



Zapping the filth

Saving the last tree in the city was the goal for a group of RMIT media students last semester. It was all part of a new 'green' computer game they developed in which players pit their wits against pollution.

The game, Terra Transeo is set in a smog-ridden city where it is impossible for

nature to survive. It features evil androids, paralysing spiders, Indiana Jones-style obstacles, teleports and items players can interact with.

The aim of the game is to save the last tree in the city by collecting clues and items to help it to grow, restoring the city's 'life force'.

Housing squeeze is hitting students

Deborah Fewster

Think it's easier finding somewhere affordable to rent in the burbs? Think again.

According to Victoria University's student housing officer, Ok Chang, students are struggling to find housing in suburbs as far-flung as Melton and Sunbury.

Things are so tight that Chang recently called on people living near VU campuses to consider renting out a property – or even a room – to a student.

"With the current squeeze in rental properties across Melbourne, many of our students are finding it difficult to find suitable accommodation," she said.

"We have students looking for accommodation who attend VU campuses in Footscray, Sunshine,

St Albans, Melton, Werribee, Sunbury and in the city."

According to the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, the vacancy rate for the whole of Melbourne is 1.2 per cent.

And it seems that in the competition for housing, students are coming off second-best.

For those who've just moved out of home, no prior rental experience can kill an application. Others are hamstrung by their need for flexible lease terms that fit in with the university or TAFE calendar.

With limited housing stock, students are also competing with other students and low-income earners for the same rental properties at the more affordable end of the market.

The problem is heightened in July and August, as campuses swell with new students

starting courses mid-year.

Chief executive officer of the Tenants Union Mark O'Brien, warned that landlords may take advantage of the historically-low vacancy rate.

"As demand for rental housing outstrips supply, landlords are able to increase the rents they charge without making improvements to properties that would justify rent hikes," he said.

While the Federal Government recently extended Commonwealth Rent Assistance to students receiving Austudy, the Tenants Union has called for more action to make housing affordable.

Mr O'Brien said the Government's own data showed that 35 per cent of all Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients spend so much on rent that they could not afford other necessities of living.

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