race'. These new sides are well defined, and represent specialisations in the basic races' strengths.

Thus, GDI now gets the Steel Talons, which specialise in tough and versatile armour with an emphasis on manning vehicles with infantry. This sub-faction also represents a bit of a throw-back to *Tiberian Sun*, with 'walker' units such as the Titan and the Wolverine. It also makes use of enhancements to rail-gun technology, and applies it more broadly (Guardian Cannons and Battle Bases get the upgrade). The

other new GDI faction is ZOCOM, which is an arm of the force that originated from special ops in Tiberium-infested regions. This faction brings with it some enhanced sonic technologies. Both of the new GDI factions use alternative harvesters, which feature firepower other than the default machinegun of the default harvester.

The Brotherhood of Nod sub-factions are the Black Hand and the Marked of Kane. The former are dominated by infantry making heavy use of flame-based weapons, and eschewing stealth and air. The latter are Nod's nostalgic bit hearkening back to *Tiberian Sun*, centering on cybernetics. This sub-faction has powerful cyborg infantry and uses high-energy particle beam weapons.

The Scrin also enjoy two specialist factions. Reaper-17 is a side that favours hard-hitting ground forces, and has shielded harvesters and low-tech units. It also makes more widespread use of the conversion beam, but makes far less use of airborne forces. It has only Stormriders in addition to Drone Platforms available, but none of the capital ships. Traveler-59, on the other hand, emphasises mobility and sneakiness. This faction's capital ships don't get shields, but instead can have their engines upgraded to move much faster. Other units also get speed upgrades, and this faction also gets enhanced mind-capture technology.

NEW TOYS

As well as the new factions, all the existing factions get some new units, as well as new technology upgrades. The upgrades

have also been reassigned in terms of what building they are researched in. Now, almost every faction has something to research in its Command Post or equivalent building. Also, notably, certain items have been lowered in terms of their tech. Upgrading power plants can now be done at tier-2, rather than at tier-3, which means that players can economise on space, allowing players to under-cater their power generation requirements, thus making power supply disruption a viable tactic once again (much like in the original *Command & Conquer*). Other upgrades, both new and old, have been brought to tier-2. For instance, Shock Troopers' upgrades (such as Plasma Discs and Blink Packs) can now be researched at the Stasis Chamber. GDI has gained a much-needed unit, the Hammerhead Gunship, which allows this faction to now have aerial presence in an area, rather than being limited to strike-and-return methods. All the factions have gained upgrades to certain of their weapons. Therefore, GDI's machineguns can now be upgraded to deal more damage, as can its anti-air ammunition.

MORE SUPPORT

Each faction has gained new support powers, while some have been trimmed out of some factions. Mostly, these support powers are quite clever, and have very likely been added in response to suggestions from players. (EA's development and support of this game is based on listening to the community, and acting on the feedback).

At last, Scrin has been given the ability to generate Tiberium. It made little sense that a race of beings whose technology is based on Tiberium could not do so, while Nod was able to. The two human factions can now also protect most of their buildings from Engineers and Commandos by deploying special fences around them.

SIZE MATTERS

New in *Kane's Wrath* are the epic units. These are very large and extremely strong units that each side now has available. Any player can have only one such unit in play at any given time, and it is built at a special, high-tech factory of sorts (which can also build any units that its faction's War Factory or Warp Sphere can normally build).

GDI MARV: This is something of a cross between a giant harvester and a giant Mammoth Tank. It can be manned by four infantry, each of which will contribute firepower or ability, and has the ability to gobble up Tiberium and convert it into money immediately.

NOD Redeemer: This is essentially a gigantic, four-legged Avatar. It can be manned by two infantrymen, boosting its firepower or gaining self-repair capabilities.

Scrin Eradicator Hexapod: This gigantic unit can be permanently garrisoned by three infantry units, gaining extra firepower or self-repair. Furthermore, it generates income from enemy units that are killed within a certain radius of it.

BROADENING THE HORIZONS

As is to be expected in an expansion pack for a game such as *Tiberium Wars*, this one provides a number of new multiplayer maps. Mostly, these are in the two to four player range, which accounts for the vast majority of matches. However, it is a pity that six, seven and eight player games have been neglected – larger groups of people who want to play will still be limited to the same old maps.

IN THE REAL WORLD

Also new in *Kane's Wrath* is Global Conquest, which is a turn-based strategy mode that has you managing multiple bases across the globe, training troops and mounting assaults. When a battle occurs, you have the option to micromanage it as a standard *Kane's Wrath* skirmish, or to have it auto-resolved. The strategic map is always the same: Planet Earth. Starting locations are randomised, and sometimes this leads to a disadvantageous or overly advantageous staring position. This, however, is hardly an issue, as this mode is only playable, alas, against the PC. All three factions are present in a game, vying for control of our pitiful rock. As well as a military victory (destroying all enemy bases), each faction has an alternative victory condition, and each is different from those of the others. This mode can easily occupy many, many hours, and is essentially an entire bonus game. With only a little more depth, it could rival entire standalone turn-based strategy titles!

DEBRIEFING

Our overall impression is very favourable indeed. Instead of confusing us with the new factions, EA has managed to increase the depth of this already complex game, but not to the point where it is unplayable. Also, a number of much-needed additions have been made, as well as some that are less obviously required, but, as it turns out, are very nice to have. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Getting fired from a fanatical cult

Better Than

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

RTS, Kane, Videos in games

For fans of

Bottom Line

One of the best RTS game expansion packs to date.

83 OUT OF 100

LOST ODYSSEY

MISTWALKER GAME STUDIOS' SECOND release for the Xbox 360 is a mixed bag indeed. While it certainly is better than their previous attempt (*Blue Dragon*), *Lost Odyssey* is a game certain to be met with mixed reactions.

The development team was headed up by Hironobu Sakaguchi, the "father" of the *Final Fantasy* series. *Lost Odyssey* is therefore firmly rooted in the principles of Japanese Role Playing Games (JRPGs for those in the know); it's pedantic, slow paced and turn based. Action fans will find the game thoroughly tedious, but those who like their games with a strong story line will think it's a gem.

On the surface, *Lost Odyssey* doesn't break into any new territory. It plays pretty much like any other JRPG: 'adventuring' is interspersed with regular turn-based combat sessions.

In terms of the story, *Lost Odyssey* ranges from stale to brilliant. The overall story is one that we've been told a thousand times before, with clichéd villains and predictable plot devices. However, the beauty of this game's story telling doesn't lie in the overall plot, but rather in the intricate character development. Be warned, though: as interesting and in-depth as this development is, it's almost all text based. The main characters unlock memories that fill in their missing pasts. These touching and thoroughly excellent stories are all text based. Skipping them is an option, of course, but doing so means that you miss out on the most poignant and moving aspects of the game. Besides,

if you're not going to take the time to read this stuff, you probably shouldn't be playing JRPGs.

The main character is an immortal called Kaim Argonar, a typically brooding and mysterious antihero with an unknown past. Kaim is joined in the game, which is presented on no less than four DVDs, by a number of other characters, both mortal and immortal, as he makes his way through a massive and complex fantasy world towards the story's rather predictable conclusion.

On the surface, the combat system also doesn't offer anything new. It's the usual turn-based stuff, heavily reliant on spells and special abilities. The combat sessions get pretty challenging, so it's important for the player to be constantly aware of the characters in his or her 'squad' and what they are capable of. The spells are predictably divided into the black and white schools, as well as the usual elements. Digging a little deeper into the combat system reveals a powerful new system – well, it's not really hidden at all. This system is initiated by the characters wearing rings. These rings can be worn by any character, and grant different benefits to the player according to the type of ring worn. When it comes to using the rings, timing is critical. The player, as the attack begins, is shown the usual attack animation. However, superimposed over this are two rings: a smaller one around the target, and a larger one that, when the right trigger button is depressed, shrinks towards the smaller one. Releasing the button as the two circles are equal in size results in a perfect
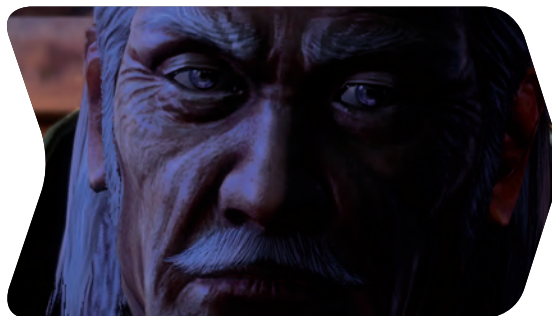
attack, and the power of the given ring is unleashed. It's a nice system, and gives the player something extra to do during combat. As said before, the combat sessions get very challenging. The game doesn't wait too long for this, either. The tactical side of combat becomes very important very early on in this game, resulting in often-frustrating repeats of the obligatory pre-combat cut-scene.

Lost Odyssey requires a player who will happily obsess for hours about ring creation (yes, you can craft your own rings out of materials bought and found in the fantasy world of *Lost Odyssey*) and skill improvement. While mortal characters learn and improve skills through use, immortals can only learn skills by 'linking' with mortals who possess the skills they want during combat. It's an interesting touch, and requires a strategic approach. Is it worth using a weaker character so that Kaim can learn a particularly useful skill?

It's almost needless to say that *Lost Odyssey* is graphically marvellous. The characters are beautifully realised, and the environments in which they find themselves are rich and vibrant (if occasionally clichéd). Likewise, the majority of the voice acting is very good, something which is often a problem in games 'translated' from Japanese. Language options do allow purists to enjoy the original Japanese soundtrack (with subtitles, of course). Every now and then a jarring voice performance does crop up, but the general good standard of voice acting combined with excellent graphics and brilliant back-stories to create characters that are believable and more interesting than your average game hero.

Lost Odyssey is little more than average JRPG faire, but fans of the genre will eat it up in great big gulps. It is pedantic to the point of being anal, and is not in the slightest bit fast paced. It's thorough and thought provoking, though, and really long.

If you like your gaming to have the heart-pounding pace that attracts so many players, you'll certainly want to avoid *Lost Odyssey*. But if you love a good story with great characters, and are the kind of player who spends hours making new rings for your characters, this is custom made for you. **NAG**

Final Fantasy
Kinda Like

PC
360
PS3
WII

Watching paint dry
For Fans Of

PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line
A standard JRPG with a few nice touches.

79
OUT OF 100

HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI

In September of 1983, Hironobu Sakaguchi and Masafumi Miyamoto founded Square, a company that would change the face of computer role-playing games. After a number of failures at producing videogames, Square released a last-ditch effort called *Final Fantasy* in December of 1987. The game was an instant hit, and the struggling company's fortunes were reversed.

Up until 2003, Sakaguchi worked with Square on various titles, including the *Final Fantasy* series, *Kingdom Hearts*, *The Bouncer* and *Parasite EVE*. In 2003, he stepped down as the President of Square, and formed a new company: Mistwalker.

In a publishing agreement, Mistwalker has released two games for Microsoft: *Blue Dragon*, and now *Lost Odyssey*. They are currently working on two titles: *Cry On* and *ASH: Archaic Sealed Heat*.

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

NAG MUST PLAY

IF THERE IS ONE developer that seems to have a perfect grasp on developing games for the PSP, it's Ready at Dawn. With the sidekick story *Daxter*, Ready at Dawn showed that the PSP is capable of truly lush, colourful visuals and animated characters, not to mention solid gameplay and worthwhile experiences. So it should really come as no surprise that their take on *God of War* for the PSP is a superb example of how exactly to handle such a high-profile bit of intellectual property.

Chains of Olympus is every bit as good as *God of War* on the PS2, perhaps almost to a fault. *Chains* doesn't inject anything new into the *GoW* formula and lacks the new stuff found in *God of War II*, which does make sense considering that the game takes place before *GoW2*. What it does do, however, is handle the existing requirement for the formula to work as well as it has before with finesse. Kratos handles like a pissed-off, mobile-genocide machine should: the controls are responsive and well laid out. The lack of a second analogue stick for dodging is cumbersome, but Ready at Dawn has made concessions for that in the design of the enemy attack patterns.

Set between *GoW* and *II*, the plot in *Chains of Olympus* is as mythological as can be expected, with Kratos going down into the depths of Tartarus to (once again, really) battle his way out of Hell, taking demigod names as he goes, and looking almost comically expressive thanks to Ready at Dawn's penchant for fluid facial animations.

It's short, around five hours if you really have to finish it immediately. The levels are designed for quick-play sessions with liberal save points, so you're never more than a few minutes away from one, provided that you defeat the enemies in your way.

Chains is hard, as could be expected. The enemy designs are top-notch and contain everything expected from *GoW*: initial enemies are turned into bloody pulp by mashing, while later enemies require that you to learn their patterns and then the game makes you fight four at the same time just to make sure you really know what you're doing. Amidst all the hardcore action, *Chains* offers some stunning vistas and honestly surprising boss fights that can only be described as epic. The basilisk boss fight alone is worth the price of admission.

This is exactly the type of high-quality, high-profile, yet intelligently designed game the PSP has been begging for since conception. Unless the genre is a personal mismatch, there is really no reason not to own this game. **NAG**

Miktar "Pan's Rubik's Cube" Dracon

As Good As — God of War

For Fans Of — Beef

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
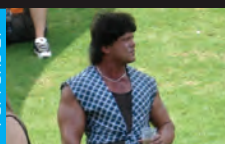
Bottom Line
Perfect, pocket-sized mythological odyssey with our favourite very angry champion of the gods.

90 OUT OF 100

BEAUTIFUL KATAMARI

AH, *KATAMARI.* **WHY DO** we love you so? Please, can we be honest here for a second? *Katamari* games were never really excellent. The control scheme is annoying and even though it's functional, surely there are better ways to roll the studded ball around. Really, what is wrong with simply tapping a button to boost? What is it with all this wiggling of sticks and stuff? The levels are equally short sighted: they don't reflect design as much as the remains of a huge piñata that exploded over the area. Sure, it is possible to find the most effective way to grow your *Katamari* in a given location, but that still involves more personal experience than recognising any method to the madness. Then again, a man who also created playgrounds designed the original game. Maybe the idea is less about structure and more about fun...

So we keep playing and playing and playing. Funny, it would take our parents endless amounts of moans, threats and perhaps downright violence to get any of us to clean our rooms. But bring out a game where your job is to pick up all the crap, and everyone's on their couches in a flash (probably because it's a good excuse not to clean your room). *Katamari* is a devourer of time, wrapped in a glazed blanket of Japanese acid-madness. Once you are hooked, there is no getting away.

The PlayStation platforms have provided several titles where you played as the little prince tasked with rebuilding planets for the king of the universe. So you are probably also familiar with how the game works: taking a small ball called a Katamari, the

prince rolls it over objects in the world, making it bigger and bigger. At first, you are snapping up toothpicks and puzzle pieces. Soon, you are big enough to pick up the cats that were annoying you earlier. In what seems like no time, you start rolling up city blocks, continents, and stars. Each level has a certain size requirement and usually a specific time limit. So, go roll a Katamari of five metres in diameter in five minutes. Or build a planet using only 'hot' things, avoiding 'cold' objects, to reach 10,000°C. Once you reach the time limit, the king takes your creation, discusses its size (or lack of it) and pops it into the skies as a new planet.

In *Beautiful Katamari* – the long-awaited 360 take on the series – the king accidentally creates a black hole when he hits a Ping-Pong ball too hard. Said black hole sucks in all the planets and you are tasked to go to Earth and create new planets, eventually building a Katamari large enough to plug the sucking vacuum itself. This experience takes a few hours of playing to complete, but will hardly put you close to any of the game's records. To do that, you'll need a good knowledge of the levels: where all the good stuff is and how to make the most of the clutter to build your Katamari as quickly as possible (this isn't too hard as the game seems to use one large master level). Larger planets count towards the end. While you can plug the black hole with ease, to create the ultra-large, 1.5-million kilometre Katamari, which defines your ultimate achievement, the respective planets you create in other levels need to have some proper girth.

Simply put, *Beautiful Katamari* is easy to beat, but will demand a lot more to actually master. If you have no interest in achieving the high scores and pushing the game to its limits, you'll find little more than a day or so of playing here. But if you are willing to get stuck into it, it will devour your time. The 360 game polishes things up with more detailed levels and lots more to pick up, but in exchange, the camera is going to give you occasional pangs of anxiety. It's still *Katamari* though, and will keep *Katamari* fans very happy. **NAG**

We Love Katamari

As Good As

Katamari

For Fans Of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line
More Katamari, but not really improved Katamari.

80 OUT OF 100

NAG

SAVING THE WORLD, ONE SAVE GAME AT A TIME

Dark Messiah has no auto-save feature. Oh, it has checkpoints, but they don't actually, you know, save your progress or anything practical like that. This mightn't be of undue concern to most of us, only the game has an occasional spiteful tendency to lock up or inextricably ensnare you with a scrap of scenery, like maybe a chair leg or a big stone. Save often.

The dangers of too much tanning

RRP→ R599 | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action RPG | **Age Rating→** 18+

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC: ELEMENTS

AFTER MANY LONG YEARS of tedious study and gruelling instruction, the apprentice Sareth (that's you) is packed off on a spelunking holiday on behalf of his guardian, the Wizard Phenrig, to retrieve a sparkly rock called the Shantiri Crystal. After battling dust, zombies, and a disgruntled magical spider, Sareth returns to his master smugly triumphant – only to be summarily redeployed to nearby Stonehelm, there to seek out Phenrig's associate, the Wizard Menelag. He in turn is allegedly in great need of the Crystal in order to further his own expedition for the Skull of Shadows, a leftover relic from the Wars of Fire and the last remaining bit of Sar-Elam, the Seventh Dragon. Several hours of similarly contrived textbook fantasy fluff ensue, including the dire prophecies of the mad disciple Sar-Shazzar, a necromantic conspiracy to claim Stonehelm, a spot of recreational demonic possession, and a ghastly *Empire Strikes Back*-flavoured revelation about Sareth's true heritage.

Unlike the original 2006 PC version of *Dark Messiah*, the 360 port has dispensed with most of the headier RPG stat-management stuff in favour of a streamlined, predefined character system designed to let you just get on with all the killing stuff. And that's okay with us,

because in between the insipid story, obnoxious dialogue, repulsive female leads, dated visuals, soggy camera control, and dippy framerates that occasionally induce violent nausea, gratuitous mêlée brutality is the one thing *Dark Messiah* does convincingly well.

There are four available classes – Warrior, Mage, Archer, and Assassin – each with their own skill sets and preferred tactics, although some weaponry crossover is tolerated here and there. But all the razzle-dazzle spells and shiny scimitars notwithstanding, the coolest thing you can do as any class is kick people. You can kick them into fires, off cliff sides, down stairways, and onto those conveniently-placed wall-mounted spike racks that some postmodernist interior decorator must've thought lent a roguish, neo-dungeon chic charm to the building. And then you can lean over, spit contemptuously, and impale the luckless goon with a great big gruesome splat of blood across the ol' fourth wall. High five, you butch thug.

Despite its flaws, *Elements* peddles a modicum of gormless entertainment to fill the space between your last mostly forgettable action RPG and the next. **NAG**

Tarryn "Better watch out, 'cause I'm the assaaaaaaassin" van der Byl

Trudging through a budget fantasy film, and killing stuff

Kind of like

Trudging and killing stuff

For Fans of

PC	
360	
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	
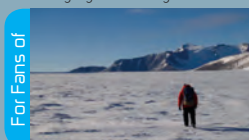
Bottom Line

You can kick people down stairs! \o/

67 OUT OF 100

EVERYBODY'S GOLF: WORLD TOUR

IN CASE YOU MISSED it, *Everybody's Golf* on the PSP (which will be getting a sequel soon) remains the most brilliantly simple, yet concise portable golfing experience known to golfing man. It is a combination of style, effortlessness and a dedication to keeping things fun that makes the *Everybody's Golf* series so different from regular offerings. *World Tour* (the fifth in the series) is the first next-gen version, and despite all the power of the PlayStation 3, is oddly reserved and conservative with regards to the visuals. That's not to say that the visuals are underwhelming (okay, perhaps a little), but could have been much better. Even so, the courses are beautiful in their own way and the perky, exuberant, very-animated, very-Japanese characters look great.

The biggest addition to this fifth iteration in the series is the new shot system. You can still use the original swing-bar method, used by golf games since the dawn of time, but the new system focuses on the swing itself. The new system removes the bar that fills up, replacing it with just a few flashes on your back swing. The golf club flashes at 25%, 50% and 75% in the new system, and flashes red at 100%. Then for accuracy on the backstroke, a circle contracts on the golf ball: hitting X right on the money gets you an accurate shot (or Special Shot if you use it). Hit X too early or too late, and a little rabbit or turtle icon lets you know how you messed

up. Putting is also slightly different in the new system, showing you a moving ghost ball for putting power that slides along the direction of your shot.

In terms of online play, 50-player tournaments are now possible. It doesn't feature voice chat, which is a gross oversight (and will probably be fixed with a patch), but the neat interactive lobbies more than make up for it. You can slide down banisters and harass woodland critters, a perfect prelude for serious golfing. The large online tournament matches involve playing against live hosts and competing on a real-time scoreboard, but if you play an eight-player game, you can actually watch every shot taken if you're up for it.

There are more courses, more items, more caddies and just more stuff in general: fifteen golfers and caddies (each with their own silly accent), six additional courses that include 18-hole configurations, and promised downloadable content in the future. The new courses are much more expansive, letting you take shots from neighbouring holes.

Everybody's Golf has a Versus Mode, Training Mode, Stroke Mode, Tournament Mode, Match Play Mode and many other modes, which all involve golf in some form. In short, this game is everything you could want from Everybody's Golf. **NAG**

Miktar "Hot Shot" Dracon

SECOND OPINION

Everybody's Golf: World Tour approaches the game of simulated golf a little differently by making it more about fun and games than the digital equivalent of tossing your bag and clubs into the nearest water feature. The cartoony characters are very expressive and sometimes sulk when hitting a poor shot... It's all very cute and cuddly, but buried underneath all the giggles and bubblegum is a decent game of golf. For fun, in the multiplayer mode you can also taunt the other player by pressing buttons when it's not your turn. The game is next-gen, so the sunlight glints appropriately and leaves twirl realistically, but you cannot help wondering if this is the best the PS3 has to offer. To wrap it up, *World Tour* has a simple and entertaining charm about it that will draw casual players while giving the more serious golfer a laugh, and a refreshing change of pace to the brilliant, but serious *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*.

80 OUT OF 100

Michael "RedTide" James

As Good As — Everybody's Golf

Kinda Like — Golf

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Just in time for the tenth anniversary of the series' debut on the PlayStation.

