

RYG Evaluates The Stanley Parable

by

Martin Pham

30th October 2014 06:20 PM



We spent a bit of time looking at The Stanley Parable, but for other reasons entirely (such as figuring out a process to benchmark and run multiple times across various configurations). While we're working on that aspect we'll be focusing more on the game itself this time around and how a "Steam-exclusive" game has worked to the favour of the developers at Galactic Cafe.

RYG's Assessment

64%

Bargain Basement Material

(64% and Below)

Our Thoughts

The Stanley Parable may be the first game we've looked at in which the developers have decided to release the game at one, single distributor: Steam. This, of course, is an interesting case because it was only a week ago that the developers, Galactic Cafe, have made their millionth sale through Steam. A great achievement considering that The Stanley Parable was released roughly a year or so ago and, prior to that, they had released a free-to-play mod version through ModDB.

So why are we curious with this particular strategy? Well for one thing it allows a team like Galactic Cafe to handle all their sales, support, distribution (of patches), analytics – even their branding and advertising strategies – all from the one platform. It's something in which Steam was designed to do for all developers. However, Steam isn't designed to do all the heavy lifting in sales and support for any one developer and it's something that people should be aware before putting / playing their games through Steam.

Nevertheless, by focusing on a single (and well known) platform the developers (in this case) can exert some control over their sales, branding and process from start to finish. The downside, as many would point out, is the potential reach from other customers through other storefronts and vendors, including through their official website (Galactic Cafe). There are potential perks and risks to this with the obvious ones being more reach = more sales as well as more reach = more administrative work in maintaining the growth, sale and support of said product.

There is a difference to this. The Stanley Parable is only sold through Steam (as far as we have found). There are other games that will go through a particular platform (e.g. Origin, Uplay, etc),

but are sold through various distribution channels (e.g. GOG, Gamersgate, etc.) with the clearest intent of acquiring a larger reach of audience. The strategies companies end up taking depends largely on their goals, but for The Stanley Parable and the developing team it's pretty clear that 1 million sales through a single platform is a pretty good indicator of genuine success.

As for the game itself what we found was a game that possessed an array of settings and customisations to improve upon the players preference to play their game. But, as we found out, a lot of the in-game video settings (bar the FOV slider, resolution and Vsyncing) seems trivial. The Stanley Parable, as advertised, was designed to play on a number of Windows (and Mac-operated) systems that can go as far as 2008 and even further beyond that. In our tests it seems increasing (or decreasing) these video settings only affected the GPU power and temperatures by a few degrees. Frame rates played on a higher-end PC maxed out at 300 fps.

Still, to play The Stanley Parable with these factors seems meaningless as the game, as minimal as it was designed to be, should be played in one session with a balance of light-heartedness and inquisitiveness. The Stanley Parable is, in many ways, a narrative crucible between a man as ordinary as they can be pitted against a voice that assumes (or presumes) control over both the player and the subject, Stanley.

There are a few issues that players might take, particularly with those who are leery with how Steam works and operates (us included). Removing both the game and Steam will take some work and a bit of patience as we found that a blanket-wide deletion of both file and registry keys can affect other Windows-related services. The Stanley Parable will also connect back to Steam's servers (internally and externally) and, as far as we can tell so far, it's mainly affected through the use of achievements. However, the game was designed using the Source Engine so we don't know beyond that if some analytics are also relayed back to Valve for their internal processes. And, yes, because it's only released through Steam it does limit those who are seeking alternative (say DRM-Free) options.

Overall we still find The Stanley Parable to be worth its money (\$15 USD) for both its positives and negatives.

About The Stanley Parable

The Stanley Parable is a first-person exploration game about a genuinely, ordinary man and his eternal struggle with a narrator with assumed omnipotence. This is Galactic Cafe's first commercial game and is also a remastered version of their first Source mod of the same title. Please refer to each section for our results we've evaluated and our summarised thoughts to gain a better understanding of how The Stanley Parable affects PCs and plays as a PC Game.

RYG Disclaimer

This Windows version of The Stanley Parable (Build: July 2014) was obtained through Steam independently with RYG funds for the purposes of evaluation and product testing. The Stanley Parable was evaluated on the following system specs: Windows 7, Intel i5-4460, 16Gb RAM, AMD Radeon R9 290 as well as on a system bearing an Intel HD 4600 Integrated Graphics.

