NAG

PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX   WII   MOBILE

TOO HUMAN
HANDS ON
WILL THE GODS BEAT
THE ROBOTS, WILL
BALDUR FINALLY GET
THOSE IMPLANTS?
FIND OUT INSIDE.

GEARS OF WAR 2

IT'S COMING TO GRIND
UP YOUR XBOX AND
SPILL YOUR GUTS...

INSIDE

• RED ALERT 3 MULTIPLAYER BETA
HANDS-ON TESTED
• BATTLE OF THE BANDS: ROCK BAND 2
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• LEFT 4 DEAD PREVIEW
• PRINCE OF PERSIA PREVIEW
• SOUL CALIBUR IV REVIEWED
• MORE COOL STUFF

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THE GLASS IS...

WHEN THIS ISSUE WAS first going into production we had no games for review. No previews to speak of... To be honest, there was some mild panic, but before long, a whole lot of really cool preview opportunities popped up out of nowhere. The day was saved, and we now have an actual magazine to put out there. Phew. Coincidentally, one of you *NAG* readers sent in a letter this month that said the following: "You guys have tweaked the content of your magazine to include hobbies like trading cards, board games on occasion, movies, comics, DVDs, music, collectables, etc. It's actually ridiculous the amount of comprehensive thought you guys put into every issue – the multi-format magazine on the market." Now, while it's always nice to receive compliments, I'd feel guilty if I didn't share something with you: a brief glimpse into the inner workings of this magazine...

The brutal reality: *NAG* is really more of a car accident in production than an orchestrated symphony. This will come as a shock to most other mainstream publications, but we never plan anything further ahead than two weeks before we actually start working on the magazine itself. Sure, there are exceptions, like when we get game reviews in early or have an interview lined up a few weeks in advance, but this is the exception to the chaotic rule. The truth: we like it like this because it forces us to make sure we only put the freshest of fresh stuff in the magazine each month. This also means there's more deadline pressure and stress as the issue goes from nothing to something. I also think this approach makes the job that much more exciting, because not knowing exactly what will end up on the cover each month is a little crazy and scary, but when it all comes together (like this month), the feeling of relief and satisfaction is hard to beat. Here's where I must also say thanks to the brilliant team of people who work here. If they weren't as dynamic and switched-on as they are, we'd never get the magazine out the door every month. So hats off.

So, for September, the DVD is a little weak in terms of demos and the magazine is a little low on reviews, but I think we made up for it with some killer feature previews and other goodies. You can send all your comments to the usual place.

LEIPZIG SUPPLEMENT
Next month is a big one. We're going to the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany, and will be putting together another supplement covering all the games you can expect in the next six months and beyond. The October issue is also going to be on sale at rAge. Just a note on the NAG LAN at rAge (which is taking place from 3 to 5 October this year), we sold all 1,800 tickets in just seven days this year. I'm going to have to seriously consider expanding the LAN for 2009 way beyond what it is now to cater for all this crazy demand. We've been receiving calls on an hourly basis from people who missed the boat and are looking for extra tickets. Two people actually showed up at the office to find out if we had anymore. Sorry to all those gamers out there who didn't get tickets, but we shall address the supply-and-demand issue next year - guaranteed. See you at the show, and for more news and announcements, please visit www.rageexpo.co.za.

TRACKMANIA WINNERS
We received well over a hundred tracks for this competition and here are the winners (the tracks can be found on the DVD this month): Rouvierre Kennard – Adaptive Rat | Martin Andreae – Alles1011 | Paul Myburgh – Drip and flush | Simon Foord – FoxtrotUniformCharlieKilo | Charl Naude – The Maze. Well done people and thanks to the rest of you who sent in tracks but didn't win (also on the DVD).

Michael James
Editor

THE FASTEST IN THE LAND
Neo, better known as GSG (Gouhan/ShockG) in overclocking circles, broke the world record in 3DMark03, scoring 103,516 using a GIGABYTE GA-EP45T-EXTREME motherboard (this month's Dream Machine motherboard), a SAPPHIRE Radeon HD4870X2 and an Intel Core 2 Duo E8500 clocked at 5.4GHz. The record was recently validated on HWBOT, and at the time of writing placed him as the highest-ranked South African on HWBOT. But as this issue goes to print, I'm sure someone else will steal the crown as they tend to do on a daily basis. Well done Neo, now you know why you're working at *NAG*.

inbox

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Krishin
SUBJECT: Will MMORPG take over the world?

"**I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT COMPUTERS...** the technology, the entertainment, and the freedom of expression (for those who know how)... but there is an extent to which my adoration of computers goes... it will never take the place of traditional human interaction. As much as people will disappoint you and make you happy at the same time, you can't replace them with anything... that leads me to the title of my entry... Will computers take over the world?

Most people that read this will brush off my theory as a load of garbage... but there is far more truth to this statement than one might think. In the computer gaming world there exist phenomena called MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role playing games) these MMORPG, allow people from all over the world to play games with each other by means of this online world. The more common MMORPG are World of Warcraft, Guild Wars and Age of Conan... and there are a lot more. I theory here is that people who play these MMORPG get addicted and then focus all their time and effort into these games. They get sucked in playing online so much so that instead of meeting with someone in real life they instead choose to meet that person at some place within the game. Will MMORPG take over the traditional human social interaction as more and more people start playing? The answer to that question isn't as simple as it seems, well most people will say that not all of us will ever play games... but in a world that is ruled by technology, the people who are most familiar with that tech (the geeks and nerds) are soon to be kings... It doesn't matter that the rest of the world continues in tradition... what happens when MMORPG take over the minds of the people that have the potential to control technology... People spend hours, days, even weeks playing MMORPG, instead of going out and interacting with people. The possibility that MMORPG take over human social interaction is possible. People somehow find "peace", for the lack of a better word, with living their fantasies of being brave warriors, through these games. Would you rather try and live a fantasy through a game in an attempt to escape reality?

At the end of the day the possibility here exists, but it is up to us to ensure the balance exists."

To be honest, I'm not entirely sure what exact point your letter is labouring to get across, so I'll pick out things I disagree with and work from there. I must confess that based on most of the people I see in the world, I'd much rather talk to and preferably kill like-minded people online than have to actually deal with the rest of humanity in person. On the whole, the human race doesn't really have much to offer me. Firstly, there are far too many people out there these days, clogging up the works and consuming precious resources. Most members of the general public are too fat, ugly and smelly. They're also slow, stupid and dumb (and yes, there is a difference between stupid and dumb – dumb people have no choice and can't help being stupid, but stupid people have the choice and still choose dumb). These people you say we should interact with also breed too much and work too little. Just look around you - it's a wonder they actually make it through the day alive. So, can't really agree with you. A small part of me prays everyday that computers do actually take over the world because this human problem has gone on for far too long and someone needs to put an end to it. Ed.

FROM: Byron
SUBJECT: Age restrictions

"**SO FAR, IN THE** gaming world you can usually control the content in the game by going to the options menu to switch off nudity, blood and gore and so on. So all I ask is that you give alternative age restrictions to games with the ability to censor things, for example: Ghost Recon 2: Advanced Warfighter."

Here, show this to your mom. Dear Byron's mom. Did you know that you could go into the options menu in most games today and tone down the violence and nudity with a few simple mouse clicks, which young Byron can then unclick when you're not watching? It's true that some offer password protection, but then, what's stopping Byron from reinstalling the whole game just to see all the blood, death and mayhem. Byron, if you're still around,

here's the official answer: there actually are no alternative official ratings for games, but we do mention on occasion that gore levels can be toned down in the reviews. Ed.*

FROM: Naomi
SUBJECT: Know it all 'critics'

"**I HAVE BEEN BUYING THE** NAG since 2006 and something I have been noticing lately in your 'Inbox' section is the 'critics' that write letters to you and telling you what you do wrong and what they think you should do. If they are so bothered by it, why do they buy the NAG month after month! They act like they know it all and if they think they can do a better job, they should apply for a job or something. You're an established and loved magazine in the gaming world and you know what you're doing when you write game reviews and tastes differ. For example: you hate a particular game and write about all the things you don't like but someone else may love the game. If you have typos every now and then, they act like it ruins the whole magazine and every big magazine has typos. And it isn't easy to make a magazine perfect. That's what I think about those 'critics' and keep up the good work!"

I think those guys just want us to be better... Usually people don't complain unless they want to keep reading a magazine or buying a product or using a service. I encourage people to give us feedback, good or bad. Ed.

FROM: Gerhard
SUBJECT: Mini-Posters

"**SINCE THE EPILOGUE OF** the epilogue you placed mini-posters at the back of the magazine. I would like to ask if maybe you could either put a blank page at the back of it or another poster. I ask this because the board games NAG reviews are on the back of these posters and I (other people may agree) hate to rip them out of the magazine."

I actually get this request a lot, so I'll ask the Art Director (Chris) to see if he can rather stick an advert on the back of the poster in future. This whole magazine business (with the design and production and planning) is a tricky thing to do, so this isn't always going to be possible. The good news is that now you'll know we're at least giving it a second thought each issue. Chris, do me a favour and see if we can put an advert on the back of the poster each month so these guys don't have to tear up their magazine. Ed. [Way ahead of you there, boys. AD]

FROM: Eben
SUBJECT: Old school vs. new age

"**NAG, I MUST CONGRATULATE** you. You are the only publication that doesn't use half naked models to sell your magazines. The reason for this is most probably, no, most definitively because you don't need to, your magazine is so great you do not have to use cheap gimmicks in order to sell your magazines. You are a gaming magazine unlike any other. Well done."

More patting on the back – thanks man, and it's true what you say. We are great. Ed.

FROM: Steyn
SUBJECT: Being a fan

"**AS A FAN OF** the Diablo series, I must say that the videos on the DVD are awesome, but the visuals lack something. It is too bright and cheerful. The way Fable was a cutesy game with too much colour and silly humour, so also Diablo looks too... happy... It just does not say, "This is the world in which creatures of horrendous evil and carnage have almost obliterated most life and where evil is part of the world as a cow is part of a burger patty." There are rainbows in it, for (not sure of the reference) sake! Perhaps the visuals are the result of it still being in development, but at the moment it seems that a frolic against the masses of creatures in Diablo 3 could be likened to taking really scary rabbits on. Let's face it: Bright colours and happiness just should not be a part of the Diablo universe, as I can only think of the Spawn of Satan, or their ilk, travelling around in dark, scary, seedy looking places. Not where a catacomb or cave looks like the failed version of a Tim Burton movie."

Read the news section on this topic. I'm not so sure if I agree with all those petition-signing gamers.

NAG FAN ARTWORK

These submissions just keep getting better and better... Thanks dudes. Your prize is a few lines of text in *NAG* stating how awesome you are. In no order of importance:

Daniel Zoeller: "Hey, I made this space fighter. I call it the NAG fighter. Software used: 3D Studio Max, V-Ray and Photoshop."

Karl van Heerden: "Attached you will find my entry for the NAG Logo competition. Some fun facts about the image 'Conquest': Modelled in Maya, rendered in Mental Ray. Modelling took a week, rendering took twenty hours. Image is HD compatible! Texturing, post processing and matte painting was done in Photoshop. Process took one day. P.S. Terms and conditions can be found in the attached legal notice (Print and commercial prohibitions are lifted for the purposes of this competition)."

Too bright and colourful – what rubbish and what a cheek. Diablo is what it is and instead of worrying about the colour of the paving on the way down to hell, just enjoy the game for what it is. I'd really hate to be a developer these days. If I were Blizzard, I'd take all those names on that list and when they buy the game, terminate their account halfway through just to give them a taste of what hell can really be like. Ed.

FROM: Cameron
SUBJECT: Letter to the Editor

"**MY NAME IS CAMERON** and I currently live in Lusaka, Zambia where I attend the American International School. First let me say that I am a huge fan of NAG and I always buy myself a copy whenever I'm down in South Africa. It has helped me to make a lot of difficult choices of what games to buy and has always recommended awesome new games. NAG is definitely the best gaming magazine available. I'll be going into 10th grade soon and my school here requires me to do an extended personal project of my own choosing. I have decided to do research into the effects of violent video games on teenagers to determine whether video games involving excessive violence have a negative effect on those who play them and if so, can these games be played and enjoyed without running the risk of developing psychological and physical problems.

In addition to the research I will be compiling an illustrated handbook with tips on how to enjoy gaming while at the same time reduce or avoid any harmful effects. This handbook will be distributed to the library and IT labs at my school. Based on some of the articles I've read in NAG recently, a number of people on your staff are quite outspoken on this matter, believing that they do not make people more aggressive or violent. I'd like to know why you guys think so, not that I'm disagreeing with you (quite the contrary, in fact) but I'd just like to hear your professional opinion on this matter. If you could please just briefly outline why you believe that video games cannot be harmful to teenagers I would be very grateful. When my research paper is completed, I would be happy to share it with you in case you would like to publish part of it in your magazine."

Well, of course we're going to say videogames don't have a negative effect on teenagers - we're in the videogame business after all. So our opinion is going to be biased and therefore not suitable as a point of reference. I do, however, battle to see how gaming can make kids violent. I've been playing games my whole life and I'm the nicest person I know. My suggestion is to do more Internet research and quote the stuff you find there from more 'credible' sources (government-funded research, doctors, lawyers and so on). I am, however, dying to see your illustrated handbook, so please send it to me so we can all have a good laugh. ;) Ed.

FROM: Cameron
SUBJECT: Quality vs. Quantity

"**IF THIS LETTER SAYS** it's from John, it's not, I'm Cameron, and I'm just using my dad's laptop because my PC is screwed up. The customary "awesome magazine", and all those that criticise it must go die... Anyway, to my topic – Why are gaming companies making games with better graphics, but making games shorter in the process? Gradually, over the years, I've noticed games are getting way too short. I remember playing the first Soldier of Fortune, the first three Tomb Raiders, the first Half-Life and numerous other old, outdated games, and they all had one thing in common – they took at least a good few weeks or even a few months to finish. It may have been my age and inexperience at the time, but I beg to differ. Nowadays, I'm lucky to get even a week out of a new game on the normal difficulty. I finished the entire Orange Box in a week, on normal difficulty. I'm not saying that they must stop improving graphics, but I think companies should also focus on making lasting games (that also keep us interested in it enough to finish it). I hope you know that all of what I have said excludes most RPG's, mainly because I've never finished one other than Mass Effect on Xbox :P. Also, game difficulties are contrasting more and more, with easy being too easy, hard being too hard, and normal (or medium) being a tough, yet passable challenge. I prefer games to have more than 3 difficulty settings. Another thing on difficulty – I prefer games to have a health bar or meter than the gears of war or call of duty 'wait to regenerate' way of life that just makes the game easier (and harder at some points)."

You are right. It's probably the fault of the consumers and game journalists. Not too long ago, when proper 3D graphics were first introduced, the gaming world went "Wow" and we pretty much haven't stopped going "Wow" since. Most big new releases are always measured by their graphics instead of all the important things. The visual aspect is the first thing people notice (and care about it seems), so if that isn't up to scratch, then the game is relegated as

average and not worth playing. Perhaps the gaming journalists of the world should start talking more about how long it takes to play the game through, value for money, plot and so on, instead of how pretty it is. I think any game that ends after ten hours of play should get below 50% no matter how lovely it looks. End of the day, the developers will keep making what sells, so until gamers start voting with their cash, we're screwed. Ed.

FROM: Matthew
SUBJECT: Help!

"**HI THERE, THANKS FOR** a well composed and informative magazine. I am 53 years old and have been gaming for the past 3 years. I suffered a stroke which left me partially disabled on my right side leaving me with the use of my left hand. I love FPS and use a mouse and keyboard. I use the tab, caps lock, shift, and ctrl, alt and space mainly and of course the mouse. I have recently bought a Logitech Force 3 D Pro joystick. I can now play games like Tomb Raider and flight simulators. My question is: will a gamepad make things easier for me or not? Any other tips would be most welcome. Keep up the great work!"

*This is a rare opportunity for NAG to give something back. Some useful advice in the letters section is long overdue. So here goes. Dear Matthew. We'd like to point you in the direction of the Zalman FPS Gun Mouse, which can be found here: **www.zalman. com**. This might be the ideal solution for you, and our reviewer (a hardcore gamer of note) said it is actually pretty darn good. As for the gamepad – hard to say. There are a number of options on the market for PC gamepads, but I'd suggest trying a few out for yourself. Wow that felt good... Ed.*

FROM: Not going to print his name
SUBJECT: "Help me out"

"**I NEED SOME HELP. MY** name is [you'll thank me] and I have this idea of starting an Internet/console game centre. I have several problems: I heard that I need to have the End User License Agreement (EULA) and I don't really know whether to user LAN or something new? Plus the set up, please share some information on how you do this things. I hope we meet at rAge."

I'll refer all the other readers back to the letter of the month reply. This is exactly what I was talking about. Ed.

FROM: Eugene
SUBJECT: Letters

"**HI NAG, GREAT MAGAZINE** and all. Now that all the formalities are done, I wish to share a thought with you, this thought regards..."

Actually no. I don't feel as though you've put enough effort into the sucking up part before stepping onto your soapbox. In the future, rather just say nothing. I'm going to read every mail that comes to my inbox anyway, and it just looks like you said what you said now without really meaning it. Nice letter though. Ed. **NAG**

ON THE FORUM

Sorry, this section won't be appearing this month because someone (Miktar) forgot to post the topic on the forums. Feel free to flame him. Don't hold back.

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE NAG FORUMS:
http://forums.tidemedia.co.za

3-5 OCTOBER
COCA-COLA DOME
10:AM
R40 ENTRY
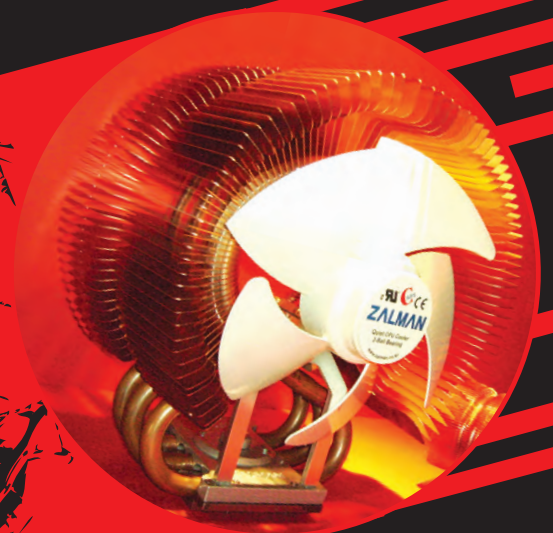
QUAKECON 2008 SNIPPETS
News and stuff out of the annual id-fest

OKAY, SO MOST RECENT gaming conventions haven't exactly blown our socks off. We can live with that. However, we were kind of hoping QuakeCon would be different. Hoping QuakeCon would throw a few surprises our way and lift our battered and broken spirits. Sadly, QuakeCon was not the convention to do so. We did get some news out of the event though, so that put a halt to our tears just long enough to write this piece...

Almost nothing was said about *Doom IV*. According to the people over at id, the game is still far too early in development for any concrete details to be revealed. They haven't even thought about what they should name it yet and they are debating whether it will even have a number (IV) in the title, or if it will simply have a sub-title. According to John Carmack, the game will feature "guns, blood, demons and gibs." In a nutshell, it's *Doom*, and that also means it's going to be fantastic. The game will allegedly be visually superior to *Rage*, even though both games make use of id's gorgeous Tech 5 Engine. CEO of id Software, Todd Hollenshead, put it this way, "The next *Doom* game will

look like it's built on another engine, as it uses three times the horsepower." The game will only run at 30 frames per second, however, as opposed to the 60 frames per second that *Rage* will flow at.

No truly exciting news was revealed concerning *Rage*, besides a couple of brand-spanking-new screenshots and a trailer. Don't expect to be able to download either *Rage* or *Doom* online, as id says they're shying away from digital distribution. Strange since *Rage* publisher EA has their own digital distribution network. Now, hold onto your seats, but apparently the game will look worse on the Xbox 360 than the PS3. This is due to storage issues on the 360, because the game is said to require multiple DVDs, which apparently is not exactly feasible economically, while the PS3's Blu-ray Disks can store all that data and more on one disk. They are working with Microsoft to rectify the problem and come up with a solution, so we'll have to wait and see. According to John Carmack, the architecture of the Xbox 360 is better, but the PS3 has done a much better job of 'future proofing' itself. We didn't say it folks. Send all hate mail their way.

OZZY AND JIMI, UNITED AT LAST

Iconic guitar legend and lefty-flipping genius, Jimi Hendrix, will finally be making his videogame debut in the upcoming *Guitar Hero World Tour*. Not only will players be able to choose Jimi as a locked character, but two of his songs – *Purple Haze* and *The Wind Cries Mary* – will be playable tracks in the game.

Every parent's second-favourite rock star, Ozzy Osbourne, will also be available as a playable character. Confirmed songs by the mumbling Brit are *Crazy Train* and *Mr. Crowley*, and the developers have divulged that Ozzfest will be a playable venue.

KICK IT INTO HIGH GEAR

World of Warcraft's upcoming expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*, now in its closed Beta stage, has started to roll out the announcements – some are big, some are small and some are just really cool. New mounts for the higher-level players have been on the cards for a while, it's nothing new that engineers will be able to craft gyrocopters as a flying mount, and passenger-carrying is something that's been talked about for a while as well. Combining elements from the two seems like the next logical step, and has resulted in a few sneaky screenshots of the new motorbike and sidecar mount, featuring a different skin for each side of the conflict. Whether or not this mount will be restricted to quest usage or not remains to be seen, but either way, expect a surplus of Death Knight Engineers to pop up once *WotLK* hits the shelves.

RANTING 101

AS MOST GAMERS ARE aware, we can be a whiney bunch. When Blizzard announced the upcoming release of the long-anticipated *Diablo III*, gleeful panic ran through the hordes of fans hoping it would match every last one of their expectations. Soon after the announcement, screenshots began to surface online, and tens of thousands of fan(boy)s wept in unison. Screams from the rooftops rained down, "The game isn't dark enough!", "It's not just like the other *Diablo* games!", "Why can't you do X, Y and Z?" Soon enough, fans formed a petition online to combat the brighter, 'WoW-esque' art, standing firm that their crudely Photoshopped images where representative of the real *Diablo* art direction.

While this parade was marching along, Blizzard continued to tinker away at the game, unmoved by the 50,000-strong petition. In recent talks, lead designer Jay Wilson had his chance to tear apart the slew of 'enhanced' screenshots. Clearly not impressed, Wilson laid down strong design and gameplay decisions as defence for the game's art direction, happily putting the retouched images in their place with comments like "Standing over there, you can't even tell the difference between him and the zombie. And that's another player, and when you can't tell the player apart from the creature, that's horrible."

FAR CRY 2: CAN YOU RUN IT?

Ubisoft has released the official minimum and recommended specs for *Far Cry 2*, their upcoming FPS set in the heart of Africa. Minimum PC specifications are set at a modest P4 3.2GHz/Athlon 3500+, NVIDIA 6800 or ATI X1650 and 1GB of RAM. The recommended specs are fairly reasonable as well, requiring anything from a Core 2 Duo/Athlon X2 5200+, NVIDIA 8600GTS or ATI X1900 and 2GB of RAM. Judging by the recommended specs, we'd venture to say you'll get a decent experience out of the game on a fairly midrange rig, likely putting many settings on high and getting 30+ FPS; just watch those advanced effects and soft shadows.

snippets
YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

SPORE COULD INCLUDE MICRO TRANSACTIONS

Will Wright's upcoming 'everything' simulation is not going to have monthly fees, despite the constant stream of player-generated content that will be accessible once the game launches. That isn't going to stop EA from scooping up a couple of misplaced dollars, however. John Riccitiello, CEO of the mega-publisher behind the game, has stated, "We're able to monetise body parts, plant parts, car parts, planets – as a way to generate incremental revenue off an install base of several million active users." There's no confirmation either way, unfortunately, but it does seem like the ever-lucrative idea of micro transactions is still a possibility.

RUMOUR: SPORE CONTENT EXPORTABLE?

While still uncertain at this point, *Spore*'s producer, Thomas Vu, has stated that there was a "strong possibility" that most *Spore* creations could be exported into a Maya format. It is not clear if the export is restricted to a simple mesh or if it will contain textures and animations as well, but should regardless be easily transferable to other 3D animation programs such as 3DS Max and LightWave.

GEARS 2 UNLOCKED BY GEARS 1

Based on the Achievements gained in *Gears of War 1*, specific content will be unlocked in *Gears of War 2*.

According to Epic's Cliff Blesinzki, speaking at Comic-Con, if you completed Act One you'll unlock a playable Anthony Carmine in *Gears of War 2*. If you uncovered all ten COG tags, you'll unlock Mihh Young Kim. Killing the final boss, General Ramm, you'll unlock a playable version of him.

Blesinzki did not elaborate if these character models will be usable in single player, and it's assumed they'll be for use in multiplayer.

MYTHOS, HELLGATE LONDON IN LIMBO: T3 TO THE RESCUE!

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD that Flagship Studios has officially gone caput. Well, this has had a few repercussions. It's always a sad day when you're forced to leave your favourite online virtual world behind after pumping so much time and effort into it. This was one hardship players of their MMORPG *Mythos* had to endure when the company decided they would suspend private Beta testing of the game. The game's servers and message boards were shut down and Flagship co-founder and COO, Max Schaefer, posted an official explanation on the game's forums. *Hellgate London* development was also discontinued. It's not all bad news, however, as Korean publisher T3 is opening a development studio in San Francisco and apparently they will be continuing development of both titles. Moreover, former members of Flagship (basically the whole team) have formed a new studio called Runic Games. They're dedicating themselves to development of action MMORPG games. Hooray!

MONKEYS IN BALLS MAKE FOR QUALITY GAMING

If sales statistics are anything to go by, the iPhone is rapidly becoming a viable gaming platform. SEGA's launch title, *Super Monkey Ball*, allows the player to use the motion-sensing technology in both the iPhone and iPod touch to control a monkey trapped in a ball through a series of mazes, collecting bananas as they go. Simple concept and it's nothing new. What is a bit out of the ordinary, however, is the fact that *Super Monkey Ball* sold over 300,000 copies in its first 20 days through Apple's digital distribution channel, App Store, marking the platform as a serious contender on the portable gaming front.

PRISON GAMES

A recent report has divulged that last year the British government spent over £10,000 on videogame hardware for young-offender institutions across the country. Now, trying its hardest to rectify the situation, the government has implemented a plan that only allows those prisoners who achieve the highest level of Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) to have access to videogame consoles, and is banning all 18+ games at prisons throughout the country. It seems that inmates will have to wait for their own release date until they can unlock the 'One-man Army' achievement in *GTA IV*.

THEY SAID IT...

"The Wii's selling incredible amounts of hardware, but Nintendo knows it needs to expand the demographic. It needs to connect with the core gaming demographic. *Resident Evil 5* – when that happens on the Wii that's going to help."

Simon Jeffrey, president of SEGA of America

"I don't think I was skilful enough to make *Fable 1* better, but I learned so much from the mistakes in *Fable 1* and that is what I'm proudest about in *Fable 2*."

Peter Molyneux, design director of Lionhead Studios

"I love *Team Fortress*' art style. It's an honour to be compared to them. But I feel like even though some people think they're looking alike, once you actually start playing, you see it's very different to *Team Fortress*."

DICE producer, Aleksander Grondol

"We're just a bunch of drinkin', smokin' assholes in a room who think of funny stuff, write it down, and put it in games."

Mike Jaret-Schachter, product manager of *Running With Scissors*

"I don't believe that *WoW* is untouchable. I completely believe that a game could come out and be more successful than *WoW*. I'm hoping that we're working on it right now."

Jeff Kaplan, lead designer, Blizzard Entertainment

ACTIVISION BLIZZARD MERGER DESTROYS LEGENDS, CUTS STAFF

The merger of Activision and Vivendi Games, like all mergers, is not without its losses. Staff cuts are the order of the day as Activision Blizzard's sales and marketing teams converge on a single focus. While ActiBlizz has claimed that no staff will be cut from Blizzard's European teams or Vivendi's worldwide crew, Vivendi UK (which forms the home of Sierra Entertainment) will be placed under the chopping block with certainty.

So, what does this all mean for gamers? Quite simply, Sierra Entertainment's two biggest upcoming releases, *Brütal Legend* and *Ghostbusters,* have a bit of a rough ride ahead of them. When ActiBlizz made their latest release schedule public, the aforementioned games were nowhere to be found.

Sierra's PR team has confirmed that *Ghostbusters* has not been cancelled, however. The shakeup will result in a few delays, pushing the release date through to sometime in 2009, although there's still uncertainty as to who exactly will publish the game.

Brütal Legend, Tim Schafer's (*Psychonauts*, *Full Throttle*) iconic, heavy metal-inspired beat-'em-up, might also survive through the winter if Schafer's secret messages are anything to go by. In his news blog, Schafer hid the text "*Brütal Legend* is fine" as the mouse-over text for a photo of a dead weevil he caught in his cereal. If we're lucky, the weevil will be the only casualty in this war, and we'll see *Brütal Legend*'s release date become anything other than 'TBA' before too long.

GO ON, BLAME IT ON THE GAMES

Videogame violence, or rather, violent acts blamed on videogames, is on the up in public eyes of late. A recent tragedy in Thailand involving a murdered Bangkok cab driver was blamed on *GTA IV*; the perpetrator claiming he was re-enacting a scene from the game. Now, anyone who has played all the way through *GTA IV* will be aware that nowhere in the game does a mission require you to kill or rob a taxi driver, a fact that the Thai government just doesn't buy. All copies of the game have been taken off the shelves and the Thailand government has placed an indefinite ban on the sale of the game.

In related news, two young whippersnappers from Georgia were caught red-handed after their recent spree of car fire-bombing. Their excuse? Get this: they claim they learnt "how to do it" from the *Grand Theft Auto* series. We're trawling through our *GTA* collection to ascertain whether or not the assembly of a Molotov cocktail is described anywhere in the series, but regardless, these punks are clearly just looking for a scapegoat, and a well-timed "*GTA* made me do it" might have seemed like an excellent idea at the time.
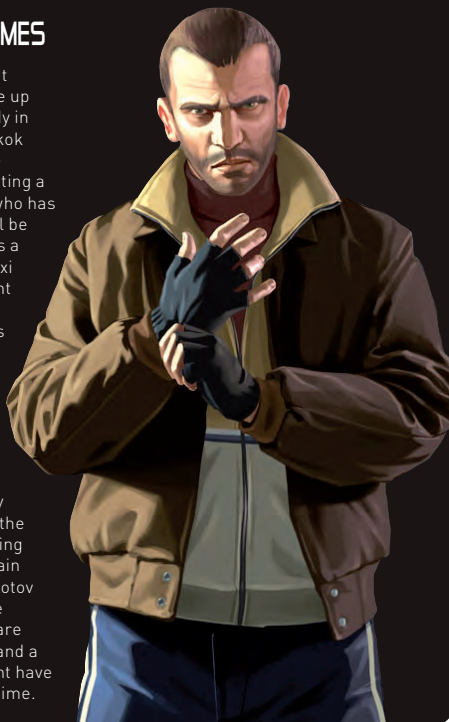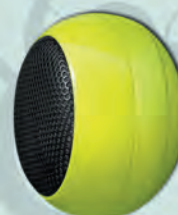
EA AND DC TEAM UP TO CREATE MIRROR'S EDGE COMIC BOOK

EA, the folks behind *Mirror's Edge* – an upcoming first-person action-adventure game – are teaming up with DC Comics to create a series of books based around life in the game's utopian city. The game's original scriptwriter, Rhianna Pratchett (daughter of wildly popular author Terry Pratchett) joins up with artist Matthew Don Smith to put together a comic book adaptation. A seven-page teaser comic was released for free at this year's San Diego Comic Con.

INEVITABLE FAILURE

Midway Games, the folks behind recently announced *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* are having some financial woes. Anywhere from 90 to 130 people from their Austin studio, formally known as Inevitable Entertainment, were retrenched and a previous, unannounced title called *Career Criminal* – a free-roaming gangster game described by CEO Matt Booty as "a large, ambitious, open-world project" - was cancelled. While no news of the game was ever released before now, we're a little sad to see the Austin studio take such heavy knocks, but we should survive as long as *MK vs. DC* is still on the cards.

GTA IV FOR PC OFFICIAL

As if you didn't know this was coming! Rockstar has confirmed that November the 21st will be the European release date for the game (North Americans can expect it on the 18th). *GTA IV* will be Games for Windows LIVE compatible, meaning widescreen and Xbox gamepad compatibility, and will also feature a few more ways to kill your buddies online than the console versions.

Games for Windows®

GO FOR GOLD WITH GAMES FOR WINDOWS - LIVE

EARLY 2007, MICROSOFT SHOWED the world Games for Windows - LIVE, the online matchmaking and all-in-one solution for multiplayer gaming, a service almost identical to Xbox LIVE, just for PC gamers. As one would expect, the reception of the system was less than fantastic, largely due to the monthly fees that gamers had to pay to use the service. That, coupled with a large choice of free and exceptionally useful competitors meant that GFW-L ended up being pretty much a waste of time, as neither many developers nor gamers bought into it.

Now, over a year and half later, MS has finally realised the error of their ways, and has decided to cut the 'Gold' fees for the service completely. This new change will later be accompanied by the Games for Windows - LIVE Marketplace, a game downloading service likely similar to Steam and GameTap, although no official details have been announced yet. All of this is very positive news for MS, although it may be a bit too late.

Competitors are quite securely entrenched in the market already, having secured a large number of exclusive releases across the board in the time they've had to mature. Although MS denies having these competitors, instead choosing to distance itself with features like achievements, cross-platform multiplayer and advanced matchmaking technologies, they still need to capture the core element of this market: getting people to use their service to play games against each other, something that they might have some difficulty pulling off.

EA BRASS "ALL HARDCORE GAMERS"

According to Tim Willits of id Software, the *Doom* and *Quake* developer's decision to partner with Electronic Arts to distribute their upcoming game, *Rage*, was partly due to the fact that EA higher-ups are all "hardcore gamers."

"When we were looking at publishers, there were only a handful, and we were really excited by the leadership. John Riccitiello flew to Mesquite to talk to us and he is more of a gamer than I think people realise," Willits told Website *Eurogamer* at QuakeCon.

"The questions that he asked, and Frank Gibeau, David DeMartini – those guys run the most powerful publisher in the world and they're all hardcore gamers. They were excited about the title, and we felt that EA would be the best partner for us, and it wasn't about money." EA's risk-taking choices to invest in many unproven projects instead of relying on existing franchisers like *Madden* "resonated." "And regardless of whether your organisation's 100 people or 5,000 people," he told *Eurogamer*, "the personality and the desire of the whole organisation is driven by those at the top."

SERIOUS RUMOURS

While no guarantees can be made, and it's far from an official press release, it seems that the world was wrong in doubting the existence of a *Dark Knight* videogame. Super-secret sources have revealed that Pandemic Studios – the crew behind *Star Wars Battlefront* and *Destroy All Humans* – is responsible for production. The game is set to take a *GTA*-style free-roaming approach to the exploration and protection of Gotham City, allowing the man in black to take to the streets either on foot or in the Batmobile in search of his next criminal to beat up. On the story front, the game will take place after the film, possibly allowing for a *Matrix*-inspired storyline spread across multiple media.

THE EVOLUTION OF: rAge

2003
NAG LAN: 300 people
Floor Space: 4,313m²
Exhibitors: 31
Total Visitors: 5,130
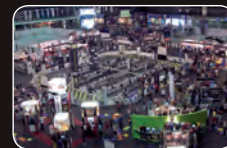
2004
NAG LAN: 433 people
Floor Space: 6,850m²
Exhibitors: 37
Total Visitors: 7,755
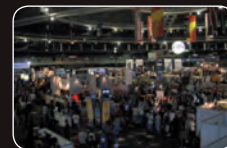
2005
NAG LAN: 700 people
Floor Space: 8,750m²
Exhibitors: 58
Total Visitors: 9,141

2006
NAG LAN: 1,200 people
Floor Space: 9,990m²
Exhibitors: 60
Total Visitors: 12,568
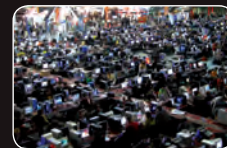
2007
NAG LAN: 1,500 people
Floor Space: 12,904m²
Exhibitors: 71
Total Visitors: 17,223

2008
NAG LAN: 1,800 people
Floor Space: 12,904m²+
Exhibitors: 75-80
Total Visitors: You decide!

CONSOLE WATCH

We can't figure out how this helps sell PSPs, but Sony must be doing something right...

