SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX   WII

MOTOR MAYHEM
FROM FORZA FANATICISM
TO FLATOUT INSANITY

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BETA TIME BABY! HAS ENEMY
TERRITORIES BEEN REBORN?

OVERLORD
DID WE HYPE IT ENOUGH?
IT'S REVIEW TIME!

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BLOWS US AWAY AGAIN

ASSASSIN'S
CREED

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08

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ON THE DVD

LET ME START WITH an apology. I was completely wrong about the LIVE issue I complained about last month. Microsoft hasn't blocked the games on your 360 to only one account and with LIVE connected. Instead, it actually was about specific hardware. See, I had to replace the 360 in my lounge after *GRAW 2* killed it and LIVE didn't like that. Fortunately, that issue has also been resolved: you can now just re-download the game and assign it to your new console. Apparently, this change is really to make it easier for users to migrate to the Elite. Regardless, my bad luck. I'm back to supporting LIVE and I humbly apologise to Microsoft.

It's eerie! While I write this, E3 is in full swing. However, what used to be an annual pilgrimage to LA for many has become little more than a mere hum. Sure, I expect plenty of news and announcements, but the whole affair is incredibly low key. Nevertheless, it's not that bad a thing. If you haven't noticed it yet, this year hasn't produced the usual dry spell of games we've become accustomed to. That patch of desert has been reducing year after year for a while now, but I think the smaller E3 finally burst the dam and games are being released all year now. There's little reason to delay a game now just so that you can capitalise on the E3 hype. It will be interesting to see what happens with the event this year and if the new format will live on. However, so far it's been very quiet...

In closing, it's been a sad month for professional wrestling fans after Chris Benoit was found dead. This then turned into tragedy when it was discovered that he had murdered his family before killing himself. The circumstances surrounding his actions are so strange that it's become instant tabloid gossip about steroids and growth hormones. Whether any of that's true, Benoit won't make it into the WWE Hall of Fame now, which is a great tragedy in itself. It's ironic that one of the best performers of a fake contact sport would end his legacy so terribly. The murders aside, the Rabid Wolverine will be missed by many of his fans.

James Francis
Editor

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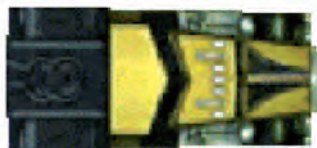
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[Important Stuff] rAge happens over the weekend of 28 September – 30 September 2007 at the Coca-cola Dome at Northgate.

You can check out www.rageexpo.co.za for more information.

D-Link has powered the NAG LAN since it first began. In fact they are the single biggest sponsor of gaming in South Africa when it comes to rAge and the NAG LAN. Give them love!

2007 NAG LAN

1500 [another record] gamers all playing on the same ultra slick super fast D-Link powered network, with juicy Intel servers all hooked up by the best damn crew in South Africa, the mighty VC. Take part in an informal Battlefield 2142 competition that could bag your team R32 000 cash courtesy of EA South Africa, while you enjoy the sights and sounds of rAge. We've even arranged, thanks to Toshiba and CTT Computers, a handful of gophers to help carry your stuff into the venue [if you come at the right time].

DESPOT IN TRAINING

SUBVERSIVE: Adrian Riddle
SUBVERSION: How to write a letter to NAG

(INSERT COLLOQUIAL GREETING), I have decided that after many months of deliberation (I'm slow, I deal with it, so should you) I should write a letter to your well managed, finely produced and all-round fantastic magazine. Now the problem that I had was that if I wrote a letter I wanted it to at least get published, so I read through past letters and came up with something I thought might work.

Firstly I found that I should compliment you profusely, see above paragraph for compliment. Also I should tell you how devoted I am to the magazine. Since the dawn of time, whence the winds did bellow copiously through forgotten meadows, I have been reading your magazine. Did that work, a bit too verbose?

Now to add a bit of the good old rivalry between consoles and PCs, that always seems to work. For this part I thought I should delve to the core, the molten epicenter, of the debate. Then I realised that I cared more about a ferret playing a fiddle with its teeth than add anything more to the topic. Actually I would really like to see a ferret do that, but you get the point. Every time I read "Console vs. PC" I want to slap a fat sailor and yell, "Aaaaarrrrgggggg".

Moving swiftly ahead, we travel the nostalgic trip through games of yesteryear. Police Quest, Whoop-Whoop! Done. That was short, but then again so is my attention span.

Next I thought I would kill two birds with one stone (I actually just murdered three: use many clichés, check), I should complain about service in the IT industry, but I should include swearing to express myself with greater gusto. Here goes, ah-hem... Has any %*$&#!& one noticed the #@%$ caps and crazy $%#&%*# prices that we mother-$^#%@$# must put the #&^# up with? I mean what the $%#^? Yes, that bit should have the censors running in circles, stroking pigeons and crossing over my hard work but it shows spirit, that's what counts.

This is the part where I complain about how you changed the magazine, which has affected me in such a way that I am forced to cry in the dark and am now only able to speak in vowels. This section should also include why other magazines have better ideas that you should copy. The main one I've found is the plastic sleeve of the DVD, it's horrid. The sheer complexity of the little sticky strip has stumped many readers, all of which have the IQ on par with a decomposing ham sandwich. The next time someone complains about stupid things like the DVD cover, the font you use or the fact that you use a glossy cover, please, I beg you, send someone to break their kneecaps with said glossy cover. Miktar seems like a good person for such a mission. Well I guess that's my sad, pathetic attempt at a letter for the time being, use it, don't use it, use it to line the cage of your pet ferret who you have tried to teach to play the fiddle.

You won! Now who are you? What are you doing here? How did you get so much information about our organisation's inner workings? Majestic 7 has a proud tradition of ruling the world by knowing what everyone does without anyone knowing what we do. Then you come up with this letter, exploiting some of our cabal's deepest secrets! It is a little known fact that if you want to join the New World Order, you need to be polite to the doorman. Anyway, you've made a powerful enemy now! We're going to be watching you and eventually purge your knowledge of us from this world! Also, where the hell did you find our mailing address?

SUBVERSIVE: Jaycee Lock
SUBVERSION: Pirate Attack on the Gaming Industry

LET ME JUST CLARIFY before I begin my rant that I'm totally AGAINST pirates. Why? Because they undermine our hobbies by duplicating what is most sacred to us, the companies who make games. But a few days ago, while reading a letter sent to you, I suddenly realised why they do it. I think it's because games are a bit overpriced, I mean, not everyone can afford a R300 game every month(including me).

If they just push off like R50, a lot more people can afford it. And if you think of it in business terms, more people buying your stuff = more cash $$. But alas, it's too late, the pirate industry is now too big to shut it off like that, but good luck anyways.

Ah, but the piracy industry is part of our operations to take over the world. By constantly undermining the market with black market games, we completely control the so-called consumer's purchasing power. Now, instead of making a choice between an expensive game and a pirated game, the stakes are much lower. Soon we will have destroyed genuine games. Then we will swing purchasing power to choose between pirated games and bubblegum, since they'll cost roughly the same. Then we lace the bubblegum with our mind-control chemical and we control the world. Keep supporting the dodgy guy at the flea market – it's the first step to a wonderful New World Order.

SUBVERSIVE: Cameron Torode
SUBVERSION: Gaming

YOUR TOPIC FOR JUNE was about Pro Gaming, so I would like to say something about this. Why pay money to watch someone win the title of The Best Player in the World when you could hold a competition to become the best player in the neighbourhood? It's much easier and you wont have to worry too much about who's winning because you might win anyway. And to change the subject, why the hell do you have to go on the Internet to play Half-Life 2? It's so bloody frustrating if you don't have Internet or Broadband or ADSL. And here's something I want to ask about the Cover DVD. When the demo for Spore comes out, are you going to put it onto your Cover DVD? Oh and every time I try to install a MOD for a game, I can't play the game, so I have to reinstall it.

Keeping things that small doesn't really work. Initially Majestic 7 only tried to rule its neighbourhood. But the lack of natural resources and any form of government made that tricky, plus our immigration policy sucked, so Majestic 5 and 6 were always jumping over our fences and raiding our fridges. For the sake of the New World Order, we had to think big. That's the lesson here, kid: if you think small, someone will steal your snacks out of your fridge.

SUBVERSIVE: Maxim Needham
SUBVERSION: Death of PS3=Death of gaming

I WILL START OFF BY thanking you for an awesome issue, so thanks. The Xbox 360 is not a bad console. Micro$oft has decided to take the PS2's place in this console war as the cheaper yet not quite as powerful console. The other crucial thing for Micro$oft was releasing their console a year before Sony's, which they also achieved, giving impatient gamers a thing to buy. Nintendo's Wii is a nice console which I intend to buy in about two years, but it is not for a graphic craving gamer. Sony is standing on the edge of a cliff at the moment with the PS3, a console which could have pwned the next generation. Now most former PlayStation exclusives are migrating to other platforms, leaving little incentive for potential buyers to purchase the PS3. Like on a PC, the PS3's Internet service is free and the PlayStation store offers most downloadable content for no cost. Micro$oft however intend to make downloadable content prices standard. Micro$oft has lost quite a few OS fans (including me) over their 99% anti-PS3 system. I own a PS3, as well as a PC, and I use both for gaming purposes. I also enjoy downloading free mods off the Internet. I am not rich, I broke the bank to buy a PS3 and decent PC and I would not like to see the PS3 die, because I like to surf the web and download stuff for free, on an HD console as well as PC. I download a lot of content, a thing which I will not be able to do if the 360 wins the war and I am forced into buying it. Consoles bring in n00bs and turn them into gamers, and most n00bs are on a cheap pay. If the console dies, so does PC gaming. Micro$oft are inevitably going to lose many potential customers over their greedy ways in the long run. Either Sony does not lose the console war, Micro$oft revises the whole marketplace concept or console gaming may turn out to be for the well-off only, halting the n00b transformations and killing off gaming.

Don't worry. Majestic 7 actually engineers all the wars in the world, including the console one. We also happen to secretly own all the console companies, so it doesn't matter that we win. The whole thing was really just to get back at Majestic 6, who thought it was funny to spike the Majestic 7 Christmas punch with

> ## If you think of it in business terms, more people buying your stuff = more cash $$. But alas, it's too late, the pirate industry is now too big to shut it off like that, but good luck anyways.

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Are there too many sequels and remakes? Can there be such a thing as too many?

Scorp1on25: Sequels are all fine and dandy as long as they give us the same as before, but with new exciting things added to the mix.

BLACKWOLF: Most people like sequels from good games but games cannot be made into indefinite sequels as the sequels will all be the same later. Every good sequel has a bit of originality in it to part it from the former game. If you want to just recreate a game, wait about 20 years so that it seems as a new game.

Gazza_N: The Tomb Raider series is an excellent example of how a franchise can be "sequelled" to death. The masses may love sequels, but even the masses have a saturation point.

Chevron: Originality is overrated. A game that's not original, but fun will get more play time than a game thats original, but boring. People are going crazy over Starcraft II because the original was a great game and this is the first sequel for the game, which was released several odd years ago.

Antharias: People are ironic creatures. Look at Deus Ex and Invisible War. We all wanted another game like Deus Ex, but we would have complained if they had made it exactly the same as the first one but with different settings and a storyline.

Nduimiso: There can definitely be too many sequels, but that is when the franchise starts taking a nosedive. As long as the game is fun and tries to improve on the previous iteration, then there can never be too many sequels.

Rein_Her: Sequels are great but most developers are bound to either cross the line, plot-wise, or lose their way entirely. Example : Quake 4.

Uncle Buck: Some sequels are a labour of love, others are merely cash cows. The reason the Mario franchise is still fresh despite spawning many sequels is that a new Mario inevitably introduces something new each time, plus we also see a new Mario game only every four or five years.

MADRYN: Quickly thrown together sequels with a little extra content shouldn't be worthy of the lofty title of sequel. IMHO there are no NFS sequels, just expansion packs.

REPLINE: I believe sequels are very dependent on the storyline factor of the game. If there is a good or excellent storyline sequels are usually a success (Final Fantasy, C&C etc), however the opposite is also true on below average storylines.

Have your say on the NAG forums
http://forums.tidemedia.co.za

" Everyone is complaining about violence in games and even on the television, but I can't see their point in arguing that games make bad people. "

male impotency medicine. Okay, it might not even make sense – Majestic 6 hasn't tried to make a console since the Jaguar, but we had a lot of time to kill after drinking that punch and we were sure consoles could help us with the New World Order thing.

SUBVERSIVE: Billy Pengilly
SUBVERSION: Games and Violence

IT SEEMS TO BE at the center of discussion every now and again between parents and every other person feeling that they can give comment on the games people play. Everyone is complaining about violence in games and even on the television, but I can't see their point in arguing that games make bad people. Have you ever done a bit of Googling on the big bad guys of our times and even from times long past? Look at Saddam and even Ted Bundy. Do you think they became evil from playing games or watching movies? Do murderers, drug lords and every other type of criminal start their root to evil with a game...? My answer is NO, circumstance, upbringing and lifestyle molds you into who you become, not playing games. If you play violent games you take the violence out on the games, you're getting rid of it. After some bad guy bashing in a game I alway feel my head is clear and all stress and anger has left me. Now if you look at the evil of our times, it's because of poverty and how your parents brought you up. The majority of bad guys were victims at one point in their lives, be it from child abuse or from being poor. Most murderers are angry at their parent or other family members and they take out their anger on others. Poor people out of envy and also anger take it out on people that have more than them, by stealing from them. Or if they don't steal they take drugs to get rid of the feelings of self worthlessness and they pity themselves. Now this might all be harsh, but I see it as the truth, according to what I believe. Now as we humans are, it's never our fault nor did or do we do anything wrong we are always "innocent". They use games as a lame excuse for the shortcomings of situations and parenting. Children become what their parents put into them. If you teach them the good things of life and lead by example, you should have a great or even just normal child. And yes there is the odd chance that some other aspect of life could change it, but games, come on it is like me telling you guys that I am afraid of drinking milk because I will become a cow, only because a cow has cow parents will it become a cow. So in ending games are just that... games and far from shaping a person, after all programmers are not that great yet, otherwise if I play way too much bookworm I will read much more... nope still don't.

Actually, all of the world's bad guys played violent games. Majestic 7, in Order to make New the World we live in, has been shipping bad games to a lot of the worst of the worst. Genghis Khan loved GTA. Nero couldn't get enough of Mortal Kombat. Vlad the Impaler wasted hours and hours playing Doom. And Hilter loved The Sims. Okay, that doesn't add

up, but Hilter was gonna go bad anyway. This technique didn't always work, though. We sent God of War to Jesus, but all he ended up doing was chase people out of the temple. SexyWorldRuler1455673 was right – we should have sent him Dark Messiah instead.

SUBVERSIVE: The Extremist
SUBVERSION: Ask Not

WHILE I AGREE WITH The_Basilisk ("Ask Not", June 2007) that the guys from Ask. com should've thought through the wording of their statements a bit better there are some valid points underlying their shameless quest for traffic.

For now, Google is benevolent. Even if it wasn't how bad could it possibly be? They collect data on your searches and deliver more relevant ads to you. But now consider their wealth of other services made available to you: Docs & Spreadsheets, PicasaWeb, Orkut, Blogger, Calendar. All linked to your Google account. And then there's one service to rule them all: Gmail. Who doesn't have a Gmail account nowadays? And right there in Gmail is GoogleTalk, which I would wager most people use as well.

All of a sudden Google has all your personal communications to use for delivering more relevant ads to you. And they do. There I was, reading a mail from a friend of mine in New Zealand in which he speaks of learning to play the guitar and Google promptly delivered ads for purchasing new and used guitars right to my Gmail interface. So what, right? They're just ads. When Google's noble kings expire (as even the best humans do) and they happen to be replaced by those with less scruples all that information may become available to the highest bidder.

Generally, people satisfied with finding a nice job, building a nice life, going on holiday every year with their 2.4 kids and then dying a score years or so after their grandchildren are born don't worry about pitiable little issues such as information privacy. Those with grander aspirations that may involve riling The Man at some point, worry. Yes criminals and their ilk are included in this group but so are resistance movements and freedom fighters. Imagine a corrupt government with such power.

Hell, unlikely conspiracies aside, imagine a corrupt corporation with that kind of power.

Listen, if Google broke all of our New World Order plans would go down the tube. Majestic 7 needs the Internet and its wonderful system of silly names for pseudonyms. Centuries ago, when we were still competing against the Masons, everyone was just called Jebediah with a number at the end. Later on, when we took on the Illuminati, we used a lot of Elder words. While briefly fighting the Tong, we had the great team name of Super Swinging Ninja Clan. But since we got onto Google, everyone's gotten their own call sign. Unfortunately, everyone signed up for SexyWorldRuler so there are a lot of them, except the one guy, who seems to like MrGiggles745. Besides conspiracy? We invented conspiracies! Google's nothing! Ooo! New mail!

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MANHUNT 2 BANNED FROM PILLAR TO POST

IT'S BEEN YET ANOTHER month of lurid controversy for the perennially-embattled Rockstar. This time around, it's the impending release of *Manhunt 2* and its consumer classification that have the moral watchdogs' knickers in a twist.

First off, the British Board of Film Classification refused to grant the game a rating, effectively prohibiting its distribution and sale anywhere in England, Scotland, and Wales. In a statement to the press, BBFC director, David Cooke, said that issuing a certification "would involve a range of unjustifiable harm risks, to both adults and minors, within the terms of the Video Recordings Act, and accordingly that its availability, even if statutorily

confined to adults, would be unacceptable to the public." He went on to decry the game's "unremitting bleakness and callousness of tone in an overall game context, which constantly encourages visceral killing with exceptionally little alleviation or distancing."

This decision makes *Manhunt 2* the second game to have been denied classification in the UK, preceded only by SCi's 1997 release, *Carmageddon*. Paul Jackson, Director General of UK games trade body, ELSPA, later announced, "A decision from the BBFC such as this demonstrates that we have a games ratings system in the UK that is effective. It shows it works and works well."

Quick to join the cause, Ireland and Australia followed suit, with the Irish Censor's Offices declaring, "the level of gross, unrelenting and gratuitous violence is unacceptable." The Entertainment Software Rating Board in America, meanwhile, has slapped an 'Adults Only' sticker on the game – as good as pronouncing damnation, given that major retailers won't stock AO-rated releases.

Inscrutably reticent as always, Rockstar has thus far declined any public statement beyond saying that the banning was "completely unexpected to the whole team," and that the company was "considering all its options."

PlayStation 2

manhunt 2

BANNED GAMES

Manhunt 2 joins a growing club of games that were banned or changed for one reason or another:

GRAND THEFT AUTO
The *GTA* series has simply been notorious all over the world. Apart from the Hot Coffee fiasco in *GTA: San Andreas*, games from the series have been banned from Australia and refused release in countries like Singapore.
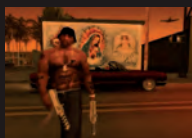
POSTAL
Both New Zealand and Australia banned both *Postal* games. In Sweden, the distributor was taken to court because of the game's violence, but the case was dismissed.

COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS
China banned *Generals* because it wasn't happy with how the country was being depicted in the game.

CARMAGEDDON
Carmageddon wasn't really banned anywhere, but it was forced to change its pedestrians to zombies and robots in the UK and Germany respectively. The UK decision was eventually overturned.

MORTAL KOMBAT
Ed Boon's violent fighter stirred a bit of a fuss when it was first released. Games in the series have since been restricted in Germany while all Nintendo versions were changed to display green blood.

GRAW 2
Mexico banned *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2* because of how it depicted the country, in which the game's fictional war takes place.

POKÉMON
You can't catch them all if you live in Saudi Arabia. The country banned the game, saying the six-pointed stars that appeared on some cards promoted Zionism.
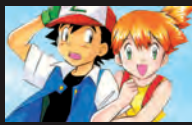
MERCENARIES
South Korea wasn't very happy with *Mercenaries*, which took place in the demilitarised no-man's land between the DRK and PRK. Venezuela threatened to ban the second game because it took place in the South American state.
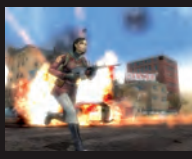
THE DARKNESS VS. THE ~~LIGHT~~ THE CENSORS

IT WAS BOUND TO happen. *The Darkness*, based on the popular mature comic series from Top Cow, has conflicted with censors in at least two countries. Germany has delayed certifying the game, with its certifying authority, the USK, demanding that certain changes be made. Among these is the removal of Nazi symbols that appear somewhere in the game - these are banned in Germany. However, the classification board also wants Take-Two to remove certain death sequences and replace Darkling finishing moves with a nice green mist. In 1997, *Carmageddon* was also similarly sanitised for the German market by replacing pedestrians with robots. Take-Two has delayed the game's release there to make the changes to all its formats.

Singapore, though, didn't worry about finessing the issues and simply banned the game, sparking fears among gamers there that Take-Two's *Bioshock* might suffer the same fate. The island state has previously banned other Take-Two titles like the *Grand Theft Auto* series. However, neither is as bizarre as China's move to censor *World of WarCraft*. The country ordered the game's local distributor to replace dead bodies with graves and put some meat on the skeletons. Apparently, the skeletons undermined the president's attempt to create a "harmonious society."

SONY APOLOGISES FOR CATHEDRAL FAUX PAS

AFTER DISCOVERING THAT IMAGES of the Manchester Cathedral in Northwest England were being used in the PlayStation 3 game, *Resistance: Fall of Man*, Rev. Rogers Govender decided an apology and a generous donation to the church's education centre were in order. David Reeves, Sony's President, sent an "unreserved apology" but quickly explained in a letter to the Church of England that, "We do not accept that there is any connection between contemporary issues of the 21st-century Manchester and a work of science fiction in which a fictitious 1950s' Britain is under attack by aliens." This, of course, did not stop Tony Blair adding his opinion, stating that, "There is a wider social responsibility as well as an interior responsibility for profits."

THQ

THQ has teamed up with Direct2Drive to distribute its games digitally. The first titles on the service are **S.T.A.L.K.E.R.** and **Supreme Commander**.

Mario Party 8 has stormed to the top of the records for a Wii debut. The game sold over 550,000 copies in just over a month stateside.

Nicole Kidman has become the spokesperson and promotional face for Nintendo's **More Brain Training from Dr Kawashima: How Old Is Your Brain?** Meanwhile, Minnie Driver will be voicing Lara Croft in an upcoming series of animated episodes to be released on GameTap.

The British Advertising Standards Authority has banned a **Burnout** ad. It featured a wrecked car and the slogan "Inner Peace through Outer Violence."

300 production house, Legendary Entertainment, landed the rights to produce a **World of WarCraft** movie, so far starring Ron Perlman. There was brief talk of a **Diablo** movie, but that ended up just being a rumour.

GAME ADDICTION NOT THE REAL DEAL

IF YOU PLAY TOO many games, are you an addict? Well, perhaps if you play too much of the same game. Then again, by that logic, if you kick the same kind of ball around all day, maybe you're an addict too. However, there have been genuine incidences of people becoming far too hooked on their games, especially online ones. While not technically as much a sign of an addiction as of overdosing, several people over the past decade have also died from marathon gaming sessions that lasted days. Still, one report believes that there was enough cause to consider game addiction as an actual medical condition, which would have placed it on the same level as alcoholism and gambling. Sporting the wordy title of the *Report Of The Council On Science And Public Health: Emotional and Behavioral Effects, Including Addictive Potential, of Video Games*, it called on the American Medical Association to make game addiction official and also prescribe healthy limits for people around gaming, such as only playing for one to two hours a day.

However, medical professionals were sceptical from the start, saying that nearly not enough research had been done on the issue. The plan to debate the matter at an ASA conference was opposed, and even when the debate did take place, it was quickly concluded that the report jumped the gun.

"There is nothing here to suggest that this is a complex physiological disease state akin to alcoholism or other substance abuse disorders, and it doesn't get to have the word addiction attached to it," said Dr Stuart Gitlow of the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

However, even if game addiction exists, it affects few gamers. Perhaps the professionals should first come up with a disease for not being able to finish all your games.

VISTA GAMES CRACKED TO RUN ON XP

INFAMOUS WAREZ GROUP, RAZOR1911, has managed to successfully 'crack' *Shadowrun* to make it run on Windows XP. The information file that comes with the crack states: "Tired of waiting for Falling Leaf to produce drivers so that you can play *Shadowrun* on XP? The wait is over, because Razor1911 already has the remedy! Yes, you read right. This game will also function on Windows XP." Falling Leaf Studios previously reported that it was working on the 'Alky Project', a set of libraries that would allow *Halo 2* and *Shadowrun* – both games designed to function exclusively on Vista – to run on Windows XP, without any need for DirectX 10. At the time, Brian Thomason, CEO of Falling Leaf, wrote: "First [Microsoft] claimed that it was impossible to implement DirectX 10 compatibility atop Windows XP, and now they also want us to believe that they couldn't successfully launch two DirectX 9-based titles on XP either. We plan to expose both theories as patently false."

SONY STANDS BEHIND UMD

ALTHOUGH THERE'S STILL MUCH controversy regarding the PSP's UMD functionality, Sony has stated that whatever people said, it would never drop the miniature disks. According to the senior marketing manager for the PSP, John Coller, UMD has a great advantage over cartridges because of its size and its portability. The only real problem is porting games from DVD-sized disks to fit onto UMD, and it's here where publishers shy away. Another minor problem some have noticed with UMD is the long waiting times experienced during gameplay.

While the UMD can also play movies on the small screen, its sales figures have waned due to the growth in digitally-distributed content. However, although they're smaller than at first, they're still making a profit. As John Coller said, the future of UMD is bright, but only time will tell exactly how bright this future is.

THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH THE WII

IT WAS JUST A matter of time before a full-on *Star Wars* game for the Wii, with full Wiimote capabilities, was announced. However, it will be *Lego: Star Wars* instead of the FPS we were hoping for. Although there might be more announced soon, *Star Wars* fans the world over are rejoicing that they'll finally be able to weld a lightsaber via the Wiimote instead of a joystick.

The game will make use of all the features that the Wii offers and will feature both trilogies in one package. Do you feel the Force yet?

360 VS. JAPAN

AT THE TIME OF writing, *Halo 3* had just shot to second place on the sales charts of Amazon Japan, sitting snug behind the number-one seller, *Gotcha Force* for the GameCube. *Halo 3*'s movement on the charts seems uncharacteristic for Japan, where gamers typically favour strategy and RPG titles above first-person shooters. The Xbox 360 continues to fall in the retail charts, with reports that it sold only 3,154 units between June 25 and July 1 (a decrease from the 3,369 units sold the previous week). May sales totalled only 11,082 units for the 360, with the Wii selling 251,794 units and the PlayStation 3 selling 58,644 units. Namco Bandai's *Trust Bell* for the 360 managed to enter at sixth place on the Amazon Japan top-20 sales, while the *Trust Bell* Bundle (which includes the Core System and game) ranked at 48.

MICROSOFT PAYS $50 MILLION FOR EXCLUSIVE GTA 4 CONTENT

THE *GRAND THEFT AUTO* franchise has planted another foot in 360 territory when a Take-Two spokesperson revealed that the PlayStation 3 wouldn't be receiving *GTA 4*'s episodic content. Echoing statements made by Peter Moore at X06 last year, Take-Two said that the content would be exclusive to the 360. Laine Goldstein, Take-Two 's chief financial officer, revealed during a meeting that Microsoft fronted $50 million for the privilege. While he didn't name the company, Goldstein explained that the cash-strapped publisher would get two advance payments of $25 million per episodic package. Two are scheduled for 2008. However, if *GTA 4* or the episodic content does poorly, there's a chance that Take-Two will have to refund at least some of the cash. Considering that Microsoft will be getting two exclusive episodes for *GTA 3*, it's reasonable to assume it signed the cheque. Neither companies have commented on the news.

NINTENDO ENTERS JAPANESE TOP-TEN COMPANIES

HAVING HAD ITS SHARES on the Japanese market quadruple over the past four years is an achievement in itself, but this rise in shares has pushed Nintendo onto the list of the top-ten companies in Japan, which includes the likes of Toyota and Canon. Nintendo's shares, with a total value of over six-trillion yen (over $52 billion), have also pushed it ahead of its main competitor: Sony. To put things into perspective, the PAL Gaming Network Website adds that this figure is larger than Vietnam's gross domestic product. The recent rise in Nintendo's shares, push-started by good DS handheld sales, has been credited to the popularity of the Wii. Although it was launched a month after Sony's PS3, the Wii sold more units than the Xbox 360 and PS3 combined in North America in May this year. In the same month, the Wii outsold the PS3 in Japan by more than five to one, according to game magazine publisher, Enterbrain.

L. 11:57:20-63 AM

GAMES ARE BAD. NO WAIT… THEY'RE GOOD. OR MAYBE – OOH, COOKIES!

IN THE RED CORNER, ladies and gentlemen, we have a pair of gun-toting teenage brats in New Zealand who stole a car and shot at police. "It was like one of those videogames the kids play where they steal a car and shoot at police," said investigating officer, Inspector Karl Wright St Clair. Next up, we have a study that says kids who play games don't spend enough time romping outside, making them "more prone to a range of childhood problems, including obesity, depression and attention disorders." Lastly, a squadron of huge brains recently revealed that kids who spend their afternoons playing games spend less time doing homework. It's sort of like a story sum – only, this one used taxpayers' money.

In the blue corner, we have two recent studies released by Massachusetts General Hospital's Center for Mental Health and Media, as well as the Archives of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, both of which conclude that gamers lead healthy social lives, and that gaming itself is a social activity. "Contrary to the stereotype of the solitary gamer with no social skills, we found that children who play M-rated games are actually more likely to play in groups. [Games] are not turning kids into killing machines," says Cheryl Olson, co-director of the Center. "The evidence just isn't there."

Somewhat more controversially, researcher and psychiatrist, Jerald Block, published a study claiming that the 1998 Columbine massacre was prompted by a lack of access to games. The two boys responsible, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, were allegedly banned from using their computers after being caught breaking into an electrician's van. "How do you pull them out, without triggering homicidal or suicidal behaviour?" asks Block. "Very soon thereafter - a couple of days - they started to plan the actual attack."

ARRRRR! THE INDUSTRY TACKLES PIRACY

THE BUSINESS SOFTWARE ALLIANCE, a trade group whose paying members include Microsoft, Apple, Adobe, and IBM, has temporarily raised the bounty for reporting software piracy from $200,000 to $1 million.

"Businesses often have a million excuses for having unlicensed software on office computers," said Jenny Blank, BSA's director of enforcement. "BSA is now offering up to a million dollars for employees who turn them in." The guilty parties, meanwhile, can expect to cough up $150,000 per violation. That's approximately $149,700 more than a copy of Windows Vista would've cost in the first place.

This comes hot on the heels of several huge admonitory piracy busts. A California man was arrested for modifying consoles to play pirated software, and now faces ten counts of felony-level thefts, "including grand theft, computer crime and trafficking counterfeit marks." Meanwhile, Raymond Griffiths, a British national living in Australia and head of the DrinkOrDie piracy group, was sentenced to 51-months' imprisonment for "orchestrating the theft of hundreds of thousands of dollars in copyrighted material," according to Assistant Attorney General, Alice Fisher. Finally, a Uruguayan counterfeiter was recently ordered to pay Nintendo $2.5 million in damages and legal expenses for copyright infringement.

THE EVOLUTION OF: FIGHTING GAMES

Warrior (1979)

Street Fighter (1987)

Mortal Kombat (1992)

Virtua Fighter (1993)

Tekken (1994)

Def Jam Vendetta (2003)
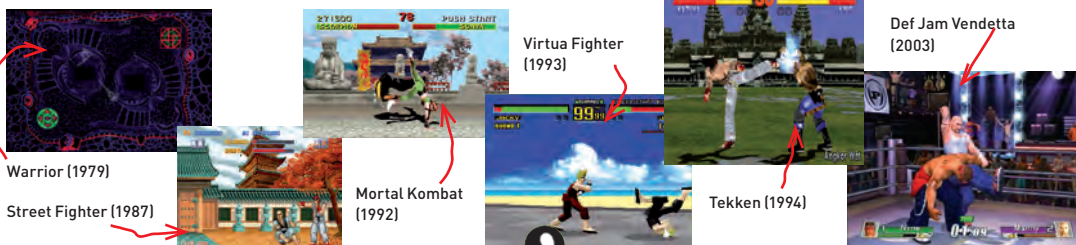
FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

WARSOW
[http://www.warsow.net/]

IN THE FREE GAMES folder on this month's DVD, we have *Warsow*: a competitive FPS with a slick look and some thinking behind the gameplay itself. The developers took the Quake II engine source and modded it to their liking, removing all of the copyrighted material, making it a 100% free FPS multiplayer shooter. The visual style of *Warsow* takes obvious inspiration from Disney's *Tron*, as well as adding a little cell-shading here and there to give it a more graphic-novel/cartoon feel.

Just unzip it to a folder and run the .exe. *Warsow* has a few fundamental differences to *Quake II*. The weapons are all different, but some of them take inspiration from the original Quake II and Quake III weapons, so you might feel that the Plasma Gun and the Rocket Launcher are just new models and skins. What really sets *Warsow* apart from *Quake II* is the inclusion of the Special Key, which you can tap to dash forward if you're running (or to the sides if you strafe), and you can also kick off walls by hitting the Special Key as you jump against the wall. The

Special Key can also be used to 'slide' down ramps, letting you gain some serious speed. Combining the Special Key with bunny hopping and sliding down ramps lets you pick up insane velocity – enough to make Capture the Flag really interesting.

Warsow has all the regular game types and a few new ones. The developers have also made some personal adjustments to the regular game types like CTF, which you'll have to experiment with to notice. Be sure to keep an ear out for the really geeky announcer voice: it's both horrible and amusing at the same time.

MOVERS & SHAKERS

EIDOS REVEALED WHY TOMB Raider: Anniversary wasn't released on the 360: it plans to release the game in episodes on LIVE Arcade, starting in September. • PSP owners will have to wait a while for **Earthworm Jim** – possibly a long while. Atari has confirmed that the game is off the roster, which means it's been shelved. • The XBLA-bound remake of **World of Sensible Soccer** will hit the 360's download service later this year, according to Codemasters. • Here's a surprise combination. Bioware has apparently signed up with SEGA to develop a **Sonic RPG**. Could it be the change the blue hedgehog needs? At this rate, anything might work. • Get ready to start preloading! Valve has told Shacknews that **Half-Life 2: Episode 2** and its two companion games will be released on all platforms on 9 October. • **Stranglehold** has an Australian release date. According to a press release, the game will be available on 6 September. Therefore, we might see it around then too. • While Namco Bandai still remains mum, a product sheet was released for **Beautiful Katamari** that now includes the Wii as a platform. However, the PS3 has been removed. • As was revealed at E3, a PC version of **Gears of War** is indeed on the way. It will support Windows LIVE and demand Vista. Well, the Games For Windows project needs the shot in the arm. • UK retailer, GAME, has changed the release date for **Mass Effect** on its site. The game's now only due early next year. • Gentlemen, have some tea! Polyphony has warned fans that despite a demo being on the PS3 Network, **Gran Turismo 5** might only be out late next year. • PS3 owners will get their hands on **Haze** before any other platform. Ubisoft has confirmed the game's release date for 30 November, but didn't list the PC or 360 versions. • Bioware has opened a new studio in Austin, Texas, which will focus on MMO games. **KOTOR Online**? • Vivendi has confirmed that a **Battlestar Galactica** game is heading to LIVE Arcade later this year. It will be a top-down shooter featuring single- and multiplayer campaigns. • Initially announced as a Wii launch title, **Project H.A.M.M.E.R.** has been cancelled. Perhaps using the Wiimote as a blunt instrument of destruction wasn't the message Nintendo wanted to send. • The fastest gun in the West is heading to the PC, DS and Wii. Atari has won the rights to develop a game for the upcoming **Lucky Luke** animated movie. • **Dungeon Siege** creator, Chris Sawyer, has teamed up with publisher, SEGA, to develop **Space Siege**, an inter-stellar, follow-up to Dungeon Siege. It's not clear if Gas Powered Games is involved. • **Spore** has been delayed again... to 2009. Yes, Will Smith's game is becoming a bit of a Duke Nukem Forever. • **Dark Mirror**, the successful PSP instalment of the **Syphon Filter** series, is being brought to the PS2. The port will be out in September while the second PSP game, **Logan's Shadow**, will be released in October stateside. • Sony and Quantic Dream have re-announced that **Heavy Rain** will be a PS3 exclusive. The game from the **Fahrenheit** developer was originally announced before the PS3 was launched. • Hide in the dark! Arkane's **Dark Messiah: Elements** will be out on the 360 in September. • A pseudo-sequel to **Supreme Commander** is coming in November. Called **Forged Alliance**, it's more of a standalone expansion. • **Fatal Inertia** has once again been delayed on the PS3 until "somewhere in 2008." The 360 version, announced after the PS3 game, is coming out in September. What happened?

Immersion originally sued **Microsoft** and **Sony** over their rumble features, causing the one to sign a deal and the other to exclude rumble from the SIXAXIS. Now, Microsoft is suing Immersion for not completing its duties. Hey, you want to play with the big boys...

Nintendo has announced **Wiiware**, software that will let all of us try and develop a game and get it onto the Wii's online store.

Sony has reached full manufacturing capacity for the **PlayStation 3**, and its factories are producing 1.7 million blue laser diodes per month.

According to a **New York Times** piece, **LIVE Arcade** and **Marketplace** are growing by two-digit increments. However, they're not making a profit yet.

The **Castlevania** movie has lost director, Paul W.S. Anderson (**Resident Evil**). It will now be directed by Silvain White, who directed **I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer**. Yikes!

The **Dead or Alive** live-action movie bombed really hard at American cinemas, making $232,000 on 505 screens.

QUAKE WARS TO FEATURE IN-GAMES ADS

SPLASH DAMAGE'S MANAGING DIRECTOR and one of the Producers on *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, Neil Postlethwaite, claims on the official *ETQW* community site that the decision to add advertising to the game was not one that was "made lightly." The advertising, which supposedly will be unobtrusive, will provide extra funding for post-release support (including the maintenance of the community site and production of updates and improvements) for *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. Although the ad system will apparently not store any personal details, it will track how much time the player spends looking at the advertisements even though the images themselves will not be interactive. Splash Damage also has the final say about which adverts are appropriate and where they will be situated, promising that all the advertisements will blend seamlessly into the *Quake* environment. The demo will be released with the adverts, so gamers will get a chance to see what is in store for them.

CONSOLE HARDWARE IS JACKED UP

THE RECENT SPATE OF news regarding various console hardware malfunctions seems to have given Microsoft and Sony a little incentive to secretly upgrade machines as they come in for repairs. People all over Europe spoke out after their 360s were returned with a second GPU heatsink, which should in effect solve the problem they are having with that pesky red ring that keeps popping up. Sony, on the other hand, after weeks of rumours, has announced that the PSP has been upgraded with the latest firmware patch to run at a clock speed of 333MHz (a 25% increase). This was released in the 3.50 patch, but it wasn't the only thing. Apparently, Sony has tried to sneak in an ISO loader, which would in effect allow players to play games directly off their memory sticks. It is rumoured that this is because Sony wants to start selling downloadable games from its Website in the near future.

FREE MOD OF THE MONTH

Q3-GEOBALL
http://mods.moddb.com/8920/q3-geoball/
[On the DVD]

Q3-GEOBALL IS A CUTE *Quake III Arena* mod where you roll a ball through several levels, trying to reach the exit. Along the way, you'll encounter various puzzles you'll have to solve before moving on. Some levels have lifts, pendulums and other obstructions to frustrate the crap out of you. *Geoball* is no *Ballance* (still a favourite ball-rolling puzzle game at *NAG*), but it's a decent enough mod and interesting mods for *Quake III* are getting far and few between. The mod developers are looking for mapmakers to create more levels for it, so if you dig the mod, head on over to the moddb.com page and offer some help. If you do make levels, be sure to send them to us so we can include them on the cover DVD. If you have problems running this mod, such as the levels loading, but you're still the regular *Quake* guy instead of a ball, try running the second_chance.bat file in the *Geoball* folder.

THE CONSOLE NUMBERS WAR

SALES WERE SLOWING DOWN for the 360 during the past year, which became evident when Microsoft revealed that it didn't hit its 12-million unit sales target by the end of July. The number had formerly been downgraded from 15 to 13 million. However, it might be the fault of the Elite: pre-orders for the upcoming console spiked dramatically on Amazon, suggesting that people are holding off on buying the older 360 models. Meanwhile, the console's rivals are closing the gap on its one-year advantage. The Wii is selling incredibly well. According to an article in the French media, 700,000 Wiis have been sold in the country so far. Nintendo's console has also sold a healthy 100,000 units in Australia so far, about double the sales the PlayStation 3 has achieved there. Portugal has taken to Sony's console: over 20,000 units have been sold there so far. However, Japan remains in a much bigger league. In June, Japanese gamers bought 41,628 PS3s and 270,974 Wiis. The 360 still maintains a steady lead over the PS3, which has upped the game with a price cut, but the Wii is still leaving everyone in its dust.

