

International Racing Squirrels 35

Publisher: Playniac
Genre: Flash Racing / Business
Platform: PC / iPad (Coming Soon)

8.5



The topic of serious games or games designed to replicate real world experiences has been of growing importance in the modern world of technology. More and more often games are not only made to entertain but also to relay a more serious topic associated with life's qualms and quandaries. These games have spanned a wide range of the gaming industry with some more focused on the play aspect and others focused entirely on referencing and relating real world experiences, but why relate a real world experience?

Video games have penetrated our everyday lives. From what once was a term known only to those few in the niche to being a familiar topic to almost every American. The aspects of gaming and play are some major driving forces behind human motivation, thus, they are used in many fashions to motivate players to, not only play, but to know. Educational games are notoriously referenced as the things small children use. Those big, padded chunks of plastic with screens and large colorful buttons, but what about more recent mainstream console games? Does Mass Effect not teach you how to accept consequences and manage resources? In the game there are many decisions that must be made because it is impossible to accomplish everything, and from those decisions come consequences that must be dealt with. This kind of education is ever-present in video games, as, many times, resource management is the only way to win.

Here we'll look at and analyze the effectiveness of

a simple flash game called International Racing Squirrels. International Racing Squirrels is a title developed by Playniac, a London-based company that simulates the management of a racing team. The player starts off with one racer and must house and finance that racer to help it win races. The game grows in complexity steadily as the player progresses and acquires new racers, snowballing into a big pile of responsibility that must be handled by the player. This review doesn't make the game sound very appealing as a game, yet it still is, so what makes it a good game? We'll start with the rhetorical devices of immersion used by the game and then look at how they work together to draw us in.

There are three rhetorical devices that represent how the human mind is appealed to: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos. We'll start with Pathos or Passion, the emotional appeals of the game. The primary factor of the pathos appeal is the squirrels themselves. The idea of



managing a racing team is strange and foreign to many and when dealing with people, stereotypes arise. The squirrels fix this problem by causing the player to feel safe and morally and physically unaffiliated with the racers, allowing the player to willingly care for them. The game's use of squirrels brings the mentality of pet ownership instead of business partnership. The lighting also plays a factor. Its use on the modeling of the squirrels creates a lighter and happier appearance and prevents the character from being discouraged. Many other factors from the game contribute to the encouragement generated by the game. Often the non-playable characters congratulate the player and the announcers in the races only discuss the player's squirrels' progress. Everything from the power ups to the stars emitted by the interface help create the feeling of accomplishment and gaiety. The second of the three rhetorical devices is Logos or Logic. The main logical appeal of the game is the immensely detailed monetary system built into the game. The cash, credit, banking, and bills are all in order and similar to real life. This is a great appeal to any parent wishing their child to play the game and it acts as a great incentive to players who are looking for their entertainment to have a little bit more. Like war games today that are designed to replicate the glories and tragedies of war, which is albeit more popular a topic, this game is designed to replicate the stress and security of good financial management. The game practically forces the player to use every available method of money management and payment just to survive the game, but not only must the finances be managed, but the racers must also be kept fit. I lied earlier when I said that the main logical appeal of the game was the monetary system, because the entire thing is about resource management. The money may be the biggest thing to manage, but the squirrels don't just race themselves and they are not easily kept under control. Their need for daily amenities and exercise to stay in top performance condition is constantly increasing as progress is made. The outside world also plays a factor and the public image of squirrels must also be managed; one of my squirrels was accused of being an international spy and it was all of a sudden my job to make a call on what to do and the wrong decision could have destroyed the team. All these elements come into one ball of stressful management training built into a fun game. The final of the three rhetorical devices is the Ethos.

“Im-
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The Ethos of a game is its character, or how it represents itself. This game has much to do with Ethos as its character is the drawing factor of the game. Just the name itself creates a character for the game. When someone reads “International Racing Squirrels” they get this generalized template of a strange or different than real life game, which is a big reason why the management aspects of the game are not as stressful. If the game were instead titled “Race Manager Pro,” people's ideas of the game would be drastically different and their focus might be on the management and not the silliness of the squirrels and the happy attitude of the game. The game also works to not make the game too cartooned, and realistic enough to appeal to a wider audience. Every item or character that the game wants the player to focus on gets a dark background surrounding it to blot out other parts of the shiny, lit-up interface and remove cartoonish aspects of the game for a short period. This dark realism is also used



to handle the problem that the money is fake. The dilemma is that the money may not be handled well because it

is not real, which is solved by the darkly contrasted black and green payment screen, because it brings the ultimate sense of seriousness right where it needs to be: with the money.

This game really hits the mark every time it aims. It grows in difficulty because it needs to in order to simulate the real world, but it covers the difficulty with cartoonish graphics and approaches to the game play that emphasize the mood of the game rather than the skill required to play it. Unfortunately, there is no real draw to bring the player back after they stop playing. The game is fun while playing, but there are no wins of epic proportions to keep the player thinking about it when not playing. However, the money is portrayed realistically enough to not cause thrift problems and, despite the stress of what is actually going on in the game, the fun prevails. Earning this game a squirrely 8.5 out of 10. [REDACTED]