THE BEST OF THE FREEBIES
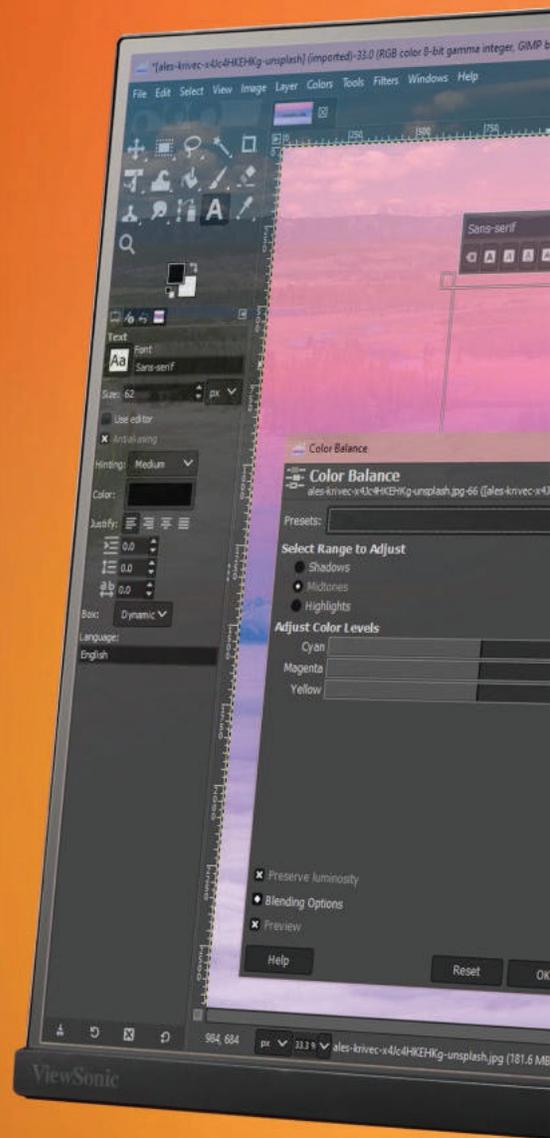
50 completely free programs you should install on your PC SAM LEWIS

WE'RE NOT SAYING you should install all 50 of these programs at once, but these are our recommendations for software that we feel will hopefully benefit you in some way, give you a kick-ass experience, or simply add a little entertainment to your day. And who doesn't like a freebie?

Paying for things can get tiresome, not to mention expensive, but thankfully there are plenty of free alternatives or routes to take instead of delving deep into your pockets to buy an application. We've rounded up a wide range of programs here that enable you to improve your PC's efficiency, customize your rig, get creative, or just have some fun.

The free market has rapidly changed over the last decade. Cell phones have played a huge role in this transformation, because we've grown to expect more and more from free services. The quality of free applications available now compared to even a just few years ago has shifted massively. For instance, triple-A title *Call of Duty* is now offering a fully immersive and epic gaming experience with its battle royale game mode, "Warzone," taken from *Modern Warfare*—all for free. Of course, it's a clever way to entice you into the franchise, but the free gaming market has exploded because of titles like this. It sets a bar, with high expectations for the quality of free applications and games to continue upward. The free market is an exciting area to keep your eye on, so here's 50 of the best programs that won't cost you a dime.
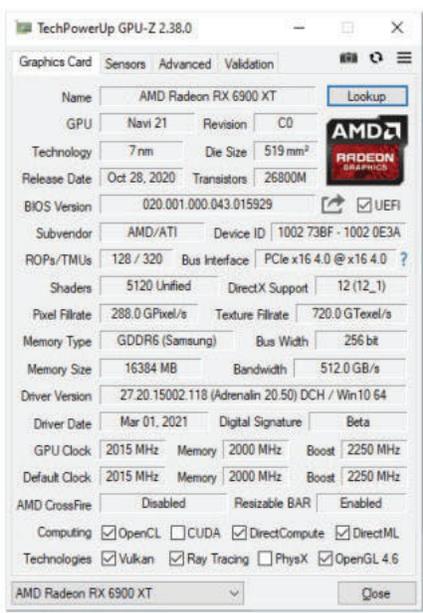
MAINTENANCE & REPAIR

01 TechPowerUp GPU-Z

GPU-Z is a lightweight program that tells you everything you need to know about your graphics card. It's a quick, effortless solution to keeping tabs on lots of data in one place. You can check the GPU's BIOS version, when the card was released, the GPU clocks, and so on. Other metrics revealed by the software include temperature, core frequency, memory frequency, GPU load, and fan speed tracking. Who wouldn't want this data for free, and always just a few clicks away? **www.techpowerup.com**

