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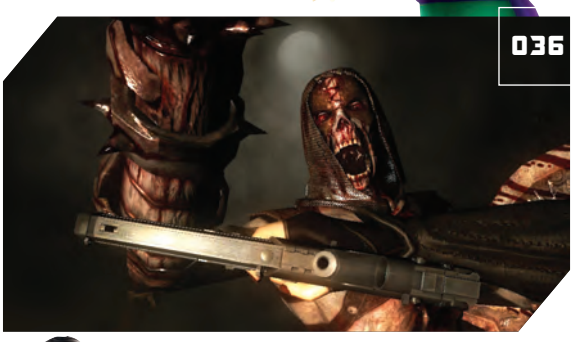

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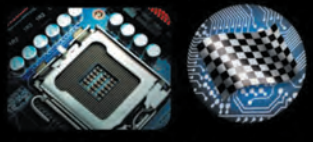

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ED'S NOTE

IT'S ANOTHER ISSUE BULGING of excellent, explosive content as only *NAG* can deliver! Well, actually not – we know that there are plenty of places you can go and find your gaming content (and plenty of places where you do), so the fact that you still find *NAG* worth buying means a lot to the people who put it together. Speaking of those people, they have decided my Ed's Note makes a good spot for announcements. I'll survive. If you want know what I really think of things, I have a blog on the *NAG* site. So here are those announcements. First, the *Quake Wars* demo is on the cover DVD and a local server is already cracking it on the SAIX Games network (http://games.saix.net). Sticking to the DVD, the *BioShock* art zip is apparently corrupt – we'll have a working copy on the November DVD. Finally, the ad people would like to remind you of another SMS competition in NAG: "Win 1 of 5 advanced driving courses, SMS your name and Juiced 2 to 34102 – R2 per SMS." Ah, then be sure to check out the new gaming site Headshotsa.com. We have nothing to do with it, but we know the folks there.

Enough of that. This issue also contains the first Leipzig Games Convention supplement, the spiritual successor to the now-defunct *E3 Tribune*. After E3 changed its format dramatically, there was no real point in going, especially when LGC has grown hugely. But it's the same deal, just a new show. Another newcomer to the *NAG* family is the movie section, located in the back. October's *NAG* is bigger, so you aren't losing out on gaming content, but you do have seven pages of movie previews and DVD reviews. Tell us what you think! You could say that this is not the place for movies, but many gamers love their movies as well, plus the coverage for movies locally is very scant. *NAG*'s staff also enjoys the diversion in writing material.

Get ready for the next two months! Every man and his dog are about to release their games as the holiday rush starts, a period that always excites and aggregates me equally, because more games mean more play but also more work. Oddly, only August seemed to have been quiet this year. How many games are being developed? A crap-load, clearly.

James Francis
Editor

NAG REVIEW RIGS SUPPLIED BY:

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managing editor
michael james
michael.james@tidemedia.co.za

editor
james francis
james.francis@tidemedia.co.za

games editor
miktar dracon
miktar.dracon@tidemedia.co.za

contributing editors
regardt van der berg
russell bennett

technical writers
toby hudon
neo sibeko

staff writer
alex jelagin

copy editor
nati de jager

contributors
adam liebman
anton lines
bradley hatton-jones
clive burmeister
danny day
eddie francis
justin slabbert
megan hughes
sean james
tarryn van der byl
walt pretorius

sales manager
len nery
len.nery@tidemedia.co.za
+27 84 594 9909

marketing and promotions manager
jacqui jacobs
jacqui.jacobs@tidemedia.co.za
+27 82 778 8439

art director
chris bistline

designer
chris savides

photography
dreamstime.com
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office assistant
paul ndebele

tide media
p o box 237
olivedale
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MOST WANTED BARNACLE

SEADOG: Brian Murdoch
YARRING: Do You Still Pirate Games?

NOPE, AND I TRY make other people not pirate as well. Two years ago in November, I made a moral decision to stop coping games and the bigger one was to throw away the current games that I had. I got two big black bags, sat down and added my piracy collection to my rubbish collection. It was hard and I think only one game was saved - that is my version of *Quake III*. I still have it and the first time I see a version of *Quake III* that I can buy, I will buy it and throw away the copied version.

I have a crack for *Warcraft III*, but I have the full version of *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* and *Frozen Throne*. The reason I still have a crack for *Warcraft III* is because that's the only way I can play online in South Africa. The crack I talk about is the 'acid' file (most *DotA* players will know what I am talking about) and it is the only way to play on the South Africa PvPGn server and to play on those servers at LANs. I know that most of the people at LANs playing *DotA* (*Warcraft III* custom map) don't have the full version. At one of my company's competitions, I donated five copies of *Warcraft*, so I have helped five more people become 'legal'. I even bought my friend the Battle Edition as a wedding present just so he would have a legal copy of the game.

Since the 'clean out', I have bought every game. I feel that we owe it to the distributors and producers of the games. We don't need to pirate games: their prices are not unreasonable. New releases are still R300; it has been that way for the last century or longer.

Most of my friends know about me not having any copied games, and now don't even ask to borrow my CDs to make a copy. I know I am not perfect (I still have *Quake III*) but I am trying...

Yaaaaaaaar! All this talk of pirates and such will just attract the wrong sort, me'lad! But to be serious for a second, the World Piracy Consortium is not a shady organisation that hangs around on old ships and tropical islands. We spend most of our time in dark, smelly rooms constantly monitoring torrents or pumping our industry-insiders for gold copies and anything worth peddling. It's a hard, tough existence that you just fail to appreciate. The average game programmer has his own cubicle, health benefits and doesn't have to sit next to some guy's farts for twelve hours straight. You've decided to support his cushy life instead of the daily struggle involved with piracy. It's none of the glamour of cool hats and feisty lasses, unless you count AllURTorrents4evur.com's webmistress, Big Frieda. Between you and me, she's no Kiera Knightley or even Geena Davis, so think about where your money is REALLY going.

The 'Most Wanted Barnacle' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH:
Was there really a game drought in 2007?

SEADOG: Ziyaad Moolla
YARRING: Bad Games?!

VIOLENCE IN COMPUTER GAMES is commonplace. Numerous fighting games and war simulations hit the shelves every month; we see plenty of animated blood and gore in games rated 'Teen'. In fact, I'm not even sure I can name a game off the top of my head where the object isn't to kill someone. It's quite clear from our choice of subject matter that violence is a part of human nature. For millennia, we have found the solutions to all sorts of problems by taking up arms and marching off to war. The manifestation of this violent nature in games is therefore unsurprising. But, aside from the odd sensationalist generalisation, the public has no problem with this violence. On the other hand, what always gets people going are games such as *Manhunt* or *GTA*. What is it that makes them special? Quite simple: in these games, the 'Bad guy' wins! 'Bad guy' games, then, play an important role in managing tension among the working and studying population. At the end of a stressful day, there is something satisfying about taking a baseball to a crowd of innocent pedestrians!

You know what the world needs? A good game in which the lead character is a pirate. Not the silly, mincing type or grog-swilling beach dregs, but the digital pirate who prefers jogging around with a flash drive instead of a sword and who sucks on caffeinated drinks. That would set the scene right. Sure, the establishment will smirk at it and declare it as a universal evil, but the gamers will appreciate us more and the efforts we put into stealing the latest and greatest stuff out there.

SEADOG: Anonymous
YARRING: September Letter

I HAVE TO COMMENT ON the person that wrote to you about the graphics not being important. WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG HIM! Now that I have that out of my system, good mag, nice DVD. *This man is clearly a supporter of the WPC. He doesn't have time to waste writing long letters, but instead needs to get back to the latest and greatest games and movies out there. I don't want to sound queer or anything, but without people like him, being a pirate just wouldn't seem worth it. We love you, man!*

SEADOG: Ryno Steyn
YARRING: Old Games = Better Games

HI THERE, PEOPLE AT *NAG*. First off, thank you for the best gaming magazine over the past few years!

Now to my letter. I recently went down memory lane and thought about all the older games I used to play. And what great memories it brought back. I started thinking to myself that in recent times there were very few games that left a special something that one would remember. To name a few of the games I am talking about: *Road Rash, Jazz Jackrabbit, BioForge, Cyclones, Bad Mojo, Duke Nukem, Full Throttle, Little Big Adventure* and *Redneck Rampage*. These days, games just aren't original. Sure, the graphics, sound and physics are getting better and better, but I think they are hiring more technical guys than story writers. To name a few games that recently left a special place in my heart: *Half-Life 1 & 2*, the *Metal Gear Solid* series, the *Silent Hill* series, *Doom 3*, *Grand theft Auto* and *Max Payne 1 & 2*. I hope they can hire someone with a really creative mind and bring back some new original games.

Do you hang around with those Abandonware dweebs? Sure, be a softy. Tout your whole 'old games still mean something' line. You're just a stuffed shirt 'pretending' to pirate stuff no one cares about. Abandonware isn't real piracy! At the annual Christmas Party, we don't even let them look after our cars! Also, who wants to pirate an old game? Where's the rush in that? Hey, no one broke the July 8 torrent record (which I did) by uploading Pac-Man! Huh! Unfortunately, what I did upload was beaten on July 9 by a Hello Kitty DVD rip from SuprLAXXO. But I had my day of glory. What have you had? Just ugly pixels and low seed counts. Hah!

SEADOG: Jonathan Finlay
YARRING: Impressed

THIS LETTER IS NOT a complaint but rather a compliment to Microsoft and BT games Westgate.

I was lucky enough to purchase a shiny, new Xbox 360 on its release last year. It has given me many hours of awesome gaming until the day I got the dreaded ring of death. Being an idiot, I lost my receipt and the box during moving to my new place. Feeling a bit nervous about it and thinking some pimple-popping punk would tell me that I wouldn't be able to get my exchange because of obvious reasons, I was mistaken. They told me to phone Microsoft and get a reference number, which was given to me within five minutes by a friendly American lady. I then took my reference number to BT Games without my slip or box and was given a brand new console within fifteen minutes. I must say this was great service. We are all complaining about the level of service in SA, but this proves there is some hope. I am now enjoying the wondrous entertainment of my new Xbox 360. Thank you BT games and Microsoft. Well done *NAG* on the awesome mag.

"I'm not even sure I can name a game off the top of my head where the object isn't to kill someone. It's quite clear from our choice of subject matter that violence is a part of human nature."

ASUS BC-1205PT BLU-RAY DRIVE
23 HOURS VIDEO PLAYBACK

"IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A DVD DRIVE THAT SUPPORTS HIGH CAPACITY BACKUPS AND HIGH RESOLUTION MOVIE PLAYBACK, THEN THE ASUS BC-1205PT BLU-RAY DRIVE IS AN IDEAL CHOICE FOR YOU."

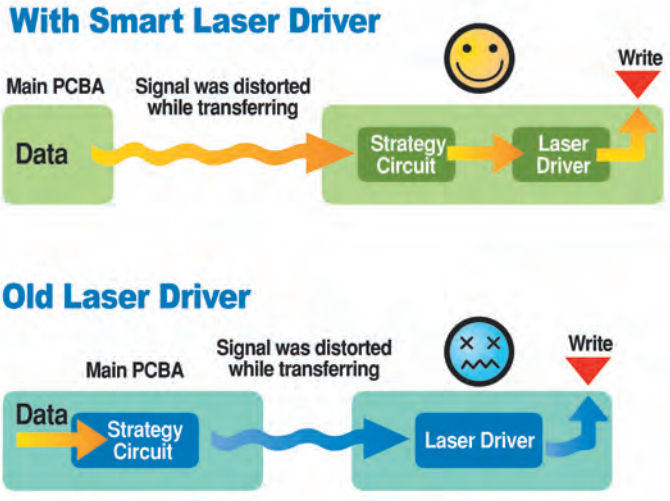
ASUS BC-1205PT is a BD-ROM/DVD±R/RW/CD-RW drive designed with fast read/write speeds for reading and writing data at 12X DVD+/- write, 4X DVD+/-R (DL) and 5X DVD-RAM speeds. It will also support high capacity data backup and a SATA interface that will provide you with five times faster data transfer rates than current DMA33 standards.

5 to 10 Times Extra Capacity with Blu-Ray

The BC-1205PT supports Blu-ray technology – allowing you to utilize Blu-ray discs to store large amounts of data – 25GB to 50GB worth, in fact. With 5 to 10 times more data capacity than standard DVDs, you can effectively watch 23 hours of standard definition TV or 6 hours of HD content on a single disc. With Blu-ray, you will be able to enjoy a more cost-effective way to view high definition movies on your high resolution TV. Additionally, Blu-ray technology provides data transfer speeds of 4500 Kb/sec – 3 times the speed of normal DVD data transfer rates.

Smart Laser Driver – Stabilized High Speed Recording Quality

The smart laser driver technology inherent in the BC-1205PT combines the strategy circuit into the laser driver in the Optical Processing Unit (OPU). This means that even if there is distortion in the data and clock signal, the strategy circuit in the OPU will correct these irregularities and not allow them to affect the recording quality – especially for high-speed recording drives.



Smart Laser Driver provides stabilized recording quality for high-speed recording

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: Which platform do you play on most often? Why?

Khayne: PC. Reason: *World of WarCraft*. Nuff said.

Magon: My 360 rules my life... Help!!!!!

Gambit: I used to play all my games on PC, but I moved over to the console market just because it is more financially viable. What I mean by that is obvious: no upgrading.

Antharias: PC, because you can get emulators for the platforms that are no longer around.

BKE: I play PS3 coz I reasoned by the time the whole online part of the Xbox is paid for and sorted, it would cost the same amount as a PS3 whose online service is free.

Venom Dragon: Xbox 360 – I couldn't keep up with the high prices of maintaining my PC.

dangarratt: PC - because I already have one, and because the console games are so bloody expensive I'd be able to afford one game a year!!

Rossi RSA: Xbox 360. Why? Because I work on my PC all day

UncleSalie: PC. A console is an investment in gaming. A PC is an investment in gaming that you can hide from your girlfriend by doing work.

Boggle24: PS2. Reason, both my *Guitar Hero* games are on my PS2. Nuff said.

Xennox: In recent months my Xbox 360, before that it was my PC.

Wir: I mostly play on PC - I used to own a PlayStation though. But we decided it'd be too expensive to maintain both console and PC gaming.

Jub Jub: Computer. I own a PlayStation 2 and PSP, but nothing beats just sitting down in front of the PC having a good time.

BlazingNferno: PC all the way!!! I know a lot of people have said it is superior to console because of the keyboard and mouse and therefore better for FPS - well, I agree.

Gazza N: PC, because I have one, and due to its versatility. That said, if I could afford an X360 and its games on top of that, I'd probably go dual-platform in a heartbeat.

BitterBoetie: I play PC, cause the price of Xbox + console games + HD TV will not justify getting rid of my PC.

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

"To Chris and Chris, I salute you. You are the unsung heroes of this magazine. Without people like you, the world would be a place of boring design and grey images on white paper."

Suuuuure, tow the line why don't you? I bet you made it all up. Everyone knows all corporations are evil. But even if you didn't, I can deduce from your story that your Xbox was clearly not chipped. Do you have any idea how big console games are? The 360 is already several gigs while the PlayStation 3 is just huge. Stupid Blu-ray. But, hey, the WPC members waste their time and bandwidth making the ISO dumps and uploading the files somewhere. You, though, don't even have the decency to go and get a mod chip so that you can appreciate our hard work! You and your warranty can go to hell! If our consoles break, we fix them ourselves! (Or steal another off the back of a truck.)

SEADOG: Roelof Loots
YARRING: I Salute You...

I'VE BEEN AN AVID *NAG* reader for the last couple of years and one thing that amazes me every edition is the layout and design of the mag. Not once has there been a letter of thanks to your art department for the superb job they do each month to bring the games and reviews to life. So I have decided to say something regarding this very important aspect. Being a graphic designer myself and layout artist for a magazine I fully understand the amount of work that goes into design and layout of a magazine of *NAG*'s size. The deadlines, the amount of work, the number of times you have to change a page... To Chris and Chris, I salute you. You are the unsung heroes of this magazine. Without people like you, the world would be a place of boring design and grey images on white paper. Thank you for giving us the best computer mag in the country and please continue to extent the boundaries of design with each issue.

I think you are completely overrating the importance of layout. Sure, you get people who can string a few pictures and text together to make things look nice, but caring about design is so shallow. All WPC member sites conform to a strict code of anti-design and loads of database-generated text. To show you we care even less about design, all WPC sites have large and annoying ads everywhere, especially ones of nubile babes shaking their curves at you. And yet, way more people read out stuff. What does that tell you about design? Thought so.

SEADOG: Jan Verwey
YARRING: Violent players, not Violent Games

MOST GAMERS PLAY A violent game, like *CS* for example. After they're done playing, they continue with their lives in a totally normal way. They don't grab a rifle and start mowing fellow humans down. The gamers who are indeed guilty of the aforementioned were usually not influenced by the game alone. The two largest factors that push a person over the edge are depression and a weak state of mind. Now *CS* (again only an example) may have a subliminal effect on your view of life, but 99% of gamers are mature and smart enough (I know it's hard to believe, but bear with me) to filter these impulses out and, in short, draw a very clear line between gaming and real life. The problems appear when kids are left to use their own discretion, but have not yet developed the necessary 'skills' to discern between fantasy and reality. Depression is a totally separate topic, but the only ways it can be linked to games is if the person uses weapons he/she has seen in a game (the Columbine shooters used a Glock 18 and a MP5, classic *CS* weapons) or if he/she was teased about his/her gaming abilities. This crap about videogames turning children into killers is not true. I quote SaintDJ in your April issue: " Why did the boy kill his classmates? Because he was pissed off by them. Why was he pissed off by them? Because they are '...arseholes who wrecked my life...' " I have read about numerous accounts where unstable, depressed or mentally disturbed people have been exposed to extreme violence or fanaticism for long periods of time. One example is that of Mark Thomason, a mentally retarded kid in the US, who, after watching his older brother play *StarCraft* and constantly hearing the Protoss zealots shout, "My life for Aiur!", thought that they were brave and noble, and that he would imitate them. This led to him beating his mother to death with a hockey stick while fanatically screaming the Protoss war cry. (Yes, it is true.)

What I'm trying to say is that gamers should be mentally able to discern between the world on your screen, and the world you live in. Furthermore, an oppressed and depressed child is more likely to go on a rampage than a normal child. Thus, it's not the game's fault (most of the time), but that of the player.

It is a sadly under-documented fact that piracy lowers the amount of cases involving homicide and games. It still requires more research to give all the naysayers something to shut up about, but you can ask any of the WPC's members about this. The fact is that when someone buys a game at its full value, they are forced to play it so many times to get their value back out of it or they have to keep playing it because they can't afford another game. Now what if it is a really bad game (and let's face it, originality is dead). This person will just end up getting really angry and decide to take it out on someone. But the developers all live in their mighty ivory towers, so he has to turn his sights to you, the ordinary guy on the street. Now if he had pirated the game, he could just go, "This is crap," write a review on his blog way before anyone and then go on to play something else. Piracy saves lives – tell your friends.

SEADOG: Stefan Jacholke
YARRING: Pirating Nicknames

NOW CHECK THIS - a few years ago LAN gaming started in our small town. Last year we got a local LANing corner and every few weekends big LAN parties are held there. This year a lot of newbies got into this scene. The new fad for them is to take our nicknames, which we got rep for, and then they mess your nick up - forcing you to either step away from your nickname or just hide your head in embarrassment. What can I do to avoid this?

Now if there is one type of piracy the WPC does not tolerate, it's nickname piracy! If you think you've done a lot of effort putting value behind your nic, just imagine the poor pirate who has spent countless hours ripping movies, dumping games, avoiding the law and investing in even faster DVD writers! Then some other fool comes along and dumps his ugly shaky-cam Spanish version of The Holiday on the Internet first, but renames it to Brangelina Sex Tape – and he uses YOUR nic! Your reputation is in ruins. Your fans, who have all eagerly been waiting Brad and Angie to get it on publicly, are assaulted by a romantic comedy in Spanish and half shot from under a jacket! Nickname piracy is just not on and if we ever find you, we'll DOS your blog into dial-up speeds! **NAG**

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- PCI Express 16X

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- 256MB DDR3 Graphic Memory
- Dual-Link DVI for High Resolution Display
- High Dynamic-Range(HDR) Support
- PCI Express 16X

NX8500GT-TD256E

- Powered by NVIDIA® GeForce® 8500GT GPU
- 256MB DDR2 Graphic Memory
- Dual Link DVI Support
- High Dynamic-Range(HDR) Support
- PCI Express 16X

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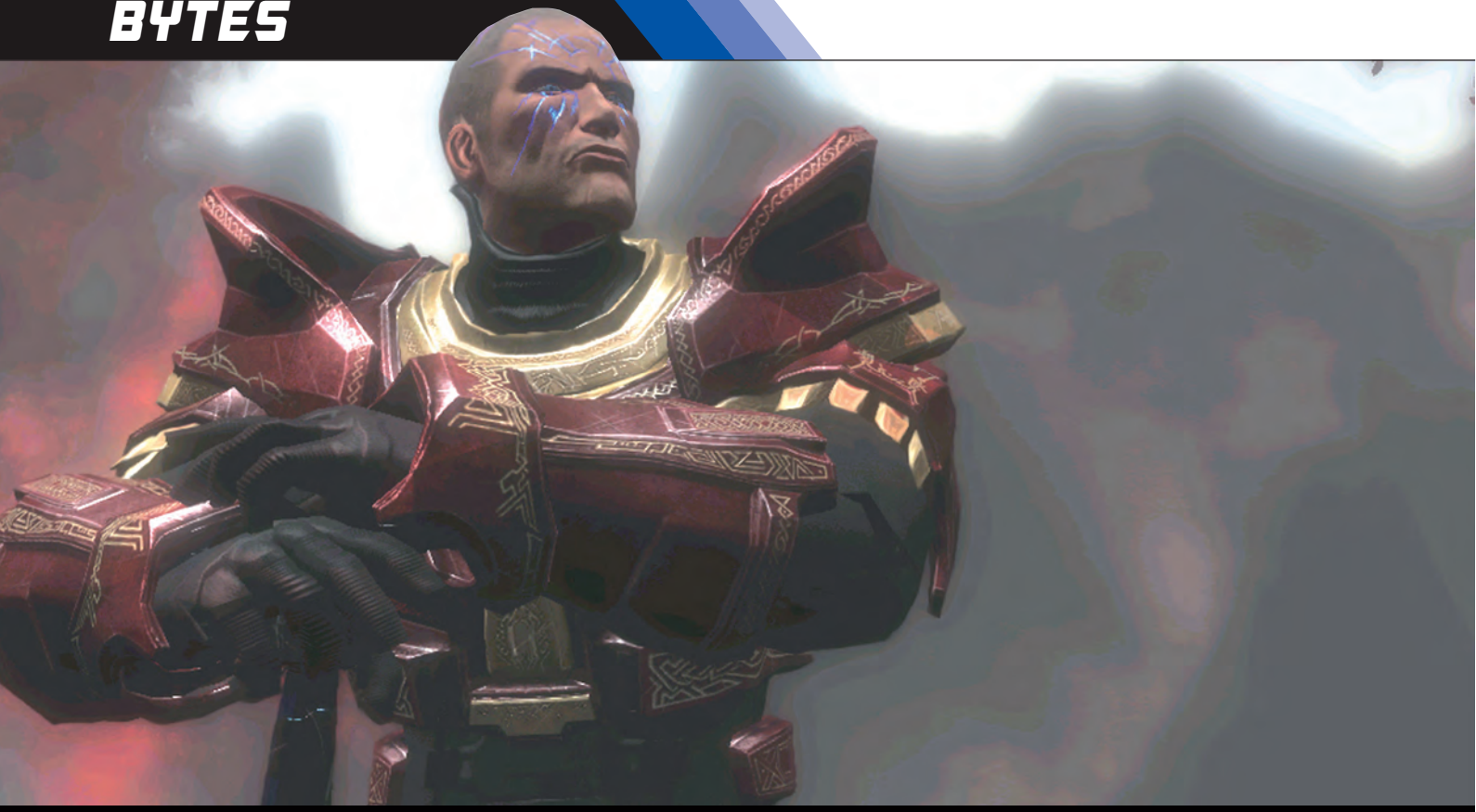


EPIC VS. SILICON KNIGHTS

WHAT DO YOU DO when faced with a lawsuit? Well, according the Epic, you file a counterclaim and let the lawyers battle it out for you.

In a case which involves much finger-pointing and general bad-mouthing, Epic has filed a counter suit and a move for dismissal of Silicon Knights' original claim. Silicon Knights has claimed that, although they were promised a workable development kit of the Unreal Eng ine technology, which they planned to use with *Too Human* and another unnamed game, they received it seven months late, in November 2007 instead of March. Silicon Knights is also claiming that Epic had a working kit but "kept it to itself... a clearly unfair advantage."

However, Epic is claiming that Silicon Knights has "...made unauthorised use of Epic's Licensed Technology and has infringed and otherwise violated Epic's intellectual property rights, including Epic's copyrighted works, trade secrets, know-how and 'Confidential Information' as defined in the License Agreement..." The company also added that the lawsuit is "a cynical effort... to unlawfully enrich itself at the expense of Epic Games" and is seeking damages of $650,000 and the deletion of any code or games, including *Too Human*, that infringe on their copyright.

Meanwhile, Silicon Knights' Denis Dyack has confirmed the previously announced 2008 Q1 release of *Too Human*.

GABE NEWELL: DX10/VISTA A BAD IDEA

VALVE SOFTWARE RUNS AN ongoing survey using its Steam client, the results of which can be found at http://www.steampowered.com/status/survey.html. According to the survey, only one in fifty players has a DirectX 10-compatible graphics card and Vista installed. In an interview, Valve president, Gabe Newell, said that Microsoft made a terrible mistake releasing DirectX 10 for Vista exclusively. Newell also commented on the increasing lack of input device diversity in PC gaming culture. He mentioned that he'd like to see more specialised controllers such as the Wiimote or *Guitar Hero* guitar on PC.

Newell also highlighted the cross-platform problem: the fact that neither the Xbox 360 nor the PlayStation 3 uses DirectX 10 features. This limits DX10 support given the financial requirements for console versions of games. Thus far, it seems that only Microsoft considers its DX10/Vista move worthwhile - the general consensus among both developers and hardware manufacturers is that it fractures an already-diverse PC gaming market even more, making consoles appear more attractive.

The Orange Box, estimated to be released for PC and Xbox 360 on 12 October and on Steam on 10 October, uses very rudimentary DirectX 10 functionality. Visually, it will be almost impossible to differentiate between the DirectX 10 and DirectX 9 versions.

WIKIPEDIA EDITS EXPOSED!

INVENTED BY AMERICAN STUDENT, Virgil Griffith, and only released on the 14th of August this year, Wikiscanner, which cross-references edits with the IP address, now enables Wikipedia to check who is editing whose page with some surprising results. A user with access to the EA network recently removed all mention of the founder of the company, Trip Hawkins, and his business plan from their Wikipedia page. The line, "The company has also been the subject of criticism, most notably for its business tactics and employment policy," which refers to the recent lawsuit EA endured, was also deleted.

Sony was also caught with its fingers in the cookie jar when someone on its network removed negative comments about the Blu-ray system and edited the Microsoft *Halo 3* entry adding that it "won't look any better than *Halo 2*."

Others that have been caught in the act include MySpace, which erased the paragraph about their site hacking, and Apple editing Microsoft's page to add negative comments (a compliment which Microsoft returned in kind).

BIOSHOCK DENIED!

UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE TO wrap up their own project in time for its scheduled October release, Valve employees have been temporarily prohibited from playing *BioShock*. "Nobody gets to play it until *Orange Box* is done," declared Valve's big cheese, Gabe Newell. "That's our reward to ourselves as a company - everyone gets a copy of *BioShock*."

There's still money left to buy anything after *The Orange Box*'s long and storied development cycle. Actually, Newell doesn't even know how much it's cost his company. "We don't track that," he shrugged. "One of the nice things about being an independent developer is we just keep everybody busy. We're making lots of money, and we just focus on what we're trying to build and then build it."

And much of that money must surely stem from lucrative licensing deals for Valve's proprietary engine, Source – most recently acquired by Chilean developer, ACE Team, for the "features, tools, and flexibility" needed for their current project, a steampunker called *Zeno Clash*.

Once *The Orange Box* is done, it seems that Valve intends to maintain its publishing partnership with EA for upcoming zombie apocalypse romper, *Left 4 Dead*. Going against the general consensus of the *vox populi*, Newell insists that the partnership has been nothing but pleasant – an opinion shared by Crytek CEO, Cevat Yerli. "From a business point of view, we have more support from EA and superior distribution and marketing power behind us, more freedom," Yerli told *GamesIndustry.biz* in a recent interview. "They deliver more, because we both want this to be the best game. The relationship overall has been very positive."

SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

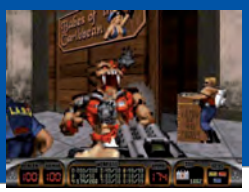
A representative from **Crytek** has stated in an interview that if a new German law banning the production and distribution of violent games becomes a reality, the developer would leave the country. It might move to its new branch office in Budapest.

Epic's **Marc Rein** revealed that thanks to its increased capacity, the **Blue-ray** version of **Unreal Tournament 3** might contain more maps and other content, as opposed to the DVD-based 360 and PC versions.

Research by casual game publisher **PopCap** revealed that up to 95% of adult family gamers say casual games provided a chance for them to bond with their children. 70% of the respondents feel casual games have educational benefits.

Atlus had to recall an arcade machine in Japan called **Arm Spirit** after the arm wrestling simulator apparently broke a few arms. But the company feels the machine isn't THAT strong and that "even women should be able to beat it". It blamed over-excited arm twisting for the accidents.

3D Realms again mused about the possibility of **Duke Nukem 3D** appearing on **LIVE Arcade**. Will they ever stop teasing us and just do it?



AMERICA'S ARMY: PROPAGANDA TOOL OF NOTE

THE QUESTION OF MORALITY is certainly an issue when one considers the US Army's recruiting game, *America's Army*. It seems to some that, while it's a fun game, it shouldn't be used as a means of recruiting people for the armed forces. The surprising thing about this is that not only are anti-gaming activists against it, but army veterans as well. Recently, a protest took place in St. Louis, where over 90 US war veterans marched in black shirts with "War is not a Game" emblazoned on the front. This protest comes after the Global Gaming League came under fire for receiving a two million dollar sponsorship by the US government for promoting *AA*. The title has proven very successful since it was first launched, outperforming any other recruitment drive attempted by the army. *AA* is available as a free download.

PS3: MORE DIFFICULT TO DEVELOP THAN OTHER CONSOLES?

RECENTLY, THERE HAS AGAIN been a wave of Sony bashing, but this time it came from some developers and journalists who stated that it's more difficult to develop games for the PS3 than for the other consoles. While this might be true, one must take into account that the PS3 has had less running time than the others, being at least a year younger than them. Also, with the PS2, developers complained at first and it was not until the end of its cycle that the PS2 actually started using its full capabilities. Some developers, though, like EA and Ubisoft, have sided with Sony and have stated that they found the challenge most rewarding and once they got used to the PS3's features, it was on par with the Xbox 360 in terms of coding difficulty. It is, unfortunately, only a case of time, but whether it will benefit Sony, we will have to wait and see.

N-GAGE RETURNS WITH A VENGEANCE!

AT THE NOKIA: GO Play event in London, Nokia unveiled its redefined vision for the N-Gage brand. The original N-Gage cellphone failed to make an impact on the market, so Nokia has taken the brand and revived it into a multiplayer gaming service that will deliver mobile games and extra services to any cellphone capable of running the N-Gage application. N-Gage games will be distributed digitally by network operators or via the Internet to a user's PC.

Electronic Arts, Gameloft as well as Vivendi Games Mobile are all already onboard, and will be providing a host of games for the service. Nokia is aiming to position N-Gage as the premier mobile gaming service, with functionality for hosting multiplayer tournaments, organising games with friends as well as letting people download trial versions of games.

MIYAMOTO: WE NEED MORE FUN!

IN AN INTERVIEW IN the latest issue of Japanese weekly gaming magazine, *Famitsu*, Shigeru Miyamoto (creator of popular Nintendo franchises such as *Mario*) spoke at length about how he intends to balance difficulty and accessibility in the upcoming Wii title, *Super Mario Galaxy*. "With *Super Mario Galaxy*, while searching for new and interesting things, we've tried to build a game that beginners can play well without us underestimating them or going easy on them."

Last year at E3, Miyamoto commented that Nintendo intended to break down the wall separating hardcore and casual gamers.

UK POLITICIANS TALK GAMES

JUST DAYS AFTER PUBLICISING proposals for tax breaks, special economic benefits and a "more robust IP framework to protect publishers against piracy" for the UK gaming industry, UK Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, announced plans to curb youth violence by limiting "violent games and encouraging responsible parenting." In an interview with BBC, Cameron added that, "companies that make music videos, films and computer games have a social responsibility to not promote casual violence." All this while the current party in power, the Labour Party, has "reaffirmed its commitment to the games industry" in an attempt to compete with the incentives offered in other countries and prevent the drain of educated individuals the country has recently experienced. The party has also outlined plans for a public review of violent and sexual imagery in games in which the Citizens' Jury will be given the opportunity to directly influence policy by offering suggestions and opinions. The Labour Party has also cleared stated that they are "not interested in censorship at all."

YO HO, YO HO, A PIRATE'S LIFE FOR ME

DURING A RECENT RESIDENTIAL raid in West Yorkshire (UK), police discovered a gargantuan stockpile of chipped consoles, including 246 Wiis, 168 Xbox 360s, 19 PSPs, 12 DS Lites, six PS2s, and six PS3s, as well as 300 to 400 pirated game discs. This followed the seizure of more than 5,000 discs worth in excess of £50,000 at the homeowner's stall at a nearby market.

Meanwhile, a similar raid in Mexico resulted in the confiscation of some 15,000 counterfeit Nintendo products, including 4,500 pirated Wii discs. In a previous raid at the San Juan de Dios market in Guadalajara, police hauled in more than 56,000 illegal Nintendo items.

And while those responsible might escape the traditional branding, it's no slap on the wrist either. Timothy Hall from Mount Vernon, Illinois, convicted of selling pirated games, was recently sent to prison for two years. Here's hoping all that time spent handling slippery goods gives him a firm grip on the soap.

Er, here's a weird one for you. A new production company aimed at "25s and under" has decided that its first game-to-movie title will be eighties classic **Joust**, set in a floating Las Vegas future. The problem is that most people under 25 weren't alive when Joust was released.

The **Kane & Lynch** movie must have impressed studio bosses at Lionsgate, because the movie's production has been fast-tracked to start soon.

PS3 Vault decided to test the **PlayStation 3**'s heat mettle and stuck the console in a Sauna for 108 hours while it operated. Impressively, the console didn't suffer or fall over during the stress test, something a 360 might not manage.

SA has a new gaming Website! From former NAGite, columnist and G.E.A.R.-founder Walt Pretorius comes **Headshot SA** (www.headshotsa.com) for local and international game and gaming-related goodness!

HEADSHOTSA

Hellgate's online pricing has been announced. For £6.99 per month players can expect extra classes,items, monsters and areas after the offline-experience grows old.

LARA FOR SALE?

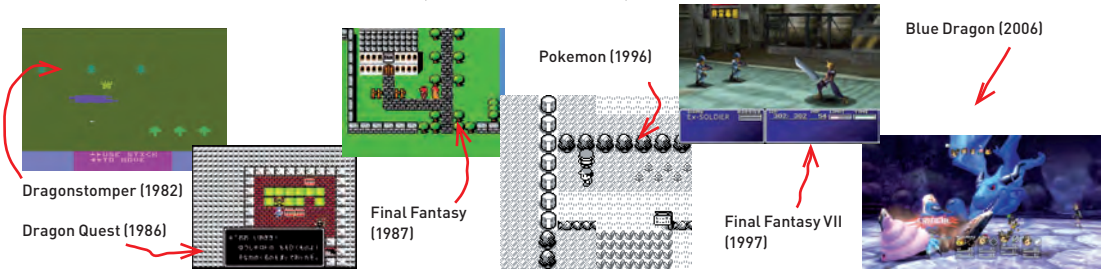
WHO IS BUYING EIDOS? IT MIGHT BE UBISOFT, WHICH SEES A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD. BUT THAT FUTURE LOOKS TO INCLUDE EA MORE AND MORE.

IT'S BEEN AN INCREDIBLY busy time for game publishers in August, but the biggest news seems to orbit around the cluster of Electronic Arts, Ubisoft and SCI/Eidos. Eidos's Ian Livingstone confirmed that the new *Tomb Raider*, the eighth, is well underway at Crystal Dynamics. It also sounds like the game will be a follow-up to *Legend*, though at an Eidos event earlier this year Livingstone said that the latest game would be completely new to the series. He also gave a speech at the Edinburgh Interactive Festival (EIF), where he said that the industry needed more iconic characters. That seems to be the idea behind Eidos's *Kane & Lynch*, which might be part of the reason why the publisher has become an attractive buy. Its parent company, SCI, confirmed that it was in preliminary talks with a third party about SCI/Eidos being sold. So far, the three names speculated as potential buyers are EA, Ubisoft and Warner and a sum of £300 million has been mentioned.

A Ubisoft acquisition would be interesting, especially considering the big plans it has for the market. Recently, its CEO, Yves Guillemot, predicted that the gaming market will grow by 50% over the next four years.

"We have a huge opportunity as an industry [for] people to express who they are, how creative they are and build their community of friends online," he said at EIF, "Games give you a way to do something that people can recognise." Meanwhile, thanks to an obscure French stock law, EA has managed to increase its voting power in Ubisoft to 25%. The company bought a 15% stake in its French rival two years ago, described by Ubisoft as "hostile." By law, certain stocks in France double their voting capacity after two years, which got EA onto the board of directors. But the company has been quiet and made no move to take advantage of its new power. It might be that EA sees Ubisoft as a good investment, but the French publisher still regards it as a potential sign of a take-over.

THE EVOLUTION OF: JRPG (JAPANESE RPG)



FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

CORTEX COMMAND

www.datarealms.com [On the DVD]

"MINE PRECIOUS GOLD FROM the deformable terrain in order to buy better weapons, digging tools, and deployable defences. Use these assets to defend your disembodied brain and bankrupt your opponent! Old-school 2D sidescroller pixel graphics coupled with an extremely detailed physics simulation makes for a mix of nostalgia and surprising gameplay."

Maybe it's just us, but this game is hard, even on the easy difficulty (except when the AI opponent somehow manages to kill itself). You build yourself a base during Planning phase and then the game continues to throw waves of dudes at you eventually overwhelming your defences and killing your brain. We've come up with a few good base designs so far after some practice and we can beat Easy easily enough now, but just when you think you have it licked, a higher difficulty proves just how ineffective your design really is. This type of trial-and-error game isn't for everyone, but the nature of build-it-and-see-if-it-lasts games is undeniably addictive. While only a Beta, a proof of concept almost, *Cortex Command* is still a great way to waste a few hours. We're curious to see how the final product from this one-man team eventually turns out - especially if it's to become a retail product (as he plans it to be).

The proper way to play *Cortex Command*, however, is two- or four-player versus (team support works) - the physics really makes mid-air rocket collisions interesting. There is no online or LAN multiplayer yet - you gotta share the keyboard or plug in a few gamepads.

On its official forums, you'll find a lot of useful information as well as some user-created scenarios and game modifications, all of which add a lot of life to the game.

MOVERS & SHAKERS

ALONE IN THE DARK appears to be lost in the dark. It has been delayed AGAIN and will now only appear somewhere in 2008. • We might not get the show here, but a game for the new **Dr. Who** show is in the works. Ironstone Partners is doing the development and Eidos is publishing. • **Age of Conan** has been delayed – after NCSoft promised the game wouldn't be delayed again. Now it will only come out next year in March. • Get ready for some cutesy destruction! **Ratchet & Clank**'s PlayStation 3 debut, **Tools of Destruction**, lands in late October! • EA has confirmed that **Rock Band** is heading to Europe, but only in 2008. • Get ready for some good-on-evil action! The new lord of Diablo, **Hellgate: London**, is nearly done and will be released by the end of October. • Janie's got a fully automatic – **Call of Duty 4** will be released on November 4, so get ready! • **Spore** is coming to consoles – at some point. EA confirmed the game will land somewhere other than the PC and DS, but spoke about it on a franchise level. • **Devil May Cry** Mobile has been announced and should appear later this year. Yes, we also wondered how that would work. • The time-hopping **Timeshift** will be out by the end of October, said its publisher. This game really did take its time to get to release. • Mega action UE3 gore-fest **Dark Sector** will be released in the US in January for the PS3 and 360. That means we'll see it soon after that. • A billboard in Vice City Stories for the PSP hints at a **San Andreas Stories** games. Vice City was revealed the same way in GTA 3. • If Hideo Kojima has his way, **Metal Gear Solid 4** will get a worldwide release. When that will happen, though, he did not say. • According to US gaming mag EGM, the **Penny Arcade** game will be released on LIVE Arcade. Hmmm... • **The Chronicles of Riddick** will have to wait a bit – Starbreeze and Sierra delayed the remake to next year. • As you might expect, game versions for the upcoming **Incredible Hulk** movie are in the works. This time, SEGA is handling the project. • The next **Need for Speed** game is racing around the corner. EA says we can expect **ProStreet** in the first week of November. **Gran Turismo 5 Prologue** will be close after that – by the end of the year says Sony. But **GT5** itself will only be out July next year. • Console FPS pioneers Free Radical let it slip that **Timesplittters 4** is in development. Meanwhile their other game, Haze, will be a PS3 exclusive until the end of this year. • Hopefully you already heard the great news: a **Mafia** sequel is in the works and is looking really good. • With the Wii launching here soon, the game you want to get is **Super Mario Galaxy**. Nintendo says it will be in PAL territories by mid November.

Lionhead's Peter Molyneux has said that there are "no excuses" for the studio not to make a great game anymore. Expressing the studio hasn't reach that point yet, he believes "the best is yet to come". **Fable 2**?

Want to know how to make a lot of money go down the drain? **Australia's government** spent $84 million on a national porn filter, but the system was thwarted within 30 minutes of going live by a 16 year old. The government responded by uploading a new filter, which he then got past within forty minutes.

If you have the latest version of **Google Earth**, you can now waste time flying around in it. Google included a small flight simulator in the latest release, which can be activated by pressing Ctrl + Alt + A. If it doesn't work, try being close to an airport first.

This might be great or terrible news to you, but **Gamespy** has signed up with **Epic** to support **Unreal Engine 3**. The deal will make Gamespy's multiplayer technology available to all UE3 licensees.

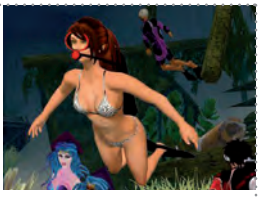
Bought an **iPhone** and feel like some serious retro action? A version of **MAME** has been ported to Apple's first phone, but it's still limited. Playing anything more complex than Pac-Man tends to run into performance issues. Learn more at http://code.google.com/p/iphone-sdl-mame/

WEIRD GAMING

It seems that an overheating 360 can cause you to do some rather stupid things. That's the case with a 14-year-old boy from North Carolina in the US. His 360 kept switching off every five minutes, something he deduced had to do with the console overheating. But he also seemed to have misunderstood what 'water cooling' is, because his solution for fixing the problem was to wrap the 360 in plastic and tape and submerge it in a pan of water while it was still powered on. The teenager's mother had barely left the room when he tried this. When she returned a few minutes later, she found the gamer unconscious on the floor. Fortunately, he suffered no major injuries and was awake when the ambulance arrived. The state of the 360, as you might guess, wasn't that good.

Even old people take their games seriously! An 85-year-old man from New Mexico arrived back home after leaving for the day to find his place ransacked. A brief search uncovered the thief, whose feet were sticking out from the bed he was hiding under. The thief was in the process of stealing several items, including the senior citizen's gaming systems. The man kept the 16-year-old burglar at gunpoint until the police arrived.

Sex causes theft! At least, one can deduce it from this tale. For four years, Eros LCC has been making good money selling a program in MMO, *Second Life*, that gives its players realistic genitals and sex moves. But its creator, Kevin Alderman, discovered that someone had stolen his code and had been reselling it. When he caught up with the avatar, its user just told him, "So sue me!" Kevin took the advice and has hired a law firm to track down the user and take him on over copyright issues.



Stupidity will get you banned! A pirated copy of *Halo 3* has been doing the rounds after it was leaked recently. If the users who got hold of this version were smart enough, they would have stuck to offline mode. But quite a lot of them, for reasons unknown, decided to play on LIVE - before the game was even released. This prompted Microsoft to ban all those 360s - but not permanently. The users are allowed back on LIVE again in the year 9999. The weirdest part of the story? It only broke when some of these users complained about the ban!

WIRED DOESN'T LIKE POSTAL, BOLL DOESN'T LIKE WIRED

FOLLOWING A SOMEWHAT UNFLATTERING review of Uwe Boll's film adaptation of *Postal*, the terminally angry German director contacted the offending article's author, Chris Kohler, claiming he had "ignored [the film's satire] ...and wrote another bad review about Uwe Boll because it's trendy to do this."

Undaunted by the inherent flaw in this statement, Boll bulldozed onwards: "You trashed me as, like, untalented guy [sic]. I think you're not a good film reviewer, you're not a good journalist. Your article was only an ongoing insult against the untalented, bad director."

But seriously, what more could we possibly add to that?

GAME CRIME

A 13-YEAR-OLD BOY WAS APPREHENDED for vandalising 23 plastic PlayStation 3 security cases at his local Toys R Us in Anderson, South Carolina. He used a permanent black marker to write "PS3 Sucks" on the cases, but was discovered and held until police arrived. When he was asked why he did it by police, he responded, "I have an Xbox and I hate PlayStation. I found the marker lying on the shelf and I guess I was bored. Sorry."

A Tennessee man, who was kidnapped and tortured for nine days in a motel, managed to escape thanks in part to a Sony PSP. According to an FBI report, one of the two assailants had given the other a PSP, which the kidnapper played day and night. The victim used the distraction to loosen his bindings, making his escape while the kidnapper slept. Both men have been arrested in connection with the incident.

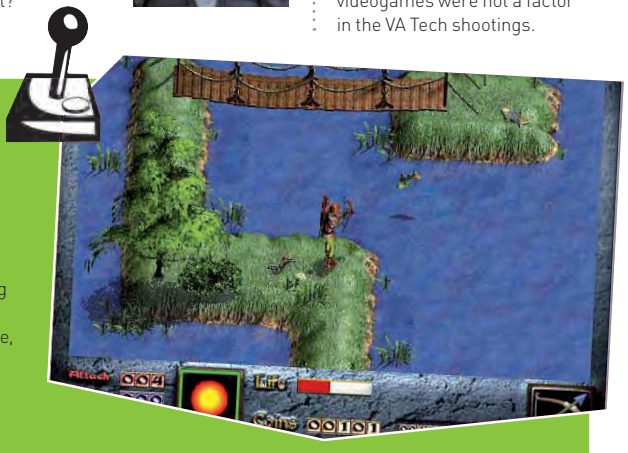
Three children, two of whom are 12 years old, were charged with breaking into a Boston home and stealing a Nintendo Wii as well as other electronics. The resident returned home and found a 12-year-old girl holding the console while two boys fled out the window.

Lastly, Virginia Governor, Tim Kaine, has recently made public the final report from the Virginia Tech Review Panel tasked with investigating the tragic campus shooting, which cost the lives of 32 people. It has been established that videogames were not a factor in the VA Tech shootings.

FREE GAME OF THE MONTH 2

DINK SMALLWOOD

www.datarealms.com [On the DVD]



DINK IS A TYPICAL country lad: he lives with his mum, feeds the piggies, and is desperately scrambling for the affections of the village lasses. While out gathering nuts for his mother one afternoon, his house mysteriously burns down. Mum dies, Dink cries, the local yokels mill about, scuffing their boots and offering empty platitudes. Oh, the pathos. A short while thereafter, the wretched orphan receives a letter from an aunt in a nearby village, who magnanimously offers him a place to stay. Some sort of grand adventure must certainly be waiting somewhere along the cobbled path - but in the meantime, let's punch some ducks' heads off.

Dink Smallwood is sandwiched somewhere between light RPG and old-school adventure, slathered with parody, and garnished with a tasty pickle. Think of it as the runty offspring of an extraordinarily unlikely union between *Diablo*, *Zelda* and those dime-a-dozen old SSI games. Originally released back in 1997, the game suffered production and distribution hassles, and was subsequently re-released as freeware less than two years later. The game takes itself about as seriously as a Life Orientation class, and mostly involves trotting around and killing stuff, while something just barely resembling a plot occasionally pops up from behind a rock or tree. But you totally get to punch ducks' heads off.

The game's real time sink lies in its level editor, DinkEdit. Over the last decade, a bustling and industrious fan community has created all sorts of additional modules, some even longer than the original game. This freeware version even packs its own bonus mod, created by original game designer, Seth Robinson. It's the game that just keeps on gaming. Did we mention that you get to punch ducks' heads off? Why are you even still reading this? Go play it already, insolent peasant.

CONSOLE WATCH

The ABI Research firm expects that **184 million household devices will provide digital content in homes by 2012**, with game consoles accounting for 85% of delivery. • Newer PlayStation 3 consoles will have a "new" gamepad with **refined analogue sticks and an updated motion sensor** but no rumble. Sony admits this is not a new controller but part of the normal development and evolution of controllers. • A Sony TV ad featuring a **gun and knife-wielding character** has been banned in the UK for condoning or glamourising violence. The ad was part of a series of print, TV and Internet commercials for the PS3 and has attracted over 23 complaints. • David Reeves of Sony Europe mentions that **Sony is still deciding** between larger internal flash memory or a conventional HDD for upcoming versions of the PSP. He also mentions that **most titles on the PlayStation Network, such as Calling All Cars, will eventually make their way to the PSP** in modified form. • Peter Edward, director of Home for Sony, has gone on record to state that **Home abusers can be turned off or if that doesn't work, banned by Sony staff.** • The newly unlocked 333MHz mode for the PSP (utilised by the upcoming **God of War: Chains of Olympus**) has a restriction: it cannot be used if Wi-Fi is enabled. • Confirming rumours, Microsoft has **cut the price of the 360 by $50 in the U.S.** Microsoft has also cut the price of the 360 in Europe to €349 for the Premium and €279 for the Core, **as a result of the 360 Elite launch.** • Californian resident **Kevin Ray and Microsoft have settled out of court** with regards to his lawsuit filed saying that the October firmware update bricked his system. • Microsoft has set up **http://service.xbox.com/service**, a site which allows you to start a repair request for your 360 – the site is currently only available in the US but will be rolled out to other regions in the future. • EA has gone on record to confirm that **development on the Xbox 360 takes priority** as some of their multi-platform titles near completion – EA will concentrate on getting the 360 version 'out the door' first. • Apparently **the new 65-nanometre Xbox 360s are on their way from China** and will cost less, perform better and not fail as much as the current 90-nanometer units. Microsoft is not expected to notify customers, in an effort to flush out current inventory. • Borderlands from developer Gearbox **will require the 360 HDD.** Microsoft has also confirmed that **HDMI will be incorporated in future versions of the Premium unit**, but not the Core. • According to Microsoft, there are **7.1 million Xbox Live subscribers clocking over 25 million downloads of Xbox LIVE Arcade titles.** • A patent has been filed with the US Patent and Trademark Office by Nintendo, which **indicates they are working on motion-sensing technology for use in a handheld console.** • The recent firmware update for the Wii **breaks compatibility with third-party software Freeloader**, which lets you play GameCube games from any region. • Nintendo has refuted rumours that the hardware production capacity for Wii units has been hindered due to a component shortage. • There are also **no plans for a Wii budget game range** according to Nintendo.

GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES MP3 • ACCESSORIES

GfK
July figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2
2	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08
3	Ninja Gaiden Sigma
4	Ratatouille
5	Heavenly Sword

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas
2	MotorStorm
3	Transformers: The Game
4	Resistance: Fall of Man
5	Formula One Championship Edition

XBOX 360

1	Halo 2
2	Bioshock
3	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08
4	MotoGP 07
5	Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights

XBOX 360

1	Forza Motorsport 2
2	Overlord
3	Colin McRae: DiRT
4	Gears of War
5	Fight Night Round 3

PLAYSTATION 2

1	Rugby 08
2	SingStar '90s (with microphone)
3	Stuntman: Ignition
4	Ratatouille
5	God of War II

PLAYSTATION 2

1	Rugby 08
2	FIFA 07
3	Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer
4	Need For Speed: Carbon
5	Ultimate Spider-Man

PC

1	Guild Wars: Eye Of The North
2	BioShock
3	MotoGP 07
4	The Sims 2 Bon Voyage
5	Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights

PC

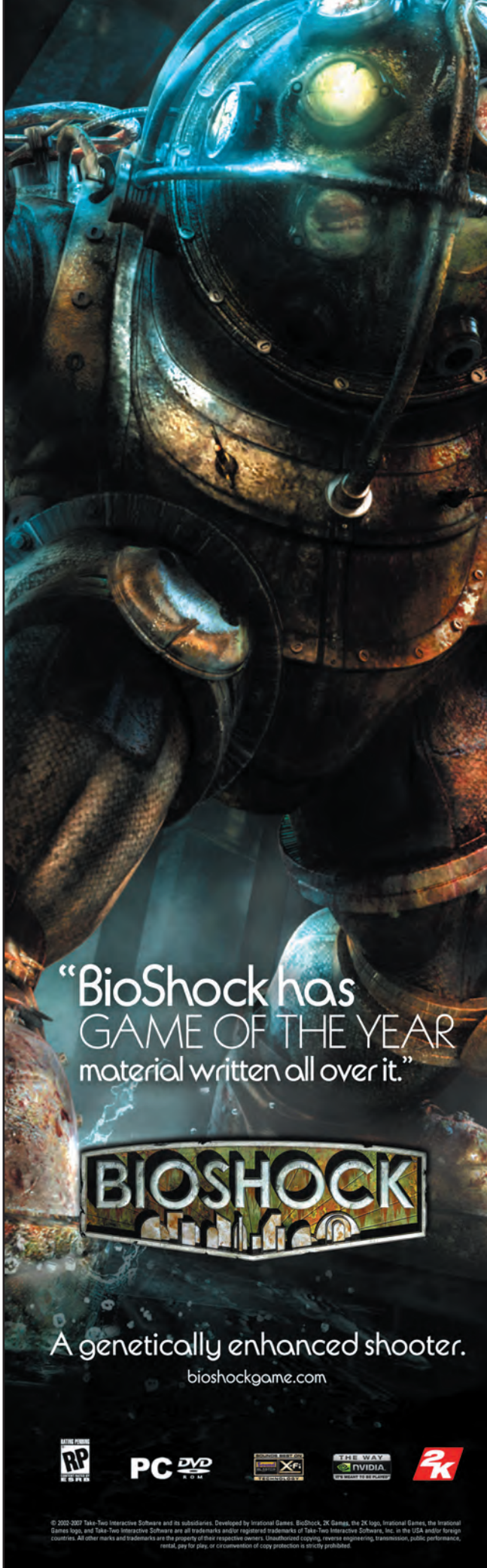
1	The Lord Of The Rings, The Battle For Middle-earth
2	Need for Speed: Most Wanted
3	Rugby 06
4	FIFA 06
5	Battlefield 2

PSP

1	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08
2	Worms: Open Warfare 2
3	Ratatouille
4	Surf's Up
5	WipEout Pulse

PSP

1	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
2	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix
3	Transformers: The Game
4	FIFA 07
5	Need For Speed: Carbon



THE NUMBERS

30 percent

The amount of people who know their 360 has HD features (source: NPD)

40 percent

The amount of people who know their PS3 can play Blu-ray Disks (source: NPD)

1 million

***Halo 3* pre-orders in the US (source: Microsoft)**

4 million

***Guild Wars* copies sold since the MMO launched two years ago (source: NCSoft)**

$1 billion

US game sales in July (source: NPD)

10 percent

How much Take-Two stocks rose when *BioShock* was released (source: Reuters)

83 minutes

The average play session on the PS3 (source: Nielsen)

57 minutes

The average play session on the Wii (source: Nielsen)

CALENDAR

OCTOBER RELEASES

Subject to change

Day	Game	Platform
2	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008	PSP
5	Crackdown (Xbox 360 Classics)	360
5	Viva Piñata (Xbox 360 Classics)	360
5	Virtua Fighter 5	360
5	Project Gotham Racing 4	360
	Pre-order for only R504.96	
5	Disney Princess	PS2
5	Heroes of Might and Magic V: Tribes of the East Expansion Pack	PC
5	Heroes of Might and Magic V Gold Edition	PC
5	Settlers VI: Rise of Empires	PC
5	Settlers VI: Rise of Empires Collector's Edition	PC
5	Tabula Rasa	PC
5	Disney Princess: Enchanted Journey	Wii
10	SKATE	PS3
	Pre-order and stand a chance to win one of two Volcom decks	
11	Collin McRae: DiRT	PS3
11	Race Driver Create and Race	DS
12	Crash of the Titans	PS2
12	Crash of the Titans	PSP
12	Power Rangers	PS2
12	Scrabble 2007	PC
12	Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	Multi
12	Spider-Man: Friend or Foe	Multi
16	Half-Life 2 Orange Box	360
16	Half-Life 2 Orange Box	PC
	Pre-order for only R303.26	
18	Orochi Warriors	PS2
18	Fatal Inertia	360
18	Orochi Warriors	360
19	Cars: Mater National	PC
19	The Club	PS3
19	The Club	PC
19	Football manager 2007	PC
19	Thrillville: Off the Rails	Multi
19	Cars: Mater-National	Wii
24	The Sims 2: Castaway	PS2
25	Lair	PS3
26	Cars: Mater-National	360
26	International Cricket Captain	PS2
26	Naruto	360
26	Fashion Designer	PC
26	Horsez 2008	Multi
26	Totally Spies	Multi
26	Crash of the Titans	Wii
30	Hellgate: London	PC
	Pre-order for only R314.06	
30	The Simpsons	Multi
30	Need for Speed Pro Street	Multi
TBA	The Witcher	PC
TBA	Ace Combat 6: Fire of Liberation	360
TBA	My Horse and Me	PC
TBA	World Series of Poker 2008	Multi
TBA	Cabela's Big Game Hunter	Multi
TBA	Barbie as the Island Princess	Multi
	Order and stand a chance to win a Barbie SUV	
TBA	Folklore	PS3
TBA	SingStar Next Generation	PS3
TBA	NBA 2K8	PS3
TBA	Frontlines: Fuel of War	PS3
TBA	Stuntman: Ignition	PS3
TBA	John Woo presents Stranglehold	PS3
TBA	Pro Evolution Soccer 7	Multi
TBA	Buzz Junior: Monsters Rumble	PS2
TBA	Buzz: The Hollywood Quiz	Multi
TBA	SingStar R&B	PS2
TBA	ATV Offroad Fury 4	PS2
TBA	Syphon Filter Dark Mirror	PS2
TBA	NBA 2K8	PS2
TBA	Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	PS2
TBA	Moto GP '07	PS2
TBA	Donkey Xote	PS2
TBA	Pro Evolution Soccer 7	PS2
TBA	Ninja vs Samurai	PS2

Release list and special offers provided by **www.kalahari.net**

Day	Game	Platform
TBA	Grim Grimoire	PS2
TBA	Hard Rock Casino	PS2
TBA	King of Clubs	PS2
TBA	ATV Offroad Fury 4 Pro	PSP
TBA	Patapon	PSP
TBA	Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow	PSP
TBA	Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	PSP
TBA	Donkey Xote	PSP
TBA	Pro Evolution Soccer 7	PSP
TBA	Coded Arms 2: Contagion	PSP
TBA	Castelvania: The Dracula X Chronicles	PSP
TBA	Steel Horizon	PSP
TBA	Gotlieb vs Williams	PSP
TBA	Dead Head Fred	PSP
TBA	Oblivion: Game of the Year Edition	PC
TBA	Donkey Xote	PC
TBA	Monster Madness: Battle for Surburbia	PC
TBA	King of Clubs	PC
TBA	Donkey Xote	DS
TBA	Ed, Edd and Eddy	DS
TBA	Chronos Twins	DS
TBA	8 Ball All Stars	DS
TBA	Monster Madness: Battle for Surburbia	360
TBA	World Championship Poker All In	360

EVENTS

Go to www.langames.co.za for more information

Date	Name	Location
5	Carnage. LAN	Cape Town
5	LanGames Event	Kempton Park
6	C@llissto LAn	Jo'burg
12	Proline/ DnA lan	Port Elizabeth
13	Mayhem Oct	No Venue Specified
19	Organised Chaos	Cape Town
19	MPLD	Pretoria
19	SICORP LAN	Cape Town
20	Liberty	Benoni
20	BattleLan.co.za - Rivonia	Randburg
26	L.A.N.ing SuX	Pretoria

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 [October Caption].

OCTOBER CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:
"Careful, there's a pothole!"

SEPTEMBER WINNER

"I'm a reporter for the wizard times. My pen is my wand and my articles are pure magic!"

- Dave Loubser

vivendi GAMES

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!

WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Heroes October]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a copy of *Ace Combat 6* for Xbox 360 from Megarom!

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Tanya Michas, p146

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Q&A: ASSASSIN'S CREED

WHITE CLOAK FLAPPING, KILLER BLADE GLEAMING, SEVERED GHOST FINGERS ITCHING – IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR THE MASTER ASSASSIN IN UBISOFT'S UPCOMING BLOCKBUSTER, *ASSASSIN'S CREED*. JADE RAYMOND, *ASSASSIN'S CREED* PRODUCER, ANSWERS A FEW OF OUR QUESTIONS WITH THE HELP OF CREATIVE DIRECTOR, PATRICE DESILETS.

What spawned the idea behind *Assassin's Creed*? How did all the key players get involved?
Patrice Desilets, our creative director, as well as some other key members of our creative team read a book about the Assassins and then started to do a lot of research about the clan and the Third Crusade. The more we discovered about these people, the more we wanted to make the game. Even the Assassins' motto, "Nothing is true, everything is permitted," fits the game medium perfectly. We developed our main character, Altair, as a forward-thinking missionary of sorts on a mission to end the Third Crusade.

Many gamers anticipated *Assassin's Creed* as a spiritual successor to *Prince of Persia*. While that might not be relevant, what would you describe as the main difference between the games?
I think that this is a trick question because there aren't any platforming sections in *Assassin's Creed*. We have recreated the entire Holy Land as it existed during the summer of 1191. As a player, you'll be asked to explore our three major cities as well as all of the surrounding countryside in order to track down and assassinate your target. There are no levels or sections dedicated to fighting or platforming because these don't fit with our organic approach. This is an open environment where you can climb and fight anywhere and when you add emergent crowd and enemy AI, the result is an experience that is completely different from *Sands of Time* and any other game you have played

In the game, you can apparently go nearly anywhere and climb nearly anything. What has it taken to accomplish this?
The design decision to make everything interactive required us to build a new engine and to completely redefine the way artists work. With most games, modellers and level

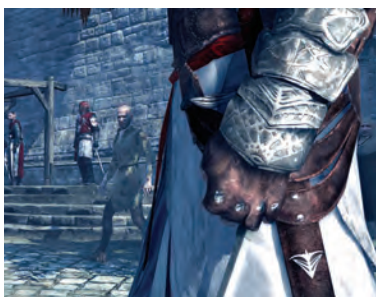
artists spend most of their time thinking about making great-looking levels, but with *Assassin's Creed* artists also had to learn level design rules. Since we have huge open cities, it's not possible for any one person to own the creation of a whole map. Artists instead have to work cooperatively to build the city, with some focusing on houses, others on landmarks and others on objects. Furthermore, it's not enough just to make sure that your house looks good and fits within a budget. With *Assassin's Creed*, artists have to start by making sure that their design works with the character and level design rules, and only after that can they think about making it look good. Regarding tools to help jumping and character movement, we started by evolving the system that we had with *Sands of Time*. Our main goal was to generate interaction points automatically so that the tedious task of flagging interactive edges could be done by the tools instead of level designers. It required a fair amount of testing from our level designers to mature the system, but it was functional and ready for production relatively quickly. The time we spent developing and testing the tools has more then paid for itself now that we're in production. There's no way we could have manually flagged every ledge in each of our three huge cities to be interactive.

How did the development team ensure that gamers don't end up 'breaking' the game with all the mobility?
It's a lot of work, for sure, and there's always the question you have to ask yourself, "How much effort am I going to put into making the experience work for a gamer who just doesn't want to play the game?" Obviously, you want to make sure that it's not super easy to break the realistic, living, breathing world that we've created, but we also don't want to spend our development time thinking about all the scenarios where a player's determined to 'break' the game. Moreover, maybe that's the fun for them - managing to break it. Development is about keeping that balance.

Apart from the city shown so far, what other locations can fans expect?
We have recreated the entire Holy Land, three major cities as well as all of the countryside in between. The player is free to roam the countryside, explore cities, and participate in side-quests and missions to help the population or complete main Assassination missions.

How important is the story? Has the game been designed around it or it around the game?
We have created a unique gaming experience that our creative director, Patrice, likes to refer to as a 'Flowerbox' game. It's a sandbox experience that is heavily story driven. The player has the freedom to complete missions when they want and use the strategy that they find the most satisfying, but all of these missions are tightly woven into an intricate story and are essential to the big reveal at the end.

Were there any concerns about a story based on the Crusades, considering the sensitivity around that era at the moment?
We obviously didn't make this game with a political agenda. Our goal is to provide a new type of entertainment experience based on crowd gameplay and new levels of interaction within a living game environment. Basically, we want to provide gamers with a level of immersion that was not possible on previous consoles. What better setting for interesting crowd gameplay then narrow medieval streets filled with merchants, knights, public hangings and all of the street life from this gruesome time? What better way to provide a truly immersive experience than to base it on real historical events? We worked with historians as well as cultural experts throughout production to make sure that we remain as close to historical facts as possible, while respecting particularly sensitive topics. However, games leave room for interpretation. Since the Assassin clan was historically distinct from the Crusaders and Saracens and not all facts about them can be confirmed, we were able to portray them as a secret group of people with the objective to end the Third Crusade.
Right from the beginning we wanted to have a setting where there's a culture clash, where there's no real bad guys, no good guys and where you as a player and character are in the middle of it and have to make some choices and learn about the people with whom you interact. It's more than a challenge. It's a fun place to dig for ideas. Yes, there was a lot of ambiguity, but that's what permits us to construct our own history.



AC's technology is certainly impressive. Will it be used in any other Ubisoft games?
Yes many games, but that's all I can tell you.

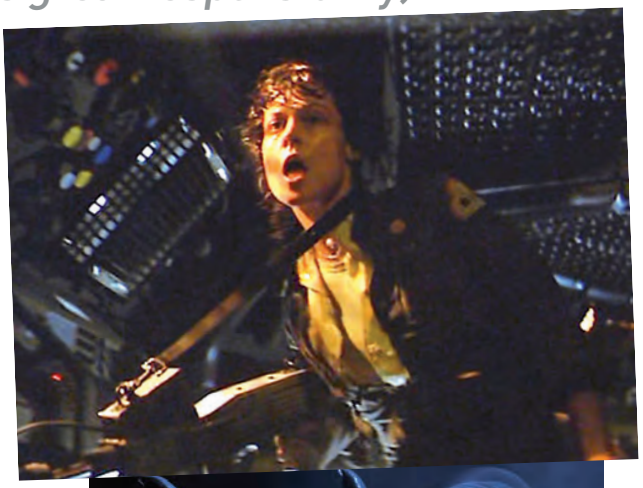
The game looks difficult. Is it aimed at hardcore gamers? How would you rate its accessibility for casual, novice and infrequent gamers?
Altair has over 1,000 different contextual moves. Obviously, finding a way to map that to a controller is a challenge. We didn't want to confuse people with a million combos to memorise, so we had to take a different approach to controls. Patrice Desilets, our creative director, was inspired by a puppeteering concept. Triangle is mapped to your character's head, square to your character's weapon hand, circle is mapped to your free hand and X is mapped to your feet. Each body part then reacts contextually to the situation you are in. If you're in a fight scene and you press free hand it'll allow you to grab and throw an opponent. If you're in a crowd, free hand will allow you to push people out of the way. It's a new concept, so it takes a bit of time to get used to. However, once you 'get it', the controls are intuitive. **NAG**

MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

THE JOY OF GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

(or: with great power comes great responsibility)



HEY, I STILL THINK in exactly the same way I did when I was 18. At least, I think I do. I'm still the same person I was – I just know more stuff. And own more stuff.

Would you look at the time? Over twenty-five years have trickled by under the metaphorical bridge since Ridley Scott's masterpiece, *Alien*. Lane change, but stay with me. I know this because the *Alien* Special Edition DVD's Director's Cut opens with a scene in which Ridley Scott mentions that a quarter of a decade has gone by since he completed the film (the Director's Cut edition was released back in 2003).

I watched *Alien* when it first appeared on TV, a few years after the theatrical release.

What this means is that I've grown old enough to realise that I'm old. It's a disconcerting idea to fully consider, if you think about it. I'm sure a few people out there are already nodding their heads in camaraderie. Raise your glasses, gents. *Prost*.

There's truth in the words, "You are only as old as you feel." When you feel old, you feel quite old. Then comes the need to somehow feel younger – find your inner child as it were – and that's when you're stuck.

However, a second lesson was imparted upon me. The Alien Special Edition DVD is proof that often an initially perceived curse usually ends up being a blessing in disguise – a paradigm helpfully shifted, out of the way so I could see better. I recently bought the Alien Special Edition DVD along with numerous other DVDs. This reminded me that with age come progress and progress usually means earning more money with which to buy the junk you want. It just so happens that I like getting junk like DVDs and games: they entertain and delight exactly how they were designed to. Man deserves to be happy, and so it only makes sense to do what makes you happy.

Being happy is powerful – nobody can deny that. You enjoy life more, the roses smell sweeter and nothing can ruin your day unless it really tries. Let's not forget about the mental and physical health benefits that come with being happy. Let's face it, being happy rocks. However, for some reason it's hard to be happy all the time. Being happy seems to take effort, which is strange. Are we naturally morose creatures? Everyone has a different answer to that question, I'm sure. Yet, it doesn't seem that I'm alone in thinking being happy takes effort. That's the only way I can explain why so many people just seem to be so dang unhappy, or often talk about how unhappy people seem to be (including themselves).

When you're happy, the people close to you, the people who really matter, are also happy (often in spite of themselves). It seems so inexplicable and who knows why – but there it is.

Growing old gracefully means realising that as you get older you have a responsibility to be happy – for the sake of the ones you love, pets included.

The cautionary part of this tale: when you're sad, the people close to you run the risk of being affected by the same malady. Nobody wants to be Sad Guy, and nobody likes a Sad Guy.

It's all hippy and crap, I know, but people really do have strong influences on each other. Knowing that, the real test of your mettle is in deciding what you plan on doing with this information or if you're going to do anything at all – if you need to do anything, that is.

All this because of a DVD buying spree so generously sponsored by increased responsibilities and more stress in one's life.

It's easy to get wrapped up in gaming. As easy as it is to get lost in delicious food, gaming can take you away, focus your mind and give you both challenge and entertainment cunningly intertwined, one supporting the other and inversely. Like being happy, gaming rocks (but if you're reading this magazine, chances are you already know this).

Nevertheless, as great as gaming is, one really needs to step back on occasional and consider a few things. **NAG**

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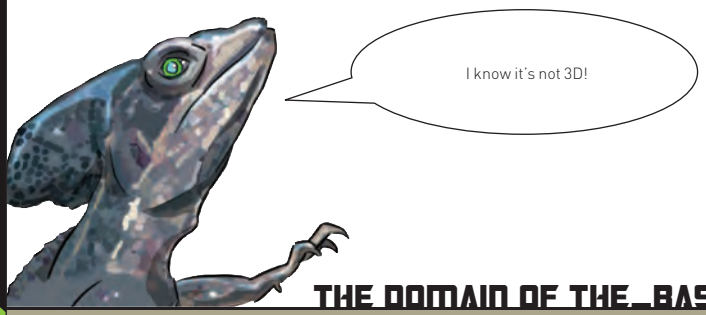

THE DOMAIN OF THE BASILISK

by Anton Lines

A GAME BY ANY OTHER NAME...

IT SHOULD BE A glorious new literary era. Technology has now advanced to the point where there's nothing we can't do with interactive storytelling. At least, in theory. In practice, we're still faced with a vast majority of artistically underdeveloped games that don't come close to the medium's full potential. A few months ago I wrote about how the gaming economy seemed to be sliding back towards arcade-style entertainment. The trend has, to my disappointment, continued.

Therefore, when my friends all started talking about this fantastic new game with art-deco-inspired production design, intelligent storytelling, well-rounded characters and a level of immersion never seen before, I could hardly believe our collective good fortune. People were even comparing it to the experience of watching a good film or reading a good novel. And then someone told me its name.

BioShock! Wham, bam, shazam!

BioShock? Okay, if you're putting together a story-based game, the first thing you don't want to get wrong is the title. If that was all the information I had, you can bet your big daddy I wouldn't be standing in line to pick up my copy. I'd have concluded that the chances of it being artistically worthwhile were more remote than the odds of successfully navigating an asteroid field... Ahem.

Yes, I know it's the spiritual successor to *System Shock*, and yes, the game involves modifying genes. I'm not calling the title irrelevant, I'm calling it tasteless. For all of you at home, here's a little thought experiment: What would you expect from a film with the same name? That's right, you'd expect it to be starring Dolph Lundgren.

However, just hold on a minute, good Sir Basilisk, surely a game by any other name would play as sweet? The answer – Mr Shakespeare's musings aside – is that nomenclature (the naming of things) does make an obvious difference in art. Entire fields of literary theory have been dedicated to analysing the relationship between a work and its title. And then there are the names of characters, places and objects within the narrative. All are potential meaning-carriers and even those that aren't will contribute to the atmosphere of the story. When a developer is unable to grasp the importance of this and opts for hard-sell advertising copy instead of a serious title, we can be forgiven for thinking that no gifted artist is at work.

This malady is actually widespread throughout the gaming industry. A quick glance at a list of newly-released and upcoming titles reveals gems like *BlackSite: Area 51, Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow, Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* and that paragon of creativity, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky.* I mean, what could be more awesome than an acronym that actually spells a real word?

To be honest, I don't think most of these even deserve the credit of being called advertising copy. It's more likely the result of programmers sitting together at the pub after work, yelling, "LOLZ U NO WAT WUD BE REALY COOL??" The problem is that there are just so few real writers in the gaming industry.

And I simply can't figure out why. All other aspects of game development have advanced in leaps and bounds over the past decade. Set and character design now rivals anything the silver screen has to offer. Stunning sound effects and music continue to add layer after layer of atmospheric depth to the virtual worlds. Realism? Just look at *Crysis*! Direction? I guarantee twenty seconds of Blizzard's latest single-player presentation for *StarCraft II* will drop your jaw. Yet, the best storytellers still stick to the established forms: the novel and the motion picture. Both sides deserve some of the blame here: more writers should be trying to get into the gaming business and the gaming business should be trying harder to attract them. Unless this aspect of development catches up with the rest, single-player gaming will never be able to shake off its B-grade artistic image. NAG

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RAMMIT

by Megan Hughes

SURVIVOR: RAGE ISLAND 2007

THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY provides a lengthy definition for the word 'rage', including: "fierce or violent anger." Hopefully, that won't be the experience for most who are planning to attend NAG's favourite event of the year. Personally, I prefer "vehement desire or passion" and "widespread temporary enthusiasm" as explanations of the word's meaning. "Temporary insanity" would also work, though it's not listed in the dictionary.

Of course, anyone who can honestly claim that they have a gaming thumb will know what rage really means: Really Awesome Gaming Expo. This year, not unlike last year, it will be held at the Coca-Cola Dome in Johannesburg during the last weekend of September.

Hopefully, if you're planning to attend the three-day LAN event that forms part of rAge, you're already in possession of a ticket. Otherwise, too bad: they were sold out over a month ago.

For those of you who'll be arriving at the Dome in droves, I've decided that I should, at the very least, provide you with some tips to survive the weekend. I've only listed the vital and most important things that you need to be aware of to be able to leave rAge with only the coolest battle scars to share with your friends.

TOP TEN SURVIVAL TIPS:

1. Don't touch the booth babes. These creatures, even the undercover ones wearing 'I am not a booth babe' T-shirts, are a dangerous breed and are known to bite. Bleeding to death could possibly put a damper on your weekend and it might leave an ugly stain;
2. Use deodorant. This is a substance, available at all supermarkets and pharmacies at a minimal cost, which can be used to reduce body odour. Apply especially to areas such as armpits to avoid having people around you pass out whenever you lift your arms;
3. Don't forget your PC. If you're attending the LAN, please understand that all that is provided is a table and two plug points. There's no such thing as free computers. Pretending that your console or computer is invisible will only serve to embarrass you;
4. Bring extra cash. There'll be hundreds of stalls, each presenting you with something you never knew you wanted. You don't want to be in a situation where you have to choose because you didn't bring enough money to buy everything you now have to have. It also avoids the inevitable depression that may set in when you cannot afford what you have to have. Depressed people aren't allowed at rAge;
5. Don't forget about your bodily functions. Your body doesn't realise that you have better things to do than attend to its basic needs. Don't ignore them. Eat food, drink liquids (preferably high in sugar so that you can avoid the need to sleep) and get rid of the waste when necessary. Having you die from starvation or dehydration could ruin the fun for the rest of us;
6. Wear comfortable clothes. It's quite possible that these are the clothes that have to make it through the three days, so choose wisely. If you plan to explore the expo, make sure your shoes will last. In the event that you have to remove said shoes due to poor planning, please ensure that you do so far away from any living creatures (including plants). Killing other living things with your foot stench isn't allowed;
7. Don't be a sore loser. Nobody likes a sore loser;
8. Turn off your cellphone. This will save battery life for when you really need it and will also avoid all sorts of interruptions like girlfriends, parents or debt collectors calling;
9. Quit smoking. The more time you spend outside with your cigarettes, the less time you have to frag. It's also, supposedly, good for you; and
10. Have fun. Anyone not having fun will be asked to leave the premises or taken to a booth babe to be 'dealt with'. **NAG**

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RAMJET

by Walt Pretorius

YOU CONSUMER WHORE, YOU

IT'S GETTING TO THAT time of year again – time for me to put on my Scrooge hat and issue a big "bah-humbug" in the direction of the impending Silly Season. I do it every year... it's the only Christmas tradition I have.

However, before I begin I want to qualify something. The only thing that gets me madder than people who say they hate big exploitative gaming corporations are big exploitative gaming corporations. It's ironic, yes, but it's true. If you peruse the release lists for the end of this year – I know you will, if you haven't already – you'll notice that virtually every big title anticipated for 2007 will be coming out in the last quarter of the year. This has been timed so that the big bad corporates can take advantage of the idiotic and irresponsible spending spree everyone seems to go on come November. It happens every year, of course, but it seems that this year is the worst one ever.

Now that I think about it, though, I don't blame the corporates at all. After all, it isn't only gaming that's experiencing this phenomenon: the DVD market, for example, is seeing a number of products held back for the rush of unbridled consumerism. The corporates are concerned about padding the bottom line, that's all. You cannot blame them.

Likewise, I don't blame gamers for this. Quite honestly, gamers will take a great game at any time. If it's released at three in the morning on 23 July they'll be there. They don't need an excuse like a major religious holiday to buy games... Probably because so many of them are pirates, but that's another story. Nevertheless, those select few who do actually buy games (funny how pirates justify not buying games because of high prices, driving prices up in the process) will do so at any time. They'll put off neurosurgery to get a game at the moment it hits the shelves, Christmas or not.

So who are at fault? The masses, that's who. The people who wouldn't know a good game if it rebooted them in the ass. The ones who go, "Oh, Little Timmy will love this 'Ultimate Mankiller Deluxe Super Gore Edition' game" and then bitch about violent videogames when Little Timmy goes all psycho on his school mates with an AK-47 and a paper knife. The ones who assume that games are just games. The ones who fill our Christmas stockings. Bastards.

Moreover, (here's the real nasty part) it'll never change. These people, be they casual gamers (who also, I might add, are largely responsible for the 'crap game based on movies' phenomenon), parents or (shudder!) grandparents, who have never played a game in their life, will never ever, EVER, know anything about games because they couldn't be bothered to. All they know is that Little Timmy squeals with delight when he gets games for Christmas (although he does like getting ammunition and gun oil too) and so they buy as many as they can to shove under the over-decorated plastic tree, all wrapped up in paper with holly and mistletoe and snowmen on it. They don't care about advanced technology and excellent physics and compelling game dynamics. They actually just enjoy the squeals.

Where does it leave us? Screwed, that's where. And there is very little we can do about it because rampant consumerism short-circuits any form of logic. So, come the end of this boring year, there are so many games out there that our bank accounts tremble. Moreover, don't tell me that we can buy them all and play them during the year to come: no serious gamer plays a game that's more than three months old, unless it's a classic or personal favourite.

The only thing we could do, as gamers, is launch some kind of multinational boycott on getting games for Christmas, or by getting a second Christmas instated in July (when the pool of good games is pretty much empty). The boycott might force corporates to pace the release of good titles. It would never happen though, and you know exactly why. Not because such a huge protest would be difficult to organise – it would, but that's beside the point. It would never happen because you and all of your gamer friends strap on Little Timmy hats and squeal with delight when you unwrap your games that were so thoughtfully shoved in under the tinsel and baubles. You spend the year bitching and moaning about it, and then become part of the problem.

So yeah, it's time for the Scrooge hat... Here's an idea: Why don't you all keep your Little Timmy hats on for the rest of the year, all attend the same school and all take your AKs to 'show and kill' on the same day? It wouldn't be the perfect solution, but it would be a start... **NAG**

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A LIVING NIGHTMARE

AFTER MILLENNIA, AN ANCIENT CITY HAS REAPPEARED IN THE MIDDLE OF A DESERT. THE GOVERNMENT MOBILISES AN ELITE FORCE TO INVESTIGATE IT. THEY ARE ABOUT TO DISCOVER A CREATURE AS OLD AS CREATION ITSELF AND HELL-BENT ON TAKING EARTH FOR ITSELF, WITH A TWISTED AND EQUALLY HELLISH ARMY FROM ACROSS THE ERAS. THIS IS THE CREATION OF CLIVE BARKER, THE PROLIFIC HORROR MASTER – A NIGHTMARE CALLED *JERICHO*.

For mature readers only

THE BEST WAY TO describe Clive Barker is probably as iconic. He's not really a dominant force in any of his chosen mediums. His art and efforts have produced some great comic books and figurines. Though he's not as widely read as other horror writers, his books have snared a large cult following. His successes in film have also been mixed and his directing career only spans three films. But one of those was a vision of Hell called *Hellraiser*. So, whatever Barker touches will eventually bear his mark and he's been keen to get that impression into a game. A large but select group of gamers revere *Undying*, a project he was heavily involved in. But there the material was already pretty developed when he joined the project. *Jericho* is Barker from the ground up and might finally let him expand his particular brand of creepiness into the virtual world.

Jericho is the name of a certain type of group; a group that has existed for quite a long time. In the beginning, God tried to make a single being in his image. It was of neither sex and lacked some of the emotions that comes with that division. Called the Firstborn, it was also very powerful, but lacked something that God could only get if he made two people instead of one. So, Adam and Eve became the second and third things he created in his image and the Firstborn was cast into the void. But it was and still is a powerful entity and it tainted a small part of Eden (Earth) before it was banished. This spot allows it to return here every now and then and every time that happens, his power grows as does his influence and the tainted area. But every time a clandestine group of psychic warriors called Jericho repel it. To do so, though, requires that they sacrifice themselves as well.

Sadly, the measure is only temporary. The Firstborn keeps finding a way back and successive Jericho groups have had to stop it. Where the game kicks in, the Firstborn is planning quite a massive

move of the world-ending type and its influence has amassed cults and other monstrosities. The event that sets the reaction to this in motion is the reappearance of a long-lost city in a remote part of the Sahara. Several Jericho teams, now secret government squads, are sent in and not surprisingly stop responding to base. Your team, also a Jericho, is sent in to find out what happened to them. But soon enough the mission becomes clear – the Firstborn needs to be stopped before it executes its plan.

To do this, the team will need to fight through various ages. The Firstborn has trapped warriors and other teams from history in its realm, converting them to serve it. So, the team will essentially take a time tour, going into eras as diverse as the rule of the Romans and World War I, fighting all kinds of creatures to get to it. To do this will require teamwork, but in reality, *Jericho* appears to be more of a team-based narrative. It's not clear if the squad leader is dead or simply unable to do this, but you play his spirit, jumping from character to character. That means that you are more of a voyeur to their saga while you lead the action and make sure the bad guys go down. For this reason, *Jericho* doesn't seem to include a multiplayer component and is intended as a single-player experience.

An experience it will be. *Jericho* is dark and forbidding, but doesn't aim for the same scare that *Undying* might have evoked. Instead, it's an unnerving freak fest with grotesque monsters and hellish décor crossed with the various eras the team will encounter. The gloomy atmosphere is anything but inviting and the team has its work cut out for it as it will be charged by WWI soldiers, Gladiators and Templars with explosive-tipped crossbows, to name a few. Judging from the concepts included in the demo code, there are some truly nasty-looking things awaiting players – and we mean that literally. The entirety of *Jericho* screams of Barker's influence, which is good. It's definitely very edgy, which despite popular belief, remains a rare thing in games. Though Mercury Steam, the development team, is in Spain and Barker in Los Angeles, they collaborated from the start on design, ideas, story and other factors. Barker is most involved with the creatures and story, while the skills of composer Chris Velasco have been enlisted for the soundtrack. Velasco's name might not ring a bell, but his track record says it all: *Gears of War*, *God of War* and *God of War II*.

While you can read our Hands-On preview of the game, *Jericho* is very solid and resonates all of these ambitions. It also looks great, thanks to Unreal Engine 3 and is by far Clive Barker's best go at making his mark in gaming. The novel scares of 'there's something in the closet' will remain the domain of other horror titles. *Jericho* wants to make a different type of horror statement – one that confronts you with the reality of a constant nightmare instead of simply coaxing the fear of your possible demise.

MEET JERICHO

LIEUTENANT ABIGAIL BLACK

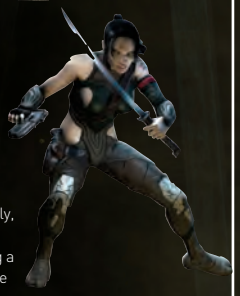
Sniper

Abigail Black has shown strong telekinetic powers from a young age, but also suffered under an alcoholic and very superstitious father. She gave him a stroke, but Jericho only sees her abilities helping them.

SERGEANT FRANK DELGADO

Heavy Weapons

A Shaman scholar, Delgado has a colourful history with spirits and his quest to learn more about his Chickasaw culture. This has helped him control a fire spirit he summons to great destructive effect.



SERGEANT WILHELMINA "BILLIE" CHURCH

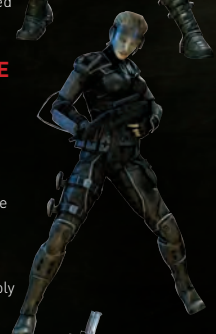
Support

Born into an obscure snake-handling Christian sect, Billie was revered for her ability to write 'angelic script' in her own blood, creating powerful incantations. Unfortunately, the government removed her from the cult, creating a very troubled person in the process.

CAPTAIN XAVIER JONES

Reconnaissance

The only child of travelling anthropologists, Xavier Jones has been exposed to many different cultures. This is how an Aborigine holy man spotted his ability for second sight and helped him develop it.



CORPORAL SIMONE COLE

Support

An autistic genius, Cole could hack things for the NSA and wrote a book on Chaos Mathematics before she could even legally drink. She also has the ability to alter time and space, which Jericho deeply appreciates.

FATHER PAUL RAWLINGS

Medic/Chaplain

A career military chaplain, Rawlings left the military after three tours in Vietnam and started to explore other cultures and religions. When he resumed active duty, Jericho was more than happy to have his experience and exorcism abilities.

JERICHO HANDS-ON

LOOKING AT THIS GAME has been something of a privilege. Not because it's a game that we were particularly excited about (okay we were, but mainly because we're such *Undying* fanboys), but we had the chance to really look at the code for all three the platforms: PC, Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. This gives a much better all-round impression of what one could expect from the final game in its various incarnations. The irony is that we might as well have just played one build, since all three are so equal that you can't pick a superior one. Even the PC controls don't fail and graphically it looks great no matter what you're playing on.

Getting to understand the game was a bit more of a learning curve. The first thing you notice about *Jericho* is that the enemy is a lot tougher than the standard shooter would deliver. It's not that they come in hordes (sometimes they do) or do ridiculous amounts of damage. The meeker ones take quite a bit of damage before they fall. There's nothing we encountered that you could pop away with a shotgun blast or two. Then again, you have an entire team's firepower to back you, but it's debatable how often your team members inflict damage. We'll get back to that, though. Monsters of higher ranks start appearing with shields, such as the unexpectedly tough Centurions. These beasts hulk at you with a massive shield and enjoy throwing spears that hurt - a lot. It's not that an agile player won't be able to do a lot using one character for a long time. There are sections in the game separating team members from the group, forcing you to take on the beasts on your own. These sections are notably more unnerving and is where *Jericho*'s creep factor really oozes in. You also probably don't want too many of them and it's fairly certain that boss fights will involve at least partial teams.

HANDS ON TESTED

The strangely tough monsters feel a bit like overkill at first, but there's a trick to it. Some previews of the game make the mistake of assuming you can simply use a character until it dies, then jump to another team member. This strategy will work for a while, but your team's eventual demise is sure, despite the fact that team members can heal each other after they've fallen. To win means team work. Take the Legionary, which likes to hold up its full-length shield to deflect any bullets. You can try to out-strafe it, but these monsters are hardly alone. Instead, it's easier to switch team members. Working as a team seems to be the meat of the game. You can jump to a character by looking at them or using a pop-up menu. This allows you, in the case of our shield-wielding friend, to always jump to his side or back. Once you open fire, he'll turn to face you, so you just pop to a character on the other side and keep going. It sounds confusing, but it is pretty intuitive and quickly becomes fun – especially when you are trying to take down a really big monster. The Gladiator, a giant with an iron ball and a large blade for arms, will lumber around swinging as he keeps turning to face the person shooting him in the back. It seems as if the game wants you to play this way and caters the animation and monster AI towards that. Not that you'll have a choice – some of the boss battles we could access showed that teamwork is a must – and that killing some things will require more than shredding them from behind.

Story-wise, it definitely seems interesting. The voice-acting is more than good enough and the dialogue is quite engaging. Then again, so was *Undying*'s. We expect Clive Barker has a lot to do with that. What needs to be said is that this is not *Undying* and will hardly be as scary. In fact, with all the intense action and team play, don't expect *Jericho* to creep you out too much. But much like Barker's *Hellraiser*, you can expect to be shocked and grossed-out. The dark design of the levels and intimidating creature design are at worst unnerving and more generally the stuff of nightmares. It's exactly what *Jericho* is going for, so don't expect 'horror' in the very traditional sense, but plenty of nastiness. Unfortunately, the fractured nature of the code meant we couldn't really follow the plot or the game's guidance on how to really play it. But even with these pieces, *Jericho* is impressive and above all, intense fun.

KEEP THEM SEPARATED

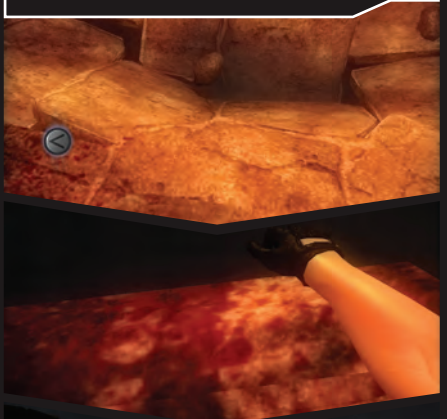
Jericho is virtually identical on all three the platforms we received code for – PC, PS3 and 360 - so it doesn't merit writing three different pieces. You don't have to fear console port syndrome when considering the controls – the PC version is arguably the best of the three when it comes to the interface. There's nothing wrong with the consoles, but the team switching was particularly fluid on the beige box. The game also runs very well on a mid-range machine with a reasonably decent graphics card. Between the PS3 and 360, it's really a matter of which controller you prefer. In the console builds we noticed a few things still missing, but we were able to tweak the settings on the PC version and get more of the effects going. So, regardless of your platform of preference, you will likely get the whole *Jericho* experience.

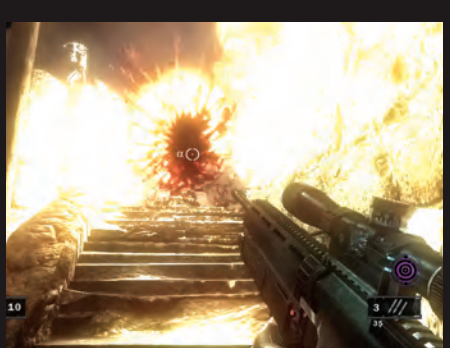
PLAY WITH YOUR NEW FRIENDS

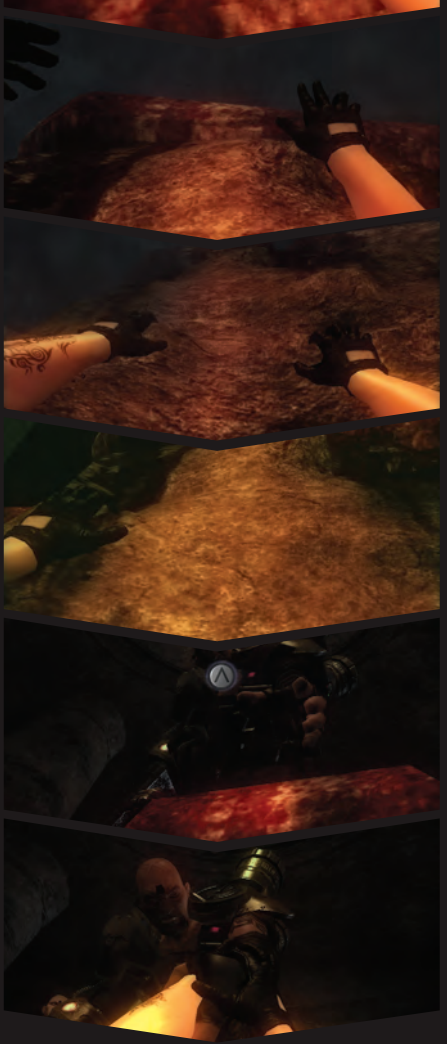
There are two types of situations in an FPS involving team members and both are far too familiar. The one is where every monster in the room only seems interested in you and the one where your team members try to be helpful, which just ends up killing them or worse, stepping in front of your carefully-aimed rocket. *Jericho* gets around both problems with an interesting twist. In the game, you can jump to a character if you can place your target reticle over them or you can select them from a pop-up menu. In turn, the monsters seem largely interested in you once you start shooting at them. But they will remain focused on that character, so you can jump to a team mate standing behind them and blast them from there. The monsters appear to be designed for this, since a lot of them brandish shields or are particularly weak from behind. You could try and out-strafe them, but the fact that you can heal fallen team mates means that constant switching is the best way to survive a fight. Beating bosses will demand this level of teamwork.

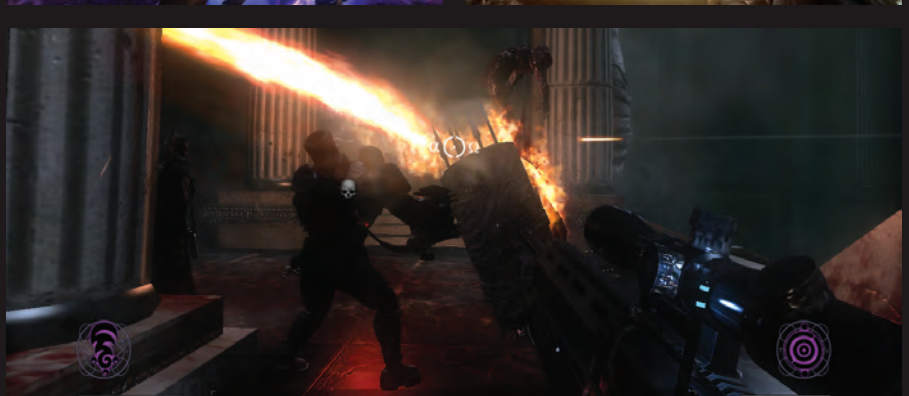
HIT THE BUTTON NOW

If the interactive cut-scenes from *God of War* or *Tomb Raider: Legend* annoyed you, be warned – *Jericho* is upping the ante. In the case of those games, you watched a proper cut-scene and pressed buttons as they flashed, or else the scene diverted and the hero died. In Jericho, these cut-scenes keep the first-person view and act fast. The method of using timed button presses to keep you on your toes is not to give you something to do while the story fills up, but for unique action scenes in the game. Near the start, you plunge down a collapsing floor, but you crawl out (if you press the right keys on time). In another situation, you have to tap buttons to beat a monster knight that followed you down a well and wants to cleave your head open. One situation had us edging along a crumbling ledge – one wrong button press and you fall. It's not the same as other implementations and much quicker on the draw. If you didn't know your controls before, you will now.



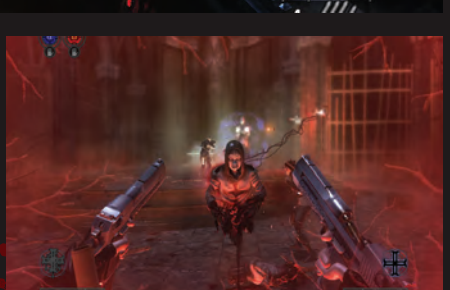






MERCURY STEAM

Spanish developer Mercury Steam is a fairly new kid on the block, with only one other game to its name – the flawed *Scrapland*, which American McGee helped produce later into its cycle. But team members at the developer also boast past experience with several games, most notably work with Pyro Studios, which was responsible for the *Commandos* game. *Jericho* is Mercury Steam's most high-profile game to date and looks set to put the studio on the map.



CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO Q&A

THE GREATEST THREAT IN ALL OF CREATION IS ABOUT TO UNLEASH ITS TERROR ON US ALL, BUT THE HARDY PEOPLE AT *NAG* STILL FOUND TIME TO CHAT TO SOME OF THE PEOPLE BEHIND *JERICHO*. BEFORE ALL DARKNESS DESCENDS, WE HARASSED ENRIC ALVAREZ, PROJECT LEAD AT MERCURY STEAM, JOE FALKE, CHIEF GAMES DESIGNER AT CODEMASTERS, AND SOUTHAM GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, SAM CORDIER, FOR SOME ANSWERS.

Could you introduce the primary team and their past experience? How big is the team working on *Jericho*?
We (Mercury Steam) developed a game called *Scrapland* a couple of years ago for the PC and original Xbox. We got American McGee on board for it, which was quite an honour as that was our first project as a company. We are based in Madrid, Spain and the team consists of over 70 people when including everyone who's involved in developing the game.

How did the project come to be? Did Clive Barker approach you guys or was it the other way around?
Clive Barker's Jericho originated deep within Clive Barker's mind. Codemasters acquired the IP to develop games based on Clive's idea, and Mercury Steam was then attached to the project as the developer. It's one of those situations where everything fit together so strangely. We were developing our in-house next-gen technology, heavily focusing on action-horror elements. Codemasters was looking for a developer able to develop a next-gen Clive Barker horror game. We are great fans of Mr Barker's books and movies... and then suddenly all the pieces fell into place and here we are today creating one of the most terrifying games I've ever worked on.

Considering that the game features several characters in a squad, would you still define it as a horror game?
Clive Barker's Jericho has a HEAVY focus on frantic FPS squad action and horror. It has the same level of content a good horror film has, like *Dawn of the Dead* or *Hellraiser*. Drama is also important to us though, which is why we have a cast of very strong characters, including enemies that are going to look and behave in a very believable manner showing much more than just combat abilities throughout the game. In my book, that's still a setting for a fantastic horror game.

Are you fans of Barker's work?
We are all huge fans of Barker's work and many of us have watched his movies and read his books over and over again.

How long has *Jericho* been in development? Are you using proprietary technology and do you have a primary platform?
The game's been in development for just over two years and uses our in-house proprietary engine. The engine is multi platform, so we don't really have any lead platform.

What has Clive Barker's involvement been in the project? Is he just overseeing and approving things or is he more hands-on?
Clive has been involved every step of the way. He has written the story and guided visual development of the characters and enemies in the game. He has also closely directed the musical score and sound effects implementation so that gameplay and cut-scene moments portray emotion and that feeling of uneasiness and fear only Clive can deliver. Clive's creativity and experience in both story telling and filmmaking give *Jericho* a really cinematic feel.

Judging by the intro trailer, most of the team will die. Is this a reality that will be changed through the course of the game or a look at things to come?
In *Clive Barker's Jericho*, you play the leader of the Jericho Squad who's a hardened veteran of conventional and supernatural warfare. It'll be an interesting challenge for players as the character (Devin Ross) suffers a tragic misfortune very early in the story, but perseveres, turning the misfortune into a major benefit for the squad. I can't say much more than that without giving away a major spoiler,

and we don't want to let that cat out of the bag this early on.

For a horror context there is a lot of gunplay and action. It will be pretty hard to keep players on the edge when they pack serious heat and even more serious team mates. How are you going about addressing this balance?
These are formidable monsters, and there's lots of them. You won't always be with all the squad members either; sometimes you'll be with just a few or even on your own. So there's plenty of opportunities for *Jericho* to freak you out.

Those undead knights are really freaky though! Can we expect even nastier surprises? Just how difficult will *Jericho* be?
Well, that's just a testament to great AI. Of course, there will be different levels of difficulty, which the players can choose from, but the monsters in *Jericho* will always want to take you down and will duck and weave in an attempt to avoid your fire. There are also some hugely impressive boss characters with which the Jericho team will need to use more than just brawn to take out.

The game does some interesting things with the first-person camera movement (for example, it never stops moving) and in-game cut-scene sequences. What prompted this style choice and how do you go about making sure it works well?
We really wanted to make sure that you are never taken out of the first-person experience, and that meant incorporating the first-person camera throughout the entire game.

Who is responsible for the creature design? What kind of monsters can players expect?
The monsters in *Clive Barker's Jericho* come from the deepest and darkest parts of Clive's mind. Players will face creatures from different parts of human history, each with distinct and unique characteristics from their particular time slice.

On the one hand, *Jericho* is a pure action game, but on the other, it uses squad tactics as well. Which would you categorise the game as? Would *Jericho* still appeal to people who aren't that fond of managing team members?
Clive Barker's Jericho is a squad-based, first-person, action-horror game, but you will not have to worry about what your team members are doing at any point during the game. They will take care of themselves when players are playing as one of the team. So, in answer to the question; yes, I do think that it will appeal to people who aren't fond of managing team members... as long as they like playing fantastic games!

Apart from Barker's work, what else has been an influence on the project?
We are all fans of horror, so we wanted to develop a game that gives the player that experience. *Clive Barker's Jericho* also draws influence from action/horror films like *Blade* and good comics like *Hellboy* and *The Crow*.

What does the development team do to unwind and make sure they don't lose focus?
We never lose focus! In all seriousness, going home at the end of a good day and spending time with family is always a good way to re-energise.

Thank you for answering the questions! Anything you'd like to add?
Play *Clive Barker's Jericho* in the dark... go on, I dare you. **NAG**

EXCITING? OH YES, PLEASE. TWO SUGARS.

WITH E3 NO LONGER being E3, but instead being a mini-E3, you may have noticed the lack of an E3 supplement this year. Fear not, we're still perfectly poised to bring you the most important, most pertinent and most relevant gaming previews. This year we visited the Leipzig Games Convention (GC), which not only looked like E3, but also smelled, tasted and barked like E3 used to. That's why you'll find your very own special GC supplement with this issue: it contains screenshots and write-ups of all the important titles you'll want to keep an eye on.

MAFIA 2

Developer→ Illusion Softworks | **Publisher→** 2K Games
Platforms→ PC, 360, PS3 | **Genre→** Action | **Release Date→** TBA

"ARE YOU AGAINST KILLING animals? How 'bout, you know, the human animal?" The smirking gangster in *Mafia 2*'s debut trailer looks awesome when he says this, making us all secretly beg that the visuals are something close to in-engine and not just a CG movie. Time will tell, but those who played it'll tell you what a sweet game *Mafia* was. Instead of going for the popular sandbox system that so many crime games settled on, it had a linear structure with a great story, incredible gun battles and some beautiful locations. All this is promised to return in the sequel. Based in the forties and fifties, you'll be another potential mobster trying to work his way up the cartel. This will mean lots of killing, violence, extortion and definitely a few of your friends stabbing you in the back. From our perspective, it's about time, especially since we were afraid that *Mafia* was going to be the last we've seen of the series. Compared to it, *GTA* seemed downright goofy and *The Godfather* laughable. *Mafia 2*, once again being developed by Illusion, will hopefully blow our socks off.

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Developer→ Creative Assembly | **Publisher→** SEGA
Platforms→ PC | **Genre→** Strategy | **Release Date→** 2008

THE *TOTAL WAR* SERIES just keeps on rolling on, despite changing publishers and having been around the block a few time. It seems that if you crave large-scale war – from the nuances of running an empire, using diplomacy and maintaining a healthy war-time economy, down to the grassroots of the battlefield, commanding units and implementing tactics – *Total War* remains the decisive way to get your hands dirty. The management side of things is turn-based, while actual combat is in real time. What makes *Empire* a departure from the series is the age it finds itself in. Set in the 18th century, players will be able to explore events such as the American Revolution, the battles for the lucrative Eastern trade routes and the expansion of the empires of the day. Thanks to the start of the Industrial Revolution, a bevy of new technology will come to your aid, specifically muskets and cannons, which will require players to adapt their tactics. In addition, for the first time in the series, naval combat will feature, so plan on building large fleets and blowing the enemy to kingdom come.

ETERNAL SONATA

Developer→ Namco Bandai | **Publisher→** Namco Bandai
Platforms→ 360 | **Genre→** JRPG | **Release Date→** Q4 2007

LYING ON HIS DEATHBED, legendary composer, Frederick Chopin, slips into a dream world where a version of him and several characters named after music terms have to stop a world verging on war. This is the premise behind this lovely-looking and interesting JRPG developed for the 360. Players will control a party of characters that can attack in the traditional turn-based style or in real time - a combination that apparently works surprisingly well. The game has touches of technology as well, such as cameras and guns, and the real-time combat will influence special attacks and the more tactical turn-based sessions. An extra nice touch is that areas of light and shadow can have different effects. For example, a humble-looking pumpkin critter turns into a giant beast in the shadows, while some spells will only work in the one or the other. The bosses look big, the world appears bright and colourful. If *Blue Dragon* has you already anticipating what next-gen JRPGs can deliver, *Eternal Sonata* is bound to have you singing for more.

DEAD ISLAND

Developer→ Techland | **Publisher→** TBA | **Platforms→** PC
Genre→ Action | **Release Date→** TBA

WHAT COULD RUIN YOUR holiday trip more than delayed flights and the airline losing your luggage? Crashing on a tropical island, discovering your wife's missing and then discovering that the island is crawling with all kinds of nasty monsters. Curiously enough, the premise reminds us of *Isle of the Dead*, a terrible, terrible *Doom* clone from years ago. This promises to be much better. *Dead Island* will let players roam the island as they please, but in exchange they'll have to fight lots of zombies and other monsters in their quest to find their wife and get the hell off Dodge. The engine promises an advanced combat and physics system, so detailed that you'll be able to see flesh and bone damage on monsters and so complicated that you can take advantage of the environment – be it rickety platforms, gas or electricity – to help you finish the job. Players will apparently also be able to choose allies, suggesting that NPC players will join you on your jaunts. However, the effect of this will be that your decisions can change the game world. Perhaps *Dead Island* will have a friend-or-foe dynamic that we saw in *Mercenaries*.

AQUA TEEN HUNGER FORCE ZOMBIE NINJA PRO-AM

Developer→ Creat Studios | **Publisher→** Midway | **Platforms→** PS2 | **Genre→** Sport, Action | **Release Date→** Q4 2007

AH, TO BE HONEST, if all that *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* demanded from you is to control Master Shake and find ways to destroy everything – destroy the universe and you win – we'd be happy. But a combat golf kart racing title? Sure, bring it on. Anything with the three sentient junk food products rampaging around a golf course, beating up monsters and trying to stay below par sounds good enough to us. However, the videos released so far didn't excite *NAG* staff members that much. The characters look and act on par, complete with the right voice actors. The gameplay, however, doesn't seem that engaging, even if you can expect boss battles against Carl, the Moonenites and other 'villains' from the show. Overall, *Aqua Teen* isn't really about anything, so perhaps the whole golf-meets-combat thing will work. We'll have to wait and see.

