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Duke Nukem Forever

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VOL 13 ISSUE 7 10.2010 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00



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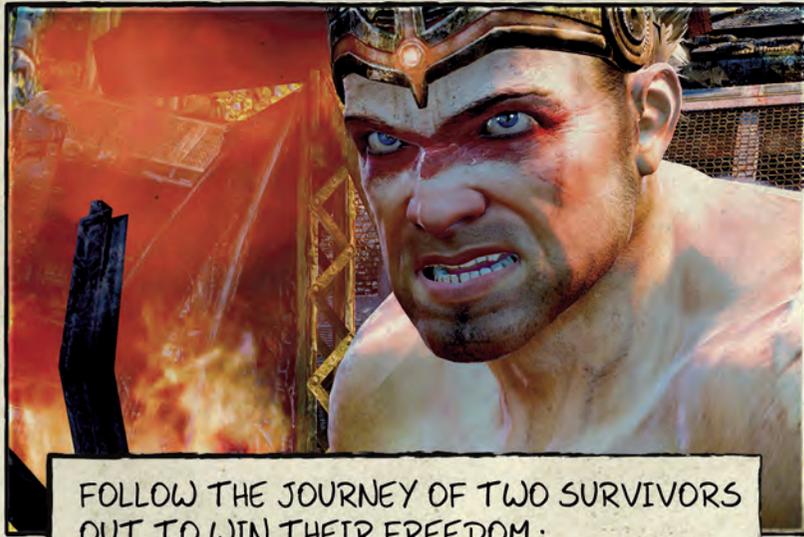


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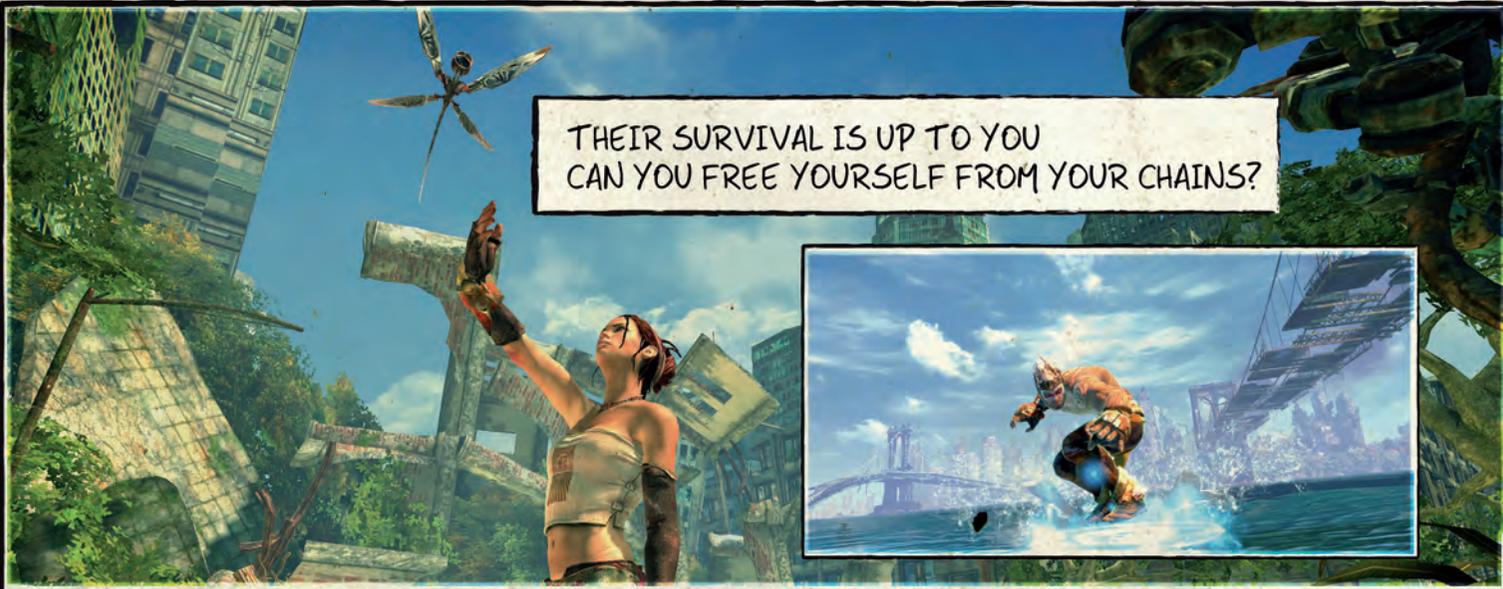




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Gamecca Volume 2 Issue 14 August 2010 +
Volume 2 Issue 15 September 2010 | rAge
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Borderlands Patch v1.31 [Retail]

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ATI Catalyst v10.8 Windows Vista, 7, XP - 32 &
64-bit NVIDIA GeForce ION v258.96 Windows
Vista, 7, XP - 32 & 64-bit



OCTOBER 2010

rAge 2010

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18
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Hail to the king baby!

I don't usually day dream – there's no real time for it. But the other day... umm, rather... forget the padded introduction and the daydreaming thing and rather just skip to here... 2011 is going to be known as the year of gaming. 2011 is going to shatter records and redefine the industry. Here's why. There's a very long list of games that are supposedly arriving early 2011.

Starting with the incredible *Duke Nukem Forever* announcement (see page 54), stopping for a visit with *Dead Space 2* and hopefully ending with the next chapter of *StarCraft II*. But that's not all – we've got *Crysis 2*, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Rage* (the game) and *Brink*. The next *Gears of War* is also lurking there, *Max Payne 3*, *SOCOM 4*, *Portal 2*, *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* and I could really go on all day. Microsoft's Kinect and Sony's Move will be in full swing (LOL, I made a funny) and everyone should be fully recovered from the economic slowdown in 2008. All I'm saying is ask for money for Christmas and instead of sitting on your crack in December get a part-time job, sell lemonade or mow the lawn. I can think of at least 20 must-have titles that are all releasing early 2011. Of course I can't say all that and then not tell you to make sure you get your copy of *NAG* each month. We're already lining up some cracker exclusives for the coming craziness. I can't talk about anything yet, but it's going to be really special.

SUPPORT THOSE THAT SUPPORT YOU

Do me a quick favour and close the magazine and have a look at the cover (top right corner). Did you see the FNB logo there? I'm going to use them as an example here. FNB approached us a while ago about a competition to send one of our readers to an international gaming convention (Germany in this case). It all went swimmingly well as you will read in this issue. The point I'm making here is that when your parents eventually drag you off to their bank to open an account for you, make sure it's FNB you're giving your money to. If not, dig those heels in and make sure you tell them that this is an important decision and you've chosen FNB as your preferred bank. I'll tell you why – they believe in you. They spent a lot of money with *NAG* to communicate with you, and more importantly gamers in general. This kind of proactive behaviour must be rewarded and you should apply this thinking whenever you spend your money. Besides what's in *NAG* each month, if you do come to *rAge* this year take a look around at the logos and brands at the show and remember them. These logos and brands are all there because they believe in you and want to talk to you. It's an important distinction and difference from all the other companies that just take and never give back. Just remember: if these companies believe in you then you should return the favour and show them that their marketing is working.



THE CHALLENGES WE FACE...

All the guys in the office love what they do and this is why we all work so hard to bring you this rag each month. Sometimes our resolve is tested. The other day we had a visitor in the office. A giant rain spider (that's him inside a DVD tube) decided to say hello to Jacqui. People in the office block over the road said they could hear the scream and our resident spider wrangler (Junior), said he thought people were coming through the door with AK-47s. The poor spider was clearly terrified so we carefully caught it and set it free outside. So, the next time you spot a spelling mistake in *NAG*, give us a break. ;)



WHAT IT TAKES TO WRITE FOR NAG...

Tarryn, our gaming goddess recorded an achievement on *Gears of War 2* recently, and this is what she said: "Here's the info about that *Gears of War 2* rank thing. It's basically for the Veteran Gear achievement, and requires reaching Level 100 in online ranked multiplayer. This in turns means accruing a total of 6,825,825 XP in matches. Apparently just over 1% of *Gears of War 2* players actually manage to get this. It took me 6 days, 9 hours, 43 minutes, and 59 seconds to reach Level 100, with 10,436 kills across all modes. I rule." So next time you're lying in bed wondering how you can get to write for *NAG*, this is a good place to start. ;)

Enjoy the issue and check out the November magazine for a full report back on *rAge* for those of you that missed it.

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[Editor]

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R.I.P. Soul Assassin – I hope you can get uncapped wherever you are, and that they never run out of coke and cigarettes..)





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Letter of the Moment

From: Constantin
Subject: Letter of the Moment
"HITHERE NAG. ALTHOUGH I've been an avid (oh yes, fancy word) reader of you magazine for some years, this is my first letter. I was browsing the Internet one uneventful day, where after I went downstairs to watch this documentary on the founding of Pixar studios. About half way through, a thought occurred to me. What kind of office working environment do the NAG offices have? I ask this as, in said documentary, it was said, and I quote (or at least try to), "It was the kind of place where you could make a whole in your office wall and no-one would mind." Also, in the video footage, you would see the employees speeding down the hallways in scooters and hopping around on those inflatable-ball-with-handle-things, or playing a round of office football.

So I ask again, what's happening at NAG? Is it hell, with fluorescent lighting? Is it a cube farm? Is it a dungeon, nerd or otherwise? What is your daily routine? Judging from what I've read, I've come to this 'piece of eclectic chicken scratch'... I can imagine Michael James, shouting out orders and swearing because he isn't happy with something

about the magazine and telling Lauren das Neves to get out the way. Chris Bistline is taking photos of everything in sight and trying to get some page design past Michael, with Chris Savides help, Miktar Dracon is constantly trying to get over his jet lag, Geoff Burrows and Dane Remendes are always getting the sh1t that flowed down the office hill, Paul Ndebele is always on the move, doing those 'errands' that he's sent on. Cheryl Basset and Jacqui Jacobs are always trying to make ends meet. Then you have Derrick Cramer, Rodain Joubert, Adam Liebman, Russell Bennett, Walt Pretorius, Miklós Szecsei and Tarryn van der Byl are all doing their jobs, at least most of the time, and Tarryn is harassing pigeons on the roof. Lastly, you have Neo Sibeko who has locked himself into a room with a Liquid Nitrogen pipeline going into it because he finally got that new piece of hardware. Lastly, if the lights go out, do you all run and get your high strength flashlights and Tasers because you know Tarryn is waiting in the darkness with a chainsaw?"

Your theories are interesting but mostly wrong. Miktar lives in the USA as our international guy and

finally got Internet after being there for years - LOL. Tarryn lives in Cape Town - she can't live in JHB because there are too many normal people here. So she won't be able to go anywhere without everyone pointing, screaming and taking pictures. Adam, Walt, Russell and Miklós are all freelancers so they don't actually work at the office. You can't make holes in the wall here because we're renting office space. It's not a cubical farm but we do have florescent lights (and giant spiders - see the Ed's Note). Neo is the hardware guru and has liquid nitrogen delivered to the office with worrying regularity. Dane and Geoff are category-B sh1t buffers but Walt is really the person we send all the games to

that nobody wants to play - this is because he has a lot of experience with rubbish games and knows how to handle them. I don't shout - I just speak in a loud clear voice (which is really 99% of leadership when you get down to basics). Paul is our out and about man but gets abused by our needy staff with lift requests and other non-work related rubbish. Chris and Chris do design the magazine but don't take photos of everything in sight - we call one Chris and the other junior (not because he's young, he was just hired last in the design department). Lauren, Jacqui and Cheryl do all the real work in the office and everyone is too scared to tell them to do anything. Finally, if the lights go out we all just go home. Ed.

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

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 Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



From: Nicola
Subject: The death of vampires
"HHEY NAG... YOU ROCK... I have two things to say, first is that NAG is my bible and Miktar is my god... Secondly I want to go into this whole 'vampire' thing and how Stephanie Meyer killed vampires (they're already dead but whatever!) I mean when I think vampire I think super scary blood sucking monster not gay pretty "I sparkle" and only drink animal blood. Not to mention Edward is like crazy stalker over Bella... He watches her when she sleeps - if that's not creepy I don't know what is. So she has successfully butchered the most awesome of all mythical creatures... And this is coming from a teenage girl."

Umm, I don't see what this has to do with zombies. Ed.

From: Shaun
Subject: Tiny Little Minor Error
"HELLO ALL YOU WONDERFUL people at NAG. The day the May issue of NAG came out I, as usual, ripped apart the packaging so that I could see what wonderful goodies it contained this time. I started with the preview of RDR where the first sentence started out by stating, "You play John Marsden." I took this to be correct and assumed nothing out of the ordinary. A bit of time passed, and I finally got my copy of the game. To my surprise, I noticed that the character you play is named "John Marston." Assured that NAG couldn't possibly have made a mistake, I rushed back to my June issue of NAG to double-check... and it said Marsden. Since I know the NAG is the most amazing magazine ever, I realised that it was Rockstar who made the mistake. That a major game developer could misspell the name of the main character in such a big

game... somebody should speak to them about that!"
Funny guy - thanks for your unyielding faith in our ability not to screw up. Well spotted - the truth is that it was my mistake. You see, occasionally, I make little mistakes in the magazine so the rest of the staff can feel more adequate - but in this case I really have no idea how it happened. I went to London to play the game and somewhere, somehow in my notes I must have written down Marsden. Then again I do have an Outlook contact with the surname Marsden so I might have corrected it in Word. Who knows? If only there was a prize for pointing out my mistakes. Ed.

From: Mealstrom
Subject: DIY with Dremel
"HHEY GUYS CAN YOU please do a keyboard for the next DIY, with LEDs so it can achieve an awesome glow from between the keys?"

Nice idea... Geoff does that section - let's hope he also reads the magazine. Ed.
Update - I told him about this and he said that we've already added lights to other things and that the principals remain the same. **1.** Stick lights where you'd like them to go. **2.** Connect them to a power source (not the wall). **3.** Turn them on. **4.** Enjoy. See issue April 2010. Ed.

From: Bretton
Subject: rAge! Our E3
"JUST WANTED TO THANK you for hosting such a prestigious event like rAge. It may not be as big as E3 but to the South African community it is where we get to see the latest games, hardware and just plain awesomeness of the gaming world so to

>> **Shorts [extracts of LOL from NAG reader letters]**

"He is from the arrogant assortment of teenagers that believes your magazine is on the shelves to serve only himself and his pimply cronies." - Guy

"Can I come work as a coffee boy at NAG?" - DarkAge

"Your magazine is awesome and your demos are wicked but that is not what I want to talk about." - Joshua

"Letters; simply put: please publicize letters that make sense." - Kevin

us it's pretty damn big! Keep rocking NAG! I can't wait for October."

Thanks for the kind words. If you compare relative size of market, rAge is actually a lot bigger (or at least achieves a lot more) than it should be, and this is thanks to all the different exhibitors coming to the party. So part of the thanks needs to go there. Truthfully, we're also looking forward to the show, but more with dread than anything else - it's a product we work on for 11 months and then have to just sit back and hope it all works out right in the end. It's actually quite terrifying. Ed.

From: Lee
Subject: Consideration is the key to success
"IJUST BOUGHT THE NEW NAG [E3 special] was my favourite because of the cover ;) I take the CD out and watch all the amazing E3 videos while my mouth melts and I am in complete awe. I then think to myself, which game should I purchase? There is a choice of over 100 games! [Did you hear me...over 100 games?] I knew NAG could help me but in what way? Then I had a brain wave. If NAG could give demos to PC users then why can't they give them to Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 users? Wait! Stop! I know what you are thinking "But NAG started off as a computer magazine for computer users" [nagging old granny voice] but not all recent NAG readers [NAG magazine has adapted to an all platform gaming circuit and NAG should develop with that adaptation] have good gaming computers that can install and run the demos but most readers have Xboxes and PS3s and some [most] games are previewed and reviewed on Xboxes and PS3s [you can probably see where I am headed with this]. Surely most NAG readers that..." [Let me stop you there. Ed]

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.



Simone Odendaal: "I present to you a StarCraft bar renamed to NAG... because every bit of it is addictive! Great magazine guys – keep it up!"



Jamie Edwards: "I created this within a couple of hours, just using Photoshop for the finished piece, and using 3D Studio Max to create the "Companion Box" NAG logo."



Theo Mosienyane: "What could be cooler than NAG underwater. The artwork took me 12 hours render time, created in Maya, Vue xStream and Photoshop. Hope you enjoy."

Congrats! You all win a prize, courtesy of Phoenix Software!



I agree with everything you say 100%. Except for the bit about favouring the PC – we're really a gaming magazine. :) It's a great idea and do know that we have tried to get Xbox 360 and PS3 demo discs for NAG in the past. We were going to offer special subscriptions and everything for the more serious console guys. But... the problem is exclusivity deals with overseas magazines (UK) who have signed contracts and other blah so that only they can produce/have/buy/get console demo discs. We tried to get the discs licensed separately but those greedy magazines overseas have an all or nothing policy. The second something changes you'll all be the first to know about it. Ed.

From: Conor

Subject: Memoirs of an insomniac

WAS SITTING WATCHING RUBBISH on TV in the early hours and possibly out of madness due to sleep deprivation, a crazy thought came to me. To explain, I need to say something, NAG, you are awesome and I trust and rely upon your wise judgement in all my game purchases. I was sitting there reminiscing my early gaming days and started thinking about a thought which could possibly be very scary and/or thought provoking. I wondered: do we really want to play a game that is perfect? A game that scores 100/100 and a game that changes your perspective on life? You could highly utterly disagree with me on my next point; I don't want to play the perfect videogame. I don't want the graphics to be so amazing and the storyline so purely genius that it's a work of art. My worry is that a game might be so good, you would never want to play another game again, it couldn't possibly compare. What if *Modern Warfare 3* kills the Xbox? Then again, it was very early and I could just be in shock."

I get what you're saying but I like to think about it like this. Any game that scores 96%+ changes and inspires the whole industry, and as a bonus makes everyone work a little harder. I don't really believe in the '100% score' because there's always going to be something wrong with any game. Also consider that games that scored high five years ago wouldn't rate like that today. It's difficult to create hard and fast 'standards' in an industry that changes and innovates every other month. Thankfully, this is the most exciting time to be around – we're all experiencing the birth and growth of a medium. Ed.

From: Lourens

Subject: Well Deserved Praise

HI EVERYBODY AT NAG. As is accustomed I first want to say thanks for the great work that you guys are doing. Keep it up. I have been reading NAG for about three years now and I enjoy it from cover to cover, there is a great amount of excitement, bubbling inside me close to the end of February every year. The April issue of NAG is my favourite issue, not just because my favourite magazine gets a new look, but also because the sweat, tears and drama that you, the NAG team put into every issue, is doubled and sprinkled with a little flair and lots of love. This makes for an awesome piece of entertainment and a lot of happy readers, I'm sure.

The best thing for me is how NAG gets their readers' input to add to the quality of the content. The competitions are great and the winners are rewarded well. I think that each member of the NAG team feels like they are sending a child to school for the first time every time the NAG leaves their hands to wherever it goes thereafter. You put a lot of effort into every issue of NAG and should be rewarded for that, as I am in no position to give any sort of reward other than a thank you, I will do just that. Thank you NAG team!!!!"

Thanks for the kind words but with NAG it's more like kicking a lazy teenager out of the house – not the way you're describing it. :) Ed. NAG

On the Forums

QUESTION: What do you prefer to do on a weekend? Game all day and night, fighting the approaching Monday, or game a little in-between weekend activities?

sualk: At the moment, I'm getting a bit of practice in StarCraft 2 on weekends. I'm such a noob. lol.

Wah: I generally game strictly on Saturdays. My whole Sunday is spent dreading the coming Monday.

Tigman 1: I do my homework.

spjt07: Well my weekends are spent at work so it's game during the week and after work on weekend nights when I get the chance.

OllieTheDog: I game long and hard for the weekend into the long hours but otherwise I read, animate and interact with the outside world.

CaViE: Up to the weekend, the dream is to spend all of it gaming. But then life hits us in the teeth, and all that's left are little mini-sessions of gaming, mostly late at night.

Wight: I try not to game on weekends, especially Sunday. I hold on to that last day like maple syrup, still clinging to the underside of the bottle.

Tankiuse: Well I am coaching myself for rAge. Staying up till the early hours, drinking PLAY and conversing with the cardboard cut-outs that represent the people that will be sitting next to me.

Sir PaniCore: My weekend basically plays out like so: Play games in the morning and afternoon, go out to the Pub/Night club, return home and play some more games in a drunken stupor... and that's just Saturday ;)

Changsta 187: Play MW2 all day on a Saturday and then have my last moments of Halo 3 on Sunday. Though I always get detention for not doing my homework. :p

brazed: Whatever catches my fancy. Usually I fit in a jaunt into Middle Earth, ala Lord of the Rings online, but weekends I just want to relax. I can do that by watching movies, sleeping all day, reading, whatever the hell I feel like really.

pArkEr: I usually just pop in a game when I'm in the mood for it, else I'm either studying, playing soccer or studying some more.

Obi Two Kenob: I study and work most of the week so weekends are my time to continue with whatever game I'm currently married to and catch up on gaming news.

Sw!zzCh33se: I just game my weekend away. Maybe a wee bit of homework in between.

Dark Prince: My routine is as follows: Wake up, game, game, game, game, game, game, game, eat, sleep, repeat. Being organized is really handy in my super hectic routine.

McDangerous: I'm busy with the girlfriend most of the time on weekends, but when she goes home or we get back from wherever, it's game time. I can't remember a weekend where I didn't stay up on Friday and Saturday night playing 'til about 2-3 o'clock.

BaldursGate Fan: I normally play games on the weekends. Sometimes I do an odd job here and there for extra money to upgrade my PC. Because I am still in school, I am not to play games in the week.

Azimuth: It's 01:12 on Sunday morning, and I'm writing a review because Michael gave me a Sunday afternoon deadline. Michael is a monster.

Bust that chop on our forums – go on, everyone is welcome: <http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>

I, Gamer



by Miklós Szecsei

Digital prostitution

A FEW DAYS AGO I was called a prostitute. While that in itself is not too remarkable (I've been called worse) it was the context that made the quip interesting. It happened over dinner with some people, and it was a priest who passed the comment. In fact, he called me a digital prostitute. He had just asked me if there was anything new I was up to, and I replied that I'd started writing reviews for *NAG Online*. After the briefest of pauses, and after I'd explained what *NAG Online* was, he tilted his head to one side and uttered this most apt of analogies for reviewing games.

"So you play the games and then write about the experience?" he asked, gobsmacked by the very idea of something so simplistic yet brilliant. "You're a prostitute then – a digital prostitute" he chuckled. "You get paid to do something pleasurable!" he

If I'm a digital prostitute then I guess that makes NAG some sort of glossy whore house, which would obviously make the editor our pimp.

exclaimed triumphantly before swigging the last mouthful of his red wine.

You know, I do get paid to do something pleasurable. I'm also quite certain that it's a dream job for many of you who are holding this magazine right now – you dirty sluts. Don't feel judged; I'm also a dirty slut because I'll quite happily keep selling my services to any game that comes along in need of a good –ahem– reviewing. Whenever a new client is introduced to me, I feel a jolt of anticipation at the thought of getting to know it before getting down to the business end of things. Of course, I say that now because it's still all new and exciting. Sooner or later I'm certain that one will come along (no pun intended) that'll be into something kinky that's way out of my comfort zone, like getting stuck into some Italian plumbing with two brothers in dungarees. When that happens I'll just have to lie back and go with it – I am being paid after all.

If I'm a digital prostitute then I guess that makes *NAG* some sort of glossy whore house, which would obviously make the editor our pimp. Somebody in the *NAG* offices please make sure Michael drinks his coffee out of a pimp chalice from now on.



The Future is Digital

Introversion credits Steam sale as the reason for its continued existence

VETERAN INDIE DEV INTROVERSION has had a rough time of late. The last six months hadn't been kind to the British developers of indie cult hits *Darwinia* and *Defcon*. Though they'd built themselves up from humble beginnings to having an office and staff, they knew within an hour of releasing *Darwinia+* to gamers everywhere that they hadn't done well enough and they'd need to take drastic steps if they hoped to stay afloat. Those drastic steps involved selling their office, firing most of the staff, selling off furniture and working from their bedrooms again. Even cutting Introversion back down to just three people working at home wasn't enough, because they still had operating costs to cover.

In a desperate bid for cash, *Defcon* had Steam achievements attached to its list of features, with the hope that Valve would give a Steam promotion of the game go ahead. It all went swimmingly and Introversion was basically saved by one of Steam's awesome sales. In a candid reveal by Introversion's Mark Morris as to how all of this went down, he states the following:

"Valve okayed the promotion and even though it didn't focus on *Defcon* we were happy that we had achieved our core objective. This was the game-changer.

When we started Introversion we'd had a string of successes and believed we were undefeatable, but it was a long time since we'd had a victory and we really needed one. Right on cue, Valve delivered. The promo exceeded all of our expectations and when combined with our low burn rate (no office or staff now) we had gone from being fearful about paying our mortgages to having a year's operating capital in the bank."

So there you have it. If you needed proof on the matter of Steam's importance to PC developers, this should kill any doubts. While it's obviously totally terrifying that Valve's digital distribution platform holds so much power over the fortunes of developers across an entire platform, we can't help but feel grateful to Valve for keeping a brilliant developer like Introversion alive in such an unusual manner. Introversion deserves to keep on making great games and Valve has provided them some relief. This isn't the first time Steam has helped Introversion out: the platform put Introversion's *Darwinia* on the map when the game was struggling to find an audience to appeal to.

The crux of the matter is – we're still getting *Subversion*, Introversion's incredibly intriguing next title, and we can't wait to see what comes of it.

>>

WHAT'S RESPAWN UP TO?

Respawn Entertainment is the studio created by former heads of Infinity Ward, Vince Zampella and Jason West, after their very public, very painful break up with Activision earlier this year. With the former *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* head honchos at Respawn's helm, much is expected of the fledgling studio. In a recent interview with Eurogamer, EA Partners' David DeMartini fills us in on Respawn's status. "I know everybody is going to say, 'Well what are they working on?' The thing everybody needs to remember is they were starting at absolute zero." DeMartini said when EA gave the pair a home, they didn't have any of the basic facilities a development studio requires. He also claims to have no idea what Respawn is working on. Guess we're going to have to wait a bit longer.



New official Xbox 360 controller revealed

Major Nelson (aka Larry Hyrb and head of all things Xbox LIVE) recently announced that a new controller for the Xbox 360 will be arriving soon. The controller maintains the standard Xbox 360 controller shape, but two changes have been made. Immediately noticeable are the A, B, X and Y buttons which are no longer colour-coded; they are now various shades of grey. In fact, the entire controller has a very monochrome and steel colour scheme.

The second addition will be a welcomed one for fans of fighting games: the D-pad has been altered to become combo-friendly for all your favourites. At first glance it won't seem like it, but with a simple twist to the D-pad, the entire piece pops up to make the directional arrows much more raised and (in theory) more responsive to specific inputs. The new controller will be available in the US from 9 November, but will only be sold through a new play-and-charge kit package that Microsoft is bringing to market. The same package will be available in Europe from around February 2011, which is hopefully more or less when we can expect to see it hit South Africa.

While the changes to the D-pad are definite improvements, we are a little interested to know why Microsoft decided to drop the colour-coding on the face buttons. Many gamers will have grown accustomed to the layout of the buttons based on the colours and not necessarily the letters associated with each. What's more, certain games are built to make use of the specific colours for various actions: *Table II* is one such example of this.

Xbox avatars getting a Kinect makeover

When Kinect releases this November, your Xbox 360's avatars will receive their very own virtual makeover. Rare (developers behind the 360's avatars) reckon that the motion-sensing, gesture capturing device we've come to know as Kinect has caused a bit of concern for users in the middle of gaming sessions where their real-life actions were being replicated by the digital avatars. Rare says this isn't a technical issue at all: instead, it's got to do with the perception of the players. The podgy, cartoonish little avatars have been throwing off people's hand-eye coordination because their proportions are very different to ours (we've got floppy elongated arms and legs and all that – don't argue, this is science hard at work here). The solution? Rare is going to force feed every gamer on the planet and book them in for surgery that'll cut a few inches here, add a few pounds there and shorten their arms and legs to bring our proportions in line with those of our avatars. Also – big-head mode is finally coming to the real world, courtesy of these surgeries that come free with your purchase of Kinect. Okay, that was all a blatant lie. Rare's solution is simply to give our avatars more realistic proportions. How very boring.

>>

WHEN WARREN SPECTOR SPEAKS, YOU LISTEN

The creator of *Deus Ex* has warned that videogames must be wary of becoming as niche and marginalised as he thinks comic books are. "If we don't break out of big buff guys with swords and guys in tights and space marines in armour, we're going to get marginalised in the way comics have been in the United States," he told attendees during his keynote address at GDC Europe. "I hope we can break free of the content of comic books."

In other Spector news, it turns out that he pitched a spiritual successor to *Deus Ex* to Disney before beginning work on *Epic Mickey*. Spector delivered a presentation for a "futuristic sci-fi game" – but he walked out with a different game to develop than the one he'd pitched. "We have a concept for *Mickey*, we want to show you our idea," Spector recalls the executives telling him during that meeting. "And they gave me this pitch." A pitch that turned out to be *Epic Mickey*. With Spector's studio Junction Point nearing the end of *Epic Mickey*'s development, might we see a return to that idea for a *Deus Ex* successor? "Disney now owns the IP to it," said Mr Spector. "So who knows?"

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The Indie Investigator

by Rodain Joubert



A hybrid industry

IF THERE'S ONE BIT of bunk that surrounds indie games (and their devs), it's the idea that indies are sitting where they are because it's a stepping stone towards doing something "better." The idea that making games with a smaller team, a smaller budget and a smaller audience is inherently less desirable than getting into a big-time company funded by a big-time publisher.

I'm not about to argue that the AAA realm isn't more glamorous. Far from it. Being responsible for upcoming, shiny blockbusters like *Gears of War 3* must be pretty cool after all. But the incredible strengths offered by this area of development are offset by some pretty noticeable weaknesses: the low-risk, high yield business models of the mainstream industry (combined with frequently sweatshop-esque work environments) leaves a lot of developers feeling unduly frustrated about their jobs, driving them to the less restrictive indie arena.

Development teams like Klei

Companies like this are typically responsible for innovative – and sometimes astounding – indie titles.

Entertainment (*Eets, Shank*), Positech Games (*Kudos, Gratuitous Space Battles*) and Runic Games (*Torchlight*) are all examples of people from hotshot mainstream companies packing up and "going rogue" – seeking the indie route above the more conventional job model. Companies like this are typically responsible for innovative – and sometimes astounding – indie titles, earning enough to keep their heads above the water while bringing their experience and creativity to an area in game development that some people would dismiss as filled with nothing but wannabe hipster artists scratching in the dirt.

And in cases like that of Klei Entertainment, they occasionally come around full circle to be picked up by outreach projects from companies like EA – creating what could be described as "hybrid games" which feature the intrigue and novelty of an indie title combined with the budget and profile of a fully published product.

This is a promising sign for the industry as a whole. It's becoming increasingly clear – particularly to game developers themselves – that there's something unique to be offered by both the publisher-driven and independent markets, and having more people willing to cross-pollinate the two brings a lot more to the table than each could offer alone.



Mass Effect 2 players are nuts

Crazy gameplay stats revealed by BioWare

BIOWARE HAS BEEN COLLECTING data from *Mass Effect 2* players in the name of research and science. They've revealed a portion of these stats and some of them are properly insane. There are also some interesting differences between PC and Xbox players.

Let's start off with the lighter stuff: the least-chosen class in the game was Engineer, while more people chose the Soldier class for Shepard than all the other classes combined. 80% of players were happy to roll as male Shepard and 80% of players made use of the face customisation system. The average completion time was 33 hours. 50% of those who started the game actually finished it and around half of players imported saves from the first game. 15% of conversations in the game were skipped by players.

Now for the mad and wonderfully weird stats: Xbox gamers did more of the crew loyalty missions, while PC players took

longer to complete the game overall. PC gamers seemed more interested in pursuing Miranda's loyalty mission, but Xbox players were more interested in Grunt. There are people who spent **66 hours on a single playthrough**. What's even crazier than that is that four Xbox players have completed the game 23 times. Two PC players went even further, completing *Mass Effect 2*'s epic storyline 28 times.

That's either dedication, madness or a severe lack of other stuff to play. BioWare's reason for tracking these stats is to get a feel for what people want in their *Mass Effect* titles, to determine how the third title should be approached.

"There was a great improvement in quality from *Mass Effect 1* to *Mass Effect 2*, and that was without collecting this telemetry data," said Casey Hudson, executive producer over at BioWare. "If this endeavor proves useful, we can expect great things from the final chapter in the trilogy."

>> **BIOWARE <3 PS3**

EA's press conference at GamesCom gave PS3 owners a reason to cheer when they announced that the second game in the phenomenal *Mass Effect* series would be making its way to the console next January. According to the press release, the PS3 edition of *Mass Effect 2* will include the full game, together with hours of bonus content. We're guessing this means the PS3 version will get the plethora of DLC that BioWare has already released for the game on other platforms. If you're prone to hoping for more, however, perhaps this means new, exclusive gameplay for this new version?

Jim Gordon's in my Call of Duty

Gary Oldman, star of films like *The Fifth Element*, *True Romance* and *The Dark Knight*, is no stranger to the *Call of Duty* series. He voiced Sgt. Reznov in *World at War*, giving an excellent performance. He's reprising his role as Viktor Reznov for *Black Ops*, and joining him will be Ed Harris (*Enemy at the Gates*, *A Beautiful Mind*). Harris will be voicing CIA operative Jason Hudson, one of *Black Ops*' lead protagonists.

Oldman isn't the only member of the crew from Christopher Nolan's epic pair of *Batman* films to add his name to *Black Ops*' credits, either. Scribe David S. Goyer, whose work includes the screenplays for films like *Blade*, *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, is consulting on the game's script and will aid in the development of the story.





My dungeon's keeper

If you've been praying to the gaming gods for a new game bearing *Dungeon Keeper's* beloved title scrawled in unobtainium lettering on its front to be delivered to your house atop the back of a majestic unicorn with the mouth of Peter Molyneux as its horn, then you're in luck. Sort of. *Dungeons* is set to be the spiritual successor to Bullfrog's legendary imp-slapping simulation. It's being developed in Germany by Realmforge, a studio owned by Kalypso Media.

So it's not Bullfrog, which is a bit worrying, but we expect that *Dungeons* will follow a similar path to the one the *UFO* series took in its attempt to act as successor to the *X-COM* franchise. In it, you'll play an evil Dungeon Lord, and from what we've read in press releases, it'll be quite similar to the game it's attempting to mimic. You still bait heroes into succumbing to your devious traps as they wander the dungeons searching for treasure and glory. Teaser trailers show wimpy little goblin things that we're assuming will act as imps (we're not sure if there'll be slapping).

10 different hero classes can be lured into your dungeon, where 15 different types of monsters loyal to you await them. There'll be 20 campaign missions to test your mettle as a Dungeon Lord, in addition to a custom game mode.

While we're a bit apprehensive about this one, we can't help but hope that it'll capture the spirit of *Dungeon Keeper* while improving on the formula in some way when it lands early next year.



Back again, El Presidente?

It seems that *Tropico 3* found its way into the homes of enough gamers to warrant a speedy sequel from publisher Kalypso Media and developer Haemimont Games, because the sequel to that excellent management title has been announced. The fourth title in the *Tropico* series is due Q2 2011, offering features that will expand on its predecessor.

New buildings, political features, Facebook/Twitter integration and some new online leaderboards stuff will find their way into the game. The developers also promise improved disaster and trade systems.

>> MIGHTY TURN-BASED MAGIC

Fans of the *Heroes of Might & Magic* series of turn-based strategy titles will be thrilled to hear news of a new game in the series. Aside from a slight name change (this one is called *Might & Magic: Heroes VI*) and a new developer working on the game, it looks set to bring more of the same excellent turn-based strategy for which the series is loved. Due out for the PC in 2011 and in development at Black Hole Entertainment (who previously created *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos*), the game is set 400 years after the events of *Heroes of Might & Magic V*. The people at Black Hole say that you can expect a mix of familiarity and innovation from the gameplay when it hits store shelves.

>> ROCKSTAR BREAKS OUT BANHAMMER

If you've got hacked saves stored to give you boosts in *Red Dead Redemption's* multiplayer and Rockstar hasn't already put an end to your shenanigans, you may want to delete those saves. Like, right now. Rockstar announced a while back that they would be "swiftly and indefinitely banishing from the world of *Red Dead Redemption* multiplayer all Gamertags and PSN IDs we've detected with hacked game saves." If you cheated temporarily for some momentary multiplayer boosts, Rockstar will have mercy on you. Habitual cheaters, however, will not be dealt with lightly. You've been warned.



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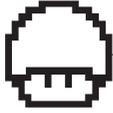
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Miktar's Meanderings

by Miktar Dracon



Look, Over There! An Obvious Distraction!

WHEN YOUR INTEREST IN gaming reaches beyond just looking to them for mindless entertainment to take you away from the mundane trivialities of life (not that there's anything wrong with that), it becomes difficult to pick a single topic to discuss. After all, while I may personally find the nuances of a finely-tuned Japanese fighting game combat system the stuff of long talks over dinner, I doubt the five people that read this column would, as a whole, appreciate such matters. So instead, here's a different tact, pulled out of my ass at the last minute because let's face it: nobody believes us writers spend more than five minutes on these columns anyway, right?

While I may personally find the nuances of a finely-tuned Japanese fighting game combat system the stuff of long talks over dinner, I doubt the five people that read this column would, as a whole, appreciate such matters.

