



Fetch to Final Boss – Classifying Quest Motifs, Functions, and Tale-Types in Western Video Games

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Fetch to Final Boss – Classifying Quest Motifs, Functions, and Tale-Types in Western Video
Games

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for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

Folktales have existed for thousands of years. Video games have existed for a few decades, and yet the video game market makes even more money than the century-old worldwide film industry. Despite the existence of a passionate community that encompasses investors, developers, reviewers, consumers, academics, and enthusiasts, systems of archiving and classification for games remain piecemeal and inconsistent. A perplexing challenge for developers and researchers alike, the need for quantifiable organization of video games and the components required to make them grows dramatically alongside the number of new titles released year over year.

For developers, the scope of contemporary games has expanded to the point where players reasonably expect one hundred-plus hours of original gameplay, a task that often requires years of work and tens of millions of dollars. For researchers, the abundance of games, coupled with the rapid advancement of technology, means that titles can be forgotten—or even rendered unplayable—a mere decade after release.

The rise in popularity of the role-playing game, or RPG, as a genre in the video game industry came with standards for gameplay, character development, and narrative elements tied to quests. These objective-based adventures appear to share similarities with elements found in traditional folktales, with recurrent themes and motifs, not unlike those recorded in the seminal Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index.

Originally developed a century ago, the Index identifies prominent narrative elements from folktales, and tracks variants of them over time and across cultures. This

allows folklorists, anthropologists, historians, and other researchers to follow the emergence and adaptation of collective narrative elements throughout differing cultures and geographical regions. Due to similarities in structure, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that a method of classification influenced by the Index might be created to track repeated and iterative elements found in quests in RPGs.

However, unlike folktales, many game quests, especially those developed in the West, offer variance to the player in the form of differing gameplay mechanics, character appeasement, and overall outcomes. This element of variability adds an additional dimension to any attempt at categorization, and in order to provide a comprehensive system, these unique needs of developers and researchers must be considered.

Therefore, a proof-of-concept “RPG Index,” drawing inspiration from both the ATU Index and the surveyed requirements of contemporary developers tests the hypothesis that there are sufficient similarities between folktales and video game quests to allow for effective categorization.



Azura. Christian O'Brien, 2021.

Author's Biographical Sketch

Maria O'Brien has worked in the video game industry for fifteen years. She resides on the East Coast with her husband and their dogs.

Dedication

For my mother, Mary Bevilacqua O'Brien, who introduced my brother and me to folktales from around the world, and for my husband, Sean Baptiste, who adventures beside me through fascinating video game universes and our not-so-ordinary everyday life. The two of you showed me how boundless and beautiful this lived and contemplated world can be. Thank you both for all of your material, intellectual, and emotional support.

Acknowledgments

Like playing video games, this research would not have been possible if not for a series of choices and events that allowed me to meet and consult with extraordinary people.

Much gratitude goes to Drs. Donald Ostrowski and Richard Martin, who as Research Advisors remained patient and positive in light of my many questions. Thanks also goes to Dr. Doug Bond, who kindly helped with matters of research and bureaucracy. Chuck Houston and Lacey Klingensmith were equally patient and knowledgeable in all things related to academics, the graduate program, and the thesis, as was the unflappable Gail Dourian. Appreciation also goes to Trudi Pires, who helped to clarify the complex formatting challenges for the paper.

Further gratitude goes to Dr. Clara Fernández-Vara and Matthew Weise, who patiently listened to my overarching ideas and recommended excellent resources for this research.

Thanks also to Gregory Adams, for his comprehensive knowledge concerning tabletop RPGs' history, questing, and world-building.

The inimitable Ed Greenwood kindly consented to an interview for this research, for which I remain both extremely grateful and slightly intimidated.

Much appreciation also goes to Christian O'Brien, for the frontispiece depicting *The Elder Scrolls'* Azura. Rarely does a fictional deity look so *cool*.

Thanks also to Mary Bevilacqua O'Brien, Sean Baptiste, Louise Bevilacqua, and Antoinette "Nina" Bevilacqua, who each in your own ways supported me and kept the bar high.

Finally, my profound and extensive gratitude goes to Dr. Maria Tatar, whose knowledge, wisdom, and counsel as Thesis Director expanded my understanding of folklore in ways I only heretofore dreamed. Thank you for investing these ancient tales we discussed with meaning, vibrancy, and life—and making it possible for me to see the same in the "modern" adventures I researched.

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Author's Notes

For better clarity and comprehension, any citations from the ATU and the Thompson Motif Indexes in the body of text have been placed in brackets and italicized. For continuity, this style of citation continues in the RPG Quest Index found in the Appendices.

Video games in this thesis are cited foremost (and usually solely) with the developer company title, then (if relevant) with the publisher company title. This is due to the primary focus on the history of the practical development of these games, and endeavors to acknowledge the numerous individuals who contributed to their material creation and implementation.

Because, over time, many of these video games are released on multiple systems, platform specifics are de-emphasized or not included (due to version release differences/alterations).

To that end, most of the titles cited are presented with their initial publication year. Re-releases, Game of the Year editions, Director's Cuts, Bonus editions, Collector's editions, and Special editions are neither mentioned nor cited.

All quests cited in the text can be found in their actual games (either via gameplay or code review). For clarity and ease of reference, most named quests are cited with online wiki pages where the quest in its entirety has been archived via crowdsourcing. Like all wikis, this content is subject to change, and may be occasionally incomplete or inaccurate. As always, the default resource is the video game mentioned.

Chapter I

Once Upon a Time (Background of the Problem)

“Thus we see that the problem of classification of the tale finds itself in a somewhat sorry state. Yet classification is one of the first and most important steps of study. We need merely recall what a great significance Linnaeus’ first scientific classification had for botany. Our studies are still in their “pre-Linnaen” [sic] stage.”¹

-Vladimir Propp

“Technologies are invented to make our lives easier - not our choices.”²

-Deus Ex: Human Revolution

This is a tale of two types of media. The first are folktales, older by millennia. The second, video games, have existed for only a few decades. Folktales, a collaborative creative effort that iterates over time to reflect differing mores in various locales, can be found in every culture. Video games, a collaborative creative effort that iterates over a compressed time period reflecting contemporary attitudes to problem-solving, also now extend to every technologically-connected culture. Where once people gathered to share folktales around a fire, today, in developed worlds, one is more likely to hear of the latest

¹ Vladimir Propp, Laurence Scott, and Louis A. Wagner, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968) 11.

² Jean-François Dugas, François Lapikas, Antoine Thisdale, and Pierre-François Lafleur, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (Montreal: Eidos-Montréal, 2011).

adventures involving *Fortnite* or *Madden*. Indeed, video games are now financially outpacing the modern form of tale-telling, the movie industry, by billions of dollars.³

Both folktales and video games provide extensive benefits to individuals and communities, via exploring, challenging, and reinforcing cultural values. For folktales, this influence was underscored with the studies of Antti Aarne, in his initial classification system, published in 1910.⁴ Edited and expanded by Stith Thompson, the now-seminal Aarne-Thompson classification system was updated in 1928⁵ and again in 1961.⁶

With the new millennium came further revisions by folklorist Hans-Jörg Uther, and in 2004 the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) system was published, expanding on both the types of narratives considered folktales and the geographic regions where they were found.⁷ In considering the evolutionary nature of folktales, the ATU could now track how certain motifs or plot elements were shared or altered as these tales spread. Not unlike the economic and cultural effects tracked via migratory trade routes such as the

³ Samuel Stewart, “Video game industry silently taking over entertainment world,” Ejinsight.com, October 22, 2019, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.ejinsight.com/eji/article/id/2280405/20191022-video-game-industry-silently-taking-over-entertainment-world>.

⁴ Antti Aarne, *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen (3)*, (Helsinki: FF Communications, 1910).

⁵ Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folk-Tale: A Classification and Bibliography. Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*, (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1928).

⁶ Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography. Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1961).

⁷ Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004).

Silk Road, the variance in “standard” tales reflected the adoption and adjustment of narratives to suit local culture. For example, “Cinderella” [ATU 510A] has different names, tasks, nights spent dancing, and type of shoe, among other elements, based on when and from which culture the tale is told. Motifs from other tales are present in one or more variants, but the essentials of the plot remain consistent: a young girl is condemned to servitude, rescued via supernatural gifts, and through the loss of an item (usually a shoe) is reunited with a true love initially ignorant of her identity. This is the story identifiable to most cultures that share in the essential “Cinderella.”

Blueprints are not the Building

The advent of Uther’s contribution to Aarne and Thompson’s work presents an opportunity to reevaluate the anthropological approach for curating and analyzing folktales. Alan Dundes’s “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique” already indicated valid issues in 1997,⁸ seven years before Uther’s significant re-categorizations. He leads with two of the most discussed—that of accurately isolating and identifying distinct motifs across several tales, and of the focus on Eurocentric traditions.⁹ Uther attempts to improve both issues, but places particular importance on expanding the geographical parameters of the Indexes. He also reconsiders the classification of tale-types specifically regarding gender, adds written sources alongside oral traditions, and

⁸ Alan Dundes, “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique” *Journal of Folklore Research* 34, no. 3 (1997): 195–202.

⁹ Dundes, “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique” 196.

gives attention to what he terms “smaller narrative forms” that do not really fit with “traditional genres.”¹⁰

Coupled with Propp’s Formalist approach (placing emphasis on action over motif), it is understandable that a researcher of folklore might agree with Uther’s primary criticism (which I term simply as an acknowledgement), that “Classifying narrative implies a scientific exactness that does not in fact exist, and that works as an “ideal type” only for certain texts in a limited region.”¹¹ Ascribing definitive terms to folktales, which by their very distribution methods guarantee evolution and variance, is perhaps a fool’s quest. That said, Dundes, Uther, and Propp all agree that attempting a system of categorization is essential; collating tales and identifying the elements that comprise them builds a framework that generations of researchers can consult, expand, and refine.

Tracking Tales Through Time (and Space, and Media)

Unlike stories attributable to a single author, folktales depend on communal, generational accounts to perpetuate themselves. Essentially, folktales require *folk* to relate them, or their power is lost. As such, they reflect collective joys, fears, and challenges important to the peoples telling them. In recent decades, the researcher Joseph Campbell proposed the concept of a “monomyth,”¹² a gestational tale of humanity’s overriding and

¹⁰ Hans-Jörg Uther, “The Third Revision of the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index (FFC 184): Classifying Folktales,” *Folklorefellows.fi*, July 6, 2009, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.folklorefellows.fi/the-third-revision-of-the-aarne-thompson-tale-type-index-ffc-184/>.

¹¹ Uther, *Ibid.*

¹² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato: New World Library, 2008) 343.

universal condition, that was told and re-told in various forms throughout the world.¹³

Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* postulated that there were strong similarities in what he termed "the hero's journey" concerning psychological cycles that could be found in myths and folktales spanning centuries.¹⁴ While possibly a reductive argument, Campbell's analysis of a universal hero is essential when considering the concept of a video game player, and the avatar they choose to insert in a virtual world.

It is participating in an *action* (or series of actions) that creates meaningful understanding for a player, just as interpretation matters to readers of folklore. And, as Vladimir Propp attests in *Morphology of the Folktale*, the placement of those actions (Propp terms them "functions") within the narrative is as important as the actions themselves.¹⁵ Propp states: "Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action."¹⁶

Indeed, after analyzing one hundred fairy tales, accounting for plot events and accepted motifs, Propp asserted that within the fairy tale subgenre, the placement of actions was ubiquitous enough that one could state that overall, the structure of one tale to the next was nearly identical. He describes the discovery:

What conclusions does this scheme present? In the first place, it affirms our general thesis regarding the total uniformity in the construction of fairy tales.

This most important general conclusion at first does not coincide with our conception of the richness and variety of tales. [. . .] Yet one still

¹³ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 17-18.

¹⁴ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23-28.

¹⁵ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 21.

¹⁶ Propp, *Ibid.*

feels inclined to pose this question: if all fairy tales are so similar in form, does this not mean that they all originate from a single source?¹⁷

If Propp was correct, does that imply that fairy tales themselves are identical in structure? Is “Rumpelstiltskin” the same as “Snow White”? Is Campbell’s (somewhat contested) assertion of a monomyth valid? If parallels are drawn, does that mean that in video game quests, Commander Shepard from *Mass Effect*¹⁸ faces the same challenges as the Hero of Kvatch from *Oblivion*?¹⁹ To quote George R.R. Martin, “Well... yes. And no. And yes. And no. And yes. And no. And yes.”²⁰ Martin was speaking of similarities between the finale of the *Game of Thrones* television show and the (still unpublished) end to his *Song of Ice and Fire* novel series. He went on to state that:

I am working in a very different medium than David and Dan, never forget. They had six hours for this final season. I expect these last two books of mine will fill 3000 manuscript pages between them before I’m done... and if more pages and chapters and scenes are needed, I’ll add them.²¹

Despite discussing television and novels, not folktales and video games, Martin’s quote is relevant to the issue at hand—that like or identical topics are necessarily treated differently when experienced through different frames or media. The underlying

¹⁷ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 105-106.

¹⁸ Preston Watamaniuk, Drew Karpshyn, and Casey Hudson, *Mass Effect* (Edmonton: BioWare, 2007).

¹⁹ Ken Rolston, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (Rockville: Bethesda Game Studios, 2006).

²⁰ George R. R. Martin, “An Ending,” Notablog.com, May 20, 2019, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2019/05/20/an-ending/>.

²¹ Martin, *Ibid.*

similarities in structure between various folktales does not diminish their significance. In fact, the repetition in plot or pacing can often fade into the background, allowing the listener to focus on the context. To that end, while fighting the final bosses in *Mass Effect* and *Oblivion* may look similar from a tactical perspective, the extremes in location, cosmology, and weaponry serve to anchor each battle within their unique worlds. As a result, the larger issues of triumph and heroism within both *Mass Effect's* Citadel and *Oblivion's* Cyrodiil are emphasized, and victory, bittersweet in both games, comes at two very different costs.

Both Campbell and Propp address the presence of similar actions with meaningfully divergent contexts—Campbell through arcane mythology, and Propp through more provincial fairy tales. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell describes the different challenges various protagonists undertake:

Prometheus ascended to the heavens, stole fire from the gods, and descended. Jason sailed through the Clashing Rocks into a sea of marvels, circumnavigated the dragon that guarded the Golden Fleece, and returned with the fleece and the power to wrest his rightful throne from a usurper. Aeneas went down into the underworld, crossed the dreadful river of the dead, threw a sop to the three-headed watchdog Cerberus, and conversed, at last, with the shade of his dead father. All things were unfolded to him...²²

As different as these adventures are, Campbell notes that these acts (undertaking great tasks) are structurally consistent with an overall mythical narrative, however unique their individual cultural hallmarks may be.²³

²² Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23.

²³ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 30.

In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp addresses these similarities in another, equally influential manner—where functions (character actions) hold “double morphological meanings” as established by the narrative. Here, context holds meaning beyond an initial interpretation, as he describes two cases: one where a hero must select an ideal horse offered by a witch, the other where a hero must identify the actual daughter of a water sprite, hidden among eleven other matching young women. Propp notes that the function (choose a “treasure” offered by a magical individual) has two different morphological meanings. The offer of the horse is a “test” of the first hero’s skills, while the command to find the second hero’s true mate is not so much a test (in terms of classification) but a “difficult task,”²⁴ one that significantly alters the hero’s circumstances. He summarizes the concept by stating,

We consequently see that the means by which functions are fulfilled influence one another, and that identical forms adapt themselves to different functions. A certain form is transferred to a different position, acquiring a new meaning, or simultaneously retaining an old one. All of these phenomena complicate the analysis and require special attention when being compared to one another.²⁵

While Campbell is concerned with humanity’s transcendence through the use of active trials (and proportionate rewards) found throughout heroic myths, Propp is careful to note that the challenges in fairy tales, though prosaic, are still usually touched with magic, and that the end result for these folk heroes is still transformative.

This presents an interesting paradox: many RPG quests—while similar in structure to Propp’s fairy tale-inspired functions—offer narratives that more closely

²⁴ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 66-67. (Propp stresses that these variances in determining the category of a function are, crucially, “*according to its consequences.*”)

²⁵ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 70.

resemble the heroic adventures of myth. While not considered a true RPG, Sony’s *God of War* series literally features Greek and Norse gods as antagonists to the player character Kratos, a fictionalized sire of Zeus. This antihero’s quests could be considered classically epic, as he deals with Olympians²⁶ and Valhallans²⁷ throughout the series. Indeed, especially in fantasy-based RPGs, it is common to have a game universe with an interactive cosmology, where deities for whatever reason are compelled to communicate with the player character—whether they are true “heroes” or not.²⁸

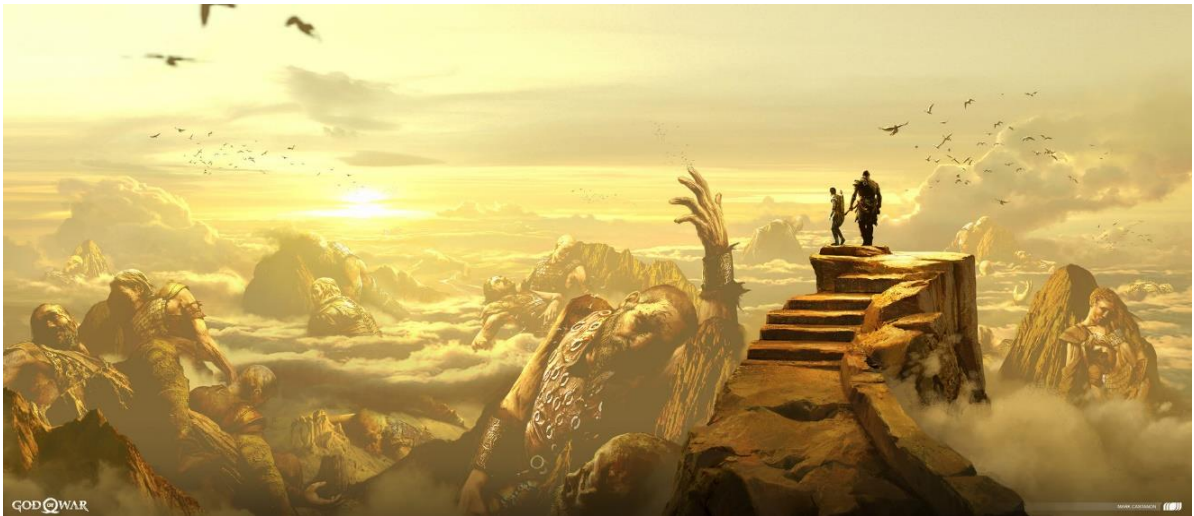


FIGURE 1.1. *GoW Concept Art*. Kratos and his son contemplate their world in concept art for the 2018 version of *God of War*.

²⁶ David Jaffe, *God of War* (Santa Monica: Sony Santa Monica Studio, 2005).

²⁷ Cory Barlog, *God of War* (Santa Monica: Sony Santa Monica Studio, 2018).

²⁸ Examples include the previously-mentioned *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and (somewhat ominously for its science fiction setting) *Mass Effect*, among others.

Campbell's view of myth depicts a foreordained path, a destiny that can be "refused" (read: suspended) but never truly avoided. Salvation for tasks accomplished is portrayed as essential, both within the myths themselves and in the reader's own identification with them. The sacred world of "myth" becomes a place of some tension, where Campbell acknowledges heroic figures as both examples and symbols. He stresses to the listener/reader the importance of reflection (of heroic acts) over imitation (of same), stating, "the lesson being, not "Do thus and be good," but "Know this and be God."²⁹

Propp's work focuses heavily on lessons that instruct "Do thus and be good," as he acknowledges that many fairy tales, especially pastoral ones, were intended as cautionary tales, where "interdictions" are ignored or violated.³⁰ This emphasis on knowledge of a secular world, with its environmental dangers and social mores, implies that the structure of the fairy (or folk) tale can be less lyrical and shorter than epic myths. In many cases, these tales stress obedience within the first or second function (action), only to have the protagonist deliberately ignore that command, and thus embark on the adventure. From this perspective, "destiny" as Campbell presents it, has less importance in the folktale's more-prosaic world.

As we will see later, players of RPGs experience adventures on both epic and pastoral levels, usually in the same game. Tropes such as "chosen ones," "touched by destiny," and "honor-bound to save the world" are hallmarks of main questlines, and the

²⁹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 275.

³⁰ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 26-28.

events that contribute to the game’s completion can feel literally legendary. However, faction quests, side quests, and minimal chores known as “tasks” are also normally implemented for multiple reasons—two of which are supporting the game mechanics (that is, giving the player more opportunities to “level up” their character via encounters, skills, and items) and expanding the in-game universe (adding character development and lore to increase immersion in a fictional environment). These quests, usually shorter, often provide the player with an embedded perspective of the game world’s society. In that manner, they provide an adventurous “window on a similar-but-different world,” much like the relating of folktales.

Both Propp and Campbell seem aware that it is scope, and not merely taxonomy, that makes analysis of actions in folktales challenging. Campbell describes the differences:

Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph. [...] Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained.³¹

It seems that these “similar differences” establish frameworks that allow folktales (and myths) to be readily heard—if not fully comprehended—by those outside of the culture to which the tales belong. If telling and retelling stories results in variances unique to specific peoples, what does that signify for researchers?

³¹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 30.

The Jungian scholar Marie-Louise von Franz gave a series of lectures that was later released in print as *Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales*.³² Crucial to her argument was the theory that fairy tales could not be fully understood unless assessed through retellings from more than one culture. Her analysis of “The Princess with the Twelve Pairs of Golden Shoes,” while focusing on a Jungian concept of self-reflection, is remarkable, in that she cannily assembles from both German and Danish sources a retelling of the tale that is far more insightful than any singular culture’s presentation could offer.³³ Franz addresses regional differences in the tale such as a single princess versus twelve, the age of the hero,³⁴ and other elements, notably her description of some enchanted forests:

One motif we find in the Danish story, which I think is essential here, has really given me the clue about what I never understood very well in the German version: here the silver, golden and diamond [sic] forests are cursed kingdoms which are turned back into human kingdoms with a drop of the troll’s blood. That motif is completely missing in the German version. It is very advisable, therefore, to persist whenever you meet a fairy tale with motifs you can’t figure out. You should ask yourself, “Now how does that fit in?” and if you get into difficulties, it is very important to look up parallels, because sometimes in the parallel it becomes clear. Then you will also understand the more complicated version.

This is important advice: whenever you get stuck, don’t only look up amplifications of the motifs, but also look up parallel stories, because when you do this you may discover not only amplifications of single motifs, but also amplifications of a sequence of motifs. Parallel stories very often provide a clue you would not be able to find any other way.

³² Marie-Louise von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1997).

³³ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales*, 12.

³⁴ Franz, *Ibid.*

With the German version of this story I was mystified until I discovered the Danish one.³⁵

Franz emphasizes both pattern-matching and distinguishing differing elements as essential to understanding fairy tales from a cultural and psychological perspective. Once again, as with Campbell and Propp, the context in which a tale is situated provides far more meaning than the tale alone.

A New Challenger Appears (or, A Short History of RPGs and Quests)

How, then, does all this similarity and variance relate to game quests?

Consider the most basic version: the “Fetch” quest can be found in almost every tabletop and video game RPG. The hero (or party of heroes) is tasked by a quest giver to go to another location, obtain an item, and deliver it, either to the quest giver or another NPC, usually for a reward. Despite its simplicity, the “Fetch” is a quest that appears in multiple games, in multiple contexts, allowing for extremes in scope, time period, location, and importance, simply by changing the item required, the character of the recipient, or the location of both. There are multiple “Fetch” quests in a Campbell favorite, *Star Wars*, many pivotal to the main plot. Jeff Howard notes that “While the term fetch quest is often used critically by gamers because this device sometimes seems clichéd, the original “quest for the holy grail” is itself a fetch quest.”³⁶ In addition, unlike

³⁵ Franz, *Ibid.*

³⁶ Jeff Howard, *Quests: Design, Theory, and History in Games and Narratives* (Wellesley: A K Peters, 2008), 101.

the mechanically-simpler but strategically-more-complex “Kill/Destroy” quest, the “Fetch” inherently offers the narrative satisfaction of an epilogue (as that which must be fetched, must also be delivered).

A band of rebels must find plans for an apocalyptic weapon, and bring them to analysts to search for structural weaknesses (*Star Wars*). An order of knights searches for a cup that promises salvation for a burgeoning kingdom (*King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*). A young warrior travels to the oldest archives in the land, searching for knowledge that will allow his brethren to defeat their enemies (*A Feast for Crows*). “Go there, get that, return,” is a promising basis for any adventure, however mundane the origins. Even the main plot from J.R.R. Tolkien’s masterpiece, *Lord of the Rings*, could be considered a “reverse fetch” quest (go there, get rid of that, return). (Tolkien’s expansive influence on RPGs will be discussed later.)

This simplest of actions, implemented in countless contexts throughout film, legend, fiction, and other media also integrate seamlessly into game-playing. Like modular construction pieces, numerous actions like “explore,” “rescue,” and “fetch” become frameworks that support game mechanics, plot, and context.

Fetching objects was one of many adventures that Gary Gygax and creative partners like Dave Arneson designed in their work on the seminal tabletop game *Dungeons & Dragons*, a ruleset dictated by skill-based percentages and dice rolls.³⁷ *D&D*, a game that led parties of adventurers through multiple quests in search of treasure, glory, and other honors, was a crucial series that helped to establish the role-playing

³⁷ Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, *Dungeons & Dragons: Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargames* (Lake Geneva: TSR, 1974).

genre. Drawing on fantasy influences and serialized adventures such as *Conan the Barbarian*, Gygax and company established a structure where the outcome of actions was determined by chance after establishing parameters for victory or failure based on talent levels and probabilities.³⁸

To instill context, statistical data needed narratives. *Dungeons & Dragons* (and subsequent editions and supplements) offered bestiaries, plotted locations, and, perhaps most importantly, introduced quests that allowed players to embark on interactive stories. In his youth, Gygax was heavily influenced by the magic and monsters found in folk and fairy tales.³⁹ A cursory view of any of his earliest publications reveals the effect that had on his output. By the 1980s, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, and numerous expansions were bringing in millions of dollars, and were some of the most popular forms of role-playing tabletop games in the country.⁴⁰

It would be only a few years before the rulesets found in *D&D* and *AD&D* migrated to a nascent video game market. The original video game is somewhat contested, but one of the first was 1962's star fighter *Spacewar!* played on the MIT campus and eventually other universities, including the Stanford Institute of

³⁸ David Kushner, "Dungeon Master: The Life and Legacy of Gary Gygax," *Wired.com*, March 10, 2008, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200918123632/https://www.wired.com/2008/03/dungeon-master-life-legacy-gary-gygax/?currentPage=all>.

³⁹ Michael Witwer, *Empire of Imagination: Gary Gygax and the Birth of Dungeons & Dragons* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2016), 15.

⁴⁰ Witwer, *Empire of Imagination: Gary Gygax and the Birth of Dungeons & Dragons*, 165.

Technology.⁴¹ Certainly, early programmers were intrigued by the computational abilities when applied to gameplay, even utilizing algorithms to render accurate astronomical skies.⁴²



FIGURE 1.2. *Spacewar!*. MIT's *Spacewar!* rendered on an early monitor.

⁴¹ Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* (Sebastopol: O'Reilly, 2010), 42-46.

⁴² Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, 43.

At least a couple of early computer role-playing games (CRPGs) emerged in late 1975 through 1976, one year after 1974's published release of *Dungeons & Dragons*.⁴³ There is some scattered evidence of CRPGs in development before that, as Matt Barton and Shane Stacks note in *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing:*

Indeed, at least a few websites claim that one or another CRPG was created before Gygax and Arneson published *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974! Such a feat seems unlikely at best, though not impossible—after all, Gygax and Arneson had been developing and play-testing the system before 1974, and it's possible that word leaked out to programmers.⁴⁴

Earliest identifiable CRPGs, such as *pedit5*, *Dungeon*, and *dnd*, all utilized the leveling system based on experience points gained for encounters, but *dnd* was notable for its plot: “enter the Whisenwood Dungeon, kill a dragon, and retrieve his orb.”⁴⁵ Though history at this time is incomplete, here is evidence that at least one of the very first plotted quests in a CRPG is a basic fetch (coupled with exploration and kill/destroy objectives). It could even be argued that defeating the dragon also signifies a “Fetch and Final Boss” quest—if one considers the Whisenwood expedition to be *the* main quest in early versions of the game.

⁴³ Matt Barton and Shane Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2019) 43-44.

⁴⁴ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 43.

⁴⁵ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 44. (Barton and Stacks go on to clarify that there were two separate games in development around this time period, represented as “*dnd*” and “*DND*,” but that the Gary Whisenhunt and Ray Wood-designed *dnd* is notable for utilizing leveling, experience points, and the nascent quest/plot in the form of the Whisenwood expedition.)

The evolution of gaming from tabletop to computers in some ways parallels the early years of theatrical adaptations for cinema. As successful plays, works from authors like Eugene O'Neill, Clare Booth Luce, George S. Kaufman, and Moss Hart transferred elegantly from the stage to film. Movies such as *The Women* and *You Can't Take It with You* remained more-or-less faithful to the theatrical staging, keeping locations intimate and plausible. There was an emphasis on snappy, rapid-fire dialogue that theatergoers expected from well-rehearsed, acclaimed dramas. The structure of live performance shown on screen portrayed an adherence to the "rules" of theater, rather than utilizing the cinematic stunt work and special effects that were hallmarks of more grandiose literary adaptations such as *Ben Hur*.

In a similar way, the early years of CRPGs drew heavily on both the traditional rulesets of pen-and paper RPGs, and the genres and tropes favored by those players. In addition, like the development of *Spacewar!*, many of them were passion projects or were designed by hobbyists. An interesting branch of the RPG style that made good use of connected computers in the 1970s and 1980s was the popular MUD, also known as a multi-user dungeon/dimension/domain. These (often text-based) environments, centered around the familiar rulesets found in RPGs, utilized the emergent interconnectivity of computers, and allowed people to communally engage in quests and adventures that players could set for themselves. Barton and Stacks note that:

What's interesting about the history of MUDs is how they slowly evolve (or, as some might say, "devolve") from gaming to socializing. Even in MUDs that place more priority on combat and leveling up, there is still a strong emphasis on conversing with other players: indeed, MUD weddings

are commonplace, and many people have found their real-life spouses on MUDs.⁴⁶

This popularity is notable, as it shows users were quick to exploit technology in order to provide a truly virtual experience that replicated the immediacy of playing in person at a tabletop RPG with others. In addition, the communal manner in which people online created their own quests and adventures appears to echo the older traditions concerning the performative aspects of relating folktales to a native audience.

⁴⁶ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 58.

```

A little girl stands here happily amusing herself.
Eric is standing here with a big smile on his face.

189H 27U 76811X 0C Exits:EW> #TICK
sca
Looking north:
You see nothing special.
Looking east:
You see nothing special.
A brown lemming runs along the forest floor playfully.
A jackrabbit jumps around the forest happily.
Looking south:
You see nothing special.
Looking west:
You see nothing special.
The door is open.
Looking up:
You see nothing special.
Looking down:
You see nothing special.

189H 27U 76811X 0C Exits:EW> look eric
Eric is very happy after the return of his daughter. Looking at him you
notice his noble clothes and he appears to be in very good physical
condition.
Eric is in an excellent condition.

189H 27U 76811X 0C Exits:EW> look girl
The little girl is wearing a pair of red shorts and a bright yellow shirt.
Her clothes are completely drenched. She is amusing herself with a childish
game.
A little girl is in an excellent condition.

189H 27U 76811X 0C Exits:EW> listen eric
You pause and listen to what he is saying.

189H 27U 76811X 0C Exits:EW>
A jackrabbit arrives from the east.

189H 27U 76811X 0C Exits:EW>

```

FIGURE 1.3. *A MUD Excerpt*. An example of a MUD text screen.

As time passed, developers released titles that demonstrated an increasing understanding of the new medium, and a refinement of rulesets and quests that made the most of advancements in computational power. While this paper is not intended to be a full history of the origins of the CRPG (which could be a thesis on its own), a very brief mention of prominent early developers and titles is required. (Without wanting to rely too exclusively on a single resource, Barton and Stack's second edition of *Dungeons &*

Desktops is one of the most robust histories of an under-researched topic, and so this short timeline draws heavily from their work.)

