

1. The Birth of One Switch Games

Electrical games have been played by humans for thousands of years. Rubbing fur to build up a static charge then using it to shock someone or make hair stand on end was playing with magic. My fascination though, is in one button “one switch” video games and how, at their best, they can open gaming for all.

The first step towards the joy of video gaming was in finding a way to store electrical power. The solution came from a macabre one-switch experiment by Italian scientist Luigi Galvani in 1780. Galvani found that it was possible to make the leg of a dead frog twitch into action using an electric shock. He deduced that a store of animal electricity was kept within the Frog’s pelvis. All manner of bizarre experiments followed that would form the basis of Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein. Intellectual adversary Alessandro Volta questioned Galvani’s conclusions, and in seeking to disprove him, created the first electrical battery using copper, zinc, and brine-soaked cloth in 1799. It was a success and the reason why today people do not power their electronic gadgets with plug in frogs.

Human one-twitch games played long before Galvani prodded a frog include stare out competitions, sleeping lions and try not to laugh or grin games. First to blink flinch, smile or laugh is the loser. Last to do so, the magnificent winner.

The earliest battery or mains powered one-switch games arrived in the 1800s and were initially suffered by the rich in their own homes. Essentially, it was electricity enhanced “knock down ginger”. Flick a light switch on and off or press a doorbell button repeatedly until the occupant loses their rag and chases after you.

In 1844, an early US telegraph system bridging 44 miles between Washington and Baltimore, carried the test message, "What hath God wrought?". Sent by Samuel Morse on paper-tape using his binary on-off language of dits and dahs, it was repeated back to complete the test. How disturbed Morse would have been to have received instead, "An electronic vessel for the sharing of faith, science, culture, cat videos and an unfettered bilious torrent of human consciousness. You may regret this. LOL ;)"

