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### Perception's Play: The Art of Immersive Storytelling in Disneyland's "Indiana Jones Adventure"

In the realm of entertainment and themed experiences, few entities rival the enchantment and allure of Disneyland. Founded on July 17, 1955, in Anaheim, California by brothers, Walt E. Disney and Roy O. Disney, Disneyland revolutionized the theme park industry with its unprecedented attraction technology and extensive attention to aesthetics. Since its opening, the theme park's reputation has grown worldwide with the continuation of its technological advancements and enhanced ability to create a sense of nostalgia and emotional connection to its guests. As a collaboration between Lucasfilm Ltd. and Walt Disney Imagineering, the research and development division of the Walt Disney Company responsible for designing and developing the Disney theme parks, "Indiana Jones Adventure" quickly became one of the most beloved attractions since its opening date to the public on March 4, 1995. Based on the films from the Indiana Jones franchise, guests embark on a guided tour into an ancient temple, which unfortunately goes haywire when an evil curse is unleashed. As the guests attempt to flee from the temple, they encounter the famous archeologist, Indiana Jones, who aids in their escape through the many thrilling events. The manipulation of human perception through strategic use of sensory stimuli, environmental design, and narrative techniques plays a crucial role in making the storytelling of the Disneyland attraction, Indiana Jones Adventure, deeply immersive to

audiences. Through Disney's use of these seemingly simple elements, they are integrated to create a complex experience that transports their guests out of the scope of the park.

While the element of the attraction goes heavily unnoticed, the transition from natural lighting to artificial lighting in the waiting queue plays a pivotal role in deepening the immersive experience. As guests enter the attraction, they initially encounter the bright, natural daylight of the exterior environment (Fig. 1). This familiar lighting slowly gives way to a dimmer, more controlled artificial lighting as they progress through the queue, simulating a descent into an ancient and mysterious temple (Fig. 2). "If a guest was to be immersed in an outdoor



Fig. 1. Loren Javier, *Outdoor Queue of Indiana Jones Adventure*, 2013.



Fig. 2. Theme Park Steve, *Indoor Queue of Indiana Jones Adventure*, 2022.

environment they would expect to see a blue sky and perhaps hear the sounds of birds chirping. If the sky was red, the guests would be less likely to accept the idea that that environment is real” (Pron 9). Similarly, it is expected that upon entering an indoor area, the light source shifts to artificial, and the environment dims accordingly. This shift in lighting subtly enhances the sensation of venturing deeper into the temple, making the transition from the outside world to the interior of the temple more dramatic and engaging. The strategic use of artificial lighting within the queue area serves multiple purposes. It not only accentuates the architectural details and textures of the temple's interior, such as the weathered stone walls and ancient carvings but also evokes a sense of mystery and anticipation. Dim lighting, flickering torches, and shadowy corners are carefully designed to create an atmosphere of exploration and danger, heightening the realism of the narrative and making guests feel as though they are embarking on a true archaeological adventure. The use of shadows and light contrasts helps to obscure certain areas, adding to the sense of unpredictability and excitement.

Disney Imagineers meticulously control the lighting to manipulate guests' perception, making it feel as though they are leaving the familiar, safe world behind and descending into the depths of a forgotten mystical realm. In Emily Nelson's "The Art of Queueing Up at Disneyland," she analyzes the significance of an attraction's queue as it transforms waiting time into an integral part of the entertainment. She states that "an ideal queue [sets] the scene for the story and [transitions] guests from the land outside to the attraction's theme" (Nelson 51). "Indiana Jones Adventure" features one of Disneyland's most complex storylines. Given that the ride lasts approximately three and a half minutes, this duration is insufficient to fully convey such an elaborate narrative. Since most guests spend a significant amount of their time waiting in

line for the attraction, incorporating elements of the story into the queue can be advantageous. This strategy not only provides Imagineers with additional time to elaborate on the attraction's backstory but also allows guests more time to grasp and appreciate the narrative being presented. Reiterating one of Nelson's ideas towards guest satisfaction, "...the focus in improving the queue should not be on [the] length of time spent waiting, but rather on the customer's perception of that time" (Nelson 54). As guests move through the progressively darker environment, they become more immersed in the story, building anticipation for the adventure that awaits them. By the time they reach the boarding area, the shift in lighting has effectively prepared them mentally and emotionally for the thrilling journey ahead, making the entire experience more cohesive and compelling. This seamless blend of environmental design and narrative technique ensures that the transition from natural to artificial lighting significantly enhances the overall immersion and enjoyment of the attraction.

