

PERSONAL ADVENTURES
THE SHIFT FROM PLAYER TO AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

The formative years of computer gaming saw the birth of a genre dedicated to storytelling as a primary experience. These games, adventure games, briefly rose to dominance within the industry in the nineties but faded fast. Sequels in the major franchises and planned games for the new millennium were mostly cancelled, and the genre is often held up as an example of a failed experiment where games tried too hard to play the role of traditional media. Yet while commercial innovation fell to the wayside fan communities continued to keep the genre alive, passing around games deemed *abandonware* and building their own games, both extensions of the familiar and new narratives. These projects emerge from communities united not by love of any single classic game but by devotion to a genre, a form, which the members of the community extended and rebuilt. The fans who created ways to extend this form of gaming throughout two decades were concerned less with evolution in graphics and processor speeds than with keeping games playable and available on modern computers. Their efforts created value even in games that had been left unsold by developers for ten years or more, and a revitalization in the genre has begun with innovation moving freely from communal to commercial space.

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Chapter 1. Personal Adventures, Corporate Games

Walk the streets of Florence and you'll find a copy of David on practically every corner. For centuries, the way to become a Florentine sculptor has been to copy Michelangelo, to learn from the master. Not just the great Florentine sculptors, either—great or terrible, they all start with the master; it can be the start of a lifelong passion, or a mere fling. The copy can be art, or it can be crap—the best way to find out which kind you've got inside you is to try.

(Doctorow, 2008, p. 89)

On July 15th, 2009, LucasArts released a special edition of *The Secret of Monkey Island*. I visited the web site for the release and found all the standard accompaniments to a new game: an opening flash animation, pictures of the swashbuckling pirate cast, widgets for every social network, a swordplay mini game (LucasArts, 2010). But everything about the game is familiar, and rightfully so. The original was released in 1990, almost two decades prior to this remake. It was an early entry in the adventure game genre, a genre that saw its peak in the nineties and dwindled away in the face of a quickly transforming industry. It is not so surprising to see another remake among many: everywhere I look someone is retelling a familiar story. The box office is overflowing with remakes of classic, and not-so-classic, films—while it might not be as overrun as Florence with imitations of the great masters, the feeling of testing the waters by recreating the familiar is everywhere. A successful young adult novel about wizards or vampires

spawns legions of similar stories, and, inevitably, its own series of movies and video games. The gods of Greek mythology are being reborn on screen and on the page for Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series. In the face of this constant cultural reinvention, why is one decades-old computer game so outstanding?

The release of the special edition of *Monkey Island* could be dismissed in the same way we dismiss all these brands built from old stories. It is easy to sell the familiar. This same reliance on tried and true brands makes a movie sequel a safer bet than an unknown property. The production cost of recreating a game is also decidedly less than that of re-making a game. There's no need to hire a team of writers when the dialogue and story are already written, no need to hire particularly imaginative artists when they can simply rebuild what is already in front of them, however pixelated it might seem on a modern screen.

But there is another question to be asked here: why remake a twenty-year old game to begin with? Perhaps the easiest answer is: "it's a classic." But what does that mean? It's a hard term to use when talking about a game that is only twenty-years old, even when the genre itself is not much older. One way I can define a classic is by asking whether a story can stand the test of time. *Secret of Monkey Island* is beginning to achieve that distinction—the release of a special edition makes it playable on modern systems, while running the original game in

current environments is much more of a challenge. While the current experience is aesthetically distinct from the original, in most ways it is a revitalization of the same story.



Figure 1-1 The Lucasfilm and LucasArts Logos (1990 and 1991)

I first encountered *Secret of Monkey Island* when it was released in 1990, when LucasArts was still called LucasFilm Games. They hadn't yet invented the golden man logo that would appear on *Monkey Island II* and become a symbol for a company that defined the genre—a transformation of logo that would mark an entrance into increased commercial presence of the company and the first time the logo was designed out of house by a marketing team (ATMMachine, 2006). The hero, Guybrush Threepwood, with his geeky demeanor and naïve aspiration to become a mighty pirate, was an easy icon for a player to connect with. His quest for romance included combat of sorts, but in its own style, insult-fighting. Rather than trading blows with superior pirates directly, Guybrush gradually learns the

appropriate retorts to insults thrown at him from all directions. The player accompanies him on a heroic quest through multiple installments released as late as 2000 prior to the recent 2009 resurrection of the series. The 2009 resurrection includes both the special edition, by LucasArts, and *Tales of Monkey Island*, a new licensed series by Telltale Games that will continue the narrative in installments.

Who was clamoring for the special edition? At times it might look like no one—the idea of re-releasing a classic game is so rare, it’s not something the market pulls for. When adventure game fans seek out a classic game today, they are more likely to find it hidden for download on an *abandonware* site—a name given to games that are no longer sold commercially but are still legally under copyright. Maintainers of such archives tiptoe on the boundaries of legality and, when challenged, remind their detractors that the owners of these stories would rather let them languish than continue to make them available for play. A few such games have actually been released as freeware, but the majority is kept online using the justification of archiving. The physical forms of games are subject to decay: floppy discs and CDs cannot provide endless storage. Digital copies, continually moved, updated in format, and otherwise kept alive in archive projects are the best way to preserve “at-risk software”: a term used by the

Internet Archive in describing its own efforts to both follow the rules of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and keep such software available (Internet Archive, 2003).



Figure 1-2 Elaine and Guybrush in the original Secret of Monkey Island (Lucasfilm 1990)



Figure 1-3 Special edition Elaine and Guybrush (LucasArts 2009)

Defining the Adventure Game

Adventure games, with their strong focus on narrative and point-and-click exploratory interfaces, ruled the market of the late 80s and 90s with classic series like *King's Quest* setting sales records and generating new installments as late as 1994 (Business Wire, 1994). But the genre hit a turning point: graphics-based games, and the rise of 3-D, made the cartoony two-dimensional environments of the adventure games suddenly look dated. Attempts to bring the games into the new style failed, with later releases attempting to embrace action and in doing so alienating the franchise's followers. While the series, and the adventure game genre, were near the peak of their success, Espen Aarseth argued for the expanded

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study of adventure games, a genre of computer game devoted to narrative experience, not as a bastardization of a literary form but as a literary form in itself: “The adventure game is an artistic genre of its own, a unique aesthetic field of possibilities, which must be judged on its own terms” (1997, p. 107). He noted the roots of the genre as, perhaps, more in folk art than in commercial art: the story of the ‘first’ adventure game “is a paradigm of collaborative authorship on the Net: one person gets an idea, writes a program, releases it (with the source code); somewhere else another person picks it up, improves it, adds new ideas, and rereleases it” (p. 99). This allows for the classification of this first adventure game, at least, as “folk art” created through a repurposing and expanding by authors building a narrative tradition (p. 100).

As the game form diminished commercially, many decried it as dead, but *King’s Quest* designer Roberta Williams responded to the charge: “If you go back and look at where adventure games were and where they went, you can see that the adventure game is still there, it’s just a different/better (depending on your particular point of view) experience playing them. The adventure game ‘as we know it’ just keeps evolving. It’s still evolving” (White, 2006). The games evolved with their players: there is a clear progression through the *Monkey Island* series until the failed 2000 release *Escape from Monkey Island*, where a reliance

on three-dimensional graphics and the addition of more complicated forms of monkey combat alienated some of the core audience. The games were more likely to continue to resonate with the audience who grew up with them when they stayed true to their traditions.

My generation was the first to grow up with video games woven into the fabric of stories that offer a window into the transition to adulthood. I was born in 1984, the same year the *King's Quest* series first hit the shelves when personal computers were nowhere near the ubiquitous household device they would quickly become. The new form was immediately viewed with suspicion by those experienced enough to know better: we didn't know we were engaged in the formation of ourselves, we just thought we were shooting at demons. The shift to a world where it is possible to have the immersive experience of play in a fully realized interactive environment seemed to happen overnight, and the immediacy of the transition meant that those outside the virtual playground were not so ready to accept it into the cultural text as those born with the new toys. The battleground over gaming became a battle for identity. As an opportunity for the broadening of self, games did not begin in a promising fashion. They lacked both the imagery and immediacy of television and film and the depth of narrative of a book. Most of the games available in the early graphical form still didn't offer much in the

details or imagery we've come to expect from modern games. Yet Marie-Laure Ryan describes how the games compensated for these elements by advertising an immersive experience: "Even in the 1980s, when computing power allowed only rudimentary graphics, developers promoted their products by promising a narrative experience that rivaled in its sensory richness the offerings of action movies" (2006, p. 182). The games born out of this focus on a narrative experience were the first adventure games, games dedicated to telling a particular story around an embodied character.

The addition of narrative to games built up quickly through the years, particularly once Nintendo began to redefine the initial collections of pixels not as simple targets but as characters participating in battles of good and evil. The games offered the basic shapes and the virtual playground: we players provided the imagination to fill in the gaps. The actions the players take are necessary for the story to be fulfilled. Without a player, there is no story: the self is invested as part of the experience. The reliance of adventure games on this model of investment helped to make them the best-selling series works of the early computer game era.

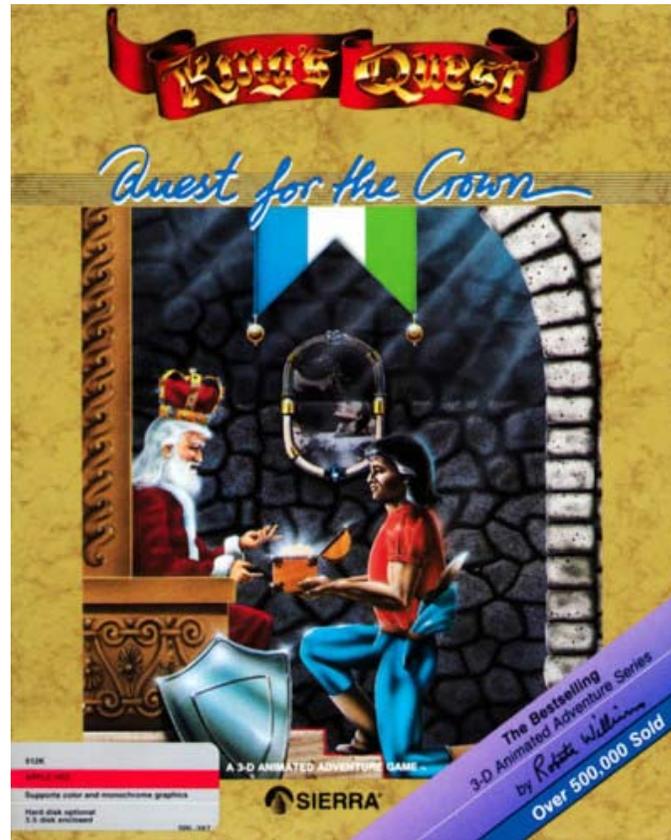


Figure 1-4 Box for King's Quest I: "Over 500,000 Sold" (1984)

This thrill is the interactivity: the feeling that I as a player can shape the fate of the world. It doesn't matter to me that the story of *King's Quest I* is incredibly contrived. A knight rescuing a kingdom, and later in the series becoming a king, then rescuing a princess...these are the archetypes of stories that don't require me to engage in deep literary analysis. The connection I have with Sir Graham, *King's Quest's* knight errant, isn't because of his great depth of

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character: it's because of the fusion of our characters and quests towards trying out a different perspective and seeing the world through another's eyes. The games I played as a child have a particular hold on my mind because that was a time when I was just learning to stretch my mind in those directions: I remember the characters that were part of that initial experience of the other, of being someone beyond my initial realm of experiences.

Playing a fully narrative game, I am ideally not aware that the control I feel is an illusion. The adventure games of my youth represented the most purely narrative form of game, a style that is occasionally decried as a dead genre despite the continual fascination with narrative games. I came to know the characters of these adventure games in a different sense than I know the characters of Shakespeare. I read about the escapades of the lovers caught in a magical forest, I imagined myself in their places; I became aware of new possibilities and ideas for love and fantasy. But Guybrush Threepwood, Indiana Jones, Sir Graham—those are characters whose lives I've played. The narratives of these characters may not offer the same depth as Shakespeare, but the experience of play allows for actually testing the possibilities and limitations the characters represent. To a player of more modern games, the limitations in these old systems can seem too restrictive. Only a few dialogue options were available in each conversation and

game worlds were small with only confined spaces for exploration. Many objects in the background paintings of a screen would be frustratingly unusable, not even available for the perspective character to comment on. Yet the interactions the player character could perform were always suited to the persona—the feeling of taking on a role involved accepting these limitations. Some of the depth in the character that is missing on the screen is added when the player takes on their role, and the connection between player and character can grow over multiple installments of a series. This continued fandom helped to support later installments in adventure game franchise even as late as 2000, when the genre itself had already been pronounced dead.

Rebirth of a Genre

Over the past few years, the adventure game genre has seen a rebirth. New sequels have been published extending classic series: *Tales of Monkey Island*, obviously, but also *The New Adventures of Sam and Max*. Aside from the remake of *The Secret of Monkey Island*, other classic producers have rereleased their games. The first *Gabriel Knight* game was just brought out in a digital-rights-management free form for online download, and at ten dollars a download, it is clear that creators still think there is value in these older games (Activision, 2010). Such releases are not of interest to a large number of users, but they benefit

from the “long tail” of the digital—they require no shelf space, no inventory, and can be directly downloaded by the audience that would seek them out (Lessig, 2008, p. 129). This type of success is part of the reason why *abandonware* as such is hard to identify. When a game can still return, decades later, and have a commercial audience the old idea still has value. As in Doctorow’s observations of the city of Florence, with its litter of David statues, the original idea is constantly revisited by one means or another. Roberta Williams appears to have been correct when she declared the adventure game genre still very much alive. However, there is a caveat: the essentials have not evolved, and the original works have been resurrected alongside attempts to modernize the genre by adding mimetic interfaces or multiplayer elements.

The gap between the golden age of adventure games and this new resurgence appears to be a long one. The entire genre was declared dead by those who were supposed to know best. The games were too narrative, too lacking in the freedom of player choice demanded for true interactivity. Players were growing accustomed to the free-roaming worlds of the *Elder Scrolls* series and its clones, while the adventure game worlds still confined players in small spaces on relatively linear paths. The stories relied on an out-of-date interface and were essentially point and click while other genres were touting immersion.

Yet as the number of mainstream releases dwindled the genre did not die: it was alive, but not commercially. As scheduled sequels by the major production companies were delayed indefinitely and finally cancelled, fan sequels were—and are—being regularly released for free on forums. Many of these fan games resemble the new sequels in their style and intent: some remade the classic games with improved imagery and voice-acting, while others released short installments gradually extending the old narrative in their own directions.



Figure 1-5 Tales of Monkey Island (Telltale Games, 2009)

One such installment-based release is *Tales of Monkey Island*, released by Telltale Games beginning around the same time as the first game remake. The two

events brought the classic franchise back to life nearly ten years after the last installment had failed to achieve much commercial success. Players were nervous about a repeat of the most recent game, and also concerned to see a different company take over the LucasArts production. The designers responded to these concerns in the game's FAQ:

WILL *TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND* BE EXACTLY LIKE I REMEMBER THE *MONKEY ISLAND* GAMES BEING WHEN I PLAYED THEM TEN YEARS AGO?

Is this a trick question? We know fans have been imagining their own versions of a new *Monkey Island* game for a decade now, but we're not trying to make that sequel you dreamed up... we're making something completely new. And *Tales of Monkey Island* will be just like you remember in the ways that really count. Funny characters? Check! Goofball humor? Check! Ridiculous storyline that lovingly spoofs pirate legend and lore? Check! (Telltale Games, 2009).

The key phrase “just like you remember in the ways that really count” shows the designer's courtship of the original fan base: older now, but still drawn to the familiar elements that shaped their first experience with these types of games. The rest of the response places the elements of narrative at the forefront, promising the same experience of character and storyline and saying nothing about the puzzles or gameplay itself. That omission suggests that the gameplay aspect was allowed to evolve, to change, without betraying the core of the series. The designers are

not simply imitating, making their own version of the David statue, but also expanding beyond the older mold. The fans that this FAQ addresses are those who “have been imagining their own versions of a new *Monkey Island* game for a decade now”, but this description might be selling those fans short. Some have been imagining new fan games like this for over two decades—and many of them have done more than just imagine, and have had more than a fling with the act of creation.

Loyal Adventurers

Even as the adventure game is being continually redefined and repurposed by the commercial arena, there are still authors continuing the genre outside of the commercial realm. These authors work in a manner that is collaborative and yet personal in the tradition of *Adventure* itself: they build games and tools, share those processes and their code, and expand upon the games and tools made both within the community and outside in commercial projects. These authors are not merely continuing the tradition of the “original” games but, more importantly, are adding their own ideas. The works of this tradition are a glimpse at the future of electronic literature. These are games created not by so-called independent or corporate collectives, but by individuals working within a collective to evolve this style of interactive narrative in their own images. Many of the creators would not

identify themselves as aspiring to the revolution of literature, yet their patterns of practice resemble the days of literary salons made virtual. It is in the growing communities that celebrate this form of authorship that we can see a narrative tradition growing from early examples, not unlike the stories originally serialized at the birth of the novel. It is here—and in spaces like it, throughout the Internet, where older forms of popular culture are routinely processed, consumed, re-mandated, and taken as inspiration for new content that holds its audience through a shared heritage of stories built towards a world of new ideas.

Members of one such creative group, the Adventure Game Studio community, are often, if certainly not always, around my age. They are likely equally able to recall formative experiences with their first adventure games. Adventure games are linked with casual games in their accessibility to an audience not generally associated with gaming. Jesper Juul observed the connection of *Myst* with the casual game revolution, and noted that among baby-boomers *Myst* is “the most common first computer game played, as well as the most common favorite computer game” (Juul, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and their Players*, 2010, p. 27) This dynamic helps differentiate them from the stereotypical gamer community, as adventure games have never been part of the “hardcore” gaming realm. Even *Myst* has experienced a recent

resurgence, with a release on the iPhone boasting graphics identical to the original. This transition onto a new platform allows *Myst* to recapture its original audience, now owners of the casual gaming hardware with time on their hands for shorter gaming experiences that can be picked up and put down at a moment's notice.

Jesper Juul notes the similarity of the original *Myst* audience and today's casual game players: "Games like *Myst*, *Monopoly*, and *Lego Island*—also three of the most popular computer games of 1997—appeal to a much broader audience of males and females of all ages that want easy-to-learn family games. These games tend to use simple technology, and sell steadily year after year" (p. 26). Some of this diversity is reflected in the Adventure Game Studio, or AGS, community. The AGS community is now twenty-years old, and had already formed when games like *Myst* were bringing adventure games to a wider audience and starting to shape the demographics of casual games. Such demographics don't much resemble the stereotypes of teenage males as the only serious gamers.

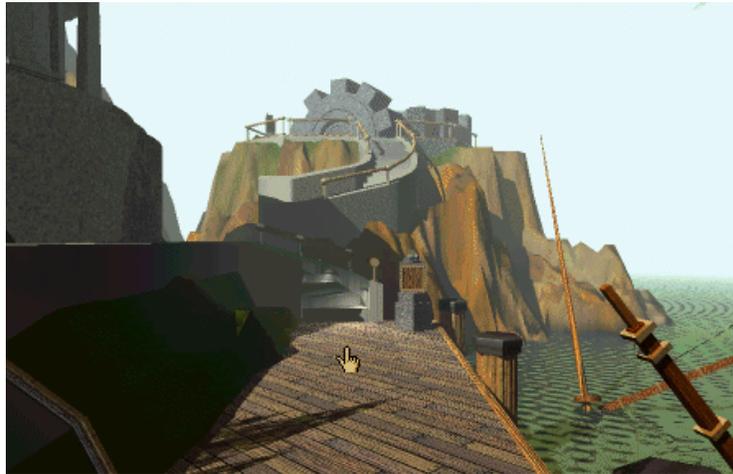


Figure 1-6 Myst (Cyan, 1993)

While commercial games such as *Myst* are at the heart of the inspirations of the AGS community, AGS itself is founded on free creation and free content. In this, the community is part of a larger trend online: what David Bollier terms the “viral spiral.” Bollier is describing the seemingly chaotic process of social creation centered on programs just like AGS: “The viral spiral began with free software (code that is free to use, not code at no cost) and later produced the Web. Once these open platforms had sufficiently matured, tech wizards realized that software’s greatest promise is not as a stand-alone tool on PCs, but as a social platform for Web-based sharing and collaboration” (Bollier, 2008, p. 3)

AGS is only one of the many options for free or paid-for creation tools: however, of such tools, it is the only one at the center of a strong sustained

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community. Other tools tend to be more narrow or inaccessible, driving off communal participation. This allows AGS to play a significant role in David Bollier's posited viral spiral. The freely created content, both in the forms of tools and narratives, inspires further creation and cycles through the community. Works produced using AGS tools occasionally appear alongside commercial releases on reviewing sites dedicated to the remaining outputs within the genre. Players are more willing to pick up games reviewed in this manner because of the nonexistent price tag, and would-be creators are not barred from the process by the expense of tools. The greater influence of the adventure game fans would not have been possible without the communal aspect.

