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<center>The Rebirth of Interactive Fiction</center>

To consumers, book publishers, and video game publishers, books and video games

exist in two completely separate and distinct realms. A book provides a literary experience—a

narrative with twist and turns, complicated characters, and lessons learned—while a game is

just a game—shallow, ephemeral, rule-based, and mindless entertainment. While arguably true

in the past, interactive fiction blurs the line between our definitions of what we consider a "book"

or a "game." *Time* magazine named interactive fiction game *80 Days* its Game of the Year in

2014, while at the same time, London's *The Telegraph* newspaper named it one of the best

novels of the year. Interactive fiction as a genre is gaining steam again, and book publishers,

who are already involved in gaming through strategy guides and game tie-ins, should capitalize

on this new medium that appeals to both audiences.

What is *80 Days*? It's a now ubiquitous work of interactive fiction that's heralded as a

leading example of the genre and of the branching narrative. Its storytelling is designed to allow

players to make choices that impact the plot. In a 2014 article about the top developers and

games of the year, gaming Web site *Gamasutra* said *80 Days* is, "Comprised of more than half

a million words, stylish, touchable images, and a sprinkling of board game-style mechanics and

events, it brings the classic adventure story *Around the World in 80 Days* to vivid life under

players' fingers—without sacrificing sophistication and depth for accessibility" (*Gamasutra*). Why

and how did *80 Days* reach such critical acclaim and why is it significant that it won a book and

game award?

Important to this discussion is the idea of disruption. As explained in an article from the

Harvard Business Review, "Disruptors adopt a new technology and target a market segment

that doesn't matter to incumbents, then ride improvements in the technology to expand into established players' core customer base" (Sull). Works of interactive fiction disrupt books by taking literary elements, specifically from literary fiction, and incorporating them into a gaming interface and structure. In a similar fashion, interactive fiction disrupts gaming by introducing a different form of reading and experience to gamers, which subverts their archetypal expectations of gaming. It is in this way that interactive fiction is changing perceptions of what defines a "book" or a "game" and our expectations of both. This hybrid medium merges the differing aspects of player/reader empathy and traditional methods of reading and expectations of gaming with interactivity, player choice, and branching narratives. Gamers get a game with literary content, while readers get a book with game-like interactivity. To understand this revitalized medium, however, it's first necessary to break down each individual component. Interactive fiction attracts both readers and gamers by appealing to each of their respective desired elements.

The reading of a book and the experience of a video game require different cognitive processes—deep attention and hyper attention. In a scene familiar to readers, literature professor Hayles, of Duke University, described deep attention as "the cognitive style traditionally associated with the humanities, [and] is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods, ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times" (Hayles 187). Deep attention is what allows readers to become "lost" in their books and allows for hours-long reading sessions. On the other end of the spectrum is hyper attention, which Hayles defined as "switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom" (Hayles 187). This type of attention lends itself to video games as gamers are frequently presented with multiple types of stimuli simultaneously. If consumers, book publishers, and video game publishers all view books and

games as different, and even our brains use different processes to interact with each, how is it possible that interactive fiction can satisfy either party?

In *The Language of Gaming,* Ensslin explored what she called "literary games," "which are primarily played, but they also feature some distinctive poetic, dramatic and/or narrative-diegetic elements, which require players to combine the psychological modes of gaming and close-reading, thus demanding deep rather than hyper attention" (153). As previously defined, this means that players of literary games are using deep attention to interact with the game, instead of the hyper attention required of most video games. Literary games are therefore a successful combination of book and game, which require deep attention and interactivity to experience. To further understand this concept, we must come to an understanding as to what we mean by "literary."