T&A

PSP

ACCORDING TO MEDIA CREATE, for the week ending on August 3, the **Sony PlayStation Portable** held onto its lead on the Japanese hardware sales charts by selling 61,181 units. The **Nintendo DS** edged ever closer, selling 57,398 units in the same period. The **Nintendo Wii** continued to rake in the money by selling 41,109 units (incrementally higher than the week prior), while **PlayStation 3** sales declined to 9,508 units. The **PlayStation 2** continued to sell as well as the PlayStation 3 at 9,508 units, while the **Xbox 360** continued to be shunned, selling only 5,359 units.

Nintendo is fighting back against piracy, currently suing five companies that import and retail Nintendo DS piracy devices (like the R4 cartridge). Backed by several Japanese firms including Capcom, SNK, Taito, Square Enix and Tecmo, the lawsuit intends to stop the marketing, sale and import of the Chinese-made hardware and software. Nintendo claims that such piracy "is causing severe damage to our company and software makers, and this is something that we cannot possibly overlook." The lawsuit has been filed with the Tokyo District Court and is for Japan only.

SEGA has unveiled its first-quarter fiscal results for 2009, showing a loss of $95.8 million, even though it boasts a consumer sales growth of 90.6%. Consumer sales (videogames) grew from $140 million to $270 million over the year, spurred on by increased sales in all regions (especially North America and Europe). The poor sales performance of the Pachinko (pinball-like gambling machines) segment dragged the results down, showing an operating loss of $39 million.

Nintendo reported a 34% rise in profits over the last three months, and its total net profit for the fiscal year stands at $990 million. Sales are up by 24% compared to last year, with Nintendo reporting sales of **Wii** hardware reaching 5.17 million units worldwide (with a lifetime sales figure of 29.62 million units). *Mario Kart Wii* sold 6.42 million units worldwide over the last three-month period, with *Wii Fit* selling 3.42 million. The total lifetime sales of the **Nintendo DS** sit at 77.54 million.

Electronic Arts has unveiled that it has 40 titles in production for the **Nintendo Wii** and **Nintendo DS**. EA also mentioned that the Steven Spielberg collaboration-title, *BOOM BLOX*, had sold over 450,000 units in the first fiscal quarter. "*BOOM BLOX* from EA Casual continues to sell well," said CEO John Riccitiello. While Electronic Arts has reported a loss of $95 million for the first quarter of the 2009, sales for the period almost doubled year-on-year to $804 million.

NPD DETAILS GAMER DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The **NPD Group** has published its Games Segmentation report, which details several game demographics and habits. It reveals that only 10% of **PlayStation 2** owners also own a **PlayStation 3**. Of an estimated 174 million gamers worldwide, 3% are 'Extreme Gamers'; 9% are 'Avid PC Gamers'; 17% are 'Console Gamers'; 14% are 'Online PC Gamers'; 15% are 'Offline PC Gamers'; 22% are 'Young Heavy Gamers'; and 20% are 'Secondary Gamers'. Six out of every ten **Nintendo DS** and **PlayStation Portable** owners fall into the 'Young Heavy Gamers' segment. **PlayStation 3** owners were found to be more likely to own other next-gen consoles, compared to **Wii** and **Xbox 360** owners. While 45% of **PSP** owners also own a **DS**, only 21% of **DS** owners also have a **PSP**. Digital Distribution was also covered, showing that 14% of games purchased in the last three months were through digital downloads, with 'Avid PC Gamers' making 27% of the purchases.

UBISOFT SUES OVER GAME LEAK

Assassin's Creed only sold 40,000 copies (on PC), yet was reportedly downloaded more than 700,000 times after an employee at the game publisher's manufacturing partner allegedly made a copy of the game and posted it on the Internet.

Ubisoft insists that the manufacturer, Optical Experts, ignored strict security guidelines in its manufacturing contract. Ubisoft tracked the illegal copy of the game online to an unnamed Optical Experts employee, and later found a copy of the game at his home.

Ubisoft also claims that a bug, deliberately placed in the code for security reasons (which caused pirated copies of the game to crash), led to negative reviews of the game, which further hindered sales and damaged Ubisoft's reputation.

Optical Experts is being sued for millions in reparations.

RUMOUR: FABLE 2 ACHIEVEMENTS

Fable 2's achievement list has gone public, and there are some real gems. From simple unlocks like The Archaeologist, which requires you to dig up something your faithful canine companion has discovered, to the highly entertaining Party Animal, which is achieved by getting 15 villagers drunk within three minutes, it looks like *Fable 2* will be an absolute gas when you're just not in the mood for saving Albion.

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC MMO

In a recent interview, Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello let slip that the company is working on an MMO for LucasArts, developed by BioWare. Now, anyone with a bit of RPG knowledge will realise that the combination of those three words means a *Knight of the Old Republic* MMO might be coming our way some time. When asked to confirm if he was, in fact, talking about a *KotOR* MMO, Riccitiello simply replied "Yes".

WARHAMMER ONLINE IS 'SHIPPABLE'

ANXIOUS *WARHAMMER* FANS AND MMO addicts alike have been waiting for what seems like a lifetime for *WAR*, but it's likely that the waiting period is finally drawing to a close. After the recent announcement of content cuts (in the form of four classes and capital cities), impatient would-be players started to get a little concerned that the game might be pushed back even further past its original scheduled release date. Worry not, however, Paul Barnett, creative designer behind the fantasy-themed MMORPG claims, "The game's finished. It's just being polished and cooked." With all the content done and final touches being the only thing keeping the title from taking its maiden voyage, it seems like we might just have a playable game come September.

WII MOTIONPLUS ADD-ON

While the hundreds of drooling journalists at E3 hung around the Microsoft conference, eagerly awaiting any form of announcement about a new motion-sensing controller, Nintendo was quietly chuckling away backstage. The next day, the current reigning champions of the console wars showed their recent addition to the Wii's selection of peripherals. Apparently not entirely content with the responsiveness of the Wii Remote, Nintendo decided to launch the MotionPlus, a small, cube-shaped device that plugs into the bottom-end of the controller.

The add-on features three internal gyroscopes to trace its movement along any axis, which when combined with the array of motion sensors in the main controller will further the fluidity and responsiveness of motion data sent to the Wii. Attendees at the conference claimed a much-improved experience, with less jittering and more accurate portrayal of movements.

FALLOUT 3 BACK IN FOCUS DOWN UNDER, GAME DEVELOPERS STILL NOT HAPPY

AUSSIE GAMERS WILL LIKELY be getting a taste of Nuka Cola this year. The Office of Film and Literature Classification has given Bethesda a chance to clean up the drug content in the game to make it fit within the 15+ age-restriction limit. Understandably, irate game developers in Oz still aren't satisfied. The president of the Game Developers Association of Australia is furious that mature gamers still aren't being catered for, citing the OFLC's policies for treating videogaming as little more than a kid's toy. No word yet on just how Bethesda will be sorting out the chem issue. We hope they can simply mask the system without having to remove it completely – something that could have a serious impact on gameplay.

AMAZON.COM SECURES ANOTHER VIDEOGAME EXCLUSIVE

It really does seem like Amazon.com shoppers have all the fun these days. Not only has Amazon.com secured the now-legendary Pip-Boy 3000 alarm clock for its exclusive *Fallout* Survival Edition, but it seems that they're doing the same with the *Gears of War* Lancer. Available only through Amazon at the decent, yet by-no-means-cheap price of $139.99, purchasers will nab themselves a full-size Lancer replica, with *Gears of War 2* thrown in for free! Those willing to cough up an additional $10 will get their purchase bumped up to the special edition of the game. Stocks are limited, and South Africans absolutely set on getting one of these bad boys could wangle something through MyUS.com if it comes down to it.

SONY PLANS PSP COMEBACK IN AMERICA

THE PLAYSTATION PORTABLE WAS practically absent from E3 2008, with little to no representation from either first- or third-party publishers. That's not to say that Sony has forgotten about its neglected handheld and is in fact planning a return to grace (in America, at least). In speaking with MTV, John Koller, Sony's director of hardware marketing, had a few things to say about the PSP in 2008.

"Where we are today is the result of a development cycle from 18 months ago," said Koller. "Eighteen months ago, PSP hardware wasn't doing quite as well in terms of sales. Since then, it's taken off. We've been talking to a lot of developers and really trying to change their thinking about how the PSP is doing and they've realised it from what they've seen at retail."

No surprise, considering how well the PSP has been doing at retail lately, especially in Japan thanks in part to the release of a new entry into the popular *Monster Hunter* franchise for the PSP. "We've told developers to think about how they create the games," he said. "Because the games they were creating were mostly ports and a lot of consumers were playing it at home and saying 'Well, I could play it on a screen like this or I could play it on a smaller screen.' We don't want to have that competition."

"Going towards the end of the year and going into '09 and beyond, we're going to see a lot of very large franchise games coming from third parties," Koller admits. "They're going to be a bit of a surprise; they're going to be like 'Wow, that's coming to PSP?'"

THE NUMBERS

SEPTEMBER RELEASES

1.56 MILLION
PS3s sold in Q1 2008
[Source: SCE]

$180 MILLION
Revenue from XBL DLC in the last
12 months [source: Microsoft]

82%
Percentage of gamers who don't
mind in-game ads
[source: IGA Worldwide]

840,843
Total sales of *Guitar Hero on Tour*
to date [source: VGC]

10%
The percentage of PS2 owners
who bought a PS3 [source: NPD]

28,500
Sales of *Braid* within the first three
days [source: VGC]

382,716
Copies of *Soul Calibur IV* shipped
during its first week [source: VGC]

17%
Of *GTA IV* purchasers who are
under-age [source: Nielsen]

75
Games on their way under the
Warner flag [source: Warner]

Date	Game	Platforms
3	Family Trainer	Wii
3	Guild Wars: The Complete Collection	PC
3	Sacred 2: Fallen Angels	PC
3	Sacred 2: Fallen Angels Collector's Edition *[Pre-order and stand a chance to win new PC Collector's Editions valued at more than R3,000]*	PC
3	Pure	PS3, 360, PC
10	Midnight Club 4	PS3, 360
10	Midnight Club 4 Remix	PSP
10	Fallout 3	PS3, 360, PC
10	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 10	DS
10	Bella Sara	PC
10	LotRO Mines of Moira	PC
10	Mechanic Master	DS
10	Bella Sara	DS
10	Shaun the Sheep	DS
17	Fracture	PS3, 360
17	Star Wars: Clone Wars	Wii, DS
17	Crash Bandicoot: Mind Over Mutant	Multi
17	Fable 2 *[Pre-order for only R591.26]*	360
17	Fable 2 Limited Edition *[Pre-order and stand a chance to win new Xbox 360 Collector's Editions valued at more than R3,000]*	360
17	Saints Row 2 *[Pre-order for only R591.26]*	360
17	Saints Row 2	PC
24	James Bond: Quantum of Solace	Multi
24	Spider-Man: Black vs. Red	Multi
24	MotoStorm: Pacific Rift	PS3
24	SOCOM: Confrontation	PS3
24	Buzz Junior: Ace Racers	PS2
24	EyeToy Play Hero with Sword and Camera	PS2
24	EyeToy Play Pom Pom with Pom Pom and Camera	PS2
31	WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	360, Wii, DS
31	Dancing Stage Universe 2	360
31	Disney: Sing It! Featuring Camp Rock	Multi
TBA	A Vampyre Story	PC
TBA	Alone in the Dark	PS3
TBA	Avatar: Into the Inferno	PS2
TBA	Barnyard Blast	PSP
TBA	Battleforge	PC
TBA	BioShock	PS3
TBA	Blitz: The League	PS3, 360
TBA	Boogie Superstar	Wii
TBA	Bratz 09	PS2
TBA	Brave: A Warriors Tale	PSP, Wii, 360
TBA	Brave: Shaman's Challenge	DS
TBA	Call of Duty: World at War	Multi

Date	Game	Platforms
TBA	Call of Duty: World at War Collector's Edition *[Pre-order and stand a chance to win a Collector's Edition valued at more than R3,000]*	Multi
TBA	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 *[Pre-order for only R518.36]*	360
TBA	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 *[Pre-order for only R303.26]*	PC
TBA	Dancing Stage Disney Channel Edition	PS2
TBA	Dead Space	PS3, 360, PC
TBA	Diabolik	Multi
TBA	Don King Presents: Prizefighting Boxing	Wii, DS
TBA	Dungeon Lords 2: Orbs and the Oracle	PC
TBA	EA Sports Challenge	Wii
TBA	Fallout 3 Collector's Edition *[Pre-order and stand a chance to win a Collector's Edition valued at more than R3,000]*	PS3, 360, PC
TBA	FIFA 09	Multi
TBA	Galactic Civilizations II: Endless Universe	PC
TBA	Garfield Gets Real	Wii, DS
TBA	GO! Explore	PSP
TBA	Gothic 3: Forsaken Gods	PC
TBA	Last King of Africa	DS
TBA	Legendary	PS3, 360, PC
TBA	Littlest Pet Shop	Wii, PC
TBA	Littlest Pet Shop: Garden	DS
TBA	Littlest Pet Shop: Jungle	DS
TBA	Littlest Pet Shop: Winter	DS
TBA	Margot's Word Brain	Multi
TBA	Monopoly Here & Now Worldwide Edition	Multi
TBA	More Game Party	Wii
TBA	More Touch Master	DS
TBA	Mountain Bike Andrenaline	PS2
TBA	MySims	PC
TBA	MySims Kingdom	Wii, DS
TBA	Ninja Town	DS
TBA	Order Up!	Wii
TBA	Pro Evolution Soccer '09	Multi
TBA	Racing Team Manager	PC
TBA	Raven Squad	PC, 360
TBA	Saints Row 2	PS3
TBA	Shelock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper	PC
TBA	Sherlock Holmes: The Lost Vases	PC
TBA	Sherlock Holmes: The Mystery of the Mummy	DS
TBA	Silent Hill	PS3
TBA	SpongeBob Globs of Doom	PS2
TBA	The History Channel	DS
TBA	TrackMania	DS
TBA	TT Superbikes	PS2
TBA	Twin Strike: Operation Thunder	Wii
TBA	Zubo	DS

THIS DAY IN GAMING: SEPTEMBER

1

9
(1995) Sony unleashes the PlayStation on North America; it goes on to sell over 100 million units worldwide.

17

25

18
(2008) *Warhammer Online* is due for release; will *WoW* have a genuine competitor?

26
(LAN) Evolution LAN (No venue specified) www.langames.co.za.

3
(1998) Japan sees the release of *Metal Gear Solid* for the PSone; Psycho Mantis can read your mind.

11

19
(LAN) Organised Chaos (Cape Town)
(LAN) criXian Chronicle (Bellville) www.langames.co.za.

27
(1996) *Meridian 59* is launched by 3DO; MMORPG addicts are born.

4

12
(2003) The first stable version of Steam is released; Valve can almost hear the money trickle in.

20
(LAN) Mayhem (Boksburg) www.langames.co.za.

28

5
(LAN) Frag Lan Major Event: rAge *DotA* Qualifier (Durban)
(LAN) MPLD (Pretoria) www.langames.co.za.

13
(1999) Sony unveils the PlayStation 2 in Tokyo. The console goes on to dominate for almost a decade.
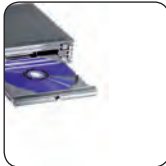
22
(1999) Capcom releases *Resident Evil 3* in Japan; it's simply not as good as *RE2*.

30
(1997) Interplay releases *Fallout*; gamers throughout the world soon realise that war never changes
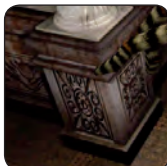
23

31

8

16
(2003) *The Temple of Elemental Evil* is released by Troika Games; it's the only CRPG with a world designed by Gary Gygax

24
(1993) *Myst* is released by Broderbund; "walkthrough" becomes a household term

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [**September Caption**].
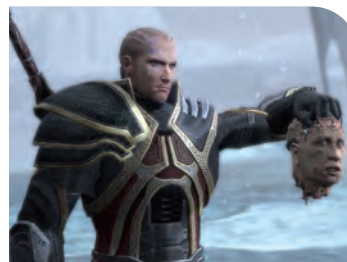
**SEPTEMBER CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:**
"Baldur gives a little head..."

AUGUST WINNERS
"After much consideration, the Olympic committee implement the new way of carrying the torch."
Dave Edwards

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

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Find the Badger! He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [**September Badger**]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a limited-edition Badger T-shirt from Gamer Gear.

www.rudra.co.za

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
Matthys Steenkamp, p44
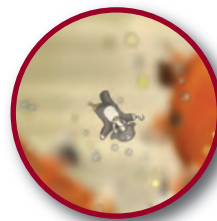
Miktar's Meanderings

by Miktar Dracon

Guitar Hero killed the Dance Dance Superstar

Based on a true story.

"Okay, so we're gonna try it. You sure? Sweet, lemme just finish my beer. Y'know, those Korean (Chinese, Japanese, I can't tell) guys make it look so easy. You paid for the last round, right? Right, I'll get the tokens. At least the arcade isn't busy tonight. I don't think I could ever play this damn game when there are people around. God, we're going to look like a couple of fools. Here, four tokens for you, four tokens for me. I think I understand the basic principle of the thing, so let's find an easy song to play. Hey, Tubthumping, *I know that song. Let's try that. Here we go. WTF? Ack. Heh. Ack! Feet! Doh! Well, that didn't last very long but it was kinda fun. You wanna try again?"*

TRUTH BE TOLD, MY friend and I kept trying and sure enough, 'Miktar's Fourth Rule of Gaming' held fast: rhythm games are addictive no matter the shape or form. Over a decade ago, we took the plunge and attempted one of the scariest activities our local arcade had to offer: *Dance Dance Revolution* (*4th Mix*, to be precise). If you've never seen one of the 'dancing games' yourself, it's a tall cabinet with two sets of arrows in front of it. The arrows are laid out on the cardinal directions.

The idea is to pick a song from the song list and up scrolls a series of arrows that you need to match (on the beat, usually) by stepping on the corresponding arrow on the floor at the same time as the arrow reaches the top of the screen. Simple in premise, difficult to master. Like most rhythm games, the more you play a specific song, the better you get at it and the more attuned you become to what the game expects of you. You never stop looking silly though. Except when you start playing Doubles, which involves using both pads. Then you're a superstar.

Now, ten years later, and we're still playing *Dance Dance Revolution* whenever possible. There is always a new song to master, a new trick to try, a new style move to attempt.

Created by Konami, *Dance Dance Revolution* never attained the mainstream status of contemporary copycat *Guitar Hero*, which incidentally sort of 'plagiarised' another game from Konami in their Bemani rhythm game series, namely *Guitar Freaks*. An interesting note: *Guitar Freaks* only had three fret buttons, a whole lot of J-Pop instead of Hendrix, but it could link up with another Konami game, *Percussion Freaks*, which is the drum set version. Essentially a proto-*Rock Band*, if you will. Suffice it to say, *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* brought the experience of instrument-based rhythm games to the Western consumer in a big way, albeit nearly a decade after the experience was already easily available in the East.

Before *Guitar Hero* hit the Western gaming scene like a hurricane, *Dance Dance Revolution* was slowly gaining popularity in the home market thanks to cheap third-party dance mats that "brought the arcade experience home." The appeal of *Dance Dance Revolution* is much the same as what brings all the boys (and girls) to the *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* yard: there is a tangible enjoyment in learning an entirely new input method to a game (hence, peripheral gaming); and having music as the premise lets people form a connection with the game before they've even started playing. Ooh, I love that song. I wonder what this song will be like?

Of course, prancing around on a dance mat could never withstand the awesome might of being a virtual guitar legend. As *Guitar Hero* entered the scene and started cutting right into the mainstream mind space, the interest in *Dance Dance Revolution* quickly started taking a backseat. After all, why jump around and get all sweaty when you can just sit on your couch and press buttons with your hands? Oh, don't get me wrong, I love all rhythm games. And when I say all, I mean all. Even 'Para Para Paradise', if you know what I mean. Yet, the inescapable truth is that *Guitar Hero* and its ilk have effectively superseded any chance *Dance Dance Revolution* had at gaining the equivalent popularity in the West that it has enjoyed in the East.

Perhaps the influx of new-school rhythm games will encourage gamers to seek out new experiences in the genre, which in turn will lead them down the roads of *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Beatmania* and such.

Dance Dance Revolution and related contemporaries seem 'utterly Japanese' in their applied aesthetic. Jumping around on a bunch of arrows with no actual dancing involved is exactly what I've come to expect from the native Eastern pop culture that birthed the sensation. It seems that rhythm games are very much moulded by the surrounding culture of the music itself.

There is just no denying it: I'll always have a place in my heart for 'Japanocentric' music games. Perhaps I'm a 'Japanophile'. Or perhaps these big feet were always made for dancing. **NAG**

> "The appeal of *Dance Dance Revolution* is much the same as what brings all the boys (and girls) to the *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* yard: there is a tangible enjoyment in learning an entirely new input method to a game (hence, peripheral gaming); and having music as the premise lets people form a connection with the game before they've even started playing.

Dammit

by Megan Hughes

I almost bought a Wii

And other stories from my globetrotting days

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT you find yourself packing (or rather stuffing) a bag full of clothes for every season as well as some other items that you'll never use - and probably never see again - all in an attempt to prepare for a trip that will see you on two separate continents (not including the one you live on) in just two weeks. Twenty-nine hours of flying time later, I've lived to tell the tale.

THE GRASS REALLY IS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE, SERIOUSLY

Having travelled by car, taxi, bus, airplane, tube train, normal train, steam train and two very different kinds of boats on two very different stretches of water and having slept in cars, buses, airplanes, trains as well as airports (think *Amazing Race* here), and having touched down on three separate continents in just over two weeks, I think I am now qualified to say that, yes, the grass is greener on the other side.

Of course, in Dubai this is because they spend huge amounts of money just to water the grass they've managed to cultivate in their desert climate, while in England, Scotland and Wales they simply have the perfect climate for rich, green grass to grow. And it is amazingly green, like nothing I've seen back home in Africa. But then, of course, they've never known the heat of the African sun and what a lovely tan it can produce.

WHERE WERE THE GAMES ALL HIDING?

Because I wasn't travelling alone, what I wanted to do was definitely not the highest priority on any given day. I managed to sneak in a few activities and sites into the daily itinerary, mostly by pure chance of being in the area, but when it came to finding a shop selling games I was pretty much on my own. Somewhere between London and Scotland, I managed to sneak into an electronics shop that just happened to stock everything in terms of games except PC games (and, unfortunately, I don't own any consoles). Talk about forgetting the kitchen sink. Some DVDs were purchased and that was the last time that I came close to even buying any games.

I ALMOST BOUGHT A WII

Through a rather awkward turn of events, we managed to miss the last flight out of Gatwick Airport to Dubai by mere minutes.

With little money left to travel back to the relatives we had been staying with, we decided to get comfortable. About ten hours, and a McDonald's meal each, we had all survived the night (along with the rest of the people crowding the airport). It was then that we had to brave security. Passport control was relatively painless, as did the hand luggage and human X-rays turn out to be, but I couldn't quite believe it when I was asked to remove my shoes for scanning... must be a British thing.

After that, duty-free! And it was here that I got to enter the only electronics shop in the airport, which just happened to be of the same franchise I'd found earlier in the trip. No PC games. They did, however, have the Nintendo Wii for the unbelievable price of about R2,400. Knowing how expensive they are back home, I was thoroughly tempted, but realising I hardly had the space for it at home and didn't actually have that much money to spare, I had to leave it there. It was a very difficult thing to do, I assure you.

NO FACEBOOK. NO CELLULAR

I spent the entire two-week holiday without a cellphone or access to Facebook. Not surprisingly, I didn't really miss it either. It was an amazingly peaceful experience knowing that even if I wanted to, I could neither contact nor be contacted by other people. No interruptions... fabulous. I also found out on my return that I hadn't really missed much anyway. There was just absolutely no reason to have had a phone or computer with me while I was trying to explore two very different countries.

600 PHOTOGRAPHS LATER

Digital cameras really do make things easier while travelling. No need to worry about film or wonder if the pictures will even come out. It's all there; it's all so simple. And yet, trying to deal with the aftermath is not. Two digital cameras and 600 photographs later, I don't even want to attempt to figure out which should be printed for the photo album, which should be use to decorate the walls, and which should be deleted.

Overall, I would thoroughly recommend a trip to anywhere in the world, just for the experience of truly being there in the flesh. No photo or film will ever be the same as the real thing. And remember to take some like-minded people along on your travels. **NAG**

> " Having travelled by car, taxi, bus, airplane, tube train, normal train, steam train and two very different kinds of boats on two very different stretches of water and having slept in cars, buses, airplanes, trains as well as airports (think *Amazing Race* here), and having touched down on three separate continents in just over two weeks, I think I am now qualified to say that, yes, the grass is greener on the other side.

Ramjet

by Walt Pretorius

Politicians:
The Final Dumb Tier

WE COMPLAIN ABOUT STUFF a lot. It's all "crime this, power-outs that, fuel prices the next thing." Sometimes I wish people would try and see the good things that we have. There may not be a great many, to be honest, but there are some very positive things in this country that we can feel grateful for.

Take, for example, gaming. It's a small thing for some, but gamers like us have to admit that we have it fairly easy here in some respects. I am not talking about costs and distribution and the conspicuous lack of online services that should have been in place long ago. Rather, I am talking about the level of censorship that is applied to gaming in this country. Quite simply, there isn't any. Sure, games locally are rated by the Film and Publications Board (or they're supposed to be, anyway) and there are age restrictions imposed on them by that body, but the level of censorship on the whole in this country is really very low. Other countries, ones that many people see as Promised Lands, have a far stricter system. Take America, for example. The USA is constantly undergoing struggles in the political arena regarding games. This should worry every gamer, because the size of the US market means that decisions made in that country could affect everyone. But, for now, the Yanks are mainly looking at the regulation of game sales, not at banning content. For now...

The country that takes the cake in the banning stakes is Australia, because of the system they have imposed on rating games. For those who don't know, Australia has no way to rate games that are meant for mature audiences, purely because they steadfastly refuse to create an 18+ rating for games. Their top rating for games is 15+, meaning that a huge number of games cannot be correctly classified. Their answer to this problem is to simply ban any game that is a little too excessive for the 15+ rating. The latest victim in this sad state of affairs is the long-awaited *Fallout 3*, which was banned for its depiction of drug use.

The real problem lies in the fact that politicians, for the most part, are seriously disconnected from reality. While the Yanks take the gold in this matter, the Aussies aren't far behind. The following extract is from a television interview with several Australian politicians.

Announcer: "Okay, so here's the question: should there be censorship of these things, or should people over the age of 18 be able to buy these things with an R rating and play them, even though, as we've just heard, they're obviously extremely violent?"

Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group, **Heather Ridout:** "Look, I mean if they're over 18, they'll find one way or another to get hold of it, Tony, and they do. But, as a mother of three kids, two of whom spend an awful lot of time playing these sorts of games, I mean I just find the whole thing appalling, the minds that come up with this stuff. Now *Grand Theft Auto* is one of the more famous games that seemed to turn everyone into a car thief, you know?. My Jordan thankfully didn't do that. But... I mean I'm not a censorship girl... But violent games... violence breeds violence. It's not nice."

Senator Nick Xenophon: "I think we need to listen to the psychologists who've looked into this. And this is different in the sense [that] it's interactive. People get immersed in these games and I think there's a real risk. I think as a society we can live without it."

Announcer: "But does the risk warrant censorship?"

Sen. Xenophon: "Look, I think it does. When you look at some of the concerns of what it can trigger in some minds, then I think we need to be just a bit cautious about it."

Sen. Mark Arbib: "To actually ban them, they must be terrible games. So, personally, I'm probably thinking [an] R rating over the age of 18 is fine because as you said, 'if you wanna play [the] game, you're going to get it somehow'. But I haven't seen the games, so I really can't judge whether they should be banned or not."

Announcer: "...these things are being banned because there isn't a rating system on videogames... That means anyone of any age can buy them..."

Sen. Arbib: "As I said, I think there's a strong argument to actually have a rating system. For all games, no doubt about it. And not just an R rating, but ratings just the same as ratings for the movies... So yeah..."

Sen. Barnaby Joyce: "You can't just say [that if] you can see it, therefore you should be allowed to see it, otherwise you legalise snuff movies and all sorts of profane things which I don't think take our society ahead... We had the thing with avatars... is that the right term?... where people can actually go out and rape people. Now, this is not acceptable. You have to draw a line... You must take into account those who are vulnerable to influence, how they would be affected by that. And if you don't, well you suffer what comes next. I, too, have four kids... I want these kids to grow up in quiet, unaffected streets. And if there's someone playing a videogame where they're raping someone, I'm not feeling good about the place. So, knock it out."

Christine Jackman, journalist: "I agree, we urgently need a rating system."

The best thing of all? It seems that these people running the country aren't even aware of the fact that Australia does have a relevant rating system for games, albeit one that needs to be fixed. Priceless! **NAG**

> "Australia has no way to rate games that are meant for mature audiences, purely because they steadfastly refuse to create an 18+ rating for games. Their answer to this problem is to simply ban any game that is a little too excessive for the 15+ rating.

GEARS OF WAR 2

SIX MONTHS HAVE PASSED since Delta Squad's big day out in the rubble of suburban Sera. Despite the permanent disposal of professional bully, General RAAM, and the successful detonation of the Lightmass Bomb in the Locust tunnel network, it seems that the Horde are relentlessly pursuing their corporate mandate to kill everything on the planet with pitiless abandon. They've also invented flamethrowers and something that appears to snack on cities. For all that, they've the collective temperament of a bag of trolls and the social sophistication to match; you have to admire their dedication and resourcefulness. Meanwhile, residual fallout from the emulsion eruption has bequeathed a somewhat insalubrious legacy with the advent of Rust Lung, a fatal affliction now running wild throughout the barely remaining human population of the Jacinto Plateau. Bad luck really is in a class of its own over there.

Undaunted, Marcus and his COG chums devise an ingenious counteroffensive to foil the Locust incursion. Using enormous mobile derricks, the Coalition forces begin dragging state-of-the-art Grindlifts into embattled zones. Designed to bore right through to the Locust subterranean fortress, these 'elevators to hell' are Delta Squad's one-way ticket back to the party.

WEAPONS OF WAR

THIS IS MY BOOM-STICK!

Look, nothing is ever going to be even remotely as awesome as a fully automatic assault rifle with a chainsaw bayonet, but in the interest of variety, *Gears of War 2* is including a bristling range of additional firepower to Sera's collective arsenal. Make the red stuff with:

THE GORGON PISTOL

Favoured by the cabalistic Locust Kantus, this high-calibre semi-automatic pistol features a dual-clip designed to push two slugs simultaneously. Fatal and very messy. As one of only three available single-handed weapons (alongside the Boltok and Snub pistols), it's also ideal for brandishing around the sad face of your meat shield.

NEW! IMPROVED! NOW WITH MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS! GRENADES

All grenades in *Gears of War 2* now do double duty as proximity mines. Making Locust salsa has never been so easy. Unless they spot your booby-trap and destroy it, that is. Grenades are now also imbued with a concussive force that will knock enemies off their feet, leaving them scrambling stupidly on the ground for a few moments of cheap kills.

POISON GRENADES

It's an itty-bitty, baby Nemacyst glued to a bolo grenade. And it turns into a big cloud of blinding, highly toxic gas when it explodes. They're so temperamental at that age.

THE MULCHER

A new portable model of the Locust Troika turret hot off the assembly line, this high-velocity chain gun is the first choice in terminal dispute resolution for the COG on the go. This first-generation model suffers from a bit of an overheating problem with extended use, however. It's also somewhat inaccurate, but that's okay when it's spitting out 400 rounds a second.

THE SCORCHER

Kill it with fire.

AN EPIC CHAINSAW DUEL

No longer relegated to a math.random() function somewhere in the bowels of the game code, chainsaw squabbles will now be resolved with the indubitable authority of a frenzied mashing of the B button on your controller.

THE MEAT SHIELD

Well, it's not technically a weapon, but it's so totally rad we simply can't neglect to mention it. Downed enemies can now be hauled back to their feet, and used as mobile cover until they're turned to steak tartar by incoming fire. Remember, kids – aim for the knees!

A FINISHING TOUCH

Sometimes, a curb stomp just isn't enough. Dispatch fallen enemies with a grisly assortment of weapon-specific fatalities, or even a good old-fashioned flurry of punches to the face.

Safety in numbers

Like its predecessor, *Gears 2* features a drop-in, drop-out, two-way co-op campaign mode, now with individual difficulty settings. This allows one player, for example, to play on Insane while the other plays on the new Rookie difficulty mode. Gently introduce hard-line keyboard-and-mouse evangelists to the inimitable delights of controller fragging, and then watch their PCs gather dust. Take enough damage in *Gears of War*, and you'd be reduced to a defenceless lump of bleeding steak on the battlefield, until your co-op buddy managed to duck, cover, and tag you back to fighting order or you died in bloody disgrace. In *Gears 2*, however, you'll be able to crawl to assistance. It's all about initiative, you know. Elsewhere, there's the new five-way co-op Horde mode, pitting the intrepid quintet against an increasingly formidable succession of Locust offensives. Five grumpy Berserkers at one time? Yes, please. We're masochists.

16 September

Dear Mum,
Yeah, we're still stranded. Thanks for the food parcel – those baked beans expired only seven years ago. The other guys were so jealous. Apparently, some of those COG thugs blew up Chops gas station a few weeks back, and nicked Franklin's Junker APC. Bastards. Nobody's seen Chop since then either. Must go, I'm on Kroll watch tonight and I need to replace a few broken light bulbs.

Love,
Eugene

25 October

Dear Mum,
Still stranded. Franklin's cousin got the Rust Lung, so we're all avoiding him. I also found a brand new shotgun and several full boxes of ammo just lying abandoned in the street the other day. Lucky me! Not much else going on.

Love,
Eug

12 November

Dear Mum,
Still stranded. Franklin's cousin didn't get any better, so he had a little accident with an unreliable street lamp down the street while he was on Kryll watch. No sense in us all getting Rust Lung. Some of the guys are saying that Tollen and Montevado just, like, fell into the ground last week. How does an entire city just vanish? Have you heard anything from Auntie Joyce?

Love,
Eugene

MEATFLAG. IT'S THE COOLEST WORD EVER

The official name was later changed to Submission, but it will always be Meatflag in our hearts. *Gears of War 2*'s bold, new interpretation of Capture the Flag substitutes a live, kicking, and decidedly uncooperative Stranded bloke in place of the traditional and now comparatively rather drab old flag. Oh, and he's armed with a shotgun. Teams will have to seize and forcibly escort the abusive hostage back to base to score. The next big thing? Probably.

Other confirmed multiplayer modes include the two vs. two vs. two vs. two vs. two-player Wingman mode, which isn't actually as complicated as it looks, and Guardian, a modified version of the original's Assassination mode, allowing players to continue fighting once the leader has been eliminated, but at the expense of additional respawning. And while you're waiting to for the next round, you can take advantage of the new BattleCam system to grab snapshots of all the marvellously gratuitous violence. Additionally, all multiplayer modes have increased the maximum number of players from eight to ten.

The game will ship with 12 multiplayer maps, including the revamped, fan-favourite Gridlock (now Gridlock 2.0), as well as newcomers Day One, River, Security, and Avalanche, with the latter two featuring environmental hazards. Set in a snowboard mountainside retreat, Avalanche plays host to periodic, well, avalanches. Anybody caught in the frosty landslide is killed instantly, while survivors will have to negotiate their way through 30 seconds or so of dramatically reduced visibility. Elsewhere, Security is all wrapped up in a series of high-voltage laser fences that can be deactivated for 20 seconds at a time. If it's not deactivated, it's 100% lethal, and it's really only a matter of time until someone successfully combines this rude shocker with the grenade's new concussive force.

As though we weren't already going to be spoiled rotten, Epic has also recently announced the inclusion of bots in all competitive multiplayer modes, designed by renowned *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament* bot-master, Steve Polge. It almost makes up for the in-game loss of the word "Meatflag."

WE BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT...

