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- BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
- G.I. JOE: THE RISE OF COBRA

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- TROPICO 3
- TONY HAWK: RIDE

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VOL.12 ISSUE 7 10.2009 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00



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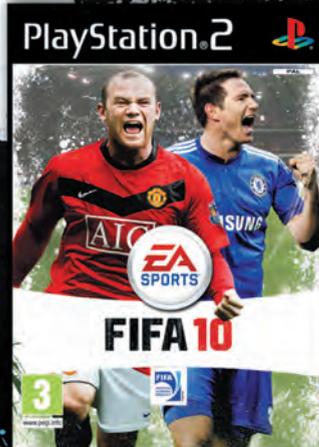
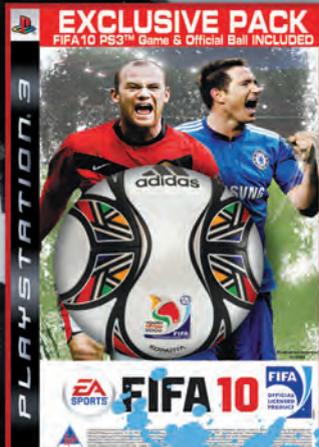
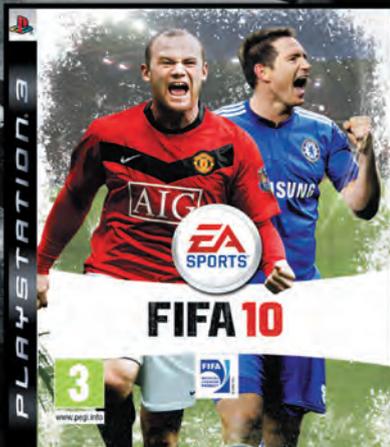
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## Drivers

ATI Catalyst Drivers 9.7 Vista | Vista 64 | ATI Catalyst Drivers 9.8 XP | NVIDIA ForceWare 190.62 WHQL Vista | Vista 64 | XP

## Extras

CheatBook Database 2009 + Updates | CoD: WaW - Beauty of Annihilation [music] | CoD: WaW - The One [music] | For your kid brother | For your sister | Games for Windows Live 3.0 client | Hot stuff rAge 2009 Tuks Radio [advert] | The Overclocker Issue 6 [PDF] | Wallpapers

## Patches

Mass Effect Patch v1.02 | Spore Patch v1.05 | Wolfenstein Patch v1.1

## Game Videos

Alpha Protocol - GC 2009 Associate Producer Interview | Ashes Cricket 2009 - Launch Trailer  
 Assassin's Creed II - Creative Director Interview | Avatar - HD Teaser Trailer | James Cameron's  
 Avatar: The Game - GC 2009 Trailer | Batman - Gadgets Trailer | Batman - Harley Quinn Challenge  
 Game Trailer | Batman - Henchmen Beatdown Game Trailer | Batman - History of Arkham Asylum  
 Trailer | Batman - Launch Trailer | Battlefield: Bad Company 2 - GC 2009 Senior Producer Interview  
 | Battlefield: Bad Company 2 - Squad Stories Trailer | Battleswarm: Field of Honor - Debut Trailer  
 | Beaterator - Debut Teaser Trailer | Big Slip | BioShock 2 - Multiplayer Trailer | Blur - GC 2009  
 Communications Manager Interview | Blur - Mash-ups Trailer | Borderlands - Game Montage  
 | Borderlands - GC 2009 Randy Pitchford Interview | Brutal Legend - Tim Schafer Rubik's Cube  
 Soundtrack Reveal | Champions Online - Supergroup Documentary | Cities XL - Overview Trailer  
 | Command and Conquer 4 - Teaser Trailer Director's Cut | Crysis 2 - Nanosuit 2 Trailer | Dante's  
 Inferno - Gluttony Developer Diary | Dark Void - GC 2009 'Hover Up' Walkthrough Part 1 | Dark Void -  
 GC 2009 'Hover Up' Walkthrough Part 2 | Darkest of Days - 'Times of War' Trailer | Dawn of Fantasy  
 Trailer | Dawn of War II - The Last Stand Trailer | Dead Space Extraction - Developer Diary | Defense  
 Grid: The Awakening - Critical Acclaim Trailer | Diablo III - Blizzcon 09 Monk Skills Walkthrough  
 | Diablo III - Monk Reveal Trailer | Diablo III - Wizard Disintegrate Power Game Trailer | Diablo III -  
 Wizard Slow Time Game Trailer | Colin McRae: DiRT 2 - Chief Game Designer Interview | Colin McRae:  
 DiRT 2 - Crash Montage | Colin McRae: DiRT 2 - Dirty Racing Game Trailer | Colin McRae: DiRT 2 - GC  
 2009 Game Montage | Colin McRae: DiRT 2 - Rally Reality Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - 'Wynne'  
 Character Reveal Trailer | Dragon Age: Origins - Voice Talent Documentary | Dreamkiller - Debut  
 Trailer | Fairytale Fights - 'Walk in the Woods' Trailer | Final Fantasy XIII - GC 2009 Demo Walkthrough  
 | Fossil Fighters - Overview Trailer | Grand Theft Auto IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony | Guild Wars 2 - GC  
 2009 Story and Art Interview | Guild Wars 2 - Trailer | Guitar Hero 5 - Features Walkthrough Part 1  
 | Guitar Hero 5 - Features Walkthrough Part 2 | Guitar Hero 5 - Johnny Cash Trailer | Guitar Hero:  
 Van Halen Trailer | Halo 3: ODST - 'Crater Night' Game Trailer | Halo 3: ODST - 'Security Zone' Game  
 Trailer | James Cameron's Avatar: The Game - Producer Interview | Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days -  
 Story Trailer | Lead and Gold: Gangs of the Wild West - Debut Trailer | Lost Planet 2 - Cooperative  
 Gameplay Trailer | Mafia II - Art of Persuasion Trailer | Majesty 2 - Overview Trailer | Mass Effect  
 2 - GC 2009 'Grunt' Trailer | Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 - Multiplayer 'Flag Runner' | Muramasa:  
 The Demon Blade - 'Chop Chop' Game Trailer | Muramasa: The Demon Blade - Game Montage  
 Naruto Shippuden: Ninja Destiny 2 - Game Trailer | Need for Speed: Nitro - Customise Trailer | Need  
 for Speed: Shift - Road America Trailer | Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising - Cooperative | PES  
 2010 - GC 2009 Features Trailer | Pokémon HeartGold and SoulSilver - Debut Trailer | Professor  
 Layton and the Diabolical Box - Suitcase Trailer | QuakeCon 09 - BYOC Area | QuakeCon 09 - Gamers  
 Documentary | QuakeCon 09 - Interviews | QuakeCon 09 - John Carmack Interview Part 1 | QuakeCon  
 09 - John Carmack Interview Part 2 | QuakeCon 09 - John Carmack Interview Part 3 | QuakeCon 09 -  
 Overview | Rage - Creative Director Interview | Rage - QuakeCon 2009 Trailer | Sacred 2: Fallen Angel  
 - Ice and Blood Trailer | Section 8 - Developer Diary | Section 8 - Story Developer Diary | Serious Sam  
 Commercial | Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner - 'Key Terms' Game Trailer Part 1 | Singularity  
 - Walkthrough Part 1 | StarCraft II - Old Rivals Cinematic Trailer | StarCraft II - Battle Report 3  
 StarCraft II - Blizzcon 2009 Custom Editor Walkthrough | StarCraft II - Single Player Game Trailer  
 | Tales of Monkey Island - Episode 2 Trailer | The Saboteur - 'An Irishman In Paris' Trailer | TMNT  
 Smash-Up - Features Trailer | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - DLC Launch Trailer | Trials HD -  
 Crashes Trailer | Tropico 3 - Vote for El Presidente Or Else Trailer | WET - Gunplay Game Trailer | WET  
 - Lovestruck Dead Trailer | Wolfenstein - Launch Trailer | World of Warcraft: Cataclysm - GC 2009  
 Debut | WTF | Xbox 360 LIVE - Get Connected Trailer

## ScrewAttack

Awesome Possum | Battleship | Chester Cheetah: Too Cool To Fool | Fun House | G.I. Joe A Real  
 American Hero | Marvel vs. Capcom 2 | Metal Slug 3 | Michael Jackson's Moonwalker | Night  
 Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge | Ninja Gaiden Shadow | Swat Kats | The Punisher | Top 10 Cartoon  
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## Hamsters are us

**MADE THE MISTAKE THE** other week of getting two hamsters for the kids. At the speed of lightning, two became eight, and mom is already looking chubby again. They're so cute and furry that I couldn't bring myself to commit a midnight flush. So now, it's a bigger cage with more tunnels and other 'fun things to do'. The problem is that the Trail Critters® tubes and piping don't fit with the Squeak™ Inc. exercise wheel attachment, and then nothing fits inside the Furry-R-Us® metal cage.

Besides the question as to why people think these tiny, defenceless animals would want to be running through brightly coloured pipes outside the safety of their cage. Why are there a thousand different makes and models and types of parts and accessories but none of them fits together?

This long, painful and laboured metaphor gets me to the point of hardware and standards and advancement. It's a little like the Betamax/VHS war, except nobody ever wins. Although I'm the Editor of a gaming magazine that has a hardcore hardware section, I really couldn't tell you which GFX card is the best to buy for any budget, rig or circumstance at any point. Then, even if I could, I wouldn't know what motherboard to put it into and then what CPU would work in that motherboard or which RAM to buy...

You see, what's happening here is that technology is advancing too quickly for us to keep up with it. The 'us' I'm talking about is average Joe gamer with average spending power. You can't just upgrade to the latest graphics card anymore (you need to buy an entirely new system almost every time). Do we need to slow things down and only release something new every three months instead of every week? Should PC gaming aim to be a little more like console gaming where the hardware remains static for a few years? In the distant past, with gaming machines like the Commodore 64 and eventually the Amiga, nothing changed for years. Because of this, games ended up being more innovative and amazingly kept improving in graphical fidelity in leaps and bounds despite having a static hardware platform... Is it all just over-the-top crazy at the moment, or is it just me?

Last thing... if you got this issue early, remember that rAge 2009 is happening at the Coca-Cola Dome on the weekend of 2-4 October. It's gone from awesome to rock and roll this month with all the various announcements coming in from the different companies. See you there.

Michael James  
Editor



## Gaming rig competition

Speaking of hot, new hardware... go to page 62 and 63. In this issue of NAG, and at rAge 2009, we're giving away an epic gaming computer worth over R70,000. This is the 'biggest' prize ever in the history of this magazine and rAge in terms of a single computer prize – the specifications are really ridiculous. In fact, it would be a lot like winning the lottery, really. The real challenge has been to keep the NAG staff away from it. If you want to actually see it before entering with your SMS, come along to rAge and find the NAG stand where you can bask in its glory (bring sunglasses). Remember to get permission before sending the SMS if it's not your phone. If it is your phone, please feel free to enter as many times as you like so we can actually pay for it – at least twice, see. ;)



## Fail

Also – a big shout out to the postal strikers and their crack management team – thanks for delaying the delivery of the September issue of NAG to all of our readers. In this day and age where e-mail is taking over from the post, you should be more worried about your industry as a whole, instead of your pay cheque. This kind of rubbish only makes people seek other (more efficient) methods of getting the mail delivered, thereby taking away more of your paying customers in the long run. Enjoy your increases...

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There once was a dude named Drake. Who jumped and fell in a lake. He got out with a swish. And in his pants found a fish! And said, "Honey, tonight we eat hake!"

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## Letter of the Moment

**FROM:** Christo

**SUBJECT:** Cutting Down!

**"IT HAS COME TO** that point in my life, were my wife is telling me to start cutting down on unnecessary stuff and start spending my money more wisely and not on crap (Gym / NAG / etc.) I know, I think she has lost it! [I recommend divorce, the judge will understand. Ed] Yes, I recently became a father of a beautiful baby girl, whom I am very proud of and becoming a father felt exactly the same as when I defeated Sephiroth for the first time. Yes, baby products are quite expensive, so my darling wife said that I must consider not buying the NAG each month, for we can use / save that money on milk and nappies. [Rather aim for dieting and toilet training, Ed] I almost had my first heart attack at the age of 25, when she said that. Just there and then I decided to stop her dead in her tracks, for NAG is the one thing that I will never stop buying. No matter what! Let's face it, how else am I going to teach my baby girl about the best magazine in the world, if I don't support you guys. So, instead of cutting down on NAG, I started cutting down on the other good stuff in my life. After a long struggle and cutting down on the other stuff, for example beer [which includes my friends], wine, games, etc., the wife agreed that I can keep buying my NAG. [Excellent, you showed her who wears the pants in your house, Ed] I never felt so relieved before in my life and not only can I keep buying my NAG, but I won't have to suffer a very slow and painful heart attack. So this is just to show that I am a loyal reader to the end and that no matter what happens, I will never stop buying and supporting the best magazine ever. I hope this is what it takes to land myself in your magazine. Keep on rocking NAG!"

*Awesome. I'm not going to step into the minefield of your married life - it looks like you're already well spoken for as it stands. :) What I can do for you, however, is show you some love by giving you the 'letter of the month' prize. If you do the maths, these two games [more or less] represent enough saved money to keep buying NAG for the next two years. Ed.*

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**FROM:** Lein

**SUBJECT:** A Warning to the Unconverted

**"IN MANY FORMS HAVE** I walked many paths, which few have dared to tread. I have stood in the face of great evil, and I have been that evil. I have aided elves and dwarves and aliens and men, and have crushed them in turn. I have raised hope, destroyed dreams, and led armies for both good and for evil. I am accounted in lands a hero, as a god, and as a devil. I have mastered the sword, and the gun, and many other weapons besides. I am wise in the ways of magic, and of the force, and whatever name men give to power. I have robbed and killed, hijacked and shot in cold blood for nothing more than money.

I have faced monsters and demons and spawns of hell, and commanded them in equal measure. For I am a gamer damn it, and for those that would scorn myself and my kindred, all I say is beware, for we have experience in death beyond measure."

*Nice one. It does smudge the grey area between crazy and sane a little, but your use of English and emotive phrasing just manages to drag it back from the brink. It does sound familiar, though, but my quick Google check didn't reveal anything suspect - so, well done! Ed.*

**FROM:** Justin

**SUBJECT:** Inevitable

**"I BOUGHT A PLAYSTATION 3** for three reasons. One: I found a brand new console for less than four grand. Two: Because the graphics would continue to improve due to great developers who never seas to amaze me with their..." [Snip, Ed]

*Seas = LOL. Ed.*

**FROM:** Regan

**SUBJECT:** A plea for help

"I was reading NAG the other day and thought that rAge is probably the best thing ever and believe me I did everything to convince my mother that I should go. Please don't take this the wrong way, I'm not complaining, it's just I live in Balito, Durban and it really sucks that I can't go to rAge. Will rAge be in Johannesburg till our species has to move from this planet because the sun is dying or will rAge decide to move every year eventually?"

*I hear what you're saying, but here's the thing: any business venture needs at least five years to really start 'working'. If we brought rAge to Durban, we'd have to treat it separately as a whole new 'business' event and reset the timeline back to zero. Now, if you look at average global warming predictions, most of Durban is going to be underwater in a few years time anyway; so there's little point in starting anything long term there now. Sorry, but I'm sure you understand. Ed.*

**FROM:** Waldo

**SUBJECT:** LEGO

**"HI NAG, DO YOU** make games yourselves and if you do have you ever thought of making a LEGO Sims. I think it would be very cool if there was a LEGO Sims. By the way, have you ever thought of making your own TV show? I think it would be freakishly awesome to see you guys on TV. Your magazine is great but I think you would make even more fans with a TV show that shows all the stuff in the magazine and what you personally think about them!"

*Keep watching this space. A NAG show has been circling the bowl for years and just won't flush, it seems. We're working on a few solid ideas with some new people, and as soon as rAge 2009 is done, we can turn up the heat on that pot again. Ed.*

**FROM:** Codie

**SUBJECT:** RollCageX open source project

**"I AM THE LEAD 3D** Modeller for an open source game project titled RollCageX - <http://goRCX.net/forum>. We are currently an official team of only a handful of coders, testers and designers. The current version of the game engine is 0.05 (R4). What I am hoping for is some form of publicity in order to get the community to grow, so that the development of this project can move faster, particularly with hopes of gaining additional coders, track designers, Texture artists, etc."

*If anyone is interested (only serious people), contact Codie via the Website or post on their forums. Good luck guys. Please also note that if you go to <http://forums.tidemedia.co.za/nag/>, you'll find a very active and friendly game development community that's backed by NAG (check under the game.dev link). Ed.*



**FROM:** Thys

**SUBJECT:** Blizzard (and StarCraft II) Fail

**"CAN I ANNOUNCE THAT** I am seriously disappointed with Blizzard?"

*Go for it. Ed*

**FROM:** Johan

**SUBJECT:** Prices of hardware

**"PLEASE BRING BACK THE** RRP on hardware products. I have difficulty putting a product into a proper (relative) perspective without a price. I appreciate the hardware section a lot, it's just this little niggle. After reading your reviews I have to go online and search for the prices. Bit of a mission."

*We've added them back in this issue due to increasing demand. Now, please remember the following - this is for everyone. The RRP is the suggested retail price and will probably be different when you arrive at the shop or on the Website with your cash / credit card / livestock for barter, ready to spend. This is due to many different variables that are not under the control of the retailers, suppliers, distributors or this magazine. We also sometimes get products directly from overseas and are given the dollar price - and you know how exchange rates change on a weekly*

basis. This also applies to the different vendors. If you disagree with the pricing in the magazine, then talk to the people supplying the hardware, as this is where we got the pricing from. It's not us, see; it's everyone else. Ed.

**FROM:** Logan

**SUBJECT:** For the Editor of NAG

**"I AM A GRADE 10** student. For Life Orientation this term our assignment is to learn more about the career we are interested in. I personally love everything computers and also enjoy the English language, so I have decided that I would like to either start my own gaming/computer magazine, or work for an existing one. It would greatly help me if you could answer the following questions:  
*[Oh, I love these, Ed]*

**1) Give a brief description of your job.**

*Imagine a field full of cats (about 200). They're all hungry, angry, wet and being chased by large, savage dogs. I'm the guy who needs to get all of them into the barn at the bottom of the hill before the Sun sets. All I have to help me is a plastic bank bag of catnip, a tin of cat food and a pair of oven gloves.*

**2) How did you become interested in computers?**

*It's more correct to ask when computers became interested in me.*

**3) What university did you attend and what subjects did you take/major in?**

*I didn't. I barely made it through high school because I never really studied. So, that kind of blew my university options. I'm not smart. I just speak in a loud, clear voice - the essence of true leadership.*

**4) How long did you study there for?**

*See above.*

**5) How much experience does one need in the field?**

*None really. As long as you can write 'good' and organise your life around deadlines, you'll be fine. It's more of an art, really. Regardless, the more experience you have, the easier it all becomes.*

**6) Do you have time for family and friends?**

*No. Not because I'm busy all the time, but rather because I don't really like them.*

**7) Do you enjoy working at NAG?**

*You have to.*

**8) Does the job pay well?**

*I get paid very well, but everyone else, not so much. You see, there are so many people applying for jobs at NAG that we can almost get away with charging them to work here.*

## NAG Fan artwork

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



**Devyn Rees:** "This is the NAG logo made up of 50 copies of NAG in chronological order. Starting with the August 2009 issue (I hadn't gotten the September issue yet due to the Post Office strike) and ending with the October issue of 2003 (My first ever NAG). One issue doesn't have a cover because I cut it out as a poster."

**9) What position does one start at when wanting to get into the magazine field?**

*At NAG, usually on their knees, hands clasped together, while begging for the job; and then shortly after that, in the foetal position, sucking their thumb, while slowly rocking backwards and forwards under their desks. Deadlines are not for everyone.*

**10) For how long have you been editor at PC Format?**

*I've never been the Editor of PC Format. Getting this question so horribly wrong isn't going to help you get a job here, BTW. Accuracy is everything in journalism.*

**11) Do you receive any benefits? If so, what are they?**

*I benefit from the knowledge that we sometimes make a difference in someone's life.*

**12) Do you get to travel?**

*Definitely! Each morning, I travel from my house to the office; and then, in the afternoon, back again.*

**13) What is your motivation to get up every morning and go to work?**

*My home loan, car loan, food, school fees, etc. I'm motivated by my democratic right to have better things than my neighbour.*

**14) Lastly, what is your favourite part of working as an Editor?**

*I'd have to say sifting through the garbage I sometimes get from writers. And figuring out how to do as little to it as possible to make it publishable.*

*Hope this helps, Ed. NAG*

## On The Forums

**QUESTION:** Do the personal lives of the people who make them affect your decision when buying their games? (For example, if you knew that CliffyB from Epic Megagames likes to kick puppies, would that stop you from buying Gears of War 3?)

**01DT!m3r:** "No, the personal lives of the developers don't really matter, but maybe their reputation, i.e. John Carmack, does. Depending on the game at hand."

**Xcaliber:** "Yes. It would affect my choice, if I knew about it. They say ignorance is bliss but in the end it never works out."

**Azraphael:** "No, not at all. I am pretty sure there are many guys in the industry that get up to things that wouldn't sit well with me. If I was picky about those sorts of things I would probably have no games to play then."

**Graal:** "I'd just act as if I hadn't heard. Saves me a guilty conscience when I inevitably buy the product."

**Tieron:** "To be honest, I don't give a crap who makes what game, and I don't even know in most cases! What does it matter? It's about the game, not about the people behind the game."

**Cleric:** "The fact that as many as a hundred people work on a game makes boycotting it because of one of the developers kind of silly. That said - if the crime was of a very serious nature (e.g. convicted child-pornographer) then I would definitely not buy it."

**Azimuth:** "If I knew the guy personally, and couldn't stand him, yes. If not, no. I'm consistent like that."

**dammit:** "I make my decisions based purely on if I like the game itself or not. Generally, I have no idea which person is behind any particular game. Of course, if the game was produced by skinning various creatures alive and using their bodily features as covers for the disks or something, I'd have to make it a no, I would not buy the game."

**Sismrnoth:** "I wouldn't be too bothered. The psychological problems of many authors, musicians, game developers and other artists often go hand in hand with their genius. My purchase is not going to change any personal habits, I'm sure."

**Gh0sT\_828:** "Well, let me put it this way; if Jacob Zuma was on the design team of Modern Warfare 2, I'd still buy it. So, no, not at all."

**Micta:** "No, unless it had some impact on the gaming industry. Say, Gabe Newel suddenly signs Valve over to EA and retires to his mansion on a remote island off the coast of Australia... then I wouldn't buy Left 4 Dead 2."

**zom813:** "No. All that matters to me is the company's reputation."

**FaNb0y:** "No. If a developer at Valve put a puppy in a blender and drank it, I would still buy Half Life 2, E 3."

**CaViE:** "That's like saying people would boycott a game about shooting things, just because it has some loose ties to some guy who hates gay marriages... Oh, wait... Well I for one wouldn't care..."

**pArkEr:** "While I seriously doubt gaming folk are capable of such heinous acts of terror, if it was really bad (like on a cannibalism type of level) then I wouldn't buy it. I'd pirate the bastard."

**Wight:** "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

**Tankiouse:** "I would buy their game as long as it isn't a game about kicking a puppy."

**InsertName:** "I've always been a cat person."



# Introducing the leaner, meaner PS3

Get ready for round two of the current gen wars

**IT'S BEEN A GOOD** few months since rumours of the PS3 Slim first arose. Grainy photos and a ton of fakes emerged, and were quickly shot down by Sony legal teams. Now, the rumours can finally be laid to rest. The PS3 Slim is a reality. It's smaller, cheaper, cooler and, many would argue, better-looking than the glossy behemoth. Let's take a closer look at this next stage in the PlayStation legacy...

First, the specifications: the Slim is 33% smaller, 36% lighter, and consumes 34% less power than the original model. The fingerprint-loving piano black finish is out, replaced by a more practical matte charcoal finish. All launch models will include a 120GB hard drive (with a rumoured 250GB model on its way soon), and pricing is expected to be around the R3800 mark – a significant improvement over the current option, although a little higher than Europe's recommended retail price of €300 Euro. Everything inside has been slimmed down to accommodate the smaller form factor, and the hard drive will still be

replaceable. The only major software change, which shouldn't affect too many users, is the discontinued support for third-party operating systems – that means no more Linux (for now, at least; hackers always find a way round these things if the demand is there). In addition, users with Bravia remote controls (for a Bravia TV or sound system) will now be able to use these remotes to directly control their PS3s, thanks to the included Bravia Sync function. The device can stand either vertically or horizontally, although there are no rubber feet for vertical operation; a separate vertical stand will be available for purchase.

The big question on everybody's lips is "what about backwards compatibility?" Unfortunately, it's out – completely. Placing a PS2 game into the disc drive will result in absolutely nothing. When quizzed why, SCEA's Director of Marketing, John Koller, explains: "We're at a point where we're three years into the lifecycle of the PS3. There are so many PS3 disc-based games that are available

## PS3 KEEPS MOMENTUM

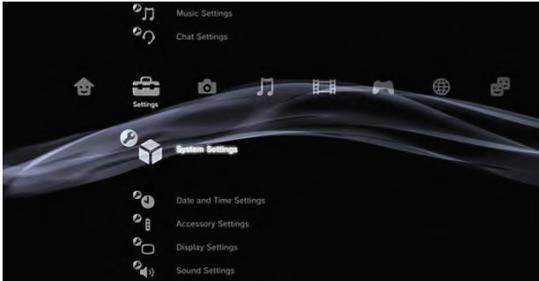
In an effort to prove to the world that they're still quite serious about their new motion controller, Sony recently released a teaser video showing just what the technology is capable of. Most importantly, it can perceive distance, which is something that the Wii's controllers don't seem to be able to do. There are promises of all sorts of possibilities, from gestural wand control to painting, to bashing a piñata with a cricket bat. For the most part, all it really means is "we're still working on it, don't worry," which is enough to keep us hooked. Of course, the real challenge is going to be in not just beating back competition from Nintendo's Wiimotes, but Microsoft's upcoming Natal, which doesn't even bother with controllers.



Your old PS2 discs won't work in the new PS3 Slim

that we think – and noticed this from our research – that most consumers that are purchasing the PS3 cite PS3 games as a primary [reason]." He continues, "We do know that there are next gen consumers wanting to come over from the PS2. Most of those are consumers who have not utilized their PS2 for a little while and they're ready to jump into the PlayStation 3." While the percentages seem right, we can't help but think that this is a considerable missed opportunity. The PS2 may be more-or-less dead to the world, but that doesn't cancel the fact that a large portion of PS3 owners still have a library of excellent PS2 titles, that are sitting gathering dust because it's too much of a hassle to plug in the PS2.

While the Slim hasn't added much in terms of functionality, the reduced retail price and smaller form factor are enough to refresh the brand and squeeze it into a few more households. Now, if only Microsoft could figure out a way to follow suit, without bringing any more overheating issues to the table.



## Isolated Issues...

PlayStation 3 fans are always frothing at the mouth when it comes to new firmware updates, but the latest one – firmware v3.00 – has managed to cause a few issues. Apparently the update has resulted in a number of technical problems, including game crashes and controller sync-up being difficult (if not impossible.) Naturally, forums around the globe are resounding with outcries from gamers who believe that the errors in the firmware are personal.

Sony's senior director of corporate communications and social media (and try say that when you've had one too many), Patrick Seybold, has responded on the company's official blog, stating that Sony are aware of "isolated issues" caused by the upgrade.

"Rest assured that we are looking into the matter and will provide an update here as soon as possible," Seybold wrote. "We apologise for any inconvenience, as it's our mission to deliver the best consumer experience on all PlayStation platforms."

In the meantime, the flaming continues, despite improvements that include new trophy and friends list features, dashboard themes and support for new avatars.



## Early Sales Heavy for the Slim

Long term observers of the video game industry have learned that anything Sony says needs to be taken with at least a little smidgeon of salt. The company has demonstrated an incredible degree of optimism, even in the face of sales figures that have been less than exemplary.

However, the release of the new Slim PS3 may see a turnaround in the platform's fortunes. According to Sony's UK Sales Director, Mark Howsen, the weigh-less treated version of the PlayStation powerhouse has been performing better than expected on store shelves.

"The first week's Chart-Track numbers for sales of the new PlayStation 3 were ahead of our expectations, so we were extremely pleased," Howsen.

"A new price point and a new machine has proven a significant catalyst to help consumers make the move onto PS3."

Sony will keep the momentum going by launching a £82 million ad campaign.

"Our new advertising campaign, 'The Game Is Just The Start', is also demystifying the value proposition," Howsen said. "This ongoing campaign and the addition of some great exclusive and new IPs – *Uncharted: Among Thieves*, *EyePet*, *Heavy Rain* – and services [such as] PlayStation Video Store, will hopefully provide even more trigger points to drive future purchases of PS3."

## GET LEET, YO

Just when you thought you could finally pick up a PS3 for less than the price of an Xbox Elite, Microsoft swoops in to shake things up. The recommended retail price of the Elite bundle, which includes a 120GB HDD, HDMI cable and, of course, the coveted matte black finish, has officially dropped to R3399 – a massive price-drop of R1500. If that looks rather much like the retail price of the Pro bundle, then it should make sense that the Pro will no longer be sold, which is the case. In addition, Comztek will introduce the 250GB Super Elite bundle, which also includes an extra wireless controller, at an RRP of R4,699. Currently BT Games is the only retailer confirmed for this special.



## PSP DOWNSIZES

As a part of Sony's plans to relaunch the PSP in the form of the PSP Go, they'll also be introducing a new host of games perfectly suited for the quick-fix, pick-up-and-play nature of the platform. Entitled PSP Minis, these games will be limited to 100MB in size and will be available for download only, but will work on all PSP versions. There will be fifteen titles available at launch, including *Alien Havok*, *Sudoku*, *Pacman Championship Edition*, *Championship Manager*, and *Melody Bloxx*. As the casual gaming market blooms, it's clear that there's a demand for these types of games, especially if one casts an eye in the iPhone's general direction.

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DP2733/E/NAG





# Fable III announced

Peter Molyneux has some big plans. Is anyone surprised?

**L**IONHEAD STUDIOS HAS RECENTLY announced what might come as a surprise to some gamers – the development of *Fable III*. According to the team, discussion of this third title began somewhere in the middle of *Fable II*, and now that the first sequel is out of the way, they're getting stuck into the production of the next title in the series. A lot of changes are in the air, as well as an almost militant loyalty to the core gameplay of the series. Details are rare at this early stage in development, but a recent interview with Peter Molyneux and a number of developers at Lionhead revealed some interesting results.