CONSOLE WATCH

SONY HAS DROPPED THE price of the 60GB PS3 by $100 in the US to $499.00 after endlessly telling the media it wouldn't drop the price. The special edition of the PS3 for South Korea, with an 80GB HDD and *MotorStorm*, at $599.00 now also retails in the US. Sony has promised at least 145 titles for the PlayStation 3 by the end of March 2008, including *Eye of Judgement* and *Metal Gear Solid 4*. Jack Tretton, head of SCEA (Sony Computer Entertainment America), accused Microsoft of being too dependent on third-party titles and Nintendo of relying too heavily on first-party games. "We don't buy exclusivity. We don't fund development. We don't, for lack of a better term, bribe somebody to only do a game on our platform."

Sony has announced a special PS3 bundle deal for the release of *Minna no Golf 5* in Japan (known as *Hot Shots Golf 5* elsewhere), which will combine a 20GB or 60GB PS3 system with a copy of *Minna no Golf 5*. A report from analysts, Screen Digest, suggests that sales of the Xbox 360 have hit a wall in Europe, and that the Nintendo Wii is causing a divide in the market. "The target market is still too focused on adult males, and the brand [360] doesn't enjoy the same cachet in non-Anglo Saxon markets as it does in the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK," reads the report. As for the Wii, the report suggests that some developers are riding the coat tails of the Wii with poor games while others are investing whole-heartedly in it. The console market in India is set explode: iSupppli research indicates growth to $125.4 million by 2010, a 75% growth for the region, which was worth $13.3 million in 2006.

Shigeru Miyamoto, legendary game designer, was recently ranked 20th by CNN's Business 2.0 on its list of "The 50 Who Matter Now", saying that Miyamoto is "breathing new life into a $30-billion industry that was starting to stagnate" by marketing the Wii aggressively to a 25-to-49-year-old demographic.

Eidos European managing director, Scott Dodkins, has told MCV that its decision to release a download-only version of *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* on Xbox LIVE has "broken down barriers" for other publishers, as it "encourages hardware sales." However, you'll need to own a disc copy of *Tomb Raider: Legend* to download *Anniversary*. SCEE game director, Tony Buckley, has told PSP developers to start getting more creative and attract customers.

Ubisoft had to pull the DS game, *Mind Quiz*, off the European market after it was discovered that poor performance in the game gets the player labelled in a manner derogatory to the disabled. *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* director, Yosuke Hayashi, has confirmed that Team Ninja will be working on further titles for the PS3. *FIFA* producer, Tim Tschirner, believes that the Nintendo Wii equals the power of the original Xbox.

Vice president of marketing for SEGA US, Scott Steinberg, has commented that the Wii will look "dated" in a few years from now. Meanwhile, a *Star Wars* lightsaber game using the Wiimote is in development at LucasArts.

CONSOLE FAILURE COSTS MICROSOFT $1 BILLION

THE REDMOND GIANT HAS finally issued a *mea culpa*, and this one with a $1-billion price tag. This follows many months of groaning from the gaming community at large about the Xbox 360's failure rate – speculated by some sources to be as high as 30%. While Microsoft has refused to disclose specific figures, Robbie Bach, president of the Entertainment and Devices Division, said, "Suffice to say, with a billion-dollar charge and the focus we're putting on this, it's a meaningful number." The new reparation measures include a three-year extended warranty for the dreaded 'Red Ring of Death',

the all too-common general hardware failure said to be caused by inadequate cooling inside the console.

"To address this issue, and as part of our ongoing work, we have already made certain improvements to the console," Microsoft's Peter Moore revealed in an open letter to Xbox owners. "As of today, all Xbox 360 consoles are covered by an enhanced warranty programme. This applies to new and previously sold consoles. In doing so, Microsoft stands behind its products and takes responsibility to ensure that every Xbox 360 console owner continues to have a fantastic gaming experience."

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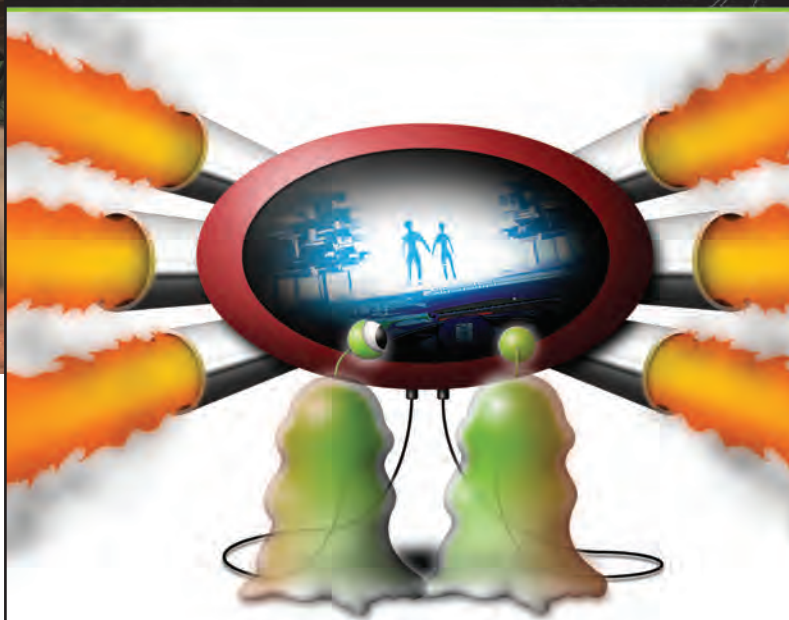
Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES • MP3 • ACCESSORIES

GAMING CHARTS

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
2	Spider-Man 3
3	The Godfather: The Don's Edition
4	Formula One Championship Edition
5	MotorStorm

XBOX 360

1	Forza Motorsport 2
2	Shrek the Third
3	Colin McRae: DiRT
4	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
5	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

PLAYSTATION 2

1	God of War II
2	Shrek the Third
3	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
4	Final Fantasy XII
5	Medal of Honor: Vanguard

PC

1	Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars
2	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl
3	Shrek the Third
4	The Sims 2 H&M Fashion Stuff
5	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

PSP

1	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
2	Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters
3	Shrek the Third
4	Call of Duty: Roads to Victory
5	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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

AUGUST CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:
"Fill it with unleaded and make sure to clean the windscreen."

JULY WINNER
"So, Mr. Anderson, tell me again why you want me to remove the red pill?"
Justus Posthuma

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

vivendi GAMES

WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our new favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Heroes August]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a fabulous prize from our new sponsor, Trust! See details at the top of the page. And remember: Save the cheerleader, save the world!

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Clarke Parker, p. 104

CALENDAR

AUGUST RELEASE LIST
Subject to change

DAY	GAME	PLATFORM
10	Guild Wars Double Pack	PC
10	Call of Juarez	360
16	The Darkness	PS3
16	Xyanide Resurection	PS2
16	G1 Jockey	PS2
16	PaRappa The Rapper	PSP
16	Xynaide Resurection	PSP
16	Capcom Puzzle Word	PSP
16	Gangs of London (Platinum)	PSP
16	Lemmings (Platinum)	PSP
16	Evil Days of Luckless John	PC
17	Surf's Up	PC
17	Surf's Up	360
17	Surf's Up	PS3
17	Surf's Up	PS2
17	Surf's Up	PSP
23	SingStar 90s	PS2
23	Atelier Iris 3	PS2
24	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	PC
24	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	PS2
24	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	PSP
24	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	360
24	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	PS3
24	Skate	PS3
	Pre-order and stand a chance to win a skateboard	
24	Skate	X360
	Pre-order and stand a chance to win a skateboard	
24	Medal of Honor: Airborne	360
24	Medal of Honor: Airborne	PC
26	Crash Triple Pack	PS2
26	Moto GP 2007	PC
31	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	PS3
	Pre-order for only R517.46!	
31	Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	PSP
31	Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions	PC
31	Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions	360
31	Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions	PS3
31	The Sims 2: Bon Voyage	PC
31	Blue Dragon	360
TBA	Guitar Hero II: Rock the 80s Expansion	PS2
TBA	Guild Wars: Eye of the North	PC
	Pre-order for bonus weapons and more…	
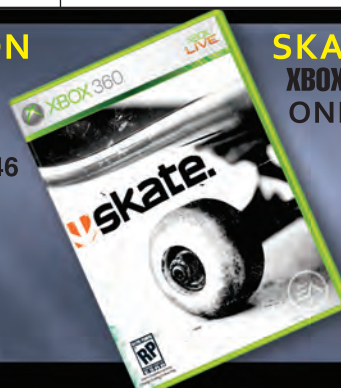
NAG FUN FACT
This NAG FUN FACT has been removed due to budget constraints.

1
HISTORY:
1989: Charlotte Marion Huges from Cleveland turns really old and celebrates her 112th birthday, entering the record books. We believe she may have died at some point after that.

2
HISTORY:
1990: Iraq invades Kuwait. Do you even know where Kuwait is? I bet you don't. No, really, show it to me on this map. See? I knew you didn't know where it was.

3
EVENT:
Carnage.LAN August
Cape Town
(www.langames.co.za)

4/5
HISTORY:
1962: Actress Marilyn Monroe, the one who did that whole "whoops, my skirt is being blown upwards by this vent of hot air" thing, was found dead in her bed with an empty bottle of sleeping tablets. Nobody knows what happened to the sleeping tablets. Many suspect foul play.

6
HISTORY:
1945: America nukes Japan, taking out Hiroshima. We were going to make a joke about a little red dot and StarCraft, but it would be really bad taste, sorry.

10
EVENT:
MPLD *Pretoria*
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
{S.w.A.T} 10_08
Amanzimtoti
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
INSOMNIA *Johannesburg*
(www.langames.co.za)

11/12
EVENT:
Mayhem *Boksburg*
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
PULSE *Brits*
(www.langames.co.za)

17
EVENT:
SICORP LAN
Cape Town
(www.langames.co.za)

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

18/19
EVENT:
Liberty *Benoni*
(www.langames.co.za)

20
HISTORY:
1975: Viking 1, an unmanned US planetary probe, is launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on a mission to Mars.

23
HISTORY:
1998: President of the United States, Bill Clinton, admits to "having had relations with that woman", which was later explained to him to be White House intern, Monica Lewinsky.

EVENT:
23-26: Leipzig Games Convention

24
EVENT:
L.A.N.ing SuX *Pretoria*
(www.langames.co.za)

25/26
EVENT:
PULSE *Brits*
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
Digital Warfare V
No Venue Specified
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
BattleLAN.co.za *Rivonia*
(www.langames.co.za)

28
HISTORY:
1963: Dr Martin Luther King Jr. told thousands of Americans that he had a dream, and that the dream was very important, and that he wished more people would listen to him.

31
EVENT:
MPLD *Pretoria*
(www.langames.co.za)

EVENT:
Carnage.LAN September
Cape Town
(www.langames.co.za)
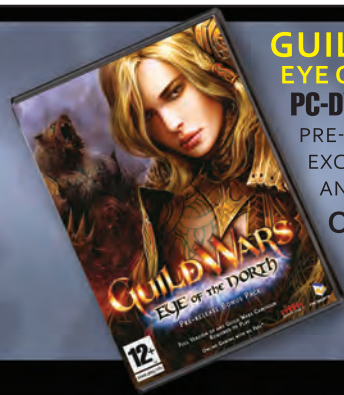
iGF 2007
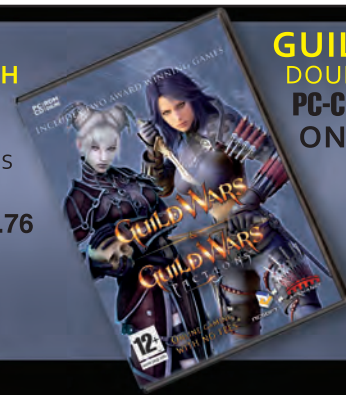
The best in games you didn't even know existed

YOU KNOW HOW AT every music concert there's that guy, the one with the scraggly beard and clothes so trendy they don't even know they're in fashion yet. You know the type: He looks like he hasn't bathed in weeks (but it's really just spray-on dirt) and he has an encyclopaedic knowledge of bands you've never heard of before, which he uses to tell you exactly why all your favourite music is crap.

Well, you get them in gaming too. Indie gamers, the brave souls who cruise the periphery of gaming in search of the tastiest gameplay and soul-searing storylines, bringing the labours of hard-working, hard-bitten, hard-assed and mostly hard-up independent game developers to light. We went out and found one, despite the protests of our olfactory senses. This is what he said:

"Hey. Yeah, you wanna know about indie games. Okay.

You know how the GDC Awards are like, the Oscars, but for game developers. No, I bet you didn't...

Anyway, part of the GDC is the Independent Games Festival. Each year, the IGF accepts nominations for indie games from all over and picks the best in a whole bunch of categories. Go check out the winners dude, you'll like 'em.

Man, I'd love to go to the IGF. Maybe even meet Jenova Chen - except he's a sell-out now..."

After that, he ranted on about how games aren't what they used to be, how graphics are killing the industry and that the adventure game isn't really dead. We snuck away - during a particularly expansive gesture aimed at all known publishers - to go and apologise to Mr Chen: *flOw* is awesome and being able to buy food is almost as cool... Our indie friend wasn't kidding about the IGF winners (and nominees in general) being totally amazing games though. Honour them, play them and shove them in people's faces when they drone on about games these days being stagnant and lacking in creativity or innovation!

BEST MOD: WEEKDAY WARRIOR
By Cut Corner Company Productions
http://students.guildhall.smu.edu/
~weekdaywarrior/

A *Half-Life 2* total conversion that takes the game into truly alien territory for an FPS. Your job (well, maybe not your job *per se*, but a job nonetheless): In an office, a really, really boring office (hence the daydreams the main character has about being a super spy known only as "The Mongoose") that comes under attack from upper management, the only way to save your 'job' is to don your point-and-click adventure thinking hats, solve puzzles and play mini games. Seriously. It's an excellent adventure game and it's free! How much more motivation do you need?

BEST STUDENT GAME: TOBLO
By students from the DigiPen Institute of Technology (Steve Chiavelli, John Jensen, Brad Rasmussen, Ben Smith and Zach Peterson)
http://www.toblo.info

There has been much speculation about physics in games and its impact on gameplay. Thankfully, in indie circles a spirit of experimentation is encouraged that would seriously scare a major publisher. *Toblo* asks the question: "What would happen if you had a fully-destructible world and could kill your friends by lobbing bits of the world at them?" *Toblo*'s a CTF game and you can invite your friends for a bit of destructive multiplayer mayhem. If toppling a tower that until recently supported your enemy's flag is fun, then running away, dodging the very same bricks that made up the tower as they're hurled at you is totally priceless.

EXCELLENCE IN AUDIO, DESIGN INNOVATION: EVERYDAY SHOOTER
By Jonathan Mak, Queasy Games
http://www.queasygames.com

"What if God made you a little glowing dot. And the music in your head had nowhere to go but out?"

Jonathan Mak puts forward a convincing argument that clearly you'd be flying around, shooting things and compiling a guitar track as you go. Because that's what you do in *Everyday Shooter*; except that there's more to the double award winner than just a shooter. Mak explores the idea that a game can be delivered in a way similar to how music is delivered in album form: a series of related but distinct songs/games that all get perceived together.

Not only does *Everyday Shooter* explore the reasoning and methods behind conceptual game design, it also does something unique with sound. Everything

Weekday Warrior

Weekday Warrior

Toblo

Everyday Shooter
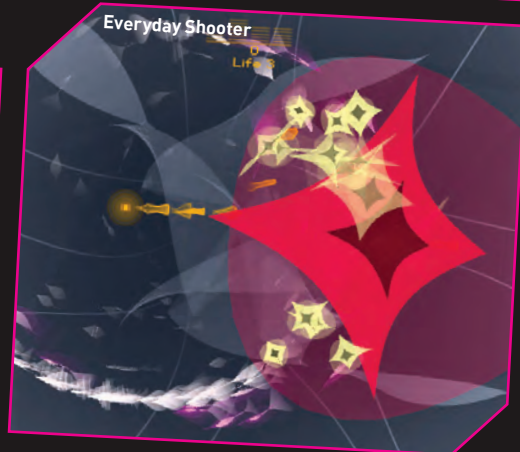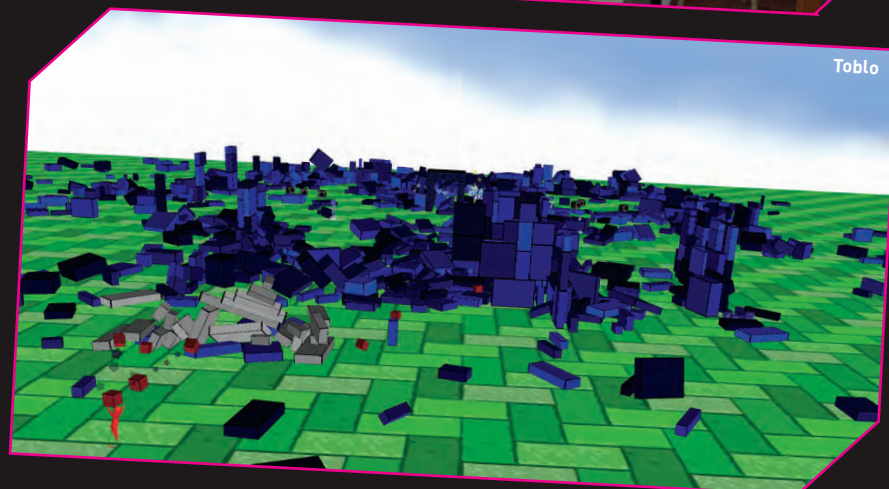
in the game is a guitar riff or chord, from an enemy exploding to the bullets you fire. At first thought, this seems like it would produce a chaotic mess of sound. However, it doesn't. As Mak says, there's an inherent ordering to how and why the sounds are triggered, so in essence there's a beat defined by what you end up doing as the player.

When you hit the Queasy Games site, don't pass up the opportunity to play *Gate 88*. It stole days of Miktar's time a couple of years ago.

EXCELLENCE IN VISUAL ART, AUDIENCE AWARD: CASTLE CRASHERS
By The Behemoth
http://www.castlecrashers.com

You should know about The Behemoth. You really should... In fact, if you don't know about The Behemoth, turn to the nearest PS2 or Xbox owner and hit them: they've done you a grave disservice. The reason why The Behemoth should be bringing warm and fuzzy feelings to your gaming naughty bits is *Alien Hominid*, the crazy platform shooter that started as a Flash game on Newgrounds.com and propelled The Behemoth into self-funded indie-dom (incidentally netting the exact same awards at the IGF last year along the way: Visual Art and the Audience Award).

Dan Paladin is currently committing his distinctive visual styling to *Castle Crashers*,

a four-player, beat-'em-up romp of a game that should be coming to Xbox LIVE Arcade reasonably soon. If you liked *Golden Axe* and have a sense of humour, you'll definitely want this game. *Alien Hominid* continuously delighted with its utterly over the top take on standard things like boss fights. *Castle Crashers* is sure to do exactly the same, except that you'll be able to play it with even more people. The only thing missing would be dwarves to kick.

TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE: BANG! HOWDY
By Three Rings Design, Inc.
http://www.banghowdy.com

Shoot first and say hi later. That's the philosophy behind *Bang! Howdy*, a game that's sure to make our copy editor rip his hair out due to misplaced exclamation marks... Yes, Three Rings Design, we know that it's hard to develop a massively multiplayer online 3D game using Java. It's impressive, but that's not what makes this game kick ass. No, that would be the action strategy Wild West gun fighting - online, against hundreds of other players with character advancement, card collecting and bounties! Form gangs with your friends and make the frontier an even more dangerous place for everyone else!

Castle Crashers

Castle Crashers

Bang! Howdy

Bang! Howdy

Aquaria

Aquaria

Samorost 2

Samorost 2

Aquaria

Aquaria

BEST WEB BROWSER GAME: SAMOROST 2

By Amanita Design

http://www.samorost.net

Kudos if you're busy going "Hey! *Samorost*, I remember that, it was [insert adjective here]!" *Samorost 2* builds on the deep-seated feelings of wonder and strangeness that made the original such an intriguing game to play. As your little avatar wanders around the eerie organic terrain, solving puzzles in strange and enchanting ways, you really get the feeling that there's something undeniably spooky going on. That emotional hook, that curious fascination with the plight of your pyjama-clad protagonist is what makes *Samorost 2* utterly unique. As an adventure game it does everything right: You can't die, there are no "you forgot to pick up item X in level one, now you're screwed!" scenarios, the setting is completely engrossing, and you'll be laughing at more than a couple of the eventual solutions you find. Perfection in bite-sized doses.

SEUMAS MCNALLY GRAND PRIZE: AQUARIA

By Bit Blot

http://www.bit-blot.com

Aquaria just has that certain something about it that makes it intriguing. Go watch the gameplay trailer on the site and try not to look forward to the game. We dare you... Bit Blot is really pushing to produce something that harkens back to the golden days of yore when games were epic and intriguing instead of 'realistic' and 'addictive'. Everyone who gets their hands on the game seems to suddenly wax lyrical about adventure games... The sheer level of art polish that's obviously gone into Aquaria so far should instantly attract even the most stalwart of mainstream gamers. Therefore, it has the eye candy for your shallow friends, but if you dig a little deeper, you'll find an intuitive, gesture-like spell-casting system (in the form of notes that make up songs) on top of a game developed around non-linear exploration with a helping of combat. The game is set in an underwater world and follows Naija as she goes on a journey to discover the tragic history of her surroundings. If the story proves as haunting as it looks to be, you can bet that this gorgeous game is going to be on "games that everyone should play but probably hasn't" lists the world over. We're jealous of all the IGF judges who got to play an early version and cannot wait for the game to be released.

Go. Go now and take the light that is indie gaming to all who haven't yet seen it, heard it or licked it. Pass around the various demos on the cover DVD and rejoice in your sudden popularity. This is where the game ideas and genres that become tomorrow's mainstream über-games come from: the motherhood, the gaming Gaia! **NAG**

MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS
by Miktar Dracon

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND SUNSHINE

A FEW MONTHS BACK I had the pleasure of paying a visit to one of my favourite places on earth once more: New York. A large pile of *NAG* back-issues accompanied me on my journey to the US, which I gleefully distributed to various friends and colleagues I visited while there.

Before heading back to South Africa, I asked them to e-mail me their personal comments on the magazine once they'd had the chance to read copies thereof in depth. Considering how different the various international gaming cultures are, I was curious to see how our little local publication matched up against the 'big boys' of the industry, such as American-based *Game Informer* (which claims to be "The World's #1 Computer & Video Game Magazine," yet is only sold in America). Recently an e-mail arrived from one particular friend whom I consider quite knowledgeable when it comes to gaming, yet has never struck me as being 'hardcore' in any way. He simply loves playing games casually and approaches them with a kind of calm rationale uncommon in gaming circles.

He had finally finished reading the four issues I had given him and had a few quick comments about *NAG* and its writers:

"The tone of the writing and balance of information the writing conveys is unique compared to common game journalism here, and in the UK.

Compared to here, on one hand, it is written with a tone that dispenses with elaboration and frameworks. The tone assumes the reader either knows what is being talked about, or, with some basic facts, can accurately infer. But...

... it is also not like 'hardcore' geared writing here either.

Here the 'hardcore' prose is written with tons of extraneous posturing. The writers don't just talk in the language of the pro gamers, they feel the need to sell themselves as pro gamers. They use all the latest slang, the buzzwords, the shorthand. But, they use it without irony.

The 'l33t' attitude of NAG, for the most part, is a little snippy, a touch arrogant, but also defused heavily by a layer of irony about that. The catchphrases, the l33tisms, the trendy jokes, are presented in a way that doesn't actually bloat the hardened content - in most places. It's just style; not a replacement for content.

Put another way, the feel of NAG is that it is actually written by people who are really part of the serious gamer and Internet culture, and all but take it for granted.

Compared to here, where most of the pro gamer, hardcore writing and presentation try far too hard, and it's clear that editors are attempting to play up their 'pulse of the people' to exaggerated levels to market it.

Plus they're also snippy and arrogant so that just starts to get too much all together."

We shunted his e-mail around the office a little, discussing the various points raised as well as patting ourselves on the back because, hey... it's nice to get some good commentary once in a while. It's not that we don't enjoy the 'NAG U ROCK!' e-mails (those are the glue that holds us together, much like Anton Lines), but there is a real sense of satisfaction that comes from a well thought-out critique. I know how it's going to sound, but putting *NAG* together is both heaven and hell at times. Heaven, because it's the most kick-ass job in the world, one that nobody here would ever willingly give up... but also hell because when it comes to gaming, it seems everyone has a different idea of what should be done or could be done. Don't even get me started on the high-level

politics that come into play when dealing with the various local game distributors (most of whom are thankfully quite level-headed, God bless their hearts, but some not so much).

The comments from my friend truly bolstered us on some level, since they give us cause to believe that, despite everything and in spite of our comparatively diminutive (but growing!) market, *NAG* actually has quite a lot going for it. When crunch time sets in, when there are only a few days left to get everything done before the magazine has to go to print, it's actually quite easy to lose sight of the real reason we all do this: because we love gaming and want to tell everyone just how cool Game X or Hardware Y is. Deadlines are probably the biggest cause of consternation when it comes to living the Dream, because Deadlines equal Work, Work equals Job, and Job unerringly tends to corrode away the baseline level of Fun to be had. However, without deadlines, the magazine would probably never be published, so we must slave away for the greater good.

And this concludes my column this month, which I hope you have enjoyed. We love you with mouth. **NAG**

Wanna guess who wins?

OH NOES
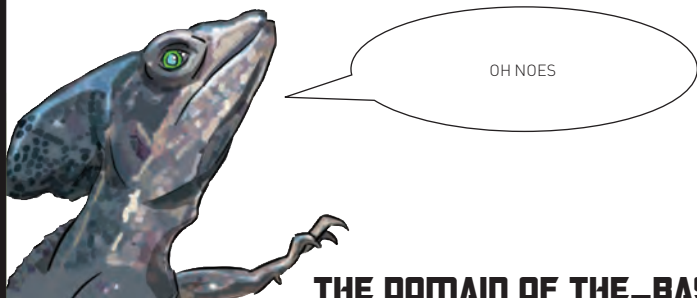
THE DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK
by Anton Lines

THE DEATH OF A CULTURE

I LEFT SOUTH AFRICAN GAMING on a bit of a high note. We'd just managed to pull off a fantastically successful rAge 2006. The *NAG* LAN finally broke the 1,000-gamer mark, and the competitive spirit triumphed too, with full-capacity turnouts in virtually all of the supported titles. Yes, one could be forgiven for thinking the glory days of *Worfaire* were back.

However, that's just the thing with the South African scene: it lacks the consistency to build on previous strengths. The fragility of the competitive culture was painfully clear at this year's beleaguered Electronic Sports World Cup quasi-qualifier. While the dates of the event (falling in the middle of school exams) were partly responsible, one just needs to take a look at the gaming demographic to see the underlying problem.

Quake 4 in South Africa currently has four players. I know twice as many played at the ESWC qualifier (the worst turnout in SA history, by the way) and I'm not trying to take anything away from the new blood. However, at the time of the event there were only four serious competitors in the country, at least three of who have now thrown in the towel following the cancellation of the trips to France. *WarCraft III*, another tournament staple, has two serious players… maybe.

For the most part, the local gaming masses flock to *Counter-Strike* and *Defense of the Ancients*. While both of these titles can be extremely competitive, the vast majority of players spend their time in casual 'pick-up' games. There is, of course, nothing wrong with playing for fun, but what worries me is the hugely disproportionate ratio of casual to competitive players. Tournament attendance, especially in *DotA*, has been severely lacking. There is plenty of smack-talk and banter on the online servers, but when it comes to actual competition, very few are willing to step up to the plate.

The competitive culture – the desire to push oneself to greater and greater heights, pitting one's skills against the best possible opponents in the fairest possible environment – is dying in South Africa. Some blame it on the lack of reliable tournaments and prize money, and to an extent they're right. It doesn't help that there are only two major tournaments per year. And the drastic last-minute reduction in prizes at this year's ESWC qualifier hasn't instilled great hope in the community either.

Nevertheless, the problems with these events are often directly related to the lack of attendance. I'm not trying to excuse organisers making promises they can't keep, or sponsors reneging on their agreements, but these problems would all be solved if there were massive interest from the community. If thousands of competitors showed up at every event, natural market competition would take over and better organisations would simply pick up the business.

My point is this: A vicious circle is obviously in operation here, and the only way to stop it is to tackle the issues that set it in motion to begin with. Why is interest in competition itself waning? When you look at the history of competitive gaming in South Africa, a pattern starts to emerge. Almost all of today's top players were there at the beginning. There are notable exceptions, such as Travis "Shase" Weedon, the defending *WarCraft III* champion, but they are few and far between.

The growth in competition in the 1990s was due to the fact that nothing was certain. Every tournament seemed like anybody's game. Nowadays, we can predict with relative certainty which player or team is likely to win the next event. This discourages new players, because the skill gap is huge and, more importantly, obvious. The second problem is that nobody seems to be able to decide on which game to play. At the beginning it was simple: *Quake* and *StarCraft*. Now there's a deep rift between *Quake III*, *Quake 4*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, *Counter-Strike 1.6*, *Counter-Strike: Source*, *WarCraft III*, *DotA*, *StarCraft*, *Day of Defeat*, *Call of Duty*, *Command & Conquer 3*, the various *Battlefield* titles… the list goes on and on.

The issue is, as usual, an attitude thing. I am quite happy to play any game, and I'm quite happy to play against a stronger opponent and lose, because I love competition for competition's sake. The South African gaming community needs to make a choice. Either it needs to come together, decide on a few select titles and support them, and put in the effort to close the skill gap; or otherwise resign itself to a permanently casual culture, because that's the way things are going at the moment. **NAG**

PLEASE NO!!! Cygnus X-1
6 2 f P S

1. Dano   70
2. Cygnus X-1   42
∞

84   100   50

ASUS EN8800ULTRA
Splendid™ Technology Delivers Great Visuals

Prepare yourself for high performance graphic solutions like never before. With the release of the ASUS EN8800ULTRA/HTDP/768M, performance-hungry gamers can now rejoice as this high-powered card comes fully equipped with the new generation GeForce GPU to provide gamers with the graphical power they want.

Phenomenal Graphical Performance

This radical graphics card utilizes NVIDIA's latest GPU technology and 768 MB of DRAM memory to provide extreme HD (high-definition) gaming with full DirectX 10 and Windows Vista support. The ASUS EN8800ULTRA will also come bundled with the highly anticipated first person shooter game – S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadows of Chernobyl.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadows of Chernobyl Bundle

With immersive atmosphere and gameplay, S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadows of Chernobyl is a unique foray into the survival horror First Person Shooter (FPS) game genre. It transcends previous attempts at engaging gaming by utilizing the ASUS EN8800ULTRA's powerful graphics engine to provide gamers with excellent graphical performance. Being visually tantalizing and open-ended, this game is able to bring out the best of the graphics card and maximizes them to the fullest.

Exclusive ASUS Features for Versatile Graphics Usage

The new ASUS EN8800ULTRA series of graphic cards also comes equipped with Splendid™ Video Intelligence Technology – an exclusive feature found only on ASUS solutions. With Splendid™, images enabled by ASUS graphics cards are fine-tuned to deliver spectacular visuals in conditions most favorable to the discerning eye of any serious gamer. It also works on top of AMD's Avivo™ HD technology to offer sharp decoded videos.

Things can only get better with the ASUS EN8800ULTRA as it comes complete with the exclusive ASUS Gamer OSD. This feature is able to deliver overclocking and chat options during gameplay – allowing users real-time performance upgrades when they require it.

Renders the best visuals for games

With so many features built into this graphics card, the ASUS EN8800ULTRA is able to provide gamers with the ultimate gaming experience with stunning visuals and full support for Windows Vista™ and DirectX 10 games and applications.

True-to-life graphics that come alive on your screen

Providing high resolution for your enjoyment

DAMMIT

by Megan Hughes

AND THE GIRLS COME OUT TO PLAY…

IT HAS BEEN SAID, time and time again, that the computer and technology fields, including gaming, are basically male-dominated areas. Popular belief will have you supposing that this is because the male mind is more inclined to the logical subjects, such as mathematics and science, and thus males enjoy a field of this nature. This theory has one obvious flaw: pressing a bunch of buttons on a peripheral device doesn't require a huge amount of logic – or intelligence, for that matter.

Thankfully, the general IQ of the gaming population has been on the rise of late due to the vast number of females becoming interested and getting involved. Jokes aside, statistics show that what once was a 70% male domination has been squashed to a number closer to 50%. Even the LAN at the 2006 rAge saw some very serious 'girl-gamers' (namely the clan girlz 0f destruction, or gOd). Moreover, although some testosterone-fuelled gamers will disagree, gaming levels the playing fields in the best possible way. This means that, yes boys, you can get your ass whipped by a girl, or a jock or a nerd for that matter. Nevertheless, don't feel too bad about it.

How did all this happen so suddenly and without anyone really noticing? Well, with the introduction of more sophisticated cellphones the girls got a taste of what the information and technology market had to offer them. And it only ever takes one girl in a group to get the whole gang excited about trying something new.

Even South African magazines, which have been targeting a fashion- and make-up-conscious female market, have started introducing articles on the topic. Not so long ago, *Cosmopolitan* magazine did a three-page spread on gaming in which the general female population would be interested in, adding reviews of the pop-culture games most hardcore fans might cringe at. Since then, the 'Gadget Girl' page has become a regular feature (albeit rather close to the back cover). *Cosmopolitan*'s not the only one: many other magazines have started adding mini-reviews for PC and console games that they think their target market would be interested in. *You*, a family-orientated magazine, even handed out free CDs with one of their publications, which featured the original *The Sims*.

It has also suddenly become commonplace to see games and consoles advertised on billboards and during previews at movie theatres. This trend is certainly more noticeable in Gauteng (more people, more money, more business), though I tend to blame the lack of rapid progress in the coastal regions on the vast number of surfers who tend to inhabit these areas.

There seems to be a definite rise in the number of games released recently that are aimed at the mainstream or pop culture rather than at hardcore fans. This has probably added to the gaming industry becoming more accessible to the female market as well as other, before now, untouched markets (such as the pre-teens and younger kids). Hardcore gamers might like to blow up demons and such, but someone new to the market might like a game that first allows them the chance to explore the novel world now open to them. Humorous and open-ended games, like *Sam & Max* and *Nintendogs*, have given the female gaming market, among others, a real chance, which ultimately gives the gaming market, worldwide, a better chance of not only surviving, but thriving.

However, let me just add that although I may be one of the 'girl-gamers' who enjoy 'non-violent', 'non-scary' and somewhat 'non-threatening' games, there are some dangerously scary hardcore chicks out there who are quite the opposite. Surprisingly enough, probably because I generally avoid gamer get-togethers, I have never come across one personally (though I don't doubt their existence). I would suggest refraining from using any offensive sexist comments in their presence because they can, and probably will, whip your ass in some seriously violent way in any game you challenge them in - especially if you suggest that they go sit quietly in the corner and care for their Sims.   **NAG**

RAMJET
by Walt Pretorius

WHY GOOD GAMES ARE BAD FOR KIDS

I'M NOT GENERALLY KNOWN for bouts of seriousness. In truth, I'm a fun-loving, grumpy old fart... However, at the moment, the game industry is rife with something that I think needs mentioning. Therefore, you'll have to forgive me if the usual humour is missing; this isn't really a funny subject.

It would seem that the world is finally calling the gaming industry to task. Sure, there have been incidences where games have been blamed for abhorrent behaviour, although the evidence either for or against the accusations has never been anything but circumstantial. I know what you're thinking: "Games don't result in violence." They never do, otherwise we'd all be killers, right? Well, why don't you park your argument for a second and listen. That would make a nice change. Shut up and pay attention.

It's time for the games industry to start taking some kind of responsibility for its actions. Back when games were things like *Mario Bros.* and *Asteroids*, well, then it was still kids' stuff. These days, though, things have evolved to a completely new level, with gamers demanding (and developers delivering) more in terms of realism. This increased realism leads to increasingly realistic depictions of violence. Don't get me wrong; I enjoy violent games as much as the next guy does. It's fun blowing seven kinds of crap out of those pixelated bastards. Moreover, being a mature and supposedly responsible adult it's my right to enjoy that kind of entertainment. I'm old enough and certainly ugly enough to make that choice for myself.

Kids, though, aren't, and they are far more impressionable at those tender ages.

Right. Now that every thirteen year old who reads this magazine has had a little fit, let's get down to logical arguments. "You suxorzz," doesn't count kiddo. The things that kids experience need to be controlled. I'll say it again: the things that kids experience need to be controlled.

However, parents would apparently rather shift the blame, and governmental bodies in various countries around the world tend to be over-reactionary. Therefore, it comes down to the people who develop the games. You could say that kids should regulate themselves, but that's like releasing an alcoholic in a brewery... Responsible behaviour would be, in a word, lacking. Therefore, the people who develop games need to realise that the products they are producing are no longer "just TV games," and take a little responsibility for their actions.

Take, for example, Take-Two Interactive. No, I'm not turning into Jack Thompson here; I'm merely trying to point out the fact that splurging a super-violent trailer for a game about slaughtering people all over the Internet is poor form. It's a knee-jerk reaction to a knee-jerk reaction. It's the developers going, "Ha, ha, you can't stop us from doing exactly what we want. Boo. Sucks to you."

This attitude got *Manhunt 2* officially banned in the UK, and rated Adults Only in the States. Take-Two, in an act of... I don't know what... shelved the project. I say good.

Once again, I loved the original *Manhunt* game - I guess it's the sociopath in me. However, I wouldn't let my kids play it (if I had any) and I wouldn't want them to see that trailer either.

There's a system to be put in place, apparently, to age-rate trailers now. It's a start, sure, but that will not prevent them from falling on inappropriate eyes. Age rating doesn't mean a thing either, if you really think about it.

The answer is not to stop developing violent games, or to stop hyping and marketing them. The answer lies in the way that they are marketed, and the education around them: game developers should take it upon themselves to educate the general public about their games, about the degree of violence and sex and language, and about the suitability of their titles for youngsters. That's not caving in to the system; that's taking responsibility. And responsibility, guys, breeds respect. **NAG**

ASSASSIN'S CREED™

NOTHING IS TRUE. EVERYTHING IS PERMISSIBLE

The world is in turmoil. Crusaders are trying to conquer Jerusalem. Monarchs are on the battlefield, causing new lords and other greedy sorts to take advantage of the situation. Among all this chaos is a mysterious religious sect called the Hashsashin and one of its disgraced members who needs to redeem himself by killing nine key instigators of the Crusades. However, all of that is really just an excuse to release one of the games you'll remember for a very long time. Forget everything *Prince of Persia* has shown you. It's the dawn of the *Assassin's Creed* era.

BEING AN ASSASSIN; NOW that's really the gig everyone wants. You don't even have to dig hard to find that out. Luc Besson got there twice with *La Femme Nikita* and *The Professional*. John Cusack ran into a little trouble with rival assassins in *Grosse Point Blank*. Don't forget the legendary James Bond who, despite really being a secret agent, uses his license to kill with extreme prejudice. There's romanticism about being an assassin - something that might have started with the world's fascination about the best-known assassins all-round: the ninja. We seem to like characters that slip in unnoticed, snap the target's neck and get out before the tea is even cold. There's a problem, though. While assassins are seemingly awesome, the way they do their job is not. As *Hitman*, *Thief* and *Splinter Cell* have shown, it involves lots of careful sneaking, painstaking timing and a bit of luck, because the one thing a Hitman isn't is Serious Sam: when it all goes bad, your average assassin prefers not to be surrounded by a dozen armed assailants. Okay, maybe a ninja might, but you can bet your last dollar he'd wish at that point he were a samurai.

Assassin's Creed isn't doing that. If you're expecting another stealth game in the tradition of *Metal Gear Solid*, you'll be surprised by a lean and smooth action game that still encapsulates the essence of being a kick-ass assassin. Based in the third century, players will take charge of Altair, a recently disgraced member of the Hashshashin. This group really existed and is ancient enough for some to credit it with originating the word "assassin." The group, which was mostly active from the first to the third century, killed many prominent political leaders during the crusades on both the Catholic and Saracen sides. As a member of the order, Altair is sent to kill nine prominent figures, who are in the absence of King Richard the Lionheart encouraging and exploiting the Crusades. He will do so by gathering intelligence on the target, locating him or her and doing the job.

