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PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX   W

MONSTER TERRITORY EXCLUSIVE

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ASSASSIN'S CREED II
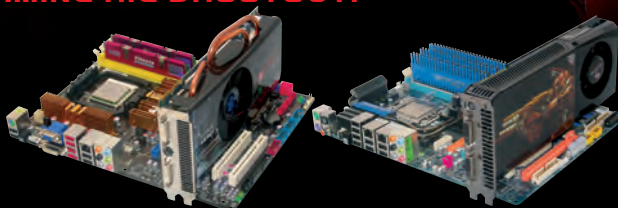
Is your DVD missing? Consider for a moment that it's you and your copy of NAG that's missing while the DVD is exactly where it's supposed to be...

NAG May 2009 DVD

Hot demos:
Wanted: Weapons of Fate
Men of War [SP]
Codename: Pandora - Cold War [SP]
The Maw

EXTRA!

ULTIMATE GAMING RIG SHOOTOUT!

INTEL AND NVIDIA VERSUS AMD AND ATI – WHO WILL BE THE VICTOR IN THIS BENCHMARK ORGY?

VOL 12 ISSUE 2 05.2009   SOUTH AFRICA   R42.00

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RESIDENT EVIL™ 5

XBOX 360 LIVE

Resident Evil 5 Xbox 360
(69482)

R799⁹⁵

Resident Evil 5 PS3
(69481)

R799⁹⁵

Contents

70

44

On the DVD

Demos
Wanted: Weapons of Fate | Men of War [Single Player] | Codename: Panzers - Cold War [Single Player] | A-Train 8 | The Maw | Wallace & Gromit's Grand Adventures | Classic Demo: Original Dungeon Siege

Drivers
ATI Catalyst Drivers 9.3 Vista & XP | No new NVIDIA drivers were available at DVD production time. Version 182.08 was the latest.

Extras
CheatBook Database 2009 + All Updates | Doom: Fall of Mars | Far Cry 2 Map Pack | K-Lite Mega Codec Pack 4.75 | Left 4 Dead: Doku Survival Modification | NAG CD Database v1.16a

Free Games
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Patches
Burnout Paradise v1.10 | Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 v1.08 | Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 v1.09 | Crysis Wars v1.4 | Grand Theft Auto IV - Patch #3 | Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. v1.01

52 Videos
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ScrewAttack VideoGame Vault
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Please insert another coin...

HEADS UP, THERE'S A new bandwagon in town and I don't know if I like what I see. Purchasable downloadable accessories and content (not the nice, free stuff you only pay in bandwidth for, but the evil pay-with-cash-and-bandwidth kind) have arrived... again. Johnny gamer is now expected to buy new cars for his racing game, levels for his FPS and clothing for his little computer people. Yes, I know that some companies have been selling new content online for ages already (*Guitar Hero* tracks, for example), but lately everywhere I turn, I'm being offered virtual things that I have to pay for. Cool cars in *Burnout Paradise* and new maps in *Call of Duty* immediately spring to mind. I just don't see how developers and publishers are now charging for things that used to come for free – as gifts for supporting a particular franchise. Even Valve Software has expressed their disapproval, stating that software companies should support their customers for buying their games. It gets even worse when you consider multiplayer games, were paying more money gives you an advantage in the game world (new weapons or abilities). What's going on here? Soon you'll be buying just the game engine in a retail box and only when you get home, will you be able to download the maps, weapons, enemies and spark plugs. Are they going to start charging us for bullets soon or plasma refills? Will you have to enter your credit card information at in-game kiosks to unlock the boss level or open up a few more inventory slots? With the multiplayer version of this pay-to-play malarkey, all you'll need to dominate is money. I wonder if they'll eventually build it into RPG conversation trees. "Greetings bold adventurer, I am a grand old wizard. I have a quest for you. Please enter your credit card details for more information..." I hope this doesn't represent the future of gaming. I'm all fine with the buying and selling of cosmetic rubbish like T-shirts and sunglasses, but when it comes to multiplayer maps and weapons, I think someone should draw a thick line.

But enough with the ranting... What I'm looking for now are your educated opinions on this topic, so send mail to the usual address.

Enjoy it this issue by knowing more than the usual amount of blood, sweat and tears went into making it. ;)

Exhausted, but happy
Michael James

Before you go... NAG Online (www.nag.co.za) is now in full swing with new articles being posted all the time. Make sure you click yourself over there, and let me know what you think.

Epic cover story

Deep into week one of our two-week production cycle, we still didn't have a cover story for this issue. There were hushed conversations around the water cooler and everything. The backup plan (considering we had two Vin Diesel reviews in this issue) was to go with a combination cover featuring *Riddick* and *Wheelman* artwork. It would have looked good and worked well, but I don't like doing covers for reviews... Lucky for us, we ended up being invited to a *Need for Speed: Shift* event where we chatted to local game development legend Stephen Viljoen (look out for a cool interview in the next issue). So, we finally had a cover story. But the artwork was lacking for the main internal feature and despite Stephen's valiant efforts, we only ended up with 13 similar-looking screenshots and a cover render. As I type this text on the last day of our production cycle, there's probably more artwork on the way – but it's going to be too late. Thankfully, the gaming gods smiled on *NAG*, and in the final hours, Ubisoft popped onto the radar with a territory-exclusive feature, packed and ready to go (with plenty of artwork). And this is how *Assassin's Creed 2* ended up on the cover of the May issue of *NAG* magazine. Thanks to everyone* who worked so hard on all three cover options (especially considering that tomorrow is the start of the Easter Weekend). I hope I never have to go through this ever again. ;))

* Rehana and Stephen for doing everything they could and to Doug and Vincent from Electronic Arts overseas for compiling and sending me the artwork so quickly – sorry it didn't work out guys. Then, to Andrew for all the cool *Riddick* stuff, and finally to Rene for the Ubisoft opportunity. Last but not least, Walt for putting the text together at the last minute. I also wish to thank the Easter bunny for screwing up an already tight schedule this month. See what I mean by epic...

Wieners

Rhyse Crompton and Marc-Alan Thom are the winners of the *Dawn of War II* goodie pile from the April issue... We're still getting plenty of entries for the gaming rig (also April) and we'll announce the winner in the next issue. Good luck!

All letters sent to *NAG* are printed more or less verbatim.

Letter of the Moment

FROM: Noel
SUBJECT: Sequels to games- Stop nagging

"**F**IRSTLY, GEARS OF WAR 2 is a good game – actually it's a great game. But, for some reason I've seen a lot of players on Xbox Live falling back to the first game. I don't understand why anyone would do this, so I started to talk to some of these guys and it surprised me to see so many flaws they detected which I did not seem to notice. Firstly they told me about the shotgun that was now too slow, the lancer which was now under-powered. One thing I did notice is the maps in Gears of War 1 are much better than those in Gears of War 2. For a moment I was tempted to start playing Gears of War 1 again, but I didn't because I realised something... This brings me to my point. There are always going to be complaints about sequels to games, because everyone expects the sequel to be better. Creators like Electronic Arts and Epic have to keep trying new things and take risks. If they kept it the same and took no risks more people would complain about things being too similar. There's just no way of keeping all the gamers happy with a single game. If you do not like this or that version of a game there will probably be a third one on its way. That's what's happening with Gears of War and I am hoping that the third one will make everyone happy."

You make a very good (although laboured) point. I have a firm personal policy to abandon old versions of games when new versions arrive. In my opinion, everyone needs to just move on (nothing to see here people) and past their nostalgic clinging to the good times they had with a particular game in the old days. Just look at what happened with Counter-Strike *– there are still people playing it. In terms of the current gaming industry,* Counter-Strike *is from the Iron Age. The message here is to always move on and embrace the future. Who cares if a new version of a rocket launcher doesn't shoot as fast or if the old maps are better – it just doesn't matter. Live in the now! However, we're still playing* Quake III *in the office, so I guess 'do as I say and not as I do' would apply here. Ed.*

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

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

FROM: Travis
SUBJECT: Nicole (Isaacs Girly Friend) with postal address

"**F**IRST OF ALL I would like to recommend Dead Space to anybody that has been thinking of getting it but has not yet done so. It is totally worth the time and has great replay value. Right, the question or thought or thing... You know when you meet Nicole (Isaacs Chick 'Isaac is the main character') for the first time in game and she helps Isaac to open a door while you defend her from the Necromorph (the alien/subhuman/the enemy of the human race in this game)? I want to know how Nicole (Isaacs chick) manages to open the door for Isaac (the main character) as well as dies when you fail to kill the Necromorph (the alien/subhuman/the enemy of the human race in this game) when Nicole (Isaacs Chick) is a figment of Isaacs (the main character of the game) imagination. Your input would be greatly helpful."

I spread this one around in an effort to find a proper answer because I really have no idea. "It's just a game... get over it," is far too dismissive for such a superb game. This is what Tarryn came up with: It would be naïve to dismiss Nicole as merely a figment of Isaac's imagination. She is a transient, somatic manifestation of the CEC's collective solecism, consequent to their more insalubrious operations on Aegis VII. As such, she fulfils the role of an extended pseudo-literary aphorism - one might even say a conceit - on the subject of extraterrestrial ethics in the broader context of colonialism... No. I don't understand it either. Ed.

FROM: Eric
SUBJECT: Gaming in South Africa

"**I** WAS JUST PONDERING THE situation of gaming in South Africa and how lots of gamers complain about there's never enough support for whatever and then there was the whole Ster Kinekor debacle with Killzone 2 which made me realise something. In South Africa the companies and businesses that support gaming are not run by gamers or even employ gamers. Gaming sections grew out of a response to a need but never became a major priority of a business and that is where the problem lies. For anything if you want the best possible results from it then you need to have passion for it and these people don't. There are many a time when I go into a shop and request something only to have the clerk look at me as if I was deranged or speaking a foreign language. I know that now you can order games of the Internet or download them via Steam but not everybody has that option and so in store purchasing will always be a necessity and in this country it will always end in one way, with a very frustrated gamer talking to a clerk who is incompetent and not getting the service they deserve unless the business model for gaming changes drastically."

Moronic store clerks aside, I have to disagree with you. I deal with everyone in the industry in this country (including a few overseas organisations) and I can promise you that we've got some of the best in the business. The only reason why NAG *sees the light of day each month is thanks to all the people in the gaming industry in South Africa. Without their hard work and support there wouldn't be a* NAG *or any current (reasonably priced) games on the shelf. That said, I do understand where you're coming from – it can sometimes be frustrating to be a gamer in South Africa. Just remember that it's improving all the time, and if you look at the history of the industry in this country, you'll see that we got here at almost twice the pace compared to the rest of the world. Be patient you must. Ed.*

FROM: Cristiano
SUBJECT: Influence of consoles

"**W**HAT'S UP? I DON'T know if this is a question, complaint or statement but hear me out; recently on the news there was a story of a young adult who went on a killing spree in Germany. It was alleged that this kid did not have friend's and mostly stayed a home and played Xbox 360 and now my parents and my friend's parents are freaking out and won't let us get a Xbox 360. Please, you are a well know gamer who's been in this business for a long time, personally I believe it's not the console. Seriously how could a game console do anything? We live in the 21st century. Please for all the good peeps in South Africa state if it is the console, game or gamer?"

Unfortunately, there's nothing I can do about uneducated (in terms of gaming) parents. It's really all your fault. Perhaps you should have chosen your parents more carefully... Oh well, there's always the next lifetime. Try this: do some research on the Internet instead of whining and nagging for an Xbox. Consider that the overwhelming majority of children who play games don't go around killing people. Explain to your well-meaning parents that abusive environments cause violence and not violent games. Show them that there are games out there that teach management skills and even some that have flowers in them. But please remember: if you do somehow end up with an Xbox, don't let them see you murdering prostitutes for fun in GTA IV. *This will count against you. Ed.*

FROM: Husain
SUBJECT: Thanks

"**I** AM WRITING THIS LETTER to show my appreciation at the level of responsiveness I have been getting from you. I highly appreciate the level of dedication you have towards your readers."

I usually publish letters like this when I want to feel good about myself. Okay... I'm all done. Ed

FROM: Ruan
SUBJECT: My favourite change to NAG so far. It's the small things that count

"**S**O I HAVE TO say that I'm really impressed so far with the new layout of NAG. But the thing that makes me extremely excited is probably for most the thing that really does not matter. The new plastic sleeve the NAG DVD is now comfortably slipped into is so much better than the previous silly plastic sleeve. I keep every NAG DVD from every issue, because I'm a firm believer in formatting my PC at least once every six months. It is really handy to have all those patches for my favourite games ready after a format and my

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the *NAG* logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.

Lisa: "Here is my shot at a NAG fan art submission. It's obviously LEGO inspired and depicts a couple of slave drivers trying to topple a mighty NAG LEGO logo. The slave, naturally, is doing this against his will because he is a NAG fan himself (as can be seen on his shirt). Hope you enjoy it :)"

Christian Strydom: "This took me quite a while to create so I just hope I will win the prize for this month. This is a 3D stereogram. You have to squint to see the 3D picture."

Actually, I wasn't being snotty. I was giving him good, solid advice. I can't take someone's idea and present it to a game developer – I'll probably be too busy doing the magazine. End of the day, aspiring game developers have to think on their own feet and do their own legwork. Ed.

FROM: Barend
SUBJECT: For your letter page
"MY RIG IS NOT just an expensive piece of electronic equipment. It serves as a device that opens portals to dimensions within virtual-reality and cyber-space. Once Scotty beams me to the other side, the equipment that really matters is given to me – like a BFG. I've fought in both World Wars and Vietnam, left skid-marked underpants in the dark corridors of Mars City, and fought Strogg and vampires. I've been employed as hit man, commander of armies, and a star ship trooper. I went bald in the Zone surrounding Chernobyl, explored the imagination of H.P. Lovecraft, bashed old ladies beyond recognition, shot cops, and indulged in all sorts of socially unacceptable behaviour in artificial environments. The list goes on. In cyber-space I can be and do anything Freud and Jung warns me against. PC gaming is a platform for healthy psychological displacement. My rig sports an over-clocked Intel Core 2 Duo, NVIDIA GeForce 7300 GT 256MB graphics card, enough HD space, and 2GB RAM. Laugh all you want. For a while this was good enough for me, but now... I want more! I want a power source that runs on Plutonium 53, a processor that clocks 66.6THz, a 666TB HD, a show-scan mega-resolution holographic virtual-reality projector, an 'Are-U-Insane' God Force 7Tb graphics card, a Rammstein macro-sonic sound card, an OS with self-evolving AI that will make MENSA members feel like morons, and never mind a mother-board... I want a mother-in-law-board. I also want a sound-proof air-conditioned darkroom with 7.1 DTS surround-sound and padded walls. I want an electronically-adjustable customised leather office chair. I want a topless maiden with a nice rack to make me coffee, light my cigarettes, empty my ashtray, serve me instant noodles, massage my neck and shoulders, and go out monthly to buy my copy of NAG from the nearest NPC whilst I'm busy playing the game of games. Am I asking for too much? Well?"

Well, you did mention a room with padded walls. I think this will be perfect for you. Ed **NAG**

---

folder of NAG DVD always gets put to good use at me and my friends LAN. So it must be true what my girlfriend always yells at me: 'It's the small things that matters!'"

Your girlfriend is very kind. Ed

FROM: Bevan
SUBJECT: Vouchers for everyone! Except you!
"WOW! THAT WAS MY reaction when I saw that I was getting a R50 game voucher. It was the exact amount I was short to get F.E.A.R. 2 Project Origin. So I quickly opened up the packaging to get to the voucher. Now I saw a beautiful sight. I saw I had two vouchers neatly packed away in the magazine. But unfortunately I saw that the voucher was only for XBOX 360 PlayStation 3 and WII and no PC. I have nothing against the consoles I was actually planning to get an XBOX but money is tight. Now I am sitting with two vouchers that I can do nothing with. I'm a bit disappointed that NAG, Incredible Connection or your sponsors didn't also let some PC gamers in on the action. Especially since 90% of the readers in the survey have a PC. And the new layout is awesome by the way."

I agree with you and am sorry about the disappointment. Next time I'll make sure the vouchers are for all platforms, or we won't run the offer. Ed.

FROM: Xander
SUBJECT: New Game Idea?
"NOT SURE IF I misread the Ed's comment in the April edition, about Louis that asked about the new game idea... But to me it sounded pretty snotty and, well, not like advice at all. Ideas are, like you said, 'easy to cook up', but throwing out a random programme you think might help when someone really wants help is not what NAG is about. I also noticed that you told another reader about maybe getting a TV show. What about this, 'I've got a great idea for a TV Show, it should be about games!' Sound familiar? Think about Need for Speed. How downhill has that game gone since Need for Speed: Carbon? I mean, even Burnout lost its appeal. Don't even get me started on Grid. I like racing games, but the quality of racing games these days are horrible. Taking that guys idea and maybe sending it to someone who can help would actually be useful, for then maybe we can reduce the quality of horrible racing games. And don't come with 'We don't know anyone who can help!' You're a gaming magazine, work it out! Not saying you guys are a bunch of self-absorbed keyboard jockeys, just being open and cool about it. Treat such ideas as Open Source and developers as potential volunteers."

GDC Wrap-Up

We've sourced, scratched, scrimped, sloughed and skimmed to bring you the most soothing overview imaginable for the five-day insanity that is the Game Developers Conference. Held in San Francisco and playing host to over 17,000 industry-worthy attendants, GDC 2009 dropped megaton bombs on our fragile gamer brains.

GAME DEVELOPER'S CONFERENCE?

Organized back in 1998 and originally called the Computer Game Developer's Conference, GDC has since become the largest annual gathering of professionals in the gaming industry. The conference focuses on networking, inspiration and education in all things gaming with tutorials, lectures and round-table discussions on game-related topics such as design, audio, production, arts and programming.

It's also become a great avenue for giving awards, announcing your hot new product and dropping quotes that get you into gaming news.

AWESOME HIGHLIGHTS

According to a panel on **Women In Gaming**, it's more critical than ever for the female of the species to get into games, as player or developer. "The game industry has created a box around itself that says 'get out,'" says Tracy Fullerton, associate professor of interactive media at University of Southern California. "If you're not dedicated to hardcore games, you're not a gamer," some believe.

Blizzard lead designer Jeffery Kaplan, during a presentation on **Where World of Warcraft Messed Up**, notes several mistakes in WoW specifically related to quest design. The short of it: too many quests dumped on a player in one go, quests being too lengthy in their descriptions, mystery being a bad thing to motivate a player with, poorly designed quest difficulty, gimmicky quests without polish, bad flow (such as too many collection quests), to name a few. He states that giving players a strong sense of direction isn't "dumbing down" a game, but rather "elegant game design."

At the ninth annual Game Developers Choice Awards, *Metal Gear Solid* series creator Hideo Kojima was handed the Award for Lifetime Achievement. At the ceremony, the 45-year-old **Kojima stated he would never retire.** The Pioneer Award was given to Alex Rigopulos and Eran Egozy, who founded Harmonix in 1995. Tommy Tallarico, lifelong game musician who has worked on over 250 games, was awarded the Ambassador Award.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sequel to the classy *Phantom Hourglass*, **The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks** has you travelling Hyrule on a steam locomotive. Dungeon delving, puzzle-solving and new items are included. You can also capture monsters, summoning them in battle to assist you.

Supplementing the already-extensive nostalgia-driven Virtual Console store on the Wii, the newly unveiled **Virtual Console Arcade** section hosts **Gaplus**, **Mappy**, **Tower of Druaga** and other cheap thrills.

Thanks to the **Wii System Menu 4.0**, available now, the Wii storage issue has been resolved. You can now download to and play games directly off SD cards, with support included for HCSD cards up to 32GB.

Not to be forgotten in the shadow of the iPhone, Nokia unveiled their expanded **Ovi.com**, a new smart store" for buying games, uploading videos and keeping track of friends.

While the reputability of its claims may be suspicious, the announced "streaming" gaming service **OnLive** remains appealing on paper. Using a broadband connection, no console is required for playing the newest games. With "no noticeable lag",

Crytek claims their new CryEngine 3 will revolutionise both PC and console gaming
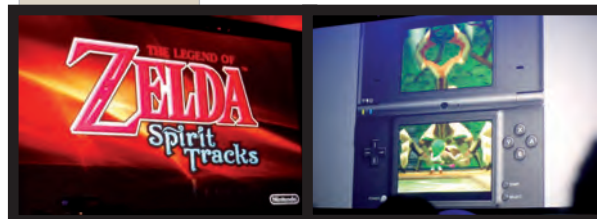
the service streams high-definition video of the game you're playing to any screen connected to their little magical OnLive "microconsole" box. The service aims to offer the newest console and PC games.

With a strong focus on consoles as well as PC, CryTek have unveiled the **CryEngine 3**, successor to the engine that powered *Crysis*. They claim the engine is a revolution in both PC and console gaming.

Developer Frozenbyte (known for *Shadowgrounds*), has announced their next game. **Trine**, they say, is best described as a "side-scrolling physics-based Terry Pratchett-style *LittleBigPlanet* fantasy platformer". Three-player co-op included, each character having its own unique abilities, such as the Wizard being able to draw shapes that manifest as solid physical objects.

If you're not Japanese, **Monster Hunter Freedom Unite** would be *Monster Hunter 2G*. The sequel to the popular PSP co-op experience contains over 1,500 weapons, 2,000 sets of armour and 400 missions. You'll be able to import your previous character and take him online for more monster-hunting.

The creators of **Project Offset**, believed-to-be a fantasy *Battlefield*-esq game, announced that they're not dead, and that their website [www.projectoffset.com] has new screenshots.

Activision announced that they're dropping the Call of Duty title from the sequel to *Modern Warfare*, and that **Modern Warfare 2** will be released this November.

Serving as a sequel to the successful kingdom-management WiiWare title, *My Life as a King*, **Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a Darklord** lets you to play as the more evil side of the *Final Fantasy* universe, building your keep and populating it with monsters that want a better bakery.

Sequel to *Final Fantasy IV* and previously a mobile-only release, Square Enix confirmed **Final Fantasy IV: The After Years** will now also arrive via WiiWare later this year. The sequel is styled to look and feel just like the original *FFIV* in all its pixel-y goodness.

AWARDS

In the ninth annual **Game Developers Choice Awards**, the belle of the ball was most certainly *LittleBigPlanet* – nominated in seven separate categories and taking four awards including Best Technology, Innovation Award and Best Debut Game.

Dead Space had already won Sound Design of the Year and Audio of the Year from the Game Audio Network Guild Awards, as well as the DICE award for Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design and two BAFTAs for Use of Audio and Original Score – but that didn't stop it from adding the GDC Award for Best Audio to that list.

The coveted **Game of the Year Award** however, along with Best Writing, went to Bethesda Softwork's *Fallout 3*. Best Downloadable Game went to *World of Goo*, while Best Handheld Game made Kratos very happy in *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus*.

In a repeat of last year, Rockstar North went home without a single award.

They said it...

"Innovation is inherently risky. **Gamers want to be shocked**, surprised and awed."

Peter Molyneux, Lionhead Studios

"We say at Bethesda we have a low asshole quotient. **The game industry is very small, and if you're an asshole today they're going to remember you six years later.** Some junior developers seem to have a sense of entitlement, like, 'I'm the badass you need to hire.'"

Emil Pagliarulo, Bethesda Softworks

"It's easier to make a complex design than a simple design, **because a simple design is elegant**."

Gordon Walton, BioWare Austin

"Let's join together, everybody here today, **and make the impossible possible**, because I think everyone has that responsibility in the game industry."

Hideo Kojima, Kojima Studios

"During America's great depression in the 1930s, **creators invented the jet engine, television and even the chocolate chip cookie**."

Satoru Iwata, Nintendo

DRM shake-up

Combating crime and frustration, can there be balance?

DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT (DRM) is one of those necessary evils in this world. While it's certainly important for publishers to protect their intellectual properties from piracy, it's also important for their legitimate customers to be able to install, uninstall and (most importantly) play their purchased games with as little frustration as possible. Companies are divided on what exactly is the best way to deal with this issue, with some (like Stardock and Steam) implementing multiple installation-friendly solutions and others, like EA, being focused more on brute-force tactics to get the job done.

Thankfully, things are about to change. In response to Valve's declaration that it's beaten back DRM headaches for good with its new Steamworks system (which was a response to Microsoft's updated Games for Windows Live), Stardock has upped their game and introduced Goo (Game Object Obfuscation) to the market. While Microsoft's solution is straightforward, controlling the licence to operate the game rather than block distribution (and possibly jumping on the Torrent bandwagon simultaneously), Valve's Steamworks offers all-in-one copy protection, downloadable content management and multiple installation management in its simple, easy-to-use Steam application. Stardock's Goo, on the other hand, is even more elegant. It

enables developers to encapsulate the game executable and Impulse, Stardock's virtual platform, into a single file. When users load up the game for the first time, they simply enter their email address and serial number and the game is linked to their account – not their hardware. What's even more impressive is that this technology is not tied to a particular distributor – which means any developer or publisher can take advantage of this system regardless of its distribution channel (online, retail or otherwise). Additionally, Goo will allow for second-hand sales, as all licences are fully-transferable between users.

A little late to the party, but still trying to make the effort nonetheless, is EA. A new DRM management tool released by the mega-publisher will help ease the burden of uninstalling and re-installing all EA products developed from May 2008 onwards (including *Crysis*, *Mirror's Edge*, *Spore* and *Red Alert 3*). This tool will scan the users' computer, giving them a single place to uninstall and claim back from the limited installation pool any compatible title. While it's far from perfect, and still requires understanding of the whole system and the knowledge that you actually need to do these things, it's at least a step in the right direction from EA and a sign that they're taking DRM as a sore point for customer rights a little more seriously.

NEW RELEASES FROM THQ

THQ's upcoming release list has slipped into the public eye, revealing a couple of rather interesting new titles on their way. Worth special mention for their fiscal year 2010, which runs from April 2009 to March next year, is *Company of Heroes Online*, with FY2011 featuring *Saints Row 3* and a mysteriously-untitled racing game. FY2012 holds even greater allure, listing *Red Faction 4* (if there's anything left to destroy), *Darksiders 2* and a *Warhammer 40K MMO*. Sadly, there's little else of interest on the list, aside from a handful of *Sponge Bob* games and a title listed simply as "Pixar 4", and these dates aren't set in stone by any means. Details will, of course, follow as soon as we can figure them out.

New Jak & Daxter, Ratchet & Clank for PS2

Seems the old girl ain't dead yet. Independent developer Sanzaru Games is busy bringing *Secret Agent Clank* to the PlayStation 2. Originally a PlayStation Portable game developed by High Impact Games (which was awesome), Sanzaru says it has focused a great deal of time and energy on rebuilding all the levels, characters and effects to take advantage of the additional power in the PlayStation 2. "Also given the different controller we wanted to bring back the lock-strafe camera mode seen in previous games, since a lot of us have enjoyed using it to great effect to blow stuff up over the years."

The new *Jak and Daxter*, being developed by High Impact Games, is a true sequel to *Jak 3*. Titled *Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier*, it picks up "from where the original trilogy left off" according to Sony. The game involves exploring the Lost Frontier as you help Kiera on her "quest to become a Sage and save the world from the threat of darkness." Emphasis is being placed on "sky-high adventure" as you fly "in one of five different aircrafts" and "blast airborne enemies and battle sky-pirates with your powerful Gunstaff, a new transforming weapon. We're wondering if they'll ever find Daxter's pants.

Steam now supports DLC

Recently Valve introduced the ability for developers and publishers to offer downloadable content through their content delivery system, Steam. This is exactly like DLC on the 360 or PS3, where gamers pay money for expansions, added characters, new maps and so forth. Now, any game attached to Steam (regardless if it was bought at retail in a box or online via Steam) can use Steam to deliver add-ons. An example of this is the indie puzzle/platformer, The Maw. The game's creators, Twisted Pixel, have released two additional levels for it at a price. "We're happy that we can now offer Steam customers significant expansions to the Maw story," said Twisted Pixel CEO, Michael Wilford, adding: "delivering more Maw directly to gamers while they're still playing the game." While Valve themselves are strongly against DLC for their own titles, arguing that if someone has bought a game they should get all additional content as part of that investment. However, Valve's publishing platform itself is a discrete entity and doesn't discriminate against developers and publishers who want micro-transactions.

Crikey, mate!

As is customary for the popular team-based FPS Team Fortress 2, the next update is on its way and it's looking to be a big one. Next up for an overhaul is the Sniper – everybody's favourite camping Australian. Valve is being tight-lipped about the exact details at this point in time, but hopes are high on the NAG forums that he'll be packing a boomerang in future (although we're secretly hoping for a kangaroo launcher). Along for the ride will also be considerable content updates for the rest of the game, including a couple of new maps. We should see another content patch before then, however, with Valve claiming that all the classes will be receiving additional content at that time. For the Xbox players out there still waiting for the existing patch to come their way, apparently Valve has been having some trouble fitting all the updated code into the console's limited amount of memory. According to Valve's Greg Cherlin, these problems are well on their way to resolution.
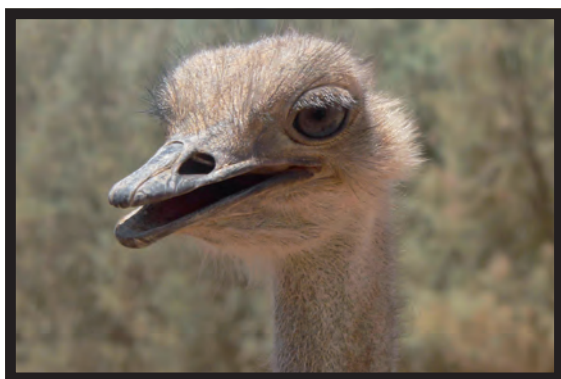
Ostrichcized

Red Faction: Guerrilla recently made it into the April Fool's Day Hall of Nonsense for developer Volition's quirky idea for a new melee weapon – the ostrich hammer. In a recent 'very serious' behind-the-scenes video blog, the developers showed off the stringent process for creating not only the perfect ostrich hammer, but the perfect catch phrase to go with it. It was all fun and games, with lines like "The Internet has spoken. They want our game to have more ostrich, and we're going to give it to them." being thrown around; but now it's actually happening. We suppose the developers thought that if they went through all the effort of building the silly thing for the video, they might as well just chuck it in. So there you have it, folks; the ostrich hammer will be an unlockable multiplayer weapon in Red Faction: Guerrilla, which is due to hit the shelves in June.

PIECE OF OLD COD FOR XBLA/PSN?

Those of you who missed the first very *Call of Duty* boat will finally have a chance to make amends. While nothing has yet been confirmed by Activision or Infinity Ward, there are some pretty convincing clues leading to the upcoming release of *CoD* for Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network (and likely PC-based online distribution as well). Both PEGI and the ESRB let slip new ratings for the game, with the ESRB listing the title on their site as for "Windows PC, Online, Xbox 360, and PlayStation 3".

EIDOS, EXIT STAGE LEFT

The East meets West takeover of Eidos has finally been completed as new owners Square-Enix readies itself to move in. Luckily for those working at Eidos, their jobs seem to be safe for now. SE claims that it has no intention of meddling with the internal affairs of the company, and will allow it to continue to run from its head office in Wimbledon. The deal is estimated to be worth £84 million.

Not the one about people being banned for having their sexual orientation listed in their Xbox Live gamertag descriptions, though, but rather the curious case of Jamie Durrant who sued Microsoft over claims of "unaddressed homophobia" within Lionhead Studios. During his tenure at Lionhead, Durrant claims the company "changed" under Microsoft's ownership and he started to receive emails mocking his sexuality. Peter Molyneux dismissed the claims, telling GamesIndustry.biz "everyone is happier and they feel more empowered and more creative than they've ever felt before". Regardless, Microsoft has agreed to settle out of court, paying an unspecified amount of money to Durrant, after his complaints of homophobic abuse were "blatantly disregarded" by Microsoft's human resources department. "We are pleased to have reached an amicable resolution to this matter with Mr. Durrant," said a Microsoft spokesman, according to PinkNews. "The terms of the settlement are confidential, but we can confirm that Mr. Durrant will not continue his employment at Lionhead as part of the agreement."

