Adventure Games

Overview
While most good games include elements found in various game genres, there are some core game mechanics typically found in most Adventure games. These include character progression through dialog, game story structure, puzzle solving, and exploration. Looking back at classic Adventure games such as Monkey Island, Beyond good and Evil, Grim Fandiago, and others used these elements to create some popular and playable games. Modern Adventure games such as the Tomb Raider series or games from Telltale Games (the Walking Dead and the Wolf Among Us) include such core elements in their game designs.

Core Game Mechanics and Features in Adventure Games
The core mechanics in most adventure games include the following elements:

- **Story driven** – most adventure games include some kind of game story that is used to structure the game and allow the player to participate in the game. Typically, the game ends with the story. The win/lose conditions are based on puzzle and exploration actions.

- **Single Player and Character Driven** – most adventure games are single player and allow the player to assume control of a game character. This character is typically set at the start of the game and, unlike RPG games, is not mutable as the result of gameplay. Most (but not all) Adventure games are in the third person perspective.

- **Exploration** – Many adventure games allow the player to explore (to some degree). The purpose of such exploration is typically to flesh out the world, extend the story, or solve puzzles. Some adventure games that have a strong story structure may not allow for much exploration.

- **Player choices in story progression and dialog** – Many adventure games allow the player to make choices in dialog options and decisions on exploration. These can result in alternative game story paths and outcomes.

- **Some combat, but this is not normally a primary game mechanic** – unlike FPS games player combat is not likely to be a primary game component but may still be in the game.

- **Puzzle solving** – most Adventure games include some kind of puzzle solving that requires the player to figure out various kinds of puzzles. These puzzles could include both physical puzzles (exploration) and logic puzzles.

- **Resource Management** – most Adventure games may include some level of resource management mechanics but in most cases these are used to solve puzzles or progress through the story.

Adventure Games Sub Genres
While most adventure games include most or all of the core mechanics and features, there are examples of Adventure games that include more or less of such core mechanics. These result in various sub-genres of Adventure games. These sub-genres have been established because some games tend to follow similar design decisions. These sub-genres include:

- **Action/Adventure games** – these games focus more on combat (either melee or ranged) as one of the core game mechanics. Players in these kinds of games will be forced to use various combat methods in order to complete adventures and progress the game. Examples would include The Last of Us, Kingdom Hearts 3, and the Batman
games.

- **Character and Narrative games** – these games allow the player to control a game character and experience the game story through control of the character. These games are designed to allow the player to interact with other game characters (NPCs), collect resources, solve puzzles, and explore (to a limited degree). The important element to these games is that the player directly controls a game character normally in third person.

- **Visual Novels** – these games have limited animation and tend to be very linear in structure; tracking the game story, and presenting scene-based and static graphics. The player may have limited dialog options and almost no exploration. These are also called Point and Click adventure games.

- **Walking Around Simulator** – these kinds of adventure games use the First Person Perspective (FPP) and try to put the player into game. While this is similar to First Person Shooter games, the player typically does not engage in combat but uses exploration to proceed with the game. The game story progression and puzzle solving requires the designer to allow the player to discover these elements through exploration. Such FPP adventure games typically include a lot of environmental story telling.

- **Logical Puzzle Games** – these kinds of adventure games could include first or third person perspectives but their primary focus is on having the player solve puzzles.

Example Games – Traditional

Kings Quest
Monkey Island
Grim Fandango
Day of the Tentacle
The Longest Journey

Example Games – Modern

Soma
Firewatch
Portal 2
Wolf Among Us and Walking Dead (Telltale Games)
Oxenfree
Night in the Woods
Life is Strange
Last of Us
Uncharted Series
Thimbleweed Park
Unavowed (Wadjet Eye Games)
Whatever Happened to Edith Finch
Papers Please and Return of the Obra Dinn
Strange Brigade
 Bioshock

Game Design Issues

When creating an Adventure the designer should first decide on what type of adventure game should be created. While most adventure games include most of the core features, their mixture and balance will vary. For example, Firewatch
and the Last of Us both include character development and story presentation, but the Last of Us includes combat and resource management. Both of these games have little impactful player choice outside of exploration and combat.

One way to decide what elements to add to the game and in what proportion is to figure out what kind of experience the game designer wants the player to have and how this experience would be implemented in the game. For example, the Wolf Among Us wanted to present a game with the feel of a noir detective movie or book. The game color and graphic design were highly stylized and the game story relied on solving mysteries and discussing issues with other characters. There were player choices that would slightly change the direction of the game but the final outcome was not dependent on choice. The game structure and progression was very story driven with little options given to the player.

The game Strange Brigade was focused on giving the player the experience of playing an old mummy movie where the hero/heroine would discover old tombs, fight mummies and other monsters, get gold and discover artifacts. This player experience was accomplished by using a graphical style that was lush and detailed and including a number of puzzles that must be solved in order to get gold and find your way into tombs. The level design was gated areas that could only be accessed once a prior part of the game was completed. Combat tended to be mob based and fairly repetitive. Boss battles were very similar. Overall, this game was fun to play but became very one dimensional in terms of level design and game combat.

Designing an Adventure Game

Assuming that you are designing an Adventure Game, along with the general game concept, you need to define the following elements:

- Player Character and Non-player characters
- Game Narrative
- Game Structure
- Puzzles and Exploration
- Game Loop and Player Progression
- Resource Management and Upgrades

Player Character and Non-player characters

The player character in Adventure games can be either first or third person. Each of these modes will affect the experience of the player. Since the player character in Adventure games does not (typically) level up and acquire new abilities, the definition of the game character is very important. The player needs to connect with the player character as a separate character and not as a stand-in for the player. This could be done as a third person game by letting the player see and control the player character. Background narrative for the player character could be introduced as part of the narrative or through cut-scenes. Adventure games using the first person perspective must include more environmental storytelling, cut scenes, or non-player character dialogs to define the game character.