Perhaps the best emissary for explaining the purpose of this thesis is Automated Simulations' (later Epyx's) *Dunjonquest: Temple of Apshai*.⁴⁷ As quoted in *Dungeons & Desktops*, Apshai heralded the (perhaps inevitable) rise in popularity and evolution of the role-playing genre. Excerpted from the game's instruction manual, Barton and Stacks quote the following:⁴⁸

Did you grow up in the company of the Brothers Grimm, *Snow White*, the *Red Fairy Book*, Flash Gordon serials, *The Three Musketeers*, the knights of the Round Table, or any of the three versions of *The Thief of Bagdad*? Have you read *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Worm Ouroboros*, *The Incomplete Enchanter*, or *Conan the Conqueror*? Have you ever wished you could cross swords—just for fun—with Cyrano or D'Artagnan, or stand by their sides in the chill light of dawn, awaiting the arrival of the Cardinal's Guard? Ever wondered how you'd have done against the Gorgon, the hydra, the bane of Heorot Hall, or the bull that walks like a man? [...] If any or all of your answers are "yes," you're a player of role-playing games—or you ought to be.⁴⁹

This clarion call to adventure succinctly expresses the dominant themes of role-playing games: to test personal abilities against universal psycho-cultural challenges, under an often-unforgiving, but usually-balanced set of game mechanics.

Apshai's visuals, like other games of the time, were rudimentary—a mishmash of blocky pixels representing warriors and monsters, but they were still an artistic dimension

⁴⁷ Jon Freeman and Jeff Johnson, *Dunjonquest: Temple of Apshai* (Mountain View: Automated Simulations, 1979).

⁴⁸ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 73-75.

⁴⁹ Jon Freeman and Jeff Johnson, *Dunjonquest: Temple of Apshai* (Mountain View: Automated Simulations, 1979), Instruction Manual, 5.

above MUDs and other text-based adventures. Improvements in graphics, sound, and computational quality would greatly accelerate the look and experience for CRPGs over the next two decades. Barton and Stacks term these evolutionary periods as “Bronze,” “Silver,” and “Golden” ages, with late-Bronze period *Apshai*’s popularity across multiple computer systems heralding the shift to “Silver.”⁵⁰

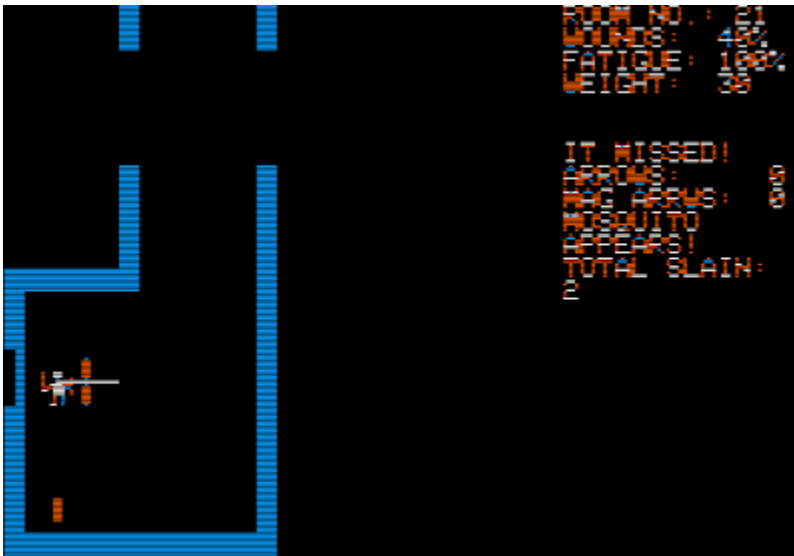


FIGURE 1.4. *Temple of Apshai*. A screenshot showing *Temple of Apshai*’s rudimentary graphics.

As short as the Silver Age was (approximately the first half of the 1980s), it was notable for the emergence of the powerhouse series *Ultima*, developed by Origin

⁵⁰ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 75-78.

Systems.⁵¹ In an effort to expand locations while minimizing processing power, *Ultima* featured changes in perspective—from third-person in the countryside to first-person when encountering monsters in dungeons. This shift, among others, showed a slow departure from tabletop gaming rulesets rendered on a computer screen, to a “different, more computer-centric experience.”⁵² It signified a quiet but deliberate movement away from sitting at a table with friends (*D&D*), or conversing via text online (MUDs), to role-playing experiences where an individual player was truly (and individually) challenged by the computational power supplied by a PC. Moreover, in a single-player CRPG, the player, no longer beholden to “event” calendars, could schedule her play sessions as her time allowed.



FIGURE 1.5. *Ultima*. A Cyclops challenges the player in the first-person view experienced by players in dungeons in *Ultima*.

⁵¹ Richard Garriott, *Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness* (Houston: Origin Systems, 1981).

⁵² Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 82-83.

The Golden Age fared longer, as technology advanced and more households invested in personal computers. Increased demand for computer games—CRPGs and otherwise—created a market that supported more developers, more titles, and sequels to those titles, ensuring exponential growth over the next ten years. A cursory glance over the titles from this period reveal far too many to list here, but of particular significance are the following:

The Bard's Tale:⁵³ Developed by Interplay Productions (which would go on to offer some of the most legendary CRPGs of the Golden and Platinum Ages), this Michael Cranford-designed title was renowned for both widespread aesthetic appeal and scrupulous mechanics. The plot was simple: a bard and his party venture forth through the storied village of Skara Brae in search of notoriety, treasure, and adventure. The inclusion of the bard role-playing class as the eponymous hero was described by Cranford as “an afterthought,”⁵⁴ but the game mechanic allowing the player to “inspire” their fellow warriors by way of song captured the imagination of an enthusiastic audience. This is questing at an episodic, almost Odysseus-like level. Barton and Stacks

⁵³ Michael Cranford, *Tales of the Unknown: Volume I: The Bard's Tale* (Irvine: Interplay Productions, 1985).

⁵⁴ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 116.

go on to describe the game as “much greater than the sum of its parts,”⁵⁵ and the most recent addition to the continuing series was released in 2018.⁵⁶

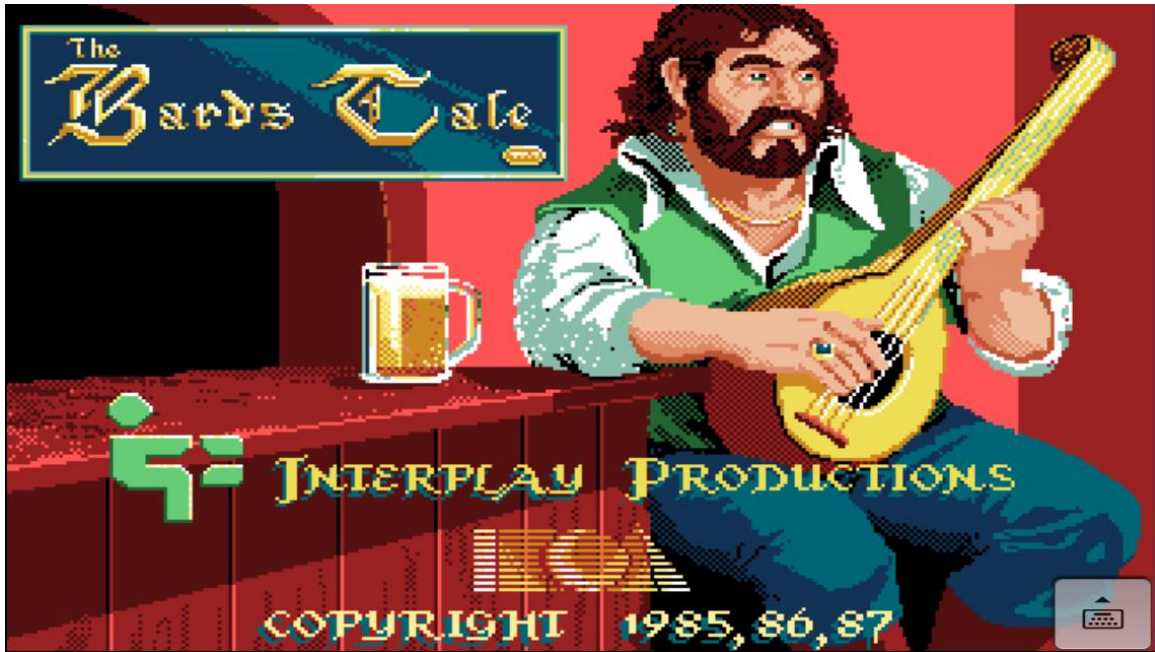


FIGURE 1.6. *The Bard's Tale*. From the title screen onward, Interplay's *The Bard's Tale* informed the player that this was, truly, the adventure of a treasure-seeking balladeer.

⁵⁵ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 116.

⁵⁶ David Roger, *The Bard's Tale IV: Barrow's Deep* (Newport Beach: inXile Entertainment, 2018).

Wasteland:⁵⁷ Another Interplay offering, *Wasteland* is often considered the progenitor of the more-renowned *Fallout* series, and is an excellent example of a non-fantasy RPG from the Golden Age. The unique take on a post-apocalyptic setting, combined with heavy emphasis on diversification of skills appealed to players who wanted to experience a wide range of encounters in the game universe (not simply combat). Barton and Stacks write that “*Wasteland*’s game engine can be described as a blend of *The Bard’s Tale* (for combat and character info screens) and top-down games like *Ultima* (for travel and exploration). [...] At any rate, the appeal of *Wasteland* stems more from its fascinating gameworld and character customization than from combat stratagems.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Brian Fargo, Ken St. Andre, Michael A. Stackpole, and Liz Danforth, *Wasteland* (Irvine: Interplay Productions, 1988).

⁵⁸ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 214.



FIGURE 1.7. *Wasteland*. An example of *Wasteland*'s occasionally-absurd challenges.

Quest for Glory.⁵⁹ Moving away from one influential RPG developer (Interplay), it is important to mention another: Sierra. *Quest for Glory*—the first game, as well as the overall series—was significant for its hybridization of two gaming genres: role-playing and adventure. Director Lori Ann Cole, half of the married developer team known historically (with husband Corey) as “The Coles,” stated in an interview,

The main thing about the Quest for Glory [sic] series that stands the test of time is that the game is not about puzzle solving or monster killing, but about story and character. All of the characters you meet in the game are more than just information devices – they all have personality as

⁵⁹ Lori Ann Cole, *Quest for Glory: So You Want to Be a Hero* (Oakhurst: Sierra On-Line, 1989).

well as their own story. I wanted to create the impression that this was more than a game, but a living world that the player somehow managed to step into. [...] And I wanted the player to feel like he really was a hero. So I believe what has stood the test of time is that *Quest for Glory* [sic] is like a beloved book that stays in your heart because you believe in the cause of heroism and feel as if you became a part of it.⁶⁰

Cole also mentions that while designing *Quest*, it was important for puzzles to have more than one solution—a mechanic that is more often found in RPGs, rather than traditional adventure games. That emphasis on variable solutions, and rewards for utilizing logic and ingenuity instead of ““Guess the Designer’s Mind” school of design” (as Cole describes it)⁶¹ demonstrated the series’ longstanding appeal to role-players.



⁶⁰ Don Rayner and Philip Jong, “Lori Ann Cole,” Adventureclassicgaming.com, September 8, 2003, updated July 4, 2010, Accessed July 23, 2021, <http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/208/>.

⁶¹ Rayner and Jong, *Ibid.*

FIGURE 1.8. *Quest for Glory*. An example of the wry humor found in Sierra's *Quest for Glory*.

By the mid-1990s, the start of CRPG's Platinum Age was having a significant impact on not only personal computers, but video game consoles, as well. While many RPGs, especially of Japanese design, were popular in the late 80s and early 90s, the advent of consoles, along with refinement in "real-time 3D" meant that a sizeable market was expanding once again, and a larger market often meant better funding and longer development times for titles. It is mostly RPGs from this Platinum Age and beyond (up to the present day), that represent the main focus of this paper—a span of approximately twenty-five years.

A Demographic Interlude

Despite persistent beliefs that gaming is primarily a kid's pursuit (and more often than not—a boy's), recent demographics indicate that the "gaming audience" is not only getting older, but displays a fluctuating balance in market share between women and men. Studies indicate that the average age of a gamer is early-to-mid thirties,⁶² with women comprising 40% of game players.⁶³ While much can be written concerning the

⁶² J. Clement, "Age breakdown of video game players in the United States in 2020," Statista.com, May 5, 2021, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/189582/age-of-us-video-game-players-since-2010/>.

⁶³ J. Clement, "Distribution of computer and video gamers in the United States from 2006 to 2020, by gender," Statista.com, May 5, 2021, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/232383/gender-split-of-us-computer-and-video-gamers/>.

increasing prevalence of both mobile⁶⁴ and multiplayer⁶⁵ popularity, to say nothing of cyclically popular genres such as life simulations, tower defenses, RTSs (Real-Time-Strategy), and battle royales, role-playing games remain the third-most popular genre in the United States as of 2018.⁶⁶ The gradual increase in age for consumers implies a continuing desire for games with equally mature themes and mechanics. A well-balanced RPG offers challenges for novice players up through the expert level, and re-playability in these games compounds the value of money spent and time invested.

The Crux of the Issue

While the communal, immediate structure of pen-and-paper RPGs encourages linear adventures, video game RPGs can offer the player a wider luxury of time and choice in choosing quests. Once selected, however, a quest's framework often dictates the "grammar," especially regarding objectives, potential actions, and possible outcomes. It is this structure that appears to parallel themes and motifs found in folktales. Bethesda's *Skyrim*, for example, has a quest where the hero encounters a talking dog, then searches for a magic axe after promises of rewards.⁶⁷ Talking animals, magic

⁶⁴ "Share of online population that plays," Newzoo.com, August 1, 2018, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://newzoo.com/insights/infographics/us-games-market-2018/>.

⁶⁵ "Yearly Population Chart," Mmo-population.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://mmo-population.com/charts/players>.

⁶⁶ "Genre breakdown of video game sales in the US (2018)," Wepc.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.wepc.com/news/video-game-statistics/>.

⁶⁷ Todd Howard, Bruce Nesmith, Kurt Kuhlmann, and Emil Pagliarulo, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Rockville: Bethesda Game Studios, 2011), "A Daedra's Best Friend."

weapons, and rewards are all found in the ATU ⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ and Thompson Motif Index⁷⁰ ([I-299], [560-649], and [Q10-190], respectively), and like a folktale, there are differences in how this particular quest can be resolved. However, unlike differences due to centuries or different cultures, the variance for this quest is literally coded into the adventure, and the hero can choose to either kill the dog and keep the weapon, or spare him and gain a different reward, with the tale's end adjusted accordingly. ⁷¹

⁶⁸ Aarne and Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. Antti Aarne's *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*.

⁶⁹ Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*. Based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson.

⁷⁰ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, Rev. and Enl. Edn, 6 vols (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955-58).

⁷¹ Howard, Nesmith, Kuhlmann, and Pagliarulo, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, "A Daedra's Best Friend" Killing Barbas/Sparing Barbas.



FIGURE 1.9. *Clavicus Vile and Barbas*. The talking dog Barbas confronts his petrified, fractious master in Bethesda's *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*.

The idea of an objective-based task supported by tropes gives the player an opportunity to *experience* events only described in folktales. The lure of participatory action instead of passive attention allows players to embed themselves, surmounting obstacles that they would have only been informed about otherwise. As such, *playing* though a quest can provide a profound incentive to reflect on the nature and context of the problems presented, sharpening the experience overall.

Bruno Bettelheim states as much in *The Uses of Enchantment*, a work concentrating on the psychoanalytical benefits that fairy tales instill in children. Games exist for all age levels, as do subconscious issues and opportunities for emotional and intellectual growth, so when Bettelheim writes,

He [the child considering a fairy tale] can achieve [. . .] the ability to cope [. . .] through spinning out daydreams—ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content. It is here that fairy tales have unequaled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination which would be impossible for him to discover truly on his own.⁷²

...it is not unreasonable to extrapolate that his theories extend beyond childhood into maturation. Bettelheim’s phrase of “ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures” is notable when considering the variability present in CRPG quests. That “rearranging,” in particular, becomes important when considering the possible outcomes to a multiple-outcome quest. But the luxury of “playing out” different actions and moralities allows people the chance to challenge or reinforce ideas or beliefs. Later, Bettelheim states,

There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our very own natures—the propensity of all men for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety. Instead, we want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know that they are not good; and often, even when they are, they would prefer not to be. This contradicts what they are told by their parents, and therefore makes the child a monster in his own eyes. [...] This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does

⁷² Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 7.

not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.⁷³

The immersive control that gaming offers accelerates the process Bettelheim discusses, giving the player the opportunity, in a controlled environment, to exercise the “aggressive” aspects to nature. He or she can experience both selfish and heroic approaches to difficulties, and, mettle tested, participate in an outcome that reflects the choices made, however virtual. Much as Bettelheim believes that fairy tales “should be told rather than read,”⁷⁴ so there is benefit in similar tales being lived, rather than heard. Perhaps it is just the addition of decades (and the emergence of this “new” technological medium) since Bettelheim’s (and Aarne’s) work that allows the addition of another dimension of perception and understanding to human psychosocial development.

Individually, this is of enormous importance to a player. Having the opportunity to relay or share these adventures with others often adds to a player’s enjoyment, either through bragging rights, in mutual commiseration, or pooling of information. This allows all players—be they friends, family, or online strangers—to resume their gaming with additional support or knowledge. While not true RPGs in the classic sense, *Journey*⁷⁵ and the *Dark Souls*⁷⁶ series include mechanics where other players can leave messages or

⁷³ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 7-8.

⁷⁴ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 150.

⁷⁵ Jenova Chen, Nicholas Clark, Bryan Singh, and Chris Bell, *Journey* (Santa Monica: Thatgamecompany, 2012).

⁷⁶ Hidetaka Miyazaki, *Dark Souls* (Tokyo: FromSoftware, 2011).

assist players in game areas that they might find challenging. These players, having acquired new knowledge with the help of a community, may assist others in turn.



FIGURE 1.10. *Journey*. An experienced player helps a novice through the levels in *Journey*. The length of the scarf is a visual cue of their longer experience playing the game.

For streamers, playing through a quest offers a different kind of immersion for their audience. As the player, the streamer acts as point person, often subject to the collective desires of those watching, dictating tactics, plot choices, or handicaps, which often makes for rambunctious and popular viewing. This collective effort recalls popular panto performances in Great Britain, or midnight showings of cult movies in North America, where audience participation is crucial for the success of the event. The

streamer becomes both bard and hero, performing for the delight and collective will of the audience. A recent example is Larian Studio's *Baldur's Gate III*,⁷⁷ where, if a streaming player chooses to broadcast on the Twitch platform, an extension for the game allows the audience (via percentage votes) to select dialogue options and quest paths.⁷⁸

Examples of streaming styles differ. Some players adopt their broadcasting persona from the character they have specifically constructed in the game. In doing so, hearing commentary of the action at hand and the character's inner thoughts, the audience shares in a relayed tale not unlike a theatrical performance. A streamer known as "Gopher" creates carefully-constructed, long-running characters, such as "Leonard the Hero," who has quested through Bethesda's *Skyrim* for over two hundred hours, for the amusement of almost half-a-million subscribers.⁷⁹ Gopher's "Leonard" keeps up a running internal monologue as he sets goals and objectives, all while aligning himself to a not-always-sterling set of "heroic" ideals.

Other types of streaming include the "challenge" type player, where the streamer tries to "speed-run" a game, finishing the main questline in as little time as possible, or

⁷⁷ Swen Vincke, *Baldur's Gate III* (Ghent: Larian Studios, 2020/ Early access. Release Date as of this writing: TBD).

⁷⁸ Larian Studios, "Baldur's Gate III Companion," Twitch.tv, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://dashboard.twitch.tv/extensions/sf4o3dj6llwt1y4ndq2yaj5d9woh2>. (Copy from the site describes the extension's functionality: "The extension works by numbering each dialogue option, which corresponds to the viewer choices. At every dialogue decision, the streamer can activate viewer voting. This feedback is seamlessly integrated into the game, where both streamer and viewer will see each percentage vote next to each dialogue option.")

⁷⁹ Gopher, "Let's Play Skyrim: Special Edition/(Ch. 3, Prelude)," YouTube.com, December 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPQnvwK0Rn8&list=PLE7DIYarj-Ddp2MTrMB7nQN4qu-KgxYTt>.

where a player deliberately handicaps their abilities (“This time I won’t use spells,” or “I’ll complete the game using only a crowbar,” for example), often for charity or subscription drives. Examples of streamers utilizing this can be seen with the charity challenge website *Games Done Quick* for former,⁸⁰ and streamers “Many A True Nerd”⁸¹ and “Mitten Squad” for latter.⁸² By doing so, it could be argued that the players are imposing a “meta-quest” over their gameplay, an externally-created objective that shapes events both inside and outside the game.

Another collective form of role-playing game, the massively-multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), structures their quests so that they may be tackled singly or in a group. The higher-level challenges require coordinating tactics, positions, and resources for victory, evoking real-time battles and, as regards their characters invested in these virtual worlds, a form of passion play. This is important when considering that these same quests are often fought and re-fought by new and veteran players alike. The unique nature of MMORPGS such as *World of Warcraft* or *Guild Wars 2* means that many quests are structured as pure combat encounters, albeit with multiple strategies and martial attacks to consider. Even then, however, the communal requirements of these

⁸⁰“Games Done Quick,” Gamesdonequick.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://gamesdonequick.com/>.

⁸¹ Many a True Nerd, “Fallout New Vegas: No Kill Run - Part 1 – Goodsprings,” YouTube.com, August 18, 2013, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uEyMJFXdiU&list=PLwH1xJhcXG0deo3l6BBHDoy_mDXY4Rw_V.

⁸² Mitten Squad, “Can You Beat Fallout 3 Without Attacking Anything?,” YouTube.com, February 22, 2019, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyDc4yjEz9Q>.

quests require an overriding predetermined outcome to the quest narrative (usually, only a victory or fail state).

Through shared experiences (relating/viewing gameplay with friends), streaming, and participating in MMORPGs, it becomes apparent that the collective nature of questing is similarly as meaningful to a group as it is for an individual. Through examining the works of researchers such as Campbell, Franz, Propp, and Bettelheim, it is presumed that folktales are instrumental for both individual development and reflecting collective ideals and challenges in varied and far-flung cultures. Folktales, thousands of years in the telling, have only recently acquired a scientific system of classification. Video games, far newer, have no industry-wide accepted form of universal categorization outside of standard genre descriptions. Moreover, a perusal of existing literature offers little in the way of classical ludological analysis regarding quests specifically. There are some examples of general analysis—the texts for game development such as the second edition of *Introduction to Game Analysis*, which states the need for it as “a necessary tool to develop the concepts and vocabulary of game studies, which is still a relatively young field of study.”⁸³

As frustrating as this is for researchers, it is even more limiting for developers. A contemporary open-world RPG designed in the West (Europe and North America) is typically expected to have one-to-three hundred hours of “new” gameplay, or challenges presented to the player without repeating. This requires directors, producers, designers, artists, audio engineers, programmers, and testers to assist in developing systems

⁸³ Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 13.

(combat, dialogue, etc.), levels (locations), items (weapons, clothing, rewards, etc.), sound (audio cues, score, environment), and more, usually over the course of one to five years. A single error in continuity, functionality, combat balance, or even lighting effects may take days or even weeks to resolve, and not surprisingly, can stall effective ongoing implementation of quest design, if not causing the cutting/limiting or outright cancellation of quests.

While errors are an unavoidable part of game development, the use of systemic classification systems and development libraries assist in limiting damage, and archiving iterations allows developers to regress to earlier versions of a title to mitigate issues. From a narrative standpoint, this is crucial for resolving errors in continuity and pacing, and, unfortunately, is also the area most underserved by a universally-accepted system of classification. Narrative-driven developers such as BioWare and Double Fine usually develop their own (often proprietary) systems for tracking narrative implementation, but few, if any, industry-wide resources exist.

Short of creating a full system (à la the Dewey Decimal System, or similar), it may be hypothesized that an index in the tradition of the Aarne-Thompson or ATU would assist both researchers and developers in effectively classifying quests and quest lines in a style reminiscent of folktales. For developers, this would allow for checking if an unreleased title has implemented a sufficient spectrum of narrative beats without repetition. For researchers, this would make it easier to track emerging trends and evolving styles across developers and regions, rather than keeping quests hidden behind monolithic series (i.e., *Dragon Age*, *Fallout*, etc.).

If, in fact, there are enough similarities between folktales, especially fairy tales, and RPG quests, then a proof-of-concept ‘RPG Index,’ in the tradition of the Aarne-Thompson and the ATU, would be beneficial. (While there are some criticisms around potential categorical, historical, and even typographical errors regarding the Index⁸⁴—years before Uther’s extensive rework—its emphasis on Western folktales reflects the predominant themes of RPG development in both Europe and North America over the last five decades.)

To test this hypothesis, five folktales displaying active forms similar to those found in Western RPGs were selected. These tales involve meaningful action and challenges performed by the protagonist, much as the player character in a video game is similarly tasked. Predominant themes and motifs from these tales were presented.

Next, fifty quests and/or quest lines were selected from a spectrum of Western RPGs over the past three decades. Because of unique regional peculiarities found in Western RPGs versus those developed in the East (particularly Japan, with its iconic JRPG), for the purposes of this survey, only North American and European developed titles were used. A selection of main, side, faction, and recurring (incidental) quests was included, and fantasy, science fiction, and historical genres were considered. Wherever possible, when quests were narratively essential to larger quest lines, those quest lines were listed. Differing narrative outcomes were noted, especially when they affected player morality and alignment. To a lesser extent, different rewards and boons were also noted. If a player character had an option to resolve (or skip outright) elements of a quest

⁸⁴ Alan Dundes, “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique” *Journal of Folklore Research* 34, no. 3 (1997): 195–202.

via dialogue (charm, wit, diplomacy, etc.) or a skill check, it was also noted. Using stealth or subterfuge as a possible solution was also noted. To a lesser amount, variance in combat strategies was recorded, although it is standard practice in RPGs to allow a broad degree of martial choice for players, regardless of quest parameters. A player may choose their loadout (if using weaponry) or spells (if using magic), either as an inherent aspect of their chosen role (i.e., archers prefer bows), or when considering the unique requirements of a specific location or quest (i.e., knights use blessed swords or silver weapons when fighting undead).

Themes, tale-types, and motifs that matched those found in the selected folktales were identified with corresponding ATU and Thompson Motif index listings. Beyond that, additional thematic and mechanical matches between quests were noted. In addition, additional appended notations for quests were considered (completion necessary for plot/guild advancement, uniqueness of quest within the overall title, whether the quest had or was inherently an ‘Easter Egg’, and so on); however, these were not implemented.

Utilizing this system, it should be easy for developers and researchers to determine the narrative and mechanical breadth of a role-playing title, both before and after release. With additional development, an extensive index might provide a resource that could be continually referenced and updated, allowing for a greater understanding of quest variance and evolution through developers, titles, regions, and time periods.

A Geographical Explanation

Much like Antti Aarne’s early work, the geographical and cultural research for this paper was narrowed to focus on single-player role-playing games developed in Europe and North America. This was due to three primary reasons:

1. In attempting to determine historical parallels and influence from folktales to role-playing quests, one must initially concentrate on the regions from where developers drew their cultural familiarity. Barton and Stacks's accounts of RPGs from the Platinum Age through the Late Modern Age (and beyond) demonstrate a preoccupation with both Tolkien and European-style cultural influences and folktales.

2. Asian role-playing games have significant structural, artistic, narrative, and cultural differences from games developed in the West. Japan in particular has a version of role-playing game so distinctive that it is known by a specific acronym (JRPG). To adequately include Asian RPGs in this initial research is far beyond the scope of this paper, and is best reserved for after any proof-of-concept confirmation.

3. Similar to the issue described in reason 2, MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) quests are also not included in this paper, even if they are developed in Europe and North America. While they are role-playing games developed in the West, the multiplayer component adds dimensions of mechanical complexity dependent on compounded factors (game "seasons," multiple players, etc.) that is best reserved for study at a later point.

Chapter II

The Folktales

“Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed.”⁸⁵

— G.K. Chesterton (attributed)

“The way to read a fairy tale is to throw yourself in.”⁸⁶

—W. H. Auden

As mentioned previously in Chapter I, Propp argued that there was an underlying structure to folktales that was based on what he termed “functions,” or active events.⁸⁷ Breaking these events down into functions allowed Propp and other folklorists to use them as puzzle pieces, that could be inserted, jigsaw-like, into multiple tales. A single action could, through contextual clues, represent multiple narrative meanings, based on the scope and location of the tale.

My initial hypothesis, based on the indexes of Aarne, Thompson, and Uther, speculated that there would be a similarity in narrative events and motifs between selected folktales and a majority of RPG quests developed in the Western hemisphere. Upon closer research, certain procedural issues appeared. Despite similarities in structure,

⁸⁵ James Grant, “Chesterton on Fairy Tales and Evil,” Firstthings.com, April 12, 2011, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2011/04/chesterton-on-fairy-tales-and-evil>.

⁸⁶ W. H. Auden, George MacDonald, and Maurice Sendak, *The Golden Key*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 85.

⁸⁷ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 21.

the goals of folktales and quests demonstrated a divergence in their actions due to the necessity of their functions. I gradually discovered that the social reinforcement of collective psycho-cultural mores essential to folktales exists for a different purpose than the embellished problem-solving that is enjoyed by RPG players. Put simply, informing and entertaining serves a different purpose than challenging and entertaining.

While much of the activity related in folktales involves events dependent on the protagonist's *presence* for resolution, another predominant element is one of *inactivity*, either through captivity, enchantment, or observation. All three elements exist in RPG quests; however, only observation is habitually used in RPG gameplay.

The “waiting” motif is not described as such in the Indexes, but captivity appears in the Thompson Motif Index [R0-tR99], as does magic [D0-tD2199.2], with particular note of [D1960-tD1978.5], describing various motifs of “magic sleep.” (This is immediately followed by the “magic invisibility” motifs [D1981-tD1985.2], often used as a gameplay mechanic paired with “observation,” but that will be discussed later.) In the ATU Index, “Tales of Magic” under “Ordinary Folktales” lists standard narrative plots involving some form of magic as [ATU300-ATU749*]. Rapunzel [AT-310] waits, first for her captor, later for her mate. That she leaves her captivity is usually at her captor’s command rather than her own initiative. Red Riding Hood [AT-333] displays a passivity akin to waiting by obeying her “grandmother’s” orders, only taking action (in some versions) by seeking out the iconic woodsman for assistance. The heroine in “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” [ATU-425A] is more or less confined to her circumstances, until her disobedience results in great initiative and activity in the second and third parts of the tale.

That said, many well-known folktales do display the activity connected to “functions” that Propp puts forward, and these same actions are similar, if not identical, to tasks in quests. Jack, of “Jack and the Beanstalk” [AT-328] barter, ventures to a new land, hides/observes, steals, repeats his actions, and ultimately defeats his pursuer the giant via his own hand. Moral considerations aside, thievery as both a one-time option and/or a fully-fledged profession can usually be found in fantasy-based RPGs, such as *Dragon Age: Origins*⁸⁸ and *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*.⁸⁹

The long-term endurance of the title character Iron John [AT-502] displays similarities to the main quests of the *Elder Scrolls* RPGs, where the protagonist always starts the game as a prisoner, who through the course of the main questline is revealed to possess godlike aspects, much like the inherent nobility of the folktale’s hero.⁹⁰

Women, Folktales, and Soft Power

While it is true that these more proactive characters tend to be male, the resourcefulness and agency of heroines is present in some of the better-known tales. The oft-unnamed young woman in “Rumpelstiltskin” [AT-500] triumphs over her antagonist using hidden observation and then an extended conversation, a gameplay mechanic

⁸⁸ Dan Tudge, Brent Knowles, Mike Laidlaw, and James Ohlen, *Dragon Age: Origins* (Edmonton: BioWare, 2009).

⁸⁹ Mark Nelson, Ian S. Frazier, and Ken Rolston, *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* (Providence: 38 Studios, 2012).

