

“Omotesando Adventure” is, as far as I can tell, the very first adventure game written and published in Japan. It predates the first Japanese translation/remake of Mystery House by a few months (although the latter probably had a bit more influence on the larger picture).

Omotesando Adventure was first published as a memory dump listing in the April 1982 issue of Monthly Ascii magazine. It was later also available for sale on cassette. The program is written for Japanese 8-bit machines, head among them the PC-8001 series. It's completely in (often broken) English and has a simple two work parser interface.

Monthly Ascii magazine was one of several personal-computing magazines published in Japan in the late '70s and through the '80s. It continues to this very day, although it changed its name to “Monthly Business Ascii” in 2008, to complement the publisher's diverse array of computing and entertainment magazines. Ascii was first published in 1977, and like all personal-computing magazines of the time, was aimed at the hobbyist. In the early '80s, however, it was the only magazine that seemed to realize there's a future to the personal computer in business as well as at the non-enthusiast home, and its articles and themes started to diverse into these areas as well. By the late '80s, content about games and such was branched off into new magazines from the publisher, and the flagship Ascii magazine focused entirely on the “serious” side of the personal computing business. Ascii the publisher itself branched into other computing-businesses. By the mid '80s they developed retail games and software, and were even the Japanese distributor for Microsoft software for a while.

Omotesando Adventure was published before all that happened, though. The program wasn't published in the main magazine, but rather in the second installment of a yearly April Fool's supplement, “Yearly Ah-SKI!”. The supplement was mostly fake articles and advertisements mocking the computer industry, but included one full, working program as well each year. In 1982 and 1983 they published two adventure games. The first is this one. The magazine also included a brief introduction to the genre. The second is also interesting (even more so than this one, since it does something unique with the text adventure interface), and hopefully we'll get to it later.

Regarding the English -- Japanese is not an easy language to input and output on a computer. Most certainly not on the 8-bit machines we're talking about here. Japanese is comprised of three different scripts. One is “kanji”, a script borrowed from Chinese with thousands of characters (in order to be able to read an average Japanese text you need to know about 2000 of them, give or take a hundred). In addition, there are two syllabaries that can be used to write the language phonetically - “hiragana” and “katakana”. Each include about 50 characters, and they are simply different scripts for the same phonetic values (similar, but not quite equivalent, to capital and non-capital letters in English). Japanese text is written using all three intermixed: kanji is used for the stems of content words, hiragana for grammatical stuff like suffixes, prepositions and function words, and katakana for a variety of sundry tasks - most famously to write loan-words from other languages.

Japanese computers at the time came with nothing but katakana on the ROM. Katakana was chosen because its characters are square and easy to make out even in a low-resolution display. I believe you could buy expensive ROMs containing a fuller set of Japanese characters, but even if you had this text-encoding was far from standardized. Katakana, on its own, is fine for short sentences or simple messages, but reading a long script in it is difficult, so it definitely isn't ideal for something like a text adventure game.

Input is also difficult. Japanese doesn't lend itself quite as easily to the <verb> <noun> pattern without sounding completely broken -- much more so than the lacking a determiner in the English version.

Omotesando is a famous street in Tokyo. Ascii's offices were located there at the time the game was published.

Below is a very quick (and not so good) translation of the text accompanying the program. It also contains the background story for the game.

Special Feature - Adventure Games

Among the various things we can use a personal computer for, games are the most constant and popular. Games are in high demand, and software houses are pushing them into the market continuously.

This issue we are introducing the Adventure Game. It's an entirely new genre, the like of which was never seen on a computer. We may even call it a "New Type" of computer games.

We will start our explanation by describing the most basic operations of these games.

Usually, the games begin by describing the player's environment and condition in text and pictures. For example, something like "You are in front of a building. You can see a door." is displayed on the screen. Then, the computer demands an input.

In regular computer games, the operation procedure is understood, and the player is told in advance what kind of input is acceptable. Adventure games don't work that way. A computer game can't understand any random input, of course, so there is a contract regarding the input between the game and the player.

The contract requires the player to input what action they want to take concerning the described situation. Given the previous example, something suitable will be "open the door". After that, the computer describes the condition after the player acted and demands an input once again. For example, "The door is locked and cannot be opened."

A simple explanation of adventure games can describe them as this kind of repeating situation-description and action-input. We can also call them role-playing games. In short, the player is expected to act as a certain character in a story the game is telling.

Adventure games are not limited to just one type of story. In an adventure story, you can become an astronaut attempting to save the earth from an asteroid on a collision course or a warrior in the middle ages saving a princess by fighting dragons and wizards.

Furthermore, you can only play an adventure game once. That is, once you complete the game's goals it is over. Once you do that once, you already know what to input at what location, and can't play again. That said, the one time you play the game won't be over in one hour or even one day no matter how good a player you are. There are rumors that some recent games can take up to a year to solve. In that way, it can be said adventure game make the most of the personal computer's abilities.

There are also ways the game can end without reaching the goal. For example, if you jump into space without wearing your space suit or face the dragon without having a weapon equipped, the player's death is certain. At those times, you must try again from the beginning.