While *Fable III* will strive to maintain its action-RPG roots, it will also branch out. The story takes place about 50 years after *Fable II*; The hero has saved the world, and technology has surged forward, mirroring the industrial prowess of the Napoleonic period. The world of Albion has become an industrialised nation, bustling with steam-powered contraptions. The skies are filled with airships, balloons and cable-cars, and the world is larger than ever – now stretching its industrial fingertips across vast distances. While Lionhead is tight-lipped on who the main character will be in the game, they've more than let slip that they'll be powerful. Players can expect to have the view pulled back a bit for certain parts of the game, taking on a pseudo-management approach as the character rules the land and makes big decisions. Quick to shoot down the

comparison between this and Godfather II's "Don's View", Molyneux claims that this will be a much richer experience. "What promises are you going to make to become ruler, and then how many of those promises are you going to keep?" asked Molyneux.

*Fable III* won't be an RTS, however. It will maintain its roots, with strong combat and a deep, character-centric storyline. "When you're in power it's still very personal," adds Molyneux. "Rulers don't stand on a big balcony and dictate what happens. Rulers are surrounded by people telling them they need to go here and do this and do that. Power's a very intimate thing in this game. The interesting thing is that one of the resources is you: what you're choosing to do is very important. What will you do, what will you deputise? You have to pick your battles and pick your time."

If that's not enough, then the re-launch of *Fable II* might be sufficient to throw off everything you thought you knew about Lionhead Studios. From the 29th of September, *Fable II* will be launching as *Fable II Episodic*. A (clearly) episode-formatted version of the game, with *Chapter 1* costing absolutely nothing. The remain four chapters are yet to be priced. The company claims that the design of *Fable II* is such that it can easily be segmented into five parts. It's certainly an interesting attempt to re-launch the game, but we can't help but suspect something else is afoot; the title was released less than a year ago.

## IT'S JUST BUSINESS

Let's be honest – *Wolfenstein's* multiplayer component is better left not spoken about. We're not the only one's who think so, apparently. British studio Endrant, which was working alongside Raven Software, has fired a large number of employees following the shelf date of *Wolfenstein*. According to the team, it's just business, however. "We have recently completed a development cycle and have regrettably been forced to make adjustments to staff and headcounts," said an Endrant rep. "Those affected are valued members of our team who have worked incredibly hard on our latest title. We hope that they land on their feet quickly."

## TOTALLY NAPOLEON

It's only been a few months since Creative Assembly's *Empire: Total War* hit the shelves, but already there's talk of the next in the series. Entitled *Napoleon: Total War*, this continuation of the series promises a more story-oriented campaign, with players controlling either the diminutive leader or his opponents. The game will continue where *Empire* left off, and will take place over three campaigns: Italy, Egypt and Moscow. Creative Assembly is looking to have the game in stores towards the end of Q1 2010.



## Five is right out

While we can all appreciate the idea of playing retro games with a traditional, Atari-lookalike controller, nothing says "I'm awesome and dangerous" quite like picking up a grenade and having a game of *Bomberman*. Okay, so it's not a real grenade, but this fantastic piece of Danish engineering could certainly earn you a couple of concerned looks from passing-by elderly couples. All it really is, is a grenade-shaped joystick base, with the controller part poking out of the top. We're not sure where you could get one from, or how much you'd have to pay for one, but we find this both terrifying and wonderful.

## Blizzard to keep innovating

Although Blizzard is responsible for one of the biggest grossing games of all time – that's *World of Warcraft*, if you couldn't put two and two together – the company will not be resting on their laurels. According to Blizzard Entertainment's VP of International, Michael Ryder, the company will keep pushing the boundaries of innovation in creating new products.

"I don't think that innovation for us is necessarily a choice," he said at a recent interview at Gamescom. "I think the way that Blizzard operates, we look at players' need, quality, gameplay... all those things that are critically important. We put those at the top of the list, and we've got some really talented people in development who are always looking for some good ideas."

"It's not just development either, it's all the services we provide – we look for things we can do to make the experience better. I think we make a big attempt to listen to what the players have to say, and suggestions they might have on areas they feel we do better on."

According to Ryder, Blizzard will also be paying attention to the mobile space.

"One of the innovations we've made recently is using mobile devices for access to the Armory, using mobile devices for authentication – I think that's the beginning of a trend, perhaps, where we look at using mobile devices to make it easier for players to interface with the game," he said. "That's an area of innovation that comes naturally – the technology's there, the platform's there."



## Age of Conan Expands

*Age of Conan* isn't ready to give up the fight just yet, according to developer Funcom. Hot on the heels of the recent downsizing (or "rightsizing") of underpopulated servers, as well as a ton of other updates to the game, it seems that *AoC* is still going strong. So strong, in fact, that there's an expansion on its way. Based on Robert E. Howard's *The Tower of the Elephant*, *Rise of the Godslayer* will see players exploring a whole new land as well as the new character advancement system that's designed to give high-level players more to do once the level grind is over. Expect all the regular bits and pieces, such as new armour, weapons, quests and skills, as well as an improved PVP system for the bloodthirsty.

No release date is available as yet, but there's plenty more information available at [www.riseofthegodslayer.com](http://www.riseofthegodslayer.com).

They said it...

"A small segment of very vocal gamers say everything has to be new and different every year.

**Actually, people are happy with existing franchises, provided you innovate within them."**

-Bobby Kotick, Activision CEO

"We did great on the Quake III generation, tons and tons of licenses on that. **But it does tie up your arms a little bit technically and it does mean you're out of the game business** and you're in the technology supplier business."

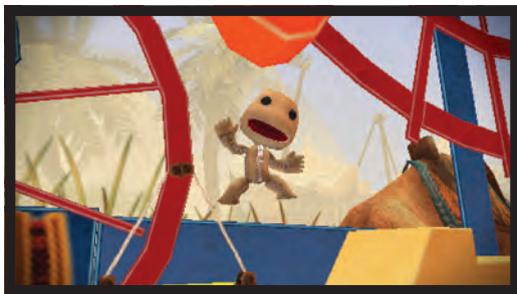
John Carmack,  
id Software Technical Director

"We are not doing movie-based games anymore. **Actually, wait... we are not doing crappy movie-based games anymore.** You can quote me on that."

Ira Rubenstein, Marvel Executive VP  
of Global Digital Media Group

"Big companies need to be safe. **This is why indie games excite me: they have the freedom to fail.**"

Ron Gilbert, Monkey Island Creator



## Even Little-erBigPlanet

*LittleBigPlanet*, as you should know, is on its way to the PSP, but it's not arriving unharmed. Apparently, the processing power of the PSP is such that it can either handle the game's physics requirements, or multiplayer. No prizes for guessing which has been dumped.

"You've got full physics systems, you got full create mode, you've got all the aspects of *LittleBigPlanet* - you can upload, download, ad-hoc share with people - but we haven't got multiplayer," explains Mark Green, *LBP*'s producer.

Combined with the loss of a depth plane for movement, it's starting to look like Media Molecule is having a tough time shrink-wrapping this title to fit into the portable platform.

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D92733/ENAG





# Guild Wars 2 gets informative

**NCSOFT'S AION ISN'T THE** only title sharing the company's marketing budget. The recently launched *Guild Wars 2* website is packed with information about this exciting return to the world of Tyria. Here's what we managed to dig up:

The most notable addition in *GW2* is the open, persistent nature of the game world. Much like *World of Warcraft*, *GW2* ditches the bandwidth-saving instanced worlds in favour of a common environment in which you can expect to encounter hundreds (if not thousands) of fellow gamers. Of course, certain missions and dungeons will be instanced. To go hand-in-hand with this new approach to the game world, exploration will be taken up a notch, with the inclusion of jumping and swimming. The addition of swimming is looking to do a little more than just play catch-up, however.

According to ArenaNet, "We want to make underwater exploration easy and

exciting for players and eliminate some of the traditional limitations (i.e., drowning) to aquatic travel found in many games. The underwater zones open up exciting new possibilities and greatly expand the explorable areas in *Guild Wars 2*."

While much of the story is still shrouded in mystery, we do know that the sequel takes place about 250 years after the events in the first games, and will see the humans joined by their historical foes, to stand united against a new enemy. This means that players will be able to create not only human characters, but also a Charr, Norn, Asura, and Sylvari. The rather Steampunk-looking artistic style of the game also lends itself to a significant addition – firearms, albeit with a "unique twist".

There's no solid release date yet for *Guild Wars 2*, but one thing is for certain: it will retain its subscription-free payment model.

## TESTING, TESTING, 1, 2...

Apparently, being a games tester is, like, totally the most desirable job in the industry. At least, according to Sony. They're so sure of this, that they're creating an entire *Big Brother*-esque reality show just for gamers. The prize: become a QA tester at PlayStation San Diego. In this show, entrants will go head-to-head in a series of game-themed elimination challenges designed to test "mental toughness, endurance and videogame knowledge". The show is accepting entrants now, so if you happen to be American, head over to the US PlayStation blog and register.

## Speaking for the Dead

Apparently Sir Paul McCartney wasn't as excited about *The Beatles: Rock Band* as people might think. His initial impression of the game left him cold, appearing to be "a couple of grown-ups standing looking very foolish with these little plastic guitars playing to a screen." However, approval was obviously eventually given for the project – one that the various stakeholders in The Beatles' intellectual property believe would have pleased both John Lennon and George Harrison.

"I think they would have been amused," McCartney said in a recent interview. "I think they would have seen the point of it."

"For us, let's remember that the central thing is our music is getting played. That's the bottom line. I'm sure John and George would have thought, 'Hey, what a clever idea.'"

"[John] would have been excited about the *Rock Band* concept, and very happy with how the music and the visuals of the Beatles were represented," said Yoko Ono, John Lennon's widow.

"It will inspire and encourage the young generation to be intimately involved in music making," she added. "You can't ask for more. It will be another musical revolution created by the Beatles to make our planet a planet of music."

"I hate to say, but I know I'm [George's] biggest fan and biggest critic, and I'm happy with it," Olivia Harrison said. "I think they did a great job, and if I didn't like it I would feel very uncomfortable."



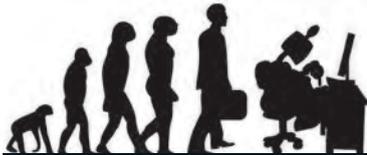
## Eve Online opens doors to consoles

In a daring move, developer CCP has announced *Dust 514* – an MMO/FPS/RTS hybrid that will directly interact with their other MMO – *Eve Online*. The details are still fairly slim at the moment, but the team is promising that this console shooter will allow players to affect the galaxies of *Eve Online*. It will "give [console players] a chance to become part of one of the most massive cooperative play and

social experiences ever," according to CCP, as well as "giving commanders and ground infantry real-time configurable weapons and modular vehicles to manage dynamic battlefield conditions."

Apparently the title has been in development behind closed doors for the past three years. *Dust 514* is due out for Xbox 360 and PS3, but no release date has been pegged just yet.





## Evolution of LUCASARTS ADVENTURE GAMES



Labyrinth (1986)



The Secret of Monkey Island (1990)



Full Throttle (1995)



Grim Fandango (1998)



Escape from Monkey Island (2000)



Tales of Monkey Island (2009)



## Mechwarrior takes a knock

Remember last month, when we reported on the upcoming *Mechwarrior* revival? Well, it seems that the reboot of this fine brand is off to a rocky start. In 1996, Harmony Gold, the publisher that owns the rights to all things *Macross* and *Robotech* in the US, went to court against *Battletech* (the franchise from which *Mechwarrior* was born). Apparently, *Battletech* had been stealing designs from *Robotech* and *Macross*. The court ruled in favour of Harmony Gold and *Battletech* was forced to withdraw a number (but not all) of their mechs from their franchise, including anything *Mechwarrior* related.

Still following? Good. Now, with the recent release of the jaw-droppingly awesome *Mechwarrior 5* trailer, Harmony Gold is out for blood again. One of the mechs in the video is reportedly based on a *Macross* design (the Tomahawk Destroyer, in particular), and Harmony Gold wants the entire trailer pulled from everywhere on the Internet. We're not sure if this is just mud-flinging or the basis for a potentially damaging law suit, but we hope that Piranha Games gets this sorted out, one way or another, before the brand is put at risk.

## Jade and the gang on hold

It's time to break out the tissues, folks; we've got some bad news for you. As you may know, Ubisoft has been suspiciously quiet regarding the upcoming sequel to 2003's *Beyond Good & Evil*, only releasing a teaser trailer, which was followed by a supposedly leaked video of gameplay conceptualisation. At one point, an executive even outright denied that the game was in development. It seems the reason for all the secrecy is that they just weren't that interested in developing the title, which has reportedly been put on hold. For how long, exactly, is anyone's guess as this stage, but *BG&E2* is sadly the perfect candidate for outright cancellation during these tough financial times. The information comes from e-zine Gamersyde, which claimed that they "got confirmation at Cologne's Gamescom that *Beyond Good & Evil 2* is on hold for now."

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D92733/E/NAG





# Move over, Marvel

## NOW HERE'S SOMETHING UNEXPECTED:

Disney has recently announced that the company will acquire Marvel Entertainment, in its entirety. Payment will be made up of a combination of cash-per-share and a partial share exchange, for a grand total of \$4 billion for the transaction. For their troubles, Disney will receive full access to over 5,000 Marvel characters including The X-Men, The Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, and Captain America.

"This transaction combines Marvel's strong global brand and world-renowned

library of characters... with Disney's creative skills, unparalleled global portfolio of entertainment properties, and a business structure that maximizes the value of creative properties across multiple platforms and territories," said Robert Iger, President and CEO of The Walt Disney Company. Marvel is equally concerned with the expansion potential of this acquisition. "Disney is the perfect home for Marvel's fantastic library of characters given its proven ability to expand content creation and licensing businesses," said Ike Perlmutter, Marvel's CEO.



## Respect my authority!

Tower Defence is still going strong, it seems. What started off as a crappy Sega Megadrive game eventually burst onto the RTS mod scene. It's dabbled in the casual Flash game market and dipped into current gen consoles, and now, *South Park* is here to tear it apart. Developed by Doublesix Games (the studio behind *Burn Zombie Burn!*) for the XBL Arcade, *South Park Let's Go Tower Defense Play!* will see up to four players take control of our *South Park* heroes in an attempt to stop the

onslaught of a horde of vicious enemies – including cows, ginger kids, woodland critters, old people and hippies. You'll control your characters to assemble defences as well as directly attack the enemies with snowballs – available in white or yellow.

While we're not sure the world needs another Tower Defence game, let alone one centred around toilet humour, political satire and crude animation, but it couldn't hurt to download the demo once it hits XBL on the 7th of October.

## MARVEL AT THIS NEW FEATURE (HAR HAR)

While the iPhone has been humming this tune for some time now, and hacked PSP owners are no stranger to the delights of PDF readers, the time will soon come when original PSP owners can get a piece of the action. Sony announced at their Gamescom conference that there will soon be a digital reader for the PSP. The first company in line for this? Marvel Comics. The company is claiming that "hundreds" of comics will be available for this service. Precisely when, and for how much, is unclear at this stage.

## WHAT IS EA UP TO?

If two recent trademark applications are anything to go by, we may well see the return of *Dungeon Keeper*. Of course, China is already going ahead with the *DK* MMO, which will likely never see the light of day in Western territories, which leads us to believe that this is a part of the recent talks from former Bullfrog employees and EA that there has been a renewed interest in a few of the classic Bullfrog titles. These two trademarks, which have been filed by EA Redwood Shores, are lacking in detail but cover two categories: Class 9, which pertains to computer games with a special mention of digital distribution, and Class 41, which pertains to "games accessed and played via electronic, wireless and computer networks."



## EA in court again

It doesn't take much to work up a lawsuit these days. This time, EA Sports is on the chopping block regarding the use of a number of boxer names and likenesses in *Fight Night Round 4*. Fighters Inc., which represents a group of boxers, is accusing EA Sports of deliberately "undermining the interests" of boxers by approaching them individually for licensing purposes. Apparently, the boxers are meant to operate as a group in circumstances such as these, to avoid being scammed by big bad companies like EA.

"Not only did EA take money out of the pockets of all professional boxers who are participating in the group licensing program," claims Fighters Inc. managing member Chip Meyers, "but its intentional misconduct could completely destroy what we are trying to build to empower today's professional boxers with the same marketing and earning presence that is enjoyed by professional athletes in all major sports."

## Turbine sues Atari

Big business means big money, and big money means people get sued. Atari are on that list now, after *Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach* developer Turbine dropped legal papers in the publisher's lap.

Turbine are suing Atari, claiming that the company failed to effectively promote the game, and left Turbine with publishing duties once the game saw the light of day. They want \$30 million out of the law suit, but Atari are trying to get the whole thing dismissed, on the grounds that Turbine still has contractual obligations to fulfil, and that legal actions of this nature will hamper the game's success.

"Last week, with no warning, Turbine filed what can only be viewed as a frivolous lawsuit against Atari," read an Atari statement. "This action can ultimately do a great disservice to D&D fans and to the MMO community at large. Turbine's actions also appear intended to divert attention from the contractual obligations that Turbine owes to Atari."

"In response, today Atari served a motion to dismiss the entirety of Turbine's lawsuit. Atari also filed a separate complaint to recover monies owed to Atari resulting from an independent third party audit of Turbine."

## Gaming Charts

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LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...



June 2009 figures provided by GfK  
www.gfksa.co.za

### PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Need for Speed: Shift
- 2 Batman: Arkham Asylum
- 3 Uncharted 2: Among Thieves
- 4 Madden NFL 10
- 5 Gran Turismo 5

### XBOX 360

- 1 Halo 3: ODST
- 2 Forza Motorsport 3
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City
- 4 Borderlands
- 5 Left 4 Dead 2

### PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 FIFA 2010
- 2 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010
- 3 Bakugan
- 4 Pro Evolution Soccer 2010
- 5 Guitar Hero 5 Bundle

### PC

- 1 The Sims 3
- 2 Dragon Age: Origins
- 3 Sacred 2 – Ice and Blood Expansion
- 4 CSI 5
- 5 Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising

### PSP

- 1 Gran Turismo
- 2 Silent Hill: Shattered Memories
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars
- 4 Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time
- 5 Star Wars: The Clone Wars – Republic Heroes

### WII

- 1 Wii Sports Resort + MotionPlus
- 2 Wii Fit Plus
- 3 Spore Hero
- 4 Cars Race-O-Rama
- 5 Rapala: We Fish [Bundle]

### DS

- 1 Spore Hero Arena
- 2 Littlest Pet Shop City Friends
- 3 SimAnimals Africa
- 4 Need for Speed: Nitro
- 5 Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games

### PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Fight Night Round 4
- 2 Saints Row 2
- 3 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
- 4 FIFA 09
- 5 UFC 2009 Undisputed

### XBOX 360

- 1 Trivial Pursuit
- 2 Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box
- 3 Fight Night Round 4
- 4 PROTOTYPE
- 5 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10

### PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 2 Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 5 FIFA 09

### PC

- 1 The Sims 3
- 2 FIFA 07
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
- 4 Need for Speed: Underground 2
- 5 Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

### PSP

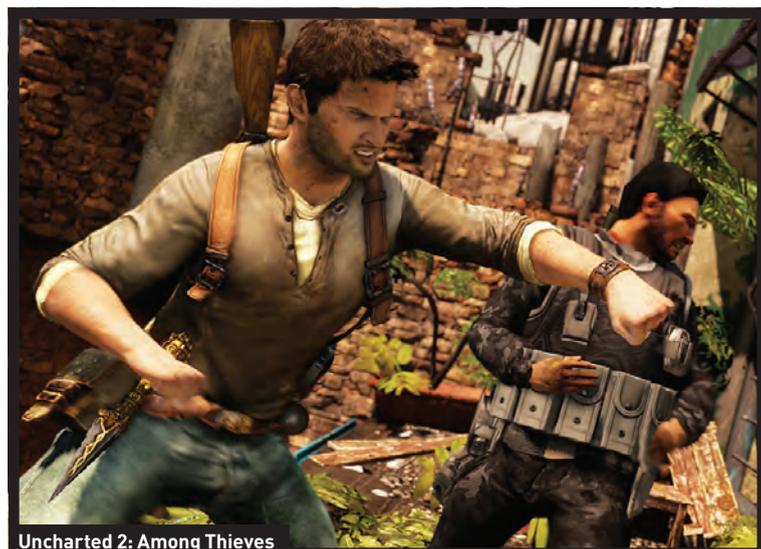
- 1 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
- 4 Burnout Legends
- 5 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

### WII

- 1 Wii Sports
- 2 Wii Fit + Balance Board
- 3 EA Sports Active
- 4 Grand Slam Tennis
- 5 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10

### DS

- 1 Brain Training
- 2 Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs
- 3 New Super Mario Bros.
- 4 Space Chimps
- 5 Mario Party



Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

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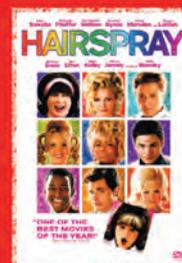
Quantum Of Solace



The Dark Knight



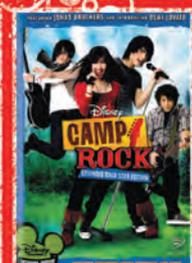
Indiana Jones  
And The Kingdom  
Of The Crystal Skull



Hairspray



Dirty Dancing



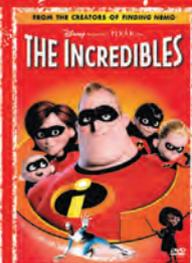
Camp Rock



Kung Fu Panda



Bee Movie



The Incredibles

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## Tipping the bouncers

Videogame technology is a wonderful thing. While thousands of boring old scientists around the world sit around trying to do things like cure diseases, or discover alternative energy sources, videogame engineers get to use their intelligence to create things like this: Sixaxis-powered boob bouncing. The new *Ninja Gaiden*, entitled *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* is the culprit here, in which you'll be able to directly control the gravity-defying breasts of Momiji or Ayane, who can be played co-operatively with Ryu Hyabusa. There's sure to be a massive outcry from the female gaming population, so we're not really sure why the developers would dare to tread there, but they have. *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* should be out in October, only on PS3. And, in case you're wondering, there's no mention yet of any additional control over Ryu's anatomy.

### SEX SELLS...

... and, as it turns out, especially well in Japan. Japanese firm DDM.tv has gone out on a limb in recent times, however, by launching an adult film download service for PS3 owners in the country. Steven Hirsch, founder of Vivid Entertainment (which is the world's largest producer of adult films) would like to see this service taken across the globe. "[DDM's launch] is a good start. We hope that Sony will allow adult movies to be downloaded worldwide. As long as proper age verification is in place there is no reason why consumers should not be allowed to view adult movies on any device that they desire."



## THE BAGINATOR

So we all know the history of the poor badger, stomped by a demon and then resurrected, lost to the Internet torrents, only to return as the Dread Pirate Badger. All of this left him with a peg leg, an eyepatch and a healthy respect for demons.

And so his story continues...  
On the weekends, the badger likes to run free in the long savannah grass near the highway by the airport. Often he dashes across the road (you know... to get to the other side). The peg leg and eyepatch have robbed him of his usual nimbleness. Too bad he didn't spot that truck carrying cybernetic body parts, which was luckily followed by an ambulance full of cybernetic doctors and scientists, which was luckily followed by a military jeep on its way to Vicinity 42 in Kempton Park (they do advanced experiments here in an underground lab). They worked for days on the battered remains of our poor badger and finally produced what you see on this page. He's still hiding (they wanted to use him for nefarious purposes) in the magazine - go get him. Remember, it's not going to be easy anymore - he's more advanced.

Send your sightings to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line 'October Badger' and stand a chance to win a Samsung Ecofit monitor, sponsored by Samsung.

### LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Michael Bouwer, p53



## BottleRocket fizzles

There has been a fair amount of bullet-dodging in the gaming industry of late, but some companies were not lucky enough to get out of the line of fire. One of them was developer BottleRocket... the company has finally closed its doors, after a six month struggle for survival.

It all started when Namco Bandai pulled the development of *Splatterhouse* from the team. In the storm that ensued, several members left BottleRocket to work on the project with Brash (a company that also recently closed doors.)

Company founder Jay Beard wrote an email explaining the situation. "It is with deep regret that I have to inform you of the closure of BottleRocket," he wrote. "After fighting to keep the doors open for the past six months we have decided to close and move on.

"BottleRocket was in business for seven years and I feel that we developed a sound reputation



for quality and creativity. I was once told that we 'zigged while others zagged,' and I like to think that we shall be remembered this way.

"We had the opportunity to meet and work with many talented and passionate individuals along the way, and I want to take the opportunity to thank you all for everything that you did for BottleRocket. Seven years wasn't long enough for our plans to bear fruit; but it was a decent run.

"I am now in the process of building a new development studio from the ground up and look forward to us crossing paths once more."

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## Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a 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 copy of *Pro Evolution Soccer 2001* for Xbox 360, sponsored by Ster Kinekor Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line [October Caption].



### THIS MONTH'S CONTEST



**NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:**  
"The pumpkins make a stand against Halloween."

### LAST MONTH'S WINNER



**"No jokes, you really need a tic tac!!!"**  
- James Wilson

### AUGUST WINNER



**"Optimus, I told you I was getting the Pink Eye!!!"**  
- Salim Ismail

## Events

### MAGIC THE GATHERING

#### NOVVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC

**When:** Every Friday  
**Time:** 19:00  
**Type:** Standard, Constructed  
**Cost:** R30  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

#### MID-MONTH MADNESS 2-HEADED GIANT

**When:** 17 Oct  
**Time:** 13:00  
**Type:** Standard, Constructed, Team  
**Cost:** R30 per player  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

### LANS

#### NAG LAN @ RAGE

**When:** 2-4 Oct  
**Where:** Coca-Cola Dome, JHB  
**Status:** SOLD OUT!  
[rageexpo.co.za](http://rageexpo.co.za)

#### ARENA 77 RAGE QUAKE III 1V1

**When:** 3 Oct  
**Where:** Coca-Cola Dome, JHB  
**Type:** Competition  
[arena77.co.za](http://arena77.co.za)

#### NOVVA LAN

**When:** 10 Oct  
**Where:** Novva Gaming, JHB  
**Type:** Free-for-all  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

#### HALLOWEEN MAYHEM

**When:** 31 Oct  
**Where:** Boksburg  
**Type:** Open LAN  
[langames.co.za](http://langames.co.za)

### YU-GI-OH!

#### TOURNAMENTS

**When:** Saturdays  
**Time:** 10:00  
**Where:** Novva Gaming, JHB  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

### HEROCLIX

Contact Novva Gaming for info.  
[novvagaming.co.za](http://novvagaming.co.za)

## bt GAMES™ Release List

Release dates subject to change

### WEEK 1: OCTOBER 1-8

| TITLE                        | PLT      | TITLE                     | PLT      |
|------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
| Ghostbusters: The Video Game | PSP      | The King of Fighters XII  | PS3, 360 |
| Gran Turismo                 | PSP      | Batman: Arkham Asylum     | PC       |
| WET                          | PS3, 360 | Championship Manager 2010 | PC       |
| MagnaCarta II                | 360      | Order of War              | PC       |
| FIFA 10                      | Multi    | Resident Evil 5           | PC       |
| Wacky World of Sports        | Wii      | Dead Space: Extraction    | Wii      |

### WEEK 2: OCTOBER 9-16

| TITLE                           | PLT      | TITLE                               | PLT          |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Hasbro Family Game Night        | PSP      | Sacred 2 - Ice and Blood Expansion  | PC           |
| Risen                           | PC, 360  | Spore Hero                          | Wii          |
| Spore Hero Arena                | DS       | Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2                | PS3          |
| Yoshi's Island DS               | DS       | Donkey Kong Jungle Beat             | Wii          |
| Rock Band 2                     | Wii      | All Star Cheer Squad 2              | Wii          |
| SingStar Motown                 | PS3, PS2 | Section 8                           | PC, 360      |
| Uncharted 2: Among Thieves      | PS3      | Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising | PC, PS3, 360 |
| Cars Race-0-Rama                | Multi    | Miami Law                           | DS           |
| Drawn to Life: The Next Chapter | Wii, NDS | Brütal Legend                       | PS3, 360     |

### WEEK 3: OCTOBER 17-23

| TITLE                            | PLT          | TITLE                                     | PLT      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---|----------|
| Puzzle Chronicles                | PSP, DS      | Forza Motorsport 3                        | 360      |
| Saw                              | PS3, 360     | Bakugan                                   | Multi    |
| Borderlands                      | PC, PS3, 360 | Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games | Wii, DS  |
| Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars | PSP          | WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010                | Multi    |
| Ghostbusters: The Video Game     | Multi        | Dragon Ball: Raging Blast                 | PS3, 360 |
| Blur                             | PC, PS3, 360 |   |          |

### WEEK 4: OCTOBER 24-31

| TITLE                                   | PLT               | TITLE                                | PLT      |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Wii Fit Plus                            | Wii               |                                      |          |
| Wii Fit Plus + Balance Board            | Wii               | GTA: Episodes from Liberty City      | 360      |
| Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time | PS3               | Dragon Ball Z: Attack of the Saiyans | DS       |
| Pro Evolution Soccer 2010               | 360, PS3, PSP, PC | Dragon Ball: Revenge of King Piccolo | Wii      |
| Tekken 6                                | 360, PS3          | Formula 1 2009                       | Wii, PSP |
| Tekken 6: Limited Edition               | 360, PS3          |                                      |          |



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# MINIATURES MAGAZINE

BY MIKTAR DRACON

## The "Good Enough" Revolution

**NETBOOKS ARE FANTASTIC. RECENTLY,** a little 10-inch Acer Aspire One (with a 1.6GHz Intel Atom processor, 1GB of RAM and a 120GB HDD) came into my possession. At the rand-dollar exchange rate at the time of going to print, it only cost a little over R2,000. It is a wonderfully **utilitarian** device, built not for the demands of the **gamer** and his increasingly desperate need for more unrealised graphical prowess, but for the pragmatic computer user who needs nothing more than an Internet-capable typewriter. That can play full-screen YouTube videos. And browse porn.

When talking about things like netbooks or the minimalist Google OS due next year, the Fetish Gamer gets uncomfortable. "But it can't play *Crysis*," he says. "But it won't make games run faster," he remarks about Google's OS. Fetish Gamer, after all, lives with the arrogance that everything revolves around him and his narrowly focused gaming addiction. It is inconceivable to him that someone might want a netbook, not to play games, but just to browse the Internet, type up some work, connect with friends and watch the odd video. Perhaps play a Flash game here or there. Get a little groove on, if you know what I mean.