PIRATES VS. NINJAS DODGEBALL

Developer→ Blazing Lizard | **Publisher→** Gamecock | **Platforms→** TBA
Genre→ Sport | **Release Date→** 2008

WE COVERED *PIRATES VS.* *Ninjas* a while ago, but it appears that the game has made the transition from 2D to 3D, platforming goodness and... dodge ball. Sure, why not? However, we will miss those cute sprite graphics that looked so perfectly retro. In this game, destined for a download service, players will be able to settle the argument of who is superior – pirates or ninjas – using the family-friendly sport of dodge ball (a bit like stinger, except that the ball is bigger and doesn't hurt nearly as much). The game will include three other teams (yet to be announced) and allow contestants to run anywhere on the court. Your odds of winning can also be improved by the many special attacks the characters will be capable of. Alas, it appears that the original *Pirates vs. Ninjas* won't surface anymore, but at least with *Dodgeball*, Blazing Lizard has secured a publisher, Gamecock. Keep an eye out for it online early next year.

WHAT WE WANT

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE [PC]

The 360 multiplayer Beta is out now and *Call of Duty 4* is already looking to be one of the must-have FPS titles of the near-future (especially if you're bored with *BioShock* already). James came into the office after a night of watching people play the MP Beta, muttering phrases like "material penetration" and "visual fidelity." He's sedated right now, so he won't hurt himself or others.

BURNOUT PARADISE [360]

Every now and then, someone might turn up their nose at a mention of *Burnout* before launching into a diatribe of how *Burnout* is "not a real racer" and that they prefer to get their 'thrills' from the more 'respectable' racing titles. It's best just to ignore people like this - if they want to go play with a clutch, they're more than welcome. Meanwhile, *Burnout Paradise* looms every closer, tantalizingly near with its crashing, racing, shunting, and burninating. Hurry up, EA!

WARHAWK [PS3]

Often referred to as "Wowhawk" by PlayStation 3 fanboys, in this case, they may actually be correct. Sony defence force aside, *Warhawk* is impressing those who have played it and the gaming press has been very favourable towards it. We don't have it yet, so we can't really tell you anything about it, other than that we're really eager to give it a bash. Reports indicate that it's "a bit like *Battlefield* but with more scope, vehicles and more carnage." Sounds good to us.

CONTRA 4 [DS]

You'll be able to play two-player cooperative wirelessly, using only one cartridge. You'll be able to play two-player cooperative wirelessly, using only one cartridge. You'll be able to play two-player cooperative wirelessly, using only one cartridge. You'll be able to play two-player cooperative wirelessly, using only one cartridge. Did we mention that you'll be able to play two-player cooperative wirelessly, using only one cartridge? Well, you'll be able to play two-player cooperative wirelessly, using only one cartridge.

CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES [PSP]

'*Demon Castle Dracula X Chronicle*' is essentially a remake of *Akumajo Dracula X Chi no Rondo* with 3D graphics, but it still retains the 2D gameplay mechanics. It'll include the original *Akumajo Dracula X Chi no Rondo* as well as a port of *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, which was an absolute blast to play on Xbox LIVE Arcade. It's good to see the PSP getting some quality titles after a lacklustre start.

Jerry doesn't know it yet, but we've glued his feet to his board.

SKATE

Developer→ EA Black Box | **Publisher→** EA | **Genre→** Sport | **Release→** 21 September 2007

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

"DO YOU HEAR THAT sound, Mr Anderson? That is the sound of inevitability." Loud and clear ring the unstoppable comparisons between wet-nosed contender *SKATE* and respected king of the hill (unchallenged for over a decade), *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. There's no denying that the *Pro Skater* franchise has given us some good times. The earlier games made skateboarding fun and accessible to the momentum-challenged, just as *Guitar Hero* makes rock a reality for the tone-deaf. Things did get awkward for a while with the whole jackass phase the series went through, but *Project 8* was a solid addition and brought the series back to skateboarding.

Pro Skater deserves love and respect for what it has done. However, along comes *SKATE* with its fresh, new take on skateboarding games from the control scheme up, a clear and decisive shot across the bow of *Pro Skater*. We sat down for a session with the Xbox LIVE demo and a short tutorial later it quickly became very clear that *SKATE* is an entirely new kind of beast when it comes to skateboarding. No over-the-top stunts here, only smooth skating with a heavy emphasis on style and substance, instead of the button-mashing combinations we've come to know (and love) from *Pro Skater*.

You can *'Tony Hawk' SKATE* and force your skater to 360 an impossible back flip stunt – the game will allow it. However, it won't look good or very impressive. All the detail, incredibly smooth animations and realistic tricks are localised to the skateboard itself and where it is in the world. The controls are incredulously simple: left stick controls your body, right stick your board, shoulder triggers grab left or right and A/X let you push with your left or right foot respectively. No grind button, no kick flip button - it's all in how you 'flick' with the right stick and then what you do with it while you're up there. An 'ollie', for example, involves holding down on the right stick until the skateboarder bends his knees, then flicking straight up to make him kick the board up into an ollie. Reverse the motion, and you do it nose-first for a 'nollie'. Flicking the stick differently sets you up for a different type of kick flip trick, and if you're in the air holding a grab, you can tweak the board with the right stick as well.

Grinds result from simply finding a good edge and having enough speed: you can grind any corner, rail or right-angle surface and then adjust the type of grind by moving your body with the left stick. Unlike with *Tony Hawk*, you don't have to string combination moves together with other moves to keep your Combo multiplier up. *SKATE* has a power bar that fills up as you trick and slowly empties if you don't trick, giving you enough time to grind a rail, kick flip out and then push off to a new part of the level to continue your run there.

HANDS ON TESTED

A simple trick by *Pro Skater* standards is much harder in *SKATE*. Pulling off a slick ollie to a rail, grinding the edge and then kick-flipping off may not look impressive to a *Pro Skater* veteran, but *SKATE* players will understand the nuance and timing required to sculpt such a trick, which is much more in line with actual skateboarding. *SKATE* is not a proper simulator. You can still hit some edges unrealistically hard and not bail, but it has more than enough detail where it counts to make the experience rich and rewarding.

In terms of its feature set, *SKATE* has every base covered (showing remarkable attention to detail by EA). You can pause the game at any time and edit the last few minutes of skating (adding effects, camera angle changes and slow-downs) before uploading it as a movie to SKATE.reel, the online community of *SKATE*. Every online mode you could want is catered for in the release, including a Skate Park mode where you simply skate around with friends.

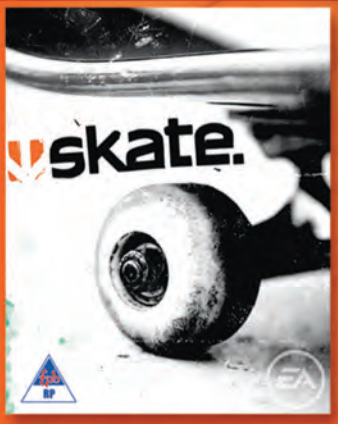
Skateboarding games have always been synonymous with the *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* franchise, but no longer. **NAG**

Miktar "Flickitrealgood" Dracon

TOP games!

skate is the closest thing to skateboarding without actually putting your feet on a board. Using the dual analog sticks, sculpt tricks and define your own style so that no two tricks will ever be the same. And there's plenty of room to pull off those tricks - San Vanelona, an authentic boarding mecca, challenges you to explore, find, and own the best spots. Capture footage to create and show off your style with people across the world - because without footage, it's fiction. Get ready for all the fun, creativity, and culture of skateboarding without the hours of practice, broken bones, and hospital visits.

PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360



FIFA 08 enables hardcore and casual soccer gamers and fans to play like a real soccer player through competitive and social game modes, new gameplay controls, and enhanced authentic presentation. Get closer to the action than ever before. With new attacking and defending manual controls, competitive game modes, and greater depths of authenticity, live out your dreams with FIFA 08.

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THE SETTLERS: RISE OF AN EMPIRE

Developer→ Blue Byte | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Genre→** Strategy/Management | **Release→** October 07

PC
PS2
PS3
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MOB

***THE SETTLERS* HAS BEEN** a household name for PC management strategy gamers for many years now. The earlier titles in the series were known for being somewhat ahead of their time from a technological point of view: the graphics were relatively advanced and the game's complexity and overall dynamic had only been seen in a similar title, *Knights and Merchants*. However, more recently this franchise had become rather stale in terms of advancement. While it's true that the play dynamic has remained true to its roots, there has been little innovation and the visual aspects rapidly started to lag behind the industry average. *The Settlers: Rise of an Empire* is set to address these issues.

The game dynamic remains consistent with that of previous titles (fans will be happy to hear this), but manages to feel somehow streamlined, which is probably a result of the smoother controls and the far more advanced graphics engine (which we'll get to in a moment). As with previous *Settlers* games, the player is called upon to develop a settlement, providing for the inhabitants' needs and defending the settlement from invaders and the like. New in this instalment is the presence of a Hero unit, which is essentially the player's representative on the map. Various technological achievements (in the game's context) allow the Hero to be promoted (to Sheriff, Baron, etc.), and each successive promotion opens up technological advancements such as new buildings with more powerful effects.

The most important element for players to manage is resources, which include food, building materials, raw materials and manufactured goods. Each of these provides for the settlers' various needs. Additionally, players need to tend to their citizens' health (by providing healthcare and sanitation), morale (by hosting festivals and providing religious services) and defence (by fielding an army). Another new element is the city's reputation, which is influenced by the citizens' morale, the city's prosperity and its military might, among others.

Cosmetically, this title is a huge overhaul compared to previous generations. The new graphical engine makes full use of 3D and boasts changing weather and light conditions. Characters still have the trademark 'cartoon-like' look, though to a less exaggerated caricature degree than before, looking somewhat more realistic now. Animations are highly detailed and a pleasure to watch – players will now be able to indulge in their tourist streak while waiting for things to happen. However, waiting periods are now generally shorter than in previous *Settlers* titles even though the pace is still the relaxed, languid one of older versions. Basically, you can still enjoy a laid-back game, but with fewer annoying idle waits.

Although the early preview code we viewed is still a long way from completion (some sound effects were missing and idle characters sometimes behaved in amusingly odd ways, like conducting conversations without another participant), what we've seen so far is very impressive indeed. We cannot, at this point, comment on the single-player campaigns as a whole, but the individual missions that were present were satisfyingly long and composed of a number of objectives (the completion of each resulted in some reward or advantage being conferred on the player). From what we can tell so far, it looks like *The Settlers: Rise of an Empire* will be a worthy heir to the franchise's mantle and will also infuse it with much-needed new life. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

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TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND

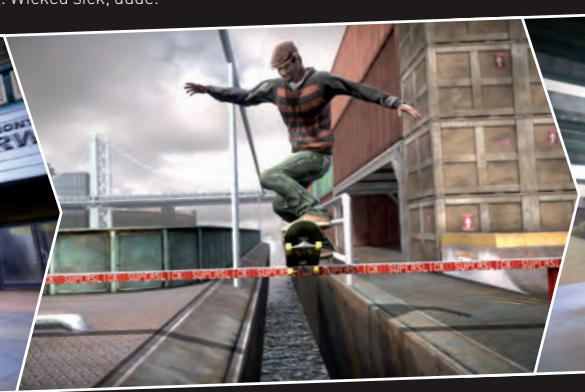
ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER *TONY* *Hawk* title, as the sequel factory at Neversoft HQ works its jaws in preparation to spit out number nine. And with EA's upcoming *SKATE* potentially handing Neversoft a dash for its cash, the developer is cramming in so much new stuff that *numéro neuf* is looking to be the gnarliest yet.

While the core "grind your way to the top" premise remains in place, its implementation is a little different: *Proving Ground* trots out three categories of skaters, and players must dabble in each area to round off their expertise. Career skaters like Tony Hawk and Ryan Sheckler, for example, go for the huge tricks and glossy magazine covers, while hardcore skaters like Mike Vallely and Dustin Dollin prowl the streets and stake territory by shoving small kids out of the way. Lastly, riggers like Rodney Mullin create the ultimate lines by rearranging environments to accommodate them. All three categories are presented simultaneously in the single-player campaign, and players will be able to chop and change their development progression in each type.

Project 8's somewhat quaint Hometown, USA gives way to gritty urban locations in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington DC, all interconnected via a skate-able subway system. In addition to its predecessor's swanky Nail-the-Trick mode, *Proving Ground* throws in Nail-the-Grab and Nail-the-Manual, for twitch-perfect rocket airs and cross-foot pogos. There's also something dubbed the Aggro Kick, a carefully-timed manoeuvre (similar to *Gear of War*'s active reload) that grants a temporary speed boost for clearing huge gaps. Then there's Skate Checking, a sort of skate-by smack for getting thugs and other malcontents out of your way, and Rig-A-Kit and Environmental Altering mechanics that allow players to modify their surroundings by adding kickers and rails and whatnot without resorting to a separate level editor. Wicked sick, dude.

Using the robust video editor, players will also be able to cobble together mash-ups of saved footage with music to create two-minute clips of their most awesomely awesome moments, and upload them to Xbox LIVE so everybody else can stare in envy. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl



Developer→ Neversoft | **Publisher→** Activision | **Genre→** Sport | **Release→** Q4 2007

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MOSH PIT!

DUNGEON HERO

Developer→ Firefly Studios | **Publisher→** Gamecock | **Genre→** Action RPG | **Release→** 2009

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

DUNGEONS IN RPGS DON'T really make much sense, do they? Around every corner you'll find clumps of monsters, just sort of milling about, picking bellybutton lint and rolling boogers, and waiting for bold adventurers to throw scimitars into their heads. Sometimes you'll leave a dungeon, only to return and find it repopulated (apparently nobody sent a memo around, because the monsters are standing right where you butchered their pals previously). Somewhere in the distance a baboon sings about the circle of life.

"That's not a dungeon," sighs an itty-bitty goblin in the game trailer. "At least, not the kind of dungeon I live in, anyway."

Dungeon Hero intends to subvert this imperialist traditional approach, and champion the cause of those wretched and grossly-misrepresented denizens of the underworld. In this game, intrepid spelunkers will find a subterranean metropolis teeming with life, industry, slums, pavement pulpit preachers, cheese merchants, health insurance schemes, and other trademarks of established society. And much like any other city, there's plenty of trouble afoot. The city is under constant threat of foolhardy adventurers looking for bags of gold hidden in the corners. There's an ongoing squabble with the nearby Red Eye Clan, and somewhere in the bowels of an incautious mining operation, someone has dislodged the wrong rock, and wreaked all manner of unearthly wickedness upon the place. Goldstar City needs a hero (you).

Other aspects of the genre that developer Firefly hopes to do away with are the somewhat asinine click-click-boom combat and artificial event management of, well, every hack and slash ever. Opting for a context-sensitive control system instead of the usual button squashing, players will employ some 200 manoeuvres learned through the course of the game (including shield shoves, head butts, backhanded sword swipes, kicks, punches, bites, slaps to the face, and all sorts of other cool ninja assassin stuff). And instead of making a beeline for conveniently conspicuous yellow exclamation marks, players looking to find an entrance to the mines, for example, should rather look out for someone dragging a mine cart and follow them. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

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RESIDENT EVIL: THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES

AS THE SECOND OF two games, forming part of the infamous *Resident Evil* series, already released this year for the Nintendo Wii, *The Umbrella Chronicles* will bring even more zombie shooting action to fans of both the genre and the series.

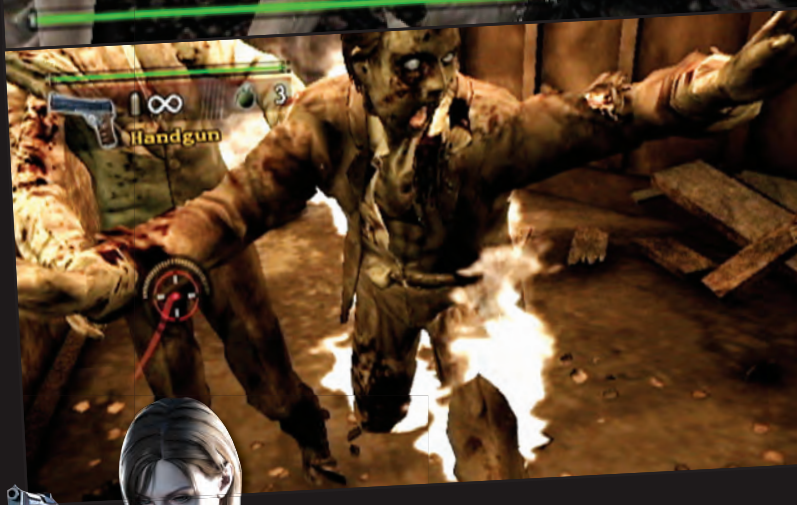
What'll make this particular title interesting is that the storyline covers the *Resident Evil* series again with only the final level (which takes place in the Umbrella Corporation's underground bunker) advancing the story any further. In this way, the player is given the opportunity to experience the events and battles, which have before been merely part of the character dialogue and script, and discover some twisted truths. During the claimed 20 hours of gameplay, the player will find out more about what happened to the pharmaceutical super company that was the Umbrella Corporation's as well as the criminal agenda of Albert Wesker. With the opportunity to control various characters, such as Chris Redfield, Billy Coen and Jill Valentine, the player will be taken through many recognisable locations that span the entire series, including the Arklay Mansion from the original *Resident Evil* and parts of Raccoon City, which players saw in *Resident Evil 2* and *3*.

Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles uses an on-rails system that arcade dwellers will instantly recognise. Although there are a few pathways to choose from, players will have little to no ability to backtrack or change course. The analogue stick on the Nunchuck controller can be used to look in all directions, which should be especially useful to find hidden herbs, which act as health pickups, as well as ammunition and a variety of weapons. These can be found by interacting with the environment. Although it sounds quite easy, the system will only allow short periods between battles with zombies and other evils to pick up herbs and should keep the player on his or her toes.

The Wii Zapper, the gun-shaped extension that neatly holds the Wiimote and Nunchuck, would be ideal for this title, but isn't vital. The Wiimote is simply aimed at the screen, with the crosshairs glowing on enemy weak spots. The B button is used to fire. Reloading is done by turning the Wiimote vertically and jerking it up and down once. Although the player's main weapon, the pistol, has unlimited ammunition, the submachine gun, shotgun and rocket launchers (to name but a few of the toys available) have limited ammunition and should be used strategically.

To add to the game's replay value, a cooperative mode, wherein two players can team up to tackle the more challenging levels in the game, will be available. *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles* also boasts a graphics facelift, making the walking dead and the locations you find them in that much more sinister. *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles* will also add 480p, 16:9 widescreen support. **NAG**

Megan Hughes



Developer→ Capcom | **Publisher→** Capcom | **Genre→** Survival horror | **Release→** Q4 2007

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STUNTMAN: IGNITION

Developer→ Paradigm Entertainment | **Publisher→** THQ | **Genre→** Driving simulation | **Release→** TBA

PC
PS2
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MOB

THE DAWN OF GREAT stunt games is upon us. Over the years, games have touched on the concept of being a stunt driver here and there. The most memorable of these, in my opinion, is the 1990 game, *Stunts* (*Trackmania*, but in four colours). Today, thanks to better physics, stunt-styled games are even more attractive. Titles like *FlatOut* and *Burnout* have taken the concept to new highs. However, pure stunt action isn't that common yet. The last time we experienced it on a major platform was the flawed *Stuntman*, a game with great ideas, but which was ultimately too demanding to translate into fun. The idea was to feel like a stunt professional, not suffer like one.

Taking this to heart, *Stuntman: Ignition* was developed to make amends for the faults of its predecessor and to bring more to the table. In the series, you take on the role of a stunt actor on various movie sets, specialising in vehicular stunts. Unfortunately, you won't tumble from great heights onto cardboard boxes or run down the street on fire, but you'll be driving things through burning buildings. In *Ignition*, there'll be six movie projects to take part in, each featuring around six missions. In turn, each of these missions has various stunts you need to complete. At first, the director will tell you to race down a road, take a hard right at the lava, go through the burning building, hit the button that sets your car alight, ramp, drive through water and so on.

To finish the mission, all you need to do, well, is to finish. You can fail and still get to the end. However, to progress you cannot fail more than five stunts. To do well, you have to achieve them precisely. To do terrifically, you must also complete all the non-crucial stunts. *Stuntman* was very demanding in this regard: miss one stunt and you had to start over. *Ignition* will be more forgiving. In addition, instead of needing to hit the time gates to survive, these now add to your score bonus. Developer Paradigm also mentioned that side-missions will be available, load times will be shorter and the whole package will be easier to get into. Players will also be able to create their own stunts and compete online against other hopeful stunt masters.

In recent years, only Reflections (*Stuntman*) and I-Imagine (*Chase*) have attempted to really deliver games based on being a stunt professional (and not simply by doing crazy things in cars for no reason other than racing or creating a traffic jam). Therefore, Ignition's arrival will be a welcome one, though the game has taken a while to come out of development. Visually it's looking good and it appears that as far as the game goes, Paradigm has learned a few lessons. Keep an eye out for it on shelves soon. **NAG**

James Francis

CINECARNAGE: IGNITION'S FILM JOBS

AFTERSHOCK: A disaster movie where earthquakes and volcanoes create lots of fire, obstacles and lava to look good on.

WHOOPIN' & HOLLERIN' II: The game's version of *Dukes of Hazard*. Spend time in a souped-up muscle car and large farm equipment for maximum destruction and running from the law.

OVERDRIVE: A cop on the edge? You just know that this is going to involve high-speed chases and driving into storefronts.

STRIKE FORCE OMEGA: Someone is doing something evil somewhere and this squad of elite military personnel needs to stop it. So expect to ramp some military hardware.

NEVER KILL ME AGAIN: What's a stunt career without some work of the Bond variety? A super spy will need to cause super destruction in whatever vehicles are on hand.

NIGHT AVENGER: I'm not Batman, but you might as well be. Drive the vehicles of both the masked superhero and crazy super villain, among other things, and hopefully go up a few vertical walls as well.

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SEGA RALLY

IN 1995, SEGA RELEASED *SEGA Rally Championship*, probably one of the most successful arcade games of that era. The game featured 'advanced graphics' with vehicles consisting of 150 polygons each. It also featured an 'advanced' physics system and mud splattering effects.

SEGA Rally, a remake of the original game, will be released later this year, and unlike the arcade game, can be played in the comfort of your own home. It'll feature advanced physics, updated visuals, a deformable terrain and vehicles will consist of 65,000 polygons each. Unlike current games such as *MotorStorm* and *Colin McRae: DiRT*, the terrain will stay deformed and will affect track conditions: cars skidding on the track will form permanent tyre tracks and trenches. These can aid the driver later on in the race when control becomes more of a factor than skidding. It also means that a player's fastest lap time will probably be the last lap of the race.

The greatly-improved and advanced game AI will ensure that computer-controlled opponents display some truly realistic racing techniques. They will hang back and drift on straights, try and overtake on corners and try to block you from passing them by swerving in front of you whenever possible.

There'll also be various environments such as deserts, Arctic tundra and even idyllic tropical islands to race on. Along with these environments, there'll be at least three different courses, each with different types of terrain to destroy. The game won't place such a heavy emphasis on realism as is the current trend, but will recapture the essence of the original. This means that *SEGA Rally* will be more focused on action and will feature unbelievable power slides and dust hazes that should blind even the most daring rivals.

Although these features may seem unbelievable and too good to be true, one must take into account that SEGA Racing Studio developed the game. This team consists of some of the greatest minds in the industry with over 50 racing game veterans from the likes of Codemasters, Rockstar, Criterion and Rare.

The game looks to be a real eye catcher, and if all the predictions come true, it'll probably be one of the best rally games of the year. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

The car always ran after its master

Developer→ Bugbear Entertainment | Publisher→ SEGA | Genre→ Racing | Release→ Q4 2007

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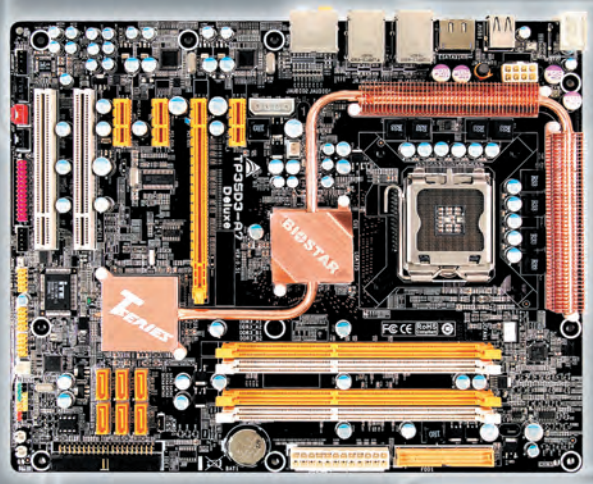

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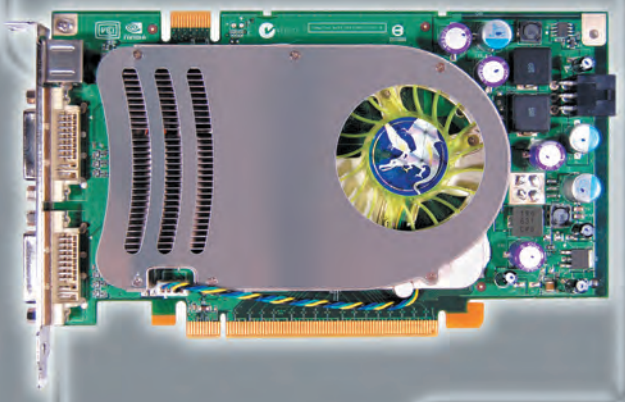

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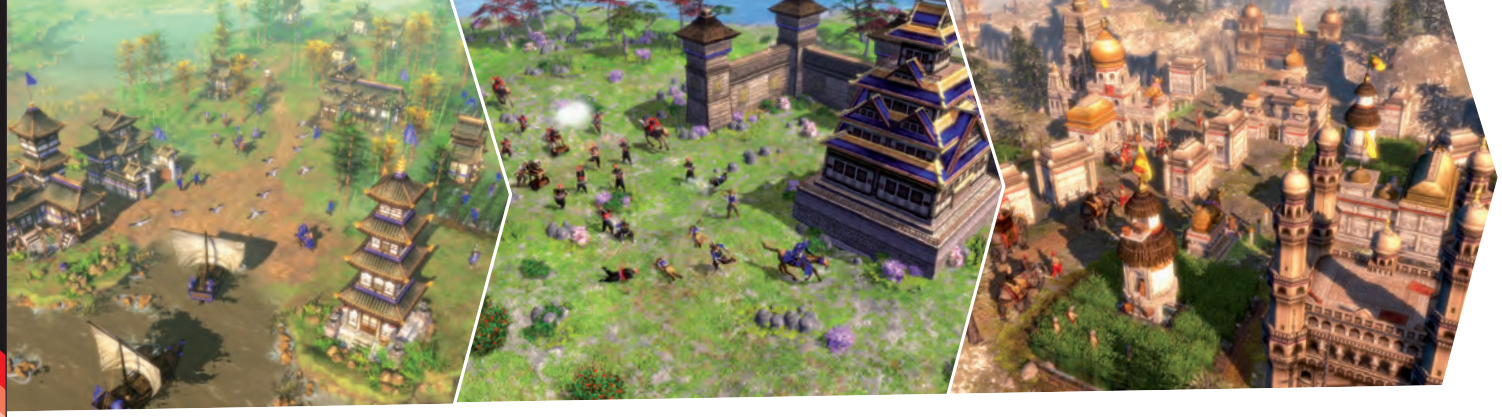

AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE ASIAN DYNASTIES

Developer→ Ensemble Studios/Big Huge Games | **Publisher→** Microsoft Game Studios | **Genre→** RTS | **Release→** Q4 2007

UNTIL NOW, *AGE OF* *Empires III* has focused on Western civilisations while forgetting about the East almost entirely. The soon-to-be-released expansion, labelled *Age of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties*, will focus on three of these ancient kingdoms, namely India, China and Japan. There'll also be a few minor ones such as the Jesuits, Sufi and the Shaolin.

It'll definitely be worth the money when you consider the fact that for once players can command battalions of Samurai or the new cavalry units of the Chinese. The Indians, of course, offer various war elephant units that can trample enemies in their way. There'll also be new wonders like the Taj Mahal, the Great Buddha and many more.

The cards system has also been modified a bit for the Asian civilisations, and although they might get more card uses per age, they now have to build at least one wonder per age to advance to the next age. It has also been speculated that the Eastern civilisations will be able to collaborate with Western ones and trade technology and resources, which should allow them a lot more in terms of units as well.

Age of Empires III: The Asian Dynasties should be one expansion that fans of the series will be eagerly anticipating. Even people who have never played a title in the series will be able to enjoy it as long as they're willing to purchase the original base version as well. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

PC
PS2
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MOB

No shins to kick!

THE WITCHER

Developer→ CD Projekt RED | **Publisher→** Atari | **Genre→** Action RPG | **Release→** September 2007

BASED ON THE POLISH novels of the same name by acclaimed author, Andrzej Sapkowski, *The Witcher* picks up the story five years after where the novels left off. This single-player game has the player taking control of the grey-haired Geralt, of the medieval fantasy land of Rivia, who is suffering a small bout of amnesia. Geralt, a witcher who has been endowed with superhuman strength and reflexes by sorcerers and who has been trained from childhood to master medieval sword fighting techniques, is faced with a world full of zombies, werewolves and the like. Being part of an age-old brotherhood, Geralt earns a living protecting people from these monsters.

Capable of some alchemy, players can mix the ingredients that Geralt finds to create potions of varying effects, including night vision. However, every potion has side effects, including raising Geralt's toxicity levels, which can endanger the character's health. Potions, therefore, have to be used strategically as do the points that the player earns as he or she levels up. Points can be used to buy special abilities, combat and magic skills, but the player will have to choose carefully as the game doesn't allow players to buy everything. *The Witcher* also boasts 600 genuine combat animations, six fighting styles, modifiable weapons and potent magic with which to accomplish tasks and missions.

However, the storyline isn't that simple and is definitely not directed at the younger market, as it deals with real and serious issues such as genocide, racism, genetic manipulation as well as terrorism. Throughout the game, the player is faced with choices that define the rest of the game with their, often unforeseen, consequences, which are often only realised many hours of gameplay later. The choices are also not simply between good and evil, as every choice will have good and bad results, instead of either or, and the player is forced to question his or her own sense of ethics and morality. *The Witcher* has been developed in such a way that quests can be completed in several different ways, with the game having three different endings. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

PC
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BEAUTIFUL KATAMARI

Developer→ Namco Bandai | Publisher→ Namco Bandai | Genre→ Third-person puzzle-action | Release→ Q4 2007

***BEAUTIFUL KATAMARI* IS THE** fourth game in the series following *Katamari Damacy*, *We Heart Katamari* and *Me & My Katamari*. Originally scheduled as a PlayStation 3 title (as well as for the 360), development on the PS3 version was recently abandoned (which is strange, considering all previous *Katamari* games were exclusively Sony console games).

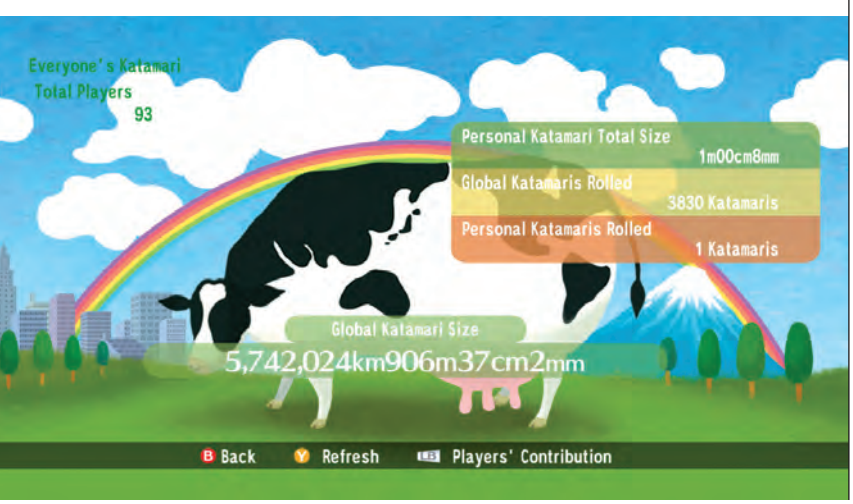
A three-minute, time-limited demo of *Beautiful* hit Xbox LIVE, and after a quick roll it's clear that the developers followed an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" policy. The core mechanics are unchanged: you roll a 'katamari' by collecting objects smaller than the katamari, rolling them up until the katamari's large enough to roll up larger objects. It's fun, quirky and straightforward. The challenge lies in learning the terrain, knowing which objects to roll up when, as well as finding a good path through several objects.

Speed is key, especially in the demo.

In the demo it's clear that *Beautiful* benefits greatly from more powerful hardware – not by adding more visual effects, but by simply removing the load-times that would occur as the katamari grows beyond a certain point. There are more objects and the draw-distance has been improved dramatically, but the simple, elegant art style remains unchanged.

The retail version of *Beautiful* will include more cousins to find, support a higher resolution (720p) and even include 1-2 player support on the same Xbox and 2-4 player support on Xbox LIVE, both cooperative and competitive. **NAG**

Miktar "Roll me another one" Dracon



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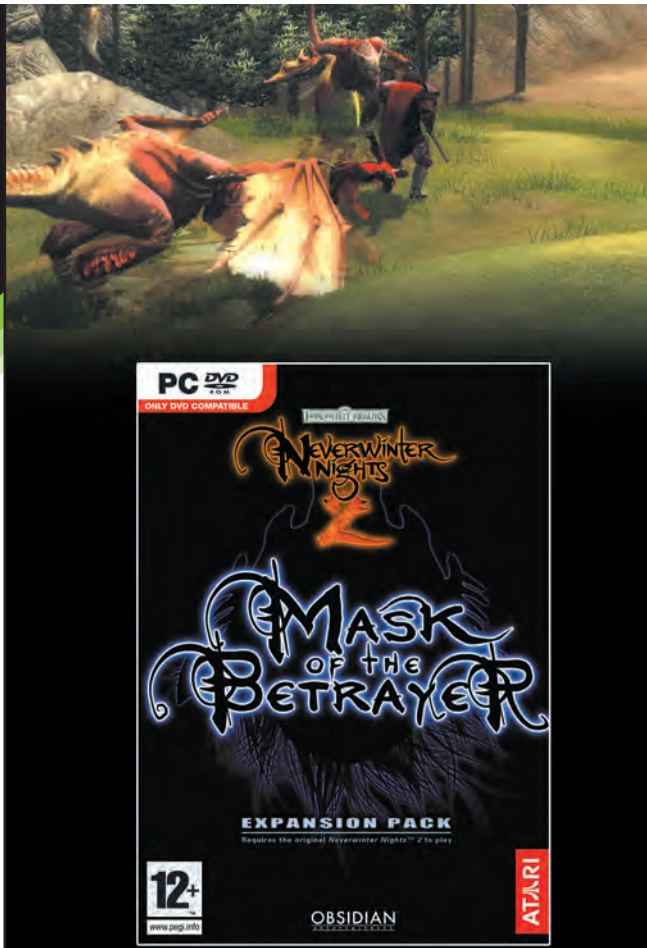

Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer

Following the climactic battle against the King of Shadows, you awaken alone and stranded deep beneath the earth. A dark hunger grows within you, threatening to devour your very soul. Will you fight against the hunger within or will you embrace it, revelling in your newfound power?

Set in harsh, spirit-rich Rashemen, near the powerful nation of Thay, Neverwinter Nights 2: Mask of the Betrayer presents players with an exciting new 20-30+ hour campaign filled with meaningful choices, rich characters, and surprising outcomes. Continue the adventure of your Neverwinter Nights 2 character or create a completely new epic hero – no previous Neverwinter Nights experience required. Hundreds of new game options include epic levels, feats, spells, races, and classes as well as powerful weapons, armour, crafting options and hordes of diverse creatures.

Available October 2007

PC
DVD ROM

ATARI

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RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS 2

Developer→ Ubisoft | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Genre→** Platformer/Party | **Release→** November 2007

THOSE APPARENTLY CUTE BUT definitely insane bunnies are back again and this time they have a much more sinister plot: the invasion of planet Earth. Having mistaken a shopping centre for the epicentre of human culture, the Rabbids have set up base in one and are attempting to study and mimic human behaviour (with some strange and humorous results).

The hero of the previous game is back to foil the evil Rabbids' plans by infiltrating them disguised as one of their own. Rayman must complete several missions around the globe, missions that would prepare the bunnies for world domination, with the USA, Europe, Asia, South America and the tropics each representing a campaign that must be completed to unlock the next.

If the original campaigns aren't enough to satisfy, then simply create your own. *Rayman Raving Rabbids 2* offers players the chance to create their own campaign, allowing them to choose which of the 50 mini games (down from the original 60 announced) to include and their time limits. However, the customisation options don't end there. Both Rayman and the Rabbids can be dressed in a choice of more than a hundred items, including skins, clothes and accessories, none of which has any actual effect on the game.

Choosing to play either as a disguised Rayman or one of the Rabbids, players can fight up to three opponents in all the games unlocked in the single-player campaign, or team up in the few cooperative games available. The games all involve some crazy, though repetitive, movements of the Wiimote and Nunchuck, such as peddling, balancing or varying between wild shaking and remaining still to avoid detection. The real fun, of course, is bumping your opponents both on and off screen to steal their scores, making the title an entertaining party game to look forward to. First, second and third place will all receive medals while, in true Rabbids humour, last place will be rewarded with only a roll of toilet paper. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

Plumber RABBID!

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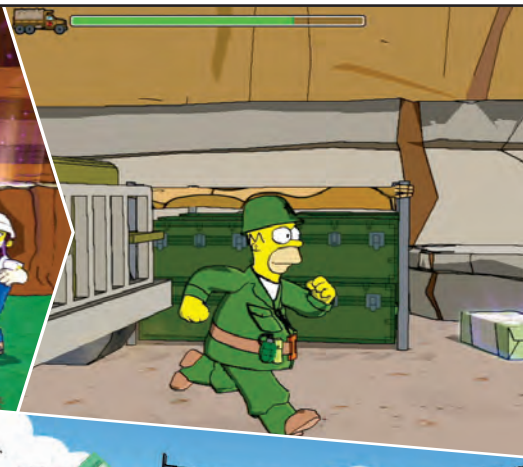

THE SIMPSONS GAME

Developer→ EA | **Publisher→** EA | **Genre→** Action Action | **Release→** Q4 2007

WHEN *THE SIMPSONS MOVIE* was announced (and ultimately released) earlier this year, everyone with two brain cells could deduce that a game would follow. With EA's announcement of the development of "the most mind-blowing, marvellous videogame ever to feature Homer Simpson as a big green lump of candy," Simpson fans all over rejoiced. However, fans of *The Simpsons* will have to wait a while for the release of *The Simpsons Game*, as it will only be released concurrently with *The Simpsons Movie* DVD launch towards the end of the year. It'll feature graphics from the series and the movie and will parody modern-day culture similar to the series. The series' characters will of course be completely playable, with the exception of Maggie, who only has a few minutes of playtime. However, who really wants to play as her with Bart masquerading as Bartman or Homer around the corner! Not much is known about the plot yet, but it has been mentioned that the game is self-referential in many ways with the end boss being Matt Groening himself. How that will work is beyond us. The only real fact known about the plot is that Marge will be trying to stop the launch of a *Grand Theft Auto*-style Itchy and Scratchy game and players will have to help her nag fellow NPCs with a giant megaphone.

Whatever the case may be, as *The Simpsons* has become a household name synonymous with fun and parody, not many people will want to miss this game. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

Developer→ Arkane | Publisher→ Ubisoft | Genre→ Action | Release→ Q4 2007

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT & MAGIC: ELEMENTS

"IT'S A POWERFUL ENGINE on PC, but on Xbox 360 it creates miracles..." Those are the thoughts of Daniel Palix, *Elements'* producer when talking about the Source engine. Valve's software has apparently been used to full effect on the 360 version of the successful *Dark Messiah*, Arkane's new vision for the *Might & Magic* universe. In it, players take on the role of a magician's apprentice who has to go and ultimately stop an evil prince from ruining everything for the rest of the world. As fans of the PC version will tell you, the game's main appeal is its physicality. In a first-person vantage, the lead character can kick, punch and swing his way around situations, which mean that a sword/club/dagger/magic fight involves more than just running in and bashing the attack button feverishly. You have to block, dodge, kick and outmanoeuvre your opponent. You can also make use of the environment, throwing monsters onto spikes or hitting the support pillar from underneath a rickety platform, sending its contents down onto hapless foes. The 360 version will include a reworked multiplayer (courtesy of the *Splinter Cell* team), a lot of tweaks to the graphics and additional content and missions. Unfortunately, the intuitive 'become what you do' approach has been replaced by choosing a class beforehand and levelling up as you gather points. Perhaps Arkane felt that the previous system was too bewildering for players, but we'll miss it. Still, *Dark Messiah* had a lot of little problems, so *Elements* might be the opportunity to iron things out once and for all and establish *Dark Messiah* as the great action title it should've been. **NAG**

James Francis

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

Heroes of Might and Magic V: Tribes of the East*

For the first time, play as the Orc faction and recruit heroes, build armies and manage cities as you explore and conquer legendary lands. Use tactics, skills and magic to outsmart fantasy armies while developing your heroes and unveiling the dark plot that threatens to tear the world of Ashan apart. Heroes of Might & Magic V: Tribes of the East chronicles the final chapter in the epic struggle that began with the interrupted wedding of Queen Isabel. Players will follow the steps of the Necrolord Arantir as he uncovers the prophecy of the Dark Messiah of Might and Magic and exposes the Demon Sovereign's conspiracy. Following this brilliant conclusion to the Heroes of Might & Magic V story, the world of Ashan will never be the same again...

*Standalone Product: Tribes of the East will be a standalone product and no previous Heroes game installations will be required to play.

Available October 2007

PC DVD ROM

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"Sometimes to understand your present, you have to go back to your past."
Lara Croft, Tomb Raider

SOUTH AFRICA

BACK IN THE RACE!

THE HISTORY OF GAME development in South Africa is as fascinating as it is short. Local game development has historically been rather ambivalent: caught in the quicksand of an emerging market, hidden in the shadow of much larger global efforts. It's not that South Africa lacks the talent, ability, drive or street-cred required to succeed in game development, even at a global scale. The local industry, market and support structure simply took this long to finally reach the point of being able to provide beneficial incubation. Earlier game development efforts were, thus, not in vain but ill timed - too premature, perhaps too visionary.

A quirk of local development has always been over-ambition: the urge to run in and fight alongside the big boys from Europe, Japan and America is ever-prevalent throughout South African culture, a powerful force that has served the local technical industries very well. However, it's this overeager attitude that forms the biggest barrier to local game development because it quickly undermines the proper planning and holistic considerations required to really see the forest from the trees. To start small, to tenderly grow and nurture a game development studio until it's strong enough and capable enough to handle a project of the size and scope needed to satisfy local developers must be agonising. Nobody wants to have to make *Pac-Man* before being allowed to work on the next *Quake*, *Doom*, or Big Name Title... but in business, precedence is a critical factor in establishing the relations, technologies and manpower required to sustain development.

Game development started in South Africa as early as the first computer had been assembled on our shores. A near-mystical South African with the online *nom de guerre* of 'Denthor' paved the way for local game development aspirations by releasing tutorials online on how to program in ASM (Assembler) as well as pulling off some amazing graphical trickery with it - his tutorials remain world-renowned to this day. Along the way, many small-time hopefuls registered their CCs and started working on their next best thing, but almost every situation ended the same: no more effort, no more time, no more money. Twylyt

DEVELOPMENT

Since *MINI 37* is based on real-world locations around South Africa, a lot of time and effort has been put into recreating the look, feel and ambiance of the locations. The Camps Bay course takes advantage of photo references for proper verities; even some houses are perfectly recognisable in the game.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ALL-STARS

Luma's Technical Director, heavyweight code master Luke Lamothe (one of the founding members of I-Imagine), left his position as Chief Technical Officer at I-Imagine to join Luma when I-Imagine went dormant. Luke has over nine years of experience in the industry and cut his teeth at the original DigiPen in Vancouver. He graduated from the DigiPen Institute of Technology in May 1998 and then worked at DigiPen for a year as Teaching Assistant.

Lead Artist, Dave Baxter, is another I-Imagine luminary and has the unenviable job, game artist, in a studio filled with TV and animation specialists.

Diorgo Jonkers, who is currently working on mobile technology and tools for Luma, also worked at I-Imagine where he was involved in an unreleased Game Boy Advance title as both a sprite artist and programmer. He briefly assisted local mobile developer, SmallFry Mobile, before settling at Luma.

LUMA ARCADE

David Baxter - **Lead Artist**
Dale Best - **Creative Director**
Chris Cunnington - **3D Artist**
Luke Lamothe - **Technical Director**
Herman Tulleken - **Programmer**
Diorgo Jonkers - **Tools Programmer**

LUMA

[http://www.luma.co.za/]

The Luma offices: a big, imposing building that hides a deceptively jovial interior - although at the time of our last visit, the biting cold had everyone wrapped up in hats, beanies and scarves, making it look like a very dubious operation. The inside is literally strewn with bric-a-brac, gaming paraphernalia, posters, figurines and friendly faces (once they stop concentrating so hard on the work they're doing).

Luma began in 2001 as a digital studio specialising in 2D and 3D animation. Around 2005, the studio started focusing on creating content and developing technical ability. If you watch any amount of local television, there's a good chance you've seen Luma at work in several high-profile advertisements for Renault, Tracker and Clover.

You may also have caught Luma's little stars, Bun and Bunee (http://bunandbunee.com/), who often appear in advertisements for cellphone wallpapers and other customisations. Luma is currently producing three Bun and Bunee mobile games, the first of which should be completed by the end of September and available for download from the official Website.

MINI 37

[http://www.mini37.co.za]

"We built a prototype game as a tool to show our clients a more exciting, further reaching, and much more immersive way of communicating and interacting with people than a 30 second TV or cinema ad." says Creative Director, Dale Best. "That said, our intent wasn't to simply rehash the superficial existing model of marketing afterthoughts slapped in the 'cool' section of some bland Website in the form of Flash/Shockwave 'games'. Our goal was to make real games that people actually wanted to play, and wouldn't mind actually spending money on. Only this time round, the consumer isn't paying to drive a (insert brand name here) licensed product, but the (insert brand company here) is paying for the consumer to be able to play the game."

As a project to expand the MINI brand, both locally and internationally, Luma is currently developing an arcade racer for MINI – *MINI 37* - which will be episodic, based on locations around South Africa and free. Luma is planning three episodes and each location will have three tracks. Tracks include racing through Camps Bay, the V&A Waterfront and a dock area. Other tracks are set in the vibrant nightlife of Newtown. New cars will become available as downloadable updates and with future releases, all of the MINI cars will eventually feature, including vintage MINIs and tweaked sports models like the GP and the JCW.

You can race Single races on any of the unlocked tracks in Arcade Mode, while Championship Mode lets players compete through a series of tracks in Grand Prix style - both game modes will be playable single-player or multiplayer. Players will be able to register with the Website, which lets them download the game, get updates and eventually post best lap times. Luma's ultimate goal for this project is to develop "the official *MINI* game".

"We have other projects in the pipeline, but that is only part of the big picture in terms of where we want to go with regards to game development, and that is what in my opinion motivates an answer to your next question: 'Why should anyone care?'. Well, our plan is to develop ability and build a strong team that would grow over time. Our business model includes projects like *MINI 37*, which fund reusable technology and in the process create know-how. This will enable us to fund and develop our own projects in the future. So, instead of having to answer to an outside investor, or even perhaps a publisher, we can make decisions on our own, and develop titles that would be distributed using alternative methods to what may be considered mainstream," explains Dale.

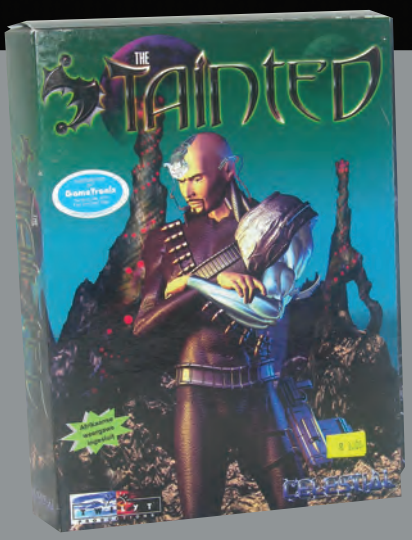
"Besides that, our ethos is platform independent. So, developing mobile games, Web-based games, PC, whatever, would be dictated by the project. The common denominator would be a level of quality in terms of gameplay and polish. Our intent is to build a strong, self-sustained game development company. Being on the southern tip of Africa means coming up with new ways of being a global player, and we believe that the plan we have put together is a good way we can create a platform of growth in the local market."

THE TAINTED

By all regards, *The Tainted* remains South Africa's first large-scale commercial game development venture. Developed by Twylyt Productions (whose most visible face was a man by the name of Travis Bullford), *The Tainted* was actually their second published title: the first was a *Jazz Jackrabbit* clone titled *Toxic Bunny*, which was published under the EA Classics range due to a publishing deal with EA South Africa. *Toxic Bunny* received no major interest or attention, but ironically ended up being a better game than *The Tainted*.

"Afrikaanse weergawe ingesluit" aside, the high retail price of *The Tainted* (R300 back then was no small amount) combined with little to no advertising and wounded development (the developers claim they had their computers stolen near the end of development) quickly resulted in South Africa's first large-scale commercial game development flop. The unstable South African gaming industry at the end of the 1990s didn't help matters and the whole thing practically collapsed in early 2000, taking most local game development with it. As a point of trivia: the big game distributor of that era, Multimedia Warehouse, brought in *Quake III* (released at the end of 1999) but had such lacklustre sales with it that they eventually closed the business (after a long run of struggling to sell gaming stock to the local market).

At the role-playing and comic book convention, Icon/Gencon (now known as Gencon), back in 1998, the same year as the first *StarCraft* competition in the country (held at the same venue - the Edenvale Community Centre), Twylyt Productions was there previewing *The Tainted* to anyone who would listen. "Game development isn't a good job," the developers stated. "We all have three regular jobs."



CRASH COURSE!

Luma took its *MINI 37* game on a nationwide road show with MINI as part of the "All New MINI" campaign, but on route from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town, the truck rolled. The driver sustained non-critical injuries (ribs, broken arms, cuts and bruises) and thankfully recovered quickly. The overturned truck spilled its contents and apparently a lot of equipment disappeared, but the smashed-up racing seats and Logitech MOMO steering wheels were recovered. Luma proudly displays their wrecked seats and wheels at the Luma offices. "It makes us feel all hardcore," says Dale Best.

Productions and Celestial (practically the same people) represent the Genesis of game development in South Africa: they produced two games, *Toxic Bunny* and *The Tainted*. Both were published locally and sold on South African store shelves alongside every international title from that era. Neither was very successful and in a few short years, Twylyt/Celestial slowly disappeared from the public eye.

If the early pioneering efforts of these developers were the Genesis, then the next visible developer would form the Exodus. Late in 1999, I-Imagine was formed and started prototyping and developing their first title, *Chase* (released late 2002). Developed for the Xbox and not retailed locally (due to publisher restrictions and involvement, not to mention that the Xbox was never launched here, unlike it's successor the Xbox 360), very few locals have ever heard of *Chase* except in this magazine. It's this lack of exposure that kept *Chase* from being anything but "just another" title in the Xbox range regarding local enthusiasm. I-Imagine's next title, *Final Armada* (released early 2007), would follow roughly the same path. Retailed predominantly in Spain due to its publisher, *Final Armada* appeared on the PSP as well as the PS2. You can even find a few local retailers that still sell it. However, out of sight, out of mind.

Right now, game development in South Africa is finally leaving its metaphorical primordial soup, questing its way through the cacophony created by local ancillary development industry osmosis. It seems that the groundwork has finally been laid and that local developers are now finally ready to approach game development with the pragmatism and patience required, if there is to be any hope of putting South Africa back on the game development map.

These are incredibly exciting times and anything is possible. With anteriority, a new local game development studio is quickly earning itself a reputation for having all those pesky little duckies in a row. Birthed from the structure and talent of an established digital studio, Luma Arcade is perfectly poised to put the pedal to the metal and come screaming out of the starting gate, bringing local game development with it. **NAG**

THE HIGHWAY TO HELL

IT'S TRUE. WHEN IT COMES TO THE *GUITAR HERO* FRANCHISE, *NAG* SNEERS, DOES A NONCHALANT, DISDAINFUL MAGAZINE COVER POSE, AND SHOWS 'PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVITY' THE MIDDLE FINGER. THAT'S BECAUSE ANY GAME THAT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE A ROCK GOD IS THE MOST TOTALLY AWESOME THING EVER, AND WE'RE THROWING OURSELVES AT *GUITAR HERO III* AND *ROCK BAND* LIKE THE SHAMELESS GROUPIES WE CAN NO LONGER DENY WE ARE. MOVE OVER... WE'RE WITH THE BAND.

WHILE *GUITAR HERO III: Legends of Rock* is largely just more of the same guitar and bass posturing with a new multiplayer mode (ain't nothing wrong with that), *Rock Band* adds vocal and drum campaigns to the gameplay ensemble. It's not really a question of which one you're going to buy, but rather which one you're going to buy first. After all, every rock career starts with shucking two-bit cover versions in seedy downtown dives, and wraps up face-first in vomit goulash in some forgotten gutter in Las Vegas. The only really important bits in between – that is, chapters two through twenty of the Official Biography – concern your meteoric rise to fame and the golden years of your ultimately tragic and ill-fated celebrity status. Do you start with a band of high school chums, only to abandon them after three or four enormously successful albums for an indulgently narcissistic solo career, or the other way around? YOU DECIDE. **NAG**

WAR PIGS

Guitar Hero III boasts an all-new, multiplayer Battle Mode, pitting two players against one another in an all-out fret-frenzy for world supremacy. The idea is to nail Star Power sequences and earn attack manoeuvres. Once you've racked up enough of the shiny blue stuff, you get to unleash up to three different strikes on your hapless opponent. These include:

- Broken String: One fret button will malfunction and have to be restored by rapidly tapping it back into working order (while presumably flubbing two verses of *Rock You Like a Hurricane*);
- Difficulty Up: Get your opponents' fingers into a tangle by bumping them up one difficulty level. Oh no, there's another button in play! Cry, noob;
- Amp Overload: This causes the scrolling display to temporarily shudder and blur. It's just like popping acid into your opponents' Oros, only this version's family friendly; and
- Double Notes: Every note gets a piggyback - instantly transforms any song into a DragonForce cover version.

FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK

Rock Band features independent single-player Solo Tour Mode campaigns for each instrument, as well as a multiplayer cooperative Band World Tour career mode. Quick-play multiplayer modes include head-to-head and co-op options. All multiplayer modes, moreover, will support any number and combination of online and offline participants, while each player can choose their own difficulty setting.

During co-op play, band mates must wail, shred, rumble, and bash their way through the song. If anyone botches and falls out, their pals can grab and use Star Power to resurrect them. For those who haven't played previous *Guitar Hero* instalments (shame on you), Star Power is gained by playing through specially-marked sequences without bumbling a single note.

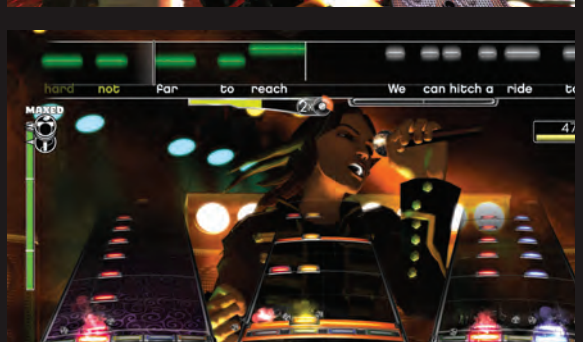
If everyone's still in by the end of the song, the band is rewarded with a short, all-out jam session. Jazz Odyssey, anyone?

CONTROL FREAK

Although *Guitar Hero*'s wired controller will be compatible with its successor and *Rock Band*'s, there'll be some hot new models available. *Guitar Hero III* introduces two new wireless controllers: a super-sexy, white Gibson Les Paul for the next-gen boxes, and a black Kramer Pacer for the PS2. *Rock Band* offers a black and white Fender Stratocaster, featuring ten fret buttons. The additional five buttons are placed higher up the neck for squealing arpeggios, pinch harmonics, sweep picking, and any other ostentatious swaggering about you intend to film and upload to YouTube. All that's left to do is find one of those sci-fi floor vents that blow your hair back in slow motion.

For aspiring screamers, there'll be a microphone somewhat similar to that sold with previous Harmonix release, *Karaoke Revolution*. This technological marvel packs a phoneme detector that parses incoming vowels and consonants to determine lyrical accuracy, and may also be used as a sort of *ad hoc* tambourine or cowbell (more cowbell!) during lengthy instrumental sequences.

Finally, there's a five-piece drum kit, including four foam-covered pads representing the snare, mounted/floor double-duty tom-tom, hi-hat, and crash/splash/ride cymbal, as well as a bass drum kick pedal. All the bits and bobs are adjustable according to player preferences. This contraption isn't all that different from an actual electronic drum kit, so it's time to get your hand-foot coordination ready. According to Harmonix representatives, "If you can play the drum parts on hard, you can pretty much play the drums [in real life]."



TURN THESE UP TO ELEVEN

The track listings for both games read like a bedroom rocker's ultimate mix-tape. Denim vests, Motorhead back patches, and 18-inch Stonehenge replicas are sold separately.

GUITAR HERO III

- *Take This Life* – In Flames;
- *3's & 7's* – Queens Of The Stone Age;
- *Paint It Black* – The Rolling Stones;
- *Closer* - Lacuna Coil;
- *Knights of Cydonia* – Muse;
- *The Metal* – Tenacious D;
- *The Number of the Beast* – Iron Maiden;
- *One* – Metallica;
- *Cherub Rock* – Smashing Pumpkins;
- *Through the Fire and Flames* – DragonForce;
- *Raining Blood* – Slayer;
- *When We Were Young* – The Killers;
- *Welcome to the Jungle* – Guns N' Roses;
- *Suck My Kiss* – Red Hot Chili Peppers;
- *Rock and Roll All Nite* – Kiss.

ROCK BAND

- *Don't Fear the Reaper* – Blue Oyster Cult;
- *Suffragette City* – David Bowie;
- *Paranoid* – Black Sabbath;
- *In Bloom* – Nirvana;
- *Wanted Dead or Alive* – Bon Jovi;
- *Enter Sandman* – Metallica;
- *Vasoline* – Stone Temple Pilots;
- *Learn to Fly* – Foo Fighters;
- *Tom Sawyer* – Rush;
- *The Hand that Feeds* – Nine Inch Nails
- *Creep* – Radiohead;
- *Here it Goes Again* – OK Go;
- *Highway Star* – Deep Purple;
- *Sabotage* – Beastie Boys;
- *Won't Get Fooled Again* – The Who;
- *Go with the Flow* – Queens of the Stone Age.

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

SPACE GIRAFFE [XBLA]

Gaming, just like music, tends to be twisted into a cruel metaphorical IQ test between rival factions who disagree on the merits of a specific title. Nonetheless, if you think *Space Giraffe* is a 'dumb and pointless' and 'hard' game, you then become what we like to call "weaksauce." The brilliance of *Space Giraffe* defies mortal comprehension, making it possibly one of the best games ever conceived. Can you beat level 64?

THE DARKNESS [360]

We've finally managed to acquire (borrow) a copy of *The Darkness* (by asking a friend if we could use their copy once they're done with it). However, we did spend a lot of time with the early review code we received a few months back, and the retail seems to be identical except for an extra layer of polish and an improved framerate. It's still too early to form a full opinion on the game, but so far, it's fun and the dark (haw) theme certainly works for it.

BLAZING ANGELS 2: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII [360]

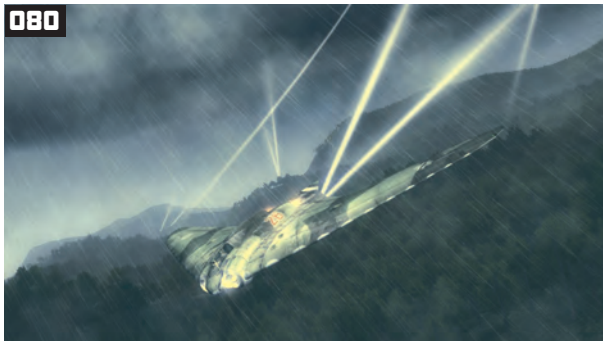
It has a split-screen cooperative mode that defies convention by actually being worthwhile and incredulously fun. The first *Blazing Angels* was a good title, but the sequel really removes all the limitations and runs with it, presenting gamers with a visual splendour that has to be seen in motion to be believed. The controls feel tight, the missions are varied and overall, *Blazing Angels 2* is turning out to be a far superior game than its predecessor.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END [360]

It's a licensed game, sure, but to quote James, "When you hold the analogue stick only slightly in a direction to walk, Jack Sparrow actually *minces*." You cannot get a higher recommendation than that if you're a Jack Sparrow fan. The combat system is simple, plain and easy while the boss-battles incorporate a rather slick 'rock-paper-scissors' element to keep things cinematic but not overly difficult.

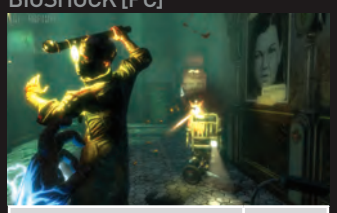
WORLD IN CONFLICT DEMO [PC]

If you never played *Ground Control 2*, you missed out on a solid, action-packed RTS that focused more on the tactical application of your available units and resources instead of base-building and defence (you couldn't build structures at all). *World in Conflict* takes this idea and refines it. It's action packed, the explosions are purdy, but most of all, it's fun and plays well. This is going to be a multiplayer game to watch out for.



WEB SCORES

BIOSHOCK [PC]



NAG	90
METACRITIC	96
GAMERANKINGS	96

BLAZING ANGELS 2 [360]

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GAMERANKINGS	70

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ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR [PC]

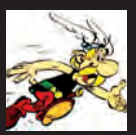
NAG	75
METACRITIC	64
GAMERANKINGS	67

THE REVIEWERS

All South Africa is divided into three parts. No, four - for one small village of indomitable Gamers still holds out against the Roman invaders...

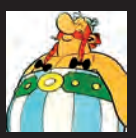
Sean Jamesix

Using the power of the Magic Potion, novel aviation Gamer takes to the skies and flies so high.



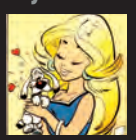
Miktar Draconix

Menhir delivery Gamer and all-round round guy, Miktar Draconix is the village vaudevillian.



Tarryn van der Bylix

Super strong in the mouth, Tarryn is the most feared Gamer among the Roman invaders.

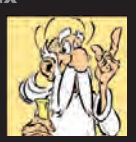


James Francisix

Standing high atop a shield born on the backs of two goats, Francisix rules from on high.

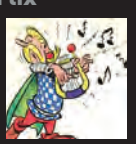
Eddie Francisix

In the shadow of his brother, the second Francisix likes to eat small children when nobody is looking.



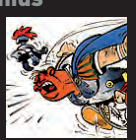
Justin Slabbertix

Gamers love to fight, and Justin is no exception. He uses words like fisticuffs to beat up the Editorix.



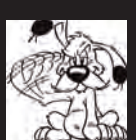
Adam Liebmanius

This converted Roman now lives among the Gamers, taking his time and doing it right.



Toby Hudonix

Having beaten both Verbostix and Sesquipedalianix in a duel to the death, Hudonix should be feared.



MMMMMM ... SHINY!

A quick guide to the *NAG* reviews section

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE REVIEW ICONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

For your convenience, the numbers of the distribution companies

Aleet Distribution	[011] 888-8916	Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817
Apex Interactive	[012] 347-9956	Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Asbis	[011] 848 7000	Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450	Megarom	[011] 361-4800
Axiz	[011] 237-7000	Microsoft	[011] 265-3000
Comstar	[011] 314-5812	MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
Comztek	0860 600-557	MobileG	084 245 5400
Corex	[011] 238-2315	Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Creative	[011] 849-2021	Proton Technology	[011] 466-8888
Devon	[041] 365-0258	Rectron	[011] 203-1000
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300	Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Esquire	0861 70 0000	Ster Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7960
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142	The Outer Limits	[011] 482-3771
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038	Tuerk Music	[011] 792-8402
Greenstone Interactive	[021] 557-6248	WWE	[011] 462-0150
Headset Solutions	[011] 706-9844		

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

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

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

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

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

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

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

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

The October issue of SACM is on sale now at your local newsagent for R29.95

SACM

www.sacm.co.za

Live the Technology Life

Published by Tide Media

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The new-look 124 -page SACM is a must-read for IT enthusiasts, computer and gadget users, SOHO and micro businesses and everybody with an interest in the latest advancements in computers, cellular technology, software and peripherals.
The magazine also covers topics ranging from emerging technological trends to internet and online activities, as well as digital entertainment in the home, behind-the-scenes looks at the technology involved in making games and movies, and software that will enhance the reader's computing experience. Each issue is also bundled with a free CD filled with essential software applications and utilities.

COPY PROTECTION PROBLEMS

The PC version of *BioShock* comes in two flavours: a Games For Windows box copy and the digitally-distributed Steam version. The Steam version requires a good 6GB of downloading, but lacks the copy-protection and activation issues of the box copy. The store-bought version of *BioShock* requires online activation (limited to two activations) and sports some hefty anti-piracy SecuROM copy protection, which, of course, often gets in the way of legal owners enjoying their purchase. The developers of *BioShock* have already stated that the limited-number-of-activations thing will eventually be removed and that they're working on solving all the SecuROM issues.

BIOSHOCK (PC)

WHAT'S THIS? IT LOOKS like an FPS, has FPS key-bindings... but something is different. It's not taking me straight into the action, it's actually trying to get me involved: there's plot in them thar hills! It smells a little like the train ride of *Half-Life*: you feel like a tourist with hints of action and adventure on the edges. It starts off slow, easing you into it, like the tender caress of a lover. Blink and you're in Rapture, up to your ears in water, literally in the deep end of an underwater utopia gone bad. Everyone's crazy, trying to kill each other with all sorts of gene-spliced-induced horror. To top it off, you're seeing ghosts.

What follows can only best be described as pure, unadulterated escapism - and it's about time.

Rapture is an art deco city that invites exploration. Built to be an unconstrained utopia at the bottom of the ocean, unfettered by petty morality and ethics, it looks and acts every bit the part. However, by the time you reach it, things have already gone horrible awry. People, unchecked and free, started splicing their own genetic code too much thanks to two products provided in Rapture: ADAM, the canvas for genetic modification and EVE, the plasmid paint with which people restructure themselves out of boredom or for beauty, power, vengeance and love. What man builds, man destroys.

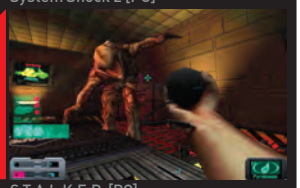
The glass walkways connecting the districts of Rapture, thousands of fathoms beneath the ocean, look up to a paradoxical skyline of neon-lit skyscrapers in the green, murky deep. However, the cracks in the glass leak, as does the entire ruined city of Rapture. The destruction from water, neglect and chaos is as evident as it's important: pools of water can be used to electrocute enemies; spilled oil can be lit to form barriers of fire. The security system still works, sending homemade flying drones to gun you down or - if you hack the camera - become your allies in a fight. *BioShock* doesn't have 'fully-interactive' environments as most FPS titles claim, but it has that interactivity where it counts. Tiny touches, such as breaking the glass of a storefront window, causing the security system to try and repel your vandalism, go a long way towards turning a finely-tuned and tense scene into something memorable - utterly by accident. The developers put care and attention into every corridor, every room and every location. This

NAG EDITOR'S CHOICE

NAG MUST PLAY

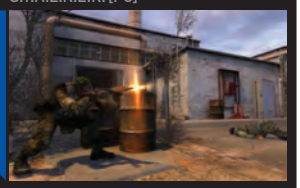
System Shock 2 [PC]

AS GOOD AS



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. [PC]

BETTER THAN



18+

BOTTOM LINE

Would you kindly... go out and purchase BioShock?

90 OUT OF 100

RRP→ R499 | Publisher→ 2K Games | Distributor→ Ster Kinekor Games | Genre→ FPS/RPG | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

Look & Listen For the Fans

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

kind of dedication is what turns *BioShock* into a game worthy of your time.

Plasmids are what form the RPG element of *BioShock* - they are your skills and they come in a variety of colours. Electro Shock and other offensive Plasmids have multiple levels: some you can simply purchase from a Plasmid vending machine while others may involve researching your enemies. Research is done with a camera and some purchasable film: by taking a good photo of an enemy, you'll do more damage to that type of enemy or uncover a new Plasmid. Some Plasmids help you with hacking, others with healing and some cover attacking, hiding or trapping. You can only equip a certain amount in each of the categories and you purchase upgrades to carry more at a time: Fisher Price role-playing, but extremely effective and it allows for variety in how you play or approach situations. First-person shooting works in *BioShock*. You can play it like any other FPS, but you'd be stuffing yourself with the potato side dish while the delicious meat and sauce are left metaphorically untouched.

Rapture is a closed ecology, its inhabitants all smaller cogs in the bigger machine. Two specific characters, the Little Sister and Big Daddy, are central to this ecology as well as central to the moral and ethical structures intertwined throughout the plot. They form the foundation of Adam harvesting in Rapture: the Little Sister climbs out of special pipes in the walls, matted and filthy, talking to herself and to the Big Daddy that protects her from harm. The Little Sister will wander the environment, harvesting Adam from dead bodies, with the Big Daddy in tow. The Little Sister and Big Daddy steal the show.

Following the pair around, quietly and unseen, lets you appreciate just how much effort was put into just these two characters. They converse, they show emotion and drama. They actually have on-screen synergy.Tape recordings, scattered around Rapture, serve to flesh out the plot and fill in where needed. Following a 'thread' across multiple recordings is both fascinating and often risky. Recordings play as you continue to wander around - perfect distractions that cover up sounds you really should be hearing such as the metallic scrape of an approaching Splicer.

Anything more said about *BioShock* would be a spoiler and a disservice to a title that deserves to be played, not reviewed. All it lacks is cooperative multiplayer to make the world a much happier place. **NAG**

Miktar "Shodan" Dracon

SYSTEM SHOCK

BioShock is, for all intents and purposes, a *System Shock* game. It may not be *System Shock 3*, but the two *System Shock* games in existence fully defined the genre.

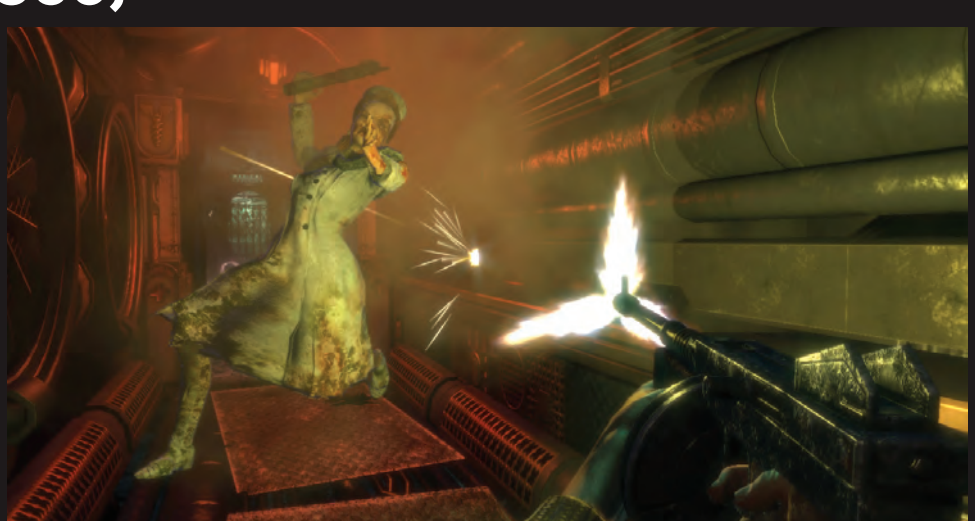
The similarities between *System Shock* uno and dos and *BioShock* are crystal clear: mild RPG elements, a heavy focus on classifying your interactions with the universe (class system), but in a fluid way so as to not frighten off action junkies, not to mention hackable security cameras and voice-recordings that creep you out with their indifference to your situation. It's all there, plain as day, but this time they nailed it. How the concepts interlock in *BioShock* is masterful, coming from the years of experience and experimentation with the *System Shock* series.

And to think, originally no publisher wanted to sign *BioShock* because they thought it was "just another FPS."

BIOSHOCK (360)

IN THE EARLY YEARS of the 20th century, a former Soviet citizen turned wealthy industrialist named Andrew Ryan, disillusioned with the altruistic social inclusivism of the world around him, envisioned something better for himself and his esteemed contemporaries, Rapture - a self-sustaining underwater utopia, hermetically segregated from all possible outward corruption and populated by none but the most distinguished luminaries of art, science, and philosophy. Built in 1946 on the mid-Atlantic sea floor, the sub-aqueous metropolis swiftly attracted residents, and by the early 1960s Rapture's population numbered some several thousand.

Around this time, a young German scientist named Bridgette Tenenbaum, having survived the Holocaust by dint of her exceptional acumen and assistance with condemned Nazi experiments,



Look & Listen
For the Fans

makes a remarkable discovery. While studying the local fauna, Tenenbaum and a colleague find a species of sea slug that secretes stem cells – self-replicating material that could be used for all manner of genetic tampering and enhancements, and later dubbed ADAM. Initially snubbed by the greater scientific community, Tenenbaum secures capital from a young entrepreneur named Frank Fontaine. With this investment, Tenenbaum is able to continue and refine her research, while the miraculous ADAM substance becomes a much sought-after commodity.

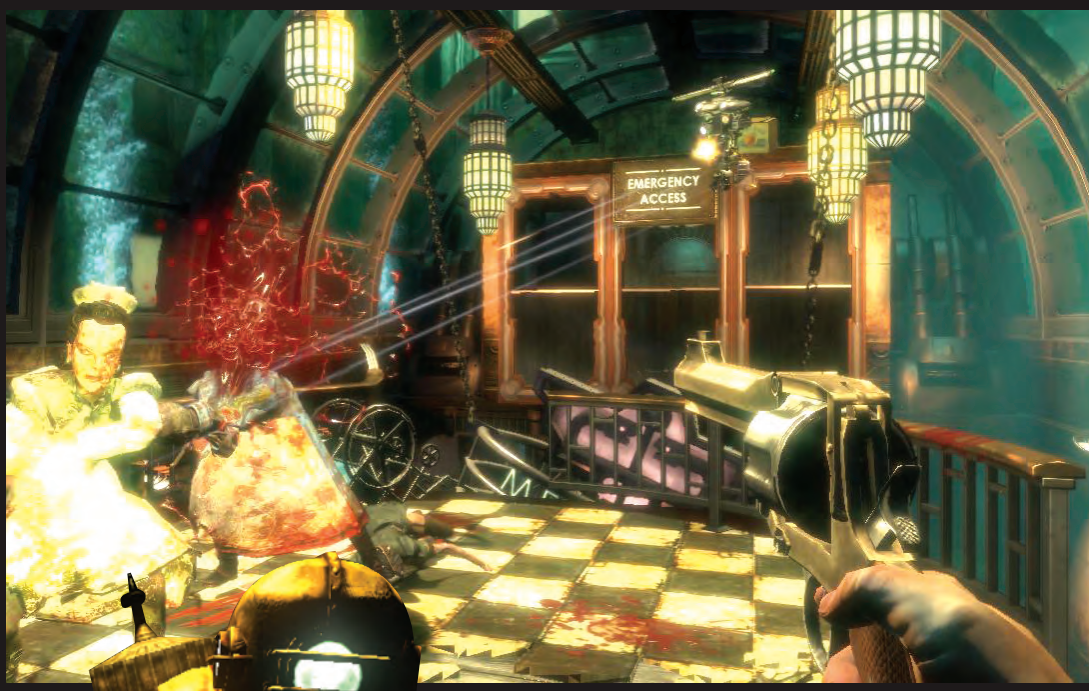
As public demand for ADAM spirals out of control and threatens to unravel the delicate social structure of Rapture, a war breaks out between Ryan and Fontaine. Ryan ultimately emerges the victor, but at a terrible cost. During the course of the conflict, ADAM's ability to modify and improve the human body is carelessly abused, and the city's inhabitants become biologically dependent on the stuff to survive. Rapture falls to a violent mobocracy, as its wretched denizens turn to madness and murder for their next fix. The walls are fracturing and the ocean has slowly and inexorably begun to reclaim its territory, while an engineered horror prowls the halls and passageways, collecting ADAM from the carrion of reckless progress.

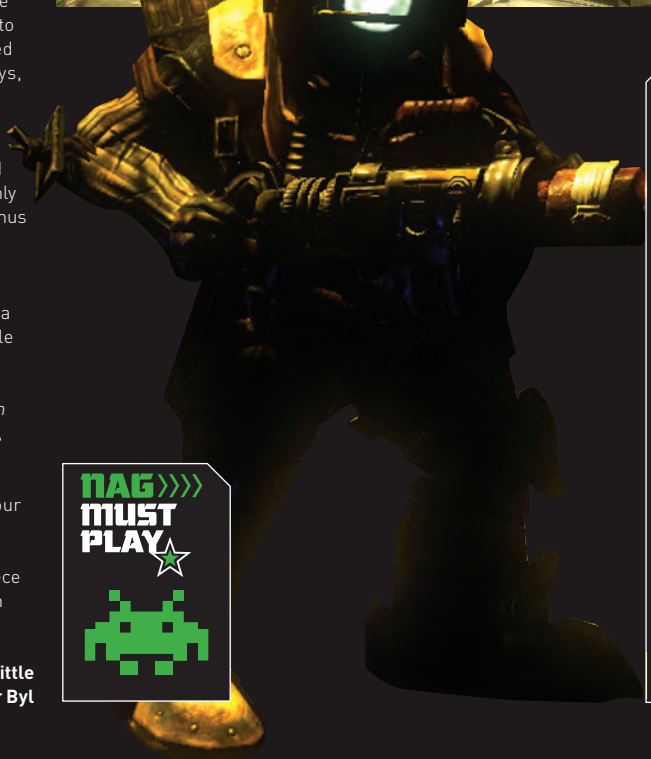
You are a passenger on a transatlantic flight that concludes rather abruptly – and somewhat conveniently – alongside the only entrance to Rapture, a bathysphere terminus in a mid-sea lighthouse. Now, would you kindly enter pandemonium?

To call *BioShock* an FPS or reduce it to something as petty and bourgeois as a percentile score would do it an untenable disservice. *BioShock* is revolution. *BioShock* is avant-garde. *BioShock* plays excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* as the magnificently-insane artist, Sander Cohen, triggers an alarm and casually unleashes hoards of ADAM-crazed, genetically-spliced villains in your direction. Just writing about *BioShock* feels like some sort of heresy.

Ultimately, the aim of the game is to piece together the catastrophe that has befallen Rapture and survive it. How you do that is really up to you. **NAG**

Tarryn "Unrepentant Harvester of Little Sisters" van der Byl

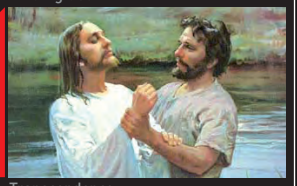




NAG MUST PLAY

Finding God

AS GOOD AS



Transcendence

FOR FANS OF

18+

BOTTOM LINE

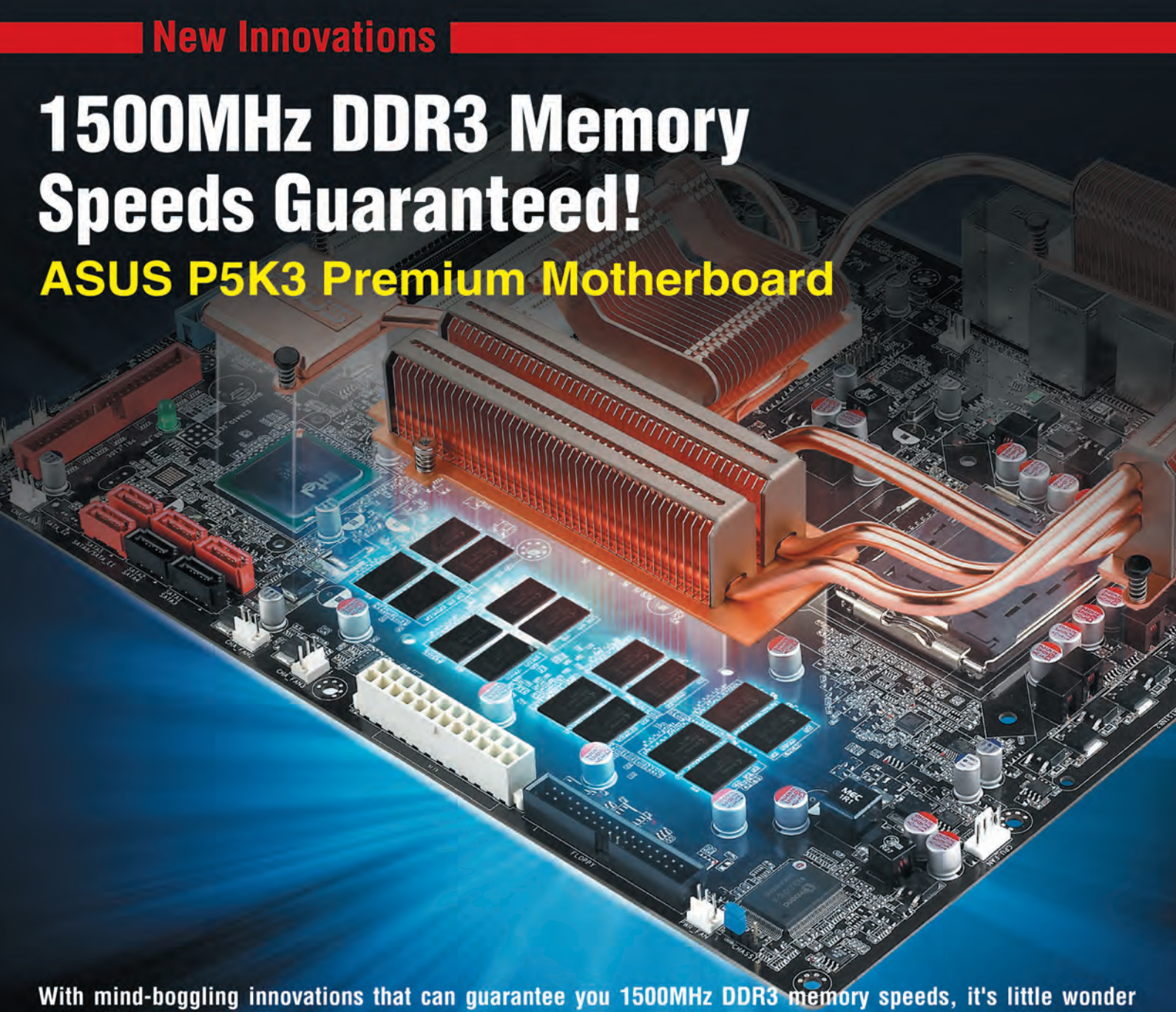
Essential.

RRP→ R599 | Publisher→ 2K Games | Distributor→ MiDigital | Genre→ Action adventure

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

1500MHz DDR3 Memory Speeds Guaranteed!

ASUS P5K3 Premium Motherboard



With mind-boggling innovations that can guarantee you 1500MHz DDR3 memory speeds, it's little wonder that ASUS is the leading motherboard maker in the world. The ASUS P5K3 Premium motherboard, with the ASUS exclusive technology - Turbo D3 Onboard Memory, will allow you to experience the adrenaline rush of overclocking beyond your wildest dreams.

Turbo D3 Technology

With news of ASUS's Native Support for DDR3 1333MHz yet to subside, ASUS has yet again provided us with another groundbreaking technology. The P5K3 Premium utilizes Turbo D3 - a set of superb onboard memory features that guarantees overclocking above DDR3 1500MHz. This groundbreaking technology includes the Perfect T-Tree Design and Hyper PCB Design and works seamlessly together with ASUS's exclusive Super Memspeed Technology for the best overclocking performance.

Perfect T-Tree Design

The P5K3 Premium motherboard utilizes cutting-edge Perfect T-Tree Design to provide you with simultanous random data access on every memory chip. Data access to each memory chip occurs at the same time, instead of conventional DDR3 Fly-by Topologies that require time to be spent waiting for one by one random data access. This reduces clock cycle timing by 50% for random data access - thereby ensuring faster memory speeds.

Additionally, an innovative Hyper PCB Design provides good power delivery and cleaner signals with less crosstalk. It also provides more ground layers to provide better heat dissipation for thermal purposes - allowing you to enjoy faster speeds for better overclocking.

*Note DDR3 1500MHz (O.C) It is recommended that you install a CPU with 1066MHz FSB or above to guarantee DDR3 memory overclocking to above 1500MHz.

Look & Listen
MP3 + ACCESSORIES
For the Fans

BLAZING ANGELS 2: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII

FOR A BRIEF PERIOD in the 360's launch year, *Blazing Angels* stepped in to fill a small gap in the console's launch line-up. It was neither extraordinary nor really memorable. In other words, I didn't play too much of it. The framerate was poor and the game seemed rather bland. Not that it was bad, but scurrying around the skies as a WWII pilot certainly doesn't stand out in my happy game memories. However, the game probably suffered from launch jitters (even though it wasn't a launch title), the developers hadn't had a grip on the technology yet, and we ended up with a game that looked and felt unremarkable on both the 360 and PS3.

Usually when this happens to a game, one of three things can happen: (1) the title could disappear into obscurity; (2) an even-worse sequel could follow; or (3) the developers could take notes and jack things up. In a rare show of solidarity for an improved sequel of a so-so title (a rare sentiment in this industry), *Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII* headed straight for number three. *Blazing Angels 2* is simply awesome.

Have you ever played *Crimson Skies*? Firstly, it looked great. However, more so, it was the Indiana Jones of the sky – air pirates, air wars, massive zeppelins and flying fortresses, not to mention insane dogfights and stunt flying that would sink a mosquito. It even boiled down to a massive fight above Manhattan, but not before stopping pretty much everywhere else on the globe. The thing I really enjoyed, though, was the banter between the pilots and the interesting voice acting. It was a very cheesy game, much like a movie made in the forties, and difficult as hell, but it was a lot of fun too. Zipper Interactive has moved on to the *SOCOM* games and Microsoft doesn't seem interested in the franchise, so it was left up to a Ubisoft team in Romania to take on the mantle.

Blazing Angels 2 takes the theme to heart, complete with the cheese and high-flying action, but places it in WWII. You take charge of an elite squadron of fighters out to stop the Nazis and their allies from unleashing a super secret weapon that will win them the war. Backed by your wingmen, each with different skills to help you out in a tight spot, you'll fly to Egypt, Italy, China, Thailand and a host of other places, flying fighters, bombers, experimental Japanese aircraft and even early jet planes. All of these are apparently historically accurate, but the story is gung-ho fictional as you attack a giant zeppelin full of turrets, shoot down crazy ace pilots, sink Japanese carrier subs that launch kamikaze pods and take out rockets being fired at San Francisco from U-boats.

All this is really beautiful and crisp. Not only visually, but the sounds and soundtrack are beefy and really there for you. It's also pretty unforgiving and more than once you'll throw the controller with the type of anger I thought only *Call of Duty* could generate. Just like that classic, you'll grab the controller and try for the twentieth or thirtieth time to accomplish your mission. Fortunately, the checkpoints are liberal, but might as well also be a trap. The really hard bits are never entire missions, just certain parts of them: shoot down six bombers in less than a minute with no wingmen or nail kamikaze pods as they hurtle towards a target that must not die. But you eventually crack these and you head on. No specific mission is impossible to achieve. Multiplayer is also a lot of fun and it's good on split-screen, in particular for skirmish. If arcade-style flying action is your thing, you seriously need to try *Blazing Angels 2*. We couldn't recommend it more. **NAG**

James Francis

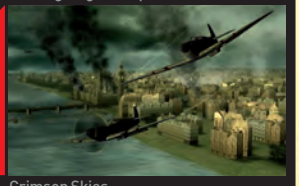
RRP→ R599 | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Flight combat

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

NAG MUST PLAY

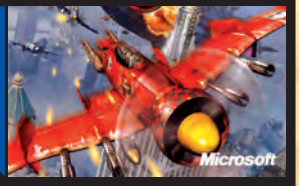
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII

BETTER THAN



Crimson Skies

FOR FANS OF



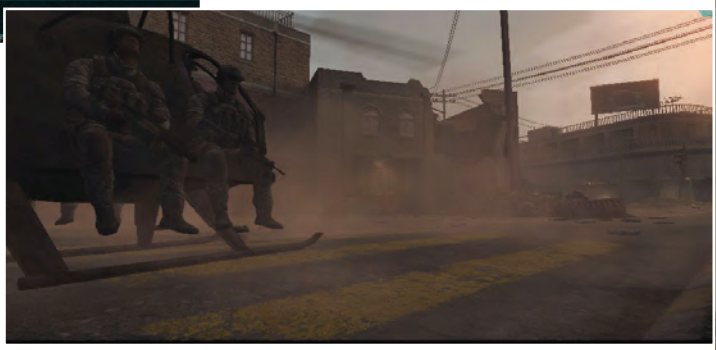
BOTTOM LINE

If you've really been looking for that arcade dogfight fix, call this game.

90
OUT OF 100

Engage warp speed... NOW!

Look & Listen MP3 & ACCESSORIES For the Fans



TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2 [PC]

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: *Advanced Warfighter 2* is a game we've eagerly anticipated because of its predecessor. Fortunately, it was a wait well worth it because like the previous game, *GRAW 2* is a big success. It takes place on the Mexican side of the border and revolves around a plot to launch a nuclear attack against the US. The Ghosts have only 72 hours to stop this.

The gameplay is excellent and, at times, similar to that of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas*, albeit a lot brighter and far less taxing on the eye. The squad-based system, which has been implemented, works wonders for various strategies the player might use. Although it's a small team, enemies are never in short supply. Unfortunately for the enemies, their AI can at times be testing. It's a constant rollercoaster of being excellent or pathetic. For example, enemy snipers can hit you from the other side of a city and there are unrealistic moments where you take out the leader of a patrol and that patrol just keeps on moving like nothing actually happened.

There's the added benefit of using CrossCom 2.0 technology to deploy your squad, making up for the bad enemy AI. Unlike before, the squad's AI seems to have been vastly improved. The squad moves fluently through the various terrains without getting stuck or doing something completely stupid, like exposing their heads in plain view of enemy fire. It's also important to remember that your squad members specialise in different fields. It's for this reason that at the beginning of each stage, the player must decide which team members will be better suited for the job and equip them to utilise their strengths.

In terms of physics, *GRAW 2* doesn't disappoint and actually makes good use of the AGEIA PhysX engine without hogging valuable system resources. If you have an AGEIA PhysX processing unit, you'll see quite an improvement. However, while this might be useful, it's not necessary in order to play the game.

GRAW 2 has stunning graphics, superior gameplay and a good storyline. If you don't have this game yet, rush out and buy it. It's worth its weight in gold. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

RRP→ R299 | Publisher→ 2Ubisoft | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Tactical FPS | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
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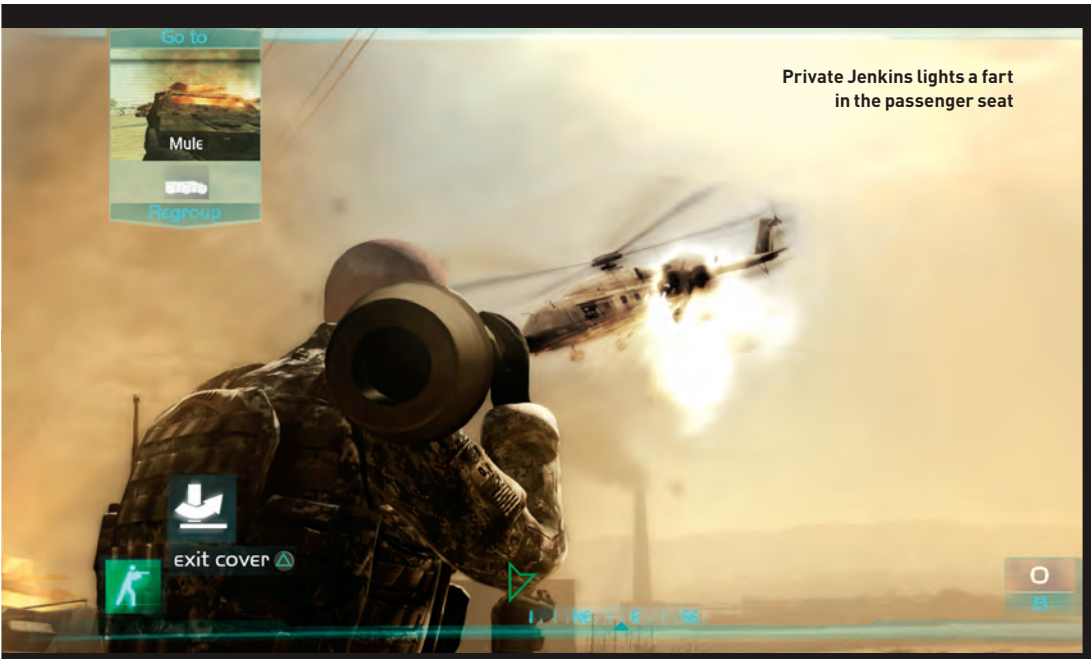
MOB



Private Jenkins lights a fart in the passenger seat

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2 [PS3]

RRP→ R599 | **Publisher→** Ubisoft
Distributor→ Megarom
Genre→ Tactical shooter

Set in a Mexican civil war in 2014, *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2* picks up where its highly-acclaimed predecessor ended. You control Scott Mitchell, a member of the highly-specialised Ghosts, charged with trying to contain the Mexican situation and protect the United States against threats of an imminent nuclear attack. A solidly-woven (if occasionally farfetched) story holds all the action of the single-player game together. It may not be masterful, but it certainly serves its purpose.

The game revolves around tactical combat, with the emphasis very much on stealth and cover. Although it's possible to simply charge through sections of the game with guns blazing and little or no regard for subtlety, the game rewards a patient approach. Taking cover behind a variety of objects is made exceptionally simple and intuitive by the play dynamic, as well as by the abundance of opportunities to shrewdly use the multitude of tactical gear at your disposal, including sniper rifles and remote-controlled reconnaissance drones. The control scheme is effective, if not as customisable as it could be, making aiming at and picking off your foes fairly straightforward. SIXAXIS motion sensitivity has also been implemented in a number of areas, though this still-clumsy feature can thankfully be deactivated.

The game certainly doesn't lack variety, with a wide array of mission objectives and environments in both Mexico and the US. *GRAW 2* offers a spectacular array of weapons, which steadily expands as one progresses through the game, and opportunities to control a number of different vehicles. Visually, *GRAW 2* doesn't disappoint either, with superbly-detailed characters, weaponry and locales, as well as spectacular lighting effects. A few isolated occurrences of short-lived framerate niggles don't detract from the experience. A suitable, if unremarkable, score is complemented by excellent sound effects and more-than-passable voice-acting.

In addition to the engaging, if somewhat short-lived, single-player campaign, *GRAW 2* offers a fleshy multiplayer experience, with massive maps and a number of modes on offer. Included among these is a cooperative campaign mode with its own storyline, independent of the single-player campaign.

GRAW 2 marks a successful debut for the franchise on Sony's next-gen platform and manages to combine a polished single-player experience with solid and enjoyable multiplayer action. The fantastic visuals, audio and storyline make this one of the best PS3 titles around and establish *GRAW 2* as the benchmark for tactical shooters.

Adam Liebman

16+

BOTTOM LINE

Polished and riveting tactical shooter, superb alone or online.

90
OUT OF 100

Look & Listen For the Fans

It opens bottles too!

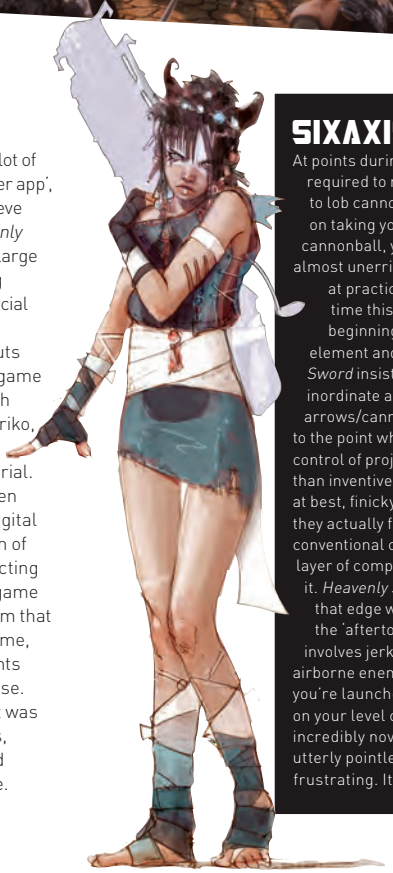
HEAVENLY SWORD

HEAVENLY SWORD ENDED UP being a very difficult game to review objectively, so I must resort to using the utterly subjective first-person and leave the objectivity up to you. To start, it seems pertinent to stress the contents of the *Heavenly Sword* hands-on preview I wrote for last month's *NAG* (September, page 54). The preview was written after playing the full second chapter of *Heavenly Sword*, and now having played the final retail version, very little has been changed other than some mild bug-fixing on the physics and animations. I actually played that preview copy to death to be honest: it was fun, I really enjoyed the combat system and the visuals were certainly top-notch. The second chapter of Heavenly Sword contains quite a package of explosive ingenuity, jaw-dropping graphics as well as quite a few hilarious cut-scenes that really raise the bar in terms of what we should expect from digital actors.

You could say that the second chapter really sums up what *Heavenly Sword* is about and why Sony has worked so hard to try and produce it as their flagship title for the PS3 next to *Killzone 2*. You may have noticed they even got *Heavenly Sword* into an episode of the popular TV show, *Heroes*. There is a lot of pressure on *Heavenly Sword* to be a 'killer app', and let me state for the record that I believe they succeeded to a large degree. *Heavenly Sword* will entice, excite and entertain a large swath of the demographic they're aiming for and I have no doubt that as a commercial venture the game will be a success.

That aside, let me laundry-list the nuts and bolts of my experience with it. The game begins its story at the end and you watch strong, but misunderstood heroine, Nariko, die after cutting up a large chunk of an invading army as part of your basic tutorial. She pegs it, goes into the clouds and then gives one of the single most stunning digital monologues ever uttered by a collection of polygons. Her expressions, her voice-acting - near perfect. The first chapter of the game is set five days before her death and from that point on you play up to the end of the game, each chapter a day in the unfolding events leading Nariko to her inescapable demise.

The combat is unchanged from what was described in the preview: three stances, each with a defined set of strengths and weaknesses, each having a specific use. There is no active block; Nariko will



SIXAXIS SIGH!

At points during *Heavenly Sword*, you are required to man (woman?) a turret so as to lob cannonballs at giant catapults bent on taking you out. After the turret fires its cannonball, you can control its flight path almost unerringly so as to hit any target at practically any distance. The first time this happens (nearly right at the beginning of the game), it is a novel element and entertaining, but *Heavenly Sword* insists on having you spend an inordinate amount of time controlling arrows/cannonballs/people/hats mid-flight, to the point where the SIXAXIS 'aftertouch' control of projectiles becomes more abrasive than inventive. Motion-sensing controls are, at best, finicky to implement in a game so that they actually feel like an improvement over conventional controls instead of just another layer of complexity added in for the sake of it. *Heavenly Sword* teeters perilously on that edge with regards to motion-sensing: the 'aftertouch' during combat, which involves jerking the controller up towards airborne enemies (or to save yourself if you're launched into the air), is, depending on your level of allegiance to Sony, either incredibly novel and infinitely rewarding or utterly pointless to the point of being horribly frustrating. It's up to you, really.

RRP→ R515 | Publisher→ SCEE | Distributor→ Ster Kinekor Games | Genre→ Action

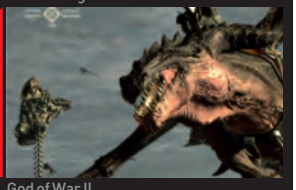
PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

automatically (attempt to) block incoming attacks as long as you're in the right stance for them. It's easy to master the combat system and even on Hell difficulty (unlocked after finishing Normal, your only option at the start of the game), I didn't find enemies very challenging. *Heavenly Sword* is not very difficult and death usually only comes as a result of either not knowing the pattern of a boss or by not destroying everything required of you during the turret missions. As you fight, new combination moves get unlocked for all three stances. You can skirt through the game without ever having mastered a good 70% of the combo list, which is unfortunate as the more complicated combo moves are truly stunning. It should be noted, though, that *Heavenly Sword* is focused on spectacle over challenge, so I do not hold it against the game for being easy, or short (only around six hours for my first play-through).

Every time the King (performance captured from the utterly capable Andy Serkis, whom you may know as Gollum) appeared in a cut-scene I was glued to the screen, enjoying myself immensely in spite of noticing that often the cut-scenes are video clips instead of in-engine, real-

BETTER THAN

Most PS3 games



WORSE THAN

God of War II

16+

BOTTOM LINE

You should really read the review for this one.

70

OUT OF 100

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2. Splinter Cell Trilogy
3. Rise of Nations Gold Edition
4. Age of Empires Collector's Edition
5. Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter
6. Brothers in Arms Earned in Blood
7. Devil May Cry 3: SE
8. Age of Mythology Gold Edition
9. Dogz & Catz
10. CSI: 3 Dimensions of Murder
11. Playboy The Mansion Gold Edition
12. Pirates of the Caribbean The Legend of Jack Sparrow
13. Rainbow Six: Lockdown
14. Star Trek: Legacy
15. Zoo Tycoon
16. Rayman Raving Rabbids
17. Rayman 10th Anniversary
18. Far Cry
19. Silent Hunter III
20. Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002

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For the Fans

time rendering. But who cares about that anyway? The cut-scenes are good and that's what the game is going for: a quality 'Hollywood' style experience.

It loads a lot, though. Sometimes almost a minute of loading precedes a new level, or worse, it can take that long to reload a level if you die. The Quick Timer Events (QTE - pressing required buttons during a cut-scene) thankfully place you right at their beginning if you fail, without any loading.

I enjoyed playing *Heavenly Sword*, but the experience felt very transient. *Heavenly Sword* exhausts its bag of tricks very early on in the game and has to resort to recycling its ideas to the point of dulling their edge too soon. There are a few unlockable videos and some art, but nothing to really make me want to run through it again. That may or may not disappoint you, depending on the type of gamer you are or how much you're looking forward to *Heavenly Sword*. Suffice to say, *Heavenly Sword* is a game everyone should play at least once, but the high price may make your mileage vary.

Note: If you're a *God of War* fan and have bowed to the might of Kratos, you may be considering *Heavenly Sword* as an extension to keep you busy until *God of War 3*. As a *God of War* fan myself, let me warn you that *Heavenly Sword* is not *God of War* by any stretch of the imagination. **NAG**

Miktar "Prometheus" Dracon

HEAVENLY SWORD: SECOND OPINION

One of the most eagerly-anticipated titles in the PS3's sparse line-up, Ninja Theory's *Heavenly Sword*, is a hack-and-slash adventure, much in the same vein as the *God of War* series or *The Mark of Kri* before it. The protagonist, Nariko, is charged by her clan with the task of protecting the Heavenly Sword, a godly weapon of immense power, and to stop it from falling into the hands of the evil megalomaniac, King Bohan, and his massive armies. In terms of presentation, *Heavenly Sword* truly is a treat, with spectacularly-detailed (and massive) landscapes and beautiful cut-scenes, replete with incredibly realistic facial expressions and convincing voice-acting (keep an ear out for Andy Serkis, best known for his role as Gollum). The scale of the enormous final battle, in particular, simply has to be seen to be believed. As for the fighting, Nariko has a number of impressive combat moves at her disposal. There are three different types of attack: ranged attacks cover a wide area but do little damage; power attacks are slow but menacing; and speed attacks occupy the grey area in between. Also in Nariko's repertoire are some very cinematic instant-kill techniques. The combat is fluid and intuitive, even if it does occasionally encourage button mashing, and the variety of enemies often necessitates a change in strategy: it's difficult to get through the game without varying your techniques. The only niggle with the control system is perhaps the lack of a block button: automatic blocking makes it difficult to cancel a combination in order to protect against incoming attacks. The game also introduces a fair amount of variety throughout, giving you more than a few chances to snipe at enemies with a crossbow or to fire a giant cannon at the invading forces' catapults. Nonetheless, the game does tend to feel a little uninspired. It's certainly entertaining, but it fails to be astonishing, perhaps since it's just too similar to titles like *God of War*. Another point that needs to be mentioned is that the game is short, lasting only in the region of 7-9 hours. If anything, one is left feeling it was just too short - the game is over before the action becomes too tedious. Make no mistake, *Heavenly Sword* is a fun romp while it lasts, and worth seeing for its breathtaking visuals alone. It's just not astonishing enough to be the *pièce de résistance* the PS3 is waiting for.

Adam Liebman

78
OUT OF 100

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RRP→ R249 | Publisher→ DreamCatcher Interactive | Distributor→ Apex Interactive | Genre→ Space sim | PC Spec→

PC
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DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

Space fender-bernders are nasty

SPACEFORCE: ROGUE UNIVERSE

SPACEFORCE: ROGUE UNIVERSE **IS** another space sim game that, like everything since *Freelancer*, isn't as good as *Freelancer*. If you've seen the screenshots and started dusting off your joystick, put it back - especially with the abysmal joystick support (it emulates a mouse that's emulating a joystick!) in this game.

Let's start with the beginning. The tutorial... isn't. You're tossed into the deep end of a fight the instant the game starts, and it continually gives you 'helpful' suggestions like "Change weapon firing mode with CHANGE FIRE MODE key." If you somehow figure out how burst fire and missiles work while in the middle of a dogfight where you don't even know the ship's HUD, you may get lucky and beat the 'tutorial' after only half a dozen tries.

Once you're out of the fight, the game is pretty much a sandbox. You'll probably breeze through the first four plot missions and then hit a brick wall (or bright, red, glowing black hole). This game is pretty much the antithesis of *DarkStar One* (*NAG* Oct 2006 pg. 90): you have plenty of ships you can buy and do lots of upgrades and such, but the plot is uninspired and the difficulty curve has been sculpted with a chainsaw. Just to make things fun, there are about a dozen different shield and armour types, and each weapon has a different effectiveness rating on each of these. This leads to fights where either one of you rips the other to pieces instantly, or neither of you can hurt the other and you spend an hour in a dance of death that amounts to killing each other with carpet burns.

That's not to say all is bad. The attribute point system for ship upgrades is cool, though it's hard to get the cash to buy new ships, which mainly have the advantage of higher maximum points. Mining for resources to build booster items is nice too. The graphics are pretty decent and it has some nice things like waypoints, instant travel on the map and warp to station/jump gate functions that are very welcome.

However, it still suffers from space-sim syndrome. That is, nothing but combat is cost effective since there are roughly a billion types of cargo that sell for razor-thin margins. Someone somewhere must think that memorising that station Q in sector 457 wants uranium, cheese, and inflatable rafts, and exports designer cats, luxury cars, and transvestite midget foot fetish porn, while blue jeans are illegal in the sector... but we haven't met that person. For extra fun, the items are very drug-centric and the stations randomly say, "Scanning your cargo for contraband!" when you dock. However, it turns out that's just fluff they say at random and they're not actually doing that - kind of like when the plot says, "You must get to this system immediately!" but you're really supposed to upgrade a bit first.

For those who've played *DarkStar One* to death, you can get another fix here. Oh, and where the heck is multiplayer? It might have saved this game, but it seems to have been ignored completely. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

YOU'VE SEEN THE MOVIE, perhaps even bought the DVD, now live the adventure. I've always wondered what it was like for the pilots and sailors on that eventful day. Moreover, I wonder what it was like for the families who lost loved ones on both sides during the conflict. Do simulations like *Attack on Pearl Harbor* invoke pride or anger or a sense of loss? I don't know, but if not just for the historical significance, the simulation warrants a closer look.

