

NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII MOBILE

+ PREVIEWS

Fight Night Round 4 | Mass Effect 2
Batman: Arkham Asylum

+ REVIEWS

Demigod | The Sims 3 | inFamous
Bionic Commando | More!

MASS EFFECT 2

Mass Effect 2: to boldly go where no clichéd headline has gone before...



BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM

HANDS-ON PREVIEW

WE TAKE A DANCE WITH THE DEVIL IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT AND FIND OUT WHERE HE GETS ALL HIS WONDERFUL TOYS

HARDWARE

ALL YOUR GAMING GEAR REVIEWED!
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NAG DVD

Demos:
2007 Superbike World Championship
Street Outlaws vs. Jack the Ripper
Grand Alpha Rome
More...

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VOL.12 ISSUE 4 07.2009 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00

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07

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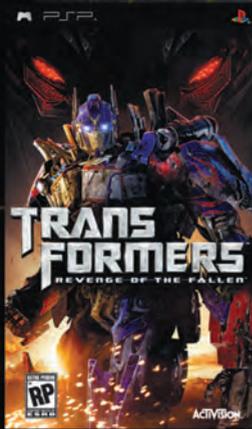
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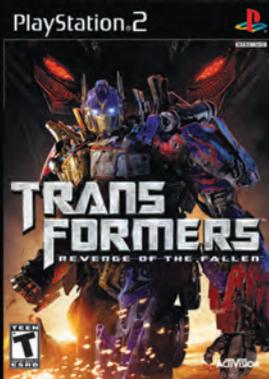
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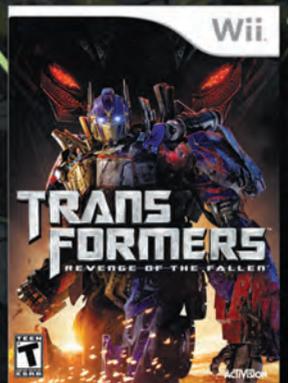
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VS



PlayStation®3 80GB

XBOX360 Elite

Processor type	3.2 GHz	3.2 GHz	Processor type
Graphics processor	nVidia-based, 550MHz, 256MB GDDR3 RAM	ATI-based, 500MHz, 512MB GDDR3 RAM	Graphics processor
Native video resolutions	480i, 480p, 720p, 1080i, 1080p	16:9 WIDESCREEN 720p, 1080i, 1080p	Native video resolutions
HDTV output	Yes	Yes	HDTV output
HDMI output	Yes (Cable not included)	Yes	HDMI output
Sound output	5.1 channel Dolby surround sound	Multi-channel, up to 256 discrete channels	Sound output
Optical drive	Blu-Ray	12x dual-layer DVD	Optical drive
Hard drive	80GB	120GB	Hard drive
USB 2.0 ports	4 in 20 GB version; 6 in 60GB version	3	USB 2.0 ports
Ethernet Networking	1 port (1 GBps)	1 port (100 MBs)	Ethernet Networking
Wireless Networking	Bluetooth 2.0 (Wi-Fi available on 60GB version)	Wi-Fi ready	Wireless Networking
Number of supported controllers	4 wireless (plus wired controllers via USB)	4 wireless (plus wired controllers via USB) Controllers will work with Windows PCs	Number of supported controllers
Compatible with previous generation games	Near-complete compatibility with PlayStation® and PlayStation®2 games (only a minority of titles don't work)	Partial compatibility with original XBOX titles (only some original XBOX titles work, more are being added slowly over time)	Compatible with previous generation games

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- > PS3 (69941) R599.95*
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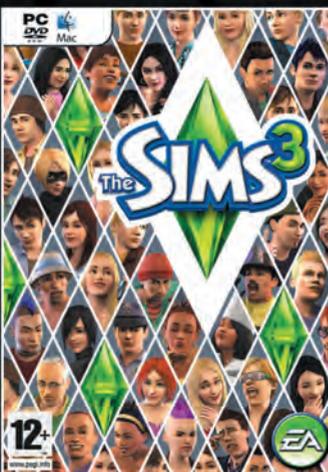
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On the DVD

Demos

AaaaaAA!! A Reckless Disregard for Gravity | Grand Ages: Rome | Light of Altair | Ragdoll Cannon | SBK 09: Superbike World Championship | Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper | Smashing Toys | The Path

Drivers

ATI Catalyst Drivers 9.5 Vista & XP | NVIDIA ForceWare 185.85 WHQL Vista & XP

Extras

CheatBook Database 2009 + Updates to June 2009 | Adobe Reader 9.1 SACM June 2009 [Complete]

Patches

Far Cry 2 v1.03

Game Videos

Aliens vs. Predator - Teaser Trailer 1 | Aliens vs. Predator - Teaser Trailer 2 | Batman: Arkham Asylum - Pamela Isley | Battlefield 1943 - Coral Sea Trailer | Borderlands - Debut Trailer | Brutal Legend - Tim Schafer Interview Part 1 | Brutal Legend - Tim Schafer Interview Part 2 | Burnout Paradise - Big Surf Island Tour Trailer | Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood Trailer | Crysis 2 - Teaser Trailer | DC Universe Online - Game Trailer | Diablo III: The Fallen Ones - Trailer | Colin McRae: Dirt 2 Trailer | Fight Night Round 4 - Boxers Trailer | Fight Night Round 4 - Developer Part 1 | Fight Night Round 4 - Developer Part 2 | Fight Night Round 4 - Developer Part 3 | Fuel - Events Trailer | Fuel - Multiplayer Trailer | Fuel - Tornado Trailer | Halo Wars - Keep Away Mode Commentary | Halo Wars - Reinforcement Mode Commentary | Halo Wars - Tug of War Mode Commentary | Heavy Rain - Interview 'Death' | Heavy Rain - Interview 'New Character' | Heavy Rain - Lagoon Trailer | Heavy Rain Trailer - Part 1 | Heavy Rain Trailer - Part 2 | inFamous - Launch Trailer | inFamous - Parkour Trailer | inFamous - Train Ride Trailer | Kung Fu Hustle The Game - Axe Gang Trailer | Kung Fu Hustle The Game - Interview | Little King's Story - Game Trailer | Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2: Fusion - Deadpool | Modern Warfare 2 Trailer | Natural Selection 2 - Teaser Trailer | Need for Speed: Nitro - Debut Trailer | Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising - E3 Trailer | Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising Trailer | Overlord II - 10 Reasons Trailer | Overlord II - Creature Crunch Trailer | Overlord II - Minion Maximus Trailer | Overlord II - Walkthrough Trailer 2 | Overlord II - Walkthrough Trailer | Overlord II - Ministry of Information Trailer | Phantom Brave: We Meet Again - Debut Trailer | Real Soccer 2009 Overview | Red Faction: Guerrilla - Tools of Destruction Trailer | Red Steel 2 Trailer | Risen - City Life Trailer | Server Quest II | Sherlock Holmes Trailer 1 | Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny - Director Interview | Spore Galactic Adventures - Commentary Part 1 | Star Wars: The Clone Wars - Republic Heroes - Debut Trailer | Star Wars: The Old Republic - Timeline Trailer 1 | Star Wars: The Old Republic - Timeline Trailer 2 | Swords and Soldiers - Launch Trailer | Team Fortress 2 - Meet the Spy | The Grudge - Japanese Debut Trailer | The King of Fighters XII - Girl on Girl Game Trailer | The King of Fighters XII - Trailer | The Sims 3 - Riverview Trailer | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - One Shall Stand Trailer | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - Voice Acting Trailer | Wolfenstein - Particle Cannon Trailer

E3 Videos

Alan Wake - E3 Trailer | Alpha Protocol - E3 Trailer | Assassin's Creed 2 - E3 Game Trailer | Batman: Arkham Asylum - E3 Joker Game Trailer | Battlefield: Bad Company 2 - E3 Trailer | Bayonetta - E3 Trailer | Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood - E3 Trailer | Crime Craft - E3 Trailer | Dead Space: Extraction - E3 Trailer | Colin McRae: Dirt 2 - E3 Game Trailer | DJ Hero - E3 Debut Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - E3 Trailer | Final Fantasy XIII - E3 Trailer | God of War III - E3 Game Trailer | Gran Turismo 5 - E3 Trailer | Halo 3 ODST - E3 Game Trailer | Kung Fu Hustle The Game - E3 Game Trailer | Left 4 Dead 2 - E3 Teaser Trailer | Lost Planet 2 - E3 Trailer | Mafia 2 - E3 2009 | Mass Effect 2 - E3 Teaser Trailer | Natal Milo Demo E3 | Need for Speed: Shift - E3 Trailer | Project Natal E3 Announcement | Singularity - E3 Trailer | Splinter Cell - E3 Debut Trailer | Star Wars: The Old Republic - E3 Cinematic Trailer | Supreme Commander 2 - E3 Trailer | Tekken 6 - E3 Trailer | The Saboteur - E3 Trailer | White Knight Chronicles - E3 Trailer

ScrewAttack Video Game Vault Videos

Dig Dug | Duck Tales 2 | Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards | Metal Slug 3 | MicroMachines 2: Turbo Tournament

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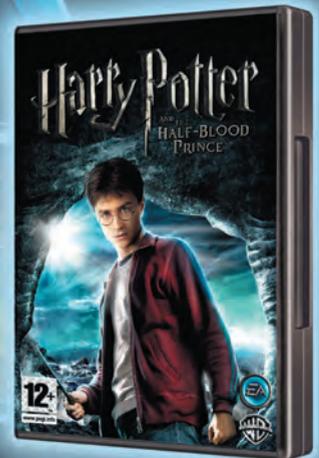
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Whiz, Bang... What?

IT'S BEEN A WHILE since I said this, but E3 is finally behind us... Remember, the show sort of collapsed a few years ago, and we really missed it. Take note: in the next issue of NAG, you can expect a whole separate guide on the show, listing all the latest and greatest game announcements, and some interesting things you probably didn't know. We even put a few of the more exciting E3 videos on the DVD this month. Make sure to watch the Natal Milo video and prepare your mind for the next step in peripheral innovation. The guys at the office were saying that even though it looks impressive and all science fiction *Minority Report*-like; it's just a really clever combination of some very ordinary technology.

I often get asked to predict where gaming will be in five years; and each year that goes by, the realisation that I have absolutely no idea sinks in a little deeper. Who would have thought five years ago that we'd be entering a peripheral era in gaming (this is following the next-generation era, which is now correctly called the "current generation")? Yes, the games keep improving in graphical fidelity with better stories, acting and innovation, and everything else. It seems that this inevitable and unstoppable march of technology will always be with us, and I'm done 'predicting' that graphics, sound and speed will keep getting better - this isn't a prediction anymore, it's a given. We're now seeing skateboards, wands, Natal, and even a heart-rate monitor, all of which probably started with the Wii and *Guitar Hero* bringing new input peripherals to the mainstream. This is what makes predicting the future impossible: nobody in this industry or out of it could ever have foreseen an actual skateboard peripheral. What leads to these kinds of innovations? Does it all start with a good idea in a science fiction novel, converted into reality, and then pushed and driven by marketing departments? Where will the current trend end: full body suits and implants? The trick with predicting is to pull back from the small incremental details and focus on entirely new ideas. Perhaps the next big thing in five years will be games that play us, and not the other way around. Following that, other gamers will play us; and finally, we'll have games that just play themselves.

This, then, highlights something I read that made me wonder... Reggie Fils-Aime (Nintendo America boss) went on record



rAge

Just a quick update: the NAG LAN tickets go on sale on 1 August 2009 at Computicket around the country. We've increased the size of the LAN to accommodate 2,000 people (up from last year's 1,800). Please act early. These tickets sell like hot cakes, and each year we have many disappointed gamers requesting special arrangements. Once the tickets are sold out, they're sold out; so make sure you get yours. rAge is happening at the Dome in Northgate from 2 to 4 October 2009.

stating how unimpressed Nintendo was with all the "whiz bang" technology on display at E3 (he was talking about rivals Microsoft and Sony). He was essentially stating that Nintendo is different by focusing exclusively on entertainment, dismissing these wonderful technological toys, while conveniently forgetting that new and exciting technology is what the Wii is based on. Throughout history, technology was and always will be the driving force: it wins wars and solves problems; it lets people live out their fantasies, and drives the human race forward. Dismissing it as trivial is a rather shortsighted view.

Enjoy this issue and don't forget to get the next one: it'll have a major cover feature (secret for now), the mighty E3 supplement in a new format, and all the usual excitement as we gear up for the most interesting period in gaming for a while.

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Can somebody tell me what kind of a world we live in, where a man dressed up as a bat gets half of *Mass Effect's* cover? This magazine needs an enema!

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Letter of the Moment

FROM: Ryan

SUBJECT: Opinions...

"ABOUT A MONTH AGO I bought Dark Sector (groan), plain and simple, I hated it. That game is horrible! Anyway a couple of weeks down the line a friend and I were discussing games and somehow we came on to the topic of Dark Sector. Well... I said that it was the worst game I've played in the last year; the genuine shock on his face brought a smile to mine. He said to me that it was one of the best games he played in the last year. At that moment something occurred to me, how good or bad a game is depends on the player. From what I seen, heard and read people seem to believe that NAG is the law and that every review you guys do is a reflection of that game. In truth everyone holds that key. An example, if a game comes out before it's reviewed and I decide I'm going to buy it just based on the videos and news and I love it, and then next month you review it and give it the pony award (touch wood)... What then, do I hate because it got the pony award, the answer is no... I enjoy it and keep playing. Which brings me back to my original point, games and how good they are is opinion based."

No. NAG is law (your words), because I give the games we review to the best possible person for the job. The people who work here have been playing games for a very long time. They've also played all the games in a particular genre and on multiple platforms. They know the industry and they know the developers. They play the games long before they're on sale, and they also discuss their opinions with the rest of the staff (me included). What you're getting in a NAG review is the considered opinion of an expert in their field, which is backed up by other professionals. This might seem a little high and mighty considering we're 'just playing games and writing about them', but a lot more goes into it than what is visible on the surface. If we say a game is rubbish, then it is. Unless, of course, nothing we say matters, because you just love the game for your own reasons - that's the opinion part of it. What we do is very different. Ed.

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

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FROM: Aswin

SUBJECT: The BAGINATOR

"HI, ED, IS THERE even a BAGINATOR this month? I've been through the magazine 7 times. And I can't seem to find the little freak. But I'm not going to stop. I'm going to find him."

In the movies, you know, when the evil scientist thinks he's achieved his nefarious goal or has just foiled the good guy/agent/spy; right after that, the scene switches to a wall and you see the enlarged silhouette of the scientist hunched over. Now think about the deep evil laugh you usually hear... Imagine you're hearing it now! Sorry about all

the drama, but I don't know how else to convey the futility of your plans. Ed.

FROM: Aziz

SUBJECT: Popular Gamers?

"AS WE ALL KNOW gaming has skyrocketed in popularity in the past few years (thanks to the new generation consoles such as Xbox 360, PS3 and the Wii) and due to this rising popularity now you get many moderate gamers that before used to beat up on people that were hardcore gamers. Now because of this huge rise in popularity, gaming is seen as cool. So now even the 'cool' kids that thought gaming is for nerds even play games. Which begs the question, why aren't the hardcore gamers seen as the new 'cool' guys? I would think that the biggest fans of current trends would be seen as the most popular kids, but that is not the case? I am still seen as a loser, and I even got myself a 360 (yes I crossed over to the dark side, I'm ashamed to say that I don't even LAN anymore) which is supposed to be cool. And this is not the case just with me; almost no gamers are seen as cool, so I'm just wondering when are the real gamers going to be seen as the popular ones? Not that I care (okay, that's a lie). And it is not right in my eyes that the moderate gamers are the future of gaming and that they are seen as the main movement of gaming, it should be us the real gamers that stuck with the industry through good and bad."

Have you ever considered that maybe the problem lies with you? I did a quick check around the office and everyone here is really cool: we've all got girlfriends, snappy haircuts and everything. There are people out there who try really hard to be cool, but just never get it right - the biggest problem is that they're trying too hard. Stop worrying about what other people think - who cares? You'll never be truly free and happy unless you stop giving other people permission to decide how you're supposed to feel about yourself. Unless you're just plain ugly and have a runny eye, everything will work out okay in the end. Trust me, I used to be a good counsellor until they put that pesky restraining order in place. Ed.

FROM: Eugene

SUBJECT: Wheel of Time

"HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT that the man upstairs has a very enduring and ironic sense of humour? That is if you believe in the man upstairs, if not, it is probably the big micro chip controlling all, but I digress. Have you ever thought back to when you where still a youngster scratching in you piggy bank trying to get that last rand out of it, just so that you can go play street fighter at the arcade, dreaming of one day owning your own personal gaming machine right in your own room, doing all sorts of odd jobs just to get some resemblance of a hobby going? Well time has passed and irony as it will have it, has made sure that these

dreams came true, at a cost albeit. The cost you ask that these mighty gods of irony and agony inflict on us for owning multiple entertainment devices and actually having the monetary means to pursue these hobbies? Time. Yes time folks, I have realized more and more that I have less time to spend on these hobbies and this is a very costly factor. So I find myself in this predicament of battling with the wheel of time, trying to get it to stand still for just a moment, so that I can indulge myself in all the wonderful worlds of escapism that this hobby provides me with. But alas it seems I am fighting a losing battle as things such 'obligations' (shudders) come in to play... well that was my two cents... regards and thanks for a great magazine every month."

I'm with you, but back to me. Imagine how soul-destroying it is for the Editor or writers of a gaming magazine. I have all the games and hardware any reasonable person could wish for and no time to play them all. They just sit there, on my desk, mocking me - piles and piles of preview code, review samples, new hardware, DVDs, and even comic books, graphic novels and figurines. It's all this actual work I have to do. But back to you. Are you sure you can't make the time? Do you sit on the couch some nights just staring at the TV because you're too 'lazy' to get into a game? Are the games to blame because some of them require such a time commitment to play? You must make the time - I order you. Ed

FROM: Ian

SUBJECT: The Gaming Community Today

"I'VE BEEN PLAYING GAMES since I was 5, but only started to play online and competitively for about a year. When I first started playing online people were friendly, kind and polite, they helped me to become a better gamer with some tips about the game and so on... Since about Middle of the year in 2008 after about a 1-2 month gap period I stopped playing online due to no Internet after about 2 days playing I started to realise how bad the gaming community got so quickly. I couldn't even join a server without being moaned at about even using a weapon in the game. And the point is I'm only 16 years old and these guys threaten everyone that they don't like. I'm 16, what can I do if I meet them at a LAN? It's because of these types of people that are beginning to cause me too stop playing competitively and stop gaming completely."

I'm going to tell you from my experience that not all the communities are like this and you should probably stop playing Counter-Strike. The guys at SAIX are really decent - as well as a few other service providers. They even have rules stating that nobody is allowed to tell you which weapon to use. Regarding being worried about meeting these guys at a LAN, don't. Based on my experience,

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.



Hubert Knoblauch:

"The depicted NAG Woodlands Humvee is reasonably low poly, except for the wheels. The tyre treads were created in 3D instead of the image based bump mapping process. All 3D work, lighting, UVW unwrap and texturing were done by myself and rendered with the 3D studio Mental Ray Renderer. The gritty effect is a watercolour Photoshop filter."

the biggest mouths are always attached to the biggest cowards. Just ignore the morons – they're not worth the effort. Ed

FROM: Shaun

SUBJECT: Game Design

"I WOULD LIKE TO RESPOND to Desmond's letter concerning where to study game design as I have a great love for games and designs of how to design them are there any places where I can study game design in South Africa."

I suggest spending a little more time studying the English language before you start with game design. Ed

FROM: Justin

SUBJECT: Nostalgic?

"THE OTHER DAY I was playing my good old PS3, when my roommate asked me when I was planning on dropping this childish thing of playing TV games. I obviously immediately went for my samurai sword as an answer, but hesitated so I could educate my good friend. I tried to clearly explain to him that playing games is not childish but something I do to relax and a pass time I very much enjoy. He having 'no sense of knowing things' syndrome did not understand this. He went on to tell me that it is nostalgia causing me to play games and that I'd eventually stop playing them. So was it nostalgia or something else. I think something else. It goes back to the days of our ancestors hunting gazelle on the plains of the Kalahari. That rush of adrenalin they got from hunting or being hunted by some predator of old. In today's world we don't get that rush in any other place but the fantasy world of games. It's that excitement and raw thrill that we seek in it. And yes, even so in games like Little Big Planet and Viva Piñata. So, until I don't need that thrill anymore (which would be never), I'll continue killing chimera and scoring goals in the world which is games."

Your first instinct was correct; you should have slit him open for even making you

think about gaming in a negative light. It's not too late. There's that old ninja line of thinking about drawing blood if you unsheathe your blade. It goes even deeper, if you even think about it. It needs to be done, and once you get out of jail, just think about how cool the games will be in twenty years. Ed.

FROM: Eric

SUBJECT: Bad games

"I WAS PONDERING TO MYSELF the other day, how does someone make a bad game? I would think it is impossible since games tend to go through a large development cycle in which there is an infinite amount of testing, and adjusting to make the game as good as possible. So how does a bad game happen? Is it due to lack of budget? That can't be an excuse because independent development companies do wonders with a shoe string budget. Could it be laziness? I doubt it because a game could have an impact on the name of a studio and publisher and a sub standard game would hurt his name and future sales. I think the real reason for bad games lays in management being a board of directors who feel that they should follow gaming trends rather than make their own way. They tell the programmers to make something that has certain qualities but never how they should interact they just want the game to be free roaming, in space with ninjas and should play like FIFA 09. Then when they end up with a lump of steaming dog manure they release it anyway since now they need to make money."

Didn't you know? There's no such thing as a bad game, only bad gamers. It's all about money at the end of the day – nobody does anything anymore just for fun. They rush to hit the Christmas-buying period, they hire cheap staff, they're overworked, management is lazy, etc. Essentially, anything wrong with any company and the products it produces can usually always be traced back to economics. Ed.

On The Forums

QUESTION: Which game shown at E3 are you looking forward to the most, and what announcement or game was the biggest disappointment?

Graal: "Mass Effect 2 and Fallout New Vegas if it get's shown."

kolle_hond: "Tony Hawk's RIDE as well as Project Natal were highlights, I'm disappointed that FFXIV is another online game."

PAPABEAR: "I think my most disappointing announcement from E3 was that the Fallout 3 MMO is only coming in 2014."

pArkEr: "I'm most looking forward to 'Game of the Show' Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, as well as Alan Wake. Biggest disappointment: Sony announcing Final Fantasy XIV, then coughing under their breath 'Online'."

wir: "I'm a little disappointed at L4D2 being announced, while I'll still look forward to it, I think it's a bit soon."

Tieron: "I'd have to say Section8 (the preview video a few months back on the DVD... ma'ead nearly 'sploded!), Modern Warfare 2 and brutal legend (even though I don't have a console, METAALLLLLL!!!!!!) are looking amazing. I'm a bit disappointed in the whole DJ Hero thing..... Can you imagine, dude pitching at a LAN, "wassup dawg, yall ready to be fraggin dose middle-east side terrorist fools in the hizzaaay?"..... pffffff *raises the pimp hand*"

Takiro: "Halo: Reach... Orgasmic! And Assassin's Creed 2 :)"

brazed: "My biggest disappointment and the announcement I was most looking forward to, are one and the same. Half-Life 2: Episode 3. I could only watch in disbelief as E3 passed by with not even a mention, no whisper of its progress, no nothing."

X-Gamer: "Hey Brazed, You forgot Portal 2!! Or maybe Valve are trying to get a few games together so they can release The Orange Box 2!!!!!"

zom813: "The one thing I was disappointed about was the lack of any announcement relating to the next Elder Scrolls game. Although, I guess Bethesda usually keep raps on their Elder Scrolls games until they are nearing completion, so no surprises there really."

Pl2070+YP3: "My biggest disappointment was Final Fantasy XIV being another Online title, they just wasted a Roman Numeral."

NecroWolf: "I'd have to say gt5, WET, Bayonetta, brutal legend, god of war 3 and ac 2. They all look awesome and I'm gonna buy them all when they're released. My biggest disappointment was the PSP Go being download only, I really wanted one but I won't get it 'coz I don't have internet."

Gh0sT_828: "Despite the insane amount of flak it's been catching, I was pleased to see Left 4 Dead 2. However, the lack of Episode 3 saddens me."

echo: Yay: "Mass Effect 2. Nay: Half Life Episode 3 (Or lack there off)."

SON1C: "Assassin's Creed 2?!? Yeeeeeaaahh!!! Nothing about Half Life Episode 3?! Nooooooooooooo"

Incognito: "Assassin's Creed 2 looked spectacular. But the fact that nothing was mentioned about Half-Life 2 Episode 3 did leave a hollow place in my heart :)"

Boggle24: "Half Life episode 3 not even being mentioned was almost infuriating never mind disappointing. Uncharted 2 gets my nod for game I'm most looking forward to, the demonstration they did in the Sony press conference seriously blew me away."

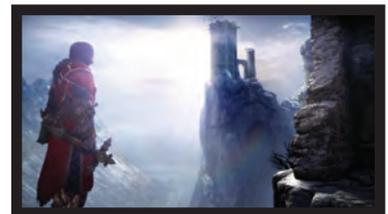
Cpt.Monde: "I'm really looking forward to Tony Hawk RIDE, Tekken 6 and Metal Gear Rising but I'm really amped for Uncharted 2: Among Thieves. Final Fantasy XIV was really disappointing."



Space Marine official

Those of you who took note of our brief mention that there's a new *Warhammer 40K* title on the way will be pleased to know that the project has been confirmed by THQ. The publisher has shaken things up at bit, however. The original "leaked" footage from THQ Australia that caught our eye featured a title with heavy *Gears of War* influence and intense one-on-one battles between Chaos and Imperial Space Marines on an epically-scaled Imperial Hive World. This new title, from *Dawn of War* creators Relic Entertainment, bears closer resemblance to *God of War* with a small dose of Wargear-laden RPG to spice things up. THQ Australia's project has been canned, sadly, and its assets cannibalised to feed Relic's new title.

Simply entitled *Space Marine*, the game takes place on an Imperial Forge World that's been overrun by Orks and it's up to the player, a member of an as-yet undisclosed Space Marine chapter, to team up with a small squad and kick as much slimy Greenskin ass as it takes to get the critters off the world before they blow it all up. Many of the details are still work-in-progress, but the team has let on that there's a good chance of four-player co-op making its way into the game. Players will be able to kit out their Space Marine with loads of Wargear as they progress through the game, combining ranged attacks with brutal melee combat on a scale fitting the tabletop game thanks to Relic's purpose-built Phoenix engine.



Whipped into shape

Konami recently announced the next title in the *Castlevania* series and it looks fantastic. Taking on a *God of War* style of gameplay combined with massive boss fights, acrobatic feats aplenty and all manner of unholy opponents, *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* is being developed by Konami in partnership with *Metal Gear Solid* creator (and former Konami employee) Hideo Kojima and his studio - Kojima Productions. It seems rather like the Konami title announced at last year's Games Convention, *Lord of Shadows*, has been cut down and harvested for this project. Fair enough, considering the original *Lord of Shadows* featured a whip-wielding male protagonist fighting the undead. *Castlevania: LoS* is packing a star-studded cast, featuring the voice talent of Patrick Stewart, Robert Carlyle (as Gabriel), Jason Isaacs and Natasha McElhone. The title is due for release next year on both PS3 and Xbox 360.

Xbox 360 is born again

Controllers are for wimps anyway

WHILE NINTENDO CONTINUES TO flaunt the Wii's user-friendly controls and Sony invests heavily in both SIXAXIS and its new motion controller "wands", Microsoft has opted to take a step back, re-evaluating whether or not we need a physical controller at all. Project Natal (named after the Brazilian town and loosely meaning "to be born") is similar in principle to Sony's EyeToy, but is far more precise and adds in an additional camera and infra-red to allow for depth-perception, a microphone and a host of powerful software that includes everything from facial and voice recognition to full-body motion capture technology.

What this collection of technology means for games today and the future is quite something. Natal can recognise your face and automatically log you into XBL. It can read the skeletal makeup of your body and transfer your real-world animations to your Avatar or in-game character - meaning sports and fighting games become a real workout. It can scan physical objects, photos and faces and bring them into the game world. If you're playing a racing title, simply hold out your hands as though you'd be holding a steering wheel and use your feet to accelerate and brake. The possibilities are endless and while we're

still sufficiently sceptical (as few demos released so far have been live), there is tons of potential here, something that Lionhead Studios (*Fable*, *Black & White*) lead designer Peter Molyneux has been wrapping his spring-loaded mind around for the past few months.

Meet *Milo* - Molyneux's latest wacky creation. *Milo* is an application that combines the power of Project Natal with eerily-convincing AI and graphics to create a young boy, named Milo, with whom you can interact. Chat to him about (and help him with) his homework, play minigames with him, explore his world or just hang out. According to the "Nuex, Milo will follow you as you pace around the room, detect emotion and fluctuation in your voice, reflect emotions in his own face and voice and even remind you of your mum's upcoming birthday. "What we want to create is a connection to our worlds; and that's what I believe Natal does," is Molyneux's driving force behind this project - a force so strong that Microsoft has officially bumped him up to Creative Director of European studios at Microsoft Games Studios. This means he'll be leading not just Lionhead but Microsoft's Rare Studio (*Banjo-Kazooie*, *Viva Piñata*) as well. Despite concerns, he claims this new position will in no way water down his presence at Lionhead.

T...T...T... TOUCH ME

While everyone is busying themselves with quirky motion capture devices and little wands that you wave about, *RUSE*, the upcoming war game from Ubisoft, is keeping it real with touch screen support. The game will use multi-touch input, which means you can smear your hands across the screen to give orders, drag two fingers together or apart to control the zooming and literally wipe the opponents off the map. You don't even need a \$10K Microsoft Surface system to get the job done either (although it does make for a good start to your "Please mom, I need it" campaign). You'll be able to put any regular touch screen monitor to use with *RUSE* - so start saving!





Guybrush returns!

TELLTALE GAMES, THAT LOVABLE bunch that brought us the *Sam & Max* reboots and *Strongbad's Cool Game for Attractive People*, have been keeping themselves busy lately. Not being the laurel-resting type, Telltale has recently announced its next series of classic continuations: *Monkey Island*. Currently available for pre-order for both PC and Wii, *The Tales of Monkey Island* is a five-part episodic title that follows the exploits of everyone's favourite dim-witted pirate as he attempts to muddle through his ill-fated career with more monkeys than you can shake a peg leg at. Following on from the original series, Guybrush has accidentally poisoned the entire Caribbean with the evil zombie pirate LeChuck's stolen mojo, turning every last scurvy-ridden sea dog into a savage monster. Expect an all-star cast to return - Guybrush, his beloved and eternally patient Elaine, LuChuck himself and even the Voodoo Lady. Certainly a fitting fate for the series considering how many ex-Lucasarts employees currently clock in at Telltale.

If that's not enough for you, Lucasarts has also been secretly monkeying about; fans of the series can look forward to a remake of the original *Secret of Monkey Island*. This remastered version will feature dozens of hand drawn HD graphics and full voice acting (including a reappearance by Curse actor Dominic Armato). The remake is built directly on top of the original game's code and will allow players to instantly switch between the original and HD graphics. Expect this remake to be available soon for both PC and Xbox Live Arcade.

