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INSTITUTO DE LETRAS  
CURSO DE GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS

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**READING THE GAME, PLAYING THE TEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE READER IN  
INTERACTIVE FICTIONS**

PORTO ALEGRE  
2017

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado como  
requisito parcial para a obtenção do grau de Licenciado  
em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do  
Sul.

Orientador: Prof. Ian Alexander

PORTO ALEGRE, 2017

## AGRADECIMENTOS

Aos meus pais por sempre acreditarem em mim, respeitarem meu ritmo e minhas decisões e principalmente por serem meu porto seguro e compasso.

Aos meus amigos Diogo, Luca, Daniel, Felipe e Angelo por nunca me deixarem sozinho, não importa a distância ou os estresses da vida.

Ao Gabriel por ser um irmão e alçar vôos maiores.

Às minhas avós por todo o amor e carinho tão típico delas.

Ao Prof. Ian Alexander, por ter a paciência de ser meu orientador apesar de todos os obstáculos no caminho e por ser um exemplo para muitos de nós (mesmo ele sendo muito modesto para acreditar nisso).

À Júlia, por provar que a amizade prevalece apesar de tudo e por ser uma pessoa maravilhosa.

À Prof<sup>a</sup>. Márcia Ivana e à Prof<sup>a</sup>. Elaine Indrusiak por disporem de seu tempo para avaliar o trabalho presente.

Finalmente, ao meu avô, a quem as palavras já não adiantam.

## RESUMO

Este trabalho procura elucidar as formas como a mudança de um paradigma *leitor-obra literária* para um de *leitor/jogador-jogo/obra literária* pode afetar a experiência do leitor especificamente no que toca os conceitos de Horizonte de Expectativas e Horizonte de Interpretações no contexto das Ficções Interativas. Ficções Interativas são jogos baseados em texto nos quais o leitor pode interagir com a narrativa, mudando a maneira como a estória se desenrola. Elas oferecem uma abordagem diferente do ato de leitura, tornando o leitor uma parte ativa do storytelling. Prestando atenção aos diferentes métodos utilizados pelos autores destes jogos e através da análise de alguns exemplares selecionados deste gênero, buscamos descobrir como as decisões relativas ao design de jogos se misturam com as escolhas estéticas e narrativas tomadas pelos autores, focando nos efeitos das anteriores no ato de leitura e especialmente na relação entre leitor e texto que é central para a Teoria da Recepção.

**Palavras-chave:** Ficções Interativas; Teoria da Recepção; Jogos.

## ABSTRACT

This work seeks to elucidate the ways that the change from a *reader-literary work* paradigm to a *reader/player-game/literary work* one can affect the experience of the reader specifically when it comes to the concepts of Horizon of Expectation and Horizon of Interpretation in the context of Interactive Fictions. Interactive Fictions are text based games in which the reader can interact with the narrative, changing the way that the story is played out. They offer a different approach to the act of reading, turning the reader into an active part of the storytelling. By paying close attention to the different methods used by the authors of these games and through the analysis of some prime examples of this genre, we seek to find how the decisions relating to game design mingle with the aesthetic and narrative choices made by the writer, ultimately focusing on the effects of these on the act of reading and specially on the relation between reader and text that is core to the Reception Theory.

**Keywords:** Interactive Fiction; Reception Theory; Games.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Texts that allow the reader to take part on a nonlinear narrative as an acting element are not new to contemporary literature: from gamebooks like the old series *Escolha sua Aventura* (known as *Choose-Your-Own-Adventure* outside of Brazil, where they are also called CYOA) or more contemporary examples such as *O Senhor das Sombras* and *A Espada do Samurai*, which give the reader options and correspondent pages so she can discover the results of these choices; to books like *S*, which present themselves as multi-media puzzles in which the reader must organize the given resources (pictures, documents, footnotes, codes, flyers) in order to obtain a more complete reading of the book. With a ludic streak, meaning, having entertainment as a focus, these interactive texts tend to purposefully take the reader from a passive standpoint (not to be confused with the ideas of active reading and passive reading, although related) to an active one. The reader becomes an acting part in the narrative, her choices affecting the development and conclusions of central points of the text.

Unlike the previously mentioned examples, *Interactive Fictions* are not bound to physical media but to a digital one, being easily accessible for different readers from their computers or devices such as tablets and smartphones. Furthermore, these digital games have access to a large range of multimedia resources like music, images, sound effects and even video in integrated form, without the need for a separated physical medium (DVDs, CDS etc) for these features. The use of these resources in an *Interactive Fiction* should never overshadow the starring role of the written text, serving only as ways to enrich the reading experience.

Before we define what are *Interactive Fictions* and how can they be seen both as narratives and games, let us explore the motivation for the choice of this topic.

### 1.1 OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATION

Through the course of my years in college, the immense potential that is offered to us by the areas of Linguistics and Literary Studies has always called my attention. The science that studies communication and social interaction together with the analysis of its most refined forms (poetry, prose, music, theater etc) were, and still are, fascinating to me. I have always questioned

if the experiences that I had and still have were of any value to the area, if they had anything to add to what becomes an increasingly expansive and inclusive field of studies. My personal passion towards games, movies, animation and comic books found echoes in classmates and were motivated by teachers from the most diverse areas in the course (whom I cannot thank enough). By turning these media into analysis and study subjects, I have seen myself enabled to also use them as tools for the teaching and learning of languages, both Portuguese and English.

But, to turn these passions into something that could be studied and used by our field of studies, it is necessary that we look upon them beyond their aesthetic, social and entertainment value. Focusing especially on video games, I have noticed how language is an essential part of this media. From the obvious points, such as the *lore* (a game's history and background), going through the way the rules are written and what they imply, to the active communication, both verbal and written, between players, language is an essential part of these games.

Beyond that, we can ask ourselves if a video game can be art. Can we question if their narratives and their dialogues possess poetic language? All these questions led me to review some of the games that I believe are truly relatable to our area. It was then that I was reminded of the *Interactive Fictions*: games completely based on text in which all the interactions, descriptions, the game itself is built on written language. By reading/playing them a question has arisen: how does the fact that I'm now playing a game which is at the same time a written narrative affects how I relate with this text? In what way does the fact that many of the decisions that were previously under the control of the author are now given to me affect my reading of this narrative? How does the author lead me in these decisions? What does each of the involved parts add and sacrifice in this new dynamic?

I believe that there is fruitful material to analyze and study all of the parts involved: author, text and reader. Due to practical questions, in this thesis we shall focus only on the reader, more precisely on the reader as a player, focusing on the question of: how is the reader affected in the experience of reading and playing an *Interactive Fiction* and how the different uses of both literary and game aspects affect this experience?

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY**



In order to answer the previous question, we are going to analyze a select number of IFs (*Interactive Fictions*). The IFs chosen for the corpus are organized in the following table according to a number of criteria that are going to be explained later in this work, as it follows in table 1:

TABLE 1 - CORPUS ORGANIZED BY CATEGORIES

	OPEN INPUT	CLOSED INPUT
DIRECT PROTAGONISM non determined	<i>Colossal Cave Adventure</i>	
DIRECT PROTAGONISM determined		<i>Welcome to Morreytown</i>
DIRECT PROTAGONISM predetermined	<i>Photopia</i>	
INDIRECT PROTAGONISM		<i>Buried</i>

SOURCE: The Author (2017)

Four IFs will be analyzed in this work having as a focus how my personal experience as a reader-player affected my reading and involvement with these narratives and how the fact that these are stories that are meant to be played changed my approach towards them. By taking in account the *Horizon of Expectations* we can establish a relation between our expectations towards each IF and how they either change this *Horizon of Expectations* or fail to produce any kind of shift or change.

Each one of them will have a separate section according to its classification. These IFs will not be analyzed in their entirety due to the fact that some of them are excessively long and would warrant a thesis just for them (*Welcome to Moreytown, Photopia, Buried*). The objective of this work is discover how the a shift in the paradigm *reader-literary work* to *reader/player-literary work/game* changes the experience of the reader and I do not believe that full extensive analysis of the texts in the corpus would prove efficient at this stage of this research.

Due to this, the first chapters of each text will be analyzed in order to investigate the initial impact of these IFs on the reader and if there is any break of expectations or conflict with the relation between text and reader presented by Jauss and Iser. The experience as a player is

also going to be taken in account, with special attention being paid to the moments when these two approaches (as a reader and as a player) might mingle into a unified experience as reader-player, therefore backing the usage of the term.

The parameters used for these analysis are divided in three major criteria: *reading experience*, *gaming experience* and *convergence*. The separation in these three divisions helps us to focus on different aspects of an IF.

*Reading Experience* focus on the enjoyment (as a reader) from the process of reading, the writing skills of the writer (wordplay, descriptions, figures of speech, pacing) and the change in horizon of expectations after reading the text. *Gaming Experience* is about agency (being aware of your choices and what they represent), meaningful play (how and if these choices affect the IF) and enjoyment (if it felt good to play this game). Finally, *Convergence* is the parameter that measures how well the two previous criteria (*Reading Experience* and *Gaming Experience*) merge together in order to make the most out of the IF genre.

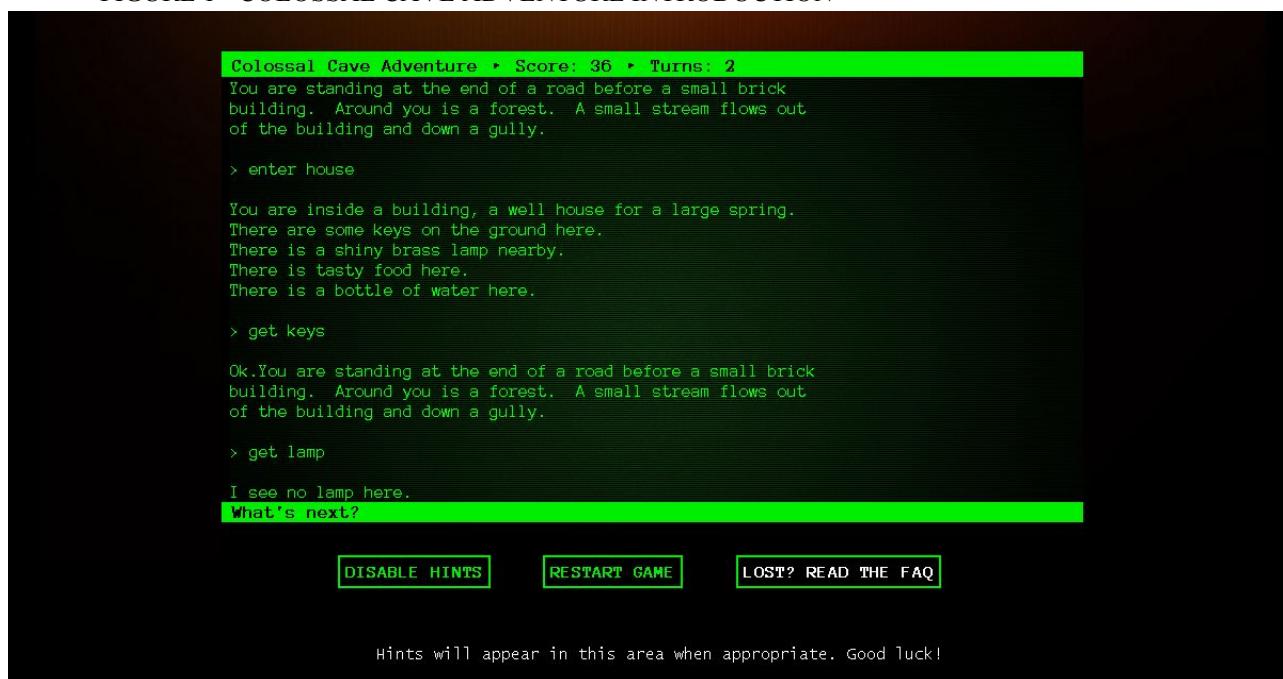
## **2 THEORETICAL BASIS**

### **2.1 WHAT ARE INTERACTIVE FICTIONS?**

*Interactive Fictions*, which we are going to call IFs, are digital media narratives in the form of computer programs that allow the reader to interact with them through text inputs throughout the reading. These narratives can be of the most varied genres and deal with different types of subjects (*Photopia*, for example, is a romance which changes character focus constantly, much like *Game of Thrones*; *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is a comedy in a science fiction scenario). The reader's answers and interactions with the text actively change the development of these narratives, allowing the author to play with the most varied possibilities and giving to the reader-player part of the control over the narrative (and yet, not in absolute, since the possible answers and *paths* still must be written and integrated in the narrative by the author before the moment of reading).

