



Extra Life: Coming of Age in Cyberspace

David S. Bennahum

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Today's digital culture traces its roots to the 1980s, when the first computer generation came of age. These original techno-kids grew up with home-brew programs, secret computer access codes, and arcades where dedicated video gamers fought to extend their play by earning "extra life." In that era of gleeful discovery, driven by a sense of adventure and a surge of power, kids found a world they could master, one few grownups could understand. In this fast-paced, real-life tale set in the bedrooms, computer rooms, and video arcades of the '80s, popular media chronicler David S. Bennahum takes readers back to his initiation into this electronic universe, to his discovery of PONG at age five. We follow him from video game addiction—his Bar Mitzvah gift was an Atari 800 with 48K of RAM—to his ascent to master programmer with the coveted title of "Super User" in his high school's computer room. Bennahum reflects on how computers empowered him and his friends to create a world of their own. We see how their geekiness, grounded in roleplaying, iterative thinking, and systems analysis led to a productive, social existence—the "extra life" they found on the other side of the screen. Hilarious, poignant, and packed with little-known computer lore, *Extra Life* is a grand digital adventure set against the background of the emerging information age.

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