Poor? Bored? Read this now

JOYSTICKS ARE GREAT THINGS. They let you play your favourite fighting game the way that it's intended to be played and they give you that feeling that you're at the arcade, kicking some 10-year olds butt at Tekken while simultaneously trying to scrap the gum off the bottom of your shoes. Indeed, if you're a fighting game fan, you know that joysticks are the only way to play. But what do you do if you don't have the funds to own a decent gaming joystick but still want to hang with the cool kids? You build one yourself! With a little bit of electrical know-how, the right tools and (most importantly) access to high-quality Japanese imports, anyone can piece together their very own authentic and highly-capable gaming stick in an afternoon or ten.

First off, you need to visit www.slagcoin.com to get the low-down on what exactly is required. You'll need a spare controller for whatever platform you'll be tinkering with that you're happy to rip apart, the buttons and joysticks themselves, which you'll be able to get from arcadeblaster.co.za or enterarcade.co.za (these chaps can also sell you the entire unit prebuilt, if you're not up to the construction) and a handful of electrical and mechanical tools mentioned on the website. While we're yet to experiment with such high-end DIY shenanigans, we've been told that it's really not that difficult; just have a look at Internet geek Rotundo's Nike shoe box version that he built to cut costs even further!
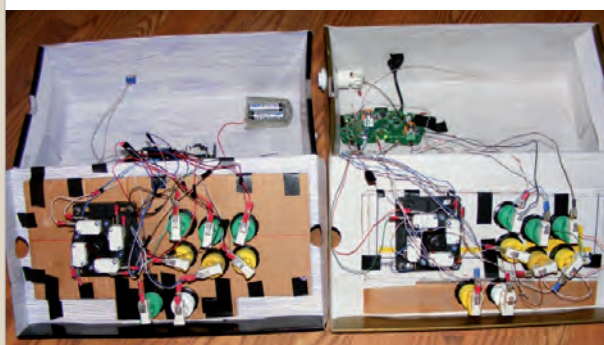
MK team parting ways?

While the world waits in bated breath to see just what will happen to Mortal Kombat creators Midway Games, especially now that their US branches have been declared bankrupt, the developers behind the aging fighter franchise might be looking to save their own skin and jump ship before it goes completely under. Weighing in at about 50 developers, the team behind Mortal Kombat is apparently in negotiations with multiple publishers looking to take them in from the storm. While they couldn't, unfortunately, take the MK brand with them, the loss of Midway's prize bull could be highly detrimental to the publisher's future, regardless of who they use to fill the gap.

Nolan Bushnell is the creator of Pong and the Atari 2600, as well as the founder of Atari. During a Q&A session at BAFTA in London, Bushnell commented that the internet experience is "stilted and flat", arguing that real social gaming involves people playing together in person. "Social is buying someone a drink," he said. "Sitting in a dark room in your underpants talking to thousands of people might seem social, but it's not cool. The public space is always going to be here." He elaborates by drawing a comparison with alcohol, saying that the reason a Martini is more expensive in a bar compared to making one at home, is because "the bar has people around". Naturally, the real reason Bushnell poo-poo's faceless online gaming is so he can make his own new gaming venture, uWink, seem more appealing. Described as an "entertainment dining experience", uWink allows people to play games via interactive video terminals at tables.

Motion Plus Plus Plus

It's not often that developers complain that the systems they're developing on are too good, but that's almost exactly what EA Sports has resorted to. Working on the upcoming sports title Grand Slam Tennis, which will be one of the first Wii titles designed to use the upcoming Wii MotionPlus attachment, producer Thomas Singleton claims that the motion sensing is actually too accurate. One-to-one motion sensitivity has been Nintendo's goal for some time, and now with MotionPlus, it seems they're about to achieve that. The trouble is, however, that not ever gamer slobbing on their couch is capable of the precision movements required to play professional-level tennis, and this has led to a detrimentally challenging experience for testers working on the game.

Singleton says "It truly is giving you that one-to-one control movement of your arm motion and then mapping it directly to that one-to-one movement of your character on screen. At times it's overly responsive. It had so much fidelity that at times we have limited that fidelity to make it a compelling experience and giving you full total control."

The motion-sensing technology on the new Wii MotionPlus attachment might be too good, says EA Sports.

Evolution of
VIN DIESEL

Breakdancing (circa 1980)

Strays (1997)

Pitch Black (2000)
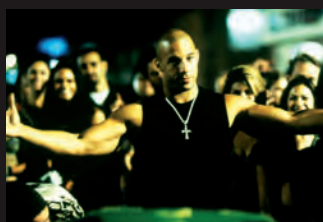
The Fast and the Furious (2001)

The Pacifier (2005)
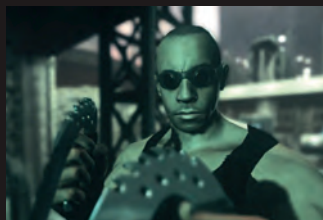
Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena (2009)

Interplay gets lucky

Cast your minds back to the November 2008 issue where we told you that there's still some hope of Interplay developing a *Fallout* MMO. We mentioned that there were a number of conditions for this to take place, one of them being that they need to secure $30 million in development funds and secondly that they begin development before the 4th of April 2009. If our sleuthing is up to scratch then that means they've managed to kick off development (albeit very secretly), because the company has just announced that they've managed to secure the necessary funds through a partnership with Masthead Studios – developers behind the upcoming (also post apocalyptic) MMORPG *Earthrise*, which is currently preparing to enter beta. With everything leading us to believe the game is underway, we're still awaiting confirmation from Interplay that the codenamed project, which they're calling Project V13, is in fact the *Fallout* MMO. In the meanwhile, you can read more about Earthrise at www.play-earthrise.com.

Hellgate: London to make a return?

It seems that HanbitSoft wants to re-launch Hellgate: London in the West. After the Korean publisher acquired the rights to distribute the title in Eastern territories, as well as host servers to keep the (oddly) popular game afloat in the region, it was just a matter of time really. The trouble is, however, Namco-Bandai still owns the right to publish the game in Europe and the US, and isn't giving that up with the ease we'd expect. According to HanbitSoft CEO Kee Young King, "There have been many inquiries from US and European Hellgate players surrounding the availability of the game in those respective territories." Stay tuned to this one; a relaunched and tweaked HG: L might be just the ticket to get this title back into everyone's good books.

MMO gamers assemble!

Well would you look at that – it's another MMORPG, and this one has superheroes! *Marvel Universe* is due out in 2012 at the earliest, but few other details have been confirmed at this stage. Marvel's Simon Philips divulged that the game won't be out before 2011's film release of *Captain America* or even *The Avengers*, which is set to follow the year afterwards. Apparently they've been at work on this title for some time with developer Gargantuan (which operates under their publisher Gazillion), but kept having to push development forward as new technology broke into the market and their requirements for the game changed and evolved. While this news is hardly unheard-of, considering the title was first announced in 2006 as a project to be created by *City of Heroes* developers Cryptic Studios that was later cancelled, this new project marks the start of a ten year-long contract between the licence holders and Gazillion, which means you can expect expansion packs and possibly even a sequel (or two) from this exciting partnership.

Former Sony exclusives like Final Fantasy and Resident Evil have shifted to the Xbox.

PREPARE FOR THE UNKNOWN

Frictional Games, the Swedish developers behind physics-friendly survival horror *Penumbra*, has revealed information about their next project entitled *Unknown*. While they've been mostly tight-lipped about the gameplay elements, a short video was released to illustrate the style that they're aiming for with this next release. Showing plenty of shadowy corners, Gothic-inspired architecture and the kind of creepy ambiance we've come to expect from the team, *Unknown* looks set to live up to its predecessor's legacy.

The WoW factor

Whenever you feel like you've got too much free time on your hands, just remember that the collective population of *World of Warcraft* (which is currently sitting around the 13 million mark) will always have infinitely more. They must do, because a recent report by developer Blizzard claims that 16 millions quests are being performed per day in the hugely popular MMORPG. That's not a typo – on average 16 million versions of 'bring me this ring', 'kill 8 kobolds' and 'go there and do a silly dance' are being completed every single day within the game world, and that doesn't even include the failed attempts.

Microsoft returns some smack talk

FOR THE LAST SIX months Sony has been on the attack in the public space, making derisive remarks about Microsoft and Nintendo's products in the game console space. It was only a matter of time before Microsoft executives started returning fire once more. Speaking to Gamasutra, Aaron Greenberg of Microsoft has gone so far as to suggest Sony's PlayStation 3 is "haemorrhaging" at retail. "You can't underestimate that we're half the price of the PS3 at a time when consumers were looking for great value," said Greenberg following the latest NPD sales results for February. "The PS3 was down in February two per cent even with the launch of Killzone 2 – that's months of year-over-year declines," he claimed. "Xbox continues to head north while the PS3 is heading south. We're gaining share." Greenberg makes

the case that PlayStation 2 owners are investing in 360 instead of PS3. "What we're finding in our research is that a large portion of the volume we're driving with Xbox 360 purchasers is actually PS2 owners choosing Xbox for the next generation. We're switching people from the PlayStation brand over to the Xbox brand." Part of this attraction, it seems, is the migration of previously Sony-exclusive formats to Microsoft. "Not only is [Resident Evil 5] selling more, but we did a limited edition Elite bundle with that as well – so we've obviously benefited from having this deep partnership with Capcom, and we're excited to have the Resident Evil franchise for the first time ever on our platform. That follows in the steps of Grand Theft Auto – and we all know Final Fantasy is coming – that have been historically associated with PlayStation."

Gaming Charts

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

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3
1. Resident Evil 5
2. Killzone 2
3. The Godfather II
4. Afro Samurai
5. Street Fighter IV

XBOX 360
1. Halo Wars
2. Gears of War 2
3. Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
4. Wanted
5. 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

PLAYSTATION 2
1. Ben 10: Alien Force
2. Pimp My Ride 2
3. X-Men Origins: Wolverine
4. Guitar Hero: Metallica
5. SingStar: Queen

PC
1. Dawn of War 2
2. Demigod
3. Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor
4. Empire: Total War
5. Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.

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

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

DS
1. Ben 10: Alien Force
2. Club Penguin
3. MySims Party
4. Rock Revolution
5. Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

PLAYSTATION 3
1. Time Crisis 4 with GunCon 3
2. FIFA 2009
3. Need for Speed: Undercover
4. MotorStorm
5. Call of Duty: World at War

XBOX 360
1. Stranglehold
2. Gears of War 2
3. Kung Fu Panda
4. Race Driver: GRID
5. LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures

PLAYSTATION 2
1. FIFA 2009
2. Need for Speed: Undercover
3. Need for Speed: ProStreet
4. Ben 10: Protector of Earth
5. Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PC
1. Need for Speed: Carbon – Collector's Edition
2. Need for Speed: Most Wanted
3. FIFA 2009
4. Grand Theft Auto IV
5. Call of Duty: World at War

PSP
1. Need for Speed: Undercover
2. FIFA 2009
3. FIFA 2007
4. Ben 10: Protector of Earth
5. Burnout Legends

WII
1. WII Sports
2. WII Fit + Balance Board
3. Mario Kart + Wheel
4. Need for Speed: Undercover
5. Wii Play

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

HALO WARS
ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL SETS ****ING RECORD

The newest *House of the Dead* game, a parody of itself and the titular *Grind House* double-feature by Quentin Tarantino & Robert Rodriguez, has made its way into the *2010 Gamer's Edition* of the *Guinness Book of Records*. It is, according to Guinness, the most profane videogame in history with 189 counts of the multifunctional f-word. There is irony here that the on-rails light gun shooter is also a Nintendo Wii exclusive. *House of the Dead: Overkill* holds its record by having "just over one [swearword] per minute". Jonathan Burroughs, writer of *House of the Dead: Overkill*, said: "It is a dubious honour to receive such an accolade working in an industry where so often the fruits of your labours are derided and dismissed for being puerile or irresponsible, but in the case of *House of the Dead: Overkill* a little puerility was the order of business. Parodying the profane excess of *Grind House* cinema was Headstrong Games' objective and I am flattered that this record acknowledges that we not only rose to that challenge, but entirely exceeded it."

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a copy of *Killzone 2* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [May Caption].

KILLZONE 2

THIS MONTH'S CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
"Dude! Watch where you put your hand!" ... "That's not my hand."

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

"Read the back of the organ donor card before you sign it."
– *Aaron Morse*

Stargate MMO in doubt

Brad Wright, executive producer of *Stargate-SG1* as well as creative consultant on the *Stargate Worlds* MMO by Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment, has expressed doubts about the future of the licensed MMO. When queried on the game's status by the GateWorld fan site, Wright could only say "We don't know. It's a shame. If it doesn't happen – and, let's be honest, it should be happening now if it was happening – it's a shame. It's a terrible shame." The developer, Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment and its publisher, FireSky, were both created specifically to undertake the *Stargate* MMO project. "They had an opportunity and they got our support, and they obviously had significant funding, and it didn't happen," said Wright. "It's kind of a drag for the fans and the time that we invested – what little of it there really was, in comparison to what they did – was still a shame that it was wasted, because it should have happened." While reportedly still in development, Cheyenne has had funding problems as well as been sued for unpaid bills and not paying its staff.

Events

MAGIC THE GATHERING

NOVVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC
When: Every Friday
Time: 19:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed
Cost: R30
Prizes: FNM Foils & Boosters
novvagaming.co.za

MID-MONTH MADNESS 2-HEADED GIANT
When: 16 May
Time: 13:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed, Team
Cost: R30 per player
Prizes: Boosters
novvagaming.co.za

EXTENDED
When: 2 May
Time: 13:00
Type: Extended, Deck Constructed
Cost: R30 per player
Prizes: Boosters
novvagaming.co.za

STANDARD
When: 9, 23, 30 May
Time: 13:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed
Cost: R30 per player
Prizes: Boosters
novvagaming.co.za

LANS

SILENT WARRIORS COMPETITION
When: 2 May
Where: Boksburg
Type: Competition LAN
langames.co.za

HAYWIRE LAN
When: 2 May
Where: No venue specified
Type: Open LAN
langames.co.za

CYBER-LAN
When: 2 May
Where: Cape Town
Type: Open LAN
langames.co.za
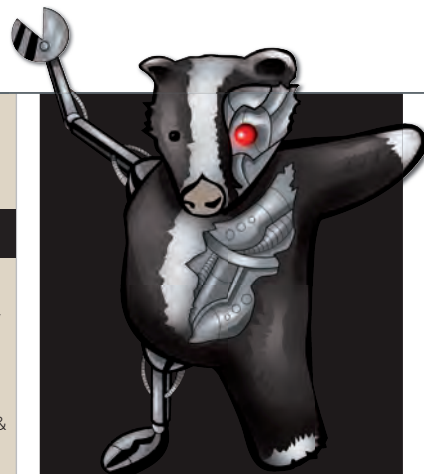
THE BAGINATOR

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

And so his story continues...

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

Send your sightings to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'May Badger' and stand a chance to win a *Hell Boy II Golden Army* DVD sponsored by Nu Metro Home Entertainment.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
Troy Stonall, p85

Three out of ten MMO players buy gold

According to gold trading review site WoW Gold Facts [www.wowgoldfacts.com], around 30% of MMO players buy virtual goods and services using real money, instead of just spending hours grinding for them like everyone else. Granted, 90% of statistics are made up on the spot, but the sheer size of the gold-selling industry for MMOs speaks volumes on the demand part of supply & demand. During an expose into MMO gold-trading by Eurogamer.net, the site owner (who remains anonymous) argues that the size of the gold-trading market means MMO companies need to wake up and licence the transactions. "In my opinion, the industry would be better served if publishers would recognise that lots of gamers like the benefits of RMT (Real Money Transactions), and work with credible companies and allow it to happen," he said. "I don't see why this is not possible. They could make a condition of involvement in RMT that players give them a complete release of all forms of liability." While most MMO providers are strongly against real money transactions, the online black-market for virtual goods is estimated to be worth 2 billion dollars.

bt GAMES™ Release List

Release dates subject to change

WEEK 1 – 1 MAY

TITLE	PLATFORM
ICC Cricket 09 – 20/20 World Cup	PC
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	Multi

WEEK 2 – 8 MAY

TITLE	PLATFORM
NARUTO: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2	Wii

WEEK 3 – 15 MAY

TITLE	PLATFORM
Trauma Center: Second Opinion	Wii
Buzz!: Brain of the World	PS2, PS3, PSP
Company Of Heroes: Anthology	PC
Marbles! Balance Challenge	Wii
Rock Revolution	PS3, WII, NDS
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	PS3, 360
BIG Family Games	Wii

WEEK 4 – 22 MAY

TITLE	PLATFORM
EA Sports Active	Wii
Spore: Galactic Adventures	PC
Sports Island 2	Wii
UFC 2009 Undisputed	PS3, 360

WEEK 5 – 29 MAY

TITLE	PLATFORM
Heroes Over Europe	PC, PS3, 360
Guitar Hero: World Tour Drums standalone	PS3, PS2, 360, WII
Guitar Hero: World Tour Guitar standalone	PS3, PS2, 360, WII
Guitar Hero: Metallica	PS3, PS2, 360
Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising	PC, PS3, 360

MIKTARS MEANDERINGS

BY MIKTAR DRACON

Planned Obsolescence

YOU ARE NOW FOLLOWING @Miktar, and the semiotic verisimilitude of his tumultuous twittering. You fool.

How crazy is this? Electronic Arts is being punished for taking risks, while Activision enjoys obscene profits from milking franchises until their teats hurt. Activision CEO Bobby Kotick has gone on record to say that they don't care about games that "don't have the potential to be exploited every year on every platform."

PC Gaming Alliance President Randy Stude thinks games like *Quake, Doom, StarCraft* and *Half-Life* wouldn't be where they are today without piracy. Whose side is he on?

Ugh. So sick and tired of the self-professed "hard core" lamenting over the Wii as a betrayal, a blight on the "true gamer" topography, as if it's somehow "inferior". Bunch of self-centred, self-important, predominantly male, middle-to-upper class, anti-social tech heads who only care about polygon count. Waste of oxygen.

"No matter how great the Saturn is, or PlayStation is, or Ultra 64 is, we will outsell them by an enormous amount with 32X," said SEGA US Chief Tom Kalinske. This was, of course, before the Saturn, PlayStation or Nintendo 64 was released and before the 32X died a horrible financial death on the market by being lame.

Peter Molyneux, the guy who "made" *Black & White, Dungeon Keeper* and *Fable*? Totally kidnapped a baby kangaroo once – it's true! He said so himself. "I once kidnapped a baby kangaroo from Windsor Safari Park." Having a hard time tracking down what exactly he did with the damn thing.

"Watch out for the next-generation *Tomb Raider*," said Core's Adrian Smith. "It will offer something different." He was talking about *Angel of Darkness.* It seems that sometimes "different" actually means "really terrible." They did re-release the game later, as an interactive choose-your-own-adventure DVD. Neat.

Sometimes I remember the June 1991 Consumer Electronics Show like it was yesterday. For one magical day, Sony was the proud creator of the next Nintendo console. Okay, so it was a Super Nintendo Entertainment System with a CD-ROM drive - a project managed by Ken Kutaragi (a Sony executive from their hardware division). The next day, Nintendo told Sony they couldn't be friends anymore - they'd fallen in love with Phillips (that didn't last long either, incidentally). Heartbreakers! Sony and Nintendo split because they couldn't agree on how to divide the potential revenue from their joint project (CD-ROM SNES). Kind of funny, really.

Upset at Nintendo, Sony president Norio Ohga insisted that Sony continue the videogame path. "We will never withdrawn from this business, we will keep going!" Ohga wanted PlayStation games to come in big plastic CD-caddies that slotted into the console like a VHS tape, to set it apart from traditional CD-ROM loaders. Kutaragi really hated the idea, but Ohga insisted on uniqueness. Kutaragi came up with the idea of making PlayStation CDs black underneath. Ironically, Kutaragi hated the controller design for the PlayStation, and wanted one that looked more like the SNES pad. The arguments were epic, we're told. Eventually, Ohga told Ken to either learn to like the design, or Ohga would fire him and everyone else who didn't like it. That's so badass.

Do you remember the early PlayStation advertising posters?

They're something I'll never forget. One proclaimed, in big bold letters: "... it's more powerful than God." Before its release, the focus group testing revealed that people absolutely hated the name "PlayStation." Sony came very close to changing it to "PSX." They didn't, because SCEI president Terri Tokunaka told Phil Harrison, head of Sony Entertainment Worldwide, that people originally hated "Walkman" too.

Originally, Sony higher-ups wanted the PlayStation to be a multimedia machine. It was only because of Ken's insistence that it became a gaming-only machine. Thanks to Ken Kutaragi's constant badgering that the PlayStation was a gaming machine, not a multimedia device, it focused the huge organisation into unity. It's hard to imagine, actually, any company other than Sony (with its experienced hardware, software and entertainment divisions), producing something like the PlayStation.

The PlayStation 3 – let's be candid here – is the result of anything but focus. It's all over the place, practically designed by committee. Too much fat. And now, Nintendo has regained the position as the leading console maker. How? By releasing a console driven by the most coherent vision of its generation.

Reminds me of what Harrison said once, about how Sony initially didn't want to be in the videogame business at all. They weren't interested in "toys."

"Sony's old guard was scared that it was going to destroy their wonderful, venerable, 50-year-old brand. They saw Nintendo and SEGA as toys." They sure changed their tune when the PlayStation, after only a few years on the marked, started accounting for 90% of the company's profits. Huh?

Speaking of toys, a favourite writer of mine – Steven Poole – had some wonderful thoughts on gaming recently while playing *LittleBigPlanet* with a friend. "In *LittleBigPlanet*, we were working out strategies, experimenting and discovering things. And it is that childlike potential that is among the most important virtues of the form." He added, "Every child, it is said, is naturally a scientist. The best videogames enable us all to practice science as pleasure."

Watched *Contact* again today. Totally better than the book. I get lost in Jodie Foster's eyes. Most of the universe does, I think.

Sitting on toilet, I wonder if I can write a column in which no sentence is longer than 140 characters. **NAG**

> The PlayStation 3 – let's be candid here – is the result of anything but focus. **It's all over the place, practically designed by committee.** Too much fat.

TERMINATOR SALVATION
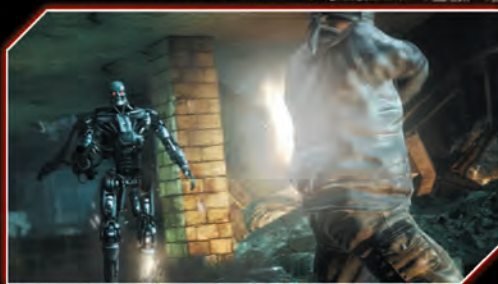
You are John Connor, a resistance soldier in post apocalyptic Los Angeles. Lead your squad of loyal fighters in a desperate battle for survival against the superior forces of Skynet and its deadly Terminators.

The end begins in this prequel to the Terminator Salvation feature film.

GAME AVAILABLE JUNE 2009

RRNJET

BY WALT PRETORIUS

The Golden Paddy

I DON'T REALLY PLAY MMO games. I have a life. And I don't really want to lose it, either. I knew a number of people who had lives before, who started playing MMOs, and now they don't have lives anymore. These once vibrant, lively people have become pasty-faced shadow dwellers who mutter about getting to the next level.

No Thank You. I prefer actually living to living vicariously through some pixel chick with impossibly large breasts and a chain-mail thong. It seems more practical that way. It seems more... well, real.

Still, millions of people spend all their free time 'socialising' via these interactive games. Socialising through games – it's sort of like masturbating and then telling all your buddies you had a threesome with a couple of Norwegian twins. But if that's what they want, then good for them. And, apparently, there are a whole bunch of people who are making a good living out of these poor sods who think that "LOLZ I pwned u, nub" is stimulating conversation.

I am not talking about the publishers. Yes, they are making money, but they are, strictly speaking, the ones who are entitled to do so. Nope, I am talking about the estimated one million Chinese residents actively participating in gold farming. The Chinese aren't the only ones to do it, of course – it's just a handy statistic that I had lying around the dusty recesses of my brain: one million people. That's a lot of activity in what the game publishers think is not a good idea.

The statistic comes from the www.eurogamer.net Website, who are doing, at the time of writing, an investigation into the world of real money trading in virtual worlds. As a matter of fact, the next figure they threw out was even more astounding. Estimates of the value of real money trading activities like gold farming are around the $10 billion mark. Ten billion dollars... That's a massive amount of money in anyone's book, and it is being generated by 'black market' activities.

Insider sources say that around one third of all MMO players buy in-game currency with real cash. That figure leads to two conclusions. The first is that one third of all MMO players are not only pasty-faced shadow dwellers, but are also lazy underachievers who would rather spend money to (essentially) cheat than try to take the more rewarding route. The second is that gold farming is a lucrative business.

A question regarding the legitimisation of real money transactions was raised (obviously by an insider involved in such activities). It ain't gonna happen, and with good reason. It's not because they can't control it properly, or because they don't get the money it generates, it's because two thirds of the people out there don't want their level twenty-seven million character trashed by some newcomer who spent enough real cash to be able to afford the Awesome Armour of I'm Gonna Bust You in Two +100 vs. Everything. The publishers are trying to protect the experience of those who want to play the game legitimately – those who want to experience the game as it was intended.

It's a matter of pride in their work... something that your average gold paddy worker probably doesn't have a lot of. Still, he probably drives a Ferrari. **NAG**

> Socialising through games – it's **sort of like masturbating and then telling all your buddies you had a threesome** with a couple of Norwegian twins.

I. GAMER

BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

Class-A pixel fix

GAMES HAVE, FOR YEARS, been my escape from reality. While that sentence seems trite considering the rise in popularity of gaming, I still use it but often have to emphasise the keyword in it: escape. Ultimately, that's what I'm doing. I'm not playing a game to kill a few hours; I'm diving head first into a game in a deliberate attempt to wrench my conscience from reality. If you look at it like that, then I suppose you could consider it my drug.

With drug abuse, the effect tends to become so desirable that reality begins to be unbearable (fortunately I'm not writing while in a drug-addled condition). This can lead to forms of depression, as the fix cannot continually ward off the reality the individual is trying so desperately to escape from. Having always maintained that gaming was a safe way of detaching from reality, I was surprised when something similar happened to me. It began when I picked up a copy of *Mirror's Edge*.

Mirror's Edge depresses me. I don't mean that it depresses me because it somehow failed to live up to expectations – quite the opposite actually: I had no expectations and the hype for it was relatively low-key, which aided my lack of generated preconceptions. I love the game. I think it is something refreshing; a new IP in a hackneyed run of sequels that the industry seems intent on spewing out. Above all, *Mirror's Edge* has what I am constantly looking for when it comes to gaming: immersion. If a game has that immersive quality, it means that the desired effect of escaping reality is made that much more forceful. *Mirror's Edge* increases its immersion by using a first-person perspective intended to imitate a physical body in a 3D world. For me, however, that is just the surface immersion – countless games have done that before. There is a far more compelling reason to get sucked into the game.

The city, the colours, the music and the characters all combine to create an attractive offering of set pieces that form a believable and desirable world. Yes, other games have done the same (*Shadow of the Colossus*, *Oblivion* and *Mass Effect* all spring to mind), but there is something about *Mirror's Edge* that sets it apart from the aforementioned titles: feasibility. The setting, plot and core premise of runners transporting information in a strongly monitored future are all possible; they're believable. There are no zombies, aliens or night elf priestesses that require the player to have a willing suspension of disbelief. With *Mirror's Edge*, I found myself getting seamlessly sucked into the world and caught up in the environment; I fell in love with the city and the dichotomy of 'free-running' in a highly monitored and censored society.

People are naturally drawn to what is aesthetically appealing, so as daft as it sounds I would love nothing better than to live in that city with its clean-cut, minimalist style. And it was in making that affirmation that the depressing side of things came through: it's not real. None of it is. In the end, we still have to turn off the power and head back to our jobs, stresses and dramas of real life.

I know I'm not the only gamer who has experienced this bizarre side effect of deep immersion. I think it is the feasibility – coupled with the highly appealing look and feel of *Mirror's Edge* - that makes it all the more potent. The longer I think about it, the more I find myself becoming attached to the game. For some time, there has been a debate as to whether or not games are a form of art. If art is meant to awaken some sort of emotion based on what is presented to you on an aesthetic level, then I unequivocally consider *Mirror's Edge* to be a work of art. The bright and contrasting colours in the city of *Mirror's Edge*, while utilised in the game to show you the route you're meant to take, rather seem to highlight the obscene mundanity of our everyday lives. It seems as if developers are pushing to make more realistic games that imitate life, but here I am left wishing that life would imitate games. As games become more and more immersive, they also become more heartbreaking by showing us just how monotonous our lives really are. **NAG**

> Above all, Mirror's Edge has what I am constantly looking for when it comes to gaming: immersion. **If a game has that immersive quality, it means that the desired effect of escaping reality is made that much more forceful.**

ASSASSIN'S CREED II ™

ASSASSIN'S CREED **INTRODUCED THE** player to a world full of intrigue and hidden violence. Set in massive cities around the time of the First Crusade, the player took on the part of an assassin working to recover a powerful mystical device. With absolute skill and a wide array of tools and abilities, the player could move through the cities in any way they wanted, scaling tall towers and walls or skulking in back alleys – all the while researching and stalking their intended targets. The game allowed players an immense amount of freedom, and presented a world full of hidden challenges and discoverable objects.

But the game was deeper than that. The player's character was actually a descendant of a long line of assassins, subjected to a special process to uncover his genetic memory. The story will continue in the next instalment of *Assassin's Creed*, which introduces the player to yet another ancestor. The action moves from the Middle East to Renaissance Italy, and the player will have access to a host of new skills and weapons with which to terminate the lives of their many targets. In *Assassin's Creed 2*, just like before, the game promises a deep and intriguing story. We nailed down an exclusive interview with Sébastien Puel, producer on *Assassin's Creed 2*.

Could you introduce yourself and explain your role in the project?
"My name is Sébastien Puel. I am the producer on *Assassin's Creed 2*. My role is to manage the production team and to ship the best game."

On which platforms will *Assassin's Creed 2* be available?
"*Assassin's Creed 2* will be available on PS3, Xbox 360, PC and also on PSP. I am in charge of the PC, 360 and PS3 versions. *Assassin's Creed 2* will be released during Holiday 2009."
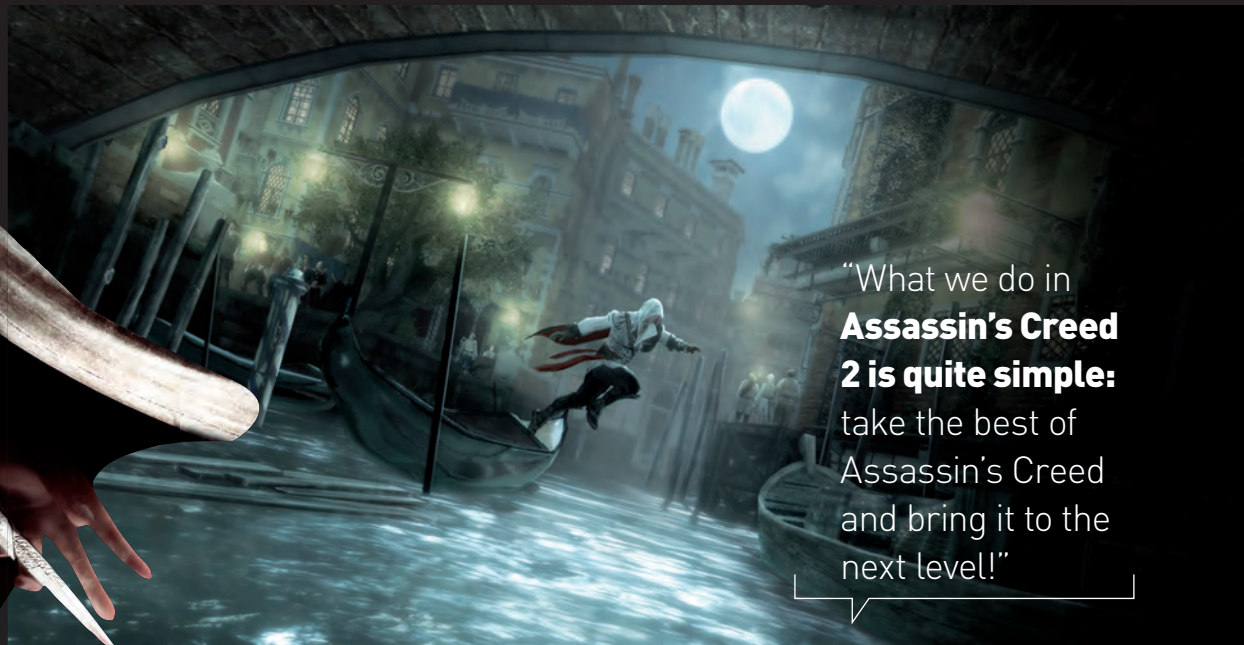
"What we do in **Assassin's Creed 2 is quite simple:** take the best of Assassin's Creed and bring it to the next level!"