CLASSIC VIDEO GAME "SCREW YOU" <http://goo.gl/TutP>

This cute entry on TVtropes.org caught my eye: it's a tongue-in-cheek examination of what its authors like to refer to as "Fun Units" in classic videogames, elements in gameplay that exist to screw you over while simultaneously providing you with the challenge you deserve, because you're not some weaksaucy n00b-age quick save/checkpoint bunny, right? My favorite: "Teleporting Keycard Squad", the trope for when a game, upon noticing you've picked up something important, like a key, will spawn enemies around you even if there weren't any in the area to begin with.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE <http://goo.gl/Bk6l>

Dave Grossman, designer at Telltale Games, makers of fine point-and-click (and soon, all-star Poker) games, shares a story on Gamasutra about how he tested *Sam & Max* on his mother-in-law, and the lessons learned from it. If there is but one article I would get aspiring game developers to read this month, it's this one. Something that stands out for me personally in his anecdote: too often game designers, having been taught to look at games a certain way, bring personal bias into their designs, entirely in ignorance. As a result, the game may not be approachable by the exact audience it's aimed at, because of that personal bias locking out certain types of problem-solving mentalities – fascinating stuff.



Realtime Worlds in jeopardy

Crackdown, APB dev on life support

REALTIME WORLDS, THE CREATOR

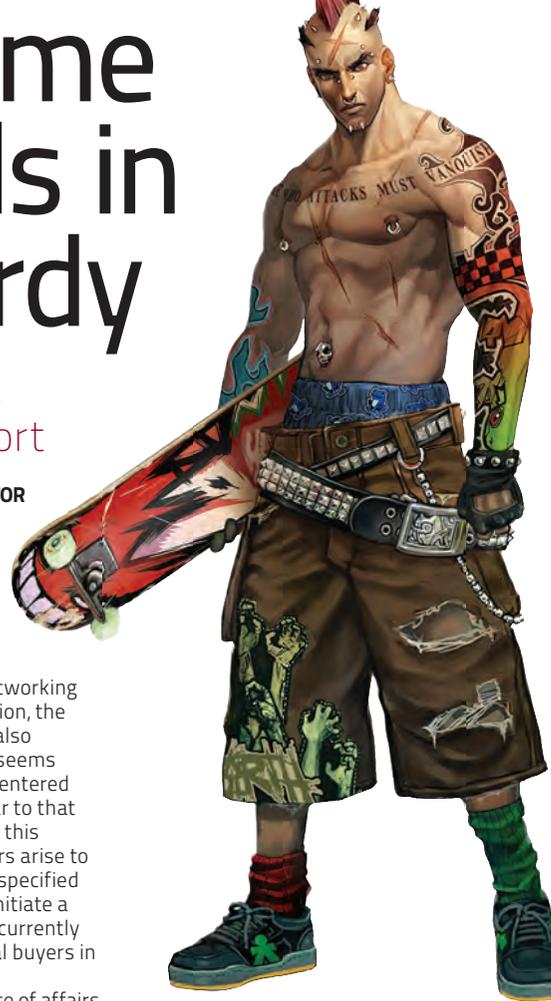
Of the original *Crackdown* and more recently the *GTA*-style MMO *APB*, isn't having a fun time at the moment. The UK-based studio recently laid off 60 employees who were working on social-networking game *Project MyWorld*. In addition, the team that worked on *APB* was also downsized post launch. Now it seems that the troubled company has entered administration, a process similar to that of Chapter 11 bankruptcy. What this means is that if no new investors arise to back the company before an unspecified deadline, Realtime Worlds will initiate a full liquidation. The company is currently desperately looking for potential buyers in the UK or the US.

While this is a terribly sad state of affairs, this is by no means the absolute end of the company (oops, never mind – see the update below), yet many are treating it as such. At the time of writing this it's been revealed that of the original 252 employees that used to populate the studio's Dundee, Scotland and Boulder, Colorado offices every day, only 67 remain – that's a 75-percent reduction in staff. Those left at the studio must be losing their minds over what the future holds for Realtime Worlds. We wish all the current employees over there the best of luck, and we hope that those who lost their jobs find a new home soon.

Studio manager Colin Macdonald had this to say about the future of *APB* in the face of these tumultuous times: "We've got the whole team working on making *APB* as good as it can be. It's a shame things haven't turned out the way we

had envisaged them, but then the beauty of online gaming is that we can address problems and keep on improving experiences. We're completely behind *APB*, it's got huge potential, and we'll continue to make new content for it."

Update: On the day the magazine was due to go to print, news broke that *APB*'s servers will officially go silent soon, with Realtime Worlds unable to find a buyer. We left this news piece as is and simply added this update so that you could appreciate the story in its entirety. Reports indicate that *Project MyWorld* has been purchased by an anonymous American company. *APB* was not so lucky – and so arrives the end of the sad tale of Realtime Worlds. We hope everyone involved in this crappy situation finds sure footing soon.



WE NEED A HERO

No More Heroes developer Grasshopper Manufacture (headed by the awesomely eccentric Suda 51) and Digital Reality (who made *Imperium Galactica* and *Imperium Galactica II: Alliances* – a pair of games that hybridize RTS and 4X gameplay) are teaming up to create a number of games together. The first is a side-scrolling shooter called *Sine Mora*, which will feature time manipulation and is coming to XBLA and PSN. The developers promise it'll be unlike anything else in its genre.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2 INCOMING

GSC has seen fit to announce the sequel to open-world FPS *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (hereafter known as *Stalker*, because seriously – typing that acronym/title is physically painful, due out in 2012. The developers have stated that the game will be built on completely new technology. There are rumours floating around that the game is set to use Crytek's CryEngine. "After the official sales of the series exceeded 4 million copies worldwide, we had no doubts left to start creating a new big game in the *Stalker* universe," says GSC's Sergiy Grygorovych. "This will be the next chapter of the mega-popular game players expect from us." There you have it. *Stalker 2* is coming. Act accordingly.



Zynga's "Platinum Program"

Alright, so that headline might be slightly sensationalised, but just bear with us. Zynga, the company behind wildly successful social networking games *Farmville* and *Mafia Wars* has been running a hush-hush purchasing program whereby players can drop huge amounts of real money for virtual currency and items to be used to boost their game. Online media group Gawker reproduced an email they had acquired from Zynga, which details all instructions on how to go about paying the company for virtual goods. Zynga already has a Facebook store that allows players to purchase currency and items for their games, but the maximum that can be purchased through the store is limited to \$200. From a business standpoint that obviously prevents potentially lucrative clients from dropping exorbitant amounts of money at once. The Platinum Program is there to fill that niche, but it is decidedly cloak-and-dagger in execution. There is zero advertising for the service and people are granted access to it through friend referrals. Once referred to the program, players are able to make requests for wire transfer purchases. Each request is given a wire transfer ID number (or WID as Zynga calls them) that expires in seven days and must be replicated in the final transfer of money into Zynga's account. Failure to include the WID, or if an expired or pre-used WID is provided by the customer, then the money is forfeited and Zynga keeps the lot. To make the whole transaction even more shady, there is a minimum purchase amount of \$500 that has to be transferred electronically. No credit cards are accepted so as to minimise Zynga's payments to banks.

Naturally, only the exceedingly addicted/stupid/wealthy will opt for a service like this. Conversely, it has been suggested that Zynga has begun the program to help foreign players make purchases that would otherwise prove difficult for them through the Facebook store. If that's the case then why is there a minimum purchase amount of \$500? Whatever the case may be, the company has gone out of its way to make sure their Platinum Program is kept decidedly low-key.

Medal of Honour barred from sale in US Army bases

The upcoming *Medal of Honor* has just been dropped from GameStop stores found on US Army bases throughout North America. The reason is because of the inclusion of Taliban forces as a playable faction in the multiplayer. The Army and Air Force Exchange Services Commander, Major General Bruce Casella, recently ordered that the title not be made available through on-base GameStop stores "out of respect for those who serve". This comes in the wake of UK Secretary of State for Defence, Liam Fox, publicly calling for the ban of *Medal of Honor* for the same reasons; a call that did little more than drum up bad press for the British MP.

GameStop, however, was very obliging and has since pulled all pre-orders and advertising for the game from their on-base stores. Any members of the US Army will have to make use of a public GameStop (or the plethora of other stores in the US) in order to secure a copy of *Medal of Honor*. In related news: did you have any idea that they actually had game shops on US Army bases?

>>

BRINGING THE HOLODECK TO GEEKS EVERYWHERE

Project Tuatara was revealed at this year's QuakeCon in August; the piece of gaming technology allows players to become just that much more immersed in an FPS. By standing in a large igloo-like tent, the techs from Microvision played an FPS with a plastic rifle instead of a standard mouse and keyboard or controller. The technology behind it is quite clever: built into the gun is a projector that beams the standard first-person view of the game world onto the wall of the igloo. As the real-world plastic rifle is moved, so too is the view in the game world. Movement controls for walking characters around in-game is handled by an analogue stick on the base of the rifle where your supporting hand would be; obviously pulling the trigger on the plastic gun makes the in-game gun fire as well.

The gaming peripheral is being made to handle any game that would ordinarily be played with a mouse and keyboard. The only drawback we can see is that not everybody has a giant inflatable igloo lying around.

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The Evolution of...



Duke Nukem



1991 – Duke Nukem



1996 – Duke Nukem 3D



1999 – Duke Nukem Forever (Not!)



2002 – Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project



2010 – Duke Nukem Forever (for real!)



Ignorance in the name of publicity

Hey Vito, grab your bat. Some kneecaps need bustin'...

BY THE TIME YOU read this, you'll likely already have your arms wrapped in a loving embrace around a shiny copy of *Mafia II*. You'll have played it, loved it and formed your own opinion about it. At the time of writing this, however, nobody at UNICO National, a group that represents Italian Americans and claims to be the largest Italian American service organisation in the US, has played *Mafia II*, yet they're more than willing to spout their irrational hatred and misled opinions about the game in an attempt to jump on the games-equal-bad bandwagon or something.

UNICO president Andre' DiMino called the game a "pile of racist nonsense" and demanded that publisher 2K Games halt the release of *Mafia II* and "cleanse it of all references to Italians and Italian Americans." Aside from the fact that that would mean cutting pretty much all of the game's content and replacing it with photos of fluffy bunnies, there's also the small issue that a game that casts players as a Mafioso rising through the ranks of an American offshoot of the Sicilian mafia (hence the game's title) is obviously

going to be filled with Italians/Italian Americans, because come on – **it's the mafia.**

Displaying outrage at Italians being in a game about the mafia makes about as much sense as walking into a supermarket and demanding to see the manager because you feel that that block of Swiss cheese is a pile of racist nonsense. We don't hear them bitching about the fact that you can easily get hold of *The Godfather* trilogy, or read old news reports on famed mafia members of the past, or check Wikipedia, or watch the news, or use your basic general knowledge of the world's workings to associate Italian Americans with the Cosa Nostra.

Take-Two head honcho Strauss Zelnick responded to this madness by issuing a statement clarifying that they will only release a socially responsible product and that the game "tells a compelling story about organized crime in America – a subject that for decades has been featured in movies, television shows and novels." He also stated that he will fully stand behind any product in the publisher's catalogue, including *Mafia II*.

>> NOT WITHOUT MY CAMERON

With director Sam Raimi (who directed the *Spider-Man* trilogy) at the helm of the upcoming *World of Warcraft* movie, what about Blizzard's other influential IP, *StarCraft*? Well, that's not going to happen. Unless *Avatar* director James Cameron steps up to the plate, that is.

Speaking with MTV Multiplayer, Blizzard's VP of game design Rob Pardo stated that they're looking for "the right partners" to pursue Hollywood plans beyond the *WoW* film. Someone like James Cameron, however, could convince them otherwise.

"...It's really important to us that we find creative people that are really talented but also really excited about our properties," Pardo says. "I think if Jim Cameron came to us tomorrow and said, 'You want to make a *StarCraft* movie?' we'd probably sign that."

>> NEVER SAY NEVER

Last month we reported on a rumour that Atari was preparing to announce a new *Neverwinter Nights* game. Turns out it was true. They've announced online RPG *Neverwinter*, in development over at Cryptic Studios. The PC title will allow five players (or one player with AI companions) to select from five classes from the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe and journey through a story written by best-selling author R.A. Salvatore (if you know the name, you know it's a big deal).

Obsession, thy name is WoW

Just in case you haven't already spent enough cash running fetch quests and pressing 1, then 2, then 1 again a million times over on your keyboard, Blizzard's got more things for you to spend many moneys on. *World of Warcraft*'s third paid expansion, *Cataclysm*, will be getting a snazzy special edition that'll fit in nicely with all those *WoW* figurines, comics, novels and trading cards that adorn your shelf/desk/mom's basement. Priced at \$79.99 (something like R650), the special edition comes with some neat stuff. A 176-page art book (which should be great, as Blizzard's art books always are), behind-the-scenes DVD (with over an hour of interviews, commentaries and that type of stuff), soundtrack (featuring 10 tracks from *Cataclysm*, including exclusive bonus tracks) and mouse pad (which depicts the dragon Deathwing doing dragon-type stuff) all come in a fancy box. Speaking of Deathwing, you also get an exclusive in-game pet: Lil' Deathwing, so you can have a pint-sized version of the menacing foe with you at all times. In addition, you'll get some *World of Warcraft Trading Card Game* cards: a full 60-card starter deck from the *Wrathgate* series, two extended-art cards and two collector's edition exclusive hero cards. You done reading this? Good – now get back to grinding with that Undead Warlock. It's not going to level up itself.



Gaming Charts

Look & Listen

Look & Listen recommends

PS3

FIFA 11
Medal of Honor
Gran Turismo 5
The Sims 3
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

XBOX 360

Halo: Reach
Fable III
Madden NFL 10
Dead Rising 2
Dragon Age: Origins Ultimate Edition

PS2

FIFA 11
Despicable Me
Toy Story 3
Bakugan Battle Brawlers Platinum
Disney Sing It: Party Hits

PC

StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty
The Sims 3: Ambitions
Medal of Honor
Call of Duty: Black Ops
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

PSP

God of War: Ghost of Sparta
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker
Bakugan Battle Brawlers 2
UFC Undisputed 2010
Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest

WII

Super Mario Galaxy 2
Donkey Kong Country Returns
Wii Party
Just Dance 2
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

DS

Pokémon Mystery Dungeon
The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks
Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem!
Hello Kitty: Birthday Adventures
Tetris



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Sales by game platform

PS3

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Army of Two: The 40th Day
Burnout Paradise: Ultimate Box
Need for Speed: ProStreet
Madden NFL 09

XBOX 360

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Halo 3: ODST
Forza Motorsport 3
FIFA 10
Red Dead Redemption

PS2

FIFA 09
Need for Speed: Most Wanted
Rugby 2008
The Sims 2: Castaway
Fight Night Round 3

PC

StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty
The Sims 3: Ambitions
The Sims 3
Hunting Unlimited 2009
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

PSP

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Need for Speed: Carbon
Burnout Dominator
Ben 10: Protector of Earth
Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier

WII

Wii Sports
2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa
Super Mario Galaxy 2
New Super Mario Bros. Wii
Wii Fit + Balance Board

DS

New Super Mario Bros.
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story
Mario Kart DS
Toy Story 3
Shrek Forever After



CHRIS TAYLOR BELIEVES IN THE PC. DO YOU?

The founder of Gas Powered Games and creator of games like *Total Annihilation*, *Dungeon Siege* and *Supreme Commander* believes that thanks to the enormous success of Valve's Steam platform the PC version of upcoming *Dungeon Siege III* will compete with the console versions. He believes that with "every major player in the world buying a PC gaming company" there's a very bright future for the PC. Here's a quote from an interview that Eurogamer conducted with the industry legend:

"It's a matter of time before you're playing a game of the quality of a triple-A game that we know and love, like a *Supreme Commander 2* or a *StarCraft II*, in a browser experience. There's no reason that won't happen within five to eight years. That's one of the reasons PC gaming breaks out in that space. No installation. No grief. No reading the box and wondering if you have a 7000 or 8000 series video card and DirectX what? It just plays. It works. Wait till that happens full on."

Taylor seems to wholeheartedly think that the PC is where all the opportunity is.

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PREFACE CHALLENGE IS THE GAME

"Challenge is the game" highlights the philosophy to bring out gamers' addiction in gaming excitement and the ambition of reaching to the extreme. Tt eSPORTS, a gaming obsession division from Thermaltake, is uniting gamers from all over the world in a unique & fascinating eSPORTS culture, inherited the spirits of Thermaltake. Tt eSPORTS is an energetic, powerful, bold and intelligent challenger who never says "no" to the extreme competition. Tt eSPORTS not only provide gamers the ultimate gaming gears but also fulfills the passion to achieve the ultimate success.

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Ratchet & Clank goes cooperative

Insomniac Games may no longer be developing games exclusively for Sony, but that doesn't mean they won't still show Sony some love. *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*, a four-player cooperative take on the beloved series, has been announced for the PS3. Due out in 2011, the game will feature online and offline drop-in/drop-out multiplayer for up to four players. Characters that you'll be able to play as include the titular duo of Ratchet and Clank, with Captain Qwark and other characters also available for your choosing. It'll be cool to see how well this traditionally single-player franchise (aside from *Ratchet: Deadlocked*, a game released late in the PS2's life cycle which focussed on competitive multiplayer) translates to the cooperative arena.

The Beavatar

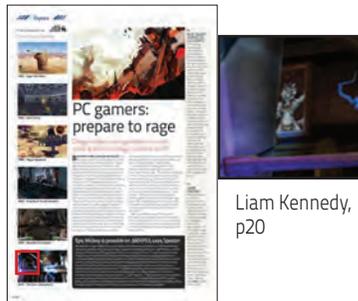


I'm in ur jungle, hiding from ur doods

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

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

August Winner



Liam Kennedy, p20

WIN!

One person who finds the Beavatar will win a Shadow Wireless PS3 controller, sponsored by Bowline and Dream Gear.



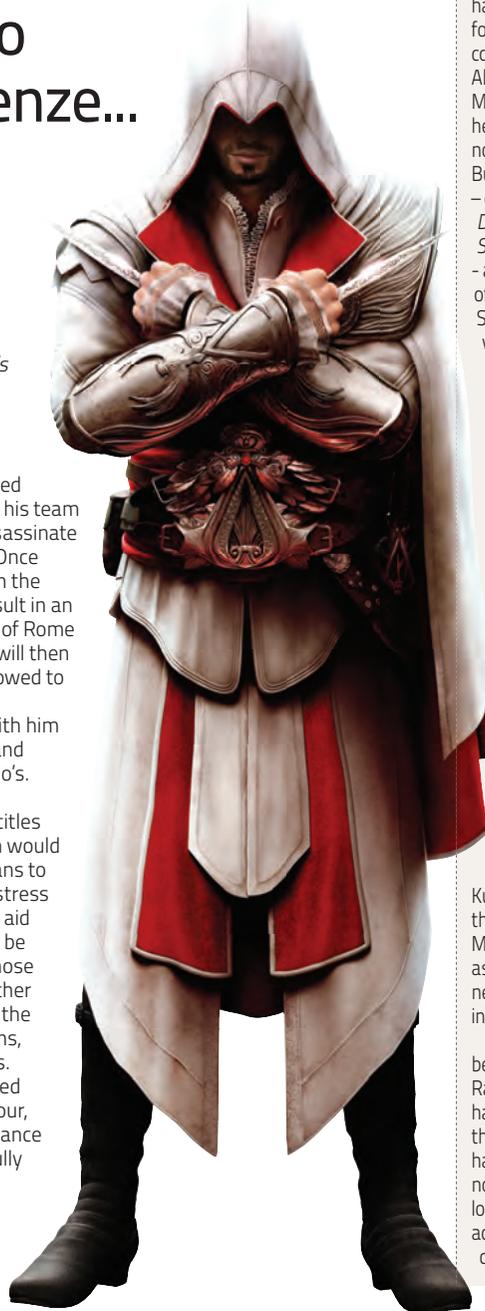
My name is Ezio Auditore da Firenze...

More Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood details spring from a haystack

AT GAMESCOM THIS YEAR, Ubisoft showcased some gameplay videos that provided a detailed look at the side missions you can expect to find in the latest *Assassin's Creed* title. For a start, the playable area of Rome is the largest map ever created in an *Assassin's Creed* game. Within the map are a number of districts and each district is controlled by Borgia troops that are dispatched from a control tower. Ezio will be able to rally his team of assassins to take out the Borgia units, assassinate the district overseer and destroy the tower. Once this is completed the district is liberated from the oppressive Borgia presence. This will also result in an aesthetic effect over time as liberated areas of Rome will prosper and change in appearance; Ezio will then gain access to new shops that have been allowed to reopen.

Of course, Ezio has a team of assassins with him this time, and this team can be customised and sent on different missions separate from Ezio's. Recruiting new assassins will form mini side missions as well. Previous *Assassin's Creed* titles allowed you to help citizens in distress which would then give way to vigilante groups or courtesans to blend in with. This time, certain citizens in distress can be recruited by Ezio as new assassins to aid him in his missions. Recruited assassins can be sent on contract missions all over Europe. Those missions involve goals like starting riots in other cities or stealing contracts in order to cripple the enemy. As assassins complete these missions, they receive experience points and skill levels. Of course, those experience points can be used to upgrade Ezio's assassins with better armour, weapons and more. Choosing the correct balance of skilled assassins is essential for successfully completing these contract missions.

Also shown during GamesCom was Ezio picking up Borgia Flag 1 of 101 – bad news for OCD gamers indeed. *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* arrives on 19 November.



>> WANT A CONTROLLER? TOO BAD, YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE.

Developer Rare (a subsidiary of Microsoft and creator of games like *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Viva Piñata*) has revealed that the studio pushed to have at least some form of button-filled controller for Kinect. Along with Peter Molyneux (former head of legendary, now defunct Bullfrog Productions – developers of *Dungeon Keeper*, *Syndicate* and more – and current head of Microsoft Game Studios), Rare was very vocal about their desire for a Kinect controller.

"We were absolutely adamant that we needed a button, something with haptic feedback, that would initiate an action," said Rare's George Andreas. "It took a long time – we threw some prototypes together and then we saw you didn't need one. We were very vocal to Kudo [Tsunoda] at the time, and Peter Molyneux was as well, that you needed something in your hand."

Seems that after being shot down, Rare and Molyneux have grown to love the idea (or at least have been left with no choice but to love it) of a person acting as the sole controller.



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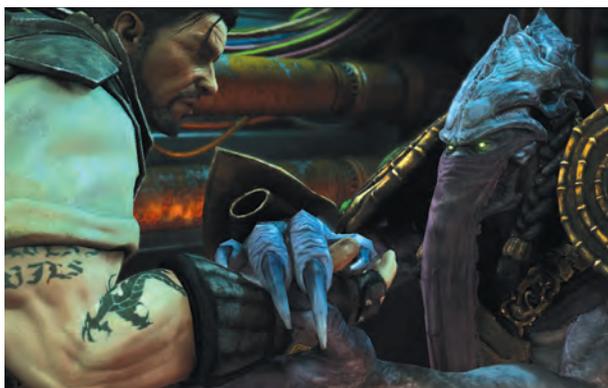
If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Pro Evolution Soccer 2011* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'October Caption'.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR: "@nobleactualFTW consols r 4 noobz and your gay lol – about 2 hours ago via interstellar needlecass"



LAST MONTH'S WINNERS: "1... 2... 3... 4! I declare a thumb war!"
– Renier Wessels and Gavin Mudrovcic

Back to the Future is the future for Telltale

Telltale Games, the team behind episodic-content adventure games like *Sam & Max* and *Tales of Monkey Island*, is bringing a new franchise to their ever-growing stable of intellectual properties. To mark the 25th anniversary (25 years – wow that makes me feel old) of the *Back to the Future* films, Telltale is releasing a new series of games based on the characters from that awesome eighties trilogy. For fans of the movies, the news gets sweeter because the likenesses of both Marty McFly (played by Michael J. Fox) and Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) have been secured to make the experience that much more authentic. The cherry on the cake, however, is news that Christopher Lloyd will be voicing his own character and that Bob Gale (the film's screenwriter) is onboard as a consultant for the whole project. Hell, the game is even going to have the DeLorean in it! No news on what type of game this will be, but judging by Telltale's previous titles an educated guess would be on it being an adventure game.

btg GAMES™ Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

OCTOBER: WEEK 1

FIFA 11	Multi
MySims SkyHeroes	360, PS3, Wii, DS
Ghost Recon: Predator	PSP
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2	PC

OCTOBER: WEEK 2

NBA 2K11	Multi
NBA Elite 11	360, PS3
Enslaved: Odyssey to the West	360, PS3
NBA Jam	Wii
Wii Party	Wii
Dead Rising 2	PC, 360, PS3

OCTOBER: WEEK 3

Medal of Honor	PC, 360, PS3
Just Dance 2	Wii
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2	360, PS3
SingStar Guitar	PS3
World Rally Championship 2010	PC, 360, PS3
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011	360, PS3

OCTOBER: WEEK 4

Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock	360, PS3, Wii
Saw II: Flesh & Blood	360, PS3
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	PC, 360, PS3, Wii, DS
Shaun White Skateboarding	360, PS3, Wii
EA Sports MMA	360, PS3

OCTOBER: WEEK 5

The Sims 3	360, PS3, Wii, DS
CSI: Fatal Conspiracy/Unsolved	Multi
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011	Multi
Ben 10 Ultimate Alien: Cosmic Destruction	360, PS3, PS2, DS, PSP
Fallout: New Vegas	PC, 360, PS3
Fable III	360
Splatterhouse	360, PS3
Monopoly Streets	360, PS3, Wii, DS
Castlevania: Lord of Shadows	360, PS3
The Sims 3: Late Night	PC
FIFA Manager 2011	PC
Disney Sing It: Family Hits	PS3, Wii
Rock Band 3	360, PS3
Bakugan Battle Brawlers 2	Multi
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011	PC, Wii, PS2, PSP
Front Mission Evolved	PC, 360, PS3
Football Manager 2011	PC, PSP



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Red Faction: Armageddon

pg
45

> We smash our way through the next game in this destruction-themed science-fiction action adventure series.

game

Guild Wars 2

pg
40

> NCSoft's next subscription-free MMORPG shows us how it aims to get personal.



pg
36

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

> Will the third title in this series be able to hang onto the die-hard fans? We sit down with the developers to see for ourselves.



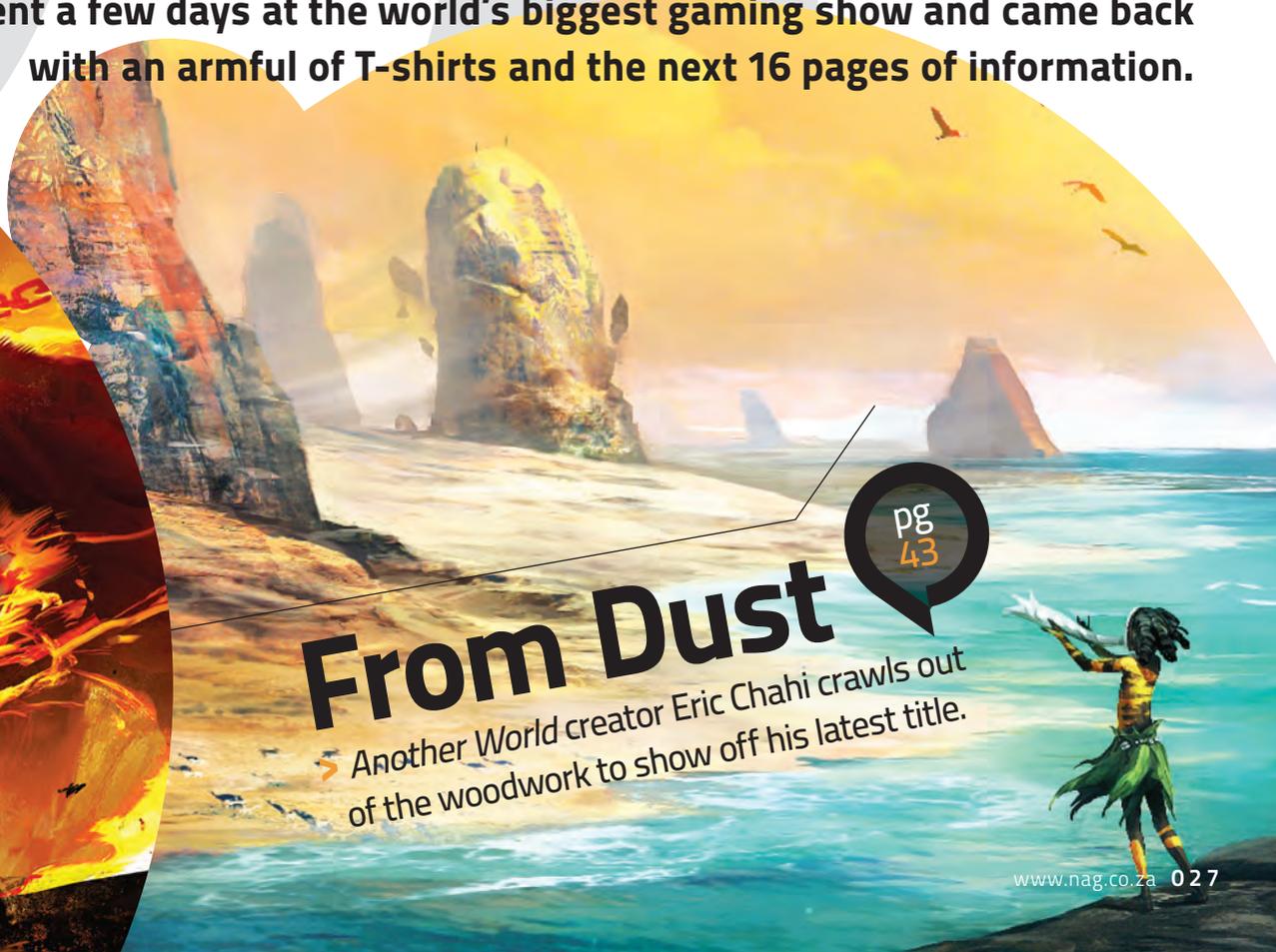
pg
34

Crysis 2

> Take Cover! We explore the inner workings of this highly-anticipated sequel's multiplayer component.

esc.com

We spent a few days at the world's biggest gaming show and came back with an armful of T-shirts and the next 16 pages of information.



pg
43

From Dust

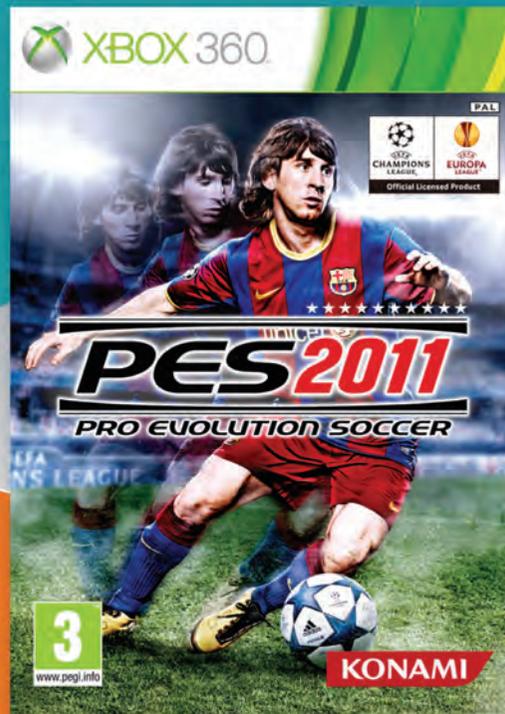
> Another *World* creator Eric Chahi crawls out of the woodwork to show off his latest title.

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How can we help you?

Welcome to gamescom 2010



 #GC10 NAG Online is going to GamesCom 2010! We'll be tweeting our journey and experiences, so be sure to follow along on Twitter or nag.co.za

IT BEGAN ON TUESDAY the 24th of August, 2010. I landed at Düsseldorf International Airport and attempted to make my way to Cologne. Little did I know, the locals prefer to call it Köln, or Koeln, or whatever they feel like, really, but despite this little hiccup I managed to find my way to the correct platform, hop on a train, find a taxi driver that understood what the hell I was saying and get to my hotel.

Wednesday was the first official day of gamescom, but it was closed to the public. On this day, press and trade visitors were free to roam the massive halls (six of them, each the size of The Coca-Cola Dome that houses rAge every year) and take in the almost overwhelming booths without the need to fend off thousands of sweaty gamers. The airport-sized Koelnmesse convention centre was calm, organised and in every way as German as one would expect.

By Thursday, it changed. The once-peaceful hallways and booths were filled with armies of salivating gamers. They ran along the wide walkways, eager to use their time to see as many titles as possible. Burly security guards now stood beside the polite ladies with the green ties who check that you are where you're allowed to be. PlayStation Move, Call of Duty: Black Ops, Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit, XBLA hands-on machines, you name it; every station was occupied, and it was rapidly becoming difficult to move around. Thankfully, most of my time was spent in the business halls – a safe haven from the masses where men in suits sit and discuss important things while sipping on expensive coffee. There's no cheap bockwurst or pints of Kölsch here. Press are invited to relax in private publisher lounges while they gather their thoughts and wait for their next appointment. Not that time is something that's readily available at gamescom; most of the good stuff is gone by the weekend and it's important to see as much as possible. Lunch breaks are entirely optional.

Friday managed to pass by without much change, but it was on Saturday that the event truly reached its zenith. This year's show was host to over 250,000 visitors and almost 19,000 trade visitors. That's a quarter of the popular of Cologne. If Wednesday made walking between booths feel like you're in the middle of a riot, Saturday made it feel like a war. But a nice war, one where cosplay is encouraged and everyone stands in awe instead of stabbing each other with bayonets. For every goth kid there's a Cloud Strife and a Link. Hardware manufacturers have rock concert-like presentations to make up for their lack of exciting gameplay videos. Bold teenagers take photographs of women with plastic assault rifles while men with microphones throw stickers and badges to the screaming crowds below them. A proud few walk around with freshly-unpacked gaming T-shirts.

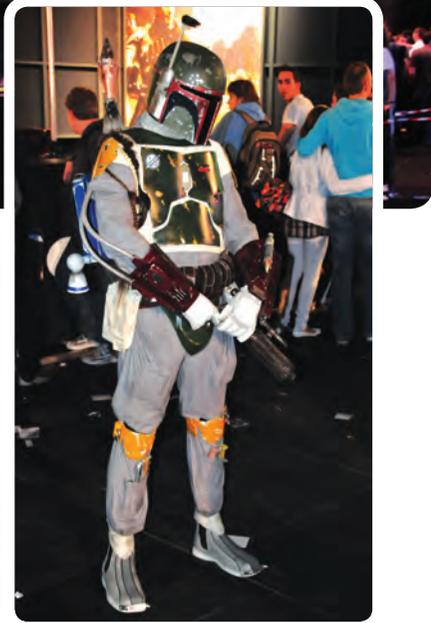
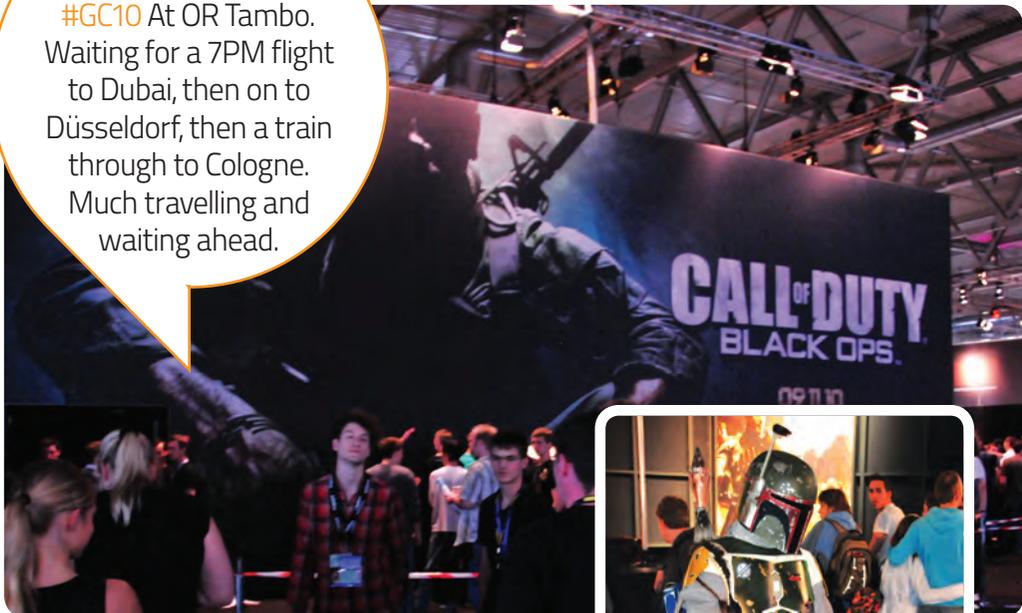
Gamescom was an amazing experience. I can say with complete certainty that any gamer with the means to get there some time in their life should do so without hesitation. Luckily for those who don't have the means, we've taken care of you. The next dozen or so pages are filled with accounts of my experiences from the show; I hope you enjoy reading them and that you're as excited about the next year of gaming as I am.

Geoff Burrows





 #GC10 At OR Tambo. Waiting for a 7PM flight to Dubai, then on to Düsseldorf, then a train through to Cologne. Much travelling and waiting ahead.





So long, and thanks for all the games

DURING THE COURSE OF June 2010, I received the unbelievable news that I had won a trip to Cologne, Germany, to attend gamescom 2010, all expenses paid, for myself and a partner compliments of NAG and First National Bank.

The first thing that strikes one as a visiting South African to Germany is how well run and super efficient everything is. This was my second trip to Germany, the last more than 10 years ago, and things have only improved for the better. Trains, trams are on time, no litter on the streets, everyone you meet is polite, cordial and eager to be helpful.

On to gamescom: we attended on the first public day, the 19th of August there were crowds so huge that we could hardly move. My main interests are the offerings from Blizzard entertainment: *Diablo III* and *StarCraft II*. I was keen to play the current version of *Diablo III*, but alas the queue for the game play was three and a half hours long. As die-hard a fan as I am, there was just too much to see and three and a half hours was too long a wait. I spent some time at the *Diablo III* stand taking photographs and watching the gameplay and was approached by a security official who insisted that I delete the photographs I took of the screens. They seem to want to keep as much secret as possible.

The other very popular stand was *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. This stand was so busy and totally enclosed so one couldn't even get inside without waiting for several hours.

