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NAG DVD

SPORE Creature Creator

SA FIRST LOOK

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THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

GOOD GRIEF!

EVERYTHING THAT CAN GO wrong went wrong this issue. I'm actually writing this text while touching my desk (wood or at least something that looks like wood); I'm governed by the intricate set of rules and laws as dictated by Murphy. So, while I'm writing this, I'm thinking, "will it ever see the light of day, will we hit the print deadline this month". You see, if we're late by even one day with the print deadline, there's no guarantee that the magazine will make it on time. If this happens it'll be a week late on-shelf (something we've never had happen in the past... I'm touching my desk again) and a week late means loss of sales, readers with pitchforks and burning torches across the country and more than a few irritated advertisers. Some highlights... as you know, the *NAG* DVD is being prepared by Miktar in the States these days. The plan was to create an ISO of the DVD and upload it to our FTP server. Because we always leave the DVD until the very last hour to catch any major new demos or movies, we only discovered the upload speed to our German based FTP service provider was too slow too late; so slow in fact it would have taken over 40 hours to upload. Yes, I know we should have tested it – blame Miktar. So much for the mighty USA to Europe bandwidth we keep hearing about. Following the upload, I would then have to download it. The problem: we needed it in less than 16 hours. Panic started to spread at around 20:00 that night as the DVD needed to be burnt and sent by 12:00 the next day – 16 hours to go. Thankfully most of the *NAG* staff were online that night so we split up the downloading and between five of us managed to pull in the complete 9GB of files from all over the Internet. So a big thank you to everyone who helped out and sorry for cutting into your online gaming for a night. The benefit to our readers is that we were able to update and improve on the DVD by adding a lot of E3 trailers and videos. The only problem is that some of the content has changed from what we've advertised in that .exe that loads when you stick the DVD in. Oh well... Then, the art director's computer crashed on the second last day of layout and design. Groan. But anyway, here it is. Enjoy this one because it was hell to get out there. ;)

NEWBIE

Following on from the last issue, I'd like to welcome Geoff to our ranks; he wrote the obligatory 200 word, "my first two weeks at *NAG*" which you can find elsewhere on this page. Before he mailed it the excuses were already coming in about not his best and so on... it's not too bad, a little mushy here and there, but hey he was under pressure to squeeze it out. So that's it for a while. Both new writers are installed and working properly and the future is looking bright.

R**A**GE 2008

What can I say about r**A**ge this year? Surprisingly, it's bigger than last year and we've increased the LAN to 1,800 people (tickets go on sale on 1 August 2008 at Computicket). There are more exhibitors, more people coming and a monster stage area. We might also have one or two international developers coming to show off their latest games too – nothing confirmed but it's looking good so far. The interesting thing is that the event is attracting some international attention, which is going to mean good things for the future. r**A**ge is happening from 3-5 October this year, so make a note somewhere and prepare to experience the biggest and the best in the country.

Michael James
Editor

MY FIRST 2 (.4) WEEKS AT NAG

Before I started working at *NAG*, I came to the office once. I peered in through those glass doors, taking in the sight before me: giant LCD TVs, mounds of high-end components, and one very particularly strange sight – happy people. People like working here, they enjoy it. It's a strange concept, really it is, and it's something that I now get to experience. Coming from my 3D animation job, which I always thought I enjoyed, into this completely alien industry was one of the most natural changes I've ever made in my life. Mushy stuff aside, my first two weeks were awesome. I discovered that I'm not as bad at *Quake III* as I thought, but I still get pwned by most of the guys here. I also came to the conclusion that I rather like this whole writing gig, it's an oddly fun activity, even when I've got the whole office standing around waiting for me to submit a piece (this is happening right now).

While I didn't get a chance to sit around playing games all day, and actually had to, like, work; I'm confident that with enough effort and patience, one day I'll reach that golden goal of all gamers around the world, here's holding thumbs.

Geoff Burrows

COVER STORY

Initially we were going to run a *Fable 2* cover and then it was going to be a *Spore* cover, but unfortunately for everyone else news of *Diablo III* broke while we were busy with this issue, so naturally that had to be our cover. We were sent two pieces of *Diablo III* cover artwork, but they weren't that great so we opted to just stick the logo on the cover – you know, for dramatic effect. It's all you really need to tell the whole story in this case, so enjoy the feature and prepare for the long wait until it's finally installed on your machine and ready to play... and people say PC gaming is dying – what a joke.

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Zyniker
SUBJECT: Letter of the Month :D

"**SOME OBNOXIOUS IGNORAMUS SENT** a letter in to your July issue defacing NAG for a typo. Perhaps he's just new or maybe page 25 of your May issue was the first he's bothered to read but typos in NAG can be found in abundance. However I write this not in an attempt to insult but rather I endeavour to enlighten. Every large publication has typos, especially magazines. You see writers have this thing called 'deadlines'. These deadlines are law in the world of journalism and without them nothing could get accomplished as writers tend to get... distracted. Now let's imagine these writers have lives, they have families, go to movies, play games, travel etcetera, etcetera. So when articles get handed ion on the deadline and go through the editing process the Editor(s) are left with a lot of work and very little time to accomplish it. This leads to typos which you can find in every publication spanning the globe. My point is this, it happens, get over it. In the grand scheme of things typos are rarely significant and do not justify complaints."

I like the point you make and it's all true. Give us a break people. Have two free games for flying the NAG *flag so high. Ed.*

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

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

stand alone

From: Xavier
Subject: DVD content outdated

"**I BOUGHT THE JULY ISSUE** of NAG two weeks ago. I love the magazine and the free DVD with all that content. There is just one problem I would like to mention with the Oblivion modifications. They are not the latest versions currently out. [He then goes on to list a few, Ed]. I would like to know why the DVD had those versions instead of the latest versions and I would suggest placing those latest versions in future issues. Otherwise, Great magazine!"

The DVD is done about 2-3 weeks before the magazine is on shelf, so it's possible that new updates arrive which we'll be too late to catch. Ed.

From: Reiner
Subject: Ethnic Groups in Gaming

"**LIKE MANY LANS I** had previously went to there was always something that I had left at home, this time unfortunately it was my mouse (retard...). Anyway I sat down and asked the dude next to me if he had an extra mouse he could lend me... He then replied in Afrikaans which I was not any good at so I asked another person but he also spoke Afrikaans. I soon figured out that nearly the whole LAN was Afrikaans. I also noticed it when I was playing online. My question, does gaming belong to a certain ethnic group than it does to another? I still see and hear a few English speaking people here and there but it seems that especially at big LANs the Afrikaans (and sometimes Gothic) ethnic groups are the majority. Is it a norm in the community? Or just a lot of them love the gaming scene? And I am not a racist person."

I can solve your problem. Here's what you do. The next time you're at a LAN and have borrowed, begged or bought all the stuff you didn't remember to take with you, make a list like this: computer [ ], screen [ ], headphones [ ], mouse [ ], keyboard [ ], mouse pad [ ], required software [ ], etc. Now, next time, before you leave the house, make sure everything is ticked off on that list. In general, you're going to have a lot of problems in life if you keep forgetting to bring essential equipment to group activates. Ed.

From: Chris
Subject: C&C Renegade

"**HEY ALL AT NAG,** love the magazine I've bought it for longer than I can remember now, just a request but can you please put Command & Conquer Renegade as a full game on the next DVD? Please, I am a huge fan of the game and your magazine."

Well, no we can't, because that would be illegal. I keep getting moronic requests like this all the time. It makes me worry about some of the people who buy this magazine. I'm torn between asking them not to buy NAG in the future and their lovely money [rubbing of hands and evil laugh go here]. Ed.

From: Neil
Subject: Movie licence Gaming

"**MOVIE LICENCE GAMES HAVE** never been great (with the exception of Lego Star Wars), but I've always gotten plenty of enjoyment while playing them, even though they are not comparable to games such as Call of Duty, Crysis, etc.. But when I came across the trailers for the

NAG FAN ARTWORK

A **WHILE BACK (MAY) WE** asked people to send in NAG fan artwork. This month we received a few decent entries. In no order of importance:

Jaco Herbst. "I made this game model for a competition recently. I've now turned it into a tribute to the awesomeness that is NAG, may your heads swell with pride."

Pieter Steyn. Didn't say anything...

Darren Peach. "I built this some time ago, I updated it with a simple environment for it and tweaked the model to integrate the NAG logo into the geometry. The software I used for this is 3ds Max, Vray, After Effects and Photoshop for touch-ups."

Stefan Zermattenm. "By night a lonely bedside light but by day it spends its time staring at truly beautiful centrefolds. Made this in Blender, inspired by the lonely lamp. If you'd like any changes or a better resolution render please let me know."

new Iron Man game and read that it would be licensed under SEGA, I was really looking forward to it, thinking that this was the new hope of all movie licensed games. So I managed to get myself a copy (for PC) and well here goes... The only video option that is changeable was the resolution; the menus are slow and frustrating. Now to the actual game... the music is repetitive, boring, and painful, the visuals are crappy, with no detail at all, the gameplay makes me want to smash my head into my monitor, the map sizes are minute and when you reach a boundary line, you are pestered by that annoying suit voice, the enemies suck, the AI sucks, the fighting sucks, the shooting sucks, the damage system sucks, boss fights suck and flying sucks. So I think you get my point, that the game is by far the worst game I have ever played and just makes me suicidal. Maybe it would be better on console but I doubt it. I do not recommend this game to anyone that enjoys the movie."

You should have read the review before you bought the game dude – it got a rather generous 50% in the last issue of NAG [July 2008]. But you are right – it did suck. Ed.

From: Voltar3n
Subject: NAG, NAG, NAG

"**A HEARTY HELLO TO ALL** the peeps in the NAG office, slaving over hot consoles and the ever dying PC... Guys ever since I played those TV games of old, I wanted to become a games tester, it'd be my greatest accomplishment, I even thought of studying journalism and becoming a games reviewer for a great magazine. Yet it seems that reviewing has not become the norm, no, as it is with the media as a whole, it boils down to your opinion. I don't buy your magazine to find out what you think or what you feel is lacking in the game, that's your experience! Keep it to yourself. I see that game X Y and Z will be reviewed, yet when I turn the pages it's four pages of complaints and constant nagging. You've all become spoilt with choice and freedom of opinion, great visuals and gameplay, notwithstanding the fact that the games you review, on (I believe) sponsored consoles and PC's, look bloody brilliant! Page 59 for example! Never have I seen such attention to detail WRT the explosions and character detail, nor will I soon because getting a console or PC capable of doing those visual back flips is a financial commitment. I think you should all be locked in a really dark room with board games, because you've totally lost perspective and your consumers are noticing I am writing this in the hopes of helping the magazine and in some small way the gaming industry, as stupid as it sounds, it's always been part of my life and surely will be for a long time to come. You're lucky people, realise that. If any of you wake up in the morning and say "oh no, work again" go and become an accountant or wrestle snails for your granny, it looks like you'll enjoy that more

than your current employment position. Show us some NAG without the Nagging, please! All of the best you spoilt brats."

More from: Voltar3n [This was his next letter – a week later. Ed]

"I have to commend you on a superb July edition of your magazine! Maybe you read my previous letter, not being at all happy with its content (sending it straight to the trash), or maybe, just maybe it did its rounds in the office and was taken to heart. Either way, apart from some typos and grammatical errors, the magazine is near perfect! So thank you and my sincere apologies if anyone was offended or in any way reprimanded because of my letter, I wrote it with the best intentions at heart and you need someone to keep you on your toes. (No offence Ed, from a market point of view)"

Thank you for your guidance. Everyone at the office agrees that your comments and insightful letter made all the difference – we were nothing until you touched our lives. I'm glad you enjoyed the new and improved July issue of NAG, the one you received a week after you sent your first letter. Ed.

From: Robert
Subject: How it must be writing about games.

"**A FTER READING THE LATEST** NAG, I realised something. It must be cool to write about games. I mean, other than selling your soul, receiving death threats and writing long reviews all the while consuming large amounts of coffee, reviewing the thing you love most and giving it a score that will produce the aforementioned death threats, must be a really cool thing. I have been a gamer for nine years, since I was five. I started out secretly playing on my sister's PC, until she discovered the evidence of my presence and proceeded to beat me up. I moved on to the PS1, then 2, then jumped the bandwagon to the Xbox 360. But enough about that, and back on topic. Is it really cool writing about games? Is it cool being a bunch of cats in an office building, knowing no one will notify the authorities because, in true SA police fashion, they'll arrive in a really long time? I have always considered writing for games and I would have gladly sold my soul for a part time job at NAG if I hadn't already sold it for Halo 3. I hope one day I can be the one producing the awesome magazine, not buying it. I'd look forward to the Friday night drunken sing along and chainsaw wielding editors demanding a ten page article on the evolution of something most haven't heard of. Keep producing a great magazine and thanks for the unique sense of humour and accurate reviews you manage to fit into one magazine. I'm off to go do what I do best, and play the games I have a passion for."

It be good to write about games. Thanks for the nice letter and yes, I love this job. Ed. **NAG**

NAG

FALLOUT 3 UPDATES

Australia loses out, modders and child-killers snubbed, traitors denounced

BETHESDA'S POST-APOCALYPTIC FIRST-PERSON RPG won't be landing on the sandy shores down-under, it seems. The Classification Board of Australia has refused to give the game a rating that would fit within its MA15+ age-restriction limit, largely due to *Fallout 3*'s high levels of drug use, known as "chems" in the game. The Board is unhappy with the way in which "chems" are presented to the player in the inventory screen, depicting syringes, blister packs and something representative of a crack pipe. Drugs have previously played a fairly major role in the series, showing the darkest side of drug addiction. It all seems a little odd, however, considering the fact that Australian customers buying through EB Games were set to have their very own special edition – featuring a Brotherhood of Steel figurine instead of the Pip Boy Bobblehead.

In other *Fallout 3* news, Bethesda has confirmed that despite the fact that it could be done, the game will not ship with an editor of any sort. Citing console security issues as the major concern, Bethesda's Todd Howard told eager fans, "If and when one is available, it will be a free download. I wish I could promise that an editor will be coming and when, but I can't."

Adding to the waves of concern emanating from the upcoming release, it has been officially noted that there will be no child-killing in the game. Previous iterations of the series half-heartedly tiptoed around the issue, something that was soon bypassed by the modding community. According to Howard, children will simply run away when attacked, and nearby adults will immediately turn on the player.

Howard has also made a confession, one that might send *Fallout* fanatics around the world into a screaming rage: traits are out. Chosen at character creation, traits are almost always double edged. For example, one particular choice would give the player enhanced agility, but would significantly reduce their strength. What this ultimately amounted to was a way to manipulate the primary stats with more freedom than simply dividing 35 points among seven scores. All is not lost, however, as perks are set to take over in a big way. Players will now be able to select a new perk every single level, choosing from a pool of almost 100 – if you include ranking up existing perks. If this is all sounding rather horrible, fear not: the notorious Bloody Mess trait is back, in perk form, and is sure to treat you to a brilliant shower of violence almost every time you slay an enemy.

1942 REMAKE AVAILABLE ON XBLA AND PSN

It seems that Capcom just can't seem to avert their attention from the lucrative retro-remakes business. This time round, the classic top-down WWII shooter *1942* is up for renewal, in the form of *1942: Joint Strike*. Sporting some rather snazzy particle effects and a 3D engine (although rest assured that the view will still be from a bird's eye), the remake is sure to rekindle those lost childhood fantasies of gunning down countless enemies that fly straight at you while dodging slow-moving explosive projectiles in ridiculously complex patterns. The game will be available by the time you read this from both PSN and XBLA.

DEFINITELY NO STARCRAFT II FOR 2008 :'(

StarCraft fans throughout the world, prepare to weep. Despite previous (unconfirmed) hints from Blizzard that their sequel to the number one RTS of all time might be out this year, you'll have to wait until 2009 for your alien warfare fix. Blizzard claims that the single-player campaign is only about a third complete, and judging by the company's history of strict quality control, we're happy to wait until they're good and ready.

EA TO PUBLISH ID SOFTWARE'S RAGE

ID SOFTWARE (*DOOM, QUAKE,* *Wolfenstein*) and EA have signed an agreement citing EA as the publisher of id's latest sure-fire blockbuster, *Rage.* Activision (who usually handle the publishing of id's titles) may have been left out in the cold on this one, but really, with the Activision/Blizzard merger, it's doubtful that Activision needs any more cash to fill their (doubtlessly) overflowing coffers. David DeMartini, senior vice president and general manager of EA partners, had this to say about the deal: "The *Rage* publishing deal is the epitome of EA Partners' mission: Provide the world's best developers with access to the world's best publishing resources. The team at id Software is one of the best development studios in the world. We're excited to work with id Software to give *Rage* a blockbuster launch on the global stage." Currently, *Rage* is the only id title set to be published by EA, with possible publishing deals for other id titles at a later stage.

The game is built on id's shiny new Tech5 engine and is supposedly an "all-new take" on the first-person shooter genre, seemingly set in a post-apocalyptic future. Can't be sure, but given that most of the current-generation games are set in post-apocalyptic wastelands, doesn't putting "all-new take" and "post-apocalyptic future" in the same sentence make those two statements cancel one another out? Here's to hoping that the gameplay will blow us common folk away. Taking a step in a different direction than most of id's previous FPS titles, *Rage* revolves around the use of vehicles in combat and travel - no more trudging around on Mars for hours on end with no benches in sight and the blisters on your feet swollen to the point that they begin peaking out of your boots. Vehicular battles and races allow you to earn cash, which can be used to upgrade your vehicles and character. Details are scant on the title, so we'll have to wait and see how id's latest will satiate the masses. QuakeCon 2008 is happening soon though, so hopefully we'll have more info on this mysterious title soon. Who knows, maybe we'll hear more about the other titles id is working on as well (*Doom IV* and *Quake Live*, that we know of).

TEAM HIGH TECH CRIME, AWAY!

For many readers out there, you'll no doubt be familiar with the hacking scare that had thousands of Steam users worrying themselves to sleep at night during April last year. Internal Valve Website information, error logs and Steam users' credit card details, had reportedly been stolen by 20-year-old Dutch hacker MaddoxX. While the hack's seriousness was later rebuked by Steam's marketing director, Doug Lombardi, the act remained illegal and MaddoxX became a wanted man. Soon after, MaddoxX hacked into Activision's systems, and supposedly got hold of early code for *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars.*

Almost a year later, the Netherland's super awesomely-named Team High Tech Crime (THTC) has caught up with the young criminal. If his previously mentioned infractions weren't enough, Dutch police have dug up even more dirt on MaddoxX – claiming he procured over 50,000 users' credit card details from an "English tickets site", using a fair chunk of them to play online poker and order goody-bags full of gadgets, ranging from MP3 players to high-end laptops.

FANBOY NOW A REAL WORD!
That's right, now you can use the word "Fanboy" in your essays without fear of repercussion! Merriam-Webster Inc. who publish those dictionaries, have added "Fanboy" along with 100 other new words to the most recent edition of its Collegiate Dictionary.

Fanboy is apparently one of the "oldest" of the new words, with origins dating back to 1919. They define Fanboy as a "boy who is an enthusiastic devotee, such as of comics or movies". Tough luck, girls, Fangirl is going to have to work harder. Better luck next year!

The last time Merriam-Webster made a poignant (for gamers at least) addition to its word list was with their word of the year in 2007, "w00t".

EA'S MYSIMS COMING TO PC IN OCTOBER
There's a theory that goes something like this: EA will sell anything to anyone, sooner or later. This stands true once more as they prepare to release *MySims* for the PC, the cutesy town-building simulation originally found on the Wii and DS. Whether or not this is a good thing is difficult to say, although it will likely draw in the younger and more casual crowd – segments that are rapidly slipping out of the grip of PC gaming.

JUDGE GOES AFTER THOMPSON
Jack Thompson, every gamer's favourite lawyer, is under some serious pressure thanks to Judge Dava Tunis's relentless approach to his disbarment case. During the case against Thompson, the judge announced her recommendation that his potential punishment for over 30 accounts of misconduct be permanent disbarment, not the measly ten-year suspension the Bar prosecution initially went after. Jack's response to the sanest thing we've heard from the Florida court in recent years? He calls Judge Tunis a "raving mad woman" and "unhinged".

DUAL SHOCK 3, NOW AT A STORE NEAR YOU

AFTER NEARLY EIGHT MONTHS of impatience, European territories (that includes us) finally have access to Sony's "true" PS3 controller. When the PS3 first launched, legal entanglements prevented the inclusion of feedback functionality in its controllers. While motion-sensitive SIXAXIS technology is cool, PS3 owners yearned for the days of a rumbling controller in their hands. Legal squabbles had finally been laid to rest, and Japan was rewarded with the slightly heavier Dual Shock 3 in November 2007. Recent firmware updates for the PS3 ensure that at least a handful of pre-Dual Shock 3 games have feedback support,

while Sony promises that all future games will be compliant with the new standard. For those precious few who still fling their SIXAXIS controllers about in awe, fear not – Sony's Dual Shock 3 still includes motion-sensitive technology.

The new controller is expected to retail for around R500, a tad more expensive than Microsoft's competitor, and set to come in at approximately the same weight, which many users will find to be quite suitable given the SIXAXIS's unnervingly dainty feel. Given the added functionality, the price is fair, although recent PS3 buyers may be left feeling a little cheated.

RUMOUR: SONY CANCELS HEAVENLY SWORD 2

ACCORDING TO AN "INSIDE UK source" via Kotaku, Sony Europe has allegedly cancelled *Heavenly Sword 2*. Ninja Theory, developer behind the first game, are said to be unhappy with Sony. Initial rumours spoke of Ninja Theory, which had offices in the same building as Sony Cambridge (developer on Heavenly Sword 2), moving out following "increasingly bitter" treatment by Sony. Sony however will not comment on the *Heavenly Sword 2* rumour. Ninja Theory's official statement: "You'd have to ask Sony about *HS2* – it's not something that we're involved in."

"We are moving but it's completely amicable! We move mid July and have been planning it for the best part of a year, there's nothing nefarious about it. We are excited about the move - our new premises are considerably bigger and in an excellent location near the town centre." Our guess: Sony has taken *Heavenly Sword 2* entirely out of the hands of Ninja Theory and given full control over to Sony Cambridge.

MAYOR OF LONDON BLAMES VIDEOGAMES FOR KNIFE CRIME

Boris Johnson has been taking cracks at videogames for a while now. Back in January 2007, he wrote a piece on his Website titled "The writing is on the wall - computer games rot the brain" in which he spews a lengthily diatribe encouraging readers to "garrote the Game Boy and paralyse the PlayStation", calling games "narcotics for children". He's in the news again, having written a piece for thelondonpaper that attempts to rally London against the current rising knife crime epidemic. "We must show young people that knives are not cool, and for that we need positive role models", he writes. He then goes on to compare videogames to narcotics, by saying, "I want to counteract the damaging influences drug-addled celebrities and violent videogames and the lure of the life in the gang by providing opportunities." Boris firmly points the finger at violent videogames for being a cause in the knife crime in the Capital. He is oddly coy about commenting on soccer violence.

STARDOCK ON PIRACY

IN SPEAKING WITH BIG Download, Stardock CEO Brad Wardell has quite a few things to say about keeping piracy in perspective. Stardock has made big waves with their recent title, *Sins of a Solar Empire*, that has gone on sale without any kind of DRM or copy protection.

"Piracy is a major issue for the PC game industry. But the issue has to be kept in perspective – the people who actually buy games don't want to be inconvenienced or treated like a criminal. Everyone who buys games knows they could easily have gone out and stolen it if they wanted to. Customers expect to be treated with respect."

Having just launched their own digital distribution service, Impuse, and with the success of the digitally distributed versions of their games, Stardock has become a case study in the ongoing battle between retail and digital.

"Retail isn't going to go away. Not anytime soon. But I am very thankful that digital distribution has become so accepted as it allows us to make much riskier games (like The Political Machine)."

Developer Crytek said it would no longer be creating PC exclusives, due to the mass piracy of its latest title, *Crysis*. On that, Wardell argues, "[Piracy] is not why [*Crysis*] didn't sell as many as they wanted. Everybody knows why *Crysis* didn't sell more copies. I couldn't run *Crysis*. ... I have a $6,000 Alienware box that's obscene, the most powerful setup. And it doesn't run *Crysis* great. People say I can run it at a lower resolution, but I say look, I have a 24" monitor. I want to run it in its native resolution. If it runs chunky at that resolution, that's not a good experience."

MY LITTLE CYLON

B*ATTLESTAR GALACTICA* **GEEKS, IT** may be time to extend that mortgage. Sideshowtoy.com has added a life-size (7-foot) replica Cylon to their catalogue. Unfortunately for some, it's of the original "toaster" variety, so don't expect Tricia Helfer to be delivered to your door any time soon. While it may not come armed with flesh-melting lasers, the maker – renowned robot builder Fred Barton, claims it will feature the all-to-well-known red glow emanating from the eyes.

Each piece will be lovingly handcrafted on demand in machined aluminium and brass, taking approximately 8-12 weeks for construction. So, how much for this wonderful piece of memorabilia? Not a dime short of $7,900, and likely a couple of dimes over that if you'd like it shipped to you. Exact shipping costs for this 136Kg titan weren't available on the site, but expect to cough up at least another $500 for the privilege of having it sent across the skies to your doorstep.
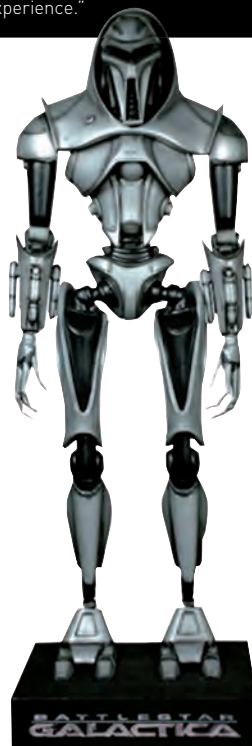
WINDOWS XP SALES AXED

That's right, the time has finally come. After recently cutting off the sale of Windows XP to OEMs, Microsoft has now extended their hack-and-slashing to retail stores, effectively stopping all sales of Windows XP. While this comes as no surprise to most, it does mean that customers no longer have a choice, and will need to wait until late 2009 (if not longer) for Vista's upcoming replacement, Windows 7.

MICROSOFT WANTS MII TOO

It seems Microsoft wants in on the customisable avatar system popularised by the Wii, according to some Intellisponse research papers uncovered by Website Xbox 360 Fanboy. Plans are to roll out "a more lifelike, animated and fully customisable persona" avatar system by the end of the year. Speculation points to these avatars replacing the Gamerpicture on Xbox LIVE, as well as being incorporated into "various arcade and retail games", just like the Miis that appear in Wii Sports. Apparently, there are "hundreds of clothing options", such as samurai outfits, bunny costumes and boxing gear. Licensed attire may also appear, with one image showing an Incredibles costume. Rumours put developer Rare as the creative force behind the project.

SQUARE ENIX BRINGING CHRONO TRIGGER TO DS

If you haven't played *Chrono Trigger*, Square's time-travelling JRPG on the Super Nintendo, you'll finally have a chance to seek redemption - the original release was a bit of a hidden gem for many gamers, seeing that the SNES was never officially released locally. While it hasn't been confirmed just how the Japanese developer will take advantage of the touch functionality or the second screen, they claim that this won't just be a straight port – the DS's features will be put to good use in this classic remake, as well as the addition of some extra real estate to explore. Projected release dates are still very much up in the air with this one, but don't expect anything this side of Christmas.

GOD OF WAR DESIGNER TAKES POT SHOTS AT NINTENDO

DAVID JAFFE HAS A reputation for being an insulting, loud, noisy, cussing and very vocal type on the Internet. He recently became popular thanks to having designed *God of War*. Before that, nobody cared about his other game, *Twisted Metal*. Writing on his personal blog, Jaffe took the time to accuse Nintendo of "high school vibe immaturity bullsh*t" after Nintendo marketing director Laurent Fisher (whom he mistakes for a female) stated that only "geeks and otaku" want more storage for the Wii. Choice Jaffe Quotes™:"This statement … reeks of one of two things: Arrogance at a level that should make Nintendo … very ashamed. [and] a marketing person who has no real clue about games and thinks she's being cute and coy by dissing the 'geeks' 'cause she thinks the mainstream loves them now… if this is the case, she really needs someone to sit her down and explain to her which side her f*cking toast has been buttered on for years and will eventually get back to being buttered on."

"I like Nintendo. And I love old Nintendo. And both old and new Nintendo have brought so much to this industry that they should be proud and excited and even a little cocky when it comes to their amazing accomplishments. Anyone in our business should envy their ability to read, direct, and redirect the market. And to also – when they want to – make some world class, ground breaking games."

"[The comments were] really, really sad. And not so much because Nintendo seems to be telling a chunk of its loyal fan base to go f*ck itself, but because it's just reeks of junior high school vibe immaturity bullsh*t." Nice…

MEGA MAN 9 COMING TO WII WARE, XBOX LIVE AND PLAYSTATION NETWORK

Launching over ten years after its prequel, *Mega Man 9* is guaranteed to have the somewhat older crowd of gamers squirming in their seats with excitement. The game will be available through all three console-based online distribution systems and is clear in what it sets out to achieve – no flashy graphical updates for this one, just good old-fashioned *Mega Man* awesomeness. Taking players back in time further than initially thought, Capcom is using the classic sprite from *Mega Man 1* through *6*. Also making a return is Rush, the springboard-mounted transforming robotic canine.

Players should also prepare themselves for the first-ever "female" robot boss, Splash Woman, in addition to seven other bosses, including Hornet Man, Tornado Man and Magma Man. Get ready to battle Doctor Wily and his robotic horde any time from September onwards, which is when the Japanese launch is scheduled to take place.
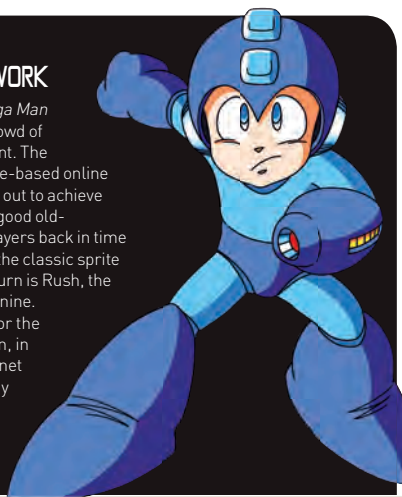
EA GAMES DON'T GET CULT BENEFITS

According to Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello, his company's games don't get the perks usually attributed to "cult" games with regards to game ratings. "It used to be…All Metacritics were higher once upon a time because it was ten professionals rating them. Now, sort of anybody with a pen can rate them and it ends up with a bit of a wider track some times." NAG Wry Translation: now that the paid-off journalists aren't the only ones putting in scores, the Madden series isn't getting the scores EA would like the public to see. Speaking to investors at the William Blair & Company's 28th Annual Growth Stock Conference, Riccitiello was asked to estimate the Metacritic.com review scores for EA's impending titles. "EA doesn't usually get the benefit of the cult - 'everybody has to rate it a hundred' thing going on - that happens sometimes even when they may not, based on the review, have played more than the first fifteen minutes of the game. But that's a separate issue."

THE EVOLUTION OF: GEFORCE CARDS

GeForce 256 (1999)

GeForce 2 (2000)

GeForce 3 (2001)

GeForce 4 (2002)

GeForce FX (2003)

GeForce 6 (2004)

GeForce 7 (2005)

GeForce 8 (2006)

GeForce 9 (2008)

WELCOME TO THE SPECIAL E3 2008 edition of console watch: hold on to your hardware, it's going to be a bumpy ride.

MICROSOFT

From the Microsoft press conference, this is what you want to know: *Fallout 3* is getting exclusive DLC for both Xbox and Games for Windows. *Resident Evil 5* will have online two-player cooperative play and has a release date of Friday the 13th of March 2009. Peter Molyneux has announced *Fable 2* is done and ready for October. Your friends on Xbox LIVE will be able to float around your game world as orbs and get invited in at any time. *Gears of War 2* will have a new online mode called Horde that allows for five-player cooperative, fighting off a constant stream of Locusts. Release date: November 7, 2008. And you can ride a Brumak! A new Xbox 360 dashboard was unveiled that includes avatar support and eight-player voice chat. *Geometry Wars 2* announced, ready for August 6, with four-player cooperative play. *Portal: Still Alive* announced for XBLA, it's an expansion. Also announced, *You're In the Movies* – a game where you film yourself doing various mini-games, and the clips are strung together into a silly film. *Lips* has finally been announced, a karaoke game with motion-sensing microphone. Square Enix announced *Final Fantasy XIII* for Xbox 360. *Rock Band 2* will feature tracks from Guns 'n Roses: *Chinese Democracy.*

SONY

From the Sony conference: the PlayStation 3 will be launching in Latin America and over a hundred PlayStation 2 games will be coming out this year. *Ratchet & Clank: Quest for Booty* announced for PSN. New PSP bundle announced for *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*: including the game, silver PSP, 1GB Memory Stick Duo, *Natural Treasure 2* UMD and a download voucher for "echochrome". *DC Universe Online* is shown, as well as a short cinematic trailer for *God of War 3. MAG (Massive Action Game)* announced, which will have 256-player online battles with players broken down into squads of eight.

NINTENDO

From the Nintendo conference: *Shaun White Snowboarding* announced, and it uses the Balance Board and Wii Remote with Nunchucks. Iwata talked a lot of statistics (the short of it: Nintendo is owning the competition and more girls are playing with their Wii). *Animal Crossing: City Folk* was announced, and includes WiiSpeak: a new multi-directional microphone that goes on top of your TV and allows for voice chat. *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars* announced for the Nintendo DS. *Wii Sports Resort* announced, which uses the new Wii MotionPlus for perfect control. You can Frisbee, jet-ski, fight with swords all in perfectly recreated motion, since the MotionPlus lets you do that. *Wii Music* was finally announced, with 50 instruments and uses the Wii Remote plus Nunchuck and the Balance Board. Casual mode will let you just flail around to play music, while the more hardcore mode has the potential to teach you how to play an instrument.

SONY AWARDS THEIR GAMERS, WITH BRICKED PS3S

THE LONG-AWAITED FIRMWARE 2.40 update for Sony's black behemoth finally arrived. PS3 owners around the world scrambled for download links, eager to get their hands on the funky new awards system (think Xbox achievements, just, you know, for PS3) as well as an in-game-accessible XMB. Much to their dismay, however, many users were faced with soft-bricked consoles, unresponsive controllers or games that crashed when opened.

Shortly after, reports of "repaired" PS3s began to surface. Neither denied nor confirmed by Sony, it was apparently possible to bring a soft-bricked console back to life with a full HDD format; not something that every gamer was willing to do, but it provided an answer to those desperate enough.

While many lucky owners got their promised updates and continued to play without a hitch, Sony weren't taking any chances, pulling the update off their and other websites. Almost a week later, firmware 2.41 was released – Sony claiming that they had found and eliminated the problem. No other significant changes to the system were made in the patched firmware, although the awards crown has been changed to a trophy, and a new tab to show recently played games has been added. Reception of the update was smooth, with no reports of bricked consoles.

ROUND 1. FIGHT!

With the advent of *Street Fighter IV* looming, Capcom is preparing to blow the still jam-packed arcades of Tokyo out of the water with its approach to the modern-age arcade games. A recent trend in the competition-heavy arcade scene in Japan is the ability to track user stats and unlocked features with the use of a smart card that players slot into the machine when they sit down. *SFIV* will take this to a new level, putting players deeper into the competition by allowing them to not only play against anyone on the same grid of gaming cabinets, but also be alerted when particular competition games are beginning, or when their battle time is near. Gone are the days of lurking past the cabinets in search of a worthy adversary. Just pop in your card and scan for the right opponent. You won't even have to get up.

ACTIVISION, VIVENDI: WE'RE DONE WITH THE ESA

The Entertainment Software Alliance, proud defenders of game publishers in the battle against piracy and suppliers of more pie charts about females who play videogames than any other organisation, has just lost Activision as a client. Claiming that they're big enough to handle their own software and intellectual property protection on the legal front, Activision, together with its recently acquired partner Vivendi Universal, are out of the ESA. How this will affect the piracy of its products remains to be seen, but it's likely that they will be as active on their own as the ESA was in the protection of its software.

TRANSFER YOUR XBOX DLC, NOW IN TWO EASY STEPS

FOR THOSE OF YOU who have multiple Xbox 360s, the power of transferable licences is now yours. Transferring downloadable content between machines previously required that you log in as the original owner whenever you wanted to access the content, something that isn't always possible or desirable (*Guitar Hero* strikes a chord at this point). Microsoft now offers you the chance to semi-permanently move ownership from one machine to another, with a couple of small catches: you can only transfer your licences once every twelve months and you can't be selective in what you take across – it's all or nothing. The procedure is straightforward, and begins at www.xbox.com.

Once you've logged onto the site with your XBL account, locate Console Licence Transfer under the Support menu*. Follow the prompts provided by the site; you'll need to have your console ready and waiting nearby, with an available connection to the Net. Once you've completed the (very quick) process on the site, log on to Xbox LIVE from the receiving console (using the original owner's account), and navigate to Download History, located under Account Management in the Marketplace blade. You'll find your licences patiently waiting there for you, ready to be received by your loving hard drive or memory unit.

Now it's a matter of physically transferring the files with the use of a memory unit, or downloading them again if you have the bandwidth to spare – simply select the item you'd like and choose Download Again. You'll now be able to use your DLC when logged in as any user on the receiving console. Should you wish to use the content again on the donor machine, simply log in as the original owner.

*You'll need to be in US localisation mode on the Website to have access to licence transfers, or else the option simply won't be there. Click "International" at the top-left corner of the site to change regions. This has nothing to do with your XBL region, and is safe to adjust as required.

XBOX 360 HARD DRIVE OPTIONS UPDATED, THE WAIT IS OVER

In a recent series of announcements, Microsoft has unveiled a couple of new tricks for the Xbox 360. While US buyers are preparing themselves for a healthy $50 price-drop on the current Premium system, as well as a new 60GB option at the original price (for both the console package and standalone hard drive), the rest of the world is starting to cringe at just how small the good old 20GB HDD is starting to seem. In a coming update, Xbox owners will be able to copy across all content from their game discs to their Xbox hard drives, although they'll still need the disc in the drive to validate the legitimacy of the game. This will likely improve load times considerably, as well as reduce model and texture pop-in that plague a few games on the console.
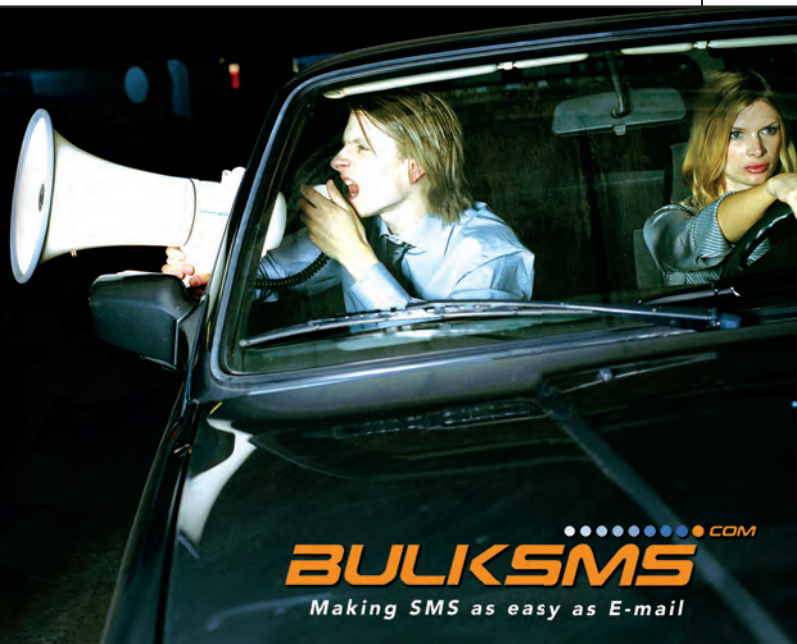
NOBODY ACTUALLY CARED FOR HOT COFFEE

REMEMBER THE "HOT COFFEE" debacle regarding *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*? If not, there was some leftover data in *GTA: SA* that involved the lead character dry-humping his girlfriends if you took them on enough dates, but the content was never actually activated in the game.

