

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GAMING

EXACTLY WHAT DOES GAMING OFFER AND WHY DOES IT HAVE SO MUCH APPEAL AMONG THE MASSES? DR NICOLA DAVIES INTRODUCES SOME OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRICKS EMPLOYED BY GAME MAKERS TO KEEP YOU PLAYING - FROM USING DELAYED REWARDS TO INCREASE ANTICIPATION TO INTRODUCING 'COGNITIVE FLOW' IN THE FORM OF HEIGHTENED ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GOALS, FEEDBACK AND MANAGEABLE RULES...

with the player's competency; punctual feedback on performance is provided; and non-essential diversions that create distraction have been eliminated to increase player concentration.

Dr Jamie Madigan, a lifelong gamer and expert in the psychology of games, highlights the importance of providing players with a sense of competence. He says, "One of the widely used models of player motivation is Self Determination Theory, which holds that people like to play games because they satisfy needs for competence (the feeling that you're good at something), autonomy (the feeling that you have meaningful choices), and relatedness (the feeling that you are important and connected with other players)."

For games to be engaging and successful - to produce cognitive

In the early days of gaming, we would sit in front of our consoles repeating the same actions over and again. Think *Donkey Kong*, *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. While these titles remain popular among some gamers, they lack something that modern games possess - the ability to tap into the human mind.

Today, videogame developers are using psychology to create titles that enable players to fulfil needs not being met in the real world - by using psychological techniques to heighten levels of engagement, also known as cognitive flow. Games now offer luring

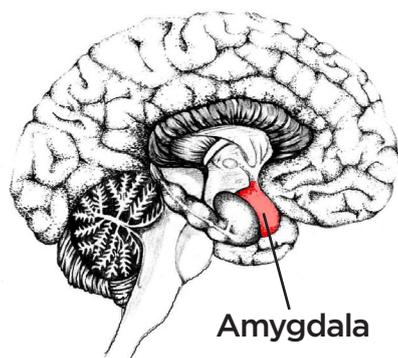
challenges, rewards, escape from reality, autonomy and anticipation. Think *Sims* or *SimCity* - games that grant you control over others' lives or even over entire cities.

According to psychologist Dr Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, there are four characteristics found in gaming tasks that are successful in keeping us engaged: they comprise objective goals with unambiguous rules; they solicit actions to accomplish challenges and goals that match



ABOVE: Even the blocks in *Tetris* fall faster with every level, because if there was no challenge we would be easily bored by games.

RIGHT: The amygdala is the pleasure centre of the brain - the region triggered by addictive games.



Amygdala