Since Adventure games typically include more structured story elements, the game will likely include a large number of NPCs (non-player characters) that interact with the player. Even if the NPCs are just opponents, they should be unique and interesting. For example, Kingdom Hearts III has a large number of Disney based NPCs that interact with the player and help move the narrative. The Last of Us and the Wolf Among Us were games that had memorable non-player characters.

Game Narrative

Since Adventure games are normally not open world, the game structure is likely more linear than open. Players will move from area to area in a more controlled fashion. There are a variety of ways to control players movement through the game structure, but one way is through game narrative. Most modern games have some kind of narrative content...
that is part of the game play and the game structure. When creating narrative for an Adventure game the designer should decide how the narrative elements will be presented. These elements include:

- Introduction Narrative – this sets up the player character and the world so the player understands something about their player character and about the game world.
- Progression Narrative – this narrative element moves the player through the game and gives the player goals for progressing in the game. Since Adventure games are more linear in structure than open world games, this narrative element will be closely tied to gameplay elements.
- Inflection Point Narrative – these narrative elements are typically used to define critical points in the game progression where the player could be given more information about the game, introduced to a new NPC, moved to a new part of the game, etc. These narrative elements should be based on the character and world contexts and lead logically out of the progression narrative.
- End point narrative – this narrative element is typically done at the end of the game and wraps up unanswered questions, etc.

Game Structure

The game structure in Adventure games is much more controlled than open world games. The game will put the player into a series of levels/areas that are (typically) tied to the narrative. Each area could be free-roaming within the area but gated so that once the player has moved to the next area they cannot go back. The game structure is tied to the narrative in the sense that the narrative makes the player understand Why they are moving to the next section.

Puzzles and Exploration

Many non-Adventure games have puzzles as part of the game. However, Adventure games typically include (but not always) more puzzles than other games. Creating puzzles for games is not easy and such puzzles should have some important features:

- The puzzle should be integrated into the game-play in such a way that the player is not “taken out of the game” in order to solve a puzzle. For example, solving a puzzle in order to progress to a new area, get an important resource, or defeat an opponent would make sense.
- The puzzle should fit into the game world. For example, if an Adventure game is set in outer space, solving simple mechanical puzzles takes the player out of the world. A good example of an Adventure game integrating puzzles into the world is Portal.
- The puzzle should have a logical solution that does not rely on unknown information. Players expect that most puzzles won’t rely on hidden information that the player may not know. If a puzzle does rely on game information, the game should have made getting such information easy for the player.
- Games will teach players how to solve puzzles by creating initially easy to solve puzzles and work up to more complex puzzles.

Along with game puzzles, most Adventure games include some amount of exploration. This means that the player is encouraged to explore areas of the game world in order to get resources or solve puzzles. If an Adventure game includes a player exploration feature it should consider:

- Exploration should have a purpose. This could include rewards (resources or solving puzzles), game progression (finding a way to a new location), or narrative progression.
- The game environment should make exploration easy enough for the player to understand the environment.
- The exploration area should limit the player activity as little as possible. Adventure games should use “invisible walls” as little as possible and rather limit the player by making the environment physically inaccessible.

Game Loop and Player Progression
Most games include some type of Player Game Loop. This refers to the set of actions that players will typically repeat in order to make progress in the game. For example, in an Adventure game the player must solve puzzles to open new areas to get resources and other items in order to move to the next section of the game. Elsewhere, the player may have to kill opponents in order complete quests in order to continue with the game.

Many Adventure games use some type of player game loop which the player must complete in order to progress in the game. For example, in the Adventure game Strange Brigade the player must solve puzzles to open tombs or progress to new areas after killing mummies and other opponents. This player game loop is repeated throughout the game. When creating player game loops the designers should:

- Explain how the player game loop works early in the game tutorial sections.
- Make sure that the game consistently uses the player game loop to progress in the game.
- If the game introduces a new player game loop or modifies an existing loop make sure that the player is introduced to the new loop gradually.
- Provide some type of reward players for completing a player game loop rather than just progressing to a new part of the game.
- Ensure the player game loop is consistent with the game’s structure, mechanics, and narrative.

**Resource Management and Upgrades**

Many games include some kind of game resources the player can acquire. These would include health, ammo, gold, upgrades, etc. Resources and resource management are critical to games in order to balance gameplay and motivate the player. For example, in an Action Adventure game the player would collect resources such as gold or upgrades that would affect the players weapons and abilities. These may be necessary to face future bosses, solve future puzzles, and generally progress through the game.

When including game resources in a game the designer should consider:

- Purpose of resources. Collecting stuff without any purpose soon results in the player ignoring the items. Generally, resources collected would be used for immediate use (health, stamina), for directly upgrading other items such as weapons, for purchasing new items, for completing quests of adventures, or for crafting.
- Location of resources. Depending on the kind of resources, the designer wants to make it easy to find the resource. For example, in a battle the player should be able to easily get health/stamina resources as they fight opponents. In other cases, for non-critical resources, the player may have to explore or solve puzzles to find the resources.
- Amount of resources. Controlling the amount of resources located in an area of a game is critical in order to ensure game balance. Providing several powerful weapon or unlimited ammo just before a Boss fight might distort the game design in terms of balancing player skills vs balance. Restricting the amount of health during a battle would make the battles harder for the player and make the game more challenging.

Along with the resources themselves, another critical element to the game is resource management. This is how resources are managed and implemented by the player. For example, the number of available weapons might be restricted in order to force the player to use various strategic decisions during gameplay.