Literary fiction as a genre is difficult to define. Author Joyce Saricks, in *Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*, said of the genre, "Literary Fiction presents a world in which there are no easy choices and no clear-cut good and evil. The story line almost always takes the reader beyond the basic plot into the world of larger issues and broader implications" (181). This is especially pertinent to interactive fiction because interactivity and choice are the source of momentum in such works. Literary fiction is generally more complex or experimental in structure, all the characters are multi-dimensional, and the story lines are thought-provoking with slower pacing and a darker tone (Saricks 178–182). These attributes are carried over into interactive fiction where they combine with interactivity, player choice, and branching storylines to create a familiar, but new, literary and reading experience.

Interactive fiction is equally difficult to define, but combines attributes of both mediums, which creates a product that can't exist without such a combination. The most important ingredient in any written work is the narrative; the combination of characters, story, and events that propels the protagonist. The authors of *Understanding Video Games* use the following

concise definition: "Narrative can be defined as a succession of events. Its basic components are: the chronological order of the events themselves (story), their verbal or visual representation (text), and the act of telling or writing (narration)" (172). Much like any novel, the success of a work of interactive fiction rests on the strength of its narrative; it gives the reader and gamer their reason to experience the work. No amount of interaction can offset the lack of a compelling narrative. This interaction can include interacting with the game's environments or a branching narrative, but it also frequently includes both.

Video games, much like all games, are restricted by specific rules that dictate the structure of and the action in the game. A game is not a game without some form and degree of interactivity. Interactive fiction creator Aaron Reed said that, "Games present challenges that must be overcome using the rules of the game: the challenge should be difficult but possible to achieve for at least one player. The challenge often represents some real-world difficulty, providing a way for players to rehearse the act of problem solving in a safe and consequence-free environment" (12). As part game, works of interactive fiction utilize a user interface that players use to interact with the world, characters, and environments presented in the story. Players use their own logic, through the interface and in accordance with the game's rules, to solve puzzles presented to them, which in turn advances the story.

Interactive fiction undoubtedly must walk the line between challenging and too difficult; however, this potential issue is now routinely addressed with two different kinds of in-game hint systems. Some games tackle this by incorporating their hint systems into dialogue with the game's characters and story. The dialogue is natural and directly relates to the current situation. If done properly, a player's immersion won't be broken and they'll get the assistance they need. These hint systems appear in every genre of game, and they can be based on player requests (speaking to Navi in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*) or by paying in-game currency to specific characters or objects for hints (*Professor Layton* series). Hints can also appear based

on a set amount of time (*Metroid Prime's* map) and once a player has died a set amount of times (in *Tales of the Abyss*, two party characters discuss strategies for beating a boss). In-game hints can also appear outside of the game world—flashing arrows and items, pop-ups to suggest specific moves, and more general hints during loading screens. Some hint systems are even tiered; the *Professor Layton* series allows players to spend in-game currency at multiple levels—more money for better hints. In-game hint systems and in-game tutorials give players plenty of opportunities to get assistance when and if they want it.

The aforementioned explanation is useful in our understanding of interactive fiction because of the inherent nature of video games. One could easily argue that almost any video game could be described as a work of interactive fiction. However, there are several key attributes that set interactive fiction apart from video games as a whole. Firstly, interactive fiction is highly accessible; it is largely (but not exclusively) focused on reading, which means it's accessible to anyone who is literate. Secondly, interactive fiction generally features little to no action. A familiarity with video game mechanics is unnecessary for most works. Lastly, the narrative drives the progression of the game and story, which is based upon the choices of the player. These choices influence the game's progression and the possible outcomes of the game. Player interactivity in the form of choices is central to a work of interactive fiction. This also means that interactive fiction tends to proceed more slowly than most games and is action and reaction based, which means that nothing happens until the player causes it to happen. It's important to note that, according to the writers of *Understanding Video Games*, "the most successful narrative experiences happen in games where our actions have noticeable plot consequences" (183).

Now that we've defined literary fiction and established what interactive fiction is and is not, we can further explore the resurgence of interactive fiction, how it disrupts the industries from which it is born, how it changes how we read, and the conditions that allow it to flourish.

