WILDCARD

1ST ISSUE, 2011-2012

COMMON LASERS

by Patricia Guloy

From science fiction to everyday tools, lasers have been rather iconic in the advancement of technology. By now, they are used in sensitive equipment and vital pieces of machinery, such as in military-grade missiles and for in-depth medical procedures. However, laser gadgets – save for the humble laser pointer – have always seemed quite distant from our everyday lives.

Of course, it is not surprising that great minds eventually also took it upon themselves to bring lasers into the homes and pockets of the common man. These laser gadgets that can be found today, varying from incredibly useful to unnecessary but fun, are perhaps clear evidence of how quickly what was previously fiction is becoming reality.
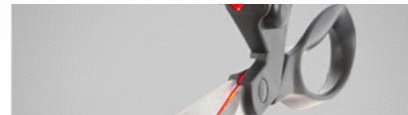
Laser Distancemeter

The Leica DISTO reduces the trials of running a tape measure down a room to the simple point and click of a button.
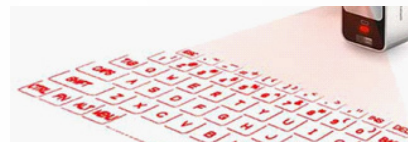
Laser Pitch Detection

Allowing you to determine the pitch of a guitar string before it is plucked, simply by measuring its length.
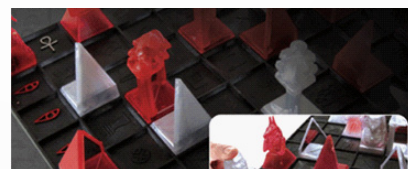
Laser Guided Scissors

For seeing exactly where your scissors will cut, even before you squeeze the handles.

Laser Keyboard

The Cube Laser Virtual Keyboard transforms any flat surface into a red laser keyboard, and lets you carry a full-size keyboard around in your pocket.

Laser Chess

Combining chess and lasers to an Egyptian motif, Khet 2.0 involves moving mirrored pieces in order to bounce a laser across the board and illuminate your opponent's Pharaoh.

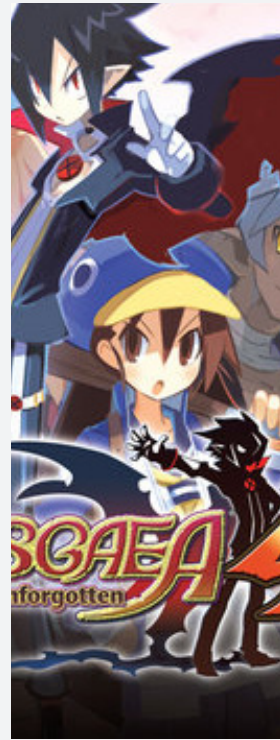"Leica DISTO." 2011. Leica-Geosystems.com. Leica Geosystems. <http://ptd.leica-geosystems.com/en/Laser-Distancemeter_5061.htm>.
"Laser Guided Scissors." 2011. ThinkGeek. ThinkGeek, Inc. <http://www.thinkgeek.com/gadgets/tools/a823/>.
"Cube Laser Virtual Keyboard." 2011. ThinkGeek. ThinkGeek, Inc. <http://www.thinkgeek.com/gadgets/cellphone/e722/>.
"Laser Pitch Detection." 2011. M3i-Technologies.com. M3i Technologies GmbH. <http://www.m3i-technologies.com/node/3>.
"Laser Game: Khet 2.0." 2011. Khet.com. Invention Toys, LLC.<http://www.khet.com/>.
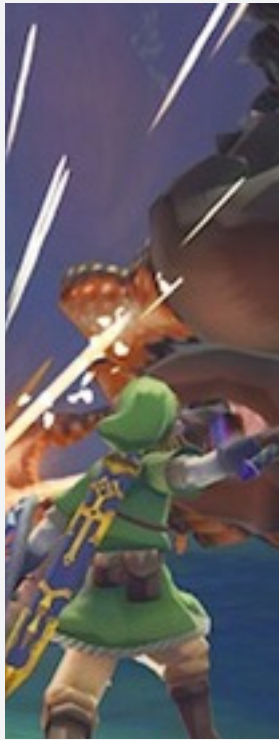
Something Fresh For Everyone
by Hans Chua

Xenoblade Chronicles

"Xeno" is a prefix that has become short of a legend to any classic gamer, and it has achieved that status rightly so. If you're familiar with the namesake, Xenoblade Chronicles is the new brainchild of the same director responsible for the critically-acclaimed Xenogears and Xenosaga series. This time, he is backed by the same people who made your shiny Gundams and Super Robos, so expect no shortcoming in the graphics department even though it's exclusive to the less powerful Nintendo Wii.