I first came to observe AGS as a community through their role as archivists and gatekeepers to the not-all-forgotten adventure games of the classic era. Remakes of several classics are made using the AGS tools, and while the community itself is against illegal *abandonware* and blocks links to such content, a communal respect for classic works keeps them alive. The members of this community are a subculture of fandom with a specific textual heritage. However, the genre of their allegiance is adventure games. The shape of this fandom is different than one built around, say, *Monkey Island* itself, the community is not drawn together by any one game or series but by the form.

Narrative Games Reborn

Putting the Adventure Game Studio into the larger context of fan productions requires first recognizing what makes the AGS community unique.

Over my two years observing the community, I noticed two trends:

1. The Adventure Game Studio fan movement has sustained itself for a decade developing narrative games in parallel to and in conversation with the mainstream gaming industry.
2. A larger recognition of remix culture has applied various labels to this type of movement, but this particular fandom has gone largely ignored—in part, perhaps, because while other fandoms focus on clearly identifiable media artifacts this fandom focuses on a narrative style.

Now, the classic adventure game genre is kept alive in the mainstream by occasional corporate remakes and with recent releases such as *Tales of Monkey Island* revisiting worlds abandoned by their original creators for nearly a decade. Yet these mainstream outlets are not the real heirs to the literary aspirations of the original games: that title belongs to the independent efforts of players turned creators working in online communities to create games in the tradition of the classics but with their own visions fully embodied in the style of the genre. The video games of today are often left outside the gates of electronic literature, held

as pulp fiction cousins to the more serious efforts of hypertextual and non-linear experiments. Yet these games offer one vision for the future of literature in a digital age where ideas can move freely from commercial to communal space, and the fact they have gone largely ignored needs to be remedied to understand the role these narratives are still playing in our culture.

The AGS fandom and similar communities have sustained themselves for decades while going largely unnoticed, creating games in parallel to the mainstream. At first, such production often seems to be in one-sided conversation with corporate creation. However over those same decades, fan production has come under closer study and we've come to appreciate that this practice does not occur in a vacuum. The remix culture, as named by Lawrence Lessig, has power, it influences motion of ideas within and beyond a community: "Remixes happen within a community of remixers. In the digital age, that community can be spread around the world. They are showing one another how they can create...that showing is valuable, even when the stuff produced is not" (Lessig, 2008, p. 77) Members of the community play both commercial games and fan games, and while it appears that only other fans play fan-created games, the current trends in production suggest there is a back and forth. Given that: what is the power of Adventure Game Studio? Does it impact the larger world of games?

To understand the scope of the movement, I will look at classic games and their players as contrasted with fan games and their creators. Players have never been passive: though it is tempting to talk about games as narratives in a traditional sense, and these games are even more story-central than most, it is important to keep the role of player distinct from that of reader. As Jesper Juul points out: “The relations between reader/story and player/game are completely different - the player inhabits a twilight zone where he/she is both an empirical subject outside the game *and* undertakes a role inside the game” (Juul, *Games Telling Stories?*, 2001). Juul wrote to discourage the literal projection of film and literary models onto games—a position that emphasizes that active role of the player and the variance among play experiences. The type of authorship that the early adventure games required from players was more metaphorical than literal: the players did not write any of the text, and while their emotional investment was required for the power of the narrative, it was not required for its execution. Yet the current transformation is from player to author. Creators today are emerging from the first generation to grow up with video games embedded in their early experience, and this state—the state of the digital native—allows for a different approach to the process of creation. Previous game creators were shaping the form from the influences of traditional narratives—the games they created were

necessarily compared with literature and film because these were the models available for both inspiration and contemporary parallels.

The blurring of the positions of reader and author is happening everywhere on the web. Posters on YouTube remix, imitate and innovate in short video postings that can respond to one another in linked webs of dialogue. Writers and artists create fanfiction and fanart that keeps a series long “dead” in the hands of its producers alive—witness the large communities around *Harry Potter*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and even the original series of *Star Trek*. Players of massive multiplayer games become co-creators of the game experience, building their characters and creating the social networks and add-ons that make the game a lasting world. The world of *Little Big Planet* expands endlessly beyond its initial platform content with the constant addition of new user-created levels that other users in turn play and respond to. It is tempting to see the adventure game creators as just one more node in this growing culture of co-creation.

Yet there are a few aspects that make this community a microcosm for considering the future of co-creative work. As the community has existed for ten years, continually unified by one main forum and software tool, it is easily defined in its age and scale. While few records have been maintained as to the exact nature of the community throughout these years, the evolution of the creator

has tracked the general demographics. All the produced content is made freely available online, and the community encourages and hosts these works, allowing a better grasp of the range of content. Obviously some projects remain private and impossible to track, while others are begun and reach certain stages without ever being published in completion, but a large archive does exist covering most of the work. Very few forms of co-creative content exist in this type of cluster, particularly in relative isolation. While other software tools exist for creating adventure games none has built this type of presence. The community remains in a state of production throughout all seasons, with new members coming and going and projects posted regularly throughout the year. Some are elaborate games, some single-room affairs without much content, but nearly all are made freely available and commented upon by others.

The forums are continually active: this is not a dead community despite the fact that many of the games that inspired its existence are now unplayable on modern systems. Fans are continually fighting the forces of obsolescence, returning games to a playable state through a number of methods I will be examining throughout. The “viral spiral” continues as fan games are played by and inspire fans; which in turn leads to evolution within the creation tools themselves. The conversation is always going.

Despite this apparently harmonious model, some suspicion of an open-source, creative-commons world even exists within the community itself: the creator of Adventure Game Studio, Chris Jones, refuses to release the source code. He cites his fears that to do so would not only allow others to turn his code towards personal commercial ends but also allow other people to more easily reverse-engineer others' games (AGS FAQ). This decision has in some ways limited the potential of the software, but the ease of adding modular content and creating “expansion packs” for the original toolset allows innovation to continue. The release of the source code would allow for the program to move a step further, but thus far the same people have maintained the software and continued to release new versions of AGS.

The revolution in content creation that has accompanied the move to digital distribution begins with the model of free creation. The games under analysis here were heirs to commercial products but are not themselves inherently commercial—in fact, most are released with no more expectation than to reach a limited player base that mostly consists of other game creators of the same genre. This non-commercial form puts narrative and expression ahead of technological advancement, as creating a game of modern style requires substantial capital and a large team of varying expertise. The new creators of interactive narrative

content in this tradition are not faced with the same challenges as the producers of the classic games. The communities themselves have built and freely shared tools—such as Adventure Game Studio, SLUDGE, and AGI Studio—that transform the process of creation into something manageable by an individual author.

About this Thesis

Throughout the course of this thesis, I will be examining the questions raised by this community and by adventure game fandom in general, focusing on two areas:

1. Why do adventure games have this lasting influence? Which games survive and why? What does this divergence say about game culture and the ordering of the gaming canon?
2. What changes as the player becomes the author? How is society and industry changing with this reordering? How is creation changing both in and outside the industry?

Chapter two examines adventure games in a historical and literary position. How do they work as literature? What are the classics and why? In examining the particular games that have survived, and how those games “work” as literature and interactive narrative, I hope to reveal a sense for why games in this genre are being remade even today.

Chapter three looks at the people who create these games and how the community can be understood in terms of the desire for presentation and continuance of story. There are many forms of fan production within the adventure game community that are not games. Fan art of all kinds persists throughout digital space, and these types of activities keep individual games alive for the players while filling some of the same roles as fan games. Examining the different types of expression reveals the preoccupations of the fan base and the role some of the game characters still play in media-centered lives.

Chapter four and five look at the new games that have been created from within the AGS community. Chapter four takes six months of AGS productions and looks at what was produced and how these new texts relate to the classic works and larger trends. The interplay of these texts is where fandom of individual games ends and fandom of the genre begins. Chapter five considers fan games with direct lineage from commercial work, otherwise known as fan games. These games are more clearly intertwined with a particular source game, but also demonstrate some of the same principles of genre allegiance as the rest of the new games within the AGS community productions.

The reinterpretation of classic games by certain fan games raises questions of copyright and the creative commons. Chapter six considers the legal

implications and the possibilities that emerge in a space where the corporate-communal distinction is abandoned for a wider creative policy. Chapter seven concludes by considering what this community means for larger video game culture and fan culture and how this can change our understanding of the literary potential of video games and the lasting influence of what seems to be ephemeral production.

same respect that we afford the great authors: their games are not yet preserved on the classics shelf of your local game shop or library. When someone such as me starts talking to you about the merits of one particular title or another, we are unlikely to be speaking from the knowledge of a core set of canonized games. Any English teacher will tell you this stalls the conversation and freezes the potential for debate. We can't see the precedents of our own form if we do not know those precedents. We can't envision the games that are to come if we don't know where we are coming from, nor can we find this start point when classic games continually disappear from our reach.

Outside of communities devoted to their favorite classic games, many of us don't even play the games that started the traditions. Canonizing games is difficult: each year our expectations change and the technology advances. Old games are made unplayable by an upgrade in video software, or in hardware, or in operating system. Playing old games becomes work: investing time in finding emulators to make the conditions favorable and fussing with setting upon setting to convince the game to play with sound or in full-screen. Even finding the old games is a challenge. Most games disappear from the shelves within a couple of years, and physical mediums that store games--the CDs and floppy discs--can go obsolete or become unreadable to the system. Try buying a computer today with a

floppy drive reader. You're unlikely to find one: that format and the information it contains are obsolete. Somewhere in my great closet graveyard of old computer parts I have floppies in a range of sizes, computers that could only run Windows 3.1, and even a DOS machine or two. They linger in boxes forgotten and abandoned. I doubt I could get one to run if I wanted to, but still I keep them around, the shells of the games of my past.

I constantly find myself in discussions of what is new and great, yet talk often turns to comparisons with what is old: sure, arcade gaming has come a long way, but that *Pacman* machine in the corner is still there for a reason. The gaming industry overwhelms us with even more sequels than the movie industry can dish out. Once a form of gameplay finds its fan base we anticipate seeing revision upon revision of that same familiar concept brought onto the latest software platform. Like James Bond, old games never fade away: they just keep getting a new look. And just as with James Bond these new incarnations often cannot live up to the original, particularly when the original model is the one we've grown up with. A designer's vision is replaced by a corporate mandate, or an inspired graphic style is abandoned for hollow three-dimensional computer-generated art.

The games that survive in our collective memory are but a sampling of those that were available. So what makes a game a classic? Are the "old" games

still worth playing? What can the industry learn from the titles that the computer industry leaves behind in a constant rush towards that next big thing? How can we create criteria for defining what is classic? With the Internet a graveyard of abandonware, it is hard to decide what is worth saving. Some games garner a great deal of popular attention, while others make a stand based on critical acclaim. Consider the Wordle tag cloud that opens this chapter: those phrases are collected from the conversations of members of the AGS community attempting to answer the question “What is the best adventure game?” Even among fans, consensus is hard to achieve. Certain titles crop up with increasing regularity, like *Monkey Island* or the various Sierra quest games which include *Quest for Glory*, *King’s Quest* and *Space Quest* franchises. Others, like *Day of the Tentacle*, appear in their abbreviated form (DOTT) and stand out a bit from the masses of other popular LucasArts titles. Yet no one small set of games emerges to form an absolute canon, and the influence of age and experience is clear. People use words of personal passion, not of absolute merit. As I must when trying to answer such a question, they turn to memories and emotion to choose a favorite.

A more concrete measure of the canon might be sales and actual statistics of ownership. By these metrics, franchises like *King’s Quest* and *Monkey Island* quickly rise to the top, but those numbers cannot account for illegal downloads

and preserved copies. Another way to consider importance in the canon is through influence, either obvious influence, such as remakes, modern resurrections, and derivative works, or the subtle influence that inspires homage and repurposed elements.

But in many ways, what Harold Bloom said is what matters: the desire to reread, or in this case, to replay. Classics are what we care enough to save from obsolescence. And in the digital form, where institutional archiving and other methods are still now emerging, the community has built its own canon by saving some games from destruction. Other sources have attempted to impose the choice—such as the release of LucasArts treasures collections, etc—but even those are stopgaps, tied to forms of distribution that themselves come with an expiration date. No one has yet solved the problem of digital decay, and no release is truly timeless, so replay ability has to be preserved through continued effort.

Playing Classic Games Today

Just as readers are inclined to remember most fondly the characters encountered in their childhoods, so too are gamers attached to the avatars and game worlds they first ventured through. Lists of top adventure games published today still pay homage to the same classic worlds. Two publishers, Sierra and

LucasArts, came to define the genre. Sierra's classic games are bookends for the rise and fall of the genre. The *King's Quest* series is the most prominent of those, with its traditional medieval fantasy narrative following iconic figure Sir Graham.



Figure 2-2 Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards (Lucasfilm Games, 1987)

A far less traditional narrative from the same company, *Leisure Suit Larry*, brought an early gaming sexual revolution in content and humor and is still remembered for introducing the “adult test” for age validation (Lowe, 1987). The screenshot is typical of the narrative, which spawned a number of sequels, one of which is still scheduled for release in 2009. The figure at center, Leisure Suit Larry, is typical of a Sierra avatar: his form is simple and iconic in this first appearance and stayed true through future installments to these roots, though it would continue to evolve as computer graphic capabilities advanced.



Figure 2-3 Sam and Max (LucasArts 1993)

The classic-era games of LucasArts brought a different twist of humor, pioneering a graphical cartoon style distinct from its predecessors during the transition from text-based to fully graphical games. *Sam and Max* brought animal characters straight from comics to a cartoon style adventure world. Similarly *Monkey Island* cast players in the boots of Guybrush Threepwood, mighty pirate (Gilbert, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, 1990). The series still had installments through the beginning of the decade and it pioneered a system for having fighting in a game without actually having fighting: insult combat. Guybrush Threepwood, is repeatedly referenced in fan games as he presented a recognizable figure of great naiveté. Once the characters in these games were established, players

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usually journeyed with them through installments lasting years—in the case of *King's Quest*, it was a decade before the tale of Sir Graham came to a final halt with a half-hearted last installment that crossed over to the hybrid genre of action-adventure.

The mechanics of the classic adventure game were also pioneered by LucasFilm Games and Sierra On-Line, among others. When these classic adventure games were created, game engines needed to be planned from scratch. Much was learned and derived from the text-based interactive fiction games that preceded graphical adventure games, but the ability to model an interactive graphical environment was then new. The focus on environment interaction required designers to take the traditional verbs of text interactions—push, pull, open, take, talk to and so forth—and revise them to create avatar based play. In 1987, Lucasfilm Games—which would soon be renamed Lucas Arts—released an animated adventure game entitled *Maniac Mansion*, the first to use a gaming engine Lucas Arts would refine for most of their adventure game releases. This gaming engine was entitled SCUMM, or “Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion.” Designed by Aric Wilmunder and Ron Gilbert, the SCUMM gaming engine allows for the easy transfer of an adventure game to multiple platforms, meaning that the game could be played on many different models of personal

computers available at the time without as much difficulty in rewriting the code. The SCUMM interface has a unique character: it places the traditional text-based verb commands for a game environment as options on a menu bar that takes up a third of the screen. This allows for choosing a verb such as “Pick up” and enacting that verb on an object from the game world, such as “Pick up key.” This leaves no need for guesswork in determining what actions are possible at any point in the game. This engine was at the heart of many classic Lucas Arts games: the Sierra engine which developed in parallel offers similar properties, and variations on these basic forms remained in use for the next decade.

The King’s Quest Series

The *King’s Quest* series was the most long-running and successful series of adventure games published. The lead designer of the *Kings Quest* games is Roberta Williams, one of the cofounders of Sierra On-Line with her husband Ken Williams. The series began with *King’s Quest I: Quest for the Crown* which has been released in several different versions: the original version of 1984, a remake in 1990 with improved interface, and an unlicensed remake by fans in 2003. Over this succession, the quality of graphic, sound, and interface varies, but the story remains the same.

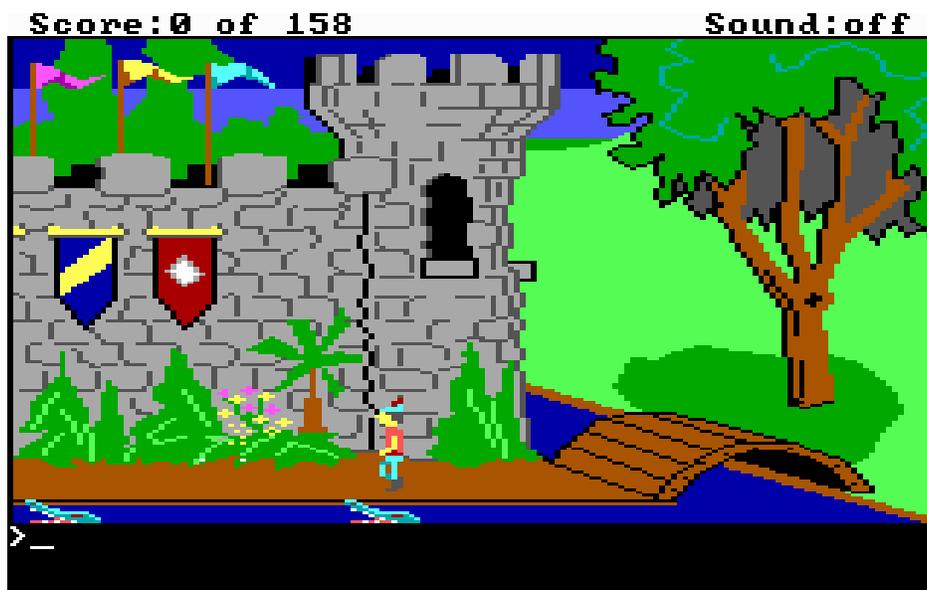


Figure 2-4 The original King's Quest I (Sierra On-line, 1984)



Figure 2-5 Sierra's VGA King's Quest I remake (1990)

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Some of the explanation for the story of *King's Quest* is not even part of the game itself, but is instead relegated to the manual. In what serves as an introductory sequence within the game itself, the king tells Graham of the troubles of the kingdom since the loss of three treasures: a magic mirror, a magic shield, and a chest of infinite gold. If Graham recovers these three treasures, he will inherit the crown and leadership of the kingdom of Daventry, and as the player explores the kingdom it will become clear what a step up this is for Sir Graham, who does not appear to have a house or any belongings of his own upon starting the adventure—he may be a knight, but he doesn't even have a sword.

As the player leads Sir Graham on his adventures, he moves around on each location screen but the player's perspective does not change until he walks on to the next area. The screen that offers the player his or her view into the world is posed in a static view, and when the player moves Graham it is like moving a puppet on the stage. In the earliest version of *King's Quest I*, this was accomplished through text based commands, such as *look at object* or *walk to object*—the later versions change the interface to incorporate the mouse, which offers more graphically based control by allowing players to click on an object of interest. Traveling through this land is not without its perils. Opportunities for death exist from the moment Graham steps out of the castle: walk forward too far,

and he falls in the moat. A few moments later, a moat monster sticks up a grinning green head—wearing Graham’s blue hat. A command box pops up, explaining that “The moat monsters appreciate your good taste.” But no death is final and three options accompany the message: restore, restart, and quit. This is but one of the many ways death can strike Sir Graham. Others include drowning, falling off a cliff, eating a mushroom, and falling out of the clouds or off a beanstalk. Death can be a sudden end to the experience of playing the game, and can also force the player to backtrack through certain obstacles over and over again, re-loading the game to attempt to advance the storyline.