Interactive fiction isn't a new medium. One of the earliest examples of the medium is developer Infocom's *Zork* in 1977. Entirely text-based, *Zork* required players to use a text parser to interact with it. A text parser takes the user's input and strips out unusable parts. For example, if the user wanted to pick up a shiny key, they might type, "Pick up the shiny key." The parser would strip out "the" and "shiny" and recognize that the user wants to take the key. Words with the same meaning are also recognized as the same word, so "pick up", "get", "grab", and "take" would all be recognized as the same word. Verbs such as "take", "leave", "open", and many others were used to discern and interact with the game's story and setting. These early works gave rise to graphical adventures that used a point and click interface and graphics with which the player could interact. *Maniac Mansion, Shadowgate,* and the *King's Quest* series are notable examples of games with a point and click interface.

Technological advances in the 1990s led to a shift from traditional point and click interfaces to active 3D worlds. Many developers who created interactive fiction games either scrapped upcoming projects or completely closed. The more complicated systems and 3D worlds in RPGs and first-person shooters, and the birth of online gaming, dominated the market, and interactive fiction all but vanished.

While advances in technology ultimately pushed gamers away from the antiquated format of interactive fiction in the 90s, new advances in technology in the 2000s and 2010s is reviving the medium. While the tenets of the genre are still intact, notably player choice and interaction, branching storylines, and a strong narrative focus, their development and execution is decidedly different than their predecessors. Developers and consumers are flocking back to interactive fiction because of its ability to meld the style of literary fiction (or literary elements) with player choice. Developers and writers are finding new ways to create and present interactive fiction that wasn't possible at the genre's inception.

The branching storylines of the old interactive fiction games is still present, but writers and developers have found ways to tweak the formula to enhance player choice and storytelling. Games such as *9 Hours, 9 Persons, 9 Doors (999)* and its sequel, *Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward (VLR)*, feature branching paths, but all the paths are entwined. These games take the traditional branching storyline format to the next level. In the traditional format, each story and play through is self-contained. Each story exists in the same world as all the others, but isn't necessarily connected to any other story. In *999* and *VLR*, each branch traveled in the game is part of the larger story. Players are required to follow every path to experience the entire story.

999 and *VLR* are also significant because they demonstrate another common tenet of interactive fiction—the ethical dilemma. The game's story follows Junpei, a college student, who, along with eight other people, is abducted and trapped on a sinking cruise ship not unlike the Titanic. There are nine doors on the ship, each with a number painted on it, and the group of nine has nine hours to escape before the ship sinks—hence the title. Each participant wears a numbered bracelet, numbered one through nine, which is the key to accessing these doors. Their kidnapper, named Zero, informs the group that they are playing the "Nonary Game," and the game has strict rules with dire consequences for breaking those rules. The rules for unlocking the doors are as follows: first, no fewer than three and no more than five people can enter any given room. Second, each group's digital root must equal the number on the door, and participants scan their bracelets on the door's locking mechanism to open the door. A digital root is the addition of each digit in a number until only a single digit remains. For example, $7 + 4 + 3 = 14$ and $1 + 4 = 5$. Those wearing the number 7, 4, and 3 bracelets can only go through the number 5 door. The goal of the game and the story is to escape by locating the number nine door.

The consequence for breaking the rules is explosive—literally. Each participant has a bomb inside of them, and breaking the rules activates the bomb. This fact is made perfectly lucid in the game's opening scenes as a group of the participants open a door, only to have the man with the number nine bracelet rush by right as the door closes. Locked on the other side by himself, the bomb in his gut activates and blows him to pieces. Junpei describes the scene in vivid detail: "What had once been a man's internal organs now looked like so much vomit... As though something had chewed up and spit out the better part of his torso. It was hideous, but worse still, it was cruel. It was hard to believe the thing on the floor had once been human... The black pool of thick blood... The lumps of glistening flesh spread across the floor…" (999).

