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Gaming the Composition: An ethnographic study on composing ergodic fiction

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Introduction
This ethnographic study of undergraduate writers composing digital and prose fiction expands the author’s practice-based research on digital composition, which found that digital composition has significant effects on writer cognition, approach to story, and narrative elements1,2,3. The aim of the study was to investigate the composition practices of experienced prose fiction writers (undergraduate students on creative writing programmes), and how they are affected by shifting these established practices into new techniques and tools offered by digital media.

Methodology
Data was collected through a 12-week taught undergraduate module. The module met for 3 hour-long sessions per week (lecture, study group, workshop). Topics and readings included narratology (theories, cognition, unnatural), interactivity, and the evolution of narrative and play. Creative readings included Twine games, hypertexts, interactive fiction, and print ergodic texts. Students completed weekly activities based on critical discussion questions and writing exercises, and recorded them in research logs. The three assessments consisted of a 2000-word digital fiction, a 2000-word prose adaptation of the digital fiction, and a 1500-word word prose adaptation of the digital fiction. Students completed weekly assessments including Twine in some preparatory activities based on pre-storygame methods, though 26.7% reported using Twine in some preparatory

Results
13 student-participants between the ages of 18-24 completed all assigned work, logs, and questionnaires.

Initial Survey indicates participants primarily read on their computers or mobile devices, and primarily read and write speculative fiction genres: fantasy, science fiction, fairy tale. 85% identify as gamers at intermediate or advanced level.

Writing Tools:
- 55% use a combination of pen/paper and word processor
- 45% use word processors alone
- For their storygames, most used Twine in combination with another tool: 47% with pen & paper, 41% with a word processor
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Participants completed four (4) questionnaires on their reading & writing habits:
- Initial Survey, Week 1
- Post-Storygame Survey, Week 6
- Post-Adaptation Survey, Week 9
- Final Survey, Week 12

This paper focuses on the results from the participant questionnaires; further analysis of the remaining documentation will be forthcoming.

Writing Strategies:
Participants named characters (90%), storyworld (80%), narrative (80%), and creative expression (80%) as dominant interests in writing fiction.

Most prominent elements to transfer from storygame to prose were unnatural narration (26.7%) and multiple storylines (26.7%).

Participants were more mostly concerned with adapting character (60%) and storyworld (60%) to maintain the elements of play (6.7%) from their digital fictions.

Literature cited
4. R. Lyle Skains, Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin (under review).

Further information
The “Reading Digital Fiction” project can be found online at https://readingdigitalfiction.com/
Contact the author at ly.skains@bangor.ac.uk and @skains. Website: http://lyskains.com/

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