The ugly: If none of the hype from the previous paragraph has gotten to you, then none probably will. This is going to be turn based, so if you belong to the younger half of the generation gap (the ones that think taking turns to attack is dumb), you probably should stick to your first-person shooters, browser games, and bandwagon, social games.

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

After Nintendo giving too much attention to its handhelds, it's about time we had a new one for the consoles! Five years ago, we had our main guy Link (who everyone STILL thinks is Zelda) turning into a wolf. This year we have him seemingly going back to his roots. Knowing the company's flair for innovation, however, we can probably count on something outrageous in this installment too. More details are kept under wraps by Nintendo as of now; we all know how they love their surprises.

The ugly: If none of the earlier entries to the series have managed to pique your interest thus far, chances are, the Skyward Sword would probably fail to change your mind anytime soon. Knowing the company, again, this game will probably follow the same formula as its predecessors.

Disgaea 4: A Promise Unforgotten

The series probably has a cult following at best, but it's one of the best strategy role-playing games to ever hit the market. Addictive gameplay, highly customizable characters, endless stages, and over-the-top challenges characterize the Disgaea series. Like the previous games in the series and its spinoffs, A Promise Unforgotten features a different main character (Barbatos), his motivations for desiring power, and his viewpoint on the many facets of the Netherworld.

The ugly: If you find the story portion of the game difficult or uninteresting, then this game is not for you. Most of the content and addictive aspects of the game will be found post-story. Further, its atmosphere and humor are part of its appeal, and it's not going to be everybody's cup of tea.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

We all know the name, we all know the game, and we all know the cursing that ensues when we play. Apart from Domination, classic PvP, and classic Survival, MW3 is going to have a two-player Survival mode on ALL maps, complete with kill-streak powerups and the like. The general feel of the game, of course, looks smoother. Not a lot of level-up customization was shown in the trailer, but new guns, new powerups and new perks are to be expected.

The ugly: It's probably going to feel similar to the previous games, so if you're looking for a fresh experience, there's nothing to see here. Further, balance skews will definitely show up again, so expect frequent DLC updates.

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Finally, the most anticipated game of the year. The title speaks for itself, whichever half of the generation gap you belong to. From the same director that brought us Fallout 3 and Oblivion (Elder Scrolls IV), he has confirmed a quest system that would span the reaches of imagination. The beauty of open-ended exploration and customization we've had from his previous games will make a comeback, only with much more freedom (complete with a choice of crime and jail) this time around.

The ugly: With all medieval-dragon-mythical inspired games coming out of the woodwork recently and the due hype that this game has received, Skyrim will have to be all that and bring much more to the table than its counterparts (Dragon Age, The Witcher, etc) to live up to the bar it has set for its fans with Oblivion.

PHONES OF 2011

by Ian Uymatiao

Can you still remember the very first phone that you owned? What was it like? What were its features? How much was it? From massive, wired machines to pocket-sized pagers to antenna-adorned devices to feature phones to the current smartphones, the Digital Era has truly revolutionized the way we communicate. Would you have imagined then that mobile phones would reach this kind of level, and truly change the way we connect with our loved ones?

Over the past few years, ever more capable devices have come out to market, easily outperforming their predecessors. The emergence of new players in the market, as well as shake-ups among incumbents, have resulted in an arms-race towards mobile supremacy. As such, it is to be expected that the year 2011 would usher in even more competitive devices fighting for the right to get into users' hands.

Here are some official (and unofficial) upcoming phones to look forward to for the remainder of the year.