This event, especially so early in the game, impresses upon the player that their choices have weight. Each choice, particularly which group of people to partner with to enter a given door, can have lethal consequences, and if such consequences occur, it is because the player made a choice that led to such an outcome. While escaping the ship is the primary goal for each participant, it's certainly not the only goal. Why is each person on the ship? What is their relationship to each other? What's the point of the game and who is Zero? These are questions that Junpei and the player will ponder during their journey through the ship. Each room also exists as its own puzzle, which requires players to interact with their surroundings, analyze and collect items, and work with the other captives to find a solution. The idea that one of the captives could be Zero is considered early on as well, which suggests that trusting anyone too much could spell disaster, but the necessity to work with all the captives is forced by the design of the doors. No single person can escape the ship; a minimum of three people with specific numbers are required to open the number nine door. This represents yet another dilemma because the player is forced to trust people who might be untrustworthy, but putting their lives at risk ultimately puts the player's life at risk as well.

999's sequel, *Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward* follows a similar format in that nine people are trapped in a building with nine doors, each of whom wears a numbered bracelet. The victims in this particular game are one again forced to play the "Nonary Game," but with a twist —the goal is to win 9 points, which allows the winner to open the number 9 door and escape. Participants win points by participating in the "Ambidex Game," a real life version of the prisoner's dilemma. *Kotaku* writer Jason Schreier summed up the game's version of the prisoner's dilemma: "If you both ally, you both get two points. If you ally and your partner betrays, you lose two points and they get three. If you betray and your partner allies, you get three points and they lose two. If you both betray, you both get nothing" (Kotaku). Nine points allows escape and zero points means death. Because these outcomes are mathematically determined, players know which choice has the potential to kill another person, which represents an ethical dilemma. It's not uncommon for the player to have to choose between their own life and another's. The prisoner's dilemma itself represents an ethical dilemma—if everyone chose ally, everyone would eventually escape together, but doubt and fear make it impossible to know whether or not everyone would make that choice. That's the heart of the dilemma.

Like *999*, the game is broken up between narrative sections and puzzle sections. Each room again functions as its own puzzle and requires the player to uncover its secrets to escape. Much like before, no one goes it alone as the doors and bracelets (this time color based) dictate who can go to which room. This presents yet another dilemma—if the player chose to betray someone, they might be forced to work with that person in the next round who more than likely would betray them in return. Players are forced to navigate these ethical dilemmas while trying to uncover the identities of each person, the reason for their kidnapping, how each person relates to another, and the ultimate goal of the "Nonary Game," all while trying to survive to escape.

999 and *VLR* are examples of détournement, which author Daphne Dragona described as "using play as a practice to transcend rigid forms and to break constraints is a distinctive feature of today's game-based art. Artists working in the field are playing with the rules, rather than playing by rules; they modify or negate instructions, structures, aesthetics and norms, seeing contemporary game worlds as a reflection of the contemporary digital realm" (*Artists Re:thinking Games* 27). *999* and *VLR* accomplish this because both titles break the rules of the traditional branching path narrative structure and add the emotional punch of multiple ethical dilemmas. The divide between friend and foe is also unclear, which is largely uncommon for video games. This is also true of literary fiction. Rare are the instances in which a player would directly work with their enemy or someone who didn't have their best interests at heart. The player's and the reader's natural inclination would be to trust the other victims, if only because of their shared predicament. These two games aren't the only ones to rebel against tradition and to subvert assumptions about the construction and definitions of games.

999, *VLR*, and other works of interactive fiction play with and modify the archaic frameworks of the original interactive fiction. This evolution has also bled into other mediums where it continues to evolve. The incredible growth and absorption of technology and gaming into our everyday lives has led to new games, genres, and the revitalization of interactive fiction. According to a Pew Research Center study, 68% of American Adults owned a smartphone in 2015. The study also found that "smartphone ownership is nearing the saturation point with some groups: 86% of those ages 18-29 have a smartphone, as do 83% of those ages 30-49 and 87% of those living in households earning $75,000 and up annually" (Anderson). At the same time, the Entertainment Software Association found in its 2015 study that the average game player age is 35, and more than 150 million Americans play video games (ESA).