It's funny though, how modern netbooks are quite capable of playing 'older' games like *Quake III* perfectly fine. So, what is it about netbooks anyway? Well, they form part of the "Good Enough" revolution, as *Wired* calls it. Devices need no longer be the best, most powerful or the shiniest to win over consumers – just **good enough** for their needs. For a while now, product manufacturers had tried to tell consumers what their needs are, and it worked for a while. But eventually, people woke up and realised they paid more for powerful things that far overshoot their own actual needs. These things are cyclical, as we all know: the pendulum of consumer desires swings this way and that; one year it's all about faster processors, the next it's about better power consumption at the cost of speed, and so on and so forth. The trick with Fetish Gamer, like most specialised users in any given area, is that Fetish Gamer sees himself as the defining characteristic of computers. The branch has come to believe that he is the trunk of the tree.

What's a Fetish Gamer anyway? Upon a time, I might have called Fetish Gamer something like Mr Hardcore Gamer, but I've decided I prefer using the term "fetish" in there, since it's a more accurate description of the mindset of that particular demographic. Fetish Gamer plays only his preferred genre, or his preferred franchise. Fetish Gamer is a vocal minority, a niche with delusions of grandeur – branch, tree, that whole thing. With Fetish Gamer, contents are as labelled. Moving up a rung is Core Gamer. Now, Mr Core Gamer has diverse tastes, and will play mostly anything – as long as it's a game. Core Gamer rarely gets caught up in the 'X-is-better-than-Y' argument over game franchise, console or preferred platform of choice. Core Gamer is, as it says, the core of the gaming market. Nothing is set in stone, of course, and Fetish Gamer can be Core Gamer the next day – and vice versa. These are just labels for the sake of clarity.

Beyond Core Gamer, we get the vast, blue-ocean Expanded

Market. The Expanded Market is Everyone Else in gaming demographics: the people who don't play games but might; the individuals who are interested in games but only as a tool for distraction; and, of course, people who've never played games and have no interest in them. The Expanded Market is where Nintendo is fishing for new customers right now, as is evident by their blue-ocean strategy. Meanwhile, Microsoft and Sony are squawking, preening and posturing for the Core Gamer, trying to win his undivided attention by having the prettiest plumage, while rallying their respective brand-loyal Fetish Gamers in case anyone needs to be told which the better platform is on some Internet forum somewhere.

When it comes to the Wii, the Core Gamer thinks it has mostly sub-standard graphics, but doesn't mind overall, since gaming is about more than graphics. The Fetish Gamer shrieks in absolute horror at the lack of High Definition, and then runs to hide in the basement from the piercing light of the day star. The Expanded Market, however (as has been made pretty clear by the sales figures of the Wii), thinks it is **good enough**. An amusing anecdote I heard recently involved friends of a family coming over with their six-year-old kid. The kid wanted to play games, so the dad brought out the Wii. But the kid had already played all the Wii games the dad had. The dad found a copy of *Super Monkey Ball* for the GameCube and put that in, since the kid hadn't seen it before. The dad handed the kid a GameCube controller, since it didn't use the Wii Remote. No amount of explanation could get the kid to stop waving the GameCube controller around, and the kid just could not understand why the game didn't just let him tilt the controller to move, or shake it to jump.

The Expanded Market in me can't help but smile at that. The Core Gamer in me laughs, but does wonder about the long-term effects the Waggle Generation will have. The Fetish Gamer in me was murdered with an NES controller back in 1986 – body never found. **NAG**

Fetish Gamer, after all, lives with the arrogance that everything revolves around him and his narrowly focused gaming addiction.



# WET

Become Rubi Malone, a gun-for-hire equipped with an arsenal of acrobatic moves, over the top sword kills, and dual pistols. Experience the freedom to shoot anytime, anywhere in an adventure spanning three continents. Featuring an ironic mix of humor and violence, WET is a third-person shooter unlike any other!

Available 25 September 2009



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## Blowing off Steam

**B**EFORE WE BEGIN, I need you to turn to the Ed's Note page and look at the grey strip on the right-hand side. At the very bottom, underneath the logo for Tide Media, there's a paragraph that begins with "Copyright 2009 Tide Media..." Now, take note of the bit that says, "Opinions expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Publisher or the Editors." You can see where I'm heading with this, right? Good. *[I guess I'll just look the other way then, Ed]*

I recently had a copy of *Empire: Total War* delivered to me from an online retailer. While buying games online is invariably cheaper than in store, the downside is the waiting for the delivery to actually arrive: the want for instant gratification is a peculiarity we gamers all suffer from. The game, of course, arrived just as I was going to be away from my PC for the weekend – typical. By the time I actually got a chance to begin the installation, I was a jittery husk of a gamer who had suffered too long from escalated anticipation – I'm sure many of you can relate. I am also sure that you can imagine my utter rage when I was greeted by a condescending little message while trying to install the game: "the CD-key you've entered has already been activated and tied to another account on Steam." There are children squatting in the dust in far-off African countries who could hear and who learnt new profanities that day.

I'm ashamed to admit that my initial, hellfire-fuelled fit of anger was directed at the DRM functionality of Steam. There I was, sitting with a brand-new copy of *Empire*. A paying and legitimate customer being told to shove it because somebody else already owned the CD-key to **my** game. Actually, let me correct that: because somebody else had already **stolen** the CD-key to my game.

After four days, I was beginning to see Steam-installation failure messages popping up in my sleep: "The dream you are trying to register has already been activated and tied to another account on Dream." During those abominable four days, I was exchanging e-mails with Steam's client-support team. They were actually rather helpful, and the only reason it took four days to sort out was because of that pesky time difference between South Africa and the United States – damn you, solar system! Finally, I was able to install and play *Empire*. I was also told that this sort of thing happens every now and then, and it is usually the result of some cheapskate with a key-generator and a copy of the game stolen from elsewhere. Therefore, this whole debacle was not the fault of Steam, but some obnoxious thief sitting somewhere in the world thinking he or she had just bucked the system.

Here comes the tirade you've all been expecting and the

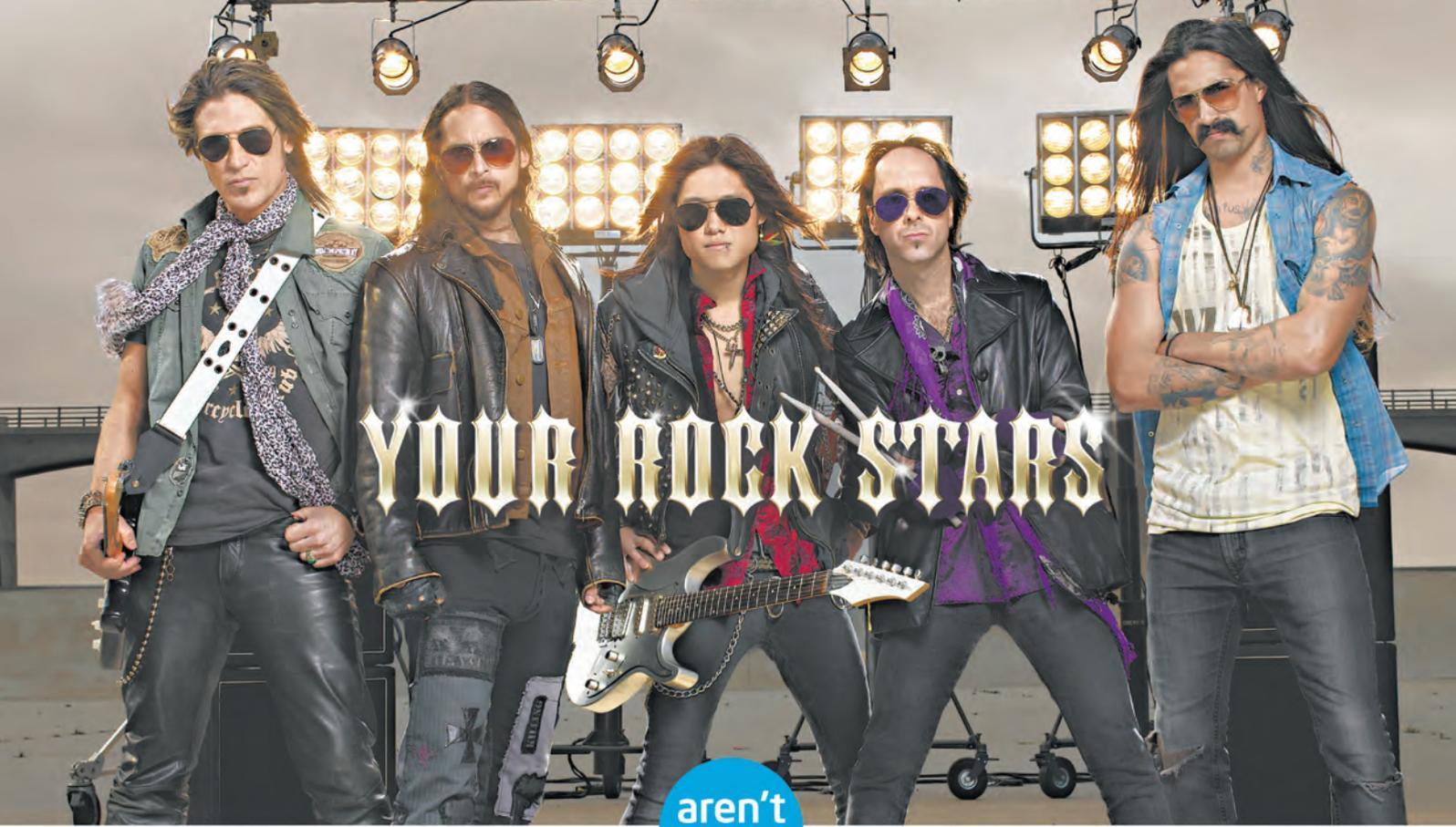
reason I asked you to read that disclaimer:

I eventually got to play the game that I rightfully own, so this isn't an issue. At issue, here, is the reason why this problem occurred in the first place: piracy. Lots of gamers bemoan what piracy is doing to the industry, but this is the first time piracy has actually affected me directly. And because it is now affecting me directly, I'm going to take the problem personally from now on. I've always had a problem with people who pirate games, but now I have a fanatical loathing that the Lord Himself wouldn't be able to quell. If you, who are reading this, frequently pirate games, know that I hate you and that I classify you amongst petty thieves and lowlives. You cannot **ever** call yourself a gamer. You are a cancerous growth on the gaming industry – and nothing more. I wish all manner of destructive virus upon your PC and person.

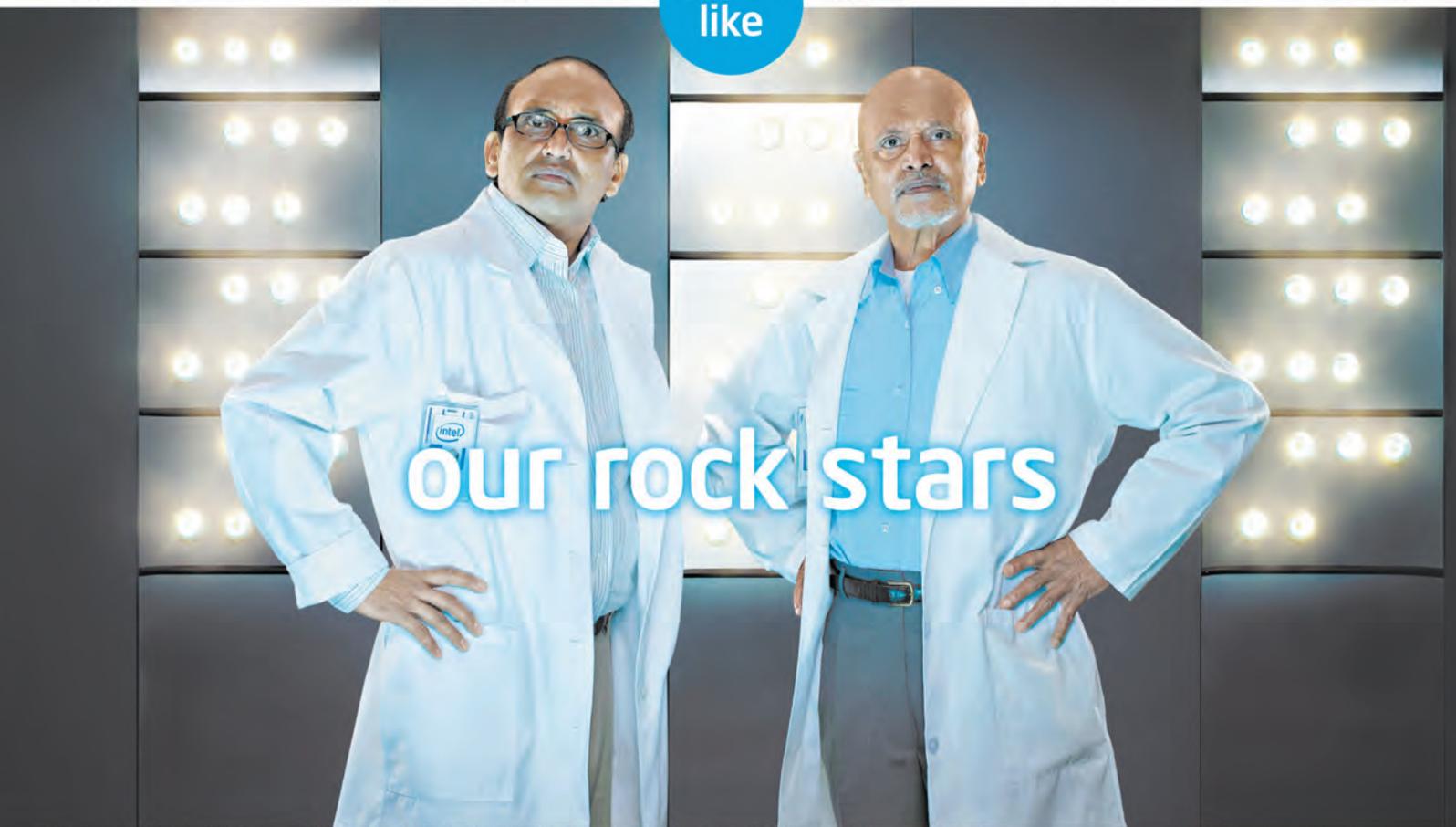
Here is some startling information for you not-so-bright types out there: gaming as a hobby is expensive, so don't even think about getting involved if you cannot afford to buy the games you want. Pleading poverty to accusations of piracy is inexcusable; you are a resounding moron for getting involved in a pastime you cannot afford. In fact, I don't even know why you buy this magazine, as it is one created by gamers for gamers and your kind is really, as far as I'm concerned, not welcome here.

All right. Phew, I'm done. If you've read this far and have not felt the urge to storm off in an offended huff, then it's pretty safe to assume that you're a legitimate gamer. If this is the case, then hi. I like you. Let's be friends. **NAG**

If you, who are reading this, frequently pirate games, **know that I hate you and that I classify you amongst petty thieves and lowlives.** You are a cancerous growth on the gaming industry – and nothing more.



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# Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Aw, Kitty got wet

**Genre** → Third-Person Action Adventure  
PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

**O**UR TIME WITH *UNCHARTED 2: Among Thieves* begins with our hero, Nathan Drake, driving along the snaking streets of a war-ravaged city. Immediately, it's impossible to ignore the painstaking detail on display here. Each building that Drake drives past might as well be a separate character in the game; they're so distinctive and unique. Locals haphazardly run through the streets, brandishing fully automatic weapons and a desire to survive their situation. They're seemingly oblivious of Nathan as he drives by. Nate's rickety vehicle leads him through the city - almost torn asunder by civil war - searching for clues to the location of the Cintamani stone, an ancient and powerful artefact. Buddhist and Hindu mythology reveal that the magical jewel is capable of fulfilling the wishes of those who possess it. Throughout history, great and terrible rulers like Genghis Khan have possessed but a sliver of this stone, and it was all they needed to provide them with the power necessary to carve out their place in history. The vehicle's radio emits an unfamiliar female voice - it's certainly not Elena Fisher, the love interest from the original *Uncharted*, subtitled *Drake's Fortune*. The dialogue

evokes emotion from Nathan, showcasing the game's impressive facial and character animation as he reacts to each word spoken by the woman. He struggles with the sticky gear stick, again cementing ourselves in the notion that these could very well be real characters we're seeing on screen. Mention is made of someone named Lazarevic and he certainly doesn't sound like a nice fellow. He's tearing the already crumbling city to shreds, searching for the same clues as Mr Drake. The conversation between Nathan and the woman on the radio is cut short when a truck comes screaming into place behind Drake's banged-up ride. It doesn't seem like they're here to ask questions.

After being run off the road (in spectacularly cinematic fashion) by his pursuers, Nate shambles into a nearby alley on foot, but it's not enough to throw them off. They're on him before he has time to catch a breath, somehow slipping the truck into the slim alley. We take first control of Nathan at this moment, running and gunning our way along a perilous path in the opposite direction to the truck. Nate's desperation is palpable - his anxiety shining through thanks to the all-round brilliant



voice acting in this early build of the game. The truck, its engine now aflame thanks to our superb aim, loses control for an instant and smashes into the side of the alley. The force of the impact sends Drake tumbling out into the adjacent street. Safety seems in reach, but voices from the direction of the wreckage prompt our hero to take cover behind a bullet-riddled wall nearby. We assume that these are Lazarevic's goons (these assumptions are confirmed later). They begin hunting for Drake, slowly scanning the street for signs of him. The bus that pops into view and ploughs through a couple of the lackeys cuts them short, creating the perfect distraction for us to unleash a bit of hell on these n00bs...

For the next ten minutes, the short, but impossibly sweet *Uncharted 2* demo that is presented to us blows us away. Let us just say it right now: this game is going to rock so much harder than that 'band' you started in high school ever did. Playing the game is like being the star of a big-budget, *Indiana Jones*-wannabe adventure film. The lead protagonist is a smart-mouthed ruffian who could spout a thousand one-liners before the kettle finishes boiling; and the plot will send you on a treasure-hunting trip that spans the globe. As is the case with most adventure films, humour plays a large part, and we'd be lying if we said that during our time with the game we didn't chuckle a few times at Nathan's interactions with the characters around him (both friend and foe). A few characters from the first game will make a return in *Uncharted 2*. Elena Fisher (the love interest from *Drake's Fortune*, who has since been replaced as Drake's significant other by a new pretty face by the name of Chloe Frazer) and Victor Sullivan will be around to make you feel at home in the new locales you'll visit.

The preview code highlights a number of areas that have been improved in this sequel. Let's start with the combat. Drake is now able to use his weapon from any position or location: whether he's sprinting from cover to cover, hanging from a lamppost or dangling from a cliff, Nate can pull out his trusty pistol and let loose on enemies. He can also create cover for himself by kicking over tables, opening car doors and the like. The melee combat system is getting some major

improvements, and based on what we saw, it's definitely going to be one of the most cinematic and visually impressive parts of the game. Nate punches, kicks, grapples and generally gets his hands even dirtier as he counters enemy aggression. The close-quarters combat is incredibly fluid. We can imagine engaging in plenty of fire fights where we ignore our ranged weapons and charge in for the melee takedown, just to sit in awe at the splendour of the incredible animations and intensity of up close and personal battles. Speaking of fluid and well animated, *Among Thieves* will place a much greater emphasis on Nathan's acrobatic side. What this means is that you can expect lots of free-climbing sections and *Tomb Raider*-style shenanigans. Nate's no Lara Croft, though, and his animations show this: he's clumsy and oafish (in a cool way) and it's entertaining to watch him clamber around levels in this manner. These acrobatic segments aren't without their own special brand of action. Climbing up the side of a building, for example, could prove more hazardous than in some other games of a similar nature, as footholds and handholds (like air-conditioning units and flimsy signboards) tremble and crash to the ground under Drake's weight.

Stealth will play a role in the game, but it's optional and very dynamic. By dynamic we mean that there's no crouch or 'enter stealth mode now' button - Nate will simply move slower and generally keep a lower profile when you're around enemies who haven't spotted you yet. How you use this dynamic change in Nate's movements is up to you. You could ignore it and charge in guns blazing, or you could sneak around and sneakily take down enemies until you're spotted. Another improvement worth mentioning relates to the AI, and the new stealth stuff ties into this. Enemies will be much smarter in *Uncharted 2*, able to hunt Drake if he disappears from view. Disappear behind cover for too long, and enemies will change positions in an attempt to flank you or coax you into sticking your head out so they can shoot it off. This presents some interesting opportunities for Drake, as he can trick enemies into moving up on his last known position while he sneaks around behind them. They'll also investigate if they see anything suspicious. Enemies can pretty much do everything



"...playing the game is like being the star of a big-budget, Indiana Jones-wannabe adventure film..."



## The new hotness

The word on the street is that the original *Uncharted* only made use of 30% of the PS3's SPU power. Developer Naughty Dog claims that their new game engine (imaginatively titled 'Naughty Dog Engine 2.0') is maxing out the power of the PS3. While this is up for debate, what cannot be argued is the fact that *Among Thieves* will likely be

one of (if not the) best-looking games out there when it finally hits store shelves. The game looks absolutely spectacular. The numerous environments that we'll travel to are varied, colourful and impeccably detailed. The characters and their animations (especially of the facial variety) are uncanny. The visual effects pack a powerful punch. We may sound like fanboys, but trust us: this game is going to be one sweet-looking package.

## Multiplayer treasure hunting

One of the biggest complaints from gamers about the first game was the lack of multiplayer. *Uncharted 2* is giving players what they want by including both cooperative and competitive online multiplayer.



"...the plot will send you on a **treasure-hunting trip** that spans the globe..."



## The plot thickens

The story that *Among Thieves* will tell takes place a few years after the first game ended. Drake's back to his usual antics of trying to solve the fuzzy parts of a historical mystery. This time it involves Marco Polo's infamous doomed voyage home from China back in 1292. For those of you unfamiliar with the tale, pay attention. After spending nearly 20 years in the court of emperor Kublai Khan, Marco Polo departed for home (Venice) with 14 treasure-laden ships that carried over 600 souls onboard. When he finally arrived in Venice a year and a half later, only one ship remained, carrying only 18 survivors. While he described almost every other aspect of his journeys in detail, Marco Polo never revealed what happened to the lost ships. You're wondering how this all ties into *Uncharted 2*? Well, Nathan (who'd like nothing better than to find Marco Polo's lost treasure) attempts to find the lost ships. Along the way, he discovers that there was a much greater secret behind Marco Polo's voyage: he had gone on a clandestine expedition for emperor Khan to find the mythical kingdom of Shambhala (or Shangri-La) and recover the legendary Cintamani stone spoken of in Buddhist and Hindu mythology as a wish-granting jewel of unimaginable power. This prompts Drake to follow the exceptionally cold (700 years cold) trail of Marco Polo and find Shambhala, which is rumoured to lie deep in the Himalayas. Why is he doing this? The answer is simple: the stone would be worth billions of dollars if it were found.

that Drake can: they can use cover, jump across chasms, climb ladders and more, making them very agile and highly mobile targets for Nate to gun down. Our hero's ability to create cover for himself is also being granted to his enemies.

*Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is looking amazing. Everything about it boasts high production values and brilliant craftsmanship by the developers. It's the little things in the demo that impressed us the most. The subtle facial/character animations and already superb voice acting belie the digital nature of the characters. It's the way that plants give way to the wind generated by the rotor blades of a helicopter hovering overhead. It's the incredibly dynamic combat. All of it comes together to create a game that promises to be a cinematic, action-packed and thrilling treasure hunt around the digitally recreated world. Expect great things to come from this game. We are.

**NAG**  
Dane Remendes

## Help!

The cooperative multiplayer will allow three players to take control of Nate, Sully and Chloe respectively in missions that will feature a lot of elements similar to those of the single-player campaign. So, basically there'll be lots of platform fun, teamwork-based objectives and epic fire fights. If a teammate is badly injured or is grabbed by an enemy, you'll have to engage in some thrilling heroics to get them out of their predicament. An example of the cooperative modes is Gold Rush, which is similar to the competitive Plunder mode: two to three players must work together to fight through the level and recover a treasure that is heavily guarded by AI-controlled enemies.



"...this game is going to rock **so much harder than that 'band'** you started in high school ever did..."

## Die!

The competitive multiplayer modes that we know of so far consist of Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and a unique take on Capture the Flag, called Plunder. The DM and TDM game modes are ten-player (5v5 in TDM) match-ups where players can customise their character's appearance (by choosing between heroes and villains from the single player, depending on which team you're on) and equipment load-out. Plunder is like CTF, except that instead of a flag, you're working to steal treasure from the enemy's base and cart it back to yours. The catch is that while you're carrying the treasure, your movement speed is reduced and you can only use a pistol. You can pass the treasure to a teammate or hurl it out of reach of the enemy so you can defend yourself if you happen to find yourself in a dangerous situation.

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## Tony Hawk: RIDE

Can a plastic motion-sensing controller bring back the edge?

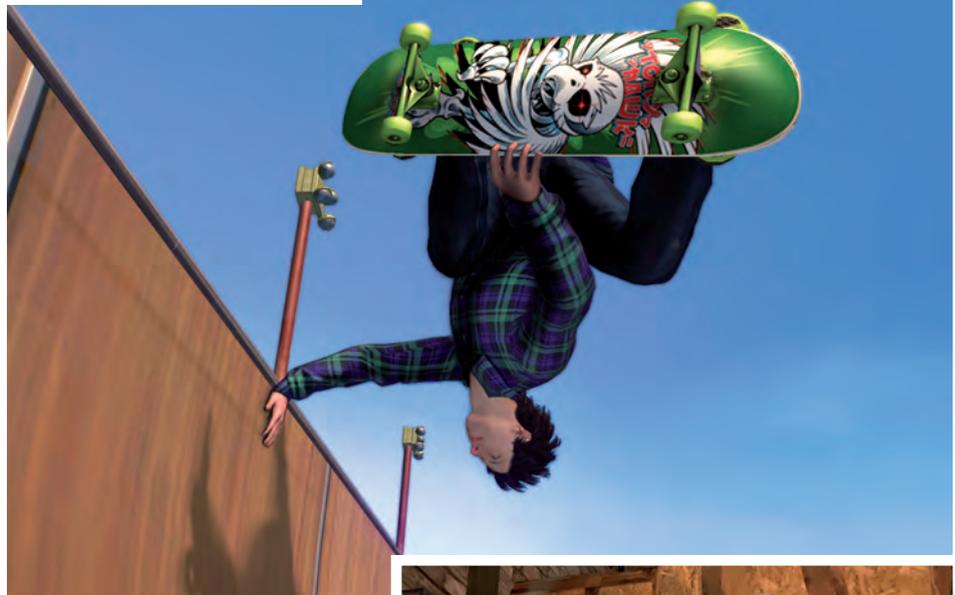
Genre → Sport

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**L**OOKED AT FROM ALL angles, *Tony Hawk: RIDE* is many things. It's Activision hoping that the *Guitar Hero* plastic-peripheral magic will rub off on the franchise. It's a desperate move to save the franchise, which has, over the course of a single game, lost almost all relevance due to its own failures and the rise of a strong competitor. It's an attempt at blue-ocean strategy: to appeal to an unimaginably large, untapped expanded market. It's, albeit perhaps unwittingly, a move towards not just enhancing a real-world activity, but replicating it.

The *Tony Hawk* franchise is not known for being static, having gone through many course changes from *Pro Skater* to *T.H.U.G.* and beyond; adding and removing contemporary pop-culture elements almost at whim. The mainstay of the franchise has always been that of huge score-attack combinations pulled off with increasingly complex button presses in a progressively 'surreal' environment. At the start of the franchise, the hyper-exaggerated vision of skateboarding with its obscene hang-time and impossibly spastic grinds was an alignment with what games of the time were. It made skateboarding - albeit a crazy gamer version - accessible and fun, but without the pretence that it was being an honest replication of the actual sport.

The allure of peripheral-based games is that of enhanced reality, letting you do what you couldn't in real life, by giving you assistance in the form of a simplified physical control mechanism. It started in arcades with steering wheels and gun grips, aimed at bringing across



physicality to the activity of the game. In the case of something like *Guitar Hero*, the distillation of music down to five plastic buttons and a strum results in the Ultimate Power Chord; a kind of magic that feels like you're doing it just like the pros, even when you're not and you know you're not, but you don't care. It's a fine line when dealing with the translation: one step too far, and instead of enhancing your reality of the activity, the peripheral replicates it and with it, all of its pitfalls. It becomes self-defeating: you may as well go out and do the real thing, and that's not what gaming is about.

Sporting an estimated \$120 (just under R1,000) price tag, thanks to its required motion-sensing 'skateboard-without-



wheels', *Tony Hawk: RIDE* represents a fundamental paradigm shift for the series. They're moving the franchise out of the genre it helped create and putting it in an entirely new market. They don't want to directly compete with the likes of *Skate*. It's a bold move, but nobody knows where it's going to land. Taking an entire core franchise that far out of its comfort zone is risky, no matter what anyone says. The *Burnout* franchise made a similar lane change, going from arcade circuit racing to open world. Until the game was in the customer's hands, nobody knew how it was going to pan out.

We were flown to an Activision press event in New York to go experience the *Ride* for ourselves. Tony Hawk greeted us upon entering the demo room, where he was already playing a very early version of the game and making it look easy. Leaning to the sides and tilting the board this way and that, spinning it laterally 180 degrees on his heel, it became clear that the board is a controller where the physicality of interacting with the game is much more in line with the reality of the actual activity - something that weighed heavily on our minds as we took a turn at playing. Stepping on to the board, it creaked and complained, but we were assured the noises were only

the result of it being a test board that had been dismantled many times during its development\*. They offered an actual consumer-level production model for us to try, though it wasn't working with the game yet. The production model did not creak or make any noises, feeling incredibly solid, but in our minds, something we were going to break if we got a little too excited.

The game is split into four sections: Speed Run, Trick, Challenge and Free Ride. Even though it only supports one player at a time locally, there will be 8-player hot-seat (or hot-board, if you will) and 8-player online multiplayer. An interesting 'tell' that *RIDE* was indeed going for a more non-gamer audience, was the Casual Mode setting switched on for us as we got used to the board. In Casual Mode, the game steers for you, helpfully directing you down the hill, towards the ramps and through the various obstacles you can decide to trick off or not. Taking a shot at Challenge, the level presents several elements you have to trick off, grind or jump over in turn as you try to beat a level par score.