My girlfriend, who isn't a gamer, really loved Microsoft's Kinect. In one of the demo booths, the screen showed a lady demonstrating some pretty nifty Thai Chi moves which one attempts to replicate; you're then scored based on your accuracy. My GF did very well, getting 95% and 100% for some of the moves. This is the future of interactive gaming where one can literally learn Thai Chi with an interactive game.

We spent the day visiting every stand and everything was a sensory overload. What was really impressive was how seriously the gamers take their gaming and how very well this type of event is supported.

We had an amazing time and would once again like to thank NAG and First National Bank for the amazing prize. Thank you!

Regan Waverley & Regina Molloy



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Need for Speed Hot Pursuit

EA'S BIG, NOISY and incredibly bright **A**stand, visitors were given a chance to sit down and have a bash at the latest *Need for Speed* title that attempts to re-invent the wheel. *Hot Pursuit* is in development by Criterion Games, and that's important because, a) We've seen that EA's past decisions to give other developers a go at the series has proved successful, and b) Criterion is the team behind the *Burnout* series. The result is a title that's quite definitely *Need for Speed* (we assume EA wouldn't have it any other way), but with an obvious dose of arcade-like combat and vehicular mayhem.

In *Hot Pursuit*, players choose to take on the roles of the cops or racers, with full career modes for both. Instead of simply attempting to outpace one-another, players

now have access to a suite of power-ups to give them the edge. Power-ups include the ability to deploy spike strips, call in air support, set up road blocks, activate turbo mode, drop an electronics-disabling EMP or jam your opponents' radar.

A feature that is rapidly gaining popularity, especially among racing games, is social networking tools. Autolog is *Hot Pursuit's* approach to this, in which players can compete against each other to dominate in various events, or simply post their latest achievements to their newsfeed to let everyone know how awesome they are. Additionally, players can share their latest vehicles, upload racing videos or find a recommended race depending on your latest activities.



#GC10 Hello Dubai airport at 5AM. Three hour layover ahead, then it's off to Germany.

Homefront

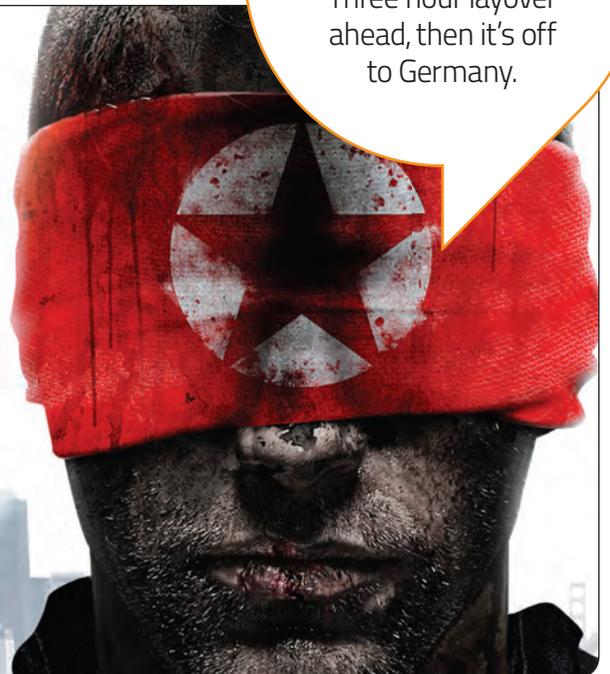
AMONG THE UPCOMING HIGH-PROFILE shooters, *Homefront* hasn't received all that much attention. It's rather a pity, considering how good this title looks, and its interesting approach to the age-old question "what would happen if the USA was invaded?"

Our brief demonstration of *Homefront* began with an introduction to the setting: In the year 2027, the USA has been invaded by the Greater Korea Republic under the leadership of Kim Jong-il's successor, his son – who led a force comprised of a united Korea, a conquered Japan and other nations annexed during a 12-year campaign.

The game opened as our player character awakes from unconsciousness inside a house. When he's led outside, it turns out that he is inside the occupied state of California, within a camouflaged suburban property that has been forced to turn to self-sufficiency. There, a small rebel cell has been

growing in size and they're about to launch an attack on a large value store that's been taken over by the Koreans. As a member of the rebels, our recently-conscious player is asked to grab a gun and join in the attack.

During the mission, we witnessed pretty standard action-FPS fare: providing sniper coverage while our friends operated on the ground, shooting down helicopters, and operating a remote-controlled tank called a Goliath to rain missiles down upon the enemy. The catch here is the setting: while most games of this genre tend to focus on taking the fight to the enemy in a sandy country somewhere, *Homefront* portrays a sense of desperation and urgency to get the invaders out of the back yard. Sure, it's not entirely unique (especially for those who have played *Modern Warfare 2*), but it's a good sign that wartime FPSes aren't ready to go stale just yet.



Guitar Hero Warriors of Rock



THINK IT'S SAFE TO say that the *Guitar Hero* series has been struggling to innovate recently. *Rock Band 3* has taken the leap to the six string controller (although it's not mandatory), and other competitors are on their way to join in the fray, but *Guitar Hero* has decided to stick to its strum bar and instead focus on improving the core gameplay elements and fluffing up the story. For *Warriors of Rock*, the developers have made a firm decision to go back to *Guitar Hero's* rock and metal roots, and testament to that, the game's 90+ songs will not feature any mainstream pop tracks. They've also redesigned the (now customisable) guitar to adopt the iconic "metal axe" concept – so much so that this thing looks like it could do some real damage.

Storylines are features not commonly associated with the rhythm genre, but Neversoft is certain that it's the way forward. The story goes like this: some time ago, The Demigod of Rock was beaten in combat by The Beast, and his all-powerful axe was banished to a cave. So, the Demigod calls on the Warriors of Rock, comprised of Lars Umlaut, Johnny Napalm, Judy Nails and other returning *Guitar Hero* characters (as well as a few new ones), to defeat the source of evil, retrieve his guitar and save the day. While that all means approximately nothing in terms of gameplay, there is a new feature that will spice things up a bit: during the encore song of each stage (which is played with a particular character per stage), your character will transform into a powerful being with unique powers used during star power sections, such as earning bonus points or having higher combos. It's a nice shake-up of the old star power concept, and combined with a more definitive, deliberate art style, the game feels more solid than previous offerings.

A few other new features make an appearance, such as sorting options for the ever-growing track list, a DLC recommendation system, and narration by the legendary Gene Simmons, but we're not certain that these are enough for the series. Either way, it'll be a great addition to anyone's collection if they're not yet tired of this series, especially if the track list appeals to you.



Darkspore

SPORE MIGHT NOT HAVE been the most awesome game in the world that it pretended to be in the months leading up to its launch, but it had some pretty cool ideas and one hell of a creature editor. *Darkspore*, which is being developed by a separate development house within Maxis, takes that creature editor from *Spore* and throws it into a top-down action-RPG that plays like a combination of *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* and *Pokémon*.

In *Darkspore*, players will have to build up their army of creatures to take on the evil Darkspore that have infested the Universe. To do this, you'll need to visit a number of planets to accomplish various goals, grab armfuls of loot and gain experience points. There are five DNA types: Necro, Cyber, Bio, Plasma and Quantum, each with their own special abilities, and three character classes: Sentinel (tank), Ravager (rogue), and Tempest (mage). During your missions, you'll gather loot in the form of weapons, armour and equipment, which can then be equipped on your heroes back at base using the creature editor. Heroes are organised into squads of three, and you're able to change between them at the press of a button; the key is not only to have a balanced force that can deal with the particular threats of the planet you visit, but to balance your heroes with those of your team-mates, as the game is designed to be played as a four-player co-op experience.

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Each level will feature a degree of verticality, thanks to the jumping abilities provided by the Nano Suits. Don't think that this means it'll be a sniper's paradise, however; one particularly sneaky module will blur a sniper's vision whenever they're scoped in on you.

 #GC10 We have communication! In Cologne. Attended an EA press event earlier: DA2, FIFA11, Dead Space 2, Crysis 2, Bulletstorm and more were shown.



 #GC10 Crysis 2 multiplayer aims to own MW2: prestige mode, hardcore mode, perks, custom loadouts. Plus Brink-ish movement and nano suit abilities.

Crysis 2

GENRE > First-person shooter
 PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THE ORIGINAL **CRYSIS' MULTIPLAYER** mode was hardly worth writing home about. With only two game modes at release, even the standalone expansion's *Crysis Wars* mode couldn't save the title from obscurity among the champions of the multiplayer FPS genre. With *Crysis 2*, things are set to change. Crytek UK, formally known as Free Radical Design (the team behind *TimeSplitters* and *Haze*) is a studio of over 70 developers, and is dedicated to the production of the multiplayer mode. They'll work with Crytek Frankfurt, sharing assets and ideas, but for the most part, you're getting what is considered a sizable studio that's dedicated to bringing you opportunities to headshot your mates on a Friday evening.

Within the cramped confines of an EA demo booth at gamescom, we sat down to join in a 6v6 (the maximum number of players) battle against the QA team back at Nottingham. Right away it was obvious that this studio is competing with *Call of Duty*. Testament to this, the gent I chatted to kept on referring to Nano Suit modules as "perks." In truth, they perform the same function

of giving players builds to customise, and there are twenty to choose from (each with three tiers, one more than *MW2's* pro perks), among three categories. What you can gather from this, of course, is that every player in the game wears a Nano Suit, and with that stylish piece of futuristic fetish-wear comes special abilities like cloaking, enhanced armour, super-speed and the ability to leap tall buildings. All of those features transfer into the multiplayer game, with toggles on and off for the cloaking and armour, a sprint function (quicker than typical), and the ability to mantle up onto high ledges. These four functions help to create a much faster and tougher multiplayer game that gives players the freedom to choose their style of play and find their own ways around the highly vertical levels. In a sense, it's not entirely unlike *Unreal Tournament 3's* arcade-like approach, albeit smaller, and with *Call of Duty* features thrown on top.

Players will be able to gain experience points and advance through 80 character levels (ten times over, just like prestige mode). Doing so will unlock new weapons (of which there are 20) and the suit modules. As is popular these days, there will also be plenty of achievements, 140 in particular, to tackle, and 250 various dog tags for accomplishing

specific goals in a match, similar to the system used in *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*. In addition to the five pre-set classes, there will also be five customisable class slots. There you can specify your load out with three suit modules, two weapons, and one explosive. As one might expect there is also support for a hardcore mode, called pro mode here, but the developers are still toying with the idea of having it unlocked from the start, or requiring that players prestige at least once before it's available.

While we only had a chance to see two maps: a rooftop garden area in the heart of NYC, and the interior of two buildings (one ultra-modern, the other vintage) that had collapsed together following an attack of some sort, it's clear that Crytek UK knows what they want and how to achieve those goals. Will *Crysis 2* be able to compete head-to-head with whichever *Call of Duty* the kids are playing when it releases? Quite possibly. Almost certainly on the console, where 6v6 is acceptable, but they'll need to avoid past mistakes made by *Infinity Ward* if they want to stay on top in the PC market. **NAG**



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 #GC10 And that's it for day 3 of #GC10. Finished off with a very impressive Deus Ex 3 demo. Just a few hours tomorrow, then I'm out of here.



Deus Ex: Human Revolution

GENRE > First-person RPG
 PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE FIRST *DEUS EX* was a big deal. It took the world by storm, received generally impressive scores and set the benchmark for science-fiction first-person role-playing games. Not a massive market, granted, but the game managed to secure a place in history, and since then very few titles have measured up to it, including its sequel. In what many would call a bold move, *Human Revolution* is the first title in the series not led by the original creators Warren Spector and Harvey Smith.

Our presentation began with the player character, a cyborg security agent known as Adam Jensen, being tasked to retrieve an implant from a corpse in a Detroit police station morgue. Lead game designer Jean-Francois Dugas took us through three distinct methods to get in, grab the loot and get out.

The first method was the most direct: walk in and shoot up the place. As soon as we had walked into a restricted area, the police guards opened fire and we were forced to take cover using a third-person snap-to-cover system. After blind-firing a few rounds to clear the way, we dived to cover on the other side of the cubicles we were hiding behind. With the room clear, Dugas gave us a brief glimpse of the inventory screen, where he upgraded his pistol to accept explosive rounds, which were soon put to use to eliminate enemies in a single shot. As the guards swarmed on our last-known position, we were able to hide behind a wall to move closer into range, and spring a few melee take-downs. To help us keep track of enemy positions, we used an X-ray vision mode called Smart Vision, which was provided by an augmentation Jensen already had installed. Breaking into the morgue itself



With sufficient strength you can even carry around cover objects for both stealth and combat purposes.

 #GC10 My thought for the day: "Beer is cheaper than soft drinks here." Game of the day is tough, I'm going for Deus Ex. Red Faction is a close 2nd.

required that we blow open the door with a mine template: a blank mine and remote detonator that can be combined with any grenade to provide the desired effect. Once inside, we grabbed the implant and shot our way to the exit.

Next, we attempted to use social engineering to get in. The desk guard turned out to be an old colleague of Jensen, but required quite a bit of convincing before he let us inside the restricted area. With the aid of multiple augmentations, we had a number of dialogue options that eased the process. The dialogue tree played out in the typical fashion, where we selected an option from a choice of keywords (in this particular case, we could crush, absolve or plead). Chit-chat done, we were then allowed to pass freely through the station. As we did so, we were able to overhear conversations between officers, which provided insight into other areas of interests, including other quests.

The third option was to use stealth to break in. We found a number of alternate entrances into the building, some that

required the use of augmentations to lift heavy objects or leap over barriers, and others that simply relied on exploration. Using the hacking mini-game, we broke through the basement entrance and moved through the building, avoiding security cameras and guard patrols. This is where the cloaking augmentation came in handy, but we were warned that without an accompanying noise suppression augmentation, we'd have to move slowly to avoid attracting attention. Dugas performed a few non-lethal, silent take-downs, and then dragged the bodies out of sight. After looting one particular body, we found a PDA that contained the door code to get into the morgue itself.

From our brief time with the game, it's difficult to say whether or not *Human Revolution* will live up to its predecessors, but it certainly looks like it's on the right track. Player choice, a deep RPG system and plenty of non-combat activities are an excellent start to this highly-anticipated title. **NAG**



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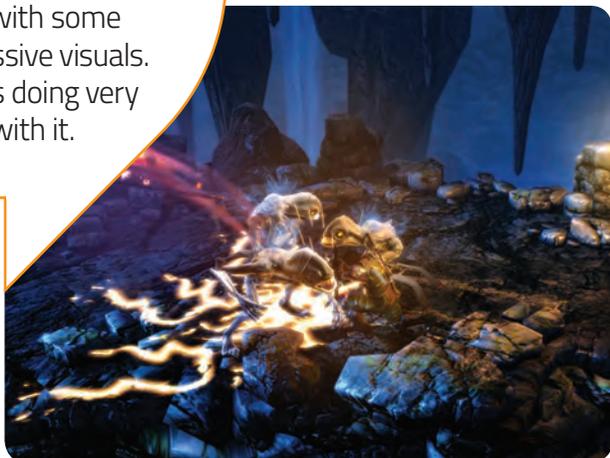


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#GC10 Dungeon Siege 3 is looking sweet. Slick, complex combat system with some very impressive visuals. Obsidian is doing very well with it.



DS3 is built on Obsidian's proprietary Onyx engine with support for ragdoll physics, massive gaming environments and incredible lighting technology.



Dungeon Siege 3

GENRE > Action RPG

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

IN THE RPG WORLD, it's a well-known fact that Obsidian Entertainment is the go-to studio if you need a sequel. *Knights of the Old Republic II* and *Neverwinter Nights 2* established this studio as developers of quality sequels, and with *Dungeon Siege 3* and *Fallout New Vegas* on their way and looking great, we're just-about ready to forgive them for the monstrosity that was *Alpha Protocol*.

Working with *Dungeon Siege* creator Chris Taylor and Gas Powered Games, Obsidian hopes that the lore and story elements from the first two titles are carried over into this third game. We were introduced to this story through a player character that the developers named Lucas – a warrior and descendant of The 10th Legion, which has fallen from its mighty post of protector of the land. As a result, the world is in disarray, and Lucas takes it upon himself to restore The 10th Legion to its former glory, restore order to the land and kill loads of monsters along the way.

We were dropped into a gamescom-exclusive quest in which Lucas was charged to uncover some evil mysteries and, using his sword rather a lot more than his tongue, to rid the world of said evil. As a Guardian class, Lucas can change stances and weapons based on his situation: switch between a two-handed sword for concentrated damage-dealing, or a classic sword-and-shield combination for a balance between offence and defence. Each of the face buttons on the gamepad is assigned to special skills based on the stance, which can be triggered once you've gained sufficient focus, a resource that is gained by performing various attacks. The abilities can also be empowered by using one-shot power orbs that you'll gather during your adventures. Empowered abilities gain new properties; for example, the Guardian's

blade-dash, which is a linear area-of-affect charge attack, can be empowered to have him charge at multiple opponents in succession. This resource management element helps to detract from the basic "hack and hack and hack" gameplay usually associated with early-level play.

Bashing living skeletons in the face until they come crashing down is fun, but Obsidian has been hard at work to ensure that the story and questing elements are still plentiful. There will be branching quests, side-quests and non-linear progression through the storyline, as well as a traditional town-based hub-and-spoke system to connect everything together. You'll also be able to chat to NPCs using tree-based dialogue.

Perhaps the most impressive part of the demonstration was the drop-in/drop-out couch co-op system. Later in the quest, Lucas came across a female Archon (a magic-powered damage dealer similar to the Amazon from *Diablo III*) who then followed us around as a computer-controlled sidekick. However, at the press of a button, a buddy can drop in and take control over the other party member, complete with their own stats and inventory. This also introduced a co-op revival system that aims to keep the down-time to a minimum in this style of play.

Throughout the presentation, we were shown a visually-appealing game world filled with pretty effects and massive playing environments. *Dungeon Siege 3* is still a while from its release, and Obsidian has many more announcements on story elements, character classes and abilities lined up for the year or so leading up to this title's release. From what we saw at GC, it's off to a great start, and should keep all of the *Siege* fans happy; perhaps Square Enix's decision to shunt development out of Gas Powered Games will prove to be a good one, especially considering the disappointingly average performance that *Space Siege* delivered. **NAG**

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When you're not out saving the world, there will be a few activities to perform in the towns, such as shooting contests and other minigames.



It's oddly quiet this early on at #GC10. First stop, NCSoft's business booth to get some time with Guild Wars 2.



Guild Wars 2

GENRE > MMORPG
PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

IN A GENRE DOMINATED by *World of Warcraft*, *Guild Wars* was a breath of fresh air for many who sought a new approach to MMORPGs – one that didn't require grinding and taking out a second mortgage to pay for groceries because you've had to quit your real-life job to raid three times a day. Perhaps that's an exaggeration, but regardless, *Guild Wars* was a blast. Its sequel has been something of an exciting prospect, then, for those who adored the original and others who didn't have the heart to quit their daily fix of *Whatever Online*. A new game means fresh prospects, fixes from years of player feedback and a whole new storyline to get stuck into, so let's take a look at what we can expect.

As is becoming a trend in MMORPGs, *Guild Wars 2* wants to make every player feel like a unique little snowflake among the millions of others online. To accomplish this, each character will have a personal story that is not only based on their profession (you can only choose a single class this time), but on their character's actions throughout the game world. During character creation, you're asked a number of questions to set your character apart from everyone else: Where were you raised? What is your biggest regret in life? Which god do you worship? What this does is create a tailored storyline for you to follow, and will affect many cut scenes, NPCs and quests. It will also affect your instanced home district, which functions as your own little slice of your home town (which is based on the race you choose to play as). Characters, quests and whole buildings will change in your home district as you progress through your personal story – sometimes prospering and other times suffering based on your actions, and you can even invite other players into your home to show off a bit or allow them access to your very own merchants.

When you're not busying yourself with quaint personal affairs, you'll most likely want to do your bit to save the world of Tyria from the five almighty dragons bent on its destruction. While running around performing day-to-day quests (quests that take place in the large, persistent world, not dungeons and other instances that will also be found in the game), you'll either partake in static quests, usually reserved for your personal stuff, or dynamic quests, which form the bulk of the entertainment. Dynamic quests, as the name implies, are not definite, guaranteed happenings, like the eternally-frustrated farmer who so desperately wants you to kill ten boars and return their innards to him, but will change and move around based on player interactions and other world events common in the first *Guild Wars*. Events are similar, but larger than regular dynamic quests, and often form chains based on their outcome.

During our presentation, we were charged to fight off a few nasty centaurs that like to cause trouble for the local garrison. When we completed the task, our character was rewarded based on their level of participation, and then another event was sparked that required us to deal with the centaur shaman, who proceeded to summon a massive earth elemental that we had to destroy.

The goal of these quests is to keep players active and to keep the world interesting and free of boring grind or repeat quests that do little to enhance a game. With the dynamic events, you'll find yourself truly involved in the daily social and warfare occurrences in Tyria, and the introduction of a personalised rationale for your involvement in the world's events means more replayability and a deeper connection to your characters and the world they inhabit. **NAG**



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NetherRealm is doing their best to ensure that this is the most gory *Mortal Kombat* to date, but is already in discussions with German, Australian and other difficult ratings boards to get the game on shelf with as little cut content as possible.



#GC10 Game of the day: *Mortal Kombat*. Thought for the day: "My feet hurt."

Mortal Kombat

GENRE > Fighting
 PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

AMONG THE CLASSIC '90S titles like *Street Fighter* and *Virtua Fighter* emerged a brave new game: *Mortal Kombat*. It wasn't a complex combat system or realistic martial arts moves that got hordes of teenagers hooked on this game, however; it was its buckets of blood and gore, and digitally-captured images of real people beating each other to death. *Mortal Kombat* continued to bounce from success to success, but then took a tumble around *MK4*. While subsequent *Mortal Kombat* games have been decent, they haven't managed to recapture the heart and soul of the series that made it so popular to begin with. Now, *Mortal Kombat* is preparing to return to its roots in many ways, while modernising itself simultaneously to play catch-up with the likes of *Street Fighter IV*.

The most notable change to the game is its return to a 2D fighting plane. That means no more strafing, and some pretty interesting ambient visuals that don't interfere with the fighting, such as witnessing two combatants battling against each other on a distant bridge in The Pit, or fighting against an opponent in front of Shao Khan in The Arena – both are distinctly *Mortal Kombat* settings.

Some new tricks await players, such as the super meter which powers up as you fight. The meter has three bars; utilising a single bar in conjunction with a power move, like Sub Zero's ice blast, will increase its damage, area of affect, speed, or other statistics. Two

bars can be expended to perform a combo breaker to get you out of those tight spots, and the use of three bars will allow you to perform a character-unique X-Ray Move: a powerful mini fatality that inflicts 30% damage on your opponent and gives you a fantastic cinematic of you breaking the bones of your unlucky victim. Each character's X-Ray Move is unique to them (along with all of their other special moves and animations, even those who traditionally shared animations, like Cyrax and Sektor), and the use of these powerful attacks won't always been a good idea: certain X-Rays will target air units, others will be best used as counter attacks or parries, and others still might juggle your opponent.

Another new, and possible risky (but entirely optional), feature is tag-team combat. This plays out as typical tag-team combat tends to do: you only win once both opponents are defeated, and you can bring in your reserve partner at any time by pressing the corresponding button. There are a couple of interesting tricks you can perform with this; bring in your partner to perform a single power move, then return to the sideline (such as casting a projectile attack your primary fighter might not be able to perform to keep an air juggle in motion), called tag swap assist; or attack tag, which brings your partner in with an attack to lead the swap. Both aggressive forms of swapping with deplete a single bar in your super meter.

The developers, who are essentially the



same studio that's been developing *MK* all this time, just under a different name and (something they're very grateful for) a new publisher, have told us that the new, simply-named *Mortal Kombat* (*MK9* if you're counting) is going to appeal to fans of the original trilogy. They pretty-much guarantee that you'll see a return of everything you loved about those first three iconic titles, but couldn't confirm *Animalities*, *Friendships* and those other hippy things. Regardless, this looks like the title to truly bring the series back to the charming, gore-drenched game that it used to be, while confidently stepping into the current generation of fighting games with a dripping, pulsing heart in its hand. **NAG**



#GC10 From Dust (formally Project Dust) is looking fantastic. Elements of B&W, Populous and, oddly enough, Lemmings.



From Dust

GENRE > God simulation

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

ASIDE FROM A FEW re-releases of *Another World* and a smattering of conference appearances, there's been little heard from Eric Chahi until recently, when he announced a partnership with Ubisoft under the name *Project Dust*. Gamescom was the perfect time to confirm loads of details, and also present the game with a final title: *From Dust*.

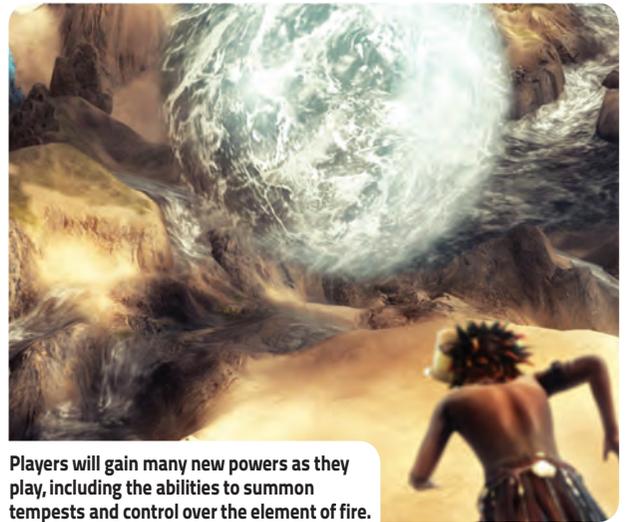
Chahi – a small, eager-faced and probably easily frightened Frenchman – presented his work-in-progress to a small group, and introduced us to the world of Dust. The controls are simple: navigate around the current island using your analogue sticks, pick up matter with the left trigger, and put it back down with the right trigger. You can gather water, sand, rock, lava or anything that forms part of the planet, then move it around and plop it down where you think it's more suited. Every substance in Dust is affected by physics. This means that heaps of sand will settle realistically when dropped; water will slosh about as it runs down a causeway; lava will roll slowly down a hill until it eventually cools and hardens; and currents will move about in the expected fashion, eroding sand and eventually rock as they do so.

Chahi describes this type of gameplay as the same simple pleasure that playing in the sand brings a child. While it certainly looks fun, there's more to *From Dust* than digging for underground springs. As a god, it's your duty to protect the tribal inhabitants of the land, and ultimately help them to

discover Paradise. You'll do this by helping them to survive each island, expand their settlements and, when their population is large enough, move to the next island.

In the example that was demonstrated, a small village on a peninsula warned us that a tsunami was incoming, and charged us to find the power of water. Finding the power was easy enough; a totemic stone stood some distance from the village; we'd need to mark it out for the villagers, who would send one brave warrior across the lands to do a little dance in front of the stone and so become imbued with the powers. This engaged a mini-game in which the path our warrior chose to take was laid out across the land, turning red where he would be unable to continue, such as a strong river or lava flow. Chahi demonstrated the need to change the land to suit the warrior's travel, adjusting pathways, damming up rivers, extinguishing fires and building bridges. Suddenly, the game was similar to *Lemmings*, or if you're a *Quest* fan, Erasmus' Mage's Maze from *Quest for Glory I*. With the warrior safely at his destination, he then had to be guarded on his way home. A malicious Chahi chose to speed up the process by sending him down the river instead, and then mercifully gave him a gentle beachhead from which to depart his watery doom. The village, now with the power of water, could defend itself against the massive tsunami, which altered and eroded the land as it passed through.

We were then told that this same



Players will gain many new powers as they play, including the abilities to summon tempests and control over the element of fire.

challenge could have been solved in multiple other ways, such as by elevating the village above the level of the tsunami, or building a massive wall around it, or simply by asking the villagers to relocate to higher ground. Whatever the solution, the outcome was a new god power for the player to tinker with: the ability to freeze water in time for a brief duration – perfect for parting the seas. As the player progresses through the game, they'll be faced with varying challenges which will grant them new rewards and powers. **NAG**



#GC10 Just sat down with Hiromichi Tanaka and Nobuaki Komoto. Wow. FFXIV's armoury system looks like it'll really work well.

Final Fantasy XIV Online

GENRE > MMORPG
 PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

MANY WOULD AGREE THAT *Final Fantasy XI Online*, for all the Chocobos, Gil and cute little Elfsh creatures, wasn't what millions of Final Fanboys were looking forward to. *Final Fantasy* has always been about embarking on an epic adventure by yourself; taking the time to experience the world, discover all its nuances and locations, and generally spend an unhealthy amount of time in-game. That might not sound too far from common practises found in an MMO, and in truth *FFXI* performed fairly well and pulled in a decent following, but its emphasis on MMO conventions over *Final Fantasy* conventions meant that a lot of would-be players simply didn't bother with it. During the show, I had a chance to sit down with producer Hiromichi Tanaka and director Nobuaki Komoto to find out why they feel that *FFXIV Online* is the next true game in the core series.

The greatest change between this and *FFXI* is the balance between solo and group play; now you can play through your entire storyline without involving others, but ideally the developers want you to interact with other players in the game, at least on occasion. At the heart of this balance is the Armory System. Simply put, Armory allows you to change character classes on the fly without suffering any penalties. This is because your class is dictated by the weapon in your hand, which will bestow you with abilities, skills and stats depending on what it is. A knight, for example, would wield a sword and shield. Likewise, using a blacksmith's hammer changes your class into one focused on production rather than combat. For solo players, this means that you can go off on an adventure safe in the knowledge that you

can handle any situation the game world throws at you, whether it requires the bow of a ranger, fiery magic of a black mage or healing powers of a white mage. Of course, this dynamic is compounded in group play, which will become more complex and open-ended than typical MMORPGs, but that's largely optional.

On the flip side, there's an increased emphasis on social interaction outside of combat. Production classes – known as Disciples of the Hand – will be able to provide goods and services of a better quality than the NPC merchants and smiths. This means that those who want their kit repaired to the highest standard need to seek an expert armourer, for example, or would need to trade with a Disciple of the Land (gathering classes) to acquire the best crafting materials to produce their own goods. Of course, Square expects players to choose a few primary classes (likely one combat, one support and one or two non-combat), but this means that players can adjust their overall build at will without being restricted by a choice that they made during character creation. In addition, each profession, even the non-combat ones, will have its own story-based quest line that can be completed on your own and, in the case of the goldsmiths, woodworkers, armourers and others like them, without the need to lift a weapon or shed a drop of blood.

Final Fantasy XIV Online is designed with the sceptics in mind. Square knows the restrictions of MMORPGs and is working to improve user-friendliness, UI elements and the overall way in which people play their game. They have some bold ideas, and a huge following begging not to be disappointed, but it looks like this might just be the perfect way for those who avoid MMORPGs to break into the genre – especially if they're avid fans of the series. **NAG**



The developers have promised that Chocobos will make it into the game, but felt that simply relegating them to the roles of mounts would be doing them an injustice. Expect big things.



If you're wondering what happened to Mason's son, keep an eye out for the feature-length *Red Faction* film from Syfy which will focus on his life and bridge the story between *Guerrilla* and *Armageddon*.



#GC10 Had a good look at *Red Faction: Armageddon*. It's looking great. Also saw *RF: Battlegrounds*, top-down dual-stick multiplayer shooter.

Red Faction Armageddon

GENRE > Third-person shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

FOLLOWING ON FROM *RED Faction: Guerrilla*, *Armageddon* once again returns to a colonised Mars in the future. You'll play as the grand-son of *Guerrilla*'s protagonist, Alec Mason, and, once again, you'll have to save the day from a number of factions out to destroy what's left of humanity on the planet. Since the insurgency that raised Alec to the rank of hero, a new threat has been discovered on the planet: parasitic alien life-forms deep below the surface are bothering the colonists, who have been forced to live underground as well. Now, with a military threat aboveground, and a growing alien menace below, you'll have to lead the free people of Mars to safety with every ounce of wit and heavy weaponry you can lay your hands on.

The free-form sandbox approach has been dropped in favour of a narrative-strong, linear storyline, although it has a few branches jutting off to give players optional quests. The action has also been cranked up a notch since *Guerrilla*, which we had a chance to witness during an underground mission (like most missions in the game, although you will eventually break through to the surface) in which young Mason had to clear an abandoned mining colony of any infested buildings and life-forms.

As most *Red Faction* veterans will know, destruction is a key element to the series. It's no different here, and Mason's favourite family heirloom, the Nano-Forge, will give him a number of ways to eliminate pesky



organic foes and troublesome buildings alike. The Forge has had a number of advancements made to it over the years, and new abilities include a function that can rebuild destroyed objects. There are other new weapons as well, including the Shockwave, which lifts enemies into the air and holds them in a stasis shield; the Magnet Gun (shoot once to tag an object, and a second time to send the tagged object flying in the desired direction at great speed); and the black hole-creating Singularity Cannon. Volition has put emphasis on using weapons in combination, and showed us an example where a group of aliens was blasted into a tight, air-bound group with the Shockwave, then followed by a single shot from the

BATTELGROUNDS

We had a chance to see a little digitally-distributed title called *Battlegrounds*, also developed by Volition. *Battlegrounds* is a top-down dual-stick shooter that will see up to four players battle it out in vehicles from throughout the *Red Faction* series.

Playable modes include Capture the Flag, Team CTF, Deathmatch, TDM and King of the Hill. At launch, there will be eight vehicles (each with different weapons and statistics) to choose from, ten maps and 16 single-player challenges if you find yourself without friends more often than you'd like. The action that we got to see was chaotic and frenzied; *Battlegrounds* looks like it'll make for a good bit of fun with a few pals.



Singularity Cannon which dealt with the bundled group with ease. Players can also use the new repair function in combat: the simplest notion being to repair cover when it's needed, but you could also use it to repair a box while you're inside to buy you some time to heal, reload and recover.

Right at the end of the sequence of tearing down massive infested structures, we had a chance to see a new vehicle in action: the Leo mech-suit. Mason climbed inside and laid waste to the remaining alien hordes with a combination of weaponry, including heat-seeking missiles, and melee attacks like the rhino charge. As you may expect, vehicles will form a part of the action as much as they did in *Guerrilla*. **NAG**



Q&A

Tim Campbell & David Adams | Vigil Games

DURING THE SHOW, *NAG* had a chance to sit down with Vigil Games' Executive producer Tim Campbell and General Manager David Adams to ask them a few questions about their upcoming MMORPG *Warhammer 40,000: Dark Millennium*. The studio revealed the first playable race, the Imperium of Man, at the show, with Space Marines and Tech Priests as playable classes, the day before; we decided to probe a little deeper into the details of this exciting project.

NAG: During the trailer that you showed, we caught a glimpse of Space Marines riding motorbikes. Does this mean that there will be player-controlled vehicles in the game?

Tim: Vehicles are one of the pillars of the game. We've spent a lot of time and energy to plan for vehicles. We really want them to be an important part of the game because they're certainly an important part of the IP. They come in three primary flavours: there are the personal vehicles that you use to get around the world; there are the public transport vehicles; and then what we call battleground or battlefield vehicles.

David: We really wanted something a little more sophisticated than what you'd find in a traditional MMO, so the vehicles actually have physical responses; they can jump and skid out. It's not 'super hardcore,' you can't physically crash the vehicles as we still wanted it to be fairly playable. I often call it cart-racing physics. There's suspension and a response to what you're doing, but it's not so severe that you're going to get stuck in a ditch or get stuck upside-down or anything like that. The other cool thing is that the combat vehicles and even some of the personal vehicles have multiple seats, so four guys can jump in a tank with one guy driving it and the others targeting enemies. It's a lot of fun and makes for a pretty neat 'actiony' experience.

NAG: You mentioned the battlegrounds; how big are those battles going to get?

Tim: We can't quantify at this stage, but what I will say is that we spend a lot of time making sure that everything in the game feels 40K. You can extrapolate from there that you can't feel 40K unless you have some pretty big, sizeable battles. We and Games Workshop feel like we're

delivering to that expectation, and we can't wait to talk about those details and show you more later on.

NAG: How close do you work with Games Workshop?

Tim: We work with them really closely. We talk to them every week. You could say that we're co-developing the game with them because they're very involved. They're more than just a licensor; they make games; they're creative people. So, it's really easy to work with them because they have this great IP that's really vast and battle-tested over the course of the years. The good news for us is that they also make games, so they understand how important gameplay and gameplay mechanics are, and that MMOs need certain things that their IP doesn't directly address. They're really good partners in helping us solve problems with the IP that we need to have as player mechanics in the game. We're always spit-balling ideas and creative solutions, but in general, if the IP directly addresses something, we're going to go with the IP because it's awesome.

NAG: Squad-based play is an important part of the IP. Will there be squad-based mechanics for ordering squad-mates around for most advanced control, or is it more like 'every man for himself?'

Tim: While we can't go into too much detail at this stage, but what we're always trying to do at Vigil is allow the players to play the game that they want to play. So, if somebody wants to come into the game and play by themselves, perhaps only get into groups every now and then, we want the game to be fun for them. But on the flipside, if big guilds want to get together and be really organised and communicate, we're accounting for that as well. But we're not forcing people to play the game one way or the other.

David: In addition to that, it is an RPG – you're just a guy in this world. You're not a squad or a troop running around. You're a Space Marine with a name and a face.

NAG: How are you going to compensate for team dynamics such as suppression fire and other challenges of dealing with guns?



#GC10 Vigil Games confirms 3 vehicle types for *Dark Millennium*: personal (player-controlled) transport, battle vehicles and public transport.



Tim: If you look at our combat mechanic in the game, we've had to embrace guns. In order to do that right, we wanted guns to feel great and respond the way a gun should respond. Pulling the trigger should feel really satisfying. In order to make guns work, we've had to embrace the pace of gunplay. We've had to really think about the classic tank, DPS and healer archetypes – we're going to have archetypes in our game, but the concept of, for example, a ranged tank, starts to get into new territory so we feel that our archetypes are going to feel slightly different. It's going to create different dynamics of how people work together, support or buff each other. Because gun and ranged combat are going to change up they paradigm and we like that. We're not shying away from it but rather embracing it.

NAG: How important are classic action skills like aiming and firing going to be?