This type of narrative began with *Adventure* (later renamed *Colossal Cave Adventure*), an IF created by Will Crowther, professional programmer and amateur writer in 1976, in order to connect with his children after a complicated divorce. Initially, *Adventure* only accepted text commands composed of two words (a verb and a noun, as in *GRAB KEY*, *OPEN DOOR*, or a verb and a preposition, such as *TURN LEFT*), therefore limiting the interaction between reader and text. At this stage, the concept of IF was still very new and its potential, unexplored. Due to its pioneerism, *Colossal Cave Adventure* has a simple narrative structure with little depth, both literarily and as game, as we can see in FIGURE 1:

FIGURE 1 - COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE INTRODUCTION



SOURCE: CROWTHER (1976)

After the success of *Colossal Cave Adventure*, more creators showed an interest in the creation of narratives in the same style, which led to the creation of *Zork*, a milestone in the electronic gaming industry and one of the biggest influences on the style of games that we see nowadays. Being able to recognize and respond to complex sentences (such as *put the blue book on the writing desk*), *Zork* allows the reader to have complex interactions with the text, at the same time increasing immersion and interactivity. We can see an example of the increase in complexity in FIGURE 2:

FIGURE 2 - ZORK SCREENSHOT

```

>get lantern
Taken.

>move rug
With a great effort, the rug is moved to one side of the room
dusty cover of a closed trap door.

>open trapdoor
The door reluctantly opens to reveal a rickety staircase desc
darkness.

>d
You have moved into a dark place.
The trap door crashes shut, and you hear someone barring it.

It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue.

>what is a grue
The grue is a sinister, lurking presence in the dark places o
favorite diet is adventurers, but its insatiable appetite is
fear of light. No grue has ever been seen by the light of day
survived its fearsome jaws to tell the tale.

```

wiki How to Play Zork

SOURCE: ANDERSON; BLANK; DANIELS; LEBLING (1977)

And an example of the evolution in the quantity of detail and description when compared to *Colossal Cave Adventure* in FIGURE 3.

FIGURE 3 - ZORK SCREENSHOT 2

```

Ice Room                               Score: 155   Moves: 390
The dragon looks amused. He speaks in a voice so deep you feel it rather than
hear it, but the tongue is unknown to you. You find yourself almost hypnotized.

>w
Ice Room
A mass of ice fills the western half of the room.

As the dragon enters, he sees his reflection on the icy surface of the glacier
at its western end. He becomes enraged: There is another dragon here, behind
that glass, he thinks! Dragons are smart, but sometimes naive, and this one
has never seen ice before. He rears up to his full height to challenge this
intruder into his territory. He roars a challenge! The intruder responds! The
dragon takes a deep breath, and out of his mouth pours a massive gout of
flame. It washes over the ice, which melts rapidly, sending out torrents of
water and a huge cloud of steam! You manage to clamber up to a small shelf,
but the dragon is terrified! A huge splash goes down his throat! There is a
muffled explosion and the dragon, a puzzled expression on his face, dies. He
is carried away by the water.

When the flood recedes you climb gingerly down. While no trace of the dragon
can be found, the melting of the ice has revealed a passage leading west.
Your sword is no longer glowing.

>

```

SOURCE: ANDERSON; BLANK; DANIELS; LEBLING (1977)

This is a good moment for us to define the reason why IFs are something to be played, and more importantly, to define what is the act of playing and what is a game.

## 2.2 IFs: GAMES TO BE READ, TEXTS TO BE PLAYED

In order to determine that IFs are playable we shall look at the definition of the act of playing presented to us by Bernard Suits:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. (Suits, Bernard (2005), *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Broadview Press, pg. 54–55)

In other words, according to this definition, playing means having a predefined victory situation [prelusory goal], allowing the use of methods and means defined by an arbitrary set of rules [lusory means], making use of knowingly less efficient means instead of more effective alternatives [constitutive rules], finally, the existence of these rules is only accepted because without them there would be no game to be played [lusory attitude]. Kristen Salen and Eric Zimmerman, in their fantastic book *Rules of Play*, give us a more practical and efficient definition of what is a *game*, defining that “a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome” (ZIMMERMAN, SALEN: 2004, pg. 94.). As seen previously, when discussing what IFs are, the presence of rules is fundamental to what they are and how they work, we can give as examples of rules: the only interaction is through predetermined inputs, the player-reader can only enact one action each time, all interaction is given through written text. However, it is in relation to the other determining factors, artificial conflict and quantifiable outcome, that we can point out the possible issues. Let us take as an example 1998’s *Photopia*, an IF that has won prizes such as the XYZZY (an award specifically geared towards IFs) in which it received awards in the categories of: Best Writing and Best Story; and first place in the poll for Best Interactive Fiction of All Times (2015). *Photopia* is an IF in the classical style: it uses only written text and the only form of interaction is through a command prompt similar to the one in *Adventure* and *Zort*. However, if we observe the way that it begins and presents itself, we can see that despite the obvious evolution in the quality of writing, no challenge or objective is presented to us, and we

don't know what is going to be the result of our endeavor:

The main rule of thumb here is to keep your commands as simple as you can while still getting the meaning across. The parser has come along way from when two words were the maximum allowed: you can enter commands such as GIVE THE BANANA TO THE RHESUS MONKEY THEN TAKE ALL FROM THE CAGE EXCEPT THE BANANA PEEL and be understood perfectly. But the parser will not understand things like WALK UP TO THE SIGN or GO BACK TO WHERE I WAS A FEW MINUTES AGO. Once you get the hang of it, the correct way to enter commands becomes second nature. So feel your way around, try things as they occur to you, and most of all, have fun (*Photopia*, tutorial)

The tutorial should be where we are presented with the conflict in question, what are the rules of the game and what is the possible outcome (victory and defeat conditions), as we can see in the tutorial of *Colossal Cave Adventure*:

Somewhere nearby is Colossal Cave, where others have found fortunes in treasure and gold, though it is rumored that some who enter are never seen again. Magic is said to work in the cave. I will be your eyes and hands. Direct me with commands of 1 or 2 words. I should warn you that I look at only the first five letters of each word, so you'll have to enter "Northeast" as "ne" to distinguish it from "North." (Should you get stuck, type "help" or "info" for some general hints). (*Colossal Cave Adventure*, Help Prologue)

We can see here that there is an objective (find the treasure), conflicts (“some who enter are never seen again”) and rules (use only commands of one or two words, being valid only the first five words of each one). The same cannot be said about *Photopia* which presents us only with rules (it is possible to use complex commands, albeit limited). Is *Photopia* a game or not? Can it be played or only read? As Zimmerman later notes in his work:

Sometimes the answer to the question of whether or not a game is a game rests in the eye of the beholder. Any definition of a phenomena as complex as games is going to encounter instances where the application of the definition is somewhat fuzzy. Rather than seeing these moments as a breakdown of the definition, we view them as valuable opportunities to understand games as a whole. (ZIMMERMAN, SALEN: 2004, pg. 95.)

Despite being vague, by combining this notion and Marcussi's concept of RPGs (Role Playing Games), we can get to a more definitive point about what we are dealing with:

(...) games in which a group of participants tells a story interactively. Each player assumes the role of a fictitious character and is responsible for interpreting him and define his actions in the story. This way, the game is shaped by the interactions between characters and the fictional scenario in which they are inserted. The result of an RPG session will be a narrative or story told collectively, in which the actions of each main character are decided through improvisation by the player that it represents. (...) the RPG dynamic obeys pre-established rules that are followed in such way to organize the collective development of the story. The link of each protagonist player to a specific character (...), the role of the narrator as controller of the narrative environment and his power to resolve the actions given by the players to their characters are the most generic and essential rules to the game (...). Beyond those, it's common (although not obligatory) for the narrator to rely on a series of defined parameters to help and guide in the

resolution of actions, generally systematized around a system of rules that can vary in each session of RPG. (MARCUSSE, 2005)<sup>1</sup>

An IF, in which the reader must define the actions taken by an specific character (as in *Photopia*) or in which she finds herself in some way inserted in the narrative itself (such as in *Colossal Cave Adventure* and *Zort*) involves, in the same way as an RPG (a game about the interpretation and playing of roles) in which the player-reader puts herself actively in the role of a character, not only due to empathy or catharsis, given that this character's choices are the same ones taken by the player-reader. Some IFs such as *Welcome to Moreytown*, in which the player must create a human-animal hybrid (similar to the ones seen in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*) to be the protagonist of the narrative are highly similar to a tabletop RPG, being different only in what relates to the number of players (solely the reader) and in the absence of a "tangible" narrator (the Game Master or GM) instead having a "preprogrammed" narrator (the author), therefore, by definition, these IFs are also role playing games, but with a focus on the individual experience.

However, these IFs are not only objects of play, but of *Meaningful Play*. *Meaningful Play* is a term which might be hard to define but that is explained to us by Salen and Zimmerman as it follows:

Meaningful play emerges from the interaction between players and the system of the game, as well as from the context in which the game is played. Understanding this interaction helps us to see just what is going on when a game is played. One way of framing what players do when they play a game is to say that they are making choices. They are deciding how to move their pieces, how to move their bodies, what cards to play, what options to select, what strategies to take, how to interact with other players. They even have to make the choice whether or not to play!

When a player makes a choice within a game, the action that results from the choice has an outcome. (SALEN, ZIMMERMAN, 2004, ch.3 pg.3)

In other words, *Meaningful Play* consists in the fact that the decisions made by the player MUST affect the game itself. If a decision or action taken by a player does not incur in any changes of state or in the situation of the game, it loses its meaning. For example, what would be the meaning in a chess player rotating one of her pawns on its axis? None. It is an empty decision and meaningless to the game, being only possibly relevant to the players in a specific and personal reality. As Zimmerman and Salen tell us "the goal of successful game design is the creation of meaningful play" (SALEN, ZIMMERMAN: 2004, cap. 3, pg. 3), i.e. to make sure

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<sup>1</sup> My translation

that the player's decisions and choices are filled of meaning and consequence is vital to the experience of playing.

Let us take that to the context of IFs: if each of the reader-player's decisions must be full of meaning and consequence then we can affirm that in a good IF the choices made by the reader-player do and should modify the narrative and the text in some way (always remembering that IFs are almost exclusively constituted of written text), this decision-making being a shaping force in such literary work, that, in its turn, opens itself to these changes and transformations but in a guided and controlled fashion through the mediating figure of the author. The relation between reader-player and literary work creates new meanings and new purposes as once again exemplified by Salen and Zimmerman:

Playing a game means making choices and taking actions. All of this activity occurs within a game-system designed to support meaningful kinds of choice-making. Every action taken results in a change affecting the overall system of the game. Another way of stating this point is that an action a player takes in a game results in the creation of new meanings within the system. For example, after you move a piece in Chess, the newly established relationships between Chess pieces gives rise to a new set of meanings-meanings created by the player's action. (SALEN, ZIMMERMAN, 2004, cap. 3, pg. 3)

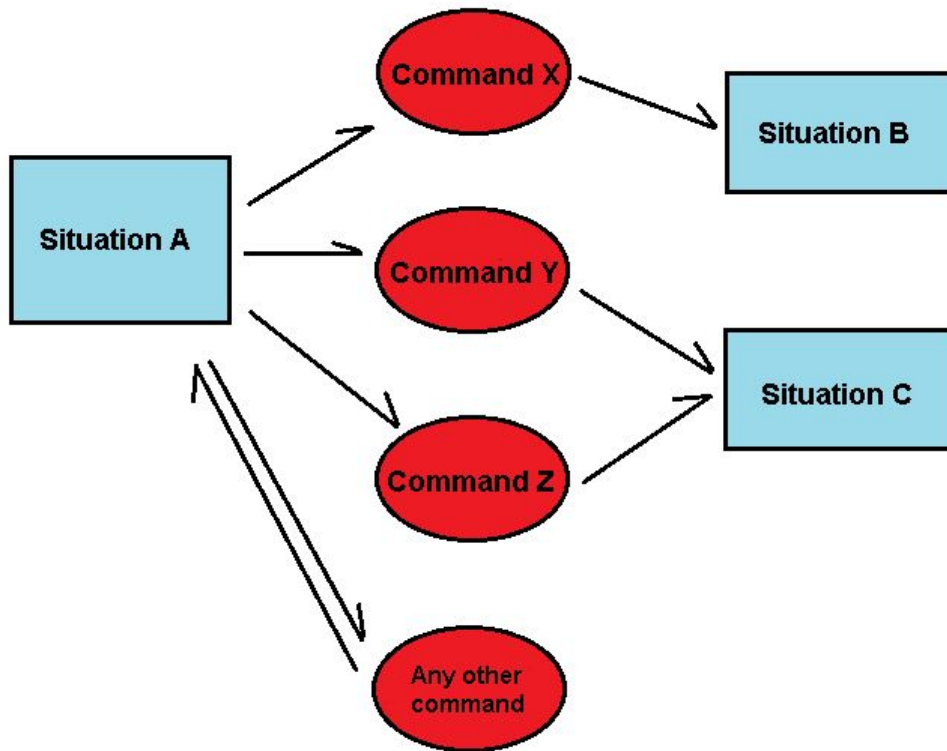
Having defined the importance of the act of playing an IF and how that relates to the objectives here defined, let us turn our attention towards the workings of these IFs. How can we classify and understand them?

