

TICKET Games

With KEVIN LYNCH



IK MULTIMEDIA iRIG PRO DUO

£180 ★★★★★

Making music on the go has really come into its own recently thanks to the increased power of laptops, tablets and smartphones, along with how compact audio interfaces have become.

This genuinely pocket-sized interface takes things a step further in terms of its dinkiness. Able to be powered by a pair of AA batteries (or via USB or a wall socket adaptor), it boasts a pair of XLR/TRS audio jacks with phantom power for connecting up guitars and microphones, 24-bit analogue/digital converters as well as MIDI in/out jacks, yet only measures 75 x 127 x 37mm and weighs just 200g.

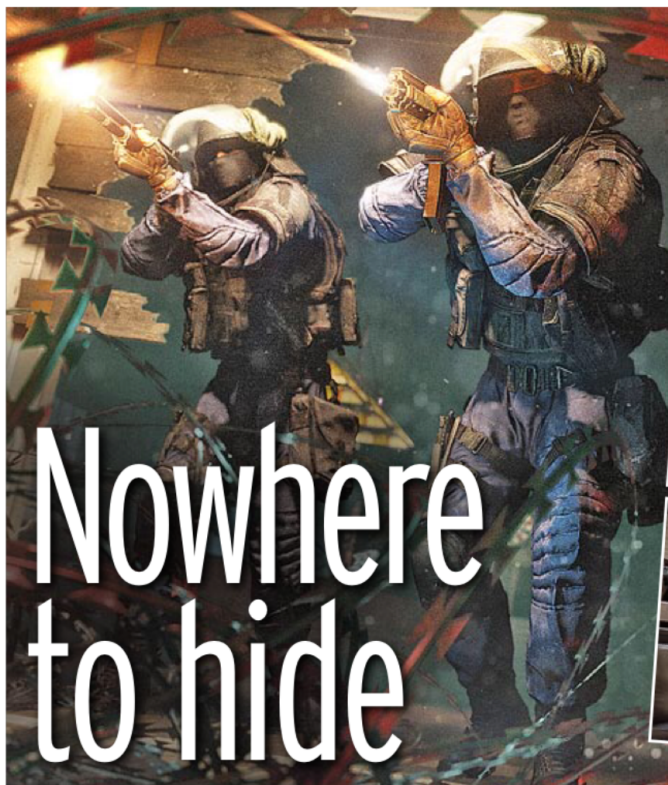
The two channels of inputs allow for a pair of audio tracks to be recorded at the same time, making it perfect for singer songwriter types, while the quality of the inputs raises the Pro Duo above being merely just a device for sketching out ideas.

Multi-coloured LEDs on the front of the device provide visual level indicators, show whether phantom power is enabled, and denote MIDI channel activity.

There's also a generous bundle of free IK Multimedia software thrown in such as lite versions of guitar amp simulator AmpliTube and virtual instrument workstation SampleTank, which are great for getting newcomers to music tech up and running.

The one real snag comes with the fact that it only supports sample rates up to 48kHz – fine for most recordings, especially given the limited storage space of iPads and phones, but those looking to make or playback pristine, hi-res takes at 96kHz will be left disappointed.

Reliable and capable of superb sounding results despite its size, expect to see this on the tour bus of seasoned performers as well as in the bedrooms of those starting out in the world of music production.



Nowhere to hide

RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE

Xbox One, PS4, PC
£42.99-£49.99 ★★★★★

For those who like their shooters a little more cerebral, the Rainbow Six series – based on the special-ops novels of the late Tom Clancy – have always delivered.

Tactical and punishing for those who prefer a Rambo approach to running and gunning, Siege is a reboot of sorts that shifts focus to five versus five competitive play.

Two teams – terrorists and counter-terrorists – face off in a series of assault modes, such as securing a hostage. Matches are always tense, due to just how vulnerable you are. Defending teams have a short period at the start of a round to fortify defences, but there's no guaranteed safety anywhere.

Weak walls can be shot through, fortified windows and doors can be broken down with sledgehammers and stronger defences shattered with explosives. With only a single life in each match, teamwork and communication is vital, as is understanding the proper use for

the host of gadgets and skills each of 20 unique operatives have at their disposal.