Delays, delays, delays

PlayStation 3 owners hoping to get their hands on Quantic Dreams' spiritual sequel to *Fahrenheit*, *Heavy Rain*, sometime this year might be disappointed. Despite some Sony members calling the game the "most important title of 2009", *Heavy Rain* has been officially shoved into the 2010 release bracket. When, exactly, is anyone's guess, but it's likely that it won't go far past Q1.

Joining *Heavy Rain's* delay is *Take 2's* open-world, 3rd-person duo *Mafia II* and *Red Dead Redemption*, both of which have been bumped down to no sooner than November 1st 2009 and (hopefully) no later than April 2010. According to *Take 2*, the titles have been delayed "to allow additional development time for the titles and to maximize their full potential in terms of the quality of the player experience and market performance," but it's highly possible they've just been set aside to avoid squashing too many high-profile titles together, what with *BioShock 2* and *GTA IV's* new expansion on their way soon.

STILL LEFT 4 DEAD

It's time to break out the Bourbon and the dungarees; *Left 4 Dead* is going South. Valve recently announced *Left 4 Dead 2*, which is due in November; it'll feature a crew of four new survivors, new locations, new boss infected and new melee weapons. That means chainsaws, axes and frying pans. That's right: chainsaws. Valve also promises a vastly improved AI director (the sadistic AI engine that dynamically throws infected at the players). This new director won't just stop at hurtling undead, either; it'll be able to change the weather as well as the survivor's pathways through the landscape. The five new campaigns, which begin in Savannah and end up in New Orleans, will be fitted together a little more coherently than the previous *L4D*, providing some more story for players to get into and developing the survivor's personalities to the point where their attitudes actually change throughout the game.

BIOSTAR



RADEON HD 4890

625/2000MHz 512MB, 256bit
(16x32 -1.0 DDR3)
HDMI/DVI/D-sub



RADEON HD 4850

Radeon 4890 850/3900MHz
1024MB, 256bit
(32x32 -1 DDR3)
Dual DVI/HDTV



- »» HDMI support
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- »» Enhanced Anti-Aliasing (AA) & Anisotropic Filtering (AF)
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I'll have three franchises to Go

The PSP game catalogue is set to get a serious boost in quality with three major titles making their way onto the portable platform. *Gran Turismo PSP* is still in the "mysterious details phase" but is set to be a PSP Go! launch title. It's said to feature over 800 licensed vehicles, 60 tracks and will run at a full 60 frames per second for buttery-smooth gameplay. Joining *GT* will be *Metal Gear Solid Peace Walker* which is set to take place after *MGS 3*. *Peace Walker* focuses on Big Boss in '70s Costa Rica where he's preparing his vision of Outer Heaven and Kojima Productions is calling the title "The missing link in the Metal Gear Saga". Aside from an expected release date of Q2 2010, details are slim; but speculation mounts that the game will allow up to four players in co-operative play. Also worth looking forward to is *Resident Evil PSP*. This all-new RE title is also sadly light on details at the moment, aside from Capcom claiming that the title is "specifically designed for the PSP Go!"



Monkey see, monkey do

Sony's finally found another use for the PlayStation Eye, and it doesn't involve an expensive card game! Say hello to the *EyePet*. Using the PS Eye, *EyePet* tracks your movements and uses it to display your interactions with a 3D creature (which some have aptly called a "weird dog monkey thing"). This Tamagotchi-like game allows users to kit out their *EyePet* with over 250 unique wardrobe items, adjust its fur colour, style and length, and play all manner of games with it. Most impressively, you'll be able to draw an image, hold it up to the camera to be scanned in and then watch the pet redraw the image in the game - only to have it manifest as an actual in-game item. Draw a car and watch it drive around the on-screen environment, draw an aeroplane and you create a balloon-popping minigame for you and your pet to enjoy. It's still a while from release but if the initial demo is anything to go by, this could be as impressive as *LittleBigPlanet* by the time it retails.

PSP evolves

Sony continues radical updates to the console, ditches UMD drive

DESPITE THE IMPRESSIVE POWER and functionality Sony manages to pack into the increasingly slimmer PSP, there's no denying its form factor together with a clunky optical drive have been bulking up the otherwise tidy device and adding unnecessary weight. Sony has been paying attention to the competitive portable market and has finally reacted. Not with the "PSP2", as many were hoping, but with a radically redesigned device that makes up for all its past mistakes and takes more than a couple of cues from existing devices and fan-made mockups.

Introducing the PSP Go!; this new device loses the noisy and battery-hungry UMD drive completely and adds in 16GB of onboard flash storage which means all games, movies and other media will be available for download through the PSN. The slider device shaves down the dimensions of the screen, measuring 3.8" (down from 4.3") but is still capable

of displaying 480x272 pixels. All the controls remain the same (sadly there's no additional analogue nub), and are revealed when sliding the screen up. The entire machine is much smaller than its predecessors, weighing in at 15% lighter and 43% smaller than the already much lighter PSP-3000. All the other hardware updates (including increased RAM) should remain, making this the device to own if bandwidth isn't a major concern.

According to Sony there are no plans to drop the PSP-3000 ("lite & bright") any time soon and all games will continue to ship on both UMD and downloadable PSN format. Sony has, however, remained tight-lipped on the process of transferring UMD titles to the flash storage for those customers with already vast libraries of games. The PSP Go! is expected to retail for \$249 (approximately R2000, not taking local pricing structures into account) while the PSP-3000 will retain its current retail price.

WE'RE NOT KIDDING...

One has to wonder just what happened to Nintendo between revolutionising the way your grandparents play video games and launching their latest Wiimote attachment - the Wii Vitality. In a nutshell, Vitality attaches to your finger measures your pulse (or "the body's inner world"). That's it. Obviously this is a big part of Nintendo's home fitness program that will be ramping up soon with *Wii Fit Plus*, but we're strapped for ideas as to how effectively it could be used in actual gaming. Goichi Suda of Grasshopper Manufacture (*No More Heroes*) says he's got a couple of plans, however, and will do his damndest to get the device into the upcoming *NMH* sequel any which way.





TA 790GX

- »» AMD AM2+/AM2 Platform
- »» Support latest AMD Phenom X4 , X3 / Athlon /Sempron processors
- »» AMD 140W processor support
- »» AMD 790GX Chipset with ATI Radeon HD 3300 Graphics
- »» On Board 64MB DDR2 Side-Port memory
- »» Dual-Channel DDR2 1066/800/667/533
- »» ATI Hybrid Graphics Support
- »» Superior scaling with ATI CrossFireX technology
- »» Integrated HDMI/DVI interface with HDCP Support: 1080P HD Video Experience
- »» AMD OverDrive Utility Support



- »» Design for Intel socket 1366 Nehalem Core i7 Extreme/ Core i7 45nm processors
- »» Intel X58 / ICH10R Chipset
- »» 12 Phases Power Design
- »» Support 6-DIMM DDR3-1866(OC)/1600(OC)/1333(OC) up to 24G max
- »» Support ATI CrossfireX and nVidia SLI Technology
- »» 100% X.D.C Japanese solid capacitor
- »» BIOSTAR Space-Pipe with high efficiency copper heat-pipe
- »» BIOSTAR G.P.U (Green Power Utility) Technology for Energy Saving
- »» BIOSTAR TPower Utility
- »» On board Dual GbE
- »» 1394a,eSATA,S/PDIF Out(Optical/Coaxial)



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Keep on riding

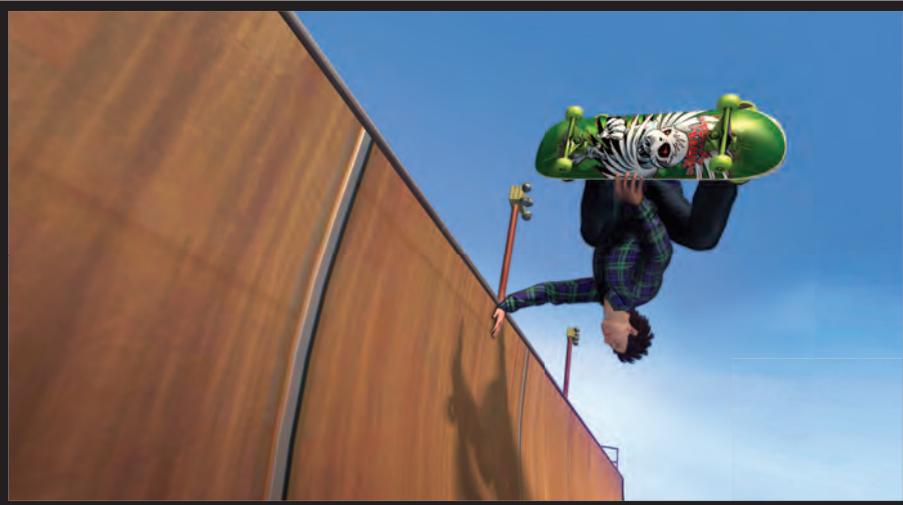
LET'S FACE IT, PERIPHERAL gaming is just getting started, and Activision is trying it's hardest to be at the forefront. To prove this, *Tony Hawk* creator Neversoft is seriously upping the ante with the next release in the *Tony Hawk* series – *Tony Hawk Ride*. *Ride* features a rather authentic-looking skateboard peripheral in the form of a bare (wheel- and truck-less) skateboard deck with multiple motion and infra-red sensors. Players will position themselves on the device and perform all their skateboarding moves as accurately as possible. Thankfully, if you're not exactly hot off the half-pipe, the game doesn't require you to lift the board off the ground or jump off your leather couch to get the job done; simple, small movements are enough to pop an ollie or darkslide down a telephone wire in easy mode, but the harder difficulty levels should put your skating abilities through their paces if you want to nail those combos. The man behind the name claims that the device should become standard – happily working with a snowboarding, surfing or even fitness game. Warn your mom now that the wooden floor in the lounge is going to take a beating.

GAMING SOCIALITES

As great as digital social networking is, it has that annoying habit of requiring you to get up off the couch and turn on the PC. No longer, thanks to Microsoft. Facebook, Twitter and Last FM will be coming to the Xbox 360 in the form of scaled-down applications that lets you chat to your friends and catch up on all the latest gossip without the need to take your feet off the coffee table. Facebook will join the New Xbox Experience interface and can integrate directly with the existing friends and avatars system so there's no escaping your nagging relatives in Australia for a quick game of *Gears*. Additionally, users will be able to capture screenshots and share them online, although this facility will only be available to select games, starting with *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10*. We're yet to see if older games can simply be updated to allow this functionality.

PSP To Remain Trophy-less

It's been confirmed: PSP users will not be getting the PS3 trophy system on their portable. Eric Lempel, director of PlayStation Network operations, bottom-lined the issue: "You're not going to see Trophies on the PSP." His reason: "keeping it secure". With all the hacking and system exploits running rampant on the PSP right now, modifications for using custom software (Homebrew) and for running pirated games, the system is too open for users to "artificially inflate their rankings and mounts of Trophies." This could "kill the whole [Trophy] system", according to Lempel. What with the PSP having the same promised 10-year life cycle as the PS3 (as is evident by the release of the UMD-less PSP Go!), there is still some time left before an entirely new (and ostensibly secure) PSP platform is released upon which the Trophy system could be grafted.





There's nothing Final about this

Square breaks out the big guns at this year's E3

THREE MASSIVE FINAL FANTASY announcements graced the floors of E3 this year. First, *Final Fantasy VII*, which many fans proudly claim to be the greatest in the series, is finally making its way to the PlayStation Network – which means the downloadable game will be playable on both PS3 and PSP thanks to the systems' built-in emulators. It should be available for download right now at around R100. Next up, is *FFXIII*'s tentative Xbox 360 release date (and, by Square's previous promise of a joint release date, the PS3's as well). The game has been pegged at Q2 2010. It's by no means a guaranteed date, but it's at least something for us Westerners to look forward to.

Square wasn't going to leave it at that, however, with the announcement of *Final Fantasy XIV Online* (that's "Fourteen" for those of you whose youths were lacking in *Asterix*). The game will continue on from *FFXI*'s strengths but will add a

number of new features that the aging MMORPG simply couldn't handle. Square says that they are "trying to implement a lot of new systems other MMOs haven't used in the past," and that they didn't want to "make a copy of *World of Warcraft*." In an attempt to continue the feeling of being the all-powerful saviour and keep a fresh MMO angle, the team is working on integrating single and multiplayer in such a way as it's not damning to play one way or another. "If you want to play in a solo, you can play solo. If you want to play 40 minutes in a day, you can play 40 minutes in a day. If you want to play all day, you can play all day." While Sony's E3 conference made the bold claim that the PS3 had console exclusivity on the title (with a PC version due along for the ride), Square-Enix has made it abundantly clear that they "are considering all options at this time" – meaning the Xbox 360 might not be out of the running just yet.



SERIOUS SAM THE THIRD

Even though the *Serious Sam* series of first-person shooters has never quite managed to penetrate the mindspace of the mainstream, it remains a much-loved franchise and possibly the most-loved Croatian-developed games, period. With more enemies on-screen than any other shooter, *Serious Sam* was always serious business. Roman Ribaric, CEO of Croteam, recently wrote on the team's official website: "We have also recently started the development on two games, one of which is the next *Serious Sam* FPS game. Here, we are pretty close in signing the publishing deal." Once more, *Serious Sam* will be powered by the *Serious Engine* – Croteam's own internally-developed powerhouse -, this time in its third incarnation. The *Serious Engine 3* should, if the previous two are anything to go on, be able to render at least a billion enemies on screen.

LittleBigStreetRod

The user-generated content craze is about to continue with *ModNation Racers*. Developed by United Front as a PS3 exclusive title, *MNR* will let players create their own custom car and racer and send them screaming around user-generated tracks. Clearly inspired by *LittleBigPlanet*, *MNR* breaks away from the civil engineering degree requirement and focuses on getting players into the action and designing their own tracks as quickly as possible. Instead of requiring players to select from dozens of pre-fabbed corners, straights and embankments to build their perfect track, *MNR* lets them drive around a bare field with a steamroller and watch the raceway build as they go. It's quick, simple and still allows for all the fiddly bits if you want them. *ModNation Racers* is due out in 2010.



LittleBigWebsite

The level-sharing power of *LittleBigPlanet* is unparalleled, but sometimes finding the gold amidst the mud can be time-consuming. The search function isn't as useful as one would hope, and the 'Best Levels' are ranked by number of plays and how often they are 'hearted', which means levels that award trophies by being built specifically to 'cheat' for trophies, tend to dominate the Best Levels section of *LBP*'s online level menu. To combat this, Media Molecule is working on a web-based portal that lets users easily share and advertise their levels. Speaking at the Nordic Game Conference in Sweden, the web-portal eliminates the need for self-promotion of levels on forums – each creation is given its own custom URL that you can opt to queue for download the next time you turn on your PS3. The portal will also offer leaderboards, photos and comments. Evans notes that the portal is currently being beta-tested, with a launch planned for "as soon as possible".



They said it...

"I think that we launched too many new IPs all at once in Q3. **I would have spread them out and found better windows for them.** We didn't have enough assets to build a fan base, build a community and get that long-demand built."

Frank Gibeau, EA Games

"The PC and the 360 are just more straightforward. We can focus on what we want to do, which is make game experiences, instead of sweating bullets over obscure architectural decisions they make with their platform. **I didn't come into this business in the 90s because of some technical fetish. I came in because I wanted to give people experiences that made them have fun.**"

Valve's Tom Leonard

"*Mass Effect* is great – it's more cinematic – whereas with *Dragon Age*, we're definitely going to something that's a little more traditional. **There's nothing wrong with traditional. We're looking at our Baldur's Gate roots.**

David Gaider, lead writer on Bioware's *Dragon Age*

"We think we win over the *Halo* audience with something like *The Conduit* – a multi-player, online, shooting experience – or *Dead Space Extraction*. **And you know what? Once those people buy into Wii, they'll go buy *Mario Kart* or *Wii Fit Plus*."**

Nintendo of America President Reggie Fils-Aime

Grand Theft Auto THE BALLAD OF GAY TONY

Next GTA expansion on its way

If you just can't get enough of *GTA IV* and tore through *The Lost and the Damned* faster than a child opening their Christmas presents you'll be pleased to know the next expansion is on its merry way. Entitled *The Ballade of Gay Tony*, the expansion will put the player in control of Luiz Lopez, "part-time hoodlum and full-time assistant to legendary nightclub impresario Tony Prince (aka 'Gay Tony')". Players will struggle with the competing loyalties of family and friends, and with the uncertainty about who is real and who is fake in a world in which everyone has a price." If you don't own *GTA IV* and are starting to feel a little left out of the action, worry not. Rockstar will be releasing *Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City* which contains both *Lost and the Damned* and *The Ballade of Gay Tony*. Best of all, *GTA IV* isn't required to play *Episodes*. Both packages will be available soon exclusively (for now, at least) for Xbox 360.

Now everyone can waggle

Microsoft isn't the only company attempting to re-invent the videogaming wheel. While their development isn't nearly as far along as Microsoft's, Sony's take on a motion controller is nonetheless impressive and quite likely resulting in a few frantic calls around the Nintendo offices. Although it doesn't yet have a fancy name, the PS3 motion controller is comprised of two "wands" with bright, colour-changing spheres mounted on top and a PlayStation Eye camera. The spheres' motion is detected by the PlayStation Eye and the combination of all of that translates to some rather precise motion capture. There was little to display at E3 but Sony did show a live demo of the wands in action; superimposing swords, tennis racquets and even a stop sign onto the demonstrator's on-screen hands. It's still early days but Sony's motion controller clearly has potential even at this stage; which is a good thing considering the company's projected Q2 release date for the system.

NAG LAN

tickets go
on sale at
Computicket on
1 August

Tickets cost R250 per person for the whole weekend which includes free access to the Expo



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I want my MOM!

In a move to stun the crowds, Nintendo announced the next upcoming AAA title for the Wii – *Metroid: Other M*. This expansion of the Metroid lore will see Samus Aran doing battle in a mix of 3rd and 1st person views and is being created by *Ninja Gaiden* developers Team Ninja. *Other M* will have a strong focus on story and narrative but still pack tons of explosive action with Samus armed to the teeth and sporting a range of new melee attacks together with her traditional arm cannon, missile launcher and ice beam. Other than a tentative “some time in 2010” release date, details are pretty scarce at this time. Speculation on the plot has the game take place in Samus’ early years before she became the armour-clad warrior we all know and love, as the E3 trailer shows her sporting short hair and civilian clothes.

Tomo being Tomo

Ninja Gaiden and Dead Or Alive creator dropping bombs

GAME DEVELOPMENT ONLY HAS one true rockstar, and his name is Tomonobu Itagaki. An ex-Tecmo employee, having quit Tecmo and his studio Team Ninja after a rocky period of lawsuits and counter-suits, Itagaki has announced he’s heading up a new development studio and working on an Xbox 360 title. Tentatively called *Tokyo Vikings*, the studio consists of many ex-Tecmo employees who left to follow Itagaki. “Game making is my true calling. I’m aware that I have fans all around the world waiting for me. The rest I leave up to your imagination,” he said, adding only that the new game isn’t a fighter: “It’d be more fun if we made something new, right?” While nothing is set in stone just yet, Itagaki did have this to say about which platform he’d be developing for: “I’m trying to be flexible in that respect, but I do feel that the Xbox 360 still has a lot of potential that I haven’t been able to play with yet. I also have many good friends [at Microsoft’s Xbox team] too, and being in a comfortable environment is best.”

Not content to leave his fans hanging without an “oh snap”, Itagaki also recently took the time to say a few harsh words about his rival, Hideki Kamiya and his game, *Bayonetta*. “If I made a similar game as a game I made in the company I quit, people would say, “What an idiot, can’t he make anything else?” Well, that is more or less the opinion I have for, uh, that Bayo-something game,” Itagaki told 1UP. If you recall, *Bayonetta* is about a sexy British lady who kills demons using her hair and gun-stilettoes. “Covered in hair, is she?” said Itagaki. “I dunno, Mr. Kamiya must have a lot going through his head. Well, in any case, I would first recommend laser eye surgery. I’m sure he’s not that strapped for cash, right?”

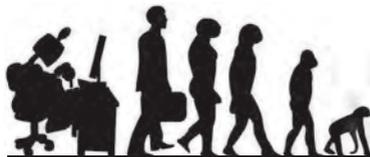


Blast from the past

If you’re old enough to remember the original *Battle Tanks* on the Atari 2600 or NES, have a thing for dual stick shooters like *Geometry Wars* and long for the days to shoot your friends in the back – you need to get your hands on Gameloft’s new *Battle Tanks* for the PS3 when it launches. The game pits up to four player-controlled tanks against each other in a fixed-screen arena where they proceed to blow each other up with all manner of cannons, rocket launchers, flamethrowers and the like. That’s not all; you’ll also be able to bounce projectiles off walls to sneak in that killing blow.

CONSOLE CRISIS

Crysis 2 is on its way. Alright, this is hardly revolutionary news, we’ll admit, but the news that the title will be multi-platform should make up for that. The game will run on the CryEngine 3, which was announced a couple of months back to support PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 development. “The development of *Crysis 2* marks a major stepping stone for our studio,” according to Cevat Yerli, CEO and President of Crytek. There’s no word yet on a potential release date or any gameplay details, but rest assured we’ll be keeping an eye on this one.



(De)Evolution of LEISURE SUIT LARRY



1987: Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards



1989: LSL3: Passionate Patti in Pursuit of the Pulsating Pectorals!



1991: LSL5: Passionate Patti Does a little Undercover Work



1996: LSL: Love for Sail!



2004: LSL: Magna Cum Laude



2009: LSL: Box Office Bust



Short walk to freedom

In an unexpected move, EA recently made its already price-reduced CCG/RTS game *BattleForge* absolutely free. The free version includes 32 of the 200 cards you'd expect to find in the retail box as well as all community scenarios and the recently-released Renegade campaign. Players will still need to cough up the dosh if they'd like to expand on their decks, which we have the sneaking suspicion is the driving force behind this free offer. The regular-priced version will still be available for \$30, which includes all 200 cards as well as 3,000 BattleForge Points for you to craft your ultimate deck. If you'd like more information on this offer or are all ready to bust your data cap wide open, head over to www.battleforge.com and click on Play 4 Free.



I'd tap that

If you're into trading card games but couldn't be bothered to get off the couch and drag yourself into a gaming store, then *Magic the Gathering: Duels of the Planeswalkers* is here to save the day. Due out for Xbox Live Arcade by time you read this, *MtG: DotP* will give players access to an almost exact recreation of the physical card game and will be bundled with eight unique decks, single and multiplayer campaigns and cooperative play. It's the first official *MtG* title since the pitiful *Battlegrounds* and while there is no word yet on boosters or expansions, it should satiate any trading card gamer's digital needs for some time.

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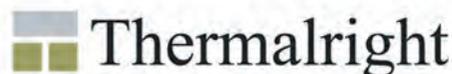
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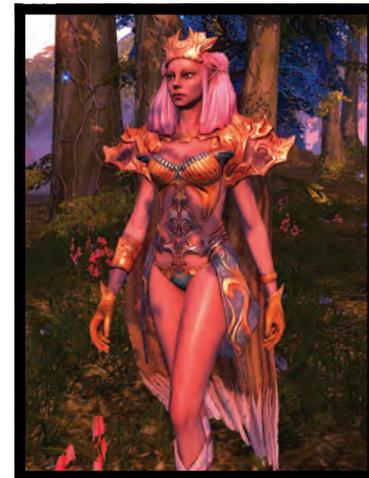


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Garsfontein, PTA



Heating up the competition

Heroes of Telera is an upcoming MMORPG that strives to deliver content in a unique and versatile manner. While all the video and audio processing will be handled client side, as with any other game, all the game world processing and updates will be taken care of on the servers – resulting in reduced CPU requirements and quick, painless updates that won't require gigs of downloading. Aside from that, *HoT* seems to be a fairly generic, fantasy-based MMORPG that pits human players against all manner of spindly, fiery and generally hostile creatures to save the world from peril and forge your destiny – the usual fair. It claims to have a deep subclass system and the ability to let players learn any and all professions and crafts, and it does look rather pretty. According to their announcement at E3, "*Heroes of Telera* removes many of the technical and design barriers common in MMORPGs, allowing players to more easily share their adventures in the game with anyone, regardless of rank or skill level." Certainly one to pay attention to if you're hankering for something new without breaking away from the mainstream.



It's a summer fiesta!

Microsoft is bringing back the Summer of Arcade super special with one hell of a lineup of XBL Arcade games to warm our frosty fingers. From the 22nd of July, XBLA users will have access to the fighting game *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, Epic Games' side-scrolling eye candy fest *Shadow Complex*, the quirky 'Splosion Man from Pixel Studios, physics-enabled side-scrolling racer *Trials HD* and the big cake-taker *TMNT: Turtles Through Time Reshelled*. There really is something for everyone here; especially if you're looking to relive the childhood you spent dropping tokens into arcade machines – the remake of the classic *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* arcade game is sure to awaken your nostalgia.

WELL IT'S ABOUT TIME

Xbox owners who have been hoping to get their share of the *Metal Gear Solid* pie will finally get to have their delicious pastries with *Metal Gear Solid Rising*. *MGSR* is currently in development for the Xbox 360 (and possibly other platforms) and will put players in control of Raiden – the major playable character from *MGS2* and a non-playable character from *Guns of the Patriots*. There's no word yet on an even close-to-tentative release date but our bets are on "some time in 2010".

Fallout shmallout, it's time for Brink

BETHESDA SOFTWAREWORKS AND SPLASH Damage, creators of the *Enemy Territory* games as well as *Doom 3*'s multiplayer component, are teaming up to bring us *Brink*. Set in a futuristic Utopian city called Ark, *Brink* throws players into the middle of a civil war that erupted as a result of Ark housing over ten times its recommended population. Ark was built as a green, sustainable city that floats high above the dying planet beneath it. When the planet went from dying to dead, however, Ark was forced to take in refugees and now, thirty years later, civil war has broken out between the smug residents and struggling refugees.

From what was demoed at E3, players will take on the role of an Ark security officer charged with the protection of the city. Working together with their AI squad mates (or player-controlled in multiplayer), players will be able to take on quests, customise their characters and traverse rugged and difficult paths in this hybrid FPS. Using the SMART (Smart Movement Across Random Terrain) system, you'll be able to quickly move from one point to another, be it across buildings, through passageways or a combination of any number of obstacles. Simply point to a location, press the SMART button and shoot as many enemies in the face on your way as the system guides the player through the landscape – letting them focus on the action and task ahead. Think *Mirror's Edge* with a "go there" button.

POKE-PEDOMETER? SOUNDS DIRTY

Upcoming DS remakes of *Pokémon Gold* and *Pokémon Silver* will be released with a peripheral that sports a rather obliquely unfortunate nomenclature. The "PokéWalker" to come bundled with the remakes, is a pedometer that levels up your Pokémon as you wander about, and not a device that measures your proximity to paedophiles. The PokéWalker itself is a cross between a Tamagotchi and the pedometers that come with DS health software like "Walk With Me!" which enjoys an odd success in the East. Shaped like a flat Pokéball, the pedometer has a small screen on the side that lets you transfer one Pokémon at a time to the device via infrared. The Pokémon in the PokéWalker will gain experience and affection for you with every step you take. The remakes, *Pokémon Heart Gold* and *Soul Silver*, are set for release in Japan at the end of the year.



Gaming Charts

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

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 inFamous
- 2 Red Faction: Guerilla
- 3 PROTOTYPE
- 4 UFC 2009 Undisputed
- 5 Fight Night Round 4

XBOX 360

- 1 Silent Hill: Homecoming
- 2 SBK 09
- 3 Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood
- 4 Virtua Tennis 2009
- 5 G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 2 Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs
- 3 Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince
- 4 X-Men Origins: Wolverine
- 5 Guitar Hero: World Tour Bundle

PC

- 1 The Sims 3
- 2 Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor
- 3 Overlord II
- 4 Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
- 5 Spore Galactic Adventures

PSP

- 1 Buzz!: Brain of the World
- 2 Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings
- 3 Rock Band Unplugged
- 4 GTA: Vice City Stories Platinum
- 5 Ben 10: Alien Force

WII

- 1 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 standalone
- 2 EA SPORTS Active
- 3 Sports Island 2
- 4 MySims Racing
- 5 Guitar Hero: Metallica

DS

- 1 Professor Kageyama's Maths Training
- 2 Sight Training
- 3 Mario Party
- 4 More Brain Training from Dr Kawashima
- 5 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen



April 2009 figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Resident Evil 5
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Killzone 2
- 4 Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon
- 5 Need for Speed: Undercover

XBOX 360

- 1 Resident Evil 5
- 2 Gears of War 2
- 3 FIFA 09
- 4 Kung Fu Panda
- 5 LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 2 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 3 Monsters vs. Aliens
- 4 FIFA 09
- 5 Need for Speed: Most Wanted

PC

- 1 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- 2 Need for Speed: Carbon
- 3 FIFA 07
- 4 Cricket 07
- 5 Age of Empires: Collector's Edition

PSP

- 1 GTA: Vice City Stories
- 2 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 3 GTA: Liberty City Stories
- 4 Burnout Legends
- 5 Need for Speed: Undercover

WII

- 1 Wii Fit + board
- 2 Mario Kart + wheel
- 3 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga

DS

- 1 Brain Training
- 2 New Super Mario Bros.
- 3 Mario Kart
- 4 Monsters vs. Aliens
- 5 The Sims 2: Pets



inFamous

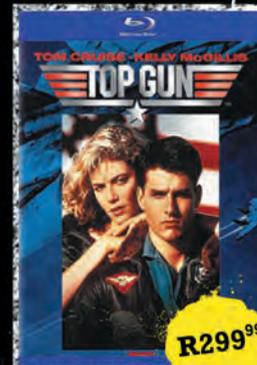
Blu-ray

For the Fans



R299⁹⁹

Happy Gilmore
Available from the 20th July



R299⁹⁹

Top Gun
Available from the 27th July



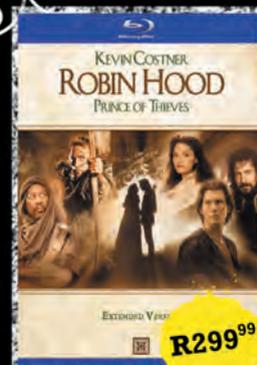
R299⁹⁹

**Crouching Tiger
Hidden Dragon**
Available from the 27th July



R299⁹⁹

**The Shawshank
Redemption**



R299⁹⁹

**Robin Hood
Prince Of Thieves**



R299⁹⁹

The Italian Job
Available from the 13th July

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More Brütal bashing

I F THE LAWS OF karma are anything to go by, Double Fine Productions lead Tim Schafer must be sacrificing small kittens on an almost daily basis to warrant this much bad luck. As you're no-doubt aware, Activision dropped Double Fine's *Brütal Legend* off its release schedule earlier this year due to its financially in-exploitable nature and further financial requirements needed to complete the game; following this, EA promptly swooped in and rescued the title from the bowels of vapourware and production continued. The developers recently announced that October is Rocktober, with the 13th set as *Brütal Legend's* release date. Now, Activision is claiming that Double Fine has reneged on its promises to deliver

the title in due course and is suing for the "irreparable harm" that the company has since suffered. The publisher is claiming that "it never relinquished its rights to the game and that Double Fine improperly transferred *Brütal Legend* to EA."