84 OUT OF 100

NAG

WORLD SERIES OF POKER 2008: BATTLE FOR THE BRACELETS

WITH THE UNPRECEDENTED RISE in the popularity of poker, it's no wonder that electronic versions of the game are plentiful and range in scale from small, online freeware applications to fully licensed videogames, replete with voice acting by the professionals themselves. *World Series of Poker 2008: Battle for the Bracelets* manages to recreate the kind of poker seen at the World Series events. *Battle for the Bracelets* is the third instalment in Activision's franchise, which has already all but established itself as the frontrunner in commercial poker titles.

The game is aimed at players already familiar with *WSoP*, who will instantly recognise the commentary duo of Lon McEachern and Norman Chad. There's also an impressive roster of professional players, including the likes of Chris "Jesus" Ferguson, Scotty Nguyen, Mike "The Mouth" Matusow, and the ever incorrigible Phil Hellmuth Jr., who even appears in a number of unlockable video clips filmed specifically for the game. The characters look and sound just like their real-life counterparts, which goes a long way establishing the authentic atmosphere that *Battle for the Bracelets* portrays so well.

A vast variety of different styles of poker is available for play, ranging from Omaha and Seven Card Stud to no-limit Hold 'Em. The game also offers a Season mode wherein you can create your own poker player, and compete in various *WSoP* events (including the all-popular Main Event), trying to build your bankroll with tournament winnings while accumulating prestigious Player of the Year points, which give the player some incentive to play patiently and intelligently rather than recklessly.

Of course, what makes or breaks a game like this is the artificial intelligence and the developers have done well by creating opponents that play smartly, but not flawlessly: they're also prone to errors and rash decisions. Most significantly, it never really feels as if the computer is 'cheating'. Furthermore, every character has an individual play style that's usually in line with that of their real-world counterparts.

One slight gripe, particularly evident in the PS2 version of the title, is the 'lag time' before characters make their moves: it's just a little too lengthy, and makes the game dynamic feel slightly disjointed. It is possible to set the game to run at a faster pace, though this automatically skips all the player comments and animations that would normally be seen when actions are taken.

In addition to the rewarding single-player experience, an online multiplayer mode complete with a leader board is also available, where you can compete for rankings and build rivalries against other real players online. Overall, for fans looking to recreate the kind of poker seen on TV and play against the pros, *Battle for the Bracelets* is highly recommended. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

World Poker Tour

Better Than
The WSOP Main Event without the $10,000 buy-in

For Fans Of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Good presentation and realistic AI make *WSoP 2008* one of the best poker titles around.

78
OUT OF 100

NAG

I have this dream, I'm on holiday at the beach, and the stove I left on back at home keeps following me around

LOST: VIA DOMUS

WE ALL KNOW OF the ABC television series called *Lost*. Some of us are diehard fans while others have probably only watched a few episodes and 'lost' interest. Whatever the case may be, *Lost* is a phenomenon that you either love or hate. The same can be said of *Lost: Via Domus* (also known as *Lost: The Way Home* in English).

As with the television series, the game follows the story of the survivors of Oceanic Flight 815 and their quest to find a way home. It also introduces a previously unseen survivor named Elliot Maslow. While he is also a survivor from the crash, he suffers from amnesia. This helps promote the style of gameplay in which the player must replay flashback memories that reveal crucial elements to both the player and their avatar. These gameplay elements make the game play and feel exactly like its television counterpart, while also leaving the player wanting more.

Unfortunately, the game is quite short, with only seven levels (called Episodes), which span the first 70 days on the island. One thing that does stand out in the game is the graphics: beautifully rendered and well detailed, from the moment you start playing, you feel as if you are actually on the island. The smoke effects are good, especially on the mysterious monster that occasionally appears, and the game features some truly amazing lighting effects.

Lost: Via Domus plays as an adventure game should and involves a lot of exploring and fetch-type quests creating some variety (you never feel as if you're replaying the same quests repeatedly). Various mini-games have you taking photos of events

inside a flashback, rewiring circuits and preventing an engine on the downed plane from exploding. Considering that Elliot is a photojournalist, much of the game focuses on him taking photos of events occurring on the island. This also gets him into trouble with a mysterious man, whom the player will learn more about as the game progresses.

Lost: Via Domus is definitely a game for fans of the TV series. However, if you haven't really watched it, you might have a bit of difficulty understanding certain elements of the story. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

Damn, I wanted to see the end of that movie

Elliott Maslow. We know what you did. And we will find you

As Good As
Being stranded on an island with a Kate

For Fans Of
The TV series

	PC
	360
	PS3
	WII
	PS2
	PSP
	DS
	MOB

Bottom Line
Being lost on an island never sounded so intriguing.

67 OUT OF 100

NAG

Bathtime fun

RRP→ R199 | Publisher→ Ubisoft | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Combat Sim | Age Rating→ 7+ | PC Spec→ 1 2 **3 4** 5
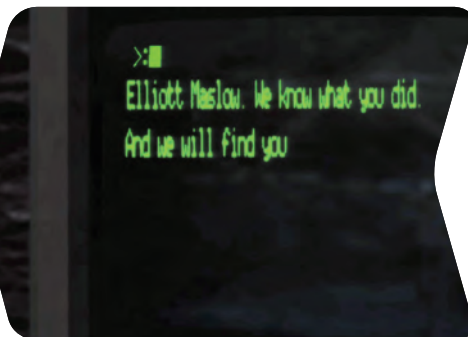
SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC U-BOAT MISSIONS (EXPANSION PACK)

THIS EXPANSION PACK FOR *Silent Hunter 4: Wolves of the Pacific* features German U-Boats operating from Japanese navel bases. On launching the game, you will notice a new menu: U-Boat Campaign. By selecting this option, you defect from the US to the German navy.

Amateur navel historians (i.e., anyone who logs more than three hours a month on the History Channel) will know that the German U-Boats were quite lethal, having sent countless ships to the murky depths of the oceans and disrupting supply shipping. Now you can attempt to change the outcome of the war as the commander of a U-Boat. The *U-Boat Missions* expansion pack includes an upgrade to the original *Silent Hunter 4* game engine, which ageing PCs won't be able to handle. However, you can reset the changes made by the installation to get the game running smoothly.

Even if you're a bit rusty, you'll quickly master the new options. Perhaps you may want to visit submarine school again to familiarise yourself with operating the sub. Although the boats look different inside and out, the controls are identical and function the same as their American rivals'.

The U-Boats have the advantage of greater accuracy. Better navigational aids, maps and new intelligence systems will give you the edge over American war and merchant ships. The action can be intense but there are times during the missions where there is absolutely no action at all. Thankfully, the time-compression tool allows you to shrink days into minutes.

The mission engine generates randomly. Although you're able to select things such as home base and unit, you never know exactly what to expect, as no missions are the same. Missions are time consuming and there are no quick combat modes to kill an hour before that all-important hair cut. Objectives range from supplying deliveries to attacking convoys and calling in air support. The primary objective is to disrupt American merchant shipping. As your success rate improves, you gain reputation and stay in the game longer. Fail too often, and you're relieved of your commission.

The graphics is excellent and the sound effects and dramatic music provide realism to the game.   **NAG**

Sean James

32nd America's Cup

Better Than

Falcon 4.0

Worse Than

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Same game but adds an extra life to *Silent Hunter 4*

70
OUT OF 100

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: CIRCLE OF DOOM

THE HEROINES ARE SO scantily clad you'd assume they are on their way to sunbathe. The heroes are groaning under such weight of armour, you'd swear they just pillaged a tank (or two). And the monsters just keep coming – legions of vicious-looking beasts intent on pummelling our fair heroes. Clearly, it's another *Kingdom Under Fire* game.

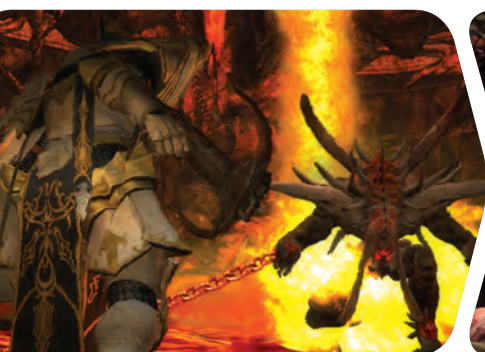But most local gamers won't be that aware of the *KUF* series, since the first three games were released on the original Xbox. It never made a huge splash, but the series' alchemic fiddling to try and shoehorn real-time strategy and hack-and-slash action together has earned it a cult following. Thus, it comes as no surprise that *Circle of Doom* has been poorly received: it shuns its RTS roots and breaks away from the series with a pure Action/RPG focus. Clearly annoying fans of the original, it added insult to injury by being the first *KUF* game on the 360 – not the best time to be experimental with a fan favourite.

Circle of Doom takes a fair stab at the hack-and-slash world, though not a terrific one. There is little point in paying attention to the plot, as you'd need to know the rest of the series to really make sense of things. In a nutshell, some heroes ended up in a different realm and now need to fight their way out of the situation before something cataclysmic snuffs everything they know.

Thus you start, having chosen your preferred hero from a selection of characters. Each has its own place in the *KUF* world and obviously also certain abilities. Some are fast but deliver little damage, while others prefer indiscriminately pounding away with the biggest weapon they've just dragged out of the bushes. *Circle of Doom* keeps things simple. There are two things essential to your quest. Obviously, the Health Bar is vital, as it keeps you alive, and thus obviously a lot of points should go into upgrading it. But the blue Magic Bar also needs a lot of love and care: every time you use a weapon, this bar drains. Once it is depleted, a weapon becomes sluggish and much less effective. The blue bar continually refills, but the stronger the weapon, the quicker it drains. However, you can arm your hero with a lesser weapon that doesn't drain the bar as quickly. Finally, there is a Luck Field you can also upgrade. This determines what kind of weapons you'll be rewarded with when defeating the many bad guys on the road.

The problem with *Circle of Doom* is how it plays. I'm calling it a "J-Action-RPG." Imagine the difference between *Lost Odyssey* and *Mass Effect* or between *Final Fantasy* and *Oblivion*. You can spot the same kinds of nuances when comparing *Circle of Doom* to something like *Titan Quest* or even the Japanese-produced, *Ninety-Nine Nights*. It is very rigid and demands a certain kind of play style, specifically the repetitive bash-this-button kind. Granted, things are a lot more fluid when you pay attention to the blue bar's longevity, but it really boils down to mindless bashing along a very linear set of levels. On top of that, things get very repetitive, especially the décor and monsters, which seem to loop endlessly at times.

For me, *Circle of Doom*'s real problem is a lack of substance. There is no real feeling of power and impact when you swing around, so you never really get to experience how badass your character is. Purists will hate the missing strategy elements, but that isn't what hurts *Circle of Doom*. Instead, the game is a half-baked attempt at an Action RPG and it doesn't give players nearly enough to be wild-eyed and bloodthirsty about. The tedium doesn't ruin it completely, and if simple, repetitive playing is your thing, you might as well give it a try. But *Circle of Doom* is a rather unenthusiastic stab at blatant monster bashing. **NAG**

James Francis

For Fans Of
Stomping monsters

Worse Than
Ninety-Nine Nights

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line
Not the most exciting hack-and-slash game around.

65 OUT OF 100

NAG

Lost?

Owen Wilson?

THE SIMS 2 EXPANSIONS

IT'S BEEN A WHILE since we looked at *The Sims 2* and its rapidly growing collection of expansions. We have three new expansions too look at in fact, so we're doing a bit of a roundup to catch up with where we left off.

The game that was originally released a few years ago has changed considerably since we first installed it, thanks to the new game dynamics introduced by these expansions. The latest three, *Seasons*, *Bon Voyage* and *Free Time*, have had varied impacts on the game.

Seasons added changing seasons, each of which last around five in-game days. Certain activities have become available because of the seasonal changes too, but the biggest addition was the ability to garden more effectively.

Bon Voyage added holiday destinations (three, in fact), which your sims could visit. This has a number of benefits, including increasing the number of wants your sim has and a whole bunch of other things.

The biggest expansion, in terms of actually having an impact on the game, has been the latest one, *Free Time*. This expansion gives your sims the ability to have hobbies, which they need to spend time on to stay interested in. Additionally, it has added a system of points that earn your sims new 'skills' as they achieve lifetime goals such as graduating from college and having babies. One of these 'skills' can be a secondary aspiration, which gives more variety to the whole 'wants' system.

Obviously these three expansions also add new objects and careers.

To quote Miktar, *The Sims 2* has always been a bit of a "stealth-RPG." It is now, if you have all the expansions installed, starting to show its true colours, with the customisation of the abilities and attributes

of individual sims becoming more complex and varied. It's still a virtual doll's house, but it was never meant to be anything other than that. The lives of these computer people have just become more complicated, and the things they can do and experience have grown in number.

On the whole, *The Sims 2* expansions are some of the most worthwhile game additions one can get. Almost everyone has an impact on the original title and, when combined, they result in a rich and rewarding life simulation. It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but the folks who enjoy *The Sims 2* in all its modified glory understand the benefits of these expansions and are always awaiting the next one. How long the expansions for *The Sims 2* will keep on coming out is unsure, but there will most certainly be a couple more before *The Sims 3* hits the shelves. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Being the deity of your choice

For Fans Of

Type A

Personality

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
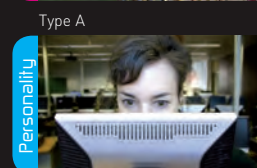
Seasons

A fun expansion, but no huge game dynamic impact.

Changes implemented: Changing seasons, gardening, can put leftovers in the fridge.

79 OUT OF 100

Bon Voyage

A real time chewer, but massively beneficial to your sims.

Changes implemented: Vacations

80 OUT OF 100

Free Time

The biggest game dynamic change in quite a while – a must-have expansion

Changes implemented: Hobbies, lifetime aspiration rewards, secondary aspirations, parenting skill, easy movement between neighbourhoods

84 OUT OF 100

* *The Sims 2* required

NAG

PATAPON

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** SCEI | **Distributor→** Ster Kinekor Games | **Genre→** Music | RTS | God Simulation | **Age Rating→** 3+

A GAME ATTEMPTING SOMETHING NEW, different or entirely unorthodox is often met with an oddly vocal menagerie of disapproving noise. A problem with games that try is that they may end up not appealing to large swaths of people who think that every game should appeal to them. The games that don't are obviously broken.

That being said, *Patapon* comes from the same unassuming developer that gave us *LocoRoco* (PSP). Using specific button sequences on a rhythm to control your army, *Patapon* is quite unique in its approach by putting music and real-time strategy next to each other and asking them to play nice. The music so integral to the experience won't appeal to everyone (perhaps because it doesn't cater to the tastes of Westerners). The more on the beat your commands, the quicker your troops get to the all-important Fever mode. In Fever, your army is neigh unstoppable, creating copacetic feelings in your ability as Deity of the Dance.

The battle system is surprisingly deep, breaking the action down into a kind of tit-for-tat where the equipment of your army and weather conditions can make the difference on the victory screen. Either your Patapon troops carry home spoils of war on little carts, or you end up back at base camp having never undertaken the mission in the first place.

In fact, *Patapon* is merciful in many ways. Failure isn't penalised too harshly and the game only expects a bare minimum of 'grinding' to whittle your army against previously defeated bosses for the sake of weapons, armour or materials with which to summon "Raripons."

Miktar "Chaka-Chaka Pata PON!" Dracon

NAG MUST PLAY

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

Bottom Line
You are a god of your very own dance party/ army, where your whim is the rhythm.

89 OUT OF 100

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

RRP→ R769 | **Publisher→** Midway Games | **Distributor→** Ster Kinekor Games | **Genre→** FPS | **Age Rating→** 16+

PROBABLY ONE OF THE most prolific game series of all time, *Unreal Tournament* has had its highs and lows throughout the last decade. *Unreal Tournament III*, the latest in the series, is definitely one of the better games in the series, if not the best. The game is polished and features awesome graphics and terrific gameplay. Adding to the experience, *UT3* sports new vehicles and remodelled races, such as the Necris. This race, also known as the Black Legion, has appeared in previous titles, and features some of the most detailed vehicles in the game, such as the DarkWalker: a three-legged, heavy assault vehicle obviously inspired by H.G. Wells' novel, *War of the Worlds*.

However, the game's AI, although advanced and well implemented, acts 'unintelligent' in certain levels in single-player mode. In one level, where the player's team must secure a node, drive tanks over a bridge onto a pressure pad and then destroy the node, the AI unfortunately doesn't play 'nice'. Instead of driving tanks onto the pad and attacking the node, the tanks are stuck in some of the most bizarre places. However, as already stated, the AI is advanced and because the game is designed for online or local multiplayer, the aforementioned lack of intelligence in some instances is negligible.

Unreal Tournament III for the PS3 is definitely worth the money. To top it off,

DISCLAIMER: Screenshots shown are from the PC version, because the official PS3 screenshots provided by Epic looked fake. *NAG*: Keepin' it real!

gamers who also own a copy of *UT3* for PC can import modifications made to the game to their PS3, further enhancing the 'unreal' experience. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

NAG MUST PLAY

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

Bottom Line

UT3 proves just how 'unreal' the series really is.

90 OUT OF 100

GODZILLA: UNLEASHED

RRP→ R299 | **Publisher→** Atari | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action | **Age Rating→** 7+

GODZILLA SEEMS LIKE THE perfect candidate for a potentially brilliant videogame. The prospect of controlling a giant city-crushing lizard with a bad attitude would have many players chomping at the bit. Unfortunately, that potential has, up to now, gone unrealised and *Godzilla: Unleashed* does little to remedy the situation.

The game offers a vast line-up of playable monsters (many of which have to be unlocked by accumulating points playing through the game) including such familiar favourites as Godzilla, Mothra, Jet Jaguar and King Caesar. Unfortunately, the differences between characters are mostly cosmetic, playing with just about any of the monsters feels roughly the same, and the game quickly becomes tedious. The

too-short single-player campaign has a far-fetched plot, and quickly boils down to being just a series of boring fights against various opponents. The play dynamic is also disappointing, with the environments being much less interactive than they should be: you can destroy buildings, but that's about it. There's no using lampposts as clubs or launching radio antennas as spears as we've seen in older games such as *War of the Monsters*. Even the multiplayer modes, pitting up to four different monsters against each other in a single city quickly deteriorate into the depths of boredom.

The visuals are lacking, with the cities looking decidedly unrealistic, and the monsters don't fare much better. It's a

shame that a game with such potential isn't able to deliver a more satisfying experience, especially when much older games without any official backing have shown exactly what's possible in this genre. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

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

Bottom Line

Another disappointing attempt at making an enjoyable *Godzilla* videogame.

44 OUT OF 100

SPANDEX FORCE

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

STRAP ON YOUR CAPE, pull your underwear up over your tights and get ready for some match-three action! *Spandex Force*, from KarjaSoft, is a gem-swapping RPG in the vein of *Puzzle Quest*. Instead of battling orcs and goblins in a mythical *Dungeons & Dragons*-style universe, you are a superhero who has to defend the unsuspecting citizens of Vigilance Valley from an onslaught of super villains.

You start by creating a superhero and customising an outfit. (We chose a green-and-purple motif). Once your costume and secret identity are established, you have to start establishing your heroic credibility. Within moments you'll see someone who needs your help: an old lady needing you to rescue her cat from a tree; a rogue piano about to crash down on some unsuspecting citizen's head; a plane about to crash into the city. Each scene is accompanied by humorous animation and campy dialogue.

Depending on the mission, you'll play one of several different match-three games, which will be familiar to fans of these types of gem-swapping puzzles. However, instead of rubies and emeralds on a grid, *Spandex Force* uses superpowers, coins and other goodies.

Occasionally, you'll have to combat a crook, which involves a smart turn-based strategy game where you collect resources by creating three-in-a-row matches to unleash an attack on the opponent. Each turn, you'll have to decide whether to unleash a superpower attack on your enemy or swap tiles on the board to build up enough superpower points to fuel your attack.

Spandex Force is an RPG. After every mission, you collect money, reputation points and clues. The money can be used to upgrade your Hero Base or buy new superpowers and artefacts, which improve your skills. Reputation points increase your superhero standing. (You start as an Unknown and eventually progress to the rank of Champion). Clue points help you discover which super villain is behind the string of crimes plaguing the city.

While almost no match-three game can be called original anymore, *Spandex Force* keeps the formula fresh with a variety of mini-games and kitsch style. The puzzles do get a bit repetitive after a while, but the corny dialogue and cheesy comic-book style animation make for an enjoyable few hours of play. **NAG**

Chris "The Puzzler" Bistline

PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS	MOB

Bottom Line
Puzzle Quest meets Marvel Comics with a healthy layer of cheese melted on top.

70 OUT OF 100

JENGA: WORLD TOUR

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Atari | **Distributor→** TBA | **Genre→** Puzzle | **Age Rating→** 3+

FOR THOSE OF YOU who've not yet been drunk enough to play a game of real-life *Jenga*, here's how it works. There's a set of 54 rectangular wooden blocks, precariously piled up into a sort of tower. Blocks are extracted one by one, until the whole thing tumbles down and/or somebody vomits tequila-scented foam and soggy chips onto the table. Then everyone remembers why there was a three-foot layer of dust on top of the *Jenga* box and an iron crucifix through its heart, and totters off in search of a good bar brawl.

Now, I can perhaps understand why – in theory – this might've seemed a marketable idea to a boardroom of dead executives. There are, after all, quite a lot of drunken people out there. And apparently most of them were hired to develop this game.

Jenga: World Tour is, categorically and unambiguously, the most thoroughly abysmal game I have ever played. It is a shameful affront to my professional sensibilities to sit here and dedicate considered words to its utterly contemptible, aggressively insolent existence.

Actually the verb "played" isn't even really all that applicable, given that the physics are so shoddily implemented that the game isn't, strictly speaking, even playable. You might, with a charmed wobble of the wrist, manage to tug one of the virtual blocks from its mooring, but you'll never get it back on top of the pile. I suggest you try it and see for yourself, but rather just don't. **NAG**

Tarryn "Maybe this stack will collapse and kill me" van der Byl

WHY YOU SHOULD NEVER, EVER READ A PRESS RELEASE

Now that you've read the review, you can read a few excerpts from the press release...

'Atari announces Jenga© ... Edge-of-your-seat video gaming fun™' and *'Players will experience sophisticated physics, and a multitude of game-play options (single and multiplayer). The game will contain all the fun, intensity and challenge of the original boxed game with a wealth of exciting new enhancements, power-ups and twists that are possible only in the videogame world.'*

See what we have to put up with in this industry?

PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS	MOB

Bottom Line
Abominable.

NO! OUT OF 100

NAG

GO! SPORTS SKYDIVING

RRP→ R40 (Depending on exchange rate)
Publisher→ SCEA | **Distributor→** PSN
Genre→ Sports/Puzzle | **Age Rating→** 3+

THE OBJECT OF THE game is to use the SIXAXIS controller to perform stunts in the air while free falling and then to achieve a perfect landing on the ground".

Translation: a strange, fat Elvis lookalike kind of accompanies you through the tutorial (and beyond) that teaches you when to tilt, when to turn and when to press a button.

