**Robomaze III: The Dome**

Although today it has largely been lost to history, Robomaze III was quite popular in its day with users of MS-DOS. Released in 1991 by Wetware, this top-down adventure game likely served as inspiration for the slightly later Legend of Zelda (NES). Like the Legend of Zelda, it is a RPG exploration and dungeon crawler, with grid-based movement and basic inventory management. However, there are several distinct improvements present in Zelda which were not implemented by Robomaze. These mechanical modifications most likely made the difference between a game that would go down in history, and a game that would be lost to history.

Chief among these differences is the fact that while Zelda’s inventory management is quick, effortless and unobtrusive, that in Robomaze was infuriatingly clunky. Pressing the inventory management button would pause the game (even in combat), bring up a new menu painfully slowly, and completely break the player’s immersion. Another significant difference in design is the fact that at the beginning of Zelda, the player is spawned in a relatively safe area, in which they can familiarize themselves with game controls. The Zelda player is also presented with a weapon outright, and may practice with it before confronting enemies. This is completely overlooked in Robomaze, in which the player is immediately thrown into a hostile starting zone full of enemies, given no weapon, no control directions, and told to fend for himself. For good reason, some players would feel quite alienated by their introduction to Robomaze.

Lastly, players of Robomaze are given no indication as to their character’s purpose, or the plot of which they are a part. This is certainly fixed by the Legend of Zelda, which has occasional dialogue that serves to move the plot forward and keep the player interested. Although story is generally second in importance to mechanics, Robomaze seems to avoid any mention of plot or dialogue whatsoever, and instead relies on the player’s curiosity to observe their environment. Based on the two games’ respective popularity, this seems to have been a poor design choice.

**The Dungeons of Grimlor**

Released in 1993 by RederWare, the Dungeons of Grimlor for MS-DOS is another once-popular video game which is seldom remembered. The game has a similar mechanical feel to that of The Legend of Zelda (NES), in that it has a darker, moody atmosphere which is quite immersive. Combined with a shared genre of top-down adventure, these two games share a vast arrangement of mechanics, particularly with regard to player movement. However, there are a couple key differences which set them apart, and sent Zelda alone to the hall of fame.

In particular, a major difference between the DOG and Zelda is the respective map design. The Legend of Zelda gave the player largely free reign of movement in spacious, open areas, and allowed the player to choose from a number of directions, adding to the feeling of adventurous exploration of an unknown land. This is vastly different from The Dungeons of Grimlor, which was known for tight, claustrophobic maps with just a few small rooms and long, narrow hallways. Because of the walled-in nature of the entire DOG game, many players were left feeling that the game was too linear; there was very little choice involved in where to go and when, which can be frustrating for many players.

Another significant design difference was the availability of multiple save slots in Zelda. A player could maintain multiple games at once, or enjoy sharing the machine with a friend without losing his progress. This was not the case in the Dungeons of Grimlor, which was infamous for only offering a single save slot. Coupled with the unfortunate choice in level design, this most likely made the difference between going down in history and being lost to history.