It's safe to assume that anyone who owns a smartphone, and perhaps even on a larger scale, a cellphone, texts on it. Social media accounts for an incredible proportion, "with the

highest usage observed in those between the ages of 25 and 54" (Chang). The Digital Trends

study also found that Americans spend 4.7 hours a day on their phones. Texting and social

media have become a fundamental part of our lives, which is why a mobile game such as

Lifeline, and it's sequel *Lifeline 2*, is so significant.

Lifeline and *Lifeline 2* are mobile games with traditional branching storylines like we've

previously discussed. However, the hook is that the game is played through notifications; the

same notifications received from social media and texts. "*Lifeline* stories play out in real time. As

Arika travels to complete her quest, notifications deliver new messages throughout your day.

Keep up as they come in, or catch up later when you're free" (*Lifeline 2*). How does *Lifeline*

differ fundamentally from its predecessors? It's execution. The game integrates itself into the life

of the player. Notifications from Arika appear like any other notification a person receives. A text

to Arika is the same as a text to anyone else. This integration deepens the player's connection

to the story by becoming a part of the person's life.

While these two games are technically traditional choose-your-own-adventure games,

the medium of the mobile device changes the ways in which the player interacts with the story.

This is especially true of the way in which the developers handled time. If Taylor tells the player

that it will take about an hour to reach a destination, the player won't receive another notification

until that time passes in real time. Writing of *Lifeline*, author Laura Hudson said, "The game

takes about three days to play if you check in regularly, and what makes it really compelling is

how it combines the familiar back and forth of text messaging with the tense passage of time to

make your relationship with Taylor—and the impact of your choices—feel surprisingly

real" (Hudson*).* This means that players frequently have to wait to see the outcomes of their

choices. They are forced to wrestle with the—potentially catastrophic—choices that they've

made while they wait.

This is similar to the publication of literary fiction novels in the 1800s. Novels such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Dickens' *Bleak House* were both published in serial installments, which forced readers to wait for the next installment to see what happened in the story. It is in this way that games such as *Lifeline* can be seen as a technological evolution of the serialization of long literary fiction novels. While interactive fiction is active and reactive based on the player's choices, *Lifeline* and *Lifeline* 2 adds another layer to that by making it applicable to the game itself. After the player makes a choice, nothing can happen again until events have taken their course and the character texts again.

We consider our phones as extensions of ourselves; they are private and intimate, and for our eyes only. Placing the story in this medium increases the player's intimacy and connection with the game's character, and it forces them to live with the weight of the choices they've made for another person. It is in these ways that *Lifeline* and *Lifeline* 2 act as disruptors, as détournement like *999* and *VLR.* The traditional elements of the genre are there—player choice, ethical dilemmas, a branching storyline that is narrative-driven—but the change in medium changes the player's involvement, experience, and expectations of the story. Action and reaction are not immediate, and as writer Dave Justus said of *Lifeline 2*, "When people are playing it, it's not just about the time that they're interacting with Taylor. The whole goal was to make something that would become a part of people's lives" (Hudson). *Lifeline* and *Lifeline 2* are character-driven; the player is a character just as much as the in-game character. Unlike the untrustworthy settings of *999* and *VLR,* trust between the player and in-game character is a built-in aspect of the experience.

Technology has also influenced interactive fiction in another way. While the advent of 3D worlds initially excluded interactive fiction in favor of action-oriented games, developers have found ways to marry these 3D worlds to the branching storyline format of the old days. In *Heavy Rain*, players control four different characters whose lives are intertwined with a serial killer.

