The future of high-performance graphics
Welcome

Tom Olson
ARM
The story so far...

• Prehistory
  - Growing recognition that OpenGL needs a reboot

• June to August 2014
  - Next Generation OpenGL project launch
  - Unprecedented commitment from all sectors of the industry
  - Project disclosure and call for participation at SIGGRAPH

• Since then...
  - Intense focus and a lot of hard work
  - Vulkan unveil at GDC 2015
Outline

• Welcome  -  Tom Olson, ARM

• Introducing Vulkan  -  Johan Andersson, EA

• High Level Concepts in Vulkan -  Pierre-Loup Griffais, Valve

• Going Wide: Vulkan and Many Threads -  Dan Baker, Oxide Games

• Vulkan Binding Model -  Niklas Smedberg, EPIC Games

• Shaders and Programs and Binary Oh My! - Aras Pranckevičius, Unity

• It's Dangerous to Vulkan Alone—Take These -  John McDonald, Valve
• Huge thanks to the whole Vulkan team!
  - New members are always welcome
THANKS AMD!
INTRODUCING VULKAN

JOHAN ANDERSSON
ELECTRONIC ARTS
STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

- **Consensus** around explicit low-level graphics APIs!
  - Mantle pioneered & led the way
  - Proven with multiple engines & full games
  - DX12 & Metal further contributed
NEED A STANDARD

- Work on all (modern) GPUs
- Supported on all platforms – desktop & mobile
- Developed together – not owned by a single platform / vendor
- Extensible - avoid explosion of platform- or vendor-specific APIs
- Binary intermediate representation for shaders
Based on Mantle – standardizes & replaces it

Explicit control & extremely low overhead

Designed to be efficient on a wide set of GPUs

Advanced concepts:
  - Multi queue & multi device
  - Tile-based passes & load/store operations
  - + Much more!

Frostbite will transition our Mantle renderer to Vulkan
VULKAN FOUNDATION

- Unprecedented collaborative rapid development in Khronos
  - Game engine developers
  - Software developers
  - GPU vendors
  - Platform vendors

- Building a powerful foundation for the industry going forward!
High Level Concepts in Vulkan

Pierre-Loup Griffais
The soul of Vulkan

- Brand new API
- Built with multi-threading in mind
- Works everywhere
- Greater control over memory management
- Less hidden work and overhead in the driver
- → Smaller drivers, better driver quality
With great power...

- More developer responsibility
- No runtime error validation
- CPU synchronization around common objects
- CPU/GPU synchronization
- GPU memory hazards
With great power...

- More developer responsibility
- No runtime error validation
- CPU synchronization around common objects
- CPU/GPU synchronization
- GPU memory hazards
- Tools and validation suites to help developers
- John will talk more about this later
Scheduling work in Vulkan

- Queues and command buffers
- Command buffers are built on many threads
- Every command buffer is self-sufficient
- Scheduled into GPU queues
Shaders in Vulkan

- SPIR-V, brand new binary shading language
- Easy and fast to consume by the driver
- Makes offline shader compilation possible
- Spec and GLSL compiler available TODAY
Vulkan is here

- Valve driver for Intel GPUs developed along the spec to help ISVs bootstrap their code
- Source 2 supports Vulkan alpha today
- Spec and drivers coming later this year
- Intel/Linux driver will be open-sourced
- Vulkan supported across the board on Steam Machines
Going Wide: Vulkan and Many Threads

Dan Baker
Graphics Architect, Oxide Games
Certain types of games, peak loads can get pretty big.
Observations

- GPUs are getting faster more quickly than CPUs
- Most CPU performance now comes from higher core count
- Software takes years to develop, even if your app is not CPU/API bound yet, will be soon
- Conclusion: Software must scale
CSS Threading

- Caller Side Synchronization Threading
- Previous generation APIs built on either single threaded or client/server thread designs
- Advantageous if application does not make good use of multiple cores
- Hugely problematic if application is truly threaded
CSS: Functions are “Silo”ed

vkTypicalCall([output], [input], [input1])

Only modifies output*

Only reads input

No global state side-effects!
A contract between App and API

- Application will not make conflicting calls on the same objects (e.g. writing one object while another is reading it)
- Driver will generally not lock or serialize any API call
  - Context information is embedded on the object being operated on
  - With exception to occasional CPU side memory allocation (but should be rare occurrence on create calls)
Application runs parallel to GPU

