

READER'S GAME OF THE YEAR
YOUR PICKS FOR THE BEST GAMES OF 2015

YOUR GAMES DVD INSIDE!

AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

PC

PowerPlay

WIN
7 NIGHTS ON THE
Sunshine Coast
VALUED AT
\$7,100

REVIEWED:
OCULUS RIFT VR!
IS IT THE REVOLUTION
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR?



TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY LEARNS
FROM HISTORY AND
EMBRACES FANTASY

THE DIVISION

HAS UBISOFT BITTEN OFF MORE
THAN IT CAN CHEW WITH ITS
AMBITIOUS SHOOTER/MMO?

DARK SOULS 3

WE HEAD TO LOTHRIC TO
REVIEW FROMSOFTWARE'S
LATEST MASTERPIECE

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

PERSONALISATION UNLEASHED //

Thermaltake and Tt eSPORTS push the boundaries of hardware personalisation and customisation - we understand that gamers want to have their gaming setup to look exactly how they want, without any limitations on style and customised flare.

We're proud to offer an unmatched range of products that are molded and built with full RGB integration, covering both core PC hardware including PC cases, power supplies and cooling - as well as professional RGB gaming gear and peripherals. Get the look and performance you've always dreamed about, today.

LEARN MORE >>

RGB.THERMALTAKE.COM.AU



YOUR GAME WORLD LIGHTS UP



 **Thermaltake**

THE ULTIMATE **RGB** FAMILY



WG LABS

INNOVATIONS
IN GAMEPLAY



MASTER OF
ORION
CONQUER THE STARS



TERRAN

ONLY AVAILABLE IN
COLLECTOR'S EDITION

PSILON

Master of Orion revives the iconic 4X strategy gameplay (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, and eXterminate) pioneered by the original Master of Orion franchise. Lead one of 10 playable races across vast galaxies, crushing worlds, manipulating leaders, and amassing resources in your bid to become the Master of Orion.

**CONQUER THE STARS IN
OUR **EARLY ACCESS** TODAY!**

<http://masteroforion.asia/>



> PCPP
250

ON THE COVER
TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

p. 36

Two great wargaming flavours
together at last

REVIEW
DARK SOULS 3

p. 64
FromSoftware deliver another painful masterpiece



TECH

OCULUS RIFT

p. 78

The VR revolution begins here



TECH

ASUS PG348Q

p. 82

The king of (expensive) gaming monitors



CONTENTS

Frontend

- 14 News
- 20 Big Picture
- 24 PCPP Interview: Battletech

Opinion

- 18 Far Canal
- 22 JAM
- 26 Generation XX

Features

- 28 A Collection Aside
- 32 10 to Watch
- 36 Total War: Warhammer
- 44 Reader's Game of the Year

Game Reviews

- 57 The Division
- 60 Gears of War
- 62 Hitman
- 64 Dark Souls 3
- 68 Battlefleet Gothic: Armada
- 69 Need for Speed

Tech

- 73 Galax GTX 970 Black
- 74 Acer Predator G3 710
- 76 Asus PG348Q Monitor
- 77 Billion BiPac 8900AX-2400
- 78 Oculus Rift
- 82 Oculus Rift Games
- 84 MoS Audio S Plus Speaker
- 84 Kingston KC400 1TB SSD
- 85 OCZ Trion 150 480GB SSD
- 85 CoolerMaster Sentinel III
- 86 Hotware
- 88 Tech Menagerie
- 90 How Things Work

State Of Play

- 94 Extended memory: Total War and Warhammer
- 96 The Last Word

Regulars

- 12 Inbox
- 13 My PC
- 98 Next Month

p. 74





Sweet Pie

This year really isn't letting up. It's been a rather crazy time so far, with more AAA releases coming in the first few months of the year than I can remember. We have five high profile games reviewed in the issue and next issue is looking to have the same kind of saturation. It looks like this year is going to be an exceptionally good time to be a gamer, or someone who writes about games. Of course, the number of games available isn't the biggest news of the month. That honour goes to the fact that the Oculus Rift, the first commercially viable end user VR headset has finally become available – at least to those lucky enough to have had their order shipped already.

Despite some rather heavy handed and unpleasant fine print in the ToS that allow for information to be grabbed at any time for marketing purposes and the fact that anything done with the Rift can be used, royalty free by the company, it is still a landmark achievement. It may not represent a future for gaming that I am particularly interested in personally, but the potential for a shift in the way people think about and interact with games is something I find fascinating. Bennett, a fan and backer of the Rift since it was first announced is understandably over the moon to finally have the retail version of the headset in his hands. The 30 odd games he got to go with it should keep him busy for a fair while as well, though hopefully not so busy that he won't be able to meet deadlines.

In this issue we also collate your votes for Reader's Game of the Year. The votes were interesting, with some definite favourites becoming apparent early in the process. No spoilers though – Malky made pie charts.

Daniel Wilks
Editor
@drwilkenstein



QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Who steals cars anymore? Not prostitutes"

"I feel sorry for sucking your Redskin"

"Come on mate, you eat fish, you eat chicken"

EDITORIAL

EDITOR Daniel Wilks
dwilks@nextmedia.com.au

GROUP ART DIRECTOR Malcolm Campbell
mcampbell@nextmedia.com.au

TECH EDITOR Bennett Ring
bennettr@internode.on.net

SPACE LORD Ben Mansill
bmansill@nextmedia.com.au

INTERN Lewis Vaughan

CONTRIBUTORS

James Cottee, Alex Mann, Terrence Jarrad, Meghann O'Neill, Josh Lundberg, Jordy Bertram, Theo, Morte, Nathan Lawrence, Dan Staines, Dave Kozicki, Joab Gilroy, Katie Williams, Heidi Kempf, Patrick Stafford, Ashley McKinnon, John Robertson, Anthony Fordham, Anthony Agius

ADVERTISING

GROUP NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER

TECH & GAMING
Cameron Ferris

cferris@nextmedia.com.au
☎ (+16 2) 02 9901 6348
M: 0405 356 419

ACCOUNT MANAGER

Sean Fletcher
sfletcher@nextmedia.com.au
☎ (+16 2) 02 9901 6367
M: 0402 585 124

ADVERTISING TRAFFIC

Alison Begg
abegg@nextmedia.com.au
☎ 02 9901 6346

PRODUCTION MANAGER Alison Begg

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Carole Jones

SUBSCRIPTIONS

www.mymagazines.com.au

TOLL FREE ☎ 1300 361 146
Locked Bag 3355, St Leonards NSW 1590

COVER DISC INQUIRIES:

dwilks@nextmedia.com.au
☎ 02 9901 6100

nextmedia

Building A, Level 6
207 Pacific Highway
St Leonards, NSW 2065
Locked Bag 5555,
St Leonards, NSW 1590

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

David Gardiner

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR

Bruce Duncan

PC PowerPlay is published by nextmedia Pty Ltd ACN: 128 805 970, Building A, Level 6, 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065 © 2011. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, in whole or in part, without the prior permission of the publisher. Printed by Bluestar WEB Sydney, Distributed in Australia by Gordon & Gotch, ISSN 1326-5644. The publisher will not accept responsibility or any liability for the correctness of information or opinions expressed in the publication. All material submitted is at the owner's risk and, while every care will be taken nextmedia does not accept liability for loss or damage.

Privacy Policy We value the integrity of your personal information. If you provide personal information through your participation in any competitions, surveys or offers featured in this issue of PC PowerPlay, this will be used to provide the products or services that you have requested and to improve the content of our magazines. Your details may be provided to third parties who assist us in this purpose. In the event of organisations providing prizes or offers to our readers, we may pass your details on to them. From time to time, we may use the information you provide us to inform you of other products, services and events our company has to offer. We may also give your information to other organisations which may use it to inform you about their products, services and events, unless you tell us not to do so. You are welcome to access the information that we hold about you by getting in touch with our privacy officer, who can be contacted at nextmedia, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590



REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

THE CHOICE OF CHAMPIONS



NVIDIA G-SYNC™

ROG SWIFT PG34BQ **CURVED** GAMING MONITOR Expand Your Gaming Horizons

Cinematic Gaming Experience

34-inch 21:9 Ultra-wide QHD (3440x1440) curved display with 100% sRGB colour

Ultra-smooth Graphics

NVIDIA® G-SYNC™ technology with fast 100Hz refresh rate

GamePlus Technology

Exclusive hotkey gives onscreen crosshair, timer, FPS counter for an in-game advantage

GameVisual Technology

FPS, RTS/RPG, Racing, Cinema, Scenery and sRGB modes to suit various games and contents

ASUS - NO.1 GAMING MONITOR BRAND

ASUS Australia & New Zealand

Inbox



FEEDBACK #249

> Matthew Schmidt: Matthew Schmidt Best cover image since the Simulator Special.... ..and I guess a flagship VR game keeps that theme....maybe I'm simulator biased.

A WINNER IS YOU
Congratulations to the winner of our The Division subscriptions major prize, Gordon Evans!

MAKE YOURSELF HEARD!

facebook.com/pcpowerplay
www.pcpowerplay.com.au



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS!

Write in to PCPP with your rants, considered opinions, and endless run-on sentences of pure awesome. The address is letters@pcpowerplay.com.au. Each letter read by hand! This month our Letter of the Month winner scores himself a copy of *Forced Showdown* thanks to the good people at BetaDwarf!



LETTER OF THE MONTH SEQUELITIS

I've read your magazine since the first Duke Nukem 3D issue and it's still hands down a better read than any online games titles that have popped up since then. One thing that I've wanted to ask you for a while is: How do games developers choose which games to produce direct sequels for and why are some good games neglected when other crappy games are not? Are games developers so commercially driven these days that bad ideas are continued because they've managed to convince the masses to buy them?

Or is it a matter of developers bending to the collective will of a small (but loud), group of fans on forums? Maybe it's something more arbitrary – perhaps they put the question to a sequel-selecting cephalopod in an office fish tank, like Paul the octopus who predicted the outcome of 2010 World Cup games.

How on Earth is it that games like Resident Evil and Final Fantasy are given so many sequels when games like Minecraft and Star Wars: Republic Commando are neglected? And we've only recently gotten sequels to Starcraft, Shadow Warrior and Duke Nukem 3D (and

the latter was bungled and not worth the wait).

Then there are companies that make great games in different genres but still focus on one particular genre. Take Bethesda's Fallout series for instance: Don't get me wrong, Fallout 4 and its predecessors are fantastic games, but to assume that there are more fans wanting a direct sequel of open world post-apocalyptic games than there are of open world fantasy games like Oblivion, for which there have only been a few add-ons, is just ludicrous. Please can you shed some light on this perplexing state of affairs?

Stewart Nicholas

Hi Stewart – the mistake you've made is to think that game distribution was ever anything other than commercially driven. The simple answer is that games that get sequels are deemed financially viable due to proven success – hence eleventy billion Final Fantasy games, whereas many other, potentially better games do not show as much potential for return on investment. The slightly longer answer is that games development/distribution is also something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. When a thing is proven to be successful (military shooters like CoD for example), other publishers jump on the bandwagon.

FROZEN TREATS

Hey guys...great mag and just thought I'd tell you this....

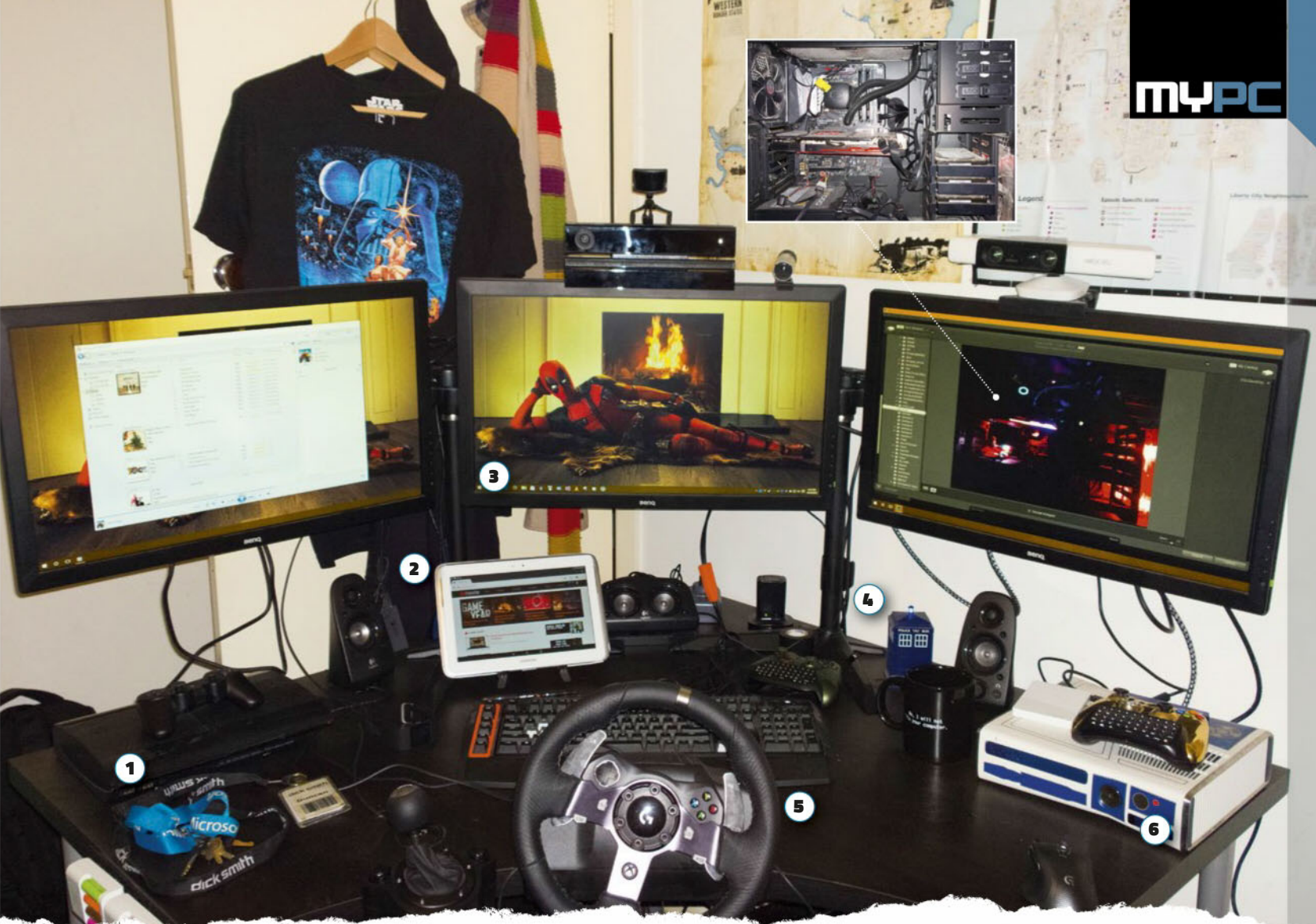
I have a 500Gb Western Digital HDD (definitely out of warranty) that just spins-up and then repeats. When connected internally it is not recognised at startup. Also, when I try to connect as an external drive it does the same thing but stops after a bit of time and then the red light comes on permanently (usually indicates HDD activity).

I read something on a forum that suggested putting HDD into ziplock bags and reduced air and put in Freezer for an hour or so and try again to connect. The theory is that the cold shrinks the platters slightly and changes the distance / angle of the heads to the platter.

WELL; THIS ACTUALLY WORKED....I was able to copy pretty much everything I wanted from it (around 300Gb). I tried to repeat it again the next day...but it didn't work the second time. I will try again in a few weeks/months' time to see just if I can access.

Nomad

Hi Nomad – the theory seems sound as a temporary fix. We'd just worry that trying multiple times could make your platters brittle making them shatter under torque.



DUNCAN 27, VIC

This month's MY PC brought to you by



This watercooled SFF gaming rig was built to replace my prehistoric Core 2 Duo & 9800 GTX - it was a phenomenal jump in computing power.

4 MOST IMPRESSIVE FEATURES:

- x3 BenQ RL2450H
- i7-6700K
- ASUS Strix 980 TI
- Simulation kit (G920, Shifter, TrackIR)

LAST UPGRADE: Kinect V2 for use with Windows Hello (Because passwords are so last decade)

DREAM UPGRADE: x3 ASUS PG279Q.

WHY SO SPECIAL? It's the first computer I've built to date where I've had the monetary freedom to experiment with accessories (peripherals/sensors) and gradually expand the capabilities over time.

Since taking this photo I've upgraded to a G920 wheel and gone wireless (in the audio department) with a G933.

1. There are two too many consoles in this PC pic
2. Nice tablet placement for bored in game browsing or second (or in this case fourth) screen action
3. Pure sex appeal right there
4. Way to pander to Wilks with the blatant Doctor Who merch placement
5. Between the wheel and the speakers, we think someone likes Logitech
6. OK, we can forgive the consoles because the R2-XBOX is rad

DUNCAN WINS!

Thanks to the good people at Thermaltake, Duncan scores himself a fresh off the production line Poseidon Z Forged mechanical keyboard!

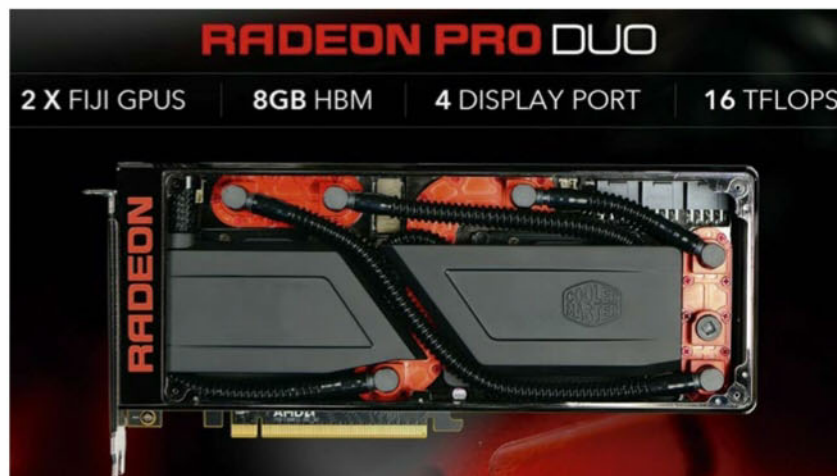


winner!

WANT FREE STUFF? Send your MyPC entry today to mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au. Include the four most impressive elements of its hardware, your last upgrade, your dream upgrade, your favourite feature and what you think makes your PC special. Make sure to include your name, age and location. And last but not least, attach a 5MP or bigger image of your PC! No camera phone shots, and make sure it's in focus!

SAMSUNG RELEASES HUGE 15.3TB SSD

Samsung have started to ship a huge 15.3TB SSD, designed for the enterprise. The PM1633a has a conventional 2.5" form factor, but with a SAS connector, belying its enterprise destination. Cramped in that small space are 512 of Samsung's latest 256Gb V-NAND chips, stacked in 48 layers. This provides the PM1633a with the ability to read and write sequential data at over 1.2GB/sec and perform 200,000 IOPS for random reads and 32,000 IOPS for random writes. The ability to house 15TB in a single 2.5" drive means that if cost is not an object, a business can increase storage density by a massive order of magnitude compared to the largest 10TB 3.5" drives available on the market. There's no price yet for this 15.3TB monster, but it's probably safe to assume that if you have to ask, you can't afford it.



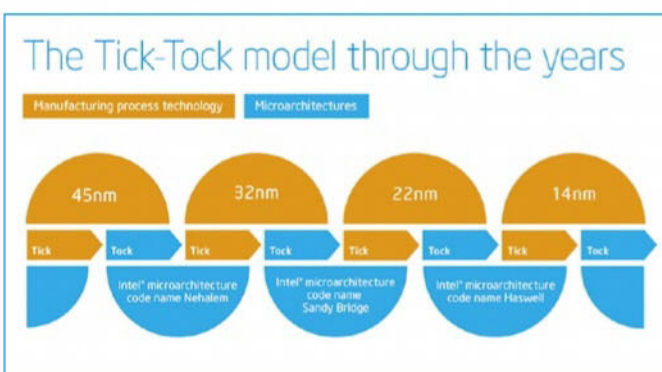
AMD'S NEW RADEON PRO DUO GRAPHICS CARD

AMD have unleashed a behemoth of a graphics card in the Radeon Pro Duo. It combines two, already blisteringly fast R9 Fury X GPUs in a single card. To keep all that GPU power cool, the Radeon Pro Duo is factory fitted with a closed loop water cooling solution with a 120mm radiator. The Radeon Pro Duo is designed to handle the intense workloads of VR headsets such as the Oculus Rift and is the first product in AMD's VR Ready Creator line. With 16 teraflops of compute performance, it'll likely be a DirectX 12 monster. The Radeon Pro Duo will be available in early Q2 2016 and an RRP of USD\$1499. You may need to budget for a new monster power supply, as a single Fury X can peak at 450W, so two of them on a single board might need 900W of juice to operate.



INTEL MOVES FROM TICK, TOCK DEVELOPMENT TO PROCESS, ARCHITECTURE, OPTIMISATION

Intel built its recent microprocessor dominance on a Tick Tock strategy for developing and releasing new CPUs. The Tick resulted in new fabrication processes (e.g: 32nm, 22nm, 14nm) and the Tock delivered new architectures (Sandy Bridge, Haswell, Skylake etc.). Intel announced to investors that they're moving away from the successful Tick Tock to a "Process-Architecture-Optimisation" strategy. This change is the result of the Ticks in Intel's strategy are hitting the limits of how small humans can make things and improvements are becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. Expect to see small percentage increases in speed on each new CPU rather than the big gains each new CPU would offer back in the mid-2000s. This radical change in Intel's strategy provides companies like TSMC, Samsung and maybe our old mates at AMD a chance to reach the cutting edge if Intel takes too long of a nap.



msi

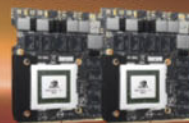


DESKTOP GAMING REDEFINED

Size of a console, Power of a PC



- ▶ VOLUME : 6.5L
- ▶ DUAL GRAPHICS CARDS
- ▶ 3DMARK 11 SCORE 21000 UP



Vortex G65 SLI

For more detail:
MSI Australia



LATEST 6th GEN. INTEL® CORE™ i7-6700K / i7-6700 PROCESSOR

- | WINDOWS 10 HOME / WINDOWS 10 PRO | NVIDIA GTX980 / GTX960 GRAPHICS SLI |
- | VR READY (For GTX980 SLI only) | SUPER RAID 4 (DUAL NVMe M.2 SSD BY PCIe GEN3 X4) |
- | DDR4-2133 | STORM COOLING TECHNOLOGY | THUNDERBOLT™ 3 | 450W 80 PLUS GOLD PSU |
- | METALLIC SILVERY GREY FINISH | NAHIMIC | MATRIX DISPLAY (UP TO 6 MONITOR OUTPUT) |
- | XSPLIT GAMCASTER | KILLER DOUBLESOT-X3™ PRO WITH SHIELD |



INTEL INSIDE® . EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE OUTSIDE.

WHERE TO BUY

NSW			QLD		
Capitol Computer	(02) 9281 8890	http://www.capitolcomputer.com.au	Umart	(07) 3369 3928	http://www.umart.com.au/
Wireless1	(02) 9687 8828	http://www.wireless1.com.au	Computer Function	(07) 3720 4777	http://www.computerfunction.com.au
Techbuy	(02) 9648 1818	http://www.techbuy.com.au	Computer Alliance	(07) 3421 3200	http://www.computeralliance.com.au
Mwave	1300 727 446	http://www.mwave.com.au	GameDude Computers	(07) 3387 1500	http://www.gamedude.com.au
Kong Computer	1300 159 272	http://www.kongcomputers.com	WA		
JW Computers	(02) 9726 2818	http://jw.com.au	Affordable laptops	(08) 9536 8500	http://www.affordablelaptops.com.au
Umart	(07) 3369 3928	http://www.umart.com.au	PLE Computers	(08) 9309 4771	http://www.ple.com.au
			Austin Computers	(08) 9202 0100	http://austin.net.au
VIC			SA		
Tecs	(03) 9602 3499	http://www.tecs.com.au	Getright Computers	(08) 8231 0622	http://www.getright.com.au
Scorptec Computers	(03) 9249 6000	http://scorptec.com.au	IT Warehouse	(08) 8296 3211	http://www.itwarehouse.com.au
PC Case Gear	(03) 9560 2122	http://www.pccasegear.com	ALLNEEDS	(08) 8211 8661	http://www.allneeds.com.au
PLE Computers	(08) 9309 4771	http://www.ple.com.au	NEW Zealand		
Centrecom	(03) 8311 7600	http://www.centrecom.com.au	JUSTLAPTOPS	(09) 442 2066	http://www.justlaptops.co.nz
BCC Computers	(03) 5227 6888	https://www.bcccomputers.com.au/geelongwest	Computer Lounge	(09) 368 4818	http://www.computerlounge.co.nz
CPL	(03) 9223 4288	http://www.cplonline.com.au	Playtech	(09) 415 1020	http://www.playtech.co.nz
Prototech	(03) 5444 1980	http://www.prototech.com.au			
Umart	(07) 3369 3928	http://www.umart.com.au			

NO. 1 IN GAMING

INTEL UNVEILS NEW SKULL CANYON NUC FOR GAMERS

Traditionally, a small computer means small performance. All the high speed components generate so much heat, that a small form factor limited what they were capable of. Not so with Intel's latest addition to their Next Unit of Computing range (NUC). The Intel NUC6i7KYK Skull Canyon NUC is a small PC measuring only 211 mm x 116 mm x 28 mm, but packing an Intel Core i7-6770HQ quad core CPU which wields the fastest Intel GPU available, the Iris Pro 580. While it's not a 4K 60fps beast, it does manage to play Just Cause 3 at 1080p 30fps and holds its own on many games at 1080p. The NUC6i7KYK has dual M.2 slots for SATA3/PCIe x4 Gen 3 NVMe/AHCI SSDs, such as the Samsung 950 Pro, for insane disk performance. Also on-board is a Thunderbolt 3 port, operating at 40GBps, that allows an external graphics card to be hooked up.



RAZER'S PERFORMANCE ULTRABOOK REVEALED

The Razer Blade Stealth's target market is the person who wants an Ultrabook for day to day lugging around town, but also wants to play some games without having to own a second computer. Its base specs are very slick, featuring a 12.5" 2560x1440 or 3840x2160 LCD, Samsung's speedy PM951 PCIe NVMe SSD in various capacities, the top of the line Intel Core i7-6500U CPU and Thunderbolt 3. All of this in a 1.25kg package. A Killer 1535 802.11ac Wi-Fi card and a keyboard with per-key RGB backlighting round out this high end Ultrabook. The only downside is the rather low 8GB of RAM, as there's no option to upgrade to 16GB. The killer feature for gamers is the Razer Core Thunderbolt 3 external graphics card enclosure. Purchase this US\$399 accessory, insert a graphics card, hook it up to the Blade Stealth and game away, free from the integrated laptop GPU.



ACER'S \$5,000 PREDATOR Z850 GAMING PROJECTOR

If you've ever wanted a projector that you can also game on, Acer has you covered. The Predator Z850 is a mirrorless ultra-short throw projector that will throw an oddly shaped 1920x720 image up 120" in diameter. Because it's an ultra-short throw unit, it only needs to be 47cm from the projection surface. There's no fan, so you can game without annoying sounds. Specs wise, it's rated for 3,000 ANSI lumens and has a 100,000:1 contrast ratio. For US\$5,000 you'd think it included a sweet gaming rig on-board the projector, but no, you need to use one of the HDMI 2.0 ports to connect your computer or console. Kudos to Acer for releasing a projector aimed at gamers, as most projectors don't suit the needs of high frame rate action, but the 24fps of cinema - but what's with that 1920x720 resolution? 1080p or 4K would have been just fine.





Make It Yours.



The Best of Both Worlds

MASTERKEYS PRO L / S

Most RGB keyboards make you compromise with either bright LEDs or high-quality switches. But with the full MasterKeys Pro L and tenkeyless MasterKeys Pro S keyboards, you get the best of both worlds: the brightest LEDs and the best tactile feeling that gamers have come to love. How is this possible?



Cherry switch
(Red/Brown/Blue)

We completely redesigned the interior to fit both Cherry MX switches and big, fat, LEDs that can radiate 16.7 million colors. You also get on-the-fly macros, profile support, and easy-to-use software - all in a sleek, minimalistic design.

Learn More at coolermaster.com/MasterKeys

NSW ARC Computers arc.com.au
Capitol Computer capitolcomputer.com.au
Dcomp dcomponline.com.au
IJK ijk.com.au
J&W Computers jw.com.au
mWave mwave.com.au
MSY msy.com.au
TI Computers ticomputers.com.au

QLD Auscomp Computers auscompcomputers.com
Computer Alliance computeralliance.com.au
MSY msy.com.au
Umart Online umart.com.au

VIC Computers & Parts Land cplonline.com.au
Centre Com Sunshine centrecom.com.au
MSY msy.com.au
PC Case Gear pccasegear.com
Scorpion Tech Computers scorptec.com.au
Umart Online umart.com.au

WA Austin Computer austin.net.au
MSY msy.com.au
PLE Computers ple.com.au
SA Allneeds Computers allneeds.com.au
MSY msy.com.au

TAS MSY msy.com.au

VALVE FOUND TO BE IN BREACH OF AUSTRALIAN CONSUMER LAW

The verdict: Steam was screwing over Australians.

The Australian Federal Court has just released its findings following an 18 month proceeding into Valve's business practices in Australia, brought to court by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

The ACCC's case was that the Steam Subscriber Agreement contained articles that were fundamentally illegal under Australian law, especially in relation to game refunds and warranties. Steam now has an official refund policy, but didn't in 2014 when the ACCC began its case.

Valve's defence was that the agreement was correct under Washington State Law, where Steam operates from, and further

argued that Steam only provided a service, not actual goods, in Australia. In effect, Valve believed that Steam was exempt from Australian consumer protections.

The official verdict, however, is that Steam does in fact do business in Australia, and therefore elements of its Subscriber Agreement and Refund Policy contained 'false or misleading representations to consumers'.

"The Federal Court's decision reinforces that foreign based businesses selling goods and/or services to Australian consumers can be subject to Australian Consumer Law obligations, including the consumer guarantees," ACCC Chairman Rod Sims said in today's release..



"In this case, Valve is a US company operating mainly outside Australia, but, in making representations to Australian consumers, the Federal Court has found that Valve engaged in conduct in Australia," Mr Sims said. "It is also significant that the Court

held that, in any case, based on the facts, Valve was carrying on business in Australia."

A further hearing as to the nature of the relief that Valve will be required to offer will be made at a later date. You can read more at the ACCC's site.



LAWBREAKERS WILL NO LONGER BE FREE-TO-PLAY

Cliff Bleszinski's next game will be exclusive to Steam, and come with a price.

Boss Key Productions' upcoming game, Lawbreakers, is undergoing some changes ahead of its when-it's-ready launch. The biggest is that the game is no longer going to be free play - though Boss Key's Cliff Bleszinski's promised it won't be AAA-expensive.

"As the game continued to take shape, we realized free-to-play wasn't the right fit for what we're building," said Cliff Bleszinski said at a presentation at GDC overnight. "LawBreakers is a competitive game at heart and that means balance is a big priority to

me, my team, and our community. Using a digital premium model helps ensure an even playing field by giving fans access to every available role without any barriers."

On top of that, Lawbreakers has also had a change in its look and feel. The game's now shifted to a more mature tone.

"Being constantly compared to the current slew of colourful shooters on the market made us realize we needed to stand out from the crowd" Bleszinski continued. "We decided to take a step back and explore how we could dial up the maturity in LawBreakers, going

back to our original vision. The new look and feel embraces the innovative and vertical nature of our game elevated by violence, intensity and competition."

And at launch, the game will be exclusive to Steam, and while the game is still currently a PC exclusive, the option of going to console has not been ruled out.

In case you missed last year's announcement, Lawbreakers is a team-based competitive shooter set in a future riven by strange gravitic anomalies, which will feature as a big part of gameplay.

METABOX

Starting at \$1219

CUSTOM-BUILT.
GROUND-BREAKING PERFORMANCE.
THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL LAPTOPS.



METABOX
The Laptop Reinvented

www.metabox.com.au/store

4K gaming, best big thing ever

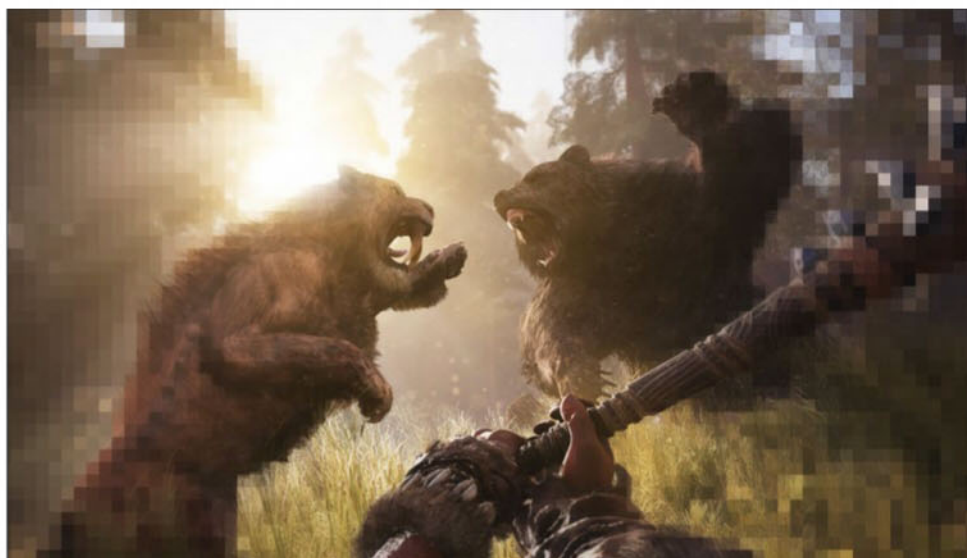
When once SVGA was the high-res pinnacle...

PC gaming has always rewarded us with more than just amazing game experiences. I know I'm not alone when I say that I get just as much of a jolly from seeing and feeling the hardware at work as I do from being in a game. As I play with a new bit of gear, the gains in detail thanks to more power on tap – or smoothness if that's the priority – is fantastic to sit in front of and eat up over the hours of loading up one game after another.

We love getting a new video card or CPU, and then ploughing through our games. Maybe tweaking the system a bit, doing some overclocking, monitoring temps, sensing quicker loading times and visualising the new component in your case which moments before you'd lovingly unpacked, stared at affectionately, then installed and fired up.

So it was that three weeks ago I was testing a new monitor. I always review monitors at home so I can play it properly. It's a nice perk of the job, but of course the day the gear has to be returned is a bit sad, though in balance I'm grateful for the experience, and the privilege of being able to report on it to you. This particular screen was the Asus PA329Q. The 'PA' is for ProArt, which is Asus' professional series where colour accuracy and uniformity is the top priority. As such it didn't include any of the new Sync technology, but it does have a sub-5ms response time and DisplayPort 1.2 which allows 60Hz. I know those two specs aren't generally noteworthy for gamers who expect that as a minimum, but they're critical in making this one gameworthy.