The board peripheral has four sensors, one on each cardinal point, which you can block with either your foot or hand for the purpose of triggering tricks or pushing



“Tony Hawk greeted us upon entering the demo room, **where he was already playing a very early version of the game** and making it look easy.”



yourself along in the game. Sweeping a foot past the sensor on the side of the board acts like a push, while moving your hand close to any sensor works as a grab for holding that part of the board. We were told that in the production model you won't have to lean down too far to block the sensor, which would be a good thing. Tall people have a hard time bending at the knees and blocking the relevant sensor. Simple tricks like an ollie (jump) involve leaning back until the front of the board lifts off the floor: you don't have to actually do a forceful kick off the back of the board to lift it off the floor. So it's not entirely like riding an actual skateboard, but the experience is very reminiscent of one, complete with having to be mindful of your balance when attempting tricks. Admittedly, we're not skateboarders, so losing balance often and having to plant a foot off the board on the floor to right

ourselves didn't seem like much losing of face.

Visually, *RIDE* is perhaps a touch too cartoony and simplified; though, if this is a bid to seem more approachable to the expanded market, who knows how well it will work. Switching Casual Mode off in *RIDE* gives you full control over your motion of steering and a lot more fidelity to the tricks themselves, but even then, the process is one of translation, not a true recreation. You cannot flip the board over for a kick-flip, for example, and have the game understand what you're doing. Watching Tony Hawk play *RIDE* makes it look as if the game was created entirely for his sensibilities. There is the risk that this may well be the case; on the other hand, that may only indicate that *Tony Hawk: RIDE* is the most literal-minded entry in the series' history. **NAG**

**Miktar Dracon**

\* You should lay off those double cheeseburgers dude, Ed.

We're moviiiiin' on up, to the East side.



## Tropico 3

Viva la revolución!



Genre → Management

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

Welcome back, *El Presidente*. Much has changed since you last ruled the nation of *Tropico*. We got rid of those stinking pirates, for one, and discovered a third dimension! Please, come in; sit down and help yourself to a glass of rum and a fine cigar – both produced locally by your unworthy populace. We've got plenty to talk about.

**F**OR THE UNINITIATED, *TROPICO* is a management city-building series in which you rule over a tiny Caribbean nation. All of the typical management tasks await you: organising resource chains; ensuring your people aren't slacking off; and keeping that bank balance on the healthy side of zero. What separates *Tropico* from the norm, however, is the degree to which you can be an utter bastard. There's a lot at stake here, and there are plenty of would-be dictators, both internal and from the

outside world, eager to see you thrown into the street. It's up to you to ensure that the locals are kept in line, either by an iron fist or gentle nudges in the right direction; but never forget that this is your island.

*Tropico* focuses on finding the perfect balance between directly conflicting components, and plays on moral decisions – much like *Dungeon Keeper*. While it's possible to stamp out democracy – by banning all elections and keeping a soldier on every street corner – you'll have more than just a few disgruntled peasants to worry about. Foreign relations play a big part, so while the USSR might appreciate your efforts to brand *Tropico* as a communist nation, the USA might decide that local unrest is the perfect excuse for invasion – that oil of yours looks like it needs a little liberation of its own.

While the foreign powers might influence your overall decisions, day-to-day affairs will directly affect the various groups within your island's population. Religious groups need churches; Intellectuals want schools and colleges;

From what we've experienced so far, ***Tropico 3* is shaping up to be the perfect sequel to the first title.**

Nationalists want immigration control to clamp down on foreign workers; and the Capitalists think tourism is the way to bring *Tropico* into the First World. The seven local factions will constantly keep you busy. If one of them starts to feel a bit left out, it won't be long before they're rioting in the streets – or, in the case of the Militarists, marching up to your palace to take the throne by force. On the other hand, careful manipulation of each faction will result in additional tools to manage your island. Get the Religious guys on your side, and you'll be able to publicly scream "Heretic!" at all who oppose you. If you concentrate on appeasing the Militarists,

## Out with the old

Aside from the obvious visual changes, there are plenty of additions – large and small – to look forward to in *Tropico 3*. First, you'll have access to a campaign mode, which spans across multiple islands and will be more objective and event driven than the regular sandbox or challenge modes. You'll also have greater control over El Presidente him/herself, with the ability to send them off to a building to increase productivity with a few insightful words and/or armed guards. There's a pretty neat weather system, as well, which features natural disasters such as earthquakes and tornados, as well as a lighting system with day/night transitions.

"This is great, but where are the pirates from *Tropico 2*?" I hear you ask. Well, frankly, they're gone, along with pretty much everything from the game. *Tropico 3* is set to be more of a sequel than *Pirate Cove* ever was.

## Sharing is caring

To bring the *Tropico* series into the current generation, the developers have been working on a few new features that should light up the eyes of any management fan. There's a great challenge editor that lets you design your own missions and share them with the rest of the world. Designers will be able to set starting conditions, and then implement date-specific changes such as a world economy crash, or immigrant stoppage, or perform simple variable-based changes. There's also an achievement system with tons of objectives to meet, should you find the basic free-play or challenges insufficient.



you could lock yourself inside your palace and feed off the fat of the land with little concern for your enslaved population.

From what we've experienced so far, *Tropico 3* is shaping up to be the perfect sequel to the first title. It looks great, everything has been streamlined and improved, and it has managed to actually enhance the feeling of being a ruthless dictator – which, as anyone who has played the first title will tell you, is an impressive feat. This is definitely one to look out for if you're a fan of serious management titles. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

## One brick at a time

Every building in *Tropico 3* has been painstakingly recreated and is looking fantastic so far. There are a few newcomers to look out for as well.

### PALACE

The ivory tower from which you rule. This is the most lavish, over-the-top building on the island and that's just the way you like it. Great for making impromptu speeches to drum up a little favour.

### GARAGE

One of the new buildings, the garage allows your peasants to use vehicles to get to work, job sites, and perform deliveries.

### ROADS

Tar is the new dirt in *Tropico 3*. You'll have much better control over the plotting of travel routes with the upgraded road system, and it lends the game a certain *SimCity* air.

### DOCKS

Money makes the world go round, they say. And what better way to earn some of that useful stuff than by selling your locals' labours of love to the highest bidder? Just make sure that your dockworkers are well paid; industrial action is no stranger to the island of *Tropico*.

### SHACKS

These dirty little hovels will pop up all over the place, if you're not careful. They look bad, they don't earn you any rent, and the fussier tourists will flat-out refuse to set foot within sight of one. Thankfully, eviction notices are easily served to shack occupants... just in case you need some space to establish that new rum distillery.

### NEWSPAPER

It doesn't take much to generate a sense of liberty, and what better way than with a government-funded newspaper?



Tailgate branding: optimism at its finest



## Need for Speed: Shift

Race Wars 2009 have begun!

Genre → Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**O**KAY, WE ADMIT: *NEED for Speed: Shift* has been occupying a lot of pages in recent months, and it doesn't even have a zombie mode! *Shift* is a big deal, however, as the turning point in one of EA's biggest franchises. So, imagine our excitement when we finally got a chance to sit down and play through a bit of the Career mode. Let's see what we discovered...

You're thrust straight into the action as soon as you enter career mode. You're given a BMW 135i Coupe and told to take it for a spin around England's famous Brands Hatch. Based on your performance, you're given a recommended difficulty level and sent off into the wild with a fat wad of cash and a starry-eyed dream of success.

While *Shift* is, without a doubt, focused on the simulation-racing side of things, it still manages to feel like a *Need for Speed* game; not only due to the traditional assortment of car modifications, but also thanks to the forgiving nature of the career progression. Players are rewarded points for performing various tasks in each race: precision points are earned for clean overtakes, following the race line and mastering each corner; while aggression points are rewarded for drifting, dirty overtakes, corner slides and trading paint. In turn, these points help you gain driver levels, which unlock new upgrades and sometimes come with a cash reward. It boils down to a system that will praise you for pretty much anything, and encourages veteran *NFS* players to race in any way they feel comfortable. The game might centre on track racing (and actually penalises you

for cutting corners), but it still manages to retain that arcade-like, gritty *NFS* style. Unless, of course, you're really here for the higher difficulty levels, which introduce a mechanical damage system that will leave your car spluttering into last place, if you drive too recklessly.

Another trick *Shift* pulls from its roots is the ton of game modes available. While many 'serious' simulation-racing games focus on plain-circuit races, *Shift* keeps things interesting by providing the player with loads of different themes for each race. You'll constantly be driving different cars as you enter manufacturer challenges, invitational events, race coalitions (a group of tracks), time attack, driver duel (which is similar to previous versions), and the very welcome drift event. In case you're wondering just how drifting has been converted to this more realistic style: it's very challenging, and should keep the more masochistic of simulation fans occupied for hours.

*Shift's* release is right around the corner, and if the multiplayer and free-play modes

have anything on the Career mode, we should be looking at a serious contender for which racing game of 2009 deserves your money. We'll reserve our final judgement for the final release of the game, but things are looking very positive at this stage. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



### Vehicular mayhem

The game's 72 vehicles are divided into four tiers:

- Cars like the Ford Focus ST and SEAT Leon Cupra occupy the lowest tier;
- Tier 2 has the Audi RS4 and Subaru Impreza WRX STi;
- Tier 3 features the Aston Martin DB9 and Audi R8; and
- The highest tier is home to the Bugatti Veyron and Pagani Zonda R.

There's also a special tier for drift cars, which is a collection of cars from the other tiers, but modified to operate under drift conditions.

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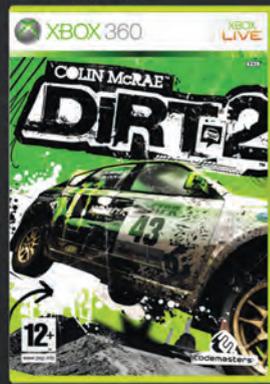
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Scientific proof that orange cars are slower than red ones



## Blur

Go on... Shunt me... I dare you

Genre → Arcade Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**T**HE ONSLAUGHT OF Q4 racing games is here, and you'd better be prepared. Will you anchor firmly on the simulation side of things, would you like a balanced experience, or are you just looking for a chance to smash your friends into walls at high speeds? If you're in the last group, then pay attention: *Blur* wants you to drive like a maniac.

Producer Peter O'Brien describes the game as "controlled, beautiful chaos," and judging from what we've had the pleasure to experience already, he's bang-on with that description. Taking a few cues from *Wipeout*, and also much from crash-racers like *Burnout*, *Blur* fits rather neatly into the arcade-racer category, with loads of over-the-top action and more explosions than a Michael Bay film.

The game is also taking a few cues from modern social-networking sites like Facebook and YouTube, which form the basis of the career mode. As a newcomer on the street-racing scene, your character will need to connect with other AI racers, exchange messages, videos (through a fake service called "Inner Tube") and invites to events. Every progression in the career takes place this way, from unlocking new events to adding vehicles to your collection. You're also judged on your street credibility, which is determined by the number of fans you



manage to pull in from each race. The more precise, flamboyant, or downright sadistic you are on the track, the more fans you earn.

It's the multiplayer modes that really carry a racer to a healthy longevity, however, and *Blur*'s got a few tricks up its sleeve to help in this regard. It features up to four-player split-screen (or "Party Mode"), which is sadly almost unheard of these days, and will allow for up to 20 vehicles on the track at the same time. Multiplayer is highly customisable, with a fantastic mode called World Tour that will throw you and three buddies into an impromptu tournament with random events, random cars, and random modes and objectives.

*Blur* will have some competition when it finally arrives, most notably from *Split/Second*, but the game has already come a long way from the last time we caught sight of it. This is definitely one to look out for if you still long for the days of *Carmageddon*. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

## Go, Go Gadget lightning storm

What really sets *Blur* apart from the collection of racing titles clamouring for your Christmas bonus is the power-up system. These tools of defence and destruction are picked up as you drive, and can turn the tide of a race in an instant.

**BARGE:** Stuck in the middle of the pack and just can't seem to bust free? Hit Barge to send your soon-to-be-unlucky rivals flying in all directions.

**SHUNT:** 'Drafting' is for wimps. This is how real drivers overtake.

**SHOCK:** It's a giant ball of lightning, which you shoot at other cars on the track. Why doesn't every racing game have this?

**NITRO:** It makes you go fast. Very fast. Watch out for that hairpin corner.

**MINES:** Leading the pack can be tough, but following the leader is even tougher when he's dropping explosive death out of his tailgate. You might want to avoid these.

**REPAIR:** The best offence is a good defence. Or something. Regardless of your strategy, this will keep you alive and in the race for longer than the guy who doesn't pick it up.

**SHIELD:** Not in the mood to be Shunted, Barged, or otherwise belittled? Work those reflexes quick enough, and you might just survive - provided you have enough Shields remaining.



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Look at that terrain  
– ain't it pretty?



## Heroes Over Europe

Barrel roll, then swoop in for the Ace Kill

Genre → Combat Flight Simulator  
PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**H**EROES OVER EUROPE IS the sequel to *Heroes of the Pacific*, which was released for PC, PlayStation 2 and the original Xbox. *Heroes Over Europe's* precursor managed to slip by me when it was first released, so as you read this preview, keep in mind that I'm new to this series. From what I could gather while playing a preview build of the game, it seems that *Heroes Over Europe* is the *Gears of War* of flight simulators – it lays the action, intensity, flair and crazy aerial manoeuvres on thick. This isn't a game that fans of ultra-realistic flight simulators are likely to enjoy, but if you're the type of person who'd rather spend their time doing impossible aerial stunts than constantly checking flight instrumentation, then read on.

Despite the fact that it was preview code, it was clear that *Heroes Over Europe's* presentation is slick. From the old wartime video reels that wouldn't be out of place in a documentary on the History Channel, to the wartime placards and posters that make up the menus and loading screens, the game presents itself well. The game features a plethora of aircraft (from the factories of both the Axis and Allied powers, with variants of each plane available to test-fly as well), each of which features its own unique statistics (they also have their own distinct look, sound and feel). Transmission Games (the developers) promise that the game will feature over



40 different planes in the final build. When beginning the campaign mode, the game lets you choose between two styles of play, Arcade or Pro, to cater for both types of simulator junkies. The game appears to be quite detailed, in terms of both sound and visuals. When battling over London, for example, it's difficult not to appreciate the amount of detail that the developers have put into creating the game world. As I said before, the game is very heavy on the action and there are plenty of enemies to shoot down/blow up/eviscerate in each mission. To aid you, you'll have the ability to perform Ace Kills, which essentially let you slow down time and take shots at critical locations on your enemy's aircraft once you've kept said enemy in your sights for long enough. The best way to sum up my experience with the game is to put it like this: your plane's 'health' regenerates. If that doesn't make you want to try this game, nothing will. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

## Multiplayer Over Europe

*Heroes Over Europe* will feature online multiplayer for up to 16 players (which I unfortunately didn't get a chance to get some hands-on time with). The game mode that the developers are touting the most is Conquest, which requires that players form up with a squadron of bombers and escort fighter planes in an attempt to bomb the enemy team's base. Naturally, this game mode will require teamwork and coordination between the players controlling the bombers and those controlling the escorts in order to achieve victory. In addition, Dogfight, Team Dogfight, Survivor and Team Survivor modes will be available.

# Preview

Developer → EA Canada Publisher → Electronic Arts  
Web → www.fifa.easports.com Release Date → October 2009



HANDS ON

## FIFA 10



Another year, another FIFA... Act accordingly

Genre → Sports Simulation  
PC **360** PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**THIS YEAR'S FIFA TITLE** promises to bring with it the usual batch of gameplay improvements, roster updates and technical upgrades. *FIFA* fans know that there aren't many changes made to the formula each year, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Each title released brings gamers one step closer to bringing the ultimate recreation of the beautiful game to our living rooms.

*FIFA 10* plays much like we're used to, but with a greater sense of control over the on-screen footballers. Our time with the preview copy of the game, which EA so kindly provided us with, was as enjoyable as always, especially when playing multiplayer with buddies. The game boasts a new "360° Dribbling" system that'll let you force your in-game counterpart to dance around maniacally to find the tiniest of spaces between defenders. Lateral dribbling is now possible, so sliding the ball out of reach of a defender before dashing by him is now a breeze. This doesn't mean that the game is any easier than before - the AI is being upgraded with what the developers are calling "improved AI urgency logic." It's an imaginative way of saying that the AI is much smarter now, and it definitely showed during our playtime, even in this pre-release build. For example, attacking AI will curve their runs to try to stay onside and will automatically charge forward to create opportunities. It's not only attackers who are getting all the attention - defenders have been given some fancy new manoeuvres to allow them to more effectively clear the ball in dangerous situations, and slide tackles



will be much more accurate. Goalkeepers are being enhanced with some AI modifications: they're more perceptive as to when to rush, stay on the goal line or intercept loose balls. The variations in goalkeeper behaviour also mean that attackers have more varied scoring opportunities.

In terms of ways to play the game, *FIFA 10* offers the usual single-player offerings like the Manager Mode and career-style options. New to the game is the Virtual Pro feature, which lets you create your own professional footballer, add him to a team and improve his skills as you play through the offline game modes. In our opinion, *FIFA* is most fun when played multiplayer, and this title will allow you to take your Virtual Pro online to compete in the 10v10 Pro Club Championship. That's right: 20 real-life players position themselves on the virtual pitch and battle it out. Offline multiplayer will still be available (four players on Xbox 360 and seven on PS3), and there's nothing quite like leaving your friends with deep emotional scars following your verbal abuse in a game of digital football. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

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## What We're Playing

Here are the top 20 games we're currently playing in the NAG office

| #  | GAME NAME                      |
|----|--------------------------------|
| 1  | Wolfenstein                    |
| 2  | Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare |
| 3  | Quake III Arena                |
| 4  | Elements                       |
| 5  | PROTOTYPE                      |
| 6  | Batman: Arkham Asylum          |
| 7  | Battlefield 1943               |
| 8  | Blue Dragon                    |
| 9  | Colin McRae: DiRT 2            |
| 10 | Demigod                        |
| 11 | Guitar Hero: Metallica         |
| 12 | Mirror's Edge                  |
| 13 | Puzzle Quest                   |
| 14 | Red Faction: Guerrilla         |
| 15 | Rock Band 2                    |
| 16 | Shadow Complex                 |
| 17 | Star Ocean: The Last Hope      |
| 18 | Tomb Raider: Anniversary       |
| 19 | Trials HD                      |
| 20 | Virtua Tennis 2009             |

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## Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

### DIRT 2



360

86  
89  
89

### WOLFENSTEIN



PC

85  
75  
77

### BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM



360

93  
92  
92

### MINI NINJAS



PSP

78  
70  
65

### G.I. JOE: THE RISE OF COBRA



PSP

50  
47  
47

### DISSIDIA: FINAL FANTASY



PSP

89  
80  
81

### TRIALS HD



XBLA

90  
86  
87

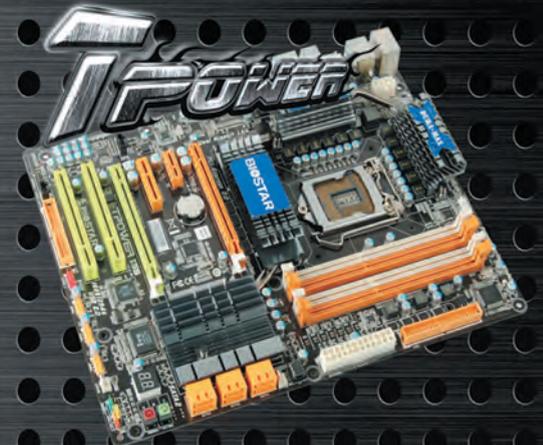
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## TPOWER X58



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## TPOWER I55



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Developer → Raven Software (single-player) | Endrants Studios (multiplayer) Publisher → Activision  
 Distributor → Megarom Web → www.wolfenstein.com

This bad boy shoots a plasma stream at anything that moves



## Wolfenstein

The return of the old-school shooter

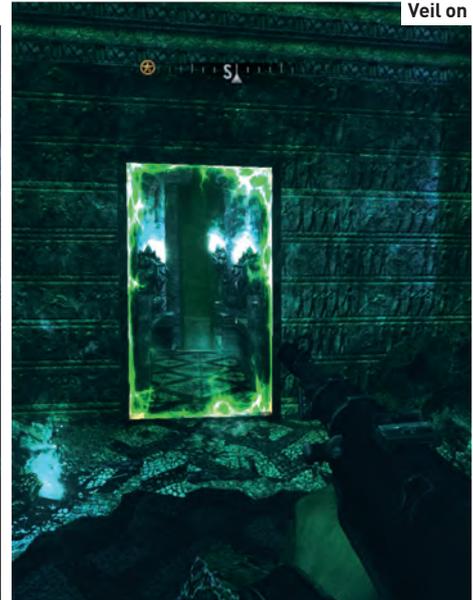
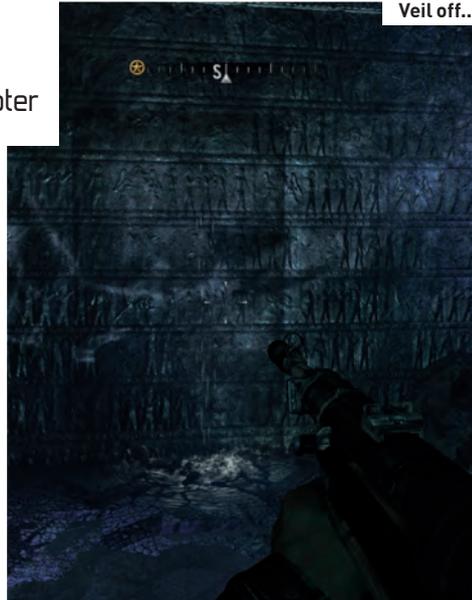
Genre → First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**IT'S BEEN A WHILE** since the first *Wolfenstein 3D* game was released. How long, you ask? Well, 17 years actually. If you ignore *3D Monster Maze*, then *Wolfenstein 3D* was the game that introduced '3D' and first-person shooting to the world. Now, 17 years later, we're back with the one-man army (B.J. Blazkowicz). And, hey, look – it's still World War II and full of Nazi scum. This new *Wolfenstein* brings it back to basics with run-and-gun, sneak-and-snipe action, a bunch of cool weapons and super powers, and a whole new dimension to explore.

The game mechanics are sound, and once you get used to the unique 'feel', it's pretty much all the shooting action you'd ever need. Remember, though, this is old-school shooting action with none of the refinements that have been exploited by the *Call of Duty* series. There are no set-piece sequences or much variation in what you have to do – go here and kill this is a deep as it gets.

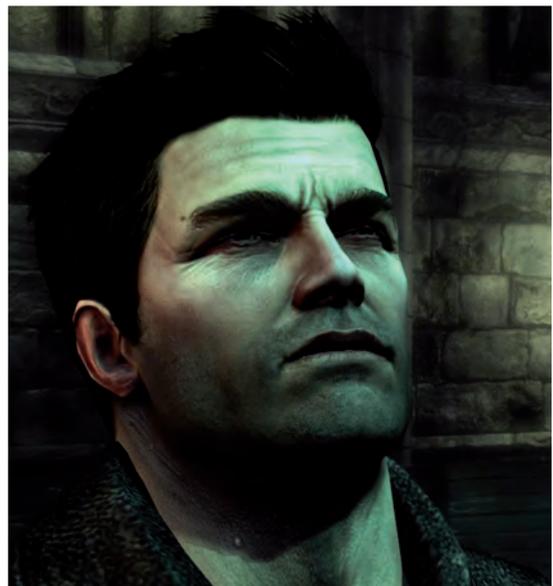
The story is told through video sequences and NPC interactions. Most of your missions will be given to you between two resistance factions, each with their own agendas. There are side missions to add to the game time and depth to add to the story. You play from a huge city-hub level, which offshoots into actual missions. So, you need to navigate and fight your way through the city to specific locations, where you'll find a resistance fighter waiting to take you in a truck to outlying mission areas. Occasionally the missions are at locations in the city. In the



missions and around the city you can find gold, intelligence and tombs of power. The gold buys you multiple upgrades for the game's weapons (see box out); the tombs allow you to upgrade veil powers (see the same box out) and the intelligence documents flesh the story out. We'll leave it there to avoid any spoilers.

### BLACK SUN

Early in the game, you'll find an amulet that enables your character to see the 'Black Sun' dimension. This is a world bathed in a greenish tinge and devoid of shadows. The amulet has a countdown timer that you can 'refill' at veil pools scattered randomly around the map. While using the amulet, you'll move a little faster and more importantly, be able to clearly see enemy soldiers – they glow a little. In this mode, you'll also be able to spot secrets, and some walls reveal hidden entrances. These hidden



entrances usually allow you to gain some tactical advantage in a fight. You'll also see veil ticks – creatures that commune around veil pools and feed on its energy. They're mostly harmless, but don't kill them: they will eventually retaliate.

As you hustle and shoot your way through the game, three additional powers are added to the amulet (accessed with numerical keys 1-4). Each of the powers has a few optional upgrades that can be bought for cash, provided you've found enough hidden tombs to unlock the upgrades. This gold and tomb hunting is another touch of genius by the developers. Be warned: this isn't really a game that can be enjoyed on a speed run. Half the fun comes from exploration and treasure

hunting – not to mention box breaking (which the game actually keeps track of). The more you explore, the quicker you can buy upgrades for everything – which makes the game easier to beat. The treasure hunting is very satisfying. Remember the original *Tomb Raider*? You look around the tomb and wonder if that far-off ledge has a pile of treasure on it, and you climb all the way up there and you actually find some. *Wolfenstein* is like that: the game rewards you well for all the exploration. There's even a secret entrance in a fireplace.

### A FEW TWEAKS

The game uses the id Software Tech 4 engine – with some improvements. From a

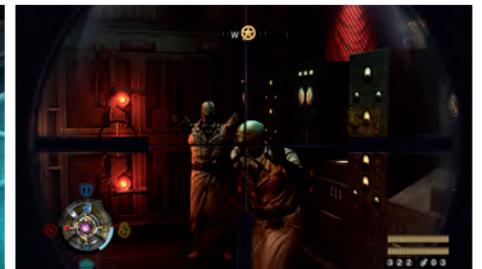
## Then and now

This is what *Wolfenstein 3D* looked like 17 years ago. It's hard to imagine that the current (2009) version might look just as hopeless to our future selves...



## Multiplayer

It's pure garbage. Although the *Wolfenstein* multiplayer component was done by a different development team, it's just criminal that id Software and Raven signed it off as good to ship. The whole thing feels like a completely different game, put together by some independent and inexperienced garage developers. It's the *Wolfenstein* engine, textures, guns and stuff – but all thrown together in an afternoon. The reason the multiplayer is detailed here, in this little box, is an attempt to distance it from the main review. It would, on its own merits, score around 28%, thereby dragging the stellar single-player game score undeservedly down. Three long and dedicated hours were spent online trying to suck some enjoyment out of it, with no result. In fact, it's so bad that the next patch should simply just remove the multiplayer executable and all associated files – that would at least be an improvement as you'd gain back 527MB of hard drive space. It's also hard to see any amount of patching that might make this fun one day. Fail.



## Weapons

### Model 24 Grenade

This is a fragmentation grenade with upgrades that include things like an improved explosive yield, radius and so on. Oddly, this useful device isn't the first choice in a fire fight. It's so ineffective in its vanilla state that you tend to not use it early on and therefore never bother to upgrade it.



### MP40

The meat-and-potatoes gun, also the first weapon you're given when you start. Upgrades include a silencer and improved rifling. Once you start getting better toys, you'll only use it for silenced machine gunning where required (i.e., a room full of Nazis with their backs to the door).



### Kar98

The Kar98 (you might recognise it from *Call of Duty: World at War*) is the sniping weapon of choice for sneak and camp experts and those who have issues with confrontation. Upgrades include a scope (essential) and bayonet. Spot the irony.



### MP43

Now this is 'the' gun and the one you'll probably end up using the most (besides the Kar98) in the game. Upgrades include increased magazine capacity, a scope, improved rifling and a bigger bore. It's the AK-47 of the *Wolfenstein* universe FTW.



### Panzerschreck

Wins the award for most underutilised weapon in the game – all that explosive power and rocketry in mostly tight levels just isn't a good idea (i.e., this is not a melee weapon). Eventual upgrades include more ammunition and an improved sighting system. It's fun but pointless.



Secrets are revealed when using the amulet



### Flammenwerfer

The Flammenwerfer (which is German for flamethrower) does what it says on the box. This nasty piece of kit is great for clearing entire rooms with a pop, crackle and fizz. Upgrades include range, fuel and damage.



### Particle Cannon

The first of the 'special weapons' is a cannon that apparently shoots particles. This piece of kit wouldn't look out of place in a science fiction movie, and is excellent for making the bad guys 'evaporate' in a swish of special effects. Upgrades include extended range, human-seeking ability and an increased particle juice tank.



### Tesla Gun

This puppy is a fun little toy that shoots out arcs of electricity that fries anything caught in range – including multiple targets. Think the Emperor in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* – but instead of your hands, you use a gun and instead of the force, it's a Duracell battery. It has a cool upgrade option that stuns enemy soldiers when used as a melee weapon. And as for the rest, the usual options apply.



One of the intel 'Documents' hidden in the game



### Leichenfaust 44

Loosely translated as 'corpse fist' and not a type of foreplay, this is the 'fire-and-forget' BFG of *Wolfenstein*. The catch is that ammunition is hard to find and it's cumbersome to use. Upgrades here include quicker recharge, more shots per canister and faster energy-ball movement from gun to target. Keep it for the end-level bosses – it helps.



## Powers

### Veil

This allows you to peer through the veil (or into it) and see (or be in) the Black Sun dimension. When this is activated, you'll move quicker and be able to spot enemies and secrets easier. Upgrades include extended use via a larger recharge capacity, quicker recharge and you can see enemies behind walls.



### Mire

This is the time machine in the game. Using this allows you to move faster, effectively turning enemy soldiers into statues. This is especially useful for the many fast-moving enemies. Upgrades include a 'temporal flux' thing that 'obliterates' the enemy things.



### Shield

Rather obvious, this one... upgrades are fun and include returning bullets back to sender and a resonance setting that disintegrates organic matter (and by organic matter, we mean Nazis).



### Empower

This is the superpower equivalent of quad damage. Use this to shoot through energy shields. It's also powerful enough to send bad guys flying when using certain weapons. It doesn't last very long, but sure packs a punch. Upgrades to this power allow your bullets to pass through light (wood) and heavy (concrete) cover.