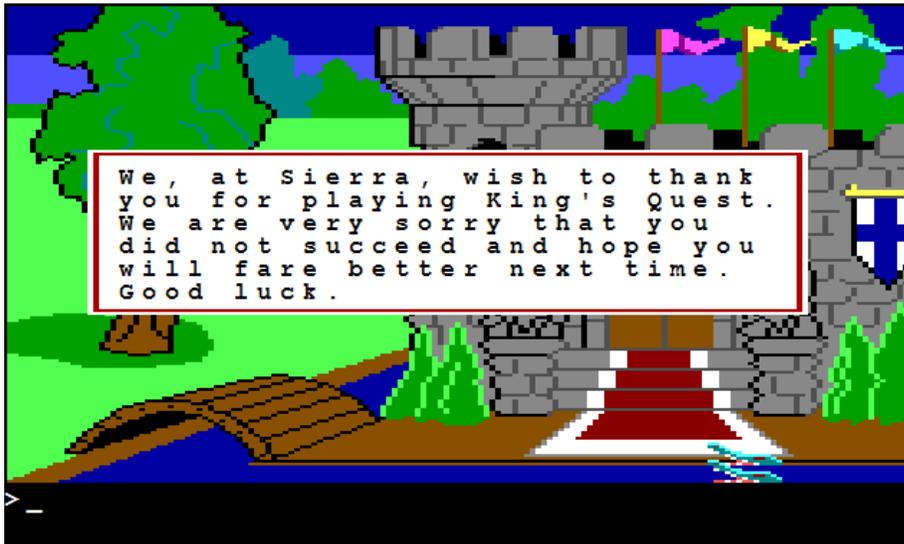


Figure 2-6 An often-encountered death message in King's Quest I (1984)

The game is populated with traditional fantasy creatures: a witch who whisks Graham off and turns him into a gingerbread man (“graham cracker”); an elf with a ring of invisibility; a leprechaun king; a giant who lives in the clouds; and even a fire breathing dragon. However, battle against these enemies is never the focus: instead, they are puzzles to solve. It is possible to engage in violent actions. For instance, the wicked witch can be defeated by pushing her into a boiling pot or the giant can be defeated through a David and Goliath attack with a slingshot. Many of these archetypes would continue through the early games of the *King’s Quest* series—there were eight in total.

Solving a puzzle in *King’s Quest I* involves going between several screens and completing specific tasks. For instance, one of the quest items is guarded by a fire breathing dragon. In order to douse the dragon’s flames, a bucket of water would come in handy. There’s a bucket hanging from the well—but to get that, Graham would have to cut it off the string. Unfortunately, Graham is a knight without a sword—a continuity concern that is never explained—so he has to find a dagger. Where do most folk store weaponry? Well, there’s a dagger under a rock on another screen, of course. And even that poses a challenge: if Graham tries to push the rock out of the way while standing downhill of it, the player will find himself confronted with another taunting death message: "The moving rock

rolls downhill...and right into you. A crushing defeat." Survive the rock, and Graham is still only part way to victory over the dragon—with two other treasures waiting to be uncovered throughout the realm.

An eventual victory in *King's Quest I* can be won by passing all these obstacles and presenting the three treasures to the King. When this victory is won, you—Sir Graham—will be officially heir to the throne. However, the final score might not be at a full 158 points. Even at this early stage of adventure gaming, there are multiple ways around certain obstacles—and some of those paths are worth more than others. For instance, the Jack and the Beanstalk style giant who waits in a castle in the sky can be killed with a slingshot—but it is worth five more points to wait for the giant to go to sleep instead. The system allows for different playing styles or moral codes but rewards one style over another, and this is but one case of how the designer controls player actions. However the game is played, the only conclusion Sir Graham can aim for is ascending to the throne.

One defining aspect of the *King's Quest* series is the development of a storyline where the central family ages and the world expands. The series matures with its protagonist. The first story is the simple uncomplicated quest of a young man sent to complete three tasks and thus win the throne of the kingdom. The

same archetype has been repeated throughout mythology. There is no human complication to this first tale, no human rival for the throne. The opponents are all fantastical creatures: a dragon possesses the magic mirror, a giant holds the magical chest, and a leprechaun king has the magic shield. There is not even any implication of moral ambiguity in “repossessing” these items, as the king has declared them to be goods stolen from him. The depth of story in this first game is limited and so too are Sir Graham’s wanderings. The entire world seems to consist of screens on an 8 by 6 grid: walk off any edge of the grid, and end up on the other side. Keep walking, and the avatar will always return to where he started.

The adventure game genre is an extension to the genre of interactive fiction, a type of game where the story supersedes game play and the action consists of a player acting to reveal more of the narrative until the story comes to an end. Interactive fiction games, broadly speaking, consist of text with at most the addition of a static image, whereas adventure games added graphical worlds and the interaction with an environment through the player’s “avatar”—a viewpoint character who often appears on the screen and acts as an extension of the player’s will. Adventure games are marked by a focus on story and a lack of combat. Most genres of computer games, such as role-playing and first-person-

shooters—games where the player “sees” enemies through the computer screen and destroys them—involve combat where the player is in a direct conflict with many of the characters encountered and solves that conflict through violence. In a “pure” adventure game, violence is not an option: the game does not rely upon swords or guns for progress—as the genre evolved, hybrid games emerged which incorporated elements of combat. These games involve seeing a story through from beginning to end, following the experience of the avatar through a quest that the player is guided on by the designer’s shaping of the world and story. Progress is inhibited not by enemies to be fought but by puzzles to be solved, whether those puzzles involve sneaking past guards, finding a key, or finishing tasks for a character in order to learn a vital clue.

The term interactive, as applied to both the category of interactive fiction and the larger realm of interactive narrative, poses a problem. Clearly, interactions are involved in this style of play: without action, the avatar remains fixed on the screen, and the narrative cannot advance. However, the world of the adventure game is not a sandbox game, a game open freely to player exploration and manipulation, so the quest progression can resemble a lab rat en route through a maze to cheese. While diversions from the course are possible, they usually dead-end, and the player is always herded back on the straight and narrow path towards

the final destination of the narrative. Given these limitations, the player can seem powerless, and the interactions no more independently motivated than that of the rat. The designer is trying to tell a story, but the more linear and unified that story becomes, the more the player is confined and imprisoned within it, left without agency in the world of the game. Too much freedom, and the player is left wandering without guidance or motivation, and the quest loses its power to motivate the player to progress through the world. In *Pause & Effect*, Mark Stephen Meadows offers his definition of interactive narrative: “An ‘interactive narrative’ is a form of narrative that allows someone other than the author to affect, choose, or change the events of the plot” (2003, p. 238). This definition is revealing of the most fundamental characteristic, but it can be almost too inclusive for useful discussion as it brings in everything from the *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels to computer and video games to narrative hypertexts, works that offer very different interactions and progressions.

Choosing Your Adventure

The positioning of adventure games within the category of interactive narrative is somewhat dependent upon the design principles at work in any given game, as often an adventure game is set along fairly set lines in a nodal progression: the difference in gaming experience of two different users is in the

ordering of events, not in the events themselves. Because of this progression, adventure games are closer to what Meadows terms an impositional interactive narrative: “A heavily designed story, such as one of the 1980’s *Choose Your Own Adventure* books...it guides you with strict sets of individual rules that only allow the reader a narrow margin of decisions” (Meadows, 2003, p. 63). This places adventure games close to one extreme of the definition Meadows offers, as the user cannot often substantially rewrite or similarly influence the story—the choices are set, and the user must follow the path or abandon the game.

At the other extreme are what Meadows calls expressive games:

“Expressive...relies less on the series of events and behaves more like architecture: The visitor is allowed to roam freely, explore, investigate, and make changes in the environment. The specifics of a narrative plot are far less defined and, as a result, the breadth of interaction is much wider” (p. 63). Expressive games include some of the progeny of adventure gaming and role-playing game as identified within the realm of massive multiplayer online games such as Lucas Arts early game *Habitat* and successors such as *Everquest* and *World of Warcraft*. In these games, the idea that the user is part of a story is still present; however, what is far more important to the game playing experience is the building of a consistent world experience. These types of games are less likely to inspire the

creation of interactive content, and more likely to lead to the development of metatextual information, guides to the world, videos of player exploits and other fan material based upon the particular journeys each player takes.

Meadows does not intend to offer these standards as a binary descriptor for what is possible in interactive narrative. Instead, he is offering two points on a scale where most games fall somewhat in between. Lurking somewhere near the middle are adventure games such as the defining classic *Myst* from 1993 wherein the user was able to explore a world with great freedom and little guidance, but through certain actions would gradually reveal more of the environment and the overarching storyline. *Myst* was a success not only with habitual players of computer games but also with a surprisingly wider audience, in part because the environment exploration was found to be engaging and intuitive—visual and musical cues are used to progress involvement (Miller & Miller, 1993). *Myst* remains an early example of using narrative devices well-suited to the interactive form—the world tells the story, giving it the impact of myth. The user reveals the story by exploring the world, but has little chance to actually impact the story as it progresses. The balancing of these elements remains one of the challenges in interactive narrative is to become truly literary. Each of the traditional elements of

a narrative experience must be reworked to meet the demands of the experience of play while still retaining cohesiveness.

Telling More Than a Story

In his article on “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” Henry Jenkins notes that narrative is absolutely not where the study of game design can begin and end. Attempting to understand games as merely a product of their story is to miss much of the experience of gaming: “The experience of playing games can never be simply reduced to the experience of a story. Many other factors which have little or nothing to do with storytelling per se contribute to the development of a great games and we need to significantly broaden our critical vocabulary for talking about games to deal more fully with those other topics” (Jenkins, 2002, par. 6). These other elements include the parts of a game that a reviewer might deal with: graphics, environment, the user interface and controls, and the gameplay itself whether oriented toward combat or exploration. The place of narrative in game design is somewhat of an afterthought: “You say narrative to the average gamer and what they are apt to imagine is something on the order of a choose-your-own adventure book, a form noted for its lifelessness and mechanical exposition rather than enthralling entertainment, thematic sophistication, or

character complexity” (par. 2). Finding a complexity in gaming narratives to mirror that found in other media also requires noting that the style of storytelling is truly dependent on the media being used to tell it: “If some games tell stories, they are unlikely to tell them in the same ways that other media tell stories. Stories are not empty content that can be ported from one media pipeline to another. One would be hard-pressed, for example, to translate the internal dialogue of Proust's *In Remembrance of Things Past* into a compelling cinematic experience and the tight control over viewer experience which Hitchcock achieves in his suspense films would be directly antithetical to the aesthetics of good game design” (par. 7).

Jenkins makes the point that translating Proust into the form of a game would be a challenge entirely opposed to the type of story that games or movies are suited to tell. The internal dialogue Proust constructs relies on sensation and memory, as Proust offers tantalizing pieces revealing an individual experience reliant upon the creation of images inside the reader's head. This is a form of projection of the most specific of selves, a character whose every idiosyncrasy is developed over the course of the multivolume novel. When comparing a character like Proust's narrator to the characters normally encountered in games or novels, the narrator is remarkable for his self-awareness. There is no more room for the

reader to fill in the space where the narrator exists. For a character to be playable there must be room for a player to take on part of the persona. An avatar is by necessity incomplete. Yet this does not mean that great literary works do not offer potential gateways into the potential for games—as Guillermo del Toro suggests: “We are used to thinking of stories in a linear way—act one, act two, act three. We’re still on the Aristotelian model. What the digital approach allows you to do is take a tangential and nonlinear model and use it to expand the world. For example: If you’re following Leo[pold] Bloom from *Ulysses* on a certain day and he crosses a street, you can abandon him and follow someone else” (Toro, 2009). This line of thinking pushes the limitations of the original narrative. While a world was present in Joyce’s original work, only one path was followed—even if that path has nonlinear elements, and the viewpoint jumps and turns to suit Joyce’s narrative, the reader cannot control the lens. A game offers the potential to wander off the story’s beaten track.

When Players Become Authors

The type of authorship that the early adventure games required from players was more metaphorical than literal: the players did not write any of the text, and while their emotional investment was required for the power of the narrative, it was not required for its execution. Yet the current transformation is

from player to author. Creators today are emerging from the first generation to grow up with video games embedded in their early experience, and this state—the state of the digital native—allows for a different approach to the process of creation. Previous game creators were shaping the form from the influences of traditional narratives—the games they created were necessarily compared with literature and film because these were the models available for both inspiration and contemporary parallels. The new creators may not have a clear canon of games to reference, but they do have the experience of play from the classic era to influence their work. Formalizing the knowledge of that influence, and preserving the games constantly “reread,” will eventually shape such a canon in the same manner that Bloom observes the more traditional canon in its continual motion.

Chapter 3. Fans and their Creations

Like all old gaps, the one between producer and consumer is closing. Production is more and more incidental to information. The factory depends upon it as much as the DNA particle. The consumer depends on the symbolic data to direct his energies, too. Ideas have become the main ingredient of the new economy. (McLuhan, 1970, p. 138)

Fans preserve the classic adventure games through a number of expressive actions. An act as simple as twittering about a classic game can evoke the images of that game in a reader's mind, bringing a character back to life. The desire to create such moments can be dismissed as nostalgia. Certainly the fact that I grew up playing *Day of the Tentacle*, and in fact had a *Day of the Tentacle* birthday party when I was ten, allows me to subscribe more emotion to a photo like this one than someone for whom the game has no resonance:



Figure 3-1 Tentacle snowman, linked on Twitter by Tobytes

At the same time, the image must have incredible power for “Tobytes” to be the subject of this type of effort.

Putting on a Character

Traditional fan production brings characters or elements of books, movies, games, television and other media into one’s life expression. There are many less-active ways of indicating your fandom: listing a game as your favorite on a Facebook page, putting up virtual button in your social networks that advertise your allegiance to a certain game, keeping an archive of games played and reviews using the Virtual Library tools and sharing that information with friends. But fan *production* starts when the expression of attraction to story becomes an activity in itself, whether that activity involves running a website, writing fanfiction, creating fan art, building costumes and engaging in cosplay, the act of building and taking on the look and persona of a character for creative play, or any one of a number of other practices.



Figure 3-2 Cosplayers dressed as Elaine and Guybrush from Monkey Island (pixfans.com)



Figure 3-3 Cosplayers as the cast of LucasArt's Day of the Tentacle (cosplay.com)

Figure 3-2 and 3-3 are examples of adventure game cosplayers: fans that create costume imitations of character's wardrobes, adopt their mannerisms or personas, and wear them to special events or conventions. Cosplay is particularly interesting in the context of adventure games because this is a literal manifestation of the desire to wear a character's clothes. Becoming a character is part of the fundamental experience of playing an adventure game, and that act of stepping into their shoes is here turned literal. The details of the costumes in both of these images show the level of detail that cosplayers can recreate in their efforts to recreate themselves in their character's images. The identification with characters that a player may feel internally is made external, and other people can see the connection at events of shared fandom.

Making the Digital Physical

The making of physical objects with the qualities of digital characters can bring those characters into touchable space. Some of these types of production are often filled by the commercial world: a popular game might have merchandise or action figures. None of these campaigns tend to reach the levels that the physical production surrounding a popular film is likely to inspire, but adventure games were not without their collectible merchandise—t-shirts, world maps included in games, and even novelizations in the case of the *King's Quest* and *Myst* series.

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Yet none of these objects rival the physical objects produced by fans. Recreating a character in a physical medium requires both mastery of the chosen medium and an intimate knowledge of the character being reproduced. For the production to be successful, the connection between the digital and physical object has to be clear to any fellow fan.



Figure 3-4 Karaimame's Amigurumi Max (flickr.com)

Figure 3-5 Stuffed Tentacles for Sale (<http://de.dewanda.com/product/8009986-Tentakel>)

In all these cases, the new object merely fills the role that it did in the original narrative. The object being produced is original, but it is imitative—while it might be innovative in its pattern, as with the complex creation of a stuffed Max as shown, it is not a true extension of the original narrative. Other fan forms take on the narrative itself and build further: creating back story, imagining futures for

characters, or revising the story entirely and rebuilding the canon. Some of these extensions take pure textual form, as written fanfiction, while others build into graphical narrative that recalls the original. Figure 3.6 shows such an instance, Day After Day of the Tentacle, a webcomic that uses imagery from the original game and repurposes it. The comic’s humor is contingent on a strong memory of the game’s characters, and while it does not require any independent art creation—the elements are all pulled from the game itself—it requires a study and familiarity with the game to make use of the available images.



Figure 3-6 Day After Day of the Tentacle (<http://dadott.reelfilm.com>)

These are all examples of labor-intensive fan productions that should not be confused with piracy, which can also represent a large investment of time and effort. Cory Doctorow noted the similarity in the motivations when observing the “bookwarez” movement: “I witness the early days of the “bookwarez” scene,

wherein fans cut the binding off their favorite books, scanned them, ran them through optical character recognition software, and manually proofread them to eliminate the digitization errors. These fans were easily spending 80 hours to rip their favorite books, and they were only ripping their favorite books, books they loved and wanted to share” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 136). What Doctorow observed is fan labor of another kind, still motivated by passion—the same can be said of the seemingly and even outright derivative works within the game form produced by fans of the adventure game genre.

How is making a game different from these traditional forms of fan production? Perhaps the most obvious distinction is between being a fan of a game versus being a fan of the form itself. Creating a game is building an expression within the form, while these other instances of production take the content and divorce it from its original context and media.

themselves, essentially point and click: even animating sprites is an easy task. This lowering of the barriers to entry allows for an interactive form that is open to a wider possible realm of creators, and it sets an important model for how the creation of interactive narrative content moves from the hands of specialists to the general population. Tools of this kind allow for fan production along the same lines as the revolution in fan filmmaking Jenkins previously chronicled: “Digital technologies have also enabled new forms of fan cultural production...fan filmmakers have used home computers to duplicate effects Lucasfilm had spent a fortune to achieve several decades earlier; many fan films create their own light saber or space battles” (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 143-144). The online distribution of these tools is crucial to their influence. Would-be creators similarly moved by this particular style of game can easily locate both the tools and the specific toolsets inspired by interfaces of the era: even the most specific of interfaces are often available for easy reproduction, with fans posting tools for creating everything from the LucasArts SCUMM engine to the *Gabriel Knight* “talking heads” chat.

Games have seen a similar revolution: an individual can now create at home as a hobby what once took a team working on what were then top of the line machines. Fans engaged in this style of creation are developing what is termed procedural literacy: “Taking full representational advantage of the

computer thus requires procedurally literate authorship; that is, artists and writers who are able to think about and work within computational frameworks. By procedural literacy, we mean the ability to read and write processes, to engage in procedural representation and aesthetics, to understand the interplay between the culturally embedded practices of human meaning-making and technically mediated processes” (Mateas & Stern, 2007). Adventure game development with a graphical interface requires not so much knowledge of programming as it does understanding of this type of interaction. The tools provide the ability to model interactions and set the stage for objects to be moved and manipulated within the environment.

Several different tools constructed by fans have been made available. Of these, the most popular is Adventure Game Studio, a tool for creating games in the classic Sierra style. The interface for Adventure Game Studio is shown below, here with the graphical interface overlay for managing dialogue options with non-player characters. The interface provides for all the standard elements of an adventure game to be managed without any more than simple code. This allows authors to enter who might have been barred from game creation by the level of procedural literacy required to use a more complex tool.

Other free tools exist to serve more advanced or specialized niches in the fan community and do not have the same wealth of created titles as Adventure Game Studio. One of these, SLUDGE, was created by a designer who wanted to increase the flexibility of adventure game environments to allow features he wanted in his own game, *Out of Order*. Other systems—AGAST, Wintermute, Visionaire, Adventure Make—offer everything from the possibility of modeling three dimensional environments to more complex imitations of other classic interfaces. The tools that fans have made available in the promotion of independent adventure game creation allow for a fusion of programming and artistry on a basic level that is still rarely seen in commercial products: as Chris Crawford notes, “programmers and artists face a huge task in bringing computer technology within the reach of artists...artists must commit themselves to working with clumsy, weak, hard-to-learn software in order to show programmers how to make that software less clumsy, more powerful, and easier to use” (Crawford, 2004, p. 174). Adventure Game Studio and other titles are generally created by would-be designers with an interest in both artistry and production and with clear models for success guiding their vision. However, AGS stands out from the crowd, as beyond providing a graphical interface for game production it

provides a community: would-be creators put their efforts online for their fellow enthusiasts to download and comment upon.

