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Media Review: Tron

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Abstract

This review analyzes the film Tron from the perspective of the gamer. In it, the author explores how the both video games and the film are important forms of technology that have influenced society. It argues, Tron is the ultimate video game movie; it contains all the essential elements that comprise an engaging video game, even though it was released before the development of video games as we know them today.

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<div align="center">Media Review: *Tron* (1982)</div>

As visual technology advances, the lines that divide video games from movies blur. When the first video games started emerging, they were simple and had no real story. They existed in a two-dimensional space and contained no characters, faces, distinction of class, or any of the things that define what video games are today. By the first video games, film technology was already well developed, and ss time has gone on, video games have drastically changed from what they once were. Video games now have plots, multiple developed characters, romance, adventure, violence, and all the things that people think of when they go to a movie. Most video games even contain cinematic sequences, many of which are live action and use real actors that appear in mainstream films. As video games have become more like films, films have also become more like video games. The first film that really blended the world of movies and video games was *Tron*. *Tron* is the ultimate video game movie, because it contains all the elements that are instrumental in a good video game even though it was released before video games really started to develop into what they are today.

Every thing about the film speaks to gamer culture. The film's opening sequence is a kaleidoscope of different colors and computer-looking components with music blaring behind the images, followed by a big boom and a title shot that says "Tron" in huge letters surrounded by lights. This is how most great games start even today. Most gamers would call this sequence the first indicator of whether the game, or in this case film, will be good or not. The first live action sequence in the film takes place in an arcade. This too speaks to the gamer because it is the origin of all video games. Many older gamers would say that they can still remember being in

a crowded arcade screaming with other gamers watching someone win the high score almost identical to the scene in the film.

An important part of the film is the human characters. The gamers are not just kids, but also adults and even older men. The main character and best gamer in the film is Kevin Flynn, who is actually a very intelligent hacker in his twenties. This lifestyle of gaming and intelligence is extremely common today. Many older men of many different professional backgrounds still play video games and are rather good at them. The film even shows female gamers of different ages who are attractive and capable. The gaming culture is not limited to any specific type of person, and the film makes a point to show this.

The game truly speaks to gaming culture once Flynn gets inside the game. Even the way he enters the game is a gaming fantasy. A computer zaps him with a laser and digitizes him into the game world. When Flynn is transported into the game, the film shows a sequence of moving platforms, lights, and futuristic-looking computer settings. This is the world that every gamer thinks of when he or she goes into the game. The platforms are especially important because they represent the most famous type of game there is. The "platformer" game type started with Super Mario, who is still the most famous character in all of video games. Everything about the world inside the game is exactly how games came to be.

The technology used in the film's game world is all standard gaming supplies. The characters in the game world use super bikes call light cycles, tanks, throwing discs that create laser trails, and flying ships that have controls that look just like those used by gamers in the real world.

The film also contains many of the elements necessary for any great game. The Master Control Program (MCP) is the BOSS. He is in charge of all the evil minions and programs in the

game and works relentlessly to stop the user/hero. The MCP not only fights against Flynn in the game world, but also in the real world. This concept of the game actually trying to stop the player personally is exactly how gamers feel when they get stuck in a challenging game. The game becomes personal and the user actually starts to feel like the game is playing against them personally and is unfairly improving as a means to keep the user from his/her goal. The programs, which represent the user characters in the film, are extremely important. They resemble the real-life users who created them. When Flynn gets sucked into the game he looks just like the other programs because they look like the people who made them. This is extremely common in gaming culture. When given the chance to create their own character, many gamers choose to create avatars that look like themselves. Today, all XBOX 360 owners actually have to construct digital representatives of themselves just to use the system without even starting the actual game. The names of the characters within the film's game world are all gamer tags instead of real names. Names like Tron, Crumb, and RAM are all similar to the names people use to represent themselves when they play games today. My own gamer tag is BIG O. The film also contains many subtle elements that all story games have today just for ascetics. An example of this is the guardians, who are characters that are portrayed as older and impart wisdom if a player proves himself worthy enough to pass.

One of the most important parts of the entire film includes the mini-game challenges. These are the part of the film that most people think of when one says *Tron*, the most popular one being light cycle. The mini-games are important because they represent the politics of the game world in a way that most gamers really think when they play games. The games are not just little fun ways to pass the time. They are true life or death challenges that are necessary to go through in order to progress in the story; losing in the game means death. When a gamer loses a

challenge like this today, it is still referred to as "dying." The film presents this point brilliantly because the MCP uses the games as punishment, and when characters lose the games they actually die by being "derezzed." It also important to address the fact that the games are real games. The first game that Flynn is forced to play is a two-player game against another character. This is a life-or-death match of something similar to pong where the loser actually dies. The scene is so serious that Flynn refuses to deal the finishing blow, because he does not want to kill a fellow player. The light cycle game is important because not only is it another life-or-death game situation, but also because the scene in the film is also a foreshadowing of the future of multiplayer games. The scene shows Flynn, Tron, and a side character named RAM working together to defeat three nameless minions of the MCP who are under the command of General Sark, who represents the mini-BOSS, which is another extremely common part of gaming culture. This scene is the first example of what eventually came to be known as cooperative gaming, and extremely popular concept today. Each of the minions drives a standard blue bike, while the three characters all get different colors. This, too, is an important part of gaming culture, because it represents the beginning of character customization, also now standard in popular gaming.

The film also contains multiple examples of backdoors, cheat codes, and a number of secrets. An example of this is when Flynn diverts the solar sailor onto another stream to avoid being captured. Only Flynn could do this because he had the power to bypass the system. This is very common in older gaming. Many games contained glitches and secrets that would give players an unfair advantage.

Another important scene in the film is when Tron communicates with Allen. Allen sends him a special code that enhances his weapon disc so that he will be able to defeat the MCP. This

moment in the film is very important to the gamer because Allen actually talks to Tron. This represents the bond that all true gamers have with their characters. When a player truly immerses himself in a game, there is a true emotional connection formed between the user and his character. Users do not just control their characters, but they also build them, shape them, name them, and worry for their safety. An interesting concept that the film portrays is the fact that even when the users are not playing, the game is still going on and the characters in the game are still fighting to survive.

One of the more awkward concepts of the film is showed when Flynn kisses Yuri. Yuri is the game world version of his ex-girlfriend in reality. He kind of develops a crush on the program after their adventure together. This is also a common occurrence in real life gaming culture. After sometimes more than a hundred hours trying to save the princess, some gamers do admittedly wish they could get their hero's kiss at the end.

The ending of the game in the film is also extremely gamer culture in spirit. The MCP is hit with the final attack and then a huge colorful explosion occurs. Flynn is then pulled out of the game and the audience finds out that the whole adventure took place over the course of just one night. This is exactly how gaming works. You can start as a weakling, find some weapons, meet some friends, become a great warrior, and save the world all in the course of just one night. This is how the gamer lives.

Tron is truly a video game in film form. It contains all the elements necessary for a great video game. The film was created before video games really developed and was most likely the inspiration for many of the standards parts of video games today. It is important to state the fact that more than one game was spawned in reference to the film, the latest one being in 2005, more

than twenty years after the film was released. *Tron* is truly a sacred artifact in the gaming culture

and will not be forgotten for many more years to come.