⁹⁰ Aramithius, “Why are Elder Scrolls Protagonists Always Prisoners?” Writteninuncertainty.com, November 15, 2018, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://writteninuncertainty.com/podcast/prisoners/>.

known in RPGs as a dialogue challenge. In a reversed action, the protagonist of “The Six Swans” [ATU-451] ironically achieves her goal of saving her brothers by saying nothing. Red Riding Hood also engages the wolf-in-disguise in a dialogue challenge, but more from a place of genuine ignorance or innocence. Dialogue challenges as a mode of discovery exist in RPGs, but they usually require actions beyond conversation to determine truth. (That, coupled with the fact that the woodsman is the individual delivering “the killing blow” removed “Red Riding Hood” from primary consideration.⁹¹) Gretel, from “Hansel and Gretel” [ATU-327A] uses feigned ignorance in a dialogue challenge to trick the witch into getting cooked in her own oven. Much like the woodsman in “Red Riding Hood,” her sole significant action comes at the end of the tale, contributing to the resolution.

Female protagonists in folktales labor at domestic tasks that might be considered repetitive (such as weaving or spinning, or even cooking daily meals), but the applied persistence demonstrates a patience and endurance that RPG players can appreciate. Male or female, the hero of *Fable II*⁹² and *Fable III*⁹³ can pass some time and earn extra coin

⁹¹ However, the numerous versions of “Red Riding Hood” certainly include examples where Red saves herself—or is saved by the enchanted intervention of an object, such as her cloak. Catherine Orenstein mentions some in her book on the subject [Catherine Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, And The Evolution Of A Fairy Tale* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 69-70.], where she notes a version collected by Paul Delarue in which Red escapes the monster’s clutches by claiming she needs to relieve herself outside of the house.

⁹² Peter Molyneux, *Fable II* (Guilford: Lionhead Studios, 2008).

⁹³ Peter Molyneux, Josh Atkins, Guillaume Portes, Simon Carter, Mark Llabres Hill, *Fable III* (Guilford: Lionhead Studios, 2010).

doing small chores for townspeople, such as pouring a perfect pint⁹⁴ or baking pies.⁹⁵ While doing so, they can overhear the townsfolk chatter for an (in-game) afternoon or evening, gaining a better understanding of their location without directly questioning everyone they meet.

In addition to laboring, women in folktales often tell stories, and can escape danger through either distracting their antagonist, or exposing them to saviors. As mentioned by Maria Tatar in her analysis of “The Robber Bridegroom,” “Like Scheherazade, who uses storytelling as an instrument for survival, the young woman recounts what she witnessed at the abode of her betrothed and provides the evidence needed to seize the man and bring him to justice.”⁹⁶ It is rare that the pivotal act of survival in RPGs is tied to just relating information, although the indie-darling *Undertale*⁹⁷ allows the player to befriend monsters rather than killing them, often through advice, stories, and general companionship. Regardless, the structure of RPGs usually requires a (virtual) physical act by the player in order to resolve most quests. (Exceptions occur, as we will see in the analysis of “Oh, the Indignitaries” in Chapter III.)

Heroines in the tradition of Cinderella only gain victory through magical intervention, while she labors at menial household chores. Meanwhile, papers abound

⁹⁴ “Bartender,” Fable.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://fable.fandom.com/wiki/Bartender>.

⁹⁵ “Pie Making,” Fable.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fable.fandom.com/wiki/Pie_Making.

⁹⁶ Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm, and Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm: The Bicentennial Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 193.

⁹⁷ Toby Fox, *Undertale* (Self-published via Steam, GOG: Toby Fox, 2015).

regarding “Snow White’s” [AT-709] and “Sleeping Beauty’s” [ATU-410] comatose protagonists—triumphing through inaction. In gaming, a napping hero would be expected to at least have adventurous dreams while they slumber, such as in *Oblivion*’s “Through A Nightmare, Darkly” quest,⁹⁸ or *Dragon Age: Origins*’ “Lost in Dreams” quest.⁹⁹ As a result, most of these renowned tales, despite their ubiquity, did not fulfill enough requirements to provide meaningful comparisons with standard RPG quests—as is explained in the next section.

Choose Your Everything

Folktales draw on millennia of cultural predispositions and gender roles to convey narrative. It should be noted that RPGs, especially contemporary ones, usually allow the player to choose their gender along with other aspects such as race, class, and special talents. Unless there’s a specific character that the developers intend the player to control and experience, such as *The Witcher*’s Geralt of Rivia,¹⁰⁰ the choice of gender is up to the player. This is not to say that the choice is not noted and commented on by NPCs in the game world. In many titles, gender selection can affect social regard and skills, especially when interacting with characters who would be more receptive to one gender over another. This is a long-winded attempt to explain that while gender roles in folktales can

⁹⁸ “Oblivion: Through A Nightmare, Darkly,” Uesp.net, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Through_A_Nightmare,_Darkly.

⁹⁹ “The Fade: Lost in Dreams,” Dragonage.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://dragonage.fandom.com/wiki/The_Fade:_Lost_in_Dreams.

¹⁰⁰ Jacek Brzeziński, Michał Madej, and Maciej Siniło, *The Witcher* (Warsaw: CD Projekt, 2007).

carry generations of expectations in their telling, they hold a less influential, often cosmetic consideration in RPGs and the quests offered. The overall “role” the player has selected is far more significant in participating in a quest than standard gender-based societal positions. As a result, the premise that I had when I hypothesized that RPG quests shared a majority of the themes, motifs, and tropes found in the AT, ATU, and Thompson’s Motif Indexes is somewhat incorrect.

Instead, I have adjusted my hypothesis to examine the possibility that quests, while utilizing some aspects of the predominant Indexes, also pull heavily from Propp’s morphological functions, and in comparing quests vs. folktales in an introductory RPG index, will take into consideration the use of “action” as a crucial element of both tales and RPGs.

The five folktales I selected for comparison, then, all have significant elements where the protagonist(s) display agency, usually through direct action, or failing that, gain and relate knowledge obtained through observation. This is essential for what is considered “meaningful” gameplay in RPGs and other contemporary video games.

“Iron John,” “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “The Twelve Dancing Princesses,” “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” and “Rumpelstiltskin” all display elements that are found in standard RPG gameplay mechanics. While I had hoped they would mirror or parallel equivalent quests (and disappointingly, did not), they all offer, in a majority of their narratives, mechanical and narrative elements that are found in common quest structures.



FIGURE 2.1. *Shield with Greyhound Held by Wild Man*. This Schongauer engraving from fifteenth-century Germany displays the archetype of a “wild man” as a figure that, through the shield, still maintains some connection to a more “settled” society.

“Iron John”

([AT-502] “The Wild Man as Helper”)

*“Something in the adolescent male wants risk, courts danger, goes out to the edge
– even to the edge of death.”¹⁰¹*

— Robert Bly

Who is the true protagonist in this Brothers Grimm tale? Is it the disobedient prince with “the hair of gold,” or is it the eponymous John? Two of the most distinctive aspects to this story are the sequential plot points and the persistence of John as a consistent magical helper. Notable for its male-centric narrative, “Iron John” became the focus of an influential self-help book in the early nineties, with author Robert Bly outlining the path of powerful-but-restrained men in contemporary society.¹⁰² Reading the story, one might infer that the laconic, imprisoned John has greater reserves of agency and power than the unnamed prince, and that he utilizes the prince as a means to ending the captivity his enchantment enforces.

I have touched on the idea of “character as tool” when discussing “Red Riding Hood’s” woodsman, but Iron John holds more intrigue, mainly due to his ubiquity throughout the tale. While the incognito prince can certainly attempt to perform all the tasks (and there are many) that the neighboring king sets out, the added support from John via magical weapons, armor, horses, and more implies that, even while cursed, John’s power exceeds the inherent abilities of the prince. That almost every significant character in “Iron John” (save the gardener) is of noble birth is notable—along with the

¹⁰¹ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2015), 30.

¹⁰² Bly, *Iron John*, ix-xii.

fact that the neighboring king's country is in danger of conquest, and *must* be saved by the prince and John's cooperative actions. It is not usual for entire nations to be saved in folktales, but it is often a driving plot point in main questlines in RPGs.

Player characters in traditional RPGs usually have several claims on their time. The local baker may need the rats cleared out of the storeroom so she can get her flour safely, the region's duke might require help to resolve a dispute involving warring families, and the empress has a request involving a dragon and the possible destruction of her lands and all her subjects. Ranging from provincial challenges like those found in folktales to life-or-death imperatives reminiscent of legendary myths, the scope of questing is usually determined by classification: side quests generally have smaller goals and stories, while faction or main quests typically involve more sweeping concerns. A robust RPG asks the player character to be the protagonist, the hero, or both, depending on which adventures are currently highlighted in their journal. "Iron John's" tow-headed prince gets to experience several of these challenges, from gardener to savior, with the help of John himself.

The motif of a magical/older/more experienced helper appears throughout RPGs, regardless of genre. This same helper being hampered by some issue that is not initially communicated to the protagonist usually serves as a significant side quest (often improving the quality of the helper's skill level if the player assists). It can also provide a pivotal point in a main questline (usually to reveal a heretofore unknown—but crucial—piece of information that can be used to defeat the antagonist).

The classification of "Wild Man as Helper" presents an interesting paradox. In "Iron John," the unnamed prince is presented as the hero, inasmuch as the listener is

meant to identify with him more than any other character, John included. Yet John seems to have a greater access to material and magical power, while the only quality that the prince has in excess is that of spirit.

It is rare, but not unheard of, for an RPG character who is NOT controlled by the player to perform the most consequential actions, or provide crucial (sometimes sacrificial) moments of support. The *Witcher 3*'s Vesemir, the oldest and wisest of hero Geralt's brotherhood, sacrifices his life to save the one individual who can restore their universe.¹⁰³ *Oblivion*'s Martin Septim, whom the player's character spends much of the main questline protecting and furnishing with needed magical weaponry, ultimately becomes the only individual who can truly save the in-game world of Tamriel.¹⁰⁴ Much like Jack Burton in the movie *Big Trouble in Little China*, the player serves as a sidekick in another hero's story.

Whichever way "Iron John" is regarded, there are significant archetypes, tropes, and functions that evoke the pacing and structure of traditional fantasy RPG questlines. That said, Bly's suggestion that John and the prince are two aspects to one psyche¹⁰⁵ is a provocative idea, especially when one considers an RPG player's ability to utilize other, non-playable characters as resources to achieve what *the game* advocates as a victory, or a desirable goal.

¹⁰³ "The Battle of Kaer Morhen," *Witcher.gamepedia.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://witcher.gamepedia.com/The_Battle_of_Kaer_Morhen.

¹⁰⁴ "Oblivion: Light the Dragonfires," *Uesp.net*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Light_the_Dragonfires.

¹⁰⁵ Bly, *Iron John*, 13-15.

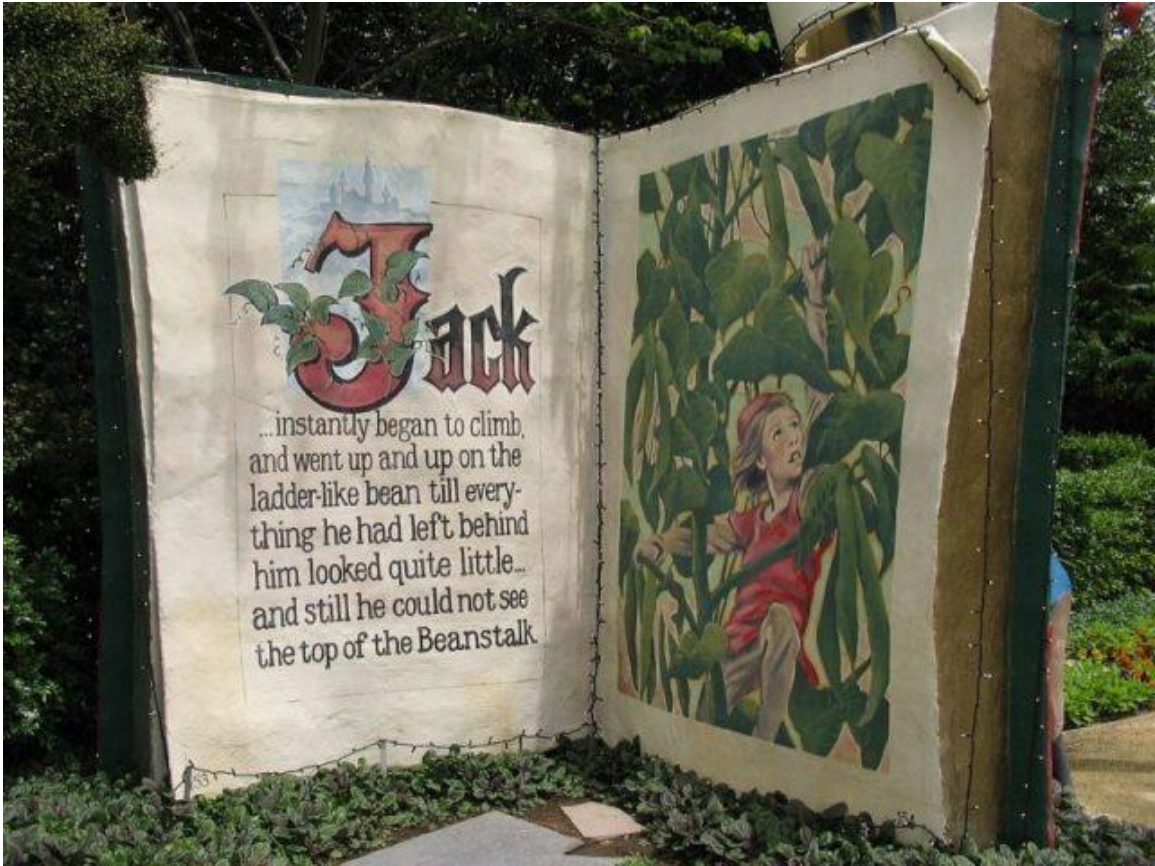


FIGURE 2.2. “*Jack and the Beanstalk.*” Both “Jack” the character and “Jack” the folktale are examples of centuries-old narrative structures.

“Jack and the Beanstalk”

([ATU-328] “The Boy Who Stole Ogre’s Treasure”)

“Fortune favors the bold.”

-Latin proverb

Perhaps the strongest aspect connecting “Jack and the Beanstalk” to RPG quests is the folktale’s title character. The youthful “Jack” appears in a number of traditional

tales and is considered a stock character,¹⁰⁶ especially in England. Despite his naivete, he can be spurred to action, especially when there is little alternative. In “Jack and the Beanstalk,” impending poverty inspires him to barter, disobey, explore, eavesdrop, hide, steal, escape, and ultimately destroy his antagonist. Most, if not all of these actions are utilized multiple times in an open-world RPG. Aside from the activity essential to the plot, the nebulous morality concerning Jack’s thievery is not dissimilar to standard RPG game worlds. In the earliest published version of the tale curated by Benjamin Tabart, a backstory justifies Jack’s crimes, lest impressionable listeners believe they are sanctioned to steal singing harps and golden geese.¹⁰⁷ That said, the stronger emphasis surrounding Jack’s victory is not trickery, but the defeat of an impossibly outsized antagonist, one who gleefully murders and consumes other people. As a result, there is a tacit sense of justice in his gaining the giant’s riches, whether they were originally stolen from his family or not. (In much the same manner, rewards in open-world RPGs are offered from villain’s possessions—as well as from innocent neighbors and bystanders.)

Jack’s “foolishness” (or fool-hardiness, depending on perception) is not unlike a standard RPG player character, especially when experiencing the game for the first time. He is impelled to action, enters an unfamiliar location, and uses his wits and guile to survive multiple encounters with a creature intent on his destruction. He utilizes the

¹⁰⁶ Janet Thompson, “The Folklore Tradition of Jack Tales,” Ccb.lis.illinois.edu, Last updated January 15, 2004, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140410004237/http://ccb.lis.illinois.edu/Projects/storytelling/jsthompson/tales.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 131-132.

environment much like a player character can, relying on stealth when prowess is not in his favor.

This brings us to the classification of “Jack and the Beanstalk.” In the ATU, it is listed as [328A], a sub-section of “The Treasures of the Giant” or “The Boy Who Stole Ogre’s Treasure.” Hierarchically, “The Treasures of the Giant” is under “Supernatural Adversaries” in the folktale group “Tales of Magic.” As motifs, “treasures” and “supernatural adversaries” are standard fantasy RPG fare. As tale-types, oversized, magical antagonists possessing substantial riches that must be defeated for any number of narrative reasons is pretty much the basis of many “boss battle” quests. It is interesting that the unique elements to Jack’s personality are not categorized in the ATU Index, despite the fact that the character traits of quick-thinking “Jack” are as iconic as the giant’s brutish malevolence. Those traits (brashness and naivete when confronted with desperate need and overwhelming odds) are aligned with early-level play styles in RPGs.

A Justifiable Interlude

Considering the systems of justice portrayed in folktales, especially varied versions of folktales (such as “Jack and the Beanstalk,” with more than one explanation for Jack’s thievery), it is logical to contemplate the idea of social, political, and cultural balances as they are historically portrayed in RPGs. Imbalance of any sort makes for narrative tension, and all the more when the player is invested in its resolution. RPG tropes are peppered with examples of xenophobia, sexism, class and race issues, and exploitation. However, it should be noted that these have been historically introduced as opportunities for players to resolve outstanding issues to their satisfaction, according to the “role” they have selected for their current playthrough. This can involve gradations of

morality, especially when complicated geopolitical issues are factored into the attempt. In the last twenty years, robust RPGs have added to pre-existing standard complexities by providing additional opportunities to experience or interact with oppressed or exploited societies. The “City Elves” storylines found in *Dragon Age* are examples, filled with slavery, poverty, sexual assault, and abuses from an elevated political class toward an impoverished and mistrusted race.¹⁰⁸ As found in robustly-developed RPGs, the player may choose to right the wrongs inflicted on the city elves, or condone and assist in their exploitation.

One of the hallmarks of JRPGs is the emphasis on the cultivation of romantic relationships. Interestingly, while it is not only possible, but expected in Western RPGs to be able to court or seduce multiple potential romantic interests, the mechanics of wooing simply have not been given the same levels of attention by Western developers. There are exceptions, such as games developed by Edmonton’s BioWare, but at the end of the day, in an action-focused Western RPG, the goals and mechanics are directed toward the player saving the world, themselves, or both. As a result, quests and lore that address non-heteronormative relationships sometimes offer an intriguing perspective.

¹⁰⁸ “City elves,” [Dragonage.fandom.com](https://dragonage.fandom.com/wiki/City_elves), Accessed July 23, 2021, https://dragonage.fandom.com/wiki/City_elves.



FIGURE 2.3. *Arcade Gannon, Fallout: New Vegas*. The good doctor confronts the player character.

Arcade Gannon is a doctor serving a fictional humanist organization, the Followers of the Apocalypse, in Obsidian's *Fallout: New Vegas*.¹⁰⁹ He's available as a companion for the player; however, like all companions, he cannot be romanced or seduced.¹¹⁰ His family belongs to a military organization called The Enclave, a remnant

¹⁰⁹ Josh Sawyer, *Fallout: New Vegas* (Irvine: Obsidian Entertainment, 2010).

¹¹⁰ If the player has certain dialogue perks, they can engage in superficial flirtations with some of their companions, although these dialogue trees ultimately lead back to platonic conversations.

of the previous warmongering government. This has spurred Gannon to create a life where he serves people, rather than a career that he believes would have contributed to a system that hampered them. He also identifies as homosexual.

This final fact is casually mentioned by him, usually muttered *sotto voce*, or tossed out in a beleaguered wish for a perfect romantic partner.¹¹¹ Erudite, private, and often sarcastic, Gannon lives his life like many residents of the *Fallout* universe—focusing on survival first, his friends and co-workers second, and his philosophies and code of ethics third. Romance and sexual fulfillment ranks below that—and in that respect, he’s living a life similar to most of the other people the player meets in New Vegas.

What is notable about this is how *not* notable it is. *Fallout: New Vegas* was released in 2010, and at the time, the introduction of Gannon as a capable, useful questing companion was appreciated by gay players,¹¹² who were gratified to see the presence of a character who had a non-heteronormative aspect, but was not exclusively defined by it.¹¹³ The “othering” of Gannon, if it can be said to happen at all, is the discovery during his loyalty quest that his family are generally considered antagonists, hostile to the people he

¹¹¹ [{"a bit of sarcasm} Right now, I'm sure you're asking yourself, "Why hasn't some lucky man scooped this bachelor off his feet?" {serious} Like I said, I'm boring."] "VFSArcadeGannon.txt," *Fallout.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/VFSArcadeGannon.txt#Miscellaneous>.

¹¹² Shann Smith, “VIDEO GAY-MER | Honestly, *Fallout* is lowkey ahead of the game.,” *Popdust.com*, January 11, 2018, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.popdust.com/fallout-relationship-with-queer-gaming-2524117573.html>.

¹¹³ Christian Guyton, “The best LGBTQ+ representation in PC games,” *Techradar.com*, January 22, 2021, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.techradar.com/best/the-best-lgbtq-representation-in-pc-games>.

works to help.¹¹⁴ Gannon’s character is an example of the evolution of characters for video game RPGs that relies less on tropes, and more on multifaceted aspects to their humanity, allowing players to invest and reinvest in multiple playthroughs.



¹¹⁴ “Arcade Gannon,” [Fallout.fandom.com](https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Arcade_Gannon), Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Arcade_Gannon.

FIGURE 2.4. *Parvati Holcomb, The Outer Worlds*. Parvati stands ready to support the player character.

Like *New Vegas*, another Obsidian title, *The Outer Worlds*,¹¹⁵ also does not allow the player to “romance” their companions. However, they can assist in loyalty quests where they can help the NPC fulfill a desire or need. In *Worlds*, the player can work with shipmate Parvati Holcomb, an asexual mechanic who admits a romantic attraction to the captain of another ship.¹¹⁶ The quests “Drinking Sapphire Wine” and “Don’t Bite The Sun,” named for Tanith Lee novels,¹¹⁷ allow the player to assist with a nascent relationship that might not progress without their help.

Ironically, it is when the player is not romantically invested in a companion, but either accepts their full and complete existence (as with Gannon) or helps them to fulfill their own goals and contemplate their own character (as with Holcomb), that one notices how RPGs are evolving to rise above standard stock characters and plot points. As mentioned earlier, players expect to be able to choose their gender, race, sexual preferences, and more, and most contemporary open-world RPGs offer these options. It is not difficult to craft a character role in RPGs that not only caters to a specific sexual

¹¹⁵ Leonard Boyarsky and Tim Cain, *The Outer Worlds* (Irvine: Obsidian Entertainment, 2019).

¹¹⁶ “Parvati Holcomb,” *Theouterworlds.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://theouterworlds.fandom.com/wiki/Parvati_Holcomb.

¹¹⁷ “Drinking Sapphire Wine,” *Theouterworlds.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://theouterworlds.fandom.com/wiki/Drinking_Sapphire_Wine#Trivia.

preference, but often offers multiple potential partners in that respect throughout the game. At this point in RPG development, the player expects it as an included function, much as contemporary home buyers look for dishwashers or central heating as default amenities.

However, the opportunity to first acknowledge true social inequalities (as with the city elves) and then save, assist, ignore, or further restrict them, is the mark of a thoughtfully-designed RPG. A game world where NPCs who surround the player have desires, traits, and input that do not overtly define their characters, but comprise parts of intricate and layered personalities, is one where the player is better able to participate in the fiction of the virtual universe.

Players like to know that they can change the world, but they also appreciate that a good part of it can chug along under its own power, without input from them. A game that demonstrates issues on a macro (social, political, cultural) level, and on a micro (NPCs, companions, player characters) level, is a game that offers a world where the concept of “justice” can be contemplated in a more comprehensive manner.



FIGURE 2.5. “*The Twelve Dancing Princesses.*” This illustration from a 1998 edition of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* highlights the ongoing fascination with the folktale.

“The Twelve Dancing Princesses”

(*ATU-306*) “The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces”)

“If you danced from midnight to six A.M. who would understand?”¹¹⁸

-Anne Sexton

¹¹⁸ Anne Sexton, *Transformations* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 87.

The protagonist's actions in "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" [ATU-306] are remarkably similar to Jack's in the previous tale. However, rather than a foolhardy youth, the (usually unnamed) hero is often mentioned as a seasoned former soldier, and his call to action has less to do with poverty, and more for a (possibly ongoing) desire for riches and glory. Most of the tale centers on the soldier's undetected observation of the princesses' nighttime activities. Like Jack, some versions tell of a final conflict with the antagonist(s). Again, as with Jack, there is an emphasis on extraordinary otherworldly treasures, and the assurance of a comfortable life by the end of the story.

However, as we have seen in Franz's analysis of a Danish variant of this tale, there is a far greater need for the hero's success than mere poverty or hunger for glory. First, it is important to note that Franz concentrated on two versions, and her primary one was a Danish narrative titled "The Princess with the Twelve Pairs of Golden Shoes."¹¹⁹ This version reduces the dozen maidens down to one, and presents a controlling troll as the antagonist instead of malicious or enchanted princes. The protagonist is a fortune-seeking young man, and his method of rendering himself invisible is a stick, bestowed by an older man to whom he has shown kindness. Her supplemental version (German instead of Danish) describes the more commonly-known retired soldier, the twelve princesses, and the equal number of princes who enthrall them. The invisible item is a

¹¹⁹ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales*, 9-11.

cloak, and there is no violent confrontation against the princes, who are merely (and vaguely) cursed for their revelries.¹²⁰

But Franz’s major reason for comparing the German version against the Danish is the fact that the forests made of precious metals and diamonds are, in fact, cursed and trapped kingdoms, every tree or leaf a person. In the Danish version, these people are liberated through the troll’s blood, and suddenly, there is a far greater significance to the protagonist’s actions, that affects entire societies.¹²¹

It is not predominant in folktales for entire nations to be saved—the theme certainly exists—but when approaching that level of salvation, the folktale begins to take on mythic tones. That said, “saving the world” is what commonly impels many an RPG player character onward—along with a desire for riches, glory, and the love of an exceptional partner.

¹²⁰ Grimm, Grimm, and Tatar, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm: The Bicentennial Edition*, 362-369.

¹²¹ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales*, 12.



FIGURE 2.6. “East of the Sun and West of the Moon.” The heroine asks an older woman where she might find her enthralled husband in this 2005 version of the Norwegian folktale.

“East of the Sun and West of the Moon”

([ATU-425A] “The Search for the Lost Husband”)

“Love sacrifices all things to bless the thing it loves.”¹²²

-Edward Bulwer-Lytton

¹²² Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Lady of Lyons, or Love and Pride*. (1838), Gutenberg.org, Updated August 29, 2016, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2461/2461-h/2461-h.htm>.

This Scandinavian tale is, like “Iron John,” significant for the extensive narrative beats and functions of the story. In its entirety, it seems to take place over months, if not years, and the events that occur to the (again, unnamed) protagonist allow for extensive character growth. The young bride shifts from innocence, to curiosity, to regret, to valiance, finally assuming true agency over her life, desires, and choices by taking on the false wife of her enchanted husband. It is a long tale with many narrative shifts, and yet none of it is marked by martial conflict—but rather, information gathering, trickery, exploration, and persistence.

The tale almost feels as if it is told in two or three acts, which aligns with questline structure, rather than individual quests. The first act, when the young bride is promised to the enchanted prince, is told from a perspective of incredulity, where lack of information places the heroine at the mercy of the prince and his enchantments. The second, where the new wife has lost her husband as a result of her need to see his true face, comprises an extended journey to the four compass points, implying that she literally travels the known world in order to find him. Maria Tatar states in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales* that the cooperation of cardinal winds to transport the girl to her beloved is notable, as their appearance in other tales is not always so harmonious.¹²³ That said, having a player character argue a cause to differing factions, attempting to gain their unified consent and action, often occurs in RPGs. The winds and their support of the young bride may be a prototypical motif of that quest narrative. The final act, where the wife first barter, then negotiates, and finally proves the worth of her affection by

¹²³ Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, 194.

cleaning his shirt (an act his “false” wife cannot do) shows triumph not only by love, but by resolve.

The rescue of a husband by a wife in folktales is unusual, but saving important figures, regardless of gender, is a recurring function in RPG quests. Some of them, perhaps deservedly, are reviled for the need for the hero to ensure their ward’s well-being until reaching a safe destination, a quest style similar to the equally-known and disparaged “escort missions.” Especially in the height of Barton and Stacks’s Modern Era, limitations in computational and design powers ensured that attempting to rescue and care for an NPC could often result in the death of their charge (either via friendly fire or environmental enemies), and repeated attempts were required for players to successfully complete their quest. Nevertheless, the lengths to which the hero of this tale goes to rescue her husband are meant to be extensive, challenging, and a testament to her choice of him as mate, long after he initially selected her.

The enchantments that surround the tested couple seem to be part of an overriding system of magic that is essential to their universe. In a similar fashion, *The Witcher’s* Geralt searches for his daughter, Ciri in a world absolutely saturated by magic. While Geralt cannot ride the cardinal winds, he does (with help) traverse dimensions searching for her.¹²⁴ The hero of BioWare’s *Jade Empire* spends the majority of the game traveling the country in search of her kidnapped master, who has trained and raised her since birth.

¹²⁴ “Through Time and Space,” *Witcher.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://witcher.fandom.com/wiki/Through_Time_and_Space.

Once again, magical elements both interfere with and aid the hero, and once again, multiple alternate worlds are visited in the search.¹²⁵

The extended path from an arranged bride to an intrepid, assertive wife is fairly long for a folktale, but the shift in events, character growth, and locations feels familiar to any seasoned player of RPG questlines, especially main ones. The evolution from a character who passively allows things to happen around her, to one who chooses to act in a manner that secures her desire and her future, is also reminiscent of the leveling of skills and opportunities found in these same role-playing games.

¹²⁵ Jim Bishop, Diarmid Clarke, and Kevin Martens, *Jade Empire* (Edmonton: BioWare, 2005).



FIGURE 2.7. *The Miller's Daughter, "Rumpelstiltskin."* The miller boasts about his daughter in this mid-century Spanish illustration of "Rumpelstiltskin."

“Rumpelstiltskin”

([AT-500] “The Name of the Helper”)

“Truth is always exciting. Speak it, then. Life is dull without it.”¹²⁶

-Pearl S. Buck (attributed)

It is notable how many protagonists in folktales are unnamed—or their names are so varied as to be inconsequential to the plot. The protagonist in “Rumpelstiltskin” is one such character—she is known as “the miller’s daughter” until she later becomes “the queen.” Instead, her antagonist’s name identifies the story, cuing the audience to the tale’s eventual climatic resolution. There are unnamed protagonists in four of the five primary folktales listed here; only Jack, himself a well-known stock character or archetype that audiences were once familiar with, gets both a name and a share in the title.

That said, the discovery and use of the name “Rumpelstiltskin” is a significant motif, and one that RPGs have utilized via a mechanic called a dialogue challenge. Even when said challenge is not asking for a proper name, the need for a password, specific phrase, or perceptive identification¹²⁷ tends to occur with regularity in all genres of RPGs. Put simply, if planned well in the early stages of a game’s development, dialogue

¹²⁶ John Mason, *Know Your Limits—Then Ignore Them* (Tulsa: Insight Publishing Group, 1999), 46.

¹²⁷ By “perceptive identification” (also known as a “skill check”), I refer to a game mechanic where the player, due to acquiring a skill level or talent, can bypass or provoke an antagonist with a simple insight. An example can be found in *Skyrim*, where the player, approaching a town, is prevented from entering unless she pays a toll to the guards. If the player has a high-enough “persuasion” or “intimidate” skill, she can correctly identify that this is not official law but a shakedown, and the guards reluctantly allow her to pass.

challenges are an inexpensive, yet powerful method of expanding on in-game lore, character development, and player agency.

This emphasis on conversation, description, and diplomacy can cue the player to additional treasures and adventures, with less resource expenditure for developers, who are often engaged in creating entire visual worlds and combat systems in a compressed time period. The use of names or phrases as powerful keywords is noted by Tatar when she states, “Knowing the name of your antagonist represents a form of control, a way of containing the power of the adversary.”¹²⁸ From a gameplay perspective, there is a measure of satisfaction in triumphing against a villain without ever unsheathing a weapon—a case where the pen (word) really is mightier than the sword. Similarly, medical anthropologist Sjaak van der Geest, in a paper contemplating the psychological concept called the “Rumpelstiltskin principle” states, “It becomes clear with some examples that words not only express or refer to things, but that they also *produce* things.”¹²⁹ [Emphasis mine.] Often, mere conversations or in-game texts can add context to a quest or location that is limited due to developer cuts, the words alone allowing the player’s imagination to fill in the gaps.