### **2.3 HOW DOES AN IF WORK?**

In the interest of this text, we can divide IFs in two groups according to the way that the reader-player can interact PRACTICALLY with them (i.e., we are not talking about the concept from Iser and Jauss of interaction between reader and text, the same will be seen more in depth in later sections of this text), in other words, it relates to how the reader-player exerts her choices and opinions in the narrative. On one hand, following the model started by *Colossal Cave Adventure*, we have IFs with what we are here calling *Open Input*, meaning an open writing prompt (known as *parser*) in which the reader-player can insert commands that, depending on the context of the narrative and what was written by the author, result or not in consequences and reactions in the narrative, similarly to what can be seen in the scheme in FIGURE 4 or more practically in the example in FIGURE 5.



FIGURE 4 - OPEN INPUT IF SCHEMATIC



SOURCE: the author (2017)

FIGURE 5 - HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY SCREENSHOT

You wake up. The room is spinning very gently round your head. Or at least it would be if you could see it which you can't.

It is pitch black.

>turn light on

Good start to the day. Pity it's going to be the worst one of your life. The light is now on.

Bedroom, in the bed

The bedroom is a mess.

It is a small bedroom with a faded carpet and old wallpaper. There is a washbasin, a chair with a tatty dressing gown slung over it, and a window with the curtains drawn. Near the exit leading south is a phone.

There is a flathead screwdriver here. (outside the bed)

There is a toothbrush here. (outside the bed)

>get gown

You can't reach it from the bed. The effort almost kills you.

>stand up

Very difficult, but you manage it. The room is still spinning. It dips and sways a little.

>get gown

Luckily, this is large enough for you to get hold of. You notice something in the pocket.

>put gown

What do you want to put the gown in?

>put on gown

You are now wearing your gown.

>open pocket

Opening your gown reveals a thing your aunt gave you which you don't know what it is, a buffered analgesic, and pocket fluff.

>take analgesic

You swallow the tablet. After a few seconds the room begins to calm down and behave in an orderly manner. Your terrible headache goes.

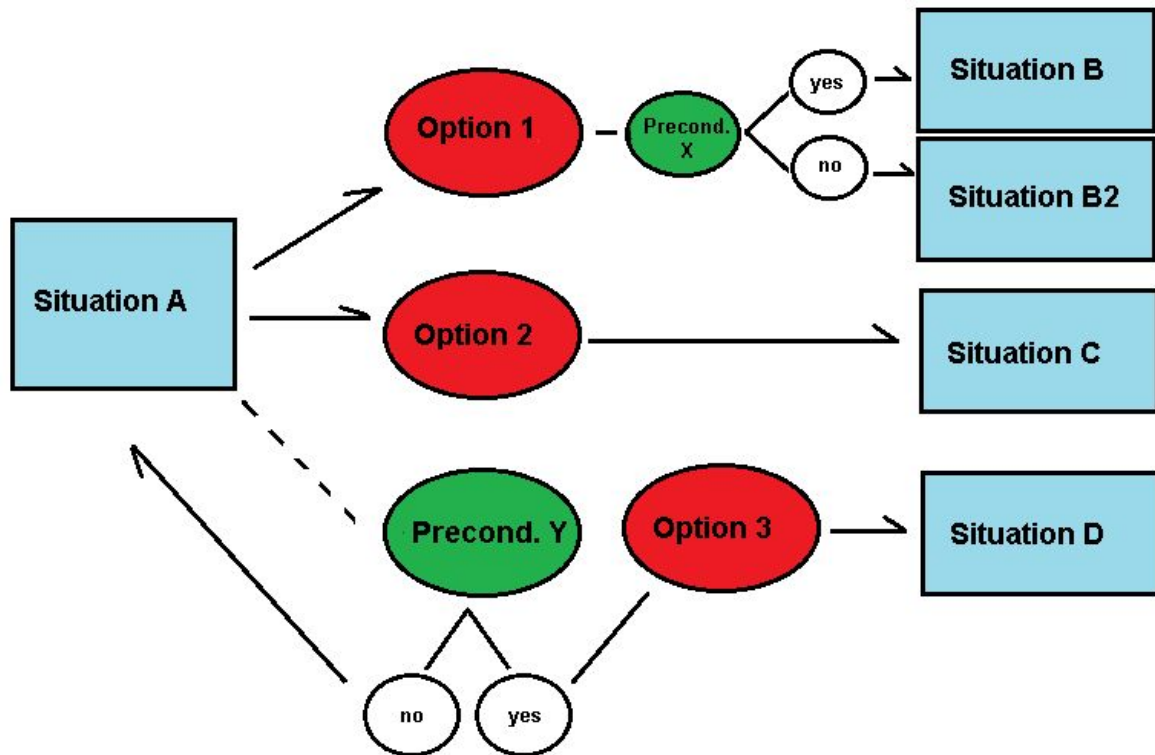
>brush teeth

You have nothing to brush your teeth with.

SOURCE: ADAMS; MERETZKY (1984)

The other manner of practical interaction would be through what are going to call *Closed Input*, characterized by offering to the reader-player the choice between an arbitrary number of prompts written by the author, the choice of one of these prompts results in a reaction or specific development in the narrative, generally the choices being mutually exclusive, in other words, choosing OPTION A implies giving up on the possible outcome related to OPTION B. It can be observed in the schematic in FIGURE 6:

FIGURE 6 - CLOSED INPUT IF SCHEMATIC



SOURCE: the author (2017)

In the example given in FIGURE 7 and FIGURE 8 that the reader-player possesses agency limited only to the choice between the predefined options given by the author, not being able to make use of a *parser* for writing.

FIGURE 7 - WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN INTRODUCTION

# Welcome to Moreytown

by S. Andrew Swann

Show Stats

Restart

Achievements

Menu



You live in the Essex Arms, which you've always thought was a pretentious name for a crumbling apartment building in the middle of Moreytown. At one point, fifty years ago, this place had been luxury condos. But after the moreaus started settling around the neighborhood, the old human residents sold to some anonymous development company that subdivided all the condos into low-income housing. The company name on your lease has changed every year you've lived here. Right now, it's something-something Property Management. Whoever they are, they debit your account on the first, and you get a roof over your head for another month.

This apartment has been your home longer than anywhere else you've ever lived. It's an odd-shaped studio that was sectioned off when they converted the place. It might be kind of shabby —what apartment in this neighborhood isn't? But you could afford it without any roommates. And despite the shabbiness, you're attached to this place. In particular...

- I'm a larger moreau, and it was the one place where the ceilings could accommodate my size.
- It had a shower designed for moreaus.
- I'm a smaller moreau, and I got a deal because anyone bigger wouldn't fit in this place.
- It was the one place where I didn't have to deal with human management.

**Next**

SOURCE: SWANN (2017)

FIGURE 8 - WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN POST CHOICE

# Welcome to Moreytown

by S. Andrew Swann

Show Stats

Restart

Achievements

Menu

Once this place must have been the great room for the original condo. Now it's just a studio with a kitchenette and bathroom wedged off of one corner. But it has four meter ceilings, and it was one of the only apartments you looked at where you didn't have to hunch over to avoid bumping your head on a light fixture.

Not that any of that really matters to you at the moment. It's five o'clock Tuesday morning, and even though you're standing in your apartment, you're not really there. You received some bad news yesterday, and you can't avoid thinking about it.

When you came home on Monday...

- I received an eviction notice...
- I received a subpoena to appear in court to answer charges...
- I received a subpoena to appear in court to testify...
- I received a letter from the I.R.S...

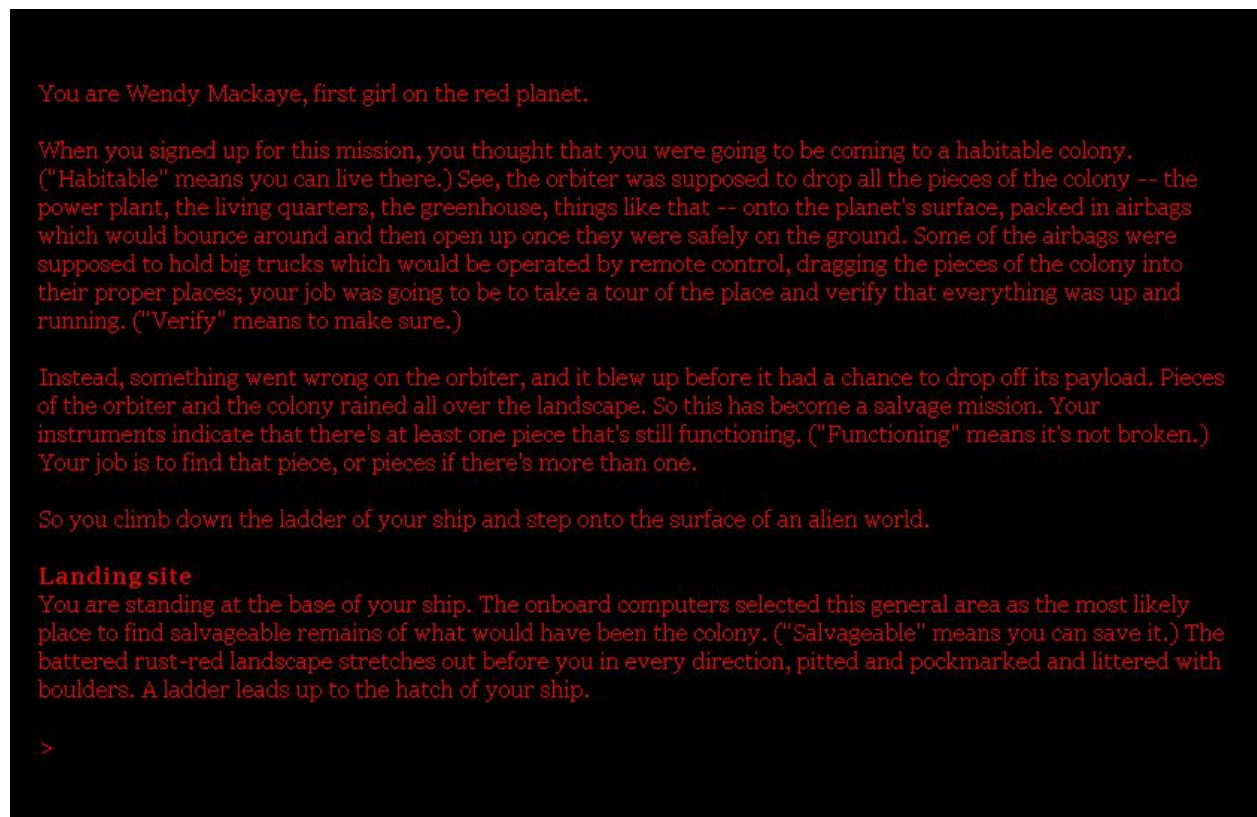
Next

SOURCE: SWANN (2017)

Beyond this division between *Open Input* and *Closed Input*, we can separate the IFs present in the Corpus and, consequently, more generally in IFs of *Direct Protagonism* and *Indirect Protagonism*. By *Direct Protagonism* we refer to the narratives in which the protagonist is the reader-player or, more specifically, a character or construct (active or subjectively) created by her. In FIGURE 5, FIGURE 7 and FIGURE 8, we have some examples of *Direct Protagonism*, with a character created subjectively (in FIGURE 5) and actively (in FIGURES 7 and 8). Generally these narratives are in second person, with the narrator interacting directly with the reader-player. In this category of *Direct Protagonism* it is also possible to make a further subdivision related to characterization of the protagonist-reader: she can be *non*

*determined*, as seen in FIGURE 1 and FIGURE 5, in other words, the narrator does not give details or ask about the protagonist; in contrast, the protagonist can be *determined*, her characterization being defined by the reader-player as seen in FIGURE 7 and FIGURE 8; furthermore, it is still possible for the protagonist to be *predetermined* by the author of the text, being up to the reader-player to play the part that was given to her, no direct choices given, as seen in FIGURE 9.