The first part is reasonably simple. Our hero will arrive at one of the three cities - Jerusalem, Acre or Damascus – and start scouting through its lively and diverse population, which is unbelievable to behold. Everything about this game screams 'next generation'. That's not an accident of the times. The core group of *Assassin's Creed* initially consisted of the very people who thought up the excellent *Prince of Persia*. Right after *Sands of Time* was shipped, David Chateauneuf, Alex Drouin, Patrice Desilets and Richard Dumas sat together and toyed with a new engine in which they explored new movement and interaction ideas. The plan was to create a game that was truly next generation when it came to improving on things we saw in *POP*. It's interesting that both that series and *Tony Hawk* were born from basic prototypes that were built just to explore a new way of controlling a game character. With the basics in place, the game needed a theme and Diselets found it while reading a book about assassins. A few months into the project, Ubisoft got *Sims Online* producer, Jade Raymond. The result: one of the most incredible games you've ever seen.

It's important again to stress that *Assassin's Creed* is not about stealth. Altair might not prefer being in the thick of things, but it appears that will happen plenty of times anyway. However, you can break *Assassin's Creed* into two types of gameplay. The first comes in handy when trying to find

THE HASHSHASHIN

Altair, the hero of *Assassin's Creed*, is part of the Hashshashin, a religious sect that might even be the origin for the word "assassin." The Hashshashin were a militant group that would get involved in religious or political affairs. It rose to infamy for its members' fearless and effective executions of crusaders, but the Hashshashin also targeted Muslim leaders and anyone whom it viewed as an obstacle or a problem. The sect existed from the first to the third century AD, but it has entered popular culture as one of history's greatest assassin groups. Apart from *Assassin's Creed*, the Hashshashin have in some form appeared in *Ragnarok Online*, *Broken Sword*, *Medieval: Total War* and *Gothic 3*. They also inspired the fedaykins in Frank Herbert's *Dune* and the Assassin's Guild in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*. The title of this article and the inspirational motto for the game, "Nothing is true. Everything is permissible" is credited to Hasan bin Sabbah, the Hashshashin's founder. We are pretty sure, though, that not all of them were snappy dressers like Altair.

BUILDING THE SCENE

The scene is set with the artist's impression, detailing the look, feel and colours for the market.
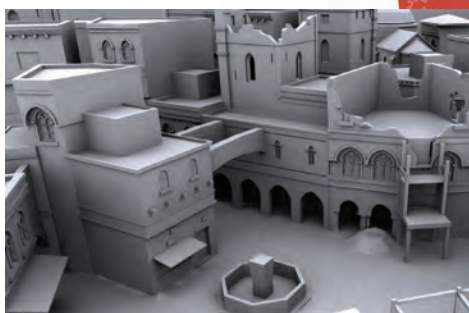
The level is built with polygons, but textures haven't been applied yet.

This wireframe includes the polygons and some basic textures.

The final scene, complete with dynamic lighting, shadows, post effects and the obligatory bump-mapping.

JADE RAYMOND, PRODUCER, AND PATRICE DESILETS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Jade Raymond has become the face associated with *Assassin's Creed*, covering its interviews and doing what a producer should (plugging!). She started as a programmer at Sony and moved on to EA a few years later as a producer. Since then, she has produced several games, most notably *The Sims Online*. After that, she left EA and went back to her hometown, Montreal, and joined Ubisoft there. Patrice Desilets, though, is the secret weapon. Apart from being one of Ubisoft Montreal's first employees, he's also worked on several of its major projects, such as *Rainbow Six*. His real claim to fame? He was the creative director for *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time*! Aren't you excited yet?

your target, reach your target and get away afterwards. Altair can climb any building in the historically accurate cities – and not just in some pre-designed path that stands out with different textures, as *Crackdown* did. From early on it was claimed that players would be able to use any ledge that cropped out more than two inches. In fact, gamers have been challenged to this: Raymond has repeatedly mentioned the ability to go to any building you see in the game and climb it, daring us to find the highest spots in the city. You might not be able to reach it initially, but it's there waiting for you. If you spot an eagle hovering over a building, reaching its top will give you a great view and unlock more parts of the city.

The rooftops are not where you get your intel. On the ground, Altair is able to mix with the vibrant crowd, which reacts towards him in different ways. The streets are filled with traders, thugs, beggars, nobles and the temperamental. You can move through the crowd normally, politely nudging someone to a side. You can also push them harder or just throw them around for good measure, but depending on the citizen's social status, you can cause some trouble this way. Nobody will really mind you beating the snot out of a mugger, but raise your hand to someone with a higher status, and the crowd could get nasty, even trying to take you on or calling one of the hundreds of guards patrolling the place. The crowd will pay attention and might take notice if you clamber onto a roof or come running if you cause a stir. Any of these things might alert the guards, whose AI is pretty fascinating. If you accidentally knock someone over, they won't take much notice – not unless they were alerted to an assassin being there. If they have reason to be alert, it could cause problems for you. A lot of time in *Assassin's Creed* will be spent chasing or being chased

Chasing someone will apparently differ every time you do it. However, being chased will be more interesting, since the AI tries to find the shortest path to you. In order to hide, you have to break line of sight and then hide. For this you can also use the crowd. Using a skill dubbed "Social Stealth," Altair can blend into a crowd to avoid capture and even take advantage of friends he made along the way (such as joining a group of passing monks and pretending to be one of them). Considering that you have a job to do, Altair doesn't need that kind of attention, but he needs to eavesdrop, pickpocket and so on to discover clues on his target's whereabouts. Three clues will unlock the location, though finding more can improve your chances. Once the target appears on your map, getting to him or her is the next task.

Assassin's Creed has been throwing around a lot of how it will be a true next-generation game. That is already clear with the impressive visuals and huge cities, not to mention the chance to climb anywhere and everywhere. However, it thinks outside of the box, especially when it comes to controlling such a powerful character in an open environment. The control scheme is different to anything attempted before. The four face buttons on the controller control Altair's head, arms and feet. The left analogue provides basic movement and the right trigger controls the intensity of an action. Think of it as a fuel pedal. Move forward normally, and Altair saunters along at an inconspicuous pace. Squeeze the right trigger, and he starts to run. Likewise, he'll push someone out of the way with an arm

LEAP OF FAITH

Altair has several abilities he'll develop as time goes by. Some will be contextual to the environment, like the Leap of Faith. If you spot a building that has doves hovering above it, climb to the top and find yourself on a sheer drop. Altair can swan dive off the spot, safely into a cart full of hay, or something equally appropriate. Get it wrong, of course, and the assassin displays the one ability he doesn't have: bouncing.

button, but with the throttle all the way down, he'll grab and throw them. With the pedal to the metal combat turns to fast-paced attacks and defensive moves. Essentially, you just have to hit the button for the right part of your body, point to the direction you want to go to and squeeze the trigger for as much emphasis as you think the situation might require. It's apparently a bit tricky to learn at first, but watching the game in control of a more skilled player is incredible.

The developers call this philosophy "Organic Design," something that has more than a little bit to do with Altair's 10,000 character animations (compare that to *POP*'s 500). The combination of the control system, the throttle and the various situations you will run into while mingling, running, climbing or fighting allows for thousands of contextual actions with the environment and its characters. A really good skill is to free run across rooftops, similar to the popular street sport Pakur. You just hold the trigger and run, making a few timely taps on the relevant face buttons when required - Altair will jump, roll, grab, kick and swing his way across the city, giving chase or escaping. Players will be able to climb walls, searching for outcrops, cracks and whatever else Altair can hold onto, by simply moving around with the left analogue. Our assassin can even quickly switch weapons, creating some awesome combinations and moves during combat. All of this places a high demand on the animation system, which rises to meet the challenge. There's nothing that you've seen yet to compare to *Assassin's Creed*, as the on-screen character reacts seamlessly with his world.

Altair carries a small arsenal with him, such as throwing knives, a sword, a crossbow and the mysterious blade hidden around his left arm. As an assassin, two of his fingers were cut off during an initiation to make place for the blade, allowing him to strike using a closed fist. Despite all the weapons though, Altair will have to deal the final blow with this blade. The team at Ubisoft Montreal has hinted on several occasions that there's more to the blade than simply a means to kebab slavers, politicians and other targets, and the need to finish someone off with your blade seems to help along the story. It's a bit difficult to have a conversation with a dying person if you shot him with a crossbow from a distance away. Apparently, players will unlock more of the assassin's abilities as the game progresses and will be able to customise and upgrade his weapons.

Speaking of the story, it's important to briefly mention the theory of a sci-fi plot. On several occasions in demos of the game, strange scenes appeared after death sequences, such as a dimly-lit lab with a female scientist inside it, or a game menu that appears to refer to genetic memory. During the E3 07 demonstration, the screen glitched in a very futuristic way and targeted characters appeared to have small data strings rotating around them. Then there's the cut-scene at the end of the demo, which apparently really suggests something more than an assassin building karma in the third century. Rumour has it that a trilogy is being planned, but that might just be Ubisoft wondering if it can repeat *POP*'s run. Not that any of it matters. The story might turn out being a pumpkin dreaming he's an assassin. As long as we get to become Altair, super assassin of the third century. Seriously, the Crusades have never been in more danger. **NAG**

NOW YOU SEE ME...

Altair's name wasn't just pulled out of a hat, as we might have assumed. It means "The Flyer" in Arabic. His full name is Altair Ibn'La-Ahad, the last bit translating to "Son of None." Altair is an orphan and was adopted and trained by the Hashshashin. His lack of a clear background, usually a key part of any hero, will become clearer as the 'not what you think it will be' plot is unveiled during the game. Adding a bit more mysticism and grace to the character, Altair is also a star in the constellation Aquila, which is Latin for "Eagle."

GET ON WITH IT!

JUST SO THAT WE'RE clear on this, *NAG* is all about the games. We don't care which is better, console or PC, and we don't care which game will make you rich if you play it competitively. We really don't care if *Unreal Tournament* is better than *Quake* or if *DotA* is like the hawtest thing ever. We're here to game and keep on gaming, while passing along all the important news, reviews and previews you'll need to make sure that you can get the most out of your gaming. We don't let advertisers, publishers or distributors influence what we write or the scores we give our games and hardware, because if we did, then we might as well just pack up and go home. It's with this in mind that we bring you this month's What We Want: a critical look at some things that are seriously out of whack with gaming and really deserve a good kick to set straight.

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC: ELEMENTS

Developer→ Annecy | **Publisher→** Ubisoft
Platforms→ 360 | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** Q1 2008

WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME! Arkane's successful *Dark Messiah* wowed enough gamers on the PC to justify a port for the 360. The timing isn't accidental, since the Source engine that the game employs has been ported to the console for Valve's own games. In essence, console gamers will be getting the same package that PC gamers experienced, though optimised for a console. This includes a new lock-on function for combat, and the deal is sweetened with new multiplayer maps as well as two secret levels not released on the PC version. The port isn't being handled by Arkane. Instead, Ubisoft is supporting internal crew Annecy, which cut its teeth on *Splinter Cell* multiplayer modes. One worry is the screens from *Half-Life 2*'s 360 version, which looked very rough and understated. Nevertheless, *Dark Messiah* will no doubt love the dedicated power to take real advantage for its world physics. Throw in some LIVE multiplayer and we're eager for its release.

RUGBY 08

Developer→ EA Sports | **Publisher→** EA
Platforms→ PS2, PC
Genre→ Sport | **Release Date→** 2007

IN THE VAST UNIVERSE of EA's sports games, the *Rugby* titles haven't enjoyed the support that the main franchises or even smaller titles like the *Cricket* series have enjoyed. However, since moving the series to EA's Canadian offices and giving it to a team experienced with other EA Sports franchises, there has been a considerable improvement in quality. Likewise, EA has been breaking a lot of new ground with control schemes for a sports game, giving rugby fans the much-needed ability to react quickly to changing match conditions. Unlike a lot of other field-based ball sports, rugby doesn't allow the ball to go just anywhere on the field like soccer or the fine-tuned strategies of American football. Concentrated force and taking advantage of brief opportunities make it fast paced and unpredictable. EA believes it has achieved a lot of that with *Rugby 08*, which will be out in time for the Rugby World Cup.

SUPREME COMMANDER: FORGED ALLIANCE

Developer→ Gas Powered Works | **Publisher→** THQ | **Platforms→** PC
Genre→ Strategy | **Release Date→** November 2007

THAT WAS QUICK! OR was it? It's not even been a year since *Supreme Commander* has been released and we've already got a pseudo-sequel on the way. Actually, we prefer calling it a pseudo-expansion, the type that brings more to your game, but doesn't require the original to run. That means that apart from a new faction and 100 new units, *Forged Alliance* will contain both factions from the original game. In other words, if you haven't bought *SupCom* yet, *Forged Alliance* might well be the one to go for. The extra units, spread across three factions, will enable larger navies, special counter-intelligence attacks and orbital platforms to rain fire from the sky. According to Gas Powered Games, *Forged Alliance* will push the RTS bar even higher, something fans of the series will be glad to hear. More info on the units will emerge until the game's release in November, but in the meantime, it's good to see developers are still trying to get expansions and such out before the main game has cooled down.

THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

Developer→ High Moon | **Publisher→** Vivendi | **Platforms→** PS3, 360
Genre→ Action/Stealth | **Release Date→** 2008

FINALLY, WE KNOW WHAT to call these games! Third-person Espionage Action Games, according to Sierra's press release for *The Bourne Conspiracy*. In other words, something like *Splinter Cell*. You can also deduce from the title that this game isn't based on any of the three movies, nor the books. Instead, Sierra and *Darkwatch* developer, High Moon, are doing the tried-and-tested "build on a license" approach by bringing more to Robert Ludlum's *Bourne* canon, obviously with the cooperation of Ludlum's company. Therefore, it will be authentic for authenticity's sake, even including those special tidbits that you would only learn by playing the game: in this case it's the real identity of super-agent Jason Bourne. While plot details

are sketchy, it seems that the game will go through several parts of Bourne's missions and his fall from grace with his superiors, instead of a new story.

Since the third movie concludes most of the *Bourne* saga, that makes sense. No word yet on voice support from Matt Damon and company.

BLACK POWDER RED EARTH

Developer→ Echelon Software | **Publisher→** TBA
Platforms→ PC | **Genre→** Online Action | **Release Date→** TBA

"ECHELON SOFTWARE ANNOUNCES *BLACK Powder Red Earth*, a multiplayer-only, first-person shooter that combines highly-stylised visuals and fast-moving tactical action with a persistent virtual marketplace and social network." The press release goes on to tell us about the military talent advising on this game, boasting operational experience in 32 countries on four continents. Isn't it nice that mercenaries can get jobs afterwards at game developers? Nevertheless, their experience will be handy, since this futuristic "on Mars" shooter will put a lot of emphasis on team tactics in volatile combat situations. How the social networking thing ties into it all is a bit vague, other than a few enthusiastic buzzwords and mentioning examples of social networking. Briefly, it's something about easily setting up games among friends and in-game currency that will lead to user-owned storefronts. The

game's social network and marketplace will also be separate of the game executable, letting you access it via the Web.

ROCK BAND

Developer→ Harmonix | **Publisher→** EA
Platforms→ PS3, 360 | **Genre→** Rhythm | **Release Date→** 2007

WE'VE HAD *GUITAR HERO,* a game that has taken the world by storm and showed that people don't mind looking stupid, as long as they're doing something cool. Well, that should be obvious, but you can cite Harmonix's game as an example of that. Despite *DDR*'s most valiant efforts, it was *Guitar Hero* that brought rhythm games to the masses. Well, EA wants some of that pie, as it made very clear when it joined forces with Harmonix and MTV to create a clear contender in the air guitar wars. However, how do you beat a game that already does it very well? Add more instruments.

Instead of just one pithy guitar or some passing co-op, *Rock Band* will let players hook up two guitar peripherals, a drum controller and a microphone to simulate that full band experience, sans crazy groupies and vomiting on the bus – but that's up to you. Therefore, it's *Guitar Hero* meets *SingStar* and the black sheep of rhythm games, *DrumMania*. All it really needs are two dance mats for backup dancers, but maybe an expansion will provide. Alas, due to the taxing task of manufacturing the peripherals, this will only be released in the US in the near future.

FIGHT ORDER

Japan is full of bat-hyenas

MARUMARO KLUKE SHU JIRO ZOLA

	HP		HP		HP		HP		HP	
MARUMARO	HP 38	KLUKE	HP 27	SHU	HP 36	JIRO	HP 30	ZOLA	HP 36
	MP 22		MP 20		MP 16		MP 25		MP 18

BLUE DRAGON

WHAT **DO YOU DO** when you have a console that just won't take hold in one of the most-prominent gaming markets in the world? Much has been said about Microsoft's failure to woo the Japanese gaming public, but the real problem seems to be that Japanese gamers are just not interested. Western consoles have traditionally struggled with this, while Japanese-manufactured machines had no problems getting Western gamers to gobble them up. *Blue Dragon* is specifically targeted at changing this. What else could you expect from a JRPG that was not only developed by the lead talents of *Final Fantasy* and *Dragonball Z* (and *Chrono Trigger*), but steps very closely to what stalwart fans expect from the genre. While *Final Fantasy XII* created countless arguments over the new Gambit system, *Blue Dragon* doesn't break new ground. Instead, it tries to polish the genre as much as possible, adding everything possible to make it shine really well.

The result appears to be a stock-standard but highly-enjoyable and engaging JRPG. *Blue Dragon* even sticks to character stereotypes and the main drive is that it gives gamers exactly what they'd expect. Lavished on top of this are very nice visuals and undeniably cute characters. You join the trek of three village children when they uncover an evil old man's plot after trying to stop the Land Shark destroying their village. It quickly propels them onto a path of stopping the evil villain. Along the way, they meet more characters with the same goal. On this very pathway there will be plenty of running around maps, opening chests and taking on weird monsters and powerful bosses. Your characters' powers come from their spirit creatures, such as the blue dragon that manifests from the main character, Jiro. These creatures have many power abilities that are improved as you grind for XP and gold. In other words, you quickly start to kick some serious ass.

The combat features a new enhancement: a group attack. When you encounter monsters in the map, you can extend a circle outwards around your characters. Then, when you engage the enemy, you'll attack all the monsters in the circle's radius and not just one group at a go. Sure, you could end up biting off more than you can chew, but often it's useful for taking out larger groups of monsters without having to go after each individually. Another nice combat touch that might or might not be new is charging some special attacks. Holding in 'A' fills up a bar under the spell. Hit the red area, and you use no magic point. The longer you charge, the more powerful your attack, but the character is dropped further down the attack queue. On one hand, it's a gamble, but on the other, you can line up two or three devastating attacks on a powerful boss right behind each other.

Beyond that, though, it's a carbon copy JRPG. Exploit enemy weaknesses with specific attacks. Spend time in no-combat areas talking to NPCs. Puzzle over the quaint dialogue courtesy of Japanese/English translation. To its credit, *Blue Dragon* features both the English and Japanese audio options. Nevertheless, it doesn't need much credit though, providing you want a JRPG that seems to be doing everything right, but nothing really new. Considering that it worked well for Square-Enix, it can't hurt *Blue Dragon*. It certainly helped in Japan, giving the console a reasonable boost in sales. **NAG**

James Francis
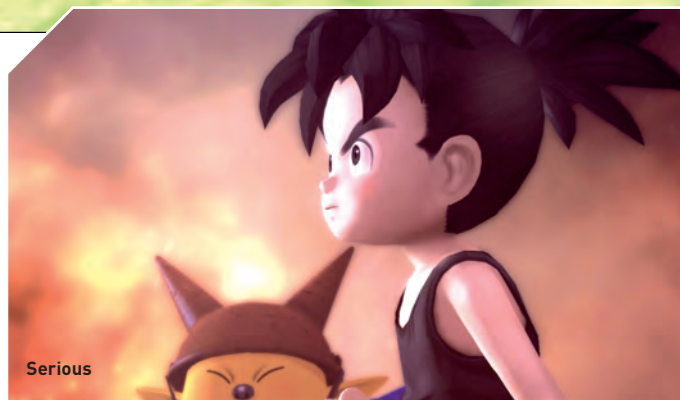
Serious

Sulphurous

Sexy

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EA Sports Rugby 08 is building upon the excitement leading up to the 2007 World Cup in France. New modes introduced this year include the Rugby World Cup and the World Cup Challenge mode. On top of these exiting additions, we have introduced all new gameplay features including simplified lineouts and defensive formations. We've topped all this by achieving a whole new feel to the game through all new cameras that allow unprecedented view of all the action on the field.

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Thanks to the groundbreaking EA SPORTS™ Century Stick control system, batting has become more intuitive, responsive and rewarding than ever. For the first time in a cricket game, players can enjoy full control over foot choice, shot, direction, power and timing, all governed through the use of both analogue sticks. Allied to new cameras that deliver a more natural behind-the-stumps batting perspective and a wider view of the field, cricket has never been so easily accessible.

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

The good news: *NAG* managed to get a few beta keys for the recent online trial of *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. **The bad news:** An average ping of 390. It was hell to play so remember that next time you plan on thinking any bad thoughts about *NAG*.

MOST PEOPLE ARE SAYING that this is *Battlefield* meets *Quake*, so to appease the masses this will be more of a look at the game based on that – incorrect – assumption. The similarities are essentially on the surface and the only real parallel you can draw is that both games are all about eliminating online opponents with the battlefront moving backwards and forwards based on which side has the better players.

The game involves two warring sides, the GDF [human global defence force] and the Strogg [alien bad guys]. Each round sees both sides either defending or attacking specific objectives such as planting explosives, disabling shields or simply capturing a spawn point closer to the main objective. In *Quake Wars*, this single objective game dynamic mimics *Unreal Tournament 2004* [the Assault game mode] more than *Battlefield 2* or *2142*. In *Battlefield*, the action is essentially distilled down to capturing as many flags as possible and holding them until the enemy tickets reach zero [the more flags you hold the quicker the opposing forces' tickets deplete]. Bottom line, *Quake Wars* is more of an elaborate combination of *UT 2004* and *BF*

2 / 2142, and in case all of the above isn't clear enough, this is a very good thing.

Another interesting difference is that the objectives are class based and players can decide if they want to participate in the major objectives, secondary objective or simply just enter the game to see how many enemies they can kill. Naturally, if you play the game as nature intended, you'll do a lot better when it comes to experience and awards – not to mention that warm fussy feeling you get when you know you've just made the critical difference in an epic struggle.

For more on what makes *Quake Wars* unique, you have to look at the two different sides and some of their special abilities. All the usual classes are on offer: Soldier, Medic, Engineer, Field Ops and Covert Ops for the GDF and Aggressor, Technician, Constructor, Oppressor and Infiltrator on the Strogg side. Both sides have specific roles for the different classes. Only the Soldier class [or Aggressor class on the Strogg team] has access to the HE Charge [High Explosive Charge], which means only they, for example, can destroy the sewer gates on the level. If nobody spawns

as a Soldier then that objective will never be achieved. This makes for varied usage across all the different classes, but considering *Battlefield* is a little more simplistic and forgiving, this kind of restriction might not find favour with all players. The other trick that *Quake Wars* adds to the mix is the ability for certain classes to deploy 'toys', everything from anti-personal turrets to area clearing artillery are on offer and yes, they're all plenty of fun to use. Naturally, some of these deployments can only be made in territory your team occupies so those overachievers thinking they can covertly set up an anti-personal turret in the enemy's base are going to come up a little short. There are also plenty of interesting vehicles to pilot and drive [especially on the Strogg team], grenades, hacking tools, third eye cameras and so on. There's a lot more complexity on offer in this game, but it does run the risk of being overly complicated, or you can look at it as just being better by offering more than what is available in other games. In terms of graphics and sound nothing should be discussed as this is a Beta release and not optimised for

commercial use, that and the high ping we ended up playing on [which will be solved as we get our own servers] make it impossible to really enjoy the visuals – primarily because they're jumping around too much.

End of the day, if you're looking for direct comparisons you're not going to be able to make them between *Quake Wars* and almost anything else around today although we're sure the respective communities will disagree – we've still got debates raging over which is better between 'identical' hardware platforms. To summarise, the *Battlefield* series is more about finesse and simplicity over *Quake Wars*,, which comes in under the action banner with tons of options [perhaps too many]. That said, *Quake Wars* is really more like *Unreal Tournament 2004* [Assault and Onslaught modes] where it focuses the action around specific areas. It's really nothing like anything else out there and has enough unique selling points to ensure a long and successful tour of duty – it's also another *Quake* game. The ultimate test is going to come a few months after release when the gaming community will get to vote with their precious online time. **NAG**

HANDS ON TESTED

Damn! Did EVERYONE have to choose the same outfit?!

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR KINGDOMS

"Stay not idle upon thy claw-footed throne, my lord, for thy kingdom must grow and feed, and those painted heathens up north are looking pretty tasty."

– Godric the Mad, late advisor to the King

IF YOU DIDN'T INADVERTENTLY learn enough history with 2006's *Medieval II: Total War*, Creative Assembly is throwing more textbook stuff at you, ingeniously disguised as another strategy game, with the enormous *Kingdoms* expansion later this year. Featuring four new campaigns, *Kingdoms* will run the gauntlet from the twelfth-century Crusades in the Holy Land, through the religious squabbles in Eastern and Northern Europe and the outward expansion of the Teutonic Order, to the feudal and civil wars and Viking invasions of Britannia during the following century, and finally the sixteenth-century (re)discovery of the Americas and all that drama. There's a whole lot of new land to claim, so make sure you have a flag.

All told, there are 13 new playable factions and more than 150 new unit types spanning the new campaigns. The New World campaign, for example, trots out Spain (obviously), as well as several of those unfortunate indigenous tribes who really just fell over and died of flu moments after Cortés set a pointy gold-buckled shoe on the beach. We assume Creative Assembly will take a few practical liberties and draw this one out a little longer for dramatic tension. And we really want to see a head rolling down a ziggurat. The Crusades campaign, on the other hand, offers the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch (where the Holy

Hand Grenades come from), Egypt, the Turks, and the kohl-eyed Byzantines. The expansion also debuts the new Hero units, including legendary rival Crusades champs, Richard the Lionheart and Saladin, Scottish ramble-rouser, William "Freeeeedoooom!" Wallace, and the last independent Welsh prince, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. These great leaders of men come packing some nifty abilities to call on when things look a little grim out in the battle lines. Richard the Lionheart, for example, has a rallying cry that will renew troop morale and call back all those naughty deserters who shamelessly fled the field at the first sight of a few hundred little war elephants.

For the first time, factions will be able to convert religions should players deem it a prudent tactical decision. When playing as Lithuania in the Teutonic campaign, you can abandon the old gods and their wicked ways, and convert to Catholicism. You'll lose all your dark pagan sorcery, but you'll enjoy the benefits of contemporary Western technology. New structures include permanent fortresses. These provide crucial defensive and offensive positions between settlements, as well as affordable garrison space for all surplus legions. Seizing and occupying enemy fortresses, moreover, inflict exceedingly crippling blows to the enemy war effort, as control of these stony behemoths is vital to unit and provincial upkeep. Another exciting addition is the ability to issue orders to reinforcement armies while simultaneously controlling your own. Be the lord of the hosts! **NAG**

Tarryn v.d Byl

It's just too peaceful. Break out the giant metal spider!

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

SIMCITY SOCIETIES

IF YOU'RE A FAN of the legendary *SimCity* series, then I suggest that you skip this preview because this is no *SimCity 5*. *SimCity Societies* is a completely new game and to make matters worse, in the eyes of many a good *SimCity* major, Will Wright and Maxis are nowhere near this project (both being too busy working on *Spore*).

President and Director of Titled Mill Studios Development, the company behind this project, Chris Beatrice, warned on its forum that *SimCity Societies* "is not a realistic urban simulation... [but we] make no apologies about what we have managed to create."

And what they have managed to create is something that is intended to appeal to the masses. Even Will Wright has admitted that the *SimCity* series had become too complex for the average player, adding that, "We want to take it back to its roots where somebody who had never heard of *SimCity* can pick it up and enjoy playing it without thinking it was really, really hard." In this vein, most of the player-controlled infrastructure, like zoning and the laying of pipes, was removed from the new title. Players also no longer have to concern

themselves with traffic, pollution and trade.

However, this title is by no means mere child's play. At the start of the game, players will have access to over 300 buildings (this is apparently only one third of the total number of buildings, ranging from a number of architectural periods, which can be unlocked during the game). Each falls into one of three categories: Homes, Workplaces and Venues. Homes serve the obvious purpose of providing housing for the people of the city and come in a wide variety including castles and gingerbread houses, while Workplaces are the structures that generate money. All other buildings, such as shops and bars, fall under the vague title of Venues. Structures can be placed anywhere the player likes and can be manipulated, rearranged and combined to ensure an almost limitless number of possible shapes and designs. Many buildings will offer 'click-on' actions that add a bit of humour to the game.

Each building, through a system of Social Energies, has an effect on the overall attitude of the city by emitting or consuming one of the Energies. There are six Social Energies, consisting of Spirituality, Knowledge, Obedience, Wealth,

Power and Creativity, which can be mixed together to form any number of interesting combinations. For example, a city with many schools and universities as well as government buildings will have Knowledge and Obedience energies, which will result in cameras on every street corner to ensure everyone is obedient. This won't only affect the attitude of the people in the city, but also the overall atmosphere, with the system reacting to the Energies produced. The lighting and music, along with the goals, will change automatically according to the core attitude that the city develops. The buildings that become available as the game progresses will also be dictated by the type of city you're building.

Being more focused on the people living in the city, *SimCity Societies* allows for a much smaller population, whose wants and needs must be attended to. The camera is closer to the ground than other *SimCity* titles, giving players a closer look at the Sims in their city. It may not be one for the fans, but *SimCity Societies* looks set to create a completely new and separate fan base that will be able to share their creations online. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

Some guys took the office paintball games too seriously.

TIME CRISIS 4

Developer→ Namco Bandai | **Publisher→** Namco Bandai | **Genre→** Action | **Release→** TBA

THE *TIME CRISIS* SERIES has gone from a relatively obscure arcade gun game with a pedal for leaning out from behind cover, to a series that somehow manages to pull off a few more innovations with each new iteration (in spite of the limited design framework gun games find themselves in). *House of the Dead* could learn a few lessons from *Time Crisis*, and so could *Virtua Cop*.

Time Crisis 4 (large machine with two guns, two screens and two foot pedals) in arcade features two interesting innovations. In certain scenes, you can point the gun to the edges of the screen to rotate the view around the cardinals to shoot off-screen enemies. Other scenes require you to shoot at your team-mates' screens to defend them when they cannot do it themselves.

The PS3 version is upping the ante a little by throwing in a host of new features in addition to what was in the arcade. Taking advantage of the newly redesigned Guncon peripheral for the PS3, you can now change camera angles and control your characters' movements with the dual analogues on the gun, including crouching and jumping. Exclusive to the console version is a new FPS mode where you can roam freely with a new character, generally turning the game into an FPS.

Multiplayer modes include the standard Full Mission co-op where you blast with a buddy and the return of Crisis Missions, which require stealth and precision. Several mini games even it all out, making *Time Crisis 4* one for the gun game fans. **NAG**

Miktar "Evan Bernard" Dracon

HAIL TO THE CHIMP

Developer→ Wideload Games | **Publisher→** Gamecock | **Genre→** Party | **Release→** 2008

EVER IMAGINED WHAT IT would be like to run for office? What if the position happened to be the king of the jungle? That is what *Stubbs the Zombie* developer, Wideload Games, has promised with its upcoming title, *Hail to the Chimp*. This game will be mainly a party game, meaning that a whole group will enjoy playing at once. It's also the first game of this nature to come out on next-gen consoles like the Xbox 360 and the PS3. The story follows the deposing of the king of the jungle, the lion, after which the rest of the critters decide to try out a democracy. Ten animals will run for office, but only one will become the new king of the jungle.

The gameplay takes on many different forms, but the best way to describe it as would be a party fighter. Run around the various

environments collecting clams and trying to knock others out of the race by stealing their clams. It therefore becomes like a giant free-for-all with every animal out for themselves. By the way, these animals range from armadillos to monkeys and even hippos.

The game also features a team-up ability in which, if you think you can trust another player, you can perform some seriously awesome moves that require two animals. Of course, they may very well turn on you later on down the line, so they may steal your clams.

Hail to the Chimp looks like a lot of fun and is slated for release sometime in 2008. May the elections begin in this political satire! **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

ARMA: QUEEN'S GAMBIT

Developer→ 505 Games | **Publisher→** 505 Games | **Genre→** Action | **Release→** Q3 2007

IT'S THE SELF-PROCLAIMED "MOST realistic tactical combat simulation ever made," and it's about to get its first expansion (we can only assume it's the "most realistic tactical combat simulation expansion ever made"). Named after one of the oldest opening moves in chess, *Queen's Gambit* adds two new story-orientated campaigns, the Rahmadi Conflict and Royal Flush.

The first of these promises to conclude the story begun with *Armed Assault*, staging a large-scale operation within the massively-

fortified Rahmadi Island, and the idyllic sandy shores of nearby Porto Island. Royal Flush, taking place some 18 months after the first bout of hostility, recounts the misadventures of a crack squad of mercenaries tangled up in some sort of suspect government plot or other.

The expansion includes two new multiplayer missions, a 40-player capture-and-hold scenario grandly titled The Battle of Porto, and a six-player cooperative romper called Urban Raid.

Queen's Gambit will also ship with the new 1.08 patch, which adds new vehicles, weapons, characters, arms dealers, resource management features, and a few technical tweaks and enhancements, as well as finally enabling North American players to join the rest of the international *ArmA* community in online multiplayer. **NAG**

Tarryn v.d. Byl

ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT

Developer→ Midway | **Publisher→** Midway | **Genre→** Fighter | **Release→** November 2007

THE LATEST EDITION OF the *Mortal Kombat* series will be coming to the Nintendo DS system in the form of a port. It will contain all the elements of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* as well as the mini game *Puzzle Kombat*, which was originally seen in *Mortal Kombat: Deception*. It will also have all the playable characters that previously were hidden or locked, as well as a few new moves and items, but with a lot more balancing having taken place. Some of the older characters

have been toned down while others have been souped up.

There will also be the return of the arena system with a few layered stages. One, for example, will be the subway in which a player can uppercut someone into the streets above. There will also be a few stage-specific fatalities with which the player can experiment. An example of this would be a pit fatality in Scorpion's lair in which a player can uppercut his opponent into a pit of lava.

The storyline is expected to follow the same direction as that of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, although this storyline was overridden later on with the release of *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*. The game will also feature a multiplayer functionality that uses the DS's Wi-Fi capability. It's expected to be released sometime towards the end of this year and only time will tell how it will fare on the DS system that we have grown to love. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

DO <u>TRY THIS</u> AT HOME
WARNING

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THE SETTLERS VI: RISE OF AN EMPIRE

Developer→ Ubisoft | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Genre→** Strategy | **Release→** October 2007

THE RECENT RELEASE OF *The Settlers II: Anniversary Edition* came on the wave of news that Blue Byte Software was busy developing another *Settlers* title, so far known as *The Settlers VI: Rise of an Empire*. They have promised us that it will bring the series back to its roots while adding new and innovative ideas to the game. For instance, there will now be female settlers with which other settlers might fall in love with or Vikings could come and kidnap. You had better make sure that they're protected. Their relationships with the rest of the populace rely heavily on festivals and celebrations, which you, the player, will organise. The whole point of the game will be to create a totally self-sufficient community in which mining, farming and

various other trades take place. Remember, though, in the previous games a good community had a good road system on which transporting goods ran smoothly. You don't want traffic jams in the middle of a war now, do you?

The graphics look to be in top performance from what has been seen so far and it looks as though *The Settlers VI* might very well be the best in the series if it lives up to what Blue Byte has promised. The *Settlers* series has always been a City Management Sim in essence, but *Settlers VI* seems to incorporate a bit of the god Sims we have seen in the last few years. This is one game worth waiting for and will be released sometime later this year. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

WARHAMMER 40K: SQUAD COMMAND

Developer→ THQ | **Publisher→** THQ | **Genre→** Strategy | **Release→** TBA

BRINGING ALL THE TURN-BASED strategy and action-filled battles of its previous titles right into the palm of your hand, *Warhammer 40K: Squad Command* is making its appearance on the two favourite handhelds, namely the Sony PSP and Nintendo DS.

Claiming to make full use of the portability of both systems, including the DS's dual screens and stylus for the touchscreen, *Squad Command* presents the challenges of both single- and multiplayer modes. In the single-player mode, you, as one of the top Space Marines of the Ultramarines Chapter, must work your way through 13 missions that form part of the storyline, which will feature

cinematic breaks to keep the story moving. All this, while presumably commanding your own squad and fending off any advances from the evil forces that are the Chaos Space Marines.

Multiplayer mode offers the choice between nine maps, ranging in sizes from small to large depending on the number of players participating, as well as nine missions to choose from. Deciding whether they want to join the Imperium of Man or the Forces of Chaos, between two and eight players can team up or battle against one another in the completely interactive and destructible 3D combat zones. In addition, the battles

aren't just local anymore. *Warhammer 40K: Squad Command* is making use of the Wi-Fi connections on each of the handheld systems to allow for global matches too, which means no shortage of opponents and team players. It isn't clear, however, whether there will cross-console play.

Of course, you won't be sent into battle empty handed. Having taken most of its weapons directly from the *Warhammer* universe, the arsenal of more than 20 pieces of weaponry in *Squad Command* will be easily recognised, with the Plasma Gun and Power Fist both making their appearance. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

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Magic Tune
Magic tune software enables you to control brightness, contrast and colour levels by the simple clicks of a mouse. Nothing could more conveniently optimize the way you interface with your computer.

Magic Bright II
Changing the way you view separate images has never been simpler. Select the best mode to meet your viewing environment needs. Text, Internet, Game, Sports and Movie modes are provided. Each can be easily accessed by using the Magic Bright II button.

EVIL

Being evil isn't easy. It's a long and hard trek to the worst of the worst. So here are a few handy tips to keep in mind on your way as the new Overlord.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE SOUL?

An evil Overlord is nothing without his army of minions. However, minions aren't free. In fact, you'll need to kill something to get one. The main currency of the world is the life force found in the creatures inhabiting it. The most common life force is yellow, most commonly found in sheep. Yellow's plentiful, but the other three colours are harder to come by. Green creatures are most common in the Elven forest, while the area next to the graveyard in Heaven's Peak is a good place for Red critters. In fact, you can harvest a lot of life force for all the colours in and around Heaven's peak. One good way is to move back and forth between the sheep fields outside and the sewer entrance inside the city, killing the bugs that respawn when you re-enter an area.

FORGE AHEAD

Your army of minions might be your proverbial iron fist, but your real hands can also be strapped in steel. By finding the three forges in the game, you'll be able to slowly upgrade your helmet, armour and weapon, as well as create new items from better metal (one metal type per forge). Creating something from scratch costs gold, while upgrades cost minions. Depending on the item and how many of what minions you use, you can imbue things with special powers, such as regenerating health and magic, increased damage or magical effects. The better the metal, the more minions you can fit in, but there is a unit cap, so you cannot max out everything. All that also costs minions, which sacrifice themselves into the forge. Nevertheless, it's useful to have some extra support in heavy fights.

