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Interactive Narratives: The Future of Storytelling

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Abstract

The way we tell stories is in a constant flux of change and evolution, which results in the innovation of narrative and the roles of reader and author. Lately, this innovation has led towards the ascendance of interactive narratives. Thus, this end-of-degree project aims to examine interactive narratives and their relevance in our present and future. Furthermore, my goal is to provide new information and academic research on the topic, to facilitate discussion and bring attention to a narrative form often overlooked for its recentness. Through the analysis of different media with a core interactive element, such as videogames, virtual reality, fanfiction or boardgames, I will illustrate the journey from the first examples of interactive storytelling to the latest. This study will show how authors and readers have adapted to the appeal of interactive stories, and how these stories interconnected the roles of the two. Interactivity, agency, and immersion theories will help illustrate this new reality.

Keywords: interactivity, narrative, storytelling, agency, immersion

Introduction

“Learn English. You will need it in the future.”

I grew up hearing this mantra year after year, since I was a little girl who thought distinguishing between fourteen and forty hard enough. Learning any language can be hard, even if it is a mandatory subject in school for as long as you can remember, and especially if you are unable to find the motivation to do so. Fifteen-year-old me was not planning a trip to London anytime soon, and I was quite comfortable watching dubbed films and reading translated books. So, I shrugged and ignored it, at best, or disagreed stubbornly at worst when someone dared repeat that claim to me. Obviously, given that this end-of-degree project means I am practically past the last corner of *English Studies: Language and Literature* Street, I had a change of heart at some point or another. Indeed, my sudden interest in learning English came to me suspiciously at the same time I found a new form of literature I had never seen before. I found *Frozen Essence* (2010), a visual novel, a mix between videogame, comic and novel that introduced a concept I had never encountered before: I could change the story. I remember opening the program and being prompted to write the name of the protagonist. Such a simple notion, and yet it blew my mind. Was not that the author’s jurisdiction? Was I writing alongside them now, unbeknownst to them? My previous experience with any narrative was: you either like it or not. I could devour a book in a day or put it back in its shelf; I could binge-watch a TV show or turn off the TV. That was the extent of interactivity in narrative I had known until then. *Frozen Essence* changed my perspective by allowing me to change the story. There were choices, paths, decisions I could take and influence not only the ending, but the journey. Soon after, I learned of the existence of multiple works of interactive fiction that I was more than ready to enjoy... if it was not for a tiny problem. They were all in English. And thus, I finally found my motivation. English, now years later, proved to be the language of the recent future, and I dared make a new claim of my own: interactive narratives were the future of storytelling.

Before moving on, I must clarify that my arguments in defence of the future relevance of interactive fiction do not diminish any other narrative in any way. After all, English may be the language of the future, yet every other language must be preserved and used regularly. The rise of interactive narratives, making fiction richer and more diverse, is an addition, never a replacement. Having established these ground rules, allow me to act as a guide in a quick tour of this essay's structure. It is divided in four chapters, each one also divided into subsections that tackle specific forms of interactive narratives or explain particular concepts. Chapter one introduces us into the topic at hand by defining three concepts that, together, become the pillars of interactive fiction: interactivity, agency, and immersion. Once these are clarified, chapter two begins to unravel the many types of this modern narrative with a familiar and extremely popular genre: videogames. The first section deals with what most people would imagine when thinking about the word "videogame", yet the next sections explore more recent and less common media such as virtual reality or interactive films. The third chapter focuses on narratives more closely related to novels, and heavily text-based: the first books of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series, their heirs and most modern versions passed to digital screen, the fanfiction phenomenon, and the visual novels, the genre that picked my interest all those years ago and made this project a reality. To wrap it up, the last chapter brings us back to the beginning, exploring typical board games and their evolution towards greater storytelling and an audience that keeps growing, with the specific case of *Dungeons & Dragons* and its continuous rise in popularity. After analysing interactive narratives in both my personal experience and the works of many other researchers, I hope my arguments and exposition are enough to convince any reader of this essay that there is a place for interactivity among the other forms of narrative. Interactive narrative has history in the past, it has matured as a genre in the present, and shows great promise for the future, if only we give it the place and attention it deserves.

1. Key concepts: interactivity, agency, and immersion

1.1. Allowed to look... and touch: the concept of interactivity

The discussion of interactive narratives should be approached, first and foremost, by explaining a few concepts that clarify the essence of these narratives. As the name suggests, interactivity is one of these key concepts, which can be “defined in terms of the users’ direct influence in navigating through the digital text” (Cheng 16). Indeed, interactivity and navigation go hand in hand, whether it is simply to navigate through different menus or to explore a fictional world. All forms of interactive narratives possess this inherent quality: from old-fashioned *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, which have readers navigating from page number thirty back to page number fourteen, to the most modern videogames, which have players exploring vast open worlds in cities or jungles. This direct, physical exploration is what makes interactive narratives stand out from others and deserve individualized attention and study.

Within the interactive design of a narrative, Mark Stephen Meadows (2003) offers three capital steps: adding ambient information, perspectives, and increasing involvement. The latter is more related to immersion, so in this section I will explain the other two. First, we have the addition of ambient information, which translates into giving context to the world explored and offering activities on which the reader can take part, such as “moving through a place and looking for items that increase an understanding of the place, investigating what’s already there, flipping switches, solving puzzles, learning systems or even viewing pretty pictures” (230). Second, giving readers the opportunity to experience the world explored in different perspectives, “in both a dimensional and emotional way” (231). Thus, interactivity involves the reader into its narrative by giving them a role where they can participate directly, unlike other narrative forms where their role, although participative, remains implicit and traditional, and there is one clear path which can be navigated, yet never allows to stray from it.

1.2. Agents of change and consequence: agency

There is a concept heavily linked with interactivity, so much that often they are interpreted as synonyms. Agency is “the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power” (“Agency”) while interactivity “[involves] the actions or input of a user” (“Interactive”). Therefore, while agency is always interactive, interactivity does not require agency. In the context of interactive narratives, the difference between the two relies on the extent of the effect readers have on the narrative. As we have seen in the previous section, interactivity could be exploring a space, for instance. However, the act of exploration has little to do with agency if we cannot modify said space. Murray (1997) defines agency as “the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices” (qtd. in Cheng 18).