02 CPUID HWMonitor

As the name suggests, HWMonitor is a hardware monitor, and focuses on the health of your PC. The application enables you to take a look at the main health sensors, such as voltage, temperature, fan speed, and so on. It's a great place to check whether anything is a particular bottleneck if you're experiencing performance problems. It can help you identify why these issues are occurring, and confirm whether they're hardware-related. It's a free, easy-to-use PC doctor, and a big part of our testing suite here at the magazine, too. **www.cpuid.com**

03 CCleaner

The more you use your PC, the more it becomes cluttered with unused files, settings, and junk, which all combine to slow down your once beautifully fluid machine. Obviously, this is far from ideal, but CCleaner is specifically designed to fight against the problem. It features

Get the complete skinny on your graphics card with GPU-Z.

a file cleaner to eliminate all the pesky excess for increased speed, a privacy protection tool to remove tracking and browsing data, and a health check to automatically analyze, fix, and tune your PC's performance. **www.ccleaner.com**

04 CPU-Z

Here's a handy tool to reveal extra information about your CPU that Windows usually likes to keep hidden away. CPU-Z can tell you which processor you have, what chipset it uses, which motherboard is installed, and information about your memory, all in an easy-to-
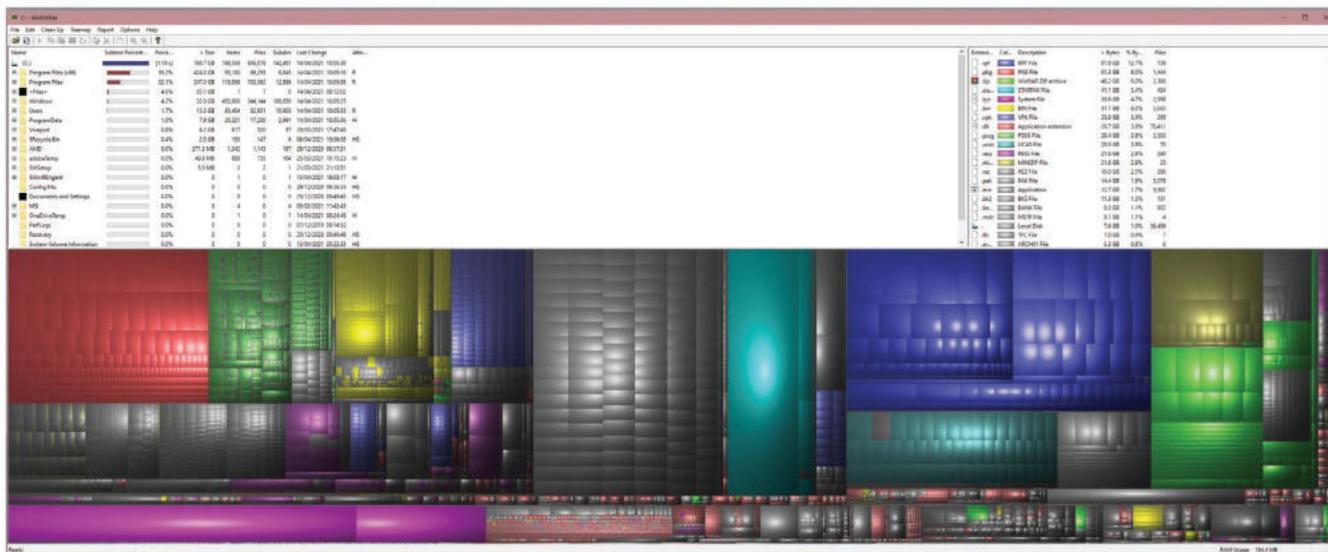
use lightweight application. It can be particularly useful for overclockers— even though it isn't specifically filled with overclocking features, it can help you create a report about your system's hardware specifications, which you can then use alongside HWMonitor. **www.cpuid.com**

05 WinDirStat

If your PC is ever tight for space, WinDirStat can give you a helping hand with the matter. It's always a pain in the backside to figure out what's clogging up your PC's storage, but with this application, you get a visual report so you can literally see what's taking up all the room. Simply put, it is a disk usage statistics viewer and cleanup tool, which displays your storage as colorful visual tiles, so you can see where all your space has gone. **https://windirstat.net**

06 Cinebench

Benchmarking is a great way to compare your rig against another PC's performance. The results can determine what you are able to get out of your PC and which elements are having the most impact on a game's frame rates, for instance. Cinebench is a visual benchmarking tool and the built-in leaderboards make it really easy to compare your results. It will give you an idea of whether your CPU is performing adequately compared to similar CPUs, and can give you an indication of how much of an improvement to performance a newer processor could add to your system. **www.microsoft.com**

Visualizing storage with WinDirStat makes storage management a walk in the park.

With its intuitive design, f.lux makes it easy to protect your eyes.

