

Booming life for 'PUBG' death-match computer game

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Scores of virtual warriors faced off in a Hunger Games-style death match in a massive, real-world eSports matchup of upstart shooter game "PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds."

The computer [game](#)'s rise has been epic, with some industry trackers branding this the year of 'PUBG' even though it is technically still in trial mode with a final version yet to be released.

In a colossal two-day event that ended Sunday, 80 players hunched over computers in a warren of cubicles set up in an arena where the champion Golden State Warriors usually play home basketball games.

Shooter games played as spectator sports typically pit one team against another, and such was the scene nearby in the Oracle Arena in Oakland where a "Counter-Strike Global Offensive" tournament was taking place as part of the overall Intel Extreme Masters event.

Brendan Greene of Ireland, the creator of "PUBG," released an early-access version of the game online at Steam in March, referring to it as a "very special day" in a blog post.

That was more than 20 million copies ago, according to data service Steamspy.

A Steam chart showed PUBG was the most played PC game on Monday, with nearly 2.7 million people simultaneously taking part at a peak point.

"With PUBG's growing popularity, we really wanted to incorporate it into this event," Electronic Sports League vice president of pro gaming Michal Blicharz said.

"The interest in the game from the industry and growing PUBG community is greater than I can remember."

Hints of Hunger Games

It's a dizzying rocket to success for a game born of frustration with eSports titles seeming to play it safe and predictable with tight maps, established lanes for action, and reliance on hectic action and hair-trigger reflexes.

Greene had a different vision for competitive game-play, and began to make it real by modifying source code of military-style games Arma 2 and 3 to create a modification or "mod" called "Battle Royale."

Often likened to blockbuster book and film series "The Hunger Games," game play created by Greene takes place on large virtual islands where players drop in, scavenge for resources and weapons, then battle rivals and the environment to be the sole survivor.

Success of the "mod" earned Greene a job working on a similar project with Sony Online Entertainment in 2015, then South Korean developer Bluehole hired him to be creative director of his own original "Battle Royale" game.

The result was PUBG.

Intel Extreme Masters was a rare time when PUBG matches played out live in a stadium instead of online with competitors squirreled away at home or other private settings.

"It is exhilarating," said 23-year-old Ewan Tindale of Britain, a member of team Digital Chaos which won the first PUBG round in a tournament which boasted a total prize pool of \$200,000.

"We are used to sitting in the dark at the PC gaming, then all of a sudden you have thousands of people watching, cameras and lights, but once you are in the game you kind of tune out."

Team aAa (Against All Authority) Gaming of France reigned victorious at the PUBG tournament battle, taking \$60,000 in prize money.

A tally of arena and online spectatorship was not available, but expected attendance at the venue to at least match the 6,500 figure from the tournament last year at the same location.

Games market intelligence firm Newzoo projects that eSports will be a \$1.5 billion a year industry by the 2020. That remains a pittance compared to the tens of billions of dollars spent annually in the traditional [video game industry](#).

Participation and viewership have soared as virtual games gain traction, with a worldwide fan audience now estimated at 280 million, approaching that for the NFL.

Such a leap in growth has helped fuel talk that competitive electronic sports, or professional gaming, could even soon become an Olympic "discipline."

"Anyone can watch an eSports tournament and go buy the game for \$20 or so and try to be like the players they see," Greene said.

"PUBG is such a new thing you can get good quickly and compete."

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