

Reading vs. computer games: what will the future hold?

Computer games have been a much-feared commodity for many years. As a child of the 80s I grew up playing *Space Invaders*, *Pacman*, and other such games, while the adults around me complained that kids would stop reading, that they would become addicted to computer games, and that society would crumble. Despite all the doomsaying, my friends and I did not stop reading and, surprisingly, society has remained intact.

So here we are now in 2010, and the same fears are still troubling people. Will computer games seduce our youth away from the written word? Can the book compete with the computer game? As games get more sophisticated, with more realistic graphics and increasing interactivity, will books fall by the wayside?



The flaw in this thinking is the belief that there is a direct competition between books and computer games. The fact is that there are a lot of things that compete for time in the life of young people — homework, chores, family, hanging with friends, sports, games, television, etc. And kids will always find the time to do the things they like doing. Assuming they like both reading and gaming, they will find the time to do both — as well as watch television, play sports, hang out with friends...

Kids have been playing games a lot longer than there have been computers. Computer games are simply a technological step forward in game playing. In fact, playing games has become more like reading: someone other than the player is providing the setting and story.

Both reading and computer games are forms of escape and enjoyment. They are not mutually exclusive. Playing computer games can lead to reading and vice versa. Many successful books and movies spin off into the world of games. Harry Potter is probably the ultimate example of this — seven books that have lead to extremely successful films and computer games. Many computer games are also finding new life in the literary world. The *Warcraft* and *Final Fantasy* games are the two that immediately spring to mind, as they have a plethora of tie-in novels.

I would argue that there is a greater competition between genres than between games and reading. As an adult my interests have widened, but as a kid I was singularly focused on science fiction. I read books of that genre and I played games of that genre. A grade 6 boy recently told me his favourite game was *Assassin's Creed 2* and that his favourite books were the *Horrible Histories* books. The game is a historical adventure set in the 15th and 16th centuries about a young assassin who uses a variety of amazing weapons. The books look back on all the nasty, gory, horrible elements of bygone ages. Kids will always find time for the things they like, be it science fiction or gory history.

I do not necessarily believe that authors and publishers need to come up with gimmicks to compete with computer games. But given the amount of reading material available to young people today, a gimmick or a new approach can help a book stand out from other books. Take for example, Gabrielle Lord's *Conspiracy 365*, a thriller set over the period of a year and published as a series of twelve books released monthly throughout 2010 — the

release timeline mirrors the timeline of the story. The series has its own website and was launched with a competition to win a Wii games console.

For an author or publisher, finding a link between their book and the world of computer games can be a plus, be it a competition to win a games console or an actual story link, such as with Gillian Rubinstein's *Space Demons* trilogy from the 1980s, in which kids find themselves trapped within a computer game. As an author myself, I set my latest book, *Gamers' Quest*, within a computer game world. I endeavored to mimic the feel of a computer game in the pages of this novel. And I have used a computer-animated video with the look and feel of a game to promote the book.

So what does the future hold? I think that games will continue to become more sophisticated, that books will look for new and exciting ways to attract readers, that kids will continue to both read and play, and that adults will continue to fear the technological advancement of computer games.

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Currently reading *Solace and grief* by Foz Meadows



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