Some industrious hackers found the content and released a patch to activate it. Several people got upset about "sex in their games", and lawsuits started happening.

However, while affronted gamers (who enjoy doing drive-bys with their pals) could file a claim for between $5 and $25, only 2,676 people bothered to do so.

"Am I disappointed? Sure," said Seth Lesser, lead lawyer for the plaintiffs, reports the *New York Times*. "We can't guess as to why now, several years later, people care or don't care. The merits of the case were clear."

The 11 law firms who filed the class action are attempting to claim $1.3 million in fees. Take-Two only has to pay out $30,000 to claimants.

Theodore Frank, director of the Legal Center for the Public Interest at the American Enterprise Institute, believes, "There are two possibilities. Possibility one is they have a meritorious lawsuit and they're selling out the class for attorneys' fees."

"The other possibility is that, and frankly I think this is the more likely possibility, they brought a meritless lawsuit that had no business being brought to court at all."

AUGUST RELEASES

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

Date	Game	Platforms
1	Pet Hotel 2	PC, DS
1	Arkanoid	DS
1	Space Invaders Extreme	DS
1	Soul Calibur IV	PS3
1	Soul Calibur IV *Order for only R603.86!*	360
1	Heavenly Sword (Platinum) *Buy any two PS3 platinum games together in August and get 10% off!*	PS3
1	Unchartered: Drake's Fortune (Platinum) *Buy any two PS3 platinum games together in August and get 10% off!*	PS3
1	Resistance: Fall of Man (Platinum) *Buy any two PS3 platinum games together in August and get 10% off!*	PS3
1	Motorstorm (Platinum)	PS3
1	Ratchet & Clank: Tools of Destruction (Platinum) *Buy any two PS3 platinum games together in August and get 10% off!*	PS3
8	Buzz Quizz TV	PS3
8	EyeToy Kinetic	PS2
8	EyeToy Kinetic Combat	PS2
8	EyeToy Total Fitness	PS2
8	EyeToy Total Combat	PS2
8	Race Driver: GRID	DS
15	Final Fantasy XII Platinum	PS2
15	Final Fantasy III	DS
15	Off Road Racing	Wii
22	Cory in the House	DS
22	Destroy All Humans: Path of the Furon	360
22	Project Baja Racing	360
22	Saints Row 2	360
22	WWE '08 (Platinum) *Buy any two PS3 platinum games together in August and get 10% off!*	PS3
29	Soul Calibur Legends *Order for only R603.86!*	Wii

Date	Game	Platforms
29	Hellboy	360
TBA	Tiger Woods PGA Tour '09	Multi
TBA	The Sims 2 Apartments	PC
TBA	The Sims 2 Apartment Pets	DS
TBA	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2	PSP
TBA	Brothers in Arms: Hell Highway	PC, PS3, 360
TBA	Brothers in Arms: Hell Highway Collector's Edition	PC, PS3, 360
TBA	Brothers in Arms: Double Time	Wii
TBA	Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice (Platinum)	PSP
TBA	Buzz! Master Quizz	PSP
TBA	Ferrari Challenge	Wii
TBA	Redbull BC One	DS
TBA	Diabolik	DS

THE NUMBERS

8,002,530
Downloads of Firefox 3.0 during its first 24 hours [source: Mozilla blog]

23
Companies still part of the ESA [source: The ESA]

100,000
Creatures created in the first 22 hours with Spore Creature Creator [source: Will Wright]

10 MILLION
PSPs sold in Japan since its launch [source: SCE]

3,500,000
Text and Live Vision messages shared via Xbox LIVE every day [source: Microsoft]

$650 MILLION
Activision's Q1 revenue before its merger with Blizzard [source: Activision Blizzard]

3.2%
Increase in Square Enix's share price after announcing *FFXIII* for 360 [source: Square Enix]

48
Record for the most world videogaming records broken in a single event [source: Twin Galaxies]

1 MILLION
iPhones 3Gs sold in its first weekend [source: Apple]

THIS DAY IN GAMING: AUGUST

1
(LAN) FRAG LAN (Durban)
(LAN) MPLD August (Pretoria)
www.langames.co.za.
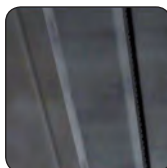
25
(1997) *GoldenEye 007* is released for the N64. Eight million players learn to play FPSs on a console.

2

26

3
(2004) id Software releases *Doom 3* on the PC. Gamers wish they could see and shoot zombies at the same time.

11
(1965) Shinji Mikami, creator of the *Resident Evil* series, is born. Noticing a theme here?

19

27
(2000) *The Sims: Livin' Large* is released. Maxis discovers just how much oil they've struck.

20

28
(2002) *Mafia* is unleashed on PC gamers. Two million players stick to the speed limit from now on.

21
(2007) *Bioshock* enters the market on PC, PS3 and Xbox 360. The world discovers just how cool steampunk really is.

29
(LAN) The Merriment LAN August (Meyerspark, Pretoria) www.langames.co.za.

6
(2004) Glen 'FrenZon' Murphy creates the DuctTape mod for *Doom 3*. Zombies look awesome while being shot.

14

22

30

7

15
(LAN) Organised Chaos (No Venue Specified) www.langames.co.za.

23
(LAN) Mayhem (Boksburg) www.langames.co.za.

31
(1996) Bethesda Soft releases *TES2: Daggerfall*. Over 40 million acres of game world seems a little much to some.

8
(2006) Capcom shares *Dead Rising* with the US. Zombies discover hundreds of new ways to die.

16
(LAN) Respawn LAN (Bloemfontein) www.langames.co.za.

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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

AUGUST CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT: "Stella takes gold in the lit fart Olympics..."

vivendi GAMES

JULY WINNERS
I was looking high and low, I can't find that damn badger!?!
Michael Louw

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

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Find the Badger! He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to **ed@nag. co.za** with the subject line [**August Badger**]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a Gold Oinks figurine, courtesy of DLA Group.

DLA GROUP (PTY)LTD
0861 DLA GROUP

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
Freddy Briedenhann, p71

Miktar's Meanderings

by Miktar Dracon

Wii in the blue ocean of love

Holy crap! Diablo III*! Someone call God and tell him Hell is an icicle on Satan's butt!*

MEANWHILE BACK AT THE ranch: ever noticed how gaming as a whole is still trying to figure itself out? Tell me if I'm wrong, but gaming for the most part seems to be reactionary: it attempts to cash in on the current big wave. It tries to understand what's hip with the young dudes and then spins some products for delicious consumerism. And that's just fine.

Those trying to anticipate the waves and forecast the future are a paltry few. Ever heard of the term "Blue Ocean" to describe how some companies are approaching their markets? Some people think it means that a company abandons its current markets in favour of finding markets where its competitors have yet to set up shop. In reality, it has more to do with calculated forecasts on upcoming shifts in the industry.

As an example, look at Nintendo and the Wii. Remember that games were originally based on a single 'primitive' if you will: score. The entire pretext and container of a game back before the videogame crash of the 80s was that of score. Score was the progression through the game as well as the hook to the enjoyment factor. Games were essentially virtual sports, gauged around three initials after an arbitrary number. Most games of this type did not have a true end and would simply get harder or loop infinitely once you hit the last level.

After the videogame crash, Nintendo stepped in and changed the core primitive to something new: narrative. Games suddenly had a finite length and while score still did play a big part (did you ever care what your score was in *Super Mario Bros.*?), it was no longer the underlying mechanic for progression. Narrative brought along with it perhaps the biggest 'change' in gaming history, fundamentally altering all future games inexorably.

Because of the narrative-centric primitive in games, developers started harbouring a fixation on replacing movies as the primary form of entertainment, as the two entertainment sectors now had a significant overlap of their primitives. This methodology of game development does have its issues: the 'Hollywood' era of games that were really just interlinked video clips; shallow games that focused more on wiz-bang or technology instead of the challenge-reward system that had made games appealing in the first place. The list goes on. The core primitive of any entertainment form creates a 'form-follows-function' effect that one can notice in entertainment types of the same core primitive.

There was a sort-of change with the advent of the PlayStation and its proliferation of 3D visuals over 2D as well as the types of new additional gaming primitives that were unlocked in terms of gameplay styles, but that's another matter entirely.

Back to the now and in steps the Wii. Nintendo launched a console on the back of a sports title that, once again, valued score over narrative. There are no plot twists in *Wii Sports* or *Wii Fit*, but there sure is a smell of change in the air. It's as if Nintendo went Blue Ocean on a forecast and took a gamble on something nobody else had noticed: that the narrative-driven, core-primitive game has a finite lifespan in the consumer space.

It's not that consumers are done with games such as *Gears of War*, *Halo* and *Diablo*, but rather that there is only so much you can do with that core primitive. Something the 'hardcore' have been trying to pointedly ignore since conception is *The Sims*, a game not built on the narrative core primitive, but rather something entirely different (and familiar, if you played a lot of MMOs or *Grand Thefts*). A failing of the 'hardcore' is that they traditionally consider themselves the foundation of gaming and the part that matters most. As such, they shun any and all new core primitives that don't fit in with their sensibilities: they will degrade and berate *The Sims*; they will only agree that the casual indie scene is wonderful when John Carmack says so; they think that the Wii is a fad or bubble. However, do not pity them. Rather give them your love, for they are your misguided brothers and slightly broken people.

Interestingly enough, *Metal Gear Solid 4* is pretty much the Death Star when it comes to narrative as a core gaming primitive - the ultimate behemoth of 'games that want to be movies'. In the narrative arms race, it doesn't beat the 'garden-vs.-garden' supreme craziness of *Final Fantasy VIII*, but it gets close.

Gaming is at least still capable of transformation. "I'm a big fan of transformation," said Alexander James Adams, who is a wonderful Celtic musician, songwriter and singer and a devil with the fiddle. He was originally called Heather Alexander before the sex change operation. She had recorded an album before the operation and then recorded the second half of a duet with herself after the testosterone had changed his voice. It was my pleasure to attend his concert at Anthrocon '08. **NAG**

> "
> Do not pity hardcore gamers. Rather give them your love, for they are your misguided brothers and slightly broken people.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

To the kid in Cape Town who knows my sister: you rock little dude. Thanks for the support!

Dammit

by Megan Hughes

Another Repeat

RECENTLY, I WATCHED A television documentary on one of our SABC channels. It was a Sunday afternoon, mid-winter and Durban offered few alternatives in terms of entertainment for the cash-strapped student. I could have gone surfing if, say, I actually surfed, or I could have woken up my friends out of their alcohol-induced comas if, say, I didn't see much point in extending my stay on this planet. I could have even gotten a game off the shelf to play if, say, I wanted to be constantly reminded of the work I still had to get through for college. With options like these, and a lack of DStv, it was really no surprise to find myself on the couch with a blanket staring at this particular SABC channel.

The documentary, which was an attempt to portray, as accurately as possible, the life of Elvis Presley (Part 1 of 2) was surprisingly engrossing. Having never been particularly interested in the lives of celebrities (both past and present), or the magazines that insist on drilling this kind information into their readers' minds, most of what the documentary revealed was new to me. However, as fascinating as Elvis's life might have been, the type of negative publicity he received on his road to (and through) fame was no surprise. In fact, the ideas and phrases are so familiar to me that I could almost write them myself. Singer and actor, Frank Sinatra, was quoted as describing Elvis's music as "deplorable, a rancid smelling aphrodisiac" that could foster "almost totally negative and destructive reactions in young people." Elvis's music and dance moves even had psychologists concerned that the youth would be "aroused to sexual indulgence and perversion" (thank you Wikipedia.org). Generally, Elvis's critics feared that he would bring about the downfall of society.

Granted, Elvis's hip-swinging did bring about a little change to society, like any trend held onto by the masses, but he didn't lead the American and European citizens to total anarchy. It was, after all, just music and dance. As far as I know, few people suffered any ill effects from his dance moves on stage and most found a whole lot of enjoyment in his music. It seems, naturally, that the cause of all the fear and criticism lodged against poor Elvis was less about Elvis's moves and more about the fear of change.

Things that are new and different have long caused a heightening of adrenaline and increase in anxiety levels. Moreover, every time something new appears, people do their best to judge the danger levels and protect themselves and those important to them as much as possible. Elvis hasn't been the only one (or thing) to generate this kind of response. Fear has caused uproars about all sorts of new things and inventions, and, of course, videogames.

Not only have many critics claimed that games can induce a violent and murderous rage in the most passive of children, with no other cause for said violent rage, but new research is claiming that playing videogames can be linked to traits, including "lack of extraversion and agreeableness," specific to those who have Asperger's syndrome*. Of course, all of these claims (and others like them) don't take into consideration the family environment, the social environment and the personal experiences of the child.

Therefore, like the critics in Elvis's time, many are basing their accusations on unfounded allegations just because they're afraid of the unknown. With fear of the unknown being one of the highest-rated fears worldwide, one can understand this kind of reaction. A simple solution to the hurling of unfounded accusations would be for those making the claims to actually have experienced what they are talking about first hand. It's a commonly known fact that to get over any type of fear, one has to be exposed to the source of the paranoia for many short time periods over a long stretch of time. So, if the critics would just try playing a game they claim leads to violent tendencies in short bursts until they've completed all the levels, I'm sure they'd get over their overwhelming fear and actually embrace that which is new and exciting in our modern world. They may even enjoy themselves in the process.

Of course, this is unlikely to happen anytime soon. The only other hope is for something newer to distract their attention for a while. In the meantime, let those critics go home and relax to the crooning voice of Elvis Presley. **NAG**

> " Generally, Elvis's critics feared that he would bring about the downfall of society.

*http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2008/04/22/video-games-autism.html

Ramjet

by Walt Pretorius

Rudely shaped bread rolls

THE WAY HUMANS THINK never ceases to amaze me. In fact, I find the workings of the human mind so extremely funny that I am more often than not chuckling with glee while reading the various bits of news floating around the Internet. Take, for example, Jack Thompson's statement that, while *GTA IV* doesn't feature rape to his knowledge, it certainly contains forced sex. Jack, Jack, Jack... isn't forced sex, by definition, rape? Man, that guy is so funny it hurts.

My latest source of amusement, though, doesn't originate from game-hating ambulance chasers, but rather from the game creators themselves. See, EA somehow thought that sticking a clause about inappropriate content on line 54 of the Spore Creature Creator would prevent people from creating thousands of penis-shaped monsters with this powerful and versatile tool. EA has undertaken a crusade to try to get people to stop, issuing various levels of punishment for all the boob-monster creators. But let's be honest, folks... give man flour, and he's going to make bread rolls shaped like naughty bits.

Is this because people are sick? Is this because people want to shock each other? No, I don't think so. I think it's because people will always retreat to their most basic instincts (like making whoopee) in almost any given situation. And, let's be honest, a big phallus on legs is funny. So is EA's reaction, because you cannot convince me that they didn't see this coming. Justified? Surely they live in the same world as you and I, and anyone who has spent more that five minutes on the Internet knows that things like this are commonplace. Anyone who has been on the *Second Life* servers knows that there's a huge horse porn community on there, for example, and EA's own

Sims Online became a virtual orgy around 43.2 seconds after it went live.

But EA is thinking of the kids, who will undoubtedly be right there among all the big people when *Spore* hits the shelves. No one wants kiddies to see giant penises running around in their favourite game. But that's driving the game right down to the lowest common denominator, isn't it? And let's be honest once again, most people who play games are big people, particularly games such as this one. It's not exactly a simple game, after all. And one thing that big people want to do is do what they want. And what they want, apparently, is to create breast-shaped monsters with Creature Creator.

Is there a solution? Sure, there is a fairly simple one: EA shouldn't try to make one massive user-driven universe, but rather two: one for the little kiddies and prudes who are offended by the site of their own naked bodies, and one for people who live in the real world and don't find virtually anything offensive.

Whether that's going to happen or not I couldn't say. More likely, EA will try to sterilise a greater online service, resulting in penis-monster guerrillas becoming nomadic fugitives within the *Spore* universe, chased by big puritan-shaped monsters. That should also be quite funny to watch. **NAG**

> " And, let's be honest, a big phallus on legs is funny. So is EA's reaction, because you cannot convince me that they didn't see this coming.
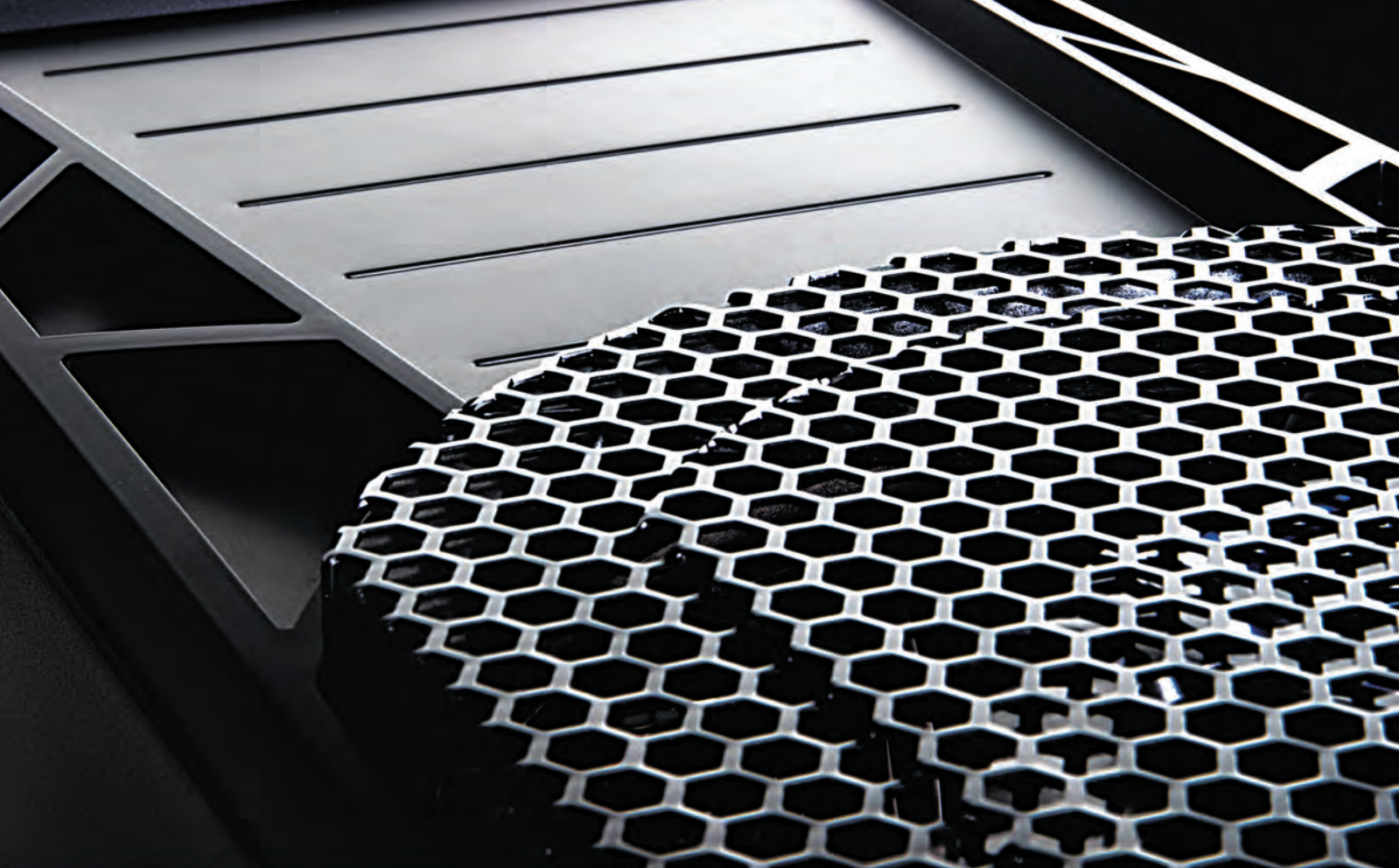
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SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

For those of you who haven't heard, at this year's Worldwide Invitational, held in Paris, Blizzard Entertainment officially announced *Diablo III*. The company also launched a Website dedicated to it, as well as releasing several videos showcasing artwork and, more importantly, in-game footage. Of course, this being Blizzard, no hints were given as to when the game will be released. At this point, we can only speculate that it will probably hit stores towards the end of next year, but don't quote us on this! (*StarCraft II* was announced at last year's Worldwide Invitational and appears to be nearing completion, with pundits expecting it to launch late this year.)

THE SETTING

While details are currently scarce, at least part of the story (apparently, the beginning) will be taking place in what is now called New Tristram. *Diablo* fans will recall that the town of Tristram was the setting for the first title in the series, as well as featuring as a quest location fairly early in the second. The town has since (about 20 years have elapsed in game time) been rebuilt and resettled, and been given its new moniker.

Another area is Caldeum, an ancient city that was previously the commercial centre of the world, and maintained strict neutrality and autonomy, not allowing politics or war to interfere with its trade. However, of late, dark influences have insinuated themselves into its society, and now the city is plagued with problems such as crime, poverty and disease.

THE ACTORS

Also returning is Deckard Cain, whom players of the previous titles will remember well, mostly as the go-to guy for getting magical items identified as free. There is some indication - in the gameplay footage - of some self-referential humour, such as when Cain meets the new hero, says "Come, stay a while and..." is cut off by the impatient hero, lamenting that, "No one ever listens!" Of course none of us have ever interrupted his "Stay a while and listen," or muttered comments such as "Thanks, I've heard enough. Now pay attention and take a look at this gear..."

Of course, while NPCs (non-player characters) play a part, the central characters of any story are those that are controlled by the player. The character classes have been revamped, and at the time of going to print, only two of the five had been unveiled: the Barbarian and the Witch Doctor. Those of you who routinely refer to the barbarian as "Barbie" will be interested to know that there will now be male and female versions of each character class. Despite the changes, the new characters and even the new classes will have much in common with previous ones, particularly from *Diablo II*. The overall skill-tree structure seems to be broadly congruent with that of *Diablo II*, and even some of the skills, as mentioned above, have been retained.

EYE CANDY!

Of course, as can be expected, the graphics has been significantly updated. The models are now amazingly detailed, right down to fabric garments waving in the wind or as the character moves. This sort of detail has been applied to the game world as well: tapestries wave and flutter, and as
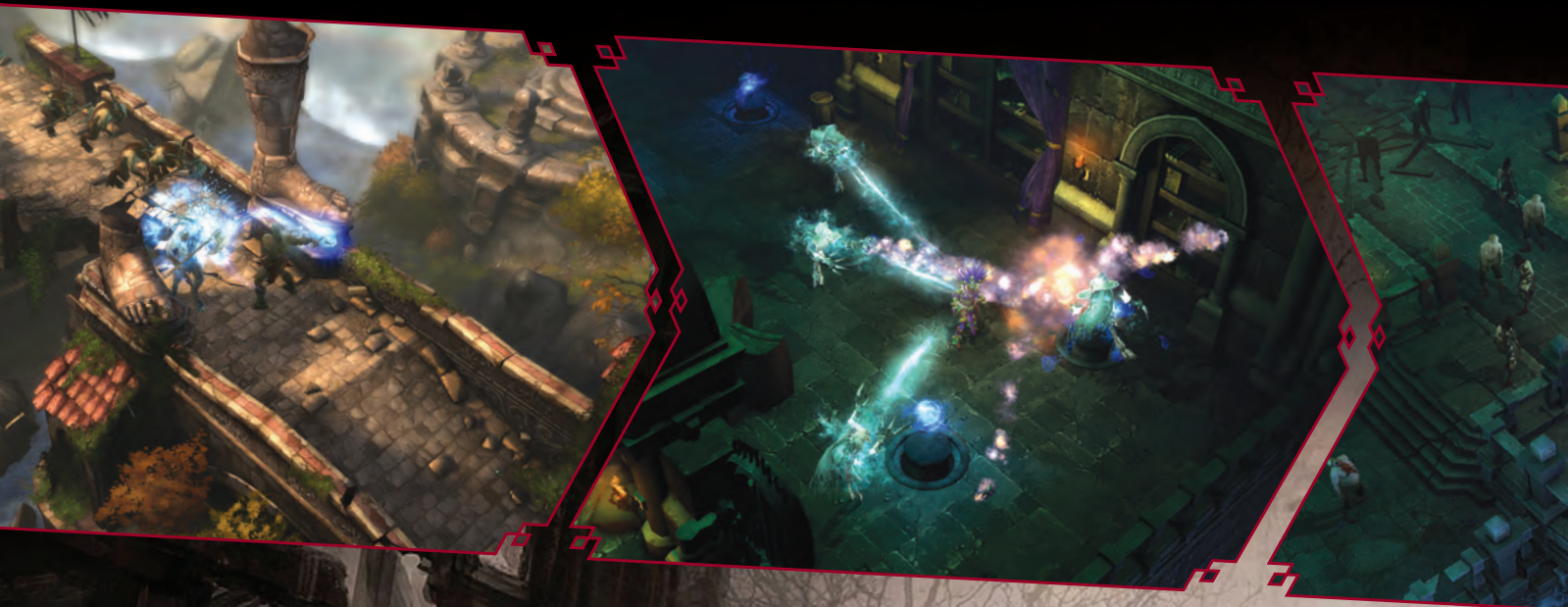
characters move through flooded areas, their footfalls cause ripples in the water. As well as finely detailed graphics, it looks as if the game will offer some fairly sophisticated physics modelling in some regards, boasting such elements as a partially destructible environment. (This is apparent in the video, with the Barbarian character collapsing a stonewall to crush some zombies. However, the developer's boasting with regards to this factor may be misleading: it suggests that the environment is fully, or at least largely, destructible and interactive, but the official fact sheet we received from Blizzard cites "destructible elements," which are much more conducive to the sort of experience we expect from a *Diablo* game.)

SHINY STUFF

No action, hack-and-slash role-playing game would be complete without a large variety of items, magical items, potions, scrolls and whatnot. In *Diablo III*, while these are important elements, it appears that Blizzard has opted to streamline certain elements. Monsters will now often drop special orbs that act much like rejuvenation or even full rejuvenation potions did in *Diablo II*, restoring a character's health and mana. This is intended to help maintain a fast pace, by reducing the amount of time that players spend standing around waiting to regenerate, rooting around for potions, or even travelling back to town to buy such. From what little has been revealed so far, it seems that the item 'hierarchy' will be similar to that in *Diablo II*, with common items, magical items, and more special, rare treasures. There are also certain other items to be seen in the video that have not been explained, sparking speculation as to how runes, gems and sockets will be handled. Additionally, items will be designed specifically for the various classes. What exactly that means, we'll have to wait and see!

Something that caught our attention was some of the traps. Given that much of the loot comes from chests, it stands to reason that players religiously open them to not miss anything good, and inevitably trigger something dangerous from time to time. In *Diablo II*, however, the traps were generally quite pathetic, seldom posing any serious threat. However, the small taste we are given in the gameplay video suggests that at least some of the new ones will be significantly more dangerous. The one that is demonstrated has the booby-trapped chest sink into the ground when triggered, so no quickly collecting the contents until the threat is dealt with. And the threat is four summoning orbs that rise up, surrounding the chest's location, spawning a stream of bad guys. Only once all four orbs have been destroyed does the chest become accessible.

THE ACTION

From what we have seen so far, the combat seems very *Diablo*-esque indeed. Hoards of weak monsters try to overwhelm the character(s), with occasional stronger creatures directing specialised attacks at the player(s). (An interesting aspect is the fact that some of the creatures have mobility options that are unavailable to the player, as evidenced by the ghouls clambering up the walls leading to where our hero in the video

BARBARIAN

Good old "Barbie." Hailing from the area surrounding Mount Arreat, this proud and physically imposing feral warrior no longer has a home, since the destruction of the Worldstone, which laid waste to the surrounding region. Barbarians still favour hand-to-hand combat, and old favourite skills such as Whirlwind are still at his (or now, her) disposal, along with some new ones.
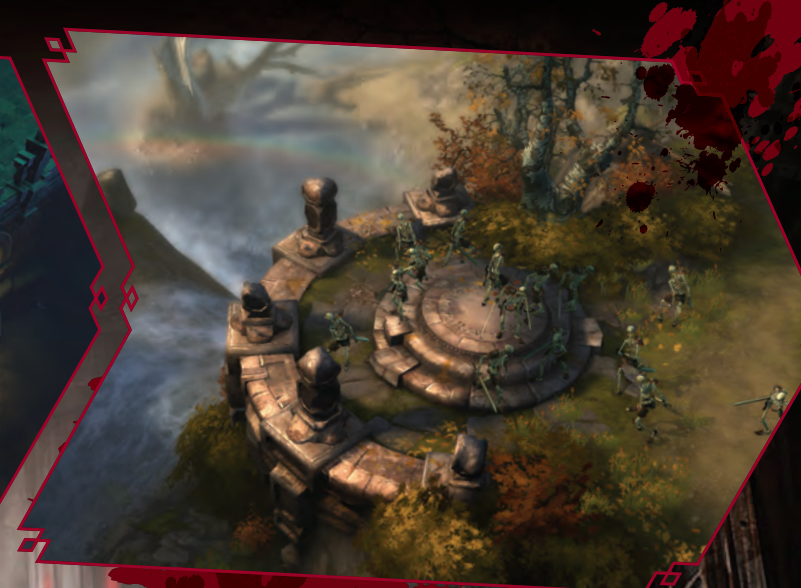
SPECULATION

The archangel graphic at the top of the *Diablo III* site, presumably depicting Tyrael, has sparked some speculation on the discussion boards regarding Tyrael's role in this instalment. Given that people could reasonably expect the main villain to occupy this particular space on the page, many are wondering whether Tyrael's interaction with the Worldstone at the end of *Lord of Destruction* has somehow corrupted him, leaving him as the final 'bad guy'. This would not be the first time that the plot progressed in such a fashion: at the end of *Diablo*, the player took up Diablo's soulstone, and it was then discovered that the former hero was the new host for the Lord of Terror. Tyrael, at the end of the *Diablo II* story line, destroyed the corrupted Worldstone in order to curtail otherworldly influence on humanity. Who knows what may have happened in that cataclysmic event...

WITCH DOCTOR

The Witch Doctor is a new class, and appears to approximate the old Necromancer, with a dash of sorcery thrown in. This character specialises in mass 'DoT' (damage over time) effects, summoning 'pets', messing with opponents' minds, and throwing some fire around, all by tapping into a spirit realm known as the Unformed Land. The Witch Doctor's back-story is very African centric, right down to the names of people and places.

BUILDING THE ANTICIPATION

Blizzard certainly knows how to market a product. *Diablo III* builds on a highly successful franchise, which pretty much sells itself. Therefore, all the company needs to do is to reconnect players with the past to make them look forward to the future. So, it is hardly any surprise that they have recently released a patch for *Diablo II*. This patch addresses no issues, adds no content, and fixes no bugs. What it does do, however, is allow the game to be played without the disc in the drive. This has a twofold implication. Firstly, the vast majority of copies of the game that are out there are getting, let's say, rather long in the tooth, which means that the physical media (i.e. the discs) are mostly quite worn and prone to read failures. This patch allows players to bypass this issue, if they can get all the content onto their hard drives. Secondly, and this is strictly unofficial, the company is no longer really counting on revenue from its old title. Therefore, releasing a 'no-CD patch' may well be tacit consent for players to share copies of the game: for example, at a LAN, several people could conceivably play after having installed off one copy. This is smart marketing, as it helps build anticipation for the upcoming release by tapping into a commercially exhausted product...

THE CONTROVERSY

The same day that the in-game video footage was released, some naysayers started complaining about something. According to them, *Diablo III*'s artistic direction is off target, the colours used in the game are too "bright and cheerful," and they are calling for the colour palette to be toned down. Either there are many negative nitpickers out there or the art direction has truly strayed from its roots. We'll let you make up your own mind, as the video is included on the cover DVD. Meanwhile, the debate rages on...

is passing through.) The story is punctuated by encounters with 'boss' creatures - really tough and seriously big slabs of nastiness that require a lot of firepower to take down. Interestingly, it looks as if the combat has been designed to be more tactical, challenging players to be creative with their characters' skills. An example of this is seen when the Barbarian runs into a bunch of shield-bearing skeletons backed up by ranged, attack-wielding skeletons. The former take very little damage while they are holding up their shields, allowing their 'colleagues' to inflict much damage with their bows. The Barbarian then wades into the shield bearers' midst, uses an area stun-effect skill to get them to drop their shields, and then proceeds to promptly dispatch them. While this is a fairly basic and simple example, there are other clues in the video that suggest that this sort of philosophy has been adopted throughout the design of the combat elements.

One intriguing point that is not covered in the video's voice-over, but which is receiving some attention on Blizzard's discussion boards, is the orb. For the Barbarian, it is a sort of teal colour, while the Witch Doctor's is filled with blue. What does this mean? Do the different classes have different secondary resources? Do spell-casting characters use mana while fighting types use stamina perhaps? Yes, you guessed it. We'll just have to wait and see!

OUR IMPRESSIONS SO FAR

If you have not done so already, check out the video footage we have included on our cover DVD before you read on.

From what we have seen, this title will be a fitting next chapter in the *Diablo* saga. The action seems very consistent with that of its predecessors. With so many *Diablo* clones out there, this official 'heir to the throne' will need to deliver the most authentic experience in order to measure up to fans' expectations. The character and ominous environment graphics are very reminiscent of those in the previous instalments, as is the way that the spell powers and combat abilities has been animated.

Oh yes, did you listen to the music? Wow! Moody and atmospheric, and very much in true *Diablo* style. So are the sound effects, including the sound of gold being dropped and other little details like that.

We are intrigued by what improvements to the control interface are being alluded to in the clip. Very little detail has been furnished, so we are quite keen to see how they have made the action easier to control, given that the previous generation of the interface was quite well put together in the first place.

Something else we are intrigued about is whether the bridge collapse in the demo will feature in the finished product. And if so, will there be other such events during the course of the game, and how will characters without jumping or teleporting abilities get around them? Or will such scripted events happen according to what character or characters are being played at the time? The latter option would suggest a welcome variation in the experience (but keep in mind that this is purely speculative conjecture!).

Overall, we like what we see. Since the news about *Diablo III* first broke, there has been considerable excitement here at *NAG*. In fact, a couple of us have been playing some *Diablo II* once again. Then again, some of us never stopped. So you can imagine our sense of anticipation? **NAG**

POW! KER-NAG!!

SIM ANIMALS

It's like *The Sims*, but with animals! We think. We don't really care, because it's *The Sims*. You could take *The Sims* and make it all about finishing high school (again) and we'd totally play it, designing our room (and leaving it messy), not doing homework and then having to sit in detention for hours while our Sim child gets increasingly eager to urinate.

MIRROR'S EDGE

It's amazing what DICE can do when they're not doing *Battlefield*. There is simply no reason for anyone to not be excited about this, although try to contain it because too much excitement leads to hype, and hype leads to the dark side. The dark side leads to stubbing your toe on the bookshelf in the corner. And that hurts.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Every character you create will have an origin story, although we wonder just how detailed this concept will be in actual play. Then again, it's not like this team has ever let us down, so we have complete faith that they're going to rock our fantasy civilisation by making our down-and-out dwarf from the bad side of town completely plausible and amusing.

I AM ALIVE

It's a game about surviving natural disasters. This could go either way. On the one side, we hope this will finally let us act out our irrational fears of wolves on boats on ice in the middle of Manhattan. If not, we'd settle for a game where your character can get buried under a thousand tons of rock while trying to save a kitten.

WII SPORTS: RESORT

You can swordfight with bokken. You can swordfight with wooden swords. The Motion Plus add-on for your Wii Remote is going to rock civilisation, and jiggle it around a little in perfect 1:1 translation. So now there is no excuse for that lightsaber duel game, LucasArts. You hear us? You hear us? We want Desann vs. Yoda battles!

LIPS
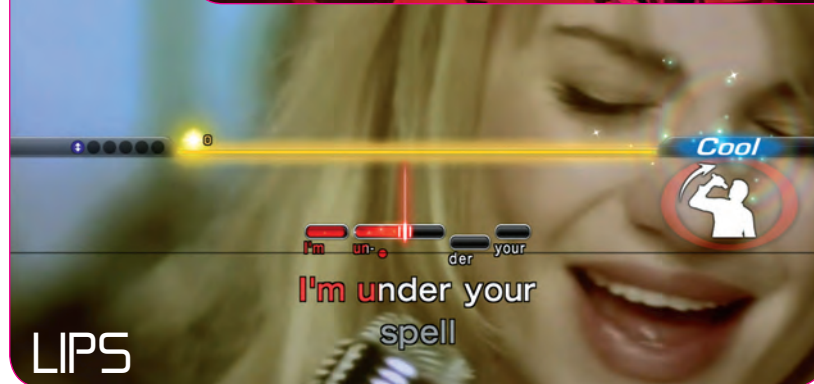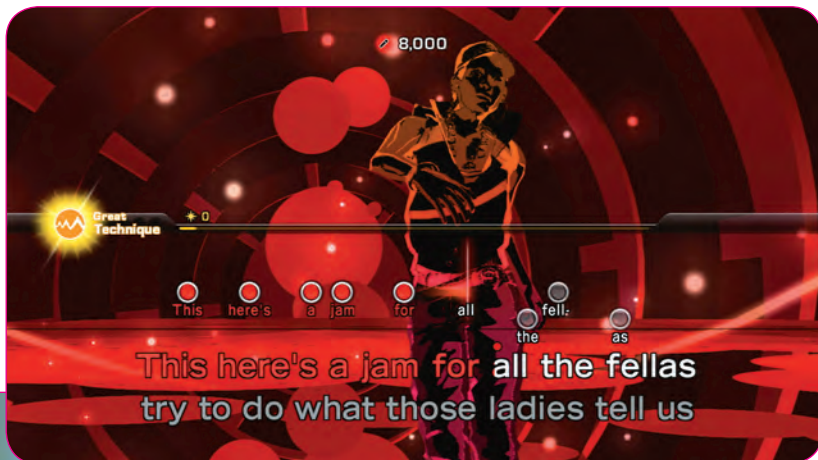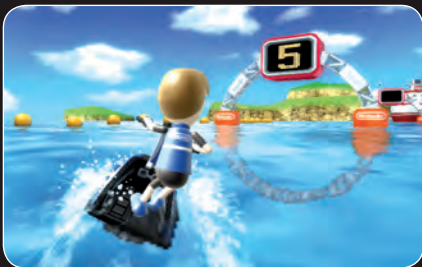
Developer→ iNiS | **Publisher→** Microsoft Game Studios | **Genre→** Rhythm | **Release Date→** Q4 2008

WHILE MANY MAY CRINGE at the idea of standing in front of a group of strangers (or even friends) and sing their hearts out, one can't deny the popularity of games such as *SingStar*. Now, thanks to Japanese developer iNiS - the creative minds behind the critically acclaimed *Elite Beat Agents* for the Nintendo DS - Microsoft is preparing to give the Xbox its answer to the popular karaoke game franchise.

