

HOW RETRO TEXT ADVENTURE GAMES ARE PUT TOGETHER

The main thing that stands out with text adventure games is that they usually have no graphics. The game world is made up of many locations which are described using words, although a few text adventure games will display images of the location along with the description. Playing the game involves typing instructions to inform the game what you want to do. For example, you could type "go north" to move to another location or "get lamp" to pick up a lamp if there is one at your current location.

The object of the adventure game is to solve a quest. This could be to slay a dragon, rescue a princess, recover an object, or solve a mystery. The game acts as your eyes, ears, and touch – describing what is visible in your current location along with any objects you can pick up. As you travel through the game world you will come across various puzzles that need to be solved before you proceed, along with any dangers to overcome.

Here is an example of a text adventure game in action.

You are in a forest. A long winding road leads to the north and a small cottage stands to the south. To the east, in the distance, is a large cave.

There is a lamp here.

What do you want to do?

>get lamp

You now have the lamp.

>light lamp

There is no oil in the lamp.

So, you know you are in a forest where you can see a road, a cottage, and a cave. You can choose to go to one of the described areas by typing something like "n", "north" or "go north". There is also a lamp at this location that you can pick up but if you want to light it then you need to find some oil. This is a puzzle you need to solve because you will need the lamp to go into the cave, otherwise, it will be too dark to see.

Now let us see how text adventure games are put together.

CREATING YOUR GAME WORLD

Like books, text adventure games usually start with a single idea. Imagine a village where people are dying because a wicked witch has put a curse on them. The locations in your game world would consist mainly of villages, castles, forests, and caves. Now let's say that your quest is to reach the witch's castle and kill her so the curse will be lifted. Her castle would be your final destination in the game. Maybe the cursed village could be your starting location. Now you can make a list of the locations in the game which would include something like village1, village2, river, lake, cave1, cave2, clearing, mountain1, mountain2, village tavern, forest, and so on.

If a location covers a larger area or is a building then you can split it into sub-locations such as east of the forest, west of the forest, front of the cave, middle of the cave, back of the cave, tavern kitchen, tavern bar, etc... You also need to ensure a location is in sight before you mention it in your location description. For example, you can't see the tavern kitchen unless you enter the tavern first. This is obvious but it is possible to make such mistakes.

CONNECTIONS

For the player to move around your game world you need to connect your locations. For example: if you are in the cursed village and there is a tavern you want them to visit then you need to tell them which direction it is in. You move around the game world using compass directions which are north, south, east, west, northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest. Some games even allow up and down.

So, to connect the locations you need to decide what we can see from your current location. In a village, you would see a tavern, shops, a school, and a church. Now decide what direction they are in. So let's say the tavern is to the north, the school is to the south, the shops are to the east, and the church to the west. Each location in your game will have a number and your list of connections would look something like this.

Location 01: Cursed Village

North=Location 01, South=Location 02, West=Location 03, East=Location 04

Location 02:- Tavern

North=Location 05, South=Location 01

Notice there is a connection back to location 01? Always make sure you can get back to the previous location by using the opposite of the direction you used to get there... North to get there and South to get back. East to get there and West to get back.

Some locations can't be accessed until you solve a puzzle. In the earlier example, there is a cave that is going to be dark. Therefore, you need to get the lamp first, find some oil and then light it before you can enter the cave.

Other locations may be guarded so you need some way of getting rid of, or getting past the guard. Creating puzzles to get to some locations makes your game more interesting rather than allowing the player to get places easily.

OBJECTS

Objects are items that can be used, eaten, or worn. Their purpose is to aid you in your quest and to solve certain puzzles. Sometimes objects have to be combined: such as the oil and the lamp to work. Objects are usually found in locations waiting to be picked up. Some objects are hidden until they are uncovered in the game. For example, a crystal ball might be locked in a trunk and will only appear in the current location when the trunk has been opened.

Imagine you wanted to get into some building and the guard stops you. Maybe you can find some money and bribe him. Or maybe you can find a disguise to wear that will allow you to get past him. Objects can be used in unlimited ways to add puzzles to your game and make them much more challenging to the player.

One thing to remember: Don't make an object too big or too heavy for the player to carry and limit the number of items they can carry. Adventure games also allow the player to drop items they are carrying so they can pick others up. Some adventure games give the objects a weight so how many objects you can carry depends on the weight.

EVENTS

Imagine entering a cave and coming face to face with a huge grizzly bear who wants to eat you. You can't explore that cave as the bear is blocking your way so you need to overcome it somehow. Events come in three flavours: High Priority, Low Priority, and Local.

High Priority: These events happen as soon as the player enters a location before they get the chance to input any commands. For example, the bear could kill you as soon as you enter the cave so you need to do something before you enter such as have a weapon handy or be wearing armour.

Low Priority: These events handle situations that continue as you move through the game. For example, if you are getting hungry, thirsty, or sleepy, or if you are injured and losing blood. These events report your status just before handing input control to you.

Local: Events that happen at your current location. For example, the bear won't kill you as soon as you enter the cave, you will get a chance to defend yourself or to leave the cave. Once that bear has been dealt with – the local event will state that you "see a dead bear" or you "see a sleeping bear".

CONCLUSION

This article covers the basic bones of a text adventure game and provides enough information to get you started in creating one either using a programming language of your choice or a dedicated adventure creator.