SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

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BULLETSTORM

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> Singularity > Alpha Protocol
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> Super Mario Galaxy 2
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08

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<145 E3 2010 VIDEOS>

Also 3 ScrewAttack Videos

I'm a poet and I don't even know it...

...I rhyme every time.

KINGJAMES 17823

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New Shave Gel and Post Shave Balm from **OXY**

Hang on, this used to be fun?

Be warned. I am going to be speaking in general here, so if you feel offended but haven't done anything wrong, then this applies to you. If you're not offended, and it doesn't apply to you, then you understood it. If you aren't offended because it does apply to you, and you did get the message then... Well, you get the idea.

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN *Warfare 2* has lost its magic – we used to play it every day in the office and then some of us even carried on at home until the early hours. Now it's a once a week date at a push. We did check under the hood and it is still the same game (more or less) that was released last year, so what is the problem exactly?

I'll tell you what the problem is – the players. It's been a slow degradation – like wood rot, cancer and rust. You just can't seem to get a game in anymore without being sworn at and insulted, camped, sniped and let's not forget the tubing, and cheating. And people accusing people of cheating, and I won't even get into how annoying clans are. Now these are all perfectly acceptable ways to play the game (except for the cheating of course), but for pity's sake can we not just have a single round where there isn't some moron... anyway – let me stop before this starts sounding like a n00b rant.

I have figured it all out: it's a combination of Steam, Infinity Ward's matchmaking system and the lack of dedicated servers, not to mention weak-sauce DLC, which I'll get to later. Without a dedicated server setup, I can change my name and act like a tool the whole night without any consequences. Many gamers are now bored with the game and are only playing it to chase up their rank and, more and more, are devolving into these mindless 'experience points' zombies. They don't really enjoy the game anymore but are just there sucking as many points out of it as possible by whatever means necessary. Come on now, don't lie to yourself.

I thought the first batch of DLC would pump new life into the game, but it has actually just made it worse. Not enough people are on the new maps, two of them are just rehashed *CoD4* maps,

and nothing else is new or exciting. I think the combination of long term boredom and apathy pinned too much on a simple DLC fix that failed to deliver and only really, as a colleague put it, added new places to camp.

This 'rant' brings me (the long way around) to *Worms 2: Armageddon* and the epic *Battle Pack* DLC Team 17 released a few weeks ago. For 400 Microsoft Points ($5) instead of the $14.99 for the *CoD* DLC, you get new weapons, new maps, new utilities, new outfits, new voices, two new game modes and more. So, how is it that you get all this for a third of the price compared to the Activision DLC? Did they wait until people were so desperate for something new or anything to break the monotony or did they just put together a really cool video to sell 'nothing' for $14.99? The sad part is that the DLC broke records in terms of sales, thereby enforcing the thinking that you can release five maps and make millions of dollars. Is this what the gaming industry has come to? Are you scared yet?

NAG LAN

This is a reminder to get your tickets at Computicket on 1 August 2010 for the mighty NAG LAN – they cost R300 each this year and we're giving you a R100 voucher from BT games for your trouble. We won't mention that we're spending around R200,000 on upgrading the network – in case anyone is wondering why there's a price hike. ;)

Enjoy the issue and the E3 supplement – special thanks to the writers and designers for pulling another E3 supplement out the bag.

Michael James
[Editor]

The Dean & Gerry Show, coming soon to YouTube!

Letter of the Moment

From: Jake
Subject: NAG is becoming fail

"SO AGAIN, I BUY the latest NAG only to be confronted with the same plaguing issues. Firstly, the magazine is like 10 pages - really? Hold the magazine in your hand and notice how freaking "thin" it is. Oh, but wait it's actually 98 pages… Of that number, 30% of the content in the magazine is advertising crap. I know you have to make some extra money. But you are gimping heavily on content. Seriously, have you read through your latest issue? Are you proud of it?

Then we have the same old "ZoMbIe ApOcAlYSPE" rhetoric. Have you ever for a moment considered that some people DO NOT like hearing ZOMBIES over and over and over again, weather *[lol, Ed.]* in reference or otherwise in your magazine! It's become so overused to death, that it's just really sad to still see your odd obsession with it. IT'S LAME. Change things around a bit perhaps?

Neo – it's fairly obvious he's an NVIDIA fanboy. Literally every graphics card review hints at NVIDIA being superior in some way. He never praises ATI or even offers purely objective reviews. ATI is the win GPU for the consumer market at the moment. I can give you a million facts and reasons. That NVIDIA undertone makes him lose all credibility as a reviewer, no matter how vast his knowledge maybe.

Tarryn – her earliest articles in the magazine were somewhat interesting… However as time went on, I've witnessed a massive degradation in the quality of her work. It's like, "oh crap! I have 1 hour to submit my work, let me slap dash put something together, maybe no one will notice!" Her article page: 30% of the page (on the top) is taken up by her huge banner and stupid pictures. 50% (of the bottom page) is used for some lame cartoon. What do NAG readers then get, a small tiny little article in the centre with irrelevant and boring content? Dude what are you playing at? You actually PAY her for that? She gets PAYED for that crap?

Your magazine just doesn't warrant R42 anymore. You are cutting where it hurts the readers and ignoring glaring problems about your writers and the lack of innovation that the magazine is seemingly incapable of bringing.

Golly, you're just a whole bag of peaches and sunshine. To reply to your mail I'm going to offer a few different replies in the hope that you'll be happy with one of them. Ed.

The LOL reply (evading the real issues)
I can't hide it anymore. It's not our fault really, but ever since the zombies took over this whole damn magazine has gone to… shoot, I can't say that. All they do is make a mess, stink up the place and when they look at you it's never directly in the eye but just a little above – like right through you! All the girls have already left and as you know, guys can't run anything to save their lives. Help us!

The www.hellopeter.co.za bait reply
Look, quit your bitching and rather go buy another magazine. Remember, choice is what separates us from the machines. Saying NAG is 10 pages and then correcting to 98 is a limp noodle way to make a 'point' – if we were to increase by a whole extra 16 pages (for example) 10 of them would be adverts anyway so what do you think you're really missing here. Also, advertising isn't 'extra money' it's critical for the whole endeavour. Too bad that you don't like zombies – we do and we call the shots around here. You also obviously don't understand what rhetoric means – you probably heard it in a movie and think it applies to your point because it sounded cool in that context. Also stop complaining about our writers, considering what they're paid we're lucky to get better than primary school writing out of them. Run along now.

The corporate serious reply
Thanks for taking the time to write in with your complaints and suggestions. I do understand that people only complain when they like the product, aren't happy and want things to improve. Considering the economic crisis that struck everyone in 2009, 100 pages of magazine is really the best we can do under the circumstances. I will, however, consider revising the content to advertising ratios immediately. I agree that this zombie obsession has run its course and I will have a word with the entire office about this and put an immediate stop to it. Neo and Tarryn have both received warnings about their writing and opinions and bias towards and away from the highlighted issues. Thank you for your letter and rest assured we're on top of this and I trust you will see an improvement in the coming issues.

The ugly truth reply
You are 100% correct. Although the office is full of intelligent people with varied backgrounds and plenty of experience we just can't think beyond zombies, gaming and junk food. We really like and get on with Tarryn so we can't really be honest with her about her last minute hacked together drivel [it's also kind of awkward because we're sure someone here has fathered a child she doesn't talk about]. The magazine is thin because we've been in financial trouble since we started and our corner cutting is the only way we can make enough to pay our underpaid and motion free staff. Of course, I have an extravagant lifestyle to maintain and therefore everyone that works here or reads NAG must suffer. I just don't care anymore and can live with losing a few readers here and there because we attract a whole new bunch each month. It's an amazing never-ending supply of people with low standards.

There, I hope you find something that you like. ;) Ed.

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness.

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

From: Clinton
Subject: The Incredible Value of NAG

"WITH THE AMERICANS CAUSING a global recession and the fact that everything costs an arm and a leg nowadays (especially gaming) I couldn't help but notice how valuable NAG really is. Not only am I getting a world class gaming magazine, but I'm also getting a 9GB DVD full of features. Even though the DVD mainly features free downloadable content, the sheer amount of time and Telkom's monopoly internet you would need to download it all would cost you much more than NAG's modest R42 sticker price. Considering that NAG might even get a second DVD means that its value could potentially double. And let's not forget the quality of journalism, research and humour that goes into the actual magazine, throw in the occasional exclusive content, vouchers (some of which save you more than R42) and prizes and NAG is basically saving you money. The point I'm trying to make is that everything we buy is getting more expensive while losing value, and NAG just keeps on getting more valuable. Keep up the awesome work, and don't sell out to anyone, especially that Bobby Kotick guy…"

Thanks man, we needed that. Ed.

From: SK8KID
Subject: My NAG, my opinion

"I HAD PURCHASED MY NEW copy of NAG just the other day (June edition) and was ready to read it at any moment but to my surprise I see that the wrapping on my NAG was missing. So I grab it and rush to my dad (the only person I live with) and ask him about it and surely the man admits to opening and reading it; and that opens way to a conversation about some of the staff. He tells me that on one of the pages (P10) there is a bit on how the Editor cannot wait for the world cup to be over which offended him (he thinks this is a big opportunity for the country) and he also goes on to say; on the review of the 2010 FIFA World cup game the reviewer puts down the availability of the Vuvuzela sounds on the game as a negative even though they can be turned off. I'm not writing this to criticise or anything like that but rather to point out that the new readers (which NAG acquires all the time) can really take offence especially to sensitive subjects. But then again you guys write our opinion and everyone is entitled to their own opinion, right?"

Right! To clarify – this is what I said, "I'll be glad when this world cup thing is over too and we get our country back from FIFA." For the record – when it comes to World Cup soccer I'm a huge fan. I watched close to 40 games at home and went to two matches including the epic Ghana vs. Uruguay. Hosting the event is an amazing opportunity for this country (especially for all those big corporate sponsors… but not so much for the guys that actually built the stadiums). I felt proud and elated during the event and even now I still feel good about it all. Regardless, we did lose our country to soccer, and I am glad it's over but sad that my evenings feel so empty now. Do you have any idea how hard it is getting through a deadline when everyone is at home watching soccer? Other thing, if people don't like an opinion it's probably best that they just don't read it. ;) Ed.

Shorts [extracts of LOL from NAG reader letters]

"…why don't you guys make a competition where the prize is for one of your fans to get to visit you?" **– MJ**

"I think I have a groundbreaking argument." **– Beastly**

"I was wondering if you could please tell me the names of some good graphics cards that won't cost me so much that I would have to go and sell my body at the harbour." **– Alec**

< Inbox >

NAG Fan artwork

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

You win a copy of Nero Multimedia Suite 10, valued at R1,299, courtesy of Pheonix Software!

David Oakley: "The image above was actually created in Garry's Mod, The UFO took me about 2 hours then I used Valves Hammer Editor to Edit one of the "Outland" maps from Half-life 2, so that I could create a forest of trees, I then placed the UFO in the Map, took a snapshot and then later added in the text using CorelDraw."

From: SK8KID *[Yes. Again, the spotlight tends to follow. Ed]*
Subject: What does that mean?
"**C**AN SOMEONE PLEASE TELL Tarryn to write words that not only an English proffesor of 30 years can understand?"

I sent this to Tarryn and this is what she said, "It's spelled 'professor'; cf. 'profess', 'profession'. From Latin past participle professus *'avowed'. Comments like that irritate me. It's like hanging a neon billboard over your head saying, 'I'm thick'." You did ask for it, Ed.*

From: Siemeon
Subject: Xbox Live in SA Finally
"**I** HAVE HEARD A COUPLE of rumours that Xbox Live is coming to SA this year is this true and if it is when will it be here?"

It will be here. Not 100% clear on when exactly but definitely in 2010. We will let you all know when the muddy water clears. Ed.

From: Charles
Subject: In Reply to Too White
"**P**EOPLE ALL OVER THE country are going loony because of the footie, which is all good and well but I'm a supporter of Team NAG and would rather spend the R599 it costs to buy a soccer jersey on a NAG T-shirt and a bargain bin game or two. That's just me though.

Anyway, I'm writing in reply to Adolph's letter in the June issue of NAG about the gaming scene still being 'too white'. This is true and there are probably many complex reasons for this but my own experiences as a black gamer and geek in general have been rather pleasant and at no point have I ever felt sidelined because the truth is that black gamers are a minority. It always amuses me that I live in a country made up mostly of black people but my interests result in me being one of a few black people in the vicinity at any given period – it's all very mind boggling in an Alice in Wonderland kind of way.

The sad reality is that many people in the world still live in their comfy pigeon holes and would rather do what is 'acceptable' for a certain group of people to do than to venture out and explore. I listen to metal music for example and this results in me getting quite a lot of flak from the black community for being weird, satanic and so on. But this is simply because they don't understand the genre so I don't mind. The world is changing, though, and people from all walks of life are getting into the goodness of gaming and many games are reflecting this. That's my two cents. Keep up the great work. :)"

Thanks for 'representing' the other side as it were. I think this situation is exactly the same as the whole girl gamers (also a much spoken about 'minority' not too long ago). Now things have changed to the point where most of the girls I know play games. I keep telling anyone that will listen that the 'black market' (whatever that means) in this country is the key to unlocking our true potential when it comes to being taken seriously on a global scale. We're still classified as an emerging market and the only demographic that I see emerging in the future is the black one. Ed.

From: Russell
Subject: Vuvuzelas and gaming
"**S**EEING THAT THE SOCCER World Cup seems to have inspired half the world to buy vuvuzelas (and the other half to buy ear plugs), what impact do you think this will have on gaming? I can already see a mod being made for Left 4 Dead 2 to include a vuvuzela to attract any nearby zombies, startle the witch and generally make other players feel no guilt in engaging in a bit of team-killing. What do you think? Or have I just opened the gates to your worst nightmares where you cannot escape the dreaded vuvuzela?"

LOL, nice letter... the answer however is no, there is no future for the vuvuzela anywhere – it's a moron's 'instrument' and while it was all LOL for the World Cup, they should all be handed in for recycling. You see, most of the people who buy a vuvuzela don't understand the idea behind 'responsible use'. Ed. **NAG**

On the Forums

QUESTION: Now that E3 2010 has come and gone, what are your impressions? Try to keep it as short as possible.

Cleric: Too much focus on 3D and motion control. Can't we focus on advancing the medium instead of gimmicks?

Graal: Where are all the cool games?

echo: Is it gone already?

NecroWolf: Hot pursuit, GT5, KZ3, Sly collection, MotorStorm, Twisted Metal, Madden 11 and Portal 2. Despite the games that were missing, I'm happy with what I saw from this list.

FaNbOy: To be honest, I haven't been following it much at all. I'll have to wait for the supplement included with NAG :)

Sir PaniCore: It was pretty average. Sony had the worst conference. Nintendo and Microsoft were quite average with Nintendo being the best out of the 2. Only game I'm hyped for is Gears of War 3.

Miz3r: From what pics I saw, loads of 3D equipment being introduced into the gaming and electronic industry, hopefully game developers get on the band wagon with this new technology and make us something spectacular and mind blowing with this new tech.

Splash: I also haven't been following it. Though I must say I am pleased with Fallout New Vegas, I'm amped. Also heard about the 3DS. I'm definitely going to look into it further, sounds pretty cool. Jeez I'm going to have to wait for the NAG to get the full lowdown on E3.

CaViE: So. Much. OMGWANT.

Azraphael: To be a 100% honest, nothing really appealed to me besides Gears of War 3. I think after last year's E3 in which Sony's Move was announced alongside Microsoft's Project Natal and MGS finally coming to Xbox - this year's E3 just...fizzled.

apie: I just freaked when they announced that Xbox Live would be coming to South Africa before the end of the year. And that Gears of War 3 would support 4-player co-op. Now, I am at peace with the world. :D

pArkEr: "And though we may pledge fanboy allegiances to different flags, deep down inside we all serve one master, one king, and his name is gaming! Forever may he reign!" - Kevin Butler, VP of Awesome. Sadly the rest of E3 wasn't as exciting as its predecessors.

Zen: Where's my Half-life 2 Episode 3?

hideinlight: Mortal Kombat IX is gonna make me buy a console, might be too hot for the new Xbox360 though.

Cpt.Monde: Not the best E3 but it was pretty good (portal 2 and Killzone 3 FTW!). Way too much Move and Kinect stuff though... like srsly

Machine: The Nintendo 3DS looks interesting, MGS: Rising and of course Portal 2 looks awesome as ever. I was disappointed that HL2: Episode 3 wasn't even mentioned. Microsoft and Sony look absolutely silly trying to grab some of Nintendo's success with motion control.

KingLink: my religion, gamingism-ism, dictates that I shouldn't enjoy a game if I have to break a sweat or strain my eyes... overexertion is for lumberjacks... BTW Gears 3 and Portal 2 look awesome. :D
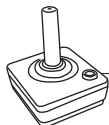
Karuji: Game name <x> Number <y> Oh and bad gimmicks lots of bad gimmicks.

Z1OC: E3 has past now it's time for rAge...

Come share your pearls over a cup of wood rot on our forums: http://www.nag.co.za/forums/

I, Gamer

by Miklós Szecsei

A.W.A.

HELLO EVERYONE, MY NAME is Miklós and I'm an Achievement Whore. Well, not yet but I'm definitely heading in that direction even though you wouldn't think that looking at my Gamerscore. The paltry, sub-fifteen thousand figure that's branded to my Gamercard like a scarlet "A" contradicts the feeling that I've had for some time now: I no longer play games for fun, but rather for the achievements. Seriously?

It was never always like this. A few years ago I would have felt quite secure spending hours just, you know, playing a game for the sake of doing so. That's all gone now; it's been replaced by a gnawing lust for achievements that has sapped all the joy from something I used to love doing. Now, if I spend a few hours playing games, and I have no new achievements to show for it, then I consider those wasted hours. It's quite pathetic – seriously.

> *I stumbled upon a clearance sale and indiscriminately began filling my virtual basket with Xbox 360 titles. And then I added High School Musical 3: Senior Year Dance.*

I can't recall what it was that sent me down this path. Peer pressure? A desire to fit in online? A way to impose pseudo control over the glut of new games that perpetually saturates the market?

The awareness that I was heading down a path that few have been able to come back from happened a few weeks ago. I was browsing an online retailer for games on special – budget achievement trawling; it's all the rage and lots of people are doing it. I stumbled upon a clearance sale and indiscriminately began filling my virtual basket with Xbox 360 titles. And then I added *High School Musical 3: Senior Year Dance*. Suddenly, it was as if a trillion voices shrieked at once, and I instinctively closed my web browser and threw my wallet into the darkest corner of my desk drawer. "What have I become?" I thought to myself. Here I was adding the most ridiculous title to my shopping list, and I was using Achievement Whoring as an excuse. That's when I knew I needed to get help – but help can totally wait because there's a quadruple XP weekend for *Gears of War 2* on at the moment and I need to mop up some XP-related achievements and shoot some Tickers in the face. Seriously.

Not everyone likes to move it

But there's plenty of light at the end of this long, dark tunnel

WHERE MICROSOFT HAS BEEN quiet on any third-party support for Kinect, Sony is being sure to let everybody know that Move isn't just for the next generation of shovelware, but this could come with a cost to the development of anything else.

Plain Sight, which we briefly reviewed in June, was originally designed for XBLA, but made it to the PC with relative ease. Now the title is on its way to the PSN as well, and looks to be one of, if not the, first indie title to jump on board Sony's motion-controlled bandwagon, as the game is set to fully support the PlayStation Move. Let's just be sure that Sony's controllers are going to include a wrist-strap; this is one game that will seriously endanger your expensive TV if arm-flailing is involved.

Next on the list is support for *Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition* and *Time Crisis Razing Storm*, which are to be found in separate bundles in Japan, alongside the Move and necessary PlayStation Eye. The *Time Crisis* bundle, called *Big 3 Gun Shooting Pack* (we hope that's just a translation quirk), will also include *Dead Storm Pirates* and *Time Crisis 4 Arcade*. Certainly sounds a whole lot better than *Move Sports*, or *Move Granny Racing 5*, and paints a pretty picture for the type of bundles we can expect locally.

Then, there's some sad news: *Heavy Rain*'s DLC is going to be delayed, indefinitely. Entitled *Chronicles*, this DLC series has been on hold for some time, while developer Quantic Dreams fervently worked on adapting it for Move.

"Our approach was to make no compromise on the quality of the *Chronicles*, and offer exactly the same quality than the original game," says boss David Cage. "So the answer is yes; *Chronicles* as we saw them were ambitious and with high expectations. As explained, they are on hold to allow the team to work on Move and on new projects, and I doubt they will ever be produced."
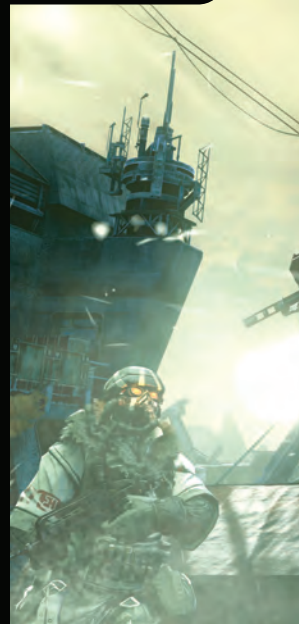
Killzone 3 controls on the lighter side

Even if you removed the jetpacks from *Killzone 3*, we'd still be excited for it. If any of you thought that *Killzone 2*'s controls were too "heavy" (whatever the hell that means) and were a bit clunky, then developer Guerrilla Games has a band aid for your ouch. "I'm confident that when *Killzone 3* comes out, we're going to have a set of controls that will really appreciate the vast majority of audiences," said Guerrilla's managing director Herman Hulst, "The heavy sensation of *Killzone 2* is absolutely gone. Instead, this feels much closer to standard run-and-gun responsiveness." With a story that the developers liken to a David and Goliath-style tale, *Killzone 3* picks up right where the second game left off and sees protagonist Sev and his buddy Rico trapped on the planet Helghan in the middle of a civil war. Helghast infighting in the wake of Emperor Visari's death has made the planet an even more dangerous place. Without reinforcements and only limited supplies, Sev's job is no longer to help win the war between the ISA (Interplanetary Strategic Alliance) and the Helghast, but instead simply to survive the mayhem that he finds himself in the middle of.

Guerrilla has promised gameplay that is more varied and more epic than the previous title. We're guessing they're talking about the jetpacks, but the multiplayer will also see numerous improvements. Even the enemy deaths won't be safe from all the variety, with Guerrilla building hype for its "cinematic deaths" – which add a number of wonderful ways for enemies to explode and/or die. A blog post on Killzone. com revealed this: "*Killzone 3* is strongly influenced by Hollywood realism … Cinematic deaths are the logical progression of this design philosophy, adding a variety of spectacular (and sometimes explosive) new ways for Helghast enemies to perish." To show how willing Guerrilla is to utilise all of Sony's upcoming technological magic, if you've got a 3D-ready television and the goofy glasses to go along with it, you'll be able to enjoy the game in stereoscopic 3D (together with using the PlayStation Move-enabled controls that are making their way into the game). With environments that are supposedly up to ten times bigger than anything we saw in the previous title, *Killzone 3*'s environments vary from nuclear wastelands to snow-covered vistas and alien jungles. These new environments will also be filled with new enemy brutes to kill, new weapons to pick up, more vehicles to frolic about in and jetpacks to pilot.

PS3-DIMENSIONAL

PS3 owners can expect another firmware update this September. This one will add support for 3D Blu-ray movies. There's only one 3D Blu-ray movie out there at the moment (*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*), but that doesn't seem to bother Sony – they're incredibly keen on pushing 3D technology with the PS3 wherever they can, with their plans to display movies, games and seemingly even YouTube videos in glorious 3D on their console. "YouTube will be supporting 3D content over the next 12 months as well – and you'll be able to watch that on the PlayStation 3," said SCEE senior director Mick Hocking. Later in the year, your photos won't be safe either, because you'll be able to view those in 3D too.

DESTINATION ARCADE

As the collection of Xbox LIVE Arcade games continues to grow from the already large number of titles (over 250), finding your way around the hordes is getting tougher. Thankfully, Microsoft is implementing a new system for browsing through the XBLA service, entitled Destination Arcade.

The system, which should be available by the time you read this, gives users a more intuitive way to browse through the XBLA catalogue. Features include new ways to sort content (such as by price or community rating), a system that recommends titles based on similarity, and a readily-available feed that displays all recently-released titles along with games that are on sale.

The Indie
Investigator
by Rodain Joubert

Art games? Again?

AT THE TIME OF writing, famed film critic Roger Ebert (notorious among gamers for his hard-line stance against the idea of games as art) had just admitted that he was actually *not* qualified to make calls on whether or not games could have cultural value. And it's a good thing too, because entire gaming communities have been soiling their pants over his opinion of the medium – in ways ranging from defensiveness to occasional zealoty.

Chances are that if you're (a) a gamer, (b) an Internet user and (c) somebody who actually gives a crap about whether their chosen hobby is considered a cultural pursuit, then you've probably stumbled across this "are games art" debate at some point or another.

If you haven't, then consider this your official welcome to the most dead-horse debate since Jack Thompson's "violent videogames" saga. The idea of whether or not games could be considered art would possibly be an

> *The idea of whether or not games could be considered art would possibly be an interesting one ... if it wasn't so damn worn out.*

interesting one (and did in fact interest me at one point) if it wasn't so damn worn out. Advocates on both sides of the fence bore observers with the same tired ideas and arguments, decorated with only slightly different analogies and examples each time, boldly claiming to explore new philosophical and cultural territory when all they're really doing is attempting to re-invent the wheel. The esteemed label of "art" has been debated for a long time with regards to movies, comics and even regular ol' books, yet the current generation seems quite happy to state the argument all over again (from scratch, no less!) just so that we can waste more time wrangling out definitions instead of enjoying stuff.

With this in mind, here's a little bit of homework for you: check out the indie "art games" contained on this month's DVD. These are games which aim to deliver abstract messages through their unique medium -- sometimes at the cost of interactivity and meaningful goal-oriented gameplay. Play them, think about them, and then figure out whether or not you care. Are these games art? Are all games art? Is life art?

When you're done puzzling about this, purge your brain with the meaningless delights of *Enviro-Bear 2000,* the best bear-car-driver simulator existing today.

Everyone knows pirates can't see in 3D

They have no depth perception because of the eye patch… it's a sensitive issue. I wouldn't mention it.

NINTENDO'S DS IS NO stranger to the swashbuckling world of piracy. Earlier models of the handheld have fallen victim to the exploits of hackers and crackers the world over, with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of software having been illegally reproduced to work on Nintendo's dual-screen handhelds, despite Nintendo's best efforts to curb the problem. THQ's executive VP of global publishing, Ian Curran, seems to think that the 3DS will finally put the DS's piracy problems to rest. He's even more excited about the anti-piracy countermeasures in the 3DS than he is about all the games coming to the portable console.

"The problem with the DS market in the last few years, particularly with the DS Lite, is that it's just been attacked by piracy. It's made it almost impossible to shift any significant volume. The DSi combated it a little bit, but the 3DS has taken that a step further," said Curran. Rewritable cartridges for the DS, particularly the R4 cartridges (which are now illegal in Japan), have destroyed revenue for many publishers in the past, so Mr Curran's dismay is understandable. "I actually asked Nintendo to explain the technology and they said it's very difficult to do so because it's so sophisticated. They combated the piracy on DSi, which they don't believe is cracked yet – but they know they've been hurt across the world and they believe the 3DS has got technology that can stop that." Curran went on to say that these piracy preventing measures will encourage publishers to invest more in developing software for the system – an important consideration when it's likely to cost them more to develop everything in 3D.

In other 3DS news, it turns out that the 3DS design we were shown when the handheld was first announced is actually final, despite us being told that it was not the final design for the device at the time. We're sure the design will change when the inevitable announcements of the 3DSi, the 3DS Lite and the 3DS XL are made though...

Xbox LIVE to hit South Africa

Microsoft's Xbox 360 has been available locally for years now, but the console's multiplayer capabilities and online content have been crippled by the lack of official LIVE support. While it's not a major hassle for online gaming, as LIVE simply operates as a peer-to-peer matching service (like *Modern Warfare 2*'s IWNet) and will always try to find the lowest ping players, our access to content has been severely stifled. Local players who want to play against their friends have been forced to use a US or UK account, which required a bit of subterfuge to get up and running. Thankfully, Microsoft has heard our cries of pain, as well as those of eight other countries, and will bring official, full Xbox LIVE support to South Africa by the end of the year. Now, you might be wondering exactly what that means for you, o bearer of an illegally-acquired Xbox LIVE account. Microsoft has your back; you'll be pleased to know. Representatives claim that Microsoft feels it's very important for local players to migrate their accounts, which means your gamertag, gamerscore, and all purchases are safe.

SOCIAL GAMING – GOOGLE THROWS MONEY AT IT

It's been reported that Google has sneakily invested somewhere between 100 and 200 million dollars in Zynga, creators of *FarmVille, Mafia Wars* and other social games.

Sources indicate that this is all part of a strategic deal that will see Zynga's games playing a large role in the launch of Google Games later this year. The folks at Zynga are no stranger to people flinging ridiculous amounts of money at them, with the company having raised around half a billion dollars in the past year – with a large part of that coming from Google, if this report is anything to go by.

Poor Bobby wants more Xbox pie

Activision Blizzard CEO (and poster boy for gaming industry capitalism) Bobby Kotick is boo-hooing about how mean Microsoft is. According to Mr. Kotick, Activision is responsible for 60% of the subscriptions to Xbox LIVE Gold. How so? Why *Modern Warfare 2* of course. The man at the top of the Activision Blizzard giant has claimed responsibility for a significant part in the $1.2 billion Microsoft's Xbox LIVE service has generated. Note that $600 million of that is *just* from Gold subscription fees – fees that Kotick feels Activision Blizzard should have a share of. Of course, the likelihood of this happening is slim to none, as Microsoft has strict control over all aspects of content development for its console. Kotick is well aware of this as well and has taken the chance to bemoan the "walled gardens" nature of console networks. He went further to say that he would ensure his company supported PC manufacturers "very aggressively" were they to produce more gaming-oriented PCs in the future. This isn't the first time that rumblings of this nature have cropped up. It is entirely possible for companies like Hewlett-Packard to develop PCs specifically for gaming that would be more like open-source consoles, thereby giving companies like Activision Blizzard the freedom to create their own online networks and subscription based services. Perhaps there are larger plans ahead for the new Battle.net service?

Final Fantasy gets collectable

Final Fantasy XIV is set for a September release on PC, with its PS3 shelf date to follow in March 2011, but the game's PC release has been split into two: the regular release of the title on September 30, and the collector's edition more than a week prior, on the 22nd. The reason for this is simple: give those who laid out the extra cash for the CE to have a head-start of eight days. International (read: optimistic) pricing has the premium edition come in at $25 (R190) over the standard package, and for your trouble you'll not only have the opportunity to get into the game earlier, but will also receive a special in-game item, the Onion Helm; Behind the Scenes DVD; the Travel Journal which includes concept art; a voucher for a personalised Rite of Passage certificate; a *WoW*-like electronic security token for super-secure logins; and a game box cover by artist Yoshitaka Amano. Both versions of the game will include 30 days of game-time, as well.

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"XBLA IS A SLAUGHTER-HOUSE"

Online distribution services like Steam, XBL or PSN are the perfect way for indie game developers to get their games out there and make a little money while they're at it. Hello Games' Sean Murray, one of the team members behind the recent indie hit *Joe Danger*, says that Xbox LIVE puts small developers at a disadvantage, compared to PSN.

"Why choose PSN? It was the only way we could self-publish," said Murray. "XBLA is kind of a slaughterhouse for smaller developers. There are games that do amazingly well. But there's two titles released every week and a lot of those are falling in that 25,000 or less category."

According to his stats, only 13% of titles on XBLA make over 200,000 sales, while the bulk struggles to make it over 25,000. However, with fewer releases on PSN but still plenty of willing shoppers, *Joe Danger* managed to break even on its first day of release, and go on to sell over 50,000 in its first week.

