

SCI|TECH

THE BATTALION

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Online gaming comes to College Station

PlayStation 2 and Xbox's live services pull Internet gaming out of the world of PCs

By George Deutsch
THE BATTALION

Since the dawn of video gaming in the 1970s, game developers have dictated the evolution of game play through not only technology, but innovation. The technology of today allows home video game consoles to do things unheard of in the days of the Atari 2600, and one of the most recent innovations in console video gaming is found online.

Of the three major home consoles — the Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube — the Xbox and PlayStation 2 offer gamers the ability to play others from across the country via a modem and Internet connection. And whether online gaming is time well spent or merely time away from class, it seems to be catching on in College Station.

Senior information and operations management major Justin Stafford has been playing his PlayStation 2 online for about a year. For Stafford, playing games online allows him to find a level of competitiveness he normally couldn't amongst his in-town friends.

"People here (in College Station) suck," Stafford said. "You can't really get competition here."

For Stafford, the online PlayStation 2 arena is a good test of skills. It is such a good test, in fact, that some PlayStation 2 and Xbox games even offer gamers, such as Stafford, statistics tracking and an online national ranking system.

Thousands compete with each other everyday, with win/loss

records and game scores helping to determine a player's numerical ranking. Stafford, for example, is currently ranked No. 44 in the nation on EA Sports's NCAA College Football 2003.

Stafford plays his PlayStation 2 online under the name JJSaggie2003, but gamers' online names range from the bizarre to the obscene. A gamer's online name can reveal a lot about the person playing under it. Stafford's online name has actually drawn criticism from other online gamers, as it reveals his Aggie status.

"Cussing happens a lot on here, and people are real aggressive. People... say things they wouldn't in person."

— Justin Stafford
senior information and operations management major

"I played this guy from Texas Tech," Stafford said. "He saw I was an Aggie and immediately started saying A&M was inferior in football. It's like he had a vendetta against me."

The online world is not without its problems, and in some cases, more grudges are formed than resolved. As the Official Xbox Magazine reports, cussing is still a problem online for some gamers, as many take winning and losing very seriously.

And since an online voice com-

municator is standard with a PlayStation 2 or Xbox online membership, opposing players can potentially hear every word said and vice versa. Fortunately, both systems offer a mute feature.

"Cussing happens a lot on here," Stafford said, "and people are real aggressive. It's just like the Internet. People have the guts to say things they wouldn't in person. Some people rub it in."

In the end, it is up to the individual gamer to decide whether live game play is worth it. Xbox owners looking to experience Microsoft's live arena, Xbox live, need only purchase a subscription, which is about \$50 a year, but they must have a broadband Internet connection. PlayStation 2 owners must purchase a network adapter for about \$40, but they don't have to pay an annual membership fee, according to the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.


Whether an Xbox or PlayStation 2 enthusiast, the era of online gaming has begun.

As Stafford said after beating a younger gamer this weekend, "This guy just called me 'sir.' He said, 'Good game, sir.' Here, it's like I'm a legend."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE AND THE OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

The PlayStation 2 network adaptor (pictured at top) enables online play and costs about \$40. It attaches to the back of the PlayStation 2 (above). Microsoft's voice communicator accompanies the Xbox Live starter kit (right) and attaches through the controller's memory unit slot, enabling verbal communication.



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