Agent Blazkowicz guessed 'a clucking hen' correctly in the game of charades...



graphical look and feel, *Wolfenstein* shows its age a little. This is particularly evident in the beginning when you're first getting used to the game. However, as you progress further, it quickly becomes more about the playing than the fussing about how it looks. There are some nice touches and special effects, as some of the weapons fire spectacular streams and balls of death that look as good as the disintegrating bodies and explosions. Lightning crackles realistically and all the guns probably sound right – but do ask a WWII veteran to confirm this. The sound track is too close to *Indiana Jones* for comfort, but when you're surrounded by angry, shouting Germans, it somehow fits in perfectly.

The three things that eat away all the points in this game is the difficulty level, AI and the multiplayer. Even on the hardest setting, the game borrows a little too much from the console generation; and while it's nice to pimp and flow through a game with a save spot only seconds away at any given moment, you do need to occasionally die to make it memorable. The veil powers render you invincible, and there's so much ammunition around for all the weapons that you can afford to spray and pray to your heart's content. On the AI side, the enemies find and use cover well, but are predictable and never vary their attack strategy. In some cases, if you simply stay where you are, they'll line up and come straight at you, making for a less-than-exciting game dynamic. Then there's the multiplayer – groan. Look, it got its own box out.

### "ARE YOU FRIGHTENED, AMERICAN?"

*Wolfenstein* brings everything back to what used to make games fun and exciting. Strange mutations, power-crazed Nazi generals, hundreds of grunts and cool lighting and plasma weapons.

This is a Raven game through and through, and their influences are everywhere: the disintegration effect from *Elite Force*; the gruesome, gory bits from *Soldier of Fortune*; and the pure gaming awesomeness from their *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*. Naturally, id Software was overseeing the project. But who knows what that really means?

So, if you pretend there is no multiplayer in the game, then *Wolfenstein* is a fun romp back in time to when games were frivolous and men didn't snicker when they spoke to a tough guy called B.J. **NAG**

Michael James

### The Score

1  
 2-12  
 None  
 18+  
www.pegi.info

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Plus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Good, old-fashioned fun</li> <li>+ Plenty of variety</li> <li>+ Addictive</li> </ul> | <p><b>Minus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multiplayer is rubbish</li> <li>- Dumb AI</li> <li>- A little too easy</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

#### Bottom Line

It's a sublime, old-school FPS with treasure hunting, intrigue and Nazis to shoot. It's such a pity that the multiplayer is so horrific.

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For the Fans



Unwashed armpits - #1 killer of henchmen around the world.



## Batter up!

Doing pretty much anything around Arkham Asylum earns you a little heap of XP. Accrue enough of this stuff, and you can trade it in for upgrades, courtesy of WayneTech. Of course, you're the CEO of WayneTech and you should get this junk for free and whenever you want it, but apparently the rules are different in comic books or something. Anyway, investing in improved, multiple Batarangs early on is probably a good idea, since you can use these to temporarily subdue goons. In encounters where you're outnumbered (that's most of them), and especially in encounters where those goons are brandishing stun sticks (that's most of them later on), chucking Batarangs is going to be all the difference between XP and no XP (dying). Combine this with the double-tap redirect and ground takedown for maximum efficiency, and maximum XP. You'll also want to get your Quick Batarang down fast. You'll see why. Being Batman is **awesome**.

# Batman: Arkham Asylum

Holy licensed game that doesn't suck, Batman!

Genre → Action Adventure

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**IT'S ALL IN A** night's work for Bats, really. After recapturing Joker (again) and dragging him back off to Arkham Asylum (again), everything starts to go all sorts of wrong, when it quickly becomes evident that Joker has planned this all along (again). Holy plot twist, Batman! Joker contrives a daring escape (again), claims control of the entire facility (probably again), and challenges his nemesis to the inevitable, ultimate showdown of ultimate destiny (also again). Game on.

The short version: *BioShock* and *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* got drunk at the office Christmas party. Things got complicated for two minutes behind the photocopier. Arkham Asylum turned up after whatever passes for a videogame gestation period. *Super Metroid* adopted.

The long version: *Arkham Asylum* is a mash-up of adventure, action, stealth, exploration, and platform gameplay, with a truckload of collectible stuff for people who like to collect stuff (like me). Unlike almost everything else that tries mashing these up into one game, *Arkham Asylum* manages it all with an enviable elegance, economy, and style – nothing is there to the detriment of anything else. So, expect a lot of rushing about and grappling yourself places, and punching goons in the teeth on the way there.

Close combat in the game is handled with a deceptively simple single-button scheme. Remember that bit about elegance, economy, and style? You've got four basic melee manoeuvres at hand – strike, cape stun, counter attack, and evade – as well as Batarangs and other



gadgets you'll pick up along the way. You could, of course, just bash away at the buttons until you win, but you probably won't. The idea here is to link these together into something Batman would **actually** do, and it's all in the timing. As you maintain an unbroken line of hits, you'll start racking up combination multipliers, which in turn speed up and massively increase your damage. By artfully alternating your tactics, you can smash one goon, stun the goon next to him, counter and vault over the shoulders of the goon next to him, and finish off the first goon with a roundhouse kick in the guts in one uninterrupted and immensely satisfying demonstration of consummate brutality. It feels great, and it looks even better.

But Bats is so much more than a city-endorsed thug in spandex. When you're





not brawling with Joker's entourage, you'll be playing the cop all over Arkham Asylum. By switching over to your ultra-convenient Detective Mode, everything around you is filtered down to analyse and identify what's going on. This turns up information about nearby goons (useful for gauging threat levels), environmental features like ventilation ducts and such, as well as forensic evidence that you might want to investigate.

Speaking of forensic evidence, 240 bits of collectible stuff have been concealed all over the asylum's enormous campus by Edward "The Riddler" Nigma. Picking these things up not only shovels XP into your meter, but also often reveals information about some of the asylum's more notorious residents. While veteran Batman fans are obviously going to love all the filler, these do a fine job of

providing substance and context for people whose frame of reference begins and ends with Christian Bale in the Bat suit. If you'd never heard of Killer Croc before spinning up the game disc, you'll know all about Killer Croc by the time you bump into him, because you've been finding tapes of him talking about eating people for the last three hours.

And speaking of talking, the voice acting in *Arkham Asylum* is superb. Mark Hamill as the Joker and Arleen Sorkin as Harley Quinn (both reprising their roles from DC Animated Universe) invest the game with a class and credibility that's all too rare, and perhaps that much better for it. I'll bet hard cash I heard John DiMaggio (Marcus Fenix in *Gears of War*) in there somewhere too.

The only time the game really falters is in the boss encounters. Some of these



## Bats in the belfry

Bats like to hang out in dank, dark places. So does Batman. Rather than rushing in Batarangs a-blazing, it's often a much better idea to find some place dank and dark to hang out and wait instead. The baddies are going to go by sooner or later, and dropping in for the silent, violent strangle is 100% less likely to incur bullets to the face - guaranteed. Discretion is the better part of valour, they say, and it's also the better part of not dying and reloading your game over and over. They don't call Batman the 'Hangs Out In Dank, Dark Places, Waiting For A Cheap KO Guy' for nothing, you know. They don't? Well, they do now. Also, the inverted takedown just never gets old, ever. Being Batman is **awesome**.

## Gone batty

There's simply no disputing that Batman has absolutely the finest roster of villains in any comic ever. Lex Luthor wishes he were as cool as Joker. Lex Luthor wishes he were as cool as Calendar Man, and Calendar Man is actually totally rubbish. I mean, seriously, calendars? Fail. But still cooler than Lex Luthor, because Calendar Man is, importantly, a Batman villain. Where other comics typically present their villains as wacky, droll characters with about as much credible menace as a dachshund puppy in a teacup, Gotham City's malefactors are authentic psychopaths. Even Calendar Man would probably murder someone if he weren't wasting all his time shopping for calendars.

So anyway, given well over half a century's worth of cool villains to pull, it's hardly surprising that *Arkham Asylum* features one of the most extraordinary, compelling casts of supporting characters you're going to see all year. Even calling them "supporting" characters feels like something of a disservice. It's probably worth buying the game just for Scarecrow. Being a Batman villain must be **awesome**.



Who says capes are for wimps?



are immoderately hard, while others are over with the press of a button – and not in the order you'd reasonably expect. One of the first boss encounters in the game is probably the most difficult, not least of all because so early on, you're a bit short on the upgrades that really make Batman... well, Batman. Also, while I appreciate that one-on-one appointments with most of Batman's nemeses would be absurd, stuffing them full of goons instead felt like a cheap and artificial way of resolving scenarios. There's plenty of that everywhere else in the game already.

This minor gripe aside, however, the game touts the sort of production value never really seen in licensed games, and hardly ever seen in triple-A titles either. Visually very impressive, the asylum walls are practically screaming with detail, the whole place looking and feeling like nothing so much as Rapture's terrestrial twin. Despite having had the opportunity to parade hundreds of instantly recognisable villains across the game in one of those tacky, unashamed displays of "We bought the licence, suckers" (*Transformers*), Rocksteady demonstrates a subtlety and restraint that does them tremendous

credit. Besides, nobody really actually ever wants to see the Penguin in a game – nobody **likes** the Penguin. I think the best thing about *Arkham Asylum*, however, is that the game is **dark**. This is no kids' comic mucking about here. The game is loaded with very mature themes, and where dressing up as Batman might've quickly descended into campy tragedy, it's every bit as cool as it should be instead. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

### The Score

1
None
None
www.pegi.info

**Plus**  
+ You're Batman

**Minus**  
- Inconsistent difficulty

#### Bottom Line

Puts the "super" back into "superhero games." KAPOW!

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For the Fans



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Flank right and take the high-ground? Deploy your sniper to eliminate Anti-Tank squads from distance to allow M1A2 Abrams to roll into the valley.

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PLAYSTATION 3



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## Colin McRae: DiRT 2

Clean that up, you swine!

Genre→ Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**D**IRT IS EVOLVING. THE original Colin McRae: DiRT was a step in a different direction relative to the Colin McRae Rally titles of yesteryear. In addition to the familiar rally mode, DiRT added a number of new ways to play the game, and presented itself in a way that is still impressive today. After McRae's (who consulted on the series for over ten years) tragic death in 2007, it was unclear what would happen to Codemasters' renowned, rally-based racing series. Thankfully, the series continues with DiRT 2, and it's impressive (to say the least).

Right from the word go, DiRT 2's presentation is striking. The load times are (sometimes infuriatingly) long, but you don't really notice them very often, because there's always something to do while you wait. You see, the game's interactive loading screens throw up all manner of useful information and statistics (i.e., they distract you with shiny stuff) while you wait. Things such as achievements that you've unlocked, longest time on two wheels, and your average speed are flashed around the screen, and they're always interesting to check up on while you await the end of whatever loading screen you're currently on. After initially choosing a name, surname and nickname for your in-game self, you're off to the races. Completing events in DiRT 2 earns you cash (with which to purchase new rides) and experience. Gain enough experience, and you'll level up, which unlocks rewards (such as new liveries for your cars) and, more importantly, unlocks new events to participate in. Six difficulty levels



If this lens flare doesn't make your eyes bleed, then we're done trying.

are available to choose from before each race, catering for enthusiasts and casual racers. The difficulty level chosen determines your reward for finishing the race and how many Flashbacks can be used. In DiRT 2, you have a number of opportunities to rewind time (by using Flashbacks) in each race to correct any unfortunate mishaps that may have befallen you and your precious vehicle. A few new race types are available in this title, like Gate Crasher (which tasks you with hitting 'gates' to add precious seconds to a countdown timer – the racer with the most time to spare at the end of the point-to-point race wins) and Rally Cross (stadium-based races filled with lots of jumps, tight turns and angry opponents). Other new game modes include Domination and Last Man Standing – the former requires that you dominate segments of the track with your impressive times, while the latter

### Wash me!

The number of vehicles available for your driving pleasure in DiRT 2 may seem paltry compared to the 72 that will be on offer in *Need for Speed: Shift*, or the 400+ that will feature in *Forza Motorsport 3*. However, DiRT 2 more than makes up for this with the incredible attention to detail that was paid to the look, sound and driving style of each automobile in the game. Each car in this game is unique and will gradually be upgraded as you advance through the Rookie, Pro and All-Star racing tiers. In addition, each car can be customised with liveries and dashboard/windshield toys that are unlocked as you level up. You can even change the sound made by each car's horn.

## Dirt around the world

*DiRT 2*'s career mode is a globe-spanning ride through a number of varied locations. From lush Croatian mountains to the barren deserts of Morocco, the game's scenery changes as often as you want it to throughout your career. Each location requires its own unique approach, too. If you're racing through the treacherous jungles of Malaysia, for example, you may want to watch out for pools of water that might slow you down - or worse, destabilise you enough to send you careening into a nearby tree...



The game's engine is pretty adept at throwing all manner of dirty particle effects around. Gravel, dust, bits of shattered garden gnome - nothing is safe from the wrath of this engine.



periodically eliminates racers sitting at the back of the pack. While *DiRT 2* has its roots in rally events, these extra game modes mean that anyone looking for a pure rally simulator may want to look elsewhere. That's not to say that there isn't a rally mode in the game (there is), but it's not the focus here.

There's a friends system in *DiRT 2*. The game features a number of virtual representations of some real-life rally superstars like Travis Pastrana, Ken Block and Dave Mirra. These guys (together with a few other superstars) occasionally compete against you in events, and if you impress them enough with your wins and slick overtaking manoeuvres, they'll become your buddies. Having friends in *DiRT 2* means that you have someone to race with in team-based events. They'll even chat with you while you're racing, which (not surprisingly) can get slightly repetitive and annoying, but it's a nice touch nonetheless.

Being a racing game, we'd be remiss if we didn't discuss *DiRT 2*'s technical side.

Simply put, the game is technologically amazing. The game's visuals are stunning, with plenty of flashy particle effects, gorgeous environments and great lighting. Vehicles behave as they should and the full damage model is much appreciated - seeing expensive vehicles gradually being ripped to shreds never stops being entertaining. Everything in the game sounds, looks and breaks the way it should.

It's quite satisfying to see the windshield wipers of your in-game vehicle wiping away the results of your reckless aquaplaning, and admiring the fireworks that go off when hitting a big jump on the road to victory never gets old. It's the small details that make playing *DiRT 2* such a worthwhile affair. The game is awesome and, while it would have been nice to see split-screen multiplayer support (as it stands, multiplayer is only possible online or via system link), we couldn't have asked for a more enjoyable sequel to the original Colin McRae: *DiRT*. **NAG**

Dane Remendes



### The Score

|   |     |      |               |            |
|---|-----|------|---------------|------------|
|   |     |      |               | <b>16+</b> |
| 1 | 2-8 | None | www.pegi.info |            |

**Plus**  
 + Impressive interface  
 + Fantastic attention to detail  
 + Variety of game modes

**Minus**  
 - No split-screen multiplayer

#### Bottom Line

*DiRT 2*'s phenomenal presentation introduces gamers to a frantic and amazingly detailed romp through some of the world's top racing spots. Play it!

AVAILABLE AT  
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 For the Fans



There's more than a little Star Wars in *G.I. Joe*



## G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra

If these are the heroes, Cobra's going to win!

Genre → Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**THE IDEA BEHIND THE** *G.I. Joe* videogame, released in support of the recent movie, is a nice one. The intentions that the developers had were good; but, as they say, the road to hell is paved with those. While the idea behind the game is great, it falls short in the execution; and, considering that this was developed by a team who have some experience under their belts, it goes a long way to prove that rushing stuff is never a good idea.

In this game, the player will take on the role of one of the eponymous Joes. While the selection of available characters is very small to start with, more can be unlocked with virtually every mission, giving the player something of a variety in how they approach the game – whether as a close-combat specialist, a heavy trooper or a more standard grunt. Each Joe has unique abilities in terms of weapons, which make for a nice variety and a degree of replay value.

Each mission will need the player to select two Joes. In the single-player mode, the player can switch between either of them with the press of a button, leaving the other character to be taken care of by a fairly effective AI (at least, a much better AI than the enemies have). A nice option is that the other character is available to another player, who can drop in and out of the game at any time. *G.I. Joe* is always multiplayer ready – boo-rah!

While the game is simple enough in approach and offers the player lots to shoot at and collect, it has numerous problems that relegate it to the ranks of 'yet another movie-based game'. It is fun, but the fun is that mindless sort.



Graphically, the game leaves quite a lot to be desired. Although the images are clear and don't cause any confusion, they are rather dated. Additionally, the camera acts like a retarded paparazzo, often not showing the action and preferring to lock on to the characters. Close-ups are nice, but not when you're getting your butt blown off by the opposition.

The controls are competent enough, as long as the Joes are on foot – handling vehicles is like trying to balance an egg on a jelly spoon, while doing a hundred-yard dash in a hurricane. Actually, it's probably a bit more difficult than that. Moreover, the game has a handy auto-aiming system that will invariably lock on to exactly the wrong target at crucial times – particularly if that target is a bonus score item, which can be shot as well as collected normally.

And then, there's the fact that two players can never get more than a certain distance away from each other... it kills a lot of the game's potential tactical elements, changing it from a light version

of *Army of Two* into an invisible wall marathon.

This game is not awful, but only a true saint would not find something annoying with it. It's a fun way to kill a few hours if there is nothing better to play, but the good ideas behind its design got steamrolled by rushed production.

Walt Pretorius

### The Score



#### Plus

- + Mindless fun
- + Wide character variety

#### Minus

- Dated graphics
- Rotten sound
- Vehicles – they suck!

#### Bottom Line

A little more time spent on the production might – just maybe – have saved it from the hell of mediocrity. Oh, well...

AVAILABLE AT  
Look & Listen  
For the Fans

50

# WORK OR PLAY - THIS IS FOR YOU.

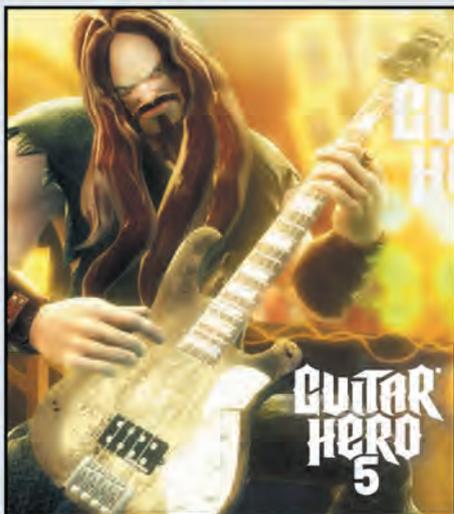
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## Mini Ninjas

Small, cute and deadly...

Genre → Action

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

**NINJAS ARE COOL. ALMOST** everyone thinks so. But what these black-clad, shadow-inhabiting killing machines are rarely described as is cute. There's something about the idea of a person who could brutally disembowel you with one thumb while nimbly devouring sushi with the other hand (using chopsticks, naturally) that precludes the idea of "cute." However, industry veterans Io Interactive have been able to take these legendary Oriental killing machines and make them just that – *Mini Ninjas* has more cute in it than a sack full of puppies.

But it's this appeal that is also, to a degree, the game's downfall. It is perhaps overly cute – although, the whole idea of these adorable little ninjas taking out equally adorable little enemies has a twisted charm to it, no doubt.

The story behind the game is simple enough. When a once-banished evil Samurai warlord returns to the land, he upsets the natural balance – mainly by turning harmless forest creatures into his mindless army of nasty (but, oh, so cute) samurai warriors. The leader of a ninja clan sends out four warriors to try to stop the warlord, but each of them disappears. The final hope rests with the youngest Ninja, Hiro, and his large friend, Futo. But Hiro has a secret knowledge that none of the other ninjas possesses – he can weave natural Kuji Magic.

And that, in a nutshell, is the game's premise. It's an uncomplicated story for an uncomplicated game. On the surface, there doesn't appear to be very much to do in *Little Ninjas* (and the action does, admittedly, get a little repetitive). But



there are lots of collectible items, new spells and potion recipes, to name a few aspects, and the game's placid surface belies more depth than one would expect from a title like this.

In addition to collecting things and making potions, the player will also get to rescue the four missing ninjas. The player will ultimately have six characters to make use of, but the fact is that (with very few exceptions) the player only ever needs to make use of Hiro. The characters share the same stats, but offer different strengths and weaknesses. Still, Hiro is enough (except when Futo is needed to take on some of the larger enemies).

The presentation of the game is very well handled. A pleasing (and yes, cute) graphic style is applied uniformly to the large and vibrant world. Additionally, the voice acting is done by people who have actual Japanese accents, as opposed to contrived ones, and makes for a nice change. The controls are simple enough for youngsters to get to grips with, as is the story line – the game is, for the most part, brutally linear, with a few deviations needed to find special objects.

The game is a little short, though, although collecting everything possible

in each of the levels will probably necessitate a few replays. It's a very well put together package – the only real downfall is the length of the game and the appeal (which, thanks to the fact that enemies disappear in a puff of smoke, leaving behind a confused rabbit or fox, will preclude most gamers). It's a game designed for the more casual and younger player. It's still fun, though. Oh, and did I mention that it's cute? **NAG**  
Walt Pretorius

### The Score

|   |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|
| 1 | NA | NA | 7+ |
|---|----|----|----|

www.pegi.info

#### Plus

- + Lots of action
- + Tons to do
- + Nice presentation

#### Minus

- Action gets old
- A little short

#### Bottom Line

*Mini Ninjas* is a fun game, particularly for those who aren't going to take it too seriously.

AVAILABLE AT  
**Look & Listen**  
For the Fans

78

Developer → RedLynx Publisher → Microsoft Game Studios Distributor → XBLA Web → [www.xbox.com/en-US/games/t/trialshdxboxlivearcade/](http://www.xbox.com/en-US/games/t/trialshdxboxlivearcade/)

## Trials HD

If you miss it, you might die!

Genre → Racing and Platform

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**L**IKE A MOUNTAIN TO climb, because it's there, *Trials HD* is your hazing into the 'Cult of Skill' and the 'Brotherhood of The Almighty High Score'. You will fail - over and over. You might even fling your controller at the screen, regressed to the temperament of a five-year-old. Or, if you're into the 'Joy of a Thousand Deaths and its Zen', you will transcend.

Originally an overlooked PC title [*the demo's on the DVD, Ed*], *Trials HD* is a simple, elegant concept: you (on a motocross bike) versus cunningly designed courses, which demand - once you hit the higher difficulty challenges - accurate control over your full-physics vehicle. One button makes you go. The other makes you stop. The left stick shifts your weight. Like a new-age *Excite Bike* or *Elasto Mania*.

Entertaining 'Skill Games' (like 'ski-jump' or 'ride-fast-because-you're-on-fire') present a diversionary relief from the main game. The best attempts by your friends show up in the game world - like a visual carrot urging you on. Downloadable



replays are great for inspiration on how to get further... or to break your spirit. The built-in level editor with centralised hosting lets you abuse your friends.

This isn't a game. It's a martial art. Watch a master play, and you'll see a graceful confluence of focus and control. Man and gamepad become one. Watch the inexperienced grasshopper, and it's a clumsy, painful display of spastic flailing. If you manage to overcome your own deficiencies and make it through the fire, feel free to brag to your friends. You deserve it.

Miktar Dracon

### The Score

|   |      |      |               |  |
|---|------|------|---------------|--|
|   |      |      |               |  |
| 1 | None | None | www.pegi.info |  |

AVAILABLE AT  
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For the Fans

### Bottom Line

You get to ride a motorcycle inside a giant, metal sphere.



TM



## Dissidia: Final Fantasy

So hip, it almost throws its back out

Genre → Fighting

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 **PSP** DS

**AFTER A DECADE OF** leaving it alone, Square returns to the fighting-game genre with an evil look in its eyes, wielding a depressed tank, filled with magical nuclear bombs.

Much like their previous attempts in the genre, *Bushido Blade* and *Tobal No. 1*, this game is a unique combination of ideas and systems, thrown together in ways that would make ordinary developers scream in terror. To their credit, this time it actually works. This role-playing, action-fighting game is a sight to behold. Every primary hero and nemesis from *Final Fantasy* one through ten is available as a playable character. Battles are every bit as dynamic as fights from a cut-scene, complete with environment-smashing, wall-slammings, magic-ball-busting action unlike anything before.

One minute you're upside down under attack by rainbows, the next you're moving along a grid-based board strategising on the best route to take so as to maintain as many Destiny Points as possible. You get mail from Moogles, asking you random questions. Today is double-experience points day, according to the in-game calendar. Your last fight was recorded and saved, so you can edit its camera angles, convert it to a video, and upload it to YouTube. Take a few screenshots of your epic Sephiroth vs. Sephiroth duel. It's time to buy some better equipment, perhaps. Oh look; you've unlocked a new Accomplishment, having met the required criteria. It rewards you with an item to buy in the Museum. If you play the card-based battle mode for a while, you'll have enough DP



to unlock a hidden character: someone new to level up until he's powerful enough to take on the Ultimate Challenge. Don't forget; after every fight, won or lost, the Chocobo takes another step along the Play Plan you've selected. Oh, and everything levels up: the characters, the attacks, the abilities, the levels...

It's crazy, no doubt about it. Crazy and awesome. Treading the fine line between a game and a hobby, *Dissidia* rewards skill and pure participation equally. Looked at another way, the game pulls on all the same strings that the popular massively multiplayer online games do, without requiring you to be online. There is always a new virtual dragon's tail to chase, thanks to the obscene amount of content. Each of the ten heroes has their own campaign - a kind-of weird, condensed retelling of their personal *Final Fantasy* psychosis. After that, more 'tales' unlock that elaborate on the strained metaphor that is the plot.

It helps to remember that the franchise is *Dissidia*, not *Final Fantasy*. In all likelihood, we'll see a '*Dissidia: Dragon Quest*', or hopefully even a '*Dissidia: Chrono Trigger*'. Finally, almost as a

concession to *Final Fantasy* fans not accustomed to action games, there is a Command Mode that lets you interface with the battle via a recognisable series of menus, turning the fight into something akin to the Active Time combat system commonly found in the series. Like most fighting games, though, *Dissidia* is best enjoyed when unleashing the beat down on friends. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

### The Score

1  
 2  
 None  
[www.pegi.info](http://www.pegi.info)

12+

**Plus**  
 + It's Final Fantasy  
 + Fantastic fighting  
 + Furiously addictive

**Minus**  
 - It's Final Fantasy  
 - Steep learning curve  
 - Confusing

AVAILABLE AT  
[www.lookandlisten.com](http://www.lookandlisten.com)

#### Bottom Line

There's never been a fighting game like this before.



# Shatter

When busting bricks makes you feel good

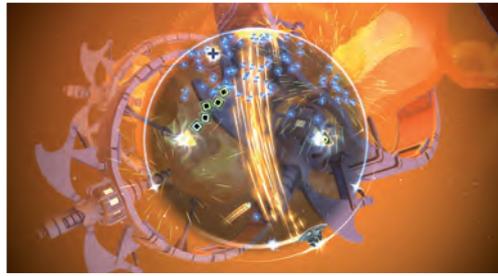
Genre→ Puzzle, Action, Arcade

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

**W**HEN IT COMES TO 'brick-busting', contenders to the *Arkanoid* throne have always attempted sophistication through complexity and glitz. Physics was always going to be a natural evolution for the genre. Unlike its forerunners, the quality in *Shatter* is not from quantity, but clarity. There is physics - bricks swing, bounce and slide about - but it's not the centrepiece. Its developers remembered correctly, that in games like these, the star is the paddle.

Left and right triggers push and pull with understandable conviction, letting you curve the ball slightly for ninja-class aimed shots. When ball meets brick, the brick shatters into collectable Shards. Suck the shards in with the Pull button, and you charge up a super shot that, when activated, blasts out a barrage of bullets in slow motion - great for clearing levels.

The charge meter also powers your shield, used to protect yourself from incoming bricks. If a brick hits the paddle, it's out of commission for a few vital seconds. Trusty 'multi-ball' is



available at any time - if you want to risk your ball stock on it. Press X and one of your lives enters the playfield in simple risk versus reward.

Long after you're done playing, the modernised, chiptune retro-styled music will remain in your head - by far the most memorable aspect of the game. That, and how cheap it is.

After 23 years, there is finally something better than *Arkanoid*. It tells the engrossing story of an errant kinetic-harvesting machine gone rogue. The plot is presented in pantomime. The paddle, your avatar in its two-dimensional world of balls and bricks, is a Jedi. **NAG**  
**Miktar Dracon**



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## Bottom Line

Brick-busting is back, in a form you can actually enjoy for more than five minutes.



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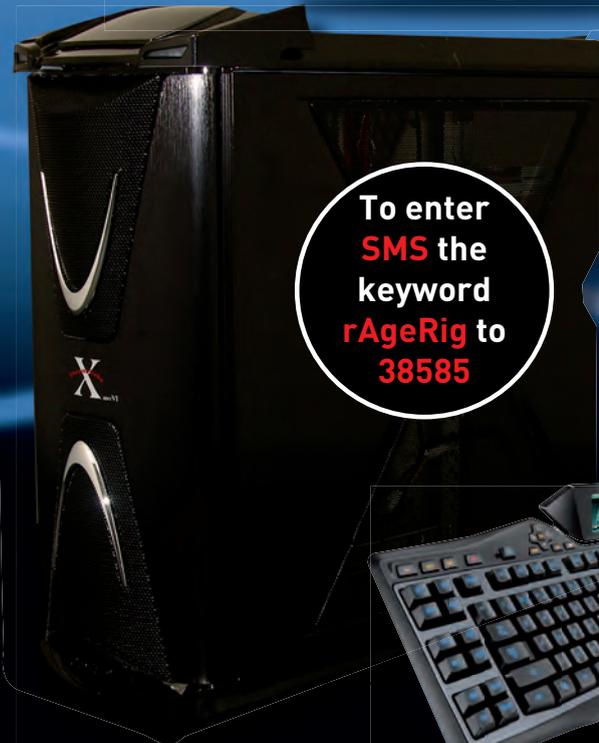
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# WIN

## MACHINE SPECS:

Chassis: Thermaltake Xpressar  
RCS100 (TT-VG40031N2Z)  
MOBO: MSI X58 Platinum  
CPU: Intel Core i7 Extreme 975  
Memory: Corsair DOMINATOR 6GB  
Triple-Channel Kit  
HDDs: 4 x 1TB Samsung Spinpoint F1  
PSU: Thermaltake Toughpower 1000W  
GPU: MSI N295GTX (M2D1792)  
Optical Drive: LG Blu-ray Drive  
Keyboard: Logitech G19 Gaming  
Keyboard  
Headset: Logitech G35 Surround  
Sound Headset  
Mouse: Logitech G9x Laser Mouse  
Speakers: Logitech G51 Gaming  
Speakers  
Displays: 2 x LG w2216V 22-inch  
OS: Microsoft Windows 7 Ultimate



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Developer → Xatrix Entertainment Publisher → Interplay Price → \$5.99 on gog.com

# Redneck Rampage

**WHILE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS LIKE** *Quake* and *Half-Life* dominated the late '90s, there were still a couple of remnants from the old 2.5D FPSes that were arguably just as entertaining. Obviously, *Duke Nukem 3D* is one of those worthy titles, as is the occult-themed *Heretic II*, but there's also a little game known as *Redneck Rampage* that might have had the misfortune to slip under your radar; at least now you can redeem yourself.