White Duck White Duck Black Duck

YOU KNOW THE TYPE. They claim they "don't care about reviews". They think reviews are pointless. But when *New Game X* comes out, those people usually do one of two things. They might have played *New Game X*, or not, that doesn't matter.

1) They will cite reviews that agree with their opinion that *New Game X* is awesome, as proof that it is indeed awesome.

2) They will cite reviews that confirm their suspicions that *New Game X* is actually crap, as proof that it is actually crap.

What we're dealing with is called "confirmation bias" or "selective thinking." Simply put, confirmation bias is people's tendency to favour information that confirms their preconceptions, irrespective of its accuracy. People selectively collect

> *Be careful. People like to be told what they already know. Remember that. They get uncomfortable when you tell them new things. New things... well, new things aren't what they expect.*

evidence, interpret information in a biased way or remember things in ways that support their preconceptions. This happens a lot with emotionally significant issues and with established beliefs. So, like, with gaming it's practically a *given*.

To quote Terry Pratchett speaking through the character Lord Vetinari from his Discworld novel, "The Truth":

"Be careful. People like to be told what they already know. Remember that. They get uncomfortable when you tell them new things. New things... well, new things aren't what they expect. They like to know that, say, a dog will bite a man. That is what dogs do. They don't want to know that man bites a dog, because the world is not supposed to happen like that."

Part of the Scientific Method is the notion that you get closer to the truth by looking for evidence to the contrary. This is called "falsifiability." Saying "all ducks are white" is easily found false by finding one black duck, and then applying logic.

When it comes to gaming, and opinions, people could stand to learn a thing or to from this idea. Or just in general, applying more logic.

Team Fortress Engineer updated

New glove, new maps, same old boring hard hat

THOSE HARD-WORKING LITTLE BUILDERS have been clamouring for this for ages, and now the *Team Fortress II* Engineer update is finally here! Here's what's been added to the Engineer's toy-box:

The Wrangler replaces the Engineer's pistol, and allows them to directly control their deployed sentry guns. While active, the sentry receives a damage-soaking shield and greatly increases its rate-of-fire. The next weapon is a shotgun replacement, called Frontier Justice, which cannot crit naturally and only has half the magazine size, but instead gets "Revenge Crits" – two critical hits for every time their sentry makes a kill, and one for every assist. However, the Engineer will only receive these crits when their sentry is destroyed (either from enemy fire or self-destruction).

To replace the faithful wrench is the Gunslinger, a robotic glove that increases the wearer's maximum health by 25 points. It will always crit on the third attack in a

series of punches, and gives the Engineer the ability to drop mini-sentries. These little guys only cost 100 metal to deploy and build at four-times the speed, but cannot be upgraded or repaired, and only deal half the damage.

All of these updates come with the new ability for Engineers to pack up and redeploy buildings (sentries, dispensers, etc), as well as three new maps: Thunder Mountain, Hightower and Upward. During the reveal process of this update, 100 lucky recipients were also given a special golden wrench randomly during crafting. This wrench turns any slain enemies into solid "Australium" upon death.

The result of this update is an Engineer that is much more capable as an offensive class and generally gives them more to do than babysit their sentry guns. We do, however, feel that this was a great missed opportunity; we were half expecting a makarapa to make an appearance.

Crysis 2 Nano Edition appears, then disappears

Swedish online store Webhallen.com momentarily listed a *Crysis 2* Nano Edition before quickly taking it off their website, but being the Internet, some enterprising individuals managed to snag details and pictures on the limited edition package faster than Webhallen could remove it, causing the Internet to explode as fanboy minds crumbled in amazement. If the brief leak (which we hope turns out to be real, because at the time of writing this no confirmation had been given) is anything to go by, the Nano Edition will cost around $200 (approximately R1,600) and comes with a nifty nano-suit backpack, complete with a metallic spine similar to that found on the game's nano-suits. If that's not enough for you, there's also a 7.9-inch statue of Prophet doing cool stuff, a 176-page art book, a SCAR hologram and access to unlockable in-game items, with a cool steelbook case to store your disc in as well. There's also something called "Waffenskin SCAR – Camouflage". Sounds exotic!

With the advent of EA's "Project Ten Dollar," which aims to encourage new retail game purchases over rental or second-hand with a $10 voucher for "premium" content (and in the case of EA Sports, online content), the company is looking for new ways to increase the allure of online features, even for those who don't actually engage in online multiplayer. Buyers of PS3 and Xbox 360 versions of *FIFA 11*, which is due out in September this year, will now be able to manage their team roster entirely through a web-based service called The Creation Center. This service will allow users to create new players using a variety of customisable sliders and options, set up teams, adjust team strategies and even trade players and teams with friends. You can then access your team from the console once the data has been downloaded.

This kind of initiative goes to show that there can be more to in-box premium content than weapon packs or additional customisation options; with this, the content is provided as a service, and is something more than what you'd expect to find included with the game to begin with.

Awesome Donkey Kong skills = fortune and glory

Have you ever seen the documentary, *The King of Kong*? If you haven't, it details the rivalry between Steve Wiebe and Billy Mitchell, two men trapped in gladiatorial mayhem armed with swords and pet monkeys wielding guns, with only one man able to leave the bloodied field of battle after their deadly, monkey-filled contest is over. Well, not really: the documentary details the pair's attempts to beat one another at achieving the all-time *Donkey Kong* high score. Wiebe, made famous by his relentless (probably unhealthy) pursuit of *Donkey Kong*'s all-time record, will now officially be inducted into the International Video Games Hall of Fame along with his rival.

Wiebe, an algebra teacher in Kirkland, Washington, currently holds the world's 3rd-highest record for *Donkey Kong* and is second in the running for the *Donkey Kong Jr.* record, although he's been in the top spot for the latter title twice and has also held the world's highest score for the former title as well. The inaugural celebration of the International Video Games Hall of Fame takes place in Ottumwa, Iowa, from 5-8 August, with numerous tournaments, LAN gaming, historical displays and guest speakers all part of the event. Other famed individuals who will be honoured at the ceremony and inducted into the first class of the Hall of Fame are Nolan Bushnell (creator of *Pong*) and Shigeru Miyamoto.

Freely go where no one has gone before?

Craig Zinkievich, executive producer for *Star Trek Online*, recently announced his departure from Cryptic Studios. Daniel Stahl, producer on the game and who apparently shares Zinkievich's passion for all things *Star Trek*, stepped up to fill the former executive producer's shoes. Stahl already has some interesting views on the future of Cryptic's MMO, stating that he could easily see a hybrid free-to-play model working for the game. He also mentioned MMO developer Turbine's existing freemium models for *Dungeons & Dragons Online* and *Lord of the Rings Online* (which goes free to play later this year), dubbing them "interesting plans" and saying that the model allows for a "robust way to demo the game" while still allowing players eager for more content to pay for subscriptions/in-game items. It'll be interesting to see if *STO* heads in a free-to-play direction.

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ACB AND CAPCOM, SITTING IN A TREE

Those poor Aussies always have a hard time when it comes to games with adult content. Zombie games in particular seem to suffer; *Left 4 Dead 2* required some serious changes to fit into the country's MA15+ maximum age restriction for videogames. Oddly enough, *Dead Rising 2* hasn't had any of the same troubles, and is arguably a more violent title. The game, which is due to go on sale in October following a recently-announced delay, has racked up the maximum ratings from PEGI, ESRB and BBFC, all of which slapped a Mature or 18+ age restriction on the title.

We're all for age restrictions, and we might understand the decision by the Australian Classification Board if THQ was given as much trouble as Valve had with *Left 4 Dead 2*. This process ended up costing Valve time, money and lost sales, but Capcom isn't going to experience any of that. Add to that the bizarre idea that a 15 year-old could visit Australia while on holiday, for example, and purchase *Dead Rising 2* without any of the problems they'd suffer elsewhere in the world. Whatever lies in the ACB's future, they need to figure out a consistent and logical system that isn't going to favour one publisher over another. Frankly, an 18+ age restriction would make everyone's life easier.
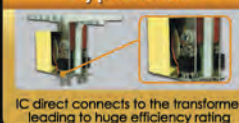
The Evolution of...

Epic Games

1991 – ZZT

1994 – Jazz Jackrabbit

1998 – Unreal

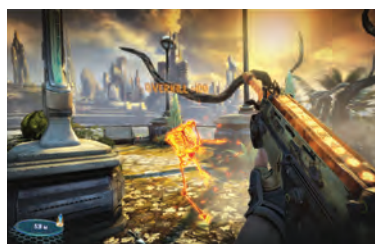**2004 – Unreal Tournament 2004**

2006 – Gears of War

2011 – Bulletstorm

A chicken in every pot and a 3DTV in every living room

DO YOU KNOW WHO is super excited about this new 3DTV thing? Ubisoft, that's who. In fact, they are so super, *SUPER* excited that their UK Marketing Director, Murray Pannell, may have gotten a little ahead of himself in claiming that every household will have a 3DTV within three years. Wow, that's some fast market penetration right there! We bet Sony would *love* it if Pannell is on the money with this little bit of clairvoyance, given the Japanese company has been pushing its 3DTVs and 3D capabilities of the PlayStation 3 for a few months now.

But wait! What's this new bit of frightfully inconvenient research just seeing the light of day? Roughly 12% of UK citizens suffer from binocular vision? What does that mean? It means that they can't see 3D effects on 3DTVs at all. According to The Eyecare Trust report, "more than one in ten of us (12%) has a visual impairment that means our brains are unable to correctly process the individual images that are transmitted to it via our left and right eyes." That pretty much rules out stereoscopic 3DTV sets then. So perhaps Pannell will have to refine his stance somewhat: maybe 80% of households within three years? Time will tell.

Cats and dogs, living together!

For the most part, scandals in the gaming industry are about as much of a travesty as Paris Hilton's recent visit to PE, or David Beckham's latest hairstyle, but every now and then something truly spectacular crops up. This is not one of those situations. Instead, this is a situation where a bunch of forum members, those belonging to Blizzard's forums, to be specific, grab their pitchforks and start hunting down the village abomination. Oooh, maybe this is scandalous after all. Dramatisation aside, here's the skinny: recently, Blizzard announced that all users of their brand new forums would have their real names revealed to the world every time they posted. Their argument is simple: if people have their anonymity removed, they'll behave less like trolling jerks and more like civilised members of society. Of course, this is the Internet, so the obvious result was mass hysteria, fire and brimstone, claims of endangered lives and an increase in stalker-like behaviour. Now, we're not out to judge those who would genuinely be in danger from this going through because, well, there are some crazy people out there – with 11 million plus *WoW* subscribers, at least 1% are bound to be complete loons – but the overwhelming response from the crowd was just taking the opportunity to have a whinge at the big bad corporation. Besides, we're pretty sure that a) your boss isn't stalking you and, b) they don't care if you think Night Elves are sexier than Blood Elves. Thankfully, all of this has been resolved. Blizzard soon backed down, and won't be putting Real ID into place as a mandatory rule – at least not yet. For now, users can opt into the program to make it easier to find friends and be found by them while playing across Battle.net's games (*WoW* and the upcoming *StarCraft II*, with more to follow). It's like Facebook for gamers, but hopefully with less poking and more Zergling rushes.

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PLAY WHENEVER, WHEREVER

InstantAction.com, a company run by former Westwood founder and EA big-wig, Louis Castle, has a very large, very challenging goal in mind: to change the way that PC games are played and distributed. While we have services like Steam, and a few brave studios have jumped on board the browser-based gaming concept, InstantAction instead offers developers the opportunity to distribute their games in a similar manner to Steam or Impulse (i.e.:tying purchases to a single user's account), but will go a step further by allowing those players to pick up and play their game on any platform, anywhere in the world, without the need to wait for a download. Instead, you'll be able to stream the game's content to your web browser while you play, which is especially useful in terms of demo distribution, as there's zero commitment (aside from possible bandwidth costs) for the user – they can jump in and start playing within minutes. Additionally, studios can easily integrate social networking features into their games, and users will be able to play InstantAction games within sites like Facebook and Twitter. Currently, InstantAction only has *The Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition* available for play, but many more titles will make their way onto the service over the next few years. Their biggest target right now is the upcoming *Call of Duty: Black Ops*.

Gaming Charts

GfK
May 2010 figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za
Sales by game platform

PS3

Look & Listen recommends
2010 FIFA World Cup SA
Red Dead Redemption
God of War Collector's (I & II)
Mafia II
Final Fantasy XIV

PS3

Sales by game platform
FIFA World Cup 2010 SA
Red Dead Redemption
God of War Collector's (I & II)
God of War III
GTA: Episodes from Liberty City

XBOX 360

Red Dead Redemption
Alan Wake
Madden NFL 2010
Dead Rising 2
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days

XBOX 360

FIFA World Cup 2010 SA
Forza Motorsport III
Halo 3: ODST
Red Dead Redemption
Halo 3

PS2

FIFA 10
Avatar: The Burning Earth
WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw 2010
Toy Story 3: The Video Game
LOTR: Aragorn's Quest

PS2

FIFA 10
Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
Call of Duty 3
Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks
Grand Theft Auto 3

PC

StarCraft II
The Sims 3 Ambitions
Battlefield: Bad Company 2
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2

PC

GTA San Andreas Platinum
Far Cry 2
The Sims 3
Call of Duty: Deluxe Edition
Need for Speed: Underground 2

PSP

Toy Story 3: The Video Game
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker
James Cameron's Avatar Platinum
MX vs ATV Reflex
Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines Platinum

PSP

FIFA World Cup 2010 SA
Iron Man 2
Ben 10 Alien Force: Vilgax Attacks
Need for Speed: Undercover
FIFA 10 Platinum

WII

Super Mario Galaxy 2
New Super Mario Bros. Wii
Big Beach Sports 2
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11
Project Runway

WII

Wii Sports
FIFA World Cup 2010 SA
Wii Fit + board
New Super Mario Bros. Wii
Wii Sports Resort + Motion Plus

DS

Camp Rock: The Final Jam
The Sorcerer's Apprentice
Shrek Forever After
Batman: The Brave and the Bold
Bakugan Battle Trainer

DS

New Super Mario Bros
Mario Kart DS
Pokémon SoulSilver Version
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story
Prof. Kawashima's Brain Training

» READ THE BOOK, PLAY THE GAME

Seems that *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is looking to jump on the games-to-novels bandwagon with *Deus Ex: The Icarus Effect*, a novel published by Del Rey and due out next year (probably around the same time that the game hits shelves). Author James Swallow is penning the novel, whose previous work includes tie-in novels for *Doctor Who, Warhammer 40, 000, Stargate* and *Star Trek*, meaning that Swallow is no stranger to expanding existing fictional universes. He also worked on *Killzone 2* and is working on *Human Revolution* itself. Characters and events from the novel will feature in the upcoming game, making it worth a look if you want to flesh out the game experience, or just enrapture yourself further in the fascinating universe of *Deus Ex*.

PS3 GETTING EXCLUSIVE MAFIA II DLC

The first details on the PS3's exclusive Mafia II content (announced at E3) have been revealed. Buying the game for PS3 will get you access to free DLC in the form of "Jimmy's Vendetta", and it appears (thanks to Trophy descriptions) that the DLC will include several missions and an arcade-like points system, complete with score multiplier.

Blast from the past

Sometimes, we can be complete suckers for anything to do with retro gaming, so when a deal like this comes along, we get a little misty-eyed. The device in question is the RetroN 3. Not only does it have the words "retro" and "tron" in its title (which alone scores it well over a hundred nerd points), but allows you to play NES, SNES and Genesis (Mega Drive) game cartridges from a single console. With the current state of second-hand purchases of thousands of classic carts, you'll be able to build up your collection in no-time, if you don't already have a library worth gloating over. The system accepts original controllers from all three devices, but also includes two wireless gamepads that will work across platforms, and look much like the Mega Drive's controllers. The RetroN 3 costs $70 (R530) excluding shipping, and is available in either red or blue from **www.hyperkin.com**.
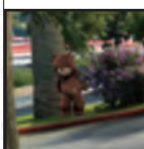
The Beavatar

I'm in ur jungle, hiding from ur doods

The story so far: Our poor badger has disappeared (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights... so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of *NAG* has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere... Get going. Send your sitings to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'August Beavatar'.

Spank Me! Winner July

Alan Docherty, p62

WIN!
One person who finds the Beavatar will win a Dream Gear PSP 3000 & 2000 Limited Edition starter kit, sponsored by Dream Gear and Bowline.

Dragon Age grows up and moves out

THIS IS NOT MUCH of a surprise: BioWare is working on *Dragon Age 2*. From what we can tell, the game will be subtitled *Rise to Power*, and will focus on a brand new hero in a new part of the world doing exactly that: growing from a lowly nobody to a champion of the land. You'll flee your destroyed home, fight for survival and put together a group of powerful allies, seek out your fame and fortune, and "seal your place in history."

Details are a little sketchy at the moment (EA is saving everything for a massive information blow-out, so expect a full preview soon), but we know that the game's storyline will take place over the space of a decade. Whether that means we can expect a *Fable*-style shift in gameplay partway through the game remains to be seen, but it would certainly fit the bill. BioWare has promised new combat mechanics that will get the player closer to the action than ever before, regardless of class, and will wrap this all up with an "entirely new cinematic experience that grabs hold of you from the beginning and never lets go." All of this, combined with what they claim to be a new visual style with updated graphics, and you have a recipe for what could be a very successful sequel to an already impressive start to the series.

Obsidian isn't ready to give up just yet

SEGA's recent *Alpha Protocol* didn't perform terribly well, which you'll gather from the review in this issue. As a result, the publisher is pretty adamant that they're not going to give developer Obsidian Entertainment a chance at a sequel.

"Let's speak very commercially; the game hasn't sold what we've expected, therefore we won't be doing a sequel," says Sega's US boss Mike Hayes. "The concept was brilliant, though. You know this whole thing with Metacritic where you have to be in the high 70s to mid-80s minimum – well, with RPGs you have got to be in the late 80s.

"Whilst we had a good game, I don't think we had a game that had enough to get us to that upper echelon and I think that was the issue. Again, the amount you need to invest to get there is so large because RPGs are naturally big projects. We've decided we won't do a sequel."

Well, we have maintained that Obsidian is perhaps best left to continuing the work of other studios, as we've seen with the excellent, and successful, *Neverwinter Nights 2* and *Knights of the Old Republic II* (and, hopefully, the upcoming *Fallout: New Vegas* and *Dungeon Siege III*). Thankfully, the studio is going to get right back on that horse, and is looking towards the cult classic *Chrono Trigger* for a comfy saddle.

How cool will this be when they're all zombies?

Red Dead Rising Redemption – More multiplayer packs inbound

We all know the old adage: zombies make EVERYTHING cooler. *NAG* loves zombies – LOVES 'EM! So you can imagine the shrieks of delight when we found out about Rockstar Games' four new multiplayer packs for *Red Dead Redemption*, one of which has been dubbed *Undead Nightmare Pack*. Hell. Yes.

If all goes well, the first pack, called *Legends and Killers*, will be available for download by the time you read this. The pack will add new multiplayer map locations, new multiplayer characters, a Tomahawk for use in both single-player and multiplayer, as well as new trophies and achievements.

The second pack, *Liars and Cheats* does not have a release date yet but will include a ton of new multiplayer activities including Poker and Liars Dice. What's more, a new Explosive Rifle (oooh!) will be added to the weapon load-out.

A third pack called *Free Roam Pack* has been announced, but details are scarce at the moment. We're guessing it will fine tune the Free Roam experience and add new bits and pieces for posses to do.

Last but not least is the aforementioned *Undead Nightmare Pack* which will add zombies to the mix. New animals, challenges and new single-player adventures will be included as well, but in all honesty nobody gives an armadillo's carapace about those because there will be waves of undead to mow down! And we thought *Red Dead Redemption* couldn't get any better.

All of the packs will be available as paid for downloads on the PlayStation Network and Xbox LIVE.

< Bytes >

Distributors

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Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Nat Geo Quiz! Wild Life* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'August Caption'.

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR: "What really goes on in the sewer."

LAST MONTH'S WINNER:
"Hey Steve if they grab you, just tell them to lego. Get it? Lego?"
"Oh God... I hope they kill you first Bill." *– Arthur Fung*

It doesn't matter if you're black or white

Console colours are a funny thing. If a console is released in white, people go nuts over a special version that's in black. Release the standard version in black, and white is the best thing in the world all of a sudden. Regardless, the idea of a white slim PS3 does sound appealing, and Sony knows that. They're set to release a special version of the slim, all in white (oddly named "Classic White"), that will include a sizable 320GB hard drive, but it's only going to be available in Japan – for now, at least; possible Western releases are down to market demand at this point. Also in the region, the 120GB and 250GB versions have been canned; they're to be replaced by 160GB and the new 320GB models. The console will retain its fingerprint-destroying matte finish and includes a white controller.

BT GAMES™ Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

AUGUST: WEEK 2

World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars	PS3, 360
Madden NFL 11	PS3, 360

AUGUST: WEEK 3

TNA iMPACT: Cross the Line	DS, PSP
Everybody's Tennis	PSP
The Sorcerer's Apprentice	DS

AUGUST: WEEK 4

Mafia II	PC, PS3, 360
Imagine Dream Resort	DS
Patrician IV	PC
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	PC, PS3, 360

AUGUST: UNCONFIRMED

Trinity Universe	PS3
Quantum Theory	PS3, 360

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 1

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2	PC, PS3, 360
Metroid Prime Trilogy	Wii
Dead Rising 2	PC, PS3, 360

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 2

Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	PS3, 360, Wii, DS
R.U.S.E.	PC, PS3, 360

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 3

Halo Reach Standard, Limited and Legendary editions	360
NHL 11	PS3, 360

SEPTEMBER: WEEK 4

Sid Meier's Civilization V	PC
Hot Wheels: Battle Force Five	WII, DS
Toy Story 3: The Video Game	PS2

SEPTEMBER: UNCONFIRMED

Playstation Move	PS3
F1 2010	PC, PS3, 360
LOTR: Aragorn's Quest	PS3, PSP, PS2, DS, Wii
The Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole	PS3, 360, DS, Wii
Batman: The Brave and the Bold	Wii, DS

BULLET

DEVELOPER > People Can Fly   **PUBLISHER** > Epic Games   **RELEASE DATE** > Q1 2011   **WEB** > www.Bulletstorm.com   **GENRE** > First-person shooter   **GENRE** > PC | 360 | PS3 | PSP

Perhaps the better title would have been "Sh1tstorm"

KICKING PEOPLE IN THE *nuts improves one's sanity, and greatly increases one's chance of survival. It's also fun.*

That is the true story behind *Bulletstorm*, an upcoming kill-with-style first-person shooter from People Can Fly (recently bought by Epic), the creators of the deliciously camp and yet somehow nutritious kill-with-stakes first-person shooter, *Painkiller*.

The setting: a pair of outlaws, banished to the rear-end of space. The one is a chauvinist, egotist, sadist and racist (against cyborgs). The other's a cyborg. On the planet Stygia, a "paradise defiled," the duo must fight for their lives and sanity against a tribe of punks called The Skulls. There's also a giant man-eating plant – a single underground organism – that assaults every inch of the surface with tongues, barbs and vines.

There's only one clear course of action: kick everything in the nuts! For points!

MAY CONTAIN NUTS

Cliff Bleszinski (a.k.a. "CliffyB" a.k.a. "Dude Huge") is best known for having put a chainsaw on a machine gun as lead designer on *Gears of War*, an idea he cribbed from *Warhammer 40,000*, but we won't tell. He's a very excitable person, and enjoys kicking people in the nuts. He runs around demonstrating this feature in *Bulletstorm*.

"I hope I'll be able to work someday on a game that has absolutely no space marine characters in it," he says. "That'd be great. Somewhere down the line I hope to work on something people will look at and say: 'That's an Epic game? No way.' That's a way off, but it's what I'd love to do eventually."

Bulletstorm, which does not look like an Epic game and wasn't really made by Epic, was built up through a "gospel of iteration." People Can Fly pitched the idea for the game at Epic, who loved it and then pitched back suggestions. This, back and forth for a few years, helped *Bulletstorm* grow into the fine nut-kicking simulator it is today. But it's not all about nuts, you see. To paraphrase Cliffy, it's about being a "kick-ass" dude who can get into some "creative mayhem" by "killing with skill" so you can

>>
People Can Fly chose their studio name after listening to a lot of trippy music.

< Bulletstorm >

STORM

THE MANY WAYS TO KICK NUTS (IN SPACE)

There will be many unique scoring situations in *Bulletstorm*.
Here is a short guide to some of them:

Mercy: Shoot punk in the kneecaps, then shoot off his head.

4th Of July: Shoot punk with explosive chain, detonate chain.

Gag Reflex: Shoot punk in the neck, watch punk bleed.

Afterburner: Shoot explosive crate near punk, watch punk burn.

Gang Bang: Shoot punk with explosive chain, Leash another punk into the air, kick airborne punk into first punk. Detonate chain.

Fertilizer: Leash punk into air along with explosive crate, shoot crate. Watch meat chunks drop.

Trap Shooting: Leash punk into air, shoot punk with shotgun.

enjoy the "circle of awesome," which we presume is the game's main loop of killing stuff, upgrading your ability to kill stuff, then killing more stuff. All along a story-driven narrative, of course.

It's true, however, that you can be *quite* creative. Like in *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic*, you can kick an enemy into spikes, which adds bonus points for environmental usage. You can slide into a punk, which stuns him into a kind of insular bullet-time, then shoot him. You can kick him in the nuts, then in the face, for a double-tap bonus. You can kick him into a man-eating plant, which then eats the man. Everything you do is scored with special points used for upgrading your moves and guns.

CREATIVE NUT-BUSTING

There is the Leash, an energy whip. Tapping the left bumper sends it out to snap up your target, slamming him into the ground or throwing him into other enemies. You can whip up an explosive create for a makeshift missile. Being a first-person shooter, you can also *shoot*.

"The guys at People Can Fly put a lot of work into the down-the-barrel core shooter experience being fun," says Cliffy.

He's right, it looks wonderful. When zoomed in, there is a crisp depth of field and some explosive muzzle flash. This, on top of an already detailed Unreal Engine 3 powered environment. God beams (shafts of light) poke through holes, textures are detailed, enemies expertly modelled and animated. To be honest, it looks better than what Epic themselves have done with their engine. "*Bulletstorm* has two suns, so that means twice the god beams!" exclaims Cliffy as he uses a gun that shoots 100 bullets all at once. The skin melts off the punk he fired at. He uses the Leash to juggle another punk into the air before dispatching him, toying with the bad guys like a cat plays with a mouse. "Like a fat kid plays with his cake," says Cliffy.

A huge bruiser busts on to the scene, bullets seem to have no immediate effect. By dashing into him, sliding and then whipping, Cliffy turns the bruiser around and proceeds to unload a clip of bullets into the guy's ass. He gets a "Fire In The Hole" skill-shot bonus.

"This is the only videogame that lets you give your enemies a colon-cleansing with lead!"

NUT YOUR AVERAGE SHOOTER

The action is eccentric and visceral, gore is everywhere, the dialogue between the two characters is one-liner central and funny. The entire thing looks *exactly* like the kind of shameless self-indulgent pleasure we all secretly crave from our games, but are too mature to admit. This isn't the type of game you can write about and accurately convey the *spirit* of the thing. You're just going to have to play it.

Bulletstorm has some tough competition upon its release, facing off against the "run-anywhere" team-based shooter, *Brink*, and the recently announced score-attack shooter *Bodycount*. Will gamers lump them all together, thus missing out on *Bulletstorm*'s finer points?

"The human mind's wired to see patterns," says Cliffy. "Hollywood always moves in patterns with shark movies, zombie movies or vampire movies – don't get me started on those. Everyone loves a challenge, they love competition. So, bring it. With *Gears*, they brought *Resistance* and *Killzone*, and I think *Gears* held its own. We're going to make this game kick-ass, and the consumers win, man."

When the main goal of a game is to violently assault a digital character for score, *everyone* wins.

Miktar Dracon
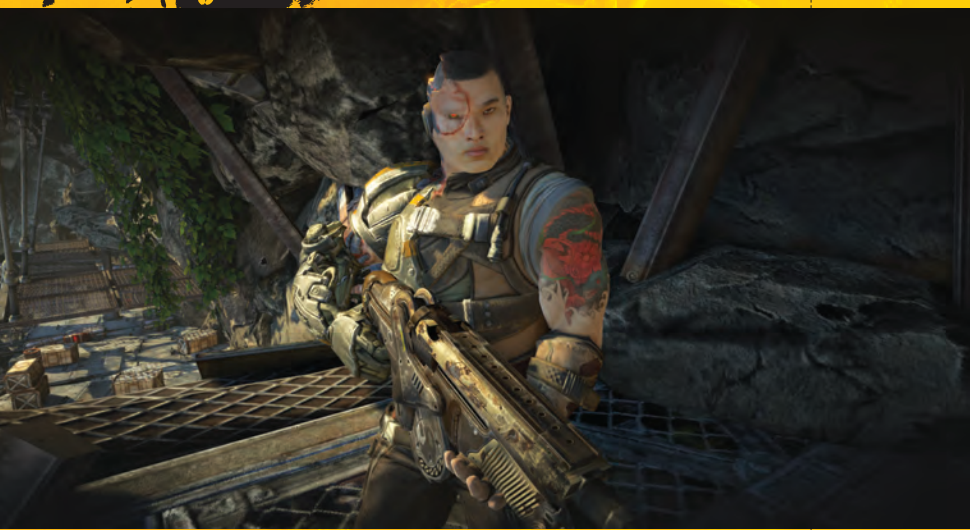
Q&A

ADRIAN CHMIELARZ, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, PEOPLE CAN FLY

> In addition to its colourful personality and sense of humour, what else does *Bulletstorm* bring to the first-person shooter genre that sets it apart?

Oh, but the most important feature is the Skillshot system. Look, in most shooters in the world killing an enemy is a good thing, right? You aim, fire, he's dead – awesome, let's go, let's move. But in our game, if you "just" kill the enemy, you're disappointed with yourself – because if you killed him in a special way (like thumping him with your energy leash into the air and then killing with a headshot or by kicking him into over-grown mutant cactus spikes) you would have been greatly rewarded. So regular kills are okay, but what you really want is the Skillshot. It's a simple feature – reward players for creatively pulling off cool kills – but it completely changes the way you play a shooter. Anyone who ever had a chance to actually touch and play *Bulletstorm* can confirm that.

> What have you learned from your previous projects that you can apply to making *Bulletstorm* better?

One example that I can give is that you want your game to be consistent. For example, *Painkiller* was a balls-to-the-wall shooter full of big guns and even bigger enemies, but we decided to have a couple of puzzle sequences in the game to improve pacing and just add something cool to the mix. And it was a mistake. Many people got stuck in these places, not because these puzzles were particularly hard, but because when you play a shooter, your mind is in a certain state that's hard to change on the fly. So your design has to be consistent. You can mix things up – *God of War* does it very well with combat and puzzles – but you cannot add features "just because it's cool."

> What was the inspiration for *Bulletstorm*?

We were inspired by the lack of games like *Bulletstorm*. Everything's so dead serious and buttocks-clenched. It's not that we are going totally towards the *Painkiller* way – when it was all about good fun and silly story – but we think you still can have a serious story, well designed characters and real emotions, *and* have a fun dialogue and laughter-inducing gameplay moments.

> The Energy Leash, kick and slide mechanics are very strong components in the game, what brought them about?

We want a very visceral feel to the game, that's the reason why at one point we have decided to go first-person perspective route. Kicking and sliding and fishing people out of the cover with the Leash is something that greatly adds to this feel.

> Any plans for co-operative or multiplayer?

We're not discussing multiplayer yet, but stay tuned.

> Is there a maximum length to combination chains?

It's all in your imagination. Unleash your inner sadist and see how far you can go with the ways of destruction. Sometimes you will be satisfied with just a perfect headshot, sometimes you'll want to leash the guy, kick him away in a different direction, shoot the nearby barrel to set him on fire, leash him back to you again, then wrap the flailchain around him, and kick him into the cactus.

4720

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Founded in 2002 by a handful of industry veterans, Polish game developer People Can Fly made a name for themselves with their cult hit, *Painkiller*. They're a small studio, only 20 people, not counting external contractors. They were acquired by Epic Games in 2007, after their stellar work converting *Gears of War* to PC.

