



Tips & Tricks

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Warm Up To Penguins

Old-School Gaming

Put your Wii in the closet. Give your 512MB Nvidia card a chance to cool down. Today, we're going to turn back the clock to a time when text on a screen could get your heart pounding as much as any blood-dripping zombie can today. Yes, we're going to take a trip down memory lane and look at some of the old-school computer games still available for Linux systems.



■ Text-Based Adventures

"You're in a twisty little maze of passages, all alike." Anyone who has ever played Advent, the great, great granddaddy of all text adventures, will recognize this phrase. Advent, known more formally as The Colossal Cave Adventure, was the first real computer game that many geeks ever experienced. Based on a treasure hunt through a series of intricate caves, you tried to collect all the goodies and maximize your score. Finding all the items wins the game, but you couldn't find some items unless you found and used other items appropriately. For the time, it was a breakthrough, but its limited vocabulary and dry descriptions haven't aged well. For example:

"You are crawling over cobbles in a low passage. There is a dim light at the east end of the passage.

There is a small wicker cage discarded nearby.

> take cage

OK

> w

It is now pitch dark. If you proceed you will likely fall into a pit.

> lamp on

Your lamp is now on.

You are in a debris room filled with stuff washed in from the surface. A low wide passage with cobbles becomes plugged with mud and debris here, but an awkward canyon leads upward and west. A note on the wall says, "Magic word XYZZY."

You can try Advent yourself; just install the BSD Games package on modern Linux distributions, and you should find it in /usr/games/Adventure.

In the early '80s, one of the perks of working in the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory was playing Zork. Zork was a quantum leap in entertainment value above Advent. Although it followed the same basic gameplay model as Adventure, the puzzles were much more intricate, the geography huge, and the writing highly amusing. When you made it to the lobby of Flood Control Dam #3, you could do the following:

">n

This room appears to have been the waiting room for groups touring the dam. There are exits here to the north and east marked 'PRIVATE', though the doors are open, and an exit to the south. A guidebook entitled 'FLOOD CONTROL DAM #3' is on the reception desk. There is a matchbook whose cover says 'VISIT BEAUTIFUL FCD #3' here.

>take guidebook

Taken.

>read guidebook

Guide Book To Flood Control Dam #3 Flood control dam #3 (FCD #3) was constructed in year 783 of the Great Underground Empire to harness the destructive power of the Frigid River. This work was supported by a grant of 37 million zorkmids from the central bureaucracy and your own omnipotent local tyrant Lord Dimwit Flathead the Excessive. This impressive structure is composed of 3.7 cubic feet of concrete, is 256 feet tall at the center, and 193 feet wide at the top. The reservoir created behind the dam has a volume of 37 billion cubic feet, an area of 12 million square feet, and a shore line of 36 thousand feet.

The construction of FCD #3 took 112 days from ground breaking to the dedication. It required a work force of 384 slaves, 34 slave drivers, 12 engineers, 2 turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree. The work was managed by a command team composed of 234 bureaucrats, 2,347 secretaries (at least two of whom could type), 12,256 paper shufflers, 52,469 rubber stampers, 245,193 red tape processors, and nearly one million dead trees."

To install Zork, do the following:

```
% wget http://almy.us/files/dungeonlinux.zip
```

```
% unzip dungeonlinux.zip
```

```
% ./dungeon
```

You can see a beautifully hand-drawn map of the Zork universe at almy.us/image/dungeon.jpg.

■ First Person Shooters (Kind Of)

Just as Advent is the ancestor of all text-based adventures, Hunt the Wumpus is the Stone Age version of an FPS. If you install the BSD Games package, this game comes along with it (`/usr/games/wump`). If you have more than five working brain cells, you won't be playing it for long, however. It's essentially a logic game: You move from room to room and try to shoot an arrow into an adjoining room when the Wumpus is there. For example:

"You're in a cave with 20 rooms and 3 tunnels leading from each room. There are 3 bats and 3 pits scattered throughout the cave, and your quiver holds 5 custom super anti-evil Wumpus arrows. Good luck.

You are in room 1 of the cave, and have 5 arrows left. *whoosh* (I feel a draft from some pits.) *sniff* (I can smell the evil Wumpus nearby!) There are tunnels to rooms 2, 10, and 20.

Move or shoot? (m-s)"

■ Enter The World Of Textcraft

It wasn't long before more interesting hack-and-slash games started to emerge. By far, the most popular of them was Rogue. It took advantage of Unix's newly available "curses" library, which let you move the cursor around a terminal (this is back in the days of VT100s and other dedicated CRT terminals). Rogue begat Hack, which begat Nethack (www.net.hack.org), the version most commonly played today. Heavily influenced by Dungeons & Dragons, Nethack lets you navigate a character-rendered, 50-level dungeon (randomly generated each time, so it's never the same twice). The fabled Amulet of Yendor lies at the bottom, but orcs, dragons, and all sorts of other monsters stand in the way. And worse, finding the demon-guarded Amulet is only half the problem because you then have to work yourself back up those same 50 levels.

Nethack may look simple on first glance, with its ASCII-rendered rectangular dungeon rooms and monsters represented by letters and symbols, but there's a shocking amount of complexity built into the game. For example, you have a cute little pet (either cat or dog) that will assist you in fighting the monsters (and stealing from shopkeepers), but only if you keep it fed. There are dozens of different potions, wands, scrolls, rings, and staves, and you'll have to figure out which ones to use every time you play (and they're not all beneficial things) There are also dozens of different monsters, all with their own powers and attacks. You also pick a character class and race, which also affects gameplay.

To give you an idea of the game's complexity, let's say you decide to "rob" a shopkeeper (basically, walk out of the store without paying for the items you picked up). Because shopkeepers are as tough as most powerful monsters, direct attack is usually not an option. So, first you kill a floating eye and eat its corpse. This will cause you to randomly teleport. Next, find a ring of teleport control, and you'll be able to select your teleportation destination. Now you can enter the shop, pick up everything you can carry, and teleport out. But you should teleport to the staircase down, because the Keystone Kops (with deadly cream pies) will be after you immediately, not to mention one understandably angry shopkeeper.

■ Boldly Going Where Everyone Has Already Gone

We'll end our retrospective with a look at the ancestor of all modern space strategy games. When Unix was new and hot, so was "Star Trek." As a result, it was a popular theme for early games. Trek is probably the most popular; it ended up ported to just about every computer and microcomputer you can imagine. In Trek, you travel from sector to sector searching for Klingons, protecting Star Bases, and mining planets for dilithium crystals. You have shields, photon torpedos, and phasers at your command, but watch out because you might be tractor-beamed into combat in a nearby sector just when you're most vulnerable to attack. If you set it for a long game at the hard level of play, you can play for a very long time before you win the game, with many a destroyed Star Base and blasted USS Enterprise between you and victory. As with Nethack, the primitive ASCII graphics belie the complexity of the game.

There are a ton of other games available on Linux from the early days of computing, as well as great modern games, such as TuxRacer. Exploring them can almost make you forget that Xbox 360 down in the living room. ■

by James Turner

Infinite Loop: Survival According To WoW

If anyone has ever accused you of spending too much time playing World of Warcraft, tell them you're just brushing up on your survival skills. On their way to school, 12-year-old Hans Jorgen Olsen and his younger sister were chased by a moose. Hans taunted his antlered opponent away from his sister by shouting and then feigned death, a trick he learned in WoW. Olsen lifelessly remained on the ground until the moose wandered away.

www.switched.com/2007/12/10/boy-saves-sister-from-moose-attack-with-skills-learned-in-warcraft/