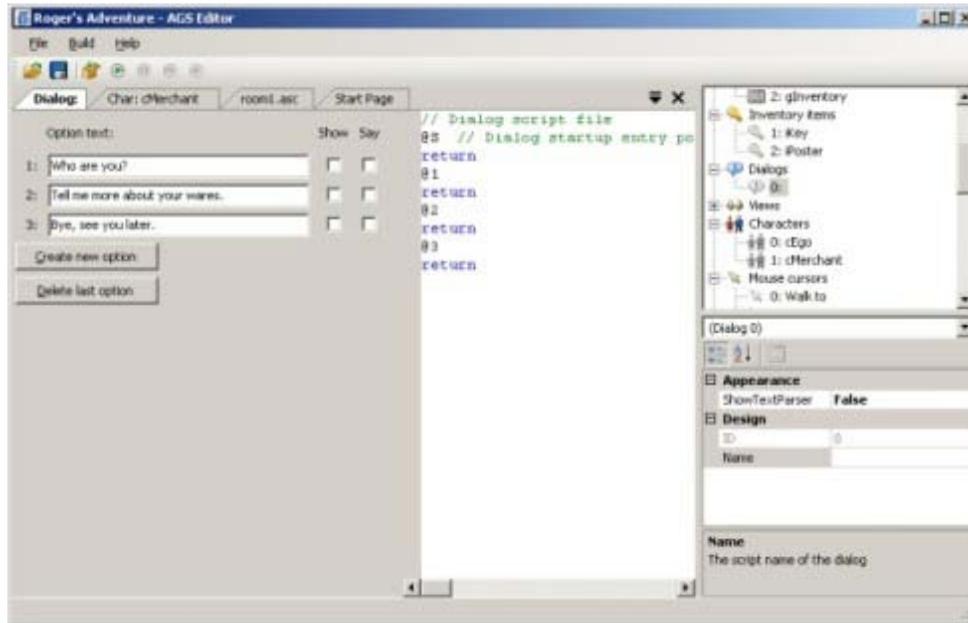


Figure 3-5 Adventure Game Studio's graphical interface

Adventure Game Studio Forums

The central hub of AGS is an active forum where authors find collaborators with different skill sets, seek out beta testers and advice on construction, and talk about games in general. Games with “commercial” intention are relatively rare in this setting. Creators are supposed to be motivated by pure love of the game and perhaps by the desire to create a portfolio that will entice companies their way: the standards of this fan community dictate the

importance of passion. Furthermore it is important to note that the creators of these games are often the players of other fan's titles: playing and creating these games are their own reward. In this, the fan authors have much in common with the "modders" of first-person-shooters, whose work similarly rarely provides them with financial rewards even though they create content: "The precarious status of modding as a form of unpaid labour is veiled by the perception of modding as a leisure activity, or simply as an extension of play. This draws attention to the fact that in the entertainment industries, the relationship between work and play is changing, leading, as it were, to a hybrid form of 'playbour'" (Kücklich, 2005). There is a purity ascribed to noncommercial intent that is itself illusory but appealing: the mystique of the fan author driven only by passion allows a purity of purpose to stand against the accusations of copyright infringement and intellectual property theft. In reality, there is also the promise of recognition from a community, as games created in this way can aspire to win awards given out by the community itself or to be reviewed by one of the websites devoted to the adventure game genre.

With the roles of programmer, artist, and designer all often falling in the hands of one person aided by these development tools, these games are more aptly called "individual games" than independent games. On some occasions

“production teams” of independent designers form to create more ambitious projects or outside talent is brought in for voice acting or music. However, the involvement remains that of the hobbyist pursuing an individual vision, not a corporate goal. The most successful of these designers must eventually overreach the bounds of the established tools, as the creator of SLUDGE acknowledged when he found his project too demanding for the existing system—“procedural authorship is required to take full advantage of the representational power of the computer as an expressive medium...new media practitioners without procedural literacy are confined to producing those interactive works that happen to be possible to produce within existing authoring tools” (Mateas & Stern, 2007, p. 207). Yet even the amateur can find possibilities in what those tools encourage and provide for, and the availability of these tools is part of what opens the door to a larger personal game community. The forums for AGS display records of 200 posts a day, and each month several posts announce the release of newly completed personal games (AGS, 2009). The community’s range of output displays the diversity of a forum with, as of January 7th, 2009, over four thousand active forum members (AGS). While that number is relatively small when considered in the context of Internet participation or the gaming community at a whole, each person can add their own strand to the web of available works.

Chapter 4. Adventure Game Studios Productions

The Internet is enabling a further decentralization in who gets to make art, and like each of the technological shifts in cultural production, it's good for some artists and bad for others. The important question is: Will it let more people participate in cultural production? Will it further decentralize decision-making for artists?

(Doctorow, 2008, p. 79)

The Adventure Game Studio community, of which Rebecca Clements is a member, noted that as of March 2004: “The actual average age on the forums at present is 22 years old. There is, of course, a reason for the majority age group being young adults - people that are aged about 20 now would have played games like *Monkey Island* and *King's Quest* when they were children, and are now old enough to want to recreate the games” (AGS, 2009). This self description acknowledges the impact the classic games have made and continue to make on the AGS productions, which are themselves created with an interface designed to allow work expanding upon the tradition. The games of the classical era of the genre are continually evoked, both by personal games produced today and by rereleases, re-masterings, and extensions of the classic universes. The patterns of production in these two genres show the transference of creative control from the original corporate authors to fans. The heritage of adventure games both in particular titles and in the general form has become a playground for new content

creation. Game making as a cultural production does not belong to corporations and the center of innovation is quickly moving to these outer circles.

Examining personal interactive narrative projects outside of the corporate frameworks still shows a reliance on a folk art tradition. A study of one segment of output, the games produced using the free Adventure Game Studio over the course of six months, reveals the different facets of these creations. Particularly interesting is the creation of an internal heritage network: a series of games, based on an original collaborative creation, that continue to build on a canon produced within the community. These projects, even when created by an individual, reveal a shared world of a different sort where the fan-creations in turn spawn creation, where the individual productions take the place of corporate productions at the center of a network. Most importantly, the games I will be examining draw attention to the potential of this form to bring with it innovations in areas that the commercial world is less likely to hold of value.

Digital Folk Art

Like modders, fanfiction writers, or the creators of fan vids, the new co-creators of these “neoclassic” adventure games are participants in a fusion of play and labour. They produce content without reimbursement for their time or efforts.

That content is in turn made freely available, easily downloadable by fellow

enthusiasts through communal hubs like that of the Adventure Game Studio website. Sometimes these releases are even in clear competition with the commercial endeavors of the primary creators, as with the *King's Quest* remakes and Sierra's re-release of the series. However, this competition goes mostly ignored—the remakes belong to one world while the re-releases occupy another. This is best understood as a symptom of Lessig's notion of the hybrid economy, where distinctions are maintained between an economy of "sharing" and an economy of "commerce" (Lessig, 2008, p. 177). The remakes build the value of the games, keeping them alive and active, even if the audience is small. The commercial economy, on the other hand, is more concerned with ownership: while authorship may have passed to the fans, ownership remains in the hands of the creators. Were the fan creators to try and profit from their remakes, they would no longer be in the spirit of sharing and would present a clearer threat to the commercial value of the brand: as it is, their efforts actually add to the commercial. Yet despite the lack of monetary rewards fan co-creators persist and through their authorship continually re-create the worlds of their devotions through a practice of a still-evolving tradition of folk art gone digital. The tools of the trade, with their baseline interfaces and engines providing for the same style of interactions as the early games of the classic era, encourage both adherence to

the standards of the genre as well as deviation and further expression through personal consideration of the potential points of departure of the adventure game experiences. Whether that authorship results in new personal games following original storylines or in so-termed “fan games” emerging directly out of works of the classic era, these authors are participating in a post-commercial venue of production that encourages the pro-active remix of cultural artifacts as part of the building of digital folk art.

These productions do carry with them the legacy of the formal constraints of the classic era systems the tools were modeled upon. The structures of earlier games were inextricably tied to the restraints of the system, as Hutchison addresses in his study of two pivotal games of the early nineties: an adventure game, *Myst*, and a first person shooter, *Doom*. Both games were released in 1993 on a computer platform not yet capable of handling strong advances in graphics. The designer's solution to this problem would, Hutchison argues, set precedents that would shape subsequent environmental design even as the platforms themselves advanced (Hutchison, 2008). This led to certain models, including the room-based system that adventure games would adopt with the playable space being explored scene by scene and subject to the limits of the screen. An illusion of an extensive world was created by transitioning when the player's viewpoint

character moved off screen and into a new “room.” Such elements remain an influence on personal games, as many of the games being replicated, extended, or remembered are from this same era—this despite the fact that the technology itself no longer imposes such limits. Hutchison's suggestion that the similarities between current games and these predecessors go beyond aesthetics into fundamental dynamics and interactions offers a gateway for discussing the idea of game design as a progressive folk art, with each new formal structure building upon the assumptions of the previous.

Exemplars of the Form

While there are no editorial forces directly at work in the production of personal games, there are editorial venues and systems of merit-recognition that allow some games to reach a wider audience. Certain projects are more talked about within the adventure game community—games that received accolades or response on multiple websites or that were given various awards. Some projects are granted recognition because they are reflective of the community: a recently released personal game, *Adventure: An Inside Job*, is built as a swan song for the classic era, and thus holds a strong appeal for other player creators. The premise of the game is that all the characters from unreleased adventure games—games that were abandoned or had their funding cut—are gathered in a world built out of

classic sprites and screen shots. The game's creator, Akril, noted that "In some ways, ATIJ can be considered a fangame, which would make it one the few fangames that includes ripped graphics and music yet isn't a sequel, a remake or a spinoff" (Akril15, 2008).

This strange status—a derivative game that is not a spinoff—allows the game to exist as a critique of corporate production. Through its very premise it draws its material from truly abandoned games, the type of games where most of the content exists only within the inaccessible confines of the corporate vault. The game is not only a tribute but a satire, a reminder of the potential lost with each abandoned idea that is allowed to languish, incomplete.



Figure 4-1 Screenshot from *Adventure: An Inside Job* displaying the range of "forgotten" characters (Akri15, 2008)

Akri1's intention was "to appeal to people who not only love adventure games, but have played too freaking many adventure games" (Akri15, 2008). Akri1's wording is interesting: she suggests that appreciation of a game like this, with its critique on the death of the genre, is only possible for those who have passed a certain threshold where they have been immersed in the adventure game canon. The game would be difficult to parse for a newcomer to the genre, as much of the humor and gameplay depends upon recognizing the intertextuality of the content. Yet the implications go beyond mere familiarity—the number of references on screen at in time in Akri1's world rival those of a *Family Guy* episode and

encourage the player to probe the depths of their own memory to be “in” on the joke.

Intertextual explorations are common to the narratives of personal games. *Out of Order*, released by Hungry Software in 2000, uses a system called SLUDGE—a toolset that the creator designed entirely to meet the needs of his game. *Out of Order*'s main character, Hurford Schlitzing, “stuck in this strange environment with only his pajamas and teddy-bear slippers,” recalls Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a novel once reworked into a piece of interactive fiction (LaVigne, 2004). The artistic style of the game is not particularly evolved from the traditional style of the genre. The cartoon graphics, as shown, are at a slightly higher resolution than the early games. The line work adds to the whimsical atmosphere throughout Hurford's journey, which is both surreal and ordinary at the same time—there are echoes of familiar cartoon worlds.



Figure 4-2 Out of Order

Certain intertextual references, such as the stranding of Hurford in space in his pajamas and the occasional turn of phrase, are impossible to deny. Such connections add to the enjoyment of other fans in spotting the connection to the classics. This again invokes the form most recently popularized by *Family Guy*. Viewers of the postmodern cartoon *Family Guy* are presented with a process of symbolic encoding that is heavily reliant on the texts of the seventies and eighties among other sources. Interpreting the episodes fully requires knowledge well beyond the closed text of a single episode or even of the series as a whole. To merely quantify *Family Guy's* influences, such as *The Simpsons* and various family sitcoms, does not begin to reveal the symbols at work in the text. The

process of decoding can be attempted without awareness of the works being referenced, but such an interpretation is incomplete: in the semiotic model of interpretation, knowledge of the cultural encyclopedia and related texts is essential to decoding meaning. This destroys the notion of the writers as creating something new: instead the writer's only power is in a textual collage, in the ability to create "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146).

Intertextuality is at its most basic the notion of the path which connects meaning to previous texts. These connections do not need to be the conscious intention of the author; indeed, in the world of literary criticism, such connections are drawn while paying little attention to the author's intent. However, in *Family Guy* these references are conscious and part of the defining character of the show—this is the hyper-commercial transformation that intertextuality has taken. References in *Family Guy* are thus a case of intentional intertextuality: the show's writers are, as Barthes puts it, orchestrators of the "already-written." The reader is required to participate in this self-conscious form of intertextuality: in the hyper-commercial realm, being "in" on the joke creates part of the essential pleasure of viewing. Similarly, the intertextuality of *Out of Order* is intentional, and implies its own audience that is willfully held separate from a traditional commercial

audience: an understanding of science fiction, a presence as part of the fan game community, and a relationship with more traditional literary texts all allow a player to gain more from the game—the text knows its own reader.

Even more grounded in referential narrative is a 2004 game entitled *Cirque de Zale*, a game created by Rebecca Clements, who is also notable as one of the few known female creators working within the realm of personal games. *Cirque de Zale's* graphics are closer to the classic games of early Lucas Arts with a low resolution and simple color palette. The game, shown here, centers on a boy sent through a portal to a fantasy world, where that kingdom supposes him to be the answer to all of their prayers. The expectations set by the genre are very clear: in the main games being parodied, namely the *King's Quest* and *Quest for Glory* series, the boy would promptly assume his destined role as hero.



Figure 4-3 Cirque de Zale's Monkey Island style interface

Instead, Zale dedicates himself to starting a circus, noting that rescuing the princess sounds dangerous and generally like a bad idea. When at one point he is kidnapped by the same person who captured the princess because of that expectation that he'd fulfill the role, he walks right past the trapped princess and leaves her to her fate: he doesn't have the key and he can't free her even if he wanted to. The player can try any approach possible, but the game will not let the player rescue the princess. She's left to rot in the cell, contrary to the classic era assumptions about the role and place of a hero. Players of the old *King's Quest* games who remember playing the hero and rescuing kingdom and princess have flocked to play through Zale's quest, and the designer described her intention to

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evoke the tradition of Lucas Arts adventures: “I wanted people to get a real sense of nostalgia as they played it, which is exactly the kind of game I'd love to play” (Manos, 2004).

The creator’s statement here is ironic: *Cirque de Zale* is nothing like the old games, and Zale’s antics little resemble that of the traditional game heroes who always accepted their quests. The game is a rejection of the commercial formula even as it claims to be a homage—it is evoking a sense of nostalgia, perhaps, but that nostalgia is colored with a realization that the audience has grown and their expectations have changed. The story is like a postmodern folktale retelling that rejects the paths and values of the original tale even as it pays homage to it by viewing the original as worthy of such a reinterpretation.

Another *Adventure Game Studio* release, *A Tale of Two Kingdoms*, shows more concern with graphics and convincing atmosphere—the same elements more common to commercial innovation. *A Tale of Two Kingdoms* is the creation of a Dutch team of experienced designers. The game includes wandering non-player characters and allows for multiple endings, an element that remains challenging for any game to incorporate convincingly. Part of the convincing atmosphere is in creating a world for nonlinear play: this is particularly difficult when presenting a fairy tale world, which is familiar territory for most gamers.

Part of the atmosphere of the game is provided by the imagining of non-player characters as people going about their everyday lives, a feature that one reviewer commented upon as unusual in this type of game: “I was particularly charmed by the town, where you see many game characters and "extras" strolling around, going about their business as you might expect in a real town. This is a marked contrast to so many games that are full of abandoned villages, characters who just hang around in one spot waiting for you to come and talk to them, and huge metropolises that never actually seem to have anyone in them” (MacCormack, 2007).



Figure 4-4 Tale of Two Kingdoms

The games to which the reviewer is referring could easily be games typical of the classic era, of the personal games community, or even of modern commercial games—the stationary character is a model established by the limitations of classic systems that has now become a familiar pattern. The game has the feeling of what Sierra might produce today had they not abandoned the genre: it is not a fan game in the way that a direct *King's Quest* sequel might be classified, but it is highly informed by those classics in design and play. Such a game appears to be the truest form of homage, bearing much more resemblance to the canon than *Cirque de Zale*, but even it demands a trajectory of innovation. The creators are not merely reproducing that which commercial creation once built—they are expanding upon it and in the process even redefining the very mold.

Perhaps the most innovative individual game in recent years is an experimental game entitled *What Linus Bruckman Sees When His Eyes Are Closed*. Vince Twelve's adventure game designed around two stories occurring at once. The designer explains the concept: "If someone could read my mental design document they would have read about two worlds, completely unconnected except by gameplay, as different as possible in mood, art, sound, and writing. One, a sad film evocative of a Kurosawa classic except rooted in Japanese mythology, the other an upbeat Saturday morning cartoon about an alien

working at an interstellar burger joint. The player would play the two games simultaneously” (Twelve, 2006). Gameplay in *Linus Bruckman* is true to this vision of connected narratives. The difference in styles between the two linked games is staggering: the highly cartoon imagery of the one contrasts with the surreal mysticism of the other. The AGS community gave *Linus Bruckman* their award for innovation, acknowledging the move towards a direction very different from the classic era games.

A game like *Linus Bruckman* is no longer concerned about a dialogue with commercial works: it is pushing the limits of the form as art. Such a game would be as comfortable in the discussions of critics of electronic literature as it is in the AGS community: it might even be there that it finds its aesthetic compatriots. I return to Lessig’s thoughts on communities of remixers whose: “showing is valuable, even when the stuff produced is not.” (Lessig, 2008, p. 77) *Linus Bruckman* is valuable, both in its showing and in its innovations. It transcends the expectations of the amateur creator and of the limitations of this type of free tool, reminding its audience that traditional production has its own set of limits that a creator in this medium can defy. This does not resemble any game of the classic era of adventure games—it redefines the linearity and progression of the form in a way that fragments and unifies its player’s attention.



Figure 4-5 The dual screen narratives of Linus Bruckman (Vince Twelve, 2006)

Design Trends in Personal Games

During the period between January 2008 and June 2008, thirty-eight freely downloadable games, as detailed in the appendix, were announced as completed on the AGS completed games forums. This list is representative only of those games where the creator chose to make an announcement, and therefore does not include games produced outside of the AGS toolset or announced within different venues. However, the completed games forum is a popular tool for gaining an

audience. Every game post within the forum is responded to, often with pointers about bugs, commentary, and even offers for translation. Thus, the forum is both an ideal tool for announcing the release of a game and for tracking the progression within the community. The information in the appendix reflects the details of these thirty-eight games as indicated by their postings and downloadable versions, and what follows is an analysis of the narrative trends in personal games based upon this sampling.

Of the thirty-eight, only nine can be clearly termed fan games, or games that are clearly derivative of other narrative works and in fact define themselves by that textual link. The first, *Maniac Mansion Episode 40* by Rayman, is part of an extended series of short games that keep the characters from the original Lucas Arts game participating in various further mysteries. This game is not particularly inventive in story, as the puzzle is finding the key to allow two of the characters to escape the cellar, but it reflects the original series in style and in humor. The second, AgentBauer's *Space Quest IV.5* accomplishes a familiar task of fan games by filling in the missing interlude between *Space Quest IV* and its official sequel. The *Indiana Jones* franchise, which was explored in adventure games during the classic era by LucasArts, is taken as a starting point by Rob Shattock in *Indiana*

Jones - Coming of Age. The narrative chosen for extension is not from the adventure games as instead the story takes its cue from the films.