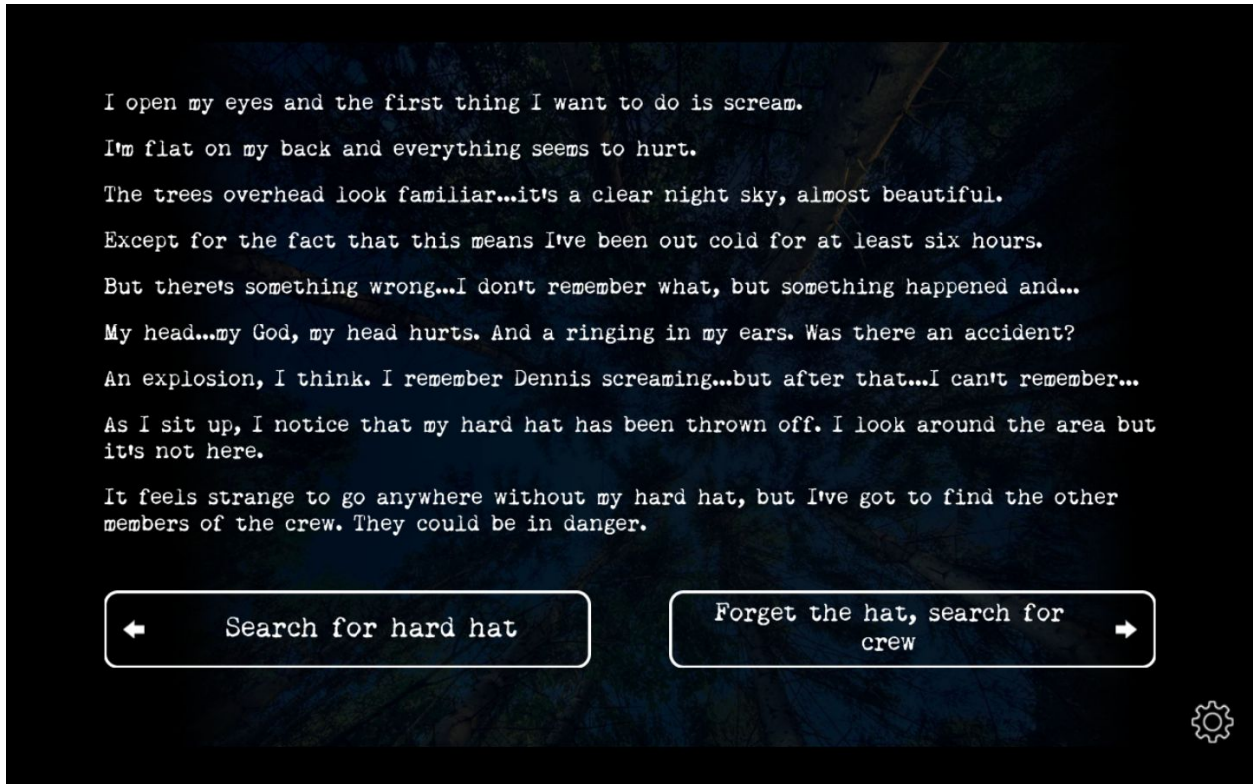
FIGURE 9 - PHOTOPIA, THE GIRL FROM MARS



SOURCE: CADRE (1998)

On the other hand, when we talk about *Indirect Protagonism* we are talking about narratives in which the protagonist is not the reader-player, but the decisions taken by her guide the actions of the protagonist. As is shown in FIGURE 10 and FIGURE 11, the narratives in this case are in first person, the protagonists being the narrators and the role befalling the reader-player varies depending on the text, but never being the role of protagonist of the events in the narrative.

FIGURE 10 - BURIED FIRST SCENE



SOURCE: Bromoco Games (2016)

FIGURE 11 - LIFELINE FIRST SCENE





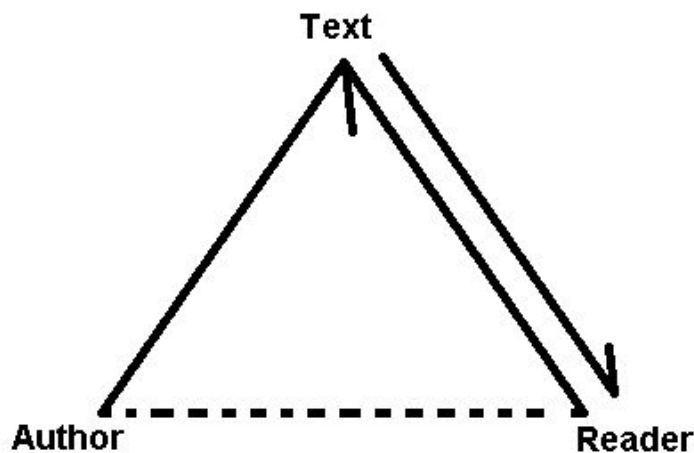
SOURCE: Three Minute Games (2016)

Regardless of the type of *Input* utilized or the type of *Protagonism*, in an IF the progress of the narrative relies heavily on the actions of the reader-player which therefore presents itself as the driving force behind the story. The IF can have multiple endings, the outcome always depending on the choices and actions of the reader-player.

## 2.4 READER-PLAYER AND THE IF GENRE

The term reader-player has been utilized so far to refer to the consumer of IFs and we believe it is time to explain the usage of this term. Let us take a look at the triangle shown in FIGURE 12:

FIGURE 12 - AUTHOR, READER, TEXT TRIANGLE



SOURCE: The Author (2017)

By observing it, it is possible to conclude that it is based on the Reception Theory of Jauss and Iser, pointing out that the reader affects the text from a Horizon of Interpretations and the text affects the reader, changing or not her Horizon of Expectations.

As seen so far, IFs are composed solely (or largely) of written text. All interactions



between reader-player and text happen through the written language. Similarly to how we have defined the fact that an IF is something to be played, it is essential to understand that it is also piece of literary work that demands active engagement from the reader. By taking a look at the definition of literature from Afrânio Coutinho we can further strengthen this point:

Literature, as all art, is a transfiguration of the real, it is reality recreated through the spirit of the artist and rebroadcasted through language to the forms, which are the genres, and with which it takes body and a new reality. It starts then to live an autonomous life, independent of the author and the experience of reality from where it came (COUTINHO, Afrânio. 1978. Pg. 9-10<sup>2</sup>)

Similarly to the idea of Mimesis, Afrânio's definition of literature as a recreation of reality allows us to properly classify IFs as literary work. Furthermore, it is now necessary to properly identify *Interactive Fiction* as a secondary genre, as defined by Bakhtin:

There is no reason to minimize the extreme heterogeneity of discourse genres and the consequent difficulty when it comes to defining the general character of the enunciate. It matters, at this point, to take into consideration the essential difference between primary genre of discourse (simple) and secondary genre of discourse (complex). The secondary genres of discourse - romance, theater, scientific discourse, ideological discourse, etc. - show themselves in circumstances of more complex and relatively more evolved cultural communication, especially written: artistic, scientific, sociopolitical. During the process of their formation, these secondary genres absorb and transmute the primary genres (simple) of all kinds that constituted themselves in circumstances of spontaneous verbal communication. The primary genres, by becoming components of the secondary genres, transform themselves within them and acquire a particular characteristic: they lose their immediate relation with the existing reality and with the reality of the enunciate of others(...) (BAKHTIN, M. 1997, p. 281<sup>3</sup>)

What are the characteristics of the IF genre? Seeing that , as defined by Bakhtin, "Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call speech genres" (BAKHTIN, 1986, pg. 60), we can point out as characteristics of the IF genre: highly descriptive language, always paying close attention to the surroundings of the characters as it can be seen in FIGURES 1, 2 and 8; predetermination of arbitrary choices to be taken by the reader through enunciates preprogrammed by the author as can be seen in FIGURES 5 and 7; the enunciates offered by the author intentionally direct to the advancement of the narrative and/or the development of *Meaningful Gameplay*; the choices taken by the reader cannot be irrelevant to the narrative.

Why not only using the term *player* instead of *reader-player*? to put it simply, in an IF the text is at the same time reading object and object to the direct actions of the player. By

---

<sup>2</sup> My translation

<sup>3</sup> My translation

acting, the object is modified and the reader-player comes closer to the objective in mind, becoming more involved in the narrative and in what happens to the characters in the story. Simultaneously, the reading subject affects the text (both directly as a player and indirectly as a reader). An indissociable relation exists between game and literary text wherein the two of them are inseparable since the text is the medium and the object of the game and its narrative the objective and cathartic means of the same. As such, it only makes sense to use the term reader-player as the subject is both at the same time and can't possibly be just one or the other.

## 2.5 ISER, JAUSS AND THE READER IN RECEPTION THEORY

This research is supported in two main theoretical pillars: the Reception Theory of Iser and Jauss and the concepts of *Embedded Narrative* and *Emergent Narrative* initially introduced by Marc LeBlanc and further developed in *Rules of Play* from Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman.

First of all, it is of utmost importance to have it clear how central is the figure of the reader for Jauss, as it said to us in *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory* :

the relationship of work to work must now be brought into this interaction between work and mankind, and the historical coherence of works among themselves must be seen in the interrelations of production and reception. Put another way: literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject-through the interaction of author and public (JAUSS, Hans Robert, 1970, pg. 15)

The reader is fundamental for literature and art. Jauss moves the focus from the process of literary creation and the author (which is still vital) to the consumer. A literary piece that is not read is not complete. It is through the interaction with both author and reader that these texts place and relate themselves throughout history.

From Jauss we shall also use the concept of *Horizon of Expectation*, defined as it follows:

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the "middle and end," which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text. (JAUSS, Hans Robert, 1970, pag. 23)

This concept is fundamental for it allows us to understand the idea of narrative expectations and how the reader-player ponders her choices during a session of reading-playing.

We can also notice that in moments of hybridization of secondary genres in an IF there is a mixture of horizons of expectations due to the junction of these different genres (*Buried*, for example, is a suspense IF, with elements from both genres; in the same way, *Welcome to Moreytown* is a detective story and, therefore, subject to patterns and expectations relative to this genre).

In consonance with Jauss, we have Wolfgang Iser. Like Jauss, Iser tells us about two poles in the literary process, artistic and aesthetic, and how the two of them are necessary to the completeness of the literary piece since it finds itself betwixt those two poles:

(...) literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader-though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence (...) (ISER, Wolfgang, 1972, pag. 279)

In other words, the complete work only exists through the realization of its reading and the meaning and interpretation resulting of it, but the range of these interpretations and the freedom of this process are not completely at mercy of the will, humor and experiences of the reader but are still free enough to not be completely closed in themselves under the authority of the writer.

Also from Iser we are going to use the terms *Implied Reader* and *Actual Reader*, well exemplified by Raman Selden as:

The term 'reader' can be subdivided into 'implied reader' and 'actual reader'. The first is the reader whom the text creates for itself and amounts to 'a network of response-inviting structures' which predispose us to read in certain ways. The 'actual reader' receives certain mental images in the process of reading; however, the images will inevitably be coloured by the reader's 'existing stock of experience'. (SELDEN, 1997, pag. 53)

Therefore, we have the reader as idealized by the author, which is essential to understand the process and the horizon of interpretations that the writer had in mind, on the other hand, we have the reader as an active subject in the reading process, not an imaginary consumer. We believe that these concepts are of utter importance as we look to these IFs from the point of view of their creation and by analysing the roads taken by the author having in mind the existence of these two types of reader.