Who is in charge of the development?
"The game is mainly developed by Ubisoft Montreal on PS3, 360 and PC and more than 300 people are currently working on the project."

How is *Assassin's Creed* linked with *Assassin's Creed 2*?
"*Assassin's Creed 2* is the direct sequel of *Assassin's Creed*. So, of course, there are many similarities, but the team is working very hard on increasing the overall scope of the game structure and on adding more depth and variety to the core Assassin's Creed gameplay. Apart from that, there are many other links with *Assassin's Creed*. We are using the Scimitar/Anvil development engine that was conceived for the first *Assassin's Creed* and used for other games such as *Prince of Persia*

and *Shaun White Snowboarding*. Also, we have a technical team working hard on upgrading and adding new features to Anvil. Through the years of working with this engine, we have gained a great deal of knowledge and experience.

The game features a huge interactive world, this time set in another era - the Italian Renaissance. You play not only as an assassin, but also as a young Italian nobleman seeking to uncover the truth. There is also a great deal of elements that we are improving that are the fundaments of the *Assassin's Creed* brand: freedom, crowd behaviour, fluid animations, intense combat, free-running, blending, memorable assassinations, detailed realistic settings..."

What new things can we expect in

Assassin's Creed 2 **that distinguishes the experience from the one we enjoyed in** *Assassin's Creed*? **What are your ambitions behind one of the biggest (and still young) franchises in the videogame industry?**
"What we do in *Assassin's Creed 2* is quite simple: take the best of *Assassin's Creed* and bring it to the next level! *Assassin's Creed* was an astonishing experience; I believe it brought entirely new elements to the industry, allowing players to fluidly navigate an urban environment while enjoying visual perfection and quality of control. It immersed players in a believable and mature experience inspired by historical events, while recreating a rich and believable crowd that was only possible on this generation of consoles. Of course, we will keep and

improve on all those elements: even more gorgeous city landscapes, more animations, a captivating and epic story, more ways to interact with the crowd... But our main focus is on diversity in each aspect of the game: more variety in missions and objectives, more variety in gameplay, more weapons, more diverse assassinations, deep character progressions, etc. These will all help to make the experience evolve through the game. We really want *Assassin's Creed 2* to be unpredictable and have the player wonder after each main assassination, 'And now, what's next?'"

What is the storyline of the game?

"To help the assassins in their quest, Desmond will be exploring his DNA to find another ancestor's memory: Ezio Auditore Di Firenze, a nobleman who lived at the end of the 15th Century in Italy. Betrayed by the ruling families of Italy, Ezio embarks upon an epic quest for vengeance. To his allies, he will become a force for change - fighting for freedom and justice. To his enemies, he will become a bogeyman – dedicated to the destruction of the tyrants abusing the people of Italy. On his quest for vengeance, Ezio – and Desmond, through Ezio's story – will uncover a much bigger plot: a conspiracy rooted in *Assassin's Creed* and that still impacts the world of Desmond – our very world."

Why did you choose the Italian Renaissance as the next setting for *Assassin's Creed*?

"When we defined the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, we knew we wanted to talk about pivotal periods in history: the moments where everything changed, which defined the world in which we are living today. That was exactly the case with the first Crusade: this period defined the balance of power between Civilization and Religion for the centuries to come.

So, when we started *Assassin's Creed 2*, we asked ourselves the same question, 'What is the next defining moment in history?' The answer was pretty easy to find: in a few years and in a very small place, a handful of men of genius radically changed **everything**. They invented a modern vision of the world, where men were at the centre rather than God. They invented a new way of representing the world (the invention of perspective), they changed politics, architecture, the art of modern war and diplomacy – they invented the banking system as we know it and even advertising! One man even invented planes, the helicopter and tanks! Those men were Botticelli, Machiavelli, Leonardo da Vinci and the Medici. The place is Italy. The time was the end of the 15th century and it is called Renaissance, literally a Rebirth. This is the history as we learnt it. But those were also cruel times, ruled by war, treason and murder! Of course, we found it very interesting to picture this in an *Assassin's Creed* game and cast a new light on those astonishing events."

What can you tell us about the art style of the game and the general

visual experience the game will offer in bringing the 15th century Italian Renaissance to life?

"Visual quality and accuracy in the look and feel of the period are a big part of the franchise. From a strict technical point of view, we have the chance to work with great tools – and the best thing is that we also improved on this side since *Assassin's Creed*. *Assassin's Creed 2* will feature better lighting and even more detailed environments than *Assassin's Creed*. But certainly, the most important thing is that we are now playing with some of the world's most beautiful urban environments: Venice, Florence, Tuscany are all a real treat for the eyes in 3D just as in real life. Our art team managed to perfectly render not only the streets, houses, water canals and beautiful palaces of those cities, but also the unique mood and light of Italian cities of the 15th century. Walking at night alone in the maze of streets that defines Venice is a real fantasy come true... Now, exploring Venice will be possible directly from your living room. *Assassin's Creed 2* presents us with a new protagonist. We see that Ezio has a new appearance and probably a much different personality, since he is not from the same era.

> When we played the first Assasins Creed we thought, hey, this game needs more whores, and now our prayers have been answered!

What have been your inspirations behind the design of Ezio?

The Assassin's brotherhood lives on. Its creed remains timeless, although its members change over time. Ezio is, at first glance, a young Renaissance nobleman, but Assassin's blood flows through his veins. Like Altair, he is mysterious and has extraordinary natural talents; he is the master of his emotions and is very efficient in the art of killing. But at the same time, Ezio is made of his own past: he is well mannered, and able to interact with all different classes of society. As he is Italian, we also wanted to give him a special... inclination for women: he is a seducer. But most importantly, Ezio is someone marked by fate: the decadence of his powerful family certainly plays a great role in the man he becomes. Ezio's quest will first be driven by vengeance, a strong will to retaliate against the ones who were responsible for the fate of his once prosperous family. This honourable will to avenge his loved ones will lead him to unknown territory and something much bigger than his own quest for vengeance and justice..."
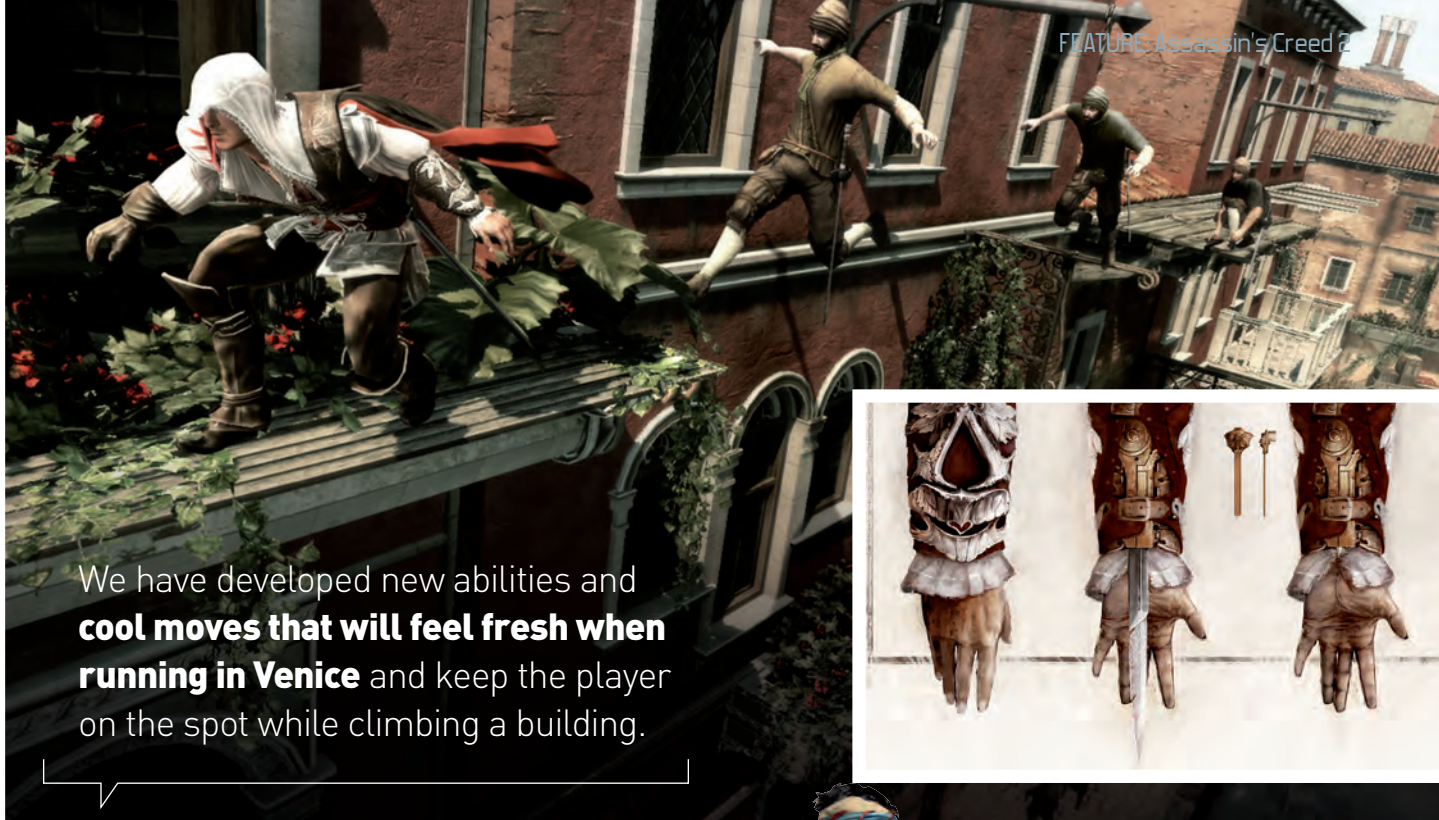
We have developed new abilities and **cool moves that will feel fresh when running in Venice** and keep the player on the spot while climbing a building.
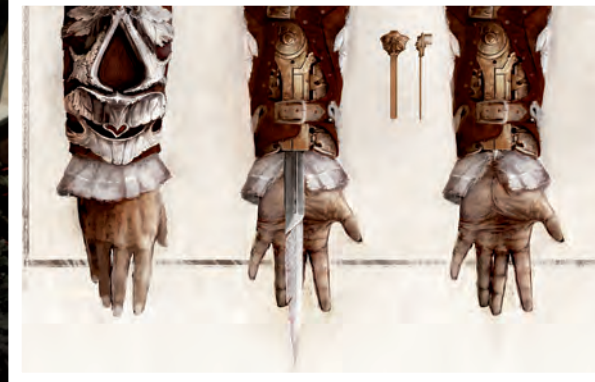
Can you describe some of the new skills and movements that will make Ezio a masterful assassin?

"Ezio will have a whole new set of aptitudes in different fields – to navigate the world, to stay out of sight, to fight and to assassinate. In terms of navigation, we, of course, wanted to adapt the main character to the new environments in the second game. Since a good part of the action takes place in Venice, Ezio is able to dive and swim. Expect to be able to strategically use those new skills to your advantage for various missions. Ezio will also have the possibility to blend into any kind of group of citizens in the crowd, making the navigation all the more fun and believable. Also, he won't have to be static in a group: players will be able to move in a group while blended and really roam around the city from one group of people to another. The crowd was a central element in *Assassin's Creed*, and for the second game, we really want the players to feel that every NPC is an opportunity. The free running in the cities is more fun and fluid than ever. We have developed new abilities and cool moves that will feel fresh when running in Venice and keep the player on the spot while climbing a building. The new 'climb leap' move

gives the player the opportunity to launch himself a couple of metres high in the air while climbing a vertical building to reach a higher ledge that would be inaccessible without this move.

Many new skills concern the fighting system – without naming all the new possible moves, Ezio can master a great amount of weapons: long pikes, axes and war hammers to name just a few. As those are heavy weapons, Ezio won't have to carry them all the time: he will now be able to disarm his enemies and leave his weapons behind. Since Ezio will not be carrying a weapon at all times - apart from his hidden blade and throwing knives - he needs to be able to use his hands more efficiently when fighting. Therefore, Ezio will be able to fight using his bare hands against enemies any time in the game and perform various punches, kicks, grab movements, head butts... One hidden blade is fun but two are better. This time, Ezio will have one hidden blade on each arm. The main hidden blade will be on his left arm and the secondary hidden blade on his right arm. Imagine all the possibilities in new assassination
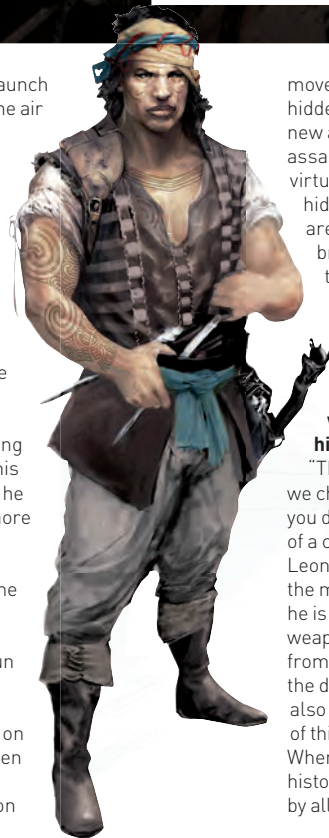
moves, counters and upgrades using two hidden blades. Finally, we added a lot of new assassination moves – Ezio is able to assassinate, with a specific move, from virtually anywhere in the city: from roofs, hiding spots, water, ledges, etc... These are just but a few of the new skills Ezio brings to the table. He has many more tricks up his sleeve..."

The Renaissance is famous for having been the crucible for some of the most talented and renowned figures in history. Will we be able to meet some of those historical figures?

"This was one of the main reasons why we chose the Renaissance and Italy. When you decide to go there, you've got a hell of a cast and lots of information on them! Leonardo da Vinci, for instance, is one of the main secondary characters. For Ezio he is at the same time a mentor and a weapon crafter. Expect some surprises from this genius mind, one example being the double hidden blade. The player will also be able to meet some of the legends of this time: the Medici, Machiavelli... When doing our research on these historical characters, we were fascinated by all the cool stories we could tell about
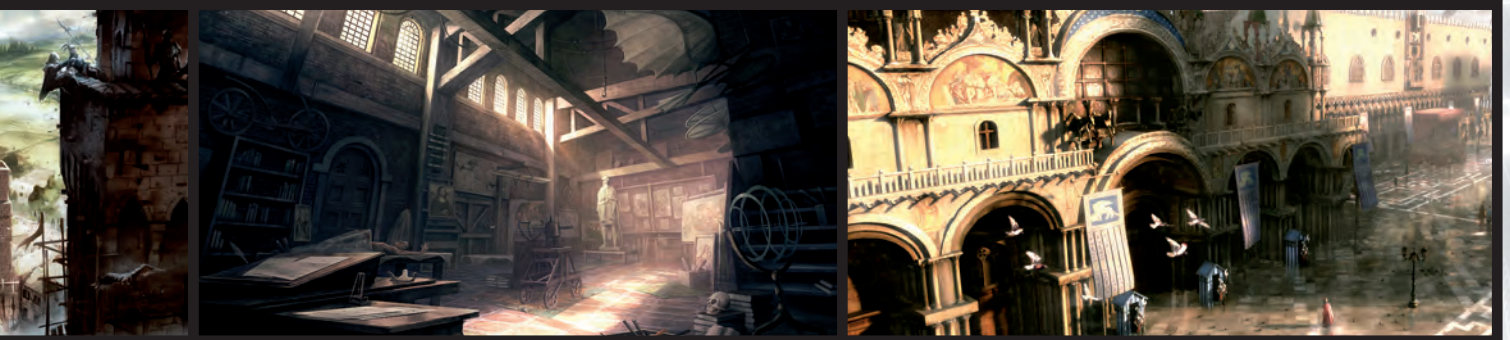
them and how we could use recorded facts and tweak them so that it suits our story very well. We want the players to learn about these characters and specific sides of them, both factual and fictional. We are proud to say that the *Assassin's Creed* franchise is one of the rare games that can serve as an excellent source of information and knowledge for a historical period. The Renaissance is much richer in terms of archived information over the Middle Ages, and we could really push our research to make the best story possible with many historical characters."

The entire gameplay/mission structure in *Assassin's Creed* was semi-linear and kept the same structure through the nine assassinations. Will *Assassin's Creed 2* feature more missions and a wider variety in the structure and how the story unfolds?
"The game structure and the mission system were the most central elements for us to improve. We are redefining the mission gameplay structure to give gamers a more enjoyable and rewarding experience. Here are the three major points we will modify:

- The variety/number of available missions;
- The number of mission givers; and
- How the story and the missions unfold to the player.

We are now telling a story in a way that is intended to be very unpredictable. There are no more 'X assassinations' to perform, but a story that develops through a great amount of mission givers. Some will give you an assassination mission, others an intimidation or information-gathering mission, etc... There is no limit now to the types of challenges we can give to players. We are very careful in creating a lot of variation in the types of gameplay and pace we are proposing. But we also want the player to have real freedom and an opportunity to explore and 'use' the world we have created. Cities are now filled with a great amount of missions that the player

can do if he chooses so: for instance, you can now decide to get rid of witnesses if you feel you are getting too famous after a not-so-stealthy assassination, or help thieves pursued by guards. Each of these tasks is optional, but will bring you interesting rewards if you accept to fulfil them."

Crowd interaction was one the main features of *Assassin's Creed*. How will you improve the crowd interaction for the second game, and the role of the NPCs for blending/stealth/attack?
"In *Assassin's Creed 2*, you have been betrayed by the ruling Italian Families. You will have to learn how to interact and use the 'common people' or, like we call them in the game, 'the underworld', to get your revenge. So, you can generally consider that the crowd is on your side (except of course if you behave too badly!). First, any crowd NPC can help you to hide: just go into a group and press the blend button to enter a crowd and lower your chances of being noticed by guards. The crowd can help you to 'stealth' through the city, but this isn't 100% stealth proof: guards have various awareness levels depending of their class. We have also added a new 'notoriety system' where your actions in the city will affect your notoriety and how you are 'wanted' in the city. You will get more updates on the 'notoriety system' soon. There are many other features in the game related to the use of the crowd, and we will definitely reveal more in the coming months."

Have you implemented any new forms of less traditional gameplay?
"For *Assassin's Creed 2*, there will be various new types of gameplay to break and vary the flow of the game and add intense 'wow' moments: one of them involves a certain flying machine that Leonardo da Vinci conceptualised and developed. Ezio will be able to launch himself from a high point in the air, flying around the city to reach specific location quickly and with the effect of surprise. Travelling with the flying machine will require precision and timing." **NAG**

Developer→ Slightly Mad Studios   **Publisher→** Electronic Arts   **Web→** www.needforspeed.com   **Release Date→** September 2009

Flaming exhausts - they make your car go faster.

HANDS ON

Need for Speed: Shift

It's a Shift away from being pretty crappy

Genre→ Racing Simulator

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

GAMING FRANCHISES CAN BE wonderful things. They bring comfort and familiarity to those who play them and provide the publishers and developers with loyal customers and word-of-mouth marketing. Unfortunately, they also have the habit of breeding laziness and intellectual stagnation, as developers stop experimenting – instead resigning themselves to pump out game after game to satisfy the masses – which is the sad story of the 16-strong *Need for Speed* series. Things are about to change, however, with *Need for Speed: Shift*. If you haven't been following the news, EA has taken a hard look at its slowing *NFS* series and decided to slice it into three. *World Online* will be a persistent MMO, *Nitro* is destined for the Wii and DS and will focus on the casual market, and *Shift* is here to take over where *Undercover* left off. Long-time developers EA Black Box are almost completely out of the picture now, with the development handed over to UK-based Slightly Mad Studios. While Black Box is still kept around for consulting purposes and a couple of technical issues here and there, *GTR* developers Slightly Mad have total control over this new take on the *Need for Speed* series. They've gone all-out to ensure that *Shift* returns *NFS* to its roots while still delivering an exciting experience for those gamers who only joined in during the *Underground* era.

Those roots, you'll discover by looking around these pages, are firmly planted on the racetrack. Gone are the days of speeding around an open-world city environment, pulling up side a pimped-out muscle car and honking the horn for a quick dice through the urban jungle. All races will take place in enclosed environments on either an official racetrack or cordoned off sections of the city (with a few fantasy tracks to keep things interesting). That's not to say that Slightly Mad is abandoning all the *NFS* mainstays built up over the years - far from it, in fact. Players will still be able to upgrade their cars to their hearts' content, fitting body kits, custom wheels, spoilers, fancy headlights and all the other bits and pieces you'd expect. The difference here is that all of those external modifications actually mean something now – they'll have a direct effect on the car's performance, handling, weight and aerodynamics.

The developers aren't content to simply combine the old with the new,

Feeling daring? Lose the traction control and drift all the way to the finish line.

The difference here is that **all of those external modifications actually** mean something now

however: they're ensuring that their three custom-built engines (one for each platform, although the graphics will be identical) are pushed to their absolute limits, delivering breathtaking visuals up front and complex precision physics behind the scenes. One particular sticking point they've had with previous racing simulators (their own included) is that it's not enough to make a game like this difficult - it has to be convincing. In the real world, drivers have tactile feedback: their bodies feel the G-forces during a sharp turn and their butts on the seats feel the road grumbling away beneath them. To bring this concept into the game, Slightly Mad has put a physics-enabled driver into the seat and attached the in-cockpit camera to its head. Now the player can freely look around the highly detailed and painstakingly recreated interior of the cars, get shoved around

during the more violent driving sessions and have their heads loll about during a crash. You'll be able to watch your driver shift gears, press the pedals, flex his fingers during calmer moments and tense up on the steering wheel in the heat of a race. Best of all, you'll be able to witness first-hand your customisation handiwork on the inside of the car. Fitting that expensive MOMO steering wheel or stripping your seats to save weight will be visually represented whenever you climb inside to race.

Those who love to see a $500,000 car thrown around the track will also be pleased. *Shift* includes a dynamic damage model for all cars that is guaranteed to leave you satisfied. Each car can be smashed, crashed and trashed to a point of near failure. Cars will actually take mechanical damage if they're thumped around too much, but thankfully can never

Hey, that guy didn't do his three-point check!

be completely wrecked so as to disqualify you from finishing the race. If this is all sounding a little too harsh for you, and you're starting to think you'd much rather go back to the arcade-style of *NFS* of old, don't panic. Slightly Mad is ensuring that each player can find their perfect balance between gameplay challenge and the rewarding feeling of cruising past that last corner in Brands Hatch to take the gold. There will be three difficulty levels, each customisable, to offer players the opportunity to toggle various assists like traction control and race-line guidance, with only the truly hardcore (or crazy) opting for Pro Mode. While we've been assured that the physics system is capable of being 100% 'real-world' accurate, the developers have toned it down a touch to ensure that you don't need twenty years of training to fully enjoy this title.

After recently having had a chance to play this gem, albeit it in pre-Alpha form, we can say that if things keep up like this, *Shift* just might be the title to put the rest of the *NFS* series to shame. While most of the previous titles in the series were lots of fun, the time for over-the-top street racing has passed. The series is reaching a point of maturity with *Shift*, and it's a point that players from across the board will enjoy. Most of what has made recent *NFS* games fun is still around, and almost everything that made them boring is gone. If you're on the lookout for a stylish, mature racing game to rival the likes of *Gran Turismo*, *Forza* and *Project Gotham Racing*, keep an eye on *Shift* – it's due out in September and might just be the game to convince you that the in-cockpit view is the only way to play a racing game (and that it might be time to get that steering wheel). **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

BE BIONIC

BIONIC COMMANDO
www.bioniccommando.com
AVAILABLE END MAY

Developer→ Grin **Publisher→** Capcom **Web→** www.bioniccommando.com **Release Date→** May 2009

This is not the best way to exit an aircraft. Unless, of course, you have a bionic arm with the optional grappling hook attachment and boots made of iron.

Bionic Commando

It's like Spider-Man, but with less spandex and more dreadlocks/rocket launchers

HANDS ON

Genre→ Action Adventure

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

NATHAN "RAD" SPENCER DOESN'T have a lot going for him at the start of *Bionic Commando*. He's due to be executed for crimes that he only committed because he was following the orders given to him by his commanding officers (to put it bluntly: his government betrayed him and denied ever having had any involvement with Spencer).

Thankfully, his luck is about to change. This new title is a direct sequel to the NES game of the same name and takes place ten years after that match-up against the Badds/Nazzs (read: Nazis, because we all know they were really Nazis) and Master-D (read: Hitler, because we all know he was really Hitler). Given that the original NES title was remade in the form of *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*, those of you who played that title will know exactly what's going on here. It's an almost indecipherable mess of facts, but it all sort of makes sense once you put it all together.

Bionic Commando sees Spencer pardoned for his "crimes" following a massive catastrophe that befalls Ascension City, leaving the city devastated and destroyed. Naturally, all the debris that remains results in the perfect playground for those with bionic appendages that have grappling hooks on the end of them. Spencer is called in by an old friend/war buddy, Superintendent Joseph Gibson, better known as Super Joe from the original titles. A group of pro-bionic terrorists known as BioReign are found to be responsible for the Ascension City incident, and Spencer is sent in to assess the situation. All these plot points set

the stage for what is looking to be an amazingly enjoyable experience.

Bionic Commando charges players with taking control of Nathan Spencer on his quest for redemption and dishing out as many 'ass-kickings' as possible. Spencer, who lost his arm following an unfortunate accident involving a grenade and lots of shrapnel, was one of the first soldiers to be fitted with a bionic appendage and survive the operation. When he's 'one' with his beloved bionic bits, he has access to some pretty amazing abilities. His bionic arm is fitted with a grappling hook that can be used to swing from location to location. The arm is also incredibly useful for grabbing enemies and tossing

Hopefully the interior environments will provide lots of space to monkey around in

them around, or for snatching up objects and hurling them at anyone standing in Spencer's way. At the start of the preview code we received for the game, Spencer is airdropped into a building in Ascension City and initially doesn't have access to his bionic arm.

The game tasks you with finding Spencer's lost appendage and so, armed with a Tungsten semi-automatic pistol, Spencer sets off to locate his arm, while players can use this opportunity to learn the basic controls of the game. The opening section of the preview code had us shooting BioReign grunts to ease us into the experience. It was also during this time that we learnt of the challenge/rewards

Ascension City is looking to provide an amazing playground for thrillseekers like Nathan Spencer
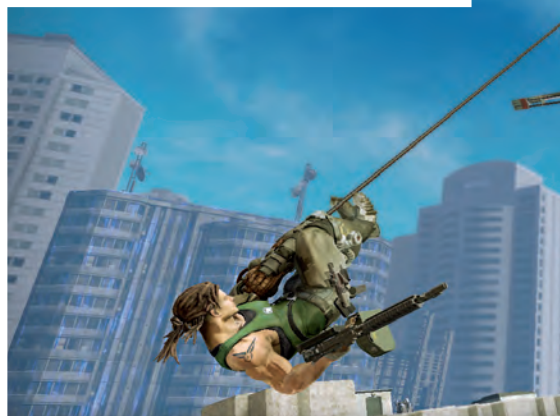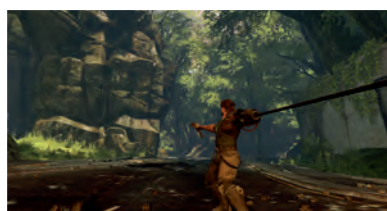
When he's 'one' with his beloved bionic bits, **he has access to some pretty amazing abilities.**

system, which is basically an in-game achievement system that offers rewards for performing certain tasks. For example, one of the early challenges encourages you to kill an enemy while zoomed in, which rewards you with decreased bullet spread while zoomed in with the Tungsten. It's an interesting way of encouraging players to spend more time with the game, since completing some of these challenges requires a bit of work.

Once you get your hands on the bionic arm, the game really opens up. Following a short tutorial sequence, players are unleashed into the ruined Ascension City to clean up the mess that BioReign have brought upon it. It's here that Spencer's abilities become clear, as you swing from lampposts and bits of metal protruding from partially destroyed buildings.

From what we experienced of the game, the controls are sure to take some getting used to, but once you get the hang of it, you'll be swinging through the streets of Ascension City at breakneck speeds and hardly ever letting your iron boots touch the ground. Yes, Spencer has iron boots and they're a huge help, since they prevent Spencer from taking damage after falling from insane heights.

Scattered throughout the city are collectables, which serve to encourage exploration, if you're into that sort of thing. It looks as though the game will follow a linear path, but each area in the game has an open-ended structure that'll allow players to explore all the intricacies of the area that they're currently in. Most of the objectives in the sections that we played

Swinging with friends

Bionic Commando features an interesting multiplayer experience, thanks to the inclusion of the grappling hook and all the other abilities that the bionic arm provides. Multiplayer modes come in the form of Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Capture the Flag game modes. Playable over Xbox LIVE or system link, the maps provided by the multiplayer all provide Spider-Man wannabes with plenty of random environmental objects from which to swing, fall and suicide.

BOOM! Headshot!

through were relatively straightforward: start at point A and make your way to point B, where you will need to hack into an enemy "relay" in order for your commander to either get a lock on your location or to learn more about what the BioReign are up to by checking out the files stored within each relay. Hacking these relays is also a major help, since it allows your commander to send drop-pods containing new weapons to your location. Completing these objectives required some finesse at times, since certain areas of the game are littered with formidable foes: snipers camped out on the rooftops of buildings, grunts that will swarm Spencer en masse and large mechanised suits of armour with very few weak spots.

In addition to the standard enemies, there are also a few environmental hazards to avoid. Parts of the city are highly radioactive and Spencer will have to avoid moving too close to these radioactive zones. Bodies of water pose a problem: if Spencer lands in one of them, he'll sink to the bottom like only a man with a heavy mechanical arm could. Floating mines are also a threat to carefree swingers.

The time that we had with the preview code proved to be immensely enjoyable and surprisingly bug free. Bionic Commando probably isn't going to be the most complex game out there, but it sure does seem as though it's going to be a truckload of fun. Since that's the reason we all play games in the first place, we can wholeheartedly recommend that you keep a close eye on this one. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Reviewers

While it may not be common knowledge to most people, many of the iconic '80s cartoon heroes (and villains) were in fact inspired by the *NAG* staff. How is this possible, you ask? Time travel, of course.

Miktar Dracon:
When Miktar isn't busy lamenting the loss of the "gamer ethos," he's leading his rag-tag band of merry dinosaurs in hot pursuit of that other group of dinosaurs. Secretly, Miktar and his dinosaurs wish they were also a rock band.

Walt Pretorius:
Defending Eternia from the skeletal clutches of Skeletor is hard work, one that Walt accomplishes with feats of great strength, great hair and dubious sexuality. Walt also denied Miktar's request to marry Kringer.

Dane Remendes:
Being from Mars isn't easy, but somehow Dane makes it through each day. Some would say it's his fetish for tight jeans and motorbikes that keeps Dane's tenuous grip on reality firm. Rumour has it Dane likes to hang out with mutant turtles.
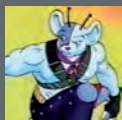
Tarryn van der Byl:
Tarryn is outrageous. Truly, truly outrageous. She's also excitement. As the lead singer for her glamorous glam-rock heavy-metal Swedish band, Tarryn travels the world and fights crime using only lipstick and a magic mirror.
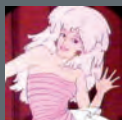
Chris Bistline:
Imbued with enough magic to flatten a medium-sized city into something resembling grey mush, Chris has a habit of transporting kids into far-flung magical realms, then giving them a unicorn just to **** with their heads.
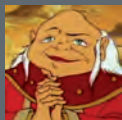
Michael James:
In his quest to teach the youth of today the finer points of socialism (and how to make do with only one female per thirty males), Michael is the most badass smurfing smurfer this side of the smurfing village.

