

# Sony PlayStation 4 terrific, but not yet essential

November 13 2013, by Lou Kesten

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Visitors look at a display case containing a Sony PlayStation 4 at the Tokyo Game Show in Chiba, suburban Tokyo on September 19, 2013.

Video-game fans who reserved Sony's PlayStation 4 several months ago won't have any regrets when it goes on sale in North America on Friday: The PS4 is a terrific game machine that will feel familiar to PlayStation 3 owners while delivering the flashier eye candy you'd expect from

gaming's next generation.

Microsoft diehards will grouse about the PlayStation hype until Nov. 22, when the new Xbox One comes out. There's no reason for envy: Most of the best PlayStation 4 games will be available on Microsoft's new console as well.

Indeed, many gamers have already made up their minds months ago. If you're somewhere in between—say, a frequent game player who doesn't feel an ironclad allegiance to either system—the PlayStation 4 is a good buy.

Its launch lineup includes 22 games to attract fans of just about any genre, from military shooters to sports simulations to family-friendly adventures. It also offers such a wealth of easily accessible media apps, including Hulu and Netflix, that may draw even the non-gamers in your household.

It's not yet absolutely essential, but if you're ready to upgrade from a PlayStation 3 or rival console, it's worth the \$400 price tag. That's \$100 cheaper than the Xbox One, but \$100 more than Nintendo's year-old Wii U. The PS3 will still be available for \$200, but that's now 7-year-old technology.

The PlayStation 4 is a slender, unobtrusive box that plugs into your TV via HDMI cable. Once you've turned on the power, it takes just a few minutes to connect to the Internet and create or update a free account on Sony's PlayStation Network.

The PS4's on-screen user interface has been streamlined, with a horizontal bar of large icons for games and apps. Above that is a line of smaller icons that let you connect with other PlayStation owners, change system settings or access the PlayStation Store, where you can download

new games and buy or rent movies.

You navigate through all this with Sony's new DualShock 4 controller. The old ones won't work. Like previous controllers, DualShock 4 offers vibration and motion sensing.

It now has a clickable touchpad as well. What it does will vary from game to game. In "Killzone: Shadow Fall," for example, it's used to send orders to a combat drone. The top of the controller also has a light bar that changes color to indicate player status. In "Killzone," red means your character is close to death.

The DualShock 4's Options button is pretty much the same as the old Start button, pausing the action so you can access in-game menus. The old Select button has been replaced by Share, which allows you to post screenshots and videos on social networks, or even broadcast your game play on the Ustream and Twitch video platforms.

A barebones headset that comes with the system lets you navigate menus by voice command. The DualShock 4 also has a built-in speaker that plays some in-game audio.

The console itself is built around computer processing and graphics processing units custom-built by Advanced Micro Devices Inc. Sony says the PlayStation 4 has 10 times the processing power of the PS3. That should translate into higher screen resolution (up to 1080p) and faster frame rates (up to 60 frames per second), meaning more detailed environments, more realistic lighting, smoother animation and huge online multiplayer matches.

Developers say the new hardware is much easier to design for than the idiosyncratic "Cell" architecture used in the PlayStation 3. On the plus side, that means developers should be able to exploit the PS4's power

more quickly. The drawback is that you can't play any of your PS3 games on the new machine. It won't be a deal breaker for many gamers, who won't be getting PS4 to play 4-year-old games anyway.

"Killzone," from Sony's Amsterdam-based Guerrilla Games studio, shows off the [new technology](#) most impressively. Purely from a game-play perspective, it's a fairly generic first-person shooter, with humans battling the dictatorial alien Helghast for control of a divided planet. But wow, is it beautiful, from its vast, breathtaking landscapes to the finely tooled details of individual firearms.

The visual boost becomes more apparent when you compare some PlayStation 4 launch titles with their counterparts on the PS3:

— In Ubisoft's "Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag," you can see the wind billowing the sails of your pirate ship.

— In 2K Sports' "NBA 2K14," you can read LeBron James' tattoos and see individual beads of sweat of his forehead.

— And the new technology allows Electronic Arts' "Battlefield 4" to bump online combat engagements from 24 players to as many as 64.

Granted, there's more to great games than slick graphics, and it remains to be seen what designers will come up with once they learn how to harness all that power under the PlayStation 4's hood.

But Sony's off to a good start, planting its flag firmly as the battle for dominance in the living room renews.

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