In *Redneck Rampage*, you play as Leonard – a moonshine-swilling, shotgun-toting hillbilly in search of his beloved swine, Bessie. The problem, however, is that Bessie's disappearance coincides with an invasion of Earth by a race of hostile, yet ridiculous, aliens. If you haven't picked this up yet, *Redneck Rampage* is a rather silly game. The storyline only makes as much sense as necessary to load the next level, but the gameplay is as good as (if not better than) *Duke3D's*. It also happens to be an incredibly challenging game.

Between the three games that you get with the collection, there's plenty of rootin', tootin' action that's slicker than a hog's back during Betsy Jackson's pork pie season. If that makes no sense to you (and frankly, it makes little sense to us), then just take our advice and head over to gog.com to get this game. Fans of *Blood*, *Duke3D* and *Doom* will love it.

## BARREL OF LAUGHS

The version available on gog.com includes not just the first *Redneck Rampage*, but also its expansion *Suckin' Grits on Route*

66 and sequel *Redneck Rampage Rides Again*. It also bundles the awesomely named Cuss Pack, which is a tiny add-on for the game that dirties up the voice-overs with a rainbow of cursing and one-liners. Definitely not for the lil' 'uns.

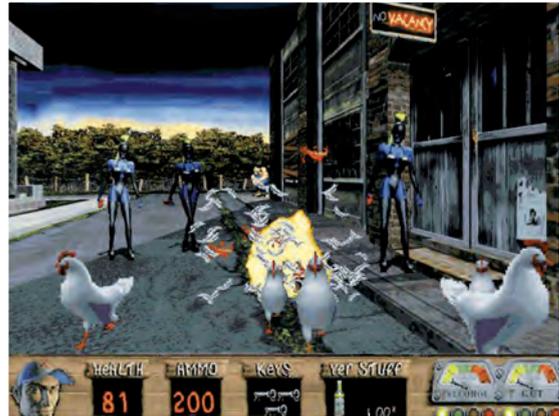
## MUSICAL GENIUS

If words like "rockabilly," "surfably" and "cowpunk" mean anything to you, the soundtrack for *Redneck Rampage* is sure to prove itself an auditory delight. Bands on board include Mojo Nixon, The Beat Farmers, and The Reverend Horton Heat, which *Guitar Hero* fans should recognise as the creators of knuckle-destroying *Psychobilly Freakout*. Useless fact of the minute: the original CD release of the game could be popped into a regular CD player and played – just like real music.

## VETERAN HERITAGE

In case you've never heard of Xatrix Entertainment, you may be more familiar with the name Gray Matter Interactive. No? Does Treyarch Studios ring a bell then? As Xatrix, the company was responsible for some pretty memorable titles, including *Cyberia* and *Kingpin: Life of Crime*. After rebranding themselves as Gray Matter, they went on to co-develop *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, *Call of Duty: United Offensive*, and later *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One*. It was during the development of *Big Red One* that they were eventually incorporated into Treyarch, where a number of developers currently work hard to bring us the latest map pack and more Nazi Zombies. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



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## Free Realms #1

**Format:** Comic Series | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** J.S. Lewis  
**Artist:** Jon Buran | **Price:** R35.95

**J.S. LEWIS BRINGS** this entertaining fantasy tale about a quest to find a missing girl - the queen's younger cousin - in an enchanted forest to life with his effortless and straightforward story-telling style. Buran's artistic technique really conveys a gaming feel to the comic with his detailed and expressive character depictions, which are even more fitting to the story, as it is based on a virtual world and a trading-card game. The story itself is a fun and light-hearted tale of mythical creatures, strange sorceries, and hideous monsters; all woven together into the timeless plot of a couple of unlikely heroes who must grow and endure through their struggles, so that they might finally prevail over the threat of a sinister evil spreading across the land.



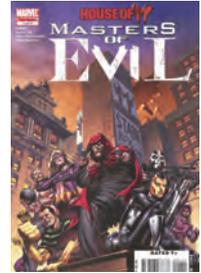
Clive Burmeister



## House of M: Masters of Evil #1

**Format:** Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Marvel  
**Writer:** Christos N. Gage | **Artist:** Manuel Garcia | **Price:** R36.95

**IN THE HOUSE OF M** world, Wanda Maximoff, Magneto's daughter (also known as the Scarlet Witch), has used her amazing reality-altering powers to replace the entire world with a new society of her own design - a reality where mutants rule and humans are the oppressed minority. It is in this world that a band of 'Sapien' villains decide that enough is enough: they will organise themselves into a structured fighting force, using quick-thinking strategies and their own unique (although not mutant) powers to carve out their piece of the pie. Their first test as a team is a great success: they emerge unscathed, and more importantly, rich.



They also inadvertently strike a nerve with the other 'Sapiens' with their 'victory' over mutant rule, but it is unlikely that the mutants in charge will take this revolt lying down. *Masters of Evil* is refreshing, something new, and a great look at how a villain's life might turn out in the Marvel Universe when the tables have turned on how things had been before.

Clive Burmeister

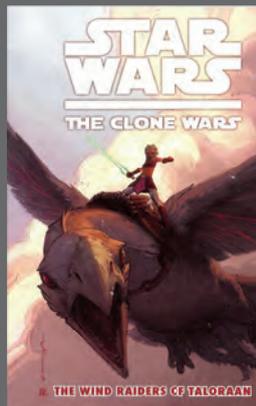


## Star Wars: The Clone Wars: The Wind Raiders of Taloraan

**Format:** Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Dark Horse Comics  
**Artists:** The Fillbach Brothers | **Writer:** John Ostrander | **Price:** R100

**THE WIND RAIDERS OF Taloraan** is volume 3 of a recent series of *Clone Wars* graphic novels, and fits somewhere between the first series (which spanned 2003-2006) and *Clone Wars Adventures*, which was targeted at the younger crowd. The artwork, by the Fillbach Brothers, is similar to that found in *Adventures*, but perhaps toned down a bit to accommodate the older audience a little better. As a result, it just slides in as acceptable 'grown-up' art, but might get on your nerves if you're used to the finer side of comic books.

With that out of the way, this little book actually proves to be quite entertaining. It's light-hearted but filled with action, and adds to the already rich *Clone Wars* universe. The story is self-contained, and follows Obi-Wan, Anakin and his Padawan, Ahsoka, as they embark on a diplomatic mission to the gas planet Defrandi. As is the norm for Jedi attempting diplomatic discussions, things go awry before too long and the need for epic Jedi action kicks in. It's a quick read, and as a result is only really suitable for a quick *Star Wars*-craving fix. When combined with the other titles in the series, however, it might provide a bit more substance.



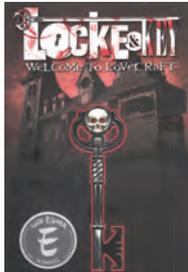
Geoff Burrows



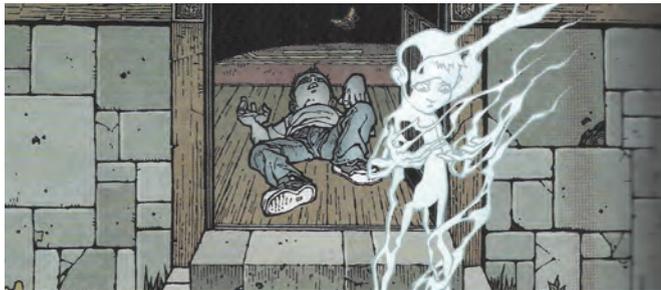
## Locke & Key: Welcome to Lovecraft Vol. 1

**Format:** Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** IDW | **Writer:** Joe Hill  
**Artist:** Gabriel Rodriguez | **Price:** R199.95

**AFTER THE BRUTAL MURDER** of her husband and the terrifying struggle they subsequently faced, Nina Locke takes her two sons, Bode and Tyler, and her daughter, Kinsey, to the small town of Lovecraft, Massachusetts. There they try to 'make' a new life for themselves, staying at the strange mansion, Keyhouse, where magical doorways lead to fantastical things starting to happen; and a frightening creature locked away begins to stir once more. But even as the traumatised family tries to overcome their recent ordeal and come to grips with the new lives they find themselves in, some terrors from their past will not let them get away so easily. *Welcome to Lovecraft* is an extraordinary book of in-depth characters, exciting plot twists, and an intense story, all brought together by some very talented writing and meticulous artwork. This graphic novel is definitely worthy of the praise it received from fellow comic-book creators and critics alike.



Clive Burmeister



## Mayhem! #1

**Format:** Comic Series | **Publisher:** Image | **Writer:** Various  
**Artist:** Tone Rodriguez | **Price:** R27.50

**A MASKED VIGILANTE IS ON** the rampage in Los Angeles, killing anyone who stands in his way to get to the mysterious crime lord, "Big X." Aided by his beautiful partner, Dante takes out the crime syndicate piece by bloody piece, with a storm of bullets, a succession of explosions, and an internal monologue running through his head about how tough and sleek he is every step of their way. But just who is this mysterious "Big X"? Do they even know what they're up against? *Mayhem!* is kind of a generic, masked-vigilante comic, with tons of action, loads of violence, heaps of murder, killings a plenty, and, well, a whole mass of mayhem! But even though it isn't really bringing anything new to the table with its first issue, *Mayhem!* is an enjoyable read, with a smooth script and a vibrant, expeditious artistic style, which keeps the adrenaline pumping, page after page.



Clive Burmeister



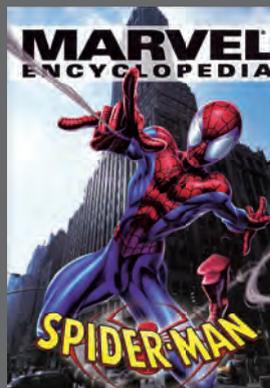
## Marvel Encyclopedia Volume 4: Spider-Man

**Format:** Hard cover | **Publisher:** Marvel  
**Writer:** Kit Kiefer | **Artists:** Various  
**Price:** R220

**AS COMIC-BOOK CULTURE GAINS** new heights in the mainstream market, it's important for those just catching on now to have a method to fill in the blanks. If you don't have a comic-book geek around to provide 'translations' during the latest comic-book announcement, you need one of these handy hard covers.

Like the rest of the *Marvel Encyclopedia* range, this collection of Spider-Man facts isn't just for the uninitiated, you'll be pleased to know. It's packed with facts from throughout Spidey's career, as well as a few pages dedicated to the TV series, action figures and films, with a focus on the hundreds of characters found in this particular universe. Each character is given their own power rating, which is a superficial measurement of their 'super-prowess' in a number of fields, as well as a mention of their first appearance, real name and weapons of choice. There are also a few locations featured, including the Daily Bugle and Empire State University.

It's a great book in terms of reference for hardcore fans, or those just wanting a quick glance through the Spidey universe, which could make this a pretty entertaining coffee-table book as well.



Geoff Burrows

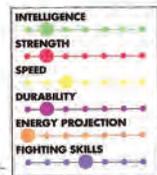
the Black Cat, Felicia's first mission was not to steal a valuable object, but to free her dying father in a daring prison break. She was aided by hired muscle Bruno Grainger and demolitions expert Dr. Boris Korpse. It was during this escape that she first encountered *Spider-Man*, easily evading the web-slinger with a series of carefully planned traps — as well as the use of her highly suggestive feminine wiles.

Following her father's death, Felicia used her skills to establish herself as New York's premier car burglar. While Spider-Man attempted to capture the Black Cat a number of times, his efforts were continually thwarted by Felicia's elaborate games of cat and mouse. Although they operated on opposite sides of the law, Felicia had grown increasingly attracted to the heroic Spider-Man; she soon came to desire his heart above all other creatures. To ensnare Spider-Man in her romantic web, Felicia allowed herself to be caught by the crime-fighter and revealed her attraction to him. Spider-Man initially resisted the Black Cat's affections, but he could not hide his own feelings for the seductive beauty for long. After Felicia swore off her criminal activities, the Black Cat and Spider-Man became crime-fighting partners — as well as lovers.

While Spider-Man enjoyed his costumed relationship with Felicia, he also wanted to share his personal life with her. After bringing the Black Cat to his apartment, the web-slinger removed his mask — revealing his secret identity as Peter Parker. Felicia was shocked to learn the hero she

Continued...

**Eye Color:** Green  
**Hair Color:** Platinum Blonde



### POWERS/WEAPONS

- Balance-enhancing earrings
- Infrared contact lenses
- Projectile grappling hook
- Extendible electro-claws
- Master thief



Art by Terry Dodson

## Storm White Costume Statue

**RRP:** R2,095

**Supplier:** www.awx.co.za

**Series:** X-Men

This twelve-inch statue is a Bowie Designs sculpture. It depicts Ororo Iqadi T'Challa (quick, say that three times - as fast as possible!), otherwise known as Storm from the X-Men. She's incredibly detailed thanks to the sculpting of Mark Newman, Gabe Perna and Randy Bowie. She also comes with a kickass display stand. Just don't drop it - there are only 1,500 of these statues in circulation.

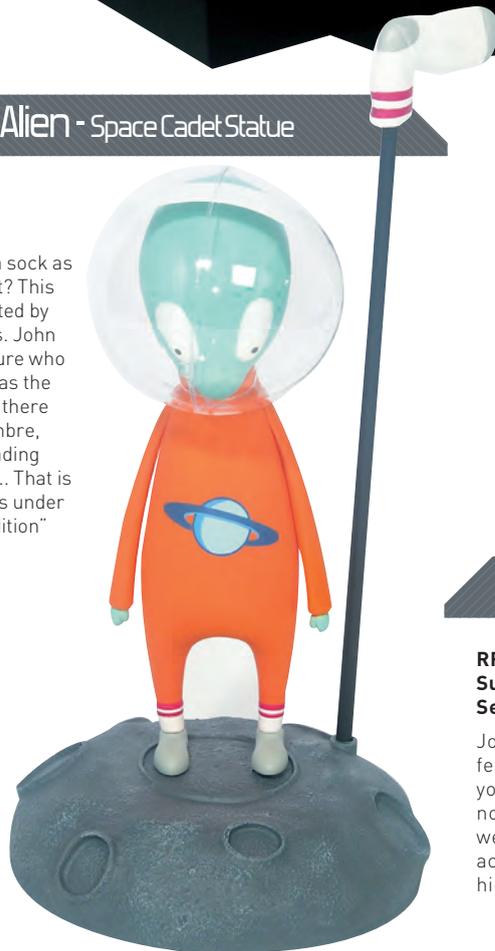


## Voyage of the Alien - Space Cadet Statue

**RRP:** R710

**Supplier:** www.awx.

It's a space alien! Using a sock as a flag! Are you excited yet? This is the second figure created by Devil's Head Productions. John McCormack (we're not sure who that is either) is credited as the creator of this figure and there are only 400 of these sombre, sock-wielding aliens invading planet Earth at this time... That is to say that this figure falls under the "extremely limited edition" category.



## Commander Shepard Polyresin Statue

**RRP:** R965

**Supplier:** www.awx.co.za

**Series:** Mass Effect

John Shepard stands ready to fend off the Geth invasion of your display stand. All we need now is a statue of Saren and we'd be set to have a pretty epic, action-figure face-off. It's a highly detailed statue and, like

the other figures on this page, is available in limited quantities. Two thousand five hundred of these are available for you to spend your hard-earned cash on. We suggest you buy a thousand of them, just to be sure that you don't miss out. And you can sell 999 of them on the black market for an obscenely large profit.

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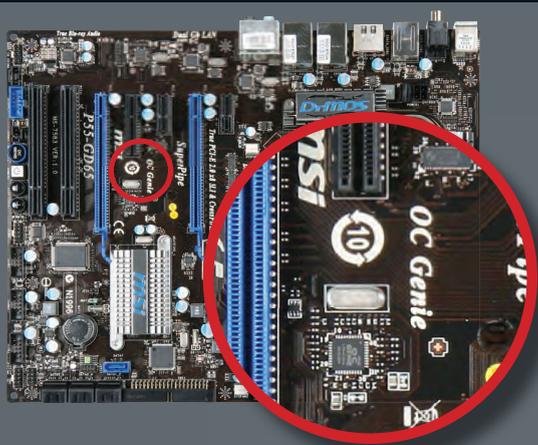


## Corsair brings DOMINATOR GT back

**T**HE POPULAR DOMINATOR GT line of memory modules, which was recently removed from the market due to failure levels, is back.

"The issue with the Hyper RAMs was discovered with the help of the enthusiast community, and we worked closely with them to solve it," stated John Beekley, VP of Applications Engineering at Corsair. "Our lab was able to correlate the failures to specific batches of early material; we worked very closely with Elpida to determine the root cause of the issue and to define the associated corrective actions to take. We are confident that every GT module using the Elpida Hyper IC Corsair ships from today will meet our strict quality and reliability standard."

The DOMINATOR GT memory kits are being re-introduced with updated part numbers, and include the Airflow cooling fan and a limited lifetime warranty.



## MSI Easy OC Technology

MSI has identified a need by consumers to make the overclocking process a bit easier. OC Genie, their new-generation Easy OC Technology, combines a push button and dedicated overclocking processor, allowing you to boost your CPU and memory performance at the push of a button. OC Genie Processor and OC Genie Button don't require any hardware modifications or BIOS tweaking - it simply detects the best overclocking settings automatically. MSI will be including this technology in the P55 product line, with future plans to implement it on other AMD platform motherboards.

## Cooler Master's gaming mouse

Cooler Master has announced the official release of the Sentinel Advance gaming mouse as part of its CM Storm line of products. Cooler Master says the Sentinel was two years in the making and comes with lots of features that classify it as a "professional grade gaming mouse." Features include a twin-laser optical sensor (5,600dpi), 4.5-gram increment weight system and the StormGuard security solution, which protects it from being stolen at LAN parties.

## Snippets

SteelSeries will be releasing two gaming mouse surfaces with official **StarCraft II** artwork. One will be the Space Marine and the other will be a battle between the characters Kerrigan and Zeratul.

BFG has announced a pre-built, liquid-cooled NVIDIA GPU. The GeForce GTX 285 H20+ and GeForce GTX 295 H20C graphics cards with Thermo-Intelligence Advanced Cooling Solutions are fully assembled, **self-contained liquid-cooling solutions** right out of the box.

SAPPHIRE is equipping two of its new product lines with exclusive near-silent cooling solutions developed specially by Swiss cooling solution provider ARCTIC COOLING. The new **Accelero L7 cooler** is already being employed in the SAPPHIRE HD 4770 and the latest version HD 4670.

## NAG Awards

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

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



## Hardware Scoring System

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

- 5 The stuff of Legends.** Buy it while you can, we already have.
- 4 A good deal;** worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 What you'd expect,** no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.
- 2 This has some issues.** You should shop around for something else.
- 1 The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.



## Peregrine PC controller glove in action

The company behind the Peregrine PC controller glove has launched a YouTube channel where you can see how the glove actually works. The glove allows you to perform over 30 unique actions by touching your fingers. Check out the videos at [www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=5E6B823F962E27C3](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=5E6B823F962E27C3).

## SteelSeries Limited Edition Aion gear

Co-designed with NCsoft, the publisher and developer of Aion, SteelSeries will be releasing the SteelSeries Zboard Limited Edition Aion Keyset and SteelSeries QcK Limited Edition Aion Asmodian Mousepad. This set boasts original artwork from the game.



## Sony Ericsson launches PS3-compatible cell phone

Earlier this year, Sony Ericsson announced the Aino, a mobile phone that makes use of the PlayStation 3's Remote Play feature. Remote Play was initially developed for the PSP, and allows you to control and access media content on your PlayStation 3 from your Aino cellphone. This can be done via a local network between your PS3 and Aino in your home, or via the Internet from anywhere in the world. Aino also introduces Media Home, an application that will pull media content from Media Go on your PC over Wi-Fi to your phone.



# #3.6

According to market research company, iSuppli, only 3.6% of all computers shipped this year were equipped with Blu-ray drives. iSuppli predicts that by 2013, BD drives will still only be installed in 16.3% of all PCs, at best.

## Storage goes up to 2TB

Western Digital has announced a pair of new 3.5-inch 2TB 7,200rpm HDDs: the WD Caviar Black and the WD RE4. Features include 64MB cache, dual processors, dual-actuator technology, IntelliSeek to reduce vibration, Notouch ramp-loading technology, and a SATA 3Gb/sec interface.

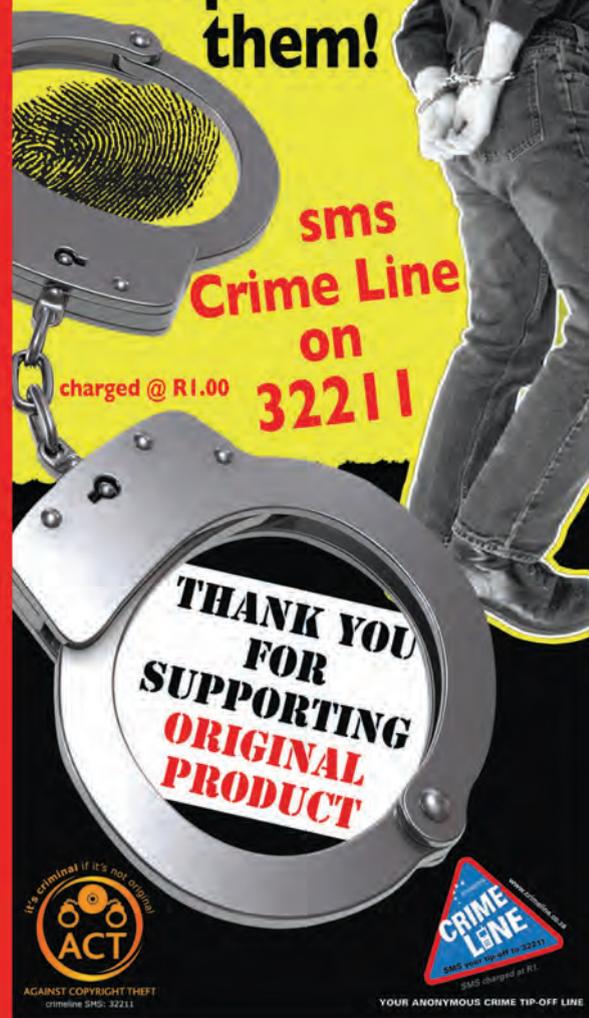
## Football controller coming for Wii

Nintendo recently applied for a patent for a football controller. The controller looks similar to an actual football that can be strapped to your hand. Movement is detected when you jog, dodge left or right, or throw the ball.



# PIRATING OF GAMES IS A CRIME!

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## PC SHOPS

**From:** Dewald Jacobs

"I was wondering if you know of some online PC shops. The few that I know of are rip-offs. Thanks for the info."

**Neo:** *These are our two favourites: [www.prophecy.co.za](http://www.prophecy.co.za) and [www.sybaritic.co.za](http://www.sybaritic.co.za). You could also try [www.wantitall.co.za](http://www.wantitall.co.za).*

## CORE 2 DUO E8400 OR CORE 2 QUAD E8200 FOR GAMING?

**From:** Gary Schiel

"Hi guys! I'm looking to buy one of these two CPUs (in subject header). I have asked different people which one of these would be the better CPU for gaming and they all gave different reasons! Is the Quad better than the Duo for future games? All of this confused me more, so I thought I would ask the professionals for help! PLEASE HELP!? PS: keep up the great work!"

**Neo:** *The Core 2 Quad E8200 would be better in the future and about the same as the E8400 in current games. Rather buy the quad-core processor.*

## AM2-IN-1 EXPRESS

**From:** Donovan Fourie

"I want to buy a new, cheap computer that can run good games. The best I can find for under R3,000 is an AM2-in-1 Express. The specifications are: AMD Athlon X2 7850 + 2.8GHz BE, 2GB DDR2 800MHz RAM and 512MB GeForce 8100 shared graphics card. Can you please rate it on the old 'will it run PC game specs'?"

**Neo:** *That PC won't run any recent games at an acceptable level. No integrated graphics processor is decent enough to game with currently - unless one plays games at the lowest possible resolution with the lowest graphics setting.*

## RRP

**From:** Ilyaz Mohamed

"You guys are doing a fantastic job with the magazine, but without the RRP, I don't know which hardware I can afford. Could you please include that price range that you were talking about in one of the issues? It would be much appreciated. Thanks."

**Neo:** We have added pricing back to all the reviews in this issue. Please do bear in mind though that this pricing is merely a guideline, and may actually vary from time of writing this to the time you are reading it. Exchange rates are out of our control, as are price variances between online and in-store.



## OPTICAL DRIVE

**From:** Michael Toweel

"I've recently bought an HP Pavilion DV6-1125ei notebook and it all runs perfectly, except that the optical drive is really slow. When I try to load demos from the NAG DVD (or any game for that matter) onto the machine, it takes forever just to load the install wizard. The software can't be out of date, so I'm not sure. Any ideas?"

**Neo:** *It could be a failing drive or some other background service that's slowing down access. Some optical drives are very slow when reading dual-layer discs, but it shouldn't be a minute. Try to shut down unnecessary programs that may be taking up resources.*

## INTEL OR AMD

**From:** Tjaart Bester

"I am a gamer. Unfortunately, I'm also as student, meaning I don't have oodles of money to spend. I've recently read the review of the new AMD Phenom II 955 and decided that it could be a very good replacement for my old Core 2 Duo 1.8GHz. I started reading reviews about the Phenom and realised I would have to buy a new motherboard and new RAM (I want to go DDR3!). But in the back of my head, I know there's the i7 920 in about the same range. Now, I know the AMD option will be cheaper, but is it smarter considering performance and software compatibility?"

**Neo:** *There's no issue of software compatibility: x86 code is the same and runs in the same way on both AMD and Intel platforms. The AMD Phenom II X4 955 delivers about the same performance in gaming as the Core i7 920 - for the most part. Your graphics card will make the biggest difference.*

## HELP WITH LCD NEEDED, PLEASE

**From:** PJ

"I need your help with the purchase of an LCD. Ideally, I want to use this as my computer monitor, but as I am currently running a TV tuner card in my PC, I need the screen size to be at least 32 inches.

Obviously, from a gaming PC point of view, the response time should be 5ms or better and possibly have HD support. Have you ever come across any brand that meets the above-mentioned specs? If yes, would you be able to supply details with regard to make and model, price and seller? Your help in this regard will be appreciated."

**Neo:** *Most home electronics stores have 32-inch LCD TVs at about the R8,000 mark or less. They are usually only 720p capable, which is a fairly low resolution if you want to use your PC with such an LCD. So, ask yourself this question: will you be able to live with such a low-resolution monitor for your computer usage? You could look online: try [www.jump.co.za](http://www.jump.co.za).*

## SAPPHIRE HD4870 512MB VS. ZOTAC GTS250 1GB

**From:** Warren Fletcher

"For the last two weeks I have been trying to figure out which graphics card to buy and I have selected two specific models: the Sapphire HD4870 (512MB) and a Zotac GTS250 (1GB). I don't know which is better, except that NVIDIA's cards have PhysX. I also don't know how drastic the difference between 512MB and 1GB is in terms of performance. I have also heard rumours that there are issues with the GTS250. Will I need a stronger power supply than 400W and will I need a specific range of motherboards?"

**Neo:** *The 4870 is definitely faster, regardless of the amount of memory. You don't need a special motherboard to use either card, and your 400W PSU should be fine - provided it's a brand-name PSU. If it's a generic unit, it will likely fail to power the graphics card.*

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

SA COMPUTER MAGAZINE

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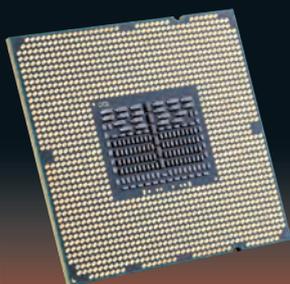
## Dream Machine

**T**HIS MONTH, WE ADD surround sound headphones to our Dream Machine setup. After all, any self-respecting gamer would likely own a pair of headphones for those late-night zombie-bashing sessions when grandma is asleep and you can't be cranking up your desktop speakers too loud. The Logitech G35 Surround Sound Headset comes highly recommended by Geoff. Although he did go on a bit about the cushiony headband thing, we aren't too sure if he was referring to the G35 or his Hello Kitty earmuffs.



### Headphones

Logitech G35 Surround Sound  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



### Processor

Intel Core i7 Extreme 975  
[www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



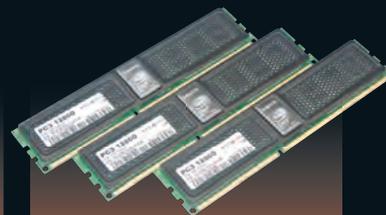
### Motherboard

GIGABYTE GA-EX58-EXTREME  
[www.gigabyte.co.za](http://www.gigabyte.co.za)



### Graphics Card

ASUS GeForce ENGTX295  
<http://za.asus.com>



### Memory

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3  
[www.ocztechnology.com](http://www.ocztechnology.com)



### Case

Cooler Master Cosmos S  
[www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)



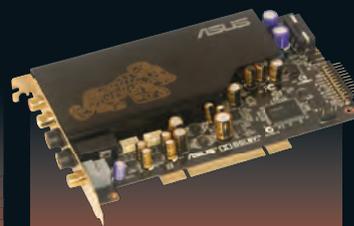
### Storage

Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD  
[www.patriotmemory.com](http://www.patriotmemory.com)



### Power Supply

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU  
[www.ikonik.com](http://www.ikonik.com)



### Sound

ASUS Xonar Essence ST  
<http://za.asus.com>



### Monitor

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD  
[www.samsung.co.za](http://www.samsung.co.za)



### Keyboard

Logitech G19  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



### Mouse

Logitech G9x Laser  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



### Cooling

Thermaltake BigWater 780  
[www.thermaltake.com](http://www.thermaltake.com)



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| • Front bezel material   | Aluminum  |
| • Drive bays             | 5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (external)<br>3.5" x 5 (internal)             |
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| • Form Factor            | CEB / ATX / Micro ATX   |
| • System fan (front)     | 1 x 12cm silent fan   |
| • System fan (rear)      | 2 x 12cm blue LED illuminated fan                                 |
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BY NEO SIBEKO

## Visual Computing is the Future

**GRAPHICS HAVE COME A** long way, particularly during the past 15 years or so. And with each successive generation of advances, we get better-looking games and graphics cards that accelerate and process video. Today's GPUs have physics calculation capabilities and can be used for general-purpose computing.