Adam Liebman: He's steering us to the future! Oh, and trying to find his father. For the most part, Adam is involved in one of the most intricate and detailed story arcs to ever grace the television screen, but kids would rather watch Walt flex.
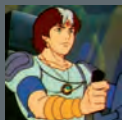
Geoff Burrows:
Using the power of the Ted Turner Turing Machine, Geoff is the result of the focused amalgamate hopes and dreams of several children around the world who've got nothing better to do than save the planet from toxic waste.

Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Score

Breaking down the box

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

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

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

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

AGE RATING: Let's see some ID, son

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

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

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

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

What We're Playing

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

#	GAME NAME
1	Quake III Clan Arena
2	Team Fortress 2
3	Resident Evil 5
4	Call of Duty: World at War MP & Zombies
5	Magic: The Gathering
6	Afro Samurai
7	Battlefield Heroes
8	Empire: Total War
9	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
10	Fallout 3
11	GTA: Chinatown Wars
12	Mario Kart Wii
13	Midnight Club: Los Angeles
14	Peggle
15	Penny Arcade Adventures Episode 1
16	RACE Pro
17	Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
18	Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.
19	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
20	World of Goo

Distributors

Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
Asbis	[011] 848-7000
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Comztek	0860 600 557
Core Group	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640
Drive Control Corporation	[011] 201-8927
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
Esquire	0861 700 000
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817
Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Megarom	[011] 361-4800
Microsoft	0860 225 567
MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
MobileG	[021] 982-4606
Ne14 Solutions	[082] 490-1510
Nology	[012] 657-1317
Nu Metro	[011] 280-3000
Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Rectron	[011] 203-1000
Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Ster-Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7700
Syntech	0861 274 244
TVR	[011] 807-1390

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

Web Scores

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

NAG // Metacritic // *Game Rankings*

RIDDICK: ASSUALT ON DARK ATHENA

360 — 85 / 82 / 83

TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.

360 — 79 / 73 / 75

RESIDENT EVIL 5

360 — 86 / 86 / 86

WHEELMAN

360 — 71 / 66 / 67

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

DS — 89 / 95 / 94

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! PATH OF THE FURON

PS3 — 50 / 22 / 27

WWE LEGENDS OF WRESTLEMANIA

PS3 — 59 / 72 / 75

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

Right! Grab his sack and pull hard!

Resident Evil 5

Go for the eyes Chris, the eyes!

Genre→ Action Adventure

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THE *RESIDENT EVIL* SERIES has come a long way. From the original PlayStation days of static camera angles, late-night scare sessions and creaking floorboards, through three generations (and three movies) and finally arriving here, at *Resident Evil 5*; to deliver not only the most action-packed game in the series, but also the title that pulls back the storyline's veil further than ever before.

Veteran players of the series will once again have a chance to face terror through the eyes of Chris Redfield – *RE 1*'s hero. While doubling up on player heroes/ heroines is nothing new to the series, never before has the second player character - in this case Sheva Aloma - been this powerful and this present. *Resident Evil 5* has been built from the ground up as a two-player experience (with the AI taking over in the absence of a trustworthy friend), and Sheva will only ever leave Chris's side for a couple of puzzles.

In this next slice of the *Evil* pie, Chris and Sheva are dispatched to the fictional central African region of Kijuju. Their organisation, the BSAA, has been keeping an eye on the rise in terrorist activity and the use of biological weaponry since Umbrella's closure a few years earlier. There the two will meet up with old friends, enemies, monsters, and the small matter of a little virus and its origin. The game follows on from the events in *Resident Evil 4*, with the Las Plagas infestation, which was first encountered by Leon Kennedy in Spain, now on the loose in Africa and creating all sorts of nastiness for the BSAA to deal with. Chris

and Sheva will journey through dust- and sun-swept shantytowns, derelict mines and further than ever before into the history of Las Plagas, the T-Virus and its derivatives, and the original bugger that started all of this nonsense – the Progenitor Virus.

Where *Resident Evil 4* broke away from the norm, offering players a fully-3D mechanism for exploration and combat, simplified puzzles and zombies that have figured out that tossing a scythe at the nearest face tends to hurt people, *RE 5* takes these concepts to the next level. Something that you should be aware of: *RE 5* is an action game with thriller elements, not a survival horror. Like its predecessor, the game makes sure that you have plenty of ammunition (if you're careful), tons of weaponry to choose from and an array of movement and combat abilities to keep you on the move. The game's pace shifts at an

eerily uncertain rate between all-out chaos and unsettling calm, interspersed with quick time events just in case you thought it'd be safe to put down the controller during cut-scenes. Chris and Sheva could be swamped by dozens of Majini (the African equivalent of Las Plagas), many of which are armed to the teeth with all manner of farming implements and the occasional crossbow (some flaming), one minute only to remain unhindered at length, free to explore an ancient ruined temple for hidden treasures. While the game tends to adopt a formulaic approach to triggering the next wave of attackers ("Don't pull that lever yet! Don't open that chest!"), it manages to keep players on their toes by varying it just enough to ensure that you never have complete confidence in your next move.

To help along this action-orientated approach to gameplay, many elements

from *RE 4* return in a streamlined, simplified way. You won't encounter that creepy, wandering merchant anymore, and Chris and Sheva will be able to buy, sell and upgrade their looted weapons and trinkets between each chapter and in the event of death. While the system is certainly a little on the convenient side and does no good for gameplay immersion, it does allow for some strategic thinking when loading up your very limited inventory in preparation for a tough-to-crack boss battle or any other particularly challenging part of the game. Collectable treasures have returned, yielding a tidy profit for anyone with the patience or skill required to explore the beautifully-detailed game world to its fullest.

Arguably the biggest sticking point for traditionalists is the control system. It's certainly different from all in the series bar *RE 4*, and does take some getting used to. However, once you've figured out which of the four predefined, customisable control schemes you're most comfortable with, the game quickly pushes you into the fray, forcing you to figure things out or suffer the humiliating wrath of *RE 5*'s death screen. Until you

realise that the quickest way to take down that screaming Majini is with the chainsaw (I wish I was kidding). If things are looking a little grim in the ammunition department, which does tend to happen in the earlier parts of the game, be sure to target vital body parts instead of just "shootin' dem folk", then move in for a close-quarters finishing move that is guaranteed to leave you feeling satisfied. This is one of the greatest feats *RE 5* manages to perform – it always ensures that you're fighting new enemies, many of which are utterly terrifying on first encounter, and figuring out the best way to kill them. There is no single strategy for dealing with the Majini and their friends; each opponent requires careful thinking and often trial and error to determine the best method for an expedient and ammunition-conscience death.

For those who like their games to look as well as they play, *Resident Evil 5* will certainly be your cup of tea. Arguably one of the best-looking titles on the market right now, it fills the screen with lush visuals and incredibly believable animations for the player characters and their many opponents. Insect-like Bukichwa limp along on

The after party

Once you've completed the more or less 15 hours of gameplay (not including the endless time you'll spend messing around in pre-mission loud-out selection), the fun doesn't stop there. There are plenty of interesting facts and back-story titbits to unlock, as well as costumes for Chris and Sheva, hidden bonuses and other intriguing options that begin their life on the menu as a string of question marks. The Versus multiplayer mode will be out shortly in the form of paid-for DLC, in which players will have a chance to duke it out over the Net for bragging rights, and *RE 4*'s Mercenary mode makes a return in this title to extend gameplay time late into the night.

Chicks with big guns and zombies, what more do you need from a game?

disfigured limbs while the bulbous, bat-like Popokarimu swoop and dive with the grace of an airborne hippopotamus. All of this is aided by the versatile lighting engine – truly the star of the show. When you're out in the open shantytowns, the harsh African Sun beats down relentlessly, obscuring your vision for a moment when you first step outside. Underground or indoors, rays of dusty light pour through slits in the flimsy construction and craggy temple ceilings, while weapon muzzle flashes illuminate even the darkest corridors to reveal a previously hidden horde of Majini two feet in front of you.

Sadly, not all of *RE 5* is fun filled and fret free. Without a human player controlling Sheva, her abilities to judge when to shoot and which weapon to use seem haphazard, much like her sense of ammunition conservation. Interaction with her inventory is also severely limited in the heat of battle, with most of the good stuff only available during lead-out sessions between chapters (or deaths, as is more often the case). She does tend to back you up most of the time, however, but I found that her role is best suited to healing and sniping rather than relying on her quite as much as the developers intended. Ultimately, having that human player in control is the way to go, and

you'll soon discover that this is the way the game is meant to be played. Players can strategise to their hearts' content, free to manage their equipment and ammunition however they see fit.

There are a couple of other niggles to deal with alongside the joy of landing a headshot on an Uroboros (if you can find its head) from 100 metres with a fully upgraded handgun. The puzzles are rather simple once you've taken a moment to think about them, and the further departure from tradition does leave much of the suspense at the door. Nevertheless, ultimately *RE 5*'s appeal will be determined by how much you enjoy action games with a healthy mix of game mechanic elements. Chris and Sheva will be pulling stunts from all over the gaming world – taking cover, mashing buttons, dodging special attacks with quick time events, manning gun turrets, running gauntlets and even hopping on a couple of vehicles. While it doesn't have the pace to rival the likes of *Gears of War* or the suspense to stack up against earlier *RE* titles, *Resident Evil 5* does strike a 'keen' balance between the two, which should satisfy anyone's need to dig deeper into the series' extensive storyline and keep themselves entertained while they're at it. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

The Score

					18+
	1 - 2	2		2	www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Great story
+ Phenomenal graphics
+ Hardcore action

Minus
- AI suffers a bit
- Inventory quirks
- Not terribly scary

Bottom Line
It might not be for the steadfast traditionalists, but it'll offer plenty of fun for anyone willing to look past its nuances.

86
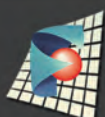
Shooting while driving simply requires holding down a single button and Vin does the rest. Depending on your location relative to the target vehicle, Vin automatically chooses a sweet spot (like the tyres or gas tank) to riddle with holes.
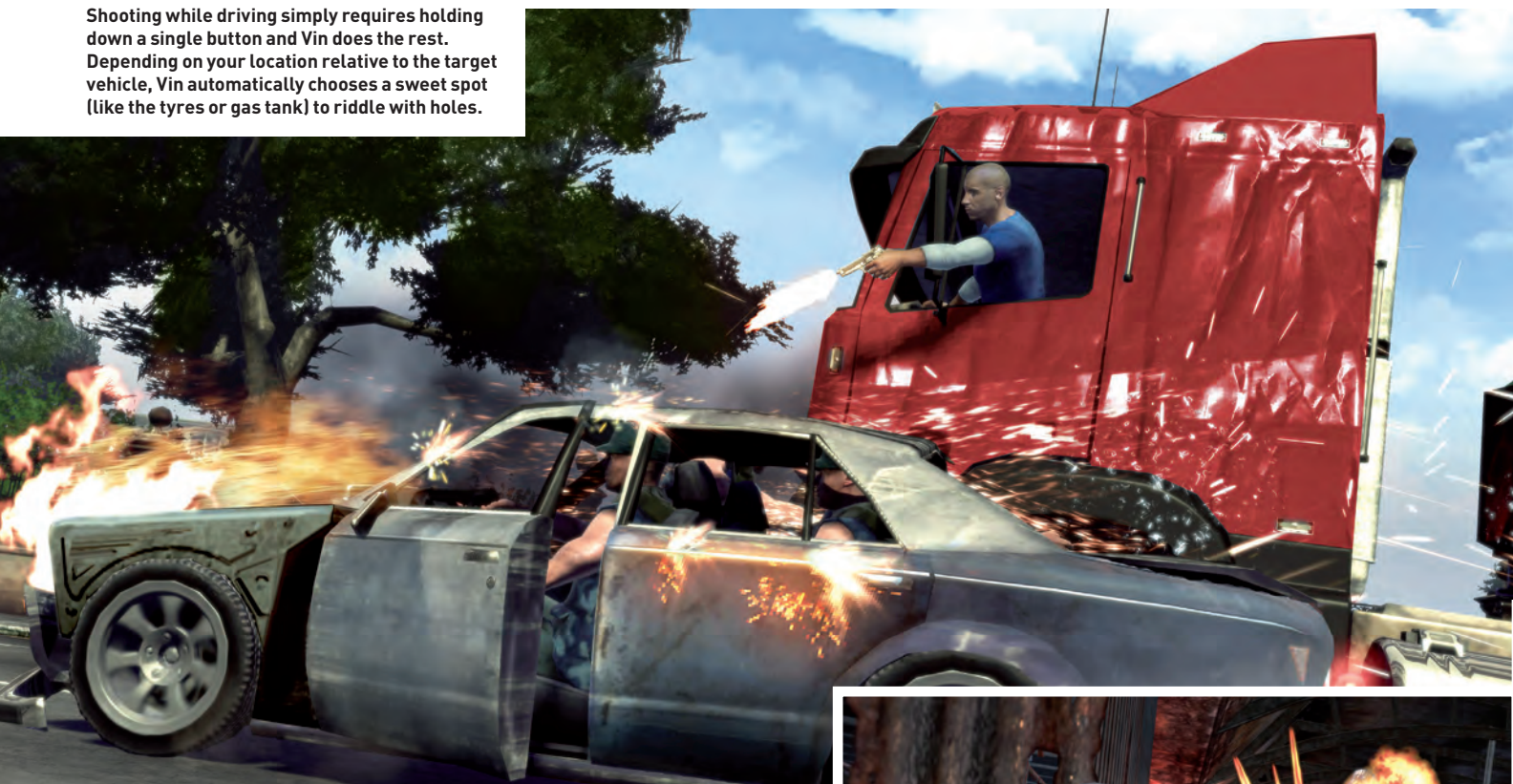
Wheelman

Good times with explosions and movie-style car chases

Genre→ Action

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

IN PART 1 OF our 'Diesel-a-thon', gamers take on the role of Vin Diesel as he takes on the role of Milo Burik. *Wheelman* starts with a bang when you first meet Milo sitting in a car parked on one of Barcelona's (the location in which the game takes place) busy streets. A stylish cut-scene follows, which ends with all hell breaking loose when a woman scampers her way into Milo's car and the chase is on – although I'm not sure why. See, *Wheelman*'s story just 'happens' and is entirely worthless. Apparently, Milo is a CIA agent (I think) who is in Barcelona to play mind games with the local gangs (maybe that's why he's in Barcelona, but we'll never know for sure – you'll see what I mean if you play the game). Let me just state this: it's better to just take *Wheelman* at face value and appreciate what the game dynamic offers, rather than try to understand the game's plot, because there's really no point to the story at all.

The introductory cut-scene sets the stage for most of what you can expect from *Wheelman*. After the weak plot device of a woman getting into your car, the action kicks in and the cops are hot on

your tail. *Wheelman* employs a vehicular combat system that is quite satisfying and surprisingly easy to get the hang of. Using the right analogue stick, you can basically turn your vehicle into a really expensive melee weapon. Thrashing the analogue stick around causes your ride to violently swerve into enemy vehicles. Repeat this in as chaotic a fashion as possible, and you'll eventually mash the enemy vehicles into a pulp, enough so that one last critical hit causes them to explode and barrel roll into oblivion while the player is treated to a slow-motion view of the ensuing chaos. Naturally, the bigger and heavier the vehicle that Milo is driving, the better. The vehicle melee makes car-chase sequences fast, frenetic and exciting when the AI isn't being slightly idiotic... but more on that later. To add to the chaos of the vehicular combat in the game, Milo eventually gains the Cyclone and Aim Shot abilities. Milo has a 'focus gauge' that gradually fills as you scream around at high speeds, destroy scenery and generally make awesome stuff happen. This focus gauge depletes if you drive slowly, run over pedestrians or crash into civilian traffic. Once this focus gauge is filled enough, Milo can do one of three things: he can initiate his magical speed-boost ability, which is pretty self-explanatory and can be activated no matter what vehicle Milo is

driving, or he can use the aforementioned Aim Shot and Cyclone abilities. Aim Shot essentially places the camera inside the vehicle, slows down time, and allows Milo to take a devastating shot at the soft spots of any vehicle in front or on either side of his vehicle. The soft spots are highlighted and the player simply has to move the targeting reticule towards the on-screen indicator and pull one of the triggers in order to cause the recipient of Milo's bullet to suffer some form of grievous harm. Cyclone is essentially the same ability, except that Milo whips his vehicle 180 degrees, allowing him to do exactly the same thing to enemies behind him. Aim Shot can be used from any vehicle (including the motorcycles that Milo can ride), while Cyclone is prohibited from use when Milo is using a particularly cumbersome vehicle, such as a truck. Milo has the ability to air-jack vehicles, whereby he simply leaps from his current ride to another one without needing to stop. The ability keeps the vehicular action at a steady pace and is often comical to watch as Milo forces the vehicle's occupant out of the vehicle and onto the tarmac in order to take control.

Wheelman succeeds in that it makes all of these actions easy to perform by anyone playing the game, effortlessly turning even the most inexperienced person into an action hero. When Milo is without a vehicle, the awkward on-foot segments come into play and they do little other than make way for some non-vehicular gunplay. During missions that require you to muscle in on enemy territory with the weapons at Milo's disposal, the AI falls apart. Using a pseudo cover system (Milo can crouch behind objects to take cover and will pop back up automatically to take shots at enemies that you've locked onto), most of the on-foot action segments only serve to break the pacing of the game. They're made far too simple by the automatic target locking and the AI's inability to put up much of a fight (AI characters seem quite happy standing out in the open and eating your bullets). These sequences are fun at first, but eventually become annoying. The vehicular sections have their own AI niggles, such as artificial speed boosts that allow them to drive faster than you can, no matter what vehicle they (or you) are driving. As you progress through the game, new areas of

the city are unlocked and a variety of side missions are made available. Completing these side missions rewards players with access to hidden weapon caches, garages (which can be used to repair and repaint vehicles - useful for avoiding the police) and increases to some of Milo's key stats. Completing the 'contracts' side missions, for example, will provide an upgrade to the focus gauge. These side missions are fun for the most part, but once you've completed enough of them, you'll get bored quickly. The game is powered by the incredible Unreal Engine 3, but Wheelman doesn't match up to the visuals of many of the other titles out there. The models are awkwardly animated and the world looks plastic (which is further aggravated by the fact that the city seems very lifeless). The audio does its thing, but there's nothing spectacular about it. At least there are some lacklustre radio stations that you can listen to (or not) when you're not busy with a mission.

Wheelman is not a bad game. It's actually highly enjoyable if you can see beyond its faults. The lack of any multiplayer component is a sore point, but it's not a deal breaker. It's almost as though the developers tried to squeeze too much content into a game that would have been far better if only its core dynamics (crazy vehicle-based combat and insane stunts) were in play. The game lacks polish, but it's cinematic and chaotically fun, and it's hilarious seeing Vin Diesel on a scooter. **NAG**
Dane Remendes

There are some interesting missions, including one where you have to manoeuvre a car though Barcelona's alleyways while another character sits in the back seat with explosives strapped to his chest. The catch: the car's brakes are bust and the slightest bump may cause the bomb to go off...

The Score

			16+
1	N/A	N/A	www.pegi.info

Plus	Minus
+ Cinematic	- The AI sucks
+ Fun vehicular combat	- Dodgy visuals
+ Cool explosions	- Story is pointless

Bottom Line
Wheelman offers a fun experience that is marred by a few bad design decisions, a shoddy story, and a general lack of polish.

(71)

Developer→ Starbreeze Studios | Tigon Studios   **Publisher→** Atari   **Distributor→** Megarom   **Web→**http://atari.com/riddick/

The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

They say hope begins in the dark...

Genre→ First-person Action Adventure
PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

IN **THE CHRONICLES OF** *Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena*, Vin Diesel once again provides his voice and likeness for the character of Richard B. Riddick in the sequel to 2004s *TCoR: Escape from Butcher Bay*. In the process of creating new content for their current-generation conversion of the original game, Swedish developer Starbreeze Studios developed enough original content to create a full-fledged sequel to *TCoR: AoDA*. During the tempestuous development cycle, there were times that it seemed as though *Assault on Dark Athena* would never grace our televisions and computer monitors, yet here it is. *TCoR: AoDA* comes bundled together with its innovative forebear in one package, making its value unquestionable. You're able to select to either play through the first title to refresh your fond memories of escaping from the dreaded Butcher Bay, or you can jump straight into the new content offered by *TCoR: AoDA*. Either way, if you're a fan of *TCoR: EfBB*, you're in for a treat here.

DARKNESS IS WHERE I SHINE...

TCoR: AoDA deals with Riddick and his attempts to escape from the Dark Athena, a massive ship captained by an old acquaintance of Riddick's - a woman named Revas. The Dark Athena plays home to a group of space pirates, a nasty bunch who enjoy trapping unwary ships and then scavenging from them whatever valuables they can find. The crew of any ship captured is locked away in one of the hundreds of cell decks on the Dark

Y Exit Drone

Athena, while the most unfortunate of them are turned into drones to join Revas' innumerable drone army. These drones are essentially a human shell with a basic artificial intelligence running the show (although characters can 'hack' into the drones to control them manually), and these make up the bulk of the enemies you'll be facing. Like its predecessor, *TCoR: AoDA* offers a unique mix of stealth gameplay, melee combat and all-out gunplay. The first half of the game is very stealth orientated and melee weapons are the only means of dispatching enemies. Stealth still works in the same manner that it did in the previous title: hitting X on the 360's controller will engage sneak mode, letting Riddick hide in the shadows and causing the screen to take on a hazy blue tint to let you know that you're almost

Multiplayer

Addressing one of the main complaints directed at the original title, the developers have added multiplayer to the series' repertoire. A number of game modes are available, the most notable of which is Pitch Black. In this game mode, one player takes on the role of Riddick while a group of mercenaries (who have access to a number of weapons from the get go) attempt to take him down. The mercenary who manages to kill Riddick becomes him until he dies and the cycle is repeated. The catch is that Riddick is located in a lightless area, putting him in his element, while the mercenaries have only the flashlights mounted on their weapons to help locate him. The weaker the weapon, the more powerful the flashlight mounted on it, so players have to make a trade-off between heavy firepower and the ability to see in the inky blackness.
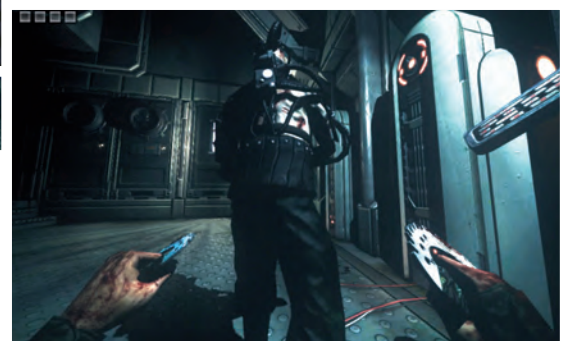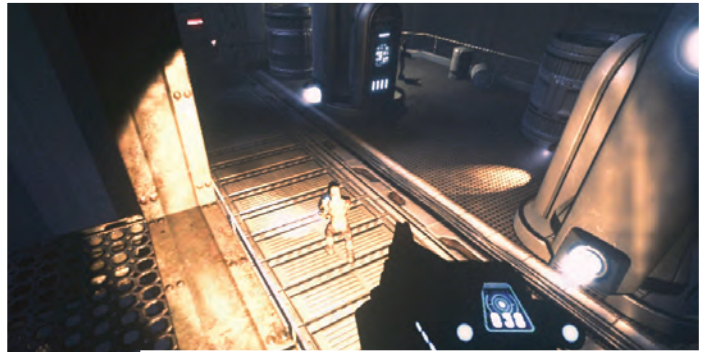
completely invisible. Riddick also has his Eye Shine from the get go (since he already acquired it in *TCoR: EfBB*), which allows you to see in the dark. There are ranged weapons early on, but they're impossible to remove from the drones to which they are attached. Using a drone's weapon involves dragging its entire body around, severely restricting your movement and thus only making them useful in the direst of circumstances. At a certain point in the game, you'll meet up with some of the imprisoned inhabitants of the Athena, for whom you can expect to do a number of odd jobs to gain their favour and eventually get them to aid you in escaping the ship. Later in the game, the combat opens up to incorporate ranged combat as well, as Riddick gets his bloodstained paws on tranquiliser guns, assault rifles and shotguns (there's even a mech armed with rocket launchers and chain guns to pilot in the game).

IN THE END... EVERYBODY BLEEDS THE SAME...

If that description of the game sounds familiar, you're right on the money. *TCoR: AoDA* is almost a carbon copy of *TCoR: EfBB*. As a result, it doesn't feel as innovative as the first title did. If you hated the original, then you'll hate this new iteration. If you loved the original, the chance that you will hate this game remains because it really doesn't do anything new. If you can accept it for what it is, *Assault on Dark Athena* offers more than enough action, light RPG elements,

stealth gameplay and people to punch in the face for those looking for *TCoR: EfBB* in a new setting. *TCoR: AoDA* is a lot heavier on the action than *TCoR: EfBB* was, toning down the stealth level and using combat to fill the gap. The game's title explains it all: we're not trying to sneakily bust out of a prison here, we're assaulting Revas and her crew of deviants. The game's combat never stops being enjoyable (especially the close-quarters bits), making the heightened level of action in this new title no problem. The game's story has its highs and lows, but it provides gamers with a better understanding of Riddick and his history. The voice acting is impressively handled for most characters, and the dialogue is sure to have you giggling at the banter between Riddick and those he interacts with. Vin Diesel gifts us with more of his gruff-voiced one-liners, some of which are quite memorable. The AI isn't spectacular, which makes sense, because for the majority of the game you're battling mindless drones and enemies seem to only be capable of two schools of thought: either take cover or blindly charge in. The graphics provide decent eye candy, but don't expect the best-looking game to date. To be perfectly honest, if you don't feel like playing a rehash of the stellar original game, then you should stay away from *TCoR: AoDA*. If you do so, however, you'll be missing out on a pair of good games in what is undoubtedly a great deal. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The old made new again

The revamped *TCoR: EfBB* is essentially exactly the same as we all remember it, but it's a lot shinier now thanks to the new game engine used. Don't expect a total overhaul, however, since *TCoR: EfBB* doesn't benefit from the engine in the same way that *Assault on Dark Athena* does. The gameplay doesn't have the same impact that it had back when it was first released (we've played similar offerings since then), but it's nevertheless a great game and well worth playing through again (or for the first time).

The Score

1	2 - 12	N/A	16+ www.pegi.info
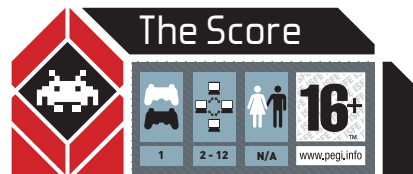
Plus	Minus
+ Great value	- Average AI
+ It's more Riddick	- Rehash of EfBB
+ Pitch Black multiplayer	

Bottom Line

Two games in one package make this a great deal, but the original game doesn't feel as innovative as it once did, and its sequel does nothing new.

(85)

"Though I Fly Through The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death, I Shall Fear No Evil. For I am at 80,000 Feet and Climbing"

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.

Redefining 'authentic'

Genre→ Flight Simulation

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

PROMISING ONE THING AND delivering another is a rather common occurrence in the world of videogames. It's called the "hype machine" and it endlessly 'over-promises' and 'under-delivers'. Take, for example, the latest *Tom Clancy* title from Ubisoft. We were promised an authentic flying experience in *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.* but got something rather different in the end. It's not a problem really, because the game is still fun. But hardcore flight simulation enthusiasts are going to be a little peeved about that particular broken promise.

The *Tom Clancy* games have taken a very different course of late. It started with the release of *EndWar* last year, and the trend looks set to continue. At one point, the famous author's name was synonymous with top-quality squad-based tactical shooters. But *EndWar* was a strategy title based on a rather nifty voice command system. Now we have *H.A.W.X.*, a flight simulator. It seems that Mr Clancy is broadening his horizons, as well as creating a more complete "future war" universe for gamers to enjoy. This is even hinted at quite strongly within *H.A.W.X* – one of the initial missions has the player flying air support for a group of ghosts on a mission in Mexico City, which will seem all to familiar to those who played *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*.

H.A.W.X. puts the player at the controls of some of the world's most impressive flying machines, ranging from aircraft like the A10 Warthog to the F16 and more, for a total of 50 licensed aircraft. These fighters are all faithfully modelled within the game, and look great on screen. They handle

well, too… in fact, perhaps a little too well.

There are two main 'fields' when it comes to flight simulation games. There are the nuts and bolts, technical ones, and then there are the insane action-arcade ones. H.A.W.X. claims to be the former, but is actually the latter. The player may come across authentic aircraft and real-world locations, painstakingly recreated from satellite photographs, but that's pretty much where the realism ends. The player is never forced to take off or land, but is rather being dropped into the various missions right before all kinds of hell breaks loose, and being yanked out again shortly thereafter. And the player gets to perform moves that are, quite frankly, beyond the capabilities of the aircraft in the game and the materials they are made from.

So, no – *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.* is not

an authentic flight simulator. It is not a bad game because of that, but the hype was a lie.

The premise behind the game is that the player is an ace pilot working for a private military corporation (PMC) in the near future. Just as he investigated a possible cause for a third world war in *EndWar*, Clancy uses *H.A.W.X.* to look at what might happen if PMCs became a reality. The story is a little predictable, but it's still exciting and serves as a backdrop for numerous single-player campaign missions that vary in purpose from bombing runs through to escort duties. Each of these allows for up to four players to drop in or out for a little co-op action, although they need to be running multiple consoles for that – this isn't the kind of game you want any screen splitting on, anyway.

H.A.W.X. offers thrilling aerial action that could only be called realistic arcade-style

dog fighting. The player can carry a massive amount of ordnance into the air (perhaps an unreasonable amount despite the modern trend towards the miniaturisation of munitions) and take on huge waves of enemies. The action truly is nonstop, and the only breathing room afforded the player in missions is there if the story demands it.

The controls for this particular title are simple, yet they offer a complex game dynamic at the same time. This stems from what the developers call the Enhanced Reality System, or ERS. It's a rotten name for it, because it isn't particularly enhancing any kind of reality, but that's what it's called. With the ERS turned on, the camera sits close to the plane's tail (like in most arcade flight fighters) or can be changed to a cockpit view. The controls are manageable and sensible, and a 'help' function will help the player plan interception and avoidance routes. This is particularly helpful when planning ground attacks, because *H.A.W.X.* likes 'sticking' enemies behind cover. Turning the ERS off 'delivers' a completely different approach. The

camera pulls back, affording a wider field of view, and centres on the currently selected target. The player's aircraft is on screen somewhere between the camera and the target, but can move freely in that area. It takes a bit of getting used to, and is a particularly risky way to fly at low altitudes. However, it enables the player to pull of some rather remarkable moves.

The game explains this away by saying that the pilot switches off performance limiters in the aircraft. That's all fine and well, but the drift turns, purposeful stalls and other insane things that the player can do in this mode would more than likely destroy the aircraft in midair, or squash the pilot like a rotten grape at the very least, thanks to what would be insane G-forces. It's not particularly realistic, but mastering this mode of flight delivers the most fun. Targets can be taken out more quickly, missiles dodged more heroically, and a whole lot more. Players who get this right will have an easier time in multiplayer dog fights too… dodging missiles can be easy, once you know how.

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. is to flight

simulators what a Jerry Bruckheimer blockbuster is to film – it looks good, feels good, is lots of fun, but isn't particularly bothered too much about realism. Hardcore flight simulator fans will find this annoying, but normal people will probably have a lot of fun with this title. It's all about style over substance, but it's also great fun. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

"It is not advisable
to eject over the
area you just
bombed"

The Score

			12+
1	2 - 8	2 - 4	www.pegi.info

Plus	Minus
+ Non-stop action	– Not realistic
+ Great graphics	– Predictable storyline
+ Nice plane models	

Bottom Line

H.A.W.X. is great fun for those who prefer their flight simulators action packed and light on the pedantic details.