The simulation's developers have most definitely attempted to capitalise on the success of the blockbuster movie, *Pearl Harbor*. The storyline is all too familiar, so no surprises here. As is recorded, 350 aircraft forming part of a Japanese task force, which included six aircraft carriers and two battleships, attacked the American Pacific Fleet as it lay at anchor in *Pearl Harbor*, thus igniting one of WWII's bloodiest conflicts.

The game doesn't attempt to recreate the battle, but instead offers you a chance to change the outcome. Four campaigns are on offer with over 40 missions to fly. In addition to the Pearl Harbor campaigns, you can sign up for the Battle of Midway and Iwo Jima.

Although the simulation has an arcade feel, it has depth. In campaign mode, you can earn medals for valour. Some missions are only available at certain points during campaigns, and if not selected, won't be available again. This feature ensures variety even when you replay missions. As mentioned earlier, the outcome of each campaign is determined by your performance in each mission. Bad performances will lead to an early end to the campaign and defeat. The loss of all your wingmen will result in the end of the game.

Mission results are automatically saved and your commanding officer will provide you with a written report detailing your performance. Promotions and medals are linked to your number of kills as well as how many wingmen you failed to protect.

The controls are simple: a keyboard works well, but a joystick is a better option. Unlike many flight simulators, the only view is from the rear of the aircraft. In this game, it works well as you're able to exercise good situational awareness. On-screen instrumentation is good and the radar, damage meter and gun temperature give you a good overview of your status during missions.

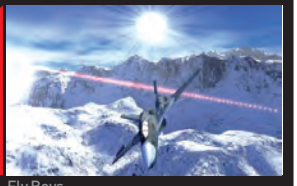
The single-player mode offers campaigns and a dogfight mode is available for instant action. The gameplay is intense with enemy aircraft on your six continually.

Overall, *Attack on Pearl* Harbor offers some incredibly enjoyable arcade-like action. **NAG**

Sean "virtualpilot.co.za" James

Rebel Raiders

BETTER THAN



Fly Boys

AS GOOD AS

BOTTOM LINE

The game appears simplistic but it's not - definitely worth the money.

75
OUT OF 100

A people to manage, an Empire to build

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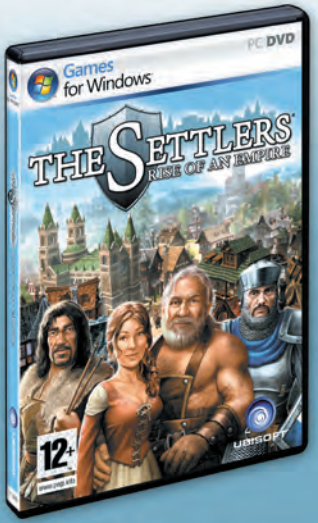

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Look & Listen For the Fans

RRP→ R199 | Publisher→ Electric Distribution | Distributor→ Apex Interactive | Genre→ Combat flight sim | PC Spec→

PC PS2 PS3 PSP XBOX 360 DS Wii GBA MOB

REBEL RAIDERS: OPERATION NIGHTHAWK

REBEL RAIDERS: OPERATION NIGHTHAWK, as a title, isn't very descriptive of the game, nor does it exude an inviting lure to any would-be flight sim nutters. Nonetheless, the job of a *NAG* reviewer can be tough. Some of the crud sent to me by the editor would put the toughest simulator enthusiast into a tailspin. Fortunately, this title doesn't fall within the realms of crud!

Despite the name, the artwork on the DVD does more than hint at what lurks within the game: awesome aircraft and immersive combat action.

The opening sequence reminded me of *Battlestar Galactica*. The action is cinematic, fast-paced and immersive. From the start, you're thrust into the action via a compulsory tutorial. The developers have ensured that even the training is fun.

The aircraft have simple controls and the noticeable absence of complex systems is a relief for arcade simmers. Kando has opted for a keyboard-based interface although most flight simmers would prefer to plug in the old trusted joystick as *Rebel Raiders* allows for this as well. Surprisingly, the keyboard works better than a joystick.

A selection of aircraft becomes available as you progress through the simulation's campaigns. The four aircraft classes that can be unlocked have different characteristics and players will have to take the time to adjust to each one. Special challenges are also unlocked along the way. The challenges add variety to the campaigns.

A variety of weapons is available for all aircraft. The primary weapons consist of missiles, machineguns and guided missiles. Special weapons are available through the Special Weapons function. Special weapons are very powerful, but very difficult to lock onto a target. The multi-missile is by far the most impressive. It launches six missiles simultaneously at the target, but leaves you vulnerable during the targeting phase of the launch sequence. A backfiring missile and smart bomb are also available in the special weapons arsenal. As your kill rate increases so does your resistance to enemy hits. This is also true for the enemy though. As you progress through the game, the missions become tougher to complete. Very little strategic planning is needed. All you need to do is shoot the bogies down while avoiding enemy fire. However, the AI is poorly coded.

A missile avoidance system is provided, but it's not very well implemented. Graphically, the game has much to offer and visuals are rendered in high-fidelity.

Overall, *Rebel Raiders: Operation Nighthawk* is a solid enough performer with great visuals, good sound and exciting, futuristic aircraft – enough said. **NAG**

Sean "virtualpilot.co.za" James

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BOMBERMAN LIVE

RRP→ 800 Microsoft Points | **Publisher→** Hudson Soft | **Distributor→** Microsoft | **Genre→** Action, Puzzle

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

WHEN IT COMES TO developing a *Bomberman* game, there are only two possible outcomes: perfect or horrible. *Bomberman*, in spite of being one of the simplest game ideas out there, requires a certain amount of tact, finesse and attention to detail to avoid making it not fun. *Bomberman LIVE*, thankfully, was in good hands during development and came into the world as a healthy, perfect *Bomberman* with practically zero flaws. Two to eight players (any combination of one to four local players versus up to four others online) compete in a round-based battle, placing bombs and collecting power-ups until only one remains standing: sublime simplicity that creates some of the most exhilarating battles you and a few friends can have. You can collect 'costume balls' by playing Local Match mode, which gives you more costumes for avatar customisation. There's a large variety of maps and game modes to keep you busy and the expansion pack, *Bomb-Up Pack 1*, which will add ten new outfits, two new levels and a new game type, is on its way for only 250 Microsoft Points. It's *Bomberman*, it's fun and it's perfectly executed. **NAG**

Miktar "Pirate Cowboy Ballerina" Dracon

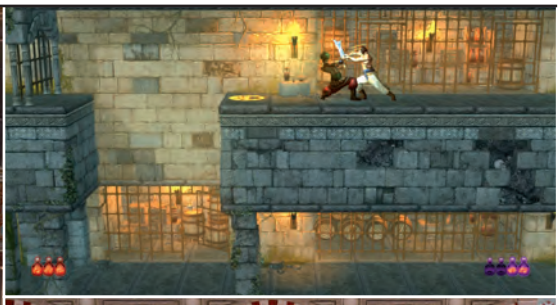
BOTTOM LINE

BOOM! HEADSHOT! Dig Bomberman? Dig this.

81

OUT OF 100

Interpretive dance CAN save lives



PRINCE OF PERSIA CLASSIC

RRP→ 800 Microsoft Points | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Distributor→** Microsoft | **Genre→** Platformer

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

IF YOU'RE REMAKING A classic you have to do it right. Gameloft has proven themselves rather adept at reinterpreting and reinventing – just look at what they've done for mobile gaming - and they certainly knew how to handle *Prince of Persia* for this new remake. Ubisoft could have opted for a pure port using emulation, but instead saw fit to give the experience a new coat of paint and a little TLC. *Classic* contains revamped, updated graphics with extra animations, improved visuals and stunning lighting effects - all without breaking an already finely-tuned experience. The soundtrack is fully orchestrated and some of the new animations are also new moves: you can roll, rebound off walls and twist in midair to catch a ledge you've just run off. The Prince literally looks plucked straight from *The Sands of Time*, as do the Princess and Vizier. Levels now include a checkpoint midway, smoothing the difficulty curve just enough to keep it in line with modern convention. The new Time Trial mode stresses rapid level completion, while Survival is the ultimate in masochism: one life, one hour. You can also view a ghost of yourself when you replay a level, letting you fine-tune your 'run' to the exit against your best time. **NAG**

Miktar "Jaffar" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

A perfect new version, modernised for fun, but treated with reverence where it counts.

84

OUT OF 100

SBK'07

RRP→ R199 | **Publisher→** Blackbean | **Distributor→** Apex Interactive | **Genre→** Racing

BIKE RACING GAMES ARE notorious for either being completely over-the-top arcade-style affairs, or ridiculously realistic and unforgiving simulations with exceedingly steep learning curves. Milestone, *SBK'07*'s developers, have tried to swim against the tide by releasing a title that caters for fans of both genres, and have done a surprisingly good job. Carrying an official license, and featuring 11 different tracks and 15 teams from which to choose your rider, as well as a slew of unlockable content, *SBK'07* won't disappoint fans of the Superbike Championships.

Race options available include quick races, full weekend races, a championship season, and a tricky challenge mode. Where *SBK'07* sets itself apart from its competitors, however, is in allowing the player to select either an arcade or simulation style of play. The arcade setting, as expected, is all about fast and furious racing – your bike is easy to control, you'll seldom crash, and even if you fall behind, it's a simple matter to catch up.

The simulation mode, conversely, offers a greater degree of realism, requiring careful and precise control of the bike in order to succeed. It does, however, allow you to customise settings regarding driver aids, and other variables like crash damage, so the degree of difficulty can be tailored to suit anyone's playing ability.

Despite the dated visuals, which could definitely stand to be a little more detailed, and the relatively plain presentation of the title, *SBK'07* succeeds in accomplishing what it set out to do – it's an approachable and enjoyable motorbike racing title, that manages to be realistic without being inaccessible. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

BOTTOM LINE

Enjoyable racing title, suitable for devoted enthusiasts & novices alike.

72
OUT OF 100

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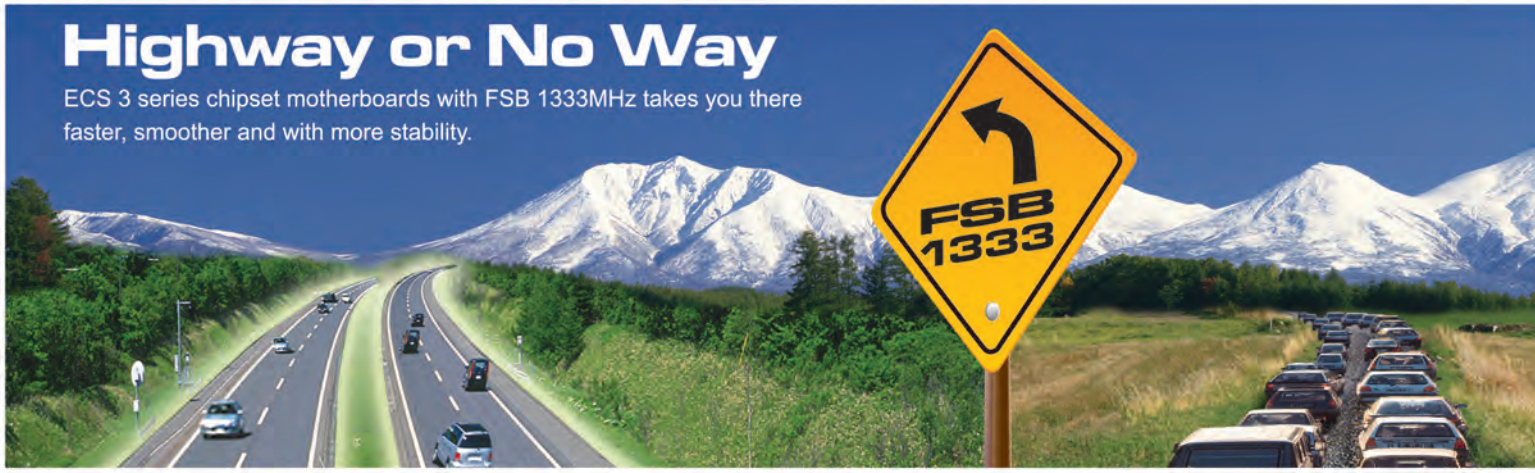

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THE FANTASTIC FOUR: RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER

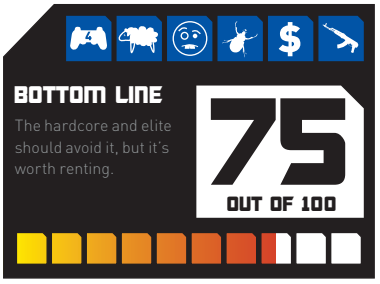
RRP→ R549 | **Publisher→** Activision | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action

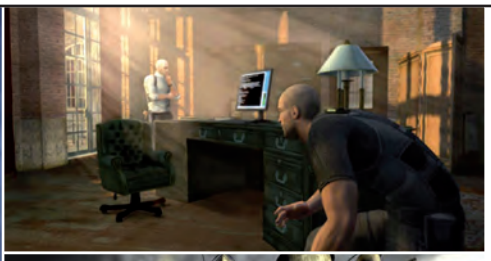
THE WORLD'S IN PERIL! A mysterious entity has arrived from outer space and is causing power failures, not to mention making large holes in the planet's surface. I know this because I sat through the torture of the *Silver Surfer* movie. As is often the case of a licensed game, the development team only had a bit of an idea what was going on and used the larger plot outline, so the game tells you really nothing of the drama and intrigue of the film, including Big Bang jokes.

Many people who tried it or watched me playing it seem to think this game is absolutely terrible. In it, you can swap between the four team members, or up to four players can play together. Essentially, it's *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*: your characters have four normal attacks and four special attacks when you hold in the right trigger. You can swap the team around with the D-pad, though if a character falls during battle, you just need to wait long enough and he/she/it will recover. Puzzles also cater to specific powers: for example, using Mr. Fantastic's high punch to reach buttons high up, The Invisible Woman's ability to walk through force fields or The Human Torch's ability to fly. A basic upgrade system is plunked in all over the show for good measure and you quickly figure out which attacks on whom you prefer. This isn't a very difficult game by any measure and a lot of it will just annoy you to pieces, such as how uncooperative the camera becomes during multiplayer or the legions of generic bad guys. Visually, it's also nothing special and clearly suffers from port syndrome.

But, and this is a big one, it's a game designed for kids and people who would find something like *Ultimate Alliance* too much too handle. In the tradition of *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Incredibles*, it's a good license game for novice gamers and a suck-fest for anyone more accomplished. So, don't be surprised by the score - it's a good license game. **NAG**

James Francis





TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

RRP→ R599 | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Stealth Action

THE ONE THING ABOUT the new *Splinter Cell* title, *Double Agent*, which not many people have yet realised, is that there are two very different versions of the game out there with two different storylines. One is for the next-gen market and the other for the older consoles. Take a guess which one this review will focus on.

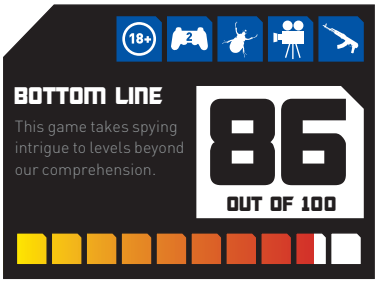
The game starts with our hero, Sam Fisher, flying to Iceland to avert a missile attack by Islamic terrorists. Although he's successful, after the mission he's told about a tragedy in his family, which ultimately causes him to become an undercover operative who is sent to Ellsworth Prison where he must escape and join the JBA.

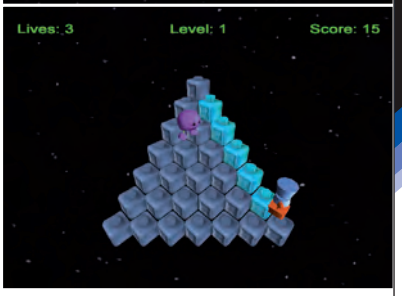
At this point, the player must make various decisions that will ultimately result in him or her gaining or losing the trust of either the JBA or the government Sam Fisher works for. These decisions will have repercussions, and if done right, the player will be given access to other areas and more in-depth story arcs with one of the endings leading to the 2008 title, *Conviction*.

This means that players will be able to play through the game multiple times looking for that fabled "To Be Continued" dialogue at the end.

Splinter Cell: Double Agent is well worth the money for any of the consoles, but if you own a PS3, make sure you get it. NAG

Justin Slabbert





THE ARCADE

RRP→ TBA | **Publisher→** SCEE | **Distributor→** Apex Interactive | **Genre→** Budget

JUST KEEP ON WALKING. If you spot this on a shelf somewhere, don't make eye contact: just pull up your coat collar and pretend you didn't notice it. If you so much as even look at the back of its box, it means that you've touched this abomination and will require fire to purge yourself. We don't want people to set themselves on fire, that's why we review titles such as these: we're professionals, and we have the right equipment for handling hazardous materials. Using a pair of hardened steel tongs, we opened the case and extracted the disc, placing it inside our reinforced PlayStation 2 Ultra Edition (on loan from NASA). *The Arcade* is a collection of ten 'classic' games like *Joust*, *Centipede*, *Bomberman* and *Q*bert*, but minus any kind of fun whatsoever. The developers basically remade the 'classics', stripping all nuance and balance, shoving in some badly-conceived 3D graphics just for the sake of it, and then went home to have a nap after a hard day's work. Jokes aside, this is trash and anyone will regret buying it. It's a cheap knockoff, a poor product and a shameless attempt at making a quick buck. **NAG**

Miktar "Eeeeew" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

Please don't purchase this game!

30

OUT OF 100

Look & Listen
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Wii
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CRICKET 2005

RRP→ R90 | **Publisher→** EA | **Distributor→** EA South Africa | **Genre→** Sport | **PC Spec→** 1 2 3 4 5

HAVE YOU EVER HAD the urge to crack leather against willow or bowl a maiden over? If you answer yes, then EA's Cricket 2005 might just be the budget game you need to fill that void. This series has been around for years, and if you've ever played a virtual cricket game, chances are it was from the EA stable. As with most games, if you own an older copy of a game, you'll notice that a newer release offers a vast improvement compared to the older game. The nice thing about budget releases is their low system requirements. If your PC's not that ancient, Cricket 2005 will run beautifully. With all your favourite and most-hated international and domestic cricket teams and all the pitches you'll ever need, this game brings cricket alive in its own way, from the excitement of Pro20 Cricket to the five-day test version. You can set up your match in any way you choose. In the Create a Player mode, you can create and customise your players and teams. Moreover, thanks to over a thousand new motion-captured moves, your team feels pretty real. In terms of gameplay, well, you really have two choices: either you're an EA fan or you prefer the Brian Lara range. Even though I'm a Brian Lara fan, this EA version is loads of fun to play. It's superior to its predecessor in all aspects and sounds and feels just like the real thing. **NAG**

Eddie Francis

GUILD WARS DOUBLE PACK
(GUILD WARS: PROPHECIES & GUILD WARS: FACTIONS)

RRP→ R299 | **Publisher→** NCsoft | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Competitive online role-playing game (CORPG) | **PC Spec→** 1 2 3 4 5

WHAT MAKES THE GUILD Wars Double Pack so interesting is that you get a *Guild Wars* access code and all the *Prophecies* data on a DVD, as well as a *Guild Wars: Factions* access code and all the Factions data on another DVD. This means that if you already own *Guild Wars: Nightfall* and you're looking to get *Factions* and *Prophecies*, this is a good deal. You can add the two access codes to your existing account and then install the data on the two DVDs on your PC, which lowers how much you have to download for both dramatically.

If you've never played *Guild Wars*, it's a CORPG (competitive online role-playing game) with no monthly fees and a heavy emphasis on teaming up to complete missions. What sets *Guild Wars* apart from most MMO titles is that there is no emphasis on grinding just to level up, as skills have no level requirement. With *Prophecies* and *Factions*, there are 40 missions, more than 700 skills across eight professions, as well as PvP Alliance Battles and cooperative Challenge Missions.

For it's low price, the Double Pack is worth it if you want to expand your *Guild Wars* experience to the continents of Tyria and Cantha, or if you're new and itching to see what *Guild Wars* is all about. You don't need *Nightfall* to enjoy *Prophecies* or *Factions*, and you can start with either *Factions* or *Prophecies* depending on which one tickles your fancy. It's easy on bandwidth and can be played over low-speed, dial-up connections. **NAG**

Miktar "Charrbait" Dracon

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

RED ORCHESTRA: OSTFRONT 41-45

THE GAME MODDING SCENE has always been one of great interest for some and has, to a degree, launched many indie studios. The creative team behind *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* is no different. This new title is based on the *Unreal Tournament 2004* mod, *Red Orchestra: Combined Arms*, and will once again throw players into the war-torn Eastern Front where the Germans and the Soviets are battling it out. Players will be able to choose either side and enter the various multiplayer maps with completely remodelled weapons and vehicles.

The game unfortunately employs some outdated graphics. However, although the game may lack realism, details more than make up for it. Instead of the usual crosshairs found in FPS titles, *Red Orchestra* makes use of a 3D line of sight on the various guns. The game features an advanced ballistic system, which incorporates various things like bullet drop and flight times. Therefore, when a player wants to take out something at a distance, he or she must take into account the trajectory and velocity of the bullet and the speed at which the target moves. This feature isn't confined to handheld weapons, but is also employed on vehicles. In terms of vehicles, the player will be able to assume one of the various duties onboard, such as driver, gunner and various others, depending on the type of vehicle they're in.

While this game is a multiplayer game, it has a single-player practice mode. Unfortunately, due to its multiplayer nature, if you don't have a fast Internet connection or you're not playing against others on a LAN, then this game isn't for you. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert

BOTTOM LINE

A multiplayer WWII game that is focused on realism.

83

OUT OF 100

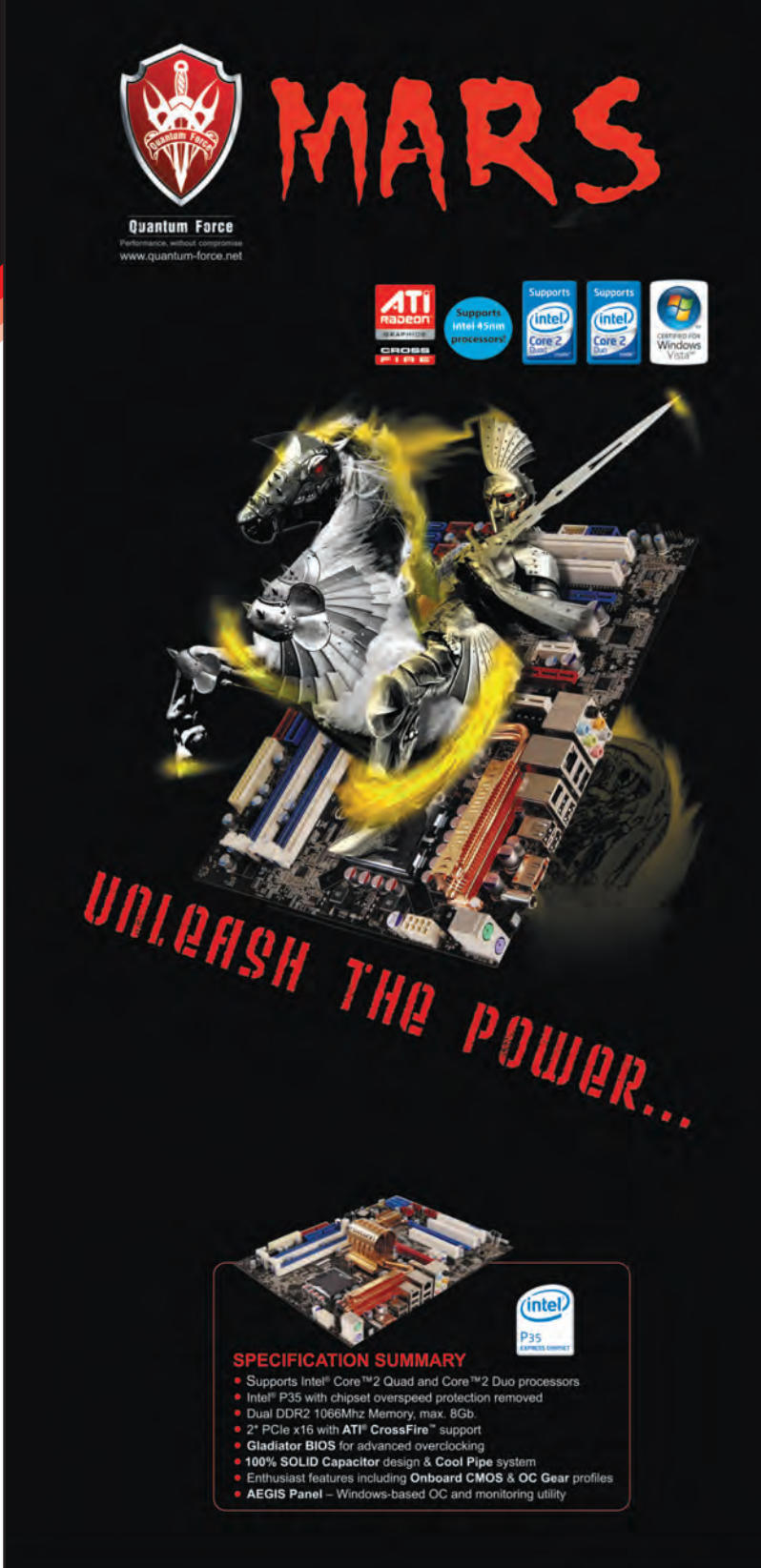
Look & Listen

For the Fans

RRP→ R299 | Publisher→ Bold Games | Distributor→ Apex Interactive | Genre→ FPS | PCSpec→

1 2 **3** 4 5

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB



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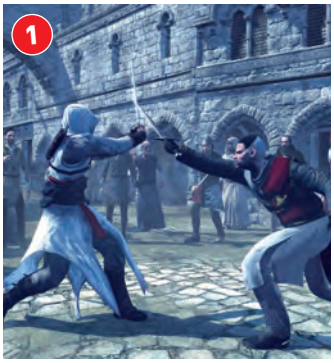

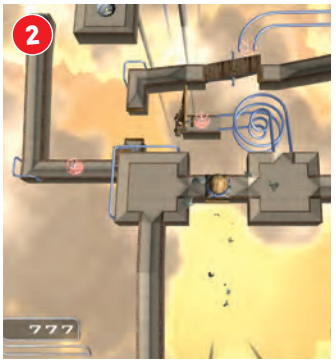

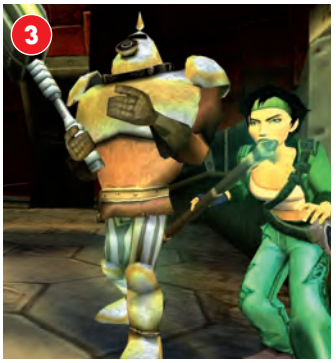

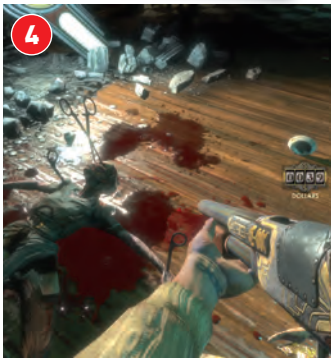

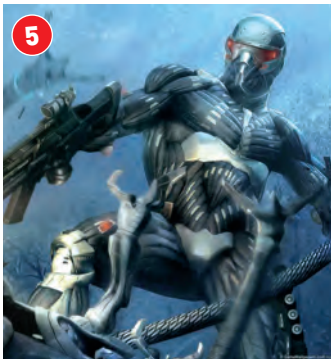

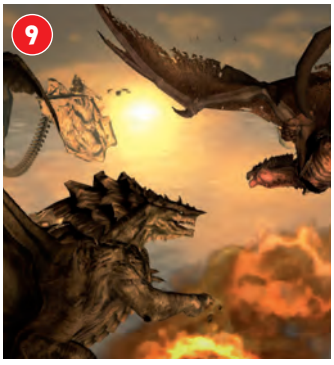

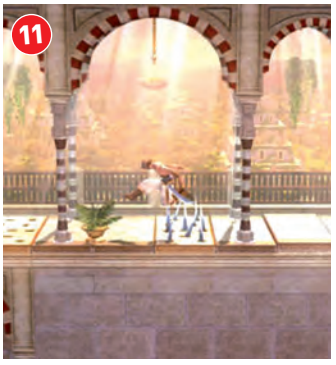

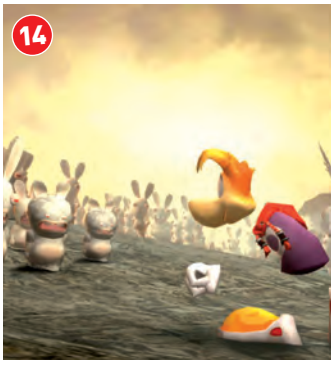

LAST MONTH'S GAMES: **1.** Cannon Fodder; **2.** Command & Conquer; **3.** Duke Nukem 3D; **4.** Full Throttle; **5.** Hi-Octane; **6.** Ivan "Iron Man" Stewart's Super Off Road; **7.** Jazz Jackrabbit; **8.** Jill of the Jungle; **9.** Kingpin; **10.** MDK; **11.** One Must Fall: 2097; **12.** Redneck Rampage; **13.** Rise of the Triad; **14.** Shadow Warrior; **15.** The Secret of Monkey Island; **16.** Warcraft II

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LOCK AND LOAD

In addition to your fireball and fizz-bang Plasmids, there's an assortment of somewhat more standard weapons lying around, waiting to be picked up and used. Gotta collect 'em all!

The only melee weapon you'll find in Rapture is a wrench. That said, your wrench damage can be significantly enhanced with a number of Physical and Combat Tonics. In fact, once this baby is backed up with a potent cocktail of gene Tonics, it becomes a rather formidable weapon indeed, capable of bludgeoning just about anything except the Big Daddies into sandwich spread.

When it comes to pushing lead, there are a number of ready agents on offer. There's a .38 calibre pistol, quick to squeeze rounds and very accurate, as well as that trusty old veteran, the shotgun, while a machine gun completes the complement of traditional slug-spitters. There's also a grenade launcher, a crossbow, and the almost game-breaking chemical thrower. Each weapon takes three different types of ammunition, and you'll have to chop and change these to take advantage of enemy weaknesses. The pistol's antipersonnel rounds, for example, work quite a treat against most Splicers, while equipping the chemical thrower with electric gel is a sure-fire way to lay a lumbering Rosie to eternal rest. While selecting the appropriate ammunition is mostly commonsensical (nobody likes a shotgun blast to the face at close range), the most valuable source affecting your decision will be the research camera. Use it.

All the weapons can be upgraded with various nuts and bolts at the Power To The People stations scattered throughout Rapture. These include a substantially larger ammunition capacity for the pistol, for example, as well as improved damage for the shotgun and diminished recoil from the otherwise rather unwieldy machine gun.

HAPPY SNAPPER

During the course of your unscheduled tour of Rapture, you're almost certain to become the proud – and subsequently somewhat intrepid – new owner of a fancy research camera. These have been abandoned by the former law enforcement agency of the city, and by dint of some marvellous newfangled 'electrickery' are able to analyse and parse photographic elements for information. A well-timed and expertly framed shot of a spider Splicer scuttling across the ceiling is likely to yield all manner of intriguing details about this monstrosity, including its weak spots and attack strategies. These details will assist you in improving counteroffensive measures and improve your chances against this creature when you next encounter one.

The advantage of this is that you'll gain some significant damage bonuses against enemies you've photographed, and sometimes a little more.

Besides, once you've fully researched a subject (something that takes time, dedication, and more than a little intestinal fortitude), you're awarded some sort of bumper prize, more often than not a gene Tonic that you wouldn't find anywhere else. In fact, some of the niftiest gene Tonics can be found after a hard day's snapping. Instant Turret hacking, anyone? Yes, please.

Some photographs are more useful than others. Much as in real life, a blurry close-up of something that might be a shoe, possibly a bed or maybe a Big Daddy isn't much use to anyone. Photographs are graded A, B or C, with additional options for multiple targets and lots of action, not to mention subject placement within the shot. The best photographs, therefore, are those that feature three or four deranged Lummoxes, centred in the shot with their heads and feet in frame, throwing themselves at you with guns ablaze.

> It was not impossible to build Rapture at the bottom of the sea; it was impossible to build it anywhere else
> **- Andrew Ryan**

PLASMIDS

You'll need Plasmids to survive Rapture, as they're your active attack and defence. Here's a list of some of the more important Plasmids, their purchase cost, where they can be found and what they're good for. (Note, a Gatherers Garden will sell higher-level Plasmids for cheaper later and won't sell lower-level Plasmids once the higher level becomes available - for example, when you can buy Electro Bolt 3 for cheap, Electro Bolt 1 and 2 won't appear in the vending machine anymore.)

CYCLONE TRAP 2

Cost: 80
Location: Gatherers Garden in Hephestus Core
Use Against: Splicers (all types)
Comments: The Cyclone Trap is a novelty power, fun for throwing Splicers up into the air, but not that useful in proper combat.

ELECTRO BOLT 3

Cost: 150
Location: Gatherers Garden in Hephestus Core
Use Against: All Enemies
Comments: The most effective Plasmid for almost any situation - the third version paralyses much longer.

HYPNOTIZE BIG DADDY 2

Cost: None
Location: Gatherers Garden in Fort Frolic (only if you rescue Little Sisters)
Use Against: Big Daddies (both types)
Comments: Lobbing this at a Big Daddy makes him think you're a Little Sister, and he'll do anything to protect you. Great for turning the tide of battle.

INSECT SWARM 3

Cost: 120
Location: Gatherers Garden in Olympus Heights
Use Against: Splicers (all types); Big Daddies (both types)
Comments: This cloud of irate insects goes through walls and up stairs, great for flushing out Splicers in a dark room or giving yourself an opportunity to escape.

TARGET DUMMY

Cost: 60
Location: Gatherers Garden in Lower Wharf
Use Against: Splicers (all types); Big Daddies (both types)
Comments: While not an incredible power, Target Dummy remains surprising useful. You can use a Target Dummy to distract a Turret, which will become hackable for the duration of the Plasmid.

TONICS

As passive upgrades, Tonics require no activation and exist to make your life easier in certain situations. Tonics come in Combat, Engineering and Physical flavours and there are 53 to be found in Rapture. Here's a list of the more important ones, their purchase cost and where you can find them.

COMBAT

ELECTRIC FLESH 2

Cost: None
Location: Fontaine's Apartment, top floor on a desk
Comments: Later in the game, Splicers start electrifying their weapons. This Tonic greatly reduces electrical damage.

PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE 2

Cost: None
Location: You get this Tonic for free after filling the second research bar on 'Rosie'
Comments: With this, research is a breeze. It lets you research enemies and objects much faster, which will in turn give you even more Plasmids and Tonics.

WRENCH LURKER 2

Cost: 50
Location: Gatherers Garden in Hephestus Core
Comment: When you cannot be a Ninja, you can be a Wrench Ninja. This tonic almost totally silences your footsteps and lets you do massive damage to an unsuspecting Splicer.

ENGINEERING

Clever Inventor
Cost: None
Location: Suchong's Apartment, in the flooded room
Comments: This lowers how many components you need when Inventing by one, which is great for making more heat-seeking rockets. Best when combined with:

PROLIFIC INVENTOR

Cost: None
Location: Gatherers Garden in Apollo Square (only if you rescue Little Sisters)
Comments: With this, you double the amount of items you create when Inventing, using your Components more efficiently.

SPEEDY HACKER 2

Cost: 50
Location: Gatherers Garden in Olympus Heights
Comments: The best version of the best hacking Tonic: this slows down the water flow during hacking, giving you ample time to bend those Cameras and Turrets at your will.

PHYSICAL

BLOODLUST (INVENT)

Cost: 4 Glue, 3 Enzyme, 2 Empty Hypo
Comments: If you love the Wrench, you'll love this Tonic, which lets you suck some EVE and Health from enemies you bludgeon.

HACKERS DELIGHT 3

Cost: None
Location: In Failsafe Armored Escorts by all the Big Daddy Helmets
Comments: Every time you hack with this Tonic equipped you get a large amount of health back. Using the AutoHack tool also causes this to activate.

NATURAL CAMOUFLAGE

Cost: None
Advantage: Fully research the 'Houdini Splicer' twice
Comments: If nobody knows you're there, simply disappear. This Tonic turns you invisible, even to Security Bots, so you can just stand around and wait for the Security Alarm to stop.

SCROUNGER

Cost: None
Advantage: Fully research 'Leadhead Splicers' twice
Comments: If you're not happy with what you find on bodies or in boxes, this Tonic lets you trade your find for something better - or if you're unlucky, something worse.

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH!

Think Research is only for lab-coat wearing academics? Think again! Research often leads to interesting surprises! Did we mention automatically Insta-Hacked Turrets?

THUGGISH SPLICER

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: SportBoost Tonic
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: SportBoost 2 Tonic
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

LEADHEAD SPLICER

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Scrounger Tonic
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Static Discharge 2 Tonic
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

SPIDER SPLICER

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Spider Splicer organs are turned into first-aid kits
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Extra Nutrition 3 Tonic
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

NITRO SPLICER

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Permanent 15% chance that any enemy grenade is a dud
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Permanent 35% chance that any enemy grenade is a dud
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

HOUDINI SPLICER

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Natural Camouflage Tonic
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Easier to see where Houdini Splicers will reappear
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

SECURITY CAMERA

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Twice as much film found on destroyed Cameras
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Flow speed reduced while hacking any Camera
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

SECURITY BOT

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Security Expert 2 Tonic
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Hacking Security Bots is instant and automatic
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

TURRET

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Twice as much machinegun ammo found on destroyed Turrets
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Hacking Turrets is instant and automatic
Level 5: Increased Damage +++
Note: All types of Turrets are in the same category

LITTLE SISTER

Level 1: Small increase to your maximum Health and EVE
Level 2: Small increase to your maximum Health and EVE
Level 3: Small increase to your maximum Health and EVE
Level 4: Small increase to your maximum Health and EVE
Level 5: Small increase to your maximum Health and EVE

BOUNCER

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Wrench Jockey 2 Tonic
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Permanent 50% increase to Wrench damage
Level 5: Increased Damage +++

ROSIE

Level 1: Increased Damage +
Level 2: Photographer's Eye 2 Tonic
Level 3: Increased Damage ++
Level 4: Rosie drops almost always contain rare invention parts
Level 5: Increased Damage +++ **NAG**

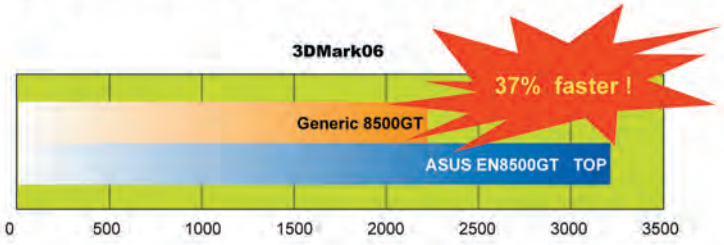
ASUS EN8500GT TOP

37% faster!

With a reputation of providing the world's best motherboards, I can't help but feel that their new graphics card, the ASUS EN8500GT TOP/HTP/256M, will do spectacularly well. This excellent piece of graphics hardware features an astonishing overclocking performance and a unique fansink design to provide you with the best possible graphics. Additionally, it will be released with the ASUS exclusive official World Touring Car Championship game – RACE™ THE WTCC – giving all you car racing aficionados a real taste of the World Touring Car Championship scene.

37% Performance Upgrade

With the EN8500GT TOP, you can expect engine clock performance boosts from 450MHz up to an incredible 600MHz. Such an amazing performance upgrade helps raise the 3DMark06 score from 2211 to 3043 – an astonishing 37% faster than any other reference design boards. Additionally, The EN8500GT TOP also utilizes a new generation of specially designed cooling fans that effectively dissipates heat – lowering temperatures by 18ºC in comparison to reference design boards.



Bundled Official WTCC Game – RACE™ THE WTCC

RACE™ THE WTCC is the first game that focuses on the intense action of the exciting WTCC Championship. In this game, you will be able to experience vivid and life-like representations and simulations of the cars and driving styles of the championship. With such ultra-realistic graphics, a graphics card like the ASUS EN8500GT TOP/HTP/256M truly shines with its powerful performance and high quality to bring out the best visual experience of this highly realistic racing game.

Q&A: BLUE DRAGON

A BOY ENLISTING THE HELP OF HIS FRIEND TRIES TO STOP A GIANT SAND SHARK TEARING APART THEIR HUMBLE VILLAGE. WHAT COULD GO WRONG? WELL, EVERYTHING, OBVIOUSLY, AS OUR TRIO (A GIRL JOINS THEIR VALIANT ATTEMPTS) TUMBLE DOWN A CHASM, BUT SOON EACH ENDS UP WITH SHADOW-CHANGING ABILITIES THAT WILL PUMMEL ANYTHING AT THEIR COMMAND. THE MIND BEHIND THIS JRPG IS NONE OTHER THAN *FINAL FANTASY* CREATOR AND MISTWALKER FOUNDER, HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI, SO WE JUMPED AT THE CHANCE TO ASK HIM A FEW QUESTIONS.

Where did the story come from? What inspired it and was the clean cartoon style always part of the plan?
It all started with the shadows. I wanted to create a story in which characters travel with their shadows. A shadow is a reflection of oneself. I wanted to create not just a story, but a game that showed that with personal growth comes the growth of your shadow. That was the core concept that I was pursuing when I started developing the game.

How much of *Blue Dragon*'s future will be driven by downloadable content?
We will follow up with three sets of DLC/PDLC, as were released in Japan post-launch. While it's premature to comment on which one is free, our goal is to continue to enhance the role-playing game experience even after 40-plus hours of gameplay. Downloadable content deals with a new difficulty level, many unlockable

items, and a new dungeon with eight randomised patterns and a new set of environments and monsters.

***Blue Dragon* doesn't take any real risks when it comes to the JRPG formula. What did you do to make the game stand out in what is a really a crowded genre?**
We put an emphasis on 'ease of play'. We made it easy to start the game, even for people who have never played RPGs. As they get into the story, they'll get used to the complex system and their skills will naturally improve.

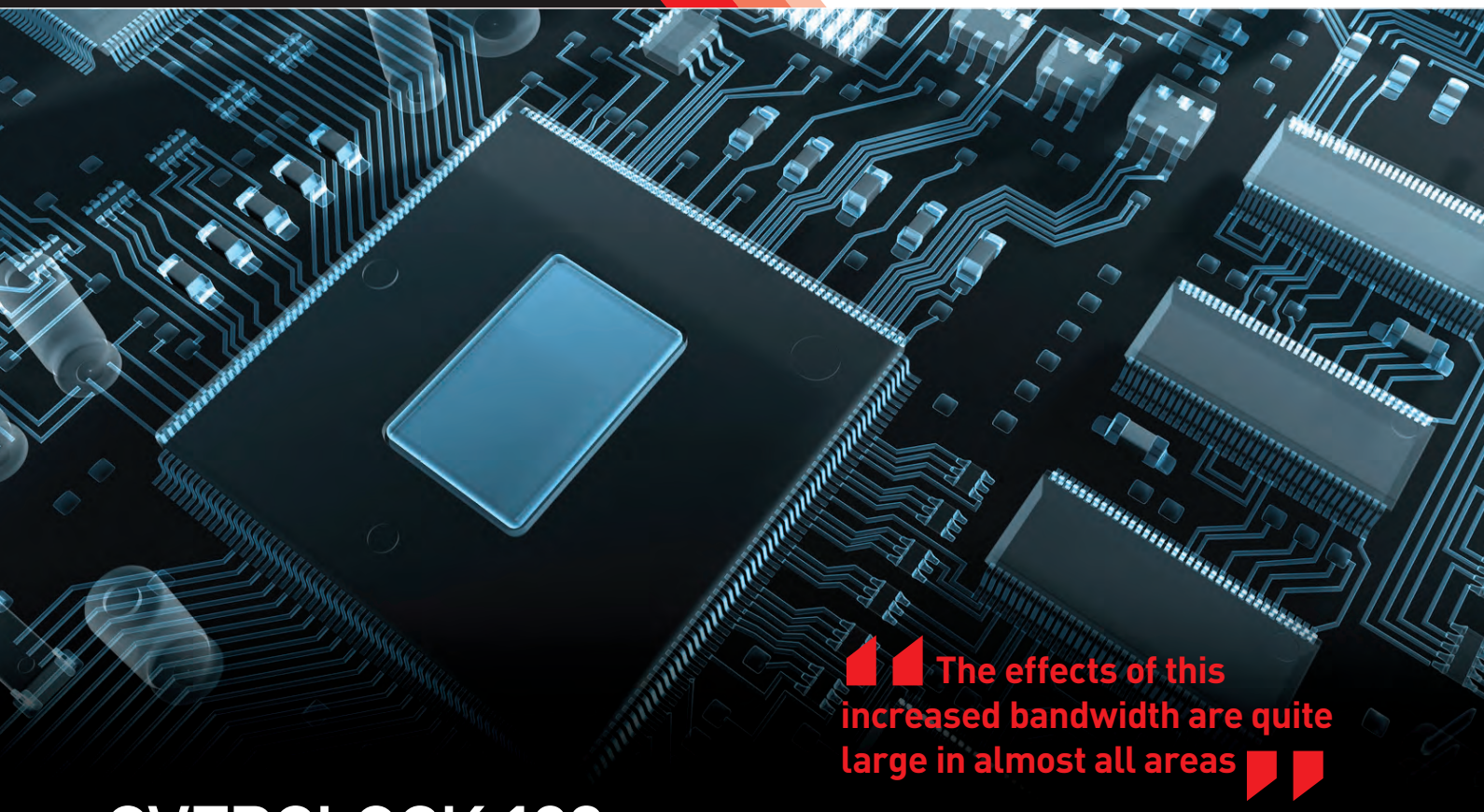
JRPGs have long been strongest on Sony's platforms, making *Blue Dragon* one of the most important games the 360 will ever see. Was this pressure ever a factor in the development?
There was no pressure. You cannot create a good piece of work if you're feeling tense. I focused on being spontaneous and pushing myself to do my best. I think it panned out.

***Blue Dragon* brought together yourself, Nobuo Uematsu and Akira Toriyama. How well did this relationship work?**
We discussed many things. Mr Uematsu first raised the idea of working together. I really appreciate a friend who shared hardships with me in the past.
As for Toriyama-san, basic things such as the setup of the shadows, etc. were explained and he was asked to take charge of these. However, everything related to design was completely entrusted to him.

Was any development focus aimed at Western audiences or is this a game developed for Japanese gamers?
As was the case with *Final Fantasy*, I'm less concerned with a target audience when developing games. I believe in the 'enjoyment' and 'fun' that transcend age and nationality, and I just thought about sticking to the direction that was very clear in my mind.

You must be very happy with *Blue Dragon*'s success in Japan. You even outsold *Twilight Princess* for a while! Did you expect it to do so well?
I have focused on creating an exciting game, and I always will. As a matter of fact, if this exciting game has any positive impact on console adoption, it'll be a joyful thing. Whether or not it will sell also depends on the luck of the time, but I've decided not to worry about it too much. More importantly, I care about the reviews that it receives after being sold. I think that the quality of your work is most important to you and has the most influence.

What is Mistwalker's future plans for games on the 360?
I'm exploring various concepts. I believe I'll be able to announce something soon. **NAG**



> The effects of this increased bandwidth are quite large in almost all areas

OVERCLOCK 102

IN THE AUGUST ISSUE, we looked at AMD CPU overclocking. This month we pick up where we left off with fine-tuning the RAM on DDR2 platforms for both AM2 and LGA775.

As stated last month, the highest frequency and tightest timings will result in the best performance. With an AM2 platform, you inherently have massive amounts of bandwidth even with DDR2 533. The memory bandwidth, while dependent on CPU speed, will be anywhere from 5.9GB/sec when using a low-end, low-clock CPU to 8GB/sec when using an Athlon X2 5000+ or higher. Making use of high-speed RAM, it's possible to record figures of 14GB/sec or more in measured memory bandwidth tests. Since bandwidth isn't really a problem on AM2 platforms, timings are crucial. One school of thought postulates that timings aren't that important because memory transactions terminate inside the CPU, so latency isn't such a major issue. Then there are those who believe that it's important where the controller is and that high latencies affect the CPU far more than a local on-die cache. Therefore, latencies beat outright bandwidth. As with most arguments, the truth lies somewhere in between and you'll have to find the exact point where sacrificing timings for a higher frequency yields negative results. With DDR, setting memory speed is quite easy and straightforward. With DDR2, however, the memory speed is not exactly, "What you set is what you get." We'll cover this at a later stage.

Moving on to the Intel 775 platform, high memory bandwidth isn't so easy to achieve. Since the FSB is so important to this platform, it's of paramount importance to understand the relationship between the memory speed hub in the Northbridge and the memory speed itself. Given that the reference FSB speed for the latest Intel offerings is 333MHz SDR (1,333MHz QDR), the maximum theoretical bandwidth that can be achieved is 5.3GB/sec (counting SDR rates). However, the data rate is actually calculated and operated at twice that, as data is transferred at the rise and fall edge of the clock. Therefore, the maximum data rate is actually 10.6GB/sec. However, because the controller is situated away from the CPU where the data must eventually get to, the bandwidth efficiency is lower than what one would like it to be. This situation is worsened by various timings and settings within the Northbridge, which further reduce efficiency (between 59% and 61% in most cases). This kind of efficiency leads to data rates of around 6GB/sec to 6.5GB/sec.

There's no way to influence or change this, so all we can do is increase the FSB. Assuming that efficiency stays the same, we would need a 400MHz FSB to give us about 7.8GB/sec of bandwidth, which is much better than the 6.4GB/sec recorded earlier. The effects of this increased bandwidth are quite large in almost all areas. Sometimes the benefits outweigh losing 100MHz on the CPU clock as the processor is starved of bandwidth. The large on-die cache makes up for this inefficiency quite well, and even with a 99% cache hit rate, there are some data sets that must be pulled from main memory. In such cases, the added memory bandwidth from the increased FSB will pay huge dividends.

Timings will make a difference - quite a big difference - but for a different reason than they do on an AMD platform. However, we'll cover this next month along with tips on how to maximise bandwidth and timings on both platforms. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

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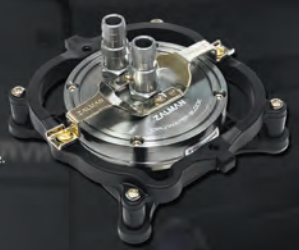

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GROUND ZERO

by Toby Hudon

MORE POWER

YOU MAY THINK THAT I've ranted enough about power supplies last month. Well, you're wrong. I still have a few things to say that didn't make it due to space. In particular, how power affects overclocking.

Okay overclockers, here's a fun formula for you: Power = voltage^2 x frequency. That's how you figure out how much power your CPU uses, and it roughly correlates to heat output. Yes, I know this ignores leakage, but I'm not about to give a lecture on semiconductor physics in my column. However, the reason you want a big cooler for OCing is: less heat = less resistance = less voltage required = more headroom for frequency boost in the same power footprint. This is why water-cooling and vapour phase work, but pushing your voltage very high doesn't.

For example, my QX6700 runs at 3.66GHz and 1.7V. The base rating at 2.66GHz and 1.35V is 135W (thermal) peak according to Intel. At the settings I use, it puts out more than double that - in the order of 300W! Seriously, and the specs on my Swiftech show that it should be dissipating 292W at ambient + 40°C (my load temps are 62-66°C, do the math). And that's just heat; obviously electrical draw must be more than that! There's a reason Swiftech has brought out a 3mm x 120mm fan-sized radiator to replace the 2mm x 120mm I'm running now. The new model dissipates 500W with a 10°C temperature delta! Now add an overclocked chipset, an overclocked GTX, a four HDD RAID, the water cooler's pump... you can see where I'm going. Suddenly 1,000W doesn't seem that unreasonable, does it?

So the claims that PSU manufacturers are trying to market ridiculously excessive units is both true and untrue. With your regular 65W max Core 2 Duo, there's no way you'll need some of these gigantic expensive supplies. However, the overclocking part of the market needs as much power as they can get - possibly more.

Now, let's talk about another kind of power for a little bit. I'm sure that unless you've been under a rock, you've heard of *BioShock*, which is now out. You may even have played it. If you've bought it, you may have noticed that it uses an extremely aggressive version of SecuROM.

Now, copy protection is one thing. Personally, I'm not a big fan of it since I believe it's mostly overdone and just inconveniences people who have actually bought legal versions, while people who want to steal it have hassle-free pirated versions. But that's a debate for another time.

What really gets me though is how these guys dare think they have the right to dictate what software people can and cannot run on their machines! I don't care who you are. What other apps I run is none of your business! Especially when it's something like ProcessExplorer, a completely legitimate application, or a tool designed to keep the registry clean by monitoring changes so they can be properly undone when an app is uninstalled. Oh, but this might give away the secrets of what's been installed to spy on you, so we can't have that! Good luck trying to use it as an excuse to return opened software too! No, you'll just have to use it as a coaster.

This kind of thing has been going on for some time now, quite a few games in the past have done crap like this, and we need to make sure we don't allow it. I've heard that *BioShock*'s creators have admitted that they had screwed up with this and a future patch will be fixing it, so kudos to them. However, not every game publisher is so realistic. I'm particularly worried about the rising popularity of Steam.

Why? I don't have an Internet connection at home. Not because I can't get one, or can't afford it, but because I don't want one! I'm perfectly happy not being able to drag my work home with me or waste away the hours refreshing pointless forums and news sites. Since I moved a few months ago, I've found I have way more time for gaming and other pursuits when the Internet isn't sucking away the free time with the "I'll just check my mail... or maybe the *NAG* forums... since I'm on let me check Fark quick..." lure.

Therefore, as you can imagine, it's really annoying when you want to do all your game-playing at home and the games decide, "Oh but you NEED an Internet connection," even for a single-player game! Hate to break it to you guys, but you're probably hurting your sales here, since quite a few people still play single-player and don't have great broadband, even in First World countries. **NAG**

"What really gets me though is how these guys dare think they have the right to dictate what software people can and cannot run on their machines! What other apps I run is none of your business!"

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HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

THE FUN AND GAMES

OVER THE LAST TEN years or so, hardware manufacturers have been falling into obscurity. Some chose to focus on entirely different businesses and others just seized to exist. One doesn't have to go far or think hard to find them. At the beginning of the 3D accelerator boom in the late nineties, we had the likes of PowerVR, 3Dfx, S3, Matrox, Rendition and others. They all fell by the wayside and as it stands today, NVIDIA really is the last man standing.

