Review Sketch

A game hobbyist picks up the controller o their preferred gaming system, powers up the television, ramps up the sound, and finally relaxes on a comfy chair, couch, or possibly even the floor. “What am I going to play?” he/she may ask themselves. This is the frontline question that every gamer must answer. Battling it out in the new Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare may be fun, or maybe he/she could take a dive at racing… from the cops. Or this excited gamer could build a replica of the Empire State Building out of blocks in the famous game, Minecraft. Each game claims the title of a piece of art, or sometimes as a masterpiece created by many or even a single ambitious and visionary developer.

In Alexander Bruce’s Antichamber, released in 2013, the player is immersed in what Alexander was striving for - a masterpiece. He states in an interview that “Antichamber is a psychological, first person, exploration puzzle game set within an Escher like world.” (Tek Syndicate). Although there isn’t any of MC Escher’s art in the game itself, it does display scenarios and obstacles that seem impossible in the real world (Bruce). This is because the game works off of non-Euclidean geometry. An in-game example of this is the player’s first puzzle that they encounter. The player walks down a white hallway with the edge of each wall outlined in black; suddenly they see a fork in the path. On the left is a red staircase that leads downstairs, and on the right a blue staircase that leads upstairs. Say the player goes downstairs; he/she is wrapped around a corner to head down another hallway. Suddenly this new hallway has another fork; the player is presented with the exact same staircase as they just went through. Naturally the player would then try to go upstairs through the blue staircase instead of downstairs. After that the player is again wrapped around onto another hallway that contains the exact same staircases. No matter which path the player chooses the outcome is the same. The answer to the puzzle is simple, but not always obvious.

Antichamber is rich with brain teasers that range from simple and humorous, to near impossible. Instead of the player taking on each level one by one, the player is dumped into a vast world of puzzles and mind games. The world is big enough and the puzzles are complex enough that one could easily spend hours finding their way throughout the world. This gives a feeling of seamlessness throughout the world. Alexander Bruce tried specifically not to break the immersion in the game (Tek Syndicate). He mentioned that in another popular puzzle game called Portal, the immersion is broken when the player dies by falling into a pit of lava, and is then teleported back to the start. “That’s game logic, that’s completely ripped me out of the world and there is no story or explanation for that” Alexander states when posed a question about Portal. During the interview he also noted that “I want to try and make a game that doesn’t have death, and while I’m at it I’m going to do the same thing to menus. Because just having a menu pop up totally breaks all the immersion, I’m not happy with that.” Antichamber’s menu differs from normal menus due to the fact that you are still playing the game when one enters the menu (Bruce). When the escape key is pressed, the player is teleported to a room covered in black tiles. On one wall contains all the game options (i.e resolution, controls, mouse sensitivity, etc.). In order to change the settings you simply walk up to the wall and click on the enable/disable buttons. Another wall holds the map of the game, showing all the areas that you have explored, and also allowing you to jump to any location you wish – provided you have been there before. Keeping the player “in” the game kept it immersive and unique.

The art and graphics in the game also stand out. For a user that has played this game before, he/she could easily look at the screen and be able to determine if you were playing Antichamber. If you took some scratch paper, created simple geometric objects with a black sharpie, and filled some of those objects in with other colored sharpies, this is similar to what the world of Antichamber resembles. It’s a mainly a black and white game, that’s accented with bright colors. A very simplistic approach was taken for the graphics of this game; it gives you a clean, minimalistic feeling. Being that Alexander Bruce was the only developer for Antichamber, he most likely wanted to keep the graphics within the means of his ability. This does not mean that getting the graphics just right wasn’t difficult, no matter the level of graphical realism in a game, keeping a visual sense of a theme, convention, or style is challenging and important. The down side of Alexander’s piece of art is that it seems to bring out occasional headaches. After a roommate and I each played for an hour of two, we both started to get either a headache or slightly dizzy. Going from solid black to a vibrant blue, to deep red, and then to a pure white gives you a slow-mo strobe-like feeling.

**To be continued…**

Works Cited

Bruce, Alexander. (2013). Antichamber [Video game]. Melbourne, Australia: Alexander Bruce.

Tek Syndicate. “PAX East: Antichamber Interview with Alexander Bruce.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, Apr 10, 2012. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.