07 CrystalDiskMark

An open-source hard drive benchmarking tool, CrystalDiskMark is used to determine the read and write speeds of your SSD. It measures these speeds in sequential and random positions, with varying numbers of queues and threads. Like all benchmarks, you can use the data generated to compare your machine against other PCs to ensure yours is running up to speed, and that all your drives are operating correctly. **https://crystalmark.info**
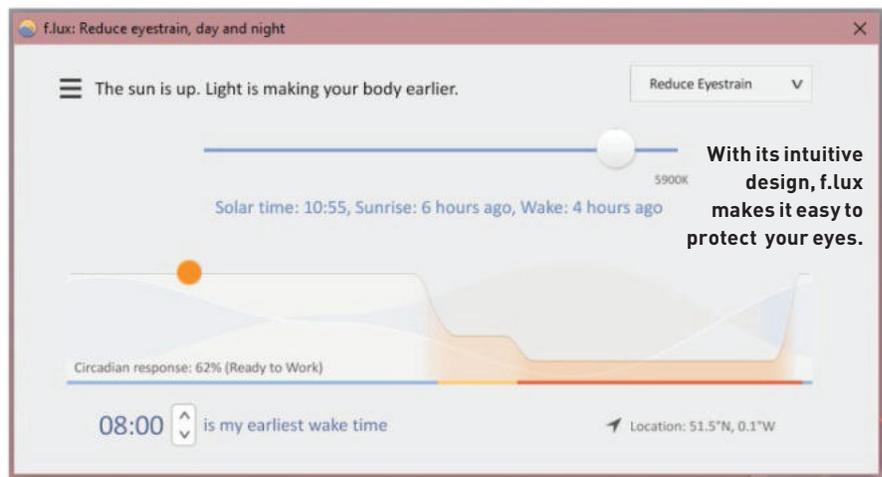
08 Recuva

Deleting the wrong file can give anybody a fright, but what if you do that and then proceed to delete it from the recycling bin, too? First of all: unlucky. Secondly, don't fret, because Recuva can help recover deleted files for you. When you delete a file on your thumb drive, hard drive, or SSD, the file isn't necessarily gone instantly. The block of space that the files were taking up has merely been relabeled as "free space" so it can eventually be used to store something else. Recuva can look to see if it's there, but the longer you leave it, the more likely it is that the file will have gone, so as soon as you accidentally delete something, find it on Recuva ASAP! **www.ccleaner.com**

09 MediaInfo

Like a lot of these programs, the name kind of gives it away. If you need to find out information about a media file, MediaInfo will do just that. Right-click a video, for instance, and then click MediaInfo, and you can find its technical details all in one place. You can learn about the codec, video bitrate, audio stream, resolution, and FPS, for example. It's a good method of checking whether a video you've rendered has been saved to the correct format. **https://mediaarea.net/en/MediaInfo**

10 FurMark

With its OpenGL routine, FurMark will put your GPU through its paces. The aim is to see how your GPU withstands its strenuous benchmarking test, to compare it against others. FurMark is no laughing matter, though, as it's been known to damage PCs, so take it steady, and make sure your cooling is up to scratch. The website gallery even shows hardware that has been defeated by this app, so make sure you know what you are doing. On the plus side, at least you don't have to pay for it. **http://geeks3d.com/furmark**

CUSTOMIZATION & EFFICIENCY

11 QTTabBar

A feature that should already be integrated into Windows Explorer is the use of tabs. Every time you open Windows Explorer, another window opens, and before you know it, your PC is flooded with pesky pop-ups. QTTabBar adds tabs to Windows Explorer, just like you see in a web browser, making file searching and transferring a much more fluid experience. Head to the "View" button in the taskbar, then to the "Options" drop-down, and click "QTTabBar" to enable it. Now just right-click a folder to open it in a new tab. It still looks and feels the same, but with the added benefit of tabs. **http://qttabbar.wikidot.com**

12 f.lux

Blue light isn't great for your eyes, and using any sort of screen later on in the day or through the night can cause eye strain, which can massively impact your productivity, procrastination, gaming, or whatever else you are getting up to. What f.lux does is change the color temperature of your screen to match the time of day. This, in theory, should cause less eye strain, resulting in fewer headaches and a better night's sleep. And, of course, it's free, so it gets two thumbs up from us! **https://justgetflux.com**

13 Rainmeter

An all-arounder for great visual PC customization. You can add skins to your desktop to make your computer your own and personalize it to your heart's content. Rainmeter is full of widgets to add to the desktop that give you advantages over the standard theme. You can add hardware-monitoring widgets to always keep an eye on your PC's performance, or add clocks, calendars, audio visualizers, and more. If you like making things your own and want to experiment with desktop customization, Rainmeter is a great shout. **www.rainmeter.net**

14 Fences

This one certainly sits on the fence between customization and efficiency.... Ouch, that was painful—sorry! Anyway, Fences is a neat little piece of software that organizes your desktop icons and shortcuts into folders, much like those on your phone's home screen. Unfortunately, the latest version requires a few bucks, but you can go ahead and download an older version of the software for free or try the 30-day free trial option. **www.oldversion.com/windows/fences-1-0-1**

