

From Rolling to Reading

An Analysis of the Adaptation of Narrative
Between Role-Playing Games and Novels

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Introduction

Today when one thinks of stories many examples come to mind. Perhaps the word triggers thoughts of exciting and well-written novels, full of rich characters and vivid descriptions. Perhaps it evokes an image of a dramatic and heartfelt climax being projected onto a 50-foot screen at the movies. It could unearth memories of sitting at your grandfather's side and listening to him recounting grand tales. For some, however, the word "stories" brings to mind role-playing games, which may raise questions for those unfamiliar with them. The basic premise of role-playing games are fairly well known today, yet to many they are misunderstood, both in no small part thanks to limited exposure through shows like *Stranger Things*¹ and *The Big Bang Theory*². Because of this limited exposure those unfamiliar with role-playing games might view them as merely a video game that makes use of dice and make-believe instead of code and rendered graphics.

However, others would disagree with this assessment. Junot Diaz for one describes his childhood experiences of role-playing games differently. "Being a bunch of kids of color, in a society that tells us we're nothing... [sic] to be able to play heroes... [sic] this was a revolution. None of us had been asked to be protagonists of anything.... [sic] it was profoundly transformative for us."³ Judging by Diaz's experience it would seem that there may be more to role-playing games than one might first assume. At their essence role-playing games are games of cooperative storytelling where a group of people gather with the intent to create and explore a story. The way these stories are created and told is primarily what separates the experience of storytelling in a role-playing game from that of a novel. In a role-playing game you don't watch heroes face down insurmountable odds, you *are* the heroes and it is your choices, actions and agency that determines the outcome of the game. Perhaps the most fundamental difference can be summed up in a single question often asked towards the players: What do you do?

Role-playing games do not have a singular author who creates and runs the narrative from point to point; instead the game's narrative is constructed organically by the players through a dialogue. Because of this the narrative of a role-playing game is very much the result of a co-narration by all the players and is in many ways a highly performative experience. Diaz describes it as chance to explore and immerse oneself in another place where instead of

¹ Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer, *Stranger Things*, Netflix, 2016.

² Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, *The Big Bang Theory*, CBS, 2007.

³ Leah Schnelbach, "Dungeons and Dragons was 'a Revolution' for Junot Diaz", tor.com, <https://www.tor.com/2016/04/28/dungeons-and-dragons-was-a-revolution-for-junot-diaz/>, published on 2016-04-28, retrieved on 2018-02-26.

feeling small you can don the role of someone larger than life. Role-playing offers a sense of escapism through immersion and can empower its players by making them the heroes.

Despite the narrative and performative differences between role-playing games and novels one can still find many similarities. As is obvious both act as a medium for communicating stories and ideas, and because of this they are both able to influence those that partake. I believe most people can agree that an open and empathetic mind is a well-read one, and role-playing games might similarly be used to explore personal development and new ideas. The transformative aspect of which Diaz mentions comes into play by donning a fictional role and working together with a group of people in order to solve problems ranging from puzzles to moral or ethical dilemmas. By playing the game it seems likely that one can begin to develop both understanding and empathy for others. This in turn is why role-playing games have been shown to be effective tools for both therapeutic aid and rehabilitation. In the *American Journal of Psychotherapy* Wayne Blackmon presents a case of role-playing games being utilized as a psychotherapeutic treatment.⁴ By discussing the motivations and feeling of characters within his patient's gaming sessions Blackmon found that his patient could begin to articulate emotional content, and that after six months the crutch of the displaced medium was no longer needed.⁵ In a similar note role-playing games have been used by inmates as both a way to cope with their prison sentences as well as aid their rehabilitation to society, as is presented in the Waypoint documentary *Escaping Prison with Dungeons & Dragons: Waypoint Specials*.⁶ The documentary showcases a pair of former inmates who describe how *Dungeons & Dragons*⁷ helped them find both escape and comradery both in and outside of prison. For them "it's not how you play the game, it's *why* you play the game".⁸ While not academic in nature, the documentary does bring to light both the immersive and transformative aspects of role-playing games as a concrete example.

Wayne Blackmon's case and Waypoint's documentary are merely two examples of how role-playing games can have a lasting impact upon its players. Just as one can intuitively understand the influence literature can have upon its readers, it is possible to imagine that role-playing games possess a similar manner of influence. Considering the similarities in narrative focus between both media it could be pertinent to give role-playing games a closer

⁴ Wayne D. Blackmon, "Dungeons and Dragons: The Use of a Fantasy Game in the Psychotherapeutic Treatment of a Young Adult", *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 1994, pp. 624-632.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 626.

⁶ Waypoint [YouTube Channel], *Escaping Prison with Dungeons & Dragons: Waypoint Specials*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9iQEK7w4Rw>, published on 2017-07-25, retrieved on 2018-03-02.

⁷ Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, *Dungeons & Dragons* [original box set], Wisconsin: TSR Games, 1974.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 0:32-0:36.

examination, especially where the two overlap. Since their conception role-playing games have always had a close relationship to literature. The original role-playing game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, in fact originated from miniature wargaming⁹ through players who wanted to incorporate magic and other fantasy elements found in Tolkien and the sword and sorcery literature into their games.¹⁰ The end result became a game where instead of each player battling each other with armies they instead controlled a singular hero and worked together to overcome challenges, not unlike the fellowship of the ring. Today role-playing games have strengthened their literary connections through countless adaptations between both novel to role-playing game, and also novelizations of role-playing games themselves. It is these adaptations in their many incarnations that will serve as the dungeons that this thesis will delve.

Background – What is a Role-Playing Game?

In order to analyze something it is important to understand how its moving parts interact. While most may have a passing familiarity with role-playing games it could be quite pertinent to provide a more detailed definition of what a role-playing game is and how they are played. Since their conception there has been a general shift in the attitude of what a role-playing game is about. Over time focus has shifted away from its wargaming roots and instead focused more upon narrative and player agency. This narrative focused trend can be seen through the rulebooks of both recent editions of older games as well as in newer role-playing games. In the current edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* (5th Edition) the use of simulational battlemaps and miniatures are considered optional.¹¹ Other games inherently hold the narrative as something more important than the rules, such as *Vampire: the Requiem*¹² which is “[...] not about rules [...] or even about a particular fictional world. It’s about stories.”¹³

At its core, role-playing games can be best described today as games of cooperative storytelling. In order to aid in the facilitation of story each game has their own set of rules. While the rules between games can vary heavily between being ‘rules heavy’ or ‘rules lite’¹⁴ both serve the same function, to provide a framework for everyone to build upon.

⁹ Wargames such as these use painted miniatures and rules systems to simulate battles between armies controlled by each player.

¹⁰ Michael J. Tresca, *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2011, p. 61.

¹¹ Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford, *Dungeons & Dragons Player’s Handbook 5th Edition*, Renton, Washington: Wizards of the Coast, 2014, p. 192.

¹² Stewart Wieck, et al., *Vampire: The Requiem*, Stone Mountain, California: White Wolf Publishing Inc., 2004.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁴ Or going by their colloquial terms: Crunchy and Fluffy.

Additionally the rules provide a more structured experience which is needed to enhance the enjoyment of the game, but players can opt to alter, remove or add new rules as they see fit. Just as a childhood make-believe game of cops and robbers only has one real “real” rule, that the cops are supposed to catch the robbers, new rules or ideas could be added during play. Generally the rules of a role-playing game are presented through a rulebook. Within these rulebooks one can expect to find the rules of the game, examples of play as well as varying amounts of description for the game’s fictional world or plot ideas to help jumpstart the reader’s creativity. For some games the sum of their rules can be fit onto a small number of pages, while others consist of several volumes and many optional supplements.

All role-playing games consist of three core components, of which one is the rules system. The second is a method to determine success or failure. Usually this is done through the use of polyhedral dice, but other methods exist such as the use of a deck of cards or even a Jenga tower. By introducing a random, or semi-random, element into the chance of success one creates not only a sense of uncertainty and tension for the players, but also aids in improving their ability to interact with the game and thus increase their own immersion by providing a sense of raised stakes through uncertainty.¹⁵ The final component present in the role-playing game deals with how visual representation is handled. To some extent all role-playing games utilize vivid descriptions of environments and characters in order to create a theater of mind within the player’s imaginations. Some, however, recommend additional visual aids, such as props ranging from written notes to physical representations in the shape of miniatures and battlemaps. The use of visual representation, whether it be textual description or physical aid, help create what Marie-Laure Ryan describes as a mimetic text which “[...] invite[s] the reader to imagine a world, and to imagine it as a physical, autonomous reality furnished with palpable objects and populated by flesh and blood individuals.”¹⁶ This in turn directly improves player immersion by providing the players at the table with a concrete space for the role-playing game’s storyworld¹⁷ to exist.¹⁸ Although a distinction should be made between how the descriptive and the physical aids are actually utilized during gameplay. Oftentimes the role-playing games which recommend the use of physical representation have held onto the tactical aspects from the wargames of their descent, particularly when combat is involved.

¹⁵ Jennifer Grouling Cover, *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010, p. 87.

¹⁶ Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 92.

¹⁷ The term storyworld refers to a world shared between stories, and includes both fictional and non-fictional worlds.

¹⁸ Grouling Cover, pp. 85-86.

Dungeons & Dragons in particular is notorious for this, and while the latest edition does not require the use of miniatures and battlemaps, an accurate visual representation provides players with a concrete space with which they can strategize around.

The actual gameplay in a role-playing game is conducted through a dialogue between the multiple players and a singular Game Master¹⁹ (GM). Generally each player controls a single Player Character (PC) while the GM controls everything else, from all of the Non-Player Characters (NPCs) to the basic shape of the narrative. As such the GM is responsible for creating and shaping the general plot of the game, but the actual narrative is created only once the players begin to interact with it by narrating their own actions and speech. The GM then reacts in turn by calling for any dice rolls or other criteria needed for the player's actions to succeed as well as how the world and its inhabitants react. Because of this the creation of narrative in a role-playing game takes place on three levels, or as Grouling Cover defines it within three Frames of Narrativity. These frames are ranked from their level of impact upon the narrative, or their narrativity. The highest is the narrative frame, where the GM and players narrate directly within the fictional world. This is followed by the game frame, which is where players interact with the game-like aspects of role-playing such the dice rolls whose results directly determine success or failure within the fiction. Finally players interacting with one another out of character do this within the social frame, which can encompass discussions about rules, strategizing out of character or even jokes about the fiction.²⁰

Purpose and Problem

Narratives are a far reaching phenomenon. The formal study and concept of a narrative may have started within literary theory, but it has since then migrated to numerous other fields of application. Today we study narratives belonging to a range of different media, such as films, graphic novels or even video games. Thon attributes a large part of this to the increase in intermedial adaptations, which in turn has given rise to what he describes as “transmedial entertainment franchises”.²¹ These franchises span several different forms of media through various adaptations, and they encompass everything from the filmatization of novels to less traditional adaptations such as a novelization of a video game. As Thon points out, narratives have long been seen as something which transcends barriers.²² By taking a more thorough

¹⁹ The term for the game master varies depending on which system is being used. Other common names include dungeon master, keeper and storyteller, but all refer to the same role within the game.

²⁰ Grouling Cover, pp. 72-83.

²¹ Jan-Noël Thon, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016, p. xvii.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

look at transmedial narratives it would seem natural that we could learn more about those limited within a single media, assuming that such a narrative medium actually exists. It is perhaps especially interesting to look at some of the more unique narrative structures in various media forms, such as role-playing games. Through their history role-playing games have always had a connection to literature, primarily because the first role-playing games were made in order to simulate games with the influences of Tolkien and early Sword and Sorcery novels. Today however we can find the reverse as well, with novelizations of various role-playing games abounding. Performing a comparative analysis of the various adaptations between novels and role-playing games could therefore yield deeper insight into not only narrative studies, but also aspects of reader-author relationship, agency and performativity due to the nature of the medium.