Repeated challenges are also prevalent in *Rumpelstiltskin*, and as a plot function, remarkably similar to the ludonarrative beats found in RPG quests, especially in open-world games. The miller’s daughter spends three nights in rooms filled with straw that

¹²⁸ Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, 128.

¹²⁹ Sjaak van der Geest, “Rumpelstiltskin: the magic of the right word,” [Sjaakvandergeest.socsci.uva.nl](https://sjaakvandergeest.socsci.uva.nl), Published 2010, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://sjaakvandergeest.socsci.uva.nl/pdf/anthropology_and_literature/rumpelskin.pdf.

must be turned to gold, and three times, Rumpelstiltskin visits and performs the task. The miller's daughter three times must pay the antagonist, and when she finally balks at the final payment, she's given three nightly opportunities to save her child.

Sequential tasks, similar in mechanics (but often increasing in difficulty) are essential elements to quest structure, especially if the developers wish to give players a goal that allows them to visit multiple unexplored locations. In addition, the narrative stealth required by the miller's daughter/queen to track down Rumpelstiltskin and discover his name is often a mechanical prelude to a dialogue challenge in RPGs, where the player, using concealment and eavesdropping, can discover hidden contacts or motivations from NPCs, and may choose to confront them later.

Like many popular folktales where women are the protagonists, the actions in Rumpelstiltskin can seem constrained, the options for the miller's daughter increasingly limited. However, the tale is an example of a hero making use of cunning, negotiation, and patience—gameplay qualities that are often prized in complex RPGs.

A Tolkienesque Interlude

As mentioned earlier, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien had extensive influence on RPGs, in narrative, establishing lore, and game mechanics.¹³⁰ The idea of selecting specific races (human, elf, dwarf, halfling, and orc) for certain “racial” qualities (read: skills and talents) can be found in early versions of pen-and-paper role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*. In addition, selecting specific classes (Fighter, Ranger,

¹³⁰ Barton and Stacks, *Dungeons & Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, 28.

Rogue, Barbarian, Wizard, etc.) allowed parties of players to coordinate their tactics when engaging in battle. Even today, both in MMORPGs and party-based single player RPGs, the idea of a “warrior in front, archer further back, wizard/healer to the rear” is considered one of the most effective basic strategies for classic fantasy role-playing games.

Tolkien himself, while a philologist at heart, stated that he created his sweeping fantasies in an attempt to “reclaim” what he believed were lost legends of the people of Britain and the United Kingdom.¹³¹ However, he was also influenced by the myths and folklore of most of Europe, and his extensive writings concerning his fictional universe of Arda reflect his philosophy toward mythopoeia, a term he used to describe the creation of mythologies.¹³²

In a similar manner, role-playing games—especially ones that hope to become long-standing series—usually have extensive cosmologies that the developers have given much consideration with regards to creators, gods, heavenly bodies, and even physical concepts like gravity or the phases of moons. The comprehensiveness of Tolkien’s universes, from divinities on down to agricultural practices, act as frameworks for developers to make it easier to establish a sense of real existence and verisimilitude for the player as they make their way through a fictional world.

¹³¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, Humphrey Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000), 143-145.

¹³² J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 83. (I cite Tolkien’s poem using this term, because his entire reason for writing it and titling it “Mythopoeia” was, in effect, a philosophical rebuttal to his colleagues at the time who could not see much intrinsic value in “created” mythologies.)

Other Tales of Note

Many other tales, some well-known, offered significant parallels to motifs and tale-types found in common quest structure. Some have been mentioned previously, but for now, I'd like to touch briefly on a few that have elements that can be meaningfully compared to quests. These tales did not, in my research, have sufficient functions to fully compare to contemporary quests, but possessed aspects worthy of continued consideration.

“Red Riding Hood” ([ATU-333] “Supernatural Adversaries,” “Little Red Riding Hood”): Even if Red requires the external help of the woodsman to save her and her grandmother (in the versions where she survives at all), her conversations with the wolf, and the observations she notes, are clearly conveyed as warnings to listeners. These same opportunities for a player to trust their instincts concerning potential malevolence occur, notably in the later *Fallout* games. Minor side quests, often reoccurring, where “wounded” or “helpless” characters lure the player character into traps, are found in *Fallout: New Vegas*,¹³³ *Fallout 4*,¹³⁴ and other titles.

“The Six Swans” ([ATU-451] “The Brothers Who Were Turned into Birds”): The hero of this tale, much like the iconic mermaid from another story, spends most of the events mute. Only at the climax, when the brothers can be saved and she is about to die,

¹³³ Josh Sawyer, *Fallout: New Vegas* (Irvine: Obsidian Entertainment, 2010).

¹³⁴ Todd Howard and Emil Pagliarulo, *Fallout 4* (Rockville: Bethesda Game Studios, 2015).

does the truth of her situation emerge, and all transgressions against her are resolved. Interestingly, the actions of the hero—remaining silent while spending six years crippling her fingers sewing shirts made of stinging nettles—is not unlike one of the most ubiquitous mechanics found in RPGs. “Grinding,” or attending to a taxing, monotonous action in order to accomplish a formidable goal (usually attaining an improved talent or accumulating money for a specific item) is often the method many players employ when a specific, high-level reward is their objective. Like the princess sewing for years, players will train, fight, craft, or collect items repeatedly, sometimes for hours, with little interruption for interesting quest events or exploration. That single-minded persistence is one of the reasons *The Six Swans* is highlighted here—and is a good example of a specific function often exploited by players.

“Hansel and Gretel” ([*ATU-327A*] “The Children and the Ogre,” “Show Me How”): As mentioned before, Gretel uses a dialogue challenge to great effect when she tricks the witch into cooking herself in her own oven. She and Hansel display quick thinking throughout the tale, first when they try to mark their path in the woods to find their way home, and later when they fool the witch into believing that Hansel remains skinny, regardless of how much he is fed. However, the state of ongoing captivity that the title characters spend most of the tale enduring is not commonly found in RPGs. Temporary imprisonment is common, especially in in-game societies that allow (but do not condone) thievery, such as the incarceration side quest in *Kingdoms of Amalur*.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ “Behind Bars,” *Amalur.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://amalur.fandom.com/wiki/Behind_Bars.

Other methods of being restrained by antagonists also are occasionally used in quests, to compel the player to surrender an item or information. In addition, the enticement of witches in general appears in fantasy RPGs—usually, however, through the disguising of the witch as an attractive woman, with less emphasis on edible households.¹³⁶

“The Twelve Months” ([*ATU-480*] “The Kind and the Unkind Girls”): The repetition of quests in this tale (which is not as well-known as stories like “Cinderella” or “Beauty and the Beast” in contemporary North America, but still historically found in narrative traditions around the world) displays actions found in multi-part quests. Four times Marusa, charged with an impossible task, is sent into the woods by her stepfamily in an attempt to kill her. Four times she finds the personifications of the twelve months, and four times they facilitate her impossible task, each time slightly differently, as the turn of the seasons dictates.¹³⁷ Structurally, multi-part quests often require acts of equal-but-different effort, and many times can be completed in whatever order pleases the player. That the Months ultimately deal with Marusa’s cruel family, through no act of her own, makes it less consequential as a comparative story (outside of Marusa’s multiple tasks).

¹³⁶ “The Fisherman’s Bride,” Amalur.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://amalur.fandom.com/wiki/The_Fisherman%27s_Bride.

¹³⁷ Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 85-91.

“Bluebeard” (*ATU 312*) “The Bluebeard,” “The Maiden-Killer”): In folklore studies, “Bluebeard” is infamous as a tale that warns women of the dangers of curiosity, and the seduction of luxury in place of sincere emotion and character. In a strange way, it evokes similar themes to “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” because in each story, the austere and wealthy husband forbids a naïve wife against a certain action. The difference in “Bluebeard” is the husband’s malice toward his wife for her disobedience, versus the “East and West’s” enchanted prince’s regret at the loss of his “authentic” wife. In a pattern seen before, the protagonist wife in “Bluebeard” does not possess the singular agency to rescue herself, but must rely on her siblings for help. This is at odds with conventional RPG quest structure, where the player character is encouraged to find solutions on their own (or at least in leading a party) where they control the martial aspects of their revenge and victory.

However, “Bluebeard” remains significant when considering its motifs and tale-types against RPGs, primarily due to the Propp-style interdiction, and the essential truth that is revealed when the wife discovers her husband’s previous murders. This misleading of an RPG protagonist, that they then must spend some measure of gameplay uncovering, is an effective mechanic in expanding the player’s understanding of the game world—and the systems of disinformation that can waylay their overall goals.

“Rapunzel” (*ATU-310*) “The Maiden in the Tower”): “Rapunzel” is a complicated tale to consider in light of the actions commonly found in RPGs. Characters visit Rapunzel, while she remains in the same place (imprisoned) for two-thirds of the story. The witch’s discovery of her pregnancy and her banishment from the tower push

Rapunzel to itinerant motherhood, but it is unclear if she ever truly chooses her fate, or if she merely submits to circumstances. In some versions, Rapunzel searches for her prince as actively as he does for her; in others, she's merely living near-wild in the woods, nursing their twins and consumed with grief. Video games, especially RPGs, do not handle extended sorrow well; many virtual worlds, especially dystopian ones, are grim, but players often lose interest if these same worlds offer no wry commentary or opportunities for improvement. If "Rapunzel" were to be approached as an RPG questline, the most significant events would happen to both Rapunzel and the prince after they leave the tower, but before they are reunited.

"Cinderella" ([*ATU-510A*] "The Persecuted Heroine"): This tale was the first I analyzed when initially proposing my thesis topic. Most compelling were the trials that Cinderella endured (losing her mother, forced to labor in indignity) and the magical assistance she receives that ensures her triumph and vindication. I compared it (superficially, I admit) to the protagonist paths in *Fable*¹³⁸ and *Fable II*,¹³⁹ where the heroes lose family members, and labor through most of their youth before utilizing magical assistance to achieve their eventual triumph and vindication. The *Fable* series was also selected specifically because of its particular artistic focus on a world inspired by a pseudo-Britain of centuries past, where magic and extraordinary creatures recall the *environment* of fairy tales, if not always the specific tropes. However, the issue that

¹³⁸ Peter Molyneux, Dene Carter, Ben Huskins, and Mark Webley, *Fable* (Guilford: Big Blue Box Games, 2004).

¹³⁹ Peter Molyneux, *Fable II* (Guilford: Lionhead Studios, 2008).

Cinderella primarily gains her victory while merely continuing her life of domestic servitude (rather than actively seeking out her magical helper) rendered her passive enough to be removed from primary folktale consideration.

“Sleeping Beauty” (*ATU-410* “The Sleeping Beauty”): Similar to “Iron John,” the reader/listener may ask the question—who is the true hero of the story? Is it Beauty, who, like so many other errant protagonists, falls victim to her own curiosity? Or is it the prince, who braves obstacles that have paralyzed a kingdom in order to gain a glimpse of her? The psycho-social implications of regarding this tale from both perspectives changes the meaning of the actions undertaken by both the princess and prince. From a questing perspective, the onus on the prince to find and free the princess is more logical—it asks for decisive action from the player, with a promise of (nebulous) rewards. Poor Beauty, after initially exploring her home and pricking her finger, can only wait, sleep, and dream. As a result, this tale, while iconic enough to consider for analysis, offers only partial material for comparison in gameplay.

Chapter III

The Quests

“An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered.”¹⁴⁰

-G.K. Chesterton

Incentive is as complicated as the mind that contemplates it. As a fan of Maslow’s hierarchy,¹⁴¹ much of my life, and even the daily to-do list, is ordered from the immediate requirements of survival (“get groceries for dinner”) through self-actualization (“work on my thesis”). In gaming, the “don’t die/don’t lose” imperative is paramount over any other requirement—even, it could be argued, the need to win.

Eric Hayot raises some interesting points in his essay, “Video Games & the Novel.” He discusses “the rise of interactive aesthetic activity” in the last century, while acknowledging that aspects of true narrative interactivity (in the style of biblical stories, Greek mythologies, and folktales) harken back for millennia.¹⁴² He goes on to assert that “players of games must be able to *win*. Any obstacle faced by their protagonist, any blockage in forward progress, whether its agent is the environment or a villain, must be

¹⁴⁰ G. K. Chesterton and Patrick Madden, “On running after one’s hat. 1908,” Quotidiana.org, December 1, 2007, Accessed July 23, 2021, http://essays.quotidiana.org/chesterton/running_after_ones_hat.

¹⁴¹ A. H. Maslow, “A theory of human motivation” *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–96.

¹⁴² Eric Hayot, “Video Games & the Novel” *Daedalus* 150, no.1 (Winter 2021): 182.

able to be overcome through the player's effort."¹⁴³ This, technically, both is and is not true in role-playing. In a standard RPG, incentives to play the game according to self-imposed role-playing boundaries often conflict with the desire to secure resources or exploit design flaws in order to minimize any potential for defeat. In fact, there is an approach well-known by seasoned RPG players that is referred to as "Munchkinism"¹⁴⁴ or "Powergaming,"¹⁴⁵ (in deference to a famously aggressive RPG card game designed by Steve Jackson and an earlier book by James Desborough describing the practice) where players sacrifice personality-based decisions ("My knight would never lockpick someone else's door") in favor of gaining as much power and resources as they can to guarantee survival ("If I pilfer every villager's house, I'll gain hundreds of gold coins").¹⁴⁶

Analyzing the monolithic challenge of mastering game mechanics in order to successfully "complete" an RPG,¹⁴⁷ the player can take advantage of the opportunity to

¹⁴³ Hayot, "Video Games & the Novel" 183.

¹⁴⁴ Steve Jackson and John Kovalic, *Munchkin* (Austin: Steve Jackson Games, 2001).

¹⁴⁵ James Desborough and Steve Mortimer, *The Munchkin's Guide to Power Gaming* (Austin: Steve Jackson Games, 2000).

¹⁴⁶ "Munchkin," Tvtropes.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Munchkin>.

¹⁴⁷ The concept of "completion" in any open-world video game, and particularly RPGs and MMORPGs, is contested. Any game where the world persists in an interactive state after finishing a main questline presents ongoing opportunities for other accomplishments, such as console goals (Achievements, Trophies, etc.) or self-perpetuating quests. Some games have skill and experience level caps, halting any additional difficulty advancement, while others allow the player to reset their capped abilities, effectively redesigning their character from a new starting point. Suffice to say, many players and developers agree that any form of "winning" or "finishing" is essentially tied to one or two main endgame questline resolutions, despite the fact

develop both their chosen role and the game’s mechanical systems through quests. The rewards from successful quest completion are historically varied, but conventional: money, weaponry, resources (health and crafting items), additional locations, and crucial items and/or information allowing the player to advance. Some RPGs weight experience points in favor of completing quests over defeating enemies or accomplishing tasks, thereby neutering any “grinding” bonuses. Grinding is actually encouraged in RPG-light games such as the *Souls* series,¹⁴⁸ where quests are minimized and repeated failure (dying) is essentially part of the system, allowing the player to “git gud”¹⁴⁹ and develop effective strategies against various bosses over time. However, this is less to our purpose, as RPG questing traditionally allows the player to negotiate a foreign environment in a controlled manner, testing both environmental hazards and cultural mores in a limited scope—a “game within a game,” if you like. Much like folktales (or any small-form narrative), quests are intended to offer a specific challenge during a specific period in a character’s existence. This fragment is not the full experience of life, any more than a quest represents a complete game.

The quests presented later in this chapter were selected for particular aspects: either the Propp-like functions that reflect the grammar of RPGs, or a distinctive encounter that enables the player to better understand the fictional game world. The

that the player can often continue to participate in and affect the game world after these quests are accomplished.

¹⁴⁸ Hidetaka Miyazaki, *Souls* (series) (Tokyo: FromSoftware, 2009-2020).

¹⁴⁹ “git gud,” Dictionary.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/git-gud/>.

breadth of significance, either to the player character or the world itself, operates on a scale from mundane to mythic, but ultimately a pattern emerges: impetus to action, action(s), resolution. All this is incentivized to the player as a means to—if not win—participate meaningfully in the game.

An Interlude on Mash-ups

In an age where Austen’s heroines stalk zombies,¹⁵⁰ and Fox Mulder is reimagined as a Joseon-era hero,¹⁵¹ the idea of genre-bending or hybridization might seem exhausted. However, from a narrative standpoint, RPG developers have enthusiastically drawn from multiple and disparate sources of inspiration to spectacular effect, especially in more notable side-missions, expansions, or conventional DLC packages. Sleuthing (as an investigative gameplay mechanic) figures significantly in four of the five quests analyzed in in this chapter, despite the fact that two of the titles are fantasy, one is science fiction, and one is post-apocalyptic/alternate history, none of which immediately convey a sense of Holmes-or-Marlowe-types of deduction.

While detective-style stories often appear as novel breaks in more conventional types of gameplay (as we will see with “A Brush with Death” later in the chapter), there are other mash-ups that appear, to engaging and at times poignant effect. A notable DLC to the historically-influenced Western *Red Dead Redemption, Undead Nightmare*, puts

¹⁵⁰ Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009).

¹⁵¹ “Joseon X-Files - Secret Book,” Imdb.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2146531/>.

the 1911-era John Marston in a situation where he must deal with a zombie plague, while hunting down multiple legendary creatures like Sasquatch.¹⁵² Despite its baseline historical accuracy, placing Marston in an early-twentieth-century horror genre changes the experience of the *Red Dead* series into something surprising, allowing the player to re-engage with familiar landscapes and game systems in an unsettling context.

Another genre-blending quest occurs in *Fable III*. “The Game” literally places the Royal Hero, miniaturized, into an ongoing tabletop RPG—a game within a game.¹⁵³ The *Dungeons & Dragons*-influenced adventure is a tonal change from the emerging industrialization in the world where the majority of *Fable III* takes place. Broad fantasy, winking in-jokes, and an “artificial” location (including painted boardgame tokens) mean that “The Game” acts as a satirical counterpoint to the much-grimmer country of Albion that the Hero must effectively navigate, much like a *Saturday Night Live* skit tries to poke fun at real-life events.

¹⁵² *Red Dead Redemption: Undead Nightmare* (San Diego: Rockstar San Diego, 2010).

¹⁵³ “The Game,” Fable.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fable.fandom.com/wiki/The_Game.



FIGURE 3.1. *Horizon Zero Dawn*. The heroine Aloy confronts a technological monster.

*Horizon Zero Dawn*¹⁵⁴ portrays a world where tribal culture, including weaponry and hunting tactics, are used against electronically-mutated beasts, a *Clan of the Cave Bear*¹⁵⁵ set in a post-apocalyptic science fiction setting. As the player character, Aloy struggles to reconcile the tensions arising in her world as a result of generational ignorance and earlier hubris. The game world asks the player to contemplate the

¹⁵⁴ Mathijs de Jonge, John Gonzalez and Ben McCaw, *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Amsterdam: Guerilla Games, 2017).

¹⁵⁵ Jean M. Auel, *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (New York City: Crown Publishing, 1980).

mysteries that could lead to such an environment, a conundrum that is examined in the next section.

By drawing on multiple genres as sources of inspiration, a game world can present competing philosophies, technologies, and even architecture and aesthetics, offering complexity in place of more-expected single-genre conventions.

Mr. Hemingway, meet Mr. Rolston

As an interactive medium, video games offer both opportunities and limitations for the participant. Unlike novels or folktales, the players affect the game world in order to provoke certain outcomes. Survival and mastery have been discussed already; but another goal of some dedicated players is that of completion (inasmuch as this is logistically possible). Players can “complete” a game using various metrics, such as accumulating trophies, achievements, in-game collectibles, location discoveries, skill level maximization, and, of course, finished quests.

Another form of completion found in RPGs and other narrative-heavy games occurs when players seek to “discover” the majority of the game world. This is accomplished through exploration, exhausting dialogue options, and interacting with environmental cues and tableaux.¹⁵⁶ This can be utilized in conjunction with a game’s

¹⁵⁶ While the concept of “winning” and “completing” an RPG has been discussed earlier, the idea of “unlocking” the totality of a game’s content is another matter. In fact, due to variance in quests, multiple endings, and the increasingly-popular “new game +” concept (where a player must finish an initial playthrough in order to unlock additional bonuses, difficulty levels, and hidden content in subsequent attempts), the act of “discovering” everything a game world has to offer is becoming increasingly challenging and time-consuming.

predominant mechanic, as we will see when analyzing *The Witcher 3's* “Isle of Mists” quest later in this chapter.

Video game exploration aligns well with Hemingway’s “Iceberg Theory,”¹⁵⁷ where the author’s sparse, “just the facts” style of writing allows the reader to attempt to surmise unspoken truths using surface details as clues. Certainly, the nature of video game development means that much of the backstory of a fictional world never makes it onto the screen. (Design bibles for video games can be years in the making, comprising thousands of pages and including hundreds of concepts, a small fraction of which will ever make it into a title, regardless of how sprawling the universe may be.) However, sometimes this limitation becomes an added benefit that allows the player to assist in the act of their own immersion. Ken Rolston, the lead designer for both *The Elder Scrolls III*¹⁵⁸ and *IV*, and the executive design director for *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*, was known for his “unsolvable mysteries”¹⁵⁹ philosophy when it came to creating fictional interactive worlds, stating:

We now call them 'franchise mysteries'. And as a Visionary, I preach that your setting should always be filled with franchise mysteries. And people in the setting should constantly argue about the Truths of those mysteries. And internally, you should have strong advocates for each of the 'One

¹⁵⁷ Paul Smith, "Hemingway's Early Manuscripts: The Theory and Practice of Omission" *Journal of Modern Literature*, Indiana University Press 10, no. 2 (1983): 268–288.

¹⁵⁸ Todd Howard, Ken Rolston, Douglas Goodall, Mark E. Nelson, and Michael Kirkbride, *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (Rockville: Bethesda Game Studios, 2002).

¹⁵⁹ Ken Rolston and Lady N, “Ken Rolston’s Posts, On unsolvable mysteries in the Elder Scrolls setting (02/02/12),” The Imperial Library, Published 2010-2012, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.imperial-library.info/content/forum-archive-ken-rolston>.

True Ways', and they should squabble like real scholars competing for tenure and grants.¹⁶⁰

These unknown quantities, be they creation myths, unexplained disasters, disappeared races, or something else, work to unite players even as they disagree over “Truths,” as they all must participate in the developers’ worlds, even as each of their experiences in those worlds is distinctly different and personal.

From Hemingway’s perspective, a narrative based on sparse and salient facts (the “top of the iceberg”) gave “dignity”¹⁶¹ to his fiction. Transferred into the interactive alternate reality of a video game world, sparse and salient information (limited, as it is, by current technology) conveys a reflexive idea of environments that appear to be greater than the sum of their parts. For Rolston, that includes “delicious nonsense”¹⁶² in *The Elder Scrolls III*, a geographically enormous title that utilized conversation and unique encounters as a way to communicate the culture and history of races that were millennia in the making.

Whether dignity or delicious nonsense, an approach to narrative that deliberately refuses to hold the hands of either reader or player gives both a chance to participate more fully in the experience that an author or developer intends. The analyses of the

¹⁶⁰ Ken Rolston and Lady N, “Ken Rolston’s Posts, On unsolvable mysteries in the Elder Scrolls setting (02/02/12),” The Imperial Library, Published 2010-2012, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.imperial-library.info/content/forum-archive-ken-rolston>.

¹⁶¹ Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York City: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 192.

¹⁶² Steve Burke, “Ken Rolston: “The Great Thing About Morrowind is that There’s Too Much There.” GamersNexus, April 24, 2014, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.gamersnexus.net/gg/1418-ken-rolston-morrowind-interview-ecgc>.

following quests should illustrate the elegance with which video game developers utilize the limitations of the medium to provide an encompassing sense of adventure and accomplishment.

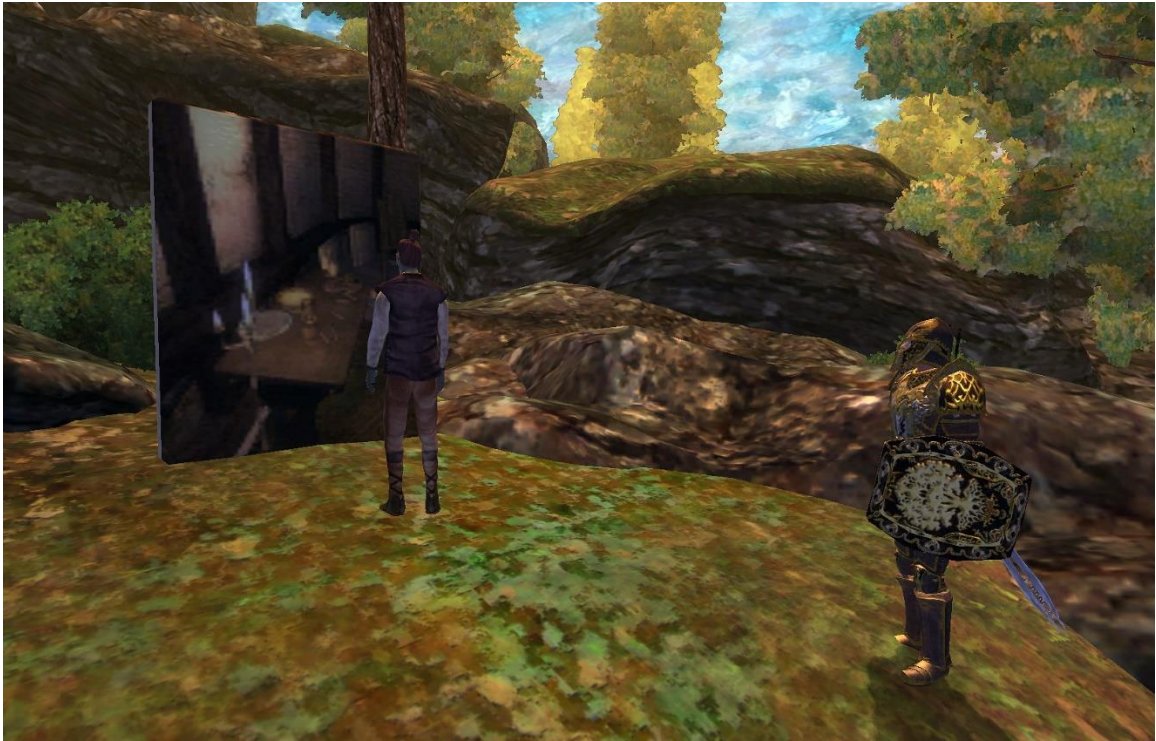


FIGURE 3.2. *The Painted World*. The famed painter Rythe Lythandas uses his enchanted paintbrush to return the player and himself back to his hometown of Cheydinhal.

“A Brush with Death” (Side Quest, Town: Cheydinhal)¹⁶³

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.”

-Thomas Merton¹⁶⁴

In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp notes that violating interdictions (i.e., “don’t do that”) is a predominant function that allows the protagonist to initially embark on an adventure.¹⁶⁵ In RPGs however, instead of being told “don’t,” a hero is almost always asked to “do.” Any enterprising player visiting the refined town of Cheydinhal in Bethesda’s *Oblivion* is presented such an opportunity.

Asking residents about local gossip, the player learns that a respected painter has disappeared. Visiting his house and speaking to his distraught wife, the player learns that the painter locked himself in his studio to work (as he normally did) but failed to emerge after a full day had passed (as he normally did not). Investigating, the wife finds the room empty. When the player is given the chance to inspect as well, they find an “Unusual Painting to The Painted World,” which transports them inside the canvas itself, and near the missing painter in question, Rythe Lythandas. Conversation with Lythandas reveals his possession of an enchanted “Brush of Truepaint,” gifted from a goddess and inherited from his father, that allows him to create paintings so luminous, so lifelike, that they are

¹⁶³ “Oblivion: A Brush with Death,” en.Uesp.net, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:A_Brush_with_Death.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, 1955) 34.

¹⁶⁵ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 27.

regarded as the product of a true master. Assaulted in his studio by a thief who broke in, Lythandas found himself inadvertently trapped in a world of his own painting, and tormented by trolls that the thief painted in order to protect himself. Armed with some enchanted turpentine gifted by Lythandas, the player can defeat the “painted trolls,” gain a unique alchemical ingredient, reclaim the stolen paintbrush, and return with the painter back to his home and his grateful wife. Rewarded further with an enchanted apron, the player is free to resume their adventure, slightly more famous and well-regarded in the game world of Cyrodiil.¹⁶⁶

A quick review of the ATU and Thompson Motif Indexes indicate that several elements appear in this quest (and overall with “fantasy” genre RPGs, as there is always a significant appearance of magic in the form of adversaries, helpers, gifts, and rewards), but a couple obvious examples are the ATU’s [*Tales of Magic > Supernatural Tasks 460-499*], and the Thompson Motif Index’s [*> D1170. †D1170. Magic utensils and implements.*]. There are more, and much like the following quests, patterns emerge showing the predominance of some tale-types and motifs over others.

Much like the aforementioned “The Twelve Dancing Princesses” and “Jack and the Beanstalk,” the motif of traveling to another reality to confront a monstrous entity is well-known in both folktale studies and RPG development. A segue that “breaks the conventional world” or “crosses a boundary” is an expected element, one that provides an interesting interlude for the player that somehow also reinforces the existing rules in the game world itself. One finds examples of these altered worlds (or altered perception of

¹⁶⁶ “Oblivion: A Brush with Death,” en.Uesp.net, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:A_Brush_with_Death#Return_to_Tamriel.

worlds) in game series as diverse as the post-apocalyptic *Fallout*,¹⁶⁷ the sarcastic fantasy *The Bard's Tale*,¹⁶⁸ and historical games such as *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*.¹⁶⁹

To avoid the monotony of repeated low-narrative “Fetch” quests, or merely doing the exact bidding of a quest-giver (“Kill that monster, take a thing, deliver it over there”), the “Investigate” action gives the player a chance to utilize some intellect and agency in pinpointing the source of a problem. One might argue that “A Brush with Death” is a fetch quest, as Lythandas’s wife asks you to try to locate him, but the lack of information concerning his whereabouts puts the player in a different initial position, mechanically.

“Investigating” in an RPG often requires one or more of three specific actions: Questioning/Interrogating, Tracking, and Inspecting/Identifying clues. “A Brush with Death” utilizes two of these: [*Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive identification)*] when questioning Lythandas’s wife, and [*Investigation via environment (clues, notes)*], as there is only one interactive object in the studio that leads to the painter’s location. From there, it becomes a true “Fetch,” as the player must retrieve the stolen brush, thus facilitating their return.

In considering “A Brush with Death,” especially in the context of other side quests in *Oblivion*, it stands as memorable, despite the conventional mechanics that dominate the majority of its playthrough. One reason is the previously-mentioned and

¹⁶⁷ “Tranquility Lane,” [Fallout.fandom.net](https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Tranquility_Lane), Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Tranquility_Lane.

¹⁶⁸ “The Bard’s Tale Solutions,” [Bardstaleonline.com](https://www.bardstaleonline.com/bt1/walkthrough/solution-from-interplay), Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.bardstaleonline.com/bt1/walkthrough/solution-from-interplay>.

¹⁶⁹ “Playing with the Devil,” [Kingdom-come-deliverance.fandom.com](https://kingdom-come-deliverance.fandom.com/wiki/Playing_with_the_Devil), Accessed July 23, 2021, https://kingdom-come-deliverance.fandom.com/wiki/Playing_with_the_Devil.

under-used “Investigate” mechanic, but another is the removal to an altered environment, one that literally imitates the normal game world, but in a painterly manner. From a developer standpoint, given the fact the game was released in 2006, the blurred, water-colored style of “The Painted World” might have been hand-crafted by an environmental artist at Bethesda, but it is also possible that the artist(s) also utilized a different texture set on the pre-existing forest models. Either way, the sudden aesthetic shift from a realistic location to an impressionistic one allowed players to expand their understanding of the world, to see how enchantments and magic function beyond mere potions and spells, and to realize that they were still equipped to address this previously-unknown aspect of the universe. Taken together, these two functions (Investigation via clues and Transportation/Crossing to an altered location) add just enough difference to challenge the player regarding any presumptions they carry about the game world of Cyrodiil, and the varying ways they can interact with it.