Not settling on creating just a straight Xbox 360 version of the shriek-inducing game, iNiS is raising the bets with a handful of unique ideas. Lips will allow players to not only choose from a collection of bundled songs, but also any (DRM-free) tunes from their own collection. This concept allows players to expand their game almost infinitely without the need for any pricey DLC, although additional tracks (likely featuring an accompanying music video) will still be available for download via Xbox LIVE Marketplace.

In addition to wailing into the light-emitting microphones, players will have the ability to control their on-screen diva with a few funky dance moves, courtesy of the motion sensors built into the microphone. While it may seem insignificant, the inclusion of motion-sensing technology marks an important first step on the Xbox platform. Wannabe backup percussion artists will also finally have their chance to shine, as cowbells, claps and other exciting instruments are accessible via a standard controller.

The game will ship with two wireless microphones. These, combined with two backup percussionists, should make for a decent-enough party game given the right atmosphere. **NAG**

GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR

ADMIT IT. AT SOME point or another, you wanted to learn how to play the guitar. I did. I even bought a guitar, back when I could hardly afford one. The interest was there, but I just could not get myself to stay focussed on learning how to play the damn thing. A year or so later, a few of us started a band for our own amusement. It was fun initially, but we soon realised all we really wanted was to be rock stars. We did not want to learn how to play instruments, we did not want to work on our talent or write songs, we just wanted to rock! Not surprisingly, we weren't too good at the band thing and after a while not even our girlfriends wanted to be groupies. As the years passed by, our dreams of rock stardom was replaced by dreams of meeting deadlines and paying the bills. Until now...

Since its launch in 2005, the *Guitar Hero* franchise has taken the console market by storm. The concept is simple and the result is a game experience unlike anything you could imagine. Even at *NAG*, this game has managed to attract the most critical gamers.

As life goes, things evolve, and while *Guitar Hero* is still a favourite, gamers clearly want more. Harmonix, the developer of the first two *Guitar Hero* games, was quick to respond with *Rock Band*, a game in which you not only use a guitar controller, but you also have drums and a microphone. While gamers were getting their rock on with Harmonix's game, Neversoft quietly planned the next iteration in the *Guitar Hero* franchise. As soon as rumours surfaced, we all speculated that they would take on *Rock Band* and come up with a similar, and hopefully improved, concept. To see whether this was true, Megarom invited us to the Neversoft Studios (based in Los Angeles) where we got a sneak peak at *Guitar Hero World Tour*, the fourth game in the series.

YOUR SET LIST

One of the things we have always loved about the franchise is the quality of the music. In past games, the set list contained a combination of original music and cover versions. *Guitar Hero World Tour* will feature only master recordings and there are over 85 of them in the game. So far, only three bands have been officially confirmed for the game - Van Halen, The Eagles and Linkin Park - but rumour has it that other bands such as Foo Fighters, Blink 182, Muse, Smashing Pumpkins, The Doors, and Jimmy Hendrix will also feature on the track list. Neversoft also assured us that *Guitar Hero World Tour* will enjoy a large downloadable collection of songs and albums.

GET YOUR ROCK ON

One of the nicest changes within the dynamics of the game is the fact that the Career mode will feature non-linear play. This means that there will be multiple gigs available to you and you won't have to play songs in any particular order, as there are multiple paths through the game. Another nice touch is that you can drop the difficulty level for a song while in Career mode to help you through difficult songs. Neversoft did not explain this in detail, but we'll take a guess that you will have a quota of the number of songs you can drop a level, per career, before the Career level is also dropped.

Guitar Hero World Tour will also feature an extensive Character Creator. As it was shown to us in painstaking detail, you will be able to change many facial features and clothes. You can also add tattoos and face makeup. Your in-game instruments are also customisable: everything from type to colour, and you can even custom-design the finish yourself.

Neversoft also emphasised the improved online capabilities of the game. While many of the old, familiar online modes will be present, you will now also be able to jam with your band members over the Internet. There will also be four-player, band-versus-band modes and various other combinations of the same concept available.

The *pièce de résistance* for most gamers will undoubtedly be the Music Creator built into this game. If you are thinking that this will merely be a music creator to fiddle with, you'll be wrong. During our briefing session, the Music Creator took the longest to explain. It has just so many features and from the live demos we saw, it's apparent that gamers will be able to create full music tracks using the *Guitar Hero* game instruments. There will even be an online component called GH Tunes where users will be able to upload their masterpieces. The rating system for GH Tunes will allow the best tracks to surface to the top, while the badly created ones will be left at the bottom of the list. The Music Creator will not be able to record a voice track, and rightfully so. We can just imagine the type of nasty lyrics that would cross our paths should Neversoft have allowed voice tracks to be uploaded to GH Tunes.

While we did not get any hands-on time, the live demos we saw were impressive. It's a game true to its roots and there is no doubt that *Guitar Hero* fans will sell a kidney for this game - it's just that good. While *Rock Band 2* is also just around the corner, competition between these two titles will be tough, but in South Africa, *Guitar Hero World Tour* is almost guaranteed to take the limelight. Take that *Rock Band*! That is for ignoring us! *Guitar Hero World Tour* will reach our shores early next year... maybe earlier if we ask Santa nicely. **NAG**

Regardt van der Berg

THE GEAR

As we expected, this game will feature drums, up to two guitars (one guitar and one bass), and a microphone. During our introductory briefing, Neversoft said that each of the instruments will have its own Career mode – a very nice touch, considering that not everyone will be able to afford the entire kit. While Neversoft declined to give pricing, a spokesperson said that *Guitar Hero World Tour* will be competitively priced with what's out in the market. [*We heard a rumour from a reliable source that it's going to end up between R2,000 and R2,500 – but don't quote us on that, Ed*].

THE GUITAR

Unfortunately, the only part of the kit we were unable to see was the new guitar controller for *Guitar Hero World Tour*. Neversoft was tight-lipped about any possible new features, but by the time this article was written, some more details have surfaced. The guitar will be slightly beefier than its predecessors. It has also been designed to resemble a real guitar, with an improved whammy-bar and a slight repositioning of the buttons. This guitar is one step closer to the real thing. The most interesting feature, however, is a touch-pad located on the neck of the guitar. Not only will you be able to use this within the game, but according to the developers, it will play a key role in the Music Creator.

THE DRUMS

The drum kit on display in the Neversoft demo room was an early prototype, but from the looks of it, it seems like a solid piece of gaming hardware. If you know what the *Rock Band* drum kit looks like, you will also immediately notice the two raised drum pads, which mimic the cymbals on a real drum set. The drum features velocity sensitive pads, which mean that a different sound will be produced based on how hard you play. Best of all, the drum kit is wireless.

THE MICROPHONE

The microphone is the simplest of the controllers. It features no buttons and uses a cord to connect to your console. It would have been nice if there was a wireless version, but it's okay: singers don't need too much room, they can stand in the corner next to the console.

Q&A:

GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR

After the briefing session, we managed to get a few minutes with Brian Bright, the project director for *GH World Tour*.

NAG: What's the process in taking a music track and making it playable in the game?
BB: It takes a couple of weeks of work. Our first step is to get the deal done with the record labels. Then we have to track down the master recording. This can be very difficult as many of the old songs' master recordings are locked in a basement somewhere. Once we track down those recordings, they are mixed by an engineer - usually of the band's own choice. Those tracks are then sent to us as a Pro Tools session. The first thing we do is tempo map the song. From there, it goes in parallel to a few designers. One of them is animation, where they do the motion capture for the song. We then also have our note-tracker designers who work with each of the instruments and map out the notes for that song. We also have lighting guys who work on it so they can get the right cues for the lighting in the game. It's a big process for each song.

NAG: *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* **is quite a popular title. Do you get many bands that want to work with you on similar game projects?**

BB: Yeah, it's really taken off. While it's been difficult to get some of the big bands for *Guitar Hero III*, its success has certainly made it easier for the franchise, as the bands and the record labels are realising the potential of these games, including things like downloadable content.

NAG: The Music Studio seems like a huge project on its own. What made you guys do it?

BB: We realised that there was a trend for gamers hacking their guitars to make their own note charts for their own songs. I then started to experiment with some of the techniques myself and later brought Travis Chen on board. He was one of the first gamers to hack his *Guitar Hero* controller. We actually wanted to do something like this for *Guitar Hero III*, but

it was such a big undertaking that we did not have the time.

NAG: Do you think we'll soon see the world's first virtual rock band, using only *Guitar Hero World Tour***?**

BB: Most certainly. With the power of the Music Studio, we'll be surprised if we don't see one.

NAG: Why should gamers buy this game instead of *Rock Band***?**

BB: I'll start with the hardware: the drum kit is far superior, it is velocity sensitive, and has quiet pads. The layout of the drums is also more like the real thing. There is also the fact that the drums and guitar are wireless. On the guitar, there is the new touch pad, which will allow for some really impressive gaming and music creating. There is also the Music Creator and customisable characters. Finally, the songs: we have way more songs in this game and they are all master recordings. **NAG**

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
MAC

SPORE

IN THE BEGINNING, WILL Wright created the heavens, the Earth and a sort of brightly coloured amorphous blob with an extendable spine. Then he added eyes, legs, wings and a spiky ball thing on the end of its tail, and sent it out to kill stuff. There's no adolescence like a stroppy, pugnacious adolescence, after all, and if genetic supremacy is the prize, then eating everything else is totally worth the moral ante. Besides, what are so-called petty 'moral' things between you and a consenting cluster of gnawed bones when you can build spaceships?

Will Wright's oft-delayed 'massively single-player online' simulation everything is finally peeping prehensile eyestalks just over the horizon, and with the recent release of the Spore Creature Creator, the hype surrounding the game is reaching galactic proportions. In its first week of release, more than one million monstrosities were ushered howling and slithering into virtual existence, and uploaded to Sporepedia at www.spore.com, exceeding Maxis' estimate of 100,000 before the game ships in

September by a rather considerable margin.

Spore spans no less than the entire arc of evolution - from single-celled microbial infancy through barbarian bashing of stuff on heads and finally beyond the far-flung frontiers of galactic colonisation as beings of transcendental intellect and eminent sophistication - and is rolled out in five broad phases. If, at any point in the phase, a player's species is entirely exterminated, the game will revert back either to the beginning of that phase or the last viable stage of that species' development cycle. It's worth mentioning that players may choose which stage to play from the outset, so if slapping your way through hostile troglodyte tribes isn't your thing, you can jump straight to the *Star Trek* stuff instead.

THE CELL PHASE
Oh, to be a unicellular protean runt in a tidal pool crammed with unicellular food and the promise of a better tomorrow, like maybe some mitochondria and a bungalow with a nice view of the Palaeocene. Inspired by arcade-guzzler, *Pac-Man*, the Cell Phase

of the game mostly involves doggy paddling around the primordial slop, avoiding predators, and eating stuff until you've grabbed enough biological matter to grow a leg or something.

THE CREATURE PHASE
Somewhat similar to the previous stage, and inspired by click-click-loot, action-RPG *Diablo*, the Creature Phase sees your precious little abomination scuttling around a land-based ecosystem, avoiding predators, killing stuff, and looking for a girlfriend to ensure that succeeding generations of precious little abominations will inherit your beautiful lobster claws. At this stage, your creatures tout statistics for Abilities, Attack and Social values, determined by their physical accoutrements. The primary objective of the Creature Phase is to expand your beastie's brain capacity, until it finally twigs that there's more to this whole existence thing than hitting stuff with rocks.

THE TRIBAL PHASE
Well, it appears there's more to this whole

existence thing than hitting stuff with rocks by yourself, anyway… time to make some friends. Adopting a more RTS-orientated style of gameplay inspired by Bullfrog's *Populous*, the Tribal Phase reveals subtle civilising considerations like fire, clothing, and verbal communication to your wide-eyed monsters. You can still hit stuff with rocks, but you could sing to them instead if the mood takes you.

At this point, you can begin to assign tasks like hunting and fishing to your population, while establishing a primitive sort of society and economy.

THE CIVILISATION PHASE

Your clump of ramshackle huts is now a sprawling city, and your clever ogres have figured out how to jam stuff together into useful things like submarines and aircraft. In addition to the Creature Editor, players now have access to building and vehicle editors, although your available options will be determined to some extent by the overall inclination of your civilisation: militaristic, economic, or religious. The inspirations

informing this stage of play include *SimCity*, *Risk*, and *Sid Meier's Civilization*, with an emphasis on territorial expansion.

Your objective in this phase is nothing less than global control, although it's left up to players to decide whether to conquer the place with torpedoes, beguile them with propaganda, or give presents to everyone else until you're all best friends.

THE SPACE PHASE

It's good to be the king. Well, it's also a bit boring, now that's there's not all that much to do around here anymore. So, your creatures turn prospecting telescopes to the sombre vastness of space in search of new places to kill whales and drive tanks.

Drawing on a number of inspirational materials ranging from *SimEarth* and *Destroy All Humans* through *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the Space Phase is a largely sandbox-styled stage offering players all sorts of stuff with which to wreak galactic chaos, including terraforming tools and great burning comets to fling at

hapless worlds.

With more than four billion planets on the game's galactic map (yes, seriously), there's more than enough metaphorical cake to have, eat, and kill with fire.

Tarryn van der Byl

GENETICALLY SUPERIOR

Scheduled for an early September 2008 release, *Spore* will crawl out in two forms: a basic retail package as well as a special collector's *Galactic Edition*. For the extra investment, happy consumers will bag themselves a *Making Of Spore* DVD, a *How To Build A Better Being* DVD from the National Geographic Channel, the *Art of Spore* hardback book, a fold-out *Spore* poster, and a 100-page *Galactic Handbook*.

"The *Spore Galactic Edition* is the ultimate backstage pass for the *Spore* universe," says Patrick Buechner, vice president of marketing at Maxis. Well, your morning trot to the bog has never been so exciting.

SPORE™

I'VE CREATED A MONSTER!

Not quite sure where to begin cobbling together your very own abomination, Doctor Frankenstein? We'll show you how it's done. The creature editor is on this month's DVD, so have fun and don't be rude...

STEP 1

This is the basic Creature Creator viewport. Navigating around this window is done easily with just your mouse by left- or right-clicking, holding down anywhere in the background, and simply dragging, while you can zoom in and out with your mouse wheel. If you prefer using the keyboard, the ← and → keys rotate, and use the + and – keys to zoom. Changing your viewing angle from time to time is a good idea unless you want your creature to go knock-kneed. You can undo/redo anything you inflict upon your creature with Ctrl + Z and Ctrl - Y respectively.

The triangular bit on the dais indicates which way your wee monster will be facing. Unless you're weird, therefore, you're probably going to put all the face bits on this side. To extend the spine, drag on either of the Adjustment Arrows to add vertebrae. Position your pointer over any vertebra to highlight it, and move your mouse wheel up and down to enlarge or reduce the flesh around it. Highlighting and dragging vertebrae will change the orientation of the entire body.

STEP 2

Your fledgling fiend can't scream, eat, or do anything much else useful without a set of teeth. Your choice of jaws will determine whether your creature is carnivorous, herbivorous, or omnivorous, and while that won't have much impact just yet, it is likely to become an important consideration when you finally plop him into *Spore*. So, for now, let's choose an undiscriminating pair of gobblers. Besides, these are awesome.

STEP 3

Once you've placed any body part onto the torso, you can lengthen/shorten, reposition, and reorientate it using the Adjustment Arrows, Position Ball, and Rotation Ring respectively. Some items (mouths, for example) have several Adjustment Arrows, in order to accommodate resizing along more than one axis. To resize the entire item, highlight it with your pointer to select it, and simply use your mouse wheel to make it larger or smaller. To view additional adjustment options, select the item and hold Tab.

STEP 4

Time to get your monstrosity scurrying along. Jump to the Arms/Legs palette, find something suitable, and place it on the torso. Moving a pair of limbs into the centre of the torso will reduce it to a single limb. While the available options are divided into obvious arms and legs, there's no functional difference between the two. In other words, you can use arms as legs, and vice versa.

To remove the grasper, either click to select it and press Del, or drag it off the limb. To lengthen a limb segment, select a joint ball and drag it around. You can also fatten up joint segments with the mouse wheel.

reposition the leg as shown. Add in another single limb segment just for overkill using your elite new limb crafting skills. Finally, tack on some claws.

STEP 7

Now for a coat of paint, because that drab shade of green won't be getting him a date anytime soon. There are three layers making up your little spider friend's colouring:

Base: Determines the underlying layer and overall tone and colour.
Coat: This layer puts markings over the base layer.
Detail: This layer adds small frills on top of everything else.

You can change the colour of every layer by selecting a colour above the Styles palette, while additional options are available if you hold down the left mouse button while pointing over a swatch.

To finish him, click the 'Name Your Creature' field at the bottom of the viewport, enter something appropriately fearsome, and hit the disc icon to save him.

STEP 5

Now for some advanced stuff. To park an additional limb onto an existing one, hold down the Ctrl key and move the new limb over the joint to which you want to attach it. Remove the grasper, and fiddle with the new limb segments until they resemble the arachnid majesty shown in the image provided.

Now, hold Alt and move your pointer over the joint attaching the entire leg to the torso. You'll now be able to drag a replica limb out onto the torso. To remove a single segment, hold Ctrl, click anywhere around the middle of the segment itself, and simply drag it off the rest of the limb. Now resize and

STEP 6

Limbs and limb segments have all sorts of other uses; so let's give your beastie some tentacles for added aquatic menace. Pop an arm onto the side of his face, ditch the grasper, and resize and replicate the limb as shown. Hop to the details palette, and select the Bone Tablets to sexy up your creature a bit, before making some final tweaks to his leg angles.

I'M IN YOUR .PNG, PROCEDURALLY GENERATING YOUR DUDES

Alongside everything else that's immensely cool about *Spore* (making monsters, making your monsters eat all the other monsters) is its remarkable use of procedural-generation technology. It's really all about exceedingly complicated maths and algorithms and other number stuff that make my brain hurt, but the end result is that *Spore* is able to create and recreate content on the fly. The technology itself isn't new (both *Diablo* games, for example, employed procedural synthesis in their random-level generation), but *Spore* is doing something especially mindboggling with it.

Anyone who has fiddled with the Creature Creator probably knows by now that they can drag a static 26KB 128 x 128-pixel .png image file off the online Sporepedia and drop it into their Editor, and see that beastie entirely recreated right down to its quadruple-jointed legs, pink belly spots, and clumsy dancing routine. But how does it work?

Stuffing all sorts of additional information into image files isn't novel in itself (a simple animated .gif file, for example, will include information about its frame attributes),

but these .png files are hiding a lot more than a tag that tells your browser to hold a frame for 0.2 seconds. Using a method of concealing information called steganography, the numbers and values dictating the creature's 3D composition and generation are actually slathered all over the image in an invisible alpha channel, as well as the basic RGB (red, green, blue) colour channels.

From a more technical perspective, a 24-bit .png file with alpha transparency will have eight bits representing each of the previously mentioned colour values at each pixel. This allows for an enormous range of different blues, for example, and the difference between 11111111 and 11111110 in the colour value is entirely undetectable by the human eye. The number on the far right (or the least significant bit, in binary terms) may

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL OF *SPORE*

Ah, creativity. Let it flow unfettered by the... OMG, is that a penis monster? Stop, stop the creativity!
It seems that the *Spore* Creature Creator brings out the best (and sometimes the worst) in people. A few users have gone ahead and put their... well, they've made some creatures. Some look like Pikachu, some like Yoda, but all are well done and put the power of the Creature Creator to intuitive and imaginative use. There are even Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii controllers buried somewhere in the Sporepedia. If you spot one of the, ahem... male and female organ-inspired critters, pretend like you didn't see it, move on and pray to whoever's listening that your mom didn't catch a fleeting glimpse of it.

therefore be used to denote something other than colour information.

With this method, as much as 8KB of raw creature data is squirreled away inside the image, acting as a sort of DNA template.

SPACE INVADERS!

Once you've registered yourself over at spore.com, you can begin sharing your own, lovingly handcrafted monstrosities with everyone else. After uploading something, you're able to tag it with descriptors like "purple" or "tentacles," which are used to categorically or thematically integrate your content with others' in the online Sporepedia. These tags are then addressed by user-defined Sporecasts, which in turn determine the sort of content your game will pull from the Internet to populate your game. You can also subscribe to certain *Spore* Creature Creators if you've taken a particular fancy of their brand of trolls.

Similarly, if you'd rather avoid the inevitable deluge of allegedly hilarious mobile genitalia trawling your pretty villages and bothering your toddlers, you'll be able to toggle available downloadable content between "No user-generated content," "Official Maxis content only," "Friend content only" and "All user-generated content." **NAG**

FABLE 2

YOU MET HER SCULLING ale in a tavern. She just wasn't like the other girls. In hindsight, you can't really say what it was that drew you to her, but it was love at first sight no matter which way you slice it. Marriage, kids, house in a little village - the usual story. I came from another dimension, on the proviso that I'd help you slay some monsters and save the world, of course. We did a bit of that, but I got bored, so I have a new agenda: I'm going to kill your wife. And then I'm going to lay waste to your hometown, and move on to the adjacent city. And when I'm done, it'll all be your fault, because you let me in. That's power.

Lionhead Studios isn't about to explicitly condone that sort of behaviour, but in *Fable 2* – its latest attempt to provide players with a sentient virtual world – it's entirely possible. *Fable 2* returns you to the fantasy world of Albion, now with a steam-punk finish, and you're once again tasked from childhood with righting the world's wrongs. Rote RPG stuff, naturally, but the story's not the star of *Fable 2*: in this game, the

world you're rescuing can and will be totally reshaped by your actions. And not in a binary, scripted, branching-storyline kind of way, either: change is emergent.

If this plan is realised, Lionhead will have singlehandedly evolved the open-world genre. Where open-world games now provide players with large, free-roaming spaces to explore, *Fable 2* will give players a world they can change. How does this work? One of the most comprehensive AI systems ever seen in gaming can't hurt.

Fable 2's AI is multi-tiered: it begins with a grand economy system that regulates what costs what, what effect that has on the relevant region/district, and how you can change that. Below that, there's the local AI, which looks at specific areas, and assesses how NPCs behave there, according to their socioeconomic status. Finally, the family/NPC AI tracks how individual characters feel about you, what they remember about you, and how they'll act around you. This is especially complex with the player's family, as Lionhead wants players to develop

genuine empathy with them. This is assisted somewhat by the fact that your spouse can be anyone in *Fable 2*'s world: every NPC can be killed, taken on adventures, and even romanced. If you start a family with them, the AI elevates your chosen mate to a 'special NPC status', and the family AI kicks in. They'll grow as you grow, change as you change, and possibly even turn against you if they don't agree that shooting everyone with red hair is a jolly good idea.

The star of *Fable 2*'s AI tech, however, is your pet dog. He is, like it or not, the most important character in the game, after your good self. From childhood, the little beast tails you, and he'll gladly fight with you, entertain you, and play with you. Lionhead has revealed that it chose to focus on the dog's AI because it sidesteps the "uncanny valley" problem that plagues most attempts at virtual acting. After all, while we know dogs reasonably well and have a rough idea of how they'll behave in any given situation, it's fair to say we're not particularly good at analysing their more subtle communication

cues. Due to the robust AI powering the animal, the dog's behaviour will reflect how you treat it and others.

Take this to a grander scale, and you'll begin to understand how *Fable 2* allows for meaningful, dynamic, and widespread player influence. Go to a village, for example, buy out all the shops in the area, and shift the prices around. Depending on what you do with that and how you manage it, the area could either become highly affluent or degenerate into a slum. Of course, even if Lionhead can't predict your behaviour, it certainly plans to make you accountable for it. Due to the emergent nature of the game, your choices will have far more tangible consequences than in the first *Fable*. Expect people to erupt in throes of gratitude or recoil in horror as your notoriety grows, and be prepared for those reactions to shape not only your experience of the game, but also the game world itself as your influence strengthens.

Of course, in *Fable*'s second iteration, the world doesn't just have to contend with

your influence: co-op is the game's most fascinating new feature, as players cannot only enter your world to help you with the main quest, but they can also experiment with their surroundings – with potentially catastrophic consequences. Once you've set 'Safety' off – which, when on, precludes the murder of innocent bystanders by foreign players – I am fully within my rights to destroy everything you love in your fantasy land, even as we rapturously play through the story together, killing monsters in tandem.

It's a scary prospect, and one that may lead to more than a few thrown controllers, but *Fable 2*'s potential, with or without co-op, is plainly obvious. If what has been discussed and demonstrated remains true and consistent throughout Lionhead's biggest project yet, *Fable 2* could well be the next *Grand Theft Auto III*: a significant, highly influential, and immeasurably large leap forward in not only open-world games, but game design as a whole.

That's a big if, though. After all, *Fable*'s 2004 release was hampered by the hype

the game had accrued hitherto; Lionhead apologised for promising that the game would include features like player offspring and real-time foliage growth, when it didn't. Peter Molyneux puts this down to a tendency to be a little too frank with the press, but the backlash over his blue-sky *Fable* versus the final product was enough for many gamers (and some writers) to describe *Fable* as a failure. (It was, in fact, critically and commercially well received.)

This time, they won't be making those mistakes. *Fable 2*'s concept is every bit as vast and detailed as its predecessor's, but this time, nothing's said until coded into the game. The developer has gone about excising everything they saw as superfluous and undercooked in *Fable*, added in the things players missed, and completely refined everything else. The result, glimpsed in demonstrations, screenshots, and trailers, is a consistent and engrossing experience, despite the Herculean effort required to build it.

Alexander Gambotto-Burke

Q&A:

WITH PETER MOLYNEUX

What do you think is the core goal behind *Fable 2*?
I think we should entertain people. The whole point of the games I make is all about making you feel powerful... you know, 'Wow, aren't I cool! Look what I can do!' That's what I want everybody who plays this game to feel. So often I've played games where I just felt stupid and unskilled, and I just wanted to throw the controller across the room, because the game had killed me for the umpteenth time. And I was just thinking, God, it must be me. And I play games every day. Imagine what the average person on the street feels!

So how are you planning to empower the player?
We want you, the player, to walk into the scene, and we want you to play around and experiment. How many times have you gone to do that in a game, only to find that nothing happens, or something really idiotic happens? We love the idea of a player going in and thinking, 'What would happen if I walked in and killed everyone? What would happen if I gave away all my money, or befriended everyone, or was a really famous hero?' There are a lot of what-ifs, and that's what makes computer games so different. If you have simulation, people can really get a feel that they're experimenting themselves. And it's true, too, because it's not scripted. Players can go in and wonder what happens if they do this and this, and I as a designer may have never heard of it, but it should still work.

How does the player-influence system work?
The player influences group minds. Now, a group mind can be a family, a town, a city, or even a whole country. Sometimes those group minds affect when people get out of bed, sometimes it'll affect how they live their lives. It colours their mood. It can make them go to work, or be grumpy, or be happy.

Could you explain the AI in a bit more detail?
What we're doing with the AI is what I'd call 'simulation systems'. This stuff is immensely complex, but when you play the game, you won't be aware of that complexity at all. The reason we're doing it is to make *Fable 2* seem like a real world. So, the AI has multiple levels. At the highest level, there's a piece of AI that controls the economy of the whole world – how much things go for sale here, how much they go for sale in another place, what a particular region looks like, whether they're well-off or not... That's the biggest piece of encompassing AI.
Then it looks at a city. There's a city in *Fable 2* called Bowerstone, and there is some AI in there that causes some people to get up in the morning, and they go to work, and, you know, have a job. And if their job is working in a shop, say, and they run out of stock, then they'll call for new stock, and the stock will be picked up and be carried to the shop... This is all working, and you can just sit back as a player and watch this play out. And then evening comes. Some people go home, some to the pub. There's a rhythm to each part of the town, and it changes over days, weeks, and seasons. Finally, the family AI looks at how they react to what you're doing, what they're doing. If they don't have much money, how they'll react. If they've got a lot of money, how they'll react to that... And then beyond that, you have the individual person's AI. That looks at how they react to you, and what they remember about you.

You've said that *Fable 2*'s dialogue is AI driven. Many developers have promised that, though, and not quite lived up to the task.
The dialogue is AI driven, yes, but there's always a limitation, and it's actually quite a tedious one. It's basically how many hours you can actually trap people in the studio – and there are a lot of people you need in the studio – so they can read lines and react to situations. That's where our problem lies. For example, I walk into a town and I have a chicken suit on, and I go around and slaughter everybody. First people should laugh at me, and then they should get really panicky. There are many variations there. And we have hundreds of thousands of lines, and to try to pre-think all the responses we'll need is impossible. One of the things that makes the hairs stand up on the back
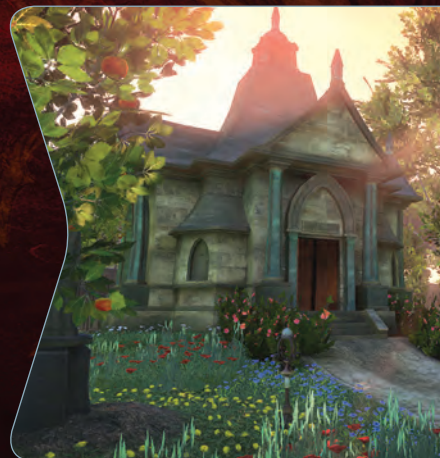
of my neck is when a piece of AI works in such a way that it refers to something that happened in your past. That, to me, feels more like AI than someone laughing in ten different ways.

The biggest challenge with the AI is that we have a limited palette of what someone can say, but if an NPC repeats a dialogue line… well, that just kills it for me. If someone comes up to you and says, 'Hey, nice hat,' and then they come back two minutes later and say, 'Hey, nice hat,' you'd think they were crazy. We just don't do that in real life. So in *Fable 2*, we're saying, 'Right, we're not going to repeat lines. We'd rather have a facial expression or something than have repeated lines.' So there's a whole AI system that manages all of the conversations in the world, and it knows which ones you've heard, and which ones you haven't heard.

How about the dog? What impact will he have on the game?
We've crafted the dog very differently to how we've crafted anything before. He's a little bit similar to the creature we did in *Black & White* a long time ago, but we approached it from a very different angle. The creature in *Black & White* was this mystical, semi-human being whom you could teach all sorts of tricks. We had giant, bipedal cows. And you don't point at a giant, bipedal cow and say, 'Hey, that's not how he's supposed to behave!' They don't exist in the real world, so you can't say that. With a dog, though, people know what dogs are like. So, we've read a lot of books on dogs, and have applied the AI and behaviour to it and polished it. We want to make you feel, as a player, that you have something travelling with you the whole time, which is both slightly vulnerable – because dogs are naturally slightly vulnerable – but also incredibly useful to you.

When players enter your world in co-op, will they have the same level of influence as you?
Yes, very much so. Be careful whom you invite into your world, because they can and are completely free to change it. There's a thing called 'Safety', which you can turn off, and that means you can attack innocent bystanders. So they could go into your world and… I demonstrated this at GDC, when I asked someone to come up on stage, and they shot my husband. I was playing a woman at the time. So that's the sort of thing you can do.

Clearly, *Fable 2* facilitates somewhat morally questionable behaviour. How do you keep the player accountable?
This goes into philosophy. There are moral consequences to you being good and kind, and consequences to you being cruel. And we're putting in some interesting tests for you, especially on the good side. Seventy to 80 percent of the people who'll play *Fable 2* will play a good person. That's just the way people are. But how good is good? I want to test that. How much are you willing to sacrifice? Truly wonderful people have to sacrifice a lot, and that may be money, power, opportunity, or things and people they love. I want people to think about that, and perhaps sit back for a moment and think, 'You know what? This isn't me. I don't have it in me to be that nobly good,' so they might realise how hard it is. And the same with being evil – you have to be completely, unnecessarily cruel, for cruelty's sake. And you have to deal with how the world – even your dog, although he'll always love you – will respond to that.

Finally, in hindsight, is there anything you would've done differently with *Fable*?
Talking about things that were theories in my head rather than actualities in the game come back to haunt me. And I've tried this time to really just address the things I can demonstrate. Everything we discuss I can demonstrate to you, in game, today. **NAG**

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

I SAID VITO, NOT NICO

While the similarities between many elements in the *Mafia* and *GTA* series are undeniable, the games as a whole are certainly different. 2K Czech knows its strengths, and is quite clear in its approach to the series. *Mafia II* is a linear, cinematic experience. Certain parts of the game will require players to make a choice on Vito's behalf, but for the most part, the player will be taking part in an epic and clearly defined story. Over two hours of cinematic sequences are expected to make their way into this game, thanks to the nearly 700 pages of screenplay set out for the top-notch voice actors, cinematographers and artists to follow.

MAFIA II

MAFIA: THE CITY OF *Lost Heaven* captured the hearts of thousands of gamers and scored well among critics, without necessarily being a record-breaking commercial hit. Originally released for the PC, over two million units were sold across its native platform and rather crummy Xbox and PS2 ports. What kept it from being the *GTA* beater that many thought it would be is somewhat a of mystery, although perhaps the release of *GTA: Vice City* a little over two months after its release had something to do with that. The game had charm, a heart-wrenching story, fearlessly innovative game dynamics and good looks to boot. Now, reinvigorated by Take-Two's recent buyout, developer 2K Czech (formally Illusion Softworks) is preparing to release the highly anticipated sequel, and from the looks of things, they're doing a heck of a job.

If you're hoping that the story will (somehow) continue the legacy of Tommy Angelo, stop right there. *Mafia II* takes place some 20 years after the original, following the tale of ex-military man and petty crook Vito Scaletta, shortly before the end of World War II. What this means for players is an urban playground twice the size of the city of Lost Heaven, 20 years of automobile advancements, and the chance to experience arguably one of the most exciting times in American history – all through the visionary words of returning writer and director Daniel Vavra.

The story kicks off with Vito arriving back from the War after a mandatory term of service, following a blundered burglary. His buddy, Joe Barbaro, waits to pick him up from the train station. Determined to make it big, Vito and Joe (who won't be playable) team up to take on San Francisco- and

KEEP ON RIDING

Drawing directly from the first game, driving and vehicle maintenance will play a crucial role in *Mafia II*. Players will need to keep an eye on traffic lights and speedometers if they want to avoid trouble from the cops, and cars will run out of petrol if you're not paying attention. Expect all sorts of cinema-quality vehicular mayhem: paint will scrape off; bumpers will dangle precariously from the front of the car, kicking up sparks until they eventually fall off; and tyres will eventually burst when subjected to too much heat, courtesy of your well-aimed bullet to the fuel tank.

Players will be able to kit out their cars to their liking, with the ability to change a wide variety of elements, including paint colour, interior styles and entire engine replacements. You'll also have the ability to have your own car, complete with a personalised licence plate – something that no self-respecting mobster should be without.

New York-inspired Empire City mobster style. With the aid of already 'made man', Henry Tomasino, the three embark on a journey of money, murder and mayhem, with missions ranging from simple muggings and burglaries to elaborate assassinations.

Vito is on a quest to move up the ranks in any of the three reigning crime families, meaning you'll have to perform various tasks for the families to gain the respect needed to make your way to being a 'made man' – not just a lowly street thug. If the lengths you go through to get that respect, however, cause too much of a ruckus in a certain area, the city mayor will order more police officers to be on the lookout for you. You'll need to provide the mayor with a sign of the family's good intent, colloquially known as a bribe, before being able to operate unhindered in the area again.

The technology and game dynamic behind this old-school gangbanger are set to be nothing short of awe inspiring. Players will need to make good use of the cover system to stay alive during firefights, but staying on the move is essential: cover doesn't last forever, and you'll soon find chunks of overturned table and concrete wall flying off at a disturbing rate. When it comes to brawling, expect even less time to rest. Vito will be able to wield a number of innocently mundane items for use in melee combat, or just stick to the traditional art of bare-knuckle clobbering.

In an effort to make the game world that much more believable, the developers have been hard at work creating systems that will truly bring the city to life. Citizens will have real activities to do: you could literally tail a random pedestrian, watch him or her go into

a clothing store, make a purchase and head home. Windows will light up when the sun sets, drivers who have been in a collision will get out of their cars, exchanging a few nasty words or insurance details, and police will react to different crimes in different ways. You won't be gunned down for punching an officer or drawing a weapon in public, but ride over a well-positioned clump of pedestrians, and you can expect a much harsher reaction.

2K Czech is promising a lot. The first *Mafia* still holds a place in many gamers' hearts, and anything short of amazing could put a much-undeserved black mark next to its name. From what we've seen so far, *Mafia II* looks set to deliver. However, only time and a collection of very demanding fans will tell if it will stand its ground against competitors.

Geoff Burrows

NAG

Q&A:

WITH DANIEL VÁVRA (2K CZECH, LEAD DESIGNER)

The first *Mafia* was truly a piece of art, and hordes of fans can't wait for the continuation. Why did you take such a huge break before starting the sequel?
Well, we know there was a pretty big break and it is mainly because we needed to be sure we created a sequel worthy of the name. As you said, *Mafia* managed to grab the attention of a huge number of people and suck them into a world of intrigue and crime. We have spent a huge amount of time creating the tools to build *Mafia II*, as we wanted to make the best use of the hardware available and give fans a truly inspiring game to experience.

The quality of the characters in the *Mafia II* trailer is astonishing. Are those really game models with all the details and great facial animation, or is it a rendered video? What quality of scripted scenes can we expect in the final game?
The tools we have created for *Mafia II* are incredibly powerful and allow us to create cut-scenes in the game engine that provide incredible detail and depth. For instance, having total freedom to alter everything down to the position of individual fingers

and facial expressions. We always wanted to provide gamers with a truly cinematic experience and as you get to see more videos over time, you will clearly see that the time and effort that have gone into making the scenes have been worthwhile.

Is there still no currency in the game? Do you feel that it's right for players not to have to think about money?
Currency is obviously a measure of power for members of the family. The family always looks after its own and if you can remember, the very first cut-scene from the first *Mafia* game was a huge parcel of money transferring hands to fix the player's taxi. So, money is a key driving force for Vito and Joe, irrespective of whether it becomes a key element of gameplay or not!

How large and detailed will the new Empire City be?
Mafia II is an incredibly detailed and rich environment, spanning many different types of locations, from industrial to residential. There are interior and exterior spaces, all with destructible elements. In terms of physical size, we are currently looking at

about ten square miles, but *Mafia* really is more about the experience within that area than just providing miles and miles of roads. Obviously, there will be pedestrians and radios playing your favourite music, time of day cycles with lights going on and off and loads of other environmental details that just enrich the experience more.