By manipulating the perception of distance and scale, Disneyland's Imagineers effectively transport guests into a realm where ordinary constraints of space and proportion are suspended, allowing them to fully immerse themselves in the adventure unfolding. After boarding the ride vehicle, guests quickly approach the Hall of Promises, one of the most compelling elements of the "Indiana Jones Adventure" attraction that utilizes forced perspective. Forced perspective is a technique that manipulates visual perception to make objects appear larger, smaller, closer, or farther away than they are. By adjusting the scale and positioning of architectural elements and using strategic lighting, this technique creates illusions of depth and size. In "Disneyland: Another Kind of Reality," David Allen compares the Disney Parks to "a kind of Platonic cave of illusions" (Allen 34). This analogy draws on Plato's theory of simulacra,

where reality is perceived through distorted images, shadows, and reflections, leading to a false sense of truth. According to Plato, simulacra are imperfect copies of an ideal form, often deceiving the observer into accepting these illusions as reality. This philosophical perspective is particularly relevant to "Indiana Jones Adventure," where Imagineers use forced perspective to create a convincing yet artificial environment. In the context of the Hall of Promises, this manipulation serves to enhance the grandeur and mystique of the temple interior. Dr. Brody's comparison highlights how Disney's use of such techniques aligns with Platonic ideas, creating a world where the boundary between reality and illusion is intentionally blurred. The Hall of Promises employs these visual tricks to make guests feel as though they are exploring a vast, ancient temple, despite the actual physical limitations of the space. This deliberate distortion not only captivates the audience but also reinforces the attraction's narrative, making the imagined reality more impactful and immersive. By engaging with these philosophical concepts, Disney Imagineers transform the ride into a profound sensory and cognitive experience, embodying Plato's notions of perception and reality in a modern, entertaining context.

As guests venture into the Hall of Promise, they are confronted with an expansive chamber that appears to stretch far into the distance, an effect achieved through the clever use of forced perspective. The Idol of Mara, the evil spirit that inhabits the ancient temple, serves as the focal point of the room, anchoring the illusion (Fig. 3). The surrounding brick walls, seemingly



Fig. 3. Disney Photoblography, *Idol of Mara*, 2013.

ordinary at first glance, subtly employ forced perspective to create the illusion of greater height and depth. Dr. Michael Brody's analysis in "The Wonderful World of Disney—Its Psychological Appeal" illuminates how Disney employs such techniques across its parks. He observes that just as the diminutive-sized bricks of the buildings on Main Street, U.S.A. present an illusion of smallness, the larger ratio of the bricks on "Indiana Jones Adventure" produces an illusion of immenseness (Brody 356). Brody's perspective underscores how the varying brick sizes—more substantial near the base and diminishing near the top—create a deliberate distortion of scale. This intentional distortion of scale not only enhances the architectural realism of the temple but also imbues the space with a sense of grandiosity and otherworldliness, effectively transporting guests into an ancient and mystical world. By integrating Brody's insights, it becomes clear that such techniques do more than deceive the eye; they shape the entire narrative experience, reinforcing the fantastical elements of the attraction. The use of forced perspective therefore becomes a crucial storytelling tool, making the imagined reality of the attraction both believable and compelling.

