

Minecraft Fans Gather For Minecon In Paris

Minecraft fans gather for Minecon in Paris By Mark Ward Technology correspondent, BBC News in Paris

Thousands of cheering, stamping, whooping fans. Pounding dance music. Videos that are cleanly edited and produced. Dry ice machines. Spotlights moving across a stage. Giant screens are suspended above the stage.

This is not a concert by rock stars.

This isn't a surprise PA at the nightclub of a boy band.

This is not the launch of a blockbuster movie or a car.

This is Minecon - the international convention for Minecraft creators and players - a videogame set in a world of blocks that has become a worldwide phenomenon in just a few short years.

Free!

According to industry estimates, the PC version has sold around eight million copies. However, this estimate does not include the many people who have played it on the Xbox 360 and on Android phones, iPhones, Android handsets, Kindles, and a growing number other devices. All in all, the global community involved with Minecraft is thought to be about 40 million strong.

Why is it so popular

Erik Christiansen (known for his Minecraft game as Torencrent) said that "freedom" is the best word to describe it. "You can do anything in the game.

People do many things. Some create huge structures, others build palaces and others recreate real-world places with Minecraft blocks. Others make simple blocky devices and machines out of the materials available.

And, added Mr Christiansen, if what you wanted to do was not there you can create a

modification - or mod - that does the job, and then you can share that with other players so millions of others can do what you did.

He said some of the improvements players suggested also made it into the game's core code. He said that the game has become a huge success because of the positive feedback loop between fans and the game.

Big stars

Minecon 2012 took place at Disneyland Paris. This is where the game's 4,500 most loyal fans gathered to meet other faithful, see in-person friends they only knew via the game, dress up as the creatures and people in the game, and talk to Minecraft's creators.

"They are stars," said Danny Gelder, aka Nyloch in the game, an avid player who runs a Minecraft Server for himself and a few of his friends.

It is hard not to agree with the reaction the game's curators and developers get when they step out onto the stage during the opening ceremonies. They look slightly overawed as they blink and grin under a barrage of flash photography.

Markus Persson aka Notch is the biggest cheerleader. This unassuming programmer coded the original game, then made it free online for others to use while he worked on improving the game.

"When I started out making the game it was going to be a six-month project." He told the BBC later, taking some time to drink coffee, relax backstage, and then he said it to the BBC.

These moments of silence are rare during Minecon. He can't walk more than a few steps before someone asks for a photo, hands him a flyer or poster to sign or gives him a high five.

He has to admit that he is both surprised and amazed at the game's success.

"I was hoping to see if I could make enough money to make another game - that was the dream goal of it," he said, "but it just kept growing and exploding, thanks to the community,"

And his surprise is not just at the number of copies sold but also at the vast community it has spawned.

He said, "There are people making a living creating content and things for Minecraft. It is amazing to think about."

Some of those others are also stars at Minecon. They are the fans who have made YouTube videos that millions see, coded mods and skins for millions, or created maps that other players use.

They are much more well-known by their web and game alter egos (Vareide CaptainSparklez and SethBling, to name a few), than by their real names.

They too get a deafening reception when they are introduced on stage. They are so well-known that they are frequently stopped to get autographs or photos taken as they move through the conference halls at the show.

Serious uses

Lydia Winters, who oversees Mojang and its players' links, said that Minecraft's real strength is its community.

She said, "The community, and the things they come up with are actually far beyond what we could expect or comprehend."

Fans want to hear what's next in the game. The game's next major update, which is due in January, will clean up the code that supports Redstone, a Minecraft resource.

It can be used in the right way to Minecraft blocks to create crude electrical circuits that can be used to power many ingenious devices. Redstone will become more useful and be able to be used for a wider range circuit components.

There is also talk of running Minecraft on the Raspberry Pi's bare-bones computer. The code to accomplish this is available now. Anyone can load the game on a Pi and share it with their friends.

Fans can also get advice on running their own server and creating custom maps.

Sessions can also be held on how to use Minecraft for serious purposes. It is already being used by schools to teach programming, geology and geopolitics.

Stephen Reid, an educational consultant who uses Minecraft in schools, said it was a success in the classroom for the same reasons it is so popular with gamers.

He said, "It's mainly all about the process of creating and people love to make." "As human beings, our constant goal is to do better. Addict Gaming We strive to build and succeed. Minecraft is exactly that."

Minecraft sued over user control

23 July 2012

Minecraft makers reveal new game

25 June 2012

Minecraft maker unveils new game

April 2012

Vareide - YouTube

CaptainSparklez - YouTube

Raspberry Pi

Danny Gelder (Nyloch)

Stephen Reid