15 Folder Marker

If you struggle with organizing your folders, this is another tool that can help you with getting everything sorted. It enables you to change icons and add color to your Windows folders. When working on large projects that use a load of different folders, it can be a pain navigating your way through the mess. Now you can right-click a folder, click "Folder Marker," then change the priority status or work type of the folder to make everything clear and tidy. It's a small program but it can really help with work efficiency. **https://foldermarker.com/en/folder-marker-free/**

16 EarTrumpet

With a funky name like that, it's a shame the app isn't quite as exciting as its moniker implies, but it's a nifty and clever addition to your setup nonetheless. EarTrumpet is a sound icon that sits in the taskbar, but as it looks similar to the existing one, it's best to remove that

first. What this app does over the standard sound control is change the volume of different sound sources. You can already do this if you're prepared to route around in the settings, but it's so much easier with EarTrumpet. **www.microsoft.com**

17 ShareX

There are plenty of screen-capturing programs available, but ShareX is a particularly feature-packed example. It can capture screenshots and record with several options for how you want to capture, including full-screen, active window, active monitor, window menu, monitor menu, screen recording (GIF), scrolling capture, and webpage capture. This app makes it super easy to capture what you need, especially when paired with the provided shortcuts that you can find in the hotkey settings. **www.microsoft.com**

18 Everything

Windows search is definitely an essential part of the operating system, but sometimes it can be painfully slow, and isn't always the easiest solution for finding exactly what you need on your PC. With Everything, it is very easy to find what you are looking for, making the whole process so much quicker. Another simple yet effective alternative to improve your overall PC experience. **www.voidtools.com**

19 MyFolders

This effective tool adds a context menu that enables you to access your favorite folders from any right-click. Using MyFolders' interface, you can add your folders while organizing their location. Once activated, and with your selected folders added, you can now right-click anywhere, click "MyFolders," then "Go to," and you will find your selected folders available from the menu. A quick and easy to find what you need. **www.coretechnologies.com/products/MyFolders/**

20 7 + Taskbar Tweaker

This taskbar customization tool falls right in the line of sight of people who like to have tight control over how their PC's interface looks and behaves. It makes your taskbar more interactive, giving you options to change the function of current buttons, alter how mouse buttons interact with the taskbar, change thumbnail previews, add functions to empty space, and much more. Add this free piece of software to interact with your PC exactly how you want. **https://rammichael.com/7-taskbar-tweaker**

GAMER'S TOOLBOX

21 Razer Cortex

If you want an extra boost that focuses your PC's power on the things that really matter, look no further. Use Razer's suite of gaming optimization tools to achieve higher frame rates and loading times. It also features a system booster that automatically detects and deletes junk files to free up space, similar to CCleaner. A great addition to help your gaming experience. **www.razer.com/cortex**

22 LaunchBox

If you enjoy dabbling with emulators, LaunchBox is an excellent launcher to store and display your retro collection all in one place. Its crowd-sourced library organizes everything, and the visuals on this launcher are, quite frankly, stunning. Including instruction manuals for the emulators, it's a super-friendly and easy-to-use package. Even if you aren't into emulators, it can store your Steam library, too. **www.launchbox-app.com**

EarTrumpet's simplicity is what makes it so easy to quickly adjust your sound outputs.

23 Pin Steam

Everyone wants to make their PC aesthetically pleasing and effective, right? Well, here's one for your Steam games. As the name suggests, it enables you to pin your Steam titles to your Start menu with cool-looking tiles. Compared to standard icons, these visually rich tiles add detailed artwork to your Start menu, making it much easier to find and organize your games while improving the look of your PC. **www.microsoft.com**
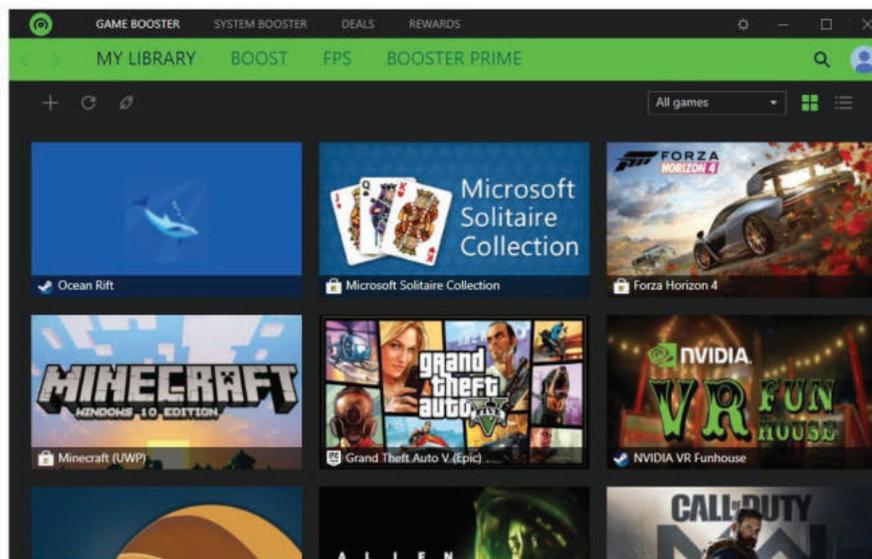
24 Discord