ZEN
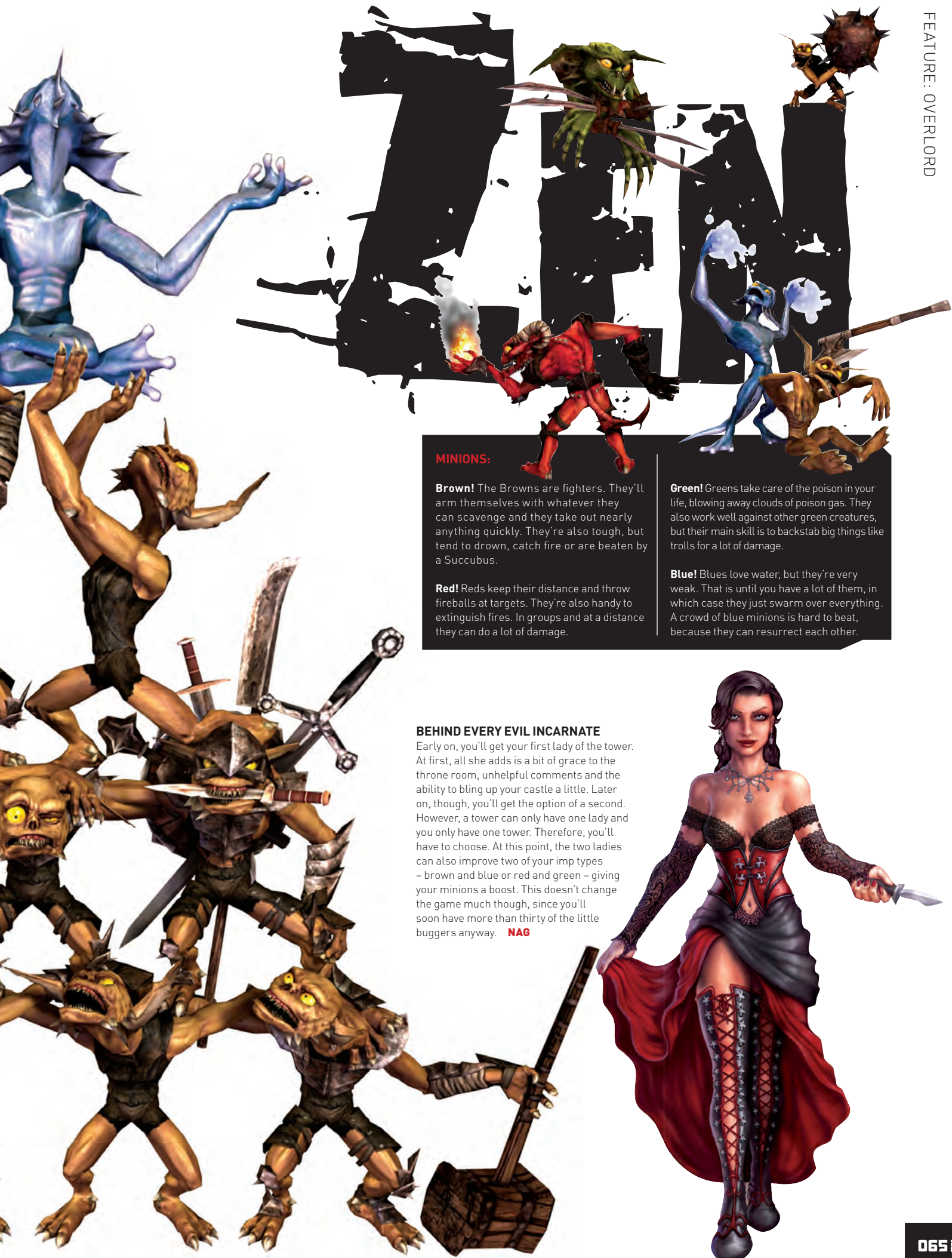
MINIONS:

Brown! The Browns are fighters. They'll arm themselves with whatever they can scavenge and they take out nearly anything quickly. They're also tough, but tend to drown, catch fire or are beaten by a Succubus.

Red! Reds keep their distance and throw fireballs at targets. They're also handy to extinguish fires. In groups and at a distance they can do a lot of damage.

Green! Greens take care of the poison in your life, blowing away clouds of poison gas. They also work well against other green creatures, but their main skill is to backstab big things like trolls for a lot of damage.

Blue! Blues love water, but they're very weak. That is until you have a lot of them, in which case they just swarm over everything. A crowd of blue minions is hard to beat, because they can resurrect each other.

BEHIND EVERY EVIL INCARNATE

Early on, you'll get your first lady of the tower. At first, all she adds is a bit of grace to the throne room, unhelpful comments and the ability to bling up your castle a little. Later on, though, you'll get the option of a second. However, a tower can only have one lady and you only have one tower. Therefore, you'll have to choose. At this point, the two ladies can also improve two of your imp types – brown and blue or red and green – giving your minions a boost. This doesn't change the game much though, since you'll soon have more than thirty of the little buggers anyway. **NAG**

REVIEWS

WHAT WE'RE DOING

CHECKING OUR FACEBOOK PROFILES

Not everyone at *NAG* is a Facebook enthusiast, but those who are can be found at the office late at night, clicking on their Facebook apps and looking at what apps their friends have been clicking on. There was a big burst of enthusiasm a few weeks back about Facebook, and it looked like just about everyone and their brother (who heard about it on 5FM) had a Facebook account. However, a few of the more-dedicated Facebookers admitted that they were getting a little bored with the whole thing. Is Facebook here to stay, or is it just another Internet fad that'll pass with time?

POSTING ON OUR FORUMS

As part of our new online strategy, we've launched a fresh new Forum and Website (which should be publicly available by the time this magazine is on shelves), and we're having a blast. We've bit the bullet, dedicated some proper time and money to the whole thing, and can now promise that there will be no more forum wipes and that users won't have to re-register from this point forward. We'll all be spending a lot more time talking to the *NAG* readers who post on the forums, getting involved in the discussions and adding our input. We're hoping to make the *NAG* Online Forums the absolute best place to go if you want to talk to people about gaming and gaming culture.

GETTING READY FOR RAGE

It's almost time! Can you believe the year has gone by so fast? Soon, very soon, we'll all be up to our proverbial ears in gaming, consoles, PC hardware and a giant 1,500-person LAN, all wrapped up in an awesome gaming expo filled to the brim with stuff to buy, anime to watch and people to meet. *NAG*'s planning to have its own stand this year where we'll be showing off the games we think you should check out. More on that will appear on the Website (www.rageexpo. co.za) and the forums as things start getting finalised. We hope to see you all there!

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS (BETA)

It took quite a bit of nagging and work, but we managed to get a few *Quake Wars* Beta keys and we're digging it. It's a little heavy on the bandwidth right now, but that's probably just because it's still not finished. We're quite fond of how fluid the objectives end up being. Depending on how the round goes, you may be able to select either defending an area or assaulting a forward spawn, and doing so will get you more or less XP depending on how important that objective is. It's a bit like a 'mission within a mission' thing, which brings a lot of focus to the match and helps newcomers better understand what they're supposed to do. We'll have more on *Quake Wars* in the next issue!

RE-LAUNCHING SACM

SA Computer Magazine (another filly in the Tide Media stable) has received a nice face-lift and will be re-launching with its September issue! With a slick, new design and a refined focus as being a technology lifestyle magazine, if you've never checked out *SACM* before, give it a look if you see it on shelf. We're quite proud of how far it's come over the last few years since we adopted it, and believe you (or your parents) might be interested in it.

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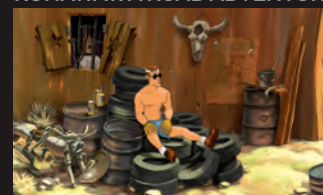
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MMMMMM ... SHINY!
A quick guide to the *NAG* reviews section

PC SPEC: Will this game rape your machine, or make it fly? Check the box at the bottom right for an explanation on our fancy hardware rating system.

VITAL INFO: A game can't survive without these vitals, so you should probably pay attention to them.

BETTER THAN/WORSE THAN: Everything is relative, right? Because of that, we keep making comparisons between games in this space, and try to be funny about it.

SCORE: You only care about this number, we know that. But try to pretend you read the reviews because they're so insightful and informative. Thank you, we love you.

BOTTOM LINE: It all comes down to this, and the words written here will shape the future, moulding it towards gaming excellence.

PLATFORMS: The brightest block is the platform on which the game was reviewed. Dimmer blocks are platforms on which the game also appears. Simple.

GAME NAME: This is the important bit, and you might want to write it down somewhere just in case you need it later.

AWARDS: You won't find these *NAG* awards, given to games of merit, anywhere but in *NAG*. Truth.

ICONS: Check the list on the right for our frikkin' sweet icons, distilling the essence of games even further, just for you.

THE REVIEW ICONS
The *NAG* review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like, while giving us less work to do in the review. Everyone wins, so best memorise this list below and look out for them in the Review score box.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? Careful, it might be Foreign!

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

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

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

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

ALL AGES: These games contain no violence, immoral acts or anything that might narrow the demographic, but they may still be difficult.

KID FRIENDLY: Kids can play this game without needing an adult every five minutes to explain to them what button to press.

16+ RESTRICTION: If you're 16 or over, you are well within your rights to play this game.

18+ RESTRICTION: If you are not yet 18, please put down this game and back away slowly before the police come and arrest you.

MULTIPLAYER: The number on the contoller icon indicates the maximum number of people who can play at at the same time.

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For your convenience, the numbers of the distribution companies

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Apex International	[012] 347-9956	Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
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WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS
PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

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

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

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

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

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

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2 **IS** a bit of a first for the console gaming world. You see, *Gran Turismo* on the PS2 and *Project Gotham Racing 3* on this Microsoft platform are not, despite what many would have you believe, actually driving simulators...

Both of these titles are actually arcade racers. "No" I hear you say, "Arcade racers are things like *Ridge Racer* and *Burnout*." Yep, you're right, but just try to get the 'feel' of your

simulated vehicle in any of these four games I've already mentioned. It isn't really there, is it?

FM2, on the other hand, is more than that. Developer, Turn 10, worked very closely with a variety of automotive organisations, including Toyo Tire & Rubber Co. Ltd. for instance, to collect and then accurately recreate as much real-world driving data as could possibly be crammed onto this DVD and the innards of the next-gen console! As their name suggests,

these guys know a thing or two about racing cars as well, and the Turn 10 team also includes many individuals who race cars as a passionate pastime (in fact, the studio claims that pretty much all of its diverse team are committed petrolheads!).

You can believe them when you play *FM2*, as it does show in the final product. Once you have your head around the analogue triggers on the controller, you can really tap

SECOND OPINION

Forza Motorsport 2 is by far the best racing sim I have ever played - period. It offers everything you'd want and then some. *Forza* can be considered as *GT4* for the 360, and works in pretty much the same way. You choose from hundreds of production cars, stuff some parts in them and go race. Slightly more realistic than *GT4*, the game does over 300 physics calculations every second, So, it's very responsive and realistic. Although the game really needs an HDTV, it doesn't look half bad. It almost feels like graphics were sacrificed for physics. This also includes a full damage model, which makes for lots of fun, especially on LIVE. One hard enough knock and your race is over. *Forza Motorsport 2* features some of the most famous race tracks on earth. If you know the *GT* range, then all the tracks except Monaco feature. The difficulty settings also help bring the game to life for anyone, regardless of their skill level. Changing your difficulty also allows you to win more money, so the going isn't that slow. To progress through the game you complete races, which push both your car and your driver levels up. The higher your level, the cheaper cars and parts become, and the more races you unlock.

However, the races are quite strict on your car's class, so you'll have many, many cars. These cars can be modded. Yes, that's right: engine, shocks, turbos plus some body mods to boot. You can even create custom skins for the cars, so be creative. The performance upgrades are quite extensive: even your tire choice is bigger and more in-depth. However, don't be fooled by the pretty colours. Prove yourself on the race course. Thanks to LIVE, you can compare your career performance to your friends'. All lap and race times are uploaded. You can also improve your technique by watching on-line races on Forza TV. You can race and trade online, but you need a gold account for that. Probably the most impressive part is the game's sound. However, there isn't in-game music, but the menu songs rock. While on the track, the car sound will blow you away. It truly sounds real. So go, run, buy your copy or miss out. Be your own personal Alonso and stake your claim for the flag. Choose your car, choose your track, and let the dice fall where they may.

Eddie Francis

94 OUT OF 100

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ Microsoft | Distributor→ MiDigital | Genre→ Racing

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

into the feel of each individual car (there are more than 300 in the game). This almost tactile connection is further enhanced by track surfaces that appear to be incredibly close to the real thing. You can feel the 'seams' of concrete surfaces slightly and subtly unsettling your racing machine as you attack the bend, for instance, and each track is dotted with small surface imperfections, which you come to know quite intimately with enough laps under your belt!

As the driver, you're able to control your vehicle almost as naturally as a real car, thanks largely to the blistering 60fps framerate at which FM2 runs (as opposed to the 30fps standard, which in more conventional Xbox 360 games is considered more than sufficient). It isn't enough for minute adjustments to a car's attitude at the limit, however, which is why Turn 10 went with the faster rate, and it works beautifully.

Add realistic damage models, which alter the feel of your vehicle as they happen, an AI model, which is by far the most 'human' I have ever experienced, the joys of the Xbox LIVE global multiplayer environment, as well as a Career mode that's addictive in its progression, and you have possibly the most enjoyable racing simulator ever coded!   **NAG**

Russell Bennett

GT4

BETTER THAN

Nothing

WORSE THAN

(NOTHING)

BOTTOM LINE

Finally a reason not to buy a PS3 just for the next GT.

91

OUT OF 100

FLATOUT: ULTIMATE CARNAGE

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO say that *FlatOut: Ultimate Carnage* is the game its predecessor wanted to be. It definitely offers an experience you'll love your 360 for - for many months to come. I remember getting my copy of the first game as a birthday present, thus ensuring none of my loved ones got to see me for the next couple of days. Much the same happened with the latest instalment. I arrived an hour before the game did, just because I couldn't wait anymore. At first, the game seemed blurry. Then, I wiped the tears of joy from my eyes, revealing a most glorious sight: mud, boxes, bus stops, all were at my mercy, and I had no mercy left. You pick your car, same idea as the first game - make it big, make it heavy. *FlatOut* truly is the game for big-block, rear-wheel drive

monsters of the road. You start in the Derby class. Beat-up, rusty, several owner models are your choice. Drive fast and smart and you may soon find yourself in the Streetcar class, the top of the pile (but not before stopping over in the Racing class). Sleek, flat, and thunderously fast. Yes, these are the cars you love to crash, but do remember to pick your vehicle wisely and upgrade well. There are lots of parts and combinations to choose from, but only winners have money to spend on upgrades. Winning's the tricky part. You see, much like the first *FlatOut*, you'll need to change your driving style. Remember to brake and say this mantra: Fast in, slow out. (Keep hands firmly placed on controller - this is car racing, not waxing.) Eventually you'll become confident enough to drift, though

We'd joke about rush hour, but there's nothing funny about traffic jams

**NAG >>>>
MUST
PLAY** ★

RRP→ R599 | Publisher→ Empire Interactive | Distributor→ MiDigital | Genre→ Racing

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

It all started when someone stole a parking spot.

you won't get any boost for that. You have to knock stuff over for boost, and there is an art to boosting, or well, getting boost without crashing. Now that you have the basics, it's time to attempt the tracks. Ranging from cities to farms, from nowhere to construction sites, the destruction is equal everywhere. Beautifully rendered physics objects will fool and confuse you, though these objects give you boost: their sole intention is to flip you over and make you the upside-down-driver 9000. Many other objects, like walls, are strategically placed for your discomfort. Many objects can't be driven through, but are mistaken as possible shortcuts. To avoid these, you'll need to be alert. Luckily, a perfect mix of sound effects, music and ambient sound will be delivered via your ears. Every splash, ding and unforeseen drama should be noted in this way. However, don't forget your visual sense as many, many things and other blurs will come tumbling toward, over and mostly into you. It's really amazing how many physics objects move across the screen at any given time. Don't forget the dust, the wonderful, beautiful dust. If your experience differs, it means that you're in front where nothing really happens. However, don't worry: driver error will soon ensure that you fall all the way back to the middle of the pack. The same counts for the delightful AI. Smart enough not to ask about the wife and kids, the AI will attack and devour you in a second, so be nice-ish. Soon you'll crave the extra events, which are much like the first game. You know, long jump, high jump and so on, but more importantly, Destruction Derby has been added. So, connect to LIVE and crash into some old friends. This won't teach you to be a better race driver, but who cares? Your car isn't the one on fire, so you win. **MAG**

The first FlatOut

BETTER THAN

The next FlatOut

WORSE THAN

BOTTOM LINE

Better than the first FlatOut; better than most games.

94
OUT OF 100

RRP→ R599| **Publisher**→ Codemasters | **Distributor**→ MiDigital | **Genre**→ Action/Adventure

| PC |
| PS2 |
| PS3 |
| PSP |
| XBOX |
| 360 |
| DS |
| Wii |
| GBA |
| MOB |

Help that old lady across the street!

OVERLORD

THIS IS GREAT. YOU rise from the ashes as a new evil Overlord, ready to stamp his steel-covered fist on the world. Even better, it's morally cool. The heroes who put you in your grave in the first place all have gone power-mad or devastatingly morose, so your revenge will have some side benefits for the local population. Besides, if they allowed the good guys to turn so rotten, they deserve whatever great vengeance and furious anger is struck down upon them, which just happens to be yours. However, best of all, you have your own private army of Gremlins. Okay, if you were born after 1986, you probably don't know what I'm talking about. For the rest of you, you have an army of friggin' Gremlins! Sure, they call them imps, goblins, or something, but all that was missing was a few Mohawks and a microwave scene. If you're still not with me, go rent *Gremlins*. However, suffice to say, they're very destructive, dangerous creatures with a thing for causing chaos.

In *Overlord* you control such a horde, which grows as you find certain pillar pieces in the game worlds, eventually growing over 40 strong. You have four different types, each with different abilities. The soldier Browns are your staple, since they fight well, arm themselves and only need the slaughter of a few sheep to bolster their ranks. The Greens, Blues and Reds are weaker, but have their uses; especially the latter's ranged fireball attacks. Since no one locally seems to have played *Pikmin*, the system is new - the game presents different obstacles and situations that will require the different abilities of your horde to overcome. For example, Greens can

remove poison clouds and backstab large opponents. It doesn't get horribly technical. Most of the time an army of Browns and a few Reds get you through nearly anything, providing it's not in water or a monster that requires a special attack (such as the wizard's floating eyeballs, which are vulnerable to Greens or Succubi who fall fast under Red fireballs). Apart from traversing the various areas – green meadows, dark Elven forests, windy Dwarven highlands, Halfling burrows, a city near a swamp and a ninja-filled desert – your Overlord will among many things also gather three forges for his own upgrades: gold to decorate the tower and a choice between two ladies, each whom enhance two different types of your goblins. It's not particularly deep, but it's cute and fun. You don't even really need to fight, though giving a hand at times keeps your horde numbers healthy. However, you just have to point (or, with the right analogue, sweep) them towards what you would like killed/maimed/destroyed/ransacked/pillaged/vandalised. The bigger your horde, the more effective they become.

Overlord is great, so it's tempting to gloss over its issues. There are a few: the camera sometimes moves too slowly; the in-game cut-scenes and voice acting are pretty rough; some of the horde would at times briefly stop responding, so mild control issues surface. The lack of a map is also annoying at first, but you'll do plenty of walking around. I think the game's biggest flaw is that after a while it starts to rush the story and doesn't offer any real sub-quests or other distractions.

Nevertheless, despite all that, *Overlord* is a pleasure to play and has enough charm to distract you from its flaws. There simply aren't enough games like this and *Overlord* does it well enough to shine. In fact, I hope Mr Miyamoto is taking notes for *Pikmin 3*... **NAG**

James Francis

NAG ⟩⟩⟩ EDITOR'S CHOICE

KINDA LIKE
Pikmin

FOR FANS OF
Fable

BOTTOM LINE
Sure, it has problems, but damn, you have a HORDE!

90 OUT OF 100

skate.™

www.ea.co.za

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ EA South Africa | Genre→ Fighting

You have to be this tall to fight me.

The Nike/Reebok rivalry gets nasty.

DEF JAM: ICON

PICTURE IT: SOME OF the world's most famous rappers slugging it out against each other while fine rap tunes boom in the background. We don't know who came up with the idea for *Def Jam: Icon*, but we certainly like it.

The game's greatest asset is that it adds something new and different to any other game out there. And that's always good. Sure, it lacks polish and needs more depth, but for a first-time effort, it hovers on the above-average list.

The game starts you off as a gang-banger for a big-shot hip-hop producer. You help him out by getting rid of a couple of his ex-associates. Pretty soon, he's inviting you to build up the label by signing new acts (such as Sean Paul, Ludacris and Big Boi), while pandering to their every need and promoting the hell out of their singles. Interspersed with building up the label is the game's main focus: fighting. Fighting with promoters, fighting with rival artists and, heck, even fighting with some fairly nasty player-haters.

However, fighting ain't what it used to be. In *Icon*, you have to time your attacks to coincide with the hip-hop beats that accompany the duel. This is done by spinning an impromptu turntable and unleashing interactive scenery on your foe. For example, a burst fire hydrant can knock an enemy down to the ground in

the hood just as a broken camera crane can in a TV studio. Knock down an opponent and, before he gets up, knock him down again with a fine piece of timing and a helpful bit of scenery. It needs some work, sure, but it's a novel concept and proves rather satisfying.

The ability to upload your own tracks is bad (and by bad we mean good!). It seems surreal beating up Young Jeezy while listening to Beethoven. But there you go.

The fight scenes, although refreshing at first because of their unique approach, do start to become a little bit repetitive as they're forced down your throat. There are just too many fights and too many faceless opponents, and the storyline becomes blurred as a result. What seems far more interesting is the 'Build a Label' component. *Icon* has missed a trick here, because, while this mode should be taking centre stage, it remains firmly on the periphery. Managing artists and promoting records while updating your bling and, naturally, your girl, should have been more on the agenda.

Still, the game entertains and has a kicking soundtrack. *Icon* may not have other fighting games in a spin, but at least it has ushered in something original. Here's hoping it mixes the genre up a bit. Peace out! **NAG**

Ryan Kalis

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

BETTER THAN
Trying to decipher anything that comes out of Sean Paul's mouth

WORSE THAN
Watching Kenny Rogers wasting The Hoff

16+

BOTTOM LINE

(See *NAG* May 2007, pg. 87) A serious step backwards for the series.

68
OUT OF 100

All that tech and no one brought a ladder

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ EA | Distributor→ EA South Africa | Genre→ Strategy

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

COMMAND & CONQUER 3

OKAY, FINE. IT'S A real-time strategy game on a console. The novelty is still frivolous, but it's time to accept that a long-held gaming point of contention has been resolved: the RTS has actually managed to expand beyond the PC onto consoles. It only happened recently: two years ago you had to either play a really clumsy PC port or a strategy game developed from scratch for a console. Why the former sucked is obvious, while the latter just missed the point. An RTS in the most basic sense of the word isn't the same if it's kinda like an RTS. The problem here is the input system, not how the game plays. Not that console strategy games are bad, but they aren't like *WarCraft* or *Command & Conquer* - the generation born from the Westwood/Blizzard rival years.

Whoever cracked the formula I don't know, but I first saw the system working on *Battle for Middle-earth II*. That game was drab, but EA capitalised on the experience when it developed *Command & Conquer 3* for the 360 – and this is the one people will remember. *C&C 3* on the 360 makes sense and I suspect quite a few non-PC players will become fans of the series. Briefly, the *C&C* series has a main canon that surrounds the green mineral, Tiberium, which instigates a war between the Global Defense Initiative (GDI) and militant/terrorist cult, Brotherhood of Nod. These two sides have been duking it out for a while, and when we arrive in *C&C 3* land, the Tiberium has chewed up most of Earth's

surface, instigating an Armageddon-like last-stand between the two factions. Then an alien race shows up and everything goes mushroom-shaped. *C&C* defined the "build high-tech forces and blow up everything" family of RTSs, as well as super-cheesy, full-motion video clips and a deep impression that you are the rock and roll general of the war. Rock on, brave soldiers: die screaming while I sneak a few engineers around the back and build an Obelisk of Light in the enemy base. There may be bigger RTS games, but nothing makes you feel as bad ass. Maybe it's the soundtrack, or perhaps the large group of flame-throwing tanks you just ran through someone's base.

C&C 3 really takes you back to that era, which isn't surprising since the developers really recycled a lot to bring back the nostalgia. Like the PC version, it's fun, bar a few frustrations and annoying missions. The user interface, though, borders on perfect. Nevertheless, it's also controller-specific and things like unit selecting works a bit differently. It's not anything non-PC gamers would notice, though, and if you go with it, even mouse users will find *C&C 3* very friendly to control. However, it would have been nice to preset and jump between camera angles to compensate for rotating it. Moving around is a different matter and very responsive. *C&C 3* doesn't compromise on RTS expectations (purist concerns aside) or controller fundamentals, finally bringing a

console RTS control scheme everyone can talk about. The game's fun too, so if you like what you see... Rock and Roll! **NAG**

James Francis

NAG〉〉〉 EDITOR'S CHOICE ★

C&C 3 PC

AS GOOD AS

Crazy Commander

FOR FANS OF

BOTTOM LINE

The controls work well and the game doesn't suck. Rock and Roll!

90
OUT OF 100

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

PC Spec →

Genre → Survival Horror

Distributor → Apex Interactive

Publisher → Lexicon Entertainment

RRP → R199

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

PENUMBRA OVERTURE: EPISODE 1

"AS MY FINGERTIP RESTED on the incinerator's ignition switch, I stopped and thought, for the first time, about what it was to take the life of another human being. Which parts of me had to die themselves, before I could go through with this? I watched the switch flick down and turned away as his screams rose above the roar of the fire. He took three minutes to die."

Overture started life as a free, downloadable tech demo developed by Swedish developer, Frictional Games (and is still available for download at http://frictionalgames.com/penumbradownload). The tech demo was an engine demonstration, showing off interesting physics and rendering techniques via a short, almost-survival-horror game that managed to get enough attention for Frictional to consider turning it into an actual game.

Even though *Penumbra: Overture* is listed as a first-person adventure game, right from the start the survival horror tones are apparent and come across with remarkable clarity. With obvious inspirations drawn from *Lovecraft*, the first episode takes place predominantly in an abandoned mine in Greenland. The lead protagonist, Philip, is a 30-year-old physicist who suddenly finds himself in possession of a letter from his father, urging him not to examine the strange circumstances surrounding the disappearance of his father.

What makes *Penumbra* interesting is how you physically interact with the world. You could say that interactions are context-based, but interactions lean more towards intuitive control instead of everything being a single button-press. An example: if you want to open a drawer in *Penumbra*, you look at the handle and hold down the mouse button while dragging the mouse back, as if physically opening a drawer. Opening a door involves pushing or pulling, physically manipulating the object in the game. This is an incredibly tactile experience and it really pulls you into the atmosphere. *Penumbra* makes clever use of its physics and even manages a few tricks the bigger development studios could learn from.

Physics aside, the various creatures found in *Penumbra* also react in a much more logical way to sound, smell and light. Spiders shy away from light, turning your flashlight into an effective weapon. However, *Penumbra* isn't about combat. Direct combat often ends in death, and your best bet is usually to try and outwit your opponent. The Lovecraftian hues come into effect especially around creatures. Looking directly at a creature for too long, even if you're perfectly hidden and they cannot find you, will cause Philip to panic much to his own detriment. You'll have to keep creatures in your peripheral vision, heightening the tension and horror. There aren't many creatures in *Penumbra*. The real focus seems to be on the story and atmosphere - two areas where *Penumbra* excels.

As an episodic, first-person survival horror, *Penumbra* has a fair amount of playtime and we're curious to see how the future episodes shape up. The game does require a bit of a hefty machine to enjoy fully due to the impressive lighting and physics system, but you can lower the detail settings enough to make it work on most gaming machines. **NAG**

Miktar "omgwtfspidershelp" Dracon

NAG ⟫⟫ MUST PLAY ★

Cold Fear (PC)
BETTER THAN

Clive Barker's Undying (PC)
WORSE THAN

16+

BOTTOM LINE

Survival horror game fans won't be disappointed with this remarkably tangible, slick and frightening offer.

85 OUT OF 100

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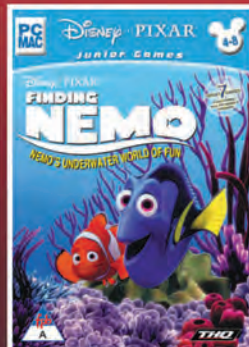
Finding Nemo
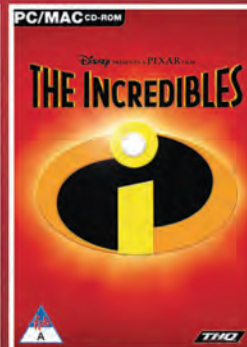
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PC

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Okay, there's *nothing* stable about that guy

RRP→ TBA | Publisher→ Nintendo | Distributor→ TBA | Genre→ Action

SUPER PAPER MARIO

ETERNALLY-FOILED-BY-MARIO BAD GUY, BOWSER, and Princess I'm-In-Another-Castle, Peach, get married, and then things start getting really weird. New villain, Count Bleck, and his menagerie of cronies start destroying world after world and only Mario, with his newly-acquired dimension-flipping ability, can stop them. What follows is a genuinely epic and humorous adventure spanning several imaginative worlds filled with ingenious situations, plenty of innuendo and quite a few in-jokes that not only poke fun at the *Mario* universe, but even those that return to it time and time again.

Unlike *Thousand Year Door*, which was an RPG, *Super Paper Mario* goes back to its platforming roots and you literally jump on enemies to defeat them (unless you switch to Bowser, who joins your party later in the game, and flame them with his fire attack). Certain enemies require a touch more finesse than just a straightforward head-jump, and the inclusion of various RPG-style status effects, such as poison, mixes things up a little. You do level up, which increases your attack power and maximum health, but *Super Paper Mario* is firmly rooted in the action genre, and it works.

Much of the game is a series of moments that enforces the obligatory exclamation of "Awesome!" separated by exploration and dialogue. Some moments are true technological showcases while others are just downright creative to the point of making you wonder why other games don't put in this much effort. The experience is heart-felt and the game rings clear as a bell in terms of solid design. You'll never feel cheated by bad programming or finicky controls, because the game simply doesn't have them.

While at first glance the game world may appear two-dimensional, laced with a warmth of *Mario* nostalgia, once you get into the whole '2D to 3D flip' thing, everything suddenly starts to make an eerie kind of sense. Pressing the 'A' button rotates the view from the side to the back, showing you previously-hidden things behind innocent blocks, or exposing behind-the-scenes humour or a hidden path. Intelligent Systems use this effect masterfully and you never know just what they're going to do next - possibly the best motivation for playing a game.

The Wiimote sees mild use throughout the game. Its main function is that of a kind of flashlight when you point it at the screen to uncover hidden doors or blocks. You can also flick it after you've jumped on an enemy for some extra flair, mostly for fun and a higher score. In a way, it seems better that the Wiimote wasn't used more extensively as it would've come across as overbearing.

What's really odd is that Bowser and Peach are technically still married when the credits start rolling... **NAG**

Miktar "Bowser, duh!" Dracon

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

NAG〉〉〉
MUST PLAY
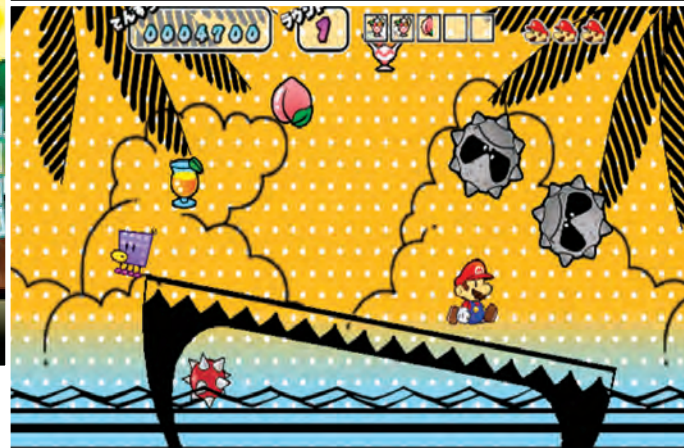
New Super Mario Bros (DS)

AS GOOD AS

Paper Mario: Thousand Year Door (GC)

AS GOOD AS

BOTTOM LINE

There's simply nothing wrong with Super Paper Mario, other than the fact that the experience is finite.

90 OUT OF 100

Genre→ Third-person Shooter | Distributor→ SK Games | Publisher→ Sony Computer Entertainment

RRP→ R265 | PSP

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

SOCOM:
U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRY of Adjikistan (don't bother looking for it on a map, its location is a highly classified secret) is beset by marauding, opium-peddling paramilitary scallywags, and it's up to the intrepid US Navy SEAL frogmen to ramble about shooting stuff, and wonder why they never seem to do anything in the water. It's all in the name of Freedom, and Liberty, and Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Adjikistan.

Its predecessor was a big hit back in 2005, and *SOCOM 2* is doing a splendid job of keeping the franchise's sterling reputation intact. This is a fully-featured, mission-orientated, third-person, squad-based tactical shooter. It's also exceedingly awesome.

Along with all the things you'd reasonably expect (guns, stuff to bolt onto your guns), the game sports a few innovative little features. For example, when tackling the local poppy plantation, you could simply mow down everyone on the business end of your crosshairs, like the painted mercenary you've always wanted to be. Alternately, you could be a little more diplomatic, considering these goons are just misunderstood locals being exploited by foreign investors, and rifle-butt them into submission, then cuff the sods. This kind and gentle approach will earn the gratitude of their long-suffering wives (well, it's called Local Influence in the game), granting you access to some nifty black-market wares next time you step into town.

Completing mission objectives (as well as bonus objectives) bags you some cool stuff called Command Equity: a sort of intangible currency used to buy supply drops and air strikes before deploying into a new mission. Whenever you feel the need to stock up on flash bangs and chewing gum, or carpet bomb the snoozy hamlet just over the ridge, you can radio in and enjoy the sweetest fruits of your labour.

By dint of the gameplay's depth, getting to grips (literally) with the interface requires some diligent attention. Every button does double duty, depending on whether it's tapped or held in, and may have even third or fourth functions here and there (items in the pop-up inventory display, for example, are selected using designated buttons). It's not as ghastly as it sounds, however, and the control layout is efficient and reasonably intuitive. If you're feeling overwhelmed, there's always the comprehensive in-game help just a button-press away.

SOCOM 2 is in the premier class of handheld shooters, and certainly one of the finest all-round titles for the PSP. With quite a few recent firecrackers, and the upcoming *God of War: Chains of Olympus*, is the PSP in danger of becoming a very respectable little platform? Stay tuned. **NAG**

Tarryn "Move to Crosshairs" van der Byl

NAG >>> MUST PLAY ☆

KIND LIKE
Cross country hiking, but with guns

FOR FANS OF
Cross country hiking with guns

BOTTOM LINE
It's Ghost Recon on the go-go-go!

86
OUT OF 100

SANDMAN
LONESTAR

30/120

29/120

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

HOSPITAL TYCOON

RRP→ R300 | **Publisher→** Codemasters | **Distributor→** MiDigital | **Genre→** Simulation | **PC Spec→** 1 2 **3** **4** 5

ESSENTIALLY, *HOSPITAL TYCOON* IS the spiritual successor to Bullfrog's *Theme Hospital*. The only problem is that instead of being a step up in terms of gameplay, it has been dumbed down. For example, there are no longer options to assign queues, no more speedy emergencies as well as no surprise inspections by unwanted diplomats. The game does, however, keep the same sense of humour that we all came to love in *Theme Hospital* and it includes some really hilarious diseases such as Mummifried or Golf Course Syndrome, or as we medical tycoons like to call it, GCS.

While running the hospital, you'll also be the star of your very own hospital drama show where you can play cupid to your employees if wanted. This style of play is even taken a step further where, if you play through the campaign, you'll notice that it's split up into seasons with a few episodes in each.

Graphics-wise, *Hospital Tycoon* does little to stand out from the rest. Nevertheless, this doesn't really matter when one considers how much of a cartoon this game really is, which is brilliant. *Hospital Tycoon* might not be 100% like *Theme Hospital*, but it sure is close enough for those old diehard fans. You can, however, take comfort in knowing that you'll never have to shoot another rat hyped up on speed ever again. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

BOTTOM LINE
A spiritual successor to *Theme Hospital,* but lacks that certain X-factor.

76 OUT OF 100

RUNAWAY: A ROAD ADVENTURE

RRP→ R129 | **Publisher→** Focus Home Entertainment | **Distributor→** Apex Interactive | **Genre→** Adventure | **PC Spec→** **1** **2** 3 4 5

OKAY, LET'S TAKE STOCK for a moment here. We need to figure out how to wrangle those batteries from that rather slippery janitor downstairs. That way, we can get this grotty little voice recorder working again, fool the thermal chamber into opening, and get that Mayan mask. Using the gargantuan ruby lodged in its forehead, I'm almost certain we can bump up that laser's power a few crucial notches, and get this crucifix thing cleaned up so we can stick it in that fancy pants scanner and identify its origin. Once that's done, we'll have to plot our way past those goons outside, so we can get out of this creepy museum and on with the road adventure. Let's hop it!

This game documents the giddy misadventures of a pair of somewhat unlikely companions thrown together by a somewhat unlikely twist of fate. Brian, a geeky university graduate on his way to Berkeley, meets Gina, a nightclub dancer of the 'exotic' variety, when he drives into her (it's speed dating with a twist!). She's desperately fleeing a squadron of local thugs, who've apparently dusted her old dad, and are now looking to grind her for information she doesn't have. Old-school adventure ensues, and along the way, you'll learn an innovative method of grinding coffee, discover that – under the right conditions – peanuts can actually melt in the sun, and even dabble in a spot of casual necromancy. **NAG**

Tarryn "She points! She clicks!" van der Byl

What do you mean it gets bigger?

BOTTOM LINE
Well, it's not *Curse of Monkey Island*, but it's not *Space Quest IV,* either.

75 OUT OF 100

Alas, the enemy well survived

CALL OF DUTY: ROADS TO VICTORY

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Activision | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action/FPS

YET ANOTHER WORLD WAR II themed game - shudder! As the bowl of petunias in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* said, "Oh no, not again!" These games are two-a-penny, and yet developers and publishers keep churning them out. Sometimes, a gem is created. Other times, the resulting product can only be described as "unnecessary." Sadly, this is the case with *Call of Duty: Roads to Victory*, even though it may not be immediately apparent. In fact, the game is quite entertaining for a while, in a mindless sort of way. This game is totally linear, which will appeal to some and not to others. To us, it feels like we are being deprived of the ability to make decisions, which is often the most compelling element of a game. Therefore, you'll never find yourself making tough choices or trying to figure out the most tactically sound approach to an objective: there is one way to do anything, and you either do it so, or you die.

From a technical point of view, the game isn't bad at all. The control scheme is quite good for a shooter being played with buttons, though the auto-aim feature is both a blessing and a curse. It works so well and is so forgiving that you basically don't really aim… Ever. At times, though, especially when there are several targets on the screen simultaneously, it becomes impossible to prioritise targets as desired, and becomes necessary to first eliminate the enemies that the auto-aim chooses to designate. Graphics and sound are pretty good, if uninspiring and lacking in variety. In general, that's the problem with the game as whole: the novelty soon wears off. A variety of missions and tasks is presented as an attempt to ease the dullness, but this ultimately fails. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

BOTTOM LINE
A technically sound game that is sadly not entertaining.

57
OUT OF 100
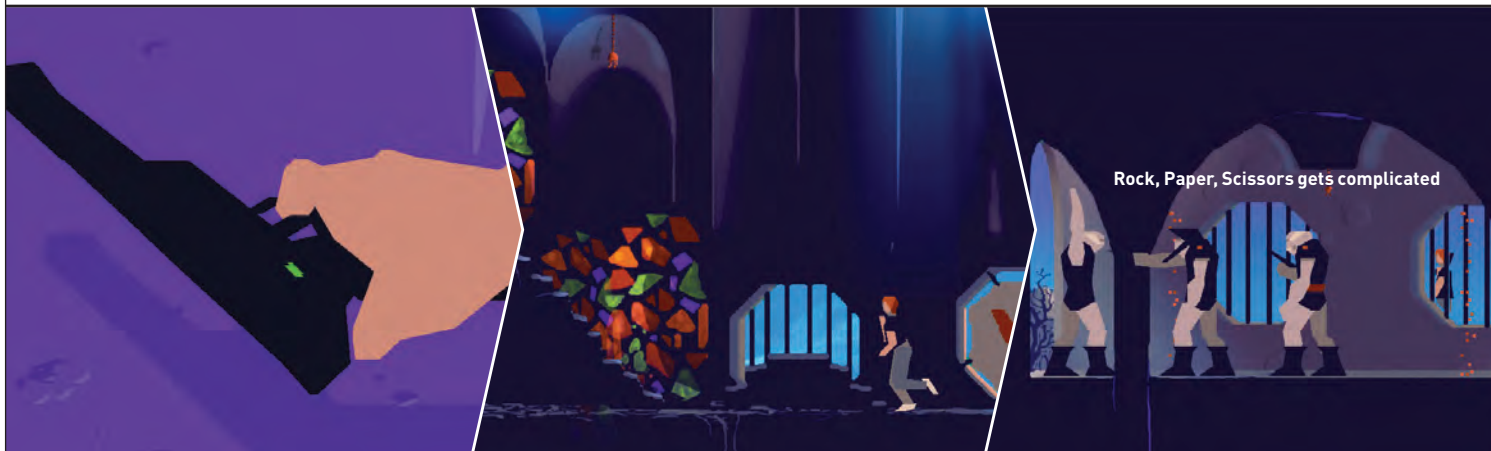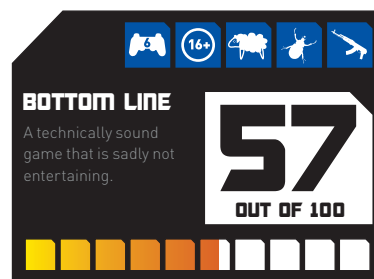
Rock, Paper, Scissors gets complicated

ANOTHER WORLD

RRP→ R199 | **Publisher→** Lexicon Entertainment | **Distributor→** Apex Interactive | **Genre→** Action | **PC Spec→** 1 2 3 4 5

TIME HAS A WAY of sneaking up on you. In this case, it was the realisation that it has been over 15 years since *Another World* was first unveiled. If you have never seen or heard of *Another World* before, you might wonder what all the fuss is about. Simply put, it blew people away with its stunning, strikingly fluid visuals (full-motion video and CG were uncommon in games at the time) as well as its (at the time) unparalleled experience filled with exciting scripted events and scenes that truly innovated. The collectors' edition is a worthy tribute to *Another World* in that it gives the original a once-over, sprucing up some background art and the sounds, as well as letting the game run at a much higher resolution than originally intended. The original, un-tampered game can still be played, but in all honesty, the updated version is the more appealing of the two.

