Although we see similar discussion in many types of media, in regards to video games, high-fidelity and low-fidelity ("hi-fi" and "lo-fi") describe the nature of the overall audio/visual presentation. This is not to be confused with definition or quality, and can reference graphical fidelity (resolution, framerate, detail), audio fidelity (reproduction, distortion), or both.

It's a little confusing, for sure, and there's a lot that goes into actually defining lo-fi and hi-fi. Perhaps a visual will help:

Lo-Fi and Pony Island

(Jan 04, 2016)

Hi-Fi and Rise of the Tomb Raider (PC)

(Jan 28, 2016)

"Fidelity" does not necessarily refer to content, but more to the intention of the presentation. Hi-fi games like Rise of the Tomb Raider are GPU heavyweights, using 4K resolution, 60 frames-per-second, 3D graphics, and an orchestral soundtrack to immerse the player in a highly sensory experience based in realism. On the other hand, Pony Island's clash of audio and graphics are intentionally jarring, glitching and distorting on purpose in a "gamey" display which is clearly formal and meta/self-reflexive and about as far from realism as you can get. But the graphics are not low-quality, nor is the audio poorly produced - rather, the intention is that it look like they were.

So why try lo-fi? Well, lo-fi games are often (not always) easier to produce and play, as they require less hardware to compute and render the game. If you decide you want to try game design as a hobby or career, you'll probably start by creating a small, lo-fi experience, which will allow you to spend more time considering content rather than technology - although both should be of the utmost importance as your journey continues.

So, you've played a retro-style game (design, technology) which got huge applause for notoriously toying with the player (content). How was Pony Island different to the games you're used to playing? Why do you think we're seeing an upsurge in this design trend, even though rendering power has increased significantly and new technologies like the Vive are now affordable to build for?

Please respond to the following:

Add an original discussion about your thoughts on gaming fidelities and their futures. This can be about content, technology, or both... Do you think retro design will continue, or is it a fad? Does this future have room for both hi-fi and lo-fi gaming cultures? And what did you think of Pony Island?

I encourage you to respond to a classmate, although it is not required.