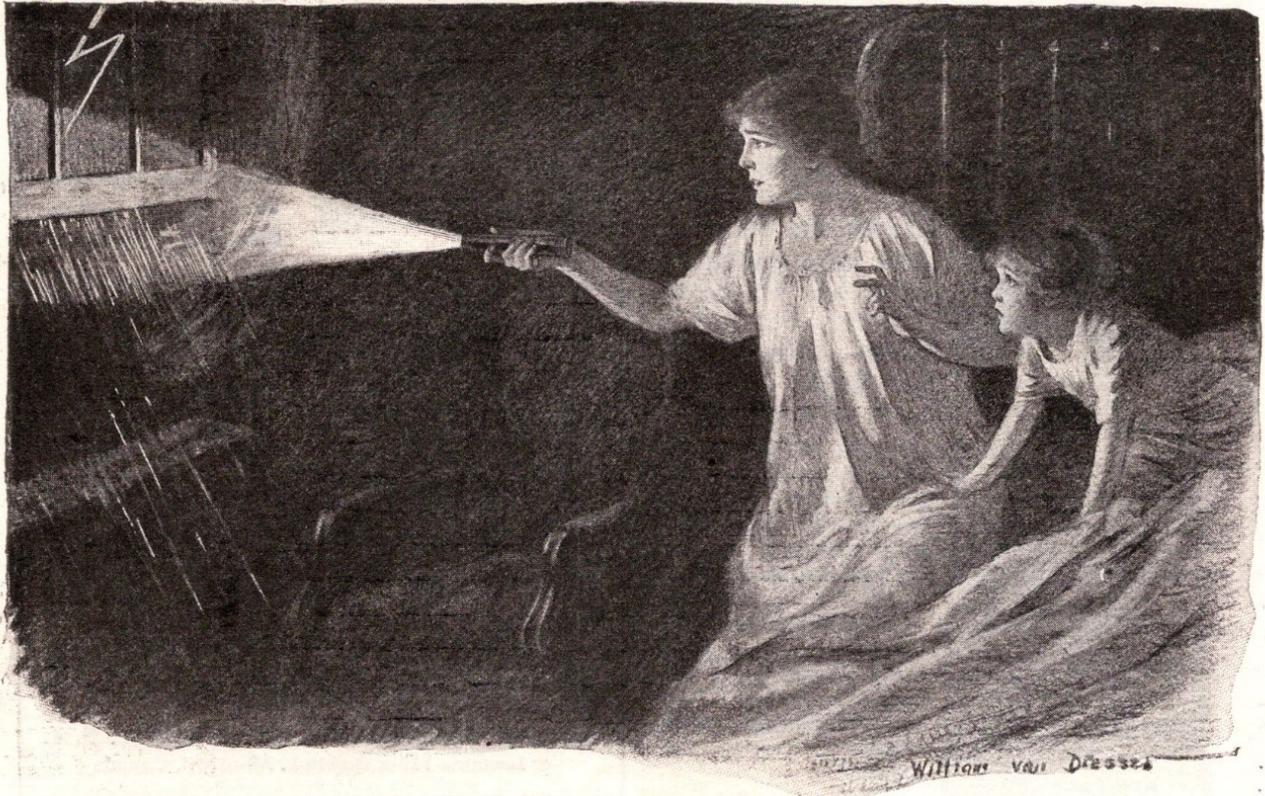


That same year across those same cables, a game of Chess was played via a pair of one button telegraph keys. By 1902 underwater telegraph cables encircled the globe carrying the earliest international on-line gaming communities.

The sound of Morse code pulsed ever stronger around the world alongside the glittering of electric lights spreading night after night. By 1922 there was said to be 10 million battery powered torches in North America alone. The popular Eveready Daylo flashlights sold alongside a free "Signalling with Eveready" booklet. Such resources enabled night-time children to silently defy bed-time curfews. Surreptitious communication from bedroom to bedroom, house to house, tent to tent. The game was to avoid interception. Whether by passers-by, teachers or worst of all, your parents. Lights out NOW!

One torch game that children and adults continue to play to this day was in trying to dispel a fear of the dark: One press to banish the shadow monsters. It was something primal that Eveready recognised.

Always keep a Daylo under your pillow!



So handy and convenient;
—a household necessity!

Is the rain coming in?
What was that?
What time is it?
Is the baby all right?
Did I lock the cellar door?
Where are my slippers?



No. 2631

Important
For your protection the registered name Eveready DAYLO is stamped on the end cap.

Accept no substitute.

The ideal Daylo to have under the pillow. 77 styles, many especially designed for home use.

The Light that says:
—“There it is!”

With that long-lived



All Eveready dealers
are now well stocked

604

Tungsten Battery

Fear sells. Especially when linked to losing your slippers. However, as argued in Jill Tomlinson's children's book *The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark*: Dark is [also] fun. Fun fairs and amusement arcades are at their most magical once the dark descends. This is where the next wave of electric one-switch games appeared.

1929 saw the arrival of both the Great Depression and Exhibit Supply Company of Chicago's Love Tester. Insert a coin then squeeze the grip to set a sequence of lights flashing wildly. Once released, the lights would settle upon a single position announcing to all how irresistible or repulsive you clearly were. Obviously, pay to play again if you didn't like the results.

THE WHEEL OF LOVE

"ROUND AND AROUND SHE GOES, AND WHERE SHE STOPS, NO ONE KNOWS"

A Companion Piece To Our Famous Love Tester.



Size:
82" High
29" Wide
19" Deep

Insert a dime, push the button, and watch the world's most unique sex appeal tester go into action. A bell rings, and the multi-colored center wheel begins to whirl, producing a dazzling circle of spinning lights. The wheel slows and stops. One light remains lit, indicating the love rating.

The Munves LOVE TESTER

Our Irresistible Antique Reproduction of An All-Time Favorite.

Insert a coin, pull the handle, and watch the fun begin! Bells ring, and lights flash from reading to reading. The flashing stops, and the laughter starts!

Here is a game that's been location tested for almost 50 years!