EA's already spoken up about this whole debacle when it began in February, claiming any suit by Activision would be akin to "a husband abandoning his family and then suing after his wife meets a better looking guy". Hopefully this won't delay the title any further but if recent publishing suits (Fox vs. Warner: *Watchmen* edition, for example) are anything to go by, Rocktober might just be late this year.

CRIMECRAFT TO HAVE FREE UPDATES

Vogster Entertainment's upcoming MMO *Crimecraft* is going to have free monthly content updates, according to the developer. "We have a pretty aggressive content update schedule with new abilities, instances, clothes, weapons, items, achievements, challenges and gameplay types being released monthly free of charge," said Vogster's senior game designer Mike Donatelli. While content will be free, which likely means expansion packs will be unnecessary, the game will still have monthly subscription fees to cover server costs, support and the content updates themselves.



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 'July Badger' and stand a chance to win a *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* DVD from Nu Metro.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Jaco de Wit, p52



Apple's new super phone

The next iteration of Apple's popular and powerful iPhone is on its way; bringing something for gamers and regular users alike. Dubbed the iPhone 3GS (the S stands for "speed"), this new device features a number of hardware updates to bring it in line with competing phones, and then some. The camera gets a boost to the industry standard of 3 Megapixels, adds geotagging functionality and bumps the video recording up to 30 frames per second VGA with auto focus.

The 3G modem has been upgraded to full 7.2 Mbps HSDPA and Apple has even thrown in a magnetometer to act as a built-in compass for enhanced GPS functions through Google Maps. General performance benefits as well thanks to an improved processor, with applications loading up to 2.9 times faster while still improving battery life from 20-30%. For the gamers there is an improved 3D acceleration chip which is apparently more powerful and allows for more complicated video processing, although no other details are available at this time. The device is expected to reach our shores in the next few months.

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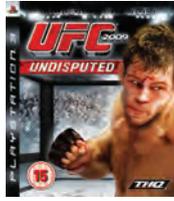
PROMOTION

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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 *UFC 2009 Undisputed* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [July Caption].



THIS MONTH'S CONTEST



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
"Extreme fly fishing"

LAST MONTH'S WINNER



"Look man I usually wear pants you hear! Don't ask and no wise cracks or else this will be the last crack you see right!"
- Mark Muller

Hanging on for a QFG remake

In a recent interview with *Quest for Glory* creators Lori and Corey Cole, the couple revealed that they were only ever approached to do a remake once - for the original *Hero's Quest*. Apparently they're not as profitable as some would like to think; the remake ended up costing more to make than the original, even coming close to the sequels. The couple said that they'd love to do remakes of the first three *QFG* titles, however, much how Lucasarts and Telltale have been doing, to give greater continuity to the titles (since you can create a single character and carry him through all five titles in the series). The couple would even love to whip up an MMO based on the franchise, claiming *World of Warcraft* as inspiration. We're not sure if it's time to get excited or depressed, but a simple re-skinning of the first three games would sure go down a treat.

Events

MAGIC THE GATHERING

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

EXTENDED
When: 4 July
Time: 13:00
Type: Extended, Deck Constructed
Cost: R30 per player
novvagaming.co.za

MID-MONTH MADNESS 2-HEADED GIANT
When: 18 July
Time: 13:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed, Team
Cost: R30 per player
novvagaming.co.za

STANDARD
When: 25 July
Time: 13:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed
Cost: R30 per player
novvagaming.co.za

LANS

OLD-SCHOOL LAN
When: 27 June
Where: Novva Gaming, JHB
Type: Competition
novvagaming.co.za

TRUTH LAN
When: 26 June
Where: JHB
Type: Open LAN
langames.co.za

FRAG LAN 300 MAN BREAK UP DAY
When: 26 June
Where: Durban
Type: Open LAN
langames.co.za

THIS IS WAR
When: 27 June
Where: Bloemfontein
Type: Open LAN
langames.co.za

bl GAMES™ Release List

Release dates subject to change

WEEK 1 - 3 JULY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Call of Juarez : Bound in Blood	PC, 360, PS3
Summer Sports Party	WII
Oblivion/BioShock double pack	360
Fight Night Round 4	360, PS3
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	PC, PS2, PS3, 360, PSP, WII

WEEK 2 - 10 JULY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
GTA: Liberty City/Vice City Stories double pack	PSP
Midnight Club 3/GTA: Vice City Stories double pack	PSP
Midnight Club 3/GTA: Liberty City Stories double pack	PSP
Street Fighter IV	PC

WEEK 3 - 17 JULY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Diabolik: The Original Sin	PC, PS2, PSP, WII, DS
HISTORY™ Great Empires: Rome	DS
Ghostbusters	PS2, PS3
Wolfenstein	PC, 360, PS3

WEEK 4 - 24 JULY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
MySims Racing	WII, DS
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	PS2, PS3, PSP, WII, 360

WEEK 5 - 31 JULY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
G-Force	PC, PS2, PS3, 360, PSP, WII, DS
G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra	PC, PS2, PS3, 360, PSP, WII, DS
Super Paper Mario	WII
Ashes Cricket 2009	PC, 360, PS3
Race Driver GRID Platinum	PS3, 360
Jumpgate Evolution	PC

GAMING



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MIKTAR'S MIND-BENDING

BY MIKTAR DRACON

What Is The ?

TODAY, I'D LIKE TO discuss a serious issue. Our species is a complex, interlocking meta-construct, a gestalt that, when abstracted, could be considered an entire organism all its own*. Each individual person is akin to a gear in the huge machine we know as humanity, every thought and action of the microcosm spiralling upwards to influence the macrocosmic whole in ways which seem unfathomable. As time marches on, our bright minds in the physical, mental, and social sciences continue to make new discoveries, shedding light on who we are, where we came from, what we can do and where we might go.

These new insights into our universe and ourselves bring about a greater awareness of how we function best... and when we break down.

Have you ever met someone who seems a little strange, but you can't put your finger on what it is?

Perhaps their speech is somewhat unusual. Maybe it's because they talk about things you've never heard of, or bring up ideas that don't make a lot of sense. It could be that they dress oddly, but they're not from a foreign country. It could be your neighbour, your pharmacist, your teacher, or a friend. Often, the behaviour of these people goes from being just strange to a little frightening. Something about them upsets you, scares you, even though they're nice, amicable people.

We've all seen cases of sudden and traumatic transcognition. Usually the result of abrupt trauma - be it physical or emotional - transcognition causes a person's state of mind to become distressingly detached from the security of the Groupthink around them. For a short while, these victims do not think like normal people. They may make inexplicable remarks, or incomprehensible accusations about their friends and family, their employers, their church, or in some extreme cases, their political leaders. Transcognition is always unnerving, but it's usually brief. Within a short time, the trauma passes and with the help of those close to the victim, they come around to right thinking once again.

But what you may not know is that some people don't suffer from transcognition due to a temporary shock to the system: they're born that way. The cause of this condition is poorly understood because, understandably, exposure to transcognitive thinking is profoundly disturbing, so little active research has been done until recent years, when the number of people with natural transcognitive dysfunction has seen a marked increase. Dubbed ATD - Advanced Transcognitive Disorder - its sufferers are shown to exhibit symptoms from an early age, in the range of 7 to 10 years. Often, the condition goes unnoticed, with aberrant behaviour dismissed as the unruly disobedience one expects to find in children. By the time they reach their early teens, many ATD victims have learned how to hide what makes them different, aware that they're suffering from a disorder but not knowing why. Only a relative handful of ATD victims are so powerfully affected that they can't help but act out their perverted behaviour.

For years, these people have suffered by being confused about the world around them. Often they retreat into fantasies: games, books, and media devoted to strange, fictional words that have little to do with the clear and accepted reality we all know to be true. Some ATD victims use the Internet to create entire personas that have nothing to do with the reality of their own lives. People with ATD may even, shockingly, choose online names that are not their own. Right-thinking citizens tend to avoid dwelling on these subcultures, their own natural avoidance mechanisms steering them to safety. But those with transcognitive thinking have no defences, and are usually at the mercy of whatever strange and lunatic ideas are presented to them. ATD tends to make its victims aggressive; they strongly resist desperate attempts at intervention, and are even immune to the stern but necessary social control mechanisms of shame, mockery, and humiliation.

THERE IS HOPE!

With increased awareness of this ongoing tragedy, more cases of ATD can be brought into the light of day and a greater understanding achieved. Just as with other pre-natal genetic disorders, ranging from autism to homosexuality, ATD may someday be correctable before birth. Better drugs, more effective treatments, may also help sufferers live ordinary lives and reconnect with those around them. You can do your part. Report observed demonstrations of outrageous behaviour, the discussion of shocking ideas or delusional claims to your doctor, or if necessary, to your local branch of law enforcement. Write or call your representatives, letting them know that ATD is an issue that matters to you and your family. Confront ATD sufferers within your own household, even if they exhibit aggressive denial of their condition. Don't take your children's behaviour for granted: ATD's symptoms can emerge at any time. Carefully monitor what they read and the television programmes they watch. Restrict access to the Internet, and purchase site-blocking software (the most up-to-date databases today list the most common websites that are portals to the online transcognitive underground). **NAG**

* *You've lost me, Ed*

As time marches on, our bright minds in the physical, mental, and social Sciences continue to make new discoveries, shedding light on who we are, where we came from, what we can do and where we might go.



DARK VOID

Coming Soon!



PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX 360



Games for Windows





BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

I game from a land down under

THERE ARE TWO GREAT things about travelling and being a gamer: actually looking forward to the flight so that you have uninterrupted hours of gaming, and being able to explore another country's gaming scene. This side quest of exploring another scene has become somewhat of a preoccupation while travelling abroad. I love searching for foreign, game-related bits and pieces that we may not necessarily be able to get back home. Armed with my PSP and a fresh copy of Patapon 2 (such fun) I boarded a plane to Australia.

Somewhat naively I was expecting a gaming Eden on the other end of my 14 hour flight. I mean, come on: Australia does have branches of IGN.com and kotaku.com, and is home to numerous game developers. Surely a country with stakes in massively popular, international gaming publications and developers would be an oasis of digital entertainment? A place where the media would bombard you with adverts for the latest releases? Where you wouldn't be able to walk down the road or ride a bus without seeing somebody plugged into a DS or PSP? Or where piranha plants would snap at you from gaping manholes and 1UP mushrooms would appear in floating, golden boxes? It turned out that it wasn't said oasis and, anyway, I was battling to figure out why I was not disappointed.

While I was there the media coverage on gaming was pretty low-key: I saw one billboard for the DSi and one TV commercial for Mario Kart. The only people I saw actually using handheld consoles in public were two little girls with hot pink Nintendo DSs. The girls were speaking French to each other, so probably weren't local. What I did see were plenty of retail stores for buying games, but there were very few titles available that we couldn't get here at home. And then there was the price. PC gamers in South Africa are no longer allowed to moan about the price of games. Being a PC gamer in Australia is expensive, even by South African standards. I used Dawn of War II as my reference point as I had bought it for R370. Throughout my stay I could not find a copy of the game for under AU\$100 which equated to about R700. While chatting to one of the sales staff in an EB Games in Sydney, I was told that it was unheard of to find new release PC titles under AU\$100 at retail. All new releases across platforms are pretty much pegged at AU\$100 to AU\$120 (handhelds excluded).

Hardware is a little different: the Nintendo DSi had launched two days before I arrived. Initially I did a victory dance as I saw shops offering a shiny, new DSi for AU\$175, which is about R1200. What they didn't tell you is that you had to trade in your old DS Lite in order to get a DSi at that price. A new DSi handheld retails for about AU\$300. That being said, I would be pleasantly surprised if we were given a similar trade-in option in South Africa, but I'm not holding my breath.

Strangely enough, the best gaming experience I had during my time in Australia wasn't in a gaming shop at all, but rather an amazing shop called Anime at Abbotsford. One of the off-shoots of gaming as a hobby has been collecting

gaming figurines, which are pretty difficult to come by in South Africa. This shop had wall-to-wall gaming, anime, and comic figurines. I am so grateful that I only discovered the shop the day before I was leaving, otherwise the overweight would have killed me. There was a moment of weakness narrowly avoided: I'd already accumulated a pile of figurines from Soulcalibur III, Super Mario Bros and Shadow of the Colossus when the store attendants brought out a Gears of War Lancer from their storeroom. Were I not guaranteed to be arrested in Sydney airport with the thing, my credit card would have been a smouldering clump of gooey plastic.

Where am I going with all of this? Well, our gaming scene in South Africa is very often compared to those in first-world countries by us querulous gamers. To my surprise, however, we didn't differ too much from the scene in Australia. Sure, hardware prices are slightly better down under, but a console purchase is a once-off expense (unless it's an Xbox 360 – ooh, low blow) and it's the games that are going to cost you in the long run. So I had an epiphany that there was nothing new and exciting. When I spent a year in the UK I was amazed by how huge gaming was there, but when I got home, gaming had grown in South Africa. This has resulted in overseas visits to other countries becoming less awe-inspiring in a gaming sense. Is that a bad thing? Of course not, it just shows we're able to hold our own. Big gaming scenes are no longer "over there" in far off countries, they're right here and ready for us.

The moral of the story? If you ever find yourself in Sydney, get on a 504 bus and get off in Abbotsford. You'll thank me. **NAG**

Strangely enough, the best gaming experience I had during my time in Australia wasn't in a gaming shop at all, but rather an amazing shop called Anime at Abbotsford.

WHEN BEING NOTICED IS A PRIORITY.

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MASS EFFECT

Developer → BioWare Publisher → Electronic Arts Web → <http://masseffect.bioware.com/> Release Date → Q1 2010

Genre → RPG Platforms → PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

SO, HE'S NOT DEAD. If you're one to take even the most fleeting interest in RPGs, this thought – that Commander John Shepard, Normandy skipper, was still clinging to this mortal coil – inevitably crossed your mind when you saw BioWare's E3 trailer for *Mass Effect 2*. It wasn't so much a surprise (why keep your save-games if you're not going to slip into Shepard's loafers at least part of the time?), or even that much of a relief – but it was nice to know. *Mass Effect* has yet to deliver on its initial promise; and indeed, probably hasn't yet made its lasting impression on the general gaming consciousness, despite its massive sales and critical praise. It was an unquestionably excellent RPG, but if BioWare can't follow it up with something deeper, darker, and bigger, odds are it will disappear into the ether.

Don't believe us? Would *Baldur's Gate* have been regarded as such a

watershed were it not for its astonishing sequel? And where's *Jade Empire*? *Mass Effect* was a remarkable feat, yes. Its universe felt as rich as the one BioWare borrowed from George Lucas for *Knights of the Old Republic*, yet completely different, too. Nevertheless, the sequel needs to carry the franchise. Thankfully, BioWare seems to understand this. "We're working on a range of categories," BioWare's VP, Greg Zeschuk says. "Obviously, we touched on how much we love doing sequels, as it gives you an opportunity to push things further, and we're seeing that now. *Mass Effect 2* is definitely the darker chapter; the story has a hard edge to it. We've reworked how the story is delivered, too, and the technology around it. We're ensuring the game is rock solid: you'll be seeing battles, not long elevator rides."

"When I suggest that there was something rather interesting and





Mass Effect 2 is definitely the **darker chapter**; **the story has a hard edge to it. We've reworked how the story is delivered**, too, and the technology around it.

A long time ago...

The original *Mass Effect* was something of a treat. It first proved to be an enjoyable experience on the Xbox 360, later moving on to the PC. Developed by BioWare, the game had a distinct *Knights of the Old Republic* feel to it, and introduced players to a completely new setting, new characters, and a compelling new tale.

The player got to take the part of the first ever human Spectre - agents who doggedly protect the galaxy from threat. The player's character embarked on a mission to stop a famous Spectre gone rogue, and was supported by a number of team members that the player could modify,

equip and select for missions according to their abilities. However, the truth behind the plot was far deeper and more insidious than expected, making for some thrilling entertainment.

While the game was rather linear, it presented such a fascinating story line and so many other options in terms of skills, equipment and the like that the linearity of the tale almost didn't matter.

In addition to a great story line, *Mass Effect* brought the idea of third-person RPG gaming to the Xbox 360, supported by excellent graphics, great voice acting, and awesome special effects. Additionally, the player could make choices

that would affect the outcome of the game, and could use the familiar 'good or evil' idea that first surfaced in the *KotOR* games.

Mass Effect was an exciting and action-packed game that, although a little short, nonetheless provided the player with a huge amount of science-fiction enjoyment. The wide variety of character options, highly individualised non-player characters, and overall richness of the title established it as a fascinating and exhilarating title.

Walt Pretorius



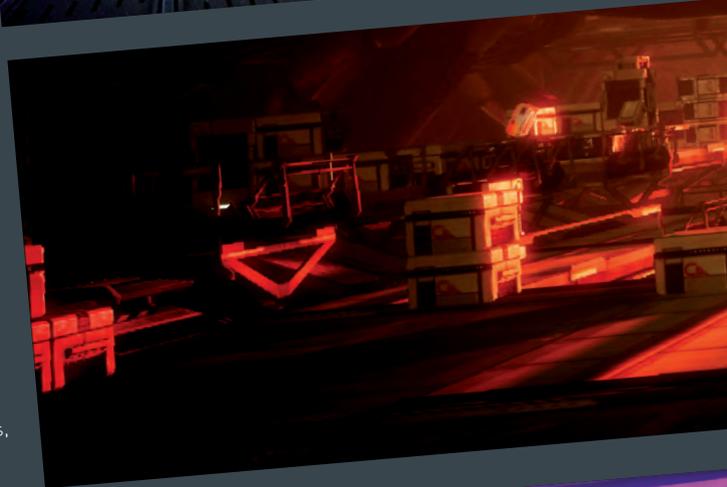
innovative about those awkward tracts in *Mass Effect*'s non-linear narrative; seriously, can you think of another game that's done painfully directionless small talk so well?" he demurs. "Well, yes, there was something interesting about them, but - you know - players aren't going to be losing any of the good stuff. *System Shock* did elevator rides, too - you had the news reports and the music playing in the background. But yeah, we're really aiming for a much more intense - consistently intense - experience this time around. We're optimising everything. We have a checklist, and we're hitting the points on that list really well. It's exactly like what we did for *Baldur's Gate II* - we're taking the lessons we learnt, and when you get the opportunity to do a sequel, you apply those lessons. We're doing that with *Mass Effect 2*. *Baldur's Gate II* benefited from that; it was a success right out of the gate, unlike the first one, which was more of a 'slow burner'. We made a list of the 100 things we wanted to improve, and got all the way down that list."

Fair enough. But it doesn't really tell you much, does it? BioWare's been keeping all information related to *Mass Effect 2* heavily veiled for some time, so this will likely mean very little to anyone hoping for a clearer picture. What we do

know thus far is this: after driving the Greatest Threat to The Universe into a humiliating checkmate, humanity and allies are presented with a nebulous Even Greater Threat. BioWare's aiming for something approximating an old-style Western in tone - expect crime gangs to take centre stage - and you're probably going to see a few new aliens. Oh, yeah, and Shepard's alive. Maybe.

BioWare's refining the Unreal Engine 3 - the first third-party technology solution they've ever used - for *Mass Effect 2*. According to Zeschuk, you're going to see "big battles, with consistent frame rates." "We picked Unreal," he continues, "because of the focus for the series: there's a strong shooting element, and we really thought that using this engine would give us the time to focus on the game, rather than building an engine. We can focus on the RPG elements and focus on creating conversation systems and everything we're improving to make *Mass Effect 2* special. But we're definitely building upon the technology."

As an example, he cites how the amount of animations available to each character has increased roughly tenfold. The in-game camera has been tweaked to feel much more cinematic than in *Mass Effect*, and the combat is appropriately



“... the amount of **animations available to each character** has increased roughly tenfold.”



Meet the neighbours

What would any good space opera be without aliens? So far, we know of two new alien species being introduced in *Mass Effect 2*.

The first are the Drell, though we know little about them. Thane, an assassin and the only Drell introduced so far, has the appearance of an amphibian or fish and speaks with a gurgling voice.

The second species are the Vorcha, who originate from a small and overcrowded planet, which has been largely stripped of natural resources by successive generations of this fast-breeding, savage species. The lack of resources has resulted in a tight-knit clan-based society, in which rival clans wage constant war against one another for control of scarce resources. Even as their population grows, the Vorcha constantly fight each other in fierce competition over basic necessities. This constant warfare has had the dual effect of making each generation of Vorcha stronger and more aggressive than their predecessors. However, their lack of resources has kept Vorcha society extremely primitive.

Vorcha, on average, only live about 20 years, but they possess limited regenerative abilities. When a Vorcha is injured or in distress, special cells move to the affected area and rapidly mature into specialised forms that will alleviate the issue. A Vorcha that is cut or burnt will adapt by having thicker skin.

The lungs of a Vorcha, placed in a barely-breathable atmosphere, will adapt to better use the gases there. A Vorcha subjected to strong gravity will quickly develop stronger heart and leg muscles. Vorcha can even 're-grow' lost limbs over a period of months.

Chris Bistine



We always want every play-through to be slightly different. **We don't just want to have one morality meter.** We always strive to make every game better than the previous one.





@ E3

While at E3 2009, we were shown a private demonstration of what we can expect from *Mass Effect 2*. Project Director on *ME2*, Casey Hudson explained, while Lead Systems Designer, Christina Norman controlled the action during the live gameplay demonstration. Reiterating an important point, Casey noted that players will carry over their saved data from *Mass Effect* - every character choice and gameplay decision impact events in this dark second act. The key points of the demonstration included a Precision Shooter feel, which includes the ability to directly target specific limbs. You no longer have to pause the combat to access powers, and there are nine new weapon classes in all, with the Heavy Rocket Launcher on display during the demonstration. The dialogue during cut-scenes has been made much more dramatic, with more dynamic static and moving camera angles, while the Interrupt System lets you physically and abruptly end a conversation if the I.S. icon appears (the example shown was Shepard shoving someone through a window instead of bothering with pleasantries). Landing on planets now lets you choose exactly where you want to land, with the planets' ecosystems being more diverse and detailed. "Each one is like a science-fiction painting brought to life," explained Casey. In *Mass Effect 2*, even the lead character can die, which is something to think about.

Miktar Dracon

more "intense". The AI has been reworked, too, promising increasingly dangerous enemies; capable of using the environment to their advantage, and making do when certain limbs have been forcibly removed. And the allies are somewhat less mentally dispossessed.

If Zeschuk's comments - and the game's explosion-marinated E3 trailer - are to be taken at face value, one might deduce that *Mass Effect 2* is going to be more action-oriented than its predecessor. This might well appease those gamers who complained about the amount of dialogue, but it should certainly concern those raised on a diet of dialogue-heavy BioWare RPGs. Comfortingly, Ray Muzyka - BioWare's CEO - is on hand to dispel any such scepticism. "Story is very important to us," he assures. "Those strong moral dilemmas, sense of choice - that always play a role. It's an opportunity - a vehicle - for us to make the world reflect your actions and keep track of what you're doing, and then see

how your friends, enemies, and the world itself respond to you. We always want every play-through to be slightly different. We don't just want to have one morality meter. We always strive to make every game better than the previous one. You're going to see a lot of nuance in the morality and the alignment, and the way the world looks at you. As before, your companions are the lens through which you see the rest of the world; there's no black-and-white system of good and evil. That's up to you to determine. We did a lot of that in *Mass Effect*, but the morality system in the game, we're building on that."

Hopefully, BioWare will make good on its promises to build and refine. There's little doubt that *Mass Effect 2* is one of the most anticipated games due out in the next year, and with good reason: it could well become the RPG series to usurp *Baldur's Gate* as BioWare's best. Now, that's surely something Shepard would live to see.

NAG
Alexander Gambotto-Burke

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Batman: Arkham Asylum

Joker here!

Genre → Action Adventure

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANY game featuring good old Batman is going to be followed with great anticipation by everyone. That includes comic book buffs, gamers, infants, you – and yes, even your grandmother is probably checking up on the game's official Website in giddy anticipation. This year marks the Caped Crusader's 70th birthday. Over the years, he has been portrayed in a variety of ways, and has gathered more die-hard fans than there are flies at a dung-processing plant. Being a fan of all things superhero/comic book/gaming/awesome-related, I'm told I blacked out upon hearing the news of a new game featuring 'Bats' that doesn't only focus on the physical side of Batman – it also deals with his extraordinary mental prowess. Batman started out as a detective with a few... let's call them eccentricities. The closest thing that he has to an actual superpower is his phenomenally high intelligence, which the developers of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* promised would be put to good use in the game. What they meant was that not only would gamers be punching bad guys in the face, but there'd also be plenty of stealth gameplay, puzzles/riddles and lots of controlling Batman as he goes about the business of detecting stuff. They tell me I blacked out again when a copy of some preview code for the game arrived on my desk.

Arkham Asylum starts out with Batman just having apprehended the Joker (again...) and taking him over to the infamous Arkham Asylum. Once there, the Joker does what he does best and ruins Batman's day by escaping





and declaring himself Arkham's new administrator. Joker's henchmen are now running amok throughout the asylum and Batman's the man for the job of throwing Joker back in his hole. That's the spoiler-free version of the game's plot. From the very beginning of my time spent with the preview code, it was impossible not to notice how slick and polished everything is in the game, despite its unfinished state. The game has a very gritty atmosphere: everything's dark, dank, and sombre – the type of environment that Batman thrives in. The game is looking visually amazing and it's obvious that the developers are tweaking the Unreal Engine 3 to not only provide the game with some fantastic visuals, but also to create a game world that would make even Batman teary-eyed with pride if he saw it. The audio is also fantastic, with music that suits the game perfectly, sound effects that are as meaty as the gameplay, and utterly fantastic voice acting (check the box outs for more info).

The gameplay is a mix of stealth, puzzles, combat, and a combination of the three. Batman's detective side is on full display here: there're a few puzzles in the game, most of which require the use of a special vision mode that highlights important areas and objects near Batman. As an example, you can also use this "investigator vision" mode to scan objects for fingerprints, chemicals and the like, which can then be used to track the movements of a particular person by following the unique signature of whatever was scanned. The easiest way to describe all this is to liken it to



an episode of *CSI* – there's evidence gathering and lots of snooping around. The game's stealth aspects are very important: Batman isn't superhuman and he can't stand toe to toe with Joker's henchmen if they're armed to the teeth with heavy firepower, so Batman will have to use misdirection, gadgets and lots of 'hidey-holes' to take down enemies quickly, quietly and efficiently. Batman can use his grappling hook to gain the height advantage over enemies, perching himself on ledges, gargoyle statues and other out-of-reach places. He can then use investigator vision to see through walls and objects to check up on enemy movement and their emotional state (calm, terrified, etc.), based on their heart rate. From here, Bats can glide down from his perch to take down enemies; he



can use his batarangs to knock enemies unconscious or he can use some other advanced manoeuvres to incapacitate his foes. He has a number of gadgets such as explosive gel and the batclaw. The former is used for blowing things up (such as destructible walls) and the latter is good for tossing objects about and opening hard-to-reach air vents (you'll be moving through ventilation ducts a lot). A number of familiar friends (and enemies, who are looking to provide some pretty intense boss battles) are around the asylum, such as Commissioner Gordon, Bane, and Poison Ivy. The island on which Arkham Asylum is located can be explored at will, giving the game an almost sandbox-type feel. This is great because there are tons of secrets and collectable items scattered around the island, which reward players with nifty extras such as character bios when they're found. Add upgradable abilities, a "challenge mode" (which

tasks players with completing certain scenarios such as beating wave after wave of enemies in a fixed environment) and a number of other nifty features, and it's clear that there'll be a lot to see and do in this game.

Batman: Arkham Asylum is looking 'too hot' to describe. It just feels 'right'. The combat is great, the stealthy bits are well done, and the atmosphere does Batman's long-and-storied history proud. With a bit more work, this game could possibly be one of 2009's best.

YOU SEEM FAMILIAR... HAVE I HEARD YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE?

The game's script is being co-written by Paul Dini, who has spent so much time writing about Batman (in both comics and television) that it's safe to say that he and Bats are "more than just friends." He's also responsible for the awesome



I am Batman! Fear the Bat-bicep!



We think we prefer this version of Harley Quinn...



Oh yeah you're right, I see it, you did step in dog poo



Yes, Batman can glide in this game.



Batman: The Animated Series. A few people who did voice acting for that animated TV series are handling the voices for their respective characters in the game. These voice actors include Mark Hamill [it's Luke Skywalker everybody!], who – just as in the TV series – does an incredible and wildly entertaining job playing the Joker, while Kevin Conroy voices the stern-faced and perpetually serious Batman. Arleen Sorkin plays Harleen Quinzel (Harley Quinn) once again, with the in-game model of her character having gone through a pretty awesome (read: slutty) makeover.

NOT IN THE FACE, NOT IN THE FACE!

The game's combat system (aptly named FreeFlow Combat) is brilliant. One button unleashes a standard attack (which can be chained into pretty devastating combos), another is used to counter enemy attacks, and a third is used to

stun enemies – useful for when you find yourself up against a knife-wielding thug who needs to be dizzied up a bit before you can safely attack the blighter. Used together, these simple button presses result in Batman being unleashed in a flurry of fluid movements and deadly strikes, leaping towards enemies and showing off surprising acrobatic ability considering how insanely muscular this version of Batman is. Counters are especially impressive. There's an icon that pops up above an enemy's head to let you know that he's about to attack, and if you hit the button in time, Batman will perform a counter, which is different, based on the enemy's attack. If the enemy tries to kick you, Batman will grab his leg and turn the attack in his favour. This is not only effective, but is as incredibly cinematic as the rest of the game's combat system. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Did you know that boxers don't have sex before a fight... That's because they don't fancy each other.



Fight Night Round 4

Punching your friends will never be this fun

Genre → Sports

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

GAMERS ARE OFTEN NOT what one would call "the sporty type". How is it, then, that a game based on boxing, which is about as sporting as two men slugging each other in the face (oh wait...), can be so absolutely entertaining? Quite simply because FNR3 offered players a more authentic fighting game – one that praised strategy above button combinations, and gave players a genuine feel for getting your face punched in by a 300-pound gorilla. *Fight Night Round 4* is right around the corner and, if the preview code we've been playing is anything to go by, it's going to take everything to the next level.

"What, the next level of punching people in the face? Oh goodie," I hear you pessimists say. Well, yes, actually. Fighting games have, up until now, relied on specific key-framed animations to carry the fight forward. "Jin punches high + Hwoarang blocks low = Hwoarang eats through a straw for the next week": simple as that. *FNR 4*, on the other hand, uses physics-enabled punching, blocking, bobbing and weaving to simulate every careful nuance of a real fight – which means realistic glancing blows, meaningful arm length, and haymakers that can end a fight ten seconds into the first round.

Players will be able to create their own custom fighters and take them through the ages in the game's career mode called Legacy. Kit out your fighter with a weight division, sponsors, a fly hairdo and fighting style, along with custom entrance music and victory dance. You'll play as both manager and fighter – scheduling



bouts, challenging opponents, dominating tournaments, and spending some much-needed time in the training gym between clashes. Not ready for combat? No sweat – run a simulated fight or two to see how well or poorly you'd perform with a certain strategy; just make sure you can back it up when it comes to the crunch.