Application

Even Command Buffers

Odd Command Buffers

Delete Queue

Flush Queue

Delete Queue

GPU
Application runs parallel to GPU

- Application
- Even Command Buffers
- Odd Command Buffers
- Delete Queue
- Delete Queue
- Flush Queue
- GPU
Review

- When we say Vulkan is free threaded, we mean
  - most API function calls are *operators*. They operate only on data which is passed into them as output, and read-only the data passed on that as input
  - API function calls are transparent for thread safety: valid to call so long as there is no read/write or write/write hazards
  - No hidden driver work!
  - GPU/CPU hazard is explicitly exposed. GPUs are read operators on data, therefore read/write hazards between CPU/GPU must also be managed by application
  - In General, API function calls will not have locks in them
    - With exception to calls which must allocate some types of memory
Driver related cores. Missing time due to thread accounting and system level synchronization primitives

Lots of unused CPU space! Engine is just waiting for driver to be done
Powerful New model

Current Frame

Next Frame

Core 1: Sim Job, Sim Job, Sim Job, Sim Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Game Job
Core 2: Sim Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vulkan CMD Job, AI Job
Core 3: Sim Job, Sim Job, Sim Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vulkan CMD Job, AI Job
Core 4: Sim Job, Sim Job, Sim Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Game Job
Core 5: Sim Job, Sim Job, Sim Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Game Job
Core 6: Sim Job, Sim Job, Sim Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vulkan CMD Job, Vk present Job

GPU Fence

End of Frame
Vulkan simulation using a modified Mantle build to simulate infinitely fast GPU
Big performance Gains

• 8-Core/16 thread CPUs exist today for consumers – even in mobile

• Where will be in 2 years? 5? 10?

• On the high end, game genres are limited by API threading model. What types of games will Vulkan bring to us?
Vulkan Binding Model

Niklas “Smedis” Smedberg
Senior Engine Programmer, Epic Games
Goal

• Efficiently bridge the gap
  – Traditional fixed hardware bindings
  – Bindless-like operation
Overview

• Shader uses a Descriptor to access a resource
  – Resources: Sampler, Image, Buffer

• Descriptors are grouped into DescriptorSets
  – DescriptorSet is bound as a single unit
  – Shader bindings described by DescriptorSetLayout

• Shader has multiple DescriptorSet binding slots
  – Described by DescriptorSetLayoutChain in PSO
DescriptorPool

- DescriptorSets are allocated from a DescriptorPool

- One-shot:
  - Allocate until DescriptorPool is full, then clear entire pool
  - Ultra-fast allocator: great for ring buffering DescriptorSets

- Dynamic:
  - Out-of-order allocation/delete of DescriptorSets
Multithreading

• Update Descriptors on any thread

• Pre-alloc DescriptorSets of a common DescriptorSetLayout
  – Update existing DescriptorSets, avoiding alloc/free

• Update descriptors:
  – By copy (driver schedules the update)
  – Immediately (promise no synchronization is needed)
DescriptorSetLayoutChain

- Ordered by binding frequency (lowest first)
  - Fast switching between similar DescriptorSetLayoutChains
  - Low-frequency bindings are persistent

- For example, two PipelineStateObjects:
  - PSO A using Chain S: {LayoutX, LayoutY, LayoutZ}
  - PSO B using Chain T: {LayoutX, LayoutY, LayoutW}

- When binding PSO B after using PSO A:
  - Only bind Set for LayoutW
  - Sets in {LayoutX, LayoutY} persists
Extra Features

• Bind DescriptorSets to all or any subset of pipeline stage

• High-frequency buffer offsets for UBOs and SSBOs
  – Can be provided at DescriptorSet binding

• Flexibility with samplers. API supports:
  – Separate \{sampler\},\{texture\} descriptors
  – Combined \{sampler,texture\} descriptors
  – Immutable samplers specified in DescriptorSetLayout
Shaders and Programs and Binary Oh My!