The other examples of fan games are examples of narratives that rework characters and settings, both classic and modern. Ghost's *Once Upon a Crime* is not a traditional fan game, but it does, like the pop culture phenomenon Shrek, among others, make use of familiar fairytale archetypes re-interpreted. Similarly, Elen Heart's *Once Upon a Time* is a more traditional fairy tale world retelling presenting mostly well-known characters and settings. Marion's *James in Neverland* offers beautiful environments to present a Neverland inspired not by Disney's *Peter Pan* but more so by the original novel. Another fan game from the same creator, *Dread Mac Farlane 2*, is an adaptation of a French comic book by the same name—it is also the sequel to a game also created by Marion. Both games also incorporate original elements, but the primary focus of Marion's work is in reinterpreting narratives. The remaining fan games show closer adherence to the narratives of their source material: Ultra Magnus's work reaches to the medium of television not only for inspiration but also for graphics and to some extent narrative. His game, *The New Kids*, takes the Icelandic television show "Lazytown" and uses it as a framework. Games like this are a sign of the international scale of the AGS community: even though it is small in numbers, it

draws from a global influence. Skerrigan's *Doctor Who - Episode 0* draws upon the familiar world of the television and radio program for a two room game, the narrative of which could translate easily into the *Doctor Who* canon.

Reality-On-The-Norm

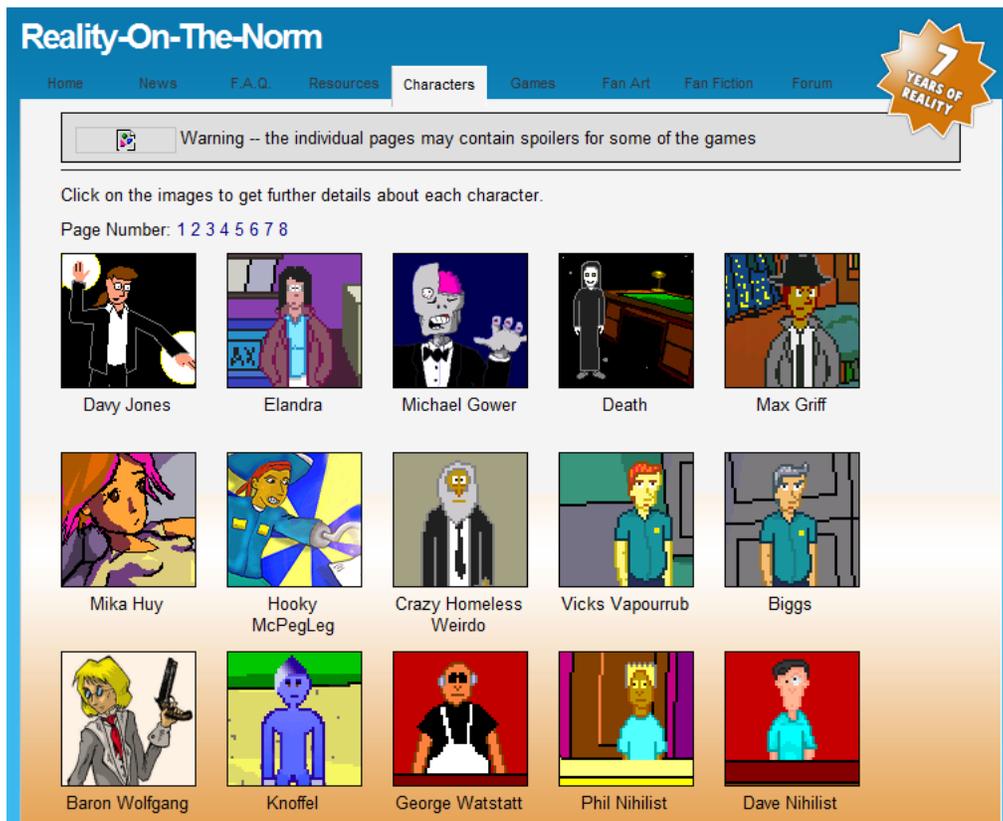


Figure 4-6 Reality-On-The-Norm character gallery (2010)

Among the remaining original titles, some are related to one another but not to any external text. These games are referred to as RON games, or the

Reality-On-The-Norm games. Members of the Reality on the Norm project describe the collective as involving “the creation of a central environment - in our case, the Reality-on-the-Norm town. Each member of the team creates his or her own game as a chapter to be added to all the previously achieved ones, thus creating a collective and diverse "book" of several independent yet coherent chapters” (Reality-On-The-Norm, 2008). Participating in the RON games requires acceptance from the community, which mandates certain rules. For instance, authors are not allowed to kill anyof characters within the town, nor are they allowed to claim the work of others as their own. The collective provides backgrounds and characters as well as a persistent narrative that is continually expanding. Two RON games were released during the six months: Brentimous's *Rock-A True Story*, and Bitby's Reality on the Norm game, *Au Naturel*, one of the few games clearly identified as for a mature audience.

The RON community even acts as the center of its own creations. The page features fanfiction and fanart, some of which juxtaposes the RON characters with icons from classic adventure games:



Figure 4-7 Fan art featuring RON's Dave and Monkey Island's Guybrush Threepwood

The central hubs of the RON community include work by the “original” creators of the concept and fans who have joined the efforts later side by side. The shared universe resembles commercial worlds, like Marvel or DC’s comic universes or Wizard of the Coast’s Dragonlance and Forgotten Realms, but those series put barriers on their expansion. Not just anyone can create a new extension to the universe: their efforts have to be approved by the intellectual property holders, and only authorized projects add to the canon of the commercial universe. RON

demonstrates how such a universe can exist and thrive outside of ownership when expansion is open to all who desire.

The remaining games of the six observed months reveal a range of narratives, graphics, genres, and even languages—games were released in original languages including French, Italian, and German. This again shows the global reach of the community, and the cooperation across languages that allows for frequent translations of fan games for other audiences. Among these, a few stand out for offering original elements, particularly in terms of artistry. Creamy's *Bob Escapes* offers art that is unusual within the digital medium, as the settings appear to have been drawn by hand using colored pencils, while Eugene's *The Oracle* heads the opposite direction with backgrounds taken from photos shot on location. *Nanobots*, a collaboration between The Ivy and Vince Twelve, is a game of particular high quality created by two who might be considered among the stars of the AGS community. Vince Twelve is also responsible for *What Linus Bruckman Sees When His Eyes Are Closed*. The narrative of *Nanobots* pits tiny self-aware robots against an evil professor and thus plays with perspective and philosophies of artificial intelligence. Ivan Dixon's *Sydney Treads the Catwalks*, which focuses on the life of a homeless man thrust into the spotlight, is clearly the work of an illustrator, as a trip to his website confirms. However, his work is further

complicated by a complex relationship with his own transmedia presence--the game is an adaptation of a comic that he created. These games show the constant focus on innovation of all kinds, a reminder that this is not a stagnant place of nostalgia but a community where new canon-worthy works might form entirely outside the purview of commercial media.

While the audiences for the games released varies greatly—some are admitted by their creators to be intended originally for their own family or friends, while others aspire to draw in fans of particular genres or of other narratives—none goes entirely ignored on the AGS forum. The proportion of fan games to original creations suggests a larger interest in original narrative, even if those narratives themselves often acknowledge their debt to other sources. The imagery of these games laid out side by side also reveals the variation of approaches, as the lack of editorial control means that games of any genre, style, or quality can be brought to the attention of the community. However, the community itself acts as a censor, and games that are bug-ridden or show insufficient craft are quickly forgotten. Games that attract an audience continually rise to the top of the forums and are kept alive in the archives of the community game list to form, perhaps, the classics of the personal games genre itself.

Chapter 5. Fan Games

Anyone who thinks remixes or mash-ups are neither original nor creative has very little idea about how they are made or what makes them great. It takes extraordinary knowledge about a culture to remix it well. The artist or student training to do it well learns far more about his past than one committed to this (in my view, hopelessly naïve) view about “original creativity.” And perhaps more important, the audience is constantly looking for more as the audience reads what the remixer has written. Knowing that the song is a mix that could draw upon all that went before, each second is an invitation to understand the links that were drawn—their meaning, the reason they were included.
(Lessig, 2008, p. 93)

Devoted fans have made use of the available tools to reconstruct entire games, often with basic improvements to allow them to stand the test of time. These new versions are more playable than the old, as the games will run on more modern systems and can be made available through a simple downloadable executable. A number of classic games have undergone these fan treatments and been brought back to the attention of players new and old. Some are merely repackaged with enhanced graphics and interface, others are fully reworked where fans have tried to patch up holes in the original plot or provide music and voice acting where there was originally only static and text. At first, these creators might appear to be completely losing any elements of “original creativity, but as Lessig reminds us even a process of remixing can be a creative act. That metaphor

can be extended to reconstruction: even the most faithful of these remakes includes a point of view, from the decision to recreate the game at all to every choice the creator makes to rework the original intent and expand from the starting framework. These games are important both for the preservation of the gaming heritage through a form of digital archiving still not common within the industry itself and for providing signposts to the community's own timeline of game innovation and heritage.

Nostalgia in gaming is common: signs can range from the availability of *Pac Man* car seat covers and mirror danglers, to live action costumed recreations of games in the street, to the popularity of games re-released or preserved from past decades. Suominen notes that the very playing of, and thus preservation of, nostalgic games—what he refers to as retrogaming—is part of a memory system of gaming: “the Internet seems to be a kind of a central processing unit of the memory machine in today's retrogaming. In addition to recollection narration, the Internet also makes many other forms of nostalgia possible. A gamer's personal work and their consequent 'inside' position are central in this kind of action” (Suominen, 2007). Fan games fall under the category of “retrogaming” that Suominen is examining, and the adventure game remakes of these communities are an example of an attempt at preservation that shares some commonality with

the emulators and videos Suominen discusses. But this is a form of productive nostalgia—it is not the act of clinging to bygone cultural artifacts but rather the reconstruction of those artifacts to fit new needs and desires. As with the innovative works of the more clearly “original” creators within the community, the focus of these creators is not just on reproducing an old experience—for that, they could turn to emulators and look to the original game. Instead, they are building something new, acting as producers of an experience that will not merely be a translation of the old.

The fan culture of adventure games is not limited to recreations and extensions of past games, but these projects make up a dominant subgenre within the community. The community keeps the folklore they value alive: “As more and more amateur works have entered into circulation via the Web, the result has been a turn back toward a more folk-culture understanding of creativity. Historically, our culture evolved through a collective process of collaboration and elaboration. Folktales, legends, myths and ballads were built up over time as people added elements that made them more meaningful to their own contexts” (Jenkins, 2003). Works of personal game design begin as part of the extension of a beloved folklore, and remain in a sense a fandom taking the genre and recasting them with the fan’s beliefs and ideas: “Every author faces a loss of intentions and integrity

of their original story. That is a part of the business. Once a novel is published, as the word publication indicates; it belongs to the public. How consumers relate to it in the realm of fandom is a reflection on the author's ability to connect with their audience” (Hay, 2002). Projects that restore classic games gain attention in large part due to the desire of the community to see the gaming experiences of their childhood and inspiration preserved—but the interest in the remake itself, and in the creators involved, suggests they are also motivated by seeing the familiar become something new. Both the direct sequels and re-imaginings of classic-era commercial adventure games and the original storytelling of the personal game author can be better understood through the light of fan studies, as these games celebrate a very particular heritage of form and narrative best understood as an evolving digital folk art.

Remaking versus Modding

Copyright law has not prevented the fans from taking ownership of such games, including canon classics from LucasArts and Sierra, for recreation and expansion. Their efforts are distinguished from the more accepted practices of “modders,” or players who build new levels and content for games, by their intentions and product. Modders build on the original game, melding their efforts with the original developers and extending the content in a way that is of benefit

to the original copyright holder: “multiplayer FPS [first-person-shooter] games are “co-creative media”; neither developers nor player-creators can be solely responsible for production of the final assemblage regarded as “the game”, it requires the input of both” (Morris, 2003). The player-creators that Morris describes are active creators of new content in the same way as the authors of the adventure game community, but the first-person-shooter games in question have embraced the practice of creation. The developers rely upon this created content to continue to expand playability options within their game, and are secure in the knowledge that these mods are unplayable without ownership of the original copyrighted games. They are free to create as long as they remain part of the commercial economy, but they are allowed to claim ownership of their mods and to take pride in creation. This is crucial to keeping Lessig’s hybrid economy function: as Lessig notes, “If those within the sharing economy begin to think of themselves as tools of a commercial economy, they will be less willing to play” (Lessig, 2008, p. 177). Commercial products use gamers as creators of free content all the time, from the tutorials and websites that guide players through to actual mods and in-game levels, but they participate freely under an understanding of the game as somewhat “theirs” thanks to their contributions. When changes are made to a game that such player-creators are heavily invested

in, as with *World of Warcraft*, those same players often take offense at seeing the world they have helped shape changed without their consent. Finding balance of power in these shared spaces is a continual challenge of the hybrid economy.

Fan creators of the classic adventure game movement can also be identified as co-creators, as they are in dialogue with the work of the original developers. The crucial distinction between fan authors in the adventure game community and modders in the FPS community is that the fan authors are not endorsed by those developers themselves. Fan authorship co-opts material from the existing games without requiring the game itself. A game authored by a fan stands on its own and is playable as a complete structure. It is informed by the original, and may even be an exacting remake of the original, but it is developed separately. While the work of modders is tied to the original game by a web of interdependence, the games created by fan authors can even go so far as to replace the original game and render ownership of it irrelevant. The work of personal game creators, a subset of the fan authors, is less problematic in that such works tend to owe considerations of form or concept to the classics but not actual copyrightable characters, settings, or narratives.

Devoted fans have made use of the available tools to reconstruct entire games, often with basic improvements to allow them to stand the test of time.

These new versions are more playable than the old, as the games will run on more modern systems and can be made available through a simple downloadable executable. A number of classic games have undergone these fan treatments and been brought back to the attention of players new and old. Some are merely repackaged with enhanced graphics and interface, others are fully reworked where fans have tried to patch up holes in the original plot or provide music and voice acting where there was originally only static graphics and text. Who is the true author of a fan remake? Certainly the original designer retains the credit for creating a world worth re-mastering. As for the fans, they are often hesitant to take any credit at all: the team responsible for many Sierra remakes as Tierra simply call themselves the Anonymous Game Developers—although they have made their names public and their projects are widely known. Yet anonymity is not a protection, nor does the removal of a name remove the fan from the murky territory of shared authorship. The fan author is engaging in a one-way dialogue with the works of the previous creators: the fan is remaking the classic game, and the original creator is now silent in the remake's direction. This is perhaps best understood as a practice that extends Aarseth's consideration of the adventure game genre as folk art to a new era where fan creators engage in practices more in parallel to those of the early commercial creators, while the commercial creators

have moved more completely into corporate production: fan works are put in to the communal tradition, and new works emerge that continue and expand upon that tradition (Aarseth, 1997, p. 100). Who is the ultimate author of the work? All the creators involved in the practice. There need be no notion of one auteur, of one author working alone to create a masterpiece.

Rebuilding the Maniac Mansion

One of the first great adventure games, *Maniac Mansion*, languishes in the Lucas Arts vault. It was last released as a playable application on a computer within its own sequel, *Day of the Tentacle*. Even that version was riddled with bugs: launching the game often crashed the system if it was too far advanced in hardware. A German enthusiast, known online as “LucasFan,” put in hours converting the game to *Maniac Mansion Deluxe*. Lucasfan’s *Deluxe* is a freely available and improved version of the original *Maniac Mansion*. LucasFan created the game using Adventure Game Studio, the aforementioned fan tool for fashioning games in the style of the classics. He used as a foundation the old environments and modeled anew the avatars and characters. Unlike the old version, which was constructed for the DOS operating system, this new version is playable on a range of computers and has in effect archived the *Maniac Mansion* experience for gamers present and future. The impulse LucasFan is drawing from

is similar to the desire to reread that Harold Bloom notes is essential to the definition of the canon. While the Sierra fan co-authors faced legal consequences, LucasFan even earned an endorsement from the game's creator—if not from its copyright holders: "I think it's incredible," said *Maniac Mansion* co-creator David Fox. "When we first released these games, we figured people would be interested for two or three years, max. The fact people still care enough to put this kind of work into the games, it's amazing" (Ogles, 2004). David Fox can be credited with recognizing his own work as part of a tradition of folk art. He accepts and invites the extension of his creation: the story of *Maniac Mansion*, to him, did not end when his creative team shut the final door and put it in a box to ship.



Figure 5-1 The original and deluxe interfaces for *Maniac Mansion*

The two images here side by side show the improvements LucasFan made in revisiting the game. The image on the left is the original version: the spirit of the game is preserved while the quality is enhanced. The image on the right is a screenshot from the new version, where LucasFan incorporated the interface from *Maniac Mansion*'s sequel, *Day of the Tentacle*, and enhanced the graphics. He also included an easy interface for transitioning among the playable characters and enhanced the verb recognition. The game now reaches the standard of design set by the Lucas Arts sequel, a quality that was not yet possible when *Maniac Mansion* was originally produced and the SCUMM engine that powers Lucas Arts classic games was only in early development.

While fellow fans heaped their praises upon LucasFan's efforts, the copyright holders did not view it so kindly. In 2005 LucasFan made a dramatic disappearance from the Internet following rumors of a heated exchange between LucasFan and the attorneys responsible for Lucas Arts's cease-and-desist orders. At the time, LucasFan was rumored to be working on an *Indiana Jones* game in the spirit of the original *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* adventure game, a project that might have brought him negative attention given the fact that the *Indiana Jones* license was still profitable for Lucas Arts. In this case, the long tail of profit in a digital world was already clear to Lucas Arts: *Indiana Jones* still has

more than a niche audience and a fan game can be marked clearly as a threat to that profit. Details are difficult to confirm as the involved parties were mostly silent on the matter. The Lucasfan website reveals only the words “Recent events have forced us to shut down our web appearance. We would like to thank all our fans and supporters who believed in us and our dreams.”

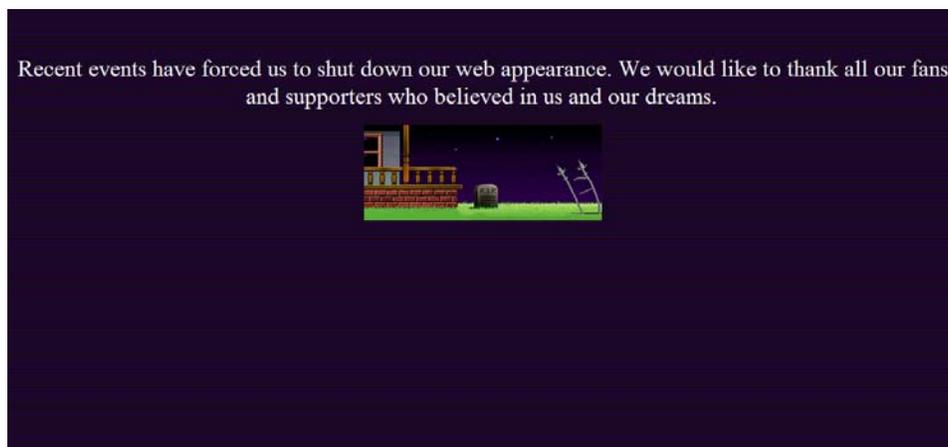


Figure 5-2 The current Lucasfan website (as of 2/7/10)

The accompanying image, above, recalls their *Maniac Mansion* remake with a tombstone set outside the famed mansion itself (Lucasfan). The game, however, lives on, and the remake can still be downloaded through new sources that preserve the work. Lucasfan as the author is unnecessary for the game’s survival now that it is in the hands of a larger community—like all abandonware, it has an audience willing to flout intellectual property law to preserve its availability.

Authorship of the remake is less important to the current artifact than the original authorial source—players seek out a remake of a classic game, not a game by this particular recreator. When the author moves on the community claims the game, and it can be drawn upon and rebuilt again without heed to that author’s intent. However, the incident with LucasFan epitomizes the greater challenges the fan community has seen from LucasArts. Only rarely has there been creative cooperation or even implicit endorsement of fan activities by the company—unlike with Sierra, where legal clashes have ensued, but been have resolved in favor of continued creative freedom.