You have to be living under a rock if you haven't heard of Discord; this free communication app was bound to feature on our list. Although it has all sorts of uses, it can facilitate any sort of online chat, from VoIP to text to video, making it essential for gamers who want to hang out online with their pals. Its simplicity makes it a breeze to use, and for gamers, communication is key, so install this if you haven't already. **www.discord.com**

25 GeForce Experience

Calling all Nvidia GeForce GTX users: You need this app. This free software is a great graphics card manager. It keeps your drivers up to date and optimizes game settings for better performance. You can also use GeForce Experience to share exciting in-game moments with pals. **www.nvidia.com**

26 MSI Afterburner

Designed to push your Nvidia or AMD graphics card to the limit, MSI's Afterburner is a great tool for

Cortex displays your library with large artwork, for a simple yet effective UI.

overclockers as it focuses on clock speed and video memory, enabling you to get better frame rates by increasing voltages and clock speeds, unlocking your GPU's potential. Make sure you have more than adequate cooling, though; the last thing you want is a fried GPU for breakfast, especially in this climate. **www.msi.com**

27 SuperF4

We all know the pain of being stuck in a game when everything seems to crawl up and die. Your game freezes and you're forced to quit. Alt-F4 should do the trick, but this isn't always the case; Windows only asks the program to quit, and lets it decide for itself what to do. SuperF4, however, kills the foreground program when you press Ctrl-Alt-F4, or you can press Win-F4, then click the window with your mouse cursor. Straightforward but essential for those infuriating times when your PC just doesn't listen. **https://stefansundin.github.io/superf4/**

28 GameSave Manager

As the name suggests, GameSave Manager's purpose is pretty simple: It enables you to automatically back up all your game save files at once and restore them. It also offers scheduled backups, and can tie in with cloud services such as Dropbox. If you're paranoid about game saves vanishing into thin air, GameSave Manager could be your golden ticket out of the missing or corrupt file abyss. **www.gamesave-manager.com**

Take control of your graphics card with MSI Afterburner—just don't grill it.

Dusk II is one of *CS: GO's* most popular maps to get its own mode.

ESSENTIAL FREE GAMES

29 Call of Duty: Warzone

We mentioned it in the intro, so there's no shock that it features in our list. The bottom line here is that you get the same *Call of Duty* quality we all know and love, but for free. Of course, you only get the battle royale mode, not the campaign or standard online features, but battle royales are taking over, and the *COD* franchise sure knows a thing or two about producing a solid visually brilliant first-person shooter. Put two and two together and you have a great free game. **www.callofduty.com/warzone**

30 Counter-Strike: Global Offensive

CS: GO has been popular for years, and by the looks of things, it's not going anywhere soon. At some point, you're bound to have played or watched it, and now it's free on Steam. For the uninitiated, it's an online team-based shooter; if you want to play casually with friends, you can, if you want a high-intensity competitive experience, you can have that, too. *CS: GO*

works across all sorts of performance levels, so is a very accessible PC game. **http://store.steampowered.com**
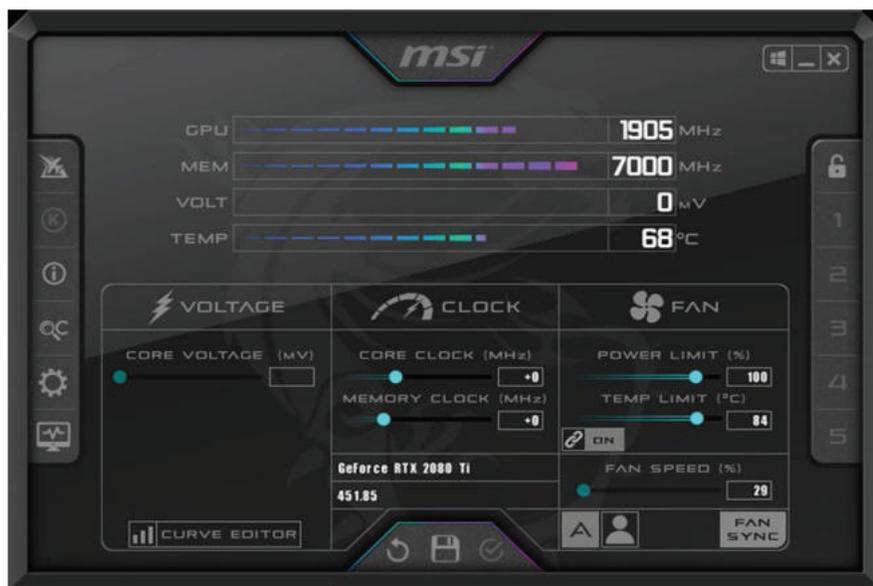
31 Old School RuneScape