## 2.6 EMBEDDED AND EMERGENT NARRATIVE

As mentioned before, the other major theoretical basis for this work is the concepts of *Embedded Narrative* and *Emergent Narrative*. *Embedded Narrative*, as explained by Salen and Zimmerman consists of:

Embedded narrative is pre-generated narrative content that exists prior to a player's interaction with the game. Designed to provide motivation for the events and actions of the game, players experience embedded narrative as a story context. (...)The embedded narrative also provides the major story arc for the game, structuring a player's interaction and movement through the game world in a meaningful way. (SALEN, ZIMMERMAN, 2004, ch. 26, pg. 7)

The *Embedded Narrative* is the story written by the author and all the details that are found in the text upon the completion of its creative process. It can be simplified as “fixed and predetermined units of narrative content, like text on the page of a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure book” (SALEN, ZIMMERMAN, 2004, ch. 26, pg. 7). We see here reinforced the similarities between the IFs and the Choose-Your-Own-Adventure books. The main differences we can point out between the two are the difference in medium (IFs are digital, CYOA books are physical) and the fact that you cannot “cheat” in an IF, there is no way to skip pages and find out the best option or a way to have a “do-over”. In an IF, once you commit to a choice, it is final.

On the other hand, *Emergent Narrative* is defined as:

Narrative can also be emergent, which means that it arises from the set of rules governing interaction with the game system. Unlike embedded narrative, emergent narrative elements arise during play from the complex system of the game, often in unexpected ways. (SALEN, ZIMMERMAN, 2004, ch. 26, pg. 7)

Now, as explained by Salen and Zimmerman based on the presentation of LeBlanc, *Emergent Narrative* is the result of the interaction between the player and the system of the game. Another game designer to give us an interesting insight about these two different types of narratives is Doug Church in his article *Formal Abstract Design Tools*:

The most obvious uses of story in computer and video games can be found in adventure-game plot lines. In this game category, the story has been written in advance by designers, and players have it revealed to them through interactions with characters, objects, and the world....

But story comes into play in NBA Live, too. There, the story is what happens in the game. Maybe it ends up in overtime for a last-second three-pointer by a star player who hasn't been hitting his shots; maybe it is a total blowout from the beginning and at the end the user gets to put in the benchwarmers for their moment of glory. In either case, the player's actions during play created the story (CHURCH, 1999)

So, we have the story written by the author of the game-text and the story that is created by the act of playing the game and reading the text, which is unique to each individual and reliant on the personal experiences of the same. These concepts quite clearly relate to the ideas present in the Theory of Reception. Where in the theories of Jauss and Iser the text is only partially complete until the moment of its reading and is open to a myriad of possible and plausible interpretations, the two different types of narrative idealized by game designers such as LeBlanc and Church stem from a very similar idea to the aforementioned theorists. Despite the factual existence of the text/embedded narrative, the act of reading/playing generates an invariably personal interpretation stemming from a horizon of expectations and emergent narrative, therefore, each reader should experience these texts/games differently based on her experiences and reflections prior to and during the contact with these texts/games.

We have established the similarities between these two fields, but, this opens up to the question: despite these similarities, how does the fact that the reader is also a player change the experience and interaction of this reader with the text-game in hand?

### 3 ANALYSIS

As seen before in the Methodology section, four IFs are going to be analyzed, according to the parameters previously established:

TABLE 1 - CORPUS ORGANIZED BY CATEGORIES

	OPEN INPUT	CLOSED INPUT
DIRECT PROTAGONISM non determined	<i>Colossal Cave Adventure</i>	
DIRECT PROTAGONISM determined		<i>Welcome to Morreytown</i>
DIRECT PROTAGONISM predetermined	<i>Photopia</i>	
INDIRECT PROTAGONISM		<i>Buried</i>

SOURCE: The Author (2017)

### 3.1 COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE

*Colossal Cave Adventure* is considered the first IF as we know it, as explained in the introduction of this work. It makes use of a *parser*, in other words, it is an *Open Input* IF with non determined protagonism. The main character is the reader, but at no point whatsoever does the game ask you who you are or what are your characteristics, as shown before in FIGURE 1.

The first thing we see in the game is the following screen (FIGURE 13):

FIGURE 13 - COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE 1ST SCREEN

```
Colossal Cave Adventure ▶ Score: 36 ▶ Turns: 1

Welcome to ADVENTURE!

Original development by Willie Crowther
Major features added by Don Woods
Conversion to BDS C by J. R. Jaeger
Unix standardization by Jerry D. Pohl
Conversion to PHP by Matt G. S. Cox
Adapted for AMC.com by Rick Adams

To play the game, type short phrases into the command line below.
If you type the word "look," the game gives you a description of
your surroundings. Typing "inventory" tells you what you're
carrying. "Get" "drop" and "throw" helps you interact with
objects. Part of the game is trying out different commands and
seeing what happens. Type "help" at any time for game
instructions.

Would you like more instructions?

What's next?
```

SOURCE: CROWTHER (1976)

Although very practical, this prompt gives us no objective (apart from “trying different commands and seeing what happens”). As someone embarking on this adventure I want to know more, so I press the game for more information by writing “Y” on the *parser*. What the game gives is as follows (FIGURE 14):

FIGURE 14 - COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE OBJECTIVE

```
Colossal Cave Adventure ▶ Score: 36 ▶ Turns: 2
```

```
objects. Part of the game is trying out different commands and seeing what happens. Type "help" at any time for game instructions.
```

```
Would you like more instructions?
```

```
> y
```

```
Somewhere nearby is Colossal Cave, where others have found fortunes in treasure and gold, though it is rumored that some who enter are never seen again. Magic is said to work in the cave. I will be your eyes and hands. Direct me with commands of 1 or 2 words. I should warn you that I look at only the first five letters of each word, so you'll have to enter "Northeast" as "ne" to distinguish it from "North." (Should you get stuck, type "help" or "info" for some general hints).
```

```
You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick building. Around you is a forest. A small stream flows out of the building and down a gully.
```

```
What's next? █
```

SOURCE: CROWTHER (1976)

The game here gives us some information about your objective (to explore the Colossal Cave and find its treasure) and how the game is going to be played (through prompts to be “interpreted” by the narrator). Now that we know what is our objective it is natural to move forward. The game now follows in a regular pattern as you explore the Colossal Cave. You can use the *parser* to guide your character around and solve the puzzles (many of which consist of using the right words in the right place).

As a reader, *Colossal Cave Adventure* focuses a lot of its writing in describing the places you are so you can properly interact with them, but in no way do I, as a reader, felt compelled to find out more about any of the things of the embedded narrative. Since the author doesn't mention anything that would make the reader think about the protagonist, it is not something that comes naturally to us. This has some effects in the way I positioned myself as a reader, to mention: there was no moment of contemplation, at no point whatsoever was the aesthetic or philosophic value of a sentence superposed on the need to progress in the narrative and to accomplish my goals; paradoxically, despite the protagonist of the story being the reader, there is a lack of strong protagonism in the story, the protagonist is faded and the empathy we feel

towards him is none, since we, as protagonists, focus on action and there is no time to actually take in the information that is given to us.

In this IF, although there definitely was a vast amount of reading, the act of it in no way resulted in reflection or a change in my Horizon of Expectations. As a reader, the main point here was to decode and scrutinize the descriptions in order to find out which words were best suited for the prompt, and not to reflect and add upon the text itself.

To motivate the player (and not the reader), the game has a *score* system, meaning that your decisions are somehow mathematically valued, some of them being *better* than others (at least game-wise). I found this extremely disheartening. Not only the text lacked reflection or depth, but the game aspect of this IF lacked in the sense that it made use of a score system that in no way rewards the player except by having a better score than someone else. Despite being a game that makes use of text, there was no aesthetic pleasure derived from it and very little to the sense of challenge and reward that is expected of a game, failing to unite these two experiences as a whole.

READING EXPERIENCE: Too simple and pragmatic, there is no attention to the protagonist and there was no empathic bond to the narrative or the character.

GAMING EXPERIENCE: Very archaic, there was no clear indication of how important were the choices made, the score system is not appealing enough to cover the faults of the IF.

CONVERGENCE: Due to the fact that both writing and gameplay are weak, this IF was not able to bring the two together efficiently since neither one of them stands on its own.

### **3.2 WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN**

*Welcome to Moreytown* is a game from 2017, written by S. Andrew Swann and based on the series of novels *The Moreau Quartet*. This IF also uses of direct protagonism, putting the reader-player in the heart of the action as the protagonist of this text. However, differently from *Colossal Cave Adventure*, it spends a while asking the player about who they are *in the fictional world* (emphasis to show that the author is not interested in who the reader-player is in the real world, but how she is imagining herself in the world of the IF) as we can see in FIGURE 7 and FIGURE 8 and below:



One thing that was of tremendous importance to me as a reader is the fact that this is a Closed Input IF. At first, this seems like a very minor difference, putting more control in the hands of the writer and less in the reader's, but it goes much farther than that.

Since there is no need to think "what word is the 'key' to this puzzle", I could now evaluate each one of the options given to me, think about them and ponder their repercussions and implications. Should I be a large moreau or a small one? What does that imply to this world around me? How will this affect the choices ahead of me? Will this be a game-changing choice? It can be seen that I was thinking both as a reader, interested in this world that was created by the author and how my introduction into it would affect it, and as a player, thinking how these (hopefully) meaningful choices would alter the way I would interact with the system of the game.

Beyond that, the author was actively making me think about who I was in this world, which triggered reflections about how this related to how I see myself in the "real" world. There was no sense of urgency whatsoever and I spent hours thinking about these choices that were laid in front of me and their possible repercussions both for the IF and for me as an individual.

For this work I played the game twice: the first time I chose to be a small and law abiding moreau, a capybara; the second time I went for the opposite, a very large and rebellious one, a bear in this case. The differences that these choices made become apparent soon after.

Right after going through a series of character defining paragraphs (do you talk to your ex? Is it a he or a she? Are you male, female or something else? Do you have problems with the law? Are you broke? Do you value money or appearance? Etc), all of which are integrated in the overall plot, you face the following situation (FIGURE 15):

FIGURE 15 - WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN, FIRE SCENE

# Welcome to Moreytown

by S. Andrew Swann

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You dash out the door to your apartment. The corridor beyond is hazy with smoke, but the way to the stairs seems clear. You break into a run for safety, ducking as low as you can manage, to avoid the worst of it. A few meters away from your apartment is a small red box on the wall. You reach up and pull the white lever just under the word "FIRE." A klaxon shrieks in your ears, and a strobe light flashes somewhere above you, beyond the smoke. Before you resume your escape you hear someone groaning in response to the alarm. It sounds as if it's coming from behind the apartment door closest to the stairs.

- I ignore it. I'm not here to do the fire department's job.
- I pound on the door, calling to see if someone's in trouble.
- I break down the door.

Next

SOURCE: SWANN (2017)

Now, if you chose a small moreau, there is no point in trying to break down the door, and there's no time to think (you are in a burning building after all), so I chose the reasonable choice and pounded on the door (FIGURE 16):

FIGURE 16 - WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN, SMALL MOREAU DOOR SCENE

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by S. Andrew Swann

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You stop and pound violently on the door, yelling, "Are you all right in there?" You have to repeat yourself several times.

After several nerve-wracking seconds, the door creaks open on an elderly feline with a shaggy coat of gray-shot tawny fur. It's too hazy in the corridor to make out his exact species, but he's obviously one that doesn't age well. His joints are knobby and arthritic, and his pupils are completely dilated and silvery with cataracts. The disoriented cat wheezes, "Who is it?" at you before breaking into a coughing fit.

- I grab the cat by the arm and run for the steps.
- I tell the cat he needs to get out of here, the building's on fire.
- I call for someone to take this guy off my hands.
- I've wasted enough time with this senile old fart. Time to go.

Next

SOURCE: SWANN (2017)

Now, this is because I was a small moreau, there was no chance that I could have broken down that door. If we take a look at how it went when my character was a bear (FIGURE 17):

FIGURE 17 - WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN, LARGE MOREAU DOOR SCENE

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by S. Andrew Swann

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The doorframe splinters when you throw your full weight into the door. The door swings open on a flustered-looking old cat. He has a shaggy tawny coat shot with gray. It's too hazy and dark in the apartment to make out his exact species, but he's obviously one that doesn't age well. His joints are knobby and arthritic, and his pupils are completely dilated and silvery with cataracts. The disoriented cat wheezes, "Who is it?" at you before breaking into a coughing fit.

- I grab the cat by the arm and run for the steps.
- I tell the cat he needs to get out of here, the building's on fire.
- I call for someone to take this guy off my hands.
- I've wasted enough time with this senile old fart. Time to go.

Next

SOURCE: SWANN (2017)

Now, as one can see, there was no difference in the actual outcome, the door was opened and the person inside saved. However, the way that the two played out are very different and accentuate the differences in you character and not on the situation. As a capybara, I felt small and quite flustered, as a bear I felt powerful.

