EECS 494 – P1 Research

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For this research, we are comparing *The Legend of Zelda* with three other NES games - *ExciteBike, Kid Icarus* and *Ice Climber. ExciteBike* is a time-calculating game that asks players to control and finish multiple given motor bike tracks as quickly as possible. During the game players are allowed to accelerate quickly by heating up the engine, and their best time for each track will be recorded into the system. *Kid Icarus* is a game that allows users to control Pit through platform areas while fighting monsters and collecting items. The ultimate goal of the game is to reach the end of the levels, and to locate and beat the boss monsters that guard the three treasures. *Ice Climber*, in a similar fashion to *Kid Icarus*, features a goal of reaching the end of the levels for the players. The only tool the players carry is a wooden mallet to break and carve openings in the ice above and to hit enemies.

A well-designed game usually consists of subtle hints that guide the players throughout the game without having the player to read bunch of manuals. This is evidenced in *The Legend of Zelda*, in which the stark contrast between the ground, wall, stone and door outlines and defines the path that leads the player to the next level. The settings also give the game an intuitive and realistic feeling as the environmental settings such as the path and the trees are common in our daily life. In *Kid Icarus*, players are not provided with a clear path with the graphics like Zelda. It is also less realistic than Zelda as the enemies and the settings are not as intuitive and common in daily life as those in Zelda. Instead, only by observing the path of the enemies can players discover and find the way to reach the upper levels. Specifically, due to the limited size of the screen in the *Kid Icarus* gameplay sometimes new players might find themselves confined in a space that is surrounded by blocks and obstacles. Nonetheless, if players observe how enemies were spawn and reached the lower levels, they might notice that the rightmost space of the game is not a wall, but instead a space that will lead the player back to the leftmost position of the game. By switching back and forth from the rightmost and leftmost wall can players continue to find their way to climb up to higher levels. In *ExciteBike,* players are able to accelerate at a greater rate by pressing the ‘B’ button. Nonetheless, when the motorbike’s temperature exceeds the safety limit, the players will be immobilized for several seconds in order to cool down the motorbike. In order to hint the player to use the optimal strategy, a UI text is provided by game designers to indicate the temperature of the motorbike. This provides a means for players to maximize their race time by accelerating when the engine is cool and slowing down when it is overheated. In *Ice Climber*, similar techniques have been applied – players are hinted to jump below the blocks and ice in order to carve the openings and get a step closer to the ultimate level. Only by carving openings and jumping up can players continue to reach to the higher levels.

A good, immersive and entertaining game is also designed appropriately such that it is challenging, yet interesting and playable. In order to continue on attracting players’ attentions, game designers have to adjust the game just so the game has replay values, and that it should award and punish players appropriately. In *the Legend of Zelda*, enemies are only set to walk in random x and y movement without having the ability to walk diagonally. As a result, the player should not be overpowered to obtain the right balance. To increase the difficulty of the game, the player is thus set in a way that he can only walk in arrow-key-defined 2D movement, and is incapable of jumping and squatting. By doing this also gives the movement in Zelda a less smooth feeling as movements can only be made in x or y direction, one at a time. On the contrary, enemies in *Kid Icarus* such as the Octo (flying octopus) are capable of flying and moving diagonally. Because of the more flexible movement of the enemies, it is generally harder for the player to dodge or kill the enemies without extra capabilities. As a result, the player is set to be more powerful - capable of squatting and jumping over blocks and also to move horizontally while jumping or squatting. In *ExciteBike*, since players are often thrown into the air with the ramp, it is extremely hard to determine the landing position of the bike. Consequently, a shadow is provided in order to aid players with accurate landing. With these subtle hints these games become much more user-friendly and effective.

Besides giving hints to players when appropriate and adjusting the difficulty of the game, excellent game designers are also capable of making a game that arouses player’s feelings when necessary. Specifically, ExciteBike is able to excite the player’s feelings and keep the players immersed in the gameplay. The game does so by adding a timer at the lower right-hand corner of the game. The game also adds in more variations to keep entertaining and challenging the players by providing multiple race tracks. Since players are usually motivated by a strong feeling to break their high score, the simple timer display text adds a competitive and intense feeling to the game by making players aware of the time. Ice Climbers and Kid Icarus also achieve the same effect, although in a slightly different manner. In Ice Climbers and Kid Icarus, once players reach a higher level from the base, they are not allowed to travel back to the lower level. That being said, if the player accidentally falls into the gap connected to the lower level, the game will be over right away. Consequently, this feeling of intenseness and nervousness piles up as the player reaches higher level, as player is gradually getting a better score, but at the same time not allowed to make a positioning mistake in order to survive in the game. Unlike Kid Icarus, Ice Climbers even features a bonus stage in which a player has to face trickier jumps and multiple moving platforms within a 40-seconds-period. This creates even more intense feelings to the overall experience of the game. In the Legend of Zelda, on the contrary, the overall settings and feelings is less intense until you reach to the level with Wall Masters. Since the game is not constrained by a given time, players have unlimited time to beat the monsters and collect items. Nonetheless, if you accidentally get caught by a Wall Master, you will be forced to return to the base level and start over again.

Conclusively, the Legend of Zelda is more relaxed and context-based, whereas the Ice Climber, ExciteBike and Kid Icarus in general have a more intense feeling to the game. In the Legend of Zelda, players are guided to beat the monster, collect rupees, items and keys in order to unlock to a new level. Ice Climber and Kid Icarus have similar objectives, where the magnitude of the intensity of game gradually piles up as the game continues. ExciteBike is slightly different from the rest of the games. The game is simplistic yet powerful, primarily due to the timing agent. By adding shadows to increase the game interface and a timer text box to make the player aware of the time can the game becomes more attractive and immersive to the players.