FIGURE 3.3. *Squire Brio is Grateful*. A relieved squire thanks the player for solving a diplomatic nightmare in *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*.

“Oh, The Indignitaries” (Side Quest, City: The Gardens of Ysa)¹⁷⁰

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

“It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important.”

-Arthur Conan Doyle¹⁷¹

At first glance, this quest appears simple—almost a throwaway, where the game mechanic is built on SAT-esque logic problems. A newly-arrived hero to the Fae (read: fairy) capital city of Ysa is asked by a harried squire to assist in determining the protocol for ordering a number of diplomats who seek audience before the Fae ruler. Of course, interviewing them reveals that each has strong opinions concerning their proper location in their order of presentation. Anecdotally, some players mention failing this quest, and after reviewing the dialogue choices, one can see that that is quite easy to accomplish. Taking the dignitaries’ preferences at face value (and without the added bonus of a dialogue skill check), there does not appear to be an obvious solution—at least one participant will always be disgruntled by their place in the queue. Almost all of them believe they have the right to go first, while some very specifically request to be near others, and some want to be kept as far away as possible from others. With a skill check,

¹⁷⁰ “Oh, the Indignitaries,” Amalur.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://amalur.fandom.com/wiki/Oh,_the_Indignitaries.

¹⁷¹ Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Ryan, *The Complete Works of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012), loc. 11049 of 32108.

the conundrum becomes clearer, but only if the player takes the liberty of presuming some unspoken additional preferences. In essence, there is no “perfect” order, only a “best-I-can-do” compromise.

If the order is presented to the squire correctly, the player earns some coin, some experience points, and the gratitude of a functionary in the Fae court. However, completing the quest also gives the player a chance to speak with highly-ranked members of a (not playable) race that, throughout the game, are presented as austere and even condescending to other (playable) peoples. In interviewing the dignitaries, the player is given a chance to see the inner workings when the Fae deal with each other, and that there appears to be a specific vocabulary, cadence, and etiquette for speaking with outsiders versus communicating amongst themselves. It is an efficient way to open up the game world a bit more for the player.

Despite its fairy tale setting, this quest seems to have the least in common with folktales—although logic challenges are often essential elements to these stories. The closest I can find are the “riddling” antagonists and testers, such as “Rumpelstiltskin.” It should be observed that it is not logic but rather eavesdropping through which “Rumpelstiltskin’s” miller’s daughter prevails. However, the “who goes first, who goes last” mechanic should be recognizable to any student with a passing understanding of logic word problems. This quest is notable because, being a dialogue challenge, it is ridiculously inexpensive in terms of resources for a video game developer to implement. As mentioned before, it gives the player an insight into a culture that is not experienced firsthand, but as something where comprehension by an outsider is crucial to “solving” the main questline. To clarify, despite being a side (not main) quest, the player gets a

much better sense of what both the protagonist and antagonist sides of this struggle represent (“good” Fae vs. “corrupted” Fae). Quests like this—cheap to install, enlightening, and diversionary—can be essential for the player to aid in understanding an effective game world.

Consulting the ATU and the Thompson Motif Index, as mentioned previously, there are not any comparable tale-types for this quest (the closest classification is under [*Cumulative Tales 2000-2100 > Chains Involving Other Events 2029-2075*]), but there are some motifs categorized by Thompson that spark similarities, particularly in [*Choices > †J810. Policy in dealing with the great., †J860. Consolation by a trifle.*], and [*†J880. Consolation by thought of others worse placed.*], along with [*Customs > P632. †P632. Customs concerning recognition of rank.*].

Any apparent functions are via Interrogation [*Investigation via dialogue*] and, anemically, Negotiation. The actions required of the player are locating and conversing with the four dignitaries in question, and the quest cannot be completed without doing so. The added information provided by a high enough Persuasion skill gives the player further insights into their true thoughts, which can make the player’s decision easier, although not by much. Quests where a player must gain information are often paired with dangerous situations (encountering aggressive enemies, surveillance being discovered) so this particular quest stands out for its peaceful progression, as well.



FIGURE 3.4. *Geralt and Ciri on the Isle of Mists*. Revived from a death-like sleep, Geralt’s daughter Ciri contemplates the challenges they both face in *The Witcher 3*.

“The Isle of Mists” (Main Quest, Region: Skellige)¹⁷²

*The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*¹⁷³

“I used to be Snow White, but I drifted.”

-Mae West (attributed)¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ben Jessey, “The Witcher 3: A Guide To The Isle Of Mists,” Thegamer.com, January 20, 2021, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.thegamer.com/witcher-3-wild-hunt-isle-mists/>.

¹⁷³ Konrad Tomaszewicz, Mateusz Kanik, Sebastian Stępień, and Marcin Blacha, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (Warsaw: CD Projekt Red, 2015).

¹⁷⁴ “Mae West: Mae’s Famous Sayings Are Part of Nation’s Folklore,” *LIFE* (New York: Time, May 23, 1949) 105.

Of all the quests presented in this chapter, “The Isle of Mists” may claim the strongest influences from a traditional folktale. This makes sense, because much of *The Witcher* series, be it Andrzej Sapkowski's books, CD Projekt's game series, or the fantasy drama for Netflix, draws heavily from European folklore. The quest, sometimes referred to by players as the “Seven Dwarfs” quest, sets the player hero Geralt in further search of his missing adopted daughter Ciri, who, at last report, has sought refuge with some diminutive protectors. Even *reaching* the fabled Isle is a challenge for the player, followed by encountering a panicked group of estate assessors who have been sieged by hostile paranormal forces, refusing to open the door to Geralt unless he rescues their three missing compatriots. Geralt then searches the island to rescue two dwarfs, and discover the death of the third.¹⁷⁵

Allowed into the dwarfs' barricaded cabin, Geralt finds Ciri, apparently deceased. Embracing her in grief, Ciri is magically resurrected, through what appears to be an enchantment sparked by Geralt's paternal affection and a destiny-driven paranormal source. This allows both Geralt and Ciri to address the larger problem threatening *The Witcher's* game world: the advancing of an apocalyptic enemy known as The Wild Hunt.

Some parallels can certainly be drawn between the quest—Ciri's death-like sleep, her noble lineage and shock-white hair (rather than her complexion), the personalities of the dwarfs—and versions of Snow White. However, it is far from exact, and the ultimate incentive (to save not only Ciri, but the world she and Geralt inhabit) is a broader goal than any handsome prince finding love in a glass coffin. This similarity-with-variance is

¹⁷⁵ In the end, only one dwarf makes it back alive.

found throughout *The Witcher* universe, most notably in the *Blood and Wine* DLC expansion¹⁷⁶ location known as the Land of a Thousand Fables.¹⁷⁷



FIGURE 3.5. *The Land of a Thousand Fables*. The Land of a Thousand Fables appears as an enchanted storybook brought to life in *The Witcher 3*'s expansion, *Blood and Wine*.

Expansions to released titles often provide players not only the luxury of a few more hours of gameplay, but also the opportunity to expand the mechanics and lore in a

¹⁷⁶ Konrad Tomaszewicz, Grzegorz MocarSKI, and Marcin Blacha, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Blood and Wine* (Warsaw: CD Projekt Red, 2016).

¹⁷⁷ “Land of a Thousand Fables,” *Witcher.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://witcher.fandom.com/wiki/Land_of_a_Thousand_Fables.

way that would be distracting in the main game's playthrough. The Fables section of the *Blood and Wine* DLC introduces characters from folktales (such as Prince Charming, The Three Little Pigs, Thumbelina, and more) in a slightly-altered state, which is expected by seasoned RPG players. Here, CD Projekt Red highlights the European folktale heritage from which the (much darker) *Witcher* series draws inspiration.

Returning to "The Isle of Mists," Geralt's actions through the entire quest are similar to his behavior in the majority of the game—however, like "A Brush with Death," it is both the location and the context that add to the player's sense of urgency and unreality. As part of his profession, Geralt utilizes the "Investigate" action, with three subsets: Interrogate [*Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive identification)*], Track [*Investigation via environment (items, clues, notes, recordings)*], and Identify. He tracks an enchanted beacon to the Isle, a location so hidden as to be almost fictional within the *Witcher* universe, then interrogates the barricaded elves, and identifies their lost compatriots. Along the way, he is compelled to battle with treacherous monsters, utilizing various strategies to maximize his attacks against overpowering foes with differing weaknesses. His encounter with his daughter takes the form of an interactive cutscene, where specific dialogue cannot be avoided, but if he chooses, Geralt can inquire further about the events that put them both in their current (dangerous) location.

Considering the ATU, it is logical to include "Snow White's" place in the Tales of Magic section [*Other Tales of the Supernatural > 709: Snow White*], and of course, [*Supernatural Adversaries 300-399*] (which is almost ubiquitous as a tale-type in any fantasy RPG quest), and [*Supernatural Helpers 500-599*], in the form of the beacon that guides Geralt and resuscitates Ciri. Arguably, both Ciri and Geralt could be considered

“supernatural” themselves (as in [*Supernatural or Enchanted Wife (Husband) or Other Relative 400-459*]); however, this extends the comparison to an almost pedantic degree.¹⁷⁸

In Thompson’s Motif Index, one finds similarities most prominently to [*E50. †E50. Resuscitation by magic.*], [*†D1960. Magic sleep.*], and [*Z230. †Z230. Extraordinary exploits of hero.*]. Most of these concern Ciri, but certainly Geralt is renowned with regards to his exploits as well. The curious nature of the Isle falls under [*†F110. Journey to terrestrial otherworlds.*], but it appears to be a lateral shift, concerning neither a heaven nor a hell.

“The Isle of Mists,” as a main quest for *The Witcher 3*, is pivotal enough that it requires a warning before entering, as other parts of the game are not accessible (or are outright failed) by Geralt embarking on the trip.¹⁷⁹ Like many main quests, this restriction signifies a shift toward urgency and the player’s actions begin to assume a scope that, as has been discussed previously, is more mythic than earlier adventures. That this heroic quality is underscored by the context of a familiar folktale makes it significant for the player during their navigation through the game.

¹⁷⁸ The protagonist or hero of an RPG, in the form of a player character, is often traditionally bestowed with enchanted or supernatural abilities, to the point where the trope is routinely accepted as a narrative method of justifying the player’s need to “save the (game) world.”

¹⁷⁹ “The Isle of Mists (quest)/Cutoff point,” *Witcher.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, [https://witcher.fandom.com/wiki/The_Isle_of_Mists_\(quest\)#Cutoff_Point](https://witcher.fandom.com/wiki/The_Isle_of_Mists_(quest)#Cutoff_Point).



FIGURE 3.6. *Commander Shepard on Eden Prime.* Commander Shepard's first mission on Eden Prime does not go as expected.

“Prologue: Find the Beacon” (Main Quest, Planet: Eden Prime)¹⁸⁰

Mass Effect

“Death or glory becomes just another story.”

-The Clash¹⁸¹

This is a fairly long quest, and technically the first encountered in the game. It stands as a tutorial for novices, yet the unfolding action is so essential to the rest of the

¹⁸⁰ “Prologue: Find the Beacon,” Maseffect.fandom.com, Accessed July 23,2021, https://maseffect.fandom.com/wiki/Prologue:_Find_the_Beacon.

¹⁸¹ Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Topper Headon, and Guy Stevens, “Death or Glory,” *London Calling* (London: CBS, Epic, 1979).

main quest that it remains compelling to seasoned players. Much like the myth of Odysseus,¹⁸² or even “East of the Sun, West of the Moon,” the player travels toward a definitive goal over a geographical distance, stopped along the way by various encounters, some requiring battle, others gathering information. A preeminent soldier (the player) has been selected to potentially become a member of a galactic special forces unit. How she acts in this mission will determine the outcome—and, in the best narrative and ludological traditions, little goes as expected. Each fresh obstacle brings more challenges, and the player must deal with information that is new not only to them, but also to their in-game character. It is a remarkable and immersive way to allow players to invest in their avatars, and gives them a sense, however illusory, that they have true agency over the events that unfold in that first hour.

From moment to moment (or narrative beat to narrative beat) more arguably happens to the player character in this initial quest than in any other quest in the game. Sent to a pastoral agrarian colony to retrieve an artifact of archaeological importance to the entire Milky Way galaxy, the player (Commander Shepard) embarks on a series of events that includes the loss of a squad member, the murder of a supervising officer, the acquisition of a seasoned soldier, the death of a significant portion of the colony, the emergence of an enemy that has not been encountered for decades, the betrayal of a chain of command, and a confrontation with an apocalyptic warning beacon that only the player and the main antagonist truly understand.

¹⁸² Homer and Emily Wilson, *The Odyssey* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017).



FIGURE 3.7. *Eden Prime*. Eden Prime before the attack in the tutorial quest.

A mythic encounter, to be sure—and one the player spends the better part of three games impressing upon various civilizations.¹⁸³ Like Odysseus, Shepard understands that several supernatural intelligences are desperately trying to influence the players in an ancient geopolitical game of chess. Like Odysseus, Shepard attempts to protect her crew, but is hampered by her own evolving awareness and the compelling insistence of needs from galactic/environmental allies.

¹⁸³ Convincing an entire (skeptical) galaxy of an encroaching Armageddon (and searching for methods to thwart it) becomes the overarching plot for *Mass Effect* and its two sequels.

Much has been made of the third game (*Mass Effect 3*)¹⁸⁴ and its scientifically imperfect resolution to Shepard's overall story.¹⁸⁵ That is an issue for another time (and frankly, another thesis). Regarding the Eden Prime tutorial quest as first encountered, it should be viewed as something akin to an overture, the introduction to motifs and mechanics the player will be experiencing for several dozen hours.

Breaking down the path from Shepard's drop-off point at the colony to her revival on the *Normandy* (the ship she will soon command), there's a decent balance between exploration, battle, and investigation (usually in the form of dialogue with locals). The location varies, moving through back country, to an archeological dig, to outlying settlements, to two active ports connected by a well-defended rail system. In that respect, the player gets a miniaturized experience for different combat and interrogation scenarios that expand on a larger scale as the game progresses.

Another hallmark of this quest is the introduction of the morality system, where dialogue and actions are presented on a scale from "Paragon" to "Renegade." As binary as the two extremes appear, choices are not always overtly good vs. evil, such as when Shepard tells a surviving crew member either "We'll see that he receives a proper service once the mission is complete," (Paragon) or "Leave him. We need to finish the mission," (Renegade).¹⁸⁶ As presented, a Renegade might be brutally focused on the current

¹⁸⁴ Casey Hudson, Preston Watamaniuk, David Falkner, and Mac Walters, *Mass Effect 3* (Edmonton: BioWare, 2012).

¹⁸⁵ "Did the ending of Mass Effect 3 really suck?," Debate.org, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.debate.org/opinions/did-the-ending-of-mass-effect-3-really-suck>.

¹⁸⁶ "Eden Prime Surface," Maseffect.fandom.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://maseffect.fandom.com/wiki/Prologue:_Find_the_Beacon#Eden_Prime_Surface.

priority, whereas a Paragon might be concerned with the parameters of honorable procedure. This dichotomy affects decisions throughout the trilogy, with effects both galactic and personal. The bifurcation of a morality system is one of the most basic foundations for western RPGs, although as the genre has evolved, different approaches are being developed with greater emotional and philosophical nuance, to varying degrees of success.¹⁸⁷

It is slightly more challenging to draw comparisons between a science fiction (as opposed to fantasy) quest and the ATU, but at least one categorization shares similarity in theme, if not narrative: [750-849: *Religious Tales* > 780-799: *The Truth Comes to Light*]. This is a grouping of tales of murdered, abused, or exploited people or animals, where their remnants (through some manipulation) “speak,” telling of their destruction and who is responsible. Given the cosmic threat to the civilizations scattered throughout the galaxy, Shepard’s interaction with the warning beacon from a long-disappeared race which is trying to convey the encroaching danger to as wide an audience as possible certainly invites comparisons.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ *The Divinity: Original Sin* game [Sven Vincke, Farhang Namdar, Jan Van Dosselaer, and Sarah Baylus, *Divinity: Original Sin* (Ghent: Larian Studios, 2015).] employs a version of Rock, Paper, Scissors for some conversations, where the player can use Charm, Intimidate, or Reason to plead a case and then attempt to convince an NPC to perform an act or favor to which they are disinclined. The structure of these conversations (and the subsequent mini-game mechanic) is intended to convey a sense of complex motivations and low-level diplomacy, rather than a simple “Me good, you bad” form of bickering. (However, by the time the mini-game starts, players may feel and act even more pugnaciously than before the conversation began.)

¹⁸⁸ The overarching plot from *Mass Effect* is indicative of a trend in contemporary folktale narratives that concerns an “upset” or threat to an established environment or biome, usually by revealing an ancient imbalance that needs to be corrected.

In Thompson's Motif Index, the warning Shepard encounters aligns with [*A1000.--A1099. World calamities*], although the list of calamities and catastrophes are, logically, centered on single-world based issues (such as fire and floods). Much of the celestial categorization in the Index seems concerned with creation myths, which is consistent with the historic origins of these motifs. During the squad's approach to the beacon, the double-crossing and murder of Shepard's superior by a fellow warrior falls under [*K800.--K999. Fatal deception*], and more specifically, [*K950. Various kinds of treacherous murder.*]. One could consider the presence of advanced technology as equal to "magic" or "supernatural" adversaries/helpers/items, but ongoing studies will help to establish the extent of the technology within the world that it is set.¹⁸⁹

Functionally, as mentioned before, the player spends most of their time Exploring [*Investigation via environment (map marker)*], Battling [*PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)*], and Investigating (using both Interrogation [*Investigation via dialogue*] and Negotiation [*PC may use dialogue challenges*]). However, the final act (in a cutscene that the player cannot control) has Shepard experiencing a vision that repeats itself through the rest of the main questline. These images, and the need to translate them into something a contemporary humanoid from this game world can understand, establish a major goal for Shepard, one that affects many of the choices the player encounters. In that way, the knowledge is not dissimilar to the Arthurian Knights' vision of the Holy

¹⁸⁹ It may be that the introduced technology could be as conventional as a laser weapon, available to everyone, or an object that is extraordinary in its presence or function, like the beacon Shepard and her squad encounter.

Grail, justifying their embarkation on the famous quest,¹⁹⁰ and drawing comparisons once again between a science fiction epic and myths or religious folktales.



FIGURE 3.8. *Diane at Work*. As the business head of the Great Khans' drug running and smuggling operation, Diane is a character not inclined to trust outsiders easily.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Malory, Aubrey Beardsley, and Stephanie Lynn Budin PhD, *Le Morte d'Arthur: King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (San Diego: Canterbury Classics, 2015), 527-529.

“Aba Daba Honeymoon” (Faction Quest, Location: Red Rock Canyon)¹⁹¹

Fallout: New Vegas

“When you begin to see that your enemy is suffering, that is the beginning of insight.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh¹⁹²

Historically, the faction known as the Great Khans has not endeared itself to other societies in the storied *Fallout* universe. Known as clannish thugs, raiders, smugglers, and drug dealers,¹⁹³ a player in *Fallout: New Vegas* finds the Khans in a canyon retreat, trying to regroup after a horrific battle with a competing faction that resulted in the deaths of many of their elderly, ill, and young—a battle that even the opposing (and victorious) side admits amounts to a war crime.¹⁹⁴

Their numbers diminished, the Khans support themselves primarily through smuggling and drug manufacturing. Encountering the heads of the current operation, Jack and Diane, the player learns that due to their population numbers, they need some help supporting new trade routes and deliveries in the area. What follows is a multi-step quest, where the player is given a chance to see how the Khans’ ongoing presence in the New Vegas area is regarded.

¹⁹¹ “Aba Daba Honeymoon,” *Fallout.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Aba_Daba_Honeymoon.

¹⁹²Thich Nhat Hanh, Arnold Kotler, and H. H. the Dalai Lama, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 120.

¹⁹³ “Khans,” *Fallout-archive.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://fallout-archive.fandom.com/wiki/Khans>.

¹⁹⁴ “Bitter Springs Massacre,” *Fallout-archive.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fallout-archive.fandom.com/wiki/Bitter_Springs_Massacre.



FIGURE 3.9. *Caught by the Legion*. Asked to track the whereabouts of an errant scout for the Great Khans, the player finds him sentenced to crucifixion at the hands of a warring faction.

After rescuing a kidnapped scout for the Khans, completing a couple deliveries (with varying degrees of danger), and providing some research to their chemist, the Khans affirm that the player is now welcomed as a respected visitor in their camp. Depending on how the player is progressing through the main quest, this affinity can be used in diplomatic negotiations with the Khans for their political allegiance.

This quest is interesting for several reasons, but one of the most significant is that it gives the player the opportunity to assist a group which is regarded as legendarily aggressive and violent. In their reduced, neutered state, there is little of the raiding behavior that the Khans were infamous for, but they still persist—even explaining their philosophies regarding their combative culture with the player.

Much like folktales involving mercurial adversaries such as Baba Yaga,¹⁹⁵ the player is given an opportunity to see the needs of opponents, adding underlying reasons and meaning to their actions. In a contemporary example, few might dispute that Magneto is a true antagonist operating in opposition to the interests of the X-Men, but comic readers and movie watchers alike can certainly understand his point of view, even if they do not condone it.¹⁹⁶ Like Baba Yaga and Magneto, the Great Khans are not “one-time-only” villains, but longstanding rivals in the *Fallout* universe. The opportunity to see their vulnerabilities (and what drives the culture that sustains their survival) allows the player to add a missing piece to the perpetually-broken, post-apocalyptic puzzle that is the *Fallout* universe.

Structurally, there’s little to pair most of “Aba Daba Honeymoon” with tale-types in the ATU. However, one could argue that in [850-999: *Realistic Tales* > 950-969: *Robbers and Murderers*], interacting with the Khans-as-criminals, some similarities could emerge. In the Thompson Index, numerous motifs appear: [Q10. †Q10. *Deeds rewarded.*], [Q20.2. †Q20.2. *Fulfillment of precepts rewarded.*], [†H1210. *Quest assigned.*], [†H1220. *Quest voluntarily undertaken.*], [†H1550. *Tests of character.*], [†R110. *Rescue of captive.*], [U220. †U220. *Forced peace valueless.*], and more. The complicated structure of “Honeymoon,” and the multiple stages involved (where, at every crucial point, the player can choose to aid or hamper the Khans’ efforts), makes this quest

¹⁹⁵ Maia Nikitina, “Russian Folklore: Baba Yaga as a Symbol of Mother Nature,” Thoughtco.com, Updated July 26, 2019, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.thoughtco.com/russian-folklore-4589898>.

¹⁹⁶ “Magneto,” Comicvine.gamespot.com, Updated March 31, 2021, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/magneto/4005-1441/>.

an excellent example of the use of variance, especially with regards to faction-based affinity over binary examples of morality.

The functions/actions required of the player to complete this quest are numerous, and further amplified by skill check and perk bonuses (allowing the player to skip over certain challenges in favor of an easy exchange of knowledge or liberal application of charm). Exploring an unknown location, or Exploring for a specific goal [*Investigation via environment (map marker)*] both figure here, as well as standard Battle/Combat encounters [*PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)*], [*PC may use alternate methods (concealment, stealth)*]. There are some Reverse Fetch aspects, where the player must deliver a “mildly suspicious package” and later, a “highly suspicious package,” and of course, Interrogation [*Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive identification)*] and Negotiation [*PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (via skill checks)*] are used multiple times. Pointedly, the player can convince Jack, the chemist who researches and produces the majority of the Kahns’ drugs, to produce healing medicines alongside his more-addictive recreational or performance-enhancing ones, and can even be persuaded to do business with the player at a reasonable discount. The material payoff is somewhat nominal for completing multiple tasks, but the regard from the Khans as a group is increasingly valuable as the main quest progresses.

There are numerous factions that the player can engage or alienate in *Fallout: New Vegas*, including other aggressive groups like the Brotherhood of Steel¹⁹⁷ and the

¹⁹⁷ “Brotherhood of Steel (Mojave chapter),” *Fallout.fandom.com*, Accessed July 23, 2021, [https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Brotherhood_of_Steel_\(Mojave_chapter\)](https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Brotherhood_of_Steel_(Mojave_chapter)).

literally-criminal Powder Gangers.¹⁹⁸ However, among these, the Khans stand apart as a society that is unrepentant, yet humbled by circumstances they know they had a part in creating. It is unclear if given the opportunity, they would act differently to protect their own vulnerable population or display empathy to other groups that they menaced, but the damage to their numbers stunned them on levels both sociological and conceptual. For a culture that values strength and aggression above all else, the Khans of New Vegas appear to be using their retreat as a period of contemplation, however briefly.

¹⁹⁸ “Powder Gangers,” Fallout-archive.com. Accessed July 23, 2021, https://fallout-archive.fandom.com/wiki/Powder_Gangers.

Chapter IV

Sequences, Surveys, and Structures

*“Everyone thinks they’re the hero of their own story.”*¹⁹⁹

*-Borderlands (series)*²⁰⁰

The best quests, like the best folktales, are presented in a way that makes the player want to revisit them, often multiple times. The performative aspect of tales related or quests played means that both forms of media will vary, however slightly, for each interaction. When composing a proof-of-concept RPG index for this thesis, it was crucial to identify parallels between categorized folktales and RPG quests—and to identify where the narrative or mechanics simply did not offer an exact match. For the most part, there were very few quests with either narrative or mechanics similar to the tale-types found in the ATU. Wherever possible, I found the hierarchical categories where the quest would *potentially* fit if it were presented as a traditional story. This often meant that more than one category provided similarities, such as [*Robbers and Murderers, 950-969*] and [*Stories about Married Couples, 1350-1439*] for *Jade Empire*’s “The Flower of the Fields.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ “Handsome Jack,” [Talesfromtheborderlands.fandom.com](https://talesfromtheborderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Handsome_Jack), Accessed July 26, 2021, https://talesfromtheborderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Handsome_Jack.

²⁰⁰ *Borderlands (series)* (Frisco: Gearbox Software, et al., 2009-2019).

²⁰¹ “Quest: The Flower of the Fields,” [Jadeempire.fandom.com](https://jadeempire.fandom.com/wiki/Quest:_The_Flower_of_the_Fields), Accessed July 26, 2021, https://jadeempire.fandom.com/wiki/Quest:_The_Flower_of_the_Fields.

Searching for motifs in the Thompson index, I found far more close or almost exact comparisons, such as in *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*'s "Red in Tooth and Claw"²⁰² that had [B211. †B211. *Animal uses human speech.*], [D113.1. †D113.1. *Transformation: man to wolf.*], [D313.2. †D313.2. *Transformation: wolf to man.*], [D1242.1. †D1242.1. *Magic water.*], and [F718. †F718. *Extraordinary well.*]. However, even then, the unique mechanics involved with gameplay meant that *actions* remained an essential aspect to quest structure, definitively crucial to the *essence of questing*. Propp's morphological functions became a framework from which to try to develop a system of identifiable actions.

"ACTION! ...er, AcTANT, that is..."

As discussed in Chapter I, internal context is key to understanding the placement and structure of Propp's different morphologies. When considering the "Propp-like functions" that appear in RPG questing, that context was adjusted to allow for the more practical requirements of a player deciding (usually in real-time) between various solutions to the challenges presented.

While this thesis is not intended to be an examination of video game semiotics, it would be prudent to acknowledge the influence of actants, mostly via Propp's "spheres of action," seven situations or environments where one or more characters may act in a

²⁰² Jon Bitner, "Kingdoms Of Amalur: Red In Tooth And Claw Mission Guide," TheGamer, September 8, 2020, Accessed July 23, 2021, <https://www.thegamer.com/kingdoms-of-amalur-red-in-tooth-and-claw-mission-guide/>.

specific way to materially change the path of a story.²⁰³ Descriptions of “dispatchers,” “helpers,” “heroes,” and “villains”²⁰⁴ illustrate the seismic events that propel a folktale from purpose to purpose (as opposed to more reflective types of literature).

The work of Algirdas Julien Greimas expanded this concept, firstly by acknowledging the importance of Propp’s spheres,²⁰⁵ then positioning the concept of these spheres or others like them into “actants,” eventually proposing an “actantial model”²⁰⁶ by presenting the characters and actions as narrative pairs on specific axes. The influence of actant upon actant can then be visually represented to determine the general direction of a story.

In a similar (but simpler) manner, Kurt Vonnegut attempted to render a visual example of a narrative, as we shall see below.

“Cinderella” is a Staircase

During a lecture titled “Here is a lesson in creative writing,” Kurt Vonnegut attempted to chart a basic graph that would allow the viewer/reader to see the “shape” of a story, based on movements along axes charting fortune and the passage of time.²⁰⁷ In

²⁰³ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 79-80.

²⁰⁴ Propp, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Algirdas Julien Greimas, Alan Velie, Daniele McDowell, and Ronald Schleifer, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 205.

²⁰⁶ Louis Hébert, “The Actantial Model,” Signosemio.com, Accessed July 23, 2021, <http://www.signosemio.com/greimas/actantial-model.asp>.

²⁰⁷ Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man Without A Country* (New York: Random House, 2005), 24-29.

describing stories that would appeal to broader audiences, Vonnegut suggested that an important and deliberate aspect to many tales was the need for the axis signifying fortune to end at a higher point than where it started. Vonnegut called it “encouraging to readers.”²⁰⁸

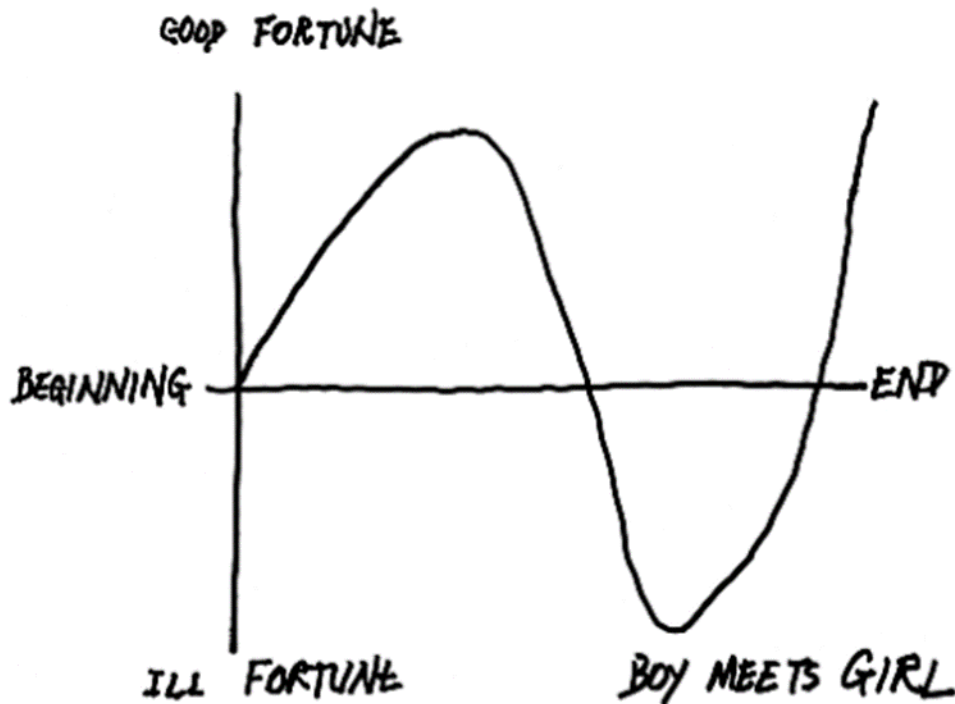


TABLE 4.1. *Plot Chart, “Boy Meets Girl.”* Vonnegut’s visual representation of narrative action.

That incline toward ultimate (and eternal?) good fortune is not consistent; there are dips and peaks signifying challenges and crises that add to the story and the overall

²⁰⁸ Vonnegut, *A Man Without a Country*, 24.

sense of accomplishment that, it could be argued, are mutually shared by the protagonist and the reader. This graphing of time and success shows the course of action in a simple image, the picture to a story's thousands of words. Vonnegut charts the staggered, sequential success of Cinderella, demonstrating that some classic simple stories require multiple "wins" before a final catastrophe, which then serves to bring the eponymous heroine to her true love and "ever after" success.

