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Press Sneak Fuck

Today at 12:29 PM



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Earlier today, someone [made an awful thread](#) based on a lengthy conversation I had on the Kotaku Splitscreen podcast by transcribing a single line from it, and it led to 12 pages of truly embarrassing discourse. Since so many of you commented and reacted without actually listening to the episode, and since the thread's creator did such a piss-poor job of giving context, I took the time to type out an actual transcript. Here you go.

Oh, and, listen to [Kotaku Splitscreen](#) to get plenty of proper context, scoops, and most importantly, discussion about the weather.

(Note: the conversation started with me criticizing Sony's marketing plan for making the first-ever PS5 event a dry technical stream that was incomprehensible to most fans, as opposed to holding a fan-focused event followed by a GDC talk.)

**JASON:** ...The other really interesting thing that happened was, because they released this giant list of tech specs that maybe your average hardcore gamer who reads a lot of forums and Reddit and Twitter and stuff can kind of semi-parse this stuff--

**KIRK:** They can parse it just enough to have a super strong but not entirely informed opinion on this.

**JASON:** Yes, exactly. The number everyone's looking at is teraflops, which is essentially the maximum speed that a graphics card can run at. I believe it stands for floating point operations per second. So everybody's now seeing this spec sheet and they see PS5, 10.2 teraflops, and Xbox Series X, 12 teraflops. And it's like, oh my god, the Xbox is more powerful than the PlayStation. But meanwhile, the people I've been talking to over the past few months and the past couple years who are actually working on the PlayStation have pretty much unanimously all said: This thing is a beast. This thing is one of the coolest pieces of hardware that we've ever seen, we've ever used before. There are so many things here that are revolutionary, so many behind-the-scenes tools and features, APIs, and all sorts of other stuff that is way beyond my scope of comprehension. This is why I'm a reporter, and not an engineer.

But the general consensus is that these things are both extremely powerful and both very similar in a lot of ways and both do different things in really cool ways. These are both extremely impressive pieces of technology. But because of the way Sony has actually presented this thing and marketed this thing, now the narrative is 'The Xbox is way more powerful than the PlayStation,' and I think that is such a -- maybe fatal flaw on Sony's part for this console generation. Maybe it'll all be forgotten if the PS5 comes in cheaper, or it has a killer launch lineup, and maybe none of this will matter in November. Or maybe these consoles won't even be able to come out in November. But right now, it's such a dropping the ball after so many years of smart decisions on Sony's part.

**KIRK:** Yeah, I wonder about that, only because yes this is a messaging thing right now. The real question for me will be when the consoles are out, and there are multi-platform games on them. Because as much as I generally do feel that the number of teraflops isn't a huge deal, 12 versus 10, if you have great games on it, it's fine. It does, and I wrote about this at Kotaku back when the last consoles launched, I remember trying to articulate this as a very difficult needle to thread, by saying that basically yes, graphics aren't everything, but at the time the PS4 had this clear graphical advantage over the Xbox One. I remember Battlefield 4 was out on both systems and it was running at 1080p on one and 900p on the other. There were just these numerical ways you could say well here's the same game running on both, and they could only get it running this well and not the other.

**JASON:** So let me be clear. So what I'm hearing from people actually working on these things is that the Xbox is not significantly more powerful than the PlayStation, despite this teraflops number, and that the teraflops -- it might be a useful measure of comparison in some ways, but ultimately it's a theoretical max speed, and there are so many things that could come between where you are trying to get and what you are actually able to do, to the point where the GPU could have X number of flops that it can actually perform, but if the developer isn't able to actually access all of it for whatever reason, then it doesn't even matter, and there are so many other variables here that go into it.

At the end of the day, that is fundamentally the big question -- when Assassin's Creed Kingdom, or whatever it's called, Assassin's Creed Vikings comes out this fall, presumably, corona aside. Presumably it comes out this fall on both Xbox Series X and PlayStation 5 -- which one will it look better on, which one will have a better resolution and better framerate on? **I don't think we can know the answer to that question just from the spec sheet, and that's the point I'm making.**

Right now, Sony is dropping the ball so hard in that they haven't talked about what games can actually do with this stuff, because their SSD advantages -- the stuff I'm hearing from developers is very different from what I'm seeing in Sony's marketing strategy, and that is mind-boggling to me. Because I don't want to be like, carrying Sony's water and be like "no, look at what this thing can actually do" but they're just failing so hard to convey that. It's frustrating to watch.

**MADDY:** Do the developers think the SSD does pose a lot of advantages? Because that's the bulk of what Mark Cerny talked about. He did talk about taking photos of people's ears and that's very funny to me, but he also spent time talking about the SSD and how it works, and I barely understand it, but the various ways that the PS5 is set up -- it makes it so games load faster is the shorthand version of all the things he was saying, so you don't have to have a long elevator level or a super-windy path that makes it so two different areas can load.

**KIRK:** RIP elevator levels.

**JASON:** One important piece of context here is that both machines have a solid state drive as opposed to the traditional hard drive they've had in the past. So this is going to -- the whole super-short loading times thing is going to affect all next-gen games. I think that in itself is just going to make a huge difference. It's important to be clear -- the Xbox is a beast of a machine and that is going to do some incredible things. Both of these machines, I think, are going to do some incredible things.

I'm looking at the notes I took when I was talking to one person who's technically minded and works on this stuff, and this person was telling me that A) it's going to be hard to market this stuff because it's very hard to convey what makes a difference, as we're now seeing with Mark Cerny talking about it...

The speed of the PS5's SSD is significantly higher than the speed of the Xbox's SSD, and I don't think that's only going to affect loading times. The way this person was conveying this to me was that it can also affect the way games are designed, because if you're designing an open world, you no longer have to think about certain constraints you had to think about in the past... The obvious example is like in Jedi Fallen Order crawling between spaces, but I think it goes beyond that, I think it's the type of thing where developers have to get in front of this and start talking about like, here's what we can actually do with this open-world triple-A massive game now that we're no longer constrained by the CPU and hard drive of the past. I think ultimately the fact that people are fixated on these teraflops is doing us all an injustice because there's so much more.

**KIRK:** Hang on, let me just jump in here for a second. Don't you think this is the type of thing people are going to talk about for a month and then they're going to show more stuff and then talk about the console, etc etc?

**JASON:** Sure. I'm talking about what's happening right now. Yes, 100%. But to go back to what we were talking about earlier, what we saw with the Xbox One was that the narrative you start with can make a huge difference.

...

[lots of talk about the messaging]

...

This is going to lead to weeks and weeks of talk about how Xbox is the most powerful console, and so on. Meanwhile I'm getting texts even today from developers being like this is such a shame -- the PS5 is superior in all these other ways that they're not able to message right now or can't talk about right now. I heard from at least three different people in the past couple of hours since the Cerny thing being like, wow, the PS5 is actually the more superior piece of hardware in a lot of different ways, despite what we were seeing in these spec sheets. So, again, yes, plenty of room to talk about this, for all these companies to keep messaging and showing games, but I do think Sony has really dropped the ball from what we've seen so far.

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