

Paper Computer Games (PCGs) Context Loader

Paper Computer Games, or PCGs, are a unique form of hand-drawn, interactive storytelling where imagination drives gameplay. Played between a human player and a PCG Master, the game unfolds screen-by-screen as the player describes their actions and the PCG Master narrates the outcomes. Each screen represents a frozen moment in the story, filled with potential puzzles, interactions, or dramatic decisions. There are no set rules—just creativity, logic, and the improvisational spirit shared between the player and the PCG Master.

Gameplay Fundamentals

- **Screens:** Each PCG is composed of a series of hand-drawn illustrations called "screens." A screen captures a single scene, typically including the environment, obstacles, NPCs (non-player characters), and important objects. Screens are static and do not change; instead, the player navigates between them based on choices or puzzle solutions. Occasionally, players may return to a previous screen if new information or items change the outcome (e.g., returning with a key to unlock a previously locked door).
 - **Player Interaction:** Unlike video games, PCGs are not interactive through physical touch or movement. The player progresses through the game by asking questions and describing actions. For example, they might say "I open the door" or "I talk to the guard." The PCG Master then decides how the world responds. Players often begin each new PCG by asking, "What's in my inventory?"—a beloved tradition.
 - **PCG Master Role:** The PCG Master acts as the narrator, environment, NPCs, and puzzle designer all in one. They interpret player actions, describe the outcomes, and play the roles of all characters encountered. The Master is also responsible for enforcing logic and consistency within the world. They balance fairness with challenge, creativity with structure.
 - **Roleplay and Dialogue:** PCGs are heavily roleplay-driven. The player may talk to NPCs and expect real-time conversations. This means puzzles can sometimes be solved by persuading or tricking an NPC, rather than brute force or item usage. The PCG Master must think quickly, responding naturally in character.
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Staple Mechanics and Traditions

- **Inventory Screen:** Inventories are tracked on a separate screen, often labeled with a large letter "E." This odd tradition comes from a childhood spelling mistake of the word "inventory" by one of the original creators, which was eventually embraced as part of the culture. While the inventory can contain anything, it's limited by logic—so you can't carry a car in your pocket.

- **Save Game:** One of the most iconic PCG mechanics. A player may say “Save Game” at any moment, allowing them to later “load” and retry if something goes wrong. This originated from a miscommunication between early PCG players but became a key feature over time. It's now an official part of PCG tradition, creating a game-within-a-game where trial and error are not only encouraged—they're celebrated.
 - **Creative Puzzle-Solving:** PCGs have no formal rules, stats, health points, or dice rolls. Outcomes are determined solely by logic and creativity. For example, if a guard has a gun and the player tries to run past them, the PCG Master might say they're shot and die. However, if the player throws a key to knock the gun out of the guard's hand, it might succeed—depending on how believable the action is. The goal is to reward clever thinking, not just brute force.
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Notable History

- **Creation and Legacy:** PCGs were invented by a child named Chris, who, with his friend Xaq, began creating and playing these games around the age of 8. Their simple yet imaginative approach laid the foundation for what would become an underground creative movement.
 - **YouTube and Community:** Years later, Xaq launched a YouTube channel titled "Paper Computer Games" to share and preserve the games they made. Over time, this channel introduced the concept to a growing fanbase and inspired many others to create their own PCGs. The channel showcased not just finished games, but explanations of mechanics, fan creations, and even playable adventures.
 - **Famous Examples:** Games like "Agent Peanut"—a goofy but iconic PCG where you play as a human-sized peanut sneaking into a church—have become cultural touchstones within the community. Despite their simple visuals, these games are praised for how effectively they turn paper into dramatic, interactive experiences.
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Tone and Style

PCGs are grounded in imagination and are meant to feel like a mix between a puzzle, a storybook, and an improv game. They are often funny, sometimes serious, and always unpredictable. A single screen can contain multiple layers of interaction, and even the most ridiculous situations can be approached with clever logic.

The tone is intentionally flexible—one moment you could be dodging lasers in a futuristic prison, the next you might be talking your way out of a conflict with nothing but a spoon and your wit. What unites all PCGs is the creativity required to navigate them.

Key Concepts Summary

- PCGs are imagination-driven, puzzle-based games that exist entirely through paper drawings and verbal narration.
- The player interacts by describing actions. The PCG Master reacts and controls the game world.
- The game progresses screen-by-screen, with players navigating puzzles, enemies, and challenges.
- There are no formal mechanics like dice, stats, or health bars. Logic, creativity, and improvisation rule.
- Inventory is tracked in a screen labeled with an “E” and follows real-world logic.
- Saying “Save Game” lets players return to earlier moments and try new strategies.
- PCGs can be comedic, action-packed, dramatic, or absurd—all depending on how they’re designed.