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tech tuesday: the appeal of Minecraft

Tech Tuesday: The \$2.5 billion appeal of Minecraft

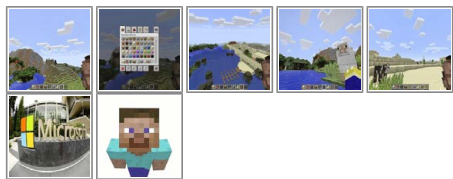
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Posted: Tuesday, September 16, 2014 12:00 am | Updated: 12:29 am, Tue Sep 16, 2014.

By ROBERT EVATT World Business Writer | 1 comment

What does Microsoft's staggering \$2.5 billion purchase of Mojang get it? A few dozen employees and two fairly obscure game concepts.

But most importantly it also gets Minecraft, which is one of the most popular games available today and a genuine cultural phenomenon.

The colorful yet blocky game has been sold over 54 million times on computers, tablets, smartphones and the PlayStation and Xbox console families. Toys and shirts featuring blobs of squares roughly in the shape of pickaxes, pigs and people are easy to find.

And this Halloween, you could see kids wearing square boxes on their head representing main character Steve or a green-hued, explosive creeper.

Though Minecraft was originally released in 2009, it's showing no signs of slowing down. How has the game managed to enthrall tens of millions of players?

At its core, Minecraft is a building game. The

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original “survival” mode puts you on a huge, randomly generated world with varied types of geography. Monsters will come out when the sun goes down, requiring players to build shelter in order to stay alive.

As players gather more resources, they can build more elaborate homes by combining various resources. For example, putting together three iron ingots and two sticks will create a pickaxe. With time, patience or ingenuity, players can tame and reshape the entire world however they see fit.

Or players can jump into “creative” mode, which drops the survival angle and gives access to every type of tool and building material immediately. The Internet is filled with incredible creations, such as full-sized re-creations of the King’s Landing city from “Game of Thrones,” the Taj Mahal, Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture and countless more. Some designers have even figured out how to create working computers that can

solve simple math problems.

Lukas Nerten, a 13-year-old living in Owasso, said he’s been coming back to the game for over three years now.

“I like the fact that you can build pretty much anything you want, though you have to collect a lot of resources to do it,” he said.

Minecraft has been embraced by educational organizations as a creativity tool. The Tulsa City County Library has held Minecraft events at several of its branches, with the Owasso branch set to revive them from 4 to 5 p.m. on Oct. 1, 8 and 15.

Steven Hulford, children’s library associate at Owasso, said the branch’s previous Minecraft events were well-attended.

“They were very successful,” he said. “Some people drove up from other cities to participate.”


While the first Owasso Minecraft events were build-offs that challenged kids to see what they could build with set materials, the upcoming events will be organized around themes, such as building a dream home or imagining where they’d like to work, Hulford said.

“Much like books take you into a different world, Minecraft is the same concept,” he said. “But while books are preconstructed, with Minecraft you can be the author of the story.”

My experience with Minecraft went a little differently. My plans to construct a massive fortress were interrupted when I broke through the ceiling of a huge cavern while mining for rock. I immediately forgot my architectural aspirations and started exploring.

For days I wandered through the cavern, encountering ruined minecart tracks, lava lakes and increasingly strange monsters as I went deeper down. Though the world was

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randomly generated, I couldn't stop myself from pressing further into it and discovering what I could find just a little farther on.

Minecraft isn't a game with a set story or goals. It is, often literally, what you make of it. It's likely this virtual playground will keep our imaginations going for many years to come.

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of the games in that top 10 list it is important to note that those other games have come and went while Minecraft has staying power.

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