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Chapter 22

Designing Adventure Games

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With the overview of Adventure and Role-Playing games under our belt, we can now spend a bit of time designing the two games that are going to be developed in this part. More to the point, we look at two radically different ways of putting together an adventure game.

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Designing an Adventure Game

The adventure game is fairly similar to any other game that is designed. The one big difference is that the adventure game should have more initial planning as making drastic changes to the game, especially in later stages, can more easily break the game. There are three things that should be worked out before work on the game should begin. These are the story, the map, and the puzzles. While all three things can be considered separate entities, when it comes to adventure games they are actually closely intertwined.

The story is important as it is the reason the player is playing the game. The story has three main purposes. First, it gets the player involved in the game and hopefully keeps the player interested in the game. Second, it provides the player with clues as to what they have to do. Finally, it is used to reward players for solving puzzles while also introducing the player to new puzzles.

The map is vital, as it governs how the player moves through the game. Most adventure games use a room based approach. This approach breaks down where the player can be into a series of locations which are called rooms. Rooms may in fact be rooms, but can just as easily be a section of desert, part of an underground labyrinth, or any other location you can imagine. The idea is that distinct areas of the game are worked out.

Finally, the puzzles are the actual game. The point of the adventure game is to figure out how to reach the end of the story by solving the problems at hand. Ideally, puzzles should be linked to the story and the environment that the player is in so that they really don't see the puzzles. Having more than one solution to the puzzles is also not a bad idea, though takes longer in the planning stage. I find having more than one solution is more realistic. While this can also make the game easier, remember that if a game is too frustrating a player will stop playing the game.

The Most Common Puzzles

There are many types of puzzles within adventure games. Some types of puzzles seem to be used far more frequently than other puzzles. The three most common puzzles that are used are the obstacle, maze, and the fetch quest.

The obstacle is an area of the map that is inaccessible until some action is performed or some item is found. Locked doors or lever controlled gates are the most common variants of this type of puzzle.

The maze is quite simply a maze. I happen to like mazes so I am not bothered by this type of puzzle, but there are many people who do not like mazes. The biggest advantage of a maze is that it is extremely simple to put together. More importantly, there are many ways of having a maze, some may even not appear to be mazes.

Finally, the fetch quest is where the Non-Player Characters (NPCs) in the game have an item that the player needs but before they can get the item from the NPC, they have to perform some errand or find some other object to give the NPC.

There are a large number of other puzzles that can be placed into adventure games. While there is nothing wrong with the three puzzles outlined above, I would recommend trying to limit your use of them due to their persistent use within the adventure game category.

One of those Weeks

Now it is time to create an adventure game that has all of it's locations in a single movie. This game is actually not the complete adventure. Instead what I am doing is breaking the game up into a series of smaller mini-adventures. This breaking the game into smaller parts serves two purposes. First, it makes sure the memory requirements are not too much. Second, with the Blazing Games web site's game release format, devoting a huge amount of time to a single game is unrealistic. Having multiple episodes for a game gives me the ability to spread the game out over a larger number of weeks, thereby allowing me to have a much more complex adventure.

The problem with the episode format is it restricts the game to a fairly linear story. For the game we are going to be developing this is not too much of a problem. Other adventure's, however, would be hindered by this. One solution I am thinking about having would be to release the game as a series of rooms, with new rooms added every week until all the games locations were incorporated. I am not sure how well this idea would go over, but may attempt this with a future adventure game.

Now, obviously there is not enough time to cover the creation of the entire game in this book. For that reason we are only going to cover the creation of the first episode of this game. The first chapter of the game is actually a dream sequence. The player is in a maze of rooms and must find their way out. To build tension, if the player stays in the same location for too long, a creature will appear and...well, you get the picture.

Dragon and the Sword

This game was a quickly done prototype to demonstrate that adventure games could be done in Flash for one of my potential clients back when I was running Spelchan Software. The interface is overly simplified, and there isn't as much animation that could be done, but the time it took me to put this game together clearly showed the viability of Flash for creating adventure games. While the adventure is very small and easy to solve, it has paved the way for a much larger adventure that will be broken into about 50 episodes, better known as *One of those Weeks*. As it happens, the first four episodes of *One of those Weeks* happens to be part of this collection, and we are creating the first part of that game earlier in this book!

The basic story for *Dragon and the Sword* is fairly simple. A dragon has been terrorizing your village for the last few years. Many knights have attempted to somehow rid the land of this dragon, but have come to crisp ends. You have recently heard about a magic sword that is lethal to dragons while protecting the wielder from fire. If you were able to find this sword you would be able to rescue your village. As it turns out, you also discovered where the sword is hidden. Inside the dragons caves!

This game has a simple inventory system. Click on objects on the screen to pick them up. Objects picked up are added to an inventory bar at the bottom of the screen. Click on the object in the inventory bar to attempt to use it.