As such the purpose of this thesis will be to perform comparative analyses of several different variations of adaptation between role-playing games and novels, and comparing their inherent differences not only between hypo- and hypertext²³ but also to the traditional novel as a genre. Conducting comparative analyses between adaptations of role-playing games and novels yields a wide range of subjects to examine, and would likely exceed the scope of this thesis. Because of this it is imperative to limit the analyses in order to focus attention upon the thesis' purpose. In order to achieve this goal the analyses will focus on examining and attempting to answer a smaller sample of queries. At its core the interest of this thesis is to examine how the adaptation process looks between role-playing games and novels. This primarily raises questions on how the narrative structure and differences in temporality and sequentiality are translated between the two. However it is possible that differences of this nature could present themselves differently between each hypertext. Because of this it will be important to analyze and compare several examples of adaptations between each other.

Concerning adaptations between role-playing games and novels there are many fundamentally different adaptational variations. These range from novelized adaptations of the rules systems of role-playing games, such as the adaptation of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition*²⁴ into the novel *The Crystal Shard*²⁵, but can also encompass adaptations of a specific group's personal experiences being novelized, as is the case with the

²³ In regards to adaptation the hypotext refers to the original text that is being adapted and hypertext refers to the finished adaptation.

²⁴ Gygax, Gary, 1st Edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, consisting of *Player's Handbook* [1978], *Monster Manual* [1977] & *Dungeon Master's Guide* [1979], Lake Geneva, Wisconsin: TSR Games, 1979.

²⁵ R. A. Salvatore, *The Crystal Shard*, Wizards of the Coast, 2009 [1988], E-book (Kindle Edition)

*Superworld*²⁶ role-playing game and the *Wild Cards*²⁷ anthology series. Yet as the popularity of role-playing games has grown we find more adaptational variety. Several storyworlds introduced through novels have been adapted into role-playing games, allowing for players to explore and craft their own narratives within these worlds. Most notable of these is perhaps the adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's short stories into the horror role-playing game *Call of Cthulhu*²⁸. Other instances of adaptation include metafiction surrounding role-playing games, such as the Drew Hayes novel *NPCs*²⁹ which explores the concept of a living storyworld within a role-playing game in the same vein as Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*³⁰ explores the idea of a living novel. Each of these various adaptations deal with the issue of adapting the different dimensions of interactivity between novels and role-playing games through an adaptation of narrative, agency and sequentiality. By focusing on how these aspects are presented, altered or preserved between the differing adaptive circumstances we can gain a deeper understanding in how unique or media specific aspects are adapted when the novel is concerned.

As such this thesis will be approaching its analyses primarily through the question of how the creation of narrative is adapted between novel and role-playing game. This question will be examined from several differing points of view as we will be examining a range of differing starting points for the hypertext as outlined above. While the creation of narrative in the different mediums will at most times be the focus of the analyses, the nature of role-playing games will also need to address other aspects such as the fixed sequentiality of the novel and the author-reader relationship. Last but not least how, if at all, the storyworld is adapted between adaptations will also be considered and will be a tool in aiding the analyses of the adaptation as a whole.

Literature

In order to provide an adequate number of adaptations to compare and analyze the literature studied as a part of this thesis will be both varied and will aim to cover a wide berth of role-playing game adaptations. Each analysis performed will be focusing upon a singular hypo-

²⁶ Steve Perrin, Steve Henderson and Roland Brown (Illustrations), *Superworld*, Albany, California: Chaosium Inc., 1982.

²⁷ George R. R. Martin (Ed.), et al., *Wild Cards* anthology series, New York: Tor Books [Current publisher], 1987-ongoing, <http://www.wildcardsonline.com/index.html>, retrieved on (2018-02-21).

²⁸ Sandy Petersen, *Call of Cthulhu 1st Edition*, Albany, California: Chaosium Inc., 1981.

²⁹ Drew Hayes, *NPCs* [Kindle Edition], Thunder Pear Publishing, 2014.

³⁰ Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story, Die Undliche Geschichte* [Original Title], Thienemann Verlag, 1979.

and hypertextual pairing of primary literature. This is in turn intended to exemplify different variations of the adaptation of role-playing games.

As such the first pairing to be used as primary literature is *The Crystal Shard* by R. A. Salvatore and *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition (AD&D)* of which it is a novelization of. The decision of beginning with this analysis is motivated for two reasons: Because Salvatore's novel has primarily adapted the themes and rulebooks of the game as a framework for which he builds his narrative upon, and because *D&D* was the original role-playing game. As such it provides an ample opportunity to examine how the basic structure of role-playing games can be novelized as well as showing insights into the narrative properties within some of the earliest role-playing games.

The second pairing consists of the *Wild Cards* anthology series and the *Superworld* role-playing game. *Wild Cards* is an ongoing anthology series of Superheroes set within a shared storyworld. The original anthology, *Wild Cards #1*³¹, was based upon the shared experiences of a group of authors who played *Superworld* together and decided to write about their tabletop adventures. As such this second analysis will be exploring how shared player experiences have been adapted into literature.

The third analysis is less of a pairing between a specific game and novel, but rather of role-playing games and their tropes in general set against Drew Hayes metafictional novel *NPCs*. While the novel *NPCs* is set in fantasy style trappings its metafictional observations and parodies are applicable across all manner of role-playing games. As such this analysis will be able to delve deeper into exploring both role-playing culture and how the tabletop interactions between players can influence a narrative.

Fourth and finally we will be completing the circle by examining novels that have been adapted into role-playing games. The pairing here consists of the short stories of H. P. Lovecraft and the *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game. By examining the adaptational process from novel to role-playing game we are able to see both how the linear narrative of the novel is gamified and how this influences the narrative of the accompanying role-playing game. This process also provides an opportunity to examine the expansion of a storyworld's transmediality, especially due to the role-playing games encouraging players to create their own stories set within the storyworld.

Regarding secondary literature the spread is somewhat broader. Because of this not all texts referenced will be listed here, instead this passage will focus upon the most important

³¹ George R. R. Martin, et al., *Wild Cards #1*, New York: Tor Books [Current publisher], 2012 [1987].

ones. As I will be working with narratives *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* by Gérard Genette³² is an obvious starting point. From Genette I will primarily be utilizing his terminology as a part of the analyses in order to provide my observations with a degree of accuracy. Another large influence upon the understanding of the processes behind the creation of narrative is found from Kendall Walton's theory of make-believe, as presented within *Mimesis as Make Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*.³³ From Walton's theories the primary take away is his concept of fictional worlds and the Principles of Generation. In a similar vein several works of Marie-Laure Ryan are utilized for their take on narratives, transmediality and her and Jan-Noël Thon's collaboration on storyworlds. Additionally *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* by Jennifer Grouling Cover will primarily serve to offer insights into role-playing through her Frames of Narrativity, which is a useful tool when analyzing a role-playing game in action. Finally in regards of performativity Peter Kivy's *The Performance of Reading*³⁴ will serve to aid in the comparison between novel and role-playing game.

Method

A clear methodology is and always will be essential for academic study. This is perhaps even truer when applied to fields and subjects that are still somewhat unexamined, such as the narrative adaptations of role-playing games. This section will serve as a clarification of how the analyses within this thesis will be tackling the research purpose and problems.

The core method of the thesis will be a comparative analysis between four adaptational examples. In order to perform the comparative analysis however each example will require a separate analysis of its specific adaptational process. Due to the primary purpose of the thesis (examining how narrative structures, temporality and sequentiality are translated between role-playing games and novels) some adaptational and intermedial analysis will be required. This will be done primarily through a comparison between hypo- and hypertext, which in turn will require varying degrees of narratological and intermedial analyses. Close reading will be another methodological tool that will be used to lift pertinent examples from the texts forward.

³² Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980 [1972].

³³ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.

³⁴ Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006.

Analysis

In order to better examine and relate the analysis portion of this thesis to its purpose it will forego a singular analysis in favor of four separate ones. Each of these analyses will be analyzing a different variation of adaptation between novel and role-playing game. These analyses will be conducted primarily with the thesis purpose in mind, both in order to limit the scope of each analysis and also to aid in keeping a firm level of coherence. Because of this the analyses will focus upon the narrative structure of the adaptations and how the role-playing hypertext has influenced and can still be seen through the hypertext.

This will be done through four analyses, each with a focus on their own adaptational variation. We will begin with an analysis of the novel *The Crystal Shard*, which is fundamentally a novelization of early *D&D* rulebooks. Following that we shall look at how more personal role-playing experiences have been novelized by examining the *Wild Cards* anthology and how it was conceived from the gaming sessions of a group of authors. The third analysis will focus upon the novel *NPCs* which is a metafictional adventure wrapped in comments about both role-playing games as well as the fantasy genre in general. The fourth and final analysis will bring the subject of discussion back full circle by examining how novels have been adapted into role-playing games. This will be done by focusing upon the *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game, which is based upon and set in the storyworld of author H.P. Lovecraft. After these individual analyses have been discussed their results will be discussed and compared to one another in a final comparative discussion.

From Rulings to Readings

The idea of transmedial storyworlds is a familiar one today. Many major franchises have adapted a strong transmedial presence. *Star Wars*, while undoubtedly being a movie franchise first and foremost, has branched heavily into releasing novels, comics and video games. Other franchises have shifted their prime medium such as *Marvel Comics*, which today seem more focused upon their movies than their comic namesake. The *Harry Potter* storyworld has begun its expansion beyond the original novels and now explores a new frontier of the “pottiverse” with *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, which originated directly as films written by J.K. Rowling rather than novels. Other forms of media are doing the same, with games like *League of Legends* and *Overwatch* producing digital comics which explain and expand upon the lore of the games and their characters. Countless examples show how transmedial adaptations and their storyworlds have permeated our society. Adaptations of this

kind are in itself nothing new, which Leitch exemplifies with our “[...] long tradition of nonnarrative paintings based on narrative originals drawn from biblical or classical or mythological subjects.”³⁵

Gibbons describes transmedial storyworlds as providing two primary functions for its recipients. The first function is the “[...] creation and distribution of narrative worlds [...]”³⁶, which allows recipients to partake in the storyworld through several different formats. However, it is worth noting that Gibbons use of the term “narrative worlds” points towards a shared mental image of a world which possesses a number of distinguishing features, such as the connection between Star Wars and lightsabers.³⁷ As such it is not unlike a storyworld. The second function is that the spread of information naturally promotes an “imaginative construction” of the storyworld, which in turn becomes another way for recipients to interact and partake in the storyworld.³⁸ These dual functions would seem to allow for a greater spread of media available for recipients while simultaneously creating a richer experience for them. Both of these functions seem positive, which could be a driving force for the widespread prevalence and almost expectation of it today. Transmedial storyworlds have existed for an age, which doesn’t make it surprising for there to be early adaptations of role-playing games as well. *The Crystal Shard*³⁹ by R. A. Salvatore is one of the most well-known of these.

Salvatore’s novel was based upon the 1st edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*⁴⁰ (AD&D) role-playing game, which was an updated version of the original boxed set. The novelization was commissioned in order to promote the new official campaign setting for D&D, *The Forgotten Realms*.⁴¹ In role-playing games a campaign refers to a series of connected or semi-connected adventures and is the general term used to describe a narrative arc of gameplay for a group. Therefore a campaign setting denotes the storyworld that the role-playing game explores in order to construct a narrative through play. Ryan describes a narrative as a mental image which consists of:

[...] a world (**setting**) populated by intelligent agents (**characters**). These agents participate in **actions and happenings** (events, plot), which cause global **changes** in the narrative world. Narrative is thus a mental

³⁵ Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to Passion of the Christ*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 258-259.

³⁶ Alison Gibbons, “Reading S. across Media: Transmedia Storyworlds, Multimodal Fiction, and Real Readers”, *Narrative*, Vol 25, No. 3, 2017, p. 322.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ R. A. Salvatore, *The Icewind Dale Trilogy: Collector’s Edition [The Crystal Shard]*, Renton, Washington: Wizards of the Coast, 2000 [1988].

⁴⁰ Gary Gygax, 1st Edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, consisting of: *Player’s Handbook* [1978], *Monster Manual* [1977] & *Dungeon Masters Guide* [1979], Wisconsin: TSR Games.