Aras Pranckevičius
Graphics Plumber, Unity
TL;DR

- SPIR-V
- It’s bytecode!
- Well, that’s it :)
Improvements

• Half of the world is not even using GLSL!
  - Allow more source languages

• No need for full compiler stack in every driver
  - Solves different frontend bugs/performance

• Solves IP issues for some usages
SPIR-V

• Standard Portable Intermediate Representation
• Core for Vulkan
  - Supports GLSL
• Core for OpenCL 2.1
  - Supports CL 1.2, 2.0, 2.1 C/C++
• Allows conversion from/to LLVM IR
SPIR-V

• Highly regular binary representation
• Higher level than other shader IRs (D3D)
  - No register alloc
  - No packing into float4
  - Hierarchical type info preserved
  - Structured flow control preserved
• SSA for all intermediate results
  - Load/Store for IO
Splitting the work

• Offline
  - All frontend work
  - Some optimizations

• Load Time
  - Conversion to GPU code, regalloc, sched

• Vulkan
  - No hidden recompiles (full state specified)
  - Can save/load final pipeline objects
Source Languages & IRs

- Multiple possible (GLSL & CL out of the box)
- Built-in function sets separate from core spec
- Convertible to other ILs without data loss
  - SPIR-V -> LLVM -> Optimize -> SPIR-V
Misc

- Extensible: can import new instruction sets & semantics
- Debugging: can annotate anything with text/file/line
- All instructions encode their size
  - Tools can skip over unknown extensions easily
Call to shader action!

- Go write your own parser/compiler
- Specification and reference GLSL->SPIR-V
  - Available right this second!
- Other shading languages?
  - Should be possible™
It’s Dangerous to Vulkan Alone—Take These

John McDonald
Efficient Development

- Layered API
- Official SDK
- Other Tools
Layered API?

- Vulkan consists of multiple layers
- The bottom-most layer is driver—the top-most is the application
- Application developer chooses which layers are active
  - Proportional Taxation: Inactive Layers are completely free
Layered API?

- Vulkan consists of multiple layers
- The bottom-most layer is driver—the top-most is the application
- Application developer chooses which layers are active
  - Proportional Taxation: Inactive Layers are completely free

Diagram:

- Required -> Application
- Optional* -> Loader
- Optional -> Validation
- Optional -> RefCounter
- Required -> Driver
Types of Layers

- Active (application requested)
  - Debug
  - Validation
  - Performance

- Passive (injected via third party)
  - Steam Overlay
  - FRAPS
Types of Layers

- **Active (application requested)**
  - Debug
  - Validation
  - Performance
- **Passive (injected via third party)**
  - Steam Overlay
  - FRAPS
- Layers can be OSS (all Official Layers are OSS)
- Or Proprietary
  - RAD Game Tools’ Telemetry Layer
Vulkan SDK

- Official SDK with BSD/MIT Open Source License directly from Khronos
- SDK Includes
  - Loader
  - Header / Build Scripts per platform
  - Official Layers
Loader?

- Expected that platforms will ship a default loader
  - You can use this if you choose

- But applications can ship a private version as well
  - Allows you to work around bugs
  - And avoids the opengl32.dll problem

- The Loader is actually just another Layer!
- You *could* opt-out of using the loader, but it’s usage is highly recommended
The complete list of layers is TBD, but the current expectation is roughly:
- Loader
- Validation
- Reference Counting
- Performance Linting
- Debug
- Thread Safety
- Trace Capture & Replay

Above may change, of course
Additional SDK Includes

- Scripts to trivially generate your own layers
  - Useful for tracking down app-specific bugs
  - And helping build a richer ecosystem
- Open Source Intel Driver
  - For Linux/SteamOS
  - Used in today’s demos
- GLSL->SPIR-V Compiler
Conformance Testing

- Open Source Conformance Testing!
  - Allow developers to easily verify an implementation they are running on
  - And see examples of feature usage in real code

- Ensure your application is covered by submitting usage cases back to Khronos
  - Patches Welcome
3rd Party Tools

- Introducing GLAVE, an Open Source Debugger for Vulkan
  - Effectively VOGL, but for Vulkan
- Developed in parallel with the API
- Expected to ship with the API
Performance Demo
Questions?

- Come ask questions at Khronos sessions today
  - SF Green Space
  - 657 Mission Street Suite 200 (5 minute walk)
    - 12-1:30 (First Session)
    - 2-3:00 (Second Session)
  - All Technical Questions are fair game!
• Tom Olson: @thekhronosgroup
• Johan Andersson: @repi
• Pierre-Loup Griffais: @plagman
• Niklas Smedberg: @EpicGames
• Dan Baker: @danbaker, @oxidegames
• Aras Pranckevicius: @aras_p
• John McDonald: @basisspace