Jon DiMaggio, the voice actor behind butch COG gunslinger, Marcus Fenix, is the same guy who does the voice of Bender in *Futurama*.

23 November

Dear Mum,
Still stranded, yeah. With the recent Locust resurgence, I've been assigned a new watch post downtown. Spotted a few COG and Locust patrols today, but they were so busy throwing grenades at each other, nobody noticed me squatting behind one of those big concrete blocks that seem to be all over town for no good reason. Funny, that never really struck me as odd until now. Sorry to hear about Auntie Joye.

Love,
Eugene

29 December

Dear Mum,
Still stranded. The COG and Locust patrols are becoming a real menace. They got so close to me yesterday, I could hear them shouting at each other. It's weird, some of them sound like kids. Anyway, I've set up a laser turret perimeter as a precaution. If they come any closer to my post, they're going to get extra crispy.

Love,
Eugene

According to lead designer Cliff Bleszinski, *Gears 2* features "the best cover system ever seen in the videogame industry". The system has been optimised since the first game to reduce stickiness and avoid accidental cover.

15 January

Dear Mum,
Still stranded. Look, I don't want you to worry, but I had the most terrifying experience last week. Two squads of COGs and Locust launched an assault on my watch post. They trashed my laser turrets, and then tried to grab me. The whole time this was going on, they were all screaming at each other about meeting someone called "Flag". I still can't figure out why these grizzled, battle-scarred COG soldiers and Locust grunts sound like teenagers. I've no idea what has prompted this rather alarming turn of events either, but I'm taking my shotgun to work with me from now on.

Love,
Eugene

New ambient occlusion, dynamic shadows, improved character lighting, mass character rendering, improved water and soft body physics, additional blood and bullet decals, advanced destructible environments, weather effects, and the introduction of fluid objects make Chompers the Rockworm happy.

Meet the Locust Kantus – he loves poison grenades, reviving fallen comrades, and long walks through the blasted remains of your old neighbourhood.

SPOILS OF WAR

The Limited Edition of *Gears 2* will ship in a collectible SteelBook case, and include a 48-page hardback book entitled *Beneath the Surface: An Inside Look at Gears of War 2*, a bonus content DVD, an exclusive, locked, gold-plated Lancer rifle for online play, and a keepsake photograph of Dom and his girl. Meanwhile, whispered rumours claiming the existence of some sort of outrageously expensive, super-ultra, mega-special $140 Amazon-exclusive edition that bundles in a full-scale replica Lancer were recently confirmed by Microsoft. Tragically, this offer does not appear to extend to South Africa.

4 February

Dear Mum,
Still stranded. These unprovoked raids on my watch post have become a daily occurrence. Constantly repairing my turrets is becoming exceedingly tedious, and has put me in an almost permanently sour mood. On Monday, the COG fascists managed to drag me halfway across town before I taught them otherwise. This flag guy would turn up for the meeting already, so I just leave me the hell alone. Must go. It looks like there's a fresh Locust rabble gathering down the street, and I need to reload the shotgun

Love
Eugene

P.S. What's "tea bagging"?

Give someone a facelift
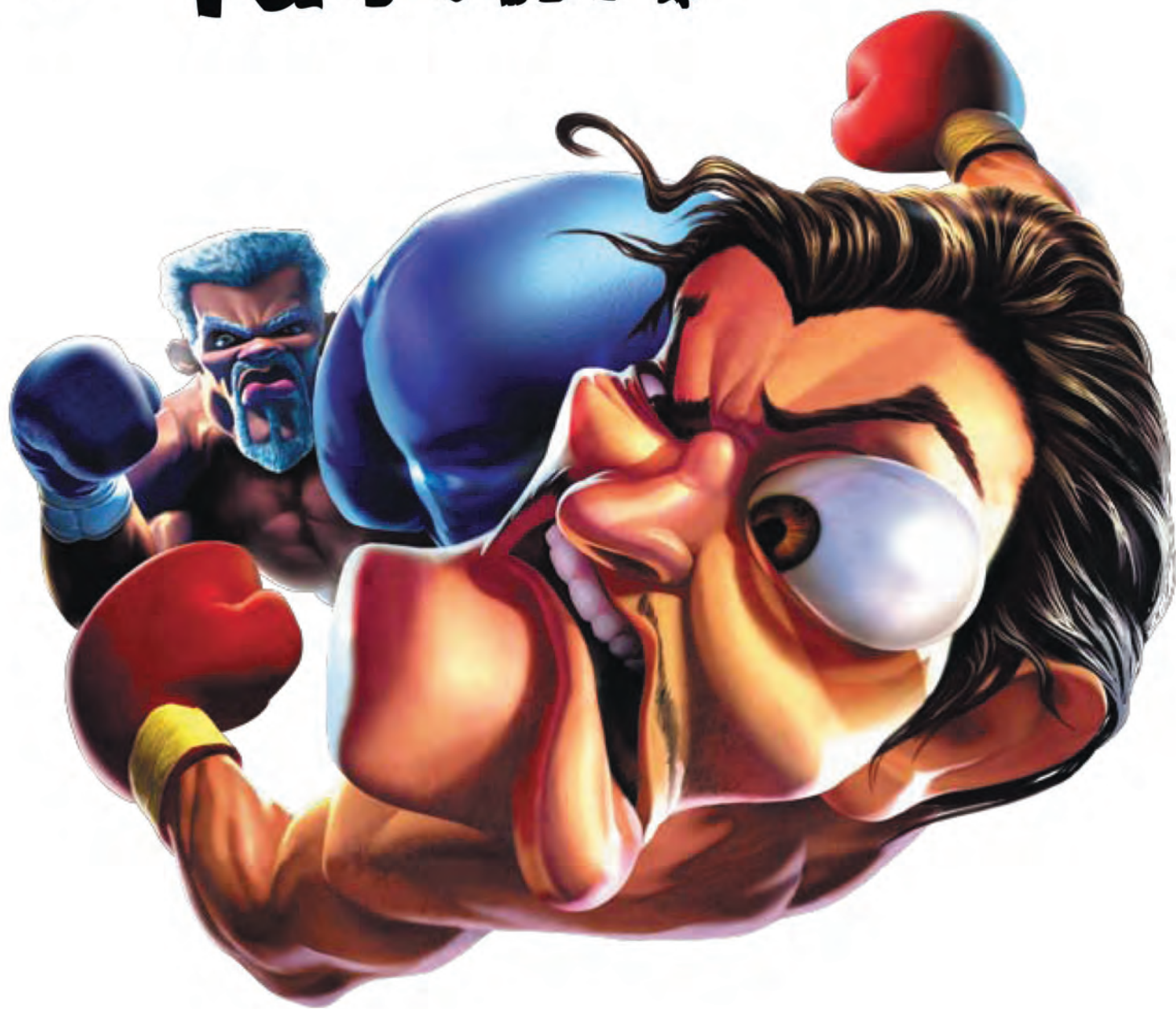
FaceBreaker™

Break our characters' faces,

or one of your own.

Introducing a riotous new tribe of distinctive characters lining up for a bashing. Upload photos to create your own ring-side opponents or capture friends directly from your webcam, ready for the slaughter. So whether it's an embarrassing dad or terrible teacher, watch the hilarious disfigurement as you throw that final punch – The FaceBreaker.

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WHAT WE WANT

POW! KER-NAG!!

AMERICAN MCGEE'S GRIMM [PC]

When you stand still, lead protagonist Grimm starts to pee. It's not just infantile – the arc of urine shows the exact height and distance you can jump. The game's premise is simple: as you wander around the fairytale, you corrupt the pastel blues and greens into horrible purples and blacks, tainting the environment and changing the natives from happy folk to demented folk. It's all cheeky Grimm fun set in the stories of *The Boy Who Learns What Fear Is*, *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Fisherman and His Wife*, each with chunky, Burton-inspired visuals.

TITAN QUEST 2 [PC]

Since Iron Lore has closed its doors, this is unlikely. Yes, we're excited about *Diablo III*, but *Titan Quest* had its own charm that even 'the Return of the Demonic King' doesn't have.

SPACE INVADERS GET EVEN [WIIWARE]

This time, you sit in the cockpit of the alien mother ship, raining down all sorts of pixel hell on the poor inhabitants of Earth. It's in 3D, but the Pikmin-like swarms of Invaders remain the 2D iconography of the series. You move the mother ship around, dropping different types of attacks on the defences Earth erects. Looks cute and fun!

GALAGA LEGIONS [XBLA]

Same mechanics but new nuances, this reinvents the classic to new, eye-blisteringly colourful heights. Developed by the capable Pac-Man Championship Edition team, can *Galaga* hold its own in a market super-saturated by the new colours practically invented from scratch by *Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2*?

WALLACE & GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES

Developer→ Telltale Games | **Publisher→** TBA | **Genre→** Adventure | **Release Date→** TBA

IT'S HARD NOT TO like *Wallace & Gromit*. The series of short films that brought fame to the cheese-loving duo captured the hearts of all who watched them, and later paved the way for a couple of fairly poorly-performing action-puzzle platform games and a collection of desktop mini-games. As fun as the previous games were, they failed to convey the wit and quirk of the series, a problem that Telltale Games is well on the path to remedy.

Straight from the first visual, *Wallace & Gromit's Grand Adventures* looks just right: Telltale Games is no stranger to point-and-click adventure games, thanks to the extremely well-received *Sam &Max*

series. Playing as both Wallace and his faithful sidekick Gromit, players will be faced with a range of puzzles and challenges, many of them requiring the assembly of the typical zany contraptions the inventor is famous for. Telltale is paying special attention to the depiction of the world originally created by Nick Park and the rest of Aardman Animations, ensuring that the game maintains the look and feel of Claymation by working closely with the creators. Like *Sam & Max, Wallace & Gromit* will be episodic, a distribution scheme that is rapidly growing in appeal for both developers and gamers alike.. **NAG**

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

MADWORLD

Developer→ Platinum Games
Publisher→ SEGA | **Genre→** Action Brawler
Release Date→ TBA

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

YOU ARE JACK. YOU'VE somehow landed yourself on a television show called "Death Watch," in which you have to fight to survive. *MadWorld* can best be described as *Manhunt*'s violence forming an unholy coalition with *Sin City*'s visual style. And it's on the Wii.

The unique black-and-white presentation of the game is more often than not dotted by obscene amounts of the crimson-red blood of slain enemies. The default weapon in Jack's arsenal is a chainsaw, but much of the environment can be used as weapons. Road signs can be snatched up and jammed into enemies' skulls, while commentators provide running commentary of your actions, filled with the necessary puns and one-liners to add to the hilarity of it all. Jack can use his chainsaw to literally slice and dice through his enemies, often with an insanely gruesome outcome. Button presses mostly control standard combat, but finishing moves will require some manly waggle to pull off. One such move the developers have showed involved dual swords, a jabbing motion with the Wii remote and Nunchuk (thrusting said swords into the opponent's torso), followed by a separation of the arms, which is likewise translated into the game... The results need no explanation.

The game is being developed by Platinum Games (a team comprised of former members of Clover Studios, responsible for *Okami*, *Viewtiful Joe* and more) and this is definitely one title you're going to want to keep an eye on. **NAG**

Dane Remendes
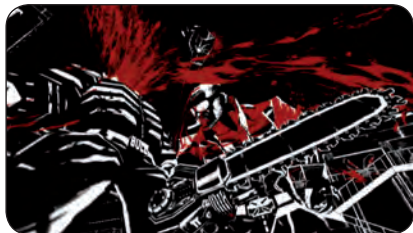
MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2: FUSION

Developer→ Vicarious Visions
Publisher→ Activision | **Genre→** Action RPG
Release Date→ Q1 2009

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

VICARIOUS VISIONS, THE NEW York-based developer behind the PSP and Wii versions of *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*, as well as a host of ports of other Activision titles, has now been given the reigns for the creation of *Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2: Fusion*.

MUA2 will see 24 Marvel superheroes battle it out in an effort to save the world from a super-terrorist threat from the fictional nation of Latveria, ruled by the iron-faced Doctor Doom. Sticking with an updated version of the now six-year-old Alchemy engine, the game will allow players to put together a small team of superheroes, controlling one at a time, with the unselected heroes controlled by the game's AI. Players will be able to upgrade and kit out their heroes with a wide range of equipment and special abilities, and the game features an XP and character-levelling system.

The key new element in *MUA2* is hinted at by the game's subtitle: the ability to fuse the character's superpowers together to form a unique, ultimate superpower. The developers claim that every hero will be able to combine at least one power with every other hero, which could make for some incredibly entertaining multiplayer gaming sessions. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows
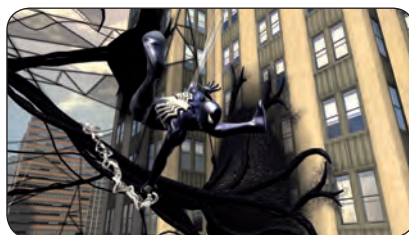
SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS

Developer→ Shaba Games
Publisher→ Activision | **Genre→** Action
Release Date→ Q4 2008

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

SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS is based on an original story inspired by the comic books rather than the films. Venom has found a way to clone himself by infecting the civilians of New York. This causes a world of trouble for the web-head because suddenly he has a throng of symbiotic-empowered foes gunning for him. To top it all off, Spider-Man has also been infected by the symbiotic menace. What this means is more of the on-the-fly costume switching seen in the *Spider-Man 3* game. While the red-and-black outfit grants Spider-Man increased agility, the black suit turns him into a devastating powerhouse in combat. However, the way you use the different costumes determines how characters around the world perceive you. Use the black suit more often, and you're more likely to attract villains to aid you in your cause. Use the traditional outfit, and other heroes from the Marvel universe will enter the fray by your side. Expect to be able to fight against or team up with iconic Marvel characters such as Wolverine. Aerial combat and side-of-building battles have been streamlined, while web swinging has been simplified for those of you who thought it was a bit problematic in *Spider-Man 3*. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE SIMS 2 APARTMENT LIFE

Developer→ EA Games
Publisher→ Electronic Arts | **Genre→** Simulation
Release Date→ Q3 2008

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

A S MANY PEOPLE ARE no-doubt aware, expansion packs are the main driving force behind the overwhelming sales figures for both the *Sims 2* and its predecessor. Now, marking number eight in the onslaught of expansions (not counting the nine stuff packs), *Apartment Life* is set to give virtual home executives not only new toys to play with, but even more ways to interact with your Sims and their neighbours.

The more attentive readers may have already figured out the premise behind *Apartment Life*. If you haven't, here's the scoop. Those wacky Sims will now have the ability to buy and kit out a single apartment, further pushing the student angle as started in *University*, and widening the big city socialite approach we've seen adopted in *Night Life*. In addition to the new social dynamic of living on top of your neighbours, *Apartment Life* will bring with it a slew of content for you to get your greedy paws on. To add to the ever-present supernatural theme, your Sims will now be able to become witches, complete with their very own witch's cat if you have the *Pets* expansions. Butlers also (finally) make an appearance, so your preppy/lazy/extremely wealthy Sim can take it easy on the deck while their manservant brings them trays of martinis.

With the next sequel around the corner, this will likely be the last of the expansions for the *Sims 2*. It seems like they've implemented a few 'save-it-'til-the-end' gameplay elements, not to mention the Good Charlotte-featuring soundtrack you can bop your head to while you're shopping for that perfect converted loft. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

WANTED

Developer→ Grin
Publisher→ Universal Studios | **Genre→** Action
Release Date→ TBA

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

W *ANTED* IS BASED ON a movie, which is in turn based on a comic. Epic disaster could be on the cards here, but when you read up on the premise behind *Wanted*, you'll realise that this is perfect for a videogame adaptation.

Without wanting to unleash any film plot spoilers, I'll keep it simple: you play as Wesley, a nerd turned ultimate badass and member of a secret society of assassins. The game begins directly where the movie ended, with the developers calling it "Wanted 1.5," given that it continues the story told in the comics but doesn't serve as a true sequel. Players guide Wesley on a quest to find out the truth about his mother. Cue assassinations of copious amounts of enemies stupid enough to stand in your way and you have *Wanted* clocked. Based on an updated version of Grin's Diesel Engine, the game features a cover system that works a little differently from those you've seen before. Expect to be rewarded for making quick dashes between areas of cover as bullets graze by your jugular. You can also initiate "Assassin Time" (very original) from behind cover, which will slow down time and let you target enemies with ease. Expect plenty of bullet-curving action as you mow down the bad guys. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

THE WHEELMAN

Developer→ Tigon Studios
Publisher→ Midway | **Genre→** Action Driving
Release Date→ Q1 2009

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

M USCLE-BOUND MEATHEAD AND CLOSET geek, Vin Diesel, together with Tigon Studios – the Diesel-powered developers responsible for *Riddick* – have been hard at work creating the latest game to join the swelling ranks of the get-a-car-and-smash-things genre. Set to parallel the movie of the same name, *Wheelman* will give the player control over Milo Burik, seasoned driver and go-to guy when you need a package delivered or a quick getaway.

Taking place in the bustling metropolis of Barcelona, the game will challenge players to put Burik's driving expertise to the test through a combination of free-city driving and *Burnout*-inspired stunts, all while ensuring the success of the mission at hand. Players will also have a chance to take to the streets on foot; though don't expect the action to drop a notch when that happens: Burik is no sissy when it comes to gunplay either.

Of course, the real allure of this game will be the insane stunts that players are expected to carry out. Burik can fire his weapons with deadly accuracy while you fling your ride through the air at oncoming traffic thanks to the "Steerable Targeting" system. While many action-orientated driving games put emphasis on the skill required to pull off some of the crazier stunts, Tigon Studios has taken the high road to accessibility since to assist players in feeling as if they're performing incredible feats of gamepad prowess with only a button press or two. That's not to say the game will be easy, but that most people willing to put some effort into the game will be rewarded with cinematic splendour and delightful aerial acrobatics. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

"Be careful when you fight the monsters, lest you become one."
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
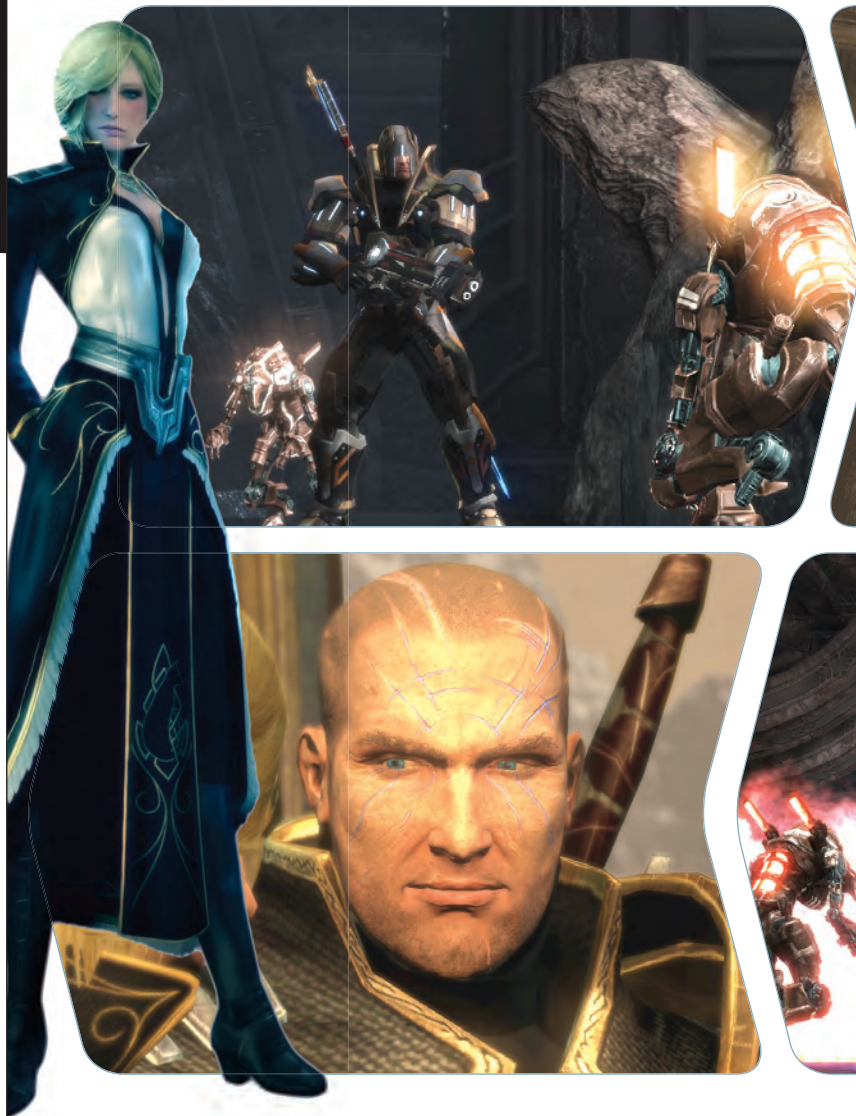
TOO HUMAN

TOO HUMAN HAS BEEN described as *Diablo* (not entirely accurate) with lasers (well swords, hammers and guns really). It's the first in a trilogy (could be good news or bad news) and has an original enough story to tell (as original as these things go). In the gaming industry, what sounds good on paper can go either way when it comes to the final product. *Too Human* is an odd one: it's compelling and annoying, interesting and irritating, addictive and repetitive - all at the same time. However, before we probe further, let's find out why we're here in the first place.

Now, although there are plenty of dramatic video sequences laced with many lines of engaging dialogue and interesting characters, and important stuff happening all the time, the actual plot/background is a tad hard to follow. If you're a little slow or don't pay attention in life, much of the on-screen drama is going to sail way over the top of your head. If this does happen to you, then the rest of the video bits are going to annoy and seem too long and not worth watching. So wake up and watch closely. In *Too Human*, you play Baldur, a god. In this alternative game world, gods are humans

with cybernetic enhancements. Baldur, not entirely sure if he should abandon his humanity and go completely cybernetic, isn't currently 'enhanced' enough and is therefore viewed by the others as too human. Or something like that (yes, I know, I wasn't paying attention). A little into the game, players are offered a choice between cybernetic or human customisation paths, which has a bearing on which weapons can be used, fighting styles and so on – something to take note of if you intend on playing through the game a second or third time. There's also a lot of Norse mythology tossed into the salad bowl. We have three witches, a tree of life that allows access to Cyberspace (a view of the world before it became all metal and grey) and there're characters like Thor, Loki and Odin too. The game is essentially about these gods protecting the humans from the machines. But do remember, if you buy this game make sure you read the story introduction bit in the manual and pay attention or you're going to miss the point of it all. Then again, you can ignore the story and just plough your way through the action until the final (and by that stage very confusing) end-video sequence.

HANDS ON TESTED

LOOTING AND ROOTING

Right, enough with the background. *Too Human* is a third-person RPG with loot collecting, creature killing and skill assigning action. The levels are a little drab but have a distinct life about them with smoking bits in the mix, some vibrating sections and occasional partial level destruction. There are secret areas, moving platforms and even jump pads. Fortunately, there's enough decent variation in the later levels that'll stop you thinking they rushed the end of the game. In the case of *Too Human*, it appears that they rushed the start of the game as things start out bland and then keep improving. The enemies are primarily a mixture of robots, the Borg, with a little id Software styling as flesh blends with machine. In the early stages, the enemy is more robotic, but towards the end this shifts to reanimated corpses with even more id Software inspiration. Onto the loot... It's all pretty unexceptional – one sword looks like another and the pair of boots you had on originally look a lot like the ones you're wearing now (or are they actually the same and you forgot to change them?). Another problem - sometimes
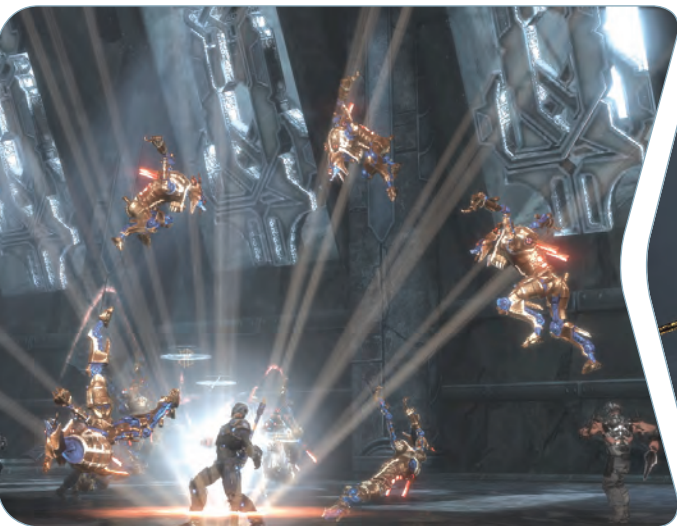
REPLAY

Many games boast replay value but few ever deliver. *Too Human* actually offers a lot to those players who complete the game. Once you finish it, you can start it all again at the character level you ended it on (provided you're using the same class). Playing through the single-player game will get you to around level 25, so if you start again, you'll start at whatever level you ended on, but the monsters will also increase in potency so it won't be a cakewalk. The levels are also full of secret areas and Cyberspace is also worth revisiting. Add to this five character classes and a diverse skill tree, the choice between human and cybernetic paths, and you've got more than enough reasons to play it through a few times. Also note that the final level cap in *Too Human* is 50. For the second instalment it'll be 100 and then for the final, 150. Silicone Knights has a long-term plan for *Too Human*, so enjoy the ride.

The following Google Talk chat history with minor editing for spelling and grammar (you should have seen the mess before it was tweaked) probably best describes the whole experience.

Tarryn: "So how is *Too Human*?"
Michael: "Just okay actually... ; (A little too repetitive..."
Tarryn: "Is the camera still so shitty?"
Michael: "Yes... There's also lots of running around doing the same thing - a lot. It's good but needs less padding and more variation. I'm like 38% done..."
Tarryn: "I don't really mind repetition if the loot is good :P"

Michael: "I feel more punished in the game than rewarded... so you get lots of loot but it only increases your potency a little at a go - there's no period where you get to feel like a god... Then there's the inane running around Cyberspace - you can't sprint and you can get lost so you get fed up quickly. Also, the bad guys are now starting to get tiresome - same monsters."
Tarryn: "Oh, now that's just sloppy. :/"
Michael: "It'll keep playing for the next three nights..."
Tarryn: "Sigh. If only Iron lore hadn't gone under. I was so looking forward to *Titan Quest 2*. :(They totally knew how to do the hack 'n' slash.)"
Michael: "Now that was a good game - did all the

right things."
Tarryn: "Yeah. Awesome loot, varied monsters, themed locations. Perfect."
Michael: "You also felt like a hero - I think in *Too Human* this is the greatest failing. You feel like you suck and it's just a plod to get through the game. Add this to the simplistic stick twirling [read button mashing] action and it all falls apart. It does have a few good points... But the negative swings the scale in the wrong direction."
Tarryn: "What a ←bleep→ pity. I was really looking forward to it. :("
Michael: "Good stuff... the sci-fi bit linked with the Norse stuff - not that I know squat about that mythology. Look - give it a go - you can review it and

you'll pick up items that you can't use because you're only a level 20 and need to be a 24. Although this is a good hook to keep playing, your inventory does have its limits. Then we get to the inventory system itself. It's confusing to use initially, but eventually you'll get used to it - but you know what they say about one man's intuitive design... It's a pity that most of the stuff you pick up looks the same and it would have been much better to offer fewer items but with more variety. There are five character classes to choose from and a skill tree that you can assign points to after levelling up – it's pretty standard stuff but there are restrictions within the illusion of choice. Thankfully, you can reset the assigned skills for a very small fee and try again. It's important to try a few combinations because a tweak here and there can really change how effective you are in combat. All of this is again linked to which class you select, because some are better at melee combat while others are better at long-range attacks – the usual story.

DEVIL MAY YAWN
Too Human does for thumb twirling what fighting games do for button mashing. The left stick moves your character around and the right stick directs your attacks. It's a little unorthodox in terms of 'standard tradition', but practice does make perfect. Stick combinations of left and right and in both directions initiate different types of attacks, while holding in the trigger buttons fires your ballistic or laser weapon. It's also possible to swipe an enemy into the air and then whip out your guns and finish him/her/it off while they're suspended helplessly in the air. This is great fun and will remind more-rounded gamers of *Devil May Cry*. Besides swords, hammers, staffs and guns, you have a little spider robot that, when charged up, can be directed into battle for a limited period (there's some irony in having a robot kill the other robots). It's all rather frantic and involved, but at the same time can be too repetitive. End of the day, *Too Human* certainly ends up offering players the goods with a lot of action and a lot to kill (which can never be a bad thing, right?).

While this preview might sound a little negative overall, *Too Human* certainly has that special magical hook that'll keep you playing right until the end. If it were a little more polished, it would be a masterpiece of a game; but as it stands right now, it's a very mixed bag that'll appeal to fans of the genre and should provide ample entertainment with enough to do and see to justify the money spent when it finally ends up in the shops. There's also a two-player online cooperative mode, so hooray for that... **NAG**

Michael James

NAG

LEFT 4 DEAD

IT IS ONE OF the great injustices of the gaming industry that a sell-out like Mario should be considered its mascot before the humble zombie. The latter, after all, appears in almost every videogame ever made, and has dutifully lain down before players' swords, shotguns, chainsaws, and rocket launchers without complaint. Furthermore, the zombie is clearly the superior orator. His "Join us in death" and "Your flesh tastes so sweet" are a great deal more compelling than a barrage of insipid one-liners ("Wahoo", "Let's-a go!", "It's-a me!"). Were I to choose an Ambassador for Videogaming, the zombie would surely be it. Valve clearly agrees, for they've chosen to inject their upcoming co-op shooter, *Left 4 Dead*, with more zombies than a certain pompous plumber could ever hope to upstage.

Joyously, they're also making quite an interesting game out of it. With *Left 4 Dead*, Valve's Marketing chief, Doug Lombardi, explains that they're trying to bridge the divide between single- and multiplayer experiences. "Right now," he says, "you see games like *Crysis* or *Half-Life 2* really focusing on the single player, and the narrative experience, and all these really dramatic moments. Big set pieces and stuff. Then you have multiplayer games – *Counter-Strike, Team*

Fortress 2, or even, you know, *World of WarCraft*, to some extent. There, people are having a very social experience, playing with their friends, forming guilds, building community pages, and all that kind of stuff that's more like Facebook than a game, if you will. And what *Left 4 Dead* is trying to do is sort of tie those two things together – we want to give you the dramatic moments and tense experiences that characterise traditional single-player games, but also allow you to do that with your friends, and have a really re-playable co-op experience. A lot of co-op games right now – you know, you shoot through them once, and when you go back, you realise that, basically, everything was scripted and you're basically on a rail."

Left 4 Dead is mitigating – perhaps even eliminating – this problem by allowing a clever AI system to govern how the game progresses. Apparently forgetting to take advantage of the opportunity to use the term "Zombie Puppet master," they've decided to call it "The Director." "With *Left 4 Dead*," Lombardi continues, "everything is done procedurally. The Director is yet another AI that's in charge of managing the other AIs and scheduling things like sounds, waves of zombie hordes, and boss monsters. So, for example, if you're playing through one of

the hospital 'movies' – we're calling levels 'movies' - and you're in a particular area headed to the rooftops of the hospital, if your team has been doing great, you know that last journey up to the top of the rooftops is going to be laden with people trying to take you out. If, on the other hand, you're just barely hobbling your way up there to that finale on top of the hospital, the stairwells and whatnot will be fairly empty. That's oversimplifying the dynamic nature of it a bit, but there you go."

Oversimplification or not, what this means is that not only will players get a different experience every time they play *Left 4 Dead*, but the game will tailor itself to players' combined level of skill and pace. It's these innovations that are necessary to revitalise relatively underused co-op gameplay, Valve reasons, but Lombardi has a simpler explanation as to why you don't see more of it in games: "It's hard. It's really hard to do, and number two, it's not commercially proven! You're living in an age when all the publishers are controlling all the money for development, and when someone comes in and says, 'Oh we wanna do this co-op thing,' they're going to say, 'Great, what can we compare it to; what can we do to make a forecast and estimate how much money we can spend on this?' And if you say, 'Well, it's never been done before,

and that's a cool hook,' they say, 'Oh, well, then it's a risk.'"

As you might be able to tell, Valve isn't bothering with creating a separate single-player component to compensate for *Left 4 Dead*'s risky premise. You'll be able to play with bots if friends or broadband are in short supply, but it's obvious that the focus is online play. "There're three modes," Lombardi outlines. "There's the primary mode, which is what we're calling the 'Movie Mode', where it's one to four players playing as the survivors - the human characters. You play a campaign there, and can save your progress and come back later with your friends if you need to. The AI controls all the zombies there. Then we have the skirmish mode, which is like a quick, drop-in version of Movie Mode. It's a single-map kind of thing, rather than the campaigns; a 15-to-20-minute kinda thing.

"Then we have versus mode, which is what we're not calling 'deathmatch'. There, you have four boss monsters to play as – the Smoker, the Hunter, the Tank and the Boomer – and each of those guys has a mutated superhero ability. The Boomer is a big fat guy with a belly full of gas; if you shoot him too close to yourself, he acts like a human grenade and blows up everything around you. He can also vomit on people,

and then his vomit summons the common infected on people. So, when you're playing that side, really, what you're trying to do is just be distractive and disruptive. And then on the survivors' side, it's very much about getting from point 'A' to point 'B', so it's a little more mission-orientated. There's an objective on the survivors' side. And on the zombie side, well, it's a griefer's paradise. You just have to be this disruptive jerk. That's your role. So all those guys on the *Counter-Strike* servers who like doing that, well, *Left 4 Dead* is their new favourite game."

With the elusive, disruptive jerk market cornered, one can only hope Valve can the make the game tantalising enough for those of us who don't hate the world. They certainly have a lot on their side – the refining of the sorely neglected co-op genre should be instantly appealing to those who were disappointed by what was on offer in *Army of Two* and *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men*. And its re-playability ensures that even though the game does employ a set campaign structure, it's still procedural enough to guarantee new thrills each time it runs. Oh, yeah, and zombies. Love them zombies. **NAG**

Alexander Gambotto-Burke

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

PRINCE OF PERSIA

WHEN THE *PRINCE OF* *Persia* series relaunched with *The Sands of Time* in 2003, Ubisoft brought the world of ancient Arabic chivalry and adventure to a new generation of gamers; one that expected bucket loads of eye candy and game dynamic innovations at every turn. Nothing could have prepared this impatient generation for what was released: *Prince of Persia* made a comeback that surpassed all expectations.

For the uninitiated, the *Sands of Time* trilogy took the platform-leaping and scimitar-poking 2D action of the original series and brought it into the wide-open world of 3D. However, this wasn't the first attempt at seeing the Prince in all three dimensions: the original publishers completed the first trilogy with *Prince of Persia 3D*, but the title suffered from numerous bugs and ownership battles, which ultimately saw the demise of the game. The second trilogy, under new ownership and with a renewed focus, gave the Prince tons of new combat tricks and vast puzzle-like environments to interact with via his acrobatic approach to adventuring.

Now setting the stage for the third trilogy, *Paradox*, Ubisoft is preparing players for yet another revision of the Prince and the world he inhabits alike. Paradox will not continue from where *Sands of Time* left off: the setting and world are different this time round, and the Prince

himself is officially "not the same Prince as before." So much so, that he's not even a Prince. The player takes on the role of a vagabond adventurer, one more concerned with fine wine, women and song than saving the day or even the princess, as was the case in the very first *PoP*. With no royal heritage to speak of, no crowns to wear and no bejewelled daggers to wave about in the hope of rewinding time, what drives the Prince to rise up and save the day?

To start, we need the mandatory bad guy and his evil hold on the land. No problem. Enter the Lord of Darkness, Ahriman. After an almost endless battle with his lighter counterpart, Ormuzd, Ahriman is spewing his vile darkness throughout the world, corrupting all that it touches. This Corruption taints both the living and the land they inhabit, killing all in its way – or turning those who are prepared to give up their immortal souls to the Dark lord. The premise is sound, and boils down to one essential factor: if the Prince wants to make the most of his hard-earned treasure chests full of gold, he's going to need some place left in which to spend them.

Next station on the storyline express is a love interest: something that's been a key element since the dawn of the series. As was seen in the previous trilogy, the Prince tends to pick women who can take care of themselves. A powerful warrior and magician, Elika, will travel with the Prince during his adventures, usually by his side.