Adventure games were developed in America, and so at this point in time both the descriptions and the input are set in English. (Because of that our English has improved considerably. When we play adventure games here at the office, a Japanese-English-Japanese dictionary is an

essential accessory).

Furthermore, while outputting text isn't a problem, formatting a request for action in Japanese is difficult and so is analyzing the input. We think even home-grown adventure games are going to use English for a while.

We hope adventure games will expand in popularity even here in Japan, and that our readers can use them to make the most out of their personal computing life.

Omotensando Adventure **Suguho Takahashi / Hideki Akiyama**

Introduction

Let's state this clearly: we don't believe you, who are experiencing an adventure for the first time, will be able to easily achieve the game's goals. For several dozen tries you probably won't even manage to sneak into Ascii Publishing's offices. You will be caught in traps and die frustrating deaths. By trying again and again dozens or hundreds of times, you'll learn things like "if I do this here I can go through" or "before I do this I must not do that" by trial and error and will be able to proceed.

Solving the riddle that is the entire game can take several months and try your endurance.

In any case, since this is a game of endurance, we added the ability to save your position to a cassette and reload the game to continue from the same point. We're very kind.

That said, to stay in the spirit of the adventure game, you must look for the way to save the game in the course of playing it (we're not always kind). Once you find the way, you will be able to solve the game's puzzles much more quickly.

How to play "Omotensando Adventure"

"Omotensando Adventure" is an adventure game. To find out how to play it, you must run the program and try for yourself. Thus, the instructions are now over.

...but we can't really do that, so we'll tell you just a little more.

You are a member of the editorial team of a certain failing computing magazine. At this moment you've accepted the responsibility of trying to drag down Monthly Ascii magazine from its position of power by sneaking into their offices and doing some kind of sabotage on their facilities. If you return with the job done, there's a high chance your good-for-nothing chief editor will get fired and you will be promoted to the position. If you fail, you'll be forced to do menial works for months.

Since Japan is a peaceful country, there is no way a regular citizen like yourself can get hold of weapons or bombs. Even if you could, you're executing your mission on a Sunday when no one is around, and in the middle of the day so your family won't get suspicious. There is also no way to go through Omotensando carrying a bazooka on your back.

Furthermore, until yesterday you were nothing more than an average, peace-loving citizen, so even if you could get hold of an AR-15 you probably don't have the skills to shoot anyone. If you can get close enough you can probably get a shot to hit, but doing that will just get you caught, your mission revealed, and your publisher shamed out of existence.

Nevertheless, you need to find some way of sabotage that will stop Monthly Ascii from being published, or at the very least put it on a huge delay. How to do that without being caught is the question.

Using the program

The appeal of an adventure game is directly proportional to the size of the program, or more accurately to the size of the data. In other words, that size is responsible for the length of the adventure and its complexity level.

We tried to make "Omotesando Adventure" as appealing as possible. Therefore, the program's code is certainly long. You can run Omotesando Adventure on machines with a Z-80 CPU: the PC-8001, the PC-8801 (in N-BASIC mode) and the MZ-80K/C/K2 and MZ-80B (the main routines and the data are the same for all. The input routine is specific for each machine). Since we're confined by the space of the famously tiny Ah SKI! magazine, a regular program listing won't fit. Therefore, this time we're publishing the program in the form of a hexadecimal memory dump for the PC-8001 and PC-8801. Otherwise, we would have to continue serializing the code in our next issue a year from now!

We're terribly sorry, but users of MZ machines must also enter the separate machine independent dump listings. Furthermore, we are using memory locations shared by the three machines listed above (MZ-80K/C users are required to have 48K of RAM installed), so the listing begins at location \$9000.

Speaking of which, Omotesando Adventure is approximately 13 Kilobyte long. Entering such a long memory listing without errors probably requires superhuman concentration powers. Therefore, the program includes a self-check routine. When you cold-start Omotesando Adventure, the program will checksum itself prior to initializing game-related data. In case of an error, the program will display the address of a 256-byte area that is incorrect. If the check ends without an error - congratulations! The game will display its startup message and you can begin playing. When the checksum routine finds and displays an error, it also waits for a keypress, giving you time to write down where the error occurred before the system resets itself. After fixing the error, please cold-boot the system again.

Now, in order to make sure the checksum routine itself doesn't contain any errors please take special care when entering the code in addresses \$9000-\$91FF.

When in doubt... try things out!

The form of the English commands Omotesando Adventure takes is limited to

<verb> <object name>

That said, the program doesn't mind if you add adverbs or prepositions before, after or in the middle of the command. Therefore,

get the key

will be interpreted correctly (that is, if a key is available for taking), but

get key and use it

look and get key

and so on will not do what you expect (To find out what happens if you enter such commands, just try them out. That is the nature of adventure games).

What verbs and objects can be used can only be discovered by trying. Here are two rules of thumb, however, to make you feel at ease: (1) you can enter commands to move around, look and listen. (2) The English required is around middle-school level (this is because we can't write in a level above our very own).

...are you still not at ease? In that case, it's unavoidable: we'll teach you 5 basic keywords. First, you can use "north", "south", "east" and "west" to move around. Second, "look" is the keywords that tells you the state of the location you're in. Now, with those 5 words at your disposal, go ahead on your adventure!