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# Chapter 21

## Adventure Games

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A look at what adventure and role-playing games are.

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## What is an Adventure Game

By an adventure game, I am referring to the classic computer gaming definition. The classic adventure games were simply puzzle based stories. In these games the game would present the player with a series of problems. The player advances the story by solving these problems. We will cover some of the more common puzzles in the next chapter.

Traditional adventure games have largely vanished from North America, though more arcade like adventure games have started to become more common. In fact, there is a whole category of games, known by fans as survival horror, that is largely based on combining simple adventure game puzzles with combat. Likewise, there are a few good adventure games that do get released each year. Hopefully more such games will start to be released.

What I would like to see more of, and with my upcoming One of those Weeks adventure games, is to see a game that is much more story based. In this book we will build the first chapter of this series.

## What is a RPG?

RPG stands for Role Playing Game. Like adventure games, RPGs are story based. Many even have puzzle elements like adventure games. The key things that distinguish RPGs from Adventure Games are Character Development, Combat, and World Scope.

RPG's have the player create one or more characters (with more than one character being known as a party of characters). These characters have a variety of statistics and skills associated with them. As the player plays through the game, the character earns experience. This experience is used in order to improve the characters statistics and/or skills. In fact, there are some RPG gamers who are more concerned with how high of a level they can get their character (levels are a common term which reflect how skilled a character is) instead of how far along they are in the game's quest.

Characters in RPG's can equip various weapons and protection which they can use against opponents they encounter in games. In most of today's RPG's you will encounter a lot of opponents. Combat systems in RPGs tend to be very strategic in nature, which actually shouldn't be much of a surprise when you realize that RPGs evolved from strategic fantasy combat games. As much as I like RPG's, I must say that I find there to be way too much combat in current RPGs. Even my own Coffee Quest series tends to rely too much on combat.

Finally, RPGs tend to have large worlds in which the characters move around in, while most adventure games tend to revolve around a smaller number of more detailed locations. I'm not saying that all RPGs have huge worlds, or that all adventure games have a small number of locations, but that for the most part, RPGs take place in much larger worlds and require much more exploration than most adventure games do.

## A Brief History of Adventure

In the early days of adventure games, the games were text only. At the time graphics were very rare in games and what was being done was very primitive so this was not that huge of a deal. The very earliest of adventure games actually limited the player to typing in one or two word commands. The commands were in the format of “verb noun” such as “take coffee.” The earliest games had very small vocabularies, so finding the correct word to use was a problem. For instance, let’s say there is a guard and you have to show him your pass to get by. You type “show pass” and the computer doesn’t understand. You then try “display pass” and “use pass” to no avail. Eventually you type in “give pass” which finally solves the problem.

Adventure games parsers and vocabularies slowly improved. One company, known as Infocom, had vocabularies consisting of thousands of words and had a parser capable of analysing a compound sentence. They also produced some of the best adventure games.

As computers became more powerful, the graphical abilities of computers became more powerful. Some adventure games actually started to have pictures added to the game. In these cases, the game was still a text based game but only a portion of the screen showed text while the rest of the screen showed a picture of the player's current location. As disks tended to be small, in order to support the pictures, something had to be sacrificed. So many early graphic adventures went back to simpler two word parsers.

In fact, once graphic adventures started appearing there were debates among fans of adventure games as to whether or not graphics were appropriate for adventure games. Many gamers believing that text was better as the games could be more complex and imagination produced far better images than any graphics could.

Of course, the graphics won out. There are still fans of the text adventure and new text adventures do get created, but these tend to be a small group, and the new text adventures aren’t being produced for sale but are instead being created by hobbyists (which means quality will vary dramatically, but it also means that you will find some diamonds among the coal). Eventually, the parser was eventually removed by menu based commands and point and click controls. This also lead to much higher production requirements, as more elaborate graphics and animation became a requirement of the adventure game.

## Why There are so few new Adventure Games

Adventure games used to be a staple of the computer game industry, yet today there are few new adventure games being created. At least in North America. Other parts of the world still seem to have new adventure games being regularly created. Why is this the case? I have found three core reasons for this.

First, as graphics became more prevalent in the game industry, the amount and complexity of graphics required in games increased. More graphics means more cost, meaning the cost of creating an adventure game has skyrocketed. Even using Flash, the amount of graphics work required is still tremendous.

Another factor that has led to the stalling of adventure game development was the fact that the puzzles in these games have gotten harder. Partly to satisfy hard core adventure game players. While the hard core players may be familiar with all the older puzzles and want more complex puzzles, newcomers found many of the adventure games too difficult. As a result they were turned off of adventure gaming.

Finally, there is a misconception about adventure games. Many people I have talked to don't want to buy adventure games because "you can only play the game once". While this is partly true, what many people fail to understand is that if a game takes you 50 hours to complete, you are still getting a HUGE amount of entertainment for the cost. And I personally do play through the story more than once, in an attempt to find hidden things and other goodies.

A fourth factor that I have heard, though I am not entirely sure I agree with, is that a certain best selling adventure game was actually a very poor adventure game. Due to its popularity, many people played this game only to discover the game was little more than an interactive slide show. This particular game I didn't care for as I found the puzzles to be obscure but easy to solve and the game's story wasn't really much of a story at all (unless you read the books that came out afterward). Still, as I have gone to academy award winning movies that I thought didn't even match the quality of "Plan 9 from Outer Space" and still go to movies in similar genres, I can't see one best selling game that the player doesn't like permanently turning them off a whole genre of games.

## Flash Ideal for Adventure Games

The first time I used Flash, it was Flash 3. Even back then, I could see the potential for using Flash in an adventure game. At that time I was considering using Flash in combination with the Java language to create an adventure game. Other jobs came up so that plan was put aside.

When Flash MX came out, my workload had been reduced significantly, largely due to the internet bubble bursting resulting in companies going bankrupt or cutting back on how many outside contractors they hire. When I was working as a contractor, I spent a lot of time talking to a variety of people about potential projects that I could work on. Sometimes, as a result of the discussions, I would get some work. If I was really lucky, I get to work on an interesting project. I ended up talking to some contacts that I have about how I thought Flash would be ideal for creating adventure games. As we were curious about how much actual work would be required for doing such a game, I decided to quickly put together a prototype to test some of the concepts I had.

When you think about it you will probably come to the same conclusion that I have. Flash already is an adventure game engine. The goal of a game engine is to handle the game mechanics. With an adventure game, most of the mechanics are graphical or animation related, which Flash already does. The scripting of the game would have to be done anyway, so the only work that really needs to be done is the inventory system. This could be considered an engine, but the amount of scripting code will probably be a far more significant portion of the Action Script required for the game.

My Dragon and the Sword game is a result. While very simple as adventure games go, and lacking the animation that could be done, it defiantly proved that Flash was quite capable at producing adventure games. The key advantages to using Flash are it's obvious animation capability, the ability to have rooms as separate movies which can be loaded on demand, a fairly powerful scripting language, and the fairly small file sizes due to Flash's use of vectors.

The only thing that is missing from Flash is the ability to save the games due to Flash's restrictions on file access. While Flash does allow information to be stored locally, this storage is restricted and can be turned off by the user. If the game was to be played over the internet, this problem could be avoided by simply having the server save the games, though this would require some server side programming. If the program was to be released commercially the saving would have to be done by having a host program create an instance of Flash and then communicate with Flash by using the `fscommand()` function.