Beyond showing different text and development depending on the characteristics of your "protagonist", there are also many different ways to approach a same situation, which can result in different interactions depending on you current protagonist characteristics (FIGURE 18):

FIGURE 18 - WELCOME TO MOREYTOWN, AFTER THE FIRE

You look away from the bear, trying to catch sight of the human female again, and you're jostled by a surge in the crowd behind you. You turn to see a mass of moreaus moving to converge on a beat-up panel truck, the kind of automated vehicle that tends to move through the city anonymously until someone overtaxes its nav computer by doing an unexpected merge. This one is less anonymous than usual. A blurry mural covers the sides of the truck, dominated by a globe. Above the mural, the words "East Side Unity Center" are written in large block letters. The truck finishes backing toward the crowd, and the door at the back rolls up, revealing a lean muscular feline with spotted yellow fur. He's wearing cut-off jeans—human make, you can tell because of the ragged hole torn in them to accommodate his tail—and a t-shirt with a design matching the pattern on the side of the truck. Jaguar or cheetah, it's hard for you to tell the difference at a distance. The feline talks to the crowd and starts passing out bottled water out the back of the truck.

- I shove my way through the crowd to see what that human in the pantsuit is doing here.
- I step out toward the human and shout, "What the hell're you doing here?"
- I join the crowd massed by the rear of the truck. Maybe I can help.
- I push through the crowd by the rear of the truck, I need water as much as anyone.
- I ask the massive ursine, "What's up, big guy?"
- I keep a low profile and try to eavesdrop on the ursine's phone conversation.

**Next**

SOURCE: SWANN (2017)

Here we have three possible situations, each one with two different approaches, and, possibly, two different results. Here, as a reader, I theorize that I can follow three different narrative paths, however, there is also the feeling that by choosing one of these options, I will give up on the possibilities opened by the others. This is partially true, since you can follow two of the three narrative paths, and you can only choose one approach for each one of these situations. These choices eventually lead up to further branching paths in such a way that it is extremely hard for two people to have the same experience.

Compared to *Colossal Cave Adventure*, this IF is on whole different level. There is complexity in each one of the choices presented to the player and a richness of detail and

complexity for the reader to enjoy. At the same time that as a player I struggled to make the most out of the choices given to me and of the challenges presented by my own choices, my experience as a reader was one of enthrallment in the story and scenario created by the writer. The *Embedded Narrative* is rich and complex and the *Emergent Narrative* is highly immersive due to the investment in the creation of a persona for this adventure, which eventually leads to a personal attachment to the characters and feelings developed due to the choices and resulting situations. It is important to notice that while *Colossal Cave Adventure* cared not for gender, age or sexual orientation of its reader (the *Implied Reader* here being a blank slate that is filled fully by the reader-player), *Welcome to Moreytown* gives the reader-player the tools to craft a complex persona for herself (the *Implied Reader* in this case is also a blank slate, but one whose characterization is guided by the author to the finest detail) resulting in a much deeper and personal *Emergent Narrative*.

The experience of playing and reading this IF was wholesome, the two combining into a profoundly engaging experience and the one that brought the most in terms of enjoyment, reflection and aesthetic pleasure. My *Horizon of Expectations* was highly changed by this IF, since before reading-playing it I had some prejudice towards some aspects of it (the use of anthropomorphized animals is something that I have always looked upon with some discomfort) and a lot of the ideas of prejudice and power relations that I had were somehow called into question.

READING EXPERIENCE: Great worldbuilding, the writer is able to immerse the player in the scenario; great attention to the protagonist, allowing the player to define the persona that she will be roleplaying in this experience; dense and deep narrative.

GAMING EXPERIENCE: Very responsive and simple, allowing the player to spend more time reflecting upon her choices and their consequences.

CONVERGENCE: the two aspects are very well integrated, each one of your choices affecting the narrative and the characters involved. Your persona in the IF is heavily shaped by the choices made by you and the whole story and character development revolves around these choices.

### **3.3 PHOTOPIA**

*Photopia* is, as mentioned before, a highly awarded IF. It uses predetermined protagonism, putting the reader-player in the role of many different characters throughout the story. It also makes use of a *parser* and *Open Input* in order to puzzle the reader-player about which command is the correct one in order to further advance the story. By its opening text we can see that it stands in a different league from *Colossal Cave Adventure* (FIGURE 19):

FIGURE 19 - PHOTOPIA INTRODUCTION

"Will you read me a story?"

"Read you a story? What fun would that be? I've got a better idea: let's tell a story together."

SOURCE: CADRE (1998)

The opening line of this IF already establishes one of the fundamentals of the genre: reader and author are telling a story together. This is true to many other texts of many other genres, but it is rarely told so explicitly to the reader that such is the case. Therefore, this IF begins by extending to the player authorial rights to the story being told.

However, in opposition to this idea, the first paragraphs we are presented in this IF are not about us as a reader and/or player, but rather about the embedded narrative that the author is already setting into motion (FIGURE 20):

FIGURE 20 - PHOTOPIA FIRST SCENE

#### **Speeding down Montgomery Boulevard**

The streetlights are bright. Unbearably bright. You have to squint as hard as you can to keep your retinas from bursting into flame.

"Welcome back to the land of the LIVING, bud," Rob says. "You planning to stick around for a while or you gonna pass out again? Cause one thing I've learned about chicks is that they actually DON'T LIKE IT when you pass out on them in the middle of gettin' it on. You hear me? So if that's, like, your PLAN, then I'm droppin' you off and showin' up solo."

You don't exactly remember where the day went, but as you listen to Rob rant on, bits of it start to float back to you: a day on the slopes, the brisk February wind against your face; polishing off a keg back at the lodge; those two girls you and Rob had hit it off with, the ones who'd given you their address in town. "We all should get together sometime!" they'd said. Of course, Rob insisted that by "sometime" they'd meant "later tonight." You hadn't been so sure, but then you'd blacked out before you could argue the point.

How Rob came to be driving your car you're not exactly sure. Apparently he couldn't wait till you were sober enough to drive it yourself. From the way he's weaving all over the road, he also apparently couldn't wait till HE was sober enough to drive it, either.

Rob changes the radio station a few times, eventually settling on the station you were listening to in the first place.

>

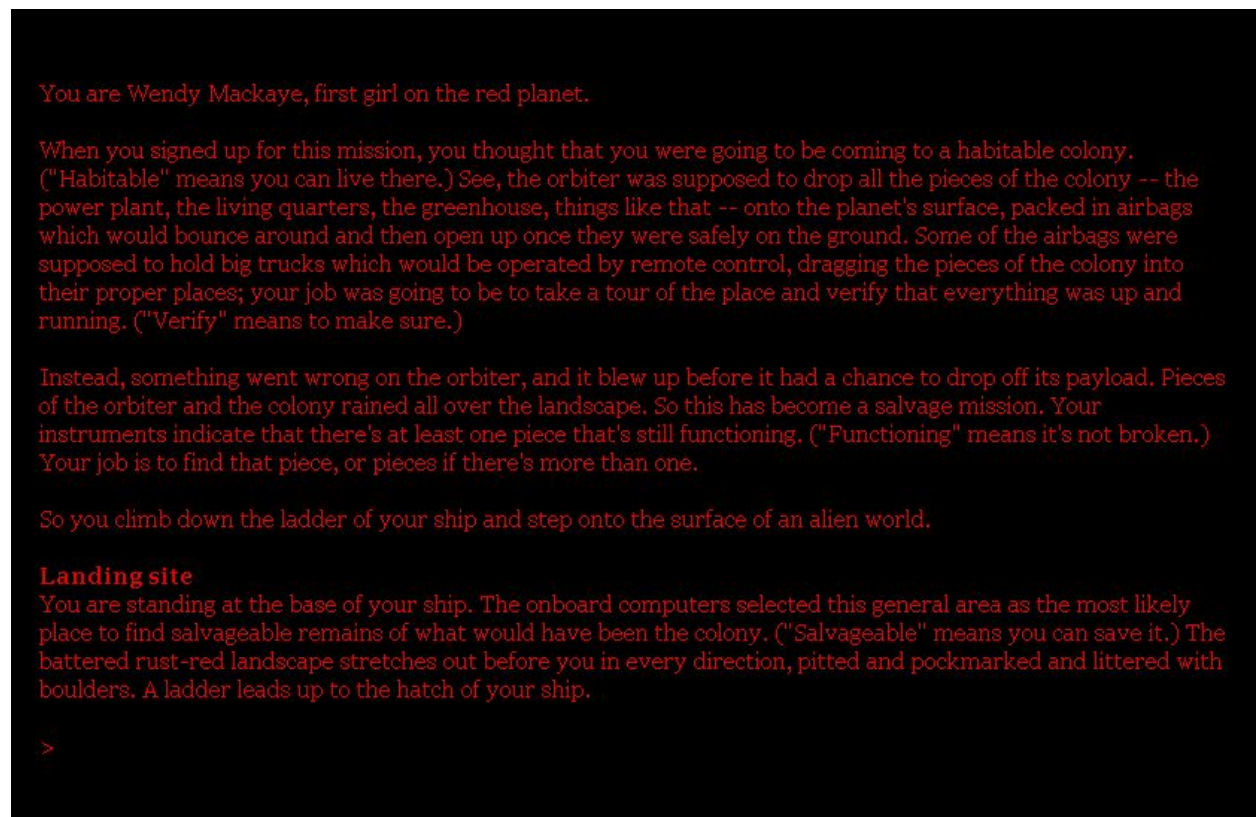
SOURCE: CADRE (1998)



We are set in this scene as the protagonist and are soon introduced to the a new character, Rob, who is clearly in good terms with us. There is a lot for us as readers in these paragraphs, from the figures of speech (*retinas bursting into flame*) to the colloquialisms and dialogue, there is a lot to be absorbed. You can ask Rob questions, look around, talk to him, a lot of interaction is possible. However, there is no game element present to speak of. If we are players here it is in a fashion similar to an RPG: we are playing the role of the protagonist, trying to figure out who is Rob and what is that we did last night as we speed through the night.

The game allows you to write a few commands in the prompt before it shifts its focus to a different character. The jump is abrupt and immense, going from a (presumably) male character on Earth to a female character on Mars, as was seen in FIGURE 9, and again replicated here:

FIGURE 9 - PHOTOPIA, THE GIRL FROM MARS



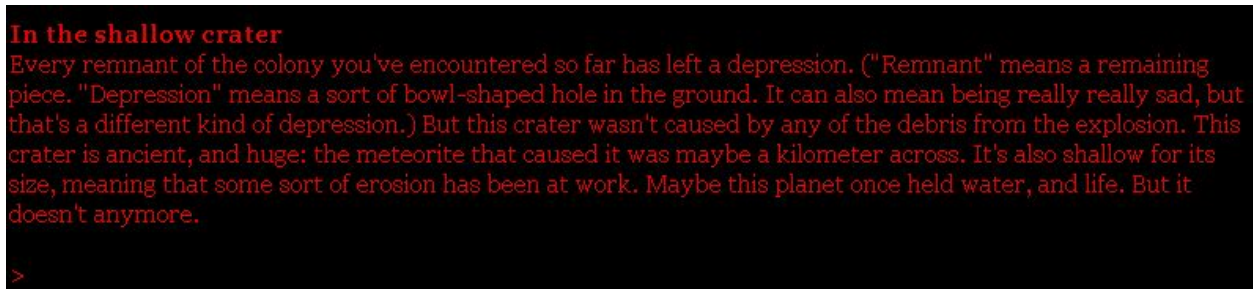
SOURCE: CADRE (1998)

While the first part of the text doesn't present us with no objective or challenge, this section does (we have to find the missing pieces of the colony). This part of the story played out similarly to what would be expected of an IF: clear goals; focus on exploration; puzzles based on



observation of the descriptions and correct choice of commands. This section is very pragmatic, heavily based on descriptions and seems to heavily lean towards functionality, unlike the first part, that was more aesthetically pleasant and deep. Compared to the first section, this one felt much more like a game than previously. Except for one detail: the explanations for words that every now and then appear in the body of the text (FIGURE 21):

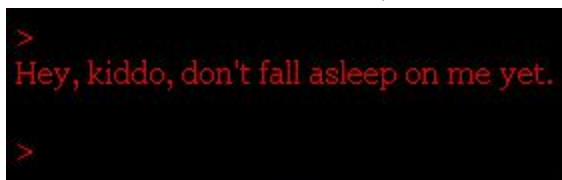
FIGURE 21 - PHOTOPA EXPLANATION DETAIL



SOURCE: CADRE (1998)

The detail of these explanations made me think that maybe this is a diary or perhaps a story being told to someone (similarly to how a parent would stop a story midway to explain a word to her child). By pressing the [ENTER] key, we are given this message (FIGURE 22):

FIGURE 22 - PHOTOPA, KIDDO



SOURCE: CADRE (1998)

This further reinforces that this is perhaps a bedtime story or some other tale being told during bedtime. This adds a whole new level of depth to the reading of this IF. The game aspect is not changed (our objective remains, our methods are still the same) but the gaps being filled due to this new information heavily changed my view of the story and called to my attention the question of “who am I really?”. Am I the girl on mars? Am I the man in the car? Am I being told a story by someone that puts me in the role of the main character in a type of metanarrative?