Consequently, even if it is true that an interactive narrative could rely only in interactivity to fit into the category, agency is the element that elevates a better, and more involving narrative from a basic, plain one. These narratives, in fact, are often praised when the paths and choices are meaningful—that is, when they have a great impact on the story—and that can only be achieved through agency. Empty choices or “railroading” that coaxes readers to stay put and let events unfold tend to be the object of most criticism in interactive narratives, because readers lack agency and the interactive experience suffers for it. As Meadows (2003) argues, “this is a big swerve from the course of traditional narrative because, traditionally, the narrative opinion is the opinion of the author. Sometimes, with narrative that contains interactivity, the interpretation is made collaboratively (or simultaneously) by both the author and the reader” (29). Through agency, readers do not replace the author; however, the author must allow flexibility in their story, enough that readers can feel agents of change, even if every single change was orchestrated from the beginning.

1.3. Immersion, or getting lost and not wanting to be found

The third and last concept that shapes the core of interactive narratives is immersion. While in other narratives it could be defined as the feeling of reality disappearing and the assimilation of the fictional world, in interactive fiction immersion reaches deeper; it is the transportation of the reader as an agent to the fictional world. Interactivity and agency, as we have seen, allow readers to take a much more personal and direct approach to the narrative. When you are an active participant in the events of a fictional world, your perspective changes. Every reward was earned, and every failure was a mistake that could have been prevented. Feeling in control of the narrative helps with the immersive experience, because readers feel part of the story from the moment they make a decision for the first time.

There are different levels of immersion, as there are different kinds of readers. Many interactive narratives allow customization of the protagonist, the character readers will control and guide. Sometimes this customization allows for choices of gender, appearance, and personality, beyond plot choices. Some readers immerse themselves by “self-inserting”, that is, by making the main character into a fictional copy of themselves, while others role-play as a fictional character of their own invention. This division is what Marie-Laure Ryan denominated internal and external interactivity, in which the reader “projects himself as a member of the fictional world [or] situates himself outside the virtual world” (qtd. in Cavallaro 135). There is, as well, a third option, where the protagonist is a set character with their own appearance, motives, and personality, but whose actions and decisions can be controlled by the reader. This third option is the less immersive one, but only in relation to the protagonist. An interactive narrative can be immersive in other ways: if there are vibrant, alluring spaces to explore, or if our actions can have serious consequences, immersion is deepened, and readers are encouraged to delve into the world and story. For instance, in most horror games,

the player is not the near-invincible soldier that is so common in other games. Instead, one typically plays the role of an ordinary and vulnerable person who simply hopes to escape a horrible situation. The need to move slowly and listen for oncoming threats creates an atmosphere of dread. Because one controls the character instead of merely watching, as one would in a film, there is far more anxiety. It is far more immersive (Deen).

2. Ready player one, or the boom of videogames

If we are to talk about new forms of interactive storytelling that have appeared in the last decades and that only keep growing in popularity, we must mention videogames. It is a somewhat new market, but one extremely successful. The Interactive Digital Software Association's 2002 Consumer Survey, states that approximately "sixty percent of all Americans, or about 145 million people, play interactive games on a regular basis" (qtd. in Garitte 12). This success is reflected not only in sales, but in the creation of *e-sports*, where professional gamers compete against each other, and the skyrocketing popularity of streamers of gameplay in *YouTube*, *Twitch*, and similar platforms. The base of videogame's success relies on the principle of interactivity. Whether it is interacting with other players, in multiplayer games that focus on competitiveness, teamwork or a mixture of both, or in single-player games where the interaction is solely between the player and the game, the concept remains the same. As Deen reminds us,

While critics have rejected video games because they are intrinsically an interactive medium, proponents have seized upon this point as their rallying call. Recalling Clement Greenberg's argument that as each artistic medium reaches maturity it narrows to what uniquely defines it, game designers and theorists focus more and more on interactivity

(Greenberg 1965). Game designer Warren Spector claimed, "The word 'interactivity' isn't just about giving players choices; it pretty much completely defines the game medium" (Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 57). Games obviously do not fit within a spectatorial framework.

This “spectatorial framework”, as Deen names it, would be the territory of different narratives, such as watching a film or reading a poem. These “older forms of media are themselves ‘always-already’ interactive in the sense that consumers read or interpret texts, but video games extend this process further by combining traditional “psychological” modes of interaction with physical or external modes” (Garitte). One could say that as long as there is a text and a reader, there is a process of interactivity between the two. However, videogames take it several steps further, allowing the reader to feel as if they were presently writing—or living—the text itself. Of course, the text and the possibilities were already written beforehand, yet if a videogame manages to achieve immersion successfully, the player will forget about their knowledge of any previous written pathways.

Moreover, interactivity can be expressed in different ways in the same videogame, and mould itself to players’ needs. There is diversity in players as there is in videogames and what they offer, yet to simplify matters Richard Bartle divides them in four groups depending on what they expect and enjoy the most from the game, as well as their behavioural tendencies while playing: “‘Achievers’ aim to accomplish objectives set out by the game; ‘explorers’ seek to discover the minutest features of the game’s virtual world; ‘socializers’ use the play context as an arena for interacting with other players; and ‘killers’ draw pleasure from causing harm or distress” (qtd. in Cavallaro 79). Every type explores interactivity in a unique manner, and sometimes players may belong to more than one category, although there is usually one of the four that draws them in more prominently. Game developers must know their audience and their expectations in order to offer a satisfactory product. The “physicality” of videogames’

interactivity strings along another matter that other forms of media lack: difficulty. Other narratives can of course present difficulty, in the sense that the reader requires certain previous knowledge or a deeper analysis beyond what is presented at face value. However, videogames once again go further than offering cerebral challenges, asking players to display quick reflexes, for instance. There is also a need for mechanical, physical knowledge about the tools used to play; keyboard and mouse or a gamepad, in most cases.

Mastery is a key component of both game players' experience and motivation, and it is reasonable to predict that people will select only those computer games for enjoyment that they believe they can master to a satisfying degree. Someone may expect a game to be too difficult, for example, because a game review indicates a mismatch between the game's average task complexity and his or her perceived capabilities. If this is the case, he or she is less likely to select the game, because his or her self-efficacy does not recommend the product under consideration. On the other hand, players who hold a very strong efficacy belief, those convinced that they can easily master the game at hand, may refuse to play because they anticipate mastery experiences that are not preceded by real challenges. (Klimmt and Hartmann 142)

In this way, we can certainly find similarities between less interactive media and videogames: a particularly opaque novelist or director may create narratives that challenge the reader, and while some may avoid them for that reason, others will be interested because it is a demanding experience. Be that as it may, the deviation of videogames from these other classic narrative forms hinges on their highly interactive elements.