> Will you be able to save or share replays, or play against ghost replays of other players?

Obviously we want the players to share their experiences with other people, but in the days of YouTube and video camera in every phone doing this in-game seems like a little bit of overkill. It's technically very challenging, and we'd rather focus our resources on more action and more bad-ass kills than the recording system.

> How are the interactions between Grayson Hunt and his 'sidekick' (Ishi Sato) handled, squad-based orders, will a second player be able to control Ishi?

No. You yourself are the hero, and we want you to feel like a bad ass mother****er, not a bad ass team leader. Also, Gray's relationship with Ishi is complicated. Ishi's not an "Okay, man!" kind of a sidekick. I don't want to spoil it, so I'll say no more, but there are some real surprises in store here.

> What's it like working with Epic, what kind of help, challenges and input, etc?

It's what you expect, pain in the ass! Just kidding. These guys have such insanely high standards, that you need to be better than you really are if you want to impress them. With jokes aside, is truly a great thing for gamers, because what it translates to is a better game than we could have ever imagined.

> Will there be any form of statistics tracking applied to the game, leader board ranks in the single-player and so on?

Yes. No. Maybe.

> What was your biggest challenge in developing this game?

Everything is challenging. We try to have it all: great gameplay, great visuals, great tech, etc. So we challenge ourselves in every area, which, I guess, is the answer to your question: the biggest challenge is that we treat everything with equal importance.

> Was there anything cool that was left out of the final game due to technical, timing or logistical reasons?

The game is not finished yet so we haven't left anything out. But from what I have learned during the years, usually if you have to cut anything, it's not a big deal, and quite often it makes the game better. And you can always keep this killed idea for any future project.

> Can you talk about DLC, do you think everyone expects it now (gamers) or do publishers simply demand it for extra revenue and is there DLC planned for _Bulletstorm_?

We're not talking about DLC plans yet."

> What has been done/added/improved/updated to Unreal Engine 3 to make it your own?

The myth about Unreal engine is that it's an engine that has been released a few years ago and now every developer has to add its own set of features if they want to shine. "We're using heavily modified version of Unreal" is something you can hear quite often. But the truth is that Unreal is constantly updated and improved. Unreal Engine 3 from today has nothing to do with Unreal Engine 3 from 2006. Just with the latest engine build we

got god rays and dynamically lit particles.
Of course we did our own stuff, but it's mostly on gameplay side – other than this, Epic's tech team is doing an amazing job and delivers the kick ass goodies to us every single month.

> Can you provide a list of weapons and their basic function or unique selling points?

We spent some quality time with our weapons, real blood, sweat and tears were shed. For example, one of our signature weapons, the Flailgun, took over three months to make. But it was worth it; wrapping enemies with two grenades on the end of a chain is very satisfying, especially when you pull the trigger and observe how the helpless enemy is blasted to bits and pieces. Personally, I like one particular even crazier weapon, but I cannot reveal the details for now – stay tuned!

> What is the first computer game you ever played and platform?

Ah *ZX Spectrum* and some *Star Wars*. This was the first time I touched a computer, and I was just ecstatic, especially considering I beat the score of anyone else in the room. True story.

> Is tea bagging possible or even encouraged in *Bulletstorm*?

We considered a Skillshot like that at one point, but it's too easy. We have something better, but my lips are sealed.

> What recent movie blew you away and what is your favourite all time movie?

Avatar kicked my ass, but hey, that's not a big surprise, is it? As for the all time favourite, I am torn between *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Blade Runner*.

> Can people really fly...?

Not when Island's volcanoes have something to say...

> How much cash do you have on you right now?

Not enough to get back home in a taxi, so I'd have to hit the ATM after work.

> Favourite 'developer' snack and drink?
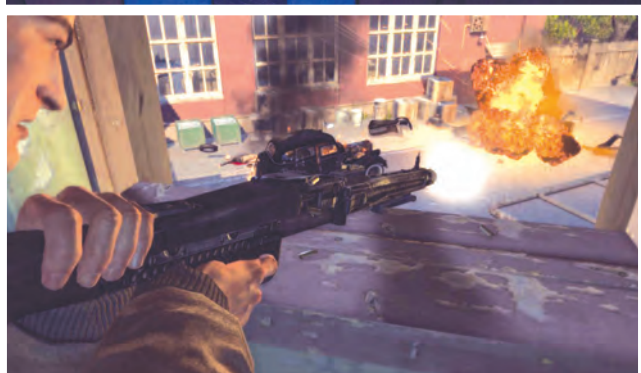
A cigarette and Red Bull Light. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

>>
Mafia II has a screenplay over 700 pages long, compared to the "mere" 400 pages of the first title. Daniel Vávra, writer and director of *Mafia I*, has returned to fill the same roles in the sequel.

Mafia II

Say hello to my little friend

GENRE > Action

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

HANDS ON

MANY GAMERS MISSED OUT on the first *Mafia*. I'm not really sure why; the game had a fantastic story, well-crafted characters, tons of action, a great driving system and plenty of city to explore. Whatever the reason, if you fall into the group that didn't play *Mafia*, you won't be penalised: *Mafia II* might share a name with the first title, but its story is almost completely separate. Sure, you may not fully appreciate all the little nuances in the game, but when it finally rolls out, you'll be able to pick up and play what is my most anticipated title of the year (even beating back the might of *StarCraft II*). If you did play the first *Mafia*, however, you should know that you're in for a treat. The developers have been working on this next title for a long time in an attempt to bring back the magic and charm that *Mafia* possessed, but wrapped up in a current-generation, bright and sparkly cover that's sure to please even the most hardened *Crysis* fanboy.

For this preview, we were given access to a selection of chapters from the first part of the game. I simply couldn't play past the first two (which are chapters two and five); even spoiling that tiny bit of the story was enough for me, but the amount of non-story content that we got our hands on was enough to

have me chewing at the bit *[you mean champing right, Ed]* for the final release of this game. While it's usually considered rude to comment on the visual and gameplay quality of pre-release code, I'm willing to stretch the bounds here and say that everything I saw and played was brilliant: polished, engaging and entertaining.

Anyway, enough of my blatant fawning, here's *Mafia II* in a nutshell: you play as Vito, a young troublemaker who has recently been discharged from the army, circa 1945, following his mandatory service as punishment for a botched burglary. You're not back home long before your childhood friend, Joey, lets you in on his recently-discovered secret to financial success, which is of particular interest to Vito, as he quickly discovers that his dead-beat father left his family heavily in debt before he passed away. So, Joey introduces you to his mobster friends, and before long you're neck-deep in the affairs of *La Cosa Nostra*. The game will span a full decade as you rise from the ranks of goon to 'made man', and eventually all the way to the top of the biggest family in America.

The game retains the same sandbox gameplay from the first *Mafia*, or if you're not familiar with that, think of *GTA* in the '40s,

< Mafia II >

> "...think of *GTA* in the '40s, with all the style and flair associated with the post-WWII era."

SPEEDSTONE BETA
Chrome

The body shop

Not to be confused with that store that sells all the smelly butters and fizzy soaps, these handy garages are located around Empire City and will make your vehicular getaway attempts all the more manageable. Even once you've escaped the long arm of the law, any vehicle involved in criminal activity will be flagged as wanted, so you either need to ditch the ride or cover up your tracks. The body shops can be used to re-spray vehicles in any colour, fix up dents, scratches or broken bits, change the licence plates (which are customisable), fit some flash new rims or even tune the engine to give you that edge when trying to escape from the cops.

with all the style and flair associated with the post-WWII era. You'll have to perform a number of missions for the mob, which range from theft to beatings to murders, with many of the missions having a driving component. Everything in *Mafia II*, from the combat to the driving, has been given a make-over; there's now a pretty decent cover system, and the act of brawling throws Vito and his opponent into a semi-fixed area-style battle that ensures you can give your full attention to the bout of fisticuffs in front of you.

Throughout the city are a number of stores that you can visit. In addition to the body shop mentioned elsewhere on these pages, Vito can go to restaurants and diners to refill his health on food and drinks (too many alcoholic beverages aren't a good idea), pick out some new threads at the tailor, and

purchase weapons and thieves' tools from gun shops, military surplus stores or black market traders. There's also a junkyard whose owner is always on the lookout for new cars, and will commission Vito to pick one up whenever an order comes in. The car-jacking system is a little different this time: Vito can steal and drive any car without needing to learn the particular ropes, and has an option of smashing the window (which alerts passers-by but is quicker) or taking his time with the lock-picking micro-game to do things on the sly. In case you're wondering: yes, you can still get pulled over for driving too fast, but the cops are a bit more lax than they were before, so you're not restricted to driving at granny-pace all the time. Many police officers are also quite happy to accept a bribe for other criminal offences, so long as there aren't too many boys in blue around to

witness the under-handed dealings.

If you were concerned that *Mafia II* wouldn't be able to recapture the special moments that made the first game so good, then it looks like we can all breathe easy. From what we've seen so far, the game is exactly what everyone wanted: more *Mafia*. The developers haven't changed too much; they've simply expanded on the ideas from the first game and brought everything up to date. Perhaps the biggest change to the game will be the focus of the action. While *Mafia I* was pretty hard-hitting, it romanticised the mobster world by drawing inspiration from classic gangster films and stories. This time, 2K Czech is out to show the grittier, darker side of the mob by drawing directly from real-world events rather than their poetic retellings. **NAG**
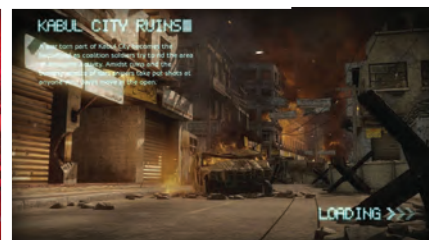**Geoff Burrows**
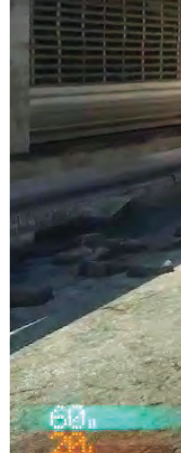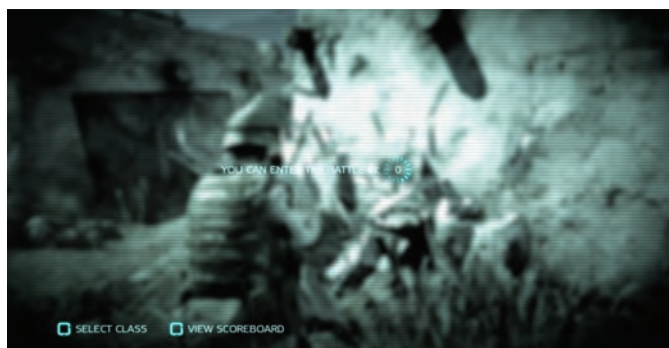
Medal of Honor

CoD vs. MoH. Ready? Fight!

GENRE > First-Person Shooter

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

HANDS ON

IT'S NO SECRET THAT we here at *NAG* are **obsessed** with *Call of Duty*. We struggle to play anything else online really, because every time we try to find another game to play, it takes all of five minutes for boredom to set in and drive us back into *CoD*'s addiction-inducing arms. The truth is, however, that we're getting a bit sick of *Modern Warfare 2* and the horde of loud-mouthed, profanity spewing campers (in conjunction with the "OMG there's no way you could possibly have killed me – you don't have a clan tag and therefore you obviously have no skill" clannies that seem to crawl from game to game and do nothing but whine for the duration of each match) who infest the servers every minute of every day. Granted, it's highly likely that these whine fests and camper carnivals are mostly limited to the PC version, but our growing disdain at the very thought of yet another *CoD* multiplayer match (which have pretty much devolved into 15-minute insult contests) has us ready for something new. A new game to rival the awesomeness of *Quake III Arena*'s multiplayer would be nice. We're just saying.

TUBER P**S

We can't imagine that happening though, so instead we'll look for a game very similar to *CoD*, but wrapped up in a slightly different box that has a different title scrawled across the front of it: *Medal of Honor*. With the multiplayer beta having recently opened up to people who pre-ordered the game, we dove in headfirst to find out if this might be the game that'll entice us to take our eyes off of *CoD* for more than five minutes.

LIES!

If you played *Bad Company 2* and hated its focus on teamwork and playing nicely with others, but loved everything else about the game, then you'll be happy to know that *Medal of Honor* takes all the best bits of that game and combines it with the ability to be the lone gunman and still have fun without needing a good team to back you up, much like *CoD*. The multiplayer is being developed by EA DICE separately from the single player, and utilises the same Frostbite engine used for *Bad Company* and its sequel. The single player is being developed by EA Los Angeles and runs on a heavily modified Unreal Engine 3.

HAX!

For those of you who plan on buying *Medal of Honor* for the single player, here's what we know so far. The story will be based on true events that took place in Afghanistan in 2002, with the player taking control of numerous characters from different US military outfits throughout the campaign. When playing as a Tier One Operator (an elite group of badass dudes with guns and glorious beards), you're the tip of the spear, having a huge impact on the outcome of the overall conflict. On the flip side, when you don the combat boots of a US Army Ranger, you're a small fish in a very large, explosion-filled sea of bombs and destruction. Word is that you'll spend most of your time playing as a Tier One Operator in a storyline littered with raids on terrorist hideouts and undercover operations. Driveable vehicles will feature and EA has seen fit to bring in consultants from the US military to provide insight on how to make the game as authentic as possible.

BS!

Now let's talk about what you're really here for: the multiplayer. Simply put, the beta is a

< Medal of Honor >

Medal of Honor takes all the best bits of [*Bad Company 2*] and combines it with the ability to be the lone gunman and still have fun without needing a good team to back you up, much like *CoD*."

ton of fun. It's essentially a mixture of *CoD* and *Bad Company*, with generous helpings of *CoD*-inspired linear weapon/equipment unlocks and unyielding chaos, with a splash of gameplay mechanics pulled from *Bad Company* that set it apart from its main rival. Two game modes are on offer in the beta: Combat Mission and Team Assault. Team Assault is a fancy way of saying Team Deathmatch, with utter madness ensuing as both teams vie for points by killing as many enemies as possible without getting shot in the groin too many times. Set on an urban map filled with camping spots and multiple elevation levels (i.e. camping spots on rooftops) called Kabul City, the Team Assault mode is exactly what you'd expect: simple, uncomplicated fun without objectives and all that stuff to take your mind off of killing dudes, great for when you don't feel like thinking and just want to shoot lots. Combat Mission is far more interesting, a game mode with constantly changing objectives set on a map dubbed Helmand Valley. One team defends while the other attacks, with the attacking team having to complete objectives like destroying roadblocks and taking out anti-air turrets so that air support can be called in. Each time an objective is completed,

>>

The first *Medal of Honor*, released back in 1999 for the original PlayStation, boasted a story written by Steven Spielberg. The director/producer/god is credited as the creator of the series. US Marine Captain Dale Dye provided input as the game's military advisor, who on occasion saw fit to put the *Medal of Honor* developers through the same kind of combat training that the cast of *Saving Private Ryan* underwent.

the frontline of the conflict shifts to a new location. The constantly shifting battlefield and the interesting objectives make this mode hugely enjoyable, especially when you coordinate your onslaught/defence with friends. The map also boasts vehicles, with tanks that occasionally spawn for the attackers to make big booms with.

NO SKILL NOOB!

At the end of every game, you gain points towards unlocking new weapons and equipment for whichever classes you played as during the match. There are three of these classes in the beta: rifleman, special ops and sniper, each with their own unique unlocks and weaponry. New weapons, laser sights, different ammunition types and all sorts of wonderful toys can all be unlocked when you gain enough experience. These classes can then be customised at any time, even if you're in the middle of a game. The gameplay is scarily similar to *CoD*'s, with the only real differences being the ability to sprint infinitely, the reduced general movement speed and the slower, more deliberate gameplay. Online leader boards, persistent stats and locked ribbons and medals are all in there, together with

dedicated servers for the PC gamers. That's right: if the bum's still a bit raw from the debacle involving *Modern Warfare 2*'s absence of dedicated servers, EA is providing some ointment, which means the clannies won't even have to stage a boycott of the game for half a day before going out to buy it anyway...

ALL CAPS!

So, the big question is: will it be bigger and better than *CoD*? This may sound like a copout, but it really is too soon to tell. They both offer a similar gameplay experience, with the biggest difference coming from the look and feel of the game. Chances are that both games will retain their own following of gamers who will likely argue with each other over which game is better until long after the English language runs out of insults for them to hurl at each other. We'd be lying if we said that we aren't excited for *Call of Duty: Black Ops* along with *MoH* and it'll be fascinating to see which game comes out on top as most-played multiplayer game at the *NAG* office. Our guess? It'll come down to whichever game's player base is the most fun to game with. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

SEEN AT E3 2010
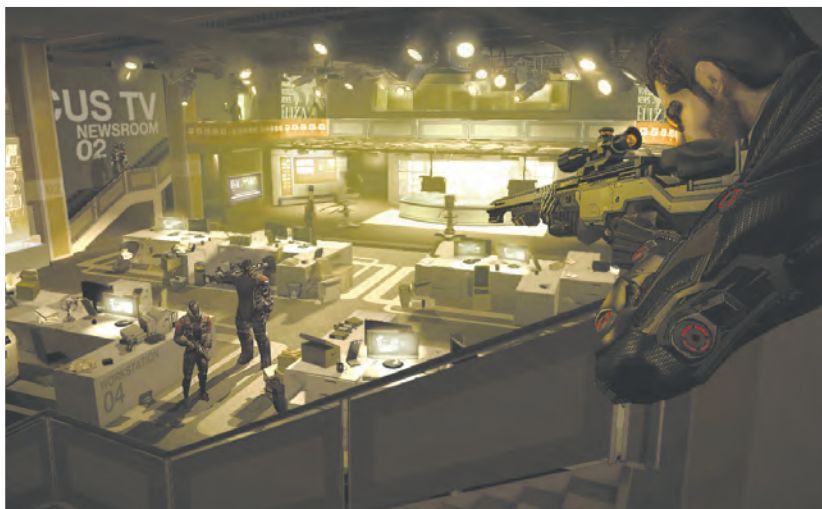
Transhumanism for fun and profit

GENRE > Action RPG

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

HOW SOON IS TOO soon, when remaking the *Best PC Game of All Time******? With ten years having passed since the original, perhaps the better question is: what took them so damn long? The last decade has seen such significant advances in hardware and software, gameplay conventions and design philosophy, that any remake done today would not only stand as its own creation, it would be speaking to an entirely new audience that probably never even *heard* of the original.

Deus Ex stood alone when it launched in 2000, a year filled with the strange and diverse explosions of hundreds of new game ideas as everyone in game development everywhere flung as much as they could at the walls to see what stuck. A cybernetic thriller set in a future where human augmentation via machines was the norm; *Deus Ex* emphasised a rich storyline and a *truly* interactive environment, when everyone else simply listed such features as bullet points for the sake of saying them.

Human Revolution takes place 25 years before *Deus Ex*, a tidy way of starting fresh yet still paying homage to the original franchise without requiring that anyone play the previous two games. "The year is 2027", says Lead Writer and Designer on *Human Revolution*, Mary DeMarle, as she fires up the game for our E3 demonstration. "*Human Revolution* is an action RPG, based around four pillars of gameplay: combat, stealth, social and hacking." Playing as Adam Jensen, a private Cyber Security specialist, players will be able to solve any situation using one of those pillars. *Human Revolution* is to be

a multi-path, multi-solution game – bold words, in a climate of increasingly narrower gameplay experiences.

DeMarle runs us through a few key events set six hours into the game, Adam has to find a hacker involved in a conspiracy against a security company. For the demo, the HUD had been removed and infinite ammo and energy had been turned on.

Arriving on an island cradling a giant, futuristic, *Blade Runner* neon-city filled with smoke and people, Adam can talk to every NPC, either to learn more about the story or to get side-quests. Reaching the door to a club where the hacker is supposedly hiding, a bouncer blocks his way. Adam could fight him, or find another way in, but just pays him off instead. Inside, dialogue with a bartender shows the "Insist, Pinpoint, Advise" system of choices, but the conversation goes south and the informant clams up. DeMarle insists that with the right choices, the conversation could have revealed more information. Adam wanders the club,

>> The original creative directors on the first two games, Warren Spector and Harvey Smith, are not involved in *Deus Ex 3*.

gleans some information about a room downstairs, and heads that way.

As the demonstration moves to more combat-centric actions, the view shifts to third person when in cover at a corner or barrier, then back to first person when exiting cover. Strength augments are used to move a heavy box for access to a warehouse, while cameras are hacked to provide stealth opportunities. At one point, Adam uses an Augment to see heat signatures through the walls, and then punches through a wall to snap a guy's neck. Lethal takedowns are contextual, stunning canned animations viewed from an external perspective. A giant metal square airdropped in unfolds into a spider-tank mini-boss fight. Upgraded rocket launchers let Adam fire at locked-on targets from behind cover, using his invisibility Augment to flank the situation.

If the entire experience looks and plays half as good as the bits we were shown, returning fans or series newcomers alike are in for a genuine treat. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

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Sid Meier's Civilization V

When we get that feelin for some, hex-ual healin...

SEEN AT E3 2010 · E3 · SEEN AT E3 2010

GENRE > Turn-based Strategy

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

WHERE *CIVILIZATION: REVOLUTION* WAS punk, *Civilization V* is progressive. *Revolution* threw everything out and went in a radical new direction, becoming a fun and approachable simplification of the series, more like a board game than a full-on *Civilization*. *Civilization V* takes the more noble, elegant and difficult route of drawing inspiration from *Revolution*'s colourful punk sensibility, without stripping away the series nuance and complexity in order to do so.

Oh, and it's gone *hexagonal*.

"You get more tactical options with hex tiles," says Lead Designer Jon Shafer during our E3 presentation, "that, and you can more clearly see how tiles connect. Like here – it's pretty obvious there is a water channel between these two landmasses. With square tiles, that was more ambiguous."

The hexagonal tile system, combined with the new paradigm of single-unit-per-tile, changes the flow of battle into a more tactical experience. "There's no Stack of Doom," chuckles Shafer, referring to the previous game's fan tactic of just putting lots of single-type units in a pile and steam-rolling them through enemies with sheer weight of numbers. Now, a single unit can last longer against a larger army if used tactically, such as taking advantage of the high ground or funnelling an encroaching army between mountains – just like in the movie *300*.

Advisors have been re-emphasised from *Civilization IV* due to feedback from *Revolution*, and like the Leaders of nations, are fully animated. Leaders also speak in their native language (with subtitles

where applicable), making them much more interesting. We're shown a very upset Elizabeth III as we tell her politely that we're going to shove our army up her rear, via the streamlined Diplomacy screen. All the systems and interfaces have been streamlined, including a new notification system that eliminates the distracting pop-ups from previous games.

The technology tree is a new three-way path, each with unique benefits, and you can set a goal which will move research towards it, instead of having to select each tier manually. You can spend money to buy tiles around cities, while neutral "city states" can be bartered with for relations

>>

People born when the first Civilization game was released, are now turning 19 years old. Congratulations, long-time fans. Like us, you are now acutely aware of your age.

if you're aiming for a Diplomatic victory (which requires the U.N. be built). There are new social policies for a Cultural victory, you still build a space ship for the Technology victory, and the entire A.I. system has been rebuilt from the ground up to "play more like a friend."

All religion has been removed from the game, superseded by the social policy system. Trade and espionage has been made less critical. The biggest new addition is that of a built-in online modification repository; you'll be able to upload and download game modifications and new maps from right within *Civilization V*.   **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Your hands are lethal, choose your style.

TATAKAU

The Owl

The Lazy Tiger

The PS3

The Crow

The Snake

The Spider

The Stork

The Bear

The Hedgehog

The Wii

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

More like "Hawt" Pursuit 3. Giggity.

SEEN AT E3 2010

GENRE > Racing

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

CRITERION GAMES ARE KNOWN for the *Burnout* series of arcade racers, and let's face it: if you haven't played a *Burnout* game by now, why are you reading this magazine? Oh, nobody *told* you that *Burnout* is a cornerstone of the industry? A shining example of fun crashing into gameplay while both explode into nuclear fireballs made from explosions and glitter? Or even an experience that anyone can enjoy irrespective of race, nationality, creed or how you might feel about muffins? Consider yourself *told*.

When the news slipped that Criterion was developing the next instalment in the 16-year-old and perpetually estranged *Need for Speed* franchise, it sparked more than just expectations. It created almost insurmountable hopes and dreams. To show us how they plan to surmount those hopes and dreams is Craig Sullivan. He's the Creative Director on Hot Pursuit 3 (not its real title, we're just calling it that because we're nostalgic that way). He's also prone to understatement, and that's an understatement.

UNDERSTATEMENT

"We knew people would have certain expectations," says Sullivan, picking up a gamepad. Senior Producer Matt Webster picks up a controller and joins the System Link server, his silence bespeaking a quiet rivalry that had been slowly building up between them over the course of the day. The two had already done more than a dozen demonstrations today, showing off *Hot Pursuit*'s "Interceptor 1 vs. 1" multiplayer game mode, which was all they were revealing for now – nothing about the single-player, nothing about the other game modes.

Sullivan is the cop, and Webster is the racer. Super-slick real-time cut-scenes set the scene: racer going fast down one of the main roads of the fictional open-world setting of Seacrest County (four times larger than Paradise City from *Burnout Paradise*). The cops are in hot pursuit and we struggle to watch both screens.

"We wanted equal footing between cops and racers, in both single-player and multiplayer," says Sullivan, but we can tell his mind isn't on the presentation. Like a hound chasing a rabbit, he's barrelling after Webster's car in his supercharged cop cruiser. But the racer has nitro boost, so Webster quickly creates a gap between him and Sullivan. Some fancy driving later and Sullivan is almost on top of Webster, who makes a surprise J-turn and speeds by in the opposite direction.

"The game has loose enough rules so you can show off," says Sullivan. "You can win with style or you can win the cheap way," he adds with almost undetectable venom. All the racer has to do is get out of sight of the cop car and stay that way for a while to win. The cop has to take the racer down, body-check him Road Rage style. Sullivan taps a button (while making a 320 kph drift around a corner) and the chatter over the

>> Muffins are the glue that bonds the gaming industry together, bringing marketing and journalists into a wonderful union via their blueberry good vibes.

"We knew people would have certain expectations."

Craig Sullivan, Creative Director

police radio confirms his request for a roadblock. Ahead of Webster, a cop-car barricade appears as he crests a rise. Banking hard right into a side path while simultaneously using his decoy power-up, Webster splits in two on Sullivan's radar. The cop has access to roadblocks, EMP shunts and aerial support, while the racer can jam the cop's radio, create decoys and of course, boost. Both sides replenish their power-ups rapidly, so... all-out action pretty much three minutes in. The cop radio chatter is constant and informative – when it's not being jammed into noisy static by the racer.

"What we're aiming for is a feature set that's flexible enough that the racers and cops always have an option but – dependent on where they are, how fast they're travelling, what the traffic is doing – you'll never have the same situation twice," says Sullivan a little smugly after having caught up with Webster and ramming him into barricades until his car spun out and flipped over into a slow-motion cut-scene of shattered glass and twisted metal. Score one for the cops. A display at the top of the screen shows the cops vs. racers score tally of the many demo-stations at the EA booth. That same display will, once the game launches, keep track of online wins/losses in real-time for the two warring factions. It is one small part of a larger picture, dubbed "Autolog."

AUTOLOG
Up to eight players can race online, with both single-player and multiplayer automatically posting

records and achievements on the Autolog-feed that your friends can see. It's like Facebook, really, but built into the game, integral to the experience and you won't have to look after anyone's cows. Autolog has a chat system, you can share in-game screenshots, comment on them and more importantly, it generates personalised play recommendations based on what your friends are doing. "It's easy to understand and use," says Sullivan, emphasising its transparent and automatic generation of challenges.

When a friend beats your time on a track – although we're told the game-world is open-world, so we're not sure what constitutes a 'track' in the single-player campaign that spans both cops and racers – it creates a 'beat this' challenge in Autolog. Press a button, and you're instantly trying to best the time, which will be reissued to your friend as a new challenge. The system allows you to play against your friends, even when they're not online.

"It's all about Criterion taking *Need for Speed* to the next generation and bringing back *Hot Pursuit*," chimes Sullivan. After some time with the game ourselves on the show floor, taking down racers and trying to outrun cops, we think his understatement may be pathological. We may be overstating it, but *Hot Pursuit* is exactly what this franchise has needed to revisit, to wash the taste of *bling* and *street* out of its mouth. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

MotorStorm: Apocalypse

Mad Trax

SEEN AT E3 2010

GENRE > Racing

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

HITTING A TINY ROCK, barely a few polygons in size, the car suddenly front-flips while barrel-rolling, becoming an uncontrollable flying lightning-rod for the rage and hate of all things physics-based.

The person playing the *MotorStorm Apocalypse* demo launches into a litany of swearing, frustrated at having been cheated out of placing first in the race by a rock that really shouldn't have made the car do what it did. We would write the event off as a side-effect of the preview being early beta-code, but having played ample *MotorStorm* and its sequel, *Pacific Rift*, we can't really. Arcade-style racing games that rely heavily on physics for their handling and car/world interaction, like *MotorStorm*, are at the whim of some bizarre glitches in spite of the player's wishes.

Of course, he could have just avoided hitting the rock. As we sit down for our turn at the three-lap race taking place inside *Apocalypse*'s run-down mostly-destroyed urban cityscape, we vow to avoid that Damn Rock. In terms of the presentation, the camera angle, the placement of the various interface elements like the boost meter (that cools when not in use to avoid exploding your engine) and the handling of the car, it's obvious the *MotorStorm* team have been playing a lot of *Burnout: Revenge*. The vehicle feels weighty, and meatier than previous titles in the series.

By avoiding that Damn Rock, we avoided the race-ending Physics of Doom. There were a lot of close calls: the destroyed, rubble-filled environment is filled with a lot of sharp edges and little bits of detritus that

have more impact on your car than they should. At one point during the first lap, the road collapses into a parking garage below it, making for some risky racing at that exact moment. You can reset back on to the track, but the demo opponents seem relentless. A single reset would put us in last place, there to stay until the end.

On the final lap, a skyscraper starts collapsing right in front of us on top of the track (holding a button focuses the view on the event), a singularly stunning set-piece that you actually get to drive through/under to complete the race. There is also a moment

>> *Apocalypse* will sport four-player split-screen, and 16-player online races.

where a truck, racing in from an unexpected entrance, makes for a particularly cinematic power-slide under its flatbed.

The full game will let you race supercars, superbikes, choppers, muscle cars and hot hatches. You'll be able to modify vehicles aesthetics and handling, as well as granting them offensive abilities via perks. *Apocalypse* is a bold move for Evolution Studios. Our time with the E3 demo has left a positive impression of the studio's focused attempt at pinning down a series that has, thus far, lacked any true identity. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon
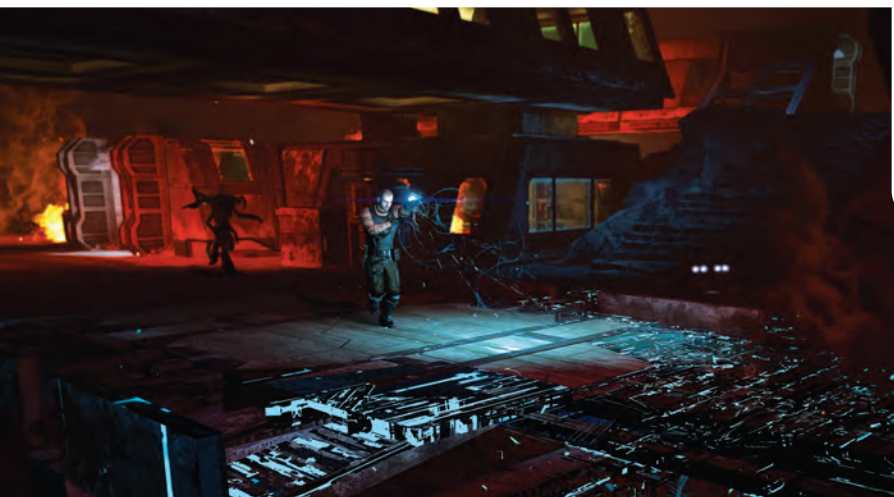
Extermination Mode

Much like *Halo*'s Firefight, *Uncharted 2*'s Siege and *Gears of War 2*'s Horde Mode, *Red Faction* gets its own "us vs. waves of them" gameplay type. Up to four players will be able to team up and battle infinite waves of attackers using the full complement of interesting weapons, though no mention yet if it will allow for split-screen.

