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An open world and exploration are very common, if not necessary, elements in today’s games, but the purpose of exploration in each game is different, some to create a large and expanded worldview, some serve for the storytelling. The Walking Dead has a very limited space to explore, yet which is the appropriate choice to depict the zombie apocalypse under great tension.

In The Walking Dead, players control Lee Everett, who is the primary protagonist in the series, to interact with the other characters with conversations and to attack the zombies or doge from them with quick time events to survive the zombie horror and also experience the story. The game is a telltale game and is in episodes, and Players can move Lee to go around in a scene with limited space, and as the story progresses, the scene changes to another. In the limited space, what players can do is also very limited. You can only control Lee to talk with other survivors and give energy bars to them most of the time; when the zombies are close, you can’t shoot freely even when you have a gun because there is no combat system at all, and the only thing you can do is to watch the video and wait until a quick time event to pop up. Though it feels like just watching a tv series of The Walking Dead, the game is still very intense and compelling with its wonderful story and the limitation of resource and space.

For example, in episode one, Lee and other survivors found themselves a shelter in a Pharmacy store. In the store, I needed to move Lee to interact with his surroundings in order to progress the story, and I learnt that one of the survivors had a heart attack and needed pills, so I moved Lee to a room where the pill located, but the door was locked, and now I could choose whether to try to open the locked door by Lee’s powerful hands or to chop the door with the axe that Lee attained in the previous scenes, but neither of them worked. So, now I needed to find the key to the door, but there was no clue indicating where the key was, so I had to look for the key in the store. Basically, all the area that Lee could move was between the room with a locked door and the store. I found an energy bar on the shelf, and I could choose to keep it or gave it to one of the survivors so he or she would be grateful of what you did and remember you. After searching again and again, I just could not find the key, because it was not in the store, and I would only get a clue after talking to Doug, who was peeking the street through the door. After a conversation, I learnt that the key was on one of the zombies on the street who was formerly an employee in the pharmacy store, and the challenge then became getting the key from the zombie. Throughout the gameplay, I felt very suppressed in the limited space, and the zombies walking outside which I could see through the gaps on the blocked window made the feeling even stronger. The narrowness of space and limitation of resources very match the tone of the game which is terrifying and intense, while a larger space or an open world would downgrade the horror.

As a successful telltale game, The Walking Dead does not need an open world to support its own style of storytelling, instead the confined exploration is what makes the game a different genre than Left 4 Dead.