79

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ SimBin **Publisher→** Atari **Distributor→** xxxxxxxxxxxxxx **Web→** www.atari.com/racepro

Why would anyone race these? They're not real cars!

RACE Pro

Racing on the straight and narrow

Genre→ Racing

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

THERE ARE TWO WAYS to approach racing games, with not much in terms of a middle ground. The first is to go ultra-hard core, with down-to-the-millimetre tuning capabilities and absolute realism. The second is to head for the arcade route, complete with flashy graphics and pounding music. The middle ground between the two extremes is very sparsely populated indeed. There have been a few attempts at a hybrid between the two, but not many success stories in that regard. A notable exception is *Forza Motorsport 2*, which treads the middle ground fairly successfully. The game appeals to hard-core fans and more casual players, with a reliance on neither of the two ends of the scale to be enjoyable.

SimBin tried to achieve the exact same thing with their latest title, *RACE Pro*. Published through Atari, the game attempts to fill that same middle ground. But SimBin has always been known for their ultra-realistic, nuts-and-bolts technicality, and this game tends to be more of a hard-core experience than a casual, friendly one.

RACE Pro allows the player to take to one of several real-world tracks in virtual versions of 350 cars. It features exclusive FIA Championships, including the World Touring Car Championship, F3000 and Formula BMW, and gives the player the opportunity to experience a very wide range of cars, from 200bhp to 1,000bhp machines. It also brings a realistic experience to the table, which should immediately make gamers a little wary.

This is a game about driving... and serious driving at that. The lack of an in-game soundtrack is as much a clue to that as the high-end physics performance: the people who will be drawn to this game are the ones who want to hear the sound of the engine while they drive, rather than the latest hits from indie charts around the world. Speaking of sound, the engine sound effects were recorded directly from real versions of the virtual cars. However, every now and then, they sound a little nasty - perhaps due to poor recording techniques. Whatever the case, the game is sparse in terms of sound, with very little voice acting other than a rather unenthusiastic 'radio' announcement that congratulates you on winning races – although the guy saying it sounds far too bored to be taken seriously.

Graphics are an entirely different story. This game looks good. The cars have been faithfully recreated for the game, and the

tracks painstakingly modelled. There are a few tracks that we have seen in other games (like *Laguna Seca*), of course, but the level of reproduction is very high indeed, doing some of the legendary competitive tracks in the game more than a little justice. This once again plays into the enthusiast's court.

There are several difficulty levels available in the game, but the difficulty increase between the lowest and the next one up is quite steep. The game is simply too easy to play on the lowest setting, even for the more casual player, but bumping the difficulty up a little starts making it a lot tougher. Remnants of SimBin's popular *GTR* games can be seen in this one, even though some new elements are there to freshen up the experience.

One cannot help but get the feeling that the developers added some of the more casual, friendly elements into the title as an afterthought. The racing line guide is a great example. While it can be effectively used to plan the best way around the track, and does its job relatively well, the truth is that other games (and you can read that as *Forza Motorsport 2*) included a dynamic racing line that, at very least,

changed colour according to what the player was doing. In *RACE Pro*, it's a static line – brake here, accelerate here. If you don't follow its instructions carefully, it won't help you out of a bind, and those who love very technical games will eat it up. But the technicality of the game extends beyond just the way the car can be adjusted – it extends to how the player should drive, and leaves little margin for anything else.

The game throws race after race at the player, with no opportunity for any of the trimmings that casual gamers enjoy. Cars can be modified only in as far as the player can adjust performance-related settings. You cannot strap a new engine into your car, or change its paint job. That, once again, excludes the more casual player, while the hard-core player won't mind – he/she doesn't care what the car looks like, and just wants to drive it. However, it also means that there is very little to do in the game, other than zooming around racetracks. This will leave the average player a little cold after a while – they'll probably play through the whole single-player career, but they won't do it in a matter of a few hours.

This review has been full of references

to casual gamers, and one might be tempted to wonder why. SimBin develops hard-core games, after all. But the fact is that this game has been released for a platform that isn't necessarily hard-core. The Xbox 360 has a wide appeal, and a large number of truly hard-core players are keeping themselves restricted to PC gaming. Had this been a PC title, the comparisons would have been unnecessary. But on the Xbox 360, they are vital.

RACE Pro is not a bad game. The physics is great, and the racing action can be very exciting for enthusiasts. It will leave casual gamers a little flat, though, purely because it lacks most of the things that they want in a game of this kind. Still, there may be some who enjoy the game's realism and technical approach. This one is best to try before you buy, purely to see if its approach is one that appeals to you. **NAG**

Serious technical racing

Walt Pretorius

The Score

			3+
1 - 2	2 - 12	2	www.pegi.info

Plus
+ Excellent physics
+ Great car models

Minus
- No soundtrack in races
- A bit too technical

Bottom Line
Although it tries hard to be consumer friendly, this title holds more appeal for enthusiasts.

(79)

Developer→ The Creative Assembly   **Publisher→** SEGA   **Distributor→** Nu Metro Interactive   **Web→** www.totalwar.com

A nice touch is how the individual soldiers don't all stand exactly the same way

Empire: Total War

"Dominate the 18th century globe"

Genre→ Empire-building Strategy

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THIS GAME DIDN'T GRAB me, initially. I felt that it hadn't evolved sufficiently from its predecessors, and it seemed, to me, to be quite dated. However, once I broke away from the story campaign and started playing a free-form game, I quickly grew enamoured of it. Firstly, for those who have not played previous *Total War* titles, here's a brief overview. The action takes place in two views (though one of them is often optional). You get the strategic overview, which shows as much of the theatre of war as you can currently see, and which you can scroll around and zoom into and out of. In this view, towns, cities and various facilities, such as farms and mines, can be seen. Armies and agents also show up in this view, and here is where you direct their movements on a grand scale. From here,

you can also access a host of various interactive screens that allow you to set policies such as taxation, direct research, hire and fire government functionaries, recruit troops and naval vessels, and much more. The other screen is used for actual battles. It is possible to play the game without accessing this screen, allowing the battles' outcomes to be determined automatically, based on the armies' strengths and compositions. However, this approach is not recommended for important or close engagements, as good command of your troops will invariably yield better results. Here you are presented with a gorgeously rendered (for the most part) 3D representation of the terrain you are fighting on, including buildings and forts and the like, when applicable. Armies tend to be massive, so you get a seriously epic feel! From a graphics point of view, here is where the game initially appears to have stagnated – it is quite easy to

Fast-moving cavalry about to hit the attackers' artillery

It's easy to spot when someone let one rip on the battlefield, just look for the big gap

overlook the amazing detail levels, until you look closer. Then you realise that this game is beautiful to look at. However, it does suffer from unaccountably poor performance in terms of frame rates. Also, there are frequent glitches – the graphics will occasionally start flickering, and the only way to remedy this is to save, exit, and restart. Sometimes, however, you are saved the trouble by the game crashing to the desktop of its own accord. While generally I would find this terminally frustrating, increasingly I found myself just shrugging and restarting the game – it is worth it! So as you play, the depth starts to unfold, and you realise just how amazingly complex this game has been made. It truly feels like running a continent-spanning empire! The amount of detail is too extensive to describe here, but I will give you a small taste: a functionary runs each of your provinces, and several others comprise your (government) cabinet. Also, each agent is also an individual.

Each of these individuals has personality traits, with new ones developing, and some of these can be encouraged or ameliorated by adjusting the particular character's environment (i.e. by assigning to or away from combat, or changing the place of employment). For example, if a certain gentleman is particularly adept at industrial research, then he should be assigned to a university where you are carrying out the appropriate type of research. But this is not all – managing your functionaries' vices can also be important, as they can affect their efficiency, or the way that their subjects respond to them. Overall, this is a game that fans of this genre will love, and can sink their teeth into with great relish. But don't expect to have time to play anything else! If this is not your cup of tea, you may find it intimidating, or perhaps even boring – this is not a fast-paced action game! On the other hand, it offers innumerable hours of play. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

The Score

🎮 1	✛ 1	👥 N/A	16+ www.pegi.info
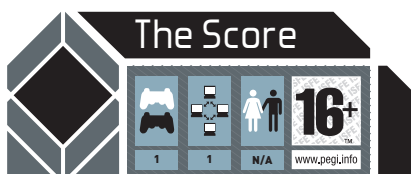
Plus
+ Incredible simulation detail
+ Vast, epic scale

Minus
- Annoying 'advisor'
- Stability issues

Bottom Line
Here we have the (to date) ultimate game for the empire-building aficionado to fully immerse him- or herself in.

81

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer➜ Rockstar Leeds **Publisher➜** Rockstar Games **Distributor➜** Megarom **Web➜** www.rockstargames.com/chinatownwars

Rucky? Do you feer punk?
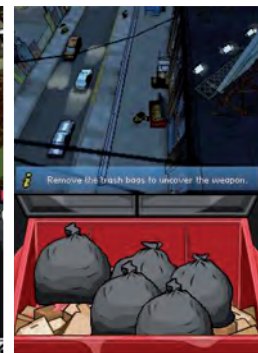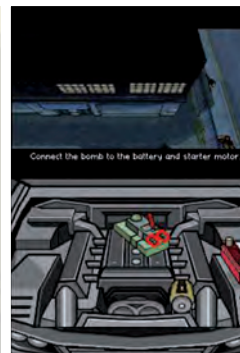
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

This fortune cookie holds good fortune for fans

Genre➜ Sandbox / Action-Adventure

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP **DS**

IF JUDGED SOLELY ON the precepts set for the series by the first two *Grand Theft Auto* games, then *Chinatown Wars* is by far a better *Grand Theft* than *GTA IV*. That may be a hard pill to swallow if you're a current-generation flunky who likes to count polygons, but there it is.

With a strong focus on story, humour, game dynamic and tactile interaction with the city, *Chinatown Wars* takes the series back to the core principles that made the original games so endearing – and we're not just talking about the top-down viewpoint. There is actual content in them thar hills. The interactive kind, not the sit-and-watch-TV fluff we're expected to accept.

The core game follows the template well: you become a mostly-unwilling participant embroiled in a life of crime. Missions to run, people to kill, cars to hijack and places to blow up for a variety of main characters – all these elements are polished and entertaining, bolstered by a diverse range of touch screen-based 'mini-games' that make Liberty City a slightly more real place. You rummage through dumpsters, hot-wire cars, fill bottles with petrol to make Molotov cocktails, scratch scratch-and-win cards, break windows to escape from cars driven into rivers, and a surprising amount more.

Aside from the main missions that take on a variety of flavours, from racing to theft, side missions and distractions include a return of series favourites: Taxi Driver, Vigilante, Paramedic and Fire Fighter missions to undertake if you hijack the relevant vehicle.

The most involved sub-game is that of drug-running: a sprawling, well thought out market simulation influenced by supply, demand, in-game day of the week and time of day. The process is made easier thanks to a well-designed interface for seeing profit/loss, where the best deals are, and a handy turf map showing where which substances are bought and sold. The turf map is part of the highly functional GPS on your PDA that lets you plot routes to specific characters, places or areas. Drug-running is very lucrative and easy with the economical legwork done for you by the game system, but intense – as what you're carrying will be confiscated if the cops catch you.

Liberty City, even on the Nintendo DS, is a vibrant place, alive with incidental high-speed car chases, accidents with ambulances on scene, shootouts and other random bits of chaos. Day segues into night and back, days of the week go by and your inbox fills with e-mails from contacts and dealers. You go online with your in-game PDA to access the Ammu-Nation 'Website'. Here you can order guns and items to be delivered to your safe house. Alternatively, you can attempt to hijack the Ammu-Nation delivery trucks roaming the city, but at your own peril. There are plenty of other small touches worth mentioning, but it's best experienced yourself.

Multiplayer requires that each player owns a copy of the game, and supports online trading and local play of six competitive/cooperative game types. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Good old-fashioned GTA mayhem

The Score

1	2	2	18+ www.pegi.info
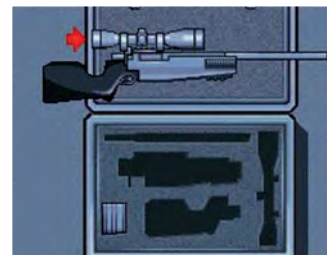
Plus
+ Touch screen use
+ Functional interface
+ Crazy fun

Minus
− Limited music playlist

Bottom Line
The highlights of the whole series distilled into one of the best handheld games ever.

89

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

imagine technology captured in art.

Imagine having a monitor like no other in the world, framing the latest display technology in art fit for a gallery. The new "Touch of Color" line of monitors from Samsung feature luxurious glass-like frames with gracefully sculpted edges. The result is an elegant monitor that feels more like artwork than a professional office tool. Truly a monitor worthy of a following. With Samsung, it's not that hard to imagine. To learn more, please visit www.samsung.com

T190, T200, T220, T240, T260

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

Developer→ InnoGlow/StormRise **Publisher→** Atari **Distributor→** Megarom **Web→** www.codenamepanzerscoldwar.com

We'll burn that bridge when we get to it

Between missions you can preview, buy and sell units

Codename: Panzers - Cold War

"WWII is history, and the Cold War has just begun!"

Genre→ Real-time Tactics

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THIS IS WHAT THE back of the box declares, and it was a welcome sight to me. Personally, I'm tired of World War II-themed games, and this blurb gave me hope. However, it quickly became apparent that this game might as well be a WWII game in a slightly different skin. Instead of German-speaking Nazis, you now face Russian-speaking Communists. However, after taking a closer look, I found that certain improvements have in fact been made.

For those unfamiliar with the *Codename: Panzers* games (incidentally, a Cold War-themed game under the title "Panzers"? Yes, a bit of a misnomer, there...), the format of the game is that of a 'real-time tactics' challenge, rather than a true 'real-time strategy' – there is no base building, and no real resource management. Instead, the focus is on effective management of available forces, with occasional reinforcements (which can, to some extent, be influenced). The action takes place on highly detailed 3D terrains (though the trees, if you zoom in, look downright crap, to be perfectly honest – but this is not an issue, as you generally need to have a better overview of the battlefield), and these have been spruced up since this title's predecessor (which already looked great for its day!). The player controls squads of infantry, vehicles, and support powers (such as recon fly-bys, bombing runs, and so on) in an attempt to overcome enemy forces, and capture mission-critical locations. When bullets start flying, unfortunately, the frame rate tends to suffer quite badly, but turning down the physics quality sorts this out.

Those familiar with *Codename: Panzers* will find this game very familiar. But beware: do not assume too much, and take a close look at your units' abilities, as you will find new goodies here! For instance, all infantry are able to erect various fortifications, such as guard towers, medic aid posts, mechanic's post, and so on, depending on the unit type. Furthermore, a very welcome addition is the new ability of medics to "heal all" in an area – including themselves! While the amount healed is quite small, the effect is instantaneous (though has a long cool-down time). Tanks can now be outfitted with modifications in the field. For instance, you can pay prestige points to equip an APC with any two of the following: amphibious capability, camouflage, anti-air defence capability, and vehicle repair capability. Various tanks have various upgrades available, including the likes of an improved engine, anti-air capability, or replacing the main gun with a flamethrower, for example. Another – and to some people quite major – enhancement (though completely irrelevant to most) is the fact that *Codename: Panzers – Cold War* supports dual monitors. One screen will show the default view, while the second monitor will display the objectives and map overview (which can alternatively be viewed by hitting Tab). This dual view is excellent for better keeping your finger on the pulse of the battle.

The game does, however, have a couple of negative quirks. For starters, the auto-save feature is annoying in that, while auto saving, the whole game freezes with the appearance of a total system freeze/hang. Also, there is the abovementioned frame-rate issue. Units are a bit too talkative, so when building a formation the player is bombarded with unit acknowledgements. And, speaking of formations: there is no

simple, modern way to create formations (at least, none that I could find either in the manual or in the game). This is a major oversight! So one ends up manually manoeuvring units into a desired formation only to find that, while it can be maintained when moving, its facing can't be adjusted, only the facing of the individual units within it. Sadly, this is a really important factor in a modern war game, particularly one that places such an emphasis on unit facing and the relative positions of units. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Objectices and strategic overview - can be displayed on second monitor, and updates live

The Score

1	2 - 8	None	12+ www.pegi.info
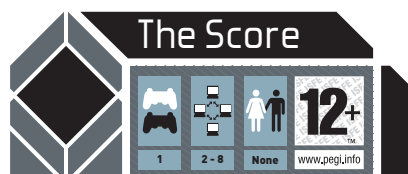
Plus
+ Dual-screen support
+ Beautiful graphics
+ Very tactical

Minus
- Rather 'plodding'
- Poor formation handling

Bottom Line
This one is not everyone's cup of tea: many will find that it lacks the tension and excitement of a game such as *Command & Conquer*.

73

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ YUKE'S   **Publisher→** THQ   **Distributor→** Ster-Kinekor Games   **Web→** www.legendsofwrestlemania.com

WWE Legends of WrestleMania

They're big, they're bad, they're geriatric: this is THQ's Legends of WrestleMania!

Genre→ Sport

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THQ, RENOWNED FOR THEIR *WWE SmackDown vs. RAW* series of videogames, takes a different approach to the wrestling genre with their latest offering, *Legends of WrestleMania*. Featuring a roster of classic wrestlers from the 1980s to the present day, WWE Legends of WrestleMania allows players the chance to recreate some of the most memorable moments in the nearly 25-year history of WrestleMania. Although the roster features such icons as Hulk Hogan, Bret Hart, and Yokozuna, there are some unfortunate omissions from the line-up. There's sadly no trace of greats like Diesel, Randy Savage, or Lex Luger, but the Create-a-Legend mode (an almost exact replica of *SmackDown vs. RAW*'s creation mode) allows those with enough patience to recreate almost any of their favourites who didn't make the cut.

The bulk of the game is found in the WrestleMania Tour mode, which allows players to recreate a selection of matches from the WrestleMania history books. A video montage of events leading up to the confrontation precedes each bout, and these well-edited clips are easily one of the most enjoyable aspects of the game. There are 19 historic match-ups, some of which allow you to 'relive' the event by playing the match as it happened, while others let you 'rewrite' or 'redefine' match-ups by changing the result or adding stipulations.

There's a great selection of memorable matches available, including Hulk Hogan vs. André the Giant from WrestleMania 3, Shawn Michaels vs. Bret Hart in WrestleMania 12's Iron-man match, and Steve Austin vs. The Rock from WrestleMania 15, to name but a few. Where *LoW* suffers, however, is in its presentation. Not only do some

characters look comically muscular compared to their real-life counterparts, but *LoW* also skimps on some entrance sequences and outfits. For example, the video clip before Shawn Michaels' Iron-man match shows him being lowered into the ring on a zip line, wearing white and gold trunks, but when the match loads up, he anticlimactically strolls to the ringside in his traditional red outfit. For a game so steeped in nostalgic value, it's a shame that the developers didn't pay more attention to some of these small details.

This is especially true considering that THQ has abandoned *SvR*'s deep and refined control scheme in favour of a faster-paced, arcade-style setup that relies only on one analogue stick and the controller's four face buttons. Much of the action takes place via timed button-press sequences, like those in *God of War*. While these 'chains' make the game simpler to play, they also prevent you from ever feeling truly in control of your character. And since many wrestlers share the same basic chains, they detract from the individuality of the different characters.

Ultimately, *Legends of Wrestling* is somewhat of a mixed bag – although its generation-spanning roster offers plenty of nostalgic value, there are too many omissions and not enough attention to detail to make *LoW* as appealing as it could have been. Given the overly simplistic play dynamic, once you've unlocked all the classic video clips, the game unfortunately doesn't offer enough to keep even die-hard wrestling fans interested for too long.   **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Countless hours of hot man-on-man action!

The Score

16+
www.pegi.info

1 - 4   2 - 4   2
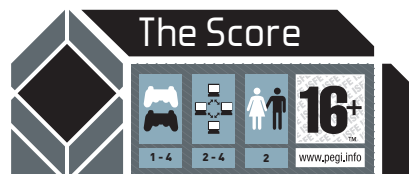
Plus
+ Expansive roster
+ Great video clips

Minus
– Shallow play dynamic
– Inaccurate character models

Bottom Line
Legends of WrestleMania, despite its varied roster of historical wrestling talent, is let down by simplistic play and too little attention to detail.

59

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ Creative Assembly   **Publisher→** SEGA   **Distributor→** Nu Metro Interactive   **Web→** www.sega.co.uk/stormrise

Stormrise

It could have been so much more...

Genre→ Real-time Strategy

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

WHEN I FIRST CAUGHT wind of *Stormrise*, I could not have been more excited. The concept of verticality intrigued me, as did the story, and it seemed as though the developers were really putting a lot of work into ensuring that the control system would work outstandingly on a console. So, when I say that I was ecstatic when I finally got my hands on a copy of the game, you should understand what I mean. From that point on, it's been a roller-coaster ride of mixed emotions and I've reached the end of the experience with a bitter taste in my mouth. *Stormrise*, for all the promise that it showed, has left me wanting. The single-player campaign sees players taking control of units from both factions in the game, initially taking control of the technologically-orientated Echelon and later the more primitive Sai. The faction balance has been handled quite well, which works in the game's favour. The control scheme is where things start to go wrong. Unit selection is handled by using the "whip select" mechanism – by whipping the right analogue stick on the controller in the direction of a unit. This is all good and works well initially, except that when you have a huge amount of units, things can get messy and frustrating when you need to quickly select a specific squad from a group of them. You can only see what your units see, as the camera is fixed at a point above whichever unit you have selected, so moving around the map and selecting units manually without the aid of the whip select is not possible. Control groups are created by moving the units

that you want in the group close together, creating the group and then selecting the group and assigning them to a direction on the D-pad. It's a cumbersome way to create control groups, but it works fine once you get the hang of things. Moving units can be an exercise in frustration at times, because the AI path finding just breaks every now and then. Units get trapped behind buildings, environmental objects and sometimes they just get stuck behind invisible walls. The verticality game dynamic is a fantastic idea, with players able to set up ambushes almost anywhere within or on top of structures, but it creates more problems than it's worth. The units' path-finding abilities are mostly to blame here, since there are times when units make some incredibly strange decisions as to how to reach their vertical destination. Units with jetpacks won't simply use them to get to the top – they'd rather frolic around the area below, slowly jumping from one object to another until they eventually find their way to the top of the building. The slightest change in elevation in a map also causes units to freak out and lose their way sometimes. The units' animations sometimes don't work, meaning that there are times when your units will be near an enemy and you'll see the enemy's health bar depleting, but your units will just stand around, not actually doing anything. Units have their own unique special abilities, but the

broken animations make these special abilities far less satisfying. *Stormrise* isn't a great game: units are sometimes unresponsive to your commands, the story is nonsensical at certain points, and the game is riddled with technical issues. It's just an average RTS title with some problems. The game looks good and sounds decent (aside from some dodgy voice acting) and it is certainly a valiant attempt at trying something different with a console RTS. Unfortunately, the game doesn't live up to the concept behind it. Regardless of this game's problems, I can't wait for *Stormrise 2* – I'm sure the sequel will blow us away. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Score

1	2 - 8	N/A	16+ www.pegi.info
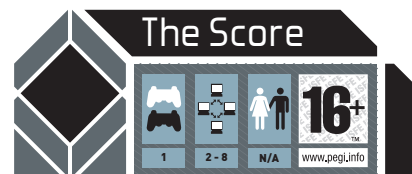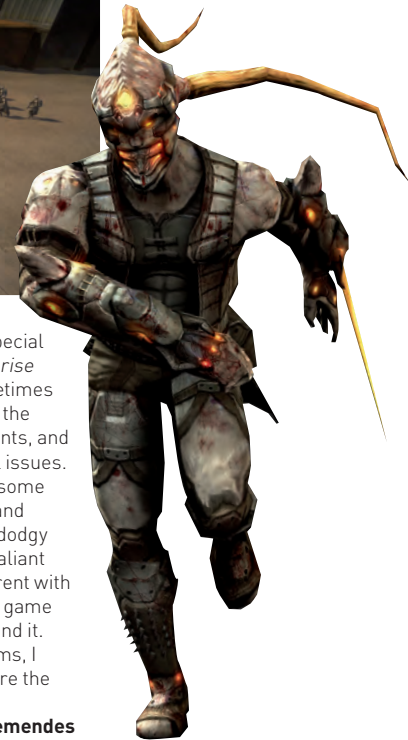
Plus
+ Great concept
+ Visually impressive

Minus
- Broken unit animations
- Broken path finding
- Frustrating

Bottom Line

Stormrise is built on a great concept that fails in its execution. Hopefully Stormrise 2 will rectify the problems in this first attempt.

60

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Pros

Developer→ Sandblast Games **Publisher→** THQ **Distributor→** Ster-Kinekor Games **Web→** www.destroyallhumansgame.com

Drop and roll... drop and roll!

Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon

What, they're not all dead yet?

Genre→ Third-person Shooter

PC 360 **PS3** WII PS2 PSP DS

THE *DESTROY ALL HUMANS!* series has been around for a while, with players having experienced the adventures of the alien hero Crypto for three decades. At least, that's three decades with the release of the latest game, *Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon*. The game is set in the 1970s this time around. However, although time has progressed in the series, the overall game dynamic has become mired in the mud of unoriginality.

The story begins with Crypto, having been marooned on Earth for a long while, owning the Star Dust Casino in the fictional town of Las Paradiso. He has grown soft and used to life on the planet, but his mission to collect human DNA to help save the Furon race has not gone away. And so, the player takes to the streets with a multitude of upgradeable weapons to cause as much mayhem as possible, while collecting the brains of Crypto's victims. It's cute and very funny, and will hold the player's attention for around fifteen minutes before it starts getting old. Those who have played the previous games will enjoy about five minutes of game time before that feeling sets in.

The real problem is that this forms the largest part of the game. Sure, it has a number of missions that drive the story along, but just playing those will mean that the player loses out on the free-roaming aspect of the game, firstly, and will not be able to advance properly due to a lack of necessary upgrades. It gets a bit more challenging when the military is called in, but Crypto dying has no ill effects in the title. The player just spawns again, with no penalties.

Even the new weapons aren't enough to keep things entertaining. There are some really off-the-wall ways to kill humans, but after using the weapon a few times, thing get pretty old pretty fast.

Naturally, the player can take to his flying saucer for a bit of a change, but the action there also gets boring after just a short while. Simply put, the game has not advanced enough, despite one or two new elements that have been added. These additions feel like nothing more than lip service to progress, though, and aren't enough to make *Path of the Furon* stand out amongst the other *Destroy All Humans!* games. The game also features a rather vicious difficulty curve. The player will doubtlessly find the game far too easy at first, only to get trapped in missions that are less than reasonable in terms of challenge moments later.

Path of the Furon is not an entirely nasty game. It has some nice voice acting and gets pretty funny at times – poking fun at everyone from Sonny and Cher to Scientologists. But the whole series needs a thorough revamp, because it desperately needs something significantly new added to it. In its current form, it just isn't stimulating enough to keep the player interested for long enough to be a rewarding experience.

NAG

Walt Pretorius

All new, but more of the same

The Score

16+
www.pegi.info
1 2 2
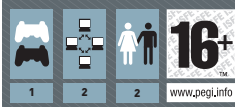
Plus
+ Good voice acting
+ Very funny

Minus
- We've done this before
- Difficulty curve

Bottom Line
Diehard fans and newcomers may get more out of this one, which is a rehash of every other title in the series.

50

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Developer→ From Software   **Publisher→** Microsoft Game Studios   **Distributor→** MiDigital   **Web→** www.ninja-blade.com

A distractingly stupid helmet

Great

Ninja Blade

Even Naruto might be better than this

Genre→ Action

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

IN THE YEAR 2010, villagers in an isolated, rural prefecture of Japan suffered an unprovoked attack by wild animals. Survivors were removed to a nearby facility for treatment, where attending doctors discovered an unknown parasite in the victims' wounds. Conventional treatments quickly proved ineffective as the parasites multiplied, precipitating rapid necrosis, malformation, and murderous behaviour in the unhappy subjects. The entire site, imaginatively codenamed "Ground: ALPHA" was sterilised a week later. Sterilised in that special way that leaves absolutely no evidence of anything ever having happened, ever, that is. All record of the event was promptly classified, and a super secret task team dubbed the Global United Infestation Detection and Elimination squad was assembled to deal with any subsequent outbreaks.

Now, five years later, Tokyo has been totally overrun in a single day. Monstrous worms are exploding out of the city's every orifice, highway overpasses are collapsing, the sky is blotted out by the leathery wings of untold horror, and the best plan the government can come up with is to send in a couple of guys with swords. Then a bunch of other stuff happens, and – well, actually, for the first time in over 20 years of gaming, I started skipping cut-scenes because I just couldn't bring myself to care and because the lead character's stupid helmet was too distracting.

Apparently, "production value" is just a random accumulation of meaningless syllables over at the From Software HQ. *Ninja Blade* is five-years-old ugly and uses what appears to be a single prop set for the entire game: there's virtually no environmental sound, and the two voice actors who did the alternating English and Japanese dialogue for 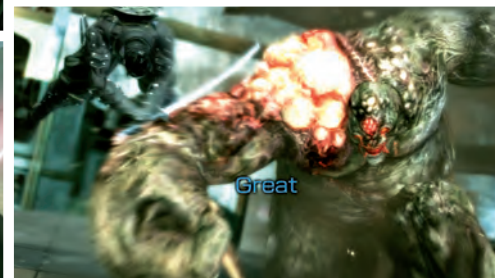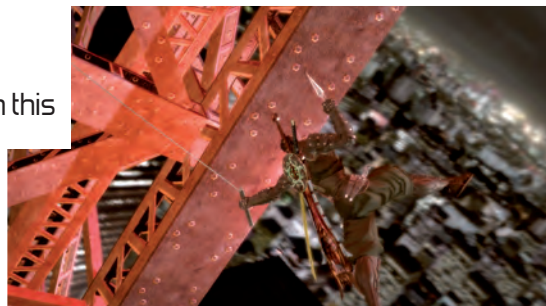lead character Ken Ogawa made no pretence of sounding even remotely like the same person. Every chapter includes at least three boss encounters, but there's no ingenuity of design in evidence – every single boss is beaten simply by hitting it until it falls over. Oh, except the penultimate boss, who is beaten by hitting his hands first, then hitting his head until he falls over... For about 20 minutes, that is, including partial restarts because it's not clear how you deliver the finishing blow, the controls are somewhat imprecise when you do figure it out, and he'll recover half his health before you get it right (Sorry, spoilers).

On top of all that, checkpoints are stored only temporarily, and quitting the game will force you to restart the entire chapter and lose all progress made (including any weapon upgrades and collectibles). Some chapters run over 70 minutes of playtime. This is 70 minutes of play, remember, that mostly involves hitting stuff until it falls over in a series of locations that all look more or less exactly the same. And you'll never quite shrug off the haunting conviction that this would all be a lot simpler with guns and bombs. People with absolutely no standards whatsoever might just barely tolerate this game, but everyone else should avoid it. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

Attack!

At least three bosses in every chapter

The Score

| | | | 16+ |
| 1 | None | None | www.pegi.info |

Plus
+ It eventually ends

Minus
– Everything else

Bottom Line
Sixteen hours, 28 minutes, and 39 seconds of my life that I'm never going to get back.

20

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

My Dearest Mrs Tumblebrook,

Well, blast & confound it all! This damnable IFS Zephyr zeppelin has contrived by some unpropitious means to ruin itself here among the Stonewall Peaks; mayhap those beastly Elves have sown some truths midst their delirious Babblings of Technology & its ill-favoured temperament. It appears I am the sole survivor of this Unhappy calamity, although I did stumble upon a dying Gentleman earlier, who bestowed upon myself a ring of peculiar likeness & charged me with its Safe Delivery to a person named only as "the boy". Most queer! Yet barely moments later, was I accosted by a strange & somewhat addled Fellow, who promptly declared me the reincarnation of some Elfish mystic. What a very peculiar business indeed! He has entreated me to accompany him to his Elder, a gentleman named Joachim who resides in the nearby hamlet of Shrouded Hills, who may lend some much-needed erudition upon this perplexing matters.