> [The Magnet Gun is] clearly the signature weapon for the sequel, able to tear sides off buildings or send aliens through them.

Red Faction: Armageddon

Stop. Hammer time. Again.

SEEN AT E3 2010 · SEEN AT E3 2010

GENRE > Third-person Action

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

MARS... **WHEN WE'RE NOT** waging Grecian war in its name, we're either opening portals to hell on its moons, or having civil war on its surface. Boldly going where games have yet to go, *Red Faction: Armageddon* takes our obsession with Mars to new heights: by plunging its depths.

The fourth instalment in the "you can destroy everything that isn't Important" series, *Armageddon* takes place 50 years after *Red Faction: Guerilla*. The surface of Mars has been destroyed (it's more red than usual), so the colonies have had to burrow deep into the substrate to rebuild their society. Two generations have passed since you brought Freedom to Mars using only a humble Big Hammer, Nanomachine disassembling Rifle and a couple of Singularity Bombs.

Times may have changed, but the gameplay hasn't: fully destructible environments (except the bits that are Important) will yield to your hammer, and you'll still have to liberate settlements. Except instead of freeing people from the totalitarian grip of the Earth Defense Force, you must free them from alien cocoons. It's unclear where the Aliens are from; we suspect they may be from the "Zoo" from the first *Red Faction*. If we're right, you owe us a cookie and a light beer. While most of the game will take place in underground caverns,

the surface of Mars can still be explored.

Our demonstration at E3 focused entirely on an underground mission with Darius Mason, grandchild of Alec "Hammer" Mason from *Guerilla*, protecting a convoy from pesky alien attackers. There's a new Magnet Gun that takes the first thing you shoot at and throws it at the second thing you shoot at. As an example, Mason shoots a car, and then shoots an alien. The effect is hilarious. It's clearly the signature weapon for the sequel, able to tear sides off buildings or send aliens through them. The Nano Forge – an artifact handed down in the Mason family – makes a return, except it's been modified to repair instead of dissolve. Using it on destroyed

>> The original *Red Faction* was actually designed as *Descent 4*, but after *Descent 3* did so poorly in sales, it was changed into the first-person shooter we came to know.

objects will make them reform, so you can construct cover or fix machines.

Mason climbs into a L.E.O. "Exo" suit, a huge powered armour, and crashes through walls as if that's a totally reasonable thing to do when attempting to kill a single alien. Our demonstrator takes his time to flatten an entire neighbourhood using the L.E.O.'s Rhino-like function (that *Guerilla* fans will remember), then acts smug about it. We would too. It's beautiful destruction.

So, more of the same then, except *more*, and with more stuff – we don't imagine anyone who enjoyed *Guerilla* will be disappointed with this sequel. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Called the "Blade Gun Replicator," it can transform into any weapon you find.

Vanquish

Gears of Bayonetta

GENRE > Third-person shooter

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

Shinji Mikami?

He's a Japanese videogame designer best known for creating the survival horror series, *Resident Evil* (known as *Biohazard* in Japan). Other works he contributed on as executive producer include *Devil May Cry*, *Viewtiful Joe* and *P.N.0.3.*

SAM IS NO HERO. He's just your regular government agent. He's not vat-grown and he has no special powers. Just because he's wearing a futuristic battle suit, suddenly everyone expects him to go up against 10-story tall robots that shoot a thousand missiles.

It's all the United State's fault, really. They built a giant sun-energy-collecting space station, but then the Russians captured it and used its awesome power to destroy San Francisco. They were hoping to force the US to surrender. Instead, the US sends out Sam, and his futuristic battle suit.

The battle suit itself is pure awesome. It protects and heals Sam, while letting him rapid-boost from cover to cover. Shinji Mikami, the game's creator, narrates a little as Sam flips over a barrier, which initiates bullet-time automatically. Using the breathing room afforded by the slowdown, Sam picks off a few enemies with some carefully placed headshots – time rushes back in, and Sam boosts into cover. The AR system, responsible for bullet-time when doing tricks out from cover, also has a passive side – when you take a lot of damage all at once, it kicks in the slow-motion so you can try to escape. If you want to replenish health quickly without waiting for regeneration, you can heal allied soldiers littered about the field.

Sam's gun is also special. Called the "Blade Gun Replicator," it can transform into any weapon you find. If you want new weapons, you just pick them up and the BGR reassembles itself into one. Pick up multiple copies of the same weapon, and it will upgrade that type.

On the surface, it really does look like a high-speed *Gears of War* with copious amounts of bullet-time and missile fire. Look deeper, and it's still a high-speed very-Japanese *Gears of War*, but with trace elements of *Bayonetta*. Not the cleavage, but rather the score-attack principles that govern the entire game's combat system.

Vanquish looks like the type of game that rewards mastery of its combat and movement with more than just score, but also the knowledge that you are playing the

>>

"I do think the visuals lean more towards a Western style, but the original inspiration was from *Casshern*, a Japanese animated show, and a lot of the game's taste comes from that," said Mikami.

game *right*. You *could* avoid danger and just pop-and-shoot from beyond cover. But for the true thrill, you'll have to use the boost mechanic and AR system to put yourself in the middle of a risky situation, make it through unscathed *and* look damn good while doing it.

The game has a lot going for it, both in gameplay and in the visuals department. How receptive a Western audience – accustomed to being giant walking bald space-marine meat-tanks – will be to Sam and his rapid, lithe movement is hard to say. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Have you played *Gears of War*? Replace the guns with swords and axes and bows, the space-orcs (Locust) with actual orcs, and you've got the general idea.

Hunted: The Demon's Forge

Gears of War in Dark Fantasy drag

SEEN AT E3 2010 · SEEN AT E3 2010

GENRE > Action

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

HUNTED **IS A DARK** fantasy *Gears of War* clone. Its developer inXile readily admits it, making them one of those rare honest developers. There's no shame in *their* game.

In this day and age, most developers would rather not admit that they're just trying to clone the popular games. An honest developer, that will proudly boast that their entire sales pitch is based on cloning a popular game, is a refreshing change of pace.

"We wanted to use what the Unreal Engine 3 was good for," says game director Maxx Kaufman as we play the game cooperatively with him at Bethesda's E3 booth. He's the sexy E'lara and we're the brutish Caddoc: a pair of soldiers in search of an artefact. E'lara has a bow as her main weapon, while Caddoc gets up close and personal with large melee weapons.

Have you played *Gears of War*? Replace the guns with swords and axes and bows, the space-orcs (Locust) with actual orcs, and you've got the general idea. Melee and ranged weapons work perfectly from the cover system, but the real interesting bit is how magic plays out between the two characters. In our case, Kaufman freezes enemies with an ice spell, and we run up to shatter them with some quick melee combos. Surrounded by skeletons, we trigger a levitate spell which pops them up into the air, immobilised, so Kaufman can dispatch them with some well-placed arrow shots. He gets downed by a zombie, so we throw a Regeneration Vial at him from a distance, reviving him without having to be near. If we didn't have

Regeneration Vials, we'd have to Roadie Run over and do it the old-fashioned way.

At one point we hit a Switch Pylon, which allowed us to trade places inside our character's heads. "We wanted to let the player be either character, and switch it up mid-mission if they got bored", says Kaufman. Because the two characters actually play different, the Switch Pylon is quite fresh.

Some *Zelda*-styled puzzles got solved, some side-quests were triggered by talking to ghosts, and we found new shields, weapons and items by exploring. While the overall structure of the game is linear, maps themselves are huge with a lot of areas

>> Before this, developer inXile Entertainment made a bunch of iPhone games and a remake of *The Bard's Tale* in 2004... So, *nothing*, really.

hidden away or only accessible if you find the right ghost to talk to. The visuals we saw showed a lush, dense forest, murky swamp and overgrown ruins filled with all sorts of fantasy creatures and hazards.

Kaufman admits there won't be any local split-screen, only online cooperative. We made sure to give him a disapproving stare. He wouldn't comment on competitive multiplayer modes either. In any case, while *Hunted* won't be winning any awards for being unique and innovative, it's clear that what it sets out to do, it's going to do very, very well. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Your mother and I are very disappointed in you.

Scott Pilgrim?

"Scott Pilgrim is 23 years old, living in the big city with his gay roommate, just trying to get by in this crazy world. He's lazy. He likes video games.
Scott Pilgrim likes the new girl in town, Ramona Flowers, but to win her heart, he has to defeat her seven evil ex-boyfriends. Seven! Evil! Ex! Boyfriends! Lucas has muscles! Todd plays bass with his psychic powers! The Twins are twins! Matthew Patel is an Indian guy! AND MORE!
Scott Pilgrim is a critically acclaimed, award-winning series of graphic novels by Canadian cartoonist Bryan Lee O'Malley. Boys and girls! Young and old! Come one, come all! Read Scott Pilgrim! Five volumes in stores now! One to go! 2010! Published by Oni Press! (Ages 13 and up!)" -
http://www.scottpilgrim.com/

"Now also a major motion picture. With trailers!" -
http://www.scottpilgrimthemovie.com/

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game

Awesome game of awesome epic awesomeness.

GENRE > Beat 'em up | RPG
PC **XBLA PSN** WII PS2 PSP DS

SCOTT PILGRIM: THE VIDEO *Game* is the story of your life. It is also a side-scrolling beat 'em up. So mainly, you will be marching blindly forward and punching everyone that gets in your way, with the occasional kick to the crotch. So it really *is* the story of your life.

Loosely following the plot of the smash-hit graphic novels, up to four players (local or online) can team up to battle through the various locations in the books and movie, in order to defeat Ramona's seven evil ex-boyfriends. But you knew that, didn't you? What? You've not read the graphic novels? Your mother and I are very disappointed in you. We had high hopes for you... that you'd grow up to be an intelligent, thoughtful and caring individual with a fine taste in graphic novels. Where did we go wrong? It's all your fault for mothering him like that, Susan. I told you, you're too easy on the boy. Now look at him. I hope you're happy.

Anyhow, if you've played games like *Castle Crashers* or *Streets of Rage* or like, *Golden Axe*, you'll know what to expect. Characters have their own unique move-sets, which can be upgraded by gaining experience. You can pick up and use weapons dropped by enemies or found in the environment, and each character has a summon-able assist character. Defeating enemies gets you coins, which is used to get health items, boost attributes or unlock content. There are Subspace areas, bonus rounds really, where you can earn extra coins. The pixel art is being done by Paul Robertson, based on the look of the graphic novels. Just like *Castle Crashers,* it's a ton of fun to play. **NAG**
Miktar Dracon

SEEN AT E3 2010 • SEEN AT E3 2010

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For some reason, we don't know why but we assume it has to do with someone giving someone else a lot of money, *Scott Pilgrim* will be a timed PlayStation Network exclusive. The Xbox Live Arcade version will only be released at a later date, which has yet to be specified.

Pirate Baby's Cabana Battle Street Fight 2006

What's black and white, twelve minutes long and features two male characters fighting zombies, humans, octopuses and a giant mutant pirate baby in a giant homage to Double *Dragon, R-Type* and *Bubble Bobble*? Pirate Baby's Cabana Battle Street Fight 2006, a short animated movie by Paul Robertson, released in 2006. You can watch it here: **http://bit.ly/PRQk** (Warning: Not Safe For Work)

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bt GAMES

NAG

"We wanted to capture that gritty feeling of *Point Break* or *Blade Runner*."

True Crime: Hong Kong

SEEN AT E3 2010 · SEEN AT E3 2010

Third time's the charm!

GENRE > Third-person Action/Open-world

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

A FLEDGLING STUDIO WHOSE ONLY other title thus far has been *ModNation Racers*, United Front Games is composed of industry veterans such as Stephen van der Mescht, Executive Producer on *True Crime: Hong Kong*.

Like its predecessors, *True Crime* is about an undercover cop trying to bring down criminal groups, in this case the Triad organization "Sun On Yee." Detective Wei Shen has to make moral decisions as he attempts to stop the Triads without blowing his cover. His weapons are the seamless blending of free-running, gunplay, hand-to-hand combat, vehicles, and bullet-time.

"We were very heavily influenced by Hong Kong cinema action movies, and we were looking to take the open-world gamer to somewhere they hadn't been before. Hong Kong just made perfect sense. You've got a lot of areas down by the docks, you've got this great commercial central area like Soho with the narrow streets, you've got night markets and stuff like that, just the range of gameplay we could get out of that, made it such a great location."

As Shen runs along the night market, he can clamber, climb and free-run almost anywhere. The foot-chase sequences look every bit the part, with Shen sliding over counter-tops and kicking people in the face, elbowing through crowds and dramatic take-down tackles that lead to multiple-opponent kung-fu fights.

"Our free-running system is a lot more ground-based, we wanted to capture that gritty feeling of *Point Break* or *Blade Runner*,

running through the market. Down by the docks there's a lot of boat-based gameplay, you may have a chase sequence across the decks of boats – it's very varied."

At any time you can grab someone and manhandle them as you see fit. "The best thing about when you grapple someone is bringing the environment into play." To make the point, Shen grabs an enemy and slams his head against the wall, before breaking his leg and heaving him off the roof. Combat is quick with counters and combinations, the same way *Batman: Arkham Asylum* managed so much with so few buttons.

"We love that you can, while using vehicles, freet shooly... *shoot freely* I mean, in any direction. You're able to target enemies, vehicles, and sub-target, some really over the top action stuff." Like jumping from car to car, *Pursuit Force* style, or riding

>> That sequel that was supposed to complete True Crime: New York? Yeah, that was cancelled. Sorry. "There's always been a desire to reboot the franchise," says Stephen. "And so when we found the perfect location, developer and story, we thought, well, no time like the present."

on a bike and then leaping off last-minute, shooting its fuel tank mid-air, turning it into a flaming missile.

"Making open-world games is a challenge," admits Stephen. "We knew that from the onset, so we wanted to get a team together that had experience doing it, so we could make fewer of those mistakes that you tend to make, making these types of games. There's a lot of guys from EA that worked on *Need for Speed, Skate, Godfather,* we've got a lot of guys from Rockstar that worked on *Bully*, we got a lot of guys from Radical that worked on *Scarface, Prototype, Hulk Ultimate Destruction,* we've got guys that worked on *Saint's Row...* so a little bit from everywhere. We're all pulling together to make this a great open-world experience." **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

The Reviewers

This is what we sent our writers: *What is your top game or thing or concept at E3 this year and why – 20 words. GO! Example: Diablo III: I've been looking forward to this game for ages and I love it like I love jelly for my supper.* **This is what we got back...**

CHRIS BISTLINE
Portal 2: Because in an E3 full of derivative retread titles, this is the most original looking... wait, never mind.

DANE REMENDES
NeverDead's health-regeneration system: Collecting and reattaching limbs that have been chopped off just to regain a little health sounds like epic win.

GEOFF BURROWS
Brink: Awesome visual style, slick controls and team-based multiplayer. Why isn't everyone else super excited for this?

MICHAEL JAMES
Bulletstorm: I think I've got a man-crush on Cliffy B. "Fire in the hole" is going to be a LOL when playing multiplayer. Can't go wrong with this game – trust me.

MIKLÓS SZECSEI
Xbox Live in South Africa: We've been whining for it for years and now we can feel loved by Microsoft! Hooray!

MIKTAR DRACON
Dead Rising 2: Being a huge fan of the first game and its rogue-like sensibilities, I can't wait for the sequel.

TARRYN VAN DER BYL
Gears of War 3: I want to have Beast Mode's monstrous babies.

WALT PRETORIUS
*****@gmail.com is offline and can't receive messages right now. *[Such fail, who the hell is offline these days anyway, Ed]*

Anatomy of a Review
A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

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

The Review: These are words that make up our opinion on the game. You didn't really need us to tell you that, did you?

Box Outs: More good stuff. Just in a box.

BioShock 2
A man chooses... A slave obeys...

Genre and Platforms: What kind of game is it and what will it run on? All available platforms are bolded. The one we reviewed it on is red.

Game Name: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. There's also a summary line for added spice!

Screenshots and Captions: A picture's worth a thousand words. The captions are mostly just fart jokes...

The Score Box

Age Rating: Lets see some ID, son

Multiplayer Icons: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

DRM: Applies to PC games only: Internet connection required, disc required, or no DRM beyond a serial key

Online Services: Is the game distributed/available over an online service, or does it gain additional features such as multiplayer by connecting to said service? Required services are bolded.

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

Bottom Line: Here's where we boil down the entire review to one sentence. Because reading is hard...

THE SCORE

18 — www.pegi.info — 1 — 2-10 — N/A — MUST PLAY

Online services
Games for Windows LIVE

>Plus
+ Enthralling setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

>Minus
- Doesn't change much

>Bottom Line
Our second trip to Rapture is every bit as captivating as the first.

88

Award: See below for details

Score: Further simplifying the bottom line to a number out of 100

ED'S CHOICE

MUST PLAY

PONIES

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

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

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

Quick Hits

SOL SURVIVOR

Tower Defence games: sometimes they're dull, repetitive time-wasters, and other times they're exciting, repetitive time-wasters. You'll be pleased to know that *Sol Survivor* falls into the latter category, and is now available on PC through Steam. The object of the game is to stop some nasty invaders from destroying your colony on some planet, or something. There's a bit of a story at work here, but really, nobody cares when it comes to TD. That's like watching *Transformers* for the science. What's important is that you get to choose from a number of commanders, each with varying towers and super-powers used to dispatch the hordes on a one-way path (or paths) to the colony (or colonies). For the most part, each commander is balanced but at the very least, they'll provide a challenge if they're on the weak side. The enemies are varied and the game-modes plentiful, but we'd appreciate a few more maps.

Bottom line: *Worth it if you're nuts for Tower Defence, but waiting for a sale wouldn't be a terrible idea.*

THE SILVER LINING EPISODE 1: WHAT IS DECREED MUST BE

The Silver Lining has had a tough time. During its eight years since inception, the team has undergone massive changes; the project was canned and restarted, and legal battles have had it on the back burner longer than it's been in development. Sadly, it's clear that those issues have taken their toll on poor King Graham. This first episode (of five in the series) is little more than a 20-minute teaser, and you'll spend more time watching cinematics than actually playing the game. There are no puzzles, no choices, and no danger. It captures the spirit of *King's Quest* because it looks like *King's Quest* (well, a particularly ugly version), but that's about it. Hopefully, the team will spend more time on polish and – I don't know, maybe develop a quest game for the next episode – than what they've done here.

Bottom line: *At least it's free.*

Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.
NAG // Metacritic average // Game Rankings average
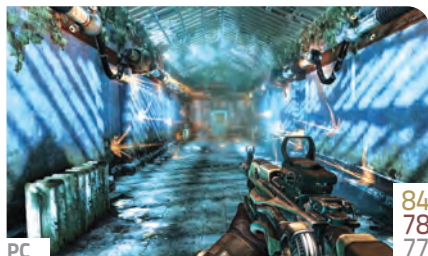
ALPHA PROTOCOL
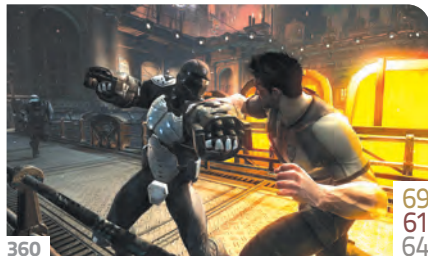

360
60
63
65

SINGULARITY

PC
84
78
77

DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION

360
69
61
64

SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2

WII
90
97
97

TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON

360
85
78
81

MONKEY ISLAND 2 SE: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

PC
92
85
83
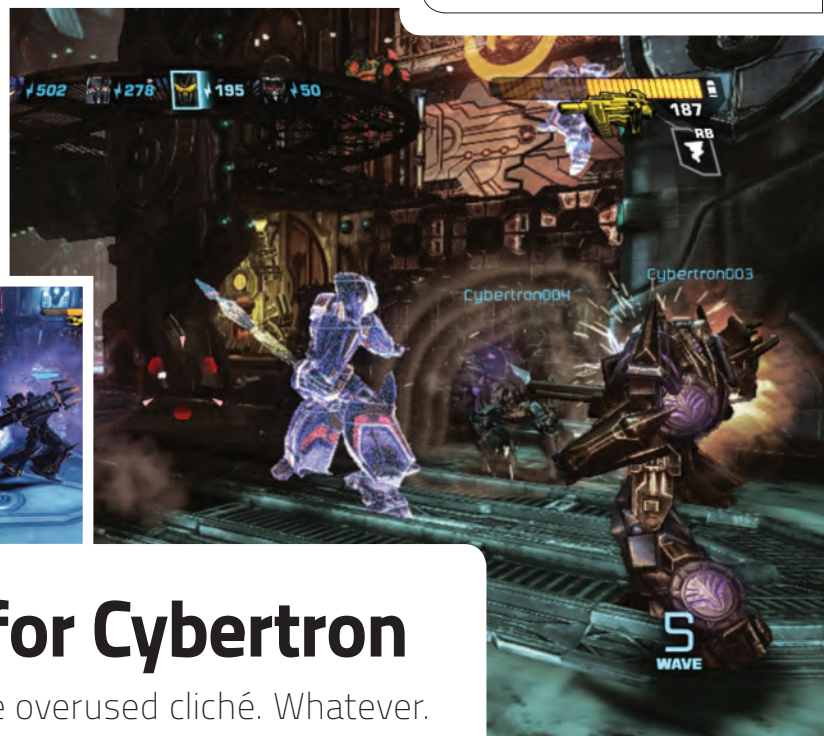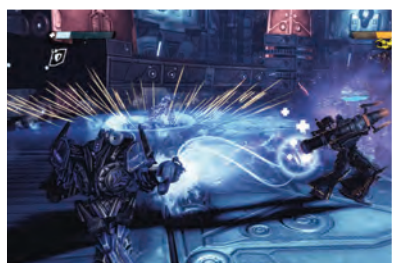
Autobots, roll out!

There are four types of Cybertronian vehicle transformations in the game: cars, trucks, tanks and jets, each with its own unique abilities, weaponry and benefits. Tanks have massive firepower, trucks can ram enemies, cars are nimble and fast and jets – well, jets fly and that's awesome.

Transformers: War for Cybertron

Robots in disguise. More than meets the overused cliché. Whatever.

GENRE > Third-Person Shooter

PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

YOU MAY WANT TO sit down for this, because *NAG* will not be held responsible if what we're about to tell you causes you to fall over and brain yourself on your kitchen counter/coffee table/porcelain potty when you blackout from surprise. Are you sitting? If not, don't say we didn't warn you.

Transformers: War for Cybertron is actually a good *Transformers* game. Not only that, but it's a good game overall. **Not only that**, but it's a good *Transformers* game published by money-mad Activision of all publishers. Wow! It's a wonder that it's taken them so long to make a good game based on the *Transformers* license, because come on: it's robots punching and shooting and ripping the heads off of other robots when they're not transforming into cars and trucks and jets and tanks and things with big guns. The license alone should be enough to make it awesome, but the last two Activision-published games bearing the *Transformers* title (which were based on the Michael Baysplosion movies) sucked. Lots. Now we've got a new developer working on the game and in a lovely change of pace for *Transformers* titles, the developers have actually poured love into the creation of the title and it's really fun.

War for Cybertron's story deals with an untouched part of the *Transformers* universe: that of the frequently mentioned, but never-before detailed Cybertronian war that transpired before the Autobots and the Decepticons crash landed on Earth and made life here much more interesting and filled with explosions. And big robots.

The campaign can be played from the perspective of either the Decepticons or the Autobots in either order. Megatron's after Dark Energon, a powerful, unpredictable and dangerous variant of Energon, the primary power source of the Transformers. Basically, it's the evil version and Megatron plans to use it to do evil things. Cue big explosions for an extended period of time, then you step in as Optimus (before Prime status is bestowed upon him by the Autobot Council) to foil Megatron's devious scheming. The story benefits greatly from not having to rely on some movie storyline that forces the game to cater to its every whim, and it's possibly the best part of the game: provided you're a fan of *Transformers*, that is. If you're a fan of the TV show, but the game's (appropriately) cheesy dialogue, familiar characters (voiced by familiar folks like Peter Cullen) and whole *Transformers* vibe don't bring a smile to your face, then we can't help you, because you're already too far gone into cynicism.

The game may be built on the Unreal Engine 3, but *War for Cybertron* is less like *Gears of War* and more like *Halo*. There's no cover system (weird, considering the engine used and the fact that the AI characters seem adept at making you jealous with

< Transformers: War for Cybertron >

their ability to use cover) and it's all about straight up, unyielding action. You point at stuff, squeeze the trigger and wait for robots to explode. Admittedly, it's a bit shallow (the only depth comes from the addition of power-ups like an Overshield that can be collected and the special abilities unique to each character, together with certain enemies that require a more tactical approach than just shooting lots of bullets until they fall over), but there was never really a moment in the game where I felt bored or wasn't being entertained. Before each chapter in the campaign, you choose one character to take control of from a trio of available Autobots/Decepticons, while the two that you don't pick are controlled by the AI for the duration of the level. The missions are spiced up a bit with sections that require you to transform into vehicle form (which you can do at any time and come complete with kickass sound effects) to zip around the speedways of Iacon, capital city of the Autobots, for example. It does all get a bit repetitive in terms of what you'll see and do in the game (the environments, the objectives and the gameplay all start to seem overly familiar after a while), but

I was so thrilled to be playing a decent *Transformers* game that I actually didn't care – the same goes for the annoying glitches and bugs that pop up from time to time. The open flight missions (where you control Transformers capable of flight, like Starscream) provide enjoyable distractions from the standard missions, which makes us wish there were more of them. If you plan to tackle the single player without making use of the other humans out there in online co-op, expect to get very annoyed at the mostly useless AI teammates, who tend to just get in the way much of the time.

Once you're done with the single player, Escalation is a four-player cooperative horde mode that sees you holding off increasingly difficult waves of enemies. This is a ton of fun and separates itself from horde modes in other games with its transformations and class-based tactics. Each character has its role, with fast-moving, flight-enabled Transformers able to swiftly reach injured or downed buddies to heal or revive them, or Transformers with the ability to drop sentry guns able to effectively hold choke points. Energon is collected with each kill, which can be used to purchase ammo,

new weapons and such, or to open doors to new parts of the level. The class-based competitive multiplayer takes a page out of *Call of Duty*'s book with its weapon/ability unlocks and kill-streak rewards. Boasting multiple game modes, the multiplayer is frenetic and addictive, once again featuring class-specific roles for each character. The character customisation (you can create your own freakin' robot that's also a car – hooray!) is a bit limited, but that's a minor niggle when the competitive gameplay is so enjoyable.

I need to admit something now: is there a chance that *War for Cybertron* is merely mildly enjoyable, but my surprise at having even a mildly enjoyable *Transformers* game to play has inflated my opinion of it? Yes, that's probably likely. The fact that a good *Transformers* game exists after playing the dismal pair of games that preceded it surprised me, because the only thing that could possibly be weirder is if Bobby Kotick started giving away all of the millions of dollars that he's made at Activision to a charity because he became obsessed with saving a soon-to-be-extinct species of dung beetle or something. Not everyone will like this game, which is why you won't see a Must Play badge anywhere on this review. Some will find the simple, mindless fun on offer here to not be enough to hold their attention. Then again, the *Transformers* were created to be simple, mindless fun for children, and *War for Cybertron* is just that: simple, mindless fun for the big kid in all of us. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Addictive, enjoyable multiplayer
+ Action-packed single player
+ Robots

>Minus
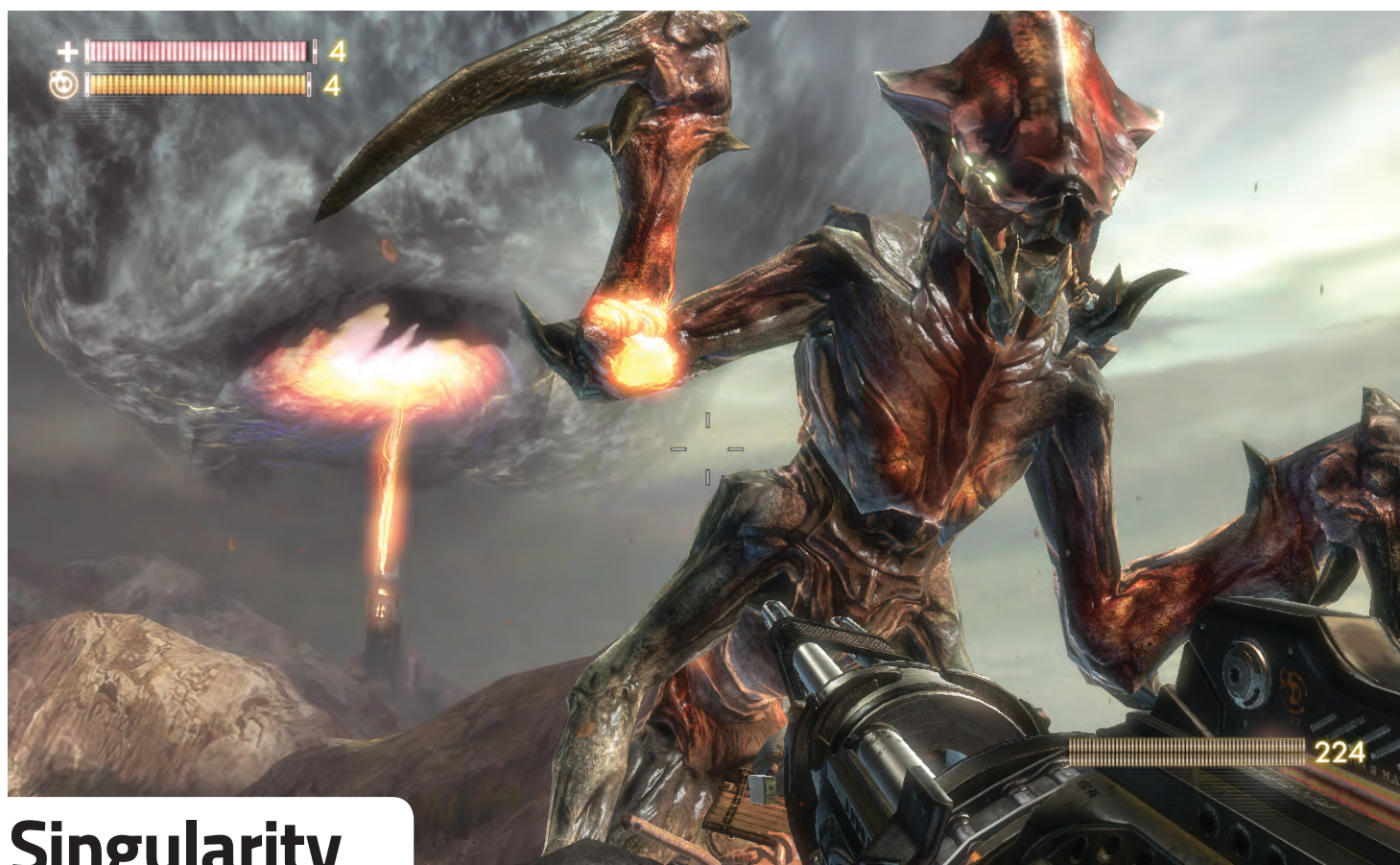- Repetitive environments
- Repetitive gameplay
- Random bugs/glitches

>Bottom Line
It's not without problems, but the great presentation, cool storyline, fun single player and great multiplayer make it worthy of wielding the *Transformers* name.

