

REVIEW

Odyssey: The Compleat Apventure

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Harold Nelson, Editor

One Friday afternoon recently, I decided to try my hand at a new game that sounded most intriguing. The evening before I had read over the game documentation pamphlet (I would urge any *Odyssey* adventurer to do the same before undertaking a game). On this particular Friday, I played one game which ended in less than success. A friend then joined me and we played a game together – one person at the keyboard and the other going through the documentation pamphlet. We must have begun this game around 4:30 PM. After thoroughly touring the island on which the game begins (see photo 1) and amassing a large army, a good deal of wealth, and considerable equipment, we decided to embark on a ship we had just purchased (very reasonably priced) for another island. Thinking it was about 6:30 PM, we decided to have something to eat before going to sea. We were astonished to discover that it was actually about 8:00 PM. We had been playing for nearly four hours, though it seemed like only half that time.



Photo 1: *The island on which the Odyssey game begins. The crosses indicate villages containing markets where you can purchase supplies and equipment for your journey. The human shape shows the location of you and your followers (mostly mercenaries). The figure to your south is an ancient temple which is locked and can be opened and entered only with the appropriate devices. The figure to the northwest of you is a hut which is the dwelling of any one of an assortment of characters. Directions, hints, and questions are generally given below the map. Commands are, for the most part, single keystrokes (e.g., E to move east). The major exception is typing numbers (e.g., amounts of quadroons to bargain for a purchase or a bribe).*

Photo by Charles Freiberg.

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Obviously, we decided, this is a game worthy of high praise. There is only one warning for the prospective player. The warning is simple: make sure you have sufficient time. It is obviously an engrossing game. It might be advisable to keep a clock handy or even set an alarm to your desired quitting time. Since a game in progress can be saved on any initialized disk and completed later, it is probably better to break off a game than risk the loss of family or job.

Upon returning to our game on that Friday evening, we set sail and were just getting the knack of handling our ship when we were lost in a fog bank and ran aground. We spent quite awhile trying, unsuccessfully, to get free. When we first went aground there was a brief message to the effect that local fishermen would help us for a price. This message appeared quite briefly and did not reappear.

In a case such as this, if the correct command is not found, it may seem as though there is a bug in the program causing it to go into an infinite loop. A call to Synergistic Software convinced us that this is not the case and that there is one command that can result in freeing a ship caught in this situation. (Hint: Use quadrooms.)

Some friends have said that they would like to see a little more detail in the documentation about how the outcome of battles with bandits and various monsters is determined. But, on the other hand, the element of uncertainty and chance that the user experiences may add to the excitement and enjoyment of the game. Also, the documentation does include the relative worth of the different offensive and defensive devices available. And, with some luck, one can increase his ability to avoid battle when its outcome appears doubtful.

The finest feature of this game is its use of high-resolution color graphics. It is the best use of color graphics in a game for the Apple that I have seen.

While this program does not operate in real time, certain features of the game give the user the illusion that it is doing just that. This is especially true of traveling on horseback, flying on a magic rug (should you encounter a wizard inclined to give you one), and sailing.

Another strong feature of the game is the great number of possible encounters both on land and at sea and the variety of outcomes that can result from these encounters. These are too numerous to list or begin to describe in a brief review, and learning to deal with them is a major part of the enjoyment of this game.

It is also interesting that, as opposed to some Adventure games, it is virtually impossible to reproduce an *Odyssey* game. Each game starts at a randomly chosen point and the locations of castles, tombs, and other objects and creatures are also changed with each game. Hence, each game is unique.

Conclusions

- This is a very fine game for the Apple II computer. It makes excellent use of color graphics. Fans of Adventure and Dungeon games should find this to be an interesting and challenging addition, with some new twists, to their collections. For those just developing an interest in this type of game, *Odyssey* is such a good one that starting with it may greatly diminish the interest you have in other Adventure games.
- The documentation seems, at the very least, adequate. Some users may desire more detail on how various aspects of the program work. At any rate, there is enough information, presented in a clear and interesting manner, to allow virtually anyone to start playing the game.
- My only criticism of the program is that some of the messages offering hints on what to do next (such as that mentioned above about the local fishermen) appear so briefly that if their meaning is not clear at first or if you are momentarily distracted, they might as well not have been there at all.
- It is important to keep in mind that a well-played game of *Odyssey* is going to take a lot of time, but games can be saved and played in installments. The only short game is an unsuccessful game with an obvious outcome. ■