Games and libraries – the future

John Kirriemuir is a researcher in the use of digital games and worlds in education. He is not a librarian, finding it less stressful to marry one instead.

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Howard Jones mused 'What is Love?' in 1983. He didn't know; neither do most of us. The same goes for the future of libraries, and digital games.

Despite this, we can make a handful of safe guesses about gaming trends for the next few years.

More people will play games

This one is easy. Game makers, producers, and suppliers are constantly seeking new markets, demographics and players. It's a multi-billion dollar industry, approaching half a century in age, that is gradually becoming mainstream and edging out movies, music and books into the more niche edges of the entertainment sector.

Processing power, the cheapness of hardware, the increasing ubiquity of platforms that can support digital games, better looking games, in-game Artificial Intelligence (AI) improvements and constantly evolving game design are some of the factors increasing the spread of games. Social factors include population rises, the increasing acceptance of games, a lengthening back history, and increasing access to hardware, software and the net.

(Some) library services will be gamified

Speaking of AI. We're into the last few decades of human-based librarianship, the end-game before Artificial Intelligence becomes sufficiently advanced, practical, and cheap enough to make humans a superfluous, expensive and error-prone factor in the provision of many library services. Sad, but inevitable, as other industries are finding out.

In the meantime, we'll still have people doing librarian-type things. However, some backroom services, such as cataloguing and metadata production, are now being studied to see if gamification[1] techniques can make them more enjoyable, efficient and of a better resulting data quality. This isn't just restricted to e.g. awarding achievement badges instead of pay rises or tenure, but using competitive gaming techniques for checking or improving data quality. Watch this space...[2]

Gaming

The latest news on games in libraries

Not all games are purely fun

The emergence of games for learning, 'serious games' and social games has led to a significant number of titles having clear personal or social benefits. Games for curriculum use have been around for a while, but game-based learning across several curriculum areas has increased over the last three years in European and North American countries. This is a quickly growing part of the games industry.

Some recommended titles are Sim City,[3] Food Force (developed by the UN),[4] and the political simulator Democracy.[5]

Not all games are digital

Despite the emergence of digital games, some games remain analogue, popular and resolutely so. These provide cheap options for libraries to stock and facilitate. There are cerebral options such as Chess and Backgammon, family favourites such as Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit and Cluedo (spoiler: the librarian did it in the library with a rolled-up copy of the *LA Record*), as well as event favourites such as Twister. Side-point: Twister is the most popular social game in naturist resorts.

And there's the more involved board gaming options, ranging from simple dice games through card games, and variations and evolvements of Dungeons and Dragons and war gaming. Settlers of Catan (15+ million copies sold)[6] is a recommended, strategy-rich starting point for many.

Nice new kit will soon be upon us

There's an argument that a few people still use: 'What's the point of buying X when there'll be a better version soon?' This is illogical, as the newer version will itself be bettered at some point; it's often a cover for someone afraid of technology, and afraid of admitting it (the 'introverted luddite' spectrum).

With gaming, there will always be new kit. Early adopters buy the premium stuff and pay the full monty, while others wait for a price drop. My personal rule is, unless I'm getting gaming kit for free through work, I won't buy any hardware until there are three or more games that I will spend time playing.

The next piece of kit, out in just a few weeks, is the Nintendo Wii U.[7] This uses a touchscreen-based gamepad; players can continue playing on it when the television is used for something else. There's a nice line-up of games for the first year and, inevitably, the console will be popular. Pikmin 3 in particular is worth a look for use in the library.

And goodbye

This is the final Gaming column from me. It's been fun writing them over the last year, especially against a backdrop of much change in libraries. Thank you for reading them, for the positive feedback, and especially to Rachel, managing editor of *CILIP Update*. A merry Christmas, and 'Hillary Clinton 2016'.

One last thing: have more fun and play more games. [U]

References
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2 **Games research:** www.silversprite.com
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4 **Food Force 2:** www.foodforce2.com
5 **Democracy.** www.positech.co.uk/democracy
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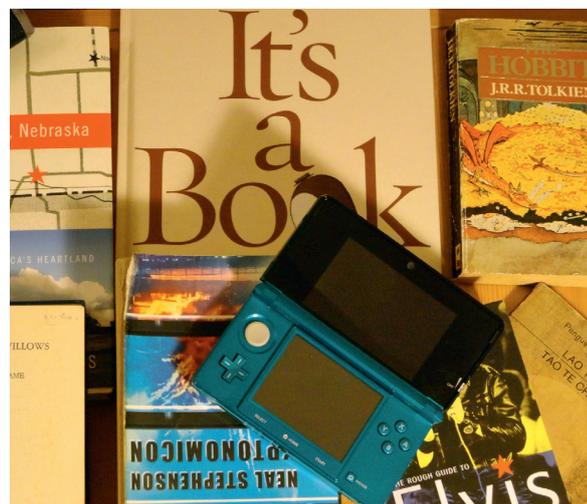
Saturday afternoon is books and games afternoon.