Why the Mafia? You guys live in a country far, far away from the States. Where does such a deep understanding and love of this theme come from?
The Mafia provides a huge amount of real-world and fictional resource material. It is a world of intrigue and unique characters. The Mafia represents a lifestyle that the public will never get to experience, but the aspirations for money and respect are not so far removed from what people desire today! Admittedly, the way our characters go about getting money and respect differ greatly from what you or I would actually do, but you get the idea! Not to mention it's also just damn cool!

Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions.
No worries! **NAG**

NAG LAN @ rAge

2008

[Marketing line] This is the big one! rAge 2008 will see 1800 gamers all connected to the same network for a weekend of murder, mayhem and violence induced by playing too many games...

[Important Stuff] rAge happens over the weekend of 3 October – 5 October 2008 at the Coca-cola Dome at Northgate.

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!

2008 NAG LAN

1800 [even bigger than last year] 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 2 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 CTT Computers, a handful of gophers to help carry your stuff into the venue [if you come at the right time].

Tickets go on sale @ Computicket
1 August 2008 for R250.00

Some rules and regulations or don't bother coming

In the Open LAN area you can play at your leisure, bring your own computer and pretty much do your own thing based on what servers VC and/or the community will have up and running. This is simply a LAN, much like any other except that it is being held at rAge and consists of 1800 players.

What will be played in the Open LAN, basically anything that you want that does not cause a non-willing participant any harm. Any communities that want to organise any formal competitions for a specific game, please feel free to contact VC. Do keep in mind though that there will be no trips to Korea, France, America or Disney Land in the Open LAN. No sponsor banners or related advertising will be allowed, not even if they sponsored you to attend from Finland.

When is rAge: 3 October – 5 October 2008 | Open time: 10h00 Friday 3 October 2008 | Closing time: 15h00 Sunday 5 October 2008
Entrance fee: R250.00 per person, tickets must be bought and collected at Computicket before the event.
If your girlfriend, boyfriend, friend just wants to see what the weekend is about, they need to buy a day pass or weekend pass for the expo at the expo entrance. Regardless of whether gamers arrive on Friday or Sunday the price will remain the same.
Anyone who arrives with a computer will need to have a valid Computicket that is still 100% intact. No valid ticket, no entry.
Entrance fee to exhibition is included. Details on what is happening at the exhibition can be found at www.rageexpo.co.za.

Registration opening: 1 August 2008 at Computicket branches around the country (www.computicket.co.za).
Seating arrangements: First come, first serve. Thus you will not be able to reserve specific seating at Computicket.
IP Addresses: Static, sticker on table. | **Parking area:** Secured Public Parking Area opposite main entrance. Follow road markings.
Off-loading area: Not applicable, since the entrance is separated from the parking area. Thus you park your car and bring your stuff from there.
Distance to carry PC: 100m to Reception, bit further inside depending on where you intend sitting. | **Noise:** Yes lots.
Entertainment: Open LAN, exhibition and the rest is up to you! | **Chill area:** Yes
Sleep area: Nope. No tents etc. Please keep in mind that we are now partly downstairs and we cannot have three-day-old gamers' stench emanating from their body bags. We know this seems harsh, but the Dome have rules to comply with. So if you collect your thoughts upstairs in the chill area on the mezzanine level and happen to think better with your eyes closed, we're sure nobody will disturb your deep thoughts.

What to bring:
PC, monitor, keyboard, mouse, headphones, power cord to pc & monitor
Please note that your power cord needs to have a **red plug with the flattened earth pin.** Without this red plug type you will not be able to plug into the power grid. Each multi-plug that we supply is meant to have two PC's plugged into it. So if you and your buddy only use two plugs because you have a power lead with multiple points, it does not mean you have two additional plugs to use for whatever. The power is calculated according to the PC's, and deviating from this might cause power failures. Since nobody likes power failures, if you cause one due to ignoring our request and abusing the power, you will leave the event. We take this quite seriously, so please don't test the waters on this.

What NOT to bring:
No Speakers | No UPS' | No Multi-plugs | No Double Adaptors | No Switches Or Hubs | No Additional Devices Requiring Power for e.g. Fans, Cell Phone Chargers, Etc.
Power test station: PC's will be tested for power at reception. You plug your PC and Monitor into the supplied power cords. You start to boot. If both your monitor and PC start without tripping the power, you can switch them off and carry on through to registration.
Two-pin Adaptors: Please note that due to the fact that we use the red plugs, two pin adaptors won't work.
Security: Yes there will be guards. The safety of your equipment is however still your responsibility. So don't leave your cell phone, mp3 player or camera on the table while you go for lunch. This will lead to unnecessary temptation. Take your mouse, headphones etc with you when you leave. Ask a buddy to keep an eye. No PC's or monitors will enter or leave after 22h00 at night. Registration opens at 8h00 on Saturday morning. Laptops also count as PC's.
Will there be viruses: Most certainly, the likelihood is very high. Therefore patch your systems, get firewalls, and get anti-virus software. We will have trial versions available, but that might be too late.
Hacking & Port-scanning: Will not be taken kindly. If you do, you will leave the event. If you need to copy, use normal network browsing. If the PC's don't display in your network neighbourhood, read up on our website at the LAN on how to fix it.
Food and drinks: Food and drinks will be for sale inside the venue. No take-out food may be brought into the venue.
Will there be patch servers: Patches required will certainly be available. We will however limit the available bandwidth from this machine, so that somebody does not decide to grab 6 Gigs of patches from the machine, compromising the availability to other players.
How do I know what servers are up and running: Servers hosted by us will be up for the entire duration of the event. Whether people will join them, remains to be seen. So we will not advertise general servers on the big screen.

Common sense:
Please ensure that your PC has the latest service packs installed.
Please ensure that the virus pattern file is up to date. | Do not share anything if you do not want it to be copied.
Remember to bring any software, serial numbers that you may require. VC will not install a custom Linux onto your brand new machine that you bought the day before and forgot to bring your drivers along
Make sure your Shares are Read only if you need to share.
If you find anything wrong with the event, please let someone from VC know at the event so that we can try and rectify it. If you do not give us the opportunity to rectify the problem, do not complain afterwards.
The Dome is a non-smoking area. No smoking inside the venue will be permitted.
Neither NAG or VC will make sleeping arrangements for anybody attending rAge. This is your own responsibility.
More at: http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/

But most important… get your tickets early. Each year we end up with hundreds of disappointed gamers, people begging for extra tickets and so on. In terms of timing the NAG LAN is usually sold out within 20 days of the tickets going on sale. This has happened every year since the beginning so there's no reason why it would change this year. The good news is that we've increased the capacity of the LAN this year to 1800 to try and cater for all the demand we get.

The LAN is open for the whole weekend [53 hours odd] from Friday 10h00 to Sunday 15h00…
To help you cope Power Play will be there in full force to get you through the hard times…

BATTLEFIELD 2

Enter the R 32 000.00 Battlefield 2 competition

www.vc.org.za

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

KONGAI [PC]

Finally, the online Flash-game Website, www.kongregate.com, has released *Kongai*: a card-based battle game that uses the cards you gain by completing various challenges in other games hosted on the site. The battle system itself is a one-on-one fighting game in which you can set the distance between yourself and your opponent, which influences which attacks you can use and so on.

LOST WINDS [WIIWARE]

It's adorable. It is adorable! Basically the 'lost *Zelda* game', *Lost Winds* is a side-scrolling platform game in which you use the Wii Remote to blow little gusts of wind (and more!) to help your cute little toddler-like kid along as he tries to save the world from evil. This game oozes style, ingenuity and bucket loads of cute innovations.

SWITCHBALL [XBOX LIVE ARCADE]

Ever played *Ballance* on the PC? This is kind of like that but better, with some *Marble Blast Ultra* thrown in for good effect... The premise: guide a ball around abstract sky platforms, solve puzzles and change shape. You can turn into a metal ball, an inflatable ball and even tear through cloth fabric, pushing around physics objects and generally gawk at the lush (ultra lush) visuals. Well worth the purchase.

ROCK BAND [360]

We have it, we love it. You have not lived until you've done your very own cover of *Don't Fear the Reaper* on vocals, guitars and drums. *Rock Band 2* has already been unveiled and will support all of the *Rock Band* songs and DLC. They're even adding two cymbals to the drum kit, bringing the number of things to hit on drums up to six, not including the foot pedal. Rock!

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS: A2 [DS]

Once again, we step into the Grimoire and bandy about with assorted *Final Fantasy* creature compatriots, building up our clan, taking on missions and optimising equipment. The new DS addition to the series benefits greatly from a second screen showing you valuable statistics and a battle overview. Nice.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

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

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

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

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

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

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

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

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

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

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

World Poker Tour

Better Than

For Fans Of

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

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

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

78 OUT OF 100
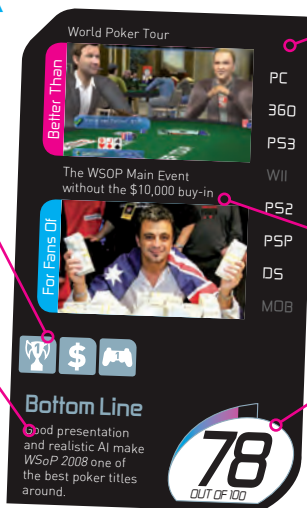
WEB SCORES

LEGO INDIANA JONES [360]	
NAG	75/100
METACRITIC	77/100
GAMERANKINGS	78.1/100

NINJA GAIDEN II [360]	
NAG	78/100
METACRITIC	81/100
GAMERANKINGS	82.6/100

ALONE IN THE DARK [PC]	
NAG	70/100
METACRITIC	48/100
GAMERANKINGS	55.7/100

THE REVIEW ICONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

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

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

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

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

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

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

NAG AWARDS

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

MUST PLAY: The thing about the Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

Aleet Distribution	[011] 888-8916	Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040	Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Asbis	[011] 848-7000	Megarom	[011] 361-4800
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450	Microsoft	[011] 265-3000
Axiz	[011] 237-7000	MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
Comstar	[011] 314-5812	MobileG	[021] 982-4606
Comztek	0860 600 557	Nology	[012] 657-1317
Core Group	[087] 940-3000	Nu Metro	[011] 280-0600
Corex	[011] 238-2315	Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640	Rectron	[011] 203-1000
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300	Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Esquire	0861 700 000	Samsung	0860 726 7864
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142	Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300	Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038	Ster Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7700
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700	Syntech	0861 274 244
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530	The Outer Limits	[011] 482-3771
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817	TVR	[011] 807-1390

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

THE REVIEWERS

ADAM LIEBMAN

There is a saying, whispered in hushed tones, when certain people start creating their own unique brand of life… "Dude, WTF is that?" Feel the reverence. This creature has the distinct honour of being able to see everything, yet do nothing.

ALEX JELAGIN

It grabs and eats, grabs and eats. If you stand too close, it will grab you and eat you. Unfortunately for this creature, it lacks the ability to dispose of what it has grabbed and eaten, so it explodes after a while.

CHRIS BISTLINE

Using prehensile tentacles, this creature is able to pick up small rectangular objects with ease, as well as rotate them 90 degrees in either direction, which creature experts believe to be a form of mating ritual.

DANE REMENDES

Visible from space due to its fetching microfiber coat of luminescent neon, this species is directly responsible for saving the Earth from meteor strikes by using its giant horns as a kind of cosmic lacrosse.

MIKTAR DRACON

In certain circles, particular creatures are known to be quite amicable. However, when approached from outside the circle, such as from a neighbouring tangent, such creatures may suddenly roll over and expose their vulnerable underbellies.

WALT PRETORIUS

When it gazes into your soul, it sees nothing but a multicoloured kaleidoscope of faceted rainbows puking out ponies that snuggle otters while singing *It's a Small World* at speeds of 145rpm.

REGARDT VAN DER BERG

This creature has no visible means of ingesting food, or even seeing, and instead is simply covered in a coat of fine phallus-looking objects. It impregnates everything it touches as it rolls around its environment – even the water.

NSFW

RACE DRIVER: GRID (PS3)

NAG	91/100
METACRITIC	88/100
GAMERANKINGS	85.8/100

CIVILIZATION: REVOLUTION (360)

NAG	80/100
METACRITIC	83/100
GAMERANKINGS	83.4/100

TOP SPIN 3 (360)

NAG	79/100
METACRITIC	78/100
GAMERANKINGS	77/100

LEGO INDIANA JONES: THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURES

IT WAS INEVITABLE. DEVELOPER TT Games has taken the *Star Wars* franchise and modified it to fit the *LEGO* look and feel as far as they could. The question was not whether there would be another *LEGO* game, but rather what that *LEGO* game would be. The choice of turning their attention to George Lucas' other blockbuster IP, *Indiana Jones*, was both obvious and not so obvious. The tie-in with LucasArts made it easier, in theory, to just stick with Lucas' work, but *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars* are quite different, in all honesty. Going from a six-episode space opera to a three-episode historical adventure is quite a leap.

However, leap they did, and splashed *LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures* onto every platform that would have it (in other words, every platform). No matter what kind of gaming setup you have, you can play this game. However, it works better on some platforms than on others, as we were soon to find out, and the experiences on different platforms

are quite dissimilar. This is a game that belongs on a console, and preferably a next-generation one at that. Its appearance on PC seems to be little more than lip service to PC gamers, and the 'conversion' does the title little justice.

The main issue? The control scheme. Playing the game on a PC makes this fact painfully obvious: the default keyboard-driven control scheme is clunky and unresponsive. It isn't badly set out, but the joys of an analogue-capable joy pad are undeniably absent when the player is faced with a very limited four-direction input system. Plugging a joy pad into the PC when you play this one makes all the difference, and converts

the game from a massively frustrating experience to one in which expected levels of frustration are present. In other words, play it on a joy pad. The keyboard controls are nasty.

As is to be expected, the game is crammed full of humour, taking the piss out of the three original *Indiana Jones* films (namely *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Temple of Doom* and *Last Crusade*). The humour even pays homage to *Star Wars* in a couple of places, which is a really nice touch. As with the *Star Wars* titles in the *LEGO* range, there is no speech in the game, with all the jokes being delivered by the blocky little characters in physical manners. The stories themselves follow the movies to a point, but a healthy degree of licence has been taken with the project, adding in bits that would make for good gaming and leaving out others that would not. A good example is an extended scene
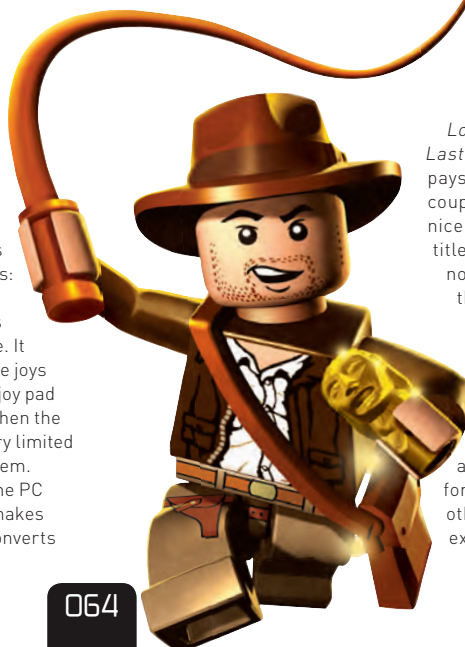
following the escape from the bad guys in Nepal (from *Raiders*, when Indy went looking for the headpiece for the Staff of Ra in Marion's bar... you remember, right?). This never appeared in the film, but makes for a fun addition to the title. Other familiar scenes include a brief but exciting trip on mine cars through Mola Ram's mines (from *Temple*) and a number of others.

There is a host of characters to be unlocked within the game, and the game dynamic always has two characters on screen at a time (generally Indy and someone else). These additional characters act as foils to Indy's whip-cracking style, with mechanical abilities, better jumping skills and so on. They are also pretty thick. The AI ranges from annoyingly dim to achingly moronic, with characters that fight ineffectively, fall down spiked pit traps and a host of annoying things. It's easier to just plug in a second controller and get a buddy in on the action: even the worst gamer will do better than the AI, for the most part. Those brave enough to take the whole thing on in single player can easily swap between the characters, but changing from Indy means that he will suddenly become just as stupid as any other AI character.

Aside from the controls and the AI, playing this game is tons of fun. It's largely a puzzle game, just like the predecessors, with most of the puzzles being the same kind of movement- and platform-based faire that were featured in the *Star Wars* titles. The puzzles are tougher and more inventive, and the wide variety of situations and locations all offer something a little different, but the basic idea is identical to the *LEGO* games we have seen before.

Still, the game is fun to play. Lots of fun, in fact, with plenty to do and experience. It's not a particularly challenging game, but the vast amount to do, in terms of unlocking and discovering stuff, will have the player coming back for more for quite some time.

LEGO Indiana Jones certainly won't be everyone's cup of tea, but it is the kind of title that almost everyone - old and young, experienced or newbie - can get to grips with. While it is preferable to play the game on console, using a joy pad will offer good results for the PC version. The bright, colourful settings and amusing characters are worth a laugh or two as well. *Indiana Jones* fans should also enjoy the irreverent attitude taken towards the works this game is based on. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

LEGO Star Wars

Kinda like

Whip cracking

For Fans of

PC	
360	
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	

Bottom Line

A fun game, but not without its problems.

75
OUT OF 100

NINJA GAIDEN II

DOES IT BLEND? OH yes it does. Your "Ryu Hayabusa" brand ninja is capable of turning anything into a puddle of meat-mush, provided you are ninja enough yourself to handle it.

NINJA SEQUEL
Ninja Gaiden II is every bit the sequel to *Ninja Gaiden* and does everything expected of a sequel. More moves, more enemies, more levels, but above all else, more accessibility. Where *Ninja Gaiden* tossed you into the deep end with lead weights around your neck, *Gaiden II* has the decency to provide an ongoing tutorial and two levels of difficulty right from the start for newcomers and returning veterans.

Gaiden II is an action game in the vein of *Devil May Cry* and *God of War*, but remains very much its own take on the premise. You cannot button-mash your way through, and will have to learn at least a few of the combination move-lists so that you can progress. Boss fights are an exercise in timing, ability and pattern-recognition, while even the standard enemies are mini-exercises in learning what's effective when, and what not to do. There are multiple weapons - each upgradeable - and every difficulty level (two at the start, two more can be unlocked) takes a slightly different path through each stage, which adds some variety upon replay.

Knowledge or playtime on the first *Gaiden* is not a prerequisite, as the sequel can be enjoyed pretty much as a standalone game on its own merits and plot. The plot itself is pretty cheesy as can be expected, with lots of over-the-top ninja drama and ninja exposition.

NINJA HARD
It serves to reiterate exactly how difficult this particular franchise can be: in its uniquely unforgivable way (although newer conventions introduced into *Gaiden II* do help, like your health being replenished at save statues). The animation, movement and control of Ryu is razor-sharp and responsive because in many situations you want precise, pinpoint motions that get you in or out of combat pretty much in ninja-time. Enemies exist to kill you, to make a point of it once more, and they won't just amble about in the background while you're busy with one enemy: they take advantage of your attention being focused elsewhere to sneak in stabs or grabs. *Ninja Gaiden II* is the type of game where if you suffer from anger issues, you will very quickly put your fist through the screen. That being said, there is a distinct reward and feeling of accomplishment in playing *Gaiden II* - like mastering a sport.

BROKEN NINJA
Ninja Gaiden II is built upon the same technology and engine as the first game and in many places it shows, as the engine wasn't developed for the size and scope of *Gaiden II*. Certain areas have loading issues, certain scenarios can be broken and in some cases you can even walk right out of the game world. Certain boundary sections will load and reload if you accidentally fight across them and back again.
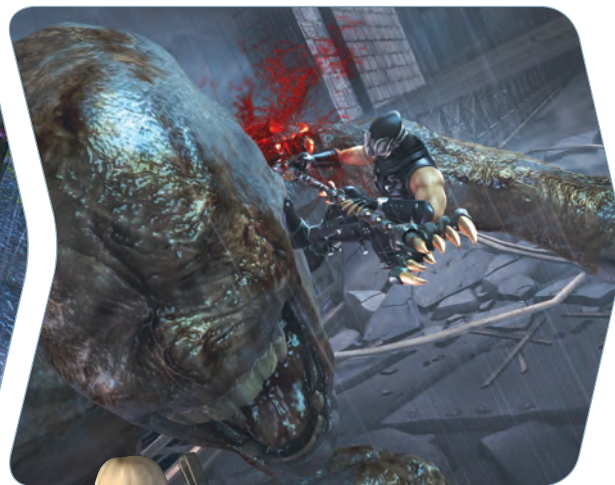
The first two difficulty levels are mostly bug free, but once you hit the later difficulty levels, you can expect some serious frame drop in certain areas and more than a few bugs and even the occasional lockup. The exact nature of why the game is so broken in the later sections may have something to do with team-lead Itagaki's beef with Tecmo not funding for a new engine, and his subsequent departure from Tecmo, which makes a patch for *Gaiden II* dubious at best.

APPEALING EVOLUTIONARY NINJA

In spite of its flaws, *Gaiden II* is actually a big shift in focus from *Gaiden*. Where *Gaiden* was a predominantly defensive game with enemies attacking in twos and threes, putting emphasis on blocking and countering, *Gaiden II* is highly offensive. Enemies attack in waves, hence the regenerating health system that allows the game to throw more enemies at you. The Obliteration Technique (one-button instant kill on enemies that have lost limbs) lets you clear out mobs and make space,

which the game uses to its advantage to punish you more, making you fight more than you did in *Gaiden*.

Due to the lack of polish inherent in *Gaiden II*, you do need to be a bit of a fan to put up with its annoyances. It may not be obvious to the casual player, but the evolution and the changes under the hood of the fighting system are immense and create a fundamentally different experience to the first game – much in the same way a fighting game evolves up through its iterations.

JUST NINJA

Ninja. Say it three times. Ever noticed how fun that word is to say? At the end of the day, *Gaiden II* really is a personalised experience tailored to a specific brand of gaming taste, and only by nibbling on a demo can you really discover if it's going to go down smooth or end up giving you ninja ring sting. We say, check it out if you dig ninja or action titles.   **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Ninja Gaiden

Better Than

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
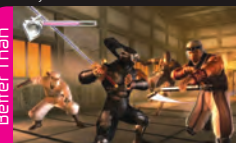
Devil May Cry 4

Kinda Like

Bottom Line

If it had more polish, the score would be at least 85

78 OUT OF 100

If you were planning on running, now would be a good time...

Finding a cab in New York can be a killer

ALONE IN THE DARK

HYPE IS A FUNNY thing. In the months leading up to the release of *Alone in the Dark*, trailers of gameplay and the much-touted "real world rules" concept had me anxiously awaiting this title. I'm sure you can understand my disappointment when I say that my expectations weren't fully met. Don't get me wrong. *Alone in the Dark* is in no way a bad game. It just isn't as great as it could have been, a fact I was constantly reminded of throughout my time with it.

I'm going to get this out of the way early: the controls for the PC version are abysmal. I made a point of sticking to the trusty old keyboard and mouse, since I'm reviewing the PC version. Luckily, once I became accustomed to them, they got slightly easier to use. I tried out the Xbox 360 version of the game and although the controls are better in areas such as movement and melee combat, in other areas (particularly in first-person view and the driving sections) they are clunky and unresponsive. The melee combat is easier on console because the game utilises a system whereby the movements of the right analogue stick translate to your weapon's in-game movement. Moving the

stick to the left will move the weapon to the left, pulling back on the stick will raise the weapon over the character's head, etc. While this works reasonably well on a controller, the developers have opted for the mouse to control these movements in the PC version, which doesn't allow for the same precision.

There's not much that can be said about the story. You are Edward Carnby (a recurring character from the *Alone in the Dark* series), paranormal investigator extraordinaire, but Edward doesn't know that. Suffering from amnesia can do that to a person. A primal evil is stirring deep within the bowels of Central Park, leaving chaos in its wake. No prizes for guessing who is elected to save the day. The story is passable, since I feel it only serves to give some purpose to your actions, and includes some incredible set pieces and scripted events. In one scene you'll find yourself in a New York taxi screaming through the streets surrounding Central Park, while buildings crumble all around you, and the streets are literally uplifted and torn apart as you scramble to escape the force pursuing you. The developers have attempted to

recreate the cinematic experience usually reserved for film and television, with camera angles constantly changing to give a more 'Hollywood-blockbuster' experience. This is reinforced by the episodic nature of the game, with the game broken up into 'episodes', which you can rewind to replay a satisfying section and fast forward to skip those especially tough pieces you just can't seem to master. Believe me when I say you'll be considering the fast-forward option a lot, because some of the scenes are incredibly difficult thanks to the awkward controls and a real-time inventory system that sounds great on paper, but in practice is more of a burden. If you're like me though, the chapter skipping features will sit unused, because I'd rather get through the story not having missed anything. Speaking of the real-time inventory, it all boils down to this: you hit the 'View Inventory' key, the view changes to a first-person perspective, looking down into Edward's coat, letting you poke around looking for the appropriate item for your current situation. Everything is good, until some beastie decides he's done waiting for you and pounces on you faster than you can

Explosions = Cool

say "useless gimmick." That's right, you have to check your inventory in real time. While a real-time inventory is not a problem in reality (then again, when I check my real-world inventory, I don't have mutant bats trying to feast on my flesh), in the game it proves to be a major nuisance.

I was very impressed by how atmospheric the game is. From the music to the sound effects, to the nail-biting – and at times infuriating – scripted sequences, everything blends together and makes you want to keep playing to the end. Unfortunately, the bugs you may encounter will also make you want to toss the game out immediately. From game crashes and hangs, to dodgy physics (at times), you'll wonder how a game that was this highly anticipated could feel so unpolished. Fire plays a big role and it's quite impressive to see the way it's been used. Enemies can only be permanently killed using fire, and certain paths are blocked to you unless you can find a way to open them up, which usually requires a few flames. Hold a chair close to a flame, and it will ignite, allowing you to use it to set fire to objects and bludgeon enemies with.

The graphics is, for the most part, quite impressive. Playing on a reasonably high-end PC, the game looked astonishing at times, especially the exceptional fire and flame effects. You can literally see the flames spread across a room as they engulf furniture and items, or slowly creep along a wooden beam, eventually enveloping it. Much like the rest of the game though, it suffers from double-edged syndrome, and at times graphical glitches manage to creep in and ruin the ambience. While I was lucky to not experience any frame-rate issues, there have been complaints doing the rounds about the performance of the game on certain hardware configurations, even on high-end systems.

Despite all of *Alone in the Dark*'s faults, the game somehow manages to offer an engrossing experience, although it only lasts for about six to ten hours, depending on your play style. Overall, it's definitely worthy of all the attention it received before its release, if only for the new ideas it incorporates. It's definitely worth taking a look at, provided that you keep an open mind. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Accidentally setting yourself on fire

Better Than

PC
360
PS3
WII

Burning stuff

Worse Than

PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
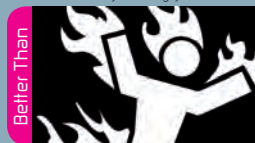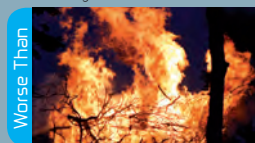
Bottom Line

If you can ignore the game's flaws and horrid controls, an enjoyable adventure awaits you.

70 OUT OF 100

RACE DRIVER: GRID

CODEMASTERS HAS A VENERABLE pedigree of racing titles under their belt, including such respected franchises as the *Colin McRae* and *TOCA* series, and their degree of experience is apparent in their latest next-generation offering, *Race Driver: GRID*. Despite bearing the Race Driver moniker, it's not a direct successor to the *TOCA* series. It's in fact a new style of racing title in its own right, and one that does well to seamlessly blend arcade and simulation elements into a highly polished, adrenaline-charged experience.

The bulk of *GRID* consists of the career mode, dubbed "GRID World," though the game also offers a slew of once-off, quick-race options, ranging from 'standard' touring-car races, to demolition derbies, and even a recreation of Le Mans (though the game will normally condense the action into 24 minutes). All the event types are also available for online play via the PlayStation Network, in both ranked and friendly matches, supporting anywhere up to 12 players.

The career mode begins with character creation, where your driver's name and nationality can be selected. It also offers a wide selection of audio tags by which your character will be called, and for those whose real names aren't on the list, there's a selection of nicknames such as "Maverick" available. The audio tags are used by your 'business manager', teammates and pit crew, and do well to add a degree of personal involvement to the action. From there, the game throws you, without any warning or introduction, directly into a race on the Seattle street circuit (which will feel quite familiar to *Gran Turismo* fans), behind the wheel of a brand-new Dodge Viper, setting the tone for the fast-paced and intense action that permeates *GRID* from start to finish. After completing the race, your business manager explains to you how things work in the career mode: your

NAG MUST PLAY

ultimate goal is to create your own racing team, and take it to the top of the global rankings. Of course, that sort of thing takes a fair amount of cash, and the first order of business is to accumulate a bit of wealth by racing as a freelance driver for other teams.

Once you've built up enough cash, you become the proud owner of a fully restored 1970 Ford Mustang, and you're given the chance to name your racing team, and pick out the decals and colour scheme that will eventually identify all of your team's vehicles. From here, you're offered a wide variety of racing events in which to participate. Events are split into three geographical regions, namely Europe, the US and Japan. European events mostly take place on racing circuits, featuring touring cars. The American races typically involve muscle cars, and take place on tight street circuits such as Seattle, Washington and San Francisco. The Japanese events usually star pro-tuner vehicles on winding circuits.

NAG

In addition to the typical start-to-finish circuit races, there are also testing sessions (time-trial events with no opposition cars), drift races, endurance contests, and menacing Touge events (one-on-one battles on tight mountain courses – such as *Need for Speed*'s canyon events).

Each of the areas has three 'tiers' of events, which require licences in order to compete. You're given a basic licence for each region at the start of the game, but in order to compete in more prestigious events, you'll need to earn enough Respect Points to unlock the necessary licences in each region. Respect Points are awarded for finishing races, with more points awarded for racing on higher difficulty levels, and using fewer driving aids (such as stability control). In addition to paying out Respect Points, winning races also rewards you with precious cash that can be used to purchase new, more powerful cars, which you'll need to splash out on if you're to keep winning races, since *GRID*

unfortunately doesn't feature any vehicle tuning or upgrade options.

As you progress through the career mode, you'll be able to hire a teammate to race with, which will allow you to compete for constructors', instead of just drivers', championships. You'll also find that as you start winning, sponsorship offers begin to flood in from bigger and better companies. In exchange for displaying their decals on your vehicles, they'll reward you with monetary bonuses for appearances as well as high enough finishes in all your racing events. Although the GRID World mode lacks the kind of storyline that previous titles in the *Race Driver* series have featured, it's nonetheless an immersive career mode that does well to make the player actually feel involved with what's going on both on and off the track.

Of course, the most important aspect of *GRID* is the actual racing, and it's here that the game sets itself apart from its competitors. *GRID* offers a varied line-up of almost 50 cars, including European exotics, such as the Porsche GT3 and Lamborghini Murcielago, American muscle cars, such as the Dodge Viper and Ford Mustang, and Japanese tuner cars, like the Nissan 350Z. There are also thoroughbred race cars available, including the Mazda 787B and Le Mans prototypes such as the Audi R10. It's certainly not the widest line-up of cars ever seen, but every vehicle available for play offers an exhilarating sense of speed, and the selection is chosen to keep things from feeling stale. *GRID*'s not intended to appeal to anyone looking for a battle of 47kW Suzuki Cappuccinos: this game is all about pace, and the vehicle line-up is in line with that philosophy.

The racing itself offers an experience varied enough to cater to all kinds of racing fans. With all the driver assistance options on, and race damage off, the game offers a style of racing that's just a little more complicated than that of such arcade titles as *Burnout* or *Need for Speed*. Crank up the difficulty a little, and you're faced with a game that demands concentration and precision, and will have you truly wrestling with some of the more powerful vehicles on offer in order to keep from spinning out through tight corners. The opposition AI represents a superb achievement by Codemasters: they're skilled, but not perfect drivers, who aren't afraid to show some aggression in challenging for pole position, and they'll also take the occasional corner a little too enthusiastically, sometimes leaving a multiple-car pileup in their wake.

Undoubtedly, *GRID*'s most radical innovation is its 'Flashback' feature, which allows the player to 'redo' parts of a race if things go wrong. All it takes is a press of the select button to activate an instant replay of the last 15 or 20 seconds of a race. From there, you can fast forward or rewind to the exact point in time you wish to go back to, and a tap of the square button initiates a Flashback, putting you back in the driver's seat at the exact point selected in the replay. So, if you take a corner a little too fast, and end up careening off the track into a guard rail, it's not necessary to restart an

entire race. You can simply 'flash back' to the preceding straight and take the corner with a little more caution the second time around. Of course, Flashbacks are a limited commodity: racing on the normal difficulty level allows you four Flashbacks per race, and as you ramp up the difficulty, this number is reduced. Purists need not feel too offended however: *GRID* also offers a 'Pro' mode in which Flashbacks are completely disabled. The Flashback idea is actually a pretty good one: it's a well-implemented way of reducing the frustration factor associated with racing games, and it serves as a useful tool, especially on unfamiliar tracks, often eliminating the need to restart a race completely just because of a tricky turn on a new circuit. The fact that they can be disabled (and need to be, if you're looking to post your lap times to the online leader boards) serves as a telling example of how much variation *GRID* allows for in its difficulty level.

Visually, Codemasters has done a superb job of bringing to life the various cars and environments featured in *GRID*. Everything from the magnificent attention to detail of the in-cockpit camera view to the sleek, streamlined menu interface is a display of *GRID*'s superb visual polish. The vehicles look stunning, and the damage effects are particularly remarkable, allowing for some truly spectacular crashes that feel amazingly forceful. The sound track is perhaps a little nondescript, and some of the effects lacklustre, but neither the music nor the voice acting become overly annoying or detract at all from the overall *GRID* experience.

Codemasters has done a truly impressive job with *GRID*: they've managed to develop a game that's accessible and entertaining, but not lacking in depth. Hardcore simulation fans who need to adjust their toes and cambers won't be satisfied, nor will anyone looking for a *Burnout* clone. If, however, you're looking for some intense, compelling and just plain enjoyable racing action, *GRID* won't let you down. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

TOCA series meets DiRT

Better Than

Speed, glorious speed!

Worse Than

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

Bottom Line
Stunning visuals and compelling racing action make GRID a hot contender for pole position in its genre.

91 OUT OF 100

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

WE'LL CALL THIS A "First Impressions" review, since we all know that a MMORPG requires an immense amount of time and dedication to see all it has to offer and fully cover all possible features. I should warn you though: although I've played far enough into it to understand most of the game's nuances, in no way do I know this game inside out. I'll try to give you as much insight as possible into the nature of *AoC*, and I'll try to keep you updated with future articles as my journey through the game continues.

Character creation in *AoC* is done in a similar way to any other MMORPG. You start out with your character aboard a slave ship, while you choose a new look for him/her, select a race and decide which class you find best suited to your tastes. Three 'races' are available: Stygian (seems to be based on the Egyptian civilisation), Cimmerian (sort of like the Vikings) and Aquilonian (a more 'civilised' race). There are twelve classes available, divided among four archetypes. The archetypes represent the four basic character types you find in most RPGs. These are the Soldier, the

Priest, the Mage and the Rogue archetypes. The classes are mostly generic, bar a few exceptions. There is a huge amount of character-customisation options available, allowing you to tinker with everything from jaw width to bust size for female characters (yes, this is a mature game, and yes, you can run around partially nude). Once you've completed your selection, the slave galley you're on crashes into... something. And your character is seen sinking to the ocean's depths. Cue bright flash of light and you're suddenly on the beach, where the man who saved you is waiting to say "Hello," at which point you realise that you've lost your memory and need to relearn the skills which once came natural to you. You're on the island of Tortage, and you're going to need to do some work (i.e. gain a few levels) to get back to your homeland.

Tortage acts as the game's starting area, which you'll be in for your first 20 or so character levels. The day/night cycle is controlled by the player, with night time allowing you to concentrate on the instanced single-player 'destiny quest' (there are

no other players around during this time), while switching to daytime allows you to adventure with other players. This starting area plays out much like a single-player RPG, with decently voice-acted dialogue and interesting quest objectives, which are a nice change from the 'travel to location X, kill Y amount of these creatures' quests that are common in most MMORPGs. Quests are specific to character class and archetype, meaning that playing as a Barbarian will give you access to a different set of quests than if you played as a Herald of Xotli. In truth, the fact that all players start in the same starting area takes some of the fun out of creating a new character, since you'll always start out the same way with the same scenery. While this isn't a major issue, *AoC* developer Funcom should consider adding new content that will make creating a new character less of a chore.

Once you've left Tortage, things start to seem a little bleak. Gone is the voice-acted dialogue, gone are the interesting class-specific quests and they are replaced with your standard MMORPG dialogue

MY KUNG FU IS STRONG...

Combat in *AoC* takes a step away from the 'click, wait for enemy to drop, repeat' formula normally seen in this type of game. Melee combat involves picking a direction to attack in (left, right, overhead and at later levels, top-right and top-left), which will cause the enemy to shift their defences, depending on how many hits you land on a specific area. Basically, if you keep attacking the right side of an enemy, he'll most likely shift all his defences there, at which point a sudden attack to the left will do greater damage, while continuing to attack his right will do less damage. Ranged combat makes use of a similar system, while spellcasters get the 'Spellweaving' ability, which allows the mage in question to amplify their spell-based damage, but will take damage themselves in the process. This forces spellcasters to strategically balance damage to themselves with the damage they do to enemies. There is also a combination system behind the combat, which sees the player making directional attacks to coincide with certain on-screen prompts (think *Dance Dance Revolution*), and once you're done with the combo, there's a chance you could pull off a gory fatality (think *Mortal Kombat*). Nice.

(huge amounts of reading, with only a few characters fleshed out by voice actors) and delivery/poaching quests. There are also 'dry spots' at certain character level ranges during the game in terms of content and quests available, making getting to the levels required to continue the destiny quest tedious and filled with the dreaded grind. I haven't had the opportunity to try out much of the game's PvP, most notably the massive siege PvP in the endgame stage, which has been so widely publicised. However, thanks to the unique combat system (see box out), the standard PvP modes make for a fun distraction when you're tired of picking up NPC #24329's dry-cleaning for the umpteenth time in the PvE game.

AoC is an exceptionally pretty game (for an MMORPG), yet it retains an epic scale, which has to be seen to be believed. More than once, I found myself lost in the visuals: the valleys and icy lakes of Cimmeria, the ground red with the casualties of generations of warfare; the vast emptiness of Stygia's desert, oases dotting the landscape; the majestic cities of Aquilonia, surrounded by lush vegetation and dense forests as old as Hyboria herself. Sounds like a marketing pitch, I know, but these visuals are worthy of such praise. I've always felt that the best soundtracks are those that you don't notice, but the second they go missing, you know right then and there. That's how best to describe the audio in *AoC*. Drumbeats will resonate from your speakers during intense battles, while more relaxed and orchestral music will play as you explore Hyboria with your companions.

Age of Conan makes a bold attempt at changing the way we look at MMORPGs. A unique combat system, a refreshingly gritty world to explore, beautiful visuals and a soundtrack worthy of an epic fantasy film will draw you into the title. Let's just hope that Funcom will dedicate their time to provide full support and bring much-needed new content, bug fixes and general polish to a game that holds more potential than any other MMORPG I've seen in recent times. This game deserves nothing less. I'll see you in Hyboria.. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Blood, savagery and nudity

For Fans of:

MMORPGs

Also for Fans of:

	PC
	360
	PS3
	WII
	PS2
	PSP
	DS
	MOB

Bottom Line

A refreshing take on the MMORPG genre and aside from some rough edges, is well worth taking a look at.