For the more discerning gamers out there, you may be a tad concerned that you'll now have yet another daft AI character to babysit, but you'd be wrong. The developers have assured us that not only will Elika not get stuck, fall off nearby cliffs or in any way hold up the Prince's progress unnecessarily, but she will be so infused with the game-dynamic elements that you'll soon wonder how you ever managed without her.

Yet another large leap towards the ocean of independence comes in the form of the art direction for the game. Sitting (rather comfortably) somewhere between *Final Fantasy* and *Assassin's Creed*, the game looks fantastic. Level design has taken a right turn into the growing realm of freeform exploration, and is more open than ever before. While previous games in the series did allow the player to do a little sightseeing, it was mostly in the form of puzzle backtracking and running away from the big teleporting monsters. Now the player will be faced with truly open-ended level exploration, and will be able to interact with the Corruption as it spreads - in real time - through the game world, changing the environment as the player progresses.

Prince of Persia, with all its grand visuals, open landscapes and innovative approach to 'sidekicks', looks set to not only honour the six games before it, but to take the series to a whole new level of magic, intrigue and 'buckled swashes'. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

NAG

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FALLEN KING

It seems that Ubisoft is finally taking the Nintendo DS more seriously, perhaps now that it finally represents a mature system with proven staying power. An independent storyline from its next-gen big brother, *The Fallen King* uses the stylus input of the Nintendo DS to control the acrobatic (and oddly hyper-cute) Prince and his new, partially corrupted buddy, Magus. The Prince has fled to a deserted kingdom infected with the evil Corruption (visually represented by black ooze, as these things usually are) and there finds "adventure, challenge and intrigue" according to Ubisoft's Casablanca studio.

The stylus is used to control all aspects of the game, including fighting and strategy. You can switch between the Prince and Magus, using the latter's magical powers to solve puzzles and fight. While the game takes its cues from the next-gen art direction (and then proceeds to dial up the adorable for no good reason other than perhaps to lure in the younger generation) and setting, that's where the similarities end. Game videos released thus far show what looks to be a solid side-scrolling platform adventure. You use the stylus to attack enemies, slashing away. Tapping on them destroys incoming boulders, while other hazards can be dragged away from the Prince. Boss fights fill up the dual screens and the game features a grapple move where you navigate around the level by tapping on specific points.

MORE THAN JUST AN AUTO-SAVE SYSTEM

With the time-controlling powers of the Sands of Time no longer on the cards, Ubisoft decided that they needed an equally compelling game mechanic to make the new trilogy not only stand on its own, but rival the former in innovation. Elika is that mechanic. Gone are the days of failing to make that jump by a few inches: Elika's there to pull you out. If you do miss a jump, Elika will plunge her magical hand down to save you, depositing you neatly on a nearby platform for you to make the attempt again. She's not just there as a gimmick though. Since she's always present, even in combat, Elika and the Prince fight and explore in tandem. She'll be available to assist the Prince in much of the puzzle-solving and leveraging they'll be faced with during their adventures, as well as provide a guiding hand when the Prince is looking a little lost.

FINISH HIM!

While the original *Mortal Kombat* characters and the villains of the DC universe will all have their own unique and bloody fatalities (this is a *Mortal Kombat* game after all), DC's heroes will have less violent, yet supposedly brutal finishers of their own, dubbed "brutalities." Could this mean kittens purring enemies into submission? More importantly, this is the first game in the franchise that won't be rated as Mature. And finally, here's a list of the current confirmed characters: Scorpion, Sub-Zero, Shang Tsung, Sonya Blade, Liu Kang, Kitana, Jax, Superman, Batman, Catwoman, The Flash, Shazam, The Joker and the Green Lantern. More will surely follow.

MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

WHEN *MORTAL KOMBAT VS.* DC Universe was first announced, it sparked some controversy. How could the fighters from the Mortal Kombat universe ever hope to take on the superheroes of DC? Scorpion taking on Superman does seem a tad unbalanced, doesn't it? Given that we're dealing with two fantastical universes, the developers have a world of possibilities open to them to come up with an explanation for all this madness. Given that they're working closely with DC, I'm sure they'll think of something.

The game introduces a few changes to the game mechanics of previous *MK* titles, adding a new 'Freefall Kombat' system to the usual close-quarters combat fans know and love. The game's arenas have multiple levels to them, so you can tackle an opponent off the edge of a platform, causing him/her to fall to a lower level of the arena. This is where the Freefall Kombat kicks in. While you're falling, you'll still need to overpower your opponent, fighting to stay on top and use your enemy to cushion your fall. The combos are not going to be as complex as in previous *MK* games, meaning you won't have to memorise never-ending sequences of button presses just to get your character to spit in the general direction of your enemy. The developers have stated that the combat is similar to *MKII* and they are experimenting with using the D-pad to control a character's movement, which would eliminate the 3D movement the series has enjoyed recently and return to classic 2D movement (even though they're using the Unreal Engine 3). They've also altered the series' staple two-punch and two-kick attacks, instead crafting a control system that opts for four general-attack buttons, which will be used to tap into the unique powers wielded by the new DC characters. Every move a character can perform has an enhanced version of itself called a "Pro-Move." A successful execution of one of these manoeuvres will give you that all-important edge in a tight battle, giving you an extra second to dish out some pain. On top of that, each character has a range of special moves, such as Batman's ability to toss batarangs at his enemies. Characters will become battered and bruised as the fight rages on, and this will be reflected visually. Batman will be covered in blood and his costume will become tattered and torn if the fight isn't going his way, Scorpion's spine will become exposed and even Superman will start looking a little worse for wear as blows find their mark.

There's no doubt that this game is looking good, and at the very least it should be loads of fun to play. Who wouldn't want to see Sonya smack Flash into a stupor? **NAG**

Dane Remendes

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DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

WE CAN'T WAIT TO see "B4tm4n69" and "Supermanmanman132" duke it out in the sky over Metropolis. But seriously, it's no surprise that the success of the iconic superhero/villain MMO *City of Heroes/Villains* would spur the big comic vendors on to create their own unique brands of cash-cows. We are surprised that it took this long.

First out of the gates is DC Comics with *DC Universe Online*, in development at Sony Entertainment Europe Austin in collaboration with Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. *DCUO* will let players create their own customised superheroes or villains to fight for good or evil alongside the big names in the DC Universe. So no, you don't get to be the Flash or Superman, that'd just be silly.

"The rich, storied world of DC Comics has never been available to players like this before," said John Smedley, president of SOE. "For the first time, gamers can actually open the door and step into the vast world of DC Comics and choose their own fate. Who wouldn't want to infiltrate Batman's cave or fly over Metropolis as you speed toward a mission to help Superman?"

The game will have a unique physics-based combat system, which will allow all sorts of interesting new combat mechanics for an MMO. Players can grab a bus to use as a projectile or melee weapon, or freeze rivals into ice cubes using their power ring and then using the iced foes as ammunition to hurl at the Daily Planet building.

"This is a big step forward for DC Comics because it really expands how our fans can participate in the DC Universe," said Paul Levitz, president and publisher of DC Comics. "Working with our colleagues at Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and the talented folks at SOE, *DC Universe Online* is going to provide a dramatic new setting for the DC world to grow and unfold."

DCUO will encompass every corner

Smug? Moi!?
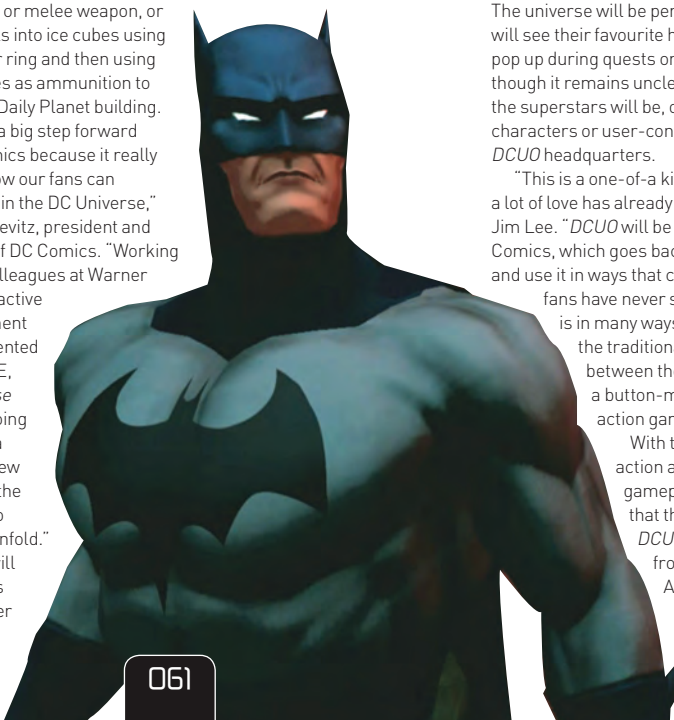
of the DC universe, from Gotham City to Arkham Asylum, Batman to Blue Beetle. The universe will be persistent and gamers will see their favourite heroes and villains pop up during quests or city-wide events, though it remains unclear just how involved the superstars will be, or if they'll be AI characters or user-controlled from inside the *DCUO* headquarters.

"This is a one-of-a kind type of game, and a lot of love has already gone into it," added Jim Lee. "*DCUO* will be able to tap into DC Comics, which goes back more than 70 years, and use it in ways that comic and gaming fans have never seen before. *DCUO* is in many ways a reinvention of the traditional MMO; it's a hybrid between the traditional MMO and a button-mashing, console-action game."

With the emphasis on action and physics-based gameplay, one can only hope that through some miracle *DCUO* will be playable from this side of the Atlantic. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

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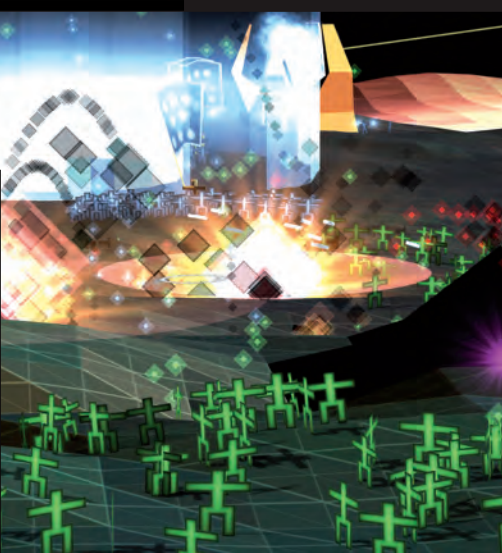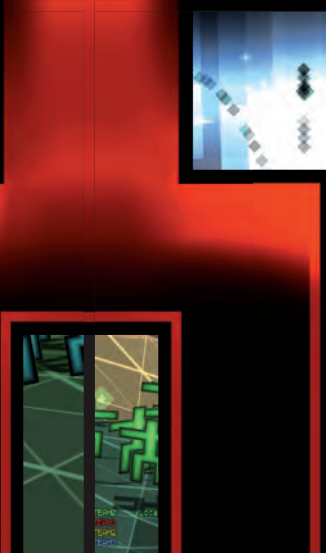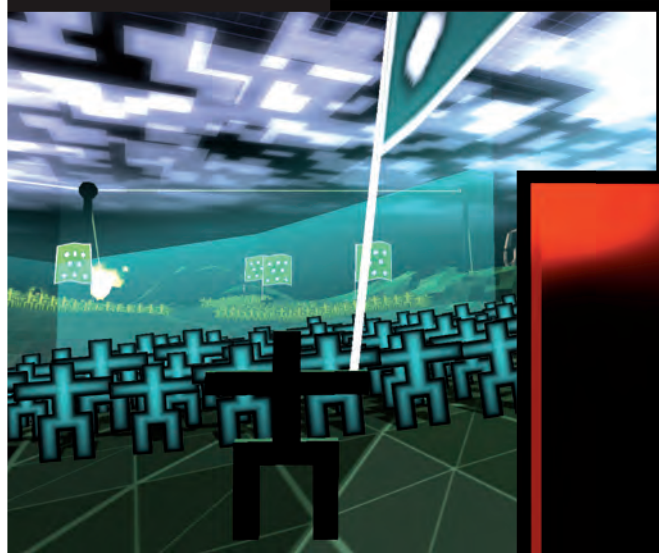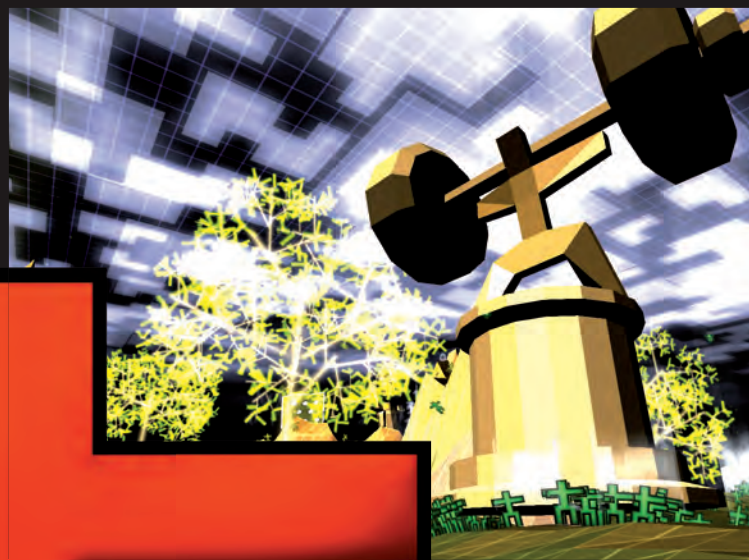
MULTIWINIA: SURVIVAL OF THE FLATTEST

*"**LONG AGO, A COMPUTER** scientist called Dr Sepulveda created a beautiful digital world existing entirely within a computer network of his own invention. This world was called Darwinia and it was inhabited by a peaceful, law-abiding, digital life form called the Darwinians."*

Then, the computer network became infected with a virus, and in steps the player with his squad of badass pixels, exterminating the infection with lasers and grenades. Virus free, the Darwinians are happy and thus concludes the events of *Darwinia*, a game that remains a firm favourite for its gnarly aesthetic and *Cannon Fodder*-inspired game dynamic.

"As the years wore on, however, the Darwinians became ever more aggressive and autonomous. They divided into factions, squabbling over Darwinia's limited natural resources. Tribes began to roam the fractal voids, hell-bent on each other's destruction, drunk on power and unswerving in the pursuit of world supremacy. Far and wide, they became known as the Multiwinians...."

Essentially the 'missing' multiplayer component to *Darwinia*, this retro-arcade bundle of game modes tickles your wildest stickman, digital-holocaust slaughter fantasies. Introversion was kind enough to send us preview code containing two of the planned six game modes: King of the Hill and Capture the Statue. Up to four players can play in most modes: online, LAN or against (admittedly stupid) AI opponents.

The former plays out as you would expect. Demarcated zones on the map are where you need to funnel your Multiwinians by promoting units at the spawn locations (which constantly pump out Multiwinians in bursts). Promoted units can tell nearby units to either "Form up" or "Move over there." So essentially, there are only two types of units: Multiwinians that attack with grenades and lasers, and Promoted Multiwinians that help you manage your mass of flat digital soldiers. You can capture additional spawn points that pump out more units, until eventually the entire battlefield is littered with the little glowing souls of the departed.

Capture the Statue involves sending a

HANDS ON TESTED

troop to fetch a big statue and drag it back to your capture zone, while intercepting any attempts by the opposing players to snatch your prize. Both modes are great fun, although the game mechanics seem a bit shallow for any meaningful strategy. Crates that drop sporadically from the sky mix things up a bit, giving you turrets to place Squads (like in *Darwinia*) to command into battle, or Engineers that harvest the souls of the fallen to give you those units back.

The remaining modes sound equally entertaining, if not more so. Domination is the deathmatch where kill count is king. Assault involves attacking a well-defended structure, then defending it the next round. Rocket Riot is more creative, as you have to capture solar panels to build your rocket and blast off before the other teams do. The final mode, Blitzkrieg, is all about capturing the multiple flags on the map as quickly as possible.

It's quirky and entertaining - typical of Introversion - and we're eager to see how the final product shapes up. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

bred for speed

COOLER MASTER®

COSMOS S

One soft touch and the red-eyed beast awakens. The low-pitched hum of the 200mm turbine leaves no soul unaffected as massive gusts of air channel through its alloy body. Squeezing out every last drop of performance, it's the COSMOS S - Bred for Speed.

Touch sensitive power button

200mm side fan

Did we mention that there's a new lighting system?

Brand new inns for you to hearth back to

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

WHEN BLIZZARD ENTERED THE MMORPG market with *World of Warcraft* in 2004, they faced stiff competition from the well-entrenched *Everquest* series and *Ultima Online*. While Blizzard had the backing of the strong and extremely popular *Warcraft* licence, nothing could have prepared the world for the runaway success story of the game with its claimed ten million active subscribers. The game is now preparing to settle into its fifth year of life, and Blizzard is getting ready to launch the second expansion pack entitled *Wrath of the Lich King*, or *WotLK*, as it is more commonly known. In the true spirit of Blizzard expansions, *WotLK* brings to the table a large number of changes ranging from minor cosmetic nuances to considerable gameplay updates.

The first thing on everyone's mind is, no doubt, the addition of the Death Knight class. This 'heroic' class will begin their journey from level 55 in the hallowed bowels of Ebon Hold, the Lich King's high-flying necropolis from which he surveys the Eastern Plaguelands. The Death Knight's primary role in gameplay will be as a hybrid tank/damage dealer, which might put a damper on a few Warriors' spirits.

Those seeking a new in-game profession will also be in luck. Inscription will allow players to either augment spells and skills with additional effects or enhance the existing numbers to do anything from improving the blast radius to reducing reagent requirements. The resulting glyphs that the profession produces can be assigned to the new glyph slots that each character will have. The six slots stretch from greater to minor, allowing for a range of effects from damage augmentation to simple cosmetic improvements.

Adopting a similar strategy to *The Burning Crusade* expansion, Blizzard is adding the continent of Northrend to the game world – the vast, icy wastes and ominous spires will make for fine adventuring ground. The addition of 12 dungeons should make the push from 70 to 80 an exciting one, and adventuring at level 80 will be made even more enjoyable with three new high-level raiding instances. For those who'd be interested in taking more than one character through to the new world, characters will have a choice of two starting areas when they leave for Northrend, further diversifying the levelling process and encouraging players to explore more than just grind.

Other changes to the game are more cosmetic: the lighting engine has been overhauled, textures in the new continent have been given an extra coat of attention and characters can make that fashion statement of the month with their new hairstyles. Achievement addicts are also getting some attention. As part of Blizzard's upcoming integrated achievement system between *StarCraft II*, *Diablo III* and *WoW*, *WotLK* subscribers will be able to earn honour and respect from their peers as they complete challenges ranging from ten very manly hugs to slaughtering 50 enemies that have invaded your hometown.

With *WotLK* set to launch close to *Warhammer Online*, it will be interesting to see if the expansion can hold existing players' attention long enough to stave off the competition. Only time will tell just how much longer *WoW*'s fan base will remain steadfast against the torrent of MMOs it's been facing in recent times. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

HANDS ON TESTED

PERIMETER 2: NEW EARTH

Developer→ KDV Games | **Publisher→** Strategy First | **Genre→** Strategy | **Release Date→** Q4 2008

IN TERMS OF REAL-TIME strategy games, *Perimeter* either tickled you **right there** with its take on the genre, or it made you want to blow chunks with its frame rate, shallow campaign or oddball play mechanics. The ability to take all units and mash them together on the fly to create a new set of entirely different units – over and over to meet any battle requirements - certainly took the Rock-Paper-Scissors concept to a different level, albeit one gamers are still deciding if they **like** or not.

Continuing where *Perimeter* ended in terms of plot, "the Exodus, lead by the wise Spirits, have been searching for New Earth while the Harkback lost faith in the Spirits, overthrown their reign and decided to head back to Old Earth (they don't believe it's really gone)". Now the two factions are at loggerheads on the same planet. And this one has water.

The game dynamic is the same as that of the first game: it's an RTS where you can shape the terrain to suit your needs and combine units to create other types of units, as long as you have enough raw materials in the units going into the mixing bowl. This time around, the territorial-warfare elements are elevated due to the yin-yang nature of the two factions: one side loves dirt, the other loves water. For water to win, it must erode the dirt. For dirt to win, it must elevate the terrain to funnel the water away. Clever, but will it blend?

Also new is the Providence: a super-unit (or "Tactical Manipulator of Direct Action" according to the developers) that grants serious damage such as meteor showers and giant explosions. The Providence gets upgrades and unlocks from crystals found on the terrain. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon
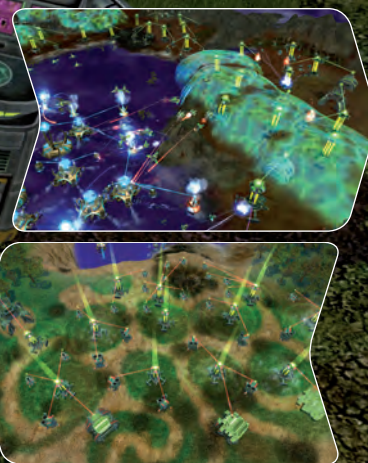
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COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

Over the past year (and then some), we have seen a revival of the *Command & Conquer* franchise, which had been quiescent since *Generals*. In fact, it can be argued that it has been longer than that, as *Generals* was a non-canonical departure from the *Command & Conquer* formula. However, about a year and a half ago we saw the release of *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars*, and a year later its expansion pack. Planned for later this year is *Tiberium*, a squad-based first-person shooter set in the *C&C* universe, but before that we'll see the release of the highly anticipated *Red Alert 3*, scheduled to debut next month. We have been participating in the Beta-test programme since its launch a month ago, and these are some of our findings. (Please bear in mind that the game is still in Beta testing and is not yet complete, and some information may have changed between the time of writing and the time of going to print. It's highly likely that the game will see further changes in the month left before its release.)

WARPED HISTORY

Red Alert 3 revisits the alternative timeline proposed in its two predecessors, wherein Albert Einstein supposedly developed a way to travel back in time, and went back to prevent World War II by assassinating Adolf Hitler. (Einstein killing someone? He must be turning in his grave!) However, instead of averting the major conflict, it was replaced by another, with merely the protagonists and antagonists being somewhat reshuffled. This premise is continued in this latest chapter. Once again, certain liberties are taken. For example, the new third faction, the Empire of the Rising Sun, is based on modern Japan: high-tech robotics and a taste for anime. This is completely fallacious, as Japan's technological boom came about because of post-World War II developments. Nevertheless, we overlook this inconsistency, as it is still quite entertaining, and an image that pop culture fans can identify with...

IN GENERAL...

The previous *Red Alert* titles' 'cheesy' theme has not only been maintained - it has been further emphasised. As a result, the title/main menu screen's style is basically a cross between a comic book and a mid-twentieth-century Soviet propaganda poster (some may dispute the distinction...). Moreover, just in case you missed the colour reference, the title/main menu screen is presented in shades of red. In other regards, the basic interface is very reminiscent of *Tiberium Wars*. The menu options are laid out in the same, and therefore familiar, fashion.

Some have commented that *Red Alert 3* feels somewhat like a "skin" for *C&C3*. What they mean is that the interface is *that* similar. For instance, the construction/training sidebar is the same (although it contains fewer items), and the same hotkeys apply (though, at the time of writing this, the very important Ctrl-~ was absent...).

There are, however, some differences. For starters, construction takes place

HANDS ON TESTED

on a square grid, which some may find restrictive, while others may deem liberating, or at least simpler. Secondly, of course, is the presence of a naval element. In this latest instalment, great emphasis is placed on this aspect. It is seldom possible to exclude either land or sea. In fact, it is generally a really bad idea to do so, as you then leave yourself open to attacks that you may be helpless against. Most buildings can now be placed on water, with the exception of the likes of a barracks or war factory. Some units are amphibious, allowing them great versatility, but are usually more at home on one element or the other. For example, an Allied engineer can walk or jet-ski, but is more comfortable doing the former, and can't use his special ability on water, while the Soviet Stingray is a battleship that can operate on land if really necessary, but its special ability can only be used in water.

Another significant difference is the resource model, which at the time of

THE SOVIETS

The Soviet faction returns as the 'heavy brute'. It once again has the heaviest tank, called the Apocalypse Tank, which takes driving over other vehicles to completely new levels with its magnetic harpoon (we pronounce that "tractor beam") and grinder (you figure it out!). Returning in this chapter is Tesla-coil technology, as well as terror drones, submarines, flak, V-rockets (now V4s) on tracks and on dreadnought warships, and the Iron Curtain. New tricks include satellite-borne magnetic attacks that can lift units right out of a battle and then later drop them on their compatriots' heads! The Soviets specialise in ground combat, though are not weak on the seas either.
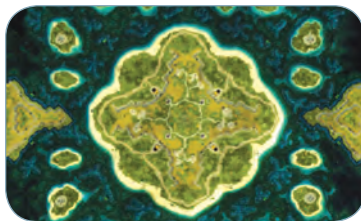
Cabana Republic and Roundhouse Redux were the maps used in the first phase of testing, while the others were added subsequently, along with modifications to the first two.

The main menu and multiplayer lobby interfaces are very similar to those of C&C3
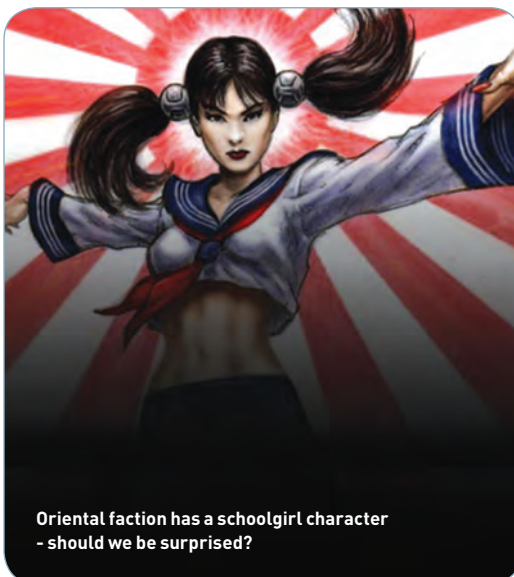
Oriental faction has a schoolgirl character – should we be surprised?

THE ALLIES

The Allies are the traditional 'good guys' of the series. However, with three factions, does it mean that there will be two 'bad guys'? Technology carried over from *Red Alert 2* includes the 'infantry fighting' keyword (now applied not only to a vehicle, but also to the default basic defensive 'turret'), chrono-tech (which has been significantly expanded), mirage technology (in tanks), and the beam-tech of the old prism towers (now dubbed "spectrum towers," and boasting very pretty graphics). Dolphins also make a comeback, as do aircraft carriers! A major new technology is cryo-tech: freezing enemies to render them inactive and brittle. The Allies' main affinity is with air, and they have a great arsenal of aircraft, as well as a possible upgrade that globally affects their air force.

THE EMPIRE OF THE RISING SUN

This is the new faction, and as such naturally carries nothing over from before. It is a super high-tech faction that has much in the way of beams and robots and so forth. It has a particularly potent navy. This faction uses fewer production facilities: it has no equivalent to the airfield. However, many of its units are multi-purpose designs that can transform from one mode to another. These include at least two units out of the war factory, and even a submersible that can take to the skies. All of these change their roles radically when they transform, making them very versatile units. Mobility and versatility are the Rising Sun's fortes, with this faction being able to build anywhere (though there is a trade-off in terms of time and exposure).

writing was hotly debated by Beta testers in terms of its merit. Instead of harvesting fields of resources, players now build facilities at ore mines. Of course, in terms of 'realism' this is a step forward: after all, it is not everyday that somebody can drive around an open plains and collect ore just lying on the ground! However, this economic model is less scalable than that of its predecessors, and leads to play dynamic somewhat reminiscent of that of *Dawn of War*. Some players are praising this new model, while others complain that it is too "dumbed down" and restrictive, forcing players into fewer choices. Only time will tell, and it's not inconceivable that it will be tweaked in the final stages of development.

The last new major element is the fact that every unit has a special ability or alternative mode. This is presumably why there are fewer buildings and units than in the latest *C&C* game: the extra diversity that these special abilities bring is akin to that of a greater variety of units.

DEBRIEFING

From what we have seen so far, we are finding that the game seems intended to be more micromanagement intensive. Apparently, EA is trying to de-emphasise 'spamming' of single, powerful unit types. It remains to be seen how well this attempt will succeed, but what we have seen so far looks promising. A concern for many is the fact that the graphics look too "cartoon-like." At the time of writing this, however, EA had stated that graphical polish as well as much voice acting, play balance and other issues were still to be addressed in the coming weeks. As the game stands now, you can expect a one-on-one match to take between 15 and 30 minutes (though it is not impossible to rush out a much weaker player in a much shorter time). One of the things we are most excited about (though EA is currently tight-lipped about specifics) is the campaign. Notice that I have not said, "single-player campaign." That's because the campaigns are being designed to be played, ideally, by two players playing cooperatively. We can't wait! **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

The Prequel to the award winning S.T.A.L.K.E.R – Shadows of Chernobyl

PROLOGUE
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.
clear sky

NO MORE FAMILIAR ROUTES THROUGH THE ZONE,...
NO MORE RULES YOU USED TO LIVE WITH...
WHAT AWAITS YOU, S.T.A.L.K.E.R.,
IN THE ZONE THAT CHANGED?

STREET DATE: 5TH SEPTEMBER
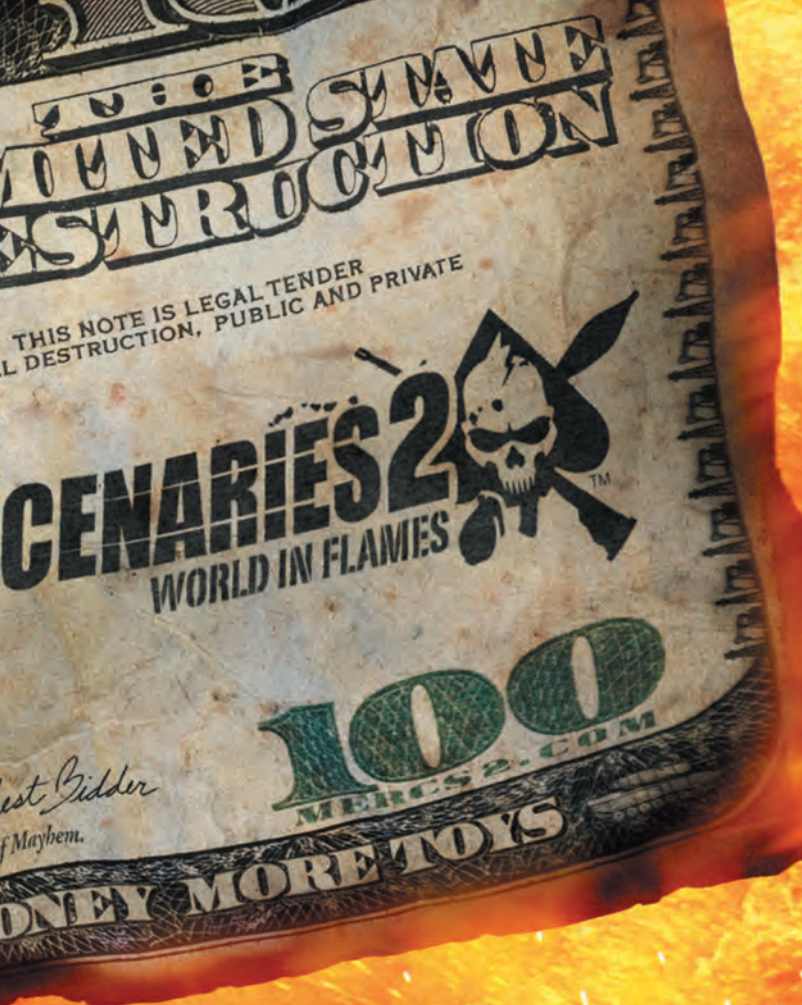
WELCOME TO VENEZUELA. WELCOME TO THE NEW PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION. WELCOME TO THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY. WORK CONTRACTS. KILL CONTACTS. IF YOU DON'T GET YOUR MONEY, MAKE SURE THEY PAY. YOU HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY ANYTHING AND GO ANYWHERE. ANY WAY YOU WANT. BECAUSE YOU'RE A MERCENARY. AND THAT'S WHAT YOU DO.

XBOX 360. LIVE

PlayStation®2

PLAYSTATION 3

reviews

POW! KER-NAG!!
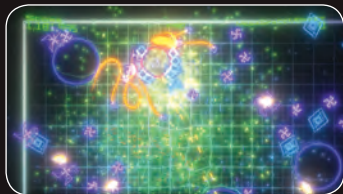
GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2 [XBLA]

We may not admit it to each other, but we're totally trying to best the scores on our friends list that now helpfully appears right there in the game when you select the mode you want to play. We're not usually competitive, but something really makes you want to not be the one at the bottom of the list. That and we're addicted to the new neon colours the game pulls from 4D hyperspace.

SOUL CALIBUR IV [360]

It's slower and the eight-way run takes longer to engage, but it's still *Soul Calibur* everywhere it counts – including the cup size. The Tower of Souls mode has us engrossed, mostly because that's where you go to unlock new apparel to adorn your custom creations of horror. What's next, *Soul Calibur V* with *World of Warcraft* characters? [You joke now... Ed]

BRAID [XBLA]

We wanted it, now we have it. And we love it. We love it so much that we restarted the game as soon as we'd finished it. Elegant, charming, and endlessly ingenious, *Braid* is the sort of game that asks us, "How" in the sense of, "How are you going to reach that elusive puzzle piece using a shadowy doppelganger of yourself from seven seconds ago?" And after staring at the screen for 20 minutes, we figured it out – because it was actually really obvious all along.

GAUNTLET [XBLA]

Red Warrior needs health! Red Warrior destroyed. Red Warrior is a douche. Red Warrior can't get past level eight. Red Warrior wonders who designed this stupid level. Red Warrior wonders how *Gauntlet* ever became so popular, since it sucks and constantly drains your health. Red Warrior has died.

ROCK BAND [360]

Everyone wants to play the drums and guitars, but the secret to persuading your friends to pick up the microphone and sing is a pre-show event at the pub, followed by a bottle of single-malt whiskey. Well, that's how we did it anyway. And we still wake up screaming. The freebie DLC of Portal's *Still Alive* is almost worth the game's exorbitant price, while the sound of your friends squeaking along in chipmunk falsetto is priceless.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

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

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

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

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

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

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

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

World Poker Tour

Better Than

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

For Fans Of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

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

78 OUT OF 100

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

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

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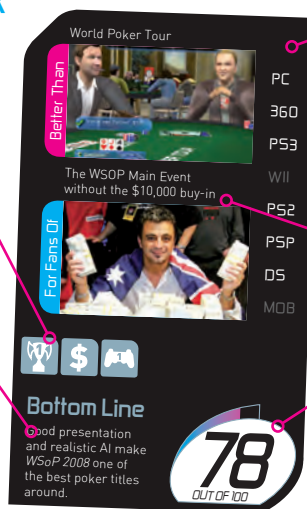
WEB SCORES

SOUL CALIBUR IV [360]
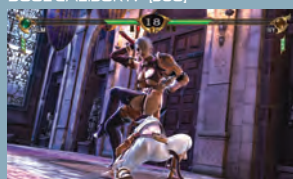
NAG	88/100
METACRITIC	85/100
GAMERANKINGS	85.1/100

SBK08 [360]

NAG	60/100
METACRITIC	63/100
GAMERANKINGS	61.1/100

WE LOVE GOLF! [WII]

NAG	72/100
METACRITIC	76/100
GAMERANKINGS	74/100

THE REVIEW ICONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

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

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

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

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

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

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

NAG AWARDS

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

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

NAG EDITOR'S CHOICE

NAG MUST PLAY

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

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

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

THE REVIEWERS

Thanks to the efforts of hundreds of fans, we've finally managed to fully translate the previously (not localised) manual text detailing the character profiles of all your favourite *NAG* super-ultra, hyper-X, dead-or-alive, street-fighting, virtual mortal kombatants.

MIKTAR DRACON

After his father was slain by a nuclear bomb sent back in time to kill the future president of the combined world of the universe, Miktar had the ancient martial art style of fist-kick-punch to avenge his family in order to rescue-orphan everyone.