The premise sounds (more or less) good on paper but in reality, the game is boring as hell. It's a puzzle game of sorts, but the most intensive thing you have to do is move your character to the ghost outline, showing you where you need to be (by tilting and turning the controller). Once you're in the right spot, you press a button and then the formation shifts and you do it again, as many times as you can, before hitting the ground.

Up to four players can play together in Formation mode, which means that at least all your friends can be bored too. There is a global online ranking if you want to prove how bored you are.

At least the visuals are quite nice. **NAG**

Miktar "Seriously, this sucks" Dracon
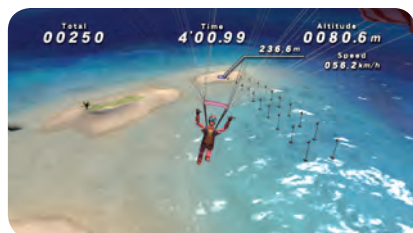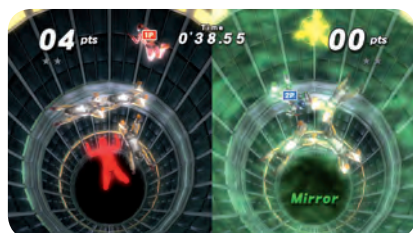
PIXELJUNK MONSTERS

RRP→ R60 (Depending on exchange rate)
Publisher→ SCEE | **Distributor→** PSN
Genre→ Puzzle | **Age Rating→** 3+

THIS ACTUALLY TOOK A lot longer to appear than expected: a nice, reasonable *Tower Defense* (or *Desktop Tower Defense* if you will) clone. If you've never played the original *WarCraft III* mod or one of the many online Flash clones, the premise of this genre is to build towers that shoot at enemies that wander down a pre-set path towards something they shouldn't reach. In this case, you turn trees on the field into the tower of your choice, so placement is more critical than usual.

As with most games in the genre, *Monsters* has various towers that have various types of attacks: some are slow, some poisonous, and some do splash damage to large groups. Unlike most *TD*-style games, *Monsters* actually has a two-player, local cooperative mode (which is a different campaign savegame, so you'll have to start over if you switch from one player to two players or vice versa). If you leave the little character you control next to a tower, the tower levels-up and increases in damage or radius. You can also purchase upgrades.

The art is whimsical and cute, and the campaign sufficient (20 levels considering the genre). Overall, *Monsters* is fun, cheap and worth it. **NAG**

Miktar "Monster" Dracon

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Activision
Distributor→ Megarom | **Genre→** FPS | **Age Rating→** 18+

WHILE A GOOD SEQUEL never really hurts anyone, a lousy one is thoroughly annoying. When they make a bad game to follow up a good one, their motivations become transparently obvious… they're in it for the money. They always are, true, but it's nasty when it's blatant. Take, for example, this latest instalment in the *Soldier of Fortune* series. Like its predecessors, it is violent and graphic, but the spark that made those games great just isn't there in *Payback*.

"Spark" is an indefinable quality. Let's look at some real problems that the game has. Firstly, the control scheme just feels wrong. It's fairly responsive, but the finicky act of aiming your weapon is frustrating. To compensate, the developers added an overly generous aiming assistant, meaning that, at a distance, you can take a guy out simply by shooting somewhere near him, not at him. Add to this the fact that all sense of motivation is removed from the game by giving the player every weapon available from the start, and all you have is lots of shooting and a bit of story.

There are more complaints, but there is no more space. Don't let the moderately flashy graphics and exotic locations fool you on this one… it's a definite "try it before you buy it" game. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

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

Bottom Line

Looks great but is about as much fun to play as tiddlywinks.

59 OUT OF 100

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

Bottom Line

Every bit as addictive as the genre tends to be, complete with co-op and online rankings.
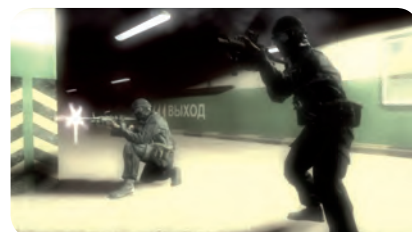
79 OUT OF 100

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

Bottom Line

Mindless, meaningless violence in a pretty package.

55 OUT OF 100

MOBILE STEAKS

SERIOUS GAMERS OFTEN LOOK at the entire concept of mobile phone games and shake their heads. The games are so far behind anything available on PC or next-gen console... why should they even bother.

Mobile games are not meant for serious gamers, even though there are international competitions for mobile gaming. Incidentally, this raises an interesting point: one of the only South African gamers (perhaps even the only) to win a gold medal playing games overseas was a 15-year-old girl from Hermanus, playing *Chop-Lifter* on a cellphone. The people these games are aimed at are not the hardcore crowd.

There is, of course, absolutely no reason why hardcore gamers shouldn't play mobile games. You cannot always have your PC or your console with you, but your mobile phone goes everywhere you do (at least, it should... that's the point of having one). Sure, the games may not feature the latest graphics or high-end performance, but they're still a gaming fix. Moreover, with technological advances being what they are in the field of mobile communications, they'll be an 'online' multiplayer fix before long.

Still, though, they're meant for casual players and as such make a lot of sense. The uptake of cellphones is very high, even here in South Africa. This means that a great number of people who may not have access to traditional gaming devices can still play games, purely because they own a cellphone. Globally, the mobile gaming phenomenon is huge because of accessibility and the low cost of cellphone games. The wide variety of titles and easy-to-play nature of most games make them even more attractive, and has helped boost this industry to become a major global player in the entertainment field.

It is a fast expanding sector that most major players in other gaming fields are taking note of. EA and Vivendi publish top-class mobile games and companies such as Ubisoft share strong affiliations with mobile game publishers (such as Gameloft).

Cellphone gaming has huge potential and a vast market and may one day challenge more traditional gaming platforms. Not for a crown, but for recognition.

NOKIA LAUNCHES N-GAGE PLATFORM – FINALLY!

ORIGINALLY ANNOUNCED SEVERAL YEARS ago and plagued by numerous delays, Nokia's new N-Gage platform has finally been launched. This new service will serve to replace the rather disappointing N-Gage handset as Nokia's gaming flagship (the sales figures of the N-Gage are rumoured to only have been a few thousand globally).

Following the Beta-testing period, a time referred to as "First Access," the N-Gage platform is now available as a fully functional gaming platform. At the time of launch, five titles were available, all with free trials and full retail versions (each of these retails for around £8). The launch titles are: FIFA 08, Asphalt 3: Street Rules, System Rush: Evolution, World Series of Poker and Brain Challenge. More titles are set to be released over the next few months.

Included in the software are a number of community functions, including friends lists and gaming feedback. The system has been likened to Xbox LIVE for cellphones.

At present, only a limited number of phones are compatible with the N-Gage platform. All are obviously Nokia handsets. The following models work with the N-Gage system: N81, N82 and N95. Support for the N73 and N93 handsets will be added shortly.

NOKIA SETS THE CHALLENGE

NOKIA HAS LAUNCHED A worldwide Mobile Games Innovation Challenge, a competition that could see winners taking home a share of €70,000 worth of prizes. The aim of the competition is to promote innovative thought in mobile game design to boost the industry to new levels. Sponsored by Nokia Publishing, the competition is open to all mobile game developers and will offer preproduction contracts as part of the prize. Additionally, the first-place winner will receive €40,000, the second-place winner €20,000, and the third-place winner €10,000. Entries must be compatible with N-Gage-, Java- or Symbian-based Nokia devices.

"Nokia enthusiastically presents this Mobile Games Innovation Challenge as a unique opportunity for the best and brightest mobile game developers worldwide to really rock the industry with innovative, one-of-a-kind concepts that showcase what you can do with our mobile platforms," said Dr Mark Ollila, director of games publishing, Nokia. "The preproduction contracts and €70,000 in cash prizes toward development of the winning game concepts are only part of the excitement. The Challenge also gives developers a chance to truly make their mark on global mobile gaming through unique and positively disruptive gaming concepts never seen before."

EA GETS SMART (PHONES)

THE LACK OF GAMES compatible with smartphones has always been a problem for those wanting to use such devices for entertainment. However, Electronic Arts has announced that it will be releasing a number of its top titles for smartphones. These games will be compatible with Symbian-, Windows Mobile- and BlackBerry-based phones among others.

"With smartphones becoming everyday devices, we are excited to offer the fun and high quality of EA Mobile games to a growing and important worldwide market," said Travis Boatman, vice president of Worldwide Studios for EA Mobile.

"Offering top titles for the most popular smartphones, and our recent announcement that we will develop for the iPhone, reflect our focus and commitment to emerging platforms and markets."

"Mobile convergence has arrived and EA Mobile is taking it by storm by bringing its top-selling branded games to Symbian OS," said Jerry Panagrossi, VP and general manager of North American Operations for Symbian.

"With shipments of Symbian smartphones reaching over 200 million to date and consistent year-over-year growth, the commercial opportunity for providing compelling content is clear. We look forward to collaborating further with EA Mobile on bringing many more leading game titles to Symbian smartphones around the globe."

Titles to be featured in the smartphone line-up include Doom, FIFA, Tiger Woods PGA Tour and The Sims.

NAG

PIRATES OF THE SEVEN SEAS

RRP→ R40
Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Action/Adventure
Reviewed on→ Nokia N81
**Download→** SMS 1211294 to 40978

THERE ARE PLENTY OF adventure games for the mobile platform and, after a while, they all start feeling the same. After all, mobile game developers haven't applied the tenuous first steps into 3D to these kind of titles yet, rather sticking to the safe and predictable platform style. It might be a safer bet, but there is essentially only so much that can be done with a platform title. Because of this, the genre is starting to feel old and overused. Some kind of innovation needs to be injected into mobile adventure games.

Another issue (which is also applicable to the this game) stems from the fact that licensed games (or 'almost licensed' games such as this one) tend to be rushed out en masse. There is very little that sets *Pirates of the Seven Seas* apart from *Shrek*, for example: they're pretty much the same game, just with different graphics. 'Almost licensed', by the way, means that while the game isn't a 'version' of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, its time of release and flavour are obvious attempts to gather some sales momentum in the wake of the popular movies (this game was released a few months ago.) It's a bit of a cheap shot on the side of Gameloft, but that's the nature of the business.

Pirates of the Seven Seas is a fun mobile adventure game, and requires better timing and faster reactions than the average mobile adventure. The graphics is good, the sound (thankfully) minimal, and the missions have a bit of variety, although they all pretty much involve running, jumping, swinging and killing monsters. It's not a terrible game, but it's not very original either. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius
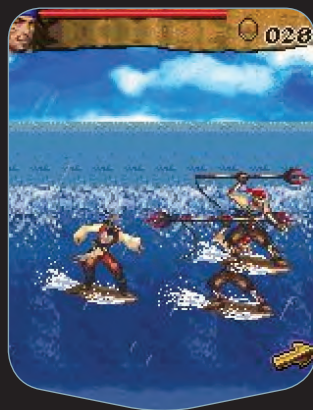
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS **MOB**

Bottom Line

It's not original, but it is fun.

79
OUT OF 100

ALL NAG MOBILE REVIEWS ARE DONE ON THE NOKIA N81

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

NAG

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ EA
Genre→ RTS
Reviewed on→ Sony Ericsson W800i
Download→ SMS 1216909 to 40978

THE BROTHERHOOD OF NOD is back! I'm not referring to some obscure Scandinavian black metal band, but the antagonist force from the thirteen-year-old *Command & Conquer* franchise. And this time they're scurrying all over your mobile handset looking to crush your GDI soul. So is this a baby version of the original or a different beast altogether? EA has clearly approached this port from a mobile perspective and the planning doesn't go unnoticed. Instead of having to balance the frenetic, simultaneous demands of base creation and troop action, gameplay is divided into two distinct modes. First, a building phase in which you produce the structures and units needed to defend yourself and then the actual attack phase. A shortened tech tree means players have about ten buildings and eight units from which to choose over twelve scenarios. A Skirmish mode is included where maybe

the ability to play as The Brotherhood or a multiplayer mode would've done better. On the plus side, mammoth tanks and ion cannons become available! Bonus! Overall, the mobile iteration may feel like a simplified version of the RTS genre and you wouldn't be far wrong, but it's a cellphone for goodness sake! To put things in perspective, most of us didn't own a cellphone when the original *C&C* game was released and some of *NAG*'s readers were either unborn or wallowing in soiled nappies. *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* is a brave attempt at a mobile translation. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

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

Bottom Line
A brave yet flawed experience.

73 OUT OF 100

THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Vivendi Mobile
Genre→ Adventure
Reviewed on→ Sony Ericsson W800i
Download→ SMS 1216791 to 40978

IN RECENT TIMES, A number of children's fantasy stories have made their way to the big screen. *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Golden Compass* and now, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. Seems like an awful lot of chronicling is going on. Naturally, each must have their own mobile game adaptation as well. Straight off the bat, you must realise which age group this title is targeted at. Children. "Well, mostly children", he says looking at himself. Arriving at their aunt's home, the Grace family kids quickly discover that not everything is as it seems. In a point-and-click run-around, Jared, Simon and Mallory must explore various rooms and locations, gathering useful items while delving deeper and deeper into Spiderwick's magical universe. During the adventure, you'll be able to switch between the three children, sometimes partying as a group or alone. A backpack is shared in which your four most important items can be stored. All other items are stored in magical chests throughout the game for retrieval at important junctures. If lethargy and apathy are important attributes for you and you're keen for a bit of an interactive yarn, then *The Spiderwick Chronicles* won't
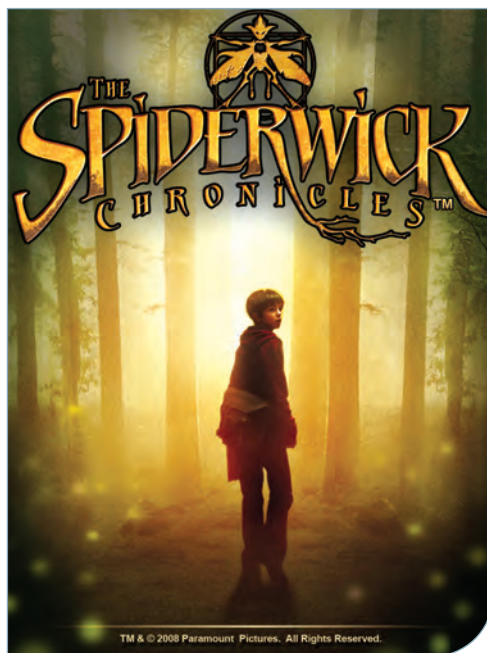
disappoint. The game is played at a pace akin to a Caribbean sunset cruise and just as pleasant. The setting, characters, their interaction and even the aural atmosphere are marred, quite unfortunately, by short but ridiculously frequent loading times. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

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

$

Bottom Line
A child or lazy man's adventure.

84 OUT OF 100

MIDNIGHT BOWLING 2

RRP→ R40
Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Casual Sports
Reviewed on→ Sony Ericsson W800i
Download→ SMS 1217232 to 40978

SWEATY BOWLING SHOES AND the inability to walk on the really slippery part of the bowling lane – this was my first tenpin bowling experience. While seeing an eight-year-old boy's failure to release a bowling ball at the correct time, causing him to lose his footing in a *Charlie Brown*-type manner, must have been amusing to any onlookers. It's the kind of memory that causes me to sweat at the thought of this ridiculous skittle game. Thankfully, Gameloft's second foray into its *Midnight Bowling* series is not a panic-inducing one. Utilising the experience that comes from producing a number of the world's most professionally packaged games, they have created a title that is easy to pick up and play and yet will require some effort to master. Sounds like mobile gaming Nirvana. Deliveries are controlled by simply setting your power, direction and post-delivery spin. If you manage to survive the cheesy nonsense that passes as dialogue, you'll soon find yourself unlocking locations, items and extra avatars. Experience points can be accrued to increase important stats like strength, spin and accuracy. Included are four game modes: the ubiquitous Instant Play, Career Mode, single-player or pass-the-phone multiplayer Battle Mode and Challenge Mode. *Midnight Bowling 2* delivers as the casual game it is intended to be. Who knows? It may even keep car-bound kids happy for a while. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

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

Bottom Line
Way better than someone else's foot fungus.

82 OUT OF 100

TUROK

RRP→ R40
Publisher→ Living Mobile
Genre→ Action Platform
Reviewed on→ Sony Ericsson W800i
Download→ SMS 1217528 to 40978

TUROK IS AMAZING! NOW don't shoot me down because you think I'm giving you the verdict of my review at the beginning! I'm actually referring to Joseph Turok, the alpha male who lends his name to this mobile stealth shooter. This little guy has mad skills. He can survive being shot, has the ability to hide in broad daylight and dodge bullets. If it weren't for the fact that plenty of the other members of Whiskey Company seemed to get picked off whenever they're within spitting distance of him, I'd have him on my side any day! The story reads that Kane (not of *Command & Conquer* fame), Turok's former mentor, is developing a lethal toxin on a world that is in the process of being terraformed. Fighting off Kane's goons and prehistoric reptiles, Turok must gather all crash survivors and mount a counterattack. Employing unlimited ammunitions, upgradeable weapons and lorry-loads of stealth, *Turok* (the game) oozes a fantastic narrative, sprightly graphics and great gameplay. Button mashers out there may feel frustrated at the inability to simply mow through their enemies, but *Turok* isn't that type of game. Instead, it rewards patient action with end-of-level statistics that encourage replay and longevity. Overall, *Turok* is amazing. Maybe I did give my verdict at the start. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

NAG MUST PLAY

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

Bottom Line
Turok the game is as solid as Turok the man.

90 OUT OF 100

TETRIS BLOCKOUT

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ EA
Genre→ Puzzle
Reviewed on→ Nokia N81
Download→ SMS 1216897 to 40978

CELLPHONES ARE GREAT PLATFORMS for the resurrection of old games, given that the processing power of modern handsets rivals and often even surpasses that of old PCs of a decade or so ago. This is the case with *Tetris Blockout*, a remake of a game originally released many winters ago for the PC-AT. The original version was rendered in vector 3D graphics, as is this mobile reincarnation. While the original PC version wasn't wildly successful in its day, being rather lightweight for a game title, on a mobile phone it could prove more popular, as its scope ideal for a casual gaming platform. *Blockout* is a three-dimensional version of *Tetris*, viewed from the top, wherein the objective is to fill complete layers ('planes') as opposed to lines. In order to do so, the player is able to rotate the slowly falling pieces in various axis, re-orientating them as desired. Because this means that a block can be aligned in any possible orientation, the game is actually somewhat easier than its two-dimensional sire. The pace of gameplay (at least in the early stages) is downright relaxed, and the initial level requirements are low, so learning the game is quite easy. The overall game dynamic is simple enough for a mobile game and engrossing enough to make it possible to while away either a few minutes or a considerably longer period, if necessary. This is one of the better mobile titles out there, particularly for fans of puzzle games. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin
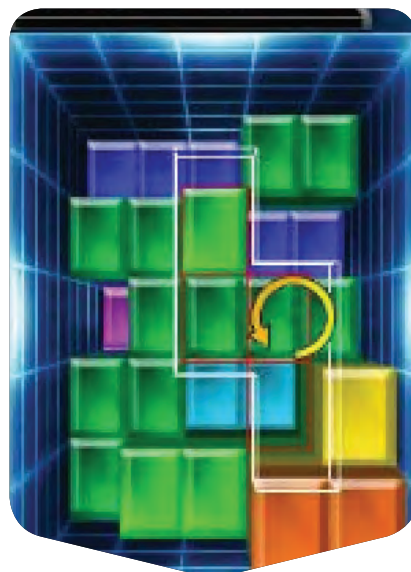
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS **MOB**

Bottom Line
It's *Tetris*.

80 OUT OF 100

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INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

IT'S 1939, AND TROUBLE is simmering in Europe like a great stinking pot of jellied tripe. Meanwhile, an exceedingly credible man with the exceedingly credible name of Mr Smith and no discernible trace whatsoever of a German accent turns up at Barnett College in New York, brandishing a key. After thorough inspection of the artefact, Dr Indiana Jones and his bumbling pal, Marcus Brody, conclude that it must surely open a mysterious idol excavated in Iceland, and conveniently located somewhere in the College's relic collection.

The errant antique is retrieved and duly opened, revealing a metal marble thingy. At this point, the exceedingly credible Mr Smith tugs a Luger out of a pocket, menaces Indy and Brody, takes the statue, and makes a mostly successful escape during which he loses his coat. The disgruntled pair riffle through the jacket, producing a newspaper clipping about Indy and his erstwhile colleague, Sophia Hapgood, and an ID that – startlingly! - unmasks the exceedingly credible Mr Smith as none other than Klaus Kerner, Nazi SS officer, Agent of the Third Reich and professional villain.

Once they're done reeling about with the totally unpredictable horror of it all, Indy decides to check in on Sophia, now something of a disreputable Z-list celebrity psychic with an imaginary Atlantean friend (because it totally wouldn't be an *Indiana Jones* adventure without a mad love interest). The two are reunited, brawl, and eventually determine that the Nazi war machine is desperately seeking the Lost Continent of Atlantis in order to mine a fabled metal called orichalcum to make really big bombs and stuff. A Point-and-click adventure ensues, with camels, a volcano, and Plato's Lost Dialogue. **NAG**
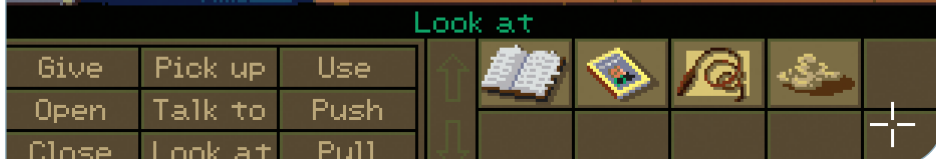
KEEP UP WITH THE JONESES

The game features three different paths through approximately two thirds of the game – Wits (wracking the skulls), Fists (cracking the skulls), and Team (two skulls are sometimes better than one). Each path includes a few exclusive puzzles, items, locations, and dialogue options. Somewhat unusual for a LucasArts game, it is possible for the player character to die.

Fate of Atlantis was originally supposed to be a film. Well, sort of. "The story I was handed, in the form of a Chris Columbus screenplay, had already been rejected for a Jones movie," says game designer Hal Barwood, "and it didn't seem very interesting as a game either. So Noah Falstein, who worked with me on the initial design, and I, desperate to come up with an alternative, hurried over to the Skywalker Ranch research library and started leafing through some cheap *Mysteries of the Past*-type books. And when we cracked the pages of the *Time Life* volume, we found ourselves staring at a diagram of Atlantis laid out in three concentric circles. The shapes just looked like a game, and we seized upon the idea."

There was a sequel scheduled, dubbed *Indiana Jones and the Iron Phoenix*, when it was canned fifteen months into production after some controversy over a plot that saw post-war Nazi fugitives in Bolivia attempting to resurrect Adolf Hitler from his ashy remains using some sort of magic rock.

