

My New Year's resolution to never cheat at games again, and advice as to how to achieve this goal.

I have played many first-person adventure games and, despite my best intentions, have sometimes succumbed to looking up the answers to certain puzzles. In other words, I cheated. I never mean to and always feel bad afterwards. I usually cheat when I'm playing the game at 2 a.m. and can't even see the monitor because of my drooping eyelids. I always tell myself, "Just one more puzzle and then I'll go to bed." I think we all know that's a certain recipe for disaster.

This year, however, I am making a New Year's resolution to never cheat at games again. I want the satisfaction of knowing that I won the game on my own. In order to help myself and others, I have collected four strategies for playing first-person adventures. If they are followed, I am sure that I (and perhaps you) will be resolute in never cheating again.

## Keep Ample and Detailed Notes

This is the best way to keep yourself from going crazy when playing a first-person adventure. The most efficient approach is to buy a 3-subject notebook and dedicate one subject to each game. Keep this notebook by your side when playing the game and note everything that's important. What is considered important in a game? Anything and everything. Each game is different in what is considered important so there are no hard and fast rules. However, there are a few guidelines that will help you out.

- Make note of everything that you see. You most likely won't know what's important until later in the game, so save yourself a lot of hassle and just write down everything. Include your thoughts on what you see and ideas about their importance and use in the game. List what buttons do when you click on them (change color, move, perform a function, etc.) as well as what

they look like. The more detail, the better. Draw a picture if using words would take too long or be too cumbersome. Also include the location of the item you're describing. If an item suddenly becomes important and you have to go back to it, knowing where it is prevents you from wandering aimlessly to find it. It might be helpful to draw a map of an area.

- When you come across a puzzle, describe it and its location because the solution to it may be elsewhere in the game. It becomes easy to associate puzzles with their solutions if you have written down one or the other in the notebook. When you get stuck, you can read the notes you've taken and, for example, might be able to associate a machine in one part of the game with a closed bridge in another part. It's very easy to forget all of the clues that one finds, so having them written down is vital to winning the game.

## Take Your Time and Pay Attention

Most people just zip through adventure games without taking enough time to look at the surroundings. If you want to take good notes, it's vital that you pay attention to everything around you. Spend at least 20 seconds looking at each scene, and longer if you need to examine details. You might find an answer to a puzzle, something or someplace interesting to explore, or just a pretty vista to admire. After all, since gamers demand realistic graphics, doesn't it make sense to spend time looking at them?

This cuts to the very heart of adventure games. The ultimate purpose of them is not solving puzzles, but enjoying the journey along the way. It's the storyline and the characters that make adventure games so much fun to play. If you are wholly concentrating on the puzzles then you are missing out on a good portion of the gaming experience. It might be hard at first to slow down and look at each scene carefully. I know it is for me because I'm goal-oriented and I want to solve the puzzles. However, I have found that my enjoyment of the game increases and it is easier to solve the puzzles if I spend the time and admire each scene before I move on.

## Save Often

Although you can't die in most first-person adventures, there is always the possibility of making an irreversible mistake when solving a puzzle or pushing the wrong button at the wrong time. Therefore, it's always a good idea to save the game just before doing something that you're unsure of.

That way, if you make a mistake, you can always open up a saved game and try again.

However, the saved games won't do you much good if they're named #1, #2, #3, etc. Sure, you know which game is the most recently-saved one, but little beyond that. A better way is to give each saved game a descriptive title along with a date so you will know which game is the farthest along. If you ever have a need to backtrack, it will be very easy for you to do so.

## iscellaneous Tips

There a number of tips that I consider important, but not important enough to have their own section. Nonetheless, these should be followed as well.

- Always have the volume turned up so that you can listen to the music and sound effects. Firstly, the music is (most of the time) beautiful and complements the game. Secondly, there might be clues to puzzles in the form of audio clues. It might be as simple as hearing a door open in the distance, or sound might be the puzzle itself. Thirdly, the sound effects provide realism and the music provides mood, so it's important to listen to them even if they don't help you solve the puzzles.

- Turn the brightness up if the game seems too dark. I have missed vital clues simply because I had the brightness too low. Always check the brightness when you first start a game to find a setting that shows details but doesn't make the graphics appear washed out. That way, you can be assured of getting the best visual experience.

- Play when you're awake. Yes, it seems obvious, but when I'm caught in the grips of a really good game, I can very easily forget about sleep. Time has little meaning when I'm faced with a puzzle that defies any solution. However, it's more important to get a good sleep and tackle it when you're awake than to stumble around when you're half asleep. Personally, most of my cheating occurred at 2 a.m. when I absolutely had to find the answer to a puzzle. Exercise that fantastic self-control and turn off the game and go to bed. Not only will that puzzle seem a lot easier in the morning, but you'll get a lot more out of the game when your are awake enough to appreciate the finer details.

'm sure you're all wondering where the update to my game is and you

probably think that it's vaporware. Fear not, I've been putting together a bunch of ideas and will soon have a better place to showcase them than Point & Click. Look for a game update next month as well as my usual literary prose. Until next time.

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