The 15th Anniversary edition also comes with excellent bonus features: a lengthy 'Making Of' with *Another World* creator and designer, Eric Chahi, talking about his thoughts behind the game; a Developer Diary (a PDF document); a Technical Handbook (another PDF); as well as all thirteen tracks from the original soundtrack in MP3 format. It's a pleasure to see the original treated with the level of reverence it deserves. However, be warned: *Another World* remains one of the most unforgiving games ever developed and it still requires zen-like patience. But it's worth it. **NAG**

Miktar "Rotoscoped" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE
still manages to look good after all these years, but really needs a quicksave.

80
OUT OF 100
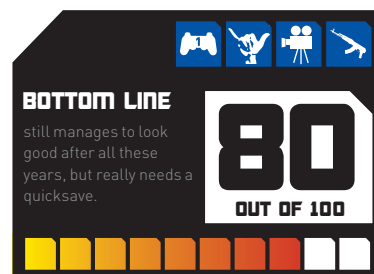
14°C Colder

ASUS EN8600GT/2DHT/256M
Innovative Cooling Solutions

With current graphics card trends concentrating on performance and heat reduction, ASUS, through extensive R&D, has come up with a revolutionary new fan design to provide an efficient graphics card cooling solution.

Excellent Graphical Performance

The ASUS EN8600GT/2DHT/256M makes use of Nvidia's newly launched GeForce 8600GT Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) to maximize usage of NVIDIA's unified architecture with GigaThread™ technology. This architecture, together with full support for NVIDIA SLI™ technology and Microsoft's DirectX 10 and Shader Model 4.0 complements graphical enhancements from Microsoft® Windows Vista™ to provide dramatic and complex special effects. The ASUS EN8600GT will also feature true 128-bit floating point high dynamic-range (HDR) lighting and NVIDIA® Quantum Effects™ technology; and will be able to support OpenGL® 2.0.

Handy Bundled Utilities

Bundled together with the ASUS EN8600GT are some useful applications to help users get the most out of their graphics cards. ASUS's Gamer OSD is a useful application that helps boost graphics card performance and allows chatting with up to 8 people for video conferencing without exiting the game - delivering overclocking and chat options during real-time gameplay. ASUS's SmartDoctor is yet another useful application that aids users in monitoring and boosting their graphics card performance. It is able to provide safer overclocking options and monitor temperature and control the fan speed for easier manual overclocking.

Utilizing the best of innovative technology and exclusive applications, the ASUS EN8600GT is able to offer superb and realistic visuals; and also support a variety of visual solutions for added entertainment options - while maintaining cooler temperatures for great performance.

Innovative Fan Design

The ASUS EN8600GT also utilizes a new generation of cooling fans to effectively dissipate heat build-up. Additionally, with 25% more surface area, the heatsink makes for better cooling. This new cooling solution is thus able to lower temperatures by up to 14°C for the EN8600GT when compared to reference design graphic cards.
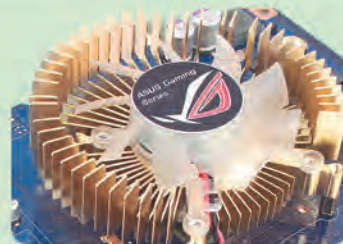
Unique Flower-Shaped Fansink Design

	Temperature °C
ASUS EN8600GT	68.5
Generic Fansink	82.5

40   50   60   70   80   90   100
Temperature °C

| PC |
| PS2 |
| PS3 |
| PSP |
| XBOX |
| 360 |
| DS |
| Wii |
| GBA |
| MOB |

DRAGON'S LAIR HD

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ Digital Leisure Inc. | Distributor→ Digital Leisure Inc. | Genre→ Interactive film | Game requirements→ Blu-ray Disc player

ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN ARCADES in 1983, using the doomed LaserDisc format, *Dragon's Lair* was never as much a videogame as it was an interactive film. It tells the animated tale of Dirk the Daring, a none-too-bright but all-too-valiant knight and his quest to rescue Daphne, the archetypal damsel in distress, from a castle filled with traps set by an evil wizard. Instead of allowing free control over the lead character, *Dragon's Lair* is simply an animated film chopped up into individual scenes. During each scene, you need to press the correct button (either up, down, left, right or the 'sword' button), and Dirk will take an action. Pick incorrectly, and you'll witness one of a myriad of death

scenes. Make the correct choice, and the game proceeds. Twenty-four years later, and playing the game is still simply an exercise of memorising the correct button inputs, but this time with remastered, 1080p high-definition visuals and 5.1 surround sound. As far as games go, *Dragon's Lair* is short lived and immensely frustrating – its only value is nostalgia. To that end, the extra features on the disc include a creator's commentary, interviews, and a 'watch' mode that runs through every scene and death sequence in the game. For anyone with a compatible Blu-ray Disc player and the desire to relive an arcade classic of their childhood, this is undoubtedly the best version of *Dragon's*

Lair to date. However, if you're not a fan of the original, you're unlikely to enjoy this. **NAG**
Adam Liebman

BOTTOM LINE
Excellent exercise in nostalgia, but newcomers should avoid it.

70 OUT OF 100

| PC |
| PS2 |
| PS3 |
| PSP |
| XBOX |
| 360 |
| DS |
| Wii |
| GBA |
| MOB |

DANCE: UK XL PARTY

RRP→ R270 | Publisher→ Jester Interactive Ltd. | Distributor→ Apex Interactive | Genre→ Rhythm

WE'RE DIVIDED IN OPINION about *Dance: UK XL Party*. On the one hand, it's relatively cheap and does mix things up a little by being an eight-arrow dancing game instead of the usual four-arrow fare. Yes, it's compatible with standard PS2 dance mats - it just uses the corner buttons usually reserved for X, Square, Triangle and O as additional arrow steps. The arrows on screen rise from the centre instead of the bottom, which is another interesting departure, and it has a Karaoke mode where you can sing along to the paltry 12 songs included. On the other hand, the production values of the game are noticeably poor and the 12 included songs are rather bland. You

can set up a multiplayer tournament for up to eight players where you take turns, or go head-to-head in the two-player mode that has a few surprises, but nothing to write home about. You can record your own steps for a song, and each song has four difficulty settings. *Dance: UK* is an obvious quick cash-in on the current rising mainstream interest in dancing games, but you should really spend your money on a much better series (such as *Dancing Stage*). If you find this bundled with a dance mat for around R300, it would be great for small kids and you can always buy more dancing games to use with the mat later. **NAG**
Miktar "Dancing Queen" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE
There's nothing wrong with it, but nothing really sets it apart from other offerings.

64 OUT OF 100

Someone should teach Spidey how to drive

SPIDER-MAN 3

RRP→ R499 | **Publisher→** Activision | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action

IT'S TIME TO TAKE a swing through the streets of Manhattan and fight crime like never before. In the latest instalment of *Spider-Man*, we see our hero in some superb graphics with a new set of villains and gangs to dispatch. *Spider-Man 3* does seem to be almost exactly the same as its predecessor in terms of its free-roaming capabilities, but for once, the player will be able to explore the underbelly of the city by traversing the various sewers and subway systems. Although this game was released on the PS3 and is in fact Sony IP, it makes very little use of the various PS3 features. For example, the new SIXAXIS functionality is almost non-existent in the game until you play as the New Goblin, which could take all of five minutes to complete. Not only that, but the game features some truly terrible voiceovers, which should have been great considering the fact that most of the movie's cast took part in it. Not only are the voiceovers terrible, but the camera angles leave a lot to be desired. These angles can actually be extremely frustrating in some fights.

The game does, however, make up for these few mistakes by adding a lot of content, which would take hours to finish. Although this marks the fourth game to be released by Treyarch, it's basically *Spider-Man 2* with a few new twists. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

BOTTOM LINE
A clone of its predecessor with better graphics.

75 OUT OF 100

35.57

MOUNTAIN BIKE ADRENALINE

RRP→ R299 | **Publisher→** Nobilis | **Distributor→** Apex Interactive | **Genre→** Sport

MOUNTAIN BIKING IS A sport largely neglected by videogame developers. In fact, bicycle-based games in general are quite scarce, apart from a few notable entries in the BMX genre. *Mountain Bike Adrenaline Featuring Salomon* attempts to introduce the same Tony Hawk-style of play to mountain biking, but unfortunately never quite gets off the ground. The game offers four locales, namely Hawaii, the Grand Canyon, the French Alps and Canada's Rocky Mountains, each with a number of different trails. Four different modes are available. The Stopwatch mode is simply a point-to-point sprint within a fixed time limit. The Challenge mode asks you to perform certain tricks, large jumps, or simply navigate a tight trail without fumbling. Also available are a time limit Arcade mode and an unlockable Free-roam mode.

Unfortunately, *Mountain Bike Adrenaline* is let down dramatically by its play dynamic. The controls are poorly responsive. You'll find it exceedingly difficult to maintain your balance at times, and almost impossible to avoid objects such as plants or rocks scattered about the environments. The collision detection simply isn't up to scratch, and once you do hit something, you'll curse the lack of a reverse button. It can easily take 30 seconds or more to free yourself from being wedged against part of the landscape. This, combined with blocky character models and an abject failure of the game to deliver any sense of speed, seriously dampens any enjoyment one might get out of the title. It's just too unpolished and frustrating to be worthwhile. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

BOTTOM LINE
Unfinished, frustrating attempt at mountain biking, best left on the shelf.

58 OUT OF 100

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

RRP→ R630 | **Publisher→** Bethesda Softworks | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** RPG

FOR THE VERY FIRST time, owners of the PS3 will be able to experience the awesome world that is in *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*. The game features some excellent graphics and a totally non-linear environment in which players will be able to perform hundreds of various quests. As is usual for the *TES* series, *Oblivion* offers a variety of classes and races to play as, each with its own unique abilities. The customisations that can be done on each character are endless. What really sets the PS3 version apart from the other platforms is the fact that it comes standard with the *Knights of The Nine* expansion, which includes all-new content as well as a further ten- to 20-hour gameplay in quests. At present, we all know that *Oblivion* offers at least 200 hours of gameplay, so this edition is worth the purchase.

Unfortunately for PS3 owners, *Oblivion* won't support the SIXAXIS functionality whatsoever, but although this is a letdown, the people over at Bethesda have promised that they would try and make all content available via the PlayStation Home network as soon as possible.

As usual, Bethesda has released a game that redefines its genre, and for the first time it's truly next gen. If you're a fan of RPG titles, then this game is a must-have. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert
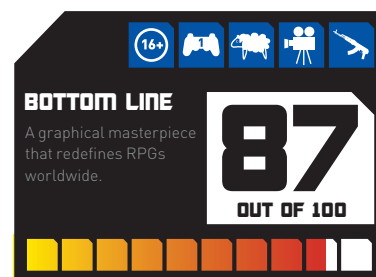
NAG >>>
MUST PLAY

BOTTOM LINE
A graphical masterpiece that redefines RPGs worldwide.

87
OUT OF 100

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

THIS JUST IN AT THE *NAG* OFFICE

CALL OF JUAREZ (360)

IT FEELS A BIT strange seeing this game on a console. Traditionally, a lot of European games, especially those hailing from the east, have stuck to PCs because that's the platform developers there has the most experience with. However, as *Call of Juarez* started to get a DirectX 10 jacket, the development team also started working on a 360 version of the game. That's good, because the currently available DX9 version of this cowboy game pales in comparison with the two versions coming up. Visually, *Call of Juarez* is impressive, especially when you look at the scenery and nice lighting effects. The character animation, though, is so-so

and the combat system doesn't really leave you breathless. During gun battles with the preacher, we found it easier to just run around like mad and shoot bad guys from up close. The quick-draw special move never showed much value, since we still ended up needing to shoot most of the targets afterwards to finish the job. Maybe we're just doing it wrong. Nevertheless, the story and presentation are nice, plus Billy's whip-swinging antics are easy to control. Therefore, we haven't written off *Call of Juarez*, but it's not really going to shine among the 360's current game collection – not unless you really like cowboys.

TWO WORLDS (PC)

A BIT OF A SURPRISE this one, with its "I look like an *Oblivion* free-form game, but I'm really a *Diablo*-style hack-and-slash" tricks. Germans have a knack for developing hack-and-slash games that initially start off a bit wobbly, but then end up gathering some good speed and a dedicated following, such as *Gothic 3* and *Sacred*. We've given *Two Worlds* a good look, and it looks good so far. A recent patch was released for the German version, which kicks things up to version 1.4 and fixes practically everything we initially found wrong with the game. This might be a bit of a stretch, but it has vague *Ultima* undertones, especially when you hang around the graveyards in the game and it moves to nightfall.

GENESIS RISING (PC)

WE ORIGINALLY HAD THIS slated for this month, but due to the patch for the EU version taking so long to be released, we decided to bump it to September so that we could look at it properly now that it's actually playable. First impressions of the game are good, but it comes across as impossible on the Normal difficulty setting, which, before the patch, couldn't even be adjusted to something easier, like Easy. The patch adds difficulty settings, a new skirmish mode and fixes the multiplayer crashing, which, if all three are fully fixed, could mean that *Genesis Rising* is now set to actually be a whole lot of fun since the premise is good and the graphics are stunning.

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES (PC)

THE *DRIVER* SERIES HAS seen its vicissitudes. Actually, it's had an up and then a slow spiral downwards since then, failing to bring fans what they wanted. So, will *Parallel Lines* make a difference? Well, it doesn't seem to be the ground-breaking *Driver* title we've all been waiting for, still opting for the GTA-like style where you drive cars and run around as a character. Nevertheless, that aside, it doesn't seem to be doing a bad job. Most of the game is based around driving missions with a control system that will endear to *Need for Speed* players. Graphically, it's not too shabby either, though apart from some new pixel-shader lighting, it's not a visual extravaganza. A big selling point might be the soundtrack, which is really good. We haven't played enough of it yet to make up our minds, but we're not disappointed yet.

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM (PS2)

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM might be a little bit *SSX*, but it's a whole lot of Tony. To quote the game's namesake, "This skateboarding victory is my most recent." From the look of things, it seems good, even on the PS2. Giving you eight environments, twelve original characters, multiplayer and a great soundtrack, it might not be the next big *Tony Hawk* game, but it looks like fun. Just like *SSX*, you race downhill to do tricks and outrun your opponents. The controls are series familiar, but don't expect *Project 8*. It loads quickly and has some extras. Whether the game disappoints fans of the previous titles is left to be seen, but it will probably turn out to be a fun addition to your collection. *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam* is something to keep an eye out for. It might be your last chance to enjoy the series on the PS2.

THESE GAMES AND MORE IN NEXT MONTH'S *NAG*

NAME THE GAMES AND WIN A PRIZE FROM MEGAROM!

megarom interactive

WIN! WIN! WIN!

DO ANY OF THE game screenshots on this page look familiar to you? If you recognise them, write down the names of the games they're from, e-mail your answers to nagcomps@tidemedia.co.za and you stand a chance of winning an awesome copy of *Transformers: The Game* for Xbox 360, courtesy of Megarom Interactive! The competition closes when the September issue of *NAG* hits shelves (the last Thursday of August).

XBOX 360
TRANSFORMERS
THE GAME
12+
ACTIVISION.

1
2
3
4
5
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8
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10
11
12
13
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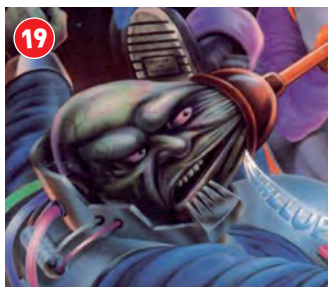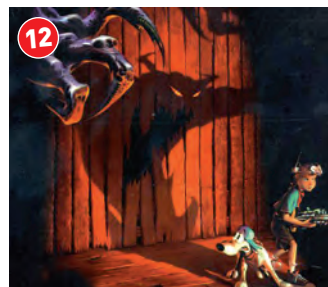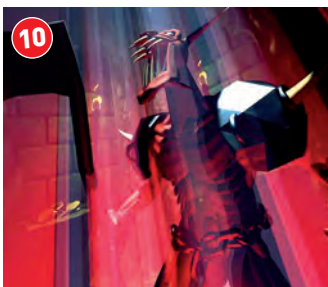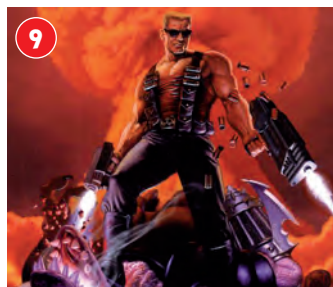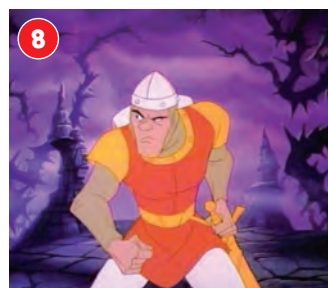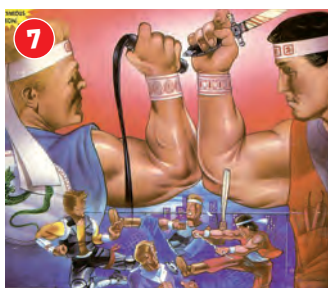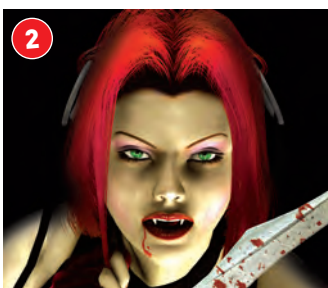
LAST MONTH'S GAMES: **1.** Armed Assault; **2.** Army of Two; **3.** Blacksite Area 51; **4.** Boom Boom Rocket; **5.** Bubble Bobble Evolution; **6.** Castlevania Symphony of the Night; **7.** Crazy Taxi Fare Wars; **8.** Dead or Alive Extreme Beach Volleyball 2; **9.** Dreamlords; **10.** Enchanted Arms; **11.** flOw; **12.** Forza 2; **13.** Frontlines Fuel of War; **14.** Ghost Rider; **15.** GRAW 2; **16.** Hellboy; **17.** Heroes of Annihilated Empires; **18.** Juiced 2; **19.** Monster Madness; **20.** Painkiller; **21.** Resistance Fall of Man; **22.** S.T.A.L.K.E.R.; **23.** Unreal Tournament 3; **24.** Wing Commander Arena

CARMAGEDDON

IT STARTED AS A 3D destruction derby project. Then it became a *Mad Max* game. When that fell through, it adorned the license of *Death Race 2000*, a movie so ancient Sylvester Stallone played a bad guy. However, that also came to nothing and Stainless Games was stuck with a driving game that emphasized arcade driving physics, reckless driving and bouncing pedestrians off windscreens. What to do? Mould it into the naughty little devil called *Carmageddon!* Like *Manhunt 2*, *Carma* received the same treatment from the BFCC, forcing it to change the pedestrians to zombies. However, it was un-banned after SCI appealed the BFCC's decision and a blood patch was released to replace the dreary zombies. Sure, zombies are fun to kill, but not as much fun as bikini babes and grannies with walkers...

It's all really depraved. So much so that even the development team's dedication in the manual is NOT to their family, because the game is a "diabolical piece of soul-poison." Tongue-in-cheek, of course. There's no other way to really appreciate *Carmageddon*. Well, there is: as a murder simulator where you use your car to tear apart countless innocent civilians traversing the sidewalks, mines, beaches, desert towns and football fields of the game world. However, like many highly-depraved games that take you where you could never possibly go, the killing of all these innocents are just a means to an end.

You picked up points for hitting them, even garnering a few bonus points depending on how you did it. Slam someone into a wall and you get a Piledriver Bonus, or bounce a loose object like a street pole into a crowd for a 'Great Shot, Sir!' These points kept the clock from running out and your bank account from emptying, since you spent plenty of cash repairing your car in real time. It was always a beautiful effect: hold in Backspace and watch the firing wreck on the screen puff out to its original shape. Fortunately, your opponents didn't have the same ability, which was good since taking out your opponents was the best way to win. The easiest was simply to do the race. Then there was always the option of killing every single pedestrian on the map, but it was a long and frustrating exercise. Running over people was merely a means to an end. The real cash and destruction came from ramming full speed into other opponents.

Few games beat *Carma* in its day, especially when it came to multiplayer, and little has identified with it since. Sadly, the series didn't fare very well. After an expansion and two sequels, *Carmageddon 4* was quietly cancelled in 2005. Since then, neither SCI nor Eidos has said anything more about it. *Carmageddon* faded into game obscurity, but it remains fondly loved by those who played it. It was sick, depraved, funny and awesome. They really don't make games like this anymore. **NAG**

Because it predates the 3D card revolution, *Carmageddon* runs on pretty much any machine today. The hardest part will be to find the game, which might crop up in bargain bins. If you can get the Splat Pack expansion, it's a big bonus. You'll likely end up with a copy that supports Windows, so after installation all you should do is edit the shortcut and add 'hi-res' to the command line to enable the (then) high-resolution textures. If you end up with a UK version, the so-called blood patch can still be found online on major game download sites like Fileplanet.com.
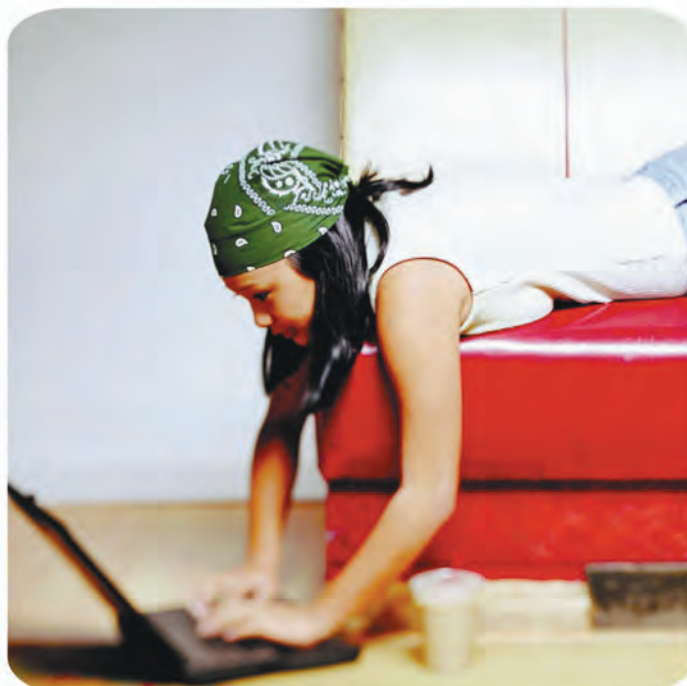
Apacer in your life
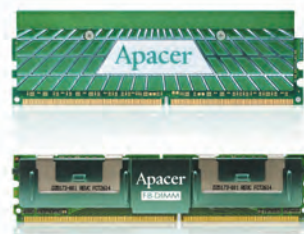
Not only does the Fifteen-year Anniversary Edition of *Another World* have more save points (though still not enough) and a new level that was lacking in the original Amiga version (but found in the PC version), but it also has improved backdrops and resolution options.

ANOTHER WORLD
REMAINS OUT OF THIS WORLD

WHEN TALKING ABOUT A cult classic game, one always runs the risk of never truly conveying what kind of an impact the game had on the gaming consciousness at the time. This is because unlike movies, games slide progressively further away from modern conventions as time ticks by with new evolutions, advancements in technology, game methodology and even control schemes. The more time passes, the harder it becomes to convey an adequate frame of reference. A movie may become more difficult to watch the older it gets (also due to frame of reference and context). *Citizen Kane*, despite being an absolute silver-screen classic, is a little boring compared to modern offerings, but how you watch movies remains unchanged. Only the timing, the pace and perhaps the lack of accepted improvements in cinematography may impede potential enjoyment, but you can still watch it despite technological advancements. The same cannot be said for games. The older the game, the more it lacks things current gamers have come to expect from their entertainment: quicksaves; impressive, computer-generated cut-scenes; full orchestral scores; infinite resolution settings; and graphical adjustment options, to name but a few. Technology has progressed much faster for games, widening the divide rapidly.

Another World (also known as *Out Of This World*) is such a cult classic - a game that practically anyone even remotely interested in gaming as a form of distraction or entertainment should play at least once or, failing that, should watch someone play at least once. There's no real way to express just how different, impressive and downright groundbreaking *Another World* was at the time of its release. By today's standards, it may look a little like a quality Flash game (in part due to its shared nature with vector graphics), but at the time, it was the *de facto* standard for cinematic gaming.

Released in 1991 along with roughly 1,079 other games, *Another World* made its debut on the Commodore Amiga. Its creator and designer, Eric Chahi, never even knew what he had developed until the reviews started coming in. To him, *Another World* was simply an expression: a work of art he wanted to create for the sake of creating. The unwitting departure from established conventions of the time made *Another World* something entirely different and new; something that just blew gamers away.

Working from of his parents' home in France, Eric Chahi was a young graphics programmer who got into programming through computer science using his school's ZX81. Chahi was actually erroneously guided towards computer engineering and would only much later shift his focus to his true

passion: art. In 1989, Chahi worked on *Les Voyageurs du Temps* (also known as *Future Wars*), which would be published by Delphine Software, a rare French entertainment flagship. Chahi created the art and art direction for the game, but longed to return to programming his own games. However, he hated the prospect of the work involved in creating a game from scratch.

The inspiration for *Another World* actually came from *Dragon's Lair*, a game Chahi used to play at a nearby arcade. When *Dragon's Lair* was released for the Amiga, it used an unprecedented eight disks to store the massive amount of bitmap frames the game required. Chahi hit upon the idea of storing the flat colour data as a series of connected points instead (which would later form the foundation of Shockwave Flash), saving on disk space and allowing for unparalleled control of the imagery on screen. He quickly programmed his own editor, a simplistic yet powerful tool that allowed him to both create the artwork and set up the game logic that drove it, letting him test game ideas literally on the fly.

Chahi approached former school friend Jean-Francois Freitas to help with the music for *Another World*. The music from *Back to the Future* was given to Freitas as a reference, as it had a rhythm to it based on a snare drum - something Chahi liked because it created a military and overall inescapable

THE COVER OF ANOTHER WORLD

Immensely frustrated at not having been able to design the cover for *Future Wars*, Chahi illustrated the box art for *Another World* himself. His love for fantasy illustration is evident in the vast vista portrayed via subtle tones. Chahi created several quick colour mock-ups until he found the perfect combination to express the dreamlike yet nightmarish experience Another World represents.

ANOTHER WORLD

Written in GFA BASIC, the editor Chahi created let him adjust the game and play it instantly without compiling. He could change colours, 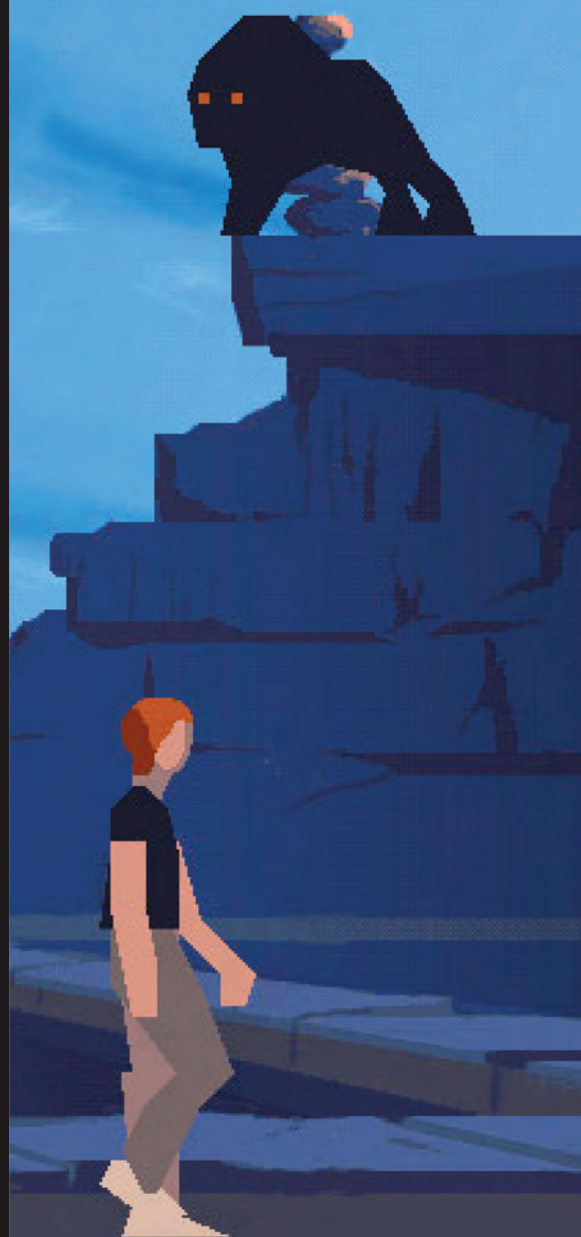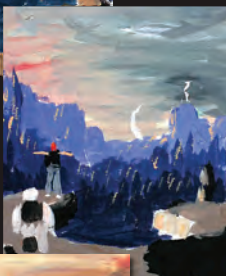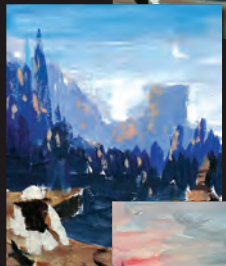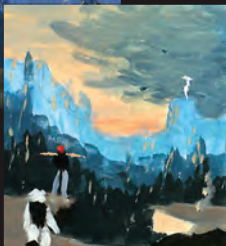add or remove background elements, add in new effects or draw entirely new cut-scenes or levels and view them all without leaving the editor.

DESIGNING ANOTHER WORLD

Much of *Another World* was designed on paper as sketches in Chahi's notebook. Later, many of the levels were conceived and designed directly in the editor he created.
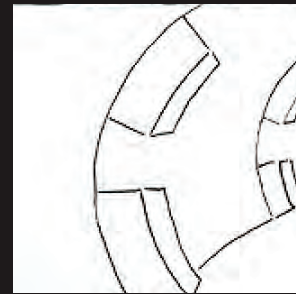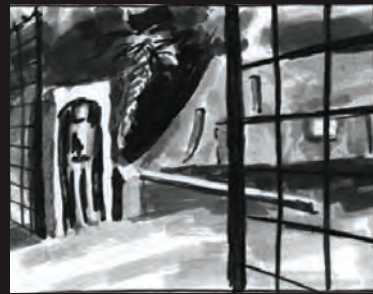
FUTURE WARS

As a point-and-click adventure, *Future Wars* was very pretty but very shallow. You played as a window cleaner who foiled an alien plot to destroy humanity, and while the exact method by which you achieved that was quite involved (you travelled to the Middle Ages, the future as well as the Cretaceous period), it wasn't quite the same class and quality as *King's Quest* or *Space Quest*. Eric Chahi created all the stunning art for the game and you can already see the beginnings of *Another World* in the art direction of *Future Wars*.
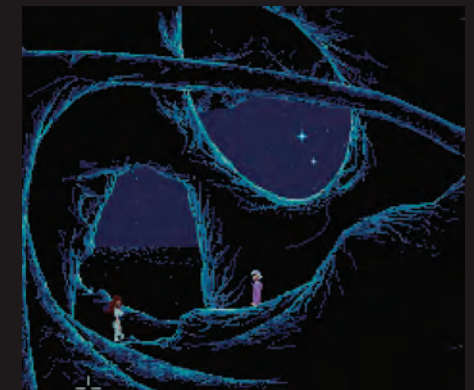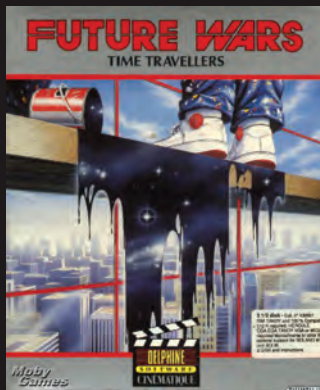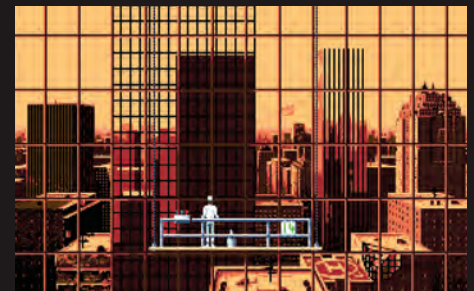
POPULAR GAMES OF 1991

3D Virtual Studio
4-D Boxing
Actraiser
The Adventures of Willy Beamish
Alex Kidd in the Enchanted Castle
Alien Breed
The Bard's Tale III: Thief of Fate
Battle Chess
Battletoads
Bomberman
Bubble Bobble
Buck Rogers: Countdown to Doomsday
California Games

Carrier Command
Castle of Dr. Brain
Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge
Centurion: Defender of Rome
Chessmaster 3000
Chip's Challenge
Chuck Rock
Commander Keen 4: Secret of the Oracle
Commander Keen 5: The Armageddon Machine
Commander Keen 6: Aliens Ate My Baby Sitter!
Commander Keen: Keen Dreams
Conan: The Cimmerian
Continuum
Crystal Caves
Dangerous Dave in the Haunted Mansion

Double Dragon
Dr. Mario
Drakkhen
Duke Nukem
Dungeon Master
Elite
Final Fantasy Adventure
Final Fantasy II
Final Fight
Gods
Golden Axe
Hard Drivin'
Hero Quest
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade: The Action Game
J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Vol. I
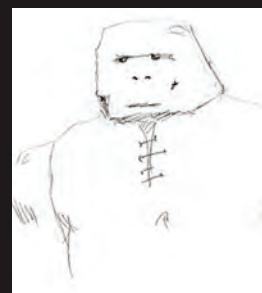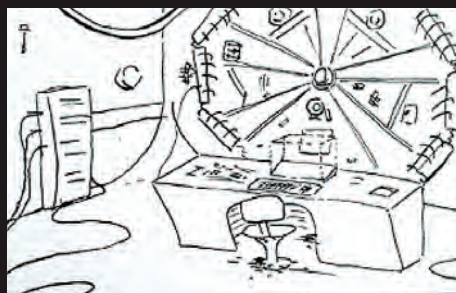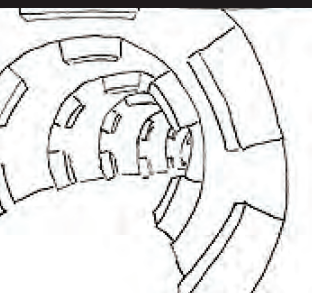
feel; something that goes forward, but not backwards. Chahi knew Freitas for four years, but had never mentioned to him that he developed and sold games. Chahi admitted that the reason for this was that he actually didn't like talking about *Another World*: he believes the game speaks for itself.

At the time, *Another World* lacked the common elements found in games of that era, such as scoring points. Chahi didn't want scoring in *Another World*, believing it would take the focus away from what the player was supposed to feel while playing the game. As a work of art, *Another World* had many unintentional analogies to Chahi's own emotions at the time. The lead character in *Another World*, Lester, is left alone in a parallel universe unknown to him and with nothing to guide him. As a game, *Another World* was unlike anything else at the time, and there was nothing to guide Chahi in its conception.

Another World is a combination of many inspirations, some logical and others surprising. During the opening scene of the second level, where Lester is caged in a prison, a guard moves in from the side in the background as Lester starts swinging the cage. The guard is

animated with a blur effect using lines, an effect inspired by Chahi's love for a popular manga at the time, *Dragon Ball*. He liked how the artist could suggest a lot with very little. The power shot of the game (achieved by holding down the fire key) was inspired by the Kameame attack in *Dragon Ball*.

Much of *Another World* is more suggestion than actual definition - the limited number of colours and solid shapes naturally lend themselves to stark and imagined detail. The iconic black monster at the start of the game is a typical monster - an outline filled with black that players can project a lot onto. Its strong mass and wild creature movements showed no actual details, yet remains all the more terrifying for it, something Chahi to this day still remarks on fondly.

Much of what made *Another World* an experience comes from its cinematic construction, something previously done in only a single title: *Karateka*. By applying ideas and styles used in films, *Karateka* draws the player in by setting the scene with moody, poignant cut-scenes. Just like *Another World*, *Karateka* used the technique of rotoscoping to trace every frame of a reference video to use as animations in the

game (which would later also be used for the insuperable *Prince of Persia*). Chahi actually got the idea from the animated production of *Lord of the Rings* by Ralph Bakshi, which used rotoscoping for many of its impressively animated scenes. The cinematic construction of *Another World* comes across not only in its fluid cut-scenes made possible by vector graphics (full-motion video was unheard of at the time and would remain so for many years still), but also by the multitude of stunningly crafted scripted events. These events occur where players least expect them and instantly create a sense of thrill because they're so unexpected. Yet, they never distract you from the action or interfere with suspension of disbelief.

It's this unflinching dedication from Chahi to create a work of interactive art, instead of a traditional videogame, that takes players somewhere they have never been before and makes *Another World* a cult classic: a game that should never be forgotten. High praise for something many debunk as frivolous entertainment (usually the same people who argue that games cannot be art), but deserving from those who know better. **NAG**

SONY WON'T PLAY WITH THE BIG BOYS

FOLLOWING THE RECENT MARKET surge of 100-inch-plus-sized HDTVs from Panasonic, Sharp, and LG, Sony Corporation has announced that it won't be unveiling its own offering any time soon. "I think it is unnecessary for many companies to make a 100-inch TV," declared Sony President Ryoji Chubachi, who went on to say that there simply wasn't a strong enough demand for enormous televisions.

However, according to the Quarterly Desktop Monitor Shipment & Forecast Report from DisplaySearch, widescreen monitors have enjoyed a recent 40% market increase, now accounting for six of the ten best-selling display sizes.

Back on the mid-sized HDTV front, JVC has just trotted out a range of 1080p tellies sporting improved specifications and lower prices than previous models from the company. These run the gamut from the 688 series, including 37-inch and 42-inch models, to the high-end 788 series, available in 42-inch and 47-inch models - the latter series features higher contrast ratios and a wider viewing angle than the former. All four sets include HDMI 1.3 inputs, a USB port for easy camcorder and portable media access, as well as a universal remote control.

AMD ANNOUNCES BARCELONA

AMD CHIPS USING THE Barcelona core are rumoured to be released on 10 September, with the first chips to surface being a 1.9GHz 2348 and a 2GHz 2350. Other chips will follow in October, although a 2354, which is a 2.2GHz microprocessor, is likely to be available in August through channel distribution. Sources close to AMD told the INQ that AMD hopes to get 2.5GHz bins out of Barcelona, although dates for such beasts are not yet available.
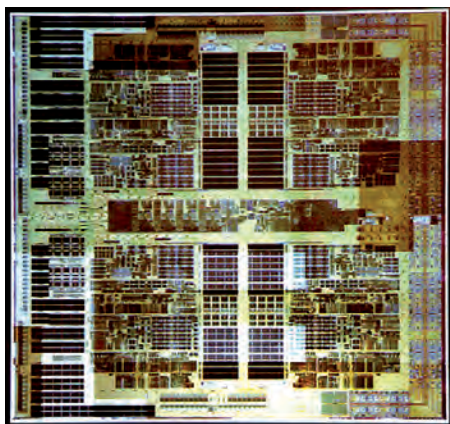
As for performance, the first numbers were based on systems using the Opteron 2356, which is a quad-core 2.3GHz Barcelona core CPU. In the Integer tests, the Barcelona 2.3GHz achieved a 21% higher score than a Clovertown 2.66GHz CPU - Floating Point performance was 50% higher. When compared to the current Opteron CPUs, the K10-based cores delivered over a 100% increase in performance and a 70% increase in multi-socket systems, even with the CPUs clocked 700MHz less. In a two-socket configuration, Barcelona is in general around 65-70% faster than the highest-clocked, dual-core Opteron. SPECweb99 yields a hefty 67% performance increase, SPECweb99_SSL a 66% increase, while SAP-SD showed a 70% performance increase.