ATLANTIS

There was supposed to be an interesting and revealing bit of text about Atlantis here but it mysteriously disappeared off the server...

wishing all a restful,
worker's day
1st of May 2008

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TEAM FORTRESS 2 STRATEGY GUIDE PART 2

Confidential

DUSTBOWL

Dustbowl is one of the more interesting maps. It consists of three stages. In each stage, blue must capture two points while red defends. When red successfully defends, the map restarts with the teams reversed. Unlike Hydro, the stage order is always the same.

POINT 1

Blue has three exits from the spawn, though most effort will concentrate on the side nearest the capture point. Note that Scouts can easily jump the gap and take defenders from the side. Skilled Demomen and Snipers can be an asset to defence here, but it's much harder to defend this first point than the second.

Sentries behind here
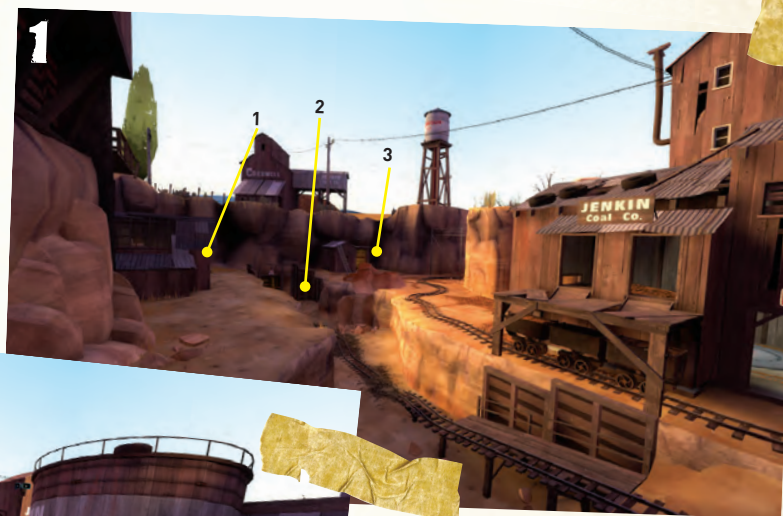
POINT 2

This second capture point of stage one is extremely difficult to take from an entrenched team. Sentry guns behind the right side of the building as well as Snipers in the back are particularly troublesome, and Pyros and Spies will try to flank around to where the attacking team gathers for assault. It may take multiple übercharges to penetrate a good defence here.

jump in here

POINT 3

The second stage is a bit different. Here it's often easier to hold the first point, so red will often mount a vigorous defence using Demos, Snipers, Engineers, Pyros, and Spies all focused on the main exit. Red can put teleporters and dispensers up in the shed near the point to move defenders up quickly. This window on the lower floor can be entered using a crouch-jump from the side.

3

POINT 4
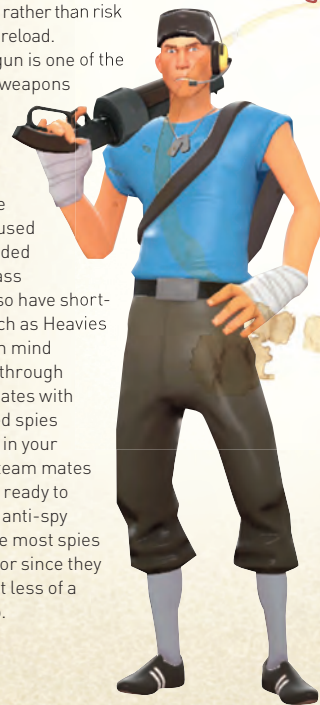
The third stage of Dustbowl is often the most difficult. From the start, there is an excellent placement for red's Sentry guns to command the point and its approach. There is a back entrance from red's spawn to here that avoids the long walk around so use it. Once the first point is taken, this path closes off, but Engineers may have put up teleporters to maintain access and try to defend from here even after the point is lost. Consider sneaking Spies past in this scenario as an overconfident team may leave the second point undefended.

4

JENKIN Coal Co.

watch for sentries here

5

stickies

tunnel

sentry spots

THE NEED FOR SPEED

The Scout may seem like an odd inclusion in the 'offense' grouping of classes, given his low health and weapon load-out. However, Scouts are quite important to any team's offensive action, especially on maps that require capturing points. You count as two people when standing on a capture point, so keep this in mind when your team is struggling to take or retake a strategic area. The extra few seconds can be the difference between backup respawning nearby or going all the way back to your base on some maps.

When playing a Scout, you must remember that your best weapon is your speed. If you're not moving, you might as well be dead, because you probably will be shortly. While most enemies are significantly tougher than you are, taking them down can be done with techniques that exploit your superior mobility such as circle strafing. Most people will expect this, so you may want to mix it up a bit by using your double jump to jump over them. This is rarely expected, since none of the other classes can jump over each other from flat ground at running speed. This means that the person you've jumped needs to turn 180 degrees to aim at you again, which provides enough of a delay for you to usually get a shot off with your shotgun. If you run out of ammo, it's often easier to attempt to land on someone's head and take them down with your bat rather than risk being killed during reload.

While the shotgun is one of the best close-range weapons in the game, keep in mind that your pistol is actually superior for medium-range targets. It can be used to pick off unattended sentries, and harass defenders who also have short-range attacks, such as Heavies and Pyros. Keep in mind that you will pass through or around team mates with ease, but disguised spies will stop you dead in your tracks. Charging team mates with your shotgun ready to fire is an effective anti-spy technique, and one most spies are not watching for since they consider the Scout less of a threat than a Pyro.

POINT 5

This last point can be extremely difficult to take or defend, depending on how well the team works. Demomen can keep the attacking team suppressed, but watch out for them coming in the tunnel entrance below. Sentries can help a lot here too, but it's hard to get a full view of the field, so proper coverage will take several. It may take multiple coordinated übercharges to break a good defence here.
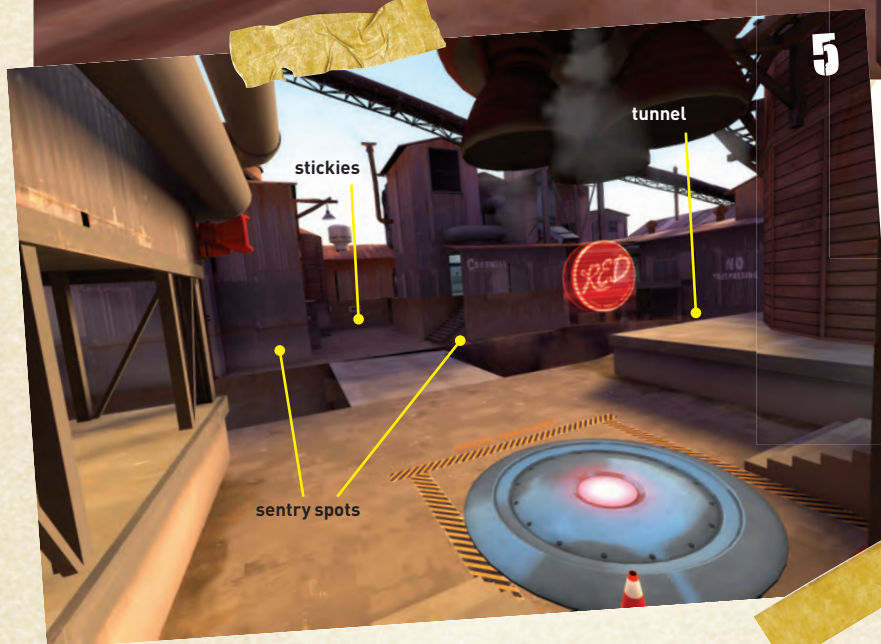
NAG

HYDRO

Hydro is the most complex of the maps to date. It is difficult to break down into highlights because it is actually comprised of six zones, and the specific map layout changes as the teams capture or lose points. There are two 'end' zones that are always last to be played and only have one capture point. These are always the same. The other four zones consist of the Radar Dish, Turbine Room, Flood Area, and Bridge. Any two zones can be active at a time, which determine the map.

1. TURBINE ROOM

The Turbine Room is another area that is well suited to Sentry defence. The enclosed nature of the room makes Snipers less effective in both offense and defence. Pyros are very effective because of the many corners, but Demos may suffer due to the vertical nature of the map, since grenades may bounce down away from enemies.

sentry spots

2. RADAR DISH

The Radar Dish is one of the most easily identifiable zones due to the large dish that's immediately outside the spawn. Sentries do well here in defence, but watch for attackers picking them off at range. Snipers also do well here (because of the large open area) and can complement Sentries. Demomen may want to place stickies on the ceiling of the capture point where they can be hard to spot.

snipers back here

snipers aim here

sentry

3. FLOOD AREA

The Flood Area can be difficult to defend due to the openness of the point and the fact that it can be circled easily. Scouts will often try to rush this point early on. The ledge above the point is good for Sentries, and Demos can often keep control of the point well. Snipers are useful if the direction is towards the Turbine Room, but not as much for the other two combinations. Heavies, Pyros, and Soldiers work better in those cases.

NO. 06

NAME NOM Agent# 85691

NO. 05

NAME NOM Agent# 36125

LIKE A SURGEON

The Medic is possibly the most instrumental class in determining the success of a team. A good Medic (or a lack thereof) can make all the difference between a walk in the park and getting steamrolled. Unlike some other team FPS games, the Medic in *TF2* has a unique play style that is quite rewarding to play, and can still get you to the top of the score list if you do it right.

The Medic's first weapon, the needlegun, is rather pointless. It has good range and a good magazine capacity, but relatively low damage, and one must be aware of how the needles arc under gravity, unlike most of the other guns. In general, if you're using this gun, you're doing it wrong. The second weapon is the heal gun, which will be why friends love you and enemies hate you. This heals your team. Note that you can over-heal teammates up to 150% health, which will then slowly fade, so you may want to distribute healing around instead of sticking to just one target.

After a certain amount of healing is done, your übercharge meter will be full and flash. At this point, you can use your Alt-Fire key to use the charge to produce ten seconds of invulnerability for you and your healed target. It's important to communicate well and learn how to maximise the übercharge. For example, Sentry guns will throw lighter classes such as Pyros back. If you run in first to draw fire, they can get close to take out the Sentry. Obviously, high-damage classes like Heavies and Soldiers make ideal übercharge partners, and low-damage classes like Snipers and Engineers don't.

Despite the power of the übercharge, a medic often works best when hanging back from the front line to heal other team mates. Don't sacrifice yourself in a charge. You are the most valuable team member, so act like it. Remember, you cannot spell 'medic' without 'dic'.

Don't underestimate the bonesaw, the medic's melee weapon. It can be devastating at close range, and many attackers will try to get close and take you out, as you are a primary target. Ducking around a corner and turning around with the saw is a good way to take out pursuers before they get you. Also, don't be afraid to saw first and heal later - Spies will try to get your attention and get close enough for a backstab.
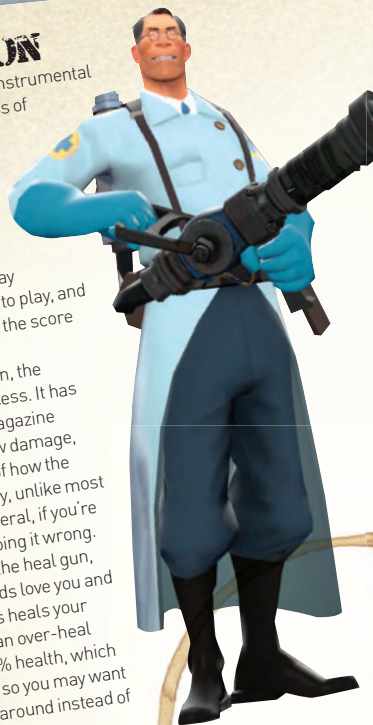
THINGS THAT MAKE YOU GO BOOM!

The Demoman is one of the best defensive classes, as he has some of the best weapons for area-denial tactics. The grenade launcher can bounce shots off walls and around corners to keep enemies from trying jack-in-the-box techniques to wear down defenders. His main drawbacks are limited range, low accuracy, and low ammo capacity. These can all be overcome with proper tactics, such as running backwards while dropping sticky bombs and detonating them at a pursuing enemy's feet.

The Demo's best friends are his sticky bombs (sometimes called pipe bombs by legacy *TF* players), which will remain attached to a surface and ready to detonate at a moment's notice no matter where you are on the map. This means a Demo can effectively be in two places at once, which is good if one of those places happens to have an automatic intruder detector such as a capture point. Note that you are limited to a maximum of eight stickies deployed at any time. If you fire more, they will disappear in the order of oldest first. The number you have in use is displayed on your HUD.

Sticky bombs also have some non-traditional uses such as 'pipe-jumping'. This is similar to the Soldier's rocket jump, but can provide even greater height and range. This involves firing one or two sticky bombs at the ground or a surface, and as the Demo runs over them, detonating them. Note that using too many bombs at once or doing so with low health can be lethal. Some jumps require only one bomb; some need the propulsion of two. It takes significant practise to master this technique.

Stickies also are good at removing Sentry guns. Four of them will kill a level-three Sentry at full health instantly, which is important to note since it means that an Engineer camping next to his Sentry will be unable to save it no matter how fast he hits. By holding down the fire key, your launcher can build up a charge meter that sends shots farther. This can be useful for taking out defences from across the map, but will often leave you exposed while charging the shot.
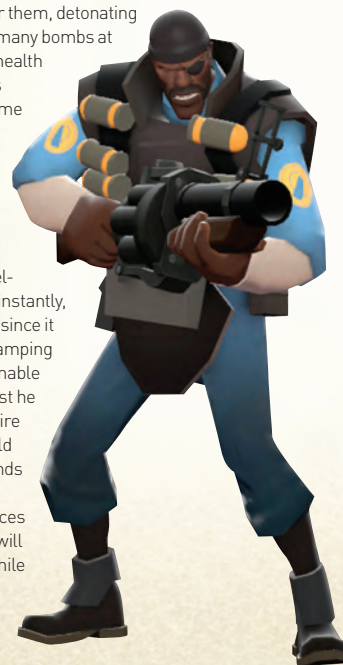
4. BRIDGE

The Bridge (or Guardhouse) area is one of the most defensible positions. The ledges can shield Sentries from attackers, and there is a lot of health and ammo in the area. With a well-coordinated mixed defence of Sentries, Snipers, Demos, and Heavies, this area is nearly impossible to take. Most teams will attempt to build up an übercharge and try to rush in from the many concealed tunnels that connect to this zone. The best counter for this is to use Spies and Pyros to take out enemy Medics while they're charging. **NAG**

hide sentry behind wall

NAG
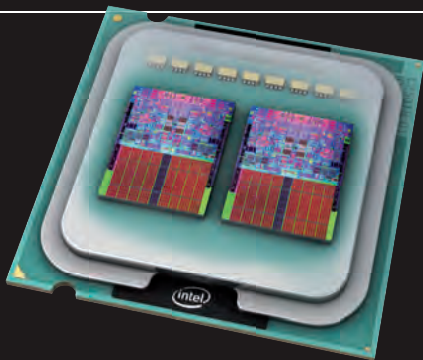
TO QUAD OR NOT TO QUAD, THAT'S THE QUESTION

WE ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH to live in a country as culturally diverse as it gets and most of us have friends that are a mix of Afrikaans, English, Black, Indian and/or mixed nuts... On top of that, we have all kinds of religions added to the mix! Therefore, it goes without saying that the tolerance levels towards people outside our cultural group is or should be brilliant.

Great. Now that I have said that, hopefully you guys are on the same page as I am when I make the following statement:

It makes no difference what colour your PC case is or what language it speaks. If you are reading this while sitting in front of your TV because you are too embarrassed to have this issue of *NAG* anywhere near that outdated computer of yours, or you tried installing the latest demo on the cover DVD and received a slap from your hard drive for even thinking that your PC would run it, you are officially branded a computer racist! Stop reading this magazine. Run to the kitchen, grab a few sharp knives and a pair of scissors. Go to the busiest intersection in your town, kraal or whatever and juggle.

Bloody idiot!

Actually, I shouldn't be so mean. Perhaps we should help people make informed decisions. Okay, I get it... that's why we are here!

No more boasting about my Cocker spaniel being bigger than yours. We are going to do some budget soul searching and this means that in our next issue we will be looking at ten Intel CPUs. From the most impressive quad-core über-monster, to the one the idiot (referred to above) most likely has in his system. One important focal point will prevail: value for money. In other words, the idiot (referred to above) will actually stand a chance of winning. In the July issue, we'll do the same with ten AMD CPUs and award one with the Hardware Award. In the August issue, we shall take the two award-winning processors, put them in a cage and see which one survives!

You see, this proves that I am capable of love...

Enjoy this issue.

Cheers.

Len Nery
Hardware Manager

TOSHIBA LAUNCH NEWS

WE ATTENDED A TOSHIBA launch during March and two products caught our attention: the U400 notebook with built-in Harman Kardon speakers and NVIDIA SLI 1GB GPUs; and the Portégé R500, weighing in at only 800 grams and is most likely the world's lightest notebook. Both of these products will be reviewed as soon as stock arrives. At the event, Toshiba announced their money-back guarantee, dubbed the Toshiba Promise Tecra A9 promotion. The bottom line is that they will allow users to claim back the purchase price of their notebook should it develop a technical fault as recognised under Toshiba's standard manufacturer warranty within one year of purchase.

VIEWSONIC AND DRIVE CONTROL CORPORATION

DURING MARCH, WE ATTENDED an event at the Hilton in Sandton where it was announced that ViewSonic's products would now be distributed by Drive Control Corporation (DCC). ViewSonic has certainly been the monitor of choice for many people over the years. Brendon Land, the country manager for ViewSonic, confirmed that CRT monitors are being phased out and replaced by LCD solutions for the simple reason that CRTs are no longer profitable to manufacture. The only obstacle at this stage is price and that will decrease because of demand in addition to ongoing innovations in LCD technology. The most notable change that will directly affect consumers is LCD screen size versus price. It has become much cheaper to manufacture larger panels. Simply put, LCD manufacturers aim at maximising profits and are getting more economical panel cuts from the substrate using the larger formats.

INTEL KODE5 SA AND 45NM LAUNCH EVENT

ON 26 MARCH, INTEL officially launched its 45nm central processing unit in South Africa with a bang! Neo Sibeko (current overclocking record holder in SA, pictured at right) used a GIGABYTE X48 motherboard and an Intel QX9650 45nm processor and achieved a score of 28,225 in 3DMark06 – an official SA record and fifth in the world. Intel showed its ongoing commitment to gaming in SA by being the title sponsor of the Kode5 tournament. The winning *Counter Strike 1.6* team (Damage Control) and *WarCraft III* FT player (Caleb Ridley) will be flown to Russia to attend the world finals of the Kode5 tournament in May! No doubt, many vodkas will be consumed. Mr Gary (Intel) Burgess, gamers salute you my friend! You are a legend.

Together with partners, Computers-Only, Matrix and Sahara, Intel gave away over R90,000 worth of computers to South Africa's top gamers who attended the event. Intel, Cooler Master, Corsair and GIGABYTE made sure that Kode5 South Africa offered a whopping R330,000 prize purse (the largest in SA gaming history).
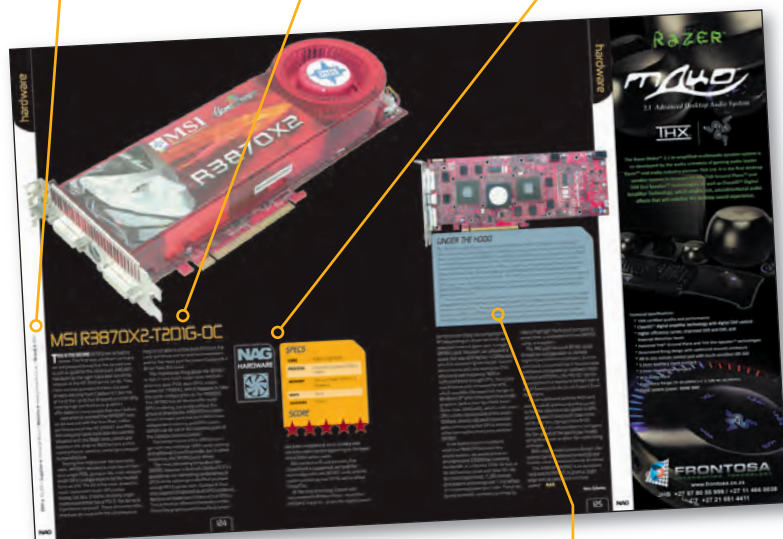
KODE5
Global Gaming Revolution

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* Hardware Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Age, weight, favourite drink and sexual orientation.

PRODUCT NAME: Good to know when you wake up in bed with this hardware.

AWARDS: Check out her hot sister on the right side of the page!

UNDER THE HOOD, YO: Ghetto flava, kicking it with the pow-wah.

DROP YOUR ROCKS AND READ THIS BOX

SPEC-TACULAR: This is where your buddy hooks you up with the nfo, yo.

SCORE: Gold-star treatment, only the best for our hardware.

SPECS

CORE	R680 x 2 (857MHz)
PROCESS	666 million gates x 2 (55nm TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit 512MB GDDR3 x 2 (900MHz)
ROPS	16 x 2
SHADERS	320 x 2

SCORE

★★★★★

HARDWARE Q&A

I RECENTLY BOUGHT AN ASUS Maximus Formula motherboard running one NVIDIA 8800GTX. I then installed a second 8800GTX, only to realise that the board only supports CrossFire.

My questions are:

1. Is there a patch, BIOS update or a way to make the board SLI?

2. Can I come to your place and steal your two Sapphire ATI 3870X2s out of the Skulltrail that's sitting on your desk?

Alex

Two AMD/ATI graphic cards running in CrossFire mode are able to run without any issues on an SLI-based motherboard, but you won't be able to run two NVIDIA cards in SLI mode on a CrossFire motherboard. Obviously, if you are running one card, you will be able to run either and AMD/ATI or NVIDIA - no problem. The answer to your second question: An emphatic no. You will be shot on site and my two dogs (pit bull and Rottweiler) will savage you. Oh, and I'm running three 3870X2 cards.

Len

Remember, simply send in your question or suggestion to len.nery@tidemedia. co.za with the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' and your letter may be printed too.

NEW 3DMARK2001SE RECORD WITH GEFORCE 9800GX2

The local records seem to be changing weekly since the arrival of the new generation of graphics cards and motherboards. The previous record of 88,408 in 3DMark2001 SE, achieved on the excellent GIGABYTE GA-P35-DQ6 with a QX9650 running at 5GHz, was bettered and the new record is 96,306. It's no surprise that the new record was set with another GIGABYTE motherboard, this time the GA-X48T-DQ6 (our Dream Machine motherboard of choice for the last two months now). Surprising, though, the CPU used was an Intel Core 2 Duo E8500 running at a humble 4.75GHz. The combination of a high motherboard speed (500MHz), DDR3 and a relatively low performance level of eight gave the system copious amounts of bandwidth just shy of 9.9GB/sec.