WALT PRETORIUS

Using the power of his thoughts to overcome all obstacles, Walt is on a mission to find fame, fortune and the loveliest lady can he possibly ever hold – strong, manly weapons crush opponents as soft pudding.

DANE REMENDES

By using its own specialised soft and tender style of martial arts, Dane is on the trail of a murderer, a painter, a thief... that man who is often not very nice. That man participated in the tournament of final death in order to avoid the cruel pursuit of Denmark.

TARRYN VAN DER BYL

Her feet itching with fate, Tarryn is to prove that they can beat within a close part of life for those who oppose her and her powerful steed. They travelled a very long road where the road is the hard, the road hardest. Victory!

CHRIS BISTLINE

This super-secret agent of the future is to marshal all those who oppose the death tournament final in the hope of peace in the world at the worlds in need of peace in the world, because the fight against the dead not very nice.
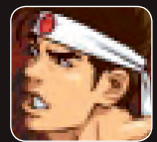
MICHAEL JAMES

After that a world-shocking paradigm shift that ended all life, he knew it, Michael on the death tournament in the hope of finding some kind of inner peace that only comes which in transposition of the world-shattering example which is ended do your disturbance.

GEOFF BURROWS

In order the tournament to control the world with robot engineering, because the secret which endeavours bribe from robot faction is taken directly, in the past it does not participate in the tournament of the death where the robot you did not note, but now it is. Inauspiciousness!
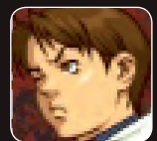
CABALA'S BIG GAME HUNTER (360)

NAG	35/100
METACRITIC	51/100
GAMERANKINGS	48/100

R-TYPE COMMAND (PSP)

NAG	69/100
METACRITIC	70/100
GAMERANKINGS	72/100

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2 (360)
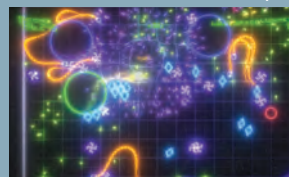
NAG	87/100
METACRITIC	90/100
GAMERANKINGS	90.1/100

NAG

SOUL CALIBUR IV

A TALE OF SOULS AND swords eternally retold... for the fourth time. Welcome to *Soul Calibur IV*.

Namco's 'other' 3D-fighting game series (we know how you love to hog the limelight, *Tekken*) proves that it can find its legs once more after a questionable third, and exclusive, appearance on the PlayStation 2. Once again multiplatform à la *Soul Calibur II*, *SCIV* sweeps in on the PS3 and Xbox 360 armed with 30 characters, online battles and a powerful, custom character-creation engine.

In fact, it's the 'Create a Soul' mode that defines *Soul Calibur IV*. Modular, do-it-yourself characters have never worked out that well in fighting games: they've been a curious gimmick in a genre that demands precisely designed and balanced, on-screen fighters. Create a Soul solves the balance problem by allowing the player to base their personal creation on any of the fighting styles of the 'standard' characters. In addition, the default fighters can themselves be customised to a degree, though not with the flexibility of a full-on Create a Soul guy or gal. Unlike *Soul Calibur III* and other fighting games with build-it modes, the characters you can create in *SCIV* look good. The dozens of faces and hairstyles, plus literally hundreds of armour and undergarment parts are designed with the same care and detail as the iconic visuals of the *Soul*

Calibur star characters. Custom characters are fully usable online too. Past looks alone, all characters in *SCIV* can be 'levelled up' via regular play, allowing them to be equipped with a wide array of attributes to grant special abilities such as poison, weapons or resistance. While fighting-game purists might be tempted to roll their eyes at this gimmickry, the RPG-like nature of the power assignment is surprisingly well balanced. Moreover, local and Xbox LIVE versus play is separated into 'special' and 'versus', which invokes custom powers and plain match-ups for a traditional experience.

All well and good, but this is a fighting game. How does *SCIV* play? While the basic mechanics of the *Soul* series have not been fiddled with much, *SCIV* does feel as if Namco learned a thing or three from the rough, experimental state of *Soul Calibur III*. Historically, the most refined and complex weapon-based 3D fighter, *Soul Calibur* has always felt looser than its cousin, *Tekken*, if only because the swings of swords and staffs have more recovery time than punches. *SCIV* is tight and responsive within the framework of its style. The characters feel as if they have more weight and solidity than in previous games in the series. As a result, the pace of combat is ever so slightly slower, and fans of the series may experience *SCIV* vaguely clunky at first. After adjusting though, *Soul*

NAG
MUST PLAY

I had beans last night, how does that one smell?

SOUL CALIBUR IV PS3
SECOND OPINION

The *Soul Calibur* series has always been great fun, and its entry onto the PS3 is a fluid and enticing title and, naturally, having Darth Vader as a playable character in the game doesn't hurt either, although he does feel a little alien in the universe. The single-player story mode is disappointingly short, but the Tower of Lost Souls mode more than makes up for it. Playing *Soul Calibur IV* on the PS3 is fun, with lots of locked content and replay value. Oh, and did I mention Darth Vader? Darth Vader, man...

84 OUT OF 100

Calibur IV feels good - its clumsiness an illusion. A few new characters round out the package, each one bringing a new fighting style or variation not previously seen. The immediate favourite of the new characters is Hilde, a female knight who fights with a spear and short sword simultaneously, creating a refreshing experience in a game already crowded with styles.

Visually, *SCIV* is a very good-looking game. Colours pop and characters enjoy extremely sharp definition, thanks in part to sophisticated use of lighting and shaders that gives *SCIV* some of the best-looking material effects in an HD console game - particularly for metal surfaces in a game where most of the characters use bladed weapons and wear armour. Their animation, on the other hand, is still visibly 'last-gen' and lacks a certain kind of natural fluidity. Stage backgrounds are vast and epic in scale, and there are a good number of them - over sixteen (but this time, most of the characters lack a personalised home stage, robbing *SCIV* of some personality).

The sound and music in *SCIV* are, for the most part, standard fare. There are few standout themes among the brassy, heroic orchestra, but it's well composed. The voice samples and sword-clashing sounds are practically lifted intact from the rest of the series: sound design continues to be a weak point in fighting games, and *SCIV* is no exception.

There's more.... guest characters in the improbable form of Yoda (Darth Vader on the PS3) from *Star Wars* and Vader's Secret Apprentice from *The Force Unleashed*. The Story mode is mercifully brief and easy to play through in order to see each fighter's ending. A mission mode dubbed "Tower of Lost Souls" provides an extreme challenge in the form of multi-enemy missions with tough optional feats to perform, which unlock Create a Soul items. The standard arcade and training modes round out the feature set, along with a gallery that features a hilariously complex diagram of the inter-relationships among the *Soul Calibur* cast.

Soul Calibur IV is a vast game. There's a ton to do, and a ton of ways to do it. The play is reasonably balanced for such a large cast, though not nearly as tight as the pinnacle titles in the fighting genre. Creating custom characters is virtually a hobby in itself, but a demerit is earned by the fact that two players cannot load their own game profiles at once in local versus play to use each other's custom characters in the same game. It's beautiful to look at on the whole. Moreover, it's all too true that there just isn't a lot of solid fighting games available. *Soul Calibur IV* fits that bill very well and provides a lot of bang for your buck in a genre that is ultimately about two characters throwing a beat down on an isolated playfield. Most significantly, *SCIV* marks a fair return to form for a series that was provisionally on the rocks after a not-exactly-welcome third entry, proving that at least for now, the soul still burns. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Better Than — Soul Calibur III
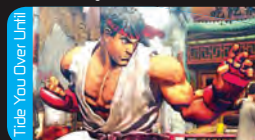
Tide You Over Until — Street Fighter IV

PC	
360	
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	

Bottom Line

Pretty damn hot, the soul still is. Hmm, yes.

88 OUT OF 100

NAG
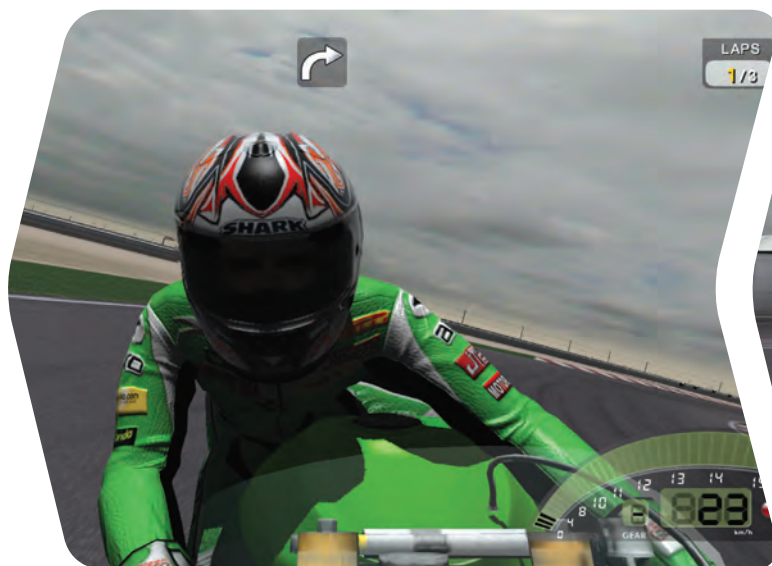
SBK08 SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

MANY GAMES FEATURE WHAT is commonly known as a learning curve. This subtle yet effective method of ramping up the difficulty is a great way to get gamers excited and enthusiastic about taking on tougher challenges as they present themselves. *SBK08* features less of a learning curve and a bit more of a learning brick wall. When you undertake the very first 'tutorial' race, the game quite promptly announces that you need to complete a lap within a certain time, not bothering to comment about controls or racing concepts. This 'gun-to-the-head' approach is a sign of things to come.

The *SBK* series isn't exactly at pole position when it comes to motorbike racing simulators. In fact, it's always taken second place on the podium against THQ's *MotoGP*, and coming second in what is essentially a two-man race isn't as good as it sounds. Still, the makers of the game are tenacious at the very least, and their attempt isn't completely without merit.

What makes the game good is its realism. From controls that are essentially finicky (because bikes can be finicky) through to lots of nuts-and-bolts customisation options, this title almost hits the nail on the head. The bike handling is pretty accurate too. Blast off on the throttle as the light goes green, and your pocket rocket is going to go nose up. Brake too late, take a curve to sharply, and you're going to go skidding off the tarmac. Fans of proper racing simulators – the kind that take a bit of thought – are going to love the level of detail in both the upgrading and tweaking of the bike and the actual riding. Folks out for a more casual racing game will throw the controller aside in frustration, more than likely before they have finished the so-called tutorial.

With several game modes available, there's a lot to do in this title, but the real value of it is in the fairly long Championship season. This requires the player to choose two riders (from many on offer) to get on one of a large number of bikes. The races can be tweaked for length on faithfully recreated

tracks (at least, the layouts of the tracks are faithfully created, but more about that later). Following that, the game launches into a painfully long introduction video, showing each rider getting ready for the race on the start grid. Dedicated gamers will by this point have taken part in a warm up, practice and two qualifying laps.

Accompanying each rider is a girl, in true superbike fashion. However, something went wrong somewhere and the chicks resemble rejects from the *Quasimodo* auditions. Misshapen figures are topped by brutally ugly visages... perhaps the riders go so fast to get away from these pit-lane lovelies. Whatever the point, the graphics are really, really nasty at this point.

Once you get past the blocky boobs, it's on to the race. Now, while the tracks are faithfully recreated in layout, they are visually uninspiring. They look horrifically bland, with flat crowds and boring surroundings adding to this game's woes. The bikes are well modelled, and the rider animations are good, but neither of these

is enough to actually save this title on a visual level. Compared to some of the other stuff we've seen on the Xbox, this is just shoddy workmanship.

On the sound front, things don't get much better. The bike sound effects are not bad, but there is no commentary, a decent soundtrack or anything else... just the whining engines.

On a personal pet-peeve note (and this is because I commute on a bike), when the hell are developers of these games going to figure out that bike riders tilt their heads during a turn to keep the world the right way up (visually, at least)? The first-person view has the character's eye line fixed to the orientation of the bike, rather than tilting to compensate for turns. This results in a nauseatingly nasty swinging back and forth that forces anyone who has even a slightly sensitive stomach to use a chase camera.

The AI is as tough as it gets, and rarely makes the kind of mistakes a player would. Taking a turn too quickly or even clipping through the grass after a miscalculation

can most certainly cost you the race as the AI bikes screech past. Getting back through the pack is a chore because the realism factor of bikes colliding even slightly has been well implemented. The physics engine may leave the player chewing dirt after the slightest clip... one of the joys of bike riding.

If you can get past the graphics and the sound, as well as the truly merciless learning curve, then this game might be one you'd enjoy. Keep in mind that this title is going to go down better with enthusiasts than casual gamers. The controls, in their realism, are utterly unforgiving, and the tweaking required to get the most out of any bike is time consuming and quite technical. Nevertheless, the Championship season can be an enjoyable experience, once you get to grips with the controls. This is not a game you're going to pick up and play, or play casually. It takes a level of dedication and perseverance to get through. It is recommended only for those who enjoy the more technical aspects of racing. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Nuts-and-bolts racing simulators

For Fans of

MotoGP

Worse Than

PC	
360	■
PS3	
WII	
PS2	
PSP	
DS	
MOB	
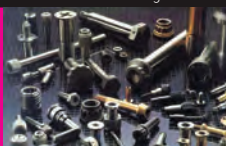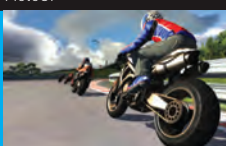
Bottom Line

A good game for truly dedicated racing enthusiasts.

60 OUT OF 100

WE LOVE GOLF!

WE LOVE GOLF! WAS developed by Camelot Software and is published by Capcom. Anyone familiar with Camelot's prior work on *Hot Shots Golf* will instantly find *We Love Golf!* familiar – maybe too familiar.

The big change in the Wii iteration of Camelot's by-now standard golf design is motion control: the Wii Remote is used to set the power of one's golf swing and then to launch the ball at the correct moment. However, *We Love Golf!* isn't the same as *Wii Sports Golf*. Gesture control is not used to physically control the power of your swing. It's used to raise your on-screen golfer's club to the correct angle to match a pre-selected point on the power meter. As a result, *We Love Golf!* is similar to Camelot's previous golf games, with the Wii interface used to make the game mechanics feel a bit more immersive. Under the hood, it still plays the same.

The content is decent, with eight 18-hole courses, a dozen golfers (most of which must be unlocked), and a slew of extra outfits, some of which pay homage to Capcom faithful. Sir Arthur, Ken, and Chun-Li are just a few of the player outfits on offer. Gamers can also use a Mii as their *We Love Golf!* character. Local multiplayer supports up to four players in different game modes, such as golfing with target rings set along the course, and landing the ball the closest to the hole.

While *We Love Golf!* is competent and hits all the right notes for a Camelot golf game, it doesn't do much else. Graphically, the Wii is not being pushed here, and the game's engine and even texture set look suspiciously like recycled GameCube development gear. The overall game interface is bright, friendly, and very Nintendo-like.

Is it fun? Yes, it is, with most of the fun found in multiplayer and a basic online play feature. Capcom wanted *Hot Shots Golf* for the Wii, but noting beyond that. If you like *Hot Shots* and would like to get another dose of it with the added fun of swinging a Wii Remote around (regardless of realism), then *We Love Golf!* is a good choice that will probably not leave you wanting. However, the Wii is still waiting for its ultimate, full-blown golf title; one that uses the console's unique technology to push the envelope as opposed to only filling in the check boxes on the survey contained inside and dropping it in the mail box. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

As Good As
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

As Good As
Any previous Hot Shots Golf

Bottom Line
No hole-in-one, eagle or birdie, but still par.

72
OUT OF 100

ASUS EAH4870 TOP

109% Speeds!

World's First Factory O.C. HD4870 for Astounding Visuals!

Graphic buffs that have been clamoring for more speed can now put their hands on the new ASUS EAH4870 TOP/HTDI/512M graphics card. This powerful graphics card utilizes the ATI Radeon™ HD 4870 GPU for outstanding 109% GPU speeds; and provides support for DirectX 10.1 special effects for the ultimate gaming visuals.

109% GPU Performances

As the world's first overclocking version for the EAH4870 Series, the EAH4870 TOP/HTDI/512M lets you experience GPU and memory clock performance boosts from 750MHz up to 815MHz and 3.6GHz up to 3.7GHz respectively. This generates an astounding 3DMark Vantage Extreme Preset score of 3733 - providing you an astonishing 109% GPU performance for that extra graphical "oomph". With such sheer gaming performance, you can now experience much more for all your gaming needs - only with the ASUS EAH4870 TOP/HTDI/512M.

HD Gaming/Video with Break-through Performance

The ASUS EAH4870 TOP brings about the power of graphical "supercomputing" to gamers - setting new standards for visual computing. Equipped with the new TeraScale graphics engine, fully immersive and cinematic gaming experiences will re-define how you play your games and take HD gaming to a brand new level. This not just applies to gaming though, as the ASUS EAH4870 TOP will allow you to watch Blu-ray movies and play HD content with incredible visual fidelity and breakthrough efficiency - all without compromising performance.

Engine Clock(MHz)

	Generic HD4870 Graphic Card	ASUS EAH4870 TOP
	750	815

109% Speeds
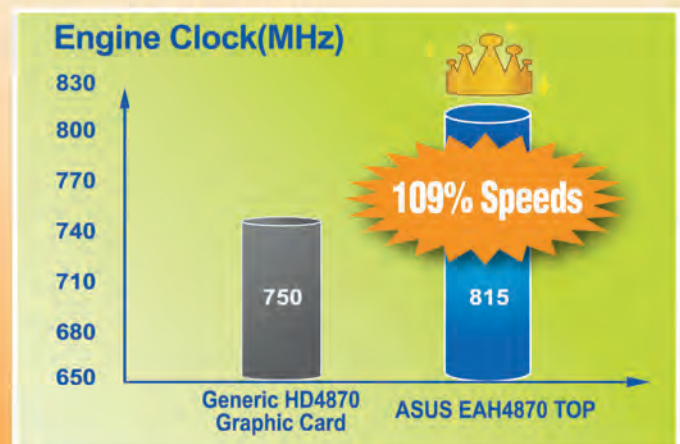
▲ ASUS EAH4870 TOP Provides Enhanced GPU Performances

THE SIMS 2: IKEA HOME STUFF

THE SIMS 2 JUST keeps rolling on, and is bigger than the original *Sims* game ever was in terms of things to do and expansion packs. This latest pack adds to the stuff pack range by taking designs from the popular Swedish furniture company IKEA, and adding them to your Sims' household – at a price, of course.

This is not the first stuff pack to make use of a popular brand. H&M was featured before, bringing 'high fashion' to your Sims. Naturally, neither brand is available here in South Africa, but that's really unimportant. The real question is whether a pack like this should even have been produced. Is it a necessary addition to the game, or just a way to push more content for the brand (and subsequently make more money from it?)?

The answer to that depends on how you view T*he Sims 2*. If you are an ardent fan, then the extra furniture and other interior-design items that this pack introduces to the game is necessity. We've had ugly couches for far too long. If, on the other hand, you were a more casual *Sims* player, then the answer would be maybe. The pack doesn't affect the game dynamic (a Sim will sit on any available couch, after all) and can easily be seen as a cash-in on the series (and IKEA). Fans will love the new options, and

the fact that they can spread their design talents out of the bathroom and kitchen (covered by a previous stuff pack) and into the rest of the house. Casual players probably won't care.

Still, it's here, and fans will doubtlessly snap it up. One does wonder, though, if EA couldn't have delivered something with a bit more scope. This refers to the stuff packs range as a whole. It's all fine and well adding hundreds of new items to scroll through to the game (variety is the spice of life, and all that), but wouldn't some kind of tool set be a better product to release? It would have to be a fairly simple tool, but something that would allow players to create their own clothing or furniture. EA has long ago realised the value of user-generated content, and if they had their doubts, the Spore Creature Creator certainly proves how massive this sector of the market is. Releasing some kind of *Sims 2* tool set would have driven the game through the roof (okay, more through the roof than it already is).

Still, the IKEA Home Stuff pack is not without merit and, as a *Sims 2* fan, I quite enjoy being able to create interiors that are more attractive for the little computer people under my care. It's certainly not a necessity, but it is something that's nice

to have. The diversity it introduces to the game makes for a more visually appealing experience. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Buying furniture

Kinda like

The Sims 2

For Fans of

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line
This is a stuff pack that *Sims* fans will probably love, but it's not a necessity.

70 OUT OF 100

Age Rating→ 16+ | Genre→ Simulation | Megarom | Distributor→ Activision | Publisher→ R399 | RRP→

CABELA'S BIG GAME HUNTER

THERE ARE GOOD SIMULATORS, and there are bad simulators. Let's leave the fact that this game is utterly distasteful aside... shooting animals when they're pixels is a bit better than blowing away real cute and cuddly critters, after all. Let's just get right down to the nitty-gritty, and take a look at this game in the context in which it was created. This is a simulator – a hunting simulator.

One of the things that make simulators fun is the realism injected into such titles. We must therefore draw the conclusion that, since this is a simulator, the folks who developed it know people tough enough to be mauled by a cougar three times. And cougars that can handle being repeatedly shot with a shoulder-cannon. Perhaps the world is a more brutal place than we first thought.

Okay, let's stop being pedantic and throw the whole simulator thing out of the nearest window (hoping to not hit a cougar with it, because a mauling is guaranteed to be painful). This is a game. Let's just go with that, shall we? Games are fun, right? Not if you ask the guys who put this one together. According to them, games are meant to be slow and snore-worthy. The concept is great, but the execution is awful. Take, for example, the act of actually shooting

an animal. The game basically comes down to a lot of waiting for an AI animal dumb enough to wander into your sights. Then it's generally a one-shot put-down, augmented by an unoriginal and completely unnecessary bullet-time camera. Between those one-shot put-downs, there's a lot of almost linear exploration through countryside that looks almost the same as all the other countryside in the game. It doesn't matter whether you're hunting lions in Africa or ducks in Alabama, things look pretty similar. Maybe the developers should have opened a book and looked at a picture or two... "Oh, so that's what Africa looks like."

The boredom could be alleviated by changing guns, but there's little point, as there doesn't seem to be any major difference between a peashooter and a bazooka in this one. Not that you can pull the old gaming trick of carrying a bazillion guns with you: you select your weapon and you're stuck with it for the hunting trip. These trips all involve meeting a hunt master, getting instructions, walking around a bit and then shooting an animal. Sometimes there are cougar-mauling sessions for flavour.

Cabela's Big Game Hunter is something of a pointless pursuit. It isn't even rescued

by good graphics. In short, it's a really nasty title that doesn't really achieve much of anything at all. Except for the cougar bits... **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Better Than
Drilling a hole in your head

Worse Than
A vasectomy

	PC
	360
	PS3
	WII
	PS2
	PSP
	DS
	MOB

Bottom Line
This one isn't worth the effort.

35 OUT OF 100

NAG

R-TYPE COMMAND [AKA R-TYPE TACTICS]

RRP→ R395 [Import] | **Publisher**→ Atlus | **Distributor**→ NA | **Genre**→ Strategy | **Age Rating**→ 3+

GONE IS THE FAST-PACED, twitch-reflex gameplay of the traditional *R-Type* series, replaced by slow-paced, turn-based, hex-grid strategy. *R-Type Command* is a bold if awkward branch for the franchise.

The straightforward two-faction campaign sports a few points of interest: units that have Charge weapons fill a gauge up a little each turn. Once full, the unit can unleash an *R-Type*-inspired shot that goes through multiple units. The trick to Charge: if the unit is hit by incoming fire, its Charge gauge resets to zero, forcing you to strike a fine balance between offence and holding back. Terrain shape is also a key factor in using Charge weapons effectively. You can view a unit's gestalt-attack range easily, letting you plan your strikes and take into account enemy positions.

The *R-Type* hallmark Force unit is both independent and able to latch onto the front or rear of a fighter, giving it added movement range. Units use fuel for manoeuvres, making your Resupply ships critical. If a unit runs out of fuel, it can no longer move around the field.

Warships are large-scale units usually designated as your flagship. These are capable of repairing and resupplying other units, or acting as carriers. Fighters are your main offensive force, while Bipedal Modules present close-range combat options.

Movement along the field can be affected by various terrain types, such as waterfalls that push units downwards. Resources found during a battle are used to develop new units after the battle, or to place facilities mid-battle to help swing the tide of the battle.

The attack animations can take up to ten seconds to load, so leaving them enabled is frustrating. The campaign is drier than chalk. You can ad hoc battle between two players if you have two copies of the game. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

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

Bottom Line

This series' lane-change into incoming traffic is a haphazard affair.

69 OUT OF 100
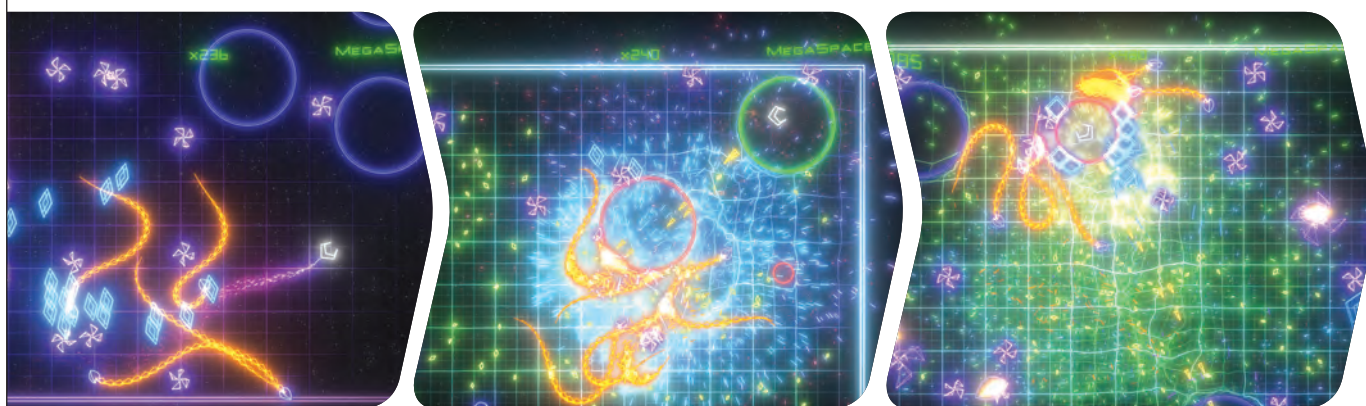
GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2

RRP→ 800 MS Points | **Publisher**→ Activision | **Distributor**→ Xbox LIVE Arcade | **Genre**→ Action shooter | **Age Rating**→ 3+

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED was a game that both rang in the Xbox LIVE Arcade and, it seemed, a new sub-genre of pseudo-retro, minimalist action. Its sparse vector-based graphics were simplicity embodied, but the chaotic scale of the game was like nothing anyone had seen before. It was as tough as nails, becoming the instant darling of the hardcore gamer scene and of players who live for the leader board.

Now the official sequel is here and is what fans would expect (and hope for): more of the same, with just enough variety and new game modes to justify its existence, but still a lean, mean, scoring machine. In addition to the most basic mode, *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2* sports a few other variations such as King,

where one to four players must quickly move between decaying safe zones - the only places from which they are allowed to fire. Yes, now up to four players (local only) can play. Oddly, the 360 doesn't explode into fragments from that degree of blazing particle death crammed into a single frame buffer. The graphics are as simple as the first game's, but offer a little more colour-cycling madness just in case you weren't already tripping enough.

Geometry Wars 2 is one of those games where you know precisely what you're getting, with no fluff, and is meant to be played and played and played. A new score-multiplier system makes the game a little friendlier to players with modest skills, but still allows experts to rack up dumbfounding entries

on the leader board. While it may not be for everyone, for those who know what they want, *Retro Evolved 2* might be the biggest game of the year. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

NAG MUST PLAY

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

Bottom Line

More of the same with four-player co-op.

87 OUT OF 100

THE UPGRADE DILEMMA

THOSE OF US LUCKY enough (or wealthy enough) to have a decent cellular contract, really are spoilt when it comes to phones. We get to choose the best handsets to go along with our relatively high basic monthly cost, and quite often, the process gets a bit complicated. I went through it myself recently, and the poor call-centre assistant on the other end of the line had to wait for ages while I researched every option that was available to me. The combination of tech-savvy and ultra-picky is a nasty one when it comes to picking a new cellular handset... particularly when you're the call-centre person.

The choices facing us when deciding on a new handset are astronomical. There are several brands to choose from, and this choice is often difficult. (I have steadfastly stuck to Nokia, as I pretty much always have since the days when cellphones were huge, unwieldy bricks and SMS was a virtually unknown concept.) Having decided on a brand, you are still faced with a host of models. Each has strengths and weaknesses that need to be taken into account, and the user would obviously want a model that will suit his or her needs. It's human nature to go for the best and most feature-rich phone available, but a top-of-the-range phone may not necessarily be the right choice – particularly if you're going to be playing games on it. Getting an i-mate handset, for example, is fantastic if you're going to make use of its Windows compatibility and host of work-related functions. You're not going to be downloading games for it, though, because most handsets that make use of Windows Mobile are poorly supported when it comes to the latest gaming titles.

So which is the best phone to go for? That's a question only you can answer - phones, like banks, offer individualised experiences. Personally, I decided on the Nokia 5610 with its large display, music capabilities and large 'joystick' button. Two of the three make perfect sense for gaming, and the model is well supported as a gaming platform. Additionally, its music functionality fills a gap: I have been too lazy to go and buy an iPod. While this phone is technically something of a downgrade from the N70 I was using, it offers a greater entertainment scope, while still offering the core business functions I am keen on.

This is a column, though, not a handset review. The point is that selecting this handset has made gaming on a mobile platform more enjoyable for me. Therefore, a little investigation and thought go a very long way.
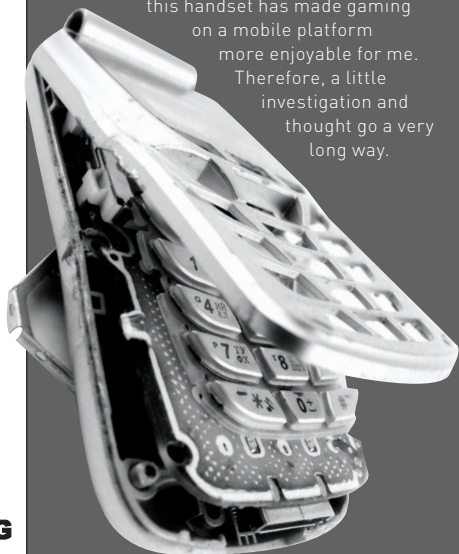
DEATH RACE

GAMELOFT IS JUMPING ONTO another movie licence with a new game based on the upcoming movie, *Death Race*. It appears to be a racing film, more than anything else, with seven vehicles (all with different weapons) available for play. Several game modes will be available, including a five-episode Story mode, Race, Rampage, Eliminator, Shooter and boss battles. The names of the modes seem to be fairly self-explanatory, and it looks like there will be lots to do in the game. Despite all of this, reviewers are calling the film (after press screenings) horrible. It stars Jason Statham and is directed by Paul W. S. Anderson, and looks to be pretty much about guys driving cars and offing each other. Great stuff for a mobile game, but maybe not the best box-office fodder out there...

SUGAR AND...

SADLY, WE DON'T GET all the cool toys here in South Africa. Take, for example, the new gaming phone from Indian handset maker, Spice. Called the X-1 Gaming Phone, this beauty is designed for games, and goes a long way to show that handset makers take this arena very seriously. Then again, it may be a good way for a smaller player in the market to get a nice portion of the pie.

The X-1 Gaming Phone comes with a peripheral controller that plugs into the device, and makes playing games on the platform a lot easier. The controller features a D-pad, four game-control buttons and a Select and Start button. The fact that the controller is bigger than the screen the games are being played on doesn't seem to worry Spice, who will be rolling out the X-1 with a number of preloaded games. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether the controller would be usable with downloaded game titles, but one would hope that Spice has thought of this and acted accordingly. While we probably won't be seeing this handset here anytime soon, other players in the market may take up the idea. And don't worry too much about not getting the handset here: it's not being sold anywhere other than in India for now.

WOLFENSTEIN RPG

GAMING GIANT, JOHN CARMACK, has shown his support for the mobile gaming platform in the past with the release of *Doom RPG* for mobile phones. The game was a slow and pedantic, almost turn-based game. However, it was good fun nonetheless, and took a slightly different look at the *Doom* universe. Id Software has announced a version of *Wolfenstein*, predictably titled *Wolfenstein RPG*, for mobile. However, they're not stopping there. QuakeCon, which took place in Dallas recently, saw Carmack announcing *Doom II RPG* for the mobile platform. Obviously, the concept has a lot of appeal. Will we be seeing *Quake RPG* for mobile? id hasn't said as much, but they haven't denied it either. It will be interesting to see what new ideas Carmack comes up with for handsets.

While the publisher for *Doom II RPG* hasn't been announced, the success that Electronic Arts had with the previous title, as well as their agreeing to publish *Wolfenstein RPG* makes speculation almost unnecessary.

NAG
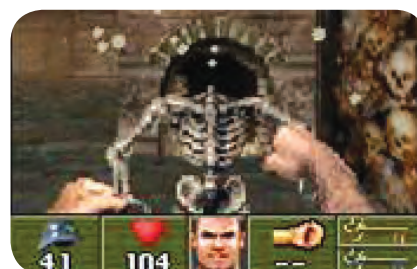
ASPHALT 4: ELITE RACING

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Racing
Download→ SMS Nag095 to 083 123 686

THE "4" IN THIS game's title means absolutely nothing to me. I've never played an *Asphalt* game until this one found its way onto my phone. Your car accelerates automatically in this title, so all you're required to do is steer as you careen around the makeshift course, throwing in the occasional nitrous boost along the way. Naturally, you start out at the back of the pack when the races begin and you slowly move up to first place, dodging scenery, traffic and the fuzz along the way. Smashing objects and barrelling into traffic sees your 'wanted' level go up, causing the police to gradually escalate their attempts to take you down. Power-ups and cash litter the course. The cash is used to purchase vehicles (and upgrades for them) in the Career mode, which sees you working to unlock new tracks and vehicles. There's also an instant play mode that randomly selects a track and vehicle and sets you off. The game plays very well, since they've eliminated the need for you to control the acceleration of your vehicle. Back that up with some decent graphics and sound effects and you have yourself one nifty mobile game that should provide some entertainment when boredom starts setting in. **NAG**
Dane Remendes

NAG
MUST PLAY
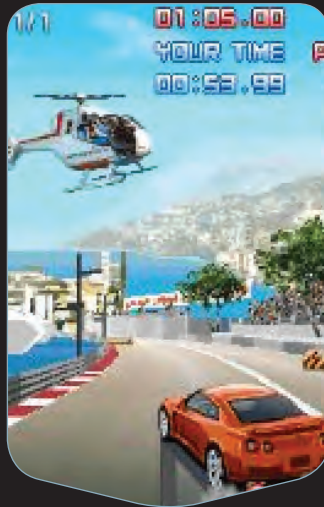
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

A great attempt at bringing racers to diminutive mobile phones.

85
OUT OF 100

ALL NAG MOBILE REVIEWS
ARE DONE ON THE NOKIA N81
Landscape gaming with dedicated game keys • Digital music player for high-quality music playback • High-quality stereo speakers • 3.5mm stereo headphone plug • Bluetooth technology • New 3D multimedia menu • 2-megapixel camera

087

NAG

THE DARK KNIGHT

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Glu
Genre→ Platformer/Fighting
Download→ SMS Nag097 to 083 123 686

DON'T YOU JUST LOVE cash-in licences and spin-offs? This game was released to coincide with the theatrical debut of a very good film so that impressionable kiddies may immediately download it to their handsets. Too bad it does its parent franchise little credit! The basic format is that of a side-scrolling platform game with elements of fighting. The first time you have the misfortune of playing this title you might want to look at the instructions, which display an interminable list of keystroke presses to perform various functions. Upon seeing this, I was quite excited: "Here," I thought to myself, "might be a game with some depth." However, I was sadly mistaken. The instructions proved unnecessary: the controls (to their credit) are fairly intuitive. And in case you are 'special' enough to not be able to figure them out, don't worry: the action in the first level is constantly interrupted by tutorial material. Fair enough. However, the frame rate is terrible (yes, this is not a PC game, but that's no excuse for the developers to create a game that runs poorly even on a decent handset!), and the action is thoroughly monotonous. The only impressive element is the music, but you mostly hear this while in the menu screen – don't let it deceive you! If you want a good platform game to play on your mobile phone, look elsewhere. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

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

Bottom Line
A shameless and lacklustre cash-in on the movie's success. Pretty good music, though.

