

Text Based Adventure Games - A Lost Art

You are standing on a trail. The grass has almost hidden what is left from lack of use. Tall trees block the sun on your left and to the right you see a green hill that leads down to a running brook.

A limb hangs by a sign that reads, "Townstead North". You see a small boulder that looks as if it was recently moved from it's original spot.

:push boulder

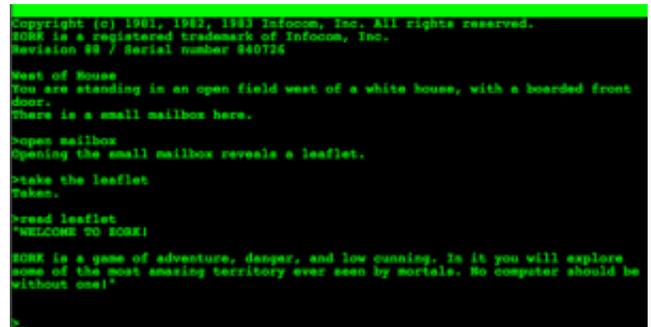
You are not strong enough to move by yourself.

:get limb

You snap a strong limb from the tree

:use limb

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Revision 34 / Serial number 240724

West of House
You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front
door.
There is a small mailbox here.

>open mailbox
Opening the small mailbox reveals a leaflet.

>take the leaflet
Taken.

>read leaflet
"WELCOME TO ZORK!

ZORK is a game of adventure, danger, and low cunning. In it you will explore
some of the most amazing territory ever seen by mortals. No computer should be
without one!"

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Perhaps not the best writing off the top of my head, but this was the essence of the text based adventure games that were abundant in the early days of home computers. Like reading a good book, your imagination unfolded as you read the context and pondered your next step. It was a mystery, a puzzle, and offered so much satisfaction each time you figured out what to do next (typically consisting of a basic two word command - a verb and a noun).

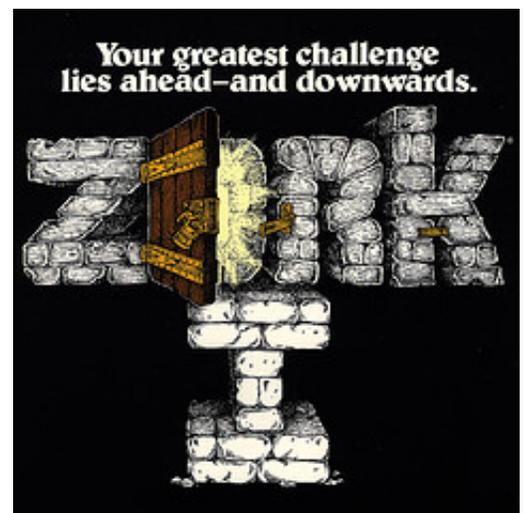
We were not very picky when it came to the plot or story line at the time, as long as there were steps to solve. The puzzle to be solved made up for any lack of writing or storyline. But when you did have a great plot, good writing, and challenging puzzles, there was nothing better. A true interactive novel you controlled and solved along with the main character you were playing.



I discovered my first text based adventure games on the Tandy TRS-80 Color Computer 2. They would come in the form of a tape cassette and I would use a tape recorder to load the data. The tape player would actually "play" the electronic data sounds and the computer would interpret it digitally.

During this era, peaking through the mid 80's, Infocom was the "Activision" of text based games. They released a ton of titles and usually provided a great story and experience. I probably played 25 different games - a few that stand out were Zork and SeaStalker.

And then something magic happened. I soon upgraded to a Commodore 64 and learned to navigate the pre-webs using a 300 baud modem ([see previous entry on 1987 file sharing](#)). Like free apps in the App Store, I now had access to many more adventures for free. These games were easy and quick to develop. So much so, I started writing my own when I was 14 years old. The public domain ran wild releasing anything someone thought up and put to code. One particular title that stood out from this was "Farmers Daughter", and adult themed adventure that could be compared to a young nerd-boys "50 Shades of Grey". But still, I preferred the Infocom games.



In the time before software stores, Best Buys, or anything that offered early gaming, coming across a title was like a treasure hunt. Especially with the Tandy, I would want to visit any Radio Shack I passed to see if any obscure titles lay hidden. And when found, the gratification was more than any retail purchase today could even compare.

In a time where brick-and-mortar book stores are closing, I dont want to lose site of a once great

text experience that doesn't even exist as a ghost town in the world of gaming. Buried by the marketing of better, faster graphics, a once great gaming media once existed that would, otherwise, no longer even be mentioned. ...Except for those who wish to remember that imagination once provided better graphics than any leading gaming console could ever offered.

-Adam

Wanna try Zork out for cheap? Get it from [GOG](#).