However, step away from the top-notch multiplayer and there's very little else to Siege. Where Rainbow Six games of old matched the multiplayer bouts with fully-formed single-player campaigns, there's little more here than an extended tutorial.

There is nothing wrong with a multiplayer-focused game, but for a series that has had some stellar solo campaigns previously, it's a bit disappointing.

Siege shoots itself in the foot

with its unlock system, too. It's a painfully slow process ranking up in the latest Rainbow Six game, meaning you'll have to invest many hours in order to acquire access to the most interesting equipment and operatives.

This is a shame as some of the most exciting stuff is deeply locked away.

Rainbow Six Siege is packed full of great ideas, but spreads them thinly or hides them. Settle down for a session with a great team and you'll have a thrilling time, but solo players will want to look elsewhere.



Game of the week

DREAM TEAM: Multi-player action is superb but solo play is poor

GADGETS OF THE WEEK

KITSOUND LINK

£70 ★★★★★



can be grouped together in Party Mode, which plays music on all speakers simultaneously.

Do you love the idea of Sonos-style wireless music streaming systems, but want to save a bit of cash and use your existing speaker or hi-fi setup?

That's the general premise of this box of tricks, which allows you to incorporate any audio device with a 3.5mm mini-jack into a multi-room setup. The Link is controlled by an accompanying free smartphone app which supports streaming services such as Spotify, Napster and Tune-In Radio, as well as playback of MP3 and hi-res audio files from DNLA networked drives. The small 119mm wide by 27mm deep unit can also be hooked up via its optical digital input.

Splash out on more than one Link and you can stream individual tracks to different rooms, or multiple Links

Incredibly easy to set up, how the Link sounds will ultimately depend on what you're hooking it up to. When paired up with an early-noughties Onkyo mini CD system and fed a hi-res FLAC version of Neil Young's After The Goldrush, the stream was robust and full of detail with no obvious signs of compression or artefacts.

There's a bit of a dearth of supported streaming services – Deezer and Qobuz are nowhere to be seen, although Tidal and Soundcloud are said to be on their way – and the plasticky casing and lack of an included power adapter (a USB-to-micro-USB cable is all that's supplied) indicate its budget pricepoint.

However, it will breathe a bit of life into your ageing separates system.

MOTO X FORCE

Price dependent on contract ★★★★★

It can often feel as if we've reached something of a plateau when it comes to genuinely useful new features appearing on smartphones, with very little distinguishing one new flagship handset from another.

So it therefore feels like something of a novelty that Motorola claims this is the only top-end phone with a screen guaranteed not to shatter.

The display features five separate layers, with Motorola boldly guaranteeing the screen for four years. The final level of protection comes in the form of an exterior glass screen protector which you can remove and replace manually if it gets scratched.

Aside from its hardness, the X Force's spec sheet is also up there with the best. Running on Android 5.1, there's a Quad HD screen, 3GB of RAM and an Octa-core Snapdragon Processor plus a battery that's capable of lasting a full two days, with a quick charge TurboPower feature that can provide 13 hours of use from just 15 minutes of being

plugged into the mains. Elsewhere, its Active Display feature senses when it's in a pocket, handily switching itself off.

The camera won't give the Nexus 6P or iPhone 6S any stress, but the X Force's 21-megapixel Sony sensor combined with a two-tone rear flash is still very capable, only let down by patchy low-light performance.

While not a deal breaker, all those protective layers make the display seem a little greyed-out in comparison to rival devices. It's also a more prone to reflections, although viewing angles are great. There's also no fingerprint scanner, an increasingly common payment feature on high-end phones.

It's been fun repeatedly slinging the handset against pavements and walls for this review – and the screen certainly stands up to Motorola's claims, although its worth bearing in mind that it isn't indestructible. The metal casing dents like any other smartphone and, unlike a number of Sony's handsets, it's not waterproof.

The X Force is a tough old workhorse and definitely worth considering for anyone looking for longevity and strong specs.

