Heart of The Swarm

Platform: PC (Windows 7 only)
DRM: Battle.NET
Digital Distributor: PHYSICAL COPY ONLY!

Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment

RYG's VERDICT

52% **BARGAIN BIN MATERIAL**
64% and Below

1. Product Info

Note: Installing and playing Heart of The Swarm requires the base game, StarCraft 2: Wings of Liberty.

Looking at how much information is provided on StarCraft 2: Heart of The Swarm (SC2: HOTS) on its website prior and on release.

- ✓ SC2: HOTS released globally on 12.03.2013
- ✓ Minimum and recommended specs provided
- ✓ Advised Battle.NET DRM was to be used for SC2: HOTS
- ✓ Advised how Battle.NET DRM would activate the game through SC2: HOTS
- ✓ Manual and Readme provided via. us.battle.net/sc2/en/game/
- ✓ EULA & Privacy Policy accessible on sea.blizzard.com/en-sg/company/legal/
- ✓ All game-related information can be found on sea.blizzard.com

- ✗ Available only on Windows and MacOS
- ✗ Base game sold as multiple "editions" with varying selections of day-one DLCs
- ✗ Closed alpha/beta access only

2. Privacy Policy

Note: 3,045 words found within Blizzard Entertainment's Privacy Policy.

Looking at SC2: HOTS's Privacy Policy found only through Blizzard Entertainment's official website.

- ✓ Privacy Policy found on sea.blizzard.com/en-sg/company/legal/
- ✓ Policy applies to SC2: HOTS and Battle.NET DRM
- ✓ Users visibly notified of any changes made to the Policy
- ✓ Data centres are 100% safe and secure
- ✓ Visible opt-in / opt-out process
- ✓ Users can access their Battle.NET user account

- ✗ Difficult to read, understand and is inconsistently worded
- ✗ Users not visibly notified of any changes made to the Policy
- ✗ "Personally-identifiable" and "non-personally identifiable" info are intertwined
- ✗ Doesn't define what info is specifically collected before and during gameplay
- ✗ Not advised where the info is specifically stored
- ✗ Not clearly defined how info is used by Blizzard Entertainment
- ✗ Third parties not identified
- ✗ Users have limited control over their Battle.NET account

- ✗ Users can't validate what they've provided
- ✗ User data is retained by Blizzard for an extended period of time
- ✗ Can't review and query changes made to the Privacy Policy
- ✗ Users must accept ALL changes made to the Policy before playing SC2: HOTS

3. EULA TOS

Looking at SC2: HOTS's End User License Agreement.

- ✓ EULA / TOS is found on sea.blizzard.com/en-sg/company/legal/
- ✓ EULA / TOS covers SC2: HOTS and Battle.NET DRM
- ✓ Drafted to coincide with relevant consumer laws at point of purchase
- ✓ Users visibly notified of any changes made to the EULA / TOS
- ✓ Refunds and/or exchanges offered for purchased games within 30 days
- ✓ Terms and conditions for Battle.NET DRM are clearly defined
- ✓ Permitted to create free "maps" of SC2: HOTS
- ✓ Won't blacklist specific background services or software
- ✓ Users can criticise or provide criticism about the game without reprisals

- ✗ Difficult to read, understand and is inconsistently worded
- ✗ Can't review and query changes made to the EULA / TOS
- ✗ License to play the game only provided
- ✗ Replacement copies provided for a fee
- ✗ Circumvention of Battle.NET prohibited
- ✗ Back-ups aren't permitted
- ✗ SC2: HOTS's source code isn't to be modified or reverse-engineered
- ✗ Monitoring services / software are required to play SC2: HOTS
- ✗ Warranties waived (excluding physical merchantability warranties)
- ✗ Cover waived against any unforeseeable damages, disruptions of service
- ✗ Termination process dictated by Blizzard Entertainment
- ✗ Stacked arbitration process
- ✗ Legal action is waived

4. Setup / Install

Looking at how SC2: HOTS is installed on Windows PCs only.

- ✓ Currently-executing background services won't interfere with installation
- ✓ Error-free installation
- ✓ Installation completed within 30 minutes

- ✗ Only one installation option was provided
- ✗ No installation logs of registry keys
- ✗ Extra game and DRM files found in /Program Data/ and /AppData/ folders

5. Updates / Patching

Looking at how SC2: HOTS is patched prior, during and after gameplay.