But the specs that send this thing into heavenly territory are thus: it's



an IPS panel, at 4k res (3840x2160) and all in a monstrous 32-inch size. Now, I've rabbited on here previously about how 2016 is the year of the monitor, and it certainly is with radical innovation in screen aspect ratio, syncing technology and curvy curves. But for me size and resolution has always been the goal. That makes this the best gaming monitor I've ever used. It's not the only screen with this resolution, and you can buy bigger, so don't take this as a statement of absolute superiority for this particular model. But having played on variously Synced screens, ultra-wides and flaming 144Hz refresh rate screens, it's the crispness of 4k and the

4K gaming is feasible today solely thanks to the Nvidia GTX 980TI GPU. It really is a ripsnorter of a card and was easily able to power this screen. I was able to stay well above 60fps in the most demanding games and at high or ultra detail. That includes a whole lot of Far Cry: Primal gaming as well as my particularly demanding sims. All sumptuously smooth, all the time. It's eye candy to the max and is a particularly nice way to experience the power of the gaming PC it's attached to. We've all gamed for years, and upgraded progressively, enjoying step by step improvements, but 4k, baby, that's where it's at for maximum satisfaction.

You see more of the game world, that's the big plus. Yes, everything is sharper, but it's also bigger. Game worlds are rendered over a larger expanse and that's a huge benefit. In flight sims a wider and taller landscape is drawn so I can see more above, below and to the sides – and of course it's crispy crisp in 4k so no detail is difficult to make out, it's all so pin sharp that there's no guesswork. I know that's a Yak-9 because I can see its shape instead of just a mystery blodge that may or may not be dangerous. I can see something behind that tree in Far Cry: Primal over on the other side of the valley, where on a lower res I'd just not see it there. I can see the corner coming up in my racing sim with razor precision, instead of it being a fuzzy mash of converging lines.

The revolution is underway and it won't be long before 4k plus Syncs converge in a single gaming screen, a big one, too. That's what I'll be buying this year, just as soon as the tech catches up, and it will. **PC**

■ Size and resolution has always been the goal. That makes this the best gaming monitor I've ever used ■

expanse of 32-inches that ticks the boxes for me.

I usually play on a Dell 30-incher at home. It's about 5 years old but still delivers a gaming experience better than anything else until now. The extra couple of inches in size didn't blow me away, because once you've played on a 30-incher you have entered the big zone where your peripheral vision doesn't see it all so you're properly immersed, I like that a lot. So while jumping from a 24-incher to say 27 or higher is a game changer, 30 to 32 isn't so much of a big deal. But it's the 4k, oh the crispy 4k that makes it amazing.



BEN MANSILL
is having a high res day

It's not a toaster*

*But it will read any SATA drive via the world's fastest USB port



VOLANS DS31

Aluminium USB 3.1 Gen 2 (10Gbps) HDD
Docking Station with RAID

AVAILABLE FROM:

Capitol Computer (NSW)
www.capitolcomputer.com.au

Centre Com Superstore (VIC)
www.centrecom.com.au

Computer Alliance (QLD)
www.computeralliance.com.au

PLE Computers (WA)
www.ple.com.au

+
*the big
picture*
+





Mirage: Arcane Warfare

DEVELOPER TORN BANNER STUDIOS
PUBLISHER TORN BANNER STUDIOS
DUE 2016
www.miragearcane warfare.com

The developers of the excellent multiplayer melee skirmish game, Chivalry: Medieval Warfare have turned to fantasy for their next game, and we couldn't be more excited. Much of the DNA of Chivalry remains in Mirage, but the addition of magic should really make things interesting!

Too Cool For School

What's the most entertaining thing about Cliffy B.: his games, or his tweets? Trick question: it's his haircuts...

In the not-too-distant future we will see the release of *LawBreakers*, the new first-person shooter from Clifford Bleszinski – better known to PC gamers as ‘Cliffy B.’ The mastermind behind *Unreal Tournament* and *Gears of War*, he isn't just one of the most accomplished game designers of our age, he's also an internet comedy savant.

Cliffy B.'s antics have entertained gamers since the turn of the century, and the age of Twitter has seen his comedy output increase dramatically. In recent years he has tweeted on such varied topics as sanitation: “Wife: ‘Fun fact! By peeing in the shower, you can save about 1,157 gallons of water a year.’ Me: ‘What about poo?!’”

On onanism: “Men are like games with attract mode enabled. Leave us idle too long and we get bored and start playing with ourselves.”

On politics: “Trump is a jizz golem fashioned from Rush Limbaugh's frantic masturbation.”

On trolling: “My favorite thing to do on Facebook is to post something really likeable, get a ton of likes, and then later edit into something heinous.”

On mobiles: “Teaching a new phone to say ‘fuck’ is like breaking a horse.”

On Microsoft: “Windows 10 is poking me with a boner at 4am like ‘you up?!’” ...And so much more.

Nary a week goes by without Cliffy B. tweeting something that could be taken out of context and blown up into a viral click-bait controversy. Though the authors of such articles would in all likelihood be either mistaken or disingenuous, because it's all a lark. Cliffy B. doesn't really mean any harm – it's all in good fun (see our interview



in PCPP 233 for more details). And in the weeks ahead we can expect the quality and quantity of these emissions to only increase, because his new baby will be fighting an uphill battle to succeed in a crowded FPS market.

LawBreakers is not a household name like *CoD* or *Battlefield*, nor do we expect it to have the sort of advertising blitzkrieg budget that Ubisoft throws at its Tom Clancy's titles. It won't have the rusted-on Blizzard fan-base primed for *Overwatch*, or the generation of aging gamers psyched for *Doom*.

LawBreakers will not enjoy blanket brand recognition at launch. But maybe it won't need it.

Cliffy B.'s antics have entertained gamers since the turn of the century

It's all about leverage. One recalls the astute actions of Max Landis, a writer/director who makes terrible films. He made the shrewd move of befriending the hosts of the popular web show *Half in the Bag*, who now feel obliged to not only review Landis's cinematic train wrecks but to try to think of nice things to say about them. During their review of ‘Me Him Her’ you could see the pain on Mike Stoklasa's face.

Cliffy B. has no shortage of powerful friends. Lately he's been palling around with Justin Roiland, so there's every chance that *LawBreakers* will get a Rick & Morty announcer voice pack, just like *DOTA 2*. It's not inconceivable that there could be a conspicuous spot of product placement in *Rick & Morty* season 3.

Cliffy B. has half a million Twitter followers, and the attention of the afore-mentioned click-bait content farmers. Lately he's even been conversing with, of all people, Max Landis, who will no doubt be more than happy to share his viral marketing tips.

We also can't discount the possibility that Cliffy B. has a killer product on his hands. He co-founded Boss Key Productions with Arjan Brussee, who was the development director of the entire *Killzone* series, not mention the coder of Cliffy B.'s *Jazz Jackrabbit* games, back in the day. *LawBreakers* holds the promise of a return to the verticality-centric arena shooting action of the late 90s, which is sure to trigger a nostalgia lobe or two. And unlike the bright and cheerful aesthetic of *Paladins*, *LawBreakers* is skewing towards a more mature flavour of sci-fi. That is, mature by Cliffy B.'s standards.

Above all, Cliffy B. has motivation. He has been retired before, and he clearly didn't care for it. It was during this era that a popular online forum took the drastic measure of issuing a blanket ban on all new Cliffy B. threads until he announced a new game – not because he was tweeting like a dudebro, but because he was considered irrelevant. Wealth and success have given Cliffy B. access to fine microbrews and fast cars and private jets, but we suspect that what he craves most of all is attention.

He's not doing it for the money any more. *LawBreakers* isn't a means to an end, it's an end to a means. He can't imagine a games industry without Cliffy B. And frankly, neither can we...PC



JAMES COTTEE
still has a lot of the alphabet to work through

GIGABYTE™

GIGABYTE recommends Windows.

P55 / P57 GTX 970M / 965M 15.6" GAMING LAPTOP



 Windows 10



6th Gen Intel® Core™ i7 Processor


PCIe Gen3
Max. 2300MB/s


HDMI 2.0
4K with 60Hz


USB 3.1 Type-C
10Gbps/ 5V 3A


DDR4
2133MHz
Up to 32GB

PLACE TO PURCHASE

Affordable Laptops <http://affordablelaptops.com.au/>
Online Computer <http://www.onlinecomputer.com.au/>
MSY Technology <http://www.msy.com.au/>

Scorptec Computers <http://www.scorptec.com.au/>
JW Computers <http://www.jw.com.au/>
Kong Computers <http://www.kongcomputers.com/>

FragLabs <http://www.fraglabs.com.au/>
CPL <http://cplonline.com.au/>
PCD International <http://www.pcdi.com.au/>

MADE in TAIWAN

The entire materials provided herein are for reference only. GIGABYTE reserves the right to modify or revise the content at anytime without prior notice.

www.gigabyte.com

METAL AS ANYTHING



WHO MITCH GITELMAN
WHERE HAREBRAINED SCHEMES
WHY BATTLETECH

A team formed of elite veterans of FASA Interactive is bringing back everybody's favourite game of armoured combat. We talked to studio head **MITCH GITELMAN** about why fans should be looking forward to the new BattleTech...

Spanning tabletop games, cartoons, VR arcade games, and a huge range of strategy and action titles for home computers, the BattleTech franchise has enthralled sci-fi fans worldwide since the mid-1980s. When we had the chance to talk with Harebrained Schemes co-founder Mitch Gitelman about his upcoming reboot, we started by asking him what he believed to be the core appeal of BattleTech?

"I think there are two things, really. It comes down to this: people love giant stompy robots. I mean, these things are enormous. Sometimes 100-tonne war machines with humans piloting them with neural helmets. They just like the massive mech destruction and the heavy metal mayhem that comes with it. So that's one side of BattleTech.

"The other side, and the side that I fall on, is the lore. With countless novels and source books, it's this very rich gameplay universe, and a great setting, with all sorts of Machiavellian politics. It was written years before Game of Thrones, but really, it's Game of Thrones in space, but instead of horses and armour it's giant robots that the knights are piloting. It's this cool mash-up of ultra-modern military with this ancient feudal system, and that's very appealing to me. And, I think, to a lot of others."

BattleTech doesn't just depict a dark future – it depicts a civilisation in decline. "And what's interesting also is its technology in decline. The idea that newer isn't better. Newer is actually inferior. If you find old technology, it's sort of like buried treasure."

While still in the early stages of production, Mitch's team already has a prototype up and running, and he sounded quite satisfied with how closely it resembles the Kickstarter pitch video. "It's fully 3D, and you'll be controlling a lance of four mechs, maybe some other units, and it'll be procedurally generated missions, along with an open-ended campaign. Along with a story

campaign that'll really get you in touch with the elements of the BattleTech universe that we want to highlight in this first title that takes place in the year 3025."

The combat will be turn-based. "We've got a new initiative system. We've found a way of making light mechs and medium mechs and heavy mechs and assault mechs all feel different, and all have their own combat roles on the battlefield. With things like indirect fire, a scout mech can run up ahead, find a good vantage point, and paint a target to allow a heavier mech that's behind cover to just let loose with their long-range missiles."

While not a carbon copy of the 1980s-era table-top rules, this new BattleTech will

■ it's this very rich gameplay universe, and a great setting, with all sorts of Machiavellian politics ■

still force players to weigh all their tactical decisions in terms of managing ammunition and heat. "Everything you do, whether you're walking your mech, whether you're running your mech, jumping your mech, firing different weapons, generates heat build-up. These mechs are powered by fusion engines that need to be vented through things called Heat Sinks. And so the idea is, as you're moving these incredibly powerful weapon platforms around the board, you generate heat, and the more heat that you generate within your mech, there are different disadvantages that happen.

"For example, it could eventually slow down your mech, so it doesn't move as far during a turn. Or give you a minus to your

to-hit numbers. At the higher heat levels you can actually damage the MechWarrior piloting the mech. Or cause the mech to just shut down, right in the middle of combat. And so what you need to do is manage that heat carefully, by only firing certain weapons at certain times, or finding bodies of water to stand your mech in to vent heat, that sort of thing. It's a real tactical gameplay element."

Mitch's team has been paying close attention to the best strategy games of recent years, in particular the new XCOM games, and Frozen Synapse. Does that mean that they seriously considered making a game of simultaneous turn-based combat? "We've considered it. We're not doing it, but we absolutely considered it. Yeah. We were considering everything. But we've narrowed it down.

"We're also hoping to implement our quirk system so that during the course of the game your MechWarriors develop certain eccentricities, that only become visible to you by actually playing with them, and you find out who your MechWarriors really are."

As for the aesthetic, Harebrained Schemes is aiming for a more painterly style, with techno-medieval misery. "It is a universe in decline, but not only that, these MechWarriors have these ancient mechs that are handed down from generation to generation. It really means something. These mechs are often named by their family. And so that sort of feeling of nobility, and fealty, and obligation, is very important. And then the idea that these people are actually often fighting for their homeworlds in desperate battles. Let's face it, the universe had been at war for hundreds of years. It all contributes to a really interesting tone."

Beyond the critical path, there will be randomly-generated missions that players will be able to grind at their leisure. "For me, personally, this isn't a company line, I compare it in a way to Shadow of Mordor.



"WALKING DEATH"

23 OF 300 TONS ALLOCATED

GENERAL DATA
Atlas: Assault Class
Foundation: Type 10X Chassis
Market Value: \$1.5B C-Bills

MOVEMENT DATA
Maximum Speed: 54 KPH
Acceleration: 0-40 KPH in 40 s
Deceleration: 40-0 KPH in 20 s
Maneuverability: 50%

CURRENT WEAPON LOADOUT

- 1 Defiance "Mach Hunter" Autocannon
- 1 Defiance "Mach Hunter" SRM 20
- 4 Defiance SRM "Medium" Lasers
- 1 Thriller "Mach Hunter" SRM 6

LEFT TORSO

2 OF 12 COMPONENT SLOTS FILLED

LRM 20

HEAT SINK

AMM0 (LRM 20)

SRM 6

EMPTY SLOT

EMPTY SLOT

EMPTY SLOT



THE INNER SPHERE

INTERNAL SPHERE MAP TO REVEAL A "MACH HUNTER" MECHA'S LOCATION AND PROBABLY DESTROY IT. (REVEALS AS YOU CLIMB)

MAJOR STATES

- Republic of Capetown
- Republic of Capetown
- Republic of Capetown
- Free World League
- United Commonwealth

PERIPHERY STATES

- Republic of Capetown
- Republic of Capetown
- Republic of Capetown
- Republic of Capetown
- Republic of Capetown

DISTANCE IN LIGHT YEARS

BATTLETECH BATTLETECHGAME.COM



Where you've got these story missions that go along, but you don't really have to play them, if you don't want to. You could just play the procedurally-generated missions, and have a great time for quite a while. Then you can go back and finish the story, if you're so inclined."

Beyond tweaking out mechs between missions, refitting and repairing them, players will also explore MercNet to decide which missions to take next, and negotiate with different members of the great noble houses. "You know, 'I'll take less money, but I want more battlefield salvage.' That negotiation phase should be an interesting part of the game between missions as well."

Mitch's team has been poring over the many tomes of BattleTech canon, scouring both technical specs and the myriad novel spin-offs; do not be surprised if some of your favourite characters from the books make cameo appearances. "Not only that, Mike Stackpole, one of the most famous BattleTech authors, is writing a giant four-part serialised BattleTech novel, that links directly into the story of our game. So we feel really good about that. Mike's been working very tightly with our writing team to make sure that we stay in synch on that."

Long-time BattleTech fans will recall that many of the mechs in early versions of the game had to be withdrawn due to copyright issues, as they looked remarkably like some of the giant robots from Robotech. But now these 'Lost Mechs,' or 'Unseen Mechs,' are set to return.

"They've been redesigned so that they kept their unique flavour, but the art and stuff is changed, so that it's reminiscent of the originals, but not the same as the originals. We're bringing several of those back, along with MechWarrior Online and Catalyst Game Labs. All of us are bringing these lost mechs back. Things like the Warhammer, for example. The Marauder. Those'll be in the game." We'll also see the return of the Catapult, and Mitch's personal favourite, the Raven, though we don't yet know the degree to which of its stealth abilities will be simulated in the new fog of war system.

Perhaps most impressive of all, Mitch is committed to keeping to a production schedule of just 18 months. "Yes. We're insane. It's true. But, you know. Shadowrun Returns, no joke. We had no code, we had nothing, when we started Shadowrun Returns, and we put that game out in one year. Now we've got a lot more technology under our belts, a lot more experience as a team under our belts. Harebrained Schemes has two speeds. Fast, and Faster. [laughs]"

Mitch's team respects the deep lore of BattleTech; it informs every decision, even something as arbitrary as the tech specs of the jump ship players will use to ferry their mercenary band between worlds. "It's all very hard science fiction. We know how many Gs the thing pulls. We've been very pains-taking in our approach to the BattleTech universe."

More than anything, Mitch wanted to stress to BattleTech fans that the franchise is in good hands. "It's in the hands of people who really care. We are absolutely committed to delivering a turn-based video game that really feels like BattleTech, and it feels like the BattleTech that you remember. But more than that, it's a BattleTech game that really brings the setting to life.

"I don't think there has been another BattleTech game like it."

For more details, visit BattleTechGame.com. **JAMES COTTEE PC**

10 to Watch



ROGUE WIZARDS

DEVELOPER SPELLBIND STUDIOS
PUBLISHER SPELLBIND STUDIOS
DUE SOON
roguewizards.com

Hybrid games are all the rage nowadays, and *Rogue Wizards*, a Kickstarted title that combines procedurally generated Roguelike dungeon crawling and town build mechanics looks to be getting the formula right. In addition to being able to master six schools of magic, craft and enchant gear and use altars to augment spells, players of *Rogue Wizards* will also be able to build and upgrade both a town and wizard tower, populating it with minions, vendors and sundry characters that will embolden their dungeon crawling action.



THE WAKE

DEVELOPER VICTOR BRODIE, RYAN SMITH
PUBLISHER INVRSE
DUE MID 2016
invrse.com/thewake

A first person survival horror game for the HTC Vive, *The Wake* looks a little sketchy in its current early Alpha stage but definitely shows promise. The world, as is the case in many horror games, has been overwhelmed by horribly mutated monsters with names like *The Glutton*, *The Throng*, *Apoplectic* and *The Whaling* and it's up to the player to fight them off with all manner of melee and ranged weapons. In a nice twist, some of the monsters, such as the 9' tall *Whaling*, have such resilient and mutated bodies that sharp weapon can be lodged in them, disarming the player.

CADENCE

DEVELOPER MADE WITH MONSTER LOVE
PUBLISHER MADE WITH MONSTER LOVE
DUE 2016
madewithmonsterlove.com

Forgive us for mentioning a handheld console game, but *Cadence* reminds us somewhat of *Electroplankton*, a Nintendo DS game that saw players manipulating plankton to create looping musical riffs. *Cadence* is described by the developer as being a musical sandbox, and that description seems quite apt as, although there seems to be a puzzle element in the game, it seems to be more a tool for people to create looping music by drawing shapes and playing with variables. Whatever the case, it all sounds rad to us.



TMNT: MUTANTS IN MANHATTAN

DEVELOPER PLATINUMGAMES
PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DUE SUMMER 2016
tmntmutantsinmanhattan.com

■ This looks like a proper TMNT game with gritty comic-style graphics, 4 player online co-op, fast-paced action and an original story from IDW comic's TMNT author, Tom Waltz. We've been wanting a good TMNT game for a long time now and Mutants in Manhattan looks like this could be the one. New York City is under attack from Shredder and Krang's evil organisation and it's up to the Turtles to stop them. We like the sound of 4-player co-op battles against enemies like Bepop and Rocksteady.



STARS BEYOND REACH

DEVELOPER ARCEN GAMES, LLC
PUBLISHER ARCEN GAMES, LLC
DUE JUNE 2016
arcengames.com/stars-beyond-reach

■ Imagine quirky turn-based 4X/City builder in which you crash on a hostile sentient world. The game takes place over 4 acts during which you have unique objectives and challenges. We like the look of being able to choose the way you deal with other civilizations, using brute force or a more nuanced building abilities like poisoning an enemy's water supply. With 14 alien races, each having 3 possible leaders with unique personalities and goals, you will have to devise different strategies for befriending or neutralising them. There are also distinct degrees of victory that you can achieve.

RIVE

DEVELOPER TWO TRIBES
PUBLISHER TWO TRIBES PUBLISHING
DUE SEPTEMBER 2016
rivethegame.com

■ A unique 360-degree shooter/platformer hybrid that let's you choreograph a 'dance of destruction'. We like twin stick shooters because they can be incredibly fun, and Rive looks to be just that. Developer, Two Tribes is going out with a bang for their last game that looks like a retro game in a modern shell. We love explosions and from what we've seen so far, Rive has plenty of them. If explosions, 3 game modes, retro vibes and more explosions aren't enough to interest you, then we don't know what will.



THE CHURCH IN THE DARKNESS

DEVELOPER PARANOID PRODUCTIONS
PUBLISHER PARANOID PRODUCTIONS
DUE EARLY 2017
paranoidproductions.com/church

■ A top down, stealth infiltration game where you can play however you want, with Ellen McLain (GLaDOS) voice acting as one of the main characters? Yes please! You play as Vic, an ex-law enforcement officer who loses his nephew to a cult in South America. Infiltrate 'Freedom Town', avoid detection, use non-lethal force or kill anyone who gets in your way, the choice is yours but you have to live with the consequences of those choices. Each play through is different and offers unique gameplay scenarios and story elements, which we think is very cool.



TYRANNY

DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER PARADOX INTERACTIVE
DUE COMING SOON!
tyrannygame.com

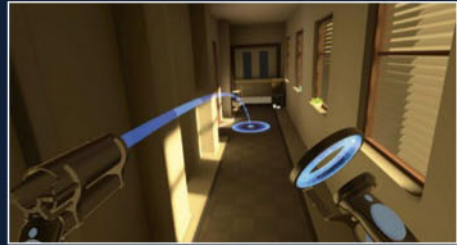
■ An action/adventure RPG that reminds us a little bit of Diablo but with a branching narrative. Set in an original world and unique setting where the battle between good and evil has already taken place, with evil standing victorious. You will interact with the general population to inspire loyalty, disgust or fear as Tyranny delivers a different play experience every time you play it. Choice matters in Tyranny, as an officer in the Overlord's army you wield a vast amount of power. Will you use that power to inspire stability and loyalty or will you be a feared oppressor?

TO AZIMUTH

DEVELOPER [BRACKET]GAMES
PUBLISHER DIGIRATI DISTRIBUTION
DUE 2017
toazimuth.com

■ Set in 1970's Alabama, To Azimuth is a surreal puzzle/adventure game that follows two separate storylines that interweave and explore mental health, war and the paranormal. Much of the game will be spent exploring environments and looking for information. Many of which will be locked behind environmental puzzles that require real world logic to solve. The game contains a sizable amount of dialogue, with each line being presented as a choice. These choices will shape the characters and effect the game in a subtle way. Very cool.





BUDGET CUTS

DEVELOPER NEAT CORPORATION
PUBLISHER NEAT CORPORATION
DUE 2016
neatcorporation.com/budgetcuts

■ A VR game that looks like Portal had a baby with Mission Impossible. Throwing knives are always fun in a FPS but in a VR game? That's very enticing. From what we've seen so far, it looks like the main objective is to perfect your time through stages where you have to sneak past robots, kill them and hide them to remain undetected. It's an exciting time for gaming and Budget Cuts looks like the kind of game we all want to play in VR.



You Do You

GX; An event that is both utterly normal and profoundly special.

One of the first things I made sure to do at GX Australia was to find co-organiser, Liam Esler, and ask some questions about the event. Although I'd backed it on Kickstarter and knew that this was, "Australia's first queer geek/gaming con," I felt that as much context as I could garner upfront would be useful. As we were talking, I thought I understood his comments. It wasn't until after I'd spent time at panels and walking the floor that I realised I hadn't really understood them at all.

In particular, I have a new appreciation for the following, directly quoted from our conversation. "Every other gaming event is unintentionally straight people focussed. Our goal is to create something where, for once, it's queer people at the centre. Straight people aren't as well represented here and the shoe is on the other foot. It provides an opportunity to realise that, actually, representation is really important." Sure, I get that. Or do I?

The first time I noticed I didn't was when I was listening to David Gaider talk about his experiences as a game designer who is gay. He simply shared stories about the process of writing for games, but interwoven were relevant insights into his experience that were more personal than I had expected to hear. Loving Baldur's Gate and Dragon Age as much as I do, I'd been hoping to ask at least one question and get a quote about representation for this column.

But the usual lore questions about mages and Templars organically turned to comments about people's own experiences, and I realised that I didn't want to interrupt, no matter how important my questions may have seemed (to me) only twenty minutes



earlier. Taking time away from any young person present who could potentially be inspired or helped by Gaider's insight seemed wrong. I subsequently didn't even try to find the con's guests on the show floor, for this reason.

Being press at the event was also different. I, perhaps accidentally, got a standard badge with a space for preferred pronouns where I wrote "PC Powerplay." Yes, this magazine is my gender identity. Nice one, Meghann. (Thankfully, I noticed many designers had written their game.) Also, where I'm usually trying to ask everyone a host of questions about their game and why they are there, I was definitely more inclined to just relax.

■ an opportunity to realise that, actually, representation is really important ■

So, I find myself in the odd position of feeling as if this convention is incredibly important to cover, yet without designer quotes or personally relevant insight. I'm your typically married straight woman, although I do work and am friends with, plenty enough people who aren't, who I've known briefly or my entire life. I bring little to this table but business cards and a large, plush Crossy Road chicken that was generously given to my eight year old son by a GX volunteer.

I could certainly tell you that this was the most enjoyable convention I've been to. Nick and I played a lot of indie games together and talked with designers who ruffled his hair. I saw panels on Twitch and noted

aspects of characterisation and game mechanics from new perspectives. Following the #GXAustralia hashtag, I considered questions raised, like how to provide for young gamers, possibly in the closet, but who need an adult to accompany them to queer events.

There were cosplayers and people playing board games. Students were explaining learning their craft to anyone who would listen. People were handing out steam codes and Mentos. Everyone seemed happy. As Liam said, no-one was, "being made to feel othered or strange for who they are." The simple fact is that, while I loved the experience too, I was deliberately not provided for (directly) in a way that made me feel usefully unimportant, making this weird to write.

It's like a movie I rented recently, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, which was described in one review as, "A gleaming monument erected to adolescent narcissism." The film is exactly that, all about the impact the girl's death had on the guy and nothing about her at all, even though her life was so tragically cut short. I fear this column suffers horribly from the same problem and I'm not a deft enough writer to resolve it. Even this paragraph is all about me.

One way or another, I'm not going to speak on behalf of anyone but myself here, especially after this reminder that maybe I don't understand these issues quite as well as I'd thought. I'll finish with something else Liam said, "We hope that by providing something like GX we can bring people together, remind them that they are loved and have a community." So, if you're a queer geek or gamer, please know that GX is wonderful, it's for you and you are so welcome. **PC**



MEGHANN O'NEILL was particularly interested in the discussion of why Sims can't inherently form polyamorous relationships and now considers this a pressing challenge.

ASRock®



FATAL1TY
GAMING GEAR



ASRock
FATAL1TY

GET THE GEAR USED BY THE PROS

FATAL1TY SERIES
100 GAMING
MOTHERBOARDS



ACHIEVA
GROUP OF COMPANIES
www.acheva.com.au

**INGRAM
MICRO**
Partner Smart

NSW
ARC Computers 02 9748 8322 arc.com.au
Aus PC Market 02 9646 8000 auspc.com.au
Capitol Computer 02 9281 8890 capitolcomputer.com.au
iIBuy 02 9599 0698 iibuy.com.au
iJK 02 9745 0877 ijk.com.au
Megaware Computer 02 9698 1593 megaware.com.au
MSY 02 9755 0668 msy.com.au
mWave 1300 727 446 mwave.com.au
Nexcom 02 4721 3457 nexcom.com.au
North Shore Computers 02 9989 1548 nscom.com.au
PC Lan 02 9649 3288 pclan.com.au
PC Meal 02 9746 7886 pcmeal.com.au
D & D COMPUTER TECH. 02 9742 3988 ddcomputer.com.au
DIY COMPUTERS 02 9897 9993 diycomputers.com.au
MAIG PTY LTD. 02 9648 2261 maig.com.au
J&W 02 8099 3332 jw.com.au

QLD
Computer Alliance Pty Ltd 07 3420 3200 computeralliance.com.au
Game Dude Pty Ltd 07 3387 1500 gamedude.com.au
MSY 07 3290 1738 msy.com.au
Umart Online 07 3369 3928 umart.com.au
AUSCOMP COMPUTERS 07 3722 5100 auscompcomputers.com

VIC
Computers & Parts Land 03 8542 8688 cpl.net.au
MSY Technology 03 9560 2288 msy.com.au
PC Case Gear 03 9551 0889 pccasegear.com
Centre Com Sunshine PTY 03 8311 7600 centrecom.com.au
Scorpion Tech. Computers 03 8561 3200 scorpTec.com.au

NT
PC Solutions 4 U 08 89412119 pcsolutions4u.com.au
TAS

WA
Austin Computer 08 9201 2788 austin.net.au
MSY 08 9344 1002 msy.com.au
Netway Computers 08 9332 0888 netwaycomputers.com
Netplus Micro Computers 08 9242 7288 netplus.com.au
PC West 08 6398 4813 pcwest.com.au
PLE Computers 08 9309 4771 ple.com.au
Worldwide Net Solutions 08 9375 9666 netsolution.com.au
ARROW COMPUTERS 08 9258 7733 arrowcomputers.com.au

SA
Hypernet Computer Distribution 08 8340 2021 hypernetdist.com.au
MATS Systems 08 8186 2110 mats-systems.com.au
MSY Technology (SA) Pty Ltd 08 8212 1656 msy.com.au
IT&Computers 08 8186 2736 itwarehouse.com.au
Photech Computers Pty Ltd 08 8349 4334 photech.com.au



www.asrock.com
FATAL1TY.COM

• The specification is subject to change without notice. • The brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies. • Any configuration other than original product specification is not guaranteed.
• The Fatal1ty name, Fatal1ty logos and the Fatal1ty likeness are registered trademarks of Fatal1ty, Inc., and are used under license. © 2014 Fatal1ty, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

A Collection Aside



MEGHANN O'NEILL never imagined enjoying a movie about cars and then *Mad Max: Fury Road* happened. This month she sticks to her usual adventures, dystopias and time travel stories, while also being briefly coaxed behind the wheel of a combat vehicle. She also explores some surprisingly sexy interactive art, if you're into electrical wiring, after finding herself humiliated and throwing up in the gutter. It's a month of experimentation and extremes, for sure.

THE SLAUGHTER: ACT ONE

DEVELOPER BRAINCHILD
PRICE \$8
www.brainchildstudios.co.uk

■ It wasn't until I was the guy reluctantly in a dress, ready to break a barstool over another guy who had made a racist slur about a third guy, that I truly had a sense of all the narrative threads converging in *The Slaughter: Act One*. It's a Jack the Ripper story, but one told in a way that is completely unexpected. I came to care immensely about everyone and their imperfect contexts. The humiliation I felt as my character vomited, publicly, was real.

The story opens with you; Sydney Emerson, private investigator, having your "organs reshuffled" by a goon and being rescued by, in her words, "a strumpet." As the first of many gratuitously lengthy cinematic sequences, your hero takes you, by horse and carriage, to her apartment. Buildings roll by and there is time to relax after the violence that preceded the ride. Over four chapters, the pacing considers the player at every moment.

Another thing you'll notice is that the music is handcrafted for scenes in ways that are often subversive and clever. In the exclusive basement of a pub, the band is playing highly appropriate folk music, which then subtly changes within the same piece to feel much more sinister, illustrating the dark nature of this place and



RELEASED



its clientele. The musicians are a local group of diegetic performers, and then they're playing the soundtrack to the game.

It's a retro-styled, historically set, point and click adventure which is not incredibly challenging, but it does defy some expectations for solving puzzles. Often, what you imagined when you used this on that is actually an opportunity for the sole designer, Alexander Francois, to lead you to a more creative solution. Other times, you observe your surroundings and arrive at logical conclusions. Occasionally, you are hallucinating or dreaming, and have to act accordingly.

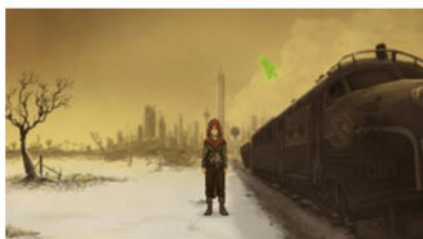
But, I haven't said anything about Jack the Ripper. Certainly, he is murdering people in his characteristically horrific way. You are investigating on behalf of victims' family and their questionable motives, as well as having a personal stake in finding him yourself. His targets are largely sex workers and you'll meet several. Some are strong willed, others will become friends.

One is addicted to opium and another is transgender.

Although elements of this story could lend themselves to insensitivity, the content is handled surprisingly well. Sydney can ask inappropriate questions and be put in his place. He is also caring in a way that makes sense for this time period, by sharing knowledge of local authorities and wishing people luck in evading legal issues. He does have quite the temper, however, and I have to admit to enjoying his throwing drinks at the women's disrespectful clients.

The Slaughter: Act One is a thoughtful, detailed surprise of an indie adventure. So, come to this past place, open your map and watch raindrops dampen it, possibly in some darkly prophetic pattern. Have a drink and gaze at the perfect, bright pixels of dust floating down from the rafters. Stumble home knowing that the killer you are pursuing has had one more night to take the lives of people who are uniquely valued. Perhaps, in future acts, prevail.





SHARDLIGHT

DEVELOPER WADJET EYE GAMES

PRICE TBA

www.wadjeteyegames.com/games/shardlight

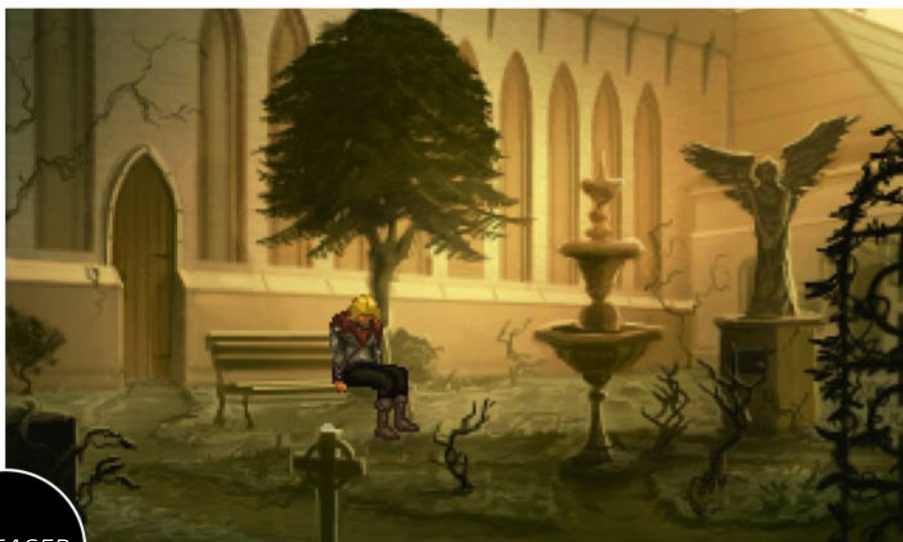
I didn't want *Shardlight* to end. I played it over three nights and I missed it profusely when it was over. Why? I wanted more of just being there, which is an odd thing to say about most post-apocalyptic settings. Twenty years after Blast Day, people are lean and ravaged by Green Lung. As well as accepting dangerous work for tickets in the vaccine lottery, however, they make pottery, restore cars and genuinely band together as a community of friends.

