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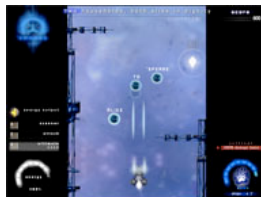


The hottest info on PC gaming, hardware, and news from Matt Peckham

Recent entries in this blog: 'Speare: To Zap or Not To Zap

Tuesday, April 24, 2007 7:24 PM PT Posted by Matt Peckham

'Speare: To Zap or Not To Zap



That's the question. The answer might be: Did you do your homework? Because if you did, you'd know the primary source for Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* [1], what percent of lines rhyme in *Love's Labor's Lost* [2], and in which of The Bard's plays Falstaff appears

[3]. (For answers, see below!)

I'm making those up (not the facts—the questions) but they're the idea behind University of Guelph English professor Dan Fischlin's 'Speare, a sort of "literary arcade game" CTV **reports** "helps kids learn about Shakespeare." (It's a shooter, it's a teacher—hey, it's a shooter *and* a teacher!) Curiosity piqued, I gave the **Flash-based demo** a whirl.

Not bad looking, for starters. You get a nice intro with FX-laden voiceovers cleverly weaving Shakespearean lore with something Frank Herbert (or Harry Turtledove) might've dreamed up. Using your arrow keys to maneuver and various others to fire, you glide as gracefully as possible through vertically scrolling levels with bits of "poetic code" like "Bite my thumb at them," or "What light through yonder window breaks?" at screen top. Enemy ships occasionally drop word-spheres, which you'll have to shoot until they display a word in the quote. Roll over matching words to complete the phrase, roll over wrong ones (say "might" instead of "bite") and the spheres go kablooeey, damaging your ship.

Periodically you'll receive transmissions full of "snack" facts, like "Catholic burials in churchyards were banned during Shakespeare's time," or "The 'moon' may be a reference to Queen Elizabeth I." At the end of each level you tackle a big-bad-something-or-other, then click through a snappy multiple choice quiz compiled from info bits you encountered in the level. Correct answers yield points which you can then spend on ship upgrades like better armor, speed bonuses, extra lives, auto-repairs, etc.

Honest reaction? I thought it'd be something silly, like you versus aliens (or literary critics, or Sir Francis Bacon's ghost) with arcane game mechanics by academics who know as much about game programming as game programmers about Shakespeare. But—and I say this bracing for slings and arrows—it's actually pretty clever. Not clever as in "aww, isn't dat cute," but more "I might just pay to play this on Xbox Live." It also makes me wonder what sort of creature you'd get if you merged it with something like *Space Rangers 2*.



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In any event, I've always quietly burned to know that the word "tempest" may have been a reference to religious upheavals in England. And supplementary to honing my hand-eye skills, now I do.

Answers:

[1] "Pandosto," a prose romance written in 1588 by Robert Greene. Never read it, but with openers like "Among al the passions wherewith humane mindes are perplexed," probably never will.

[2] According to Shakespeare scholar Tucker Brooke, 62.2%. Mystic numerologists, go wild.

[3] 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and The Choicest Product of the Brewer's Art. (One of these is in fact *not* by Shakespeare, but sure went great with pizza before Pabst pulled the plug.)

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