

TRANSCRIPT FOR ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD INTERVIEW

What is a text adventure game?

A text adventure game, also known as Interactive Fiction, is a game that has no graphics and is based exclusively on reading text descriptions of your location and any objects and game characters around you. You type commands to explore the game environment such as, "go west", or, "take sword", or, "attack the guards with the long sword", and the game engine performs your command, and then re-describes the room and the effect of your command on any objects or characters in the room. You repeat that same procedure again and again using different commands based on the situation to solve whatever puzzles are presented.

How was Adventures in Sherwood created?

To tell how ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD was created requires some background.

My first computer in 1989 was an IBM PC junior that had the following configuration.

1. One 5 and one quarter inch floppy drive.
2. A CPU that operated at a lowly 8 Hz.
3. Had a whopping 128K of RAM memory.
4. A 16 color monitor.
5. An infrared keyboard.
6. And a 1200 Baud modem.

In order to be able to do much of anything I installed a 512K add on board that also allowed me to connect a second floppy drive and upgrade the operating system that came with the IBM PC junior from DOS 2.1 to DOS 6.0.

The online experience at that time, (pre-Internet), consisted of Bulletin Board Systems run by individuals and organizations where you called their telephone number and logged onto their computer and downloaded shareware programs, utilities, games, etc.

But before I was able to download any such files I had to configure the "upper memory" in the additional RAM on the add-in board as a RAM disk to download files onto because even though the 1200 baud modem was ungodly slow that transfer speed was still faster than the write speed on the floppy disk drive which caused all my direct downloads to the floppy disk to fail. I then had to copy the downloaded files from the RAM disk to the floppy disk and clear the RAM disk before I could download another file on the RAM disk.

It was while visiting a local Bulletin Board System that I discovered and downloaded the Adventure Game Tool kit, which is the software I used to create ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD.

OK, that tells us how you discovered the software, now tell us how you designed the game using that software?

Before I created Adventures in Sherwood I consulted with a friend of mine who is a dungeon master from way back, about using AGT to put a typical DnD campaign into it and see how it worked. We created a simple text adventure game called Tales of Ta'visa in less than two months based on a campaign he created.

I also discussed with him the theory and mechanics behind health points and melee rounds as used in DnD campaigns and learned that it is all about keeping tracking of those points in all situations during a campaign. I immediately saw that the variables feature in the Adventure Game Toolkit as the perfect tool for that task.

It took about 6 months to create and test the twenty thousand, yes, 20,000 is NOT a typo, lines of source code for ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD using my IBM PC junior. And since the majority of the source code dealt with tracking health points during melee rounds it was more a matter of copy and pasting the basic source code formula and then modifying the code for each possible variation of weapon and armor and opponents than it was to actually have to type each character in all those lines of source code individually.

The basic principles I used to design the game environment for ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD can be best described as competing cycles. I created various cycles of different lengths for the Sheriff's men as they patrol Sherwood Forest and Nottingham town and castle, and then the player is free to play the game as they wish and see how those various cycles affect their game. Since there is no single set solution to the game the player could follow any path they wished and see if they end up being captured or not. Even with my knowledge of the length and location of all the cycles it still took me three days to accomplish the goal of the game, which is to rescue Lady Marion from the castle dungeons before she is starved to death by the Sheriff of Nottingham and escape with her to the outlaw camp in Sherwood Forest.

Is there anything else unique about your use of AGT in Adventures in Sherwood?

The regular version of the ADVENTURE GAME TOOLKIT had an upper limit on the number of lines of source code it could compile so I explained to the software's creator, Softworks, that I required a much higher limit to accomplish my goal of implementing half a dozen melee rounds for an armory consisting of seven classes of armor and fourteen different weapons. Softworks sent me an enlarged version of Adventure Game Toolkit that had raised the upper limit to twenty thousand lines of source code. I could have used an even higher limit but I was informed that would require a major recoding of the program to create a larger "array" and that would create additional problems. Remember, this was in 1990 and the operating system and programs were still pre-Windows 3 and limited to an 8-bit programming environment.

Because the IBM PC junior operated at a measly 8 Hz, NOT KHz, it took up to an hour to compile my 20,000 lines of source code so that the Adventure Game Toolkit program could present the data in a playable format. That means that EVERY time I had to check a change it took that long before I could perform that check.

I understand that Adventures in Sherwood received an award?

Upon completing ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD I submitted the game to the annual worldwide contest sponsored by SoftWorks in 1990 and ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD was awarded an Honorable Mention.

Did you add any improvements to Adventures in Sherwood after receiving the Honorable Mention?

Softworks issued an upgrade to the Adventure Game Toolkit in conjunction with the announcement of the winners of the 1990 annual contest that allowed the addition of both rudimentary sound to a text adventure game as well as the colorization of all of the lines of text in the game. So I added both sound and colored lines to ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD and submitted it to the next annual worldwide contest as ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD 2.0 to demonstrate those new features. Even though ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD 2.0 was the only game submitted to the contest that year that had implemented those new features, the judges disqualified it from competition because they ruled it was the same game submitted the previous year.

What has been the ultimate fate of Adventures in Sherwood?

I released ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD as shareware and you can find more information online by searching for the name of the game.

Any final comments on any aspect of creating Adventures in Sherwood?

ADVENTURES IN SHERWOOD was my very first programming experience of any kind, I created the twenty thousand lines of source code without even one second worth of either training or education in regards to programming.