Tierra and the Sierra Remakes

Sierra games are at the center of even more active fan re-mastering. One team, Tierra [also known as Anonymous Game Developers], remade the first several games of *King’s Quest*. The first remake, *King’s Quest I*, was intended mainly to be a case of improved playability. The graphics were improved, the scope of sound and dialogue increased, and the environments were enhanced but generally remained unchanged from the spirit of the original game. This first remake was a testament to the possibilities of the efforts of the Tierra game and it paved the way for more dramatic undertakings. Released from 1984 to 1998, the games of the *King’s Quest* series spanned over a decade and marked the most

massive and successful series of adventure games. The later games were markedly different in technological sophistication and narrative advancement when compared to these early predecessors: even after *Tierra's* enhancements, the first game seems dated by comparison. The most impressive aspect of the *King's Quest I* remake was the involvement of the original voice actor responsible for Sir Graham's voice-acting in IV and V: as the actor explained in an interview, he was pleased to donate his time to reprise the role: "For one, doing voices is just plain fun, and I especially enjoy doing them for games. For another, I think that the VGA remake is a great tribute to the original *KQ* series. And, lastly, because I was extremely flattered that they asked me to participate'" (Wells). The remake is thus even more in sync with the original games with this audio connection through a voice that players of the sequels were already attached to. This gives legitimacy to the project it would otherwise lack: having the original voice of Sir Graham is a far cry from taking the best volunteer from the fan community itself.

Tierra's next project was to take a dated prequel and utterly reshape its character. The team thus followed their initial effort with a remake of *King's Quest II* that was far more ambitious, intending to fill in gaps in the original plotline, increase character backgrounds, and generally overhaul the entire experience. This was originally supposed to be a project for Sierra: in 1990, the

company released an overhauled VGA version of the original King's Quest.

However, the new version failed to sell, and a remake of King's Quest II was abandoned.

The result of Tierra's effort was a game very different from the original project. It began as a graphical and narrative overhaul and eventually incorporated a full voice-over where the original had only written text.

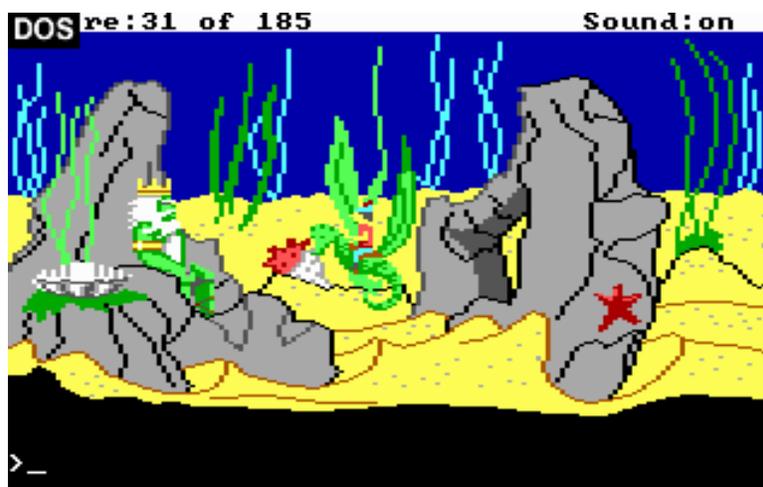


Figure 5-3 Sierra's King's Quest II (1985)



Figure 5-4 The initial remake, with improved graphics and new story (2002)



Figure 5-5 Version 3.0, with new dialog screens and full voiceovers (2009)

Much of the enhancement was done by using later games as a model and retroactively adjusting the design to match the later work, yet the game cannot easily be dismissed as a repackaging and is a full remake. In Tierra's hands *King's Quest II* becomes a different game from a later decade. Tierra made use of much of what Sierra provided in sequels for imagery and interface but updated the game in their own style. They first released their remake in 2002, but continued the project and released a Version 3.0 in March of 2009—now as Anonymous Game Developers. By their own records, over 450,000 players have downloaded the remake (Anonymous Game Developers, 2010).

It is not surprising that these remakes all focus on graphics. As Aarseth notes in his outline of an approach to game aesthetics, over time “gameplay stays more or less the same, the rules likewise, but the game-world...improves yearly. If not, the new games would never sell at all” (2003, p. 4) The tensions in the AGS community both echo and defy this rule. Aarseth asks: “Where is the new adventure game with retarded graphics that was successful? It does not exist. Take away the game-world, and what is left is literally the same game skeleton, give or take an algorithm” (2003, p. 4). I am not inclined to agree with Aarseth, nor do I think he would find much support within the AGS community where games with simplistic graphics are regularly embraced. However, it is true that the

adaptation of King's Quest II into more modern graphics—even if in this case “modern” is still a decade outdated—does open it to a wider audience of players. The Anonymous Game Developers themselves pointed out that graphics were one of their first concerns: “Many people regarded this sequel as being the King's Quest game most in need of an update...the graphics (which were impressive for their time) soon grew painfully outdated” (Anonymous Game Developers, 2010).

New Stories for Familiar Worlds

But why this desire to rework the stories of established media characters to begin with? An easy if somewhat dismissive explanation centers on audience: as one fanfiction writer notes, “You have an automatic fan base” (Cha, 2003). Why? In theory, the same audience of fans for the original material might be drawn to the work it inspires—“Write a short story about your crazy uncle and post it on the Web, and no one will read it. Write a short story about Dr. Who, and hundreds of folks will flock to your site. Fanfic writers meet at conventions (“cons”). Thanks to the Internet, writers communicate constantly on e-mail listservs” (Plotz, 2000). What brings those readers to the website in the first place? Isn't the already established material—referred to in the world of fandom as “canon” material—enough? If the motivation of writers of fanfiction seems to stem from a need for individual definition, the motivation of readers appears to be more communal, and

these motives overlap just as the roles of writer/reader overlap within fandom. Fanfiction is one of the many ways the web has become a place of extended authorship: as Doctorow describes the movement, “There has never been a time when more people were reading more words by more authors” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 75).

Fan Games and Fan Fiction

There is a clearer immediate connection between readers and writers of fanfiction than with popular works—“Fanfiction review culture tends to put readers and writers on a relatively equal footing (compared to a superstore customer buying the latest blockbuster novel and the author of same). Writers react strongly to their readers; in the case of authors working on pieces released serially, sometimes writers feel besieged or stalked by readers, and set up yahoogroups where readers can discuss their works in progress, and agonize in livejournals and chat sessions about every aspect of the process” (Chatelain). This community setting allows for immediate feedback and discussion, connecting reader and writer in an interpretive discourse that would not occur with the more remote creators of popular fiction, particularly on such an involved and day to day basis. This buildup of interactions shows a direct response to reading through the shaping of a community. Such developments are a defining aspect of fandom—

“the idea that fandom constituted an interpretive community or, more accurately, communities. Interpretive communities are social groups which share similar intellectual resources and patterns of making meaning...There is, of course, never total agreement, but there appears to be some agreement about what kinds of disagreements can be tolerated and which ones throw you beyond the parameters of a particular group” (Jenkins, 2006).

The writers in these fanfiction communities legitimize their own storytelling by sharing the results, a process that is most successful because they are tapping into a shared universe—“‘We don't grow up hearing stories around the campfire anymore about cultural figures. Instead we get them from books, TV or movies, so the characters that today provide us a common language are corporate creatures,’ said Rebecca Tushnet, an assistant law professor at New York University” (Cha). Tushnet’s sentiments echo those of Lessig and others in the public domain movement who are observing the importance media characters can have to the readers. Popular culture is filled with references to how audiences, particularly women, take such iconic figures and turn them into objects of idealized sexual desire. Hot Topic has even capitalized on this trend in the case of Harry Potter and Edward Cullen, selling clothing and accessories with slogans such as “I (heart) Harry” emblazoned on them.

One of the most debated cultures within fanfiction moves from these “safe” commercial realms into culturally charged rewritings. This movement is called slash fanfiction, where desirable iconic characters are moved into homosexual readings that are often not present in original commercial works. When these writers take over these characters, they are moving entirely away from canon—or original intent. As a fanfiction writer summarized the issue on a message board post:

“Leaving Takahashi alone, let's talk about Tom Sawyer for a moment. If I want, I can say that Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn make a good couple, and that Tom Sawyer is a coming of age story about budding homosexuality in Missouri in the mid-1800's. There's nothing wrong (improper) about me saying it. It's an imaginative interpretation, certainly. Of course, it's an incorrect interpretation of the author's intent. If I want to write a Tom Sawyer / Huck Finn fanfic where they get down with their bad selves on a raft on the great Mississippi, that's fine. But my characters will simply not be the Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn that Mark Twain wrote about. They'll have the same names, but that's it” (Desslock).

The premise offered here—that these characters are Huck and Tom in name only—opens the door to ask who these new versions of Huck and Tom really are. They are no longer the products of the original creator’s imagination, although much of their form is intact, their circumstances and selves being part of the inspiration for the revision. The new Huck and Tom are the products of the

original creator's imagination, they are the tools of a new puppetmaster, subject to the whims of her (and, less often, his) imagination and requirements. Making this leap is even easier with an interactive form, where the avatars were already puppets of the player, who could control the avatar's actions at least within the scripted environment set forth by the game designer.

The idea of writing inspired by other stories that have already gained a place in popular mythology is by no means limited to the kind of fan fiction found in such pursuits on the web—examples of the same concept abound and often achieve great success. One example of this trend is Gregory Maguire's *Wicked*, which takes the rather one dimensional villainess from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and grants her a full biography, from birth to death. The devices Maguire employs are those of fan authorship, taking a classic work and adding a personal vision--creating new romantic attachments, giving a favorite character new motivation and spark, incorporating influences from more recent political and social concerns. Would the work be as successful if it had not been a work of fan fiction but had instead featured an unknown witch of no particular narrative heritage? It is difficult to imagine what such a work would even look like, as Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" reminds us that every narrative owes a great debt to what has come before it. The barrier between that type of influence

and the fanfiction form is mostly one of legalities, where one is acceptable and the other too intentionally “derivative.” Fanfiction, like game remakes, suffers from inherent wars over legal rights: for fanfiction to be possible, the copyright holders must acknowledge the right of these cultural devotees to explore the ideas further. As Lessig puts it, “Ideas and expression must to some degree be free. That was the aim of copyright initially—the balance between control and freedom” (Lessig, 2002, p. 249). Lawrence Lessig advocates for an understanding of copyright as an essential threat to the development of new ideas with the reminder that many of the ideas and narratives that the copyright holders might protect are themselves transformations of older ideas—such as *King’s Quest’s* Sir Graham, who owes a great deal to figures from Arthurian legends.

But with the rise of virtual space and participatory media, an entire culture has arisen among fans gathering to discuss the future of the characters they know so intimately, to play out their own lives in Hogwartsesque worlds brought to life by collective imagination, and writing and reading elaborate stories that rework the universe through the eyes of a fan turned storyteller. These stories range in length from quick parodies or scene rewrites to novel-length. On one major archive site of such works, Fanfiction.net, there are over three hundred thousand such stories. Other sites exist entirely dedicated to collection *Harry Potter* works

envisioned by different groups, particularly those who find harmony in a particular romantic pairing of characters.

It can be hard to understand the act of writing fan-fiction without having been part of the practice. Writers of fanfiction spend hours and hours putting together stories that they place out on the Internet in hopes of gaining an audience. That audience might be appreciative, and a writer can even gain “big name fan” status and recognition among the community, but there are no tangible profits to the effort. It’s particularly impressive to see children and young adults involved in the writing and critique of these stories when the educational system is filled with complaints of how the Internet is reducing literacy. Here, the writers and readers are engaged because they choose their topics and are motivated by passion, not a set of guidelines.

Perhaps the most talked-about projects within the personal games communities are planned extensions of popular franchises. A game that acts as a sequel or re-visioning of a classic adventure game is more likely to be played than an amateur effort without that grounding. Many personal gaming projects, both completed and currently in production, are extensions of or remakes of classic gaming experience. These projects require the investment in gaining an initial skillset beyond that required for written fanfiction—a creator of a fan game must

master a new interface, basic scripting, animation and background creation, and other aspects of game design to a greater or lesser degree. The creator of a derivative game takes on all these challenges knowing that the work they create will never fully be their own. What characterizes these acts of “co-authorship,” and how does the repossession of corporate-owned stories by fans in this manner impact the narratives?

A game that acts as a sequel or re-visioning of a classic adventure game is more likely to be played than an amateur effort without that grounding, although both works are acts of fandom relative to the genre itself. As one commentator noted after observing the fan-constructed tales around *Star Trek*: “These types of stories, despite their disparate sociological nature, all share the mystical, cosmological and pedagogical dimensions of the original series, providing us with a well-formed response to Campbell's wish for consistently modern myths: by transforming themselves from a passive audience into active contributors to the mythos, these poachers have been able to adapt their myth of choice, retaining its mystical, cosmological and pedagogical functions even given the rapidly changing sociological climate” (Guaraldi). Some of the first documented communities of fandom surround the various elements of the *Star Trek* universe. Coppa takes a look at the practice of making videos, or “vidding,” within those

communities. This practice is as a technological exercise a matter of taking clips from episodes and restructuring them with new music to create a different atmosphere. Coppa argues that the motive for the practice is repossessing these characters and literally placing them within a desired context that is more empowering for the fan creator: a similar practice to taking an old game and bringing forth a desired relationship or event, or even rewriting an unwanted ending (Coppa, 2008).

Many fan "sequels" follow similar lines of the fan remakes but with a new story. Lucas Arts game *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders* has been repeatedly extended—LucasFan's first project was an extension of that game entitled *The New Adventures of Zak McKracken*. The developers were aware of the project, and other such fan sequels: in an interview with Edge magazine, lead designer David Fox said: "When I did this, we knew that the games would eventually die because the platforms and OS wouldn't be around forever. When I heard about the sequels, I've always seen it as an amazing honour that people would pick this up and do it themselves" (Edge, 2009). This characterization shows the influence the sharing economy can have on the commercial—when exposed to the work of creators moved solely by passion, commercial creators can be moved to rethink the context and purpose of their own works.



Figure 5-6 The New Adventures of Zak McKracken (LucasFan 2002)

The game picked up where the first left off but showed its roots as an amateur effort: the puzzles and narrative were not yet fully developed. A range of other independent projects exist, some complete and some not, that have similar ambitions of extending the story. The *King's Quest* series also has a wealth of small projects surrounding it. Among them is *King's Quest 2.5*, a game intended to fill the gap in time between the second and third game in the series. That project followed the same style as the original games. A more divergent project was announced and summarily canceled by the Tierra team responsible for the *King's Quest* remakes. Entitled "Royal Quest", this project was intended as a

parody of the series. The team released a few screenshots revealing their intentions and a preview described the vulgar and “South Park-style” humor of the parody (Wells).



Figure 5-7 Royal Quest 1 (Anonymous Game Developers, never released)

The project was abandoned with the explanation that as the team intended to restore the standing of classic games and so did not want to undermine their own efforts through releasing such a “mean-spirited” seeming parody. The game has essentially disappeared from even gossip—except, in the spirit of the fan remake, by the occasional person who claims that he or she will eventually produce their own version of the abandoned project. The rumor is kept alive by the same online

communities that distribute the more faithful remakes, and perhaps it is from their midst that a new fan of a fan co-author can emerge.

Tierra's impressive efforts were not the end of fan efforts to reshape the *King's Quest* series. Another group of fans networking across the world decided to take on the ambitious project of creating a full sequel to the *King's Quest* games, this time using modern three-dimensional graphics and technology to realize the story to its full potential. This type of project requires the use of tools outside those developed specifically by the personal games community, as the classic era games were generally two-dimensional and thus that is all the production tools tend to support. Also, it is much more difficult to create a game as an individual or even a small group using the tools more commonly used by large production houses. Below is one screenshot from that effort, which is now available only as a demo as the full game has not yet been completed:

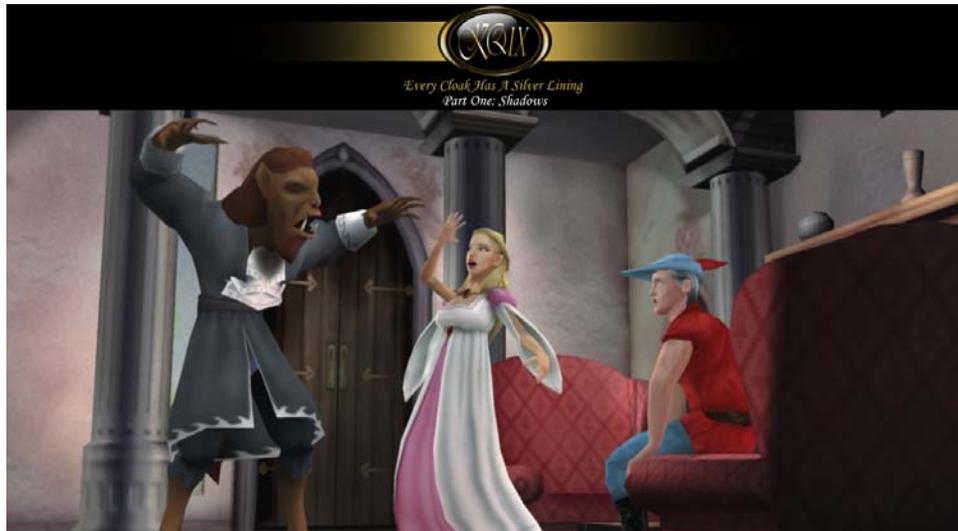


Figure 5-8 Part 1 of The Silver Lining (Phoenix Online, to be released 2010)

This project to create a sequel, now called “Silver Lining,” was once almost shut down by legal entanglements and the problem of copyright. Like fanfiction and fan movie projects, a fan created game sequel is a violation of the original copyright holders’ claim: but like those projects, such games often go unchallenged unless they reach a certain scale of attention. As the team now explains on their web site, originally the copyright holders asked them to shut down: “On September 30, 2005, the team was asked to cease production by Vivendi Universal Inc, the owners of the *King's Quest* franchise. After weeks of negotiations and with the support of our fans, on November 29, 2005, Vivendi granted the team permission to legally continue production on the game” (Silver

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Lining). The passion of the fans for the project—both those directly involved and those eagerly awaiting their chance to play the game—was the turning point in allowing the game production to continue. The only concession the fan author group had to make was removing the label of *King's Quest* from the project, so the game would not be confused with a legitimate creation of the original copyright holders. However, this did not limit the use of all of the *King's Quest* iconography, avatars, and story-line: it is a change in name only.

Silver Lining stands out from the personal games movement in part because of the intense production values at work. Often personal games are associated with inferior production, limited graphics, and outdated technology—this is due in large part to the fact that they tend to be the works of an independent creator or small team operating with only their own money, no hope of compensation, and only their free time to devote to the project. Other *King's Quest* fan "sequels" adhere primarily to this more familiar personal game model, such as games like "King's Quest 2.5" intended to fill small gaps within the series. The dated feel of most such independent projects harkens back to the early days of gaming, but this leads to assumptions about a lack of innovation within this world: to an outsider it can look entirely stagnant, with graphics and interfaces literally frozen decades back in the realm of the two-dimensional side-scrolling

game. These games innovate in other areas, such as story or presentation, but are by their very nature not at the forefront of technical innovation. They offer a chance for a fan voice to tell a story in this medium, but that voice is rarely heard outside the underground game community.

No accusation can be made against Silver Lining of falling under this stereotype: the graphics and technology in use are at the forefront of innovation. However, much of the origin of Silver Lining matches the same humble beginnings as other independent efforts. There is no corporate powerhouse behind the “Silver Lining” project, and no one on the creative team is being paid. The project represents one of the most challenging forms of collective action: as Clay Shirky observes, “the litmus test for collaborative production is simple: no one person can take credit for what gets created, and the project could not come into being without the participation of many” (2008, p. 50). If the final game is released no one will make a profit: the game will be freely available whereas a comparable effort by a corporation would be priced at thirty to forty dollars a copy. The development team, which calls itself Phoenix Studios, explains the driving motivations behind the team in terms of resurrecting the experience of the games to which they are so devoted: “The first is to bring the genre of adventure gaming back to its roots while giving it an overhaul of new elements such as the

contemporary graphic format and more attention given to plot rather than random "pixel hunting"...[and] to create a community for our fellow adventure gamers where they can be given what they miss from the golden days and provide a space where they do not feel so isolated from the current trends of the gaming industry" (Silver Lining). Phoenix Studios here acknowledges one of its primary motivations as fan authors: the pleasure of other fans moved by the values that these co-creators claim this particular style of game embodies. The success of the project, both in the legal arena of copyright and in the recognized extension of a series once considered ended, demonstrates the potential of classic games to inspire projects both personal and more monumental. The passing of everything but the *King's Quest* title to the Silver Lining project is more than a simple concession allowing the existence of a fan project: it is the passing on of once corporately-owned characters into the realm of folk art, where they can continue to exist and be re-imagined through the efforts of fans turned authors. The conversation between Phoenix Studios and Sierra, however, appeared to promise even more for the future—the possibility of Lessig's hybrid economy sparking a place where the influence can move from the sharing economy to the commercial and back again.