David: It's definitely going to be more action-focused than a typical MMO. That's not to say that it's going to be like a twitch-shooter. Engine-wise, we're just using the graphics engine from *Darksiders*. All of the gameplay and back-end stuff has been written exclusively for *Dark Millennium*. On a gameplay level, there's not a lot of crossover, but it's definitely more action-oriented than every other MMO being made. 40K is more visceral and very action-oriented; it didn't feel right to do the typical, slow-paced gameplay. Watching a Space Marine come in and slowly auto-attack a guy to death, like chopping a tree down, didn't do justice to the IP. Our challenge and I think this is something that we've pulled off pretty well, is to add action to the game

without it becoming too 'actiony.' The problem with games like that is that they're very fatiguing. With MMOs, you're going to be playing for hours, and you don't want to feel completely wrung-out at the end of it.

NAG: How are you going to balance PvP and PvE?

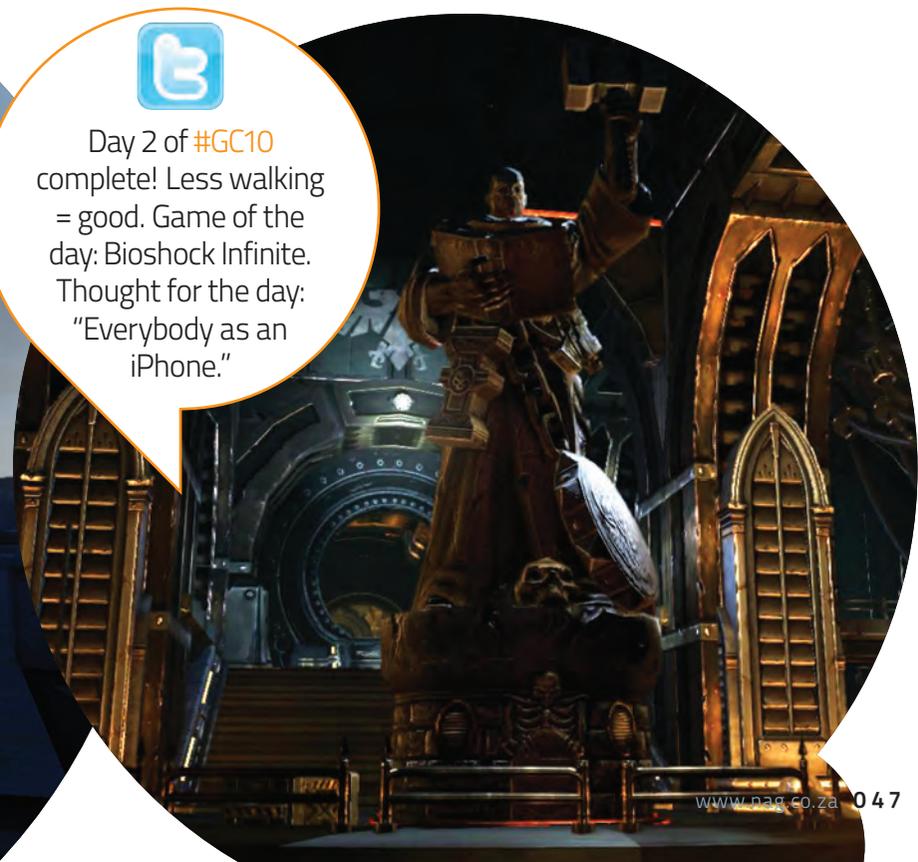
Tim: PvP is going to be 100% consensual. You're never going to be forced into PvP, or find yourself suddenly involved in it without knowing what you're getting into. There are going to be a variety of options for PvP. While I can't confirm any specifics, it's not like we're just going to be doing PvP a single way in the game. The key thing for us is to integrate PvP and PvE in the game; we want players to move in to one and out from another seamlessly. We also don't want to penalise players for choosing either. If you want your mix of gameplay to be more PvP over PvE, that's not going to impede your progression in the game or your acquisition of gear and stuff in the game. We don't want to force you to do a bunch of PvE, then level up that way, then head over to PvP, then gather a whole other set of gear so you can really finally play PvP properly. We didn't want to do that. We wanted it to be balanced and present the player with choice.

NAG: Will all of the action take place on one planet, or will there be travel to multiple planets in the universe?

Tim: The action takes place in the Sargus Sector: it's a star system made up just for this game. It will take place across multiple worlds and there will be gameplay both on- and off-planet. **NAG**



Day 2 of #GC10 complete! Less walking = good. Game of the day: Bioshock Infinite. Thought for the day: "Everybody as an iPhone."



+ Free EA game titles for a year!

SPECS

Motherboard: MSI Big Bang-XPower

CPU: Intel Core i7 Extreme Edition I7-980X

VGA: MSI N460GTX Hawk

PSU: Thermaltake Toughpower

Case: Thermaltake Level 10 case

SSD HDD: 80GB Force Series

HDD: 500GB

RAM: Corsair Dominator GT 2000C8

Display: 2 x Samsung Syncmaster PX2370 LED monitor

OS: Windows 7 Ultimate 32-bit

Mouse: Thermaltake e-sports BLACK Gaming mouse





Call of Duty: Black Ops

Multiplayer hands-on event

I F YOU'RE INTO MULTIPLAYER first-person shooters, the now annual release in the *Call of Duty* franchise is worth looking forward to. *COD* has become a staple at the *NAG* office, only losing steam in the last few months because we're tired of getting camped, n00b-tubed and berated by every second person online. Thankfully, a new title brings with it a new beginning: hope that everyone who plays games on the Internet suddenly learns to get along with their fellow gamers and have a good time purely for a good time's sake. Sure, this will probably only last a few weeks at most; then it'll be back to the insults, trolling, camping and foul-mouthed antics we all know and love. Either way, *Call of Duty* is a massive part of the run-up to the Christmas release schedule, and we know that we'll play it for months after it hits the shelves and consumes its own share of our free time.

To help us get the feel for the multiplayer component of *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, Megarom put me on a plane to L.A., only one week after my return from gamescom in Germany. There I attended a hands-on event with about a hundred journalists from all over the world. We all had a chance to wonder around and watch people play, chat to the developers and most importantly, get some time with the game to ourselves. One thing is for sure: Treyarch is out to prove that they can handle *Call of Duty* as well as *Infinity Ward*. The sheer amount of content that is being crammed into *Black Ops*' multiplayer component is mind-blowing. In short, it's everything *MW2* was plus more.

There are a few things that you need to be aware of with *Black Ops*. The most important is that there's an in-game currency called COD Points, or CP. These points are earned alongside experience points, replacing the linear unlocking system for weapons, attachments, perks, killstreak rewards and everything else, although you'll still need to gain access to those unlocks by gaining experience levels. What this means is that you no longer have to claw through the stale progression of attachments to get the one you want,

instead you simply pay an amount of CP and it's yours. More powerful unlocks cost more CP, which means it won't always be possible to have everything you want.

Another great new feature is the addition of bots in Combat Training Mode. Now those without friends or an Internet connection will be able to revel in the wonder that is *COD* multiplayer, albeit in a confined offline mode that does not count towards your online profile. Be warned, though, Treyarch was clear that their bot A.I., lovingly termed Larry, was designed as a development tool for testing maps, weapons and game modes. All they've done is polish him up a bit and give him to you to play with. Larry isn't nearly as smart as the bots found in other games, but he'll at least give you a chance to test out new weapon combos and help you learn the maps before you hit the online scene, or even as a warm-up tool before you jump into an evening's gaming.

FOR GUTS AND GLORY (AND MONEY)

New to *Black Ops* is the Wager Match – a separate game mode with its own ranking structure. In Wager, players will bet their hard-earned COD Points and attempt to rank in the top three at the end of the match (termed "in the money"). If you don't manage to do so, you lose all your cash. Wager matches are perfect for those players looking to spice up their regular gaming and potentially earn some CP.

There are four game modes available exclusively for Wager Matches:

One in the Chamber: Each player begins with an insta-kill pistol, one bullet and three lives. If you kill an enemy, either with your pistol or melee attack, you gain one bullet. Those comfortable with a knife will be able to stock-pile bullets, but don't under-estimate those with the accuracy to take you down from a distance.

Sticks and Stones: Players only have Ballistic Knives, the Crossbow and a Tomahawk. Do your best to kill as many opponents as possible within the time limit



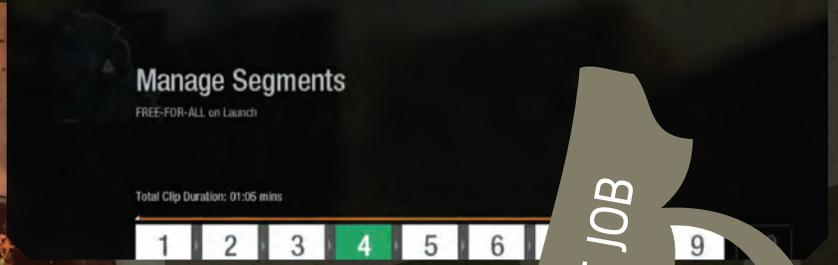
BE PREPARED

In addition to your primary and secondary weapons, you can take one lethal projectile or tactical weapon and one piece of equipment into battle.

Lethal: M67 Frag grenade; Semtex; Tomahawk (insta-kill throwing axe).

Tactical: Willy Pete (smoke grenade); Nova Gas grenade (slows enemies, impairs vision and does damage in an area); Flashbang; Concussion grenade; Decoy (displays false battle info on the enemy's radar).

Equipment: Camera Spike (deployable camera that can be toggled to replace your mini-map); C4; Tactical Insertion; Deployable Radar Jammer; Deployable Motion Sensor; Claymore.



PERKS OF THE JOB

Perks work slightly differently in *Black Ops*. Now, your choice of perk from the first tier will determine your character's overall appearance, such as a camouflage for a Ghost or loads of belts and bags for a Scavenger. Pro Perks return from *MW2*, but the prerequisites to upgrade are more complex, spanning multiple requirements instead of a single one.

Tier 1: Lightweight (increased movement speed); Scavenger (retrieve ammunition from bodies); Ghost (undetectable by Spy Plane and Blackbird); Flak Jacket (reduced explosive damage); Hardline (reduced killstreak requirements).

Tier 2: Hardened (increased bullet penetration); Scout (hold breath for longer during sniping); Steady Aim (increased hip-fire accuracy); Sleight of Hand (increased reload speed); Warlord (use two attachments)

Tier 3: Marathon (sprint for longer); Ninja (silent footsteps); Second Chance (pull out your handgun before you die); Hacker (detect enemy equipment and explosives); Tactical Mask (reduce effect of flash, gas and concussion grenades).



to gain CP. If you kill an opponent with the Tomahawk, you bankrupt them. This game mode emphasises precision and requires players to always watch their backs. A well-timed Tomahawk to the spine is a great way to cut someone out of the running in the last few seconds of the round.

Sharpshooter: Every player begins with the same randomly-selected weapon that changes periodically. All players will always have the same weapon, so being prepared for whatever the next weapon will be, and learning to take advantage of the brief chaos during changeover, is the key to success.

Gun Game: Players begin with a pistol. For every kill, they advance to the next, more powerful weapon. The first player to use all the weapons in the roster will win. Be careful of melee attacks; if you're killed by one you drop down one level. Being skilled with all the weapons is the only way to rise up the ranks quickly.

SO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOOD?

You can expect *Black Ops* to come with a ton of challenges for weapons, perks, attachments and all that good stuff that proves just how awesome you are to your friends, but there are additional

challenges for those who think they're really something special. Contracts are optional challenges that cost CP to take out, and only last a limited period of time. There are three types of contracts: Mercenary, which are typically of the "get x kills with weapon y" variety; Operations, which reward players for performing well in objective-based modes; and Specialist, which is an "anything goes" category that rewards players for accomplishing especially challenging goals. Each contract is only valid for a particular weapon, objective or goal, and more rewarding contracts will cost more CP to take out, but the benefit could be many more CP or even a few experience points. When a contract is completed or failed, it will enter a cool-down time to avoid abuse, but there's nothing stopping you from taking up a completed contract again once that time has passed. What this results in is a customisable reward system that allows players to pat themselves on the back for playing how they want to play.

CREATE A CLASS 2.0

For those of you who enjoy spending hours in character creation screens, you'll have plenty to keep you occupied in this version of Create a Class. Aside from the regular



KILLING IN THE NAME OF

A *Call of Duty* without killstreak rewards would be a shame, but the developers have spent a lot of time discussing what did and didn't work with *MW2's* killstreaks. Player feedback poured in that the game was so focussed on killstreak rewards that they often took over from regular kills in a battle. To address this, killstreak rewards now no longer count towards killstreaks. That means no more camping while you wait for your air support to do all the dirty work. It also means that there is no ridiculous 30-kill reward; it's capped at eleven.

In order, the killstreak rewards are:

- 3 Spy Plane:** reveals enemy positions on the mini-map;
- 3 RC-XD:** small remote-controlled car with attached explosives;
- 4 Counter Spy Plane:** disables enemy mini-map; units;
- 4 SAM Turret:** deployable turret that attacks air support units;
- 5 Care Package:** drops a random killstreak reward. It's also the only way to acquire the Grim Reaper (incendiary rocket launcher) or Death Machine (minigun);
- 5 Napalm Strike:** bombards an area with flaming death;
- 6 Sentry Gun:** deployable machine gun that attacks ground units;
- 6 Mortar Team:** Choose three target areas to be bombarded by mortar strikes;
- 7 Valkyrie Rockets:** player-fired rocket launcher that can be manually piloted once launched. It drops in a care package that contains the launcher and two rockets;
- 8 Blackbird:** a more advanced Spy Plane that cannot be shot down and also shows enemy direction;
- 8 Rolling Thunder:** a machine gun mounted on a tougher helicopter;
- 11 Attack Dogs:** a favourite from *World at War*; these dogs will scour the map in search of your opponents. Perfect for flushing out campers;
- 11 Gunship:** an aerial attack unit that is piloted by the player.



customisation: perks, weapon load-outs, equipment, and whatnot, you'll be able to create a custom emblem from a massive selection of clipart. Put to use multiple layers, colours, scale and rotate tools to make whatever you want. Each item costs a few CP to purchase, so it's doubtful that you'll have access to every single piece of artwork, but spending a couple of points here and there will allow you to stand out. There is also the option to engrave your clan tag on your weapon, which can be seen in-game, as well as the ability to apply face paint from a preset selection.

Weapon customisation has, as you'd expect, been notched up a little. There are only a couple new attachments: the underslung flamethrower and dual magazines taped back-to-back to facilitate faster reloads, but the red dot site can now be customised to change the colour and shape of the dot. Pink smiley faces are sure to put the love into any killcam.

WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY?

If you're a fan of clan-made ownage montages or like to keep an eye on replays to spot your mistakes or learn from the pros, then Theatre Mode is just for you. In simple terms, Theatre Mode is an advanced replay facility that lets you change camera perspectives, control playback speed and slice together footage across multiple games. While most will use the tool mainly for having a look at their own recent games, it's sophisticated enough to compile epic clan videos to rival those you see flooding the Internet, thanks to its timeline editing system. Both the raw gameplay files and compiled, finished products can be shared, and there's a really neat feature where you can choose to display your finest theatrical compilations in your own player card. Other players who read your card can then watch your heroic triumphs and be as impressed with your handiwork as you are.

NAG
Geoff Burrows



» QUICK FIX

- A zombie/horde mode is neither confirmed nor denied at this time.
- There will be support for LAN play, but private games (both online and off) will not count towards your online profile in terms of XP and CP.
- The PC version will support dedicated servers. Only authorised servers are supported; however, Megarom has tentatively confirmed that we will have local servers.
- The developers aim to ship the game with 14 maps. Thereafter, they're looking to release at least two map packs, which they'll begin work on as soon as Black Ops ships.
- CP won't be purchasable with real-world money, according to Treyarch. How long that will last is anyone's guess, however.
- Modding tools for the PC version will not be available at the time of launch, but Treyarch assures us that these tools will be released. Players will also have access to the dev console once again.
- Damage has been slightly reduced all-round in Black Ops to allow for more exciting and varied combat. Movement speed is unchanged.
- The multiplayer component has a dedicated development team that works partially independently of the campaign team. This means more maps that are designed from scratch to be fun for multiplayer, and not simply re-hashed single player locations.
- Certain maps will feature interactive functions like gates or doorways that can be opened or closed. These are fun in deathmatch-style modes but could be pivotal in objective-based modes – potentially changing the entire flow of the map or benefitting the team that has control.



Duke and You

But why should you, the reader of Space Year 2010, care about the manly icon of a bygone era and his radium-coated belt buckle? In one sense, the Duke's satirical image of testosterone overkill and brass-plated chauvinism is a timeless one; the joke is as self-evident today as it was fifteen years ago. But in a bigger sense, Duke represents the arcade shooter at its purest, he is the videogame laid bare. He is also still the most genre-appropriate icon for his job, having spawned a pantheon of imitators and tributes such as *Serious Sam* and *Painkiller*. But the original remains the best reintroduction of the arcade shooter; Duke needs no justification for his action and his stylization other than himself. Pac-Man eats dots; Mario jumps on turtles; Duke Nukem parks bricks in alien toilets. Duke Nukem is more than the idea of a man – he is a man's idea.

Duke Nukem Forever

Always bet on Duke

GENRE > First-Person Duke Nukem
PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

“**U**PLoad THAT SHIT TO Facebook!” shouts Gearbox co-founder and CEO Randy Pitchford at the crowd. “Steal a thousand screenshots – I don’t give a f**k.” The Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) is in full swing and the mass of gamers in attendance cheer at Pitchford. Behind him the trailer for *Duke Nukem Forever* rolls. Duke. Guns. Pig cops. Snappy one-liners. It’s all there. The high-point: a building-sized green alien with three pendulous nude boobs tries to kill Duke, who remarks as only he can, “Yeah, I’d still hit it.” As if reading the crowd’s disbelief, Pitchford shouts that *Duke Nukem Forever* is playable on the show floor. A stampede ensues.

PRESS LEFT TO BEER

The demo (played with a 360 controller on a PC) starts with Duke doing his business at a urinal. You can write your name in gold, if you want. He zips up and heads into a football-team locker room where professional soldiers discuss Operation Cock Block. You can walk up to the whiteboard which shows the badly-drawn game plan to take down a giant alien, and scribble on it. Most people will draw a penis. These kinds of interactions, including pumping weights or drinking beer (and presumably later, tipping strippers), fill and expand Duke’s Ego Meter: a regenerating health-bar. The more Duke does, the bigger his ego.

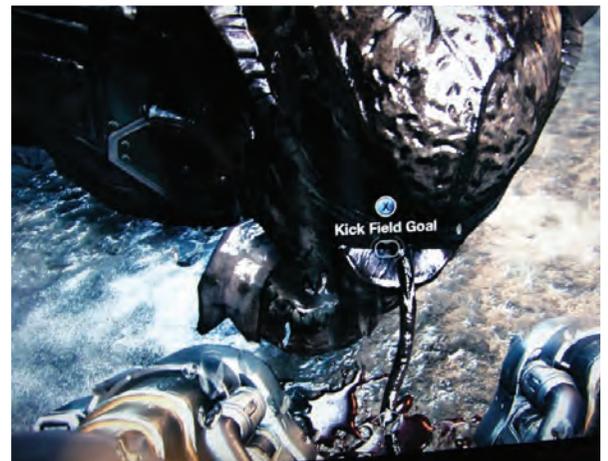
The giant alien, a Cycloid, crashes into the room, decimating most of the hapless soldiers. You pick up a Devestator – basically two rocket-launchers strapped together – which is conveniently loaded with 69 rounds. Chasing the Cycloid outside, an epic battle takes place in a rain-soaked stadium. It’s the Stadium level from *Duke 3D*, but every bit as graphically modern and awesome as one would hope for. Once killed, the Cycloid’s head rolls up to Duke and a prompt appears: “X – Kick Field Goal.” Duke kicks the monster’s eye through the goalposts.

The *Duke Nukem Forever* logo appears, the camera pulls back revealing that Duke, in first-person, was playing his own game. His gold 360 controller’s face buttons are D, U, K, and E. While playing, Duke was getting oral sex from two women at once.

“What about the game, Duke? Was it good?” asks one. “Yeah,” Duke replies. “But after 12 f**kin’ years, it had better be.”

TWO GIRLS, ONE DUKE

The second playable level is more varied, showing classic run-and-gun gameplay through a desert-like environment and many of the genre updates from the last decade, like iron sights (aiming down the sights) when you hold down left trigger. The Shrink Ray, Trip mines and Pipe Bombs are all there, along with the Minigun. Duke finds a truck and uses it to drive over pig cops before ending up manning a turret to gun down even more pig cops. Blood splashes everywhere, giblets flying in all directions.



An alien ship swoops down and blasts Duke, knocking him off his feet. As the ship lowers, Duke slowly raises his hand into the air and gives the ship the middle finger.

The demo ends with a close-up shot of Duke's crotch, tight jeans barely containing the man, and the words "Coming to consoles and PC. It's going to be big!"

WHAT IS THIS I DON'T EVEN?

It's real, and it's coming out next year. How? Why? Who is Duke? The answers lay in the name George Broussard.

Now 46, George Broussard – co-owner of 3D Realms – spent the last 13 years as head of the *Duke Nukem Forever* project. In the late 70s, Broussard met Scott Miller in high school. They'd hang out in the PC lab making 2D and text-adventure games. Miller invented "Shareware," breaking a game into chunks, giving the first part out free then charging for the rest. He formed his company Apogee, which changed

names to 3D Realms in 1994.

Miller, a quiet and savvy businessman, brought on the rambunctious ponytailed Broussard in 1990. Broussard had a knack for knowing what was fun. In 1992, they published *Wolfenstein 3D*, made by a tiny studio called id Software. It was a breakout hit, selling 200,000 copies. Broussard wanted to make something better, more colourful and funny. *Duke 3D* released in 1996 and sold 3.5 million copies. Its interactive environments, fun and gore propelled it to cult status.

3D Realms announced its sequel, *Duke Nukem Forever*, in 1997.

DUKE NUKEM NEVER

The late 90s was a technological arms race: ever-increasing CPUs and the introduction of 3D hardware acceleration cards. Broussard, a perfectionist, could never keep up. First they licensed the *Quake II* engine, which cost "a truckload of money." They

PAX?

To quote the website [www.paxsite.com]: "PAX is a three-day game festival for tabletop, videogame, and PC gamers. We call it a festival because in addition to dedicated tournaments and freeplay areas we've got nerdcare concerts, panel discussions, the weekend-long Omegathon event, and an exhibitor hall filled with booths displaying the latest from top game publishers and developers. Even with all this amazing content the best part of PAX is hanging out with other people who know their shit when it comes to games."

PAX was started by the creators of the webcomic Penny Arcade [www.penny-arcade.com], and happens twice a year in the United States, once on the west coast and once on the east coast. It is the coolest gaming expo. You can actually buy stuff there.



Pac-Man eats dots; Mario jumps on turtles; Duke Nukem parks bricks in alien toilets. Duke Nukem is more than the idea of a man – he is a man's idea.

showed an impressive demo for *DNF* in 1998. Then they licensed the *Unreal Engine*, which cost even more money. The entire project was rebooted. By 1999, *DNF* was still not done.

Because *Duke 3D* made 3D Realms a ton of money, they didn't need publisher funding. They did sign up with GT Interactive, later Take-Two, to help with marketing and shipping. In 2003, Take-Two CEO Jeffrey Lapin said they were writing *DNF* off as a loss. Broussard famously said, "Take-Two needs to STFU."

To keep fans at bay, Broussard decided to put together another trailer for E3 in 2001. It was the first peek at *DNF* in three years, and it was genuinely spectacular. But Broussard still wasn't happy. Then the staff rebelled. By 2007, most of the staff left. They were annoyed they'd spent so much time on something only to have

nothing to show for it.

The money was running out. By 2009, 3D Realms had spent \$20 million on *DNF*. Broussard and Miller went to Take-Two for a loan, but didn't get one. In May 2009, 3D Realms finally ran out of money and told its employees to pack up and go home, then got sued by Take-Two.

DUKE IS BACK

Gearbox co-founder and CEO Randy Pitchford originally worked at 3D Realms on *Duke 3D*. When 3D Realms shut down, he convinced Broussard to sell him the entire *Duke Nukem* franchise, rights and license, so they could finish what 3D Realms started. Broussard agreed because he trusts Pitchford, and because he didn't want a corporation like Take-Two owning *Duke*. So now all eyes fall to Gearbox.

NAG
Miktar Dracon



FIFA 11

Here we go again...

GENRE > Sports Simulation

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

OUR ALL-KNOWING, GENIUS EDITOR

Michael James seems to think that because there is Portuguese blood trapped in my veins, I am the most qualified person in the NAG office to do this preview, no matter what my feelings may be towards football (or any other sport for that matter). Never mind the fact that any one of the Brits (who are, if you follow our wonderful Ed's twisted and dubious logic, obviously all a bunch of ale-swilling, banger-chewing football hooligans) in the office are equally as qualified to do this preview, if that's the case. I told the Ed that that whole notion is ridiculous... and possibly racist. He cut my pay in half. Aren't stereotypes awesome?

FIFA 11 is bringing the same incremental changes to the FIFA formula that is customary with EA's sports games. This year, they're making a big deal out of Personality+, a mechanic which gives every player on the pitch their own distinct style and personality. What this means is that your footballers on the pitch accurately recreate the performance of their real-life counterparts. This applies to goalkeepers as well. Does your virtual goalkeeper's real-life progenitor have a more traditional style of goalkeeping, or does he approach his role with acrobatic flair? This is further augmented by Dive and Reflex attributes for each goalkeeper: the former affects his ability to reach shots further away, while the latter determines how quickly your keeper will react to incoming shots. Goalkeepers will now be much more aware of their surroundings and will react more realistically to counter lob shots, sprint for loose balls and the like.



The CPU AI also benefits from Personality+, as a feature called REAL AI directs CPU players to recognise specific patterns of play and react accordingly. All of this Personality+ mumbo jumbo aims to make player celebrations (which, as in *2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa*, you have complete control over), player models and even things like run styles more accurately represent each real-world player's individual flair, style and personality on the pitch.

Be A Goalkeeper mode is another feature that EA is going bananas over, because for the first time players can take direct control of their team's goalie in Career Mode, Virtual Pro 2.0 or in online multiplayer. Speaking of Career Mode, the developers promise many improvements, giving players the opportunity to start off as a real player, created player or Virtual Pro, eventually clawing their way up to become a player manager or a team manager as they progress through their 15-year career. A new

>>

The PC version of FIFA 11 will be the first in the series to use the same engine as the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of the game.

calendar system, improved status reports, authentic tournament structures and a new team-management system will all make their way into career mode.

As always, any FIFA title is most fun when played multiplayer and the developers aren't skimping on this front. You and your friends can create your own clubs online, with each player controlling their own virtual footballer for each game on your club's calendar. You can even act as the club's manager, if you're so inclined. Face off against other clubs online in friendly matches, or compete with your buddies by your side in monthly tournaments to attempt to become the top digital club each month.

These are just some of the changes EA is bringing to the table for this next FIFA. Expect to find more when you finally get your hands on the game. Now, I'm off to argue some more about stereotypes and other stuff with our fearless leader. I'll be sure to throw the word "jackass" around a lot.

NAG
Dane Remendes

"BETTER THAN THE FIRST!"

-METRO



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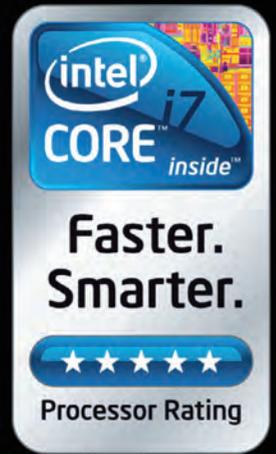


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The Reviewers

We posed the following to the team – if you could be an alien enemy to the human race what is the name of your race/ species and what would be your primary means of attack? Keep in mind that death rays are so 1920.

CHRIS BISTLINE

Canadian: Infiltrate America, subverting them by using a nefarious combination of politeness and good manners. Wait, that's not what you mean by alien, is it?



MICHAEL JAMES

Moomlings: Using our vast science ability turn all the water on Earth into propane and ignite using a lit fart.



MIKTAR DRACON

Neo-Sakkra: Our primary means of attack would be to breed prolifically before arrival, so that when we reach Earth we would overrun them with sheer numbers of sexy lizard beasts. Resistance is fertile.



TARRYN VAN DER BYL

The Ka-Blammers: A race of sentient hand grenades, of course. **** excuse me – half the imperial court just ****ing exploded. Again.



MIKLÓS SZECSEI

Slugulla: Mind-control worms. We'd enslave Tarryn's species and use them to attack humanity; always exploit lesser races to do your dirty work.



GEOFF BURROWS

Bananaloids: A spore-like parasite that pretends to be delicious bananas. When consumed, organisms within enter the host's bloodstream and assume complete neurological control within minutes.



DANE REMENDES

LOLdorian Slugpants: A race of semi-translucent gooey things with faces that constantly shift position. Attack involves throwing thousands of whiny, tiny Michael James' at humans to inundate the meat bags with bulls**t.



WALT PRETORIUS

Psilons: A combination of memory alteration and mind control techniques (via a glowing red eye thingy) to make humans kill each-other...



Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

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

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

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

Review DEVELOPER: 20 Mar. PUBLISHER: 20 Gen (E) Digital Anarchy (E) DISTRIBUTOR: 10 Gen. WEB: www.bioshock.com

Smile The research camera has been changed up a bit for this second outing. Rather than requiring you to snap still photos of enemies to earn you better than simple high-quality images, thousands of photos during combat. During the time you're free to dispose of them, you'll be using different weapons, Plasmids, and combinations of both, and by taking advantage of different environmental hazards like Electric Boogaloo, a pool of water the enemy is standing in will score you points faster. It's best to use the camera from behind; it doesn't require you to collect film and the bonuses provided by the new research camera when researching Splicer Soldiers is remarkably different; different enemy types are very useful.

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

GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PC **PS3** **X360** **PS2** **WII** **PS1** **PC**

IT'S 1946 EIGHT YEARS of our game time (the present time we joined last time) as protagonist from the original BioShock on his descent into the tragically doomed underwater city of Rapture. (Splicers deleted) we awaken from your first-year slumber to discover a Rapture that has slipped even further into decay. The ocean has continued its relentless assault on the city's foundations, causing entire parts of the city left with nobody to maintain its delicate undersea infrastructure. The Splicers have found new purpose in following the leadership of a purchased agent by the name of Sofia Lamb. Lamb is devious, intelligent and has risen up to govern across the will of Rapture since the fall of Andrew Ryan (Rapture's founder). She also wants you out of the picture. This deadly new foe will make life difficult for you, but you've got the task – because this time, you're "Daddy," a prototype in the design of the Big Daddy, and, unlike your tiny brothers, you're free will have been released.

To say any more about BioShock 2's story would run what a harrowing second journey through that it-faded submarine city all you need to know is that you're not back this time around. This time, you're one of those terrifyingly powerful Big Daddies. As is the nature of things, however, you're no longer at the top of the food chain because your threats have risen during your absence. The whole game feels contained, it's tight as when you first had it up the atmosphere, the controls, the game world – it felt as though you never left Rapture. The very charming (too-inspired) sound effects make you feel at home while at the same time making it feel like you're in a perfect world that's terribly realistic, hard to describe in words. The presentation of it all is just as if (not more) slick than the first game's already mind-blowing depiction of a dream gone awry. It's truly, truly, that the numerous similarities between the original and this sequel will be many games. Even the story is similar both in the way that it's told through voice recordings found scattered throughout Rapture and through communications with the city and in the semi-aware residents of the city and in the fact that which was born of your confrontation with Ryan in the first game. Regardless, the story is still incredibly powerful, moving, and will leave you pondering some time to come.

Even the gameplay is very similar, with 2K Max's having done little to change the game's formula. They didn't need to change it; it's already perfect. BioShock 2's single-player mode is solid. BioShock 2's single-player mode, but with genetic and science and stuff – which

NEW YEAR'S EVE 1950 It is on this fateful night that BioShock 2's story-driven multiplayer component begins – together with the start of the war on Rapture's oceans which began the end of Rapture's reign on the depths of the ocean. You choose a character, select your load from a number of Plasmid weapons and Plasmids, and head off to play your part in the Sector Solutions Consumer Rewards Program by looking for the latest Great Weapon Plasmid on the streets. All of your matching and character customization can be done from within your in-game apartment, and each game you play will reward you with ADAM with which to gradually unlock new stuff to add things with. The multiplayer when was developed by a separate studio – Digital Extremes is actually quite good and has a number of appealing games on the game's menu. A number of memorable Rapture locations like Arcadia from the first game warm their way into the multiplayer map listing, and a lot of the original game mechanics are present, like environmental hazards such as walls of spikes and the multi-stage boss fights. BioShock 2's appearance capturing the dead-reminiscent film mood you a damage bonus against that particular player-controlled.

you're able to wield, unlike your Daddy brethren and weapons can now be wielded at the same time, allowing you to quickly fire off Plasmids while still training a steady stream of lead on enemies. Plasmids can now be combined to create different effects like combining the Incinerate and Explosive Trap Plasmids to create a fiery vortex. As a Big Daddy, you're still access to weapons exclusive to the lumbering, diving, suit-wearing Splicers – like the new gun and a powerful very handy one. You'll still be able to purchase first-aid kits, EVE Traps (EVE power your Plasmids, ammo and other stuff from vending machines. ADAM used to buy Plasmids and Game Tonics, as well as improve them; remains a valuable commodity and the primary means of obtaining it by looting or harvesting Little Sisters has been tweaked in a cool new way. No longer will you simply choose to harvest or rescue the exploited little ADAM gatherers – as a Big Daddy, you can choose to adopt them and have them gather ADAM from corpses for you. This takes time and will attract Splicers, so you'd better be prepared by laying traps, min turbines and the like. This new mechanic also incorporates the newly introduced Big Sisters – ridiculously powerful new foes who take offense at your interrupting the Little Sister's gathering process. They're the classically ugly Big Daddies and you'll need to throw everything you have at them to survive.

BioShock 2 didn't need to happen, but we're very glad it did. It represents the already rich history of Rapture's myth. The improvements to the combat and gameplay make the experience much smoother; the game is filled with generally interesting characters that aren't simple cardboard cut-outs, and the visuals and audio (the voice acting in particular) draw the game's world home. Any trip to Rapture is a trip we'll gladly make. **NAG** Dana Remendes

This is the Big Sister. She's a Big Daddy, but replace the slow-moving, intimidating nature with ONGOOR the size of THOSE NEEDLES.

THE SCORE 18
+ Immersive setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

Plus
+ Enthralling setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

Minus
- Doesn't change much

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

Award: See below for details

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Score Box

Age Rating: Lets see some ID, son

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

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

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

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

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

THE SCORE 18

www.pegi.info

1 2-10 N/A

Online services
Games for Windows LIVE

Plus
+ Enthralling setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

Minus
- Doesn't change much

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

88

Quick Hits



PUZZLE QUEST 2

Back in 2007, Infinite Interactive stumbled upon a goldmine with its mind-blowing mashup of *Bejeweled* and *Final Fantasy*. Since then, everyone and his cousin have churned out an RPG-puzzler in an attempt to ride the wave of success generated by *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords*, and the vast majority of them have been exceedingly mediocre. *PQ2* promised to return the genre to its roots and bring back the charm and magic of the original, and to a large degree it does. The game even sports an old-school RPG-style isometric 3D view replete with towns, shops and dungeons packed full of baddies. The basic gameplay is still the same: match gems to gain mana to cast spells or deal damage to enemies, with a bunch of mini-games that add a few twists on the mechanic to do things like loot chests, unlock doors and disarm traps. Unfortunately, after 20-odd hours with no end in sight and no discernable plot to carry the story forward, it gets a trifle repetitive. **Bottom line:** *It's Puzzle Quest all over again ... and again ... and again ...*



WORMS: RELOADED

After Team 17's good-but-not-great attempts at transitioning the *Worms* series to 3D space, they've decided to return to what we all wanted anyway: more wonderfully devious 2D gameplay featuring lovable (but deadly) worms wielding rocket launchers. *Worms: Reloaded* is essentially a refined, enhanced and extended version of last year's XBLA title *Worms 2: Armageddon*. There's a single-player campaign, numerous multiplayer modes and a plethora of customisation options that'll allow you to create and personalise the ultimate squad of badass invertebrates. The turn-based formula hasn't changed: you still pit your team of worms against teams of enemy worms in destructible environments with ludicrous weaponry like Concrete Donkeys and Banana Bombs. It's brilliantly maniacal and you're often your own worst enemy as shots you thought were perfectly aimed and calculated backfire and send a bunch of your worms flying into oblivion. At \$19.99 on Steam, it's difficult not to recommend *Worms: Reloaded*. **Bottom line:** *Holy Hand Grenade, Batman! This is easily one of, if not the best title in Worms history.*

Web Scores

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

HALO: REACH



360 91 93 92

MAFIA II



PC 78 77 76

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS



360 60 63 65

SPIDER-MAN: SHATTERED DIMENSIONS



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LARA CROFT AND THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT



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Halo: Reach

Deliver hope. With a plasma launcher.

A LONG TIME AGO, IN a galaxy far, far away, there was a bunch of aliens. This bunch of aliens – now dubbed “the Forerunners,” because they ran before – were subsequently almost entirely overwhelmed by another bunch of aliens – dubbed “the Flood,” because they’re... flood-like – and convened a sort of shareholders’ meeting to work out a going-forward strategy to maximise universal sustainability. Realising an inter-office team building weekend over on Kepler-6 probably wouldn’t appeal to a mass parasitic menace with little to no inclination to such corporate-social niceties as trust falls and alcohol-free cocktails, they decided instead to forge an array of seven magically-imbued ring-shaped mega-structures, and annihilate all sentient life everywhere. Obviously. So the Forerunners built their Halos, pushed the big red “KILL EVERYTHING LOL” button, and vanished.

Fast forward several thousand years, and humanity has emerged and managed to contrive “slipstream” interstellar travel, which is this particular canon’s version of warp drives or something. Under the auspices of the United Nations Space Command, we’ve gone everywhere, choked it

up with polystyrene, shark nets, and tabloid controversies, and generally done our own inimitable thing all over the place. Predictably enough, of course, civil war erupts between the colonies, and the UNSC covertly deploys its cybernetically-enhanced SPARTAN-II super soldiers to hand out American fizzy drinks or whatever it is covert deployments of cybernetically-enhanced super soldiers do to suppress insurrectionist rhetoric on destitute, politically disenfranchised frontier outposts.