This is not to say the place is without violence, control and your typical dystopian class system. Just that, when tensions turn ugly, you've already come to appreciate what is being lost. Always, real hope for the future remains. Even in the church with a plane wrecked in its side, a beautiful cult plays music and comforts each other as they wait for death. Well, I'm not sure that's "hope," per se, but it is peculiarly lovely and pleasurable.

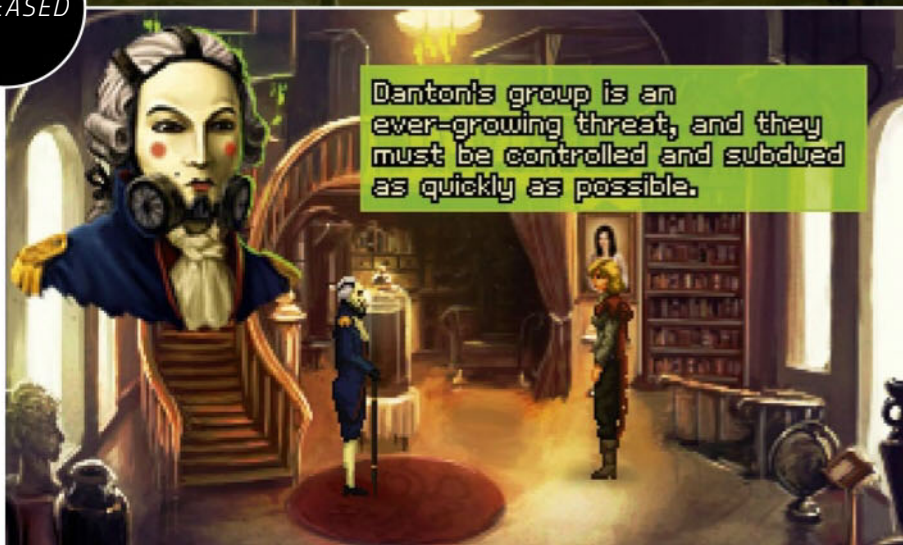
The narrative strikes a clever balance of revealing what you most want to know about the setting incrementally, without preventing your imagination from wistfully filling in the blanks. For example, local children are skipping to macabre rhymes, which hint at obscure atrocities and fearful rumours. I wondered if their parents would approve of their choice of song. Then I wondered if their parents were dead. Then I noticed the families blended by circumstance.

The protagonist, Amy Wellard, is part herself and part narrator. She knows what she knows about her surroundings but she is talking to you. She never refers to the player, specifically, but implicitly provides information for someone from a different time and place, while remaining firmly in character. Mostly, dialogue seamlessly switches between commenting on what you are clicking on, then elaborating based on some private memory of it.

At one point, Amy describes an abandoned factory, as you choose what to see and interact with, and local layabout, Denby, joins the conversation as if she were



RELEASED



Danton's group is an ever-growing threat, and they must be controlled and subdued as quickly as possible.

local children are skipping to macabre rhymes, which hint at obscure atrocities

talking to him. He's the only character who notices her musing. It's incredibly endearing. People also treat Amy warmly and it makes her very sympathetic. And, she really is expressly sweet in an adventure game context, with lines like, "You're coming with me, bucket." Why? We'll figure it out, later.

I could continue to laud the story, and how the glowing shards referenced in the title aren't ever explained, yet I went a-googling them for a good ten minutes. But, I must mention the extraordinary artwork by Ben Chandler, a Perth-based designer who I became friends with and interviewed for *Generation XX* several years ago, based on his original collection of small adventure games. It's really interesting to see his art developing over time.

He uses a bleak and seemingly limited palette of colours, all brown and yellow, but

there is such contrast between locations, from detailed, homey markets to desperate salt flats. Composition is noticeably evocative, like the wide, downward facing view into the prison making it seem all the more imposing. Similarly, the character portraits are uncommonly expressive for the genre, especially the cheeky Lady Twiner, and except for those behind porcelain gas masks.

Although I missed Amy and her world when the game was over, I didn't want it to be more. The scope was exactly on point, with every character, location and puzzle contributing to the overall experience in its own meaningful way. Wadjet Eye adventures have been consistently strong and, in my opinion, *Shardlight* is the best so far. So, pick up a copy and may death come for you swiftly, unless you find faith in something better.

CONVOY

DEVELOPER INDIETOPIA GAMES

PRICE \$15

convoy-games.com

When a friend described Convoy to me as “Mad Max meets FTL” it was, obviously, a must play. Somehow, the 2015 release, after a successful Kickstarter campaign, had passed me by unnoticed. Generally, despite the recommendation, I wouldn’t hold a game to another game (or film’s) standards, but Convoy’s Steam page does cite these two greats as influences and I got over-excited. I wish I’d played it with no expectations.

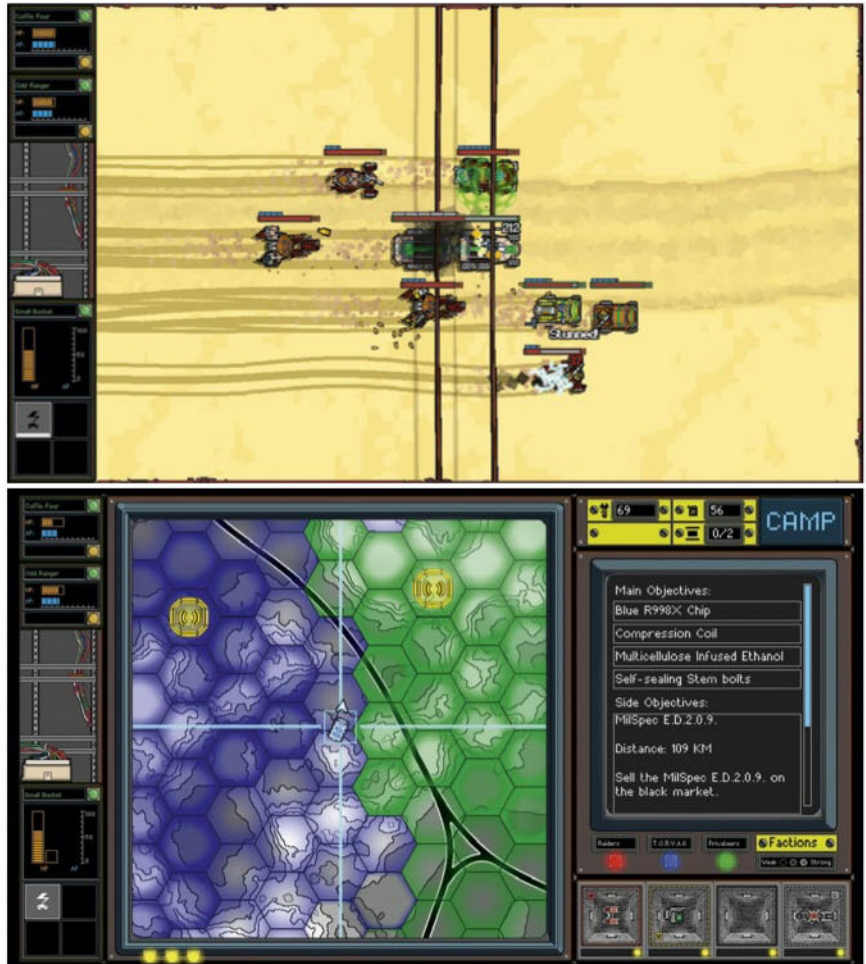
So, scrub off that Furiosa cosplay makeup and let’s discuss what the game is, and not what it isn’t, because it’s actually pretty great. You’re crashed on a complex and brutal world, finding the small collection of components you need to fix your ship. Each has a little description, a location on the world map and a few ways to get it; through amassing wealth, lengthy quest chains or brute force, often to be decided based on the context of the playthrough.

As a roguelike experience, you should expect to die a lot, at least initially. You must defend your central road train by employing combat fitted cars in real-time, tactical combat. Manoeuvre them within range of enemy vehicles, choose targets, use abilities and be very careful to avoid incoming terrain features that can instantly smash you to smithereens. No seriously. I had nearly won battles without noticing an incoming mesa, only to then lose.

Soon enough, you’ll learn how to upgrade both the truck, which can be made more robust in various ways, and the cars, which can be optimised for firepower, strength, range or manoeuvrability. How you choose to spend scrap on upgrades will influence play style significantly, although you must always endeavour to repair vehicles as a matter of priority. It’s almost impossible to play well enough to take no damage, at least initially.

To me, Convoy is more of an Out There, by Mi-Clos, than a Faster Than Light. FTL is linear, desperate, forward-moving and you can win by a hair’s breadth. In Out There, success relies on your choices leading to an increasingly stronger ship that can withstand bad luck and backtracking. Are you so desperate for fuel you’ll engage any enemies in the hopes of a good return? Are you strong enough to start pillaging everyone close by. The difference is important.

One of the most interesting features of the game is the hex map you travel over. Following roads allows for less fuel to be consumed and greater security in battle.



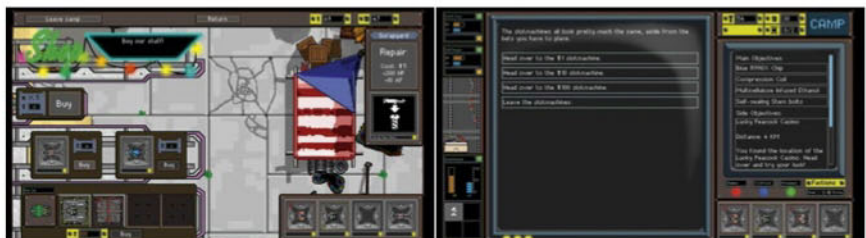
Convoy is more of an Out There, by Mi-Clos, than a Faster Than Light

Mountainous hexes require more fuel, but are often significantly more direct. Terrain is coloured red, green or blue to indicate the presence of the planet’s factions. The blue T.O.R.V.A.K, for example, are a tech-rich, but treacherous race you can often avoid and complete quests for, or betray.

The narrative is often really intriguing, but sometimes disappointing. The T.O.R.V.A.K have a cloaking technology that, in exposition, hints at how to approach their random events. Does it ever truly get explained? Not so far as I’m aware. There are also a lot of pop culture references that detracted from my engagement with

story. The ambient storytelling, as well as the potential for player-driven, emergent narrative is strong, but not supported by the explicit dialogues.

Overall, this is an enjoyable experience. Don’t expect FTL or Mad Max. Just smash your cars into other cars so they smash into an immovable object and explode. Consider your options very carefully. Plan a course that always makes you stronger. Decide whether to pay the guy or kill him. Perhaps, in time, you’ll not only have cobbled your spaceship back together, you’ll also have left your mark on this fractious place. Onwards, convoy.



SOON

DEVELOPER SPIRAL ATLAS
PRICE PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE
sqbr.itch.io/soon

I'll never forget figuring out how to get rid of Edna in Day of the Tentacle. I won't spoil it, mostly just in case time travel is real and alternate teenage me reads this review, but it involves a wheely office chair, a left handed hammer and making a change in the past that will alter the future. Even after I had an inkling that my meddling would work, I was shocked when it did work. Soon is an endearing visual novel that evokes exactly the same sense of trans-temporal wonder.

Initially, you know you are a physicist. Robots control a dystopian future involving "the streamlining of the Australian population" and rations from algae farms. Fang, your nemesis, solved global warming and didn't blow up Switzerland (like you did). It's a compelling premise for time travel, saving the world and proving who's the smartest. You're, if not entirely evil, kinda petty, but so endearing with the facial expressions, frustration and self-deprecating humour.

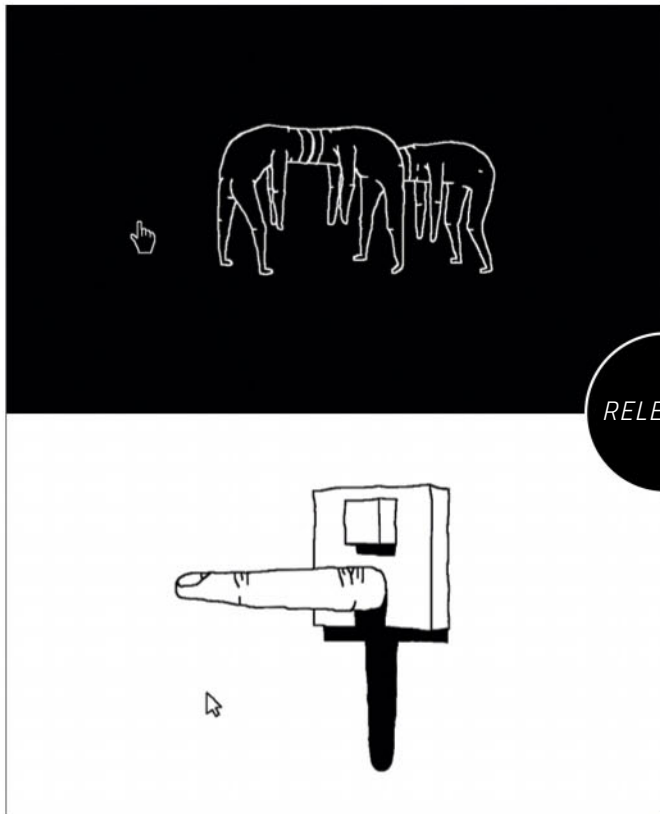
With a few locations and 4 time periods to explore, the game is surprisingly deep, while maintaining a necessarily small scope. You want your impact on the future to be meaningful, after all, and it is. If you convince your teenage self to study biology,



the character is quite different later on, with a HECS debt and new digs. And, after getting to know Fang and initially intending to prevent her from being born, it's pretty darn awkward needing her 10 year old self.

Problem solving relies entirely on knowing what you need and how to get it, across time. If you have to go backward,

you often have to repeat conversations with yourself and others in subsequent years or suffer the consequences. It's hilarious. And ridiculous. And teenage you is so cute. It's absolutely possible to mess things up so badly that a happy future is impossible. Or, things might be OK, in more ways than you'd initially imagined.



RELEASED

PLUG AND PLAY

DEVELOPER MARIO VON RICHENBACH AND MICHAEL FREI
PRICE \$3
plugplay.ch

I wasn't expecting this to be sexy which, in hindsight, seems naive. It's an arthouse game about plugs and sockets. And is that a double entendre in the title? Maybe it is. This lightly interactive experience is based on a short film, using the same animation but adding ways for you to click and drag bits into bobs, mostly. There's a little bit of figuring out to be done and, well, prongs to poo? That's a necessary teaching moment as much as it is an odd sentence.

Plug and Play might be the story of lost love and wild rebound behaviour. Certainly, my prong man was definitively rejected by his socket girl. It hurts.

Or, it could be something different, depending on your interpretation. It is both very explicit and utterly sexless.

You may never look at that dangerous tangle of power cords under your desk the same way again. In fact, I'm going under there to separate them all now. It's suddenly all too weird.

At \$3, consider trading a morning coffee for some art instead. You'll spend twenty minutes touching things in too-intimate ways and, possibly, feeling genuinely squeamish. I also watched the film and being able to actively manipulate pieces adds a whole dimension of weirdness. It's an experiment in interactivity that, while frequently wanton and unapologetically real, is not without its tender moments. I feel richer, and slightly gigglier, for playing it. **PC**



FANTASY FULFILLED

Three writers grapple with the undead

TOTAL WAR:
WARHAMMER

DEVELOPER CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
PUBLISHER SEGA
DUE MAY 24, 2016
warhammer.totalwar.com



I've come to SUCK YOUR BLOOD!

DAVID HOLLINGWORTH goes hands on with the Old World's most charming undead.

It was with some trepidation that I sat down to play Total War: Warhammer. There was also a tonne of excitement, of course, but after recent lukewarm outings, this feels like a real make or break release for Creative Assembly. It also didn't help that I'm bit of a Games Workshop aficionado – I was ready to look for any flaws in the game's presentation of the very rich and rather eclectic Old World.

This was also Creative Assembly's first showing of the Vampire Counts, the fourth playable faction in the game. And, I can happily say... Whoa, are they one spooky, amazing army to play with if you're a Total War veteran. In fact, the new mechanics and fantasy trappings could be exactly what the franchise

needs – our few hours in the pointy metal boots of Count Manfred von Carstein was a tonne of blood-sucking fun.

I do like the strategic side of the game – the broad manoeuvres, the management of cities and territories – but I really am a sucker for the tight tactical management of the battles, which have been growing in scope and scale since Shogun's relatively small, sprite-filled battles. In Total Warhammer (let's face it, Creative really should have gone that name), the usual blocks of infantry and engines of war are joined by three entirely new unit types.

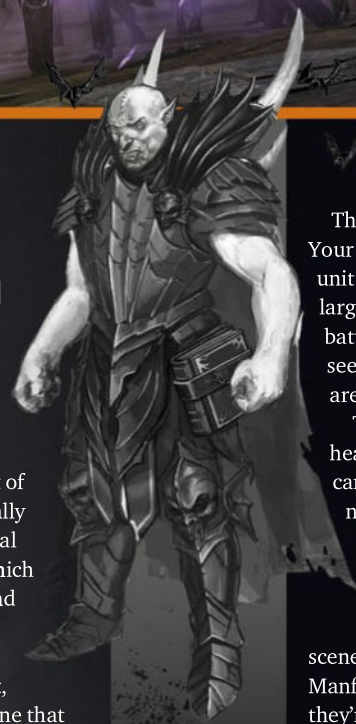
The Vampire Counts' Varghulf is a giant, twisted creature, with a massive amount of hitpoints and capable of tearing apart entire units of opposing infantry. A lot of the armies have access to similar giant beasts, and they're among the most powerful units in the game. Less powerful, but very interesting to use, are the swarms of bats you can control, which are flying units. The game will feature many of these, up to army-roasting dragons, but the bats are a lot more fragile, and

are best used as scouting and harassing units.

The third new unit is characters. Your generals are no long one of a unit of cavalry – they're literally larger than life figures that stride the battlefield alone. And while they may seem like they're vulnerable, they too are immensely powerful.

Take Manfred himself. He's heavily armed and armoured – and can be painstakingly upgraded with new skills and gear – and a terror in a fight. Watching him wade into a unit of infantry is not unlike watching Sauron lay the smack down in the opening scenes of *The Fellowship of the Ring* – Manfred bats around his enemies like they're bowling pins.

But he's also a spellcaster, and clever use of these abilities can really make all the difference on the battlefield. In Manfred's case, his two spells are



The shambling hordes have no ranged troops



very flavoursome – he can either drain the life of enemies to heal himself, or he can cast an area of affect buff on friendly units that heals them, and even resurrects dead units.

What's impressive is that these new units are remarkably true to their tabletop counterparts, both in power level and the way they play. Even more remarkable is that they don't really break the traditional gameplay of Total War. The same tactics are still the ones that will win the battle; monsters and powerful heroes may give you an edge, but a lot of the time the enemy will be similarly able to call on amazingly powerful and fantastic units. Even so, you'll want to make the most of terrain to deploy your troops into – the high ground is always the best ground, and using forests and other terrain to hide units can make for a nasty surprise on an enemy's flank.

Creative Assembly has also stayed very true to the way armies work. The Vampire Counts, for instance, have a lot of cheap units (many of which can resurrect somewhat after a battle) that are pretty hard to kill, and nearly all of them cause Fear in their opponents. However, they don't have any ranged units – just like in their tabletop version. This means you'll always have to close with any army you fight, so sending fast units like your Varghulf and Direwolves to cause confusion while your main body moves up is an entirely valid tactic. It also means that, when on the defensive, you simply cannot stand back – you need to maximise your Fear-causing units by being aggressive and charging into contact whenever you can.

And it all looks fantastic as well. Skeletons march in Argonauts style lockstep, zombies and ghouls shamble about, and the hordes of bats swoop and screech in the sky. Whether you're a tabletop fan coming to Total War for the first time, or a grognard wanting to swap your scutum for a runeblade, you're in for a treat. **PC**

RACE WAR

At launch, TW: Warhammer will feature only four factions (five for certain pre-orders), making it in some ways the most constrained game in the Total War franchise so far. Considering the depth of the campaign mode, this race limit is understandable, and the developers have said they will be adding multiple new races as DLC.

You Can't ESCAPE BATTLE

DANIEL WILKS goes outside his comfort zone

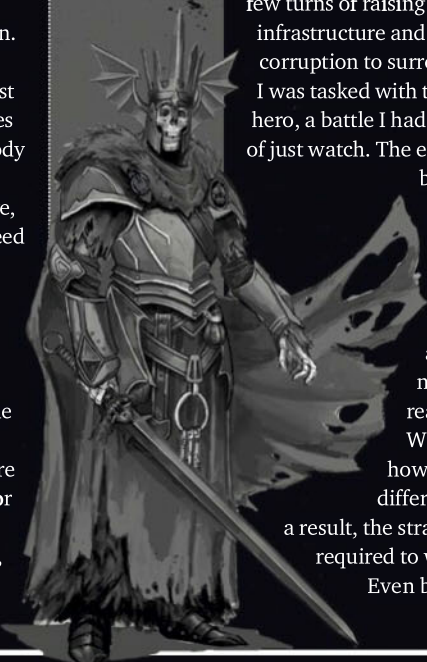
Total War: Warhammer breaks new ground as far as the long-running franchise goes, not simply because it's the first Total War game based on a license, but also because it's the first game in the series that makes battle compulsory. This isn't a criticism – forcing battle is dead bang in line with the Warhammer universe (Fantasy or 40k) – but it does come as a shock to the system to someone who has played most Total War games as mix of top level strategy and city building, automating most battles aside from the occasional ones that were either strategically interesting or that the AI said I had no chance of winning. If the Vampire Lords are anything to go by, none of the factions in TW: Warhammer will allow for such a hands-off approach. It pushes players like myself out of their comfort zones, and that, ultimately is a good thing.


Imagine my surprise when, after a few turns of raising armies, improving infrastructure and spreading vampiric corruption to surrounding territories, I was tasked with taking out an enemy hero, a battle I had to control instead of just watch. The earlier rounds had been something of a tutorial, with a stentorian and somewhat phlegmy advisor giving direction as to what to do next, but battle is really where TW: Warhammer shows how different the different factions, and as a result, the strategies and tactics required to win actually are.

Even before battle begins,

the Vampire Lords are different to anything that has appeared in a Total War game before. From the footage we've seen of the Empire and Greenskin races, with the exception of magic and monsters of course, appear to play much more like a traditional real world Total War race, with a mixture of troop types, both ranged and melee, with the Empire being roughly analogous to the English of French from Empire: Total War, and the Greenskins being somewhat like the roaming Huns from Attila. The Vampire Lords are very, very different. They thrive on blight and death, the former dictating their ability to expand and the latter dictating everything else. They also have no ranged troops, radically changing the way you have to think about fights.

Blighted ground is the lifeblood of an undead army and also something of a defensive measure. As more of a city builder than a fighter, I chose to progress the Vampire Lord, Mannfred von Carstein down the skill path of spreading blight to neighbouring territories, theorising that by blighting these areas I could weaken the resolve of enemies and destroy them with a few well-resourced armies. When not on blighted ground, undead troops take attrition, eroding their grip on the mortal plain, but it's not just a one way street. Just as being off blighted ground causes undead to take attrition, being on it causes other races to take attrition, so while the mechanic slows the progress of Vampire expansion, it also serves as something of a defensive buffer against attacks. In a longer game my tactic of buffing my corruption would probably be a sound choice, but when it comes to





early combat it didn't prove to be much of a boon given the fact that I stupidly challenged the enemy hero's army on their turf, not my corrupted ground.

Death is something of an extra resource for the Vampire Counts. On a basic level, all of the units available to the faction are necromantic on some level, but it doesn't end there. Undead armies can raise zombies and skeletons from the surrounding countryside to instantly bolster troop numbers or replenish the ranks and necromancers can resurrect fallen troops in battle enabling previously killed units to be used for clever pincer manoeuvres. The limited number of turns we had to play didn't really give enough time to fully grasp these mechanics, but with some practise, raising troops in battle could become a vital, and powerful tool for world domination.

Things didn't go well for the undead hordes. Although the undead are immune to morale checks, the vast majority of units are slow moving and are more useful as meat shields than frontline troops, especially without

buffs available in Carstein's skill tree. If anything, Carstein himself is the main damage dealer of the army, capable of cutting through normal troops like a hot chainsaw through butter whilst bolstering other units with magic. It adds a strange but welcome level of micromanagement to the macro-management typical of Total War battles. In some ways Carstein (and by extension we assume the heroes of other factions) feels more like a MOBA character than a typical TW unit. It takes some getting used to, especially for franchise veterans, but when it comes to adding Warhammer flavour it hits all the right marks.



■■ In some ways Carstein (and by extension we assume the heroes of other factions) feels more like a MOBA character than a typical TW unit ■■



The Varghulf are devastating shock troops

VAMPIRE COUNTS: UNDEAD (and loving it)

HEIDI KEMPS practices neck romance

As the last of the announced playable factions in Total War: Warhammer, the Vampire Counts are far and away the most unique of the bunch. Their gimmick - being undead - is one that transforms many of the core gameplay mechanics of the Total War series.

The Vampire Counts campaign takes place in Sylvania, which has fallen from its former glory as a land where even the bravest fear to tread. We began as Manfred von Carstein, one of the game's extremely powerful "Lords." Upon starting, we found ourselves in a bit of a spat with the surrounding necromancer. Our first goal of the game was to claim the territory nearby that those troops were squatting on.

As we began our campaign, things seemed pretty typical from an interface standpoint. Once we started mustering troops, however, we began to see where the Vampire Counts are quite different from The Empire and the Greenskins.

See, when you go to recruit fresh bodies as the Count, you can literally recruit fresh bodies: besides the typical

recruitment quotas, Vampire Counts also have the ability to raise the corpses of those who perished recently in the area to serve as your faithful minions. These aren't your typical soldiers, either: instead, you'll be summoning the rotting, undead hordes of zombies and skeletons to serve as your personal armies. (You'll also have the ability to summon the likes of Dire Wolves and undead steeds as you level up your skill trees.) There's also a "corruption" that spreads as you traverse the map: powerful Heroes and certain structure leave a blight in their wake that sullies the land. Regular troops suffer attrition when traveling through un-corrupted territory, so sending the big guns out first to plant the seeds of darkness is a sound strategic move.

■ ■ The Vampire Counts campaign takes place in Sylvania, which has fallen from its former glory as a land where even the bravest fear to tread ■ ■





Combat is where the unique strengths - and weaknesses - of the Counts are on full display. The most obvious downside when playing this faction was a complete lack of ranged units. They're also not the toughest units around, either: zombies in particular seemed to be little more than shambling sacks of meat used to distract the opponent's troops from something else.

However, what the troops seem to lack in power and range seems to be made up by their sheer numbers. Not only can you recruit extra undead troops during outside of battle, you can also use skills to instantly regenerate legions of warriors in the middle of combat. The troops are also tenacious to the end: rather than suffer morale penalties during certain battle conditions like armies of the living, the undead simply keep fighting. However, they will begin to decay, faster and faster, until there is nothing left.

Playing as the Counts is certainly different, and quite challenging in its own way. While being able to do things like raise the dead is impressive, drawbacks like the lack of ranged units forces you to rethink your typical combat strategy. They were a lot of fun to play, though, and the undeniable coolness of certain Vampire Counts units like the Vargheists - undead, flying bat-creatures that can wreck a pack in archers in a satisfyingly violent display - gives them a flair that shows off just how much effort Creative Assembly has been putting into this title. At least it won't be too much longer before we can feast on the blood of our foes.



On the Campaign trail

DAVID HOLLINGWORTH chats to James Winston, Campaign Designer for Total War: Warhammer

Just to start, tell me who you are and what you do at Creative Assembly...

I'm James Winston, Campaign Designer.

What does that entail?

Basically taking the wealth of content that Games Workshop have created for their game...

It's not a small amount is it?

No, it's not a small amount, something like fifteen books and the massive, chunky, main rulebook as well. The process is actually, at the start, very similar to working on one of our historic games.

I was going to say it would like that, instead of a library of history books it's game books but it's almost as deep.

Yeah, you're still researching history, it just happens to be history of the Old World rather than our world. There was a long time in pre-production where we were kind of plowing through that wealth of material and getting our heads around it and working out what makes all the races tick, what drives the characters, all the back stories of those characters and the flavour of that. Then we kind of went into phase 2 where Games Workshop sent us all the models and so on.

Yeah, I've been to a couple of companies who've done games with Games Workshop and the one thing in common, lousy with models.

Yeah, so quite a few of us got into the painting to a fairly decent standard, but nothing like the kind of heavy metal stuff that you see. It's unbelievable kind of quality, but you know, we kind of took that on and in the evenings, lunchtimes, we'd actually play the tabletop game, going through each of the races so, actually experiencing them in that game system.

And did that really help?

Yeah, it gave us quite a few insights, we identified a few things that on the face of them, were problems, like Vampire Counts don't have missile units. So there was a discussion, well, what should we do? Should we come up with something to fill that gap in the roster? And we kind of quickly came to the conclusion, no that is actually the Vampire Counts, they don't have missile units so you would miss that big chunk of flavour. So we decided to embrace that basically, not just on the battle side, you know, with the balance of units there, so we've stayed true to what those balance of units are but on the campaign side as well. We've kind of added



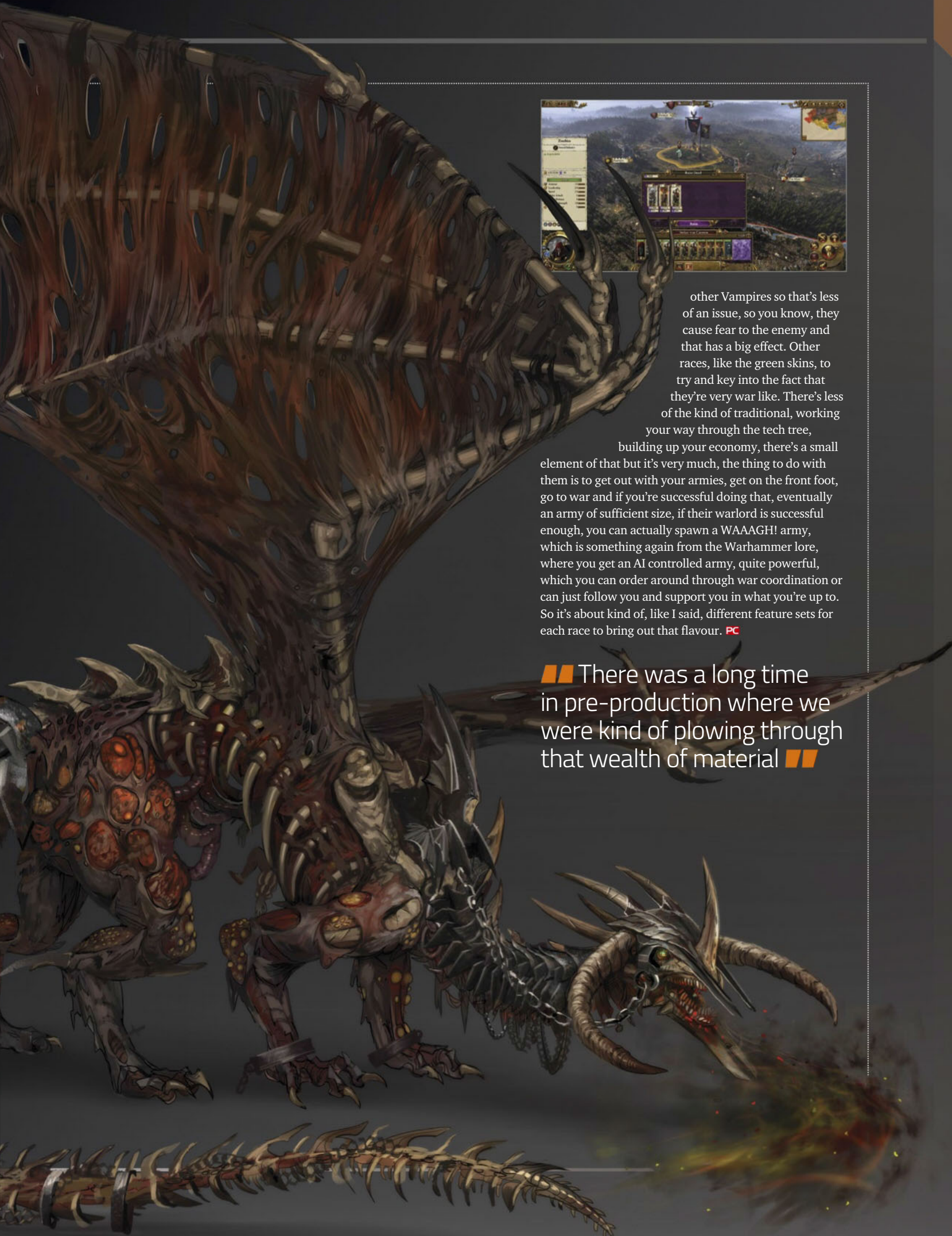
different feature sets for each of the races to kind of reflect their flavour. So with the Vampire Counts, you could probably be raising dead.

Amazing! Yeah, I keep getting these pyrrhic victories from the game, trying to tell me that's not a really good victory and it's like I don't care! Click, click click.

Yeah exactly, and I don't know whether you've had a battle of sufficient scale, but in previous Total War games, you could get kind of famous battle markers. Now if you get one of those in this game and you're playing as Vampire Counts, you go into that region and you can actually access some of the elite units and the buildings you kind of build around your faction sort of feed into that. So it's not just a win, it's kind of, you still have to develop some infrastructure to go along with that, but that's a big part of kind of, the flavour of the Vampire Counts. Also your units are all causing fear, in this obviously you're fighting against

The scale of battle is epic and the tactics radically change with race





other Vampires so that's less of an issue, so you know, they cause fear to the enemy and that has a big effect. Other races, like the green skins, to try and key into the fact that they're very war like. There's less of the kind of traditional, working your way through the tech tree,

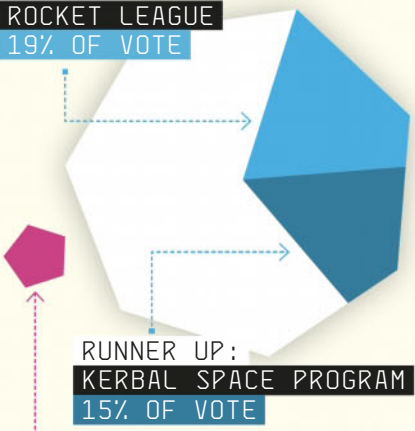
building up your economy, there's a small element of that but it's very much, the thing to do with them is to get out with your armies, get on the front foot, go to war and if you're successful doing that, eventually an army of sufficient size, if their warlord is successful enough, you can actually spawn a WAAAGH! army, which is something again from the Warhammer lore, where you get an AI controlled army, quite powerful, which you can order around through war coordination or can just follow you and support you in what you're up to. So it's about kind of, like I said, different feature sets for each race to bring out that flavour. **PC**

There was a long time in pre-production where we were kind of plowing through that wealth of material

MOST INNOVATIVE GAME/TECH



WINNER:
ROCKET LEAGUE
 19% OF VOTE



RUNNER UP:
KERBAL SPACE PROGRAM
 15% OF VOTE

ODD OUTLIER:

Not a single mention of VR at all. Considering that every man and his dog demoed or announced some kind of new VR or AR rig, you'd think that someone would be impressed.

LACHLAN TRAPPETT

> **ROCKET LEAGUE**

◆ It's soccer, but with cars and rockets. Come on.

