

BYE BYE, ZAPPER — I'M RUNNING THIS TV THE SMART WAY

Ditch the baffling button dinosaur: new apps and gizmos turn mobiles and tablets into intelligent, easy-to-use remotes, says Mark Harris

If video killed the radio star, then smartphones are killing everything else. MP3 players, sat navs and cameras have all fallen to the increasingly sophisticated mobiles that we carry in our pockets every day. And next in the firing line is the television remote control.

Sky has revealed plans to launch an app later this year that turns the iPhone or iPad into the zapper you always wanted — an easy-to-use, intelligent remote that displays programme guides and previews on its screen without interrupting what's playing on the television. The free app will use either Apple device's wi-fi link to communicate with a Sky+ HD set-top box, which is also now capable of being online. This will allow you to schedule viewing from the breakfast table or change channels from bed, even as someone else is watching their favourite show.

Sky, which is part-owned by News Corp, parent company of The Sunday Times, is not alone. Dozens of apps and gadgets are already available to convert your smartphone into a truly universal remote, controlling everything from computers to games consoles. It means that the time is fast approaching when

'It allows you to schedule viewing from the breakfast table or change channels from bed'

you can throw all the separate remotes for DVD players, satellite equipment, stereos and televisions in a box and cart them up to the attic alongside all those other obsolete bits of kit — such as your sat nav.

Smartphone remotes are arriving just in the nick of time for television makers. Traditional infrared zappers have not changed much since the 1970s when television had just a handful of channels. Today's TVs and set-top boxes offer hundreds of channels and the option to call up huge on-demand video

libraries. Add online apps, internet surfing and video call options, and trying to fit all those buttons on one remote control can make for a confusing mess.

But using a smartphone as a remote makes controlling an entire living room as easy as starting an app and swiping a touchscreen. They can work in several ways. Some use the same infrared signals as the original remote controls. The NewKinetix Re (£35) is a small gizmo that plugs straight into an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch. It has a built-in database of infrared codes for thousands of TVs, DVD players and set-top boxes. Simply select the model you have and it will automatically choose the correct code to communicate with the machine. You can then summon up a simple screen of controls. When you tap "play" on the screen, the Re turns the command into infrared light and beams it at your gadget.

The Re is great for combining lots of remotes into a single app and lets you redesign the layout so that you see only the controls you want. However, you still have to point it at the TV for it to work, and it's easily small enough to lose down the back of the sofa.

Sky's iPad app is not alone and the day is soon approaching when we control not just TVs and hi-fis from a single, universal remote but our fridges, coffee makers and central heating too

The Griffin Beacon (£50) and Gear4 UnityRemote (£80) both use a separate infrared transmitter, a battery- or mains-powered "blaster" that sits somewhere in the living room where it has line of sight of the kit you want to control. Apps on an iPhone or iPad connect wirelessly with the blaster over Bluetooth (which has a range of about 20ft). The Griffin and Gear4 apps already have the details of tens of thousands of electronic devices on tap, and can learn the infrared signals for new products from an existing remote. The UnityRemote usefully lets you set up

touchscreen gestures to control volume or switch video inputs with the flick of a finger.

Infrared gadgets work with today's tellys but some of the newest (and, inevitably, most expensive) home-cinema gear is now also able to connect to a broadband connection over wi-fi. Although primarily intended for streaming video, internet browsing and using web TV apps, the connection also means that mobiles can become wireless remotes for them.

Sony's Media Remote app (free) gives full control of a dozen high-end Sony

devices from an iPhone or iPad anywhere in the same house — no infrared blaster required. As well as copying the usual buttons and numbers, this app offers a touchscreen keyboard to make it easier to type in words for web searches, tweets or Facebook updates on a web-enabled TV. Media Remote goes beyond old-fashioned remotes in other ways. If you own a Sony Blu-ray player, the phone or tablet can pull up cast information about the film playing and link seamlessly to YouTube to show trailers, clips and spoofs — without pausing the action.

Samsung's free Smart View app goes a step further. As well as controlling all aspects of the company's Smart TV online service — available on its latest TV sets and Blu-ray players — users can also call up a "dual view" option. This lets a smartphone or tablet show whatever's on the TV, so if you have to go in the kitchen you can take the device with you and not miss a second of your show. It was launched recently for the Samsung Galaxy S II Android phone, and will roll out to Samsung's Galaxy Tab tablets and other Android phones soon.