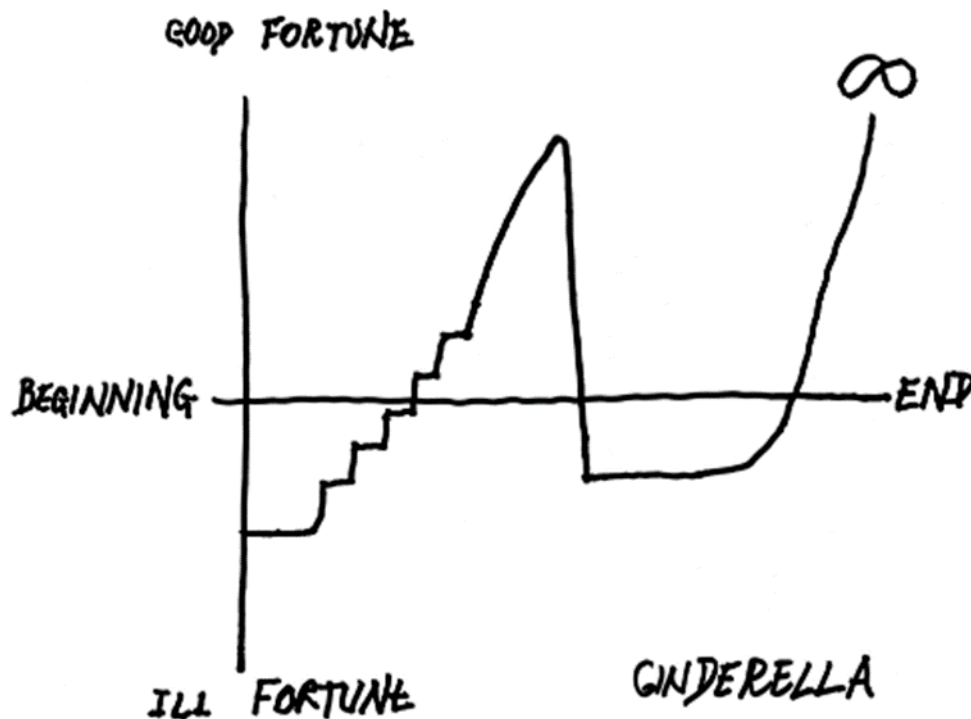


TABLE 4.2. Plot Chart, "Cinderella." Vonnegut's graph of the famous fairy tale.

While Vonnegut goes on to demonstrate that certain stories, such as the modernist *The Metamorphosis* or the Elizabethan *Hamlet* do not fit this structure, for our purposes it is "Cinderella" that remains notable for two reasons: first, because of its fairy tale structure (as most protagonists' fates in the genre trend upward as the stories end), and

second, because the staggered pattern Vonnegut illustrates could represent a number of multi-stage quests, particularly in the staircase shape of the fortune axis, and the crescendo of a meant-to-be-near-impossible final battle. Preserving player interest via a series of varying ludological challenges is standard developer practice, but before advancement can become too automatic (success after success after success, much like Cinderella’s preparations for the ball), curve-balls and handicaps can be effectively implemented (much like the stroke of midnight).

While the Index currently focuses on categorization, a supplemental graph charting the narrative beats of mechanical actions may assist in quest development, particularly for questlines hampered by repetitive events and encounters. Visualizing an interactive experience before it can be fully developed, or researching a comprehensive quest (multiple outcomes and all) without scouring lines of code or playing for hours to unlock the quest may aid both developers and researchers.

That being said, let us examine what current analysis revealed when considering quest structure and Propp-like functions.

NPC With Information Requires Help

Reviewing selected quests, certain functions appeared repeatedly, with small variations based on particular mechanics or distinct narrative elements. *Baldur’s Gate*²⁰⁹, a 1998 fantasy RPG with traditional mechanics, had a quest with an ostensibly simple goal. “Dryad of the Cloud Peaks” offered the player the opportunity to: help a woodland

²⁰⁹ James Ohlen, Scott Greig, and Lukas Kristjanson, *Baldur’s Gate* (Edmonton: BioWare/Irvine: Black Isle Studios, 1998).

spirit protect a tree against encroaching “thugs,” help the antagonists, or refuse the quest outright.²¹⁰ This “sudden encounter” [*NPC with information requires help*] where an NPC specifically provides environmental or situational information, along with a request for assistance, repeatedly appeared as the start to many of the quests selected for analysis. (A similar function [*NPC with information shares gossip*], also occurred with lesser regularity. In this instance, the player character converses with an NPC who knows of a particular quest opportunity, but is agnostic about the player’s decision to pursue the adventure.)

From that conversation, the player may Negotiate [*PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (Politeness/humility bonus)*] for a greater reward, and if they agree to undertake the challenge, after confronting the “thugs,” can either defeat or assist them [*PC may assist QG (Quest Giver) opponents*]. The potential for combat is straightforward [*PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)*], and the functions recognize the possibility of multiple outcomes [*Multiple completion outcomes (QG, QG opponents)*]. Finally, the Rewards [*Reward(s) (exp, skills, items, money)*] are listed, showing the various remunerations the player collects through the alternate playthroughs of the quest.

These elements—an introduction to the quest, the opportunity to negotiate terms, the possibility to act independently of the quest giver’s wishes (via refusal or opponent aid), the issue of combat or other mechanical elements (tactics), differing outcomes, and finally, rewards—appeared again and again in the analysis of the RPG quests selected for

²¹⁰ “Dryad of the Cloud Peaks (quest),” [baldursgate.fandom.com](https://baldursgate.fandom.com/wiki/Dryad_of_the_Cloud_Peaks_(quest)), Accessed July 28, 2021, [https://baldursgate.fandom.com/wiki/Dryad_of_the_Cloud_Peaks_\(quest\)](https://baldursgate.fandom.com/wiki/Dryad_of_the_Cloud_Peaks_(quest)).

the Index. Whether they pointed to a specific “questing grammar” or merely acted as default mechanics for the player to literally “play the game,” they still represented a structure that appeared to facilitate objective-based gameplay.

Certainly, other functions emerged, especially when Exploration and Investigation were required, as were alternate methods to complete a quest, and differing outcomes. However, the persistence and reoccurrence of all of these specific functions indicated an overriding (and conventionally accepted) structure to quest creation that appears to support the idea of a categorical Index.

Asking the Experts

During the course of this research, I had the opportunity to survey RPG video game developers about their work in designing quests and ask their opinions regarding requirements for categorization. Their responses were provocative, both collectively, and in individual opinion.

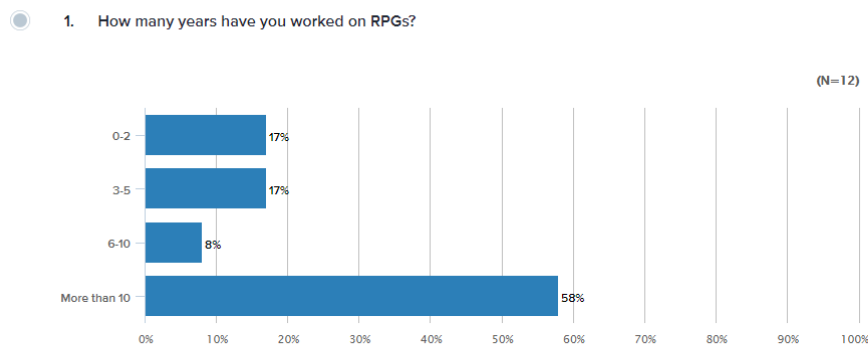


TABLE 4.3. *Years Worked on RPGs.*

From a pool of 12 respondents, inquiring about their length of time working on RPGs, around fifty percent (+/- 6 respondents) had done so for more than 10 years. While this could be considered a significant amount of time in an increasingly-mercerial industry, it was interesting to note that the quantitative output did not align with their years of work.

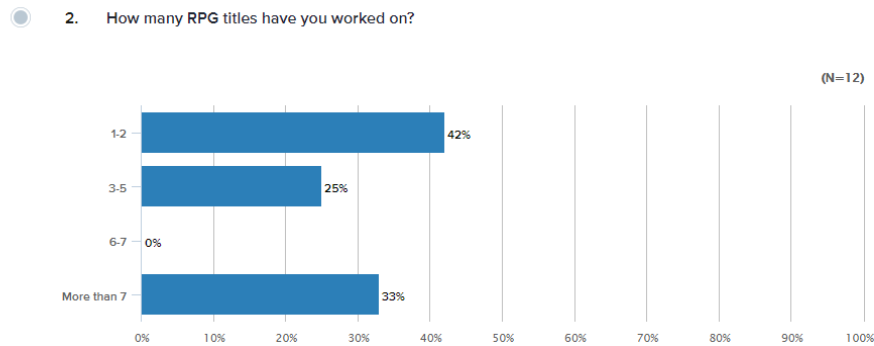


TABLE 4.4. *Number of RPGs.*

While 22% of respondents had worked on “more than 7” RPGs, a surprising 42% had only worked on one or two. While this result might indicate that many of the respondents with limited time in the industry had, unsurprisingly, worked on fewer titles, it remained plausible that many or most respondents worked on projects that were wide-ranging and complex, indicators of games that require years to develop.

This was reinforced by the number of quests and questlines that respondents had worked on per title.

- 4. What was the average number of quests (not questlines) per title? (Please include DLC/expansion packs in total.)

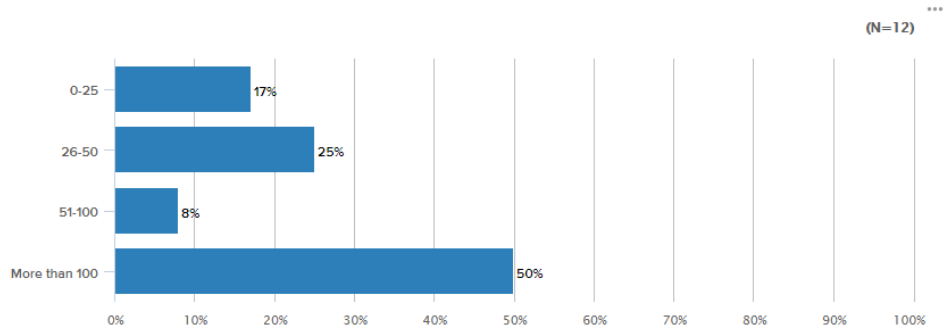


TABLE 4.5. *Number of Quests per Title.*

- 5. What was the average number of questlines? (Please include DLC/expansion packs in total.)

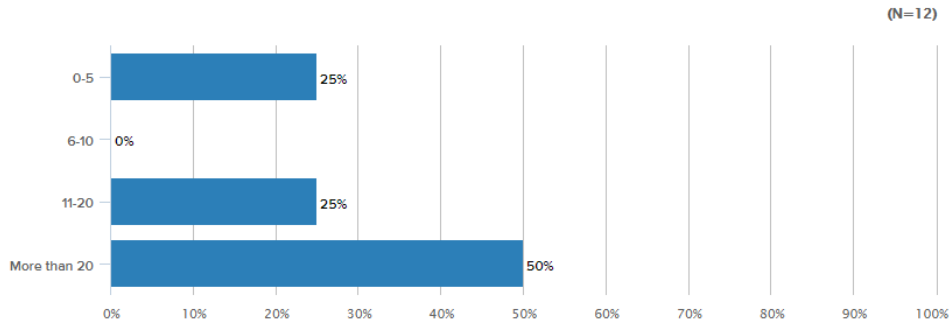


TABLE 4.6. *Number of Questlines per Title.*

In both cases, fifty percent (+/- 6 respondents) had worked on titles that had “more than 100 quests” and “more than 20 questlines,” respectively. This suggested (but did not guarantee) that the RPGs in question were expansive and wide-ranging. This researcher acknowledges that a larger pool of respondents might further clarify the issue, but still considers these results as worthy of analysis.

The thrust of the survey, to determine importance in variance in quest development and to inquire about the importance of various categories for RPG quest classification for a functional Index, resulted in some interesting responses. For example, the number of quests that the respondents had worked on that involved moral/affinity-based variance was lower than expected.

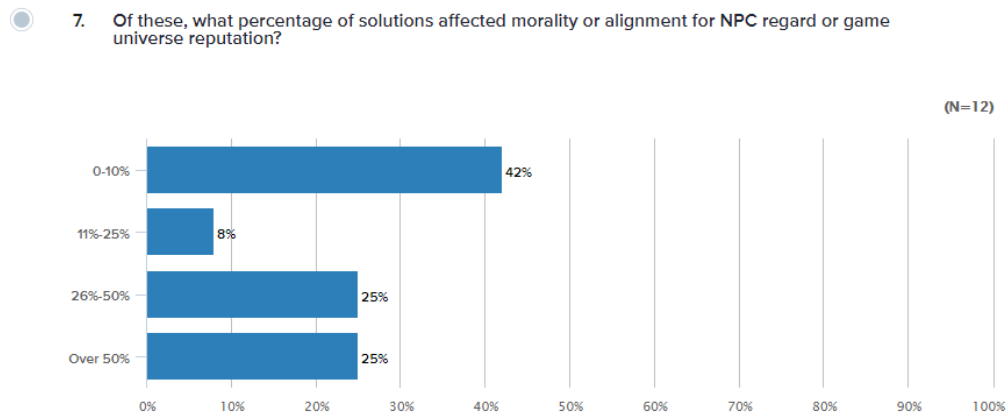


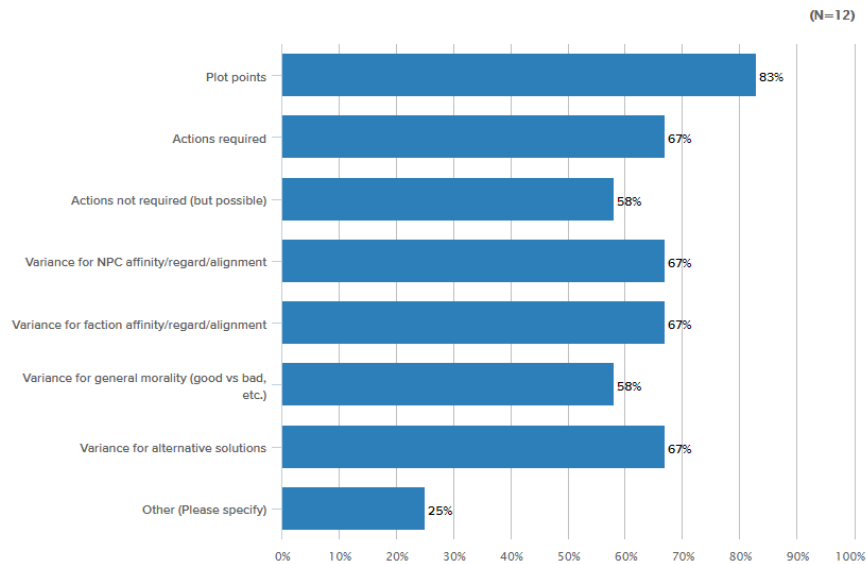
TABLE 4.7. *Percentage of Variant Quests Involving Regard.*

As seen above, the majority of quests that included alternate solutions or outcomes that affected morality, alignment, NPC regard or in-game reputation remained

relatively low, with 42% of respondents stating that these variant quests represented 10% or less of overall variant quests implemented. This was surprising, as game development in earlier decades often placed priority on player character regard.

As the survey moved into questions regarding developer needs for quest classification, the results were diverse and thought-provoking. On the whole, the majority of respondents found the suggested categories potentially useful:

15. If you could refer to an archive or index of published RPG quests organized by type, would the following categories assist in design and development?



Because multiple answers per participant are possible, the total percentage may exceed 100%.

TABLE 4.8. *Categories for Quest Index.*

However, it should be noted that not every respondent saw significant value in the creation of an Index. One developer stated:

While I think it would be interesting, I wouldn't list it as helpful. This is because to me, when going through the earlier questions, I kept thinking how critical the game context was. One of my games was explicit in playing with morality; one had more events than quests; and others were games that had RPG mechanics but didn't really allow for any choice. While I think lists would be internally helpful, externally I can't see them as having a huge amount of use.

TABLE 4.9. *Quest Category Response.*

Other respondents differed in their answers, albeit with qualifiers:

Out of hundreds of thousands of quests, maybe 5-10% of them are interesting. It would be a lot of chaff to filter through. The use would be limited, but it could be interesting. Not sure how you would categorize it. Plus, depending on the game, the definition of a "quest" can be pretty wildly different and they aren't even always called quests.

TABLE 4.10. *2nd Quest Category Response.*

Being able to reference other works is extremely helpful, but time consuming due to the need to play through games to study them. An index would allow us to better hone our craft, avoid well-trod roads, and consider possibilities made valid by trailblazing designers we might not be aware of.

TABLE 4.11. *3rd Quest Category Response.*

So, while the response was varied, a majority of respondents acknowledged *some* value in the development of an Index. In addition, asking for additional potential categories for such an Index raised ideas not previously considered:

I think knowing how much gameplay time and effort is put into the quest - having a complicated choice be just text-only and have numerical results is a lot different than one that impacts the fate of NPCs or shuts off entire gameplay routes. Knowing especially if a choice PREVENTS content from being accessed rather than just IMPACTS it (like you can only do A or B, where they are each significant routes) would be helpful. There's a big difference between a choice having an emotional impact vs. a gameplay one (like losing either Kaidan or Ashley in Mass Effect - they're kind of interchangeable in your squad, and the player is not choosing between potential romantic interests.)

TABLE 4.12. *Specific Category Response.*

NPC cast size, monsters used and reused from previous games (e.g. returning bosses, undead returning, etc.), world-settings/planes/mythological lands referenced or featured (e.g. Hell/the Nine Hells, the Underworld, Faerieland).

TABLE 4.13. *2nd Specific Category Response.*

1. Cultural origin. Ex. Japanese quests are often stylistically different than American quests, with different motivating requirements. 2. Violent vs. Non-Violent progression: Violence unfortunately makes up a vast majority of how players interact with quests, non-violent solutions tend to be more creative and satisfying. 3. Environmental vs. Character driven (opt: Voiced/Unvoiced): This might be a blue sky thought, but many quests don't require additional NPCs to complete, instead using object hotspots as a kind of personal journey.

TABLE 4.14. *3rd Specific Category Response.*

Putting aside tale-types, motifs, and functions, respondents were concerned with several other elements, each of which appeared to be of particular interest based on how each developer implemented their quests within their own team. As a result (and while being mindful of the small respondent sample size), this researcher will endeavor to examine the value of these additional categories as viable classifications.

All told, the survey indicated that developers with both recent and long-standing experience in the industry—while placing moderate importance on the development of variant quests—remained generally interested about the viability of a system of classification for RPG quests. The specifics of this system, however, are yet to be tested in an applied environment.

“Herein Lie the Lost Lands”

As the video game industry advances, technology is increasing at a rate that threatens to surpass the pace of ludological design. Strictly class-based gameplay has receded in favor of more “universal” skill and leveling systems, where proficiency is rewarded by unrestricted use of abilities (which may be arbitrarily selected and abandoned in a single playthrough, regardless of “role” or “character” selection). While this empowers players limited by time and daily resources, it can hamper the overall experience, pulling the player out of true immersion into an experience that degrades into something akin to “Press ‘Skill Button’ to Level Up,” rather than provoking thoughtful gameplay.

Ed Greenwood is the creator of the “Forgotten Realms,” a fictional universe that became the basis for the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*,²¹¹ a sourcebook to be used with the rulesets set forward in *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. After its release, it not only became one of the most significant campaigns ever associated with the tabletop RPG, but the “Forgotten Realms” also became the basis for other RPG products, as well as novels, graphic novels, and several seminal video games.²¹²

²¹¹ Ed Greenwood, Jeff Grubb, and Karen Martin, *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* (Lake Geneva: TSR, 1987).

²¹² Examples include the novel *The Crystal Shard* [R.A. Salvatore, *The Crystal Shard* (Lake Geneva: TSR, 1988).], and the video games *Pool of Radiance* [Chuck Kroegel, Keith Brors, and Brad Myers, *Pool of Radiance* (Mountain View: Strategic Simulations, 1988).], and *Neverwinter Nights* [Trent Oster, Brent Knowles, James Ohlen, Drew Karpysyn, Kevin Martens, David Gaider, and Lukas Kristjanson, *Neverwinter Nights* (Edmonton: BioWare, 2002).].

It is clichéd, but Ed Greenwood quite literally “wrote the book(s)” that established much of the post-Tolkien lore that went into the early quest designs of the eighties, nineties, and the start of the new millennium. Graciously assenting to an interview, he shared his thoughts on quest design, construction, and both the current and future state of RPGs.²¹³

Mentioning a preference to categorize IPs (Intellectual Properties) across multiple games (as part of a potential RPG Index), he went into greater explanation as to its potential usefulness (using Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*²¹⁴, a game he worked on in the eighties, as an example):²¹⁵

...because *The Two Towers* was so limiting, in format and so on. In fact, [at] Interplay, I was I was given this thing and I started mapping and he said, “No, no, you don’t understand, you only get one mapsheet.” [...]. So I started writing in stuff and he said, “No, no, no, no, nobody gives a crap about that. They want to kill things.” Like I’m working on the hall. Okay, the Golden Hall is special, which means that [it’s] much grander than everybody else’s. [...] What does everybody else live in? [...] If they’re nomadic, you know? And so, what [does] the family culture look like? What do they cook in? Is it tripods with cauldrons? Are they moving all the time? [...] If you’re going to get beyond that, what is this culture like?

Greenwood’s priority concerning culture is meant to be more profound than aesthetic window-dressing. He goes on to emphasize that the legacy of cultural elements

²¹³ Ed Greenwood, Interview with Maria O’Brien, Personal Interview, (Zoom/Port Hope, July 24, 2021).

²¹⁴ *J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings, Vol. II: The Two Towers*, (Los Angeles: Interplay Productions, 1992).

²¹⁵ Any edits made are to correct for grammar, spelling, and context. The unedited transcript may be shown per reasonable request.

in a long-standing IP from game to game can be remembered and used as touchstones for players, and even potentially as ways for player characters to literally solve a puzzle:

Because the model that that Gygax gave us, which is being steadily eroded as we go on through the generations of gamers, because let's face it, [...] there is always an element of min-maxing. You know, I want my [elf] to be able to fight. I want my blockhead fighter to be able to cast spells. [...] Okay, if we're going on a quest, and we have defined characters, like a thief, a fighter, a magic user, I must make sure my quest gives every character a moment to shine. [...] And one of the ways of doing that is to give them problem solving, which is already part of *D&D*. And by that I don't mean the overt silly puzzles. [...] “Let's figure out the puzzle or the rhyming riddle.” [...] Which of course Tolkien gave us, but it wasn't original to him. He was pulling on folklore. [...] And there were many charms and warnings in old folklore, like rowan tree and red threads stops the witch and all her speed or whatever. Because it was a way of remembering things in an illiterate society. If you could chant it, you could remember it. And you could pass it down.

While avoiding the “overt silly puzzles,” Greenwood stresses that the memories of players long-invested in lore-heavy games can aid immersion and help to solve mysteries in their current adventure. He revisits this same idea later, talking about the potential RPG Index classification of monsters that appear in sprawling game *worlds*—but not necessarily in every game *edition*:

...I need to know whether you're going to do a Beowulf. The sequel to Beowulf [...] they will fight the dragon, which is Grendel's mother. Because she knows what he did to Grendel because Grendel went back to her to die after Beowulf. Spoiler alert! Well after he tears Grendel's arm off, I think Grendel goes back to die, he goes back to his mother. He goes to the cavern and therefore his mother has it in for Beowulf. [...] But I mean, the monsters [that] survive, can learn or they're the cousins or heirs or offspring of the ones you did [destroy] ...often they're there [and] want to get revenge, or they did survive. And they come back with a missing eye and the scar and “I'm going to get you...”

What Greenwood is stating is that rather than “reinventing the wheel” with new monsters created for every sequel to a game series, previously-encountered creatures can

bring complex motivations, improved tactics, and additional *casus belli*, as long as the history of past experience is accurately categorized and archived.

As developers design new video game IPs with the expectation that they will spawn numerous sequels and other editions, Greenwood's focus on categorizing and keeping track of lore as it iterates from game to game seems prudent. The idea that players, whether novices or seasoned veterans, could both utilize persistent symbols of a long-standing (virtual) culture has the potential to further immerse them into that world, while saving developers time and resources. Greenwood touches on the importance of this with a gentle warning, meant to be understood in both fiction and reality alike:

And then you realize what that means is [that] the lessons have to be re-taught to each new generation. What does folklore do? It teaches us "Don't eat the purple berries, because that'll kill you. Eat the white berries.

Folklore (and folktales) teach and re-teach the important lessons. In a similar manner, quests place obstacles in the way of players, usually repeatedly, until the player learns how to overcome. The more elements that are categorized and archived from this new medium, the greater and more complex the lessons that players can contemplate and solve.

Chapter V

Conclusion

“There is no real ending. It’s just the place where you stop the story.”

-Frank Herbert (attributed)

"We all make choices, but in the end... our choices make us."²¹⁶

-Bioshock²¹⁷

The instinct to tell ourselves stories runs powerfully through our psyches. The need to share them with others fortifies our collective resolve, allowing us to create, honor, and reinforce our cultures. When these tales include rules, obstacles, goals, and rewards, they become powerful tools, allowing us to test our imaginations, our brains, and our character. Whether read, heard, told, acted, or inter-acted, folktales and quests engage us in a psycho-social imperative to think beyond the rote.

Originally, I started this research hypothesizing that RPG video game quests would be similar to the tale-types found in the ATU, with some additional parallels likely found in the Thompson Motif Index. As I later discovered, the age, historical context, and cultural perspective involved in the creation and relating of these folktales meant that they served a very different purpose than quests that had evolved over a few short

²¹⁶ “Andrew Ryan,” Bioshock.fandom.com, Accessed July 27, 2021, https://bioshock.fandom.com/wiki/Andrew_Ryan.

²¹⁷ Ken Levine and Paul Hellquist, *Bioshock* (Quincy: 2K Boston/Irrational Games, 2007).

decades. Folktales are at their most engaging when told to an audience, while quests are best experienced by active play, alone or in a group.

Nevertheless, folktales and quests share many common elements—the most promising being the actions required of the protagonist. Propp’s morphological functions thus became an essential part of my attempt to categorize the various elements found in RPG quests. As I reviewed folktales for elements found in gameplay, and quests for elements echoing folktales, many overriding themes emerged, some recalling the work of Joseph Campbell and his mythic Hero’s Journey, others more pedantic, such as the ongoing need for “loot” that allows protagonists to regroup, repair, and live to fight another day.

The analysis of individual quests, removed from the narrative yoke of an entire game, allows for focused concentration on specific mechanics or narrative beats. Like a single movement in a symphony, it gives the player the chance to perceive a larger theme through a smaller scope. It keeps the player from feeling overwhelmed, and offers them different perspectives and experiences in a universe that can seem staggering in design.

With the video game market now outpacing the movie industry, and worldwide demand showing no sign of lessening, the number of games published yearly is increasing at an exponential rate. Establishing archives and indexes of games and game elements is increasingly necessary to allow researchers and developers to better comprehend the history of this medium, and the future of the industry.

The “RPG Quest Index” presented in the Appendices is an initial attempt to analyze the common aspects of conventionally-accepted RPG video game quest structures, outside of their individual IPs. As surmised, these commonalities revealed

consistencies in narratives, themes, and mechanics, while highlighting distinctive elements that allowed the player to experience significant and meaningful adventures.

While it was clear that players' choices often *did* have effects on plot, character, and the overall game world, it was the variability and number of these choices that allowed for cumulative shifts, making the players' decisions (and their subsequent results) feel proportionate to the challenges presented. Like real life, the development of character does not happen all at once, but via sequences of encounters, moment-to-moment, day-to-(in-game) day.

Marking the thresholds of these encounters through the quests presented in contemporary RPGs allows us to gain a better view of *why* we role-play at all. If every time we listen, part of us is Cinderella and part Prince Charming, if every time we watch, part of us is Spider-Man and part Mary Jane, then when we play, too, part of us is both Link and Zelda, and a little bit Ganon, as well. We see what roles the world offers us, and play with them in our shared imagination. From that liminal place, we can determine the choices that define our true character.



FIGURE 5.1. *A Toast*. The cast of *The Witcher 3* celebrates with players.

Appendices

Image Credits

FRONTISPIECE.

O'Brien, Christian. *Azura*. 2021. Digital. Author's private collection.

FIGURE 1.1. *GoW Concept Art*.

Castanon, Mark. *Jotenheim Vista*. 2018. Digital. Escape the Level,
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FIGURE 1.2. *Spacewar!*.

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FIGURE 1.3. *A MUD Excerpt*.

Wees, David. *Mudstory*. 2012. "Screenshot from a zone on Arctic MUD called "*Forest of Haven*" created by Draknor." The Reflective Educator,
<https://davidwees.com/content/exploring-multi-user-online-text-spaces-collaborative-game-building/>.

FIGURE 1.4. *Temple of Apshai*.

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<https://crpgaddict.blogspot.com/2013/02/game-88-dunjonquest-temple-of-apshai.html>.

FIGURE 1.5. *Ultima*.

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<https://www.myabandonware.com/game/ultima-i-ds>.

FIGURE 1.6. *The Bard's Tale*.

Musgrave, Shaun. *Photo-2014-08-25-13-45-51*. 2014. Screenshot from title screen of *The Bard's Tale*. Toucharcade, <https://toucharcade.com/2014/08/28/rpg-reload-file-003-the-bards-tale-1985>.

FIGURE 1.7. *Wasteland*.

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FIGURE 1.8. *Quest for Glory*.

Goninon, Mark. *Desktop Screenshot 2020.01.11 - 18.20.39.65*. 2020. Screenshot from *Quest for Glory* (1989). Choicest Games, <https://www.choicestgames.com/2020/04/quest-for-glory-1-ega-review.html>.

FIGURE 1.9. *Clavicus Vile and Barbas*.

Kimi the Elf. Krusty. *SR-quest-A_Daedra's_Best_Friend_03*. 2012, 2013. A (later edited) screenshot from *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011). UESP, https://en.uesp.net/wiki/File:SR-quest-A_Daedra%27s_Best_Friend_03.jpg.

FIGURE 1.10. *Journey*.

Farca, PhD, Gerald. *8-descending-into-the-abyss-1800x1013*. 2018. Screenshot from *Journey* (2012). Video Game Narrative, <http://www.videogamenarrative.com/the-game-tourist-e01-the-magical-ascent-of-journey/>.

FIGURE 2.1. *Shield with Greyhound Held by Wild Man*.

Schongauer, Martin. *Shield with Greyhound Held by Wild Man*. ca. 1435–1491. Engraving. Sheet: 3 1/16 × 3 1/16 in. (7.8 × 7.8 cm). The Met, New York City, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336194?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Martin+Schongauer&offset=0&rpp=80∓pos=73>.

FIGURE 2.2. “*Jack and the Beanstalk.*”

Wood, Christopher (CC BY-SA 3.0). *Jack & the Beanstalk*. Retrieved 2020. Photograph. 640x480. The Vintage News, <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2019/05/09/jack-and-the-beanstalk/>.

FIGURE 2.3. *Arcade Gannon, Fallout: New Vegas.*

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FIGURE 2.4. *Parvati Holcomb, The Outer Worlds.*

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FIGURE 2.5. “*The Twelve Dancing Princesses.*”

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FIGURE 2.6. “*East of the Sun and West of the Moon.*”

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FIGURE 2.7. *The Miller’s Daughter, “Rumpelstiltskin.”*

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FIGURE 3.1. *Horizon Zero Dawn.*

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FIGURE 3.2. *The Painted World*.

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FIGURE 3.3. *Squire Brio is Grateful*.

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FIGURE 3.4. *Geralt and Ciri on The Isle of Mists*.

Unknown. *GQzjZwx*. Retrieved 2020. Screenshot from *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015). Imgur, <https://imgur.com/GQzjZwx>.

FIGURE 3.5. *The Land of a Thousand Fables*.

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FIGURE 3.6. *Commander Shepard on Eden Prime*.

Unknown. *953543-1577577517*. Retrieved 2020. Screenshot from *Mass Effect* (2007). Nexusmods, <https://staticdelivery.nexusmods.com/images/237/953543-1577577517.png>.

FIGURE 3.7. *Eden Prime*.

Unknown. *Eden_Prime_gmap*. Retrieved 2020. Digital image from *Mass Effect* (2007). MassEffect.Fandom, https://masseffect.fandom.com/wiki/Eden_Prime.

