



The year was 1992. It was the month of July and summer was in full swing. A small boy of 12 years old, on holiday in Germany, sat at a small table in a small lounge one afternoon, playing monopoly with his cousin Alexander. After a few rounds of the game, Alexander jumped up and spoke to the boy in

excitement.

“I have this awesome computer game I need to show you.” he said, getting up from the table.

“Really, what is it?” The boy asked.

The two youths made their way from the table and moved to a corner section of the lounge, where a sofa and coffee table stood. The coffee table had an enormously large personal computer on top of it. The two boys sat on the sofa and Alexander switched the computer on. After the DOS operating system was fully loaded, he typed in a few keywords and pressed enter. A beautiful game sprung up on the screen in front of the boy. That game was Sierra Online’s classic *King’s Quest 3*, and that boy was me.

My life was changed from that day on. After seeing what could be done in a game like that, and enjoying the gameplay so much, I knew this kind of game was for me. The puzzle solving, the finding of objects, the interaction with other characters, it was like being inside a fantasy fairy tale with all those 16 EGA colours making the beautifully drawn images spring to life. It was like magic, and I was hooked.

After returning home, and back to school, I was further introduced, by friends, to the likes of *Police Quest* and *Space Quest*. My father also contributed to my keen adventure gaming interest by bringing home a copy of *Leisure Suit Larry* and telling me that a colleague of his gave it to him to try out. Since my dad never had any interest in computers whatsoever, he gave the copy to me and I was playing endlessly once again. One thing led to another, and after knowing that these kind of games existed, I went in search of more titles and quickly got acquainted with a host of adventure games of all kinds from developers of all sorts. Life was beautiful. And then, the adventure game faded.

I am not writing all this to ramble on about my life history with computer games, I am writing this as a tribute to one of the most underrated, misunderstood and greatest game genres of all kind - the *Adventure Game* genre.

It all began sometime around 1980, when a game called *Zork* arrived on our screens. What started out as an MIT project ended up becoming a popular game. There were no graphics, no proper sound, only a text screen in front of you, providing you with information that could help you progress in the game. Players were required to input text commands using a text parser to progress their character further into the game. This genre was known as the *Text Adventure*, and it was from here that things got better.

Sierra On-Line was born around this time as well, and they were given funding



by IBM to create a game that would sell their investor's hardware. That game became *King's Quest* and it sold thousands. The *PC Jr.* that IBM intended to sell via the game, however, did not. Nevertheless, the true adventure game genre was born and Sierra created many more titles with the same idea in mind – to make a game whereby the player controls an on-screen character, solves puzzles, collects objects, and tells the character what to do in the game.

Sierra was the first to add graphics to the adventure game, thereby creating a movable, playable character in a pseudo-3D environment. This meant that the character could move behind, and in front of objects that were placed on a 2D environment, giving the player the illusion of 3D space. This was a major enhancement from the previously popular text adventure games. The popular text parser was still in use, so you had to enter commands like *take ball* or *open the door* to further your (now visible) character in the game. These popular titles sold thousands and the *Golden Age of Adventure Gaming* was dawning.

Towards the end of the 80's, with the release of Lucas Art's *Maniac Mansion*, the text parser became somewhat obsolete, and games became more mouse-driven. Now, instead of typing in commands, you could click on commands like *Look, Take, Push* or *Pull*, and click on objects and areas on your screen to progress further in the game. Later on, instead of commands, simple image icons like a hand or an eye represented *taking* or *looking* actions respectively. This was termed the *Point-and-Click Adventure*. For almost a decade thereafter, many developers used this style of adventure game



design to create many popular titles like the *Monkey Island* series, the *Gabriel Knight* series, the *Legend of Kyrandia* series, *Rex Nebular* and the *Cosmic Gender Bender*, *Noctropolis*, *Broken Sword* and *Myst*. Later on came the added technology of Full Motion Video, and so games like *Phantasmagoria*, *Tex Murphy* and *The 7th Guest* were adding real life videos into the atmosphere of the game.

All these types of games were on the forefront of the gaming industry and were seen as the most technologically advanced. People would flock in their thousands to retail stores when new titles from popular game series were launched. The adventure game had it all - stunning, high quality graphics, a rich storyline, wonderful and colourful characters and most of all - it had soul! So then, what happened? A popular quote from an anonymous online source says it best :

***"The adventure game genre was kicked out of a moving car and left to fend for itself."***

This would describe the outcome of this now niche-genre well. Towards the end of the 90's, certain factors contributed to the adventure game's downfall. For instance, networking was becoming popular. Since the adventure game can only be played in single player mode, there was no way to incorporate it into a



multi-player design. Companies like Sierra were feeling the pressure of the now ever more demanding market and even tried to add multi-player technology into their *Space Quest 7* project. This particular title was never released, and maybe that's a good thing too, because it might have ruined the game in a way. LAN parties, networking sessions at friends' homes, and the

start of the internet began this uprising of gamers wanting to battle against each other, but not by collecting objects and spending endless amounts of hours solving puzzles - that was more for the lone thinker. For this reason, adventure gaming started to dwindle.

