

MDA Analysis: Level Design - Jazz Jackrabbit 2

Declan Thompson – 2167636

Jazz Jackrabbit 2 is a 2D action platformer developed by Epic MegaGames and published by Gathering Of Developers on May 7, 1998 for Windows PC, with a port for Mac being released the following year. The game puts players in the role of its eponymous protagonist (or his brother Spaz or sister Lori) and tasks them with completing various levels using a combination of platforming and shooting mechanics. (Gathering Of Developers, 1998) The following analysis will analyse this game using the MDA Framework and its connection to the game's Level Design. Level Design is a process of video game development that involves the creation of the game's stages that the player will play through.

The Mechanics of *Jazz Jackrabbit 2* are split into two main categories: platforming and shooting. Platforming includes all of the in-game movement controls - the player is able to move left and right with the Arrow keys, duck by holding the Down Arrow, look up by holding the Up Arrow and jump up into the air using Left Control. While in the air, the player is also allowed to perform a downward "butt smash" by pressing the down arrow or pressing Left Control again to hover. If the player is ducking and presses Left Control, they will perform a special action – this move changes depending on which character the player is playing as. For example, Jazz will shoot upwards whereas Spaz will perform a flying kick forwards. Holding Left Shift will also allow the player to sprint.

The player is given a gun with which they can shoot enemies and other objects using the Space Bar. The player will shoot a bullet depending on the direction they are facing – this means that if the player aims up using the Up Arrow, they will shoot their gun upwards. The player is also allowed to shoot while running, jumping, ducking or hovering. There are numerous different ammunition types for the player to find and use throughout the levels, each with their own unique properties – for example, a commonly found bullet type is made out of a rubber like material and thus bounces off of walls and floors until it hits either an enemy or an obstacle.

The Dynamics of the game come into play when the player combines the basic Mechanics together to perform specific actions necessary to progress through the level. The controls of *Jazz Jackrabbit 2* are designed in such a way that they create a sense of fast-paced, high action gameplay when used in tandem with each other – the games levels are all designed around this system of Dynamics. The game's Mechanics and Level Design seem to almost encourage the player to essentially run through levels quickly whilst thinking on the fly in order to take down enemies and find collectibles on the way to the exit. Of course, the player can choose to take their time if they want – unlike other platformer games, there are no time limits to complete a level in, and taking time can make for its own entertaining experience.

The player typically starts each level in the top left corner, and must make their way across the level to reach the exit. Throughout the level there are various enemies who will damage the player – the player is able to kill these enemies either by shooting them or butt smashing them. There are also numerous collectibles for the player to find – food increases the player's score and has a chance to activate a Sugar Rush mode which grants the player invincibility and allows them to kill enemies simply by touching them; the more food the player eats, the more likely they are to activate the Sugar Rush. There are also Diamonds which grant the

player extra lives upon collecting enough of them, as well as Carrots which restore Health and 1Ups which add a large amount of points to the player's score and grant an extra life.

One important collectible is Coins. Throughout each level there are hidden areas for the player to find, some of which can only be accessed through warping. If the player collects a certain amount of coins, they will be able to warp to a secret area at a warp vendor. Other secret areas can be found by shooting parts of the wall or roof, or simply by finding hollowed out parts of the wall and floor that the player can access. These secret areas often contain a large number of collectibles as well as rare ammunition that will make progressing the level easier for the player. Some levels contain obstacles which require certain ammunition types – for example, there is a type of block which cannot be broken by shooting it or butt smashing it, so the player is required to find and use the C4 ammo type to explode the blocks.

At the end of certain levels, the player will be tasked with defeating a boss enemy. These typically have Health Bars which the player must deplete by shooting them numerous times (some require the player to defeat them in more specific ways), and each boss has its own unique moves for attacking the player. There are also specific levels which contain unique gameplay segments, such as a level which contains an underwater section not found in other levels. The swimming controls remain the same as the normal controls but they create a different sensation for the player due to their slower nature. Another level has a caterpillar creature which blows rings of smoke – if the player runs into these smoke rings, they grow confused in-game and the movement controls actually switch to also confuse the player in real life (while confused, the right arrow moves left and vice versa).

Each level has a unique theme and is designed around said theme, and not only in terms of visuals – for example, the level Jungle literally takes place in a jungle and thus has a lot of tall trees that the player can platform across, with enemies resembling animals you would find in a jungle such as apes and dragonflies, and the food collectibles consist mainly of tropical fruits such as bananas. This further emphasizes the fact that while each level is designed around the fast-paced mechanics and dynamics, they are also designed to be unique from each other in various different aspects – this can further motivate the player to take their time when exploring each level, while still allowing them to take full advantage of the fast nature of the mechanics. The levels have been meticulously designed to cater perfectly to both playstyles.

The level design's complimentary nature to the Mechanics and Dynamics is what essentially then creates the Aesthetics. The fast-paced gameplay, coupled with the level design which is constantly presenting new and unique obstacles for the player to face, would most likely create Aesthetic experiences of Sensation and Challenge – the player would feel good rushing through a level taking on challenges whilst also having to think on their feet about how to tackle said objectives. Alternatively, players who would prefer to take their time exploring the levels to find every collectible and secret will be more likely to evoke an Aesthetic of Discovery. There is also a multiplayer option which allows two or more players to play co-op throughout the story or compete against each other in various game modes – this would instead evoke the Aesthetic of Fellowship.

Overall, Jazz Jackrabbit 2's Level Design is a showcase of the levels being built to support both the Mechanics and the Dynamics created by them, and in turn creating the Aesthetics through their intentional design choices.

References:

- Jazz Jackrabbit 2 (PC Version) [Video Game]. (1998). New York City: Gathering Of Developers.