Television is the first gadget to have its remote control kidnapped by apps but it won't be the last. Some modern hi-fis such as the sleek Sonos multi-room sound system already have iPhone apps, and Microsoft is building Xbox 360 games to work with its new Windows 7 mobiles. Apps can also turn a smartphone into an ultra-responsive touchpad for a computer. Download the free Logitech Touch Mouse app for the iPhone and a small piece of software for a Windows PC and the phone's screen turns into a trackpad, complete with two or three virtual buttons. Use two

fingers to scroll quickly through documents or web pages.

It won't stop there, either: smartphones will soon even be controlling devices that don't have remotes at all right now. Manufacturers of white goods such as fridges, central heating systems and coffee makers are planning to add internet connectivity to their products, plus apps that warn you when you're running low on milk, let you add a burst of heat en route home on a chilly evening or prepare an espresso while you shower. Try doing that on your creaking old TV remote.

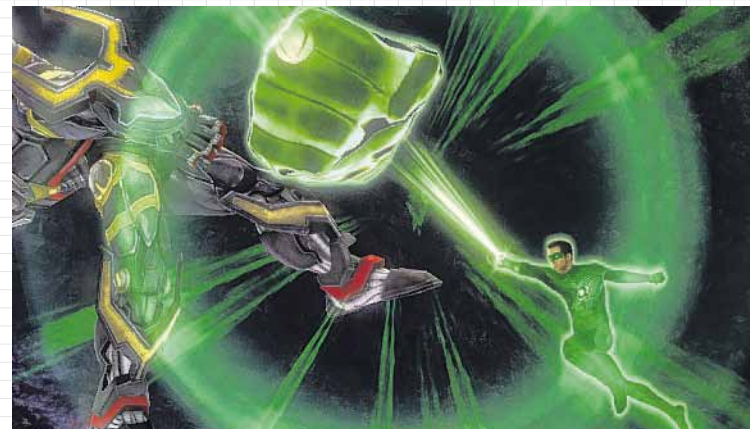


GAMES

New titles this week

GREEN LANTERN: RISE OF THE MANHUNTERS
★★★★☆
Xbox 360, PS3, Wii;
£30-£35. Age 12

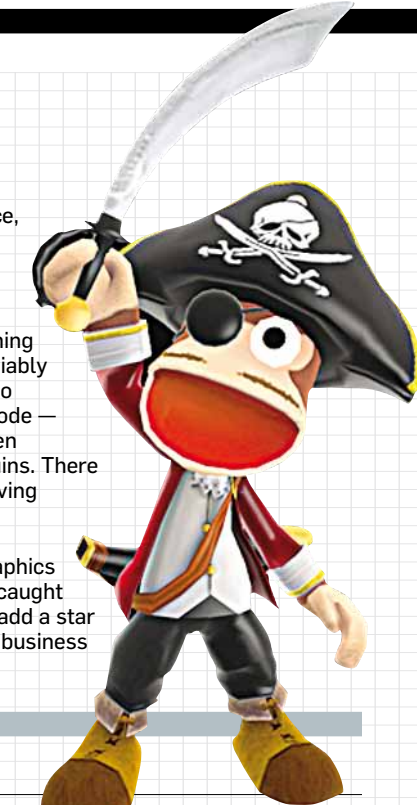
It's blockbuster season in the cinema, which means a host of lacklustre video game tie-ins are coming our way. Except that Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters is actually rather good. You must assume the glowing green guise of Hal Jordan, a human member of an intergalactic corps fighting evil across the universe. When the corps' home planet is attacked, Hal and his alien friends fight back. While this scenario sticks to the idea behind the film, the actual gameplay is very different, as Hal batters metallic manhunters and giant robot snakes with the aid of his magic ring, which can conjure up a range of vicious-looking implements. While hardly original, the result is a surprisingly satisfying brawler, with a good range of enemies and some fantastic superpowers to use, which grow even stronger as you play. There are also some fine flying sequences, as Hal soars through asteroid belts and sparkling caverns, blasting everything in his way. Spectacular alien scenery and the comic-book action give the game a great pulp sci-fi feel, and there's even an enjoyable two-player option. One criticism, however: a five-hour running time sees the Lantern's light dim far too soon. **Stuart Andrews**