2.1. Of dragons, spaceships, and zombies: *Dragon Age*, *Mass Effect* and *The Walking Dead*

In this section, I will focus on specific videogames from the *BioWare* and *Telltale Games* companies to provide examples of highly interactive narratives in the sector. Both companies are known for making story-rich games, although *BioWare* relies more in pure gameplay than *Telltale*, the latter following a more cinematic approach than the former. I will analyse two well-known franchises from *BioWare*; *Dragon Age* (2009-2014) and *Mass Effect* (2007-2017), and one from *Telltale Games*; *The Walking Dead Series* (2012-2019), although other titles will be mentioned as well in passing.

While the three series show continuity, in the sense that the story follows a chronological order and players find characters they have already met or places they have already been in, the continuity that concerns us the most is the narrative continuity. Events and decisions from the first game of any of the previously mentioned series will be reflected in the next instalments, and so on, creating a pool of choices and consequences that show how player's input changes the world in-game. *Dragon Age* presents a different protagonist in each game, although they are always mentioned or even make an appearance so players can see how their choices conditioned their fate even after the epilogue of the original game. In *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014), Hawke, the main character from *Dragon Age II* (2011) physically appears and players can customize them and choose which personality trait (diplomacy, sarcasm or aggression) Hawke showed the most in the prequel. This will be reflected in the way Hawke speaks, so players will feel they shaped the protagonist of the previous game forever, even though they cannot control them directly now. This customization of the protagonist —physically and psychologically— is a characteristic of both *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect*, although it is more nuanced in the former's case, as it allows not only gender and appearance changes, but also the possibility of choosing between different fantasy races and origins. For example, players can choose to play as an elf in *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), but even then they still have to choose between being a *Dalish* elf, living in the wild as nomads, or

a city elf, living in ghettos and antagonized by humans. This way, there are multiple possibilities from the very beginning and the narrative begins branching even before the plot begins to unfold. As Neeves points out, “if you can choose which parts of the story you experience and which you avoid, you have enormous power over the game's narrative, even if the choices you're given and their outcomes are all predetermined” (12). In videogames, especially those that have multiple side missions, like *Bioware*, this statement rings especially true. Although there is always a main story, and thus, main missions that must be followed and executed, the biggest part of the games consists of side missions and exploration. Players choose where to go, what to explore and which missions to accept or reject. Even though *Mass Effect* does not allow for the same degree of customization that *Dragon Age* does, mainly because the sci-fi title follows a dual morality system that builds the protagonist into a “Renegade” or a “Paragon”, both series give players an impressive amount of control over the main character, who will always be in an optimal position to drastically change the people and world around them. In the last instalment of the saga, *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017) the personality system for the protagonist evolved from the duality to a more realistic approach: players could be emotional or logical, in their beliefs, and casual or professional, in their speech.

Resembling the original morality system of *Mass Effect*, the choices presented in *The Walking Dead Series* are also moral dilemmas. However, these dilemmas often do not have a good and bad solution, where players are either heroes or villains, but many grey shades where you must choose the “lesser evil”. The setting for the *Telltale* game being a post-apocalyptic world goes along perfectly with presenting the player with hard choices and even harder consequences. Furthermore, in the first game, Lee, the protagonist, becomes surrogate father of a little girl named Clementine.

The Walking Dead's unique selling point is that “the story is tailored by how you play” and the player is often reminded of this by being informed that “this action will have

consequences.” The weight of the player’s choices is especially heavy when the game informs the player that “Clementine witnessed what you did” and “Clementine will remember that.” Many of these morally-questionable decisions must be made within a matter of seconds, and each major choice leads the player down specific branches of decision trees, thereby granting him or her the responsibility of deciding what kind of role-model he or she wants to be for Clementine. (Stang)

The last game in the saga follows a similar system and the story becomes a full circle when Clementine, now a teenager and the main character, has to take care of a little boy named AJ, who the game reminds us “is always watching”. This not only increases the tension in every choice made, but also its importance: your actions will shape and change the child you are raising, for better or worse. Moreover, there are other choices in the game that may not change the ending or outcome of a problem, but

allow the player to role-play a persona and participate in the story. At the beginning of No Going Back [5th episode of the second game] the group takes a hostage and then immediately argues about what to do next. The outcome of the argument is pre-determined, but the player can join in by choosing phrases and adding their voice to the cacophony of shouts and cries. This provides the experience of participating as a character in the group conversation (Sarian 21).

In the end, both *Bioware* and *Telltale Games* are videogame companies that advocate for an enhanced interactive experience, as we have seen not only in the previously mentioned games but in other acclaimed titles such as *Bioware’s Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (2003) and *Baldur’s Gate* (1998) or *Telltale’s The Wolf Among Us* (2013) and *Tales from the Borderlands* (2014).

2.2. Diving into a virtual world

Virtual reality could easily become the most interactive form of art and technology, if developed to its full potential. There are many tales and theories of the future of VR, that span from the most refined virtual worlds where one can practically feel the virtual around them for a while, to apocalyptic exaggerations where VR replaces real life in every aspect, leading humanity to a catastrophe. How far VR will go in the far future is an incognita at the moment, but so far it can be established as the most modern and striking media for interactive narratives.

In these narratives, as we have seen in chapter one, there are three key elements: interactivity, multimodality, and immersion. The latter concerns VR greatly, for immersion is its main feature. If we look for definitions of VR, there is always mention of this quality: Pimentel and Teixeira describe it as “interactive, immersive experience generated by a computer” (qtd. in Ryan 2) while Burdea and Coiffet state that “it is clear [...] that virtual reality is both interactive and immersive” (3). This immersion is often compared to other narrative forms, such as being immersed in a book or a videogame, where the goal is not to recreate reality to the point of confusion with the real world, but to achieve suspension of disbelief successfully (Ryan 89). Therefore, the fear that pits people against the possibilities of VR is unfounded, because VR is not trying to replace reality, but complement it, in the same way that a great novel may bring the reader into its world for a few hours, but not privy them of returning.

In addition to this immersion, VR also displays the other two main characteristics of interactive narratives, multimodality and interactivity. Users are not mere spectators of the greatly immersive virtual world, but agents of change: Burdea argues that

interactivity and its captivating power contributes to the feeling of immersion, of being part of the action on the screen, that the user experiences. But virtual reality pushes this even further by using all human sensorial channels. Indeed, users not only see and

manipulate graphic objects on the screen, they also touch and feel them (qtd. in Burdea and Coiffet 3).

