

Game players face their demons in virtual reality

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Gaming fans wear VR goggles to play "Echo Arena" from Oculus on day two of E3 2017, the three day Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, California on June 14, 2017

Zombies from the television series "The Walking Dead" and other demons are coming to life for video game players in virtual worlds.

With new virtual reality systems, gamers will be climbing into colossal war machines to battle high-tech armies, wandering mutant-infested post-

apocalyptic wastelands and going toe-to-toe with demons in new offerings unveiled at the Electronic Entertainment Expo this week.

While play on consoles or Windows-powered personal computers continued to dominate the annual industry gathering, virtual reality flourished as [game](#) makers invested in the future.

The number of E3 exhibitors involved with virtual or augmented realities more than doubled to 126 from 53 last year, according to the Entertainment Software Association behind the event.

"This by far, is the most exciting E3 as it comes to virtual reality," said YouTube director of gaming Ryan Wyatt.

Bathing in carnage

Virtual reality versions of blockbuster video games "Fallout," "Doom," and "Skyrim" were part of a lineup unveiled by Bethesda Softworks.

"Virtual reality is something we have been at the forefront of for a while now," said Bethesda vice president of marketing Pete Hines.

Later this year, shooter game "Doom" will "bathe you in virtual carnage" as a cybernetic survivor fighting off a demon invasion.

A VR version of "Fallout" will put players into a world destroyed by nuclear war, while they will face dragons in a full-length, open-world version of "Skyrim," according to Bethesda.

Sony built on its library of games for its PlayStation VR gear, which works with top-selling PlayStation 4 consoles.

More than a million PS VR units have been sold, along with some 5.25

million VR games.

'Breaking Bad'

Along with games, Sony is working on a VR "experience" spinning off the television series "Breaking Bad" in a partnership with producer Vince Gilligan.

Skybound Entertainment meanwhile announced it is collaborating on virtual reality games spinning off "The Walking Dead," the post-apocalyptic television series.

"Our goal is to honor the visceral world that (Robert) Kirkman has created while giving the Walking Dead's fans something to really sink their teeth into with robust games," Skydance media chief executive David Ellison and operating officer Jesse Sigsold said in a statement.

A Skydance game titled "Archangel" shared behind closed doors at E3 let players take command a six-story-tall mechanized battle suit in a fight against a tyrannical corporation.

"Archangel" is to be released later this year.

"We decided to jump headfirst into the business of VR with 'Archangel' because we saw an emerging market and want Skydance to help write this story," Skydance Interactive president Peter Akemann told AFP.

"We know we're only at the tip of the iceberg with what VR can ultimately deliver as a gaming medium but we believe wholeheartedly in its long term potential and are investing in it as such."

Pushing the envelope

Sony, HTC and Facebook-owned Oculus are the top players in virtual reality head gear, each striving to stake out territory in the budding market.

And even though the VR audience is lean compared to the hundreds of millions of people with consoles or personal computers, game makers are prone to embracing new technologies and understand that compelling content can inspire consumers to follow suit.

"If you don't start pushing the envelope, people won't think about upgrading hardware," YouTube's Wyatt said of the drive toward richer graphics and immersive worlds in gaming.

"Publishers know the long-term payout that VR will have and are investing."

Ultra-high definition graphics and virtual reality in games has been a bright spot in the personal computer, which is seeing that segment grow while the market overall declines.

While Sony's VR headsets work with PS 4 consoles, competing gear requires computers that handle the demand of processing rich, immersive graphics in real-time.

This has created opportunity for chip makers.

"We want to work with partners to get gaming titles that are really worthy... and to grow the player base for virtual reality," Intel senior vice president Gregory Bryant said at an E3 press event the chip maker held in a Los Angeles theater.

"A lot of the technology and experiences we are showcasing transcend gaming; you can expect entertainment, music, sports and more."

Gaming computer star Alienware and parent-company Dell boasted of continued investment in [virtual reality](#) and eSports.

"Virtual reality will never go away," said Jon Peddie Research video game industry analyst Ted Pollak.

"But at the end of the day, [game makers](#) want to see a big install base of these headsets."

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