ANON

> **KERBAL**

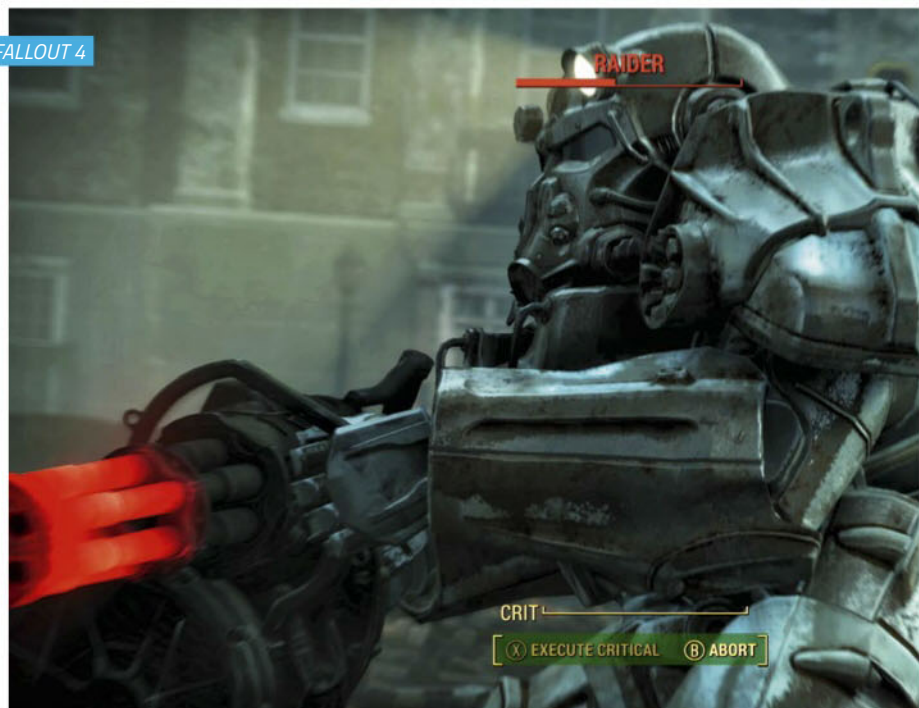
◆ Who doesn't like a sunrise and sending little green astronauts to their fiery doom?

RUBEN HUNT

> **V/G-SYNC**

◆ The difference a new monitor with sync has made to my gaming experience is unbelievable. I thought I had smooth performance before, but compared to my new Asus monitor it looks like a horrible torn mess.

FALLOUT 4



BEST SHOOTER

MATTHEW SCHMIDT

> **STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT**

◆ It's fast, it's fun, it's a great way to kill time. It also has Fighter Squadron - which we'll call a shooter in its own right

MARK LAURENDET

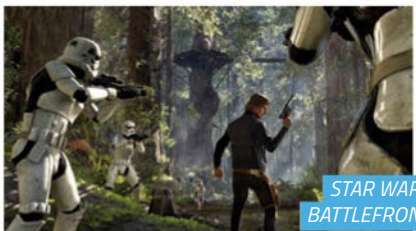
> **FALLOUT 4**

◆ More of the best

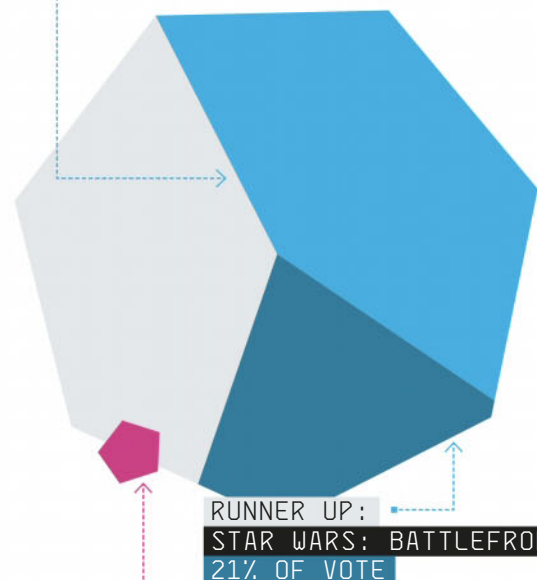
GREG LUCAS

> **FALLOUT 4**

◆ Combines all of the things I love, a great story with compelling action. The shooting in it is great fun, especially sniping. Instagibbing supermutants with a sniper rifle is always fun.



WINNER:
FALLOUT 4
 42% OF VOTE



RUNNER UP:
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT
 21% OF VOTE

ODD OUTLIER:

Rocket League. We guess you do shoot goals, but that's about as tenuous a link as you can get.



VOID RGB
 WIRELESS
 HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined.

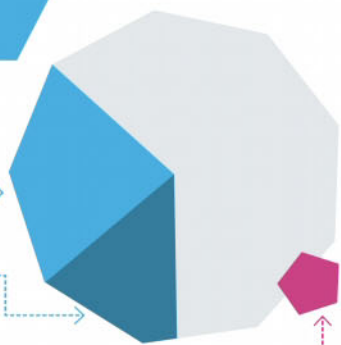


Available at

BEST STRATEGY GAME

WINNER:
CITIES: SKYLINES
 23% OF VOTE

RUNNER UP:
INVISIBLE, INC
 14% OF VOTE



LACHLAN TRAPPETT

> CITIES: SKYLINES

◆ Being able to take on Maxis at their original game and beat them speaks volumes about how well this game was made. And the modding support they included has helped it along as well.

MATTHEW SCHMIDT

> CITIES SKYLINE

◆ Thank you. Thank you for single-handedly saving the city building genre.

ODD OUTLIER:

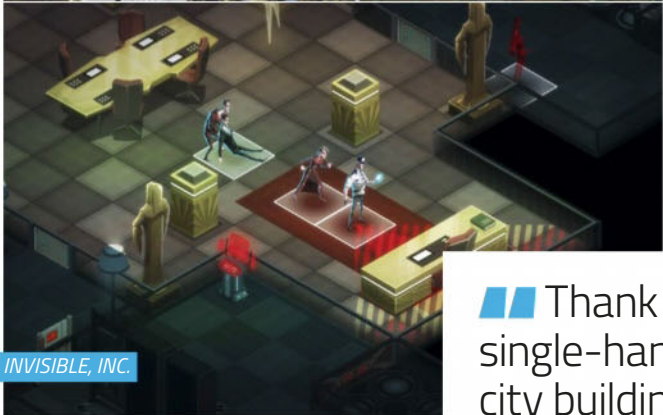
Shovel Knight. Whilst it's true that some of the boss battles require a strategic approach, it's a bit of a stretch to classify a retro style platformer as a strategy game.

HY TRUONG THU

> STAR CRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOID

◆ Star Craft II is finally finished and Legacy of the Void is everything I could have hoped for and more.

CITIES: SKYLINES



INVISIBLE, INC.

Thank you. Thank you for single-handedly saving the city building genre

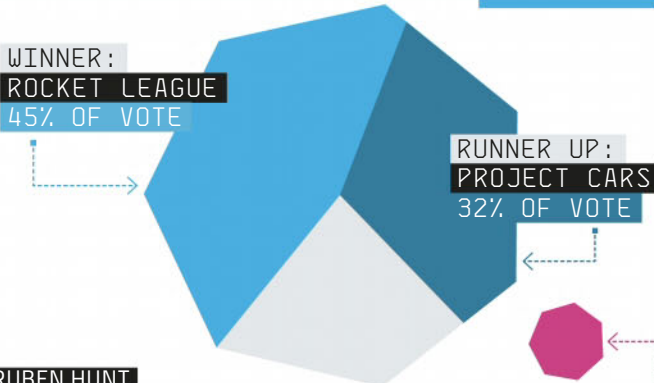
ROCKET LEAGUE



BEST RACING/ DRIVING GAME

WINNER:
ROCKET LEAGUE
 45% OF VOTE

RUNNER UP:
PROJECT CARS
 32% OF VOTE



RUBEN HUNT

> ROCKET LEAGUE

◆ It's such a simple game but it's the one I go back to more than anything else. The mixture of driving and soccer is irresistible and there is little that beats that moment when you score a turtle goal after a massive boost is super hard to beat.

ODD OUTLIER:

Forza Motorsport 6. Microsoft may want to merge their platforms but Forza 6 still isn't available on PC.

customisation and tuning available makes sure I spend hours between races perfecting my cars.

CHRISTIANO TORTAL

> PROJECT CARS

◆ I would say Asseto Corsa, but as it's not officially out yet Project Cars will have to be my placeholder choice for racing sim. The level of detail on the courses and cars is amazing and the amount of

KAT CHAPMAN

> ROCKET LEAGUE

◆ Whilst there may not be a lot of variation besides the cosmetic upgrades earned this games simple premise somehow keeps on getting better and more addictive the more hours you sink in.



PROJECT CARS



VOID
 SURROUND
 HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined.

PC/ PS4/ Xbox One/ Mobile Compatible



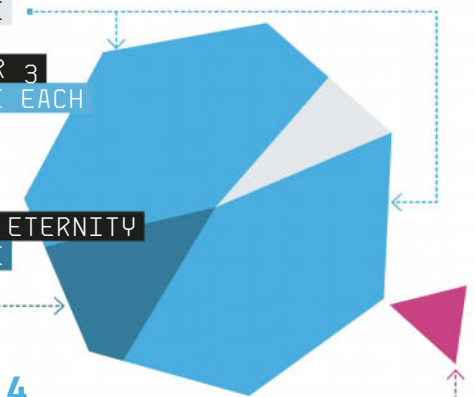
JB HI-FI

Available at

BEST RPG/ADVENTURE

WINNER: TIE
FALLOUT 4 /
THE WITCHER 3
40% OF VOTE EACH

RUNNER UP:
PILLARS OF ETERNITY
13% OF VOTE



GREG LUCAS

> FALLOUT 4

◆ The story is a bit trite but the freedom to explore the world and develop your character and towns is unlike anything I've really played before. I've already put over 200 hours into the game and I'm sure that once the DLC comes out I'll probably put in at least 100 more.

CLARA DANIELS

> THE WITCHER 3

◆ The epic conclusion to Geralt's story is everything I could have hoped for and more. I don't think I've ever played a game that feels as alive as The Witcher 3. The world continues to evolve in the background, either as a consequence of your actions or due to the way that the people behave.

ODD OUTLIER:

Rocket League. OK guys, we get it, you love Rocket League. We love it too, but multiple votes for the game as the RPG of the year is really stretching that love, don't you think?

EDWIN TRAN

> TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS

◆ I love all of the Telltale games, but I think Tales from the Borderlands is the best they've come up with so far. Even though the action is very different from the actual Borderlands games, the story, characters and pacing make it feel right at home in the universe.



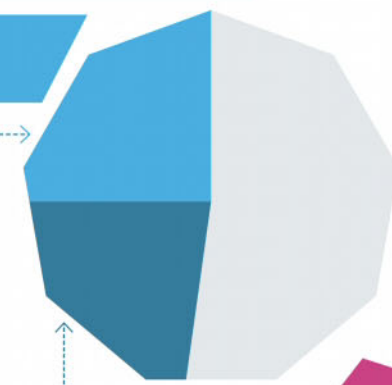
ROCKET LEAGUE



FALLOUT 4

BEST ACTION GAME

WINNER:
ROCKET LEAGUE
25% OF VOTE



SEAN WALKER

> MAD MAX

◆ 2015 was a pretty great year for Mad Max with both the game and Fury Road coming out (we'll ignore the terrible prequel comic). The combination of driving and brutal melee combat totally works for me. I hope there's a sequel.

CHRISTIANO TORTAL

> METAL GEAR SOLID 5: THE PHANTOM PAIN

◆ The combination of stealth action and management sim shouldn't work but it totally does. It may be the last Kojima Metal Gear game but it's the best yet.

RUNNER UP:
FALLOUT 4
23% OF VOTE

ODD OUTLIER:

Rocket League and Fallout 4. Both contain action, but both being voted for in this category by multiple people points to their love of the games rather than their actual content.

BEN CALDWELL

> ROCKET LEAGUE

◆ It's totally action packed, so I'm calling it an action game.



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT



VOID RGB
WIRELESS
HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined.

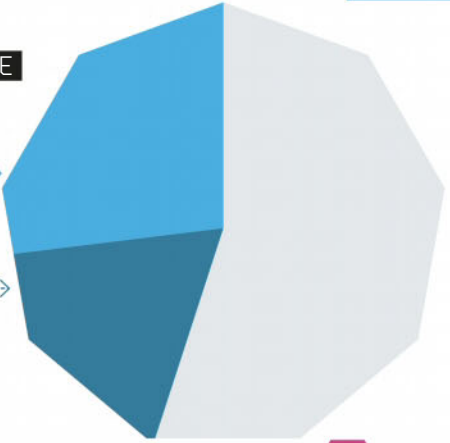


Available at

BEST GAMEPLAY

WINNER:
ROCKET LEAGUE
 27% OF VOTE

RUNNER UP:
WITCHER 3
 18% OF VOTE



MATTHEW SCHMIDT:

> METAL GEAR SOLID 5

◆ Many have tried to create something of an organisation management game and either been too cautious or too optimistic. MGS5 nails the middle ground

ODD OUTLIER:

Halo 5. The game got a bunch of votes and should by rights be the runner up in this category but the fact that it's not actually on PC kind of puts paid to that idea.

HY TRUONG THU

> ROCKET LEAGUE

◆ It's so simple to learn but so difficult to master. It's the best thing in the world for five minutes at a time.

CHRISTIANO TORTAL

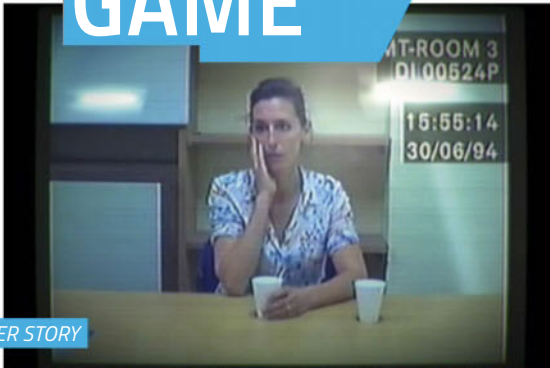
> PROJECT CARS

◆ The combination of hugely realistic driving mechanics, customisation and tuning is pretty hard to beat if you're a racing fan.

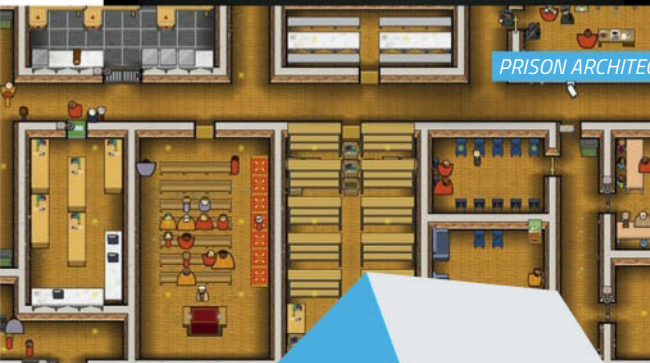


ROCKET LEAGUE

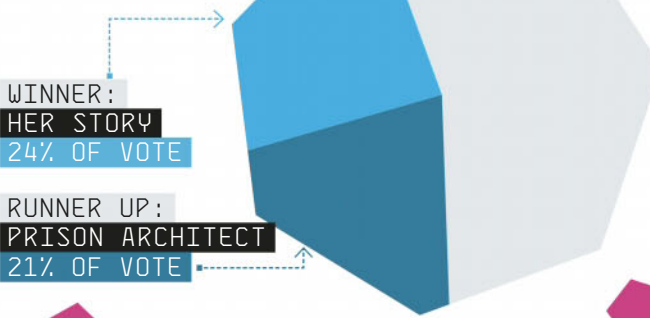
BEST INDIE GAME



HER STORY



PRISON ARCHITECT



WINNER:
HER STORY
 24% OF VOTE

RUNNER UP:
PRISON ARCHITECT
 21% OF VOTE

ODD OUTLIER:

International Cricket Captain 2015. It's a cricket game, and have these ever actually been good?

ERIK PETERSEN

> HER STORY

◆ Apparently there's a true and definitive ending to the story, but it's had me debating the ending since I played it. Any game that can keep you talking about ambiguity for so long can't be bad.

ODD OUTLIER 2:

Rocket League. Considering so many people voted for it in other categories, the fact that it only received a small handful of votes in the indies category is more than a little odd.

LACHLAN TRAPPETT

> PRISON ARCHITECT

◆ It was the gold standard for early access, and it helped to make a simple, yet thought provoking and creative game.

ANNA KING

> HER STORY

◆ I've never played anything quite like it. There's no real "gamey" mechanics and no real win condition. You just investigate and give your findings when you think you're done. It's amazing.



VOID
 SURROUND
 HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined.
 PC/ PS4/ Xbox One/ Mobile Compatible



Available at

BEST STORYTELLING

MARK WATTS

> THE WITCHER 3

◆ An incredible story about love, loss, heroism, choice and consequence. There aren't many games that give me feels, but the Witcher 3's story definitely did.

THOMAS MORENO

> FALLOUT 4

◆ The whole gritty Futurama style 'frozen, then wakes up in the future' thing is rad. Characters are likeable and believable, also the story comes around nicely as well, which is always a plus.

SEAN MURRAY

> UNDERTALE

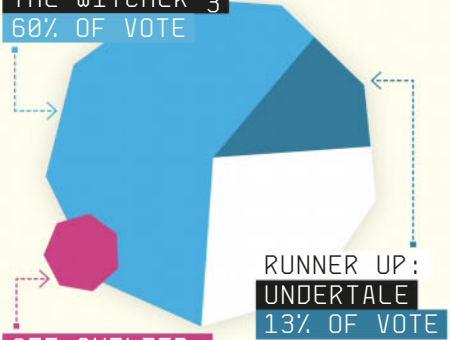
◆ The first time I played Undertale I was immediately invested. For a game with graphics that aren't anywhere near today's potential, it's amazing how sucked in I was. I owe that completely to the compelling story.

DANIEL WILKS

> LIFE IS STRANGE

◆ The ending is weak, but the build up to that point is excellent – as long as you can accept the world of Twin Peaks Portland.

WINNER:
THE WITCHER 3
 60% OF VOTE



ODD OUTLIER:

Rocket League. Seriously? Two people voted for Rocket League in a narrative capacity? This is just getting silly.

WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

BEST GRAPHICS

RUBEN HUNT

> STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

◆ The game looks better than any of the prequels by a long shot.

LACHLAN TRAPPETT

> KERBAL SPACE PROGRAM

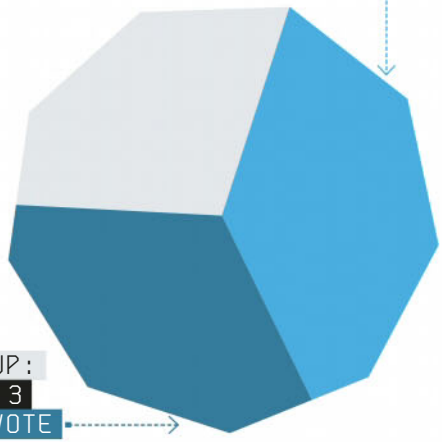
◆ Okay, so it doesn't have the greatest graphics, but you can't tell me you don't feel something when you see the beauty of a sun rise from space

DONNA PARK

> STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

◆ You just have to look at the Endor map. It looks better in the game than it does in Lucas's stupid special edition of Jedi.

WINNER:
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT
 38% OF VOTE



ODD OUTLIER:

Undertale. Sure, the 8-bit graphics are charming but it's a stretch to call them the best of the year.

WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT



VOID RGB
 WIRELESS
 HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined.



Available at

CATAclysm • SORCEROR KING • GALACIDE • OLLIOLLI 2 • WELCOME TO OLLIWOOD • METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN • SHADOWRUN: HONG KONG • MASTER SPY • ARMELLO • DEX • RYDMRESA • ARMIKROG
 ACT OF AGGRESSION • BLOOD BOWL 2 • MAD MAX • ASSAULT ANDROID CACTUS • WORLD OF WARSHIPS • SOMA • SKYSHIN'S BEDLAM • WARHAMMER: VERMINTIDE • SWORD COAST LEGENDS • AGE OF DECADENCE
 DIVINITY: OS EE • ANIMAL GODS • TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS S1 • MINECRAFT STORY MODE • LIFE IS STRANGE S1 • REBEL GALAXY • FALLOUT 4 • STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT • HARD WEST • COD: BLACK OPS III
 III • STARCRRAFT: LEGACY OF THE VOID • ASSASSIN'S CREED: SYNDICATE • JUST CAUSE 3 • RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE • DYING LIGHT • THE ESCAPISTS • SPACE HULK: ASCENSION • SAINTS ROW: GAT OUT OF HELL •
 DYING LIGHT • THE ESCAPISTS • SPACE HULK: ASCENSION • SAINTS ROW: GAT OUT OF HELL • GRIM FANDANGO HD • EVOLVE • APOTHEON • HAND OF FATE • LIFE IS STRANGE • HOMEWORLD: REMASTERED • TOTAL WAR: ATTILA • BATTLEFIELD: HARDLINE
 BLOODSPORTS TV • PILLARS OF ETERNITY • WORLD OF WARSHIPS BETA REPORT • ASSASSIN'S CREED: ROGUE • GRAND THEFT AUTO V • MORTAL KOMBAT X • CRYPT OF THE NECROMANCER • A PIXEL STORY • VERTIGINOUS GOLF • LEMMA • WAR FOR
 THE OVERWORLD • ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: CHINA • HALO: SPARTAN STRIKE • THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT • WOLFENSTEIN: THE OLD BLOOD • MAGNETIC CAVE UNLOCKED • PROJECT CARS • QUARRIES OF SERED • VAN Helsing 3 • NOT A
 HERO • FORGE QUEST • BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT • GALACTIC CIV 3 • HATRED • KHOLAT • HEROES OF THE STORM • RONIN • DEVIL MAY CRY 4: SE • ROCKET LEAGUE • VICTOR VRAN • MISSING: AN INTERACTIVE THRILLER • YATAGARASU: ATTACK ON

BEST SOUND

THOMAS MORENO

> STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

There's something about hearing those iconic Star Wars noises being so faithfully reproduced that I can't help but be sucked into yet another game. TIE fighters screaming overhead, the crack-hiss of lightsabres, the BWAT-BWAT of the big guns. It's amazing.

DARREN MARKHAM

> THE WITCHER 3

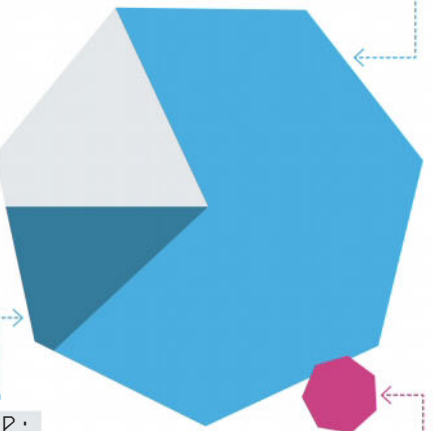
There's an ambience to The Witcher 3 that just makes the game so much more immersive than anything else I have played in ages.

JAMES RYRIE

> STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

(game sucked though)

WINNER:
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT
70% OF VOTE



RUNNER UP:
THE WITCHER 3
12% OF VOTE

ODD OUTLIER:
Thumper. We agree – Thumper does have an amazing soundscape, but it hasn't been released as yet, so it definitely doesn't have a place in the best games of last year.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

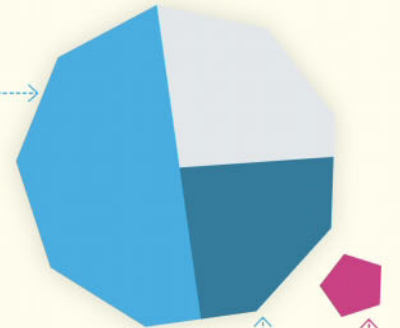


Doug Cockle does an amazing job as Geralt, but everyone in the cast is great

BEST VOICE/MOCAP PERFORMANCE



WINNER:
FALLOUT 4 – THE ENSEMBLE
50% OF VOTE



RUNNER UP:
WITCHER 3 – DOUG COCKLE AS GERALT OF RIVIA
24% OF VOTE

ODD OUTLIER:
Thumper. It's a "Rhythm Violence" game that isn't out yet and features no mocap or voice acting. Aside from that, it's a solid choice.

SEAN WALKER

> TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS

Everyone who made up that cast was awesome and delivered a pitch perfect extension to Borderlands. Handsome Jack has the most punchable voice ever.

BYRON CROSS

> THE WITCHER 3

Doug Cockle does an amazing job as Geralt, but everyone in the cast is great, aside from the person who does the rude kids that seem to be in every town or city. They shit me.

ALBERT LEE

> DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN ENHANCED EDITION

The addition of all that voice acting deserves recognition not only for the quality but for the quantity.



VOID SURROUND HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined. PC/ PS4/ Xbox One/ Mobile Compatible DOLBY



Available at

BEST SINGLEPLAYER

TIM COX

> FALLOUT 4

◆ The game totally lived up to the hype for me, delivering yet another immersive Fallout experience. I will be playing this for years to come, especially when more mods are released.

EDWIN TRAN

> THE WITCHER 3

◆ Without a doubt my favourite game. I've spent countless hours playing The Witcher series and 3 is the biggest and best looking of them all. Also, Gwent. Enough said.

ERIK PETERSEN

> JUST CAUSE 3

◆ There are few games with as many explosions as Just Cause 3 and who doesn't love explosions? I know I do. To be honest, I couldn't even tell you what happens in that game, just that I blew everything up and loved it.

WINNER:

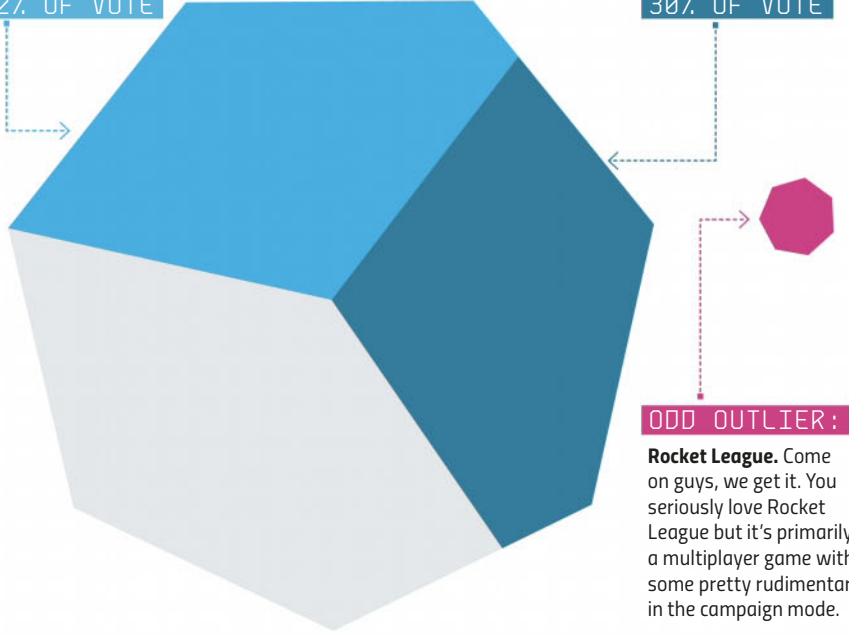
FALLOUT 4

32% OF VOTE

RUNNER UP:

WITCHER 3

30% OF VOTE



ODD OUTLIER:

Rocket League. Come on guys, we get it. You seriously love Rocket League but it's primarily a multiplayer game with some pretty rudimentary AI in the campaign mode.



FALLOUT 4



VOID RGB
 WIRELESS
 HIGH PERFORMANCE GAMING HEADSET



Comfort. Redefined.



Available at



COMFORT. REDEFINED.

Corsair Void Surround gaming headsets not only feature great sound, but they're designed especially for comfort.

With spectacular Dolby® 7.1 surround sound enabled on PC, plug-and-play functionality and stereo sound with Playstation 4, and a superb stereo experience on the Xbox One when combined with the Microsoft Xbox One Stereo Headset Adapter, the Void Surround gaming headset brings legendary audio to every one of your devices.



LONG-WEARING COMFORT



UNIVERSAL COMPATIBILITY



50mm DRIVERS

USB | STEREO | SURROUND | WIRELESS

ALSO AVAILABLE:



Visit CORSAIR.COM/VOID and choose the right headset for you



/corsair

AVAILABLE AT:

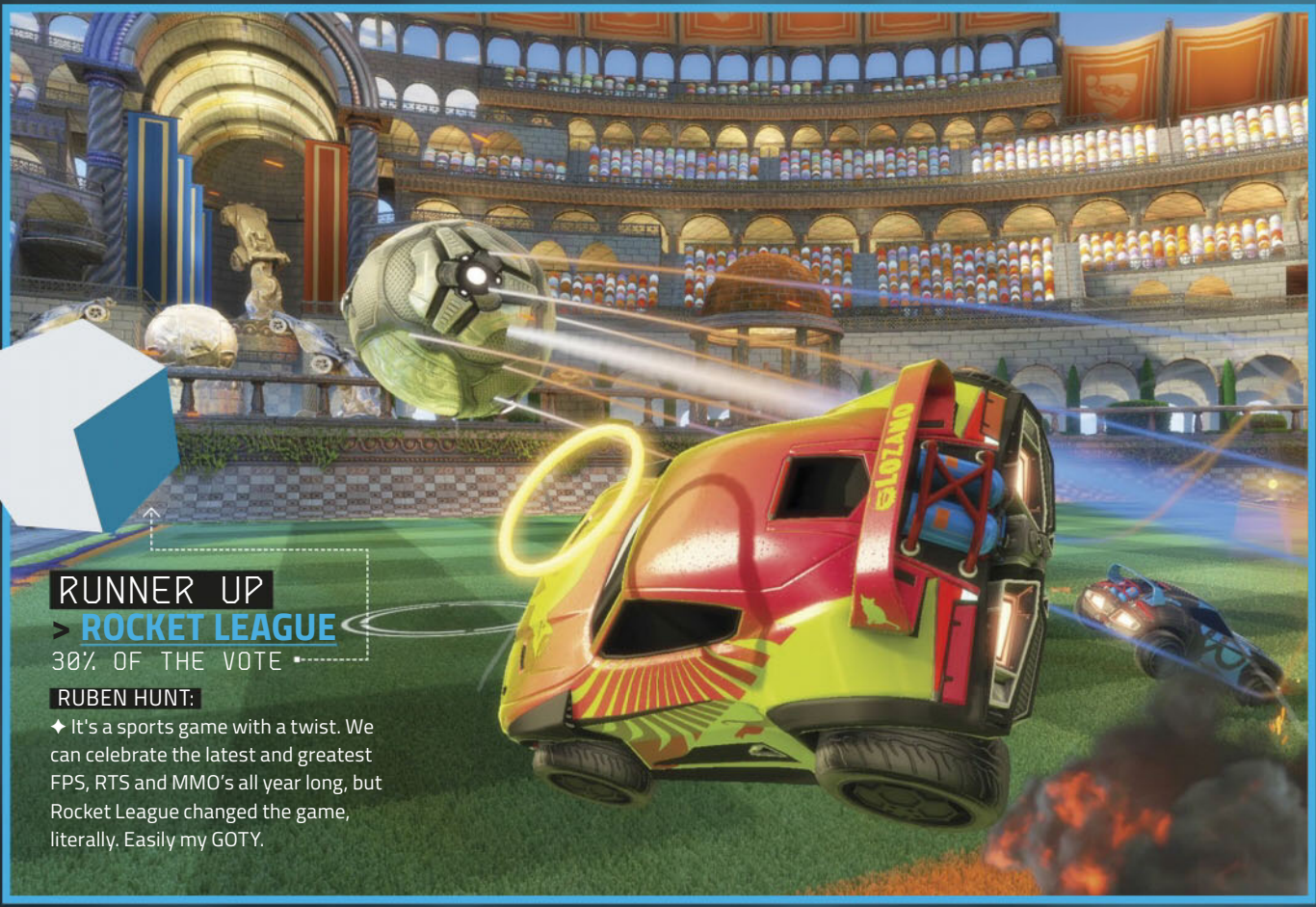
JB HI-FI

ONLINE

Dolby, Dolby Audio, Pro Logic, and the double-D symbol are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories.

OVERALL GAME OF THE YEAR 2015

After all the votes it got in multiple categories, the biggest bombshell of the vote this year explodes on these two pages. As hugely popular as a certain car based sports game is, it just wan't a match for one of the greatest RPGs in years.



RUNNER UP
> ROCKET LEAGUE
 30% OF THE VOTE

RUBEN HUNT:
 ♦ It's a sports game with a twist. We can celebrate the latest and greatest FPS, RTS and MMO's all year long, but Rocket League changed the game, literally. Easily my GOTY.

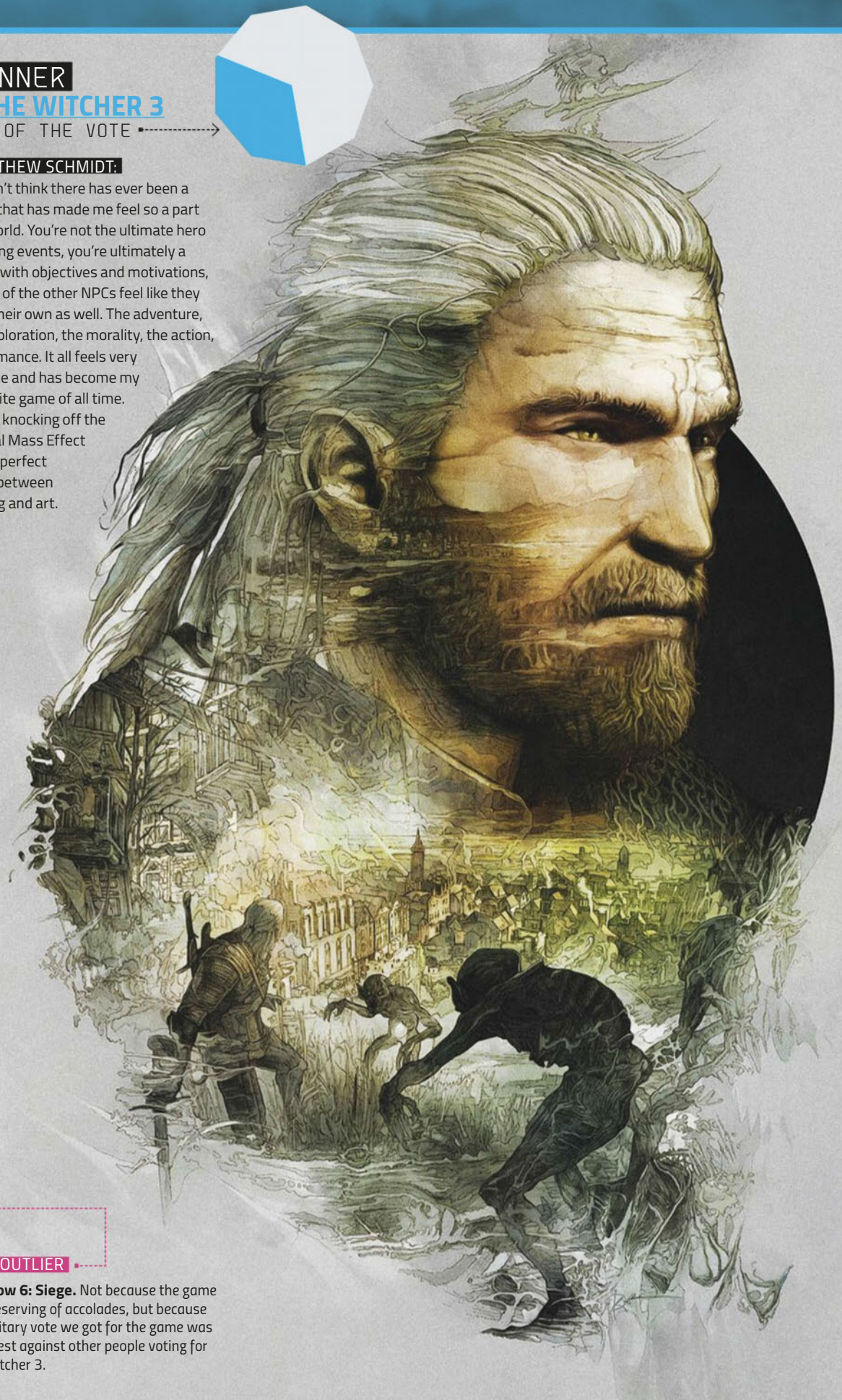
WINNER

> THE WITCHER 3

34% OF THE VOTE →

MATTHEW SCHMIDT:

♦ I don't think there has ever been a game that has made me feel so a part of a world. You're not the ultimate hero dictating events, you're ultimately a player with objectives and motivations, and all of the other NPCs feel like they have their own as well. The adventure, the exploration, the morality, the action, the romance. It all feels very genuine and has become my favourite game of all time. Finally knocking off the original Mass Effect as the perfect blend between gaming and art.