FIGURE 3.8. *Diane at Work.*

Unknown. *Aba_Daba_Honeymoon*. Retrieved 2020. Screenshot from *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010). Fallout.Fandom, https://fallout.fandom.com/wiki/Aba_Daba_Honeymoon.

FIGURE 3.9. *Caught by the Legion.*

Unknown. *353190781*. Retrieved 2020. Screenshot from *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010). Game Guides – GamePressure, <https://guides.gamepressure.com/falloutnewvegas/guide.asp?ID=10607>.

FIGURE 5.1. *A Toast.*

Unknown. *TheWitcher10th*. Retrieved July 27, 2021. Promotional art/Screenshot from CD Projekt Red's 10th anniversary of The Witcher series (2017). Xboxachievements.com. <https://www.xboxachievements.com/news/news-27985-CD-Projekt-RED-Releases-Video-Celebrating-10th-Anniversary-of-The-Witcher.html>.

FIGURE A.1. “*A Rainbow of Twelve Dancing Princesses.*”

Sheilah Beckett. *Rainbow of 12 dancing princesses*. Posted May 22, 2013. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Digital image taken from an edition of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* (Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, Jane Werner, and Sheilah Beckett (Illustrator), Little Golden Books, 1954). “The Art of Sheilah Beckett.” TheArtofJordanK.blogspot.com. <http://theartofjordank.blogspot.com/2013/05/the-art-of-sheilah-beckett.html>.

FIGURE A.2. “*The Drinking Contest.*”

Unknown. *600px-LG-cardart-A_Night_to_Remember*. Posted June 25, 2017. Retrieved July 25, 2021. Concept/Character/Playing card art from *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) and *The Elder Scrolls: Legends* (2017). en.Uesp.net. https://en.uesp.net/wiki/File:LG-cardart-A_Night_to_Remember.jpg.

Definition of Terms

Affinity: The degree of appreciation with which NPCs regard the player character.

Usually affected by branching decisions within quests. (See Regard.)

Alignment: Degrees of morality within a fictional game world. Usually affected by branching decisions within quests. (See Regard.)

Boss: A particularly challenging antagonist for the player, that may be confronted in a number of ways – usually involving an accumulation of resources, martial know-how, and wits. Usually plays a significant role in a main quest. (See Final Boss.)

Branches/Branching: Divergent options for the player in a quest or in NPC conversations. Intended to provide differing and meaningful outcomes based on the player's choice.

Designer: A developer who works on the creation and iteration of quests, combat/interaction systems, narratives, levels (locations), or a game in its entirety.

Developer: Any individual who works on the creation, development, iteration, and testing of a video game.

Eastern-style Game/Eastern RPG: Video games/role-playing games proportionately developed in Asia, primarily East Asia.

Engineer: A developer who specializes in the creation, adaption, and implementation of programming, scripting, and code.

Experience: Common metric used to determine player advancement/accomplishment during gameplay. In RPGs, experience is usually tied to leveling, or allowing the player to acquire and/or increase certain abilities and/or skills. Also known as Exp or XP. Can also refer to Skills when designed with similar mechanics.

Fetch: Historically considered one of the most basic quests. A player character is requested by a quest giver to “fetch” something and deliver it safely. May or may not involve combat.

Final Boss: The antagonist the player encounters at the end of a main questline. Intended to challenge the player at a high level, where victory requires extensive knowledge and resources accumulated over the entire course of gameplay. Defeating the Final Boss usually signifies a canonical “end” to a game, although gameplay and additional quests may still be available.

Folktale: For the purposes of this research, any tale that is found within the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index.

Follower: Companion or Party Member. An NPC with specific scripted characteristics that allows them to “follow” the player if certain circumstances are met. Their affinity for the player character may be affected by the player character’s actions during gameplay. Followers usually offer martial/combat assistance, additional inventory space, services (repairs, healing, etc.), as well as general companionship and the potential opportunity for extra gameplay via additional quests.

Gating: The developer practice of preventing players from accessing quests, locations, or opponents that are above their current experience level. A common gating example is guards at a gate (hence the terminology) who deem a player character “not powerful/well-known/notable enough” to warrant access to a specific location. (See Grinding.)

Gameplay/Gameplay Mechanics: The activities and/or systems required to actively “play” a video game. May involve exploration, combat, wordplay, problem-solving, and other interactive challenges.

Grinding: The gameplay mechanic of repeatedly performing an (often monotonous) activity, usually to increase experience or skill points. Grinding is usually done to

achieve a specific level of mastery in order to attempt a separate quest or goal. (See Gating.) Common examples of grinding are killing low-level opponents (such as rats), crafting (such as making potions), and repeatedly spellcasting (such as healing oneself for minor injuries).

Interactivity/Interactive Mechanics: Similar to gameplay but signifies actions that have verifiable effects within a video game. This may be as complex as combat, or as simple as entering a player character's name into the system.

Japanese Role-Playing Game (JRPG): A unique form of role-playing game developed in Japan. Japanese role-playing games usually display specific gameplay hallmarks such as multiple characters in a questing party, turn-based combat (where each character levies attacks and defense in a specific order), and tropes and motifs that recall Japanese folklore and philosophies. Also known as a JRPG.

Kiting: The practice of luring a difficult antagonist away from its group or tactically-advantageous location, in order to weaken or exhaust it. When kiting, the player usually lobs ranged attacks (arrows, spells, etc.) while retreating, remaining an object of attention to the antagonist (much as a kite-flyer runs into the wind to send a kite aloft).

Leveling: A definitive RPG mechanic that signifies player progression via the accrument

of experience or skill points. Levels often determine player access (to locations, opponents, and quests) in a typical RPG game.

Loot: A catch-all term for the resources and rewards received during quests.

Ludology: The study of games – more specifically for this research, the study of gameplay.

Ludonarrative: Coined by developer Clint Hocking, the melding of gameplay and storyline in a video game. When successful, it is considered *consistent*, when unsuccessful, it is considered *dissonant*.

Motif: A symbol, element, or aspect that persistently appears throughout folktales – and, more specifically for this research, video game quests. Examples may be the importance of a “magic” weapon, acquisition of new skills, or a series of tests.

Narrative: The storyline and universe lore of a video game. Consisting of more than plots, narratives in video games encompass the comprehensive existence of the game’s fictional worlds, with cosmologies, cultures, quests, events, and characters contributing to the overall experience.

Non-Playable Character (NPC): A character in a video game who is not directly controlled by the player. Non-playable characters often populate locations, providing information, quests (see Quest Giver), or chances for conflict. Also known as an NPC.

Perceptive Identification: The skill-based ability of player characters to identify additional observations/obfuscations in NPC dialogues. Utilizing perceptive identification is usually inherently tied to leveling and experience acquisition. (See Skill Check)

Player: A person who plays a game – more specifically for this research, a video game.

Player Character: The primary agent or avatar for a player in a game. It is through the (controlled) actions of the player character that the player is immersed and participates in gameplay. Pac-Man, Mario, and Samus Aran are all examples of player characters.

Quest: A specific course of objective-based action requested of a player character within a video game, usually with a promise of a reward upon completion. The structure (actions, narrative, themes) often mirrors folktales of Western origin.

Questline: A bundle or chain of interconnected quests, usually consisting of several smaller objectives and one or two overarching goals.

Quest Giver: Usually an NPC who requests, orders, or bestows a quest on a player character. Often provides significant expository information and the promise of rewards upon satisfactory completion of said quest.

Regard: A general term to describe the more-nuanced concepts of affinity, alignment, fame, infamy, morality, notoriety, and renown, indicating the spectrum(s) used in-game to determine the way that factions, followers, opponents, and other NPCs view the player character.

Role-Playing Game (RPG): For the purposes of this research, a video game that utilizes many of the rules and gameplay mechanics of multiplayer pen-and-paper role-playing games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*. Acquiring percentage-based skills and “leveling up” are traditional elements found in role-playing games, along with the creation of a specific character (or “role”) for the purpose of utilizing particular strengths and personality aspects in service of an overarching adventure. For example, in *Fable*, the Hero may choose to specialize in magic, archery, or hand-to-hand combat. Also known as an RPG.

Skill Check: The unlocking of certain dialogue options in an NPC conversation that are

directly tied to specific skill levels for a player character. An example would be a rogue character correctly identifying that a villager is lying (as rogue classes on occasion have ambivalent attitudes toward lying themselves).

Storyline: The bare-bones plot of a video game. Generally considered inconsequential unless effectively incorporated into a comprehensive narrative.

Tale-Type: Similar to motif, but for the purposes of this research, a collection of activities and objectives that constitute traditional plots in both folktales and video game quests. Examples may be searching for a hidden treasure, solving a murder mystery, or winning a contest.

Theme: For the purposes of this research, elements of folktales and video game quests that underscore an idea, question, concept, or semiotic aspect. Examples may include freedom vs. oppression, benevolence vs. greed, or the effect of nature on civilized society.

Variance: The degrees by which a player may choose to act in a branching quest to significantly affect its outcome. A nominal example is found in the tutorial level of *Skyrim*, where the player may choose to fight a bear in a cave or sneak past, avoiding combat altogether.

Western-style Game/Western RPG: Video games/role-playing games primarily developed in Europe and North America. Much like JRPGs, they usually display specific hallmarks such as single or dual-character gameplay, real-time combat (where players and NPCs attack and defend simultaneously), and tropes and motifs that recall Western folklore and philosophies.



FIGURE A.1. “A Rainbow of Twelve Dancing Princesses.” This illustration by Sheilah Beckett exemplifies the bold colors and defined lines typical of mid-century aesthetic styles.

A Folktale as RPG Quest

“The Twelve Dancing Princesses”

Approach the next town (Castleton). The player may learn about this quest through a number of ways, either by:

- speaking to an old woman on the road (Player acquires cloak of invisibility)
- speaking to an old man in the woods (Player acquires staff of occlusion)
- checking a jobs board in Castleton
- overhearing townspeople discuss “the king’s problem”
- asking the castle guards if there is any work to be done

Any of these will indicate that the king has his hands full with a problem concerning his daughters.

[Note that only speaking to the old woman or old man will provide the player with a cloak of invisibility or a staff of occlusion. If neither are spoken to, the player must use potions or spells to disguise themselves. A maxed-out sneak skill will not fool the enchanted targets in this quest.]

As long as the player has at least a level 5 renown, they may gain access to the castle and start the quest. Speak with the king, who is available in the throne room every day from eight in the morning until eight at night.

The king will inform the player that, despite being locked in their room every night, his daughters have been wearing out the soles of their dancing slippers by morning. This has perplexed him so much that he has promised “several” rewards for the person who can find out where his daughters go at bedtime. He notes that many neighboring princes have tried, failed, and been put to death. The player may opt to accept or refuse the quest. If the player refuses, the king informs the player that his offer stands “until someone gets to the bottom of this.” (If the player has a level 7 charm or higher, they can get more information from the king by flattering or challenging him using “This sure is a big throne room, Your Majesty,” or “You really must not have a grip on your kingdom if you can’t even keep track of your family,” respectively. This will provoke the king into mentioning something about his castle, family, and court being “the envy of more kingdoms than I can count,” and an aside that that may be the source of the problem. The king will also bestow a single invisibility potion as a result of this additional exchange.)

If the player accepts the quest, they are led by a guard to the princesses' bedroom. On the way, the guard informs the player that they can't bear watching executions any longer, and informs the player that the food and drink the princesses share with the investigators are spiked with sleeping potions.

After being announced to the princesses, the door to the bedroom is locked. The eldest princess, who treats the player with almost-excessive graciousness, indicates a comfortable looking bed covered in pillows. The player may accept it, or (with a level 8 charm or higher) tell the princess they "are not able to sleep in such luxury, being only a simple soldier." The eldest princess, while miffed, offers a corner of the room where some textiles are thrown haphazardly.

Dinner is served to the princesses and the player. Here the player has a few options:

- With a resilience level of 7 or higher, the player may eat their dinner without fully succumbing to the sleeping potions.

- If resilience is lower than 7, the player may "take an after-dinner drink" (actually a purging potion, but this is the response to the inquiring eldest princess) to clear their head. Two of these potions are in the room, one in the eldest princesses' chest, the other in a vase by the window.

- With a charm level of 7, the player may entertain the princesses with stories of past adventures, to the point that they do not notice that the player barely touches the dinner.

-Using a glamour spell, the player may note a “strange bird” at the window, and as the princesses look, the player is able to toss the dinner out the window, which then appears as a bird that “flies away.”

If the player does not have any of the above requirements satisfied, they will sleep through the night, only being woken by the guard to appear before the king, triggering the “Cake or Death?” quest. The quest is considered failed at this point.

If the player has satisfied one or more of the above requirements, they will retire to their chosen bed, as do the princesses. They then “close their eyes,” pretending to sleep.

If the player chose/was given the comfy bed, they inadvertently fall asleep for an indeterminate amount of time. When they wake up, the princesses have disappeared, presumably through a newly-appeared open portal in the floor. The player must then enter the portal alone (without the princesses) and must fight off several wraiths as they catch up.

If the player chose the pile of textiles, they never actually fall asleep, and witness the princesses leave their beds, remove nightgowns to reveal formal outfits underneath, and put on dancing slippers. They may then use the cloak, staff, a potion, or spell to disguise themselves and follow the princesses through the open portal.

If they do not utilize any additional elements to disguise themselves, or rely on their sneak skill, they are immediately discovered, and tied to a chair until morning. Without proof of their comings and goings to show the king, the “Cake or Death?” quest is triggered. The quest is considered failed at this point.

If the player, disguised, is with the princesses, the wraiths do not attack.

If the player removes their cloak or staff, or their potion or spell expires, they will be immediately discovered, and thrown to the wraiths. This results in a quest failure, and the player can only return to the princesses' room, which, upon speaking with the king later, starts the "Cake or Death?" quest.

The player follows the princesses through three forests. It is important to note that the player must gather a branch from each forest—silver, gold, and diamond—or the remaining samples collected crumble to dust before the king, failing the quest.

The player boards a small boat with the princesses, triggering a "balance" mini-game. If the player is not able to successfully keep their balance and "rocks the boat," they fall overboard and drown, failing the quest.

When the boat docks, the player follows the princesses to the castle housing the dance. As long as they continue to use the previously listed items to disguise themselves, they will not be detected. Alternately, the player may opt to incapacitate one of the other dancers, take their clothes and mask, and attend the event as a guest.

The player now has several objectives: to obtain evidence of the dance, to obtain evidence of enchantments, and to gain more information about the other dancers. These may be collected in any order. For evidence of the dance, the player may pilfer a sheet of music from the orchestra, a dropped dance card, or a place card from the banqueting table with one of the princesses' names. The evidence of enchantment may be a plate of drugged cakes, or a punch cup with remnants of spiked punch. To gain information about the other dancers, the player may lurk until they overhear a prince describe the kingdom he is from and displays a medal of the country's seal, then pickpocket it—or they can, if disguised as a guest, dance with them, and respond affirmatively until they reward the

player with a “boon,” or jeweled pin from their kingdom. The ball continues until all three proofs are found, or the player is discovered and expelled (left to the wraiths and awakening in the bedroom, which fails the current quest and triggers the “Cake or Death?” quest).

As the dancers are preparing to leave, the player is given the opportunity to discover the source of the enchantment. Through a door off the entranceway, the player may discover that one of the “neighboring princes” is actually a troll, envious of the king’s vibrant family and kingdom. If the player utilizes either their invisibility OR their disguise, they can overhear the troll prince laugh to his valet that it should “only take a few more weeks” before the enchantment on the princesses takes its full effect, and they will willingly agree to reside in his kingdom forever. Evidence of this knowledge is obtained via the valet’s dropped quill and account book. Since the player cannot exit the (locked) side room without using the quill, it is not possible to fail this event.

Once on the boat, the player has another, slightly more difficult “balance” mini-game. As the princesses and the player disembark, they return to their bedroom via the forest paths, which gives the player a final opportunity to obtain all three branches if they have not done so.

The princesses all deposit their worn dancing slippers at the door, and go to sleep in their respective beds, as does the player.

When the player is woken by the guard, they are escorted to the throne room to speak with the king.

-If the player attended the ball, but did not discover the source of the enchantment, the resolutions available are limited to the following:

-When asked by the king what was discovered, the player may display all six examples of the princesses' ongoing visits to the enchanted underworld.

-If the player displays the items and describes them as from "a land of treasures that would benefit your fine kingdom," the king thanks the player, takes the items, orders his daughters to be locked up in a different bedroom in the castle, and charges his knights to attack and pillage the land found through the floor of the bedroom. The player is not allowed to assist, being told by the king "you've done your service admirably," and is sent on their way with a significant (level-based) amount of gold, up to 100,000 for level 20 and higher. Later, the player may overhear or read from a jobs board that the king has lost several of his knights and has walled off a section of his castle due to "inexplicable hauntings."

-If the player displays the items and describes them as from "a land of treasures that appear to be tainted by a foul magic, of which type I could not determine," the king replies, "I see," and calls for the court wizard. When he arrives, the king bids the player to place all the items in the wizard's cauldron, which the wizard incinerates on the spot. The king then orders the princesses to be sent to a fortress out of the city "under magical guard," and for the wizard to place a ward around their former bedroom. The player is not allowed to assist, being told by the king "this is beyond the abilities of my subjects," and is sent on their way with a powerful (level-based) "Warding Cuirass," resistant to spells up to 30% for level 20 and higher. Later, the player may overhear or read from a jobs board that court life has all but stopped "except for matters of state," due to the princesses' banishment and fear of encroaching threats of enchantment.

-If the player discovered the source of enchantment, the following option is available to the player:

-When asked by the king what was discovered, the player may display all eight examples from the land the princesses visit (including the quill and account book), and respond, “your daughters are under an enchantment by an envious troll, as are many sons and daughters of your neighboring rulers.” The player has two options:

-If the player states “I will rid you and your neighbors of this scourge,” they will be given a company of battlemages and some warding potions. They may revisit the (now hostile) underground and eliminate the wraiths, the troll prince’s court, and the troll prince himself. (Note that the easiest method of dispatching the troll prince is by arming and using the quill, either as an arrow or a dagger.) Doing so releases the princesses and the other ball attendees from their enchantments.

-If the player states “I will defeat this villain, and all the fools who helped keep your daughters spellbound,” they will be given a company of knights and some health potions. They may revisit the (now hostile) underground and eliminate the wraiths, the troll prince’s court, and the troll prince himself. (Note that the easiest method of dispatching the troll prince is by arming and using the quill, either as an arrow or a dagger.) Doing so releases the princesses from their enchantments, but also traps the remaining ball attendees, still enchanted, in the castle, dancing.

The troll prince and his court offer some randomized loot upon defeat. However, the player may gather some unique troll fur to use in crafting (armor embellishment for enchantments, up to 30% for level 20 and higher).

-Upon returning to the castle, the player is awarded a leveled amount of gold and the leveled Warding Cuirass, along with the opportunity to ask for the eldest princess' hand in marriage "If she inclines." As long as the player has a Charm of 5 or higher, she does incline; otherwise, she offers to be "your friend in need." As a wife, she provides the player with an expansive bedchamber in the castle (bed, storage, workbenches) and periodic gifts of affection (random treasures). As a friend, she provides the player with a smaller bedchamber (bed, storage) and periodic gifts of food and crafting materials. Regardless of the marriage state, the player is given access to the royal blacksmith, alchemist, and court wizard, who offer better items and more gold for trading, purchase, and repairs.



FIGURE A.2. *“The Drinking Contest.”* The mysterious Sam offers an intriguing challenge in this character illustration.

An RPG Quest as Folktale

“A Night to Remember, or a Tale from Tamriel”

*Once upon a time, there was a weary adventurer. This adventurer entered a tavern in one of the many fine cities of the cold and proud land they traveled, and asked for a glass of mead. The fire was warm against the harsh night, and a bard sang of current troubles and assured victories. To be honest, the adventurer had heard these songs before, and so barely listened to the singer's tune. To their side, a robed man, already deep in his cup, stirred and spoke.

“You look like someone who can hold their liquor. How about a friendly contest to win a staff?”

No stranger to a mug of ale, the adventurer considered, then replied, “A drinking contest? You don't stand a chance!” The robed man looked skeptical, then replied “Ha! We'll see about that. This is a special brew, very strong stuff. Let's get started.”

He rose to his feet, and took the first drink. Equal to the challenge, the adventurer also emptied a cup of what was undoubtedly a ridiculously strong ale. “And another one for me!” The robed man drank deep, and the adventurer kept pace.

It was delicious, and deliciously powerful. At last, the stranger, who called himself Sam, conceded defeat. “I think I've hit my limit on these things. Tell you what, one more and you win the contest.” And so it was. The room may have swayed, or perhaps the adventurer did. Sam spoke of them visiting a place where wine flowed... but suddenly, as usually happens with “warm fires and strong ale,” everything went softly black.

“WAKE UP!”

The adventurer stumbled up from under a pile of garbage. Instead of the firelit walls of the tavern, the cool stone walls of ...Markarth? ...a temple? ...the Temple of Dibella sheltered an angry priestess and the hungover adventurer. Litter covered the temple floor; the priestess's condemnations filled the rest of the space. She commanded the adventurer to clean everything up, and when they balked, she threatened to have them arrested. Sweet talking and clever words did nothing (despite having a tongue of silver—when it wasn't coated in stale ale), nor did promises of coin, so there was nothing else for it. The adventurer cleaned up the temple, finding a crumpled note that called for “a giant's toe, holy water, and a hagraven feather” to “repair the broken staff.” The note offered nothing else, save that it was from the challenger himself, Sam. Clutching the note, a giant's toe (still slightly bloody), and some half-full bottles of wine, the adventurer penitently approached the priestess.

Mollified, the priestess told the adventurer they had stormed the temple, babbling about Rorikstead, and feeling up the statuary. There was more...something about a wedding, and a boat perhaps, but the adventurer was already gone, heading to the nearest carriage for hire.

After a crossing through mountains and over a river, the small village of Rorikstead appeared. There were few villagers out as the sun was setting, but one farmer yet tended his crops. Still feeling the effects of the previous night, the adventurer approached him, clutching the note and the toe.

“YOU!”

The farmer not only recognized the adventurer, he, like the priestess, was furious at their presence. He ranted and sputtered, and eventually the adventurer came to realize that they had stolen the farmer's best goat, and sold it to the local giant. Again, the adventurer's sweet words failed, and their sack didn't have nearly enough coin to make amends to the farmer. In the encroaching dusk, with a clearing head, the adventurer went to find the giant.

In a rocky excuse for a pasture, the adventurer spotted the giant, trailed by what looked like a reluctant goat. The adventurer remembered a saying from these parts, "Steal something once, it's wrong. Steal it again, it's still wrong." Nevertheless, they crept up behind the goat, and bid it follow.

"GROKKGKGH!"

"Grok," the adventurer remembered, was the giant's name, and it was likely that the garbled cry at the end might have been a form of the possessive noun, but they didn't want to inquire. Running away, the adventurer was swiftly overtaken by the giant, who raised a hammer in fury. The adventurer had few choices, but made the most of them, putting their own weapon away in a flourishing act of yielding.

Dumbfounded, Grok watched in confusion as the adventurer led the goat—now prancing—back to Rorikstead. There, the grateful farmer told the adventurer that they had mentioned paying back a merchant in Whiterun.

And so, the adventurer, no longer drunk, no longer hungover, but weary once more, set out on foot across the plains that led to Whiterun.

The merchant Ysolda was known for her canniness and her ambition. The adventurer, then, was surprised to learn that she had agreed to surrender one of her best wedding rings on credit, due to the professions of love from the adventurer a day earlier. Quite weary by this point, the adventurer tried to intimidate her, but Ysolda remained unmoved. She demanded payment for the ring or its return.

Much like everything else from that evening, the adventurer had no memory of falling in love or getting engaged. With as much tact as they could muster, an inquiry was made of Ysolda. “How could you forget? It was the sweetest story I'd ever heard. You met at the full moon, under the biggest tree in Witchmist Grove, surrounded by fireflies. It was straight out of a storybook.”

The adventurer couldn't remember the last time they'd visited Witchmist Grove. Certainly not at night, when more than fireflies roamed about. Nevertheless, once more their feet found the road leading out of the city, and toward the groaning, grey-green forest.

The stench hit their nose before the grove touched their eyes. As the adventurer entered a clearing in the trees, a hagraven, so bent with age and corruption as to look almost snapped in half, descended from a hut that also seemed to be the source of the awful smells.

“DARLING!”

The hagraven stepped forward. The adventurer stepped back. The hagraven, a bizarre cryptid, half-crone, half-bird, crowed loving words at the adventurer. As the adventurer stumbled through a hesitant response, she responded with a level of jealous

vehemence that was expected from such creatures, and the adventurer was forced into a violent defense. Spells were cast, swords were swung, and when all was over, the hagraven lay on the ground, the stench of decay still swirling about.

Holding their nose, the adventurer recovered the wedding ring (and a lone feather) from the hagraven's body, and after investigating the hut (which was filled with rotting meat and corpses, and likely the source of the smell), they headed back to Whiterun.

A grateful and sympathetic Ysolda told the adventurer (now sober as a judge, and unlikely to ever touch another drop) that they had spoken of a beautiful wedding location: the ancient ruins of Morvunskar, where the fabled Sam would act as witness as they took their vows. Remembering the events of the last couple hours, the adventurer coughed, bid Ysolda good-day, and, wearily, headed to the gates of Whiterun for a horse to hire—or, at the least, a map.

Far from an “ideal” wedding location, Morvunskar was damp, and cold, and moldy. It was also inhabited by a local group of territorial mages, who were most certainly practicing spellwork not sanctioned by the nearby magical university. They were upset at the adventurer's appearance, and shut down any and all questions, preferring instead to lob fire, ice, and lightning bolts at them.

Patience all but exhausted (along with actual exhaustion), the adventurer quickly dispatched the ornery mages, and suddenly, a strange portal appeared in the heart of the ruins. When the adventurer stepped close, they heard a lute-like voice sing “Come to Misty Grove....” which was not so *very* unusual in Tamriel. Portals appeared regularly,

but explorers entered at their own risk. Paradises and hells both lurked behind the gauzy borders.

The adventurer was no stranger to portals, and, equipped with enchanted weapons, the (now slightly stale) giant's toe, a fresh hagraven feather, and a bottle of Colovian brandy (which, for the coin it commanded *could* be considered holy water), they entered the glimmering passageway.

It was misty, and filled with trees, so the singing voice in this respect wasn't lying. The adventurer could smell food cooked over a fire, and heard the clink of glasses and murmur of voices, so the tiny, winding, lantern-lit path led them to a clearing. There, a banqueting table was laid out, partygoers chatted drunkenly, and Sam stood waiting to greet them.

He laughed, and seemed happy that the adventurer had arrived. When presented with the toe, feather, and brandy, Sam laughed and told them to throw the items away. In a flash, Sam transformed into a fearsome-looking daedric prince, all red scales and immortal eyes, and commended the adventurer for "bringing merriment into the world."

The adventurer stood before Sanguine, known as The Lord of Revelry, and contemplated their fate. Would they now be smited, their (unknowing) service to the daedra completed? (Undesirable.) Would they be allowed to remain at the banquet, drinking, feasting, and japing for an age, or more? (Far more desirable.) Would they be commanded to serve the mercurial Sanguine, conducting jokes on hapless mortals? (More or less undesirable, although it could have its moments.)

None of this was to be. The Lord of Revelry, in his benevolence, rewarded the adventurer with the promised staff, and bade them use it to add more merriment to the world, there was a flash—and suddenly, the adventurer was in the tavern, in the spot in the tavern, where they first met Sam. A glass of ale was in front of them on the table.

Oh, and the staff? The adventurer looked at the wood, carved like a rose. Raised high, they prepared to use it, and then...

...but that, dears, is yet another story. As there always should be.

The End

**Almost all dialogue is taken verbatim from The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim's "A Night to Remember," found in-game and recorded here:
https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Skyrim:A_Night_To_Remember.*

RPG Developer Quest Survey Data

Method

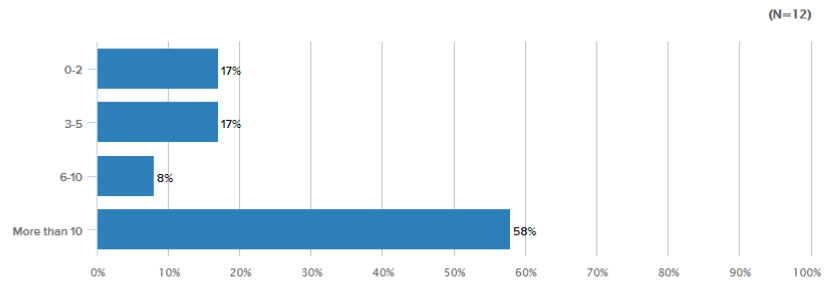
General inquiries were placed, some via industry contacts, some over social media, inviting respondents to fill out a survey concerning RPG quest development, implementation, and classification. Respondents who agreed were sent unique survey links via e-mail.

Qualifications

Requests went out for any North American (or, not subject to GDPR regulations) developer (although it was also announced that designers, narrative designers, and writers were specifically desired) who had worked on at least one RPG video game that was published and released to the general consumer market. Priority was placed on RPGs with experience leveling and skill-based classifications, although general questing and narrative-heavy games were also considered. No further parameters were required.

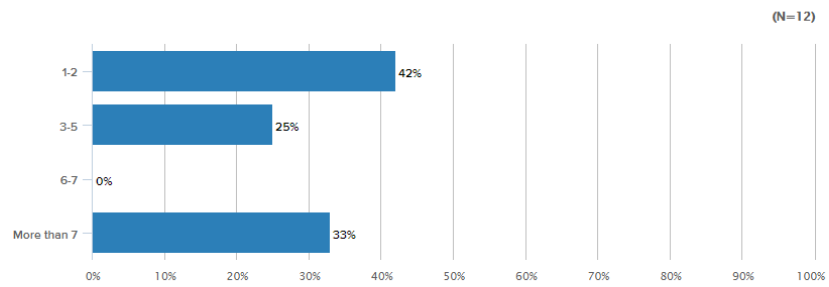
All written responses have been excluded. Any written responses cited in the thesis have had potentially identifying information removed.

1. How many years have you worked on RPGs?



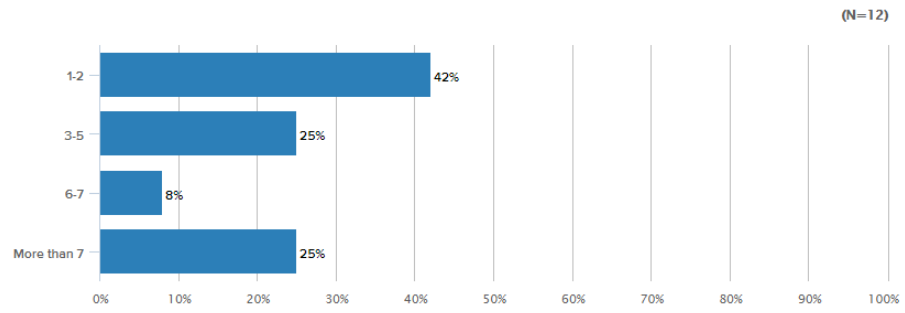
1. Number of years worked on RPGs.

2. How many RPG titles have you worked on?



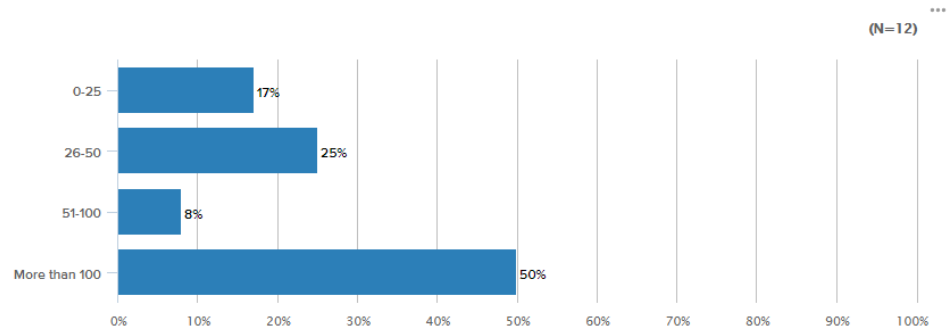
2. Number of titles developed.

