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Clash of the Keyboards, Part One

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Razer Tarantula (\$99.99 MSRP)



Razer has been around for a long time and has gotten very good at meeting the needs of today's PC gamer. The Razer Tarantula is easily the slickest and sexiest keyboard of the bunch. It sports a glossy black finish and slowly pulsing blue lighted Razer emblem on the wrist rest. It has five macro buttons on each side of the keyboard, each of which is illuminated with a blue LED. The keys are very responsive and have very short travel, almost like a laptop keyboard, but with a sturdier feel.

Razer says that the Tarantula uses 1000Hz "Ultrapolling" for super-responsive keys. We're not exactly sure how we can test that with the tools we have in our office, so we'll just have to take the company's word for it. That being said, the keys are very responsive, but their close spacing and short travel led to a few more typos than usual. At the same time we also felt like our typing speed went up a few words per minute.



There are a lot of extra features here, such as two USB ports as well as headphone-out and microphone-in jacks. We found each of these to be incredibly handy as we do a lot of switching between our speakers and our headsets in the office. The USB ports were also handy for plugging in MP3 players or memory sticks. There are also the usual multimedia buttons such as play, stop, forward and back, as well as buttons to bring up your homepage or zoom in on a document. At the top of the keyboard is the Battledock. This is for attaching accessories such as a lamp to illuminate your keys. It's definitely a unique idea but we haven't seen any of these accessories yet so we're unsure of how valuable this feature really is. Again, these aren't necessities for gaming, but they are handy features to have.

One area where we did face a few problems was with the Tarantula's software. At first the software was buggy, our recorded macros didn't play back the way we wanted them to and we had some lock-ups. All these problems disappeared after we updated the drivers and software. Just to be safe we also updated the firmware for the keyboard. That's right, firmware for a keyboard. We live in crazy times.

Once everything got up and running we were immediately pleased with how powerful Razer's software is. You can remap any key you want as well as program the ten macro keys on the sides. You can save all your macros

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under different user profiles so you can have different setups for every game. Every regular-sized key is also physically removable with the handy key removal tool (very much like the one that comes with the Cyber Snipa Warboard), including the macro keys on the sides. The macro keys are numbered L1 to L5 and R1 to R5 by default, but we replaced them all with icon keys such as one depicting a scope and another depicting a text bubble. This is exactly what we wished we could've done with the Warboard.

Our complaints with the Razer Tarantula are minor. We wish that all the buttons lit up instead of just the macro buttons. We also don't like how every time you load up the driver control program you have to wait a while for the keyboard to initialize. If you open the program and try to make a change right away you'll get a message saying "Please wait for the data to initialize!" And no, we didn't add that exclamation point.

The Razer Tarantula pretty much has it all: looks, power, functionality and plenty of perks. It may take some people a while to get used to the keys, which have a very short travel distance and are placed very close together, and the software out of the box is wonky. The price tag is steep as well, but you'll definitely get a very well-built keyboard that you can configure almost any way you want. It may be more power than most people need, but for some gamers any edge is worth it.

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