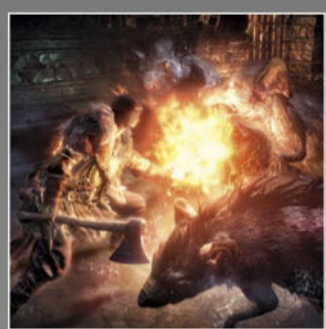
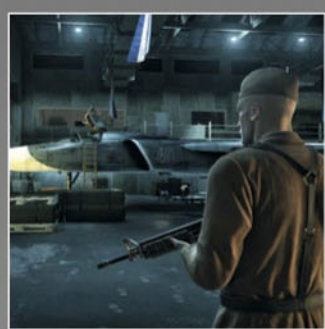
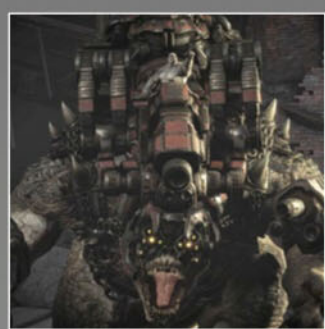
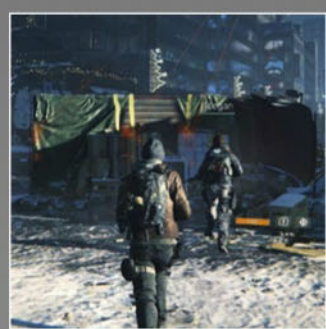


ODD OUTLIER

Rainbow 6: Siege. Not because the game isn't deserving of accolades, but because the solitary vote we got for the game was in protest against other people voting for The Witcher 3.

Games

YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMES



One of the interesting things that can happen during the review process is that your mind can change. This can be in the short term, as you start out liking a game, but then change your mind when the luster comes off - that's what happened to Daniel while we were reviewing The Division, and you'll see in this issue one of the rare instances where we actually disagree on a game.

But the process really doesn't end when the review's written, and more than once I've reviewed - and scored highly - a game, only for that to change with the proper application of time. It's a little embarrassing, but that's the nature of how reviews work these days - you've got to publish, or perish, basically.

However, I'm glad to say that even though we finished our review of The Division well before going to print, it's still a game I'm playing and enjoying, and one that I really do think - for me at least - is a longterm concern.

Feels kind of good to have gotten it really right. Shit, even talking about it is getting my virtual trigger finger itchy so how about you stop reading this and I go and fire the game up, 'kay?

David Hollingworth
Digital Editor

Contents

- 57** The Division
- 60** Gears of War
- 62** Hitman
- 64** Dark Souls 3
- 68** Battlefield Gothic: Armada
- 69** Need for Speed



SCORING SYSTEM | PCPP scores its games on a 1 to 10 scale. The higher, the better - though 10 is by no means a "perfect" game. We're not convinced such a thing exists, so consider a 10 a masterpiece of PC gaming, despite its inevitable flaws. A 5 is a decidedly average game; one that doesn't excel in any particular area, without being an affront to our senses - the ultimate in mediocrity. Below this, you'll start to find the games our reviewers suffered an aneurysm getting through; above it, the titles truly worth your time and money. And remember: a score is only a vague indication of quality. Always read the full review for the definitive opinion!

WE
PLAY
ON:



ALIENWARE
GAME VICTORIOUS™

SAMSUNG
950 PRO



The Division

A last stand against the dreaded lurgy

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MASSIVE
 PUBLISHER UBISOFT
 PRICE \$61.95 USD
 AVAILABLE AT STEAM, UPLAY, RETAIL
tomclancy-thedivision.ubi.com/game/en-au/home/

HOLLINGWORTH: I kind of feel bad about liking Ubisoft's hit game *The Division* so much. I know it's more than a little morally bankrupt. I know it's exploiting my love of loot drops and upgrades, not to mention my love of big guns and bigger damage numbers. Even it's 'only you can save the world' narrative is rather hackneyed.

But despite all of this, I'm hooked on *The Division* in a way that few other games in the last year have managed. Part of that is because the game features one of the most amazingly realised open worlds I've ever explored. Sure, other games have more to do than *The Division*, but its iteration of a virus-ravaged Manhattan is chillingly realistic. The game's progression systems offer a lot of variety in how you can play the game, and the combat feels weighty and gritty despite the bullet-sponge amount of damage it takes to drop enemies. I even don't mind the fact that the levelling process has been divorced from skill upgrades, which instead link back to unlocking new facilities in your personal

Base of Operations. That seems to me a rather flavourful take on traditional RPG mechanics.

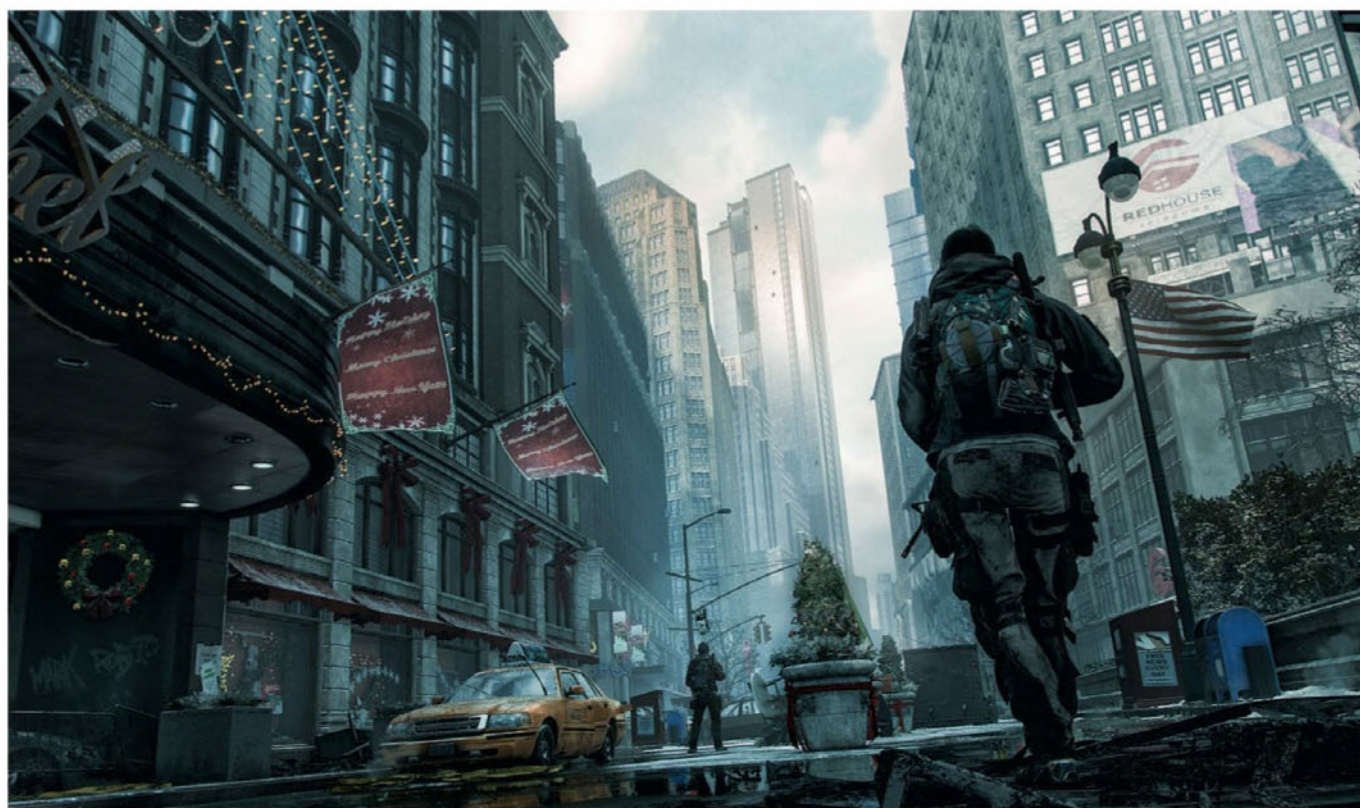
Basically, I think this is the first game in a while that I am in for the long haul. Are you as hooked, Daniel?

WILKS: For the first week of play or so I was, but then everything started to ring hollow for me. The problem, as I see it, is that *The Division* feels like two or more games mashed together in a not entirely satisfactory way. You have a single player stop and pop shooter that has been dropped into an MMO style world without ever fully merging the two. You can play with friends, but even then the story is strictly solo - you are the only one capable of stopping the baddies. Play by yourself and Manhattan quickly shows itself to be detailed, yes, but also empty. That's narratively fitting, but the lack of any real content in the city outside of the quests and side quests are completionist pickups, crafting material crates and randomised encounters with district specific and overly generic baddies.



After completing the first 15 or 20 quests I had also seen everything the game had to throw at me in terms of diversity. Go to a location, shoot some baddies. Go to a location, press a button and shoot some baddies. Go to a location, shoot some baddies and press a button. Go to a location, press a button, shoot some baddies and press another button. Maybe grab something in between the shooting. For a game that is pitched as an RPG, the only role you really play is gun.

HOLLINGWORTH: I really don't disagree. I just think the stuff that is in place is all very



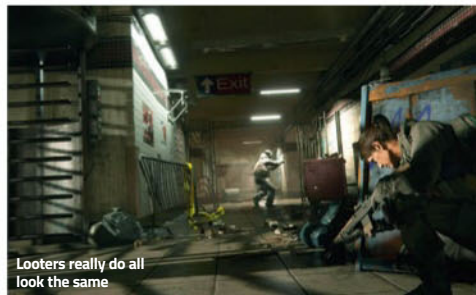
slick. As a rule I really don't like third-person shooters or cover-based games, but *The Division* does it very well. In a lot of games, cover seems like it's randomly placed, and moving from cover to cover is shambolic at best. Nearly everything you see in Manhattan can be hidden behind, and watching the windows and tires blow out on a car you're hiding behind is impressively cinematic. Then, when you need to move on, the single-key movement system is amazingly fluid, letting you traverse locations quickly and securely.

I like the way the RPG elements also don't obscure the mechanics of a good shooter. In fact, I think *The Division's* upgrade elements for weaponry is far superior to anything in *Battlefield 4* or *Call of Duty*, as the impact of a new foregrip or other add-on is far more impactful. And while the game does add a *Borderlands* style damage-fountain effect, it's not nearly as distracting as I thought it would be. And, if it were, the game's versatile UI lets me turn it off.

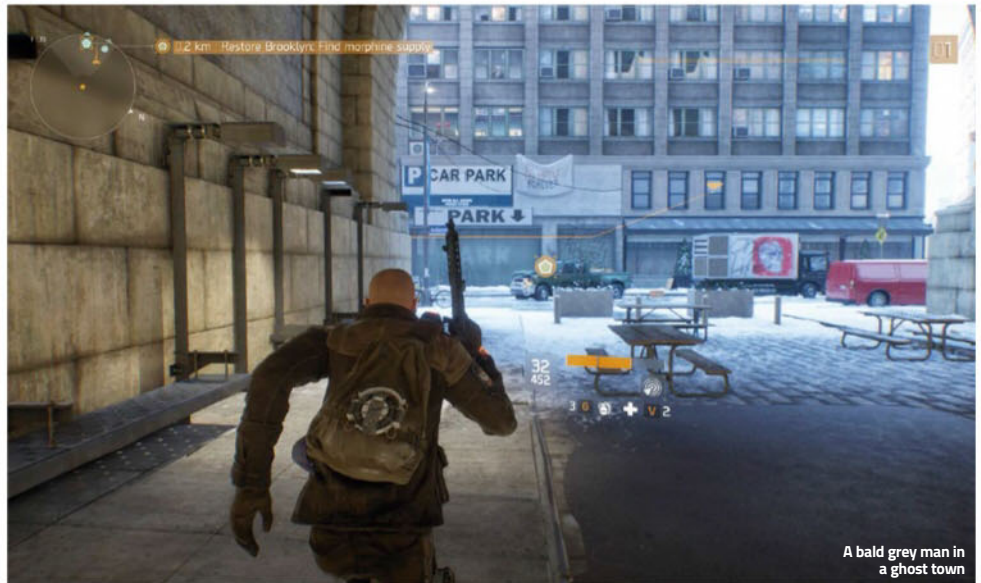
But you do make a very valid point about the way *The Division* mixes its gameplay. When you visit a safehouse or similar quest hub, there are dozens of other players. Leave that location, and the city is empty. I really would like to see a few more other players instanced into my session, and while you can do that with a group, I kind of miss the random player encounters you might get in a proper MMO. In fact, I almost wish Ubi had gone full MMO on the game, because I think an RP server would be really interesting.

Have you played much of the Dark Zone though?

WILKS: The Dark Zone for me is an example of the two styles of game not meshing. In many ways I think the Dark Zone feels like what the story game should have been - populated, dangerous, rewarding, but unlike the story campaign, there's very little option to play solo thanks to the number of rogue agents that will camp around extraction zones. You need to



Looters really do all look the same



A bald grey man in a ghost town

when you need to move on, the single-key movement system is amazingly fluid

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- + You are ready to fight the man flu
- + You like shooting the same guy over and over again
- + You never met a bullet sponge you didn't shoot
- + You like your characters to dress in drab
- + Jumping Jacks

play with friends to get anything done, something that is not at all required in most if not all of the campaign.

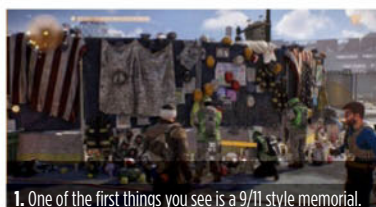
I think the shooting mechanics are strong for the most part, and the simple three statistic character system works well for tailoring a character's performance. Modding weapons and crafting gear works really nicely too and give a constant sense of progression, even when actual skill unlocks are coming slowly thanks to the order of quests. There are a number of things I like about *The Division*, it's just that things on the whole don't really seem to fit together and there is little variation in what you actually do. Most shooters don't have a campaign that lasts more than about 8-12 hours

because the developers don't want to outstay their welcome and have a multiplayer component with some type of progression and unlock mechanic as a separate feature. *The Division* mashes these two things together and to my mind highlights some of the weaknesses of the approach. There's not enough variation in the campaign to make it satisfying after the first dozen or so hours, making it feel like a grind, and the multiplayer component is too tied in with the campaign (if you want the best gear that is) to make it an optional thing for people who like competitive play.

HOLLINGWORTH: You must be luckier than me, as I've only seen

SEQUENCE

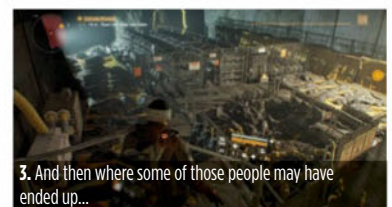
NEW YORK - THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH!



1. One of the first things you see is a 9/11 style memorial.



2. Then you see a more organised missing persons list.



3. And then where some of those people may have ended up...



THE UI

1. The minimap alerts you to other players, loot, and badguys

2. Keeping track of team health is important, especially if you're loaded up with healing skills

3. You can see a handy faux-silhouette of team-mates through walls

4. The way some UI elements present as AR-style displays is really quite elegant

5. You can easily see ammo, mapped skills, and other stats at a glance

a handful of rogue agents in the Dark Zone, and would really like to see more - hunting them down is just so damn satisfying!

You are right, though - the game does have a mess of flaws, and I'd even go so far as to say that there's some weird mathematics going on in regards to the sum of the game's parts. I find the comedic quest gives really at odds with the rest of the game's style, for instance - they seem like they belong in an entirely different game, like somehow the Far Cry writing team managed to sneak some dialogue into The Division as some of kind of dare. Your progression through the world is also really poorly managed, though that's

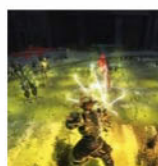
in part due to the more open nature of the city, compared to the carefully curated and bottlenecked worlds that other games are designed around. And, yeah, there really isn't a lot to do in the city other than shoot people. Given that the game comes complete with so many trappings of a tradition MMO - chat channels, grouping mechanics, even emotes, it seems like at some point in its development cycle, the game was meant to be far more ambitious in scope.

It's like you can squint at the game, and still see what it could have been.

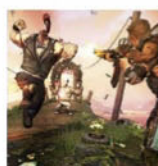
WILKS: I think that's my ultimate criticism of The Division. It has fingers in too many pies and doesn't quite

deliver enough to be satisfying on any part. For all the good moments and elements, I think the devs have spread themselves a little too thin and delivered a final product that is less than the sum of its parts. It's an empty single player game, a more enjoyable but narratively confused multiplayer game, a limited PvP game, an RPG without a great deal of customisation and loot based shooter without particularly interesting loot. With some patching and content updates The Division could definitely show its potential (much like the similarly structured Destiny didn't really shine until the first expansion was released), but as it stands it's an ambitious but severely limited curio. **DANIEL WILKS & DAVID HOLLINGWORTH** PC

OR TRY THIS:



HELLGATE LONDON
FLAGSHIP STUDIOS, 2007
▲ Hybrid MMO/Shooter
▼ Dead servers



BORDERLANDS 2
GEARBOX SOFTWARE, 2012
▲ Great shooting and loot
▼ Not an MMO



MGSV
KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS, 2015
▲ Great open world stealth/shooting
▼ Kojima nonsense

VERDICT:

WILKS: Fun for a while but less than the sum of its parts

HOLLINGWORTH: The parts are polished enough that I keep coming back.

6

8

Hitman Intro Pack

Being tall, gaunt, bald and tattooed is still the best disguise

DEVELOPER IO INTERACTIVE
 PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
 PRICE \$14.99 (INTRO), \$59.99 (ALL EPISODES)
 AVAILABLE AT STEAM
 hitman.com

Never mistake motion for action, wrote Ernest Hemingway. He was referencing the fact that simply having characters move from place to place, or emotion to emotion, within a narrative doesn't mean that they're actually going anywhere worthy of the audience's engagement. The phrase has equal weight when applied to videogames, however, and Hitman is an example of a design understanding how to promote action over motion.

Too many games simply ask you to go through the motions. Go to checkpoint B from A. Complete five quests before unlocking the door to the castle. Find the herbs required to make the potion. These acts are designed simply to move you from one point to the next, providing the illusion of progress without genuine meaning or intrigue.

Hitman overcomes this problem by rewarding only action, never motion. If you don't think things through then any move you make is unlikely to result in tangible gain. Going through the motions gets you nothing. Ultimately, it's this concentration on rewarding decisive action that is Hitman's crowning glory... but let's backtrack a little.

Developer IO Interactive has not made a better decision in its 18 years of existence than to abandon the rigid structure and predictability it offered with 2012's Hitman Absolution. Hitman circa 2016 is the one the fans have been asking for, a return to the core values and directives of 2006's Hitman: Blood Money. What's offered here is a framework that can be interpreted in whichever way you desire. Aside from your overarching objective of killing a specific target, or targets, the options and actions are yours to define.



Not the most effective way to ask for a lift

It takes a number of playthroughs to really understand the complexity on show

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ When else would you get to attend a private fashion show in Paris?

+ Because bald guys are totally fashionable

+ Playing as a guy with a barcode on his head is a good way to decide whether you should get one

Once you're past elaborate tutorial levels that put many full-fledged games to shame, the Intro Pack's Parisian mansion centre piece is revealed.

The mansion is hosting a fashion show being organised by individuals marked for assassination; the crowd and security making delivery of your deathly services a difficult one.

It takes a number of playthroughs to really understand the complexity on show here, with each attempt triggering hitherto unseen happenings, a fact that highlights just how much potential there is to define your own actions.

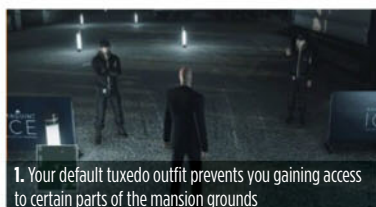
Figuring out whether to eliminate your targets with gun or knife, poison or suffocation, is the easy bit. Moving yourself and them into position to carry

out your action is the key skill. Again, every action facilitates meaningful progress. The power fantasy delivered is, therefore, incredibly potent.

Using innocents to carry out your goals is typically essential rather than optional, with IO Interactive having found a way to pack 300 artificially intelligent entities into a single environment. These entities in Paris take the form of waiters, bodyguards, event security, delivery drivers, journalists, fashion aficionados, undercover law enforcement and more. Working out their routines and using them to your advantage takes serious patience, but the payoff is worth it should you conjure up a means of influencing them to unwittingly carry out your desires. It

SEQUENCE

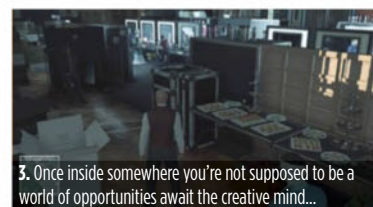
DRESS TO KILL



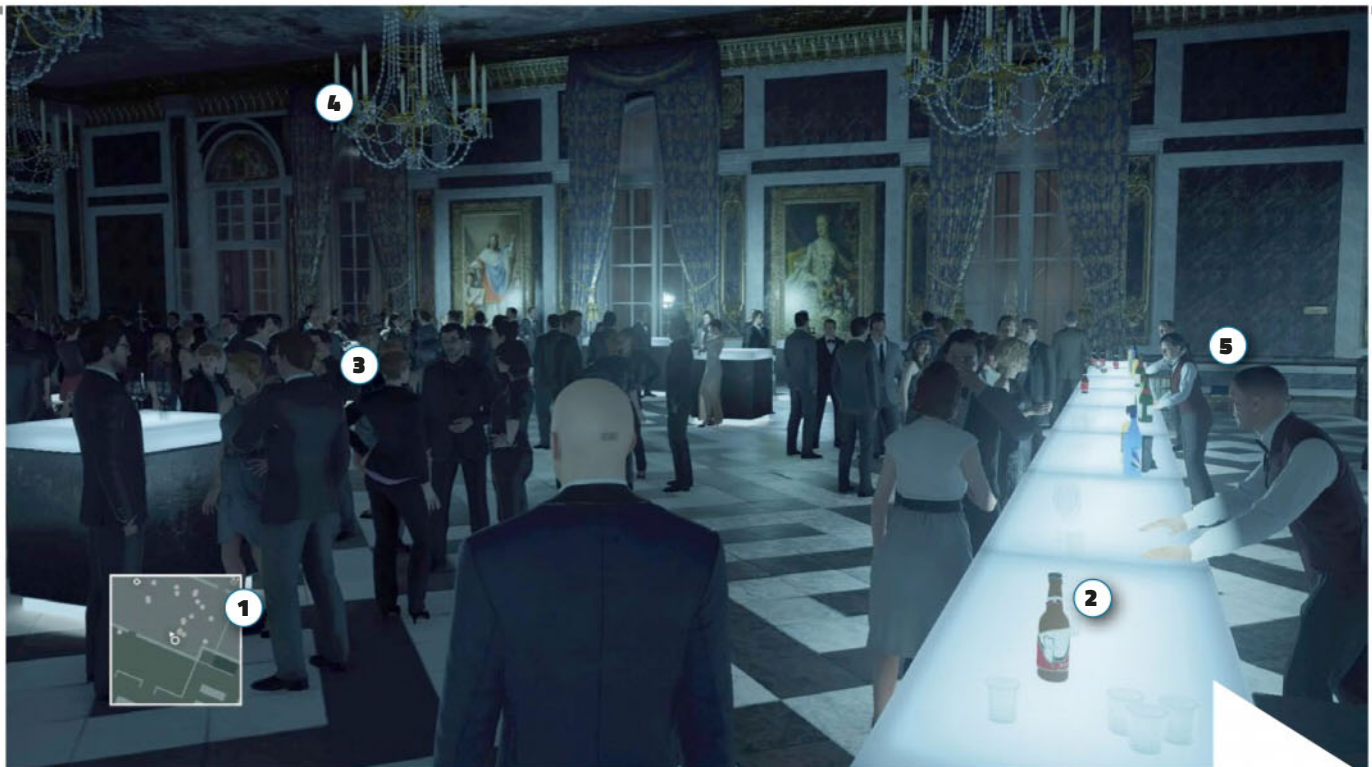
1. Your default tuxedo outfit prevents you gaining access to certain parts of the mansion grounds



2. With the right outfit, however, you can walk freely through otherwise off-limit areas...



3. Once inside somewhere you're not supposed to be a world of opportunities await the creative mind...



is entirely possible to kill your targets without laying a finger on them.

What's so impressive about these AI dummies is that they have lives of their own. They don't wait for you to interact with them in order to go about their business, as is the case in the vast majority of other games. Waiters serve, bodyguards protect. If something happens that interferes with their goals then they themselves try to figure out a way to solve the problem and get back to their jobs. It's this, more than the intricate architecture or the number of onscreen characters that gives Hitman its most persuasive shot of life.

This is a game that doesn't wait for you to tell it what to do. It has a will of its own that you influence but never control.

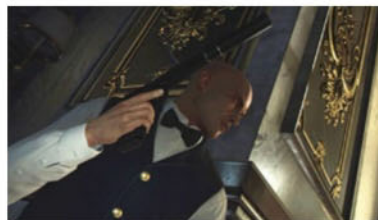
The episodic release structure - with one environment of equivalent size to the Parisian mansion released per month - has been the victim of much cynicism in the run up to release, but the format suits the density of the offering. Without a plethora of arenas open with which to immediately distract yourself, you're more committed to uncovering all of the possibilities of the single one provided here. While it's questionable as to



whether players should be corralled into exploration through release formatting, it's undeniable that your attentions are focused in a positive way.

Once the main targets have been crossed off your list you're free to engage in optional extras centred around either performing assassinations in ways designed to increase the challenge, or looking to end altogether different targets. Planned Elusive Targets are timed events featuring an individual that you have just one shot at killing; miss and your record is stained forever. Contracts are challenges set by the community asking you to take out a person of someone else's choosing (extra points for mirroring their method) and Escalations are particularly tough affairs designed to trip you up at every moment.

Less impressive is the narrative, which is both floundering in its writing and



undermined by the episodic release structure. The setup concerned itself with the typical secret agency, shady middle men, whispering killers and blah, blah... all predictable guff that we've seen a thousand times before from the minds of writers better than those employed here. Thankfully, there's so much else going on that you can ignore the plot and concentrate on the momentary stories you're making through interaction.

The story doesn't affect your enjoyment of the game, it just prevents a good thing being even better. Many games claim to offer you freedom, but all they really do is present a range of different breadcrumb trails to follow. Deviate from those motions and everything falls down. Hitman disrupts that standardised template of modern game design by, ironically, picking up on a theme its creators abandoned a decade ago. **JOHN ROBERTSON** **PC**

SPY CRAFT

1. Your mini map highlights any individuals that might be able to see through your current disguise

2. Food and drink can be poisoned to either kill a person or send them running to the bathroom in sickness

3. Blending into crowds is one of the best ways to simultaneously go unnoticed and observe movements of others

4. Chandeliers, and many other domestic fittings, can be rigged to cause harm

5. Observing employees is the best way to learn how your environment works

OR TRY THIS:



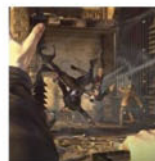
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY 10 INTERACTIVE, 2006

- ▲ It's the game that inspired this one
- ▼ Looking old



METAL GEAR SOLID V: PHANTOM PAIN KONAMI, 2015

- ▲ Blends storytelling and open-world gameplay
- ▼ Can feel unwieldy and confused over opening hours



DISHONORED BETHESDA, 2012

- ▲ Beautifully drawn world and engaging stealth
- ▼ Not as much replay value as Hitman

VERDICT:

We urge you to try and understand Hitman's environment, take action within it and control it as much as you possibly can.

9

Gears of War Ultimate Edition

A technically flawed nostalgia hit.

DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES / THE COALITION
PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
PRICE \$29.95
AVAILABLE AT WINDOWS STORE
gearsowar.com

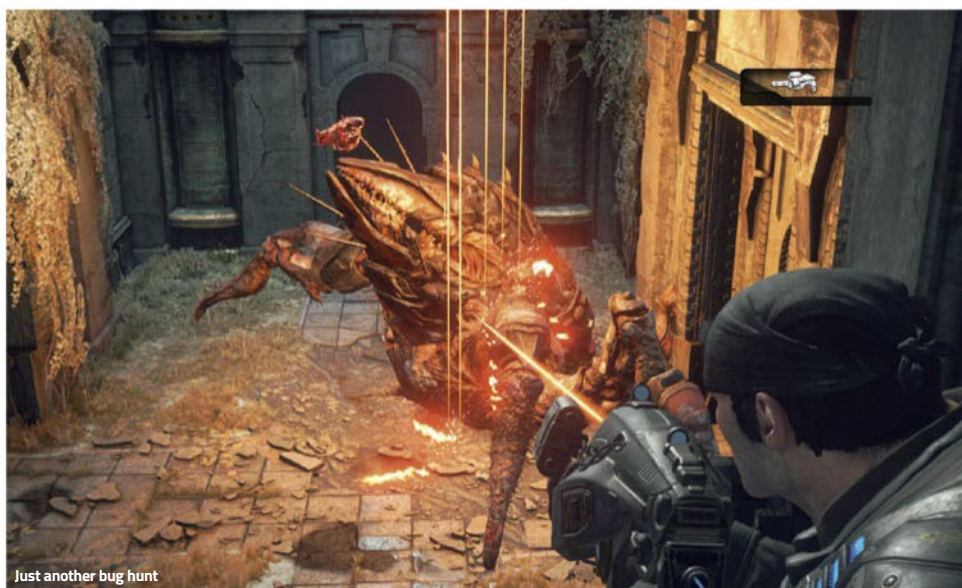
In 2007, the original Gears of War made its way to PC one year after its exclusive release on Xbox 360. This was at the time when Microsoft was pushing the Games for Windows – Live digital platform on PC, and also saw the Windows Vista-restricted release of Halo 2 (three years after its release on the original Xbox).

That extra year of development time for Gears of War allowed Epic Games to include additional content cut from the Xbox 360 version of the game, most notably an extended fifth act. Fast-forward to today, and the PC version of Gears of War Ultimate Edition has released, essentially a prettier version of that 2007 title.

For those unfamiliar, Gears of War is a sci-fi cover-based shooter that follows the exploits of gym-junky soldiers in their battle against a genocidal subterranean threat known as the Locust Horde. The original game particularly is light on noteworthy story, despite a frequently sombre tone, but what it lacks in narrative prowess, it makes up for in terms of honed third-person action.

You'll need a sizeable chunk of hard-drive space to install Ultimate Edition: to the tune of 55GB-ish. Fair warning: this installation is completed through the Windows 10 Store, which means it's treated as an app and will automatically install to your primary drive. Unlike Steam, Store doesn't pre-allocate the full download space, so ensure you have the require space prior to installation.

It's best to switch default save locations, so head into 'System', then 'Storage' to cycle the option for where 'New apps will save to'. I had to restart my download halfway through because it didn't pre-allocate the relevant space.



Just another bug hunt

■ Gears of War Ultimate Edition doesn't even register under the GeForce Experience ■

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ Missing out on the original release grinds your gears.

+ Limited graphical options makes PC gaming easier.

+ Matchmaking is better than dedicated servers.

+ Because 'brown' is a synonym for 'realistic'.

+ Not wanting to choose between a chainsaw or assault rifle.

After an initial laborious load time, Ultimate Edition is a speedy performer, even when installed on an HDD.

Better still, it loads fast and looks as beautiful as a brown-rendered world can look on full settings. That said, there's a lack of control over visual fidelity settings. At the time of writing, it's impossible to disable VSync, which caps the total fps at your monitor's refresh rate. Ultimate Edition still plays at a great newfound pace at 60fps (compared to the 30fps of old), but it's an odd omission that appears to be part of Microsoft's treatment of Windows 10 games as Universal Windows Apps (UWA).

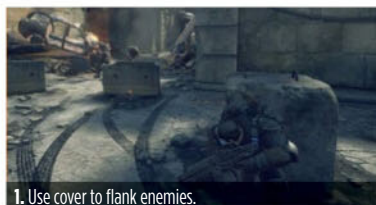
Because of this treatment, third-party programs such as Fraps and

ShadowPlay cannot be used to record screenshots, capture footage or, hell, even monitor the frame rate. For Nvidia owners, Gears of War Ultimate Edition doesn't even register under the GeForce Experience games optimisation tab, which means video specifics are restricted to the limited in-game options of anti-aliasing, ambient occlusion, as well as toggles for motion blur, full screen and a locked frame rate.

This means you're dependent on Windows 10's inbuilt Xbox game bar to capture video or screenshots, which I learnt the hard way. On top of this, if you start the game and there's been an update, the game warns you to visit the Store and download the update, even if it's already been automatically installed.

