

## Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming

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### **StarCraft**

*StarCraft* is a real-time strategy (RTS) **computer game** designed by Chris Metzen and James Phinney, developed by Blizzard Entertainment, and released March 31, 1998. Its expansion, *Brood War*, came out in 1999. The game was adapted for the **Nintendo 64** in 2000 under the name *StarCraft 64*. The *StarCraft* universe was further developed in novels and *mangas*, and the first episode of its sequel, *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*, was released in 2010.

*StarCraft* has a science-fiction setting; three species are fighting each other in a sector of the galaxy. The Terrans are humans, criminals exiled from Earth a long time ago. The Zergs are giant, insectlike creatures of various forms morphed from larvae and controlled by a central brain. The Protoss are thin aliens that gain their power from psychic capabilities and robotic technologies. Not only is each species fighting the others, but there are internal struggles within each species for different interests in the galaxy.

The game follows most of the genre's conventions of the **time**. Players must establish a base and collect resources (minerals and vespene gas) to build military units and lead their armies into combat. The game uses a mouse and keyboard, and players click on units or buildings to issue orders, which will be carried out automatically. Units and buildings have different characteristics (hit points, attack score, armor, and so on) and special abilities that influence the results of combat. Each power-up in the game is ordered in a "tech tree": in addition to an amount of resources needed, the construction of certain buildings is a prerequisite for new units, buildings, technologies, and upgrades. Collecting resources implies that the player constructs and defends new bases all over the **map**. Standard games are over when a player (or a team of allied players) destroys all of its opponent's buildings.

The narrative consists of six single-player campaigns—three in the original game and three added with the expansion. Each campaign is an episode of the whole storyline and allows the player to gain control of a specific faction (Terran, Zerg, and Protoss). The player has to fulfill the objectives of a scenario to move on to the next, objectives that could be as diverse as "survive for 30 minutes," "bring a unit to a specific location," or simply "destroy the enemy camp."

The first drafts of the game were very similar to Blizzard Entertainment's precedent work in the RTS genre, *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* (1995). In 1998, *StarCraft* still used two-dimensional **graphics** even though other RTSs had already begun using three-dimensional graphics in 1997 (in *Age of Empires* and *Total Annihilation*), and it borrowed many gameplay elements from its predecessors. Nonetheless, *StarCraft* raised the standards in several ways.

First, as in the already established *Command & Conquer* series, the story was delivered

through deep character development and impressive voice acting. Most storylines in RTSs at the time were given between scenarios—sometimes as text only—and could be easily skipped without losing the overall feeling of the game. However, at the core of its narrative and campaign gameplay, *StarCraft* featured “heroes” who were characters as well as in-game units and who talk to the player and to each other between the scenarios and during the game, resulting in

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gaming sequences that are more involved in the campaign narrative.

Second, *StarCraft* is considered one of the most balanced multiplayer RTS games, meaning that the unique characteristics of each faction do not give them advantages over the other factions. This balance is asymmetrical: each of the three races has a different set of units, buildings, technologies, and special abilities, as opposed to other RTS games of the time that had very similar factions, making the “art of balance” an easier task. Twelve years after the original release, the three races were still balanced, though *StarCraft* had an expansion and was patched many times to maintain this balance.

Third, in terms of gameplay, the importance of micromanagement is one of *StarCraft*’s defining characteristics; unit control is an important factor in the result of a combat and is essential for most of the special abilities. This micromanagement requires a lot of execution skills, which was seen as a lack in the **interface** by some but considered an interesting challenge by others.

Moreover, the *StarCraft* “campaign editor” had functionalities that made it possible for players to create scenarios where the **rules** of the game are changed. The Battle.net server, Blizzard Entertainment’s gaming network, hosted custom games with special rules that changed the gaming experience. Hardcore players preferred the “ladder” side of the multiplayer games, a mode using only a set of approved maps, where the game keeps score of the players’ results. Although Blizzard does not support a ladder system anymore for *StarCraft*, elite players can still challenge each other within a similar system through third-party servers, such as ICCup.com.



South Korean gamers compete against each other during a TJB *StarCraft* cyber game tournament in Taejeon on August 18, 2001. (Kim Jae-Hwan/AFP/Getty Images)

What makes *StarCraft* unique, though, is the fact that it gained the status of an “e-sport” (electronic sport) and saw the emergence of a professional gaming scene in **South Korea**. Television channels broadcast games and hosted leagues, such as the Ongamenet Starleague (OSL) and the MBCGame Starleague (MSL). South Korean companies sponsor

professional teams, such as Samsung KHAN and SK Telecom T1, and some *StarCraft* players are even seen as celebrities. The e-sport's integrity was even hurt in 2010 when match-fixing and an illegal gambling scandal surfaced, demonstrating that the e-sport scene faces problems similar to those in traditional sports. Although other games are

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played in competitions all over the **world**, *StarCraft* is one of the first and most long-lasting of them, officially in competition in the **World Cyber Games** since the beginning in 2000. If the RTS is sometimes thought to be a genre in stagnation, *StarCraft* was released at the pinnacle of its golden age. Even though other RTSs have a certain audience in the professional gaming scene, *StarCraft* already has a place in video game **history**, for its exemplary use of the conventions of the genre and for having held gamers' and spectators' interest for more than a decade.

*Simon Dor*

### **Further Reading**

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Hyun-cheol, Kim. "StarCraft Rigging Scandal Hits e-Sports Industry." *The Korea Times*, April 15, 2010, available at

[http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/tech/2010/04/134\\_64247.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/tech/2010/04/134_64247.html).

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