⁴¹ Ed Greenwood, *The Forgotten Realms Campaign Set* [1st edition AD&D], Wisconsin: TSR Games, 1987.

representation of causally connected states and events which captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members.⁴²

Before contextualizing the above quote it is important to note Ryan's use of the term "narrative world", the same as Gibbons. The above quote is from an older publication of Ryan's and in *Storyworlds across Media* Ryan and Thon explain that the contemporary choice of using the term "storyworld" in favor of "narrative" is both a recognition of the emergence of "world" aspects within both the narratological field as well as the broader cultural scene.⁴³ As such the term "narrative world" implies a similar meaning as "storyworld", a consistent mental image that shares a number of distinguishing features. With this in mind the campaign setting can be seen as the **world** in which the Game Master (GM) and players populate with their player characters and non-player characters, who are **intelligent agents**. And their interactions with the storyworld are the result of them participating in the **actions and happenings** which bring about **change** and thus the sum creates a narrative.

Campaign settings generally come in two variations: homebrewed or official.⁴⁴ The *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting provides players with an official and detailed world ready for them to explore. It is important to note that while a campaign setting, such as the *Forgotten Realms*, may be an established storyworld they are incomplete and intentionally leave blanks to be filled by the role-playing group during play. A campaign setting such as the *Forgotten Realms* is undoubtedly also a fictional world, and as such each recipient has their own take upon the fictional world itself, their own game world.⁴⁵ These game worlds differ from the fictional world presented within the campaign setting, even if the differences are slight. To create a greater sense of cohesion the campaign setting can be seen as providing a work world which shares a set of fictional truths with each player's individual game world.⁴⁶ As such the rulebooks act as representational works of art which, as Walton describes it, "[...] contribute[s] to social imaginative activities by assisting in the coordination of imaginings."⁴⁷ The act of social imagining takes place when the role-playing game is played, as the players partake in a joint game of imagining based off of the representational works of the rulebooks.

⁴² Marie-Laure Ryan, "On Defining Narrative Media", in *Image & Narrative: Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003, Retrieved from <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/mediumtheory/marielauryan.htm>, on 2018-05-04. Text bolded in the original quote.

⁴³ Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, *Storyworlds across Media: Towards a Media-Conscious Narratology*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014, p. 1.

⁴⁴ The term "homebrewed" is generally applied to any creations used by individual gaming groups that cannot be found in an official rulebook, such as variations of the rules, new creatures or new items.

⁴⁵ Walton, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

The work world generated by the rulebooks serves as an anchor of correspondence allowing the players to make predictions on the other player's imaginings and thus imagine together.⁴⁸ In doing so, the rulebooks act as props which can be used by the players to generate fictional truths for the game. With this in mind we can determine that as *The Crystal Shard* is both an adaptation of the *AD&D* rulebooks as well as an adaptation of Ed Greenwood's *Forgotten Realms*, that *The Crystal Shard* represents Salvatore's version of the game world. Although due to *The Crystal Shard*'s canonization within the *Forgotten Realms*, the events within the novel have now become fictional truths for the *Forgotten Realms* work world.

By novelizing the role-playing game Salvatore makes a return to the roots of *D&D* which was heavily inspired by fantasy novels from authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien and Jack Vance. *The Crystal Shard* is in many ways a typical hero's journey clad in the fantasy trappings of *D&D* and high fantasy. In the novel we follow Wulfgar, a young barbarian of the northern tribes who is spared by the dwarf Bruenor Battlehammer after a barbarian raid. In exchange for sparing his life Bruenor demands his service for five years and a day. While Wulfgar originally saw this service as serfdom, Bruenor later became a father figure for him and aids Wulfgar in finding his place in the world once his service is up. Wulfgar and Bruenor make up two-thirds of the main protagonists, with the final being the drow (dark elf) Drizzt Do'Urden. Together these three along with the supporting cast of Regis the Halfling and Bruenor's adopted daughter Catti-brie discover and thwart the plot of an evil wizard who seeks domination of their home.

While Drizzt was originally intended to be a mentor and side-kick⁴⁹ to Wulfgar most would agree that he stole the show. Through his popularity Drizzt has become the face of the *Forgotten Realms* and in many ways for *D&D* as a brand. Originally the drow were only an antagonistic race of dark subterranean elves, but the influence of Salvatore's novels has reshaped their representation in later editions. In the most recent edition of *D&D*, the 5th edition, the accompanying picture for the rules of the elven race is of Drizzt Do'Urden instead of a more traditional light skinned elf of Tolkien vein.⁵⁰ As such we can see how the novelizations hold a powerful influence upon the game itself. However, this influence appears to cut both ways as *The Crystal Shard* shows its role-playing roots on several levels, ranging both from the larger narrative structure down to the "rules" that govern the fiction.

⁴⁸ Walton, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Kathie Huddleston, "Novelist R.A. Salvatore crosses over into his newest magical realm and brings along his favorite character" [Interview], <https://web.archive.org/web/20080514045127/http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue393/interview.html>, retrieved on 2018-03-15, Q: "Your first book."

⁵⁰ Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford, *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook 5th Edition*, p. 21.

Utilizing the narrative analytical approach of Gérard Genette we can define the narrative structure of *The Crystal Shard* and begin to analyze it which in turn through connections and comparisons will lead us from the particular to the general.⁵¹ The overall structure of *The Crystal Shard* is split into three parts, denoted as “Book 1: Ten-Towns”⁵², “Book 2: Wulfgar”⁵³ and “Book 3: Cryshal-Tirith”⁵⁴ as well as a prelude preceding the first part. As a whole the temporal order of the narrative is unilateral from start to finish. While the narrative may be chronologically arranged temporal leaps sometimes occur between passages, chapters and primarily between the different books. Both the overarching structure of the novel and its chronological narrative can be seen as reflections of the source material for the novel, *D&D*. As mentioned above, narrative arcs in role-playing games tend to be structured as several smaller adventures which together make up a larger campaign. Each book within *The Crystal Shard* acts as a single adventure with a clear beginning, end and epilogue as well as weaving together details of a larger overarching plotline. The strict chronological aspect is reminiscent of how events are often presented for player characters (PCs) in role-playing games. While playing *D&D* events are generally presented in a chronological order due to the fact that the game’s narrative is created during play through the PCs interactivity and agency.⁵⁵ Salvatore’s choice of temporal order helps create a parallel between his protagonists and PCs in a role-playing game. Additionally this parallel is enhanced through the use of the novel’s narrator who presents the narrative from the character’s point of view.

The Crystal Shard makes use of two different narrators; the first, which spans the vast majority of the novel, is a zero focalization narrator who focuses upon a singular character at a time by describing only what they know, and the second is an autodiegetic narrator through the focalization of Drizzt. The autodiegetic narrator is limited to the introductory passage for each book of the novel. In these passages the reader is presented with the thoughts, or possibly the writings of Drizzt Do’Urden. These short musings are shown as being separate from the rest of the text; both through the narrative voice, but also visually separate as these passages are written entirely in italics. Additionally two of these, the passages for Book 1 and Book 3 lack chapter titles and are the only parts of the novel to do so.⁵⁶ Aside from these introductory passages the remainder of the novel consists of a zero focalization narrator who focuses upon a single character at a time, describing their actions and presenting the world

⁵¹ Genette, p. 23.

⁵² Salvatore, p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 95.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

⁵⁵ Grouling Cover, p. 30.

⁵⁶ Salvatore, pp. 7-9, 225-226.

from their perspective. For the most part the narrator will follow a singular character over the course of a chapter, but switching focus between characters does occur. An example of when a repeated change in character perspective is used can be seen in the meeting between the dragon Icingdeath and Wulfgar.⁵⁷ This narrative style places a greater focus upon a single character at a time and allows for the reader to experience the world colored through their thoughts and impressions. By using this style of narrator the novel departs from its role-playing influences. This is done by avoiding the typical second person descriptors of role-playing games and instead focusing upon the perspective of the characters. The result is that the narration of *The Crystal Shard* becomes more reminiscent of a typical fantasy novel.

Throughout the novel Salvatore establishes that the narrative is taking place within the *Forgotten Realms* storyworld. This is made clear in several ways, such as by utilizing their unconventional calendar based upon “tendays” rather than weeks. Other signifiers include the use of mythology and deities within the novel, such as the barbarian tribes who worship Tempos, God of Battle.⁵⁸ Perhaps the most significant factor, however, is the different races and creatures encountered within the novel. In this aspect Tolkien’s influence is obvious, as his staple races are all present, such as elves, dwarves and hobbits. *D&D* has appropriated all of these, but in some cases has put its own twist upon them. For example hobbits are called halflings and elves are separated into several sub-races, most notable for this novel being the drow. Salvatore’s use of monsters and creatures also calls attention to the novel’s role-playing origins. Games of *D&D* can be set within many different settings, yet oftentimes each setting will share ecological similarities through the creatures inhabiting their fictional worlds. This is due to the amount of effort *D&D* devotes to the simulational aspect of role-playing games. One of the three core rule books of *AD&D* and its later editions is the *Monster Manual* which presents a large number of creatures with cultural and behavioral descriptions as well as ready to use statblocks. Because of this the creatures present within *The Crystal Shard* become a sign of the adaptation’s hypotextual origins, which the demon Errtu is a prime example of.

Salvatore describes the demon as having clawed fingers and a horned apelike head⁵⁹, and later as having batlike wings and being “A giant even by the standards of its kind”.⁶⁰ While this may sound like a vague description, this coupled with its strong affinity for fire⁶¹ and him

⁵⁷ Salvatore, pp. 231-232.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

ranking “[...] just below the demon lords in the hierarchy of the Abyss”⁶² are telling descriptors for those familiar with the *Monster Manual*. According to the 1st Edition *Monster Manual* demons are categorized as type I-VI, with the higher types signifying greater demons and above them are the demon lords.⁶³ The manual’s example Type VI demon is the Balor, which has the largest size of all demons, has the ability to create flames around themselves and is the only example of a demon that can be convinced to aid others for “[...] proper, invoking, offerings, and promises [...]”⁶⁴ From the *Monster Manual*’s description it is possible to consider the Principles of Generation of Fictional Truths as described by Walton and thereby deduce that Errtu is in fact a Balor. “Props generate fictional truths independently of what anyone does or does not imagine. But they do not do so entirely on their own, apart from any (actual or potential) imaginers.”⁶⁵ In the case of Errtu our props are *The Crystal Shard* and the *AD&D* rulebooks, with the recipient performing a game of imagination while reading the novel. So, since *The Crystal Shard* is set within *The Forgotten Realms* fictional world the novel’s description of Errtu should align with a creature from the same fictional world. The connection between the demon in the novel and the demon in the rulebook is then established through the Principle of Genre Convention, which allows the recipient to draw the connection through this shared genre.⁶⁶ The use of the Principle of Genre Convention is in turn an example of how transmedial storyworlds promote its readers to create an “imaginative construction” of the storyworld that Gibbons describes.

With this in mind, upon closer inspection we find that the skills and abilities that Errtu possesses in *The Crystal Shard* are in fact all directly motivated from the rulebook. Additionally Errtu’s agreement to serve the evil wizard Kessell doesn’t contradict the rules stating that “Demons will never willingly serve anyone or anything.”⁶⁷, due to the exception described for Balor demons. Through Errtu we can see how the rulebooks are able to act as a work upon which Salvatore draws inspiration from. Through the game the recipient plays we find the same processes that allow the creation of narratives in role-playing games, by establishing shared connections to the work world through the Principles of Genre and Media Convention.

⁶² Salvatore, p. 111.

⁶³ Gary Gygax, *Monster Manual* (1st Edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*), pp. 16-19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Walton, p. 38.

⁶⁶ J. Alexander Bareis, “Fictional Truth, Principles of Generation, and Interpretation”, in *How to Make Believe: Fictional Truths of the Representational Arts*, Alexander Bareis (Ed.) and Lene Nordrum (Ed.), De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 177-178.

⁶⁷ Gary Gygax, *Monster Manual* (1st Edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*), p. 16.

While being an adaptation *The Crystal Shard* holds close to the original text and performs its adaptation without intruding upon the original. In *The Crystal Shard* we can find many examples of the game's rules being novelized. By this I mean that connections are established between the work world of the role-playing game and the novel, which is then presented within the novel as a part of the fictional world in a similar fashion to Errtu being a novelized Balor. In all accounts of this novelization Salvatore has adopted a strict "show, not tell" policy through his narrator, which entails that what is shown to the readers, is what the characters see. This in turn brings the recipients into the fictional world of the game they play by reading. This act of immersion occurs through the generation of fictional truths, oftentimes guided by the principles of generation, immersing them in the fiction rather than keeping them outside as passive onlookers. The narrative mood used throughout the majority of the novel would fall under what Genette describes as a "narrative of events", where the fictional world is presented through the focalized characters as their reality.⁶⁸ In doing so Salvatore achieves two things: he creates an adaptation that can easily be read without need of any prior knowledge of the original, and he opens the door to the imaginative construction which adds a richer entertainment experience to the novel.⁶⁹ But like all adaptations there are differences between the hypo- and hypertext.