The thing is, this was bound to happen. There were no strong-arm tactics applied to anyone. It wasn't necessarily NVIDIA's superior products or business savvy. In simpler terms, it's not due to NVIDIA doing well but more the others getting it very wrong. Fast forward to this century and we're left with only one independent company. While some may shout at the top of their voices that their favourite IHV won (I was one of them at some point), the truth is that this cannot go on for much longer.

As much as it's necessary to always have a number one, a situation where there only is one is the worst that could happen. Among endless promises from S3 and others of its calibre, we have yet to see a descent graphics card. This is puzzling considering that as an IHV with engineers, labs, IP and time you don't have to compete at the high end. The low to mid range would do just fine. There's far more people who buy X1600-class graphics cards than there are who buy an 8800ULTRA. So, what exactly is happening here?

This one or one and a half horse race has even put pressure on the IHV partners. In all honesty, there really isn't a difference between brand X's GeForce 8800GTX and brand Y's GeForce 8800GTX. They're all the same, usually with the same games, same promises and if there are any, troubles. It's the same vanilla ice cream in a different wrapping and at different prices.

Once again, this situation cannot last forever. Something will need to change or the PC will slowly turn into a console-like appliance. Sure, many good things will come with uniformity, but true ingenuity and progress only come from a diverse environment.

This extends past graphics cards to other system components as well. It worked in Creative's favour that everybody else who had existed in the mainstream, add-in sound card market fell by the wayside. For years on end, this situation contributed to Creative's growth and dominance. However, it all started to fall apart a few years ago. Now, with onboard audio improving, other players are coming into the market and Vista's audio interface standard is a pain in the posterior for the company. It'll start to fall apart at an even quicker pace. How long do we think it'll be before the same thing happens to our beloved NVIDIA?

Make no mistake about it. It has been a fun, unusually emotional and technically-challenging journey being a fan (NVIDIOT at the worst of times) of Graphzilla. However, when the fun stops and we realise that reality rarely ever smiles, we'll see that we're worse off now than we've ever been.

If all this seems too farfetched for you, just look at a modern gaming machine. It's likely dominated by far fewer brands than it would've been in the nineties. Years from now we may end up with only a choice of either buying a white box or black box. **NAG**

“In all honesty, there really isn't a difference between brand X's GeForce 8800GTX and brand Y's GeForce 8800GTX. They're all the same, usually with the same games, same promises and if there are any, troubles.”

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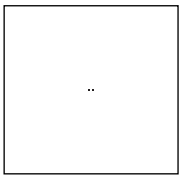
Gaming Mice Roundup

WITH RAGE UPON US, it's time for gaming, which means it's time for everyone to break out their LAN kit and head off to the Coca-Cola Dome for some serious competition. This will inevitably lead to the comparison of gaming mice, which many will attribute their performance to as either the source of credit or the target of blame.

Most likely, there will be a big pissing contest over DPI numbers, and possibly USB polling speed. However, these are actually not major factors in mouse performance. For one thing, the maximum DPI on gaming mice exceeds human motor skills by a laughable margin. Think about it. The magazine you're reading is printed at 300dpi. For a 2,400dpi resolution, you'd need to move one eighth of one pixel on this page. We've placed a pair of nine-pixel (3 x 3) dots elsewhere on the page for you. Surely, if you can tell the difference between a one eighth pixel 2,400dpi, a quarter pixel 1,200dpi, or a half pixel 600dpi mouse, your l33t sk1llz can handle a ten pixel movement with ease. Go ahead - try it. See if you can uncover one dot but not the other. Go on, it's only a mere 100dpi; surely it's not too much of a challenge.

As for USB polling rate, the default is 125Hz (8ms). Now, your neuromuscular system needs about 50ms of nerve travel time and muscle contraction time to perform a response. The fastest vertebrate, the Wood Stork, can do it in 25ms. Nevertheless, there's thinking involved. The average driver needs about 650ms to go from seeing the red light to hitting the brakes. The Star-nosed Mole can do recognition and eat prey in 230ms - the fastest thinking reaction in the animal kingdom. If you can beat that, be sure to call the *Guinness Book of World Records*. But hey, if you want to argue that 500Hz (2ms) is too much of a knock from 1,000Hz (1ms), go ahead.

So, what is important when it comes to a gaming mouse? Ergonomics. The shape and size of the mouse determines how well it fits your hand, and its weight, balance, and centre of gravity will affect your speed and precision. Things like weight and drag affect how fast you can accelerate the mouse, but other things like balance and consistency affect your precision. In addition, there's the issue of mouse-holding posture: some people are finger-mousers, i.e. they hold it with their fingers and their palm off it, and others are palm-mousers, who like to have the palm firmly on the mouse for a good grip. The former tend to use high-sensitivity short movements, and the latter low-sensitivity, arm-based movements. It's a matter of personal taste, but you'll definitely want to match your mouse to your hand size and style.



A pair of nine pixel (3 x 3) dots

So, this issue we take a look at ten popular gaming mice: two each from the big three, Microsoft, Logitech, and Razer, and four less common brands with some interesting contenders. They range from expensive models with all the bells and whistles to downright Spartan low-cost ones. The results may surprise you. We still have all the DPI, megapixel, and polling numbers for those who want them, but you'll probably want to read our impressions to get the real story. One extra spec we've added is sinisterity – a mouse's suitability for left-handed use - where we'll indicate what qualities don't favour such an operation. Therefore, lefties be sure to pay attention here. Another is surface. We measured the length of the top of each mouse, not just its head to tail size. This gives a better indication for those with large or small hands how the mouse will fit.

MICROSOFT INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER 3.0

Supplier→ Microsoft SA | **Website →** www.microsoft.co.za | **RRP →** R299

Let's start with the old classic. Many likely have fond memories of the original IntelliMouse Explorer. Well, the 3.0 version is the same thing but upgraded. Fortunately, Microsoft has figured out not to change the ergonomic masterpiece of the Explorer's shape, they've only updated the internals. They've also made sure to keep it nice and light and simple, which are things that made the original such a LAN favourite to begin with. When Fatal1ty showed up at rAge in 2005, guess what mouse he pulled out of his travel bag? I'll give you a hint - it was silver, light, and had a low DPI.

Despite its modest 450dpi, the Explorer 3.0 boasts a 9,000fps sensor rate and the highest acceleration rating in the test: 25g. It can also achieve 1,000Hz polling, so there's little excuse to complain about speed here. While it lacks many of the additional features of other mice here, it's still a solid gaming mouse and fits your hand like a glove. It's also light, well balanced, and glides well. The feet are a bit small but the low 100g weight compensates for it. The sensor is centred and the centre of gravity is right on it, so it's nice and predictable every time. We had no issues with the DPI sensitivity other than needing to readjust our software settings to compensate.

Microsoft has a fairly predictable driver with minimal functions. There are settings for things like software-based sensitivity changing and button programming, but nothing as overboard as, say, the Razer drivers. The best thing about this mouse is that it's so much like the one many people loved. Fans of the original will want to go for this updated version.

SPECS:

Length: 132mm
Width: 69mm
Height: 42mm
Surface: 162mm
Weight: 100g
Max. DPI: 450
Speed: 9,000fps
Acceleration: 25g
Tracking: 54ips
Polling: 1,000Hz
Sinisterity: Bad, - extreme shape and buttons

MICROSOFT HABU

Supplier→ Microsoft SA | **Website →** www.microsoft.co.za | **RRP →** R549

Now here is an interesting conundrum. What if we took one of the best ergonomic shapes in the computer mice world (the IntelliMouse Explorer) and combined it with one of the best electronics platforms in the computer mice world, the Razer Copperhead? Well, the result is the Microsoft Habu, which combines the strengths of Razer and Microsoft in one package, but makes one wonder how it could result in something this awful.

This is an example of an idea that's great on paper, but horrible in practice. But where is the flaw? The mouse has all the right specs: DPI, acceleration, tracking, weight, shape, and polling rate. What is the problem? It turns out whoever crammed the Copperhead's internals into the Explorer shell didn't pay much attention to the weight distribution. The CG on the mouse is far forward and the sensor is far back. Even worse, it doesn't seem to be laterally uniform. The weight seems to be at a slant, so when you hold the mouse and rotate your wrist, it feels like you're holding a gyroscope.

This flaw unfortunately translates directly into poor gameplay performance, and with the Habu our aim was all over the place. It's also quite a heavy mouse, a full 20 grams heavier than the Explorer and a bit more than the Copperhead, and that 20% extra weight does make a noticeable acceleration difference in reaction speed. Moreover, since you'll be fighting the strange resistance and torque of the mouse's mass, your aiming precision will suffer as well.

The drivers are handled by Razer, not Microsoft, so you can expect a clone of the Copperhead's drivers. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but that depends on your opinion of Razer's drivers.

SPECS:

Length: 127mm
Width: 70mm
Height: 44mm
Surface: 151mm
Weight: 120g
Max. DPI: 2,000
Speed: 7,080fps
Acceleration: 20g
Tracking: 45ips
Polling: 1,000Hz
Sinisterity: Poor - shape and buttons

RAZER DIAMONDBACK 3G

Supplier→ Frontosa | **Website →** www.frontosa.co.za| **RRP →** R354

The Diamondback is one of the more popular Razer mice, as it's in the midrange class somewhat below the Copperhead and other high-end mice. It's also one of the few completely ambidextrous gaming mice, making it a very popular contender for lefties. The 3G version has a slightly improved infrared sensor compared to the original Diamondback, which boosts peak DPI to 1,800. Oh, and it comes in 'Frost Blue', so all you guys who bought the 'Limited Edition' blue Diamondback need to go storm Razer's offices with pitchforks and torches.

The Diamondback is one of the flattest mice out there, a mere 37mm high. This gives it a fairly short surface at 146mm despite a 125mm length. Unfortunately, since the mouse is long but the back is low, palm-mousers may have a problem getting a proper grip on this mouse. It tends to result in a posture where the fingers are almost flat on the buttons, which makes clicking more difficult and slow. Unfortunately, since the overall length is still quite high, it makes it a poor choice for finger-mousers as well. The length will result in a lot of torque despite the ease at which this mouse slides, causing the mouse to fishtail all over the place. Not exactly what you want.

We also had issues with Razer's drivers not detecting this mouse. Still, for the lefties out there, choices are limited, and you could probably do worse than this.

SPECS:

Length: 125mm
Width: 65mm
Height: 37mm
Surface: 146mm
Weight: 95g
Max. DPI: 1,800
Speed: 5.8 megapixels/sec, 6,400fps
Acceleration: 15g
Tracking: 60ips
Polling: 1,000Hz
Sinisterity: Perfect

RAZER COPPERHEAD

Supplier→ Frontosa | **Website →** www.frontosa.co.za | **RRP →** R354

Razer's high-end Copperhead has been a prime choice for many in the last year. It boasts a number of impressive specs such as 2,000dpi and 1,000Hz polling, five presets, onboard memory and other goodies. There's a reason Microsoft chose this mouse to combine it into the Habu, as it's pretty impressive.

Back when it first came out, we had many issues with the Copperhead not tracking on certain surfaces where other mice were fine, and causing strange issues with USB on some machines. However, it seems that newer firmware revisions have addressed all of these concerns, and we had no problem with the Copperhead this time around.

Like the Diamondback, it also has a perfect symmetrical shape, so it can be used with either hand. Unlike the Habu, it's very light and doesn't seem to have noticeable weight distribution problems. However, it lacks a couple of features such as adjustable weight (available on some of the other mice). Razer has a weight system but it just adjusts total mass and not balance and is sold separately, making it a bit of a joke. Since the back is 5mm higher than the Diamondback, it's a bit better for palm-grip mousers, though still a bit long for finger-mousers. It's a bit on the narrow side like many Razer mice, but those with small hands will probably prefer the 149mm surface to its much larger competitor, the Logitech G5.

SPECS:

Length: 128mm
Width: 63mm
Height: 42mm
Surface: 149mm
Weight: 98g
Max. DPI: 2,000
Speed: 7,080fps
Acceleration: 20g
Tracking: 45ips
Polling: 1,000Hz
Sinisterity: Perfect

LOGITECH MX518

Supplier→ Logitech SA | **Website →** www.logitech.co.za | **RRP →** R499

Despite its ageing stature, the Logitech MX518 remains one of the most popular mice in the gaming world. Released before the DPI and feature wars got truly insane, it's a fairly modest mouse by modern standards. However, it has not really fallen behind, and makes a pretty nice mainstay as a LAN bag item.

The MX518 shares the same outer shape as the G5, which makes it quite a large mouse. It's not just the high 130mm length, but also the high back that give it a huge 172mm surface length. This means those with smaller hands, especially those who are also palm-mousers, may find the MX518 to be a bit of a stretch, literally. It also has a bit of a CG bias towards the front, which gives it a bit of a fishtail, but not as bad as an unbalanced G5 thanks to the MX518's lighter weight. Finger-mousers will likely find the forward weight a bit of a help actually, but this is still quite a big mouse for that kind of thing.

Logitech's drivers remain uninspired and resemble their earlier versions dating all the way back to the late '90s. However, they're functional and can do most of what you need to with the mouse. However, one thing we didn't like is the inclusion of the Yahoo! Toolbar with the driver. Granted, it asks before installing, but those who just click through the setup by reflex will find it on their system. It's also quite hefty, almost 60MB, for a mouse driver. At least it works for all their products so you don't have to download another 60MB for a different mouse.

SPECS:

Length: 130mm
Width: 72mm
Height: 44mm
Surface: 172mm
Weight: 108g
Max. DPI: 1,600
Speed: 5.8 megapixels/sec
Acceleration: 15g
Tracking: 40ips
Polling: 500Hz
Sinisterity: Fair - slight shape and buttons

LOGITECH G5

Supplier→ Logitech SA | **Website →** www.logitech.co.za | **RRP →** R699

The G5 was the successor of the MX518 when released, and has gone through an SE revision since, which mostly included minor changes. It's quite obviously a direct competitor to the Razer Copperhead given the matching 2,000dpi, and it was the first to popularise variable weight in gaming mice. Some may think its 'mere' 500Hz polling rate is a negative versus the Copperhead. These people should be subjected to a strobe light with their eyes taped open for a moderate period of time.

The G5 is much like the MX518, a big mouse. It's made for big hands and much of the Logitech vs. Razer debate is unknowingly fought between those with different hand sizes who each insist their mouse is superior because they've "tried the other and it sucks." It does... for them. It also has some nice features like the DPI indicator and especially the weight cartridge. Beyond just simple weight increase, the customisable position of the weight allows a bit of a CG tweak for the G5, which is actually quite useful.

The G5 does tend to fishtail slightly like the MX518, perhaps a bit more due to its higher weight even when empty. Fortunately you can do something about it, to an extent. The weight cartridge can help balance the mouse to counter its bias when moved. How much weight and where will depend on your motion and the drag induced by the surface you use it on. It's best to experiment a bit with trying to draw a flat line at high speed in something like Paint to find out. When the line is flat, your aim is true. If it's curved, the mouse is rotating.

SPECS:

Length: 130mm
Width: 72mm
Height: 44mm
Surface: 172mm
Weight: 114g
Max. DPI: 2,000
Speed: 6.4 megapixels/sec
Acceleration: 20g
Tracking: 65ips
Polling: 500Hz
Sinisterity: Fair - shape and buttons

CREATIVE FATAL1TY PROFESS10NAL

Supplier→ Frontosa | **Website →** www.frontosa.co.za | **RRP →** R399

The Fatal1ty series of products is well known in the gaming world. Fatal1ty has collaborated with several companies such as Thermaltake and Zalman, and in this case, Creative to produce gaming hardware that he has a hand in the design of. You may have noticed him at rAge in 2005 for a Shootout event versus local gamers, and also again in 2006 just playing in the comps.

This mouse is a bit of a radical departure in terms of design. It's very short, very wide, and very light. It has customisable weights but most people will want it for its lightness anyway. This is a finger-mouser's mouse from head to toe. It's completely unsuitable for gripping with the palm, unless you have extremely small hands. This may be extremely good or extremely bad for you depending on your play style. Its 2,400dpi is also nothing to sneeze at, and it does pretty well all-round.

However, the dark side of this mouse comes out when you go to the drivers. We were unable to find new drivers for this mouse anywhere on Creative's site, so had to use the ones on the CD. These turned out to be quite annoying and required reboots and annoyed with registration nags, but at least did seem to work well and let you even add two more custom sensitivity levels to the standard ones on the mouse. However, while searching Creative's forums for drivers, we found tons of threads complaining about the buttons on this mouse breaking, sticking, or behaving erratically. Our sample even began to show this problem eventually, and Creative has been completely silent about fixing it, to the dismay of many users.

SPECS:

Length: 102mm
Width: 66mm
Height: 37mm
Surface: 124mm
Weight: 92g
Max. DPI: 2,400
Speed: 6.4 megapixels/sec
Acceleration: 20g
Tracking: 40ips
Polling: 1,000Hz
Sinisterity: Poor - shape and buttons

CYBER SNIPA INTELLISCOPE

Supplier→ Axiz | **Website →** www.axiz.co.za | **RRP →** R249

Cyber Snipa is a brand that enjoys some local popularity, and makes a number of gaming products. We had a look at one of their newest mice, the Intelliscope. First, we must say that Cyber Snipa "gets it" in terms of how variable DPI should work. There are exactly two settings, 2,400dpi and 1,000dpi. There is one easy to find button to change them, and best of all, a ring of LEDs around the whole mouse changes colour to indicate which one you're on so you don't have to guess. Good job guys!

Unfortunately, the rest of the picture is not so great. The mouse performs well enough, but is front-heavy and produces quite a bit of front drag and fishtail, mainly because the mouse cord comes out of the bottom and actually drags on the pad. In addition, the button on the right side is slightly recessed, and the edge of the mouse by it is actually almost sharp. It became quite uncomfortable after a while.

Shape-wise, it's a decent palming-mouse and a bit on the heavy side, so finger-mousers won't likely enjoy it. The fact that it's symmetrical except for one button on the right vs. two on the left is good for lefties, but the mouse cord drag really kills the whole experience. So close, and yet so far. Hopefully, Cyber Snipa will keep at it as they're headed in the right direction with their DPI and LED system. However, we wish they'd provide a bit more spec info such as acceleration and tracking.

The drivers were pretty useable as well, not as fancy as Razer's and not as Spartan as Logitech's or MS's. They also incorporated a feature to make the left mouse button repeat every 0.1 seconds when held down, so pay attention *Diablo* fans.

SPECS:

Length: 128mm
Width: 63mm
Height: 43mm
Surface: 158mm
Weight: 120g
Max. DPI: 2,400
Speed: 10,080fps
Polling: 1,000Hz
Sinisterity: Good - one button difference

SAITEK GM3200

Supplier→ CompUSA | **Website →** www.compusa.com | **RRP →** $49

Saitek is a less-known brand, as their mice are not very common hereabouts. Our sample actually came from the US, where it was spotted in the wild by one of our reviewers on vacation. Since then, it has proven to be an outstanding mouse, which only makes its obscurity a tragedy. Hopefully, someone can be persuaded to start bringing them in soon.

The GM3200 is a 3,200dpi mouse, though some suspect it may be interpolating from a lower 'native' resolution. However, its interpolation is still very good and we had no problems with tracking at 3,200dpi. Its 2,400dpi was even as good or slightly better than the Fatal1ty's. Saitek has the best adjustable DPI system of any mouse we've seen. A single two-way switch adjusts it up and down, and it doesn't wrap around at the ends. A mode switch allows you to change a 'baseline' sensitivity that can be set in the modest but functional drivers. These settings are easily visible at a glance via LEDs on the side.

Overall, it's a big mouse, but surprisingly comfortable even for small hands due to its 160mm surface compared to the G5's monstrous 172mm. It's heavy, but has flippable feet that make it glide nicely when the larger ones are used. To top it all off, it has seven weights in the base that are wider spread than the G5's, allowing it to be balanced, though it seems perfectly balanced out of the box.

This mouse is an absolute dream for those who play many types of games and who need many different sensitivity settings, or switch from 'work' to 'play' often. The switch control and non-wrapping setting will easily convert those who consider adjustable DPI to be a gimmick - we just wish every mouse would adopt it.

SPECS:

Length: 120mm
Width: 74mm
Height: 43mm
Surface: 160mm
Weight: 120g
Max. DPI: 3,200
Speed: 4.5 megapixels/sec, 10,000fps
Acceleration: 20g
Tracking: 40ips
Polling: 500Hz
Sinisterity: Fair - slight shape and buttons

A4TECH X-750F

Supplier→ Budget Technologies | **Website →** www.btgames.co.za | **RRP →** R220

Finally, here's our surprise underdog, the A4Tech X-7 series mouse. You may be seeing a lot of this one, as it's actually a generic mouse sold under several brands, such as the Trust Predator and OCZ Equalizer. Some of these versions will be (thankfully) less shiny. At first glance (especially at the price tag), one may assume that this is just a cheap piece of crap, but appearances can be deceiving.

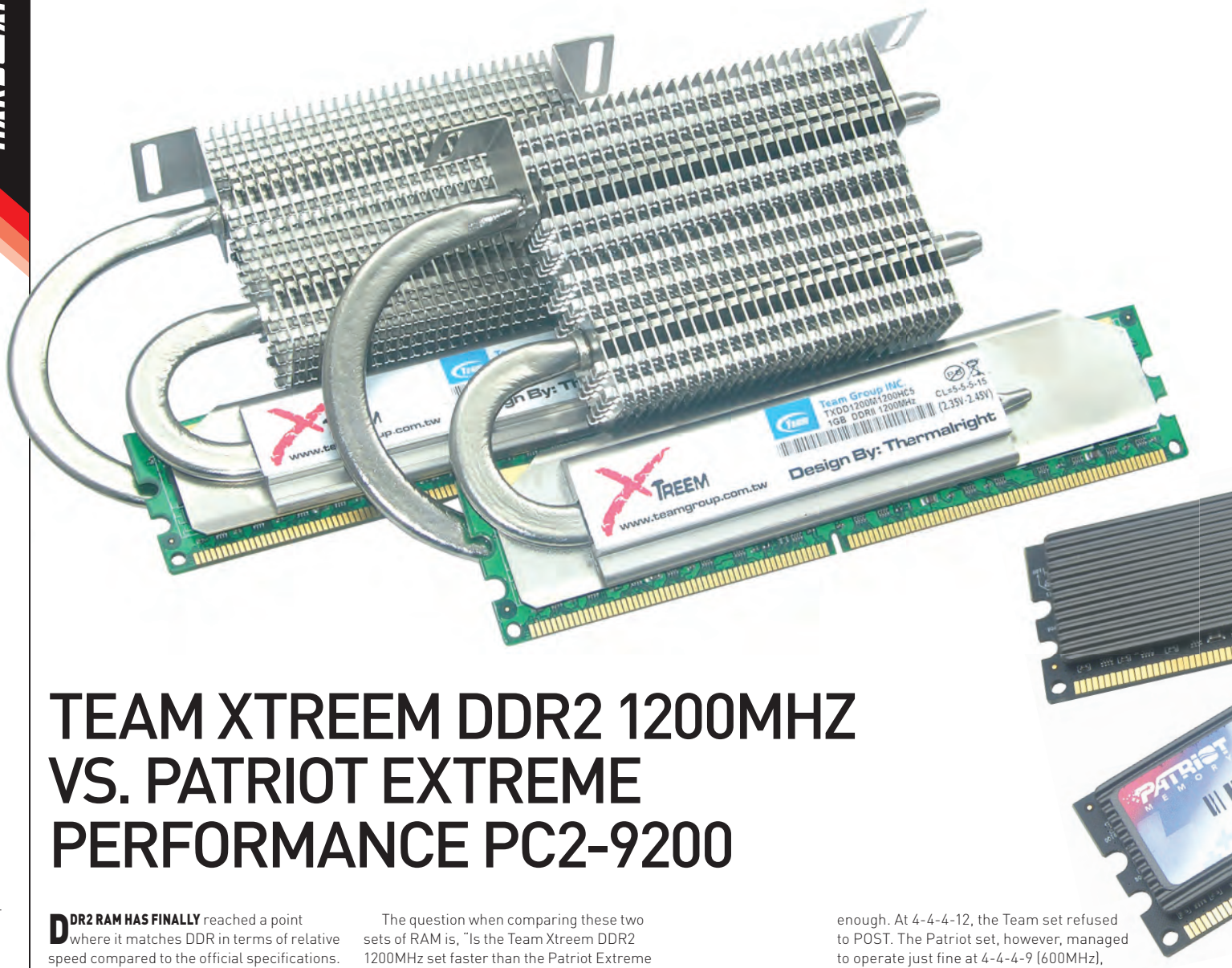
This mouse actually has excellent balance and ergonomic characteristics. It's light, has a good shape for palm-mousers, and yet works for finger-mousers as well due to the CG being in the middle where the mouse narrows. It's a shame that these attributes are nearly buried under a slew of near-useless features. The 3XFire button, which clicks the left mouse three times when you hit it, is nearly useless apart from with *Counter-Strike*, but fortunately, it's small and out of the way, so it can be ignored. But the six different DPI settings that cycle with one button and are indicated by the LED under the mouse wheel flashing different colours... ugh! Here's a tip: just set it to a DPI you like such as 2,500 and then never touch it again. Just change it in the software.

Speaking of software, the drivers are decent though not necessary. They include some odd button options like little quick-launch menus you can pop up, but are fairly unremarkable. Unlike the mouse itself, which is excellent, the little thumb grip on the left deprives lefties of its subtle yet noticeable benefit.

Overall, you'll likely find this mouse on shelf for a lot less than many others, but don't pass it by. It's worth a shot and may surprise you in just how good it really is, if you ignore the flashy features and just get down to moving it on a pad. **NAG**

SPECS:

Length: 121mm
Width: 69mm
Height: 39mm
Surface: 155mm
Weight: 104g
Max. DPI: 2,500
Speed: 5.8 megapixels/sec, 7,080fps
Acceleration: 15g
Tracking: 40ips
Polling: 125Hz
Sinisterity: : Good - buttons and grip pad



TEAM XTREEM DDR2 1200MHZ VS. PATRIOT EXTREME PERFORMANCE PC2-9200

DDR2 RAM HAS FINALLY reached a point where it matches DDR in terms of relative speed compared to the official specifications. With DDR, the last official JEDEC spec was DDR400. However, at its prime, DDR speeds were in excess of 600MHz. The highest official JEDEC spec for DDR2 is 800MHz. When you consider this, then you will realise that the Team Xtreem DDR2 1200MHz set and the Patriot Extreme Performance PC2-9200 set are at the pinnacle of DDR2 speeds. It is unlikely that DDR2 RAM will get much faster as DDR3 RAM will slowly start to be adopted and will reach higher than expected speeds, as is the case with DDR2 RAM, within a few years at most.

There is only really one way to test high-speed RAM and that is with high-speed components. With DDR2 sets such as these, there is no motherboard selectable setting that will enable these sets of RAM to come into their own. Although both these sets of RAM are aimed at gamers (as advertised) and overclockers, Team Group's Xtreem DDR2 1200MHz and Patriot Memory's Extreme Performance PC2-9200 are designed for enthusiasts (read hardcore overclockers) who want performance above anything else and are willing (read determined) to spend the time tweaking and optimising their systems to compete with and sometimes match the best in the world.

The question when comparing these two sets of RAM is, "Is the Team Xtreem DDR2 1200MHz set faster than the Patriot Extreme Performance PC2-9200 set?" So, is the Team Xtreem DDR2 1200MHz set with its 1,200MHz rating faster than the Patriot Extreme Performance PC2-9200 set with its 1,150Mhz rating? Using ASUS's P5K-E/WIFI-AP motherboard with an X6800 CPU, we set out to find out which set is the fastest and, more importantly, which set would provide the best performance at the highest speed and the tightest timings. In fact, we were willing to sacrifice more than 100MHz in speed if it would allow us to lower at least three of the four primary timings significantly.

The first test was to try and find out which set could achieve the impressive task of achieving stability at 3-3-3-9, 800MHz. This setting would be ideal for a 400MHz FSB with a CPU clock anywhere from 3.2GHz to 4GHz. The Patriot and Team sets had no problem dealing with these settings.

Since almost every high-performance set can achieve the 1GHz mark, it wasn't really useful to test at that frequency, so we jumped straight to 1,200MHz - a good 50MHz beyond the rated speed of the Patriot set. 1,200MHz is an achievement no matter which set of RAM or the price, but as we're dealing with overclocking RAM here, the reference 5-5-5-15 timings weren't good enough. At 4-4-4-12, the Team set refused to POST. The Patriot set, however, managed to operate just fine at 4-4-4-9 (600MHz), achieving impressive bandwidth numbers above the 9.3GB/sec mark.

That just about settled the outright winner between the two. Sure, with the Team RAM you'll retain your warranty at 1.2GHz and 2.45V, but that warranty doesn't really mean much considering that the Patriot set can achieve 1.2GHz at 5-5-5-15 while still operating within its given voltage tolerance range, which is 2.3V and less. There's no telling what each set could do given more voltage (in the region of 2.7V or more). However, whatever it is, the Patriot

TEAM XTREEM DDR2 1200MHZ

SPECS

CHIPSET	Micron GKX
RATED SPEED	DDR2 1,200MHz (PC2-9600)
TIMINGS	5-5-5-15
VOLTAGE	2.35V – 2.45V
PERFORMANCE	A
VALUE	B

RRP→ R2,999 | Supplier→Comstar | Website→ www.comstarsa.co.za | Brand→ Team Group Inc.

PATRIOT EXTREME PERFORMANCE PC2-9200

SPECS

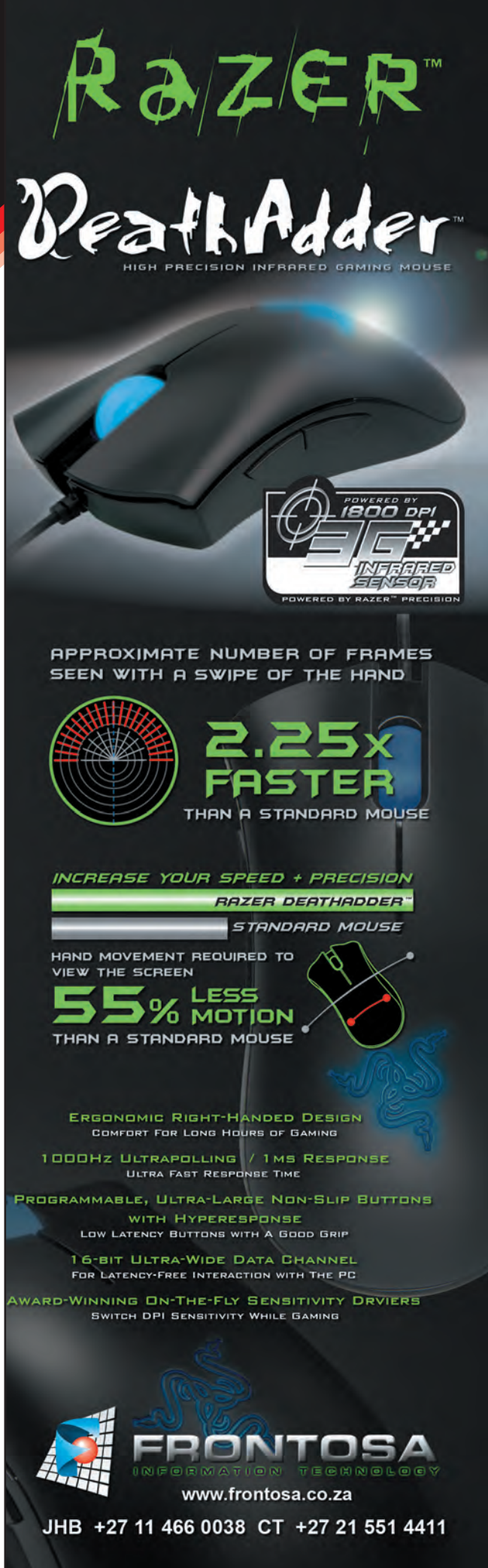
CHIPSET	Micron D9GMH
RATED SPEED	DDR2 1,150MHz (PC2-9200)
TIMINGS	5-5-5-15
VOLTAGE	2.3V
PERFORMANCE	A
VALUE	B

set is more likely to achieve it than the Team set. It's not that the Team Xtreem DDR2 1200MHz set is not fast. In fact, it's one of the fastest sets you'll find locally or anywhere else for that matter. It's just that the Patriot set is even better. One gripe about the Team RAM is that it's a little too complicated when it comes to the heat spreaders. The actual set comes in a separate package than the heat spreaders (which are designed by Thermalright). These heat spreaders can actually be bought separately for any set of RAM. The only difference here is that they feature the Team Xtreem sticker with the rated speed and latencies on them.

The heat spreaders on the Team Xtreem DDR2 1200MHz set are massive and get hot, indicating that they're doing their job very well. However, besides aesthetics, they really aren't more efficient at cooling the RAM than standard heat spreaders as employed by the Patriot set, for example. The Patriot set employs what would be called normal heat spreaders, which don't look as good as they perform. That aside, the Patriot set operates cooler than the Team RAM. It could be the result of a better PCB, superior contact adhesive or a better heatsink compound. At any rate, the Patriot RAM is the winner here, not by a massive margin but just enough to steer enthusiasts towards it. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

RRP→ R2,999 | **Supplier**→ Syntech SA | **Website**→ www.syntech.co.za | **Brand**→ Patriot



MSI RX2900XT-VT2D512E VS. MSI 8800GTX OC LIQUID

WHAT'S OBVIOUS ABOUT THE two GPU designs is, despite being similar in target API support, they go about it very differently. The bottom line is that, clock for clock, the G80 is a better GPU or rather a more efficient GPU. Yes, the current 3DMark05 and 3DMark06 records are held by the 2900XT. However, it's worth keeping in mind that those clock speeds are much higher than the reference clock speed or any clock speeds that the average user or enthusiast will ever use with the card.

Both these graphics cards are aimed at gaming and deliver sterling performances. You can play all current games at 1,280 x 1,024 with 8x AA at a comfortable 40fps or more, depending on your CPU. Even if you use a resolution of 1,680 x 1,050 (as with most 22-inch LCDs) your gaming experience won't be marred by slowdowns due to antialiasing.

With the OC Liquid, we were able to record a 3DMark06 score of 12,052 compared to the 11,440 of the RX2900XT. Since 3DMark06 is the only benchmark in the series that supports DirectX 9.0c, we'll place more emphasis on its results rather than on the older versions of 3DMark.

We also, just as a matter of interest, used 3DMark03 and 3DMark05. In 3DMark05, the RX2900XT was much faster than the OC Liquid. Even with the water-cooled OC Liquid overclocked to 690MHz and the memory speed at 2.12GHz, the RX2900XT, at its default speed, achieved 430 points more. With the OC Liquid at its reference speeds of 612MHz and 2GHz (memory), the RX2900XT achieved 1,000 points more.

3DMark03 favoured the OC Liquid. It achieved 42,706 points compared to the RX2900XT's 37,790.

However, what's likely to determine your purchasing decision is price, noise and other factors. As far as noise is concerned, the OC Liquid is a better card since it employs a water-cooling system, which makes it far quieter. Noise levels are obviously related to operating temperatures, which are far lower on the OC Liquid than the RX2900XT. Under load, the OC Liquid reached a maximum temperature of 58°C at the overclocked settings. The RX2900XT idled at 67°C and reached 90°C after successive benchmark runs. The only way to lower the temperatures was to increase fan speed from the reference 38% to anything above 50%. However, at that speed the noise was unbearable. At reference fan and clock

MSI 8800GTX OC LIQUID

SPECS

CORE	G80
CORE CLOCK	612MHz
MEMORY	384MB 1ns Samsung GDDR3 (1.0GHz/ 2.0GHz DDR)
STREAM PROCESSORS	128
FEATURES	DirectX 10/OpenGL 2.1
PERFORMANCE	A
FEATURES	B
VALUE	B

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** Pinnacle Micro | **Website→** www.pinnacle.co.za | **Manufacturer→** Micro-Star International (MSI)

RX2900XT-VT2D512E

SPECS

CORE	R600
CORE CLOCK	740MHz
MEMORY	512MB 1ns Samsung GDDR3 (820MHz/ 1.64GHz DDR)
PIPELINES	320
FEATURES	DirectX 10.1/OpenGL 2.1
PERFORMANCE	B
FEATURES	A
VALUE	A

frequencies the RX2900XT never crashed despite the high temperatures.

What the RX2900XT has (which the OC Liquid doesn't) is VIVO functionality, which may be enough to swing a purchasing decision. The ability to capture video from multiple sources may negate noise levels and the like. This is a particularly useful addition to the card on MSI's part because it at least sets the card apart from others in a market where reference designs are the order of the day.

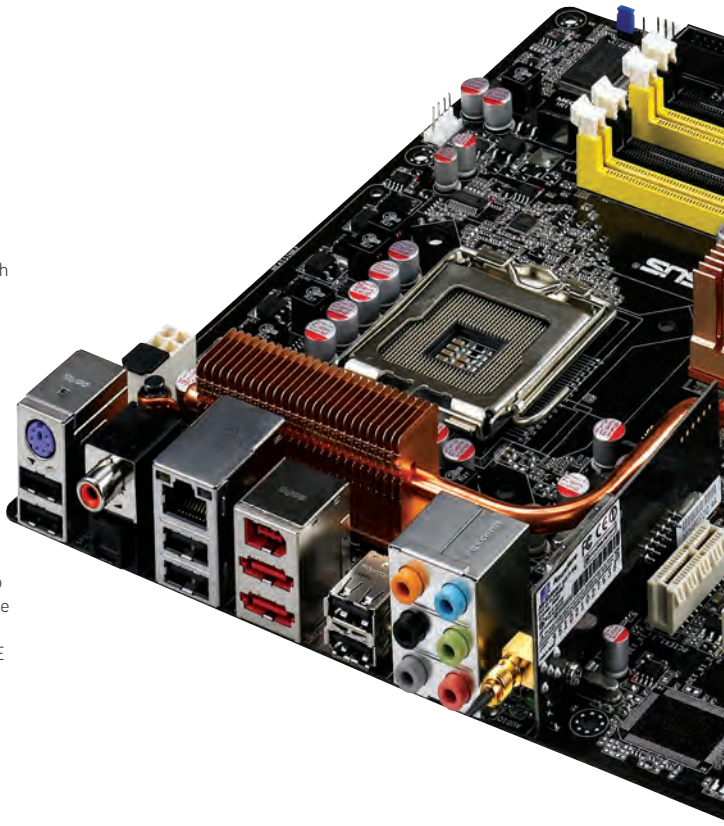
However, despite the massive strides AMD/ATI has made in making the Catalyst Control Center more user friendly, it's still not as easy to use as NVIDIA's ForceWare Control Panel. Setting up multiple displays is much easier with the NVIDIA card.

When you factor in performance, operating temperatures, noise levels and general accessibility, the OC Liquid is the better card. However, the RX2900XT's price and VIVO functionality make it an attractive choice. If you have the money to spare, you may be better off with the OC Liquid although the RX2900XT is just as capable. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

RRP→ TBA | Supplier→ Pinnacle Micro | Website→ www.pinnacle.co.za | Manufacturer→ Micro-Star International (MSI)

GIGABYTE P35 DQ6 VS. ASUS P5K-E/WIFI-AP



NEVER BEFORE HAVE WE had two motherboards that are so closely matched that it's impossible to choose an outright winner. The GIGABYTE P35 DQ6 and the ASUS P5K-E/WIFI-AP are about performance first and extras second. Most people will never use half of the accessories bundled with the DQ6 (of which there are plenty).

Starting with the layout of the boards, the DQ6 features an elaborate cooling mechanism that dominates the motherboard. While this cooling mechanism works wonders in keeping the chipset cool at frequencies above 500MHz, the P5K-E is equally capable of matching the speeds, although the chipset does get considerably warmer but not hot enough to cause concern. As far as component cooling is concerned, the DQ6 is on average a good 5°C or more cooler than the P5K-E, especially the Northbridge and Southbridge.

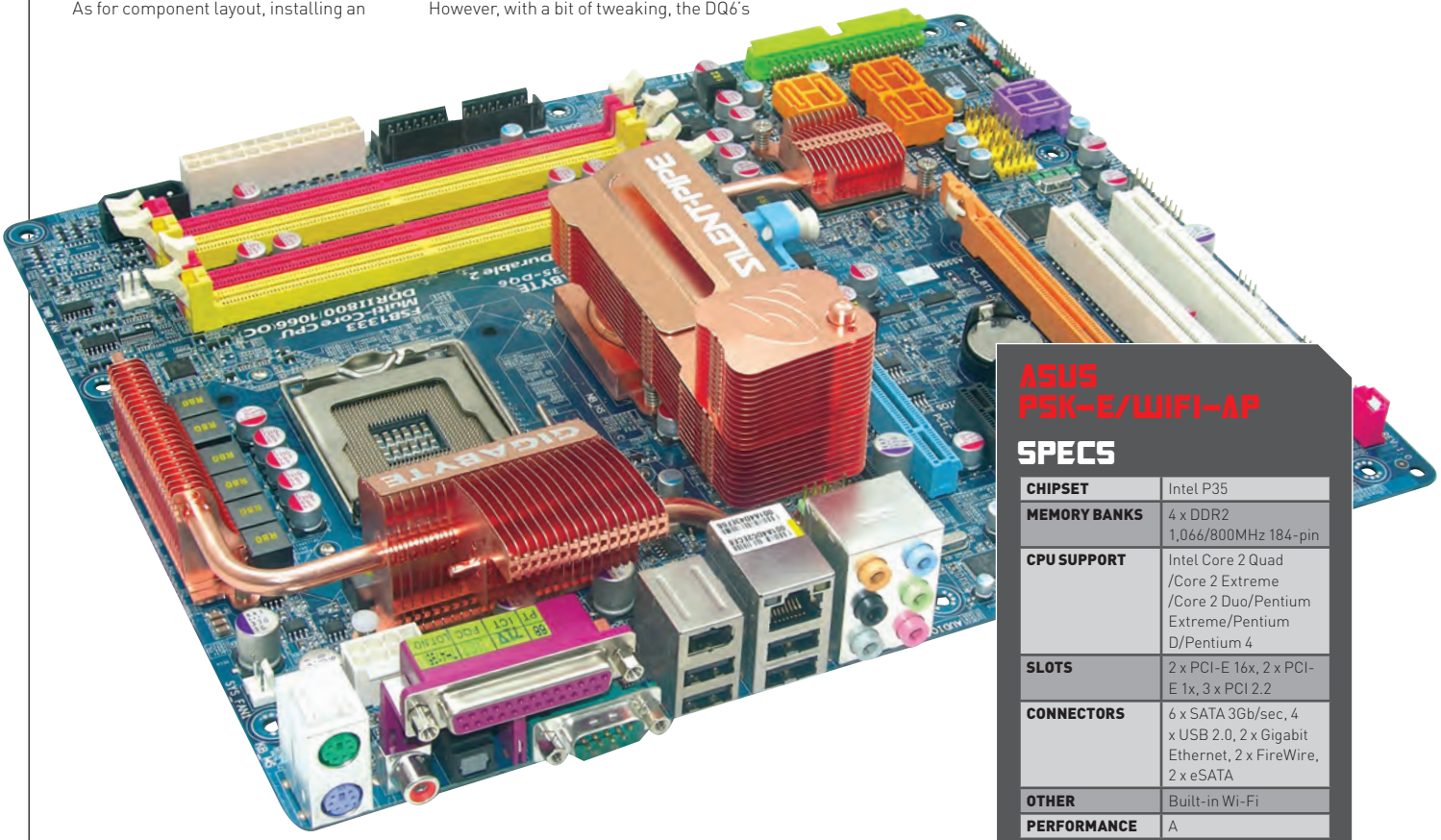
However, this superior cooling mechanism has one problem. The Northbridge heatsink is bulky and attached to the motherboard in a less than ideal way, making use of a rear heat plate. This plate is removable, but it isn't as easy as it would seem at first.

As for component layout, installing an 8800 Ultra graphics card on the DQ6 doesn't result in it obscuring the SATA connectors as it would on the P5K-E. On the P5K-E, the SATA headers will without a doubt lie beneath the card making it virtually impossible to make use of them.

The placement of the BIOS reset jumper and the CMOS battery is an issue on both motherboards as these are situated just below the primary PCI-E slot, which results in one having to remove the graphics card to access the jumper. Both boards have an auto recovery option in case of aggressive overclocking, but it doesn't always work, especially if the cause of a failed overclock is because of aggressive memory timings. Therefore, it's inevitable that one will need to clear the BIOS manually, which could become a bit of an issue.

When it comes to performance, the P5K-E is superior, particularly because it keeps a tighter strap than the DQ6 at much higher frequencies. Even at a modest 400MHz FSB, irrespective of the memory speed selected, the P5K-E still manages to outpace the DQ6.

This performance advantage won't be apparent in games and in general applications, but is evident in benchmarks. However, with a bit of tweaking, the DQ6's

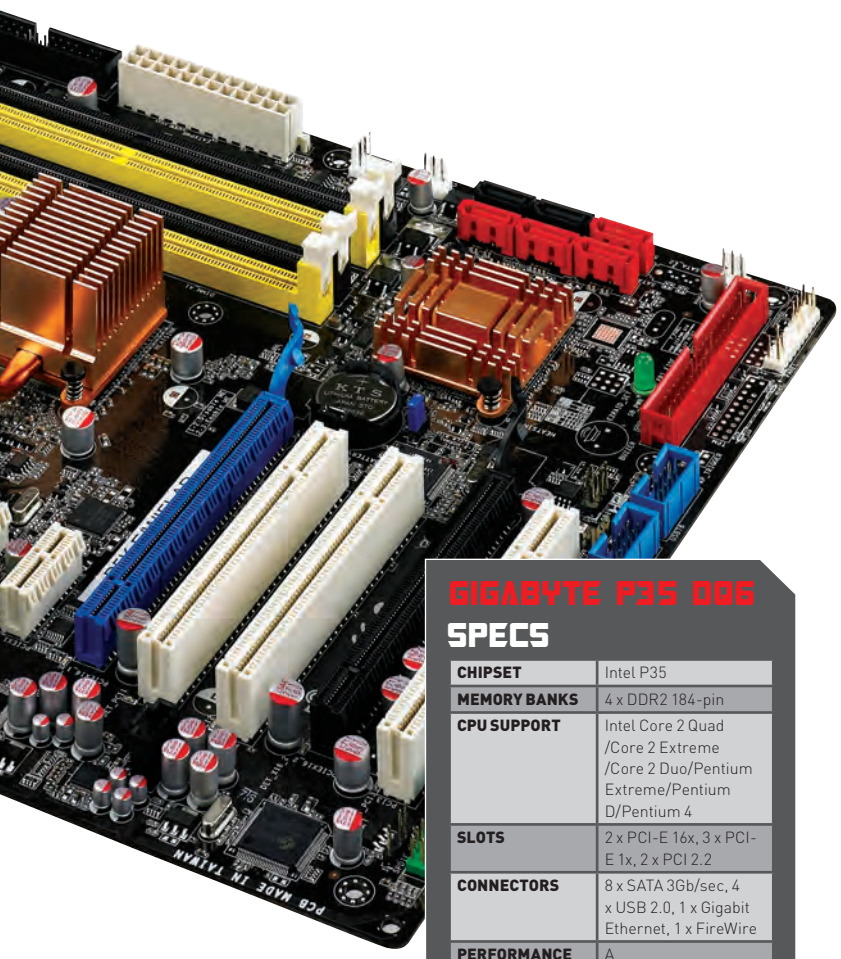


ASUS P5K-E/WIFI-AP

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P35
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 1,066/800MHz 184-pin
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Quad /Core 2 Extreme /Core 2 Duo/Pentium Extreme/Pentium D/Pentium 4
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 3 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 4 x USB 2.0, 2 x Gigabit Ethernet, 2 x FireWire, 2 x eSATA
OTHER	Built-in Wi-Fi
PERFORMANCE	A
FEATURES	B
VALUE	A

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** ASUSTeK Computer Inc. | **Website→** http://za.asus.com/ | **Brand→** ASUS



GIGABYTE P35 DQ6

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel P35
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Quad /Core 2 Extreme /Core 2 Duo/Pentium Extreme/Pentium D/Pentium 4
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E 16x, 3 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 4 x USB 2.0, 1 x Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x FireWire
PERFORMANCE	A
FEATURES	A
VALUE	B

performance almost equals that of the P5K-E. The DQ6 has a much wider VDIMM range for RAM tweaking. On the P5K-E, VDIMM is limited to 2.5V while on the DQ6 you can select 3V or more. This voltage flexibility also applies to the VCore (in particular voltage stability). While it's not possible to monitor the voltage on the DQ6 in the BIOS (a massive oversight by GIGABYTE), you can make use of EasyTune5, which, while not 100% accurate, proves that the DQ6 suffers less from CPU voltage inconsistencies than the P5K-E when the system is under load.

As for BIOS configuration options, the P5K-E is the better option, albeit by a slight margin. The tweaking options ASUS has made available on this board are more than enough for any type of overclocking: from PLL voltage to reference NB voltage, it's all there. The DQ6 has its fair share of tweaking options, but just not quite enough to match the P5K-E.

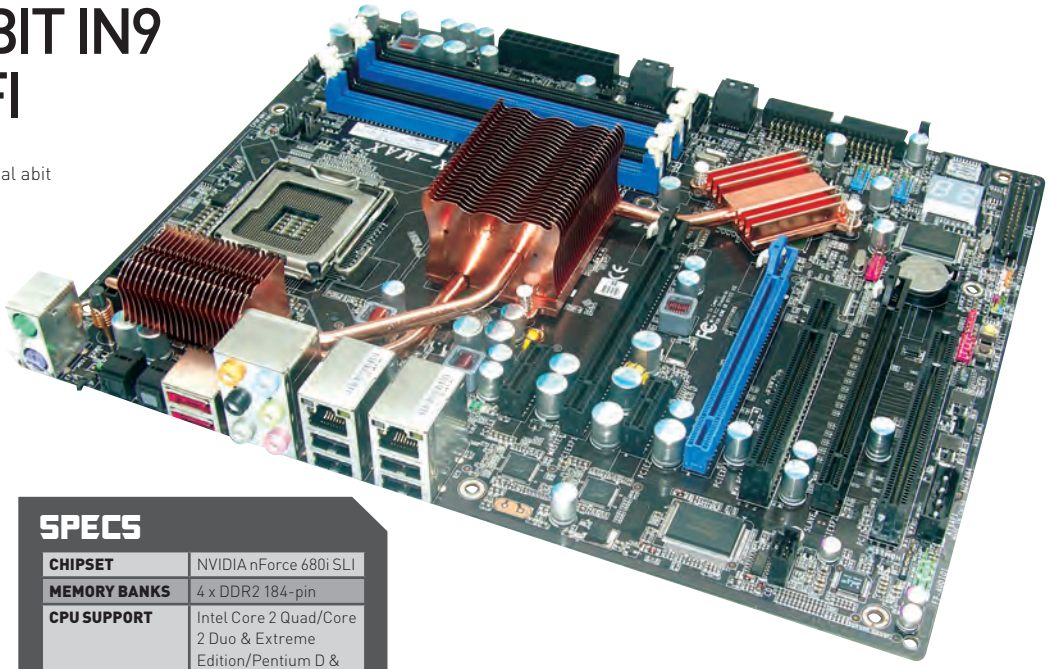
Both motherboards provide great performance and excellent tweaking options. In gaming, there's not much to choose between them, but in terms of overclocking, each board has its strengths. Whichever board you choose to buy, it'll provide excellent overclocking headroom for any Core 2 CPU available today. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

RRP→ TBA | Supplier→ Rectron | Website→ www.rectron.co.za | Brand→ GIGABYTE

UNIVERSAL ABIT IN9 32-X MAX WI-FI

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** Aleet Distribution
Website→ www.aleet.co.za | **Brand→** Universal abit



UNIVERSAL ABIT HAS HAD some difficulties over the last few years with many of its motherboards not living up to the legendary heritage that delivered the AW9D-MAX, NF7-S and IC7 motherboards. However, things are improving for Universal abit as it has not only produced amongst the best P35 boards, but it looks as if its upcoming X38 chipset-based motherboard will live up to what we've come to expect from the brand.

However, not all is well, in particular with Universal abit's 680i SLI-based motherboard. The IN9-32X MAX is an example of how a great idea can go horribly wrong in practice. What the company has tried to achieve with this motherboard must be commended, because, as high-end enthusiast motherboard, it has everything you could possibly need: from onboard reset and power switches to a special CMOS clear switch. The motherboard was (seemingly) designed from the ground up for enthusiasts. Featuring a comprehensive tweaking page in the BIOS and abit's impressive uGuru technology, abit has incorporated its best in the IN9. This motherboard may have been the board to dethrone ASUS's Striker Extreme as the ultimate SLI motherboard, but unfortunately, things didn't work out as planned.

There were a number of issues with our review sample and we weren't able to get the most from this board and give it a fair score.

SPECS

CHIPSET	NVIDIA nForce 680i SLI
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Core 2 Quad/Core 2 Duo & Extreme Edition/Pentium D & Pentium 4
SLOTS	3 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec, 4 x USB 2.0, dual NVIDIA Gigabit Ethernet, 1 x FireWire, 2 x eSata
PERFORMANCE	N/A
FEATURES	N/A
VALUE	N/A

Therefore, as a result, the scoring will have to wait until the next issue. However, should it all work as it's supposed to, the IN9 might just be the board to have. It's feature packed (from the onboard Wi-Fi adapter to an error code LED display) and designed for overclocking, but will probably work just as great in a gaming environment. Tune in next month to see the IN9-32X MAX revisited and scored. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

MUSHKIN ENHANCED XP2-6400

RRP→ R1,650 | **Supplier→** The Prophecy Shop
Website→ www.prophecy.co.za | **Brand→** Mushkin

QUITE A HIGH NUMBER of RAM brands have been making their way into the country of late. We now have more than nine major RAM brands to pick from and, obviously, we not only get better RAM but also slightly better pricing.

However, the list wouldn't be complete without Mushkin, who, as you know by now, almost single handily dominated the DDR performance market. We received this DDR800 set along with the 1GHz set (reviewed last month) and as stated in that review, the DDR800 set is better.