While the on-ride perspective of "Indiana Jones Adventure" makes it seem like the track layout covers a substantial amount of space, it ingeniously employs the space management

technique of shaping to create the illusion of a longer and more expansive ride experience within the confines of a rectangular sound stage. “This reliance on themed times and spaces is a major departure from the less-complex attraction of gravity and speed rides” (King 10). King's observation emphasizes a fundamental shift in attraction design, where the focus extends beyond mere physical thrills to encompass a richly detailed narrative environment. Despite the physical limitations of the building's layout, the attraction utilizes irregular show paths and cleverly designed transitions to manipulate guests' perceptions of space and distance. By incorporating winding corridors, sharp turns, and unexpected elevation changes, the ride's layout effectively conceals the true dimensions of the sound stage and creates the sensation of traversing a vast and sprawling environment (Fig. 4). This approach is a demonstration of the Imagineers' ability to

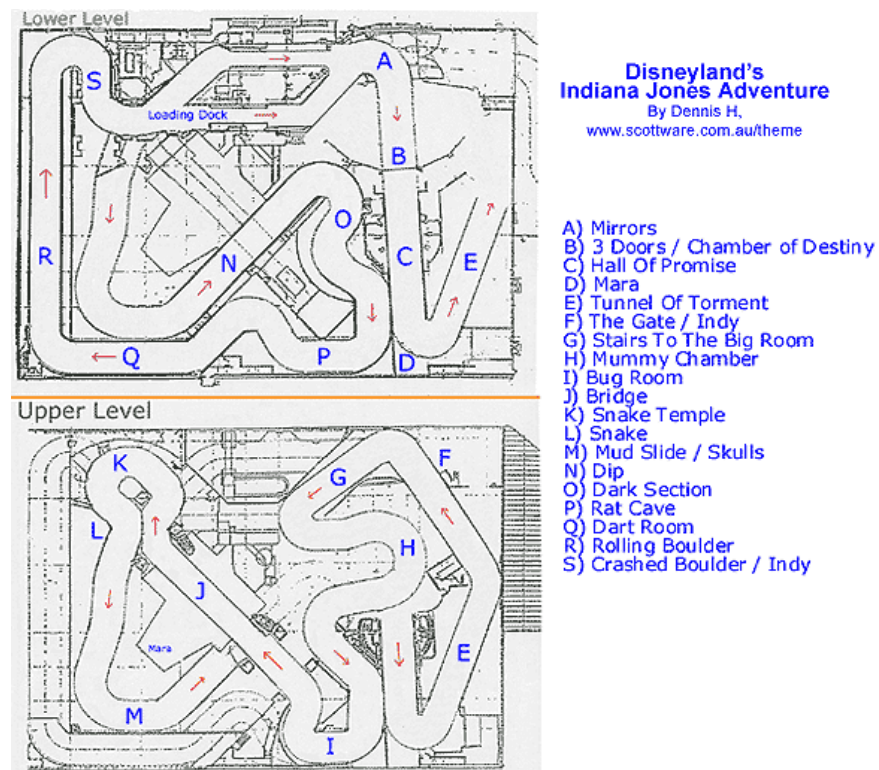


Fig 4. Dennis H., *Track Layout of Indiana Jones Adventure*, 2015.

maximize limited space, a technique that not only enhances the sense of immersion but also prolongs the duration of the experience. Guests are led through a series of meticulously crafted scenes, each designed to unfold in a way that maintains the illusion of an expansive journey. The strategic use of lighting, sound effects, and detailed set pieces further contributes to this effect, enveloping guests in the story. The irregular paths and dynamic transitions make it impossible for riders to anticipate the next turn or scene, heightening the sense of adventure and discovery. This deliberate shaping of the ride path not only intensifies the immersive experience but also allows guests to become fully absorbed in the adventure, never realizing the constraints of the physical space around them. It is evident that one of the true extraordinaires of "Indiana Jones Adventure" lies in its ability to transform a limited physical space into a boundless journey, aligning perfectly with the modern trend of prioritizing narrative depth and experiential richness in theme park attractions.

