

ZENITH

REPORT

BY

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I have now played Zenith several times and have formed several opinions concerning the games current state and how it could be improved in the future. I have divided this report into several sections, i.e. Graphics, gameplay etc., with each section containing my personal opinions of the game in relation to this section. I have only played Zenith intensely and with a purpose twice, that's sessions not games, so this report is basically my first impressions.

GRAPHICS

The first time I played Zenith was several weeks ago. At that time the main characters were much larger and looked nicer than they do now. However, I cannot really remember much else as I only played it once for about fifteen minutes. From what I have heard zooming the camera out has enhanced the whole game and from what I can remember I would have to agree.

The main character is the nicest part of the graphics. Although he is small and not greatly detailed he animates brilliantly. Watching the demo really illustrates this point as you witness him going through his full repertoire of moves with each one animated beautifully. The one flaw I picked up on concerning the main character is once you reach the peak. The camera zooms in and this exposes how poor the man looks. He appears to have no features on his face, a very strange hairdo and a piece of flat blue plastic attached to his back.

The actual level graphics are good but not spectacular. I think the main problem with them is that everything is square and thus too similar. Blocks like the half blocks and the scratched blokes make a nice change but even there is not enough of them. One thing that does particularly annoy me is the font used in the game. I think it is the wrong font to use, it is quite strange and sometimes difficult to decipher.

The graphics are nothing special when compared to other Nintendo 64 titles like Mario and Pilotwings but I don't believe they need to, although I am sure Nintendo would disagree, for Zenith has other strong points like its originality and its gameplay.

GAMEPLAY

Prior to ever playing Zenith I was very sceptical towards it. I had watched it being played a couple of times and I was not really drawn towards playing it in any way. However, my opinion soon changed after I had actually played the game, I guess Zenith is just one of those games that has to be played to be appreciated. Zenith contains the key elements of a good game: a great deal of action and a bit of thought.

With a climbing game it is essential that it does not just turn into a repetitive routine it must contain a fair bit of diversity. Zenith has the capabilities to do this but is not doing it yet. Although Zenith contains a fair amount of puzzles per level there is no necessity to actually attempt them as they have no bearing on your quest to scale the wall. I feel this key point must be addressed if Zenith is to be a good game. Why not make the puzzles compulsory and get rid of all alternative routes? This would force the player to seriously consider the puzzles and it's implications. Another option to enhance the gameplay would be to create more diverse situations. By this I mean a few more aliens to fight and more a few more tasks like using the cannon to launch balls at the sensor pad on the wall. I found the cannon task greatly enjoyable, probably because it let you use a different control system and it was unlike anything previously seen in the level, my only problem with it was it was not long enough. One thing that puzzled me was the dollar icons. The first aid icons were self explanatory

but what are the dollars for? To buy equipment perhaps? Also, I would like to see a few different power-ups introduced to the game like a parachute or a jet pack.

Basically, the current gameplay is good but too repetitive and simplistic. But Zenith definitely has the potential to be a diverse game containing many different elements.

SOUND

I could not comment on sound in Zenith as the version I played did not contain any.

CONTROL SYSTEM

The control system is a key area of Zenith and was one of great intrigue for myself prior to playing the game because it uses the Nintendo 64 controller. My first impressions of the control system was one of apprehension due to the multitude of buttons required to play the game effectively. However, once I had sat down and attempted to play the game I began to master the controls quite easily. Due to the amount of buttons on the controller I noticed that each individual function had its own button and all the buttons were in the vicinity of each other, which is very useful as it would be very difficult to play Zenith using button combinations. Another big plus for the game is that you, the player, are able to move the camera. This rids Zenith of annoying camera position syndrome. Yet, for the more inexperienced players or those who can't get themselves a decent camera position manually there is always the default camera position, readily available on the click of a button.

The most frustrating aspect of the control system is the way the directional pad is used. I generally do not adapt to well to using a pad where up is always forward, force of habit I guess. This was particularly annoying in Zenith as one false move of the d-pad could lead to you plunging several storeys. I would much prefer if the direction you were facing was always forward. Another aspect of the d-pad is the fact that it limits the players movement. In Zenith you can only move four ways and to get from north to south you have to go through two right angles. This looks very mechanical and should not be acceptable in a Nintendo 64 game. Limited movement is evident throughout the game. Every move is carried out in straight lines at the north, south, east, west points, again this restricts movements and gives a mechanical feel.

OVERALL

The potential of Zenith is clearly evident. With the current games market swamped with safe games that follow the successful games mould, clones and sequels, I feel Zenith could provide welcome relief from the norm. As I have said it has the potential to be a good game but there is a fair way to go if the current version is to be taken into account. Zenith's major attraction will be its innovative and diverse gameplay, to achieve this there is definitely a need for meaningful puzzles and sub games (Not actual games but things like fighting and shooting the cannon.) Overall, I quite like playing Zenith, fresh, easy to play and addictive but allot more work is required but the game seems to be making a natural progression.