The true star of the show was the incredible Point Of View GeForce 9800GX2 (reviewed in this issue), which delivers very good performance out the box but took the numbers to new heights when clocked at 756MHz.

The record was particularly impressive because it was achieved using a simple water-cooled setup unlike the previous record, which required a water-cooled graphics card and a dry ice-cooled E8500 overclocked by 300MHz. This is South Africa's first score above the 90,000 mark in 3DMark2001 SE.

With a significantly higher clock speed on the CPU, RAM and FSB, the score should reach the 102,000-point mark, making the 3DMark2001 SE International Hall of Fame. We'll keep you posted.

SA OVERCLOCKING LEAGUE 3600 MAY STANDINGS

AQUAMARK 3
1. Shogan85 – 227,320
2. Ch@ps – 224,256
3. 1Day – 217,384
4. VoodooProphetII – 216,390
5. Trax – 213,892

3DMARK2001 SE
1. 1Day – 72,525
2. VoodooProphetII – 70,793
3. Shogan85 – 70,195
4. seth – 70,040
5. I34z1k – 69,308

3DMARK03 (BUILD 360)
1. 1Day – 53,084
2. seth - 51,296
3. VoodooProphetII - 51,247
4. I3az1k – 50,102
5. UncleBob - 50,102

3DMARK05
1. 1Day – 24,388
2. VoodooProphetII - 23,590
3. seth - 23,309
4. I34z1k – 22,743
5. Shogan85 - 22,516

3DMARK06
1. 1Day – 18,282
2. VoodooProphetII - 17,752
3. seth - 17,231
4. Vivi – 16,828
5. GTXVorteX - 15,620

SUPER PI 1M
1. Ch@ps – 12,766
2. Wik1d – 12.781
3. Shogan85 - 12.782
4. Viceroy - 12.813
5. Do0b's – 12.875

SUPER PI 32M
1. Wik1d – 12:55,781
2. 1Day – 12:59,860
3. Shogan85 - 13:08,094
4. Viceroy - 13:08,406
5. Trax - 13:08,625

GLOBAL RANKINGS
1. 1Day – 72
2. VoodooProphet II – 64
3. Shogan85 - 58
4. Seth - 52
5. Trax - 37

NAG AWARDS

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

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

5 The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, we probably already have.

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

3 About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.

2 This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.

1 The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

Ground Zero

by Toby Hudon

Moving On

I'LL BE BLUNT (AS if I'm ever not). This is my final column for *NAG*.

Now, traditionally a writer's last column when they leave a publication is a time for vengeance. A chance to have a parade of dancing skeletons erupt from the closets of various prominent figures, and conduct a tour of where all the bodies are buried in the industry. After all, what can they do? Fire you?

Well sorry, but I'm not going to be that unprofessional. Not that I've always been a bastion of professionalism and tact or anything. Those who know me know that I'm not really a 'people person', and I don't deny it. You will find me screaming the truth littered with profanity quite often, but you'll never catch me politely lying through a smile. The truth is, such petty retribution would be pointless, as it wouldn't accomplish anything. But it's really not even warranted, since I'm leaving on my own. I've resigned.

Of course, this will cause some to immediately don tinfoil hats and try to probe for a cover-up or conspiracy of why I've suddenly left at this time. Obviously, there must be more to this, and nothing said here can dissuade them from this belief. Therefore, I won't try to, because some people won't accept that the truth can be boring. I could try to invent some amusing tale of nefarious plots and vile machinations, of shadowy figures and secret cabals, but surely, these people will be able to invent more colourful tales of intrigue than I can.

The thing is, I don't really need to explain myself. It's really getting time for me to move on to somewhere else. Not that I have anything against *NAG, SACM,* or Tide Media. It's been a great three years or so and I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had to annoy other people in print. Maybe I'll keep doing it somewhere else once I'm back home in the US. Maybe I'll change careers again, since this one was itself unforeseen. Maybe I'll be back someday. Who knows?

Sorry if my leaving disappoints anyone, but you don't need me to deliver juicy titbits of gossip about the local hardware scene. Anyone with a Web browser and calculator can figure out what stinks and trace it right to the source. I don't need to demonstrate it again. The fact of the matter is very simple. The hardware world abroad works on the principles of commodity goods, a price-driven market. The local version works on a prestige-driven market where the focus is on brand. The latter only functions if supply is tightly controlled or there are agreements in place that prevent enough volume from moving to start a price war, or prevent direct comparisons between sources. Why are things this way? Because you still put up with it.

Yes, I know it's easy to be vague and sit in an ivory tower writing columns chastising others for accomplishing nothing. However, as I've said in the past, there are limits to what I can say here in print without causing trouble for either myself or this publication. If I just went off constantly saying what I really thought, even if it's perfectly true and correct, I'd probably have been fired ages ago. The only people who can affect change in this system are the people with money. And I don't mean the multi-billion rand companies, I mean the people who are buying this stuff at the end of the food chain.

The US hardware market was not always a commodity market. It used to function much like things do here. Some of the changes were inevitable. But I like to think that at least part of it was brought about by people like me, who as a teen in the early '90s would read reviews, research parts, compare prices, and inform my parents and friends and teachers and everyone when they were getting a bad deal. Eventually people got smart enough to know what RAM was, and why a 200MHz Pentium with 8MB wasn't a stellar deal compared to a 166MHz with 32MB for the same price. People started comparing prices and shopping smarter, shipping direct instead of going to stores, and this caused the industry to have to respond. For things to change in the local scene, a similar thing will have to take place. I'm not going to be the spearhead of that movement. I never was. I had hoped someone would. That we'd see underground efforts to undermine things like secret prices and inflated import costs, but in fact, precious little has changed since I got here in 2004.

My work here is done. Not because there's no more work, but because I'm done with it. I feel bad for Neo, knowing the burden he'll have to shoulder without me. Hopefully someone else can be brought in to help out. To my replacement, should any such arise, I have only one question, and it need only be answered to yourself: Are you here because you're in the business of games, or because you play the games of business? One of these answers means you have a future. And one of them means you don't. I'm sure you'll find out which. **NAG**

> **It's been a great three years or so and I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had to annoy other people in print.**

ASUS Crosshair II Formula

Instant CPU Upgrades with Just a Click

ASUS Exclusive CPU Level Up for Easy Performance Boosts

Wish your computing performances can be easily upgraded without extra costs? Then ASUS' latest cutting-edge motherboard, the ASUS ROG Crosshair II Formula, can show you how. This powerful piece of hardware supports AMD® Socket AM2+ Phenom™ FX / Phenom X4 / Phenom X2 / Athlon™ X2 / Sempron™ and legacy AM2 processors, and comes with the exclusive CPU Level Up feature from ASUS. This allows you to easily achieve CPU boosts without the need to buy new hardware via three easy steps (enter the BIOS, choose the processor, and reboot). Once this is done, the Crosshair II Formula will now take over, and you can instantly start enjoying higher performances! This amazing technology has also been listed on the Ten Best Technologies and Trends of 2007 at the reviewing site Extremetech.
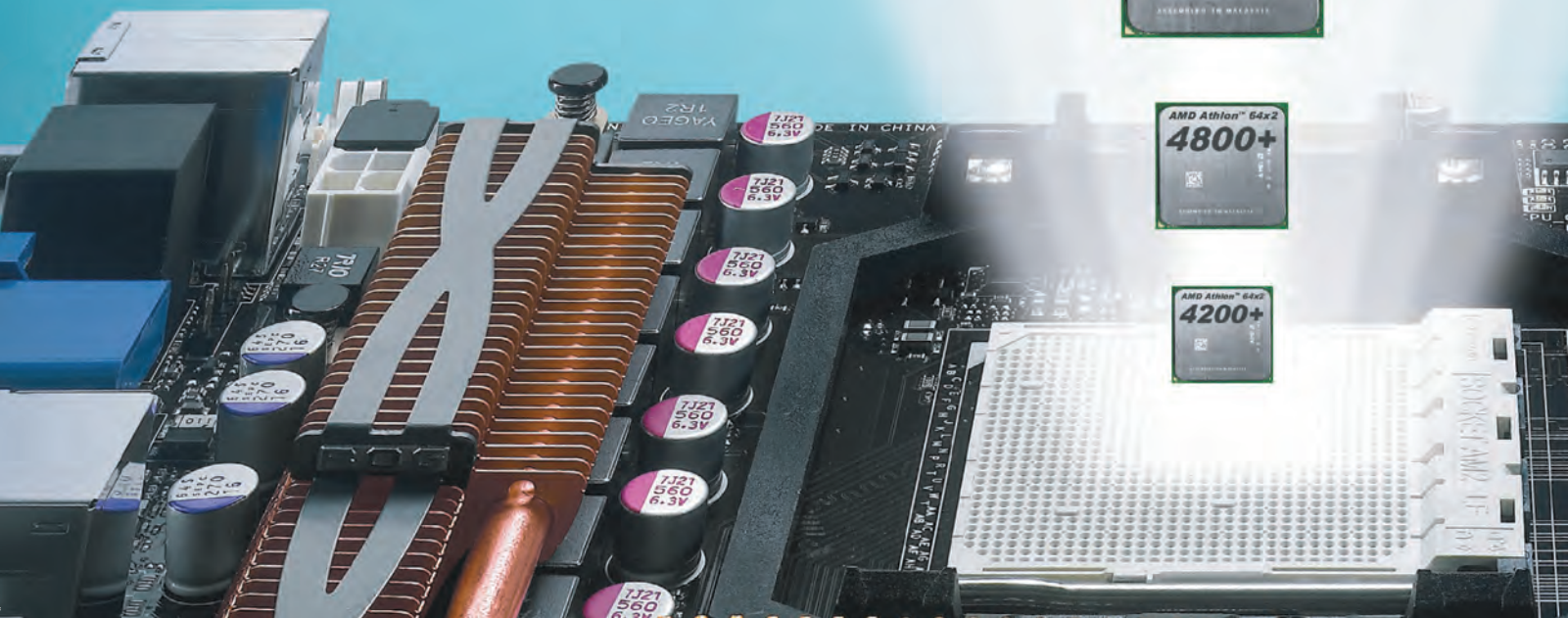
by Neo Sibeko

Marketing Mayhem

THIS MONTH, THIS COLUMN reads a little different. It's not about anything technical, not a look at PC gaming, hardware or anything like that. It's more about the great AIBs that bring us these devices that we often get far too excited about.

It's amazing the things that can be sold and marketed so well that we actually buy them. Not so long ago there was the physics card hype. Thinking about it now that the hype has subsided and AGEIA is no more, it was a bad idea from the onset.

With the advent of multi-core CPUs, it was obvious that these new CPUs would use this newfound processing power for physics simulations and AI. It's obvious that neither Intel nor AMD was keen on the idea of a new card that would make their products irrelevant or rather third in the order of importance with graphics cards at the top and CPUs a distant second. It's no surprise then that the whole thing fell apart as quickly as it started.

And then there's the hype surrounding multiple GPUs. We are almost in the middle of 2008, and all we have managed since 2006 was adding two more GPUs to the PC. Maybe as a showing of how far computer technology has come and what is possible, it all makes sense. However, let's be honest here. It doesn't make sense to spend R10,000 or more on four graphics processors so you that can play a R299 game. Despite what the marketing guys may say, it's not wise to make such an investment, nor is it beneficial to the end user.

If you cannot play any title with one or two GPUs at most, the problem is the game and not the system.

This actually leads us to another lie we believed: power supplies. We went from 400W units to today's ridiculous 1.6kW units (yes they do exist). Keep in mind that these units are not marketed to corporate clients and the like who are making purchasing decisions for their IT departments. These are sold and geared towards gamers with bright, coloured connectors, some with snazzy software for controlling fan speeds.
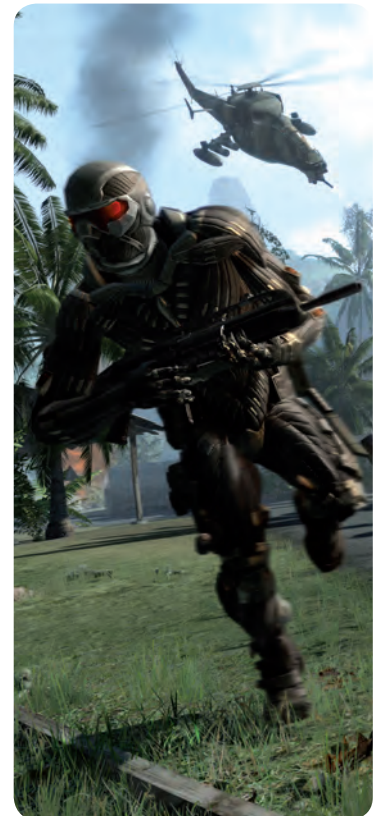
Not too long ago, extreme overclocker "No_Name" managed to run four GPUs at insane speeds, cooled with liquid nitrogen and an Intel Core 2 Extreme 9650 running at 5.5GHz, all on an 800W PSU. That should have made many people re-examine their claimed power requirements, but the marketing has won many of us over and the obvious truth about power requirements flew right past us.

Let's talk about audio. Yes, there was a time when PC audio was rubbish with the introduction of the AC'9 specification. It was slightly better the Adlib Gold and Sound Blaster Pro cards of the early '90s. However, today we have high-definition 192kHz, 24-bit, multi-channel playback on almost every single aftermarket motherboard out there. Some even have DTS and Dolby Digital 7.1 support. As far as in-game audio and music are concerned, there is not enough of a difference between the sound produced by the ALC888 DSP audio controller on many motherboards and the X-Fi chip you find on the Creative high-end products. Yes, these offer better DACs, features and a whole host of features that on-board solutions don't have, but it doesn't really mean much. Most people today listen to compressed formats and as such, there's an almost finite audio fidelity that one can appreciate without having to resort to super-audio and high-definition CDs. With such media you can appreciate the superior audio quality offered by the discreet products, but if you are such a customer, why are you listening to your audio on a PC and not a hi-fi with a separate transport, receiver, amp and the like?

We buy into all of this without thinking much about what it is we are being sold. The gamer or enthusiast needs to sober up a little when it comes to their purchases. If we believe that the ability to show video on eight displays is a must-have feature, then clearly something has gone wrong somewhere. **NAG**

> " If you cannot play any title with one or two GPUs at most, the problem is the game and not the system.

DREAM MACHINE

DROOL ALL YOU WANT, we do! Welcome to the page that separates the men from the boys, bulls from the cows, cocks from the hens and lap dancers from... uhm... well everything else I guess. I know most of you think that we are sitting in the girls' changing rooms, so to speak, when it comes to new hardware, but we too are human. We too have drool sessions. We used to drool on our own until this page. Now we share in the drool. We should have a drool fest...

I think I need to take the blue pill today please mommy...

Moving swiftly along, please send me an e-mail with your views on our sparkly new Dream Machine logo? Do any of you miss the old one? Also, what do you think of the products listed below. Do you think we should notify you where you could buy any of the items? Should we list a retail price? Send comments to **len.nery@ tidemedia.co.za**.

PROCESSOR
Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650
Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530

KEYBOARD
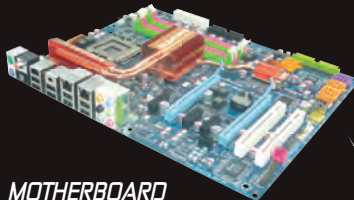**Enermax Aurora**
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

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

COOLING
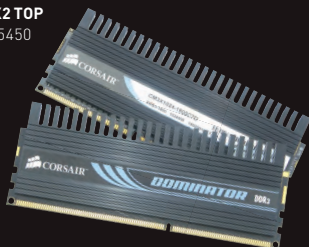**Zalman Reserator XT**
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

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

MOTHERBOARD
GIGABYTE GA-X48T-DQ6
GIGABYTE [011] 203-1000

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

GRAPHICS CARD
ASUS EAH3870X2 TOP
ASUS (011) 783-5450

STORAGE
WD Caviar SE16
Drive Control [011] 201-8927

MEMORY
Corsair XMS3 CM3 X1024-1066C7
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

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

SOUND
ASUS Xonar D2
AXIZ [011] 237-7000
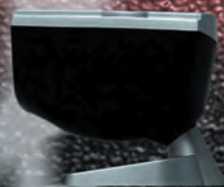
POINT OF VIEW GEFORCE 9800GX2

IT SEEMS THAT NVIDIA is more excited about their 65nm G92 core than the buying public. Since the introduction of the 8800GT late last year, NVIDIA has been releasing G92-based products at an unusually quick pace, especially considering that we had no new mid- to high-end graphics products from NVIDIA since November 2006.

If you are reading this, chances are that you are already quite familiar with the G92 core, its victories and its pitfalls (of which there are few). NVIDIA has released three high-end products after the 8800GT and here we have the latest and greatest of them all, the 9800GX2. Not since the 7950GX2 has NVIDIA paired two PCBs to produce a single-connector graphics card.

The original GX2 had each GPU housing 278 million gates. Each of these GPUs was based on the 90nm TSMC process and operated at 600MHz. Cooling two such GPUs was no small feat and resulted in a hot graphics card that would often reach operating temperatures of 95ºC, which was considered safe by NVIDIA.

Today we have G92 GPUs housing 754 million gates. Not only is it the densest GPU core ever produced, but in terms of logic gates, it surpasses Intel's impressive 45nm Core 2 Quad CPUs, which have the majority of the silicon taken up by the L2 cache. The 9800GX2 cores not only have more than twice the gate count of the original G71-based GX2 core, but they are much more efficient per clock. Physically, however, they are almost the same size, which means that in terms of heat dissipation, NVIDIA can use a similar cooling mechanism than they used

SPECS

CORE	G92 x 2 (600MHz)
PROCESS	754 million gates (65nm TSMC) (x2)
MEMORY	512-bit GDDR3 (2.0GHz 1ns)
ROPS	16 x 2
SHADERS	128 x 2

SCORE

★★★★☆

As a complete package, the 9800GX2 is a winner, delivering impressive image quality at incredible speeds. If you have never experienced *Call of Duty 4* at 8x AA, this card will give you playable framerates at such settings. In *Crysis*, the 9800GX2 will deliver playable framerates at 2,560 x 1,600 with Very High Detail enabled, but if AA is employed, the resolution will have to be reduced quite dramatically to 1,600 x 1,200.

The 9800GX2 may be a single-connector graphics card, but has two PCBs operating in SLI via a bridge chip that negates the need for an SLI-compliant motherboard. The numbers may be impressive in such a configuration, but they are theoretical numbers at most and not much else. The memory bandwidth may be an impressive 128GB/sec. However, not all that bandwidth can be used because SLI, like CrossFire or any other multi-GPU rendering system, relies on data duplication across GPUs. Therefore, despite the frame buffer being 1GB, only 512MB is addressable. This affects the level of AA that can be applied, especially at ultra-high resolutions.

NVIDIA will obviously continue to extract more performance from the card with every driver release and enable better compatibility with titles that don't currently support the rendering method. However, the 9800GX2 will never outpace a traditional SLI setup such as two 8800GT or 8800GTS cards in a single system. What the 9800GX2 offers is the ability to work on any motherboard that has a PCI-E 16x slot. It is also easier to install, which is not the case with a traditional SLI setup.

So, many years after the original 7950GX2, the 9800GX2 leaves us feeling the same way as we did about the previous card. When it works, it's excellent and well worth the investment, but you'll wonder if the performance advantage offered by this card over the 8800GTS 512MB or the 9800GTX is worth the extra money spent on it.

Overall, the 9800GX2 is a good card and actually presents better value than the outgoing 8800Ultra, which had a higher retail price. It is not only faster than the 8800 Ultra, but it's cheaper and has more features.   **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

on the 7950GX2. It's not surprising then that NVIDIA has done exactly that, but improved on the cooling in a number of ways, resulting in the graphics card operating at a much healthier 80ºC. The 65nm process on which the G92 is based helps, but is offset by the massive increase in transistor count. Therefore, the decrease in temperatures is mostly due to the improved cooler.

Besides the better thermals of the card, the 9800GX2 consumes a little more power than the outgoing G80-based 8800GTX. With NVIDIA specifying a minimum of 580W for the PSU, a good 550W unit with a single, strong 12V rail will do.

The 9800GX2 is NVIDIA's premier ultra high-end part designed with high-resolution gaming in mind. The 9800GX2 is a true HD-certified graphics card with PureVideo HD, HDCP and HDMI. This makes the 9800GX2 the only truly HD-ready graphics card as it not only outputs lossless HD 1080p video to a supporting source, but can route the audio via a small cable to your sound card, which can output the audio signal via any supported digital interface.
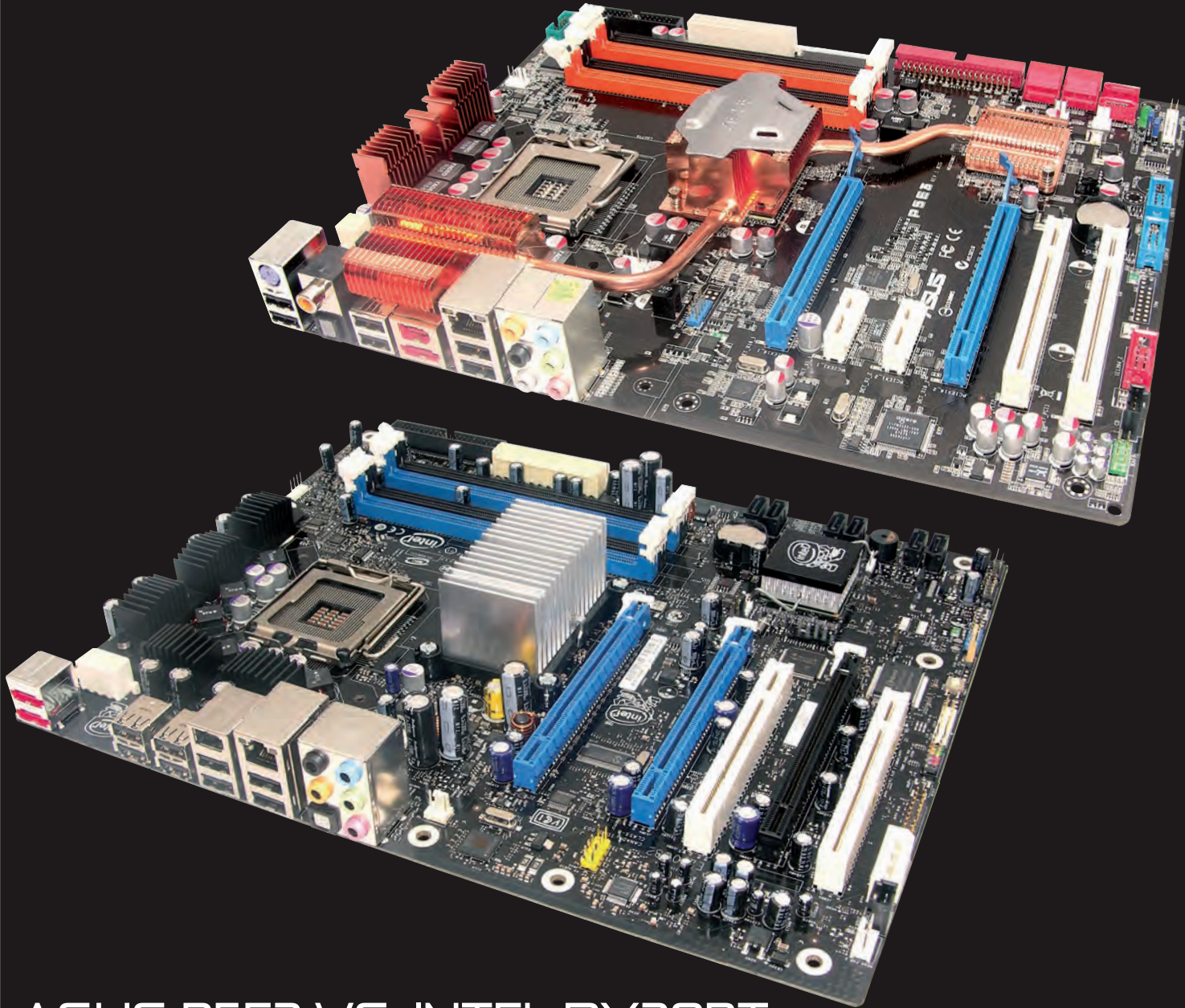
ASUS P5E3 VS. INTEL DX38BT

THE X48 CHIPSET MAY be the latest and the greatest, but availability is limited and it's expensive. For most people, the price tag of motherboards based on the X48 is not worth the often-insignificant speed advantage the chipset brings over the X38. This has given the X38 chipset and the motherboards based on it a new lease of life.