40 OUT OF 100

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2: DASH!

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ SEGA
Genre→ Platformer
Download→ SMS Nag096 to 083 123 686

ONCE UPON A TIME, this game required a console and cartridge to play it. Now, thanks to modern technology, one of the original side-scrolling favourites of the early console days, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, can be played on a device small enough to fit in your pocket.

It's a great idea, but that doesn't mean it should be done, though. Great ideas are just that – ideas; and every now and then, they don't translate all that well into real-world applications. This game is a perfect example.

When we played *Sonic 2* on our old SEGA systems, we had a control scheme that, although primitive by today's standards, was still better than that of the average mobile handset. Tasks that were performed by a D-pad and two (or so) buttons are now translated onto a numeric keypad. This works for some games, but the speed and reaction times needed to play a game like this just don't work with a mobile phone's basic control setup.

Fans of Sonic will certainly want to get hold of this game, if purely for nostalgic purposes, but be aware, though, this mobile version pales in comparison to the original. It just isn't as much fun. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

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

Bottom Line
Hardcore Sonic fans may enjoy this. Others will find it frustrating.

50 OUT OF 100

JAMES BOND: TOP AGENT

NAG **MUST PLAY**

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Sony Online Entertainment
Genre→ Action
Download→ SMS Nag094 to 083 123 686

THIS TITLE TOOK ME by surprise. Knowing that games featuring movie characters usually are among the bum end of the anatomy skewed my initial perspective. Then discovering that *James Bond: Top Agent* is not a classic action title, but a deck-duelling challenge along the lines of *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, really piqued my interest.

Loosely based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*, the game begins with 007 having escaped his captor, Karl Stromberg. Using Bond's various upgradeable skills, you'll guide him toward the final showdown with Stromberg, even encountering the legendary henchman, Jaws, along the way. Each fight is broken down into a room view, item selection and move selection. Then it's down to simply watching how your strategy matches up to your enemy's. After each interaction, you can access detailed statistics as to why a certain action failed or succeeded. A short storyline may be a cause for concern, but after having played through and only having picked up a quarter of the possible items, it still begs to be replayed.

While thoroughly enjoyable, I couldn't help feeling as if I wasn't using any strategy at all, but blind luck. Apparently, choosing moves with your eyes closed does warrant that attitude. It's an interesting adaption of a control mechanism usually associated with manga titles. **NAG**

Rory Smith-Belton

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

Bottom Line
James Bond lost in Japan? Not quite...

85 OUT OF 100

NAG

ARKANOID

RRP→ R50
**Publisher→** Taito
Genre→ Arcade
Download→ SMS Nag099 to 083 123 686

THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF things can sometimes be funny. Yes, it's the same opening line from my *Space Invaders* review last month, but I'm also a fan of irony. This month, we return to the past from the future we just came back to, to present *Arkanoid*, the classic brick-breaking title from Taito.

Firstly, let's show some respect to one of the old men of the arcade genre. The original from 1986 included most of the mainstay elements that we find in today's newer titles. These include laser power-ups, sticky paddles and indestructible bricks. The port to mobile proves fairly faithful, with the noticeable omission of random floating enemies. Controlling Vaus, the name of the spacecraft that broke away from the dying Arkanoid, makes for a pleasant experience. Perhaps it was my lack of coordination as a youngster, but the official arcade version seemed a tad tougher - unless Taito is making an unofficial statement about the status of today's gamer. Then again, maybe mobile titles are just more forgiving due to the nature of the controls.

In the light of some newer titles, *Arkanoid* may feel a bit shallow, but anyone who purchases this game to own a piece of gaming legacy won't be disappointed. **NAG**
Rory Smith-Belton
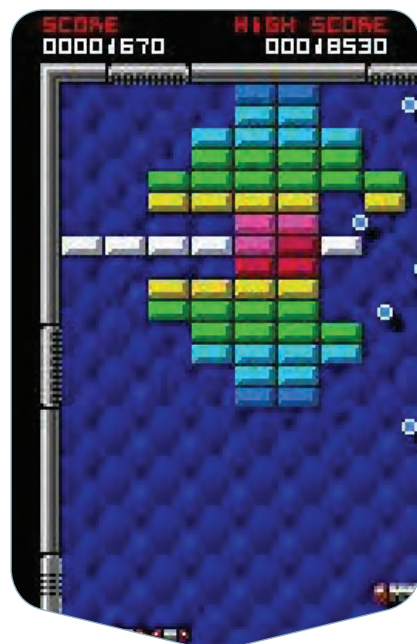
PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS	**MOB**

Bottom Line
Bounce the ball, kill the block. It's Arkanoid. No problem.

78
OUT OF 100

POCKET CHEF

RRP→ R30
Publisher→ Gameloft
Genre→ Arcade
Download→ SMS Nag098 to 083 123 686

GAMING AND FOOD, DO they go together? Of course! An all-night LAN session would be incomplete without a smattering of pizza, fried foods and a beverage of choice. After all, food is our fuel, not pixels. But actually making the food? You're kidding, aren't you? Like it or not, this is the idea behind Gameloft's *Pocket Chef*, a B-title aimed at... umm, nobody – unless I'm unaware of some strange phone-cooking cult out there. The challenge is to create increasingly complex meals through a collection of dexterity and memory-based mini-games. From the humble home to the chef's kitchen, you'll find yourself chopping, peeling, seasoning, liquidising, arranging and baking. What you don't get to do is the eating. In my opinion, the only way to make this game less appealing is if you'd have to wash the dishes in the end as well.

It's not that *Pocket Chef* is a poor game. As always, the title is impeccably packaged according to Gameloft's stringent standards, but it's the content matter that I call into question. Its only success is in actually making you hungry!

If you're desperate to kill a few minutes, this title will do it, but in the glut of the casual gaming market, there are plenty of other choices out there. **NAG**
Rory Smith-Belton

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

Bottom Line
Not a complete 'burger up', but I'd steer clear.

50
OUT OF 100

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

RRP→ R50
Publisher→ Activision
Genre→ Activision
Download→ SMS Nag093 to 083 123 686

I LOVE *CALL OF DUTY* 4. While I wasn't expecting the same gameplay in the mobile version, I was expecting the developers to at least have made an effort at providing decent game mechanics to make the mobile version fun in its own way. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The game is a top-down shooter, played as a number of soldiers from military units around the world. You run around the levels (which are all mostly the same in appearance), holding down an attack button to constantly fire bullets at the bad guys (who never seem to move, even though you're unloading streams of lead in their general direction). There are plenty of grenades to toss around, as well as C4 to plant and bazookas to fire. You'll join forces with a few squad mates along the way, but they seem to be as oblivious to gunfire as the enemies are. A cover system (if it's even worthy of that title) is available, allowing you to take cover against walls and behind sandbags. It's all very boring really, and after about ten minutes of play, you'll wonder why you ever spent money on this game. **NAG**
Dane Remendes

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

Bottom Line
Sub-standard game-play in a sub-stand-ard shooter.

55
OUT OF 100

ODDWORLD

Subject Name: Abe
Racial Profile: Mudokon
Age: 15
Assignment: Enforced, voluntary unremunerated conscript (Floorwaxer First Class)
Deployment: RuptureFarms 1029, Oddworld
Physical Characteristics: Small, purplish green, flatulent. Favours loincloths.

Summary: Current Employee of the Year. Previously under observation for suspicion of sedition and sabotage. Suspected leader of the criminal labour organisation, Free Mud Party.

Status: At Large!

Welcome to Oddworld, home of the Magog Cartel's premiere, consumer-industrial facilities, and SoulStorm Brew™. When RuptureFarms 1029 carelessly exhausts the local population of Meeches, grinding its production of the immensely popular novelty meat snack, Meech Munchies™, to an abrupt and potentially commercially devastating halt, CEO Molluck the Glukkon turns a prospective eye to the next readily available source of protein: the Mudokon slaves working his factories. Fortunately for the intended Tasty Treats™, our protagonist overhears the insidious plan, and scurries off to rescue his chums from almost certain extinction.

Representing some of the finest platform gaming of its generation (and still largely unsurpassed), *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* (1997) and sequel *Abe's Exoddus* (1998) saw its titular hero creeping, walking, running, rolling, hoisting, jumping, crouching, and farting his way through a series of daring rescues and unlikely escapes. In real life, nobody would be able to outrun a Scrab.   **NAG**
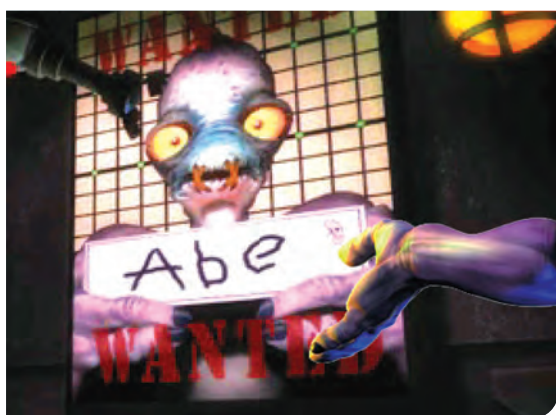
DELEGATING TASKS

Since Mudokons are routinely blinded by their employers, Abe must make use of simple spoken commands to get stuff done. Nearby Mudokons can be instructed to follow or wait for Abe, as well as manipulate environmental paraphernalia such as levers. In *Abe's Exoddus*, this feature is expanded to include pre-emptive emotional states and physical afflictions. Miserable Mudokons, for example, will remain unresponsive until Abe expresses sympathy for their wretched plight, while sick Mudokons must be healed with a special chant. All of this is ultimately aimed at cooperatively negotiating the environment in order to escort Mudokon slaves to Bird Portals and rescue.

Additionally, Abe is able to assume control of certain enemies through possession. A possessed Glukkon, for example, may be used to gain entry to otherwise unreachable locations, or issue orders to nearby Slig guards in much the same way that Abe interacts with fellow Mudokons. Both Glukkon and Slig targets are killed when this telepathic link is terminated.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The *Oddworld* series was originally intended to span five lead releases, as well as a number of subsidiary bonus titles. These were to include:

- Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee. First quintology game. Released for PlayStation and Microsoft Windows in 1997
- Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus. Bonus quintology game and a sequel to Abe's Oddysee. Released for PlayStation and Microsoft Windows in 1998
- Oddworld Adventures. Game Boy version of Abe's Oddysee, released in 1998
- Oddworld Adventures 2. Game Boy Colour version of Abe's Exoddus, released in 1999
- Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee. Second quintology game, released for the original Xbox in 2001
- Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee. Released for Game Boy Advance in 2003
- Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath. The most recent and ultimately final Oddworld game. Released for the original Xbox in 2005
- SligStorm (unreleased)
- Oddworld: Munch's Exoddus (unreleased)
- Oddworld: Squeek's Oddysee (unreleased)
- Oddworld: Nod's Oddysee (unreleased)
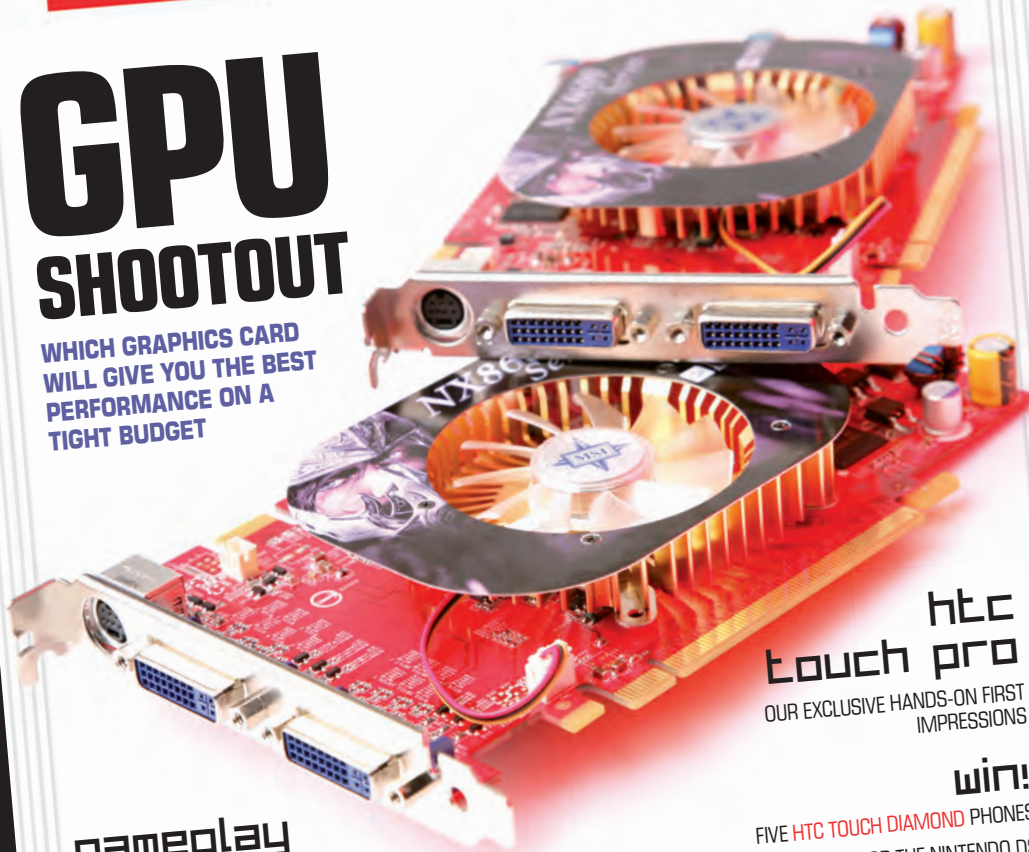- Oddworld: The Hand of Odd (unreleased)

BATTLE OF THE BANDS.

Guitar Hero World Tour versus Rock Band 2

NOTHING SAYS "VICARIOUS CELEBRITY" like strawberry lip-gloss, a packet of cheap sherbet dusting your coffee table, and a small, plastic, guitar-shaped thing. Well, your friends might think that you look foolish, but your five-star rating for *Rock you like a Hurricane* is potent testament to your inimitable rock-star awesomeness. Besides, who wants to master a real instrument and grind through the ghastly local drinking holes, shucking rubbish cover versions of 80s hair anthems, having your amplifier stolen, and ultimately losing the regional Battle of the Bands competition to a radio-friendly unit shifter, fifteen years younger and pre-eminently better looking than you, when you can be the tabloid-fancy rock god you deserve to be in the privacy and comfort of your own home? So what if it's just pushing buttons. **NAG**

SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL

Both titles are ready, set, rock to release alongside a truckload of shiny, new, improved and even more expensive peripherals. They're going to have to start packaging complimentary roadies with all this stuff. *Rock Band 2* is pushing a faux wooden Stratocaster guitar controller, allegedly featuring an improved strum bar over its predecessor's rather 'soggy' response, as well as quieter fret buttons. Fingers crossed it doesn't play like the My First Toddler Toy for Happy Smashing that was the really grotty *Rock Band* controller. The notorious drum kit has also been replaced with something a little more like what it should have been the first time around, now with a metal-reinforced kick pedal and some sort of built-in 'nerf' surface on the drum pads.

Meanwhile, *Guitar Hero* nobbled *Rock Band*'s rather innovate additional fret buttons and glued them onto a wireless, no-name, sunburst-finish controller that sort of looks a bit like an ESP, but probably isn't officially because of licensing issues and Activision's incautiously incurred litigation with Gibson. Apparently, RedOctane is still waging some sort of inscrutable crusade against left-handers, however, as this peripheral is every bit as unashamedly right-hand orientated[2] as previous models. The real rock star here, however, is *Guitar Hero World Tour*'s wireless, six-piece drum kit, featuring two adjustable cymbals in addition to the basic snare, toms, and kick pedal load-out. Developed with the assistance of drum-simulator brain box and multi patent-holder, John Devacka, the kit features silicon-based velocity-sensitive pads and a MIDI port for connecting to compatible devices, with Activision boldly promising "[the] most realistic drum experience ever in a videogame" (presumably until the next *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* iteration anyway).

MASTER OF DISHARMONY

Guitar Hero World Tour introduces a new mode for generating custom content, offering the intrepid virtual-studio mogul a sophisticated array of tools, including multiple instrumentation sequencing (although vocal support was axed due to legal issues) and a range of Line 6 amp emulations and guitar effects. Custom cacophonies will be uploaded to the new GH Tunes service via Xbox LIVE, PSN, or the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

TURN THESE UP TO 11

In a series first, both *Rock Band 2* and *Guitar Hero World Tour* feature set lists comprising only master recordings. Apparently, those cobwebbed corporate corpses over at the Music Industry Secret HQ have finally twigged that there's a lot of effortless promotion to be had here. No more of those abominable Bruce Dickinson wannabes[1]. Each title rolls out a roster of more than 85 songs on disc, as well as the inevitable blizzard of additional DLC to follow after release, representing nearly five decades of the Devil's favourite shower tunes. The nice people over at Harmonix, moreover, have ensured that players' existing *Rock Band* DLC will carry over into *Rock Band 2*, so those Boston songs secretly squirreled away on a memory stick that doesn't officially exist are as future proof as *More Than a Feeling*. Unfortunately, both developers have scandalously neglected to include Def Leppard's instant rocker, *Pour Some Sugar on Me*. Petitions, people.

THROWING DOUBLE HORNS IN THE MEANTIME:

Guitar Hero World Tour
- Hold the Line – Toto
- Stinkfist – Tool
- Sweet Home Alabama – Lynyrd Skynyrd
- Give it Away – The Red Hot Chilli Peppers
- Are You Gonna Go My Way – Lenny Kravitz
- Smells Like Teen Spirit – Nirvana
- Animal – Def Leppard
- Hallowed Be Thy Name – Iron Maiden
- Master of Puppets – Metallica
- Purple Haze – Jimi Hendrix
- Jumpin' Jack Flash – The Rolling Stones
- Dragula – Rob Zombie

Rock Band 2
- Livin' on a Prayer – Bon Jovi
- Battery – Metallica
- Ace of Spades – Motorhead
- Alive – Pearl Jam
- Eye of the Tiger – Survivor
- Chop Suey – System of a Down
- Come Out and Play – The Offspring
- Pinball Wizard – The Who
- Almost Easy – Avenged Sevenfold
- Aqualung – Jethro Tull
- Go Your Own Way – Fleetwood Mac
- Spoonman – Soundgarden

HARD ROCK

Not everyone is made of the sort of audacious, indomitable stuff needed to blitz through *Cherry Pie* on Easy, so Neversoft is introducing a new Beginner difficulty mode for rheumatic octogenarians, your insufferably enthusiastic three year-old sibling and the booth babes at rAge. This mode will require the player to simply play a note – any note!

Anyone who has played *Rock Band*, on the other hand, and been randomly assaulted with The Outlaw's haematoma-inducing *Green Grass and High Tides* on Expert in a third-tier, mystery set list should be immensely relieved to know that its sequel features a filter for avoiding that sort of instantly regrettable incident[3]. *Rock Band 2* will also offer a Breakneck Speed display mode (more or less exactly the same thing as *Guitar Hero*'s hyper-speed cheat), a feature conspicuously absent the first time around.

---

[1] There is only one Bruce Dickinson.

[2] A great, putrescent pox on you all. As if your impossible scissors weren't enough.

[3] 20,000 fans lost in World Tour Mode, and my sister didn't speak to me for two hours afterwards.

NAG

YOU KNOW YOU ARE A HILLBILLY WHEN...

IF IT IS POSSIBLE for a man to become his own grandfather through an unlikely (but legal) combination of marriages and further complications of having children, then it is possible for me to become a console owner and fanboy.

So, here is the question: do you guys want to see some of the cool hardware upgrades and mods available for the various consoles on the market in the hardware section of *NAG*? Yes, I used the word "cool" in reference to a console... I am not sure what happened to me. Perhaps I am getting older and wiser and perhaps I am finally seeing through the clouds of smoke emanating from my two nitrogen-filled copper containers atop my Skulltrail motherboard running two Intel 9775 Extreme Edition CPUs at 5GHz each. I'm not sure, but the bottom line is that there are some funky mods available for consoles such as the Xbox and I am sure for the others as well. Send in your mails - we won't know without your input.

In other news, we received the highly anticipated AMD/ATI HD4870X2 from Sapphire and cannot wait to hook it up to Neo's rig. Wonder if it will handle the leftover liquid nitrogen we used on the... *(this sentence has been deleted... I don't want a lawsuit on my hands – Ed)*

Len Nery
Hardware Manager

ASUS PUTS A NEW TWIST ON PC GAMING

ASUS'S EEE STICK IS an easy-to-use yet highly versatile plug-and-play wireless controller for the PC that translates physical motions into corresponding movements onscreen. Bearing the product tagline "Get into the swing of gaming," the Eee Stick looks like a whole lot of fun and we certainly can't wait to give it a go at *NAG*. The Eee Stick comprises an Activation stick, a Navigation stick and a 2.4GHz RF dongle. Even though vibration capable, both ergonomic sticks consume very little power, providing up to 72 hours of continuous play on two AA batteries per stick. The 2.4GHz RF dongle has a broadcast range of 10m. The Eee Stick will be bundled exclusively with certain models of the Eee PC and the Eee Box, along with a collection of games developed or adapted specifically for use with it.

Is this the Wii killer? We shall see...

HERALDING THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE IN MOTHERBOARD TECHNOLOGY

ASUS HAS RELEASED THEIR first bit of Intel Nehalem-supported motherboard news with the announcement of their Intel X58 platform P6T Series of motherboards.

The board not only has outstanding support for the new Intel 45nm Penryn family, it also features support for 36 lanes, making it possible for four PCI-E 16x slots to run at 8x modes. And thus, support for SLI as well as CrossFire is on the cards! The memory controller will be integrated to support three-channel (six DIMMs) DDR3 1,333Mhz for the CPU, while the L3 cache is expected to reach up to the 8MB mark. The new generation of CPUs will support memory of up to 24GB with a total bandwidth of 3,200MB/sec.

What's even more exciting is that this new platform will adopt a new system-bus architecture: QPI (QuickPath Interconnect), which supports up to 6.4GT/s (3.2GHz) and a maximum bandwidth of up to 25.6GB/sec (twice the bandwidth compared to current FSB 1600 standards). With such high specification standards, the P6T Deluxe truly looks set to unleash the ultimate in performance for hardcore PC users. Let me add to your excitement by telling you that the board also boasts two SAS (Serial Attached SCSI) connectors. These hard drives will provide higher data transmission speeds and better data storage reliability in comparison to current SATA interfaces, and could herald the start of a new standard for mainstream storage devices that cater to enterprise users. SAS hard drives gain a 39% improvement in PC Mark HDD Test benchmarks when compared to RAID 0 performances with SATA (supported by SB ICH10R) interfaces.

HARDWARE Q&A

"I WANT TO UPGRADE MY current system, replacing one component at a time. I want to get the MSI P7N Diamond with 1,333Mhz DD3 RAM. I would like to know if I can continue to use my E6600 Intel Core 2 Duo processor with this motherboard and RAM.

What I need to know is if the system would boot up and function at a reduced 1,066MHz FSB, or would it completely fail. The reason for not changing the processor yet is because I want to move to a quad core, but don't see the performance to warrant it in games yet. So waiting while prices drop is my plan.

Thanks in advance."

Fabio

Hi Fabio
You'll be able to run the E6600 without any issues. Your system will run like a dream and waiting for pricing to drop is generally a cool idea when on a budget. At least you are not writing in to say that you are still using a Pentium III and waiting for the pricing of Pentium 4s to drop.

Thanks for your mail. Enjoy the MSI board. It is a stunner!

Len

Send your comments to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za. Remember, I have a filter on the server, so mark your comments with either the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' or 'Dream Machine'.

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the *NAG* **Hardware Reviews section**

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

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

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

UNDER THE HOOD, YO: Ghetto flava, kicking it with the pow-wah.
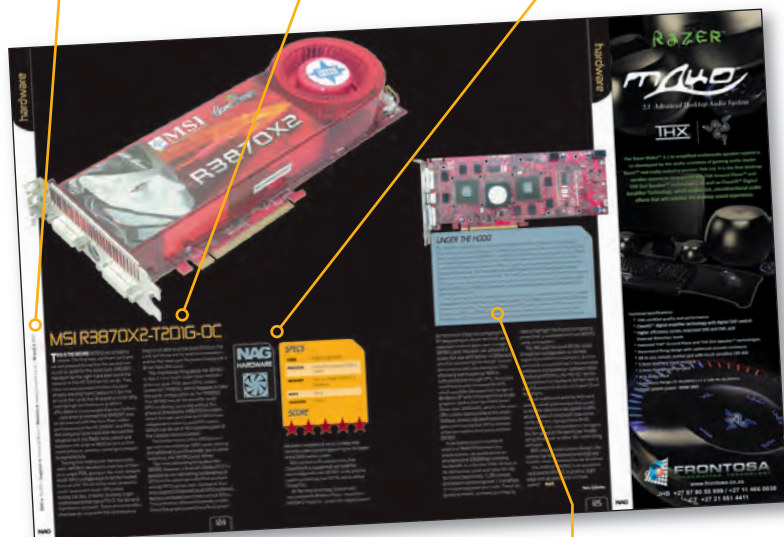
DROP YOUR ROCKS AND READ THIS BOX

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

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

SPECS

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

SCORE

★★★★★

NAG AWARDS

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

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

NAG DREAM MACHINE

NAG HARDWARE

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

DREAM MACHINE

UP THE ANTE...!

SPEED EQUATES TO SUCCESS. This has been proven time and time again by GIGABYTE.

To Tim and the rest of the guys at GIGABYTE's HQ in Taiwan, our congratulations goes to you as we at *NAG* dig a deep hole in front of the EP45T-EXTREME motherboard, plant the silver pole and bring out the pole-dancing queen to perform her award-winning dance just for you...

If you guys have any questions or suggestions, send us a mail with the subject heading 'Dream Machine' to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za.

Welcome to the drool....

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

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

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

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

MOUSE
Saitek GM3200 Laser Mouse (being replaced)
No local distributor
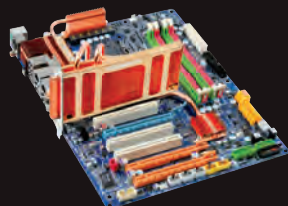
MOTHERBOARD
GIGABYTE GA-EP45T-EXTREME (R4,999)
Rectron [011] 203-1000

POWER SUPPLY
Zalman ZM1000-HP 1000W (R2,033)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

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

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

MEMORY
Corsair TWIN3X2048-1800C7DF G (R4,699)
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

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

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

Hardwired
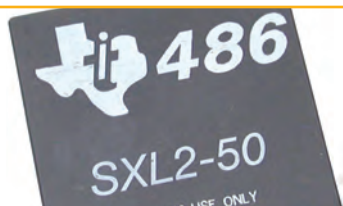
by Neo Sibeko

A greener future at 5GHz

THE INTEL CORE 2 CPUs changed the face of overclocking when they were introduced in mid-2006. If anything, the Core 2 line revolutionised overclocking and ushered in a new wave of technologies, which were developed specifically for leveraging the power available in the CPUs.

At the same time, AMD's new CPUs suffered from a 'cold bug'. The cold bug was probably what led enthusiasts to change to Intel CPUs.

Intel's next-generation architecture, Nehalem, presents yet another leap forward in performance, equal to the difference between the Pentium 4 and the Intel Core 2 in 2006.

There's no doubt that the new Nehalem cores are fast – in fact, faster than anyone could have ever imagined. However, how they overclock may prove to be more important than the sheer performance clock index, especially if AMD's Shanghai CPU does indeed clock as well as it seems to be. There are rumours of a Shanghai CPU overclocked to 5GHz, which is impressive considering that there has never been an AMD CPU on record exceeding 4.2GHz (at the time of writing there was an attempt to exceed this on an Athlon 64 X2 6000+ Black Edition). Therefore, 5GHz would be a breakthrough in both manufacturing and obviously performance as far as overclockers are concerned.

More impressive, however, is a screenshot that shows a water-cooled Shanghai CPU clocking in at above 3.7GHz. This may seem slow relative to the clock speeds we see today on the 45nm Intel CPUs, but it's worth noting that the early retail versions of Core 2 CPUs (B1 to B3) were topping out at around the same clock speeds under water-cooling. (It was only with the G0 iterations that clock speeds started to reach 4GHz under water-cooling.)

The significance on the AMD parts is that these are pre-production engineering sample CPUs, so the versions that will hit retail channels are likely to see better frequencies. With each revision, increasing overclocking headroom and providing better performance form the IMC.

Whatever ends up happening, it's clear that 2009 is going to be a lot more interesting than 2008, which was already in contention for the best year overclocking has ever had.

On the GPU front, it also seems that AMD has the upper hand with the fastest graphics card on the market with the AMD/ATI Radeon 4870X2. For the first time in several years, NVIDIA doesn't seem to have an answer. Whether the GT350 will take the crown back remains to be seen, but as it stands, the future looks a little bit greener, especially at 5GHz.   **NAG**

> "Intel's next-generation architecture, Nehalem, presents yet another leap forward in performance, equal to the difference between the Pentium 4 and the Intel Core 2 in 2006.
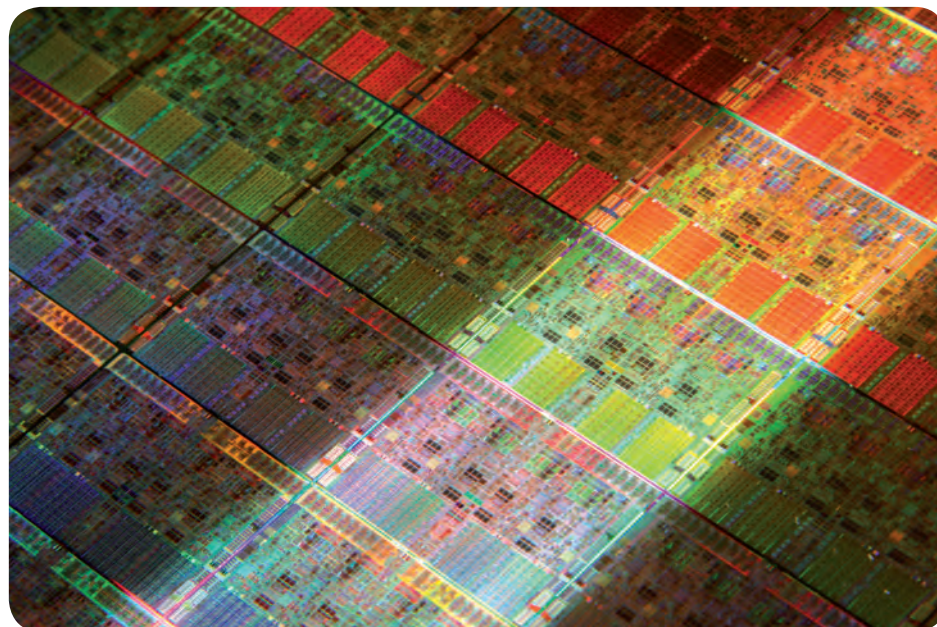
ASUS ROG Maximus II Formula
Totally Immersive Gaming Through Lifelike Sounds

SupremeFX X-Fi Delivers Realistic Audio for Ultimate Gaming Experiences

If you're really passionate about gaming, then you know how important a role audio plays in the overall gaming experience. The new ASUS ROG Maximus II Formula motherboard, with the innovative SupremeFX X-Fi audio card, will re-define how you experience games from now on. With support for DDRII memory, and featuring the latest Intel P45 chipset, the exclusive CPU Level Up technology and Extreme Engine power design - the Maximus II Formula will provide you with the ultimate in gaming experiences.

Immersive Environmental Sounds with SupremeFX X-Fi

The Republic of Gamers (ROG) is dedicated to delivering the best gaming experiences for the serious gamer. The ROG Maximus II Formula, together with the bundled new SupremeFX X-Fi audio card, will provide you with sounds so real - you'd think that you were right there in the game itself! With an emphasis on high quality design, the Supreme FX X-Fi utilizes the ADI 2000B audio codec, Creative X-Fi suite, CMSS3D and Crystalizer technologies, plus authentic EAX sound effects to provide top-notch virtual 3D surround sounds for your gameplay.

Upgrade Your CPU with Just a Few Clicks!

With CPU Level Up, you will easily obtain CPU boosts to suit your gaming needs. All you have to do is select your desired CPU model from a list in the BIOS. Once chosen, the system will do everything else and fine-tune the original processor to run at the speed of the desired CPU. Obtaining CPU boosts never been as easier!

Extreme Engine Design for Exceptional Performance

The new ROG Extreme Engine is a next-generation multi-phase power design that comprises of a 16-phase power design for the CPU, 2-phases for memory and 3-phases for the north bridge. This power design provides additional voltage options in the BIOS for higher performances options; and utilizes only the best quality components for stable operations, a power efficiency of up to 96%, and automatic power management for less energy wastage and less heat production.

by Derrick Cramer

Stairway to Heaven

LED ZEPPELIN, ONE OF the greatest rock bands of all time, graced the world with *Stairway to Heaven* in 1971. This eight-minute-long track is considered by many to be the most beautiful song ever recorded, and I can't help but agree.

Nowadays, an eight-minute track is uncommon. People don't have that kind of time to sit around and listen to a song – they're too busy rushing to do whatever it is they get paid to do. By now, you're probably thoroughly confused and can't really see what this has to do with hardware, I'm sure. The title of this column says it all: this is about a stairway to heaven – hardware heaven that is. The point of this column is to give you an indication of what I as a hardware reviewer consider when looking at various aspects of PCs.

So let's get started, shall we? The first step to hardware heaven is looking at why you have a PC, what role it plays, and what you expect from of it. This month we'll look at components that are not so important for a gaming system.

First up, the hard drive. So what if the latest hard drives have 32MB of cache for faster transfers? It means nothing if most of your game is loaded into RAM anyway. The older 8MB-cache drives are just as fast when it comes to playing *Crysis, COD4, GRID* or any other game for that matter. So why spend the extra money on something with almost no beneficial result? We both know the answer here: you shouldn't.

The next component in a system that often gets a larger than necessary slice of the budget is the motherboard. Does it have four RAM slots? Does it have PCI-E and support for the latest CPUs? Then there is nothing wrong with it. The cheapest motherboard around that meets the above requirements is probably the best suited to your system, for the simple reason that it does all you need. Most boards from major manufacturers nowadays cater for the overclocking crowd, with features such as 16-phase power and stock support for 1,200MHz RAM. The price difference between generic Intel boards and those manufactured by third-party manufacturers is often R600+, which if spent on something like the graphics card, yields far better results.

The next component people often overspend on is the power supply, led by manufacturer specifications that are often overzealous at best. I ran a system requiring 'at least' 750W using a generic 500W power supply for four years, and it never gave me a day's trouble. My advice would be to buy a semi well-known power supply whose wattage is up to 100W less than your system requirements. If you buy a power supply rated higher than 700W for a gaming machine, you either have a really large budget intended for a machine capable of running all games on at least high-detail settings for the next two years, or have missed the point of a gaming machine completely.

With that, the first step is complete and we are closer to hardware heaven. This month was an introduction to the gaming machine. Next month we wrap it up with the components you should focus on for ultimate gaming goodness. **NAG**

> " The first step to hardware heaven is looking at why you have a PC, what role it plays, and what you expect from of it.

imagine technology captured in art.

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

T190, T200, T220, T240, T260

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

NAG'S EXTREME SPIDER PLATFORM

We build an über Spider Platform... just for fun

IT'S BEEN A LONG time since AMD had the performance edge when it comes to CPUs. Since mid-2006, the competition has been putting immense pressure on AMD, and despite price reductions, the Core 2 has continued to pull the carpet from under AMD's feet at every turn.

Not too long ago, AMD introduced the Spider Platform, which isn't really anything other than an AMD/ATI GPU, an AMD/ATI chipset and an AMD CPU. AMD stated that the Spider Platform was more than just the selection of parts that came from AMD, but an entire solution that's built to work as a single unit to deliver cutting-edge performance at a cost-effective price. This may have been true in the labs, but in real life, many were left unimpressed with the result.

