

Finding Aid to the Scott Adams Papers, 1970-2015

Summary Information

Title: Scott Adams papers

Creator: M. Scott Adams (primary)

ID: 117.2818

Date: 1970-2015 (inclusive); 1978-1987 (bulk)

Extent: 4.2 linear feet

Language: The materials in this collection are primarily in English. There are some instances of German; these are denoted in the Contents List section of this finding aid.

Abstract: The Scott Adams papers are a compilation of printed source code, notes, correspondence, publicity materials, and personal papers relating to Scott Adams or his software company, Adventure International. The bulk of the materials are from 1978-1987.

Repository:

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, he has given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Conditions Governing Access: Due to the nature of the printed source code on perforated, connected printer paper, reference scans of these pages may only be available at the discretion of the library staff. On-site access is freely available.

Custodial History: The Scott Adams papers were donated to The Strong in April 2017 as a gift of Scott and Roxanne Adams. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 117.2818 and were received in three boxes, along with associated museum objects and library materials.

Preferred citation for publication: Scott Adams papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

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Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Adams, Scott
- Adams, Mitchell Scott

Corporate Names

- Adventure International (Firm)

- Atari, Inc. Home Computer Division
- Marvel Comics Group

Subjects

- Adams, Scott
- Adventure (Game)
- Adventure International (Firm)
- Computer adventure games
- Computer games
- Computer games industry
- Game design and development
- Games--software

Biographical Note

Mitchell Scott Adams (known in the games industry as Scott Adams) grew up in Miami, Florida. He became fascinated with computers after seeing a room-sized mainframe during an elementary school field trip. While in high school, Adams arrived to school earlier than the teachers and stayed late so that he could use his school's computer terminal. Adams attended the Florida Institute of Technology, graduating in 1975. Inspired by Will Crowther and Don Woods's mainframe text-based computer game, *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976-1977), Adams developed his first adventure game, *Adventureland*—which ultimately became the first commercially available text-based adventure for a home computer.

By 1978, Adams established Adventure International as a software publishing company alongside his then-wife Alexis. Initially, Adams's *Adventureland* games were loose cassette tapes, copied one-by-one on his TRS-80 and sold without any product packaging. After a Chicago-area Radio Shack owner told Adams that he could sell more games if the products came in retail packaging, Adams found a low-cost solution; he placed the cassette games into baby bottle liners and stapled a folded business card over the top to seal them. (Later packaging resembled book covers and featured a range of artwork.) Adventure International grew into a prolific software house and is credited with kick-starting the third-party software industry.

Adams authored more than a dozen interactive fiction titles, and he contacted Marvel Comics in the mid-1980s to see if they would be interested in licensing any characters for computer games. After establishing a partnership, Adams wrote the *Questprobe* comics series while Marvel artists drew the illustrations. The first Marvel tie-in adventure game, *Questprobe featuring The Hulk*, was released in 1984, followed up with *Questprobe featuring Spider-Man* (1984) and *Questprobe featuring The Human Torch and The Thing* (1985).

As the videogame and home computer game markets experienced a downturn in the mid-1980s, Adventure International closed in 1985. Adams continued his career as a programmer, and in 2013, released his latest text-adventure game called *The Inheritance*. As of 2018, Scott Adams and his wife Roxanne Adams run an adventure and puzzle game company called Clopas.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Scott Adams papers are a compilation of professional and personal papers, including Adams' time as the head of Adventure International. This collection contains game development documentation, product catalogs, fliers, correspondence, software publishing agreements, publicity clippings, awards, and more. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1978 and 1987. Additional scope and content information can be found in the Contents List section of this finding aid.

The Scott Adams papers are arranged into two series, one of which has been further divided into subseries. The collection is housed in four archival document boxes.

System of Arrangement

Series I: Professional papers, 1970-2014

Subseries A: Game development documentation, 1970-1985

Subseries B: Adventure International product catalogs and fliers, 1978-1984

Subseries C: Correspondence and agreements, 1975-1987

Subseries D: Publicity and awards, 1979-2014

Series II: Personal papers, 1970-2015

Contents List

Series I: Professional papers, 1970-2014

Scope and Content Note: This series houses original source code printouts, notes, photocopies of manuals, product catalogs, advertisements, correspondence, photographs, publicity clippings, and more. Some materials are related specifically to Adventure International, the software publishing company founded by Scott Adams in 1978.

Subseries A: Game development documentation, 1970-1985

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains original source code printouts, photocopies of manuals, cassette tapes, information about the *Questprobe* Marvel series, and other related Adventure International game development documentation. (The printouts dated 1970 are original games written by Adams while in high school.)