All these advances are as a result of many technological breakthroughs in seemingly separate fields of science. However, as Isaac Asimov said, "There is a single light of science, and to brighten it anywhere is to brighten it everywhere." In essence - at least in this context - it's all the other technologies that both challenge and spur our advances in computing.

Visual computing might not exist as a single, tangible form of computing, but I like to believe that it encompasses all forms of computing that may benefit from being visualised. Not only are things easier to grasp and analyse once we can see them, but our creativity is also spurred on by visual stimulus. As much as the building of cubes in reporting software for businesses helped the decision-makers get a better understanding of their businesses, visualising anything else works in much the same way. It takes what may be a very abstract idea and makes it real; and as such, provides even more information than previously thought possible.

Analysing seismic activity, for instance, is made so much simpler when an entire land mass can be rendered accurately and to scale in a 3D environment than when just looking at numbers and flat diagrams.

Vehicle manufacturers who have been relying on CAD for many years now also benefit from advances in visual computing - albeit in a slightly different way than what one might think. Being able to render accurate models of vehicles is important, but with hardware-accelerated physics and the massive amount of computational power that can be harnessed from the parallel nature of modern GPUs, manufacturers can simulate wind tunnels, crash tests and all sorts of other tests (which previously required hundreds if not thousands of man hours and resources).

These benefits can also be applied to the field of medicine for detecting cancers and all related illnesses much earlier than would have been possible before. The implications of visual computing and analysis are endless, and even in late 2009, we are only at the beginning of what is sure to be among the most important inflexion points in graphics technology.

Another technology that is going to be part and parcel of all

advances made in visual computing from here on in is 'touch' technology. And more importantly, multi-touch technology: it allows us to interact with what we see in a completely new way. Current-generation hardware, like the Microsoft surface - as impressive as it may be - is only the beginning of what will eventually become the only way we interact with computers or just about any computing device in future.

All these advances will shape how we interact with almost everything in our lives. Even driving will be significantly altered once GPUs make their way into the cars of the future. No longer will satellite navigation merely give you directions. With the ability to feed data to your graphics processor, the journey can be mapped out in a 3D space. This will allow you to avoid hazards, pre-empt collisions and, in general, improve the driving experience by eliminating all dangers that are a direct cause of not being able to see what is on the road and what lies ahead.

It is not unimaginable that in the near future there may be a GPU in just about every electronic device with a display or that relays information. From fridges to cars, games consoles to super computers, almost every aspect of our lives will be affected by the advances made in graphics rendering and visual computing as a whole.

These advances are not there to mimic our reality, but rather to enhance our senses and better equip us to deal with the world we live in. As much as CGI has helped artistic expression in movies, by allowing creators to 'imagine' what they could not before, visual computing will help find solutions to concepts that were previously too hard to grasp. More than that, however, it should allow us to ask more relevant questions about the world we live in. **NAG**

"It is not unimaginable that in the near future **there may be a GPU in just about every electronic device** with a display or that relays information."

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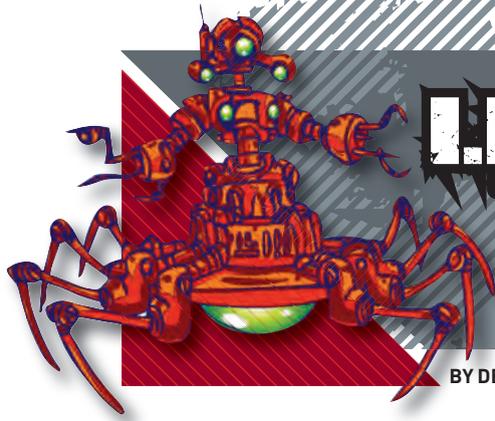
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# LIFE, HARDWARE, AND CHOTS

BY DERRICK CRAMER

## What's in a review?

**WRITING FOR A MAGAZINE** such as *NAG*, I often have people ask me all sorts of questions. Most of them are along the lines of, "OMG, you work for *NAG*! Do you know XYZ? Do you get free stuff? Can you get me a job there?" and can be answered with a simple "Yes. No. No. Go away, you're bugging me while I'm playing *CoD 4*." However, every now and then, a person comes along with a rather logical question, and since most of these are related to hardware, I thought I'd collect a few of the best ones to answer here.

### "Do you think reviews actually help readers make decisions?"

The answer here is a resounding yes. This is, in fact, why I have a job, and why suppliers send samples over for review - reviews sell. People want to make sure that when they spend money, they get the best possible equipment; and so, in an age where marketing hype can distort facts and is often overcomplicated, a reviewer can be the 'buffer zone' between marketing hype and the consumer. By reading reviews, a consumer has the ability to make an informed choice as to which hardware they are likely to invest in. It is, therefore, the purpose of a review to present information about a product in an easy-to-understand way.

### "How do you review a product? What do you think are important aspects to put forward?"

Each reviewer has his or her own style of reviewing. There is no style that is better than another - only different. Personally, I like to present my information in the most basic, easy-to-understand way. It has been a key element in my reviews of the past to stray away from conventional benchmark scores: they often confuse potential buyers who don't understand them, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they read the score and expect a similar one when they install the hardware in their own machine, and are then faced with disappointment when, due to the other components in their machine, the result is hampered by a system bottleneck - something not likely on the test rig that the score was based on. Yet, in total contradiction, I like to see benchmark scores in a review. Then again, this is due to my passion for performance hardware and overclocking, and I recognise that most people reading reviews do not share that viewpoint. It is a common joke in enthusiast circles whenever new hardware is released amidst hype and performance numbers - "Yes, but can it play *Crysis* (or any other modern game)?" While enthusiasts may take this as a joke due to

their understanding of hardware and said numbers, for many gamers with gaming as their primary focus and who view hardware as just a means to achieve an end, this is a legitimate question that will hold heavy influence in their final decision.

### "Why does your opinion on hardware count?"

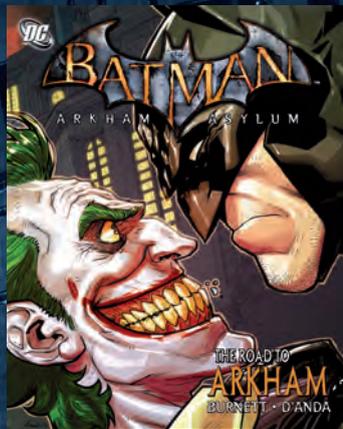
Well, my opinion is like that of any other person: it will contain bias in some way or another. What we need to remember, though, is that reviews are not opinions: they are reviews - "an inspection or examination for the purpose of evaluation." Normally, hardware reviewers are what they are, because they enjoy evaluating the hardware they've been sent to play with... I mean test. Following this starting point, hardware reviewers are more likely to get better as they progress. Experiencing many different pieces of hardware of any variety will expose them to the good and bad that the industry has to offer, and help them give a product a better evaluation. To use myself as an example, the first few formal reviews I did were not really of the highest standard. Since then, I've become a better reviewer (at least, I hope so) due to the hands-on experience *NAG* has given me.

I hope the above has clarified a few aspects of how I go about a general hardware review, and what importance a review holds in the world today. Plain and simple, reviews save you time on research by allowing you to sift through the marketing in order to find out the important basics of a product, and present you with an informed opinion as to whether the product is worthwhile or not. **NAG**

"and so, in an age where marketing hype can distort facts and is often overcomplicated, a reviewer can be the 'buffer zone' between marketing hype and the consumer."

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# MSI MASTER OVERCLOCKING ARENA 2009

**O**ver the last three years, overclocking competitions have become increasingly important to manufacturers. Not only do these competitions allow some of the world's best talent to gather under one roof and pit their skills against each other, they also prove invaluable in terms of R&D. These competitions not only stress the importance of better communication between manufacturers and users, but also give companies such as MSI direct and real-time feedback on the

quality of their products.

Much like MSI's MOA (Master Overclocking Arena) 2008 competition, MSI gathered top-class overclockers from all over the world - from Columbia to Taiwan. Every continent and region had at least one team; and in 2009, the list was even longer than in 2008. MSI did not compromise on the quality of the event, despite the global recession. The contestants and media were lodged at the official Olympic Stadium Hotel, just a stone's throw from the famous

Bird's Nest stadium where the 100m world record was broken.

The contest took place at the famous Shangri-La Hotel, which provided the right atmosphere (it's one of the world's best hotels), and this year's MOA was a gathering of overclockers of equal stature. From 64 countries worldwide, MSI had selected 20 teams (and their respective journalists); including Brazil's Adrenaline, Tech Report, The Overclocker and, obviously, NAG - to name a few.

All the teams who were invited

had managed to win their regional qualifiers. Teams and counties who had achieved podium finishes at last year's event were granted automatic entry into this year's competition.

MOA this year focused on Intel's X58 chipset, the Core i7 processor and triple-channel memory. The teams were each given an MSI Eclipse SLI motherboard (previously reviewed), OCZ Blade Series triple-channel PC3-17000 RAM, an Intel Core i7 Extreme Edition 975 CPU and the incredible

Olympic-themed MOA 2009



MSI N275GTX Lightning (NAG review coming soon), which was without question the single most impressive and spoken about component of the entire competition.

The competition, like last year, was hosted in part by Norwegian overclocker Stoolman, who was the natural choice as he could bridge any communications gap between the overclockers and the event organisers.

Unlike in any competition before, though, wPrime 2.0 and

Futuremark's 3DMark Vantage were the only two benchmarks used. The wPrime 1024 test would only account for 35% of the total score, with 3DMark Vantage making up the rest. The rules were simple: the lowest calculation time in wPrime 1024 and the highest performance score in 3DMark Vantage would win. This obviously meant that submitting a score for wPrime would limit your chances of winning or gaining a podium finish. However, the brilliance

of these two benchmarks is that they, unlike all others, rely on very specific components to scale. In the case of wPrime, the highest clock speed would win, as the overclock frequency had no effect - memory timings and speed were also secondary to raw CPU frequency. Since this was the first test, it allowed the teams to find the limits of their CPUs, indirectly allowing them to find out how fast they would be able to run 3DMark Vantage.

This year's MOA, unlike all

competitions of this nature before, had what could be argued the best balance or binning process of all. All the CPUs were capable of 5GHz with eight threads enabled, and only two CPUs were clocked at 5.3GHz - but neither finished any test at that speed. This was great work by MSI, as it eliminated any unfair advantage that could be attributed to sheer luck. Besides equalling the playing fields, it allowed the team's individual overclocking talents to stand out. Coincidentally, the two teams

**Nick Ross, editor and publisher of The Overclocker e-zine, and Deanzo of Team Australia**



**Mean Machine (left) and Stoolman (right) at the Red Bull drinks table**



**MSI had drumming shows, showing off the local talent. In this case, they were using computer components as percussion instruments**



# MSI MASTER OVERCLOCKING ARENA 2009

who recorded the highest CPU frequencies were not the winners: only one team (Team Taiwan) who had a bootable 5.3GHz CPU had a podium finish in third place.

The competition this time was also a little more flexible than before: teams could run either 3DMark Vantage or wPrime at any given time; provided, however, that they saved a valid screenshot (as per the HWBOT standard) and only submitted the result in the allocated time for the benchmark. This meant that teams had plenty of time to fine-tune their systems, and just about every competitor was able to run wPrime 1024 multiple times, improving their

scores with each successive run. Team Australia was the first to submit a wPrime result, as their skill with i7 overclocking was unmatched. They reached 5.2GHz before some teams had even powered on their systems, and they recorded an impressive 142.178 seconds. Moments later, the second US team managed an even better 140.072 seconds, but it was Sweden, with the only sub-140 result of 139.791 seconds, who would take the wPrime

stage. Team SA, represented by world-class overclocker ViVi and overclocking veteran Seth, had a time of 145.875 seconds, which placed them tenth out of the 20

teams. wPrime, unfortunately, was not without casualties, as the first US team did not submit a score, having gone through two motherboards (the second sample was apparently DOA) and two 975 CPUs. They had to exit the competition at that point.

As things stood, the competition was still open to a number of teams to win. 3DMark Vantage weighting could swing the results in any team's direction, provided they were able to submit a respectable wPrime score, and the odds were that this was going to be the case (in theory, all the remaining contestants had 5GHz-capable 3DMark Vantage CPUs.

This is where the competition was at its fiercest - the submissions were quick and the numbers managed core clock speeds beyond 1GHz, and as a result, the numbers were scaling with every slight frequency increment. However, the ones who had the best scores would be those who had the memory modification - or rather, those who had performed it.

What was happening with 3DMark Vantage was that, despite the obvious boost in performance, which the increased core clock speeds would deliver, higher core clock speeds resulted in a memory subsystem bottleneck.



Team SA's rig. You can never have too much sealing



Mean Machine and Trouffman after the closing ceremony

Given that the entrants were using a single 275 GTX graphics card, the benchmark stopped scaling at CPU clock speeds beyond 4.8 or 4.9GHz. This meant that with the VGA core speed and CPU frequency scaling basically capped, the only part remaining that could increase scores was the memory subsystem on the graphics card – and this is where most teams got stuck. Without the memory modification, setting high-speed memory past the 1,250MHz range would prove very difficult. But Sweden, along with a few other teams, managed it and scored above 18,000 points in the benchmark. Team SA managed an official 17,354, but did manage

to 'pull out' a score of 17,984 a few seconds after submission time had passed. Team Sweden (who had won the European qualifiers as well) again managed the highest score with 18,745 (which is a new 275 GTX single-card world record).

With all the results tallied, first place went to Team Sweden (represented by Jon and Henry) with a cheque for \$3,000. Second place was awarded to Ryba and Chaos of Poland with a cheque for \$2,000, and third place to Nick Shin and Coolaler of Taiwan with \$1,000. The award for highest-clocked graphics card was awarded to Team Singapore (Clon22 and NightRaven), who received an additional 295 GTX

graphics card for their achievement. Our SA team managed a respectable tenth position overall.

As with previous competitions, the competitors were familiar with each other, and the new faces from Brazil (Fabiolo, the only female contestant at this year's competition, and Ronaldo) were welcomed in the competitive spirit of overclocking. When Team SA had troubles because of delayed baggage at the airport, Nick Shih from Taiwan lent our team a GPU pot to use, and the Polish team was more than willing to share their GPU voltage program with our team. It is this kind of competitive but friendly spirit that

made MOA 2009 the best yet. As with last year's competition, MSI took advantage of having world-class overclockers at their disposal and received some very good feedback on their motherboards. From last year's feedback, they had managed to produce the P55-GDXX motherboards, which are the best motherboards MSI has ever produced. MOA 2009 may have been shorter than last year's event, but it was more impressive and we would like to thank MSI HQ and Corex for making it possible for us to cover this year's event. MOA 2010 should be even better.

**NAG**  
Neo Sibeko

Cameron of TweakTown and Team Singapore



Sampa and SF3D dry-run their rig to check that all is working



Vivi and Seth of Team SA unpacking their gear



Resident reporter for all OC competitions, Trouffiman of Overclocking



# Next-gen gaming graphics:

# The brewing mobile avalanche

by Russell Bennett

As desktop graphics hardware continues to make the steady but meaningful process it always has, largely in line with the principles of Moore's Law, there is another area of display development undergoing a much more rapid transformation at the moment: mobile, of course.

**A**ND I'M NOT TALKING about the sudden abundance of gaming laptops packing GPUs that would humble the average gaming desktop. Or even smaller, with the integration of the impressive but costly NVIDIA ION platform with integrated 9400M graphics into premium netbook platforms (although that's just starting to emerge now and could have interesting ramifications for the future).

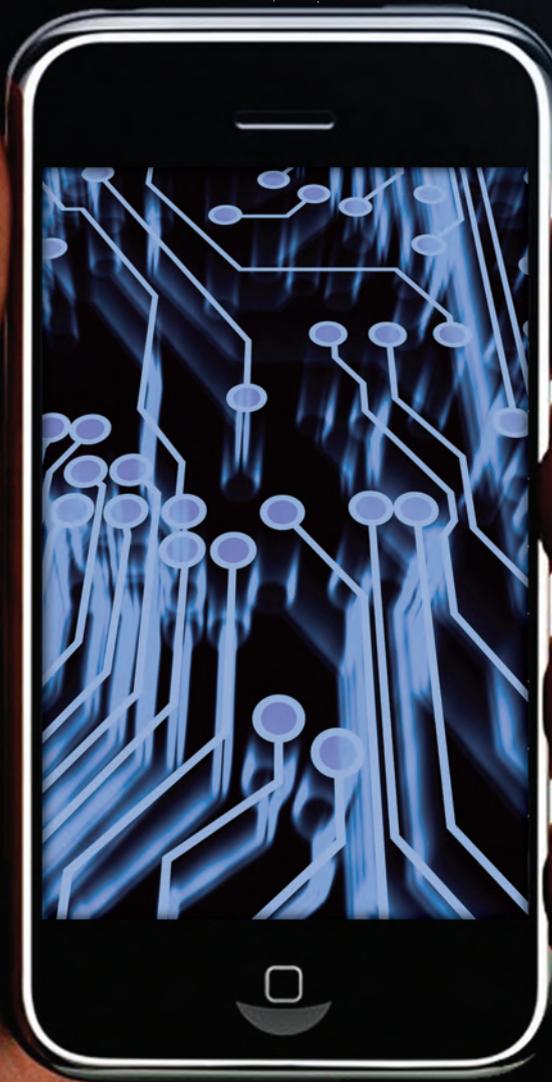
I'm talking about genuine, pocket-sized mobility. Cellphones, more specifically, and most specifically of all, the new generation of smartphones, which utterly dominate high-end cellphone offerings from all the major players. Evolution, after all, happens.

## FUSION OF FUNCTIONALITY

The signs have certainly been there for years already. It wasn't all that long ago that we actually contemplated having four mobile electronic platforms 'on our person' depending on our mood and purpose. The cellphone, of course, and a PDA for staying organised while on the move, and then the iPod and Game Boy-type device for mobile entertainment.

Of course, as circuitry shrank, fusing functions became the norm. Cellular phones that are also MP3 players are old news by now, and Nokia has tried converging gaming with cellular with the NGage - to some success even. The smartphone has now reached a level of maturity where a new model just can't compete in the fiercely competitive space if it doesn't provide the optimum combination of all of these functions.

A smartphone is basically a platform for applications - very much like a conventional PC. Users of smartphones require the ability to install and run any app they feel they need, at any time. Sure, there is a wide variety of actual software environments out there, each with their



own unique approach to being extended by third-party software. But whichever base system users choose, they'll be looking for similar things from it - and gaming is right on the fringe of becoming one of those important applications. And not the current crop of flat, 2D-based 'arcade classics' currently available for all manner of handsets, either. No, I'm talking about fully-fledged 3D with advanced lighting effects and full shader acceleration.

## MOBILE GRAPHICS EVOLVE

Just have a look at the leading players today. The Palm Pre, for instance, which was briefly hailed as the new pack leader, sports a potent Texas Instruments OMAP 3430 processor architecture featuring a new Superscalar ARM Cortex at its core, with the latest incarnation of Imagination Technologies' PowerVR SGX chipset.

If you remember the name 3Dfx, you'll recognise the PowerVR moniker as well. The company used to be a competitor in the formative stages of desktop graphics acceleration, but got relegated to 'bit-player' status by the emergence of the two current giants in the field. This company turned instead to creating low-power graphics solutions, and licensing these designs to interested manufacturers to integrate into their own hardware.

The SGX family is also known as the Series 5, and succeeds the PowerVR MBX, which is widely used in mobile devices today. It's a big step forward, too, now supporting OpenGL 2.0, OpenVG 1.1, and SM 3.0 via a programmable GPGPU based on a unique, unified architecture shortened to USSE (Universal Scalable Shader Engine). You even get multiprocessor-capable SGX grids, with up to 16 cores delivering 16Gpixels/s and 600-odd-Mpolys/s.

Take the new iPhone 3GS, for example. The S denotes that the unit is unashamedly associated with speed, which is to say processing performance. The new ARM CPU received a 50% megahertz boost, but less publicly discussed is that the graphics core went from the PowerVR MBX up to the SGX, even further improving the speed of any apps, like games, which use the 3D-processing hardware capabilities. To be precise, the 3GS uses the second most powerful chip in the SGX series, the SGX535, which is capable of rendering an impressive 28Mpolys/s and brings visual niceties such as real-time shadowing, reflection and translucency to the mobile

platform, as well as raw compute power.

Since the core clock also rose, and the available RAM was doubled, directly assessing the performance advantage of the SGX is quite difficult, but there are a few new apps appearing on the App Store, which show off advanced shader features just waiting for developers to capitalise on for the next generation of mobile games. Existing 3D apps are significantly smoother and more responsive than on the 3G models, that's for sure, and deliver a slice of the high-end graphical abilities of desktop parts, at a fraction of the power consumption and die size.

Nokia's next-generation flagship, the N900, is already boasting identical capabilities, so we assume that it'll be using the newer PowerVR chips. It has a decent 800 x 600-resolution touch screen as well, which should be quite crisp. Samsung's Omnia HD delivers the output of its SGX graphics core in - as the name suggests - full 1080p HD.

Meanwhile, Qualcomm, the supplier of the hardware platform for the BlackBerry, among others, has unveiled its next-generation mobile chipset, the Snapdragon QSD8650A - the first mobile solution to be based on a 45nm production process, in fact. Again, both core and graphics processing enhancements are specifically mentioned as key upgrades. Yes, much of the outright focus at the moment may be on media capabilities such as high-end video-decode rates, but mobile 3D capabilities are being beefed up.

## THE HEAT OF BATTLE

And it's only set to continue. Traditional PC manufacturers Dell are following the trail Apple blazed with the iPhone, entering the smartphone fray with their own offering, while Nokia is ready to release its own netbook product. The lines of mobile computing are further being blurred and players in various fields are expanding their repertoires in these times of global flux. And mobility is the core focus and one of few market niches still experiencing growth.

This increased competition is likely to drive frenzied development of the technology, as competitive advantages are sought - just as the PC market was driven to its current point of development, but on a more massive scale of deployment. These will be gadgets that will remind you of your dentist appointment, alert you of important e-mails, and connect you directly to whomever and whenever via voice. They

will be cloud-friendly, location-aware, potentially motion-sensitive, touch-screened, MP3-playing, always-handy 3D-rendering gaming beasts.

Name an IT giant and they'll either be in the fray or about to become more involved. Intel's Atom chips are just waiting in the wings, and have already been teamed up with that same SGX chipset in new products. Both ATI and NVIDIA have been feeding the press information on a strong focus on mobile products within those expensive R&D Labs. And not just the level of mobility of that 9400M solution either - smaller than that, we've heard repeatedly from both camps.

Developments now poised to drive the relevance of netbooks will quickly filter into the cellular environment; so basically, the cellphone is at the sharp end of a huge amount of R&D spending being plumbed into future products today. The traditional limitation of cellphones as gaming devices, an unnatural control interface, has now become an opportunity for savvy games developers to capitalise on. Touch has emerged as the new de facto method of input, allowing virtual controls to be placed anywhere or simply integrated into hotspots such as the edges of the screen itself.

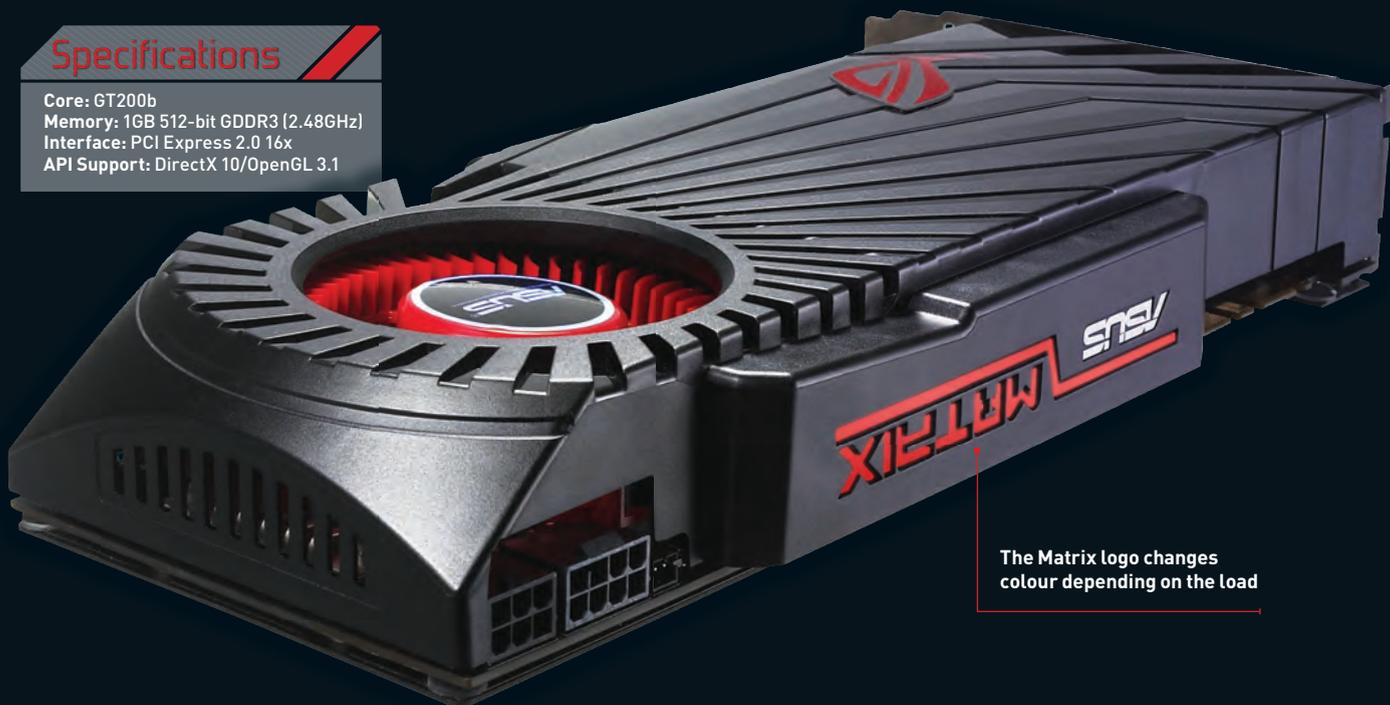
Add to that location awareness as well as hyper connectivity, and start thinking in terms of FPS, RTS, and RPGs rather than single-player and very traditionally minded side-scrollers; and the full breadth of the platform's gaming potential begins to unfold. A Nintendo DS, which isn't pretty much exclusively targeted at kids, isn't social death to have on your person, and allows you to play with like-minded people across the globe from wherever you happen to be.

And if you still don't want to 'buy' these trends as the possible future of gaming, consider this. Those Futuremark chaps are pretty smart, aren't they? I mean, they created benchmarks for next-gen technology so that it was ready by the time consumers could get their hands on it. That takes some foresight and careful planning at the least. Well, all the way back in 2004, these guys bought out a smaller software developer working on benchmarking mobile phones' performance - smartphones, of course...

It's all in place today, in terms of hardware capabilities at least. The only thing we're still waiting for to really kick-start this game-changing shift are developers and a few triple-A titles, and the avalanche will start to move. **NAG**

## Specifications

Core: GT200b  
 Memory: 1GB 512-bit GDDR3 (2.48GHz)  
 Interface: PCI Express 2.0 16x  
 API Support: DirectX 10/OpenGL 3.1



The Matrix logo changes colour depending on the load

## ASUS Matrix GTX285

**ASUS ALWAYS GOES FOR** that little extra when it comes to their graphics cards. While a large number of the features they support in many of their VGA cards might be called gimmicks, there are those few occasions where the company produces something to really get excited about.

Sure, there are competitors who engineer similar products, particularly when it comes to VGA cards employing a custom cooler and memory. However, very few go to the lengths that ASUS has gone to with the Matrix GTX285. That is because this GTX285, much like the even more exclusive hyper card, the GTX295 Mars, is ASUS showing off their ingenuity and will impress people to varying degrees.

The truth, though, is that it will impress almost everyone (be it the looks, the performance or both). This card was designed purely for the enthusiast or the high-end gamer who wants nothing but the best. Everything, from the custom-designed cooler, which ASUS claims lowers operating temperatures by 12%, to the illuminated Matrix logo that changes colour depending on GPU load, is most impressive.

The card itself looks fantastic in a matte black cooler, similar in a way to the reference cooler in terms of fan placement, but far more effective through the use of a bigger copper block and thicker heat pipes. Whether the temperature improvement is as a direct result of these changes or the 'Super Hybrid Engine' is not important.

What is true is that the card runs a good 10°C lower than the reference GTX 285. So then, with such a card and thermal performance one would be forgiven for thinking that ASUS would have pre-overclocked this graphics card to very high levels. Sadly, this is not the case. In fact, ASUS has only upped the engine core speed to 662MHz (up from the regular 648MHz). Not much of an overclock at all, and even more surprising is that the memory speed has not been changed at all, despite the use of Hynix memory, which is rated at 2,600MHz.

ASUS does provide a utility that offers several pre-set performance modes. However, these only affect the 2D speed, which is very strange, considering that few people complain about 2D performance - if at all. Even stranger is that ASUS has the famous Fujitsu PLC installed at the back of the card and uses an 8+2 power-phase design. All of this should come together to make for a card tuned for fantastic 3D performance levels and not minor GPU clock adjustments.

The Matrix card is bundled with a utility that allows one to install a custom BIOS preset, allowing you to customise memory sub-timings. The idea, while noble, doesn't work so well in practice. Tweaking GDDR3 sub-timings yields very little benefit, if any at all; and in some cases, just makes overclocking worse and degrades performance. Making use of the traditional BIOS-tweaking options available on the Net proves to be even

more difficult with this card, as the BIOS is not accessed in the normal manner, as with the reference card which could be counterproductive.