- ✓ No other (Third party) DRM files or registry keys are installed
- ✓ Details of patches provided via Battle.NET Blog

✖   Automatic updates are mandatory
✖   Day-one patch required
✖   Requires ALL patches to play SC2: HOTS
✖   Patches only installed via. automatic updates
✖   Notifications not provided for availability of game patches
✖   No installation logs of files and registry keys
✖   Rollback option not provided
✖   No plans to sunset Battle.NET DRM

6. DRM & Activation

Looking at Battle.NET DRM in relation to SC2: HOTS and its effects on Windows PCs only.

✓   Instructions provided on the activation process
✓   Won't interfere with currently-executing background services or software
✓   Firewall and AV settings aren't modified
✓   Users are aware and advised on how Battle.NET will be activated
✓   Username, password and email are only required
✓   Unlimited online activations to any one PC
✓   Only Battle.NET DRM is implemented
✓   Unlimited hardware activations
✓   Unlimited installations
✓   Support and troubleshooting process provided
✓   Activation is simple and hassle-free

✖   Can't verify the safety and reliability of the activation process
✖   No offline activation option
✖   A non-transferrable user account is required
✖   Periodic Internet connection required to play single-player game
✖   Game is locked to specific account after activation

7. Gameplay Experience

Looking at the gameplay aspects of SC2: HOTS and how it interacts with PC Windows.

✓   Can play on minimum specs
✓   Disc not required for gameplay
✓   Suitable options to modify video settings
✓   Can customise keyboard and mouse controls
✓   Can play in windowed mode
✓   Can play without connectivity issues on an ADSL connection
✓   Can play error-free for more than 5hrs
✓   Won't interfere with services and background software
✓   Will resume at the last checkpoint
✓   Can modify configuration file

✖   Requires original copy to play the game
✖   Only playable on mouse and keyboard
✖   Requires periodic Internet connection for single-player gameplay
✖   Will "phone home"
✖   Can only play on one PC at a time per game / account
✖   DRM and monitoring services will operate during and after gameplay

8. PC Checkup

Looking at whether SC2: HOTS will modify certain PC settings without users permission / consent.

- ✓ PC clean after scanning for viruses
- ✓ PC clean after scanning for malware and spyware
- ✓ PC clean after scanning for rootkits
- ✓ HOSTS wasn't modified
- ✓ Played SC2: HOTS without major errors
- ✓ Start-up settings remain unaltered
- ✓ No DRM / monitoring services running in the background after shutting down
- ✓ System configuration files remain unaltered

9. Removal Uninstall

Looking at how clean, efficient and effective the removal process is for SC2: HOTS (How much legacy material is there after the removal of SC2: HOTS?)

Note: Removing SC2: HOTS will require removing all of SC2.

- ✓ Direct uninstallation shortcut provided
- ✓ Steps to manually remove SC2: HOTS are found at sea.battle.net/support/

- ✗ No prompt to backup (local) savegames provided
- ✗ Game and DRM files remain
- ✗ Manual removal instructions still leave game and DRM files behind

10. Customer Support

Looking at the customer support side of SC2: HOTS through Blizzard's support.

Note: Much of the time spent in Customer Support was finding if there were options in downloading patches "manually" through Blizzard's official channels.

- ✓ Customer service / support found in one place at sea.battle.net/support
- ✓ Blizzard's support site is easy to use and navigate
- ✓ Arbitration / resolution service is available
- ✓ Arbitration / resolution process is easy to follow / understand

- ✗ Searching on Blizzard's support site is difficult at times
- ✗ Info is hard to read and understand
- ✗ Arbitration / resolution process favours Blizzard
- ✗ Legal action waived once arbitration process is initiated

RYG's VERDICT

52%

BARGAIN BIN MATERIAL

64% and below

SHOWS PROMISE & POTENTIAL

Between 65% and 84%

WORTH SUPPORTING

85% and above

While Heart of The Swarm can be played offline (every 30 days between online verifications), we found that much of the issues within this game were more driven by legacy files, updated terms of service(s), automatic updates that cannot be avoided and the time spent finding what should've been freely-accessible information.

Colophon

This analysis of SC2: HOTS was compiled by Lisa and Martin Pham. Typeface used is ITC Stone Sans. RYG thanks Anna Henriksson, Josh Bush, Ethan Lee, Adam Ames and David Hatch for their insights and suggestions in the design of this analysis. SC2: HOTS was bought with RYG funds through EB Games.

Disclaimer

These analyses are only a guide and represent RYG's perspective into SC2: HOTS as a product. We believe everyone should perform their own research and reach their own conclusions. This is one view of many, we hope. Again, we thank you for taking the time to read our analysis of SC2: HOTS and hope you continue to support our work.