

## *Room(s)*

*Room(s)* is a video game prototype created to demonstrate the evolution of interactive fiction and its influence on the video game genre. This idea is inspired by the text adventure genre (i.e. *Zork*) and its evolution to graphic adventure games (i.e. *Myst*). The intent of this project is not to create an example of one genre or the other, but to explore the underlying mechanics of each. By experimenting in this fashion there is the potential to create something new while uncovering pathways for elements of previous mediums to enter new forms of media.

In this initial prototype of the game titled *Room(s)* the player has the ability to freely explore a game environment, a single room, and make progress by interacting with objects within that space. The game starts similar to those text adventure games that do not present an immediate storyline or objective to the player, with the idea that by exploring the game world the player's objective will emerge.

Unlike text adventure games, the world will be expressed through media assets. This leaves less to the imagination, which may be viewed as both a pro and a con. Through text there is no need to create media assets and the world envisioned by the user is unique to that individual. However, by adding visual queues the user can be immersed in the world with less effort by the player, allowing players to spend less time reading and more time exploring. One change that the graphic adventure game has to its text predecessor is that it can be more difficult to create the impression that items are actionable in a multitude of ways. In this game items can be interacted with using a single button rather than through command style arguments and there is no disguising the limitations of the game mechanics to the player.

In comparison to graphic adventure games, this prototype is different visually as it takes on the aesthetic of the 2D top down RPG. This includes the inclusion of a player avatar. In the case of 2D top down RPGs there is a limit to the common method of interaction, which is dependent on collisions between the player's avatar and the object to be interacted with and a single action button. In *Room(s)* the mechanics for interacting with in game objects take a line from the graphic adventure game's use of a cursor. In

this way more details in the room can be ‘actionable’. The goal in mind was to add more depth to the room, so that every object could be explored and not be purely aesthetic. Clicking on one of the many objects can present an event or a text description similar to those found in the text adventure genre.

Probably the most significant leap from either genre is the emphasis on the room structure found throughout both the text adventure and graphic adventure genres. This is not entirely a new concept as it borrows from the escape the room subgenre common to both. However, the game is titled *Room(s)* for good reason. Unlike traditional escape the room genre the initial room in *Room(s)* contains ‘mini-rooms’ that can potentially be traversed deeper and deeper. This concept is inspired by *Myst*’s mini worlds that are explored by “linking books” to access several “Ages”. In *Room(s)* other rooms can be accessed through what I’ve chosen to call “transition objects”. These objects can take players to other rooms and the objects themselves can be creatively inserted. For example, a player could jump into a diorama *Blue’s Clues* style or put on a VR headset and enter a virtual world. The current prototype adds these examples, though they are not currently implemented.

The current prototype may be limited to a single room, but the framework for creating a more expansive implementation has been laid out. In addition, throughout working on this piece I feel it works well as a proof of concept for implementation in an entirely new media, virtual reality. The escape the room genre has seen the transition to real life physical manifestations, where participants are locked in a room and must search for clues to find a way out. The concept of this prototype can take the escape the room genre back to a digital medium while implementing features otherwise limited by a physical setting. Additionally, the concept would work well to the restriction of movement in a limited space commonly seen in VR applications.

Through experimenting with established genres there are important design decisions to be made. Something that works in one medium may not transition well into the next. On the other hand, by looking at multiple genres and mediums we may also see the potential for certain ideas to succeed in other forms of media. When it comes to digital

mediums there is an ongoing evolution in trying to find applications that fit the medium best, many of which take root in past examples. The video game prototype *Room(s)* serves to show the composite of past implementations and the potential for such a concept to be new and successful.