To compare *The Crystal Shard* to a game of *D&D* we find many similarities. Drizzt, Bruenor and Wulfgar could all easily be translated into game-based characters with all of their abilities founded within the rules. This has in fact been done by the game's publishers numerous times before. The general narrative structure of the novel has clear parallels to a campaign based game, but it is within the narrative that we find our main departure. *The Crystal Shard* is primarily a novel and because of this some aspects depart from the rules as stated and are given a novelistic flair, such as Drizzt's use of magic upon the barbarian Heafstaag. In the barbarian invasion Drizzt "[...] flicked a finger and purple flames limned the tall barbarian from head to toe. Heafstaag roared in horror at the magical fire, though the flames did not burn his skin."⁷⁰ The description and effects of this spell appear to line up with the "faerie fire" spell from the *AD&D Player's Handbook*, however, Heafstaag's reaction is a departure from the rules. The barbarian's horror is instead a genre convention rooted in how a superstitious barbarian might react to magic. Therefore based upon the barbarian's ignorance concerning magic and his preconceptions about the drow, his horror becomes a natural

⁶⁸ Genette, p. 165.

⁶⁹ Gibbons, p. 322.

⁷⁰ Salvatore, p. 83.

extension of the fiction despite lacking a basis within the hypotextual work world. Events such as this are scattered throughout the novel, showing how the novel creates its own fiction upon which it uses the rules it is based on as a structural skeleton. While these novelistic flourishes exist and can be done in *D&D* they are not covered by the rules as written. Instead the decision on whether to allow flourishes such as these lands on the GM as during the game they act as referee amongst other things and can choose what to allow within their game. In many ways the way that Salvatore tells his story is similar to some newer RPG systems and games, such as *Dungeon World*⁷¹ which utilizes the Powered by the Apocalypse rules-system first introduced with *Apocalypse World*.⁷² Like *D&D* players in *Dungeon World* take on the role of adventures braving dangers for glory and riches. Unlike *D&D* the narrative (or the story being told in game) in *Dungeon World* is the heart of the game. The rules have a lesser presence in *Dungeon World* and only come in to play when triggered by the narrative, usually to resolve conflicts or when there is a chance of meaningful failure. In *Dungeon World* anything that makes sense for the game's fiction can be done, such as spooking a barbarian with a harmless display of magic.

Through *The Crystal Shard* Salvatore presents a novel based upon and structured after *D&D* rulebooks, resulting in an adaptation that clearly shows its roots yet still makes a meaningful departure from the original fiction. If nothing else *The Crystal Shard* shows that the rules of role-playing games can be used to create and facilitate narratives, even outside of their intended media.

From Players to Print

As previously stated role-playing games construct a narrative through their play. This is facilitated both by the foundation of the game's rules as well as by the group playing the game and creating stories. These stories themselves are rarely spread beyond the players who created them, but exceptions always exist. Salvatore's *The Crystal Shard* was an adaptation of the rules of *D&D* framed by his own story. The *Wild Cards* anthology series, which will serve as the focus of this analysis, is a different thing entirely as it is based upon the collective stories of a gaming group in Albuquerque, of which several members happened to be authors. As one of the founding authors and editor of the anthology series George R. R. Martin reflects upon how receiving the *Superworld* role-playing game⁷³ was the beginning of an obsession

⁷¹ Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel, *Dungeon World* [Sixth Printing], New York, New York: The Burning Wheel, 2016 [2012].

⁷² Vincent Baker, *Apocalypse World*, Lumpley Games, 2010.

⁷³ Steve Perring and Steve Henderson, *Superworld*, Albany, California: Chaosium Inc, 1982.

that would lead to *Wild Cards*.⁷⁴ Characters and stories were developed and told by the group and they became inspired to share these stories with a larger audience. “I knew we had some great characters. And I knew there were some great stories to be told about them; funny stories, sad stories, exciting stories. What we needed was a way to get the stories to an audience.”⁷⁵ With several authors already in the group, a “shared world” anthology seemed like a natural fit. Although the authors of *Wild Cards* prefer to describe their work as “mosaic novels” as they were intended to be far more interconnected than a typical anthology series.⁷⁶ While it may be problematic to categorize these “mosaic novels” as a transmedial storyworld in their own right they still utilize the interconnectivity that gives those storyworlds their depth. David Herman writes that “*Storyworlds* can be defined as the worlds evoked by narratives; reciprocally, narratives can be defined as blueprints for a specific mode of world-creation.”⁷⁷ The role-playing experiences and narratives created through their gameplay laid the foundation of *Wild Cards*, and thereby providing an early narrative blueprint.

In order to better understand this blueprint and how it has influenced the final product it is pertinent to start at the beginning. With that in mind it is important to look at what kind of game *Superworld* is in order to understand how it could act as inspiration. *Superworld*, as the name implies, is a role-playing game set in “[...] the world of comic book superheroes, where costumed [*sic*] crimebusters fight powerful supervillains in the never-ending battle between good and evil.”⁷⁸ Thus *Superworld* utilizes the same basic premise of most role-playing games, where one player takes on the role of Game Master (GM) and the rest create Player Characters (PCs) and serve as the protagonists of the game and its narrative. The rules themselves appear to promote customization through a point buy system where players can choose how to customize their character by how they allot their points. Nearly half of the rulebook is devoted to character creation, with extensive lists of various powers that players can choose and combine. Apart from this there are shorter chapters on running combat, creating villains and adversaries as well as a ready to play introductory adventure or “Superworld Scenario”.

When compared to other role-playing games of its time, such as *D&D*, *Superworld* appears to be more focused upon the storytelling aspects of role-playing games. This is primarily due

⁷⁴ George R. R. Martin, *Dreamsongs*, London: Gollancz, 2006, p. 775.

⁷⁵ George R. R. Martin, “On the *Wild Cards* Series”, in *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007, p. 17.

⁷⁶ George R. R. Martin, *Dreamsongs*, p. 776.

⁷⁷ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Chichester, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 105.

⁷⁸ Perrin and Henderson, p. 1.

to the core tenant of *Superworld*'s game sequence, the "statement of intent".⁷⁹ Instead of following a wargame inspired ruleset that strictly dictates how and when one can move and attack, *Superworld* asks its player's to instead state their intent more loosely and then roll to determine the resolution. In this regard fewer rules can speed up gameplay, allowing the fiction to both progress quicker and gives both GM and PCs a greater narrative agency through the possibilities that the statement of intent allows.

Wild Cards is a novelization inspired from the characters and scenarios explored by the Albuquerque gaming group of which Martin gamemastered.

As gamemaster, I [Martin] found myself dusting off old characters like Manta Ray and coming up with new ones, villains chiefly ... plus one hero who floated around in an iron shell, and called himself the Great and Powerful Turtle. My players, half of whom were writers, created some unforgettable characters of their own; Yeoman, Crypt Kicker, Peregrine, Elephant Girl, Modular Man, Cap'n Trips, Straight Arrow, Black Shadow, Topper, and the Harlem Hammer were only a few of the strange and wondrous folks who first made their appearance in our *SuperWorld* [sic] sessions.⁸⁰

Due to *Wild Cards* being based upon a group's personal experience it is difficult to aptly analyze and compare how their gaming sessions have been adapted into a novel. Changes have undoubtedly been made. In fact several of the hero protagonists from the novel never featured in their game, such as Jetboy, Croyd Crenson and Fortunato.⁸¹ Other differences arise in the novel in part due to authorship. Each chapter of *Wild Cards* is written by a singular author and more often than not focuses upon one or two protagonists at a time. Martin's *Superworld* campaign would, however, have had a greater number of active protagonists (players) shaping the narrative at any given time. As previously stated the lack of access to the gaming groups sessions and experiences it becomes difficult to compare hyper- and hypotext with one another. However, what we do have is Martin's own reflections upon his role-playing and that of his most iconic *Wild Cards* contribution, The Great and Powerful Turtle. As such the remainder of this analysis will focus upon the first entry in the series, *Wild Cards #1* from Martin's contributions, namely his chapter "Shell Games" and his role as editor.

"Shell Games" presents us with two entwined stories. The first deals with the origin story of The Great and Powerful Turtle, showing how a short, overweight and nondescript young man dons the mantle of superhero. In the second narrative we find the interconnectivity that the mosaic novel promotes as Martin picks up the story of a dark and depressed Doctor

⁷⁹ Perrin and Henderson, p. 12.

⁸⁰ George R. R. Martin, *Dreamsongs*, p. 775.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 778.

Tachyon several years after the events in Melinda Snodgrass's "Degradation Rites". Both of these narrative threads are told through a zero focalization narrator who describes the world as seen from the perspectives of the Turtle and Tachyon. Just as with *The Crystal Shard* the third person narration presented in *Wild Cards* is a departure from the second person narration typically found in role-playing games. The use of a zero focalization narrator does, however, create a parallel with the narrative role of a GM within a game. This narrative style is fairly straightforward which gives the *Wild Cards* storyworld a clean and simple base upon which to stand.⁸²

In Martin's *Superworld* game the Turtle was a Non-Player Character (NPC), a "[...] hero who floated around in an iron shell [...]"⁸³ As an NPC the Turtle may have frequently featured within the game, but he would never have been one of the main protagonists of it. That role would instead be reserved for the PCs. Because of this it is fair to assume that the majority of stories created at the gaming table likely didn't feature much of the Turtle's deeds. In a way this allows Martin a chance to flesh out his NPC more, into a fully-fledged protagonist. One could almost say that in writing "Shell Games" Martin is able to explore *Superworld* as both a player and GM simultaneously. Despite being the sole author of "Shell Games" the chapter's narrative is still influenced by others through Melinda Snodgrass's character Doctor Tachyon and the character development required for him.⁸⁴ This collaboration draws parallels to a role-playing game where the development of narrative is a collective process between everyone at the table. Expanding on the idea that Martin's writing allows him player-like influence upon the novel as a whole we can also compare his other role as editor of the novel to that of a GM.

As the main editor of *Wild Cards* it was Martin's job to coordinate the anthology stories between its various authors.⁸⁵ This would ensure a clear narrative thread throughout each chapter. For Martin to don the role as editor for *Wild Cards* seems doubly natural considering this work is thematically similar to his role as GM for his *Superworld* game. While every player at the table has an ability to shape and direct the narrative of the game the GM has the greatest narrative influence. After all, it is the GM that constructs and introduces the allies, adversaries and conflicts that the players encounter within the game. However, this also raises the question of authorship, both within the role-playing game as well as the *Wild Cards* novel. When constructing a narrative through a role-playing game one could say that the GM and

⁸² Herman, pp. 107-108.

⁸³ George R. R. Martin, *Dreamsongs*, p. 775.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 777.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 776.

players act as co-authors, much like the contributing authors of *Wild Cards*. However, the actual game itself is often overlooked when it comes to authorship as the ideas and fictions that the role-playing rules present are contributing aspects towards the narrative that is constructed. It raises the question of whether the creators of *Superworld*, Steve Perrin and Steve Henderson, can be seen as co-authors alongside the players? When it comes to the narrative created within the role-playing game it feels natural that the rules play a significant role in its creation. After all the rules provide the players both with a concise setting with which they can establish a mutually shared game world. Additionally the rules serve to resolve conflict by determining the success or failure of actions through the use of dice rolls or an equivalent method of chance. Because of this one could fathom that Perrin and Henderson have influenced and even helped shape the narratives that inspired *Wild Cards*. However, in its adaptation *Wild Cards* has distanced itself from its role-playing roots by relying less on rulebooks for inspiration in favor of the shared authorship of its authors. While the novel may have been created as a collaboration, it is based upon an original idea inspired from stories at the gaming table rather than the actual game and in so doing removes much of the influences of *Superworld*.