Everything has been given the once-over here. Fighters drip sweat as the combat wears on, their physics-enabled trunks flap about in the expected manner and the eternally critical commentators will discuss everything from the history of boxing to your fighter's counterpunch strategies. Training has been expanded to six mini-games ranging from maize bag dodging to all-out sparring; perform them well and your fighter will reap the

benefits; underperform and you'll take a blow to your statistics. As you rise through the ranks from bum to champion, you'll break out of the stinky gym and fight in new venues from Mexican clubs to glamorous casinos. You'll even be able to create custom fighters and chuck them into the Legacy mode as opponents.

No matter whether you're a hardcore boxing fan, *Soulcalibur* veteran, or are just on the lookout for a fighting game that's not going to laugh at you for being unable to memorise a thousand combinations, keep an eye out for *Fight Night Round 4*. From what we've seen so far, it'll be enough to trounce *FNR3* – that should be enough to get anyone familiar with the series salivating in anticipation.

NAG
Geoff Burrows

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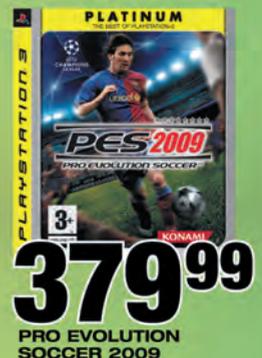
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PLAYSTATION 3

The Reviewers

While testing a new experimental trans-dimensional meta-cognition hyper-grid spacecraft, the NAG staff were slingshot to an entirely alternate dimension of science-fiction tropes.

Miktar Dracon:

All Miktar wants is to go back home, where they have chocolate, arcades, and high-speed Internet. Even though he's grown quite fond of all the alien life forms he's met, he's tired of bland food-cubes.



Walt Pretorius:

Gruff, antisocial and offensive, Walt has an unhealthy attraction to gun-swords and killing things. Simple yet misunderstood, all Walt wants is to kill the brother of his wife.



Dane Remendes:

Kind of like riding inside the horse instead of on top, Dane is the living ship the NAG staff are aboard. Dane doesn't mind cavorting around the universe with this lot inside him, it tickles.



Tarryn van der Place:

No matter the place, people or planet, no matter the scene, situation or scenario, there is one constant in the universe – Tarryn will somehow, from somewhere, get a very large gun with which to solve problems.



Alex Jelagin:

Born in the fires of the twin Delvian suns during a particularly hot day when all the clouds had been evaporated by the bombardment of gamma radiation, Alex likes to do a little dance and then he feels just fine.



Michael James:

Dominaar Michael James The Fourth rules over more than a billion subjects – or did, until his cousin staged a coup d'état. Michael was sent to prison for a while but was released for obscene behaviour.



Adam Liebman:

A ninth level Pa'uk and eighth level Rogue, Adam has mastered the mystical ability to be totally sexy even though he's the male of his species. Little is known about Adam's race, other than the fact they're blue.



Geoff Burrows:

After Geoff's brother was killed by Miktar in an accident, he's been on a crazed hunt to get Miktar to pay all his brother's traffic fines. Nobody said vengeance had to make sense.



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.

Review
Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Distributor: NAG Media Store Web: www.streetfighter.com

Street Fighter IV
Don't call it a comeback or retro-revival; this is fighting redefined

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

AGE RATING: Let's see some ID, son

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

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

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

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.

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...

Plus
+ Simple yet deep
+ Balanced
+ Challenging

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

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

Score: 97

What We're Playing

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

#	GAME NAME
1	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare MP
2	Quake III Arena
3	Demigod
4	inFamous
5	The Sims 3
6	Batman: Arkham Asylum
7	Bionic Commando
8	Call of Duty: WaW Zombie Verrückt
9	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin
10	Fallen Sword
11	Fallout 3
12	GemCraft: Chapter Zero
13	Grand Slam Tennis
14	Guitar Hero: Metallica
15	Lock's Quest
16	Overlord
17	Plants vs. Zombies
18	Rock Band 2
19	Sacred 2: Fallen Angel
20	Swords and Soldiers

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
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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
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Nology	[012] 657-1317
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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
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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

DEMIGOD



PC

85
76
78

INFAMOUS



PS3

90
85
86

BIONIC COMMANDO



360

78
70
72

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: BOX OFFICE BUST



360

10
25
25

UFC 2009 UNDISPUTED



PS3

80
84
84

VIRTUA TENNIS 2009



360

72
73
72

GUITAR HERO: METALLICA



360

86
84
85

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Kickin' it oldschool
So, you've heard all about this retro-gaming thing; you're intrigued but a little scared. We understand. The world of oldschool games can be a confusing one for those of you who missed out on the golden age of gaming. We...

Bang for your buck pixel pushers
Or apples and oranges from overseas gaming and hardware sites are all well and good, but generally don't apply in the SA context, as pricing and availability vary greatly. Fratz, online shopping...

When game modding gets serious
What could you do in seven years? Work towards a doctorate? Start your own business? Get in line and wait for Duke Nukem Forever? Or would you spend that time making a Duke Ex mod? The headlines...

Review: Tenchu Shadow Assassins
Feadal lasers, some time around the 16th century but, somewhat more pertinently, just one year after a bunch of well-thud' happened in Tokyo. South of Heaven, it seems some Bimbo warrior of yore was...

Review: Super Mario 64 DS
Dear Mario, please come to the castle. I've baked a cake for you. Now I'm totally inviting you over to share it with me, but I've a hunch feeling the afternoon is going to go all wrong...

Kickin' it oldschool
So, you've heard all about this retro-gaming thing; you're intrigued but a little scared. We understand. The world of oldschool games can be a confusing one for those of you who missed out on the golden age of gaming. We...

Review: Genius ErgoMedia 500 Gaming...
When I first had a good look at the ErgoMedia I thought was that it looked more like a toy than a piece of hardware. The 5000 is comfortable and has a solid feel to it. With its black hardware, it looks right at...

Adventure Game Studio
Ever wanted to create your own super-duper adventure game in the vein of those old Sierra and LucasArts classics? If you're open to being your own or a mod-maker, with the big boys, then perhaps...

Review: Chrono Trigger DS
I hate Japanese RPGs. Ask anyone who knows me. "The hell's with that?" they'll tell you. "and Japanese RPGs?" I hate pretty much everything about them. I hate the random encounters. I hate the...

Reviews
+ May 2009
+ April 2009
+ March 2009

About us
NAG Online is owned by Tilo Media, a publishing company that publishes SAOS (SA Computer Magazine) and NAG Magazine. Tilo Media also owns and organizes the annual (Rage) Expo

16 | InRelevance | 16 | Attention

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A disappointing number of hairstyles ship with the game, but they're easily customised by colouring from root to tip.



The Sims 3

They're... inside the computer!

Genre → Life simulation

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WHEN I CAST MY mind back to the very first trailer for the original *Sims*, I'm reminded of the simple concept Maxis introduced: take the *SimCity* model of an entire settlement's supply and demand, and shrink it down to the scale of a family. It was a straightforward notion, but in practice took them two full games, fifteen expansions, and a ton of spin-off titles to create a deep enough system. And boy, was it worth the wait. While *The Sims 2* was certainly a cut above its predecessor, in hindsight, it did little to enhance the core game mechanics. Instead, the developers opted to paste a 'pretty' 3D engine with layers and layers of new content over the existing framework and leave the rest up to the users' imagination. It was a superb game for its time, largely because we didn't know any better. But spend a few days with *The Sims 3*, and you'll discover just how shallow those titles before it were.

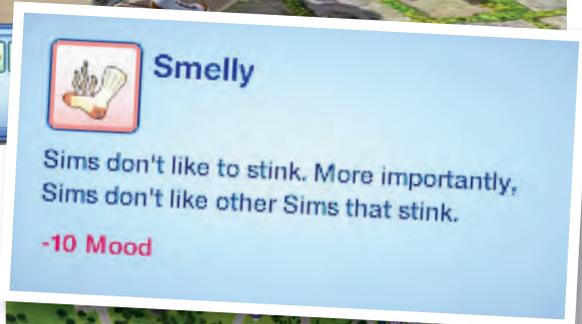
At the forefront of this evolution are two new features: one is simple and the other rather substantial. First, is the Moodlet and Wish system. Whenever a Sim experiences something, that experience has a chance of affecting their overall mood for an amount of time. Eat a pile of burnt waffles, and your mood takes a hit for the next few hours; but eat a superb meal, and it'll give you a boost. Sims' moods can be affected by anything from getting a good night's sleep, taking a quick nap before going to work, having a nice chat with the neighbours, taking a moment to admire the beautiful view, to leaving the house with the nagging suspicion that you've left the bathroom tap running. Almost everything that your



Sim does could have consequences, which ultimately creates a sense of doing things because you want to - not simply because the numbers add up. Wishes serve to add to the Sim's unique personality and are generated automatically, based on anything from your Sim's current situation to an activity that they'd like to do (either spontaneously or predictably, depending on the sanity of the Sim involved). For example, if you've been hitting the gym hard for a week and suddenly call it quits, you'll be gently nagged by your Sim that they yearn to pump iron again. Thankfully, there's no penalty for neglecting a wish; but taking your Sims up on their requests does earn them lifetime happiness points, which can be traded in for powerful rewards (steal bladder, anyone?).

Secondly, and what is perhaps the most obvious change, is the open neighbourhood. Gone are the days of keeping your Sim cooped up in the house because it's too much of a bother to load the nightclub or restaurant community lots; simply zoom out with the mouse wheel and click on the destination of choice. The game's versatile engine streams everything as you go and lets your Sim cycle, jog, drive or taxi around town like nobody's business. Sims will be able to join in neighbourhood activities such as beach parties, cook-offs at the local park, or get-togethers at the corner café with as little effort as clicking on the location and choosing "go here."

Of course, one of the most entertaining aspects of *The Sims* has always been watching the interactions between characters. As one would expect, this has





been given a serious overhaul - one that places emphasis on conversations that are more plausible and less on "friendship grinding." What that means is that the local police officer that your Sim has been trying to pick up for weeks isn't going to fall madly in love from repeated use of the "flirt" command. Conversations get stale quickly if you don't keep it interesting; change topics as needed and venture into the deep nested conversation tree and you might just emerge with a soul mate in tow.

Other Sims aren't the only source of amusement for you or your characters, however. Almost all objects in the game have been expanded upon, with a couple of particularly interesting features. Sims that are well versed in the handyman skill will have the option to upgrade a large number of objects: make that shower self-cleaning or hack the TV to score yourself some free channels. In fact, as your Sims improve any of their skills, they will unlock new abilities and options. Spend some time on the treadmill, and they'll figure out how to pace themselves properly. Keep at it, and they'll master the "quick burst" ability to get the most out of their hour-long morning workout. Those proficient at cooking will prepare better quality meals, and what better way to keep those high-quality leftovers edible than with an upgraded refrigerator? Take your Sims fishing, and they'll catch only the finest specimens for use in cooking, mounting or keeping in a fish tank. And if they spent their evenings taking long walks on the beach, who knows what manner of interesting (and collectable) insect life they'll stumble upon?

It'd almost be unfair of me to explain all the funny quirks and interesting surprises you'll encounter should you choose to pick up *The Sims 3*. It's an exciting, dynamic and often hilarious game that's bound to keep existing fans happy and might even pull in the crotchety few who refuse to smile when they 'accidentally' catch a glimpse of anything *Sims*. While the game is somewhat lacking in terms of content, it's almost encouraging to see that the development team spent the last few years building flexible and powerful systems, rather than simply churning out countless pieces of décor and clothing.



Of course, history (and EA) does have the habit of repeating itself, and it won't be long before the first expansion hits the shelves to bring us the next run of *Pets* and *Nightlife*-inspired add-ons.

GRAND DESIGNS

While the building mode is sadly much the same as that found in *The Sims 2*, it does offer a few new tools to streamline the process and generally improve the usability of Build Mode. The Buy Mode is a bit of a double-edged sword here because, while the amount of content is comparatively lacking (if you've been forking out for *Sims 2* expansions all this time), the addition of the Create a Style tool greatly expands the range of objects. Create a Style lets you customise every game object's texture, choosing from a wide palette that spreads across dozens of categories from leather and fur to metal and stone; even individual





Pregnant
The wonder of creating new life makes pregnancy an exciting time for most Sims. (From Pregnancy)
+20 Mood



Pumped
If Sims work out long enough, they get Pumped. Workouts are even more effective while Sims are pumped. (From Exercise)
+15 Mood
Time left: 4 hours

colours in those textures are at your mercy should the need arise. If you fancy a pink burlap oven or garage doors made from the finest marble, you can have such luxuries with just a few clicks of a mouse button. While the addition of Create a Style does wonders to balance things out in terms of variety, it'd still be nice to have a few more objects included with the retail package.

CHARACTER BUILDING

If you're the type who spends hours creating your ultimate hideous being in any character-creation screen, you'll be in seventh heaven here. Everything that you know from *The Sims 2* is included (unfortunately, without the "infinitely increase body proportions" bug, but it's probably for the best), with an extra layer of options and customisability to keep you busy for ages. A welcome addition is the Create a Style tool making its way into clothing editing as well, which means you can finally have those corrugated iron pants you've been after for years.

The biggest change to the character creation process (or the aging process, in the case of youngsters) is the completely rebuilt Traits system. Traits are the single biggest source of personality for your Sims, and each Sim can have five from the pool of 63. They range from the self-explanatory Flirty, Green Thumb and Handy, to the more interesting traits like Slob (Sims won't clean up automatically, but they're not bothered by the resulting filth) and Absent-Minded (Sims might suddenly forget that elaborate queue of instructions you just gave them). Each trait will open up interesting conversation options, Moodlets, interactions, or activities, and collectively serve to provide you with

much amusement at the expense of your more 'experimental' Sims.

HOLE IN THE POCKET?

Included in the launcher application is the incredibly welcome content management tool to give you greater control over the additional downloadable content you'll no doubt get hooked on. It's divided into Exchange and Store products, with Exchange being the free (and generally decent quality) items, Sims, and entire lots developed by the public, and Store being the high-quality paid-for stuff that the development team has put together. As one might expect, there is already a sizable collection of content available for download, with content packs ranging from R60 to R200 and individual items such as hairstyles, clothing and décor going for anything from R5 and up. Thankfully, EA threw its customers a bone and included 1,000 SimPoints (worth R114) in the retail package, along with an entire neighbourhood available as a free download. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

The more sadistic Sims derive great joy from the pain others experience.



The Score

1 None None 12+
www.pegi.info

- Plus**
- + Fun personalities
 - + Loads of activities
 - + Open neighbourhood
- Minus**
- Lacking content
 - Disappointing Build Mode

Bottom Line

It might not seem that different at first, but *The Sims 3* is a cut above its predecessors and will keep you occupied for ages.

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For the Fans



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“You shall not pass!” Sedna and her minions prepare to take on Oak and his croneys.



Demigod

Stop stealing my kills!

Genre → Real-Time Strategy / Role-Playing Game

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE CONCEPT BEHIND *DEFENCE* of the *Ancients* (or *DotA*, as it's more commonly known) proved to be a popular one for many gamers out there. Starting out as a map/modification for *Warcraft III*, it quickly gathered a huge following of players, so it was inevitable that we'd eventually see a retail game that utilised the concept and spruced it up a bit by adding to the formula. Enter *Demigod*, which is to the RTS and RPG genres what *Quake* is to first-person shooters. It's an arena-style game that takes elements from RTS and RPG titles to create something that is quite unique.

Your average game of *Demigod* starts out with players choosing an arena (map) in which to fight, deciding on a victory condition and each player selects the demigod (the player's in-game avatar) that they wish to play as. Players are divided into two teams: the Forces of Light and the Forces of Darkness. Once the game starts, the members of each team scramble to destroy the enemy's defences, kill enemy demigods and win the match by being the first team to achieve the victory condition, all the while defending against the onslaught of the enemy team, who are trying to do the same thing. The maps offer (there are eight of them) are visually astounding (these are some of the best looking arenas that I've ever seen in a game of this nature) and each one is tactically diverse and offers a number of ways to play. Scattered around the maps are towers and portals for each team, as well as flags that can be captured to provide benefits for your team. The portals periodically spawn waves of

“creeps”, AI-controlled minions that'll aid your war effort by blindly charging in to attack the enemy. Most of the maps are divided into “lanes” of attack through which creeps and demigods can move to attack the enemy, but these lanes are usually heavily defended by enemy towers. Each team has a home base which usually houses an item shop (and an artifact shop on certain maps), a health/mana regenerating crystal, and a citadel, which is essentially the team's main headquarters. The majority of each match involves the teamwork required to keep the enemy under pressure while capturing flags and destroying enemy towers to make life a little easier. There are four victory conditions that can be selected for each match: conquest, dominate, fortress, and slaughter. Conquest requires that you fight to destroy the enemy citadel. Dominate involves controlling the flags on the map for a certain period of time. Fortress has players fighting to destroy all of the enemy team's fortresses, which are special defence buildings. Slaughter is pretty straightforward: kill a certain number of demigods before the enemy does.

The demigods are the player characters, and there are eight of them available with the promise of more to come in the future. Divided evenly into two “classes” (General and Assassin), the demigods are the stars of the show. While the number of demigods available here may seem paltry compared to the 93 heroes offered in *DotA*, don't judge too hastily – every demigod is unique and requires a different play style to use effectively. Their skill trees are diverse and offer a slew of different options. You could spend ages dissecting each demigod's abilities, trying to find



that “perfect build” that will make you unstoppable in battle. The assassins are the more straightforward demigods – they're more effective at fighting solo and taking out enemy demigods. The generals are more “squishy” and require a subtler approach. Generals can buy idols from the item shop that allow them to summon their own minions, or they can spend skill points on abilities that will let them summon their own special breed of follower. Unlike the creeps that exit from portals, these minions can be directly controlled together with your demigod, allowing you to build up a small personal army. Killing enemy demigods and creeps, as well as capturing flags, earns your demigod experience points, eventually allowing him/her to level up and purchase new abilities. Players earn a small amount



The demigod selection screen. Left-hand column: Torch Bearer, Unclean Beast, Regulus and The Rook. Right-hand column: Oak, Queen of Thorns, Sedna and Lord Erebus.



of gold for every second of game time that passes (you can also earn your keep by killing enemy demigods or by assisting your allies in doing so). Gold can then be used to either buy items or artifacts from shops, or you can spend your earnings on some citadel upgrades that'll benefit the entire team (such as increasing the health, armour and damage-dealing capabilities of your creeps).

Did you get all that? Well, that's *Demigod* in a nutshell, and it's simply an amazing amount of fun to play. If you're looking to play the game on your own, there are skirmish and tournament options available that'll pit you against a team of AI-controlled demigods. Unfortunately, there isn't a single-player campaign, but the AI is smart enough that playing against them in skirmish or tournament mode is always rewarding, so they're a worthy alternative if you can't find any human players to go up against. If you plan on taking your A-game online, you may have a few problems – *Demigod*, as you may have heard, is suffering from some major network-related woes. If you

do manage to join a game online and the international players don't boot you for having too high a ping, then you're one of the lucky ones. Hopefully *Demigod* will build up a strong community presence here in SA (in which case finding games shouldn't be too difficult), but as it stands at the time of writing, you're more likely to become a demigod yourself than get a matchup online. The game's creators have promised that they are hard at work trying to fix these problems and we're hoping that the network issues will be squished soon. A LAN option was patched into the game shortly after its release, which should make the game a popular choice at your next gathering of gamers and ease your Internet suffering. *Demigod* is a fantastic game: it looks and sounds great, it has a wealth of tactical options and, most importantly, it plays well thanks to the well-balanced arenas and demigods. The deciding factor in whether *Demigod's* future will be bright or bleak lies in the support that it gets from both the community and the developers. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Score

1	2-10	N/A	12+
www.pegi.info			

- | Plus | Minus |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| + Impressive arenas | - No single-player campaign |
| + Variety of demigods | - Some network issues |
| + Great tactical depth | |

Bottom Line

It's not the type of game that everyone will enjoy, but *Demigod* is a fun title that offers well-balanced competitive play.

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans





inFamous

Thunderbolts and lightning. It's all very, very frightening.

Genre → Sandbox Action Adventure

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

KNOW IT'S A CLICHÉD question to ask, but if you could have any superpower, what superpower would you want? I'd want the ability to turn paperclips into doughnuts, because not only is it a cool party trick, but also, you know... doughnuts are awesome. A man by the name of Cole (just Cole) lives in the fictional Empire City. He's a bike messenger with a flair for pissing off the city's cops. He dabbles in urban exploration, and when he's not clambering around in the city's sewer network, he hangs out with his girlfriend Trish and his best friend Zeke. After receiving word that someone needs an inconspicuous package delivered pronto and that Cole's the only courier for the job, he collects the package and sets off on the errand. One thing leads to another and Cole ends up destroying part of the city and killing thousands of its citizens. It's a long story that's filled with potential spoilers, but that's the gist of it. Cole is incapacitated following his life-altering excursion and when he eventually comes to, he realises that, aside from feeling like he was just tackled by a Boeing, he has his very own superpower: he can turn paperclips into doughnuts. I'm just kidding – Cole's not that lucky. Instead, he becomes a living electrical conduit, able to wield and manipulate electricity at will.



Thus begins the tale that *inFamous* so brilliantly tells.

inFamous is an open-world adventure game at heart. Players take on the role of Cole as he learns all about his newfound abilities and tries to either keep the city safe from further harm or strike fear into the hearts of the people left living there. Speaking of newfound abilities, Cole's are awesome: Cole has a few travel-related powers (such as Static Thrusters, which essentially lets Cole glide around the city), some defensive ones (Polarity Shield is awesome for staying alive in troublesome situations) and a slew of offensive abilities such as lightning bolts and shock grenades. One of the most striking things about *inFamous* is the game's atmosphere. I truly felt like a fledgling superhero/super-villain, trying to come to terms with my new abilities while dealing with the

trials and tribulations of a world filled with super-powered individuals. This is further emphasized by the way that the city and its inhabitants are constantly reacting to the actions that you choose to take. For example, at the start of the game, when your fellow citizens first discover that you were the one who started this mess in the first place, they don't react too kindly. They even go so far as to throw cans, rocks and bottles at you while you're trying to make your way up the sides of buildings, which is just rude. Depending on the decisions that you make (thanks to the karma system that the game employs) further on in the game, the folks of Empire City will either learn to put aside their hatred and shower you with admiration (they'll even take photos of you while you roam around the city if they love you enough), or their hatred will transform into fear of your awe-inspiring evilness.

Dance Dance Revolution has changed a bit over the years, especially with the inclusion of the new "Life Ender" peripheral - it's like a dance mat, but with landmines strapped to it.



Swallowing your lunch money isn't going to stop me taking it from you...



The city also changes as you play – there are three gangs that have taken over the three districts that the city is divided into, and you'll engage in a few side missions to rid each sector within each district of the oppression and violence that these gangs perpetrate. It's simple – complete a side mission within a sector and the gang members will be too afraid to return to that sector, making your life slightly easier when travelling through the city. You might even gain favour with the cops or local medical crews if you do the right deeds for the right people, resulting in a number of benefits. There are a lot of random encounters that you'll come across which will pose you with a moral dilemma that helps to draw you into the world and make you feel more connected to it. Following the disaster that you brought upon it, the city is without electricity and it's up to you (and your new abilities) to fix that little problem, one power grid at a time. Not only that, but as it turns out, you'll also gain a new ability each time you restore power to a section of the city. No super-powered individual is complete without a few nemeses, and Cole has no shortage of them. You'll meet a bunch of baddies on your quest, each with their own superpowers. On top of all this, there's some great platform-style gameplay (Cole can climb pretty much anything that looks climbable – he's like Altair, but with electricity thrown into the mix), a system



for levelling up your abilities, and lots of phenomenal action sequences. There's a lot going on in *inFamous*, far too much to mention in this short space, so we'll just get down to business.

To put it bluntly, *inFamous* is an awesome game. The game's story is a little rough around the edges (as with most open-world games), but it's good enough that Cole's journey from zero-to-hero is a compelling and engaging one. The characters are memorable, and by the time the game is over you're very likely to feel a strong connection to the characters. The action is fast, frenetic and enjoyable, while the platform bits provide a nice change of pace between zapping enemies and dodging bullets. The story missions on offer are varied (both in terms of action and objectives) and each one is more exciting than the last. The side missions, while they can get a bit repetitive, never stop being fun. Special mention must be made of the game's amazing visuals. There are a few problems with dodgy animations, but other than that the game is absolutely gorgeous, mostly thanks to the fantastic lighting engine (it's difficult to describe just how good-looking the effects for Cole's powers are) that the developers have brilliantly utilised. Empire City and its environments are truly a beauty to behold and the game's striking visuals lend themselves well to the over-the-top action in the game. Even the

animated cut-scenes look phenomenal. The game certainly isn't without its problems – it's not devoid of bugs and the usual issues that most sandbox games suffer from (lots of repetition, grinding, and some more repetition). Despite the small problems that I encountered while playing the game, it's just too good in every other respect to dwell on the negatives. If you own a PS3, this should be high on your wish list. If you don't own a PS3, *inFamous* is reason enough to put the game and the console on that wish list anyway. I, for one, can't wait to experience the next chapter in the life of Cole, gaming's newest superhero. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

While most of the enemies in *inFamous* are packing some serious heat, Cole is unable to pick up and use their weapons. According to him, the first time he tried to handle a gun since the accident, the electricity pulsing through his fingers ignited the gun powder.



The Score

				16+
1	None	None	www.pegi.info	

Plus
 + Graphics and audio
 + Rich game world
 + Superpowers!

Minus
 - Can get slightly repetitive

Bottom Line

inFamous is one of the best open-world adventures ever developed. It's that simple.

AVAILABLE AT
 Look & Listen
 For the Fans

90



UFC 2009 Undisputed

Brutal, bloody, competitive: it's the UFC game we've been waiting for!

Genre→ Fighting

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE MIXED MARTIAL ARTS outfit known as the UFC has seen an enormous rise in popularity lately, even managing to outsell the WWE in terms of pay-per-view revenue in recent years. Given the plethora of wrestling & boxing games on the market, it's no surprise that THQ has finally decided to cash in on its official UFC license with the release of *UFC 2009 Undisputed*. This, of course, is not the first UFC videogame to be released, but previous titles have always been mediocre at best. Fortunately, THQ and Yuke's have managed to produce a game that smartly puts the technical brutality of UFC combat in the hands of couch potatoes everywhere.

Although *Undisputed* boasts a roster of more than 80 UFC fighters, the meat of the game is to be found in the career mode, which allows you to create and train your own fighter from scratch, and lead him all the way to the championship of your chosen weight division. Although the character creation mode is relatively spartan, especially when compared with THQ's *WWE SmackDown!* series, you'll soon realise that *Undisputed* relies more heavily on its solid play dynamic than it does on flashy presentation. The game offers 5 different weight classes, ranging from Heavyweight to Lightweight, each with its own roster of competitors and its own championship to vie for. Once you've created your character, you'll need to choose his fighting styles. Each character has both a striking and a grappling style, and the game offers a choice between 3 different options for each. For example, boxers will focus more on punching, whilst Muay Thai fighters have a more varied striking style; characters with the "wrestling" style will spend more time on the mat, trying to earn submission



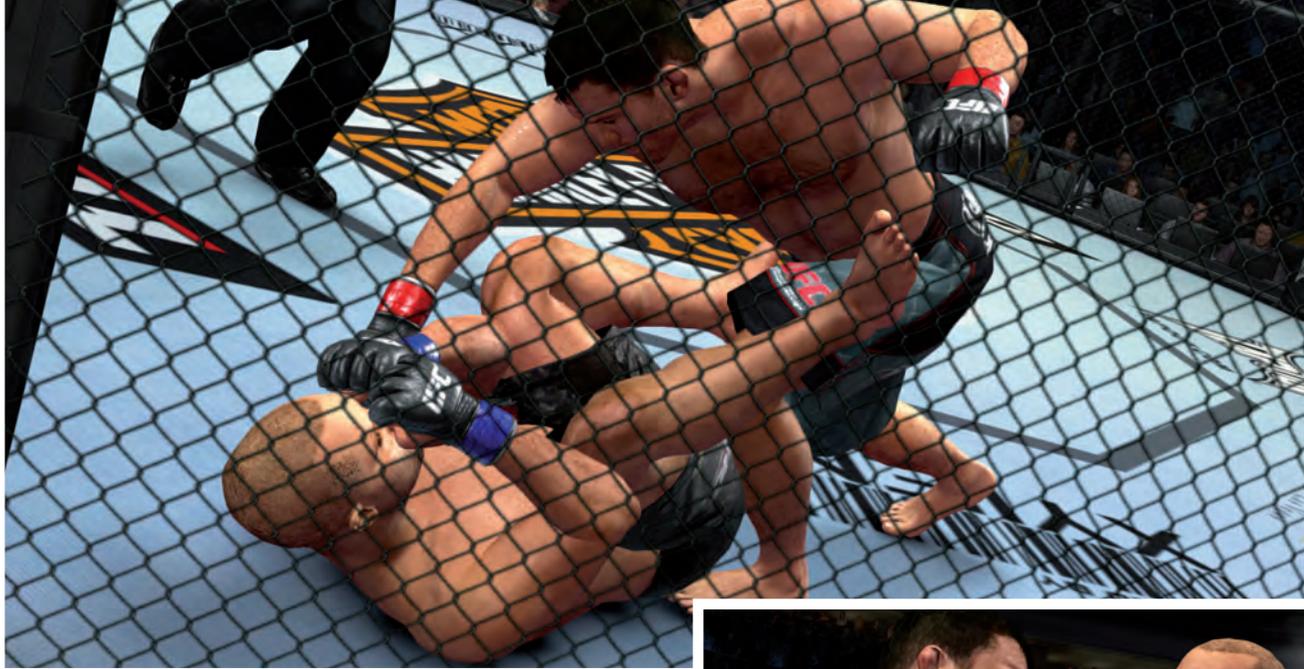
victories, while fighters favouring the Judo style will be more adept at takedowns and throws.

What truly sets *Undisputed* apart from other fighting games is, as mentioned, its play dynamic. As with the real sport, matches take place inside the fenced-off "Octagon", and are divided into rounds, each lasting 5 minutes. Victories can come by way of submissions, knock-outs, TKOs, or by the judges' decision at the end of the contest. Each opponent you face in the ring has different strengths – some of them favour ground combat, whilst others will be more comfortable fighting on their feet, some will be proficient at submission holds, whilst others specialise in reversing attacks. This variety forces you to approach each match differently, and to alter your tactics in accordance with those of your opponent. If you simply run into each match mashing buttons and wildly flailing around hoping to hit your opponent, you'll find that you quickly exhaust your stamina bar, leaving your

character open to vicious counter-attacks.

The game's control scheme is rather a complex one, using the four face buttons for striking attacks, whilst mapping all grapple moves and submission techniques to the right analogue stick, sometimes using the shoulder buttons as modifiers. As anyone who's watched UFC contests will know, it's vital for each fighter to try to reach an advantageous position, especially in the ground game, and the various "transition" moves that shift your character from one grapple position into another that might afford you better opportunities to pummel your opponent are some of the trickier moves to learn in the game. Fortunately, there's a robust tutorial mode that takes you through not only the basics but also the more complex elements of *UFC 2009*, taming what might otherwise be a very daunting experience.