83
OUT OF 100

NAG

review

RRP→ R349 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ Electronic Arts | Publisher→ Electronic Arts South Africa | Genre→ Action/RPG | Age Rating→ 18V | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

MASS EFFECT

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN LIVING on an asteroid, you already know that *Mass Effect* is one of the best games yet developed for the Xbox 360. Therefore, rather than rehash every bit of effusive praise we've heaped on this game, we'll just refer you back to the original *NAG* review (February 2008, page 64).

Finally, after a six-month wait, PC gamers get to see what all the fuss was about. While the game is still fundamentally the same, BioWare has not merely done a port, but a true conversion from console to desktop. The most basic and obvious change is that the game uses a keyboard and mouse rather than a gamepad, something every PC-shooter fan this side of the Skyllian Verge will applaud. In addition, since you have a row of number keys at your disposal, your abilities can be mapped to hotkeys, eliminating the need to pause and switch to the power wheel. The result is much more fluid, engaging combat.

Speaking of the power wheel, it's gone. Instead, your squad's abilities and weapons are arranged around the edges of the screen, making the interface much cleaner and simpler to use, especially with a mouse. The inventory and equipment screens have also been streamlined, making it a bit quicker to organise your loot.

A few other minor changes are worth noting: driving the Mako is a tad easier, thanks again to the mouse/keyboard control scheme. You can now look around freely with the mouse whilst driving in one direction using the WASD keys. The

decrypting mini-game also had a makeover: gone is the button-matching system of the 360. In its place is a series of concentric circles (with gaps) that spin around and present openings to the centre. Navigating your way through the maze will lead to a successful hack or unlock.

In March, a bonus expansion mission called *Bring Down the Sky* was released on Xbox LIVE for 400 MS points. While it would have been nice if the expansion had shipped with the PC version, it will be available as a free download to people who register their key on BioWare's Website. Unfortunately, the content isn't ready yet, but BioWare promises that their "space hamsters are running as fast as they can in their orbital wheels" to finish it.

Shortly before *Mass Effect*'s PC release, much fuss was made about the game's DRM system that would require activation the first time you played and then a recheck every ten days. Fortunately, the rechecking bit was dropped shortly before the game shipped. Online activation is still required the first time you play, but in an act of unprecedented benevolence, EA and BioWare allow the same key to be installed on three different PCs, and once activated, the game doesn't require the DVD to be in the drive.

If we have a complaint about the PC version of *Mass Effect*, it would be that it's a bit buggy. The game crashed several times on both Windows XP and Vista while we were reviewing it. It's also worth noting that it doesn't Alt-Tab nicely. You can pull

up your desktop, but when you switch back, the screen is black and the game is frozen. This can be particularly annoying when you accidentally press the Windows key when you're trying to hit Ctrl or Shift. At least quick save is mapped to F6. Use it often.

Despite the minor PC-inherent problems, this is definitely the version of *Mass Effect* to buy. **NAG**

Chris Bistline

NAG EDITOR'S CHOICE

NAG MUST PLAY

The Xbox version

Better Than

Knights of the Old Republic

For Fans of

PC	
360	
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	

Bottom Line

Significant interface improvements make the best Xbox RPG even better on the PC.

93 OUT OF 100

RRP→ R599 | Publisher→ Electronic Arts | Distributor→ Electronic Arts South Africa | Genre→ Real-time Strategy | Age Rating→ 16+
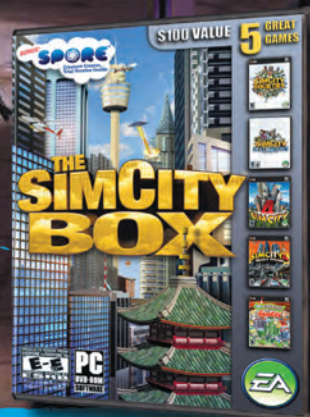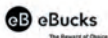
COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH

THE POINT IS, ULTIMATELY, that if you are serious about RTS (real-time strategy'), then you're playing on a PC. RTS titles have been done on consoles before - most recently with EA's *Battle for Middle-earth* and *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* (both good efforts as these things go, but read on). However, the genre is very demanding of precise and relatively complex commands – in fact, it is the aim of RTS developers to try to **simplify** the control interface as much as possible, to make it possible for players to execute complex, demanding manoeuvres and feats of micromanagement. Unfortunately, the nature of console controllers makes this very difficult and, in fact, results in more complex controls (admittedly unavoidably, as there are only so many buttons to work with) and yet the same sort of functionality is required.

Despite the platform's shortcomings in terms of this genre, the Xbox 360 version of *Kane's Wrath* is definitely a very good effort. Given the controls one has at one's disposal, much can be achieved. However, there is a fairly steep learning curve in order to master all that is available (and this is a surprisingly large majority of what is present in the PC version). Unfortunately, however, assigning and recalling control groups is rather messy and slow (I know, I know – I shouldn't really be comparing to the PC version, but it's hard not to!). A couple of minor issues are quite irritating, such as the way the camera locks onto a unit near the cursor and tracks it. This is great at times,

but when you're trying to load infantry into APCs or Hammerhead Gunships, and the view keeps shifting off the desired target, it is beyond frustrating! Also, a hallmark feature of *Command & Conquer* has always been the fact that there is no maximum units cap, and yet here we have the addition of 'command points', which are a population cap, meaning that once you hit a certain number of units, you can't make any more until some die off.

The bottom line is that, ironically, the Xbox version is more focused on **strategy** than the PC version, which is more tactical in nature. Why do I say this? Because fine micromanagement is impossible, and directing multiple strike groups is fairly tricky and time-consuming, the game tends to boil down to who develops the best economy and uses it to field the best army. While this is of a more strategic nature, it does mean that the overall spectrum of possible games is somewhat more restricted. Well, this is why I wouldn't play this in multiplayer.

However, the single-player experience is excellent. Everything that is great about it on the PC is also great on the Box: the cinematic feel, complete with its slightly cheesy sci-fi story and hammed-up acting. Additionally, there is a 'Kane's Challenge' mode, which is akin to the 'Generals' Challenge' mode in *Command & Conquer: Generals*: you choose a faction, and play a series of battles, one against each faction, and the last one against two teamed-up AI

Disclaimer:
This review has been written by a diehard fan of real-time strategy games, and Command & Conquer *in particular. As such, and given the PC-centric nature of such games, the views expressed herein, despite all efforts at objectivity, may well be biased... Okay, I'm sure you get the idea!*

players. Completing this with each faction earns you a specific achievement. Speaking of achievements, which are a staple of Xbox gaming, there are a number to be collected, for getting right a variety of things in the story mode and in Kane's Challenge. Lastly, unlike the PC version, which is an expansion pack for *Tiberium Wars*, the Xbox 360 version is a standalone title. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

An RTS with mouse and keyboard

Worse Than

PC	
360	
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	

RTSs and consoles

For Fans of

Bottom Line

An excellent effort, however, serious RTS fans should to stick to a mouse and keyboard control scheme.

70
OUT OF 100

Age Rating→ A | Genre→ Tennis Simulator | Distributor→ Megarom | Publisher→ 2K Games | RRP→ R599

PLAYER SELECTION: P1 — WOMEN

OVERALL
74
Maria Sharapova

CONTINUE · RANDOM · INFO · LOAD PLAYER

Y TO REPLAY
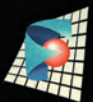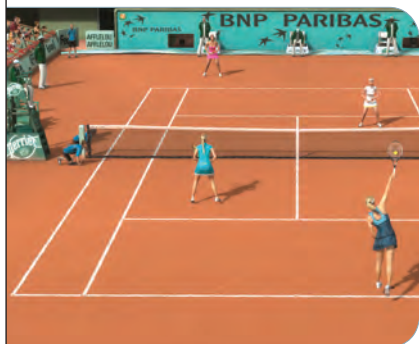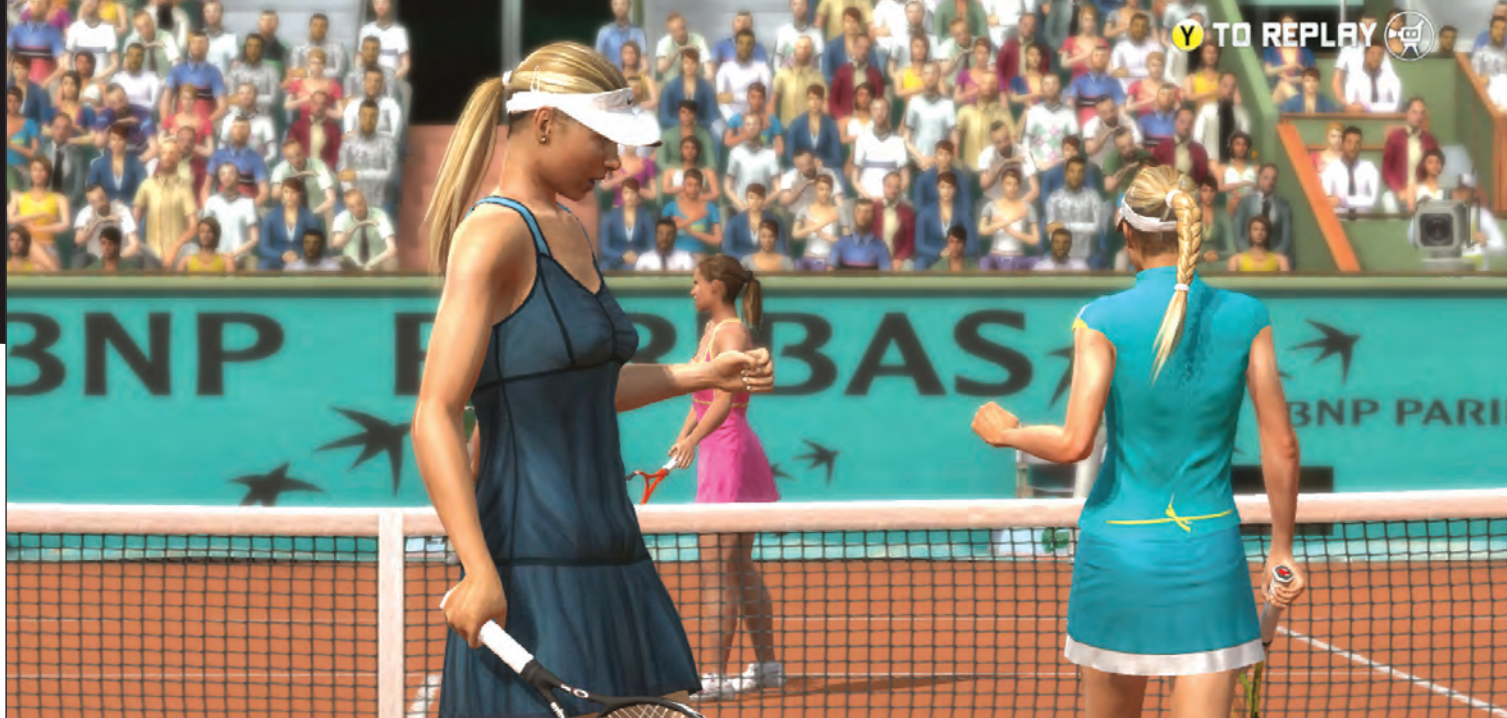
TOP SPIN 3

2K'S LATEST TAKE ON its tennis simulator series adds an element of agony and ecstasy to the sports-simulation arena. *Top Spin 3* brings with it several refined game dynamics, but also goes a long way to exclude casual gamers. This is a tennis game for tennis fans.

The game places the player on famous courts around the world, faithfully recreated in every way, except maybe for the more subdued crowd, which doesn't display the reality of tennis fans in this day and age. Crowd noise aside, the action in *Top Spin 3* is intense and rather technical. The player needs to read the situation more like a real tennis player, with the display stripped down to include only the score and a heart-rate monitor. Combined with this necessity to understand the dynamics of the game on a visual level comes a need to time shots very carefully. Mistakes are easy to make in this title, with careful timing being critical in terms of releasing the buttons that are used for different shots.

Additionally, the player will find that a new momentum-based dynamic, introduced into the character movement, can, initially at least, complicate matters. The character's movement is also affected by the heart-rate monitor, which indicates how excited or nervous the character is becoming. Increases in heart rate can have devastating effects on the player, as can environmental conditions.

This realism is one of the joys of the game, but also takes it beyond the scope of the average casual player. Learning to play the game is a tricky process. Jumping in for a quick game isn't really a possibility for someone who hasn't played the game.

Aside from the quick games and online and offline multiplayer, *Top Spin 3* also features an excellent tutorial and a great Career mode. The player can use a relatively powerful set of character-creation tools to create their own in-game persona, and can progress through a realistic Career mode that will pit them against the more or less forty in-game current and historic tennis legends. Xbox 360 players may be disappointed by the fact that Rafael Nadal, the winner of this year's Wimbledon men's tournament, has been reserved for the PS3 version of the game. However, Federer is present, as well as greats such as Bjorn Borg and Boris Becker. Various new rackets, shoes and outfits can be purchased during the Career mode, but these have almost no affect on performance.

The game is presented in a visually impressive style, with the great locations populated by players that have realistic expressions and animations.

Top Spin 3 is a great tennis simulator, although it's aimed at tennis enthusiast, rather than the casual gamer. It's a massively addictive and quality game for fans. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

The real thing

Kinda like

Short skirts

For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A great tennis simulator, but not one for casual players.

79
OUT OF 100

ASUS P5Q Series Motherboard
System-wide Energy Savings with EPU-6 Engine
Intelligently Detects & Auto Moderates 6 Major Components' Power!

> " Need a motherboard that does it all? Then the ASUS P5Q series is the ideal choice. This new series features the ASUS EPU 6-Engine that intelligently detects current PC loadings and automatically moderates the power of 6 major components of the PC during everyday computing to provide you with the ultimate in system power savings. "

Save More with New EPU-6 Engine

75% of the time, the PC is utilized in everyday computing tasks that don't require the maximum amount of power. However, the components will continue consuming power unconsciously – resulting in power loss. This power loss will occur in day to day operations and is invisible – adding up quickly in the long run. It is thus vital for users to be aware of this "hidden" power loss. The ASUS EPU-6 Engine guards against this power loss through intelligent and automatic monitoring and moderation of the power supply – lowering heat and providing an exceptional 96%+ power efficiency (the higher the power efficiency, the more energy that is saved)! With the EPU-6 Engine, savings of up to almost a household's monthly electrical bill can be attained! It is able to achieve this by focusing on 6 major components: namely CPU, VGA card, memory, chipset, Hard drives and CPU cooler/system fan.

6 Engine –
The world's first power saving provides lower heat and an exceptional 96%+ power efficiency.

All Round Power Savings for 6 Major Components

The EPU-6 Engine intelligently identifies and selects the correct CPU profile, calibrating the best possible settings for the ultimate power savings. VGA graphics cards normally utilize more power than they should, and the EPU-6 Engine, which supports the most popular and latest graphics cards*, automatically detects the system's loading and adjusts the voltage and frequency – saving up to 37% VGA power when during everyday computing. For the Chipset and Memory, the EPU-6 Engine provides up to 96%+ enhanced power efficiency – thereby improving thermal capabilities, which leads to better component quality and lifespans. The EPU-6 Engine also cleverly monitors the Hard drives and CPU cooler/system fan – reducing power wastage spent when there is no data access. This helps to reduce the hard drive and fan noises for quieter acoustics too!

*Energy Saving performance might vary with different graphics solutions.

About how you'll feel if you buy this game...

DON KING PRESENTS: PRIZEFIGHTER

DON KING, THE TALL-HAIRED, exceptionally verbose boxing promoter, has lent his image to 2K Sports' long-awaited boxing simulator. As with many other titles, 2K has challenged EA Sports with a competitive title, but putting *Prizefighter* toe to toe with EA's *Fight Night Round 3* (which is around two years old) results in the newcomer being knocked flat on its back time and time again. While it would be gratifying to not compare the two games, such comparisons are inevitable.

The most obvious difference between the two is the change in control scheme. EA's unique dual-analogue stick approach has been answered with a system that requires combinations of buttons resulting in punches thrown. With 31 different kinds of punches, the combinations in *Prizefighter* get quite confusing. A little practice should take care of this, of course, but the unresponsive control scheme means that, from time to time, the player's finger contortions result in late punches or even no punches at all.

Along with often-sluggish controls, the game's hit-detection system just doesn't work the way it should. Clipping punches through an opponent's body, poorly placed shots and a number of other issues add to the frustration the game presents the player with.

Graphically this game doesn't rise to the challenge either. While the character models and settings are hardly poor, they don't manage to impress. The camera is not too bad, although when the action gets up-close and personal, the default angle is a little dodgy.

The only real saving grace that *Prizefighter* can lay claim to is its lengthy Career mode: the player takes on the role of "The Kid" (yes, a highly original name, we know) and fights his/her way to fame. The player can modify appearance and so forth, taking a high degree of control over that aspect, but the name is going to stick whether you like it or not. The Career mode allows the player to book fights against various opponents (who might not vary widely in style, but who employ different dirty tricks and tactics nonetheless) and to train between fights, using five different mini-games to improve four different stats. Every now and then, the player's trainer will reminisce about the good old days, during which the player is granted the ability to 'refight' a famous match and unlock one of the game's large roster of licensed boxers. The player will also be given the opportunity to participate in other activities, such as dating beautiful women or appearing in TV ads. These adversely affect the character, costing valuable statistic points, but have the benefit of increasing the character's public exposure (although what that actually does is unclear). The whole Career mode is tied together with documentary style FMV footage that adds a nice flavour to the whole thing.

Don King Presents: Prizefighter is not a terrible game, but it does little to compete with EA's definitive boxing simulation. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Being bitten by Mike Tyson

Better Than

Fight Night Round 3

Worse Than

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A button-masher of note, this game will leave boxing fans a little cold.

58
OUT OF 100

Five lucky readers stand a chance to win an HTC Diamond cellphone

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- SMSes charged at R2 each
- Winners notified by phone
- No correspondence will be entered into.
- The judges' decision is final
- Competition closes 31st August 2008

Prizes kindly sponsored by Leaf Wireless

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION

SID MEIER'S *CIVILIZATION* SERIES has long had a reputation as a great, if somewhat pedantic, management simulator. It's also had the reputation of being a PC series, and the announcement that it was being developed for console raised an eyebrow or two around the industry. Still, developer Firaxis ploughed ahead, rebuilding the game from the ground up. The result is *Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution* for the Xbox 360, PS3 and DS.

The complexity of the series seems to imply that it just wouldn't work on console, but Firaxis has taken an interesting approach, stripping away some of the game's nuts and bolts and concentrating on strategy. Still, though, it's not a very simple game, and the spirit of the series is retained.

The premise, as one would expect, is that the player must guide the development of a great civilisation, from the Stone Age right through to around 2070. Victory can be achieved through technological advances, financial gain, cultural supremacy or just plain old blasting the hell out of other civilisations and taking their cities away.

The graphics is flippant in its approach, and everything from cities and armies to the inevitable squad of advisors and other world leaders that pop up on screen are cartoon-like, with a language of their own (which is pretty irritating after the first three times

they appear) and appearances that change as the ages in the game advance. As with other *Civ* games, the player will probably find his super-advanced troops taking on guys armed with spears from time to time, but that's how *Civ* has always worked.

The true secret to this game working well on console stems from the fact that the controls have been set up well. They are very simple indeed, and surprisingly intuitive, allowing the player to perform necessary tasks whenever needed. The game dynamic is, because of the control scheme, very pedantic, and the player may find the slow bouncing from one unit to the next a little frustrating. Still, units can be put in modes that don't require that kind of attention, although it would do the player good to remember that they're there for later.

Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution is not a fast-paced, action-packed game, and nor should it be. The series has traditionally been a slow game that requires more thought than fast reactions. Fans of the series will be grateful that the series has landed on console, and the slightly simplified game dynamic will ensure that a wide variety of players will thoroughly enjoy the title. Do not assume that it is an easy game though: the higher-difficulty levels will have the player jumping through mental hoops from the word go. The various victory

conditions, numerous factions and different difficulty levels mean that the game has a vast replay potential, and with the average game taking a few hours to get through, there's a lot of value in this one for strategy fans who want their fix on a console. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Civilization

Kinda Like

Civilization

For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line
A great 'conversion' of a PC classic.

80 OUT OF 100

NAG

1 **2 3 4 5**

OVERCLOCKED: A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

I REMEMBER PLAYING THE *Monkey Island* series of adventure games when I was younger and being enthralled by the story and humour. I have always maintained that in order to create a great adventure game, you need to have a great hook. All the adventure titles during the genre's glory days had their own little quirks to keep the player engrossed by the experience. Can you imagine using a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle to cross a ravine? I can. I saw Guybrush Threepwood do it. *Full Throttle* saw you playing a smart-mouthed biker with a penchant for ripping jewellery out of the noses of cocky bartenders. All of the great LucasArts (and a few other studios') adventure titles had you combing the screen with your mouse cursor, anxious to find anything that would get you out of the stalemate you had reached with the tough puzzles, yet despite how unexciting that may sound, they never stopped being fun. Sadly, *Overclocked* doesn't feature anything that'll keep you coming back for more.

Overclocked casts the player as David McNamara, a former army psychiatrist with (as you'll learn throughout the course of the game) a dark past. Five youngsters have been placed under psychiatric supervision due to their mental instability and you've been called in to find the underlying cause of their conditions. These youngsters all seem to somehow have a connection to one another and you'll piece together their fragmented tales through a series of flashbacks played through the eyes of each youth. This entails a lot of the aforementioned combing of every inch of the screen looking for something you can click on, and looking for any subtle changes in your environment, which will give you clues as to what to do next. Wash, rinse, repeat and you have *Overclocked* clocked. If you're an action-loving gamer, beware: boredom awaits!

Adventure games are usually very nice to look at, partially thanks to the fact that the backgrounds are static and can be made to look incredible when done right. Unfortunately, this is one adventure game that doesn't go the extra mile to pretty itself up, and it's filled mostly with drab colours, dodgy character models and a generally bland look – so don't expect much aesthetic appeal from this title. The soundtrack is okay – nothing to write home about – while the voice acting (an integral part of modern adventure games) ranges from nicely done to downright shocking. The presentation is definitely flawed in this title, but if you're adamant that you want to give it a play-through, it won't bother you.

At times, a laid-back adventure title is a nice change of pace when you're looking for something less action-orientated and want to use your grey matter solving puzzles and enigmas. While *Overclocked* will adequately fill that void, there are other far more appealing options to choose from, so unless you're desperate and have nothing else at your disposal, you may want to give this one a miss. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Any classic LucasArts adventure

Worse Than

PC

360

PS3

WII

PS2

PSP

DS

MOB

Adventure

For Fans of

Bottom Line

A competent adventure title, but it doesn't really do much to set it apart from the pack

65 OUT OF 100

GUITAR HERO: AEROSMITH

RRP→ R499 Standalone Game | R859 Guitar Hero: Aerosmith Bundle
Publisher→ Activision | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Rhythm | **Age Rating→** 12+

THIS WAS A GOOD month for rhythm gaming. South Africa finally got *Guitar Hero III*, we went to the launch of *Guitar Hero World Tour*, and we finally got our hands on *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith*. Needles to say, the first few weekends were spent entirely in front of the TV. *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* is based on *Legends of Rock*, the third game in the series, so the play dynamic is virtually identical. The former does, however, feature custom themes and all the Aerosmith band members. The game features a Career mode that follows a documentary style tour through Aerosmith's history, and you play at some of the venues they played at during key moments in the band's career. Not all the songs in the game are Aerosmith's. About 40% of the track list comprises bands that have opened for, or have influenced Aerosmith in some way. Either way, the mix is excellent: there are some really amazing tracks that have reignited our love for Aerosmith and other bands such as The Cult, Stone Temple Pilots and The Clash. Towards the end of your career, you will also get to play some classic Aerosmith tracks, often forgotten in light of their later albums. As long-time Aerosmith fans, we might be a little biased here, but there is no reason why *Guitar Hero* fans should not own this game. Even if you don't like Aerosmith, we guarantee that you will be hooked by the time you play *Dream On*. Sadly, there will be no downloadable content for this game, but it certainly has sparked interest from other bands to bring out similar games. Next in the works, *Guitar Hero: Metallica*. It has been confirmed! Until then, the 41 songs in this game should be plenty to keep you busy for while. **NAG**

Regardt van der Berg

NAG
MUST PLAY

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

Bottom Line
Who needs a life when they have Guitar Hero: Aerosmith?

90
OUT OF 100

Look & Listen
For the Fans

APPLE ASSAULT

APPLE'S IPHONE IS CERTAINLY making waves, with many people highly excited about the potential that the device offers. In fact, industry analysts have said that the iPhone poses a threat to popular gaming devices like the Nintendo DS. They do have something of a point: the iPhone features touch-screen technology and accelerometers, making it something of a hybrid between the DS and the Wii.

However, Nintendo has been around for a long time, with an excellent hold on the handheld gaming market. Sony has also made a bit of an impact with the PSP, and with both companies (particularly Nintendo) having a reputation as game and game-device manufacturers, one certainly needs to wonder whether Apple can make a serious dent in their markets. After all, Apple has always been seen as something on a niche product, popular among non-conformist, beret-wearing poets and artists. The computer systems built by Apple have lacked support from gaming manufacturers and, although there has been a recent move to introduce more games to the Mac platform (Ubisoft springs to mind most immediately), it doesn't seem as if Apple has cared much about their gaming opportunities.

However, the iPod and iPhone both feature gaming capabilities. Apple's move into this new market is unquestionable, although they seem to see more value in the handheld and mobile markets.

This raises the question of how relevant the mobile games market is to the industry once again. Mobile versions of potentially huge properties, such as *Assassin's Creed* and *BOOM BLOX*, tend to pale in comparison to the "real thing." Hardcore gamers will almost certainly never see the value of these games: *Tetris* on a phone may be fine, but games that are more complex don't really have the punch to attract a lot of attention from dedicated gamers. Still, people do take these titles and this platform seriously, particularly developers. The *Die Hard 4.0* game had platform exclusivity after all, only being released in a mobile version.

The iPhone may struggle to take on more established brands like Nintendo, but the device certainly will revolutionise mobile gaming. Perhaps that's where Apple should set their sites: the device is a phone, after all. To take on the likes of Sony and Nintendo would require a greater concentration on a gaming-specific device, rather than a device that has gaming functionality among all its other uses. In the end, of course, the choice of competition is Apple's decision, but the very lucrative mobile phone market may be an easier target for their device.

THE iPHONE EFFECT

THE IPHONE IS A hot topic at the moment, with everyone wanting to get their hands on Apple's mobile-communication device. The popularity of the device is driving Apple, as well as third-party developers, to step up to the plate. Steve Jobs, the Apple boss, recently revealed that when Apple's App Store goes live, around 500 applications will be available for the iPhone – a third of which will be games. Additionally, Jobs has revealed that Apple will be taking a very small cut from application sales through the App Shop, with a 70% kickback to developers for every application sold. Numerous applications will also be distributed free of charge, reinforcing Jobs' statement that Apple doesn't want to be seen as "business partners" by developers.

With some 160 gaming titles available, Apple will be making a strong run at the mobile gaming market.

Other iPhone related news reveals that Apple is confident that they will meet the demand for the new 3G version of the iPhone. When the original iPhone was released, it took around 74 days for the handset to reach the one million sales mark. The 3G version hit it in the first weekend. Apple is aiming for 5.1 million iPhone 3G sales by the third quarter of this year.

CHUCK SET TO PUMMEL THE MOBILE GAME MARKET

THE WORLD IS PERHAPS a little unfair to Chuck Norris. The brunt of so many jokes has achieved a lot during his career, including a stunning cinematic fight with kung-fu legend Bruce Lee. However, the jokes keep coming and, to his credit, the Chuckster takes them in his stride, apparently enjoying the attention a little more than David Hasselhoff did.

Gameloft recently revealed that they plan to capitalise on the Chuck-mania sweeping the Internet (and consequently the planet) by producing a videogame starring the man who the bogeyman checks for under his bed each night.

The game, *Chuck Norris: Bring the Pain*, will not be based on one of his many on-screen characters, but will rather be about Chuck himself. The action game will be tongue in cheek and, according to Mr Norris himself, will lean strongly towards the funny stuff that can be found on **www.chucknorrisfact.com**.

To reinforce this statement, Gameloft released the following reasons why this game is going to be the ultimate action title on mobile:

• Chuck Norris decided to make a mobile game so he can hit the bad guys with so many lefts, that they beg for a right.
• Chuck Norris fights evil on all screens. Movie screens, television screens and now the screen of your mobile phone.
• When it comes to making videogames, fighting bad guys puts Chuck in a good mood.

Whether South African icon Vernon Koekemoer is going to get his own game is unclear, but, in all honesty, while Chuck breaks heads, Vernon just looks like a chop at raves.

A NEW TAKE ON TETRIS

TETRIS WILL NEVER DIE, and it will never fade away. This Russian classic is one of the most recognisable games in the world, and its entry into the mobile market several years ago gave it an awesome boost. EA, the licence holder of *Tetris*, has announced that they will be taking the franchise even further with *Tetris POP*, a *Tetris*-inspired collection of mini-games that are intended to add a few thrills to the series.

Aside from dynamic backgrounds and a good soundtrack, *Tetris POP* will feature a Chrono mode. With this, the player will be able to specify how much time is available for a game, and the game will tailor a session to those requirements. Several other game modes will add fantastic variation to the title, extending and improving on this classic series.

SONY ERICSSON F305

SHAKE IT BABY!

MOBILE GAMING IS ADVANCING in leaps and bounds to the point where the phones that run many of these games seem as if they're struggling to catch up. Very few phones available in SA are powerful enough to proclaim themselves as "gaming phones," but Sony Ericsson has decided to take this relatively small market one step further by introducing the F305 "Motion Gaming-enabled phone."

Motion mobile gaming, you say? Taking cues from two distinct sources, the Nokia N81 and the Nintendo Wii, Sony Ericsson has put two dedicated gaming keys above the screen for landscape play, as well as motion-sensing technology similar to that found in the Wii. While neither is particularly new, even for mobile phones, it's still a nice combination, with phones such as the W910i showing its effectiveness in games like *Marble Madness*.

With its sights clearly set on the younger market, the F305 (the F stands for "Fun and excitement" in case you

were wondering) comes preloaded with a few quirky games designed to take advantage of the motion sensors. *Bowling*, *Bass Fishing* and *Jockey* will no doubt keep you entertained for ages, which couples well with the claimed battery life of eight hours while in game mode. Unfortunately, it seems that the combination of gaming functions and fairly low pricing has shunted a few expected features out the door. SE's almost-standard 320 x 240 resolution is absent, with the 2-inch display only capable of 176 x 200 pixels. Combine that with a bit of a measly 2.0-megapixel camera and only 10MB of built-in storage, and you're looking at fairly average features.

Time will tell how well this device will be received. Chances are it will do quite well, considering the likely entry-level price and kiddie-friendly approach, but SE will do well to introduce a higher-spec'd successor in the near future if they want the rest of the market to sit up and take notice.

ALL NAG MOBILE REVIEWS ARE DONE ON THE NOKIA N81

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

087

NAG

FIFA STREET 3

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ EA Sports
Genre→ FIFA Street 3
Download→ SMS Nag085 to 40978

DON'T LET THE TITLE of this game fool you: the mobile version has very little in common with its bigger, flashier console brethren. While the *FIFA Street* series of console games actually simulates the game of soccer (albeit in an unconventional way), this iteration of the series is nothing more than a series of mini-games designed for quick bursts of play. Each level of the game sees you being challenged by various characters to perform a series of chipping, freestyling, volleying and a few other football-esque tests, at the end of which (assuming you get a high enough score) you'll be rewarded with some arbitrary piece of a 'puzzle' you're looking to complete. (In the first level, the reward is car parts used to repair your ailing automobile.) These mini-games are very loosely related to the game of football. The only similarity is the ball that makes an appearance in these challenges. Fans of balls and mini-games will find it worth taking a look at, but if you're looking for a mobile soccer simulation, you may want to look elsewhere. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

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

Bottom Line
A set of mini-games masquerading as a football simulation. Keep that in mind when considering a purchase.

65 *OUT OF 100*

GUITAR HERO III MOBILE

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Activision
Genre→ Rhythm
Download→ SMS Nag087 to 40978

YES! *GUITAR HERO III* is available for your mobile. Now you can take your mad guitar skills wherever you go. You may not look as cool as a travelling musician with your guitar strapped to your back, but at least no one is going to think you're packing a machine gun like Antonio Banderas (unless your phone is really old and chunky).

To really get the most mileage out of *Guitar Hero III* Mobile, you're going to need a large dose of imagination. The tinny sounds that erupt from your phone are far from being acceptable replicas of the classics you're supposedly performing. Audio may not be a big issue on most mobile games, but with this being a music game, it's a bit of a letdown.

Yet, somehow the game manages to pass by virtue of its gameplay. There is even a little thrill to be had when you accurately hammer the correct keys in their sequences. Success will be largely dependent on what type of keypad your phone has, but the game's challenging enough for even the most digitally dexterous person to struggle through a few songs.

Well presented and thought out, this mobile iteration unfortunately misses a few star qualities, which have seen its big-brother console version rocking up the charts. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

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

Bottom Line
Machine guns are better.

69 *OUT OF 100*

PRISON BREAK

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Vivendi
Genre→ Action Adventure
Download→ SMS Nag086 to 40978

I'M NOT ACCUSTOMED TO playing games on my handset. When I think of mobile games, I can't help but picture puzzlers such as *Bejeweled* being played on the tiny screen, because those would be the most logical choices for a quick bout of gaming on the move. So when I realised that *Prison Break* is an action-adventure title, I was a bit surprised. Luckily, it all ended well. The game casts you as Michael Scofield (apparently the lead protagonist in the television series) and sees you running around various areas of a prison, hunting for clues, interacting with fellow inmates and snatching items, which will aid you in busting out. Interspersed are action and puzzle sequences, such as an on-rails race through the prison's hallways, hitting a key to dodge obstacles as you go, etc. The game presents itself well and the visuals and audio will not disappoint - provided you keep in mind that this is a mobile game - although the game does suffer from many boredom-inducing sequences. Fans of the TV show who are into mobile gaming will want to check this out. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

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

Bottom Line
Fans of the show will get a kick out of this game.

77 *OUT OF 100*
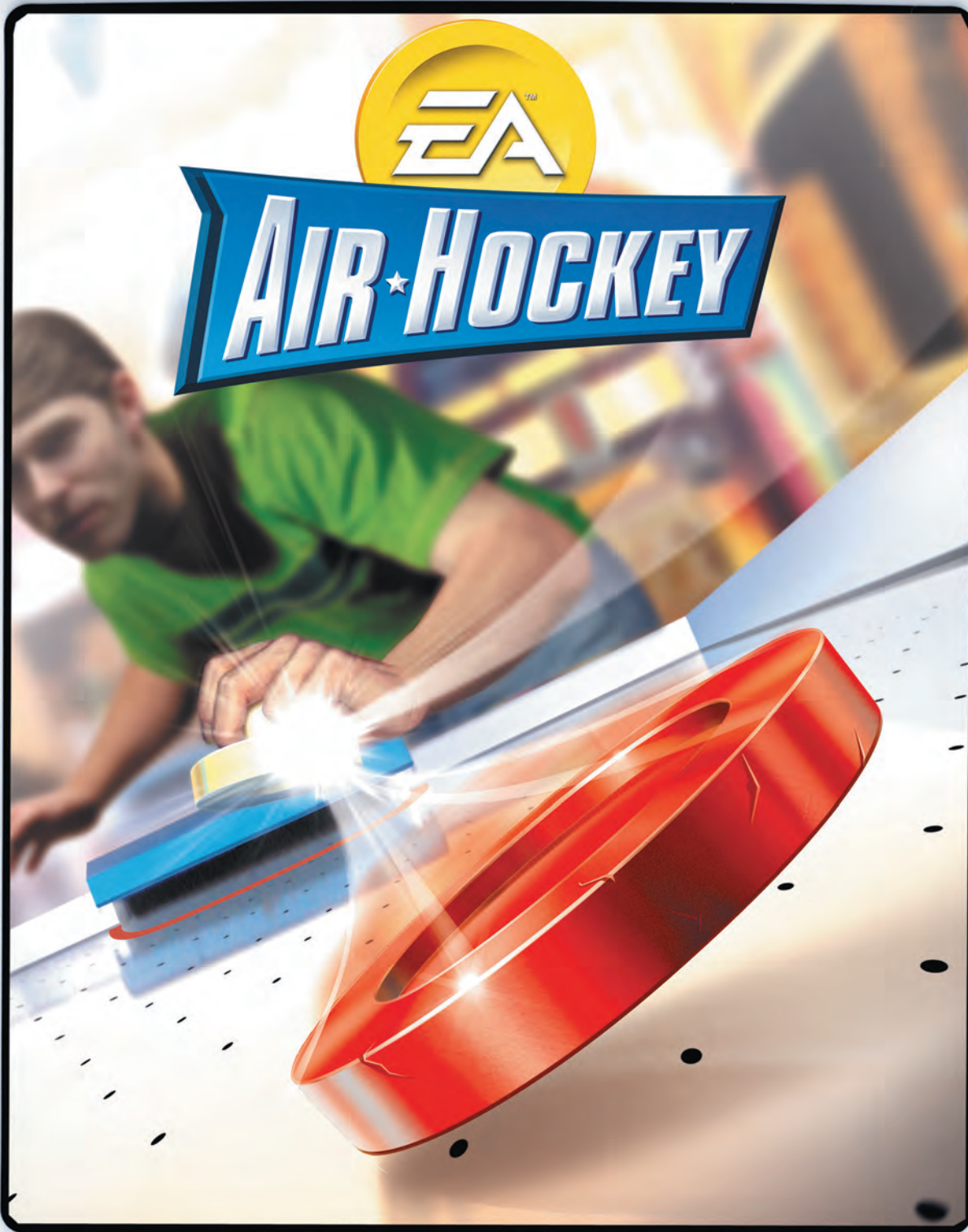
Air Hockey

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Crack that puck and complete objectives through 3 different difficulty modes or challenge a friend for fast action head to head play!