Then, in 2525, the planet Harvest is invaded by *another* bunch of aliens – dubbed the Covenant, because technically they’re actually comprised of a bunch of a bunch of aliens – who’ve declared, somewhat inscrutably, that humanity is the enemy of their gods – *surprise twist!* – the Forerunners. Obviously enough, they’re pledged to annihilating all (other) sentient life everywhere, and start going about this business with all the grim purpose of a bunch of aliens who probably intercepted a deep space broadcast reverberation of Pop Idols. The UNSC promptly scrambles its SPARTAN-IIIs and *New! Improved!* SPARTAN-IIIs back into active duty, and for the next 20-something years, they spend a lot of space-cash

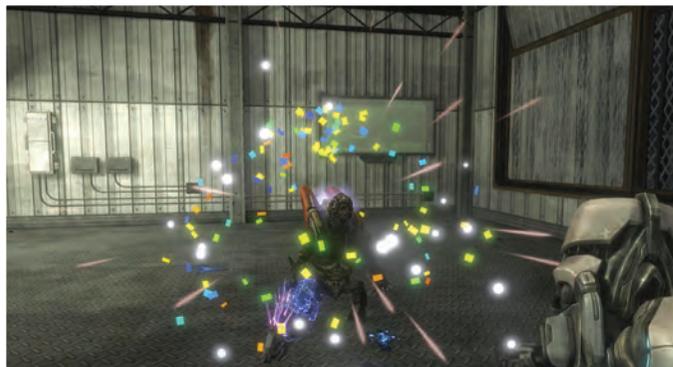
manufacturing bullets.

And then, in 2552, the Covenant arrives on Reach. By now, it’s pretty much the last remaining terrestrial UNSC stronghold, or roughly the equivalent of Los Angeles in any blockbuster sci-fi action flick. Accordingly, a strike team of five guys – *AND *record scratch!* YOU, THE ROOKIE* – with barely concealed post-traumatic stress disorders, inter-personal drama, and disaffected resistance to authority is dropped off to blow stuff up and save the universe. That’s the plan, anyway.

Having done and dusted the *ODST* thing with *Halo: ODST*, it’s back to the regular SPARTAN thing with *Halo: Reach*. Kind of. While you’re all officially strapped up in Master Chief’s patented MJOLLNIR armour again, *ODST*’s limited health system and Cursed Prismatic Amulet of No Dual-Wielding-2 are still in play. So while your shields recharge after taking damage, your meat-stuff doesn’t. Conveniently enough, this works both ways, and enemies must contend with the same fragile mortality in the bleak, uncompromising face of incoming ordnance. Inconveniently enough, the ****s are clever enough to step out of the line of fire

» PARTY LIKE IT'S 2552

Experts agree that activating the Grunt Birthday Party modifier before commencing the campaign will positively enhance the experience by between 400 and 500%. In a study of 1000 adults, 102% of respondents reported that Grunts exploding in confetti to exultant cheers helped them come to terms with the imminent and apocalyptic devastation of the entire planet. ▼



once their shields are depleted, which makes the game significantly more challenging than before, especially since the previously somewhat uncommon – and extraordinarily resilient to just about everything, apparently, possibly including a nuclear offensive – Elite troopers turn up rather too often for this SPARTAN's liking.

Which is where I should probably mention that *Halo: Reach* is brutally hard. After two days slogging and reloading my way through the campaign, my verbally abused TV isn't even talking to me anymore. Seriously, it's like playing *Call of Duty 4* on Veteran, but without that bit of existential comfort afforded by instant headshot kills. Because Elites take almost two full clips from a DMR before dying, including headshots. It's much more a war of attrition over skill, and that's on Heroic difficulty, playing solo. *Halo: Reach* introduces difficulty scaling in multiplayer co-op, so the prospect of 4-way on Legendary (AKA How To Play *Halo* Properly) is a one of some Lovecraftian horror. Or would be.

Which is where I should probably mention that *Halo: Reach* features some very interesting level design. That one mission, with that one bit, with that Wraith, and



Brian Jarrard: "It's been one hell of a ride over the past ten years and that we are truly grateful to our fans across the world for their strong support of Bungie and *Halo*. Our studio nor this Universe would be what it is today without such awesome fans. In many ways, *Reach* is our way of giving one last thing back to our fans, of passing the torch of *Halo* development from our team to theirs. Carry on, make amazing things in Forge, create awesome game types, keep *Reach* and *Halo* going strong. We'll see you online."



GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Multiplayer is obviously *kind* of a big deal with the *Halo* franchise. I've already covered most of the new stuff in the beta preview (June issue), but I must make special mention of Firefight here. Of course, this mode was originally introduced in *Halo: ODS1*, but they've pulled out all the proverbial stops for *Halo: Reach*. Much like other *Halo* multiplayer modes, Firefight is now completely customisable. I mean, you can change *everything* in the game. Oh, you want 300% weapon damage, 200% movement speed, low gravity, sniper rifles with infinite ammo clips, permanent cloaking, and enemy waves of only Elite Zealots equipped with jetpacks and armed with golf clubs? You got it. And note to self: totally trying that next. Did I mention there's a Gruntpocalypse preset? Because there's a Gruntpocalypse preset. It's only the most awesome thing in the history of stuff ever.

>>

Brian Jarrard: "During the development of *Reach* the team was definitely acutely aware of the challenges faced by dabbling in areas of the *Halo* fiction that so many people are already so passionate about and familiar with. While we did set out to make sure the events of the game fit into the established canon of the novel, we did not want to simply re-tell the novel in game format and in some cases we did have to make some minor concessions to the overall timeline and one or two events for the sake of making a better game. The novel still provides a great foundation and a great alternate perspective on the events surrounding the fall of the planet but through the game we're sending players on a brand new adventure."

THIS IS MISSION CONTROL

I threatened Bungie community director Brian Jarrard with a Focus Rifle, and demanded information and a ranking boost. I'm still waiting for the ranking boost. In the meantime, here's what he has to say about the game.

Brian Jarrard: "Well we definitely think *Reach* is the best *Halo* game yet and the best Bungie game yet. There's basically something for everyone – whether you're into great stories and huge action packed battles or hardcore competitive multiplayer or racing a Mongoose around a picturesque massive landscape or teaming up with your buddies to fight against aggressive artificial intelligence or just building stuff in Forge – *Reach* has a mode and an experience for you. It's definitely still a *Halo* game at its core but there have been enough changes and enough improvements and upgrades to warrant a serious look by anyone who was previously not interested in the series."

about twelve hundred Brutes, that took over an hour to get past? Replaying it for science (Achievements), I discovered I could bypass the entire encounter by taking a sneaky route through the perimeter of the area. Nor was this the only opportunity for such sly manoeuvring – while many of the game's formidable combat encounters are inevitable, a good few are entirely avoidable, and clearly by design. I got through about three quarters of the final mission without firing a single shot, simply because I did some tactical recon before rushing in. Just like real life or something. Point is Bungie has made some space for variable strategies, investing a bit of sandbox-style play in an otherwise ostensibly linear game. That's an extra point in the score!

This sort of sly manoeuvring is accomplished at least in part with the new Armor Abilities (henceforth designated as "Armour Abilities" because that's how we spell it in Proper-Land). Somewhat analogous to previous games' Equipment items, these are rechargeable field pickups that impart certain advantages – the Jetpack, for example, is... well, it's a jetpack, and the Hologram generates a moving doppelganger that's brilliant for distracting enemies while you creep around back for an assassination. There's also the exceedingly-rare-because-it's-totally-hax Active Camo that makes



the user invisible for a short period of time. Although just long enough, as it turned out, to circumvent one entire mission finale. There's that interesting level design thing again.

As it plays out, the campaign itself is very much reminiscent of *Halo: ODST's*, insofar as each mission being a kind of self-contained adventure. Under its glossy veneer of LSD-coloured Needler spikes and Fuel Rod plasma balls, it's still a regular go-there, shoot-that FPS, but it does a great job of disguising this with OMG, GRATUITOUS SPACE BATTLES, and I'M IN A TANK NOW, and LOOK AT ME, MOM, I'M REACTIVATING A TURRET IN THE MIDST OF A MASSIVE ASSAULT OUTSIDE A TOP SECRET LABORATORY IN A BIG CAVE AND I'VE JUST HIJACKED A GHOST.

And maybe all that bombastic boom-boom-rockets stuff undermines the plot a little, because if I've one major gripe about the game, it's that the plot is undermined by all the bombastic boom-boom-rockets stuff. Bungie obviously intended for players to care about Noble Team, but whatever subtle characterisation and personal narrative is presented is almost completely eclipsed by everything else going on, and those moments that should probably have been quite poignant simply aren't. In fact, despite having played the game to completion once over, and some missions multiple times, I couldn't really say what actually *happens* for



>> **Brian Jarrard:** "The armor abilities in Reach are essentially an evolution of the equipment in Halo 3. The basic premise is still the same – give players a unique special ability that they can use at opportune moments to change the outcome of an engagement. In Halo 3 you could pick up the bubble shield and hold onto it an entire match waiting, wondering when would be the best time to use it. The single-use limitation brought anxiety and pressure – should I use it now? Should I save it? What if I waste it? For Reach the design team wanted to build on that concept but make it easier and more rewarding to actually use these abilities. There is no penalty anymore, use them as much as you like."



the most part. I know how it starts, and how it ends, but everything in between is a dizzy reel of sticky grenades, screeching Grunts, and reloading *again* because I'd died *again*, frequently on the wrong end of a screeching Grunt's sticky grenade.

There are also frame rate issues during some of the bigger battles, particularly during one sequence near the end of the game. It's not a serious problem, but it's a problem nonetheless. As are the almost interminable waits while the game saves when you quit. The point is quitting the game, not making a cup of coffee while that happens.

These complaints notwithstanding, however, *Halo: Reach* is a triumph, and – oh, dare I say it? – now the definitive *Halo* experience. It's exhilarating, challenging, and varied enough to keep players constantly engaged, while the innovative Armour Abilities feel so obvious and instantly indispensable it's hard to imagine ever having played without them. And despite stumbling here and there in the story, the concluding moments are so utterly perfect, Bungie didn't even bother with the traditional alternate ending for Legendary difficulty. The game's probably not going to change the dedicated haters' minds, but it's a love letter to fans. "Remember Reach"? Yes, yes you will. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

THE SCORE

16 MUST PLAY

www.pegi.info 1-4 2-16 2-4

>Plus
+ It's Halo. \:D/

>Minus
- It's Halo. <

>Bottom Line
Halo lovers will love it. *Halo* haters will hate it. I totally recycled that from my *Halo: ODST* review.

Look Listen For the Fans

91

I've got an idea; let's hide behind the crates of highly flammable booze. Boy I hope they don't throw a Molotov this way.



Mafia II

City of lost opportunity

GENRE > Action adventure

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

IT'S NO SECRET THAT *Mafia II* is my most anticipated game of the year. The first *Mafia* might not have had the over-the-top gameplay or massive sandbox world to play in like its nearest competitor at the time, *Grand Theft Auto III*, but it made up for this by having a great story and believable, accessible characters. After too many delays, the sequel has finally arrived.

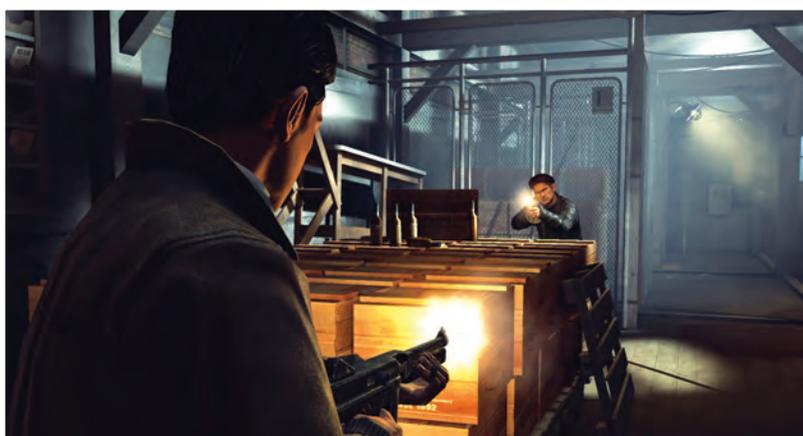
You should all know the setting by now: you play as Vito Scaletta – a young man who returns home early from the War, where he served time for petty larceny. You're not back long when childhood friend Joe Barbaro lets you in on his recently discovered secret to making the kind of money you need to pull your family from debt. Joe's involved in the Mob, so he invites you in, and after a few missions together, the guys in charge start to take notice of Vito's knack for getting his hands dirty and not complaining. As you advance through the game, you'll experience Vito's rise and fall through the Mob, and discover deep crevices in the three families that secretly run the city of Empire Bay.

The ten or so hours of game time are spread across 15 chapters, each covering anything from a few hours to years of the story. The entire game spans almost a decade; it's great to see Empire Bay change from the depressed post-war era of the mid- to late-'40s through to the vibrant '50s; fashion, vehicles, music and decor all change to reflect the passing of time.

As you may expect, the core of the game involves Vito taking care of business in a way that involves lots of killing and driving – activities that are not always mutually

exclusive. Missions types include very basic stealth/infiltration, carrying out hits, stealing vehicles, car chases (on both sides of the chase) and generally causing mayhem, but for the most part, the missions end up as a series of cover-fights as you move through a linear path to your ultimate goal. This repetition becomes increasingly evident further into the game, which gives the impression that the developers were hurried to finish off and get the game on shelf, which is quite likely considering the many delays. Thankfully, the combat is engaging and fun, the cover system works well, and the weapons are satisfying to use. However, the enemy AI needs a bit of work: opponents shift from painfully stupid and predictable





I'll have a pound of roast beef and a box of .45s please.



to stunningly accurate at the drop of a hat, which often results in frustrating deaths and the inevitable repetition of the segment.

When you're not busying yourself with the rigmarole of daily Mobster life, you have the option to cruise around Empire Bay and engage in a number of extra-curricular activities like pimping out your car, filling up with gas, shopping for clothes or robbing stores, but it will soon become apparent that you don't actually need to do any of those things. There are a few instances in the linear storyline where you're required to buy new clothes or make some extra cash, but for the most part, the entire idea of a sandbox city is wasted in a game like this. What it does manage to do is give the impression of freedom, which is great if you don't pay too much attention to this side of the game; as soon as you do, however, you'll realise that it's pointless and shallow. The story almost always ensures that you have enough money to do whatever you desire, and owning a fleet of customised, sports-tuned cars to match your fine and diverse wardrobe is quite

simply unnecessary.

The visuals, as you may notice from the screenshots, are spectacular. Weather and lighting effects give life to the otherwise sterile world, and the amount of details scattered around the game world will continue to surprise you right until the end of the game. The audio is also fantastic, much like it was in *Mafia I*. Vehicles make all the right roars and squeals as they drive along, and the music that plays over the radio stations is not only accurate for the era, but some of the best tracks of that time. There are even a few returning tracks from the first title that you might see as welcome or cheap, depending on how cynical you are.

While there aren't too many things obviously and horribly wrong with *Mafia II*, especially if you get into it without sky-high expectations, it lacks the same magic that made its predecessor so good. For starters, the story is all business. Vito moves from job to job with determination and little sense of remorse. This is in stark contrast to Tommy Angelo, the protagonist from

Mafia I, who was pulled into the Mobster world and kept there because of intricate and emotional factors. Vito is quite happy to admit that he does what he does because he loves the cash, women, cars and supposed freedom it offers. For this reason, Vito is less accessible and understandable than Tommy. It makes sense when the game's influence is considered: real-life Mobster reports over the romanticised Hollywood retellings that inspired the first game. The result is a cold experience that doesn't feel any different to mowing down endless Locusts in *Gears of War*. There are a few attempts made by the developers to introduce a sense of humanity to Vito, and occasionally I almost felt bad for the guy, but the next day he'd be back to getting the job done without a care for the consequences.

Mafia II is worth playing if you're looking for a solid action adventure that has elements of sandbox-style play, or if you've got a thing for Mobster tales and like the idea of solving most problems with a Tommy gun and hand grenades. Heck, it's even worth playing if you are expecting the world to stand still during each cut scene, but you'll do well to accept it as a standalone game rather than a sequel to *Mafia*. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

18

www.pegi.info



1



N/A



N/A



>Online services
Steam

>Plus
+ Looks great
+ Good combat

>Minus
- Gets repetitive
- Uninspired

Look Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line

Fun and simple, but lacks the magic or depth that could make it great.

78



Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days

Dog Days indeed... woof.

GENRE > Third Person Shooter
 PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE FIRST *KANE & LYNCH* game, subtitled *Dead Men*, didn't do much to impress the critics. In fact, most people who played the game had something to complain about. It was simply a case of a good game gone wrong, with a great many issues plaguing the title.

So it was a bit of a surprise that the developers of the title, IO interactive, got a green light to make a sequel. The assumption, of course, is that they would have listened to the complaints and would have fixed all those niggling little issues that the game had. But we all know what assumptions do, right?

The two rather nasty main characters from the first game reprise their roles in *Dog Days*, but this time they're in Shanghai (a place that seems to be a virtual hotspot for combat oriented games these days). When an arms deal goes horribly wrong, the two need to blast their way out of the city. It's not exactly an original plot, but the story is fairly well told, and even becomes fairly emotionally charged at times – although the connection to these nasty people may not be enough for the player to really care about their emotions. Still, it does try to tug at the heart-strings a bit. The narrative, to be honest, is the best thing about the game. That might sound impressive, but keep in mind that the story is only fairly well told.

The thing is that the developers apparently didn't listen to the complaints and went and made many of the same mistakes again. And where they did fix things, they made a whole bunch of new



mistakes to compensate.

The first issue with the game is something of a personal one... the presentation. The whole game has the feeling of being the love child between a Michael Mann film and a YouTube video. The visuals are grainy and shaky, like they were filmed on a bad quality handycam, complete with lens flare and other effects that might be cool in principle, but are actually just annoying. Perhaps the developers were looking at making the game grittier with this style. But 'gritty' often equated to 'nasty' as is the case here. Beside the obvious question of who the hell is filming the debacle, there is the nauseating camera sway and the intrusive lighting effects. It was meant to look cheap for impact, but it ends up just looking cheap.



Extreme Parkour.



Next time don't dress like the mailman.



If you can get past the whole horrible shaky cam thing, there is tons of shooting to do in this title. In fact, that's roughly all the player will do. There's nothing wrong with 'pop and drop', cover-based combat in games, provided it's well done. In this case, IO missed the mark on more than a few aspects.

The player will engage in a mad dash from area to area. As soon as there are a few viable bits of cover, they will know there is a fire-fight coming. The game will then pour the toughest cannon-fodder bad guys into the level – they take almost as much punishment as a standard, strapping video-game hero. The player will invariably be armed with a gun that is completely inaccurate and horribly underpowered. Sure, more guns can be found, but finding a truly good gun is something along the lines of a miracle... never mind finding the ammunition to keep using it. And then, just to add a little more insult, the game employs a flawed hit detection system and an aim assistant that couldn't assist its way out of a wet paper bag. The result is protracted, frustrating fire-fights, marred by a flawed cover system.

The cover system would have worked a lot better if the AI characters didn't pour in from every angle. Sure, that adds excitement and a level of strategy, but the player's character is rather clunky when it comes to taking cover, meaning that a lot of cheap deaths are on the cards.

Worst of all, this is all the player will do. In the original game there was some variety

to the missions, including heists and the like. This time around, it's a repetitive, linear run-and-gun, minus the run bit. Running isn't a big thing in games that require a lot of cover to be taken. Add to that the fact that, should the player be running down a corridor and needs to vault over some low object, he needs to take cover behind the object first, before he can jump it.

On the multiplayer side, things look a little better. There are a few options beyond the normal co-op game which players are likely to enjoy. One that particularly stood out was taking part in a multiplayer heist mission, while a random player is assigned the duty of being an undercover cop who has to stop the heist. It creates a lot of mistrust and paranoia in the game, which is fantastic, and the undercover player needs to be pretty clever to get his task done.

When all is said and done, the game is rather disappointing, just like the first instalment was. At least there's consistency in that, but the truth is that the release of this game was timed to coincide with the year's biggest gaming dry-spell, and it will do well purely because it has very little to compete against.

Worst of all is that these interesting (if unlikeable) characters and a reasonable concept were squandered for a second time. And, with the undoubted sales that the game will achieve, there will almost certainly be a third instalment in future. Let's just hope that IO listen to what people are saying next time. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

18

www.pegi.info 1-2 2-12 2

- >Plus
- + Lots of action
 - + Cool multiplayer modes

- >Minus
- Repetitive
 - Little variation
 - Presentation

>Bottom Line

A squandered opportunity to steer the franchise in the right direction.

Look & Listen For the Fans





Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2

Back in action (already?)

GENRE > Arcade Flight Simulator

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

THE ORIGINAL OUTING OF the *H.A.W.X* franchise was met with mixed responses. While Ubisoft claimed that it was an authentic flight experience, those who enjoyed that kind of game were quick to point out that it was not one. The physics of the actions the planes could perform in that title were on the wrong side of possible in many cases, allowing the player to pull off moves that would tear the aircraft's wings from its fuselage in the real world. But it was still fun, and crammed with masses of enemies that lead to intense, explosive dog fights that would have made Jerry Bruckheimer proud. The wide variety of planes, selectable weapons load-outs in the single player campaign and undeniably Hollywood feel of the whole affair made the fact that it was an arcade flight game masquerading as an authentic simulator forgivable.

The franchise has made a return (and rather quickly at that) in the form of *H.A.W.X. 2*, but there are numerous differences between the titles. The most noticeable, in terms of the story, is that the player doesn't just control one pilot in this game. Rather, he will bounce between different fighter pilots, as the game unravels its somewhat convoluted, very Tom Clancy tale.

In terms of game dynamics, the developers have seen fit to do away with the more insane aerial stunts, and have substituted for the lack of mid-air versions of drift turning with new challenges. These include taking off and landing and mid-air refuelling. The action is also punctuated by UAV and gunnery missions.

In many ways, this is a very different game from the franchise initiator. It feels

more realistic, at least in setting and aircraft capabilities, and doesn't challenge the player with truck-loads of enemies. While the enemies are fewer, they certainly are smarter than before, and dog-fights can turn into protracted affairs that last a little too long at times – particularly if the player is using the standard Xbox controller. In addition, the enemies are a lot smarter, and will relentlessly pursue the player, making the game rather difficult at times. This is exacerbated by the fact that the player's wingmen seem a little short in the AI department. Still, it's not particularly broken... just rather difficult at times. And the difficulty of the game, while following a curve, has a few unexpected spikes that, at times, make the flow of the title seem a little interrupted.

Just like the aircraft the player will use, the mission types are varied. Aside from the aforementioned sneaky UAV missions and the mass destruction of the gunnery missions, the player will get to eliminate specific targets on oil rigs, race to escape through winding canyons, take out enemies trying to smuggle weapons, and even defend a rather nice rendition of Cape Town.

The game is visually appealing, with the planes looking great and the environments (once again) based on Geo-Eye satellite imagery. The special effects are pretty good, too, and the sound is not only exciting, but informative, too (with different tones and sounds for different events, like stalls, missile locks and so forth.)

The controls aren't too bad either, although they might have been a little more intuitive. The game is best played with a flight stick peripheral, as the standard Xbox controller can sometimes make things a little tricky.

A multiplayer component has also been included, with a four player co-op being

>>

Did You Know?

If a 105mm M102 howitzer shell fired from a Lockheed AC-130 gunship hits you squarely in the face, you will die.

the highlight of the package. In fact, many will find this mode to be the best way to play *H.A.W.X. 2*. The tough enemy AI, hectic difficulty spikes and often protracted dog-fights of the campaign may not be what people are after in an arcade flight simulator.

H.A.W.X. 2 is, like its predecessor, not a perfect game. It features a few bugs here and there, and sometimes feels thoroughly imbalanced in terms of difficulty. Additionally, the cut scenes between missions could have been done a lot better. All this aside, though, it does provide the player with an enjoyable experience, if they are more inclined towards being forgiving of the title. Hardcore flight simulator gamers and sticklers for absolute realism should probably look elsewhere. However, those that want to take part in an enjoyable game based on aircraft – particularly those who are looking for a little co-op dog-fighting – will not need to look further than *H.A.W.X. 2*. It is an enjoyable title, above all, even if it isn't perfect. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

12

www.pegi.info

1

2-8

2-4



- >Plus**
- + Some new challenges
 - + Great co-op

- >Minus**
- Difficulty spikes
 - AI imbalance

Look Listen For the Fans

>Bottom Line

A passable arcade flight simulator that is best played with friends.

72

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1. Respondents from Infonetics September 2008 survey report that Tipping Point blocks 2.3X more threats compared to next closest competitor

2. IDC white paper sponsored by HP, ROI of a Complete Networking Portfolio: The Business Case for Open Standards, September 2010





If spiders could do this, the human race would be screwed.



Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

Four is better than one apparently

GENRE > Action Adventure

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

SPIDER-MAN: SHATTERED DIMENSIONS BEGINS with the Amazing Spider-Man accidentally shattering the Tablet of Order and Chaos, a powerful artifact. Pieces of the tablet are scattered across four Marvel dimensions in which Spidey resides, causing all manner of problems for each dimension as villains scramble to use the pieces to amplify their powers. Madame Web shows up and tasks the Spider-Men with retrieving the scattered pieces located in their respective dimensions, and so we're thrown into the mix controlling four distinct (well, sort of – I'll explain later) versions of Spider-Man throughout *Shattered Dimensions'* story: Amazing Spider-Man, Ultimate Spider-Man (who is donning the black symbiote suit to differentiate him from his very similar Amazing counterpart), Spider-Man 2099 and Spider-Man Noir. The story will definitely satisfy the webslinger's fans, because it's filled with total fan service: we can imagine reading a crossover comic series portraying a tale just like this one. The developers have clearly done their homework, because the story (and certain unlockable features) occasionally references long past and more recent events in the Marvel universe and puts them to good use to show fans that Beenox clearly cares about the character and his history.

Unlike recent *Spider-Man* games, *Shattered Dimensions* removes "sandbox" and "open world" from its list of features. Instead, we're taken back to Spider-Man's days on the original PlayStation and led through a series of linear missions set within one of the four Marvel universes. Never fear, however, because all the swinging and Spider-Man antics still feature in the missions, albeit with annoying invisible walls preventing you from getting too swing happy. Thirteen levels (excluding a short tutorial level), each themed around a specific super villain pulled from Spidey's extensive rogues' gallery are on offer here. Kraven, Scorpion, Vulture and others all grace the list of people to web in the eye, with each requiring a different approach to overcome. Each mission will take you around 40 minutes to complete and features level-specific challenges that'll reward you with Spider Essence with which to purchase



new attacks, health upgrades and even alternate suits for your Spider-Men. The levels themselves are quite varied, ranging from jungle ruins to the futuristic New York that Spider-Man 2099 inhabits. Combat is actually really fluid and quite impressive, with a number of different combos and special attacks to unleash as you make Spider-Man prance around enemies. Each Spider-Man is provided unique abilities and different gameplay mechanics. So: four different Spider-Men, an extensive roster of villains, a variety of cool levels and a slick combat system. Sounds great right?

It is, but it all gets a bit wobbly from there. You may have four Spideys from which to choose, but each is surprisingly similar when you get down to it. There are also some really strange design choices thrown into the mix. Spider-Man Noir, for example, is all about stealth, making him the star of *Shattered Dimensions'* take on *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Stealth takedowns are Noir's specialty, able to grab enemies from a distance and shut them up using ridiculous amounts of web to stick 'em to walls and string bad dudes up from lampposts. Problem is that it's a very forced mechanic and you've got no choice in the matter, even though Noir proves on numerous occasions that he's got the chops to brawl in the same league as his cross-dimensional siblings. Instead,

>>

Spider-Man was introduced to the world in the 15th issue of *Amazing Fantasy* in August of 1962. Created by the legendary Stan Lee and cohort Steve Ditko, we doubt the duo ever imagined the webslinger would become the cultural icon that he is today.



be seen and you're forced to run and hide in the shadows, which is understandable when most of these enemies are armed with guns, but irritating when you realise that it's impossible to take down enemies as Noir in any other manner than that in which the game forces you to. Some choice would have been nice. Ultimate and Spider-Man 2099 are provided Rage (makes attacks extremely powerful) and the ability to slow time to a crawl respectively, but these do little to differentiate their gameplay from Amazing's vanilla Spidey action. This all starts getting mind-numbingly repetitive when you take into account that mission objectives are also stupidly monotonous (I'm looking at you, Deadpool level) as you progress and it doesn't help that, while the enemies are often themed around each mission's villain, you're stuck with four basic enemy types: dudes with guns, dudes who punch stuff, dudes with shields and big dudes with big hammers/maces/whatever. Boss battles are largely entertaining, but the repetitive trudge you have to put up with to reach them gets boring quickly. Flashes of brilliance within levels (that same Deadpool level comes to mind again, when cool stuff involving tidal waves happens) alleviate this somewhat, but it'd be nice if there was more variety in the enemies, objectives and Spider-Men than there is on offer here.

I ran into random bugs that often resulted

"Em... You've got some gum in your hair. Careful with that bubble blowing."



in hilarity as enemies (even bosses) fell through floors, Spidey got trapped in geometry and such, but thankfully nothing broke entirely throughout my time with the game. Despite all my whining, bear in mind that *Shattered Dimensions* is still a good game, filled with awesome fan service (the unlockable content like figurines, character bios and concept art is very welcome), great combat and a loving amount of Spidey humour. I'm a huge Spider-Man fan and I had fun zipping about as the webslinger in *Shattered Dimensions*. If you're willing to deal with the repetition, you may enjoy it too.

NAG
Dane Remendes



THE SCORE



>Plus
+ Great for *Spider-Man* fans
+ Smooth combat
+ Level variety

>Minus
- Gets insanely repetitive
- Bugs... LOL
- Poor enemy variety

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For the Fans

75

>Bottom Line
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions is good fun and great fan service despite the repetition, technical hiccups and repetition.

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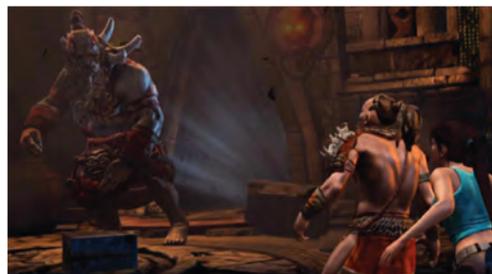
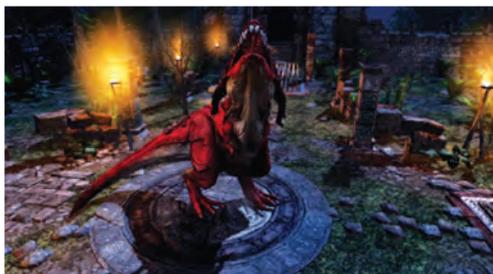
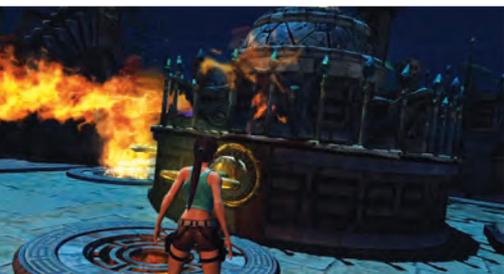
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Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light

Lara & Friend: Tomb Buddies!

GENRE > Isometric Action platform
 XBLA PSN PC WII PS2 PSP DS

LET'S GET THIS OUT of the way first: the isometric arcade adventure *Guardian of Light* is the best *Tomb Raider* game since the original *Tomb Raider*.* That's because every attempt to follow up the original classic seems to have forgotten one thing: Lara Croft *raids tombs*. She's not a super hero, or an international woman of mystery. Where every subsequent sequel strayed from the farm, *GoL* reigns the concept back in.

The forgettable plot, involving an evil priest, a precious artifact, and a valley of tombs, exists merely to get itself out of the way as fast as it can. *Guardian of Light* is a playground of super tight mechanics and toys. Part traversal adventure, part puzzle game, part twin-stick shooter, part co-op campaign: every screen worth of real estate is packed with something interesting and a brisk pace. An organic level structure leads Lara and companion Totec through several large crypts, volcanic calderas and swamps. Puzzles are never overly challenging to figure out, but remarkably logical and natural, aided in part by the mechanic of a grappling hook and rope that behaves like a real rope, wrapping around and bending over obstacles. To say any more would be to spoil great moments of revelation.

But wait, there's more! *Guardian of Light* is also one of the most finely tuned co-op games in years. Areas are fully built for either single or multiplayer with modified layouts and two players must fully cooperate like a well-oiled machine to progress. Lara, you see, needs Totec's thrown spears to use as

balancing beams. Totec meanwhile needs Lara's grapple to climb up walls and cross chasms. The complexity builds gradually and naturally, with often more than one way to solve a situation.

Couple this to an arcade-style scoring system tracked with profile support for both players, and a genuine horde of enemies to chew through with literally dozens of weapons, and you have a fairly exciting arcade-combat game to boot. The visuals keep pace with the action with only rare slowdowns, and are more detailed and rich than you'd expect. It's lengthy; around eight hours for two players working together and likely more for a single player. Challenge sheets in each area invite players to return, and unlike more hollow achievements, these each unlock upgrades to attack higher difficulty levels with.

It's a mite odd that such a mix of genres and play-styles are pulled together in a game that feels perfectly natural on its own terms. Odder yet that it's the most satisfying *Tomb Raider* in a decade. With a stronger story and perhaps, a slightly

more epic finale, *Guardian of Light* may have ended up being the best of them all. As is, it is well worth the downloadable price tag (1,200 Microsoft Points).

As of this writing, co-op is offline only. Online support is scheduled to be patched in within the month, along with three DLC chapters. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



THE SCORE

12	1-2	N/A	2	ED'S CHOICE
<small>www.pegi.info</small>				

- >Plus
- + Tons of fun
 - + Lots of challenge
 - + Awesome cooperative

- >Minus
- Cheesy plot
 - Silly dialogue
 - No online co-op yet

>Bottom Line

This is Lara at her finest, and wearing a stunning new outfit to boot.

86

DEVELOPER > EA Sports PUBLISHER > Electronic Arts
 DISTRIBUTOR > Electronic Arts South Africa WEB > maddennfl.easports.com



Nope, nothing at all gay about American football. No idea what you're talking about.



Madden NFL 11

The franchise gets friendly

GENRE > Sport Simulation

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

RECENTLY WE'VE SEEN MORE and more sports simulations related to traditionally American sports released in South Africa. There could be a number of reasons for this, but let's face facts: our traditionally popular sports just aren't getting much (if any) attention from game developers. Cricket games are few and far between and rugby games even more so. And so we have to settle for the basketball, ice hockey and gridiron simulations. This isn't a bad thing. American sports are glitzy and entertaining, at the very least, but the knowledge that we have of those sports isn't necessarily enough to warrant buying a game based on them.

There is a small fan base for American football in this country, and that is more than likely where *Madden NFL 11* will strike a chord. The game has been overhauled and simplified, meaning that newcomers to the sport

(or the franchise) will have an easier time getting into the swing of things. A little research into the rules and terminology won't go amiss, though.

Graphically beautiful, *Madden NFL 11* will allow the player better control over the players on the field. Although the player will mostly control the quarterback, they will have the opportunity to use other player positions as well during the game.

The play book has been simplified, with an automated system taking care of most of the tactics. The player can choose different tactics, of course, but the AI gets things right nine times out of ten.

If you enjoy gridiron, or you want an enjoyable, different sports simulation to get into, *Madden NFL 11* is a good choice. The sport is deliciously technical, which translates beautifully into this solid, enjoyable title.

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE



>Plus
 + Simpler approach
 + Great graphics

>Minus
 - Not huge in SA
 - Fans may find it too easy

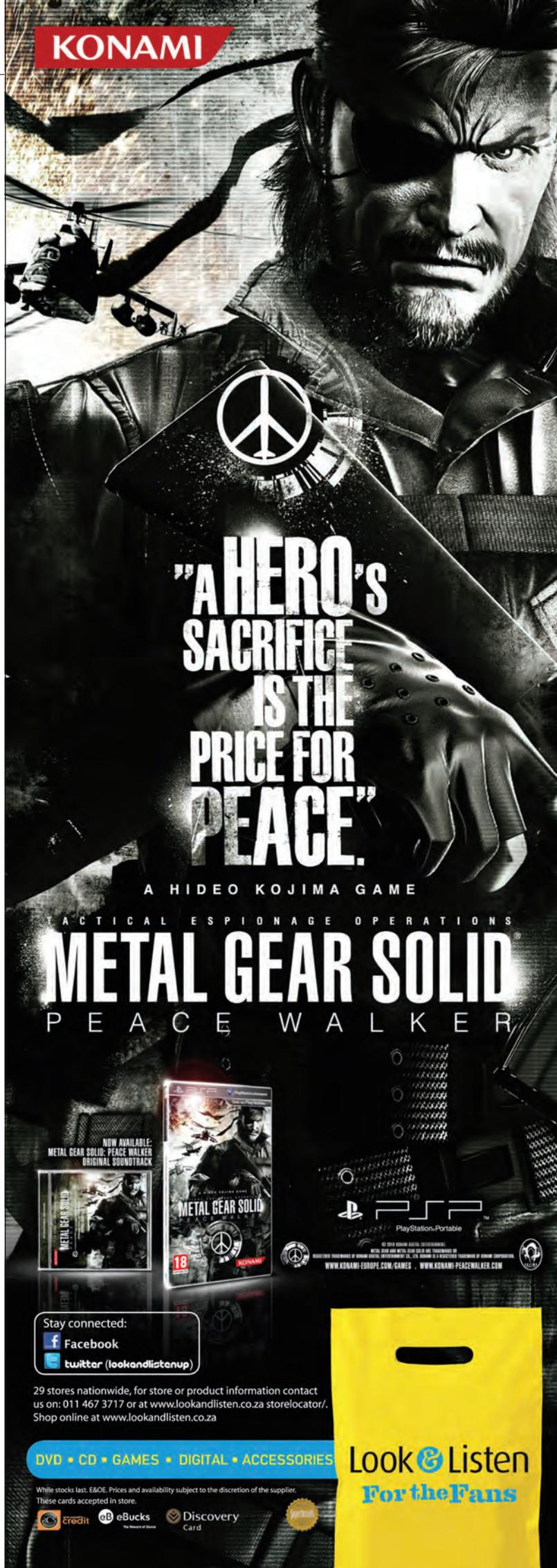
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>Bottom Line

Madden 11 is an enjoyable and accessible title for those interested in American football.