Besides being more affordable, it actually overclocks better than the higher speed set. Masked in the usual Mushkin glossy black heat spreader, the set looks the part and it performs as one would expect. The standard timings are a little conservative on Mushkin's part as this set is capable of 3-4-3-9 at just over 2.0V, which results in considerably better performance in synthetic tests than the given timings. On the GIGABYTE P35-DQ6, we were able to achieve an impressive 1,133MHz at stellar 4-4-4-12 timings, which is great for DDR2 1,000MHz sets but extraordinary for a DDR800 set.

This is an excellent set by Mushkin that comes in cheaper than many DDR2 1,000MHz sets, but outperforms a large number of them. The XP2-6400 is extreme overclocking RAM on a budget. It may not get you the highest speeds recorded or anywhere near that, but with a high enough FSB, it shouldn't matter. This is another great kit from Mushkin. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CHIPSET	Micron D9GMH
RATED SPEED	DDR2 800MHz (PC2-6400)
TIMINGS	4-4-3-10
VOLTAGE	2.1V
PERFORMANCE	B
VALUE	A

CYBEROCKER CHAIR

RRP→ R990 | **Supplier→** | ISA Components (011) 312-2292
Website→ www.isagroup.co.za | **Brand→** NA

IT WAS EASY TO fall in love with the Cyberocker Chair: it's really comfortable and very luxurious. The shape of the chair cradles the body sufficiently (even if you're 1.93m tall) and it can be folded in half for storage. On the base at the right is a panel that houses the volume control knob, a standard headphone jack, power in and audio connectors. The speakers in the seat are mounted at the top behind your head, right and left. This works well if you plug your rear channel into the seat, but initially the audio coming from behind you is a little disconcerting. Nevertheless, you get used to it.

When you're sitting in the Cyberocker Chair, using it for an extended period of time, you really want one. It's an extraneous product: nobody really needs such a chair, but having one is certainly not out of the question. When you consider the materials involved and the quality of the speakers (decent), the price seems wholly justified, but still a hard pill to swallow. Gamers have a habit of comparing prices based on a copy of a game and the Cyberocker costs almost as much as two new games - steep for a chair that really needs a travel handle. **NAG**

SPECS

RMS	Speakers 6w
P.M.P.O	96w
CONTROL	Analog control
INPUTS	RCA Audio Inputs
POWER SUPPLY	External 12V, 1.5A
SPEAKER RANGE	20Hz - 20KHz
SCORE	C

Thermalright

IFX-14
Inferno Fire eXtinguisher

Quench the fire in your computer system

Back-side heat pipe Cooler

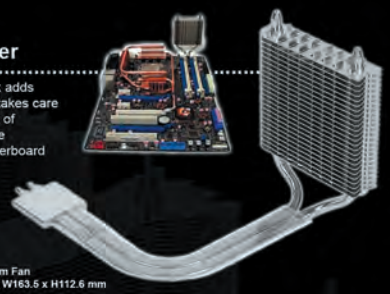
IFX-14 Heatsink Body

* Larger surface area for heat dissipation
* Designed for better air flow management to work with the heatsink fans and the air inside computer case
* Optional to rotate the heatsink 90 degrees to best fit your system configuration
* Multi-platform compatible backplate for installation on vast number and type of motherboard.

Weight: 790g (heatsink only)
Dimension: L146.2 x W124 x H161 mm (heatsink only)
Recommended Fan : All 120mm & 140mm Fan

IFX-14 Back-side Heat Pipe Cooler

Back-side dual heatpipe heatsink adds additionally cools CPU and also takes care of the heat coming from the back of the motherboard to extend the life expectancy and stability of motherboard



Weight: 130g (heatsink only)
Recommended Fan: All 80mm & 70mm Fan
Dimension (heatsink only): L134.5 x W163.5 x H112.6 mm

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RAIDMAX KATANA

THE KATANA IS PART of RADMAX's Performance Series. It features a large on button situated at the top of the drive bays along with two USB 2.0 ports and audio jacks. The front panel of the case has two vertical fins on each side. These fins are made of aluminium and are on hinges, allowing them to swing. There's no clip to keep the fins in place and the fins are not protecting anything, so they're more for show than anything else. The drive bay covers have a steel mesh to allow better airflow through the case. The front panel clips off very easy. The KATANA comes with a large window on the left side panel. This window is held in place by plastic clips and although there's nothing wrong with the workmanship, it gives the case a cheap look. Behind this window is an 80mm side-mounted blue LED fan with black mesh around it for better cooling.

The KATANA, although a 'performance' case, won't be able to house an ATX motherboard with a large, top-of-the-range graphics card installed, as there's just not enough room inside. The tool-free clips for holding a motherboard in place are fragile and unclip from their holders very easily. The case comes with an aluminium hard drive rack with a 120mm fan to keep your hard drives cool. The fan sports blue LEDs to give the case a blue glow.

The case has its good points and its bad ones. Sadly, the bad points outweigh the good ones. The KATANA is a mid-range case for mid-range computers. If that's what you are looking for and you can ignore the pointless aluminium fins on the sides of the front panel, then this case is exactly what you need. **NAG**

Bradley Hatton-Jones

SPECS

EXTERNAL DRIVE BAYS	8 x 5.25-inch
INTERNAL DRIVE BAYS	3 x 3.5-inch
MOTHERBOARD SUPPORT	ATX
FANS	1 x 80mm blue LED side fan 1 x 120mm blue LED intake fan
PORTS	2 x top-mounted USB 2.0 ports/Top-mounted audio jacks
MATERIAL	Steel case with aluminium front panel
DIMENSIONS (L x W x H)	52cm x 20.5cm x 44.5cm
SCORE	C

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** RAIDMAX | **Website→** www.raidmax.com | **Brand→** RAIDMAX

RAIDMAX X-FORCE

RAIDMAX, PRODUCER OF COMPUTER cases, PSUs and coolers, has recently released the X-FORCE chassis as part of its Performance Series gaming cases.

The X-FORCE is a good-looking steel case with a two-door aluminium front. The doors sport a large red X-FORCE logo on the front, which looks good. The doors are kept closed by a magnet and can only be opened left first and then right because of the design of the doors. The top of these doors has a large gap because of the round flow design. The front panel of the case clips off very easily - too easily in fact. While transporting the case, the front panel would flip open without warning because of a very flimsy clip holding the panel in place. It's a nice idea to have the front panel clip open and swing to the side when you need to do something inside the case. However, some kind of key and lock system would've been a better option to prevent the panel from opening up when it is bumped or picked up. The case comes with a very large 230mm fan on the left panel. With the size of this fan, I was expecting a lot of noise. However, I was surprised to find out I was wrong: the fan is very quiet considering its size.

The inside of the case is small. It will fit a medium range home computer. In no way can you expect to fit two graphics cards in an SLI or CrossFire configuration into this case without having some major cramping issues. The chassis comes equipped with an aluminium HDD rack and a 120mm fan in the front to keep your hard drives cool. The HDD rack is situated at the bottom, but with its design can be moved anywhere within the 5,25-inch bays to create some extra room if needed.

The case features tool-less clips. These clips work well enough but will break with time. As one can see just from using the clips for a couple of hours, they weren't designed for durability.

Overall, the case is good for a home computer if you're looking to change from the old standard beige cases to the new and improved ones without breaking your wallet. For people who are into good cases and only the best hardware, you'll have to look somewhere else - this case isn't for you. **NAG**

Bradley Hatton-Jones

SPECS

EXTERNAL DRIVE BAYS	8 x 5.25-inch
INTERNAL DRIVE BAYS	3 x 3.5-inch
PORTS	2 x front-mounted USB ports/Audio jacks
SYSTEM FANS	1 x side-mounted 80mm blue LED fan 1 x front-mounted 120mm fan with aluminium HDD rack
MOTHERBOARD SUPPORT	ATX
MATERIAL	SECC Steel
DIMENSIONS (L x W x H)	52cm x 20.5cm x 44.5cm
SCORE	C

FOXCONN TURBO COOL & QUIET

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** Foxconn
Website→ www.foxconn.com | **Manufacturer→** Foxconn

LATELY, IT SEEMS THAT Foxconn is manufacturing everything from graphics cards to CPU coolers. The Foxconn Turbo Cool & Quiet, although not a stock-standard and generic cooler, isn't as elaborate as some cooling solutions on the market. Featuring a pure copper heat pipe and base design, the heatsink is not much bigger than the reference heatsink from Intel, but works much better. It makes use of a four-screw spring mechanism for mounting and has an aluminium ribbed fin design to dissipate the heat more evenly. It's better than most reference coolers, but certainly won't set the aftermarket-cooling world on fire. **NAG**

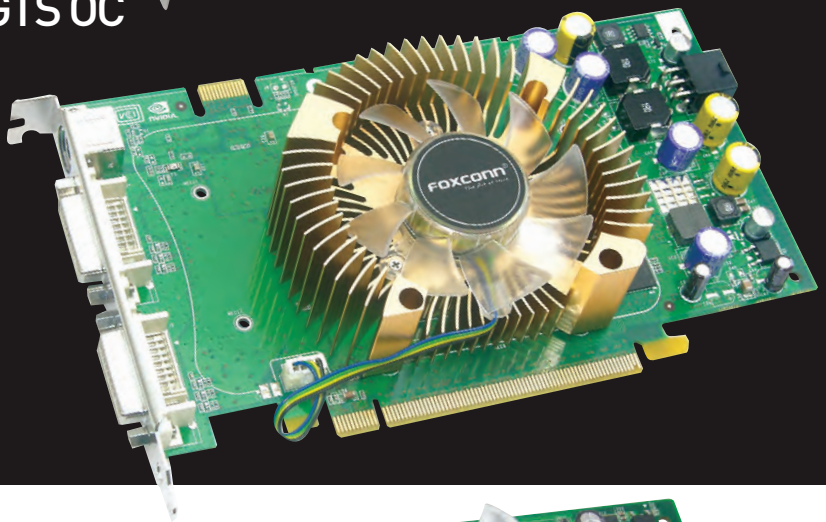
SPARKLE GEFORCE PX 8800 ULTRA

RRP→ R8,700 | **Supplier→** Eurobyte
Website→ www.eurobyte.co.za | **Manufacturer→** Sparkle

SPARKLE'S PX 8800 ULTRA is the fastest GPU we've ever had for review at *NAG*. It offers blistering-fast performance and comes only with the necessary cabling and adapters. Sparkle has chosen to go with a slightly different heatsink, but the difference is purely cosmetic as the heatsink itself is identical to the reference design. As far as overclocking is concerned, the 8800 ULTRA managed an impressive 702MHz core speed and a 2.4GHz memory speed. It's not cheap by any means, but then again, there isn't a better GPU. **NAG**

FOXCONN GEFORCE 8600GTS OC

RRP→ R2,299 | **Supplier→** Sahara
Website→ www.sahara.co.za | **Manufacturer→** Foxconn



FOXCONN HAS FINALLY RELEASED an overclocked edition of the 8600GTS. Besides the 700MHz core and impressive 2.2GHz memory clock, Foxconn has bundled VirtualDrive v10 and RestoreIT v7.0 with the package. This is great considering that most manufacturers seem to be selling the exact same card under different names, and when they do include bundled games or software, they're usually old or sub-standard titles. The standard overclock does help the card perform better than it does in its reference guise, but still not well enough to warrant an upgrade from a 7900GS, X 1950 or any other equivalent DX9.0c generation card. **NAG**

BIOSTAR 7600GT

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** Comstar
Website→ www.comstar.co.za | **Manufacturer→** Biostar

PRESSED FOR FUNDS BUT had enough of an aging GeForce 5900 or 5200? If that's the case, then this may be the card for you. It's likely as cheap as it's going to get, so this is the best time to buy this card if you're in the market for an upgrade. It offers good performance for a mid-range card and even better performance when overclocked. It may be more than a year old, but it still puts in a better performance than some of today's mid-range cards such as the GeForce 8600GS and AMD/ATI 2600Pro. **NAG**

RRP→ TBA | **Supplier→** ASUSTeK Computer Inc. | **Website→** http://za.asus.com/ | **Brand→** ASUS

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CONS OF THE WORLD

BLIZZARD AND ID BRING OUT THE BIG GUNS

AUGUST WAS GAMES CONVENTION MONTH WITH A NUMBER OF HIGH-PROFILE EVENTS TAKING PLACE. THE FIRST WEEKEND SAW SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS BATTLING IT OUT FOR FAN AND MEDIA SUPREMACY, AS BLIZZARD'S SEMI-REGULAR, PROMOTIONAL SHINDIG, BLIZZCON, UNFURLED LEATHERY WINGS OVER ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA, AND ID'S TWELFTH ANNUAL QUAKECON REGISTERED 9.7 ON THE RICHTER SCALE IN DALLAS, TEXAS. THOUSANDS OF CELEBRANTS STORMED THE DOORS AT BOTH VENUES, HELL-BENT ON BEATING EACH OTHER TO DEATH FOR A GO AT *STARCRAFT II* AND JOHN CARMACK'S AUTOGRAPH ON THEIR GIRLFRIENDS' BOOBS. WE SIFTED THROUGH THE ENSUING MADNESS TO BRING YOU THE GOOD BITS.

GUNRUNNING – NOW WITH CARS

Following a pre-keynote presentation of id's new Tech 5 game engine, John Carmack announced his company's latest title, a game he described as "Fifty percent run 'n' gun, with a significant aspect of driving and action." Uh, driving? "We're not trying to be *Gran Turismo*," lead designer Tom Willits later elaborated, "and when we come to a crossroad where we can either go for realism or fun, we'll go towards fun, even if it makes it more arcadey and a little more over-the-top. Super-sized weapons on your vehicle, fun races with flaming barrels that people are throwing at you, blow up car number eight before the race is over as a mission..."

A dramatic departure from id's regular doom and gloom fare, *Rage* features non-linear gameplay with core concepts such as shooting stuff, reckless driving, and exploration in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. "There's adventure elements to it," added Willits, "but I hate to say 'adventure game', and it's not an RPG. I wish there was a word between 'adventure' and 'RPG'". So it's *Fallout* meets *Unreal Tournament* meets *Mad Max 2* in a *Burnout: Revenge*-style vertical takedown.

The game is set for a multi-platform release, including PC, Xbox 360, PS3, and Mac, and will span two DVDs or one Blu-ray Disk. Despite its next-gen status, *Rage* will not see a DirectX 10 development cycle. "There's no DX10 feature that's going to be driven in *Rage*," Carmack said. "We're not going to make any of those centrepieces of our technology... There's nothing there that I'm dying to get my hands on."

EARTH-SHATTERING ANNOUNCEMENTS

A partnership between id and Valve's online distribution service, Steam, was announced to thunderous approval, including the immediate availability of 24 legacy titles, from *Commander Keen* to *Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil*, optimised to run on modern operating systems.

The company also revealed the development of a browser-based version of *Quake III Arena*, titled *Quake Zero*. This game will be completely free and funded by in-game advertising. "It may work, it may not," John Carmack told the audience. "[But] I think there's at least the possibility that we could see millions of people play this."

Return to Castle Wolfenstein is set to become a Hollywood film (surprise), written and directed by Roger Avary (*Silent Hill*, *Beowulf*), and produced by Samuel Hadida (*Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, *Silent Hill*). The pair was described by id CEO, Todd Hollenshead, as a "team that will be capable of making the movie come up to the level of quality we've always been able to achieve with the videogames." We've heard that before.

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars is set to be released on 2 October 2007, and something dubbed '*Quake Arena Arcade*' is scheduled for an as-yet-undetermined future release on Xbox LIVE Arcade.

MOAR MONIES!

Billed as "the world's largest LAN party," QuakeCon just wouldn't be QuakeCon without all the tournaments and cash prizes and pwned n00bs. Representatives from NVIDIA, title sponsors of the NVIDIA Championships Tournament, were there to hand over a cool $100,000 to people whose reflexes are probably faster than the average cheetah's. Among the winners were:

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS 6V6 CHAMPIONSHIP

- 1st place: Team-Dignitas - $22,000;
- 2nd place: Team HOT - $16,000; and
- 3rd place: Check-Six - $8,000.

QUAKE QUAD-DAMAGE TOURNAMENT

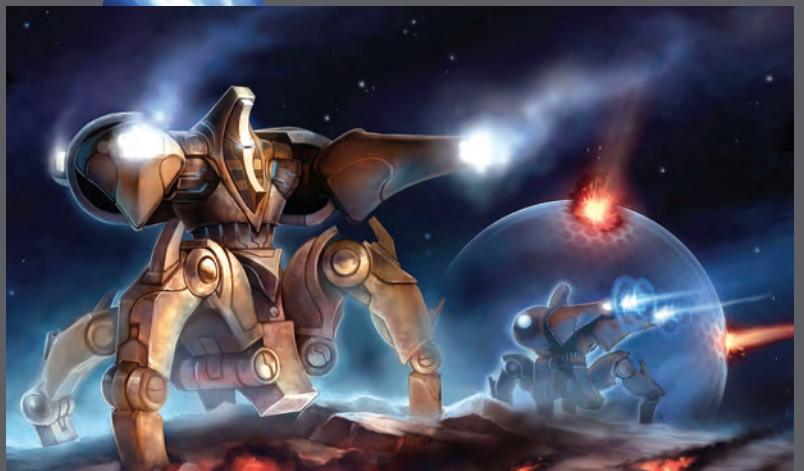
- 1st place: Johan "toxjq" Quick - $20,000;
- 2nd place: Magnus "fojjji" Olsson - $12,500; and
- 3rd place: Timothy "DaHanG" Fogarty - $7,500.

GOLIATH ONLINE

It was only to be expected that Blizzard would be touting its highly-anticipated sequel to the venerable *StarCraft*. The main convention hall of the expo was crammed with dozens of machines running both single and multiplayer versions of the game, while a live demo event walked wide-eyed attendees through a brief exhibition of the single-player campaign.

Picking up the story some four years after the events of its predecessor, *StarCraft II* sees Jim Raynor, the former Confederate Marshal of Mar Sara, scratching out a wretched mercenary existence raiding backwater planetoids for baubles and selling them off to shady conglomerates. At the start of the game, he and his crew have acquired some Xel'Naga artefacts at the behest of something called the Moebius Foundation. Self-proclaimed "Queen Bitch of the Universe," Sarah Kerrigan, meanwhile, has bolted off back to Char with her pet, Zerglings, and hasn't been seen nor heard from since. In the wake of Aiur's destruction and the murder of its matriarch, the Protoss have scampered off to the Dark Templar home world, Shakuras. It's really only a matter of time before something interesting happens.

Although the Zerg remained mysteriously absent from the proceedings, fans were able to grab some hands-on time with the Terrans and Protoss. Both races are sporting a plethora of new and improved units, structures, and tech upgrades, although Blizzard was quick to remind attendees that the game design remains somewhat in flux and nothing on show was final.

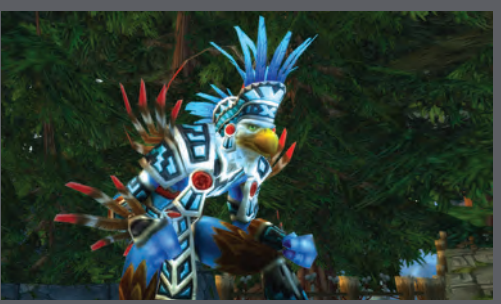


I CAN HAS LICH KINGZ

Despite two widely copied and pasted leaks, the announcement of a second *World of WarCraft* expansion managed to generate more than enough squealing among BlizzCon attendees to appease the gods of Azeroth.

Wrath of the Lich King introduces Northrend, a windswept and austere landscape dominated by glaciers, mountains, perennial winter, and the bleak gaze of the expansion's eponymous monarch. Former Paladin-turned-Death Knight, Arthas Menethil, now a self-styled Lich King infused with the malevolent spirit of wayward shaman-turned-undead megalomaniac, Ner'zhul (it's complicated), has apparently hatched some sort of wicked scheme that threatens all life on Azeroth. Only with the almighty might of ten- and 25-man raid instances can this incipient menace be defeated!

Bundled with the expansion come the usual blizzard of additions, enhancements, and tweaks. The character level cap will be raised to 80 and the profession level cap increased to 450, while new customisation options will become available, including hairstyles (perhaps via an instance where players stumble upon a sun-dappled glade to find Arthas washing his flaxen tresses in a stream with Timote. Probably not, but we reckon that would be awesome, anyway). There's a new emphasis on PvP action, including an entire non-instanced PvP zone called Lake Wintergrasp, and new battleground instances. Siege weaponry, including Meat Wagons and Steam Tanks, will be lumbering into the game, along with its natural prey, destructible structures. A new profession, Inscription, is on offer. Similar to Enchanting, this profession grants players the ability to permanently boost spells and abilities. Then there're all the new items, quests, dungeons, creatures, and other sundries you'd expect from a full-scale expansion set.



I CAN LIKE TO BE A DEATH KNIGHT

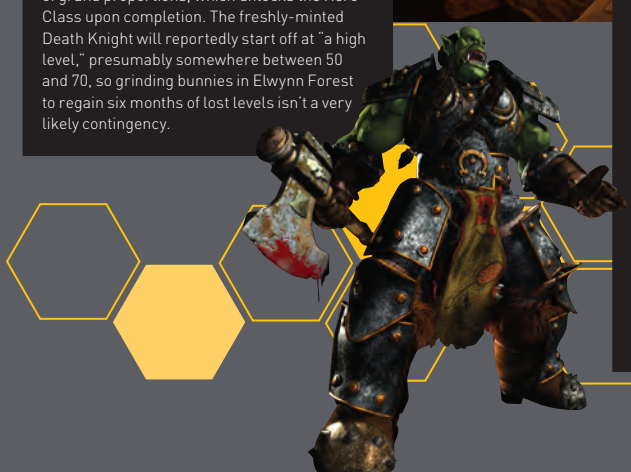
The expansion also introduces the game's very first Hero Class, the Death Knight. This formidable fellow has a penchant for plate armour and new weapons like Runeswords and Runeaxes. These weapons do double duty not only as agents of blood-squirting vengeance, but also play host to the Death Knight's primary resource, Runes. Instead of a mana or health or rage or whatever, the Death Knight draws its dread power from collectible Runes placed in weapon slots. Confirmed Rune types include Frost, Blood, and Unholy, and may be used in a variety of combinations according to spell or ability requirements.

Once players hit level 80, they'll be given the opportunity to embark upon a valiant quest of grand proportions, which unlocks the Hero Class upon completion. The freshly-minted Death Knight will reportedly start off at "a high level," presumably somewhere between 50 and 70, so grinding bunnies in Elwynn Forest to regain six months of lost levels isn't a very likely contingency.

WORLD OF CINEMACRAFT

More than a year after its announcement, some details about the (inevitable) *World of WarCraft* film were finally revealed. Blizzard has inked a deal with Legendary Pictures (*300*, *Batman Begins*, and the upcoming *Dark Knight* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*), whose CEO, Thomas Tull, was at pains to emphasise his company's commitment to producing "not a videogame movie," but something actually worth the price of its admission ticket. He went on to drop figures of $100 million (budget), 2009 (release), and PG-13 (rating).

The story takes place about a year before the events of *World of WarCraft*, and is presented largely from the Alliance's perspective, with a focus on the conflict between themselves and the Horde. No news on director or cast yet, although the movie was confirmed as live action. **NAG**



POLAND SWEEPS ESPORTS AWARDS

IT WAS ONE WILD night at the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany. Limousines and bouncers in evening sunglasses escorted the stars to the red carpet, where the paparazzi swarmed and screaming fans threw underwear. Well, not quite. Nevertheless, it was the e-sports industry's fourth annual awards ceremony, attracting a host of renowned personalities from across the competitive gaming world. Most importantly from Eastern Europe, it would seem, as Polish nationals walked away with no less than five of the eight main awards.

The awards ceremony (managed by Turtle Entertainment GmbH, the parent company of Germany's Electronic Sports League) has been criticised for its Eurocentric bias in the past. However, this year the results were clearly unprejudiced, and perhaps for the first time since its inception the ceremony seemed like a sincere, mutual celebration of everything the worldwide e-sports community had achieved. It has indeed been a rollercoaster season, and the show was a stylish way to end things off.

While it was reasonably obvious that North American players wouldn't be winning any of the main awards this year, the judges took the opportunity to present Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendell with a Lifetime Achievement Award, adding a bit of geographical balance to the evening. Fatal1ty accepted the award with a moving speech that reportedly brought tears to the eyes of a number of audience members. The award was a formalisation of everything he had fought so hard to accomplish, and his modesty and generosity towards the community even managed to win over some of his regular detractors.

However, in all of the official categories the new-blood players shone brightest. An equally emotional Filip "Neo" Kubski accepted awards for both eSports Player of the Year and Best Counter-Strike Player. It wasn't without stiff competition, mind you. Neo saw off challenges from other gaming heavyweights such as Johan "Toxic" Quick, the Swedish *Quake 4* star who made history with a record nine straight tournament wins, and Raphael "Cogu" Camargo, the man behind the continued success of *Counter-Strike* outfit, Made In Brazil.

One explanation for why Neo's success in particular resonated with the judges was the rags-to-riches story surrounding his team, Pentagram G-Shock. The Polish community had been considered a backwater as recently as the beginning of 2006, with slower Internet connections and poorer socioeconomic conditions than, say, Sweden. Their success didn't come overnight either: they persevered for years before the first major breakthrough. Another explanation is that *Counter-Strike* is a notoriously difficult game to stay ahead in. It enjoys an unmatched level of worldwide competition. Of the past four major championships, Pentagram G-Shock has won two and was placed third in another, putting them a step ahead of rivals Made In Brazil and Fnatic. In virtually every game, Neo has been the team's key player, consistently finishing at the top of the scoreboard.

Polish *Counter-Strike* team Pentagram G-Shock has won two of the past four major championships

It was no wonder that eSports Team of the Year also went to the Pentragram boys. Winning both the World Cyber Games and the Electronic Sports World Cup has only been achieved once before – by Dutch *Warcraft III* player, Manual "Grubby" Schenkhuizen, who fittingly acted as a presenter for this year's show after failing for the first time to be nominated.

Poland came up big yet again with Breakthrough of the Year, which was presented to the sixteen-year-old "boy

wonder" of *Quake 4*, Maciej "Av3k" Krzykowski. Being the only quaker to have beaten Toxic since ESWC 2006, and the youngest player ever to win a major tournament, Av3k was a shoo-in for the title.

The fifth award in Poland's bag turned out not to be for any game in particular. Popular e-sports columnist, videographer and all-round prankster, Michal "Carmac" Blicharz, shared the accolade for the Scene Journalist Award with Germany's David "Craven" Abel. The article that earned him the honours was – surprise, surprise – an account of Pentagram's ESWC victory and the adventures of a group of passionate Polish fans. Carmac is also known for his encouragement of the young Av3k, and his tendency to lift famous players over his shoulder. Don't ask.

All the excitement didn't seem to affect Toxic, who was his sedately smiling self as he picked up Sweden's only decoration, Best FPS Duel Player. Like Av3k, he was the only real candidate and anything else would have been a shock. His dominance of the *Quake 4* scene has even led people to criticise him for making the sport boring. If that's not an achievement we don't know what is.

Konami won eSports Game of the Year for *Pro Evolution Soccer 6*

Best Warcraft 3 Player was awarded to France's Yoan "Tod" Merlo for his victories at Blizzard's World Wide Invitational and the Electronic Sports League's Extreme Masters. This was the only area where public support was clearly behind another nominee. Olav "Creolophus" Undheim, hailing from Norway, caused a stir by announcing his retirement from professional gaming and then winning his first (and last) big competition a month later at BlizCon. However, Tod's consistent performances still make him a well-deserving recipient, and shows that living in China – where *Warcraft III* is most popular – has indeed paid off.

In previous years there has also been an award for Best Publisher, presented to the company with the best track record in releasing e-sports titles. However, after EA won it three years in a row, raising suspicions of favouritism, the award was scrapped and replaced with the more useful eSports Game of the Year. This year it was won by Japan-based Konami, developers of *Pro Evolution Soccer 6*. This category promises to become more exciting in future years, especially with the era of *Unreal Tournament 3*, *StarCraft II* and *Quake 5* drawing ever nearer.

Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendell was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award

Whether or not it's due to the influence of the Championship Gaming Series, European events have lately been upping the ante in terms of production and broadcasting. GIGA eSports, the German channel that covered the Awards ceremony, airs daily talk shows, game analyses and coverage of most of the bigger European leagues (albeit in German). In light of all this glitz and glamour, recent fears about the downfall of e-sports seem oddly out of place. The debate rages on, but while the scholars argue over theory, the community on the ground is moving ahead regardless. E-sports is that peculiar type of insect that just refuses to die, no matter how much insecticide you try to spray it with. **NAG**

CALL OF DUTY 4:
MODERN WARFARE MULTIPLAYER BETA

THE *CALL OF DUTY* series has been synonymous with World War II since its debut in 2003. From Africa to D-Day, the games took the player to almost every conceivable battle in the war against the Axis. It's characterised by fast and frantic gameplay often pitting the player against an overwhelming enemy. That being said, it still followed a pretty standard run-and-gun formula with little else but your weapons affecting the world and the unfortunate foe (or team-mate) in your crosshairs. Luckily for us, the original developers of the series have taken a long hard look at it and have decided to change the gameplay and its setting to suit the demands of the next-gen market.

With the development of *Call of Duty 3* delegated to Treyarch, Infinity Ward has been hard at work on *Call of Duty 4* ever since they completed the second game. The new instalment promises to revamp the series with a number of improvements to the gameplay. Given that the game is set in a more modern era, it allows the developers to add quite a bit more complexity to the overall formula. Flash bangs and stun grenades are made available and night vision goggles also come into play. The environment seems to also influence your tactics, and we're not just talking about using cover and high ground to your advantage. You see, they added something called bullet penetration into the mix. Don't be surprised when you take cover and the enemy simply cuts you in half through what you thought was a sturdy dry wall. Players are also given experience points, which are carried over to a persistent profile. Here they can gain levels and are promoted in rank accordingly, which in turn dictates what perks and features they will unlock. These features, interestingly enough, include adding clan tags to your nick through to unlocking the game modes themselves.

The game modes seen thus far are of standard stock. Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Search & Destroy and

CREATE-A-CLASS

Not a new concept in gaming but one that's used to great effect in *COD 4*. Once you've unlocked this feature through promotion, you'll be able to define your own class. This would be the only way in which you can select and use the various weapons, their upgrades and perks that you've unlocked throughout your career. Five customisable slots are available, which is great for having a class for each map or game mode. Clans will surely take advantage of this, creating a class for each role required.

PERKY, BABY!

With the create-a-class feature comes the ability to add upgrades to your weapons and perks to your class. The weapon upgrades will only be unlocked by completing challenges, which are as simple as killing a certain number of enemies with a particular weapon. These upgrades range from silencers to ACOG scopes, but a weapon can only fit one upgrade at a time. Perks can be acquired through promotion and give you unique abilities and advantages. For example, Last Stand will give you the opportunity to get in a few last shots with your side arm after you've been effectively killed, and UAV Jamming will stop that pesky radar from spotting you.

Domination all feature, as well as an announced Hardcore mode for each of them. Now this is quite an interesting thing because in this mode, damage from weapons is increased and all the HUD elements are stripped, including ammo count and crosshairs. This suggests that the overall balance of the game could also accommodate a more tactical play style and would be a sharp break from the series' established gameplay. Probably good foresight on the developers' part, seeing that the game will be launched the same time as *Halo 3*, with the president and studio head of Infinity Ward, Grant Collier, saying to *Next-Gen*, "I think for the 360 it's pretty much *Halo 3* that's the competition so we're going after who we think are at the top of the game right now and we want to take those guys on." They'll need to appeal to as many gamers as possible and a little diversity could help secure a dedicated multiplayer fan-base, hopefully exceeding it's competition's expectations. **NAG**

IN-GAME ABILITIES

In another break from tradition, the game will reward you and your team with special abilities, which will help win the round. These come in the form of air strikes, radar-equipped UAVs and chopper attacks. They will be made available according to your performance in-game: get three kills in a row without dying and you'll get the UAV, get five and it'll be the air strike. Furthermore, you'll be able to combine them. Wait until you have the UAV and the air strike and you'll be able to call a precision carpet-bomb run on your enemies.

SAVAGE 2

WWW.S2GAMES.COM

EVERY SO OFTEN THE gaming world is gifted with an indie title that not only showcases the professionalism and ingenuity of this group of developers, but pushes the boundaries of gaming in a direction that bigger developers wouldn't dare. S2 GAMES has pushed those boundaries in the past and dares to push them even further with its latest project.

S2 GAMES took its first steps into the gaming industry with its debut title, *Savage: Battle for Newerth*. With it, this small group of developers sought to meld the two popular genres of the time, FPS and RTS, into a single title that would bring together the best of both worlds. S2 GAMES may not have broken any new ground in either of the genres, but in combining them, it was able to create a truly one-of-a-kind playing experience - until now.

S2 GAMES has taken its 'FPS-RTS' genre to the next level with its latest instalment, *Savage 2: A Tortured Soul*. The basic concept and focus follow the original's: two races, humans and beasts, battle it out on a battlefield, taking advantage of various technologies, units and terrain and an array of abilities in an effort to destroy the opposing team. However, this is where the similarities end. *Savage* has had many of its features reworked and improved, and traditional *Savage* players seeking more of the old may find themselves put off at first with *Savage 2*'s revised approach to command and combat.

However, if you're a diehard fan of all things *Savage*, or just looking for something more than your typical FPS or RTS, you may just find *Savage 2* to be that breath of fresh air you're looking for. Traditional RTS players will find new challenges awaiting them: trying to coordinate a living army that has a mind of its own can be a bit like herding cats. As a commander, you're granted a number of tools to encourage players to follow your instructions. These come in a number of forms, primarily as power-ups you can grant to cooperative players and spells to hurl at their enemies.

Those who prefer being on ground level will have their hands full. Teams are divided into smaller groups of players, each led by an officer equipped with a number of abilities to help his or her squad. These groups often travel around the map together with the officer, relaying tactics to the various group members, depending on the commander's instructions. With ten ground units to choose from, not including Siege and Hellbourne, it's difficult to find a situation that cannot be dealt with by a skilled group of players.

A 42-man game starts with a team setup process. Players volunteer to take command and the rest of the team casts votes to decide who takes control. Once a commander has been elected, he or she selects four officers from the player pool to lead the team's various squads, after which players decide on the officer they want to play under and join a group, no larger than five players. Once completed, the game begins.

The commander's view and role on the battlefield is that of your typical RTS. He or she constructs buildings, researches new technologies and interacts with players, selecting them and issuing commands to move to a location, build a structure or attack a unit. A player receives these commands in the form of voice notifications accompanied by waypoints, indicating which route to follow. At the start of the game and after every death, a player purchases a unit (Worker, Support class, Warrior class or Siege), who decides what role he or she will undertake. Every class has its own set of base attributes and abilities. The player improves these as he or she advances in levels by gaining experience from fulfilling his or her class's role. Players can purchase potions, armour and extra ammo and equip persistent items linked to their account to further improve their effectiveness.

When we strip away the layers of gameplay that surround *Savage 2*, we can boil it down to one defining aspect: team play. It's all about cooperation, communication and strategy. With the fast-paced gaming *Savage 2* employs, this can be a blessing and a curse. Casual gamers, not familiar with team-based gameplay, may find it frustrating when trying to keep up with experienced players. However, 'hardcore' gamers may find *Savage 2*, with its focus on player and team skill, an exciting arena in which to prove themselves.

Overall, *Savage 2* does well in achieving what it's supposed to accomplish. It seamlessly combines two classic genres into a gaming experience you won't find anywhere else. Whether you love or hate that experience is up to you. **NAG**

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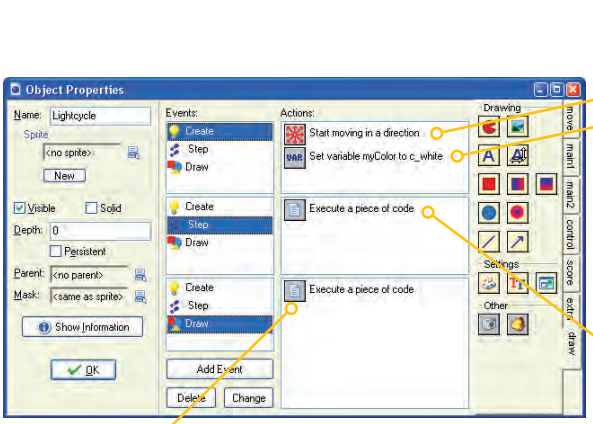
TRON LIGHT CYCLES IN PICTURES

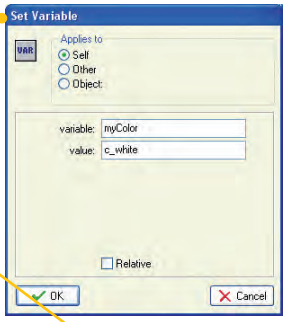
WHEN HOME COMPUTERS FIRST appeared, magazines used to print raw source code that eager readers would laboriously type in, line by line, to finally hit compile and see what on earth it did, after hunting for spelling errors and the like, of course... After a while, those eager readers started seeing at a glance what something would do, then they began changing things and adding their own code. The rest is history. We think it's time to resurrect that idea, so load Game Maker (you'll find it on the DVD) and make it look lias pictured on these pages to get:

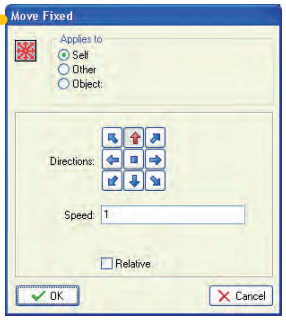
TRON LIGHT CYCLES

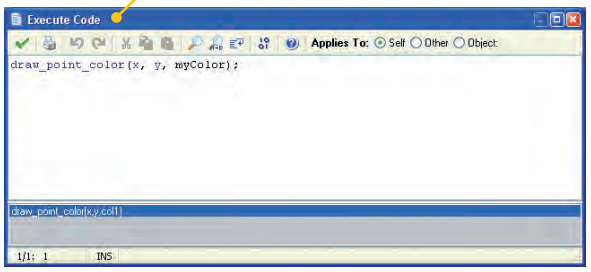
You've played *Light Cycles* before. You may not have seen *TRON* the movie and even managed to miss out on the spectacular *TRON 2.0*, but you've played *Light Cycles*. Two players, one red and one blue, try to box each other in with the lines they leave behind as they move. Hit a line or the edge of the world and you die. Simple, elegant and perfect for first-time developers. Enjoy!

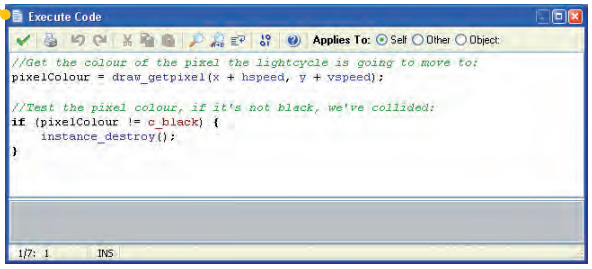
Once you're finished, grab a friend and test the game. Then try to extend it and add new things: give each player a score; try adding turbo boosts and power-ups; give the game sounds; mess with the colours; play around and have fun with what you can do!

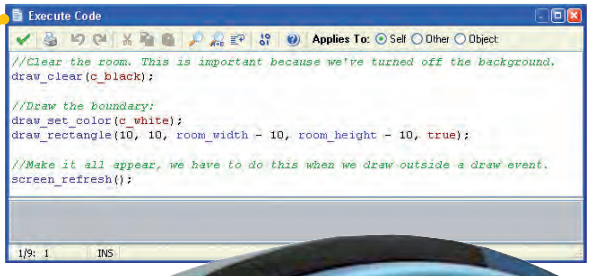


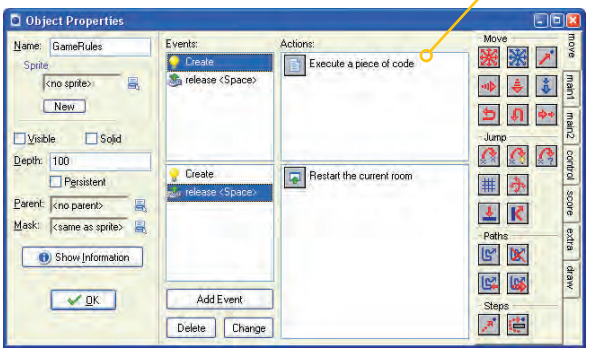


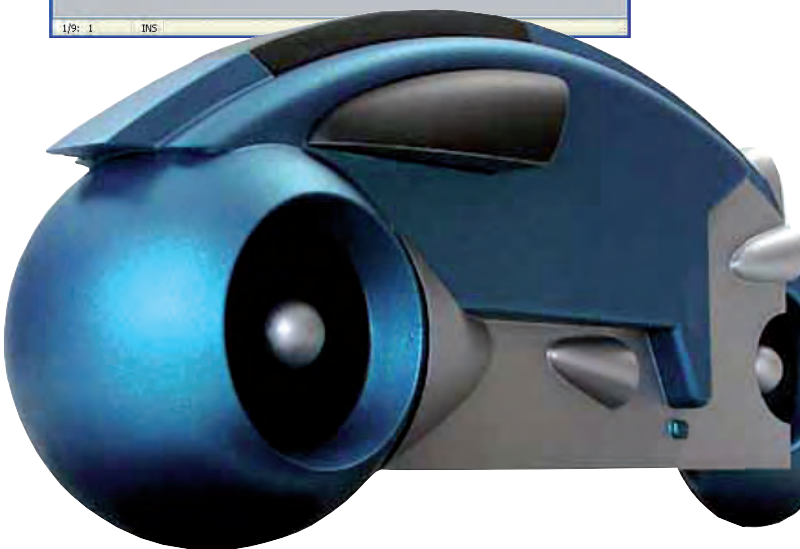


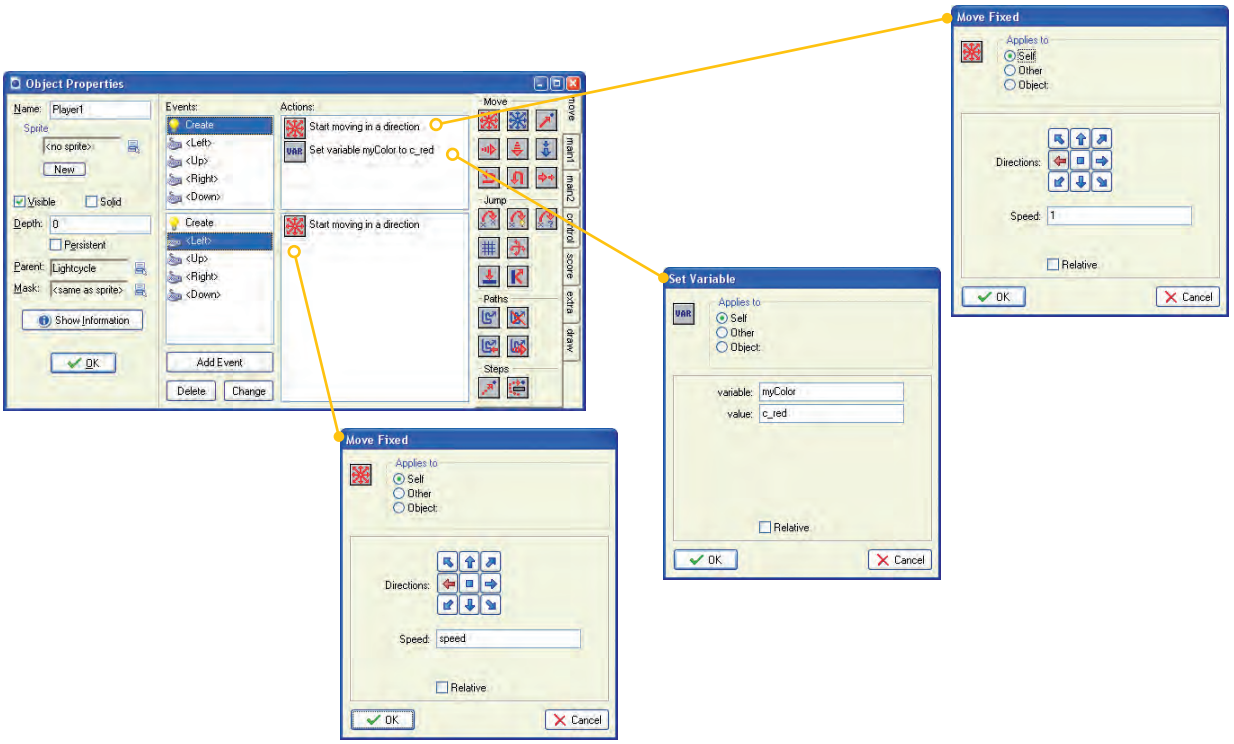








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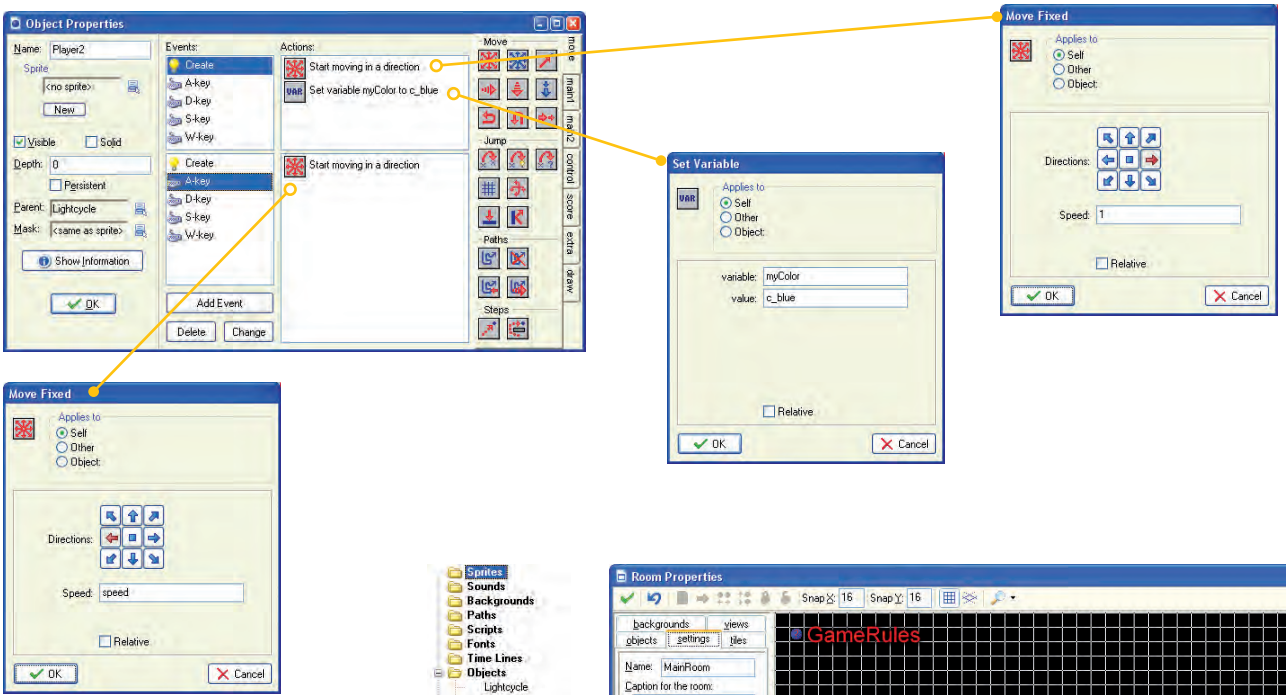
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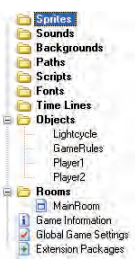
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Player2
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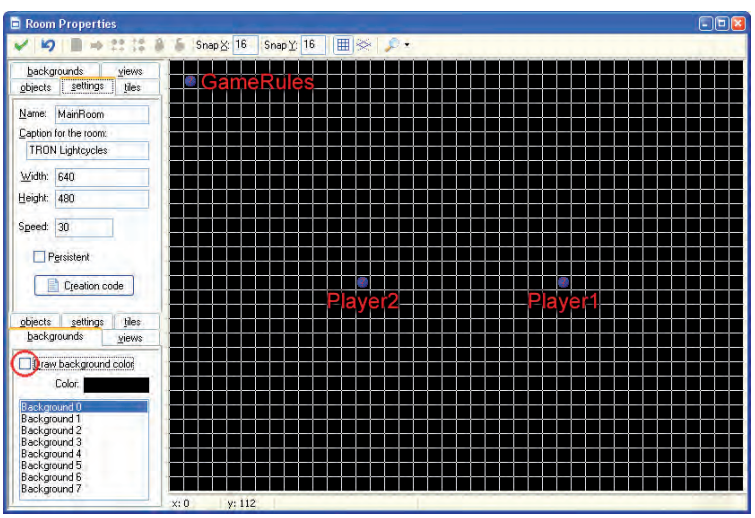
Extension Packages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Background 2
Background 3
Background 4
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Background 7
GameRules
Player2
Player1
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y: 112

TIBERIUM WARS MILITARY ACADEMY

PART 2 OF 3

REINFORCEMENTS HAVE ARRIVED!

WELCOME BACK, COMMANDER! THIS is the second part of the extended operational briefing. Our goal here will be to familiarise you with intermediate-level tactics and practices. After discussions of base management and battle command, we'll examine methodology and intelligence regarding Nod units.

BASE MANAGEMENT

The key factors for a successful base are efficiency and defence. The former will influence how effective your base is at fulfilling its basic (pardon the pun!) function: supporting your war efforts. To this end, you should make sure that your refineries are as close as possible to the Tiberium fields. Shorter trips mean faster turnaround and therefore faster income. Thus, resist the temptation to tuck away your refineries at the back of your base for protection. Likewise, don't hide barracks and war factories at the rear of your base: newly-created reinforcements will be able to reach the fight faster. This also applies not only to individual bases, but to your overall development. What this means is that it's worth (at the appropriate time) to invest in a surveyor (or equivalent unit) or mobile construction vehicle in order to establish resource-gathering operations close to outlying Tiberium fields.

Defence is a tricky issue. A compact base lends itself better to defence, but at the cost of efficiency (if buildings are too crowded, it restricts deployment and movement of enemy troops and that of friendly units). A compact base is also more vulnerable to super weapon strikes. Here a balance needs to be struck. Grow a base in such a manner that you can take advantage of natural choke points whenever the map permits this. However, don't neglect defending within your base. If your perimeter is breached, you need to be able to resist and deny the invader the opportunity to merely run over your infrastructure. Another important aspect of defence is to not rely too heavily on static defences (turrets and the like). Back up your turrets with units. This will make both elements more effective than on their own.

A note on resources and technology: whenever your technology ascends a tier (such as when you put up a command post or a tech centre), your resource requirements escalate. Allow for this in advance, lest your economy crashes at these points.

Place refineries facing Tiberium and as close as possible

Always build a war factory at an expansion

With planning it's sometimes easier and cheaper to build toward additional resources

BATTLE COMMAND

Taking a diverse army to the field is one of the most important habits you can get into. Trying to tech up to mammoth tanks and attempting to roll over an opponent with a large column of these, for example, are doomed to fail when facing even a moderately competent enemy. Don't neglect infantry: although fragile, they lend excellent support to armoured forces, delivering excellent damage for their cost.

While engaged with forces, it's best to prioritise targets. Dangerous but fragile units as well as damaged or wounded enemy units should be targeted first. In general, when possible, your units' AI will tend to target units that they are most effective against. Therefore, avoid the habit of targeting a unit with everything selected. Rather assign separate hotkeys to your anti-infantry, anti-vehicle, and anti-air units, and control these groups independently.

NOTES ABOUT THE LATEST PATCHES

The game has been significantly modified with recent patches. For starters, since version 1.06, some buildings don't grant ground control. The main implication is that it's now much more costly and difficult to 'spider base' out to somewhere and capture an area with high-tech turrets. In 1.07, some significant play-balance changes were effected. Pitbulls have been made slightly softer, and their mortar upgrade is more expensive to research and less accurate in its delivery. Nevertheless, these units are still eminently playable (which is a testament to how overpowered they were before). One of the most important changes is the fact that cranes and equivalent structures can no longer build turrets or super weapons. This means that it's now vital to build a mobile construction vehicle at some point (this is usually optimal at around the time you build a tech centre or equivalent). Having two construction yards is generally a good practice in any case.

When assaulting a base, try to prioritise your targets. There are no hard-and-fast rules here, but it's often advisable to initially ignore turrets and concentrate on units, which (except for high-tech units like mammoth tanks, avatars and tripods) tend to be significantly softer. This way you'll reduce the number of attacks against you the fastest and tilt the odds in your favour. However, don't ignore obelisks of light, storm columns and sonic emitters. It's best to eliminate these as quickly as possible, as they can inflict grievous casualties. There are also times when it pays to ignore units in favour of production facilities: if you knock out a war factory, you can then turn your attention back to the units, whose ranks will be replenished more slowly.

Taking out enemy outposts is key

DISRUPTING ENEMY ECONOMY

Here there are various factors to consider. Harvesters gather Tiberium - refineries don't. Therefore, you should target harvesters before refineries. A refinery without harvesters is useless. Taking out the harvesters will result in your opponent having to replace them. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Firstly, if the refinery happens to be the only building granting your enemy ground control in that region, take it out (this applies to any building that's the source of ground control - guard it well if it's yours, attack it mercilessly if it isn't!). Secondly, if this is the only refinery you see in an outlying area, it's worth destroying it in order to force the enemy harvesters to make longer trips. This serves the twofold purpose of slowing their income and rendering them more vulnerable by forcing them to drive around exposed.

That's all for this month, Commander. Next month, report for intel on the Scrin as well as some advanced concepts.

Tech centres should be priority targets

THE WAY OF NOD
KANE LIVES!

Welcome brother! I'm here to teach you the ways of our sacred brotherhood, for we oppose the oppressive might of the GDI, whose war machines are certainly bulkier and heavier. We must be clever and quick.

Speed, mobility and stealth are our allies. To this end, our attack cycles, while extremely fragile, pack one hell of a punch. These units are ideal for exploration, as they are very quick and can quickly hunt down and kill isolated harvesters or tanks. However, it's important to run away as soon as coordinated resistance mounts: even rifle infantry will annihilate them.