If you love *RuneScape* and need to fill the nostalgia void, *Old School RuneScape* should do the trick. After a poll to revive it received over 50,000 votes, a separate older version of the already massive *RuneScape* was released in February 2013 to subscribers. By 2015, it was free to the public. It's one of the best retro MMORPGs to date—check it out now. **https://oldschool.runescape.com**
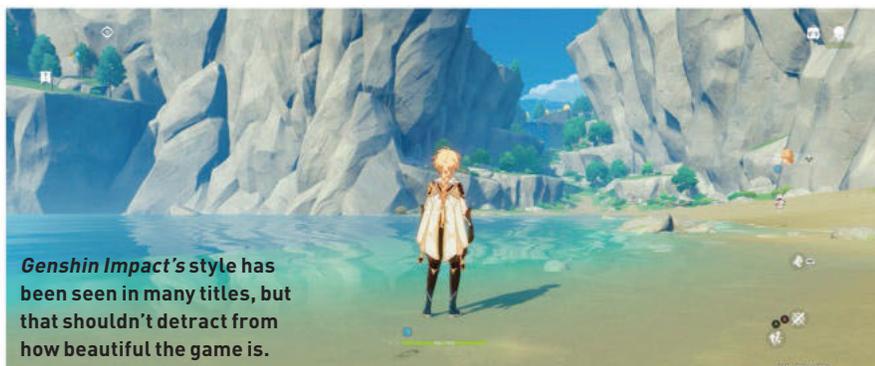
32 Fortnite

Although you might be sick to death of this game, you can't deny its mass popularity, competitive nature, and attractive bright art style. It's certainly not going away anytime soon, and it continues to bring huge amounts of traction to gaming. Its building capability, paired with shooting and bringing the battle royale game mode to the forefront, are what sets this game apart, and why it continues to be one of the best free games on the market. If you want to hop online with your buddies, it's a great place to have a laugh, but also somewhere you can get carried away in its intense competitive underside, too. **www.epicgames.com**

33 War Thunder

War Thunder was first announced back in 2011, with its worldwide release falling in 2013, and since then it has been one of the most prominent vehicular combat multiplayer games available. Its main focus is on richly detailed aviation war battles, with over 1,900 aircraft, ground vehicles, and warships to immerse yourself in. The graphics are stunning when running on full settings, and you can't ask for more when it comes to a completely free MMO. **http://store.steampowered.com**

Genshin Impact's style has been seen in many titles, but that shouldn't detract from how beautiful the game is.

34 DOTA 2

A top-down arena battle game that's almost certainly one of the best-known MOBA games to date, *DOTA 2* essentially spawned from a mod for *Warhammer III: Reign of Chaos,* but it's made a name for itself, especially in the esports scene. It was developed by Valve, with major involvement from the original creator of *DOTA*. If you're into real-time strategy and tower defense games, this MOBA is a brilliant free addition to your arsenal. *http://store.steampowered.com*

35 Destiny 2

Closely following the construction of an open-world game, you can wander freely around this gorgeous game, either to explore every nook of the map or find quests to complete the campaign. The mythical sci-fi-inspired world is captivating, with its shared-world-style multiplayer. There are elements of PvE and PvP throughout, and with a triple-A FPS RPG like this costing nothing, it's worth giving it a go. *http://store.steampowered.com*

36 RaceRoom Racing Experience

RaceRoom is one of our favorite car simulators. Its addictive yet realistic gameplay is a great example of what you can get from a free game. It's not quite full-fledged, like the paid alternatives, but the visua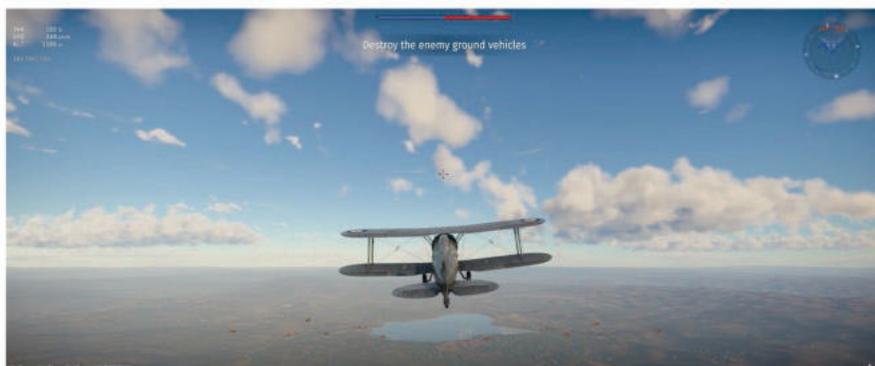ls are still stunning. *RaceRoom* is home to official race series such as DTM, WTCR, the WTCC, and ADAC GT Masters. If you want to race like a professional, jump into the driver's seat right here. *http://store.steampowered.com*