SEQUENCE

NOSTALGIC FORMULA



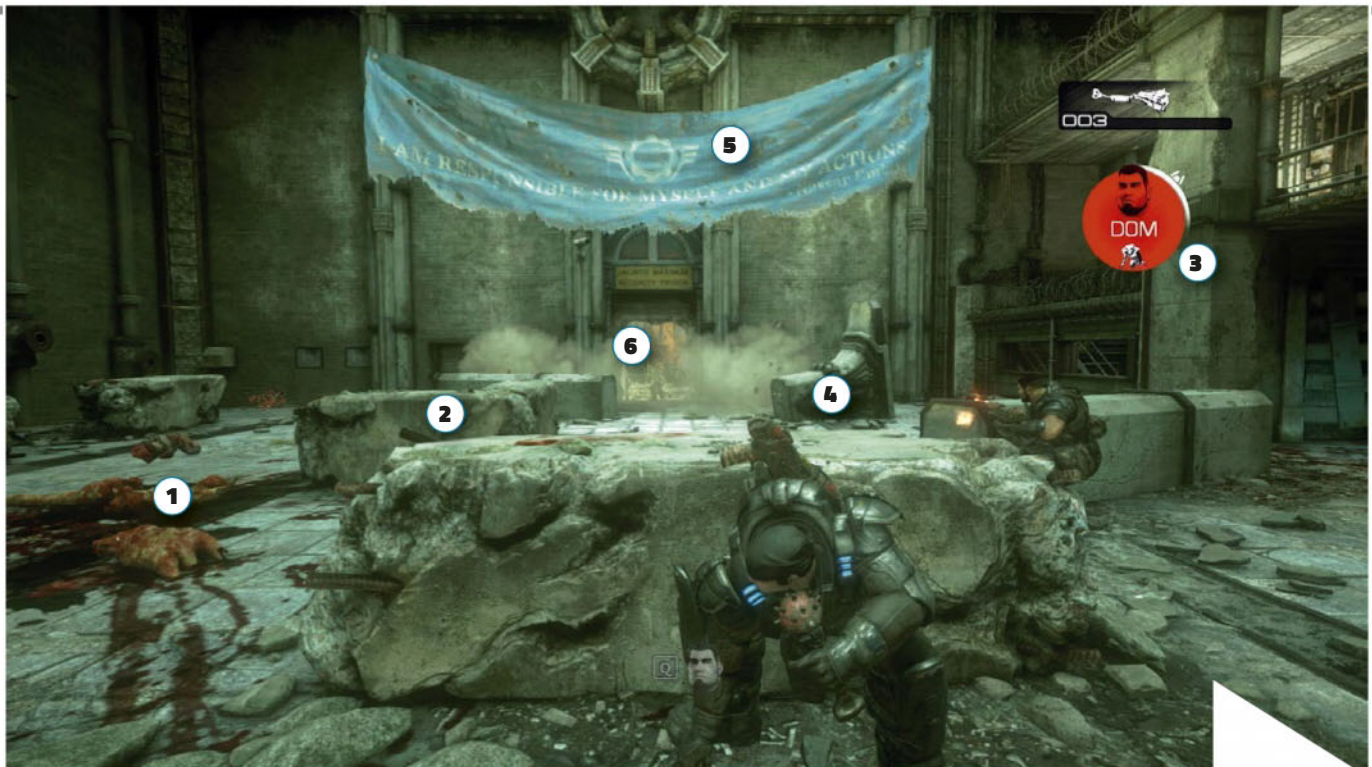
1. Use cover to flank enemies.



2. Chainsaw-bayonet the last grunt.



3. Jump on conveniently placed turret.

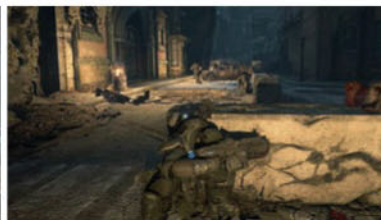


To complicate pre-gameplay matters further, we haven't been able to test multiplayer since launch because of NAT issues (despite forwarding the relevant ports). Given that the revamped multiplayer is one of Ultimate Edition's biggest selling points, we'll post a multiplayer review on the PC PowerPlay website once the issues are ironed out.

That's a hell of a lot of complaining about technical specifics for a game review, but it really does hold back Gears of War from living up to its Ultimate Edition subtitle.

Despite the funnelling nature of the level design—likely a hang-up from the Xbox 360 design approach that prioritised the console graphical-fidelity arms race over open-approach combat—Gears of War still boasts best-in-class cover-based shooting mechanics. There's a reason so many other games have mirrored Gears' cover system, and it feels a lot more fluid smashing between different cover points at a higher frame rate with keyboard and mouse control.

It also helps that the Gears of War action-heavy gameplay loop is so compelling it's easy to ignore the corridor-shooter feel of a lot of the



smaller set pieces. On normal difficulty, adept shooter fans won't find too much of a challenge as long as they stick to cover, as consistent headshot accuracy is effortless compared to the lower precision of an Xbox controller.

Bump it up to one of the higher difficulties, though, and your skills will be tested, as the comparatively low player lethality spikes considerably, and aggressive enemies swarm. This is where mastery of accurate blind-fire and active reloads comes into play. Hit 'R' to reload, and hit it again in the reload meter sweet spot for a shot at a faster reload or increased weapon damage.

Miss the window, and your reload will take twice as long, as protagonist Marcus Fenix curses and works to unjam the weapon. Given you can't switch weapons during a failed active reload, it leads to intense moments where the

gamified reload mechanic builds tension and rewards cool timing. During the more frantic set pieces it can all quickly descend into a bullet-fuelled ballet, littered with failed reloads, cinematic blind-fire evisceration, and dance-like shimmying between cover to avoid aggressively flanking enemies.

There are odd moments when the enemy AI fails or hangs back for too long, which makes for easy kills, but the worst AI offenders are the three teammates that contribute little, go down frequently and sporadically block an otherwise perfectly placed headshot.

At under \$30, Gears of War Ultimate Edition has the right price point for an HD reskin, but the abundance of technical issues, most of which occur before even playing the game, hold back what could have been a masterful reminder of a classic cover-based shooter. **NATHAN LAWRENCE** **PC**

STOP & POP

1: Blood and guts are abundant, but this can be disabled in Options.

2: Low cover litters almost every battlefield in Gears of War.

3: AI teammates can be incapacitated and revived during combat.

4: Learning to blind-fire weapons and grenades provides satisfying kills.

5: Banners are an added level of detail in Ultimate Edition.

6: Enemies don't stay in chokepoints for long before shifting to cover, then flanking.

OR TRY THIS:



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

UBISOFT MONTREAL

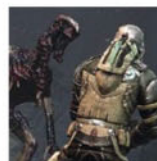
▲ Fast-paced action
▼ Not a stealth game



MASS EFFECT 3

BIOWARE

▲ Action is better than ever
▼ The ending was not



DEAD SPACE 3

VISCERAL GAMES

▲ A blast in co-op
▼ Where's the horror?

VERDICT:

A disappointing collection of technical issues mar an otherwise beautiful recreation of a classic cover-based shooter that still kicks arse.

6

Dark Souls 3

Time To Get Loth-RIC ROLLED

DEVELOPER FROM SOFTWARE
 PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI
 PRICE \$59.99
 AVAILABLE AT STEAM, RETAIL
www.darksouls3.com

Let's get it out of the way upfront. On a PC which has no trouble running *The Division* on Ultra at an unwavering 60 frames per second, *Dark Souls III* falls to pieces on anything other than low. As in, if *Dark Souls III* isn't forced to look its worst, the game (or maybe just it) crashes repeatedly. Even on low settings the framerate still spent more time than it should around 40fps, and a few brief moments below 30. As ports go, *DS3* isn't as good as it should be on PC. Just as the minimum requirements were revised (they originally required a GTX 465) there is little doubt in my mind that the game will be patched, and these requirements will be amended.

It's still utterly playable, though. And after 35 hours, let me tell you what I thought of it.

Dark Souls III is one of the best games I've ever played.

Don't roll your eyes. It really is. From Software has spent the last half-decade refining an experience many consider to be brutally difficult, and then they beat a boss. And suddenly the game clicks — the game isn't about difficulty, it's about confidence. Once you get over the idea that you have so much to lose — that all the experience you've earned in the last area could disappear in the blink of an eye — you're able to take the risks and experience the brilliance *Dark Souls* has to offer.

Dark Souls III is the best way to experience that transition too. It teaches you all the basics very early on, and within 15 minutes thrusts you straight into a proper boss fight. You learn enemy prioritisation, how to block, and when to roll or not. You take a few risks for items, find and



■ ■ You learn enemy prioritisation, how to block, and when to roll ■ ■

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- + You always wanted a game to make you feel inadequate
- + Dropping frames sucks, but it's still better than being locked at 30 like on console
- + You want to see the words "You Died" in your dreams
- + You took the lyrics of Limp Bizkit's 'Rollin'' to heart

cherish a bonfire and if it comes to it, you learn the fastest route to the boss. Sprinting past enemies to a boss is one of the critical learning experiences in *Dark Souls*, part of your realisation that killing enemies just means more to lose when you die — a step towards accepting that you *will* die. After you've beaten the first boss, you're in — you possess all the tools required to beat the game. As a medieval fantasy RPG, you'll obviously acquire more tools as you go on — more swords, more staves and shields and bows and arrows — but all they do is make your life easier. Marginally easier.

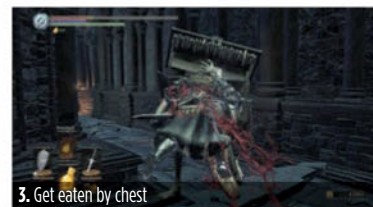
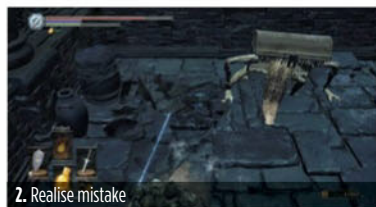
Dark Souls III is a descent into the depths of what the ever-evolving world

of *Lordran* has to offer, as you climb down from the High Walls of *Lothric* and into the graves which host kings passed. Each area confronts you with different challenges. A swamp slows your walking speed to a sluggish crawl. Catacombs reduce your visibility to mere metres. You inch across narrow rooftop pathways, struggle as knee high toxic sludge slowly kills you and startle as nearby objects grow ghostly arms to kill you.

And once you've waded through it all, you reach a boss who can kill you in two hits and you have to start back at the last checkpoint. On more than one occasion I managed to bumble my way into a boss fight I wasn't prepared for. When you know where a boss

SEQUENCE

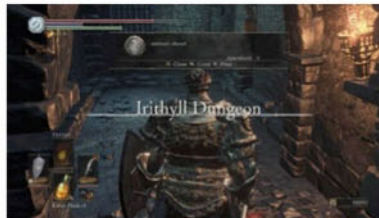
AMAZING CHEST AHEAD





THE BASICS

1. Your health bar. When you start, this will be much, much smaller.
2. Your stamina bar. The bigger this is, the more you can roll.
3. Your focus bar. Use this for weapon special moves, or to cast spells (if you want to take the easy path)
4. This is you. You're rolling because you're dodging a giant arrow.
5. Your right hand weapon. You use it for chopping
6. Your currently attuned spell. Anyone can use Pyromancy.
7. Your left hand weapon. In this case, a shield.



is, you ready for it. The moment you see the grey fog gate all Souls players recognise, you check if you've got enough Estus Flasks, you're wearing the right gear, if you're ok with the amount of Souls you're probably about to lose. If instead you walk up some stairs and find yourself up against a boss for the first time, none of that preparation is available. You panic because you only have one health-giving Estus Flask left, and you were wearing light armour so you could roll out of the way of a giant ballista's attacks, and your halberd is nearly broken and... and you probably die, because most bosses require you to learn their tricks before you can kill them. And it feels good when you beat that boss, because screw that thing, right? Controlling the panic and winning, that's what Dark Souls is about.

If you're expecting a complex and involved story, look elsewhere. What Souls fans love about the games is how little they show you up front. It doesn't tell you things, instead allowing you to work details out for yourself. It might seem like a copout, but it's a significant boon in a game which relies on you feeling uneasy and confused much of the time. What story there is, it's primarily for Souls fans. Large chunks of what occurs here leans heavily on having played the previous games, so if this is your first Souls game some nuance might elude you. The final boss though — if this is your first Souls game and you make it to the last boss, I strongly recommend going back and playing the first two games so you understand what's so special about one of the best bosses in a game ever.

I could go on and on about Dark Souls III. I feel like I've barely scratched the

surface. It's the sort of brilliant game which inspires unending, intricate analysis from captivated nerds. I'm definitely one of those nerds. If you haven't been able to get into a Souls game before, Dark Souls III is probably the best opportunity. If you've tried before and given up, it's worth trying again. And if you were already a fan, you already know it's going to be good. Just make sure your PC is up to scratch to compensate for the less-than-stellar port.

Dark Souls III is a game designed to push you to your limits and then force you to stay there while it throws more at you. When you finally succeed, you realise that you earned it. Nobody else earned it, just you. Sooner or later you'll be the guy in your group of friends proselytising, trying to make them see the game the way you do. One by one, we'll all convert to being Souls fans. **JOAB GILROY**

OR TRY THIS:



DARK SOULS FROMSOFTWARE, 2011

- ▲ The original
- ▼ The Bed of Chaos can suck the devil's dick



TITAN SOULS ACID NERVE, 2015

- ▲ Sorta like Dark Souls
- ▼ Not really like Dark Souls



DRAGON'S DOGMA: DARK ARISEN CAPCOM, 2015

- ▲ Brilliant Japanese take on Western RPGs
- ▼ Not Dark Souls III

VERDICT:

Not the best port, but not the worst either. The game, on the other hand, is one of the best you'll ever play.

9



DVD Contents

FREEDOM!

We had some people ask for more free games on the disk, and I think we can safely say that this month we have delivered, with 20 free games (and two demos). You should definitely be able to find something you like from the 20 game son offer - we've got everything. Strategy, adventure, action, visual novels, fighting and even poker. If you have any suggestions for other free games you'd like to see on the disk, send us an email or jump on the forums.

Enjoy.

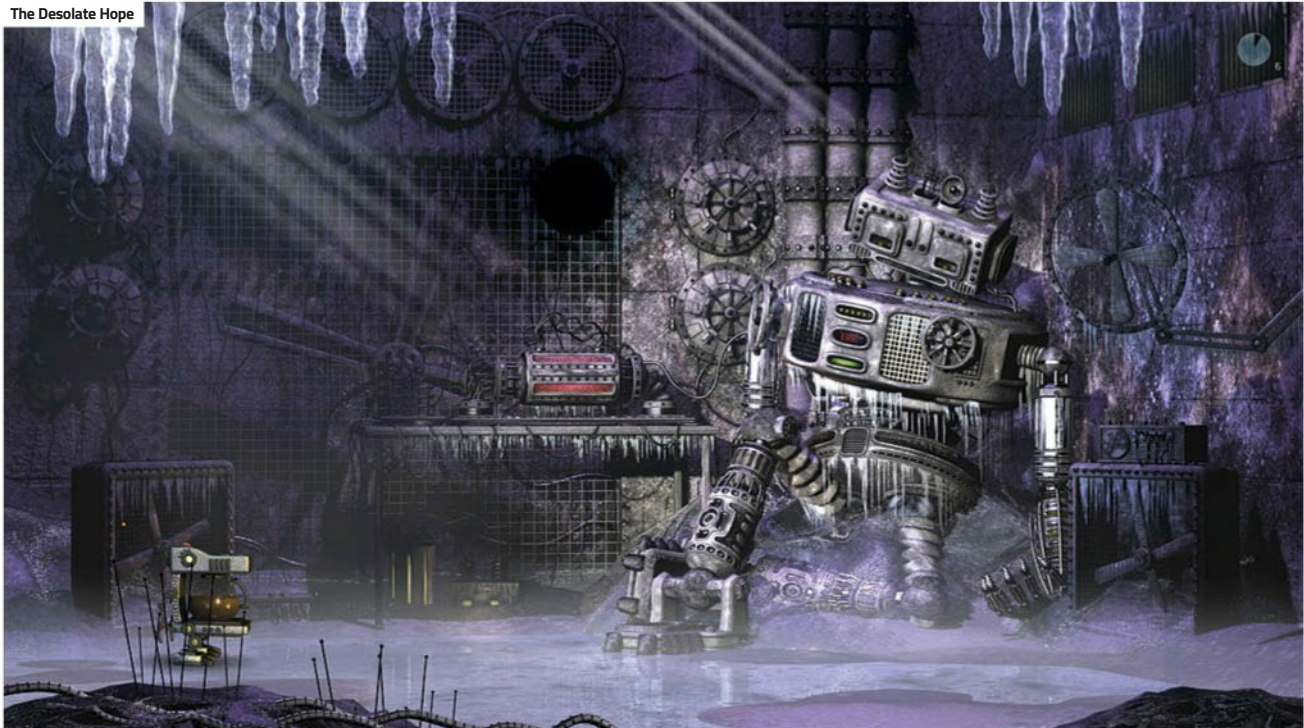
The PCPP Team.

22 FREE GAMES AND GAME DEMOS!

- Boring Man – Online Tactical Stickman Combat (Free Game)
- Cobalt (Demo)
- Cry of Fear (Free Game)
- CUPID (Free Game)
- Governor of Poker 3 (Free Game)
- Mainland (Free Game)
- Medusa's Labyrinth (Free Game)
- Mystic Destinies: Serendipity of Aeons (Free Game)
- Overload Playable Teaser (demo)
- Party Jousting (Free Game)
- Port of Call (Free Game)
- Pox Nora (Free Game)
- Saira (Free Game)
- Shadow Warrior Classic (Free Game)
- Star Realms (Free Game)
- The Bottom of the Well (Free Game)
- The Cat and the Coup (Free Game)
- The Desolate Hope (Free Game)
- The Guest (Demo)
- The Sad Story of Emmeline Burns (Free Game)
- The static speaks my name (free game)
- Who Is Mike (Free Game)
- Written in the Sky (Free Game)



The Desolate Hope



Installation instructions included on the disc. Browse the disc and launch **index.html** for more.

USING THE DVDS

PC PowerPlay DVDs are suitable for use in almost any computer but the software contained on the medium is for Windows operating systems only. Because each PC is different, PC PowerPlay and Next Media cannot guarantee the DVDs will operate as expected on every system, despite strict adherence to Windows compatibility.

LOADING

The DVDs are set to autostart. On insertion it will load the DVD's Terms and Conditions of Use disclaimer in your default Web browser. If the DVD failed to autostart, you can load the menu manually by running the file in the root directory using Windows Explorer.

VIRUSES

These DVDs are rigorously checked for viruses during production, however, PC PowerPlay can make no guarantees to this end. Next Media always recommends that the DVDs be scanned using your own anti-virus software on first and subsequent uses.

INSTALLING SOFTWARE

Simply click the install/download link under a file's description to launch the installation program. please ensure that all other programs are closed and that any anti-virus software is disabled before performing a software installation. Due to STEAM region locking, not all content may be available toutside Australia.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

PC PowerPlay assumes the end-user of these DVDs has the necessary computer knowledge required to operate and install software from this product, and cannot provide technical support either for this or for any of the software contained on this disc.

DVD REPLACEMENTS

PC PowerPlay can only replace DVDs that were damaged or faulty at the time of purchase. If you think a DVD fits into one of these categories then please contact the DVD Producer immediately to assess whether a replacement needs to be sent out. email: dwilks@nextmedia.com.au

© nextmedia

PC PowerPlay

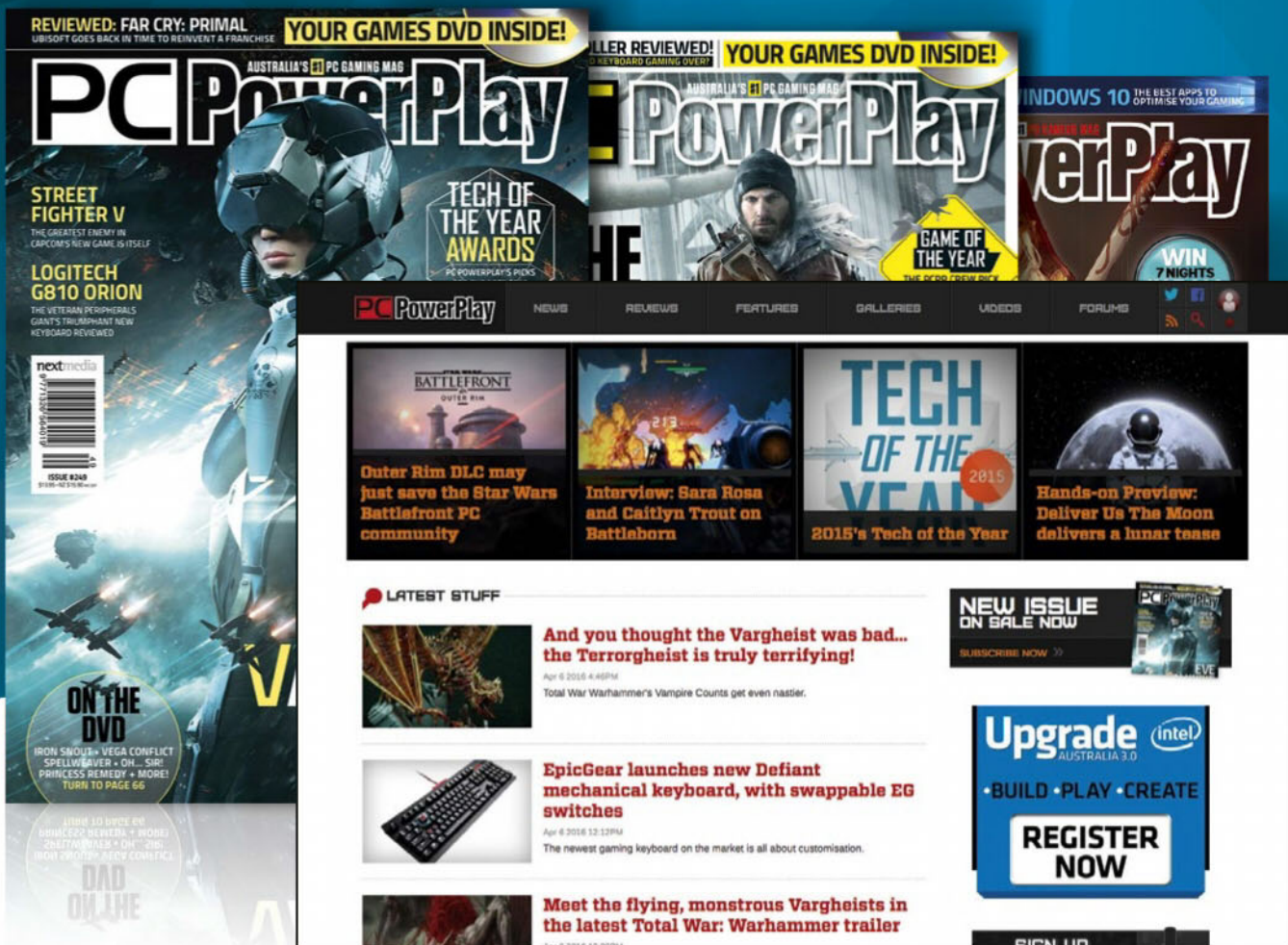
AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG

Want more gaming news?

Want to browse classic articles, the latest trailers, and more? Fancy a little bit of socialising?

HEAD TO

WWW.PCPOWERPLAY.COM.AU



If you want daily news and reviews about the best of PC gaming, point your browser our way, read some stories, and sign up for the forums to hang out with like minded gamers.

Battlefleet Gothic Armada

There's space orks off the starboard bow

DEVELOPER TINDALOS INTERACTIVE
 PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE
 PRICE \$US39.99
 AVAILABLE AT STEAM
www.battlefleetgothic-armada.com

There's a lot to like about Battlefleet Gothic: Armada – but it is far from perfect, both as a standalone game and as a recreation of the tabletop experience. For a start, the voice work is more than a little forced, and the scale of the game seems to be rather ill fitting for the game's grand presence. The campaign opens with you as a single ship captain, but the threat of a massive Chaos invasion sees you promoted to Admiral and given a fleet. Only, it's a tiny fleet, facing tiny opponents. The game obviously wants growth to be organic, but it does feel at odds with the story.

The fleet management is fun, regardless. Your ships level up, unlocking new skills, equipment, and more, allowing you to tailor individual ships to your own desire. You can come up with some nice combos, too. I equipped one ship with a shield-stripping bomb ability, and then focused on my other ships' ability to directly damage hulls. Outside of direct fire and movement, you can employ individual skills to change up your ships' abilities – you can Lock On for more effective shooting, or Brace for Impact to mitigate incoming damage, for instance.

You can set various behavioural parameters for your ships, too, though this doesn't always play out perfectly. In some cases, you can simply tell a ship to focus on broadside attacks, and from a certain distance, and let it manoeuvre independently, but a lot of time you still need to micromanage each ship, which can make the game rather hectic. Thankfully, you can slow the game down significantly which not only gives you more time for aforesaid



■ The trouble with the game however is in how samey a lot of the battles can be ■

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You live for a good broadside

+ You hate the xenos

+ Ships with tentacles are cool

management – and ship movement, with a thruster management mechanic for hard turns and burns is particularly challenging – but also lets you see more of the pretty ship-to-ship action.

You play as the Imperial faction in the campaign, but each of the game's factions are available in skirmish or multiplayer play. The Imperials are kind of classic, focusing on heavy broadsides. Orks are crazy fast and love to ram and then board your ships, while Eldar a flighty and delicately agile. Chaos kind of plays a lot like a combination between Orks and Imps, but overall it's a good mix of playstyles. Fighting Orks as Imperials feels particularly flavoursome, as ramming Orks charge into your fleet and you

struggle to turn away and open up your broadsides.

The trouble with the game however is in how samey a lot of the battles can be, especially at the start of the game.

From one angle, I seem to be genetically predisposed to Games Workshop's venerable grimdark setting, so taking the action into space, aboard kilometre long space cathedrals bristling with weapons is bit of a gimme. Other dedicated fans will likely lap it up, but I'm not sure it's going to have much appeal outside of the GW gaming fraternity. Which is not necessarily a bad thing – though getting a perfect torpedo run really is a thing of beauty that anyone can enjoy.

DAVID HOLLINGWORTH PC

OR TRY THIS:



DAWN OF WAR II RELIC 2009

▲ MOAR 40k ACTION
 ▼ Not exactly giant ships in space



PACIFIC STORM ALLIES LESTA STUDIO 2007

▲ Historical naval action
 ▼ A touch buggy



WORLD OF WARSHIPS WARGAMING 2015

▲ Pure shiphandling action
 ▼ No Orks

VERDICT:

At times too slavish a recreation of tabletop action, Armada is nonetheless entertaining and challenging.

7

Need for Speed

In the grim darkness of the near future, there is only [*fistbump*]

DEVELOPER GHOST GAMES
PUBLISHER EA
PRICE \$89.99
AVAILABLE AT ORIGIN
needforspeed.com

INTERIOR, AFTERNOON: The funky offices of Ghost Games. The team is relaxing, chatting, basking in the critical and commercial success of 2013's *Need for Speed: Rivals* and its many awesome DLC packs and cool cars. The team agrees there is nothing better than chasing down a Pagani Huayra in a cop-liveried Lamborghini Sesto Elemento and hitting the perp with a shock ram and a few EMP blasts. Beer tops are twisted off. Life is good. **ENTER a HARRIED LOOKING EXECUTIVE.**

EXECUTIVE: What the hell are you guys doing? Need for Speed guys, the game is due! You're sitting here drinking beer and the game is due!

GUYS: What are you talking about? The game is out, everyone loves it.

EXECUTIVE: What? Not THAT Need for Speed! I'm not talking about Need for Speed: Rivals, I'm talking about Need for Speed! The edgy street scene disruptive viral YouTube underground custom decal revolution in persistent world racing! **ILLEGAL** persistent world racing where it's always 2230h and raining, and volumetric fog and ambient occlusion effects take precedence over, you know, gameplay and framerates!

The **GUYS** look afraid. They rush to their computers and realise that yes indeed they are supposed to shit out another *Need for Speed*, right now, and it has to feature online celebrities like Magnus Walker (custom 911s), Ken Block (cool tricks in a rally car).

GUYS: We're doomed! **DOOMED!**

Fortunately the **GUYS** discover a whole bunch of pre-production material that a team they didn't even know existed has been working on for the last year or so. Because the second team is deeply unhip, it has a lot of FMV where **CHARACTERS**

These cars are powered by Bro-Fist technology and AXE body spray



people want ordinary cars in a realistic world doing crazy stuff so they can earn FIST BUMPS

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You hate expensive, cool, exotic cars

+ Funk Da Police in your dad's BMW M3

+ FISTBUMP my FISTBUMP

+ You love the smell of a \$450 nitrous system in the evening

continually **FIST BUMP** the **EDGY PROTAGONIST**. The **GUYS** get to work and soon enough **NEED FOR SPEED** is ready.

EXECUTIVE: Great! Gamers have been calling for disruption in the racing scene and a return to the **UNDERGROUND FEEL** of *Need for Speed Underground* because people prefer it when their first car is a \$40,000 Toyota 86 instead of a Porsche Cayman S. No seriously, people want ordinary cars in a realistic world doing crazy stuff so they can earn **FIST BUMPS** from disruptive viral celebrities. Let me have a go. Oh the framerate is really choppy, why are we running this on a crap machine? It's a GeForce 980? Really? Well **NVIDIA**

will probably make better drivers soon. Wow, this game looks WAY better than *Need for Speed: Rivals*. I mean, not in any geometric detail sense but there are WAY more volumetric lighting effects and... oh wow, it was just getting to dawn and now it's snapped back to midnight, is this a Dark City thing? Did you guys get Alex Proyas to direct this? I hope he wasn't too expensive.

The **GUYS** leave the **HARRIED LOOKING EXECUTIVE** to play, start uploading the **GOLD CODE** to **EA ORIGIN** and slink out of the offices, no doubt hoping that *Need for Speed* will be forgotten and everyone will go back *Rivals* which is an **ORDER OF MAGNITUDE** more fun and only \$20, seriously. **ANTHONY FORDHAM PC**

OR TRY THIS:



NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS 2013, GHOST

- ▲ Cool cars, EMP blasts, \$20
- ▼ No fistbumps



BEAM.NG DRIVE 2015, BEAMNG

- ▲ Soft-skin physics, epic crashes
- ▼ Hard, still early access



NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED 2000, EDEN

- ▲ So much Porsche, unleashed!
- ▼ So little not-Porsche

VERDICT:

Yeah it looks amazing but [*FISTBUMPS*] do not a good racing game make

5

UPGRADE TO CORSAIR INNOVATION

Out of the box thinking

CORSAIR BULLDOG

Bulldog combines the efforts of Corsair's class-leading cooling, chassis, and PSU technology to produce the ultimate small form factor barebones kit for 4K gaming. It includes the Hydro Series H5 SF liquid CPU cooler and the SF600 80 Plus Gold-rated power supply wrapped in a stylish chassis capable of supporting any mini-ITX motherboard and an additional 120mm radiator.

With liquid cooling support for the graphics card and the CPU, Bulldog lets you bring 4K gaming performance into any room in your home and then overclock, taking users beyond the limits of out-of-the-box performance – all without increasing noise or overheating.



CARBIDE SPEC-ALPHA

The Carbide SPEC-ALPHA's bold, angular looks and direct airflow path cooling are just begging for you to build your next gaming rig. A gorgeous, oversized window shows off the roomy interior, and the three included 120mm fans can be easily controlled with the three-speed switch on the front panel.

The SPEC-ALPHA isn't just another case, it's got a great internal design that eschews the legacy 5.25" drive cages completely for better cooling, but still has plenty of drive capacity, with room for up to three 3.5" drives and four 2.5" drives, as well as front panel USB 3.0 support.



UPGRADE AUSTRALIA IS COMING TO MELBOURNE BUILD. PLAY. CREATE

APRIL 13TH AT MONASH UNIVERSITY, CAULFIELD CAMPUS

BUILD

- Witness the newest PC hardware in action
- Get hands-on with a huge range of PC gear
- Speedbuilding returns!

PLAY

- The hottest new competitive games
- Play solo or against Australia's hottest Pro teams... and watch them annihilate each other
- Play better with exclusive tips from the pros

CREATE

- Learn how to use your PC as a powerful creative tool

PLUS! WIN COOL PRIZES AND SCORE SWEET FREEBIES

Note Upgrade Australia is an over-18s event

▪ Images on this page show previous Upgrade Australia events, and are not necessarily indicative of what we have in store for you at the Melbourne Upgrade Australia event.

Visit www.pcauthority.com.au/UpgradeAustralia

for more information, and stay tuned for when registrations opens

WHY CHOOSE AN INTEL XEON PROCESSOR?

Choosing the right processor for your workstation is an important consideration. What advantages do Intel Xeon processors have over Desktop CPUs?

Wondering whether a Xeon-based workstation could be right for your needs? We spoke with Graham Tucker, the ANZ Technical Manager at Intel to get his thoughts.

WHEN SHOULD I CONSIDER A XEON PROCESSOR?

"Xeon processors are targeted at professional users, particularly people like architects, graphic artists, photographers and video editors. Any professional who depends on applications that require high reliability and performance will benefit from a Xeon-based workstation.

"If you compare Xeon processors with desktop Core i7 processors, the Xeon has

more cores and can address more memory. Some applications can take advantage of more cores and memory, others cannot. Some examples of applications that benefit from the features of Xeon processors are CAD, photo and video processing applications. Even small businesses that operate with large inventories and data sets can benefit from using a Xeon processor.

"Consider reliability. For example, if an architect or a graphic designer loses a day's work through a hardware failure, the cost would be considerable. Whenever you're using a lot of memory, the chances of failure are higher. One of the key features a Xeon processor has over a Core i7 is ECC (Error-Correcting Code) memory. ECC memory enables better data integrity and system reliability through the correction of memory bit failures."

HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT XEON FOR ME?

"There is a larger range of Xeon processors than Core desktop processors. Xeon processors have up to 18 cores (some with hyperthreading) and up to 45MB of last level cache. Not all Xeons are supported by specific Xeon workstation board and system designs. If you are building your own workstation, it is advisable to check the manufacturers tested and supported list."



WHEN MIGHT A PC ENTHUSIAST USE A XEON-BASED SYSTEM?

"Putting aside the business uses, any PC enthusiast who does a lot of multitasking could benefit from the many cores of Xeon. For example, if you're multitasking using many high performance applications simultaneously, then you may utilise more cores of the Xeon processor.

"Similarly, anyone who makes use of virtualisation capabilities, such as for software development or sandboxing, will also benefit from more memory and cores. Typically Xeon will support multiple CPUs better than Core i7 desktop processors."

WILL A XEON-BASED SYSTEM BE ENERGY EFFICIENT?

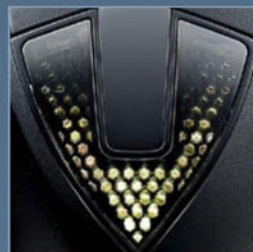
"The energy efficiency of the Xeon processor range is comparable to the Core i7. The difference is a Xeon-based system may give you the same performance as two desktop computers if you could consolidate the additional applications supported by Xeon."



GRAHAM WILL DELIVER A KEYNOTE SPEECH AT THE UPGRADE AUSTRALIA EVENT IN MELBOURNE ON APRIL 13TH!

Tech 250

YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMING HARDWARE



THROUGH THE RIFT

Time flies when you're stuck in VR

It's hard to believe that I first got eyes-on with the Rift Developer's Kit 1 in March of 2013, as it seems like only yesterday. With a resolution of just 640 x 800 per eye, playing the earliest demos was a blurry, pixilated mess, and yet it was enough of a leap forwards compared to previous Virtual Reality products that I knew Oculus was onto something.

Three years later and I'm lucky enough to be the first Aussie journalist to be sent the Rift Consumer Version 1, and I'm happy to report that this piece of hardware has come a very, very long way in that time. You can read my full thoughts in the VR review, but make no bones about it, I think VR is going to absolutely revolutionise gaming. Once you've been inside a game world, totally surrounded by the virtual environment in full 3D, it's hard to go back to our boring 2D screens. And this is coming from somebody whose boring screen is delivered across a 2-metre HD screen.

There are still a few niggling issues with VR that need to be solved – specifically resolution, in-game locomotion methods that doesn't cause nausea, and a few image problems caused by the special lenses – but we should remember that this is day one of Virtual Reality. After a false start in the early 90s, the technology necessary to deliver working, comfortable, and downright enjoyable VR is finally here. I think it's going to take another few years at least before it becomes the dominant form of interacting with our virtual worlds, but I think that the switch from 2D screens to VR is as inevitable as the move from 2D to 3D was in gaming. As a PC Gamer, you're much more likely to become an early adopter of this technology, and I hope you enjoy it just as much as I do. If you're lucky enough to have a Rift on the way, I'd love to hear your thoughts on the hardware, so sound off in the forums when yours arrives.