85

Singularity

Time is on your side

GENRE > FPS

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

IT'S 1955: RUSSIAN SCIENTISTS have been toying with a powerful and recently-discovered mineral known as E99, known to exist only on the tiny, remote island of Katorga-12. This mineral has unimaginable powers: energy production, genetic enhancements and weapons production being on the top of the Soviet's to-do list. Then everything goes wrong, as is prone to happen when one messes with forces beyond our understanding, and a catastrophic event known as the Singularity occurs on Katorga-12, destroying all life on the island. Russia is quick to cover up the Singularity; all records of research and personnel are wiped from the history books, and any results from the experiments are locked away on the abandoned island, never to be spoken of again.

Fast-forward to 2010. US Black Ops specialists are called out to Katorga-12 to investigate a mysterious radiation spike that originated from the island. Following an EMP blast while they're flying over, their helicopters go down and you, Nate Renko are one of only a few survivors. You'll have to find your way through the island, figure out what's going on and eventually become muddled up in the middle of a series of time paradoxes.

Cast your mind inside the studios of Raven Software: They've just finished developing 2009's *Wolfenstein*. They had fun working on the game, so some bright spark shouts out "Hey, let's do that again!" So they did. *Singularity* is very similar to *Wolfenstein* in the way that it plays, looks, and feels, but

gives players enough new toys to make it worth playing. *Singularity* is also entirely linear in that it gives the player no choice in where to go next. Thankfully, plenty of scripted events and interesting challenges – something that *Wolfenstein* lacked a bit – are around to keep things exciting.

As Renko progresses through Katorga-12, he'll discover new weapons and, fairly early into the game, the TMD – or Time Manipulation Device. A product of time manipulation studies on the island, the TMD gives Renko super-human powers to control time and space. In the beginning, the device's abilities are limited, but by the end of the game you'll be able to perform a number of feats: lifting and throwing objects (ala *Half-Life 2*), creating a sphere of time-slowing

energy, ageing and renewing certain objects and more. The ageing/renewing mechanic has been a major draw-card for *Singularity*, and while it's fun to play around with, and features in a few fairly basic puzzles, it feels a bit under-used in the game's design, largely because it's limited to "objects infused with E99," which are surprisingly scarce for a place like Katorga-12. For the most part, you'll simply renew crates, stairs and door controls to allow you to pass through each area and move onto the next. Travel through time occurs at fixed points in the game, where you must locate a time rift, punch it open with the TDM and step through, so don't expect anything like *Wolfenstein*'s spontaneous Veil-shifting.

Things start to get more interesting in

< Singularity >

The more the merrier

With the abomination that was *Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer mode, I expected *Singularity* to follow the same dreadful path. Thankfully, it doesn't at all; the multiplayer mode in *Singularity* is actually incredibly fun. It steps aside from the single player campaign to pit two opposing teams – the soldiers and the creatures – against each other in (sadly) only two modes: TDM and an objective-based mode that requires the soldiers to capture three beacons to eradicate the beasts and win the round. Each faction has four diverse classes that are customisable with perks and, in the case of the soldiers, weapon selection. The classes differ so greatly, in fact, that the game feels close to the likes of *Team Fortress 2* with its strong focus on teamwork. Each faction has a healing class (although the creature's stream of healing vomit also blinds enemy soldiers), and a mix of defence, offence and stealth scattered among the other classes. The abilities that each class has are borrowed from the single player campaign, but some powers, such as the teleportation of the human Blitzer, are new. Worth particular mention is the Phase Tick, which is similar to the foe in the single player, but this little guy can leap massive distances, crawl around on walls and ceilings and possess human players with a well-aimed leap to the face. Once possessed, the human is killed and you gain control over their body complete with any weapons and powers they had.

combat, where you'll frantically be combining TMD powers with regular weapon usage. Especially closer to the end, once you've unlocked all of your abilities, you'll be using the TMD all of the time, which makes for interesting and challenging combat situations that don't just rely on your ability to hold down the fire button for a while (although it'll help). That's not to say that the combat is advanced; it's far from it, and like *Wolfenstein, Singularity* has its roots firmly planted in the old-school action domain. It's not all point-and-click, however, you also have the facility to customise Renko's abilities and weapons by collecting E99 tech and weapons caches scattered around the levels – often in well-hidden locations. You'll also need to find bio blueprints throughout the game that unlock particular upgrades, such as health regeneration, improved TMD abilities or better carrying capacity for health packs and TMD energy cells. Sadly, this upgrade system has nothing on *Biohshock*'s, and while the genres between these games differ, the control and customisability offered in *Bioshock* would have been perfectly suited right here.

Despite the presence of a few missed opportunities, *Singularity* feels right when you play it. It manages to keep up the pace from beginning to end, and is undoubtedly designed to appeal to those gamers who are looking for a bit of fun, silly action to keep them occupied for the 8-10 hours of game-time. The story is decent enough to carry things along, the game looks good most of the time (despite having a few recurring visual glitches), and Renko is always going to new and interesting-looking locations on the island. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

18			
www.pegi.info	1	2 - 12	N/A

>Online services
None

>Plus
+ Good old-fashioned fun
+ Good multiplayer

>Minus
- A few bugs
- It's nothing ground-breaking

Look & Listen
For the Fun

84

>Bottom Line
It might not be the smartest kid, but, like the popular guy at school, it's fun, good-looking and gets all the girls.

Weeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

Pew! Pew!

Alpha Protocol

Better than syphilis. Or being punched in the stomach.

GENRE > Action RPG

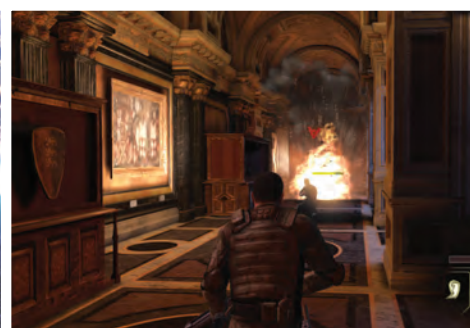| PC	**360**	**PS3**	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

I **WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO** *Alpha Protocol.* The idea seemed completely foolproof: take *Mass Effect* (one of the best action RPGs ever created) and *Splinter Cell* (one of the best stealth games ever created), lock them in a room together with a bottle of wine and some candles, and don't let them leave until they emerge with some form of love spawn that combines the best features of both of its parents. Unfortunately, after numerous cries of "daddy's shooting blanks again" (i.e. a ridiculously long development cycle) and a few issues pertaining to premature... stuff (read: delayed shipping dates to add polish), the lovechild of *Mass Effect* and *Splinter Cell* has come out looking like Danny DeVito was called in to finish the job when *Splinter Cell* got stage fright and couldn't perform as required.

I'm not entirely sure what went wrong with a game that showed so much promise. It actually still shows so much promise, with glimmers of brilliance occasionally shining in the distance before being snuffed out by substandard gameplay and myriad glitches. We've debated around the office that maybe the developers just got bored halfway through development, electing to start drinking beers before noon and work on *Fallout: New Vegas* instead. *Alpha Protocol* could do with many more hours of polish, because as it stands, the game just feels like a patchwork piece cobbled together by people who have better things to do.

Attempting to be as much of a spy thriller as possible, *Alpha Protocol* has a story that features all the obligatory global conspiracies, evil corporations, angry terrorists and foreseeable plot twists that you'd expect. It's clichéd, it's contrived and it's just very average. What's not average is the way the story progresses and the way you're able to shape protagonist Michael Thorton's journey through the storyline. This is one of those shining glimmers of innovation that I was talking about earlier. Everything you do in *Alpha Protocol*, be it the way you choose to interact with/manipulate contacts, the manner in which you handle missions or the side to which you comb your hair in the morning will affect the progress of the story. Often these repercussions (be they positive or negative) will only come back to haunt you at a much later stage, but you can be sure that they'll definitely be back.

The DSS (Dialogue Stance System) plays a large role in this. In *Alpha Protocol,* you don't choose dialogue options from a list of possible choices: instead, you pick a general stance (suave, professional or aggressive) and let Thorton work his magic. It's an inventive way of handling dialogue which sets the game apart from other RPGs and makes the narrative progression interesting and mostly unpredictable in terms of the long-lasting effects of your actions. It does mean that you lose some control over exactly what it is you wish to say to characters in the game and in certain situations it's left to chance that you might inadvertently insult someone you're trying to gain favour with because choosing the professional stance causes Thorton to insult a key character's beloved mother, but in general the system works brilliantly and keeps conversations flowing nicely. Gaining

< Alpha Protocol >

favour with characters can get you access to new equipment, unlock new missions and alter the flow of missions.

The gameplay is familiar territory for anyone who's played *Mass Effect*. All the action RPG elements are there: Thorton gains levels (together with AP which can be spent on upgrading skills), can buy/sell equipment, upgrade stats, unlock new abilities and augment his weapons and armour with enhancements that can be bought from the black market. Three classes can be chosen from – commando, spy and tech specialist. Commandos shoot stuff with big guns, spies are good at sneaky business (and melee combat) and tech specialists are great with gadgets (like EMP grenades and remote mines). This all works on a basic

level, but when it's time for all these flashy stats and abilities to be put to use, things fall apart. It feels like the game is too focussed on crunching numbers, calculations and stats to be much fun in the action department. It's not cool to have the crosshair trained right on an enemy's face, only to have your bullets veer off in a thousand useless, not at all deadly (unless you're a crow flying overhead, or a rat scurrying on rafters) directions because you haven't ranked up your pistol skill enough, even though you're at least 98-percent sure that even an untrained individual could have at least hit the bad guy in the arm and made him scream a bit. If you try to ignore using bullets because of this and choose to get as close to enemies as possible for stealthy takedowns, you're not

Ratatatatatatatatatatatatatat!
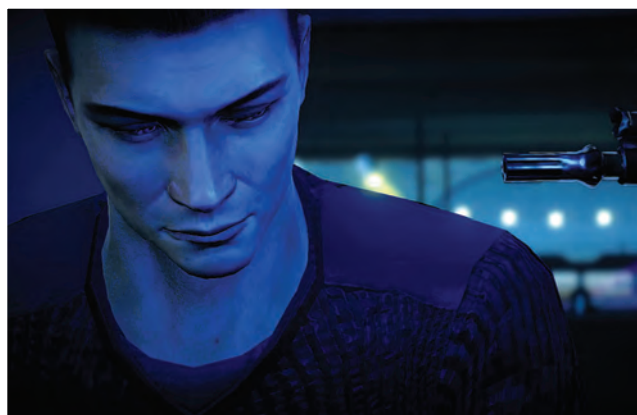
in much luck either because finicky controls, an unresponsive cover system and the iffy camera make sneaking up on dudes more pain than it's worth. This is only a taste of some of the problems that pop up during gameplay.

It goes deeper than just gameplay issues as well: the whole game is noticeably lacking polish. Graphically, there are randomly disappearing and reappearing textures, horrendous frame rate drops in certain sections and numerous visual bugs. It's not a very pretty game either, with bland environments and aging visuals.

The cover system is a mess – it's impossible to tell what can and cannot be used as cover and if you do manage to find cover, you can never be sure if Thorton will see fit to unglue himself from it when the need arises. The artificial intelligence is comprised mostly of guys who would rather run up and punch you in the face (just once, before backing away slowly to continue shooting you) than take cover and shoot you from a reasonably safe distance. They're also more than willing to run around in the open while you put bullets in them, instead of actually trying to behave like villains with at least some education in the implication of bullets hitting them in the eyes at high speeds. The missions are mostly dead average and lacking in flair, with a handful of exceptions here and there.

To be fair, I'm probably being a bit too harsh on the game because every step of the way I could see the game's untapped potential waiting beneath the crust of nonsense that lines it. It's not a terrible game (it's actually moderately fun if you can overlook its many flaws), but it's infuriatingly disappointing that the innovative bits like the dialogue system and narrative devices are wasted on a game buried under a mess of bugs, problems and badly executed gameplay mechanics. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SCORE

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

> Plus
+ Nifty dialogue stance system
+ Nifty story/character progression

> Minus
- Dodgy gameplay
- Dodgy technical issues
- Dodgy everything else really

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES   MP3 + ACCESSORIES
For the Fun

> Bottom Line
Innovative intricacies aside, *Alpha Protocol* is a bit of a disappointment.

60

Co-Star Improvements

The Co-Star cooperative mode from the first game makes a return, refined and improved. A second player can join in at any time and gets their own cursor with which to fetch coins, collect Star Bits, catch air bubbles, hold down enemies and hazards or grab projectiles for Mario to volley back at bosses. The second player cannot make Mario jump (like in the first game), which is a godsend. Most important: the Co-Star can activate checkpoint flags from a distance. Overall, Co-Star is a much more involved experience now, with the second player being of great benefit to the first.

Super Mario Galaxy 2

Mo' Galaxy Mo' Fun

GENRE > Platform

PC   360   PS3   **WII**   PS2   PSP   DS

THERE IS AN EXPLANATION for *Super Mario Galaxy 2*. Let's say for sake of argument that Duke Nukem died, and went to a special hell. Forced to wear a hat and a plumber's outfit, he must save a princess over and over - and all he gets is a slice of cake (that's not a euphemism). His only enemies are turtles, sea urchins, and moles. All his problems *could* be solved with a Glock and a couple of clips, but in this hell there are no guns for Duke. He has but magical mushrooms that transform him into a bee that can't sting, a rolling rock, or an impromptu cloud-making pimp daddy.

Well, that's *one* theory, anyway.

WHY DO THE MARIO AGAIN?

There are two kinds of sequels. The first kind, fails to capture the impact of the original (as all sequels do), then disappoints because it brings nothing to compensate for that fact. The second kind of sequel also does not capture the impact of the original, but makes up for it with a sense of refinement, greater intensity and intense satisfaction – three qualities in abundance in *Galaxy 2*.

Building upon the innovation of the first game, *Galaxy 2* is a rewarding experience not for achievement, or score, or for finishing its narrative (although it does directly reward each of those things much better than its predecessor), but because you want to be there for every jump, for

every creative surprise. It's a game that rewards you for playing it, by being worth your time – again. And that's why you want to go for a second round.

OLD SPICE

Gone is the spaceship hub level from the first game, replaced instead with *Mario Bros 3*-styled paths connecting the levels. Hidden paths can be unlocked, using collected Star Bits, while the levels themselves are far more focused than the first game. Less stars in each level, but more levels overall. While many levels re-use elements and gimmicks from the first game, they do so in new and inviting ways. Besides, said elements hardly overstayed their welcome the first time around, thanks to how little the first game used its level-specific gimmicks.

Veterans of *Galaxy 1* will breeze through the straight path with little trouble, and then find the rabbit hole goes deeper than last time: many additional levels that demand serious skills, Luigi appearing in every stage to unlock developer speed runs, and an improved Prankster Comet challenge system. Overall, getting the full amount of stars in the game is both harder and more rewarding than before

- *and there are 240 of them*. Say what? (Here is a tantalising hint: there is no second quest that consists of playing the same game with a new character to achieve this star total.)

The sequel is the most dangerous game in entertainment; with *Galaxy 2* Nintendo proves they're not afraid to play hard. For some it will be more of the same; for many, it will be more of the same in exactly the right way.   **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

THE SCORE

| 3 | 1 - 2 | N/A | N/A | MUST PLAY |

>Plus
+ Full of content
+ Tons of fun
+ More refined

>Minus
- None

>Bottom Line
You play these games not because they're Mario, or because they're from Nintendo, but because they're good.

90

Jack

Shadow

Dead to Rights: Retribution

Did he just ask a dog to disable three power generators?

GENRE > Third-Person Action

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

DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION is my first time delving into the *Dead to Rights* series, so I wasn't expecting much. Maybe that's why I enjoyed it more than most Internet-based reviewers, who generally seem to hate everything the game throws at them. *Retribution* once again puts players in the combat boots of police officer Jack Slate, a cop trying to keep the crime-ridden streets of the fictional Grant City free and clear for the few honest citizens left living there. Joining Jack is his canine sidekick, Shadow, an almost feral hound that seems to understand far more English than we're comfortable with and never seems to get a drop of blood on himself (we're guessing the dog's male, but we can't be sure) when tearing at numerous jugulars and other important body bits.

We're told that this is supposed to be a reimagining of the first *Dead to Rights* title, and the game's story details the events surrounding the beginning of the partnership between Jack and Shadow. Put simply, the story is nuts: it's bombastic, over the top and ludicrous (even the voice acting seems to be purposefully absurd), but it's also entertaining in some strange way. *Retribution* plays like a mixture of *Gears of War* and a '70s cop show, with some Hong Kong action cinema thrown in for good measure. It's got a decent cover system, bullet time, meaty melee combat, guns to shoot at guys and guys with guns to shoot at. Playing as Jack, you can command Shadow to attack enemies, find cover or even collect ammunition for you. Occasionally though, you get to take direct control of Shadow, because he's able to reach places that Jack can't. This also gives you the opportunity to earn the achievement "Scrotality" for taking two unrelated things (scrotums and fatalities) and seeing how best to combine them to create something new and probably terribly painful for criminals everywhere. Shadow is sneakier than Jack, able to bark to distract enemies, move

stealthily and be a living heartbeat sensor to see enemies through cover and find the best ways to sneak up on them to tear their throats out.

Controlling Jack and Shadow can be hit and miss. The control system, though functional, does tend to be a bit silly at times, forcing you to wrestle with it to get Jack and Shadow to do what you want them to do and making staying alive more than just a matter of dodging in-game bullets. The game is also teeming with random bugs and technical issues (Shadow isn't rooted to the ground for example – instead he always seems to float a bit above it). There's a lot wrong with the game: it's rough and lacks polish, but we couldn't help but enjoy moving through Grant City, beating up on shady characters and taking in the sights, sounds and story. The action gets intense and is surprisingly satisfying (particularly the brutal takedowns that both Jack and Shadow can perform, together with the melee combat, which is uncomplicated but varied), while the gameplay is solid enough to keep you pushing forward to the end of the game. With no multiplayer, it's difficult to recommend paying full price for this game when the story can be torn through in less than eight hours, but if you've got nothing else to spend cash on at the moment, *Retribution* is a fun way to kill time. We didn't expect much and we were surprised by how much fun we managed to squeeze out of it. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Ouch! My balls!

THE SCORE

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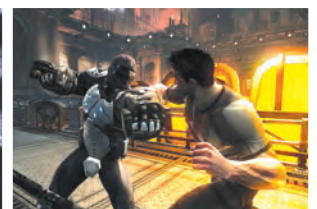
1   N/A   N/A

>**Plus**
+ Surprisingly fun gameplay
+ Solid action
+ The Scrotality

>**Minus**
- Iffy controls
- Bugs/technical issues

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES • MP3 • ACCESSORIES
For the Fun!

>**Bottom Line**
Seen from a distance it may seem ridiculous, atrocious and not worth your time, but, surprisingly, we had fun playing *Dead to Rights: Retribution*.

69

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey

Bridging the gap

GENRE > Flight simulator

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

WHEN YOU STICK A game with planes in it on the PC, it's a flight simulation. When you put the same kind of thing on console, it's an 'arcade' flight simulator. Sure, there have been arcade style games on the PC, but the door doesn't swing both ways it seems. If it's on console, it's never really a 'proper' simulation, which makes the appearance of the IL-2 Sturmovik range on consoles quite strange. See, the games in this franchise have a reputation for being tough flight simulators, both in terms of the combat they contain, as well as the handling of the various aircraft they recreate. The Sturmovik franchise has carried this reputation from the word go. Obviously, though, creators 1C have been eyeing the ever-growing casual gamer market, and their attempt to access it is *IL2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey*.

What makes this game stand out from other arcade flight games on console is that it isn't strictly an arcade flight simulator. Sure, it has an arcade mode, but it also includes one of the most challenging flight simulator modes we've seen on console. While the PC is a more natural habitat for flying (thanks largely to the increased control capabilities that PC has to offer, as well as the truck-load of flight simulation peripherals available to enthusiasts) 1C have managed to put together a very passable effort on console. And, considering that the aircraft of World War II were a lot simpler than those of today, it works with the more limited console controls.

Whether you decide to play the nuts-and-bolts simulator or take on the arcade mode, *IL2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey* offers the player a solid experience. There are several aircraft available for play – although a choice of aerial chariot is restricted to multiplayer mode, while the single player lumps the player with whatever is going. Additional weapon load-outs can also be unlocked, once again for multiplayer dog-fighting. You won't be flying any German planes in the single player mode, either, but they will be available in multiplayer sessions.

The game takes the player through several chapters, each with numerous missions. The chapters recreate big battles in World War II, and include the Battle of Britain, the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Berlin. While flying in the missions, which vary from bomber hunting to dog-fighting and even bombing runs (to name a few) the player will be able to easily and effectively control the well-recreated aircraft. The battles take place over a variety of locations, all of which are visually very impressive. Whether it's the fields of Dover or the streets of Berlin below the player's wings, the game looks great.

With a didactic element in the form of an encyclopaedia, lots of single player action and an awesome multiplayer mode, *IL2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey* is a great addition to the console market, and offers both hard-core and casual players a good experience. Sure, we're getting it a few months late here in South Africa, but better late than never. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

7
www.pegi.info

1 · 2 - 16 · N/A

>Plus
+ Awesome graphics
+ Great multiplayer
+ More than just arcade

>Minus
- Simple flight simulator
- No German Single Player missions

>Bottom Line
It might not be a perfect flight simulator, but (for a console game) it offers a lot.

80

Look & Listen
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For the Fun

Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge

That's the second best special edition I've ever seen!

GENRE > Point-and-Click Adventure

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THIS REVIEW IS PROBABLY the most biased review you will read in this month's *NAG* because I am an unremitting fanboy of the *Monkey Island* series. I have already planned to name my children Guybrush and Elaine – although that would then imply some heinous sibling incest. Ok scratch that idea.

Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge is the original sequel (oxymoron) from 1991 dragged headlong into an era that demands shiny graphics and no reading. The entire game has been redrawn in scurvy inducing detail and given a voice over with returning cast members Dominic Armato (Guybrush), Alexandra Boyd (Elaine) and Earl Boen (LeChuck). It's unashamedly nostalgic and delicious from beginning to end.

Of course, the transition from old to revamped is not without a few jolts. The book-to-move principle (the one that leaves audiences saying, "that's not what I imagined it to look like" and the one that I just totally made up now) applies here with some of the voice acting; Largo's in particular is just not what I imagined. Furthermore, the UI is streamlined but they could have gone a little further by allowing double-clicks at screen edges to instantly navigate Guybrush to the next screen (ala *The Curse of Monkey Island*).

The best bit of the remake is the scene commentary throughout the game. Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman are on hand to provide some retrospective banter at the press of a button. For fans of the series it doesn't get any better than this. The level of insight and glimpses of the designers' own nostalgia for their game is quite possibly the best addition to anything. Ever. From now on the phrase "best thing since sliced bread" is no longer permissible – use "the best thing since *Monkey Island 2* commentary" instead. **NAG**

Miklós Szecsei

THE SCORE

12   www.pegi.info

1   N/A   N/A

MUST PLAY

>Plus
+ Switch instantly to original
+ Designer commentary
+ Streamlined user interface

>Minus
- Largo's voice acting
- Occasional unresponsive mouse clicking

>Bottom Line
For those who missed the original *Monkey Island 2* (shame on you!) then you are exceedingly fortunate to be given this phenomenal second chance.

92

Freedom Force

PATRIOT CITY HASN'T BEEN a very nice place to live in of late. Superpower-enhanced nut jobs are running rampant across the city, burning buildings, freezing lakes and throwing trucks at old ladies. A mysterious energy source is bestowing comic book-style powers to formerly ordinary citizens and making them spew some of the cheesiest, most hilarious comic book-style dialogue this side of the early days of the Green Lantern comics.

Freedom Force (released in 2002) is a real-time tactical RPG featuring characters who think that wearing underwear on the inside of their pants is silly. If you've played either of the *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* games, then you've got a good idea of what to expect from *Freedom Force*. Basically, you lead a squad of superheroes through a number of missions set in various locations around Patriot City, punching, kicking and shooting laserbeams at villains with your eyes. Each character has unique abilities which can be purchased and upgraded at the end of missions back at the Freedom Fortress – which might just be the greatest name for superhero headquarters ever. Starting out with just one hero (the patriotic, communism-hating Minuteman), you'll eventually go on to attract new heroes

to join your cause, ultimately creating the Freedom Force – gaming's very own Justice League. You can also create your own heroes and grant them unique powers and abilities, after which you're free to use them in the game's surprisingly fun multiplayer as well.

Characters are packed with stats, resistances and specialties. Certain characters can jump great heights, others can fly, some have immense strength and others can mentally dominate foes: these are just some of the powers on offer in *Freedom Force*. Occasionally you'll be tasked with deviating from your primary objectives to save citizens, children and kittens in trouble – which will earn you extra rewards after each mission. Superheroes aren't complete without supervillains and you'll find no shortage of varied and interesting superpowered baddies to fight as you progress through the game's plot, which is filled with comic book-inspired goodness. Attacks and special abilities used in the game even cause giant onomatopoeic banners to pop up all over the screen, like "Whoosh!", "Ker-Pow!" and "BAM!" Seriously, if you haven't yet – play *Freedom Force*. It's great. **NAG**

Irrational Games

Founded in 1997 by Ken Levine, Jonathan Chey and Robert Fermier, three former employees of the now defunct Looking Glass Studios, Irrational Games is one of the few development studios out there who can do no wrong. They've never created a bad game, with the awesomeness of *System Shock 2* (which was developed with help from Looking Glass) setting the stage for Irrational as the first of their numerous critically acclaimed titles. 2K Games acquired Irrational in 2006 and renamed Irrational to 2K Boston and 2K Australia in 2007. The Boston wing of Irrational went on to create *BioShock. System Shock 2, Freedom Force* and *BioShock* – those three titles should be more than enough to fully detail what Irrational Games and the perpetually brilliant Ken Levine are capable of. Earlier this year, 2K Boston had its studio name officially reverted to Irrational Games.

Nazis... I hate these guys.

Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich is the sequel to *Freedom Force*. Released three years after the original, the sequel took the Freedom Force back in time to defeat the Nazis and their allies. New superheroes, supervillains, superpowers and multiplayer features made this an even better experience than the original game. You can get the Freedom Pack on Steam - which comes packing both games - for $7.49 on Steam.

BRAAAAAAAAINS Part 3
ZOMBIES IN FILM

CRAPPY B-GRADE FILMS ARE usually relegated to the bargain bin before they even hit your local grocery store (a DVD store would be a blessing; a cinema release might be considered a miracle), but horror and sci-fi film buffs have always embraced the budget titles as classy, "non-Hollywoodified" and thus worthy of, at the very least, a quick look. Within the mountains of genuinely terrible films lie a few gems – those grainy, poorly-acted films that look like they were funded on some kid's pocket money (and some of them are) – that manage to capture all the right elements of the genre and distil them down to their simplest forms. Then, you get zombie films. B-grade zombie flicks probably account for the vast majority of the total zombie films on this planet, and even when they're the worst thing you've ever watched, the tipping point from horror to hilarity kicks in and you find yourself enjoying the film regardless. This is because the majority of zombie flicks shouldn't be taken seriously to begin with.

If you're looking for some cheap thrills, you can do no worse than *Zombie Strippers*. Featuring the "talents" of porn star Jenna Jameson, this one is definitely not for the kids, but is sure to entertain any adult viewers that can appreciate parody when they see it. The 1985 classic *Re-Animator* is based on the H.P. Lovecraft's story *Herbert West – Reanimator*, and managed to gross just over $2 million at the box office. That doesn't make it any good, but it's definitely worth a rental. The fairly recent *Dod Sno* (*Dead Snow*) is pretty darn cheesy, and actually not terribly good even for a B-grade, but it has that classic "group of students on a shoestring budget" approach that gives it a charming quality. Just make sure that you watch the special features; the making of is actually better than the film itself. Of course, perhaps the most well-known B-grade zombie film is Peter Jackson's weird and violent attempt at the genre – *Braindead*. It falls under the sub-genre of zombie comedy "splatstick," and was released in 1992 – first in New Zealand and later world-wide. It didn't perform very well, but it shows Jackson's feature film roots in the splatter genre. Watch it purely for educational purposes. **NAG**

Dedicated to Jake...

THESE ARE ACTUAL ZOMBIE FILM TITLES
Zombie vs. Mardi Gras
Zombie Vegetarians
Zombies on Broadway
RetarDEAD
Nudist Colony of the Dead
The Astro–Zombies
Ninjas vs. Zombies

QUICK TIP #4
Go for the eyes! Or don't; it really won't matter. "Destroy the brain or remove the head" is the only way to get the job done. Zombies sense living flesh through a combination of smell, sight and sensory glands that develop on the periphery of the frontal lobe. In fairness, a frontal lobotomy might do the trick as well, but good luck wheeling a zombie into the operating theatre.

QUICK TIP #5
Shhhhh! Always have a backup melee weapon for stealth operations. Your 12–gauge shotgun and diesel–powered chainsaw might be the perfect tools of destruction, but they're incredibly noisy and are bound to draw unwanted attention your way.

QUICK TIP #6
Back to basics. Sooner or later, once the ZA hits, the infrastructure that supports human life will crumble, and eventually scavenging will cease to be useful. Learn how to grow your own food, build your own home, generate energy (we're talking about candles and water-pumps here; don't expect to spend the ZA behind a TV) and even make your own clothes.

SAVAGE 2010

The new Predator is here

Armed and ready for combat

THE NEW ACER ASPIRE Predator has just been unveiled in the US and it's a beast of a gaming rig. The AG7750-U2222 (what a mouthful) packs a killer arsenal: Intel Core i7 quad-core processors, NVIDIA GeForce GTX470 graphics with 3-way SLI support, and a whopping 12GB DDR3 memory. It certainly looks the part with its intimidating exterior and fiery orange battlegear. Lurking underneath the mechanised front cover is a multi-card reader, USB and audio ports. Peering past its impenetrable armour you will find a 1.5TB hot-swap SATA hard drive, along with three additional easy-swap HDD cages, meaning you could potentially add up to four high-capacity drives, bringing your total storage capacity up to a battle-ready 8GB. In your quest to further conquer and destroy it also packs a state-of-the-art, two-part liquid cooling system. It's a monster of a machine and if we could have one we would add an Acer GD245HQ/GD235HZ 3D monitor and NVIDIA 3D Vision, and our smoking-hot gaming rig would be the envy of any rival who dared to challenge us.

Acer D241H LCD

The Acer D241H 24" widescreen LCD features an integrated computer and Wi-Fi connectivity to give you access to online information even when it isn't plugged into a computer. The display features eight toolkits with widget-based functions - calendar, poster, weather, news, clock, video, music, and digital photo frame – so you can access online media content even when the D241H is not connected to a PC. The native 1,920 x 1,080 resolution and 2ms response time means it is also suitable for high-definition gaming.

> "We've got a great working relationship with the NVIDIA engineers. It has enabled us to add amazing new visual effects like native 3D, 3D Vision Surround, and PhysX/APEX support in Mafia II."

Denby Grace, Senior Producer of Mafia II, 2K Games. NVIDIA recently announced the latest addition to its Fermi-class of GPUs, the NVIDIA GeForce GTX 460. The GTX 460 will come in two flavours: GTX 460 768MB, with a 192-bit memory interface and GTX 460 1GB, with a 256-bit memory interface.

Snippets

Lian Li has launched the next-generation USB 3.0 ports on seventeen of its case series and also incorporated USB 3.0 ports onto fourteen accessory products.

OCZ has released the **RevoDrive PCI-Express SSD** that features a PCIe interface claiming speeds over 500MB/s reads and random small file writes up to 80,000 IOPS. It will be available in 120GB and 240GB capacities.

GeIL's new **DDR3 EVO TWO Gaming Series Memory** has been designed with Maximum Thermal Conduction & Dissipation (MTCD) Technology for maximum cooling efficiency and enhanced memory performance, and is now available.

OCZ recently unveiled the **Fatal1ty 750 Watt power supply**, a new high-performance PSU targeted at gamers and enthusiasts that prefer flat modular cabling. Fatal1ty 750W power supplies are also able to perform at elevated temperatures of up to 45°C, nearly twice that of the industry standard.

MSI has announced the launch of a new Windows-based application that'll allow users greater control over their processor cores, enabling them to **unlock previously disabled cores** with a few clicks of the mouse.