Unlike the X48, the X38 is much cheaper. It's not cheaper than the P35 and is unlikely to be cheaper than the upcoming P45, but it does have something that neither of these chipsets have: full-speed PCI-E 16x 2.0 slots. This may not mean much for many people, but if you have any of the newer graphics cards such as the 3870, you will receive a slight performance boost by running the card on a native PCI-E 2.0 slot as opposed to the PCI- E 1.1 equivalent.

More than that, you get full bandwidth across both slots, with each graphics card (if you use CrossFire) using all 16 lanes. Besides being faster clock for clock than the P35, X38-based motherboards are better optimised for DDR3. So, if you were

considering investing in DDR3, this would be a good place to start.

Intel has been targeting enthusiasts and gamers since the introduction of the Extreme Edition CPUs. Intel produced the impressive Bad Axe 2 board, which was better than other boards from third-party manufacturers who had been producing overclocking boards for several years. It may not have been the best, but it was respectable and offered good performance.

With the DX38BT, Intel has improved the board design, incorporating more solid capacitors and more BIOS options than before. Intel has also produced a better laid-out board with more of the ICs passively cooled via several heat sinks for better stability and reliability.

Competing with the Intel board is the ASUS P5E3, designed by the same engineers who have produced some of the best motherboards the enthusiast community has ever known.

When we tested the individual

performances of the boards using Everest, SiSoftware Sandra 2008 and CINEBENCH R10, the P5E3 outperformed the DX38BT. This was probably because the 400MHz FSB on the P5E3 resulted in a Performance Level of five as opposed to six on the DX38BT. This small difference accounted for a good 200MB/sec memory bandwidth difference in favour of the ASUS board, which is ultimately what gave it the edge.

In the CPU tests (the FPU and ALU tests in Everest and Sandra 2008), however, the DX38BT triumphed. The difference was small, but at every turn the Intel board beat the P5E3. In Super Pi 32M, the P5E3 was much faster than the Intel board, but the Intel board was faster in 3DMark2001 SE.

Investigating why these boards behaved so differently led to nothing tangible, but we speculate that since the P5E3 has more BIOS options and settings, it is better optimised than the DX38BT. The settings available on the ASUS board, such as Static Read Control, Ai Clock Twister control and Transaction Booster, allowed the ASUS
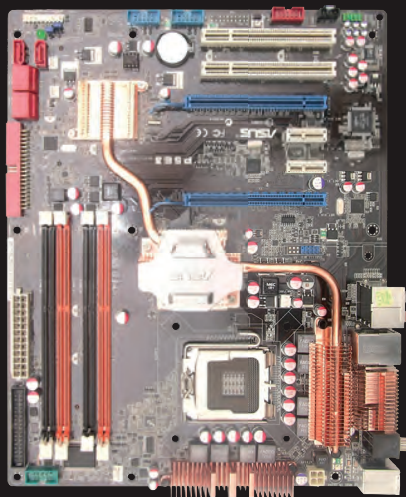
ASUS P5E3

CHIPSET	Intel X38 +ICH9R
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR3 184-pin (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core2, Core2 Duo, Core 2 Quad, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 2 xPCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 6 xUSB2.0, Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x FireWire, eSATA

SCORE

★★★★☆

INTEL DX38BT

CHIPSET	Intel X38 +ICH9R
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR3 184-pin (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core2, Core2 Duo, Core 2 Quad, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	3 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6x SATA 3Gb/sec, 8xUSB2.0, Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x FireWire

SCORE

★★★☆☆

board to pull ahead in both synthetic and real-life performance, whereas on the Intel board you have no choice but to use the default options.

In terms of overclocking, the P5E3 features much better circuitry than the Intel board. With an eight-phase power system, the ASUS board provided better stability at higher FSB speeds and we were able to push it to a maximum of 446MHz (we only managed 430MHz on the Intel board). This may not be a big difference when looking at the numbers, but because the memory speed is directly tied to the FSB, on the Intel board you lose out further on memory bandwidth than you would even if both boards were running at the same speed. The result is that even with the CPU clocked higher on the Intel board (at 3,655MHz), the 3DMark05 scores were lower than those of the P5E3 board with the clock set at 3,568MHz. In gameplay, the difference would not be noticeable at all, but it's something worth keeping in mind if you spend a good amount of time overclocking

and tweaking your system for the last bit of performance.

There is no contest between the P5E3 and DX38BT when it comes to features. Even though the P5E3 isn't the WiFi or Deluxe version, it has so much more than the Intel. What the Intel board does have (which the ASUS doesn't) is an additional full-length PCI-E slot, for a total of three (the P5E3 only features two). If the board supported NVIDIA's SLI technology, it would be a very useful and key advantage, as it would allow three-way SLI. Unfortunately, SLI is not supported by Intel chipsets and the additional PCI-E slot on the Intel board serves very little purpose.

If you're looking for an affordable and solid X38 motherboard, the Intel DX38BT is a good choice. It may not be the best, but it allows you to overclock 45nm quad-core CPUs to a respectable level. The P5E3 is more for those who want luxuries such as infrared, a remote control and BIOS profiles. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

ASUS EAH3870X2 TOP

OVER THE LAST THREE or four years, graphics cards have lost most of what used to differentiate them from each other. In the days of Tseng Labs, 3Dfx, Rendition, Number9 and others, it was very hard to find one graphics card looking exactly like another. There was some originality and creativity from the AIBs. This, however, was a result of the market having more players than it has today.

That was some time ago and since we only have NVIDIA and AMD/ATI as the main discreet graphics chip providers today, we see that AIB's are buying the completed PCB from either of these companies and differentiating them with a sticker for the most part. This has shifted the focus more to the actual IHV than the brand of the card. This has produced a number of problems for the end user, one of which is pricing. With very little variation in the products, the prices are mostly the same. Even when purchasing pre-overclocked cards, the products don't seem to be speed-binned or outfitted with anything

that makes them stand out from the others. Just higher clocks programmed into the BIOS and nothing else.

Fortunately, this isn't the case with the ASUS EAH3870X2 TOP. This is by far the best 3870X2 card we have tested and is the best 3870X2 that money can buy. Indeed, the last statement is a bold one, but ASUS has really outdone themselves with this card. They have not only managed to produce a graphics card based on a successful, tried and tested GPU configuration, but have gone the extra mile to add their own customisations, which not only make this the most aesthetically pleasing graphics card we have seen, but the fastest as well.

Unlike other 3870X2 cards, ASUS has designed a custom PCB based on the reference model, but has employed slightly different components, IC locations and other customisations, which enable the card to support four displays. This may not be useful to most gamers, but for those playing flight simulators with

multiple displays, it's a welcome addition. This feature is also useful for those with displays that can take multiple DVI connections for ultra high-resolution imaging.

This feature is not what makes the 3870X2 TOP the best 3870X2 card on the

NAG HARDWARE

NAG DREAM MACHINE

SPECS

CORE	RV670XT x 2 (850MHz)
PROCESS	666 million gates (55nm Low-K TSMC) (x 2)
MEMORY	512-bit GDDR3 (1.9GHz 0.8ns)
ROPS	16 x2
SHADERS	320 x2

SCORE

★★★★★

market, but it's the way in which ASUS has implemented CrossFire technology on their product. Unlike with other 3870X2 cards, ASUS has customised the card in such a way that you can use the card in single-GPU mode (one core with CrossFire off) or in normal dual-GPU mode. This is a useful feature for those concerned with power savings, as you can use a single GPU for games where the power of two GPUs is not needed or where CrossFire has a negative performance impact.

In single-GPU mode, the card still performs impressively thanks to the industry leading 0.8ns GDDR3 memory. We could not believe it ourselves, but the Hynix-manufactured FP-08 memory is rated at an incredible 2.5GHz, making the fastest GDDR3 we have ever tested. With such RAM, we expected ASUS to have clocked the memory well beyond the 2GHz mark. Yes, it was clocked higher than the reference models at 954MHz (1,908MHz DDR), which was impressive, but given the memory ratings, it was a little on the low side.

Not satisfied with the default settings, we set about overclocking the memory and discovered that we could operate it at an eyebrow-raising 1,125MHz (2.25GHz DDR), which is short of the 2.5GHz rating, but higher than any other card we have tested. The card would crash at 2.5GHz, and further investigation as to why this happened led us to believe that either the memory controller hub, PCB or both were not designed for such high-signalling speeds. This isn't a problem though, because the ASUS card is the only card with such fast memory on the market.

This performance is not only limited to the memory. The overclocking prowess extends to the actual GPUs themselves, assisted no doubt by the fantastic cooling solution ASUS has implemented. It is worth noting that the 3870, even though built on TSMC's 55nm process, is factory clocked at 825MHz, which makes it the highest clocked graphics card ever. With such a high default clock speed, there isn't much room left for overclocking, but ASUS
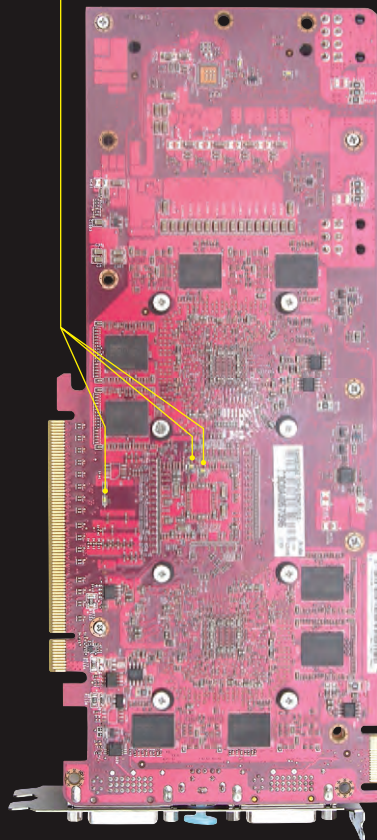
has managed to squeeze out an extra 25MHz from the cores of the TOP. Since 25MHz is nothing spectacular, we set about trying to find the highest stable speeds by overclocking the cores to 918MHz (which was our previous best with another reference PCB 3870X2). The EAH3870X2 TOP managed this clock speed with not a single hiccup and even managed 932MHz.

This makes the ASUS EAH3870X2 TOP not only the highest clocking card we have tested, but also the fastest 3870X2 and the second fastest graphics card ever. Apart from the other dual-GPU card reviewed in this issue, no other graphics card has ever managed to cross the elusive 20,000 points barrier in 3DMark06. The EAH3870X2 TOP managed an incredible 20,089. There was simply nothing this card couldn't do. From impressive synthetic numbers to great image quality and game performance, it managed faultlessly. There was only one problem with the card: because of the custom implementation of CrossFire, AMD's Catalyst 8.3 driver had performance issues in XP. However, this wasn't the case in Vista, where the card delivered even better performance, scoring 144 points more.

If you're in the market for a 3870X2, this is the card to buy. It may cost more than the others do, but in this case, ASUS has produced a gem of a card that makes it stand far above all other 3870X2s. The ASUS EAH3870X2 TOP is near perfect. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

We kid you not, the 3870X2 Top has three bright white LEDs that glow when the card is powered

VIEWSONIC VA1701WB

RRP→ R1,621 | **Supplier→** DCC
Website→ www.drivecon.net
Brand→ ViewSonic

WITH HDTV ALL THE rage, we are seeing more and more widescreen LCDs every day. From the large, full-HD 1,920 x 1,200 24-inch displays to small 1,280 x 720 LCDs such as the one we have here from ViewSonic.

Widescreen displays are not only better looking, but allows for better use of screen real estate when compared to the standard 5:4 and 4:3 aspect ratios of traditional displays. This was probably the thinking behind the VA1701wb.

While the aspect ratio is true HD 720p compliant, it's useful for watching HD media without the black bars, but doesn't really mean much for gamers and the general computer user. The problem with a 17-inch widescreen is that you don't gain anything you don't already have with a normal 5:4 1,280 x 1,028 display. If anything, you lose space - 304 pixels down the vertical axis to be exact. This is a sizeable amount of space. It wouldn't be an issue if the pixel density lost was gained across the horizontal axis. However, this isn't the case because a normal 17-inch LCD with a 5:4 aspect ratio has the same number of pixels horizontally and more vertically.

The VA1701wb adds nothing that one would have if one were to purchase a normal square display. The monitor doesn't feature DVI, component or HDMI inputs, so there's no compelling reason to purchase it. It's not much better than the vast majority of 17-inch LCDs on the market, and as such will remain a product for those who value screen geometry above all else. For everyone else, it would probably be best to invest in the other ViewSonic LCDs.   **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

NATIVE RESOLUTION	1,280 x 720
ASPECT RATIO	16:9
RESPONSE TIME	8ms
INTERFACE	VGA (D-sub)

SCORE

★★☆☆☆

CORSAIR FLASH VOYAGER 32GB

RRP→ R2,272 | **Supplier→** Frontosa | **Website→** www.frontosa.co.za | **Brand→** Corsair

IT'S INEVITABLE. THE DAYS of magnetic storage devices such as hard drives are numbered. They may be with us for the next ten years, but chances are that by then solid-state storage will have caught up in capacity, performance and most importantly price.

Currently 2.5-inch 64GB and 128GB SSDs cost more than a mid-range computer, so they are not viable as mass storage devices. This means that users have to rely on hard drives or smaller flash drives, which are not always ideal because of capacity and speed. There are a number of 2GB, 4GB and 8GB flash drives on the market for next to nothing, but the performance is atrocious and downright frustrating. It's not uncommon to find flash drives with the first 256MB of memory showing impressive read and write speeds, only to find that the remaining 3.75GB has access speeds approaching those of 3.5-inch floppy drives.

The Corsair Flash Voyager is probably the best compromise there is at present. With an astonishing 32GB of space and a read speed of around 25MB/sec, the Flash Voyager is one speedy drive. Playing back HD trailers on the drive is a breeze as it can easily handle the transfer rates, allowing smooth video and audio. The write speeds are not so impressive. With an average write speed of between four and 5MB/sec, it's not one of the fastest flash drives out there, easily being eclipsed by the Flash Voyager GT 16GB (which has write speeds above 10MB/sec).

Given the trade-off between capacity, write speed, price and read speed, however, the Corsair Flash Voyager 32GB is near perfect and a definite must-have for those who need large volumes of data with them all the time.   **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CAPACITY	32GB
READ SPEED	25MB/s
WRITE SPEED	5MB/s
MATERIAL	Rubber enclosure

SCORE

★★★★☆

TETRIS IN PICTURES

Instead of printing raw source code, like the magazines of yore used to, we're giving you a series of pictures and a challenge. The challenge is to make Game Maker (obtainable on the DVD) look just like these screenshots and you'll have yourself a game.

LAST MONTH'S *TETRIS* IN Pictures continues with arguably the most important part of any *Tetris* game: The blocks! Load up your saved version from last month (or grab it off the DVD) and start playing around...

All the different *Tetris* blocks are all derived from a single parent object,

TetrisBlock. It's a rather complicated object, with quite a few events that matter, but the basic logic is simple: Each block has its own configuration of **FallingBlocks** that it's made up of, after that they all fall and rotate in exactly the same way. Whenever any movement

happens, all the blocks are checked to see if they'll be collision free in the new position and if they all pass, the movement happens.

So, once you have your very own functioning *Tetris*, why not add new things like a gradual speed up, multiple levels or even challenges for players to complete. Go wild and have as much fun as we did making this! As always, any requests, questions and even criticism should be sent towards the helpful people over at **http://www.gamedotdev.co.za.**
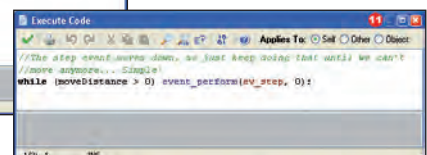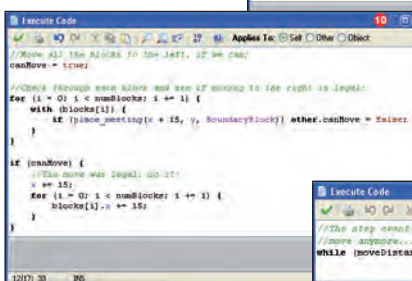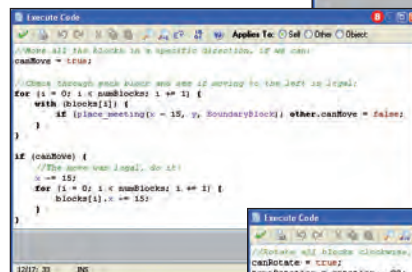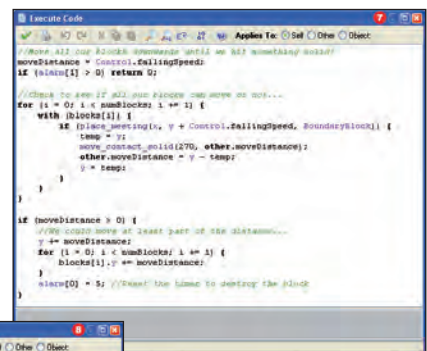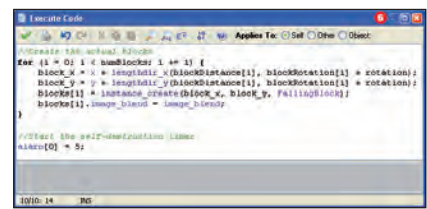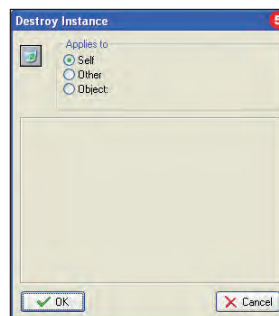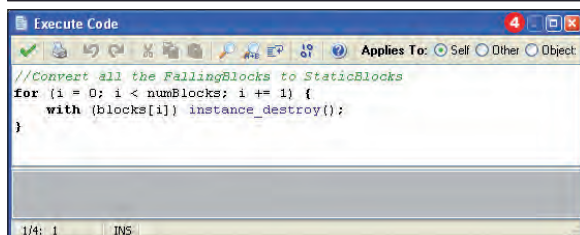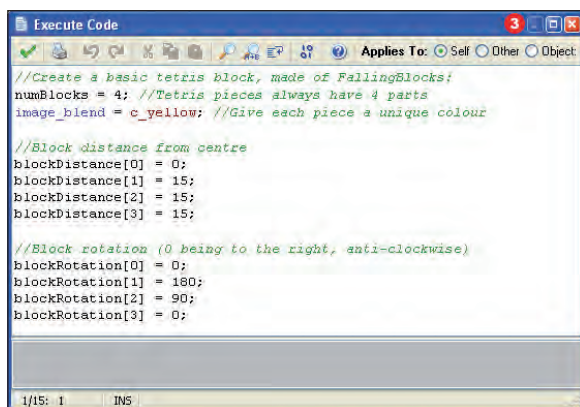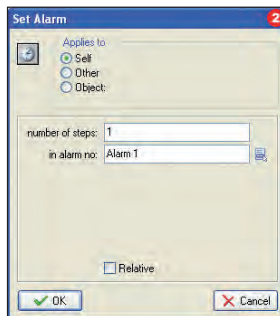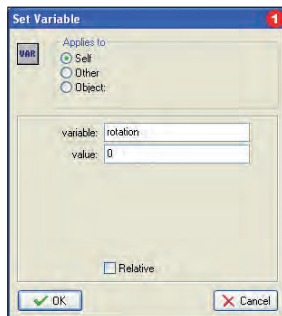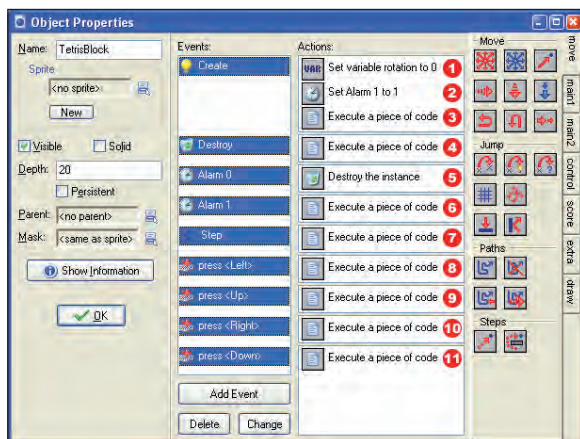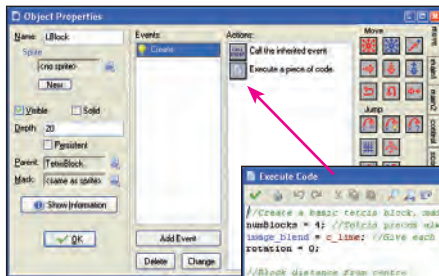
LBlock

Name: LBlock
Depth: 20
Parent: TetrisBlock

```
//Create a basic tetris block, made of FallingBlocks;
numBlocks = 4; //Tetris pieces always have 4 parts
image_blend = c_lime; //Give each piece a unique colour
rotation = 0;

//Block distance from centre
blockDistance[0] = 0;
blockDistance[1] = 15;
blockDistance[2] = 15;
blockDistance[3] = 21.21;

//Block rotation (0 being to the right, anti-clockwise)
blockRotation[0] = 0;
blockRotation[1] = 0;
blockRotation[2] = 180;
blockRotation[3] = 45;
```

SBlock

Name: SBlock
Depth: 20
Parent: TetrisBlock

```
//Create a basic tetris block, made of FallingBlocks;
numBlocks = 4; //Tetris pieces always have 4 parts
image_blend = c_orange; //Give each piece a unique colour
rotation = 0;

//Block distance from centre
blockDistance[0] = 0;
blockDistance[1] = 15;
blockDistance[2] = 15;
blockDistance[3] = 21.21;

//Block rotation (0 being to the right, anti-clockwise)
blockRotation[0] = 0;
blockRotation[1] = 90;
blockRotation[2] = 180;
blockRotation[3] = 45;
```

ERROR at line 7 pos 10: Unexpected symbol in expression.