STEALTH

Stealth is a very powerful psychological weapon. Used correctly, it'll strike terror into the hearts of your enemies! The thing to remember when using stealth units is not to use them as frontal assault weapons. Use them to scout your opponent's weaknesses and then strike at a vulnerability. When resistance materialises, fade back into the shadows and find another side to strike from. This will keep your opponent off-balance and paranoid, wondering where the next attack will come from. In the meantime, build up a main assault force and bring it closer, but remain undetected. Once your stealthy strike force has been whittled down, leave it attacking wherever you struck last, and hit the base from the other side with your main force. It's very likely that you'll get to operate unhindered on this side for a little while, as your opponent will hear "Our base is under attack" and possibly assume that the notification refers to your stealth squad.

The cloaking field support power is very interesting. It can be used to conceal a group of vehicles. However, a sneakier application is to use it to assassinate a group of enemy infantry. For example, let's assume you clash with an enemy force. You'll both probably have some infantry and a number of vehicles in the fray. Rocket infantry is exceptionally dangerous, so targeting them with a cloaking field will eliminate them and instantly grant you the upper hand.

Stealth tanks are hard-hitting units and very versatile as they can hit vehicles, aircraft, buildings and aren't entirely useless against infantry. However, they are quite fragile, but this is offset by their speed. They are ideal for deep strikes on enemy bases: find a gap in the perimeter, sneak in, take up position near some key targets, then open fire and annihilate them. Because they often get away with sneaking in undetected, you can usually take your time positioning them in such a way as to make it awkward to respond to them (behind buildings, for example, forcing the defending player to navigate his own base). At this point you have several options: continue attacking critical buildings until your stealth tanks have been destroyed (sometimes a valid choice); engage the strung-out defenders, taking advantage of the fact that you'll be able to hit each of them with several attacks while they retaliate one at a time; or leave, fading back into shadows to strike again somewhere else later.

An underused unit is the shadow strike team. These guys, being a flying unit, are great for scouting, and once they land, they are cloaked. Their sabotage capabilities are ideal for causing panic among enemy units.

A last note on stealth: With cranes no longer able to build turrets and super weapons, you'll often find your second support structure construction queue idle. In such cases it pays to erect a few disruption towers. These offer a very respectable coverage area and seriously inconvenience enemies' attempts at a planned, coordinated assault on your bases. Of course, the towers themselves will draw fire, so back them up with defensive structures. Build more than you need. These have overlapping areas of effect so that when one goes down, your enemy will feel the frustration of discovering that they still cannot see your stuff! Expect to lose them at some point.

FIRE!

While flame tanks are a bit too soft for most engagements, the black hand infantry are among the toughest in the game. Even anti-infantry weapons have to work hard to kill them. Their flamethrowers deal huge amounts of damage to infantry and buildings, and even melt vehicles. A group of tanks backing them up in taking out anti-infantry weaponry can make them well nigh unstoppable!

While we're talking about infantry, don't underestimate the infantry upgrades in the secret shrine. The Tiberium infusion's benefits are obvious. However, the confessors' are less obvious. Their hallucinogenic grenades will temporarily turn enemy infantry to assist you (without supervision). **NAG**

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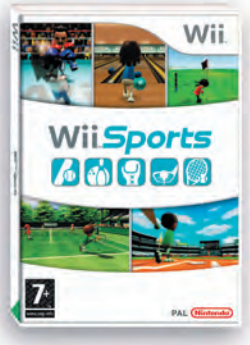

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MOVIE NEWS

The Dark Knight

Director: Christopher Nolan
Cast: Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Morgan Freeman, Michael Caine, Gary Oldman
Genre: Action, Comic Book
Release: Mid-2008

GOTHAM IS IN TROUBLE – again – and the Dark Knight is back in form to save the city he loves (or at least he is tied to in a way he can't ignore). Whatever Batman's psychology, after the success of *Batman Begins*, removing a lot of the bad vibes caused by *Batman Forever* and *Batman and Robin*, a sequel had to be expected. The movie will be helmed again by Christopher Nolan, while Christian Bale returns in the role of Bruce Wayne and his alter ego. Some fans will be happy to hear that Katie Holmes isn't returning due to scheduling conflicts, and rumour has it that sexy 'girl next door' Maggie Gyllenhaal will be Wayne's new romantic interest. Other than that, if the characters didn't die in *Begins*, they will return. That means you can expect more from Michael Caine and Gary Oldman, to name a few.

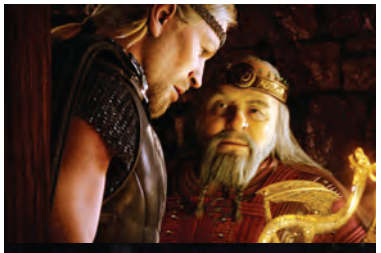
However, as you might have noted, that still leaves an empty space for the villains. Before we get to the good stuff, Harvey Dent - he who will later become Two Face - will be part of the story and portrayed by Aaron Eckhart (*Thank You for Not Smoking*), though Dent won't turn as his alter ego yet. It was also rumoured that Bob Hoskins was to play The Penguin, but that fell through. Catwoman also appears in the movie, but the biggest news for fans is that The Joker is the lead bad guy. That's a tall calling, since the actor has to follow in the footsteps of Jack Nicholson's immortal portrayal. The person they chose? Heath Ledger. Yes, nobody was particularly excited about this. That is until they saw photos of Ledger in his costume. The man is downright creepy and should fit right in with Nolan's more gritty Batman world. The last remaining question is whether Nolan has gotten to grips with directing an action movie - something the last movie lacked somewhat. Nevertheless, there appears to be plenty of explosions and pointless violence in the project. *The Dark Knight* is due for release next year and looks set to beat expectations set by *Batman Begins*.

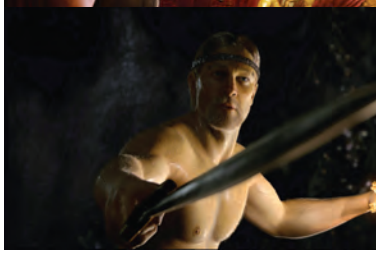
I'm Batman!

Would you like to buy this knife?

Beowulf

Director: Roger Zemeckis
Cast: Angelina Jolie, Ray Winstone, Anthony Hopkins, John Malkovich
Genre: Adventure
Release: November 07 (US)





WHEN WE FIRST HEARD of *Beowulf*, we thought it was a remake of the terrible movie starring Christopher Lambert. To us, Grendel was a comic book character. But research has enlightened us that it's a very, very, very old poem about Beowulf, a hero of the Geats (the original Goths), who travelled to Denmark to take care of Grendel, who had been making life for the people there. Grendel's mother didn't react well to that, so he had to kill her as well. Beowulf eventually becomes king and has to fight a dragon, a battle in which he is fatally wounded.

That might not be the exact plot of the movie, but it involves all the fighting bits plus a naked Angelina Jolie. However, before you get excited, the whole project is being done in CG using the same technology used for *The Polar Express*. It is in fact the same mind behind that movie: Roger Zemeckis. Nevertheless, while that was creepy, this looks pretty action-packed and violent. The US seems set to get a PG-13 release, but the rest of us might enjoy the uncensored version, which has some bloody fights in it. The script also has a lot of promise, since it was written by Roger Avary (*Pulp Fiction, Silent Hill*) and Neil Gaiman (ask one of your smart friends). *Beowulf* also boasts a heavy cast, most of who acted in the motion-captured scenes instead of just providing voices (hence the creepy sensation *Polar Express* emitted). The bigger question is whether an older audience would flock to see a CG movie. We certainly hope so.

Resident Evil: Extinction

Director: Russell Mulcahy
Cast: Milla Jovovich, Oded Fehr, Mike Epps
Genre: Horror, Action
Release: Oct 2007 (US)

ALICE HAS COME TO the city that never sleeps! As is usually the case with an ongoing zombie horror saga, by the third film the world's pretty overrun by them. Civilisation as we know it has ended and degraded into a *Mad Max*-style survivathon. Amidst all this, stalwart character, Alice, arrives in Las Vegas, which has been claimed by the desert - and zombies. Meanwhile, she's being chased by the Umbrella Corporation, which needs her specifically for, one presumes, some kind of way to stop the zombies. All this will inevitably head off into a stand-off between her and the evil company that started the whole mess.

Okay, so it's a total departure from the game, but it might be what the series needs after the lacklustre *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*. The interesting change is that the movie plays off in daylight, which will be interesting if used well. Expect evil crows, lots of zombies and another appearance by Nemesis.

Milla Jovovich reprises her role as Alice, but the movie is now handled by director Russell Mulcahy (*Highlander*). It's hard to say what to expect from this one, but lots of action and gore would be on our list. The *Mad Max* feeling might lend itself well to the theme too. The movie was shot in Mexico, so apart from the Umbrella scenes, everything seems to happen in or around lots of sand and intense amounts of sunlight. Yes, it's definitely about time they broke tradition. Daytime zombies are much creepier.

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Hot Fuzz

Director: Edger Wright
Cast: Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Jim Broadbent, Timothy Dalton
Genre: Action Comedy
Rating: 16 (LV)
Score: ★★★★★

NICHOLAS ANGEL (SIMON PEGG), the best damn cop in London, is 'promoted' to the sleepy, crime-free village of Sandford after his superiors realise he's performing so well that he's making them look bad. Once there, he is partnered with naive constable, Danny Butterman (Nick Frost), and has to adjust to the quiet, uneventful pace of the village. Soon after his arrival however, a series of gruesome murders, disguised as accidents, has Angel convinced that Sandford is not what it seems. What follows is a dry, snide and clever take on the cop action-flick, but with a clear British twist. Simon Pegg, usually known for his excitable and colourful 'down and out" characters, pulls off a convincing performance as straight-faced cop, and you can't help but think that he's almost always on the verge of bursting into laughter.

Simon Pegg and Nick Frost previously starred together in *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and the television series, *Spaced*, and continue their on-screen synergy in *Hot Fuzz*. *Shaun of the Dead* remains one of the finest 'romantic comedies with zombies', while *Hot Fuzz* very quickly established itself as a proper British dry-witted *Dirty Harry*, but set in an idyllic country town. As a movie, *Hot Fuzz* is an utterly enjoyable roller-coaster ride of laughs through some imaginative and downright silly scenarios that test the limits of Pegg's ability to remain a straight-faced cop.

Self-referential, burlesque and delightfully absurd, *Hot Fuzz* pays humble tongue-in-cheek homage to *Point Break*, *Bad Boys II* and even Wright's own final amateur film, *Dead Right*. Such parody could become disdainful of the source material, but *Hot Fuzz* clearly looks up to its inspirations and that makes all the difference.

The DVD bonus features include perfect audio commentary with Simon Pegg and Edger Wright, as well as outtakes, theatrical trailers and TV spots, storyboards and other miscellaneous fillers. **MD**

Fracture

Director: Gregory Hoblit
Cast: Anthony Hopkins, Ryan Gosling, David Strathairn, Rosamund Pike, Embeth Davidtz
Genre: Thriller
Rating: 13 (LV)
Score: ★★★½

CALLING THIS FILM A thriller might be a bit misleading, as people may expect something with a faster pace. Nevertheless, it is the closest approximation we could find, and *Fracture* is certainly tense throughout. A very intelligent man finds himself cuckolded, and executes an exquisite revenge. Soon enough he is arrested and charged with attempted murder, but whereas most movies would end here, this is the beginning of the film. Much of the action takes place in a courtroom, and involves a brilliant, young, and very ambitious lawyer, who finds himself tackling his last prosecution case before he moves into private practice. By the end of the story, this lawyer will come face to face with his inner morality and have to decide what is right and what is not, even in the pursuit of justice. While *Fracture*'s pace is fairly slow, the atmosphere is very tense, and Hopkins's performance is brilliantly creepy – something he has had some experience with! We found no flaw with the rest of the cast's performance, either. The story is clever but not excessively complex. On the technical side, I found the disk's audio to be faint, and at times a bit unclear. The disk packs a small selection of extras including a theatrical trailer and a few deleted and alternate scenes. In general, we recommend this movie, particularly if you are looking for something somewhat cerebral, but not difficult to follow, with a good cast and strong performances. **AJ**

Silent Hill

Director: Christophe Gans
Cast: Radha Mitchell, Sean Bean, Laurie Holden
Genre: Horror
Rating: 16 (V)
Score: ★★★★

MOVIES BASED ON GAMES should carry a general warning notice! We've seen them come and go over the years and other than the average to good *Tomb Raider* and its sequel, they all share one commonality. They suck. So watching *Silent Hill* with this in mind does the movie a big favour because it's really good, the kind of good where you don't want to leave the cinema for fear of breaking the spell – movies, based on games, might finally be getting better? Here we have two solid, padding-free hours of homage to the game world it's based on, but not to the detriment of the general movie-going public because *Silent Hill* puts on a great show, with great monsters, a decent story, sharp acting and all of this in a hellish setting that should see most people squirming on their couches. For fans of the game, *Silent Hill* (the movie) offers so much more: the director is an obsessive fan of the game and this shows with hundreds of small touches from the weird camera angles to the music used in the movie – most of it directly from the game. This is a class act and besides all the gore and splatter, it's a well-presented, good-looking thrill ride.

As a bonus, you get two DVDs in the box; full of extras fans of the movie and game will love. It's a pity not all movies come with extras like these. There's also a good look at the process from game to movie, so hooray for that. **MJ**

Stranger Than Fiction

Director: Marc Forster
Cast: Will Ferrell, Emma Thompson, Maggie Gyllenhaal
Genre: Comedy
Rating: PG
Score: ★★★★★

A SENIOR IRS AGENT SPENDS a lonely but structured life, waking up every day at the same time, getting to work and taking exact coffee breaks, processing the exact amount of files he can and going home on time. He's also good with numbers. However, one morning he wakes up and hears a voice in his head narrating everything he does. He thinks he's going mad, but this turns out to be an author writing a book and he is the lead character in her story. But the reclusive writer has a tendency to kill her main characters at the end of the book - something he realises when she narrates about his inevitable death.

If you like dry comedies with lots of wit and very little drama, but without being silly, you definitely need to give this a look. Will Ferrell doesn't move far outside his comedy zone, but tones back on the surreal. As an accountant who whose life is falling apart because of a voice in his head, he is simply excellent. On the other side is Emma Thompson, who plays a weird and drunk writer perfectly. Between her narration and his reactions are some of the funniest moments you'll have seen in a while. Throw in other oddball actors like Dustin Hoffman, Maggie Gyllenhaal and Queen Latifah and it just works.

Extras-wise, there are a few features on the film, two deleted scenes not really relevant to the movie and, once again, someone thinks trailers qualify as a special feature. **JF**

Jet Li's Fearless

Director: Ronny Yu
Cast: Jet Li, Nakamura Shido, Collin Chou, Betty Sun
Genre: Action
Rating: 10 (V)
Score: ★★

LOOSELY BASED ON THE life of legendary Chinese martial artist, Huo Yuanjia, *Fearless* is Jet Li's last martial arts epic (according to Jet Li). Huo Yuanjia became the most famous fighter in all of China at the turn of the 20th Century, but faced an incredible personal tragedy that he eventually overcame: restoring pride and nationalism to China at a time of Western Imperialism and Japanese manipulation. It's a pretty stoic Jet Li film that deals with very familiar themes, to the point where (if you're the type who absorbs martial arts movies by the bucket-load) you might find yourself yearning for something with a bit more substance.

The DVD contains no real interesting features and actually lacks a subtitle track for the original Chinese dialogue. This specific version of *Fearless* is the heavily-edited version (99 minutes long) and lacks the fight between Jet Li and a Thai boxer, as well as the full Michelle Yeoh sub-plot (the original 140 minute Director's Cut has already been released in Hong Kong). The only reason *Fearless* scored low in the score box is because

the DVD itself is an unappealing purchase and there are much better versions of the movie on the way.

If scored only on the merits of the movie, the score would be a four instead of a two. **MD**

The Abandoned

Director: Nacho Cerdà
Cast: Anastasia Hille, Karel Roden, Valentin Ganev
Genre: Horror
Rating: 16
Score: ★★

Here's a movie that can go either way, and your enjoyment of it will depend entirely on your own particular taste in movies. It has unique styling, atmosphere and offers something different in terms of the horror genre (the kind of movie that the masses don't enjoy but the critics love). That said, it also doesn't flow nicely, tending to jump around in a confusing manner. The plot (as told by the actors and unfolding events) isn't clear, leaving you wondering if you missed something important along the way, and by failing to draw the viewer completely into its eerie setting, it never delivers the scares and relies more on sound, lighting and camera angles to deliver the thrills. To make matters worse, there's only so much of the lead character's stupidity one can put up with before wishing she'd just die already and put herself and everyone else out of their misery. The twisty revelation at the end seems a little flat and fails to live up to all the anticipation that seemed to be building. Sure, it's well visualised, creepy and oozes that special foreignness that feels far away from Hollywood, but mechanically it jitters and stutters between the action bits. It's not that creepy or scary by any measure and if you only watch 'horror' movies to see the naked blond girl get her head chopped off by a lawnmower-wielding axe murder, stay far away, *The Abandoned* is too busy with its own classic styling

to entertain you. Other than the actual movie, the DVD is a complete waste of plastic with no extra features unless 'setup' counts as a feature in your world. **MJ**

Clerks II

Director: Kevin Smith
Cast: Brian O'Halloran, Jeff Anderson, Jason Mewes, Rosario Dawson, Jennifer Schwalbach Smith
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 18 (LNS)
Score: ★★★

As Bob Dylan so famously stated, "The Times They Are a-Changin'" This sequel to *Clerks* (1994) is about what happens when you realise that you're not in your twenties anymore and there's more to life than sitting around talking about sex and other trivia (or so the DVD sleeve states). Disaster strikes at the Quick Stop convenience store where Dante and Randal work, thanks to Randal leaving the coffee machine on overnight. This unfortunate incident forces them to look for new horizons and they end up working at Mooby's, a fast-food restaurant. Dante, free from his dead-end job, realises that this is his chance to start a new life, as his fiancée's father offers him a job in car-wash management in Florida and plans to buy the couple a new house as a wedding gift. However, Dante's ultimate plan is to get rid of his clingy fiancée, Emma. *Clerks II*'s plot is reasonably solid, but the humour and dialogue are as filthy (read bad) and geeked-out as ever. Ultimately, the tagline, "With no power comes no responsibility," is an apt description of this below-par film.

The DVD features commentary tracks, deleted scenes, bloopers and video diaries. **ND**

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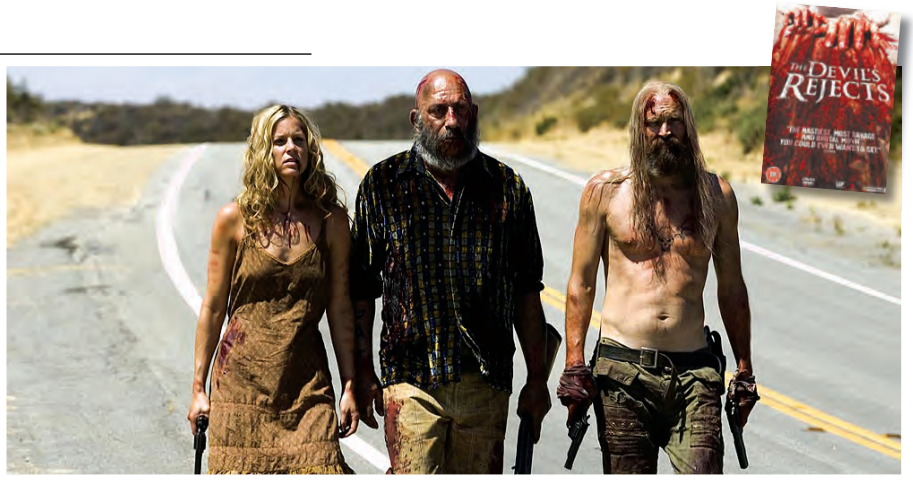
The Devil's Rejects

Director: Rob Zombie
Cast: Sid Haig, Bill Moseley, Sheri Moon, William Forsythe
Genre: Horror
Rating: 18
Score: ★★★★★



THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE that you won't agree with my feeling that this is one of the best horrors made in the past few years. It's not even about whether you loved or really disliked *House of a 1000 Corpses*, the prequel to this movie – there's a fair chance that you actually really dig *1000 Corpses*, in which case this movie is nearly nothing of what you'd expect. For those who are not familiar with either, *The Devil's Rejects* will seem like a violent, nearly pointless movie. For film buffs, a lot of it will seem clichéd and lifted from other productions. But if you ask me, it's just excellent.

Time has run out for the evil Firefly Family we've met in *1000 Corpses*. The bunch of crazy hillbillies have tortured, killed and eaten a lot of people on their desolate ranch in Texas, so a local sheriff pulls up with a helping of extra deputies and proceeds to blow the place apart. But siblings Otis. B. Driftwood and Baby Firefly escape, hook up with the creepy clown, Captain Spaulding, and go on the run. This sends the sheriff, played with great venom by personal favourite, William Forsythe, after them and you can expect that things are going to get very messy, especially for the innocents they meet along the way.

Don't confuse this movie with other hillbilly horrors like *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Chainsaw Massacre*. Rob Zombie makes the characters very personal and you spend a vast amount of time with the remaining members of the family. On the one hand, you will be disturbed by their outright evilness, but on the other, you'll end up liking them as well. Meanwhile, the sheriff transforms from a law man to the kind of evil necessary to destroy evil. While this happens, there are plenty of gory scenes, catchy one-liners and a pair of bounty hunters played by pro-wrestler Diamond Dallas Page and mean-guy Danny Trejo (another personal favourite). But it's also a complete departure from the 'fun fair' feeling of *1000 Corpses* and a proper in-your-face slasher where the killers are the good guys. That is, except for the motel scenes, which are plain chilling.

This is not a masterpiece in the traditional sense and there are no special features, but if you want mean characters, bloody killings and a new perspective on the characters of *1000 Corpses*, you should definitely watch *The Devil's Rejects*. **JF**

Dead or Alive

Director: Takashi Miike
Cast: Riki Takeuchi, Sho Aikawa
Genre: Drama, Action
Rating: 18
Score: ★★★

IF YOU LIKE TO delve into Asian films, in particular the Japanese ones, you'll eventually come across Takashi Miike, a prolific and very controversial director, specifically because he has a knack for extreme scenes and bizarre plots filled with interesting characters. If that sounds too artsy, he directed *Ichi the Killer*, which, among other things featured a guy cutting off his own tongue. Miike's stuff is not for everyone, but at the same time, he doesn't make meaningless gore-laden movies. He makes meaningful gore-laced movies that are usually pretty confusing and pretty deep. But that also depends on which of his movies you've watched.

Dead or Alive is one of his earlier works. It presented him with an opportunity to break into the mainstream and yet still defines his in-your-face bizarre style. Still, it's a slow watch and probably some of his dullest work. But this was before his masterpieces, which he still creates today (he makes a lot of stuff, though). In it, a gangster is trying to wrest power from other thugs and he soon has a relentless and hardened cop after him. The cop, though, has his own problems with a sick daughter needing a costly operation, while the gangster's kid brother returns from studies abroad. I'd like to say it ends in tragedy, but it ends very weirdly.

This is more for anyone who enjoyed his other films. The features include an interview with Miike and some notes on the film. **JF**

The Producers

Director: Susan Stroman
Cast: Nathan Lane, Matthew Broderick, Uma Thurman, Will Ferrel
Genre: Musical Comedy
Rating: PG
Score: ★★★★★

AFTER WASHED-UP PRODUCER MAX Bialystock's latest play tanks, his accountant, Leo Bloom, finds a $2,000 discrepancy in the books. Musing at how the IRS won't notice since the play was a loss, Bialystock seizes the idea and convinces Bloom to join him in producing the worst Broadway play ever, with the intent of running away with the production money. Taking a screenplay called 'Springtime for Hitler', written by a crazed ex-Nazi, and hiring the worst and most flamboyantly gay director in New York, who decides that Hitler losing the war is a bad ending, the show is sure-fire bomb - unless it turns out to be so bad it's good.

This is actually a 2005 movie of a 2001 record-smashing and award-winning play, which is itself a remake of a 1968 movie. Mel Brooks did the writing instead of directing, but his comic genius still shines like never before. The movie is shot to bring the look and feel of the stage production along instead of re-adapting it for the screen. It's hilarious at every turn, with amazing performances by Lane and Broderick, who were in the original Broadway show cast. Be careful not to drink anything that stains while watching, or you'll be cleaning your couch and carpet afterwards.

The director's commentary is just that, the director by herself. It's rather uninspired and sounds like she's reading from notes. However, the deleted scenes and especially the outtakes more than make up for it, and are worth the price of the DVD by themselves. **TH**

Blues Brothers (25th Anniversary Edition)

Director: John Landis
Cast: John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, John Candy, Carrie Fisher
Genre: Comedy
Rating: 13L
Score: ★★★★★

EVOLVED FROM OF A *Saturday Night Live* musical sketch, *The Blues Brothers* is a 1980 musical comedy romp that follows the exploits of "Joilet" Jake and Elwood Blues as they try and save the orphanage where they were raised by nuns. The church has stopped paying tax on the property, and the brothers attempt to raise the money by putting their blues band back together for a big gig.

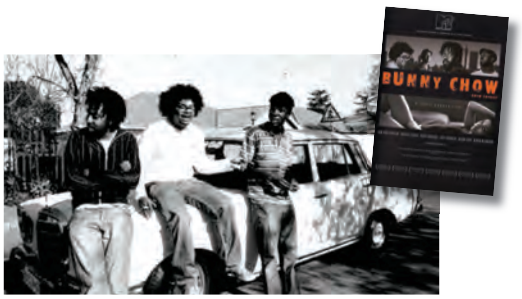
A tale of redemption, along the way they are harassed by a destructive 'mystery woman', Neo-Nazis and a Country and Western band, as well as the police, military and SWAT. The movie stands the test of time and still manages to deliver a good dose of comedy genius. Belushi and Aykroyd are at their finest, delivering some of the most memorable one-liners this side of "We're on a mission from God." The film features performances by some of blues' finest: James Brown, Ray Charles as well as Aretha Franklin. It also has the distinct honour of containing one of the finest cop car chase sequences ever filmed.

The 25th Anniversary Edition contains very little in the way of real special features other than a 'The story behind the making of', the original trailer, production notes and cast and filmmaker biographies. **MD**

Bunny Chow

Director: John Barker
Cast: JKim Engelbrecht, Kagiso Lediga, David Kibuuka
Genre: Comedy (supposedly)
Rating: 16 (SL)
Score: ★

WE UNDERSTAND HOW IT is often perceived as necessary to hype local productions in order to stimulate our industries, be they music, gaming or film. But, in this case, to do so would be a case of sheer blind patriotism and nothing more. The back of the box offers a plot synopsis, but that was more or less all indication I had that there actually was a plot! For example, one scene sees the protagonist being bitched at by his girlfriend for apparently messing around; this scene is followed by one in which a character is being bitched at by his girlfriend! This essentially sets the tone for the character interactions, which can be summarised as a cross between a soap opera, a 'reality' show, a music video, and a home video. The supposed humour is worse than base and lowbrow, and the production quality is severely lacking. No doubt, this is the kind of film that pretentious arty-wannabes will laud, while the truly arty crowd will wonder just where any merit lies. This is an hour and a half of my life I'm not getting back, and even the delectable Kim Engelbrecht's presence did not compel me to stay riveted to the screen – cooking at the time still left me capable of following the utterly banal dialogue. At least it has a few extras on the DVD, such as behind-the-scenes material, but this is all of low interest value. **AJ**



Pathfinder

Director: Marcus Nispel
Cast: Karl Urban, Moon Bloodgood, Russell Means
Genre: Action
Rating: 16 (L)
Score: ★★★

BEFORE COLUMBUS FOUND THE North American continent, history has it that Vikings found their way there first. But they were stopped from invading the continent, according to a legend, by a great warrior. *Pathfinder* speculates that this warrior was a Viking child found shipwrecked on the coast. Fifteen years later, he's integrated with the local, peace-loving Indians when more Vikings show up and destroy his village. It would appear that stone-tipped arrows and staffs are little match for steel swords and heavy armour. This allows him to take revenge on the Vikings (who he's not find of), plus keep them away from the other villages in the area.

Overall, *Pathfinder* isn't that great, but it has a certain charm to it that makes me wish it wasn't overlooked by audiences. The story is more fantasy than historically accurate, though the Vikings speak in their native tongue while the locals speak in English. This makes the invaders seem menacing – that and the very imposing heavy armour, horned helmets, huge battle horses and equally huge weapons, not to mention a penchant for roasting people alive. In the end, *Pathfinder*'s budget catches up with it and there are too many sets to suspend disbelief. But it has plenty of action, violence and stunts, landing it somewhere between a poor man's *300* and *Apocalypto*. The features include making-of doccies, the original concept trailer, commentary and some or good stuff. Watch it at least once. **JF**

Meet The Robinsons

Director: Stephen J. Anderson
Cast: Angela Bassett, Daniel Hansen, Matthew Josten
Genre: Animation, Comedy, Sci-Fi, Family
Rating: All Ages
Score: ★★★★★

LEWIS, AN ORPHAN BOY who longs for the family he never had, is taken on a wild trip through time after a funny series of events sets him on the path towards self-discovery. A mysterious nut-job from the future tries to steal his invention, but is hampered by another visitor from the future who happens to have a large and extremely bizarre family. It's all quality Disney stuff, as Disney continues to flex its new animation muscle. More *Chicken Little* than *The Wild*, thankfully it manages to hit all the right notes.

Meet The Robinsons is a witty, clever parable delivered in the most appropriate way: as a series of hilarious catastrophes punctuated by odd moments of personal clarity. The animation may not hold up against the Pixar watershed, but it does enough where it counts to make the story come alive. Some scenes may actually be frightening to small children (the theatrical release had a few confused parents removing their wailing children), but nothing more horrible than death found in the Spielberg/Lucas classic, *The Land Before Time*.

The DVD is a complete package: deleted scenes, a little documentary on inventions that shaped the world, the two major music videos for the movie as well as Director's commentary. **MD**

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Hellboy Animated: Blood & Iron

Director: Victor Cook
Cast: Ron Perlman, Selma Blair, Doug Jones
Genre: Action
Rating: PG
Score: ★★★

OF THE TWO ANIMATED *Hellboy* movies, this is definitely the better one. It benefits from a stronger story and the overall production feels more like a movie's, though it still comes across as a bit of a long cartoon episode. Hellboy and his team of paranormal investigators are asked to visit a supposedly haunted mansion that a businessman bought. He's thinking about turning the place into a tourist trap and wants the team over mostly for publicity. But while there, they inevitably uncover a deeper situation: an ancient vampire blood queen dead-set on coming back to this world and having things her way. It's also no coincidence that she was once banished before by professor Bruttenholm, Hellboy's foster father.

What sets this apart from a lot of animated work based on popular live-action movies is a sense of maturity. The art style appears very much like that of today's TV cartoons, but there is more action and violence than you'd expect. Still, it's not a very complicated or deep story and the real reason to watch it is for all the fight scenes and the fun dialogue the characters use.

The DVD boasts a lot of nice extra features that fans will enjoy, while a 32-page mini comic detailing a separate story is included. If you really don't like *Hellboy*, Ron Perlman or animation, you can give this a miss, but anyone who does will get at least something out of this. **JF**

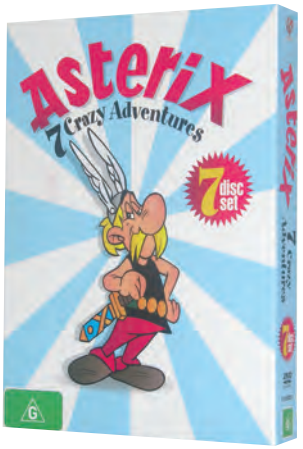
Little Britain Box Set

Creators: Matt Lucas, David Walliams
Cast: Matt Lucas, David Walliams
Genre: Comedy, TV
Rating: 13L
Score: ★★★★★

NO BUT YEAH BUT no but yeah... Surely you must know *Little Britain*, It took a while, but the show finally made its presence felt in South Africa, which has always had an eager audience for good British comedy. *Little Britain*, though, steps well beyond the classics and American-styled shows like *My Family* to enter a realm of almost Python-esque proportions. Its two main stars, Matt Lucas and David Walliams, not only write the show but play most of the characters in it. *Little Britain* episodes contain several sketches featuring specific characters. There's Sebastian, the unbelievably camp aid to the Prime Minister with a monster crush, Davin the homophobic homosexual and the "only gaaaay in tha village!", smack-talking white trash Vicky Pollard, fake-paraplegic Andy and his tortured friend Lou, teenager Jason and his crush on friend Gary's octogenarian grandmother – and who can forget Emily Howard, the worst transvestite in the world? *Little Britain* creates sketches of epic surreal effect from the sophisticated to the low brow. In one scene a deadpan teacher reads back one of Vicky Pollard's completely nonsensical essays back to her, in another Sebastian's double entendres and innuendos with the prime minister are unbelievably sharp, while in season 2 you can watch a grown man breastfeeding on his mother. This collection brings all three of the excellent seasons together in one box and word is that a forth won't be coming soon, since a new version is headed to the US and HBO. So if you bought the two-disk edition like I did, you probably feel stupid, but this version is likely to not stab you in the back. There are plenty of features and commentary tracks, making this probably the best *Little Britain* box-set you will find – unless they bring out an ultra-special edition. **JF**

Asterix: 7 Crazy Adventures

Director: Various
Cast: Varies
Genre: Animated, Adventure
Rating: 3
Score: ★★★★



EVERYONE KNOWS ASTERIX, EXCEPT the Americans apparently (after a quick poll in the office). The little winged-hat Gaul has been syndicated globally and features in over 30 best-selling books and films in over a hundred languages. It's obvious what made Asterix so popular: running visual gags for the kids intermixed with clever allusions and puns for those old enough to spot them.

This box set contains (at a running time of 80 minutes each and with no special features) *Asterix Versus Caesar, Asterix Conquers America, Asterix in Britain, Asterix and Cleopatra, Asterix's Twelve Tasks, Asterix and The Big Fight* and *Asterix and The Gauls*. Most of the movies are as you remember them and having them all together like this reveals a few interesting things. Most of the *Asterix* movies, aside from *Asterix Conquers America*, had moderately low budgets but are still entertaining to watch.

Asterix Conquers America (1994) is the real big-budget production, complete with CG and extremely-talented voice actors (Asterix is voiced by none other than Craig Charles, the English comedian most renowned for playing Lister in the series *Red Dwarf*) and is the only *Asterix* film produced outside of France. **MD**

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COMICS

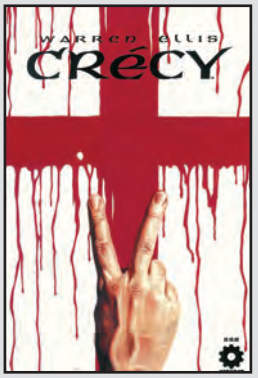
Written by Clive Burmeister

Batman / Lobo: Deadly Serious #1 (of 2)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: DC
Writer: Sam Kieth
Artist: Sam Kieth
Price: R50.50

He's back! Lobo's long awaited return to comics has come, even if it's only for an unlikely team-up with Batman on a space ship many light years from Earth, and only for a limited series of two issues (although he appeared in DC's "52" series recently as well). When a strange mysterious being teleports Batman to a space ship to fight a plague of some kind, Lobo, who's on a bounty hunt at the time, gets roped into helping Batman track down the carriers of the plague (which only affects women incidentally, driving them totally psychopathic and crazed). Sam Keith gives the book a really fresh and thrilling feel with his fluid artwork, and the story is just crazy enough to keep you thinking "What's next?" If you're a 'Bo fan, I know you'll buy this one. If not, well, it's something different in the Batman line and it might be worth it to check out.

Crécy



Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Avatar Press
Writer: Warren Ellis
Artist: Raulo Caceres
Price: R64.95

Warren Ellis transports us back in time to the 26th of August 1346, to a place called Crécy, in France, where one of England's most important battles took place. This historical graphic novel is written in that immersing and gripping kind of style that we've come to expect from Warren Ellis. It tells the story of the events leading up to the battle, as well as the battle itself, from one of the English soldier's point of view, and gets you really into the story as well as the characters and background of the tale. Raulo Caceres also does a great job, really bringing it all together superbly with his dark but detailed artwork. Another thumbs up for Warren Ellis on this one. Whether you're an Ellis fan, a history buff, or just in the mood for a great read, this one's for you.

El Superbeasto

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Image
Writer: Rob Zombie
Artist: Various
Price: R199

What happens when you combine Rob Zombie, comic books and Mexican wrestling? You get El Superbeasto, the greatest superhero that ever lived! Well, he would be the greatest, but he spends most of his time picking up women, drinking and driving his souped-up hotrod. Sometimes, though, he does take on evil – usually because it took some babe he's after – and he has to go in and kick ass. Sometimes he gets his ass kicked, in which case he can rely on his super secret agent sister and her giant robot to help him. On occasion he must even fight the diabolical Dr. Satan, who has an intelligent ape as a sidekick.

El Superbeasto is both very mature and incredibly silly. It is mature because there is plenty of nudity and dirty language in it, while the silliness comes from the story, the art and everything else. The dialogue is sometimes inane and pointless, while the stories never seem to go the way you think they should. All of that, though, is good and this is a fun read. *El Superbeasto* feels like a cross between *Lobo* (without the blood), *Heavy Metal Magazine* and *Beano*. Weird stuff, but it scratches a certain itch, even though Zombie's jokes can be a bit lame at times. This book includes a lot of the comics, so it's great value for money.

The Sentry (Vol. 1)

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel Knights
Writer: Paul Jenkins, Jae Lee
Artist: Jae Lee and Various
Price: R249

Showing the more ambitious, creative side of Marvel Comics, The Sentry (Robert "Bob" Reynolds) is a fictional comic book superhero created by Paul Jenkins and Jae Lee for the 'edgier' Marvel Knights line, which includes *Hulk*, *Wolverine* and the *Doctor Strange* limited series, to name but a few.

This compilation contains *The Sentry #1-5* as well as five one-shots: *Sentry & The Fantastic Four*, *Sentry & Spider-Man*, *Sentry & The Hulk*, *Sentry & the X-Men*, and *Sentry vs. The Void*. Bob Reynolds suddenly remembers that he is the Sentry, with the "power of one million exploding suns" derived from a special serum. He becomes aware that his arch-nemesis, The Void, is about to return and so begins his journey of rediscovery into why the world (and he, himself) had forgotten him. Along the way, Sentry seeks out several prominent Marvel characters to warn them of The Void and to ask why they don't remember him. Peter Parker, Reed Richards and even The Hulk all become involved in one of the most stunningly-executed 'whodunits' of the comic book universe.

The plot twists and turns, hard to pin down, until the final moment when all the pieces fit together. A riveting, engrossing read filled with fictional Silver Age comic covers, panels and plot-lines. (Contains an after-word by Stan Lee himself.)

COMICS, GRAPHIC NOVELS SUPPLIED BY OUTER LIMITS (011) 482-3771

First Born #1

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Top Cow (Image)
Writer: Ron Marz
Artist: Stjepan Sejic
Price: R24.95

Image's crossover of the year has just arrived. *First Born #1* sees the culmination of a number of events that have been set in place, and sees the most popular Top Cow characters come together in a story that looks to be a crowd pleaser. *First Born #1* kicks off with the Angelus's search for a new host who must be someone strong enough to absorb the power of the light. Then a confrontation between the Darkness and Angelus's forces shakes the city and leaves the police baffled on the sidelines. And finally, we receive a revelation about Sara Pezzini's unborn child. With amazing artwork and all the main characters involved, this looks to be a really good read. Also, watch out for continued story arches in the *Witchblade* comic series as Angelus seeks to ally herself with Dani, the current bearer of the witchblade.

Terror Inc. #1

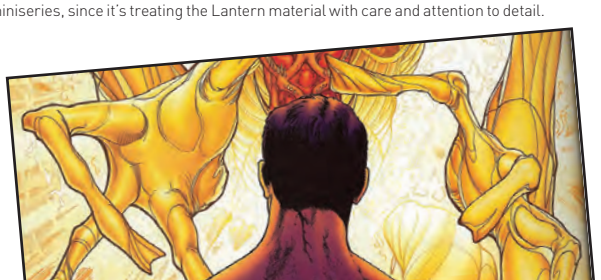
Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Marvel MAX
Writer: David Lapham
Artist: Patrick Zircher
Price: R34.95

This first issue of *Terror Inc.* gives a detailed account of the nightmarish past of Mr Terror, from his days of rampage and rape during the 455 ransacking of Rome, his fight with a demon that inflicted the curse of un-death upon him, his service under the Shadow Knight, Draghihnazzo, and his queen as they burnt their way through Europe, to his present day job of a hit gone sour. But what drives this strange creature who recreates himself over and over using the body parts of other creatures, rotting his way through the ages as he kills countless foes? Can he be stopped and will he succumb to the plots against him. An interesting read, I would like to see where they go with this story. As a MAX title, expect explicit language and violence.

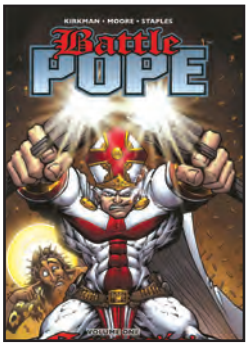
The Sinestro Corps War (#1 - 4)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: DC Comics
Writer: Geoff Johns, Dave Gibbons
Artist: Various
Price: R35.00

This is a series in progress, with *#1* released in June as the *Green Lantern Sinestro Corpse Special #1*. The continuation, *#1* through *#10*, started release in August and will continue until December, alternating between *Green Lantern #21-25* and *Green Lantern Corps #14-18*, with an epilogue in *Green Lantern #26*. Also connected to the story are *Blue Beetle #20* and *Green Lantern Corps #18-19*.
The story details a cosmic war between the fictional intergalactic police force, the Green Lantern Corps, and the newly-created Sinestro Corps led by former Green Lantern, Sinestro. Yellow power rings (which run on fear just as the Green Lantern's rings run on willpower) are flying through the universe, seeking out beings capable of inspiring great fear. Sinestro, the former 'greatest Green Lantern' gone rogue, wields a yellow power ring and has created an army of brutal killers that end up catching the Green Lantern Corps unawares, cutting down their ranks like wheat. The Green Lantern Corps quickly realises that members of the Sinestro Corps are following Green Lantern rings from their dead owners to the intelligent ring's new chosen rookie owners, murdering them before they realise what's going on. The Guardians continue to deny the connection between these events and the chapter of the Book of Oa called "The Darkest Night," which prophesies the destruction of the Green Lantern Corps. Meanwhile, Superboy-Prime watches over the Earth and waits...
So far, *The Sinestro Corps War* is a solid, engaging read with some serious punching-power in terms of the artwork and dialogue. Green Lantern fans should have no problems with this new miniseries, since it's treating the Lantern material with care and attention to detail.



Battle Pope



Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Image
Writer: Robert Kirkman
Artist: Tony Moore
Price: R129.00

While reading the excellent *Walking Dead series*, it caught our eye that writer, Robert Kirkman, is also known for another more obscure series called *Battle Pope*. The name alone would suggest why it's not as widely accepted as a series about zombies walking everywhere and killing everyone, but at the same time, someone could have told us about this excellent comic. But before getting to the review, it's proper to warn you that if you are sensitive about religion, you should avoid this like the plague. That is, if you can't take a joke, don't read *Battle Pope*.
God has come back to Earth and taken all the saved people with him, leaving the rest to survive Hell on Earth. That happens when a seal of Hell breaks and demons flood the world, killing as they go. But humans are hardy and the war reaches a stalemate. Eventually a treaty is signed, the seal is sealed and the demons are given government-housing to help them integrate. When God came, he didn't take the Pope either – a sexist, power-hungry, cigar-smoking character that more resembles a biker than the leader of the church. When the Pope is killed during a bar fight, he arrives in Heaven and is told that he can get access to the place if he goes back and rescues Saint Michael from Lucifer, who has kidnapped him. Armed with a new body, more cigars and Jesus as a sidekick, Battle Pope heads back down to Earth to take care of business: giant zombies, demons in Hell and 'satanic jailbait'. Highly recommended.

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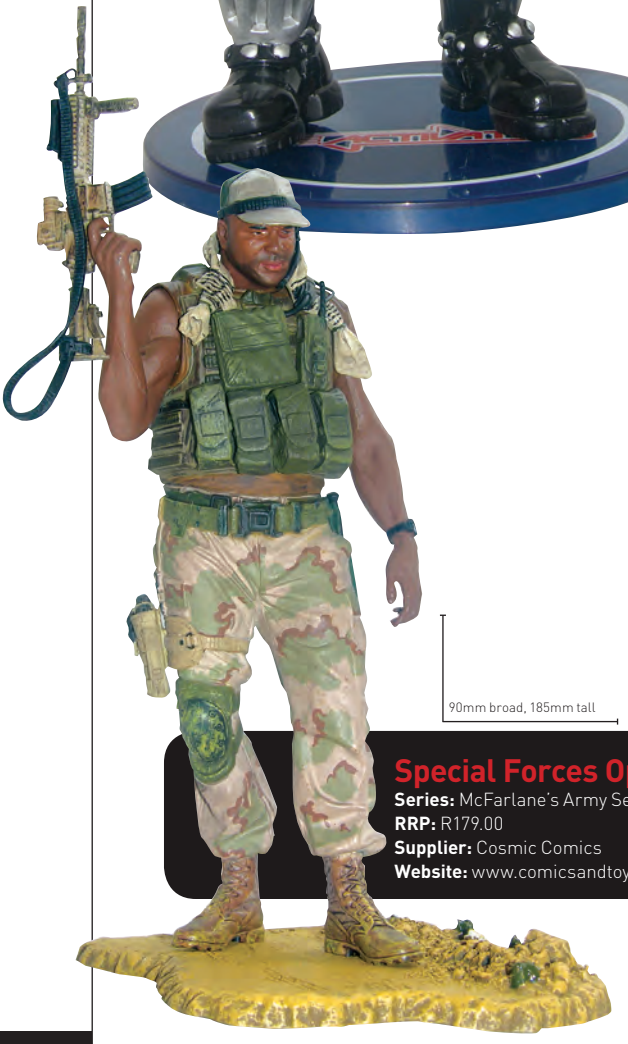
FIGURINES

Lobo
Series: Reactivated Series 1
RRP: R149.00
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

95mm broad, 170mm tall

Koko Tsukihima
Series: Da Capo II
RRP: R289.00
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

90mm broad, 205mm tall

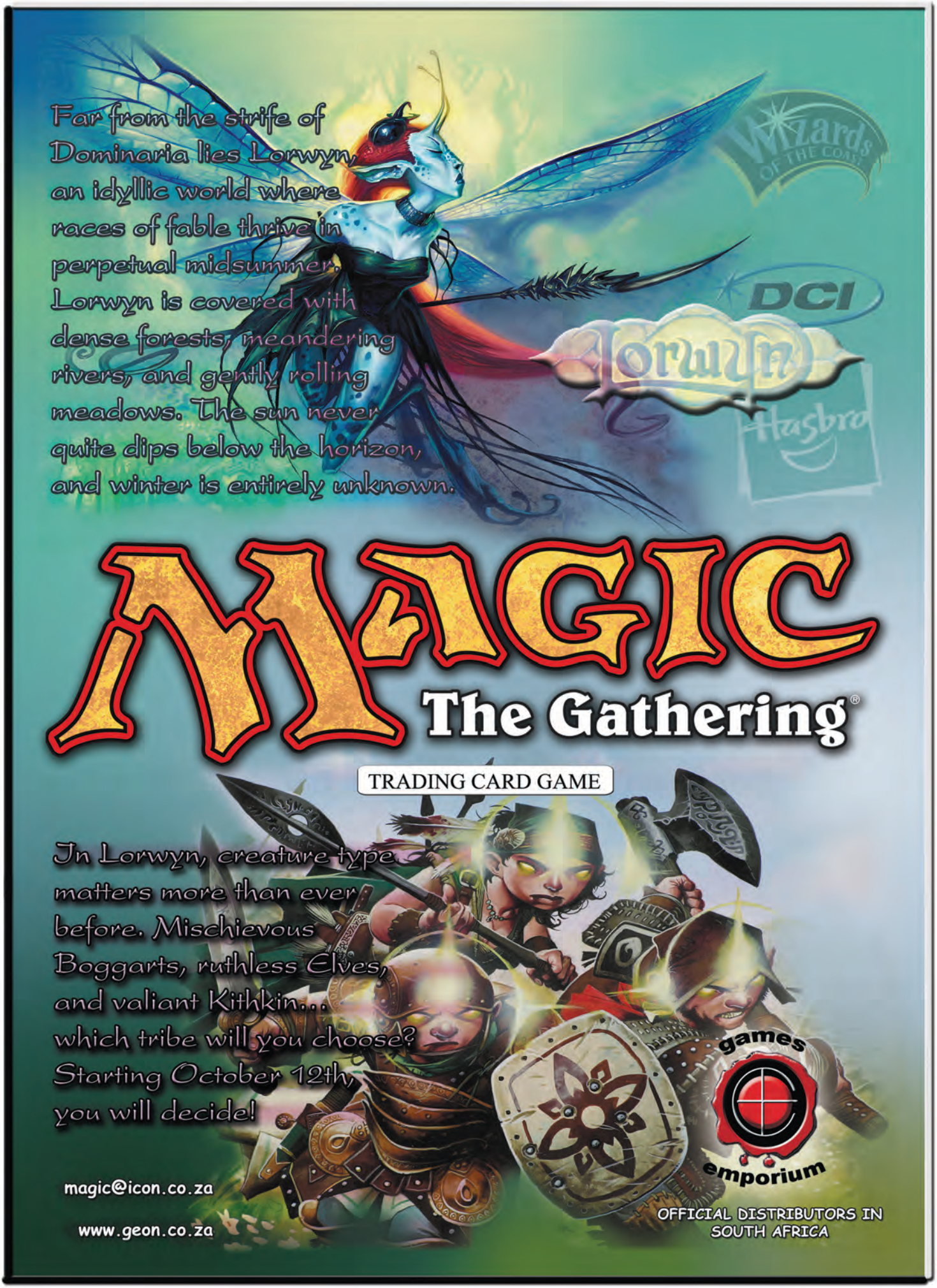


Special Forces Operator
Series: McFarlane's Army Series 4
RRP: R179.00
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

90mm broad, 185mm tall

Himekuri Image Girl
Series: Comic Himekuri
RRP: R189.00
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

130mm broad, 125mm tall


Far from the strife of Dominaria lies Lorwyn, an idyllic world where races of fable thrive in perpetual midsummer. Lorwyn is covered with dense forests, meandering rivers, and gently rolling meadows. The sun never quite dips below the horizon, and winter is entirely unknown.
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RAVEN'S LOFT

THEY WALK AMONG US...

IT'S TIME FOR A new *Magic: The Gathering* set release and this time it's the tribally themed Lorwyn. A few thoughts...

The last truly tribal block was Onslaught, the set that popularised the tribal theme. Since then, elf decks, goblin decks and a few others have abounded. Interestingly enough, however, the 'human tribe' has the most variety and is therefore the most versatile and potentially powerful. It's perhaps thanks to this imbalance that the 'human' creature type has been excluded from Lorwyn – the entire set's population is non-human!

Another unusual feature about this set is the fact that it inaugurates a block that, contrary to the norm, consists of two sets, not three. The block following this one will do likewise, and the two will, in terms of tournament formats, be treated as a single unit for purposes of set rotations.

The biggest shake-up, and the most controversial aspect of Lorwyn, is its introduction of a new card type: planeswalkers. Planeswalkers are, in *Magic* terms, more or less what players are, so these new cards are something of a departure from accepted definitions. They are essentially a new type of permanent and are summoned by a corresponding spell (just as would, say, a creature). They have their own form of 'life total' and provide some powerful activated abilities. Time will tell how players will respond to these, but in the meantime, we've included pictures of two of these.

As with any new set, Lorwyn introduces a new mechanic (as if the planeswalkers are not enough!). In this case, we have been shown the 'evoke' keyword, which allows a permanent with a 'comes-into-play' effect to be used only for that effect, sacrificing itself on resolution, but for a lower cost. Thus, for example, the Shriekmaw costs 4B for a 3/2 fear creature with a built-in Terror, but may be evoked for 1B for only its Terror effect.

Artwork by Aleksi Briclot
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STRATEGY – VIRTUAL CARD ADVANTAGE

Two months ago, I discussed the concept of 'card advantage' in *Magic*. This month, we will extend this game-winning concept to something that results in similar benefits, though in a subtly different manner. 'Virtual card advantage' refers to effects that create the equivalent of additional cards without actual cards being produced. The simplest example of this is recursive token generators. Consider, for example, the card Mobilization – this is an enchantment that grants soldiers vigilance and which allows its controller to pay three mana to put into play a 1/1 Soldier token creature. For an equivalent creature card, we can expect to play one mana, but here we get to use the effect over and over and without playing a spell, all of which makes this a very worthwhile deal.

Another subtler form of virtual card advantage can be gained by rendering an opponent's cards useless, or 'blank'. This can be achieved in a number of ways. Not playing card types (for example, creatures) that opponents expect played against them, thus leaving answers to such cards (creature removal spells, for example) stranded uselessly in the hand, is one approach. Another would be to play cards that negate other cards. Playing cards that prevent creatures from being countered, for example, will render cards such as Remove Soul utterly useless.

As well as numeric card advantage, be it actual or virtual, there's the concept of 'card quality'. This forms the basis for 'good things' decks: decks that try to defeat the opponent by outclassing opposing cards on a one-for-one basis. Cards such as Loxodon Hierophant and Ghost Council of Orzhova offer more than one normally expects for their mana cost. Creature removal cards often scale in quality proportionally to the opponent's card quality: a Terror killing a Loxodon Hierarch is much better than the same Terror killing a Raging Goblin. Ideally, you want to incorporate, whenever possible and whenever it's compatible with your overall strategy, elements of card advantage and card quality: for example, Angel of Despair offers you a good, powerful creature and it kills a permanent, thereby netting card advantage.

SCRYING THE SYNERGIES:

Stuffy Doll and Pyroclasm or Sulfurous Blast. It even works well with Wrath of God as it encourages players to bring out more creatures to get around it, thus encouraging the opponent to overextend, and by surviving the Wrath of God. Also, why not throw in Mobilization to encourage overextending before the board-sweep and to help get up and running again after. **NAG**

Local *Magic: The Gathering* Website, The LuckShack, has been undergoing upgrades and improvements. The site now offers e-commerce facilities for online purchasing of cards, and continues to provide news and support for the community. Check out the site at **www.luckshack.co.za**.

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