Apart from the collaborative aspects of both “Shell Games” and *Wild Cards* it is fair to say that they both stand firmly upon their own legs. As the *Superworld* role-playing game is quite open-ended, customizable and lacks a firm campaign setting there is less material for the authors to adapt than for Salvatore with *D&D*. Because of this *Wild Cards* feels less like an adaptation that one might expect, but instead shows how the collaborative creation of narrative shares transmedial traits across both role-playing games and novels.

From Metagaming to Metafiction

Having first examined adaptations of rules and player experiences to novels we now take somewhat of a step back and will be looking at role-playing games as a genre adapted into metafiction. Drew Hayes’s novel *NPCs* is a metafictional novel that novelizes typical role-playing tropes and archetypes while simultaneously wrapping it in an original narrative that subverts traditional racial and gender norms for fantasy literature. The metareferences towards role-playing games as a genre begins with the title. NPC stands for Non-Player Character and denotes the Game Master (GM) controlled characters that the Player Character’s (PCs) encounter and interact with. This is not quite the case for *NPCs*, however, as the novel explores the idea of a living role-playing world in which the NPCs live autonomously when not actively controlled by a GM. This idea is similar to Michael Ende’s *The Neverending*

Story which features a novel which houses a living world full of autonomous characters whose story is continually being written. In *NPCs* the same is true except with the campaign setting for a fictional role-playing game instead of a novel. As a result of this the NPCs within the fictional game are “alive” and to them the fictional world is their reality. Additionally the NPCs actions directly influence their work world, as the GM reading the rulebook for the fictional game discovers that the work itself has changed over time.⁸⁶

In short the novel *NPCs* follows the perspective of two groups. The first being the players Russell, Mitch, Terry, Glenn and Tim, who are playing a pre-made module for the fictional role-playing game “*Spells, Swords, & Stealth*”. At the start of the novel the player’s characters face untimely deaths within the tavern of a hamlet due to poor decisions and dice rolls, which in turn leads to the players later creating new characters in a second attempt at playing through the module. However, the unjust King who rules these lands was expecting the PCs who died in the tavern, and in order to protect their hamlet from the King’s unjust retribution, NPC residents of the hamlet attempt to assume the identity of the dead adventurers. This brings us to the second group and protagonists of the novel, the autonomous NPCs: Thistle the gnome, Grumph the half-orc and the two humans Gabrielle and Eric. It is the actions of this group of adventuring NPCs that is the focus of the novel as they attempt to keep their hometown safe as well as survive in a world populated by both dangerous creatures and perhaps the even more dangerous player controlled characters.

These two groups reside and act within different metadiegetic levels, one outside of the fictional role-playing game where the players speak among themselves and one within the fictional role-playing game where the players speak as their characters and the NPCs live and act. While both of these levels denote fictional worlds, the level where the players interact outside of the game is intended to be a representation of our actual world and the level within the fictional role-playing game “*Spells, Swords, & Stealth*” to be a fictional world. This in turn mirrors the levels of an actual role-playing game. Players will often switch between speaking out of character (OOC) as themselves and as their characters. The rationale behind it is that generally one will converse with the other players and the GM concerning rules, dice rolls or clarification of descriptions OOC, while they will interact and perform the actual role-playing in character. Grouling Cover describes the player’s interaction on the different fictional levels as interaction with different Frames of Narrativity. She categorized each action within one of three frames: the narrative frame, the game frame and the social frame.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁶ Hayes, Loc. 3198.

⁸⁷ Grouling Cover, p. 73.

narrative frames are separated based upon their levels of narrativity, with the narrative frame being the highest and the social frame the lowest. Each frame refers to an aspect of the role-playing game. The narrative frame encompasses interaction with the narrative within the game such as GM narration or player narrated actions. The game frame concerns interacting with the game-like aspects of the role-playing game such as dice rolls. Finally the social frame refers to interaction between the players outside of the actual game, such as discussions about rules, planning how to proceed within the game or even jokes or conversations referencing the events within the game.⁸⁸ While these frames have a varying amount of influence upon the narrative they all affect it. The narrative frame has the most obvious influence as both the GM and players will directly narrate within this frame. The game frame is more subtle, but it holds a large sway through the rules which act as a foundation for the game as well as through the uncertainty that its dice rolls provide. The result of these dice rolls has a narrative impact due to the fact that the result of the roll determines success or failure. Any greater conflict that is of narrative import will in some way involve a dice roll, and the result of this roll can therefore have a massive effect on the progression of the narrative. The social frame is by far the least narrative of them, but it does provide players with an avenue to take a step back from the game and discuss their options in order to agree upon how the group will proceed. This in turn helps shape the narrative through the player's discussion of potential actions and consequences.

While a player's actions can be categorized into the frames, in actual gameplay it is common for players to move seamlessly between the different frames or sometimes even transgress these frames through metalepsis.⁸⁹ An example of movement between frames could include a player attempting diplomacy. This course of action might begin in the social frame with the player asking for clarification on the rules or discussing with the other players about what to do. Having decided upon an attempt at diplomacy the player would make a declaration of intent, followed by dice rolls within the game frame to determine success. Finally having seen the result of the dice the player may interact within the narrative frame to describe and perform his attempted diplomacy.

The movement between the different frames is an act of metalepsis, of which Genette writes that:

⁸⁸ Grouling Cover, pp. 74-83.

⁸⁹ John Pier, "Metalepsis (revised version; uploaded 13 July 2016)", in Peter Hühn et al. (eds.), *the living handbook of narratology*, Hamburg: Hamburg University, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/metalepsis-revised-version-uploaded-13-july-2016>, retrieved on 2018-05-05.

The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation. Any other form of transit is, if not always impossible, at any rate always transgressive⁹⁰

The transition of these narrative levels in role-playing games is a common occurrence, and while the different frames have varying degrees of narrativity they all influence the overall narrative of the game. The act of moving between narrative levels in role-playing games would seem more often than not to be transgressive. This is due to the fact that narration in role-playing games, while primarily performed in the narrative frame, occurs to some level in each frame and players continually switch frames without an indication of transition. As such it would seem intuitive that while these frames may be separable and distinctive they would also bleed into one another through the transgression of metalepsis between the frames. An example of this could be a player speaking as his character yet making joking references belonging in the social frame.

Hayes' novel *NPCs* illustrates the migration between frames during a role-playing game through his opening chapter which describes a group of players playing the fictional role-playing game "*Spells, Swords, & Stealth*". The text here reads like a transcription of play and illustrates how different actions apply to different frames as well as showing the lack of transitioning between layers.

"Your party finally makes it into town sometime past midnight. The streets are vacant, save for the occasional guard making rounds, and the only light seems to be emanating from the local tavern." Russell took care describing the sleepy hamlet of Maplebark, determined to get all of the details just right.

"About freaking time," Mitch grumbled. "That took forever."

"I told you, I want to do more realism in our games. That includes dealing with physical travel time," Russell said, letting out a heavy sigh.

"Whatever; I say we hit the tavern. Boys?" Mitch asked.

"Hells yeah," Glenn echoed.

"I'm in," Terry agreed.

"I'm not sure if paladins are supposed to drink," Tim said quietly.

"Oh, would you relax? The oath of purity isn't that big of a deal. Besides, you're a level one character. If your god abandons you, then just re-roll [make a new character]," Mitch said. "We're going to the bar."

"Fine," Russell said. "Roll me Vision checks."

"How does that work again?"⁹¹

In the above quote we find the players primarily acting within a social and game frame and very little within the narrative frame. Russell, the GM, utilizes the narrative frame in

⁹⁰ Genette, p. 234.

⁹¹ Hayes, Loc. 18.

describing the scenery. The discussion about travel time as well as Mitch's proposal to hit the tavern and the subsequent replies all occur within the social frame as "narrative planning speech".⁹² Finally the Vision checks act within the game frame, providing a hurdle which limits the information available to the players. Throughout the rest of this opening chapter we can see clear differences in the frames that the players choose to interact in. The narrative frame goes largely unused except by the GM Russell during his narrative descriptions and once each by the new player Tim and veteran player Mitch. Tim speaks as his character in first person when ordering drinks and Mitch declares "I drain my mug in one sip."⁹³ The remaining two players, Terry and Glenn, stay firmly within the social and game frames for the remainder of the chapter.

The lack of player interaction with the narrative frame tells us that these players are either uncomfortable role-playing, or they simply don't enjoy those aspects of the role-playing game as much as they do the actual game-like mechanics. There are many different kinds of players, and it is possible for multiple players to enjoy role-playing games for multiple reasons. *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition* describes several aspects of role-playing games that appeal to different player archetypes. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* breaks the aspects into the following: Acting, Exploring, Instigating, Fighting, Optimizing, Problem Solving and Storytelling.⁹⁴ It is, however, worth noting that most players do not embody only a singular archetype, but are rather a combination of several. For the players in the novel *NPCs* it would seem as though there are some more extreme examples. Russell the GM enjoys the storytelling and exploring aspects of the game as seen through his desire to get all the little details right in order to bring the world to life. Mitch, Terry and Glenn appear to be quite aligned in their interests and seem focused upon the fighting, optimizing and instigating aspects. Tim, however, appears to have a greater interest in acting and storytelling, although his somewhat meek demeanor gives way to the will of the other players. The divide in player interests creates some conflict between the players, which in turn aids in creating some stereotypical role-playing archetypes. As a whole the tabletop view that Hayes presents firmly cements the hypotextual inspiration for *NPCs* within role-playing games.

Throughout the player's interactions with each other and the game it is fair to say that they metagame quite heavily, which is to say they act based on knowledge that they have as players rather than what the fiction dictates their characters would know. Concepts such as "If

⁹² Grouling Cover, p. 74.

⁹³ Hayes, Loc. 65.

⁹⁴ Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford, *Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide 5th Edition*, Renton, Washington: Wizards of the Coast, 2014, p. 6.

your god abandons you, then just re-roll [...]”⁹⁵ shows a complete disregard for the fiction in favor of the game-like aspects. This in addition to the player’s lack of compassion for NPC’s and their eagerness for violence suggest that these players are what is colloquially known by role-players as murderhobos.⁹⁶ Players of this kind are generally very disruptive to the development of narrative in a role-playing game, and could almost be deemed as antagonistic towards the fiction as a whole. To illustrate this Hayes has in fact made the player characters within the novel into actual antagonists. Instead the protagonists of the novel are all NPCs acting within the game “*Spells, Swords, & Stealth*”. This dichotomy serves to highlight the idea that sometimes the worst villains in a role-playing game can be the players themselves.

The novel’s general structure is quite straightforward, consisting of a prologue, 25 chapters with plainly numbered titles, and an epilogue. At first glance the structure is fairly basic. The use of pro- and epilogue is a common practice within fantasy novels and the chapters themselves are simply numbered. However, the actual plot of the novel can be easily separated into three story arcs connected by an overarching thread. The first story arc of the novel encompasses the NPCs setting out on their adventure and subsequently being captured by goblins, which ends with them fighting alongside the goblins against invading demons. The second story arc concerns the grand tournament and another demon invasion. Finally the third arc ties in to the reason they left their home as they answer the King’s summons and are forced to delve into a dungeon, which happens to house the cause of the demon invasions. Each of these story arcs acts as a separate adventure which together tie into a larger campaign, the same structure as found in role-playing games.

Hayes both introduces and simultaneously subverts traditional role-playing tropes with his protagonists through the roles that they assume. The half-orc tavern owner assumes the role of a barbarian due to his race’s stereotype of being big dumb brutes. The clumsy guardsman takes on the role of paladin due to his experience wearing armor. The mayor’s daughter becomes a wizard, a role suited for a dainty woman of privilege, and the small and crooked gnome becomes a sneaky rogue due to his small stature. At first glance it would seem that these are all based upon stereotypical genre conventions rooted both in fantasy literature as well as gender preconceptions. For example, gnomes are a short race, much like the halflings of *D&D* and Tolkien’s hobbits. While the term rogue is a broad one, in a role-playing context it refers to a sneaky thief-like character, not unlike a burgler such as Bilbo Baggins in *The*

⁹⁵ Hayes, Loc 18.

⁹⁶ The term murderhobo generally refers to players who tend to wander the world with little to no personal connections while simultaneously using violence and murder as a catch-all solution to problems.