I hope this finds you and the children in pleasant health. I shall be off on adventure in the meantime.

Regards,

Merwin Tumblebrook, ESQ.
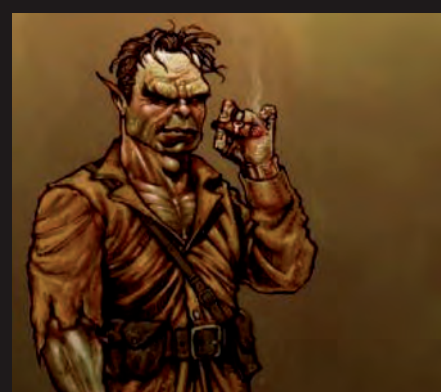
Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura

ANYONE WHO CALLS THEMSELVES an RPG fan but hasn't played *Arcanum* should be rounded up and shot in the town square. Not only was it made by more or less exactly the same people who made *Fallout*, and not only does it feature the same ingenious classless character system as *Fallout*, but it's also an RPG of another exceedingly uncommon rarity because it's set in a Steampunk universe. That's right, there's no tedious mucking about with water-coloured Tolkien-inspired clichés here – we've got muskets and clockwork and trains and all the other marvellous stuff of sooty industry crowding out the wizards in pointy purple hats. Hilariously, and not entirely

unexpectedly, the recent introduction of technology is bothering the world's Fairy Union (or wherever it is that magic comes from) and precipitating all sorts of calamity. Spell casters doing their thing around engines might have their fireballs explode in their faces, for example, while simultaneously prompting all the machinery around them to fail. Elsewhere, social tensions are escalating as half-orc factory labourers demand pay raises and dwarves abandon their subterranean heritage for urban capitalism and commerce, plying cheap jewellery on street corners for cash. Oh, it's like a whimsical, campy Victorian sitcom, except people die.

Much like its post-apocalyptic predecessor, it's possible to play *Arcanum* with an extraordinary range of different character concepts, and it's often playing on the extremes that offers the most entertainment value. Fumbling through what is suddenly an overwhelmingly complex plot and daunting dialogue sequences as a half-orc barbarian with a zero intelligence score, for example, is every bit as amusing as playing an analogous character in *Fallout*. Lacking any sort of subtlety, sophistication or elocution, you're relegated to grunting and bashing your way through a narrative that's lost about a third of its content because you're simply too stupid to know it's even there. **NAG**

Stand a chance of winning your share of the prizes – valued at R8,300 – featured on this page!

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Genius
Live with Ideas

New high-end GPUs from SAPPHIRE

SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY ANNOUNCED THE introduction of two new models in its range of high-end graphics cards. The SAPPHIRE HD 4890 series is based on a new GPU core from ATI. This core features the same architecture as that used in the HD 4870 series, with 800 stream processor units, a 256-bit GDDR5 memory interface and an integrated hardware video decoder. It also features an improved memory management architecture, and technical innovations that allow higher clock speeds. The SAPPHIRE HD 4890 has a core clock speed of 850MHz and its memory is clocked at 975MHz. The SAPPHIRE HD 4890 OC Edition is aimed at the enthusiast, with the core clocked at 901MHz and the memory at 1,000MHz, making it the fastest ATI-based single-core graphics card on the market.

NVIDIA 'PhysX' for Sony PlayStation 3

According to NVIDIA, they have signed a licence agreement with Sony to provide PhysX technology for the PlayStation 3. NVIDIA's PhysX technology enables game objects to respond in a realistic way to physical events. In a PhysX-enabled football sports game, for example, the graphics processor calculates the angle and velocity of the impact to generate a real-time response that is different "practically every time." The agreement with Sony Computer Entertainment covers tools and middleware for the PlayStation 3.

#100TB

It took around 45 million hours of rendering to produce the CGI movie *Monsters vs. Aliens*, with 9,000 processor cores working overtime. The movie in total took up 100TB of data.

Snippets

Guitar Hero Metallica and *Rock Band 2* on the Xbox 360 will be among the first music titles to support the new *Lips* **wireless motion-sensitive microphone**.

Harvard University has been recognised as a CUDA Center of Excellence for its commitment to teaching GPU Computing and its integration of CUDA-enabled GPUs for a host of science and engineering research projects.

According to Nokia, the use of its **N-Gage mobile gaming platform** is accelerating, with nearly a million users having already signed up to create personal profiles for the service Nokia refers to as "like Xbox LIVE for mobile." Nokia announced earlier this year that its E55 handset will also be N-Gage compatible when it is released later this year.

Hardware Q & A

FROM: Charles Lin
SUBJECT: Overclocking Woes
"**I** DESPERATELY NEED HELP. I'M an overclocker in training, so I get stuck very easily. How do you overclock an E2220 2.4GHz on a G31 chipset (ASUS P5KL-E) with 2 x 2GB DDR2 800? I have tried changing the CPU frequency to 333MHz, but after restarting, my PC won't start until I reset my CMOS. Am I doing something wrong? Please help!"

Charles Lin

Neo: *I have no personal experience with the particular motherboard, but when adjusting the FSB, you may want to try changing the memory divider so that in your BIOS the memory runs at 800MHz or 667MHz (1:1 ratio with FSB). More importantly, though, try using an 8x multiplier, which is 2.66GHz. That should be possible without an increase in CPU voltage, as using your default multiplier of 9x will make the CPU run at 3GHz - which may be too much when using the reference voltage of the CPU. You can also increase the Northbridge voltage slightly (it is the option labelled "Northbridge" or "MCH" voltage). That should sort out the problem. If that doesn't work, try to change the strap setting to 333MHz instead of 200 or 266MHz (it's the option labelled as "Strap" or "Frequency Latch").*

From: Mathieu Bouckaert
Subject: Dream Machine
"**Y**OU GUYS AT NAG have set up an awesome machine. I'm looking at replacing my PC and the only worry I have is whether I should get the new Intel i7 Extreme, or should I stick to the Intel Core 2 Extreme? I hear that they are having problems with the i7 running Vista. Will I also have to find a new motherboard? I was looking at the ASUS Extreme Rampage. Any help will do because I want to get my baby up and running as soon as I can. Thanks."

Mathieu

Neo: *If you choose to go with the i7 Extreme, you will need a new LGA 1366 motherboard (ASUS Rampage II Extreme, Foxconn Blood Rage, GIGABYTE EX58-EXTREME, MSI Eclipse, etc.), a new i7-compatible cooler or adapter, and depending on what memory you're using, you may need new RAM. (A dual- or triple-channel DD3 kit.) The i7 Extreme is faster than any Core 2 processor you can buy, but they don't overclock that well if you're interested in that sort of thing. There's no issue with Vista that I'm aware of, have experienced or one that has been documented officially. So, as far as compatibility goes, there should be no problem with the i7. Should you choose to remain on the LGA 775 platform, then the Intel Core 2 Extreme will be the CPU you will want (either the Intel Core 2 Extreme X9650 or the X9770). While the CPUs will only be slightly cheaper than buying an i7 CPU, chances are that you already have all the hardware necessary to run a Core 2 Extreme as opposed to the i7. Therefore, overall the upgrade will be cheaper.*

NAG Awards

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

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

Hardware Scoring System

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dream Machine

YOU MAY NOTICE THAT we have removed all the pricing information from our Dream Machine products as well as all of our hardware reviews. With the current daily fluctuations in exchange rates it is becoming difficult to supply you with up-to-date and accurate prices on hardware. The time lapse between when we compile the information and when you get to read it means that the pricing has usually changed, and we either receive irate e-mails from our readers complaining about the pricing being higher than what we published, or we receive complaints from the suppliers saying that our pricing is wrong. Jump Shopping (www.jump.co.za) is South Africa's leading Shopping Comparison Search Engine. They list and group products from over 100 local online stores, so you can compare prices quickly and with ease. We recommend that you use this resource, as this is definitely one of those instances where online will be more accurate than print in terms of actual pricing on the day.
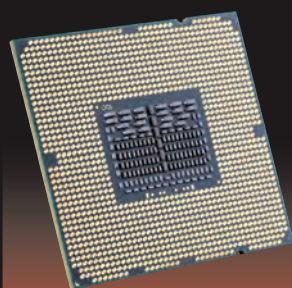
Processor
Intel Core i7 Extreme 965
www.intel.com
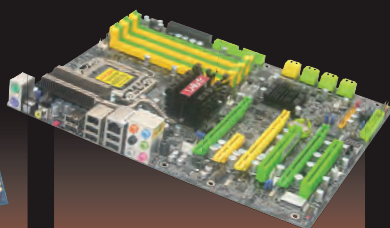
Motherboard
DFI LANParty DK X58-T3eH6
www.dfi.com.tw

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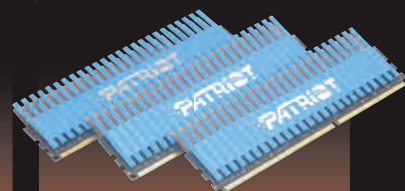
Memory
Patriot Viper 1,600MHz Triple Channel DDR3 www.syntech.co.za

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

Storage
WD Caviar SE16 500GB
www.wdc.com

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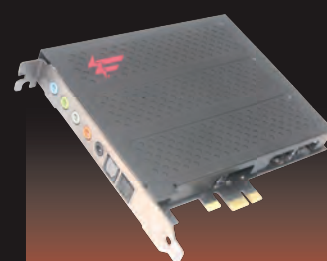
Sound
Creative X-Fi Titanium Fatal1ty
http://za.creative.com

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

Keyboard
Microsoft SideWinder X6
www.microsoft.com

Mouse
Logitech G9 Laser
www.logitech.com

Cooling
Coming soon. No, really! Oh, whatever...

HARDWIRED

BY NEO SIBEKO

4870X2 vs. 9600GT

HAVING USED ALL FORMS of graphics cards from ATI and NVIDIA since the advent of the GPU, I can safely say that there has never been a more exciting time for the industry than 2009. While the introduction of the Radeon 9000 series and the GeForce 8 series will always be remembered, in 2009 we have seen some really great competition from ATI and NVIDIA. A real attempt by Intel into the discreet graphics market is in the works and finally we are free to use CrossFire and SLI technology as we please.

Recently I had to rebuild my entire machine and had all the right hardware to ensure that I was able to play all the games at a reasonable resolution and AA levels, watch movies in full HD, experience fantastic sound and the like. My plan was to use the potent Radeon 4870X2 graphics card as the main graphics adapter while the 9600GT would be used exclusively for PhysX. An ambitious idea, but one that is possible.

After some fiddling with the driver install order and the like, I eventually managed to enable PhysX on the 9600GT while using the 4870X2 as the main display graphics adapter. This was supposed to make sure that I have a near perfect main computer. However, it was not meant to be. I discovered that despite the games working, you actually have to plug both adapters into a display - or at least the PhysX-enabled card, which was the 9600T card in this case. However, that was a minor issue, as I was still able to use GPU-accelerated video encoding on the 9600GT and any other GPU feature CUDA enables. *Unreal Tournament III* ran flawlessly and the PhysX maps worked great, but the problem had nothing to do with in-game performance or anything like that.

The problem arose when the 4870X2 would spin up for brief moments to keep itself cool. The noise was unbearable, even though I could fix the fan speed to 50% - which is loud but can be tolerated. I realised that the only reason I had two graphics cards in the system was purely because I was used to the additional features made available by CUDA. I am far too used to having these features available at my disposal.

The things that I had taken for granted, such as video encoding, full DVD and HD video (.mkv especially) decoding and PhysX, were an important part of how I used my computer. Short of an aftermarket cooler for the 4870X2, it was going to be impossible for me to live with the 4870X2 in the computer. So, the decision had to be made and I surprised myself by picking the 9600GT over the 4870X2.

The graphics cards are not equivalents in game performance - not by a long shot - but that noise produced by the 4870X2 weighed heavily against it. The poor but fast video encoding performance and the lack of PhysX support meant that almost everything else other than performance was stacked against the 4870X2, and as a result it lost out to the graphics card that was less than a third of the price.

The entire point of this is that right now in 2009 our graphics cards are supposed to be more than just devices for playing games. A 4870X2 still retails for more than R6,000. If it's only used to play games at a higher resolution and ridiculous frame rates, then it is definitely not worth the money, especially since you can buy any of the gaming consoles and a game for less than R6,000. The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced I made the right decision. Sure enough, being able to encode your videos using your video card is not a major or even important feature for some, but I figure triple-digit frame rates in games cannot be the only thing our modern graphics cards are worth.

As such, I may have taken a significant dive in computing power, but overall I'm happier with using the 9600GT than I ever was using the 4870X2. It is without a doubt the much faster card, but I'm not sure if it's the better one in my context. **NAG**

"My plan was to use the potent Radeon 4870X2 graphics card as the main graphics adapter **while the 9600GT would be used exclusively for PhysX. An ambitious idea**, but one that is possible."

LIFE, HARDWARE, AND CH@PS

BY DERRICK CRAMER

Buying online, I organise you nice price

IT'S LATE. I'M TIRED, and I have a ton of work to do. I haven't overclocked in almost a week - I'm sitting waiting for parts to arrive from all over, and my measly holiday is coming to an end. Add to all of this the fact that I have writer's block, and you have the makings for a very uninspired column. Sure, there's a bunch of news out right now: Intel and AMD arguing about cross-licensing agreements; the release of the 4890 and 275GTX; NVIDIA renaming the G92b yet again; Larrabee is set to make big waves in the GPU industry. Yet, none of this appeals to me - at least not to write about.

So I've decided to let you all in on a little secret. Well, it's not really a secret, but it's not well utilised and that needs to change. So, without further ado, I present to you the wonderful world of second-hand PC goods: classified sections of the Web where you can peddle your wares and pick up a great bargain or two. Secret? Not really. One of the best pieces of advice you'll ever receive? Would I be earning my keep if it weren't?

Sites like eBay and Gumtree have been around for many a year now, and allow you to buy anything from shoes to Micron D9GMH 'fatboys', all at the click of a button. Many use them, and after a while, you get to know the difference between a shady deal and a real diamond. But not many will risk shipping things from all over the world, preferring to deal within their own backyard. Add to this that these Websites are very generalised and don't really focus on a specific type of item (meaning less competition and worse prices), and it's obvious we need an alternative. Queue up local forums like Prophecy, Systemshock and MyBroadband, and you have your... er... forum.

Now I can talk as much as I want about how great this is, but it's obvious that you want real numbers, so let me share some of my recent experiences. I own a set of 1GB Corsair 1800C7 DDR3 RAM, given to me by a friend and fellow overclocker. This same set, which retails for well over R3,600 locally, was sold on one of the abovementioned forums for R900. No, that's no typo - you're reading correctly: R900. So the lucky buyer managed to save himself R2,700 by getting the set second hand. Sure, there will always be a measure of risk when buying online from a guy you've never met before, but the seller in this case had a good reputation online, and always looked after his hardware. This is far from a once-off scenario, and gems like this can be found every day. Take my current motherboard, the GIGABYTE EP45T-EXTREME. Retail price: over R3,000. I paid in the region of R1,600. The board was practically brand new, and the only con (or in my case pro, since I knew what to expect) was that the board had been overclocked.

The other side of the coin holds good news too: you can clear out your old junk, save space, or just make an extra buck or two to help you with your next upgrade. I've sold everything from cellphones to graphics cards to external hard drives online, and almost all of the transactions went through without a hitch. During a recent upgrade, where I felt my motherboard and CPU needed new homes, I managed to make enough to cover my new equipment - a free upgrade of sorts if you want to see it that way. In fact, there are a few scenarios where you can sell an item for more than you bought it for. Case in point (pardon the upcoming pun), I sold my CM690 case for just over what I paid for it four months ago. How's that for a sweet deal?

So much for writer's block. By the time you finish reading this, I'm sure I'll be slightly over my word limit, but let's all hope our benevolent Ed overlooks it. A good deal is waiting for you online, and even if you don't have the green to buy yourself some bargain hardware, there's always the opportunity of making someone else happy with all your old clutter. 'Pro-tip': Buy and sell online, it's worth it. **NAG**

> **"I present to you the wonderful world of second-hand PC goods:** classified sections of the Web where you can peddle your wares and pick up a great bargain or two."

Ultimate Gaming Rig
Shootout

When you get the best from the two competing camps between the veritable rock and a hard place, there will be sparks, and there could well be fire. Intel Corp. and silent partners, NVIDIA, take on those pesky upstarts, AMD, self-supported by ATI, for the title of ultimate gaming rig! By Russell Bennet
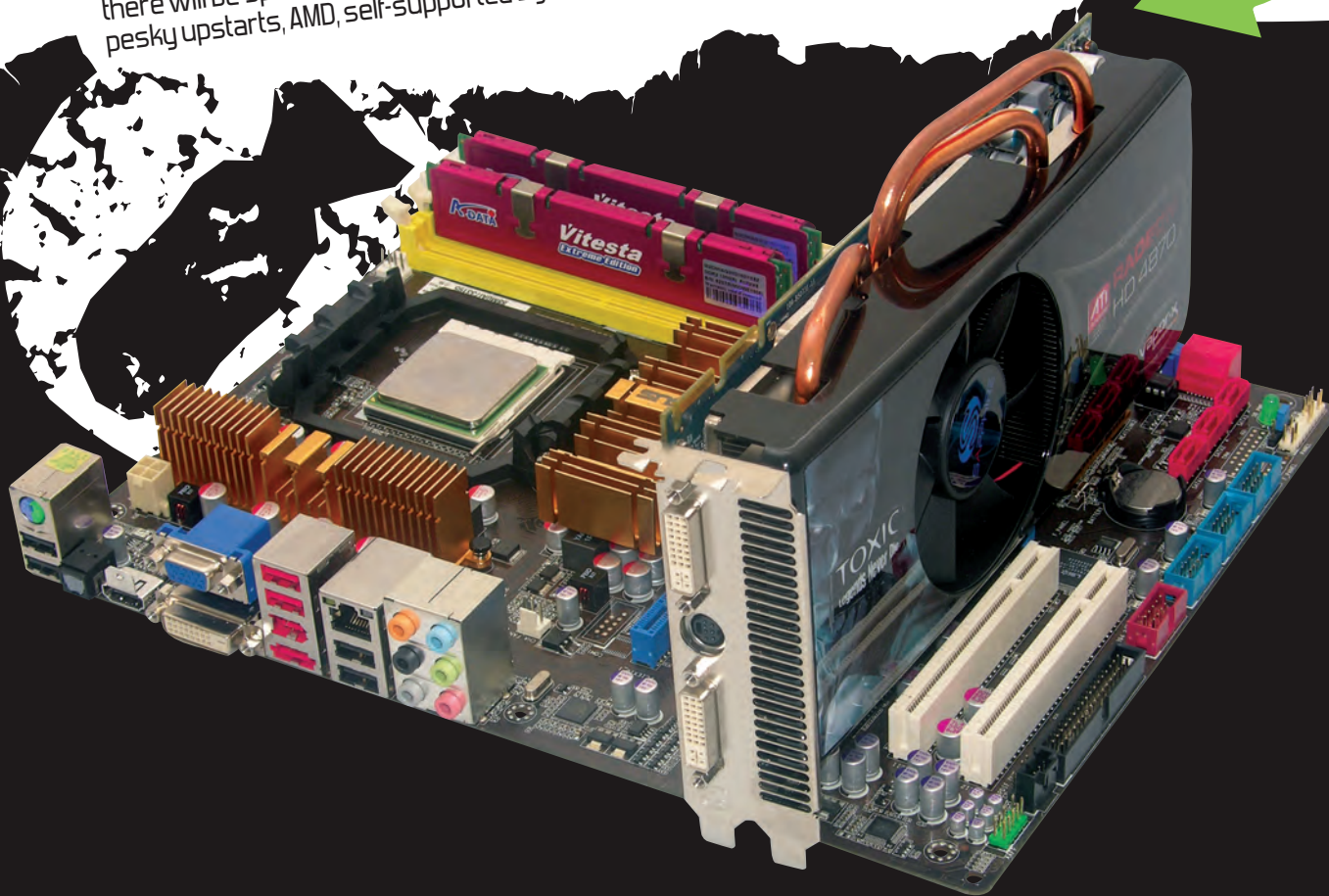
I MIGHT BE SHOWING MY 'IT-Geek' age with this one, but do you remember the days of the Athlon versus Pentium wars, or the brutal skirmishes waged between the X800 XT and 6800 Ultra? I'm referring, of course, to the battles that 'waged' between the chip giants just a few years back, for pride of place in our CPU sockets (AMD vs. Intel), and hardcore GPU desires (NVIDIA vs. ATI) - each offering unique strengths, weaknesses, and value propositions for purveyors of the enthusiast PC space.

A lot of that furore has died down in recent years. There was a time before the notions of performance equivalency when the giants literally traded monthly headline figures, one beating the other to

the gigahertz barrier (it was AMD, by the way), which was then in short order blown away by even higher performance ratings or interesting new efficiency improvements or, well, whatever the engineers could build in that might give them the marketing edge.

We are hoping that this relevant calm has been predicting the storm now potentially brewing once more behind AMD's all-new Phenom II CPU and its much-lauded Dragon platform. In fact, we're so hopeful that the smaller company has put its still-lingering acquisition gremlins behind it and got back to producing technically solid and market-friendly products to rival the old giant, that we decided it was time for a

direct, head-to-head article.

We've labelled it Ultimate Gaming Rig Shootout, in fact. It's time to pit archrivals directly against one another once again and see if they're separated by a Rizla-thin hairline or the more substantial chasm we've been subjected to since Core 2 Duo arrived on the scene. It's time to meet the contenders...

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

We started by laying down some base rules. As we're interested in outright gaming performance, we've paired the platforms with their natural partners in each case, so the Intel system also

sports a latest-generation NVIDIA graphics card, while AMD's Dragon has been upgraded from the ATI 4850 that came with the press kit, to the king of the ATI product pile, the HD4870.

We do believe that the credit crunch continues to be a very real phenomenon fundamentally affecting our global thought patterns at the moment, so in deference to shrinking budgets, we have specified that our Ultimate Gaming Rigs should sport only single-GPU setups. Going dual-GPU not only more or less doubles the initial cost of purchase, but also necessitates a monstrous gigawatt PSU, multiple displays chained together to capitalise on the resolutions available, and naturally

draws substantially more current from the wall outlet, increasing your running costs as well as carbon footprint on an ongoing, monthly basis!

Behind these GPUs we have a fully-fledged Dragon platform from AMD SA, while Intel and GIGABYTE have teamed up to create an enthusiast-targeted Core i7 machine built for outright gaming dominance. Although the RAM utilised represents both the new and older eras, the DDR3-capable Phenom II in this case shows off its backwards compatibility with DDR2 on the 780 chipset-based ASUS board, while the Intel platform flies the flag of the future of RAM with high-end DDR3 modules installed. Every other component

- hard drives, power supplies, even the test bed chassis - remains exactly the same from one machine to the other.

Victory, then, depends entirely on the combination of processor grunt in conjunction with chipset bus efficiency and the rendering output of the competitive high-end graphics cards - the most critical elements of any kick-ass gaming machine, and we'll be testing each element in one utterly gaming-focussed benchmarking orgy!

IN THE GREEN AND RED TRUNKS...
We were fortunate enough not to just get any old Phenom II processor in from AMD SA, but the battle-ready Phenom II X4 940

Black Edition. Featuring a true quad-core design with updated integrated memory controllers for the latest, high-speed DDR3 RAM parts, the 940 clocks in with 3GHz clocks, a 45nm manufacturing process, 6MB of L3 cache and a hungry 125W power draw.

Unfortunately, our ASUS M4A78 features the slightly older AMD 780/SB700 chipset combo rather than the 790/750 of the latest boards, and hence the DDR2 restriction. Nevertheless, we populated the four RAM slots with 4GB of 1GHz RAM from Corsair, and with subsequent reports of performance issues with DDR3 and Phenom II parts, this seems to have worked out well.

Our HD4870 is actually the factory-tweaked "TOXIC" model from Sapphire, which looks like a real bargain these days, offering range-topping rendering at around the R4,000 mark, with a 360GB Seagate SATA drive with NCQ acting as the sole non-transient storage platform. This drive and everything else like the 1200W GIGABYTE PSU (we got an 800W as well, in line with our single-GPU considerations, but it proved unreliable while the office 1200W is rock solid), DVD-ROM and 19-inch LG CRT are meaningless, as both systems employed these common components.

We installed a clean copy of Windows Vista 64-bit for our testing, lined up a series of the latest software and spent a good couple of days firing these benchmarks in various configuration permutations at the two machines, churning out data at a

disgusting rate to gather the empirical data our conclusions must be based on. We ran the synthetic gaming benchmark 3DMark Vantage, of course, as well as platform tester SiSoftware Sandra Professional Business 2009 SP1. Adding to these, we used a couple of the latest benchmark demos, namely PT Boats Knights of the Sea and the peculiar upcoming Oriental DX10 RPG fest, The Last Remnant.

And finally, of course, a slew of real-world games. *GTA IV*, which includes a useful little built-in benchmark, and is one of those real power-hogging games to boot, was lined up alongside older testing favourites *Far Cry 2* and *Call of Duty: World at War*, which is basically the CoD 4 Engine with a couple of visual tweaks. Naturally, in *CoD* the maximum frames-per-second value was set to zero before testing to eliminate the default frame cap. These are all pretty GPU-intensive titles, although *GTA* in particular puts strain on the system as a whole due to its enormity, but we ran each title in lowest-quality "platform testing" settings as well as at their most visually arresting.

Despite seeming very responsive and eager to get going in the OS, the Phenom II-powered Dragon platform stumbled from the start in the synthetic benchmark runs. Its 3DMark Vantage CPU score of 10,188 was a few hundred points below that of our standard test bench built around a previous-generation QX9770 – a monster of a chip in its day, but overshadowed by the Core i7 parts. Similarly, the SiSoft results

had the Phenom II just pipping the QX9770 in integer-based multimedia operations, but trailing in every other processor result.

Nonplussed, we launched straight into the two new demos, which doubled as benchmark runs - PT Boats and The Last Remnant - and things started looking up for the all-AMD combo of the Phenom II and the HD4870 GPU - when 'ranged' against our reference Extreme Edition, that is. We'll get to the Core i7 results in a minute...

At 1,280 x 1,024 in The Last Remnant, it was clear that the GPU wasn't working too hard, with the result being up just 4fps on the platform-orientated test at 640 x 480, for an average of 100.36fps. The PT Boats demo at the same resolution demonstrated how tough this pretty innocuous-looking title pushes components, with an average of just 41fps.

Real-world games continued to 'prove' the Dragon platform well up to the demands of modern titles, although *GTA IV* had to have its texture quality scaled down to medium to achieve results better than 30fps at 1,280 x 1,024. We got 55.15fps with this configuration tweak. *Call of Duty: World at War* was quite happy with all details maxed out, returning an average of 81.19fps using Fraps, with the platform peaking out at 125.91fps. *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky* managed a solid 41fps on the nose at 1,280 x 1,024 with all quality at full - not bad considering how graphically demanding this title is. *Far Cry 2* remained playable at 49.72fps at 1,280 x 1,024 (at maximum quality with no AA), and from

Sisoft Sandra 2009 SP1

	Intel/NVIDIA	AMD/ATI
CPU Multimedia (Dhrystone, GIPS)	78.81	40.11
(Whetstone, GFLOPS)	70.8	39.63
CPU Arithmetic (Mpixel/s)		
Integer x8 SSE2	138.88	117.07
Float x4 SSE2	111.15	51.7
Double x2	57.5	27.95
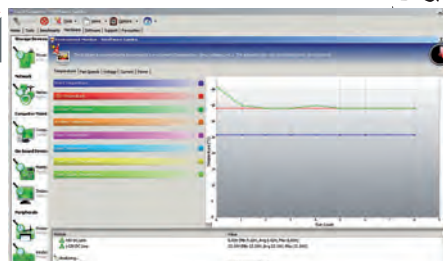
3DMark Vantage

	Intel/NVIDIa	AMD/ATI
CPU	18,396	10188
GPU		
At 1280 X 1024 NoAA	12,383	8,720
At 1600 X 1200 NoAA	8,952	5,912
At 2048 X 1536 NoAA	5,721	3,869
At 2048 X 1536 4XAA	5,366	3,636

Knights of the Sea DX10

	Intel/NVIDIA	AMD/ATI
1280 x 1,024	70.7	40.1
1600 x 1,200	70	40.2
2048 x 1,536	67.2	38.8
1600 x 1,200 8X AA	38.3	31.3

here, you can either crank the resolution all the way (45.19fps) or go for the smoothness of 8X AA (44.40fps) without a major frame rate sacrifice.

It is, in all, a solid performance from the Dragon platform, all but matching the QX9770 in synthetic CPU results, while the HD4870 (in combination with this platform) appears well capable of taking the very demanding modern games at full whack, with the exception of *GTA IV.*

Even our final benchmark, CINEBENCH R10, supported this general performance overview with an excellent single-CPU rendering result of 2,722, with 5,040 the OpenGL rendering final representing plenty of raw GPU power in that ATI chip.

And after the many hours of gruelling testing, the Phenom II had one final strength to play up to: the old AMD overclocking potential. Despite a fairly tricky overclocking process, we managed to get the CPU up to a whisker under 4GHz, still using stock air-cooling, and still stable in Vista and right through the complete SiSoft Sandra CPU benchmark suite (the 33% megahertz gain translated into improved performance numbers in a fairly linear fashion).

Now let's take a look at how the competition fared.

IN THE BLUE AND GREEN CORNER...

Our Core i7 940 is not Intel's leading contender - that would be the 965 Extreme Edition part - but this 940 is much closer to our competitive Phenom II on a price scale.

If you can't take the heat...

These two high-end systems were peculiarly similar in temperature terms, suggesting that clock speed plays the most crucial part of generating temperature regardless of what the processor does with those cycles. AMD machines used to run hotter than Core 2 Duo machines. Apart from being powerful, they're also impressively energy-efficient, high-end examples often idling at 50°C under air while Intel equivalents hovered at around 42°C.

And the same applied to GPUs, and largely still does. Where the 285 GTX hovers in the high-50s when idle and then pushes up to 78°C,

and sometimes even 80°C degrees under load, the HD4000 idles at 65°C and at times touches 90°C degrees. Interestingly, adjusting the fans to manual full speed kept both at around the 59°C level even under load, but generated a thoroughly intrusive racket on the ATI and just a mildly offensive hum from the NVIDIA card.

In fact, in temperature terms it would seem the motherboard chipsets themselves are a cause for the biggest concern. They already run pretty hot at idle, but the trick here is that a chipset should not exceed 60°C - ever. But with these chunky graphics cards in the primary PCI-E slot, a

massive part of that 80°C or 90°C is radiating from the back of the board, right into the area of the Northbridge, and raising the ambient temperature by several degrees in there, putting strain which the passive cooling systems struggle to cope with. A small chipset fan helps alleviate this quite nicely, or target some 120mm to vacate that temperature if you want a quieter way.

If noise isn't an issue, crank the graphics fan speed up to full manually whenever you play a game. That keeps the GPU's temperature down nicely, keeping the entire hotspot under some level of control.

The Last Remnant

	Intel/NVIDIA	AMD/ATI
1,280 x 1,024	172.83	100.86
1,600 x 1,200	131.84	89.97
2,048 x 1,536	93.23	61.57
640 x 480	192.69	104.66

Real-world, at 1,280 X 1,024 no AA

	Intel/NVIDIA	AMD/ATI
GTA IV (High TQ on Nvidia, Medium on ATI)	66.03	55.18
CoD 5	127.5	107.8
STALKER Clear Sky	55.6	41
FC2	79.25	49.72

FC2 In Detail

	Intel/NVIDIA	AMD/ATI
1,280 x 1,024 No AA	79.25	49.72
1,600 x 1,200 No AA	71.19	48.83
2,048 x 1,536 No AA	58.62	45.19
1,280 x 1,024 8X AA	63.85	44.4
1,600 x 1,200 8X AA	53.88	34.65

Still, this 2.93GHz quad-core part relies on Intel's exceptional Nehalem architecture, now also sporting integrated memory controllers (but only support for DDR3), and packs a staggering punch at more than twice the price of the AMD Black Edition.