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MTN

SOUL OF DARKNESS

RRP→ R40
Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Platform Adventure
Download→ SMS Nag088 to 40978

NAG MUST PLAY

NO, THIS GAME HAS nothing to do with the metal band of the same name. It does, however, involve vampires, zombies, imps, and other evil creatures. The first thing that struck me was the music: while it is MIDI, as in so many mobile games, it is very well composed and is quite atmospheric. The second thing I noticed was the fact that the text intro scrolled past too fast for me, a seasoned and enthusiastic reader, to follow – so I imagine that most people will have serious difficulty! However, it is repeated over and over until you choose to skip it, so you can read it eventually. The game is a platform adventure, much like the original *Prince of Persia*, scrolling sideways and having you dispatch evil critters with a flaming sword or an icy spear. As you progress, you'll find power-ups that heal you and others that increase your maximum health. The graphics is particularly impressive for a title that works on run-of-the-mill mobile phones, with parallax-scrolling backgrounds that simulate 3D, and responsive character animations. It's quite easy to while away a number of hours on this one. The game has some replay va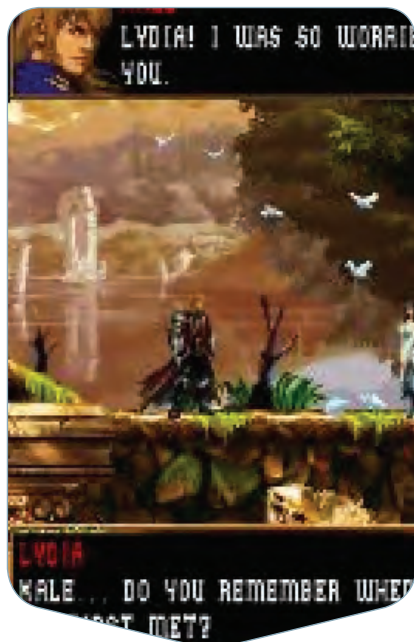lue, as it is easy to miss some secret areas and chests, so you can go back and re-explore in order to find them. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

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

Bottom Line
One of the most impressive platform games we have yet seen on mobile phones.

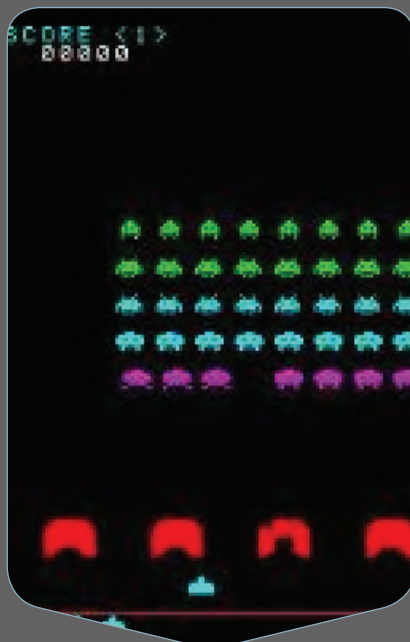**85** OUT OF 100

SPACE INVADERS

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Taito
Genre→ Arcade
Download→ SMS Nag084 to 40978

THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF things can sometimes be funny. Take for instance the fashion of the '80s. We have mocked the ridiculous hairstyles and clothing of that generation for eighteen years now. However, what do we see now? Fashionistas wearing skinny jeans that elude straight back to that disastrous decade!

So should we really point and laugh when one of the original videogames makes its appearance on mobile devices? In the grand scheme of things, perhaps it's also *Space Invaders* turn to be hot property again. If, for some reason unknown to man, you've never seen this ancient arcade title, you should expect five rows of CGA-coloured aliens descending on your position, mandibles flailing. It's possible that those aren't mandibles at all, but a pair of extra-terrestrial cucumbers. At this level of graphical interpretation, it's difficult to tell. Compared to the original release, there seem to be very few gameplay, visual or audio changes. For the purists, this is a good thing. For the new generation of gamers, it's not.

On the cellphone, *Space Invaders* handles perfectly. Few fingers can be pointed at the original formula. However, while its heritage should be enjoyed by all gamers at least once in their lifetime, the experience probably won't last a day. An ignominious end to a gaming legend. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

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

Bottom Line
We've all moved on.

64 OUT OF 100

THE LOVE GURU

RRP→ R40
Publisher→ PlayerX
Genre→ Arcade
Download→ SMS Nag089 to 40978

SO YOU WANT TO become a Love Guru. May I suggest that playing mobile games may not be the correct route for you to follow? Maybe you need the advice of a friend.

According to Tugginmypudha, your in-game mentor, to become The Love Guru, you must follow the five disciplines of D.R.A.M.A.: Distract, Regress, Adjust, Maturity and Action. Ignoring the obvious innuendo in your mentor's name, you may be tempted to think that this is a serious game. That is until you learn that to progress, you must complete tasks in Stink Mop, Elephant Riding, Tea Pouring (from the nostril), Coin Tossing and Nuts in a Sling.

Once again, this is a case where a title is held together by a loose collection of mini-games. Personally I prefer a good storyline, plot development and engaging graphics, or perhaps an absolute cracker of a puzzle. The Love Guru has little to none of these qualities. Instead, the player is guided through a series of tasks, which range from simple arithmetic games, to whack-a-mole type scenarios that are neither engaging nor entertaining. Mobile games are generally on the low end graphically, but *The Love Guru* falls short even in this aspect. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton
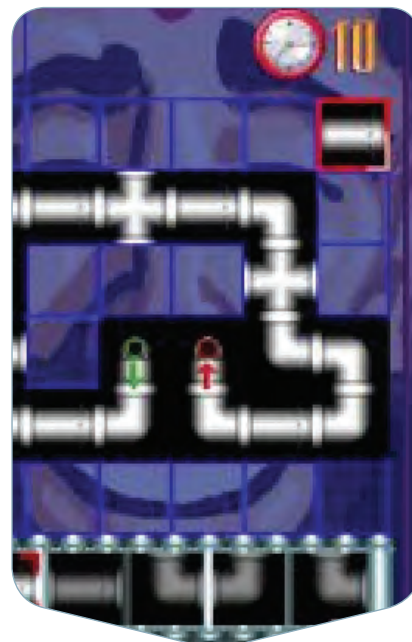
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS **MOB**

Bottom Line
Love lifts us up, but can do nothing for this game.

52 OUT OF 100

DIABLO

FOLLOWING SOME SORT OF schoolyard scrap between the legions of Heaven and Hell, the Three Prime Evils were smacked on the bottoms and exiled to the mortal realm of Sanctuary to write lines and ponder their crimes. As fate (and simple common sense) would have it, however, the trio swiftly abandoned their detention and instead wrought great wickedness and suffering upon the lands. So, the Archangel, Tyrael, rounded up a cabal of Eastern magi, and gave them three magic stones with which to capture the very souls of the three demons prowling the world. Think *Ghostbusters*, but with more overbearing Biblical menace and impending apocalyptic doom. Who you gonna call? Horadrim!

Mephisto, the Lord of Hatred, made it as far as the steamy jungles of Kehjistan before the Horadrim stuffed him into a hole beneath the Temple of Light in Kurast. His brother, Baal, the Lord of Destruction, ended up imprisoned in the body of the Horadric mage, Tal-Rasha, in a sealed tomb beneath the whirling desert sands of Aranoch (it's complicated). The Lord of

Terror and the game's titular villain, Diablo, loped west to the kingdom of Khanduras, where he was eventually apprehended and locked up in a labyrinth beneath a cathedral in the sleepy hamlet of Tristram.

However, the soulstones have weakened over the ensuing centuries, and the Prime Evils now writhe in bitter torpor, plotting spite and vengeance. The world trembles upon the precipice of bleak destiny. The world needs a hero with an acquisition fetish, an indefatigable index finger and a bit of a thing for noble martyrdom – hmm, fresh meat.

The hero in question is confined (in single player) to one of three generic action RPG classes - including the Warrior, Mage, Rogue - whose infernal adventure comprises an embattled descent through sixteen randomly generated dungeon levels, spanning four area types, with each featuring its own distinctive architecture, denizens and musical score. The cave soundtrack had wailing babies. "Spooky" doesn't even begin to describe it. **NAG**

HOW NOW, BROWN COW?

Shortly after *Diablo*'s release, rumours began circulating that there was a secret cow level somewhere in the game, accessed via a range of interactions with Tristram's bovine NPC population. The claims were patently untrue, but persistent enough that Blizzard was persuaded to include the now-legendary Secret Cow Level in the sequel, *Diablo II*. To tackle Hell's ruminant minions, return to the Rogue Encampment in Act 1 after defeating Diablo (or Baal, if you're playing the expansion), and use the Horadric Cube to transmute Wirt's Leg with a Tome of Town Portal. The unique 'Cow King's Leathers' item set is collectible only in this stage, but be prepared for some stalwart resistance.

BREAK OUT YOUR PRISMATIC AMULET OF INSECT SWATTING

Now exceedingly rare, Sierra's third-party expansion, *Hellfire*, tacked on the Monk character class and two new insect hive-themed dungeon areas, as well as additional items and item affixes, spells, shrines and interface enhancements. With a story arc sidling unobtrusively alongside *Diablo*'s, the expansion had players venturing into the lair of the demon, Na-Krul, unleashed upon the by now really rather unlucky town of Tristram by an incautious sorcerer.
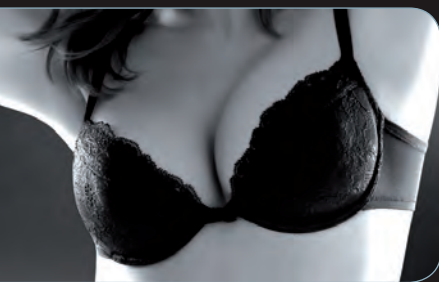
IF CANADELLE LIMITED PARTNERSHIP of Canada (owner of the Wonderbra trademark) made a PC, it would most certainly consist of two perfectly physical cores and a good few virtual glands... cough... I mean cores. Perhaps two of Intel's Core 2 Extreme QX9775s or AMD's Phenom X4 9850s would fit snugly in the Wonderbra PC. Imagine arriving at a LAN with your WPC (That's Wonderbra PC, you un-l33t person) strapped across your shoulder blades. You look around, waiting for the hush of the eager onlookers. You close your eyes and reach behind your back for the left-handed bra strap unhook move. (Naturally, you have practiced this move a dozen times in the comfort of your bedroom to avoid any embarrassing moments). The crowd applauds as the WPC gently falls to the floor. Cushioned by the patented WPC pads, your sculptured pair of Kerry McGregor-like CPUs is always safe.

Talking about perfect CPUs. As you know, we ran a feature in the June 2008 issue where we pitted a range of Intel CPUs against each other to determine the best one based on value for money. Then we did the same with a range of AMD CPUs in the July 2008 issue, again with value for money being the overriding factor. In this issue, we took the winning AMD and Intel CPUs and tossed them into *NAG*'s cage of death for the ultimate dogfight.

The problem was that we could not without complete certainty choose an outright winner! The judges ruled it a tie.

Read the feature and look at the graphs: you will see exactly why we came to this conclusion. Send your comments to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za, and as always, remember that I have a filter on the server. So, mark your comments with either the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' or 'Dream Machine'.

Remember to buy your rAge ticket from Computicket. I am planning a left-handed Wonderbra un-strapping contest on the *NAG* stand...

Later...

Len Nery
Hardware Manager

RADEON HD 4870X2 EARLY NEWS...

IN AUGUST, AMD WILL lift the veil that covers the beast codenamed R700. We'll obviously have the review in the September issue if I am able to headshot the guy sitting in the corner clutching the card with iron fists. Basically, this card isn't a new GPU at all: it's just two RV770 GPUs sharing one PCB. It is interesting to see AMD using two midrange cards on one PCB, taking on NVIDIA's 280 running in SLI and beating it hands down in most of the early tests.

If this is priced right, AMD has a diamond on their hands for sure!

The 4870X2 has eight Hynix GDDR5 memory chips per GPU, is clocked at 750MHz and as a result of the X2's 1,600 stream processors, enjoys a peak computational rate of 2.4 teraflops! Close your mouth now. You are drooling on *NAG* and that's not cool at all!

AMD/ATI XGP TECHNOLOGY

SO YOU WANT A notebook that will have battery life like no other while you are out seeing clients and doing what brings in the dough, and you want the performance to go with it when you need it.

While performance on demand isn't something new, XGP (e**X**ternal **G**raphics **P**latform) technology is, and let me tell you, it is a gemstone. AMD/ATI has given owners of notebooks equipped with a PCI Express 2.0 connector an option to simply plug the XGP in and experience high-end gaming. The connector provides 4GB/sec bandwidth throughput and won't slow down the most demanding games or graphics applications.

With XGP enabled, your notebook will run up to four displays, and it comes with HDMI, integrated audio, DVI and USB connectors. Look out for the full review in the September issue of *NAG*.

HD 4850 TOXIC, THE EARLY RUMOURS...

WHAT IS A TOXIC card? Simply put, it is Sapphire's radically overclocked and tweaked version of a standard AMD card, cooled by Zalman heat-pipe technology and produced as a once-off by the brainiacs over at Sapphire, making it a collectors' item. So, when I heard about the 4850 being dipped into Toxic waste, my ears prickled with delight! What I heard is that the card will boast clock speeds of up to 1,150MHz and sport the same Zalman cooler that made the old 1950 Toxic card run like a Ferrari whilst lapping a McLaren around Silverstone.

Hi Graeme
Thanks for your snail mail. I hope you had clean hands when you wrote it, because everyone at NAG handled it, smelled it, licked it and so on. Your letter raised an interesting angle in that you want to know what the interests of the hardware reviewers at NAG are. Here is the truth: hardware reviewers such as Neo Sibeko, Regardt van der Berg and Derrick Cramer are not real people... they are a breed unto their own. Seriously though, you make a valid point and thus a great suggestion in terms of actually bringing you, the reader, insight on how to fiddle with your computer components or how to build the ultimate SLI, water-cooled machine from a reviewer's perspective. As a result of your mail, I have given Derrick a page from the September issue onwards to do exactly that.
I asked Derrick what he had in mind, and this was his reply:

"It would be great to show the readers the hardware reviewers' mindset in terms of a 'how-to guide' for the running of a system."

From: Divan Visagie
Okay, this is not a Q&A but I used the subject line in fear of filters. Anyway, I just wanted to know if you could please send me the dream machine logo.

Hi Divan
Thanks for your mail. Here is the logo. Please make sure you do not use it for personal gain.
Cheers
Len

Now the ball is in your court. Send your questions to **len.nery@tidemedia.co.za** with the heading 'Hardware Q&A'.

INTEL EXTREME MEMORY PROFILING

OKAY, SO YOU BOUGHT that killer DDR3 RAM kit. It cost an arm, leg and your girlfriend... How do you make it last longer than your ability to sustain a relationship? The simple answer is you won't need to stress about it since Intel launched XMP (Intel Extreme Memory Profiling). Intel has been working with memory manufacturers, Corsair, Kingston, OCZ, GEIL, Qimonda and Crucial, to easily overclock any system by simply selecting a range of appropriate profiles depending on what you are busy with at any given time on your computer without the need to adjust individual parameters in the BIOS. Expert users can manually change specific SDP parameters in the BIOS and then save the profiles to easily switch between them within Windows.
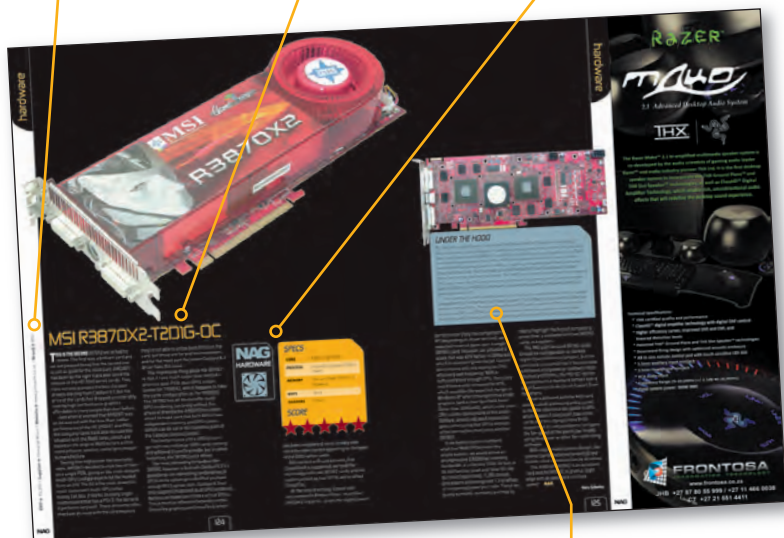
ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Hardware Reviews section

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

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

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

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

DROP YOUR ROCKS AND READ THIS BOX

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

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

SPECS

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

SCORE

NAG AWARDS

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

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

NAG DREAM MACHINE

NAG HARDWARE

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

NAG INTERVIEWS....

WELCOME TO A BRAND-NEW section of the hardware section of NAG. Let me explain how this is going to work and why we introduced this page.

Each month, we receive many letters from readers asking us questions about various brands available in South Africa. Based on our knowledge of the product, we would choose one or two mails and reply by publishing the letter in the magazine; and for good measure send you a hamper from AMD/ATI as they are the sponsors of the Hardware News and Letters section. We felt the need to get the reader and the vendor talking, so we are going to facilitate that by way of this page.

So, if the letter you send us is vendor specific, we will send the letter to the vendor for a response and publish it on this page. If it is a general question, it will be published on the previous page and answered by NAG - not the vendor. Okay, so let's start this off by having an informal chat with **Imi Mosaheb, country manager for Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. South Africa**.

Hi Imi, AMD's offices are situated on the first floor of the JSE building, number two Gwen Lane, Exchange Square, Sandton… What an amazing address! I honestly cannot image a more prestigious business address in South Africa. Why here? Why this building?
Imi: Well, apart from the convenience of the location for both our customers and employees, as well as the secure and eco-friendly environment, the JSE selected AMD from a group of potential tenants bidding for the office space. The JSE was looking for an established and respected technology brand as a tenant. It was a win-win outcome for both parties, as AMD has signed a long-term lease, which has worked out far more cost effective than similar-sized real estate available in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The feedback from our customers, staff and visitors has been extremely positive.

Len: Well, I must say that finally having AMD here in SA is brilliant and I am sure you have seen it in the numbers, purely based on the strengthening of relationships between AMD and the various distributors around the country. I attended three events at your new office thus far, and each time the same vibe has shone through: personal touch and relaxed friendly discussions. Is this a business strategy for AMD here in South Africa or is this all Imi?
Imi: AMD is an open, customer-centric company with a passion for what we do. We believe people do business with people. Therefore, people come first. The relaxed atmosphere and personal touch are part of the DNA of the company. We look forward to hosting you again Len!

Len: We have rAge coming up very soon, and based on what I see here and talking to you, I am sure you will be at the AMD stand talking to end users and basically being very approachable. In less than ten words, what would you say to a guy who walks up to you at your stand and asks you why he should buy an AMD-based platform?
Imi: AMD offers you superior energy efficiency and price/performance ratio!

Thanks for your time Imi. I can't wait to collect the new mobile AMD product that will be featured in the September issue of NAG. **NAG**

ASUS Splendid MA3850M

World's First VGA Card with Color Processor for Vivid Video

Enjoy Vibrant Visuals while Reducing Power Consumption

Tired of lackluster and blurry visuals? Then the ASUS Splendid MA3850M - the world's first stand-alone color processor with a modular graphics card is the solution. Integrating a video enhance card with the ASUS Splendid HD processor and a modularized VGA card, it is able to increase image quality for sharper visuals without increasing CPU loadings; while automatically displaying the best graphic modes for exceptional visual quality.

Enhanced Images without Adding CPU Load

The ASUS Splendid HD processor utilizes the newest generation of Splendid video intelligence technology to produce vibrant and fine-tuned images in conditions most favorable to the human eye - without any increase in CPU loading. You can now enjoy your favorite movies on your PC monitors similar to that of top-of-the-line consumer televisions - all thanks to the 7-region color enhancement, 12-bit gamma correction, real-time 2D peaking

Original image   Powered by Splendid

and dynamic contrast engine of the powerful chip. Additionally, it automatically selects the best possible display modes with inclusions of a Photo Mode, Video Mode, and Game Mode.

Lower Power Consumption for Great Energy Savings

The ASUS Splendid MA3850M is equipped with the ATI Mobility Radeon™ HD 3850 GPU that supports the ATI PowerPlay™ technology. This technology helps to reduce power consumption and provides great energy efficiency in comparison to regular desktop graphics cards in the same class. On par with generic ATI Radeon™ HD 3850 VGA cards in terms of 3DMark performance and performance-per-Watt, the ASUS Splendid MA3850M is the best green product for gaming enthusiasts.

hardware

DREAM MACHINE

DROOL HAS BEEN UPDATED... AGAIN!

OKAY, SO WE RECEIVED quite a few letters from you guys requesting a couple of changes. Your suggestions have come to fruition and as you can see, we now have the price of each individual item listed below the distributor. Should the item not have a price listed, we will give you the reason for the omission instead of the price. Three very important factors to keep in mind: firstly, the distributors will not sell to end users but you are most welcome to contact them for details on how to get your hands on the lap dancer award-winning piece of hardware listed below. Secondly, the distributor listed here is not necessarily the only seller of the hardware, but was the first to send it to us for review. Finally, the pricing we have here excludes VAT and is dealer pricing, so it is important that this must be seen as a guide only. For retail pricing, you should add 14% VAT and around 20% to 35% margin for the retailer (they have to make money somewhere folks!).

Let us know if you have any other suggestions!

PROCESSOR
Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650 (R8,228)
Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530

KEYBOARD
Enermax Aurora (R447)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

MONITOR
Acer AL2623W 26" Widescreen LCD (R4,999)
Axiz [011] 237-7000

COOLING
Zalman Reserator XT (R3,456)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

MOUSE
Saitek GM3200 Laser Mouse (being replaced)
No local distributor
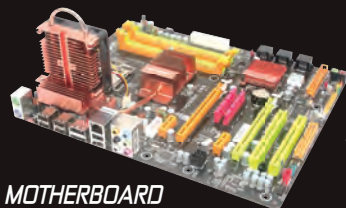
MOTHERBOARD
Biostar TPower I45 (R1,249)
Comstar [011] 314-5812
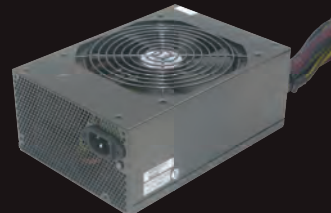
POWER SUPPLY
Zalman ZM1000-HP 1000W (R2,033)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

GRAPHICS CARD
Sapphire Radeon HD4870 (R3,099)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

STORAGE
WD Caviar SE16 500GB (R755)
Drive Control [011] 201-8927

MEMORY
Team Xtreem 2GB DDR2-1200 (R2,499)
Comstar [011] 314-5812

CASE
Cooler Master Cosmos S (R1,818)
Sonic Informed [011] 314-5800

SOUND
ASUS Xonar D2 (being replaced)
Axiz [011] 237-7000

DREAM
MACHINE

NAG

Hardwired

by Neo Sibeko

AMD Returns with a Vengeance

WITH ALL OF AMD'S recent troubles, nothing seemed to have gone according to plan or expectations. However, through all the turmoil and the less-than-stellar reception of all graphics cards since the original HD2900XT, AMD seems to have turned a corner.

When AMD started developing a scalable GPU in the form of the RV670, which could be configured upwards and scaled down depending on price point, it seemed as if they had given up on the high-end market and were focusing on the mid- to low-end graphics parts. That may very well have been true if it were not for the 3870X2, which featured two of these GPUs.

The great thing about the 3870X2 is that it was much cheaper than the twin-PCB 9800GX2. Even though it cost more than the 9800GTX at the time, it performed better in a number of titles and obviously the synthetic tests. Indeed, there were issues with games such as *Crysis*, but those were isolated incidents with the majority of games running flawlessly on the 3870X2.

However, the 3870X2 was just not enough to make people move from an 8800/9800GTX to it, irrespective of the price. AMD, though, was onto something as the 3800 did much better than the HD2000 series of cards. The next step was obviously going to be evolutionary rather than a revolution, which often requires a much larger investment than necessary and takes several cycles to optimise. Instead, we received a massively scaled GPU in the form of the RV7XX, which powers the new 4800 series.

The 4850 is probably much more than anyone ever expected. Double the number of stream processors would have been farfetched for many, but AMD did more than that by adding an additional 96 shaders on top of the original 64, bringing the total stream processor count to 800. What this has done is nothing short of incredible, making the RV770 the most powerful GPU ever developed. More than the theoretical performance, the most amazing aspect

of the 4850 is that it delivers incredible 9800GTX-beating performance at $199. At this price, it made the 9800GTX irrelevant and certainly is the best bang-for-buck GPU since the 8800GT.

To make it even more competitive, two 4850 graphics cards deliver better performance than any single card can deliver, and that includes the GTX 280 (which comes in at three times the price at the least). This kind of value is sure to bring prices down from NVIDIA, but that may be problematic because the GTX 280 is an expensive graphics card to produce in the first place.

At 1.4 billion gates, it's difficult to bring the prices down to a level where the card can compete favourably against two 4850 cards, let alone the insanely fast 4870 (which has given a new meaning to affordable performance).

Coming in at under $400 has made sure that the 4870 has no immediate competition for $100 above and below its selling price, which is significant because it places it right at the top of what could be considered midrange cards, but it outperforms anything near that price by a sizeable margin.

NVIDIA is in for a real fight this time around, and it's not clear how NVIDIA can stay competitive in the sub-$400 market without moving to the smaller 55nm process or the 40nm process from TSMC, which is highly unlikely right now. Even with the die shrink, it seems that for the sheer increase in raw power over the G92 core, the GT200 core isn't scaling as linearly as one would have expected.

Whatever NVIDIA decides to do, we must be grateful to AMD for bringing the fight to NVIDIA harder than ever before. With the 4870X2 slated for August/September 2008, it's about to get very difficult for NVIDIA. With the brains over at Graphzilla working hard though, they may have something up their sleeves to stay competitive. Until that happens though, AMD remains firmly in the lead. **NAG**

> "The 4850 is probably much more than anyone ever expected. What this has done is nothing short of incredible, making the RV770 the most powerful GPU ever developed.

On Sale Now R29.95

Core can get very hot. A 40% fan-rotation speed or above is recommended.

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD4870

A S WE HAD EXPECTED upon hearing rumours of the RV770 several months ago, we knew AMD's vengeance on the opposition would be great. However, with the brute horsepower behind the GTX 280, it seemed that any chance of the RV770 being competitive was lost and this would have been true had AMD/ATI not produced a marvel of a GPU.

Much like the opposition, AMD/ATI scaled the architecture to significant heights and in fact more than doubled their stream processor count from 64 five-way stream processors in the RV670 to a staggering 160 stream processors in the RV770. The 4800 series features an equivalent of 800 shaders and gains the title of the most powerful ASIC in GPU history, eclipsing the GT200 as the most mathematically powerful GPU on the market. It does all this while retaining a significantly lower number of gates - in the order of 410 million fewer gates than the competition. For the first time in desktop computing history, processing power in

the magnitude of one teraflop is available. From a single GPU, AMD/ATI has managed to extract an astounding amount of computational power, but more surprising than that is the price.

With a relatively small die, a 55nm manufacturing process and incredible performance, the RV770 is a wonder GPU of sorts. Sporting DirectX 10.1 support and GPGPU capability, it represents the best of what GPUs have become in the last ten to eleven years since the 3D graphics boom in the PC market. As far as efficiency goes, the RV770 is arguably the most advanced ASIC available today in the PC market, depending on the matrix used.

With a 256-bit memory bus and a simpler memory accessing mechanism than the one that was present in the HD2900XT, one would have expected the RV770 to be less efficient than the 512-bit wide ring-bus memory mechanism in the R600, but this is not the case. Featuring GDDR5 memory, the RV770 achieves massive amounts of

bandwidth with relatively low latency access to memory. All this is done at an affordable price, as the graphics card retains a PCB very similar to that employed by the outgoing HD3800 series. At a spectacular 115GB/sec data rate, the GDDR5 operates at 3.6GHz (900MHz SDR), which is an incredible speed by any measure. Since the memory is GDDR5, however, these frequencies - and obviously the performance - are much cheaper to attain than if AMD/ATI had gone with a 512-bit bus and GDDR3, which

NAG HARDWARE

NAG DREAM MACHINE

SPECS

CORE	RV770 (700MHz)
PROCESS	990 million gates (55nm Low-K TSMC)
MEMORY	256-bit GDDR5 (3.6GHz)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	800 (160 x 5-way SIMD)
API SUPPORT	OpenGL 2.1, DirectX 10.1

SCORE

★★★★★

would have driven the cost of the PCB much higher.

One advantage of such high-speed data rates is that memory bandwidth-bound operations, such as antialiasing, are handled much more efficiently than a wider bus with memory at a lower frequency would be able to. The speed at which samples are accessed tends to be much more important than the number of samples that are fetched in one cycle. This is obvious when looking at the numbers on the HD4870, especially in high-resolution situations with a fair amount of antialiasing where the 4870 is sometimes able to outpace the competing GTX 280 (which not only has an impressive 141GB/sec memory bandwidth, but twice the render outputs as well). Despite the overall higher memory bandwidth of the GT200 GTX, the RV770 can sample data much quicker per cycle.

Combine the impressive data rates on the HD4870 with the numerous stream processors, and one ends up with a GPU that is often faster than the outgoing 3870X2, which is still a superb GPU. The synthetic results may be in the 3870X2's favour more often than not, but in-game performance speaks a different truth with the 4870 outpacing the 3870X2 in Crysis, Unreal Tournament III and other recent titles. The differences may not be anything to get overly excited about in the lower resolutions, but as the screen size scales, the 4870 shows its true power and dominates the 3870X2, sometimes outgunning everything that's on the market today. The performance is likely to increase as drivers get better, so numbers will most certainly have improved by the time you read this.

The impression that the 4870 left on us, while significant, was nothing compared to the sheer performance the two Sapphire HD4870s delivered in CrossFire. In this configuration, the graphics processing power was unmatched, delivering unbelievably high scores in the synthetic tests that came close to doubling 3870X2 numbers in some cases. 3DMark Vantage was one such test where the 4870s in CrossFire managed a staggering 14,422 in the GPU test score. To put this in context, the highest score we recorded prior to this on two 3870X2 cards in four-way CrossFire was 14,690. Granted, in a four-way CrossFire configuration, CPU limitation is more prevalent than it is in traditional CrossFire mode.

What is very interesting about the HD4870, apart from the price and the performance, is the latent capability in the card, which will hopefully be revealed over the coming months. NVIDIA's PhysX has been shown to work on the RV770 cards using modified drivers, and rumours suggest that AMD/ATI and NVIDIA are in talks about supporting PhysX on the AMD/ATI cards natively. This may be surprising to some, but completely justified, given that NVIDIA has been at loggerheads with Intel over the last few months, as Intel backs Havock over any other physics-acceleration technology. After the performance gains that GPU physics acceleration has shown to offer on NVIDIA parts, when this technology is eventually enabled in the AMD/ATI products, the 4870 will be even more impressive than it already is.

There's no denying that the 4870 is the GPU of 2008, as it's unlikely that something else in the coming months will manage to have the sort of impact the 4870 has had on the market. Given the relationship between Sapphire and AMD, if we were to buy an HD4870 graphics card, we would likely not look much further than the Sapphire HD4870. Considering that we were able to overclock both cards to 4.8GHz on the memory and 840MHz on each core, we're pretty certain about sample quality. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Similar PCB to HD3870.

Dual-slot cooler keeps the GTX 280 cool enough to allow for overclocks in the region of 100MHz.

XFX GEFORCE GTX 280

ONE THING IS CERTAIN about NVIDIA: the company seems to receive the title for 'largest die ever' more often than any other chip company. This time, NVIDIA has really done what seemed impossible even to us. NVIDIA has managed to pack an astonishing 1.4 billion gates into a single package to give us the GT200 (or NV60 if you still follow the old chip-naming conventions).

Even though the GPU is built on the smaller 65nm process compared to the 90nm G80, the GT200 is almost the same size, which is significant considering that the G92 had in the region of 80 million more gates than the G80 it replaced, but was less than half the size. So one may expect a very hot GPU given the reference operating frequency of 600MHz. However, this is not the case, as the GTX 280 runs cooler than the 8800GTX, which is less than half the size and has a lower operating frequency.

A number of changes have been made to the GT200, and the most obvious change is the doubling of almost every functional unit on the GPU itself. The GT200 has 240 stream processors, compared to previous GPUs' 128, 32 ROPs as opposed to 16, and a massive 512-bit bus (the 9800GTX had a 256-bit bus).

Does this mean twice the performance? Well, yes and no. In some instances, the GTX 280 is so powerful that it outpaces the 9800GX2, while in other situations the performance gain over the 9800GTX is 50%. This is likely due to drivers. Because of the sheer amount of raw power the card has, it is difficult to illustrate its performance advantage over previous-generation parts without resorting to just increasing antialiasing levels and resolution in games. While this is a valid way to test the power of any graphics card, it is limited because it cannot show, for instance, how the GTX 280, making use of hardware PhysX, differs in performance from a 9800GX2 using hardware PhysX as well.

This is an important feature in the new GPU, as it means that all games supporting PhysX will be accessible to the large number of GeForce users. To better understand the performance of the GTX 280, we loaded *Unreal Tournament III* and ran a time demo in the Tornado PhysX-enhanced map. To put maximum strain on the card, we set the resolution to 2,048 x 1,536 and the game was playable with frame rates above the 50fps mark. This is most certainly not the case with a 9800GX2 or a 9800GTX.

Only a handful of 30-inch LCD owners will game at such resolutions, but the experience helped us better understand that the GTX 280 has plenty of latent power that just needs the right driver, game and hardware configuration to come into its own.

In synthetic tests, the 9800GX2 still remains king, beating the GTX 280 at the standard settings, but excelling in the higher resolutions. Comparing the 9800GX2 to the new GTX 280, however, can never be an apple-with-apples comparison for
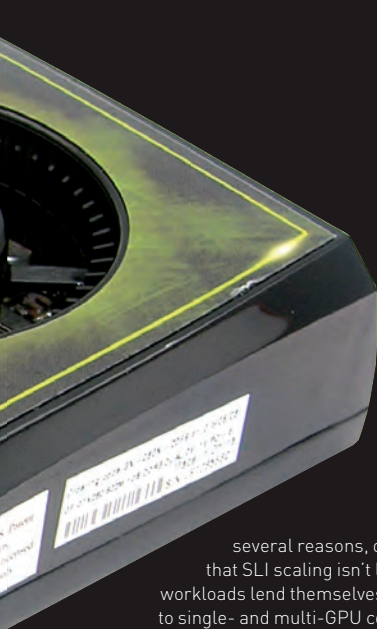
Same PCB size as the outgoing 9800GTX.

several reasons, one of which is that SLI scaling isn't linear. Different workloads lend themselves differently to single- and multi-GPU configurations. For the most part, however, the 9800GX2 and the GTX 280 are about equal in performance.

This may be disappointing considering the price of the GTX 280. However, it is worth keeping in mind that in some cases where SLI doesn't work, a 9800GX2 will have the performance of a single 8800GT – which is significantly slower than the GTX 280.

What makes the GTX 280 more attractive than the 9800GX2 form a performance point of view is that using water cooling or adding an aftermarket cooler is much easier and safer than attempting it with a 9800GX2. For the most part, it's cheaper too, as only a single water block is needed instead of two on the 9800GX2.

Over and above that, the GTX 280, when overclocked, manages to match and surpass the 9800GX2 quite comfortably. Breaking the 20K barrier in 3DMark06 with the 9800GX2 and a dual-core processor was far more difficult than with an overclocked GTX 280. We were able to keep the XFX unit at 700/1,500MHz and the memory at a fast 2.4GHz, which made the card faster than the best 9800GX2 we have ever tested - the XFX 9800 GX2 Black Edition.

The XFX GTX 280 is incredibly fast out of the box. In fact, we'd say that it's the fastest graphics card money can buy. That, however, isn't a new honour for NVIDIA or XFX. What is significant with the GTX 280 is that it's the only card that will offer 9800GX2 performance, but without the SLI, heat or scalability issues that come with using a multi-GPU graphics card.

Bundled with *Assassin's Creed*, like previous high-end XFX products, the GTX 280 is a good bundle. And if you're going to buy a GTX 280, the XFX GeForce GTX 280 would be a good place to start. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CORE	GT200 (600MHz/ 1,296MHz shaders)
PROCESS	1.4 billion gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY	512-bit, 1,024MB GDDR3 (1,105MHz)
ROPS	32
SHADERS	240

SCORE

★★★★☆

RRP: R3,999
Supplier: Computers Only
Brand: XFX

XFX GEFORCE 9800 GTX BLACK EDITION
Reference Clocks: 800; 1,836; 1,200MHz
Package: Assassin's Creed

RRP: R5,099
Supplier: ASUS
Website: za.asus.com
Brand: ASUS

ASUS EN9800GTX TOP
Reference Clocks: 820; 1,890 ; 1,224MHz
Package: N/A

THREE-WAY GEFORCE 9800GTX SHOOTOUT

WHILE WE WERE DOING this roundup, NVIDIA dropped the suggested retail price of the 9800GTX to $199 and introduced the 9800GTX+. They also introduced the GTX260 and the GTX280 at reduced prices. So to stay relevant, our focus for the three-way shootout had to change. Without a doubt, the 9800GTX cards are good cards. However, they need to be better than that because the graphics card market has changed tremendously over the last month or two.

It is no longer enough for each graphics card here to overclock to the 700MHz mark - they need to be able to match and exceed the 9800GTX+'s clocks. This may be asking a lot of a graphics card, but we could not ask for any less, because if any 9800GTX hopes to sell, it had

better be more than average. Fortunately, we received the ASUS TOP, the XFX Black Edition and an Inno3D card, which may not be pre-overclocked, but has shown itself to be more than capable of matching the other cards.

Therefore, this three-way shootout is going to be a little different. We didn't test the cards at their default clocks, but rather clocked all three of them to 9800GTX+ frequencies to see which one ended up being the fastest. Bleeding-edge performance is what these graphics cards were about just a few months ago, and they should remain so for a few more months, because SLI isn't an option for most of us, but overclocking is. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

TEST RIG
CPU: Intel Core 2 E8500 @ 4GHz
Motherboard: Biostar TPower I45
RAM: 2 x 1GB Corsair Dominator PC9136 DDR2
OS: Vista Home Premium SP1
Drivers: ForceWare 175.41 WHQL / NVIDIA PhysX 8.06.12

3DMARK VANTAGE
Base Score 7,264 | ASUS EN9800GTX TOP 7,956 | Inno3D 9800 GTX 7,824 | XFX 9800 GTX Black Edition 7,801

3DMARK06
Base Score 14,412 | ASUS EN9800GTX TOP 15,411 | Inno3D 9800 GTX 15,208 | XFX 9800 GTX Black Edition 15,288
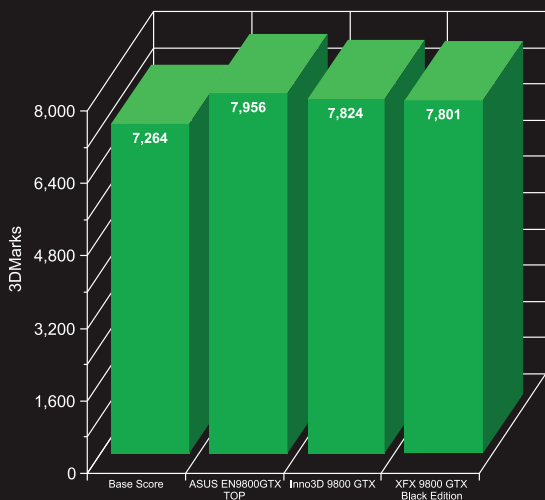
For 3DMark Vantage we used GPU-accelerated PhysX, which is the reason why the scores are a little inflated. However, PhysX acceleration is more than a gimmick, as some IHVs would have you believe. General processing on the GPU is here to stay, and the 3DMark Vantage CPU results are proof of that. Being the latest 3DMark version, it has had a mixed reception, but it seems as if most have settled with it (at least the ones who are using Vista). It is worth noting, though, that the different profiles in this benchmark have different workloads, so it's not always the case that a higher profile will yield a significantly lower score – it may even be higher. Because we are dealing with graphics cards that suddenly are in the midrange, we have elected to use the default Performance profile.
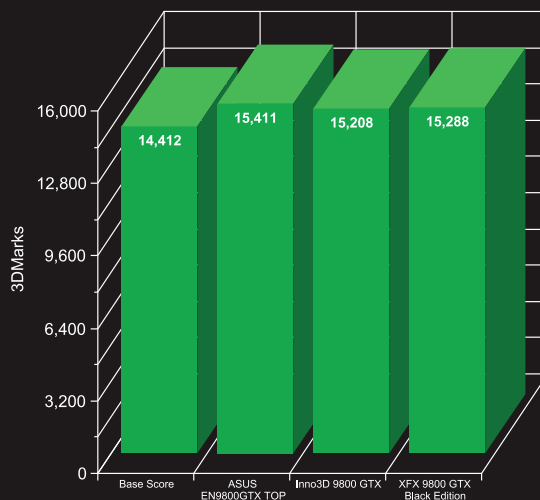
This benchmark is probably the last of the Futuremark products that is as close to a game as one is likely to find. While heavy criticism has been levelled at it for being quad-core biased, it's still a relevant benchmark, which is closer in game performance representation than 3DMark Vantage at this point. Despite supporting PhysX acceleration as well, the benchmark doesn't benefit from a PPU card or GPU PhysX, so we wonder if this benchmark really did have a physics test, or was it purely CPU threading in the two CPU tests. At any rate, the ASUS EN9800GTX TOP was clearly the winner here.