PBlock

Name: PBlock
Depth: 20
Parent: TetrisBlock

```
//Create a basic tetris block, made of FallingBlocks;
numBlocks = 4; //Tetris pieces always have 4 parts
image_blend = c_aqua; //Give each piece a unique colour
rotation = 0;

//Block distance from centre
blockDistance[0] = 0;
blockDistance[1] = 15;
blockDistance[2] = 15;
blockDistance[3] = 21.21;

//Block rotation (0 being to the right, anti-clockwise)
blockRotation[0] = 0;
blockRotation[1] = 0;
blockRotation[2] = 180;
blockRotation[3] = 135;
```

ERROR at line 7 pos 10: Unexpected symbol in expression.

ZBlock

Name: ZBlock
Depth: 20
Parent: TetrisBlock

```
//Create a basic tetris block, made of FallingBlocks;
numBlocks = 4; //Tetris pieces always have 4 parts
image_blend = c_purple; //Give each piece a unique colour
rotation = 0;

//Block distance from centre
blockDistance[0] = 0;
blockDistance[1] = 15;
blockDistance[2] = 15;
blockDistance[3] = 21.21;

//Block rotation (0 being to the right, anti-clockwise)
blockRotation[0] = 0;
blockRotation[1] = 0;
blockRotation[2] = 90;
blockRotation[3] = 135;
```
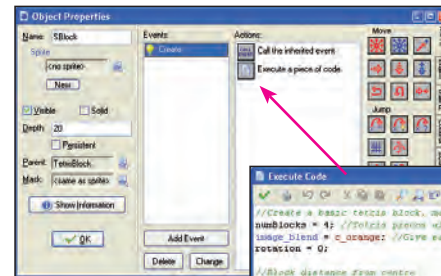
ERROR at line 7 pos 10: Unexpected symbol in expression.

LongBlock

Name: LongBlock
Depth: 20
Parent: TetrisBlock
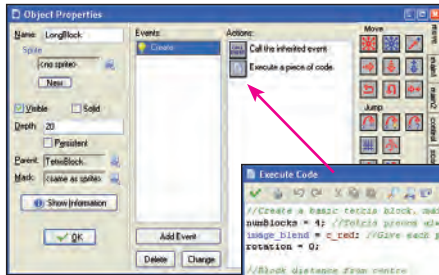
```
//Create a basic tetris block, made of FallingBlocks;
numBlocks = 4; //Tetris pieces always have 4 parts
image_blend = c_red; //Give each piece a unique colour
rotation = 0;

//Block distance from centre
blockDistance[0] = 0;
blockDistance[1] = 15;
blockDistance[2] = 15;
blockDistance[3] = 30;

//Block rotation (0 being to the right, anti-clockwise)
blockRotation[0] = 0;
blockRotation[1] = 0;
blockRotation[2] = 180;
blockRotation[3] = 180;
```
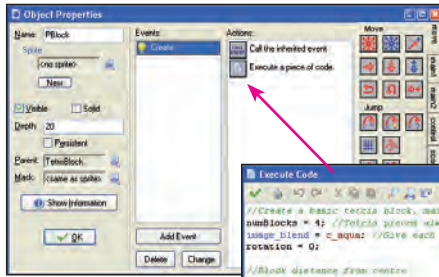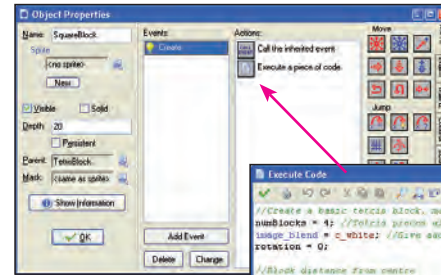
ERROR at line 7 pos 10: Unexpected symbol in expression.

SquareBlock

Name: SquareBlock
Depth: 20
Parent: TetrisBlock

```
//Create a basic tetris block, made of FallingBlocks;
numBlocks = 4; //Tetris pieces always have 4 parts
image_blend = c_white; //Give each piece a unique colour
rotation = 0;

//Block distance from centre
blockDistance[0] = 10.60;
blockDistance[1] = 10.60;
blockDistance[2] = 10.60;
blockDistance[3] = 10.60;

//Block rotation (0 being to the right, anti-clockwise)
blockRotation[0] = 45;
blockRotation[1] = 135;
blockRotation[2] = 225;
blockRotation[3] = 315;
```

ERROR at line 7 pos 10: Unexpected symbol in expression.

Room Properties

Name: TetrisRoom
Caption for the room: Tetris Remake
Width: 225
Height: 300
Speed: 30
Persistent

Control
TetrisBlock
BoundaryBlock

x: 105   y: 285   object: BoundaryBlock   id: 10
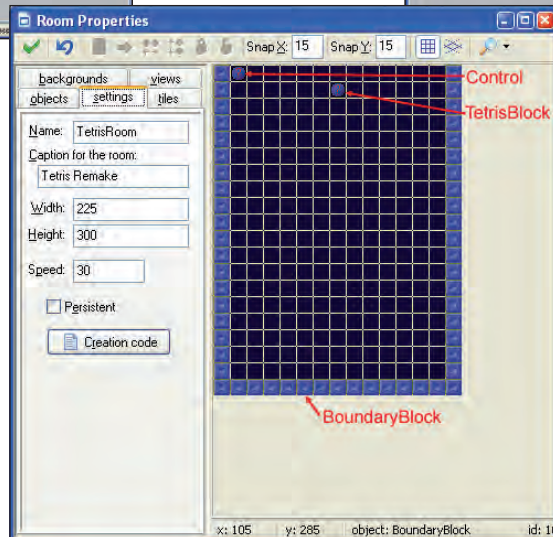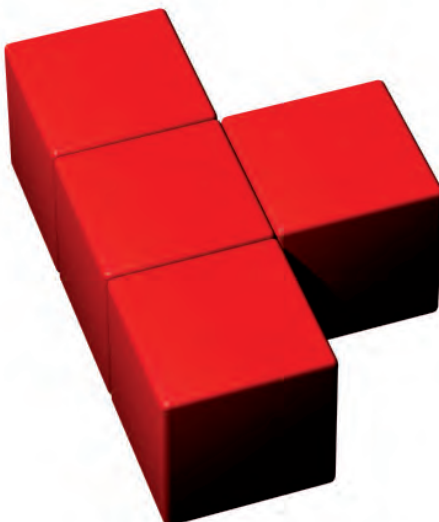
KUNG FU PANDA

Genre: Animation
Release Date: June 2008

Po **(JACK BLACK) IS** a giant panda obsessed with kung fu. The only problem is that he's the laziest animal in all of ancient China. Meanwhile, an evil warrior called Tai Lung (Ian McShane) escapes from prison to cause all sorts of evil. All hope rests on a prophecy that names Po as the "Chosen One" who'll save everyone and everything. Master Shifu (Dustin Hoffman), a red panda that has trained "five of the greatest warriors that the world has ever known," sets out to help Po reach his potential. The disciples of Shifu are all animals from the animal stances or styles commonly found in kung fu: Tiger (Angelina Jolie), Monkey (Jackie Chan), Snake (Lucy Liu), Crane (David Cross) and Mantis (Seth Rogen).

The film is directed by John Stevenson (who worked as a storyboard artist on *Father of the Pride, Shrek 2, Madagascar* and many cartoons of the late '90s) and Mark Osborne (who has a few minor directorial credits to his name), making this their full-feature animated directorial debut.

So, we have Jack Black (*Pick of Destiny, King Kong, Shallow Hal*), Jackie Chan (*The Forbidden Kingdom, Rush Hour*), Angelina Jolie (*Tomb Raider, Mr. & Mrs. Smith*), Lucy Liu (*Kill Bill, Charlie's Angels*), and

Dustin Hoffman (*Perfume: The Story of a Murderer, I Heart Huckabees*) as voice actors (to name a few).

Animated feature films using computer-generated visuals seem to have completely replaced the traditional 2D-animated feature films aimed at kids, which considering how lush and vibrant Kung Fu Panda is isn't a bad thing in our books. The plot looks predictable and the comedy is very much aimed at the younger audience, but the movie looks fun, energetic and utterly adorable. Best of all, when it comes to kids' movies, action and comedy are fine and dandy, but ideally you want something worthwhile so that parents feel better about taking their kids to such an indulgent bit of entertainment - as long as the moral of the story isn't force-fed to the little tykes. Considering the origins of the movie and the people involved, we may just have our rice cake and eat it.

Kung Fu Panda has all the sights, sounds and design of a top-quality animated film in what could probably be considered 'mainstream' by the animated feature-film industry. DreamWorks, Pixar and Disney have pretty much paved the way for films such as this, so all that's left is to sit back and enjoy. **MD**
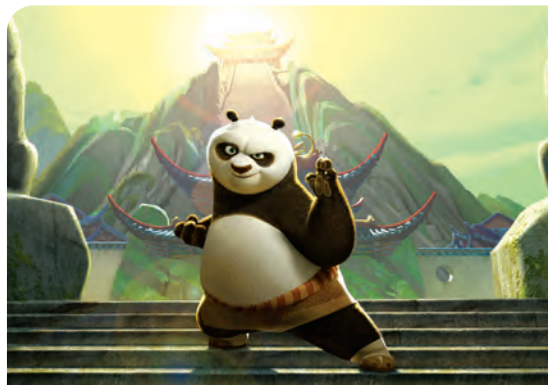
MOVIE NEWS

GTA IV versus Ironman

IN HOLLYWOODM, RELEASE DATES for movies are carefully planned around long weekends, summer holidays and other movies. For example, if George Lucas plans to release a new science fiction movie about men running around in robes on the 4th of July, then most other movies will simple step out of the way and release the following weekend. This is a very broad view of the situation but it does have merit. Equally absurd, there are some analysts who are saying that the release of *Grand Theft Auto IV* (29 April) might eat into the weekend performance of *Ironman* (scheduled for release on 2 May). The thinking is that gamers, a large target audience for superhero movies, will be too busy playing GTA IV to bother going to watch the movie. Some say it's ridiculous to think that so many gamers won't leave their homes for longer than 72 hours after the game launches. We say you don't know what gamers are like. Good luck *Ironman...*

Max Payne movie update

THINGS WE ALREADY KNOW... Mark Wahlberg (Max Payne), Beau Bridges, Mila Kunis (Mona Sax) and Chris O'Donnell are starring in it. It's directed by John Moore (*The Omen*, *Flight of the Phoenix* and *Behind Enemy Lines*). The movie is based on the original game and the sequel. Recently, Mila Kunis gave a little insight on the movie: "Lots of shooting and gunplay, but what makes this script different is that it's a really dark, sad movie about a man who loses everything and thinks that the only way he can get it back is by revenge." So, it's going to be dark, about losing everything with some revenge and a little depression and sadness. This shouldn't worry anyone too much because there'll also be plenty of killing, maiming and death to ensure that viewers don't get too down when watching the movie. We have high hopes for this one and even higher hopes that a successful movie debut will mean that *Max Payne 3* (the videogame) will get out of development hell and onto a shelf near you much sooner.

007 update

THE NEW BOND MOVIE, *Quantum of Solace*, is due for release at the end of the year. For those of you – choose one (impressed | confused | annoyed | surprised | saddened) - by the name of the movie, you might be relieved to know that the organisation at the root of all evil in the new Bond movie is called Quantum (the villain in this one is trying to control the world's water supply). Daniel Craig explains the mood of Bond in the new movie: "He has his heart broken. The love of his life is killed, and he finds out she's not who she said she was. He's out for revenge."

CONAN THE BARBARIAN (DEFINITIVE EDITION)

Director: John Milius
Cast: Arnold Schwarzenegger | James Earl Jones | Max von Sydow | Sandahl Bergman | Ben Davidson
Genre: Action
Rating: 15
Run time: 124 minutes (Disc 1-film) / 88 minutes (Disc 2-extras)
Score: ★★★★

CONAN IS A MAN. Conan is a barbarian! Conan is a barbarian-man! There is no denying the impact this classic, cult, pulp, corny movie must have had on the more conservative theatre-goers back in 1982. It did so well, it even received a child-friendly sequel two years later starring Arnie once again, but lacking the chutzpah of the original.

Based on the fictional character created by American writer Robert E. Howard in 1932, the movie is everything a *Conan* fan could have wanted. Interestingly enough, the original plot line called for a futuristic post-apocalyptic setting but they went for the traditional fantasy sword-and-sorcery style instead. There were also talks of a pop-music style soundtrack, but the studio unfortunately vetted it for a more epic orchestral score (which would go on to be used in practically every Universal Studios movie and trailer for the next 20 years).

It's the violent, bloody acting breakthrough of Arnie's career as he plays Conan: a thief, warrior, gladiator, king, philosopher and half-mime out to avenge his tribe, parents, loved ones and everyone else who is brutally murdered in front of him. The movie is camp, yet aged well.

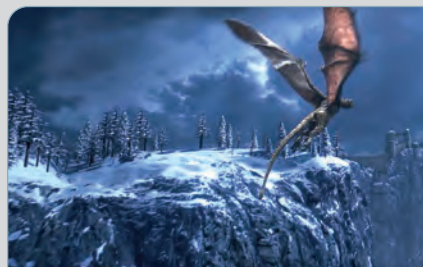What makes the *Definitive Edition* well worth it, is the commentary by Arnie himself. He cannot resist regaling all sorts of interesting behind-the-scenes stories and generally comes across very different from his in-movie role. There are deleted scenes, behind the scenes and a lot of supplementary content on the second disc, worth the watch if you enjoyed the movie.   **MD**

BEOWULF TWO-DISC SPECIAL EDITION

Director: Robert Zemeckis
Cast: Angelina Jolie | Anthony Hopkins | Ray Winstone | John Malkovich | Brendan Gleeson | Dominic Keating
Genre: Animation
Age Restriction: 13VN
Run time: 110 minutes
Score: ★★★

SET IN A TIME when demons and dragons terrorised civilisation, this movie follows a mighty warrior called Beowulf on his quest to save a small kingdom, ruled by Hrothgar (Anthony Hopkins), from a demon called Grendel and the demon's mother played by Angelina Jolie. From a technical point of view, *Beowulf* is a masterpiece of CG filmmaking, but throughout the movie I could not help but wonder why the director did not just opt for an all-live action or all-CG film. Granted, this route allowed the director some freedom when it came to camera angles and action scenes, but there are many instances throughout the film where the CG just felt a little clumsy. The opposite is also true and there are some spectacular scenes that would not have worked as well had it been live action. This mixed bag made me feel that there was something missing from *Beowulf*. While this movie made headlines for its technical achievements, the one thing that really stuck with me after I watched this movie was the storyline. Apart from the obvious plot there seemed to be an underlying story that focuses on man's weaknesses and the difficulty for us to make the right decision when presented with an object of desire.

The Two-Disc Special Edition features some interesting insights into Beowulf as a fictional character and the documentary on the making of *Beowulf* will offer tech-heads great insight into the CG processes that were used to make this movie.   **RV**

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Director: Greg Coolidge
Cast: Dane Cook | Jessica Simpson | Dax Shepard | Andy Dick
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 10 (L)
Run time: 94 mins
Score: ★★★

ZACK BRADLEY (DANE COOK) is a slacker. Vince (Dax Shepard) is employee of the month... for 17 months running. Amy (Jessica Simpson) is the hot blonde who apparently only dates the employee of the month. Zack and Vince both want Amy. Juvenile shenanigans ensue. Leave to bake for 94 minutes.

This movie strings together a lot of clichés and signs them off with a predictably happy ending. It's also not going to have dumb people whispering to smart people in the lounge and can be filed under very light entertainment. So what's the point of watching it then? Well, it has enough funny gags and smart dialogue to get you through a rough day and it'll put a smile on your face without trying too hard. The actors really add a lot of shine to this movie by staying in character and playing those characters to the extreme. Jessica Simpson is the notable exception here and is clearly just paid to look pretty. Then again, her acting 'prowess' wasn't exactly going to be tested in a movie such as this. There are no special features or any extras on the DVD, so unless you really love this movie, there's little point in buying it. It's not a bad movie but it is a lot better than those pointless spoof movies doing the rounds these days.   **MJ**

INDIANA JONES: THE
COMPLETE DVD MOVIE COLLECTION

Director: Steven Spielberg
Cast (Raiders of the Lost Ark): Harrison Ford | Karen Allen
Paul Freeman | Ronald Lacey | John Rhys-Davies
Cast (Temple of Doom): Harrison Ford | Kate Capshaw | Jonathan Ke Quan | Amrish Puri
Cast (Last Crusade): Harrison Ford | Sean Connery | Denholm Elliott | Alison Doody | Julian
Glover | John Rhys-Davies | River Phoenix
Genre: Action Adventure
Age Rating: 12+
Run Time: Raiders of the Lost Ark (111 minutes)
Temple of Doom (114 minutes)
Last Crusade (122 minutes)
Score: ★★★★★

THE THINGS WE'RE FORCED to do in this business… there should be a law or something. One complete DVD movie collection, nine hours of *Indiana Jones* and one weekend to watch it all. There is little need to rehash the plots or what *Indiana Jones* is all about. If you're buying this particular collection, it's because you're a fan, have seen all the movies (at least a few times) and of course for the bonus material. In addition to all three movies, there's a DVD containing extras. Starting with the lightweight stuff, there are theatrical trailers from all the movies as well as a preview of the game, *Emperor's Tomb*. After watching these trailers it's hard to imagine how these movies made so much money: they're classic in a terrible sort of way and more than a little old fashioned (especially *Raiders*). The bonus DVD features a 'Making the Trilogy' feature that covers each of the three movies and in total clocks in at just under four hours on the story of how the movies were made, showing plenty behind-the-scenes footage and interviews. Like a marketing blurb, it really is a fascinating insight into the *Indiana Jones* phenomenon. You only realise the genius behind these movies once you've completely digested all the bonus material. This, of course, makes watching them again that much more interesting. The other addition to the collection is a set of shorts that also feature interviews with George

Lucas, Steven Spielberg and Harrison Ford. Refreshingly, not only these big-name Hollywood heavyweights discuss the three different movies, but also the various stunt coordinators, sound designers, and so forth. The sound-design segment is rather interesting and reveals how the sound of a porcelain toilet cover sliding open, a car running silently down a sand road and actual recordings of a bullwhip were used in the final movies. John Williams, who brought us all those catchy tunes we whistle and hum every time we think about *Jaws, Star Wars* and, of course, *Indiana Jones*, is also well covered. So, hats off to a moviemaking legend. One of the short features covers the special effects in the three movies, and is essentially a lesson on how to make movies on a tight budget and without the mighty power of computer-based special effects. As a side note, it's good to know that George Lucas and Steven Spielberg are drastically cutting down on the computer-generated special effects in the new movie so that it retains the look and feel of the old movies. *Indiana Jones: The Complete DVD Movie Collection* is a worthwhile purchase, if only just for the individual movies. As an added bonus, you get an extra DVD full of stuff you probably haven't seen before, such as Tom Selleck auditioning for the role of Indiana Jones. How different things could have been. **MJ**

AMERICAN GANGSTER: EXTENDED EDITION

Director: Ridley Scott
Cast: Denzel Washington | Russell Crowe | Chiwetel Ejiofor | Josh Brolin
Genre: Drama
Rating: 16 (LSNV)
Run time: 157 minutes (Theatrical Release) | 176 minutes (Unrated Version)
Score: ★★★

THIS IS THE KIND of movie that critics are supposed to heap praise on and audiences don't watch. (*Maxim* called it the best film of the year, but the movie only enjoyed an average reception at the box office.) It's full of intense drama, convincing performances, sharp dialogue, a compelling story and even engaging cinematography. Considering the director and cast involved in this project, it should be a memorable movie, but it tends to miss the mark a little. Despite being inspired by a true story (whatever that means), it doesn't deliver on all the hyped promise. Perhaps it's because *American Gangster* might be preconceived as a gangster movie, so having seen *Casino*, *Goodfellas* and perhaps to some extent *Heat* and *Scarface* taints the whole effort. Essentially, you expect more but end up disappointed. If they perhaps added a narrator things would have been different as defining the different characters and the situations they find themselves in, instead of telling the story at hand, stretches much of the plot out. It's not a terrible movie. Just don't expect too much 'gangster' in the movie and you'll be fine. The Extended Edition has around 18 minutes of additional footage and an alternative ending. There's also commentary by the director and writer (Steve Zaillian). Overall, not exactly what you might call 'riveting extras' and the thought of watching the whole movie again just to see those 18 extra minutes isn't very appealing at all. **MJ**

FOOTSKATING 101

Director: Thomas Ferreira, Brendan Jack
Cast: Elana Afrika, Carl Beukes, Garth Breytenbach, Andrew Buckland, Bevan Cullinan
Genre: Comedy
Age Restriction: PG
Run time: 82 minutes
Score: ★

TO TELL THE TRUTH, I grew up in a small mining town, am uneducated, uncouth, have a limited vocabulary, don't know how to use a computer or a cellphone, sport a funny haircut and am Afrikaans (oh the horror, the shock). And according to our beloved editor, I was the only person (because of my background) who could in a way 'connect' with this piece of trash called *Footscating 101*, brought to you by 5FM.

Just something else, notwithstanding my 'impeccable' credentials and 'suitability' to review this flick, I didn't connect with it. It had something to do with the fact that most of the aforementioned aren't true (except that I'm Afrikaans).

Footscating 101 tells the woeful tale of Vince – a poor miner's son in a small town – trying to save his town from 'exploding', his home from being repossessed and his granny's lungs (don't ask). In order to do all the 'saving' involved, he decides to invent a new extreme sport, footskating. Just for those who haven't grown up in small mining towns, footskating is almost like skateboarding, but without a skateboard (if you don't understand how this is possible, watch the flick).