Specific release dates and pricing for the AM2 Phenom X2 and X4 CPUs have yet to be confirmed, but with the recent price drop in AMD K8-based CPUs, it's likely to be within the next month or two, barring anything going wrong with the mass production at the projected clock speeds.

WINDOWS SLOWLY LOSING TO LINUX

ACCORDING TO EVANS DATA survey results, Microsoft's Windows platform is losing favour with application developers in North American, but retains the lead as the dominant platform. The survey of more than 400 developers and IT managers found that the number of developers focusing on Windows has declined by 12% compared to a year ago, dropping from 74% to 64.8%. Development for Linux has risen from 8% to 12%.

"We attribute [the decline] largely to the increase in developers beginning to target Linux and different Linux [distributions]. Novell and Red Hat are the two dominant ones right now," said John Andrews, CEO of Evans Data.

According to Evans Data, the shift away from Windows began over two years ago and appears to be accelerating.
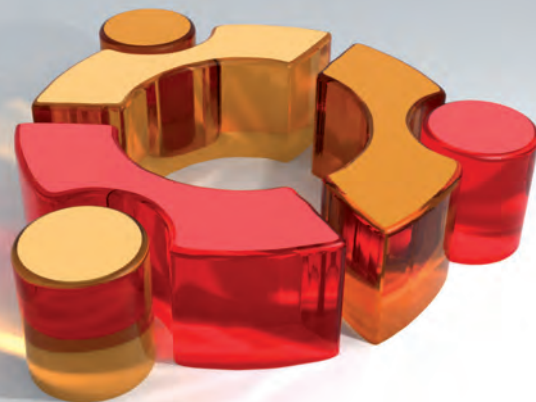
VIA LAUNCHES LOW-COST PCS LOCALLY

VIA AND MECER HAVE announced the launch of the Mecer Education PC. The low-cost PC sports a 1.5GHz VIA C7-D CPU on a CN700 chipset, up to 2GB of DDR2 RAM, and standard desktop components like a 3.5-inch HDD. It can run a variety of operating systems, including Windows XP Starter Edition, and is designed for South African schools. The PC is part of VIA's PC-1 initiative to bring low-cost computing to schools and rural areas throughout Third World countries. No price was given for the Education PC, but Mecer sells a similar model, the PC2500, for R2,396 in a base configuration with a 1.5GHz VIA C7-D CPU, an 80GB 7,200rpm HDD, 256MB DDR2-533 RAM, a 56x CD-ROM and XP Home.

While it's not likely to be showing up at LAN parties anytime soon, VIA hopes to sell the low-cost PC-1 machines through local retail stores as well as via special deals for schools.

LIQUID NITROGEN OVERCLOCKING EXCELS

UNIVERSAL ABIT DEMONSTRATED SOME extreme overclocking with liquid nitrogen at Computex Taipei with the help of leading overclockers such as Fugger. Making use of Universal abit's AB9 QuadGT motherboard and the Intel Core 2 Extreme X6800, the CPU managed an impressive 5,052MHz, with an FSB of 1,684MHz (421MHz SDR). Besides the impressive clocks on the CPU, Universal abit boasted that the demonstrated CPU could repeatedly execute the pi calculation program under these extreme conditions without incident, all made possible by the Universal abit AB9 QuadGT. Fugger had the following to say about the event and overclocking as a whole: "The gamers would go look to see what the top-ten listing would be. So if they see Universal abit up there and NVIDIA up there, chances are they are going to buy a Universal abit motherboard with an NVIDIA video card, so it's critical that the manufacturers work with the enthusiasts. If you have a lot of rankings in Futuremark, your products are going to sell a little easier."

SEAGATE AND SAMSUNG JOIN 1TB CLUB

BOTH SEAGATE AND SAMSUNG have announced one terabyte (1,024 gigabyte) drives, following Hitachi's recent release of its terabyte drive.

The Barracuda 7200.11 uses Seagate's second-generation, perpendicular-recording technology. It sports four 250GB platters spinning at 7,200rpm. Cache has been bumped up to 32MB. Seagate claims a maximum 105MB/sec sustained transfer rate, and the drive should retail for $399 in the US.

The Samsung SpinPoint F1 uses three 334GB platters to achieve 1TB and also offers a 32MB cache version for $399. Both drives will have smaller siblings using the same technology, but fewer platters and varying cache sizes.

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, I probably already have.

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

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

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

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

GROUND ZERO
by Toby Hudon

WHAT GOES AROUND...

SO, HERE WE ARE again. Another month gone by. In this issue, you'll probably see some of the hardware that followed me home from the US. I'm sure anyone who reads what I write regularly is now expecting me to go off on another tirade about local distributors, prices, PR agencies or something. However, I'm pretty much done with that for now.

You see, it takes two to tango, and that's only half the problem. We can whine and complain about high prices and prove ridiculous mark-ups all we want, but the fact of the matter is that people are still buying this stuff. The question is, "Why are you still buying it?" Seriously. Why do you, the local hardware enthusiast who I assume is reading this column, still buy the over-inflated junk that washes up on shore?

Recently, I was asked to help someone build a new system. When I then asked someone else for their suggestions, they told me I shouldn't bother telling this person to import hardware because they'll just get frustrated and wind up at a shop getting ripped off. Better that they assemble their own machine even at exorbitant prices than sink to that. I was left wondering why it's considered so hard to import your own hardware. We have an account with Access USA here. In fact, I recently got myself my own personal account so my family can send me things from stateside. A co-worker of mine has two accounts with them now. It's easy, it's cheap, and it works. Why are people still paying the prices we see here rather than use that?

I find it hard to believe that it's ignorance of the services that do this kind of thing. I mean, I've name dropped Access USA/myus.com several times here and in *SACM* as well, where we even used it for a major project. I've only been in this country a couple of years and I found them within the first few months, so I don't see how anyone with access to Google could plead ignorance.

Is it laziness? Are you guys that lazy? You'd think that a few thousand rands in price difference would be enough of a motivator. I also find it hard to believe. I've seen what happens when someone decides what information you can and cannot have: I've been to a local LAN. How is it that the same people who scoff at broadcasting and movie region issues meekly cower before much smaller companies and accept this price list crap? Why isn't that information all over the place? What, do you think they could actually take down a site that had the info on it? Permanently? I doubt it. So where is it? Why are you playing this game by their rules when you don't have to?

It's easy to bitch, but nobody does anything about it. I'm sure about now some people reading this are going, "Well, if you're so high and mighty why don't you do it?" The answer is simple. I'm outside the system. There are certain things I can and cannot say and do here for ethical reasons. It's part of the job. There are good parts, like getting to play with new hardware, and bad parts, like giving it back. I can say a lot of what people are thinking, but I'm not allowed to do certain things due to conflict of interest.

So, if you guys want to change things and stop being treated like a Third World country, you need to do it yourselves. Stop paying the prices you think are too high. Show people who ask you what to buy how easy it is to get it themselves at far lower prices. Laugh at these price lists and show everyone how you can beat their 'special' treatment by just not being lazy. I can keep harping on about the issue, but the fact is that these companies are here to make money. So, expect them to do whatever they can get away with. If you want it to change, you'll have to stop letting them get away with it. Otherwise, they'll just keep doing it because they can and it makes them more money. **NAG**

> **Are you guys that lazy? You'd think that a few thousand rands in price difference would be enough of a motivator.**

HARDWIRED
by Neo Sibeko

OVERCLOCK 101

THIS MONTH, I'M TACKLING the pastime, hobby or art you call "overclocking." For some reason, it's picked up slightly from the lull it was in since mid-2006 or so. Either way, having taken part in this pastime for years on end, it's time to spread the tips and tricks. These are concerned with overclocking and competing in benchmarks, so be it high scores or an overall improvement in system responsiveness you're after, the same principles should apply - at least for the most part.

At any rate, getting the best from your components individually will let you achieve the best from your system all around. You may not get the maximum performance from each component when it all comes together, but you'll be much better off than having an unbalanced system where you have some components stressed while others are underperforming. It's even possible to reduce strain on some pieces of hardware, by lowering frequencies, voltages and such where they are not necessary.

The easiest and quickest component to overclock is the CPU. If you're fortunate enough to own an unlocked-multiplier CPU such as AMD's FX range or the Intel Extreme range, you can easily find the limits of your CPU without much effort. Since these are low-volume parts, however, we shall concentrate on the normal types such as the X2s and the Core 2 Duos. It's important to note that what applies for AMD CPUs doesn't necessarily apply for their Intel counterparts. This month, we'll focus on the AMD CPUs.

As a result of AMD CPUs having diminished the need for a front side bus, the mainboard/bus frequency only serves to determine CPU clock speed (at least for our purposes) and not much else. As such, the first thing that one should do, irrespective of the CPU clock or anything else, is to set the HT (HyperTransport) Link speed from 'Auto' or '5x' to '3x'. This has no performance penalty at all, but will in general allow your motherboard Northbridge to clock much better. Since we're dealing with an excessively high speed bus (2GHz at the default 5x link speed), the drop from 5x to 3x only reduces clock speed to 1.2GHz - still enough to provide 4.8GB/sec of system bandwidth to the CPU on aggregate. (In truth, it's 2.4GB/sec in each direction, as the HT bus is a full duplex 2 x 16-bit system.)

This drop in HT link speed would suggest that the resulting memory bandwidth would suffer as well, but the brilliance of HT links is that the memory controller and its data path are independent of that of the motherboard. The CPU can still access the memory as normal, so there's no performance loss whatsoever. This does have an upside too.

As stated earlier, the HT/bus speed is capable of higher frequencies, but also has the Northbridge running cooler as well, which is always welcome.

After having dealt with the HT link speed, the next component you'll want to tackle is the memory. Depending on the platform you're on, either DDR 939/754 or DDR2 940/1207, you may need different voltages and settings to achieve maximum performance and bandwidth. In general, the tightest timings and highest frequency will result in the best performance. This is easier said than done, however, because the balance between timings and frequency is a bit of a hit and miss affair. Tighten too much, and you lose out on actual bandwidth, which will reflect negatively on game and benchmark performance (particularly true on the AM2/1207 DDR2 platform). Loosen the timings too much in favour of the frequency, and your efficiency will drop dramatically. So, while you'll still retain the maximum theoretical bandwidth, your actual usable bandwidth will be flushed down the tubes.

Next month, I will elaborate more on the memory issue, in particular regarding DDR2. **NAG**

> **Getting the best from your components individually will let you achieve the best from your system all around.**

SA Computer MAGAZINE

TOUCH ME

THE NEXT GENERATION OF COMPUTER INTERFACES WILL
BE HANDS-ON AND IS SET TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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INTERNET
IS COMING

THE THIRD COMING

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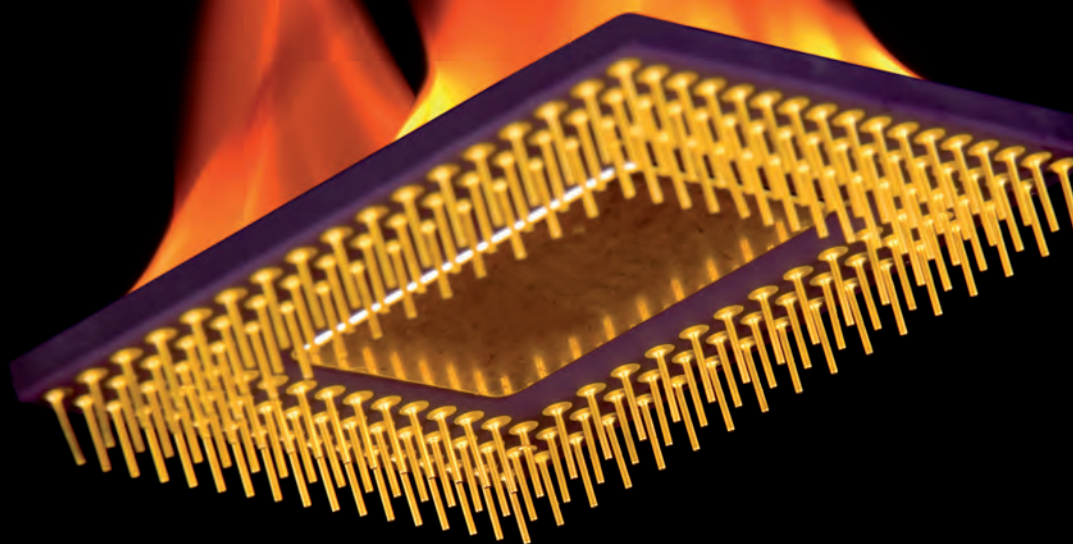
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PREVIEW

RADEON HD 2600 XT

AMD HAS FINALLY RELEASED the midrange sibling of the Radeon HD 2900 XT, the 2600 XT. What's it like? Well, we managed to get our hands on a pair of them for a little bit of testing, so you'll be able to find out below.

The first thing to note is that the 2600 XT isn't intended as a high-performance gaming part. It's a midrange-offering intended to sell in much higher volumes at mainstream prices. Typically, that price range is $99-$199 in the US, which at current card pricing trends should translate to about R1,000-R2,000 locally. It's obviously not going to go toe-to-toe with the 8800 Ultra or 2900 XT. This card's real competition is actually the cheap end of last-generation's high-end parts.

A quick breakdown of the specs: The 2600 variant of the HD 2000 family has 120 stream processors. This means roughly 24 Vect5D pipelines, compared to the 2900's 320 streams/64 pipelines. It also has eight render output pipelines, which are half the 2900's, but the real killer is the 128-bit memory bus, which is only a quarter of the 2900's. This means the 2600 cards may wind up severely limited by memory bandwidth. However, it does use a more power-efficient 65nm process, which gives it higher clock speeds (800MHz core/2,200MHz memory in the GDDR4 variant).

The reason for the narrow bus is likely one of cost. The wider the memory bus, the more lines there need to be on the PCB of the card, and the more expensive it's to manufacture.

However, given that the current top-end cards have 384-bit (8800GTX) and 512-bit (2900 XT) buses, it was thought that the midrange cards like the 8600 and 2600 parts would have 256-bit buses like the older high-end cards. However, both camps have decided to stick with the 128-bit memory bus, which results in some pretty underwhelming performance numbers. However, as we said, this particular part is less concerned with performance than value.

We did a bit of testing, and a single 2600 XT scored 4,862 in 3DMark06 with a Core 2 Duo E6700, which is pretty respectable for a midrange part. Individual shader scores were 1,644 and 2,141. We also fitted two 2600 XTs in CrossFire mode on our Intel P35-based motherboard with one PCI-E 16x slot and one 4x slot. We achieved 8,199 for the overall score, 3,112 in SM 2.0 and 3,991 in HDR/SM 3.0. Doing a little calculation, it means almost 90% efficiency in the former and over 85% in the latter - quite good for two cards and outstanding on asymmetrical slots. CrossFire didn't give us any hassles, and since all the cards now come with connectors and none of that silly master card or external dongle business, it may finally be a reasonable option for many people. The fact that the cards only consume about 50W each and thus don't have extra power connectors at all will likely help too.

Performance-wise, the 2600 XT comes in below the 8600GTS, which is a bit of a concern considering the latter is performing worse

BENCHMARKS

3DMARK06 - SINGLE CARD

SM2.0	1,644
HDR/SM3.0	2,141
CPU	2,308
OVERALL	4,862

3DMARK06 - CROSSFIRE

SM2.0	3,112
HDR/SM3.0	3,991
CPU	2,287
OVERALL	8,199

than its predecessor, the 7600GT, in many games. However, the 2600 XT may be more likely to compete with the cheaper 8600GT, where it's slightly ahead. The DDR2-based 2600 Pro will likely be one to avoid completely. However, unless the 2600's price is very low, older cards like the x1950 Pro and 7900GS are going to stomp all over it in the R1,500-R2,000 range. Two 2600s in CrossFire might be a contender, but that may push close to the price of the vastly-superior 8800GTS 320MB.

Still, if you only have R1,000 you could do a lot worse. At least the 2600 has DX10 support and enough speed for most current games on medium settings. However, how well it will run more demanding DX10 games, given its lack of speed, is another matter. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

COOLERMASTER CAVALIER CAV-T01

COOLERMASTER HAS A WIDE range of nice computer accessories and computer cases. The Cavalier follows in these footsteps and proves that simplicity is beauty and beauty is Cavalier.

The case looks good with its sleek wave design on the front panel, clearly-marked power switches, and basic but good finishes. Starting at the front of the case, all the drive bays are hidden from view by the case's aluminium door. The front panel is separated in two: the top half being the door and bays while the bottom half houses the power and reset buttons and an analogue dial to measure sound. The door opens with ease. CoolerMaster designed the door to detach and open from the other side. This could come in handy if one cannot open the door from the right because of an obstruction and would rather open it from the left: a very nice extra and sure to come in handy. The inside of the door leaves you with 1.5cm of room to play with. Therefore, if you have a case mod that sticks out more than that, such as fan controls or homemade light kits, you'll have a problem closing this door.

The analogue dial, situated at the bottom of the front panel, is a nice touch, but pointless. All it does is measure the sound coming from your sound card: this has to be installed and takes up one of your back panels. The power and reset buttons are simple and clear and don't protrude. The case has a window on the side panel. The cut out, however, is very plain. Moreover, the screws holding the window in place stick out a little and really become an eyesore. This can be fixed by replacing the round screws with flush screws to keep the case smooth. The USB 2.0 and FireWire ports are located on the left of the chassis, and the speaker, mic and volume control on the right.

The inside of the case has foldaway edges to prevent any cuts and has very basic and easy-to-use, tool-free clamps. This makes computer upgrades quick and easy. Sadly, the Cavalier doesn't have a motherboard tray. This would have enhanced the hassle-free approach. The case comes with two fans: an 80mm intake fan and a 120mm exhaust fan. It isn't much cooling but should be sufficient for a mid-range computer. The case is also supplied with an electromagnetic insulator. The purpose of this is to suppress the interference created by electromagnetic energy at the ends of electric wires connected to the electronic devices.

Overall, the Cavalier CAV-T01 is a good case. It looks good, feels good and even sounds good. It's easy to work with, with its tool-free approach, and made working with this case easy and fun. There's very little noise, which is always a plus, and the case is big enough to support any upgrades you want to add. It's good for modding, and with a little bit of work could make anybody envious. **NAG**

Bradley Hatton-Jones

SPECS

COLOUR	Silver/Black
DIMENSIONS	500mm x 202mm x 435mm
WEIGHT	10.4kg
MATERIAL	Aluminium Bezel, SECC Chassis
MOTHERBOARD SUPPORT	ATX, micoATX
POWER SUPPLY	Standard ATX PS2, 350W
5.25-INCH BAYS	5 x Exposed
3.5-INCH BAYS	1 x Exposed, 4 x Hidden
COOLING SYSTEM	1 x 80mm x 80mm x 25mm Front Fan (Intake), 1 x 120mm x 120mm x 25mm Rear Fan (Exhaust)
I/O PANEL	2 x USB 2.0; 1 x Speaker; 1 x Mic; 1 x Volume Control; 1 x IEEE 1394 FireWire

SCORE

GIGABYTE GA-MA69G-S3H

AMD'S 690G CHIPSET IS one of those chipsets that could have been great, actually is great, but somehow hasn't convinced enough people to part with their current motherboards. Out of all integrated solutions, the 690G is the fastest in terms of video acceleration and 3D. The NVIDIA 6150 and the Intel IGP parts don't come close to matching the 690G graphics processor. However, that advantage, while large in some regards, isn't enough to make a previously unplayable title playable. That is, if your current configuration (NVIDIA 6100/6150) on a fairly heavy game such as Oblivion gets you 7fps, you'll get 12fps or 14fps. While this is an improvement, it's still not really playable.

To help this situation though, the Gigabyte board allows you to overclock the graphics core in the BIOS. However, it's worth noting that the Northbridge (where the graphics part is housed) is already warm to the touch, so some active cooling would be advised if you are going to overclock the core.

Suffice to say though, we managed to run the core at 450MHz, which gave a nice boost to performance and actually made Doom 3 and Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory playable at fairly high settings. While the 690G was mainly intended for microATX/miniATX boards, which are ideal for HTPCs, Gigabyte has used this chipset in an ATX form factor, which means it's targeted at the desktop market.

Gigabyte has included a full-length, full-speed PCI-E 16x slot, three PCI-E 1x slots and a PCI-E 4x slot, which will allow the use of CrossFire-enabled cards. This isn't the ideal CrossFire configuration because one card will only be able to access four PCI-E lanes while the other will have a full 16 available. This will inevitably have a negative effect on the performance, and those interested in CrossFire setups should rather wait for a full

8 x 8 or 16 x 16 capable board. Other than the CrossFire capability, the board is pretty much standard save for the HDCP/HDMI-enabled connector. It would have been great if there was some way to enable the onboard VGA controller and make use of the HDCP/HDMI connector for media and a discreet graphics card for games and the like. Unfortunately, this isn't the case, because as soon as you add a graphics card to the motherboard, the on-board controller disables, also disabling the HDMI port at the same time. Therefore, those features are then lost to the system unless the discreet graphics card itself has HDCP/HMDI output.

As far as performance is concerned, Gigabyte has provided as many options as one would expect on a mid- to high-end board. The BIOS has all the normal voltage options as well as a few others. Memory configuration is also comprehensive. Despite all of Gigabyte's efforts, however, the 690G chipset has one fault, which is rather concerning. The memory performance is disappointing.

Measuring the memory bandwidth using SiSoftware's Sandra 2007 SP2, the board achieved bandwidth hovering somewhere around the 8.5GB/sec mark. This may not matter much in isolation, but considering that with the same CPU, memory and HT speed, the nForce 590 motherboard delivered over 10GB/sec. This difference is evident in system responsiveness, game tests and more so in synthetic tests.

With the advances made in the upcoming AMD Phenom processors, this less than ideal management of available bandwidth is going to hurt the performance of these CPUs more than the current ones. Therefore, while this may not be a major issue for many currently, it will eventually become a pain. No matter what settings we changed, we weren't able to increase memory efficiency. There are better

AM2 boards out there from Gigabyte, in both ATX and microATX sizes. The GA-MA69G-S3H is average at best as it falls neither here nor there. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

PROCESSOR SUPPORT	AMD Socket AM2 Athlon 64-FX/Athlon 64 X2 Dual-Core/Athlon 64/Sempron
CHIPSET	Northbridge Chipset: AMD 690G Southbridge Chipset: ATI SB600 Super I/O chip: ITE IT8716
INTEGRATED PERIPHERALS	Realtek RTL8110 Gigabit Ethernet, Realtek ALC889A Audio Codec
MEMORY	4 x DDR2 DIMM memory slots; Supports dual-channel DDR2 800/667/533/400 DIMMs; Supports 1.8V DDR2 DIMMs
INTERNAL I/O CONNECTORS	1 x Floppy disk connector; 1 x IDE connector; 4 x SATA 3Gb/s connectors; 1 x SPDIF In/Out connector; 1 x TV Out connector; 2 x IEEE 1394a connectors; 3 x USB 2.0/1.1 connectors for additional 6 x USB 2.0/1.1 ports by cables
EXPANSION SLOTS	1 x PCI Express 16x slot; 1 x PCI Express 4x slot; 3 x PCI Express 1x slots; 2 x PCI slots
REAR PANEL I/O	1 x PS/2 keyboard port; 1 x PS/2 mouse port; 1 x D-Sub port; 1 x Parallel port; 1 x HDMI port; 1 x SPDIF Out port (optical); 1 x IEEE 1394a port; 4 x USB 2.0/1.1 ports; 1 x RJ-45 LAN port; 6 x Audio jacks - Line In/Line Out/Mic In/Surround Speaker Out/Rear Speaker Out/Centre/Subwoofer Speaker Out/Side Speaker Out
FORM FACTOR	ATX

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
Other motherboards with an IGP
WORSE THAN:
nForce 590-based AM2 boards

CREATIVE AURVANA DJ HEADSET

EVER SINCE CREATIVE PURCHASED EMU, the company seems to have started taking itself more seriously, especially regarding semi-professional recording equipment. Not only did the sound cards improve in terms of DSPs, DACs and ADCs, the speaker systems, microphones and headphones, in particular, have improved dramatically. The Aurvana DJ headset is one of Creative's high-end sets and as the name suggests, is primarily geared towards DJs. That, however, doesn't mean they aren't suitable for other applications, as they work well for audio monitoring in a studio environment. They may be a little too much for normal portable music playback, but even for such applications, the audio is clear, natural and precise. The neodymium driver is ultra sensitive to high frequencies, which gives the hi-hats and snares in music a lovely dynamic range.

Besides the audio quality, aesthetically these headsets are among the best headphones we have ever had. The cups are finished in real aluminium, and while this may not serve any purpose other than to enhance the looks of the set, it must be said that it works very well. This addition is more in line with the rest of the headset, because besides the individual components being of a high quality, the build quality of the set itself is superb. The drivers are wrapped in leather, which can be easily removed. The swivel mechanism of the cups is tough and most importantly, the actual wire that runs from the set to the mini-jack is designed in such a way that it's robust and won't easily break any contacts on the inside

leaving one with a headset where only the left or right channel works. This is very important considering that the jack isn't replaceable, and in any of its intended environments, it's likely to get some sort of abuse quiet often. The Aurvana DJ headset is likely the most well-rounded set from Creative ever. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

DRIVER UNITS	40mm neodymium magnet with copper-clad aluminium wire (CCAW) voice coil
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	20Hz-20kHz
IMPEDANCE	32 ohms
SENSITIVITY (1KHZ)	105dB/mW
CORD LENGTH	1.4m~3m coiled oxygen-free copper cable
INPUT PLUG	3.5mm gold-plated stereo mini-plug with 6.3mm (¼-inch) stereo adapter
WEIGHT	385g

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
Any other Creative headset
WORSE THAN:
Professional studio headphones

AMD ATHLON 64 X2 6000+

AMD HASN'T BEEN DOING well on the performance front for just over a year now. This is obviously because its competitor's products offer competitive pricing, but vastly superior performance in many instances. In response to this, AMD released the Quad-FX platform and a couple of CPUs in the form of the 5600+ and 6000+ variants.

The 6000+, as far as cores are concerned, is nothing new. It utilises the same Windsor core that powered the 4000+ X2 CPU from last year, so there were no surprises in how it performed at all. Faster than the once-coveted FX-60 and FX-62, the 6000+ is likely to be the last high-performance Windsor-based CPU from AMD as the company readies itself to introduce its K10 "Barcelona" based CPUs later on this year.

As it stands, however, if an AM2 platform is what you are looking for, the 6000+ is the CPU to have. What makes this CPU so attractive is its overclocking potential. At its default 3GHz it will provide the same processing performance in general applications as the competition's E6600, but increase the clock speed, and the CPU comes into its own. Using air cooling, we were able to operate the CPU at an impressive 3.5GHz and at that speed the performance was brilliant. Windows opened and closed at lighting speeds, applications were quick to start and most impressively, the performance was comparable to that of the X6800 in some instances. Considering that this overclock can be achieved on air cooling alone, it's most likely that even with

the reference cooler, 3.3GHz would be the normal overclocking margin without much effort. At the default clocks, it provides good performance for the price. However, at the increased frequencies it starts to get really exciting. We performed a number of tests ranging from synthetic benchmarks to in-game tests at resolutions of 1,280 x 1,024 with 4x AA and 16x AF. For the most part, the 6000+ performed much like the competition's products and at ultra-high resolutions such as 1,920 x 1,200 the 6000+ started to pull ahead. This could be due to a number of reasons, but the 6000+ provides just as much grunt as any other comparatively priced CPU out there from the competition. If you're looking for a CPU that will excel in 3D rendering, then this CPU will be even better as it excels in large data sets typically used in 3D\photo rendering. Simply put, there's no other CPU to buy from AMD other than the 6000+ if performance is what you're after but don't want to change platforms.

However, all is not well with the 6000+, in particular where the chipset and memory speed are concerned. The 6000+ uses a 15x multiplier, and since the memory speed is inherently tied to the CPU speed, should you purchase performance DDR2 modules rated 1GHz and higher, you'll have a problem extracting maximum performance from those modules. This is because odd number multipliers on the AM2 platform don't give the correct memory speed. For instance, if you select DDR800, you'll only technically have DDR750. However, drop the multiplier to 14x, and you'll get the promised DDR800 speed.

SPECS

CORE	Windsor 90nm
FREQUENCY	3,000MHz (15 x 200)
CORE CLOCK	612MHz
CACHE	128KB x 2 L1 Cache, 1,024KB x 2 L2 Cache
VOLTAGE	1.4V
SOCKET	AM2

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
Any other AMD CPU available today
WORSE THAN:
Intel Core 2 E6700 and higher

While the 50MHz drop in memory frequency is offset by the 200MHz gain on the CPU core from a 14x to 15x multiplier, it would have been nice to have the memory operate at the selected speed. Nevertheless, this isn't too much of an issue, as you can increase the HT speed so that the memory operates at 800MHz again.

The current crop of motherboards is sub par save for a few, which are neither cheap nor easily available. Should you have a capable board though, the Athlon 64 X2 6000+ is a great, affordable CPU and the perfect choice for an AM2 system. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

CREATIVE XMOD WIRELESS

WHEN THE FIRST XMOD was released half a year ago, Creative had something new and innovative to bring to the computing masses. For once, you could experience X-Fi-like quality on the move without having to install drivers or anything of the like. The sound quality was good, and best of all, it's still the simplest soundcard to set up. Just plug it in and hit the play button on your media player program. Creative has extended this even further with the Xmod Wireless set.

This set includes a transmitter that is plugged into your USB port, and it works much like the regular Xmod with a stereo mini-jack plug for ear/headphones. However, the difference is that it's actually a transmitter at the same time. The receiver is identical to the transmitter, with a few minor differences. It has two RCA plugs for stereo output, a line out and a headphone output stereo mini-jack plug.

One of the highlight features of the Xmod Wireless set is the ability to control the media player with the included remote control. This remote allows you to skip forward/back, play, pause, power the unit on and off, change the volume and a host of other things: perfect for multi-room music entertainment as you don't need to go to the actual computer for anything at all...

At its heart, the Xmod Wireless is a simple audio transmitting device, but using it is made incredibly easy and the sound quality is great. Even if you only use it within the same room, the Xmod Wireless is a great system and a worthwhile investment. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

FEATURES

1 x transmitter
1 x receiver
2 x remote control
1 x power adapter

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
Original Xmod
WORSE THAN:
Nothing

MSI P35 PLATINUM

MSI, MAKERS OF ONE of our favourite 965 chipset boards, the P965 Platinum, is back with the latest chipset with the P35 Platinum. The new board has several differences from the old: primarily the P35 chipset and the 1,333MHz FSB it brings. In testing, we found a couple more differences as well.

The most obviously visible part is the new heatsink. One thing we loved about the P965 Platinum was the unassuming (and easy to replace) heatsink. However, it seems that the P35 may run a bit hotter, as MSI has gone the heat pipe route that most boards are opting for these days. The pipe is big enough for passive cooling, so those using water-cooling instead of a CPU fan may need a supplemental case fan to keep the chipset going. Also, removing it for replacement with a chipset water block is likely to be a bit more of a hassle, and leaves parts like the power regulators without sufficient cooling unless you add your own sinks for them as well.

Another interesting bit is the number and numbering of the SATA ports on the board. When hooking up the hard drives, we found the ports starting at SATA3 and going through to SATA7. Port 7 is obviously the second channel from the Marvell chip providing the IDE port, but there was no sign of where SATA1 and SATA2 went. The mystery was solved when we looked at the back panel. There are two eSATA ports, which are the integral ports 1 and 2 of the P35 chipset. The BIOS channel numbering agreed with our conclusion as well. We think it may have been a bit less unclear to put ports 1-4 on the board and then 5-6 on the back panel, but it's a minor issue really.

The third-party Marvell controller gave us a bit of a hassle as well. It added almost a minute to boot times, and intermittently detected the DVD writer that was the only device plugged into it. This was a bit worrying at first, and then confusing as the drive would work in Windows despite not showing on boot up. However, once we had the system installed, we did a BIOS update that solved all the above problems. With the latest 1.10 BIOS, the drive always detects almost instantly, and doesn't delay booting. MSI's Live Update feature had no problems automatically finding and telling us about the new revision and updating it from within Windows.

While we didn't have a new 1,333MHz FSB CPU on hand to test the higher bus speed, we did set the multiplier on our E6700 down to 6x and tried upping the bus speed. The P35 Platinum ran fine until the 460MHz mark, and then hit a wall. However, we were unable to lower our memory below 1:1, and the RAM we had on hand was likely the bottleneck in this case. Online reports indicate that this board has little trouble reaching a 500MHz FSB with premium memory installed. In addition, MSI's automatic recovery from bad overclocking settings is still there, and has been updated a little. When the system failed to POST three times, it reset the CPU speed, just like our old P965 Platinum. However, now it asks if you want to load a set of defaults or keep the current settings and go directly to the BIOS (without applying them naturally). This means you don't have to redo all your overclocking options each time the system fails - you can just change the one you were adjusting last.

Overall, this is a good board and we'd have no reservations recommending it. However, we'd really like to see some smaller active sinks instead of those monstrous heat pipes sometime. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

SPECS

PROCESSOR SUPPORT	Intel Yorkfield, Wolfdale, Intel Core 2 Quad/Core 2 Duo
FSB SUPPORT	1,333/1,066/800MHz
CHIPSET	Intel P35 Chipset; Supports FSB 800/1,066/1,333MHz; Supports dual-channel DDR2 667/800/1,066MHz Intel ICH9R Chipset
INTEGRATED PERIPHERALS	Hi-Speed USB (USB 2.0) controller, 480Mb/sec, up to 12 ports; 5 x SATA 3Gb/s connectors; 2 x eSATA connectors; PCI Master v2.3, I/O APIC; ACPI 2.0 compliant; Serial ATA RAID 0/1/5/10; Integrated AHCI controller
MEMORY	DDR2 667/800/1,066MHz (Maximum 8GB)
SLOTS AND CONTROLLERS	2 x PCI Express 16x slots; 2 x PCI Express 1x slots; 2 x 32-bit v2.3 master PCI bus slots; Marvell 88SE6111 Ultra DMA 66/100/133 IDE controller – supports 2 x Ultra ATA drives; 5 x SATA 3Gb/sec controllers; 1 x eSATA controller; 2 x IEEE 1394 FireWire ports; 6 x USB 2.0 ports; 1 x Floppy disk controller
AUDIO	Realtek ALC888/ALC888T; Flexible 8-channel audio with jack sensing
ETHERNET	PCI Express Realtek 8111B Gigabit Ethernet
DIMENSIONS	30.5cm x 24.5cm
FORM FACTOR	ATX

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
Most P35-based boards

WORSE THAN:
Most X38 chipset boards

CORSAIR FLASH VOYAGER GT 8GB

CORSAIR IS ONE OF the biggest names in memory, and was a glaring omission from our flash drive roundup a while back. They seem a bit scarce locally, so we grabbed some from overseas to play with. Fortunately, they're very light and thus cheap to import. The 16GB Flash Voyager is busy backing up *NAG*'s critical data and we couldn't pry it from our art director's fearsome grip for a review. However, we did get to play with the smaller and faster 8GB GT model.

The first thing you're likely to notice about the Flash Voyager GT is that it's red compared to the standard model's bluish colour. Nevertheless, it's still the same rubberised coating that can take a pounding, or at least a drop onto concrete, and possibly a spilled beverage, though you wouldn't want to go swimming with it.

The specs claim a 34MB/sec read and a 27MB/sec write. As with almost all flash drives, these are quite optimistic numbers. However, they're not too farfetched. We achieved 27MB/sec reads and 22MB/sec writes in the real world, and that may have been more a limit of the USB controller as we've seen USB hard drives max out at the same numbers before. Unlike many 'high-speed' flash drives, the seek times were also quite good, averaging around 0.5ms, making it

a good ReadyBoost candidate.

The rest of the package consists of a lanyard (in case you don't have any left over from rAge), TrueCrypt software on the drive, and a USB extension cable. Nothing special, but it's the drive you really care about, and they don't get much better than this. It's blazingly fast, has a large storage capacity, and isn't easy to break. The ten-year warranty doesn't hurt either. If you cannot find one locally, it's worth the trouble (and savings) to import it. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

SPECS

CAPACITY	8GB
INTERFACE	USB 2.0
MATERIAL	Rubber
READ SPEED	34MB/sec
WRITE SPEED	27MB/sec
SEEK TIME	0.5ms

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
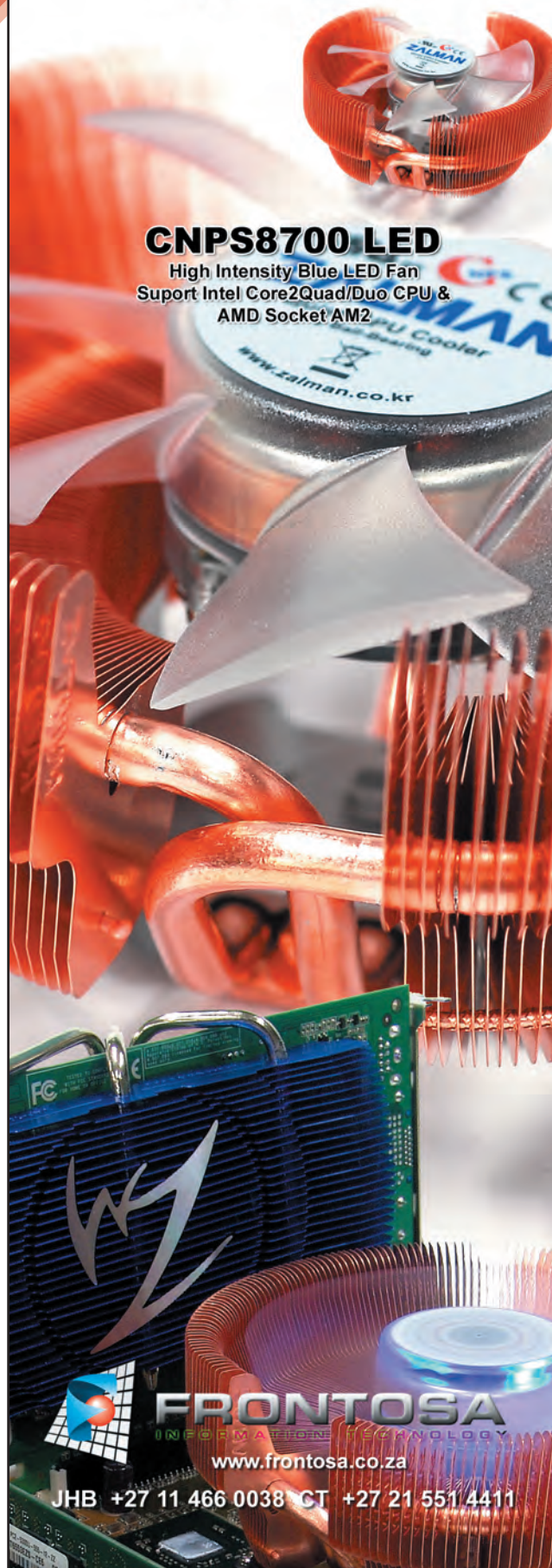Corsair Flash Voyager non-GT
WORSE THAN:
Next year's flash drives

RRP → $99 | Supplier → Newegg | Website → www.newegg.com | Brand → Corsair

JUICEBOX 450W BAY MOUNTED POWER SUPPLY

RRP→ $129 | **Supplier→** Micro Center
Website→ www.microcenter.com | **Brand→** UNI

IF YOU'VE BOUGHT A power supply in the last year, chances are you've recently found out that new connectors are appearing for graphics cards and motherboards, just after you have upgraded to get those SATA power cables and PCI Express power connectors. Yes, your 500W 'overkill' PSU is now entry level. To make things worse, AMD's new top-end cards like the Radeon HD 2900 XT will refuse to let you overclock unless you give them 300W of juice via that new 8-pin PCI Express power connector. You may try to get clever and saw off a six pin, but reports from the field are that it doesn't work: something's different about those extra two wires.