Box 1

- Folder 1 Source code printout - Checkers program, Scott Adams, c. 1970
- Folder 2 Source code printout - Calendar/scheduling program, Scott Adams, c. 1970
- Folder 3 Source code printouts - Various programs written by Scott Adams, c. 1970
- Folder 4 Source code printout - "Psycho," Scott Adams, c. 1988

Box 2

- Folder 1 Source code printout - "Receive Alpha Preprocessor," Scott Adams, August 14, 1977
- Folder 2 Source code printout - "Adventure," Scott Adams, December 1978
- Folder 3 Source code printout - "Saga Plus Number 1," Scott Adams, 1985
- Folder 4 "My First Complete Language Apl/360," APL\360 Terminal System manual [photocopy], n.d. [c. 1970?]
- Folder 5 Atari Disk Utilities code printout, n.d. [c. 1970s]
- Folder 6 Master cassette tapes for *Adventure #1* and *Adventure #4* for Exidy Sorcerer computer, Scott Adams, n.d. [c. 1978?]
- Folder 7 *Questprobe* - A Scott Adams/Marvel Comics Limited Series - letter, plot drafts, photocopies of sketches; c. 1983-1984
- Folder 8 *Questprobe* - A Scott Adams/Marvel Comics Limited Series - press release, manual, and comic books; 1984-1985
- Folder 9 "Engineering Hardware Specifications of the Atari ST Computer System," Atari Corporation, Sunnyvale, California, 24 January 1985
- Folder 10 Russ Wetmore games for Adventure International [*Preppie!*, *Preppie! II*, and *Sea Dragon*], manuals and floppy disks, c. 1982-1983

Subseries B: Adventure International product catalogs and fliers, 1978-1984

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses Adventure International product catalogs, letterhead, a press kit folder, and fliers. The folders in Box 3 contain product packaging and sell sheets removed from a binder.

Box 2

- Folder 11 Adventure International letterhead, n.d. [2 sheets]
- Folder 12 Loose *Adventure*/Adventure International fliers/advertisements, n.d. [c. 1978-1982]
- Folder 13 Adventure International product catalogs, 1983
- Folder 14 Adventure International press kit folder with product-related content, c. 1984

Box 3

- Folder 1 Adventure International product packaging and sell sheets, c. 1980s [Part 1 of 2]
- Folder 2 Adventure International product packaging and sell sheets, c. 1980s [Part 2 of 2]

Subseries C: Correspondence and agreements, 1975-1987

Scope and Content Note: Within this subseries are correspondence and related papers between Adams and various companies, as well as a few software publishing agreements.

Box 4

- Folder 1 Antiqua ADC Modifications - RCA, correspondence and notes, 1975-1976
- Folder 2 Personal Computing Festival letter to Scott Adams, July 1979
- Folder 3 "Star Trek: The Animated Graphic Adventure Game" proposal by Scott Adams for Starsoft Development Laboratories, September 1987
- Folder 4 General Software Publishing Agreement - "Saga Plus: The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle" and "Pirates of the Barbary Coast," 1987

Subseries D: Publicity and awards, 1979-2014

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds photographs of, publicity clippings about, and awards for Adams.

Box 4

- Folder 5 Photographs and ephemera, c. 1979-1984 and n.d.
- Folder 6 Publicity - newspaper and magazine articles, 1979-1988
- Folder 7 Publicity - newspaper and magazine articles, 1996-2014 and n.d. [one article in German]
- Folder 8 *Creative Computing* Tenth Anniversary Issue [bound volume with embossed cover], 1985
- Folder 9 *Retro Gamer*, Issue 89, 2011
- Folder 10 Awards, 1982-1985 and n.d.

Series II: Personal papers, 1970-2015

Scope and Content Note: This series contains information on Adams' time at Florida Institute of Technology in the early 1970s, newsletters from his stay on Ascension Island in 1974 (when Adams worked on spacecraft tracking radar), draft text for a novel written about one of his adventure games, and more.

Box 4

- Folder 11 Florida Institute of Technology - catalog, articles, commencement, newsletters, and letter; 1970-1983
- Folder 12 "The Islander" newsletters, Ascension Island, South Atlantic, 1974
- Folder 13 *Dictionary of International Biography* entry: "Adams, Mitchell Scott," 1984
- Folder 14 Screenplay Weekend 2004 publicity and notes, 2004
- Folder 15 "The Fun House Mystery Adventure: Book one of the Professor Adams Saga," R.D. Trimble, draft text, March 2015