This small-town film of ridiculous proportions feature the usual bonus content such as trailers, the premiere, music videos and TV spots. **ND**

ROCKY: DEFINITIVE EDITION

Director: John G. Avildsen
Cast: Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, Carl Weathers, Burt Young
Genre: Drama
Rating: 12+
Run time: 112 minutes
Score: ★★★★★

PUNCH DRUNK, BATTERED, BRUISED, eyes swollen shut, lips split open by blow after blow, cuts all over his dazed face, blood streaming from a broken nose, stumbling around in the ring, finding it difficult to speak, slurry speech, that's how we'll forever remember Sylvester Stallone in the original *Rocky* (and every other *Rocky* flick thereafter for that matter). *Rocky* is one of those films that have a special place in every movie buff's heart – and for good reason. It was a Cinderella story. Not only because of the rags-to-riches, against-all-odds plot and Stallone's stunning portrayal of Balboa, but also because the film was based on a story written by Stallone himself. It was a genre-defining film and was rewarded with Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Directing and Film Editing. Released in 1967, it told the from-zero-to-hero story of Philadelphian Rocky Balboa, a good-hearted, uneducated debt collector for a loan shark. Balboa was also a club fighter who fought his way to the top, eventually claiming the world heavyweight crown for his efforts. If you haven't seen the original, this DVD comes highly recommended.

Rocky: Definitive Edition is a two-disc, digitally remastered collector's edition of the original, featuring excellent bonus content such as commentary from boxing trainer, Lou Duva, TV ads and trailers, and a sneak peek at *Rocky Balboa*. **ND**

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST
(TWO-DISC SPECIAL EDITION)

Director: Gore Verbinski
Cast: Johnny Depp | Orlando Bloom | Keira Knightley | Jack Davenport
Bill Nighy | Jonathan Pryce
Genre: Action
Age Rating: 10 (V)
Run Time: 144 minutes (Disc 1-film) / approx. 40 minutes (Disc 2-extras)
Score: ★★★★

THE FIRST PIRATES MOVIE did so well that the studio practically jumped on the writers to continue the plot into a two-part sequel because more Jack Sparrow is what the audience demanded! Unless you're female, then you want Orlando Bloom, apparently. While the original movie was based on a Disneyland ride of the same name and roughly the same plot, *Dead Man's Chest* (and its sequel) was practically made up as they went along and oddly enough, it works in the film's irreverent favour.

Picking up where the first film left off, Jack Sparrow remembers he owes the tentacle-faced Davy Jones for the use of his ship, the Black Pearl, while Will Turner and Elizabeth Swann get arrested for helping

Sparrow escape from prison. From there, it's about cannibals, sea creatures, naval battles and enough special effects to kill a small child's imagination forever (which isn't as bad as it sounds). The movie is funny, epic, witty, clever, brash, and droll, long, full of butchered oceanic myths, sea legend and ample Jack Sparrow for everyone.

Extra features include bloopers (always funny), full commentary from the two writers (also funny), and a giant extra disc filled with all sorts of behind-the-scenes making-of exploratory content. Worth special mention is the "According to Plan" featurette that enlightens you as to exactly just what kind of a monumental, gargantuan and expensive task movie making of this calibre is. **MD**

ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK (SPECIAL EDITION)

Director: John Carpenter
Cast: Kurt Russell | Lee Van Cleef | Ernest Borgnine | Donald Pleasence | Isaac Hayes
Season Hubley | Harry Dean Stanton | Adrienne Barbeau
Genre: Sci-fi
Age Rating: 15V
Run Time: 95 minutes
Score: ★★★★

HERE WE HAVE A special release of an action/sci-fi classic that is older than many may realise. The screenplay was written in 1978 and filming took place in 1980. It is set in a dystopian 1997, and New York's Manhattan Island has, several years ago, been turned into the US's single, and monolithic, maximum security prison for the worst of criminals. Sentences are for life: no one gets off the island. But Airforce One, carrying the President, is highjacked and made to crash. The President bails out in an escape capsule, which lands on the island. Snake Plissken (played by Kurt Russell), former Special Forces operative and recently convicted for life imprisonment for robbing a bank, is offered a deal: rescue the President to receive a full pardon. After air-dropping into this super-prison, he finds himself in a bleak society with its own internal power hierarchy.

Although a couple of the minor characters' acting is rather hammed up, overall the acting quality is acceptable. And it is easy to overlook the dated special effects. However, there are a couple of basic premises that are pretty hard to swallow, challenging the viewer's suspension of disbelief, and the plot is fairly linear. Nevertheless, the overall story is intriguing, and not as packed with mindless violent action as one might expect. The special features in this Special Edition are quite extensive, including interviews with John Carpenter, the cast, and the producer, a lengthy deleted sequence, and a fully commentated version of the film. Overall, this is a flick that any movie enthusiast should see at least once, in part for its content, but also in order to appreciate certain advances in filmmaking that were employed in this surprisingly (and not very evidently) low-budget production. **AJ**

PULP FICTION 2 DISC COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Director: Quentin Tarantino
Cast: John Travolta | Samuel L. Jackson | Tim Roth | Amanda Plummer | Eric Stoltz | Bruce Willis | Ving Rhames
Genre: Drama
Rating: 18 (LV)
Run time: 148
Score: ★★★★★

IT'S POPULAR THESE DAYS to say you'll like the movie if you like Quentin Tarantino. It's almost becoming something of a fashion statement in Hollywood, something people say because they think they're supposed to say it. This is all probably thanks to the success of the *Kill Bill* movies. However, Quentin Tarantino is that good because he captures on film and through meaningless dialogue what people are really like. He then takes those same people and puts them in extraordinary situations, steps back and films everything that happens. Let's call it organically grown and chaos-flavoured movie making if you will.

Pulp Fiction is the famous one, the one that put John Travolta back on the map, reminded us all that Samuel L. Jackson is a class act and depending on your movie knowledge made Quentin Tarantino a more famous director. You buy this DVD if you loved the movie and want more than just having a copy to watch whenever the mood arises. There are two discs in the box: the movie, and a special features disc. The special features include deleted scenes, extended scenes, behind the scenes, trailers, and a whole lot more. The creators of this collection have really gone to town with this one and it contains hours of the most arbitrary but apt content you'll ever find, making this a very worthwhile purchase for fans.   **MJ**

THE REAPING

Director: Stephen Hopkins
Cast: Hilary Swank | David Morrissey | Idris Elba | Annasophia Robb | Stephen Rea
Genre: Thriller
Age Restriction: 13 (V)
Run time: 95 minutes
Score: ★★★

A PRIEST WAKES UP TO find that a mounted photo is on fire, with a woman's face being excised by this unexplained flame. He looks through a collection of photos, all featuring the same woman (who, it becomes apparent, meant something to him), and finds that, overnight, all of these pictures have been similarly, and equally mysteriously defaced. He calls her (Hilary Swank) up in order to warn her of some possible impending doom. Besides harbouring some bitterness as far as the priest is concerned, she is also a huge sceptic. In fact, in the college class she teaches she makes a point of debunking reported religious miracles, providing scientific explanations for all of them. But upon being asked to investigate (and hopefully debunk) unexplained events in a small Bible-belt town, she becomes embroiled in an outbreak of Biblical plagues, which seem to herald the coming of an apocalypse, (or the very Antichrist). At the centre of these events is a young girl... This film is a typical quasi religiously-inspired thriller, and not particularly original. In fact, it feels fairly formulaic. Nevertheless, it is an entertaining watch, despite trying unsuccessfully to be cerebral and thought provoking. Ironically, the most interesting element of this package lies in one of its bonus features, which is a scientific exploration of theories about the ten Biblical plagues of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, watching *The Reaping* was not an unpleasant waste of time. Therefore, it can be rated on the better side of mediocrity.   **AJ**

WE OWN THE NIGHT

Director: James Gray
Cast: Joaquin Phoenix | Mark Wahlberg | Eva Mendes | Robert Duvall
Genre: Drama
Rating: 16 (VL)
Run time: 113 minutes
Score: ★★★★

SOME MOVIES YOU CAN watch over and over, because they are so good. Others are so poor or perhaps merely unremarkable enough that one viewing is sufficient (or perhaps even too much!). And then, occasionally, one finds a movie that is excellent, and yet somehow not suited to frequent viewing. *We Own the Night* is such a film. It is really very good, but I don't see myself watching it again for at least a couple of years. The story is set in New York in 1988. A new narcotic drug is sweeping the city, and a full-scale war has erupted between the drug traffickers and the police, with casualties escalating steeply. The central character in this story is the owner of a high-profile nightclub, who tends to turn a blind eye to the trade on his premises, but scrupulously refuses to become involved in its trade. Then his brother, a high-ranking police officer, is shot in the face, and the protagonist is asked to go undercover in an attempt to discover the source of the new drug. Things get very messy, downright ugly even... This is not only a very tense movie, but it is also highly emotionally charged. Bonus features consist of interviews, film clips and behind the scenes material.   **AJ**

PRISON BREAK
SEASON THREE

ALSO AVAILABLE

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(JOHN WOO'S) 7 BROTHERS

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Virgin Comics
Writer: Garth Ennis
Artist: Jeevan Kang
Price: R139.95

7 BROTHERS IS A TALE of epic scope, created by acclaimed director John Woo. It thrusts us into a little-known legend of how history really took place, and how an evil wizard's apprentice had the foresight and nerve to create a bloodline that could save mankind in a distant future. That future is now, and the seven descendants of the apprentice Fong must now come together to stop the mighty Son of Hell. This book is so perfectly put together that, in reading it in passing, I became driven to write about it. Ennis does a superb job with the writing, bringing out the character's personalities so quickly and plainly that you feel a connection with them from the first few pages, and he mixes the past with the rough street feel of the present expertly. Kang's artwork is simply breathtaking, an ideal complement to the story. **CB**

HULK #1

Format: Comic Book
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Jeph Loeb
Artist: Ed McGuinness
Price: R45

THERE IS A SCENE where the Red Hulk (who is not Bruce Banner, as far as we know) takes a fighter jet and pounds Iron Man into the flight deck of the flying S.H.I.E.L.D. fortress. It's hard-hitting stuff that any comic-book fan will appreciate. Beyond that, *Hulk #1* is a new arc for the series and stars a great supporting cast: Iron Man, She-Hulk, Leonard Samson and Thunderbolt Ross. Little is known about this new red Hulk, who goes ahead and murders one of the oldest characters in the Hulk universe (Emil Blonksky, also known as The Abomination). The new arc manages to hit all the right Hulk notes: giant explosions, lots of pounding, ass-kicking and general puny-human-smash type stuff, but with a much more structured approach to the whole ordeal. It's not overly melodramatic, thankfully, although the new Red Hulk doesn't really have much of a speaking role in the first issue. **MD**

DARK TOWER: THE LONG ROAD HOME #1 (OF 5)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Peter David
Artists: Lee / Isanove
Price: R32.95

THE INCREDIBLY POPULAR COMIC adaptation of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* continues in the second miniseries from Marvel comics, entitled *Dark Tower: The Long Road Home.* Picking up where the previous miniseries, *Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, left off, we are flung into Roland Deschain's mad dash to outrun the Hambry posse that's hunting him down. Things quickly turn from bad to worse as Roland's spirit gets trapped inside the mystical orb known as Maerlyn's Grapefruit, and his companions Cuthbert and Alain must fend off the posse by themselves. Stephen King is personally involved with the comic as its director, to ensure that it sticks close to the original novels and that they keep within his vision, while writer Peter David brings the story across to the comic format masterfully. Artists Jae Lee and Richard Isanove do an exceptional job in bringing the story to life through their intense and vivid artwork. **CB**

THOR #1

Format: Comic Book
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: J. Michael Straczynski
Artists: Oliver Coipel
Price: R45

"I HAVE DREAMED SUCH DREAMS. I was a man dreaming I was a god. I was a god dreaming I was a man. I have known passion. I have known loss. I have known the stars. I have known failure. I have known pain. I have known war. And the end of all things. And then I-- And then I-- And then we-- went to sleep. And went away. And were no more." - Thor

In the grand scheme of comic book things, the God of Thunder and general superhero Thor may not be hitting up the clubs with the big boys like Spider-Man and Wolverine, but he's been around long enough to count as one of the cornerstones of the Marvel universe. He first appeared in Journey into Mystery #83 back in 1962. Now, after the ruckus caused in the Civil War mega-arc, Thor is back in his own intelligently written and beautifully illustrated series. The start of good things for Thor. **MD**

HEROES:
VOLUME ONE

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: DC Comics
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: R240

THIS HEFTY BOOK IS a collection of the thirty-four "comic books" that were released online. Each comic tells a story that happened in-between the episodes, acting as a companion to the series and as a good place for the series' writers to add in some more detail about the story, elaborate on character histories and even providing some interesting twists otherwise overlooked if you only watch the show.

A pleasant touch is the inclusion of the wonderful paintings by Tim Sale, used in the show as Isaac's visions. There is a wonderfully up-beat and perky introduction by Masi Oka (Hiro!), and interviews with series Executive Producer Jeph Loeb as well as series writers Aron Eli Coleite and Joe Pokaski.

The artwork varies from comic to comic, having been done by various artists and writers, but the overall presentation is appealing and sticks with the whole comic book theme so prevalent throughout the series. **MD**
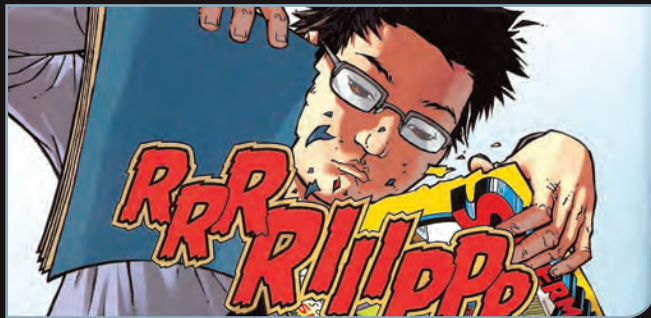
CABLE #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Duane Swierczynski
Artist: Ariel Olivetti

NATHAN SUMMERS, ALSO KNOWN as the X-MAN, Cable, fled the world he knew carrying with him the first mutant baby born since M-Day, the day when almost ninety-nine percent of mutants lost their powers. Being labelled the "messiah baby", Cable recognises its importance as paramount, and escapes into the time-stream in order to protect the baby at all costs. Ending up in New Jersey in 2043 A.D., Cable must face new challenges and unknown enemies in order to protect this baby who might someday save the world. If you're an X-Men fan, this is the perfect place to hop onboard what looks to be a solid title. The futuristic setting also gives the comic a *Terminator / Total Recall* kind of gritty sci-fi feel, which, if it keeps up, I think will give the title a bit of a following of its own. **CB**

GRIMM FAIRY TALES:
THE PIPER #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Zenescope Entertainment Inc.
Writer: Various
Artists: Alex Medellin Machain
Price: R33.95

ZENESCOPE ENTERTAINMENT HAS BEEN bringing various old classic fairy tales back to life with their own savage blend of fantasy and gruesomeness in their *Grimm Fairy Tales* line, the latest of which is *The Piper*. The comic begins with the basic fairy tale of *The Pied Piper*, which we all know, and then introduces a new scene, set in present day Florida, USA, where Sean, an outsider student whose life is plagued by bullies finds that his only escape is through his music. When he starts hearing eerie music in his mind, a strange encounter leads him to find a link to the old fairy tale, and a legend of power in music. On the whole, I found the comic entertaining, with a fresh look on the old fairy tale, and I am rather intrigued as to which direction the story will go from here. **CB**


WANTED

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Top Cow
Writer: Mark Millar
Artists: J. G. Jones
Price: R145

WANTED IS A SHOCK to the system. Violent, bloody, extreme, nasty, gory, and satirical and utterly bat-poop crazy at points, the entire moral of the story seems to be: 'f' everyone and go kill some people because you rock.

The upcoming movie with Angelina Jolie, Morgan Freeman and James McAvoy is indeed based on this graphic novel, but the two could not be more different. In the movie, Wesley Gibson joins a league of assassins and seems to be a superhero with bullet-curving powers. In the very mature graphic novel, he's a mama's boy who (aside from being modelled after rapper Eminem) discovers that his murdered father was actually a super-criminal with serious killing powers. Wesley ends up joining the elite of the super-villain crop (who banded together and used their collective powers in 1986 to kill all the world's superheroes), then goes about killing people. **MD**
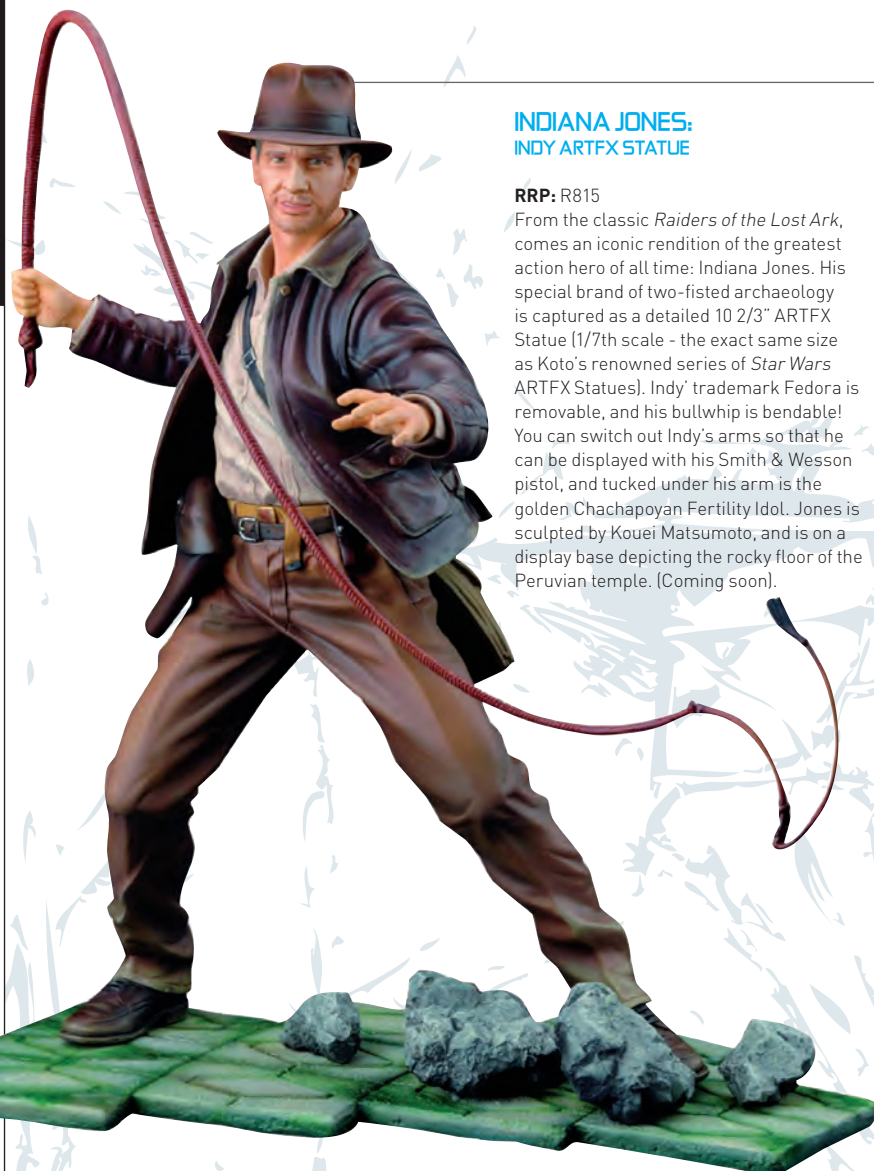
INDIANA JONES:
INDY ARTFX STATUE

RRP: R815

From the classic *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, comes an iconic rendition of the greatest action hero of all time: Indiana Jones. His special brand of two-fisted archaeology is captured as a detailed 10 2/3" ARTFX Statue (1/7th scale - the exact same size as Koto's renowned series of *Star Wars* ARTFX Statues). Indy' trademark Fedora is removable, and his bullwhip is bendable! You can switch out Indy's arms so that he can be displayed with his Smith & Wesson pistol, and tucked under his arm is the golden Chachapoyan Fertility Idol. Jones is sculpted by Kouei Matsumoto, and is on a display base depicting the rocky floor of the Peruvian temple. (Coming soon).

GHOST IN THE SHELL:
STAND ALONE COMPLEX: SOLID STATE SOCIETY MOTOKO KUSANAGI STATUE

RRP: R530

Motoko Kusanagi is one hot cyborg that is more than just another pretty face. From Masamune Shirow's sci-fi thriller *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex Solid State Society*, comes this exotically detailed statue of Major Kusanagi. The marvellous Motoko stands almost eight-inches tall and is presented here in her black and grey combat suit, along with her long, black trench coat. She is displayed holding her black shades.

LOST SERIES 1: KATE

RRP: R140

McFarlane Toys gives *Lost*'s legions of fans something new to obsess over. Each six-inch figurine has a custom base and photographic backdrop, and includes a full-scale prop reproduction central to the character's back story. Sound chip technology brings you fan-favourite dialogue taken directly from the show's soundtrack.

AWX
GAMING . ANIME . CULTURE . COMMUNITY

BATTLELORE

Published by: Days of Wonder
Supplied by: www.boardgames.co.za
Created by: Richard Borg
RRP: R689

BEFORE I GET INTO the details about this game, allow me to save you the bother of reading on should this not be for you. This is not a game for the faint-hearted, or to put it another way, do not expect to while away a couple of lazy hours with a friend and a couple of quick games of *BattleLore*. There is no such thing as "a quick game of *BattleLore*", which can best be described as a hobby, rather than a mere pastime. Now, if you are still reading, it is quite possible that you may want to try this rather daunting game. This game's rules are very complex, and unfortunately somewhat ambiguously detailed in the rulebook. The rulebook itself is quite intimidating in its size, and is organised in a not entirely logical manner, so it is often quite tricky to look something up as what you seek may well not be near a related topic. That being said, this is a game that offers great depth and can provide many, many hours of entertainment, provided that you know at least one person who is patient and enthusiastic enough to play it with you. Even the beginner's scenario, when played for the first time, takes almost half an hour just to set up, and some two hours to play. Of course, with

growing familiarity with the game's rules and mechanics, games will flow more smoothly, but we foresee that the more intricate scenarios will occupy several hours apiece. The tedious setup process is something of an issue: it would have been preferable if the complex board position were to develop organically during the course of play. The action itself unfolds on a hexagonal grid board, (whereon figures representing units battle it out), and special cards and dice. Unfortunately, chance plays an excessive part, as luck is involved in two elements: the cards and the dice. So, it is quite possible for the better player to be smashed by a lucky player, and without much chance of letting statistics normalise over the course of several games – each game takes much of a day, after all, so rematches may not always be an option. The figures can be painted by hobbyists who enjoy that sort of thing. Serious table-top board game enthusiasts, as well as dedicated role-players, are likely to derive great enjoyment from this game, particularly because expansion material is planned. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

NAG