79

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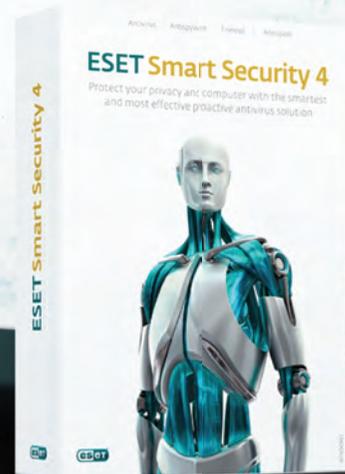
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DEVELOPER > Vector Unit PUBLISHER > Microsoft Game Studios
 DISTRIBUTOR > Microsoft WEB > www.vectorunit.com



Hydro Thunder Hurricane

Getting wet all over again

GENRE > Arcade racing

PC XBLA PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

HYDRO THUNDER WAS THE mid-90s sit-down-arcade-cabinet-bass-speaker-thumping game *du jour*. Sure it was shallow, but it was awesome. Like impossible off-road rally racing on water with nitro-powered super boats and 200m sheer vertical drop jumps – that kind of awesome. Ported a few times through the years, the Xbox Live edition is arguably the definitive build.



over quickly, but the challenge modes go deeper than it first appears.

It just works, and it works well. You should know what you want with a game like this, and it will give you what you want. It's summed up by the radio voice of your crew chief when you plunge off a waterfall: "This is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy!"

DLC tracks are coming, and while the amount of default content is fair, the price asked is maybe a notch or two higher than what represents a great value (1200 Microsoft Points). For fans, it's a no-brainer. For the un-initiated, that's why XBLA games have *free trials*. If you have any soul for arcade racing, *Hydro Thunder Hurricane* is deserving of a test drive.

NAG
Miktar Dracon

Hurricane is a little more than a remake, and a little less than a sequel. The classic tracks have been tweaked and tucked, expanded and polished up. The visuals are more up to date than not, without changing the look of the arcade game. Developer Vector Unit has stuck to what is really needed – more gameplay modes and extensive multiplayer support both online and off. Full races are supported with four player split screen, and all four players can even go online from the same console. Online races are balanced thanks to a simple mechanic where placement determines boost power gained from pickups. In single player, the tournament tour of all eight stages is

THE SCORE

3 (Score) | 1-4 (Players) | 2-8 (Modes) | N/A (Online) | [Controller Icon]

- >Plus**
- + Faithful arcade experience
 - + Rebalanced racing mechanics
 - + Tons of fun

- >Minus**
- None

>Bottom Line
One of the boats is a giant rubber ducky!

80

12
www.pegi.info

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Look & Listen For the Fans

Duke Nukem 3D: Atomic Edition

DEVELOPER > 3D Realms PUBLISHER > Apogee Software PRICE > \$5.99 on gog.com (Atomic Edition includes bonus fourth episode)

WITH DUKE NUKEM FOREVER'S miraculous revival at the hands of Randy Pitchford and the crew at Gearbox Software (developers of *Borderlands* and the *Brothers in Arms* series), it seems appropriate that this month's Looking Back should focus on Duke and his Mighty Boot. Hail to the king, baby.

It may not have been the first game featuring the macho defender of our chicks, but *Duke Nukem 3D* is certainly the most memorable. Released in January 1996, little over three years after Doom's December 1993 release, *Duke Nukem 3D* was immediately met with an onslaught of controversy in the mainstream media and overwhelming affection from gamers. Despite being labelled a *Doom* clone (i.e. an FPS), *Duke* was technologically superior to id's game (thanks to the three-year gap between the two) with its partially destructible environments, better audio and better-looking textures. Duke himself, a 'roid monkey sporting a buzz cut and a thousand one-liners ready for any situation, was such an awesome parody of the '80s action hero that gamers couldn't help but be enamoured with his preference to shoot lots of stuff without ever bothering to ask questions.

The story? It's a LOL – Duke's a one-man army fighting off an alien invasion that threatens to rob Earth of all its

busty bimbos. Duke can't have that, so the solution is to travel to locations like Hollywood, a moon base and alien spaceships to blow stuff up and keep the girls in college right here on Earth. It's this sort of tongue-in-cheek humour that the game oozes with – not only is the FPS gameplay just as fun today as it was back then, but we also can't help but giggle (partly due to nostalgia) at Duke's quips and the random hilarious imagery and WTF moments strewn throughout the game. If you ever go to a strip club and see someone tossing a dollar bill at the college girls while saying "shake it baby," you should congratulate them, for they have (possibly unknowingly) made a *Duke* reference. It's also the only game we can recall in which the protagonist uses an enemy's neck as a bog.

With its bizarre, totally awesome weaponry (like shrink rays and dual-wielded rocket launchers), cool level design filled to the brim with secrets, great action set in whacky environments and awesomely cheesy main character, *Duke Nukem 3D* has actually aged remarkably well. Yeah, it looks like something you'd pull a funny face at before scraping it off the bottom of your shoe with a stick, but the gameplay is still hugely entertaining, often brutally challenging and still loads of fun. **NAG**

Duke Nukem 3D High-Resolution Pack

This mod for the game makes playing *Duke* today much less of a burden on eyes that have become more accustomed to the "OMG graphicZ in *Crysis!*" It adds 32-bit high resolution textures, proper 3D models (instead of the original sprites) and better, more natural mouse support and more to make the experience more palatable to anyone who hates sprites, old technology, kittens and democracy. Shame on you. Download it here: <http://hrp.duke4.net>



Comparison of Duke Nukem 3D with (right) and without (left) the High-Resolution Pack.

"Duke's a one-man army fighting off an alien invasion that threatens to rob Earth of all its busty bimbos."

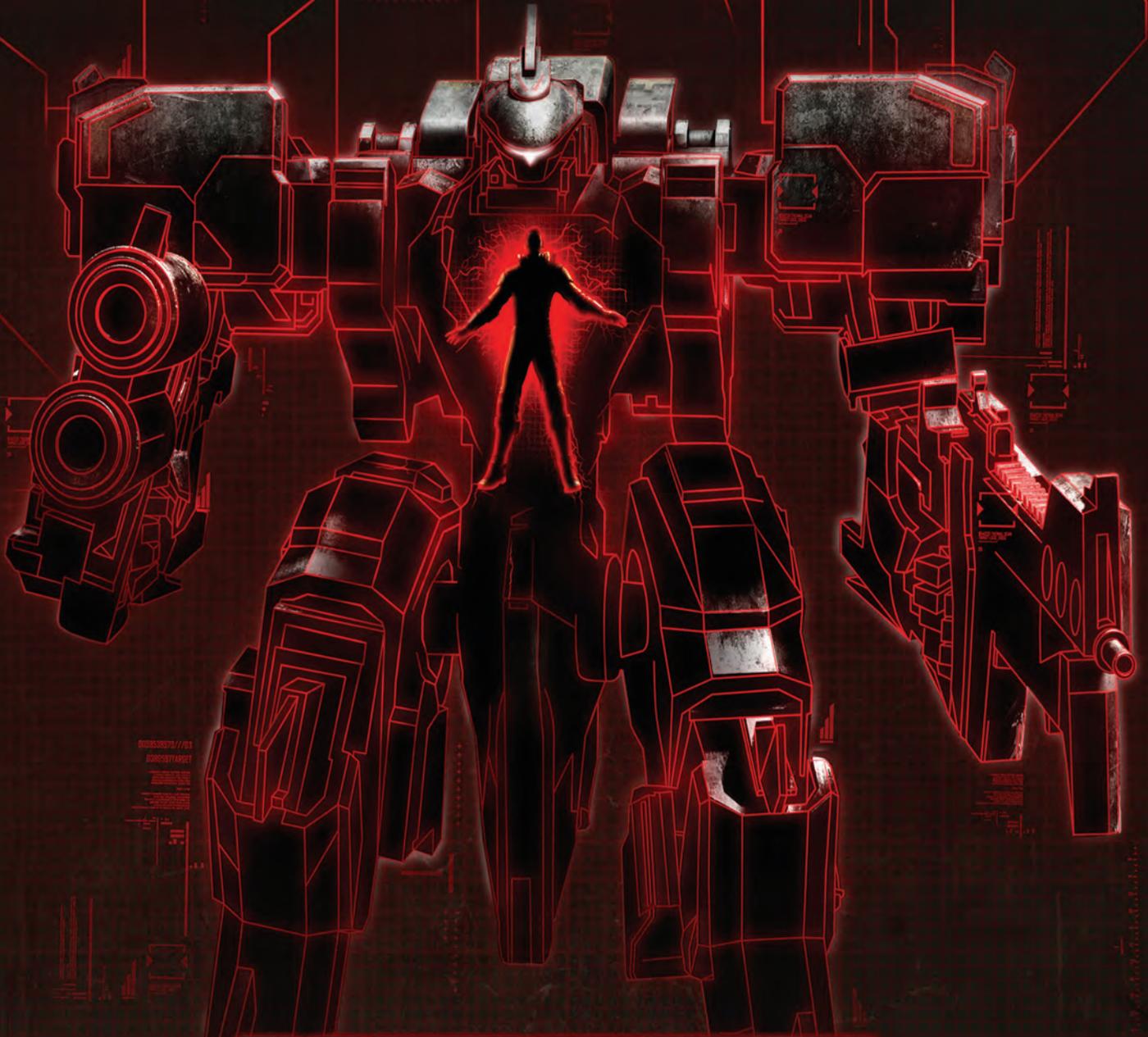


Shake it, baby!

All the sexual references, strippers, adult-entertainment stores and silliness of *Duke Nukem 3D* caused quite the uproar, with some countries refusing classification of the game and others outright banning the game entirely. The mainstream media often published blatant lies about the game in the name of publicity and sensationalism, saying that the game promoted pornography and murder. One such case involved a publication warning the public of all the bonus points their children would receive for killing the game's strippers. We don't recall ever receiving bonus points for shooting strippers in *Duke*. All we ever got was punished when the game suddenly spawned a million enemies to avenge the stripper's death.



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StarCraft II Strategy Guide

Part 1: The Terrans

STARCRRAFT II HIT THE multiplayer strategy scene with a loud bang, and is proving to be a huge competitive success not only through its own virtues, but also thanks to the slick match-making and league system rolled out onto Battle.net for it. As a result, if you are playing a competitive RTS at the moment, odds are you are playing *StarCraft II*, and if you are looking at improving your game, then watch this space. Over the next few months, we will be bringing you knowledge to do just that. However, don't expect build orders – those you can find easily enough online, or by watching replays. Rather, expect to read about medium- to long-term strategies, and the philosophies behind them. We kick off this first issue close to home, with basic common fundamentals, and a look at the Terran faction, a favourite of novice players (though by no means limited to them). In following issues, we will cover the other factions, and some more advanced concepts.

INFORMATION IS POWER

Sun Tzu was among the first to write "know thy enemy", and to emphasise the role of knowledge in war. It is no wonder his teachings are respected even to this day. In *StarCraft II*, just as in war, there are various types of knowledge:

Map knowledge: This comes primarily from experience, and from watching replays. You

can play custom games against AIs to get to know the general layout of the maps. However, it is once you start playing against live opponents that subtleties will start manifesting, so expect the unexpected.

Intelligence: This means "what is my enemy doing?" and is vital at all stages of the game. A common practise is to send out an early worker to scout out your enemies – if their factions were unknown (by playing 'random'), they will now be revealed. Try to keep your intelligence up to date – fast flying units are ideal, as they can sweep by to reveal, and then fly away to safety. You can also suicide the occasional unit.

Faction knowledge: Here is "know thy enemy", in a wider sense – knowing what you are likely to face based on your enemy's faction. The ways to do this: be familiar with all the factions (here, it helps to play 'random'), watch lots of replays, and talk to people about their experiences.

You'll notice a recurring theme: replays. You should always save the replays of difficult games, and particularly of games you lose – you'll learn the most from those. Also, actively seek out other people's replays, especially those of strong players. The replay playback interface in *SC2* is quite advanced – learn its subtleties, and you stand to gain much.



Replays

Replays are great if you know what you're looking at, but shoutcasted (commentated) replays will really give you the edge and help you gain insight into the deeper strategies common in high-level games. If you have the bandwidth to spare, head over to YouTube and search for the users "BlizShouter", "SC2NoobSchool" and "HuskyStarcraft". There are many other good shoutcasters, but these guys are a great starting point.

Geoff Burrows





Sneaky hints

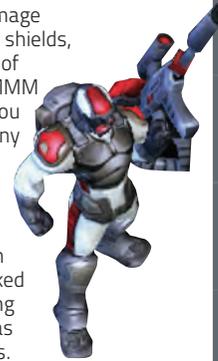
Reactors and Tech Labs aren't specific to the structures that added them, meaning that any Barracks, Factory, or Starport can dock to either. Think about how that can be used to get to a certain tech or production capacity faster. As an example (see left sequence), you can tech quickly to Banshees by building a Tech Lab on your Factory while your Starport is under construction. As soon as the Starport completes, lift it off and plop it down next to the Tech Lab built at your Factory, so you can get Banshees out without the need to wait for the Starport's own Tech Lab.

If you face Protoss, and can't tell whether he's going air (Void Rays), build Vikings. If he went ground, you can land your Vikings and they'll at least contribute on the ground.



Ghosts

Ghosts are a sorely under-utilised unit against Protoss. Their EMP ability does 100 units of area-of-effect (AoE) damage against all Protoss shields, so mixing a couple of Ghosts into your MMM ball will help give you the edge against any Protoss threats. The damage also drains all energy from spellcasters, which makes them great against cloaked Banshees bothering your base as well as burrowed Infestors.



Geoff Burrows



Team Player:
Plays well with others

A Terran player who understands his/her faction is one of the best buddies to have next to you in a team game. Terrans make excellent support players. The ability of a Terran army to arrive in an area and dig in to lock it down makes the "T" player very valuable in capturing territory, and for helping defend a teammate's facilities. Terrans are also great for army health: if you are teamed up with a Zerg, consider going with a "bio build" – lots of infantry backed up by many medivacs. This isn't a bad force to begin with (often known as "MMM ball" – marines-marauders-medivacs), but with Zerg at your side, your medivacs will always have something to heal. In SC2, SCVs can now repair damaged Protoss units, so if you are teamed up with one of those, keep this fact in mind, and perhaps keep a few auto-repairing SCVs somewhere handy. (As an aside: if you are teamed with a Protoss player who is using lots of Zealots, think twice before you use your siege tanks in siege mode behind them, or at least micro them to shoot at targets away from the Zealots – your units should not be trying to kill your teammate's!) Another useful Terran "service" in a team game is scans-on-demand (for example, when your teammate's base is being ripped apart by Dark Templars) – make sure you keep spare energy in your Orbital Commands for emergency scans.



Ground



Air

Ghosts are particularly effective against Zerg, as all Zerg units are susceptible to Sniper Rounds.

Don't underestimate the Raven's Point Defence Drone – it intercepts many types of incoming enemy fire, reducing damage done to your forces.

Keep your Orbital Commands on a number hotkey, and make a habit of scanning in messy battles: this will reveal Dark Templars, Hallucinations, Infestors, and other kinds of trickery.



Floating citadels

On maps with island expansions, a neat trick is to try to tie up your opponent in a ground war, and sneakily build a command centre near one of those islands and float it over. You can even garrison some SCVs within it for the trip, meaning that when you land you can set up your expansion chop-chop. Ring your island with turrets, and upgrade your command centre to a planetary fortress just in case a small landing party manages to make it there. Planetary fortresses can also, in rare cases, be used offensively – float a command centre into the rear of an enemy's base while you engage in a diversionary frontal assault, upgrade to a planetary fortress, and wreak some havoc! Keep in mind: this is a very tricky and risky gambit!



Scanner Sweeps

Scanner sweeps should only be performed in an emergency, if you have the minerals to spare, or if you're scanning difficult-to-reach locations. See each scanner sweep as a trade for a MULE. Know that a MULE can harvest 270 minerals (or 378 from a high-yield patch) during its lifespan and it soon becomes obvious just how expensive those scanner sweeps can be. Ask yourself if you could perform the same scouting function with a couple of Marines or a Hellion; if the answer is yes, rather drop in a MULE, train more units and scout manually.

Geoff Burrows

DENYING INFORMATION

Just as gaining intelligence is crucial, so it is vital to deny it to your opponent. "Walling off" your base entrance is a common technique, but it won't stop that early probe/drone/SCV. Dotting anti-air structures or units around your perimeter can also deter light fast air scouts later in the game. Switching techs once you've been scouted is a sneaky way to mislead your opponent: let him see two gateways, then switch to air tech, for example. If you are confident with all the factions, playing 'random' will keep your opponent guessing in the early game.

THE TERRANS

Terran is a very strong faction for "knowing stuff" – there is absolutely no way to stop a scan sweep, so make a point of getting an Orbital Command as early as possible.

Terran Wall-In: The idea was first developed in the original *StarCraft*, by using Terran buildings' ability to lift off as a "gate" of sorts, and now the concept is enhanced by the fact that supply depots can be lowered,

resulting in a gate that doesn't interrupt unit production. Placing a couple of auto-repairing SCVs behind the supply depots will delay attackers, while your own marines, marauders, and later siege tanks, can shoot over them. Make sure to include a missile turret, not only to protect from air, but to serve as a detector against stealth and burrowed units.

The pitfall: With a strong choke point like this, a common newbie mistake is to neglect defences elsewhere – but remember that there are such things as air units, and units that can cliff-jump (like reapers.) So make sure you have some sort of defence at your resources – turrets are good to discourage early Void Rays, Mutalisks, or Banshees, but also watch out for reaper entry points – keeping a couple of Hellions around can help with that. Some players even place and man a bunker at their minerals.

A more general mental pitfall of Terran defences is that of becoming too static ("turtling" too much). Try to avoid thinking

Nukes can pretty much wipe out entire armies, the trick is to place it where you think the enemy will move.



Sneaky hints

Try not to train infantry "for bunkers", but rather train them anyway – that way, you'll always be able to immediately staff new bunkers you might build.

Don't underestimate Hellions – they are powerful in the early game, and their speed makes them valuable as scouts, short-order relief troops, or fast-assault units.

Ghosts can hold their fire – use this to avoid giving away their position when sneaking up on someone, for instance when preparing to deliver a radioactive present.

Try to "layer" your siege tanks – it's pointless if all your tanks shoot at the same enemy, while other enemies get through.



Marauders are particularly useful against Protoss, as they are effective against all Toss ground units. Concussive Shells upgrade is a must-have.



Keep surplus SCVs on auto-repair around your base, particularly at defence hard-points, and anywhere you want to designate a "repair yard"



Hellions

Hellions' massive bonus damage against light units (once researched at a Factory-attached Tech Lab) makes them perfect counters against Hydralisks, which are often used as in mid- to late-game massing strategies due to their versatility. Hellions are cheaper, faster and potentially quicker to build than Hydras, and slightly tougher. If you have the micro skills, target units near the centre of the Hydra mass; the Hellions' linear splash damage will be maximised and the Hydras will be torn to pieces in no time.

Geoff Burrows



A Planetary Fortress in the opponents base, backed up with SCVs to repair any damage to the building while it takes out your enemies base.



of deployed siege tanks and bunkered infantry as permanent fixtures. Don't be too reluctant to move them out to wage war (you can simply replace them, anyway). The Terran ability to dig in and claim an area should, in fact, lend a certain mobility – use it to redraw your borders, whenever possible expanding your territory to take in more resource points. If things aren't going so well, you can retract your perimeter to consolidate, and hopefully stop a breach, then turn things around. (Just remember not to rely exclusively on a perimeter – if it is breached, you need to be able to respond.)

Set out to master guerrilla warfare – this approach can be very strong from behind Terran defences. The basic idea: lock down territory and resources, and make a highly mobile strike force with which to harass your enemy. Use the scanner sweep to find targets, either expansions or isolated targets of opportunity, then hit them and retreat (if necessary). Reapers are pretty good for

wrecking expansions – make sure they have the nitro packs upgrade, so they can make a clean getaway, and whenever possible try to hit with a frontal assault at the same time to distract and divert your opponent. Alternatively, you can use Banshees, striking for maximum effect and then cloaking to withdraw. Very annoying to your opponent can be two or three charged Ravens – sneak them in, deploy a bunch of auto-turrets, then bring the Ravens home. The turrets kill off the workers, and possibly the nexus/hatchery/command centre, if allowed to do so, and hang around afterward, further hampering your opponent. Best of all: the turrets only cost energy, so they are virtually "free".

If you've succeeded in constricting your enemy's economy, now might be the time to strike: you will both lose units, but if things went well, then you can replace them while he/she can't – keep up the pressure and you've won.

NAG

Alex Jelagin





New G-series gaming peripherals

LOGITECH HAS UNVEILED THREE new G-Series gaming peripherals – the Logitech Wireless Gaming Headset G930, the Logitech Wireless Gaming Mouse G700 and the Logitech Gaming Keyboard G510.

"Whether it's a headset with 7.1 surround sound, a mouse with 13 controls,

or a keyboard with an LCD that displays critical in-game stats, everything about the new G-Series line-up helps you win, no matter what game you love to play," said Leslie Smyth, Country Manager for South Africa and developing countries. The G930 will retail for R1,710, the G700 for R950 and the G510 for R955.



Mad Catz Limited Edition Black Ops headsets

Mad Catz have announced a new range of exclusive limited edition licensed *Call of Duty: Black Ops* professional gaming audio headsets, powered by the Company's TRITTON brand. The range includes two Xbox 360 and PS3 compatible headsets and a separate 5.1 headset for use with PC. Features include a detachable boom microphone, two sets of ear pads and a stealth 'backlit' glow, illuminating both ear cups when in use. The headset also comes with a nifty padded travel case. No local pricing or availability has been confirmed as yet, but the headset will retail for \$149.99 when it launches in the US in November.

Corsair Obsidian Series 800D

The Obsidian Series 800D is a full-tower case with a couple of unique features for gamers. It has hot-swap SATA drive bays and three isolated cooling zones.

A four-drive SATA hot-swap drive bay sits in the front of the case, making it easier to install or swap hard drives on the fly. The power supply compartment, main compartment and the SATA bays each have dedicated cooling subsystems to prevent heat buildup. A dust-filtered 140mm fan draws in cold air at the bottom of the case and exhausts it at the rear and top. This design forces fresh air directly over the graphics card and CPU. The SATA hot-swap bays are cooled by a separate 140mm fan which vents from the case via a sealed chamber and prevents the heat generated by the drives from entering the main compartment. The power supply compartment has its own dedicated intake and exhaust, also isolated from the main compartment.

The 800D is available from Frontosa. www.frontosa.co.za



Snippets

AMD will **phase out the use of the ATI brand name** later this year but will still retain the Radeon brand.

Sony confirmed that the PS3 firmware update will only be released in October. This update will allow **3D Blu-ray playback on the PlayStation 3.**

Mad Catz will be releasing a set of **amBX-supported gaming lights and an amBX-supported gaming keyboard** early in 2011. When you play an amBX-supported game your keyboard will generate light, providing an atmospheric and highly realistic gaming environment.

AMD revealed its two next-generation x86 processor core implementations. The two new designs, codenamed **"Bulldozer" for high-performance PC and server markets,** and "Bobcat" for low-power notebook and small form-factor desktop markets, were designed to address specific customer requirements and workloads.

Razer BlackWidow Mechanical Gaming Keyboard

Launched at GamesCom in Germany, the Razer BlackWidow features a uniquely tactile mechanical key architecture that provides each key on the keyboard with a crisp response and tactile feedback similar to a mouse click. The key actuation force is said to allow faster typing and precision clicking. The keyboard also features 3.5" audio and microphone out jacks as well as an additional USB port.



"The GeForce GTS 450 makes huge strides in expanding DX11 capability to the masses."

Sid Meier, Director of Creative Development, Firaxis Games. NVIDIA has announced the availability of the Fermi-class of graphics processing units (GPUs), the NVIDIA GeForce GTS 450. The GTS 450 has specifically been designed to excel at resolutions of between 1600x1050 and 1280x1024.

Know Your Technology

CAS Latency (CL): Most Ram these days is sold based on this value in addition to the memory speed. CAS Latency is the delay in clock cycles between sending a read command and getting the first bit of data back.

TWR: The number of clock cycles taken between writing data and the pre-charge command. This setting is responsible for making sure that it is safe to write data to the actual memory core. It is equally important in determining performance as CAS, but it's usually a relatively higher setting so for marketing purposes it's not referred to.

TRAS: This is the last setting after the three primary memory settings. It's the number of clock cycles taken between the bank active command and the issuing of the precharge command. It's usually an addition of the three primary settings or more.

TRCD: This is a secondary timing, and depending on the RAM there's usually a single cycle difference between this and the CAS Latency. So you will get RAM that is rated at 8-9-8-10. The "9" is the TWR setting and it's the number of clock cycles taken between the issuing of an active command and the read/write command.

By the Numbers

10Mbps

Telkom is still in the process of upgrading 4Mbps ADSL subscribers to 10Mbps. This is awesome news for online gaming, but don't get too excited just yet. To check if you're in line for a 10 Mbps upgrade you can go to this Telkom website and utilise their DSL 10Mbps Availability Checker <https://secureapp.telkom.co.za/dsl10checker/availability.do>

Did you know?

If you have an ATI graphics card and also a Steam account, you will now be able to update your ATI Catalyst drivers through Valve's content distribution network. The upcoming Catalyst 10.9 drivers will be the first to be distributed through Steam.

Hardware Scoring System

- 1 Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.
- 2 Hardware turns on/installs but doesn't do much else.
- 3 This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.
- 4 Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.
- 5 Middle of the road product. Performs and works exactly as advertised.
- 6 Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.
- 7 Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.
- 8 Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.
- 9 Excellent product, near perfect.
- 10 The stuff of dreams, the best in the market, bar none.

Hardware Awards



HARDWARE

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



DREAM MACHINE

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

The Mosh Pit



CORSAIR FLASH SURVIVOR GT 64GB

Aside from its kick ass looks (it is encased in strong CNC-milled anodized aircraft-grade aluminium), the Flash Survivor is water resistant to 200m. Its pricey yes, but you're paying for style and small form factor.

R2,400 | www.frontosa.co.za

ANTEC NINE HUNDRED TWO

This funky looking gaming case has loads of cooling technology with just the right amount of style. The 200mm TriCool exhaust fan is mounted on the top, two 120mm blue LED fans are in the front, and one 120mm fan at the back. The side window is transparent and has a vented screen; your fourth fan can be mounted here should you need additional ventilation.

R1,299 | www.frontosa.co.za



CORSAIR A50 PERFORMANCE CPU COOLER

Compatible with Intel and AMD systems, the Air Series A50 CPU cooler has a selectable 1,600 or 2,000RPM fan. If you manually overclock your CPU, the A50 will help you to achieve even higher clock frequencies. Three 8mm copper heatpipes directly contact your CPU and instantly pull heat up into the aluminium cooling fins.

R450 | www.frontosa.co.za



FRECOM MOBILE DRIVE CLS AND 3-PORT USB DOCK

The Mobile Drive CLS from Freecom is an external hard drive with a labelling system to help you organise all your chaotic data. You can label your drive to match its content: one for movies, one for music, one for work documents, one for system backups, etc.

For ease of use, there's also a 3-port USB dock available.

320GB drive: R599

500GB drive: R859

Dock: R179

www.esquire.co.za





The Dream Machine



Lickety-split

GASP! BLINK. SERIOUSLY? OMG. That's pretty much the sequence of events that happened when we were told what the price was for our Dream Machine memory this month. It's pretty hectic we know, but if you want to be driving around in a super fast car then you're gonna have to pay the super high price to get the best. The Corsair Dominator 6GB 2000MHz kit is the memory equivalent of the Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Super Sport. If you can afford to have it, then you should.

Still not convinced? At an average top speed of 431 km/h, the Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Super Sport currently holds the landspeed world record for production cars. We're not quite sure how the Corsair Dominator GT kit did out on the track, but in our test lab we achieved some scorching results. It was like greased lightning. Really.

The Damage...

COMPONENT	PRICE*
CASE	R3,999
PROCESSOR	R10,950
MOTHERBOARD	R7,999
MEMORY NEW!	R6,499
GRAPHICS	R13,999
STORAGE	R2,857
SOUND	R1,763
POWER	R4,200
DISPLAY	R3,499
HEADPHONES	R1,316
KEYBOARD	R2,001
MOUSE	R1,076
TOTAL	R60,158

* At print time

NOTEBOOK
Alienware M17x
 R29,999 | www.dell.co.za

System Specs:
CPU: Intel Core i7 720QM (2.8GHz)
RAM: 8GB DDR3 1066
Graphics: 2 x ATI Mobility RADEON HD4870 CFX
Display: 17-inch LCD (1920x1200)
HDD: 320GB SATA2
OS: Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit



PROCESSOR
Intel Core i7 980X
 www.intel.com



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



MEMORY **NEW!**
Corsair Dominator GT 2000C8
 www.corsair.com



GRAPHICS
ASUS ARES Limited Edition
 za.asus.com



STORAGE
Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
 www.seagate.com



SOUND
ASUS Xonar Essence ST *
 za.asus.com

* Does not work with Logitech G35 headphones



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



CASE
Ikonik Ra X10 LIQUID
 www.ikonik.com



DISPLAY
Samsung P2770HD
 www.samsung.co.za



HEADPHONES
Logitech G35 Surround Sound *
 www.logitech.com



KEYBOARD
Logitech G19
 www.logitech.com



MOUSE
Logitech G9x Laser
 www.logitech.com

* Does not work with ASUS Xonar Essence ST



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Windows®. Life without Walls™.
ASUS recommends Windows 7.

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THE ULTIMATE 17" GAMING LAP TOP **ASUS ROG G73**

STRIKE IN SILENCE



Blast Off to Supreme Gaming

Inspired by the F117 stealth bomber, the G73JH deploys Intel® Core™ i7 Processor and Windows® 7 Home Premium to deliver full-spec gaming thrills on a portable PC. With up to 8GB RAM and ATI Mobility Radeon HD 5870 graphics with 1GB GDDR5, this is a beast of a machine – finally notebook gaming that does the action proud!

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Tech Q&A

HARDWARE DESIGNER

From: Ashir Hanuman

"I WOULD LIKE SOME ADVICE please. I am currently studying computers, hardware, software etc... I like software also, but mostly I am really interested in studying hardware of the PC (motherboards, system units, CPUs etc...). I am currently doing the introduction and would love to study A+ next year. I love to learn about computer hardware and would love to take up a career in designing hardware. There are a lot of awesome products out there: System cases, motherboards, CPUs, keyboards, etc... In order to get such beautiful and wonderful products you need people to design them, and most probably these people have to have a good qualification in order to do so. But after studying A+, I have no clue as to what course to do in order to study designing of hardware and to become a hardware designer. Please could you advise me on which course to do? Also where to do the course. I am from South Africa (Pietermaritzburg). I picked your e-mail address from the hardware questions part, I figured that since you can answer questions on hardware, could you also help on career advice. Thank You!! Hardware Lover."

Neo: *Your best bet is to study electrical engineering, because that is the corner stone of all hardware. A degree preferably, but if not a diploma will do but is not ideal. It's not any easy field to get into because you have to have a strong grasp of electronics and all its fundamentals, but it's something you can definitely learn from experience so any additional knowledge you acquire outside of formal education will come in handy.*

VIDEOS ON THE DVD

From: Donovan Fourie

"H I GREAT MAG. I HAVE a problem. There are some movies on the NAG DVD that I can't watch. When I open them my computers graphics is reset to 4bit. I then have to restart my PC to fix this. What can this be? Is something wrong with my resolution settings? Should I get a new monitor? I have a Samsung SyncMaster 793s (its old), or should I get a new graphics card?"

Neo: *You likely need newer drivers or newer CODECS. Try updating both or use VLC player (along with updated graphics card drivers). Also, your bit-depth should always be 32-bit and not 16-bit.*

HDMI CABLES

From: John Brooke

"DEAR (TECH-GOD) NEO. I recently purchased a Samsung SyncMaster B2430 for use with my Xbox 360. At the same time purchased a cheap, generic HDMI cable. Then, at a later date, I saw some really expensive HP branded HDMI cables that boldly advertised their higher transfer rates. Now, my question is, will these more expensive cables – with their higher transfer rates – give me better quality HD gaming or will there be no difference at all, in which case should I stick with the generic cable I already have?"

Neo: *Depending on what you use your HDMI cable for, the higher quality ones may be*

worth it, however this mostly applies when dealing with very long cables. For the most part a generic one should be just fine and the higher-quality HP cable will not give you a better picture. The bit rate required for output to the Xbox is much lower than even the basic HDMI standard requires.

DREAM MACHINE QUESTION

From: Heinrich Opperman

"YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO build a PC in your Dream Machine but why no optical drive?"

Neo: *As stated at some point, this is because they are by and large the same. In my opinion there's nothing that makes one make superior to another, really."*

THIS IS DRIVING ME NUTS...

From: Timothy Steyn

"NORMALLY I'D SHOWER YOU guys with praise for such a brilliant magazine, greatly over exaggerating the Awesome that is NAG and commending for you for everything that even remotely ties to the mag. However, as you can see with the subject, I'm far too hopeless and agitated to rack my brains for well-deserved compliments for you, even though you guys and girls deserve far more than one dude can come up with.

I currently own an MSI 945P Neo3 motherboard. I'll admit my PC is rather ridiculous, but I'm still constantly told that my board can compete with some of the best – a fact I now look upon with disgust and something akin to hostility. See, the board has four USB 2.0 slots, and they work 100% where all my flash drives are concerned. My main qualm with this, and my PC as a whole, however, is how my already lacklustre Internet and my access to some of the larger USB-connected hardware come into play. What happens is the following: My flash drives work brilliantly yet, for some macabre reason, power to my USB Internet dongle and to my friends' external and portable hard drives is always cut off after a while, for no apparent reason. When this occurs, my internet connection is severed, which has resulted in my already-weak 600MB per month disappearing by the 8th or 9th day, and anything I'm currently copying or installing onto my internal hard drive is stopped immediately – and I am not amused by it, especially when a 100MB+ download abruptly stops at 96% because my "mobile connection is not possible." Apparently I need to ensure that my device has not been removed, and I know before my heart and soul that I didn't even touch it! The external and portable hard drives give me the same disillusioned story – A loud click! And then I get the dreaded Error Message – "Copying cannot continue". Apparently, the device has "been removed" according to my PC, whereas

For gaming on an Xbox 360, a high-end HDMI cable probably isn't necessary.

>>

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

it's still in the abominable ports!

I have made countless attempts to remedy this, to no avail – new drivers, removing and reinstalling the motherboard itself, nothing works. I've asked experts whether it could be my power supply unit, and they say that "There's no chance it could be that." Advice I frown upon these days. So please, I beg of you to loan me a helping hand and tell me what I can do to fix this issue – I'm close to hurling my screen in front of the closest speeding bus as it is...

Thanks in advance for your time, it's truly appreciated. I eagerly wait to hear from you guys. Keep up the great work with the amazing magazine and, most importantly, stay Awesome."

Neo: *The problem is the motherboard. Back then MSI used to make questionable motherboards, and that includes the entire 945 series and some other AMD motherboards, I have had a similar problem with a K8N-Diamond and the remedy was to throw it out and get a better motherboard. Sadly no BIOS update or anything was able to fix my problem as it was hardware related. Sorry, but you may just have to purchase a new motherboard.*

PS3 USB MODEM SETUP

From: Jacques Kuun

"I WANT TO START BY asking how I can connect my PS3 to the Internet via a 3G Vodacom USB modem? If possible, what sort of router would I need, and how much lag will I experience with the slow connection? I'm more looking towards downloading demos and firmware updates from playing online."

Geoff: *There is only one router that I am aware of that can perform this function: the Linksys WRT54G3GV2-VF. As far as I know, Vodacom does bring this router into the country, or you may be able to buy it from a retailer. Before you buy it, I suggest that you confirm with Vodacom whether or not your USB modem is compatible with the router. There is another, cheaper solution: use your PC to share the connection. Internet Connection Sharing (ICS) isn't as reliable as a dedicated router, but on modern operating systems (Windows Vista or higher), it's not too much of a hassle to set up. This link should help you get started: <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-vista/Using-ICS-Internet-Connection-Sharing>. Once it's set up, all you need to do is run an Ethernet crossover cable between your PC and PS3 and follow the setup procedure on your console. As for latency and speeds, don't expect too much. Obviously, this is dependent on your area and signal quality, as well as the particular game that you're playing, but generally 3G for gaming is only borderline playable. For downloading demos and updates, however, you should be fine. NAG*

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FROM THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED GAME DIRECTOR SHINJI MIKAMI

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www.sega.co.uk

Alienware M15x



What is Alienware?

Alienware has been around since 1996, and quickly established itself as a manufacturer of high-quality, high-cost gaming notebooks and desktops. It may have toned down the iconic grills that emblazoned earlier models like the legendary Area-51 series, but Alienware today is as focused on the hardcore gaming market as it's ever been. The Alienware brand is all-but unknown in this country, as distribution and importing was left to private purchasers and individuals for many years. However, since the company was acquired by Dell in 2006, Alienware products have become more accessible world-wide and now it's a lot easier to purchase one locally.

Specifications

CPU: Intel Core i7 Q720 @ 1.6GHz (2.8GHz Turbo Mode, 6MB cache)
GPU: NVIDIA GTX260M 1GB
RAM: 4GB DDR3 1333MHz
Display: 15" @ 1920x1080
Storage: 320GB 7200RPM HDD
Optical drive: Slot-loading DVD-RW
OS: Microsoft Windows 7 Professional 64-bit



Command Centre

The Alienware Command Centre acts as a central location to control all the fancy features of your M15x.

