

Gaming-grade headphones and keyboards stand out

November 18 2013, by Ron Harris



The Rig gaming headset from Plantronics is photographed on Nov. 18, 2013, in Decatur, Ga. It allows the user to connect a mobile phone to its mixer and toggle between phone calls and gaming audio. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

Gaming on a PC is an endeavor that can be tinkered with forever. You can add memory, faster hard drives, liquid-cooling plumbing, chassis fans and much more. At the end of the day, though, the gaming experience comes down to sight, sound and control.

I took a look at a few devices that can augment each of those factors while gaming.

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— Plantronics RIG headset and mixer (\$129):

It's a wired headset with the added functionality of a stereo input for your mobile phone. That way, you can take calls and keep gaming if you can't be bothered to pause.

Overall, I found the fit to be good. The 40-millimeter drivers in the headset carried a good range of bone-rumbling bass during sessions of "Crysis."

There are separate volume controls for the game on the PC and for my mobile phone, when the phone is attached with a single audio cable. These controls are nicely backlit, so you can find them even in a dark environment.

The unit comes with both an in-line microphone on the cable and a detachable boom microphone. The boom mic is used more during game play while a smaller mic on the headphone cord is the better approach for phone conversations.

The weighted mixer, which balances the sound from the gaming and phone conversations, stays put when I need it to, and it has plenty of length on the cord to position where I need to. The RIG is comfortable and smartly styled, and it sounds great.

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— Roccat Isku FX keyboard (\$100):

The keyboard is where the magic happens in PC gaming. Sure, you can get an Xbox-like controller for your PC gaming, but a true gaming-grade keyboard offers granular control for lighting, smart macros for toggling weapons and configurable hotkeys for menus, maps and other in-game content.



A USB-powered monitor from AOC is photographed on Nov. 18, 2013, in Decatur, Ga. The monitor allows the user to extend their desktop for additional applications and gaming activity. (AP Photo/ Ron Harris)

The Isku FX has all of that and some twists:

— Programmable "thumbster" keys rest about an inch below the space bar. This came in handy during a "Far Cry 3" session. Normally, to heal myself from a serious wound, I would have to hunt for the "Q" key in the corner using my left ring finger. I'd often press the nearby "W" or

"I" key by mistake because it isn't a natural move for me. I can program a "thumbster" key for the "Q" and access it comfortably with my thumb.

— The keys have programmable backlighting zones. I turned my main W-A-S-D keyboard section—the keys used to move my game characters—into glowing green color. Although it isn't beneficial during play because I stare at the screen instead, it branded my setup visually as a primary gaming kit for added nerdiness.

I would have preferred a shorter or detachable wrist ramp, which is the part below the keys where my hands rest. But I got used to the feel of it in short order.



A gaming keyboard from Roccat is photographed on Nov. 18, 2013, in Decatur, Ga. It has adjustable backlighting for the keys and programmable macros to augment the PC gaming experience. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

— The AOC e1659Fwu external USB monitor (\$139):

I include this not because it augments the gaming experience, but because it augments the other stuff you can keep an eye on while you're gaming.

It was useful to plug in this monitor into a USB 3.0 port and have my Facebook and Twitter feeds open on it. The display, which measures 16 inches diagonally, works as a second screen on the side, so you can devote your main monitor to the game. I don't like windowed gaming and prefer to play in full-screen mode, but during the scenes in between active play, I always wonder if someone is trying to ping me online.

Having my social media accounts up and active on the AOC display is a quality add-on. I can also use it to display a media player with a playlist of ambient background music.

The AOC can be used in horizontal or vertical mode. A kickstand keeps the monitor propped up during game play. It folds easily so you can store the unit for later. This accessory is fairly priced and nicely designed.

More information: AOC: us.aoc.com/monitor_displays/e1659fwu

ROCCAT: [www.roccat.org/Products/Gaming ... yboards/ROCCAT-Isku/](http://www.roccat.org/Products/Gaming...yboards/ROCCAT-Isku/)

Plantronics: www.plantronics.com/us/rig/

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