APE ESCAPE
★★★★☆
PS3 (with Move); £25. Age 3

When an invasion of naughty chimps takes place, it's your job to catch them all. The PlayStation Move motion controller becomes your net, with which you swipe at your adversaries as they grab at bananas. Swinging the Move controller to deflect incoming missiles and getting the timing just right to capture the simian hordes is undeniably fun, though your movement is limited: there's no wandering away from the set route. In story mode — though "story" is pushing it — you move between locations varying from city streets to ancient ruins. There are also mini games, including a two-player driving challenge, but apart from the apes' increasing tenacity there's little variety. Youngsters will certainly enjoy the fast pace, gaudy cartoon graphics and identifying which of the 50 apes they have caught in the Monkeypedia section. For these players, add a star to the rating. But for the rest of us this monkey business has limited appeal. **David Phelan**

SUNDAY TIMES ONLINE
To see video trailers of InGear's games, go to thesundaytimes.co.uk/ingear

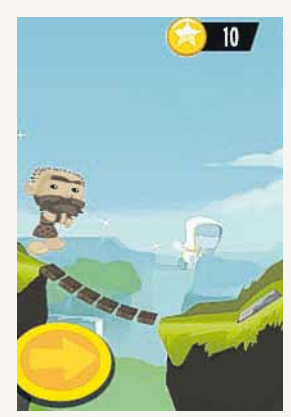


IPHONE GAMING

Stuart Dredge reviews the best new games for the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad

1000 HEROZ
★★★★☆
59p. Age 4

As game concepts go, promising a new level to play every day for 1,000 days is ambitious. Can 1000 Heroz deliver? The game is simple: each day a new level becomes available: simple running and jumping games, most of which can be done in less than 20 seconds. You get a new character, too. The depth comes from the knowledge that every 24 hours you'll need to outrun thousands of other players over exactly the same course, with your times being compared on the online leaderboards. It's quirky and clever, and you may well still be playing this in three years' time.



PRO TENNIS VOLLEY
★★★★★
59p. Age 4

Normally, Wimbledon fortnight spurs us all on to seek out our nearest tennis court. This year, though, it could instead send you to the App Store, because there you'll find Pro Tennis Volley — an addictive game that puts you up close to a virtual net, swiping your finger to volley. These aren't proper rallies against an opponent but rather score-based tests: you aim for targets painted on the court and are awarded points every time you hit one. There are three different game modes to hold your interest and global leaderboards where you can post your score. Multi-ball, which slings 50 balls at you in quick succession, is a particularly ferocious test of your finger skills.



POPSTAR PHYSICS (SAVE TOSHI 2)
★★★★☆
Free. Age 9

This is nothing to do with attaching Cheryl Cole to a Van de Graaff Generator and seeing what happens to her hair. Instead, Popstar Physics is an original and inventive Japanese game for the iPhone and iPad that revolves around a singer named Toshi. She must be unlucky — in this sequel she's been kidnapped by demons for a second time. Your task is to knock down the demons' castles and zombie clones of the hapless singer by throwing stuff at them. Shades of Angry Birds, then, although this uses a 3-D view rather than a flat 2-D one. Popstar Physics has bags of (bizarre) charm and scores highly in terms of the just-one-more-go factor.



SMARTPHONES TAKE CONTROL

NEWKINETIX RE £35, newkinetix.com
Plug-in infrared transmitter for Apple products that the manufacturer claims will work with "nearly all popular audiovisual devices". That means TVs and stereos.

GEAR4 UNITYREMOTE £80, gear4.com
An app connects over Bluetooth to a "blaster", a black lozenge that translates the commands entered on an iPhone or iPad into infrared signals for a TV, stereo or disc player.

MEDIA REMOTE FOR IPHONE Free, sony.co.uk
An app for the iPhone and iPad that lets you control the latest generation of Sony's internet-connected TVs and Blu-ray players. Network Audio Remote does the same for Sony's hi-fi kit.

SAMSUNG SMART VIEW Free, samsung.co.uk
Initially only available for the company's Galaxy S II phone, this lets you control the company's new Smart TV and Blu-ray players if they are in the same wi-fi zone; in "dual view" mode, it shows whatever is on the screen.

ECHOSTAR HDS-600RS £300, myechostar.com
Control this Freesat set-top box from an iPhone or iPad with the £17.99 SlingPlayer app, which also lets you view recordings and watch live TV over the internet.