Fortunately, the JuiceBox offers a solution to this dilemma, and only costs less than half what a premium PSU does. Instead of throwing a perfectly good power supply away for a bigger model with newer plugs, you just install this one in a free 5.25-inch bay. It sports four connectors on the back. Two can be used for 6-pin PCI-E cables. The other two can be used for either 4-pin or 8-pin motherboard power cables, or the new 8-pin PCI-E cables. The supply itself also needs a Molex plug connected, which it uses to sense when your main PSU is on and power itself

up. The last plug is a proprietary connector that goes to an AC cable. A slot cover is provided to make it look neat. While the cable has a US end, the supply itself is 100-250V universal.

We tested both our normal PSU and the JuiceBox and found we could offload about half the power drain of a Core 2 system with a 2900 XT. This meant only 100-200W on each PSU instead of 200-400W on the one. The cable setup means CrossFire 2900 XTs are a perfect fit for the JuiceBox's capabilities. Our only complaint was that some of the cables were on the short side. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

SPECS

OUTPUT	500W
INPUT	100-240V AC
FORM FACTOR	5.25-inch bay
RAILS	2
MAX LOAD	20A per rail, 38A total
CONNECTORS	2 x PCI-E 6-pin, 2 x PCI-E 8-pin, ATX 4-pin, EPS 8-pin
MODULAR CABLES	Yes

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
Buying a new PSU
WORSE THAN:
Nothing

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM X30

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** Headset Solutions
Website→ www.plantronics.co.za | **Brand→** Plantronics

IF YOU'RE ON ADSL and own an Xbox 360, chances are you have experienced its VoIP capabilities, either in-game or via the Dashboard. The only downside to the system is that the headset Microsoft bundles with the Xbox 360 feels uncomfortable and is a little cheap looking, to say the least. Considering its superb record of accomplishment with gaming headsets, it was only a matter of time before Plantronics would release a headset for the Xbox 360, and this month we received the first samples.

The Plantronics X30 headset looks a lot slicker than both the Xbox bundled and wireless headsets. At first glance, it seems a little tricky to use, i.e. how it fits on your ear. However, once you have figured out that the grey rubber-end slides under your ear, you realise that this is one of the most comfortable headsets you have used to date. This clever design also lends itself to be used on both the left or right ear by simply twisting the boom in the right direction. The only design flaw we found was that unlike the original Xbox 360 headset, the volume control sits in-line and not on the jack that plugs into the controller. This makes it difficult to adjust the volume or mute the microphone when you're busy playing a game. The X30's jack, which plugs into the controller, also doesn't look as neat as the original headset.

This is because the Plantronics headset only features the jack and not the housing that surrounds it.

During the time we used the X30, we were pleased by how comfortable it felt, but were disappointed by the sound output. In terms of

fidelity, the Plantronics X30 is superb and far superior to the original Xbox 360 headset. The biggest downside to this product is that unlike the latter, its sound output is quite a bit softer, and on more than one occasion, the other party told us our voices sounded softer than usual. This can be particularly problematic if you have the sound on your surround system turned up. **NAG**

Regardt van der Berg

FEATURES

Noice-canceling mic
Extended, flexible boom
Supple, ear-melding design
Single-ear design
Inline volume and mute control
One year warranty

SCORE

BETTER THAN:
The comfort of the original Xbox 360 headset
WORSE THAN:
The sound volume of the original Xbox 360 headset

High-definition LCD Roundup

Whether you've just bought an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, or upgraded to a top-of-the-line GeForce 8800 or Radeon HD 2900, chances are you may find your old display falling behind in terms of what it can deliver. However, these days, the difference between PC monitors and high-end TVs has become very blurry indeed. Can one screen suffice for work, games, and movies? Is it better to go for a big monitor and just watch movies up close? Will a big-screen TV really have the kind of resolution and sharpness necessary to work with PC applications? Which one's a better fit for the new generation of consoles? Well, in this roundup, we'll answer those questions for you.

RESOLVING THE HD CONUNDRUM

High definition (HD) is one of the most popular buzzwords right now. However, there are a lot of little 'gotcha' terms involved with it that often mean you don't get what you thought you paid for. Some of these are the differences between 'HD', 'HD Ready', 'HD Compatible', 'Full HD', etc. To explain these, we'll have to discuss the resolution of the display: its physical number of pixels. There are three official HDTV (high-definition TV) standards worth caring about: 720p, 1080i, and 1080p. Usually, 'HD Ready' means the screen will accept but down-sample an HD signal to a lower resolution, possibly even less than 720p. 'HD Compatible' means roughly the same as 'HD Ready': the only difference being that it has an HDMI input on the back. 'HD' itself may be deceptive, as technically 720p counts as 'HD'. However, what most people want is 'Full HD', which is the 1080 resolution. It's important to know what you're getting when you buy an HDTV. Many sets will accept a 1080 signal but then scale it down to 720p or even lower to fit the physical number of pixels on the screen.

720p means a 1,280 x 720 pixel resolution, which gives you just under a megapixel.

The 1080 standards have a 1,920 x 1,080 resolution, which is just over two megapixels. This means that 1080 has twice the detail of 720. A regular 640 x 480 standard-def TV only has about 0.3 megapixels. It's important to notice the actual physical resolution of the screen, since some manufacturers may try to cheat and down-sample a signal. Plasma TVs are notorious for this, since many panels only have a 1,024 x 768 physical resolution. Another popular resolution is 1,366 x 768, which is fine for a 720p picture, but not 1080i or 1080p.

The 'i' and 'p' represent interlaced and progressive scan, respectively. In an interlaced picture, only the odd-numbered rows are first drawn. The even-numbered ones are drawn thereafter. This means that the screen updates 50 or 60 times a second, but a full picture is only drawn at half that speed: 25 or 30 times a second. The reason for this relates to 1940 TV technology where electronics just weren't fast enough to make a CRT draw an entire TV picture in one pass, so interlacing was done and the even rows were drawn as the beam traversed back from the bottom to the top. This legacy has persisted and for some reason 1080i became part of the original HDTV spec due to bandwidth limitations, as it requires half the

fill rate of 1080p. However, there's no physical difference between a screen that can display 1080i or 1080p. You still need the same number of pixels. The differences are in the signal, not the screen.

PC monitors also have their resolution issues. These days, the standard resolution for a 4:3 monitor is 1,280 x 1,024. Widescreen LCDs usually vary in cost and size, and the most common resolutions and sizes are 1,280 x 800 (17-18-inch), 1,440 x 900 (19-20-inch), 1,680 x 1,050 (21-22-inch), 1,920 x 1,200 (24-26-inch), and 2,560 x 1,600 (27-30-inch). This means that almost all PC monitors today can display a 720p signal fine, but only 24-inch and larger models can display a 1080 signal. Therefore, in our roundup, we were careful to specify a minimum 1,920 x 1,080 or 1,920 x 1,200 resolution and "the bigger the better."

TESTING METHODS

For this roundup, we used a PC with DVI and HDMI outputs and an Xbox 360 with component and VGA outputs. We really wanted to play some PlayStation 3 games on the big screens with HDMI, but unfortunately our PS3 test unit was sent in for a firmware update right before we started the roundup, and wasn't back in time.

ACER AL2623W

Supplier→ Acer SA | **Website →** http://www.acer.co.za | **RRP →** R7,999 | **Tel →** (011) 233-6100

Some may remember the 26" Acer we reviewed a few months back. It received good scores, especially for its pricing. Well, we got it back again and ran it through some more tests including a bit of Xbox 360 gaming. The AL2623W only has DVI and VGA inputs, so HDMI users may shy away from it. It does support HDCP over DVI though, so it may be possible to get an HDMI to DVI adapter to work with this display, though we didn't try it.

This screen is one of the best we've seen, and it didn't disappoint. The colours were great, and the contrast is about as good as it gets, especially with the Dynamic Contrast Ratio feature this monitor has. Despite the bigger and more expensive monitors that were competing in this roundup, the DCR feature is an advantage bordering on unfair, and we'd be hard-pressed to decide whether to go with a bigger screen if we have to forgo DCR. It especially makes a big difference

in movies, which really need the ability to lower the backlight in dark scenes and turn it up in bright ones. Sitting in a dark room makes it even more obvious.

Obviously, the AL2623W doesn't fall short when it comes to regular work and browsing. The 1,920 x 1,200 resolution is more than sufficient, and the true grey-to-grey 5ms response time will usually be enough for all but the most spec-mad gamers (5ms = 200fps). There was a slight blurring effect when things were in motion (as mentioned in our last review), but that's not really noticeable unless you're watching pixels instead of the game, and even then only barely.

About the only place this screen came up short was with the Xbox 360. The VGA port makes it an easy fit for a 360 with a VGA cable, but we had a bit of trouble setting the resolution. Even with the latest dash updates, the monitor wasn't happy when we tried to set 1080i or 1080p over VGA. It would consistently set the

SPECS:

Size: 26"
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,200
Response time: 5ms
Inputs: 1 x DVI; 1 x VGA
Features: Dynamic Contrast Ratio

signal to 1,680 x 1,050 and part of the display would be off screen, since 1,920 x 1,080 won't fit on screen. Dropping the resolution down to 1,366 x 768 or 1,280 x 720 worked fine, though there was a little bit of 'artifacting' from the interpolation. It was noticeable up close, but not from far away where you'd be watching a movie. Therefore, depending on your gaming distance it might be a bit annoying, or somewhat fine.

If you're mainly a PC-gaming person who also watches many movies and occasionally breaks out a 360, this screen would be a good fit.

NAG >>> EDITOR'S CHOICE

APPLE 30-INCH CINEMA HD DISPLAY

Supplier→ Apple IMC South Africa | **Website →** www.zastore.co.za | **RRP →** R16,629 | **Tel →** (011) 523-9489

This screen has been an object of envy for many a PC user for some time now. Before we start this review, we should mention that the Apple 30-inch Cinema HD Display has been around since 2004, meaning it's almost a three-year old design. Therefore, we can give it a little bit of leeway in not having the latest and greatest inputs like HDMI. However, overall this screen has held up quite well, and still looks fine next to newer ones like the HP screen.

If you're one of those people who sell everything in their house each time they change the colour of their iPod, this screen is for you. It's huge and has that extremely-sexy industrial styling Apple has become famous for. This monitor is very minimalist. There's the screen with a simple, bent aluminium stand, and a few ports for USB and FireWire at the back. One thing that's missing are controls to adjust the display. This is because Apple incorporated the screen control features in software supplied on a CD. This software is unfortunately for Macs only.

The Cinema HD Display uses the often-ignored Display Data Channel Command Interface to control the properties of the monitor. This is essentially the same data channel that plug-and-play uses to detect what type of monitor is hooked up to a PC. For a while now, there have been specifications for allowing the video card to control the properties of the monitor, but very few have made use of them. Given Apple's obsession with clean design, removing the menu buttons in favour of doing things over the existing video cable was an obvious move for them. This means that PC users may be a bit frustrated by the inability to adjust the display properly. We were able to find an open source project called WinACD that claims to be able to adjust the monitor for Windows users. It does seem to work, though it wasn't happy with dual monitor setups.

The Apple 30-inch Cinema HD Display is a huge and beautiful screen. Its native resolution is 2,560 x 1,600, well beyond the 1080 spec - so no worries about losing detail here. Apple claims

SPECS:

Size: 30"
Resolution: 2,560 x 1,600
Response time: 16ms
Inputs: 1 x Dual Link DVI
Features: Apple's design elegance

that the response time is around 16ms (62.5fps), but we didn't really notice much in the way of ghosting or lag. Perhaps we were just intimidated by the size, but most likely, this screen is fast enough to keep up with most gaming needs. Obviously, it's good for movies as well, though it cannot quite match the Acer's contrast since DCR wasn't around in 2004 when this screen was designed. The only real shortfall is in console gaming. There's only the one DVI connection, so no way to hook up VGA, component, or HDMI inputs. Therefore, console gamers will have to forgo the Cinema HD Display and all its glory. Hopefully, Apple will remedy this with a new version of the screen with different inputs soon.

HP LP3065

HP sent us its 30" contender, the LP3065. Boasting a 6ms grey-to-grey response time and a 2,560 x 1,600 resolution, it seems to be a good contender for the ultimate accessory to a pair of GeForce 8800 Ultras in SLI. It's a huge screen, with a black frame for those who aren't into Apple's brushed aluminium. It also has a few features the three-year-old Cinema HD Display lacks, such as an adjustable height and rotating stand, and three (!) dual-link DVI inputs. This means that if you have your own little server farm starting up under your desk, you can switch this monitor between three different PCs with just a push of the input button.

Unfortunately, the LP3065 doesn't have a connector suitable for console gaming. We didn't really notice much of an improvement from the 6ms response time, but that was only because there wasn't much of an improvement to look

for. The display is nearly flawless and only has a slight, almost impossible to detect, blurring while in motion, which is common with all LCDs no matter how fast. This monitor quickly drew many envious glares from around the office; especially during our regular *Quake III* CTF matches. However, the LP3065 had a flaw that left us a little wary of going out and ordering one right away: it doesn't seem to have a way to adjust its properties beyond simple brightness. Unlike the Apple monitor, which does this in software, we couldn't figure out how the HP screen handles this situation. It has no on-screen display, which the manual seems to make a point of mentioning, and we combed HP's support site for drivers and utilities and downloaded and installed all of them, with no luck. We tried installing WinACD with a small hope that it might look like

the Apple display to the system and we'd be able to adjust it, but no luck there. We find it a bit hard to believe that HP would leave such a glaring flaw as being unable to adjust simple parameters like contrast and hue in such a high-end screen as this, but we couldn't find any evidence to the contrary. This means the LP3065 won't be a big favourite of movie watchers or desktop publishers.

The LP3065 is great if you're obsessed with PC gaming, and somewhat cheaper than the Apple display.

SPECS:

Size: 30"
Resolution: 2,560 x 1,600
Response time: 6ms
Inputs: 3 x Dual Link DVI
Features: Adjustable height stand

SONY BRAVIA 40X250A

Supplier→ Sony SA | **Website →** www.sony.co.za | **RRP →** R35,995 | **Tel →** (011) 690-3200

It's time to leave the 'small' screens behind and move onto the 'real' displays. The Sony BRAVIA 40X250A is a Full HD (that means true 1,920 x 1,080 progressive scan) model that sports all the high-tech goodies you'd expect from Sony. It has two HDMI as well as component and VGA inputs, so no problems hooking up to any console out there with this baby. We gave it a workout with *FlatOut: Ultimate Carnage* on the 360, and were quite impressed.

This new model BRAVIA supports many advanced features such as the second generation of Sony's Wide Colour Gamut backlight system. This uses a backlight with a specific colour spectrum tuned to match the LCD's filter-absorption ranges. This means better and more accurate colour mixing through better light transfer. The result is an extremely wide colour range compared to older LCDs that have trouble with parts of the spectrum that CRTs handled fine, particularly deep greens.

The clear frame around it just begs to be mounted on a wall rather than being placed on a TV stand, and we had no complaints about the cable hook-ups or design. The image quality was great with the 360, and only had slight shimmering, which we reduced a bit by adjusting sharpness and contrast. One minor issue we found was that when the screen changed modes from 720p to 1080i or 1080p it would seem to readjust the colour settings. We'd go into the menu and nothing seemed to have changed, but for some reason it seems as if the BRAVIA would adjust each signal slightly differently. We also found that by default the screen was configured rather poorly. Once we went through the menu, adjusted things and enabled all the nice features, things improved quite a bit.

However, we were quite disappointed when we hooked the screen up via HDMI. We expected that since this was an all-digital signal, things should be perfectly clear. However, we were wrong. For some reason, text in Windows was extremely hard to read and showed some 'artifacting'.

SPECS:

Size: 40"
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Response time: 8ms
Inputs: 2 x HDMI; 3 x Component; 2 x S-video; RF; VGA; 3x Composite
Features: Second-generation Wide Colour Gamut system

We also noticed that the image didn't fill the entire screen, but had a slight border around it. Perplexed, we tried adjusting resolution and changing parameters on both the PC and TV side, but to no avail. Playing a game resulted in lots of odd shimmering effects in many conditions, and 'ringing' artifacts around any high-contrast changes like white lines on black. Despite the 8ms response time, PC gaming on this screen was rather plain and left us a bit perplexed as to what happened. For movies, the Bravia did quite well, and we cannot fault its console gaming performance one bit.

SAMSUNG LA46M81B

Samsung sent us one of its new Full HD screens. The largest in the roundup, the 46-inch glossy black behemoth is a sight to behold. It seems a bit cramped in our little conference room, but we certainly wouldn't kick it out!. The Samsung has many interesting features, which will take some explanation. The first one is Dynamic Contrast Ratio, just like the Acer AL2623W. Just as with that monitor, it makes a huge difference in terms of output, delivering a 15,000:1 contrast. Next is Samsung's proprietary Digital Natural Image engine (DNIe). This is a generation beyond simple post-processing. It deconstructs and analyses each frame and decides the best way to enhance it. Samsung claims that the DNIe system works to improve motion, contrast, detail, and colour. Contrast enhancement alone has over a million criteria for adjustment and the engine can analyse up to 70,000 sub-images per frame.

What this means is that the output of this screen is absolutely jaw dropping. Samsung includes a demo mode that runs enhancement on only half the screen for comparison. We were able to achieve similar results to the BRAVIA with DCR and DNIe off, but once we turned these on, the LA46M81B was in another league completely. Even the minor shimmering we saw on the 360 using component was gone, and the colours were noticeably more vivid.

As for the PC side of things, this screen fared far better with HDMI input. It still wasn't quite as sharp as a high-end PC monitor, but the pixels are much bigger when scaled up to this size. Text was readable and not unpleasant, so you could probably use this as one screen to rule your house if you wanted. PC gaming was also quite better with only a minor v-sync tearing issue, which we fixed by forcing v-sync in the driver. As for movies... well, if this isn't good enough for you, you'll have to move into a movie theatre.   **NAG**
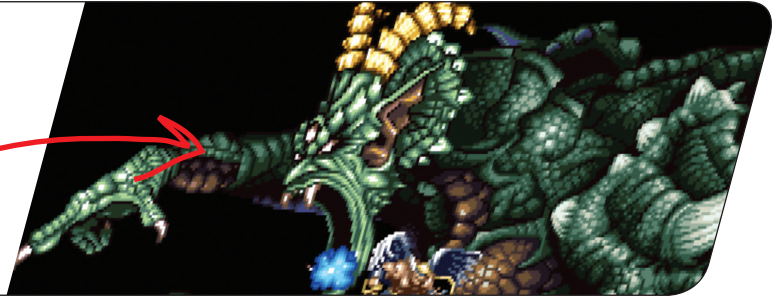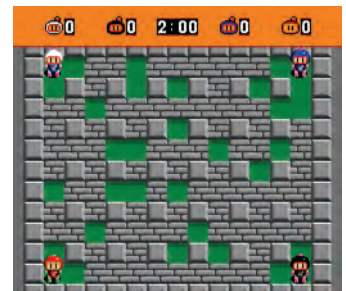
SPECS:

Size: 46"
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Response time: 8ms
Inputs: 3 x HDMI; 2 x Component; S-video; RF; VGA, 2x Composite, SPDIF
Features: Dynamic Contrast Ratio, Digital Natural Image engine

**NAG〉〉〉
HARDWARE
AWARD★**

The Gaming ABCs

A IS FOR *ACTRAISER*, WITH AWESOME MODE-7 SPIN;

FINAL BOSS! SPOLIER!

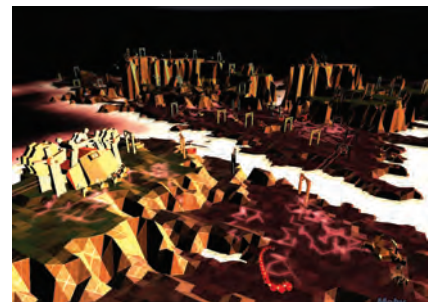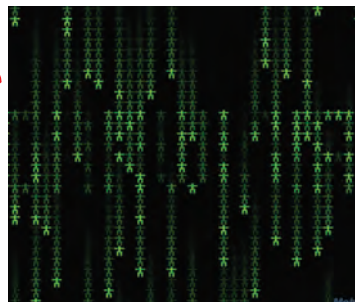**B** IS FOR *BOMBERMAN*, WHERE IT WAS A BLAST TO WIN;

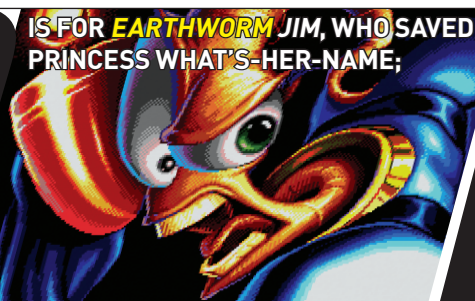**C** IS FOR *CONTRA*, WHICH WAS OFTEN DAMN HARD;

D *HAD MULTIPLE LOAD SCREENS.*

IS FOR *DARWINIA*, WHICH WON OUR HIGHEST AWARD;

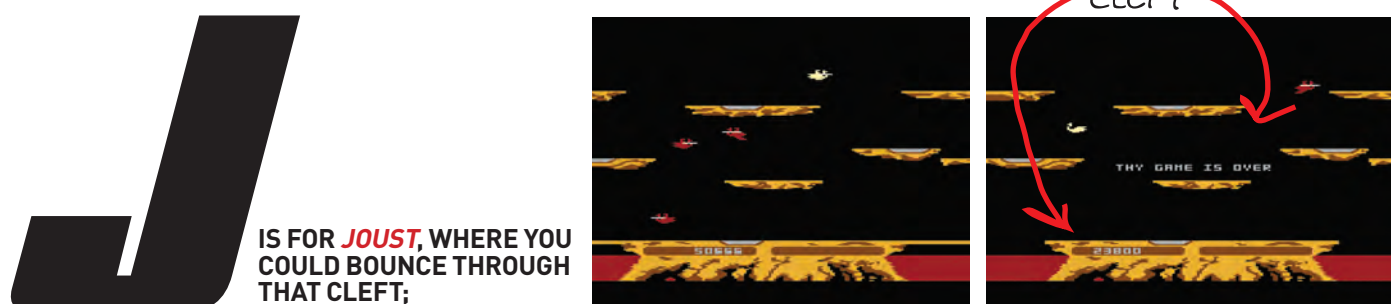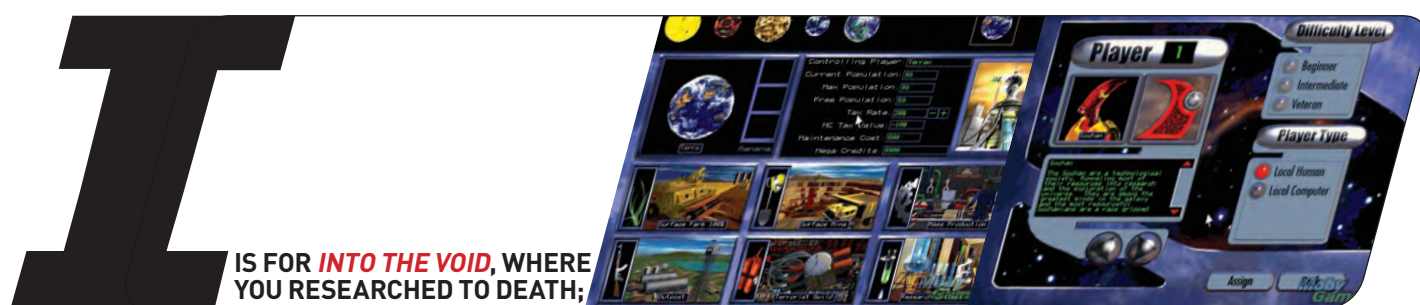**E** IS FOR *EARTHWORM JIM*, WHO SAVED PRINCESS WHAT'S-HER-NAME;

F IS FOR *FLASHBACK*, STILL THE ULTIMATE ROTOSCOPED GAME;

NOT BY THE GUY WHO MADE ANOTHER WORLD!

G

LOOKS A BIT UGLY NOW

IS FOR *GYRUSS*, WITH ITS AWESOME CLASSICAL MUSIC BEAT;

H

STILL UNMATCHED

IS FOR *HOMEWORLD*, WHICH LET YOU COMMAND A VAST FLEET;

I

IS FOR *INTO THE VOID*, WHERE YOU RESEARCHED TO DEATH;

J

CLEFT

IS FOR *JOUST*, WHERE YOU COULD BOUNCE THROUGH THAT CLEFT;

K

IS FOR *KARNOV*, A FIRE-BREATHING RUSSIAN THAT RUNS, SWIMS, JUMPS AND CLIMBS;

L

"PAWS" HA HA!

IS FOR *LEMMINGS*, WHICH GAVE US GOOD AND BAD TIMES;

M

IS FOR *MONKEY ISLAND* - LOOK IT'S A THREE-HEADED MONKEY;

YAH! i HAVE A 386!

N

IS FOR *NATURAL SELECTION*, WITH CREATURES AND GAMEPLAY QUITE FUNKY;

O

YOU REALLY SHOULD HAVE PLAYED THIS

IS FOR *OUTCAST*, WITH GLORIOUS VOXELS THREE-DEE;
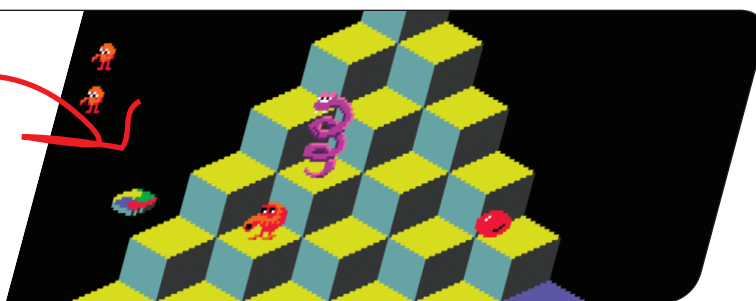
P

OVERLORD TOOK IDEAS FROM THIS

IS FOR *PIKMIN*, THEY'RE SO ADORABLY CUTE AND TINY;

Q

@!#$%!!

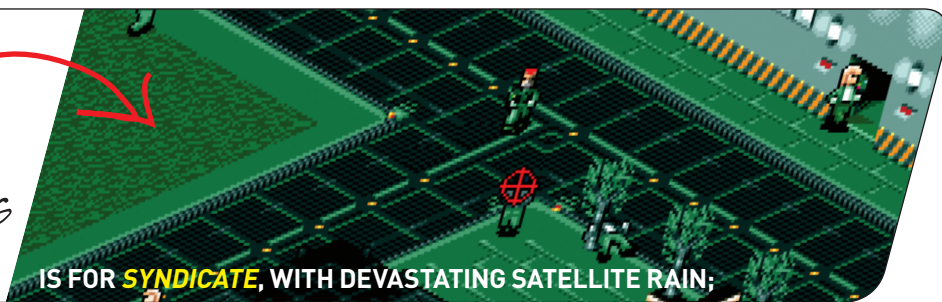**IS FOR *Q*BERT*, MAY THE LEGEND LIVE ON;**

R

IS FOR *R-TYPE*, OUR ARCADE TOKENS ALL GONE;

S

WE MISS YOU BULLFROG

IS FOR *SYNDICATE*, WITH DEVASTATING SATELLITE RAIN;

T

EVERY EMPIRE STARTS WITH A BUS

IS FOR *TRANSPORT TYCOON*, BECAUSE EVERYONE LOVES A TRAIN;

U

ULTIMA 7 WAS THE BEST OF THE LOT

IS FOR *ULTIMA*, AND ITS MAGNIFICENT LONG LEGACY;

V

BUT EVERYONE REMEBERS TEKKEN
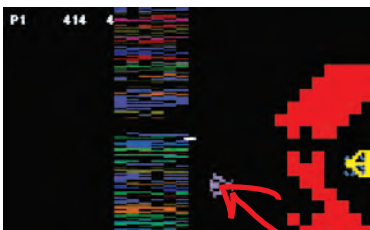
IS FOR *VIRTUA FIGHTER*, WHICH MADE FIGHTING TRULY 3D;

W

IS FOR *WORMS*, WHO WERE OFF TO WIN THE WAR;

X

IS FOR *X-COM*, AND WE STILL WANT MORE;

Y

IS FOR *YARS' REVENGE*, WHICH CONFUSED US QUITE BADLY; AND

WTF?

Z

IS FOR *Z*, AN RTS WE WOULD PLAY AGAIN VERY GLADLY.

ESWC: TRIPS TO FRANCE CANCELLED AMIDST PUBLIC OUTCRY

THE ELECTRONIC SPORTS WORLD Cup qualifier, ordinarily a major highlight of the South African e-sports year, descended into fierce controversy last month as organisers, Arena 77, announced that the winners would not be going to France for the Grand Final. The paid travel and accommodation, worth over a hundred thousand rand in total, has often been the only means for local players to compete in international tournaments, forming a major part of the incentive to enter the qualifiers.

"There was a lot of enthusiasm leading up to the event," says Mark "Lazarith" Fairbank, a top local *Quake 4* player. "The servers filled up with players in the last few weeks, all of whom seemed very excited."

However, signs that all was not well had already been present for some time. Several months earlier, Arena 77 had informed the community that the entire event was in danger of cancellation, due to the loss of the previous years' title sponsor, Rectron.

"Without a sponsor we had absolutely no way of running the qualifier," said Len Nery, owner of Arena 77. "There was an immediate outcry from the community, and obviously the ESWC organising committee also wanted us to try our level best to rescue the event. Emperors Palace came through for us as the new title sponsor, but it also meant that the entrance fees would be relatively high and the event would have to be postponed to the first weekend of June. The problem was that it was smack in the middle of exams for many players, but the forums spoke of praise and all indications were that the event would still attract the players."

When registration opened on the Arena 77 Website and via e-mail, it managed to garner a disappointing, but still respectable, 242 entrants: 162 paying the higher competition entrance fees of R265 or R295, and the remaining 80 Open LAN players paying R80 each. These were the official numbers according to tournament director, Adrian "Nexorsist" de Winter.

Despite the lower-than-average expected turnout, preparations for the event still went ahead as planned. In the final days, a small disclaimer appeared on the registration page of the Arena 77 Website, stating that an unspecified minimum number of entrants was required in order to send the winners to France, but everything else seemed to indicate there had been enough interest from the community. The last official announcement from the Arena 77 staff read: "Hope to see you guys at the event soon! It is looking brilliant."

After registrations had closed on the Thursday, Lazarith e-mailed Arena 77 with a query about travel Visas. "The response was a very confident one," he recounts, "in which Arena 77 said that I just had to make sure my passport was in order. There was not a single hint that anything would be cancelled or even that they were not fully confident the trips would go ahead." For Lazarith this reassurance was welcome, as he had organised sponsorship from local retailer Games Direct in order to cover his travel expenses from Pietermaritzburg. Several players from *Counter-Strike* team, Virtue Sports, found themselves in a similar situation, having to fly up from Cape Town and Durban.

On arrival at Emperors Palace, any potential doubts were immediately set aside. By all accounts, the venue setup was professional and visually stunning. "The presentation and layout was impressive," says Lazarith. "The main stage, entrance and table setup were all well planned, giving us that feeling of being at a top-notch event."

The atmosphere was brilliant and the admins were amazing guys – friendly, interacting with us to make sure we were happy with every little detail."

The environment was indeed conducive to good matches, and in all of the main titles (*Counter-Strike 1.6*, *Quake 4* and *Trackmania Nations*), there were many close games and several surprising upsets. Lazarith lost the *Quake 4* upper bracket final against fellow Team 42 member, Nico-Louis "Mielie" Joubert, in three maps (6-5 on Torment, 7-11 on Phrantic, and 10-9 on Placebo Effect), while the virtually unheard-of Virtue Sports knocked the favourites, Damage Control, to the lower bracket in *Counter-Strike*. Their match on Dust2 had finished with a 15-15 score, and it was only in overtime that Virtue managed to pull off a shock 5-3 win.

"We went in respecting their skill as we would any other team," said Virtue's Christopher "Anthem" Lake. "We tried not to let the pressure get to us, to remain cool and play our game as we had been doing in the earlier stages. Once we went into overtime we really came together as a team. Everybody was surprised after the win – spectators, us, and I think even DC were a little shaken up!"

At this point, however, unbeknownst to

most of the competitors, a situation was unfolding behind the scenes. "Almost every tournament had less people than were registered," says tournament director, Adrian de Winter. "There was also a large, last-minute expense to the value of about R35,000, due to a three-phase cable that we had to purchase or the event would have been without power."

Len Nery explains the situation further: "Come Saturday morning 10 a.m., we could for the first time see the full extent of our problem. I decided to call in people I trusted from the community for their input and opinions. I showed them our budget and discussed our problem at length. We continued working on the budget by phoning suppliers for discounted rates and lengthening the payment terms. By Sunday morning we had still not reached a final decision."

James "Prem" Schwikkard, leader of team Zero Effect, describes the effect of the news on his team: "Knowing that we were most likely not going to France even if we did win was a de-motivating factor for the rest of the competition," he says. Shortly after hearing the news, Zero Effect was scheduled to play Virtue Sports, who had not yet been informed of the cancellation. "Virtue played very well to beat us," says Prem, "but since it followed the news that no one was going to France, we were very demoralised."

The various finalists learned of the cancellation at different times – the *Quake 4* tournament had already reached the final. Lazarith explains: "I had been told I was playing against Mielie on the main stage and that we would be using Windows Vista laptops. We started setting up and soon realised that the laptops did not support any of our peripherals. When I went to speak to Len about the issues, he tried to calm me down by telling me that the final wasn't that important anyway, because the winner wasn't going to France. I went back to Mielie and told him everything. His immediate reaction was to just pack up our PCs and go home, which is exactly how we all felt. The only reason any of us were at that event was because it had been advertised as a qualifier to attend the ESWC Grand Final in France."

Anthem of Virtue Sports has similar sentiments. "We were told just before we were about to play on stage," he says. "We were all quite shocked and immediately thought of ways to raise the money had we won. I can't answer for the rest of my team, but when I was told, I lost a bit of my ambition to win, and I guess I didn't really play to my maximum during the finals."

However, the saddest story of all is that of Faceless, the *Trackmania Nations* winner, who went to the prize giving still under the impression that he had won a trip to France. Faceless has since been unreachable for direct comment, but has posted the following on the Arena 77 forums: "As the winner of the *Trackmania Nations* competition I am quite disappointed and angry about the trips to France being cancelled, especially considering that I only found [out] about this on Monday (the day after the competition finished)."

Regarding this situation, Len Nery has stated, "It was purely an oversight that I didn't speak to the *Trackmania Nations* winner. I truly did not do that on purpose."

Chris "Apocalypse" Lautre, team spokesperson for *Counter-Strike* winners, Damage Control, has defended Arena 77 against the waves of criticism. "We would

obviously have liked to have gone to France, but under the circumstances it was amazing of Arena 77 just to get an event off the ground, and we don't blame them for not coming up with the money for the trip. There is no easy way to tell people the prize isn't what they expected, so we didn't really care how the news was broken to us."

"Did we know prior to the event that it would [be] this big a problem? No, we didn't," insists Mr Nery. "Were we being deceitful? Absolutely not! I would like to reiterate that this event was a stunning tournament with admins that were fantastic, network that was faultless, power that was brilliant, prizes that were superb and a venue that can only be described as over-the-top and a new home to future Arena 77 events... Apart from the fact that our budget could not allow sending the players over, it was an awesome event. It looked spectacular and, don't forget, we handed out R132,000 in prizes!"

Yet, important questions remain unanswered. While the number of participants did fall short of the number of registrations, the difference was only 35 players, most of who were from the R80 Open LAN. The *Quake 4* tournament, in fact, had two more players than the number of registrations, and combined attendance in the other tournaments only missed its target by 16. A loss of only R6,000 cannot have had a substantial effect on a prize worth over R100,000.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that there must have been enough information before the event to have openly warned participants of the potential situation. On this topic, Adrian de Winter comments: "Although directly it only affected seven people, indirectly it affected the whole gaming community. Many people feel really upset that the news of the cancellation was left until the last minute and feel that the possibility should have been communicated to the gamers when the first warning signs were seen. I tend to agree with this sentiment and feel the whole situation could have been handled better. I believe it was possible to have informed the gamers much earlier."

Thus far, the ramifications for the gaming community at large have been dire. "Ordinarily I would view it in unity with the organisers as a setback for the community as whole," says *Quake 4* winner, Nico-Louis "Mielie" Joubert. "However, due to the lack of communication, information and plain

decency, my opinion of Arena77 has been damaged. I have still not even been personally informed that the trip has been cancelled. Taking the aforesaid into consideration, I don't believe I'll compete seriously again. If I do, it would only be to support the community and not based on anything promised by Arena77, as they can obviously not be trusted."

"The ESWC qualifier has shaken my faith once again," says Prem. "Zero Effect will still attend events in the future, but we will most definitely not take them as seriously or put as much effort in, as we are continuously let down. I do hope that Arena77 continues to run events, but I would hope that they have learnt a very important lesson from this one."

At the time of going to print, prize-money from the ESWC qualifier had not yet been paid out. Arena 77 has assured us that it would be paid in full by the time this issue of *NAG* hits the shelves. **NAG**

ESWC QUALIFIER WINNERS AND PRIZE MONEY:

Counter-Strike 1.6:
- Damage Control - R52,500;
- Virtuasports - R20,000;
- ZeroEffect - R7,500.
  Total Prize winnings: R80,000

Defense of the Ancients:
- Ow3ned - R13,250;
- Anonymous Assassins - R7,500;
- Born2Frag - R4,000.
  Total Prize Winnings: R24,750

Trackmania Nations:
- Faceless - R5,000;
- Zell - R1,800;
- Matosha - R1,000.
  Total Prize Winnings: R7,800

Quake 4
- Nico-Louis "Mielie" Joubert - R5,000;
- Mark "Lazarith" Fairbank - R1,800;
- William "Curious" Yates - R1,000.
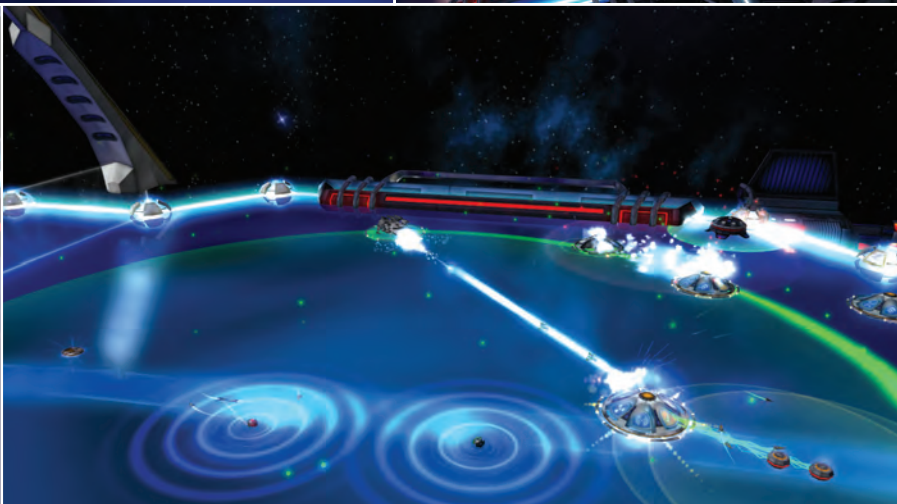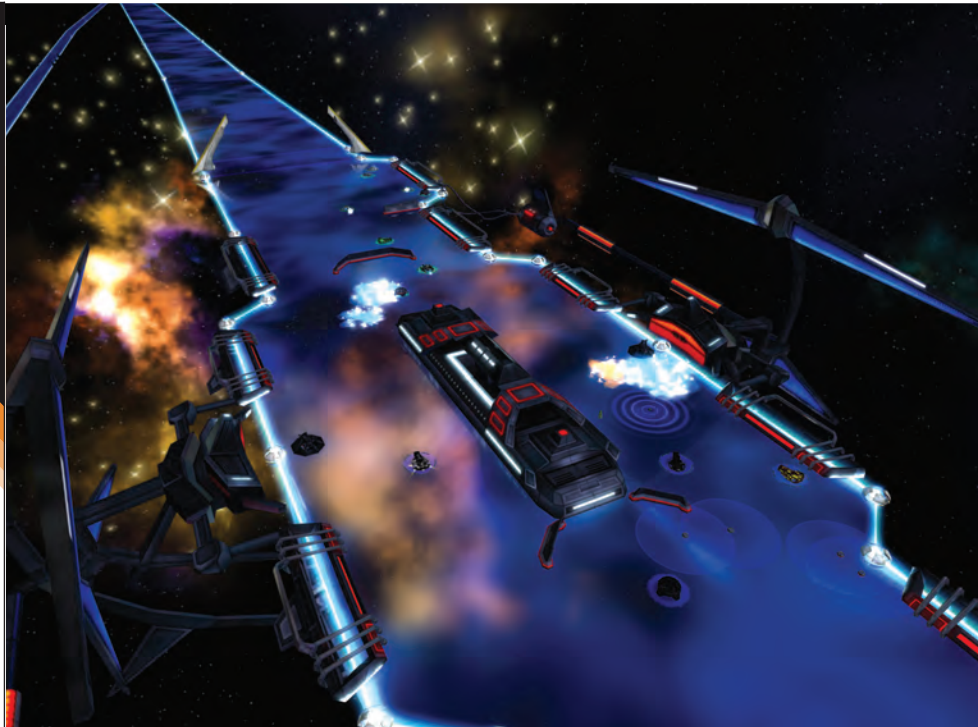 **Total Prize Winnings:** R7,800

Command & Conquer 3:
- Slick - R3,500;
- Musmit - R2,050;
- Dislekcia - R1,150.
  Total Prize Winnings: R6,700

Total Prize Purse: R127,050

THREADSPACE: HYPERBOL

www.threadspace.com

WE SNAGGED SOME HANDS-ON time with *ThreadSpace* when it held its public stress-test week on Steam recently and had an absolute blast. There's now an official demo out on Steam, around 300MB in size, so you can go check it out for yourself.