The PC Grip for your desk

Designed by top South African Industrial designer, Sven Wagner, the PC Grip has been locally developed and manufactured. It can be installed underneath your desk, is height adjustable for most cases, and comes packaged flat. With only four screws needed for installation, the PC Grip will be setup in five minutes. **www.pcgrip.com**

Cyborg R.A.T. Professional Gaming Mice

Mad Catz has recently released the new R.A.T.7 and R.A.T.5 gaming mice under their Cyborg professional gaming brand. The Cyborg R.A.T.7 Gaming Mouse tracks up to 6 meters per second and features a new-generation "twin eye" 5600DPI gaming grade laser sensor that reads each axis separately for pinpoint accuracy. Other features include interchangeable palm rest, adjustable pinkie grips, adjustable length, width and height settings and 30g of removable weights.

3TBs of external HDD space!

Seagate has launched a 3TB external desktop drive with the ability to adapt the USB 2.0 interface to a USB 3.0 or FireWire 800 connection, and the functionality to create, store and access content from either a Windows or Mac OS X computer.

< Tech News >

Know Your Technology

Cold Boot Bug (CBB): This is a phenomenon where the PC refuses to cold boot because the operating temperature is too low. This, in theory, isn't a problem, however the CPU's internal temperature diode misreads a very low reading as high and sets of a trip switch to the motherboard. For example, if the safety parameters for the CPU are set at 100°C maximum, the internal diode may misinterpret -140°C as +100°C and prevent the system from booting.

Cold Bug (CB): This is related to CBB, but works differently. A Cold Bug is when a CPU ceases to function below a specific temperature. This could be because of various parts of the CPU operating below a given threshold which cause erratic electron behaviour, either resulting in a reboot (very rarely) or a system lock up (almost always). The CB point is usually anything between 20-80°C lower than that of the CBB point. Some CPUs, in particular those from AMD, have no Cold Bug.

Over Current Protection (OCP): Over Current Protection, which is built onto the motherboard. This prevents specific components from drawing too much current and damaging the board or other components. In most cases this affects GPUs and CPUs that are highly overclocked and have copious amounts of voltage supplied to them. They will typically draw more power than the system was designed for, and when this happens, a system lock-up (in the case of the CPU) or VGA blanking will occur (GPU usually).

Over Voltage Protection (OVP): Similar to OCP, but this is voltage protection. This is used to prevent components from drawing too much voltage. Usually this has the same effect as OCP on graphics cards. Usually when one needs to disable OCP, OVP must also be disabled because they are directly related.

By the Numbers

8

Information has been leaked about the next Microsoft OS, code-named Windows 8. Some interesting things to look forward to include Bluetooth 3.0 and USB 3.0 tools, facial recognition-based login technology, potential 3D-TV/graphics improvements, including a 3D-display-ready version of DirectX, hard drive encryption performance improvements and hardware sensor-driven improvements.

Hardware Scoring System

1 > Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.

2 > Hardware turns on/ installs but doesn't do much else.

3 > This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.

4 > Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.

5 > Middle of the road product that does not stand out from the competitors, performs and works exactly as advertised.

6 > Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.

7 > Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.

8 > Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.

9 > Excellent product, near perfect.

10 > The stuff of dreams, the best in the market par none.

Hardware Awards

HARDWARE

This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.

DREAM MACHINE

The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.

The Mosh Pit

DREAMGEAR RUMBLE PAD WIRELESS
Want to funk up your PS3 gaming? This wireless controller has blue LEDs that that light up when in use. Gaming in the dark is now an absolute must. **R350 | www.bowline.co.za**

DREAMGEAR 20 IN 1 STARTER KIT
This kit sports twenty essential items for your DSi XL. A charging dock, carrying case, USB SD card reader, car charger, earbuds, audio splitter, three screen cleaners, carry-all tote bag, three stylus, two screen protectors, three game cases and two wrist straps. **R400 | www.bowline.co.za**

DREAMGEAR ARCADE FIGHTER MICRO
If your passion is playing fighting games on your PS3, then this arcade style joystick with action buttons might be a worthwhile purchase. It's surprisingly light and compact and also has programmable buttons. **R270 | www.bowline.co.za**

GENIUS HEEHA 100
A nifty little portable pocket game device for the young kiddies, the Heeha 100 has 30 built-in classic arcade games featuring racing, shooting, puzzle and memory-type games.
TBA | www.geniusnet.com

DREAM MACHINE

The Dream Machine

Throng of Battle War

ARES (Ancient Greek: Ἄρης [árɛːs], Modern Greek: Άρης [ˈaris]) is a major deity and a member of the Twelve Olympians, a son of Zeus and Hera, in Greek mythology. Though often referred to as the Olympian god of warfare, he is more accurately the god of bloodlust, or slaughter personified. He also presides over the weapons of war, the defence and sacking of cities, rebellion and civil order, banditry, manliness and courage.

And that is why the ASUS ARES just *had* to be in our Dream Machine. Plus it comes in like a really kwl case.

We also update our rig this month with Intel's latest i7 980X. Neo had a hell of a time actually getting this sample in for testing, but his persistence and perseverance did eventually pay off.

The Damage...

COMPONENT		PRICE*
CASE		R3,999
PROCESSOR	NEW!	R10,950
MOTHERBOARD		R7,999
MEMORY		R1,399
GRAPHICS	NEW!	R13,999
STORAGE		R2,857
SOUND		R1,763
POWER		R4,200
DISPLAY		R3,499
HEADPHONES		R1,316
KEYBOARD		R2,001
MOUSE		R1,076
TOTAL		R55,058

* At print time

NOTEBOOK
ASUS ROG G51J-3D
rog.asus.com

System Specs:
CPU: Intel Core i7 720M (1.6GHz)
RAM: 4GB DDR3
Graphics: NVIDIA GTX260M
HDD: 2x 320GB SATA2
OS: Windows 7 Home Premium
Mouse: Razer Abyss
Extra: NVIDIA 3D Vision pack

PROCESSOR NEW!
Intel Core i7 980X
www.intel.com

MOTHERBOARD
GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD9
www.gigabyte.com

MEMORY
OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com

GRAPHICS NEW!
ASUS ARES Limited Edition
za.asus.com

STORAGE
Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
www.seagate.com

SOUND
ASUS Xonar Essence ST *
za.asus.com

* Does not work with Logitech G35 headphones

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

CASE
Ikonik Ra X10 LIQUID
www.ikonik.com

DISPLAY
Samsung P2770HD
www.samsung.co.za

HEADPHONES
Logitech G35 Surround Sound *
www.logitech.com

* Does not work with ASUS Xonar Essence ST

KEYBOARD
Logitech G19
www.logitech.com

MOUSE
Logitech G9x Laser
www.logitech.com

Tech Q&A

OVERCLOCKING MY GTX 260

From: Willie Kruger

"**I HAVE RECENTLY DECIDED TO** start overclocking my NVIDIA GTX 260 graphics card with the MSI Afterburner tool. The stock core clock speed of my card is 576MHz, the Shaders 1242MHz and memory 999MHz. After the OC my speeds are now 700MHz (Core clock) 1511MHz (Shaders) and memory 1048MHz.

When I play a game the frame rate is really high, but after a minute or two the screen turns black for about 2-3 seconds and the frame rate is reduced (Crysis stops responding completely). During this time my clock speeds drops down to 400MHz, which is my 2D desktop setting. The shaders and memory also drop to much lower speeds.

I have tried "maximum performance" in the power management area of the NVIDIA control panel and setting my 2D speeds to the same values as my 3D speeds in the MSI Afterburner, but it still keeps on dropping back to these very low speeds. The card's temperature remains lower than 60°C before this happens.

Please help me stop the card from doing this.

PS: Thanks for a beyond-awesome magazine!"

Neo: *You can't stop this from happening unless you increase the GPU voltage, which I'm not sure you can on the GTX260 using the After Burner tool. The reason your games slow down or lock up is because you are overclocking past the GPU's capability. You'll certainly need better cooling and a higher voltage to achieve those speeds, and that's not something you want to get involved with unless you know how to overclock parts using a slider.*

SSD VS. HDD

From: Pieter

"**LET ME START BY** saying how brilliant the magazine is, i.e. you guys are doing a magnificent job. Anyway, back to the subject of my letter. Recently, I've been trying to decide whether or not I should invest in a solid state drive. When I asked from a number of different sources, most gave me completely different opinions. I am also wondering why you guys have a standard HDD and not a SSD under your Dream Machine section. This kind of got me asking if SDDs are really worth it as the Dream Machine section says that this is the system you guys would put together if there was no money limit. Some tell me I should invest in a smaller SDD and just install Windows on that and have my current 1TB HDD do all the rest. Then I went to go do some research and found that the smaller capacity drives had lower read and write speeds, which got me thinking that if I were to invest in a SDD, shouldn't I just go for the largest one right away, i.e. the one with the highest read/write level? Therefore, I would not have to upgrade again in 6 months time. Also, something crucial I noticed that is also kind of holding me back from going right ahead and buying a SDD, is that the lifetime of a normal SDD is supposed to be more or less 100 years, yet I noticed that the manufacturers of all the SDD's I had a look at, all had a warranty of only 2 years, therefore making me very reluctant to buy one, as the way I see it, this is the manufacturers implying to the consumer that the SDD's aren't really going to last 100 years, but in fact only 2, therefore the short warranty. Then again others tell me that a SDD isn't worth investing in and that I should just get another standard HDD. The problem is just that I am sick of the HDD failing all the time and then me having to reinstall all the games over again and having to contact the developers of some of the games to try and get my serial key from them. Apparently, SDDs are fail proof, as they use magnets, instead of a mechanical arm.

Anyway, point is, I trust in your guys' judgement about whether or not a SDD is worth it and whether or not I should invest in one.

Also, while I'm at it, I currently have 8GB of DDR3-2000 RAM in my PC and my motherboard is an ASUS Striker II Extreme 790i Ultra SLI. It says it supports "DDR3-2000 (O.C)". The question though is that previously I had DDR2-800 RAM, yet I see no performance increase whatsoever between the 2 frequencies of RAM and I've sent it in to the manufacturers and they sent it back to me saying that there's no problem with it. Is there something I'm not doing? I've installed and updated all the necessary drivers already but it still hasn't fixed the problem.

Your help will be very much appreciated."

Neo:
1. *We had an SSD in the Dream Machine for several months running but reverted back to a magnetic drive simply because of capacity and speed. While the SSD is significantly faster, the Seagate Barracuda XT is amongst the fastest magnetic drives there are, and the speed boost from an SSD is not enough to offset the lack of capacity and the unfavourable capacity-to-cost ratio.*
2. *Installing your OS on the SSD and running everything else on the HDD is a great idea and well worth investigating.*
3. *SSDs were never meant to last a hundred years, no magnetic hard drive lasts 100 years either (SSDs are not magnetic, they are NAND memory based).*
4. *If speed is very important to you, buy the SSD, but if not, a regular drive will do just fine.*
5. *Drive failure can occur on solid state and magnetic drives randomly. The trick is to backup frequently and you should be safe. No drive is fail proof; this applies to both magnetic drives and SSDs.*
6. *You couldn't have possibly been using DDR2-800 on the same system as that which can take DDR3-2000. So obviously your system changed at some point. As for performance gains from switching to higher speed RAM, there will be none unless you configure the BIOS to operate the RAM at the higher frequency. It doesn't automatically happen just by installing the RAM.*

USB 3.0 MOTHERBOARDS

From: Matthew Klein

"**I WANT TO BUY A** new motherboard with a i7 or at least a i5. My question is should I buy a motherboard with USB 3.0 ports or should I rather wait for more motherboards with more USB 3.0 ports (because the motherboards with USB 3.0 only has like 2 or 3 ports) and if it would be worth it? If not, which motherboard would you suggest a multimedia student buy?"

Neo: *If you wait for motherboards with more USB3.0 ports (more than two) you'll have to wait until 2012 or late 2011, because that's when USB3.0 will be added into the Intel chipsets. By then you're unlikely to be able to buy the Core i7 or Core i5 we use today anyway. Your only option is to go USB3.0 now and use those two ports and live with the other six to eight USB2.0 ports on the motherboard. As for which motherboard to buy, just about any will do from a top-tier manufacturer which supports the CPU you want to use.* **NAG**

An earlier version of our Dream Machine used a solid state hard drive. Look for a future version that incorporates both an SSD and magnetic drive.

>> If you'd like our tech guru, Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to **lauren@nag.co.za**. There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get).

IKonik EN2

The IKonik EN2 IS marketed as an entry level product with main stream configurations. Normally when a manufacturer makes such a claim there is compromise on the build quality, features or looks. After testing we can confidently say that IKonik has made a mainstream case at an entry level price.

From the rear, we can see the 20mm cable management compartment, bottom mounted PSU and liquid cooling tube holes, all features you would expect on a main stream case, ensuring your cable management, weight distribution and water cooling efforts run along smoothly.

A tool less design offers you easy installation of components on the go, and with the motherboard tray offering an access point to the rear of the board where the CPU is mounted, mounting third party coolers is a simple affair and over in minutes.

With fan mounts on the top, bottom, front, rear and left hand side, the EN2 offers more than enough airflow when needed. Coupled with the ventilated front and rear, your components will stay cool and perform at their best. The addition of dust filter mesh means cleaning shouldn't be too hard either.

Lastly, build quality. The EN2 sports build quality often found on higher end, more expensive cases. Using 0.6mm SECC for the body structure, coupled with a high finish paint job, the EN 2 is the definition of very affordable and durable.   **NAG**

Specifications

- 0.6mm SECC body structure + ABS
- TAC 2.0 or Transparent Side panel
- Top Fan Grid
- 20 mm width Cable Management Compartment
- CPU Cooler Eay Installation
- Bottom Fitted PSU with Air Filter & Rubber Stand

Hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

Upgrade that console

SOME TIME AGO I had a chat with a colleague about the feasibility of a console that could be upgraded. After going through some unsuccessful suggestions, we eventually found a way that could make sure the manufacturers make money, make the upgrade easy for the end-user and not only make it cheaper to manufacture, but more profitable for the IHV and cost-effective for the public.

How this would work is very simple, (not necessarily easy from a technology point of view) because, like modern computers, it can be made modular: a self-contained block that plugs into the console via a very high-speed interface (think something like PCI-SIG 3.0 32X lanes) that would allow several upgrades to the GPU, CPU or both. This upgrade module would replace and not complement what is already in the system. Not only would it result in a significantly smaller console, repairing the console would be much simpler because a faulty upgrade module could simply be replaced without having to junk the entire system.

Given that the time frame for this would be a few years from now, the manufacturing process would be 32nm, or even better, 22nm. The power needed in these consoles would be the equivalent of what is in high-end PCs today. So a GPU capable of processing anything between 800GFlops/sec to 1.5TFlops/sec would likely be the performance level of these consoles, and cooling such GPUs at that process node is significantly easier than it is cooling those same GPUs on the desktop today. The upgrade modules that would follow would add more power, but use an even smaller node, while keeping to the same thermal envelope as the outgoing part.

How the console connects to its displays would be determined by the upgrade module instead of the base console. This would help eliminate the need to keep legacy connections while trying to add new ones simultaneously.

When these new modules are released they could very well be marketed as new consoles and not the upgrades they are. The reason behind this would be to discourage people from assuming backwards compatibility with the previous modules or basic system. However, if there had to be backwards compatibility it would be viewed as a boon rather than a necessity or requirement.

This may sound like the ill-fated SEGA 32X and MEGA-CD add-ons to the MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS, but unlike that system, these modules in essence are a new console, rather than additions to an old one. Titles would also be written exclusively for the latest module or console (whatever name that is decided upon) much like how it's done today.

We have to acknowledge, though, that such a system is unlikely to ever see the light of day, primarily because as much money as can be made by the manufacturer, it does make 3rd party modifications that much easier because protection mechanisms cannot then be tied to every electronic component of the system. It's a simple enough problem to get around, but one that introduces more complications than necessary from the manufacturer's point of view.

> *"It would be interesting to see how consoles are handled going forward as I doubt that this system of buying a completely brand new console every six to ten years is sustainable."*

With that said, a modularised console makes sense from an environmental point of view as well; you have fewer parts to manufacture and the base console lasts you longer than it otherwise would.

Upgrading these processing modules of these proposed consoles would be as simple as upgrading your Xbox hard drive. No screwdrivers and zero technical know-how required. It would truly be a plug and play upgrade.

This is unlikely to ever happen, but that doesn't mean it's not a valid idea, and as such it would be interesting to see how consoles are handled going forward as I doubt that this system of buying a completely brand new console every six to ten years is sustainable, or rather that a better system cannot be thought of. **NAG**

Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

By Derrick Cramer

A general moan about hardware

I FEEL LIKE MOANING. TO be more specific, I feel like moaning at hardware companies about all the things they should be doing but aren't. I also feel like moaning at companies who provide services, and then do a bad job. Needless to say, I've had enough.

The first company I'm going to moan at is Sapphire. Now make no mistake, I love Sapphire to bits, it's a company that produces innovative, well-built, quality items time and time again, and because of this I'm a loyal customer. Then one day it produced the Mini 101 projector, which is exactly the type of device I would buy in a heartbeat. Needless to say I won't be buying it, because it's not good enough at what it does (for more info on this, take a look at the review elsewhere in this issue). The reason I'm moaning is this: why produce and sell a product which you surely must know is going to be useless 90 percent of the time? Rather spend more time on it, make it better and sell it for more, and I would pay the extra with a smile on my face.

Next up: Apple. Now a few of you will remember that a few months back I defended Apple in their argument against using Flash, but now I fear they're the ones who need a bit of a verbal smack down. For those of you who don't know, the new iPhone 4G has a problem with its fancy antenna. There are many reports of the 4G losing signal in a big way if you hold it in the lower left corner. A problem for right-handed people, a nightmare for lefties. Not only this, but the solution Steve Jobs suggests is hold it differently, or buy a case for it. Now I'm left-handed, and I don't want to be told to hold the phone I just spent thousands on differently! I'd also like my shiny, overpriced phone to work like it should without me having to buy an overpriced protective case for it. I'd also feel better about my iPhone if the company Apples use to produce iPhones didn't have so many employee suicides, but that's for another column.

Moving onto service providers now, and Cell C happen to be in the firing line. For years I've been a Cell C subscriber, for years just dealing with their service. I'm actually surprised when an SMS goes through on time, relieved when I can make a call free from any problems, shocked that I can connect to the internet without having to reset my phone... and since we're on the topic of internet, why do I only have EDGE connectivity? Where is my 3G? Service like this is unacceptable. If not for my contract, I would've cut up my Cell C sim card long ago and moved to another service provider. As it stands that's what I'm doing

> *"I feel like moaning. To be more specific, I feel like moaning at hardware companies about all the things they should be doing but aren't."*

the second my contract runs out, and Cell C will have to improve by leaps and bounds to convince me otherwise.

Next up: Mweb. Now everyone I know and their dog have an Mweb uncapped account, and for good reason too. They're cheap, reliable, with good customer service and are just a great experience. So then when one of my friends tried to upgrade from 384 uncapped to 4MB uncapped, why do you make him wait for hours on the phone to customer service? When he eventually gets through, why are you unable to help him? After two weeks of him trying to upgrade, why do you start billing him for a 4MB line and uncapped account, and yet continue to supply him with his original 384 uncapped service?

By the time you read this, all four of the above companies will have received an e-mail from me in which I voice my concerns regarding their products or services, and I look forward to their replies.

Now, this last bit is aimed at you, the consumer, so pay attention. If you receive shoddy service or are unhappy with a product, do us all a favour and complain. Fire off angry e-mails, post your experiences on Hello Peter, spread the word around and let's get the ball rolling. There is no excuse for sub-par service, so why accept it? **NAG**
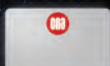
Taking Apart the E3 Hardware War

E3 2010: A BATTLEGROUND WHERE the juggernauts of the gaming industry brought their loudest canons to the field and left nothing standing. At least, that's the story told in the propaganda films that have been playing in your local cinema. According to marketing and Internet hyperbole, this year's E3 was a three-way showdown between Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo –and everyone involved will tell you that *their side* clearly wiped the floor with the other guys.

The truth is a lot more stark and nowhere near as grand. This E3 was the biggest hype assault in years, but there *was* no war. The three big hardware tent poles, Sony's Move, Microsoft's Kinect, and Nintendo's 3DS were not really competing with one another – even by admission of the players involved, if you read between the lines and past the press events.

It's not that nothing great came out of anyone's camp. There are some exciting times coming up thanks to the new technologies and platforms being rolled out this fall and in early 2011. The hype bubble has never had a thicker skin though; time to stick a pin in it.

Here's the *straight dope*, seasoned with a dash of reality and served with a steaming cup of I-See-What-You-Did-There.

KINECT

VITAL STATS: Kinect is an integrated camera and microphone unit. Powered by complex body-tracking software, it enables extreme physical interaction with games but locks out most traditional elements from controller-based and even alternative motion-control systems.

COST: It's expensive for such an untested idea, and an add-on, with limited software support by design.

INNOVATION: Despite being derived from an existing idea, it pushes that idea to the limit.

SOFTWARE SUPPORT: And 3rd parties thought making games for the Wii took them out of their comfort zone!

KINECT

HOLY STAGE SHOW, BATMAN! Microsoft was first out of the gate with a massive production for Kinect by *Cirque du Soleil*, the *avant garde* circus and entertainment empire. Featuring "interpretive dance" demonstrations of how Kinect will elevate consciousness itself, we couldn't quite figure out how a giant elephant puppet factored into the Kinect experience.

The reality of Kinect is a lot more down to Earth. Simply put, *Kinect* is Microsoft's concept of the "casual gamer" audience given form. And this is by its own admission. To quote Microsoft's Chris Penello: "When people say, 'Why don't you have Halo?' Well, I don't want Halo on Kinect. I want Halo on a controller." *Kinect* is in no way a competitor to PlayStation Move, and despite what Microsoft would like you to think, it's not a competitor to Nintendo Wii either. Kinect is "hands-free gaming." What that really means is that it's *limited* gaming by contemporary standards. It's not a matter of whether Kinect's interface is inferior or superior for common game mechanic concepts; many, if not most current game mechanics simply can't be done on Kinect in a direct way. Kinect demands one stand up for full game play. A concept demo of *Forza Motorsports* being played with Kinect is straight out of the hype dimension. Steering with outstretched hands is one thing, but there's no ready way to deal with elements such as a separate gas or brake pedal.

We must reflect on the irony that the Nintendo Wii was disparaged by hardcore gamers as "stupid arm flailing" when it was first revealed, but Kinect truly is the stereotype that many people saddled Nintendo with: the hapless gamer, with only his waving limbs to save him, forced to stand up front and centre in the living room.

It's not that Kinect won't have its perfect applications – some of those even venturing into expert gamer territory. As shown by breakout Kinect title *Dance Central* by Harmonix (*Rock Band*, anyone?), certain concepts will work better with Kinect and its sophisticated limb tracking ability than with any other format. And the fact that Kinect will force new game ideas to be created specifically for it will cause some developers to rise to the challenge and show us something we really haven't seen before.

Kinect's $150 price tag will be a sticking point for an accessory, however, and the very fact that it limits porting over of existing game designs (and thus, libraries and experience) more than any other platform will keep many developers far away from it. Beyond the hype, there's no way around the fact that Kinect is the end point evolution of Sony's EyeToy. Where this branch of gaming goes now is anyone's guess, but it's not the future of everything.

XBOX 360

KINECT

MOVE

SONY'S MOVE PRESENTATION WAS a big push, but not nearly so over the top as the Kinect assault. While Sony wasted time with the obligatory "look, we've got *Wii Sports* too" demos, PlayStation Move is not your little sister's motion control gaming. Despite the "casual" lead-in titles placed centre stage at the Sony press conference.

Move is an upmarket Nintendo Wii, plain and simple. Using the EyeToy technology as a base for a physical motion controller allows Move to achieve a greater degree of accuracy and reliability than possible with Nintendo's pioneering, first-out-the-gate setup. If you've played with the Wii, you pretty much know what to expect out of Move, only more so: more buttons on the primary control wand, and on the "Navigator" analogue control stick widget. The biggest sticking point to Move is that, well, the wand looks goofy. *There, we said it.* Each Move controller sports a giant glowing golf ball on top that changes colour so every player can tell which unit is his or hers. This glowy orb is required for the EyeToy interface to function by tracking Move's enhanced accuracy in 3D space. Another nice feature is that the Navigator widget is wireless – no more getting tangled up in Nunchuk cables ala the Wii. There's not a whole lot else to say about the technology, honestly. With Move, it comes down to the software and the pricing structure.

On one hand, Move is already being pushed as a hardcore gaming enhancement with patches for existing games, such as *Resident Evil 5*, and *Killzone 3* positioned as the bonafide killer Move app. (Those who have played *Metroid Prime 3* or *The Conduit* on the Wii understand how well Wii remote-derived aiming can work in a first person shooter.) Compared to Kinect, Move invites traditional games to be adapted for motion controls. Given its improved features over the Wii remote, developing and fine tuning gesture-based and point-and-shoot gameplay should be easier and less intimidating.

On the other hand, Move is a bit of a complex bugger to get all the pieces together with. Some games demoed used a pair of Move controllers for a single player. A full and proper Move setup involves a PlayStation 3 Eye camera, two Move control wands, and two Navigator analogue stick units. That's a lot of gear to add to a PS3 and Sony hasn't announced any bundles that make it easy. No bundle includes a Navigator, for example, because in a pinch a Dual Shock 3 pad can be held in your off-hand to duplicate Navigator functions. But since that's an ugly hack, nobody will really want to play Move that way. While the basic Move bundle will cost under $100 (US) for a camera, single wand, and demo mini-game collection, a decked out Move experience will basically double that price. Which happens to be the entire price of a Nintendo Wii system.

We have to admit we're very interested to try some "man's games" with Move like *Killzone*. And since by now both developers and gamers are coming to understand motion controls are not the devil, Move will most likely get a lot of support. We're just not sure how many Sony expects to move at that price, or if they can avoid consumers getting confused while trying to assemble the kit they need.

As for the patch for PlayStation 3 to let you play your games and 3D Blu-ray movies in 3D on stereoscopic-capable television sets while wearing the special glasses, well, it does that. There isn't anything else to say about it.

MOVE

VITAL STATS: Move is Wiimote 2.0 in HD. With more buttons for traditional input mapping, better accuracy and response time, and theoretically more reliability, it's the upmarket move of the Wii concept. Suitable for a variety of applications, from the most experimental to the Best Bro games.

COST: There has *got* to be a better bundle and pricing scheme, Sony.

INNOVATION: Sony finally reaches Space Year 2005, but at least they did bring the pretty graphics and hopefully a lack of calibration issues.

SOFTWARE SUPPORT: No beef here. PS3 get loads of games that have direct applications, such as shooters. They've got solid first-to-third party coverage across the board.

3DS

HOW DO YOU PRESENT *that which cannot be presented?* Nintendo did have the most genuinely interesting reveal in the form of 3DS. This Nintendo DS successor lived up to the Nintendo party line of "entertainment using surprises." It's also the most difficult to get a bead on, because you quite literally have to see it for yourself to understand what it does. This difficulty was reflected at the Nintendo press briefing; Nintendo had fancy movies, and a lot of talking, with Reggie waving his frozen turkey-sized mitts around to try and show us the shape of the third dimension. But in the end, Nintendo was unable to show the actual 3D effect to a mass audience.

Those who got to see the 3D effect up close with the hundreds of demo units will vouch for the 3D effect being quite 3D, without needing any glasses. Some people say it gave them a headache, others said it was just fine. For us, it was just fine.

Nintendo did, however, make a clear and very pointed reference to Sony's recent push for 3D home gaming on the PS3; 3DS, so Nintendo says, goes down a different path. The goggles do nothing (referring to the awkward limitations of 3D enabled by LCD shutter glasses) and 3DS is the solution. Backing up the goggle-free 3D effect, is a massive increase in hardware power over the Nintendo DS, and a Sony PSP-sized upper LCD screen. 3DS is a product that tries to do a dizzying number of things at once:

usher in a new era of 3D gaming, take the reins from Nintendo's massively successful DS line of portable game machines, and enable the authentic playing of 3D films on a portable consumer device. 3DS even takes 3D photographs using its twin stereo cameras, to complete the novelty value. And in a demonstration that they know what people *don't* like about the 3D trend, Nintendo was quick to point out the 3D effect of 3DS is adjustable with a slider, and can be turned off with a flick.

It's all a little much, but then, the original DS also appeared to be a device with an identity crisis when it first showed up. One thing is for sure though – the critics of the DS's limited 3D graphics capability have been silenced by the 3DS presentation. While some of the key games were still rough and unfinished, 3DS leapfrogs beyond PSP and by the time its hardware is finalised, may present visual quality on par with Nintendo's Wii console – but with newer and more advanced shaders, plus the benefit of a small screen. A few 3rd party demos using in-game assets raised eyebrows, especially Capcom's *Resident Evil 5* spin-off, which at a glance could be mistaken for HD *Resident Evil 5* with slightly less geometry.

The only real sticking point may be cost, which has yet to be announced. There's a load of hardware crammed into this tiny little thing, and some pundits can't see how

Nintendo will get it on the market at a price that invites the majority of current DS owners to upgrade. If 3DS gets off to at least a decent beginning, it seems likely the huge software support the DS enjoys will transfer over.

CLOSING

The videogame hardware wars have changed. We are no longer in what was taken for granted as the standard hardware upgrade cycle. Instead of an Xbox 720, PS4, or Wii HD, this year Kinect, Move, and 3DS are the new platforms. All of them are moving along parallel paths without directly competing as much as it might appear. With such an investment in their current product lines and platforms, nobody can really afford to reboot it all again this soon; the emphasis seems to have shifted towards keeping existing platforms and brands viable and vital for the foreseeable future. We may not see new consoles until 2015 has come and gone, at the least.

Extract yourself from the hype bubble however, and there's still a lot to look forward to. The upside to the traditional cycle having been set aside this round is that the landscape has become less predictable; it's not just about who has the biggest and best graphics on a game console anymore.

Now if you'll excuse us, we have to go clean up after the giant fake elephant. **NAG**
Miktar Dracon

3DS

VITAL STATS: It's DS 2 in 3D with console quality graphics on a handheld, it takes 3D photographs and plays 3D motion pictures, *and it makes goddamn Julian fries.* It's a typically weird Nintendo product, but weird Nintendo products have a way of taking off in ways nobody is able to predict.

COST: All rational thought suggests this thing has got to cost more than $200 at launch. Will the draw of a 3D effect really cause the userbase to upgrade so soon after the DSi and DSi XL came out?

INNOVATION: It is simultaneously more and less inventive than it appears to be. By and large, it's a sequel to Nintendo DS with a three-dimensional visual effect to strike while 3D technology is topical.

SOFTWARE SUPPORT: Conditionally excellent. If it moves enough units soon enough, expect a tidal wave of games, though be warned many of those games will be re-releases and "remakes" designed to show off 3D visuals.

gigabyte
overclocking chan

Regional Asia Africa Finals: Indonesia

GIGABYTE, ABOVE ANY OTHER component manufacturer seems dedicated to overclocking and all related activities in an uncanny way. Not only does GIGABYTE host more competitions than any other manufacturer, the company will be the first to tell you that they have seen remarkable increases in sales and market share every time they host a competition. So, beyond a real dedication to the overclockers, it turns out that the GIGABYTE Open Overclocking Championship (GOOC) is actually beneficial in terms of bottom line, as for as long as that remains true, GIGABYTE will be at the forefront of the overclocking circles.

With 2009's success, GIGABYTE has raised the bar terms of the number of competitions they have hosted this year and the quality, if anything, has improved not only in hardware used and rules, but the competition conditions as well. GIGABYTE has listened to the many overclockers it has a relationship with and has produced arguably the best run competition in terms of hardware and tests the overclocking community has seen yet.

Unlike in previous competitions, especially the PAN-ASIA finals, this time GIGABYTE did away with team competition and instead focused on individual contestants, even though team efforts were not explicitly disallowed. This was an easy decision to understand because the chosen benchmarks were 2D only. That is, no 3DMark was included this time and as such, there was no need for graphics card cooling and modifications.