In addition to the career mode, *Undisputed* also lets you pit any of the characters on its extensive roster against



We're pretty sure everybody is thinking the same thing about this screen, so we won't make the obvious comment.



each other in exhibition matches, as well as offering you the chance to replay a dozen classic UFC match-ups between some of the sport's greats. If you succeed in completing these matches in the same way they were historically won (which might entail winning with a specific submission move, or knocking your opponent out in a specific round), you'll unlock a video clip featuring a montage of footage from the actual match, definitely a satisfying reward for your troubles.

Visually, *Undisputed* does a great job not only of recreating the actual UFC fighters, but also of accurately representing damage taken, as characters' eyes swell up and cuts become visible on their cheeks over the course of a contest. Television-style replays shown after every round, as well as the "Tale of the Tape" graphic that shows up at the start of any match-up, adds to the realistic feel of the title. The game also fares well in terms of sound, with the duo of Joe Rogan and Mike

Goldberg providing commentary that's varied enough not to become tedious, and a repertoire of sound effects that bring home the impact of every punch or kick that lands during a match. There's also an appropriate hard-rock soundtrack that fits the UFC's restrained brutality to a tee.

Of course, although *UFC 2009* is addictive and entertaining, it's not absolutely perfect – the game is plagued by a rather clunky and unintuitive menu system, especially in the career mode, which makes reading e-mails and accepting sponsorship offers a rather tedious chore. There's also the annoyance of not being able to move up or down weight divisions, even after winning a championship with your character, which is a disappointing omission from the title. And there's the matter of the complex control scheme and steep learning curve that will see most players losing their first few matches in spectacular fashion. Once you've come to terms with *Undisputed*'s slow and technical pace, though, you'll

find it's a deep and engrossing title, the nuances of which become more and more apparent the more you play the game. It's certainly not yet a perfect game, but it's certainly a promising start for what will hopefully be a long lived series. **NAG**
Adam Liebman

The Score

1-2	2	None	www.pegi.info

Plus

- + Addictive, varied action
- + Compelling career mode
- + Expansive roster

Minus

- Lacklustre presentation
- Steep learning curve

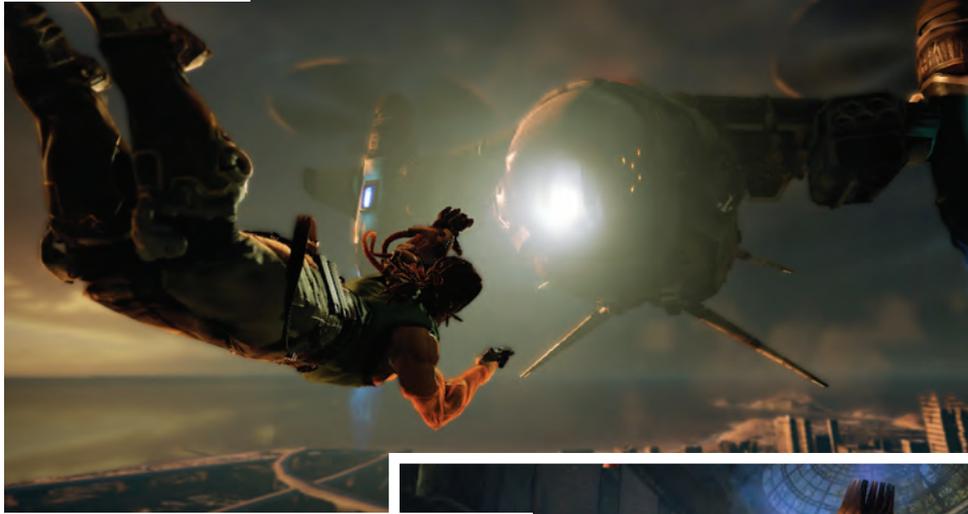
Bottom Line

UFC 2009 Undisputed delivers on its promise of varied, realistic and brutal fighting action. It's deep and engaging, and well worthwhile.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans



Flying through the air with the greatest of ease...



Bionic Commando

Armed and dangerous... literally.

Genre → Third person action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

CAPCOM HAS, AFTER A very long absence, resurrected a favourite game. *Bionic Commando* was one of those titles that was challenging and fun, on its first outing, and provided the player with many hours of enjoyment. Brining that kind of gaming fun back from near-obscurety is difficult, particularly when the game needs to be translated from side scrolling action into a modern, high-tech 3D action adventure.

Developers Grin did a good job of that, when all is said and done. While *Bionic Commando* isn't the best game ever made, it does offer the player a very solid and enjoyable experience.

The player steps into the role of Nathan Spencer, the original Bionic Commando who, thanks to some bad luck, starts the story in prison. However, a nuclear attack on a major city results in him getting freed from the whole mess, given back his bionic arm, and sent in to sort out what exactly is going on in the vast, devastated setting that is Ascension City.

The game is a strange mixture of freeform exploration and linearity. While the player gets to go pretty much anywhere that isn't irradiated in the setting, the missions are governed by a series of waypoints and goals that are very dictatorial. It doesn't matter how the player gets to them, but they must be completed or reached, with no opportunity for side quests. During these missions, the player will get to use the character's bionic arm in a variety of ways, ranging from fast-paced swinging across the massive setting through to beating enemies to a pulp. The player will also get to use a variety of projectile weapons, which are supplied not by fallen enemies, but rather through



supply drops that take place every now and then. The fact that the bionic arm can be used as a weapon (in a variety of ways that include flinging enemies around, delivering massive punches, and the like) is a good thing, because ammunition for the various other weapons is a little like hens' teeth. The player will have to manage ammunition very efficiently in this game, because there is not a lot of it about.

That's the first of two of the game's nastier aspects. The second stems from the fact that the player will not be able to save just anywhere. *Bionic Commando* uses a checkpoint system that may result in having to do a whole lot of stuff over if the player manages to get the character knocked off.

Bionic Commando looks pretty good, with excellent special effects arising both from particles and camera effects. The sound is also great, although some of the cut scenes are distinctly B-grade in their execution. The real gem is the control system. It takes a little getting used to the timing required to play the game, but once that's down, the player will have no problem zipping around the devastated city and fighting off scores of bad guys.

On the whole, *Bionic Commando* is a satisfying game, despite one or two little issues. It is likely that it will achieve the same kind of cult-classic status that the first game did, so many years ago.

NAG
Walt Pretorius



Insert fart-lighting joke here.

The Score

			18+
1	2-8	None	www.pegi.info

Plus

- + Vast environments
- + Great effects

Minus

- A bit too linear
- Very little ammo
- Some nasty cut-scenes

Bottom Line

Bionic Commando offers a fun experience for those who don't mind counting bullets.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the PlayStation 3

78

Thousands of decisions
in a microsecond.
And no mistakes.



ESET Smart Security 4

The faster, lighter PC protection

Protects against malware
Gives no chance to hackers
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www.eset.co.za

Whadda you lookin at?
She said she was 18.



Sacred 2: Fallen Angel

Hold on tight: it's a bumpy ride

Genre → Action RPG

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

PORTS FROM CONSOLE TO PC or vice versa are usually a bit of a hit and miss affair. Often it's the interface and control systems that suffer, sometimes it's a pile of bugs that come along for the ride, and at other times it's the graphics that can't keep up and end up bogging down the frame rate. *Sacred 2* is a bit of a mixed bag because, while it manages to figure out the interface and menu system quite well, it's left rather lacking in all the other technical departments.

The game itself is largely the same title found on the PC. The storyline, which predates the first *Sacred*, is kept intact, and all the characters, questing and humour are exactly the same. What this means is hundreds of side-quests that can give the player some 100+ hours of game time – highly appealing to any RPG fan looking to waste away in front of the TV for a good few weeks. Getting through the first 10 hours or so might be the biggest challenge you face with this game, however, because the bugs and glitches are so glaring and so irritating that you might end up trading it in before giving it a chance to really prove itself.

Visual glitches and sloppy animations are all over the place, texture and full model pop-in are ever-present, and poor loading times (which are subtly assisted with a hard drive installation) only serve to aggravate matters even further. The AI tends to bug out and do nothing at times (often rather rudely in the middle of a fight) and at one stage my character's horse decided to pack up and disappear, only to return a few play sessions later like nothing happened.



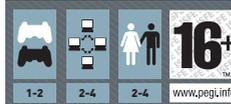
Thankfully, if you can grit your teeth and battle your way through the bumpy patches, *Sacred 2* turns out to be the charming, entertaining yet somewhat repetitive action RPG that was lurking behind the scenes all along. The humour is dry and cheesy, and the action is consistent and decently challenging on the silver or higher difficulty levels. The game's interface has transitioned brilliantly from keyboard and mouse to gamepad, although it can be a little lagged at times and it does tend to require a good spot of luck to get the targeting system to do what you want. For the most part, however, the action is pretty straightforward and doesn't suffer too much from any quirks. As long as you're killing things in the general direction of your next quest waypoint you should be fine.

If you're on the hunt for an action RPG that will keep you entertained for weeks on end or something to kick back with for a few hours with a friend, thanks to

the two-player drop-in/drop-out co-op, you should certainly give *Sacred 2* a chance. It's buggy and certainly not for the impatient, but underneath its rough exterior lies a truly fun game that won't let you down... too often. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

The Score



Plus

- + Amusing humour
- + Tons of game time
- + Great environments

Minus

- Buggy
- Lacks polish
- Can get ugly

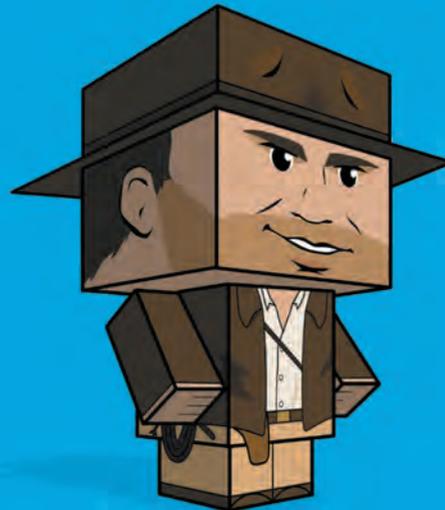
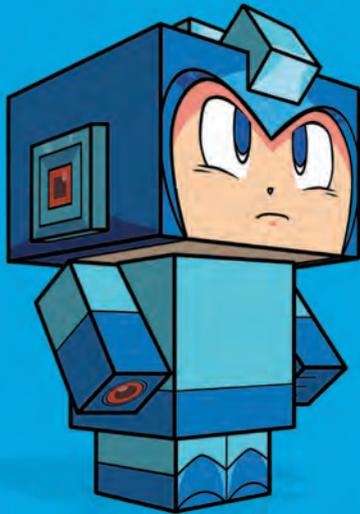
Bottom Line

Sacred 2 comes close to being great but is held back by too many bugs and poor attention to detail by the developers.

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

72

MAKE FRIENDS THIS WINTER

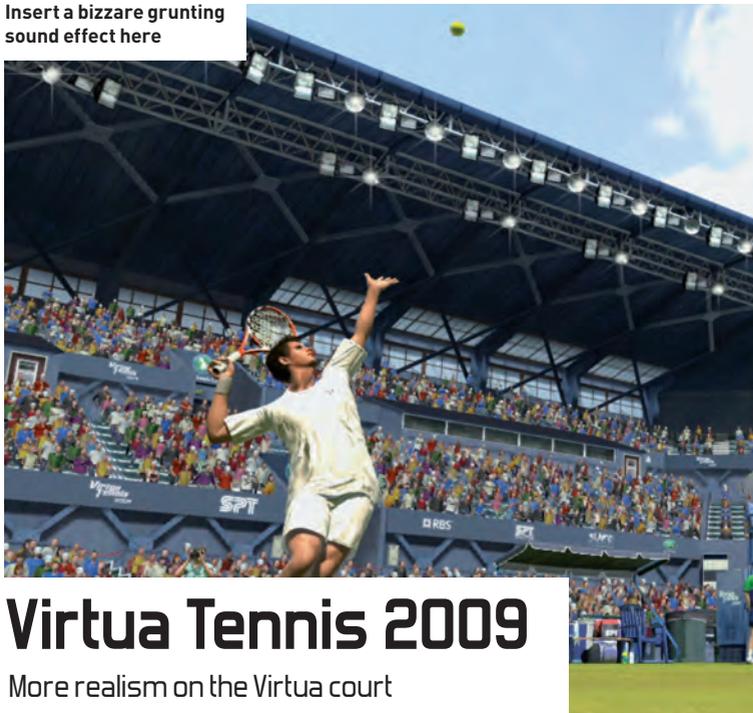


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Insert a bizzare grunting sound effect here



Virtua Tennis 2009

More realism on the Virtua court



Genre → Sports Simulation

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

TENNIS SIMULATORS ARE NICHE games that have been dominated, for the most part, by two titles. *Top Spin* and *Virtua Tennis* have played back and forth volleys at each other for years now, each doing just enough to trump the other in new instalments. However, the market is about to get invaded by the sport simulator mega-star, EA Sports, and both franchises will have to pull their socks up to take on EA's new *Grand Slam Tennis* franchise.

But, at the time that *Virtua Tennis 2009* was developed, *Grand Slam Tennis* was nowhere to be seen, so perhaps a comparison between the two is a little unfair. Still, the strong licenses that EA has secured will make this Sega title look a little paltry, as it only features a number of players and the Davis Cup as licensed content.

The most obvious change in this title, for fans of the series, is the naming convention. While this game should have, strictly speaking, been called *Virtua Tennis 4*, the developers dropped the numeric value in favour of a date. This may hint at more regular instalments of the series coming out, presumably on a yearly basis, but that's purely an assumption. Other changes have been made to the game as well, making it something of a better, more realistic tennis simulator than *Virtua Tennis 3* was.

Most obvious is the fact that this particular title feels a lot less arcade-like than *VT3*. The game dynamics have been refined, and the ridiculous dives that players could perform in the previous game have mercifully been culled from



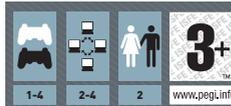
the code for this one. Additionally, some of the player graphics have been refined, presenting the player with characters (although only some of them) that are lifelike and excellent in-game versions of their real-world counterparts. Some of the less famous players still look a little plastic, though.

Virtua Tennis 2009 is a game with massive amounts of longevity, but this is largely due to the fact that the single player career – still the main focus of the game – is very long indeed. The player can create a character using the game's overhauled character creation system, and will be able to compete in a massive number of games, while partaking in varied (and sometimes rather strange) mini-games to increase their player's skills. It's a very long haul, though, and often the player may get a bit frustrated at slogging through a number of matches that are a little boring.

In the end, *Virtua Tennis 2009* is little more than an updated version of *Virtua Tennis 3*. It's a good game, and it is a very

viable option for those who want to play some simulated tennis, but the truth is that it really is just more of the same, with a few tweaks to deliver an improved experience. At very least, those brutally silly dives from *Virtua Tennis 3* have been removed, making for a more tense, exciting, and realistic tennis simulation experience. **NAG**
Walt Pretorius

The Score



Plus

- + The silly dives are gone
- + Improved graphics

Minus

- Sometimes a little boring
- More of an update

Bottom Line

Not a bad option for those who want a solid tennis simulator, but little more than an updated version of *Virtua Tennis 3*.

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

72

Developer→ Neversoft Publisher→ Activision Distributor→ Megarom Web→ www.guitarherometallica.com

Guitar Hero: Metallica

Never mind that noise you heard

Genre→ Rhythm/Music

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

IT'S GUITAR HEROTIME again, and this time around we're graced by the presence of James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett, and Robert Trujillo. From the moment *Guitar Hero: Metallica* loads up its menu screen, there's a strong Metallica feel to it. The Career Mode involves creating a band that becomes the opening act for Metallica on one of their tours. 49 songs are on offer (28 Metallica tracks, together with 21 other tracks that were hand-picked by the four Metallica members), which are divided into a number of tiers. You'll play a few songs as the opening act, then you head on to play a few songs as the Metallica members (the latter is particularly awesome – James Hetfield interacts with the virtual crowd and everything). There's a change to the way that you advance through each tier: instead of playing a specific number of songs, you have to earn a certain number of stars, which means that your star rating for songs now has an effect on your advancement. A small gauge appears on screen when you're rocking out, which gradually fills



as you increase your multiplier and hit note streaks. When the gauge is filled completely, you gain a star. Other than that, the rest of the game doesn't alter the formula that was introduced by *World Tour*. One thing that I appreciated is that all the songs in the game are unlocked for Quick Play Mode right off the bat, which is great. *Guitar Hero: Metallica* is a treat for fans of Metallica. There's a ton of extra features, such as music videos and track info that can be unlocked as you play. Fans of *Guitar Hero* will probably buy this regardless, because it's more *Guitar Hero*, but be warned – there isn't a lot that's new here. If you can deal with that fact, you'll love this addition to the series. **NAG**

Dane Remendes



Bottom Line

It's *Guitar Hero* with a splash of Metallica awesomeness. If you don't like either of them, you probably won't like this.

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

86

Developer→ PopCap Games Publisher→ PopCap Games Distributor→ PopCap Games / Steam Web→ www.popcap.com

Plants vs. Zombies

Zombies on your lawn... and you feel fine

Genre→ Action Puzzle

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

POPCAP HAS A WELL deserved reputation for creating the digital equivalent of crack cocaine, except their virtual narcotics remain legal (for now). *Plants vs. Zombies* is its take on the tower defence concept (popularised by the Tower Defence modification for *Warcraft 3*, and the *Desktop Defence* flash game), but with a few twists that are trademarks of PopCap's ability to innovate and transmute fun into even more fun. Various types of zombies attack your lawn from the right of the screen – to stop them you place spitting, freezing, chomping, and squashing plants in the way of the zombies. If the zombies reach your flower towers, they get destroyed (eaten). This direct confrontation makes for fun strategy in how and where you plant your defensive line, and what seed packets to take into a level. If a zombie gets past your defences, there is one grace given per row (five rows of zombies attack), after that if only one zombie gets through it is game over. Upgrades get you



more plants and more slots for seeds. Later levels mix things up with water or by having you battle at night-time. The latter situation prevents you from getting free Sun, the resource used for planting flowers, so you have to change your strategy. Things are kept fresh through the campaign by mixing in mini-games, which can be played separately once unlocked for trophies, money and, if you have the Steam version of the game, Achievements. *Plants vs. Zombies* has more content than any other PopCap game yet. It manages to keep surprising you, and wraps it all up with some genuine humour. It's very difficult to boil it down to the exact reasons for why *Plants*

vs. Zombies has the addictive qualities it does: such things are best left for you to experience yourself. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



Bottom Line

By throwing everything that's fun about "flow control" tower-defence style games together, PopCap have crafted one of the finest casual games ever.

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

90



Wanted: Weapons of Fate

What if nobody told you that bullets fly straight? (They don't, actually :P)

Genre → Third-Person Action
 PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

SO, YOU'VE SEEN THE movie (or read the comic) and now you want to experience some bullet-curving action for yourself. You head out to your nearest games retailer, you grab a copy of *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* off the shelf, and you make your way over to the cashier – grudgingly handing over your bank card. After realising that you're now too broke to afford food for the rest of the month, you head on home, still content in the notion that, besides the fact that you'll have to live on roach meat and dry bread until payday rolls around once again, you'll have a kickass game to tide you over between bouts of hunger pains. Upon arriving at your humble abode, you load up the game and start enjoying life as a trained assassin. Less than six hours later, the game's credits roll and you stare through teary eyes at your screen as the hunger sets in...

Weapons of Fate is an extremely short-lived game. You could finish it in one sitting – which is the game's biggest flaw. During those six hours of play, you'll take on the role of Wesley Gibson, the lead character from last year's film. You'll also play as Cross (Wesley's father) in flashback sequences that flesh out the game's story. The game begins shortly after the movie ended, with Wesley having had yet another dream about his mother's death when he was an infant. It turns out that she was murdered, and he heads off on a path to find the one who killed her, with the player merrily tagging along for the journey. The game's story isn't terribly involved or interesting, but it does set the



scene for the action which takes place. See, for those of you who don't know, Wesley is/was a member of an age-old fraternity of assassins. The training that he was given when he first joined The Fraternity grants access to certain abilities that players will need to take on enemies. This includes the curving bullets that the movie featured, together with Enhanced Quick Movements (I'll explain those in a bit) and some other stuff. The game places a heavy emphasis on effective use of cover, with players having to chain together movements from cover to cover in an attempt to flank enemies (which is made easier by blind-firing to suppress enemies, allowing Wesley/Cross to move between cover quicker). Curving bullets involves holding a button, choosing the bullet's trajectory and releasing the button, which is very useful for taking down enemies behind cover and is quite satisfying to use. Using Enhanced Quick Movements (EQM) initiates a slow-motion sequence as you move between cover, allowing you to quickly take down multiple enemies. The EQM and bullet curving require adrenaline, which is built up by killing enemies. Throw in some melee combat, explosions,

collectable items (which unlock various extra features such as still galleries and photos) and cut-scenes and you've got this game clocked. *Weapons of Fate* has its problems: aside from the game's shortness, the artificial intelligence is pretty dodgy, there's no multiplayer, the visuals are bland, and the audio is repetitive and unexciting. Nevertheless, the game is fun and the action never lets up. It's worth a try if you enjoyed the movie. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Score

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

Plus
 + Curving bullets is cool
 + Non-stop action

Minus
 - Very short
 - Not very challenging
 - No multiplayer

Bottom Line

Wanted: Weapons of Fate offers plenty of action, but the game is too short and doesn't offer much of a challenge.

AVAILABLE AT
 Look Listen
 For the Fun



Developer → Team 17 Publisher → Codemasters | Funsta Distributor → Nu Metro Interactive Web → www.leisuresuitlarrygame.com

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust

Masochism, with 3D graphics

Genre → Third-Person Adventure

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE *LEISURE SUIT LARRY* franchise was, once upon a time, a well loved, naughty game that adults could enjoy. Then, it sort of disappeared for a while, only to resurface with *Leisure Suit Larry: Manga Cum Laude*, which was a nasty game by all accounts. And then the whole Activision Blizzard thing happened, and it looked as though Larry would mercifully be put to rest. However, the franchise was picked up by Codemasters (or their Funsta division, at least) and the development was handed to veterans Team 17. The result is *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust*, which has managed to exceed *Magna Cum Laude* in terms of being really, really bad.

Where the franchise was once witty and naughty in a 'nudge, wink' kind of way, *Box Office Bust* is blatantly vulgar and crude. Virtually every line of dialogue (delivered, surprisingly, by some biggish names) either has an expletive or a crude sexual reference in it. One or two of the lines are a little funny, but most of them are just plain weak. That may not seem like a massive



thing, but dialogue is fairly important in a game like this. At least, it could be, but in this instance it is just inane.

In fact, there is absolutely nothing good about this game. The controls are rotten, the camera awful, the mission boring, the story weak, and the humour childish. The graphics (aside from the environments, which are actually quite good) are generally freakish. The game is challenging because the controls are really poor, and for no other reason.

One cannot effectively formulate how absolutely rubbish this game is. It's not witty or clever. It's not challenging in the right kind of ways. It's not even remotely close to being enjoyable. It's meant for adults, but is crammed with jokes primary

school kids would find immature... I'm sorry. I can't go on with this review. Even writing about this game is torture. **NAG** Walt Pretorius

The game does have a few redeeming qualities: it's super easy to quit and it comes on a shiny disk!

The Score

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

Bottom Line

To summarise this game review would mean using words that are not allowed to be printed in this magazine



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Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

Hack! Slash! Trade and upgrade. Rinse, and repeat...

Genre → Action RPG

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 **PSP** DS

EVER WANTED TO TAKE out your frustrations on the local fauna? Yes, this is hardly eco-friendly, or even politically correct – in fact, those kids who are found to derive pleasure from pulling bugs' wings off and setting ants on fire, tend to get at least a stern talking-to, while those who "graduate" to small animals are generally sent for counselling! So it is expected that such urges are outgrown, yet apparently there is a market for a safe outlet for them. In this new game in the series, as in its predecessors, the player assumes the role of a "monster hunter" – basically one who runs around the countryside looking for large game to cut down and chop up into bits. And yet there are constant references to "respecting nature" and the like, as though engaging in rampant poaching is a perfectly natural activity.

Yet, despite the rather shaky premise and its even shakier rationalisations, the game itself is pretty good. You start off by creating a character (unless you have one from *Monster Hunter 2* that you would like to import), a process with a bit of cosmetic detail: you get to choose your gender, face type, hairstyle, clothing – gender and face you cannot change once you have finalised your character, but the other elements you can chop and change whenever you are in your character's home. There you can also save your game, and root around in your equipment chest and your wardrobe. Your house is located in a village, which contains the usual assortment of NPCs who will provide you with useful goods,



services or information. Beyond that lays your happy hunting grounds. In those you will run into increasingly dangerous creatures (referred to as "monsters" rather than "animals", which is what they very often most resemble!) Once you slay a "monster", you will have the option to carve out various bits from it, some of which are common, such as meat that serves as rations, while others are more rare and exotic, and can be crafted into items, weapons, and armour. The combat system is uncomplicated, which is actually a good thing for a game that is truly and literally "hack and slash". Other than the fighting, there is considerable exploration involved, and a fairly decent map system (as console games go).

This game makes use of a couple of interesting technological design choices. For example, there is an option to boost the audio on the built-in speaker (with the caution that this is not optimised for headphone use.) Speaking of the audio – the sounds in this game are pretty good, and the music is quite well composed, though at times, if you spend long periods of time in a single area, you will be pulling out your hair at its repetition. But, back to interesting technology, though – what really caught my attention is the option to install a part of the game onto a Memory Stick. You

need at least a gigabyte of room on it, so you need to have a beefy card. The result of taking this option is that you will enjoy shorter loading times, as well as inflicting less wear on your PSP's UMD drive.

This title, technically, has no actual end, as such – it is open-ended. This means that, if it grabs and holds your interest, it will occupy you for a very long time indeed, so from that point of view it represents excellent value for money, which is something that is preciously rare in console gaming! **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

The Score

1	None	None	12+
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www.pegi.info

Plus

- + Good graphics
- + Many hours of play
- + Technology features

Minus

- Rather monotonous

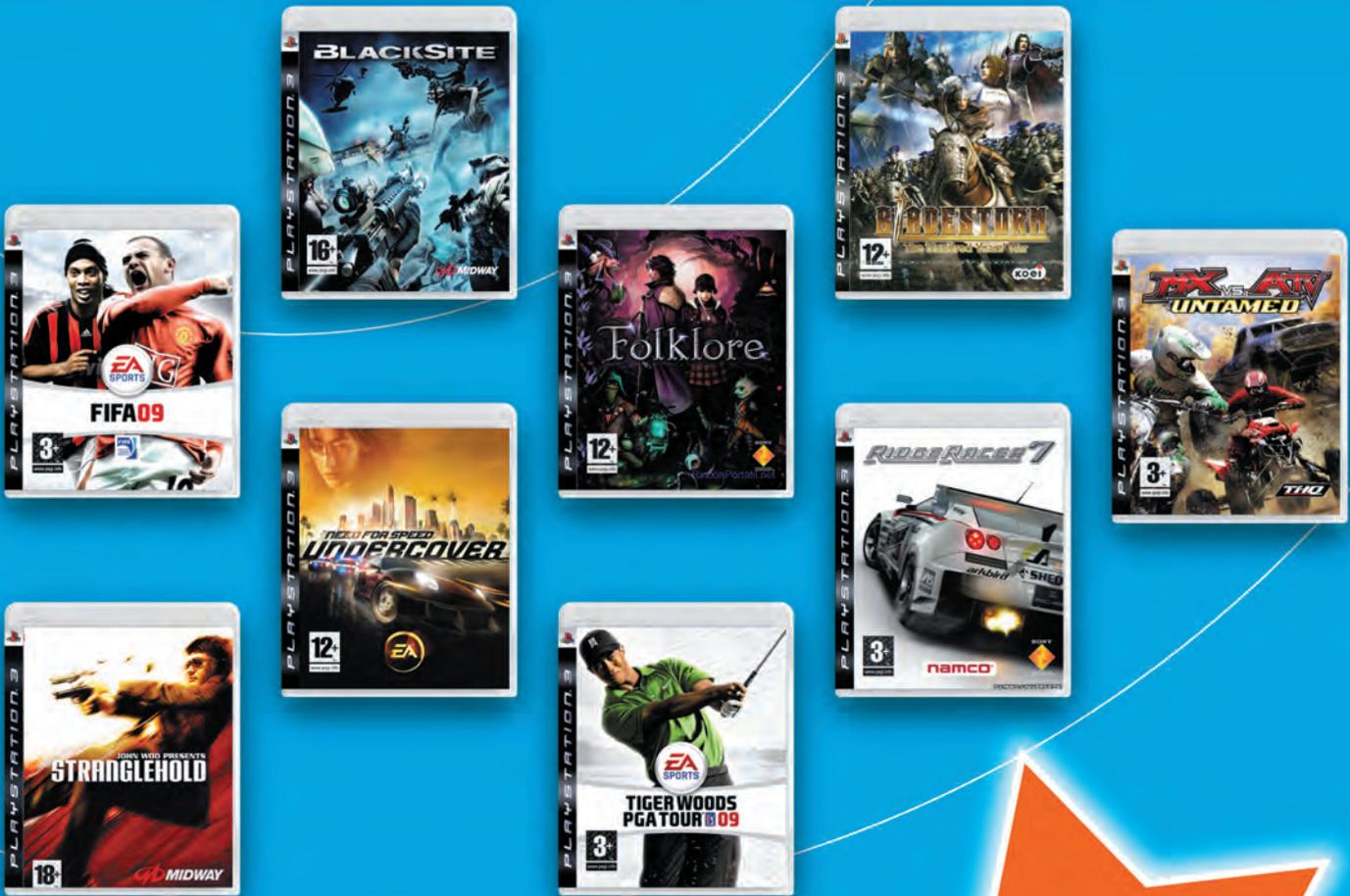
Bottom Line

Despite a thin rationale, this is a pretty good hack-and-slash game that furthermore offers almost unlimited play time.

AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Price

73

The best thing about staying in with your favourite games this winter is **NOT HAVING TO PLAY OUTSIDE**



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Thief: The Dark Project

MEET GARRETT. HE'S A nice sort of guy, living out on the streets of the City. Garrett's a bit unemployed, so sometimes Garrett liberates passers-by of their cash. One day, Garrett's liberating hand is caught liberating the pockets of a Keeper, one of these weird secret society guys who are usually actually totally invisible. Understandably surprised, and grudgingly impressed, the Keeper offers Garrett an apprenticeship with his order. So Garrett learns how to do Keeper stuff for a few years, but eventually decides that robbing people was better than all this bookish junk, and goes independent again. During his ensuing misadventures, he gets fitted with a really cool mechanical eyeball.

Of course, stealth games have been around since *Castle Wolfenstein* on the Apple II back in 1981 (that's Muse Software's *Wolfenstein*, mind you), with Hideo Kojima's MSX2 / NES title *Metal Gear* bringing the genre into the gaming mainstream around 1987. So Looking Glass Studio's 1998 *Thief: The Dark Project* might not have been a genre debut (in fact, its release coincided with *Metal Gear Solid* and *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins*), but it was set in a Steampunk world, which obviously automatically makes it infinitely better than any other stealth game.