Hobbit.⁹⁷ Other aforementioned examples are, however, rooted in the rules of some role-playing games. In the 5th edition of *D&D* Half-orcs are described as “[...] short tempered and sometimes sullen, more inclined to action than contemplation [...]”.⁹⁸ Older editions play much heavier into the Orc’s stereotypes. 3rd edition *D&D* even penalizes the half-orc’s starting intelligence score while increasing their starting strength, stating that “Half-orcs are strong, but their orc lineage makes them dull and crude.”⁹⁹

While their initial roles are firmly rooted in a stereotypical fashion each one of them ends up swapping roles with another. The gnome is twisted and unsuited to the dexterous traits of a thief, but his worship of the unconventional god of minions and his bravery makes him more suited for the role of paladin. The human knight in shining armor hates his armor and finds himself much better off without it. Without his armor he is no longer clumsy and is able to move both quickly and stealthily as a rogue would. The half-orc tavern owner finds that the detail oriented way he runs his bar and memorization of his brewing recipes makes him adept at memorizing the complex spells required to be a wizard. And finally the mayor’s daughter finds herself more inclined to follow the path of the barbarian, which plays naturally into her fierce temper and rage at always having to be a proper lady. Additionally her constant kidnapping by goblins (in order for PCs to rescue her) left her as the goblin’s ward for extended periods of time, during which they taught her woodcraft and other survival skills that barbarians are expected to possess.

With the example of the mayor’s daughter turned barbarian we see her development and acquisition of her skillset is rooted in yet another stereotype, the kidnapped noblewoman. The concept that she must be kidnapped regularly solely for adventurers to save her is absurd, yet its absurdity cements the world of the NPCs within a role-playing game. Despite this the characters accept this as the norm for their reality. For the NPCs the fictional world they reside in is their reality. Additionally the fact that the frequent kidnappings and rescues are a recurring occurrence points towards the work fiction being directly interacted with by multiple groups of player characters in the “real world”. This in turn creates a departure from role-playing games as we understand them due to multiple, non-connected groups all simultaneously affecting the same fictional work world instead of their own individual game worlds.

⁹⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin, 1937.

⁹⁸ Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford, *Dungeons & Dragons Player’s Handbook 5th Edition*, p. 41.

⁹⁹ Monte Cook, Jonathan Tweet and Skip Williams, *Dungeons & Dragons Player’s Handbook 3rd Edition*, Renton, Washington: Wizards of the Coast, 2000, p. 19.

The constant kidnapping is an example of how the different metafictional layers within the novel also influence one another. Adventurers need to save a damsel; therefore a damsel needs to be in distress. However, this also strengthens the idea that the world of the NPCs began as a fictional world designed for “*Spells, Swords, and Stealth*” and somehow grew autonomous. Other examples of the fictional layers influencing one another are made clear through the infectious slang words that the NPCs have picked up from adventurers.¹⁰⁰ This in itself is a form of metalepsis from the player character’s part. If they were truly acting as their characters they would be using language and terms appropriate for an inhabitant of the fictional world. Instead they transgress and bring aspects of the social and game frames into the narrative frame, performing a kind of performative metalepsis. The transgression of a performative metalepsis is even illustrated by Hayes when his NPCs encounter the players’ new characters, Mitchzelin, Timuscor, Terriora and Glennvint. As the NPCs listen in on the conversation that the players are having in character we encounter many breaches of the frames of narrativity.

“We stole from their town,” Timuscor reminded him. “Which we didn’t need to do. They only wanted a little bit of gold to trade, and we had more than enough after the ogre camp.”

“Why would we buy what we could take?” Terriora asked. If there were ever a motto for rogues, that would have been a quite viable candidate.

“Besides, you shouldn’t care if we stole: you’re a knight now. That’s why we didn’t let you re-roll a pally.”¹⁰¹

Here the players Tim and Terry are discussing their recent actions in character. At first their interaction is firmly placed within the narrative frame, however, when Terriora begins to discuss how this shouldn’t infringe upon Tim’s morals we find that the character Terriora begins acting within the social frame instead through a metalepsis. The moral justifications of Tim no longer playing a paladin also shows how Terriora is speaking directly to Tim instead of Timuscor. By referring towards Tim’s old paladin (whose mantle the gnome Thistle donned) we also see an aspect of metagaming as Terriora never knew of the existence of said paladin. This is further exemplified later in their discussion.

“That was smart,” Mitchzelin told him. “Last thing we need is them sending a rider ahead to get us in trouble with Solium. That’s something *Russell* would totally do just to be a jerk.” His acidic emphasis on Russell’s name left no doubt of his sentiment toward the young man.

“That seems less jerky than it does us reaping the consequences of our actions,” Timuscor pointed out.

“Kissass,” Terriora mumbled, very much over his breath.

¹⁰⁰ Hayes, Loc. 149.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Loc. 2251.

“Shut up. Look, do we even have a plan for when we get to Solium? We aren’t exactly invited guests anymore,” Timuscor said.

“This is the one time where *Russell’s* emphasis on realism comes in handy,” Mitchzelin said. “The missive our last group had still exists; the king is still expecting someone to show up. All we have to do is present ourselves and say we lost the scroll. No big deal.”

“But what if he’s already discovered our characters are dead? Or found someone else to do the job?” Timuscor asked.¹⁰²

By analyzing the quoted discussion above as if Tim, Mitch, Terry and Glenn were actual players playing a role-playing game we find that nearly everything here is a performative metalepsis of interactions in the social frame presented in the narrative frame. Additionally Mitchzelin refers to Russell the GM by name, and in doing so also refers to the power he holds over the fiction while in character. His offhand reference to Russell’s insistence on realism is also somewhat paradoxical as him acknowledging a GM and a realistic take upon the fiction breaks the sense of realism and immersion within the fictional world. The knowledge of the King expecting adventurers is also gained through the player’s metagaming which also serves to break their sense of realism within the fiction yet simultaneously as a major plot point is responsible for a powerful influence upon it. As such this is an example of how metagaming can create unconventional narrative transgressions similar to a metalepsis. While the above example is fiction, it does provide insight into how actual players can create these performative metalepses.

The influence of the player characters upon the game world is later turned upon its head through the magical crystal artifact which is described as a bridge between worlds. When the wizard Aldron gained possession of the Bridge he learned that “[...] you people, adventurers, are not truly beings of our world. Sure, you may look and feel like flesh from this plane, but the spirit guiding you is separate. It dwells in another place altogether.”¹⁰³ This artifact limits the ability of players to manipulate the game world by altering probability, or in this case their dice rolls making them always roll 1’s. This becomes especially deadly for player characters due to the rule in the fictional “*Spells, Swords, & Stealth*” that states “If you get [roll] a one, that’s a critical failure [...]”¹⁰⁴ and “You have to re-roll on a one [...] If you ever get three ones in a row, your character has failed so badly they accidentally kill themselves.”

While the actual game presented in *NPCs* is a work of fiction created for this novel it holds clear similarities to other games, most notably *Dungeons & Dragons*. The name itself is reminiscent enough of *D&D*; however, it also references a subgenre of fantasy literature,

¹⁰² Hayes, Loc. 2275.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Loc. 2905.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Loc. 31.

namely sword and sorcery. While similar to the high fantasy and epic fantasy genres that works such as Tolkien's fall under, sword and sorcery literature distinguishes itself by focusing upon "[...] personal battles rather than world-endangering matters."¹⁰⁵ While *NPCs* does feature a growing, world-endangering threat the focus of the novel is on the personal conflicts of the NPCs as they come to terms with answering the call of adventure. Aside from the name, the content of the game world is heavily inspired from *D&D*. Each class presented in the novel adheres to one of the core classes within the *Player's Handbook* from 3rd edition and onwards. Additionally the creatures that populate the world would seem to be pulled directly from *D&D*. Aside from the fairly standard fantasy races such as elves, goblins and orcs, we find gnomes (a core player race) as well as the *D&D* take on a kobold. Kobolds are represented differently across different storyworlds. In German folklore which they originate from they would often take the shape of small children, animals, fire or objects.¹⁰⁶ Other popular renditions include a rat-like depiction that is featured in the *Warcraft* storyworld¹⁰⁷ or as possessing dog-like features as they did in 1st Edition *AD&D*.¹⁰⁸ The kobold depicted in *NPCs*, however, is the reptilian, dragon-like kobold which is the standard for *D&D* from 3rd edition and onwards. Even the demons are described as having "[...] the head of a malformed rat, upper jaw stretched out inches further than its lower. Instead of hands, it has claws like that of a scorpion [...]"¹⁰⁹ has a counterpart to the Glabrezu demon in *D&D*. While the Glabrezu differs slightly from Hayes demons, the close resemblance seems a clear indication of his source of inspiration. Through the Principle of Genre Convention one could easily draw the conclusion that the fictional "*Spells, Swords, and Stealth*" is intended to represent the later editions of *D&D* without claiming the *D&D* storyworld as its own. In this sense the fiction of *NPCs* is based upon *D&D* yet the distance it creates with its own rules, such as the re-rolling of 1's, removes its obligation to adhere to the work world of *D&D*.

As a whole, *NPCs* is a clear homage to role-playing games that both parodies role-playing conventions as well fantasy tropes. By doing this the novel provides insight into the transgressive aspects that role-playing games are capable of, as well as showing how role-playing games and the rules they incorporate can inspire stories such as *NPCs*.

¹⁰⁵ Wikipedia, "Sword and sorcery", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sword_and_sorcery, retrieved on 2018-05-03.

¹⁰⁶ Wikipedia, "Kobold", "Characteristics" section, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobold#Characteristics>, retrieved on 2018-05-03.

¹⁰⁷ Wowpedia, "Kobold", <https://wow.gamepedia.com/Kobold>, retrieved on 2018-05-03.

¹⁰⁸ Gary Gygax, *Monster Manual* (1st Edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*), pp. 57-58.

¹⁰⁹ Hayes, Loc. 463.

From Page to Table

So far we have examined the adaptation of role-playing games into novels, now, however, we will be reversing the roles and take a look at novels adapted into role-playing games. There have been significant differences in the previously observed adaptations, mainly concerning which aspects have made it across the adaptational transition, and as such it is interesting to see how this relates when the process is reversed. In a way the adaptation of role-playing game into novel primarily involves trimming away the open-endedness that the game offers in favor of creating a singular narrative. As we have seen there is a large variance in the aspects that remain after the adaptation, whether it concerns the preservation of a fictional world or merely shared experiences by players through a shared game world. It would seem intuitive that the adaptation of a novel into a role-playing game would require a broadening of scope from the novel's fictional world as well as loosening the rigid sequentiality of the narrative in order to allow for player agency. With this in mind we can begin to take a closer look at one of the most well-known and well-played of the novel to role-playing game adaptations, *Call of Cthulhu*.

Call of Cthulhu is a role-playing game based upon the works of horror writer Howard Philips Lovecraft, primarily his works involving the Cthulhu Mythos.¹¹⁰ The game itself is named after his short story by the same name which features one of Lovecraft's most iconic characters, the Great Old One Cthulhu. The game itself was originally published in 1981 and has since then released newer editions over time, the latest of which was the 7th edition published in 2015. In *Call of Cthulhu* players take on the role of investigators who must:

[...] travel to strange and dangerous places, uncover foul plots, and stand against the terrors of the night. You will encounter sanity-blasting entities, monsters, and insane cultists. Within strange and forgotten tomes of lore you will find secrets that man was not meant to know. You and your companions may very well decide the fate of the world...¹¹¹

Oftentimes this begins with the investigators being tasked with investigating something apparently mundane yet draws them deeper into a world of horror and insanity from which they might not return. Unlike games such as *D&D* where players act as powerful heroes, investigators are closer to ordinary people and as such are ill equipped to deal with the dangers they face head on. In fact when playing *Call of Cthulhu* a large aspect of the game is survival and staying either alive or sane. Like the protagonists in Lovecraft's short stories

¹¹⁰ Sandy Petersen, et al., *Call of Cthulu: Investigator Handbook 7th Edition*, Hayward, California: Chaosium Inc., 2015, p. 12.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

investigators are expected to face either death or insanity as a result of their investigations. At its original time of publishing this was an innovation upon the role-playing game as they had previously been limited to the fantasy and sci-fi genres.