Not only did this simplify the overclocking itself, in some ways it made the competition a little more balanced. With graphics card overclocking, many other factors creep into the competition, and it's very easy for one contestant or team to exploit a particularly good VGA sample and win every discipline convincingly with little to no competition at all.

While this is still possible with CPU only overclocking, it is easier to manage and the process of binning CPUs is much easier than binning graphics cards.

With that said GIGABYTE settled on Wprime32M, PiFast, SuperPi1M and MaxxMem. The great thing about all these benchmarks was that they are very short, they cannot really be tweaked and as such it was a purer overclocking competition than many others. Raw speed and efficiency would win the day, but that also meant that the person with the best sample was likely to win all the benchmarks. Still, despite some minor complaints from some competitors, the general consensus seemed to be that this was the best run regional final since the inception of GOOC a number of years ago.

COMPETITORS

Amongst the competitors for the final were familiar and new faces. From Zolkorn (Thailand) and his signature red cap, Edward from Taiwan, ViVi representing SA, Sharya_Neo representing the Middle East, Ekky from Indonesia, Alex Tan from Malaysia, Gyrock from Japan and a host of others from the represented regions. There were plenty of competent to great overclockers and this made for a very interesting competition which, much like many of the regional competitions, is more of a friendly contest than an actual all-out competition. The judges were incredible overclockers themselves, as they included World Number one at the time and GIGABYTE's resident overclocking expert HiCookie, Tim

< GIGABYTE Open Overclocking Championship 2010 >

open

mpionship 2010

Marshal from Team_AU, Dinos from Australia (or is that New Zealand?) and finally the tireless and incredibly focused Benny Lodewijk. For the most part the competition went off without a hitch, but when two contestants didn't have LN2 POTs with which to compete, the judges hastily made plans and less than 40 minutes later two cooling POTs were made available. An impressive feat considering that LN2 Pots are not sold at retail stores anywhere in the world and the vast majority are made by the overclockers themselves.

RESULTS

Right off the bat, all those who had performed the OCP mod on the motherboard (GIGABYTE X58A-UD7 – a previous Dream Machine motherboard) would be in the top echelon of the overclockers. This was simply because as the 980X CPU increased in clock frequency, the amount of current needed to keep the system stable would trigger the current protection mechanism, limiting the frequency. A simple enough mod to do it, but not all overclockers felt it was necessary and those that skipped on it ended up at the bottom of the listings.

Zolkorn with a seemingly magical CPU (relative to the others) posted a Wprime32M score at 5.8GHz which resulted in a 3.234sec time, which he followed with other equally impressive results in PiFast with a 14.31 second score at 5.94GHz, a SuperPi1M score of 6.859seconds at 5.97GHz and at last a memory read bandwidth figure of 25.4GB/sec with the memory at 2,100MHz (CL7 1T). These results were enough to secure the win for Zolkorn, with Sharyar_NEO claiming second place and Indonesia's Ekky claiming 3rd place.

Vivi eventually placed 7th overall with a total of 28 points. Not a bad placing considering early problems with the hardware where the motherboard was not functioning (DOA) and had to be replaced, wasting some preparation time in the process.

PRESENTATION

Overall, a great competition with typical GIGABYTE hosting that made sure that there was no dull moment during the day's proceedings. Despite the obscurity of extreme overclocking in Indonesia, the computer mall where the event was held was filled with enthusiastic eyes as onlookers looked on at some of best overclockers around competing for a place in the World finals in Taipei.

The amount of preparation required never ceases to amaze and just like in previous competitions, GIGABYTE did not disappoint. From traditional combat shows to energetic displays of Break dancing (a seemingly well loved dance form in the East) it was all professionally done, and if it didn't help invigorate the overclockers, it sure got the people's attention.

Ultimately the GOOC 2010 Asia Africa regional final was a great success from an overclocking point of view and for promoting the hobby. As to what it will do for GIGABYTE's sales in Indonesia only the company will know, but from the incredible interest we saw, we wouldn't be surprised if GIGABYTE saw increased sales in the region.

We would like to thank GIGABYTE HQ for inviting us to be part of this incredible event, and until GOOC 2011, keep clocking up a storm.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

Part 6: Guitar Hero Controller Mod – Materials and Cutting

FOR THIS AND NEXT month's tutorial, we're going to draw our attention to the modification of a *Guitar Hero* controller. As always, you can use the principals applied here and extend them to any other device. We have quite a few things to cover, as this is going to be a total overhaul of the controller. In this first part, we're going to look at cutting the controller and materials that we'll be adding to it; in the second part, we'll look at applying a fantastic paint-job and lighting, as well as the assembly of all our hard work into the finished product.

STEP ONE: DISASSEMBLE

This part is pretty straight-forward. Remove the fret board by pulling on the spring-loaded trigger underneath the controller, then eject the faceplate using the sliding button nearby. Give the faceplate a tug but be sure not to break it. Use a Torx screwdriver to remove all of the screws; note the last screw is underneath that sneaky warranty sticker. Pull the controller apart.

Once inside, you'll have to remove all of the internal components. Take note of where everything goes, and be sure to keep all of the components, screws, wires and other odds and ends in a safe place.

STEP TWO: MARK OUT CUTTING LINES

This is the most important step, so I recommend that you take your time with it. We're going to install two separate Perspex windows in the controller. Using a pencil, draw the areas to mark where your window(s) are going to be, taking care to avoid any buttons and their mountings. You'll have to keep checking underneath the top piece of the controller and inside the bottom piece. I suggest that you use the photo on this page as a guide, but if you're operating on a different controller, you'll have to adjust your markings accordingly.

STEP THREE: CUT, SHAPE AND SAND

With the areas marked out for destruction, use your rotary tool and PVC cutting disc, and get to work cutting out those windows. Once you're done with that, smooth the edges with a sanding band and cut away any internal support struts that are likely to get in the way, then manually sand down the edges to get a smooth, even finish.

Next up is the Perspex. Using the recently-cut holes, mark out guidelines for cutting, ensuring that the Perspex pieces are slightly larger than the window holes so that there's a small ledge on which to mount them from the inside of the controller. Take your time shaping the edges, and rather cut too large and use the sanding band, on a medium speed, to grind the edges into the right shape.

This next step is optional: lightly sand the both sides of the Perspex with a combination of 400 and 120 grit sandpaper. Make sure that you alternate directions and keep washing the dust off as you work. Once the sanded Perspex is dry, it'll create a frosted look that will diffuse the guitar's internal lighting that we're going to install in the next tutorial. In addition to that, it'll prevent any unavoidable scratches to the surface because, well, we've already scratched it on purpose. If you decide to skip this step and choose to keep a clear window into the inner workings of the guitar, I recommend that you find a way to make the Perspex scratch-resistant, as even a few surface scratches will catch the light and look unsightly.

Now we're going to cut out the steel sheeting that will cover the remaining part of the face. Use the faceplate that we removed earlier to mark the cutting lines for the steel. If you have a pair of steel sheers, use those to rough out the shape from the large sheet, and then get to work with your Dremel for the details. If you don't have any sheers, you can use the Dremel to do all the work but it'll take a bit longer. Be sure to cut out the holes for the buttons, strum bar and such, and then grind and smooth the edges to make sure it fits perfectly. The final step is to cut out holes for the location of our windows. Once again, mark out areas for cutting and perform the same steps: cut, grind, fit.
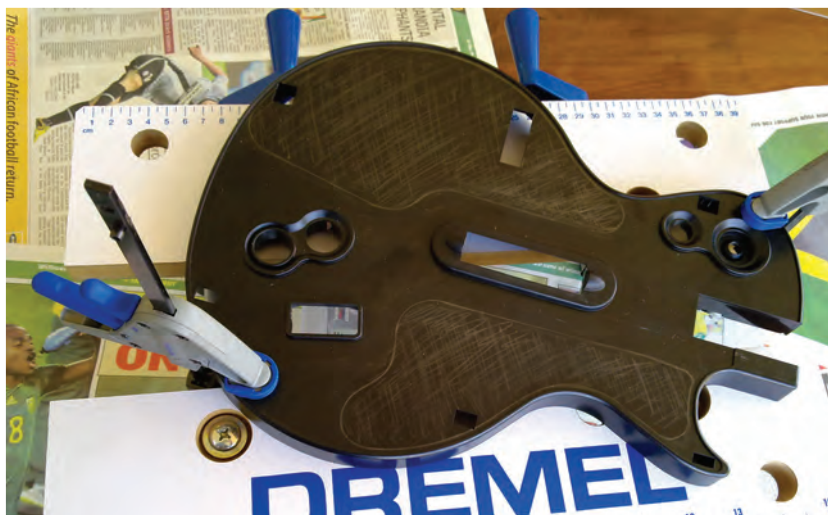
STEP FOUR: ALMOST DONE

Once everything looks like it'll fit, it's just a matter of bolting in the metal. Since we're going to use a glue gun to install the Perspex, it's best to leave that step until the end, once the painting is done, but we can get everything ready in the meantime. Put the metal in place and clamp it down. Drill holes matching the size of the bolts that you have (I'm using 6mm bolts) in the locations where you suspect the surface will need the most support. Drill through both the metal and plastic underneath. With that done, install the bolts and marvel at your halfway-complete, total-overhaul guitar controller modification. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Tips from the experts

Lithium-Ion battery technology: With its 10.8V cordless rotary tool model 8000 and the 7.2V Driver, Dremel offers the cordless freedom for precise tools that users need. Instead of relatively inexpensive Nickel Cadmium (NiCd) cells, Dremel uses Lithium-Ion (Li-Ion) batteries for these models. But what's the difference between NiCd and Li-Ion? NiCd batteries need training: they only reach full power after the 4th charging circle, but Li-Ion batteries deliver full power after the first charge. The famous memory effect doesn't apply to Li-Ion batteries whereas NiCd batteries should be emptied before they are charged again, otherwise they lose battery capacity over time. There is also a big difference in self-discharge: a NiCd battery is often flat if you haven't used it for about four months while Li-Ion batteries are still 85% charged. As Li-Ion cells are three times more powerful (Li-Ion cell voltage is 3.6V compared to the 1.2V of NiCd cells) than NiCd cells, you need fewer battery cells per pack. This makes the tool much smaller, more compact and lightweight. Testament to that, the 7.2V Li-Ion battery of the Dremel Driver makes it the smallest drill driver in its volt class.

THE ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN II

EVEN MORE ULTIMATER!
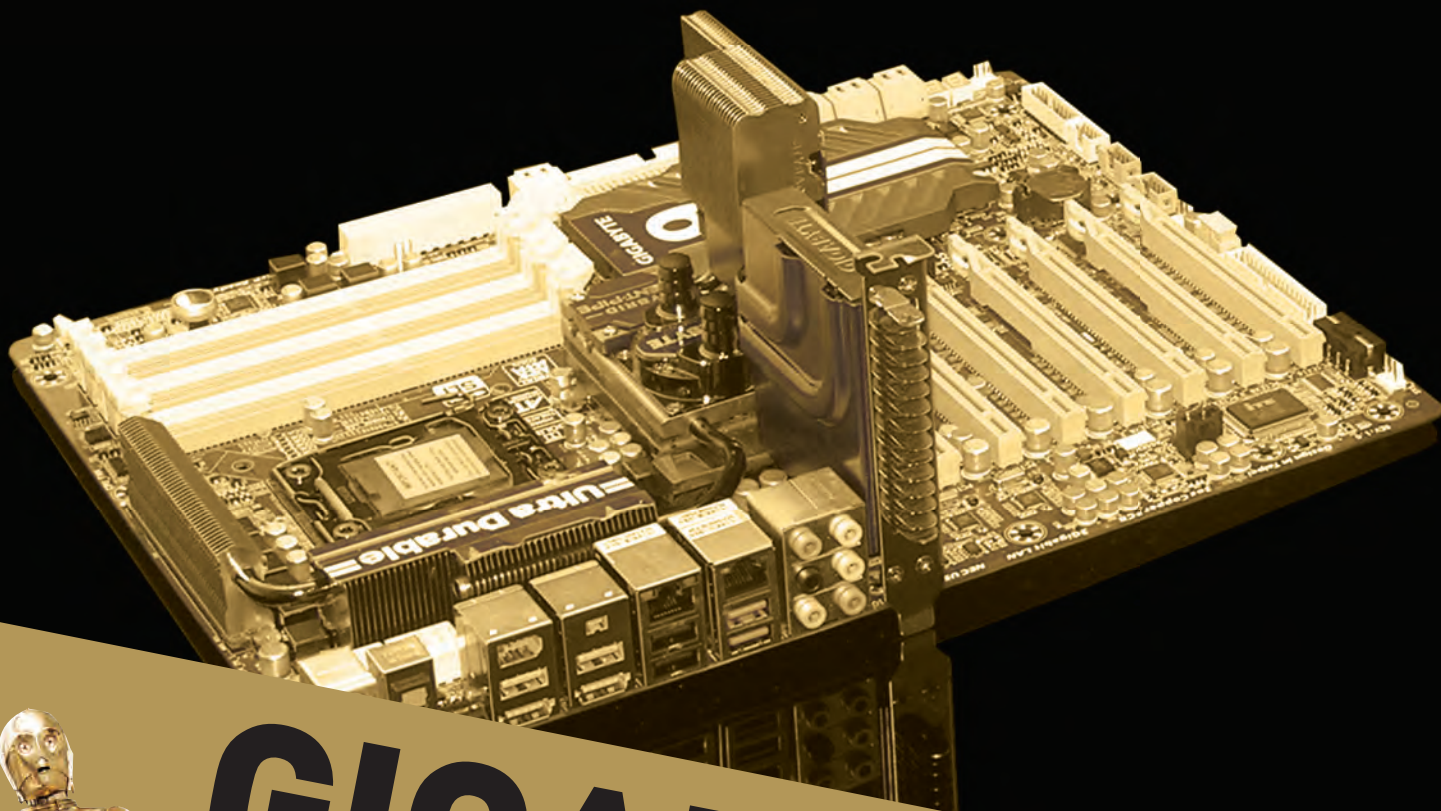
GIGABYTE
X58A-UD9
Contender

VS

SINCE LAST MONTH'S SHOWDOWN between these two component giants, we have been testing their greatest products yet, regardless of platform. This is largely because both these companies pride themselves the most on the motherboards they manufacture, and those motherboards are what made them the two most sought-after component brands in the world. As such it only makes sense that their greatest efforts would be towards the fastest computing experience there is right now, which is the Intel X58 platform.

Strangely enough, unlike the 890FX chipset we dealt with last time, the X58 chipset and all related technologies are pretty old. The first X58 motherboards were released in late 2008, as hard as that is to believe. This chipset has lasted for around two years and in that time has remained unchallenged in performance and feature set.

If we were to gauge where the X58 platform is right now in terms of maturity, we could say this is its third iteration, because both these companies have their competing products in this article as their third attempt respectively at producing the ultimate X58 motherboard. As daring as it may seem to some, it's safe to say that both these products are equals at the

least to the legendary EVGA X58 Classified and for all intents and purposes are better motherboards. So this showdown will hopefully reveal which is the best X58 motherboard ever made.

The importance of this showdown cannot be understated because these will be the last high-end X58 products from either company as they work on the next generation X68 chipset for Intel's Sandy Bridge architecture. So if there was ever a time to invest heavily into X58, this would be your last chance because it's likely curtains with this generation of motherboards.

PERFORMANCE
Both boards delivered similar performance for the most part and any discrepancy could be ignored as being within the margin of error. Everest memory performance was identical for the most part and if there were any differences, they would be down to micro tuning in the BIOS. Both products delivered

solid performance, however in Wprime the ASUS board was consistently faste,r and even at a slightly lower speed than the UD9 (50MHz or so), it still delivered better performance. It's hard to figure out just why this is, but if Wprime is your main benchmark then you'll certainly want to stick with the Rampage III Extreme. For SuperPi the advantage goes to the UD9 motherboard, but it isn't significant enough for us to say conclusively that it should be the motherboard of choice for the benchmark.

3D performance was identical on both motherboards. In 3DMark06 the differences were so small that on repeated runs the scores were within 60 points of each other, which is negligible when dealing with scores above 30,000. To this end, we will call the performance even when dealing with

< The Ultimate Showdown II >

THE BRAWL TO SETTLE IT ALL!

(UMM, YEAH... READ ON)
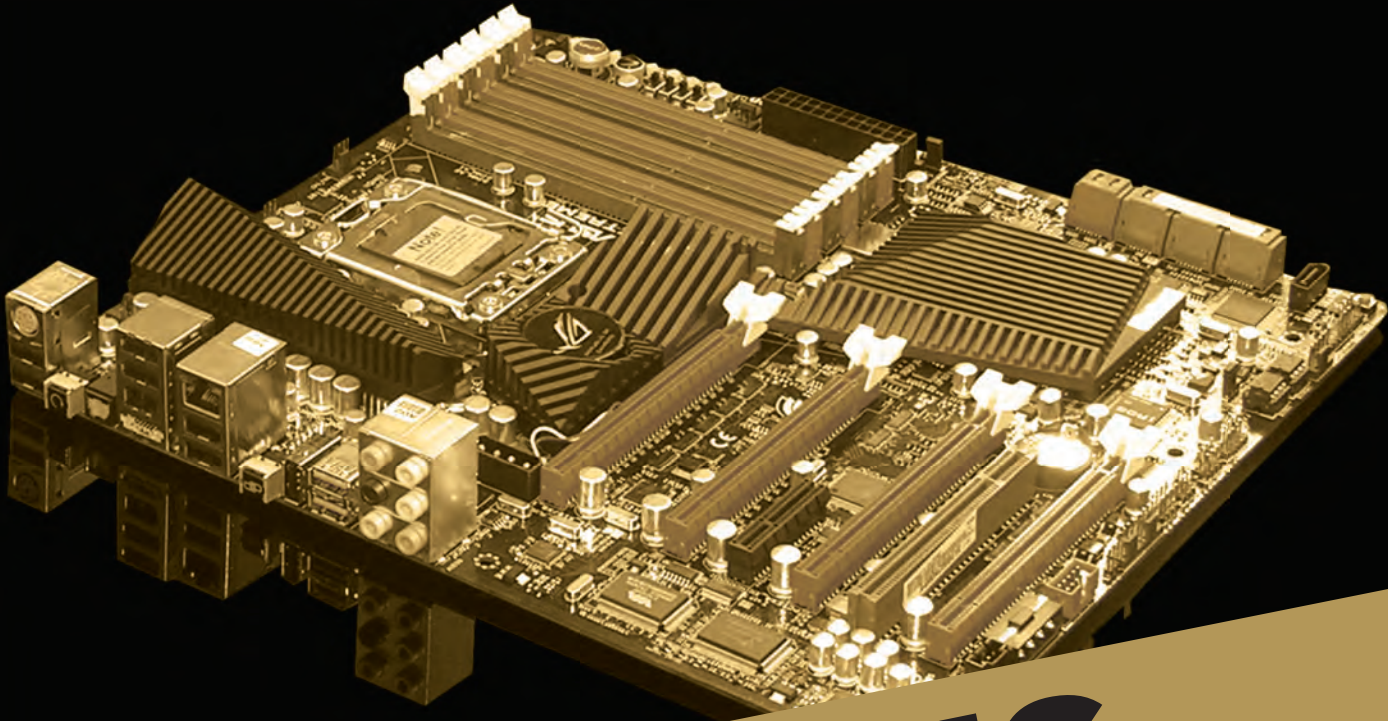
ASUS
RAMPAGE III EXTREME

Contender

frequencies below 4.2GHz. In fact, above this speed we believe the differences would remain negligible, so it falls to the overclocking headroom to determine the true X58 king.

Winner: ASUS Rampage III Extreme

OVERCLOCKING
Unlike the previous test for the 890FX, overclocking on these motherboards proved to be very similar. Raw frequency for the memory, North Bridge and the external CPU clock (Bclk) were the same. The North Bridge was slightly better on the Rampage III Extreme but that was largely because on the Rampage III Extreme board, the PLL used makes it impossible to get a very accurate clock speed as the speed

may be boosted by up to 10MHz. This is true for the CPU, Memory and North Bridge clock. It's similar to the Floating HT issue we had on the Crosshair IV, but at least on the Rampage III Extreme, it doesn't continuously change the clock speed, but is just fixed at a specific frequency that is usually higher than what you selected.

To circumvent this, we had to use the OC station and adjust the base clock (BCLk) with 0.2 MHz increments, and literally had to select 174MHz on the OC station to get the desired 4206MHz we wanted when the system was set to 183x23. Without this adjustment the PLL would have the CPU frequency at 4217MHz, which resulted in better performance under test than the UD9 which was able to maintain 4209MHz exactly. So with this adjustment the Rampage III Extreme ended up at 4206MHz, which is lower than the UD9, but far better than the 4217MHz we would have otherwise had.

Where Uncore /North Bridge speeds were

concerned, with the PLL issue aside on the Rampage III Extreme, the limits were exactly the same on both motherboards. The Rampage III Extreme however required a lower QPI/VTT voltage to reach that Uncore limit. In fact on the Rampage III Extreme we only needed to apply 1.415V, whereas on the UD9 we needed 1.495V for stability.

It is worth keeping in mind though that on the UD9 B2B CAS Latency was set to 2 while on the Rampage III Extreme the lowest it could be set at was 4 so there was inherently a higher load on the UD9 than on the Rampage III Extreme. Given how much hotter the Northbridge was on the Rampage III Extreme (temperatures sometimes above 60°C) it was probably best that the QPI voltage was lower. The reason for the high MCH temperatures on the Rampage III Extreme, much like on many other ASUS ROG motherboards, is terrible contact between the Heat Sink and the chip. Replacement of the thermal compound and tightening of the screws bring temperatures down to the early 50s or late 40s.

Under liquid nitrogen, where these motherboards are best, the UD9 seemingly because of its "Unlocked Power" dual 12-phase PWM circuitry, was able to beat the Rampage III Extreme by a small margin with

all threads enabled. 3DMark Vantage was stable on the UD9 at 5,200MHz while the highest speed that we could achieve on the Rampage III Extreme was 5,130MHz. It is to be noted that this particular 980X sample was poor and such low speeds are very rare. However it still serves to highlight the slight edge the UD9 has over the Rampage III Extreme when it comes to CPU overclocking. This remained true with HT disabled and some cores shut off as the highest speed that the UD9 could pass 3DMark05 at was 5,512MHZ (validating 5,610MHz), while on the Rampage III Extreme it was 5,400MHz (validating 5,495MHz) regardless of voltage or how low the temperature was set.

With a better sample CPU, these differences are likely to be much smaller, but on this particular CPU, the UD9 was a better overclocker. The Rampage

III Extreme may not have been able to match the raw clock speed, but it did make overclocking much easier than on the UD9 because unlike on the UD9, the CBB (Cold Boot Bug) was at a significantly lower temperature. That is you could cold boot on the R3E at -130°C and higher, whereas on the UD9 the lowest temperature that the system would handle was -112°C. Warm reboots however were pretty much the same; again you could fill the cooling POT with LN2 and continue to run tests without issue. (That is with all cores active and HT enabled. With HT off there is a definite cold bug point on both boards).

The Rampage III Extreme does offer an LN2 mode which is probably responsible for the tolerance of the lower temperatures, and in addition has a QPI load line setting absent from the UD9. It doesn't mean much when dealing with an unlocked multiplier CPU, but for those overclocking the lower end CPU's it may be worth investigating just how much more Bclk headroom the setting allows.

For raw frequency overclocking and stability, we will have to hand it to the UD9, as it just produced higher results than the Rampage III Extreme, even if

the differences were rather small.

Winner: GIGABYTE X58A-UD9

FEATURES
Once again, much like with the Crosshair IV, the Rampage III Extreme has a strong showing here.

Not only does it have labelled and easy to read measuring points for the various voltages, it has a jumper based LN2 mode and QPI Load line Calibration which are absent on the UD9. The ability to boot from either of the two socket mounted BIOS chips (as opposed to surface mounted on the UD9) is much appreciated. A feature GIGABYTE would do well to copy especially given that they have everything else covered such as clear CMOS, Power and Reset switches.

Once again the absence of the POST LED on the Rampage III Extreme much like all other ASUS motherboards is annoying as you have no choice but to use the OC-station or another external device (you can use your notebook/netbook via special connector at the rear of the motherboard). ASUS's own overclocking software is also disappointingly stuck firmly in the late 90s in interface and the settings it allows you to tweak. This is very surprising given just
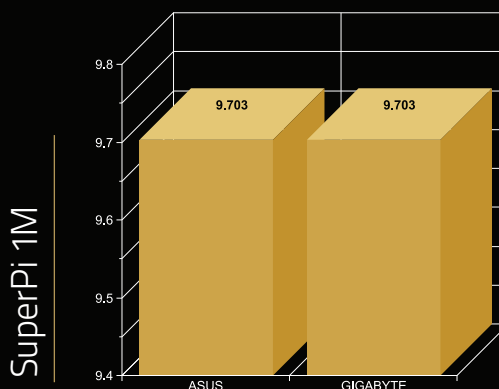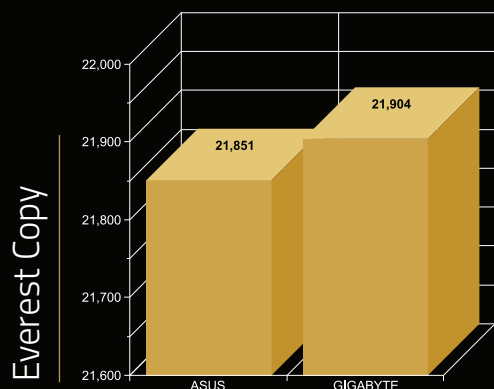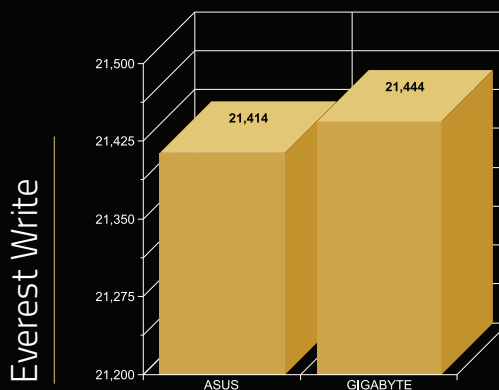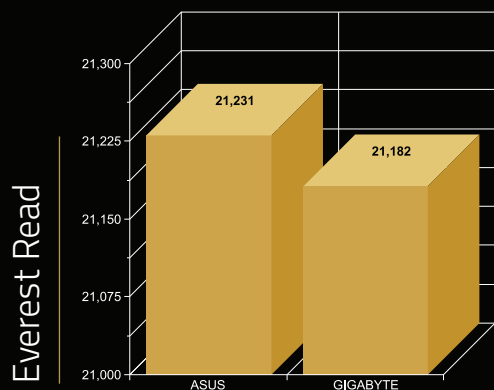
Test Setup

- Intel Core i7 980X (Q4EG 3003A830 B1 stepping)
- 3x2GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz CL7 1T (Triple channel)
- POV GeForce GTX470
- ForceWare 257.21 WHQL
- Windows XP SP3/ Windows 7 64-bit Ultimate
- Ikonik Vulcan 1.2KW PSU
- ASUS Rampage III Extreme (Bios 0704)
- GIGABYTE X58A-UD9 (Bios F4a)

X-Factor

GIGABYTE and ASUS would love to tell you that their respective motherboards are the best when it comes to extreme overclocking, and it certainly wouldn't be a lie. However there is one motherboard that came out after both of these which is looking very promising, and in fact from the preliminary results, looks just as capable as these two, has a near identical feature set and as expected isn't for the feint hearted or those with shallow pockets. The BIG BANG X-Power motherboard from MSI has entered the battle for the ultimate X58 motherboard, and with this they just may have produced their best product ever. Not surprising at all though, since

MSI solicited the help of so many overclockers all over the world to help bring their products up to standard, and the X-Power is proof of this resolute effort.

Several great overclockers have stated that there's no difference in performance or overclocking capability between these three motherboards, but much like we found in this showdown, the differences in motherboards will not be visible with a great sample, but are easy to see with a sub-standard CPU. Given that most retail 980X CPUs are not as good as the A0 ES samples, it will be interesting to see how it does next month when we freeze it and put it through its paces.

THE GRAPHS

Everest Read

21,300
21,225 — ASUS: 21,231
21,150
21,075 — GIGABYTE: 21,182
21,000

Everest Write

21,500
21,425 — ASUS: 21,414 / GIGABYTE: 21,444
21,350
21,275
21,200

Everest Copy

22,000
21,900 — ASUS: 21,851 / GIGABYTE: 21,904
21,800
21,700
21,600

SuperPi 1M

9.8
9.7 — ASUS: 9.703 / GIGABYTE: 9.703
9.6
9.5
9.4

< The Ultimate Showdown II >

LIVE ON PAY-PER-VIEW!

how fantastic the OC-station is. One is left to wonder why that flexibility isn't featured in the software. GIGABYTE's Easytune 6 could stand to start up faster but is better in every possible way than what ASUS and their Smart Doctor software offers.

The above are small issues though when we get down to the real feature set because there's one that is probably responsible for the high price tag of the UD9 when compared to the Rampage III Extreme. This is 4-Way SLI capability. This is simply not possible on the Rampage III Extreme unless you purchase the additional ROG XPANDER (if you can find it) which adds more PCI-Express slots and lanes courtesy of an additional NF200 chip. This addition makes the motherboard even larger than the XL-ATX UD9 which begs the question of how practical the ROG XPANDER really is. If you buy the XPANDER and the OC-Station on top of the initial purchase of the Rampage III Extreme motherboard you end up with a similar or sometimes higher retail price than that of the UD9 which has all these features out the box. So this will come down to personal preference and just how important 4-way SLI support is to you, because as it stands the UD9 is the most expensive motherboard we have ever seen with an MSRP of $700 compared to $399 for the Rampage III Extreme.

The features on the UD9 including on/off charge make it a better featured board than the Rampage III Extreme ultimately, but for options specifically overclocking related, the Rampage III Extreme is the better motherboard simply because of the BIOS and tweaking options it offers. This one is really hard to call and with everything mentioned earlier these boards are equal.

Winner: Tie

CONCLUSION

After all the tests and many hours spent with both motherboards (more than 100 hours collectively) it's much harder to call than the previous showdown we did last month, which was close. If this were an arcade fighting game it would be a "Double K.O" as there just isn't enough between these motherboards to call a clear victory.