GEFORCE 9800 GTX

inno3D

RRP: R2,999
Supplier: The Prophecy Shop
Website: www.prophecy.co.za
Brand: Inno3D

INNO3D I-9800 GTX

Reference 800; 1,836;
Clocks: 1,215MHz
Package: *Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts*

★★★★★

3DMARK05
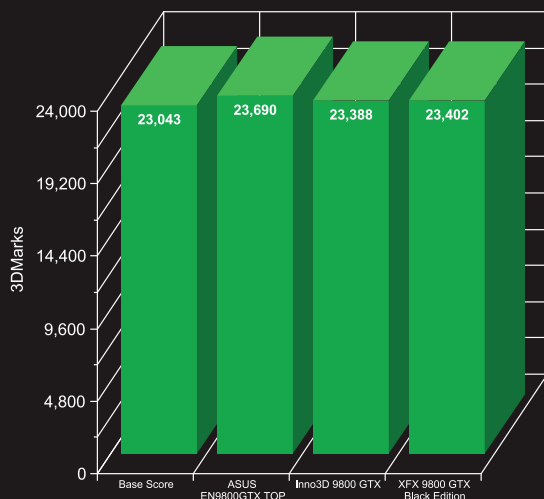
This is the oldest of the benchmarks and firmly rooted in DirectX 9 technologies. If anything, it represents the older games such as *F.E.A.R.*, *Prey* and the like. Scaling has more to do with CPU power than the cards themselves. It's still a worthwhile benchmark though, especially because it doesn't give preference to the quad cores, nor does it feature any PhysX acceleration. With that said, the ASUS EN9800GTX TOP came out on top once again.

CRYSIS
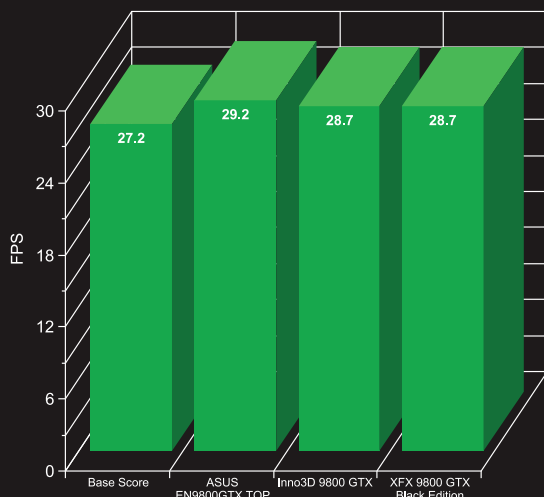
Crysis is still the best-looking and most strenuous game released on any platform, much like the original *Far Cry* in 2004. Any visual-enhancement feature you can think of that was available to use in DirectX 9.0c has been used and some of what is available in DirectX 10 as well. With GPU PhysX enabled, the game is a little smoother than it used to be. Because using GPU PhysX takes away rendering cycles, one would expect the game to be a little slower, but that's not the case. Antialiasing is still not an option on the high-end graphics cards of today at 1,600 x 1,200, and it is most certainly not an option at any reasonable resolution on the 9800GTX. The ASUS EN9800GTX TOP came out on top again for a clean sweep.

CONCLUSION:

There's no avoiding it, but the introduction of the 4800 series from AMD/ATI changed everything, and as a result, makes it even harder for the 9800GTX to find space in the market. It finds itself competing against a very capable HD4850, with no hope of matching the 4870. Things are tough at the Santa Clara offices we imagine, but NVIDIA seems to operate at their best when they are under pressure. If you want quick accesses to PhysX-enabled gaming, prefer NVIDIA, or already have a 9800GTX and looking for a cheap upgrade, the ASUS EN9800GTX TOP may be what you are looking for. It overclocks well enough and with some decent water-cooling could go even further.
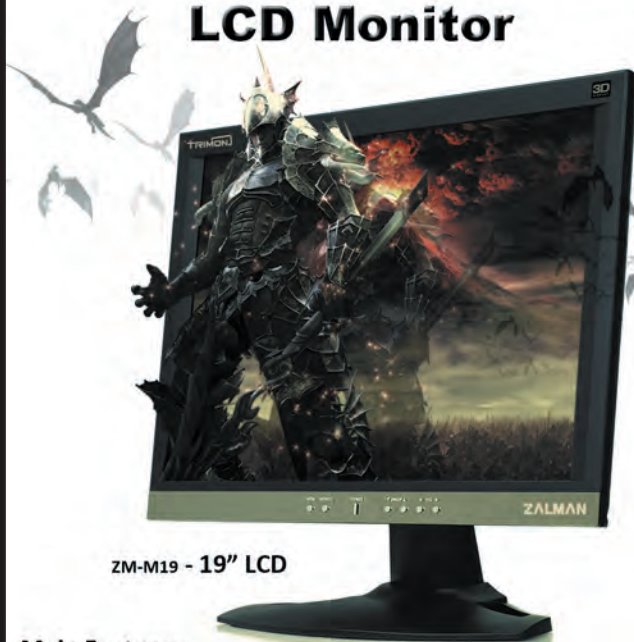
ECS GF8200A BLACK SERIES

MY LATEST VENTURE INTO the world of AMD after boycotting them for years appeared in the form of the ECS GF8200A, a small motherboard that really leaves you with mixed feelings. The reason for my boycott was simple: I'm an overclocker, a performance fanboy if you will, and of late (and by that I mean since Intel's release of the Core processors), AMD just hasn't been up to scratch.

It is for this reason that the ECS GF8200A had me fuming for many an hour. It just wouldn't give me the performance I wanted. If all you want from a board is overclocking, look at the pretty pictures and turn the page. However, if you want this little board to pleasantly surprise you like it did me, read on.

It's not every day you see a board this feature packed at this price. The ECS GF8200A is a piece of silicon on a mission. The ECS GF8200A sports an on-board GeForce 8200, and brings to the table 8-series technology such as Direct X 10 and shader model 4.0 - very impressive for an intergraded solution. The integrated graphics engine can also manage HDCP/HDMI at 1080p, decoding VC-1, H.264 (AVC), WMV, and MPEG-2 sources, and can power that new 42-inch HDTV you've just bought.

The board also has a hybrid SLI feature, where the on-board graphics processor can work together with a NVIDIA GPU, which will bask in the glory of a PCI-E 2.0 16x full speed lane. The hybrid SLI solution can adjust between an external graphics card and the on-board processor, saving you power when

you don't require maximum performance.

Did I mention the five SATA ports capable of RAID levels 0, 1, and 10? Or how about the absence of the dated floppy connector? It's gone, and we love it. The board holds its own in games. With a decent CPU and graphics card installed, you can't tell the difference between this and a much higher-end, and more expensive, motherboard.

The chipset, hidden under a rather good-looking, copper heat sink, remains cool to the touch even after hours of benchmarking, requiring no active cooling to remain stable, and therefore keeping noise to a minimum. The board even has built-in start and reset buttons - not needed but welcome nonetheless. It's as if the designers knew they had a budget, and used every last cent to create something out of nothing, creating a flawed masterpiece in the process. The board does what it claims to, and does it well. The GF8200A is responsive, and will undoubtedly attract gamers on a budget, as well as the home-entertainment obsessed.

Did I say the board is rubbish for overclocking? Well, that may not be entirely true. With a Phenom X3 8750 in place, the board managed to overclock to 3GHz - not bad for a Phenom processor. This gave us the third fastest X3 8750 in the world. Not bad for a board with overclocking options that would have the most noobish of overclockers tearing their hair out. When all is said and done, it's a decent motherboard that's worth far more than its retail price. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer
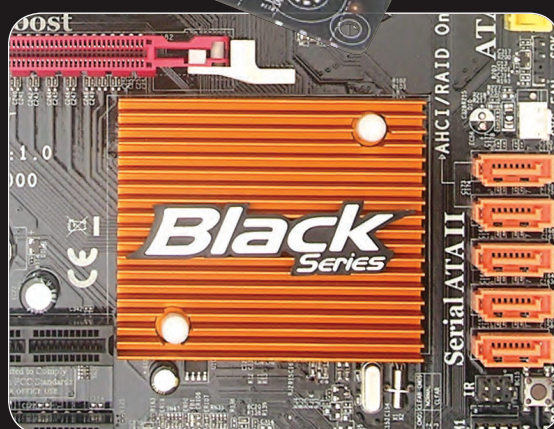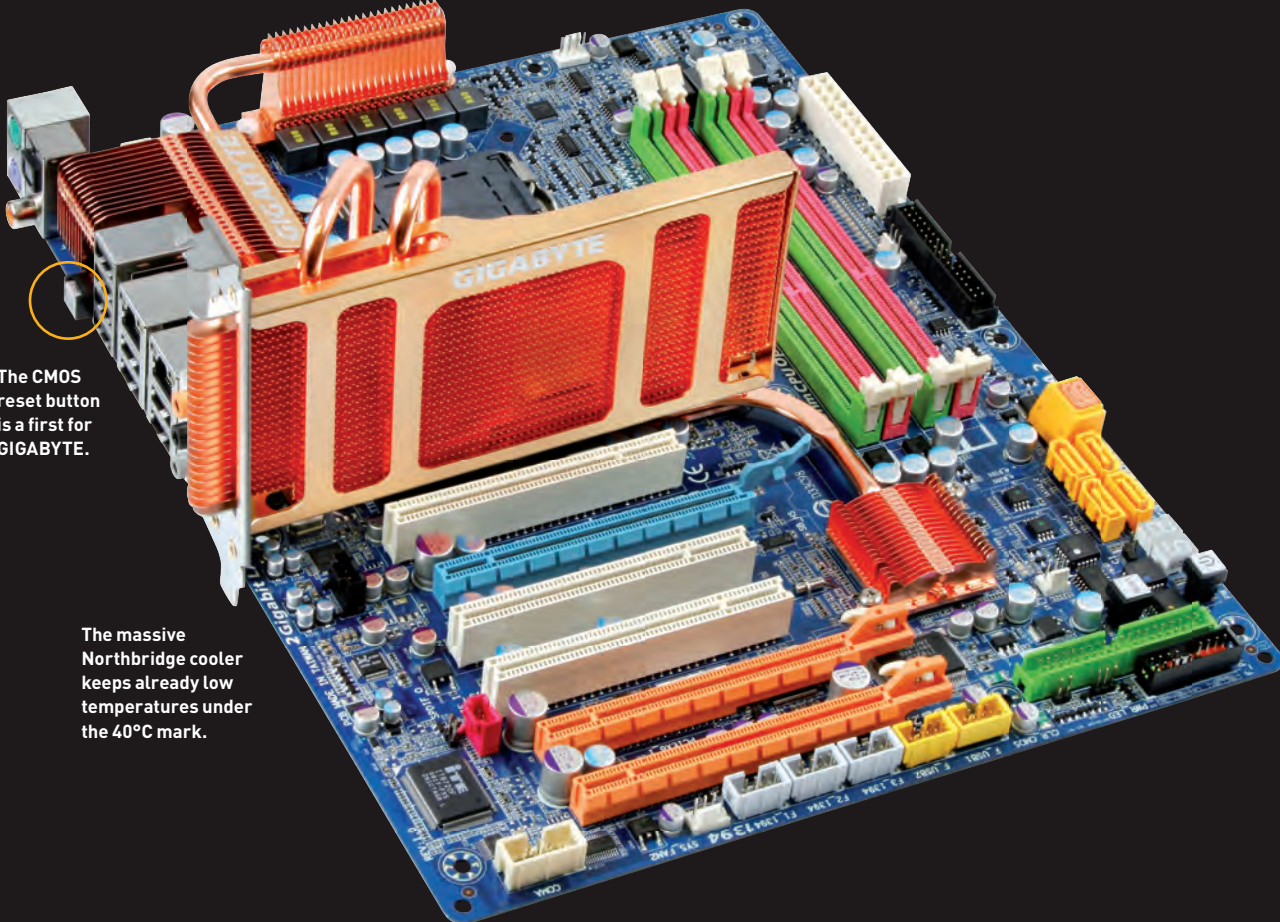
The large copper heat sink looks stylish and performs well.

SPECS

CHIPSET	GeForce 8200
MEMORY BANKS	4 x 240-pin DDR2 (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	AMD Phenom, Athlon 64 X2 Dual Core, Athlon 64, Sempron
SLOTS	1 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 3 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	5 x SATA 3Gb/sec, Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x eSATA

SCORE

108

The CMOS reset button is a first for GIGABYTE.

The massive Northbridge cooler keeps already low temperatures under the 40°C mark.

GIGABYTE GA-EP45-EXTREME

SINCE THE GIGABYTE P35-DQ6, GIGABYTE has been on a drive to get into the enthusiast market, much like a number of other manufacturers. As expected with every motherboard, there are improvements, but if we had to line up the P35-DQ6, X38-DQ6 and the X48T-DQ6 (which is currently our Dream Machine motherboard) next to each other, there wouldn't be much to separate them to the naked eye. Save for better power circuitry and the introduction of the DES (Dynamic Energy Saver) chip and lights, one would be inclined to believe that GIGABYTE hasn't been improving their motherboards at an incredible rate.

This would be untrue, however. For the first time with the P45-based motherboards, GIGABYTE has seen it fit for the board to physically reflect the changes that have been made in the BIOS. This is particularly evident in the EP45-EXTREME, which had the overclocking community abuzz.

If the size of the Northbridge cooler isn't an indication of who this motherboard is geared at, then the performance will most certainly make it known. The EXTREME series from GIGABYTE is more for the enthusiast than the gamer, who continues to be catered for with the DQ6 range. That doesn't mean that the EP45-EXTREME is not suitable for gaming - it just means that it'll be wasted sitting in a gaming rig operating at reference clocks.

It's built to be overclocked and everything about the motherboard seems to encourage you to push it to the limits. Two-phase power (instead of single phase on previous boards) to the RAM and the Northbridge help stabilise overclocks (and protect the RAM to some degree), while allowing insane frequencies. Motherboard-mounted power, reset and rear I/O panel CMOS-clear buttons make setting up this board for overclocking a simple process. Unlike before, one doesn't need to short the two pins next the CMOS battery: a simple push of the button clears the BIOS and allows you to start over again.

However, the magic is really in the BIOS and the chipset. Built on the 65nm P45 Northbridge and ICH10 Southbridge, the EP45-EXTREME runs cooler than any other motherboard based on previous chipsets from Intel, but overclocks much better. Because of the die shrink, the P45 would be quicker than an equivalent motherboard featuring the P35 chipset. This advantage is small, however, and only translates into split seconds in Super PI and a few hundred points in AquaMark3 and other sensitive benchmarks.

What seems to be common on P45 motherboards is the ability of the chipset to keep low-performance level settings at high motherboard speeds. On the GIGABYTE board in particular, we were able to maintain a PL8 setting at 550MHz, which proved very useful in edging out the P35 motherboards in 3DMark2001 SE and AquaMark3.

With all new chipsets, however, it means relearning the tweaks, and with the EP45-EXTREME, GIGABYTE has introduced a BIOS that can be daunting when first introduced to it. There are a number of new options, which all affect overclocking significantly. With all this control given to the end user, though, it means that even more spectacular overclocks can be achieved if care and time are taken when tweaking the system. There are more-detailed BIOS settings from other manufacturers, but there isn't anything significantly missing on the EP45-EXTREME, as we were able to run it at a stable 550MHz with an Intel Core 2 E8500. Higher FSB speeds were not possible because of Beta BIOS issues, but with a retail BIOS we are confident higher overclocks will be possible. The EP45-EXTREME is a great motherboard and shows GIGABYTE's unyielding commitment to the enthusiast market. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P45 + ICH10
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Quad, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 3 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 8 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, FireWire, 2 x eSata

SCORE

★★★★☆
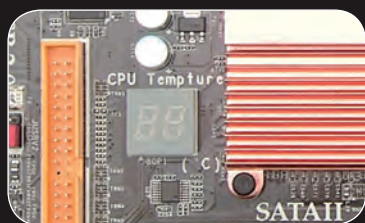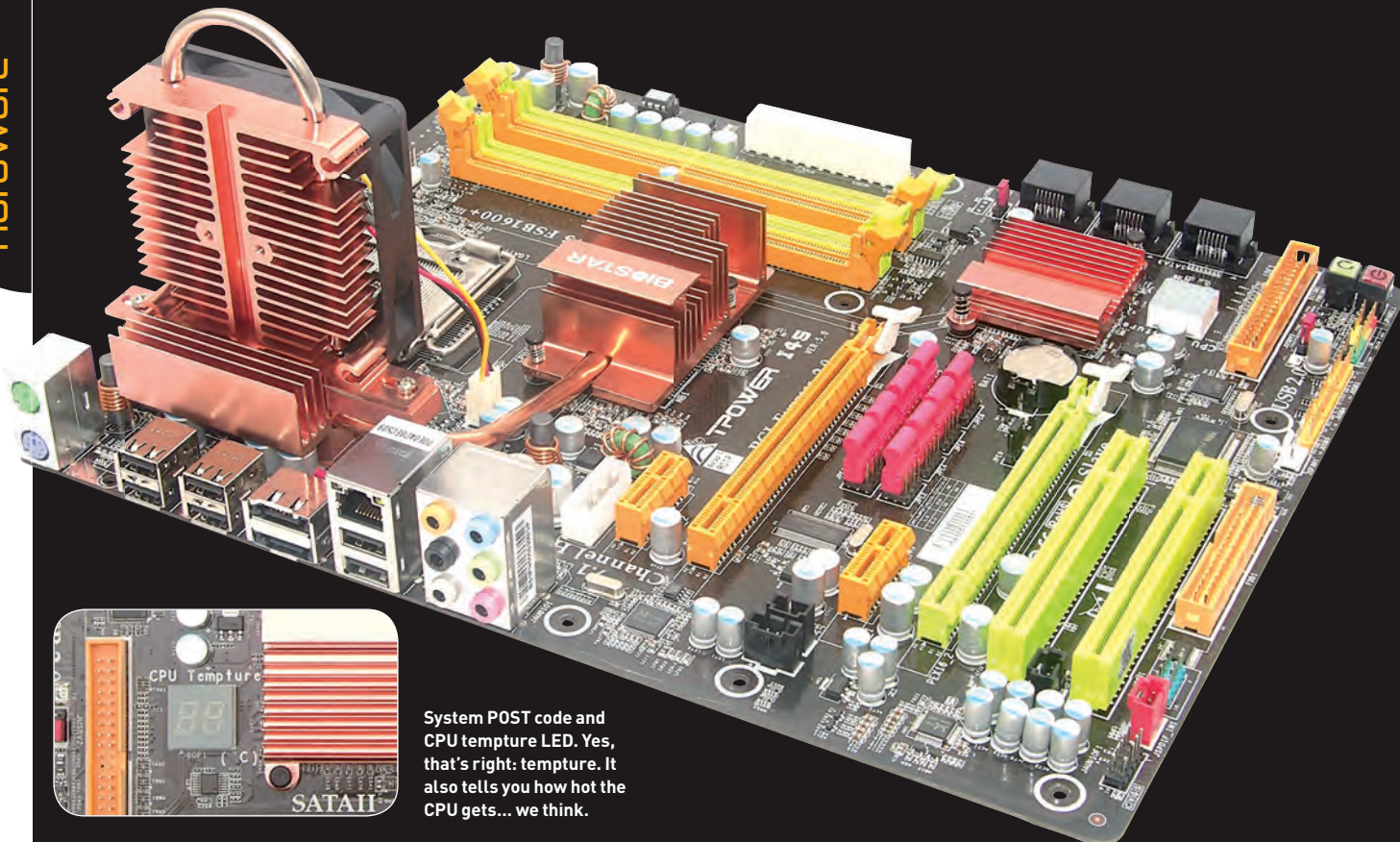
System POST code and CPU tempture LED. Yes, that's right: tempture. It also tells you how hot the CPU gets... we think.

BIOSTAR TPOWER I45

THE TPOWER I45 WAS one of the first P45 boards we received, so there was some excitement in putting it through its paces.

Before saying anything else, the I45 has one of the best BIOSes we have ever had the pleasure of working with. It has almost all the features you would expect from a high-end board costing up to twice the price. However, the board doesn't feel 'over-engineered' like so many other motherboards with many more options that most of the time don't lend themselves to better overclocking.

Since the I45 is based on the smaller 65nm P45 chipset and should run cooler and – in theory – faster than the 90nm-based P35 it replaces, we wasted no time in setting the motherboard speed to 500MHz, with the memory operating at 1,000MHz with a 6x multiplier, and restarted the system. The I45 booted into Windows with no qualms at all, but it was not stable enough for any 3DMark runs. This was quickly remedied, however, with an increase in the VTT (CPU-termination voltage), and with the new setting, we were able to boot into Windows all the way up to 580MHz. The maximum FSB we recorded with the Biostar board using air cooling was 605MHz, which was good enough for a CPU-Z validation screenshot.

While testing the I45, a new world record was set with the same board, scoring the highest recorded and validated FSB on any Intel platform with an incredible 724MHz using dry ice. Such frequencies are not stable enough for any 3DMark runs, but the results help to illustrate just how well made the I45 board is.

The BIOS is very easy to navigate, as all options are named in a conventional way and are where you would expect them to be. One marvellous feature, which is present on some boards but not this refined, is the saving of BIOS profiles. The I45 allows you to save ten profiles, but each profile can be described in up to 50 characters. Very useful, because you can name a profile exactly the way you want, describing the settings in more than just the CPU speed or FSB. This is something other manufacturers would do well to copy, as it really is useful.

The I45 features an LED that displays current CPU temperature as well as POST codes. While the POST codes are not new, CPU-temperature monitoring is not common at all.

Not all is perfect with the motherboard though. The CMOS-clear jumper is placed in an awkward position, which makes it impossible to reach without removing the graphics card if you use any of the larger cards such as the GTX280. This is not enough to detract from the greatness that is the I45. One other issue we had with the board is the manual CrossFire jumper switching. One needs to move a set of eight jumpers to enable the two PCI Express slots in 8x mode. Other than these two issues, there isn't anything to fault the Biostar motherboard on.

Seemingly out of nowhere, Biostar has produced a motherboard that has set the bar very high for other manufacturers that have motherboards costing nearly twice as much. If our experience with the I45 is anything to go by, the overclocking records are going to start falling to the Biostar TPower I45. Without a doubt, when it comes to FSB overclocking, the I45 is King. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Optional Northbridge cooler helps to keep the motherboard cool.
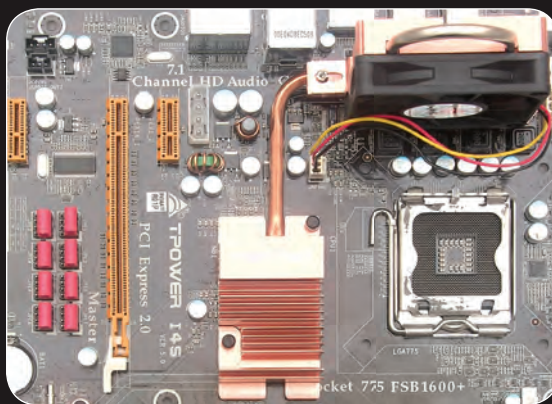
NAG HARDWARE

NAG DREAM MACHINE

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P45 + ICH10
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Quad, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 6 x USB 2.0, Gigabit Ethernet, 2 x eSATA

SCORE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DIVOOM IBASE-II

RRP→ R999 | **Supplier→** Comstar
Website→ www.comstar.co.za
Brand→ Divoom

NICE AND SHINY WITH imposing speakers, a built-in alarm clock, an AM/FM radio, support for all the latest-generation iPods, a 3.5mm audio-in jack for playing back music from non-Jobs-inspired MP3 players and a full remote control, Divoom's iBase-II will have many an aspiring living-room DJ sitting up and taking notice. We did.

Unpack it from its box, set it up, use one of the iPod dock converters to slip your iPod into the docking bay, power it up, press play on the remote and get the party started. Use the bundled remote to keep the room rocking to your favourite tunes, and you're in business. Just one thing: this isn't a premium, overpriced, pompous iPod speaker dock. It's a budget offering and is aimed at a totally different market. Not all of us can afford a Bose speaker dock – we spend our money on lap-dancing, sizzling components for our über gaming rigs after all.

This is undoubtedly the iBase-II's greatest selling point: its price. For only R999 you get what a R4,000 system will give you. However, don't expect too much. As we've said, the iBase-II is a budget dock and won't be seen in the living room of a mansion in Westcliff. It's a dock for the rest of us. We live in normal-sized dwellings and have relatively 'humble-sized' living rooms. The iBase-II suffers from one problem only: once you turn up the volume above 35, the audio is slightly distorted. It shouldn't be a problem though, as a volume of 35 is pretty loud and will suffice.

The iBase-II charges your iPod while it's docked in the docking bay. As an added bonus, you can take the iBase-II with you wherever you go, courtesy of a rechargeable battery with a ten-hour battery life. If you're looking for a very decent dock for your Pod and don't want to spend all your pocket money, the iBase-II delivers bang for your buck and is worth the investment. Trust us, we're always right. **NAG**

Nati de Jager

SPECS

TOTAL RMS POWER	12W
RESPONSE FREQUENCY	50Hz - 20kHz
THC	1%
INPUT SENSITIVITY	350Mv
DRIVERS	2 x 2-inch high-excursion drivers; 2 x 3-inch pressure drivers
BATTERY LIFE	10 hours

SCORE

★★★★☆

AMD PHENOM X4 9850 BLACK EDITION VS. INTEL CORE 2 DUO E8500

OVER THE LAST TWO months, we have tested many CPUs from Intel and AMD. This month, we wrap it all up by pitting the two winners of each shootout against each other: the AMD Phenom X4 9850 Black Edition and the Intel Core 2 Duo E8500. If you're thinking there could be a problem with pitting a quad core against a dual core, you would be right. However, it's worth noting that the Intel dual core, besides being clocked 663MHz higher and more importantly being faster than the Phenom per clock, costs only a little more than the Phenom. Given that very few games can take advantage of more than two cores, the Phenom will have a hard time keeping up with the E8500. Nevertheless, it's a very capable processor, and if any CPU from AMD has any chance of keeping up with the E8500, it'll be the 9850.

Indeed, there's an even higher-clocked Phenom, the 9950. However, this CPU was not available at the time of writing, and is unlikely to be available at your local computer retailer by the time you read this. With that said, the numbers represented here should be seen as a worst-case scenario for both the Intel and the AMD CPUs. This is simply because memory was not optimised on both systems. On the Intel machine, we made use of DDR3 at 800MHz running at 5-5-5-15 2T. We did this to even out the playing field, as the 9850 uses a half multiplier (12.5x) and is not capable of running memory at 1,066MHz, but 800MHz instead. Changing the multiplier to 13x will allow 1,066MHz memory operation, but then we'll have an overclocked AMD CPU against a standard Intel Core 2 processor. Such situations are ones that AMD system owners will have to deal with, but when the system is properly configured, sizeable performance gains can be seen in both synthetic and game performance.

For your reference, we have included all the previous graphs from both the AMD and the Intel CPU shootouts on the cover DVD, so that you can see how the CPUs scale against the others. We also changed the graphics card to the AMD/ATI HD4870, so that can account for some of the performance differences in the results even with the same CPU in the same tests.

TEST CONFIGURATION

AMD PHENOM X4 9850 BLACK EDITION
Motherboard: MSI K9N2 RD790 AM2+
Memory: 2 x 1GB Corsair Dominator DDR2 1,142MHz @ 5-5-5-15 2T (Ganged Mode)
OS: Windows Vista SP1
GPU Drivers: ATI Catalyst 8.6 WHQL

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E8500
Motherboard: GIGABYTE EP45T-EXTREME
Memory: 2 x 1GB OCZ Titanium DDR3 1,800MHz @ 5-5-5-15 2T (Dual Channel)
OS: Windows Vista SP1
GPU Drivers: ATI Catalyst 8.6 WHQL
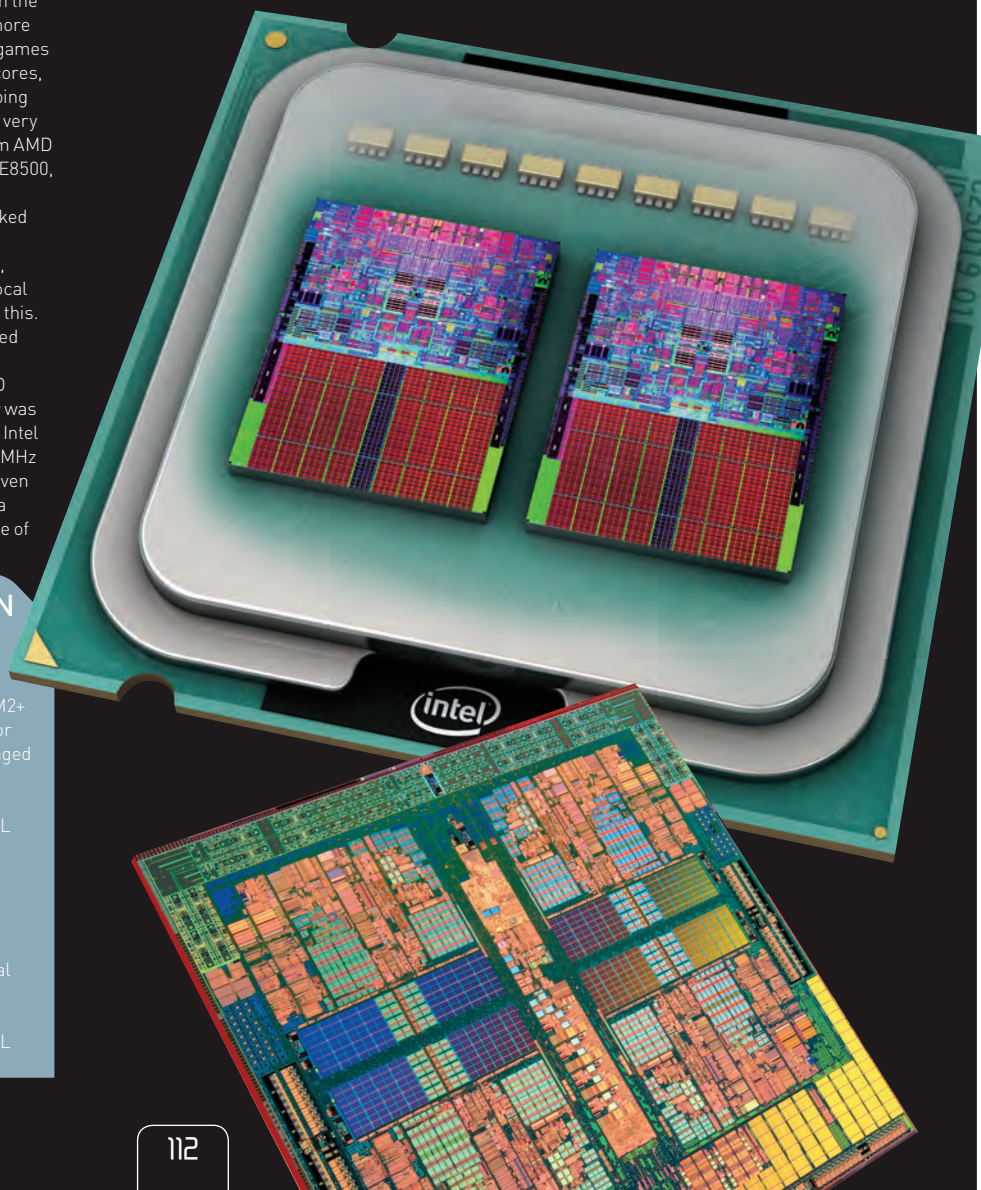
3DMARK VANTAGE

The latest of the Futuremark benchmarks is proving to be quite a unique benchmark and happens to be growing in popularity in the enthusiast market, despite the negative reception it received when it was introduced. Besides the fact that it's relatively short (only four tests), it introduced a physics element that has been missing in all the previous benchmarks. Much like 3DMark06, it does favour quad-core CPUs to a degree, but the CPU score in Vantage is easier to isolate than it is in 3DMark06. In this benchmark, while the AMD Phenom achieved a higher overall score, the GPU test scores were higher on the E8500. The Phenom proved that it's capable and took the lead to comfortably win the 3DMark Vantage test, besting the
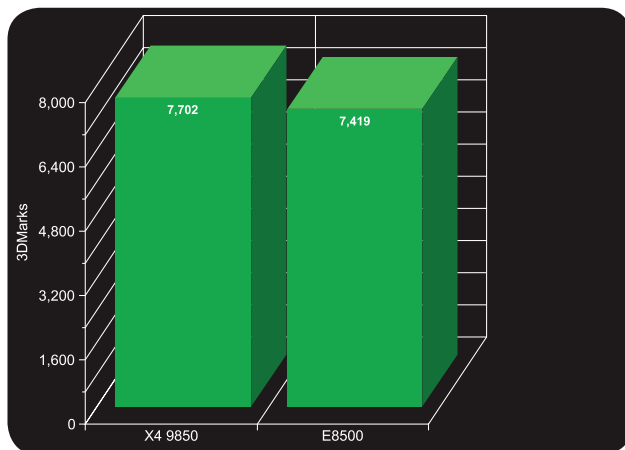
CRYSIS 1.2

Crysis is supposed to be able to take advantage of quad-core CPUs, but so far proved to be governed by CPU operating frequency in the very few situations it wasn't GPU bound. As the most demanding game ever (not because of code inefficiency, but visual fidelity), the game leans heavily on the GPU, but will benefit slightly from a capable CPU, which in this case proved to be the E8500. Even if it was by a narrow margin, the game preferred the large cache and higher operating frequency. A 12.76% lead by the E8500 in real life only translates to a 4fps advantage. Still, it was a win for the E8500, which was repeatable and only likely to increase with a more powerful GPU configuration. If the in-game resolution was increased, the numbers would even out, but the game would become unplayable. This was therefore a win for the Intel E8500.
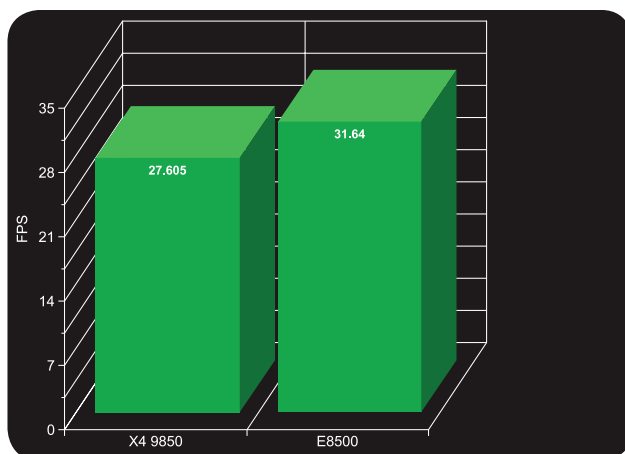
3DMARK06

3DMark06, despite having a bias towards quad-core processors, lean heavily on CPU efficiency and operating frequency, as they are not entirely GPU bound on the 4870 we used. The CPU score was significantly higher on the Phenom, but the benchmark favoured the E8500 with not only higher GPU test scores, but it resulted in the E8500 scoring more than 1,000 points higher than the quad-core 9850. The E8500 was an impressive 11.49% faster.

3DMarks

	X4 9850	E8500
	12,598	14,234
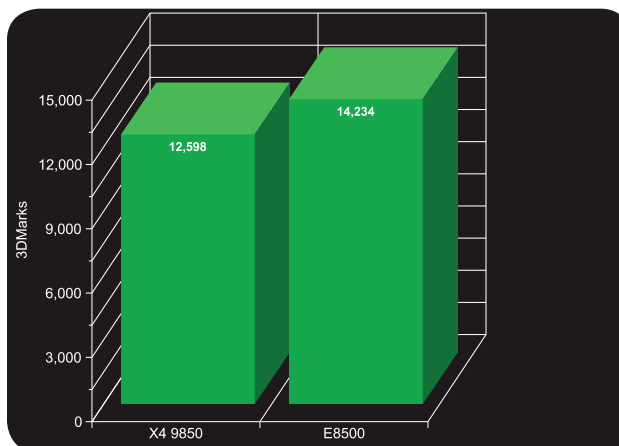
UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

Built on the brilliant UE3 engine, *Unreal Tournament III* may not support antialiasing, but because it uses low-frequency textures, aliasing is never much of a problem and it's hard to notice the staircase effect at the edge of models or the scenery. The engine is truly something to marvel at, not only because of the visuals and versatility, but also the speed at which everything is rendered. In this test, the quad-core 9850 snatched victory by almost 7fps. This game obviously responds well to multiple cores and despite the severe clock speed differences between the two CPUs, the Phenom took the win.

FPS

	X4 9850	E8500
	94.25	87.26
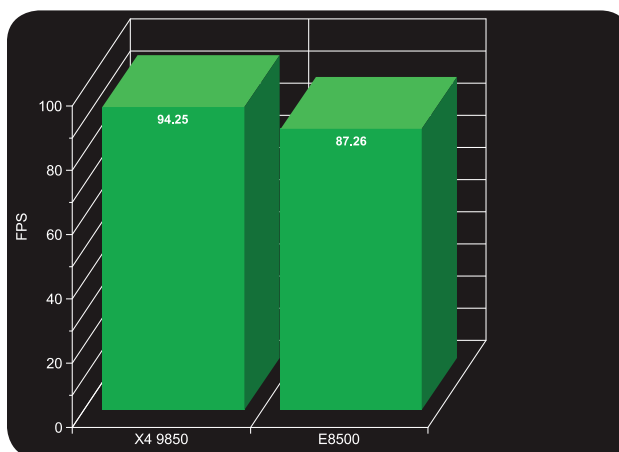
F.E.A.R.