Much like all interactive fiction, the game is about "choices that send ripples through the entire experience, changing what you see and coloring your perception of the characters. On a basic level, you watch the mystery of the Origami Killer unfold. Beyond that, how the plot and characters develop is up to you. Two players could follow unique arcs through the story, see different characters live and die, and come away with an entirely different idea of what happened and why," (Juba). This is to say that, like other examples in the genre, there is no right or wrong way to play the game, and its outcomes are influenced by the player's choices, and how they react to each ethical dilemma. Games such as these have the potential to create a stronger form of empathy by engaging more of our senses at once.

This multi-sensory reading of multimodal components—audio, visual, textual, narrative, and player choice and branching paths—can engender a different form of empathy than the one created solely by text. The outcome of ethical dilemmas is always on the player; the aforementioned examples make that known through multiple senses all at once. For example, the death of a character, perhaps caused by the player, might be described through text, demonstrated through visuals, augmented with audio and sound, and felt through haptic feedback through various input methods. The player can experience a stronger form of empathy because more senses are utilized at once.

While every decision in *Heavy Rain* is not of life and death importance, the player helps define the characters through every choice they do make. Choices such as "allowing the dad to lose a toy sword fight with his son, deciding what the insomniac journalist does at two in the morning, or making the gruff private investigator close his desk drawer without taking a swig of whiskey—these are the incidental events that slowly uncover complex emotions like trust, grief, and love" (Juba). *Heavy Rain* is certainly less textual than the aforementioned examples, but that doesn't make it less literary. Instead of describing environments and "painting the scene," *Heavy Rain* shows it to the player and allows them to decide with what to interact. Games such

as *Heavy Rain* can be seen as a visual and aural evolution of interactive literary fiction. It differs from the other examples because the visuals replace a significant amount of text. It's pace is also faster (but still slower than most games in general) because of this. It's also a more active work than the others.

Developer Quantic Dream's production and Sony's marketing efforts led to the $52.2 million price tag, but the game also made $130.6 million (Conditt). This is an incredible price tag and profit for a work of interactive fiction, especially considering when triple-A developers largely abandoned the genre. It also indicates that the creation of works of interactive fiction are not limited to independent or small development teams. Developers of every shape and size are now taking interest in the genre.

Book publishers have always involved themselves in gaming; the creation of strategy guides dates back to the days of the arcades. An article on *Publisher's Weekly,* published on April 15, 2014, revealed that Scholastic's strategy guides, *Minecraft: Essential Handbook* had sold 400,000 copies in four months. The next entry in the series, *Minecraft: Redstone Handbook*, had sold 300,000 copies since its release in March of that year (Maughan). In addition to this, there are countless fictional tie-ins to popular games, both novelizations and unique stories that take place in the game's universe. Author Oliver Bowden has written seven books based on the *Assassin's Creed* series. Published by Penguin Books since 2010, his books have sold a combined 263,004 copies, according to Nielsen BookScan (Nielsen Bookscan 2015 Report). These are books that are primarily of interest to gamers. Knowledge of the source material is naturally required to enjoy and understand these books. The continued existence and production of these books indicate that gamers also enjoy reading.

The works of interactive fiction we've discussed thus far are limited to the digital realm, however, physical products that mimic the interactivity of games and the literary qualities seen in

those works are now being developed. *Bats of the Republic*, published by Random House, is one such work. According to the book's website, it is an "illuminated novel of adventure, featuring hand-drawn maps and natural history illustrations, subversive pamphlets and science-fictional diagrams, and even a nineteenth-century novel-within-a-novel—an intrigue wrapped in innovative design" (*Bats of the Republic*). These additional components—maps, illustrations, pamphlets, diagrams, and a sealed envelope—all require reader interaction and would not have been out of place in a video game. A complete understanding of the story is impossible without such interaction, which as we've previously discussed is a central component of interactive fiction. Released in October 2015, the book has sold 4,269 copies, not including its e-book version (Nielsen Bookscan 2015 Report).

