

Reviews of Sony 'Home' and Alienware gaming PC

January 6 2009, By Victor Godinez

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HOME OPEN BETA

Grade: D

For PlayStation 3

Free

SOCIALISM: "Home"? seems like a project that everybody at Sony was afraid to cancel. Given how long the nebulous social-networking program has been in development and how much money Sony undoubtedly poured into it, it's not surprising that "Home" was launched. But right now, even at the price of free, "Home" is overpriced.

MATING RITUAL: The ostensible purpose of "Home" is to provide a relaxed virtual online resort where players can mingle, chat, watch previews for Sony games and movies and stupidly spend real-world money on digital furniture and clothes to accessorize their avatar's life. As actually played, all the identically dressed frat-boy-esque characters sprint up to any digital female within view and flail and dance like sex-starved hyenas. All in all, it's every recurring nightmare you've ever had about high school, only without the adult supervision or occasional bit of intellectual enlightenment.

BOTTOM LINE: "Home" has potential. Some of the mini-arcade games and the bowling alley can be genuinely amusing for entire minutes at a time. But the problem is that Home is designed almost solely for the benefit of Sony and its advertising partners. There's nothing to do for more than five minutes, no exclusive goodies to download, no real interaction with the other "Home" users.

Well, there is the sex dance thing. But that's probably not the killer app Sony was hoping for.

ALIENWARE AREA-51 X-58 GAMING PC

Grade: A-minus

Intel Core i7-965 Extreme 3.2 GHz processor, dual 2GB ATI 4870X2 graphics cards, 12GB RAM, 256GB solid-state drive, Windows Vista 64-bit Home Premium.

\$6,379

BLEEDING EDGE: Look, it's pretty much impossible not to have fun with a machine like this new Alienware. Even if you wanted to spend more money, you couldn't really wring any additional horsepower out of a modern PC. Sure, you could tack on extra Blu-ray drives and a larger hard drive and such, but in terms of raw speed, there's really nothing else out there. In other words, this may be the best gaming PC money can buy.

ROOM TO GROW: That said, I did get this machine to choke on one game: "Crysis: Warhead." When cranked up to its highest visual quality, the original "Crysis" is well-known for its ability to bring any PC to its knees, and the sequel is equally punishing. So this was sort of a collision

of an unstoppable force and an immovable object. At the farthest limit, though, at 1600x1200 resolution with 8x anti-aliasing (a technology that smoothes out jagged lines), "Warhead" finally caused my Alienware to stutter just a bit.

A GAMING PC FOR THE REST OF US: Of course, a \$6,000-plus computer occupies a sales niche so slender as to be translucent. But if you're working with a less stratospheric budget for your new gaming PC, the critical component is the new Core i7 processor from Intel, which is blazing fast. And Dell - which owns Alienware, by the way - has a more-than-decent i7-based Studio XPS computer starting at around \$949.

BOTTOM LINE: My only real complaint with the X-58 is that it does get hot, turning my diminutive home office into a convection oven. But hey, a little sweat is a small price to pay for thermonuclear performance.

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