AlienFX: Used for customising your LED colour theme. Throughout the notebook are banks of multi-colour LEDs, which are all customisable. You can set colours for your keyboard (including key backlights), front grills, slider bar, the little alien head at the back of the screen, and just about everywhere on this device. There are options for pulsing, blended or plain colours, and the advanced options give you even further control over the colour scheme based on active applications.

AlienFusion: For controlling your notebook's power and battery settings. The options are quite varied, and give novice users access to some of the more hidden options

that Windows 7 has.

AlienTouch: Customising the touchpad. There are loads of options: sensitivity to accidental touching, "virtual scrolling" (side and bottom bars), disabling the touchpad when there is a USB mouse attached as well as tapping settings.

AlienSense: Facial recognition. Using the built-in 2MP webcam, you can boost the notebook's security to use your face for authentication. There are four settings: off; used for user login only; auto user switching if a new face is detected; and continuous security, which locks the PC when the user's face leaves the camera based on a timer.



The bundle

Alienware wants you to feel special when you spend money on this product, so they've included a couple of extras with the retail box, although frankly we expected a little bit more. In addition to the obvious hardware, you'll receive a protective cloth sock for the notebook, an Alienware cap, an embossed Alienware sticker (presumably to be used as a bumper sticker) and an Alienware mouse pad. Sadly there's no sign of an accompanying mouse or a full carry-bag; the latter of which would be useful given the size and weight of this notebook.

NX

Breaking Silence

Audio by Bang & Olufsen ICEpower[®]



Windows[®]. Life without Walls[™]. ASUS recommends Windows 7.

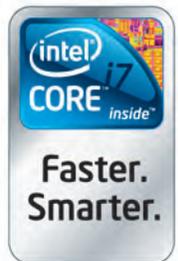
Finally, a resounding tour de force that will captivate even the most discerning eyes and ears.

The sleek, fluid lines of the new ASUS NX notebook are crafted to dominate your living room and leave an indelible imprint on your mind. For ultimate audio performance, the NX — powered by an Intel[®] Core[™] i7 processor — features the exclusive ASUS SonicMaster technology co-developed with Bang & Olufsen ICEpower[®], delivering true 3-dimensional surround sound and an unforgettable, audiophile-worthy listening experience.

For those with impeccable taste, the choice has never been easier.

Tune in to SonicMaster: www.sonicmaster.asus.com

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PlayStation Move

SONY'S MOTION CONTROLLER/POTENTIAL

Boredom-relieving toy with a glowing bit on the end is here. We've been given the chance to mess around with it a bit. The Wii is about to get some competition, as unboxing and playing with Move has brought back many memories of first getting our hands on Nintendo's console. Here's some stuff you might like to know before you head out to lay down some cash for a chance to wrap your hands around Sony's waggle-happy contender for the motion-control crown.

How does this thing work then?

Move works using a minimum of two components: the PlayStation Eye camera and that wand thing (otherwise known as Move's motion controller). If you've elected to get one, you can also attach Sony's own variation on the Wii's Nunchuk, a supplementary controller, which is simply known as a "navigation controller". The way the motion controller works is a combination of built-in inertial sensors and the Eye tracking the movement of the glowing sphere (which lights up in numerous different colours thanks to RGB LEDs) on the end of the controller. The lights change colour depending on your surroundings, with the device dynamically choosing a colour for the orb that the Eye can easily distinguish from everything else in the play area. It's also worth noting that in addition to its tracking-related purposes, the orb can also provide ambient effects, such as to simulate muzzle flashes and the like.

Move closer to or further away from the Eye and it'll interpret this onscreen in different ways: while playing table tennis in *Sports Champions*, for example, you can move closer to the Eye to reach shorter shots. This is done by the Eye's ability to discern the size of the glowing orb and thereby estimate its distance from the camera, allowing the PlayStation Eye to effectively track the motion controller in three dimensions. The inertial sensors within the controller help to compensate for certain situations where the orb is obscured, such as when players swing the motion controller behind their backs.

Pricing

Starter pack – 699
(camera, controller and starter disc with demos of various games)

Move controller – 449

Navigator controller – 349

Docking station – 349

Gun accessory – 149

PlayStation Eye – 349





What about the games?

They exist, but Move's launch ensemble isn't exactly going to revolutionise gaming. We were given three games to mess around with: *Sports Champions*, *Kung Fu Rider* and *EyePet: Move Edition*.

Kung Fu Rider is the most annoyingly silly, pointless title of the bunch. You use Move to steer a character riding a number of ridiculous "vehicles" (like office chairs and trolleys) through a handful of levels filled with obstacles and enemies. Basically, you flap your arms about like a fool as you try to not get hit by cars and not get roundhouse kicked by enemies, all the while attempting to collect cash and achieve a higher score. It's all very tedious as Move gets its first game that is shockingly reminiscent of some of the garbage available for the Wii that serves no purpose other than to hold your attention for five minutes.

EyePet retains the same strangely lovable attraction that the standard edition boasted, but benefits from Move by enabling even more augmented-reality features. Toys can be played with in your EyePet's domain using the motion controller, such as a ball that can be thrown around for your virtual pet to chase. Silly things like washing your pet using Move-enabled bottles of shampoo, waving a fan to create wind, spraying water

from a fish-shaped water gun and feeding your pet using a motion-controlled bucket all feature and are sure to delight the younglings.

Sports Champions, as it was with the Wii's *Wii Sports* upon the release of Nintendo's console, is the most impressive of the games we received. Table tennis, gladiatorial combat, archery, beach volleyball and more all appear in the game, each highlighting the impressive 1:1 recognition that Move is capable of in different ways. Adding spin to shots in table tennis, for example, is actually scary in its accuracy. Even simply directing shots becomes a matter of real-world precision colliding with the virtual world. The gladiator combat, too, is impressive in its ability to track the angle and force of your real-world swings and shield blocks. While *Sports Champions* is an impressive showing of the device's potential, we can't help but be worried when it reminds us that within a year there will be a million *Sports Champions* clones to choose from, not to mention the thousands of mini-game compilations that'll flood store shelves while we wish for decent Move-enabled games. Who knows though – maybe Move won't follow the Wii's path and the number of decent games for the device will outweigh the garbage.

Does it work?

Yes, it does. It's shockingly precise and aside from some understandable hiccups here and there with regards to occasional tracking and motion-sensing fails (which we imagine will gradually get cleaned up as time goes on), when all the pieces of Move come together it's an impressive piece of technology. The device's ability to accurately interpret distance, controller orientation and the force of your silly looking, wild movements is astounding. At the moment, it's the lack of decent games (that aren't mini-game compilations and silly little distractions, at least) in Move's launch line-up that is the most frustrating part of Sony's answer to the Wii, but we imagine that as the technology starts making its way into more games (like *Killzone 3*, *LittleBigPlanet 2*, *SOCOM 4* and the very interesting *Sorcery*), there'll be many reasons to invest in Move. The controllers themselves are well built and clearly a lot of thought was put into the design and button placement to put out a controller that is comfortable to use and feels natural.

The device's brilliant design, startlingly precise accuracy and impressive use of augmented reality in certain titles like *EyePet: Move Edition* all point towards a bright future for Move, provided it doesn't get buried under a mess of crappy gimmicks and party games. To put it as simply as possible: Move has a high chance of becoming the victor in these motion-control wars. All that's left to see is whether or not Microsoft's Kinect can best Sony's glowing toy when we get our paws on it later this year. **NAG**



Hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

NAG Benchmarks

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED that since the last issue we have been using graphs instead of just numbers to illustrate the performance of the hardware we had tested. The sole reason for this is to show graphically what kind of performance one should be expecting when compared to our baseline system.

Any product that has lower performance than our base system is not necessarily a poor product; in fact our base system only really serves as a bar with which we measure other hardware by. **So shorter bars don't necessarily mean an inferior product.** The base line system is unlikely to change for a while and when we do change it, it will be when most of the hardware we review is faster. However, seeing as we are using a GTX480, powered by an X58 Core i7 980X system, this will not be happening anytime soon. As for the benchmarks themselves, they vary accordingly to what we are trying to investigate. For instance, when testing CPUs and motherboards we are only interested in the CPU test scores and not necessarily the graphics scores, even though we may use a GPU benchmark like 3DMark Vantage.

The test system is the industry standard 3.6GHz (200x18, 3.6GHz NB, CL8, DDR1600), which obviously means an overclocked processor. All motherboards and graphics cards are run on such a system so if your results do not look like our results, it's likely because of the different clock speeds (provided you are using the same CPU. PCI-Express speed is set to 101MHz, just for stability's sake when dealing with high Bclk's).

Almost all graphics card tests are done at 1920x1080, unless we state otherwise. The reason for this is simply because this resolution is taxing but at the same time widely used by the vast majority of gamers who buy mid- to high-end hardware. All graphics cards released these days save for entry level and integrated solutions should be able to play most games at this resolution. Graphics fidelity is also something we set to the highest possible setting apart from AA which is a fixed load feature and as such, not truly indicative of GPU scaling directly.

It is important to look carefully at what is being tested and how it is being tested. For instance on all NVIDIA graphics cards, we use hardware PhysX acceleration in supporting titles. So the numbers are more than likely to come in lower than the results from using ATI hardware where hardware accelerated physics is not available presently. The primary reason for this is simply to see

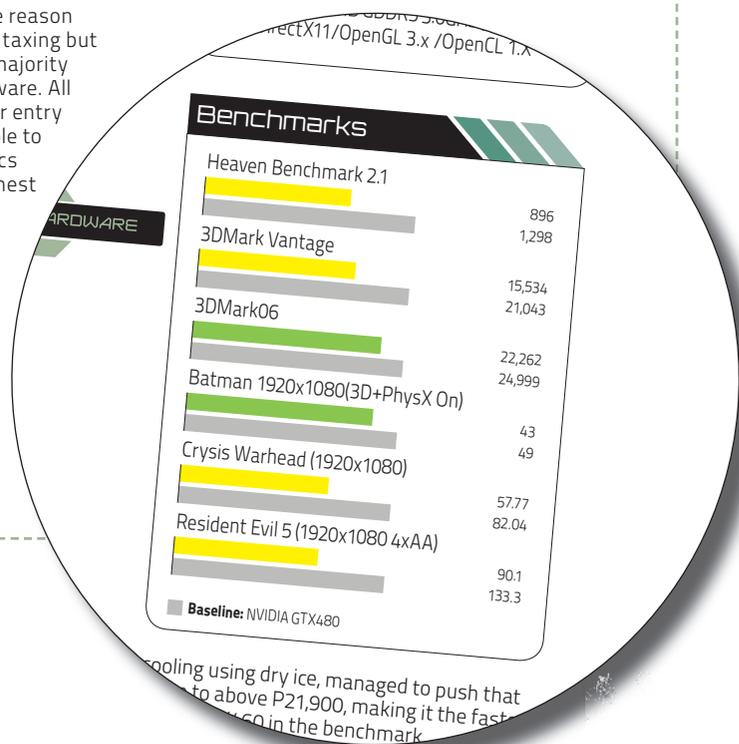
how useable the advertised PhysX capability is as it is meaningless if the game becomes unplayable due to the work load.

When testing RAM and such things, the results are not to be compared with another set of RAM where synthetic performance is concerned. The only thing you should compare is how tight the timings are on the RAM and how high the frequency is. The individual synthetic test results only serve to show the scaling at different settings and nothing else.

The rest of the graphs should be self explanatory.

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"Any product that has lower performance than our base system is not necessarily a poor product; in fact our base system only really serves as a bar with which we measure other hardware by. So shorter bars don't necessarily mean an inferior product."





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TURN ON TOMORROW

Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

By Derrick Cramer

Confucius say... wtf?

I F YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING my column of late, you'll have noticed I've been ranting and raving at everyone and their grandma for a variety of reasons. Well, I'm glad to report the ranting is continuing in full force this month. So whose incompetence or stupidity deserves some abuse? Some call it Chipzilla, others refer to it as the monolithic giant that has all but dominated the CPU industry for ages. The chance of you having its logo somewhere in your PC is rather high. I'm talking, of course, about Intel.

Some background info first. The Nehalem architecture made its debut in November 2008 with the Core i7 series processors. It has since branched off to include Xeon processors as well as i3 and i5 processor families, and has two main purposes. The first, to function as the CPU in your PC. The second, confusing you to the point where you simply ignore Intel and move over to AMD, who as of now, are only slightly less confusing.

Currently we have three chipsets that support Nehalem based chips: H55/H57, P55, and X58. X58 is socket LGA1366, and supports i7 processors. But only from the 9xx family. P55 is for i5 processors, which come in the 6xx and 7xx family. But there is also an i7 8xx chip for P55 boards. P55 also supports i3, but it's better if you use H55/H57 with the i3 processors. H55/H57 also supports the i5 and i7 8xx series, but you wouldn't really use them on H55 as it isn't really a performance orientated chipset, that's what P55 is for. Following? Good, because it gets worse.

LGA1156 which the P55 and H55/H57 are based on will soon be replaced with Sandy bridge, which uses the P67 chipset and the LGA1155 socket. The socket numbers are so close together purely to confuse, I'm sure. Now even though P67 uses a socket with less pins, it's more powerful than LGA1156. Bear that in mind. On P67 using the LGA1155 socket, we have three processor families, i3, i5 and i7. These are not to be confused with the above i3, i5 and i7 because there is no cross platform support. So the new i5 is different to the old i5. Calling Sandy bridge based CPUs something other than i5 would just make things easier for people to understand – the logical choice – so we can see why Intel didn't do that. Haven't managed to lose you yet? Well hold on, because here it gets complicated.

There are three planned i3 processors for P67: the 2100T, the 2100 and the 2120, in short, the 21XXX chips. Now the third number in that model name is

used solely for mobile parts, except for the 2120, which is a desktop part. The new i5 processor family has seven new CPUs, four of which use 2500 in their name, two have 2400, and one lonely i5 has 2390. Bear in mind the third number in the naming system is used only for mobile parts. But the 2390 is a desktop part. Oh, did I mention the i5 2400 is more powerful than the i5 2500T? But less powerful than the i5 2500 and i5 2500S. Oh, and the 2500K. All of this is okay though, because at least the i7 processors that aren't the same as i7 processors but are still named i7 processors are easy to identify. They're the i7 2600S, the i7 2600 and i7 2600K. Bear in mind the 2600 and 2600K are identical chips, the only difference being the 2600K

"All of this is ok though, because at least the i7 processors that aren't the same as i7 processors but are still named i7 processors are easy to identify."

has an unlocked multiplier. In the past this would've been called the "i7 2700 Extreme edition" to make things easier, but Intel has decided the exact same name with a K on the end would do. Not an X which is what they've done before and more aptly describes the extreme edition chip, a K.

So what happens when you want a new i5 CPU to replace your current i5 CPU? You buy an old i7 CPU. But not the oldest i7 CPU. Not the newest either. Make sure it isn't an i7 for X58 or P67, it needs to be an i7 for P55. Which can also be used with an H55/H57. But you don't want to do that, even though you can.

Well done Intel, you've created a naming scheme that will confuse everyone, except those who've bought the paper I'm considering publishing on the subject. I think I'll call the paper "Core i7 2600". Then I'll add a random letter to the end of that, something like V, denoting that it's the printed version of the i7 processor family. I'll also need a "Core i7 2600Z" for the PDF version. **NAG**

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DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

Part 8: Fan speed controller

A PC WITH MANY FANS is a cool and healthy PC, but it's also a loud one if you haven't invested in the low-noise varieties. Controlling that noise-to-cooling ratio is important but often overlooked. Perhaps your PC runs as an underclocked, ultra-green media centre, or you like to keep things quiet when you're not gaming. Whatever your reason for wanting a quieter PC, you don't have to spend a lot of money to get it. In this tutorial, I'll show you how to assemble your very own fan-speed controller for two fans. This particular version will have an on/off toggle for each fan as well as an adjustable dial for directly controlling the speed by changing the resistance and thus the current that is fed to each fan.

To give you an idea of just how affordable this mod is, aside from the tools and consumables, building a two-fan controller should cost between R40-50. You should be able to find the rest of the supplies lying around your home, or ask around at a computer repair store.

You should use this tutorial as a guideline for building your own custom controller. You could lose the toggle switches, use a multi-switch hooked up to fixed resistors, run all the fans off a single dial, or set up a system that engages/disengages groups of dedicated fans depending on your activities (file copying, gaming, rendering, etc). The possibilities are limitless.

STEP 1: PREPARATION

Before you begin the hands-on work, you should draw a diagram of both the circuit and the control panel. Decide where everything will go, the lengths of wire you'll need and every component's orientation. Have a look at my diagram on this page to get an idea of how to go about wiring up everything.

Strip the stiffy drive from its casing. You should be left with an upper and a lower piece of the case. The lower piece will have a gaping hole where the disk-spinning mechanism usually sits, so we'll need to cover that. Cut the steel sheet down to the right size and either glue it in place over the hole, or if there are steel tabs attached to the casing, bend those into place to secure the sheet.

Mark off the exact spots on the bay cover where you want to mount your controls. Drill the holes. Finally, prepare the Molex connectors by cutting their wires; leave 1-2cm to work with.

STEP 2: WIRING UP

We'll begin by running a wire from the yellow wire on the female Molex connector, where we'll draw power from the computer's PSU. Then split that wire into two and run those to the positive terminals of your toggle switches. From there, connect the centre (negative) terminals of the switches to the positive terminals of the pots. You may be surprised to find three terminals on the potentiometers, but don't panic. Use a multimeter to test the resistance as you turn the dial; you'll soon find the correct direction to wire up the terminals; then simply leave out the third terminal. Once that's done, connect the negative terminal of each pot to the yellow wire of each male Molex connector. The last step is to run a wire from either black wire on the two male Molex connectors through to the black wire on the female connector to complete the circuit.

Since we're working within the metal casing of the stiffy drive, it's important to ensure that any solder points that are likely to make contact with the casing be sealed. Heatshrink is the neatest and quickest way to handle this problem.

STEP 3: ASSEMBLY

Now it's time to install your controls into the housing. The toggle switches can simply be pushed through the holes that you drilled earlier and secured in place with a bolt on either side (these should be included with the switches). The pots are designed to be installed in the same way, but they're a bit too long and will end up poking out of the panel by about 3cm. To remedy this, you could either cut the rods to the required length, or simply mount the pots recessed back inside the casing. Use a generous blob of hot glue and hold the pot in place for a few seconds. Once they're stuck, attach the knobs to the front of the panel. Now stick the Molex connectors in place with some more glue. You may need to cut away at the steel casing to allow for a flush fit. Be sure to allow for space to attach the fans and PSU, so have them sticking out a bit.

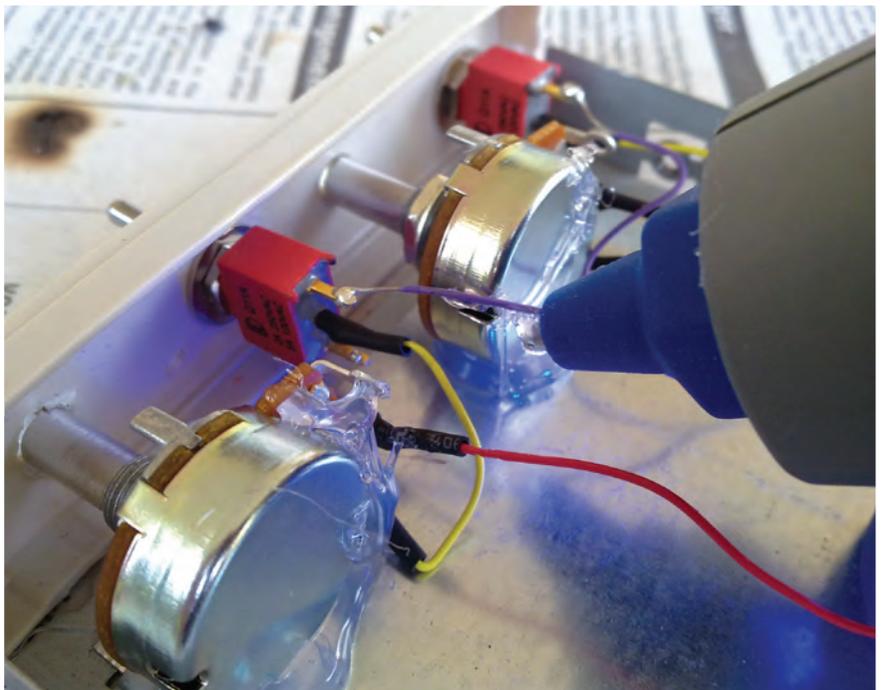
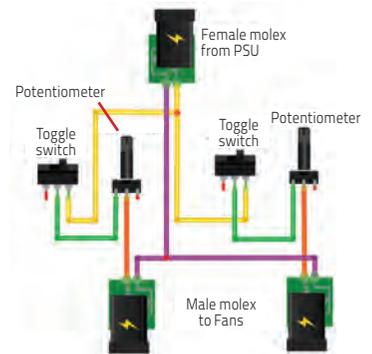
The final step is to close up the case and attach the former bay cover to the front. For this, a bit more hot glue will take care of business. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

What you will need



- An old stiffy or optical drive. This will depend on your case's drive bay configuration and the number of controls you want to mount.
- 2.5" or 3.25" bay cover
- Molex connectors (1 female and 2 male)
- 2 100Ω panel-mount potentiometers with knobs
- 2 toggle switches
- Wiring
- Heatshrink
- Drill with bits to match the pots and switches
- Soldering iron and solder
- Glue Gun and glue
- Small Philips screwdriver
- Small, thin steel or plastic sheet
- Pliers
- (Optional) multimeter
- (Optional) Dremel rotary tool with steel cutting disc



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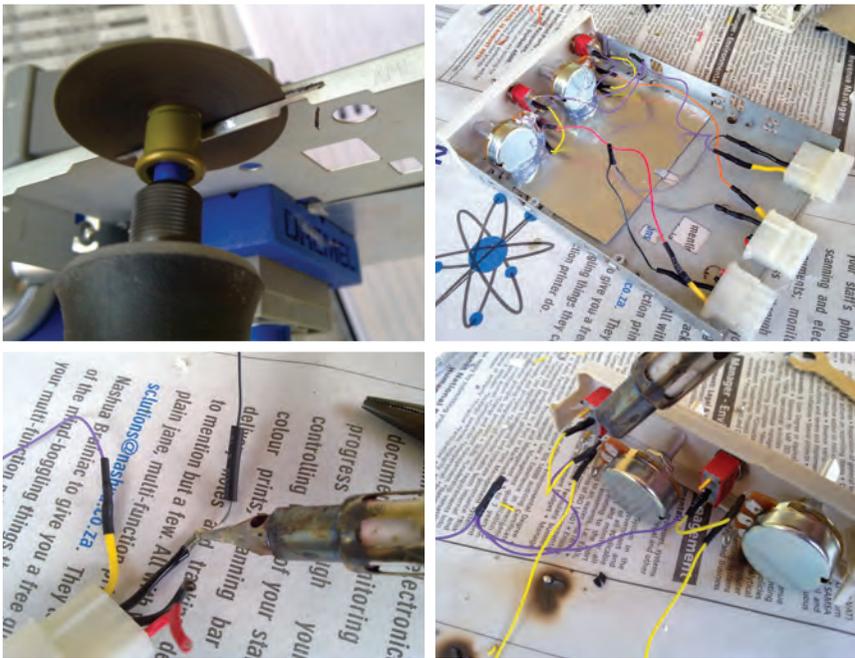
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ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO, the graphics card industry went through a change where most manufacturers seemed to steer clear of designing any of their own products, but rather opted for reference models with different artwork.

This obviously meant that as the end-user, buying these products was significantly easier, as you would purchase based purely on pricing and to some degree the warranty offered. Once you had read one review on a graphics card you could pretty much ignore every other one afterwards.

They were just too similar, and save for the odd bundled game, all the large manufacturers were selling identical hardware and hoping their artwork was more attractive than the competition.

Luckily however, this has stopped, particular with the DirectX11 parts. Manufacturers seem driven to not only make their products stand out, but at the same time break world records and claim that their part is the best there ever is. With the run that ATI had been on for the last two generations, it isn't surprising that the Radeon 5870 is the most customized high-end part we have seen to date. With seemingly unending variations on the design of the PCB, memory, cooling, power delivery and just about everything apart from the actual GPU itself.

So with that said we wanted to find out which is the best version of these graphics cards that use the Cypress Core. Not only that, we wanted to find out which

one warrants all the hoorah that each manufacturer claims about its product, and to that end you can only turn to extreme cooling to really find out.

TESTING

Each card was cooled using a high volume, low swing GPU pot. The first thing that we needed to determine on each part was its cold-bug point. Unlike on a CPU, this point is absolute on a graphics card. While there are ways around this, these are closely kept secrets by the so-called "overclocking elite" for some reason.

While we had access to these workarounds most were just too elaborate to be worthwhile, and for our purposes, we wanted to find out which was the best card using the same tools and resources available to the average consumer.

After we established our cold-bug point, it was a little easier from there, as all we needed to do was overclock the core as much as possible then move on to the memory. We used the native tool for each card: iTracker2 for the ASUS product, Afterburner for the MSI card and OC-Guru for the GIGABYTE offering. The cold-bug point was similar on the MSI and GIGABYTE products, and slightly better on the ASUS card which would continue to work up until we reached -90°C, a good 10°C colder than the other two competitors. However, as with all components, it really does come down to that particular sample more than anything else.

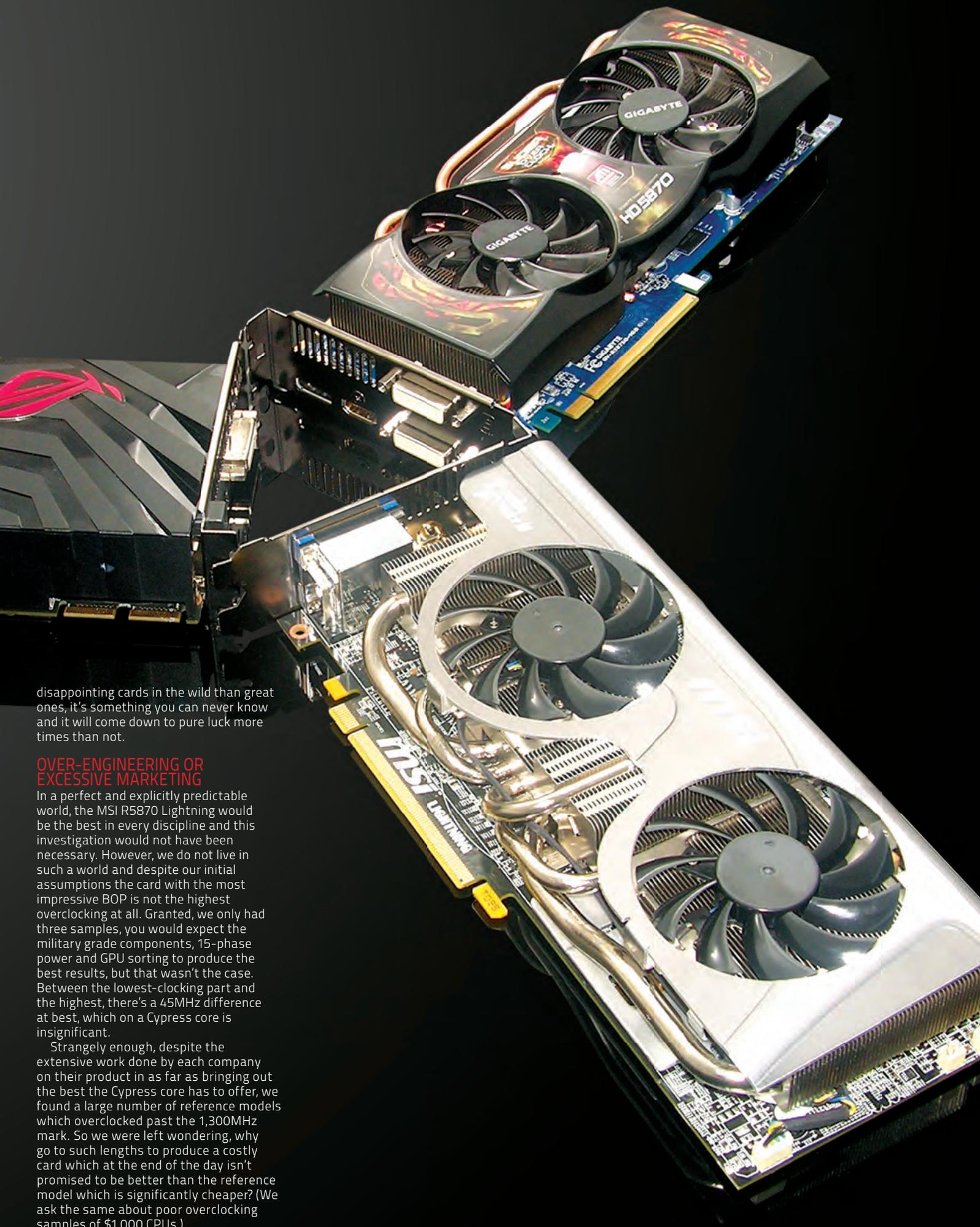
Once we had established the cold bug points, we recorded maximum overlocks. Only if the card completed a full 3DMark Vantage and 3DMark 06 run with no anomalies did we deem it stable. After hours of battling the temperatures and numerous crashes, this is what we had to say about it all.

LUCK OF THE DRAW

After we had tested all three cards we compared our results with many others all over the world. From those using water cooling to chilled water, dry ice and liquid nitrogen. If you were thinking that there was a general trend in how these cards overclocked depending on the cooling, you wouldn't be far from the truth. However, you wouldn't be quiet correct in assuming a linear scaling.

In general, the lowest speeds from liquid nitrogen when using the MSI card were 1,200MHz, which happens to be exactly what we achieved with the card. With the GIGABYTE RADEON 5870 Super Overclock, we achieved a lower-than-expected 1,185MHz and the ASUS card was the most impressive at 1,230MHz. None of these cards, however, produced anywhere near as high a frequency as we had seen from others. At the same time, they were not the worst.

The single largest issue with trying to gauge sample performance is that those with sub-standard results, regardless of cooling are unlikely to make them public, so there just may be many more

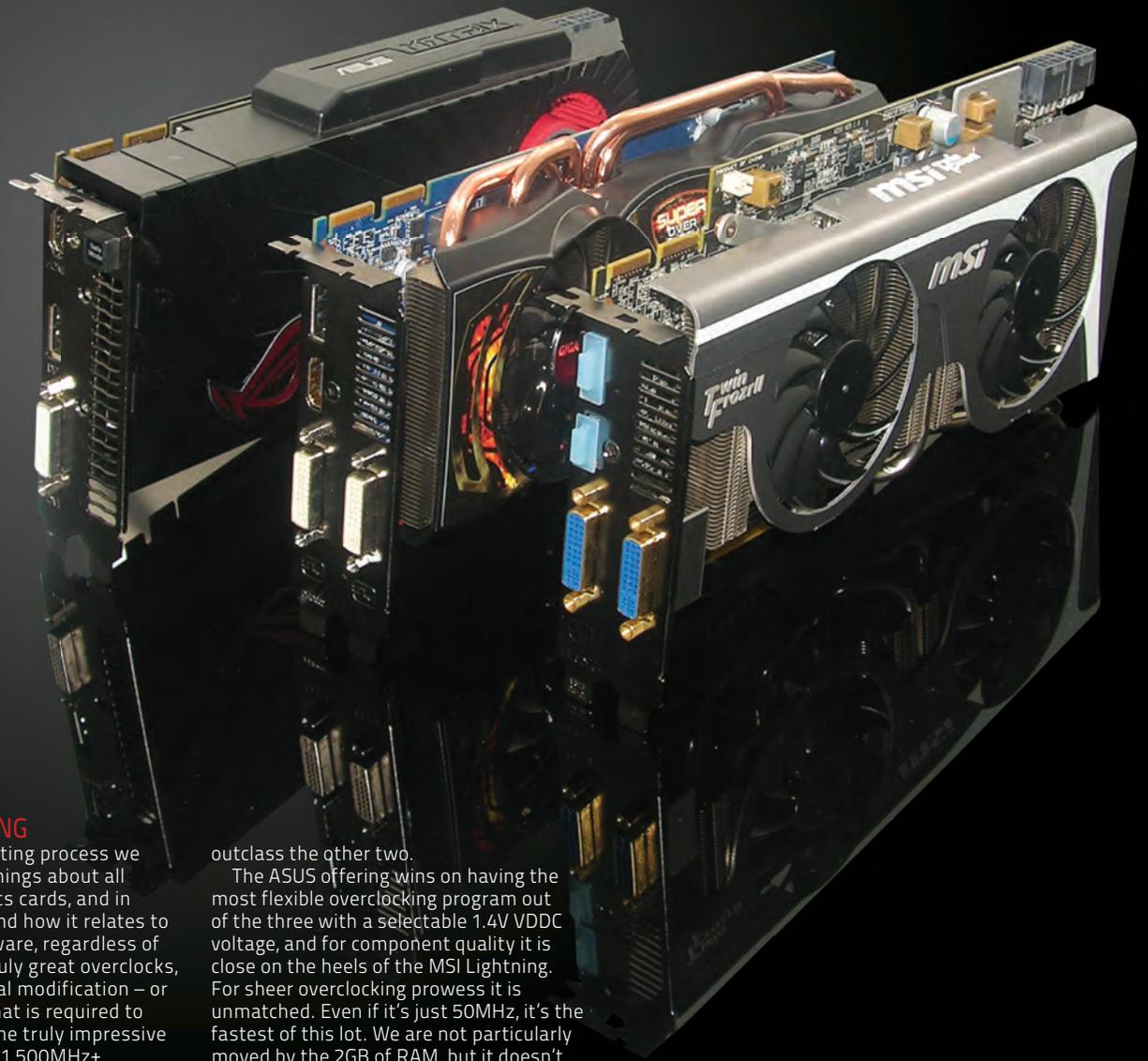


disappointing cards in the wild than great ones, it's something you can never know and it will come down to pure luck more times than not.

OVER-ENGINEERING OR EXCESSIVE MARKETING

In a perfect and explicitly predictable world, the MSI R5870 Lightning would be the best in every discipline and this investigation would not have been necessary. However, we do not live in such a world and despite our initial assumptions the card with the most impressive BOP is not the highest overclocking at all. Granted, we only had three samples, you would expect the military grade components, 15-phase power and GPU sorting to produce the best results, but that wasn't the case. Between the lowest-clocking part and the highest, there's a 45MHz difference at best, which on a Cypress core is insignificant.

Strangely enough, despite the extensive work done by each company on their product in as far as bringing out the best the Cypress core has to offer, we found a large number of reference models which overclocked past the 1,300MHz mark. So we were left wondering, why go to such lengths to produce a costly card which at the end of the day isn't promised to be better than the reference model which is significantly cheaper? (We ask the same about poor overclocking samples of \$1,000 CPUs.)



USER ENGINEERING

During our entire testing process we discovered several things about all Radeon 5870 graphics cards, and in particular the core and how it relates to the rest of the hardware, regardless of the brand. For the truly great overlocks, it seems that physical modification – or a “hard-mod” – is what is required to get anywhere near the truly impressive speeds. The claimed 1,500MHz+ frequency by the ASUS card did not come from an off-the-shelf retail part. It was handpicked (binned), bios modified and had several elaborate end-user modifications on the card. We discovered that these very same modifications (relevant to the card of course) performed on the MSI and GIGABYTE card produced very similar results. In fact, with these alterations we suspect almost any Radeon 5870 card could achieve these results, provided it isn't the reference model. (Reason being, almost all the modifications had to do with power draw or delivery, and all the cards here feature superior PWM components than the reference model.)

CONCLUSION

When we set out to do this, we had hoped to find the best Radeon 5870 money could buy. So naturally we selected the three most-revered cards on the market and the ones that are sold as record breakers with superior build materials. To this end, all three cards feature impressive electronics. Some more than others, but it's clear that in this discipline all are vastly superior to the reference models. However, what all this does beyond sounding impressive is another story. As it is, for the person who is interested in mild overclocking, purchasing any of these cards will deliver exactly what you are looking for. For the more involved overclocker, it remains the same. Purely from a component point of view we would recommend the MSI R5870 Lightning. It really is built well and does

outclass the other two.

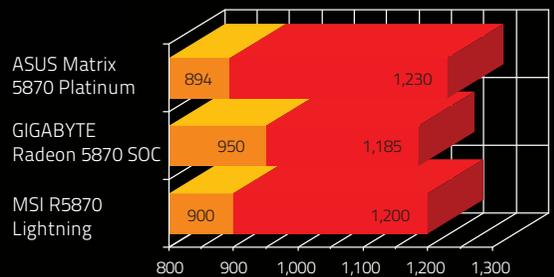
The ASUS offering wins on having the most flexible overclocking program out of the three with a selectable 1.4V VDDC voltage, and for component quality it is close on the heels of the MSI Lightning. For sheer overclocking prowess it is unmatched. Even if it's just 50MHz, it's the fastest of this lot. We are not particularly moved by the 2GB of RAM, but it doesn't scale any worse or better than the other 1GB models.

The submission from GIGABYTE was a little simpler in design, which is good if only because it's the easiest to disassemble. We like the five NEC Proadlizer quintuple chips which are said to reduce ESR electronic noise along with providing superior power to the memory and GPU core. This card is the fastest out the box with the most relevant overclock out of them all. We had issues with the overclock software and the maximum 1.28V GPU core voltage was likely the reason this was the only card not to reach the 1,200MHz mark. A less complex utility like MSI's Afterburner would have probably helped overclocking a little (with a higher voltage limit), however, as it stands it's 45MHz below the ASUS model and just 15MHz lower than the Lightning card.