The last game in the test is fairly old, but shows CPU differences quite well, provided that the GPU isn't the bottleneck. In this case, the results were much closer than in any other test, with the E8500 taking the honours. The CPU managed to edge out the 9850 by 5.7%, which translates to 7fps. Because the frame rates are so high, there won't be a difference in gameplay between these two CPUs, as is the case in all the other game tests.

FPS

	X4 9850	E8500
	116	123
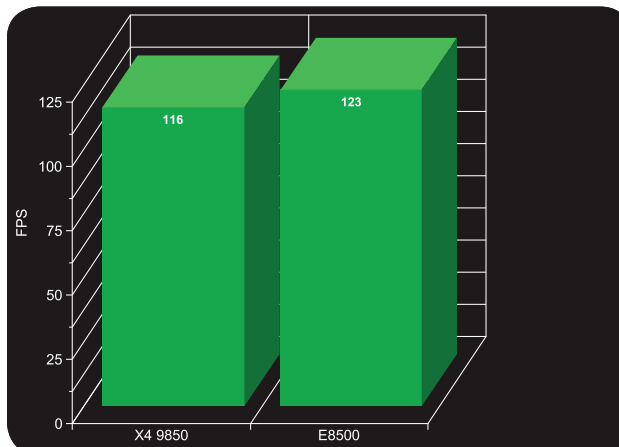
CONCLUSION

AMD

There's no doubt that the tests were much closer than we thought they would be, which is interesting because the Phenom X4 9850 is the cheaper CPU. As affordable as it is, it would not be wise for someone on an Intel 775 platform and a recent chipset to move to an AMD platform. If you have an AM2+ platform powered by the 780a, GF8200 or R780/790 chipset and need an upgrade, the Phenom X4 9850 is the CPU for you. It clocks well enough and we were able to stabilise the CPU at 3GHz. At this speed, it delivered results better than both the E8500 and obviously the 9850 at their default clocks. This CPU is without a doubt the AMD CPU to have.

INTEL

The E8500 is a fantastic CPU that not only delivers great performance, but is affordable and overclocks like a demon, reaching 4GHz quite easily with cheap aftermarket cooling and sometimes the reference cooler. At the overclocked speeds, it has devastating performance crushing the more expensive Extreme Edition CPUs in every single game and only losing out in 3DMark Vantage. If you are using any of the older 65nm-based Core 2 CPUs and want an upgrade that won't break the bank, but offers instant performance gains, the E8500 is the CPU for you. The E8500 is the best value-for-money CPU on the Intel platform for gamers and enthusiasts alike.   **NAG**

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MAKING HAPPY TIMES IN America!

THE *NAG* GUIDE TO LIVING IT UP IN LIBERTY CITY: PART 2

STYLIN , GANGSTA

Not impressing your women with your shabby threads and bombed-out pimpmobile? Just like real life, every woman you date has her own idea of how you should dress, what you should drive, and where you should take her. And just like real life, she expects you to know what these are without her telling you. Crib this:

MICHELLE

Clothing: Those rubbish clothes from that Russian store in Broker, hats and glasses.
Drive: She's not especially fussy, but don't turn up in a police cruiser or truck.
Go: Any diner, Burger Shot, Cluckin' Bell, bowling or darts. She's totally not into strip clubs, however. What a rotten spoilsport.

KATE MCREARY

Clothing: Anything from Modo and swanky shoes. Burn your Russian duds, and don't turn up in a suit.
Drive: Any middle-class sedan or SUV.
Go: Pool, darts, Lucky Winkles, or the Steinway Beer Garden. Don't take her to Perestroika or Split Sides, and she hates bowling.

ALEX CHILTON ("LIBERATED WOMAN" ON CRAPLIST.NET)

Clothing: It's Perseus's finest or bust, sweetheart.
Drive: Expensive sports cars.
Go: She's pretty much happy to go anywhere, although she's especially partial to bowling, darts, pool, and (yes!) strip clubs.

CARMEN ORTIZ ("SOBOHOE" ON LOVE-MEET.NET)

Clothing: Anything from Modo or Perseus, but don't wear the same outfit twice.

Drive: Something flashy.
Go: Take her to any bar, strip club, the Steinway Beer Garden, Comrades, or Club Liberty.

KIKI JENKINS ("LAWCHICK" ON LOVE-MEET.NET)

Clothing: She's also into that trashy Eastern Bloc look, although she won't hate you for wearing something smart from Modo or Perseus. Just don't wear shades.
Drive: Any luxury sedan. Don't rock up in a sports car.
Go: She's into bowling, darts and pool, and will enjoy a show at Perestroika or Split Sides.

HOW TO GET AHEAD IN LIBERTY CITY

NEVER GIVE UP. NEVER SURRENDER!

Oh, it's all gone horribly awry. The car's a burnt-out wreck with no wheels, and the riot trucks are closing in. The game's up, gangster, but *NAG* emphatically recommends that you go down in a blaze of gun-slinging glory anyway. If you're arrested, you'll be rudely divested of that awesome arsenal you've been accumulating over the last 30 hours of gaming. Dying, on the other hand, simply penalises you with an insignificant percentage of your available cash – and probably less than the cost of a hand grenade.

BUT IT'S AN EMERGENCY, OFFICER

You can dial 911 on your phone at any time, and have a police car, ambulance, or fire truck promptly dispatched to your location. It's easy enough to snatch an ambulance or fire truck from its driver, but you'll probably want to wait until the cops vacate the squad car before hijacking it. Driving with your sirens wailing in any of these vehicles will exempt you from paying those pesky $5 bridge tolls, while the fire truck's hose can be used to clean up the streets. And by "clean up the streets" we mean, "knock people down for your amusement."

THE FINE ART OF SNUBBING

Yes, the social thing is fun at first. Then it gets to be a bit of a drag. Then it gets immensely annoying. Then you want to stab Roman in the eye when he calls you in the middle of your hike across the Statue of Happiness's face and wants to play darts on the other side of the world. Then he has the bad grace to knock hard-won points off your friendship score because you tell him you're busy. So tell him you'd love to haul yourself across the entire map within the next 60 minutes to collect his lazy arse. Then call him up and cancel your plans. He'll be totally cool about it, and your friendship score won't suffer a single docked point.

TOP OF THE CLASS

Want to nab the prestigious 100% completion rating, and the Key to the City Xbox Achievement? Here's your checklist:

60% - complete the main story missions.
10% - complete each social activity at least once, and unlock all friend special abilities.
5% - complete all possible random character missions.
5% - win each mini-game at least once, including pool, darts, bowling and QUB3D.
2.5% - complete all 30 Most Wanted missions, accessed via the police computer.
2.5% - complete 20 Current Crimes missions, also accessed via the police computer.
2.5% - complete all 50 Unique Stunt Jumps.
2% - complete the ten package delivery missions for Little Jacob.
2% - complete the ten Exotic Imports e-mail missions for Brucie.
2% - complete all 30 car-theft, text-message missions for Stevie.
2% - complete all nine assassination missions, accessed via payphone in Alderney.
2% - complete all nine street races with Brucie.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

It becomes tedious, but hanging out with several of the game's characters is ultimately very much to your advantage. Once you've reached a friendship score of 75 or higher with the following low-life scumbags, you'll reap the benefits of underworld prestige and – more importantly – exploitable resources.

ROMAN

You'll be able to call him up and have him dispatch a taxi to your location. Free rides! You can hassle him pretty much around the clock.

LITTLE JACOB

Probably the most useful pal in the game, Little Jacob will drive over and sell you weapons and gear at significantly reduced rates to those charged by the city's gun shops. He's only available from 2pm until about 4am, however, so plan your mall shooting sprees accordingly.

BRUCIE KIBBUTZ

Available throughout the day, Brucie will collect you in his private chopper and cart you off to any wide-open space in the city.

DWAYNE FORGE

The former jailbird still keeps some shady company, and he'll send his boys over to back you up. He's around from noon until around one or 2am.

PATRICK "PACKIE" MCREARY

This Irish mobster will plant car bombs on target vehicles for you. Now that's a real friend. You can summon him any time after four in the afternoon and until dawn. **NAG**

ESCAPE FROM TERMINAL ISLAND

RETRO REMAKES, YOU EITHER love them or you hate them. Some may argue that remaking a classic '70s film like *Death Race 2000* is a poor idea. They claim that it should be content with its small cult following and left untouched. Others argue that the world needs more cool movies about cars smashing into each other, gun barrels spinning and rugged convicts who will do anything for freedom. While I can't quite decide which side of the fence I'll be taking, I can say one thing for certain: *Death Race* looks like it oozes cool.

The film's story focuses on a gritty, nasty, blood-smeared-on-the-wall prison set in future America, where inmates are selectively given an opportunity to race for their freedom. New fish Jensen Aimes (played by everyone's second-favourite British tough guy, Jason Statham), former NASCAR champion and convicted wife murderer, is having a hard time fitting in with the cool crowd at Terminal Island penitentiary. Aimes is coerced by the prison warden (Joan Allen) into entering the Death Race: a brutal, yet exceedingly-popular (and publically televised) race with only ever one

winner – the car that actually manages to cross the finish line more-or-less intact. Teaming up with navigator Case (Nathalie Martinez), Aimes must race to clear his name, or die trying.

Contenders are handed their souped-up muscle cars, which are fitted with slapped-together steel plating, roll bars, big, fat tyres and of course, lots of firepower. Using anything from smoke bombs to twin mini-guns, these vehicles hurtle through the raceway at blistering speeds, guns blazing at the other racers. So, what is the point of all this mayhem? The winner of this three-day gauntlet gets to walk out the front door, no questions asked – a prize any inmate would be crazy to pass up.

While *Death Race* isn't a direct remake of the original *Death Race 2000* in the strictest sense (the original featured contenders battling their way across Middle America, from East Coast to West), writer and director Paul W.S. Anderson makes sure to pay homage where it is due. A few key characters make a spiritual return. Machine-Gun Joe (Tyrese Gibson,

recently seen in *Transformers*) is back and he's nastier than ever, and Aimes is often referred to as Frankenstein. The original Frankenstein was played by *Kill Bill*'s David Carradine, who sadly won't be making an appearance this time round.

No stranger to liberating licensed material, Paul W.S. Anderson has been credited with a host of movies you've definitely seen: *Event Horizon*, the *Resident Evil* films (although he only produced and wrote after the first film), *Alien vs. Predator* and the first *Mortal Kombat*. He's also the producer on the upcoming *Castlevania* film adaptation.

If you've ever played and enjoyed *Death Rally*, *Quarantine* or *Carmageddon*, chances are that Death Race will appeal to you. Just make sure you wear your not-too-serious hat. It's set to be action packed from beginning to end, dark and grungy for the cyberpunk fans, and likely won't pull too many punches. *Death Race 2000* received an 18+ rating in 1975, so expect more than occasional violence in this spine-crunching remake.

MOVIE NEWS

Don't talk to Strangers

YET ANOTHER REMAKE, *THE* Day the Earth Stood Still promises to closely hug the storyline of the original '50s sci-fi classic. The original film followed the story of Klaatu, an alien who visits Earth on a peace-keeping mission, together with robotic sidekick, Gort. Landing in the US, however, wasn't such a good idea, as the two are soon fired upon and taken into custody for studying. Although the film was sci-fi in its purest form, it delved into interesting comments on xenophobia, war and humanity's obsession with both. Expect this modern remake to take additional cues from the short story on which the first film was based, which could result in some rather interesting plot twists. Keanu Reeves will (rather aptly) take the centre stage as Klaatu, with Jennifer Connelly and Jaden Smith as Helen and Jacob, the mother and son duo that actually bothers to pay attention to Klaatu's mission of galactic importance. The role of Gort has not been cast, and will likely be CG.

Oh James, do grow up

BRITISH STUD MUFFIN, DANIEL Craig, is back in action for the 22nd James Bond film, *Quantum of Solace.* While it got off to a bit of a tumultuous start - pushing the projected release date from May to October/November - Director Marc Forster is confident that this film will take Bond fans on a journey more interesting than they've ever experienced in the past. While bucket loads of gadgets and fast cars will certainly feature strongly in this iteration of the series, expect a boost in maturity this time round, Foster claims that, "The only interesting trip remains the journey inwards, deep in to the psyche." Sounds like a brave move, but as long as the action is hot and the pace stays firmly in the forward direction, it looks set to be another decent Bond flick.

Sherlock Holmes

GUY RITCHIE, THE DIRECTOR behind *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and its semi-sequel, *Snatch*, is jumping on the use-someone-else's-IP bandwagon with his take on the life and times of bad-boy detective, Sherlock Holmes. Bad boy, is that right? You bet it is. Ritchie's angle with this film is set to uncover the lesser-known drug addiction of the master detective, as was originally written by Sir Author Conan Doyle. It has been reported that the director has approached so-hot-right-now Robert Downey Jr., who, after his excellent take on alcoholic Tony Stark (made somewhat kiddie friendly in *Ironman*), will fit this role like a warm latex glove.

THE BUCKET LIST

Director: Rob Reiner
Cast: Jack Nicholson, Morgan Freeman, Sean Hayes, Rob Morrow
Genre: Drama
Age restriction: 13 (PG)
Run time: 93 minutes
Score: ★★★♩

MORGAN FREEMAN AND JACK Nicholson. Now that's quite the cast! The two perform the roles of an intellectual mechanic and an eccentric billionaire tycoon respectively, who have been diagnosed with terminal cancer. They meet in a hospital, and decide to put together a list of things they want to have done before they "kick the bucket." The subject matter is rather bleak, but there are some very funny moments and the dialogue is often sharp and darkly witty. The character portrayals, of course, given the actors performing them, are highly believable. Some will describe this movie as some sort of "uplifting message of hope," while others may find it a poignant reminder of our mortality. Ultimately, it deals with the characters giving meaning to their lives, and finding redemption. It is emotionally laden, and at times quite dreary, yet nevertheless I found myself enjoying it, perhaps thanks to the frequent moments of dark irony. This film is not gender specific, so it is neither a chick-flick nor specifically for the boys. The DVD offers no special features, but this is understandable, as this movie's nature doesn't lend itself to a making-of analysis. There are no special effects, and the story tells itself through its characters.

Alex Jelagin
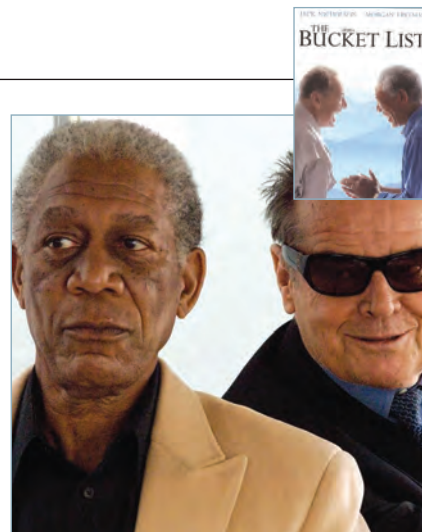
ATONEMENT

Director: Joe Wright
Cast: James McAvoy, Keira Knightley, Romola Garai, Saoirse Ronan, Vanessa Redgrave
Genre: Drama
Age Restriction: 13 (LSV)
Run time: 118 minutes
Score: ★

FROM THE MOMENT *ATONEMENT* was placed on my desk, there was no way this movie was going to get a fair review. I'm a gamer, I get my kicks cussing and screaming at my screen as I haphazardly run around killing people on the *COD4* servers. So when this movie 'booby prize' of the month was given to me for review... Well, you get the point.

Based on the novel by Ian McEwan, *Atonement* is a drama that predominantly takes place in England in the years leading up to and following World War II. The blossoming love between Robbie Turner and Cecilia Tallis is abruptly cut short by a series of "catastrophic misunderstandings," all brought on by a ten-year-old with a penchant for writing and an apparent preference for older gents. I found the movie incredibly dull, but in all fairness, your typical movie buff/artsy type/non-gamer/parent will enjoy the film. The acting is great and there's even a scene featuring a semi-nude Keira Knightley. I can't recommend this to the average gamer, but drama lovers will enjoy it. The movie does have very high production values, so the score I've given it can be blamed solely on my savage gamer mentality.

Special features include commentary by director Joe Wright, a making-of, a 'novel-to-the-screen' feature and a few deleted scenes.

Dane Remendes

LIONS FOR LAMBS

Director: Robert Redford
Cast: Tom Cruise, Meryl Streep, Robert Redford, Michael Pena, Derek Luke
Genre: Drama
Age restriction: 13 (VL)
Run time: 87 minutes
Score: ★★★★

THIS IS NEW FOR me: being given two good films to review in one month. I wonder what's up with the editor. Maybe he feels sorry for me. *Lions for Lambs* tells the tale of two ambitious students who decide to join the army and go to fight in Afghanistan. As plots go, they get lost behind enemy lines and the focus shifts to Washington D.C. Jump onboard for a slippery GOP Senator's double speak, half-truths and propaganda, and a journalist with honest intentions who recognises her organization's complicity in selling the war leading to the death of thousands of Americans in America's two unpopular and unlawful wars.

The plot is excellent, the casting spot on, and the directing above par. Watch this to see just how unpopular the 'War against Terror' is in the US, the cost of the war, how the leaders of the US sweet-talk their way out of criticism against the war and everything else we already know and expect. *Lions for Lambs* comes highly recommended. Our editor's really getting soft.

Nati de Jager

DIE HARD 4.0

Director: Len Wiseman
Cast: Bruce Willis, Justin Long, Maggie Q, Timothy Olyphant, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Jonathan Sadowski
Genre: Action Thriller
Age restriction: 13 (LV)
Run time: 123 minutes
Score: ★★★★

AS ONE OF OUR favourite movies of 2007, we jumped at the chance to get the Blu-ray version. We already reviewed the movie plot and marvelled at how Bruce Willis took out a chopper with a cop car, but if you missed that, here is the crux: *Die Hard 4.0* does the series proud by raising the action a few notches compared to the previous *Die Hard* movies. It's still true to its roots and it will keep fans of the franchise happy,

but it will also appeal to action fans of all ages. This time, John McClane has to save to world from a group of terrorist hackers who are trying to bring the US to its knees. As luck would have it, McClane gets involved when he has to deliver one of suspects in the attack to Washington. As clichéd as this sounds, this movie is a roller-coaster action ride and it will be best enjoyed on a large-screen TV with monster surround sound. Besides the improved picture quality and enhanced audio, this movie also has a handful of special features not available on the DVD version of this movie.

Regardt van der Berg

AVP 2

Director: The Brothers Strause
Cast: Steven Pasquale, Reiko Aylesworth, John Ortiz, Johnny Lewis, Ariel Glade
Genre: Sci-Fi Horror
Age restriction: 16 (LV)
Run time: 96 minutes
Score: ★★

DETERMINED TO DRAW EVERY last breath from the movie series and the games, directors Colin and Greg Strause (the visual-effects designers behind hits such as the recent *Incredible Hulk, X-Men: Last Stand* and *Fantastic 4*) seem determined to put as much stuffing into this long-dead bird as possible. The result: plenty of fairly decent stuffing, nowhere near enough turkey. Then again, that's a fairly likely outcome when you give two visual-effects artists loads of money and free reign over a licence as big as this.

The premise behind this film is simple: do what has been done before, just more. Take the Predator landing on Earth from the first *Predator* film, and put aliens on board. Instead of the Predator in question hunting humans, use aliens. Instead of one shoulder-mounted cannon, use two. When the stuffing starts to run out, add liberal amounts of water until you have the desired film length. It's not to say that *AVP 2* is a bad action film, but it's a rather poor sci-fi thriller and/or horror, which brings us to the fact that *AVP 2* is not for fans of either original movie series. However, if you enjoyed the games and don't take your action movies too seriously, you might just get some real pleasure out of this film.

The team behind the camera has done a good, albeit clichéd job. It's clearly evident there was plenty of money spent on post-production. Viewers will get many opportunities to see through the eyes of the Predator and the marines – once again, much more often than before. The action scenes are nicely performed, with a pace that struggles to keep the whole movie on its toes, but does manage to pull it off. Those in front of the camera perform their acting duties reasonably, but their characters really are present just to carry the action. And despite them having their own little back-stories, I couldn't help but wonder when each would be impaled by a hulking, dribbling alien (which, you'll be pleased to know, happens fairly early into the movie).

I wish I could say more about this film, but there really isn't much content to discuss. I found it to be more enjoyable than *Alien vs. Predator*, but that isn't exactly difficult to achieve. The DVD has a single bonus feature: a chunk of extended footage from an existing scene that did practically nothing for the film. I wouldn't have preferred an interview or two, since the directors are well-known and established professionals.

Geoff Burrows

CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR

Directors: Mike Nichols
Cast: Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams, Bed Beatty
Genre: Historical Dramatisation
Age Restriction: 13 (LN)
Run time: 97 minutes
Score: ★★★♪

WHEN A MOVIE STARTS with a huge US flag or analogue thereof, I am immediately put off. And so it was with this one. However, my opinion quickly started to change as I watched. The film is based on the story of Charlie Wilson, a US congressman during the time of the war in Afghanistan, at the height of the Cold War. The mujahidin, the Muslim freedom fighters who were opposing the Soviet army, were equipped with antiquated weapons, and the Soviets' Mi-24 "Hind" attack helicopters were too heavily armoured for the Afghans to have any effect on them. Charlie Wilson (played by Tom Hanks), largely at the prompting of influential socialite, Joanne Herring (Julia Roberts), undertakes to get the Afghans properly equipped. The trick, however, is to do so without appearing to do so, least the Cold War escalates into a full-blown conflict between the two superpowers. Charlie Wilson is portrayed as being a "man of many character flaws" (let's just say that Christians would likely assume that a well-heated afterlife awaits him, given his partying and womanising), but one who keeps his word. The dialogue is sharp, with many a hilarious, yet perfectly appropriate, one-liner or rejoinder.

The package is rounded off by 'making-of' footage, as well as interviews with actors, the director and the real Charlie Wilson.

Alex Jelagin

NATIONAL TREASURE 2: BOOK OF SECRETS

Director: Jon Turteltaub
Cast: Nicholas Cage, Jon Voight, Harvey Keitel, Ed Harris, Helen Mirren
Genre: Action Adventure
Age restriction: PG (V)
Run time: 120 minutes
Score: ★★

THE FIRST *NATIONAL TREASURE* was a relatively fun romp and provided some good entertainment for adventure buffs wishing "The Lucas" would release another *Indiana Jones* flick. The second *National Treasure* is more of the same, meaning that most of the movie's charm and sense of excitement is tarnished. The trials and tribulations the characters go through have an all-too familiar feel about them, and it all feels very repetitive to be honest. Don't panic though, as *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets* still makes for decidedly average Friday-night viewing, if you enjoyed the first film.

Once again, we follow the antics of Ben Gates and his ragtag team of treasure hunters, this time as they attempt to find the Lost City of Gold. This involves sneaking around gathering clues in Paris, checking out the innards of a desk (I kid you not) in the White House and reading books in what is commonly known as a "library" - riveting stuff. The movie seems to jump between locations an awful lot, with no real reason aside from this allowing the addition of "takes you on a globe-trotting quest" to the blurb on the back of the DVD cover. The characters all seem to solve the enigmas they face far too easily, as if they were handed a 'Riddles 101 handbook' back when they were in kindergarten. Most of the story elements feel as if they were copy-pasted from the script of the last movie, and it all feels as though the filmmakers were desperately clutching at straws to come up with something that they could make some quick cash from.

On the audio front, it's all very generic. Nothing exciting, much as everything else. The film does have a very high visual quality, and the cinematography is flawless; no doubt thanks to this being a big-budget, Jerry Bruckheimer-produced film, complete with mandatory car chase. The acting and dialogue are on par with the first film, so expect a history lesson at every turn. The acting can't really be faulted though, since it is decently done and we are dealing with the same characters from the first film, so similarities are to be expected. In truth, I would've found *National Treasure 2* a much better film if I had never seen the first one. When you rehash a lot of previously used ideas and offer very little change, you can't expect your viewers to feel the excitement they did the first time around. Sadly, that's all that this film is: a rehash of old ideas in fancy new packaging. Watch it, but don't expect too much. Hold thumbs that *National Treasure 3* tries something new.

The DVD contains an audio commentary with director Jon Turteltaub and actor Jon Voight. If you bag the Collector's Edition of the film, you'll get a bonus DVD with a truckload of special features, including a deleted scenes reel, an on-location feature and a whole lot more.

Dane Remendes

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

Director: David Slade
Cast: Josh Hartnett, Melissa George, Danny Huston, Ben Foster
Genre: Horror
Age restriction: 18 (V)
Run time: 108 minutes
Score: ★★★★

THERE'S SOMETHING INHERENTLY UNNERVING and creepy about environmental conditions that make surviving a struggle every second – dark, ice-cold conditions in this case. Combine this with isolation from the outside world and a handful of bloodthirsty vampires, and you have the perfect setting for just about any kind of scary situation.

The story is an excellent example of simplicity: the northern-most town in Alaska (Barrow) experiences 30 days each year when the sun doesn't shine. Many residents leave the town for these 30 days of night and some stay. On the first day of this natural blackout, vampires arrive and begin slaughtering the remaining townsfolk. A small group survives and must now hold out against the vampires until the sun shines again. There's basically no background padding on the main characters or their lives, and nothing about the vampires. The movie does just enough to get the premise across and then presses the action button and the ride doesn't stop until the very end. The vampires are brilliantly portrayed, with their own language, deformed features and instead of the dignified refinement of previous films, these vampires are brutal, animalistic killing machines. As for the survivor roles, they're well acted with very little cheese and come across as believable characters. A few of the cinematic scenes are truly inspiring and the pace is spot on. The movie only suffers a little in how it has been put together and is a little disjointed here and there, forcing you to pay attention.

The biggest surprise in the movie is the brutality. The 18-year age restriction is certainly well deserved, as scene after scene devolves into blood and guts. It all feels very real and, more importantly, appropriate, so it shouldn't get a gratuitous violence sticker, but rather an appropriate violence sticker. There are beheadings, people being eaten, a child vampire and plenty of red-coloured snow everywhere. So, it's a great movie if you don't think too much about it. There are times where more detail would be nice – for example, what do the vampires do when they're not killing people. There's also a mysterious stranger whose background needs some clarification, and the survivors are a little dim-witted and do stupid things that seem only in place to move the story along. However, these are small niggles and if you're watching this for a mindless horror festival, you're going to get exactly that. The DVD has a handful of special features, including some insightful behind-the-scenes footage, interviews and stuff about vampires you probably already know.

Michael James

GONE BABY GONE

Director: Ben Affleck
Cast: Casey Affleck, Michelle Monaghan, Morgan Freeman, Ed Harris
Genre: Drama
Age restriction: 16 (LV)
Run time: 107 minutes
Score: ★★★★★

"I'M ALL MISTY EYED now. Another Jack please. Two blocks of ice. I'm Patrick. I'm a PI. I went through hell the past few days. My girlfriend left me because I did what is right. It's okay. She didn't really have nice tits. A few days ago, this skank's brother came to me and my ex to look for his sister's lost daughter. We accepted the case and started following leads. I know a lot of seedy characters in Boston. I'm connected. I talked to a few guys I know - found out more about the lost girl's mom. The police captain put a tail on me and I had to work with detective Remy Bressant – hard assed and world wise. We went through a lot together – I almost got killed. I eventually solved the case. Bressant's dead now. I killed him. He was involved in the little girl's abduction. He deserved it. My story's more complicated than it seems. Everyone wants the truth... until they find it. I have to go now."

Gone Baby Gone is Ben Affleck's directorial debut, and what a debut it is. This film is thought provoking, has an excellent plot, excellent cast, and it's sad. Everything we like about a good drama. Casey Affleck's performance is stunning and so is Michelle Monaghan's. Watch this movie. You won't be sorry. We don't often give a film five out of five.

Nati de Jager

BLOOD BOWL:
KILLER CONTRACT #1 (OF 5)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Boom Studios
Writer: Matt Forbeck
Artist: Lads Helloven
Price: R45.50

BOOM STUDIOS HAS BEEN bringing the worlds of the popular Games Workshop tabletop, war-game settings, *Warhammer* and *Warhammer 40,000*, to comics for quite some time already, and now they have brought the reputable *Blood Bowl* game to life. Moreover, it's expertly done in this new miniseries. The *Blood Bowl* game imitates American Football, but does so in a much more wicked and violent aspect: that of a fantasy battle sport. Matt Forbeck's writing puts you in the front-row seats of the bone-crunching, eviscerating, gory action of the *Blood Bowl* game in full swing. Now, as the team, The Bad Bay Hackers, fight their way to the championships, an assassin has infiltrated their team. *Blood Bowl: Killer Contract* is very well put together, masterfully written, skilfully illustrated and very enjoyable, not only capturing the essence and feel of the game it is based on, but adding an exciting behind-the-scenes element.

Clive Burmeister

FIRST BORN
AFTERMATH

Format: Comic One-Shot
Publisher: Top Cow
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: Various

IN THE WAKE OF Top Cow's *First Born*, crossover miniseries, featuring the title characters from *The Darkness*, *Witchblade* and *Magdalena* comics, comes the *Aftermath* issue, which sends the various characters' story arcs spiralling in new directions. The *First Born Aftermath* comic contains three individual stories, each by a different team of writers and artists. The first of the stories, featuring the fantastic artwork of Stjepan Sejic, as depicted in the original miniseries, sees a return to the mysterious cave beneath New Jersey, and the things left behind to lurk in the dark places. The second story depicts the appearance of a new foe for The Darkness, and gives us a bit of history of another previous bearer of the power. The third story follows the current Magdalena, Faith, after her battle to protect Sara Pezzini's child in *First Born*, and reveals what direction the *Magdalena* series will take in the near future. It's a good read for the Top Cow fans out there, or anyone looking to get on board soon.

Clive Burmeister

THE UMBRELLA
ACADEMY

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Gerard Way
Artists: Gabriel Bá
Price: R160

WRITTEN BY MY CHEMICAL Romance front man, Gerard Way, *The Umbrella Company* is a collection of six issues of *The Apocalypse Suite*. The story, clearly inspired by Grant Morrison's mind-boggling and rather disturbing series, *Doom Patrol*, touches on the lives of seven super-human 'siblings' who were brought together by the esteemed inventor, Sir Reginald Hargreeves, often called The Monocle. These siblings, born under mysterious circumstances, have a collection of odd, yet rather likable powers.

While the series is a little rushed, it does serve as a decent appetiser for future issues, with wide gaps in the heroes' lives. Way's writing is straightforward, sometimes a little too blunt, but otherwise entertaining and functional. The artwork by Gabriel Bá ranges from funky and sassy to gritty and gory, carrying the pace and drama of the book with ease.

While it won't be to everyone's taste, *The Umbrella Academy* is an enjoyable read for those looking for a quick fix of traditional comic-book action.

Geoff Burrows

KILL ALL PARENTS

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Image
Writer: Mark Andrew Smith
Artist: Marcelo Di Chiara
Price: R37.50

WHY IS IT THAT all the superheroes have one thing in common: a tragedy in their early lives. Either they were the only survivors of a destroyed planet, or their parents were murdered in front of their eyes during a mugging. All heroes' lives are based on some horrific incident. So when disaster threatens to overwhelm the world, with wars and conflicts tearing it apart, a crazed scientist stumbles upon the idea that superheroes will ensure that these catastrophes will be averted. And how can the world get superheroes? Kill all parents! This comic takes a humorous look at an illogical conclusion of how things in the world of superheroes came to be, and is put together with such an easy-to-read and satirical style that it will all seem perfectly logical, or at least rather enjoyable.

Clive Burmeister

THE NIGHTLY NEWS

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Image
Creator: Jonathan Hickman
Price: R159.95

WE'VE ALL HEARD THE conspiracy theories of how the media is controlling the masses through propaganda and subliminal conditioning, but Jonathan Hickman really takes it to the next level with his groundbreaking book, *The Nightly News*. Put together by a man who obviously has a flair for design, the layout has a much more personal and 'real' feel than most comics, and the script of the book is so intense, raw and almost clinically precise that the message of *The Nightly News* hits home with deadly accuracy. One of the things I liked about this book is the original presentation, which really helps to get the emotions involved, and in doing so it justifies the brutal violence portrayed in the story. Another is the believability of it all, although it is a harsh and vicious account. Hickman has obviously done a lot of research, and it shows.

**Clive Burmeister**

WHAT IF?: EVENT HORIZON

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Various
Artists: Various
Price: R145

EVENT HORIZON IS THE fifth volume in a series of six, continuing from the classic *What If?* series born during the '70s. Like the rest of the series, *Event Horizon* is a collection of possible roads not travelled in the Marvel Universe, and includes *What if Xavier's secret second team had survived*? and *What if Wolverine was never deprogrammed*?, as well as three others. The big question here, other than "What if?" is: Will those readers not familiar with the original stories still enjoy this book? The answer is a definite yes.

Each story describes the original events without going into too much detail to bore those already well versed in Marvel lore. The artwork and writing differ greatly between stories, but manage to maintain the level of quality you'd expect, while still giving less well-known artists a chance to show their experimental side.

The book is definitely worth a read for anyone interested in expanding their X-Men knowledge, as well as those keen on experiencing the rather interesting other sides of a few well-established tales.
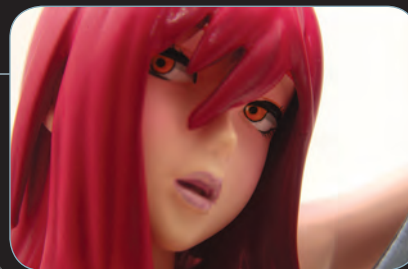
Geoff Burrows
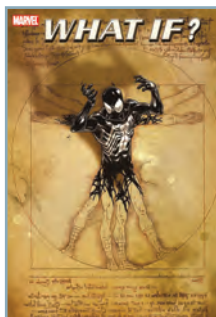
THE ART OF SHUNYA YAMASHITA:
NINIANE BUST

RRP: R735
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

The beautiful Niniane is the second cold-cast porcelain bust from famed Japanese illustrator Shunya Yamashita, well known for his work as a videogame character designer on such projects as *Final Fantasy X* and *Depth Fantasia*, and now equally famous for his figural collaborations with Kotobukiya. Based on artwork created exclusively for Kotobukiya, Niniane is almost nine inches tall, with her legs seemingly submerged in water. A true Lady of the Lake, her name is taken from the entity that delivers Excalibur in classic Arthurian legends. This large-scale, high-quality bust prominently displays some of Niniane's best features, and classily veils others behind her long, gorgeous red hair. Yamashita-sensei's artwork has been interpreted into 3D form, with ornate detailing in her wrist gauntlets, and elaborate sculpting of the enormous fantasy sword.

PLUSH SIMPSONS:
DANCING DISCO INFERNO HOMER

RRP: R380
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

This touch-activated, plush Homer Simpson figure sings and dances to *Disco Inferno*! Homer also recites lines from the TV series when you press his hand.

PORTRAIT OF PIRATES
[SERIES 3]: RORONOA ZORO

RRP: R490
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Quickly sold out when first released in 2004, this terrific completed-and-painted PVC figure of Roronoa Zoro, from the hit series *One Piece*, returns at last in new packaging, with some refinement to the figure itself too. The swordsman skilled with three swords, Zoro, is strikingly posed and comes with a pair of goggles, his swords, and a figure stand for display purposes.

GHOST IN THE SHELL -
STAND ALONE COMPLEX:
TACHIKOMA COLLECTION 1

RRP: R85
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Organic's Tachikoma Collection trading figure series features six different Tachikoma units - Uchikoma, New Tachikoma, Tachikoma, Tachi-Silver, Tachi-Blue, and Tachi-Yellow - as they appeared in the *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* anime series. Each comes with a bonus part for completing a JGSDF Arm Suit figure!

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WITS & WAGERS

THE SORT OF BOARD games we usually review are generally best suited to the fairly serious strategist or war gamer, but this month we take a look at something more casual, something better suited to a party vibe or such (perhaps with a couple of drinks thrown in, if you are over 18). This is a trivia game, but with an unusual twist: it is not necessary to get the answers exactly right, but as close as possible. This is made possible by the fact that all the answers are numerical. How it works is that, after the question is read, players have 30 seconds to write down their answers (or guesses). These are then arranged on a mat with various payout odds, with the average value being at the centre (one-to-one) payout, and then ranging outward in both directions for higher payouts. Players then have another 30 seconds to place bets on up to two of the proposed answers, and don't necessarily have to bet on their own. Then the correct answer is revealed, and anyone who had answered correctly is paid. Anyone who bet on the correct answer is paid according to their bet and the odds for that answer. Although a simple system, it offers surprising subtleties, as it is possible to bet on answers from people who are known to be knowledgeable in the field of the question, or to skew the odds by tendering unrealistic answers with no intention to bet on them. The dynamics, therefore, can get quite intense. There are seven rounds, meaning that the duration of a game is fairly predictable (making it easy to schedule), with a betting limit for the first six, and unlimited betting on the last one, allowing players to go 'all in' if they so wish. At the end, the winner is the player with the most chips. One of the greatest aspects of this game is the fact that the rules fit onto a double page, so it is quick to get the hang of the basics. There are a large number of question cards, and they represent a variety of categories. However, as with any such game, they are finite, and eventually someone is going to know most of the answers. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Maximum Players per game copy: 4-20

Bottom Line

Easy to learn, but challenging to master – the mark of a great game.

75
OUT OF 100

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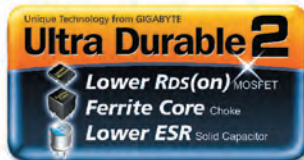
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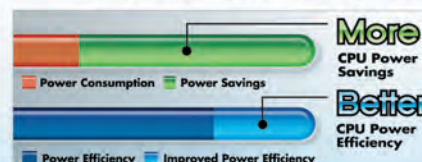
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Power Efficiency (%)

| Gear1 shift to Gear2 | Gear2 shift to Gear3 | Gear3 shift to Gear4 | Gear4 shift to Gear5 | Gear5 shift to Gear6 |

6-Gear Switching
Power Saving Design

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

VRD 11.1 Support

◄ Light Loading   Heavy Loading ►

Gear1 Gear2 Gear3 Gear4 Gear5 Gear6   GIGABYTE Multi-Gear Switching   I (A)
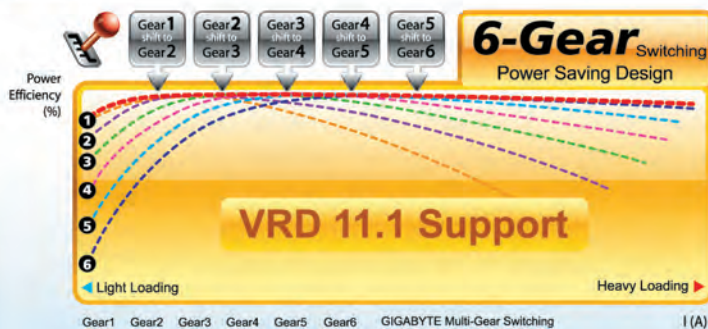
The Gear 1 phase switching requires 45nm processors with PSI signal enabled.

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