The works of H. P. Lovecraft are predominately short stories and novellas focusing upon the themes of cosmic horror, human insignificance and fear of the unknown. Lovecraft hints at these themes with the opening lines of “The Call of Cthulhu”:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far.¹¹²

Unlike some modern examples of horror, Lovecraft’s stories avoid the use of sudden scares in favor of a sense of slow-building dread. As previously mentioned his writing is often focalized through the view of an investigator of some sort who delves deeper into uncovering a mystery. This investigator could be an anthropologist (as in “The Call of Cthulhu”), a student (as in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*¹¹³) or virtually anyone with a cat’s curiosity (and we all know what killed the cat). There is a tendency for Lovecraft’s protagonists to be men of science or at least men of reason, which makes their incomprehension and realization of mankind’s ignorance of the weird all the more poignant. Within the weird aspects of Lovecraft’s writing there are a number of general themes explored such as dark magic, monstrous extradimensional beings and the cults who worship them, and ancient locales that seem to break the laws of physics as we know them.

Thematic aspects concerning characters and the fiction at large feel as if they would be easily transferrable from a novel, or short story, and into a role-playing game. In many ways these are merely the trappings that make up the setting and the kind of stories that the role-playing game wants to tell. It is a storyworld that merely needs to make a transmedial transition. At its core the role-playing game is a set of rules that facilitate and guide the creation of cooperative storytelling. The setting and themes applied to the actual game merely shapes what kind of stories are being told. *D&D* for example utilizes a fantasy setting inspired from fantasy fiction and thus encourages epic storytelling revolving around great heroes. Therefore by adapting the general themes and storyworld of Lovecraft’s work, *Call of Cthulhu* is able to guide its players in creating their own tales of Lovecraftian horror. Due to *Call of Cthulhu* being an adaptation of a collection of literary work which precedes the game,

¹¹² H. P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”, in *Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Stephen Jones (Ed.), London: Gollancz, 2008 [1928], p. 201.

¹¹³ H. P. Lovecraft, “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”, in *Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, London: Gollancz, 2008 [1936], pp. 504-554.

the actual edition examined is of less import than when analyzing a novel adapted from a specific edition of the game, such as *The Crystal Shard*. Because of this the analysis will be focusing upon examining the current edition of *Call of Cthulhu*, the 7th Edition.

Unlike previous editions of *Call of Cthulhu*, the 7th Edition has divided its rulebook into two separate books: the *Investigator Handbook* and the *Keeper Rulebook*.¹¹⁴ The former is a slightly shorter book which covers the character creation process extensively and offers many ideas for players to use as well as advice and information about the storyworld they will be exploring. The latter rulebook is primarily for the GM, or Keeper which is the term *Call of Cthulhu* uses, and contains the full set of rules, a bestiary as well as instructions on how to create and run scenarios. Amongst these one can also find the character creation rules, although they lack the depth and exemplifications provided within the *Investigator Handbook*. While called the *Keeper Rulebook* one could argue that the first nine chapters of the rulebook, which encompass the entirety of the rules system, would benefit investigators as much as they do the keeper. In this sense the *Keeper Rulebook* is the only book required for play and the *Investigator Handbook* can be seen as an extra resource, useful but is by no means a prerequisite for play. Both books discuss Lovecraft as a writer and his work as the source for *Call of Cthulhu*. The *Keeper Rulebook* primarily provides a biography on H. P. Lovecraft as well as a summary and introduction to the Cthulhu Mythos. The *Investigator Handbook* actually includes the entirety of Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror"¹¹⁵ and recommends players to read it to familiarize themselves with his work. The inclusion of biographic accounts is interesting as it implies that in order to truly play *Call of Cthulhu* one must understand not only the work of Lovecraft but also his life.

The fact that Lovecraft is directly attributed and recommended within the rulebooks shows that the role-playing game wishes to keep their adaptation close to the source material as well as defining that the intended tone of the game is a specific one. The dedication to Lovecraft in the *Keeper Rulebook* also serves to firmly root the setting of *Call of Cthulhu* into the Lovecraftian storyworld known as the Cthulhu Mythos.¹¹⁶ Interestingly enough *Call of Cthulhu* doesn't adhere to a portion of the Mythos, leaving out the cosmic war between the evil Great Old Ones and the good Elder Gods who opposed them. This is clearly stated and the reasons why motivated in the "What Was Left Out" sidebar. The motivations are based

¹¹⁴ Sandy Petersen, et al., *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook 7th Edition*, Hayward, California: Chaosium Inc., 2014.

¹¹⁵ H. P. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror", in *Call of Cthulhu: Investigator Handbook 7th Edition*, Sandy Petersen, et al., Hayward, California: Chaosium Inc., 2015 [1945], pp. 20-39.

¹¹⁶ Sandy Petersen, et al., *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook 7th Edition*, p. 25.

upon “This idea of a cosmic war is never found in Lovecraft’s own works; more alarmingly, it vitiates some of the stark horror found in the original ideas.”¹¹⁷, as well as having “[...] omitted classifying Mythos races into the divisions of Servitor and Independent (greater and lesser varieties). Such classi cautions tend to diminish the alien quality of these beings, stripping away some of the unknowable quality which HPL bequeathed them.”¹¹⁸ These omissions appear to be done in order to enhance the horror of the game and to remove the intrinsic opportunity of deus ex machina that the Elder Gods could represent. However, this sidebar also ends by stating that if the Keeper enjoys these concepts and finds them fitting then they should “[...] use them at will. *Call of Cthulhu* is your game.”¹¹⁹

As such we find that while role-playing games may offer the opportunity for players to immerse themselves in and explore a storyworld, the only changes that the narratives they construct can influence lies within the group’s shared game world. This has been noted in the previous analyses and I believe that it is a result of the nature of role-playing games. In order for players to create meaningful narratives they must create changes in the setting. On this Herman means that “[...] narratives represent disruption in storyworlds [...]”¹²⁰ and this disruption “[...] depends on forming inferences about the kinds of agency characters have in those worlds, as role-bearing or position-occupying individuals sometimes acting at cross-purposes with their own interests and goals or those of other such individuals.”¹²¹ At their core narratives are based upon conflict which creates disequilibrium within a storyworld and through the conflict’s resolution a new equilibrium is achieved through the agency of the characters. This in turn becomes the new starting point for future conflict.¹²² So in order for a novel (or a collection of short stories) to be adapted into a role-playing game it must allow for players to create meaningful characters possessing the agency required to facilitate change within the storyworld and thus create a narrative. The structure of Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos is quite suited for this as the most distinctive features of the storyworld lie within its antagonists. When someone thinks of Lovecraft chances are they aren’t thinking of his curious investigators, instead it is likely the horrors and the creatures behind them that come to mind. The lack of distinctive protagonists within the storyworld makes it easier for players to conceive themselves in that role than compared to a role-playing game adapted from a protagonist focused novel. For example a group of players playing a game of *D&D* set in the

¹¹⁷ Sandy Petersen, et al., *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook 7th Edition*, p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Herman, p. 20.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Forgotten Realms might feel that their own characters pale in comparison to heroes within that same storyworld such as Drizzt Do'Urden.

There are many other aspects that must be taken into account for adaptations into a role-playing game. As mentioned before, sequentiality is such an aspect. In a novel the characters and their actions are committed to paper, which in turn is clearly structured and intended to be read in a singular direction. As such a novel has a fixed sequentiality, and by reading it one will encounter the same events in the same order every time. This is not the case for role-playing games and the main difference could lie in the narrative. When reading a novel its narrative is already finished and committed towards its paper. For the narrative to be the same it requires the fixed sequentiality. Role-playing games on the other hand do not come with finished narratives as it is the act of playing the game that creates the narrative. Up until the point when the game is concluded the narrative is still being shaped by the players and their actions. In many ways role-playing is a performance, both narratively as players take on the role of different characters but also in the sense of actors performing a play. Each time a play is performed there will be slight differences even if the narrative as a whole is the same. The difference between the performance of a play and the performance of a role-playing game lies in the sequentiality. A role-playing game does not have a fixed progression of events. There may be a fixed timeline for events within the fiction to transpire, but thanks to their agency the characters are free to take whatever path they wish towards interacting with (or ignoring) these events. And as each group of players and the characters they role-play as are unique even if two groups play the same scenario they will end up creating two different narratives, possibly with very different final outcomes. Even if a singular group would attempt to play the same scenario twice with the same characters the narrative influence of the dice themselves prevents an exact replication of the original attempt. Not to mention that by replaying a scenario the players open themselves up to many potential metagaming situations. Just as Kivy regards the act of reading as a performance, and seeing as one can only read something for the first time once, we can draw the same parallel towards playing a role-playing scenario multiple times.¹²³

In order to better examine how the *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game promotes play I will be taking a closer look at the premade scenarios¹²⁴ presented within the *Keeper Rulebook*, namely “Amidst the Ancient Trees” and “Crimson Letters”.¹²⁵

¹²³ Kivy, p. 12.

¹²⁴ Scenario is the term that *Call of Cthulhu* uses to describe the same section of gameplay that *D&D* would describe as an adventure.

“Amidst the Ancient Trees” presents a scenario in which the investigators will be attempting to solve the kidnapping of a sixteen-year-old girl. The scenario provides a section of background information, detailing the events that led up to the current situation as well as a short list of “Dramatis Personae”, a timeline of events for the scenario and suggested investigator motivations. The timeline is described as a tool “[...] granting the Keeper a frame of reference if the players forge their own path through the scenario.” Because of this we can assume that the scenario in itself is designed to be fairly linear, but this naturally depends upon the player’s actions. Concerning the investigator motivations the scenario recommends that the investigators have their own motivations for wanting to track down the kidnapper, even going so far as to entice players with promise of rewards for utilizing one of these optional motivations. The use of these suggested motivations aids in providing the players with story hooks in order to begin immersing them into the fiction before the game has begun. Additionally the provided motivations here have the potential to create new conflicts, either between the investigator and the NPCs or even within the group itself depending upon how the player chooses to handle it. As noted the timeline of events keeps the scenario fairly linear in that certain events transpire on at certain times unless the investigators interrupt this schedule with their actions. Some events, however, occur when the Keeper sees fit.¹²⁶ In total the scenario spans three days, during which the first day covers basic investigation and departure into the woods where the investigators begin to uncover clues and portents. The second day confirms that there is more going on than at first sight and the third day provides the climax of the scenario. Finally at the end of the scenario we find a description of conclusions, which encompasses a short epilogue and rewards based upon the success of the investigators. Additionally there is “A Note on Lethality” which explains that this scenario isn’t intended to be very lethal for the investigators as it is intended to be an introduction to *Call of Cthulhu*, but it does offer options to scale up the lethality should that be desired.¹²⁷

“Crimson Letters” is described as an “[...] open-ended scenario set in the environs of Arkham.”¹²⁸ Arkham itself is a fictional city frequently featured within Lovecraft’s writing and is home to the Miskatonic University, which amongst other achievements is responsible for funding the expedition in “At the Mountains of Madness”¹²⁹ and features in “The Shadow

¹²⁵ Sandy Petersen, et al., *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook 7th Edition*, pp. 346-383.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

¹²⁹ H. P. Lovecraft, “At the Mountains of Madness”, in *Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Stephen Jones (Ed.), London: Gollancz, 2008 [1936], p. 423.

Out of Time”.¹³⁰ The scenario itself is described as being best suited as the beginning of a larger campaign and as such has been designed to have open endings and opportunities for the Keeper to add new plot threads as desired. The premise of the scenario involves a murder mystery. An academic at the Miskatonic University has been murdered and so the investigators have been brought in. In this regard “Crimson Letters” is directly referencing the works of Lovecraft and placing the players themselves directly within the storyworld.