On the one hand, the UD9 is a no holds barred motherboard that throws sensibility and caution to the wind and shows that GIGABYTE is quite capable of producing the best motherboard the industry has

ever seen in terms of quality and robust design. The Rampage III Extreme on the other hand builds on the Rampage II Extreme and in comparison, is a much better motherboard in every way and, despite not being as vocal as GIGABYTE about their overclocking exploits, ASUS can produce an equivalent motherboard for a better price. Given the CPU sample we were working with, for competitive oveclocking we would have to give the nod to the UD9, but will say that with a better sample (Q4EG B1 B3XX CPU) there is likely to be no difference in how far these motherboards can take the CPU.
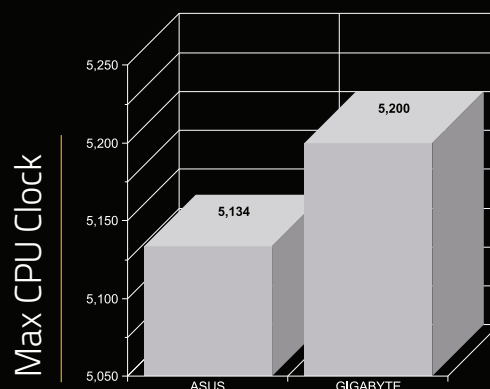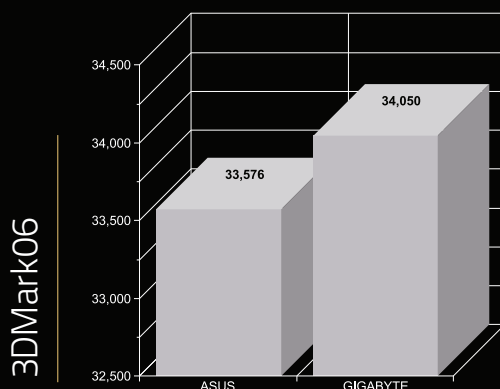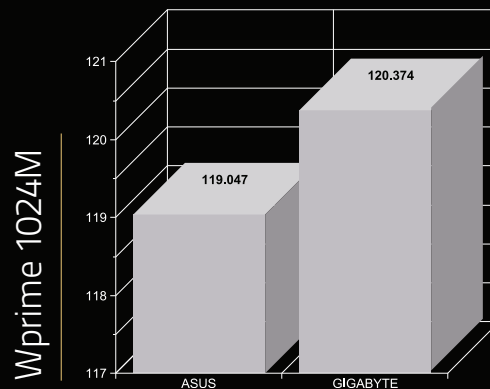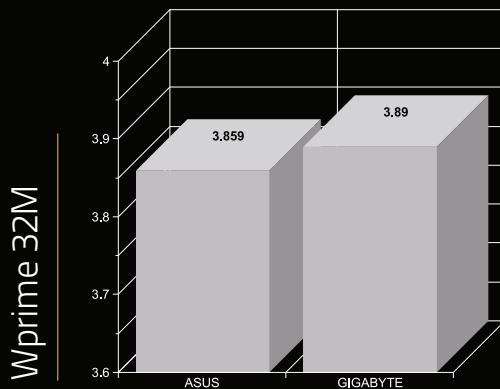
These are two of the best motherboards available on the market, and regardless of which one you buy, you'll be burning up the overclocking rankings knowing that you have some of the best kit available to any extreme overclocker out there. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

RESULTS > RESULTS > RESULTS > RESULTS > RESULTS > RESULTS > RESULTS

GIGABYTE X58A-UD9
Features: **10/10**
Performance: **9.5/10**
Overclocking: **10/10**
Overall: 10

ASUS RAMPAGE III EXTREME
Features: **10/10**
Performance: **10/10**
Overclocking: **9.5/10**
Overall: 10

Wprime 32M

- ASUS: 3.859
- GIGABYTE: 3.89

Wprime 1024M

- ASUS: 119.047
- GIGABYTE: 120.374

3DMark06

- ASUS: 33,576
- GIGABYTE: 34,050

Max CPU Clock

- ASUS: 5,134
- GIGABYTE: 5,200

ASUS ARES Limited Edition

THE RADEON HD5970 HAS stood unchallenged as the fastest graphics card available on the market for more than half a year now. Nothing from NVIDIA is close, and it looks like this will remain the case for the foreseeable future. However, ASUS not satisfied with having a reference Radeon 5970 much like other manufacturers, has created what can only be termed a "monster" graphics card.

Unlike with other Radeon 5970 graphics cards, ASUS has used full Cypress GPUs clocked at the default 850MHz instead of the usual 725MHz. Not only that, but ASUS has used 4GB of GDDR5 memory operating at a scorching 4.8GHz. All this has produced a peerless graphics card that stands above all others.

To power and cool all this, it seems ASUS has spared no cost. The cooling mechanism makes the graphics card look like something out of a science fiction movie, and the weight borders on absurd. The ARES is powered courtesy of three PCI-Express power plugs, (one 6-pin and two 8-pin plugs) and this configuration allows the card to draw up to 450W in total. So if you have anything less than a 1kW power supply, you'd best avoid this graphics card as it really is for the extreme overclocker or power user looking for nothing but the best out of a graphics card.

In typical ASUS style, the ARES Limited Edition comes in the most impressive packaging any product in computing has ever

come in. The retail unit is packaged in a solid black brief case with metallic edges. ASUS has included a high quality gaming mouse, 3DMark Vantage, and additional display and power adapters. Given that the 5970 was already the fastest VGA card on the market, it's impressive that ASUS has managed to bring out a card that is much faster. If the ultimate graphics card is what you need, the ASUS ARES is the only card you should be looking at.   **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: 850MHz Cypress (x2 (40nm)
Processors: 3,200 (1,600x2)
Render Outputs: 64 (32x2)
Memory: 4,096MB GDDR5 (4,800MHz) 307.62GB/sec
API: DirectX11/OpenGL3.x, OpenCL 1.0

Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.0: 1,655
3DMark Vantage: P29,939
3DMark06: 25,612
Crysis Warhead (1,920 x 1,080 4xAA): 82.13fps
Resident Evil 5 (1,920 x 1,080 4xAA): 148fps

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Looks fantastic
+ Superb performance
+ Great presentation

›Minus
- Ridiculous weight
- Needs three power plugs

›Bottom Line
If there is a faster graphics card than the ASUS ARES on the market, we haven't heard of it or seen it.

09 out of ten

Sapphire Mini 101 Projector

IT HAS LONG BEEN a dream of every tech enthusiast to have a fully mobile, hand sized, multi-purposed projector to serve as the perfect companion for their phone, iPod, video camera or laptop. Well, Sapphire has once again listened to the enthusiast community and produced the Mini 101 projector, but is it everything we could hope for?

Weighing in at only 103g with the built-in battery, and measuring only 116x5 x18 mm, the Mini 101 is barely bigger than most mobile phones, and far lighter. Not only that, but it packs its own battery as well as speakers, both welcome additions. Providing connectors for iPods/iPhones, Nokia cell phones, RCA inputs and D-sub inputs, you'll struggle to find a device the Mini 101 can't pair with.

So by now you must be sold on the Mini 101, but before you rush off to buy one, there are a few minor flaws in the unit that you should be aware of. Firstly, the resolution is only 640 x 480. While this will be fine for most mobile format movies, text is very difficult to read, even at the Mini 101's maximum projection size of 65 inches. Also, the maximum brightness of 14 lumens means the 101 isn't very effective in a bright environment. Lastly, a contrast ratio of 200:1 means that even in the dark, colours seems dull and washed out.

The Mini 101 is an enthusiast's dream targeted at the mainstream market, and

while it will undoubtedly be useful, its performance is sub-standard in all but perfect conditions.   **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

Specifications

Imager: LCoS
Light Source: Multi-chip LED
Brightness: 14lm
Resolution: 640 x 480
Contrast Ratio: 200:1
Projection size: 7-65 inches
Weight: 103g with battery
Size: 116x50x18 mm

A variety of inputs allows the Mini 101 to be used with almost any media source

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Size
+ Variety of inputs

›Minus
- Useless in all but perfect conditions

›Bottom Line
A great idea that is let down by its execution.

08 out of ten

Intel Core i7 980X

DREAM MACHINE

SINCE 2006, THERE HASN'T been much in the way of competition when it comes to CPUs. This is especially true for desktop parts. The Extreme edition line of products may have gotten off to a bad start with the terrible Pentium 4 CPUs, but those days are long gone and a distant memory for many.

Much like the Core i7 965XE and the 975XE before, the 980X is the fastest and best CPU you can get your hands on. Given that the previous two CPUs were basically unlocked versions of the lower-end models, the high retail price was hard to swallow. This is especially true when one could squeeze 975XE performance out of a Core i7 920 with some basic overclocking software.

With the 980X however, it's a little different. Not only has Intel delivered its first six-core desktop CPU, but it has managed to produce a CPU with a logical 12 execution threads, making it the most parallel CPU we have ever had on the desktop. This also means that Intel is ahead by a good six threads when compared to the competition. Based on the Gulftown core, the 980X is the tick in Intel's famous tick-tock strategy. This is easy to see as it's the company's first mass-produced 32nm node CPU.

Besides a few modifications made to the actual CPU die and logic, the architecture of the 980X is the same as the Nehalem CPUs, and is therefore part of that family. (Sandy Bridge will usher in a new architecture later this year or early next year.)

Besides the additional cores and smaller process node, Intel has also added another 4MB of low latency L3 cache to the system (INTEL calls it Smart-Cache). If we look at the Clarkdale series of CPUs (also 32nm) right through to Bloomfield and Gulftown we can

see that for every two physical cores, Intel adds an additional 4MB. So we would not be surprised to see the next generation CPUs featuring 16MB or more of L3 cache.

Clock-for-clock advantages for the 980X over the 975XE are very easy to measure. Even in single-threaded applications, the smaller node contributes to some amazing synthetic results. These also become very pronounced when Turbo mode is enabled. For instance, the 980X only needs to operate at 4.6GHz to calculate SuperPi 1M in less than 9 seconds. On the previous CPUs one would have needed at least 4.8GHz. Best of all, by and large the retail samples of the 980X overclock much better than the retail 975XE CPUs.

It's not unheard for the CPUs to clock to 6GHz and higher. At the time of writing, heralded overclocker HiCookie had managed to overclock an A0 CPU to 7GHz, an impossible feat with the older CPUs.

Those that are interested in the media encoding prowess of the new CPU will be happy to know that, given the additional threads and clock efficiency, encoding movies on the CPU has never been faster (on supporting software) and makes the debate of GPU encoding null, because you get the speed, but with significantly better quality on the CPU than on any GPU available on the market.

Gaming and general use aside, a feature useful to the more professional users and security experts will be the new AES instructions. These come in very handy for data encryption/decryption and make a significant difference in performance. While only a few of us will use these, those who do will benefit greatly from them.

Specifications

Core: 32nm Gulftown (x6)
Frequency: 3,325MHz
Cache: 14MB total (12MB L3)
Platform: X58/LGA 1,366

Benchmarks

Cinebench 11.5: 8.86
Wprime 32M: 5.119
Wprime 1024M: 149.353
3DMark Vantage CPU: 32,019

For the extreme overclocker, Intel has followed suit, and like their closest competitor, have released a CPU that is cold-bug free. It isn't cold boot bug free yet, but assuming nothing goes catastrophically wrong during tweaking, one can safely cool this CPU to -186°C without any lock ups.

There just isn't much to fault the 980X CPU on. It really is the best CPU on the market right now. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

>Plus	>Minus
+ 12 threads	- None
+ 32nm	
+ Very fast	

>Bottom Line
Once again, Intel has released its fastest and best CPU yet with no equal from the competition.

09 out of ten

Sony Ericsson Xperia X10

WELCOME TO THE SONY Ericsson Xperia X10, a phone that on paper punches far above its weight. With a very impressive list of specifications and sporting the Android mobile OS, the Xperia X10 aims high. But does it fall flat?

With impressive hardware specifications – most notably the Snapdragon 1GHz processor and 384MB of RAM – the X10 remains lag free and extremely responsive. Sony Ericsson has also loaded the Xperia with a 4-inch capacitive touch screen, which is very responsive to the touch, and large enough to be easy to use without a stylus. Other features include an 8MP camera, WiFi, GPS with A-GPS, and a bundled 8GB memory card, altogether making the X10 as good as the best of them out there.

The software is equally impressive. Running Android 1.6, the OS is slightly dated, however updating to the latest version is a fairly painless affair. Timescape, Sony Ericsson's application to integrate social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, performs a stellar job and keeps you up to date in a quick and convenient way. Mediascape also gains merit for its simple ease of use, and visually stunning interface. The software doesn't stop here however. With an app for just about

Specifications

Size: 119x63x13mm
Screen: 480 x 854 WVGA , 65,536-color TFT touchscreen
Camera: 8.1MP
Audio: 3.5mm audio jack
OS: Android 1.6
Misc: 3G, GPS, Document viewer, digital compass

every need on the Android market place, the chance of not finding what you want is very small.

Like any first generation handset, however, the X10 has its fair share of disadvantages. There is no DivX nor XviD playback support, and Flash isn't supported in the web browser. The camera is let down by the lack of a flash, and instead relies on a useless "photo light", and the bundled earphones are unimpressive.

The X10 then is not without problems. However these are small, and when you look at the X10 as a whole, the pros far outweigh the cons. If you're in the market for an Android-based phone that has all the bells and whistles coupled with excellent build quality, the Xperia X10 should definitely be on your shortlist.   **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ 1GHz Processor
+ Android OS
+ Excellent screen

›Minus
- No Xenon camera flash
- Poor speaker

›Bottom Line
Great hardware, great software, and stunning build quality, the Xperia X10 (almost) has it all.

09 out of ten
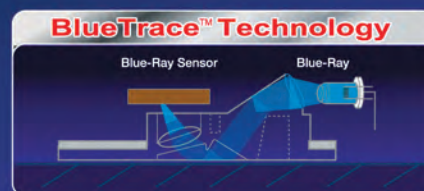
Samsung Wave

HARDWARE

IT'S BEEN A WHILE since we tested a truly impressive phone from Samsung; not since the i8910HD have we had a phone that caused such excitement.

That's not to say that the company has not been working on some impressive mobile devices since then. To the contrary, Samsung has released some intriguing phones, but none as interesting as the Wave, or if you prefer, the S8500.

One of the things that makes this phone special and unlike any other Samsung phone before is the new proprietary Bada (ocean in Korean) operating system. This may be off-putting to some people who dread having to get used to yet another OS with limited application support and an unfamiliar user interface, however this isn't the case. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. At the time of writing more than 500 applications were already available for the operating system, a number that is increasing daily.

As great as the operating system is, it is something that we will tackle another day because Samsung has managed to squeeze some incredible hardware into a very thin frame producing a phone with a sleek, compact look. Finished off in a metallic casing, it is arguably one of Samsungs' best looking phones. The CPU powering the unit is the famed ARM Cortex A8 Superscalar CPU operating at an incredible 1GHz. 3D is courtesy of PowerVR's SGX540 GPU which, while not used in that capacity on hand-held devices, actually has a feature set exceeding the requirements of OpenGL 2.0. It's fully programmable and has a peak fill-rate exceeding 50Mpixels/sec. The 3D performance is impressive, especially when paired with the Super AMOLED (super active matrix-organic light emitting diode) screen, which is by far the most impressive display we have seen to date. The colour richness, contrast and brightness are unmatched and far exceed what is available on desktop/home LED LCD displays. It truly has to be seen to be appreciated.

If that isn't enough, the screen is capacitive and multi-touch friendly, so pinching and expanding photos, text and just about everything else works beautifully. Reading

Specifications

CPU: Arm Cortex A8 1GHz
GPU: PowerVR SGX540
Memory: 1.5GB built in, up 32GB SD
Display: Capacitive Super AMOLED 480 x 800
OS: Bada 1.0
Size: 118x56x10.9mm

e-books on the Wave is simply magical and there is almost zero eye strain even after hours of reading.

To complement the incredible visual feast, sound quality is fantastic, offering multiple equalization modes, and the effect you want applied, which adds some depth to the audio stream. Listening with the built-in speaker is nothing special, but plug in a set of headphones and it sounds just as good as a dedicated portable music player.

Video playback and recording is a major feature in modern mobile handsets, and much like in the i8910HD, the Wave does not disappoint. Actually it's better in every single way. Not only does it record 720p at a full 30fps instead of 24fps, it plays almost every video format you can think of right out the box. This includes HD content in the Matroska (MKV) format. It's a simple matter of copying the file to the phone's SD card and playing it through the media browser, file manager or the dedicated video player.

Over and above everything that is available on the Wave, the phone can act as a 3G wireless router, allowing you to connect up to three devices. You can even broadcast video content on the phone over the wireless 802.11 b/g/n network

To run through all the features available on this phone would require more space than we have available here. What we have mentioned is only a fraction of what the phone is capable of. With an estimated retail price of R4,000 there isn't anything out there that can match this phone for even twice the price. To sum it up in one word, the Samsung Wave is astonishing. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Super AMOLED display
+ Incredibly fast
+ Bada OS

›Minus
- Can't lock screen orientation

›Bottom Line
The Bada OS and impressive hardware have come together to make Samsung's best phone thus far.

09 out of ten

Huntkey Jumper 550

THE HUNTKEY JUMPER 550, with its modular cabling system and claims that it is "overclocking continuously at 600W" is here, so we take a closer look.

After unboxing, things start to look good for the Jumper. A heavy power supply with a matte black finish featuring a modular cabling system and a large 140mm fan on the bottom seems to be a formula that has worked for PSUs in the past. Moving onto the cabling, and Huntkey have suprised. The modular cables are quite long, allowing them to reach no matter what the case. When mounted in the bottom of a Cooler Master ATCS 840, the cables had no problem extending to where they needed to go, a massive plus for the Jumper.

The Jumper effortlessly powered up the test rig, which has a power consumption around 550W. When the load was increased

Specifications

Rated power: 550W
Efficiency: 86%
OVP: +3.3V, +5V, +12V1, +12V2, +12V3, +12V4

to 600W in the next test, the Jumper managed without trouble.

In the final analysis, the Jumper 550 delivers an excellent modular cabling system, 80 Plus certification, good build quality of the unit and cables, and hits its claimed power output. Perhaps the only gripe we can find with the unit (and we're stretching here) is the lack of a rear power switch.

The Jumper 550 from Huntkey is a decent PSU, and for the price, it will find itself a home in many rigs in the near future. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Excellent modular cabling
+ Good build quality

›Minus
- No rear power switch

›Bottom Line
Good build quality that does what it claims to. The Jumper 550 is a very safe buy.

08 out of ten

Being so thin and light makes the M610 ultra portable.

Genius EasyPen M610

DRAWING TABLETS ARE ALL the rage with artists and designers around the world. They allow you to draw on your PC as it if were a piece of paper, touch up digital photography in Photoshop, or even write/sign in your own handwriting, replacing the clumsy mouse as a controller. So what happens if you're in the market for a slim, low-cost and feature rich tablet? Well, the Genius EasyPen M610 is worth a look at.

The first noticeable thing about the M610 is the aesthetics, and with good reason. The tablet is slim, perfect for the sketcher on the go. Barely noticeable once in a laptop bag, the pad's size means it also weighs very little. With a slight curve allowing comfortable operation on both a table top as well as the users arm or lap, using the M610 for hours on end is no strain at all. Onto the pen, and once again first impressions are good. The pen is sizeable without being bulky, and works well with both small and large hands. A clip on the top of the pen allows you to attach the pen to the tablet with ease ensuring pen and tablet don't get separated during transport.

After some initial frustration at learning a new method of input, the tablet quickly became comfortable and easy to use. It's highly responsive and accurate for the carefree sketcher, but don't expect high-end

performance from this mainstream-targeted product. Sketching in MS paint was both fun and impressive. No more shaky stick men or badly drawn flowers, the M610 responds accurately to instructions from the word go. More impressive still was how well the M610 did when touching up digital photography. It took less than half the time to touchup an image with the M610 as opposed to a normal mouse, and was far less frustrating during the process.

Amidst all this praise, however, one problem that almost all Genius products share in common come into play, that of build quality. Grip the M610 too tightly and it feels just about ready to break. The pen feels less solid than a cheap Bic and there is a tremendous amount of play on the pen buttons, which feel flimsy and unresponsive. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

Specifications

Interface: USB
OS: Windows 7/Vista/XP, MAC OS 10.4.11+
Active area: 6" x 10"
Resolution: 4,000 LPI
Report rate: 200 PPS
Pen pressure: 1,024 Levels
Programmable keys: 13

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Cheap
+ Easy to use
+ Feature rich

›Minus
- Pens feels flimsy

›Bottom Line
If you're after a good, versatile sketcher's tablet, but don't feel like investing in a far more expensive model, consider the Genius EasyPen M610.

08
out of ten
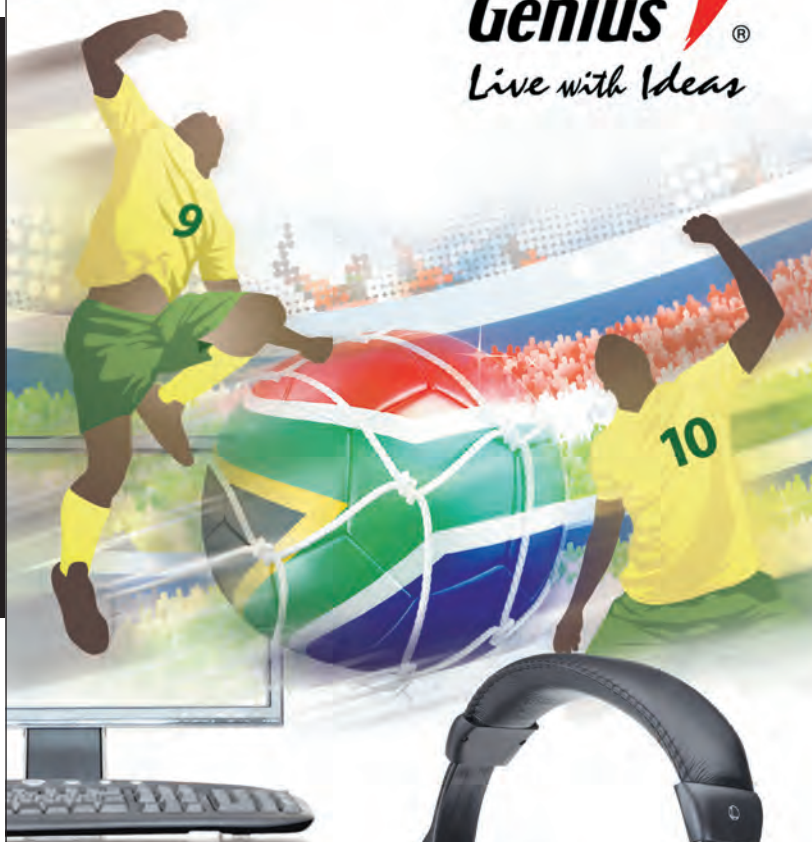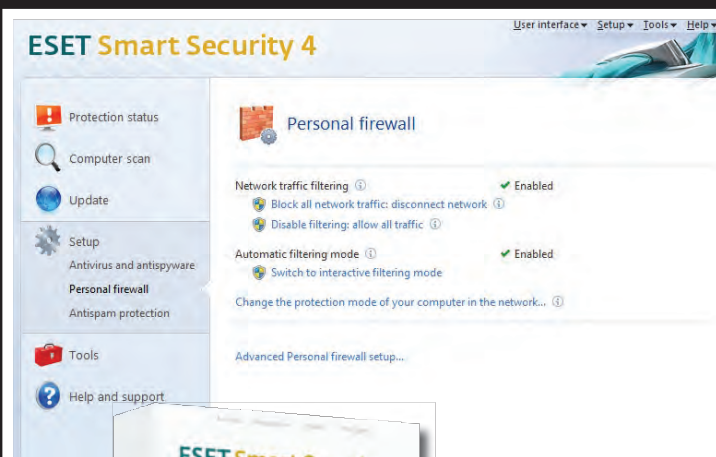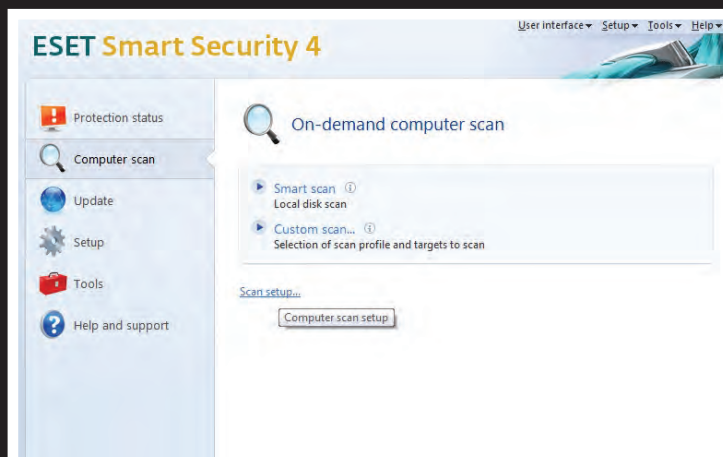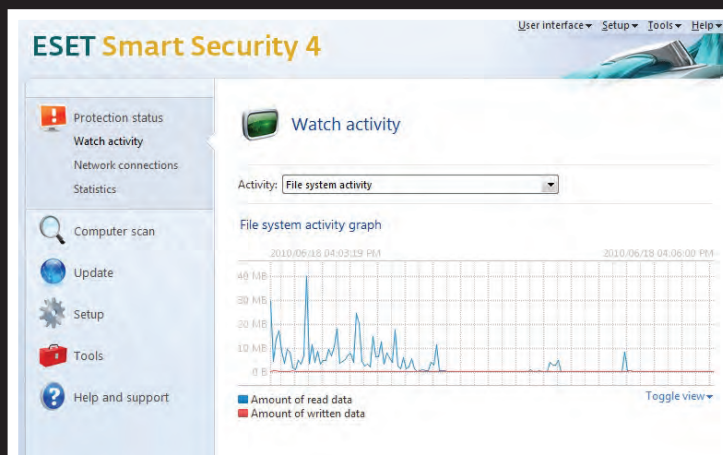
ESET SmartSecurity 4

I ALWAYS TEND TO CHECK the forums, FAQs, and general Web chatter about a security solution before installing it. In the case of ESET SmartSecurity 4, the integrated AV/threat-protection suite from the company famous for the enterprise-level NOD32 AV, it wasn't looking good.

Despite rave reviews from global software sites and blogs, there were a fair amount of users up in arms. The Firewall function of SmartSecurity 4, apparently, caused all manner of havoc with internet and even LAN connections, something to do with falsely identifying Winsock traffic as a "Poisoning attack," the result being a complete lack of connectivity in most cases. Easily fixable, by disabling ESET and reverting back to the Windows Firewall, which most any security expert will tell you is no great solution.

And yet, the people posting these problems tended to all start their gripes with one common theme. "I had problems with the old version, uninstalled for a few times, but am now back to try the latest release because I just loved the performance!" With that in mind, SmartSecurity 4 was duly installed onto my Windows 7 box so that I could see what was up first-hand.

In my case, the product worked flawlessly as advertised. Upon first install, and discovering that my Internet connection was certainly still active, I delved into the SmartSecurity 4 settings to try and induce some problems. There are a few security options which the software leaves off by default, although the firewall itself was active in its automatic mode – there are five to choose from in total, so maybe

turning everything on would summon the software demons? Still no joy. All that my OS and system suffered were the burden of heightened security.

Speaking of systems suffering, I was very pleased to note that the performance rumours were well founded. Although ESET grabs a healthy chunk of your RAM for its background services, some 45MB compared to 32MB or so total for AVG, it never noticeably slows your machine waiting for a scan. And this with far more security functions integrated than AVG Free.

That said, it does seem to slow down your actual Web speed slightly – more noticeable on a paltry 384K line than 4MB or up no doubt, and the impact is marginal.

As well as the Personal Firewall, incidentally integrated with the Windows Security Centre as a valid replacement for the MS setup, there's also a Blacklist/Whitelist based anti-spam component, and active monitoring of your Web connections to prevent infection with spyware.

There are an enormous amount of options in the setup screens of ESET SmartSecurity 4, so the more knowledgeable can go in and customise their protection profile to the nth degree.

Like the famous NOD AV, ESET SmartSecurity 4 is, in my experience, a superb security suite which is reasonably priced, easy on system resources yet delivers all the digital security you need in one box. ESET remains the most robust standard, even moving beyond the bounds of traditional AV. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Low performance impact
+ Comprehensive security
+ Windows integration

›Minus
- Does impact WAN throughput

›Bottom Line
A comprehensive digital security suite, priced attractively enough for the consumer, too.

08 out of ten
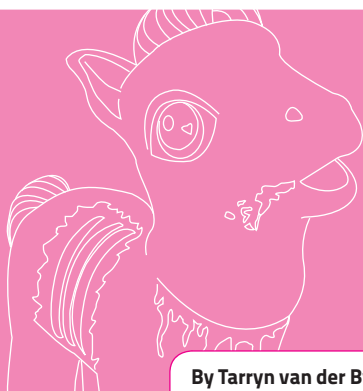
GG

By Tarryn van der Byl

Great Expectations

EVERYBODY KNOWS SOMEONE LIKE this. You know, that person who pretty much hates everything. For me, that person is my best friend. He pretty much hates everything except fried egg and bacon sandwiches. Actually, I'm sure he pretty much hates me too, and that the only reason he keeps me around is because I occasionally make him fried egg and bacon sandwiches. It's symbiosis in a very real, very National Geographic Symbiosis Special documentary sort of way, except I've not quite worked out what I'm getting out of it. This one time, he smeared hobo shit all over my car dashboard, but its substantial alcohol content notwithstanding, it doesn't really count.

Anyway, he's also a bit of a gamer. I say "gamer," of course, but I really mean "guy who plays games and hates them." And if he didn't hate everybody else, he'd quickly discover he has loads of new friends with loads in common with him everywhere, because it seems hating all the games you play is, like, totally the cool new thing for gamers to do these days.

I don't know what these people are expecting when they shove a game disc into an optical drive, but it's increasingly apparent to me that, at the very least, it's almost certainly nothing short of a transcendental epiphany of supernatural proportions. It reminds me of the time I went to see *Snakes on a Plane*, and half the audience vacated the theatre during the course of the film. I mean, I don't know about that lot, but *I* went to see a movie about snakes on a plane.

Likewise, when I play a game, I expect to be entertained, and... that's just about it. That's not to say that all games manage to entertain me, nor that some games don't manage to do somewhat more than that,

nor indeed that a few games that have no business entertaining anyone who doesn't exist without permanent and expensive medical intervention don't manage to entertain me regardless[1] – but the point is, I'm going into this playing games stuff with realistic expectations.

Maybe it's because I remember when games really were mostly a heap of rubbish. Did you ever play *Alien*? And no, I'm not talking about any game based on the film franchise, but rather the unremittingly dreary and awful text adventure I found on a borrowed floppy disc (when we still spelled it "disk", kids; now get off my ****ing lawn) in 1990. A game so unremittingly dreary and awful that a Google search for "alien text adventure" doesn't even turn it up, while "just cause 2" returns over 90 million hits. Apparently the phrase "unremittingly dreary and awful" has lost relevance or something.
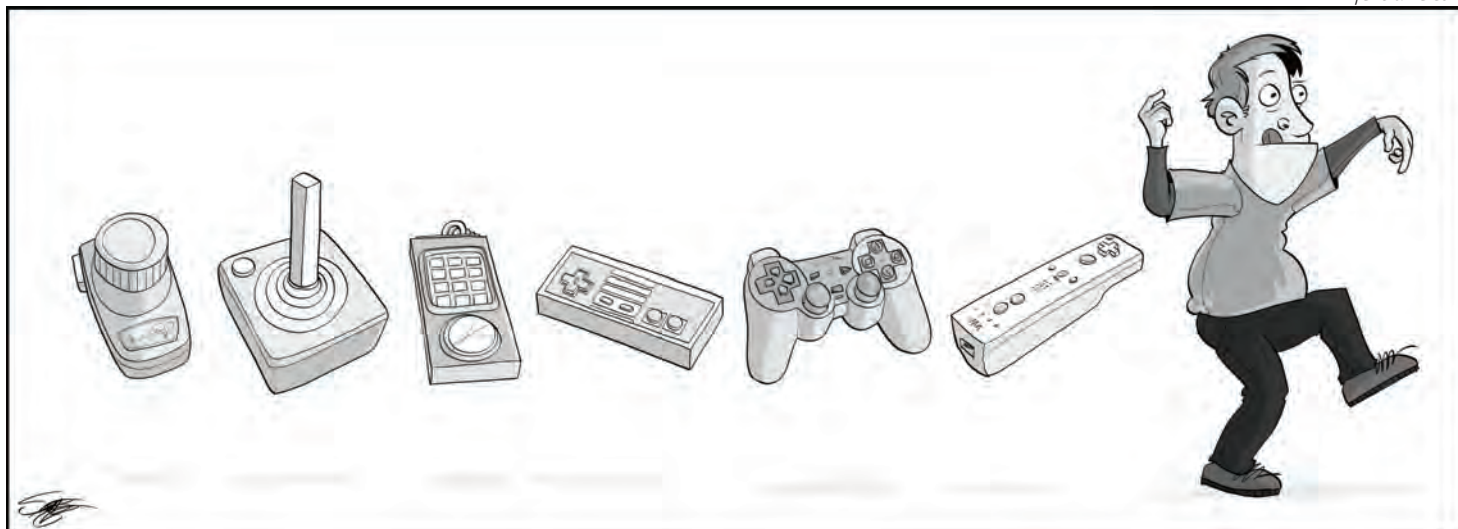
So, go out and be entertained. Or not. Just don't expect the earth to move, because it probably won't. **NAG**

[1] I fragged over 9,000 Tickers in *Gears of War 2* last weekend. Because. Don't you judge me.

Experience Points