2.3. The Death of the Director: Interactive Films

In the last few years, as the videogame industry developed and made a place for itself on the entertainment market, other media have tried to catch up and evolve alongside it. Such is the case of television. Streaming platforms have become the norm as far as television is concerned, with *Netflix*, *Amazon* or *Disney+* as examples. However, this also extends to *YouTube* and similar streaming services where, in most cases, there are individuals behind the content and not companies. In both we can see the influence of videogames and interactive storytelling: many *youtubers* upload videos encouraging the viewers to interact with them and choose what happens next, or what the *youtuber* in question should do. Of course, the possibilities were recorded in anticipation and the options are rather limited, often being able to choose between two or three choices that lead to different ending videos. Yet, however small, this new tendency speaks volumes of the pull for interactive narratives in different platforms.

The same example, in a greater degree, we find in interactive films, “an intriguing combination of video game and film” (Joy and McSweeney). *Netflix* has been producing interactive films in the last few years, and the list keeps growing. Among them, we find titles such as *Carmen Sandiego: to Steal or Not to Steal* (2020), *You vs. Wild* (2019) or the striking *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018). The latter became a phenomenon of its own; the audience—or players—finally had a complex, mature, and grim title of interactive fiction to play in their television. The film’s plot revolved around the creation of a videogame, yet “*Bandersnatch* was not just about video games, it was one” (Joy and McSweeney). The film, staying in-character with the original series, did not shy away from toying with both viewers and its own characters, this time with a new premise that fitted an interactive narrative

perfectly: the breaking of the fourth wall when the protagonist, Stefan, begins to question if he is the own making choices or if someone is controlling him. “This aspect breaks the identification with the role of Stefan and it invites a reflection on agency and responsibility – to what extend do we control the character, how much responsibility do we have and what level of control do we have ourselves?” (Koenitz and Roth 250) Questions like these are typical of *Black Mirror* (2011-2019), always encouraging the audience to reflect upon what they have just watched. The effect multiplies when the audience is no longer passive, but an active agent.

As a consequence of *Bandersnatch*'s acclaim, Netflix decided to continue producing interactive original films, which given the popularity of the platform, seems to ensure a bright future for interactive storytelling, and puts *Bandersnatch*'s in the influential position of being “not only interesting by itself, but also as harbinger of future works and an indication of the challenges for the design of such experiences” (Koenitz and Roth 248).

3. A never-ending story: the reader takes the wheel

3.1. Turn the page and *Choose Your Own Adventure*

If someone across the street is asked about the first thing they think of when they hear the word “narrative”, the answer will probably be “a book”, “a novel” and so forth. This is, of course, a very simplistic view of the term, but it is also considered the most classic form of narrative nowadays. The appearance of other narrative forms, such as films or videogames have pushed books to become the relic among present narratives for general audiences. It is not surprising, then, that books are also the classical form of interactive narratives. More specifically, the ones belonging to the so called *Choose Your Own Adventure* genre. This series of books was first published in 1979 by Bantam Books and it continued until 1998. Although, generally, there is consensus about *Choose Your Own Adventure* being the pioneer of gamebooks, some authors

like Nick Montfort (2003) and Demian Katz (2004) “credit Queneaus’s 1967 short story as the first in the gamebook format [...]. In his unpublished piece on the history of gamebooks, Katz also gives credit to *Hildick’s Lucky Les: The Adventures of a Cat of Five Tales* as the first full-fledged, published gamebook” (Cover 25).

No matter which story began this new trend in narrative, there is no arguing that *Choose Your Own Adventure* won by far in popularity. The target audience was children and pre-teens, mostly, and the series influenced the childhood of many. In fact, this series is proof of the importance of interactive storytelling in the evolution of narrative: “These books gave [the reader] power over the story. And that engaged a lot of young people who thought they didn’t like to read,” says author Doug Wilhelm in an interview with *Vermont Public Radio* (2014). However, this appealing side of interactivity can be a double-edged sword, especially given that the target audience was so juvenile. As a result, interactive fiction was considered “too entertaining”, apt for children but certainly not an appropriate diversion for adults. It did not help that the story, even if based in the concept of choice, was “heavily impositional”, as Meadows (2003) describes it: “It guides you with strict sets of individual rules that only allow the reader a narrow margin of decisions” (63). As I will argue a bit later in this same chapter, it is precisely this lack of complexity what drew adults away from interactive fiction, at the beginning.

In this series of almost 200 gamebooks, all of them followed a simple and similar patron: you, always addressed in the second person by the narrator, take on the role of an adventurer and at certain points, you are asked to make a choice and go to one page or another depending on your answer:

For example, in the TSR, Inc. gamebook *Spell of the Winter Wizard* (1983), the reader is addressed in the second person and takes on the role of a wizard’s child,

Omina. The wizard has been kidnapped and the goal is to follow the path of the story so that it reaches the positive conclusion of the father-figure being rescued. At the end of the first section the reader is offered a choice: 1. You can try to destroy Warzen [an evil wizard] first, then save Alcazar before he freezes. Turn to page 65. 2. You can seek out the Druids, find the Crimson Flame Mushroom [a powerful magical item], and take it to Alcazar. Turn to page 21. The book offers similar choices throughout, some of which lead the reader to a happy ending, some of which do not. For example, if the reader follows the path that leads to page 188, she ends up being chased by a ghost: “You run and scream and hope that someone will hear you—hope that this is not ... THE END” (Lowery qtd. in Cover 26).

In this way, gamebooks usually offer a dual system of choices: it is either *a* or *b*, with a third option occasionally making a rare appearance. These choices either lead to an ending, sometimes abrupt, or to a merging of the different paths. Because of this, and adding the short length of these books, *Choose Your Own Adventure* never became a success outside juvenile circles. Nevertheless, interactive fiction would continue evolving and develop in the next decades longer, more mature, and more complex stories with the same basic recipe of text and choice.

3.2. Your own adventure from paper to screen

As popular as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books were at the end of the last century, it was to be expected that they would become obsolete in time. The extremely fast-paced evolution of technology and the Internet in the last decades has pushed interactive fiction to search for new venues. Thus, the journey from paper to screen, not unlike the use of *ebooks* instead of physical copies, began. It may seem at first glance that the similarities and reasons why books adapted to an electronic platform are the same for interactive stories. However, while *ebooks*

are more economical, occupy much less space than their physical counterparts and allow readers to highlight the text or take notes and edit them without risking tearing apart entire pages, interactive fiction had several more reasons for moving out to an electronic home. As we have seen previously, *Choose Your Own Adventure* books had few variables when a choice was presented, mainly making the reader choose between one option or another. Furthermore, the length of the stories tended to be short for practical reasons; after all, the author would need an excessive number of pages for a complex branching narrative, and the target audience was of a younger nature, not known for their patience of long, overwhelming readings, precisely. The electronic format was the perfect solution for this when writers of interactive fiction learned a new language: coding.