The introduction of this text (“will you read me a story”) now acquires a deeper meaning and the possibility that these different stories have a deeper connection transform this from a simple “reading-to-play” to an active reading. Other pieces start to come together. When the story is situated on Earth, the background is white and the font is black, however, when the focus

moves to other planets, the background is black and the font is colored (red when you first get to Mars, blue after we have a character almost drowning in the previous chapter).

As a player, I'm still focused on finding the pieces of the colony that fell on Mars, but this is now deeply intertwined with my expectations surrounding this nonlinear plot and its multitude of focus. There is a feeling of confusion in the constant shift of point of view and location, specially when elements from one resonate with others. Despite not being able to create a persona through *Embedded Narrative*, the constant questioning helps us to create an identity through *Emergent Narrative*. The feeling of confusion and disorientation when navigating through these intermittent timelines and places seems to be intrinsic to the story being told here, with sections focused on a steady objective and exploration and others based on pure description and aesthetic, it felt as if the author is playing with the idea of a mission based game which is constantly being interrupted by a stream of what could be memories or parallel stories. Am I, the reader-player as lost as the main character on Mars? There is a clear goal in our sights but our path towards it is not in a straight fashion but rather through loops and layers of storytelling that demand to be filled by us as readers.

**READING EXPERIENCE:** The text feels very mature, with constant, but not pointless, changes in focus in a multi-layered, nonlinear narrative. The reader-player can't choose or define her protagonist, which is more in line with the traditional approach to narratives.

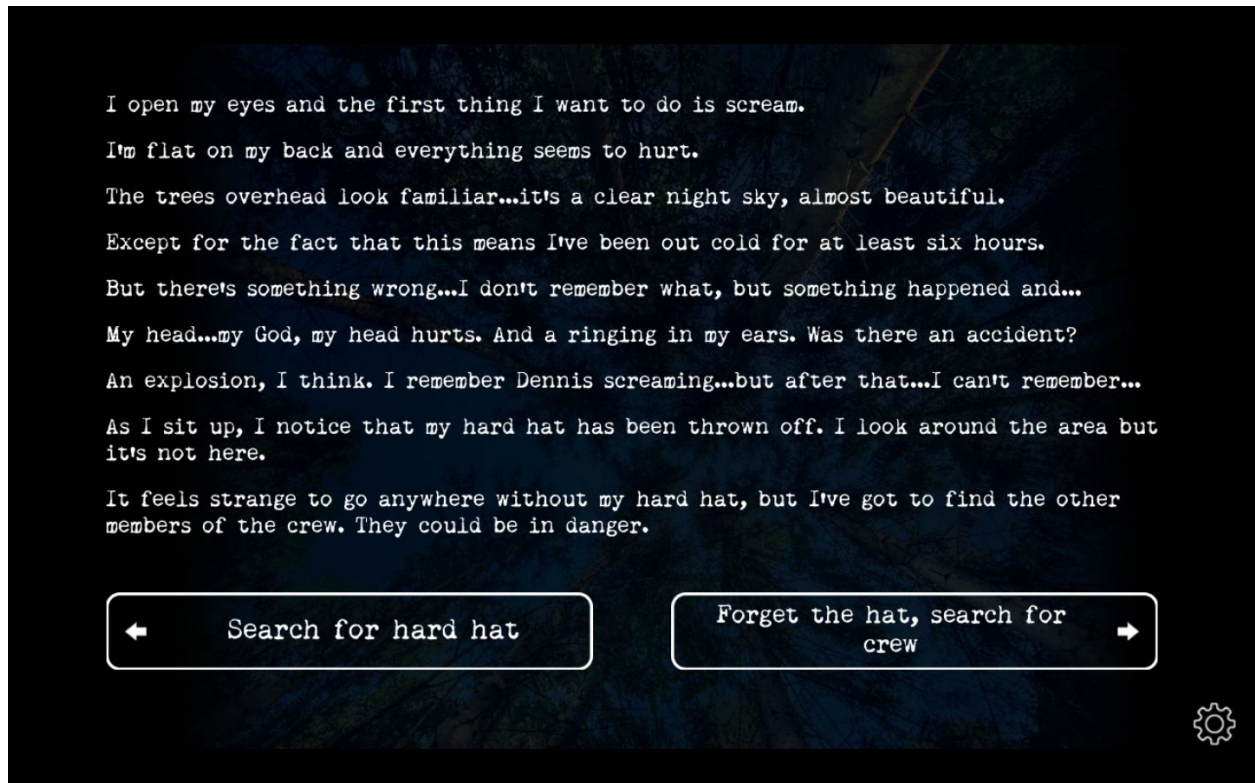
**GAMING EXPERIENCE:** There is no clear goal most of the times and the constant changes in focus aggravate the fact that a majority of the time is spent trying to figure what to do or what command to write in the *parser*.

**CONVERGENCE:** The two aspects seem to be conflicting as the nonlinear and constantly shifting narrative harms the very simplistic gameplay. The fact that the reader-player can't choose or define a protagonist makes the reading process easier, since it demands less creative effort and input, but hurts the gaming experience by denying agency to the reader-player.

### **3.4 BURIED**

*Buried* is an IF that makes use of closed input, therefore, like *Welcome to Moreytown*, it does not make use of a *parser*. Unlike the aforementioned IF, *Buried* uses of indirect protagonism, meaning that the protagonist is not the reader and the story is told in first person as seen previously in FIGURE 10, and again here:

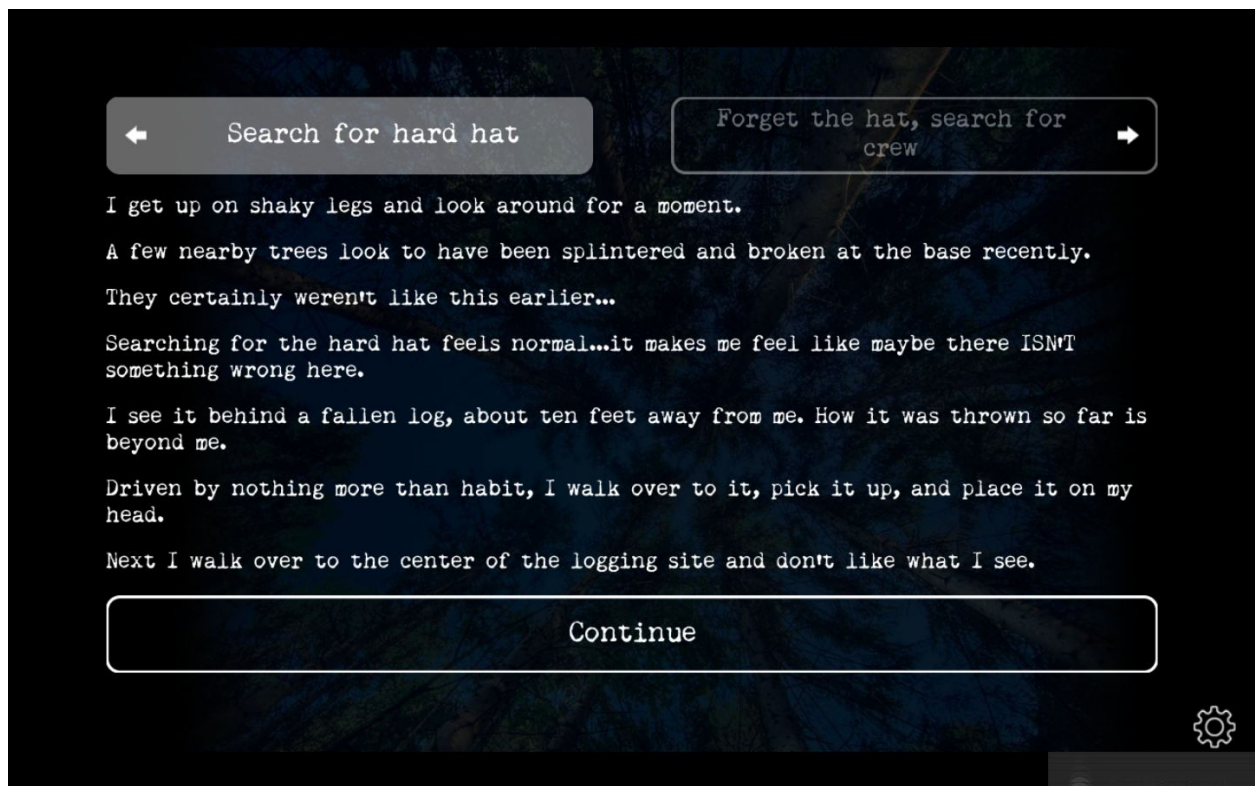
FIGURE 10 - BURIED FIRST SCENE



SOURCE: BROMOCO GAMES (2016)

The story is told in first person and reader player always has the choice between two options. This is a suspense, therefore my expectations drift towards the fact that one of this decisions is going to be more harmful to our main character than the other. As the player, we work as the voice of reason, nudging the protagonist in a certain way, but we are not in control of this character actions and thoughts as seen in FIGURE 23:

FIGURE 23 - BURIED, FIRST CHOICE

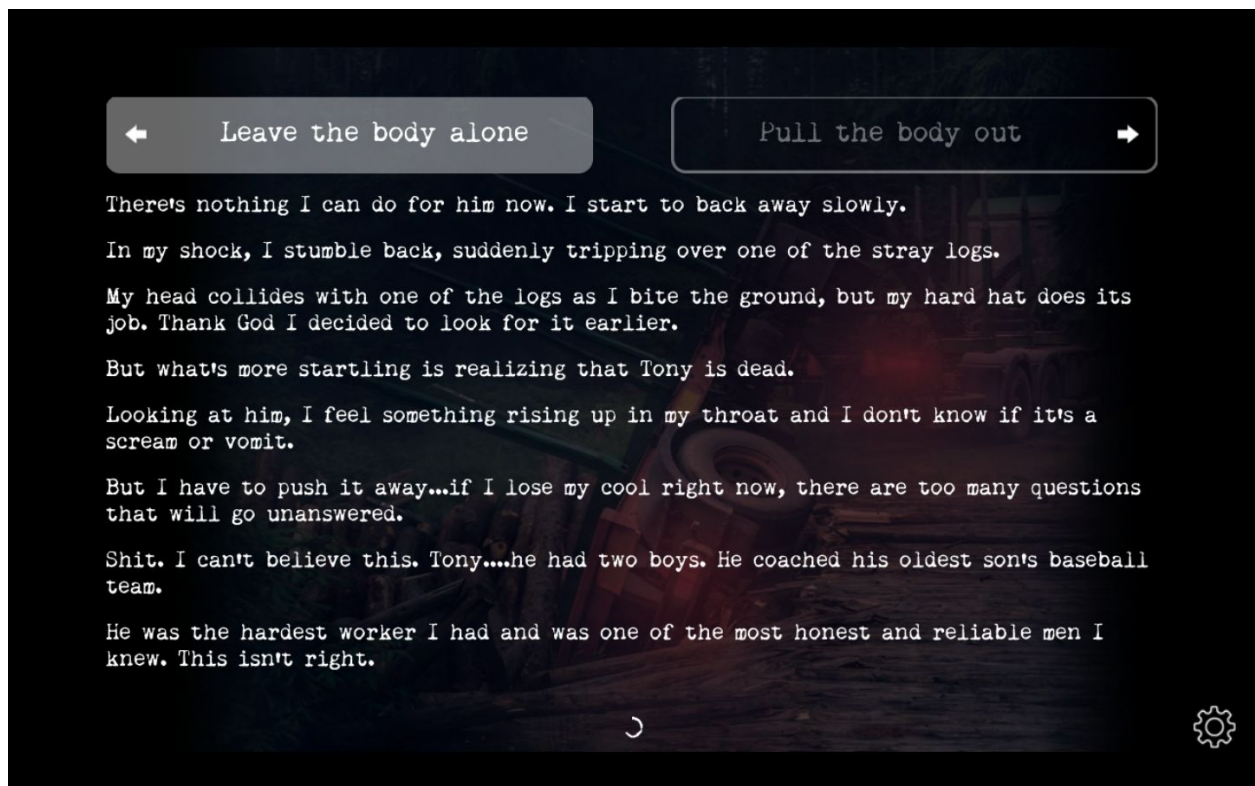


SOURCE: BROMOCO GAMES (2016)

Clearly we are not controlling this character fully, but the author uses of the writing, describing what the character feels and giving us insight on his mental processes in order for us to empathize with him. This is all in order for us to have an objective. The game itself does not present us with a clear goal from the beginning (we start in confusion, much like the main character), but we responsible for the survival of this character (and possibly others).