We were sent a gaming machine based on the Spider Platform, featuring the fantastic ASUS M3A32-MVP motherboard, an HD4850 graphics card and an AMD Phenom 9600BE. Memory came courtesy of two 1GB Corsair Value Select DDR2 667 sticks and power was provided by the Aerocool Zero dBA 620W PSU. A fairly good system out of the box, but a system that is unlikely to astound you.

For that, we would need to rebuild the computer into something worthy of praise and admiration, so a number of components had to be changed. In essence, we unleashed the Spider Platform and added the equivalent of a 'turbo' through overclocking. The focus of the rebuild was reliability, stability and, most of all, uncompromised performance. Since we were impressed with the AMD Phenom X4 9850 Black Edition, we

The brilliant ASUS M3A32-MVP has a RAM cooler built in

decided to swop out the 9600BE for the 9850 for a sizeable performance boost.

Changing the CPU, however, was only the beginning. We proceeded to change the RAM to a more capable set in the form of the Transcend aXeRam rated at 1,066MHz (5-5-5-15). Many sets are rated at this speed and even higher, but we needed sticks that would be stable at ultra-tight timings and the aXeRam was capable of 1,066MHz at 4-4-4-12. Paired with the unlocked 9850 Black Edition, the memory performance

The 3GHz CPU at the heart of the Spider system
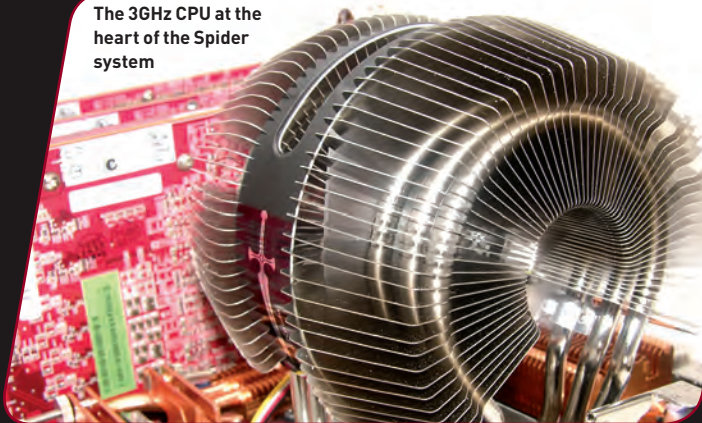
was nothing short of incredible, delivering over 13GB/sec of bandwidth in SiSoft Sandra 2008.

As impressed as we were with the HD4850, it wasn't quite right for what we wanted to build, so we resorted to the Radeon HD4870. However, we were not going to settle for one or two. No, we went ahead and installed three Radeon HD4870 cards for a three-way CrossFire configuration. With so much GPU power, we were guaranteed a staggering amount of graphics processing power with more than three teraflops of GPU power. Nothing we had ever built before had come close to reaching this level of graphics performance.

Given that we had virtually changed the entire system, we needed a power supply that could power this behemoth of a machine, and for that we turned to the Superchannel PowerX 1KW unit (reviewed in this issue), which provided more than sufficient power for the build. Despite having four PCI-E connectors, for a three-way configuration we added two additional PCI-E power connectors. Many PSUs would not function well with such a configuration, but the PowerX was rock solid and it powered the entire configuration without incident.

When all was done, we had an impressive machine. Nevertheless, we wanted more and that would have to come from the CPU. We swopped out the ASUS Silent Knight CPU cooler for the tried-and-tested, heavy duty Zalman CNPS9700, which allowed us to clock to a comfortable 3GHz with ease. Since the CPU was unlocked, we could have elected to use the multiplier to reach the desired 3GHz, but we wanted to improve performance over the entire system, so we elected to use the HT speed and increased the clock speed to 250MHz. We used the 800MHz RAM divider and ended up with the memory operating at a comfortable 1,000MHz (4-4-4-12) at an ultra-low 2.1V.

When all the tweaking was done, we had

an extreme Spider Platform and we were impressed to say the least. Doing an online comparison on Futuremark's online result browser, we were surprised to see that the Spider Platform we had built had the highest 3DMark Vantage score, outpacing the second-fastest system by more than 1,000 points.

More than the benchmarks, we were interested in game performance, but we were not able to test ultra-high widescreen settings in any game. We did, however, manage to record over 123fps in *Call of Duty 4* at 2,048 x 1,536 with 4x AA enabled. Every game we tested on the system was smooth with frame rates constantly above the 100fps mark, irrespective of the settings we used.

With this kind of performance, we can only imagine what two Radeon HD4870X2 cards could achieve in a four-way CrossFire configuration! With rumours of early sample Shanghai CPUs reaching 5GHz under extreme cooling, we can only wait with baited breath of what the Spider Platform will have to offer in the future.

The Spider system we built is high-performance computing at its best! **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

PROCESSOR	AMD Phenom X4 9850 Black Edition
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS M3A32 MVP Deluxe (RD790FX)
MEMORY	Transcend aXeRam DDR2 1066 PC8500
GRAPHICS CARDS	3 x ATI Radeon HD4870 512MB
PSU	Superchannel PowerX
COOLER	Zalman CNPS 9700

No less than three teraflops of power!
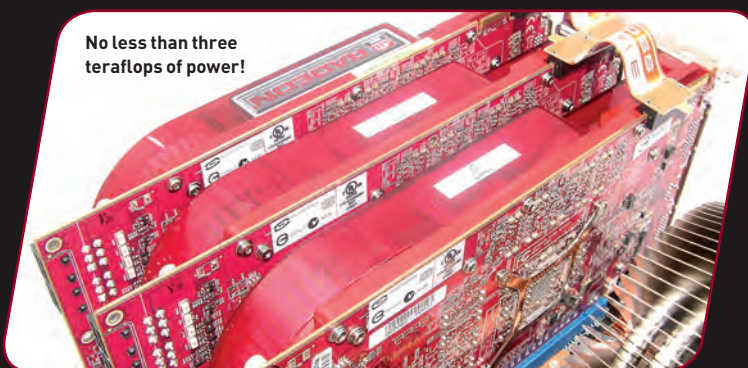
REDEFINING PARADIGMS

AMD/ATI proves us wrong again, and produces something we considered all-but-impossible: a real, on-the-shelf market reality.

WE NEVER ENJOY STARTING our reviews on a negative, but in this case, it serves a good purpose – so bear with us. Perfect mobility and screaming performance, particularly from a gamer's perspective, do not go together. Laptops are work tools, and not gaming machines. High-end gaming laptops, on the other hand, pack the punch but then the argument is that they aren't actually that mobile anymore, suffering from hammered battery life, vast amounts of heat produced, and substantial weight disadvantages. Never the twain shall meet...

But then, never say never, for graphics powerhouse AMD/ATI may just have the solution you're looking for thanks to two years of intensive and expensive R&D into solving this very prickly dilemma.

First, though, let's take a brief look at the Fujitsu-Siemens Amilo Pa3515. Part of the new Amilo 3000 range of notebooks from the German company, the latest Amilo is an absolute feast of hardcore mobile functionality.

Packaged in a gorgeous new glossy white chassis, the new Amilo sports 4GB of DDR2 memory feeding data to an AMD Turion X2 Ultra processor running at 2.3GHz per core, and can be spec'ed with dual-core Turion or Athlon parts instead as per your needs. The company has kept external connections down to the minimum required: Gigabit Ethernet, two USB 2.0 ports, a set of audio jacks, an integrated card reader, a chunky eSATA connector and one DVI-I port for connecting external HD displays. There's even an AmiloCam Webcam built into the topmost edge of the bright, clear LCD display, in between the pair of microphone pickups.

It's a potent beast under the hood. The Turion CPU and massive amount of RAM make general computing a pleasure, and you can see the power in the crisp, speedy response of Vista. The notebook isn't the slimmest, but is pleasingly sleek and portable enough for the average road warrior. It's almost completely silent during operation, and it sips electricity like a small-capacity diesel runabout does juice. Used heavily, it'll return a battery life in the region of two and a half hours.

We love the MacBook-like, large, flat, white palm-rest area with its colour-coded,

integrated touch pad, and the operation of the flat, same-hued keyboard itself. Fujitsu-Siemens hasn't gone too mad on the additional keys either, with just three running along the top for launching Web and e-mail programs, and the third dedicated to controlling the system fan speed, which is nice.

However, stunning design and giant-slaying number crunching do not a gaming machine make, and so it proves in this case. The integrated AMD/ATI 3200 Mobility graphics chipset is fine for productivity suites, but a touch underpowered for high-end gaming.

Which is where the AMD/ATI XGP architecture enters the equation, and it's this technology that is the real news here. You see, the very similarly-spec'ed Fujitsu-Siemens Amilo Sa 3650 will be the first to incorporate XGP through an FSC dubbed "Graphics Booster," instantly turning an impressive notebook into a desktop-conquering monster gaming rig!

It isn't groundbreaking, at least in concept, as the idea has been around and worked on by various companies just about since discrete graphics processing came out! With varying degrees of success of course, as evidenced by the total lack of consumer products on the market offering such an appealing combo. AMD/ATI's XGP will be the first such total solution available to the consumer, for a variety of reasons.

The biggest is speed. By basing the external interface on the PCI Express 2.0 standard, AMD/ATI is able to provide 4GB/sec of bi-directional bandwidth while still maintaining a thin, flexible, and low-cost cable-and-connector combination. To provide this throughput, the company utilises an eight-lane PCI-E connector, with a 16-lane product waiting in the wings.

The Graphics Booster is a custom-built, small and portable (weighing in at just 0.5kg) box that incorporates a high-end AMD/ATI Mobility Radeon HD 3870 GPU and its 512MB of integrated video RAM into a self-contained unit, which can be connected via this new interface

to notebooks that support it.

It has its own dedicated PSU, custom-built and optimised cooling mechanisms, and thanks to what AMD/ATI calls "Cross Display Technology," doesn't even require an additional display! It will happily use the bi-directional capabilities of PCI Express to accelerate the image on the notebook's display.

AMD/ATI is allowing its technology partners the freedom to design and name their consumer products built on the XGP architecture what they want. Therefore, you'll start seeing more and more of these units branded by the manufacturer themselves coming into the market, no doubt in all interesting manner of shapes, sizes, and catering to the needs of specific consumer niches.

Of course, there are far more applications than just gaming, although this is one of the most obvious. High-end rendering requirements? No problem. Multi-user graphics power for the home, or even office environment, available as and when necessary or allowed? In fact, this capability opens up the notebook market to whole new groups of users, who previously may not have been interested in shifting to mobile due to the limitations of the tech.

When ATI proclaimed, upon its acquisition by AMD, that it would be focussing on some very interesting mobility products moving into the future, my head was filled with visions of smartphones pushing out monster 3D graphics onto tiny LCD displays. However, this is a much better, much more viable and much better resolved solution to a problem that has long vexed laptop manufacturers across the globe. By creating something that is easy to incorporate onto any motherboard with a minimal footprint, and is robust, flexible, and affordable enough for the greater consumer market to embrace, AMD/ATI has not only revolutionised mobile computing on the whole, but it also now has a product base that is certain to support it into all new levels of future market success. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

SPECS

CHIPSET	AMD 780G and SB700
CPUS SUPPORTED	Turion X2 Ultra (2.1-2.4 GHz), Turion X2 dual, Athlon X2 Dual, Sempron (2.3 GHz X2 Ultra on test sample)
MEMORY	4GB DDR2-800
DISPLAY	15.4" WSXGA
GRAPHICS	ATI Radeon Mobility HD3200
STORAGE	Integrated 160GB SATA 2.5" drive, DVD-RW, integrated card reader
EXTERNAL CONNECTORS	10/100 LAN, audio, 1 X eSATA, 1 X DVI-I (With HDCP support)
WEIGHT	2.95kg

GIGABYTE GA-EP45T-EXTREME

NO, THIS ISN'T A mistake. We're not reviewing the same motherboard as we did in the July issue. This is the DDR3 version. Physically, the boards are the same and it would be hard to tell them apart if not for the differently coloured RAM slots. The specifications are also similar to those of the EP45-EXTREME, save for the supported memory speeds.

GIGABYTE claims support for DDR3 speeds exceeding 1,600MHz. Although these are not official JEDEC speeds, performance-DDR3 sets these days are already exceeding 2,400MHz. During all our encounters with P45 boards that use DDR2, we have been able to reach high FSB speeds, only to find that the high bus speeds were anything but stable for 3D benchmarks.

Fortunately, GIGABYTE seems to have done more than just replacing the DDR2 slots with DDR3 slots. The BIOS has been reworked: not necessarily to

add options, but to negate the need for some options such as GTL voltages. On the DDR2 board, we had both GTL reference voltages, which could be adjusted either automatically via VTT/ Termination Voltage or independently. These are absent on the EP45T for some reason, but overclocking is significantly better. VDIMM voltages also seem to be better controlled, with the motherboard delivering voltages closer to the selected DRAM voltage than the DDR2 board did.

In isolation, the EP45-EXTREME is a good motherboard, but next to the EP45T-EXTREME, the differences are noticeable: not only in performance, but also in overclocking headroom. With the DDR2 board, we struggled to stabilise anything over 550MHz for extended periods. However, on the EP45T-EXTREME, we not only managed more than 600MHz for hours on end, but we reached 645MHz in dual-channel mode.

NAG HARDWARE

NAG DREAM MACHINE

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P45 + ICH10
MEMORY BANKS	4 x 184-pin DDR3 (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Quad, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 3 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 8 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, FireWire

SCORE

★★★★★

NAG
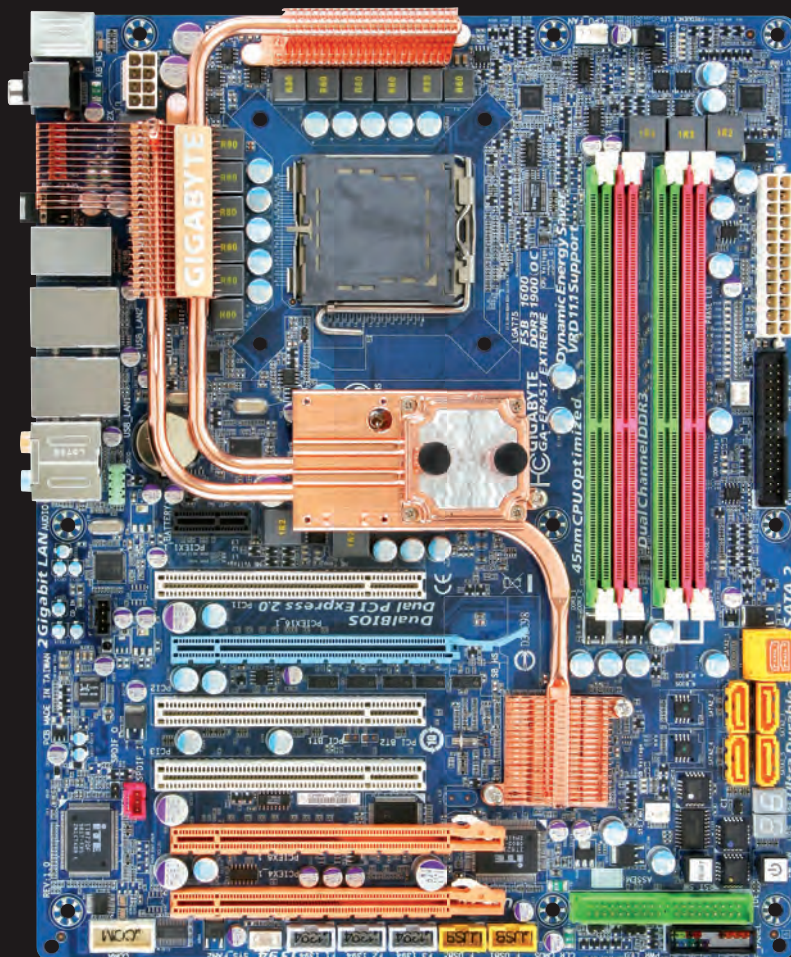
We not only managed to clock an early set of DDR3 memory rated at 1,800MHz CL8 to 2,000MHz CL7 at 2.2V, which is not much by today's standards, but is the highest speed we have ever been able to operate this RAM at.

With the EP45T-EXTREME, we managed to run PL8 at over 600MHz, which was not remotely possible on the EP45- EXTREME. With such efficiency, it's hard to argue against the EP45T-EXTREME when it comes to performance.

Suspecting its superiority over all other P45 motherboards we have tested, we 'cooled' an E8500 with some dry ice and managed a fairly stable 5.3GHz with one of the early BIOS revisions. With two Sapphire Radeon HD4870 cards, we pushed well past the previous record for 3DMark2001 SE, scoring 10,2087, 34,902 in 3DMark05,

and came within spitting distance of the 3DMark06 local record.

The EP45T-EXTREME is not without its faults, though, especially when it comes to SATA placement, but given that this board is so finely tuned for overclocking, this won't be a problem. This may be an issue on the DQ6 and the gamer-orientated models, but on the EP45T-EXTREME, it is nothing but a small inconvenience at most.

Results much higher than the ones we achieved are possible. We have seen speeds in excess of 670MHz on this motherboard.

The EP45T-EXTREME is not only the fastest, but possibly the best motherboard we have ever tested, and deserves a place in every enthusiast's arsenal. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko
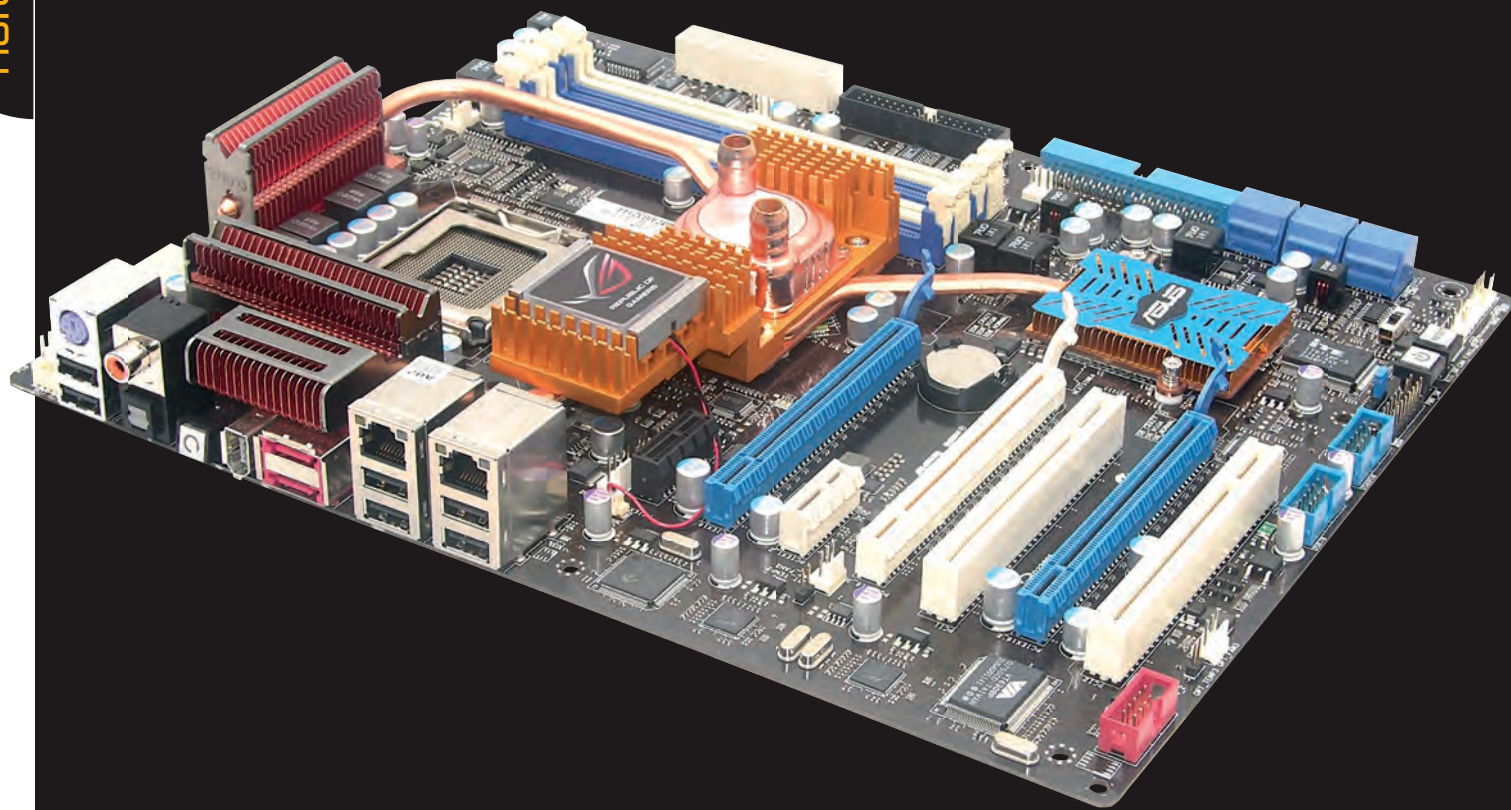
ASUS STRIKER II NSE

WITH THE RUMOURS ABOUT NVIDIA leaving the chipset business circulating the Internet, it's hard to decide if one should invest in an NVIDIA-powered motherboard or not. Nobody wants to buy a motherboard only to find that support will be discontinued shortly. The official word from NVIDIA is that they have no intentions of leaving the chipset market and it's business as usual. Whichever way it turns out, right now there's only one way to get the best out of SLI, and that's on a 790-based board.

The ASUS Striker II NSE may be the board that you have been waiting for. It is almost identical to the Striker II Extreme. In fact, some of the earlier Striker II NSE boards were actually Striker II Extreme boards with the NSE branding on the actual motherboards.

The NSE is cheaper than the Extreme as it makes use of the NVIDIA 790i SLI chipset instead of the 790i SLI Ultra. In truth, however, there is very little difference between the two as they both support three-way SLI, EPP profiles and everything else one could expect from a modern chipset.

Compared to the 780, the 790i runs cooler, has full support for the Core 2 range, supports DDR3 natively, and most importantly, it overclocks so much better.

The Striker II NSE, as with the more recent ROG-line motherboards, is packed to the brim with features - some more useful than others such as the two-phase DDR3 design, which controls not only the voltage

supplied to the RAM but the current as well (which is the number one reason why RAM is destroyed when using high voltages). Not only does the two-phase design allow better power delivery, but it also allows better stability, which could be the difference between a system POSTing with the RAM at 2,100MHz and a system that's actually able to pass benchmarks at this speed.

ASUS has included the LCD POSTer, which not only provides POST codes but can help diagnose system errors. The on-board system switch makes a return on the NSE. 'CPU Level Up' is a feature useful for those who are not well versed in overclocking, and allows users to overclock their CPUs to the next speed grade by simply selecting the CPU type and speed they want, and the board will configure everything accordingly. Unlike other automatic overclocking implementations, CPU Level Up actually works and delivers a rock-solid system every time without fail. 'Voltminder LED' is one of the features that are more gimmicky than useful, as it relies on you watching the LEDs. This is not always possible, especially if you are running three-way SLI with most of the board covered (the LEDs will be of little to no use at all).

Barring that, the Striker II NSE really impresses in terms of performance. The memory performance is simply incredible when pitted against any other chipset for the Intel platform. The advantage is sometimes more than 1GB/sec for the same settings as measured in SiSoft Sandra 2008.

The memory performance of the nForce chipsets has always been superior to those of Intel chipsets, but with the 790i, the difference is more than noticeable and gives the 790i an advantage in many memory-bound games and benchmarks.

If SLI is what you want or you simply want more features than you could shake a stick at, then the Striker II NSE is the board for you. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CHIPSET	NVIDIA 790i SLI
MEMORY BANKS	4 x 184-pin DDR3 (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Duo, Core 2 Quad, Core 2 Extreme
SLOTS	3 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 6 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x FireWire, 2 x eSATA

SCORE

SUPERCHANNEL POWERX

RRP→ R1,890 | **Supplier→** The Prophecy Shop
Website→ www.prophecy.co.za
Brand→ Superchannel

SUPERCHANNEL ISN'T A WELL-KNOWN brand locally, but that doesn't mean that the company doesn't produce good products. A good example of this is the PowerX 1kW PSU we received. It has every single feature modern PSUs have, from EPS eight-pin 12V support to eight-pin PCI-E 2.0 support. The PowerX is SLI certified and features a modularised cabling system, which is all the rage these days.

The unit is fairly basic, featuring a glossy black finish, a 12cm low-rotation fan, sleeved cables and a honeycomb grill at the rear - nothing out of the ordinary in terms of looks, but it delivers when it comes to load. We managed to power a three-way CrossFire configuration on an overclocked quad-core Phenom and the PSU didn't struggle at all. However, because of only four PCI-E connectors, we had to resort to adapters that are less than ideal as it could take away power connectors to other devices in the system.

With a rated 83% efficiency, it is better than some of the more expensive units, and this alone makes it a worthwhile purchase. Whether it can handle a fully loaded quad-core Core 2 Extreme X9770 and a four-way CrossFire configuration remains to be seen, but given the ratings of all the rails (2 x 20A and 2 x 25A), we would almost put money on it that it could handle the load and then some.

The unit is whisper quiet and despite being cheaper than all 1kW units locally, it makes use of 100% Japanese capacitors (which are known for their reliability and quality). With all the certifications you would expect from a high-end PSU, the Superchannel PSU delivers on all fronts, but doesn't cost a fortune. It may not be a PC Power & Cooling unit, but chances are that you would only be able to afford a 450W PSU of that calibre for the same price that can get you the PowerX for. If you are on a budget but need a PSU capable of powering a high-end system, the Superchannel PowerX is the PSU to buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

TOTAL POWER	1,000W
12V RAILS	2 x 20A; 2 x 25A
EFFICIENCY	83%, 830W continuous
FEATURES	Quad CrossFire, Quad SLI support, ATX 2.2, EPS 12V

SCORE

★★★★☆

TO THE EXTREME

ASUS ADVANCED OVERCLOCKING COMPETITION

IN JULY, ASUS INVITED overclockers from all over the world to compete for top honours and a prize purse of $5,000. The selection was left to Terrence Lee, CEO of popular overclocker site, VR-Zone. The following overclockers were invited to the competition: XtremeSystem's owner, Fugger, and veteran overclocker, Guatum (both from the US); Jmax_OC and Dami1stm from France; Duck and Cal930 from Japan; Sacha35 and Bazx from the UK; Darky and Harshal from India; Xu Gang and Susie from China; and many more including our very own Team Ghetto (Seth and Trax). In total, the AOCC would pit 40 of the best overclockers the world has ever seen against each other. The list of contestants read like the who's who of overclocking, with at least one person in each team having reached Top of Class or Top 20 on HWBOT or ORB.

With such fierce competition, one would have expected all the contestants to be on edge, with each team keeping to themselves and not sharing. However, this couldn't have been further from the truth. The camaraderie was probably the most amazing aspect of the entire event. It was not uncommon to see team members helping out other teams, especially on the second day where it was an unrestrained overclocking session to beat the current world records in almost all the benchmarks. The actual competition had many teams perplexed, especially since a fair number of contestants had not used the designated P5Q3 Deluxe motherboard before. Working with a new motherboard and finding its sweet spot can be a time-consuming exercise, and it becomes exponentially harder when you're dealing with -100°C temperatures.

Despite the new environment and the relatively small working area each team had, all the teams managed to get their computers started, with the lowest clock speed at around 5.3GHz and the highest peaking just below 5.9GHz.

When the competition officially began, Super Pi 8M would set the tone for the rest of the event with Team China leading the way, outpacing everyone early on. Our team, not so proficient in Super Pi 8M, was placed out of the point-scoring positions at seventeenth. Team China went on to win with an impressive 1:43.078.

At the end of the hour-and-a-half session, Team China had thoroughly dominated Super Pi 8M, but there was still hope. Things were looking up for our local

CHAMPION
Benson Lin, General Manager of ASUS APAC region, congratulates Team China on winning the tournament

The best 3D benchmark to ever exist also happens to be the last one based on a real game engine

Team SA's unique build that keeps ambient temperatures at -15°C
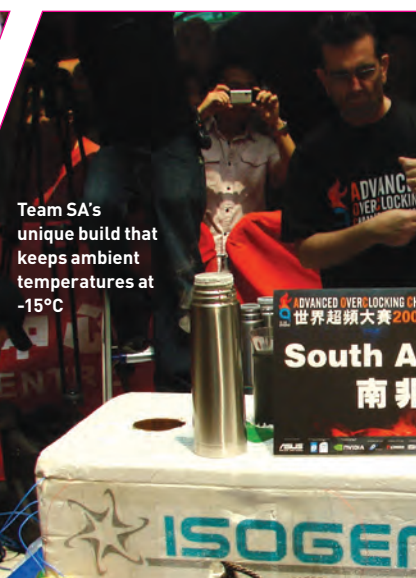
boys when their first run of 3DMark2001 SE, with a less-than-optimised configuration, briefly put them in sixth position, but eventually they ended seventh when Team Italy outpaced them by a small margin of less than 300 points. With a full 12 points in the bag for position seven, it would come down to 3DMark Vantage. Team China once again walked away with top honours, scoring an impressive 107,280 followed by Sweden at a distant 103,578.

Due to the graphics card failing to POST at anything less than -80°C, Team SA was not able to do a second run. The misfortune, however, would allow the attendees to see possibly the quickest full-voltage mod of a graphics card ever. A full volt mod, from disassembling the VGA cooler to having an operational card with a VGA pot-mounted and with liquid nitrogen in it took less

than 45 minutes, something unheard of in overclocking circles.

At the end of the 3DMark2001 SE session, Team China had a full score and only a miracle from Sweden or France could prevent China from taking the prize money. Team Japan was very quick in submitting a 3DMark Vantage score, but soon after that the bar was raised with Thailand clocking the first 14,000+ score. The scores came in one after the other, each one higher than the previous one, until the 15,000-point barrier was broken.

It was Team China once again with the highest score, 15,443, which sealed victory and gave them a full 100 points out of a possible 100. Second place went to Sweden with 86 points followed by Portugal in third with 75. Our team may have only managed thirteenth position, but in doing so, they beat

the UK, Japan and Turkey, amongst others. Throughout the entire competition, fun seemed to be the most important aspect. Irrespective of what may have been happening on the scoreboard, the vast majority of the teams enjoyed themselves, not bothered by the scores at all. The last day of the event featured no new records, but had sufficiently high enough scores to change many of the top-ten lists in the various benchmarks. Overall, it was a massive learning experience for all involved - especially our own team who for the first time competed overseas.

NAG wishes to thank ASUS, VR-Zone and all the sponsors involved in making it possible for us to cover the event. If AOCC 2008 is anything to go by, next year should be bigger and better. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Hardened overclockers drink liquid nitrogen at the gatherings... Seriously
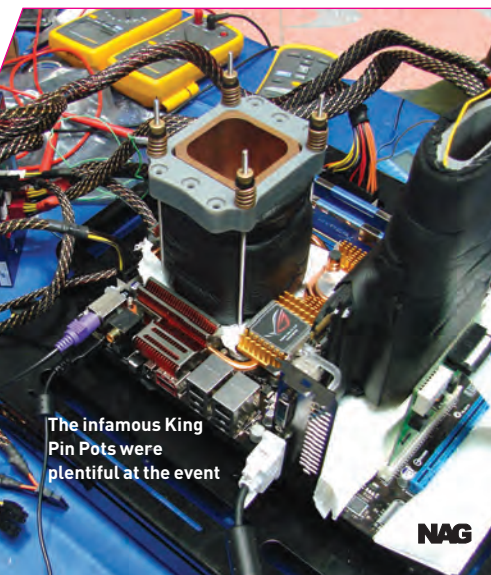
The infamous King Pin Pots were plentiful at the event

I'LL BE BACK, AGAIN... FOR THE LAST TIME.

I KNOW, I KNOW, YOU'RE thinking, "Does the world really need another *Terminator* movie?" While I'm rather partial to give you a resounding "Hell no" in response, there are elements to this new film that might just make up for the pitiful 'clichéathon' that was *Terminator 3* - elements that might make *Terminator Salvation* stand on its own (in a good way, not in the way a stinky nursery school kid stands on his own). First off, the director of *Terminator 3*, Jonathan "Right, now make her boobs inflate" Mostow, won't be getting anywhere near the reel. An all-new cast and crew have been assembled for *Salvation*, which will help the film set itself apart as the start of a new trilogy, not just a film that hangs onto the *Terminator* brand for support.

Taking place in 2018, after Judgement Day but before T-800 is sent back in time, *Salvation* follows the plight of John Connor as he struggles to reunite humanity against Skynet and its army of terminators.

The future is bleak: buildings lie in ruin and bloodthirsty machines traverse the wastelands looking for a pulse to stop. John Connor must fight deception and steel if he wants to stay alive long enough to save the human race.

Salvation will feature the direction of TV series-seasoned McG (*The O.C., Chuck, Supernatural*) as well as the penmanship of John D. Brancato and Michael Ferris – the duo responsible for *T3* and a host of odd jobs ranging from TV series *The Others* to MTV short *Aeon Flux*. Okay, so you're still not feeling too good about this whole thing. It's understandable. Here's Christian Bale to cheer you up. He'll be playing the role of John Connor. We'll also throw in Anton Yelchin in the role of Kyle Rees. We're not exactly sure who Anton Yelchin is, but he's been in an episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

McG has been working closely with the actors to bring back some of the horrors many of us remember from the first film.

His vision is to unite the feeling of dread and despair with the series' strong sci-fi focus, all while rounding it off as a solid action flick. Various technical measures have been taken to promote believability in the desolate future. The team has added three times more silver to the film stock, giving the film a surreal, almost ethereal quality that further enhances the detachment from the world as we know it. Cameras are set to never be completely calm and the action sequences have been given a healthy dose of pace, designed to keep viewers on their toes during all the right moments.

Granted, *Salvation* probably won't blow the audience away with innovation and charm, but it'll likely serve its purpose as a decent entry point into the next trilogy. While James Cameron won't have much to do with the film, it is possible that a fresh mind and fresher setting will bring the series back to life; although it looks like it could go either way, to be honest.

MOVIE NEWS

Batsh1t

FILM ADAPTATIONS OF COMIC books continue to rack up record-breaking numbers at the US box office. Totalling over $155 million on its first weekend, *The Dark Knight* outsold its nearest competitor *Spider-Man 3* with ease and went on to claim a fair number of records after that, including ticket-sales rates, which rose to a staggering 15 tickets per second for a moment before its release. The box-office buster later went on to scoop up a total of $400 million in total revenue during its first 18 days, proving that it's not just chicks who dig the car.

Whatever you do, don't go to sleep...

PLATINUM DUNES, THE PRODUCTION house behind the recent slew of shoddy horror films and horror remakes including *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Amityville Horror*, is teaming up with Michael *Car Chase* Bay for the relaunch of classic '80s horror series, *Nightmare on Elm Street*. That's right; the man responsible for *Pearl Harbour* and *Bad Boys II* is getting ready to rip apart your childhood terrors faster than you can say, "One... two.... Michael's coming for you,"

"...because death doesn't go AFK!"

SLASHER FILMS ARE A sub-genre of horror that focus on one thing: gore, and lots of it. Slashers (or 'dead teenager movies') usually comprise a group of defenceless twits running away from and dying at the hands/knife/electric guitar of a generally angry, relentless psychopath. Films like these serve as an excellent breakaway from traditional horror because they're typically not that scary - just, well... gory. Now, Creatively Bankrupt Productions, a little-known production house that's spent the last few years making (mostly horror-themed) music videos and short films, is getting ready to add to the pile of dead bodies that is the Slasher genre.

LAN Party Massacre – a title that leaves little to the imagination – will see a large group of all-night gamers, who are

attending a sponsored gaming tournament, poked, stabbed, hooked and generally torn apart limb for limb. If this all sounds a little silly to you, then you're on the right track. The film will be a spoof of both gaming culture and the sub-genre itself, while still managing to be a genuine Slasher all on its own. Key elements to look out for include the stunningly named F5 Energy Drinks, a killer with a gauntlet bristling with meat hooks and a big-time cyber-sports athlete named Mort@lity. Awesome!