The game also pioneered what would later become core gameplay elements of the genre – where *Metal Gear* and

Tenchu had used only limited enemy line-of-sight for detection, *Thief* introduced lighting and positional audio as cues. Garrett's present visibility, for example, is indicated by a "light gem" on the HUD, which brightens or darkens according to environmental set pieces, as well as the player's actions. The player is also able to map enemy placement and movement by listening for footsteps. Additionally, Garrett may be equipped with items he can use to manipulate an otherwise unfavourable environment to his advantage – firing water arrows at torches will extinguish them, for example. If you replace "Garrett", "light gem", and "water arrows" in the preceding sentences with "Riddick", "blue tint", and "tranquiliser gun" respectively, you might start to discover some appreciation for *Thief's* legacy.

The game was followed up by *Thief II: The Metal Age* in 2000, but Looking Glass went bang shortly afterwards. A whole bunch of former employees formed up Ion Storm, who then released the Unreal Engine 2-powered *Thief: Deadly Shadows* on PC and Xbox in 2004, dropping the number III to avoid putting off console gamers who'd missed the previous two titles. Finally, in 11 May 2009, following several weeks of hot rumours, Stéphane D'Astous over at Eidos-Montreal confirmed development of a fourth installation, provisionally dubbed *Thi4f*. **NAG**



Somewhere in this picture a sniper has a
high velocity rifle trained right between
your eyes.



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SAMSUNG

Goodbye PlayStation 2

(We Still Love You)

There is a sacred tradition long 'scribed' in the halls of videogame history, a hollowed rite surrounding the passing of a platform.



FOR EVERY CONSOLE AND computer format, there is a time and a season, and a place in publication. No platform ever truly dies; we just stop writing about them, because there's always something new and shiny around the corner and page real estate is valuable. That's when we - those who are always looking towards the next big thing - know that one final duty remains in our 'stewardship' of a gaming system: passing the torch. For it is only after a platform is said to die that it achieves immortality: it becomes the true property of the fans and admirers, who will keep it alive forever.

The fans have watched over the ZX Spectrum and the Commodore 64. They have watered the still fertile fields of 8-bit Original Style. They have the Konami Code tattooed on their biceps and in their hearts. They still 'Quake' with fury across the Internet and 'Doom' LAN parties to shotgun carnivals that last all night. 'Real' gamers know that nothing gets old - just well aged. Now another great old platform is passing into your hands to begin its next... nay, its true life.

So, faithful gamers, allow us to 'impress upon' the honour of this next charge and all that it entails. It's time to meet PlayStation 2 again for the first time.



AFTER PSONE: NES OF A NEW GENERATION

PlayStation was the console that put Sony - much to the surprise of many - on the map. Despite its fantastic success, it was a 'sophomore' effort. Revolutionary yet crude in its hardware, awkward and acne riddled in the development of its challenging new software, its amazing 2x CD-ROM disc drive enabled the most outrageously bad and unintentionally hilarious prehistoric CGI cut scenes ever created. PSone became the leading console format of its era largely thanks to Sony having caught everyone else with their pants down. It sowed the seeds of the PlayStation Nation, but PlayStation was not yet the format that everyone was playing. And it was too soon to hook into the rollover of a generation of players to become a cornerstone of a completely new population of gamers. When gamers still thought about 'roots', they thought about Nintendo - the Nintendo Entertainment System... the Game Boy.

Yet, when the first rumours surfaced about the mysterious, nearly mystical PlayStation 2 - a machine that would navigate SCUD missiles and allow users to jack into the Matrix - everyone could feel a tremor in the air. This was critical mass; Sony had a chance here, and they took it.

2000: EVERYONE WANTS WHAT EVERYONE WANTS

First-generation Software (March 2000): *Ridge Racer V, Tekken Tag Tournament, Time Splitters, Gran Turismo 3: A-spec, Klonoa 2*

Welcome to the sixth console generation - the 128-bit era. The PlayStation 2 has just launched (4 March - later in Europe and the US). It is the first generation of its hardware line, with each successive generation marked by improvements in the development kits and noted improvements in quality and graphical fidelity.

Maybe Sony themselves were stunned by the response to the launch of the PS2. Even though it sported but a handful of worthy titles at launch - and the system's first true heavyweight in the form of *Gran Turismo 3* was nearly a year away - the PlayStation 2 hit each retail region it launched in like a multi-ton bomb. Mobs clamoured for the Big Blue Boxes. In Europe, it was as if a catastrophe hit shops and malls. Nothing like it had been seen since the early Christmas rush surrounding the 8-bit Nintendo in the late '80s - prophetic of where the PS2 was headed. As with all hardware launches, there were bugs: a bad run of

optical drives here, bad GPUs there. It helped that the PlayStation 2 was also an affordable DVD player in an era when DVD movies were just taking off (if you bought the optional DVD remote). But it remained to be seen how the system would fare as a game machine.

2001: THE WEST KNOWS BEST

Second-generation Software (September 2001): *Ico, Grand Theft Auto III, Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, Final Fantasy X, Jak & Daxter*

Just when the PS2 was hitting its early stride, Microsoft launched the Xbox in November 2001. The Xbox did well, with the incredibly hyped birth of the *Halo* franchise. But Sony had already started fighting back. *Gran Turismo 3* had kept PS2 sales going strong and the release of the revolutionary *Grand Theft Auto III* on the PlayStation created an irresistible magnet. Nothing Microsoft (or anyone else) could do slowed the PS2 down. *GTAIII* also demonstrated part of what was to become a key strength of the PS2: the 'rise of Western game developers on consoles'. Familiar with the PC market, Western developers had rarely made inroads into the Japanese-dominated console world in past eras. But the PS2



was powerful enough to run sprawling, epic games like *GTAVIII*, and the DVD storage format meant that Western developers wouldn't have to scale back the content of their larger games. Change was in the air.

2002: PLAYSTATION 4 LIFE

Third-generation Software (August 2002):

Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny, *Kingdom Hearts*, *Sly Cooper & The Thievius Raccoonus*, *Xenosaga Episode I: Der Wille zur Macht*, *Zone of the Enders: Second Runner*

The next threat to the PS2 emerged in the area of online gaming: Microsoft's Xbox LIVE was born, and with it, the first games to compete with near PC-level online play became available to console players. Sony responded with the release of the PS2 network adapter and *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*. Gamers responded immediately: combining online play with pick-up-and-play simplicity was a winning combination whose time had come. Sony capitalised with its slogan "Live in Your World, Play in Ours." The formation of a real PlayStation subculture had begun.

2003: PLAYSTATION DOES WHAT NINTENDONT

Fourth-generation Software (August 2003):

Silent Hill 3, *Jak II*, *Final Fantasy X-2*, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*

By 2003, the effects of the competition from the Xbox became clearer: Sony was racking up more platform exclusives by wisely lining up studios such as Naughty Dog. The PS2 was carving out an identity: players thought of emerging mega-franchises from *Jak* to *GTA* to *Devil May Cry* as "PlayStation games."

The sales lead also continued to roll on. PS2 systems flew off the shelves, and holiday seasons saw regular shortages. Controversial adult games like *Grand Theft Auto* put the PlayStation in the media spotlight. Slowly, "PlayStation" replaced "Nintendo" as the generic term for all videogames, used by a past generation. Genericity [look it up, Ed] is always a good way to know when you've really arrived. The sheer popularity of the PS2 even caused SquareSoft to break with tradition and create a direct sequel to a *Final Fantasy* game: *Final Fantasy X-2*.

2004: LOSING WEIGHT AND LOOKING GREAT

Fifth-generation Software (September 2004):

Burnout 3: Takedown, *Gradius V*, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*

By the following year, the PlayStation 2 was coasting along and enjoying a steady stream of solid software. With such a stable platform, big budget sequels such as the latest *GTA* were developed for it first. Online play was taken for granted - even light-hearted games like *Ratchet & Clank* were receiving the online treatment. The rumbling of a new generation of consoles was in the air, with Microsoft antsy to be first with a new Xbox. None of this intruded the PlayStation 2 world, however. Sony released the PS2 Slim (SCPH-70000), with smaller, more efficient hardware and a built-in Ethernet port, solidifying the PS2's out-the-box online capability. It dropped support for the PlayStation hard drive, however - a device only used for the online-only *Final Fantasy XI* MMORPG.



2005: GRAN TURISMO

Sixth-generation Software (February 2005): *Gran Turismo 4*, *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening*, *God of War*, *Resident Evil 4*, *Shadow of the Colossus*

One thing that had become a trademark of the PlayStation 2 was that successive generations of software seemed to dig up new hardware tricks and graphical techniques to blow the previous generation out of the water. This reached a crescendo in 2005 with the release of the long-awaited *Gran Turismo 4* - a game so loaded with visual fidelity and features that it seemed nearly impossible to do on the console. It was 'in time' to help the PS2 survive the coming of the Xbox 360. The hype surrounding the announcement of the PlayStation 3 that year was practically unnecessary to maintain the inertia of the PlayStation brand. The hits kept rolling out, and some PS2 titles, like *Shadow of the Colossus*, garnered more critical acclaim than most software released on newer platforms.

2006: GOLDEN YEARS

Seventh-generation Software (March 2006): *Kingdom Hearts 2*, *Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War*, *Okami*, *Final Fantasy XII*, *Tales of the Abyss*

In the year that the official successor to the PlayStation 2 was released, the PS2 still competed thanks to its mature library of software - some of the best games available on consoles were still exclusive to the PlayStation 2. And the PS2 had shown that it would age better than the originator of the PlayStation brand: where the PSone's rickety, warped polygon visuals were an eyesore, stuff like *Okami* could still blow people away in the contemporary realm. Even so, the end was nearer now than the PlayStation 3



was on the market and bigger publishers were tooling up for the next-generation development struggle.

2007: NOT DEAD YET

Eight-generation Software (March 2007):

God of War 2, Rock Band, Persona 4, Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock, Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords

By space year twenty double zero seven, the mighty über-consoles had begun to duke it out for shelf space next to shiny new HD TVs. The PlayStation 2 had been pushed to the back of game stores (and the back of game magazines). Being de-emphasized was understandable: Sony was thankful for where its '150 million-sold workhorse' had gotten them, but wanted nothing more than to sell everyone on the Blu-ray revolution and SIXAXIS motion controls. Still, the PS2 showed tenacity. The PS2 editions of popular party games like *Rock Band* sold well. While its online play had become antiquated next to the PC-like sophistication of state-of-the-art consoles, gamers still liked their *SOCOM* sessions. Smaller publishers took advantage of the vacuum in big-budget releases; small-scale gems like *Puzzle Quest* might have been overlooked in previous seasons next to titans like *Gran Turismo*.

2008: STILL NOT DEAD

Final (?) Generation Software (July

2008): *Persona 4, Guitar Hero World Tour, Thunder Force VI, Lego Batman, Beatmania IIDX 15*

You know when that point in a console's lifespan arrives: the shovel age. When the big publishers are no longer putting out the heavy-hitting titles, what's usually left? *Barbie's Horse Adventures*. And by 2008 the venerable PlayStation 2 was seeing its fair share of recycled and

licensed drip ware. But when a console had sold well over a hundred million units, it becomes the definitive platform for niche publishers - be they modestly budgeted Japanese RPGs or import music DJ simulators, the gamers in the know continued to ferret out great titles to keep their PlayStation 2s spinning. Many would say that Sony "killed" the PS2 a year earlier than they should have, and seeing what is still possible with epic games like *Persona 4*, it's hard not to sympathise with that argument. That pesky 150 million-plus install base wants games, but old is old, and new is new, say the marketing drones and the media alike.

PLAY THE FUTURE

At the end of 2008, Sony removed content approval for the PlayStation 2, making it an open platform. Games are still being published and those looking for their cul-de-sac drive of Japanese RPGs or obscure shooters still have a console to deliver them. And more than a trip down memory lane, the gargantuan back catalogue that the system offers is one of the most formidable in the history of video and computer games. It can truly be said that a lifetime of gaming is contained within this slim, black box. It was the system that became the new NES. The PS2 created a generation of youths who see the geometric shapes of the circle, square, triangle, and x-cross and think of something besides geometry. Any retrospect of something with such breadth and scope deserves more than an article to commemorate it; and some day, the definitive book on the PlayStation 2 and its history in electronic entertainment will, no doubt, be written. Here and now, I am but the writer for a videogame magazine, and I know that I am not worthy. The job belongs to you now, gentle reader. PlayStation 2 is yours. **NAG**



We Salute the Best of the Best of the Best

Beatmania
Black
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter
Burnout 3
Dark Cloud
Devil May Cry
Disagea 2
Dragon Quest VIII
Final Fantasy XII
God Hand
God of War
Gran Turismo
GrimGrimoire
GTA III
Hitman: Blood Money
Hot Shots Golf
Ico
Jak & Daxter
Kingdom Hearts
Metal Gear Solid 2
Odin Sphere
Okami
Persona 4
Phantom Brave
Radiant Stories
Ratchet & Clank
Resident Evil 4
Shadow of the Colossus
Shin Megami Tensei 3
Silent Hill 2
Sly Cooper
Soul Calibur
SSX3
Suikoden III
Tekken Tag
Time Splitters 2
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3
Tower of Druaga
Valkyrie Profile 2
Virtua Fighter 4
Wild Arms 4
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner





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The Sky's the Limit

Logitech introduces its first Force-Feedback Flight Simulation Controller

UNVEILED LAST MONTH AT the E3 Expo in Los Angeles, the Logitech Flight System G940 had flight sim enthusiasts' hearts racing. According to Logitech, the design and controls of the G940 were inspired by military and commercial planes and helicopters.

"We approached this project with the goal of redefining the flight sim experience. Whether you're flying an A380, an F/A-18 Hornet, or a Comanche helicopter, when you want to feel the wind on your wings, control engines together or independently, or master tricky manoeuvres, the G940 behaves and feels

like the real thing – from takeoff to landing," said Ruben Mookerjee, Logitech's director of product marketing for gaming.

The three-component system features a force feedback joystick, dual throttle and rudder pedals, and has been designed to put you in complete control of your aircraft. Features include a two-stage metal trigger, six programmable buttons, mini-stick, 8-way hat, and three analogue trim controls. The only downside is that you'll have to wait until September to buy one, although that does give you some time to save up some cash.

The art of storage

Toshiba has extended its range of external hard drives with the glossy black StorE art. They come in two sizes: a 1.8" and 2.5" hard disk drive, with storage capacities ranging between 120 GB and 500 GB. The high capacity version is a 3.5" hard disk drive that provides between 500 GB and 1000 GB of storage, and requires an external power supply, whereas the two smaller versions are powered by USB.



All-powerful

As the newest member of Dell's premium performance brand, the Alienware M17x is a gamer's dream. It's a powerful 17-inch notebook that can be configured with up to 8GB DDR32 1333MHz Memory, 1TB 7200RPM or 512GB of Solid State Storage capacity (RAID 0), and an Intel Core 2 Extreme Quad-core overclockable Mobile Processor.

MSI X-Slim notebook unveiled at Computex

Claiming to be the lightest and slimmest 15.6" laptop in the world, the MSI X600 is a head-turner in her midnight black and techno silver garb. Less than 1 inch thick, this little lady boasts full I/O ports, an HDMI port, and Blu-ray support. She also comes equipped with 802.11 b/g/n Wi-Fi protocol and Bluetooth, as well as optional support for WiMAX. She tips the scales at a mere 2.1kg (including her battery).



Gesture-based gaming has arrived

Sony Ericsson has just announced the Yari, their first mobile phone with gesture-based gaming, where you move your body to play instead of pressing buttons on the phone. Yari also introduces a games carousel that allows you to access all your games from your desktop and to browse downloadable content on PlayNow arena, which will be available in SA in 2010. The Yari will be released locally in October.

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.

Thrustmaster RGT

IF YOU ENJOY PLAYING racing games on your PC and are looking for an upgrade from your mouse and keyboard, then you need to consider making that investment in a suitable peripheral that will give you full real vehicle controls during a race.

The Thrustmaster RGT console has a range of features designed for maximum driving precision and accuracy. These features include '5 axes' exclusive modes; 10 function buttons with 14 locations; a navigation cross button to customise your vehicle; and three large aluminium robust pedals, allowing advanced drivers to set up for 'heel and toe' downshifting. The

RGT comes with powerful force feedback touch sense technology licensed by Immersion, two 'sequential shifter system' options allowing you to choose between Rally or GT styles, and two new reinforced wheel-mounted sequential levers. Additional features include an exclusive force button on wheel that activates and deactivates the hardware centre during the race, an oversized tube with rubber grip, a 270° turning angle with a belt-driven gear system, and more real settings and switches.

The Thrustmaster RGT is available locally for around R2,299.



#1 GHz

AMD has announced availability of a factory overclocked graphics processor that is the first to break the 1 Gigahertz (GHz) barrier using standard air-cooling solutions – the ATI Radeon HD 4890

Overclocking with the ROG OC Station

ASUS has introduced the ROG (Republic of Gamers) OC Station. The OC Station is a pure hardware-based, bay-mounted device with a large 3-inch display that takes OCing to a whole new level of ease, accuracy and sophistication, according to ASUS. When used in conjunction with ROG motherboards, the OC Station will give you on-the-fly access to overclocking parameters, ROG-exclusive features, fan speeds, system information, and even a photo slideshow function. It also provides you with quick access to system voltages and frequencies without having to enter the BIOS, so you can overclock your system on the fly via a knob, even during busy benchmark runs or actual gameplay. The OC Station can be installed in virtually any PC case, where it occupies two 5.25-inch drive bays. Look out for our review in the August issue.

Snippets

LG has developed a full **HD 23-inch 3D LCD** that is said to realize Full HD images with twice the brightness of conventional 3D LCD panels.

Western Digital has introduced its AV-GP line of hard drives that includes a **2 TB capacity, the industry's largest available drive** to-date. Using WD GreenPower Technology, they provide cooler and quieter operation and lower power consumption.

The newest member of the ASUS Xonar D series, the **ASUS Xonar DS 7.1 channel audio card**, has been equipped with design features said to be found only on high-end audio equipment. The Xonar DS eliminates 91% of background noise and boasts 107dB SNR, which is 12 times clearer than most onboard audio solutions.

Fusion-io and **Johnathan "Fatality" Wendel** have launched the ioXtreme – a solid state storage device for high-performance computers running 64-bit operating systems. The unit reportedly "eliminates" application latency and delivers "the kind of storage performance once limited to the world's fastest supercomputers."

Hardware Q & A

FROM: Danelle Vivier

"FOR A LONG TIME now I have wanted to upgrade my GPU. Right now I have a GeForce 8500GT and want to upgrade to a 9600GT or GTS250. What I want to know is how big the difference is between the two and also the difference between 512MB and 1GB. I was also considering the ATI Radeon HD4850 512MB, but turned to NVIDIA for its PhysX. I also don't have a big budget because I'm only in Grade 9. Please help. I'm planning to buy it at the end of the exams."

Neo: Buy the GTS250 if you can, as it's significantly faster than the 9600GT, which is in turn much faster than the 8500GT. As for the memory, 512MB should be fine, but obviously if you can get a 1GB version of either card rather buy that.

FROM: Ilyas Mohamed

"I WANT TO UPGRADE MY PC but am confused with what to buy. I'm looking at upgrading to an AMD 7750 X2 Black edition chip, not quite sure about the motherboard yet. Then, I want to get a TwinTech GeForce GTS 250 with 3GB of Kingston HyperX DDR-800 ram. Since you guys have experience with this type of thing, I was wondering if there is a better alternative. Keep up the good work!"

Neo: The upgrade plan is sound apart from the 3GB of RAM. Either make use of 2GB or 4GB of RAM, as odd numbers will prevent you from using Dual-Channel or "Ganged" Memory mode operation, robbing you of performance.

FROM: Logan Dam

"I'M LOOKING FOR A bit of guidance. I've been saving up for quite some time to buy myself a new graphics card. I'm looking at getting an XFX GTS250 card, but I believe it won't be worth the R2,500 since the rest of my system may create a bottleneck. Right now I'm running a Core 2 Duo E6600 on a Gigabyte GA-965P-DS4 with 2GB of DDR2-800 RAM and an 8600GTS, all running on a 460W PSU. Do you think I should rather get a 9600GT or 9800GT? Do I need to go and get a stronger power supply or will my current 460w work? It has one 15A 12V rail and one 14A 12V rail."

Neo: You could go ahead and get the GeForce GTS 250, but there may be better value out there, like a Radeon HD4850, which is retailing for as low as R1,300 at the moment yet offers better performance. If you are partial to NVIDIA graphics cards then for that price point you'll be hard pressed to find anything better than the GTS250. The PSU should be fine, but you may want to get a good brand 500 watt unit.

To have your hardware questions answered, write to lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za, and we might print your question in the magazine.



Dream Machine

SINCE OUR DREAM MACHINE has been pieced together by an avid enthusiast, one should expect that tweaking and overclocking are two big considerations when products are awarded the highly coveted Dream Machine status. This is exactly how two new products made their way onto the page this month. The O CZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3 RAM and the ASUS Rampage II Extreme Motherboard have been deemed worthy by our esteemed technical guru, Neo. We know better than to get into a heated debate with him over hardware stuff, so if he says they are the best, then they are. Phoreals.



Processor

Intel Core i7 Extreme 965
www.intel.com



Motherboard

ASUS Rampage II Extreme
<http://za.asus.com>



Graphics Card

ASUS GeForce ENGTX295
<http://za.asus.com>



Memory

O CZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com



Case

Cooler Master Cosmos S
www.sonicinformed.co.za



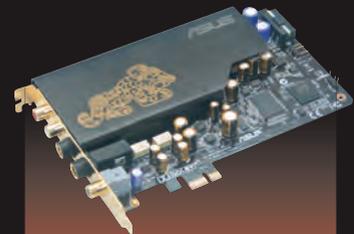
Storage

WD Caviar SE16 500GB
www.wdc.com



Power Supply

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



Sound

ASUS Xonar Essence STX
<http://za.asus.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

We had a cooler this month... it just wasn't Dream Machine worthy. We'll keep trying.

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BY NEO SIBEKO

ASUSTEK RAMPAGE II EXTREME meets 5GHZ (ROUND 1)

THE RAMPAGE II EXTREME, if you didn't gather from the review in this issue, is one truly impressive board and without a doubt the fastest clock for clock X58 motherboard that I have ever used. So, having seen this, I set about trying to find out how far this motherboard could take the sample Intel Core i7 965XE CPU I had available to me. With the i7 CPUs, clock speeds can be influenced by many a factor, ranging from motherboard type to temperature. The C0 stepping, like the sample I used, are not so sensitive to temperatures, so that means between -40°C and -80°C you are unlikely to improve the overclock as the colder the CPU, it either gets worse where overclocking is concerned, or it stays the exact same as it was at -40°C.

With that said, I ended up going through roughly 30L of liquid nitrogen and a full 14kg of dry ice finding the limits of the motherboard and the CPU. The most important aspect of all of this was that it allowed me to learn much more about the CPU, because the Rampage II Extreme [referred to as REX2 from here on in] is an incredibly stable and consistent motherboard. If the motherboard was stable at 175MHz BCLK, using a 2:12 memory divider and an Uncore speed of 4,200 MHz, it would be stable at that speed irrespective of the CPU multiplier used (save for even number multipliers which I never use).

I settled on a 29X multiplier and ended up just above 5GHz, which is a reasonably good overclock for C0 i7 CPUs. At this speed the CPU and system were stable for 3DMark05 and SuperPi 32M, in fact even 5.11Ghz was stable. However, I only discovered that when I had less than 2L of LN2 left, which means that this feat will be left for Round 2.

With very limited amounts of nitrogen I did not have time to overclock the graphics cards and had to run the graphics cards (Gainward GTX295 reviewed this issue and ASUS ENGTX295, reviewed a number of issues back) at very low clock speeds, which ended up limiting the scores. I can safely say that I have the motherboard figured out, and when Round 2 arrives the scores achieved this time will not only be beaten but they will be improved upon substantially.

The GTX295 graphics card is very good at 3DMark01, AM3, and 3DMark Vantage. However, 3DMark01 is futile on the i7, as that benchmark belongs to the Core 2 Series, but 3DMark Vantage and AM3 are very strong on the i7 when paired with an NVIDIA graphics card. I never managed to run AM3. With that said, the only tests that I ran were 3DMark05, SuperPi 32M, 3DMark06, and 3DMark Vantage.

Once again because of limited amounts of LN2 and time, I had to skip 3DMark03 and all multi GPU runs with the two GTX295 cards, and concentrate on using a single GTX295, mostly under Windows XP.

Given that this was Round 1, the numbers were relatively good and it looks even better for the upcoming run, which will feature some surprising hardware choices. The REX2 will definitely return, though, with even stronger results than the ones below. By the time you read this, the second round would have taken place and the results will be published in the next issue.

For the time being, however, the results were as follows, using a single graphics card:

3DMark05: 41,228

3DMark06: 30,574

SuperPi 32M: 7 minutes 21 seconds

The Multi GPU results were nothing significant, as the graphics cards were not overclocked, and as a result they came in much lower than they should have been with 3DMark Vantage, with an ok P33,000 score. Round 2 will feature pretty much the same hardware, but with a change in graphics cards in favour of ATI RADEON HD4890 graphics cards operating at 1GHz at the very least on each GPU, which should see some massive improvements in all the benchmarks save for 3DMarkVantage, which is without a doubt a NVIDIA strong point.

With all said, the best thing about the run is that it was the first round and at worst the scores will be significantly improved next time, so watch this space for some truly incredible scores. The Rampage II Extreme will return... **NAG**

I ended up going through **roughly 30L of liquid nitrogen and a full 14kg of dry ice** finding the limits of the motherboard and the CPU.

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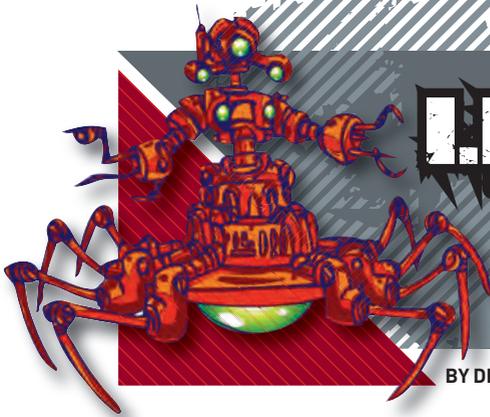
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Sony's Walkman evolves



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LIFE, HARDWARE, AND CHOICES

BY DERRICK CRAMER

Gaming on the go

SO THOSE OF YOU who read my column will remember that, a few months back, I spoke about how overpriced gaming laptops are, and how the cost for mobility just can't be justified with the hardware you get. What was ironic was that, at the time, I was looking for a gaming laptop myself. Nothing fancy, just enough to play the games I LAN, to make my life easier. However, with even this costing in the region of R10,000, I decided to search for an alternative, and it's possible I've found one.

Building an mATX-based PC sounds easy enough. Small motherboard, small case, space saved when going to a LAN, happy LANners. With a target of building the PC for under R10,000 I set out browsing the local sites to see what cost effective components I could use in my build, and keep to the main goal, a cheap LANning PC, and here's what I came up with.

First up, a mATX Motherboard. Since the focus of this PC will be LANning, we don't need to consider anything too high end. Most mid range gaming PCs would be more than adequate for the games I intend to play (which include the likes of *Warcraft III*, *Trackmania Nations Forever*, *Call of Duty 4* and *5*, and the like), so as long as the board has space for the main components, it will do. The P5KPL-AM SE will be my board of choice, with the following features in its favour:

- mATX size
- G31 chipset supports almost every LGA775 CPU out there
- Native support for DDR2-800 RAM
- Reliable brand name
- Under R500

So as you can see, all is well. The limitations on this board are obvious, but we need to take them in context. No Gigabit LAN is disappointing, but with most networks still running 100MB, and coping fine, there is no need for this. Then the SATA ports, not your normal 6/8 port configuration. This is no matter, as the only drive in the PC will be an old 640GB Samsung F1, which should be more than enough for the games. Lastly, 2 RAM slots. With 1GB DDR2 RAM sticks being as cheap as they are, 2GBs of RAM in this PC is almost a given. We could always up this to 4GB, but we'll see as time goes by what our budget can handle.

Right, now that the motherboard is cleared up, on to the second most important component, the case. It is important since this will be the limiting factor in terms of the space we have for the rest of the components, as well as power, as SFF cases often have, at most, 350 watts to give. The case I've taken a fancy to is the Antec Aria/NSK1300, a very old design, but perfect for what we need. The fact is that little separates most of the cube cases out there: as long as it has space for an mATX motherboard and a mid-range graphics card, any will suffice. Price was my main decision in choosing this case, as I could pick up a new one for around R600, but realistically we should budget around R1,200 for the case. I know it's over twice as much

as the motherboard, and while this seems like a lot, in the long haul a decent case will make your life easier, from installation to portability. Ok, so the Aria meets all of our needs, but is limited on power, coming bundled with a 300 Watt PSU. No matter, with low- to mid-range components in this build, we will have no problems.

Right, that's the important stuff dealt with, the rest of the components we can run over fairly quickly. The Intel E5200 coming in at R700 is a price/performance king, giving us more than enough power with our target games in mind. 2GB of generic DDR2 800MHZ RAM will set us back R250, and 4GB double that at R500, so the choice between these options really comes down to budget. If you can afford 4GB, take that, if not, 2GB is still great. A 500GB hard drive should suffice here – that's another R600. Samsung DVD writer, R250. ATI HD 4670 1GB, a card that would outperform most mid-range gaming laptops, and one that requires no external power, a win in all scenarios – add R1,000. Lastly, the screen: the LG 1952 19 inch LCD is a worthy LANning screen, beating out most laptops by a few inches (in a time when every inch counts) running at 1440 x 900 with a 2ms response time – R1,450.

So with 4GB of RAM, our PC, excluding gaming gear, comes to roughly R6,200, give or take. Many of the components, like the case and LCD screen, can be sourced second hand, further bringing this price tag down, and when we compare this PC's laptop competition, it smiles all round.

Coming in at just over a third of the cost, a small form-factor PC is easily the choice for those who want the perfect balance between cost and mobility. It will keep you happy at LANs for many years to come, and has the added bonus of upgradeability, which is always a plus when it comes to the longevity of your machine. **NAG**

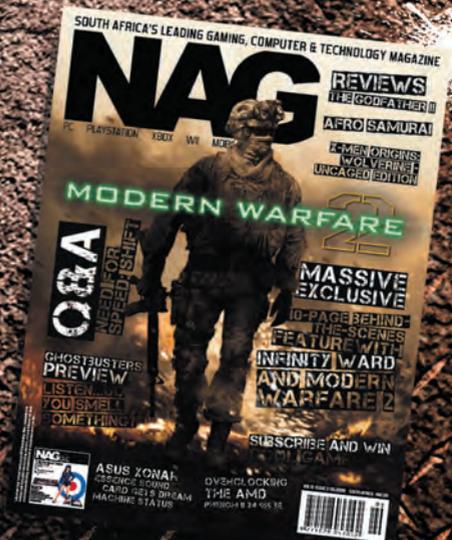
Building an mATX-based PC sounds easy enough. **Small motherboard, small case, space saved when going to a LAN, happy LANners.**

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Streaming Ahead

Ageia PhysX, now part of the NVIDIA stable and quietly integrated into every 200-series GPU this company releases, is a technology we've watched with interest since its inception. It's one of those game changers we believe, one of those new technologies that will have a profound effect on how games of tomorrow play.

