

## Interactive Computer Games

Times have changed since we used to gather around the kitchen table for a game of cards. These days, weekly poker games or impromptu euchre parties are played online. The computer age has changed everything including the way we play.

The terms "video games", "computer games" and "PC games" are often used interchangeably. Although not always identical, these are generally computer-controlled games that players can interact with. A Personal computer game refers to the games that are played on a PC, while the term "video game" refers to games that are played through the TV. Some "video games" are console or hand held devices (i.e.: Gameboys) and others can be played on personal computers, mobile phones or PDAs. Another difference also between a console game and the video game, although these can be used interchangeably, is that a console game is played on a specially designed box that plays through a TV (i.e.: Xbox).

Video games outsell PC games by as much as four to one. This is because of the limitations that are often specified on personal computers. In order for the game to play well, the PC has to meet certain specifications. If the access memories, system clock speed, hard drive space, processor speed or Internet connection are not in sync, the game will play poorly or won't play at all.

Even so, interactive computer games have become a big business worldwide. Not long ago, people spent hours batting a dot on the screen between two bars of light. The "Pongs" of yesteryear can no longer hold the attention of most interactive computer game fans. Computer game development has been quick and absolutely massive. Businesses across the world have picked up and cashed in on the limitless potential of the interactive computer game craze. Programmers and game developers are creating games with graphics that can easily compete with the clarity of a television and the sound of a home stereo system. Even the most discriminating eye will appreciate the literally millions of colour combinations used in today's games.

There are thousands of interactive computer games available and while there are rules, the players are free to roam within the virtual universe. Games can be divided into a few basic categories, and some incorporate more than one:

- \* First person shooters
- \* Second person Shooters
- \* Third person Shooters
- \* Platformers
- \* Racing
- \* Real time strategy
- \* Role-playing
- \* Simulation

Interactive computer games are so popular that there are numerous websites magazines dedicated entirely to the market segment. Microsoft has their own "official Xbox Magazine", plus there are Sony's "Official US Playstation", Nintendo Power, Amped News, Gamepro, GameSpot, IGN, Game FAQ's, and Game Spy.

The industry is so hot that even television networks are running TV programs about interactive computer game playing. Worldwide competitions are held, cartoon characters and trading cards reinforce the mass appeal, and T-shirts are sold featuring favorite game characters. Interactive computer games have moved beyond boredom-busters to important elements of modern pop culture.

With so much popularity comes responsibility. All games receive a rating, much like a theatre rating, to help users choose. Games with graphic scenes or extreme violence are marked "A" for adult or "R" for restricted. Obviously these games are inappropriate for children, but there are many titles on the market that can provide kids with education, interaction, social skills and hours of fun. Parents need to share the responsibility and choose games suitable for the age of the child. Some games are programmed with parental controls that parents can set to block scenes or situations that may not be appropriate for younger players.

Now you can play a round of poker, start a euchre tournament, play chess or backgammon, shoot a game of pool, drive a Ferrari or take on a rogue battleship any time you like. With interactive computer games, you never have to find a deck or cards or wait for another player. Just plug in your favorite software and have a virtual world of fun.