

Play! Critical Response 1

Zork & Space Invaders

My Play! Experience

Space Invaders

“Space Invaders” is a game I used enjoyed playing in short the amounts of time between different activities. It has a fast paced gameplay style allowing for some quick fun, but not when spread out over one half hour or more. This game was designed originally to be played in an arcade style system, so even when transferred into modern day technology, it is understandable that the game can only be played in shorter periods of time. That is not to say that the game is not enjoyable, however. I could easily pick up the game and enjoy every minute of it whenever I would like. The design is simplistic, shooting aliens as they encroach on the planet, avoiding fire by taking cover under slowly deteriorating bunkers. Trying to get the highest score possible was exciting as I try to line up the perfect shot to bring down the mother ship, then panicking as the final invaders increase their speed and rush downwards. Interestingly enough, this was an accident when the game was originally designed. As fewer graphics were displayed, the processor could update the game faster as well, increasing the speed of the aliens’ descent. This simple accident created an entirely new design in gameplay that made not just “Space Invaders,” but future games all the more enjoyable. I imagine the game was more exciting in the past as it was also one of the first games to feature colour! Well, the colour was faked using coloured plastic at certain portions of the screen, but even this was new and interesting at the time.

Zork

Text adventure games were once one of the best ways to convey a story or adventure in a video game format. I used to enjoy playing these for the simple excitement of exploration and adventure they would present. “Zork,” while older, definitely presented me with that same feeling, though in a very unrefined manner. For the time it was released, I find my opinions on it very mixed. In some ways, its innovation allows players plenty of freedom to explore different options, yet in the same instance those options only seem to be selectively available. For example, the ability to move an object could work and move an object or an appropriate response is given saying you cannot move it. In another instance, when I tried to move the bars on the door of the house, it didn’t understand my command. Direction is also a weak point in this game, as the lack of communication on where you are is a massive hindrance. I found my options were never directly given to me and I would have to guess directions until something worked. Eventually I discovered you can move diagonally and even vertically, even though the options were never directly or indirectly given. After wondering through the forest, I was given the choice to climb down a cliff. Even though it only stated an impossible path to reach was available, I could “move down” to climb down the cliff, who knew? Overall, the game presents an interesting adventure. Since I was unable to complete it, I definitely feel compelled to return and finish the adventure at some point, which in the end, tells me the game accomplished what it set out to do.

1. *What kind of gameplay experiences do so-called classic games provide for a modern player?*

I find that classic games return players to a simple era in gaming where the focus of a game is very clear and the scale is generally small. These types of games provide a very good insight into what makes a game, a game. In modern games, there are so many fine details we focus on when critically analysing a game such as high fidelity graphics, progression systems to advance characters, and intelligent AI for both allies and enemies. Classic games force us to look at the most simplistic building blocks. In many cases, it shows us what gameplay mechanics, such as shooting, racing, or puzzles, are fun. We don't ask ourselves enough anymore whether the basic gameplay loop, that is, the core game mechanics, are fun. When I purchased "Destiny," the world they presented had me interested and the concept of a massively multiplayer online game with shooting as the core combat mechanics had me completely intent on enjoying this game. After a few hours, I realized that while the game had no obvious flaws, it was just plain boring. The core gameplay loop was both repetitive and unrewarding, leading to my disinterest.

2. *Are old digital games only worth attention for historical reasons, or does it still fascinate and hold staying power?*

Old games are worth attention for both historical reasons and the fascination they once, and still, hold. I have never played "Zork" before, but in playing it for historical research purposes, I found it to be a very powerful game in the fascination it holds. Similarly with "Space Invaders," looking back at these games teach future generations what works well in a video game and what does not. Not all games hold such staying power and it really depends on how "good" the game was when it released. "Good" games were determined by their popularity, which of course was determined by how enjoyable the game was. If a game was popular at some point, chances are they hold something very special that will make them just as enjoyable today. They may not hold the attention of a player as well as the newest games, but they can still be enjoyed for some period of time. For example, I personally wanted to see what started the now popular *Elder Scrolls* series, so I went back to play both "Arena" and "Daggerfall." While the games were more difficult to play due to hardware limitations of the time period, they were still highly intriguing and definitely held up their merit.

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

In short, we can't account for nostalgia or personal memories when someone states they enjoy a game. Perhaps the game really is as good as this person describes it. Perhaps they enjoy this specific type of game or genre. Perhaps they don't mind certain outdated mechanics as much as another person. There really is no way to measure or engage someone's personal nostalgia for a game other than to play the game ourselves and make our own critical response, just as I am doing now for "Zork" and "Space Invaders." This even applies to our own thoughts as there are many times where I would think back to a game I loved as a child, but playing it again reveals that the game really wasn't all that great. Conversely, playing "Space Invaders" again reassured my enjoyment of the title and "Zork" has reminded me why I love text adventures.