

An Examination of What Holds True, in Terms of Genre, between The Legend of Zelda:
Ocarina of Time, Shadow of the Colossus, and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

What follows is an attempt to tease out what exactly constitutes the loose genre affiliation of action-adventure, with a look at three games that share so little in common it seems counterintuitive to look at them in the same context, much less call them all a part of the same genre. However, by looking at them in context of other genres and delineating their gameplay quirks from both one another and videogames as a whole, it can be seen that these three games take on a similarity that transcends difference through use of myriad techniques.

These three games are all action-adventure classics; The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, for instance, follows the heroically silent Link in a journey throughout time as he warps back and forth over a seven year gap, crawling through dungeons and riding across plains in a world that is both fully realized from the very beginning and beholden to time, in the sense that days and nights pass. It is an atmospheric romp through an entire fictional world that progresses into dungeons with unique enemies and bosses in an update of classical formulas. Shadow of the Colossus is a similarly realized fictional plane, where a tower and a bridge are the only constructs of man in a forbidden land lush with vegetation, animal life, and enormous colossi that must be slain to revive a woman who is in a vegetative state, and who ends up simply being bait for a monster that possesses the main character. In contrast to these two is Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas,

a game that prides itself on its strikingly realistic feel, where pragmatism seems to be a way of life and cars rule in the stead of horses. A modern feel is perpetuated by the grittiness that the game exemplifies; finding out who murdered CJs mother, taking the streets through a series of gang wars, and becoming a gambling mogul all peel away miniscule bits of this multilayered game but it really is just a character wandering his turf, like the other two.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas typifies the modern idea of an "action" game; primarily a Hollywood construct, the blockbuster franchise has played itself out. Think *Die Hard* as an archetypical example of the action; where motivation and setting are just thin constructs designed to make accessible a story about nothing in particular except a bastardized Aristotelian katharsis (Aristotle, 1459b) purgation is not helpful but an outpouring of societal aggression and rage. By following a character that attempts to anthropomorphize that larger-than-life action hero character, while still giving him an arsenal ranging from night sticks to rocket launchers, taking missions that range from the mundane (delivery) to the extraordinary (using toy planes to bomb bicycle riders in the employ of a rival toy company). Take this, then, the undiluted action, and instead of having it dictated, make it into a piece of an intricate puzzle; make the character the responsibility of yourself, but don't forget to give the city artificial barriers that hide in their obviousness. This exploration in strict boundaries, serving only to supplement the shooting, murdering, gangster lifestyle that your avatar comes to typify, is the action with a pinch of adventure.

Shadow of the Colossus is as open as any game has ever been. Detailing a world where your only transportation is a horse who has no respect for you, and your only trail

is the light you can sometimes reflect off your sword, almost all of the game is exploration; the one thing that seems to smack of action, the battle with the colossi, is more exploration than action according to the gaming dictionary; the only action is the act of stabbing, which is done somewhere along the lines of fifty times over the course of a ten hour game. These two games, on a base level analysis, seem only to share their 3rd person perspective.

The bridge between the two is *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. A game equal parts action, with the constant onslaught of enemies and simple movement/running puzzles and an adventurous aspect detailed in both the simple but eternally compelling story and the ability to explore both a vast overworld in all its splendor and the dungeons that spot its landscape, it is the epitome of action-adventure. From the Hylian fields, where shield-eating monsters must be dodged with a quick slap of the horse to the Water Temple, where endlessly respawning spiders and other assorted baddies impede your progress through a maze of puzzles and intellectual action, neither half of the titular genre is skimmed upon. By fusing the *Die Hard*/*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* aesthetic of quick movement and destruction of those in opposition with the *Shadow of the Colossus* penchant for understating its epic qualities (to make them that much more evident) and focus on discovery, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* puts the aesthetic gap into perspective, and unifies these two disparate games to a genre whose two parts cannot exist without one another, even in the other two games, which are some of the most polarized examples of the genre.

The genre of action-adventure is presumably all encompassing; every videogame has some sort of action, usually called gameplay, and any sort of linear walking/thinking

could conceivably be called adventure. However, what sets action-adventure games apart from things like Role-Playing Games or third person shooters is the implicit emphasis of the game; Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas may require that one shoot a lot, possibly more than in a lot of games in the shooter genres, but it is still clearly an action-adventure game, because it plays too heavily on the idea of exploring the city in the guise of missions, as well as the idea of, to use a word that etymologically mirrors the half of the genre that Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas epitomizes, acting, in such a way as the player has true control. Similar but different reasons are given to Shadow of the Colossus; it isn't an action game because you take action every step of the way, it's an action adventure game because it is based on adventure by using forms of action. So, with a game that use action to be adventurous, a game that use adventure to create action, and a game that uses both in equal doses in a more symbiotic approach, the genre can be used to both distinguish and coalesce.