Bennett Ring
Tech Editor



Our Power Award is given to products that are best in class no matter your budget.



Our Smart Buy Award goes to products that balance performance with price tag.

Contents

- 73** Galax GTX 970 Black
- 74** Acer Predator G3 710
- 76** Asus PG348Q Monitor
- 77** Billion BiPac 8900AX-2400
- 78** Oculus Rift
- 82** Oculus Rift Games
- 84** MoS Audio S Plus Speaker
- 84** Kingston KC400 1TB SSD
- 85** OCZ Trion 150 480GB SSD
- 85** CoolerMaster Sentinel III

THE PCPP TESTBENCH

CPU
INTEL I7 3770K
www.intel.com.au



MOBO
GIGABYTE Z77X-UD3H
www.gigabyte.com.au



SSD
CORSAIR NEUTRON
www.corsair.com



RAM
8GB PATRIOT DDR3 2,133MHz
www.patriotmemory.com



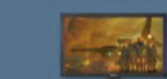
GPU
RADEON HD 7970
www.amd.com



PSU
CORSAIR AX860I
www.corsair.com



DISPLAY
DELL U2711
www.dell.com.au





VIDEOCARD

Galax GeForce GTX 970 Black EXOC Sniper Edition

Long name, big value

PRICE \$499
www.galax.net

I'm going to let you in on a little secret. When I'm buying a new graphics card for my PC and know which GPU to go for, two things are of importance – fan noise and price. I hate graphics cards that sound like I'm blow-drying my hair whenever I fire up Battlefield, but I also hate paying \$100 more for a premium branded card that performs basically identically to a budget-model. In the past Galax had a reputation for bargain-basement prices, yet its new version of the GTX 970 isn't quite as cheap as expected, with the most affordable GTX 970 being a Gainward offering starting at \$469, while the most expensive 970 is MSI's version at \$589. So what do you get for your money?

Obviously this card is built around Nvidia's excellent GeForce GTX 970 chipset, which is one of my favourites for balancing price and performance. As a quick refresher, this comes with 1664 CUDA cores, 104 Texture Units and 56 ROPs. The standard version has a base clock speed of 1050MHz which boosts up to 1178MHz when under pressure, but Galax has fiddled with these – more in a minute. 4GB of onboard memory is piped over a nice, chunky 256-bit memory bus, with the

default speed being 7GHz. Total TDP is 145W, meaning that it doesn't require liquid nitrogen to keep chilly. This probably explains why the cooler is relatively silent, measuring 44dB under load, which is towards the low end of the spectrum.

Galax has stuck with the default output configuration of HDMI 2.0, DisplayPort 1.2, and dual DVI-I/DVI-D connections. The custom cooler looks very similar to those found on Gigabyte's Windforce 970s, with twin 80mm fans. I was pleasantly surprised to see the inclusion of an aluminium backplate, and the main cooler shroud is made from the same material. This is a nice step up from the plastic jobbies found on the cheapest GTX 970s.

The EXOC in the name refers to Extreme Overclocking, and Galax has managed to bump the Boost speed up to 1317MHz, a tidy 12% boost over the default value. A 5 + 2 phase power system is a decent step up from the standard, and the power is fed via one 8-pin and one 6-pin plug. Galax claims this means the card can receive up to 50% more power for overclocking, but you'll need to mod it to do so, otherwise you're stuck with the same piddly limit as other GTX 970s.

Galax has managed to bump the Boost speed up to 1317MHz, a tidy 12% boost over the default value

With the v-core maxed out, we managed to hit a stable Boost speed of 1395MHz, while the memory speed was increased from 7GHz to 7.7GHz. This equates roughly to a 15% performance increase over a stock-standard GTX 970. Considering the excellent price point, this handy little overclock combined with an excellent cooler makes this one of the better GTX 970s on the market. *BENNETT RING*

- Solid overclocker
- Excellent, quiet cooler
- Aluminium shroud and backplate
- Low voltage increase unless modded
- No advanced overclocking features
- No bundled games

VERDICT:

It mightn't be quite the cheapest GTX 970 around, but the slight price rise is easy to justify.

9



GAMING PC

Acer Predator G3 710 Gaming Tower

So close, and yet so far

PRICE \$2400
www.acer.com.au

Buying a pre-built gaming PC from a mass-manufacturer like Acer brings a few key benefits with it. For starters, you won't need to shed any blood inside the case when you're trying to bung your graphics card under the drive cages. Secondly, if anything goes wrong you can rest assured that your machine will be collected, repaired and returned in a minimal amount of time. Finally, it's pretty safe to say that all of the components within have been stress-tested with each other, avoiding the rare bugs that sometimes crop up between components. On the flipside, you're going to have to pay a rather higher price tag than doing it yourself, and you also won't learn anything about building or troubleshooting your PC. With Acer's new Predator series hitting Aussie shores, I was keen to see just how this fabled maker of laptops and office machines would manage the distinct requirements of a gaming box. Not too well it would appear.

The designers behind the case of the Predator are obviously of the "more is more" school of design. Rather than the slick, subtle monoliths certain older gamers favour, Acer's design team has gone for a very aggressive, armour-like finish to the front fascia. Some will love it, others will loathe it, but one thing nobody can deny is that the plastic finish feels cheapish for a machine at this price point. Tucked away behind one of the flaps is a hidden optical drive, while a card reader resides slightly below. There's also the usual twin USB 3.0 ports, alongside a headphone and microphone port.

Heading to the rear reveals a relatively Spartan butt. Both onboard HDMI and DisplayPort outputs are there if you want to pipe video directly from the Intel CPU, along with four more USB 3.0 and twin USB 2.0 ports. A single Gigabit Ethernet connector is included, but there's also built-in 802.11ac Wi-Fi

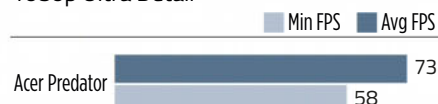
■ The first alarming sight on the rear are the audio connections – there are a mere three in total ■

if you'd prefer wireless, though there's no mention of whether it's a 2x2 or 3x3 card – we're guessing the former.

The first alarming sight on the rear are the audio connections – there are a mere three in total. Microphone, and two stereo outputs means you're going to be limited to a quadrophonic speaker setup unless you have an AV receiver with HDMI. There's not even S/PDIF, which is mandatory on most gaming motherboards. The only other outputs are delivered courtesy of the graphics card, with twin DVI-D/DVI-I, HDMI 2.0 and a single DisplayPort 1.2. We won't spoil the surprise of just which video card it is yet...

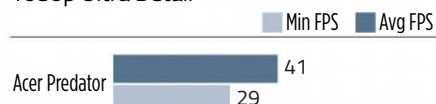
GRID AUTOSPORT Benchmarks

1080p Ultra Detail



SHADOW OF MORDOR Benchmarks

1080p Ultra Detail



3DMARK Firestrike Ultra





Removing the side of the case reveals that apart from the front it's constructed from steel, but the interior could only be described as functional. Case modders will not be impressed at all. While the cables are neatly tied, there's nowhere to hide them, as the motherboard isn't mounted on a removable tray. Just one spare 3.5 inch drive bay is available in case you'd like to upgrade the included storage. A mere two PCIe x1 expansion slots remain empty for any extras you'd like to add, so there's no chance of converting this into an SLI or CrossFire powered beast.

One of the cheapest heatsink/fans we've seen in recent memory resides over the CPU, an Intel Core i7-6700. It's actually a darn good processor for games, with all four cores featuring HyperThreading, and a maximum Turbo speed of 4GHz. Don't even think about overclocking it though, as the included BIOS has no options to do so, even if that piddly fan was capable. Still, at 4GHz this thing is more than powerful enough for today's best games, and the fan seems to do a fine job, keeping the machine silent while under load.

The inclusion of 16GB of GDDR4 2133MHz is quite generous at this price point, but we kind of wish they'd

halved this and used the money on the GPU instead. Internal storage is also respectable, with a very speedy 128GB M.2 SSD alongside a meaty 1TB mechanical hard drive spinning by at the brisk pace of 7200RPM. And then we get to the graphics card... if you could call it that. It's more of a silicon abacus that would be more at home in a budget gaming laptop.

Acer has decked out this \$2400 machine with the lowest card in NVIDIA's existing GeForce 900 series, a lowly GTX 950. This has a mere 768 CUDA Cores, 48 Texture Units and 32 ROPs. This makes it about half as powerful as a GTX 970 GPU, which can be purchased for around \$470, likely much cheaper when companies like Acer buy in bulk. The boost speed of 1188MHz isn't too shabby, but it's the lack of transistors elsewhere that bogs this GPU down. It's also only equipped with a mere 2GB of GDDR5 memory, so you can forget about running anything with ultra-high resolution textures.

As a result of this budget-GPU, the entire performance of the G3 710 is dragged down by this single choice, as you can see from our benchmark results. It seems there is an overseas version of this machine with a GTX 970 instead, which only costs US\$1499, which is even more galling.

We're not quite sure why Aussies are expected to pay so much more for the entry-level Predator G3, but that's just the way it stands. Considering it's possible to build a similarly specced system for around \$1500, paying an extra grand just for the reassurance of an Acer warranty and build-quality simply isn't worth it. **BENNETT RING** 🇬🇧

- Excellent gaming GPU
- Speedy M.2 SSD
- Large 1TB HDD

- Terrible GPU
- Very limited expandability

VERDICT:

Acer has forgotten that a gaming machine needs a decent CPU and GPU to build a truly-game ready machine.

5



MONITOR

ASUS PG348Q monitor

The king of all gaming displays

PRICE \$1999
www.asus.com.au

The era of the premium of gaming display has finally come of age. We've always had a small niche of PC screens targeted at gamers, but nothing like the huge range available today. Leading the charge for screens aimed squarely at gamer's retinas is Asus, and the new PG348Q looks set to topple all pretenders.

Yes, \$2000 is a hell of a lot for a display, but you're getting a hell of a lot for your money. The sheer dimensions alone are huge, measuring a horizon-spanning 34 inches across the diagonal. It's one of these new-fangled Ultra-Wide screens, which means it has a 21:9 aspect ratio and a resolution of 3440 x 1440. In the past this would have caused issues for gamers; as we sit so close to the screen, the outer edges of the display would show colour and brightness shift. The PG348Q solves this in two ways, starting with an ever-so-slight curve. It's barely noticeable to be honest, but the second solution to the problem eliminates it entirely – the use of an IPS panel. These have a huge 178 degree viewing angle, much wider than that of TN panels, so there's no colour or brightness issues when you look towards the edge.

IPS panels are generally limited to 60Hz, but once again Asus has managed to blow this refresh rate out of the water. An overclocking button bumps it up to 100Hz, more than enough to make your games flow like liquid mercury. As if that wasn't good enough, it's also a G-Sync panel, so you can run it at a wide variety of framerates with nary a stutter or screen tear. Note that you'll need a GeForce GTX 980 Ti or above to overclock the refresh rate to 100Hz, which is a rather interesting limitation that might deter some. Though if you're spending \$2k on a display, you've probably already got three of these suckers in your PC.

The physical design of this display is absolutely stunning, from the edgeless screen design to the ultra-modern stand. Both HDMI and DisplayPort are included, along with four USB 3.0 ports. Asus claims a response time of 5ms, and we couldn't find a hint of motion blur even when playing the fastest of games, such as Quake Live.

We used a colorimeter to measure some of this screen's vital specs, and found that the contrast ratio wasn't quite as high as advertised, hitting 665:1, whereas Asus claims it's 1000:1. Having said that, in-game we didn't notice any overly harsh contrast

Yes, \$2000 is a hell of a lot for a display, but you're getting a hell of a lot for your money

problems. Colour calibration required a little tweaking of the monitor's profile to get it to almost perfect results, but even at default it looked better than most TN panels, a benefit of the beauties of IPS.

This display is well out of the price range of most gamers, but if you've got the cash to spend and want the best-in-class gaming display on the market, we'd have to give the PG348Q two thumbs up, bearing in mind the limitation of using it with a GTX 980 Ti. Now if only Asus could somehow make it compatible with AMD's Free-Sync technology as well, it'd be absolutely perfect. **BENNETT RING**

- Immaculate image quality
- Huge crystal clear screen
- Stunning design
- Requires colour calibration
- No DisplayPort 1.2a

VERDICT:

Say hello to the king of premium gaming displays.

9



ROUTER

Billion BiPac 8900AX-2400

Leave it to the pros

PRICE \$399
www.firstint.com.au

If setting up your home network means running your router's inbuilt wizard, switching on both the W-Fi networks and setting up their security passwords, this is not the router for you. It's brilliant value, it's feature-packed, and it's speedy... but it's also a typical Billion product. In other words, you need to know what you're doing to get the most out of it.

Billion rates this as a 2400Mbps router, but as usual this isn't the throughput available to a single device. Instead 600Mbps is delivered via the 2.4GHz network, while another 1800Mbps is pumped over the 5GHz channel, using a 4x4 transmitter/receiver configuration. This makes it a dual-band router, not quite in the same speed league as some of the tri-band routers we've seen of late, which offer dual 5GHz channels. Still, there's enough potential bandwidth here to keep most households happy.

Four large moveable antennae surround the unit, and we'd suggest toying with their position to get the best reception depending on where your devices are located. It's not the sexiest router on the market, that's for sure, but Billion doesn't waste precious dollars on cases that look like they belong in a

modern art gallery. Four Ethernet ports on the rear are pretty standard, but the fact that three of them can operate as WAN ports is not. This means you can connect multiple broadband connections if reliability is of utmost importance; if one fails, the router will automatically fallback onto the next connection. A built-in VDSL2/ADSL2+ modem is included, which is nice at this price point.

The single USB port is limited to 2.0 speeds, which is a bit of a shame if you're considering hooking up an external drive to turn this into a limited NAS or file server. However, a nice touch is the ability to plug in a 3G/4G LTE modem to this port; by doing so, you can take this router anywhere that has mobile reception. It's also another way to ensure redundancy in case your ADSL line goes down.

Heading into the Billion interface revealed what we'd feared – it's the usual plethora of options that will befuddle all but the most experienced network builder. There is a very simple setup wizard to get it up and running, but even activating each Wi-Fi network involves several settings that most users won't be familiar with. Ditto with the Quality of Service section, which allows the router to give priority to

certain devices on the network. While the intimidating interface will be a negative for novices, those who know what they're doing will love it, offering a level of customisation that most consumer routers lack.

As for speed, we managed to obtain 678Mbps at a range of approximately ten metres on the 5GHz channel, which is around 90Mbps slower than the best routers we've tested. Having said that, we didn't toy with the more advanced Wi-Fi options, so are sure experienced users will be able to squeeze out more speed.

There's no denying that this speedy unit is excellent value, and the exceptional range of options will keep network nerds happy. However, if you're looking for a simple plug and play router, this probably isn't the best option for you. **BENNETT RING PC**

- Excellent performance
- Huge range of customisation options
- Great value for money
- Not quite as fast as the best
- Very intimidating interface

VERDICT:

Offering excellent performance and value, we only wish Billion could come up with a more user-friendly interface for network novices.

8

VR HEADSET

Oculus Rift Consumer Version 1

The future's so bright I gotta wear these...shades?

PRICE \$599 USD
www.oculus.com

I have waited 25 long years for this day to arrive. From the first clumsy attempt at Virtual Reality (VR) I experienced when playing the terrible Dactyl Nightmare back in 1991, I've known that VR had the potential to revolutionise the way we game, educate, interact and imagine. Sure, I may have needed to vomit immediately afterwards thanks to the chug-tastic framerates and huge delay between head movement and screen update, but it was a tiny, tentative taste of what was to come. Little did I realise that it would take so long for the world's first consumer VR headset that didn't suck to arrive. But arrive it has, in the form of the Oculus Rift Consumer Version 1 (CV1). We finally have VR that is affordable and that works... though it's not without issues.

A SMALL PRICE TO PAY

Despite the founder of Oculus, Palmer Luckey, promising a cheap VR headset, the launch price of US\$599 took many by surprise. His explanation was that he'd rather go for quality than rock-bottom pricing; launch a dud VR product and consumers would be turned off for another decade. Throw in taxes, shipping and the anaemic Aussie dollar, and the final price for Australians is AU\$1150. For most mainstream gamers this is outlandish, but PC gamers are accustomed to spending \$1000 on a GPU alone. There's also the fact that you need a decent gaming PC to use the Rift, another stumbling block for the masses. Yet many PC gamers already have a Rift-ready box, which requires an Nvidia GTX 970 / AMD R9 290 GPU or greater, 8GB of memory, an Intel i5-4590 equivalent or greater, along with three USB 3.0 ports. I did my testing on a heftier system packing an i5 6600K overclocked to 4.5GHz, along with twin GTX 980 Ti GPUs, but apparently this is overkill. From what I've seen on the Oculus

forums, the minimum spec is fine for running nearly all of the Rift launch titles at the 90 frames per second required to keep motion sickness at bay. So, what do you get for your AU\$1150?

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

The entire kit is enclosed in a slick box that Apple would be proud of, though Oculus has gone for a black look rather than white. Opening the magnetic flap reveals several key components. Obviously there's the Rift Head Mounted Display (HMD), along with the motion tracker on a small stand approximately 20cm in length. The camera on the top of this rotates to ensure the user is sitting or standing

■ Throw in taxes, shipping and the anaemic Aussie dollar, and the final price for Australians is AU\$1150 ■

in the sweet spot. There's also the Oculus remote, a very small controller with just a few buttons, designed for less complex VR experiences. Finally, there's an Xbox One controller with wireless dongle, required for the more intense games. Unfortunately there's one major piece of the VR puzzle missing – the Oculus Touch controllers. Operating similarly to a Wiimote or Playstation Move controller but with much finer accuracy, these have been delayed until the second half of 2016 at an undisclosed price. After spending extensive time with the HTC Vive prototype, which does include two motion wands, the lack of the Touch controllers is a huge disappointment. Being inside a virtual world is one

thing; being able to interact with it via hand and arm movements is something else entirely.

The setup procedure for the first two Rift Development Kits wasn't exactly impressive, but it was aimed at developers, not consumers. Thankfully the new Oculus installation procedure is much simpler, leading users through each step of the process with videos and animations, all wrapped in a gorgeous interface. After downloading 800MB or so of software, I had the kit up and running perfectly, and it was already calibrated during the setup process. Trembling with anticipation, it was time to put the Rift through its paces.

TRANSPORTED TO ANOTHER WORLD

The HMD comes with three separate straps to adjust the fit, one on each side, as well as the top support. Unlike earlier kits, I had it perfectly mounted over my glasses within seconds – it simply fits *so much better* than the dev kits. This is crucial, as there's quite a small sweet spot with the positioning of the HMD, and missing this leads to a very blurry image. However, once it's in place, it stays in place thanks to the excellent fit. Weighing a mere 470 grams, the HMD is extremely light, and I didn't notice any neck pain even after playing continuously for several hours. The CV1 has also cured the problem of the lenses fogging up, with a foam seal around the edge of the unit that keeps your moist, stinky breath away from the screen.



Unlike the HTC Vive, the Rift comes with stereo headphones, which fold up when putting on the Rift. The sound offered by these is surprisingly good, enough so that I didn't feel the need to use my Audio Technica cans. It would be easy to do so though, as the integrated headphones are removable courtesy of a plastic tool included in the kit. The headphones are surprisingly clear at higher volumes, and include virtual surround sound to enhance the feeling that you're actually in the game. While this virtual surround isn't quite as good as a true, discrete 5.1 sound system, it's up there with the likes of Dolby Headphone when faking it.

Each of the side-straps is attached to a mechanism that detects when the HMD is in place, which in turn automatically fires up the Oculus application, and the front-end of this is called Home. It's an apt name, as the virtual environment is an ultra-modern mansion, complete with designer artwork and a crackling fireplace. Hovering before my eyes was my Rift library, stocked with over 30 titles, an impressive figure considering this is the launch of an entirely new platform. Many of these are only five minute demos and animations, but there's also quite a healthy range of real games.

Looking around Home, the first thing to impress me was how responsive and accurate the tracking is – it's come a long, long way from the DK1. No matter how quickly I moved my head, the screen followed my movements perfectly, and the addition of IR emitters



on the rear HMD straps means it's possible to turn 360 degrees without losing tracking. It's super smooth and responsive, with no detectable latency whatsoever. While many of the demos and games suggest standing up while using them, I found the seated position to work best, as there's far less chance of getting tangled in the HMD's cable. I think this will be a real issue for the HTC Vive, as you'll tie yourself up in no time when walking around your living room.

The first dev kits suffered from a huge problem called chromatic aberration. It was almost as if I could see the Red, Green and Blue sub-pixels that make up each individual pixel, especially when looking towards the edge of the screen, but I'm happy to report that the CV1 fixes this issue entirely. The weird rainbow coloured pixels of the dev kits are now gone, thank god.

Instead of the single screen used in the dev kits, the CV1 now has individual screens for each eye. Each OLED panel packs a resolution of 1080 x 1200 running at 90Hz (hence why games have to run at 90 frames per second). By using two screens, it appears to allow for wider adjustments of the Interpupillary distance, which is the distance between each pupil. However,

the biggest benefit is the sharper image they provide; individual pixels are significantly harder to spot than the grainy screens of the dev kits. During most of the VR experiences that I played, I didn't notice the pixel structure at all, yet in a handful of situations they're quite obvious. While 1080 x 1200 sounds like a decent resolution, the fact that each screen is just an inch or two from the user's eye, and is being magnified by a Fresnel lens, means the pixel structure is visible if you look for it. This isn't a problem when enjoying experiences that don't have much fine detail, and also when you're focused on objects in the near distance. Surprisingly, this made games with a third-person camera some of the most enjoyable. Firing up a first person game such as *Adrift* is fine when you're in a small room, but at certain points you leave the space station. When gazing at the ruined station in the distance, the low resolution makes it difficult to resolve detail, and it's also prone to aliasing. Exposing this issue even more were the 360 Photo and Video apps. The photo app places the user inside world-famous locations, but because it's the real world they're packed with detail, and the Rift's screens just don't have enough pixels to

■ most launch titles are aware of the low relative resolution, and have used clever art and design to get around them ■

handle it. The Video app is even worse, as the content running at an even lower resolution than the screens, resulting in a pixilated, blurry mess.

Thankfully most launch titles are aware of the low relative resolution, and have used clever art and design to get around them. Whether it's focusing the player's attention on smaller spaces, or using simplified art styles that don't pack lots of fine detail, most of the time the resolution issue isn't a concern. Cranking up my GPU's forced anti-aliasing setting also helped matters. However, I think we'll need at least a 4K panel in each eye to remove this issue entirely, which is several years away. And you can imagine the horsepower required to drive twin 4K panels, each rendering a separate view of the 3D world?

One final issue that I noticed was a kind of ghosting or halo that appeared around bright objects on a dark background, almost like a reverse



shadow. They're very hard to describe until you see them, but it appears to be caused by the lenses, which means it'll probably be an issue with the HTC Vive and PSVR as well.

ULTIMATE IMMERSION

The initial wow-factor of the CV1 is just as revolutionary as the first time I played a game with 3D graphics, if not more so. Instead of peering at the virtual world before me through a 2D window, I was actually inside it, able to look around and travel through it. The leap in immersion is exponential, making even the most basic experiences so much more enjoyable. As such, even the simplest games are incredibly enjoyable, for the first few hours at least. Once the novelty wears off, some of the simpler games do become repetitive and bland, but there's also a healthy range of excellent games on offer.

I'm not sure if it's because I've already

spent quite a lot of time in VR HMDs, but I didn't find any of the experiences to cause nausea. Oculus gives each game a comfort rating, from

Comfortable to Moderate to

Intense, and even on the latter games I had no need to reach for a bucket. I did get a slight headache after playing for the first few hours, but this seems to have disappeared the more that I play. I had the exact same issue when I started playing First Person Shooters, but like VR, it only lasted a day or two.

So then, is the Rift CV1 worth \$1150? If there wasn't a competing product on the near horizon, I'd recommend it without hesitation... but HTC's Vive is launching in just a couple of months, albeit at a higher price of \$799. While the HMDs of the two competing products seem to be very similar, with basically identical specs, the inclusion of two motion controllers as well as room-sized tracking makes the Vive a more encompassing VR experience. As such, I'd recommend holding off until the HTC Vive lands, by which point the Rift CV1's price point may have dropped, and the Touch

controllers could be available.

While overall the Rift CV1 is an incredible product, delivering a quality of VR experience that is unprecedented, there are still a few niggling issues, which I think all of 2016's HMDs will likely suffer from – resolution and haloing in particular. Yet regardless of which kit you buy it's worth remembering that this is day one of the consumer VR revolution, and I have no doubt that these problems will be solved within five years, if not earlier. I also have no doubt that VR will rapidly take over from 2D screens, especially in the fields of video over IP, educational applications, virtual prototyping (i.e. engineering and architecture) and whatever else some brilliant mind comes up with. But it's us gamers who will benefit first and foremost, as once you've actually lived and played *inside a game*, it's hard to go back to that boring old 2D window. **BENNETT RING PC**

- The first truly usable VR headset for consumers
- Very comfortable
- No Touch controller yet
- Low res causes issues with detailed scenes
- Rather expensive

VERDICT:

The lack of Touch controllers is a disappointment, but the Rift CV1 proves that VR is here at last, and is here to stay.

8

Side loading

Launch titles to look out for

With over 30 different games, animations and apps to check out at launch, the Rift Store has an impressive range of experiences considering it's such a new platform. However, I wanted to check out all of the other games that are compatible with the Rift dev kits, yet aren't in the store – *Dirt: Rally*, *DCS World*, *Euro Truck Simulator 2* and dozens more. Sadly, despite these games all working well with the dev kits, none of them are compatible with the launch version of the Rift. When I pinged Oculus' PR guy about the matter, he explained that, "... they will work but we have to wait on developers to update their games to work with CV1."

In lieu of these games, here's my pick for the top games currently available on the Rift Store.

Eve: Valkyrie

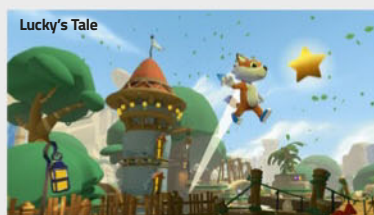
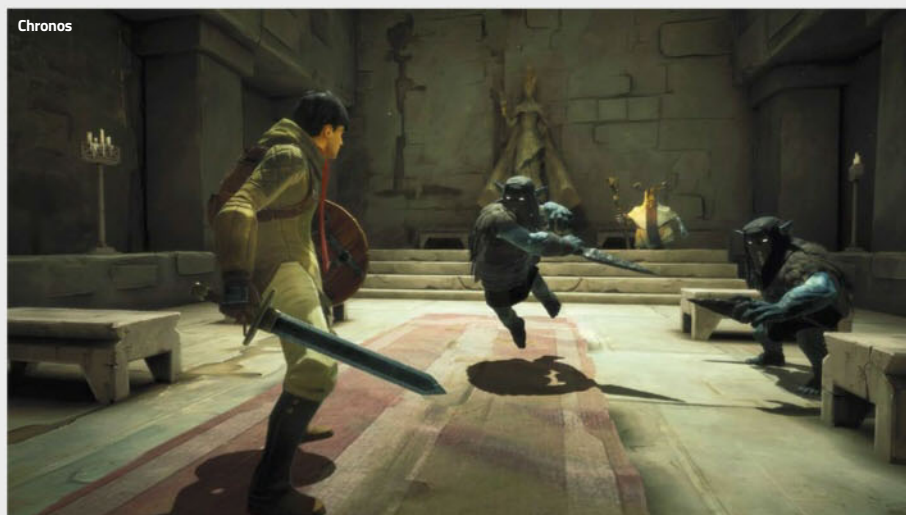
www.evevalkyrie.com/

■ There's a good reason this game is included for free with every Rift CV1 pre-order – it's easily the best demonstration of VR. From the moment you first strap yourself into the pilot's chair, and can look over, around and beyond objects in the cockpit, you'll be convinced that VR is amazing. As the magnetic catapult hurls you into space, the feeling of actually being in the cockpit of a space fighter is unrivalled. Combat is fast and frenetic, with a focus on multiplayer action, while singleplayer is limited to a handful of tutorial missions. Thankfully CCV is planning on releasing more content, as *Valkyrie's* space-hanger is a little empty at the moment.

Lucky's Tale

www.playfulcorp.com/

■ The addition of VR turns this relatively bog-standard 3D platformer into a fresh, joyous experience. It's the little



details that are only possible in VR that make it so much fun, like leaning in to get a close look at Lucky, and watching him fall over as you get too close. Or using your head to direct bomb throws and torch lights. Or adjusting your view so you can see exactly where he'll land, based on his shadow. Sure, the level and character design is rather generic, and it's only five hours long, but it's a great way to see how third person games can really shine in VR.

Chronos

gunfiregames.com/chronos/

■ This is another of the games that surprisingly shows how well VR works

in conjunction with a third person camera scheme. Playing like a *Dark Souls*-lite, the camera position is fixed in each room, but the player is able to look around each space using the HMD. It's one of the more serious games in the collection, and the designers have cleverly used simple art and smaller playing spaces to get around the Rift's low resolution.

Dreadhalls

www.dreadhalls.com/

■ Play this on a 2D screen and the basic graphics depicting endless halls would be laughable, but once you're actually walking through them, laughter will be the last thing on your mind. Walking up to a doorway and being able to physically peer around the corners is one of those cool moments that remind you why VR is the bomb. Even the minimal creature design takes on a new dimension in terror when played with the Rift.

ENTER A WORLD OF ASSASSINATION

HITMAN™

ANY TARGET
ANY TIME
ANYWHERE



PLAY NOW



HITMAN ©2015 IO-INTERACTIVE A/S. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. IO-INTERACTIVE AND THE IO LOGO ARE TRADEMARKS OF IO-INTERACTIVE A/S. HITMAN AND THE HITMAN LOGO ARE TRADEMARKS OF SQUARE ENIX LIMITED. SQUARE ENIX AND THE SQUARE ENIX LOGO ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OR TRADEMARKS OF SQUARE ENIX CO. HOLDINGS LTD. THE "PS" FAMILY LOGO IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK AND "PS4" IS A TRADEMARK OF SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT INC. ALL OTHER TRADEMARKS ARE THE PROPERTIES OF THEIR RESPECTIVE OWNERS.

SPEAKER

Ministry of Sound Audio S Plus Bluetooth speaker

Pumpin' until the battery dies

PRICE \$199


www.ministryofsound.com

As an ex-Raver, Ministry of Sound was like Valhalla for me – the SuperClub I'd one day go to when I could scratch up enough coins to visit the UK. Sadly that never came to be, but now I don't need to go, as I've got the mighty MoS in my house. Turns out this brand now makes speakers, such as the Audio S Plus. But what the heck would a clubbing brand know about making tweeters and woofers?

One thing for sure, they know how to make it look slick. This is a sexy looking, and the white band that surrounds the centre buttons and inputs helps ensure it's also splash-proof with an IPX4 rating, perfect for those pool-side parties. I'm not sure I like the fact that the speakers are on opposite sides – it always means one is facing away from the listener. Removing the rubber band reveals a micro-USB port for charging. Unfortunately the battery life isn't

amazing; I didn't time it, but I'd guess it's around 4 hours. Worse is the fact that once the battery is dead, you can't just plug it into the wall and keep playing – you need to recharge the battery.

The Bluetooth range is a little optimistic as well, claimed at ten metres but actually being around half that.

Thankfully the sound quality is nice and tight for such a small unit. The 10W speaker is loud enough to fill your hotel room without annoying the neighbours too much, and there's not too much distortion at full volume. Overall this is a decent product that will handle a beating from other competitors, but the battery life and sound quality isn't quite as good as the best Bluetooth speakers in this price range. **BENNETT RING** 



- IPX4 splash proof rating
- Looks sexy
- Decent sound quality

- The two speakers face opposite directions
- Can't play with an uncharged battery

VERDICT:

Designed for the outdoors, the rugged build quality helps make up for the lacklustre battery life and merely decent sound quality.

7

SSD

Kingston SSDNow KC400 1TB

In dire need of a price cut

PRICE \$910

www.kingston.com

Kingston's SSDs haven't exactly blown us away over recent years, somehow struggling to keep up with industry leaders like Samsung. Having said that, everybody has struggled to keep up with Samsung. The KC400 is the latest model from Kingston, so can it finally catch up to the leaders of the pack?

This is a standard SATA 3 SSD, so forget any high-speed M.2 or NVMe shenanigans. Powered by the Phison PS3110-S10 controller, our review version was the huge 1TB version. Kingston has made a big deal about the data safety features of this device, with both SmartECC and SmartRefresh promising to keep all those ones and zeroes in just the right place, even if the power goes kaput. A generous five year warranty suggests these technologies work, and Kingston claims the 1TB model can handle a whopping 1600TB of totally bytes written over its lifespan.

We tested the drive first with CrystalDiskMark's Random 512K test, and the drive pegged 486MB/sec write, with read at a rather average 393MB/sec. That's a big drop from the Samsung 850 Pro's read score of 476MB/sec. Thankfully random 4K performance was much improved, hitting 119MB/sec write, 25MB/sec read, comparing well to the PRO's 144MB/sec write and 30MB/sec read.

There's one small hitch though. You can now buy the faster Samsung 850 Pro 1TB SSD for just \$620. That's almost 50% cheaper than the Kingston, and it's faster. 'Nuff said.

BENNETT RING 



- Solid performance
- Excellent warranty
- Strong data protection features
- Ludicrous pricing

VERDICT:

Costing almost 50% more than the faster Samsung 850 Pro gives this drive no chance of competing.

5

SSD

OCZ Trion 150 480GB SSD

Small cache but tiny price

PRICE \$195 (APPROX - THE 480GB ISN'T AVAILABLE HERE IN AU, BUT THE 960GB VERSION COSTS \$375)
www.ocz.com

Half a Terabyte of SSD storage for less than \$200 sounds like an excellent deal to us, and that's exactly what OCZ has delivered with the new Trion 150. The successor to last year's Trion 100, it's aimed at budget users who don't necessarily need best-in-class performance, and are instead looking to save a few dollars.

Being owned by Toshiba, it's no surprise to see that the flash memory used within is Toshiba's own A15nm Triple-Level Cell (TLC) memory. When we reviewed its predecessor, we found that the performance of the drive varied massively as a result of the TLC memory. It can be slower than the SLC and MLC memory used in other drives, so OCZ had to use an SLC cache to speed up performance. Apparently this has been re-used on the 150, but OCZ claims performance has doubled once the size of the cache has been exceeded,

despite it using the same Toshiba TC58 controller. OCZ's brilliant 3 year shield plus warranty is included – OCZ will immediately despatch a replacement without a receipt if you can show a serial number, and you then simply need to return the faulty drive. OCZ claims a Total Bytes Written lifespan of 120TB, which equates to 110GB per day for the life of the drive.

Using Anvil Storage Utilities, we found sequential 4MB read speeds at 526MB/sec, while writes came in at 499MB/sec, very impressive at this price point. However, when transferring files larger than the cache (which is 7.2GB in the 480GB version of the 150), performance drops significantly, to around 270Mbps. It's not in the same league as the likes of Samsung's EVO, but this is still a massive improvement over the Trion 100.

As a result, we're happy to give the thumbs up to those looking for the



best value drive on the market, on the condition they're not regularly copying files that exceed the size of the SLC cache, which will be most gamers.