GOOD LUCK CHUCK

Director: Mark Helfrich
Cast: Dane Cook | Jessica Alba | Dan Fogler | Lonny Ross
Genre: Comedy
Age Restriction: 16 (SNL)
Run Time: 97 minutes
Score: ★★★

THIS IS A 'SOMETHING-FOR-EVERYONE' comedy, but the bits that aren't for you more or less cancel out the bits that are. The resultant comedic mixed bag draws a neutral, but some of the good bits are funny enough to warrant a watch. It also doesn't hurt that there's plenty of nudity and foulness, so you can stare when you're not laughing. So, does it have the hilarious stand-up comedian Dane Cook? Yes. Will he

have you chocking on your popcorn with laughter like his live routines? No entirely. Is Jessica Alba hot? Yes. Can she do comedy? Not really, unless watching her walking into things is your idea of amusing. The real problem with this film is that the quality of the humour swings wildly from clumsy-girl-falls-down to some classic and rude stuff from Stu (Dan Fogler), Chuck's best friend. You'll cringe when watching Jessica Alba stumbling around, but you'll 'ROFL' at what Stu does with a grapefruit. The movie also has penguins in it; they're related to the story (I'll spare you), which is only in place to tenuously string together the sex scenes, dirty jokes and naked girls – so no dice there.

As a bonus, the DVD includes, but is not limited to, trailers, commentary, short features, deleted scenes and a blooper reel to round off the

experience. If you're into foul comedy, definitely watch it, but please observe the age restriction – they're not kidding around on this one.

Michael James

HERO WANTED

Director: Brian Smrz
Cast: Cuba Gooding Jr. | Ray Liotta
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 16 (LV)
Run Time: 90 minutes
Score: ★★

IN A WORLD WHERE every second film-crew member in Hollywood seems to get their chance to shine as a director, movies such as *Hero Wanted* are as common as lost socks. A first-time director, Brian Smrz teams up with fraternal and equally amateur scriptwriters Evan and Chad Law to create yet another action movie about one man and his thirst for revenge, redemption and love.

Driving the reel is a narrative that proves to be functional at first: it surprises the viewer on occasion by throwing in a few twists and turns as the plot unfolds and tries to punt all the right emotions from lead actor Cuba Gooding Jr.'s limited repertoire. Gooding takes on the role of Liam Case, a generic action-movie guy

who'd do anything to be with the woman of his dreams, but ends up taking a few too many steps on the wrong side of the law. Investigated by detective Terry Subcott (Ray Liotta), Case must take revenge on those who did him over, while trying to stay out of a prison cell.

While it seems as though the writers have made an attempt at a Tarantino-like approach to story-telling, the outcome becomes meaningless when everything

has unfolded; leaving the ultimately uninteresting story looking sheepish once it realises it's still a few cards short of a full house. For those looking for even a handful of special features, you'll be disappointed. The DVD comes with a simple director's commentary featuring Cuba Gooding Jr. and a chunk of trailers for upcoming Sony films.

Geoff Burrows

SCOOP

Director: Woody Allen
Cast: Woody Allen | Hugh Jackman | Scarlett Johansson | Ian McShane
Genre: Comedy
Age Restriction: PG
Run Time: 91 minutes
Score: ★★★

HERE IS A MOVIE that I started watching with very low expectations. After all, the front cover and the back sleeve both scream 'chick-flick' (no offence intended – this is the simplest way to explain my preconceptions about this picture). So, as is so often the case with a movie that I expected little from, I was actually quite pleasantly surprised. (Such is the power of negative thinking: after all, it can be argued that an optimist can never be pleasantly surprised!) The story begins with a scene on a ship, a wooden sailing barge, moving quietly through misty nocturnal waters. As the view pans, it reveals a hooded figure that is all too familiar by dint of the scythe it is carrying.

We then see a bunch of passengers, and realise that these are all deceased. One of these is, or rather was, a very successful journalist, and as he speaks to another passenger about the manner of her death, he realises that he has the makings of the greatest scoop of his career – except for the fact that he's dead. He manages to communicate his findings to a journalism student, Sandra, who

is visiting the UK from the US. She hooks up with a stage magician (whose rendition by Woody Allen is brilliant!) and sets about investigating the son of a powerful Lord. Inevitably, however, she falls in love with him, and things get complicated. The disc includes no bonus content, with only two items on the main menu: Play and Chapters.

Alex Jelagin

NAG

ROGUE ASSASSIN

Director: Philip G. Atwell
Cast: Jet Li, Jason Statham, Nadine Velazquez
Genre: Action
Age Restriction: 16 (LNV)
Run Time: 99 minutes
Score: ★★★⯪

THE EYES NEVER CHANGE. Hold onto that though – it's important. The tagline's also sort of important, but the plot twist at the end makes it redundant: "One wants justice. The other wants revenge." Keep that in mind as well. Just a bit of trivia (and to totally waste space, make this reviewer sound knowledgeable and because I had to sit and write this on a Sunday evening, watching the Olympic Games' Female Synchronised Diving – aka hot ladies diving, doing tricks and landing in the water at the same time), *Rogue Assassin* – for some reason or another (I didn't feel like doing more research) – is called *War* in other territories. *Rogue Assassin*, in our collective, definitive opinion, sounds better than *War* anyway. Remember – we're always right, no matter what.

Our favourite pub-crawling, smooth-taking, ex small-time criminal, con-artist and transporter deluxe (i.e. chauffeur), Jason Statham, stars in this very good action-thriller. In this film, our favourite English actor – not the buff guy who's known by his codename, 007 – is an FBI agent, whose partner is brutally murdered by Rogue (aka 'the Assassin' – see title of film) and war is what follows (obviously this is where the title *War* came from – you don't have to do research for this kind of thing, it just takes a bit of logic, it seems). *Face Off*, starring John Travolta and Nicolas Cage, was a good film. It was a film about stealing faces, after all. *Rogue Assassin*, in a strange twist of fate – and without spoiling the plot – copies the face-altering thing a bit, making for a strange twist in the plot. Remember, the eyes never change. (By the way, the Chinese girls just won the gold medal – see the second sentence in this review.)

Back to *Rogue Assassin* (aka *War*), Jack Crawford (Statham) vows to find the elusive and mysterious killer and personally avenge his partner's death. However, his determination to find the killer and his thirst for revenge cloud his judgement, and the violence escalates. He also suddenly finds himself in the middle of a turf war between two rival Asian gangs. Another plot twist, but twisting the plot as often as possible in this film works. And suddenly nothing is quite what it seems. Remember, faces can change, but the eyes never do.

In its entirety, *Rogue Killer* is an excellent action film, starring two of the best action heroes in the business. The often-changing plot works and keeps the suspense palpable and convincing. Throw in some excellent action sequences, kick-ass sword fighting and the usual sexy lady or two, and you have an action flick you'll want to watch again.

Nati de Jager

GRINDHOUSE

Planet Terror and *Death Proof* are the result of filmmakers Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino having a great idea and working with it. Grindhouse is the label given to theatres in the US that run throughout most of the day and night, showing B-grade 'exploitation' films (kung-fu flicks, slashers and the like) back to back. What Rodriguez and Tarantino have attempted to do is recreating this experience by taking two feature-length films, which are meant to be watched one after the other, with the films having fake trailers (directed by numerous guest directors) and fillers in between. The films have been edited to give them as much of a B-grade movie vibe as possible, with the directors of both the feature films and the trailers going so far as to physically damage the film reels to give the films the same 'dirty', unpolished look as the films usually shown in Grindhouse theatres. Unfortunately, the copies of the films we received were two entirely separate entities, and as such, a big chunk of the trailers and goofiness, which are supposed to be shown between features, is missing. It seems that there is a box set available in SA if you're willing to search for it, but we couldn't find out if it actually contains the versions of the films that we're supposed to be seeing.

PLANET TERROR

Director: Robert Rodriguez
Cast: Rose McGowan | Freddy Rodriguez | Michael Biehn | Jeff Fahey | Josh Brolin | Marley Shelton
Genre: Horror
Age Restriction: 18 (VL)
Run Time: 98 minutes
Score: ★★★★

ON THE COVER OF this DVD, there's a woman with a machine gun where her leg should be. Go back and read that again: a gorgeous lady with a **gun for a leg**. That pretty much sums up *Planet Terror*. It's utterly ridiculous, yet absolutely brilliant in the same breath. Story specifics are as follows: 'Zombie making Virus A' infects the general populace of 'Town X' and it's up to 'Survivor Group Y' to off as many of the buggers as possible while making a break for 'Safe Haven Beta' (Alpha was consumed by fire – back to formula on that one). The story is inconsequential. What does hold weight is that thousands of dollars worth of bullets are inserted into slots on numerous zombie bodies, all in the name of entertainment. Exceptionally over the top, the movie was filmed much like *Death Proof*, but with zombies replacing Kurt Russell. Purposefully broken editing (complete with missing reels) and grainy film effects really give the movie an old-school B-grade feel. The acting is mostly top-notch, the camerawork is masterful and the movie is filled to the brim with the type of moments you'll be chatting about the next morning around the water cooler ("OMG, how great was it when…!"). The movie doesn't take itself very seriously, but you should: this film is pure awesomeness shipped in a DVD container.

Checking out the special features reveals a 'ten-minute film school' feature by Robert Rodriguez, a bit about the special effects and stunts, and features on the girls and guys of *Planet Terror*.

Dane Remendes

DEATH PROOF

Director: Quentin Tarantino
Cast: Kurt Russell | Rosario Dawson | Vanessa Ferlito | Jordan Ladd | Rose McGowan | Sydney Poitier | Tracie Thoms | Mary Elizabeth Winstead | Zoë Bell
Genre: Thriller
Age Restriction: 16 (LV)
Run Time: 110 minutes
Score: ★★★

DEATH PROOF IS WITHOUT a doubt the more relaxed and down-to-earth of the two Grindhouse films I reviewed this month. It's dialogue heavy and filled with the fantastic dark humour we love to see in Tarantino's movies. Don't expect a complete bore of a film though: when the action breaks out, things get really 'heavy', real fast. In the film, we are introduced to Stuntman Mike, a psychopath who has the charm required to get his young female victims right where he wants them. His tool of destruction: a supposedly 'death-proof' car used for film and television stunts. He could drive this beast into a brick wall going at 100km/h and walk away from the wreckage. Without spoiling too much of the plot, this is Mike's weapon of choice on his killing sprees. Everything about this movie is expertly done, from the cinematography and acting, the editing (giving it an aged look), to the way Tarantino basically cut this movie to pieces, yet somehow kept it coherent, trying to get the movie as close to the B-grade films shown in Grindhouse theatres as possible. This flick is purposefully disjointed and rough around the edges, but it's a joy to watch. If you're a fan of Tarantino movies, you've probably seen this one already and loved it.

Special features include a short feature on Kurt Russel's portrayal of Stuntman Mike, a piece on "The Hot Rods of *Death Proof*" and much more.

Dane Remendes

SWEENEY TODD: THE
DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

Director: Tim Burton
Cast: Johnny Depp | Helena Bonham Carter | Alan Rickman | Sacha Baron Cohen
Genre: Musical
Age Restriction: 16 (V)
Run Time: 111 minutes
Score: ★★★★

JOHNNY DEPP AND TIM Burton, a team-up we've seen before! And the results are always interesting, at the very least. In fact, this duo has garnered quite the cult following. Now, before I continue, I'd like to point out that I detest musicals, and then I'd like to draw your attention to the score that I gave this film. Okay, are you back? So, I hate musicals, and yet I rate this movie very highly. "What gives?" you might be asking. Well, the movie is really well made. It features that typical Burton atmosphere set by blue, grey and sepia lighting tones. It is bleak and grim, yet often very funny – in a gallows-humour sort of way. Other times it can be quite disturbing. In fact, the listed age restriction of 16 may be a touch too permissive – 18 might be more appropriate. The story is an adaptation of a musical made in 1979, which in turn is an adaptation of English folklore/urban legend about Sweeney Todd, a barber who is a serial killer, and his partner in crime, Mrs Lovett, who owns a pie shop downstairs from his 'practice'. Whether the story is based on historical fact is hotly debated, but whatever the case may be, it is quite entertaining – in a dark way. The pack includes a wealth of extra material: an entire separate disc filled with interviews, historical speculation, a retrospective to the previous version, and other interesting subject matter.

Alex Jelagin

SEMI-PRO

Director: Kent Alterman
Cast: Will Ferrell | Woody Harrelson | André Benjamin | Maura Tierney | Will Arnett | David Koechner
Genre: Comedy
Age Restriction: 16 (SL)
Run Time: 87 minutes
Score: ★★★

I'LL PUT IT BLUNTLY: in my opinion, *Semi-Pro* is a great movie. Why, you ask? It made me laugh, that's why. When a movie is labelled as a comedy, even if you only crack a few smiles while watching it, the movie is a success - plain and simple. Granted, not everyone is a fan of Will Ferrell and his brand of humour, but for those of you who are, you'll love this movie. Will Ferrell plays Jackie Moon, the owner, head coach and star player of the Flint Tropics. A sub-standard basketball team in danger of being lost in the inky blackness because of a looming merger of their league with the NBA (only the four best teams in their league will survive the merger), the Flint Tropics need to pull their act together and fight to earn their place. Decent acting, high production values and a fair amount of laugh-out-loud moments make this movie worthy of those 87 minutes of your life. It's definitely not the greatest comedy of all time, or even of recent times, but it sure as hell made me chuckle. If you're still on the fence, rent *Semi-Pro* and decide for yourself whether the movie is worthy of a spot in your DVD rack.

No special features for you here, but two cuts of the movie are on this DVD: the original theatrical version and the uncut extended edition.

Dane Remendes

JUMPER

Director: Doug Liman
Cast: Hayden Christensen | Jamie Bell | Rachel Bilson | Samuel L. Jackson
Genre: Action
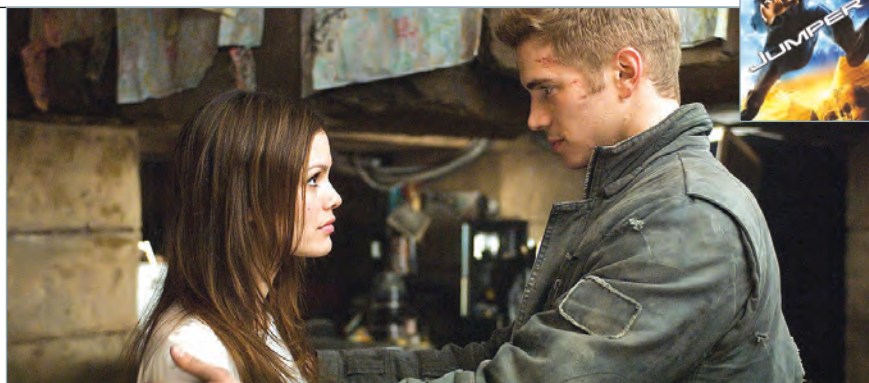**Age Restriction:** 13 (V)
Run Time: 85 minutes
Score: ★★★

WHY IS IT THAT so many films with a really cool idea end up being so inadequately executed? *Jumper* is the type of film that has so much going for it, from the flashy trailer, the really cool premise to the collection of (on average) rather good actors, yet falls just short of being anything worth dropping your jaw about.

Doug Liman, the man behind big-name brands like *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, the *Bourne* series and popular TV show *The O.C*, takes the lead crew position as director on this almost superhero action film. Liman teams up with writer David S. Goyer (screenplay writer responsible for the recent Batman films as well as the *Blade* movie series) to recreate the 1992 sci-fi novel of the same name. What follows is an all-round action title that follows the life of David Rice (played by Hayden Christensen of *Star Wars* fame), a young man who discovers that he has the uncanny ability to teleport to anywhere he can picture in his mind.

As Rice grows older, he becomes progressively more reckless with his abilities, and soon falls into the darker side of having superpowers. Unfortunately for Rice, an ancient sect known as the Paladins is catching up with him, and they're in the business of killing any Jumper they manage to hunt down. The most badass of all Paladins who simply calls himself Roland (played by Samuel L. Jackson) has been hunting Rice for eight years when he finally catches up. Needless to say, Roland the Paladin has a few neat tricks up his sleeves for dealing with furtive Jumpers, and their meeting doesn't go quite as well as young Rice would have liked.

The film, rich with action sequences and a hearty sci-fi backing, relies heavily on the use of special effects to carry it through some of the more clichéd fight scenes. In fact, so much of the movie is dominated by special effects that it almost manages to cover up the bland character interaction and very average acting we're rapidly becoming used to from Hayden Christensen. The story touches on plenty of issues of morality and right vs. wrong, but any story elements outside of 'teleport, fight and shoot electricity thingies' seem contrived without the volume those issues deserve.

One thing you can (almost) always count on with a movie like this is that you'll have plenty of special features on the DVD. *Jumper* is no exception. Along with the mandatory director's commentary, there are plenty of mini-documentaries: one discusses the move (or "jump," as they say) from novel to film, while a few more go into the technical details of creating all the various special effects. There's also an 'animated graphic novel' (also known as, you know, a cartoon) that attempts to enhance the back-story behind David's life, but instead just makes a last-minute play for the contrived award - the voice acting is terrible and the drawings are just plain average.

At the end of the day, *Jumper* is a decent film marred by a bland story and a lack of any drive to continue watching, other than to see more neat stuff.

Geoff Burrows

THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES

Director: Mark Waters
Cast: Freddie Highmore | Sarah Bolger | Nick Nolte | Mary-Louise Parker | Joan Plowright | David Strathairn
Genre: Fantasy
Age Restriction: 10
Run Time: 92 minutes
Score: ★★★

THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES IS a little bit like almost every other fantasy movie involving children (there are a lot of them these days). It seems that the mighty Harry Potter has creative people the world over desperately churning out stories about children and fantasy worlds/creatures/things. They're all the same really. Here's a DIY story kit for you to try for yourself (circle your own choice). Kid(s) find(s) a magical [book | wand | creature]. By [opening | waving | feeding] it, they [unleash | summon | create] a foul and evil [witch | goblin | gargoyle]. Trouble ensures... Plenty of CGI later, said kid(s) emerge(s) as the [hero | heroes]. Roll credits. Although this movie is well put together, it all feels very familiar, but the real catch is that it's a little too terrifying for most young kids; and if you're targeting teenagers with an average movie like this, you're not going to have much luck. It's not terrible – it's just very ordinary. The DVD also has a few extra features included - functional but nothing remarkable. Now listen up, if you want a seriously decent story about a child exploring the realm of fantasy, rent or buy *Pan's Labyrinth*. This is one of the best movies you'll watch in your life and will have you thinking about it long after it's done. The only catch is that nothing else will easily compare.

Michael James

NAG

BATGIRL #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: DC
Writer: Adam Beechen
Artist: J. Calafiore
Price: R27.50

CASSANDRA CAIN IS ONCE again living at Wayne Manor, and fighting as Batgirl alongside the hero team known as the Outsiders. But she's also on a private mission of her own, whose consequences may result in her once again becoming an outcast, reviled by even her closest friends and Batman himself. However, Cassandra swore an oath of vengeance against the two people who have manipulated her and brought havoc upon her life, and she intends to eliminate them, using all her assassin skills and the further training which Batman has given to her, no matter the cost. This new series of *Batgirl* kicks off with a gripping first issue, nicely illustrated and written, with an easy-to-read and fast-paced style. Beechen also included a brief background summary of recent events in Cassandra's life, so any new reader will know the setting from the start.

Clive Burmeister

THE HELM #1 (OF 4)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Dark Horse
Writer: Jim Hardison
Artist: Jim Hardison
Price: R31.50

WHAT IF YOU FOUND a mystical artefact that could imbue you with mighty powers, but the item was intelligent and it thought of you as an unworthy, lowly worm? Mathew is a thirty-year-old loser who works at a video store and lives in his mother's basement. His life is a shambles: he lives like a slob and has no aspirations or goals in life. Overall, he is a pretty pathetic guy. When he discovers that he is linked to an ancient helmet that will bestow magical powers on its chosen one, he leaps at the chance to hold such powers. Now The Helm and Mathew are linked until death. However, Mathew is a weakling and shrinks away from the dangers involved in becoming a hero. Will Mathew rise to meet the challenge and become a hero, or will The Helm find a way to kill him and escape the bond?

Clive Burmeister

BATMAN: THE KILLING JOKE DELUXE EDITION

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: DC
Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Brian Bolland
Price: R160

WIDELY REGARDED AS ONE of the most influential books to come out of DC, *The Killing Joke* is a tale of revenge, anger, madness and justice in Gotham City. The book combines the legendary talents of writer Alan Moore and artwork of equally renowned Brian Bolland to bring this 20-year-old epic into the 21st century with revised art and the subtitle of "The Deluxe Edition."

The story stands as a one-shot book in the *Batman* series, and focuses on the passionate psychological rivalry between Batman and the Joker. Readers are given a large chunk of insight into the Joker's past, showing him as a simple man with a family to feed, and the decisions he makes that ultimately lead him down the path of madness. The artwork, now re-coloured by Bolland himself in a manner more fitting to the sombreness of the story, is crisp and descriptive. Entire pages go by without a single speech bubble, allowing the often-eerie silence to aid in the conjuration of more imaginative imagery than a block of text ever could.

Put simply, this book is beautiful. It plays on emotions and imagination more than one would think possible from a comic. If ever you feel the need to compile a list of must-owns, make sure *The Killing Joke* is near the top.

Geoff Burrows

SQUADRON SUPREME #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Howard Chaykin
Artist: Marco Turini
Price: R28.50

THE SQUADRON SUPREME WAS a group of super-powered individuals who kept their world safe from villains and invaders, until an underhanded plot led them into battle with another world's superhero team, The Ultimates. Destruction was wrought across the Squadron's world, and as the so-called 'ordinary man' rose to rebuild the nations, the super-powered Squadron seemed to disappear. But now, five years after the near super-powered Armageddon, strange new beings appear, and mysteries shroud some of the US's prominent heroes: the astronauts from Icarus One. Are these new beings battling crime part of the new 'squadron', or are they something else entirely? Pick up the new series of *Squadron Supreme* to find out.

Clive Burmeister

X-MEN: ENDANGERED SPECIES

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: R179.95

ENDANGERED SPECIES FOLLOWS THE crisis known as "M-Day," when Wanda Maximoff, Magneto's daughter and probably the most powerful mutant in existence, uttered the words, "No more mutants," and obliterated all traces of the mutant gene in most of the world's mutants, turning them into ordinary humans. With only a few hundred mutants left in the world, and no new mutant births or manifestations since M-Day, the world's mutants face the threat of extinction. Dr Henry McCoy, also known as the X-Men's Beast, makes it his personal mission to find a solution to reverse the devastation the Scarlet Witch (Wanda Maximoff) has caused. Being one of the world's top scientists, and with the help of some the planet's greatest minds, Beast begins a horrific journey in order to save his species from annihilation, sacrificing a little more of his integrity, and losing a little more hope with each step. Is there any way in which the X-Men can fight this kind of danger?

Clive Burmeister

WORLD OF WARCRAFT BOOK ONE

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Wildstorm
Writer: Walt Simonson
Artists: Ludo Lullabi | Sandra Hope
Price: R205

DC-STABLED WILDSTORM PRODUCTIONS IS dipping their finger into the videogame market with the first-ever *World of Warcraft* graphic novel. This seven-part novel is written by Walt Simonson, a seasoned writer and artist with work ranging from *X-Factor* to *Fantastic Four*. Pencilling is courtesy of little-known Ludo Lullabi, whose work is complemented by inker, Sandra Hope (of *JLA* fame).

The book follows the story of Human warrior, Lo'Gosh, who wakes on the shores of Kalimdor to find that he's lost his memory. He joins up with a Night Elf druid named Broll and a Valeera – a Blood Elf rogue – in a quest to restore his lost past. Unfortunately, the storytelling suffers from incredibly blunt script. Dialogues and incredibly frequent narratives are blatant and too descriptive, and the characters have a knack of rattling off a monologue whenever it's even slightly possible that the action will be misunderstood, leaving little room for synergy between the art and writing. Lullabi's artwork, while detailed and true to the *WoW* universe, has a way-too-strong Joe Mad influence. Not that that's a bad thing, but those looking for originality above technical expertise will likely be disappointed.

It's clear that this book was written for *WoW* fans, and mostly those who aren't all that interested in much depth in a comic book. It's a pity that Wildstorm adopted a done-to-death approach with this one; the story itself is actually quite good.

Geoff Burrows
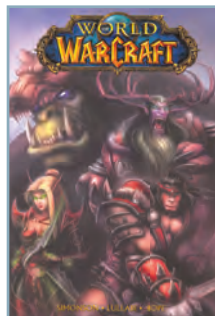
ONEGAI! TEACHER MIZUHO KAZAMI DESSERT TIME PVC FIGURINE

RRP: R535
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Teaching high school is a lot of work... especially when you're an alien from another galaxy. So after a long day at work, Mizuho Kazami of the hit anime series, *Onegai Teacher*, needs to unwind and relax. What better way to do that than to take off your dirty work clothes and enjoy some sweets?
Rewarding herself with a cup of cold vanilla ice cream with fruit and pochy (Mizuho's favourite snack), toy designer/manufacturer, Good Smile Company, has created a very stunning figurine of everyone's favourite red head. Stripped down to a very sexy green-plaid bikini, Mizuho is enjoying a snack, sitting on a very unique chair. With a silver base and clear frosted seat, you can view Mizuho from every angle.

HALO 3 BELT BUCKLE: COVENANT BADGE

Price: R145.00
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Dress for success with this Halo 3 Belt Buckle, featuring the Covenant badge from the popular videogame series.

HALO 3 PEWTER PINS: UNSCOF EMBLEM AND SPARTAN ARMOUR

Price: R50.00
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
The battle against the Covenant rages once again in *Halo 3* and these pewter pins of the Space Command logo and the Spartan Armour are the next best thing to joining the battle itself.

NINTENDO BELT BUCKLE: NES CONTROLLER

Price: R145.00
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
The original Nintendo NES controller with its grey colour, directional pad, and two buttons remains a classic of game design and is now available as a stylish belt buckle.

ZOMBIE OUTBREAK SURVIVAL KIT

RRP: R190
Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Protect your community from the undead with this Zombie Outbreak Survival Kit, filled with dozens of useful items such as twenty feet of yellow 'Caution: Zombie Outbreak' barrier tape, 16 trading cards, four warning signs, eight hazard stickers, two toe tags, an instructional poster, a 'bite kit' and more. The kit comes with a bonus CD-ROM containing desktop themes and Flash-based shooter games.

THE SIMPSONS: TALKING PENS

RRP: R70 each
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
Full of catch phrases and foul-mouthed antics, The Simpsons have left their mark on pop culture as the family who says whatever they want, whenever they want. Now you can hear Bart and the others 24/7 with these Simpsons talking pens.

LABYRINTH: JARETH AND HOGGLE SET

RRP: R280
Supplier: www.awx.co.za
This Labyrinth box set features new Jareth and Hoggle figurines from the cult-classic Jim Henson film. Hoggle is a brand-new figurine, and the Jareth figurine features a different costume from previous releases as well as a new head sculpt. Each figure is incredibly detailed and features the likenesses of the actors.

IN A CLASS OF YOUR OWN

There are eight distinctly varied classes in the fourth edition *Player's Handbook*. Barbarians, Bards, Druids, Monks and Sorcerers from the third edition are gone (for now, at least), replaced with the Warlord (a warrior with strong, team-orientated skills) and the Warlock (a damage-dealing spell caster with well-balanced stats and some thieving skills on the side). In general, the existing classes have been tightened up and given a more definitive focus, especially classes such as the Ranger and Cleric. New to the system is the concept of Paragon classes. While these are similar to prestige classes from the third edition, they differ in that a player has to choose a Paragon class (from a choice of three or four class-specific choices), and will continue to level their original class in parallel. What this brings to the table is the ability to have specialist options available to your character, while still preserving the base class.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 4TH EDITION

WWW.WIZARDS.COM/DND/

Publisher→ Wizards of the Coast | **Distributor→** Outer Limits | **RRP→** Player's Handbook [R390] | Dungeon Master's Guide [R390] | Monster Manual [R390]

THERE WILL LIKELY BE two types of people who will read this review: those who have played previous versions of *D&D* and want to see what all the fourth-edition fuss is about, and those who haven't yet experienced any *Dungeons & Dragons* games and would like to educate themselves in the mysterious art of traditional pen-and-paper gaming. If you fall into the first category, the fourth edition introduces some big changes to the game mechanics you've likely grown to love. Newcomers, here's a brief summary to whet your appetite: *D&D* is has all the freedom you've ever wanted in an RPG, more combat than your favourite FPS title and a neat slice of socialising. For the most part, it's not played in front of a screen: it's played at a table with a group of friends who exchange words, roll dice, scribble notes, consult books and draw the maps and charts that represent the game world.

The *Player's Handbook* is the largest of the three books that make up the core rules, and is where most players' journeys will begin. The book describes the character-creation and role-playing process very clearly, giving advice and

detailed instructions where necessary, and making clear any ambiguity that may arise - something that has often plagued new players during character creation.

Dungeon Masters (DMs) - the often haughty-looking über-geeks who run the game - have complex books of their own. Detailing everything from campaign construction to handling the numbers during an encounter, the *Dungeon Master's Guide* also had a makeover. Right off the bat, the biggest difference one notices when flipping through the glossy pages is a distinct lack of charts. Make no mistake, the *Dungeon Master's Guide* hasn't quite had its bits chopped off, but it has been streamlined. The book has a much sharper focus now, giving advice and suggestions to the would-be DM instead of chasing away any potential initiates. The result is that chapters now pay much more attention to providing the DM with creative tools rather than numerical ones.

Rounding off the rulebook trio, the *Monster Manual* has been simplified and monster statistics have been standardised. Each potential foe now fits neatly into

a monster 'card': a simple table that contains all the information the DM would need once the creature is on the table. The only information outside the card is a description, common tactics and encounter groups. Additional lore and artwork are aplenty, as one might expect.
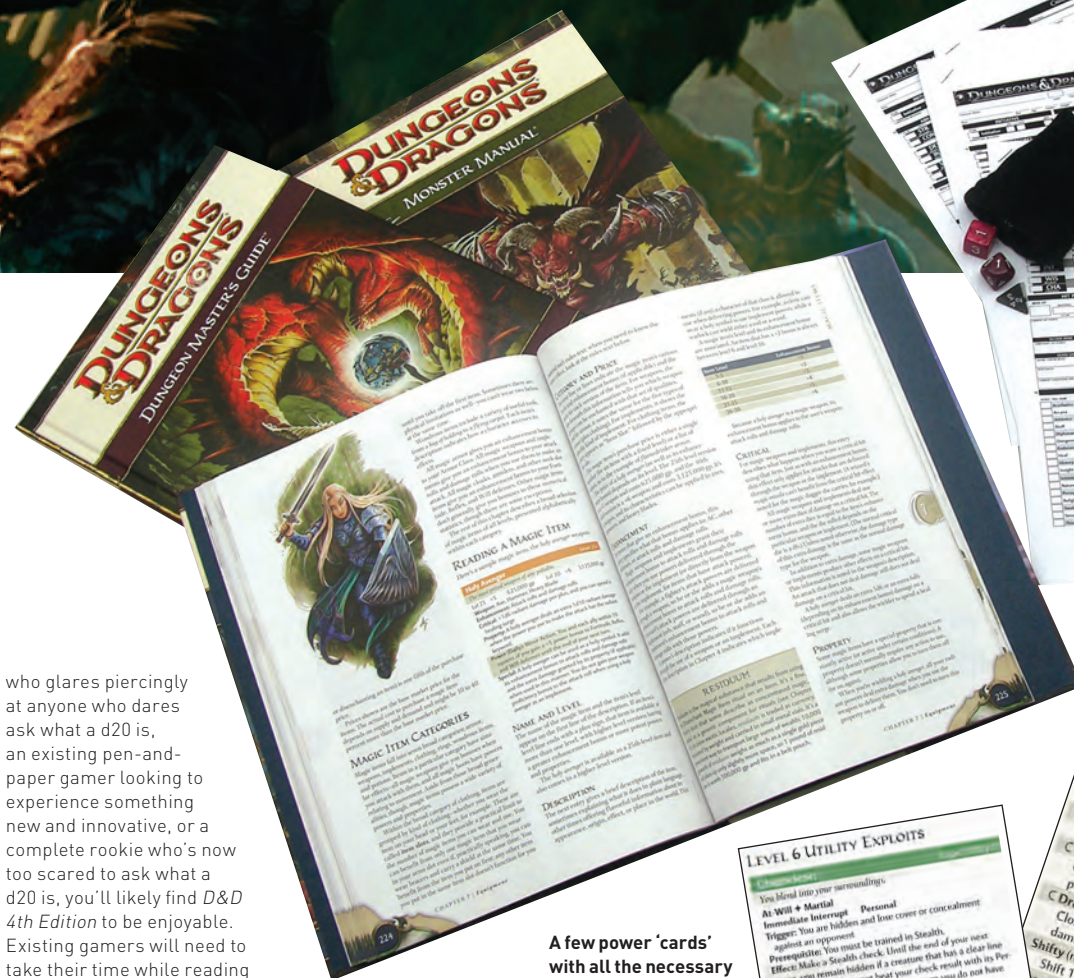
It's fairly clear where *D&D 4th Edition* stands. Almost every aspect of the game has been tweaked, streamlined and often just simplified to increase accessibility and get more gamers in front of a character sheet. Testament to this is the inclusion of the online component of the game, complete with monthly fees and customisable avatars. Found at www. dndinsider.com, players will, once the service is up and running, be able to find parties and DMs online, merge groups playing at tables across the world or run an entire campaign via the Internet. DMs can implement forced rules, requiring players to use the online game board and combat grid or dice-rolling system, or loosen up the reigns to allow for customised house rules.

Whether you're a seasoned veteran

A monster 'card' provided for use in the sample campaign in the Dungeon Master's Guide

who glares piercingly at anyone who dares ask what a d20 is, an existing pen-and-paper gamer looking to experience something new and innovative, or a complete rookie who's now too scared to ask what a d20 is, you'll likely find *D&D 4th Edition* to be enjoyable. Existing gamers will need to take their time while reading through the rules, as many nuances exist between the old and new generations, not to mention that the bigger changes really do take some getting used to. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

A few power 'cards' with all the necessary stats organised into an easy-to-use table

SETTLERS OF CATAN 4TH EDITION

SETTLERS OF CATAN WAS created by Klaus Teuber and first published - in Germany - in 1995. It has since proven hugely popular, leading to the *Catan* series selling over 11 million copies in total. It is easy to see why. Fundamentally, this game has very simple mechanics, but its subtleties run fairly deep. Therefore, it is quick to get into, but can be replayed many times. This replay value is further enhanced by the fact that the board is made up of tiles that can be arranged randomly, so each game can have a different 'map'. The tiles, of which there are 19, are hexagonal, and represent different terrain types. Each terrain type produces one of the five in-game resources, except for 'Desert', which is barren. An unusual aspect of this hex grid-based game is that not only do the hexes themselves have significance, but

so do their faces and points. The faces are where roads are built, while the points can accommodate settlements or cities. The object of the game is to be the first to get to ten victory points, which are accrued in a variety of ways, but mostly by the building of settlements and cities. These are also resource-collection points.

The game employs various pieces that are made of painted wood, and this is a pleasant change from the usual plastic. Resource stockpiles are represented by stacks of resource cards, and there are also 'development' cards, which confer various bonuses. Curiously enough, the game features no warfare, though that by no means equates to it not being playable aggressively. Aggressive moves include the likes of cutting off an opponent's expansion direction by building a road

NAG
MUST PLAY

there. The game also features a trade element, allowing players to trade various resources with each other. As a result, this game is ideally suited to four players, but can be played by three. One-on-one is not recommended, and is in fact not officially an option. Turns - once players have the hang of the game (which is generally a few turns into the first game) - pass quickly, but a game can take many turns, and it is possible for a game to take a couple of hours. There is an element of chance in the form of dice rolls, but it is somewhat ameliorated by its frequency. If your empire's development is sound, you shall gain the resources you are due. There is also some scope for sneaky, surprise moves. In short, this is an excellent game! **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Bottom Line
One of the most intriguing board games I have played.

90 OUT OF 100

Plot a course to the planet Merdegraw for a fun-size follow-up to Ratchet & Clank™: Tools of Destruction™.

The mysterious Zoni have taken Clank! Now Ratchet must use his space-age weapons and new Omniwrench to battle Captain Darkwater's band of cut-throat ghost pirates to find the Fulcrum Star – a lost treasure that could be the link to finding his best friend.

This is living

PLAYSTATION 3