While the architectural ingenuity of "Indiana Jones Adventure" undoubtedly plays a pivotal role in creating the illusion of vast exploration within a confined space, it also echoes Vanessa Schwartz's assertion regarding movement in Disneyland. In "Disneyland and the Art of People-Moving," Schwartz hypothesizes that the layout and design of Disneyland, particularly its winding pathways and strategic placement of attractions, are crafted to control and direct the movement of visitors, guiding them through a carefully curated experience. This notion finds resonance in the intricate layout of the attraction, where guests are seamlessly transported from one captivating scene to another, all while feeling as though they are embarking on an epic journey across distant lands. Just as Disneyland orchestrates the flow of crowds to optimize their experience, "Indiana Jones Adventure" manipulates the trajectory of riders to immerse them in a

narrative-driven adventure that transcends the physical constraints of its sound stage setting. By intertwining Schwartz's perspective on movement in Disneyland with the intricacies of attraction design, a deeper understanding emerges of how theme parks construct immersive experiences. Schwartz's contention that the layout of Disneyland is deliberately engineered to guide visitors through a predetermined sequence of experiences sheds light on the intentional shaping of the ride path in "Indiana Jones Adventure." The attraction's meandering corridors and unexpected twists not only serve to elongate the perceived journey but also to regulate the pace at which guests progress through the narrative, ensuring that each scene unfolds with maximum impact. In this way, the manipulation of movement within the attraction mirrors Disneyland's broader strategy of orchestrating the flow of visitors to enhance their engagement and enjoyment. Schwartz's exploration of movement in Disneyland prompts a reconsideration of the role of spatial design in immersive storytelling experiences. Just as Disneyland leverages its physical layout to shape visitors' encounters with its various attractions, "Indiana Jones Adventure" utilizes its compact sound stage setting as a canvas for crafting a larger-than-life adventure. The deliberate manipulation of space within the attraction not only creates the illusion of expansiveness but also amplifies the sense of discovery and excitement inherent in the Indiana Jones narrative. As a result, by weaving together Schwartz's insights with an analysis of attraction design, a nuanced understanding emerges of how theme parks harness the interplay of movement, space, and narrative to transport guests to worlds of imagination and adventure.

In the main showroom of the attraction, where guests experience the bug room, bridge, snake temple, mudslide, and skulls, the ride vehicle specifically follows a Cavern layout (Fig. 5). "The Cavern layout is a type of attraction layout in which the track weaves and circulates a



repetition with variation keeps the experience exciting and unpredictable, reinforcing the sense of adventure that is central to the Indiana Jones narrative. By weaving in and out of smaller adjacent rooms, the Cavern layout maintains a balance between the expansive central scenes and more intimate, detailed environments, creating a rich tapestry of experiences that fully immerse guests in the storyline.

"Indiana Jones Adventure" extends far beyond a mere analysis of a popular theme park attraction; it delves into the intricate fusion of storytelling, spatial design, and immersive technology that defines modern entertainment experiences. By dissecting elements such as lighting transitions, forced perspective, and ride layout, the analysis illuminates the meticulous craftsmanship behind Disneyland's attractions, shedding light on the complex interplay between physical space and narrative immersion. Through a scholarly lens, the exploration of these thematic and architectural strategies offers valuable insights into how themed environments captivate audiences and enable them to be transported into different worlds. Moreover, the integration of philosophical perspectives, such as Plato's theory of simulacra, adds a layer of intellectual depth to the discussion, framing theme park design as a reflection of broader cultural and philosophical concepts. Therefore, the process of noticing and studying these specific elements not only enriches our understanding of "Indiana Jones Adventure" but also invites broader reflections on the nature of storytelling, spatial perception, and the role of imagination in shaping our experiences of reality. At its core, the analysis of "Indiana Jones Adventure" underscores the transformative power of immersive storytelling in theme park attractions, transcending the limitations of physical space to transport guests into fantastical worlds of adventure and exploration. By examining the meticulous design choices that contribute to the

attraction's narrative cohesion and emotional impact, the artistry and innovation that define Disney's approach to themed entertainment are emphasized and brought to importance. Moreover, by drawing connections to broader scholarly conversations on topics such as spatial design, perception, and narrative theory, the analysis invites interdisciplinary dialogue and critical engagement with the cultural significance of themed experiences. Ultimately, the significance of the argument lies in its ability to deepen our appreciation for the art of immersive storytelling, offering a window into the creative processes and technological innovations that continue to shape the landscape of contemporary entertainment. As such, it accentuates the enduring relevance of "Indiana Jones Adventure" as not just a theme park ride, but a rich and multifaceted cultural phenomenon that continues to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

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