BENNETT RING PC

- Outstanding value
- Solid performance with smaller file sizes
- Improved performance
- Not great at copying files larger than 10GB
- Not as fast as the EVO

VERDICT:

Offering outstanding value for money, the 150 is a huge step up from the 100. Just beware of the cache limitation.

8

MOUSE

CoolerMaster Sentinel III

Huge hands required

PRICE \$79
gaming.coolermaster.com

Let's get one thing straight – this mouse is not for those with Trump-sized mini-fingers. It's a rather large mouse designed to be held in the palm of your hand, and my dainty little digits struggled to wrap around it well. It's also surprisingly weighty at first... until you discover the five removable weights, each of which weighs 4.5 grams.

When I first tested this mouse on my FUNC Surface 1030XL mouse pad, it was horrible. The mouse movement was erratic and sticky, but then I flipped the surface to the rough side, and all those problems disappeared; this is a mouse that demands a rougher mouse pad. Only then will the Avago 3988 sensor feel at home, where its 6400 DPI accuracy comes across as rather impressive (up to four levels can be saved). It's an optical sensor, so there's no dramas with artificial acceleration.

Also impressive is the small OLED screen in the middle, that shows the current DPI setting, though it's unlikely you'll ever look at it in the heat of battle. However, the two DPI buttons adjustment buttons are side by side, instead of top-to-bottom like other mice, which takes a little getting used to. There's also another button at the very top of the mouse, above the scroll wheel, but my piddly fingers found it too far away to be of use. Twin RGB lighting zones can display all the colours of the rainbow, allowing you to colour code your mouse and keyboard setup. The included software is clear and easy to use, but we couldn't get the mousepad calibration feature to work.

If you've got the hands big enough for this mouse, the excellent sensor, cool screen and extra buttons on this make it a very worthy candidate for your gaming needs. BENNETT RING PC



- Excellent Avago Optical Sensor
- Adjustable weights
- Plenty of buttons
- Rather large
- LEDs look a tad tacky

VERDICT:

CoolerMaster has delivered a solid, mid-priced mouse that delivers where it counts most – accuracy and feel.

8

HOTWARE²⁵⁰

with Terrence Jarrad

01 Misfit Specter

Price:\$ TBA • Distributor: Misfit
misfit.com

In case you were thinking that the well of devices able to be labelled “smart” was dry, Misfit is somehow drawing another bucketful, with the Specter smart earbuds.

POWERED UP: Noise isolating, protection against hearing damage, activity and sleep tracker also monitoring steps, distance, and calories.

PLAYED OUT: Let’s just think about what activity tracking headphones means, when you’re connected to, say, a phone, which has access to any number of activity tracking apps and connectivity with various health based wrist accoutrements... surely the tracking is covered there already?

02 Relay G10

Price:\$350 • Distributor: Line 6
Line6.com

A guitarist who’s never had to bend a lead into some kind of weird pentagram as tribute to the rock gods, in order to have it continue to transmit signal to the amp, is in truth, no guitarist at all.

POWERED UP: Never worry about a dodgy lead ever again. Plug in the transmitter and the receiver works out the best channel to operate on. Up to 8 hours of play time on a charge, which can be done in the handy dock.

PLAYED OUT: You still need an output lead from the receiver to the amp, so technically you might have to worry about a dodgy lead, but they should last longer since you won’t be windmilling around a stage with them.

03 Power Energy Toothpaste

Price:\$30 • Distributor: IndieGoGo
powertoothpaste.com

It was tempting to copy/paste the Specter intro text here and replace “smart” with “caffeinated” and “Specter earbuds” with “Power toothpaste”, but we managed to resist. Kinda. Anyway, while you’d think it’s highly unlikely that anyone needs caffeinated toothpaste, a newly funded IndieGoGo campaign indicates otherwise.

POWERED UP: Clean teeth. Caffeine buzz. Make yourself a morning person whether you normally are or not.

PLAYED OUT: Caffeine right before bed, huh? Seems like this wasn’t fully thought through. And no, sorry, but this will not “save money on the daily coffee” because coffee tastes great and isn’t consumed solely for caffeine.

04 THINO

Price:\$TBA • Distributor: Viglo
www.viglo.eu

With so much of our day spent on phones, browsing, reading, listening, tweeting, battery life is one of the largest hurdles we need to overcome. The THINO may be just the thing-o you need.

POWERED UP: Compact and durable, and promising to charge your phone three times faster than other sources, it should give you an extra couple of hours to send those oh-so-important status updates to all your Facebook friends.

PLAYED OUT: 480mAh is not a whole lot of juice, especially considering some of the battery packs you can pick up from electronics vendors can be anywhere from 1800mAh to 6000mAh.

05 Lego Ghostbusters Firehouse

Price:\$499 • Distributor: Lego
shop.lego.com

Since the new Ghostbusters trailer disappointing everyone with eyes, now is a good time for a trip down nostalgia lane.

POWERED UP: The iconic firehouse, clocking in at over 4600 pieces, and minifigs of the Busters themselves: Venkman, Stantz, Spengler and Zeddemore. And Slimer. Of course there is Slimer. Oh and Dana and Louis (Sigourney Weaver and Rick Moranis’ characters, if you’re having trouble remembering that far back).

PLAYED OUT: There is no Lego, only Zuul.



100% Australian 100% Independent

THE AUTHORITY ON ALL THINGS GAMING

HYPER



WARGAMING

★ CONQUERING THE WORLD, ONE GAME AT A TIME ★

nextmedia



WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

There are some good reasons we're obsessed with conflict.

CONSOLE WAR DIARIES

One survivor remembers the horrors of 1997-2002

WEIRD WARS

WW2 may be the go to for game developers, but there are far stranger wars to explore.

ON SALE NOW!

MENAGERIE

Consumer VR is finally here, so it's only natural that we added a headset to the Beast. Prepare for a whole new Menagerie next issue!

BUDGET

The perfect entry-level gaming PC

CPU

AMD FX-4300 Quad Core 3.8GHz 4 Core Black Edt.

\$145 www.amd.com

We're sticking with AMD's budget beauty.



MOBO

ASRock 980DE3/ U3S3 AM3+

\$85 www.asrock.com.au

Our CPU needs a new ASRock home.



RAM

Gell 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz

\$85 www.gell.com.tw

In with the cheapest we can find



VIDEO

PowerColor R9 380 PCS+ 4GB

\$330 www.sapphiretech.com

AMD's new 960 killer



POWER

Cooler Master Thunder 500W

\$65 www.cooler-master.com

The budget beast doesn't need a lot of juice



SOUND

Sennheiser HD201 + ASUS Xonar DG

\$35 + \$31 www.sennheiser.com

Headphones plus soundcard - yes!



OPTICAL

LG GH24NSBO DVD-RW

\$40 www.lg.com

We'd happily retire the drive, but some of you guys still believe in physical media.



STORAGE

Toshiba DTO1ACA050 500GB HDD

\$65 www.toshiba.com.au

Half a Terabyte should handle everything.



DISPLAY

Samsung 24" S24D300H

\$185 www.samsung.com

Crystal clear 1920 x 1080 res gaming



CASE

BitFenix Shinobi

\$95 www.bitfenix.com

Nice for the price. This is the little brother of the case used in our Performance build.



KEYBOARD

Tt eSPORTS Challenger

\$65 www.thermaltake.com.au

Built for PC gamers. Macros, shortcuts, the lot.



MOUSE

Gigabyte M6900

\$22 www.gigabyte.com.au

A sensor resolution of 3200DPI will make your headshots count.



TOTAL: \$1,252

PERFORMANCE

Most bells and whistles, without breaking the bank

CPU

Intel 5th Generation Core i5-6600K + Noctua NH-D15

\$359 + \$119 www.intel.com



MOBO

ASUS Z170 Pro Gaming

\$259 www.asus.com.au

Our fave affordable Z170 board



RAM

Gell 16GB DDR4 2400MHz

\$137 www.gell.com.tw

Sweet, sweet DDR4.



VIDEO

MSI GeForce GTX 970 OC 4GB

\$499 www.msi.com.tw

NVIDIA's mid-range card is perfect



POWER

Corsair VS650

\$85 www.corsair.com

This affordable PSU delivers a clean and reliable source of energy.



SOUND

Audio Technica ATH-A500X w/ASUS Xonar DG

\$159 + \$31 www.audio-technica.com



OPTICAL

LG GH24NSBO DVD-RW

\$40 www.lg.com

This is the one bit of kit that stays the same between most of our machines.



STORAGE

W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung 850 EVO 250GB

\$99 + \$135 www.wdc.com/ www.samsung.com.au



DISPLAY

BenQ XL2411Z

\$449 www.benq.com.au

BenQ's 24-inch not only looks great, it'll also save your eyesight with a 144Hz refresh rate.



CASE

Fractal Design Define R5

\$175 www.fractal-design.com

Our new favourite mid-tower.



KEYBOARD

Logitech G710+

\$135 www.thermaltake.com.au

Logi's new mechanical board is one for them to beat.



MOUSE

Logitech G502 Proteus

\$99 www.logitech.com

Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



TOTAL: \$2,780

PREMIUM

Crank everything to Ultra, including your credit limit

CPU

Intel 6th Generation Core i7-6700K + Corsair H110i GT Water Cooling Kit

\$524 + \$195 www.intel.com



MOBO

Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 7

\$349 www.gigabyte.com.au

Skylake boards cost a tad more, tis fact.



RAM

G.Skill DDR4-3200 16GB Dual Channel Ripjaws

\$149 www.gskill.com

3200MHz for our Premium PC



VIDEO

2 X Gigabyte GeForce GTX 980 Ti 6GB

\$2198 www.gigabyte.com.au

Welcome to the world of Ultra High Detail.



POWER

Corsair HX1000i

\$325 www.corsair.com

A high end PSU to ensure stable overlocks.



SOUND

Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones

\$249 audio-technica.com

We've ditched the soundcard



OPTICAL

ASUS BC-12D2HT Blu-ray Combo Drive

\$69 www.asus.com.au



STORAGE

W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung SSD 850 EVO 500GB

\$99 + \$235 www.wdc.com/ www.samsung.com.au



DISPLAY

ASUS PB287Q 28" 4K display

\$749 www.asus.com.au

4K is now a reality



CASE

NZXT Switch 810 Full Tower

\$189 www.nzxt.com

It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet.



KEYBOARD

Corsair K70 RGB

\$249 www.corsair.com

This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



MOUSE

SteelSeries Sensei RAW optical

\$109 www.logitech.com

Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



TOTAL: \$5,564



THE BEAST

When overkill is barely enough...



CPU

Intel 6th Generation Core i7 6700K + XSPC RayStorm D5 RX240 V3 Water Cooling Kit

\$525 + \$349

www.intel.com
www.pccasegear.com.au



HEADPHONES + SOUND CARD

Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones

\$249

www.audio-technica.com

Plug these into the Marantz amp for maximum sound quality.



MOBO

MSI Z170A XPower Gaming Titanium Edition

\$499 www.msi.com

Sexy, silver and super fast.



STORAGE

2x Intel 750 1.2TB SSD + 2x 4TB HDDs (any)

\$2990 + \$450

www.intel.com

Massively fast gaming SSDs and some hefty backup capacity.



RAM

G.Skill DDR4-3200 16GB Dual Channel Ripjaws

\$149 www.gskill.com

3200MHz is good for the Beast too.



DISPLAY

Epson TW9200W

\$3399

www.epson.com.au

Beautiful 1920 x 1080 gaming. Unfortunately you won't be able to do 3D gaming at anything higher than 720p due to the limitations of HDMI 1.4.



VIDEO

2 x MSI NVIDIA GTX 980Ti GOLD 6GB

\$2258 www.msi.com

Faster than two Titans when oc'd. True.



CASE

Cooler Master Cosmos II Ultra Tower

\$449

www.coolermaster.com

It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet. The compartmentalised interior ensures everything runs ice-cool.



POWER

Silverstone 1500wST1500 Strider

\$314 www.silverstone.com

1500W should be plenty for the three GPUs running alongside an overclocked CPU, as well as the storage within.



INPUT DEVICES

SteelSeries Sensei RAW optical + Xbox One USB Wireless Dongle + Xbox One wireless controller

\$109 + \$89

www.logitech.com



KEYBOARD

Corsair K70 RGB

\$249

www.corsair.com

This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



STEERING WHEEL

Fanatec ClubSport Wheel base, Formula Carbon and CSP v2 Pedals

\$1157 www.fanatec.de

There's nothing better than "Germangeering" to deliver the most precise force feedback around.



SPEAKERS

Paradigm Cinema 110 with dual subwoofers and Paradigm monitor center channel + Marantz SR5009 amp

\$3299

www.eastwoodhifi.com.au



JOYSTICK

Logitech G940

\$385

www.logitech.com

This Force Feedback set is getting harder to find, but it's still the finest flight controller around.



VR

Oculus Rift

\$1150 www.oculus.com

Bugger optical drives - a super powered PC needs the latest in technology.



COCKPIT

Obutto oZone with Butticker gamer 2 and TrackIR 5 Pro

\$1100

You're going to need somewhere to mount your wheel and joystick, and the Obutto frame is a favourite of ours.



TOTAL: \$19,169

Tri-band data rate of of 5334 Mbps
Ultra-fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi router
Smooth 4K/UHD video playback

2.4 GHz 1000 Mbps

5 GHz-1 2167 Mbps

5 GHz-2 2167 Mbps





How Things Work

LIQUID DREAMS

ASHLEY MCKINNON has a high pixel density



When you look at where we've come from, the modern LCD panel is a wondrous achievement. Not too long ago we had CRT monitors that literally took up half your desktop real estate but thankfully now we have larger, clearer and higher fidelity screens that take up hardly any room at all.

Admittedly the first LCD panels to come along were pretty subpar – but they've evolved into what we have now and do a great job at keeping us visually stimulated. At their core all LCDs basically function the same way – that is a Liquid Crystal is sandwiched between glass panels which are then stimulated to light up and produce a colour. These are called pixels, and are themselves made up of subpixels for the colours red, blue and green. An LCD screen has millions of these pixels and it's the turning off and on of these pixels and subpixels that make you able see images and video on your screen. The technology behind the LCD panel has gone in several different directions during its evolution leading to today where we have several distinct avenues vying for your purchasing dollar. Let's take a look at 3 of most popular technologies that drive modern LCD's.

The first LCD panel type we will look at is Twisted Nematic (TN). This is by far the most popular type of LCD as it is the cheapest and offers very fast response times – making it a great choice for gaming. With Twisted Nematic, the Nematic Liquid Crystal is placed vertically between 2 polarizing filters, with one at 90 degrees to the other. In an off state, when light is applied to one side it passes through the filter, then twists 90 degrees through the Nematic Liquid Crystal (hence the name Twisted Nematic) and is blocked from exiting the other side. This would show as a black pixel on the LCD screen as no light has exited. In an On state, when an electrical charge is applied, the TN cells realign so they are no longer twisting 90 degrees and therefore the light can pass through the pixel and is displayed as a colour on the screen. The amount of charge applied determines the amount of light that exits.

The advantages of TN are, as mentioned, fast refresh rates – up to 144Hz, and that they are cheap to produce. The main drawback with TN displays however is the poor viewing

angles and colour reproduction can be a little off. TN cannot display all 16.7 million colours of the 24-bit true colour standard (which the more expensive LCD panels can do) but tries to fool you through a process called dithering. Unfortunately – we can't be fooled that easily.

Vertical Alignment (VA) LCD panels are the next step up from TN. With VA, the Liquid Crystals are suspended perpendicular to the glass substrates. In this "off" state, no light can pass through and will show as black. When a current is applied, the liquid crystals rearrange themselves into a vertical position (alignment) which will allow light to pass through.

The advantages of VA LCD panels are that they are very bright, and offer great colour representation. Viewing angles with a VA panel is also a major benefit, as they don't suffer the "bleed off" effect of TN panels. It's not all roses however as VA technology is considered slow in terms of refresh rates and therefore don't suit applications such as gaming. Ghosting and artifacts (the leaving behind of images once new images appear) are known issues with VA panels.

Several manufacturers have been steadily working on the VA technology and have their own updated versions. But the truth of the matter is that VA panels are becoming less popular now that In-Plane Switching technology has come down in price and more widely available.

You're probably already familiar with In-Plane Switching (IPS) panels. They are the LCD panels that most modern tablets and higher end televisions use. They work in a similar fashion to TN panels except that the liquid crystal cells are kept horizontal and parallel to the glass substrate, thus allowing a straighter, cleaner path for light to travel through. IPS uses two transistors, one at each end of the liquid crystal to move it, which helps keep it in parallel. This is different to TN which uses only one transistor to apply a current to the liquid crystal and can result in uniform twisting. Also, IPS liquid crystals are not anchored to the glass substrate so can move freely when a charge is applied, unlike TN which is anchored to the lower glass substrate.

What results is spectacular colour representation and very wide viewing



angles (which can actually be a bad thing when you're privately trying to watch an episode of Black Sails while in public).

Put an IPS panel next to a TN panel and you'll definitely notice the difference. Colours appear more vibrant and true to life (since it can display all 16.7 million colours of the True-Colour range).

As with all technology – not all is perfect and there are some disadvantages. Like VA, IPS suffers from slower refresh rates compared to TN panels. While this is not an issue when playing most games it can become noticeable during fast paced sessions. It also requires more power. As it uses two transistors the light needs to be brighter to be pushed through – which means more juice is needed.

Asus uses IPS panels in both their new widescreen gaming monitors

Put an IPS panel next to a TN panel and you'll definitely notice the difference.

For the most part TN monitors do a great job and most users would be fine using one of these monitors. Admittedly – if you are into fast paced gaming then TN really is your only option. IPS panels however are coming down in price and for the average gamer – and for people that use their PC for other things then stretching the budget will certainly reward you with clean, clear and vibrant coloured visuals. If you're in the market for a new monitor go into your local retailer and look at the different LCD technologies side by side and decide what suits you best. **PC**

Subscribe FOR YOUR CHANCE TO **WIN** 7 NIGHTS ON THE *Sunshine Coast!*

WIN
a trip for 2
valued at
\$7,100

THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS AT VISIT SUNSHINE COAST,
YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO WIN A 7 NIGHT LUXURY ESCAPE FOR
TWO ADULTS, INCLUDING FLIGHTS VALUED AT \$7100!



oceans
mooloolaba beach

Sunshine Coast
Queensland Naturally refreshing



**3 easy ways
to order**



1300 361 146 Toll free in Australia
+61 2 9901 6111 From overseas



PC Powerplay
Locked Bag 3355, St Leonards NSW 1590



Beaches, hiking, surfing, fresh local food and world-class events — from relaxation to adventure, Queensland's naturally refreshing Sunshine Coast has it all. The only thing more refreshing than the water is the lifestyle. With its sunshine, endless coastline, lush rainforests and easy smiles, it's a place where you will feel like a local from the moment you arrive.

Explore the lush hinterland villages of Montville and Maleny; enjoy the pristine Caloundra beaches and Pumicestone Passage; and savour the fresh, juicy prawns direct from the trawlers in Mooloolaba. Then take in the awe-inspiring Glass House Mountains; indulge in the naturally stylish and find your sense of adventure on the Great Beach Drive to Rainbow Beach.



PRIZE INCLUDES:

- Return airfares for two from your nearest capital city to Sunshine Coast Airport
- Seven nights in an Ocean Front two bedroom suite at the 5 star Oceans Mooloolaba, including complimentary breakfast for two each morning
- Eight day car hire with Avis Australia
- Complimentary five course dinner for 2 on one night at The Long Apron restaurant at Spicers Clovelly Estate
- Full day Great Beach Drive tour with Surf and Sand Safaris
- Day passes for two adults to SEA LIFE Mooloolaba and Australia Zoo

Get the Beast on your chest!

RECEIVE A COMPLIMENTARY PCPP T-SHIRT WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE*



go to.. visitsunshinecoast.com

 **mymagazines.com.au**

SUBSCRIBE AT
mymagazines.com.au

- **HUGE SAVINGS** on the cover price
- **FREE** delivery to your door
- **NEVER** miss an issue



OR CALL

Australia-wide **1300 361 146**

Sydney metro **(02) 9901 6111**



OR FAX

(02) 9901 6110



OR MAIL

Locked Bag 3355
St Leonards NSW 1590



Please send me a subscription to **PC PowerPlay**

26 DISC Issues (2 years) @ **A\$199.00**

+ BONUS t-shirt **SAVE OVER 44%**

13 DISC Issues (1 year) @ **A\$129.00**

+ BONUS t-shirt **SAVE OVER 27%**

New Subscription Renewal Gift Subscription

Select your t-shirt size S M L XL

Preferred t-shirt size (Australia & New Zealand Only)

(S: 49cm chest, 72cm length. M: 52cm chest, 75cm length. L: 55cm chest, 78cm length. XL: 58cm chest, 80cm length)

MY DETAILS:

Name: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime phone:

E-mail address:

Please provide phone or email in case of delivery issues

PAYMENT:

I enclose cheque/money order for \$_____ payable to nextmedia Pty Ltd

OR please charge my MasterCard Visa American Express

No.

Expiry: / Name on card:

CVV: Cardholder's signature:

GIFT RECIPIENT'S DETAILS:

Name: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address:

Postcode:

Daytime phone:

E-mail address:

*T-shirt offer available to Australian and New Zealand residents only. Expires 18/05/16. Prices include GST. Savings based on total cover price. Overseas Airmail 13 Disc issues A\$189. Please allow 6-8 weeks for separate delivery of your free T-Shirt. A PC PowerPlay subscription comprises of 11 issues of PC Powerplay and 2 special issues per year. This form may be used as a tax invoice. nextmedia Pty Ltd, ABN 84 128 805 970. Sunshine Coast competition open to Australian and New Zealand residents over the age of 18. One entry per Eligible Subscription, defined in full terms. Competition opens 05/04/16 at 12:01 AM and closes 29/06/16 at 11:59 PM. Winner drawn 12/07/16 at 11:00 AM at nextmedia Pty Ltd, Level 6 Building A 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW. The total prize pool valued at up to \$7100 (incl. GST). Winner notified by email and published online at www.mymagazines.com.au from 12/07/16 for 28 days. The Promoter is nextmedia Pty Ltd (ABN 84 128 805 970) of Level 6 Building A 207 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065. Authorised Under: NSW Permit LTPS/16/02098. ACT Permit No. TP 16/00491. SA Licence No. T16/423. Visit www.mymagazines.com.au for full terms and conditions. Please tick if you do not wish to receive special offers or information from nextmedia or its partners via Mail Email. Refer to www.nextmedia.com.au for full Privacy Notice. **If you would prefer to receive communication electronically, please ensure we have your current email address.**



Total War Warhammer War. War.

LEWIS VAUGHAN is two great flavours together at last

Total War. Warhammer. Total Warhammer? It almost feels like these two were meant to be united. The Mac & Cheese of gaming. Both of these franchises have a long history, but we've already covered the Warhammer history before, so let's take a look at this seemingly perfect marriage and why the expectations for this game are so high, but also very achievable.

Crossovers have been around for a long time, especially in TV, comics and movies. When something is around long enough, you often see characters and story arcs bleeding into another franchise in some way or another. Video games haven't really gotten to the point where this is a common occurrence just yet. You'll really only see a single 'special character' added into a game via DLC or after unlocking a certain achievement. This is a shame because there are so many ways that games can crossover successfully, and in this case, it's a classic war-based tabletop game and a classic war-based video game. I've played a lot of Warhammer and a fair bit of Total War, particularly the Shogun series, but I've only just started to realise that these two have been a match just waiting to happen, a pairing that when you think about it, you have to ask the question "how hasn't this happened sooner?"

Both of these games have been around for a long time. Warhammer first appeared on our tables in 1983 and has seen many changes, going from fantasy setting to a dystopian futuristic setting and even a Lord of the Rings setting. The tabletop game has seen a handful of video games released under the Warhammer banner in the way of Firewarrior, Dawn of War, Warhammer Online and more recently, Vermintide to name a few. Warhammer has always had a presence in the world of video games, much like the Total War series.

Total War was first released in 2000. It was originally a turn based game (like Warhammer) with resource management mechanics and RTS elements. The success of the franchise has spawned numerous changes in setting (again, much like Warhammer) taking players from feudal Japan, to Rome and even the French Revolutionary war. The first time I played Total War, I was hooked. I couldn't believe the graphics at the time, as well as being able to zoom in on the action and see



■ ■ Warhammer has always had a presence in the world of video games, much like the Total War series ■ ■

each individual soldier fighting. The bar was set even higher when Shogun 2 came out and there was this cool feature where you could control a cannon directly with an aiming reticle, I still remember having a blast (pun intended) cutting off enemy soldiers with a well-placed cannonball. It was a great feature that allowed for tactics as well as some fast paced action. The feeling was so similar to the feeling I had when I would roll the dice and be able to do the exact same move in Warhammer.

At the time, even though I was playing both of these games, I didn't really make the connection. They were so similar, and both very good. The idea of mixing them together never occurred to me. But thankfully, someone much smarter than me did have the idea, and you can bet that I am eager to see what comes of it.

The Warhammer universe is so intricate and for the most part, well designed. Because of this, it's incredibly easy to get lost in Games Workshop's creation, even when you're just looking at bits of plastic on a table. Coupling it with the Total War mechanics and gameplay elements mean that in theory, we should be getting a turn based strategy game with strong pedigree from both franchises and smart video game design from Total War's

developer, Creative Assembly. I would be able to live out my dreams of being able to command a huge army on screen (something that my pocket-money budget couldn't afford when I was younger) and be able to zoom in on each individual unit, just to get closer to the action. I won't need to imagine my soldiers attacking, because I will be able to visualise it. There won't be any small plastic toys for me to step on and break and I won't have to fork out for Codexes every time I want to learn about something. On the flip side of that coin, Total War has always felt a little bit soul-less to me. The soldiers were just an army, not my army. If done right, I think that Total War: Warhammer can definitely bring the best of both worlds and make something truly enjoyable for old fans of both franchises, as well as bring new fans to both franchises.

With almost 50 years between the two of them, it's taken a while, but they are finally together. Total War and Warhammer, a pair that has been running alongside one another for a long time. A pair that both have had various attempts at changing the settings which have sometimes brought decent results. But now, the time is right, the date is set and all we have to do is sit back and wait. **PC**

Roles and Rolls

DANIEL WILKS never played an elf

Long before I had a PC or a console I was a gamer. I don't mean this in any type of "I knew this was who I was always meant to be" type existential bullshit, either. When I was five or so, my father's second wife's brother (step uncle in law?) introduced me to something that would become a passion for the rest of my life (so far at any rate) and probably influenced the direction my life took. That introduction was red box D&D, otherwise known as the Basic Set. In 1981 the red box was brand new, and Dungeons and Dragons had only been around for four years or so with very little presence in Australia, so the idea of this roleplaying thing was rather strange and revolutionary to a skinny little kid and the collection of mullets crowded around the table. I was little more than a mascot for a session or two of my step uncle in law's gaming sessions (I can't actually remember his name) but I got the bug for interactive storytelling and things kind of went from there.

There wasn't a lot of subtlety in the rules or the classes. This was the edition that featured Elves and Dwarves as character classes rather than races, there were three types of armour and probably a half dozen weapons and spells. Even with such simplicity, the idea of telling stories to other people or interacting with stories told by other people resonated in a major way.

In primary school, when I was around 12 or so, I joined the Hornsby Roleplaying Society. It had some terrible acronym name as well but the sensible part of my brain has thankfully excised that from my memory. It was during these Sunday meets that I seriously started writing outside of a school setting, putting together ideas for games, characters and settings. The more games I played or ran the more I wrote. The more I wrote the more I ran and the better my writing and ideas became. A few years later I was writing games for conventions ranging from intimate to epic multi-session freeforms for 40 players in every setting I could imagine, from 80s T&A comedies through to Lovecraftian nightmares.



Like many other people, I was always told as a kid that playing games would never lead to anything

By this stage I'd been acting on and off for a while – nothing major, just a line or two in an ad or something similar, but roleplaying made me think that maybe I could really give this acting thing a shot as a career. I studied theatre at uni, and had a brief but unspectacular career on the stage, a career that came to an end during a stint as a producer for what could possibly still be the worst reviewed production in Sydney theatre history (no hyperbole). This disillusionment with acting sent me behind stage and I started writing seriously again, this time writing plays, a few of which won awards. This eventually led to

where I am now, editing a magazine and using the written word to make my living writing about games.

Like many other people, I was always told as a kid that playing games would never lead to anything and that I had to study and find a career and pay bills and all that other boring adult bullshit. Whilst it's not exactly true to say that gaming got me where I am today, I'm certain that it was my attraction to and passion for roleplaying that game me a grounding in the skills, and the confidence in those skills that has enabled me to find a career doing something I love related to a topic I'm passionate about.

Ironically, since I started working on magazines some 16 years ago, I haven't had much time to roleplay. Simply finding time to sit down, plan sessions and then find time to get a group of people together became a little too much to handle, but that's about to change. I'm starting a new campaign with some like-minded and equally harried journos from around town (collusion!). And, of course, because I'm me and a compulsive backer of all things Kickstarter, I have a bunch of new and old systems steadily flowing to me in sweet, portable PDF form, filling my commute to work and back with new systems, concepts and ideas for future campaigns. Now all I have to do is decide if I want to jump back into Feng Shui, or maybe wait for Kult and Conan, or keep it simple with the world's most popular RPG, Pathfinder. Or maybe Cyberpunk. So many choices. 



NEXT MONTH



AUSTRALIA'S #1 PC GAMING MAG
PC PowerPlay

#251 ON SALE
MAY 19



PHANTOM S

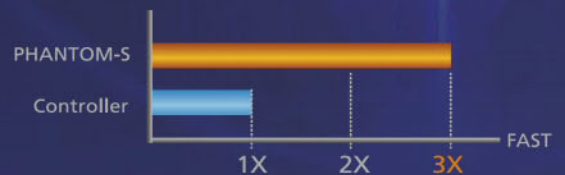
GAMEPAD EMULATOR

Can't Aim and Shoot Fast Enough or Accurately When Playing FPS Games on PS4, PS3, XBOX 360 or XBOX One?



PHANTOM-S™ IS THE ANSWER !

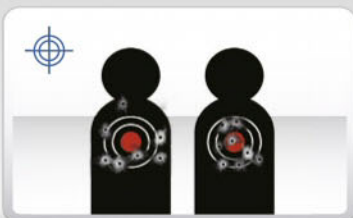
The PHANTOM-S™ uses signal conversion technology for advanced control during gameplay. You can abandon the conventional controller for FPS games to enjoy smoother movement, enhanced accuracy, customized controls and rapid fire with a PC keyboard and mouse.



The PHANTOM-S™ allows you to easily become a top FPS player with customized keyboard and mouse controls like you've never experienced. Whether you're a professional PC or console game player, the PHANTOM-S gives you the advantage.



Aim Better



Provides More Accurate Rapid fire

Regular Software Updates



Provides New Features and Boosts Performance

Unique Play Mode



Use a Laptop / Desktop keyboard to control your game console



More about PHANTOM-S™
www.aten.com/phantoms



Shop now > **PC CASE GEAR**
www.pccasegear.com

SMALL is BIG

The **Corsair SF Series** power supplies and **Hydro Series H5 SF** liquid cooling system enable desktop-level performance in small spaces. Whether **4K gaming** in the living room or building a custom battlestation, **Corsair's** dedication to small form factor is powering your big ideas.



SF SERIES POWER SUPPLY

The 80 PLUS Gold certified high performance SFX form factor power supplies are available in two wattages. The 450 watt ensures sufficient power for most rigs, while the 600 watt provides enough power for high-end graphics cards and supports 4K graphics at 60 FPS or better.



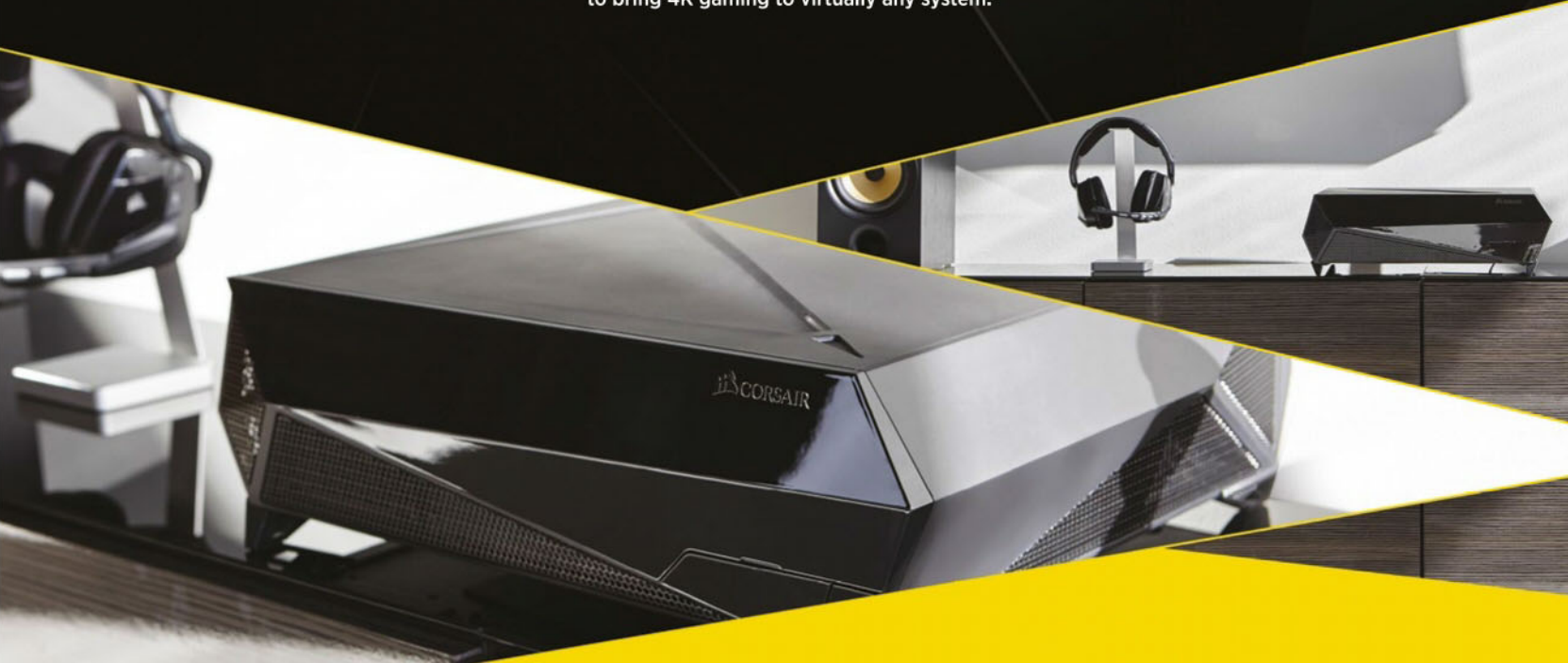
LIQUID COOLED GRAPHICS CARD

Hydro GFX lets you step up to liquid-cooled graphics performance, factory overclocked by 20%, and pre-assembled for a simple installation while running 30°C cooler than standard air-cooled graphics cards. It's powered by the MSI GTX 980Ti GPU and cooled with the Corsair Hydro Series H55 to bring 4K gaming to virtually any system.



MINI ITX CPU LIQUID COOLING SYSTEM

Building a small form factor system shouldn't have to mean compromising on processor speed. The Hydro Series H5 SF low profile liquid CPU cooler solves the problem of reliable CPU cooling in compact spaces.



BULLDOG
THE BIG 4K GAMING EXPERIENCE
IN A SMALL PACKAGE