



“All comes down to one pixel”

When home computers were new, there was this enduring myth of “killer poke.” POKE was a pretty low-level BASIC command that allowed you to write any number to any place in the memory, as there was no memory protection. From that developed a set of myths of the right magical pairs of numbers that could be input and cause *permanent* damage to the hardware of the computer, shared in nerd circles almost like campfire stories.

Wikipedia has a pretty dry [set of those](#). The most exciting one there is annotated with [citation needed], and the message seems to be: by the 1980s, this was no longer possible. Even in the earlier version of this idea, [Halt and Catch Fire](#), the “catch fire” was an exaggeration. Before then? Sure, I bet some user actions could damage the computer, but computers themselves, with their high-voltage vector CRTs, electromechanical parts, and even liquid mercury tanks early on, were not that hard to damage.

Unsurprisingly, there are more modern versions of “killer poke,” too. At this point, the best they can do is crash or hang your operating system, but they are still chased, and coveted, and mysterious.

[This 10-minute 2021 video from Mrwhosetheboss](#) is a fun story of a wallpaper that could crash your Android OS. I’m not going to spoil the surprise, but it’s not what I expected – although the moment you see the wallpaper in question, you might figure it out.

It’s a fun video, and of that good kind that actually teaches you something.



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