My choice to search for the hard hat has immediate repercussions, making clear that our choices are meaningful and will have a definitive impact not only on the story but also on the protagonist (FIGURE 24):

FIGURE 24 - BURIED, HARD HAT CONSEQUENCES

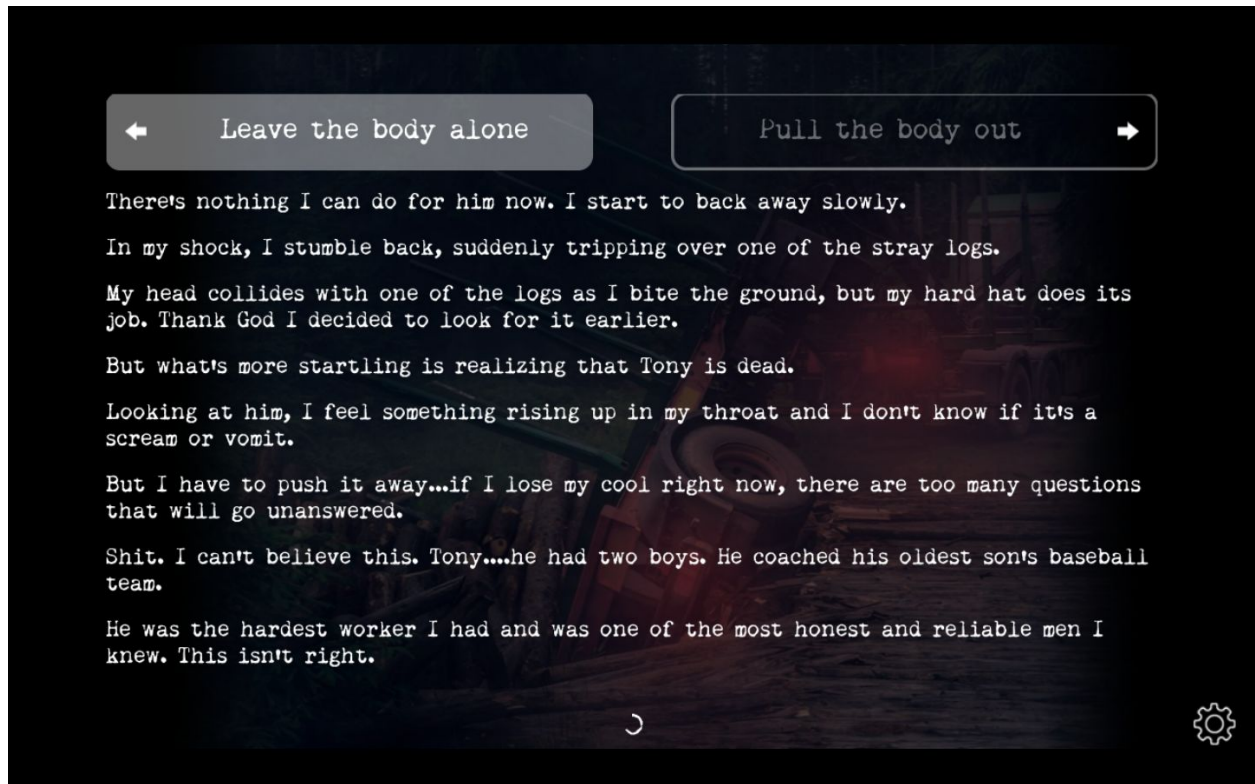


SOURCE: BROMOCO GAMES (2016)

Not only that, but there are times when a choice will be more important than others and massively affect the course of the narrative. These choices are marked by a [!] symbol in order to indicate to the reader-player that she just made a story-changing decision, sticking to the concept of *Meaningful Play* we have seen before. To the reader-player it is of utmost importance to know which of her decisions are the most important, specially if she wants to read-play the IF again in order to choose different branches of the story. An example of such an important choice can be seen in FIGURE 25:

FIGURE 25- BURIED, MEANINGFUL DECISION





SOURCE: BROMOCO GAMES (2016)

Not only are the decisions made along the chapter separated into the more trivial (without an [!] indicator post-choice) and the more crucial (with an [!] indicator post-choice), the IF also makes use of an end of chapter result screen where the reader-player can compare her decision with other people who have read-played the IF, such as is shown in FIGURE 26:

FIGURE 26 - BURIED, END OF CHAPTER RESULT SCREEN

RESPECT THE DEAD:

You and 36% of players left Tony's body where you found it.

SECRETS:

You and 76% of players were upfront with Dennis about Tony's death.

TRUST:

You and 55% told Dennis you believed his story.

CURIOSITY:

You and 25% of players ran away from the ringing sound.

Begin Chapter Two



SOURCE: BROMOCO GAMES (2016)

*Buried* is one of the most interesting texts in this corpus to me due to the nature of its genre: not only it is an IF, it is also a horror story. My *Horizon of Expectations* as a reader of the genre is quite developed and therefore, even if the author himself chooses not to explain objectively the goals or rules of the game, I know that it is to make sure the main character survive until the end of the narrative and to discover what is the secret behind this ringing noise he has been hearing.

For the player, the fact that there is such a practical confirmation of how meaningful are your decisions through the [!] symbols means that she can return to these points in order to choose new approaches to the same problem or to explore further the narrative. There is no prize to this endeavor but the text itself. To know more and from different angles is the reward. To the reader, there is a richness in psychological tension and suspense, breaks in the expectations concerning the plot twists and resources common to the genre. More than that, for the reader-player is important to not only solve the mystery of what is behind this situation but also to ensure that the main character and the ones surrounding him are able to maintain their psychological and physical integrity, not only due to empathy but also because their well being

guarantees the success in defeating the obstacles ahead of them and moving forward with the story.

By comparing my choices to those of other reader-players, the authors create a parallel narrative where is not only me playing the game but also the game is playing me. Many of these choices revolve around some type of moral compass or have to do with the validation of one or more ideals. Comparing your choices with those of other reader-players creates both a sense of community (“me and all these people felt the same way towards this topic”) and a of self-awareness (“why did only 30% of people chose this option? Why did I choose this option?”). By putting your decisions together with those of others the text is playing with values and making you, as a reader-player, question these choices outside of the world of the narrative.

The reader-player is constantly put on edge, both by trying to grant the survival of the main character but also by deciding the fate of other characters you find along the road. Not only that, but the fact that your decisions, minimal or not, will affect the outcome of future choices is heavily emphasized by the severity of the results. Most often than not, choices lead to harmful situations to the protagonist or one of the other characters. The stakes are kept high and as a reader, we see danger in every decision and expect the narrative to constantly turn against us. The choices are not made only out of curiosity, desire to advance the narrative or simply aesthetic enjoyment but mostly because we wish to survive the situations that the protagonist (and the player) are put into by the author.

However, the desire to see the development and the intricacies of the plot are always there, instigating us as reader to think ahead, to try to solve the puzzle that is this story. I, as a reader-player, felt the urge to read on the narrative, to fill-in the blanks and to make sense of the whole in order to save the main character and my (his) friends. At the same time, I felt constantly being read by the story as my decisions were compared to the other players and the feeling of being analyzed increased as the decisions became more and more morally guided.

READING EXPERIENCE: The IF is very tense, being easily identifiable as a Suspense. The writing helps to intensify the expectations of the reader concerning the genre. The choice of an *Indirect Protagonist* helps to create a solid narrative with pre-established emotional attachments between the character without the necessity of intervention by the reader-player.



**GAMING EXPERIENCE:** The choices made by the reader-player are readily identifiable as meaningful, followed by visual and sound cues. The choices are given at key moments and never detract from the tension, only adding to the feeling of urgency present throughout the IF.

**CONVERGENCE:** The two aspects merge amazingly well, the writing adding to the feeling of urgency and danger. The choices made are always meaningful somehow and affect the interaction between character and the development of the narrative. The fact that this is a *Closed Input* IF allows the reader-player to reflect upon her choices and its possible consequences before effectively choosing one of them. The *End of Chapter Result Screen* allows the reader-player to compare the choices made during the IF with the choices made by others, further increasing the moral repercussions of your choices and taking the reader-player to reflect upon them once more.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

The objective of this work was to discover if and how the experience as an IF reader-player differed from the traditional experience as a reader and how the relation between text and reader was altered by this change in paradigm. By analyzing the IFs in the corpus, it is possible to verify that there is definitely a difference in relation and experience.

In an IF, the reader-player must advance in the plot through his own choices or by selecting one of the options given by the author. We are not only changing the text as we interpret it and fill in the gaps left by the writer but we are also changing it actively, modifying the plot and the outcomes of the story and how it develops. Quoting *Photopia*, you “tell a story together” (CADRE, 1998) with the author. There’s a limit to the freedom you have as a player, much in the same way you have a limit of interpretations (Horizon of Interpretation) as a reader. One is artificially controlled by the creators of the IF, by only giving the player a select number of choices or possible inputs; the other is subjective, defined by the *gaps* left by the author and by the Horizon of Expectations of the time.

Not only that, but it is clear that, while IFs that use of *Open Input* feel more archaic, if well used, like for example in *Photopia*, they can have impressive depth and be full of literary value. IFs that make use of *Closed Input* allowed me more time to reflect on each of the choices, encouraging the filling of *gaps* left by the author before choosing one the options and providing more aesthetically fulfilling reading passages and more complex interactions between the choices and the resulting outcomes of the same.

The two more remarkable IFs, according to the parameters previously defined, were *Welcome to Moreytown* and *Buried*. In the case of *Welcome to Moreytown*, the attention to the protagonism, the rich worldbuilding and the immersion resulting from these elements make for an deeply entertaining and enthralling experience where your decisions and gameplay convert in an increasingly deeper immersion in the story. *Buried*, on the other hand, executes the mix between *game* and *text* with high efficiency, providing the reader-player with a responsive and immersive gameplay that provides the player with awareness concerning the choices made during the game.

Despite being satisfied to some degree with the results of this work, I feel that I have only slightly touched the surface. Literature and game design are two enormous fields of study and so much can be done by studying both of them. If my work proves the point that it set to prove? Yes, although not enough, at least for me as a researcher. During the processes of conceptualization, research and creation of this thesis, I felt constantly the desire to look elsewhere, to search for more theories, to make more connections, to dive deeper and deeper into these subjects. How far can we go? How far can we extend this study? To what else do these theories we are using here apply?

Along the process of writing this work I had to give up on so many possibilities, from studying the process of creation of an IF or the uses of the genre in the field of education. But this is the work for an academic lifetime, not for a graduation thesis.

The IF genre proved itself to be extremely deep, affecting the reader in ways that traditional texts cannot and adding layers of complexity on the experience of playing a game. The theories and works of Iser and Jaus were of great value, but I felt that more was needed,

maybe not for this thesis, specifically, but definitely if this research is going to be extended on, which is something I deeply wish to do.

This work can and should be expanded on and I hope that it helps to bring close together the areas of Literature and Game Design. I believe this multidisciplinary approach to these studies is extremely valuable to both areas and allows us to better comprehend the objects of study in question. To further analyze the relation between the two areas will, I believe, improve the quality of the games and literature produced in our country (Brazil has a blooming game industry that unfortunately does not receive enough praise or incentive from the population and the government).

I feel that my research could be so much more and there is enough material and room to explore these issues throughout my academic career. If initially I felt frustrated due to the wide range of possibilities and the difficulty to choose a focus in this research, this has turned into motivation to work more and more with these areas, trying to bring literary and aesthetic value to the field of game design and improving the relation between reader and literary work in literature.

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