Yet even this hope is again in flux: as of now, Activision, the new owner of *King's Quest*, has shut down the project completely: "Recently, however, ownership of the Sierra IP changed hands and became the property of Activision. After talks and negotiations in the last few months between ourselves and Activision, they have reached the decision that they are not interested in granting a non-commercial license to The Silver Lining, and have asked that we cease production and take down all related materials on our website" (Phoenix Studios, 2010). A sliver of hope yet remains, as pressure from outraged fans has brought the project again to Activision's attention and negotiations are once again open (Totilo, 2010). The fate of the project is still unknown: it may disappear even from public record, as the project creators have been forced to remove all their materials and the only glimpses that remains come from fans and media archiving the effort.

Chapter 6. Games and Co-authorship

The Internet is the age of the hybrid. If sharing economies promise value, it is the commercial economy that is tuned to exploit that. But as those in the commercial economy are coming to see, you can't leverage value from a sharing economy with a hostile buyout or a simple acquisition of assets. You have to keep those participating in the sharing economy happy, and for the reasons they were happy before. For here too money can't buy you love, even if love could produce lots of money.
(Lessig, 2008, p. 178)

Fan projects make use of the presumptions of *abandonware*, but corporate interests in heritage games continue, particularly as releases such as the recent *Monkey Island* promise continued revenue and as games are reworked for cell phones and tablets. The remix and revisiting of content that these creators engage in falls in questionable, if not outright forbidden, realms within copyright law. Yet moments of corporate and fan collaboration and discourse, such as the permission granted by Sierra for fans to engage in the making of a full scale sequel to the series, suggest the possibilities when intellectual property is treated as a commons and not a gated realm. The door is opening slowly to collaboration between the commercial and communal realms. The adventure game fan community gives a glimpse of the possibilities that might wait if that barrier is fully overcome.

This transformation is in part a movement of a hybrid model from Japan into American cultural awareness. Doujinshi, fan-created comics distributed in

Japan, are “copycat” comics that move beyond the original in some substantial way: as Lessig describes it, “the artist must make a contribution to the art he copies, by transforming it either subtly or significantly” (Lessig, 2004, p. 26). There is no legal system in place for these creators to secure rights, nor do the original copyright holders prosecute these derivative efforts (26). Perhaps most interestingly, the copyright holders might even be aware that prosecuting such creations would hinder innovation within manga itself: “the manga market accepts these technical violations because they spur the manga market to be more wealthy and productive. Everyone would be worse off if doujinshi were banned, so the law does not ban doujinshi” (27). Doctorow observes the phenomenon similarly, noting that “some of these titles dwarf the circulation of the work they pay tribute to, and many of them are sold commercially. Japanese comic publishers know a good thing when they see it, and these fanficcors get left alone by the commercial giants they attach themselves to” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 90). It is hard to imagine a similar system taking off in the United States, where our greater numbers of lawyers exist in part to enforce ownership strictly—ostensibly to preserve creativity. Yet the Japanese system actually widens the door of creations, and moments in adventure games are suggesting that US commercial producers might be learning the same lessons.

The success of projects like the work of the Anonymous Game Developers are examples of an independently negotiated consensus on the creative commons. Many classic games have little actual value without intervention—they are unplayable on modern hardware and operating systems and often out-of-date in appearance and interface. The first of these problems can render them completely inaccessible; the latter can simply make them of value only to a limited audience. The efforts of fans who keep files available and build the tools, archives and guides that make the games playable. The corporations, on the other hand, are doing a poor job of building those same elements around their own properties. But as the uncertain fate of the Silver Lining project still waits in jeopardy it is worth remembering that as corporate rights change hands a fan action that was permissible can become forbidden and new policies can impact the fate of remixed work.

Death of a Genre, Revisited



Figure 6-1 *Warcraft Adventures* (Blizzard, never released)

In the mid-nineties, Blizzard Entertainment announced that they were going to enter the adventure game genre with an installment of their popular Warcraft franchise. In 1998, they announced that even though the project was essentially complete the company had decided to cancel it. In an interview with Gamespot magazine, designer Bill Roper explained the decision:

I can't speak for everybody, but a large group of us really love adventure games and have a desire to do an adventure game. And also I think that the adventure game is still the single best way to tell a story. I think that what an adventure game is, is going to start changing, if it hasn't already. I think that one of the big problems with Warcraft Adventures was that we were actually creating a traditional adventure game, and what people expected from an adventure game, and very honestly what we expected from an

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adventure game, changed over the course of the project. And when we got to the point where we canceled it, it was just because we looked at where we were and said, you know, this would have been great three years ago. (Roper)

Roper's explanation mentions the state of creation within the company, one known for its consistent production of industry successes. He does not acknowledge outright the state of affairs within the industry, where the adventure game genre was being pronounced dead. However, he does imply an evolution of the adventure game genre that could be seen as death for the classical form—this game's screenshots and comic narrative focus appears to resemble genre classics. This wasn't the only project abandoned, though it remains one of the most infamous given its nearness to completion.

Ten years ago, the market didn't see the value in these older properties. Many other projects were closed down, partly finished, as corporations didn't anticipate rewards from completing what had been started. Sequels were announced, delayed indefinitely, and finally cancelled—like the LucasArts game *Full Throttle II*, which was started in 2000 and abandoned when a quarter complete. Even the abandoned project showed the attempt to update the lead character for a new market, as shown in Figure 6.1 and 6.2. Even fans were afraid the new sequel would move too far from the original gameplay and be lacking the

humor that lead designer Tim Schafer had brought to the first installment (Ratliff & Jong, 2008). The sequel was revived in 2003 only to be cancelled again with a final statement from LucasArts: "We do not want to disappoint the many fans of *Full Throttle*, and hope everyone can understand how committed we are to delivering the best-quality gaming experience that we possibly can" (Ratliff & Jong, 2008).



Figure 6-2 Ben Whatisname in the original Full Throttle (1995)



Figure 6-2 Concept art from the production of the never-finished *Full Throttle 2*

Imagine what would be possible if the abandoned code, images, and partial production were released to the creative commons for a do-over. What value does this unfinished content have to the company? Clearly, it represents an investment of resources, time, and money, but those resources have yielded nothing marketable. Of course, the long tail gives the creators reason to cling to their intellectual property in anticipation of some future pay-off. The same possibilities could revitalize *Warcraft Adventures* had Blizzard been willing to cede control of the nearly-finished content: had they, for instance, tapped into a

doujinshi style community of creators desperate to be a part of Blizzard they would have found many willing to try and find the innovation that could once again make the project marketable. Instead, the company released a novelization that filled the same gap in the narration and let the entire game languish in a Blizzard vault (Roper). Failures to harness fan potential harm the commercial producers and can lead to missed opportunities for innovation. Take figure 6.3, which shows a proposed strategy for remaking *Monkey Island II* as a 3-D special edition. A fan operation, Lone Clone, has offered a detailed look at how the original game could be reconstructed using various techniques that would enhance its graphics in an even more impressive conversion than the official *Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition* that inspired this concept—and rumors suggest *Secret* will not be the last rerelease.



Figure 6-3 Original *Monkey Island II* and a 3-D concept by a fan (Lone Clone, 2009)

Rebuilding a Genre

While many of the re-releases and new productions coming out today resemble the classic games and evoke the ghosts of these abandoned sequels, others have been making attempts to modernize and adapt the adventure genre to new interfaces and environments. Nowhere has this been more successful than on Nintendo platforms, where the Nintendo DS and Wii both offer innovative spins on interaction that can give even point-and-click gameplay a different feel. New series for these platforms have emerged with traditional adventure game play.

Zack and Wiki, an adventure game for the Wii, makes use of a mimetic interface to allow for the solving of puzzle-based levels. The narrative of Zack and Wiki is familiar: Zack is “a little pirate with big dreams” who “has his sights on being the greatest pirate that ever lived!” (Capcom, 2010). Zack even has his own undead pirate to contend with as his adventure echoes the themes of Monkey Island. The multiplayer mode of *Zack and Wiki* imitates the experience I remember from classic adventure games—many players gathered around a computer screen, pointing at possible solutions and guiding the player with the mouse. Rather than creating lots of Zack avatars on the screen, the multiplayer mode lets each secondary player use their controller to point and highlight as a crowd argues out possible solutions. This type of play taps into the casual games

mimetic market, where the spectacle of four players arguing over solutions to a puzzle and gesturing wildly with Wii remotes can add dimensions to the gameplay that go beyond the derivative narrative at the game's core.



Figure 6-4 Zack and Wiki, multiplayer mode (Capcom 2007)

Massively Multiplayer Adventures

While *Zack and Wiki* is constrained to four player mode, other current projects that evolve the genre make use of the potential of massive multiplayer gaming. Sarien.net, a classic adventure game restoration project, has created browser-playable versions of old Sierra games with a twist. Multiple players can be in the browser game at the same time, interacting while still going through the

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single-player storyline at their own pace. The set-up can lead to absurdity, with many clones of Leisure Suit Larry or Sir Graham wandering the streets together with no real way to distinguish one from another. The core games are not even updated versions of the classics, but they allow players to cooperate on play in new ways.



Figure 6-5 Leisure Suit Larry on Sarien.net

In 2009 Celia Pearce and Artemesia (Celia Pearce's avatar) released a study of the communities that emerged from the massive multiplayer online adventure game Uru. The game itself was cancelled soon after its release in 2003

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and continued to exist in various iterations or through fan construction. The fans, displaced from their virtual community and missing the story world that had united them, continued to create new worlds and narratives to fill the void: “the hacker group that had arranged the *Until Uru* player-run server system announced the beta release of the first Age built by *Uru* fans using their own home-brewed Age development tools. The granting of both server and content-creation rights to a fan community is an unprecedented move in the game industry, and illustrates the powerful role emergence plays in the dynamic between designers and players” (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009, p. 191) This is another case of designer and player co-operations—and again happening around a story world, one that began with *Myst*. It is a consequence of the hybrid economy, a sign of the commercial world acknowledging that while a project no longer can be supported by them those circumstances do not have to lead to its demise.

Producers are discovering old games have value again, but much if not all of that value is fan created. In rediscovering that value, the corporate community is embracing the practices of the fans, remaking games, extending old stories, and finding the continued potential in the arcs they once abandoned. This path of influence is a reversal of the norm. The corporate world is being influenced in their production choices by the fan world. That sort of influence is normally felt

through the tracking of audience desires by producers who try to create the games they are looking for, a practice of marketing research that can lead to hollow and generic releases. Here, the commercial market is being driven by a tiny niche of fans that have not merely displayed their devotion to a particular type of game but had also revealed what is still left in those games that might be attractive to others.

This interaction shows how the creative commons mentality can allow for the crafting of a tradition when the corporate-personal interactions are reasonably successful. Viewing this type of creation suggests a future for digital content that can give birth to forms and nurture them without legal interference. When it becomes clear that the folk form actually restores value to the corporate model, the intervention of copyright legislation on the creator's behalf makes less sense—if the justification of copyright law is the prevention of the deterioration of an owner's idea by competing interpretations of that idea, the model itself is flawed. This community still holds one of the first cases where this cooperation has explicitly occurred.

Admittedly the community interactions have not all lived up to this ideal. Lucasfan, for instance, perished as a creator thanks to circumstances that remain unknown. But these incidents do not rival the continued interference other forms

of fan production have felt from commercial pressures. YouTube is still constantly forced to shut down videos over copyright issues, even though this never halts the creative practice. Anne Rice loathes the continued fanfiction around her vampire novels so much that she has been known to make personal appearances on the bulletin boards and have cease-and-desist notices sent on her behalf. Stephenie Meyers, on the other hand, encourages the fan creations that surround her work—and Cassandra Claire, author of the young adult fantasy series *City of Bones*, is unlikely to attack fanfiction writers when she herself got her start writing *Harry Potter* fanfictions. Younger authors know that every instance where a fan is prosecuted or ordered to shut down a website diminishes the material that surrounds the commercial content, and in the case of classic adventure games that sort of deletion can remove the very essence of the game's remaining presence.

Abandoned Stories

One way that games linger is through abandonware, a practice of preservation debated even within the AGS community. In a forum thread on the subject, participants went back and forth on the legality and desirability of the practice. The official policy forbids the listing of links to freeware, but most of the

participants in the forum argue that the practice of keeping abandonware in archive isn't depriving anyone of income:

Some game publishers have been good enough to make their old games freeware - such as Revolution recently did with *Beneath a Steel Sky*, but there are several others (notably Lucasarts and Sierra) who feel that they would be missing out on a potential money maker by doing so. (Of course, practically speaking they wouldn't get away with selling a collection of old DOS games into a Windows XP marketplace these days, so I'm not sure what hopes they're clinging onto). If an abandonware case ever came to court, I think it would be very hard for the company to prove that (for example) *Police Quest 1* being on the internet for free download had lost them any revenue, but of course nobody has the time or money to bring a test case to find out.

What is abandonware? (Pumaman, 2004)

Of course, no legal issue of this kind can be settled by public debate, but in this instance the practices of the community are more likely to be influenced by opinion than law. Legal action against abandonware sites is possible but rare, and such archives can easily spring up again even once challenged.

More important to the players of adventure games is the risk of losing a game entirely. Some games created within the AGS community disappear and leave behind only broken links and incomplete data listings on the website's game database. Occasionally people post in search of these forgotten games, hoping that someone else took the precaution of saving a copy before it disappeared completely. The Internet Archive, one of the few methods available right now for

finding old material, is incomplete and does not offer much in the way of unearthing game files of this kind. No other system exists for keeping an absolute archive of these types of stories. What do we lose from this lack of systematic record-keeping? One answer is: everything from a game created out of family photos to mark a son's birthday to Lucasfan's *Maniac Mansion Deluxe*, which had disappeared from most sites in wake of the legal dispute and his last parting message.

Perhaps an entire tradition can be reduced to a collection of broken links—and this in an age where information is instantly and infinitely reproducible. An institution is unlikely to be the savior, and thus far salvation has been unorganized. In many ways the members of the AGS community have been their own archivists, serving not only as gatekeepers and restorers of classic texts but as trackers of their own art. This state of affairs reduces text to an ephemeral state where even trying to get a grasp on the full extent of community output is an impossible task. This is not an unfamiliar problem for researchers concerned with digital artifacts: as Lawrence Lessig asks, “How is it that we’ve created a world where researchers trying to understand the effect of media on nineteenth-century America will have an easier time than researchers trying to understand the effect of media on twentieth-century America?” (Lessig, *Free Culture*, 2004, p. 110).

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Before Fox plays “Johnny B. Goode” at the high school dance, he tells his audience, “This is an oldie . . . well, this is an oldie where I come from.” Chuck Berry recorded “Johnny B. Goode” in 1958. *Back to the Future* was made in 1985, so the gap is twenty-seven years. I’m writing this essay in 2009, which means the gap between 1985 and today is twenty-four years. That’s almost the same amount of time. Yet nobody would refer to *Back to the Future* as an “oldie,” even if he or she was born in the 1990s. What seems to be happening is a dramatic increase in cultural memory: As culture accelerates, the distance between historical events feels smaller.
(Klosterman, 2009, p. 58)

In this new economy nostalgia must be redefined. It seems that things get old but do not vanish, as Klosterman observes as he looks at the fate of eighties film *Back to the Future*. The seemingly infinite storage archive of virtual space allows for preservation of the best (and, perhaps, the worst) moments of popular culture, so that every reference, every obscure artifact, seems to leave its mark in digital form to be accessed again and again. A stay in the Disney Pop Century resort, where each decade is preserved in themed buildings that herald back to their era, is not unfamiliar even to the children brought here by parents who experienced the decade firsthand. In some cases the cultural artifacts of the eras can be even more familiar to the children, who have at times experienced them

more recently in new contexts. This world where nothing vanishes forever provides the illusion of timelessness, as it seems that this same content must stay accessible forever even as artifacts of the digital world are slowly decaying around us.

I have set out in this thesis to examine a genre that only a few years ago appeared to be dead, though it was certainly present in the vast realm of the Internet. When I was writing my master's work on the history of the genre in 2007, fan production was the only force keeping many of these games and stories alive. Now, only a few years later, the pendulum has swung back and games that by the progression of the digital age should be obsolete are returning to the market. To those who keep the adventure game fandom alive all these years, this is no surprise—for them, the stories never vanished. Threads on favorite classic games in the Adventure Game Studio Forums span pages and pages and include memories of players looking back on the games that brought them to the community:

Willy Beamish brings me back to Friday nights eating grilled cheese made by my step dad, plain Pringles and a coke. I'd stay up all night reading every description, trying every branch, etc. I loved it. I'd like to jump back through time to those nights just for a moment. The funny thing about nostalgia, though one of the best feelings known to mankind, is that it can also make you miss those

days, almost sadden you... almost *long* for it to be real again
(Snake, 2009).

These players grew up with adventure games: their stories don't only include the games themselves but also the moment that made their first encounters meaningful. It is not perhaps as surprising that these stories are coming back as it is that anyone expected them to fade in the first place. Children's books and movies valued in this way are easily returned to, but games are made inaccessible, and recapturing moments like the one of Snake's memory becomes nearly impossible.

The resurrection of classic games begins when we first mark a game as a classic. When a game can stand out in the collective memory and be important not just to Snake but to many players over many countries and years, it takes on a role of significance that will not allow it to fade completely. Whether it is kept alive first in costumes or stuffed animals, whether it inspires webcomics or fanfiction, the game itself keeps its cultural role. When the game itself is remade, rereleased, or even preserved in an abandonware archive the experience becomes repeatable even if the circumstances that made it part of a cultural moment cannot be recreated. We cannot return to the golden era of adventure games, but we can see

the role they still play in the gaming market and the relevance they still hold in the ongoing dialogue between fans and creators—and fans turned creators.

Adventure games are only one of many forms of gaming that developed as the industry began. Many classics of those other genres are kept alive in various ways—the *Mario* franchise has never faded, and playing arcade games like *Pong* or *Space Invaders* on the Internet or on new systems is far less challenging than getting an old copy of *Space Quest* to run. Players and developers have kept exemplary titles of all kinds alive, and in many cases such games have stayed profitable for a long time. The *Doom* franchise, which developed in parallel to and as a polar opposite to adventure games, still releases remade versions and sequels on handheld devices and traditional platforms. Given that, why are the adventure game revitalizations so important?

I've focused on graphical adventure games throughout this thesis, though I could have looked elsewhere. Perhaps the closest parallel is the interactive fiction community, which keeps alive a form that predated adventure games. Interactive fiction, or IF, is a system for text-only narrative games. IF communities have internal awards, archives, and even keep classics of the genre—such as *Zork*—alive and available for play despite the move in the mainstream to graphical user interfaces. Furthermore, the IF communities have already been the subject of

study in a way that the adventure game communities have not been examined. This is perhaps in part because of the clearer literary focus of interactive fiction. When text alone is employed, experiments with narrative in a traditional sense can more clearly occur. Interactive fiction as it stands works on the border of game and nonlinear narrative, tiptoeing in the realm of play but often more clearly situated in the realm of postmodern literature. There is also no clear correspondence with corporate production in IF: the dialogue with modern work is more challenging when the move from text-only to graphics so thoroughly redefined the industry with a step that the commercial work is unlikely to reverse. Commercial work does not look backward to the days of text-only. The two forms of communities thus appear similar but are differently motivated, with very different patterns of influence.

In the ongoing exchange of innovation between the AGS community and the now re-activated producers of adventure games, clear evidence of influence can be seen on both sides. The games that are resurrected by the producers are the ones the community values, and the methods of those resurrections are remarkably similar to the way the community has kept these games alive for decades. When only a few years ago I could not locate a playable copy of *Gabriel Knight*, I can now download one from Good Old Games. When replaying the

original *Secret of Monkey Island* a few years ago meant fighting with DosBox and playing without voiceovers in outdated resolutions, I can now play a resurrected version of that classic. As I write this now, adventure games can no longer be considered dead. The genre is evolving, as instances like *Zack and Wiki* remind us, but the original form has not been abandoned. Fans as archivists and determiners of the canon kept the genre on life-support for years, and now the corporate producers are recognizing the renewed value of their works and the potential of fan production models. There are still pitfalls yet to be overcome: incredible unfinished productions languish in corporate archives, copyright disputes ensue regularly over abandonware, and the full potential of creative coauthorship is still unrealized. But as we witness over the next year the fate of the Silver Lining and the success or failure of endeavors like the new *Sam and Max* and *Tales of Monkey Island* projects, perhaps other stories will be brought out of the vault and released to the creative potential of communal space.