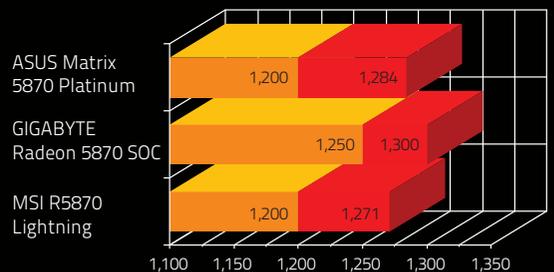
At the end of it all, it'll come down to how lucky you are and how good your electronics knowledge is, because extreme overclocking with these cards isn't just a matter of voltage and cooling; it's much more involved than that. We cannot tell which one is the outright winner and we'd even go as far as to say these cards are equal. Which one is right for you and can claim to be the ultimate Radeon 5870 will depend on how lucky you are and how much time you're willing to put in. The search for the best Radeon 5870 ever has ended the same way it started, with three great graphics cards. **NAG**

Neo sibeko

CORE CLOCKS



MEMORY CLOCKS



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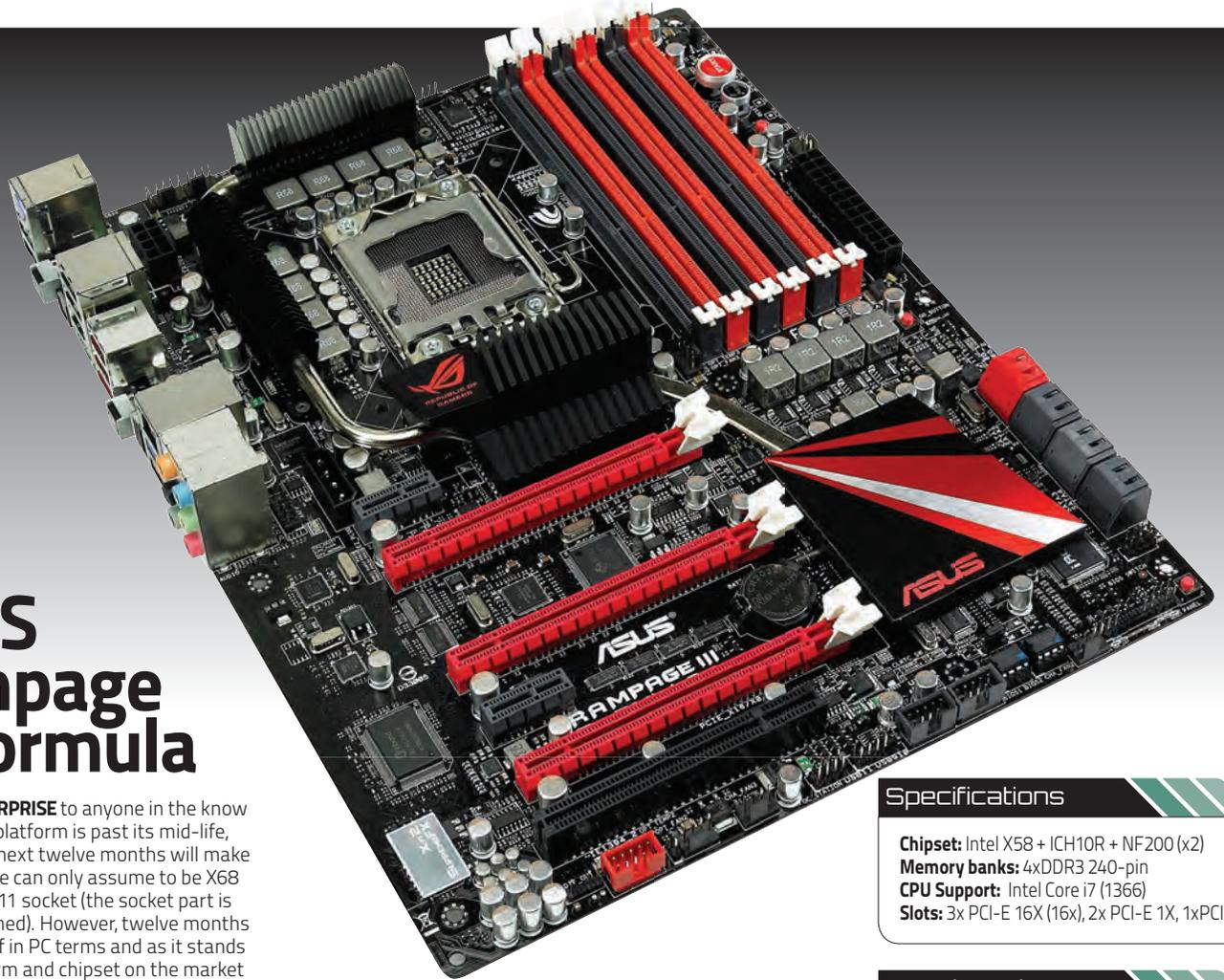
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¹ WARNING: Altering clock frequency and/or voltage may: (i) reduce system stability and useful life of the system and processor; (ii) cause the processor and other system components to fail; (iii) cause reductions in system performance; (iv) cause additional heat or other damage; and (v) affect system data integrity. Intel has not tested, and does not warranty, the operation of the processor beyond its specifications. Intel assumes no responsibility that the processor, including if used with altered clock frequencies and/or voltages, will be fit for any particular purpose.

² Intel® Turbo Boost Technology requires a PC with a processor with Intel Turbo Boost capability. Intel Turbo Boost performance varies depending on hardware, software, and overall system configuration. Check with your PC manufacturer on whether your system delivers Intel® Turbo Boost Technology. See <http://www.intel.com/technology/turboboost> for more information.

³ Intel® Hyper-Threading Technology (Intel® HT Technology) requires a computer system with a processor supporting Intel HT Technology and an Intel HT Technology-enabled chipset, BIOS and operating system. Performance will vary depending on the specific hardware and software you use. The Intel® Core™ i5-750 desktop processor does not support Intel HT Technology. For more information, including details on which processors support Intel HT Technology, see <http://www.intel.com/technology/platform-technology/hyper-threading/index.htm>.



ASUS Rampage III Formula

IT'LL BE NO SURPRISE to anyone in the know that the X58 platform is past its mid-life, and within the next twelve months will make way for what we can only assume to be X68 and the LGA 2011 socket (the socket part is actually confirmed). However, twelve months is a long way off in PC terms and as it stands the best platform and chipset on the market remains the X58 and the LGA1366 socket.

In a perfect world, or at least as far as ASUS is concerned, every motherboard would be the Rampage III Extreme, however the pricing of such products makes it unaffordable for most people, even those who are enthusiasts and overclockers. Additionally, ultra high-end motherboards run a higher risk of failure than the lower end parts, which might encourage the average consumer to spend a little less when purchasing a motherboard.

As hard as it may be to believe, most enthusiasts and overclockers will tell you that the very high-end motherboards fail purely because of the number of components used on them, with each additional part bringing potential problems with it. (This is likely why ASUS has the Sabretooth series). Knowing all this, however, should not deter anyone from a high-end board if they can afford it and especially when it comes to the ASUS Rampage III Formula.

It doesn't have the two 12V+ CPU connectors enabling copious amounts of current supply, but this should not deter any extreme user from purchasing the motherboard. All it means is that this particular motherboard will not be able to overclock a Core i7 980X past 5.3GHz or so, with all 12 threads enabled. This has nothing to do with the power phases (of which there are eight) or the quality of the components used, but everything to do with OCP that is built into every motherboard that hits retail, which is meant to safeguard CPUs.

While the Rampage III Formula, much like the Extreme, has an OCP feature in the BIOS, on the Formula board it doesn't automatically allow you to pass this clock

ceiling. In fact, we are not sure if it does anything at all as it could just be the result of the Formula featuring identical BIOS to the Extreme board.

For those interested in how to overcome this, a simple OCP mod is necessary; keep in mind though that this will void your warranty. However, if you are one that needs above 5.2GHz or so, chances are your warranty has expired already and if not, it soon will.

Why is this important? Past all the gimmicks and all the promises, the Rampage III Formula is by and large the same board as the Extreme, just for a lower price. Sure, some may be unimpressed by fewer PCI-Express slots, but that shouldn't be a concern because much like the Extreme, this board supports only up to 3-Way SLI. Sure enough, 4-Way Crossfire is not possible but that is a small price to pay when you consider everything else that the Formula offers.

Try as we might, we could not find any major problems unique to this motherboard. It has the same irritating PLL inaccuracy issue that affects almost all ASUS motherboards, which makes it impossible to select some CPU frequencies (for instance 200x18 is not 3,600MHz but 3,609MHz) however this isn't an issue for most people and it can be fixed by using SetFSB for the overclockers, or using the OC-Station if you have one.

Overall, the Rampage III Formula offers what the Extreme board did minus a few features. We'd go as far as to say it's probably a better balance between features and price and we would definitely recommend it. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Chipset: Intel X58 + ICH10R + NF200 (x2)
Memory banks: 4xDDR3 240-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i7 (1366)
Slots: 3x PCI-E 16X (16x), 2x PCI-E 1X, 1xPCI

Benchmarks

Benchmark	ASUS Rampage III Formula	ASUS Rampage III Extreme
CineBench 11.5	9.32	9.34
3DMark Vantage CPU	33,682	33,737
Everest Read	17,140	17,111
Everest Write	16,630	16,627
Everest Copy	16,441	16,441
Everest Latency	48.7	49.1
Super Pi 8M	124.956	125.175

Baseline: ASUS Rampage III Gene



THE SCORE

>Plus
 + Good performance
 + Cheaper than Extreme board

>Minus
 - Annoying PLL issue
 - Hot Northbridge

>Bottom Line

The Rampage III Formula is one of the better-priced enthusiast X58 motherboards on the market.

08
out of ten

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DREAM MACHINE

Corsair Dominator GT 2000C8

TO ANYBODY IN THE know and, if you ask most enthusiasts, good sets of DDR3 RAM are available from almost every manufacturer today and there isn't much difference between sets using the same chips. This is something we have also found to be true, however that does not mean all sets are equal; there are kits that stand above most, such as this one.

Corsair – easily the most recognizable memory brand amongst gamers, enthusiasts and overclockers – has seemingly more memory sets targeted at this demographic than any other manufacturer. Understandable given just how many high performance kits the company manufactures, including the highest rated 2,533MHz handpicked modules for the company.

The Dominator line shouldn't be new to anyone by now, but the GT (and the GTR) line may be unfamiliar to some. Basically the GT line is specifically designed for high speed, and tight timings. These sets are geared at users at the extreme end of the spectrum and while 2,000MHz CL8 doesn't seem special, what makes this set special is how versatile it is over and above the XMP settings.

As you can see from the results table, this set was capable of reaching a scorching 2,300MHz with impressive 9-10-9-24 timings. This was the highest frequency we could reach, however we did boot into Windows at 2,380MHz 10-10-10-30, but the system crashed at the login screen. This is simply amazing as far as frequency is concerned, and we have no doubt that with some exotic cooling and better tuning this set could probably approach 2,500MHz provided the IMC in our 980X sample is capable of reaching this speed (we will investigate this in a future issue).

As stated earlier, this set is very universal allowing one to run CL6 at a conservative 1,600MHz. Indeed this is a low speed by today's standards, but as the results show, speed isn't everything. The timings are equally important because at 1,600MHz CL6-7-6-18 (TRCD is usually one cycle slower than

Benchmarks

Frequency (MHz)	Timings	Voltage	NorthBridge (MHz)	Everest Read (MB/s)	Everest Copy (MB/s)	Everest Latency (ns)	MaxxMem Marks
1600	6-7-6-18	1.66	3600	17810	16758	44.8	1007
1800	7-8-7-24	1.66	3600	18144	16862	45	947
2000	8-9-8-24	1.66	3600	18281	16832	45.1	966
2304	9-10-9-24	1.74	3840	19268	17824	44.4	1031

CAS and RAS Precharge, with the Cycle Time usually being a total of all three) was the only other setting that broke the 1000 MaxxMEM Mark Barrier. The Everest Read and Copy results were very close to those of the 1800 CL7-8-7-24 configuration except the latency was better and so were the component MaXXMEM results (not included in the table).

The 1,600MHz setting happens to be our choice setting, because those settings provide not only the lowest latency and highest efficiency. At such speeds, we can maintain the ideal 1:2 memory ratio and in fact exceed it for better results. No doubt a 4,000MHz NB speed is easy enough to reach, however that requires a high QPI/VTT voltage, which in turn raises CPU IMC temperature, and we would rather set as close to reference QPI voltage as possible and 3,600MHz allows this.

Add to that, 1600MHz with the above settings was achieved with the reference voltage of 1.65V (our chosen motherboard, only has a 1.66V setting as the closest to reference) which should help keep the RAM cool.

For the extreme overclocking settings, the RAM is capable of tolerating ridiculously high voltages (in excess of 2.1V) however keep in mind that using such voltages and exotic cooling will instantly void your warranty and may lead to permanent damage (along with accelerated degradation). For the record attempts though, this is the set you will

Specifications

Size: 6GB (3x2GB)
Memory Type: DDR3
Chip: P5C

want to purchase.

In typical Corsair fashion, the kit includes the AIRFLOW attachment which is appreciated and does cool the RAM well enough to make it worthwhile, especially when using higher than default voltages. However it isn't vital to great overclocks (a 120mm fan will do the job just as well if not better). It's hard for us to find fault with this set and it's certainly the best 2000MHz kit we have tested to date, so is well deserving of our Dream Machine Award.

NAG
 Neo Sibeko

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Can achieve very high frequency
- + Capable of tight timings

>Minus

- Corsair DDR3 2000C7

>Bottom Line

The best DDR3 2000 memory kit we have tested yet.

09
out of ten

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Samsung Apps



GEC Super Computer

IT'S NOT OFTEN WE review a complete pre-built rig here at NAG. At least if we do, it's very rare that we are moved by the system, because all these ever really become are collections of components everyone can buy. For the most part, they are much of a muchness, rarely being anything we haven't seen before.

When the opportunity came to review what GEC said would be the best pre-built PC we have ever seen, we were obviously very sceptical about the bold claim and expected the usual computer with anything but the best components.

Fortunately the GEC Super Computer, despite its bold if uninspired name, is actually an accurate description of the machine. It's not only because of the component list, which is nothing short of amazing, but actually how it's all put together.

We could think of better individual components to include in the computer, but none of the parts we would have chosen would have come together like what GEC has put together. Not only because the colour scheme works with the selected components, but it's all water cooled.

Some may be thinking that when we say water cooled we refer to only the CPU and maybe the graphics cards. No, the entire machine is water cooled, save for the PSU for obvious reasons. Everything from the motherboard mosfets, South Bridge, North Bridge, CPU, RAM, CPU, graphics cards and even the hard drives.

The amount of planning required to water-cool these components adequately is not to be underestimated; the sheer number of hours required to plan and build such a rig is staggering. Not only does it have the most impressive water-cooling configuration we have seen, the cable management is nothing short of amazing, because, despite the excessive number of components in the machine, it's hard to find any clutter at all.

The attention to detail is truly incredible and it is certainly a computer that is meant to

be operated with the side panel removed, if only to show just what could be described as a work of art, and as such should not be stuck under a desk but put on show wherever it is.

Being water cooled, one would expect the computer to be fairly quiet, but this isn't the case as it's actually quite loud because of all the fans on the radiator. So when the PC is turned on there's no ignoring the hum of the pumps and fans. That's not surprising though, since under load the system draws over 1KW of power and the heat generated by such power draw needs to be handled carefully.

With three GTX480 graphics cards in the system, the amount of graphics processing power is unmatched by anything else we have tested before. Not only are these pre-overclocked EVGA GTX480 cards, they are being driven by the potent Intel Core i7 980X CPU.

The sheer amount of power available on this system is truly something worth marvelling at. For example, the standard 3DMark Vantage score is P37,104. The Heaven Benchmark 2.1 run with Extreme Tessellation, with 8xAA and 16xAF produces a score of 2,061. That is higher than any other score we have recorded on any system or any graphics card regardless of the settings.

The system, by default, comes with a 27-inch Samsung LED screen, which is great, however we would recommend any of the 24-inch 3D LCDs on the market. There's so much processing power in the machine, you'll want to take maximum advantage of this power by enabling PhysX, and 3D Vision on all supporting games. Additionally, the resolution of the 27-inch screen would be the same as the 24-inch 3D screen. If you are wondering how much all this costs, then it's likely you'll have to dip into your savings, as it really is expensive (more than twice the price of the current NAG Dream Machine). However, if you have the cash to spare and want nothing but the best, the GEC Super Computer is a worthwhile consideration. **NAG**

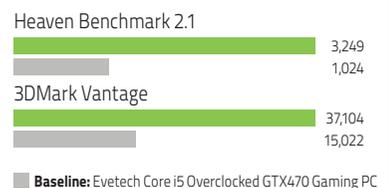
Neo Sibeko



Specifications

CPU: Intel Core i7 980X
Motherboard: ASUS Rampage III Extreme
GPU: 3x EVGA GTX480 Hydro Copper FTW
RAM: 12GB OCZ Reaper DDR3-2000
HDD: 2x 120GB VERTEX SSD, 1x 2TB WD Caviar Green
PSU: Silverstone 1,500W
Cooler: KOOLANCE liquid cooling
Case: Cooler Master HAF 932
Optical: LITEON Blu-Ray combo drive
Fan Controllers: 2x Zalman Multi Fan Controller
Network: EVGA Killer Xeno Pro
Speakers: Logitech Z-5500
Headset: Logitech G35
Keyboard: Logitech G19
Mouse: Logitech G9x and Razer Mamba
Display: Samsung P2770H LCD
OS: Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit

Benchmarks



THE SCORE

>Plus
 + Performance
 + Build quality
 + Aesthetics

>Minus
 - Incredibly heavy
 - Very expensive

>Bottom Line

The most extravagant pre-built PC you can buy locally.

09
out of ten

GIGABYTE X58-USB3

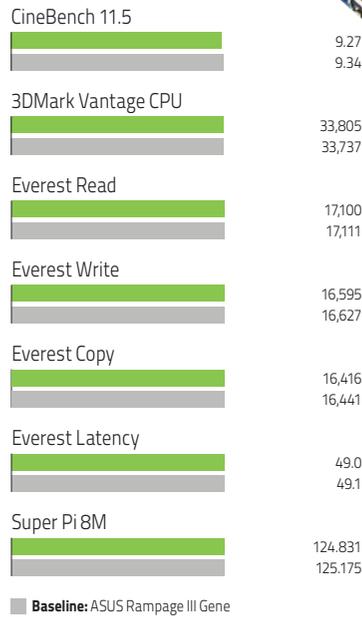
WHEN IT COMES TO X58 motherboards, the only other manufacturer that has as many motherboards as GIGABYTE is ASUS, and it makes sense because they are the two largest competitors in the channel business. From the ultra high-end parts like the UD9 to the low-end parts like the USB3, GIGABYTE is trying to cater for every user who would be interested in the X58 platform.

The USB3 is GIGABYTE's cheapest X58 based motherboard and contrary to what many thought, the UD3R isn't the entry-level X58 board from GIGABYTE, that honour is for the X58-USB3. That is it does not feature a third-party SATA 6Gbps controller, it's missing a Clear CMOS button and instead of the 12-phase PWM system found on the UD3R, it features a 6-phase system. It also has fewer PCI-Express slots and, just like the name suggests, features USB3.0 as the only feature over what the basic X58 chipset offers.

This may seem to be a motherboard short on features, and to some degree it is, but that doesn't make it a poor product at all. It's as expected when looking at the market it is catering for. It's not aimed at overclockers of any kind (even though it offers a fully featured BIOS), however it is very capable despite the seemingly inferior power delivery system.

In our testing we were able to match the UD3R frequencies where Bclk, memory speed and CPU frequency is concerned. It may be the cheapest X58 board from the company, but it certainly isn't the worst motherboard on the market and if anything is one of the

Benchmarks



better budget boards. If your budget is tight but you need a little more than what the P55 series of boards offer, the X58-USB3 is a worthwhile motherboard. If you can stretch your budget a little more, the UD3R is a better option, but otherwise the X58-USB3 should satisfy most needs. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



Specifications

Chipset: Intel X58 + ICH10R
Memory banks: 4x DDR3 240-pin
CPU support: Intel Core i7 (1366)
Slots: 3x PCI-E 16X (16x), 2x PCI-E 1X, 1xPCI

THE SCORE

>Plus

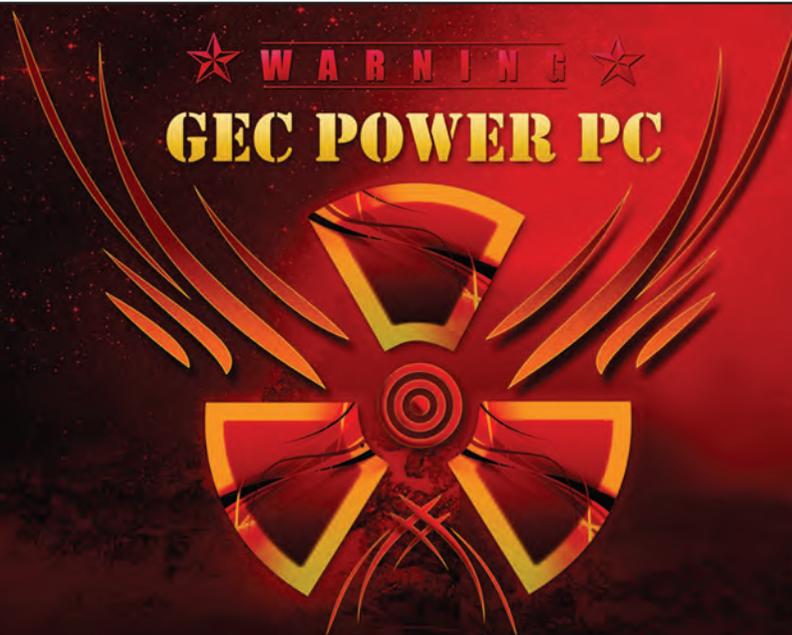
- + Price
- + Overclocks well
- + USB3.0

>Minus

- No Clear CMOS button

>Bottom Line

A good motherboard for anyone on a tight budget.



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OCZ Agility 2 60GB SSD

SOLID STATE DRIVES HAVE been with us for a while and despite the relatively high price, the adoption rate is increasing with every new drive released. Understandably, for memory manufacturers such as OCZ, the advent of affordable high-speed NAND memory and the relevant high performance controllers is a blessing, because they are now able to compete for mass storage with the likes of Seagate, Western Digital and others.

Pricing still remains high for the most part, but with products such as the Agility 2, this looks to change. Best of all, performance and capacities have seen an improvement and so has pricing compared to twelve months ago.

The Agility 2, much like its more expensive counterpart, the Vertex 2, uses the same SF1200 controller and MLC memory. There's no need for us to state again how impressive the Vertex 2 series of drives are courtesy of this very controller and how it deals with write amplification and other such alignments that plague the vast majority of SSDs. In just about every respect the Agility 2 drive is identical to the Vertex 2, however it offers lower performance where IOPS are concerned.

For those not in the know yet, IOPS referees to input/output operations per second. It's a very important matrix for measuring drive performance, and likely more relevant than read and write speeds. Most high-end SSDs will offer similar read and write speeds, but the true test is in the number IOPS each drive can deliver.

The Vertex 2 can deliver up to 50,000 per second (Random 4KB Write) while the Agility 2 is limited to 10,000 IOPS. This is where all the difference is. Indeed this is a huge difference, but it is worth keeping in mind that both drives offer the same

maximum read and write speeds. All of these factors come together to make the Agility 2 very fast and in some cases just as fast as the Vertex 2 drive.

In our testing we found that true to OCZ's performance claims, the Agility 2 drive does indeed deliver 10,000 IOPS as measured with IOMETER, in fact it delivered just above 10,600 IOPS, which is highly impressive. Maximum write speed is said to go up to 275MB/sec; we never did achieve this under any scenario, but did manage a 211.9MB/sec write speed, making it faster than any other drive we have tested before. Read speeds, as always, were slightly higher and averaged 230MB/sec across the entire drive, once again higher than any other drive we have tested before.

Where the drive did deliver somewhat disappointing performance was in the PCMark05, General Use test, with a measured 3.3MB/sec throughput, making it the lowest result we have ever recorded with an SSD. This could point to some anomaly in the test, but even with repeated testing the result didn't change.

Other than this single benchmark, everywhere else the Agility 2 impressed, with very good IO response times and close to maximum burst read speeds.

SSDs may not be for everyone and it is true that magnetic storage continues to improve not only in performance but price and capacity, but for outright performance nothing is close to solid state media. For the enthusiast and power user, there still won't be anything better than an SSD, and a good place to start would be with the Agility 2 drive. It's available in sizes ranging from 40GB all the way to 480GB and there should be one that fits your budget and size requirements. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Specifications

- Capacity:** 60GB
- Controller:** SF1200
- NAND Type:** MLC
- Form Factor:** 2.5-inch
- Interface:** SATA 3G

Benchmarks

HD Tune Average Read (MB/sec)	230
HD Tune Average Write (MB/sec)	211.9
IOMETER Total IOs (IOPS)	10,634.61
IOMETER Total MB/sec	41.54
PC Mark05 General Use	3.345

■ Baseline: OCZ Agility 2 60GB SSD

THE SCORE

- >Plus**
- + High IOPS performance
 - + Includes 3.5-inch mounting bracket

- >Minus**
- Nothing

>Bottom Line

One of the better priced SSDs on the market, with all round great performance.



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SAPPHIRE Radeon HD 5770 Flex

THERE'S NO DENYING THAT so far AMD has had the upper hand in DirectX11 market penetration. The company had a top-to-bottom line up of graphics cards before the competition released its first product. Not only that, but the mid-range cards such as the 5770 performed well enough to make them great for those on a tight budget or those who would rather Crossfire these instead of buying a single Radeon 5850 or 5870.

One of the biggest selling points for AMD with the HD 5000 series was Eyefinity. Understandably so, because for the first time, ultra wide-screen gaming was supported from a hardware level and

Specifications

Core: 850MHz JUNIPER (40nm)
Processors: 800
Render Outputs: 16
Memory: 1GB GDDR5 4.8GHz (76.8GB/sec)
API: DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.X

Benchmarks

Heaven Benchmark 2.1	525
	1,298
3DMark Vantage	11,901
	21,043
Crysis Warhead (1920x1080)	42.85
	82.04
Resident Evil 5 (1920x1080 4xAA)	68.3
	133.3

■ Baseline: NVIDIA GTX480

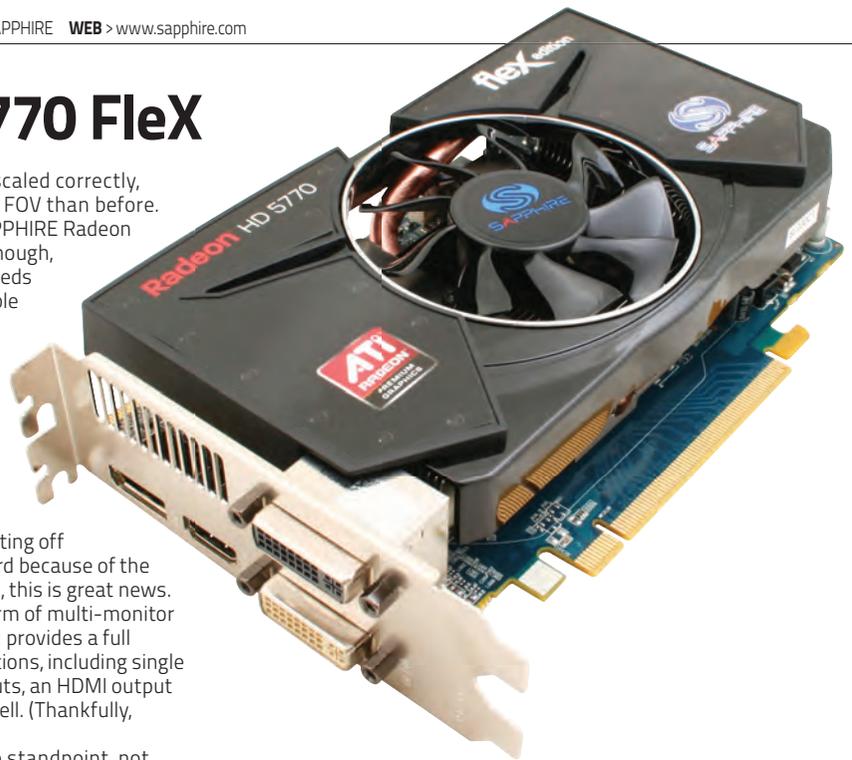
some games actually scaled correctly, allowing a much larger FOV than before.

What makes the SAPHIRE Radeon HD 5770 Flex special, though, is that one no longer needs a Display Port compatible monitor to make use of Eyefinity. So you can pretty much have any monitor configuration you want and still take advantage of the technology. This isn't something major for most people, but for those who were putting off buying any HD 5000 card because of the limitations on monitors, this is great news. To facilitate this free form of multi-monitor use, the SAPHIRE card provides a full complement of connections, including single and Dual-link DVI outputs, an HDMI output and a Display Port as well. (Thankfully, there's no mini HDMI.)

From a performance standpoint, not much has changed, with the Radeon 5770 managing to stay relevant. If anything, it has actually improved courtesy of the Catalyst 10.8 drivers, which boost performance in a vast number of applications.

We would have loved to see a slight overclock on the Flex card, especially since we were able to reach 900MHz on the core clock without doing anything but pushing up the slider in the control panel. Still, the card offers decent performance and with a virtually restriction-free Eyefinity setup, it's one of the better Radeon HD 5770s on the market and certainly worth considering. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Display Port-free Eyefinity
- + Runs very cool

>Minus

- Radeon 6770 coming out soon

>Bottom Line

The most cost-effective entry into Eyefinity technology.

08
out of ten

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Freecom Dual Drive Network Center

TIF YOU WANT TO live the dream of the true digital home, then shifting all your media files off your computers and onto a central share is a must. For most people, a dedicated PC running as a server isn't worth the expense and hassle, which is where network attached storage (NAS) devices like the Freecom Dual Drive Network Center come in.

Essentially, a NAS is a little black box that contains a couple of hard drives and a network port that connects to your router and shares all your files over your home network. In short, it's a cheap, easy-to-setup-and-use file server. The unit we tested came loaded with two 1TB Samsung hard drives already installed but is also available in 3TB and 4TB versions, as well as a barebones kit if feel like using your own hard drives. However, given the rather low price, you're better off buying one of the units that comes with drives; you can never have too much storage.

Using the unit's software, you can configure it to use one of three predefined setups: fast (RAID 0, both drives become one volume), safe (RAID 1, one drive copies the other) or as two separate drive letters (JBOD). It supports all the acronyms you'd expect

Specifications

Capacity: 0, 2TB, 3TB or 4TB
Drive type: 3.5-inch SATA
Interface: LAN 10/100/1000; USB 2.0
Supported Protocols: TCP/IP, FTP, SMB, Gigabit Jumbo frames, DAAP
Dimensions: 200 x 159 x 93mm
Weight: 2.6kg (including drives); 1.35kg (without drives)

from UPnP to DLNA, so with little networking knowledge and minimal configuration you should be streaming music and videos to every device in your house in short order.

The Dual Drive Network Center can also be set up as an FTP server or used as a dedicated download machine by using its built-in BitTorrent client, without the need for your computer to be switched on. The unit can even be accessed remotely over the internet via a web interface.

All in all, this is a great NAS at a reasonable price. **NAG**

Chris Bistline



THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Reasonably priced
- + Full featured
- + Easy to use

>Minus

- None

>Bottom Line

All the features you'd want and expect from a NAS device that doesn't cost much more than the hard drives that come with it. Buy!

09
out of ten

MSI Wind U160

SINCE ITS LAUNCH IN May 2009, MSI's Wind series of netbooks has been seen as a strong competitor to ASUS's Eee range of devices. However, unlike the "high-end" gaming-capable offerings from ASUS, this version of the Wind doesn't seem to have progressed much further than the numerous similar netbooks in the market, although its slightly upgraded big-brother, the U160DX, is closer to that goal. What we're left with, then, is a pure refresh of the original U100 – great for those looking to get their first netbook, but otherwise nothing special.

Fortunately for the U160, "special" isn't a requirement in this market. The device performs well, booting into the fairly uncluttered installation of Windows 7 Basic within good time – essential for those who will use the device on the go. The generously-sized HDD is as large as you'd ever need on a netbook, and the chiclet-style keyboard is one of the largest and most comfortable you'll find paired to a 10-inch LCD. The only downside to this keyboard is the sensitivity of the nearby touchpad, which often registers a click when one accidentally touches it while typing. Another issue with the touchpad is its lack of a scroll-bar on the side; while it's not a major issue, an omission like this seems unnecessary considering such a feature is considered standard these days. While the LCD manages to be bright and readable, the poor viewing angles might bother you if you're watching video or



typing with the device on your lap.

The battery life is perhaps the Wind U160's biggest asset, thanks to its 6-cell battery and improved Eco-engine technology. You can expect to get close on six hours of battery life from a mix of multimedia, Internet and office work, with the screen set to a fairly high level of

brightness. More frugal usage of the Eco-engine should result in even longer times between charges. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Specifications

CPU: Intel Atom N450 @ 1.66GHz
Display: 10-inch WSVGA (1024x600 resolution)
Memory: 1GB DDR2
Storage: 250GB HDD
Connectivity: 802.11 b/g/n, Bluetooth

THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Good battery life
- + Comfortable keyboard

>Minus

- Touchpad
- Poor viewing angles

>Bottom Line

A decent netbook if you're looking for something affordable and simple.

06
out of ten

Sony Ericsson Xperia X10 mini pro

WITH A 4-INCH SCREEN, the Xperia X10 is massive (larger than the iPhone, Nokia N97 and Samsung Wave). So Sony Ericsson saw fit to develop the X10 mini and mini pro with a screen almost half the size, a slower CPU, less built-in storage and a few other cuts to the specification sheet. The result is something quite different, and while both the mini and mini pro run the same outdated Android OS 1.6 as their big brother, they manage to sneak in just below the expectations one often has of a smartphone thanks to its diminutive size.

This is still a smartphone, however; capacitive touchscreen, slide-out QWERTY keyboard not found in the X10 mini (although our review unit had a peculiar QWERTZ layout; you may want to double-check on this if you purchase one for yourself), Exchange support through RoadSync, full access to the Android store, synchronisation with Google – the mini pro does everything you'd expect from a smartphone without causing you to feel like you've got a laptop stuffed into your pocket. And, if you're concerned that the lowered specs lead to a sluggish experience, you'll be pleased to know this is not the case.

I only have a few gripes with this phone, and they're minor: the OS; Sony Ericsson

Specifications

CPU: Qualcomm MSM7227 600MHz
Display: 2.55-inch capacitive non-multitouch, 240x320 resolution
Operating system: Android OS 1.6 with custom UI
Dimensions: 90 x 52 x 17mm
Weight: 120g
Camera: 5MP with LED flash, VGA video @ 30FPS

really should have used this opportunity to bring their custom UI up to Android 2.1 at the very least. Then, while the keyboard is a nice addition for those concerned to give up tactile buttons in favour of a touchscreen, the top row of buttons is slightly affected by its proximity to the screen, which might get in the way if you have large fingers. In addition, it's fairly obvious that this is just the same X10 UI crammed into a smaller screen, which occasionally gets cluttered due to its lower resolution.

Other than a couple of minor issues (some patchable), if ever you've looked for that perfect phone to bridge the gap between an everyday candybar and a smartphone, the X10 mini pro is right on target. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



THE SCORE

>Plus

- + Performs well
- + Great features

>Minus

- Outdated OS
- Minor ergonomics issues

>Bottom Line

This tiny X10 is no less capable than its big brother, but suffers from a few minor problems.

08
out of ten



GG

By Tarryn van der Byl

My Xbox brings all the boys to the yard



I WAS RECENTLY ACCUSED ON our forums by an apparently rather aggrieved reader that I don't adequately represent the magazine's "female demographic". Actually, it reminds me of this brilliant story about this one time I bought tampons, then went home and played *The Sims*. What a brilliant story. Just telling you guys – and girls! – about it has totally changed my perspective about absolutely everything and made me feel like having a big hormonal cry, and then maybe shopping for some new shoes or arguing with my boyfriend about something entirely inconsequential that happened four years ago but now extravagantly reinvented as a supercilious and overbearing psychodrama starring me. Also, games.

If it's not already abundantly clear, then, I just can't be much bothered with the whole "girl gamer" thing. For the same reason I can't be much bothered with, say, the "red-haired gamer" thing or the "green-eyed gamer" thing or the "ever-so-slightly-disproportionately-short-legged-so-I-always-have-to-turn-up-my-stupid-pants-gamer". In the context of gaming – you know, *playing games* – I'm quite sure that my particular genital configuration and other physical attributes (or anyone else's, for that matter) are really mostly irrelevant*.

I mean, what's a "girl gamer", anyway? The presumption that any person is so completely one-dimensional that this single arbitrary characteristic should be all the difference between one bunch of people who play games and another is simply absurd. We might as well start dividing gamers up into those who like bacon and those who don't. It would be just as useful.

And yet, this "girl gamer" thing persists. WE'RE GIRL GAMERS AND WE'RE JUST AS GOOD AS BOY GAMERS AND WE WANT TO BE TREATED EXACTLY THE SAME BUT WE'RE STILL GOING TO BANG ON ABOUT BEING GIRL GAMERS BECAUSE LOL. And no apparent grasp of irony either. You know what the big deal about "girl gamers" is? It's the big deal people with nothing more interesting to say for themselves have to make of it so they can feel special. GENDER SENSATIONALISM: *You're the problem!* I should print stickers or something.

In the meantime, though, I suggest anyone looking for an exposition of cyclical chocolate cravings and how they relate to shooting stuff on my TV look elsewhere. My inaugural and as-yet-unrealised threat to publish Marcus Fenix slashfic notwithstanding, I won't be subscribing to the "girl gamer" program any time soon. Or ever. If you're looking for a lactating perspective on games, read Miklos's column instead. He's just acquired a dachshund puppy, and he's practically grown a vagina overnight. **NAG**

* Mostly. Being left-handed and trying to play Red Steel 2 with no left-handed player support AND EVERYTHING ON THE SCREEN IS ****ING BACKWARDS makes being left-handed occasionally relevant. **** Red Steel 2.

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we'd categorize the Gigabyte X58A-UD3R's performance as "excellent." ~ Hot Hardware



I found nothing not to like about the X58A-UD3R. ~ Think Computers



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