Another example of this is Aaron Reed's *The Ice-Bound Concordance*, which "is told through a digital app (*The Ice-Bound Concordance*) and a printed book (*The Ice-Bound Compendium*), each dependent on the other to become complete" (*Ice-Bound). Ice-Bound* combines digital and physical storytelling, but *Ice-Bound* holds more firmly to its physicality. Augmented reality is also incorporated into the game play, and the appearance of the book's pages changes through the app based on the player's choices. The story does include a branching narrative, but its writers and creators stated that the game's engine "uses combinatorial narrative, a cutting-edge type of sculptural fiction that promises the reader deep exploration, and a rare level of reactivity to their actions" (*Ice-Bound). Ice-Bound* earned its funding through Kickstarter, and while it's yet to reach the hands of consumers, it's an interesting look at the continuing evolution of interactive fiction.

Books are borrowing from games, games are borrowing from books, and interactive fiction combines it all, but what does that mean for the book publishing industry? Interactive fiction's very nature makes it difficult to categorize and market. While interactive fiction is breaking into the mainstream through the aforementioned examples, it has yet to break the

proverbial glass ceiling. Book publishers could license game engines and interfaces for their own use, and use their authors to create new works of interactive fiction. This is especially true of interactive fiction that already exists. These works could then be marketed to both audiences through the book publisher and the game development team. Just as interactive fiction combines both industries into a cohesive whole, so too could game developers and publishers.

Part of the reason that some readers shy away from video games is inherent to their creation; they have rules, require interaction, and present barriers to the experience. One cannot play a game if they fail to grasp the mechanics. However, interactive fiction has a low barrier to participation. The interfaces commonly used in such works are uncomplicated, and in-game tutorials, hint systems, instruction booklets, and even help menus provide users with more than enough resources to conquer any potential barrier to their participation. Book publishers who are involved in interactive fiction could help nurture their audience and their interest in these works. The reading, narrative, and literary elements enjoyed by readers are in these works; they just don't know it yet and it's doubtful they'd know where to look. Even video game publishers struggle to categorize interactive fiction, and it's not uncommon to find literary games classified as action/adventure, visual novels, or even puzzles. Book publishers could help solidify interactive fiction as its own genre.

Book publishers now frequently snatch up popular authors from forums and communities. Such communities also exist for interactive fiction. A simple Internet search reveals numerous communities dedicated to the creation and development of interactive fiction. There are also multiple free programs available to anyone who wants to try their hand at interactive fiction. Inform 7 (Aaron Reed created several of his works with it), and Twine give users the tools to make their works come to life, much in the same way that publishing Web sites such as Wattpad give authors the tools they need to make their books come to life. While book publishers are busy observing activity on fan sites, in forums and communities, and in self-

publishing, looking for the next big author or book, they should also direct their attention to the rise of interactive fiction. Book publishers could easily snatch up and support interactive fiction creators much in the same way that they currently do with authors on similar sites.

Interactive fiction is also part of the indie gaming scene, which could provide book publishers with another avenue they could use to reach interactive fiction creators. Trade shows such as the Independent Games Festival and IndieCade bring together hundreds of indie game developers each year. Book publishers could support works of interactive fiction that are complete and need a publisher. In terms of distribution, book publishers could work with online distribution platforms such as Steam, PlayStation Network, and others to get their works into the hands of gamers. Distribution to readers is more complicated and would likely require the creation of new distribution platforms to reach such audiences. The next great work of interactive fiction could already exist but languishes in obscurity. Book publishers only need look to find it.

As the now prolific *80 Days* has recently demonstrated, branching narratives, literary writing, and interactivity can combine into a work that transcends the expectations and limits or each respective medium, market, and industry. Literary games should be of interest to book publishers; they contain similar content to literary books, require the same type of reading, and have minimal barriers to accessibility. Book publishers already create complementary gaming content, but they've yet to fully jump into interactive fiction. As consumers still work to puzzle out the identity of interactive fiction, book publishers are in a unique position to take charge of this revitalized medium. The best works of literary interactive fiction will come from the successful fusion of not only the elements of books and games, but the fusion of book publishers and game developers.

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