Soon, these authors would have an even more complicated, if also more rewarding, job: not only to write all the possibilities the narrative could follow, but also to program them. Of course, not every writer has to be a programmer, in the same way that not every author is an editor. Collaborations are common, although being a jack-of-all-trades is quite normal for independent authors of interactive fiction (IF, from now on), given that this genre is still growing and finding a wider audience. I will explore this Renaissance quality of IF authors further when we tackle the topic of visual novels, for instance. At this moment, however, we are only dealing with textual storytelling and the coding language behind it. This brings back the multimodality always so present in interactive narratives, because an interactive story made for an electronic platform is always both written and programmed, a hybrid between novel and videogame. “The people who work in this form call themselves "authors", write "story files", and generally welcome the use of the term "interactive fiction" as descriptive of their work, embracing literary terminology and drawing on their avid reading. IF authors also almost universally see themselves as making "games"—the default term for a work of interactive fiction” (Montfort and Short). Nevertheless, as IF can take many forms, there is no real

consensus about whether it can be considered a game, a book, or something in-between. It is a popular notion that “interactive fiction authors identify as game-makers as well as programmers and writers” (Montfort and Short), yet some of these authors may disagree. I have interviewed IF author Morgan Vane to share some light on the topic and her view seems to be contradictory with the previous statement:

I would say that books and medium's like CS is what I think of when I consider only-text IF. No images or visuals of any sort, except if it's a couple of portraits or illustrations. Visual novels have art, most video games have graphics etc. Adding art can make any story more compelling, but it can also take away from the experience. [...] So, to me, the absence of visual aids is what makes something an only-text IF.

Vane is the author of *The Soul Stone War* (2020), an interactive novel written in *ChoiceScript*, a programming language designed specifically for IF by the *Choice of Games* company. This company, funded in 2009, is home to dozens of interactive stories, both written by authors belonging to the company, and by the so-called “hosted authors”, independent writers whose stories are published by the company, which receives a share of the profits. *The Soul Stone War* is one of these “Hosted Games”. Choice of Games makes use of technology strategically, and “their easy use on mobile phones and other portable devices appeals to authors wanting to reach a wider audience” (Montfort and Short). Vane believes as well that the company played a key role in the expansion of IF as a genre for wider audiences:

I have seen the audience of *Choice of Games* increase in numbers over the years, and even larger companies are catching on to the advantages of this medium, like *Netflix's Bandersnatch*. IF gives us so much freedom as storytellers, and I believe that the larger audience is slowly catching on. One of the main reasons I chose CS as the tool for my game is because the company already has an established fan base that only grows larger

every year. There is a lot more discourse going on in the forums and on *Tumblr* than, say, five years ago, and as more titles come out, titles that are engaging and well thought-out, I believe the community will continue to grow.

As she mentions, the importance of discussions among readers and the word-of-mouth marketing is not to be underestimated. It is, after all, another part of the interactivity essential to these stories. Moreover, IF writers are often *indie* authors very much in touch with the technological world and their readers. This facilitates the creation of online communities that provide feedback and discourse about the story or game in question. As opposed to these benefits, there has been some drawbacks in the purpose of IF to reach wider audiences, as Montfort and Short indicate: “The community's success has perhaps been most limited in connecting with literary and writerly communities. Although a few IF games have been published in online literary magazines or reviewed in them, there is still little representation of interactive fiction in e-lit circles and less awareness in mainstream fiction communities.” Perhaps it is a question of time, and to keep pushing for an increase in popularity of IF, before it can become a proper and widely accepted literary genre. The novelty of it and its extremely multimodal characteristics make it difficult to establish IF as a single category in the literary department. Still, its experimental nature cannot erase the fact that this literary genre has been four decades in the making and continues to evolve and gain renown.

3.3. The Alternative Universe of Fanfiction

Up until now we had seen how authors wrote fiction with the intention of interactivity. Readers had their own percentage of authorship when they chose a path to take, but those paths had been laid out by the author beforehand. However, now we are moving on to uncharted territory: what happens when the author intended a single path, but the reader wrote another. This is the domain of fanfiction, which, as the name indicates, is the fiction written by fans. Whether the

original was a book, a TV show, a game or an opera, fanfiction always follows two main rules: first, the work created must be a written text, and second, the fanfiction must transform the original in one way or another. There are many “genres” in fanfiction that gives us clues about how it changes the original: an AU (alternative universe) could place sci-fi characters used to battling in space living a perfectly normal life as college students on Earth, while those tagged as a “crossover” can mix characters and worlds from two or more different stories; imagine, for instance, what would happen if *Harry Potter* ended up in the island of *Lost*. These are the kind of questions that fanfiction writers ask themselves, and those “What if?” are the heart of any transformative narrative.

In order to define fanfiction, Coppa (2015) made a list of “Five Things That Fanfiction Is, and One Thing It Isn't.” First, “fanfiction is fiction created outside of the literary marketplace” (2), an important notion that differentiates fanfiction from most interactive narratives with a commercial purpose. The fact that fanfiction is shared mainly online and for free has made it “much more difficult to pin down in terms of copyright law” (Page 142), and it also leads to the sixth point Coppa wants to make, that is, the one thing fanfiction is not: “Fanfiction is made for free, but not for nothing” (14). There is an intrinsic quality to fiction not destined to be profitable, but meant to be enjoyed by a community, a *fandom*. As Rebecca Tushnet puts it: “People who create with no hope of monetary reward make different things than people who want to participate in the money economy, and both are valuable” (qtd. in Coppa 15). Second, Coppa writes that “fanfiction is fiction that rewrites and transforms other stories” (4), which I had already commented on. Third, and tied with the previous statements about commerciality, fanfiction is described as “fiction that rewrites and transforms stories currently owned by others” (6). This is also the difference that allows us to draw the line between fanfiction and retelling. A retelling takes the original text, the fairytale *Beauty and the Beast*, for example, and puts a spin on it, as author Alex Finn does in *Beastly* (2007). Yet, no one owns the copyright for

Beauty and the Beast, thus making any speculative work based on it a retelling, and not a fanfiction.