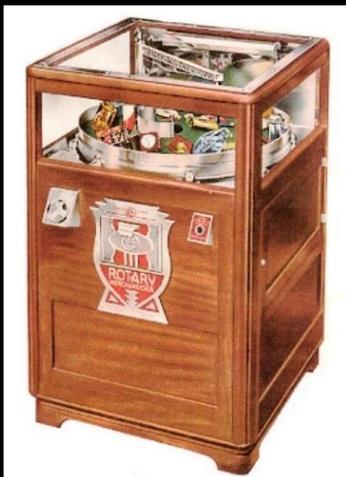
Size:
24" Wide
19" Deep
81" High

Available
in
10¢ & 5¢
Models

Features:

- Beautiful, hand-rubbed cabinet.
- Heavy brass handle and metal castings.
- Rugged, reliable mechanism.
- High volume capacity - 10 seconds per play.

1931 brought cheap one-button thrills in the Rotary Merchandiser also by Exhibit Supply Co. Unlike the love and personality testers, this was a game of skill.



The wheelchair accessible Rotary Merchandiser featured a turn-table laden with jewellery, sweets, toys or other riches. If these were placed in round cases, you'd have been wise to stay away. Inserting a coin put all in motion encircling an upwards ramp to the central drop chute. Pushing the "Stop Turntable" button set a metal arm dragging through the prizes towards the centre. If timed right, a prize would be nudged up into the drop zone to fall into the prize collection drawer. Here it would wait for the grasping hand of its new owner.

The first one-switch home television games arrived in 1951 courtesy of Zenith's "Lazy Bones" single button wired remote control. This device gave Americans the power to change their two or three TV channels from the comfort of their chairs.

The television games people played included: Find something worth watching. Mash up two or more channels to make your own programme. Race to change the channel to protect the moral fibre of your family from offensive content.

Take it Easy!

Change TV Programs from your
Easy Chair with the Amazing

Zenith "Lazy Bones"

REMOTE CONTROL



Not one knob to touch! That's right—you just hold the "Lazy Bones" control in your palm, anywhere in the room. To change programs one after another, just press lightly with your thumb. Absolutely nothing else to tune or re-tune. All the necessary adjustments are made for you—automatically. It's the far-ahead design and extraordinary stability of Zenith's Turret Tuner that make possible such miraculous remote control! You must try it yourself to believe it. Your Zenith Radio and Television Dealer invites you, today.



New Zenith® "Byron" TV Console. 19 inch (238 sq. in.) 2-in-1 Reflection-Proof screen, wider than a newspaper page! New "Super-Range" chassis. Pre-tuned built-in antenna. 18th Century cabinet in rich Mahogany veneers.

©1951

Only \$30, on any new
Zenith TV Receiver



Zenith Radio Corporation, Chicago 39, Illinois • Also Makers of Fine Hearing Aids

For UK readers, the advert above shows a Dad furiously trying to change the channel before his wife and son see the V-sign being flicked right at them.

After a few years of pets and people tripping over the long Lazy Boy cable, came Flash-Matic Tuning in 1955. However, this was not a one-switch device. The user would need to accurately aim a futuristic torch at a light-sensor on their TV. When lined up a quick squeeze would flash light at the sensor to change channels. The sun would do this too depending upon the time of day.

Using very similar “electric eye” technology, Robert LaVoy a teacher at El Portal del Sol School for Cerebral Palsied Children, California designed a communication device to aid those with “poor control of major parts of body and unable to verbalise”: The 1957 “Rick’s Communicator”.

The device consisted of a motorised clock hand, display board of interchangeable communication cards and an always on light-beam sensor. When the child broke that beam of light with finger, head, foot, or any part of the body the clock hand rotated around the board of communication cards. When they moved out of the light, the pointer would stop. over a letter, number, word, colour, or picture to communicate that selection.