APPLE IPHONE 4S/5

Many speculations have been made regarding the identity of the next iPhone. Apple product enthusiasts have their bets placed on whether the smartphone would just be an upgraded version of the iPhone 4, with modifications such as an 8-megapixel camera and a faster processor, or a complete redesign with novel features to boast. Rumors regarding an upgraded iPhone 4 have given it the alias "iPhone 4S". On the one hand, others point to a brand new entry to the iPhone series, an "iPhone 5", that will include an all new-improved and completely redesigned form such that it is believed that it would look more like an iPod Touch 4G rather than its predecessor. Rumored release dates are also making their way around the web, with most pointing to a September or Octorber release frame. Other rumored features include a 64 GB memory capacity, a 4 inches "edge-to-edge" screen with smaller bezel or border, an A5 dual core processor which is also used to power the iPad 2, a 4G LTE (Long Term Evolution) connectivity, voice recognition capabilities similar to many Android phones, a curved glass-display, and a "world-phone" design that will include a SIM-less design, with 2 to 3 internal antennas for CDMA (Code-Division Multiple Access) and GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) compatibility connectivity[1]. With these kinds of specs, people will surely be rushing and piling up again into Apple stores.

Nokia N9

In the Philippines, Nokia is known to be one of the leading mobile manufacturer, however it is quite noticeable that lately, Nokia has seemingly been lagging behind in terms of developing desirable smartphones. That was why people were surprised when Nokia announced a new device just months after the Nokia E7 was released to market. Through collaborations with Intel, Nokia will be releasing this new device that will be powered by a new mobile operating system they are calling "Meego". Unlike Nokia's other OS, Symbian^3, which powers the E7, it is believed that MeeGo could reach feature parity with other renowned mobile operating systems such as Android and iOS. the N9 will also have an 8-megapixel autofocus camera lens, a 3.9-inch AMOLED display, a polycarbonate body, and storage ranging from 16 GB to 64 GB. While plenty of good things can be said about this upcoming device, the N9, unfortunately may be the first and last of its kind. As Nokia prepares to move all of its flagship devices to the Windows Phone 7 platform, the future of the N9 and the Meego OS is far from certain. Only time will tell how successful these two will be.

Fujitsu F-07C

It's not just an Android or iOS world, and sometimes manufacturers are willing to break certain norms in order to bring to market unique and interesting devices. The F-07C, an upcoming device from Fujitsu, is being marketed as a smartphone/PC hybrid. Announced for availability in Japan starting July 23, the phone is being dubbed as the "the compact PC that fits in the palm of your hands". Users can easily switch modes between Windows 7 (the kind that runs on your laptop) and the standard mobile OS with just a push of a button. The device has some features of an actual PC as well, such as an Intel Atom CPU, a two-year license for MS Office Personal 2010, and a full-blown browser with Internet Explorer 9. The "smartphone" part of the device should not be alien to most, with the familiar Symbian OS running the phone in the absence of Windows 7. Like many smartphones, It has a slide-out QWERTY keyboard, a 4-inch touchscreen, 1 GB of memory, and 32 GB of solid-state storage. Also, the phone features a 5-megapixel rear camera and a VGA front-facing camera, some basic connectivity such as WiFi and Bluetooth, and other add-ons like 3G, HSPA, and GPS.

Sony Ericsson Xperia PLAY

Over the previous year, much was said about a rumored Android-powered smartphone that can double as a Playstation device. While pictures and videos have been leaked long before the official announcement, the "Playstation Phone", officially called the Sony Ericsson Xperia PLAY,was officially unveiled early this year. With Playstation-esque tactile buttons fit for a gamer's thumbs, this device is far from your average smartphone. While it behaves like every Android smartphone should, it also comes with some extras, such as a custom app store where users can buy and download games, ranging from Android time-killers to classic Playstation hits, specifically optimized for the Xpeia PLAY. Running through the other features, the display comes it at around 4 inches, the CPU is a 1 Ghz Snapdragon processor, the memory clocks in at 512 MB, while on-board storage is 8 GB. A MicroSD card slot is available for expanding storage up to 32 GB, and these MicroSD cards can used as Memory Cards for the retro Playstation games. The Xperia PLAY has not yet officially launched here in the Philippines, but you can expect to find a handful of these devices appear in the wild from time-to-time.