In fourth place, Coppa states that “fanfiction is written within and to the standards of a particular fannish community” (7), which is only a new layer of interactivity between the original narrative and the resulting fanfiction. It connects with Reader Response theory in an almost literal sense: fanfiction is the response of a reader to a narrative piece. Every narrative has “unwritten part(s)” (qtd. in Banerjee 4) that are meant to be filled by the reader; however, fanfiction takes a step further and instead of doing it “only subconsciously or cognitively” (Banerjee 4), the reader creates their “own” narrative, fully fleshed in text. Lastly, the fifth item in Coppa’s list of definitions is that “fanfiction is speculative fiction about character rather than about the world” (12). Technically, if we were to discuss speculative fiction about the world, we would be entering the domain of science fiction. Therefore, one could argue that fanfiction is, indeed, speculative fiction about character, the one element fans connect to the most. Readers feel a sense of authorship toward the narrative they are consuming, but especially towards its characters, going as far as to claim that their personality is being portrayed incorrectly or, as the fandom language would define it, being OOC (“out of character”) (Page 150).

Above all, fanfiction is a reminder of the demand for interaction in fiction, and how readers are not always amenable to accept a strict pathway of events. Over the last few years, the fanfiction phenomenon “has become an increasingly mainstream art form, and fandom itself is moving fast from subculture to culture” (Coppa 1). As a result, with a growing acceptance of fanfiction, it becomes clear that after all, readers want to choose their own adventure.

3.4. The jack-of-all-trades: an introduction to visual novels

There is a genre in the great pool that interactive fiction consists of that brings the concept of multimodality to a new level among those narratives that are heavily text based. This genre is the visual novel, closely related to videogames, with the main difference that it is text-focused, although it shares many similarities with the more evolved RPGs. Visual novels, as the name indicates, use a mixture of narrative and visual art to create a story; however, music in the background and sound effects are also common elements. We could say they two or three steps ahead of comics and a few steps behind videogames, mainly because videogames allow the player mobility. While visual novels can have mobile visual effects, such as characters' sprites blinking, changing their facial expression or their body pose, the player can never move their own character freely around the world, they cannot explore as they would do in a RPG. There are other methods of exploration, nevertheless, although they are more indirect than simply moving your character around. In visual novels, players' agency is closely linked to direct choices and exploration is no exception. Players are often presented with a menu of choices where they can choose what to do next. *Figure 4* illustrates one of these menus of exploration, and it belongs to the free visual novel *Ebon Light* (2020) by Ahnna Moots and it is the example of this genre I will use to illustrate how this form of IF is built. I have also interviewed her to gather the views of a visual novel author into the topic at hand. As mentioned before, visual novels shine for their multimodal properties, and when asked about the most gratifying part of making *Ebon Light*, the synergy of the whole process was the answer. Some authors and companies employ a number of professionals to take care of the different elements: the music, the background art, the character's sprites, the writing, the coding... although others do it all by themselves. Visual novels tend to be categorized as an indie genre, with the exception being Japan where the genre was created and developed in popularity with companies backing new releases each year (Van der Geest 12). As a result, taking on such multimodal project alone is a monumental task, although that on itself is also a reward, as Moots puts it: "The whole process

behind it, if you're doing everything yourself, is rather jack-of-all-trade'sy and that is perhaps what I really enjoyed. The nature of the task shifting dramatically a lot.” Moreover, if we were to delve into fields of study, visual novels would still belong into assorted categories, specifically, “narratology—the study of narrative structures and of writing and reading modalities— and ludology—the study of games as dramatic formations of a distinctive kind” (Cavallaro 33).

Even so, it can be argued that the central part of any visual novel is the story itself. Moots defends this statement by pointing out that “there are minimalistic visual novels out there with no customized GUI, minimal art... but if it's got strong writing, players are often very forgiving.” Cavallaro also sees the importance of narrative in visual novels, when he describes them as “ergodic literature”, a term coined by Espen J. Aarseth. “The term derives from the Greek ‘ergon’ (‘work’) + ‘hodos’ (‘path’) and economically describes a type of literature in which “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (Aarseth, p. 1).” (Cavallaro 10)

Nevertheless, even if the writing is the core of the visual novel, there are some interactive elements that go beyond. Lately, visual novel developers have tried to reach further and give even more control to their readers, with choices being more than deciding what to do. In *Ebon Light*, the first menu the player sees after starting a new game is the customization screen (see fig. 5). At this time, the player can change the main character’s name, family name, appearance and initial attitude or personality. Over the course of the game, every choice will influence the “stats” (that is, statistics of the character) and slowly shape a full-fledge realistic personality (see fig. 3). There is even the option to change the protagonist’s clothes in the middle of the story, which contributes not only to a great level of interactivity, but to the immersion of the player into the main character’s shoes. Whether role-playing as themselves

or as a character of their own invention, the fact of the matter is that players are allowed to almost completely own the protagonist of the story. This brings about a “feeling of non-mediation—i.e., the sensation that one has actually entered the world created by the computer instead of just using a computer” (Cavallaro 132), which enhances the experience of immersion. Other elements, such as the music that creates a particular atmosphere, also influence the immersion.

Apart from visual novels where interactivity and players’ input are highly valued, I must also mention a subgenre of this interactive fiction: kinetic novels. They are considered visual novels, in the sense that they share most of their characteristics: they are built in a similar fashion, with a text box where dialogue, voiced or thought, appears, art for the location and the characters, a story, music and similar GUI (graphical user interface). However, there is one big difference: kinetic novels lack any kind of choice. Their stories are linear, without any branching and with only one possible path to follow. Given this, even though I could categorize visual novels as videogames, kinetic novels do not possess the quality that any game portrays: the possibility of two or more outcomes. From an essential win or lose to the most complicated nuances of branching that interactive fiction can allow, games must allow for at least two different results.

4. If chess and theatre had a baby: tabletop role-playing games

4.1. You only need a table: board games of then and now

There is an element in interactive fiction that stands in-between the classic narrative formats, such as books, and the most modern forms, these being videogames and other interactive works linked with the digital media. Tabletop role-playing games, as the name indicates, are games

that require a table to play and for the players to incarnate a specific role. The role-playing tag, however, was not always associated with tabletop games, which is easy to see if we think about the first games of this variety: chess, draughts or *Snake and Ladders*. They all require a flat surface to play and moving pieces across that surface according to a set of rules. The narrative is extremely simplified, and there is no interaction beyond the banter between players, the strategy and the physical movements of the pieces. Nevertheless, these games laid out the foundation for the future of tabletop games and they share many similarities with their more advanced cousins: tabletop role-playing games (henceforth RPGs) also require a table to play, two or more players, a set of rules and the movement of pieces. None of the elements of classic tabletop games are casted aside; it is simply that new mechanics are added.