Another factor that contributed towards the suffering of this genre was the fact that computer hardware was becoming more advanced. PC's could handle a lot more than before, and with games like id's *Doom* and *Quake* spawning the *First Person Shooter* genre, gamers were offered a whole new type of

experience - *shoot-em ups*. Why spend time solving stuff when you can blow your way through, and do it all in stunning 3D graphics! To make matters worse, consoles like the Sony's *Playstation* and Microsoft's *Xbox* had even more to offer - now you could blow your way through in stunning 3D graphics on your TV in the comfort of your own lounge! The adventure game was doomed to fail, and it did. Nobody wanted to click around on the screen, PC or TV, and move a lone ranger around until a certain puzzle was eventually solved. They wanted the fast-paced action and they wanted to play against each other.

These new games were now selling in their millions, as opposed to hundreds of thousands that the adventure market brought in. Companies that previously released point-and-click adventure games were now either closing down or adapting to the new market to survive financially. The once true, happy adventure genre we grew to love was gone, lost, only to be remembered in our minds and hearts, never to grace our computer screens again.

...or was it?

Some say the adventure game never really died, it merely changed direction. In the 15 years or so, the genre has definitely plummeted from being an idol of the *Golden Age of Computer Gaming* to becoming a recluse in the niche markets. Is it still alive? Can it still work in today's day and age? It seems these are all valid questions and indeed the adventure game has evolved in many ways.

If we look at the start of the new millennium, when consoles were growing in popularity, the internet gave birth to the *Massively Multiplayer Online Game* genre, or MMO for short, and PC hardware was expanding in full force. The games that were coming out were fast-paced, action based, and less story-driven. This market of new-age gaming intimidated the previous adventure game market and game developers were forced to change their ways and game designs. This change was inevitable, and companies realised this and had to move forward. Sierra shut down their adventure game departments in 1999, LucasArts



canned some of their adventure game projects like *Sam & Max : Freelance Police* and *Full Throttle 2 : Hell on Wheels*, while others worked on new types of adventure game sub-genres.

Take the *Action-Adventure* genre for instance. This new hybrid of adventuring offered a new market to appear, and titles like *The Da Vinci Code*, *Dreamfall : The Longest Journey*, and Frogwares' *Sherlock Holmes* games offered a new way of adventuring. In these games, the adventure element still runs strong in the game; however you control the game character in a full 3D environment and in first or third person modes. Almost like a shooter game, without the shooting. You still get to solve puzzles and interrogate characters, with the added elements of some action fighting sequences to give off a more modern feel to things.

Quantic Dream's *Fahrenheit*, also known as *Indigo Prophecy* in North America, was another masterpiece that had the player move around locations, find objects and interact with characters in a new way. With a powerful storyline, motion captured animation and alternate outcomes and endings, based on player reactions, the player had limited time to answer questions and respond to certain events, using a combination of keys on the keyboard or gamepad.

Each of the player's responses would determine the game's progression.

Another hybrid adventure genre that grew in popularity was the *Role-Playing-Game* genre or RPG for short. Having the player move around in an open world, interact with other characters and build up their own character's health, strength, and abilities, this style of RPG adventures worked well as an alternative. Bethesda

Game Studio's *The Elder Scrolls* and

BioWare's *Knights of the Old Republic* are worthy of an example in this category. Let's not forget Sierra's own *Quest for Glory* titles, which helped lay the path for today's modern RPGs.

Hidden Object Adventures also found their way into the sub-genre market and sprung up in their millions to offer players another method to keep the name alive in some way. In these games, you rarely see your own character on screen, and you have to solve puzzles and find items that are hidden away in different locations.

Some developers, however, refused to submit to the new overtaking gaming market and continued to produce classic point-and-click adventure games. The likes of French developer Microids comes to mind with their popular titles such



as *Post Mortem*, *Still Life* and *Syberia 1 & 2*. Other games like the *Black Mirror* Trilogy, *The Moment of Silence*, *Secret Files : Tunguska*, *Lost Horizon* and *Overclocked* have also proven successful.