IT'S THE SCALE, BASICALLY. Physical interaction on a massive scale in a game world, without needing multiple Xeons in your machine to run it. Thanks to the similarly highly parallel computational capabilities of modern GPUs, this rich physics layer is accelerated by spare capacity on your GPU in essence, although originally it was actually via a standalone card.

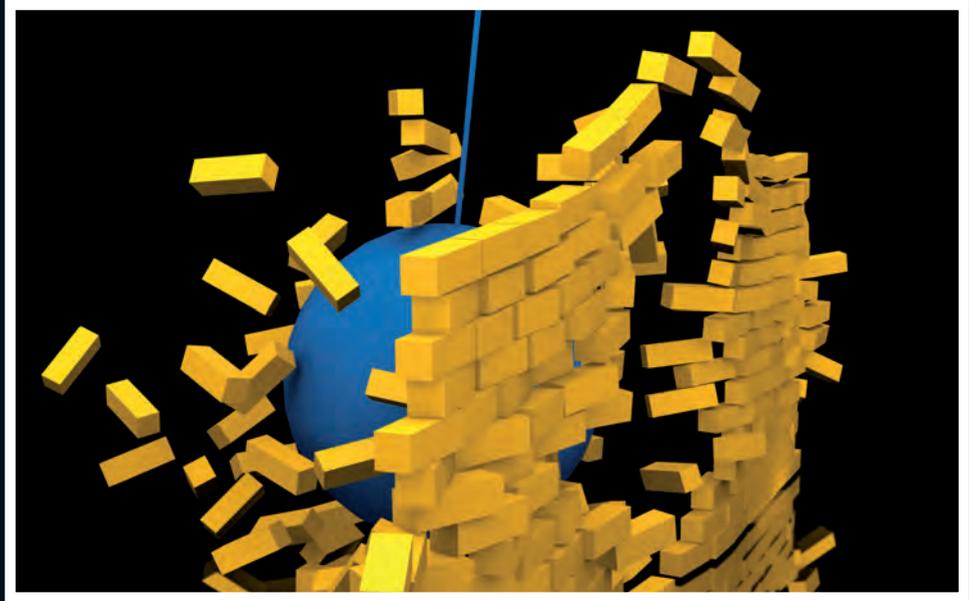
But if I cast my mind back, I remember that when PhysX first started to make itself known to the general IT world, one graphics card and chipset vendor, then still just ATI - as it was just months before the infamous buyout/merger - made a pretty loud noise debunking the dedicated PhysX accelerator, as it espoused the virtues of its general-purpose programming on graphics processing unit (GPGPU) technology for this exact same task.

I still clearly recall the demo at the stand at COMPUTEX. A mad rig, sporting a matching pair of then range-topping Radeon cards, and one midrange GPGPU in the third (very, very rare at the time) PCI Express slot. While the 'CrossFired' duo took rendering duties, the third wheel in the set was dedicated to processing complex physics environments. Perhaps even more importantly, several of these demos credited Havok - the well-known provider of complete physics architectures for many successful games - as their creators suggested that ATI's solution would be based on an industry standard, rather than trying to create an entirely new set of standards.

In short, it looked and sounded promising. And yet, with the acquisition of Ageia and the submersion of ATI itself into the AMD quagmire, the first time we actually got to see such an integrated acceleration subsystem was when it was announced by ATI's biggest competition, and based on an all-new, proprietary physics architecture.

So, what happened then? Since this recollection, we've seen the occasional whitepaper suggesting that the company continues to engineer the solution, but have heard or seen absolutely nothing of a product in the pipeline, no further information on the relationship with Havok in this matter, and no indication whatsoever of a readiness timeframe.

The good news is, it seems, that all of this has been indicative of some quiet but serious 'beaver-ing' away at this very contentious issue at ATI. Says John Estory, ISV Engineer for ATI in



Europe: "The simple answer is, AMD certainly have not walked away from that line of development. We are going to be supporting physics on the GPGPU still; the R&D focus has been why it went quiet. But you can expect it to be making some noise on this front pretty soon."

He starts our discussion by defining the two distinctly different schools of physics. The one is a largely visual effect, the other an actual gameplay modifier. It's the eye candy that's really well suited to the parallel-processing capabilities of the GPU. More linear calculations like those necessary for rigid body effects, for instance, are also massively complex, leading to problems offloading these from the CPU to the GPU. What of systems with low-end GPUs then, for instance? While on the other hand, highly accurate fluid modelling is a 'practice' that the GPU is able to cope with effectively.

So, the kinds of physics NVIDIA is serving up, according to ATI, are more for visual effect than anything else. At least, that's what the GPU accelerates, while the more intricate PhysX components are actually loading up the CPU instead.

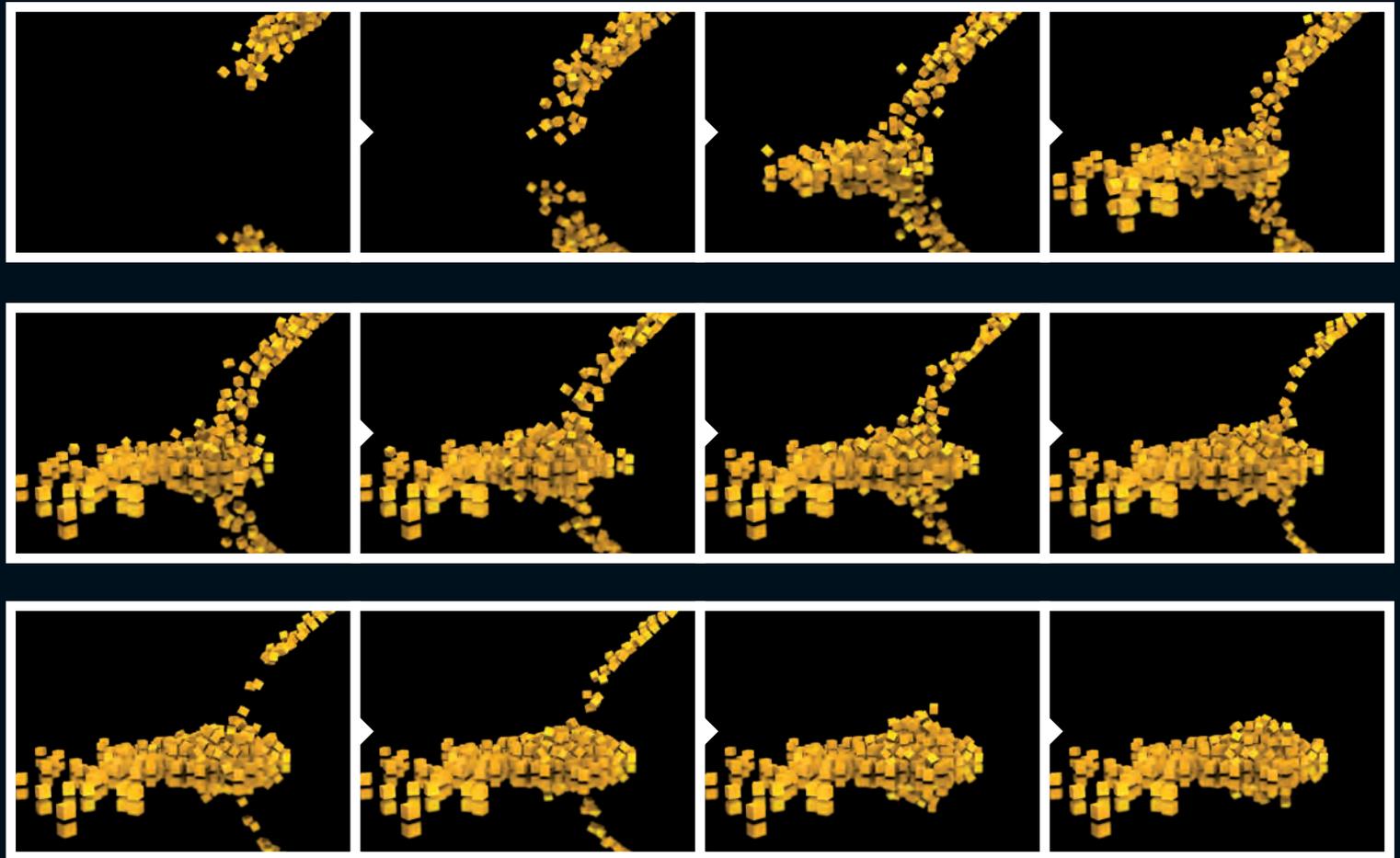
AMD has been collaborating with various industry players to develop an open-standards architecture, called OpenCL, to offer the same capabilities and much more, which a proprietary architecture is likely to have more

difficulty fitting into. In fact, at GDC the company demoed OpenCL running, surprise, surprise, a Havok physics engine off an ATI GPGPU.

"We're much more in favour of open standards than proprietary ones - the games industry doesn't want to get locked into vendors or technologies, it needs open solutions. OpenCL is an entirely open platform co-developed by major industry players, an effort incidentally being led by Apple, which we firmly believe will grow into the industry standard for accessing the functions of the GPGPU. It has a full software backup path, which means it can run on either the GPU or the CPU as the system or developer decides, and perfectly interoperable with graphics so the GPU can calculate both simultaneously if needs be. From our perspective, it's pretty clear that the industry is moving in the direction of OpenCL, proving that open standards are the way to approach this."

So, OpenCL is a C-like language, similar to NVIDIA's CG, and very much the open version of CUDA, more than PhysX itself. DirectX 11 has a similar, Microsoft version of OpenCL called the Compute Shader, which naturally isn't genuinely cross platform like OpenCL, but will interoperate with our open standard.

Using this development environment frees games creators from the tedium of writing and implementing their own OpenCL code. The main functions that



will be available are in fact already available in current Catalyst driver packages, allowing developers to simply issue a call to the GPGPU to apply a particular physics effect. Basically, OpenCL provides a 3D array of threads that you can just kick off and use!

"There's a great deal of interest in DX11 from the ISVs we work closely with, and there is actually more to the OpenCL equation than merely enabling physics processing on the GPGPU. Through this interface we're also able to provide other system applications with the rendering power of the GPU - we've already demonstrated the Cyberlink transporter, called MediaShow Espresso, which provides for a fully GPU-assisted video transport, while more huge names, including Adobe and Microsoft, will take advantage of OpenCL to utilise your potent GPGPU in many more apps."

This leads us to one of the things that really revived our interest in how GPGPU development is going at AMD these days. ATI had been working closely with Havok to accelerate its physics engine using existing GPGPUs, and then this year, Havok announced that it's working on a Havok AI model for the future. What a killer triple-play accelerator - we're sure you'll agree. One that can render gorgeous, modern 3D at killer frame rates, while calculating a complex physics environment and making the AI substantially smarter than we know

today, leaving the CPU to focus on the game engine as a whole and the perfection of the interface between you and the digital world.

Literally, clever devs with this sort of combination supporting their platform could create some vast, never-ending and richly-complex scenes with a killer combo like this. Unfortunately, Estory, who knows about things like this, thinks that AI computations may (in their current form, at least) be one of those workloads that will continue to be best suited to the CPU itself and glean little benefit from the parallel processing of the GPGPU. Still, he also confirmed that he "... couldn't right now confirm the specifics of the relationship between AMD and Havok in future solutions." Specifics or not, that's certainly confirmation of something quite cool, we foretell.

The addition of the whole "balanced platform" tale being spun by AMD in all sectors, the backbone of the vaunted Fusion experience really, which the company bundles under the name Stream, makes OpenCL even more likely to become an industry standard despite existing proprietary solutions, by substantially widening the applicability of GPGPUs beyond just gaming. Consider your next-gen gaming rig/workstation making full use of your high-end GPU while playing the latest shooter, and then again when performing some video-editing

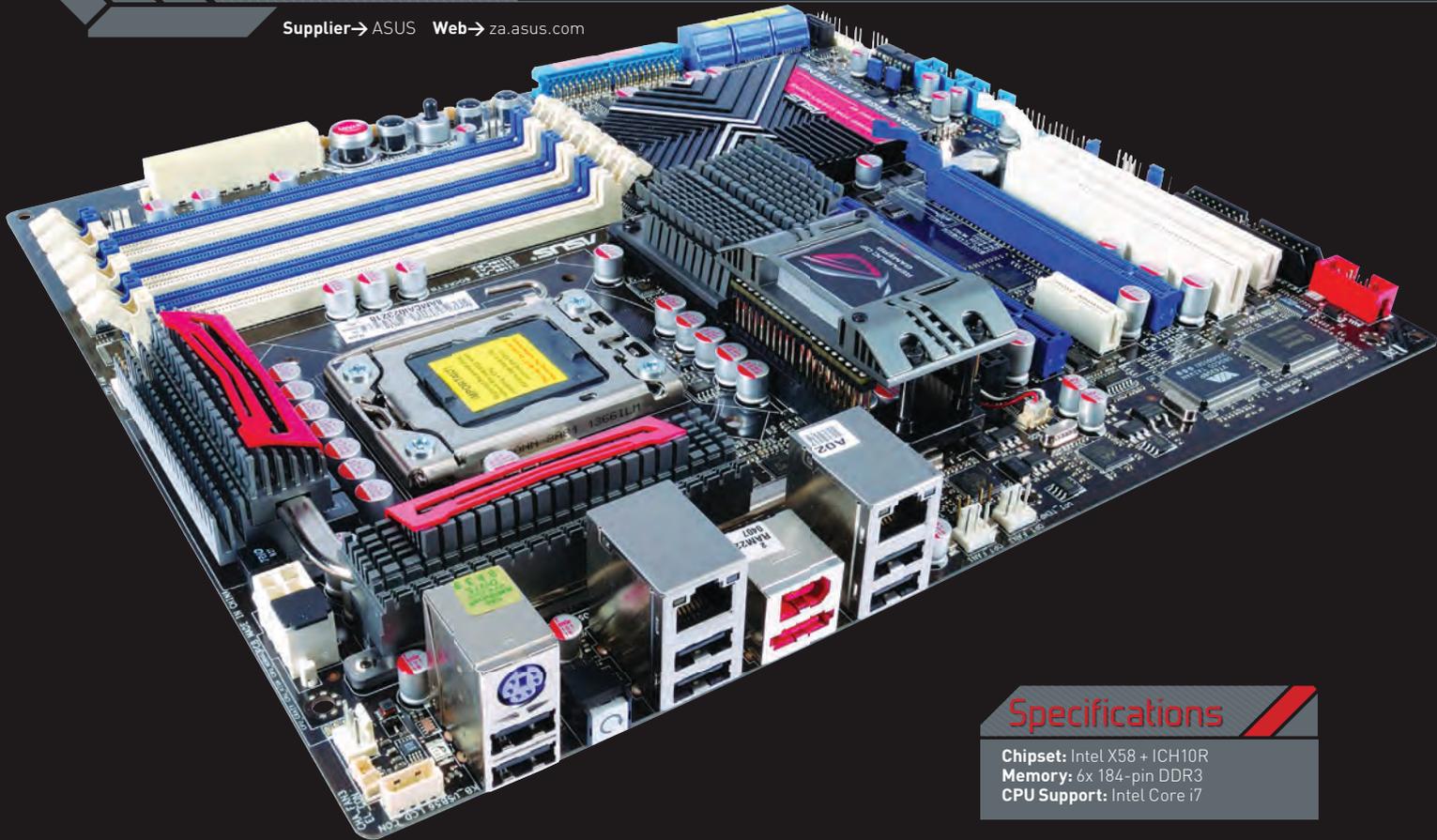
or playback functions, or even in the rendering of your photo-manipulation tool of choice.

OpenCL will effectively make the GPU a pure accelerator once more, but available for any number of tasks to be offloaded from the CPU. Most importantly to us, it will allow games developers the creative freedom to let their imaginations run even wilder, while building ever richer and more environmentally complex systems by calling on the built-in capabilities of the existing 3D renderer, enriching the game not just through the latest visuals, but also on a far more tangible level.

To be honest, I don't mind which standard wins the race: NVIDIA/PhysX or ATI/OpenCL. In fact, I wouldn't mind if they both moved forward in their own right, although competing standards always mean headaches somewhere down the line. The reality of the matter is that either way the ball is rolling now, and physics in games is set to rapidly evolve over the next few years as the giants enter a whole new fray.

I do hope that AMD has a product it can show to the market highlighting these capabilities pretty soon, because the competition really has grabbed a significant head start in terms of mindshare already, with its extensive range of products rapidly becoming available boasting the PhysX logo.

NAG
Russell Bennett



Specifications

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

ASUS Rampage II Extreme

THE **ASUS RAMPAGE II** Extreme was one of the first X58 boards to show up on the Internet. Pre-production boards made their rounds to select extreme users and review sites, which made the board an instant hit with overclockers who were already expecting a great board, especially because of the original Rampage Extreme.

Before we carry on, let it be known now that virtually all X58 based motherboards are identical, at least in basic feature sets. The Support of Quad SLI, Crossfire and the like are expected. The chipset combination of the X58 and the ICH10R Southbridge make sure that pretty much all the motherboards read like clones of each other. Even BCLK overclocking is not enough to differentiate the boards. All of them will make 200MHz and they will all top out at around the 220MHz mark. So while BCLK scaling is important, it's seemingly not as relevant as previously thought.

The real challenge now falls to maximum stable CPU overclocks, power delivery, and performance per clock. In this regard, there are more pronounced differences in X58 boards than there are in the BCLK capabilities. The Rampage II Extreme is a classic example of this. Unlike any other X58 motherboard we have tested, it is delivering equal or better results to the other boards at lower clock speeds. The BCLK capabilities are not the best and the Northbridge is much warmer

than on any other board we have had; however, there can be no denying that our CPU not only overclocked better but also, given all the findings, the Rampage II Extreme, or REX II as it's called, is better than the others by quite a margin.

Following on the design principles of the original Rampage Extreme, ASUS has turned to the Fujitsu 3V-1000 capacitors again, and they seem to be doing just as well on this board as they did on the original. While this motherboard may not reach the incredibly high BCLK, you don't need such a high clock, especially if you have an XE CPU, as clock-for-clock performance is incredible.

Our previous best motherboard, for example, managed to secure a SuperPi 32M score of 8 minutes and 6 seconds with the CPU at 4.7GHz under liquid Nitrogen. Not a particularly efficient run, in fact a less than average one, but nonetheless a fair representation of the motherboard. On the Rampage II Extreme, we managed the same 8 minutes, 6 second time, but the CPU was operating at only 4.5GHz. Anyone in the know will tell you that a 200MHz clock difference on the Core i7 is equal to about 500MHz difference in clock speed between Core 2 CPUs. At the same clock speed, there's no doubt the Rampage II Extreme would deliver a sub 8 minute run. With further tweaking we are confident we can accomplish a top 40 worldwide score, but even with the air

testing it's clear that the Rampage is the faster board.

Not only is the motherboard better than the others in the synthetic number-crunching tests, but also in the 3D tests (particularly in the 3DMark series) the board consistently posted better results. Whether the optimizations are in the BIOS or in the actual motherboard design we may never know; however, this motherboard has no equal among the boards we have tested here. We are well aware of the X58 CLASSIFIED board from EVGA, which has established itself as the peerless X58 motherboard; however, we will reserve judgment between the two until we receive a sample to pit against the Rampage II Extreme. Until then, this motherboard remains a favourite and easily becomes the best X58 motherboard we have ever tested, taking its rightful place in our Dream Machine.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Best X58 motherboard we have ever tested, the best one available locally.

Plus

- + Performance
- + Overclocking

Minus

- Availability
- Maybe a little pricey

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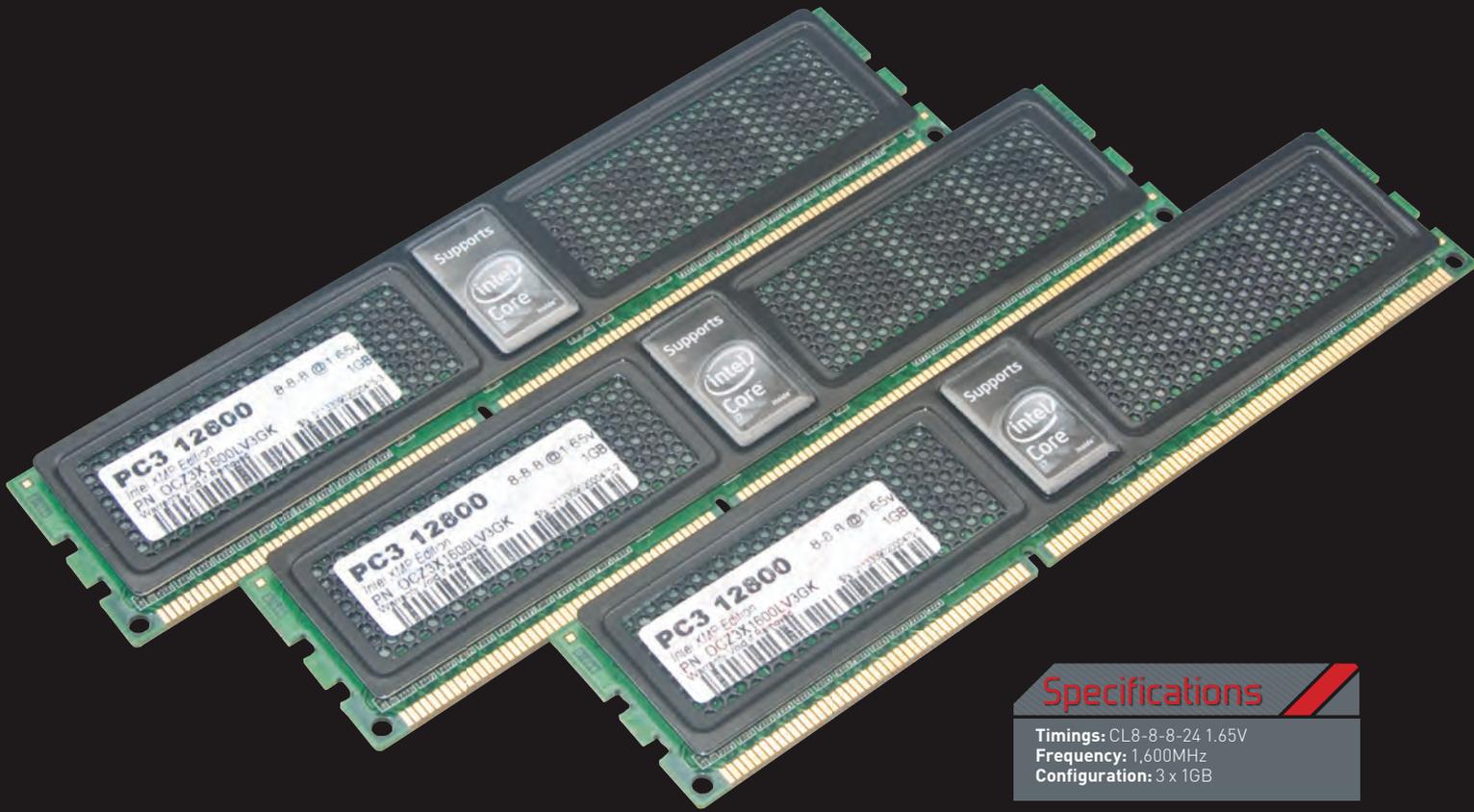
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Specifications

Timings: CL8-8-8-24 1.65V
Frequency: 1,600MHz
Configuration: 3 x 1GB

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3

OCZ HAS MANY MEMORY products and, at any given time, may have several different sets of the same capacity and speed under different series. This is the case with this triple channel kit, as there are two versions. The set featured here, with the black heat spreaders, is not part of the Platinum series like the set which we reviewed several issues ago and also rated at 1600MHz.

The difference between these two sets seems cosmetic at first, especially considering that the Platinum series is supposed to be the better performing family specially made for enthusiasts and high-end gamers.

The Platinum set was rated at 7-7-7-21 at 1.65V and this set is rated at a slower 8-8-8-24, so it is understandable that many would expect the Platinum set to have the better PCB and ICs that make it the higher overclocking set. We also expected this to be the case, but were pleasantly surprised when this set not only beat out the platinum set, but also overclocked better than any other triple channel DDR3 set we have ever tested.

The set features an XMP Profile like many mid to high end sets these days, but the profiles were a little conservative, especially considering the speeds we managed with this set.

At the default voltage we managed to run the set with tighter timings of 7-7-7-21, which was obviously more

desirable than the given CL8 timings, and both improved memory bandwidth and reduced latency by a reasonable margin. While this was impressive, it was nothing extraordinary, so we tried to tighten the timings further to 6-6-6-18. However, the system would not post with such settings, so we had to increase the voltage to 1.72V. At the new bolstered voltage the memory was capable of posting and yielded some improved performance, but far less impactful than when we moved from CL8 to CL7.

This seems to be the case with just about every set of DDR3 available on the market on the i7 platform, as CL6 brings very little gain but will limit the frequency significantly. With that said, we increased the frequency to 1,800MHz (PC14400) but set the timings to 7-7-7-21 again and were surprised to find that the system was very stable, only needing an additional 0.24V to stabilize.

At the given frequency and memory timings, the bandwidth numbers were phenomenal and the numbers were even better when we switched from 2T to 1T. At these settings the set matched the best DDR3 set we have ever reviewed before, which happens to be the Dual Channel Platinum 1800MHz set that was made for the older LGA platform. The difference here, however, was that while that set required more than 2.0V to achieve that feat, on this triple channel kit we only needed 1.74V, which will be

great news for those who are a little wary about putting that much voltage through their RAM and CPU.

Even more impressive was the maximum speed reached with this set at 2,100MHz using the default timings. The RAM put out incredible performance, outdoing anything else by a mile, and certainly earning its place in our dream machine. Considering the price and rating, the ability to overclock by a full 500MHz makes it an incredible set that will be hard to match. Our results may be because we received the one set that was particularly fast, but we have reason to believe that just about any set of this RAM will reach at least 2GHz.

The OCZ Platinum DDR3 Triple Channel PC12800 set is definitely the best set of RAM we have ever tested and quite easily the most overclockable.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Easily the best 3GB triple channel kit available in the country, with incredible overclocking headroom and tweaking ability.

Plus

- + Performance
- + Overclocking headroom
- + Value

Minus

- Only 3GB

Supplier → No local distributor Web → www.gelidsolutions.com



GELID SILENT SPIRIT CPU Cooler

IT SEEMS ALMOST EVERYTHING related to the Intel Core i7 is expensive, from memory sets, motherboards, CPUs themselves, and definitely the CPU coolers. The entire process of upgrading from any other platform can prove costly. However, with the GELID SILENT SPIRIT the process can not only be simplified but made much cheaper.

The Cooler features an unusual design that has the fins lifted off the base of the cooler with three heatpipes feeding into them. This design allows the CPU cooler to cool the caps and other components near the CPU socket, which is fantastic. However, with that design we can't help but feel that the cooler loses some efficiency, because it not only has to be lighter with less cooling mass, it also means that the air is not blowing directly on the base, but at an angle.

Having said all the above, do not be

fooled into thinking that the SILENT SPIRIT is an incapable cooler: that is not the case, as it is much better than the stock Intel cooler and is surely better than some other low to mid range coolers on the market. The SILENT SPIRIT features a PWM controllable fan which allows the board to regulate the rotation speed of the fan according to CPU temperature, and we must say the fan is quiet even at full speed.

Overall, it's a competent cooler that needs no bracket to mount and is far more affordable than the vast majority of i7 compatible coolers out there. It is certainly not for the adventurous who will tinker with overclocking and the like on the i7 platform, but for everybody else it should be more than enough. Gelid has done a decent job with the cooler, and we should see improved versions of this design in the future. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Budget LGA1366 cooler that does the job better than the reference cooler and is also much quieter.

Plus

- + Silent
- + Affordable

Minus

- Definitely not for overclocking i7

WIN LOADS OF AWESOME PRIZES IN THE SACM READER SURVEY!



Complete the pdf survey which has been included on the NAG cover DVD this month and you could win some really cool stuff ...

ONE Axis Home Surveillance Kit - 4 x AXIS M1011-W wireless network cameras / 1 x Axis Camera Station 4-channel recording software / 1 x Wireless Access Point

ONE Sony VAIO VGN-FW12 Notebook - Featuring an Intel Core2 Duo processor, 2GB DDR2 RAM, 250GB Hard Drive, and a 16.4-inch WIDE LCD

FIVE BandwidthBar ADSL - loaded with 5GB of shaped bandwidth per month for 6 months

TWO Samsung P2370 LCD

We have also included a free copy of the June issue of SACM on this month's Cover DVD. Go read it now!



Specifications

GPU: GT200b (240 Stream processors, 55nm process)
Memory: 896MB GDDR3
API: DirectX10 /OpenGL 3.0

ASUS GeForce ENGTX275

WITH THE RELEASE OF the HD4890 from ATI, NVIDIA responded by releasing what is essentially half a GTX295. This may have seemed like a futile attempt at matching the price point of the 4890 at a comparable performance level. However, it seems that the GTX275 actually stacks up well against the 4890, in fact so much so, that it is for the most part the better card.

The ENGTX275 from ASUS, much like any other GTX275, is based on the GT200b core. So it has every single feature that the GTX285 has, but the configuration is a little different, as it falls directly between the GTX260 216 and the GTX285, even though, based on the numbers and performance, it is closer to the GTX285 than it is to the 260.

In terms of performance, it matches the slightly older 65nm GTX280 core (GT200) but with some tweaking goes on to not only match the GTX285, but beat it except at the very high resolutions where frame buffer size and memory bandwidth start becoming increasingly more important.

What makes the GTX275 unique is that it features the full 240 stream processors available on the GT200x core. However, to not make it as powerful as the 285, NVIDIA has cut down the number of render outputs from 32 to 28 and has limited the memory bit-width and controller to a 448-bit controller that is divided into 7x64-bit channels.

This makes for a very interesting

part that doesn't cannibalize the other products from NVIDIA, but rather manages to bring something new that caters to those who would find the GTX285 a little too expensive yet the GTX260 216 a little on the slow side. Despite having lost a full 64-bit channel and featuring memory clocked lower than on the GTX285, the 275 still manages to put out some very impressive numbers that sometimes are so close to the GTX285 it makes one wonder if the 285 is worth it at all. These situations are largely limited to shader/maths intensive games that don't rely so much on render outputs, memory bandwidth or size.

For those who are gaming at very high resolutions, such as 1920x1200 with AA applied, a single GTX275 will cope well enough but the GTX285 here shows its advantage. While 896MB is a respectable amount of memory, when one uses such resolutions and has copious amounts of AA applied, the frame-rate drop off on the GTX275 is steep as the card runs out of frame buffer memory.

As a result of the odd memory bit-width configuration, the only way to fix this situation would be to employ a significantly larger amount of memory, like 1,792MB as on some GTX275 cards, but given the price point at which this card is supposed to come in, such an exercise would miss the price point unnecessarily and make it dangerously close to the GTX285 in terms of cost.

The GTX275 is a capable performer out the box; however, it is particularly impressive when overclocked, as it is more than capable of matching the GTX285 with its clock speeds increased into the 700MHz region. The maximum clock speed we managed with the ENGTX275 was 720MHz, but particularly impressive was the memory, which reached 1.25GHz. With some voltage modification, the GTX275 was capable of 750MHz, which is not really necessary for most users, but for the overclockers will help eliminate the advantage GTX285 users have in the synthetic tests.

