

VIDEO GAMES AND STORYTELLING



ENGLISH 2090-1

Fall 2014, Tues. & Thurs. 2:00-3:20 p.m.

Dr. Alf Seegert

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- Fulfills HF (Humanities Exploration) Gen Ed Requirement (!)
- No Prerequisites

Video Games and Storytelling explores the interplay between *game* and *story* in video game media. Students will **play** and **analyze** video games, specifically those with strong narratives, and engage with broader literary/theoretical issues in video game and literary studies. Texts include video games themselves, as well as a selection of films, fiction, and critical/ theoretical resources. **Assignments include regular critical responses plus a midterm and a final exam.** Opportunities for creative work through [Inklewriter](#) will also be made available.

This document is a multi-page COURSE OVERVIEW, not a syllabus. I will have a full syllabus available by the first day of class. Please note that some of the assigned games might change.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Video games from the 1970s and early 1980s

- Coin-operated arcade games including *Pong*, *Space Invaders*, *Pacman*, *Defender*, *Berzerk*, *Tempest*, *Joust*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Dragon's Lair*
- Early console games including *Adventure* for Atari 2600
- Early Text Adventure games / Interactive Fiction:
 - Will Crowther and Don Woods: *Colossal Cave Adventure*
 - Infocom: *Zork*

Scroll down for more required games!



More recent required video games include....

- Amanita Design: ***Samorost / Samorost 2***
- Mike Bithell: ***Thomas Was Alone***
- Double Fine Productions (Ron Gilbert, creator): ***The Cave***
- Galactic Café: ***The Stanley Parable***
- Interactive fiction games including ***Photopia*** and a selection of recent Inklewriter interactive stories
- Might and Delight: ***Shelter***
- Lucas Pope: ***Papers, Please***
- Superbrothers/Capybara Games: ***Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP***



and, time permitting,

- The Fullbright Company: ***Gone Home***

Books

- Ernest Cline, ***Ready Player One***
- Jonathan Gottschall, ***The Storytelling Animal***

Films and Video

- Felicia Day (Creator, writer), ***The Guild*** (selected episodes)
- Seth Gordon (Dir.), ***King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters***
- Edgar Wright (Dir.), ***Scott Pilgrim vs. the World***

Here are some recommended (but NOT required) video games which we will probably discuss in class:

- *Anchorhead (interactive fiction)*
- *Another World / Out of this World*
- *Baldur's Gate series*
- *Beyond Good & Evil*
- *Bioshock series*
- *Braid*
- *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*
- *Card Hunter*
- *Cave Story*
- *Dragon Quest VIII*
- *Elder Scrolls Series (e.g., Morrowind, Oblivion, Skyrim)*
- *FEZ*
- *Final Fantasy series*
- *Flower*
- *FTL*
- *Ghost Trick*
- *Grim Fandango*
- *Guild Wars*
- *Ico*

- *Journey*
- *Katamari Damacy*
- *King's Bounty: The Legend*
- *The Last of Us*
- *Lego Lord of the Rings*
- *Ni No Kuni*
- *Okami*
- *Proteus*
- *Psychonauts*
- *Shadow of the Colossus*
- *Starseed Pilgrim*
- *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*
- *To the Moon*
- *Ultima series*
- *The Unfinished Swan*
- *World of Warcraft*
- *Zelda and Zelda-style games (e.g., Dwarf Complete)*

Video Game Selection Criteria

In order to make this class manageable, accessible, and focused, my selection of required games is guided by the following criteria:

- 1) **Relatively short gameplay** (as a rule, less than seven hours to complete the full game – preferably less than five)
- 2) **Multi-platform compatibility** whenever possible (all games will be PC compatible; most will work on a Mac)
- 3) **Strong emphasis on story in both the gameplay and mechanics** (not just via cutscenes). “Quest narratives” combine elements of game and story elegantly, which means that we’ll focus heavily on quest-oriented games, especially adventure games.
- 4) **No excessive “twitch factor.”** In other words, I have decided to include games that most students should be able to “play through” with reasonable effort – not just those titles geared towards dedicated or experienced gamers.

Unfortunately, these necessary constraints mean that I have been forced to leave off many excellent video games from the “required to play” list. **For example...**

- *Braid* is brilliant and groundbreaking on the level of both mechanics and story, but it’s also very demanding on players — more demanding than I feel comfortable assigning in an introductory class like this one.
- Three of my recent favorite games are Sony Playstation 3 exclusives: *The Unfinished Swan*, *Journey*, and *The Last of Us*. Currently the University doesn’t offer access to Playstation 3 consoles, so I am leaving these titles off the required list.
- “Sandbox games” like *Skyrim* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series contain strong story elements, but their expansive worlds are simply more than we can hope to adequately address in a course like this one.

This is a class dedicated to the careful **analysis** of video games, not just to playing them. But I think that our attentive analysis will make our experience of video games more rewarding and meaningful, not less. I've devoted a large part of my life to games and stories, so I'm very excited to design and teach this class. In addition to being a professor of English I'm a life-long video gamer and the designer of multiple board games with strong story-elements, including *Trollhalla*, *The Road To Canterbury*, and *Fantastiga*.

I see this class as an exciting opportunity to discover what video games have to offer us as games, stories, and more. I hope you will join me on this digital adventure.

Thanks!

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