Where we have spared no expense is the supporting motherboard. GIGABYTE's "overclocking-focussed" EX58 EXTREME monstrosity features the latest X58 Express chipset and a complex array of passive-cooling keeping the platform to manageable temperature levels even when pushed to the extreme. The company isn't shy on its price either: this is a R5K board, more than the Core i7 CPU installed in it, and more than what the Dragon platform (excluding graphics card) costs in its entirety!

The graphics-rendering jewel in the crown comes courtesy of Leadtek, in the form of an NVIDIA 285 GTX graphics card with 1GB of video RAM - identical to the HD4870 TOXIC in this respect but almost unfairly over endowed in others. This is the latest-generation GPU from NVIDIA, and ought to be competing directly against an HD 5000-series part, which has not yet been made.

We certainly expected a powerhouse performance, but the figures that the first run of 3DMark Vantage churned out nevertheless came as quite the shock. Some 44,000 for the CPU component at first made little sense, until we realised that NVIDIA's GPGPU support for PhysX hadn't yet been disabled. With the platform thus hamstrung, the 940 came down to a more reasonable result of 18,396 - still well above what the Phenom could achieve.

Here we must pause for a moment. The strides NVIDIA has made with PhysX really do bear taking note of. A card such as this 280 GTX is able to accelerate this physics subsystem some four times more than a dedicated PhysX P1 PCI board, while still rendering graphics at a phenomenal rate. The acquisition of PhysX creators Ageia by NVIDIA was a masterstroke, and ATI needs to have an answer in their next generation of cards or this will become a killer advantage.

The SiSoft Sandra results, which have nothing to do with PhysX acceleration, showed an even wider performance advantage for the Intel rig. It managed to all but double the AMD's efforts in every single CPU discipline, scoring a phenomenal 78.81 GIPS Dhrystone result and maintaining this sort of performance advantage across the board.

Despite the 2.93GHz clock, it simply walked all over the 3GHz Phenom II and 3.2GHz QX9770.

In the benchmark demos, this additional under-the-hood grunt yielded definitive results, and again this Gaming Rig stomped its competition quite mercilessly. An average of 70.7fps at 1,280 x 1,024 in the PT Boats demo, and a stratospheric 172.8fps in The Last Remnant (194fps at platform-orientated settings) made no bones of the fact that the Phenom II is still playing catch up by a substantial margin.

Real-world gaming benches continued this relentless domination. *GTA IV*, with the texture slider still set to the maximum and every other detail slider maxed, still

Daylight dawns in breathtaking fashion in Clear Sky.

This pretty cheap expanding texture for the water spray hides some complex fluid dynamics.
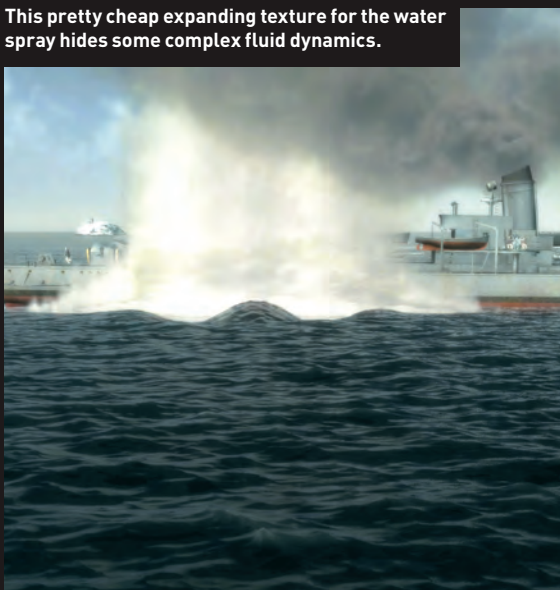
managed to average a very playable 65fps. Even pushed up to 1,600 x 1,200, it still managed a respectable 44.14fps average. *Call of Duty: World at War* meant practically nothing to this monster. At 2,048 x 1,536 (the maximum resolution of our CRT), with antialiasing enabled, you'll still be rocking 65fps, while the platform benchmark result of 212fps is pretty remarkable.

Clear Sky was free to look genuinely jaw dropping, with those new sunlight effects working overtime at a very smooth 55.60fps at 1,280 x 1,024, with this result falling only to 22.19fps at maximum resolution - the competition went into single-digit frame stepping mode at this point. The irradiated wasteland has never looked this good. And *Far Cry 2*? Well, let's just say its slowest run, 41.17fps (which was just a few frames per second behind the ATI average), was achieved at 2,048 x 1,536 with 8X AA enabled. At conventional resolutions, it sat in the 70 to 75fps zone. It's just criminally powerful really. An Extreme Edition CPU or second GPU anyone? It's just not necessary – nice yes, but a lot like that scene in *Monty Python* with the shotgun and the chained-up rabbits...

CINEBENCH R10 concluded the winning streak with a single-CPU number of 3,430, which rose by an incredible

multi-core efficiency factor of 4.15 to 14,654 using all four cores. The GTX managed an OpenGL rendering result of 5,950, just less than 1,000 more than the HD4870 in this discipline.

I believe that's called sweeping the boards. In terms of raw power, the Intel/NVIDIA dream team is just in another league entirely. Both product sets appear to have moved the game on to another place altogether, while AMD and ATI wonder where their competition, not to mention adoring fans, have gone.

All right, so I haven't mentioned overclocking on this huge-money "overclocker's dream" of a motherboard, but then the 940 really hasn't had much success in this field, and overclocking any Core i7 is a tricky affair. We managed to run it reliably at 3.3GHz under air... a modest 307MHz bump, but that was all we could get. Chalk one up, then, for the Phenom II.

Nevertheless, the Core i7 and GTX win the Ultimate Gaming Rig title on the resounding strength of this result. But before we actually wrap this lot up...

VALUE? WHAT VALUE?

There's an element that really needs to be included. We said from the start that despite limitations, this was our Ultimate

Every asteroid and asteroid fragment in this scene is being affected by the mammoth explosion – it's this large-scale application of physics that the PhysX engine is ideally suited for.

Ultimate Gaming Rig specs

Intel/NVIDIA	AMD/ATI
Core i7 940 CPU	Phenom II 940 Black Edition
2.93GHz	3.00GHz
Quad core	Quad core
45nm	45nm
12MB cache	6MB cache
TDP 130W	TDP 125W
Integrated memory controller controller	Integrated memory
6GB DDR3 1,600MHz	4GB DDR2 1,000MHz
X58 Express chipset	AMD 780 chipset
LGA1366	AM2+
NVIDIA 285 GTX	ATI HD4870
1GB GDDR3	1GB GDDR5
GT 200b	R700
55nm	55nm
648MHz Core	750MHz core
1,476MHz Shader	750MHz Shader
1,242MHz Memory	1,000MHz Memory
512-bit interface	2 x 256-bit Ring Bus

For the most part, our Gaming Rigs fly through even this demanding modern title.

Gaming Rig Shootout, but it would be downright unfair not to finish on these very valid calculations.

All other components aside, the GPU, CPU, and motherboards of these Gaming Rigs in truth compete at hugely different levels. Quickly add these rough numbers: 3,500, 2,000, and 4,200. The result is under ten thousand - albeit barely. Now try these three: 7,700, 5,500, 6,000. Yep, that's 19,200, as in rands. Add the necessary gigabyte of DDR3 (in multiples of three now, of course - triple channel and all that), and you're well over R20K. Add the more modern and powerful PSU that the newer 285 GTX needs as well, and you get the picture.

And if you wanted to upgrade to the Phenom II right now, it wouldn't be a problem. You don't need a motherboard newer than 'AM2+ capable' and you don't need to throw out that speedy DDR2 you're running at the moment. The Black Edition CPU is less expensive than the lowest-priced Core i7, and competes on a fairly

level footing with last year's king of the hill, the QX9770 (which continues to retail for a price no one can afford - R20K plus or something similarly ludicrous).

Take just one of the real-world benchmarks that show the combined performance of platform and graphics. Let's say *Far Cry 2* because of how reliable a bench it really is: run 1-2-8 is at 1,600 x 1,200 with 8X FSAA enabled, a setting which is really pleasing on the eye, and the respective machines give average frames per seconds of 34.65 and 53.88. Therefore, the Core i7 is giving 156% the performance of the Phenom II at pretty much 200% of the cost.

We'd say that's a variance that pretty evenly reflects this test in its entirety. And it's a figure that is pretty fair on both machines. The Core i7 and 285 GTX have no direct performance competition, and deliver returns on investment in a predictably decreasing scale - each increment of performance gained carries

an increasing cost penalty, the standard law of diminishing returns, really.

And finally... the drum roll

So, am I - through some weird financial equation - suggesting that AMD's Phenom II and Dragon platform are forgiven for not really turning up to compete so much as to prove a point? No, unfortunately I can't say that, as I'm a performance freak who really hoped the company could have its next giant slayer on its hands and am therefore disappointed that it doesn't.

The Ultimate Gaming Rig title is Intel's and NVIDIA's to keep even longer. Their combined dominance has run for so long that it's getting a touch old, but in fact each generation seems to see the gap between them and their competitors grow larger still. But AMD should be commended for keeping their pricing real, and if you do want the best on a specific budget, well, you'll probably appreciate their efforts. **NAG**

Supplier→ ASUS **Web→** http://za.asus.com

Specifications

GPU: RV790 (800 stream processors, 55nm+ process)
Memory: 1GB GDDR5 (3.9GHz)
API: DirectX 10.1 /OpenGL 3.0

PCB is of a higher quality than that of the 4870

ASUS EAH4890

SPECULATION WAS RAMPANT ALL over the Internet when it came to the successor of the very successful 4870 graphics card. ATI seemed to confuse users even more with statements made about their upcoming products – which would be based on the cutting-edge 40nm process. Many speculated that the RV790 would be based on the newer process and possibly house 180 five-way shader units for a total of 900 stream processors. All this speculation got everybody excited about the performance prospects of the 4890.

However, the truth seems to be a little less spectacular in some ways, because the RV790 doesn't feature 900 stream processors: it has the same 16 ROPS that have been on the Radeon cards for years, and the GPU is not based on the 40nm process but an improved 55nm process. The 20% performance gain claims stemmed from the fact that the card would be clocked higher at an 850MHz core speed – a full 100MHz higher than the 4870 graphics card.

We received the ASUS EAH4890 for review, which is based on the reference 4890 design and sports the standard cooler, which is near identical to the one on the 4870. Understandably so as well: considering that ATI's next-generation DirectX 11 part is at least six months away, it would be best to get as much as they can from current technology, especially because the RV7XX cores have scaled very well in terms of performance.

The 4890 then, in many ways is nothing new as the specifications sheet reads exactly the same as that of the RV770-powered 4870. However, do not let this deter you from looking at the 4890 as a future upgrade. While it would not necessarily be beneficial to move from the 4870 1GB card to the 4890, those using 4850s, 3870s, and 9800GTX/+ cards should seriously consider the 4890. At the standard clock speeds, it puts in performance that is much better than anything the 4870 can muster, with a 1,000-point advantage in 3DMark06 over an overclocked 4870 1GB card. In 3DMark05 and Vantage, the difference is even greater and really competes favourably against the competition's GTX285. While it is not able to match it in every single game and test, it comes within spitting distance, and when overclocked, it surpasses it.

No doubt, manufacturers will be releasing pre-overclocked versions of this card, which will bring the battle for the fastest single-GPU card to a head. We look forward to the ASUS TOP model of this card, especially considering that we were able to overclock this sample to an unheard of 950MHz without adjusting voltages at all through the supplied voltage-tuning software. **(Please note, extra care should be taken when adjusting voltages on the GPU, as aggressive voltage changes will damage your card permanently.)** The

performance at such speeds was nothing short of incredible. The temperatures did rise but not to the point where it was not feasible to run any game or synthetic benchmark. We look forward to the specialist ASUS version of the 4890, which is about to be announced (at the time of writing). We know it features a customised power circuit, PCB and cooling. Given that this card was capable of such high speeds, we would not be surprised to see this model come in at 900MHz or more from the factory.

It seems that ATI has another winner on their hands with the 4890. It's everything that the 4870 1GB card was and more. With ASUS having included a tweaking program with the card, even better performance can be had when combined with the official Catalyst 9.4 drivers. The 4890 is the best showing of the 4000 series thus far. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Bottom Line

The 4890 is a very impressive update to the 4870 and is virtually equal in performance to the GTX285.

Plus
+ Performance
+ Overclocking headroom
+ Voltage tuner

Minus
– Nothing really new

Sony Ericsson F305

IF THERE'S ONE THING that can be said with certainty about mobile phones, it's that there's always at least one feature to push that sale in an attempt to separate them from their competition. While the high-end market is dominated by GPS capabilities, 8-megapixel cameras, touch screens and 16GB of built-in storage, the mid-range market is often left out in the cold; stuck with a poor camera, weak construction or a sluggish operating system. Thankfully, Sony Ericson has been paying attention to this segment, and is proving that with the F305 (the 'F' stands for 'Fun') you can deliver a great product with plenty of value-added features while still cutting costs.

In terms of general capabilities, the F305 serves its purpose decently. While the 2MP camera isn't exactly going to win you any photography awards, it can produce decent results in the right lighting conditions and should suffice if your needs are limited to 'happy-snaps'. The system itself, while a generation behind Sony Ericsson's higher-end phones, runs smooth enough even with all the effects turned on and doesn't suffer from the same lethargy of older Sony Ericsson phones in this segment (such as the K600). The slider construction is solid and the stereo speaker quality, while

lacking in clarity at high volumes, should suffice for most of your needs.

The most important aspect of this phone, however, is its gaming capabilities. Able to play in both landscape and portrait mode, the F305 uses two dedicated gaming keys and an impressive 8-way D-pad for gameplay, although you can still use the regular keys if the game requires you to do so. The phone also literally comes packed with games, with a handful pre-installed and another 50 waiting on the included 512MB Memory Stick Micro. While not all the games are triple-A quality, many of them will provide at least a few hours' entertainment and their inclusion makes for fantastic value for money. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Specifications

Display: 2-inch, 176 x 220 pixels
Storage: 512MB Memory Stick Micro (M2) (included)
Entertainment: FM radio, media playback, stereo speakers
Connectivity: Bluetooth, GPRS, EDGE
Gaming: Dedicated gaming keys, motion sensitive

The cute and bubbly look is further complemented by interchangeable covers (front and back).

★★★★

Bottom Line
While it can't stand up to the high-end gaming phones, the F305 is perfectly positioned to clean up the mid-range segment.

Plus	Minus
+ Price	− Small screen
+ Tons of games	− Poor camera
+ Great gaming controls	

IKONIK Ra X10 Smooth

COMPUTER CASES, ESPECIALLY HIGH-END ones, are probably the most contested part of the entire gaming PC. Tastes vary and for the most part, many gamers and power users think of the cases last when thinking about upgrades. IKONIK, as some may know, are the makers of our Dream Machine power supply, the 1.2kW Vulcan PSU. The brand is new on our shores and the company itself is probably one of the youngest companies that manufacture high-end power supplies and cases.

With their high-end Ra X10 cases, IKONIK has gone for the very high end, where price is secondary. The Smooth is the cheapest of the RA cases, as the case doesn't feature software-controllable fans; and unlike the Ra X10 LIQUID, doesn't feature the custom water-cooling kit.

The Ra X10 Smooth is not a perfect case: it has no reset button, is not as sturdy as one would expect, the fans are relatively loud, and the front door magnet is not as strong as it should be. Definitely not what you want in a case that is at the

ultra high end of the market.

Having said that, the Ra X10 is very much like a super car: you may complain about certain aspects, but the things it does right are almost unmatched. The drive-mounting mechanism is truly fantastic, the airflow is impressive, and the finish is superb. Most importantly - and the best thing about it - it's one of the best-looking cases available on the market. In fact, it's the best-looking case I have ever used. It comes in two colour schemes: black and silver. The black version fits in almost anywhere and is definitely worth a look. It's not perfect, but then again, much like a supercar, if you're willing to overlook some of the small problems, the Ra X10 is a fantastic case unlike any other. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Motherboard Support: M-ATX/ATX/E-ATX

★★★★

Bottom Line
One of the best-looking cases we've ever tested.

Plus	Minus
+ Features	− No reset button
+ Aesthetics	− Rattles sometimes
+ Screw-less assembly	

Supplier→ TVR   Web→ www.palit.biz
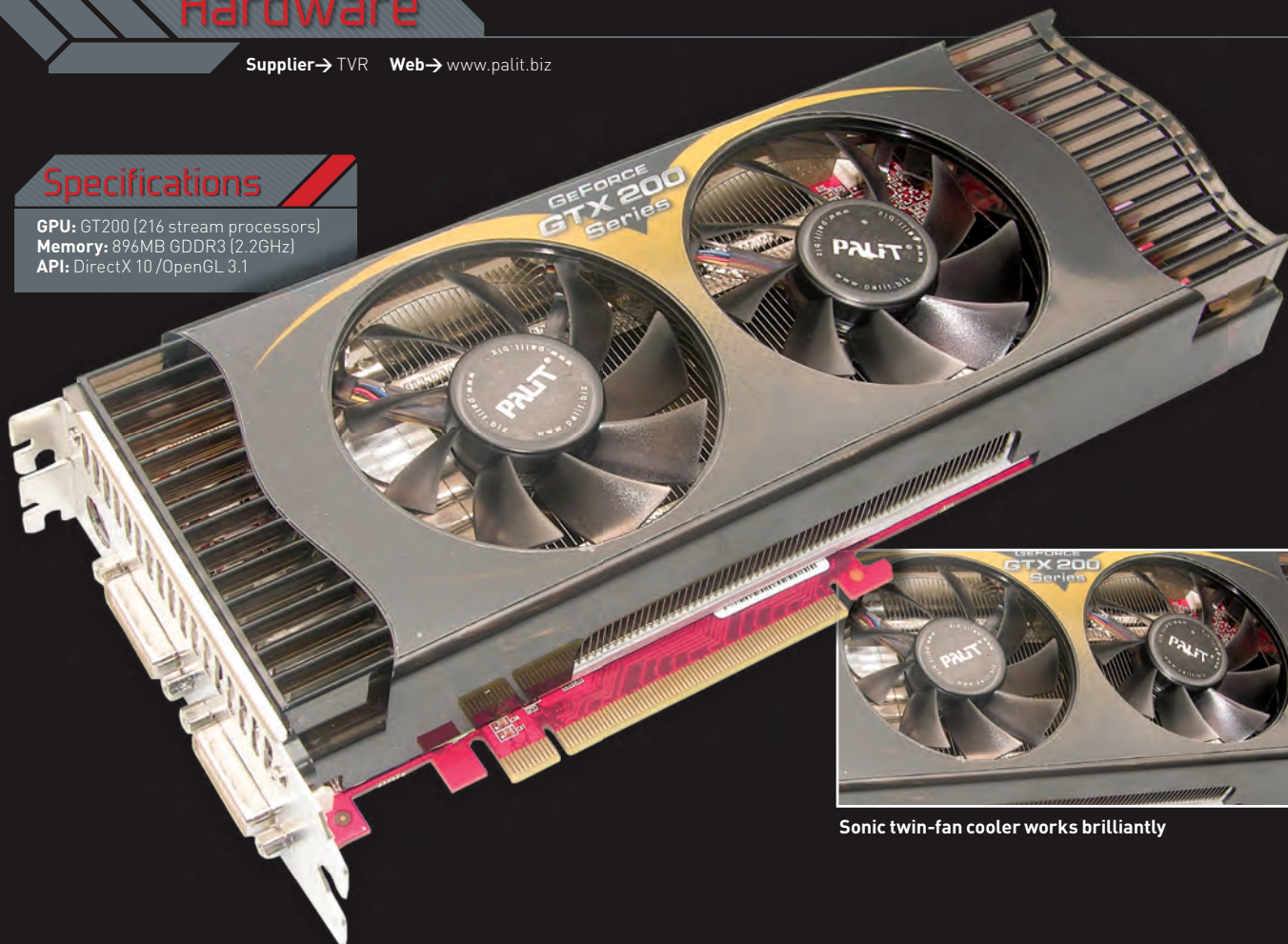
Sonic twin-fan cooler works brilliantly

Palit GeForce GTX 260 Sonic 216 SP

OVER THE LAST SIX months or so, the competition has been very tough between NVIDIA and ATI: the HD 4000 series of graphics cards has been delivering incredible performance at ridiculous prices, which forced the competition into the price war we have now. Obviously, this makes buying high-end graphics cards even cheaper for end users, and not only are the products more affordable, but newer products come in quicker than at any other time.

More than price decreases, however, manufacturers are taking liberties with the products, as NVIDIA began to sell individual GPUs to its partners, instead of completed products. Palit is one of the manufacturers that has benefited from this, and in turn has brought those benefits to its end users. While the Sonic range is not as well known as the XXX range from XFX, or the TOP series from ASUS, the Sonic 216 card is right up there in terms of quality and innovation. In the case of this particular graphics card, Palit has surpassed any other GTX260 we have ever seen.

The Sonic card is still based on the older GT200 core, but features nine clusters of shaders for a total of 216 stream processors, instead of the 192 on the previous GTX260 core. However, just getting the new core is not enough, so Palit has gone with a custom, red PCB that's based on the newer GTX260 PCB.

There have been a number of changes made by Palit in addition to going with a differently coloured PCB.

One thing that some may not appreciate is the change from the reference Volterra voltage-regulator chip to the Realtek chip, which means that it's not possible to change GPU voltages through RivaTuner and other programs, because the chip doesn't support such functionality via the I2C bus. Most people, however, will not be bothered by this, as the Sonic packs enough performance and has enough overclocking headroom to satisfy even the most power-hungry users.

Palit has clocked the GPU to 625MHz – up from the reference 575MHz – and the memory speed has been increased to 2,200MHz, instead of the reference 2,000MHz. Palit has outfitted the card with 0.8ns memory as well, which gives the Sonic card incredible memory overclocking headroom, as the memory is rated at 2,500MHz. During our overclocking tests, we were able to reach the official 2,500MHz of the memory, delivering an impressive 140GB/sec of memory bandwidth. As impressive as that is, the core speed was more impressive, partly because of the cooler Palit has decided go with on the Sonic card. Our maximum 'game stable' core speed was 740MHz, which is nothing short of spectacular for such a large 65nm-process GPU.

At these speeds, the Sonic card was delivering unmatched performance, managing to match the GTX280, and surpassing it in some of the benchmarks. Even more than the sheer performance, the card remained cool and the dual-fan solution was never loud enough to disturb gameplay – even though sometimes it was a little louder than the cooler you find on the reference design. The cooler is impressive and the triple heat pipe design lends itself to a very effective cooling mechanism that keeps the GT200 core temperatures under check even after hours of full load. Palit has done a fantastic job with the Sonic card and has certainly put together one of the best GTX260 216-based cards available on the market. The only model to surpass this would be the Palit GTX 260 216 Sonic 1,792MB version. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Bottom Line

Not only the highest overclocking GTX260 available, but among the fastest money can buy.

Plus	Minus
+ Performance	– No voltage settings possible
+ Overclocking headroom	
+ Cool	

Hori accessories for Nintendo DS

THIS IS NOT A bundled package, but rather three products we selected from Hori's range, which we thought might make a good companion set for a Nintendo DS. As you will see, we were almost right...

These earphones are marketed as DS headphones, but are really just stereo headphones, and thus can be used with any regular device such as an MP3 player or some cellphones. They are about 35mm across, and are covered in foam, so they sit on the ears instead of 'in' them, and are relatively comfortable. They stay in place by means of 'ear-loops', much like those of some Bluetooth headsets. Unfortunately, the shape of these loops is such that, while they barely feel like they are on (and therefore are comfortable and don't hurt the ears), they barely feel like they're on! I constantly thought they would fall off, and kept trying to fit them onto my ears more firmly – and no amount of this made me get used to them. The sound is okay, but because they don't sit firmly on the ears, quite a bit of it (particularly the lower frequencies) is lost.

Next up we have a protective cover. Personally, I don't like hard covers that stay on during use: no matter how they are designed, they still manage to restrict access to various items. However, in this regard, this one is not terrible, with all

Take note

Sadly, it seems that not all of these devices are intended to be used together. Specifically, you will not be able to dock a DS within a protective cover of any sort. Given that the cover reviewed here fits snugly and requires a firm hand, this is not a process one would want to repeatedly do and undo. Thus, these two items are, basically, mutually exclusive.

buttons readily accessible, as well as both slots. The covers fit snugly onto the two halves of a DS, and are clear plastic, allowing the original colour to be visible. The hinges are very poor, but this is fairly unimportant, as the DS's hinge actually does all the work in this regard.

Lastly, there is a nifty charge stand. A DS docks into this at a jaunty, slick angle, lending the device an almost abstract, sculptural look. One of the main advantages of a device such as this is that no longer will you be scrabbling around on all fours searching for the end connector among other wires, such as a cellphone charger, PC cables, and whatnot. You will still need your DS charger, as this dock gets its power from a DS power supply, and basically acts as an adapter. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Bottom Line
★★★

Individually, each of these accessories is quite useful. The charging stand is both quite functional and aesthetically pleasing.

Plus
+ Earphones: larger than usual
+ Charger: elegant design

Minus
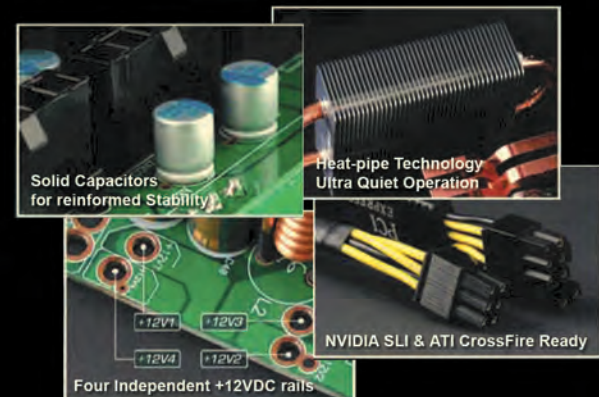- Charger and cover incompatible with one another

Supplier→ Axiz **Web→** www.xfxforce.com

XFX Radeon HD 4870 XXX Edition

XFX HAS ALWAYS MANUFACTURED NVIDIA-powered graphics cards and motherboards based on their MCPs. However, news came in late last year suggesting that XFX may start manufacturing ATI-based graphics cards. Whatever the reason behind this move, users should be happy that XFX is bringing their well-renowned XXX line of overclocked graphics cards to those who prefer the ATI Radeon line to the NVIDIA GeForce equivalents. While we are only aware of the XXX edition cards right now, hopefully XFX will introduce products under the Alpha Dog series as well, which should do well especially in the mid- to mid-high-end class of ATI products.

Given the late entry of the company into the ATI-powered products, it only made sense for XFX to bring out their 4870 in its most potent form and add it to the XXX family. XFX has gone with the 1GB version of the card, not only because the 1GB version of the card is faster than the 512MB card in its standard form, but also because the memory on the 1GB cards is generally rated at a higher speed. XFX took advantage of this in overclocking both the memory and the core. While the overclock is conservative by XFX standards, it's understandable considering that the card employs the reference cooler.

At a 775MHz core clock and 3,800MHz memory clock, the boost in performance over the reference model is anything from virtually nonexistent in some games, to noticeable in others. This is especially true for *Crysis Warhead*, where any graphics card that will be rendering this game in its enthusiast profile will need every performance tweak available to it. To this end, we managed to increase the clock speeds of the XXX card to 820MHz on the core and 4,100MHz on the memory, which is about in line with what you would expect with any other 1GB 4870 card. With the fan set at maximum speed, 840MHz is possible on the core, but the noise generated by the cooler at its maximum speed makes it impossible to use those settings. So, this kind of overclocking is definitely for those who employ water-cooling or some other more effective means of aftermarket air-cooling.

In the synthetic tests, the XFX card scored well enough to make it better than the competing GeForce GTX 260 216 – especially in 3DMark05 and 3DMark06 where it pulled out some impressive numbers, placing it closer in terms of performance to the older GTX280 than the newer GTX 260 216. This kind of performance is great, especially given the average retail price of the graphics card. As great as this card is in its single-GPU guise, however, we are not sure if it's sensible buying two for a CrossFire setup when a 4870X2 (which XFX also manufactures) would give the exact same performance – all the X2 cards feature 2GB (1GB effective in CrossFire mode) of memory.

With this kind of performance, we can only imagine what XFX will achieve with the 4890 (reviewed in this issue), especially considering how much more overclocking headroom the RV790 core has compared to the RV770 used on this card. Until then, we'll have to wait and see, but as it stands, the XFX 4870 1GB XXX Edition is one of the fastest 4870 graphics cards we have tested, and is certainly better than any 512MB 4870 we have ever used. XFX has done a great job with the 4870, and despite the existence of the 4890, it's worth the money if you are in the market. **NAG**
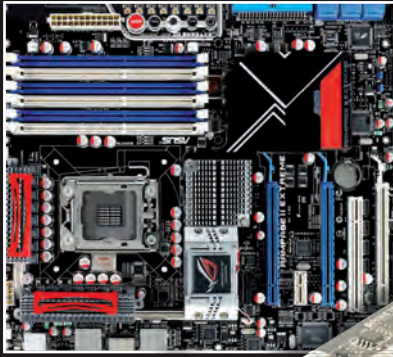
Neo Sibeko

★★★★☆

Bottom Line
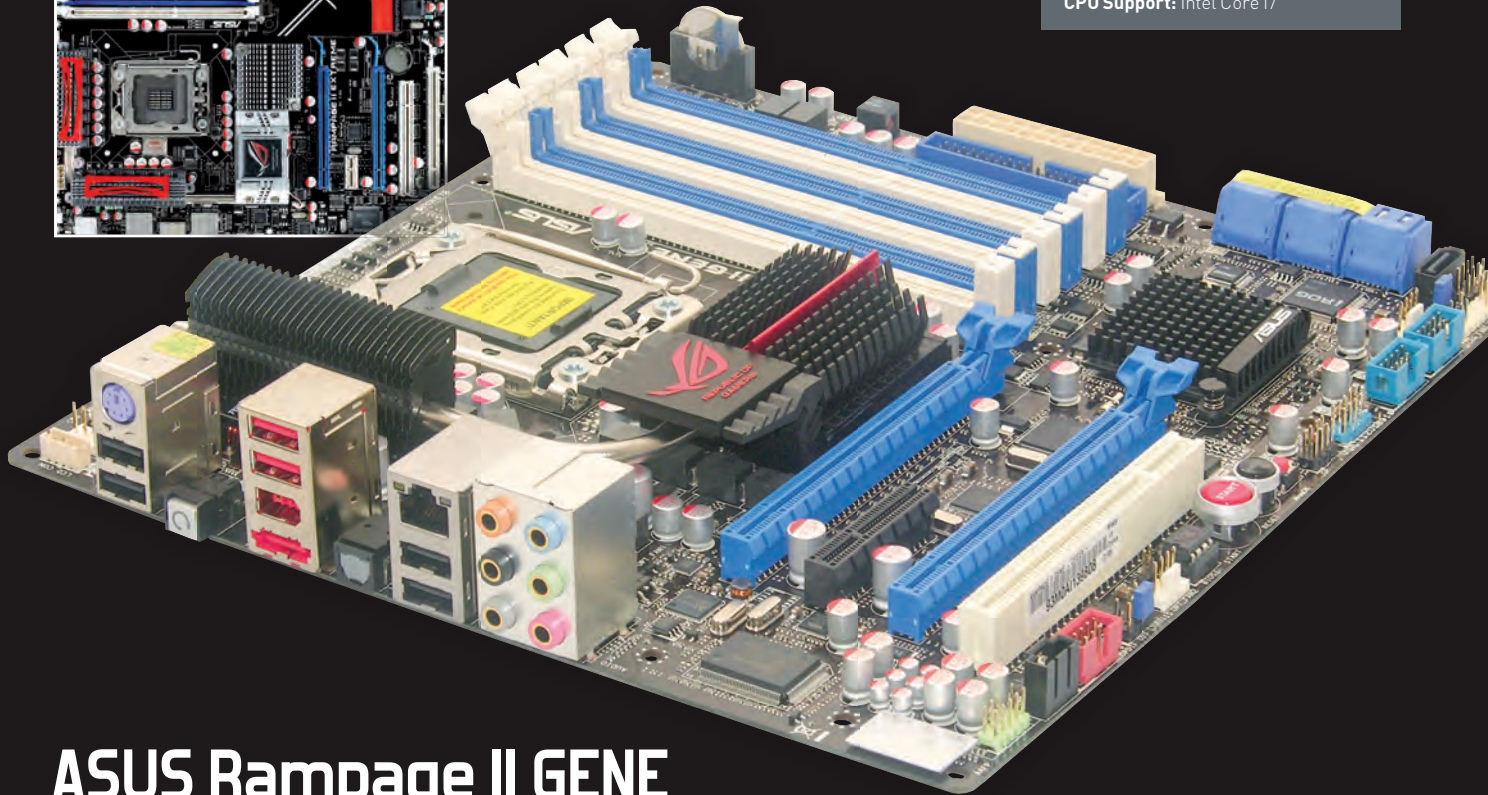The 4870 512MB card is a fantastic card, but the 1GB version is even better and well worth the money.