The general structure of the scenario is quite opposite to the linear and event focused structure found within “Amidst the Ancient Trees”. Instead “Crimson Letters” revolves around the investigators uncovering and following up on clues. What they find and what they choose to follow up on is what shapes the scenario. Because of this “Crimson Letters” can be defined as a non-linear scenario and as such the narrative structure it presents diverts more heavily from that of a novel. A non-linear scenario provides the players with several possibilities that they must choose between, with each choice having a large impact upon the narrative. Additionally despite being a pre-written scenario “Crimson Letters” requires a large choice from the Keeper. In the actual scenario nobody is designated as the killer, instead each character in the “Dramatis Personae” is a potential killer, and it is up to the Keeper to decide who the actual culprit is.¹³¹ Because of this the majority of the scenario preparation for the Keeper is an extensive list of potential killers complete with facts, clues and role-playing hooks which aid the Keeper in portraying the NPCs. The detailed “Dramatis Personae” is of great import for the scenario as the majority of the clues must be uncovered through interaction with the NPCs. Apart from this; the scenario also provides the Keeper with a list of locations, dangers that await the investigators and details on the resolution of the scenario.

Having looked at both premade scenarios it is fair to say that both scenarios rely on a sense of deepening mystery to set the tone. Additionally both deal with larger cosmic horrors as well as other typical Lovecraftian themes, such as depraved cults and forbidden knowledge. Just as in Lovecraft’s own writing the investigating characters act as the focalizers for his works, so too do the investigators in *Call of Cthulhu* take on a focalizing role in the regard that it is through their experiences and actions that the fiction is revealed. Continuing upon the comparison of protagonists, the role-playing adaptation keeps a high level of danger and lethality within the game and as such the investigators likely aren’t expected to survive forever. However, the investigators in *Call of Cthulhu* have a greater chance at seizing victory

¹³⁰ H. P. Lovecraft, “The Shadow Out of Time”, in *Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*, Stephen Jones (Ed.), London: Gollancz, 2008 [1936], pp. 555-606.

¹³¹ Sandy Petersen, et al., *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook 7th Edition*, p. 366.

than Lovecraft's protagonists, at least when considering the two scenarios presented within the *Keeper Rulebook*. In that regards death in *Call of Cthulhu* is likely inevitable sooner or later, but the opportunity for triumph may present itself several times before then. It is worth keeping in mind that "Amidst the Ancient Trees" is intended to be an introductory scenario for new players, and that "Crimson Letters" is intended to be the first scenario within a larger campaign. And because of this the opportunity for victory might be easier to achieve within these scenarios than is the norm.

As a whole, *Call of Cthulhu* appears to be an example of a fairly successful adaptation between novel and role-playing game, due to both the adherence towards the same themes as well as keeping the core of Lovecraft's work in focus at all times. Additionally the rulebooks convey a clear message of how *Call of Cthulhu* should be played and what its players can expect. Although *Call of Cthulhu* may offer its players a greater chance of victory than the protagonists within Lovecraft's work, this could very well be chalked up to the gamified aspects of the role-playing game where players may enjoy creating stories that can end in triumph.

Discussion

As stated within the "Purpose and Problem" of this thesis, the goal of the analyses is to examine how narratives are adapted between novel and role-playing game. At this point we have analyzed four adaptational variations and have seen that adaptations between role-playing games and novels can look very different from one another. In the case of *The Crystal Shard* we find a clear and heavy influence from the source material. This is both done by connecting the fiction of the novel with the rules of the game through the Principles of Generation and Genre Convention as well as the general structure of the novel. By structuring his own novel after the same campaign-like structure found in role-playing games Salvatore shows that this narrative structure can be utilized well within a novel. This structure is repeated within *NPCs* although it is not as overt as *The Crystal Shard*'s. *NPCs* lacks the clear sectioning of story arcs or "adventures" provided by the "Books" in *The Crystal Shard*. Despite this, *NPCs* does share the same three part structure. The first part covers the NPCs donning the mantle of adventurer and surviving the demon assault on the goblins, the second spans the great tournament and the third and final part encompasses the delve into the dungeon. These three parts combined create a campaign structure, where each adventure presents the players with an arc of fiction containing its own separate story yet connects to a

larger plot. In this case the demon invasions that the NPCs bear witness to during their first and second “adventures” are directly connected to the conclusion of the third “adventure”. Additionally both novels present their events in a fixed chronological order. This in turn mirrors the way that the fiction of role-playing games is presented chronologically towards the players due to the progression of the narrative hinging upon their actions and choices.

Wild Cards on the other hand is a departure from the three part campaign structure found in *The Crystal Shard* and *NPCs*. As an anthology, or “mosaic” novel, each chapter within *Wild Cards* was written by a different author and focuses upon different characters. As such *Wild Cards* can feel more akin to a collection of interconnected short stories. Also unlike the other novels *Wild Cards* lacks an overarching plot to weave them all together. Instead the interconnectivity of the novel is developed by building a consistent storyworld and through the recurrence and development of major characters. This in turn highlights the storyworld itself and the characters who reside within it. Despite lacking an overarching plot each chapter contains a complete narrative in and of itself and serves to change and develop the storyworld and its characters. Additionally the chapters are chronologically ordered, just as in *The Crystal Shard* and *NPCs*. This creates the same parallel to players playing a role-playing game, but I am doubtful that this is the primary reasoning behind it. In a way *Wild Cards* is a presentation of the chronological history of its storyworld, and as such it would be natural for it to start at the beginning and present its major characters in the chronological order that they emerged within the fiction.

Seeing as *Wild Cards* is a collaboration of several authors working together in order to create something larger we are reminiscent of the players in a role-playing game working together to create a narrative. Strengthening this concept we also find that the role of editor for *Wild Cards* is thematically similar to the role of a Game Master (GM), both of which were roles occupied by George R. R. Martin. As editor it was Martin’s job to coordinate the anthology’s authors and curate the process as a whole. By organizing the authors in this manner we can see how the joint authorship of *Wild Cards* resembles the way that the players at the table, led by the GM, construct their own collaborative stories through play. In short, *Wild Cards* highlights the shared authorship of the novel which creates a parallel to the role-playing experiences that it is based on. In this regard *Wild Cards* separates itself from *The Crystal Shard* and *NPCs* as the latter novels were written by sole authors with full control over the narrative.

The inspiration behind the novels separates them yet again. By drawing on player experiences *Wild Cards* is to some regard an adaptation of *Superworld* due to its rules shaping

the original stories that have been adapted. Although the analysis “From Players to Print” showed that *Superworld*’s influences aren’t very prominent apart from the general themes of super hero fiction. Instead *Wild Cards* grows beyond the role-playing game in order to create and populate its own storyworld which relies on its own fiction instead of that provided from a rulebook or other work world. *The Crystal Shard* and *NPCs* are both more or less closely adapted from *D&D*. Although *The Crystal Shard* focuses upon underlying rules and the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting while *NPCs* focuses on general themes and inhabitants from *D&D*. Because of this both novels can attribute parts of their authorship directly towards the games that inspired them. The authorship of *Wild Cards*, however, while shared equally by its authors, avoids the authorial influences from its hypotext. This is yet another break from the role-playing game, as the narratives constructed through gameplay rely heavily upon the authorship of the game’s creator as well as any potential storyworlds that the game is set in. The reliance on hypotextual authorship makes itself abundantly clear within the *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game which is a close adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft’s work, even directly attributing him within the rulebooks. His influences are felt so strongly in *Call of Cthulhu* that the role-playing game could be seen as a set of rules that specifically aid players in the creation of Lovecraftian stories. As such the presence of Lovecraft’s writing is notable within the game world of the players.

The process of adapting a novel or series of short stories and novellas to a role-playing game is fundamentally opposite to the adaptation of role-playing game to novel. With that being said it is conceivable that the process of novel to role-playing game could be more difficult to achieve. When novelizing a role-playing game the hypotext is a work designed to facilitate the creation of stories. Therefore constructing a story based upon a role-playing game is in a way a singular game of imagining with the role-playing game as a prop. The adaptation of novel to role-playing game, however, involves taking a fixed work with a clear beginning and end, and adapting it into something that facilitates the creation of new stories. *Call of Cthulhu* achieves this by focusing on the adaptation of themes. By focusing upon the aspects of horror found within Lovecraft’s writing they attempt to transfer the essence of his work into the role-playing game. Because of this *Call of Cthulhu* is a close adaptation of the Cthulhu Mythos, with the exception of themes that would dilute the core horror aspects. But providing the necessary trappings of the setting is not enough, rules must be added to guide gameplay and aid the players in creating their own Lovecraftian stories through play. As such core mechanics are added to the rules to simulate the dangers and themes present within Lovecraft’s writing. This involves everything from players taking on the role of investigators,

to sanity mechanics, and the level of lethality that the investigators are expected to face. The proposed scenario design is also an attempt to simulate a Lovecraftian tale through themes of mystery, investigation and survival. All together these aspects convalesce into an attempt at breaking down Lovecraft's work into its core components and rebuilding it into a toolkit which allows players to create and simulate their own Lovecraftian stories. This attempt at simulation is in fact exactly what prompted the creation of role-playing games all together. *D&D* originated due to a group of wargaming players who wished to incorporate fantasy themes into their games in order to take on the roles of heroes found within fantasy literature. As such writers such as Tolkien and Vance are in many ways to *D&D* as Lovecraft is to *Call of Cthulhu*, the only difference being the amount of influence the authors hold over the final product. In the case of *D&D* we find that its work is inspired by fantasy authors and their influence is felt. However, *Call of Cthulhu* is a direct adaptation of the work from a singular author, and as such his influence upon the game is much stronger.

When it comes to the actual creation of narrative there are similarities between reading a novel and playing a role-playing game. Walton describes the way recipients interact with a fictional world as a game of make believe with a representation used as a prop. The novel acts as a prop that the recipient bases their own game world upon.¹³² While using the novel as a prop the reader is able to generate fictional truths through the fictional propositions of the game world, aided by the principles of generation as describes by Walton and others,¹³³ such as the Reality Principle as well as the Principles of Media and Genre Convention.¹³⁴ Since novels such as *The Crystal Shard* and *NPCs* reference the genre conventions of their hypertextual origins it becomes possible for recipients to construct fictional truths within their game world through the act of reading. In doing so the recipient is also imagining, or constructing, a narrative within their game world.

Functionally the same occurs during role-playing games with the exception that it is a social imagining rather than a solitary one. Kivy notes a similarity that movies, plays and novels all have in common, they tell stories.¹³⁵ And although the narrative structure within a novel may be static and predetermined, the act of reading becomes a unique performance in itself. Each time the recipient reads the novel she is imagining a new variation of the representational game for that work, and previous readings further influence the new imaginings of the recipient. Because of this even when a recipient partakes in the same work

¹³² Walton, pp. 58-59.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 42.

¹³⁴ Bareis, pp. 177-178.

¹³⁵ Kivy, p. 42.

world twice, they may construct a new narrative within their game world. In this sense the work world of a novel prompts the construction of narratives by the recipient, much in the same regard as role-playing games do. Both media require performances by their recipients, but these performances have different tools at their disposal. Role-playing games provide their players with a greater sense of agency in that they can create their own imaginary propositions within the game world during play. An example of this could be that Player A's character is an elf who was orphaned by a marauding orc clan. Through this proposition new fictional truths are established within the shared game world: a marauding orc clan exists. This imagining can in turn be built upon by others since role-playing games are social imaginings. Player B for instance might want to build upon the proposition of the orc clan by claiming that his half-orc character was sired by their leader. Imagined propositions such as these aren't found within the work world of the rulebooks, yet they propagate the development of narrative within the game world.

So while role-playing games grant greater narrative agency to their players than the recipients of novels, other aspects are lost. For one the sequentiality of a novel provides a more carefully constructed and persistent work world than that provided by a role-playing game. In part this is due to the novel being a complete work while the role-playing game still requires co-authorial input through play. The fixed sequentiality and authorship in turn also provides the work world with a fixed narrative capable of creating change within larger storyworlds that the novel may be a part of. In the case of *The Crystal Shard* we see this through the canonization of the novel and its characters within the *Forgotten Realms* storyworld. The narratives constructed through gameplay within the player's game world can never alter the larger storyworld as a whole. One of the few exceptions to this could, however, be constructed through an adaptation similar to *Wild Cards* where player experiences are novelized, although this process has involved the creation of a new storyworld in which *Wild Cards* is set. Metafictional novels such as *NPCs* can be used to comment upon role-playing games as well as novels, and in so doing could change the way that recipients relate to the different media. And finally role-playing games like *Call of Cthulhu* which are firmly rooted within literary works can provide insight into the components required not only to create narratives, but also how one can attempt to replicate them.

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