ThreadSpace is a multiplayer ship combat game that draws a lot of inspiration from trajectory ballistic style games such as *Worms* and *Scorched Earth*. It's not turn-based like the aforementioned games- everything's in real time but with a catch. Your ship has a limited amount of engine power it can use in one go, which then takes a while to recharge, based on the ship stats and upgrade components you've purchased for it. Basically, you select where you want to move to and your ship will fly there, but then remains there until you have enough engine power to move again. This creates a lot of turret-style situations where people position themselves on the playing field and then attempt to take shots at each other. Shooting involves setting the strength and angle of a shot and you can even spin shots to curve them around corners.

The weapons are what mix things up, as there are eight categories of weapon types, each with around three or four weapons.

Some weapon types are for defence and include things like walls, repulsors and black holes. Others are more offensive, such as missiles and plasma shots or nukes and mines. Weapons take time to recharge, and before they'll even start recharging, you have to build your Base, which is shot out just like a bullet. Once the base is built, you can choose which of the eight weapon categories to build, and if you build many of the same type, the bullets for that type will recharge faster. Once you've filled all eight slots, you can choose one of the categories to upgrade to "Hyperbol" status, which enhances the weapons from that category immensely. The nuke shot, for example, changes from a simple, slow-moving ballistic ball to a faster, larger projectile that shoots out energy beams as it moves along and has a massive resulting explosion. Once your base is built, you'll have to defend it. If it's destroyed, you'll lose your weapon recharge and you'll have to rebuild it. A good tactic is to build it out of the way of combat (in Objective missions this is easier than in Deathmatch), or set up defences around it, such as walls and repulsors, to stave off any attacks. You can move your base slowly after it's been built - it has a movement engine just like your ship.

The interplay between the weapons are what make *ThreadSpace* interesting: there's a lot of variety and the way players mix things up to create interesting offensive/defensive styles is truly genius. A simple repulsor fired at just the right time can bend the path of an incoming nuke right into another ship, or by using properly placed walls, you can defend your objective much easier.

ThreadSpace has multiple game modes such as Deathmatch and Objective-based matches and even includes an online MMO-style persistent universe where three factions fight for control of territories. The more territories a faction holds, the better the weapons and ships it can buy from the Marketplace. You gain money from fighting in battles and even level up. Your level determines what rank and class ships and weapons you can use as well as which servers you may join. Players who excel in combat will quickly find themselves unable to join the newbie training servers, which is what a game like this requires if it expects to keep a fresh stream of new players interested.

There's a lot going for *ThreadSpace* so far. It has a lot of polish, good design and balance as well as a heavy focus on multiplayer, botmatch and online play.   **NAG**

DATA STRUCTURES IN GAMES

PROGRAMMING A GAME PRESENTS A VAST SET OF PROBLEMS THAT NEED TO BE OVERCOME IF YOUR GAME IS EVER GOING TO BE BOTH FUN TO PLAY AND PERFORM ACCEPTABLY. MANY OF THESE PROBLEMS CAN BE DEALT WITH USING A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE AND WHAT YOU'D LIKE IT TO DO, BECAUSE DEEP DOWN, GAMES ARE ALL ABOUT DATA…

AND THE STRUCTURES THAT LOVE THEM

IT'S TRUE. FROM A technical viewpoint, a game is nothing more than a collection of information ordered in a way that makes sense, depending on what that data means in your game. We have model data that describes points in 3D. Those points in the correct order form triangles, which get drawn on our screens to give us graphics. We have data on objects in the game world that need to be able to interact with the player and each other, via mechanics like collisions or more advanced physics. We even have data that describes how, why and where AI elements should act and what they should do. All of these are essentially similar in terms of data storage, but they need to be accessed in very different ways that depend on their uses in the game.

Different data structures are good at dealing with different problems: sometimes simply using the correct structure can drastically simplify or even completely remove a particular problem. Take BSP maps (which use Binary Space Partition trees) for example: they made *Quake I* possible, when they're simply a way to organise information… However, we're getting ahead of ourselves. We'll get to BSP trees in a while.

THE HUMBLE ARRAY

Chances are that almost anyone with a little bit of programming knowledge has at least an idea of what an array is. They're often explained as **the** way to store large amounts of discrete objects or values, which is exactly what they do. The key to using arrays properly lies in **how** they do what they do.

An array from the outside is a lump of memory that's a multiple of the size of the data elements it's supposed to store. Inside, you can access the data at a particular point in the array by using an index, which gives you the data at position X. A helpful mental image is a chest of drawers, except that instead of opening a drawer and changing what's inside, you're replacing entire drawers that are custom made for that particular chest.

The biggest issue with arrays is that they can't change size. When you define that initial lump of memory, you have to tell your program how large it needs to be. That makes arrays not very good at handling dynamic objects or numbers of data elements that are going to change over time. You'd have to either waste a lot of space on an array that's so large you could never run out of space (not a good idea, unless your design specifies a very small maximum number, less than ten for instance), or you need to constantly re-copy entire arrays back and forth as you create new arrays of the 'right' size. Both are extremely wasteful. Sorting arrays is also expensive: you have to copy a ton of data back and forth just to change the order that

elements appear in.

On the other hand, if you've got a fixed number of elements, arrays are great when you need to access a particular element really fast. You can just supply its index and you've got it. No searching needed. Arrays are perfect for graphical data like models (arrays of vertices) and textures (arrays of colour information): we know exactly how big they are going to be, they don't change much and we need to be able to get to individual elements very fast.

LUSCIOUS LINKED LISTS

Linked lists are the 'core' data structure often used to explain the idea of data management

to people. They're great because they free you from the main constraints of arrays, making them very popular once they're understood. Linked lists can grow or shrink at any time.

While an array is a single lump of space dedicated to storing stuff, a linked list is made up of a lot of individual tiny slivers of space, each big enough to store a single element of data as well as the location of the next section of space the linked list uses. Instead of our big chest of drawers idea, imagine drawers spread out randomly all over the room (on the couch, under the TV, etc.), each with a post-it note stuck to it that tells you where the next drawer can be found. That's a linked list. Adding a new drawer is easy. All you need

This is not a data structure, but it used plenty

to do is put a new drawer down somewhere in the room and then put a post-it note with its address on the drawer that has no post-it stuck to it. How easy is it to add a drawer 'in the middle' of the sequence? Astoundingly simple: all you need to do is change the corresponding post-it notes around to make sure they all point to the correct drawers and you're set. All you have to do is remember where the first drawer is and you'll be able to find everything you stored. By the same principle (moving the address post-its around), sorting a linked list is similarly easy. The place that you add or remove from can also give you different behaviour: add to and only remove from the start of your list and you

have a stack; add to the start and only remove from the end and you have a queue. Easy.

This makes linked lists great for data that can grow or shrink. However, because we never know where an individual data element actually is (as we can only get there by starting at the first – or head – drawer and keep hopping to the next in the sequence until we find what we're looking for), they tend not to be too fast. Of course, if you need to go through an entire list of items anyway, then linked lists are perfect for you – especially if the order of the data matters. That's why we tend to use them in games to hold game objects. Each object needs to be updated every frame, so we simply hop through the

list, updating as we go. That leaves us free to create, remove or add objects whenever we want without worrying about fiddly things like array sizes.

TANTALISING TREES

A tree (in data structure terms) is what happens when you tie a bunch of linked lists together and give them a method of organising themselves based on what they contain. The simplest form of tree uses drawers (or nodes, as they're called) with two post-its that point to the next nodes in the sequence.

Stop. Think about that for a second. Two 'next' drawers. How does that help? Well, what if the drawer contains something like a number? Now imagine that the drawer has two colours of post-its, a green one that points to another drawer that will always have a **lower** number in it and a blue one that points to a drawer that will always have a **higher** number. What happens when those 'child' nodes point to nodes of their own? Suddenly you have a data structure that automatically sorts its data for you! If you hop through the tree always taking a green branch, you find the lowest number in the whole system. If you then go back one jump, you have the next-highest number. Going down a blue branch on a node whose green you've already followed gives you the next-highest number after that... Going through the tree one way means you count from lowest to highest. Going the other way counts in reverse. Other ways give you still more orders. Try it.

That's exactly what BSP maps did. Binary Space Partitioning. Figured it out yet? Binary because we have two branches in each node, space because the tree sorts things in 3D space, and partition because it uses planes to split space into two partitions – one on each side. Each node contains a polygon. Everything on one side of the plane of the polygon in the map is down the 'green' branch; everything on the other side is down the 'blue' branch. No more searching through a huge list of polygons: you have everything automatically sorted for you. To find the polygons closest to a particular point in the map, just go through the tree, following the green or blue branches depending on which side of the node's plane the point you're interested is on.

However, trees aren't perfect. Because they're ordered when you put elements into the tree, adding a new element can take quite a bit of logic and comparing things. Trees can also get 'unbalanced', meaning lots of nodes with only one branch pointing to a child. What happens in our number example when you start with 5, adding 4, 3, 2 and 1? Looks like a linked list... That means that trees have to be checked for efficiency often. This is why the *Quake I* map generator took so long: it was searching for the best place to start splitting the map in half to generate a balanced tree.

STRUCTURED DATA FTW

If you look at the strengths and weaknesses of the various structures available (there are far more than just these three basic ones), you should be able to find something to help you out next time your game's running slow. No more arrays all over the place!   **NAG**

MOVIES

AT THE CINEMA:
TRANSFORMERS

BY THE TIME YOU get gotten this magazine, *Transformers* will have hit the local cinemas. So there's probably a really good chance that you've seen it already. Even if you haven't, it will be hard to miss amongst all the hype and promotions. Michael Bay and Jerry Bruckheimer once again join forces to bring us an action blockbuster, this time the live-action version of the robot toys from the Eighties. After the All-Spark, a cube that creates life out of machines, falls to Earth, the Autobots follow its trail there. But the evil Decepticons have also arrived and are just as eager to find it. Caught in the middle is the teenage great-grandson of an explorer who discovered its location. Giant robot destruction ensues with a few laughs along the way. The story is shoddy and there are lots of plot holes, plus things tend to drag from time to time, but the visual effects are spectacular and there's plenty of sensory overload to blow your mind with. Just don't watch it if you really, really hated *Armageddon*.

Apocalypto

Cast: Rudy Youngblood, Dalia Hernandez, Jonathan Brewer
Director: Mel Gibson
Genre: Action/Historic
Rating: 16V

Set in the end times of the Mayan civilisation, a tribe of Indians living in the jungle are captured by a Mayan warlord. One of them manages to hide his child and pregnant wife from them, but he is captured and has to survive. He manages to escape, but the warlord and his men go after him.

The movie: If you think Passion of the Christ was a fluke, you're wrong. Mel Gibson is showing a knack for doing these 'foreign' movies based in other cultures and using subtitles without making you feel dumb or confused. The dialogue flows easily and the story is captivating, while there is plenty of violence and action to keep things going. It's also shot nicely – definitely something you should watch.

The DVD: Annoyingly, no commentary, but there is a B-roll of the film's shoots as well as a brief deleted scenes and plenty of sound-bites from the director, crew and stars.

COMICS Written by Clive Burmeister

The Highwaymen #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: WildStorm
Writer: Bernardin/Freeman
Artist: Lee Garbett
Price: R24.95

Dark tidings are brewing in the world of the future. Two retired Special Forces operatives are recruited from beyond the grave by a former ex-president to stop a deadly threat from falling into the wrong hands. Filled with action and intrigue, deceptions and wit, *The Highwaymen* promises to be one of the more interesting and attention-grabbing series to hit shelves.

Fallen Angel Volume 1

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: DC Comics
Writer: Peter David
Artist: Lopez/Blanco
Price: R124.95

When night has fallen on the city of Bete Noire, the Fallen Angel takes to the streets. There are many who seek her out - those who are in dire need - but her help can be double-edged, and not all those who seek her out for aid live to tell of it. This is a new character to DC, and is a refreshing read that gets away from the traditional kind of superhero comic out there. The story begins with all the key characters shrouded in mystery, but gives little hints and comments as the story progresses.

The Marine

Cast: John Cena, Robert Patrick
Director: John Bonito
Genre: Action
Rating: 13 LV

A marine disobeys a direct order and saves fellow soldiers from being executed on video at an Al Queda compound in Iraq. For this he is honorably discharged and finds himself back in civilian life. While trying to sort out his head, his wife suggests they take a trip somewhere. This causes them to cross paths with a bunch of violent diamond thieves, who end up taking his wife hostage. So he does what any action hero would: goes after them as they flee through the swamps.

The Movie: Okay, it's actually really bad, like a TV movie with a high budget. The action sequences aren't that great, and if you are hoping for anything like The Rock's *The Rundown*, you'll be disappointed. That said, it sports a low age rating, and provides just enough profanity and violence while not excluding kids from the party.

The DVD: A making-of, the premiere, bit and bops as well as all the promo videos shown on the WWE's shows.

Blood Diamond

Cast: Leonardo DiCaprio, Djimon Hounsou, Jennifer Connelly
Director: Edward Zwick
Genre: Thriller
Rating: 16 LV

When his village in Sierra Leone is attacked, a villager gets separated from his family and is forced to mine for diamonds. He discovers a huge stone, which he manages to hide as the rebel forces are attacked. Meanwhile, a mercenary turned diamond smuggler is caught and ends up in jail, where he hears of the villager's find. He convinces the man to take him to the diamond in exchange for helping the villager get his family back. But that won't be easy, considering the country is in an all-out war and the villager's son has been captured to become a child soldier.

The movie: There is a very good chance you'll complain about Leo's South African accent, but he actually does a very good job. Let's face it – it will never sound right to a local anyway. *Blood Diamond* is a great thriller, set on the backdrop of a war, so it has a lot of action, though of the violent war variety. It's refreshing to see Africa being used as the backdrop for this kind of movie and makes for provocative watching.

The DVD: The second disc has several features on it: a look at blood diamonds, a feature on DiCaprio and his character, Jennifer Connelly investigates female war journalists, recreating the siege of Freetown and a music video. Disc 1 features commentary by the director.

The Adventures of the Gummi Bears

Cast: Various
Director: Various
Genre: Cartoon
Rating: All

Dashing and daring, courageous and caring, the Gummi Bears are what remains of a large, advanced civilisation of their kind that lived in the forest. We get to know them as Kevin, a young page from the local castle, accidentally stumbles onto their home. Here he meets the maternal Grammi, the hands-on Gruffi, food-loving Tummi, teenager Sunni, little kid Cubbie and elder-by-proxy Zummi. But he has to keep their identity secret from the local king, who has enough to deal with with the evil Duke Eckthorne.

The Show: If you are in your late twenties, you definitely know the *Gummi Bears*, still one of the best animated 'morning cartoon' series Disney produced, not to mention one of its first. It's aged remarkably well given it's over twenty years old. A must for fans. If you haven't watched the show yet and you like animation, you really should get it as well.

The DVD: If, like us, you bought the individual volumes, you'll feel done in. This puts all seven volumes in one package and sells for R299, the same deal as *Prison Break* got. So it's a steal. Unfortunately there are no special features and by our count, at least eight ten-minute episodes are missing. But this is more or less the first two seasons.

Warhammer: Forge of War #1 (of 5)

Format: Comic Mini-series
Publisher: Boom! Studios
Writer: Abnett/Edginton
Artist: Rahsan Ekedal
Price: R30.50

The story kicks off in the heat of a pitched battle between the Empire and the hordes of Chaos, and then takes a flashback look at various units just before they are about to engage in what promises to be a bloody fight to the death. The comic sets the scene nicely for the *Warhammer* world (the world-renowned fantasy war gaming world created by Games Workshop), and fans of the game will probably want to read this (and it will probably get you in the mood for another game).

Gungrave – Anime Manga Volume 1

Format: Manga Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse
Creator: SYasuhiro Nightow
Price: R134.95

This book features some great, full-colour art work, rarely seen in manga, as well as an intricate enough story to keep your attention. First, we are introduced to Brandon Heat, a.k.a. Grave, and then we take a look at a few stories from his past and at the events that shaped him into the deadly man he has become. This book contains six episodes of the Geneon Gungrave Volumes, recounting Brandon's journey to destroy the mafia organisation known as Millennion.

FIGURINES

Mon-Sieur Bome Collection Vol.19: Yamamoto Isoroku

RRP: R279
Supplier: Cosmic Comics

120mm broad, 240mm up

The Simpsons: Simple Simpson

RRP: R120
Supplier: Cosmic Comics

90mm broad, 160mm up

COMICS

Devi

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Virgin Comics
**Writer:** Siddharth Kotian
Artist: Mukesh Singh
Price: R149.00

Millennia ago, the gods came together and forged their powers into Devi, a beautiful woman with incredible power, to defeat the evil god Bala. She succeeded and Bala was locked underground in exile. However, he returns to modern Sitapur in India and the prophecies call for the rise of another Devi. This just happens to be the kind-hearted Tara, who suddenly becomes the focus of a lot of cult attention. Throw in hard-boiled cop, Rahul, and it's action all the way. This first book collects the initial comics of *Devi*, an Indian-produced comic. The writing and artwork beckon strongly to the work that comes from publishers like Image, but the cultural changes from an all-Indian team makes it different and refreshing. Alas, Devi herself isn't a major player in this collection, but it kicks off an epic and fun series.

Alien vs. Predator Omnibus

Format: Omnibus
Publisher: Dark Horse
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: R249.00

This omnibus (over 400 pages) kicks off with the start of the original *AvP* comic series that propelled the franchise into geek Hall of Fame, and just keeps on going page after page. The basic premise: Predators are going around seeding planets with Alien eggs in order to give themselves a nice fun hunt. One planet, Ryushi, accidentally gets seeded with an Alien queen egg, and when the Predators arrive for their extra-terrestrial safari, they run face-first into a swarm of Aliens even they can't handle. From this point forward, the story arcs monumentally as readers follow Machiko, a manager gone Predator as she tries her best to survive the entire ordeal by integrating with the Predator culture she finds herself trapped in. The artwork in *AvP* is old school but masterful, capable of setting the appropriate tone and style needed. If you've never caught the *AvP* comic book saga, this is as good a place as any to start.
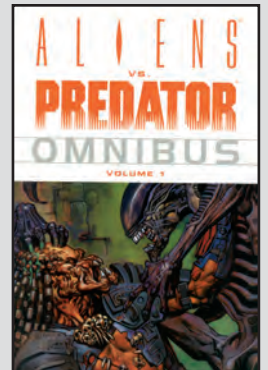
Previews Exclusive Hellboy

RRP: R499
Supplier: Cosmic Comics

230mm broad, 420mm up

Batman Mini-Figures Series 1: The Joker

**RRP:** R79.00
Supplier: Cosmic Comics

60mm broad, 110mm up

Venom vs. Carnage

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Peter Milligan
**Artist:** Clayton Crain
Price: R99.00

Carnage has been getting busy! The bastard son of Venom is having a kid of his own – and he's not too pleased about it. It seems that the symbiotes need to spawn offspring at some stage, but to Carnage his kid will just rise to try and kill him. That makes sense: Carnage and Venom have never been close either. Nevertheless, Venom thinks he can teach his grandchild the right way, namely Venom's twisted way. However, the symbiote lands with a young and honest cop who ends up experiencing a moral conflict about this, both in his human form and as the new symbiote, Toxic. This miniseries introduces the new character and is illustrated with some exceptional and unique art that is both warm and friendly, and deadly serious. The same goes for the story, which moves from drama to comedy without a problem. Even if you're not a fan of the Spider-Man world, this is a fun read that is lavishly illustrated.
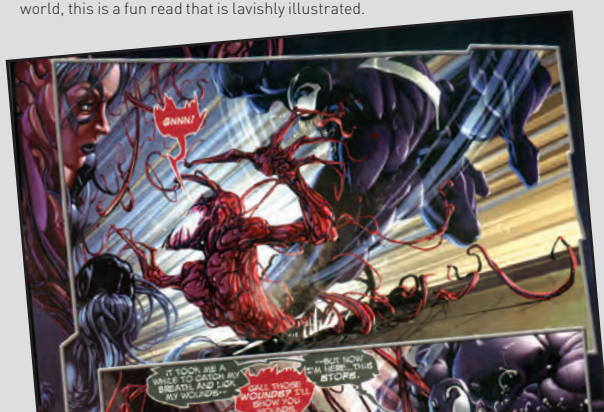
All Star Superman

Format: Book
Publisher: DC
Writer: Grant Morrison
Artist: Frank Quitely/Jamie Grant
Price: R???

In DC's *All Star* series, popular characters are handed to well-known artists and writers to operate outside of the main continuity. This isn't the first time that comic publishers have done this, but it's always fun especially with characters that have a lot of history. That couldn't be more true with Superman, one of the great-granddaddies of comic heroes, which makes reading his *All Star* comics a lot of fun. The first six issues have been captured in one hardcover edition, in which Superman gains incredible strength and an extra power when he rescues a scientist near the sun. However, his cells also start degrading, which means he will eventually die. The scientist decides to help him. Meanwhile, Clark Kent decides his new condition is enough reason to reveal all to Louis Lane. However, things just aren't going to get simpler from there. Throw in Kryptonite lasers, Lex Luthor, time travellers and more, and you have a fun and well-illustrated collection.
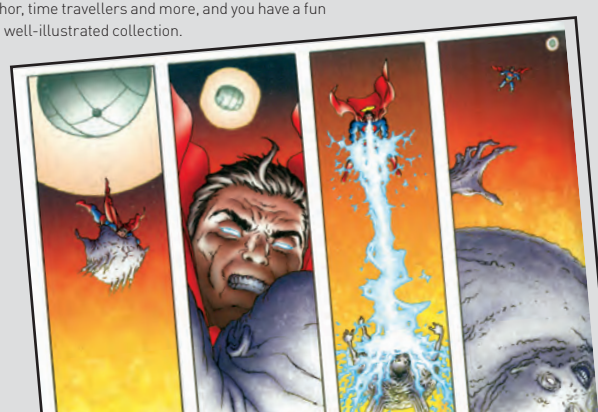
RAVEN'S LOFT

ADVANTAGEOUS CARDS

THIS MONTH, INSTEAD OF discussing the current environment (I shall, however, certainly be commenting on Tenth Edition next month, once I've had more time to play with the cards), I'd rather take a look at a strategic element of *Magic: The Gathering*: card advantage. Experienced tournament players will likely draw very little, if anything, from this month's column, but my aim here is to help less-experienced players to improve their game.

Firstly, what does the term "card advantage" mean in *Magic* terms? Let us take a look at what happens in a typical game. As a player takes his or her turn, that player draws a card, probably plays a land, and possibly plays a card (or more) from the hand. This is typical: it doesn't always play out exactly like this, but this is a fair representation of the average, typical turn. As the game progresses, more cards are played out. It's fairly obvious that, in almost all cases at any rate, having access to more cards improves your options and your overall situation in the game.

So, consistently drawing additional cards every turn means that you can play ('drop') lands more consistently, and you get to your important spells sooner and more regularly. Therefore, cards that can repeatedly yield you additional cards are very powerful indeed. Blue and black are, traditionally, the colours with the best card drawing, though the former usually costs mana, while the latter usually does so at the expense of life. Cards like Whispers of the Muse and Treasure Trove allow you to spend mana to draw cards, and eventually there may come a point when you can potentially draw two additional cards per turn, or even more. Thieving Magpie is an evasive (it has flying, so is harder to block) creature that nets you a card when it hits an opponent. Phyrexian Arena, Dark Confidant and Phyrexian Gargantua, as well as the legendary Necropotence, are good examples of black giving up life for extra cards.

Inexperienced players often doubt the usefulness of something like Phyrexian Arena, getting hung up on the fact that it costs its controller a point of life every turn. However, this slow trickle of life is more than compensated for by the extra card every turn. In the standard, average scenario, this means that you are drawing double the cards that your opponent is, and will thus be able to overwhelm him or her with creatures, find ample creature kill spells to deal with opposing monsters, or draw life-draining spells more often – along with the lands to fuel them! On average, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. (It's not unheard of for me to have two Phyrexian Arenas out at the same time, resulting in a total of three cards a turn! I've even had three of them out at a time on a couple of occasions, if mana is plentiful and I want to get to spells urgently.)

However, card advantage is not only acquired through drawing cards. Take, for example, a Gravedigger. When this zombie comes into play, it fetches a dead creature from the graveyard, resulting in card profit of one card. Eternal Witness is an even better example, as it can get back any card. Cards that generate token creatures often yield

virtual card advantage. You're not literally getting an extra card into play, but you're getting an additional permanent nevertheless. Examples include Elephant Ambush, which is a single card able to make two creatures, and Golgari Germination, which gets you a token out of every non-token casualty.

Another way to gain card advantage is by inflicting card disadvantage on your opponent. A simple example is killing a creature with an 'enchant creature' on it. Say you Terror a Grizzly Bears with a Verdant Embrace on it, you've killed both the creature and the enchantment (and, in this example, have also negated a source of recursive virtual card advantage). Another way is to kill multiple creatures (or other permanent types) with one card. If your Wrath of God kills one of your creatures and three or more opposing creatures, you have profited by one card (or more). Of course, if your creature was more valuable than the opposing three, this may still not be to your advantage, but that's a card quality issue, which I'll discuss some other time. Pyroclasm killing several small opposing creatures is also an example of a "many-for-one" (the "two-for-one" is an important tactical concept, which is also evident in

cards like Mind Rot and Stupor – spend one card to make your opponent discard two).

Cantrips (cards that do something and also make you draw a card) are also a source of card advantage. Take, for instance, Carven Caryatid: when it comes into play, you draw a card, so you get the creature and a card! An extreme example of card advantage from a cantrip is an Electrolyze killing two one-toughness creatures: not only have you spent one card to kill two, but you also draw a card as well. It may not sound impressive, sometimes, but in the abstract, this play is amazing!

Lastly, cards that just draw you a card and do nothing else don't constitute card advantage. You spent a card to get a card – no net profit. When figuring card advantage, take into consideration both how many you spend or lose, and how many you gain or your opponent loses. **NAG**

SCRYING THE SYNERGIES

Due to space constraints, this month's Scrying is very short: Deep-Sea Kraken and ways to bounce your opponent's stuff (including Remand) – you figure it out!

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ÜBËRGÄMËR

VOL ☼ ISSUE ☺ AUGUST ♠♣♥♦

VISTA/ABACUS BENCHMARK COMPARISONS

THE TOP 10 GAMES WITH BUCKETS IN THEM

BROADBAND: KNOWING WHICH NEIGHBOUR TO STEAL FROM

THIS IS A BIG YELLOW BUTTON. IT SERVES NO PURPOSE.

THE GAME STOPS HERE!

WE VISIT THE GAME-BAN CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

<What happened to all the friggin umlauts?>

ÜBER EDITOR

My timing could not have been better! The most-coveted time to be an *Übergamer* editor is when E3 happens! Okay, I nearly missed it. In fact, everyone at the office kinda missed that what used to be the world's greatest gaming event was taking place. They only caught onto it when I hit the last editor over the head with a lead pipe. Some people wanted to point out that I should have beaten him with a game, but who is really going to argue with someone holding a blunt instrument for a weapon? But I got it and as quickly as I could I got the tickets booked and the hell out of there. The *Übergamer* offices become completely nasty during E3, because while the editor isn't there, the rest of the staff get hammered in the staff lounge wearing only their underwear and watching the entire *Red Dwarf* collection over and over again. It smells, so I got out of there.

E3 is truly a surreal experience. Firstly, Americans truly do speak a different language. It took me at least thirty minutes to locate a taxi, which ended up being a camel. It took a few hours, but I eventually made it to the hotel. The gamers were definitely out in full force and impromptu real-time *Counter-Strike* and *Armed Assault* matches kept erupting in the streets. Most of these took the role-playing all the way, wearing full gear and everything, and they certainly didn't like to be interrupted. But they love involving the crowd. A bunch of 'terrorists' even tried to bundle me into a car before a group of 'soldiers' chased them off.

I had a hard time finding the convention centre – Los Angeles appears to have been shelled by the military, possibly because of the city's outspoken liberal views. Maybe Governor Schwarzenegger finally declared war on the States. When I got to the centre, it was in ruins. But I hooked up with someone who was with the publishers and he took me to a local Internet café where we watched a few multiplayer games and drank some really strong coffee. I asked the guy if he knew where the press area was, so he took me to the cleverly named International Zone. As usual, credentials were strict; I had problems getting past security because I haven't been able to get my pass (or find the registration desk). But a *Battlefield* match broke out somewhere and the press area became the target zone for some heavy shelling. Running inside for cover, I found the refreshment machine and got a Coke. Hopefully I'll get to take a look at the games soon and you'll get all of that juicy coverage in the next issue. Ü

Wooldoor Sockbat
Ubergamer E3! Editor

ÜBER NEWS

BEFORE

AFTER

BLU-RAY, HD DVD UNVEIL 256-BIT REGION CODE PLAN

Spokesmen from both Blu-ray and HD DVD camps have recently announced joint development of a new 256-bit region code system. "Basically with this new system we'll have more region codes than atoms in the universe" said PR director, Mike Schill. "This means we can have unique codes for each possible combination of user, device, title, and version of title."

This is considered a significant advance over the 'inferior' three-bit DVD region system, which divides the world into a mere eight zones of arbitrary incompatibility. "This is going to be fantastic!" commented Jeffery Usler, HD encryption engineer, "We keep track of each person's code and their player code and location. All the players require a minimum 50Mbps connections to the Internet full time. Then we ship discs locked to that specific combination to local retail stores near where the customer lives. Nobody will ever have to worry about not getting a copy of their favourite movie ever again, because they'll be the only one who can buy that specific disc! Plus theft will be a thing of the past, since nobody can play your discs on their players or their discs on yours!"

Some consumer rights groups expressed concern over inconvenience for people who travel often, as well as the need to replace lost or damaged discs. However, these issues were dismissed by VP, Allen Muring. "Travel isn't a problem. As soon as you get back home, all your discs will be waiting for you in the store to buy, there's no need to purchase anything abroad with some wacky foreign language and morally inappropriate scenes for your culture. As for lost or damaged discs, by the time that happens it will probably be obsolete anyway, though the paranoid can always just buy a second player and set of discs for it." He also informed *Übergamer* that "The players will alert customers to new versions of the movies and shows they already own, so they can always be sure to buy the latest ones. They will stop playing the old discs once a new special edition or remastered version releases, so users will always get the premium up-to-date experience. We're committed to releasing a new version of each title before the designed 2-year shelf life of each disc expires!" Ü

KONAMI ARCADE CLASSIC ON ITS WAY TO THE BIG SCREEN

Following a fierce bidding war between several high-profile studios, Columbia Pictures has acquired the film rights for *Frogger*, while Michael Bay (*Armageddon, The Rock, Transformers*) has signed on as director and producer.

"It'll be a sort of 'Small frog in the big city' sort of thing," he told *Übergamer*. "An action thriller with heart. Oh, and of course there'll be loads of special effects and explosions and stuff. People sitting in the cinema are really going to feel that f****ing frog hopping across the road."

In the meantime, casting is already well underway. "We've got Rutger Hauer as a cab driver," Bay said. "But we're still looking for that perfect frog lead. One that really embodies the sense of pathos and desperation necessary to make the whole thing believable." Ü
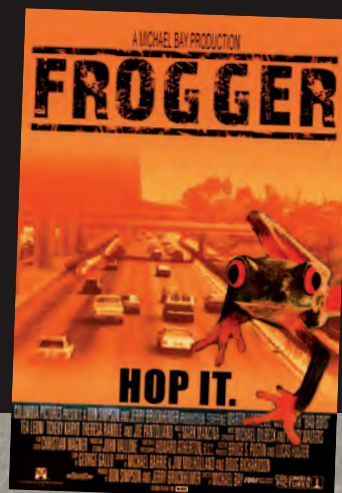
PIRACY WINNING FORMAT WARS

A recent report from a leading research firm is making a startling claim. While new formats Blu-ray and HD DVD have been getting a lot of media attention over who will become the successor to DVD, it turns out that the real winner is Piracy! According to the report, *Movie Habits: Stuff About Movie People You'd Wanna Know*, the preferred format over the high-def offerings is the free copying of the media. It's a huge market often ignored in mainstream media coverage. According to John Jones, a research associate at Jones Research and Take-Out, this is likely because Piracy often lacks a solid format.

"You might get solid examples of piracy at flea markets or in piles of back-up discs, but it's really not consistent. Neither are the requirements for them to run, since you often need a lot of different codecs for different movies." This, according to Jones, bewilders the mainstream media. The varying ranges in quality has also been a point of contention. Critics have pointed out that you can hardly compare the low-video quality often associated with Piracy to that of HD DVD or Blu-ray. This has often been a shortfall for the format, which works effectively when movies are in small sizes. But it's also proven to be extremely popular. According to the report, the quality issue doesn't remain relevant when you look at Piracy's impressive growth and reach.

Tom Blaire, freelance consultant, agrees, saying that "the new formats' growth barely hold up to that of DVD. Piracy outstrips that easily. It also works on most platforms, isn't region-coded and doesn't force you to watch the trailers." According to Movie Habits, Piracy will be a hard contender to beat. It might not even be possible, since as discs get larger, demand for bandwidth grows and Piracy can increase its grasp. The only problem, explains the report, is revenue: "Unfortunately, most of the contributors don't make a dime, a far cry from conventional media where at least some people get rich." Ü

HD CASSETTE UNVEILED

Initially the high-definition format wars appeared to be just between HD DVD and Blu-ray, but recently several new contenders have risen up to try and see if they can secure the crown of DVD's successor. This has started a fervour over creating even more HD storage options, especially in places you might not think to look. Backing the Future Research in Palo Alto has come up with an ingenious new use for the age-old cassette: high-definition storage. Using advanced new magnetic printing technology, BFR has managed to multiply the space on what appears to be an ordinary cassette to such an extent that the company couldn't give us a final number.

"It's big, okay?" said the company's spokesperson, Dr Emmet Brown, "More than the number of chips in a McDonalds order. A lot! And call me Doc!" The best is that the new HDC format will work on any conventional tape player, no matter how old. This will mean that conventional car radios will now provide many times the number of songs with the same design. BFR views the real potential as the emerging markets, where cassettes are still in common use.

"It's about to take off in a big way," Doc said, "We're in negotiations to try and get manufacturers to upgrade their cassette player firmware to support MP3 playback, and perhaps a few movie formats. We're hoping the Chinese will bite, otherwise we're screwed." Ü

YOU ALL SUCK

by Salamander GoatCopter

My fake name that absolves me from any responsibility is Salamander GoatCopter, and this is my cliché angry column where I rant about personal topics or e-sports because I've managed to convince the editors that I have a large and loyal fanbase who would burn down the office if I were ever fired.

I was going to write about my girlfriend, which I have and you don't, or a popular game, which I think they're not doing right, or some competitive e-sports game that all the skinny little emo kids play, or the fact that gamers can't spell or write or read or find their way home from outside the front door - but I'm not. I'm not even going to write about just how sucky the local scene is compared to the awesome country I've just moved to (Greenland), where I now stay and then write about things happening on the other side of the planet because I'm just such a damn authority on everything.

No.

The realisation hit me that there is something much more important I should be complaining about: You. The reader of *Übergamer*.

Just who the hell do you think you are? Every month, the staff here at *Übergamer* sweat, toil and tear their way through producing the best damn gaming magazine, the most über gaming magazine, the world has ever seen and what do you do? You don't write. You don't call. You don't even bother to let us know just how damn über we are and how thankful you are that we're doing such an incredible job at bringing you the best gaming magazine since Ghandi bought a PlayStation 2 and totally pwned Hitler in *TimeSplitters* and then wrote about it on his blog. No, you don't.

You just sit there and bask in the glory that is *Übergamer*, sucking up every little letter that was painstakingly affixed to the page with our blood as if it were the nectar of the Gaming Gods, John Romero and that guy who gives us our pirated copies of the latest games so that we don't have to waste our pizza money on whatever drivel the game developers push out of their buttcracks these days. You live, breathe and eat us, but never even stop to say Grace.

I am ashamed of you all.

Do you think we do this for fun? Do you think this is some kind of game to us? We break our backs and bones, bending over to take it from all those publishers and advertisers who try and control the minds of the gamers and get them to think that Totally Clone Sequel 4 First Person Shooter X is the best game ever and anyone who disagrees is obviously just a fanboy of Totally Other Clone Sequel Series 3 First Person Shooter Y. We do this all for you! All the pain, and the suffering, for you!

But you don't care. You're just a gamer, the kind of guy or girl (who is really a guy pretending to be a girl online for the lulz) who thinks that everything is your right, your Gaming God given right and that makes it okay to be like that, because it's your right and nobody can take that away from you. You don't care at all, do you?

I hope that once you turn 12 your parents take away your PlayStation 2. I hope they realise that you didn't actually need that R5,000 graphics card "for homework" and then give it to your cousin who only ever plays *Solitaire*. I hope they finally start to understand that the only reason you needed that 1,024Mbps ADSL connection is so that you can download more porn to give to your friends in trade for games they get from their friends, and then call up Telkom and have the line removed.

We're Über, and you're a Noober, and you'll have to live with that for the rest of your life. Ü
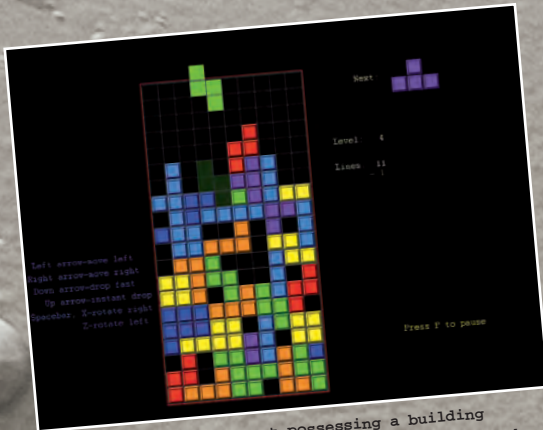
Tetris was banned for not possessing a building permit, as well as "building what would appear to be Kapitalist Skyscrapers".

Postal was banned to hide the fact that Stolokvoknia has no postal service. But the looming movie might see that reversed. The locals love Uwe Boll's films.

Nintendogs was banned because, well, how do we put this? In Stolokvoknia, horse meat is a luxury.

Lara Croft's sultry curves were just too much and the series remains banned so that local men don't figure out how ugly their women actually are.

The pill-popping habits of Pac-Man did not escape the country's censors, who also found a problem with the self-gratifying consumption.

Fearing that secret military tactics would land in the hands of local rebels, all real-time strategy games were banned – especially Age of Empires.

Fuel is heavily regulated in Stolokvoknia and this heavy rationing was at odds with the free-wheeling antics of the Need For Speed series. Also, the average speed limit in the country is 10km/h.

Solitaire was banned to cut down on rampant gambling.

Once again, Grand Theft Auto faced the wrath of a ban, but not because of the violence. Instead, the state wasn't impressed with the in-car capitalist radio.

THE NATION OF STOLOKVOKNIA HAS A LONG, PROUD TRADITION OF KEEPING ITS CITIZENS IGNORANT. LOCATED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE OTHER SIDE OF ASIA, *ÜBËRGÄMËR* DISCOVERED THAT THIS COUNTRY HAS BANNED THE MOST GAMES IN THE WORLD. WE DECIDE TO LEARN FROM ITS EXAMPLES...

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