Therefore, tabletop RPGs differ from classic tabletop games in two new characteristics: there is a story, a narrative, that puts together the whole of the game and players are active agents in that narrative. According to Brown and Waterhouse-Watson, “gamers themselves can be considered ‘narrators’ (even in the act of reading narrative events from cards, or parts of the rulebook out to other players), or ‘authors’, given the narrative/tactical decisions they are encouraged to make” (7). Many tabletop RPGs are based on a narrative source, maybe a film, a television show or a novel series. In recent times, it is common to find a game version of most commercial fiction projects that gather a prominent fanbase. It is no wonder that the popularity of these fiction products would also apply to the games based on them. Booth (2015) says that “according to the Toy Association’s annual sales data, annual board game sales increased by \$60 million in 2013” (1). If there is a solid story at the center of it, it is possible to derive any number of different new narratives from a single idea. Usually, if a product is particularly malleable in the sense of expanding into a web of narratives, that series of new products becomes a franchise. Let us take as an example the franchise created by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore and Charlie Adlard: *The Walking Dead*. It began as a comic book series in 2003 and its

popularity skyrocketed until the famous TV series premiered in 2010, which would be followed by a second TV adaptation (*Fear the Walking Dead*) in 2015 and with plans to release a third part in 2020. Moreover, seven web series have been released since 2011 and the authors began to work in a film project in 2019. *The Walking Dead* also has several videogames and boardgames, developing both versions of already existing games such as *Monopoly* or *Risk* and original boardgames.

Apart from boardgames based on a pre-existent product, there are many that stand as a completely original product, their stories created specifically for that game alone. Examples of this would be *Dead of Winter* (2014) or the Spanish boardgame *Espinas* (2017). *Dead of Winter* is very similar to *The Walking Dead* (2011) in the sense that both share the *zombie* theme, while *Espinas* belongs to the horror genre set in abandoned and cursed places. In both games the players take on different roles, choosing a character that has different goals to those of other players. There is place for both cooperation and competition, and the actions of the players often decide the fate not only of their own character, but that of everyone in the group. One of the players may have the objective of gathering resources for the colony while others must gather as many resources as they can for themselves. They both could work together for a while, but in the end, their goals could clash. *Espinas* gives each player a default character to play as but encourages creativity by suggesting them to build a common background story.

Besides the key elements of tabletop RPGs, narrative and interaction, boardgames attract the attention of so many players because they portray what Gérard Genette coined as “paratext”. As Booth explains in his book *Game Play: Paratextuality in Contemporary Board Games*, the cover of a book could count as paratext for it is part of the final product but not part of the central content: the text. The paratext, however, “encourage[s] interaction” with the product, and as he says “despite the maxim, we do tend to judge a book by its cover, as the cover influences our understanding of what is inside” (5). In boardgames, the visual and tactile

paratexts are a substantial part of the reason why playing is an enjoyable experience. The box containing the game is often decorated with art that sets the ambiance and gives a glimpse into the fictional world. The pieces that represent each character or specific objects help create an image in the players' minds of the situation they are "living". Everything combines to further maximize the effect of immersion in the players.

4.2. Roll initiative! *Dungeons & Dragons* wins all popularity contests

In 1974, Gary Gygax and Dave Anderson had a revolutionary idea: to create a game fuelled and shaped mostly by the imagination of its players. There would be rules, of course, but of a special kind; rules that could be broken and mended, because the authority of the game was left in the hands of the players, not the authors. The medieval fantasy world follows some conventions: there are monsters, treasures and magic. Apart from that, it is up to the players how to tell and live the story. Because this world is, more than anything else, a story, written and "read" simultaneously by the players. There is a Dungeon Master (DM), the narrator who presents the plot and infuses life to every character, friend or foe, not controlled by other players. It might appear as if the DM is omniscient, but nothing further from the truth. This narrator can plan ahead and think of all the possible outcomes: write down what will happen if someone steals a painting from the town hall, or the ambush the players will face if they walk deep into the dark forest. However, this is a game of adaptability and improvisation, and if one of the players decides to set fire to the entire city, the DM must, sometimes literally, roll with it.

After all, there is much rolling to do in *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D from now on). Luck has a role of its own and the phrase *alea iacta est* makes more sense than ever. Dice can decide everything, from someone failing a saving throw and dying a terrible death to how much alcohol the puny *halfling* can take before she falls off the chair. Later, I will readdress the importance of luck in the narrative experience. Of course, something as random as rolling dice

can only affect the narrative to a degree, given that the key element in RPGs is always the player's agency in choosing and moulding the story. In *D&D*, there are stats associated to abilities and powers that give the players boosts: a player who builds a rogue character with a high acrobatic skill will have luck on their side when rolling to land effortlessly after jumping off a window.

This type of role that luck plays in *D&D* is part of what Ryan (2003) calls “temporal immersion”. The suspense of not knowing what will happen next, even if you are the DM, makes the experience that much more realistic. After all, when someone is falling off a window you do not know whether they will land gracefully like a cat or break a leg until the action is completed. Beyond the temporal immersion, Ryan explores the spatial and emotional immersion in her article *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. No matter whether it is virtual reality or tabletop RPGs, the three concepts of temporal, spatial and emotional immersion apply.

Spatial immersion in *D&D* deals with the environment where the players find themselves. There is no real need of paratext in this game: imagination and acting go a long way, yet many players rely on figurines that represent the characters and hand-drawn maps to clarify how a battle is developing, how far a caravan is, and so on. It helps with spatial immersion, but this kind of immersion relies heavily in a detailed and vivid narration. The DM describes everything the players see, smell and touch. In fact, one of the most asked questions from players to their DMs, upon encountering a new situation is: “What do I see?” There is nothing but suspense and a million possibilities until the DM draws an image in the players' minds. After that, the DM's words become reality and the world comes to life.

