Final Project for EngLit 0647:

Harry Potter: The Text Adventure

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Analysis

The question of whether video games are art is a hotly debated topic among critics today. Proponents who disagree, like film critic Roger Ebert, say that games are not an experience and are simply an industry, and that gamers experience games through the lens of “profit participation.” Ebert recounts sitting through a lecture by game designer Kellee Santiago that has the purpose of defending video games as art. After the argument has been made in the lecture, he feels validated by the fact the next slides contained the supposed six major areas of gaming “Development, Finance, Publishing, Marketing, Education, and Executive Management.” He also believes that games are not art is because one “can win a game,” and that the game has “rules, points, objectives, and an outcome.” He also says even games with an immersive story cease to be games and are instead a representation of a story. “Santiago might cite a[n] immersive game without points or rules, but I would say then it ceases to be a game…a novel, a play, dance, a film. Those are things you cannot win; you can only experience them” (Ebert). I would argue games are art for this very reason, they offer a representation of a story, but one in where the user is in control and the story is written as the user plays. The reason I wanted to make a game for my final is that I see the immersive potential in video games. Whereas as someone could read Harry Potter and experience Harry’s story as a secondhand account, in a game the players are Harry and they experience his story. This is not to say that reading Harry’s story does not let the user connect with him but playing a game wherein the players are given the chance to perform an action like Harry does allows them to experience his story from a whole new perspective.

Many fans and readers of Harry Potter have always experienced the series through a secondhand lens. We watch as Harry opens his first letter to Hogwarts and feel the excitement he feels when finds out he is a wizard. Rowling has written Harry as a relatable character throughout the books. He is not descended from royalty or the best in his class. He is an average child who is thrown into a destiny must bigger than himself. Lois Lowry, a writer for the New York Times, says that “kids are from the start such powerless people, and what adolescence is all about, really, is a search for power. Even in a Potteresque world there are the same things that exist in ordinary, unmagical life: the same uncertainties, missteps and pitfalls, the same mentors, villains, and conflicts between light and dark” (Times). Harry appealed to his audience because, like all kids, he started powerless and attained power in his own fashion. Along the way, however, he experiences life: worrying about exams, uncertainty about love, and the longing for family to comfort him. Although the books contain magic at every turn, and at times otherworldly experiences, it is grounded in reality because Harry is as well. Transferring his journey to a game form works since Harry is already relatable to the audience, they can also follow his logic and make his decisions. Now not only is the audience able to interact with Harry’s story, they can understand what it is really like to be him.

The first level of the game is a recreation of the scene wherein Harry meets Hagrid and receives his letter to Hogwarts. As the level starts, the game says, “Forced into leaving Privet Drive by your aunt and uncle because for once in your life you got a letter.” Here I establish to my audience immediately the situation Harry is in. He has no control over his life because of his aunt and uncle and gets no letters or communication. Now that the audience has an insight into the character they can properly empathize with him, and now they can attempt to make his decisions. Later the dialogue prompts tell the user that Hagrid is handing them their letter to Hogwarts, and they can either type ‘take’ to take it, or type ‘noth’ to do nothing. Now if the user empathized with Harry and wanted to see him accept his destiny, they can take the letter, or if for whatever reason they did not, the game instead ends with a slightly humorous ending that says Harry ends up going to a school for criminal boys. The act of being able to choose helps players take on the role as Harry, put themselves in his shoes, and then make a decision that they think Harry would make.

Writer Sam Liberty defines a role playing game as games that “”

https://medium.com/@SA\_Liberty/what-are-role-playing-games-even-how-are-they-that-50071c5552e2

Works Cited

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Instructions

General Game Controls