

## **Play! Critical Response 2**

### **Donkey Kong (Arcade) & Yars' Revenge**

#### *My Play! Experience*

##### **Donkey Kong**

"Donkey Kong" is similar to my "Space Invaders" experience from the previous *Play!* in that it is another game I had the pleasure of playing in the past while growing up. While my prior experience was not as authentic as the original, I did have the opportunity to play it on an arcade style machine. The old controls gave me a sense of enjoyment as the clunky feeling of the physical control buttons and stick matched the clunky gameplay style. Returning to the game once more was still enjoyable, but not as much as the arcade machine. The game presents a challenge to players using a large ape giving the connotation of something angry that you want to defeat. The ape creates a sense of peril as the woman beside him is implied to be held hostage. You feel it is your mission to save her. The game is simple yet entertaining as players climb the crooked beams and ladders. They must jump over barrels in order to reach the top where the unnamed princess is awaiting a savior. Once this goal is accomplished, the game repeats endlessly as Donkey Kong, the ape, takes the girl away higher up the construct only to await salvation once more. Each level presents a harder challenge, and I must admit I only made it four levels high. The colours and design of characters were interesting as well, even for today's standard. The challenges were difficult, yet fair. I never felt forced into an unbeatable situation.

##### **Yars' Revenge**

My experience with "Yars' Revenge" could not have been further from my experience with "Donkey Kong." I can understand a less refined graphical and gameplay style, but "Yars' Revenge" was extremely confusing to understand. Through denotation, a player is first presented with a screen consisting of a bug-like ship, a vertical bar resembling a screen glitch, a small line that slowly moves towards the player, and an odd triangle surrounded by a wall of blocks. The connotation analysis seems simple. The triangle protected by a wall must be the boss and thus the bug is my player character. After some experimentation, I quickly discover the line tracks the player, defeating you on touch unless you are in the glitch zone, which acts as a safe zone. The boss periodically morphs into a ninja star to attack the player. With these rules in mind, there are some clear gameplay guidelines. Except not. The safe zone does not protect from the boss's attack, creating confusion on what the safe zone is. After destroying the protective wall around the boss, nothing happened by shooting it directly. I had to further experiment by touching the boss, thinking I was supposed to collect this object still not knowing what it really is. Once again, nothing happened. Yet, next time I fired my weapon, a strange glitch coloured square, similar to the safe zone but smaller, fired horizontally across the screen at the boss, killing it. I had to experiment again to understand the pattern being made. Get to the boss, touch it granting you a special missile, and then fire it at the boss. The problem is this special missile also kills the player caught in its line of trajectory, which is pretty easy since it follows the vertical motion of the player to aim. Even with all of these convoluted rules, in the end, I found "Yars' Revenge" surprisingly easy. The game only repeats the same two levels and once you have a pattern mastered, there really is no challenge. For that reason, I will not be playing this game again.

1. *What kind of gameplay experiences do so-called classic games provide to modern players?*

“Donkey Kong” and “Yars’ Revenge” each provide a different experience to modern gamers and when contrasted together, progression is visible over the years of video game advancement. Bateson describes games as a form of meta-communication. I believe this to be false in terms of older games as this ideology seems to have evolved over the life of video games. When observing “Yars’ Revenge,” there is no communication to the player. This creates an experience for the player where they must learn everything for themselves, just as I experienced. This was normal during this time period as graphics and memory were limited, giving no time to explain the game within the context of the game itself. The problem is furthered when significant symbols in the game cannot be drawn into something with cultural meaning. I still don’t know what that boss was supposed to be, for example. The experience is improved with “Donkey Kong” as symbols in the game become obvious, such as barrels rolling to hit you. Players easily learn that with older games, the experience becomes far less directed as this medium of meta-communication has not yet taken effect.

2. *Are old games only worth historical analysis, or do they fascinate & hold staying power?*

An old video games worth can only be defined on an individual basis. Both “Donkey Kong” and “Yars’ Revenge” prove this as one continues to hold staying power and the other does not. I believe all games are worth viewing for historical purposes as it allows us to see progression and confirm or create theories that can be generalized across video games. For example, we can apply Caillois’ Paidia and Ludus model to describe “Yars’ Revenge.” The game can be broken down into a set of rules that must be followed to accomplish the main objective. With no freedom in player actions on how to accomplish this goal, the game falls far on the Ludus end of the spectrum. With the implemented score keeper, we can infer competitive aspects to the game, showing Agon properties. This confirms the use of such models as they can be extended to older games as well as the new. In terms of fascination, it is best determined on an individual basis as “Donkey Kong,” for me, is still enjoyable to this day in the same state it was over 20 years ago while “Yars’ Revenge” is not.

3. *How can we account for nostalgia and one’s personal memories?*

While we can’t account for nostalgia when determining someone’s enjoyment of an older game we may be able to predict it using semiotics in new games. Games with nostalgia hold very specific memories for players. The memories can be created through sound, image, or even social or interpretive codes. If we could target these memories, we could create signs that invoke directly or indirectly memories associated with the target nostalgic game. Some games even try to capitalize on certain markets by taking such actions. An extreme example is Dungeon Keeper developed for the mobile market places. It uses the same title, art, and gameplay style to sell a new game on the nostalgic feeling of the beloved Dungeon Keeper 1 and 2. While the strategy definitely worked for initial sales and garnering attention, the game ultimately failed to upkeep its player base as changes to gameplay to incorporate micro-transactions slowed the game’s pacing to unenjoyable levels. This method allows us to see what factors trigger nostalgia for new games while also revealing what holds nostalgic memories in old games, giving us some ability to account for it.