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FIRST LOOK:
GOOGLE+

by Ian Uymatiao

If one were to ask a typical computer geek what was the greatest technological breakthrough of the past twenty years, chances are they would answer the Internet, and rightfully so. Looking back at two decades of building the web, most of us cannot imagine a world without the Internet. After all, the Internet gave us the gift of e-mail, web pages, online media, online games, and search.

Just recently, the Internet gave us yet another gift: the social network. Arguably the most complex piece of software to ever grace the web browser, social networks such as Facebook have transformed the web from a static page to a dynamic, persistent, and admittedly addicting information highway. What started out as an idea of connecting friends via computers has become a virtual gold rush for the IT world, earning Facebook billions of dollars and a userbase more than half a billion strong.

However, Facebook may not be alone for much longer. Google, a web giant and known Facebook rival, wants a piece of the social network pie, and has unveiled a new product to prove it. Named Google+, this social network from Google has received plenty of buzz lately as the next challenger for Facebook's crown. The question is: does Google+ deserve it? With a world that is already heavily wired by Mark Zuckerberg and Co, does Google's latest creation give us an incentive to switch?

The product itself is still in beta, but luckily the Wildcard team was able to spend enough time with it to see how well it stacks with the competition. Here we will give our take on Google+ and see the things it has going for it, as well as the things it can possibly improve upon.

The UI and Ease-of Use

Along with the rest of Google's services, the overall UI has seen a slight overhaul. The top bar that features Google's other services such as Gmail and Google Docs has been slightly tweaked. Now it sports a stylish black color, and if you are a Google+ user, the top bar will be modified to accommodate Google+ features such as notifications and the ability to share without necessarily being on the Google+ page. In other words, you will still be able to use basic Google+ features even while using other services such as Gmail, Google Docs, Google Maps, and even Picasa.

When you first open a Google+ page, you are greeted with a familiar layout, yet it somehow differs from the competition. Like Facebook, posts are front-and-center, access to groups are to the side (more on that later), and a built-in messenger system is immediately available. Despite these similarities, Google decided to modify the look-and-feel to suit its taste. For example: unlike Facebook that compacts information and keeps icons suitably small, Google+ feels more spacious. Posts are given more horizontal space, texts appear slightly larger, and photos and videos appear much larger, allowing you to view the picture without the need to enlarge it by clicking.

Google+ also fixes some UI aspects we did not think were broken on Facebook. For example: If you enlarge a picture on Facebook, a pop-up page would appear, showing the enlarged picture on top, and the comment thread on the bottom. In Google+, when you do the same thing, the enlarged picture appears on the left, while the comments are on the right, meaning you can see both at the same time instead of requiring to scroll up/down just to see on or the other. The pop-up page still lacks some features such as the ability to download, like, and tag, but at least the folks at Google have shown that they can, in fact, improve upon Facebook when it comes to aesthetics and layout.

For the most part, using Google+ will require a small learning curve if you're coming in from Facebook. Some buttons have been moved left and right. Certain functions will require an extra click or two, and the use of fancier names might confuse people at first. We also have some minor frustrations when it came to using Google+. During our testing, certain posts refuse to appear where they ought to be appearing, leading to frustrations in finding the post again at a later date. Whether this is due to a bug, or a hidden setting we still haven't found (the settings page is quite confusing), posting can be quite a hassle and doesn't feel as elegant as Facebook, where you more or less know where to post, and how.

At the end of the day, there is still much to like about the UI of Google+. It is mostly pleasing to the eye, and the minimalism mostly works to its advantage. Most of its issues lie in streamlining its user functions, which we feel is taking too much time to do something quite simple. In addition, some aspects of the experience are not made totally clear to the user. Just like the posting example mentioned earlier, knowing what to do and where to go is quite cumbersome, and Google ought to figure out a way to minimize the time and clicks required to get to the things you want to see.

The Features

Google+ shares a few features with the current leader in social-networking, mainly an IM option, notifications, sharing photos and videos, and tagging people who appear in them. Where it differs is in its application of groupings, otherwise known as "Circles," and "Sharing" which is Google+'s equivalent of a status update.

Circles allow someone to easily group their contacts under any category they prefer ("Friends," "Family," you name it). The interface is very intuitive--relying on drag-and-drop to organize people into these circles. Your contacts will know you put them in a circle, but they will not know what the name of the circle is. The organization of your contacts plays a significant part in who sees and, more importantly, who doesn't see your post/video/picture.

