

Computer Gaming

In the period between 1950 -1960, computers were quite different from the sleek laptops and powerful smartphones you use today. The gigantic, room-sized setups began with vacuum tubes (valves) and became more compact as semiconductors were invented. Along with the hardware, primitive coding languages evolved into the complex ones we use today. The great leap forward came with the integrated circuit (IC) or chip, where multiple transistors were combined onto a single piece of silicon.

It's around fifty years since electronic games appeared on the cultural scene. What is now a multi-billion-pound industry started out as a humble arcade machine created by a group of college students on a technology campus in the United States of America.

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*   M E M O   *  
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ONCE AGAIN:  
PLAYING "SPACEWAR!" DURING REGULAR OPERATIONS IS POSITIVELY PROHIBITED!  
AS YOU ALL PRETTY WELL KNOW, REGULAR OPERATION HOURS ARE FROM 0 AM TO 12 PM ("24/7")!  
  
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INSTRUCTIONS FOR PLAYING "SPACEWAR!":  
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PLAYER 1:  
  
A ... TURN LEFT  
D ... TURN RIGHT  
S ... THRUST  
W ... FIRE  
  
Q ... HYPERSPACE  
  
PLAYER 2:  
  
J ... TURN LEFT      OR 4 (NUMBER-PAD)  
L ... TURN RIGHT    OR 6  
K ... THRUST         OR 5  
I ... FIRE           OR 8  
  
U ... HYPERSPACE    OR 7  
  
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OR USE CONTROL BOXES ("GAMEPADS"), THRUST IS DOWN, HYPERSPACE IS UP.  
HIT TAB ON KEYBOARD TO SWAP ASSIGNMENTS OF CONTROL BOXES TO SHIPS.  
  
SIGNED  
  
HEAD OF THE COMPUTER DEPARTMENT
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- They used a newly installed minicomputer at the
- Massachusetts Institute of
- Technology to write a
- programme that featured two
- Spaceships in the form of a
- “needle” and a “wedge” to
- enact a dogfight whilst avoiding
- the gravity of a nearby “star”.
- Both ships were controlled by
- human players.



Players were able to use simple keyboard keystrokes to “move and shoot” and even make a “hyperspace” move to a new random place on the screen. Spacewar! is now regarded as one of the most influential developments in the early history of video games. The small programming community in the 1960s shared the code for others to use and as computer systems with monitors became more widespread, it directly inspired other programme writers.

By the 1970's people with experience of amusement parks began to realise the potential for playing video games which had been a geeky pastime for small groups on university technology campuses. At that time you'd be hard pressed to find a kid who didn't spend their weekends in the arcades. Some of you might remember the popular arcade game Pong, in which you could play tennis against a friend.



The evolution cycle for technology was speeding up and with each improvement in hardware came the potential for more complex software. This paved the way for the likes of Playstation and Xbox to take the world by storm.

We have moved to a time where a worldwide subculture, formed by video game enthusiasts, has become mainstream. They have become so sophisticated and accessible, on so many different devices, that they are now a significant influence on modern culture around the globe.

Both sexes of all ages are now identifying as “gamers”, which can mean anything from casual players to passionate enthusiasts and even professional international competitors. In the 21st Century the “big money” has moved in, and game-focused conventions are now popular social gatherings and electronic sports, or esports, have become more widely accepted and have a huge following.



Just as cricket in the 16th Century became a national sport that eventually became associated with colonialism and civilized, ‘gentlemanly’ values that still exist today and 19th Century football became a worldwide phenomenon, with a huge fanbase and some unfortunate associations with violence and hooliganism, videogaming is now having its own effect on popular culture.

The evolution of Local Area Networks and the World Wide Web has greatly enhanced the reach of video gaming by creating a social event for people who are friendly with each other, even though players aren't physically located in the same space. Gamers of all ages play online games, with an average age of 33. Inside this new community there is inevitably a growth in the use of internet slang terms that have spread into common usage (e.g. lol – “laughing out loud”).

Whilst playing video games can be a fun pastime, and there are some potential benefits, there are health risks associated with too much gaming. They include repetitive stress injuries, vision problems, sleep deprivation, depression, and possibly addiction to playing. More sinister, in some peoples’ view, is that the use of gaming technology in military applications can be traced back to the early 1980s, when the US Army began using them for tactical simulation training.

The incredible advances in graphics and screen resolution are now able to render 3 dimensional images of such lifelike quality that a virtual world now closely mirrors real-life situations. The potential of this has now become realised in the modern battlefield, as we are now seeing in the Russo-Ukraine war. Specialised schools are training the military and civilians in Kiev to become operators of unmanned aerial vehicles in their existential struggle.



There has been much debate among media theorists as to whether video games are an inherently social or anti-social activity. Negative portrayals of adolescent boys hidden away in darkened bedrooms, failing to engage with the real world, conflict with other views that an alternative reality game is inherently a beneficial social interaction.

I invite our readers to let us know what they think and tell us about some of the products that are available for use.