On the other hand, I would argue from personal experience with *D&D* that the most important type of immersion is the emotional immersion. It is to be expected that an author,

while creating a character, will grow fond and protective of them to some extent. In *D&D*, the player not only creates characters, but they embody those characters. The DM, our narrator, refers to them in second person and it is a common practice for players to talk in first person while describing their actions, words, and thoughts. They become part of the story world when fusing with their avatars. Before even starting the adventure, players are asked to develop their backstory, appearance, and personality. The world will react to what they have created: non-playable characters (NPCs) have their own opinions about them and the DM has liberty to use their backstory to add elements to the storytelling that will deepen the emotional immersion: what if the long-lost brother of the warrior elf suddenly appeared in a tavern? When the story revolves around them, players feel an active and important part of the fictional world. They are interacting with the narrative by merely existing.

Besides temporal, spatial and emotional types of immersion, Grouling (2010) adds the social immersion. It is another kind of interactivity: not interacting with the narrative itself, but with other players. Even if we are not referring to their avatars, but the real-life people that play them, a *D&D* adventure is also a social event. There is a tight-knit feeling in the “party”: even if the players were not friends already, at the end of a campaign, a series of sessions that can span from some days to years,—all the experiences shared will have undoubtedly created bonds between them. Therefore, social immersion collides with emotional immersion: it is no longer a matter of caring about your own avatar, but also caring about the other participants in the narrative game. In this digital era, people are growing anxious about the lack of human contact and the rise of screen-based text interaction. *D&D* offers an escape from the constant flux of digital walls and gives people a chance to go back to more personal and physical interactive experiences.

This raises the question of whether nostalgia was the key to the rise in popularity of *D&D* in the last few years. The game peaked in popularity for the first time in the 1980s, when

it was considered a rather shameful hobby, or at least, not a pastime to be particularly proud of. No matter its social status, *Dungeons & Dragons* gave the RPG industry the push it needed, and many other games in a similar fashion were created afterwards. Nowadays, however, *D&D* has experienced its second grand wave of popularity and demand. There are three factors at play:

In the first place, the already mentioned nostalgia. *D&D* might have been considered a children's game at its origins, but this misconception has not aged well. The children and teenagers that played in the 1980s have continued playing in the twenty-first century as adults. They enjoy the memories of childhood with a new perspective and take advantage of the freedom that *D&D* allows its players. They can build new, more mature stories and characters to continue the tradition in adulthood. The influence of TV shows such as *Stranger Things* (2016) must be noticed, however. It can be practically considered product placement with the number of times we see the protagonists play it throughout the three seasons. Still, the game did not have good publicity in television before and it was casted in a negative light whenever it made an appearance, which leads to the second factor.

The rise in popularity of *D&D* can be linked to the rise of geek culture. In the 80s, being considered a "nerd" or "geek" was a humiliation, an insult used to ridicule people for their hobbies. Today, people take pride on being called by said tags. It is no longer a synonym of someone undesirable to society; it simply describes your pastimes, without negative connotations associated. The fact that many celebrities (Joe Manganiello, Deborah Ann Woll, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Vin Diesel, Stephen Colbert...) are joining the community indicates that the game has reached a new social standing. The web series *Critical Role* (2015), a live-play that follows the adventures of a cast of famous voice actors and actresses, became a worldwide phenomenon that attracted an impressive amount of fans to the game. People often follow the trends celebrities set, and *Dungeons & Dragons* is no exception.

Finally, the third and last factor is the status of interactive fiction. As I discussed above, there are vast and different new forms of narrative, in close association with the concept of interaction between narrative and reader. The new peak of popularity *D&D* is reaching nowadays has much to do with the high supply and demand of other forms of interactive fiction. RPGs are everywhere and normalized, so of course the parent of all RPGs would make a comeback. Fictional works are all about recycling already existent material: Hollywood is a fabric of non-stop retellings and sequels of classic works; videogames are remastered and even Andersen's fairytales seem to be a constant supply of inspiration for new stories based on old ones. The same happens with *D&D*: people need a new spin on a classic tale, which results on new modules, manuals and adventures that have been tinkered a bit to adapt to current demand.

Taking all this in consideration, it is most surprising how little research there is on the topic. Scholars seem to be afraid of including interactive narratives in their fields of study, which is most likely related to the literary canon. Whereas literary works that have survived the passage of a considerable amount of time can enter, it is often considered risky to include more recent works, for we cannot be sure if they will hold any relevance in twenty, thirty or a hundred years. *D&D*, nevertheless, has already not only survived, but thrived, through the passage of four decades. From the 1980s to the 2020s, *Dungeons & Dragons* has had a prominent impact on culture and society, and therefore I can only conclude that it is worthy of further study.

Conclusion

I began this project with the idea that finding other scholars interested on the topic would be an arduous task, that research on interactive narratives would be scarce. Fortunately, I was mistaken. There has been discussion on the topic for years now, and it only seems to be

increasing with the passing of time. That was one of my goals while writing this essay: to provide new material for any who wishes to inform themselves further or who needs references for their own work. Of course, I encountered difficulties in both my research and the development of the essay. To begin with, in comparison to subjects such as the close reading of a particular literary work or the analysis of a historical time, I had next to nothing to take as examples of previous end-of-degree projects or thesis about interactive storytelling. It was a subject I had personal knowledge of, but how to shape that knowledge into a full-fledged project seemed beyond me at the beginning. There were also other limitations, such as articles behind pay-walls, that I believe every graduate encounters at this time. This essay can prove useful for future students or academics who share my same interest in the topic; it gives access to a recompilation of interactive narratives, their potential and their foundations.

It is my firm belief that interactive fiction deserves a place among other types of narrative, so it might one day become part of the literary canon. It is a foreign genre for many nowadays, even though after the analysis on its origins, evolution, and many forms, we can guarantee its rising popularity and diversity. However, an effort to put interactive narratives in the spotlight of academic research is necessary first. I hope to contribute to that effort and invigorate a much-needed dialogue.

Throughout this essay, I have tried to illustrate the spread of interactive narratives, especially in recent times, and how they take multiple forms to suit different types of readers: videogames, interactive films, interactive novels, fanfiction or boardgames belong together under the label of interactive narratives. Readers react positively to more interactive elements in the narratives they consume, which leads to a higher demand. After the examination of the past and current situation of these narratives, I have reached the conclusion that, although interactivity in storytelling was once considered niche, each day it is gaining a wider audience and it will come the time when it is established as a well-known narrative genre.

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Appendix



Figure 1: Dragon Age: Inquisition's customization screen



Figure 2: Dialogue choices from Mass Effect: Andromeda



Figure 3: Clementine and Lee from The Walking Dead Season 1



Figure 4: Ebon Light exploration menu



Figure 5: Customization of main character



Figure 6: Ebon Light's character menu