37 The House in the Woods

Why not throw a horror title into the mix? If you've seen *The Blair Witch Project* and weren't scared enough (props to you), try out this game, then see how you feel. The story sees you out on a camping trip in the deep forest, when your friend vanishes during the night. You step away to investigate, but then you get lost, too. Classic scenario, but you'll certainly get the chills here. Whether you want to freak out your pals or enjoy the adrenaline that horror games give you, *The House in the Woods* is sure to satisfy. *www.itch.io*

38 Genshin Impact

What you get here is a stunning open-world experience that uses elemental magic, character switching, and great brawls to draw you in. Visually, this fantasy adventure draws inspiration from the likes of *Breath of the Wild,* but we view that as nothing but a positive. There are tons of resources to collect, craft, and cook with, plus mini-bosses to fight and puzzles to complete, so *Genshin Impact* will still keep you on your toes even when you aren't following the campaign mode. *https://genshin.mihoyo.com/en*

CREATIVITY & PRODUCTIVITY

39 Adobe Photoshop Express

The Express edition of Adobe's world-famous photo-editing software is a free-to-use lightweight version. If you don't need the full version of Photoshop or don't want to pay the monthly fees (like many of us), this offers the same Adobe quality in a smaller package. It gives you all the basic features you need to edit pictures quickly. *www.microsoft.com*

40 Blender

Fancy making 3D models for free? Then Blender has got you covered. With this incredible software, you can design and make models using a wide range of available tools. You can then go on to animate and motion-track the models you've created. The only real limit is your imagination. It can even act as a video editor or a 2D animation suite—combined with its amazing rendering engine, it all makes for a fabulous free tool. *www.blender.org*

41 DaVinci Resolve 17

For a while, this program has been one of the best color graders on the market, but it's now a full-fledged video editing suite, too. It's been used for many large commercial projects, and you can check them out for yourself on the DaVinci website. If you are just beginning to dip your toe into video editing, or perhaps you already use other programs, such as Adobe's Premiere Pro or Sony Vegas, we recommend you take it for a spin—it's free, after all. *www.blackmagicdesign.com*

42 LibreOffice

If you only use the basic features of Microsoft Office, LibreOffice is a great alternative that checks most of the boxes, but without the associated price tag. It's certainly not as feature-rich as Microsoft's flagship, but for creating most day-to-day documents, this suite should be able to produce what you need. It has alternatives for Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and more—not bad. *www.libreoffice.org*

43 HandBrake

A little different from your traditional hand-operated stopping device, HandBrake is an open-source, free-to-use video converter. It's a must-have for video editors, because it's both powerful and easy to use. HandBrake

War Thunder invites you to buckle up and head for the skies in a high-paced battle game.

converts video files into different formats, can be used for opening files of a random codec, or to make files more universally accessible. Free, easy, and obscurely named, we love it. It's also a handy benchmark tool, too. **www.handbrake.fr**
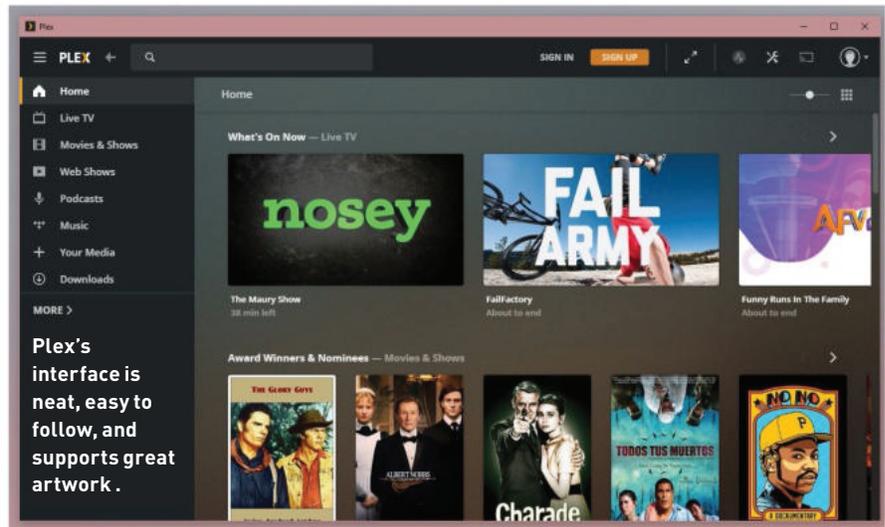
44 Audacity