Availability

Steam: <http://store.steampowered.com/app/221910/>

Recommended System Specs

OS: Windows XP above (*Windows 7 Version Tested*)

CPU: Intel Dual Core P4 3.0Ghz or AMD 64X2 above (*Chipsets released in 2008 and 2005*)

GPU: NVIDIA GeForce 7600 or AMD Radeon X800 or Intel HD 2000 Graphics and above (*GPUs released in 2005, 2006 and 2011 respectively*)

RAM: 2Gb

HDD: 3Gb (~3 Gb was used in this evaluation)

Source: [The Stanley Parable's Steam Gamecard](#)

Section 1 - Content Strategy and Product Marketing

- + Was released simultaneously with its console version
- + Free to play demo provided through [Steam](#)
- + Steam advises how Steamworks is used in The Stanley Parable
- + In-game documentation and/or tutorials provided
- + EULA, Privacy Policy and Terms of Service accessible through Steam
- + All game-related info is conveniently found on Steam

- Is available only on Windows and MacOS
- Is only available through Steam
- No known DRM-Free version
- Minimum / Recommended Specs not provided on Steam
- Complete download size not provided through Steam

Our Thoughts: Because The Stanley Parable is exclusively released through Steam the redirects provided from the official website to Steam's gamecard is perfectly acceptable (such as the system specs). On the subject of system specs we found that while there are many in-game settings (which is good as a PC game) they're really somewhat of a filler as the game is playable across PC systems as old as 2005/2006.

Section 2 - Digital Distribution

- + Is available worldwide through Steam
- + Download / Client Manager is optional for download of The Stanley Parable
- + Minimum / Recommended specs provided through Steam
- + Steam advises how Steamworks is used in The Stanley Parable
- + Only Username, Email and Password are required to create a Steam account
- + Alternative payment options provided by Visa, Mastercard, Amex and Paypal
- + Confirmation of purchase and receipt provided
- + Free and unlimited access and downloads after purchase
- + Can backup purchased games 'offline' (e.g. external or optical drives)
- + Can access personal data
- + Can review and dispute and validate breaches in [Steam's Terms of Service](#)
- Is [No refunds or exchanges](#) for purchased games
- All players warranties waived whenever they use Steam
- Cover waived against any unforeseeable damage and/or service disruptions within Steam
- Very difficult and/or impossible to terminate account
- Account termination voids past purchases and licenses to play The Stanley Parable
- Can't review and question changes made in Terms of Service
- Past purchases voided after refusing to accept Terms of Service

Our Thoughts: Steam offers a robust form of paying, downloading, installing and storing PC games and, for the most part, is quite simple and friendly to use. Steam does offer a trading platform between players in respect to PC games, but will not offer any consumer-related safety nets, such as refunds in the event of downloading a faulty product, service disruptions and a balanced terms of service. Other issues of contention, such as their elastic pricing options for players situated in various global regions, remains a constant sore spot.

Section 3 - Privacy Policy

- + Privacy Policy found on [Steam](#)
- + Covers The Stanley Parable, Steamworks and Steam
- + Refunds and/or exchanges offered for purchased games under specific provisions
- + Terms and conditions for Steamworks are clearly defined
- + Can legally make archival copies of The Stanley Parable
- + The Stanley Parable's source code is open for modifications and revisions
- + Permitted to create free 'mods' of The Stanley Parable
- + Players can create content based on The Stanley Parable and [monetise it online](#)
- + The Stanley Parable won't blacklist specific background services or software
- Not formatted for easy reading online
- Cumbersome / difficult to read
- Drafted to only abide by the laws of the US
- Players not visibly notified of any changes made to the EULA and/or TOS

- Players not consulted on future revisions to the EULA and/or TOS
- Can't review and query (legal) changes made to the EULA and/or TOS
- License to play the game only provided
- Circumvention of Steamworks prohibited
- All players warranties waived whenever they use The Stanley Parable
- Cover waived against any unforeseeable damage and/or service disruptions within The Stanley Parable
- Termination process dictated by Valve
- No known resolution process available for players experiencing issues with The Stanley Parable

Our Thoughts: The EULA and TOS from Valve are quite stacked against players and, apart from the license to play the game, leaves little room for players to actually do anything with the game other than play it on their terms. Please bear in mind that most of the wordings found in the EULA and TOS are similarly-worded in comparison to other EULAs and TOSes found in other games and distribution platforms.

However, The Stanley Parable was made through the Source Modkit, which pretty much gives license to anyone to make and remake their games using Valve's development kit. With The Stanley Parable **the developers** have made it known for others to use their game as a platform for something more and they're also quite happy for others to use their game as a means of monetisation through their website(s).

Section 5 - Installation

- + Custom installation options provided
 - + No third party software required
 - + All game files installed in main installation directory
 - + All DRM files installed in main installation directory
 - + Currently-executing background services won't interfere with installation
 - + Error-free installation
-
- No installation logs of files and registry keys

Our Thoughts: A lack of a comprehensive installation log to document what/where files and registry keys are installed is the only blemish found in this evaluation. However, the installation of The Stanley Parable are quite self-contained to where players want to install their games and will not install any rogue or foreign files outside of their intended destination. However, please bear in mind that removing The Stanley Parable completely may require the full removal of Steam if the intent of having a clean system is there.