Plus
+ Performance
+ Pre-overclocked
+ 1GB of GDDR5

Minus
− The 4890 just showed up

Virtually identical to the Rampage II Extreme

ASUS Rampage II GENE

THE ASUS ROG FAMILY of products is probably the most well-known series of aftermarket motherboards in the industry - not only because more times than not ASUS produces some legendary motherboards under the ROG line, but also because they happen to stray from the reference design more than any other manufacturer in their specialist series of motherboards. A classic example was the incredible and yet-to-be matched ASUS Rampage Extreme board. However, when dealing with the X58 chipset, a few things have changed.

We have to admit that after having tested a plethora of X58 motherboards, for the most part the motherboards are the same. This is not to say they are equal and there are no significant differences between them, but the ability to run 3-Way SLI and 4-Way CrossFire no longer raises eyebrows, nor does the ability to outfit a system with 24GB of DDR3 memory. To a certain extent, neither does reaching a BCLK of 200MHz impress anymore, as this ability is more about knowing which options to change in the BIOS rather than the motherboard itself.

With that said, there are still some motherboards that offer that much more than the other X58 motherboards. If you were not impressed by the Rampage II Extreme (great motherboard), then maybe the Rampage II GENE will be more to your liking, if only because it's one of

the few X58 microATX motherboards you can buy. In fact, other than the DFI board, there is no other microATX X58-based motherboard.

The question that most people will be asking right now is: who needs a microATX X58 motherboard? The answer is quite simple, really. The HTPC and mini-gaming cases on the market have come a long way, and most of them can support one or even two high-end graphics cards in CrossFire or SLI. However, very few motherboards are this size and have this ability.

The Rampage II GENE is one motherboard that caters to this market, and possibly to people who just like the size of the motherboard and will opt to fit water-cooling components into their cases because of the space the Rampage II GENE saves them.

In terms of specifications, the motherboard is near identical to the Rampage II Extreme that it is obviously based on. The board doesn't support water-cooling for the Northbridge and makes use of a less elaborate component cooling system. However, it is themed in a similar way to the Extreme motherboard. The motherboard sports an impressive 8-phase power-management system, and an additional 2-phase system for the memory and for the chipset. This kind of power is only seen in full-size ATX X58 boards, but ASUS has spared no expense

in this regard.

The Rampage II GENE also makes use of the SupremeFX audio technology like the Extreme board, and features the Poster LCD screen, MemOK feature, power, reset and BIOS clear buttons as well. It lacks the on-the-fly overclocking features of the Extreme board and a few other features like dual-SAS drive support, but most users never use any of those features anyway.

As for overclocking, the Rampage II GENE is as capable as any other X58 motherboard we have used and reached a 200MHz BCLK. It also reached 220MHz for validation. Clearly, the motherboard has lost nothing at all by moving to a smaller footprint and as such, the Rampage II GENE secures its place as the best microATX motherboard ever. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Bottom Line

The ASUS Rampage II Gene is the best microATX board ever and among the best X58 boards available.

Plus	Minus
+ Performance	**-** Price
+ Features	

Mass Hysteria

HOLD THE PRESSES! OR don't, in this particular context - but pay attention! Rumours have been floating around longer than *Duke Nukem Forever*'s development cycle that there's a new *Ghostbusters* film on its way - but now those rumours can finally be laid to rest, because they're true. Harold Ramis (writer and co-star of the first films, as well as the upcoming videogame) confirmed this during a recent interview, and even let slip on a few of the details. Lee Eisenberg and Gene Stupnitsky, who together wrote and directed a number of episodes of *The Office* (the US edition), will be taking on the positions of lead writers for *Ghostbusters 3*. It's rumoured that Ramis snagged the pair during his direction of *Year One*, the upcoming caveman comedy starring Jack Black. Eisenberg and Stupnitsky wrangled the scriptwriting for *Year One*, so if you're looking for any indication of the trio's ability to work together, this is certainly something you should stay tuned to.

While Ramis was fairly 'skint' with the nitty-gritty, he did confirm the information we've all been waiting for: Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson, Bill Murray and Ramis himself will be back for the third film, although they're all hovering around the age of 60 these days. So, don't expect any wild beam-crossing action. Instead, the four will take on more sedate teaching roles, ushering in a new Ghostbusters squad and showing them all the tricks of the trade. We're expecting one hell of a montage. Ramis says, "They'll be looking at younger actors [for the lead roles], I'm sure. But we'll be in it as mentors or advisers. I think the first one captured something that hadn't been seen for a long time: the combination of scary movies and smart broad comedy."

When asked to divulge a few narrative tidbits, Ramis had only this to offer: "Now there's a new concept... And it's interesting, beyond the kind of mythology of it, there's a personal story that's pretty grounded." He also confirmed that it's not the original 'Ghostbusters go to hell' idea that Dan Akroyd suggested way back when. If we were to hazard a guess, and that's all it is at this stage, we'd say Peter Venkman's (Murray) kid has grown up and wants to take over the old man's business.

So, when can you expect *Ghostbusters 3* to see the light of day? Not anytime soon, according to Remis. While the writing duo has kicked off with the script, "they work fulltime on *The Office*, the script process is slow. Even if there were a great script by the end of [August], it would be a year before [we could go into production]. It's a big movie. Lots of prep."

Pride and Predators

HOORAY - THERE'S ANOTHER *Pride and Prejudice* coming! Wait, is that a good thing? It is this time, because, just like we've always said, no soppy English period drama is complete without a giant, gaping-maw alien with a passion for Xenomorphic hunting and turning invisible. No, you haven't stumbled over and hit your head, this is for real. Elton John's *Rocket* Pictures (get it - Rocket, like the song?) will be taking on this bizarre task, and the famous musician has even revealed a few details to convince the world that he's not kidding. Director of the supposedly fantastic comedy short, *The Amazing Trousers*, Will Clark will helm the production alongside producers Steve Hamilton Shaw and David Furnish. Furnish tells all: "It felt like a fresh and funny way to blow apart the done-to-death Jane Austen genre by literally dropping this alien into the middle of a costume drama, where he stalks and slashes to horrific effect." It sounds wonderful, to be honest, and we're all rather aflutter with anticipation.

Pirates 4? No thanks!

AFTER THREE LONG FILMS, it seems that the Kraken-infested waters have finally lost their charm on *Pirates of the Caribbean* director Gore Verbinksi. With news that the *BioShock* film has been 'green-lit' by Universal Pictures, Verbinksi has decided to dedicate all his time to *BioShock* as well as Paramount's animated film *Rango* (which will, incidentally, feature Johnny Depp's voice in the lead), pulling out of the directorial role for *Pirates 4*, which was scheduled to start production next year.

Cherrybomb

RUPERT GRINT - WHO you may know as that dorky red head, Ron Weasley, from the *Harry Potter* films - doesn't spend all his days waving a stick round while shouting bad Latin. No, the boy's got a darker side too, one that is about to unleash itself on the public with *Cherrybomb*. Directed by newcomers Lisa Barros D'Sa and Glenn Leyburn and written by equally inexperienced (but by no means untalented) Daragh Carville, *Cherrybomb* is a coming-of-age drama about a group of teens who decide to go on a weekend-long binge filled with all sorts of unsavoury practices. The trailer is pretty intense, and reminds us of films such as *Human Traffic* and *Go*. Definitely worth investigation if you're on the lookout for a crazy party movie.

Pennywise returns!

WE FIGURED YOU MAY as well learn this here, right now, so you can get those nightmares over and done with so that you're ready for a fresh bout when the film finally graces our cinema screens. There's a new adaptation of Steven King's It coming our way. Not a remake of the made-for-TV movie, no - this is a full re-adaptation of the thousand-plus-page book that will endure to mimic every shriek, scream and splatter of the book in ways the '90s film could never do. Screenwriter David Kajganich has told the world that he will endeavour to get the film that stomach-churning 'R' rating. "The remake will be set in the mid-1980s and in the present almost equally — mirroring the twenty-odd-year gap King uses in the book — and with a great deal of care and attention paid to the back stories of all the characters," tells Kajganich. "This will be 'R' which means we can really honour the book and engage with the traumas (both the paranormal ones and those they deal with at home and school) that these characters endure."

Colossal shadows

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS took a lot from the film world with its cinematic visuals filled with massive landscapes, sweeping cameras and beautifully lit scenes. Now things are coming full circle - *SofC* is 'returning' to film. Kevin Misher will be producing the film, with Justin Marks in the position of lead writer. Marks is responsible for writing *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li* and the as-yet unproduced *Grayskull: Masters of the Universe*, so at least we know there's a genuine fanboy taking up the pen.

Body of Lies

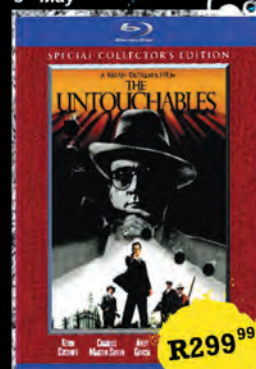**Age Rating:** 16 (VL)   ★★★★★
Running Time: 127 minutes

Director: Ridley Scott
Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio | Russell Crowe | Mark Strong | Golshifteh Farahani
Genre: Action Drama

LEONARDO DICAPRIO PLAYS ROGER Ferris, a CIA agent on the ground. Ferris is closely watched (by Predator UAV) and controlled by Ed Hoffman (Russell Crow). In *Body of Lies,* the CIA is up against a terrorist organisation responsible for a spate of bombings in Europe. They are assisted by the Jordanian intelligence agency run by Hani Salaam (Mark Strong). The movie is really a gritty, modern spy thriller that replaces tuxedos and fast cars with a disturbing look at what it means to be on the frontline in the Middle East. Location choice, the action bits, directing and acting are all top notch – no surprise considering Ridley Scott is at the helm. Throughout the movie you'll be rooting for Ferris, hating Russell Crowe and at the end of it all hopefully gain a better understanding of what war is all about. The level of intensity here is something that most other movies can only ever hope to match. There's a vivid sense that everything is life or death and that there's so much more going on under the surface than what you're seeing. Make sure you take the time to watch this one. It's absolutely brilliant and will stay with you for a while. The DVD also includes a number of special features on the making of the movie and if you really want to learn more about everything, there's some excellent and insightful commentary with director, Ridley Scott, screenwriter, William Monahan and author, David Ignatius.

Michael James

[giggles] I'm gonna give him such a fright!

Quantum of Solace

Age Rating: PG13 (V)   ★★★☆☆
Running Time: 101 minutes

Director: Marc Forster
Cast: Daniel Craig | Olga Kurylenko | Mathieu Amalric | Giancarlo Gianni
Genre: Action

JAMES BOND IS CHANGING - he's no longer the gadget-whore that he once was. He's becoming a far more physical character who'd rather punch the bad guys in the head than zap them with a pair of shoes that fire laser beams. *Quantum of Solace* offers tons of action, beautiful women and hot cars. It's got everything that a good Bond movie needs, except for the kick-ass gadgets. The movie's action sequences are fast paced and happen very frequently, rarely taking a break from the impressive explosions, gunfights and car/airplane chases. Stern-faced Daniel Craig makes portraying the more physical Bond seem like child's play, while the First Lady of this latest Bond escapade, Olga Kurylenko, is good looking enough that I didn't really pay attention to anything she says in the film. The plot involves a dastardly bad guy who wants to do terrible things to the world, so it's the usual Bond fare. The premise is exciting enough and it kept me entertained throughout, but it doesn't really do anything new. *Quantum of Solace* is an entertaining outing that offers up a slew of visually incredible moments and the usual Bond awesomeness. Special features are a bit sparse, with only a music video of the title theme, *Another Way To Die* (which is performed by Alicia Keys and Jack White), and the trailer for the movie.

Dane Remendes

So I told her I like my tea with two sugars, and then I killed her.

Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa

Age Rating: PG
Running Time: 86 minutes ★★★☆☆

Directors: Eric Darnell, Tom McGrath
Cast: Ben Stiller | Chris Rock | David Schwimmer | Jada Pinkett Smith | Sacha Baron Cohen | Andy Richter | Cedric the Entertainer
Genre: Animated Comedy

IN THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED sequel to DreamWorks' blockbuster *Madagascar*, Alex, Marty, Melman, Gloria, King Julien, Maurice, the penguins and the chimps find themselves back home in Africa, only to meet up with long-lost family and friends. While stealing a bit of plot from *The Lion King* and *Joe Versus the Volcano*, *Escape 2 Africa* is more of the same, with a little more emphasis on the life of Alex the lion and his history. The original cast of characters is all there; the laughs are fairly witty, but a bit mature at times, considering that this is a kids' movie. There's also a fair amount of violence, primarily dished out by the old lady from the first film, who makes several appearances, beating the animals senseless for some reason. The movie's only real saving grace are the penguins. Richter's sardonic wit and comic timing are fantastic and make the film worth watching, but I found myself wanting to fast forward through most of the other scenes just to get back to the penguins. If you enjoyed the first one, you'll probably want to watch *Madagascar 2*, but probably only once. Special features include a director's commentary, a couple of documentaries, a trailer for the videogame and trailers for other DreamWorks movies presented as a series of music videos.

Chris Bistline

What do you mean a pooh? I thought it was a brown snake!

The Rocker

Age Rating: 13PG (L)
Running Time: 98 minutes ★★★★☆

Director: Peter Cattaneo
Cast: Rainn Wilson, Christina Applegate, Jeff Garlin, Josh Gad
Genre: Comedy

GOING THROUGH LIFE CONSTANTLY asking yourself "What if?" has to be tough. For Robert "Fish" Fishman, played by Rainn Wilson (*The Office* - US), that's exactly how he's spent the last twenty years. As the drummer for up-and-coming rock band Vesuvius, Fish was booted and left to live out his days watching the band rise to the top and stay there for two very long decades. When he finally has the chance to return and do it all again with his nephew's garage band, he leaps at the opportunity with gusto. For a movie that bears such a remarkable resemblance to *School of Rock*, *The Rocker* actually manages to stand on its own. Rainn's acting style is almost indistinguishable from that of Jack Black at times, but he rises above the similarities with a unique charm and occasionally more sedate style of humour. Slapstick comedy features strongly, but doesn't take over. Likewise, there's plenty of teen angst and other coming-of-age content that would usually get annoying but manages to actually be enjoyable. The story flits through a few bits here and there where you'd expect it to dwell, but this pace enhances the story by not bogging it down and just getting on with the fun. Extras include deleted scenes, plenty of behind the scenes and a few gags reels.

Geoff Burrows

My Best Friend's Girl

Age Rating: 16 (SNL)
Running Time: 107 minutes ★★★☆☆

Director: Howard Deutch
Cast: Dane Cook | Kate Hudson | Jason Biggs | Diora Baird
Genre: Romantic Comedy

CHICK FLICKS AREN'T JUST for girls, they're for real men too. We all know too well what happens in real life: man meets girl, they fall in love, get married, live happily for a few years... and then it starts. She picks up weight; the bouncy bits become sagging, flapping bits, she starts pissing you off – you regret ever having met her. Just kidding... There's a flipside to that coin.

My Best Friend's Girl tells the story of a guy (Dustin – Jason Biggs) who meets a girl (Alexis – Kate Hudson) and instantly falls in love. He's totally besotted and the poor girl – feeling that things are moving too fast – decides to slow down the relationship. Permanently. He's devastated and desperate to get her back, so he turns to his best friend, Tank (Dane Cook), the smooth-talking rebound specialist. Tank's a master at seducing women and the two guys decide that Tank would take Alexis on a date to end all dates – a really lousy date, which will make her realise just how nice her former boyfriend was. However, things turn out differently and Alexis falls for Tank. So, what is Tank to do? Date her or stay loyal to his friend? Watch this romcom and find out. We really enjoyed it.

Nati de Jager
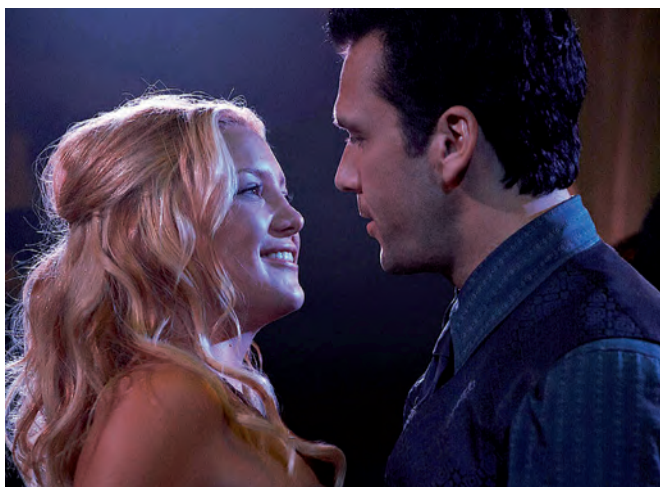
The House Bunny

Age Rating: 13PG (L)
Running Time: 94 minutes ★★☆☆☆

Director: Fred Wolf
Cast: Anna Faris | Colin Hanks | Emma Stone | Kat Dennings | Katharine McPhee
Genre: Comedy

I WENT INTO THIS ONE with a severe sense of dread: I was expecting, judging by the cover, something aimed at teenage girls, and started looking desultorily for a blunt, rusty plastic teaspoon in case I found myself needing to saw savagely at my wrists. However, once I put this flick on, I was able to leave it on while I got on with something else without thinking suicidal or homicidal thoughts (so you're safe, Mr Editor!). For starters, the humour is more adult than I expected, being rife with sexual innuendoes. The story, such as it is, is about a Playboy bunny who is evicted from The Mansion, and has to find a new home. She comes across a sorority house, and tries to move in there, but is told that she is too old. Feeling rejected, she stumbles across another sorority on the same campus, one which is home to unpopular 'rejects', and in the usual Hollywood manner ends up ensconced therein, and goes on to save the sorority from closure and giving the nerdy girls therein a makeover into veritable sexy vixens. Yes, a trite cliché from start to finish! Yawn. This movie's only saving graces are its T&A rating (if you have to ask what this means, you don't need to know!) and the aforementioned saucy humour – it gets 1 out of 5 for each of those. 'Special features' on this disc consist of a series of music videos, with the chicks singing and prancing around.

Alex Jelagin

Quick! Think of a fart joke!

Max Payne

Age Rating: 16 (VL)
Running Time: 100 minutes ★★☆☆☆

Director: John Moore
Cast: Mark Wahlberg | Mila Kunis | Beau Bridges
Genre: Action

I **LOVED BOTH OF THE** *Max Payne* games. I like Mark Wahlberg and, after watching the 'making of' special features, I ended up liking the director too – he's wonderfully irreverent. It's therefore surprising that *Max Payne* ended up being just an average cop movie that has very little to do with the game it's based on. Max Payne is there, Mona Sax (from the second game) is there and the story of a man with nothing to lose is there. It just doesn't tie together very well and ends up being a little dull in places and confusing in others. Right from the start to somewhere near the middle of the movie, you'll struggle to figure out what's going on. You're introduced to many new mysterious characters too quickly, and just as you start getting comfortable, you're whisked away to some new and seemingly unrelated scene. The direction is moody, dark and depressing, running parallel to the acting. Everyone in the movie knows what they're doing but fails to communicate this to the audience. The action bits are well strung together with a few 'bullet time' sequences that appear to have been added purely as a nod to the game. Thankfully, the disjointed events eventually tie together as the bad guy explains the plot towards the end of the movie. The DVD includes a making of special feature in two parts and a graphic novel that further explains the plot in the move. In the murky grey soup of game to movie crossovers, Max Payne ladles up more of the same drudgery that leaves a bitter aftertaste. When will these Hollywood clowns crack that magic combination...?

Michael James

Scar

Age Rating: 18 (LNV)
Running Time: 82 minutes ☆☆☆☆☆

Director: Jed Weintrob
**Cast:** Kirby Bliss Blanton | Devon Graye | Al Sapienza
Genre: "Thriller"?

OH, MY [CENSORED]! WHAT the [CENSORED] is this? Oh yes, I get it: it's a lame, pitiful rip-off of *Saw*. Predictable, clichéd, gruesome. Some sick person in a town gets his kicks by capturing two teenagers at a time, restraining them, and then torturing them. His game is to try getting either to beg him to kill the other, either to end the other's or their own suffering. One victim escapes, and goes on to live a 'normal' life (you know, with bad dreams, trauma flashbacks, and all that). She returns to her old town some years later and, lo and behold, events start repeating. Warning: I have no qualms about 'story' spoilers when I review a crap movie, and this one qualifies! Devon Graye, who plays the teenage version of Dexter in the excellent TV show *Dexter*, assumes the role of the copycat (talk about typecasting!) – there, I've spoiled it! And, of course, the 'thrilling, suspenseful' finale involves a re-enactment of events in the first encounter. Oh yes, we get to see both sequences in parallel, by the tiresome artifice of tedious flashbacks. There's lots of lousy acting, screaming, blood, cutting, and whatnot. Delightful! My recommendation: if ever you get the chance to see this film, watch something else! Next, please!

Alex Jelagin

Just dying to get out of here...
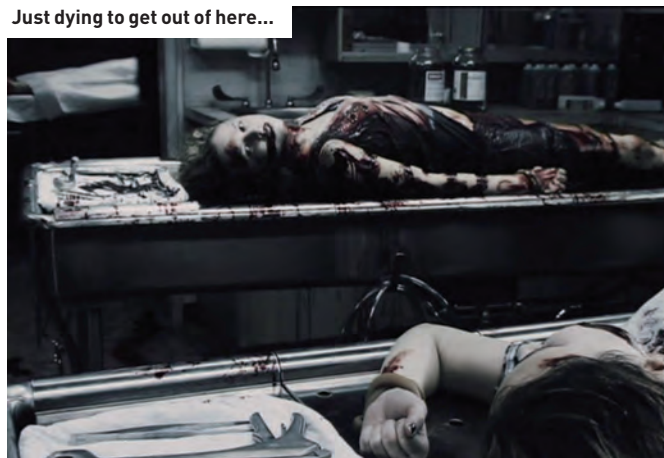
Deadpool: Games of Death

Format: Comic One-Shot | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Mike Benson
Artist: Shawn Crystal | **Price:** R46.95

FOR THOSE OF YOU who don't know Deadpool, you've really been missing out on comics. Essentially, he's another survivor of the Weapon X programme (the people who turned Wolverine into a living weapon against his will), and now he's a hard-as-nails mercenary who usually finds himself getting into all sorts of trouble. Added to that, he's a wisecracking degenerate: kind of like a really badass Spider-Man with guns. Oh, and he's totally insane and somewhat of a psychopath (kind of like a really badass Spider-Man with guns). In this once-off story, Deadpool takes on a job that leads him to compete in a blood sport, last-man-standing-kind of reality game show, in order to find the missing son of his client. Things go from a bad idea to a sweaty, bloody, exhausting and rather messy worse idea, before Deadpool sees the end of the job. But at least he didn't gain any cholesterol along the way (or did he?), or something like that. It's fun, it's violent, it's incredibly funny... it's Deadpool (now starring in his own series).

Clive Burmeister

Courtney Crumrin's Monstrous Holiday

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Oni Press
By: Ted Naifeh | **Price:** R154.95

COURTNEY CRUMRIN, A YOUNG girl and sorceress, is the main character in a charming fantasy adventure series, aimed at younger readers (ages seven to teen), but still masterfully written and enticing enough to entertain older readers as well, deftly crossing age boundaries with immersive and thought-provoking stories. In this book, *Courtney Crumrin's Monstrous Holiday*, which is the fourth volume in the *Courtney Crumrin* series of graphic novels, Courtney takes a European vacation with her uncle, Aloysius. Together they travel through Romania and Germany, taking in some of the sights as they visit her uncle's old friends. Along the way she encounters many strange people, places, and creatures, and learns more about her own mysterious magical powers, as she tries to help some of those around her who are in need. But the complexities of relationships, loneliness, and love are not always easily fixed, as Courtney must discover for herself, the hard way.

Clive Burmeister

Resident Evil Fire and Ice

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writers:** Ted Adams, Kris Oprisko
Artists: Lee Bermejo, Shawn Crystal | **Price:** R265

RESIDENT EVIL FIRE AND *Ice* is a mixed bag. Half of the book is devoted to *Fire and Ice* itself, a story about S.T.A.R.S. Charlie team, with the rest of the pages occupied by a few reprints of old stories from *Resident Evil Magazine*, as well as a ton of other *RE*-related issues. In terms of the second half, *Fire and Ice* is a great addition to the *RE* legacy and a must read for anyone looking to further their knowledge of Umbrella Corporation's nefarious plans and those who vowed to stop them. Unfortunately, the main chunk of the book, *Fire and Ice* (chapters 1-4), is a poorly written, often poorly drawn mess of a story. The characters are contrived, their speech and the narratives that follow even more so, and the artwork lacks detail and does absolutely nothing to bolster any of the story. Everything is too readily explained, with little left to the imagination.

Thankfully, if you've managed to claw your way through the first 100-odd pages, you'll be rewarded with stories that are genuinely interesting and puff up the already deep *Resident Evil* lore. It is here where the artwork picks up pace, settling into a dark, gritty style that perfectly complements the moody writing. While, overall, *Fire and Ice* is certainly worth picking up, you'd have to be a huge, information-starved fan to truly get any joy from cover to cover.

Geoff Burrows

Resident Evil #1

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** Ricardo Sanchez
Artist: Kevin Sharpe | **Price:** R48.50

WITH THE SUCCESS WILDSTORM has had with producing comics set in the worlds of popular games - like *Resistance, Gears of War, Mirror's Edge* and *World of Warcraft* - they now bring *Resident Evil* to the comic format. In this incarnation of *Resident Evil*, the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance now face a spreading scourge of bio-weapons, which threaten to overrun the entire continent of South America. Where did this plot originate, and can agents Holiday Sugarman and Mina Gere halt the tide of monsters that are rising against them? With the 'game feel' encompassed nicely into Sanchez's writing style, the comic brings a sense of excitement to the unfolding tale, and the comic's time-split layout adds a sense of growing anticipation as the story unfolds.

Clive Burmeister

The Darkness #75

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Image | **Writer:** Phil Hester
Artist: Various | **Price:** R56.50

TO CELEBRATE THE SEVENTY-FIFTH issue of *The Darkness*, Top Cow Productions (Image Comics) have released this mammoth issue, featuring the work of more than ten artists over the course of the story. The story itself takes a look far into the future, or at least a possible future, where the world's cities are shattered graveyards of their former glory, the skies are darkened into a constant sunless haze from the stagnant clouds of pollution, and humans scrabble among the ruins just trying to stay alive in the devastation that surrounds them - trying to avoid the scrutiny of the master of the world, the Darkness. But if Jackie Estacado continues with his ways in the present, his fate of master of a dying world will also mean his fate of an apocalyptic showdown between his powers and those of the Angelus, which will spell the end of all things. This is the kind of momentous comic issue that Image has become famous for.

Clive Burmeister

Prototype #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writers:** Justin Gray | Jimmy Palmiotti | **Artists:** Darick Robertson | Matt Jacobs | **Price:** R40

THE UPCOMING VIDEOGAME *PROTOTYPE* has spawned a comic miniseries. This first issue of the *Prototype* comic hits the ground running, delivering its fair share of action and a promise of good things to come. The story told in this issue runs between three time periods and locations. The first takes place in the year 1968, during which readers follow 1st Lieutenant Peter Randall on part of one of his tours through Vietnam. Approximately one year later, the story follows another Lieutenant Randall (it's unclear in the comic whether it's the same Lieutenant Randall from the previous timeframe) as he leads a squad of commandos to obtain an unknown package from a small town in Idaho. Lastly, the story fast forwards to the year 2008, and follows two New York City detectives on the trail of a rampant serial killer. This issue doesn't reveal much at all, other than that there will be lots of super-mutants running rampant through the pages of each issue, tearing the general populace to shreds. No mention of Alex Mercer, the player character in the game, but we have a suspicion that New York's serial killer may just be the man himself. The gritty art style blends together well with the rough, crass dialogue, and it'll be great to see what the future of this miniseries has in store for us. Be warned, it's intended for mature readers.

Dane Remendes

Figurines

Zack Fair Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

RRP: R300
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

It's Zack Fair from *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, complete with his oversized "I'm not compensating for anything" sword. This PVC figure is nine inches tall. In the packaging, you'll find an extra hand, a display stand and a small silver... something (we're not sure what it is, to be honest). But as far as small silver things go, it's an incredibly awesome small silver thing.

Buddy Christ Dashboard Statue Dogma

RRP: R175
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Remember the "Catholicism Wow!" campaign from Kevin Smith's film *Dogma*? Remember the campaign's poster child, the controversial Buddy Christ? Well, here he is, ready to be placed anywhere that you feel comfortable with having an overly happy figure of Jesus giving you a thumbs up, pointing at you and winking...

Cloud Strife Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

RRP: R300
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Pulled straight out of the PSP title *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (which is a prequel to the original *Final Fantasy VII*), this PVC figure stands eight and a quarter inches tall. Accessories include a pair of weapons, a set of extra hands and an alternate head, just in case you're not happy with the standard one. It also comes with a display stand. Be sure to get your hands on one of these if you just can't get enough of that hair.

Dark Knight Belt Buckle Batman

RRP: R400
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

It's a shiny Batman-inspired belt buckle. Convince yourself that it was made by the Batman himself, then don a cape and a mask and head out into the wild to fight crime. Doing so will automatically make you a better person. It's a proven scientific fact...

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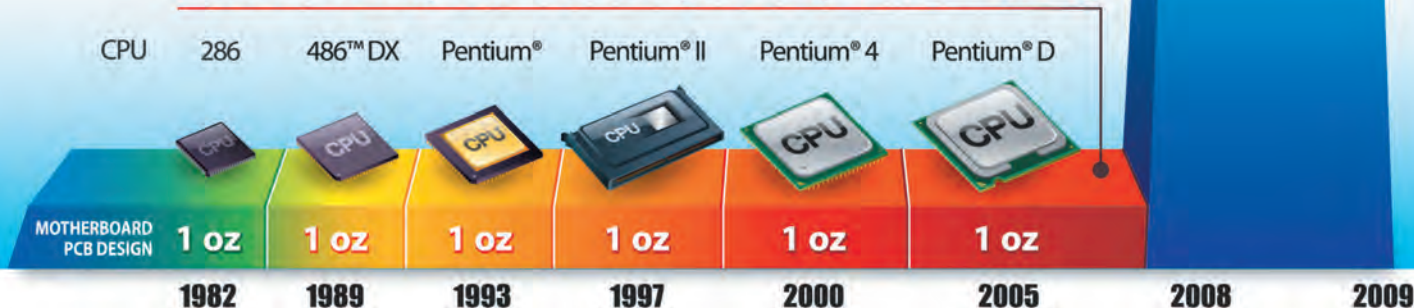## Only from GIGABYTE
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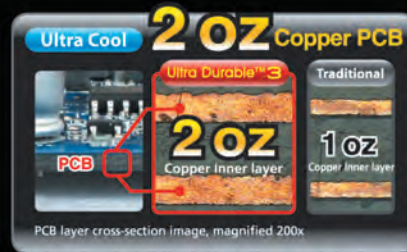
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