If you need to record your voice, whether that be from voiceover dubs, voice memos, video recording, or even if you want to kickstart a career in opera, Audacity is a superb free audio recording program. You can record, trim, add effects, re-organize, fade in and out, and much more. For audiophiles and microphone fanatics, this is an excellent choice, and a perfect alternative to Adobe Audition, albeit a little slimmed down. **www.audacityteam.org**

45 Fresh Paint

Microsoft's Fresh Paint gives you a canvas on which to unleash your inner Picasso—well, you can attempt to, at least. It's a painting app with plenty of great tools for all sorts of artists. You can even transform pictures into paintings. It's the type of program where you can dabble a bit when the creative urge takes you, or spend hours using it to create a masterpiece. **www.microsoft.com**
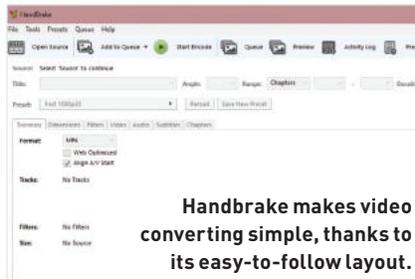
46 GIMP

This community-driven and developed image editor was bound to make an appearance here. Although it will never reach the same heights as its heavyweight rival Adobe Photoshop, GIMP has a strong foothold in the photo manipulation market, and its free price tag has a big role to play in that. It provides you with the right tools to get the job done, whether that be for graphic design, illustration, photography, or just messing around. **www.gimp.org**

Plex's interface is neat, easy to follow, and supports great artwork .

47 FocusWriter

One of the biggest issues faced when trying to get a new writing project of the ground is the distractions that come along when working on your PC. We can definitely vouch for this one. FocusWriter helps you to stay in the zone with your writing by eliminating all these distractions. Its writing environment is light, distraction-free, and simple. It utilizes a hideaway interface that you access by moving your mouse to the edge of the screen. It's very basic, but definitely gets the job done. **https://gottcode.org/focuswriter/**

Handbrake makes video converting simple, thanks to its easy-to-follow layout.
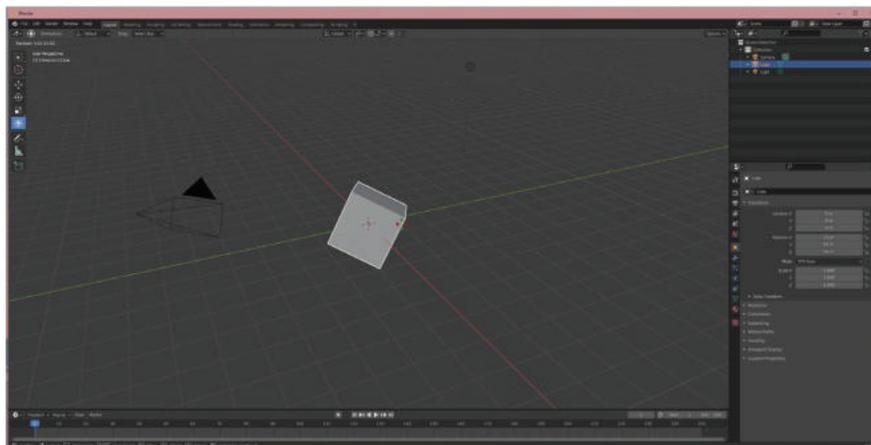
ENTERTAINMENT

48 Plex

A great hub for all of your downloaded video files. If you have a massive database full of (legally owned) TV shows, movies, and documentaries, you can store them all in Plex. It's a media server that enables you to stream your files to your other devices. The interface is very tidy and designed to work effectively, organizing your files with the appropriate artwork. You can find the Plex app on all sorts of devices, such as the Apple App Store, Google Play, and even your games consoles. **https://www.plex.tv**

49 Spotify

You'd have to be living under a rock, next to a needle wedged between 25 haystacks if you haven't heard of Spotify already. Since its launch, the music streaming service has pretty much taken over the way we listen to music. Spotify's free plan gives you access to an incredibly vast online library, and if you can ignore the occasional advertisements and don't want to download songs, this fulfills that need for instant music listening, anytime, anywhere (Wi-Fi signal permitting). **www.spotify.com**

50 Steam

Pretty much the first thing you download after Chrome when you get a new gaming PC, right? Steam is the most reliable source of PC games out there—with a huge library, pretty much any game you can think of will be available via Steam. Its interface is engraved into most gamers' brains, and if it isn't engraved into yours, you don't have enough free time. Steam is an absolutely essential tool for any PC gamer. **https://store.steampowered.com**

At first glance, Blender can look a little confusing, but with a little practice and patience, you'll realize how many incredible features this free software offers.

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