Section 6 - Automatic and/or Manual Patching

- + Automatic updates are optional
- + Day-One patch optional
- + Can play The Stanley Parable unpatched and with minimal bugs
- + Patch free from any other third-party DRMs
- + Patch free from any other third-party apps
- + Detailed list of changes provided prior to installation
- + Alternate notifications provided for existence of new patches via. Steam
- + The Stanley Parable is playable with latest patches

- Download / Client Manager required to download and install patches
- Changes / Amendments to Privacy Policy, EULA and/or TOS not provided prior to installation of patches
- No installation logs of files and registry keys
- Rollback option not provided
- No plans for a sunset patch to remove Steamworks DRM

Our Thoughts: The latest version of The Stanley Parable (July 2014) is quite stable (through our iterations of testing). Players can optionally install patches through Steam. Depending on how players see this, automatic updates through a single platform can be a timesaver or an inconvenience.

Section 7 - DRM and Activation

- + Instructions provided on activating The Stanley Parable
- + Currently-executing background services won't interfere with activation process
- + Firewall and AV settings not modified
- + Unlimited online activations
- + Can play The Stanley Parable offline
- + Only Steamworks is implemented
- + Unlimited hardware activations
- + Unlimited Installations
- + Troubleshooting process provided for failed activations

- Can't verify safety and reliability of the activation process
- A non-transferrable user account is required
- Game is locked to specific account after activation

Our Thoughts: Players will need to activate the game by logging into their Steam account after launching The Stanley Parable. After that they are free to play the game offline or even online if they wish to do so. As far as we've been looking at games Steam has come a long way in keeping activations and verifications quite simple for players.

Section 8 - Gameplay

- + Can play on minimum specs (tested on Intel HD 4000)
- + Can play a backup copy of the game
- + Can play in borderless full screen mode
- + Can play in windowed mode
- + Can play in multiple resolutions up to 1920 x 1080
- + Field of View, Anti Aliasing, Anisotropic Filtering, Shaders, Effects, Textures and Vsync are provided in-game
- + Complete options in remapping keyboard and/or mouse controls
- + Complete options in playing a console controller
- + Separate audio settings provided
- + Full subtitles and/or captions provided
- + Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, French, German and Turkish are supported alongside English
- + Can play The Stanley Parable in offline mode
- + No known connectivity issues during gameplay
- + Can opt out of achievements and leaderboards
- + Can play The Stanley Parable error-free
- + The Stanley Parable won't blacklist specific background services or software
- + Can play game at last save checkpoint
- + Can manually save gameplay
- + Can modify savegame and/or configuration file
- + Steamworks isn't running after gameplay of The Stanley Parable

- No option for players to provide custom subtitles and/or localisation
- Will 'phone home' without players consent
- Can only play on one PC at a time

Our Thoughts: While the many in-game settings are a welcome treat we did feel as if they were visually inconsequential especially when we tested the game at various settings and it came out with a high frame rate cap of 300 fps. (See screenshots of **LOW**, **MEDIUM** and **HIGH** video quality settings). (The Settings used are in screenshots **LOW**, **MEDIUM** and **HIGH**).

The game is playable across many system configurations going as far back as systems potentially dating around the 2005 mark. For the most part we did find The Stanley Parable quite enjoyable and playable without any perceivable errors. The Stanley Parable will connect back to Steam (Servers include Valve (Highwinds Network Group, Level 3 Communications, QWest Communications, Comcast, Highwinds Network)) even in offline mode where the only known reason for its connection is for its vast achievements, which can be disabled in the settings section.

Section 9 - General PC Maintenance

- + PC clean of viruses, malware, spyware and rootkits after installation and gameplay of The Stanley Parable
- + HOSTS was clean
- + Windows Startup was clean
- + Steam isn't running after gameplay of The Stanley Parable
- + No other PC settings were modified after gameplay of The Stanley Parable

Our Thoughts: The Stanley Parable is a clean game and won't impact on players PCs nor alter its settings outside of its gameplay.

Section 10 - Uninstallation

- + Players provided with options to back up their savegames and in-game settings
 - + **Steam's support** offers a process in removing Steam completely from PCs
- Some Game and Steam files and registry keys remain after manual and automatic removal of Steam

Our Thoughts: Removing The Stanley Parable and Steam will require some further work and if players did need to remove Steam it will require some searching and patience in performing a full removal.

Section 11 - Customer and Technical Support

- + From The Official Website: <http://www.stanleyparable.com/>
- + From Steam: <http://steamcommunity.com/app/221910/discussions/>
- + From SteamDB: <https://steamdb.info/app/221910/>
- + From PCGamingWiki: http://pcgamingwiki.com/wiki/The_St Stanley_Parable

If you would like to discuss this report, you can do so here on our **forum** (membership is required), or via our **Twitter** page.

Changelog

29.10.2014 – Report published on RYG