Obsolescence is happening, but it is being resisted as efforts are made to protect cultural memory. Some corporations preserve their games themselves, as with the Lucas re-release of *Secret of Monkey Island* and the Sierra downloadable *Gabriel Knight*. Others rely upon fans: Sierra has been content even in their own *King's Quest* archive collections to include the popular emulator DosBox to keep

their early games playable. On rare occasions, a company even accepts that a game is no longer of commercial value to them, and releases some or all holds on a game to put it in the public realm as “official” abandonware. Yet regardless of how any one company embraces or fights the sharing economy of the Internet, no corporation can keep their work from being a part by remix culture—and as references build in that culture, a canon emerges.

A Hybrid Planet

Other communities focus on creative expression within a system but have far closer ties to the commercial world than the Adventure Game Studio community holds. Of those, one of the most interesting parallels is *Little Big Planet*, a game and toolset that provides an internal set of worlds where players can build and share their own levels and even narrative experiences. In this type of community the direct corporate sponsorship that influences what can be created. Tools are usually designed by game’s creators with clear limitations, although occasionally content-creators can exceed those. Take, for instance, figure 7-1 and 7-2, a screenshot from a simulation of 9/11 built within *Little Big Planet*. The temptation to push the boundaries of content in *Little Big Planet* in these examples seems to be more about what a builder can get away with than what they can create.

9/11 terrorist Attacks in Little Big Planet (PS3) This is why we can't have nice things



Figure 7-1 9/11 in Little Big Planet

Little Big 9/11



Figure 7-2 Two player-created levels simulating 9-11 (*Little Big Planet*)

Environments like *Little Big Planet* encourage the interpretation of outside events and the repurposing of mainstream content structures, but the ends are very

different than within a communal creation space like Adventure Game Studio affords. The Adventure Game Studio community chooses its influences and picks to what extent the commercial creations impact their work—in *Little Big Planet*, the presence of only certain objects and the design of the world builder tools is all in the hands of the corporate creator. Similarly, there is no guarantee that content, once created by a player, will remain available within the gamespace. The corporate owners have the ability to remove offensive content and to censor what appears, leading to a dialogue between commercial and communal where the commercial world always seems to have the final say.

Hybrid Economies

The play of power within *Little Big Planet* expresses, at least for the moment, a symbiotic relationship between the shared and commercial economy. The commercial incentives are clear, and the process of creation is “fun” enough to keep the creators from feeling like cogs in a production system. The same warning that Lessig applied to remix culture in the hybrid economy holds for traditional modders and level producers in Sony’s game platform: unless they are being rewarded monetarily, the act of production must still hold the same ability to produce passion that an act outside of this commercial software might. Once money is involved as it is in the world of *Second Life* the tone of the production

changes. Intellectual property ownership becomes important and bickering turns into legal disputes between two creators who claim to have invented the same virtual sex bed. The sharing economy is overwhelmed by the commercial entanglement.

Society is currently negotiating the terms of Lessig's hybrid economy at a time when capitalism itself is doing poorly. Paid production of content is dying in several traditional forms as magazines and newspapers are taking new directions to try to keep their industry on life support. In March of 2010, *Variety* surprised its readers abruptly firing the last of its full-time film reviewers, Todd McCarthy, in favor of relying solely on freelance work (Fritz, 2010). The decision has generated criticism, particularly in light of Todd McCarthy's own perceived drawing power as a highly experienced reviewer, but the realities of the change of readership of reviews are working against him. The existence of highly popular content conglomeration sites such as Rotten Tomatoes makes it harder for any one critic's voice to be essential reading. Such sites appear to rely on individual paid content producers for their meaning: Rotten Tomatoes takes a quick summary of reviews and uses them to give each film a score. Todd McCarthy has been one of their "top critics" since the beginning of the site: yet when he vanishes, his will be but one voice lost from the clamor of the crowd. Some of the Rotten Tomatoes

voices are even drawn from among free critics who publish regularly enough to be worthy of the place: more voices will always emerge to fill the gaps.

Variety explained their decision to eliminate McCarthy's position as "being flexible in the face of economic realities" (Fritz, 2010). In an economy where the decision to cut content production can be justified, the opposite choice—to surrender the corporate stranglehold on intellectual property—seems the less likely path. Yet that is exactly the type of experiment with content that is emerging now, as the hybrid economy encourages US companies to try to expand the influence of their ideas. None of these efforts yet resemble the freedom of production represented by doujinshi in Japan. Copyright lawyers in this country would have many reasons to object to the adoption of such a cultural standpoint, as unlike Japan this nation does not suffer from a lack of lawyers ready to prosecute perceived intellectual property threats.

Some experimentation with the ceding of intellectual property is more restrictive than the doujinshi model but suggests the possibility of hybrid economy cooperation. One such project is BBC's Creative Archive project, an archive of materials from BBC broadcasts licensed under a variant of the Creative Commons standard for use in remixes. The license is hardly all-inclusive, and commercial concerns have still been at the forefront of BBC's concerns:

The Creative Archive project has not been without critics from the commercial sector, worried that the BBC giving away their content for free would make it difficult for them to be able to make money from their own content. The BBC has explained to some of the commercial players that the content would be limited during the pilot, would not be available in broadcast quality, and that watermarking technologies would be trialled so that content could be recognised when it crops up elsewhere.
(WikiNews, 2006)

Despite these sorts of restrictions, the BBC archive is a step towards freely allowing the cultural activities that would happen with or without this legislation. By creating a virtual repository of content formatted for remixing, however, BBC can actually enhance the power of its own imagery. They are in effect encouraging their own ideas to go viral by making it easier for a commentator or fan to use images from their programs than from other sources.

Releasing material from aired programs is one step. The UK's Free Culture group has suggested that BBC go a step further and make available material that is not aired, noting that "such material, at least for the purposes of reuse, will likely be as valuable if not more valuable than that taken from complete programmes. As such the BBC should prioritise it for release equally with material taken from finished works. Given that the rights situation is likely to be simpler for such 'non-programme material' it might even be sensible to focus on releasing this category of work rather than excerpts from publicly released

programmes” (Free Culture UK, 2006). Such a move is similar to the one the fan community laments that Blizzard and other publishers have not taken with their own unreleased, abandoned games: the same cultural graveyard of true “abandonware” that the fan-created game *Adventure: An Inside Job* so pointedly mocks.

I have observed repeatedly how corporations engaged with the hybrid economy can gain value from the intertwining, whether through increased recognition and long term presence of their games or through cooperative content generation that expands innovation for an entire form. Yet when such cooperation requires the ceding of intellectual property rights, the decision is difficult to make. Bethesda Software, creators of the *Elder Scrolls* series, released their earliest installments as free downloads to celebrate the anniversary and in doing so to draw attention to the latest commercial release. The BBC archives seek to expand awareness of their content and perhaps even to discover a few inspired creators who can remix their work in ways that will connect with a modern audience. Cyan, the group behind *Uru*, allowed fans the rights to run the world on their own servers when they realized their own resources would never allow them to sustain the world as they’d imagined it (Sowa, 2008). And, defying all expectations, Sierra allowed the *Silver Lining* project to continue using everything but the

King's Quest name—although Activision has since interceded. Can we expect every company to begin ceding its intellectual property rights and throw its ideas into public space? Of course not. But each of these cases suggests a willingness to negotiate new boundaries, with each one in succession moving further into the realm of a sharing economy as the commercial incentives grow murkier.

Copyright law cannot kill the remix: even if these companies wanted to, there are not enough lawyers in the world. This is not going away, it is growing, and it can lead to innovation as it spirals and builds upon itself.

Remixing the Remix

Copyright law was not always about keeping ideas locked away, tethered to an original creator and held in a sacred trust, immune to the revisions of others. To return to Cory Doctorow's description, the true purpose of copyright is to "decentralize who gets to make art" (Doctorow, 2008, p. 79). This is an idea that my generation understand implicitly. Everyone is a creator now, everyone is an author. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Blogger, LiveJournal—these are more familiar hallmarks of digital creativity than AGS, but they are driven in part by the same mindset. They are places where content is created for no better reason than the act of sharing. They are places for storytelling, whether those stories are told through an assemblage of video clips building a scene or a series of 140

character messages describing a bad day at the DMV. They are places where one rarely stops to think: who owns this? To have your idea ripped off, “retweeted,” or remixed is the highest form of flattery.

An idea remade or remixed stays relevant—and can be built on. Fan creations are without possessive authors, particularly when the work is so derivative that an author cannot even lay claim, and so are free to build upon each other. Often fanfiction begins with acknowledgements of influence, noting that aside from the represented fandom there are works from both commercial and shared spaces pushing in on their own story. The commercial economy cannot stop its ideas from seeping into shared space nor should it want to.

Online space is filled with creators who build things despite knowing that someone else might be “better.” I noted Lessig’s point earlier, that the sharing of the creation is more important than its quality, but that is not to be taken as dismissive of the works of the sharing economy. Instead, it is something to celebrate: not every fan game need be as innovative as *What Linus Bruckman Sees When His Eyes Are Closed*, but the freedom of entry to participation makes that work possible. The freedom to imagine, without any anxiety of influence, allows a form to evolve. These personal adventure games are but one form to emerge from the remix, but they offer a hybrid of traditional storytelling and

interactive media that stands as a bastion of folk creation in the hybrid economy. Even as commercial culture moves on, and the boundaries between commercial and sharing are renegotiated to acknowledge the demands of a generation that expects to freely consume, remix and create culture with equal freedom, these adventure games will be preserving and expanding a canon of stories that will not be surrendered to the black hole of obsolescence.

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Appendix: Six Months of Adventure Game Studio Releases

Date Creator	Game Description	Screenshot
Jan 2 Ghost	<p>Once Upon a Crime</p> <p>Little Red Riding Hood starts a new life as a private investigator, involving herself with crimes and characters equally familiar from fairy tales.</p>	
Jan 4 Gonzo29	<p>Fasmo 2: Fasmo Goes West</p> <p>Fasmo is a “sentient stick bug from outer space” who has landed in the Wild West, with original illustrations .</p>	
Jan 5 Marion	<p>James in Neverland</p> <p>A French-language game that takes its narrative cues from Peter Pan—essentially, a Peter Pan fan game.</p>	

Jan 5
TheatrX

Lost in the Woods

A vacation turns into a disaster thanks to a lost map, and the player is stuck looking for a way home.



Jan 6
Rob
Shattock

Indiana Jones – Coming of Age

A one room fan game for the Indiana Jones series that takes place after the third film.



Jan 11
Tequila144

The Curse of Life

An Italian-language game about a journalist battling against a curse, with almost exclusively original art and sound.



Jan 18
Creamy

Bob Escapes

A French-language game with English subtitles about a man who has just escaped from jail on Halloween.



Feb 7
Weber

Honk's Adventure

A game designated as a "joke game" parodying the traditional formula of a treasure hunt.



Feb 11
Ivan Dixon

Sydney Treads the Catwalk

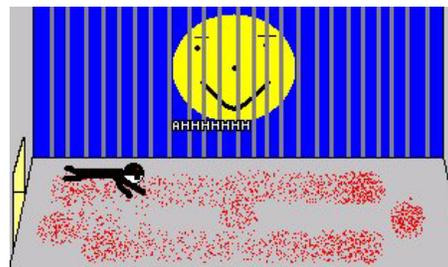
A sequel to another game by the same creator, based on a comic by the same creator, with original illustrations and a narrative focused on the exploits of a homeless man turned media star.



Feb 17
Creator

Murder in the Mansion

A traditional murder mystery with the player trapped in a house.



Feb 18
Rayman

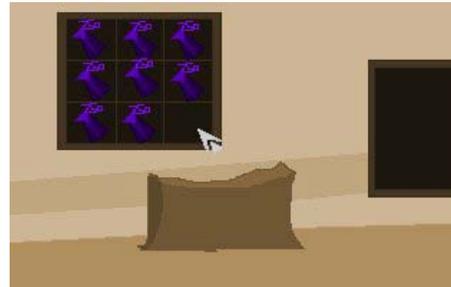
Maniac Mansion Mania Episode 40: Trapped in the Cellar

Part of a continuing series of fan games based upon LucasArts's *Maniac Mansion*, using the original characters. Translated into English, Spanish, French and German.



Feb 18Dualnames /
Sho-Ryu-Ken
corp**Lone Case 4 – Epitaph**

Uses an isometric view for what the designer calls a strategy game rather than an adventure game, with both traditional interactions and violence.

**Feb 20**

Brentimous

RON game: Rock-A True Story

A game taking place in the “Reality on the Norm” collaborative universe designed by a group of AGS enthusiasts as a collection of persistent characters and settings.

**Feb 23**

Skerrigan

Doctor Who Episode 0

A one-room fan game based on the Doctor Who show, in particular the 8th Doctor from the TV movie and radio dramas.



Feb 24
Elen Heart

Once Upon a Time

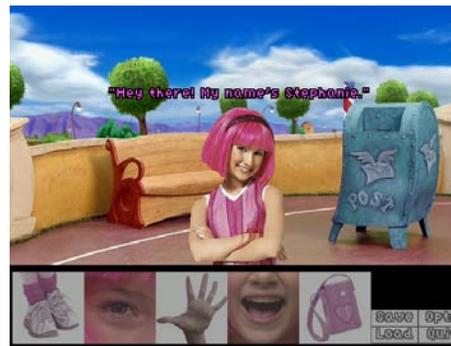
A fairytale storybook game with a traditional narrative of defeating a dragon and rescuing a princess, reworked from a game the designer made for her son.



Mar 3
Ultra
Magnus

The New Kid

A game that takes its graphics and, to a lesser extent, its narrative from an Icelandic children's television program called "Lazytown."



Mar 6
Ali

Nelly Cootalot: Spoonbeaks Ahoy!

A game created "for and about" the designer's girlfriend, who is re-imagined as a pirate investigating the disappearance of a group of Spoonbeak birds.



Mar 9
Sigbuserror

Jimson and the Jazz Crabs

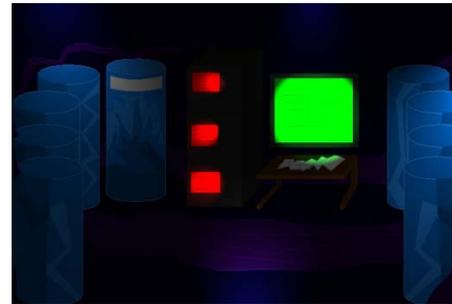
A short game about a narrator trying to find a trumpet so he can take his place in an unusual jazz band.



Mar 11
Dualnames

Lone Case 3: Showdown

A collaborative effort created as the final part of a trilogy where the main character is awakened in the future society of Palm Springs.



Mar 20
Monkey
Lover

Psychic Sam and the Postal Service of Doom

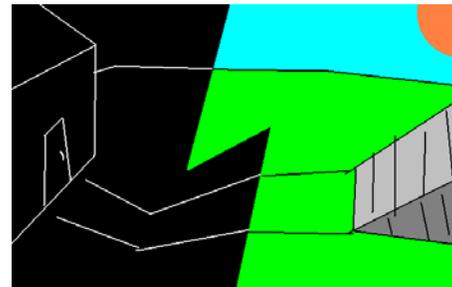
Described by the designer as “made for an audience of two (myself and my aunt)...with most of the jokes referencing my own little world.”



Apr 1
FSi

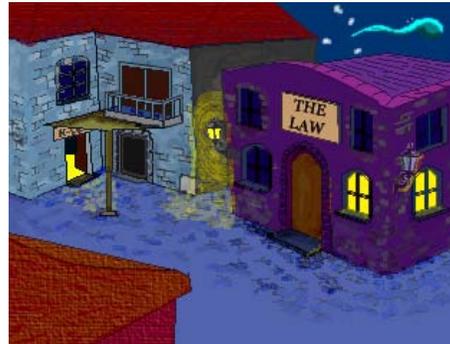
Ricky Quest

A parody of the *King's Quest* and related sequences released primarily as an April Fool's Day joke and featuring a quest for the “zeppelin of happiness.”



Apr 3
Miguel / The
Ugly Files

The Dwarven Dagger of Blitz
The first chapter of a fantasy series surrounding a quest for a fabled dagger.



Apr 26
Dezibelz

Die Flucht von Cheu-Va Island
A German-language game that is in the tradition of the LucasArts *Monkey Island* series.



May 7
Wham

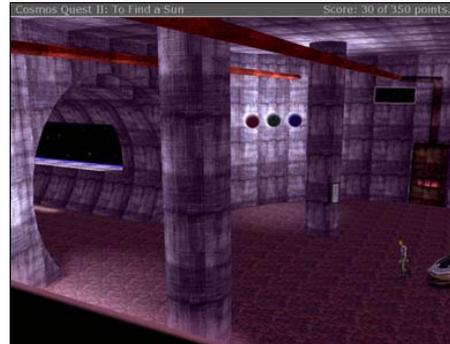
Infection – Episode I
A science-fiction genre game surrounding a spaceship mechanic on a troubled cargo transport. Makes particular use of voice-acting.



May 11
Ilia

Cosmos Quest II

A game in the tradition of *Space Quest* developed by a creator in Bulgaria, and also available translated into Spanish.



May 12
Ben304

Shoot, I Got Abducted!

An alien-abduction narrative the designer created for an Adventure Game Developers design competition within the community.



May 19
Bitby

Reality on the Norm: Au Naturel

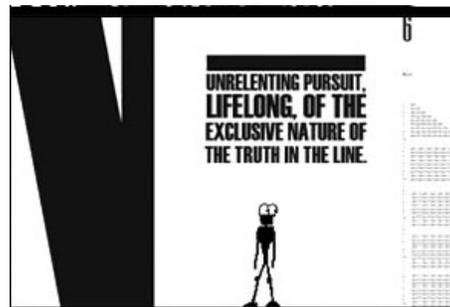
A mature audience installment in the Reality on the Norm collaborative world where the internal politics of the town are threatened when compromising pictures go missing.



Jun 2
Hofmeier

The Jackyard

An experiment in developing a platformer style game using AGS with no particular objective beyond exploration and a surreal environment.



Anastasia Salter ©2010

Jun 8
Ogre

Laundry Day

A college student attempts to do laundry at his dorm—a puzzle focused short game.



Jun 13
InsoFox

Awesome Quest 1

A game focused on unusual environments created by the designer's friend with music and animations by the designer—no storyline was planned in advance, and the puzzle instead was built out from the imagery.



Jun 15
AgentBauer

Space Quest IV.5: Roger Wilco and the Voyage Home

A fan game that takes place between Sierra's Space Quest IV and V, and attempts to reconcile the narrative gaps.



Jun 15
PokeyFlame

Quest for the Blue Cup

A short game using characters from the Reality on the Norm project with original environments.



Jun 16
Radiant

Quest for Yrolg

A fantasy game where the player is on the side of evil, trying to stop three heroes from saving the world.



Jun 24
Buckethead

Craft of Evil

A survival horror game using first person perspective and graphics with echoes of 7th Guest and similar games.



Jun 27
Eugene

The Oracle

A first-person narrative about finding a missing friend linked to an ancient order of monks. Notable for entirely photorealistic backgrounds, photographed throughout Canada and Portugal.



Jun 27
The Ivy and
Vince
Twelve

Nanobots

Six nanobots must escape from a professor who has decided to turn them into scrap metal—a collaboration between two “big names” within the community.

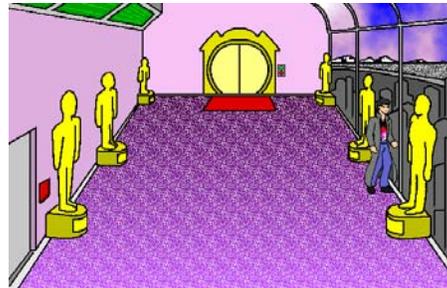


Anastasia Salter ©2010

Jun 28
Ponch /
TackyWorld
Interactive

**Barn Runner 5: Forever Friday
1**

A continuing detective story about a character named Prick who is attempting to prevent impending apocalypse.



Jun 30
Marion

Dread Mac Farlane 2

An adaptation of a French comic book developed as a sequel to a first game based on the same series, available both in French and English translation.