Since the year 2000, adventure games haven't really been able to sell as many copies as the first person shooters, role-playing games and strategy games, so most companies have either decided to reject adventure games, make them on the side or go the hybrid route. The latter has kept the genre alive somewhat, but is still not true to the original. Games like *Tomb Raider* or *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb* are often misinterpreted as being adventure games. These titles, while being brilliant in their own right, are far from being the classic adventure game we once knew.

Despite all the negativity, it seems though, that the adventure game still has some kind of potential, however it is still not appealing to the mass markets, instead, it has disappeared among the smaller cult communities. And this is where it has ended up settling for the past few years or so.

Okay, so what does the future hold for adventure games? Let's take a look at studios like Telltale Games. Formed in 2004, this company started out as a team of ex-Lucas Arts employees that previously worked on the failed *Sam and Max : Freelance Police* title. Unhappy with the way the way the genre was heading, they decided to launch a new concept - *Episodic Gaming*. With the internet now a major part of everyone's life, this would be the perfect solution to keep the adventure gamers happy - by giving them a piece of the game on a monthly basis. This idea has worked because in this way, developers don't spend many years making one title; they make them in smaller chunks.

Therefore if one compares this technique to selling a massive adventure game that took two years to develop, that needs to make a big profit to cover costs



such as labour, packaging and printing, you will find it more profitable to sell the smaller episodes online at a cheaper price. No need for massive printing and packaging costs, and no need to work on big projects for long periods of time, and with download speeds increasing all the time, the average home user can now download a small game every month for a cheap price and start playing.

Like watching your favourite TV series, when the game ends, you want to know what happens next – it adds to the thrill of the game!

Telltale have proven successful in their endeavours, releasing titles like *Sam and Max : Season 1 – 3*, *Tales of Monkey Island*, *Jurassic Park*, *Back to the Future*, *Law & Order*, and *The Walking Dead* games series. Many other developers have been influenced to go the same route, and this has worked wonders for the adventure game.

Towards the end of the noughties we saw the launch of many new and exciting smartphones, tablets, consoles and portable gaming devices. If we look at mobile phones, they went from becoming brick sized objects to miniscule devices, back to becoming larger again. The reason for this is that people are using their phones more and more for things other than calling people. They



use it for internet purposes, viewing documents, photos, chatting and of course - playing games. And for this reason, they need a larger screen, so phones like the Apple *iPhone*, HTC and Samsung's *Galaxy* mobiles have seen an increase in popularity recently.

So perhaps these formats are the perfect hardware adventure games need to thrive?

If you think about it, these phones host simple graphics capabilities, and people nowadays are text-typing addicts, so re-inventing something like a classic text adventure game can actually work? Or perhaps a simple graphic adventure with classic text parser, with predictive text?

Wow, that would certainly take away the

strain we once had guessing the right words to type. The *iPhone* already has a version of *Zork* available, and many developers are re-mastering old titles to run on various smartphone platforms. An example of this would be Revolution Software's titles *Broken Sword* and *Beneath a Steel Sky* that have been remodelled to run on the *iPhone*.

Another example of a remake is the upcoming *Leisure Suit Larry*, who will be returning as a newly re-mastered lovable loser, and unlike the disappointing previous two games, Al Lowe is fully involved in this new instalment. It is due out soon and will host wonderfully drawn HD graphics and full point-and-click technology. On top of that, it is set to be released on many types of mediums, so PC gamers, console lovers, and smartphone addicts alike will all get a piece of the action, or at least help Larry get some.

It seems remakes of classic adventures from the 80's is on the rise, even Big Finish Games have announced a possible *Tex Murphy* remake, after seeing that Double Fine's Tim Schafer has raised over \$3,000,000 for his new point-and-click adventure game. Thanks to Kickstarter, private funding of future projects can now be made a reality.

There certainly are many ways to bring it all back, and with the help of the many consoles, portable gaming devices, tablets and smartphones out there, we can make the adventure game prosper again.

Perhaps the adventure genre is repeating itself in terms of evolution? From growing in popularity, to dwindling into the dark corners, to re-appearing on the scene slowly again shows us that the adventure game has certainly travelled a long route and evolved. The journey has been tough, yet magical at the same time, from the likes of a leisure suit loser looking for lost love, to a fully fledged high definition environment that is Jane Jensen's *Gray Matter*. It has certainly come a long way and matured!

With such strong growing support and ever more HD adventure games like Pendulo Studio's *The Next Big Thing*, Animation Arts' *Secret Files*, and Daedalic Entertainment's *A New Beginning* coming out, it's a fact that the adventure game genre has got potential and stands a good chance of re-appearing on the scene. If you ask me, I think the adventure game might just be returning with full force!

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## Useful Websites

[Adventure Gamers](#)

[Telltale Games](#)

[GOG](#)

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