ASUS has put together an average package; however, it has done well with what really counts, and that's the card itself. The ENGTX275 has shown itself to be a fantastic performer which can be thought of as a GTX285 at a very reasonable price.

NAG

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Great performer at an incredible price, and, with some overclocking, can match the more expensive GTX285.

Plus

- + Performance
- + Overclocking headroom
- + Value

Minus

- Thin package

Genius Wireless MetalStrike

AS WE SKIM THE forests beneath us, I glance over and back at my wingman. The 'Cane looks like a proud, warrior-hearted bird of prey silhouetted against the setting sun. We'll be hitting the target as darkness is setting in. And while my neck is still craned, I feel it...

The yoke leaps in my grasp, judders and stutters as if alive, and it takes all of a heartbeat to realise that we'd been scarpered. More shells puncture my plane's wooden frame and send their shockwaves through the stick at me. Instinctively, I open the throttle wide and break, but we're so low the only option is a direction and up. Again the joystick jolts the forces the superstructure is suddenly dealing with into my hand, and I know that as the violent move sheds airspeed I'll be filling my attacker's gunsights, but there's no other choice. Sure enough a fresh spray of rounds peppers my machine and, with a loud bang, the engine erupts into thick black smoke and the fight is over bar the safe ejection (with any luck).

So, does a 2.4 GHz wireless force-feedback joystick, like this very striking Genius Wireless MetalStrike, make much of a difference to your gaming experience? Of course it does!

It's got all the perfect axes, a beefy throttle controller, more than enough

Specifications

Number of axes: 4
Number of buttons: 13 (programmable) incl. Trigger
POV hat: Yes, 8-way
PC interface: USB, 2.4 GHz wireless dongle
Batteries: 3XAAA (supplied)
Analogue throttle: Yes
Force Feedback: Yes
Advance Functions: Turbo

Wide sturdy base houses the three AAA batteries required to power the MetalStrike



buttons, and is perfectly chunky to hold. And, completely shackle-free, light enough hold in one hand if needs be.

OK that very "engineering", serious-sounding name MetalStrike creates some immediate impressions, which the actual construction doesn't exactly live up to. The only visible element that is not plastic is the spring at the base. And sometimes the operation of the buttons does feel a little flaky.

Also, in the real gaming world, that vibration-type feedback on offer can get tiresome after a while, not adding any information just an artificial, but nevertheless welcome, tactile input. And a great hand massage.

NAG
Russell Bennett



Bottom Line

The MetalStrike is a good joystick, but could do with feeling a bit more like it sounds

Plus

- + Looks very slick
- + Wireless
- + Intuitive flight controller

Minus

- No manual trim adjustment
- No "on/off" switch
- Lags after power-save mode

SteelSeries Siberia Full-Size Headset

THE STEELSERIES SIBERIA HEADSET rests comfortably at the high end of the gaming headset spectrum. These headphones boast virtual 7.1 surround sound, and are aesthetically pleasing to boot (although this comes down to personal preference). They look great until you put all the headset's pieces together, that is. The Siberia's cable design is an absolute mess. Designed to feature an almost modular design, which is great in theory but terrible in practice, this headset can either be plugged directly into your soundcard's stereo and microphone jacks, or you can go the cluttered route of attaching the in-line volume controller, the detachable microphone and the USB sound card. When all of these components are attached is where the problem comes into play, resulting in a mess of cables and components that is unsightly and impractical. The detachable microphone is a strange beast as well, because it's one of those tiny microphones that clip to the neck of your shirt, which isn't particularly comfortable. The microphone works fine, though, and if you don't mind putting up with its clip-on nature, you shouldn't have any

Specifications

Virtual 7.1 surround sound
 Detachable microphone
 USB sound card
 In-line volume control



problems. Aside from these minor niggles, the Siberia is a fantastic headset. It's exceptionally comfortable, which is great if you plan on using them for extended periods at LAN parties. The sound quality is astounding, with almost no distortion (even at full volume) and, although the headset doesn't offer a true surround sound experience, it still offers good directional audio. The SteelSeries Siberia is a great headset, whether you're using it for movies, music (the Siberia has also been optimised to work with mobile media players) or games, but unfortunately the strange choices made in the design of the unit hurt its appeal.

NAG

Dane Remendes



Bottom Line

The phenomenal audio that these headphones output is marred by messy cabling and strange design decisions

Plus

- + Phenomenal sound quality
- + Very comfortable

Minus

- Messy cables
- Detachable microphone
- Expensive



Specifications

GPU: GT200b [240 Stream processors, 55nm process]
Memory: 2GB GDDR3
API: DirectX10 / OpenGL 3.0

Palit GeForce GTX285 2GB

NVIDIA'S FASTEST PERFORMING SINGLE GPU solution has been the best performing part for some time now, and despite it being relatively old in graphics card terms, it is still the fastest single GPU you can buy right now. Granted, the competing Radeon HD4890 1GHz core cards are close and sometimes better in performance, but overall the GTX285 is still the faster card.

Of late, custom designed PCBs along with coolers have come into favour with many manufacturers. We are not sure whether this is a change in direction for NVIDIA, who for the longest time have seemingly discouraged manufacturers from deviating from the reference designs. Be it this is the case or not, we may never know. However, it is great to see so many coming out with custom coolers, circuit boards, power circuitry, and just about anything you can customize on the graphics card.

Palit has done very well with this card, as it features very little of the reference design of the GTX285 other than the GT200b GPU itself and the NVIO. The rest is customized, and that not only makes for an interesting card, but a great performing one.

The PCB is red, and is loosely based on the reference board; however, it features slightly improved power circuitry, a total of 2GB of memory, and a high-performance custom cooler that features

superior heat pipe cooling with two high air-flow, low noise fans. Palit has customized just about anything you can on the graphics card, and in the process has managed to make one of the most unique GTX285 cards on the market.

The 2GB of memory on the card is excessive, as it offers no benefit at all whether you use copious amounts of anti-aliasing or very high resolutions. Where it does have an effect, it gives a boost of anything from 1 to 3 frames per second, which isn't enough to make a game playable at a setting it previously was not.

Where thermals are concerned the Palit card was really impressive, as idle temperatures were in the mid 40s and the fans were barely audible. The fans can be turned up using just about any software available much like on the reference boards, and at full tilt they were quite loud, but not much more than the reference fan. Under load the temperatures rose to the early 60s, which is excellent considering that the reference card can have temperatures reaching up into the mid 70s under the same conditions. With such superior cooling the overclocking was a little better than expected, and the core managed a healthy 760MHz on the core which gave an additional performance boost in synthetic tests.

The one aspect of the card that did not gain favour was that it lacked the

Volterra i2C bus adjustable voltage regulator which allows one to adjust the voltage using software. As a result, we could not overclock the core any further. This is not unique to the Palit card, but holds true on just about every other GTX285 available on the market today. Granted, most people are unlikely to care about this situation, but given that Palit has gone to such lengths to make its offering truly unique, this would have made it the best GTX285 on the market bar none.

If a GTX285 is what you are after, then the Palit card is where you should start, as there are unlikely to be any better GTX285 cards available locally or anywhere else, for that matter. Certainly the best GTX285 we have ever had the pleasure of reviewing. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Still the fastest single GPU card money can buy; additional memory doesn't help much but doesn't hurt either.

Plus

- + Custom cooler
- + Clocks well
- + 2GB of memory

Minus

- None

Supplier → Leaf Web → www.leaf.co.za

HTC Touch 3G

IT WASN'T THAT LONG ago when HTC brought the stylish Touch into the market. Initially, user reviews were positive, but after a short while many slated the fact that the Smartphone didn't have 3G capabilities. HTC finally listened and we now have the Touch 3G and, as its name suggests, the device finally has 3G and HSDPA capabilities. The Touch 3G is small, lightweight, and compact in its design and, although this version is more of a features upgrade and less of a facelift, you'd still be happy owning a Touch 3G, especially with the new additions: GPS, FM radio, and TouchFlo 2D. At the heart of the Touch 3G is an upgraded Qualcomm processor, up from 400mhz to 528mhz, which makes it lightning quick and extremely responsive. The backbone of the Touch 3G is Windows Mobile 6.1, and being a Windows Mobile user for the past 5 years I don't have to preach how frustrating things can get with this OS on smartphones. So keep in mind that from time to time the device will hang and freeze at the most inconvenient times. [Fear not, though, as Microsoft will be launching the much anticipated WM 6.5 which *should* solve many of the bugs.]

The TouchFlo experience is quite a pleasure to use compared to previous HTC models, making browsing Web

pages, and navigating documents, texts and e-mails more of a user friendly experience. If you're into surfing the Web on a mobile, then you'll be happy that the standard Internet Explorer has been replaced with Opera Light. Installed applications include a light version of You Tube, Mobile Office and a PDF reader.

For every upside there has to be a downside, so here goes. The phone still lacks the functionality I am looking for in a mobile business phone, and this is partly down to the 2.3" display which is too small and could do with crisper screen resolution. I'd prefer a Micro SD card slot that you can get to without having to remove the finicky battery cover. You'll have to purchase additional navigating software to make use of the GPS, or you could install Google Maps, but don't expect the same experience as you'll get with Leaf Locate or Garmap. Battery life wasn't the best for my heavy day to day use, but if you're not a heavy Internet user or don't have your mobile set up to MS Exchange 7am to 7pm, then you should be able to get away with at least 2 days' worth of stand-by time. Although TouchFlo has been improved, it still has many gremlins to overcome if it really wants to compete with the iPhone.

NAG
Dave Gore



Specifications

Dimensions: 102 mm x 53.6 mm x 14.5 mm
Connectivity: HSDPA, GPRS, GSM, EDGE | Wi-Fi
Camera: 3.2 megapixel
Device control: HTC TouchFlo; 4 way navigator control with Enter button
GPS: Yes, but no software installed



Bottom Line

The Touch 3G isn't ground breaking by any means, but even though there are a few flaws, it's still very functional for general day to day use.

Plus

- + Slim and lightweight
- + 3G/HSDPA
- + GPS

Minus

- No flash for camera
- No built in GPS software
- Small display

Supplier → Ster-Kinekor Web → eu.playstation.com/ps3

PlayStation 3 Wireless Headset

THESE DAYS, CONSOLE GAMERS have developed the need for effective voice communication. Not a desire, mind you, but a need – the ability to play online has necessitated effective ways to communicate with other players.

The PlayStation 3's ability to make use of Bluetooth-enabled devices has taken care of that in the past, but occasionally there were a few issues. Not major ones, mind you, but a headset designed for cellular telephony isn't necessarily the best option when it comes to gaming. Now, though, PlayStation has finally released its Wireless Headset, a Bluetooth-enabled communication device made specifically with gamers in mind.

While there isn't all that much to set it apart from other Bluetooth headsets, the package contains a charging dock, which is massively useful for two major reasons. The first is that it charges via USB cable, which means that it can be plugged into the PlayStation 3 for charging, rather than needing yet another plug point in the ever growing rat's nest of wires behind the TV. Even better is that the headset, when plugged into the dock, can be used as a far field microphone. It also has a USB jack in the back of the device.

A rear USB connector allows the device to be wired

With around eight hours of talk time, the device delivers good performance. The clarity of both the microphone and the speaker is good, although the ear piece is rather large. It is effective both for communication and voice commands (something which we'll hopefully see a lot more of in future.) The volume control is a little small, sadly, but that's really the biggest problem with what is essentially a very sweet new toy to add to the PlayStation 3 collection. If you are playing online, you will most certainly want to get one of these!

NAG

Walt Pretorius



The ear piece is bulky, but comfortable



The recharge cradle holds the device snugly



Bottom Line

A must for PlayStation 3 users who wants effective communication and voice control

Plus

- + Long talk time
- + Handy recharge cradle
- + Comfortable to wear

Minus

- Large ear piece
- Small volume control



Gainward's rubberised cooler makes it easy to grab when installing or removing, and seems to dampen some fan vibration as well

Specifications

Processing cores: 480
Manufacturing process: 55nm
Core clock: 576 MHz
Shader clock: 1,242 MHz
Memory: GDDR3, 2,000MHz
Frame buffer size: 1,792MB
Memory interface: 896 bits
Power consumption: 289W

Gainward GTX295

THERE'S BEEN A LOT of confusion, actually, around the GTX295 and exactly what it is that it offers. Before its release, many expected it to be a pair of the fastest cores NVIDIA could lay onto a single die to easily grab the single-card performance crown from ATI's HD4870X2, which is exactly what this product was.

Turned out, though, that the 295 was going to be something weird. It appeared to coin a whole new term, a dual-hybrid, as it launched with clock speeds and a memory interface from the more midrange 260 series, but with the ROPs of a 285. Subsequently, of course, NVIDIA has released a single-card version with this same arrangement, and called it the GTX275, so that's what the 295 is. Two 275s in single-card SLI.

This Gainward model is a reference-based design, so it's fairly straightforward. It does have 480 ROPs, but it runs a core clock of 576 MHz and its 1792MB (2 X 896MB) of GDDR3 runs at 1 998 MHz and is accessed through an 896-bit channel (2 X 448) rather than the full 512-bit interface of the 285 range topper.

Somewhat disappointing, really, considering the price of the thing. Look, if you're checking dollar prices, the 295 still makes sense. USD500 versus USD400 for a 285. But here it's somewhat different, the high-end cards really seeing a lot of price padding. This Gainward, for instance, retails for over R8,000, and while you do still see GTX285s for R6,000 you can get them for under R5,000 if you don't need a big brand label.

Meanwhile, GTX260s go for R3,000, and 275s for R4,000, just to further confuse

things. So eight grand seems to be shaky ground, although to be fair dual 4870s still fetch seven when singles go for less than three brand new, so I shouldn't really be holding pricing strategy against the card – that's just the natural problem a small market without much buying power faces.

So how does it actually go? Very well, thank you, if you've got the requisite 680W PSU installed. 3DMark Vantage clocked up 19 372 in "Performance" defaults, 8270 in "Extreme" mode. Of course, that's with the GPU's PhysX processing ability disabled in the driver to enable comparisons with non-PhysX cards, i.e. everything not from NVIDIA. You may have seen higher scores from some online review sites, but the test rig used is based on a QX9770 CPU, not a Core i7, with just 4GB of DDR3 running at 1333 MHz.

At higher resolutions, however, and we tested up to a maximum of 2048 X 1536, the GTX295 does suffer somewhat from those limited data paths, at least compared to the comparatively more unfettered 4870 and newer 4890 X2s, meaning that despite this being the best single-card solution NVIDIA currently offers and carrying the price tag of the best in the business, the GTX295 isn't exactly all that. I'd rather find a pair of those R4,500 285s or even 280s, pay the R1,000 price premium, and ensure that the PSU and SLI-ready motherboard is already in place, and be a happy HD camper.

Not that I ever camp of course – just a figure of speech.

That said, it's quite a nice, unobtrusive solution, the GTX295. It's a beefy card, sure, and although the rubberised coating on the cooler gives it a bit of a peculiar

feel at first, it does seem to damp some of the fan's vibration noise pretty effectively – you barely ever notice you've got a dual-GPU monster installed.

What's more, although the AMD/ATI cards are that bit more capable at high resolutions, there's still that built-in PhysX advantage of the 200-series, and with a 295 there will be processing capacity left "spare" for the physics calculations most of the time. Until AMD releases its own physics capabilities, this feature will continue to see reviewers like us recommending the 200-series parts on the basis of this single unrivalled add-on.

If one of your options is to import one of these at the USD100 over a GTX285 price point, do it. If you prefer not to live without locally-honourable warranties, support, and the like, I don't know. R8,000 is a PS3 with a couple of new games. Which is to say, a hefty chunk of change. And if you've money to burn but insist on the ultimate, the GTX295 isn't really it.

NAG
Russell Bennett

Bottom Line

Disappointing that it isn't the fastest single-board graphics solution that a pair of GTX285s would be

Plus	Minus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Quiet + Will play most games at maximum settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very expensive - Limited bus sees it tailing 4870X2 as resolution increases

Specifications

CPU: Intel® Core™ i7 920 2.66GHz
8MB L3 Cache
Motherboard: Biostar X58
Graphics: 2 x NVIDIA GTS 250 1 GB
DDR3
RAM: OCZ 3GB Triple Channel
DDR3 1333Mhz Platinum Z3 XTC
Heatspreader
Case: Raidmax AZTEC
PSU: Gigabyte Superb 720W
Storage: Seagate 500GB SATA 2 32MB
CACHE
Optical drive: Samsung 22x Dual
Layer DVD +/- Lightscribe Rewriter
Sound Card: Integrated 10 CH HD
Ethernet: Gigabit LAN
Warranty: 24 Months Return to base



Intel Core i7 GTS 250 SLI Custom Built Gaming PC

TODAY WE DO THINGS a bit differently: rather than reviewing a specific item, the folks over at Evetech sent us a custom built gaming system for review. Not one to turn down a chance to play with an expensive toy, I wasted little time in familiarizing myself.

The system we have contains Intel's Core i7 920 processor running at a default 2.67GHZ, on a Biostar T-Power X58 motherboard, with 3 x 1GB DDR3 1333 CL 7-7-7-24 1T OCZ RAM modules, 2 x GTS250 1GB graphics cards in SLI (or you could opt for the ATI Crossfire HD 4850 1GB Graphic Cards in Xfire Mode at the same price), a Gigabyte Superb 720Watt PSU, 500GB Seagate SATA hard drive, and a DVD Writer with Lightscribe Technology, all housed in a Raidmax Aztec. You notice a few things from the spec list, of them the most prominent being the power this system presents you with. An expensive system, yes, but the performance makes it worthwhile. Enough of this, though; before we start talking numbers, let's look at the advantages of a pre-built system.

My main gripe with pre-built systems of any kind comes down to my passion for hardware, as well as the perfectionist in me. Putting my faith, and indeed my system, in the hands of a technician I don't know is a real irritation for me. I like my cables neat, each USB port plugged in, and fans positioned for optimal airflow. In short, I like my system built properly. The guys at Evetech didn't disappoint. I inspected every inch of the case, inside

and out, and found nothing to complain about. Cables were well managed, screws were fitted as they should be, the motherboard was firmly secured, and all connectors connected. When done this way, pre-built systems can become a joy to use, plug and play, cutting out all the hassle of assembly so that you can get to what is really important, the gaming.

As far as performance goes, the system did not disappoint. *Crysis Warhead* ran perfectly fine at 1680 x 1050 with all settings turned to their max, and 2x AA enabled, allowing smooth game play without slowdown even in the most intense firefights. The same can be said for *Far Cry 2*, although in this we were able to up the AA level to 4x while still remaining over the acceptable frame-rate threshold. These results were mirrored in synthetic benchmarks. Using 3D Mark 06, and 3D Mark Vantage, we were able to make full use of the i7 920s power, and coupled with the GTS250s in SLI, we managed some astounding numbers. 18654 3Dmarks in 06 is jaw dropping, and 13701 in Vantage, impressive to say the least.

With only the stock cooler at hand, overclocking the system proved tough, but we still managed some respectable numbers. The 920 managed to maintain 3.8GHZ stable, while remaining under 60C on the core, more than adequate for 24/7 usage, and a feat in itself, adding 1.13GHZ to the stock speed without breaking a sweat. Even more impressive than this is the RAM. 1333MHZ modules at 7-7-

7-24 are fairly low end as far as i7 goes, but these sticks from OCZ managed to perform extraordinarily well considering their price. They attained speeds of 1600MHZ 7-7-7-18, at their rated voltage of only 1.65v, all while remaining cool to the touch. This speed boost led to over 2GB/s extra in Everest's bandwidth test, making the system faster than it already was, unbelievable as that may sound.

So after a week of testing, gaming, and admiring, this custom gaming PC from Evetech gets a worthy seal of approval. With ease of use, reliability, and power in its favour, the high price tag (R15,999) of this system is well allocated. The only thing we would change, the choice of case, comes down to personal preference. Since all systems can be customized and upgraded prior to placing your order on their Website, you could just as well select another case more suited to your own personal taste.

NAG
Derrick Cramer



Bottom Line

A solidly built high-end gaming PC that is well worth the price tag, but could do with a nicer case.

Plus

- + Powerful
- + Can be customized prior to order

Minus

- Price does not include the cost of the OS or the monitor

Air Vol. 1 Letters from Lost Countries

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Vertigo | **Writer:** G. Willow Wilson
Artist: M.K. Perker | **Price:** R99.95

MYSTERIOUS, INTELLIGENT, THRILLING, ORIGINAL, and thoroughly entertaining, *Air* is one of the most highly acclaimed new graphic novels to hit the shelves. Wilson tells a masterfully woven tale of a flight attendant named Blythe, who gets caught up in a baffling conflict between a very aggressive antiterror-ism organisation, and a peculiar stranger who is never what he seems. As Blythe falls deeper into this web of inexplicable events, she finds herself falling deeply in love with the secretive stranger as well. And when he disappears, she sets out on a quest to solve the puzzle of where on Earth he could be - if it's even on Earth. The plot unfolds like a cobra coming out of a basket, coil by slick coil, and you'll never see any of the strikes coming. In the words of the much-admired comic writer Brian Azzarello, "I am knee deep in Air... There's so much to love in this story."



Clive Burmeister



Fusion #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Top Cow / Marvel
Writer: Abnett / Lanning | **Artist:** Tyler Kirkham | **Price:** R29.95

IN THIS EPIC CROSSOVER series between the Top Cow and Marvel comic universes, four different teams will collide in a story with intriguing plot twists and amazing artwork. When The Avengers - the Earth's mightiest, and most famous, superhero team - come across an unregistered super being while returning from a mission, they decide to check it out - even though that job should fall to Norman Osborn's Thunderbolts (a team of supposedly rehabilitated super villains who now track down unregistered super beings). What they encounter is a being of extreme might and ferocity, and the ensuing fight leaves them reeling in the wake. The Thunderbolts, who observed the encounter from nearby, move in to give chase and subdue the creature. In what must be the crossover event of the year, *Fusion* gathers the Marvel Universe's Avengers and Thunderbolts, and the Top Cow Universe's Cyberforce and Hunter-Killers in one superbly told story.



Clive Burmeister

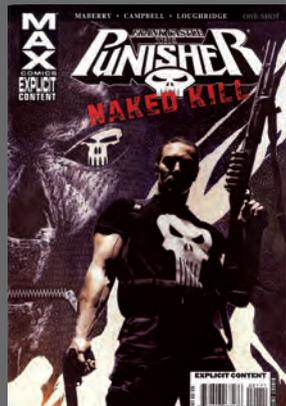


The Punisher: Naked Kill

Format: One-shot Comic | **Publisher:** Marvel MAX | **Writer:** Jonathan Maberry
Artists: Laurence Campbell | Lee Loughridge | **Price:** R40

THE PUNISHER: THE NAKED Kill is the latest one-shot comic from horror-novel veteran, Jonathan Maberry. Running under the Marvel MAX imprint, *The Naked Kill* pushes the boundaries of violence and explicit content further than most would be comfortable with, but still manages to leave plenty to the imagination. It's a gritty and excessively dark book that sees Frank Castle take his fight against crime to a snuff-film production company. If you're on the hunt for something hardcore and still readily buy into the whole "one man army" idea, look no further.

Maberry's writing is a crazy mix of snappy wit with cold, hard verbal abuse that sets an excellent pace for the story, but it's Laurence Campbell's intense art style that really steals the show. Coming from a background in 2000 AD and Image comics, Campbell's art is coarse and chunky and perfectly suited to *The Punisher*. His art is a perfect match for Loughridge's colouring, and blends an old-school feel with vibrant and scratchy backgrounds - all of which come together to deliver a surprisingly meaningful story in so few pages.



Geoff Burrows



Killapalooza #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** Adam Beechen
Artist: Adam Beechen | **Price:** R30.50

SO, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN a multi platinum-selling rock band can no longer stand each other's company and never want to see each other again? Or rather, what happens when said rock band are super-powered contract killers on the side, but their debt and enemies exceed their wealth and friends? The Clap is one such band; and now, even though they are sick to death of each other, they find them-selves having to do one last job to get them in the clear. But it's never that simple, is it? *Killapalooza* is a rough and gritty peek into the lives of these rock-stars-cum-assassins-for-hire. Adam Beechen does a terrific job of combining all the elements of jaded rock icons with exaggerated opinions of themselves, with the professional if chaotic approach to their 'other job'. Humorous, but still tuned in to all that is rock, *Killapalooza* is a taste of something new, followed by a kick in the head by something off the wall.



Clive Burmeister



StarCraft #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** Simon Furman
Artist: Federico Dallocchio | **Price:** R29.50

WILDSTORM CONTINUES ITS TREND of publishing comics based on well-known electronic games, this time getting 'on board' the *StarCraft* phenomenon. *StarCraft* is immersed in all of the popular game's crea-tures, settings, and its well-loved universe. The story follows a group of War Pigs - convicts drafted into military service. We follow this ragtag group of mercenaries on an almost suicidal mission in to a Zerg war zone, and then see their daring escape as they discover they'd been set up. From there, they find themselves all alone in a big, unfriendly universe, where they struggle to survive. The comic gives long-time *StarCraft* fans a nostalgic view of the universe they'd come to love in the long LAN sessions of their youth, while throwing some new plot lines into the universe.



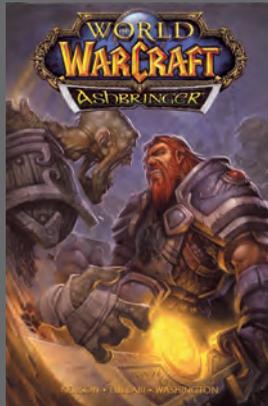
Clive Burmeister



World of Warcraft: Ashbringer

Format: Graphic Novel (HC) | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** Mickey Neilson
Artists: Ludo Lullabi | Tony Washington | **Price:** R240

ASHBRINGER FOLLOWS THE PIVOTAL events that unfolded at the start of the Third War in the *Warcraft* universe. The book covers much of the *Warcraft* lore, from Arthas's betrayal to the formation of the Alliance. Most importantly, however, is the forging of the legendary Ashbringer sword, and how Alexandros Mograine went from devoted commander of the Knights of the Silver Hand to the Death Knight most *WoW* players should be familiar with by now. It also explores the foundation of The Undercity and Grand Crusader Dathrohan's fall from mighty Paladin to the husk that the demon lord Balnazzar now possesses.



The story was written by industry newcomer Mickey Neilson, who, interestingly enough, has been a part of the Blizzard team for some time, doing everything from writing on Blackthorne to 3D art on Diablo to voice-over talent in *Warcraft III* and *StarCraft*. Ludo Lullabi returns from the first *WoW* comic books as lead artist. His art now shows a more unique style and is generally more mature. Whether you're an avid *World of Warcraft* player, familiar with the *Warcraft III* plot, or just want an entertaining fantasy comic to read, this is the book for you.

Geoff Burrows



Obi-Wan Kenobi Bobble Head *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*

RRP: R145

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

More bobble heads! These things are everywhere... This time, Obi-Wan Kenobi's been given the wobbly-headed treatment. There's a whole range of bobble heads based on the characters of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (the movie and the TV series) available for you to 'head out' and purchase.



Naomi Bust *Art of Shunya Yamashita*

RRP: R875

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

This very detailed sculpture was designed by Shunya Yamashita, a renowned Japanese illustrator and game designer. It is part of a series of sculpts that he designed.



King Mickey *Kingdom Hearts Play Arts Volume 3*

RRP: R310

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

It's Mickey Mouse! Except, he's wearing S&M gear and he's carrying a large golden key. We're not sure what the key unlocks, but we're guessing Mini Mouse's chastity belt is a major obstacle for Mickey... This figure is based on King Mickey from the *Kingdom Hearts* series of videogames.



Bleach and Naruto Trading Figures *Bleach|Naruto*

RRP: R60 | R55 each

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

These 2.5-inch figures are based on the *Naruto* and *Bleach* anime and manga series. There are a number of these that can be collected, each representing one of the characters from their respective titles.



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GGG

BY TARRYN VAN DER BYL

Denied

THAT'S RIGHT. I ENDED your poster. I also ended my three-year NAG apprentice indoctrination course, and finally got my very own column in the magazine. Of course, that Miklós Szecsei guy just sort of walked off the street and into his own column, but that's why I'm arranging to have him poisoned as soon as I'm done with lunch. Besides, he's so obviously a spy with his foreign name and his opinions and his chicken.

Anyway, I got the back page – a position rheumy wizards in rotting towers would describe as “most puissant”, as crows wheel in a darkening sky overhead. Your lasting impressions? Those are mine. Since Megan went off hunting unicorns in the Siberian tundra (or whatever it is she does when she's not playing *Team Fortress 2*), it's fallen to me to do the girl thing around here, so expect more ponies and pink and Marcus Fenix fanfic.

And speaking of stuff getting ended, bye bye *Duke Nukem Forever*, forever. People seem surprised, somehow. These are probably the same sort of people who prowl outside the bathroom door for five days, thinking, “Granny's been on the toilet ever so long now.” It's not even the first time *Duke Nukem Forever* has been cancelled, either – the game was originally side-scrolling when 3D Realms was still Apogee Software, and cancelled back in 1996 already. This, mind you, by a company whose list of shipped titles only barely exceeds its list of cancelled projects.

What an irony that the Duke, bloated with hubris and ego, should be a victim of the same superficial consumer industry he mocked, and with such vulgar disingenuousness too. They ran out of cash. Or did they? On 6 May 2009, 3D Realms terminated the *Duke Nukem Forever* project, and chucked the entire development team.

Meanwhile, 72 hours previously... **NAG**

What an irony that the Duke, **bloated with hubris and ego, should be a victim of the same superficial consumer industry he mocked, and with such vulgar disingenuousness too.**

The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox with the following visible email details:

From	Subject
Bubble Yum Yum, Inc.	Re: Stock availability - Dear Mr Nukem, We regret to inform you th
Lara Croft	Why don't you call? - I thought we really had something special
asdflkn, me (2)	Re: VIAGRA: Lol, it's just that most people don't actually respond I
Facebook (notificatio...	Lara Croft commented on your status ... "is forever" lmao!!
Bruce Campbell, me (67)	You rip-off - It's called hiring a writer. "Groovy" was MY word first ar
CliffyB	Fwd: the chair leg incident (LOL!!!!)
me, John D. Carmack (2)	Crybaby Romero - Yeah, he's a total downer. Just ignore him.
Matt Hazard	My dumbass agent - I'm really sorry about this, I had no idea they
Uwe Boll	I make you film - I get you Dolph Lundgren. You call me.
John Romero, me (34)	Hype - I know, I just think they didn't give Daikatana a fair chance
Conker	hey - hey bro, how was mexico? also, lara's been calling me and
PETA	Pigs are sty kittens - This is an absolute outrage, and we simply y
Future Plastics	Re: Order Update #17764 BLUE ACCESS CARD Dear Sir, Your o
M2M.com	Your inbox is full - Dear BeefyBlonde69, this is to inform you that y
Sarah Kerrigan	I've been soooo bad - H
George Broussard	me: and then she was just standing there like nothing had happened and her hair is like totally covered in this stuff
George Broussard	George Broussard: lol these mexican chicks sound wild
me	me: lol man i'm really starting to feel like crap now. brb gonna go grab a medkit
George Broussard	George Broussard: probably something you ate over there lol

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