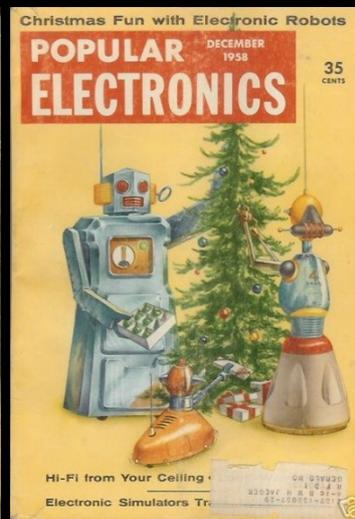
Teaching examples were explained in the 1957 Exceptional Children magazine, including learning the alphabet and counting. “Example: Flash card is held up, such as ‘4 + 1’ and child stops indicator on ‘5’. This gives the student an opportunity to participate in group games.”

Games would have been in the toolkit of any good teacher trying to motivate a child to take interest and get involved. This must have felt like a steppingstone into a future where anything could be possible.



Public fascination for Science fact and fiction was whipped into a frenzy in the 1950s. TV shows such as Science Fiction Theatre and The Quatermass Experiment. Books such as Isaac Asimov's I, Robot. Films such as Forbidden Planet featuring Robby the Robot and an entirely electronic musical score fed this. Most of all people reacted with a mix of hope, fear and wonder at the launch of the Russian Sputnik 1 satellite in 1957. It beeped a simple radio signal whilst orbiting Earth to make one statement: "I am here".

In 1958 on the crest of this wave, Masudaya Co. Japan created a range of wireless remote-control toys activated via a single button "spark-gap" handset. First in line was the Radicon Robot swiftly followed by Mrs Radicon Robot, Boats, Buses and Cars. Each press would cycle through a different function, left, forward, right, forward, backwards and stop (repeat). Games of skittles, chase a pet, obstacle course runs and mock interplanetary robot invasion ensued.



Earlier one-button battery powered toys existed, such as Telegraph trainers, light-bulb novelties, and the Marx Train-set voice controller. Radicon toys differed in bringing far more power to a single button.

Back in the amusement arcades, UK gaming company Jamiesons introduced a range of wall mounted one button gambling games. Titles from 1959 onwards included Roto Light, Electro Dart, Roto Fruit, Roulette, Roto Pool and Bingola. One game, one penny. Pressing a chrome push-button started a trail of encircling lights. The aim was to release and stop the lights on a prize-winning spot. The odds were fixed against you, but it didn't stop people being drawn in by the mesmerising display and promise of easy money.

Although the Rotary Merchandiser and Electrodart had simple one button controls, they still posed barriers. Then as today, some would have found the controls out of reach or requiring too much strength or precision to operate.



Curiously, the Jamiesons games share much in common with the more serious POSM (Patient Operated Selector Mechanism) built the following year. This would be the biggest step towards inclusive gaming.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and PICTURE CREDITS

1. “The Birth of One Switch Games”

Sciatic nerve, Galvani via <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vnky7kj5>. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Telegraph operator, via: <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/woman-sending-morse-code-using-telegraph-100085864>

Eveready Daylo, via Scribner's Magazine (Vol. 65, No. 3), New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, (Mar 1919)

Love Tester flyer, Munves, via <http://arcadeflyerarchive.com/>

Amusements 1930's London Arcade photo from Penny Arcade: <http://slotmachines.bravehost.com/page8.html>.

Rick's Communicator related rotary indicator, via Technology at Parent Level, Roger Jefcoate, Special Education: Forward Trends (Vol. 7, No. 2), British Journal of Special Education (Jun 1980): <https://www.deepdyve.com/>

Radicon Robot, Popular Electronics magazine (Dec 1958)

RotoFruit via supershotbattymanbor YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxH0L9i2gRU>

Text formed from various research including: Rotary Merchandiser: <https://videogamehistorian.wordpress.com/> (25 Mar 2015) and Jamieson's: <http://www.coin-opcommunity.co.uk/blog/> (31 Aug 2011).

SEE: [OneSwitch.org.uk/page/100](https://www.oneswitch.org.uk/page/100) for the full story

Special Effect