With all that said, probably the only thing that truly matters is how far this card will overclock. We could run a good 770MHz on the GPU clock. This could just be the particular sample we had, but no other GTX 285 can clock to this level without voltage modifications. As such, this has to be the fastest GTX 285 we have tested thus far. Whether that translates into the best GTX 285 on the market is not clear: to benefit from the advancements made on this card, one has to manually overclock the core, and this limits the appeal of the card. Having said that, if you want one of the more unique cards on the market and one that will definitely attract attention and deliver great gaming performance, the ASUS Matrix GTX285 is the card you should be looking to buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

**Bottom Line**  
 The most unique GTX 285 ever.

| Plus                                     | Minus                           |
|--|---------------------------------|
| + Overclocking headroom<br>+ Looks great | - Over-engineered<br>- Gimmicky |

RRP → R1,100 Supplier → Corex Web → www.logitech.com

## Logitech G9x Laser Mouse

**ANY SANE PERSON WOULD** shudder at the thought of spending over a thousand rand on a gaming mouse. Thankfully, most sane people stay away from computer stores, and won't be there to give you strange looks when you buy the G9x. The reason why you'll be buying the G9x is simple: it's a fantastic mouse with loads of features.

Let's get the obvious question out of the way first: what separates the G9x from the regular G9? It has the same features as the G9, but bumps the resolution up to 5,000dpi (from 3,200dpi), and firms up the mouse wheel a bit. Otherwise, it's pretty much the same, which is a very good thing. On top of that, they're the same price, and the G9x should be replacing all G9s.

You have a choice of two interchangeable grips that are designed to not get too drenched in sweat (this works pretty much as expected). Every button is customisable, including those that let you change resolutions on the fly, and there's an adjustable weight cartridge that lets you add anywhere from 4g to 28g to the mouse's weight.

In terms of performance, both

in-game and around the desktop, the G9x is almost unmatched. The Teflon-coated feet ensure that movement is smooth, and you'll manage precision unlike anything you've experienced before when the 5,000dpi laser sensor is cranked to its maximum setting. While it's a bulkier mouse than the Logitech G5, the two grips will give you enough flexibility to find comfort, although it may take a bit of time.

If you can afford this mouse and don't already own the G9, you should buy the G9x. If not, there's no shame in working two jobs. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



### Specifications

- Resolution up to 5,000dpi
- Two interchangeable grips
- On-the-fly resolution adjustment
- LED with adjustable colours
- On-board storage for up to five profiles



### Bottom Line

You'll have to plunge fairly deep into those pockets, but if you're a serious gamer, this is the mouse to own.



#### Plus

- + Smooth
- + Precise
- + Comfortable

#### Minus

- Pricey

RRP → R1,399 Supplier → Corex Web → www.logitech.com

## Logitech G35 Surround Sound Headset

**SURROUND SOUND IS A** huge part of gaming these days. It's important, then, to make sure that a stereo headset doesn't 'disadvantage' you when you're attending a LAN. Similarly, you may have only a simple on-board sound card and typically unimpressive desktop speakers. If either situation calls your name, you need a USB gaming headset with 7.1 surround sound capabilities, which the Logitech G35 just so happens to be.

Because this is a USB headset, it doesn't require a sound card at all. From the super quick installation, which takes care of all the fiddly Windows settings, you'll be set up and ready to go within minutes. The device itself is incredibly comfortable, fitting around the ears as opposed to resting on them, and even includes a different headband cushion if the standard one doesn't measure up.

The three G keys on the side of the device might seem frivolous, especially if you already own a Logitech keyboard with its own macro buttons, but they can serve very special purposes. Each key can be assigned to either open an application from a fixed list, such as Ventrilo, iTunes or Windows Media Player, as well as skip tracks, play, pause, or (in the case

of Ventrilo) 'push-to-talk'. A microphone mute key as well as headset volume control completes the package.

As is to be expected from Logitech, the audio quality is incredible. The positional audio works surprisingly well for a headset, although rear audio in FPSes felt a little too muted. Otherwise, the audio is loud, clear, and manages to handle bass very well. The microphone also offers great quality, and if you don't like the sound of your own voice, there are a number of built-in voice-morphing profiles. While it's a nice idea, it mostly just seems silly. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



### Specifications

- 7.1-channel surround sound
- Supports Dolby DTS

**Headphone:**  
Frequency Response: 20Hz – 20kHz  
Sensitivity: 90dB

**Microphone:**  
Frequency Response: 100Hz – 10kHz  
Sensitivity: -42dBV/Pa



### Bottom Line

Perfect for gamers who can't give up their surround sound, or anyone looking to move on from their standard desktop speakers.

#### Plus

- + Clear, loud audio
- + Very comfortable
- + Price

#### Minus

- Rear audio is a bit soft



## Specifications

GPU: ATI RV790  
 Memory: 2,048MB GDDR5  
 Interface: PCI Express 2.0 16x  
 API: DirectX 10.1/OpenGL 3.0

# Sapphire Vapor-X HD 4890 2GB

**S**APPHIRE HAS BEEN MAKING graphics cards for a very long time now, and much like other VGA manufacturers, has several lines of graphics cards that are tailored for the enthusiast, gamer and the budget-conscious as well. Each of these focuses on features important to the specific price point. This optimises graphics cards for end users; and obviously, in the long run, saves Sapphire money.

Vapor-X technology is probably one of the more famous SKUs from the company's long list of products. Basically, Vapor-X technology is a cooling mechanism exclusive to Sapphire products. This cooling mechanism reduces operating temperatures by various degrees when compared to the reference cooler and other coolers on the market. Not only does it help to reduce temperatures, but it also allows the graphics card to operate at higher frequencies and at lower noise levels.

The Vapor-X HD 4890 we received for review is based on the above technology, but more than that, Sapphire has gone the extra mile to truly customise the graphics card. Having said that, this is not Sapphire's highest-performing 4890-based accelerator. That honour belongs to the Sapphire Toxic 4890, which also makes use of Vapor-X technology but through a completely different cooler.

Sapphire's HD 4890 has possibly the best mix of features and performance of any 4890 on the market today. While it is true that there is a faster Radeon 4890 graphics card from the manufacturer and

competitors, none of them features the complete combination this card does. The Vapor-X card features a total of 2GB of GDDR5 memory clocked to an impressive 4.2GHz, which results in an impressive 134.4GB/sec of bandwidth; a perfect fit for those ultra-high resolutions where the extra memory can come in to play, assisted by the enhanced bandwidth on the card. This is particularly useful for those who do not want to run the 4870X2 or any CrossFire configuration, but still make use of high resolutions in the region of 1,920 x 1,080 and higher.

To further enhance the performance, Sapphire has overclocked the core to 870MHz - not a significant boost to the reference core clock, but a worthwhile boost that should come in handy at the very high resolutions, which this card is geared for.

The Vapor-X features more outputs than any other card we have ever tested. Not only does it have the standard DVI and VGA D-sub outputs, but it's complemented by an HDMI 1.3-compliant output and a Display Port output. As if that's not enough, those seeking to make use of the most extreme resolutions can use the included HDMI-to-DVI dongle to double the bandwidth available to a single display, or simply use it for a multi-display setup.

Sapphire has just about customised everything on the graphics card. In fact, the only thing that is reference on the entire graphics card is the RV790 graphics processor. Everything else is custom designed: the blue PCB, the

cooler, the 8-phase power-regulation system, and even the power connectors. Unlike the standard 4890, the Vapor-X makes use of both 8- and 6-pin power connectors, which stabilise power and help to boost clocks as well.

In terms of performance, the Vapor-X is as impressive as one would expect. Where this card really outclasses the rest is when you apply 8x AA at resolutions of 1,920 x 1,200 and higher. Not only that, but the core overclocks brilliantly, reaching the Toxic edition's core speed of 960MHz, with the memory overclocking to 4.4GHz.

To sweeten the deal, Sapphire has included a copy of 3DMark Vantage Advanced Edition and a 6-to-8-pin power plug converter. It's about as complete a package as you could expect from Sapphire, as the company's products have never been about bundled software and other value-adds. We have yet to test a Radeon 4890 that is as impressive as the Sapphire Vapor-X HD 4890 2GB.

**NAG**  
**Neo Sibeko**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
**Bottom Line**  
 The best 4890 on the market.

**Plus**

- + Performance
- + 2GB memory
- + Plenty of outputs

**Minus**

- None

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## Lian Li TYR PC-X500 Chassis

**T**HE LIAN LI X500 chassis claims, on its box, to be the ultimate gaming or HTPC chassis. I always find it odd when bulky and heavily fan-laden products like this claim to be perfect for a home theatre machine. Surely, for that you want something small, slim, unobtrusive and quiet? I even get annoyed by the humming of my Xbox 360 when I'm watching movies. Let alone four 120mm fans as come pre-installed in this beastie – more on which in a moment. Nor will it exactly blend in with other consumer, home-entertainment devices, being made entirely of very striking black, anodised aluminium complete with little detail touches also painted black – like the screws for securing the back plates for instance.

Anyway, it does specify gaming as well, which is what we're interested in. So let's have a look.

The two 5.25-inch bays (only two? Yes, the company got quite a lot of flak for that one) are positioned at 90 degrees through conventional optical bays, and DVD writers and the like can be installed so that their trays eject either side, depending on your positioning of your PC. There are also four 3.5-inch slots overall, which both reside in a top section of the chassis, which also contains the PSU. This zone can get pretty cramped with everything screwed into place; but even with a full rack of 3.5-inch HDDs installed on their included, vibration-reducing

rubber grommets, the airflow properties are still good. The PSU even has its own, vented under-tray for bottom-facing PSU fans, and is lifted half a centimetre or so proud of these vents by a pair of rubber strips – again to minimise vibration noise.

The sides of the case pop off easily enough, using a clever, one-lever release system, which is locked into place by a single, attached thumbscrew. They're made of the same black, anodised aluminium as the rest of the chassis, but are double layer and packed with sound insulation. Although the motherboard tray isn't removable, it's relatively easy to work on, because there's quite a lot of space. And all the really messy cabling, for the most part, is routed upwards into the drive bay area. Behind the motherboard tray, there's space for hiding excessive cable length, and an elementary but effective cable-management solution is included in the box.

Behind the front panel are two 120mm intake fans, with two more at the rear of the chassis venting the heated air. These front-panel fans are speed-adjustable between three modes, the fastest being quite loud for an HTPC, and probably more suited to a gaming rig. Unfortunately, the speed adjuster is positioned in such a way that you have to remove the front panel and micro-filter arrangement to reach, which is more than a bit daft.

You do have to love the simple, clean

styling of the thing, though. And the company's rabid attention to detail in making every single element matching black – although the grey fan-power cables jar slightly as a result of this same fastidiousness. It's also clear through every touch of your fingers that it's a superbly built and engineered case, and you can work in your machine without fear of shredding your hands, thanks to this construction quality (which has left no nasty, sharp edges anywhere).

Overall, it's a good product, which customers seeking genuine quality will appreciate – as is usually the case with Lian Li stuff. Its sheer size really makes it more of a gaming rig than an HTPC though, but it'll do this job stylishly and remarkably quietly – so it's all good, albeit hellishly expensive. **NAG**

**Russell Bennett**

### Specifications

**Dimensions (W x D x H):** 230mm x 380mm x 585mm  
**Motherboard Support:** microATX, ATX  
**I/O Ports:** 4 x USB 2.0; 1 x FireWire; 1 x eSATA; AC'97 HD audio



#### Bottom Line

It's a good, strong, stylish chassis with good sound dampening and a beautiful build quality.

#### Plus

- + As black as black gets
- + Smooth edges everywhere
- + Good airflow

#### Minus

- Only two 5.25-inch bays
- Only four 3.5-inch bays
- Inaccessible fan-speed controller

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## MSI SyrenPhone Gaming Headset

**SOME MAY SCOFF AT** the idea of 'gaming-specific headphones', saying that good sound is good sound regardless; and, therefore, if it's good for music, it'll be good for games, too. But true audiophiles understand that the intended application and the device's acoustic properties do, in fact, need to match. Therefore, this item is not merely a case of marketing-motivated branding. The frequency response is ideal for playing games: the bass volume is slightly lower, so that low-frequency sounds are less likely to drown out other, more important in-game events, such as speech, incoming gunfire, or notifications, among others. However, this doesn't mean that the bass is poor – far from it, in fact. It is well reproduced and doesn't overpower the other frequencies. Overall, the audio quality is very good, and these 'phones are more than adequate for enjoyment of music between games, or for watching a movie without disturbing others.

This headset connects via USB, which makes it less versatile (you can only use it with a computer – it won't plug into an MP3 player or the like), but it also means

that you can connect it to a PC without a sound card (not that those are common!). As soon as you do, the driver switches your default audio device to this headset, restoring to your previous selection when you unplug it. There are in-line controls for volume and muting.

In terms of comfort and aesthetics, these are pretty good. At first, I thought the ear cups might be a tad on the small side, but it turns out that they are just the right size, and comfortably padded. The boom mic is on a flexible yet firm cable, allowing you to position the mic as you please. On the other 'cup', there is a backlit 'G' (presumably for "gaming") – purely cosmetic, but it looks good (though, surely, that would give away your position to a sniper, wouldn't it?).

**NAG**  
Alex Jelagin

### Specifications

**Drivers:** 40mm Neodymium  
**Frequency Response:** 10Hz – 20kHz  
**Impedance:** 50 ohms  
**Sensitivity:** 110dB



### Bottom Line

This is a very capable headphone set that comes in at a reasonable price – good value for money.

#### Plus

- + Great sound quality
- + Comfortable
- + Pouch included

#### Minus

- No 3.5mm jacks

## Skullcandy G.I. Headphones

**SKULLCANDY HAS BEEN MAKING** a name for itself in the lifestyle-audio products market, and has been nominated for *Entrepreneur Magazine's* annual award, this year. The company's headphones have been finding favour in a variety of settings, given that Skullcandy 'phones come in a variety of styles to appeal to different people. This particular G.I. model features Skullcandy's high-quality standards (although plastic is, nevertheless, very much in evidence).

It must be noted that these headphones do not feature any sort of microphone, so they are not intended for online gaming with voice chat, or Internet telephony. However, they are good for pretty much anything else. Their sound reproduction is very good indeed, with a broad frequency response range, and unusually good bass (for headphones), as well as good volume. The G.I. set is part of Skullcandy's 'DJ Headphones' range; so, presumably, audio fidelity is integral to their design. They are remarkably comfortable, with thick padding on the headband, and broad, well-padded ear cups that will come nowhere near to pressing on your ears.

There is a basic in-line volume control, on what is actually a very short cable. This wire allows you to use these headphones with an MP3 player in your pocket, without having a long loop of cable to deal with. But fear not: there is also an extension cable that bundles with this model to provide a more typical wire length.

The G.I. Headphones are, of course, ideally suited to music enjoyment, but are also great for watching movies (as long as they are not encoded in surround sound), and for gaming. Because they use a conventional 3.5mm stereo jack, they can be used with just about any audio device. Unfortunately, this jack is a bit small (in terms of its grip), so it can be a battle to insert or unplug it, in some cases. No other faults could be found with this unit, though.

**NAG**  
Alex Jelagin

### Specifications

**Drivers:** 40mm Neodymium  
**Frequency Response:** 18Hz – 20kHz  
**Impedance:** 50 ohms  
**Maximum Power:** 400mW



### Bottom Line

Comfortable and well-made all-round headphones that deliver excellent sound.

#### Plus

- + Excellent sound quality
- + Comfortable

#### Minus

- None

RRP → R749 Supplier → Genius Web → [www.geniusnet.com.tw](http://www.geniusnet.com.tw)



## Specifications

- 2.4GHz wireless
- 10m range
- 11 programmable buttons (including shifters)
- C-clamp with three supporting suckers
- Works with PC, PS2, and PS3

This Genius racing wheel has all the programmable buttons you could need, but isn't huge on convincing aesthetics or tactility

## Genius Wireless Trio Racer

**R**ACING GAMES JUST AREN'T the same without a decent steering wheel to play them with. Sure, if the option of mouse control is there, it's possible to be just as fast using the pointer to steer; and many of the arcade games are actually optimised for the keyboard, but a decent wheel will bring a lot, even to these titles. An extra layer of pseudo-realism to help with the immersion factor.

This Genius Wireless Trio Racer gets its name from the fact that it covers as many bases as it can. This unit will work with a PC, PS2 or PS3 equally well. The 2.4GHz wireless adapter sports the standard PS2 controller connection, as well as USB for the other two systems. A small switch along its side is used to select PC and PS3 operation.

There's only one game I like testing racing wheels with, so I got hold of my friend Torq and informed him that I needed the *Live for Speed* dedicated server online again – and voila, we were set up. Installing the Genius device was just as easy. The peripheral-PC interface is now unfettered, and the wheel itself uses AAA batteries for power (although there is also a 5V socket for AC power, but no power converter in the box), so just the pedals are attached to the main unit via a cable.

In terms of feel, it isn't too convincing. The hard, shiny plastic of this Genius wheel makes it feel lightweight and insubstantial, and doesn't give the best grip when fighting the virtual Gs. The

mounting system is excellent, however: a G-clamp arrangement, with a trio of rubber suckers beneath the wheel, allows it to grip firmly to any sort of mounting surface. 'Grippy' rubber strips beneath the pedal set keep these from scooting out from beneath your feet as well.

Although those kings of force feedback, Immersion, have actually patented this TouchSense force-feedback technology, it is a bit limited. However, that's only from the perspective of the truly hardcore. The rumbling, shaking and shocking vibration effects of the Genius will likely be more than enough to 'convince' most people's senses of their usefulness.

Due to its light weight, relatively compact dimensions and easy but effective clamping system, it's much quicker and simpler to set up than my aging Thrustmaster RGT; but the older unit feels nicer, has better force feedback and is much grippier. It is nice to get away from the mess of cables that come with it, though, and the multi-platform functionality is a great boon, as most people have at least two of the supported platforms in their homes.

Just don't plug in a 5V power supply with those batteries installed, thinking you can save your batteries' energy for when you really need them, and run on mains power for a while. Your wheel will pop, crackle, snap, and possibly smoke a little in its dying moments. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



### Bottom Line

Not the best force-feedback system, but the Wireless Trio Racer has a great clamp and useful, multi-platform wireless functionality.

#### Plus

- + 11 programmable buttons
- + C-clamp supported by suckers
- + Up to 10m wireless range

#### Minus

- Slippery rim
- Limited force feedback
- Potential power fault

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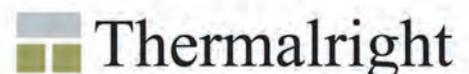
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## Specifications

**Dimensions:** 108.8mm x 53.5mm x 11.9mm  
**Display:** 3.1-inch AMOLED (800 x 480)  
**Connectivity:** Bluetooth 2.1, Micro-USB, Wi-Fi  
**Camera:** 5MP (auto focus)  
**Device Control:** Samsung TouchWiz  
**GPS:** Yes



## Samsung Jet S8003

**S**AMSUNG HAS BEEN PRODUCING incredible phones lately, one after the other, and improving upon each successive phone each time. From the F480 Touchwiz to the i8910 HD, each phone that we find ourselves using shows a general improvement on the other in one way or another.

The Samsung Jet is no different. It doesn't target the ultra high end like the i8910, but it does have some very useful functions, which should appeal to a large spectrum of users. The features list is quite impressive by any standards, but as always, it's how it all comes together that makes the phone a pleasure to use.

The phone is smaller than one would expect and that has a direct bearing on how one will predominantly use the phone. For instance, while the on-screen QWERTY keyboard is sensitive, responsive and gives tactile feedback for every key pressed, it is relatively easy to make mistakes while typing - especially with the thumbs. This can be quite frustrating for some. Another shortcoming is that one is not able to select the type of input that is preferred. Instead, it's entirely based on the phone's orientation, which can lead to random changes between the keypad and QWERTY keyboard input while typing a text message.

This is about the only setback to what is otherwise a great phone. This is very apparent in general use while browsing menus, scrolling through lists and such. The 3.1-inch AMOLED display may fool

some into thinking that watching videos on the phone and reading text may prove problematic - it's quite the contrary, as videos look magnificent on the WVGA 800 x 480 24-bit display. The phone plays all popular formats, from WMV to DivX files and other MPEG-4 formats, at ultra-smooth frame rates with no dropped frames. This is partly due to the magnificent 800MHz processor used, which is currently the highest-clocked host processor on a mobile phone, making the Jet the fastest phone on the market right now.

Given the price point of this phone and where it fits in Samsung's mobile phone family, it's surprising just how many features the phone has. It sports a 5MP camera with auto focus, built-in GPS navigation with the corresponding software, supports active sync, and has Bluetooth 2.1, Wi-Fi and HSDPA (3.6Mbps) connectivity - to name but a few. The new proprietary OS, we must say, is much improved. Not only is it more responsive and easier to navigate, but it also supports multi-tasking and has one of the best browsers of any phone that has one-touch zoom functionality. Other equally impressive features include the speed and the accuracy with which Web pages are rendered.

The Jet has another unique feature: the phone's Cube 3D interface. By pressing a button situated on the right side of the phone, one can navigate through many of the phone's functions using a 3D cube

that can be spun on both axes. Not every phone feature is available through the cube, but all multimedia functionality is - including direct video playback, camera access, the audio file browser, picture browser and the application browser as well. The cube may not really help to enhance the usability of the phone, but it is fun to play with and does provide very quick access to the above-mentioned functionality.

The Jet also features fake call ability, multiple desktops, widgets and much more. Samsung has jam-packed this phone with just about every feature and function you could imagine and the manufacturer deserves top marks for this. Had it not been for the absence of a fixed input setting or mode, this phone would have scored a full five stars. Fortunately, however, that doesn't detract from what is simply a fantastic phone. **NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**



### Bottom Line

One of the most feature-rich phones on the market, and it sports the fastest host processor available.

#### Plus

- + AMOLED display
- + Speed
- + Multimedia capabilities

#### Minus

- On-screen QWERTY keyboard
- Low volume

## Corsair Performance Series P128 SSD

**IT'S AS CLEAR AS** day now that SSDs are the way forward. While we have had recent announcements of 2.5TB hard drives, because of better platter densities from various manufacturers, the days of magnetic storage are numbered. For mass storage, they still cannot be beaten, but because solid-state drives do not require advanced manufacturing like magnetic storage, many more manufacturers can enter the market. As such, this drops prices, increases the advancement in the technology, and in general accelerates adoption.

Corsair, an expert in all things related to memory, has not featured as prominently in the SSD market as one would have expected. However, that is all set to change with the Performance line of drives. Unlike the Mainstream line (M series), the P series features key technologies such as Native Command Queuing, 48-bit addressing, Read Look-ahead and other such technologies.

Built using the Samsung S3C29RBB01 controller and Samsung NAND memory, it doesn't suffer from the issues associated with the earlier drives that used the older J Micron controller. Not only is the P128 a very reliable drive, but Corsair is confident in its manufacturing

capabilities, and specifies a two-year warranty and a 100+ year MTBF. Impressive by any standard, and it should help re-assure those who have had bad experiences with the very first batches of solid-state drives, which were prone to losing data randomly.

With regards to performance, the Performance line, as the name suggests, is aimed at the most demanding users, and offers some impressive performance. In the various testing programs we used, the average read speed was 173MB/sec, peaking at 184MB/sec on average. Write speeds were 161MB/sec, peaking at an impressive 180MB/sec.

These speeds make the P128 the second fastest SSD we have ever reviewed, and only eclipsed by the Patriot Torqx. Considering that the Corsair P128 drive is marginally cheaper, however, most users would be more than happy with the drive's performance. The firmware is also upgradable, so should there be any enhancements made to the controller or drive, the performance and reliability can only get better. We would definitely recommend this drive to any high-end user who's looking to switch to a solid-state drive in the near future.

**NAG**  
**Neo Sibeko**



### Specifications

**Capacity:** 128GB (120GB)  
**Read Speeds:** 173MB/sec  
**Write Speeds:** 161MB/sec  
**Interface:** SATA 3Gb/sec



### Bottom Line

High-performance SSD for high-end users

#### Plus

+ Performance  
+ Features

#### Minus

- Dull exterior



2.0M Pixel



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RRP → R6,599 Supplier → Corex Web → www.msi.com

## MSI GeForce N295GTX

**THE GT200B CORE HAS** been with us for some time now. While many expected ATI to retaliate with a 4890X2 card, it just never happened; and as a result, the GTX 295 has remained the undisputed king of the hill. The synthetic tests may place it at about the same speed as the Radeon 4870X2, but 3DMark Vantage and the vast majority of games favour the GTX 295.

We have seen the silent introduction of the single-PCB version of the GTX 295, but it may still be a while until we are able to get our hands on any of those cards locally. MSI has gone with the standard layout for the card, and for the most part, it's the exact reference design we've grown accustomed to over the last eight months or so.

At the rear of the card, you'll find the dual-DVI outputs and a native HDMI output. MSI bundles a DVI to D-sub converter and a second DVI to HDMI converter as well.

Performance is what the GTX 295 is about, though, and in this regard, it is still unmatched – and it seems to get better with every driver release. The WHQL 190.38 drivers help bolster the card's performance in several titles, especially at the higher resolutions, where this card is best utilised. Paired with third-party

utilities such as Badaboom's video encoder, one can utilise one GPU to encode a movie while the other one is used for playing games. This versatility lets the GTX 295 stand out above other graphics cards on the market.

Since this card is based on the tried-and-tested reference design, software voltage modifications work without a hitch, and we were able to reach a maximum of 710MHz without any adjustments; and just under 730MHz

with 1.28V applied to both GPUs. With a copy of *Tomb Raider: Underworld* included, the MSI N295GTX is an attractive card, and it can still claim to be the fastest graphics accelerator on the market. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

### Specifications

**GPU:** 2 x GT200b  
**Memory:** 1,792MB GDDR3  
**Interface:** PCI Express 2.0 16x  
**API Support:** DirectX 10/OpenGL 3.1



#### Bottom Line

Still the fastest graphics card on the market.

#### Plus

+ Performance  
 + CUDA  
 + *Tomb Raider: Underworld*

#### Minus

- None

RRP → R950 Supplier → The Prophecy Shop Web → www.prophecy.co.za

## Mushkin Enhanced HP3 3GB Triple-Channel Kit

**DDR3 MEMORY MODULES HAVE** dropped in price over the last year or two. From the sky-high prices of high-performance 2GB dual-channel kits, which would sometimes retail for anything up to R7,000, we now have 3GB triple-channel kits, such as this one, retailing for under R1,000. More than that, the memory not only runs at a lower voltage of 1.6V, down from what used to be the normal 2.1V+ operating voltage of high-speed sets, but the memory is also easier to overclock.

This set is very easy to overclock. The reference timings of CL9-9-9-27 are not impressive by any stretch of the imagination, but they are guaranteed to operate at 1,600MHz; and with overclocking, you can achieve a comfortable 1,800MHz. At a voltage of 1.74V, you can achieve 1,900MHz. That's a full 300MHz over the rated speed, which is nothing short of impressive – especially given the price of the set.

In terms of timings, you will not be able to get much better than the rated settings, as CL8-8-8-24 failed to POST – regardless of voltage used on our test system. However, timings should not be a major issue for most, and even for some enthusiasts, as the i7 platform

– which this RAM is built for – is more tuned for bandwidth rather than latency. As such, the performance figures in games and applications will be virtually the same.

Aesthetically the HP3 3GB set is what you would expect from Mushkin. The design is simple enough without being boring. The metallic blue finish on the heat sinks works well enough. It may not be as attractive as what some of the other manufacturers provide, but the set should not detract from any case theme.

If a cheap 3GB triple-channel kit is what you are looking for, but you don't want any of the budget 1,333MHz sets (which offer dismal bandwidth figures and don't overclock well at all), you should consider the HP3 3GB set. It will

be hard to find something better locally, especially at this price. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

### Specifications

**Frequency:** 1,600MHz  
**Timings:** CL9-9-9-27 1T  
**XMP/EPP:** No  
**Operating Voltage:** 1.60V



#### Bottom Line

Budget high-performance RAM for the gamer on a budget.

#### Plus

+ Can reach 1,900MHz  
 + Runs cool

#### Minus

- Heat-sink design is getting old  
 - Cannot run CL8

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# GGG

BY TARRYN VAN DER BYL

\* not Tarryn

## Rockstar O, Stupid People 1

**WAS ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH** a vilifying invective about how absolutely abominable JRPGs are [COMING NEXT MONTH!], when I saw something even more absolutely abominable in my news feeds.

Apparently, Take-Two has just reached a \$20-million-something settlement in the Hot Coffee case, with the publisher paying out almost \$5 million and their insurers handling the rest. This is more than \$20 million paid out, mind you. To people who looked for, downloaded, installed, and played to its conclusion a third-party modification [created in violation of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas's* EULA], which unlocked an otherwise entirely inaccessible and mostly incomplete bit of content that showed some kind of rubbishy looking approximation of stuff that looks just like that same stuff you see on prime-time TV every day, but in a game rated M for Mature. In a game where you can also shoot hookers and hijack cars, but nobody complained about that.

Being the most outrageously litigious nation on the planet, as soon as the Americans had finished playing the modification (twice), they filed a class action lawsuit against Take-Two for failing to disclose the game's sexual content – this is content, remember, that was otherwise entirely inaccessible and mostly incomplete, in a game rated M for Mature. Where you could also shoot hookers and hijack cars. It's all kind of on the same level of overwhelmingly stupid as suing McDonald's because you spilled hot coffee all over yourself. Oh, but that happened in America too. It's also conveniently ironic, isn't it?

Anyway, "We are pleased to have reached this settlement, which represents another important step forward for the company," says Strauss Zelnick, Chairman of Take-Two. Yes, that's one step forward for the company and about a zillion steps backward for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Just like indulging a brat with everything it demands only perpetuates the whole interminable cycle of indulgence, so does this settlement legitimise the sort of preposterous 200-year-old Puritanism of people who probably can't look at themselves in the bathtub without seeing Satan's cloven hooves dancing in the soap tray. There's no indignation like moral indignation, and now it's apparently also a free pass to cash. That the lawsuit even made it past the court's vetting procedures is an egregious disgrace – doesn't America have murderers to prosecute? Seriously, if your delicate sensibilities can't handle a bit of badly animated sex, stop wasting everybody else's time and money and go colonise another planet – preferably one with a toxic atmosphere. **NAG**



**KONAMI**



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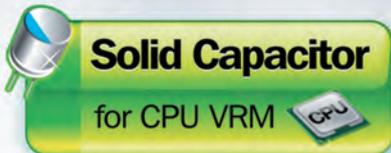
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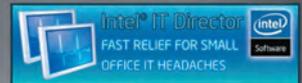
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