Sharing functions similarly to a status update: type your ideas, photos, and/or videos into a box and hit the "Share" button to post them in your "Stream," or Newsfeed. Where it differs is its implementation of certain privacy features. In G+, the box immediately underneath the Share text box displays a list of which Circles will be able to see your post--compared to Facebook which forces you to go through a drop-down menu and a small window. Though it does save the privacy settings of your last post, a lot of typing is needed to select the proper circles. This might be cumbersome for a few, but the privacy benefits are hard to deny.

The Verdict

To put it quite bluntly, Google+ gave us a good impression. Google was not really known for designing great-looking software, so to see something quite attractive to the eye is always worth some merit. The interface is sleek, well-spaced, and non-distracting, with due attention given to the layout and animations. It certainly has interface issues to iron out, and performing some tasks can be cumbersome, but in the end, Google+ does present itself as a viable social network.

The question now is: is it worth abandoning Facebook? The answer to that is an easy 'No', simply because the volume is not there yet. Until a large enough volume of friends take advantage of what Google has to offer, Facebook will remain the number one place to go to for staying in touch with the people you are close to. Still, Google+ is being developed by a huge web company, and is being built on top of very impressive technology, so its progress will certainly be worth watching. Don't be surprised to hear good things coming from them in the near future.

AND YOU THOUGHT IT WAS
ONLY Wii

Wii, a revolutionary console that came into existence in 2006, has since taken the paradigm of gaming into an entirely different level. Making use of wireless and motion-sensing technology, Wii has provided a potential that still remains in the spotlight of gamers and game developers alike. However anyone who understands Moore's Law, of course, knows that it cannot and will not stop at Wii.

[Wii] began to make perfect sense once you started hearing it as 'We'. It was clear how much fun we all had playing together even with people who weren't gamers before. But in thinking about a new Nintendo system, we knew the prevailing thought would be this, "Yes, the game will probably still be right for all of us. But could it also be a perfect fit just for you?" And the answer to that question is an emphatic absolutely. In fact, we are so convinced of it that we put that pronoun right in the name. So today, welcome to the world of Wii U.

Nintendo will be augmenting Wii, pushing the potential of the console further. The race for the development of that particular game that can tap this potential has begun.

With the new features, the possibilities are endless. This article will feature some of the proposed features during Nintendo's press conference.

TV & Controller

It is common to see the TV screen as the output device for home game consoles such as Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 and the controller screen for handheld game consoles such as PlayStation Portable or, for a classical touch, Game Boy Advance. Wii U introduces a gameplay that can utilize the TV screen, the controller screen, or both.

Nintendo has shown various possibilities for this set-up. An example would be the TV screen showing the battle while the controller screen showing the control panel. Another would be the TV screen as the environment and the controller screen as the gadget. Imagine an entirely new perspective of playing Angry Birds where the red birds are launched from the controller into the green pigs on the TV.

Basically, both screens are connected. And the imagination starts there. If you want to share a picture, push the picture from the controller screen into the TV screen as you would push a piece of paper across a table. If someone wants to use the TV in the middle of a game, transfer the game from the TV to the controller. How convenient is that?

Internet

Wii U goes beyond the realm of games into the vast cloud of information. Facebook or, better yet, Google+ anyone? But seriously, the power of the internet in a gaming console! Browse. E-mail. Stream. Chat. Video Call.

View++

While the view on the TV screen is static, the view on the controller is dynamic. The user can zoom in and out. If the user is browsing the internet, the user can focus on a particular section or functionality of the page. For example, if the view on the TV screen is the home page of the website, the view on the controller screen may only be the log-in functionality. The user can also rotate his or her view in any direction. This provides an entirely new perspective of playing games where the view on the TV screen is your general direction while the view on the controller screen is relative to it. In First Person Shooter games, imagine your character moving across a battlefield. You rotate the controller to the right. The controller screen will display all the elements to the right of your general direction while the TV screens will still display the elements on your general direction. Two sets of eyes FTW!

Although these features are superb, they are still subject to change as the console is still in development. They can be enhanced or removed but they can also be left unchanged. Nevertheless, this gaming console will provide an entirely new gaming experience the moment it comes out in 2012.

2011-2012