3. How many RPG titles have you worked on that were published?



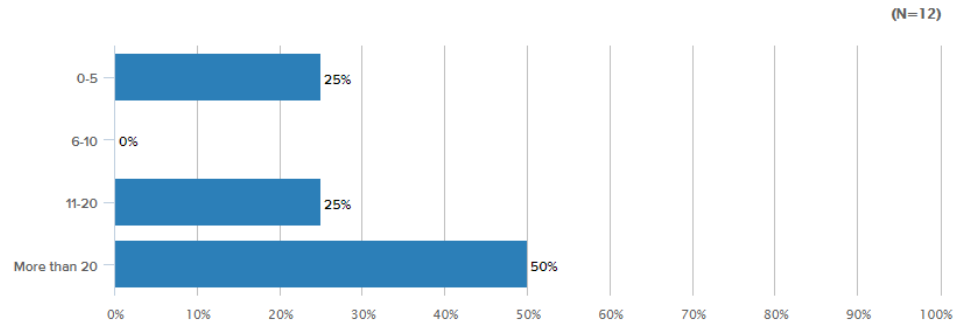
3. Number of RPGs published.

4. What was the average number of quests (not questlines) per title? (Please include DLC/expansion packs in total.)



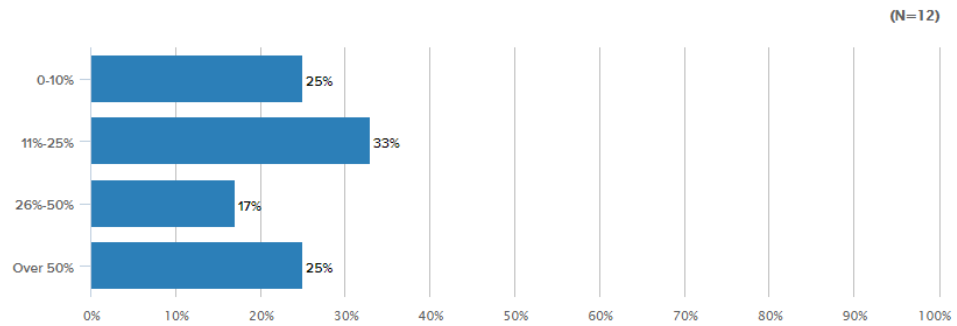
4. Average number of quests per title.

5. What was the average number of questlines? (Please include DLC/expansion packs in total.)



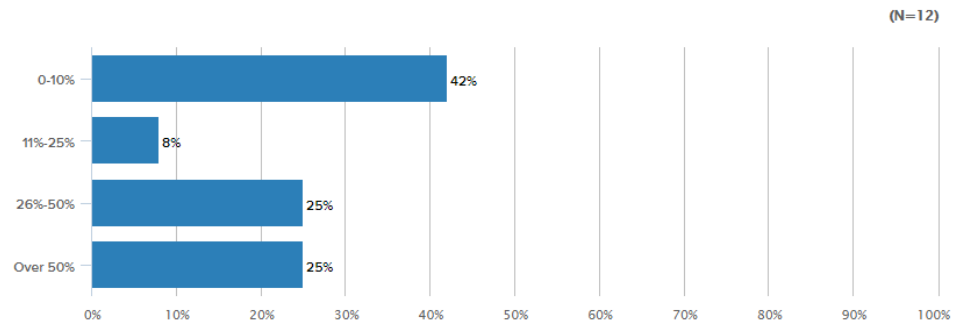
5. Average number of questlines per title.

6. Outside of standard combat/dialogue/stealth choices (if combat/dialogue/stealth is the predominant solution), what percentage of quests included alternate solutions? (That is, if a "combat choice" quest is "Kill rats", and the designer's intent is for the player to kill rats preferably via weaponry or spells, etc., an "alternate" solution might be "Bribe rats to leave", "induce rats to suicide", etc.)



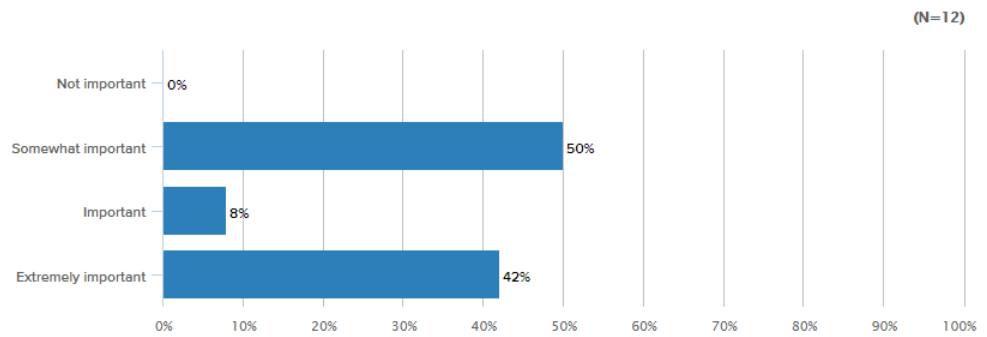
6. Percentage of quests with alternate solutions.

7. Of these, what percentage of solutions affected morality or alignment for NPC regard or game universe reputation?



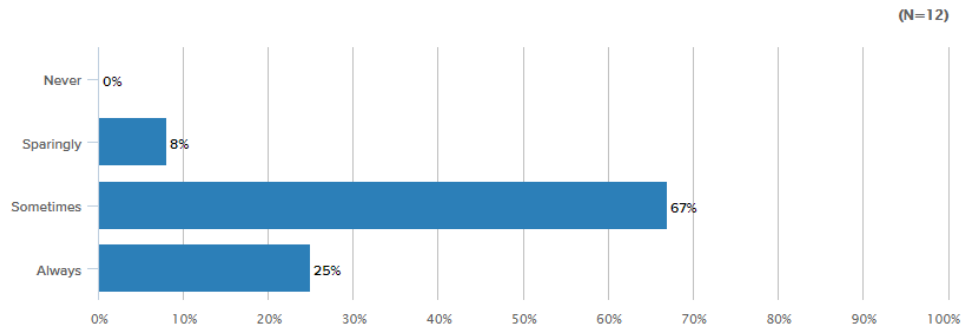
7. Percentage of quests with alternate solutions that affected general or specific affiliation within the game universe.

8. In your design/development philosophy, how important is variance of choices for quest resolution?



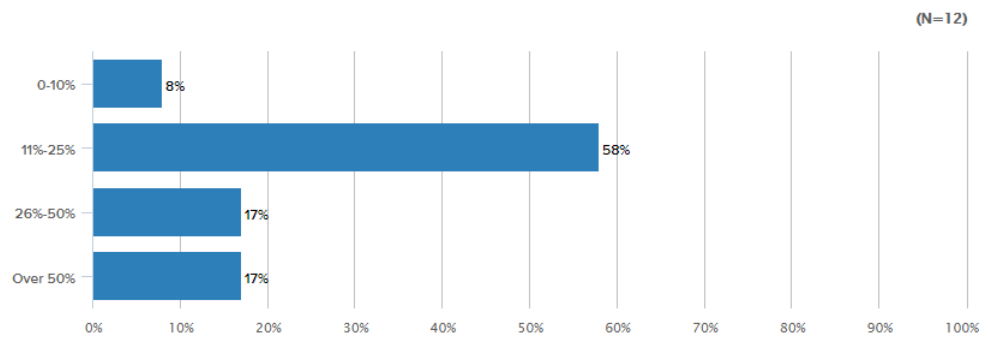
8. Importance regarding variance for potential quest solutions.

9. When considering Question 8, in your professional opinion, is the additional development time required to design, iterate, and test variant quests justified?



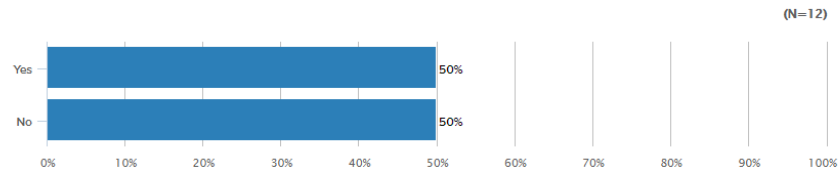
9. Importance regarding additional development time for variant quests.

10. What percentage of quests in development gets cut or significantly reduced before a title is published?



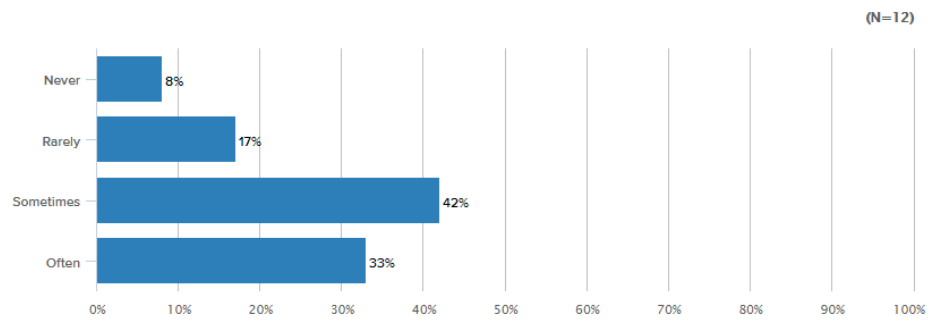
10. Percentage of quests cut/reduced before release.

11. Is variance a significant factor in this decision?



11. Variance as a factor for Question 10.

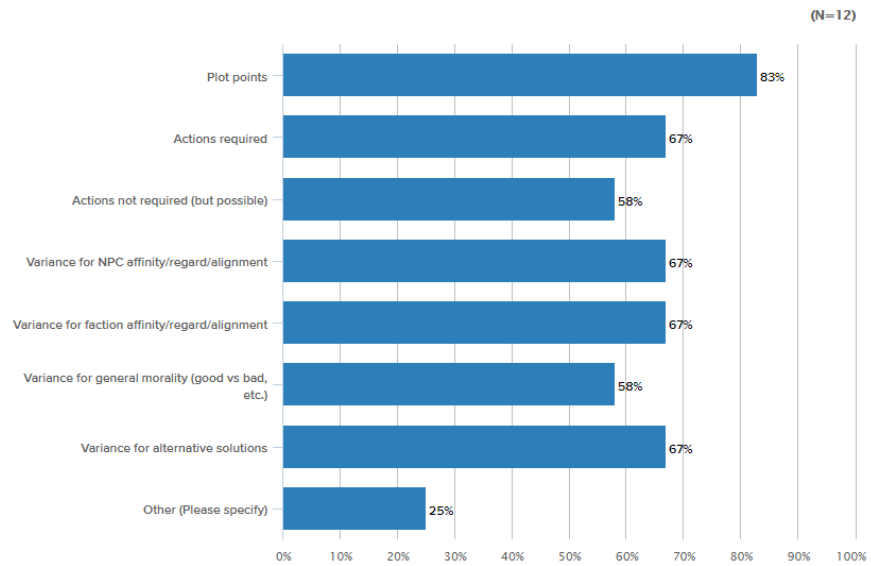
12. For you personally, how often is a “favorite” quest that you’ve worked on (pride, satisfaction, enjoyment, overcoming development obstacles, player response, etc.) a quest that involves variant solutions?




12. “Favorite” quests and variant solutions.

Questions 13, 14 removed.

15. If you could refer to an archive or index of published RPG quests organized by type, would the following categories assist in design and development?



 Because multiple answers per participant are possible, the total percentage may exceed 100%.

15. Potential categories to organize RPG quests.

Questions 16, 17, 18, and 19 removed.

RPG Quest Index

RPG Quest Index*

Legend:

Title

Developer/Publisher

Date of Publication

Genre

Quest

Type

Brief description

ATU

Thompson Motif

Propp-style Functions

NPC=Non-playable Character

QG=Quest Giver

PC=Player Character

Exp=Experience

Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura

Troika Games/Sierra On-Line

2001

Fantasy/Steampunk

"Pickup Jongle's Package"

Side

An enchanter needs a delivery brought to him.

ATU:

[*REALISTIC TALES 850-999*]

Thompson Motif:

[*H945. †H945. Tasks voluntarily undertaken.*]

[*Q10. †Q10. Deeds rewarded.*]

Propp-style Functions

[*NPC/QG with services/goods requires help*]

[*Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive*

identification)]

[*Fetch objective*]

[*PC may use alternate actions (pickpocket)*]

[*Quest item(s) obtained*]

[*Reward(s) (exp, money)*]

Arx Fatalis

Arkane Studios/Microsoft Windows

2002

Post-apocalypse/Fantasy

“The Ghostly Murder”

Side

A ghost wants her murderer exposed.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Helpers 500-559]

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[The Truth Comes to Light 780-799]

Thompson Motif:

[E231. †E231. Return from dead to reveal murder.]

[H1220. †H1220. Quests voluntarily undertaken.]

[H1228.1. †H1228.1. Quest undertaken by hero to avenge his

king.]

[Q211. †Q211. Murder punished.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information/bounty requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC encounters riddles/puzzles]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[NPC is exposed/confesses]

[Quest item(s) obtained]

[Reward(s) (item)]

Baldur's Gate

BioWare/Black Isle Studios/Interplay

1998

Fantasy

“Dryad of the Cloud Peaks”

Side

A dryad asks for help.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Other Tales of the Supernatural 700-749]

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[827-849: Other Religious Tales]

Thompson Motif:

[A139.8.5. †A139.8.5. Goddess in form of tree.]

[F441.2.2. †F441.2.2. Dryad. Female spirit dwelling among

trees.]

[J514. †J514. One should not be too greedy.]

[†Q10-†Q99. Deeds rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (Politeness/humility

bonus)]

[PC may assist QG opponents]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Multiple completion outcomes (QG, QG opponents)]

[Reward(s) (exp, skills, items, money)]

“The Firewine Ruins”

Side

An ogre mage is terrorizing a small community.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[TALES OF THE STUPID OGRE (GIANT, DEVIL) 1000-1199]

[Man Kills (Injures) Ogre 1115-1144]

Thompson Motif:

[†G10.--G399. KINDS OF OGRES]

[†G200.--G299. Witches.]

[†Q10-†Q99. Deeds rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC hears rumors/reads posting]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (Politeness/humility

bonus)]

[Boss encounter]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate approach (stealth, kiting)]

[PC may choose to encounter additional mini-boss (not

dependent on completion)]

[Reward(s) (money)]

Cyberpunk: 2077

CD Projekt Red/CD Projekt

2020

Science Fiction/Cyberpunk

“Epistrophy”

Side

The purveyor of a taxi service needs assistance locating some wayward vehicles.

ATU:

[FORMULA TALES 2000-2399]

[Cumulative Tales 2000-2100]

[Catch Tales 2200-2299]

Thompson Motif:

[H1320. †H1320. Quest for marvelous objects or animals.]

[H1320.1. †H1320.1. Quest for magic objects.]

[Z30. †Z30. Chains involving a single scene or event without

interdependence among the individual actors.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information/goods/services requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Fetch objective]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[PC must track]

[PC must escort]

[Quest item(s) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp)]

Deus Ex

Ion Storm/Eidos Interactive

2000

Science Fiction/Cyberpunk

“Second Mission: Battery Park, Hell's Kitchen, and Warehouse District”

Main

JC Denton looks to secure a prized medication.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:

[H1132. †H1132. Task: recovering lost objects.]

[R110. †R110. Rescue of captive.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has faction obligations/mission]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[PC may use alternate actions (rescue)]

[PC may escort]

[PC may use alternate actions (sabotage)]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Reward(s) (exp, services, items, skills, regard)]

Disco Elysium

ZA/UM/ZA/UM

2019

Post-apocalypse/Fantasy

"Help ravers start a nightclub"

Side

Ravers want to convert a church into a nightclub.

ATU:

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

Thompson Motif:

[J200. †J200. Choices.]

[J230. †J230. Choice: real and apparent values.]

[J530. †J530. Prudence in demands.]

[J610. †J610. Forethought in conflict with others -- general.]

[J1041. †J1041. Impossibility of pleasing everyone.]

[V111. †V111. Churches.]

[Z40. †Z40. Chains with interdependent members.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has obligations of office/mission]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (skill checks, clues, notes)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[PC may negotiate (information, items) (skill checks)]

[PC may use alternate actions (broker concessions)]

[PC encounters riddles/puzzles]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Reward(s) (exp, skills, regard)]

Divinity: Original Sin

Larian Studios/Larian Studios

2014

Fantasy

"Headless Nick"

Side

A talking skull would like some assistance.

ATU:

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[The Truth Comes to Light 780-799]

Thompson Motif:

[E783. †E783. Vital head. Retains life after being cut off.]
[E783.1. †E783.1. Head cut off and successfully replaced.]
[†Q10-†Q99. Deeds rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]
[PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (Politeness/humility

bonus)]

[Fetch objective]
[Boss encounter (potential)]
[PC must memorize/learn ideal dialogue]
[PC participates in play/litany/staged dialogue]
[PC must use dialogue challenges]
[PC may use alternate methods (refusals mid-quest)]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Multiple completion outcomes (QG objective met, QG objective

refused)]

[Reward(s) (exp)]

Divinity II: Ego Draconis

Larian Studios

2009

Fantasy

“From Soup to Nuts”

Side

A wizard desires a wyvern’s egg.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]

Thompson Motif:

[D199.2. †D199.2. Transformation: man to dragon.]

[D812.13. †D812.13. Magic objects gifts of magician.]

[H1360. †H1360. Quest for dangerous animals.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information/goods/services requires help]
[Fetch objective]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[PC may use alternate actions (pacifying item) (separate quest)]
[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]
[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (exp, money, item)]

Dragon Age: Origins

BioWare/Electronic Arts

2009/2010

Fantasy

“The Urn of Sacred Ashes”

Main

A sacred relic is needed to save a dying man.

ATU:

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[God Rewards and Punishes 750-779]

[The Truth Comes to Light 780-799]

[The Devil 810-826]

[Other Religious Tales 827-849]

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]

Thompson Motif:

[A165.2. †A165.2. Messenger of the gods.]

[A182.3.5. †A182.3.5. God advises mortal.]

[H41. †H41. Recognition of royalty by personal characteristics or

traits.]

[H252. †H252. Act of truth.]

[H501. †H501. Test of wisdom.]

[†K1900.--K1999. Impostures.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG requires help/unknown quantity]

[Fetch objective]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[PC may assist QG/NPC opponents]

[Companion/Follower regard potentially affected]

[PC encounters riddles/puzzles]

[PC may choose to encounter additional boss (not dependent on

completion)]

[Quest Item(s) obtained]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality, Follower affected)]

[Reward(s) (exp, skills, items)]

Dragon Age: Origins – Awakening

BioWare/Electronic Arts

2010

Fantasy

“A Day in Court”

Side

The Warden is requested to address judicial matters.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Clever Acts and Words 920-929]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:

[P522. †P522. Laws.]

[P522.1.1. †P522.1.1. A nose for a nose.]

[P523. †P523. Bringing suit in law courts.]

[P525.0.1. †P525.0.1. "It is a debt if it is promised."]

[P531. †P531. Taxation and payment of fines or tribute.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has obligations of office (may be delegated, ending quest)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[NPC/QG requires help/unknown quantity]

[PC may use alternate methods (refusals mid-quest)]

[Faction regard potentially affected]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality affected)]

[Reward(s) (exp, money, regard)]

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

Bethesda Game Studios/Bethesda Softworks

2002

Fantasy

"The Silent Pilgrimage"

Faction

A distant shrine must be visited during a vow of silence.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

Thompson Motif:

[H1125. †H1125. Task: traveling till iron shoes are worn out.]

[H1129. †H1129. Other tedious tasks.]

[H1506. †H1506. Endurance test: hero maintains silence in the

snake pit.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has faction obligations/mission]

[Standard mechanics forbidden (speech)]

[PC may use alternate methods (stealth)]

[Reward(s) (items, skills, regard)]

"Gateway Ghost"

Side

A ghost is terrorizing a local inn.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[ANECDOTES AND JOKES 1200-1999]

Thompson Motif:

[E280. †E280. Ghosts haunt buildings.]

[E293. †E293. Ghosts frighten people (deliberately).]

[K1800. †K1800. Deception by disguise or illusion.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC hears rumors/reads posting]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts) (unsuccessful)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[NPC is exposed/confesses]

[PC may assist QG/NPC opponents]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Reward(s) (item, regard)]

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

Bethesda Game Studios/Bethesda Softworks

2005

Fantasy

"Whodunit?"

Faction

A dinner party goes increasingly awry.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:

[K910. †K910. Murder by strategy.]

[K914. †K914. Murder from ambush.]

[K1700. †K1700. Deception through bluffing.]

[K959.4. †K959.4. Murder from behind.]

[K2116. †K2116. Innocent person accused of murder.]

[S110.2. †S110.2. Man kills all guests, hoping some day to kill

rival.]

[S111. †S111. Murder by poisoning.]

[S115. †S115. Murder by stabbing.]

[U21. †U21. Justice depends on the point of view.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has faction obligations/mission]

[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[PC may use intended methods (stealth, poisoning, dialogue)]

[PC may use alternate methods (martial attacks)]

[Standard mechanics discouraged (additional bonus)]

[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (money, skills)]

“Zero Visibility”
Side

Local villagers appear to be missing.

ATU:
[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]
[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]
[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]
[Magic Objects 560-649]
[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]

Thompson Motif:
[D1361. †D1361. Magic object renders invisible.]
[J1064. †J1064. Futility of trying to teach the stupid.]
[Q10. †Q10. Deeds rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions
[NPC with information shares gossip]
[NPC/QG with information requires help]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Standard mechanics unsuccessful (must follow instructions)]
[Specific/Unique action/item required]
[Quest Item(s) obtained]
[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (service, regard)]

“A Brush with Death”
Side

A famous painter has disappeared.

ATU:
[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]
[Supernatural Adversaries (300-399)]
[Supernatural Tasks (460-499)]
[Magic Objects (560-649)]

Thompson Motif:
[B103.7. †B103.7. Animal producing treasure at death.]
[D838. †D838. Magic object acquired by stealing.]
[D1170. †D1170. Magic utensils and implements.]
[D2120. †D2120. Magic transportation.]
[G510.4. †G510.4. Hero overcomes devastating animal.]
[†Q10-†Q99. Deeds rewarded.]
[Q101. †Q101. Reward fitting to deed.]

Propp-style Functions
[NPC with information shares gossip]
[NPC/QG with information requires help]

identification]]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive)]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate methods (poisoned weapons)]

[Quest Item(s) obtained]

[Reward(s) (item, regard)]

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
Bethesda Game Studios/Bethesda Softworks
2011
Fantasy

“A Night to Remember”

Side

A stranger wants to have a drinking contest.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Magic Objects 560-649]

[TALES OF THE STUPID OGRE (GIANT, DEVIL) 1000-1199]

[Contest between Man and Ogre 1060-1114]

Thompson Motif:

[H1598. †H1598. Contest between man and other being.]

[W123.1. †W123.1. The man who only tasted wine. Will not drink but gets drunk nevertheless by frequent tasting.]

[Z40. †Z40. Chains with interdependent members.]

[Q114. †Q114. Gifts as reward.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG challenges/confronts PC]

identification]]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive)]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate methods (stealth)]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[NPC with information requires help]

[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]

[Quest Item(s) may be obtained]

[Reward(s) (item)]

“Sovngarde”/“Dragonslayer”

Main

Alduin must be defeated in the Nords’ paradise.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]

[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]

Thompson Motif:

[F11.2. †F11.2. Man goes to heaven without dying.]

[F173.3. †F173.3. Perpetual feasts in otherworld.]

[F796. †F796. Dragon seen in sky.]

[F797. †F797. Fire from heaven kills people.]

[F960.2.5.3. †F960.2.5.3. Earthquake at dragon's death.]

[A1082. †A1082. Battle of gods and monster at end of world.]

[A1082.3. †A1082.3. Thor battles Midgard serpent at end of

world.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG has information (reluctant, does not require help)]

[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[Final boss encounter]

[Standard mechanics unsuccessful (must follow instructions)]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Reward(s) (skill, service, regard)]

ELEX

Piranha Bytes/THQ Nordic

2017

Post-apocalypse/Science Fiction

"A Half Defective Tin Can"

Companion/Side

A former electronic companion needs some repairs.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Helpers 500-559]

[Magic Objects 560-649]

Thompson Motif:

[H1132. †H1132. Task: recovering lost objects.]

[H1320. †H1320. Quest for marvelous objects or animals.]

[H1320.1. †H1320.1. Quest for magic objects.]

[G360. †G360. Ogres with monstrous features.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information/goods/services requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via environment (skill checks, clues, notes)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp, follower, regard)]

Fable II

Lionhead Studios/Microsoft Game Studios

2008

Fantasy

"The Love Letter"

Side

Two lovers kept apart would be reunited.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Other Realistic Tales 970-999]

Thompson Motif:

[Z175.2. †Z175.2. Lovers' assignation by symbolic messages.]

[C162. †C162. Tabu: marriage with certain person.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with (minor) information requires help]

[PC may assist QG/NPC opponents]

[PC may use alternate methods (stealth)]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Reward(s) (money, regard)]

Fable III

Lionhead Studios/Microsoft Game Studios

2010

Fantasy

"The Game"

Side

Three friends invite The Hero to play along.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[ANECDOTES AND JOKES 1200-1999]

Thompson Motif:

[H1220. †H1220. Quests voluntarily undertaken.]

[H1221. †H1221. Quest for adventure.]

[H1223. †H1223. Quest to undertake feats of valor.]

[H1236.2. †H1236.2. Quest over path guarded by dangerous

animals.]

[H1239.3. †H1239.3. Quest accomplished by means of objects

given by helpers.]

[†Q10-†Q99. Deeds rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPCs/QGs with information require help]

[NPCs/QGs confront/challenge PC]
[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Boss encounter]
[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (exp, regard)]

Fallout
Black Isle/Interplay
1997
Post-apocalyptic/Science Fiction
"Find the Water Thief"
Side

Someone in the Vault is stealing water.

ATU:
[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]
[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]
Thompson Motif:
[P475. †P475. Robber.]
[Q111.3. †Q111.3. Riches as reward for help against robbers.]
[Q520.2. †Q520.2. Robber does penance.]

Propp-style Functions
[NPC with information shares gossip]
[NPC/QG with information requires help]
[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]
[PC must use alternate methods (stealth)]
[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (exp)]

Fallout 2
Black Isle/Interplay
1998
Post-apocalyptic/Science Fiction

"Deliver a Sample of Jet to Dr. Troy"
Side

A doctor needs a sample of a forbidden drug to develop an antidote.

ATU:
[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]
Thompson Motif:
[C220. †C220. Tabu: eating certain things.]
[†Q10-†Q99. Deeds rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

quest start)]

[NPC/QG with information requires help (additional metrics for

[Fetch objective]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[PC may use alternate methods (concealment, stealth)]

[PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (via skill checks)]

[PC may oppose QG]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality affected)]

[Reward(s) (money, exp, regard)]

Fallout: New Vegas

Obsidian Studios/Bethesda Softworks

2010

Post-apocalypse/Science Fiction

"Aba Daba Honeymoon"

Faction

A dangerous tribe could use some outside help.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:

[+H1210. Quest assigned.]

[+H1220. Quest voluntarily undertaken.]

[+H1550. Tests of character.]

[Q10. +Q10. Deeds rewarded.]

[Q20.2. +Q20.2. Fulfillment of precepts rewarded.]

[+R110. Rescue of captive.]

[U220. +U220. Forced peace valueless.]

Propp-style Functions

identification)]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (via skill checks)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate methods (concealment, stealth)]

[PC may choose to encounter additional mini-bosses (not

dependent on completion)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[PC may use alternate methods (sabotage objectives)]

[PC may use disguise]

[Quest item(s) obtained]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality, Faction, Follower

affected)]

[Reward(s) (information, money, skill, service, regard)]

"All My Friends Have Off Switches"
Side/DLC (Old World Blues)

Several inactive items require programs to bring them back to functionality.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Helpers 500-559]

[Magic Objects 560-649]

[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]

Thompson Motif:

[F770. †F770. Extraordinary buildings and furnishings.]

[F990. †F990. Inanimate objects act as if living.]

[H1320. †H1320. Quest for marvelous objects or animals.]

[H1320.1. †H1320.1. Quest for magic objects.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[Fetch objective]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate methods (concealment, stealth)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[Boss encounter(s)]

[Quest item(s) obtained]

[Reward(s) (services, information)]

Fallout 3

Bethesda Game Studios/Bethesda Softworks

2009

Post-apocalypse/Science Fiction

"Tranquility Lane"

Main

The Lone Wanderer learns about the good old days.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

[FORMULA TALES 2000-2399]

[Chains Involving Other Events 2029-2075]

Thompson Motif:

[D141. †D141. Transformation: man to dog.]

[F1. †F1. Journey to otherworld as dream or vision.]

another.]]

[F111.5. †F111.5. Land where all creatures are friendly to one another.]]

[F150.1. †F150.1. Way to otherworld hard to find.]

[F161.1. †F161.1. Perpetual summer in otherworld.]

[F166.4. †F166.4. Magic objects in otherworld.]

[S400. †S400. Cruel persecutions.]

[S401. †S401. Unsuccessful attempts to kill person in successive reincarnations (transformations).]]

[Z40. †Z40. Chains with interdependent members.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC discovers abandoned records/notes]

[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]

[Boss encounter]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive identification)]

[Investigation via environment (clues)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[PC may use alternate methods (lies, subterfuge)]

[PC may use alternate methods (sabotage objectives)]

[PC may use disguise]

[Standard mechanics forbidden (weapons, resources, HUD)]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality affected)]

[Reward(s) (exp, info, regard)]

Fallout 4

Bethesda Game Studios/Bethesda Softworks

2015

Post-apocalypse/Science Fiction

“Last Voyage of the U.S.S. Constitution”

Side

Ancient robot sailors require assistance.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

Thompson Motif:

[F840. †F840. Other extraordinary objects and places.]

[F841. †F841. Extraordinary boat (ship).]

[Q111.3. †Q111.3. Riches as reward for help against robbers.]

[Z40. †Z40. Chains with interdependent members.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive identification)]

[PC may negotiate (money, rewards) (via skill checks)]
[PC may use dialogue challenges]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[PC may use alternate methods (concealment, stealth)]
[PC may use alternate methods (sabotage objectives)]
[PC may assist QG opponents]
[Companion/Follower regard potentially affected]
[Quest item(s) obtained]
[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (exp, money, items, housing, regard)]

Ghost of Tsushima

Sucker Punch Productions/Sony Interactive Entertainment

2020

Historical

“The Tale of Lady Masako”

Main

The last survivor of a samurai household seeks to avenge her loss.

ATU:

REALISTIC TALES 850-999

[Proofs of Fidelity and Innocence 880-899]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

[Other Realistic Tales 970-999]

Thompson Motif:

[Q411.6. †Q411.6. Death as punishment for murder.]

[Q411.11.1. †Q411.11.1. Desecrating a sanctuary (saint's house)

by murder punished.]

[W35. †W35. Justice.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC requires information/resolves honor]

[NPC/QG with information/services requires help]

[Investigation via environment (items, clues, notes)]

[PC may use standard (preferred) martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate (secondary) methods (samurai, ninja)]

[PC must track]

[PC must escort (follow)]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[PC may use alternate methods (stealth)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (item, info, regard)]

GreedFall

Spiders/Focus Home Interactive

2019

Historical Fantasy

"Old Countries in a New World"

Main

De Sardet must meet with all the local leaders for introductions.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Good Precepts 910-919]

[Clever Acts and Words 920-929]

Thompson Motif:

[H80. †H80. Identification by tokens.]

[H1558. †H1558. Tests of friendship.]

[†H200-†H299. Tests of truth.]

[J200. †J200. Choices.]

[J230. †J230. Choice: real and apparent values.]

[J530. †J530. Prudence in demands.]

[J610. †J610. Forethought in conflict with others -- general.]

[G350. †G350. Animal ogres.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC requires information/resolves honor]

[NPC/QG with information/services requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[PC may negotiate (information, cost, services, items) (skill

checks)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[Companion/Faction regard potentially affected]

[Reward(s) (exp, item, info, regard)]

Horizon Zero Dawn

Guerilla Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment

2017

Post-apocalypse/Science Fiction

"A Moment's Peace"

Side

Rumors mention a secluded village where humans and monsters peacefully co-exist.

ATU:

[ANIMAL TALES 1-299]

[Wild Animals and Humans 150-199]

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

Thompson Motif:

[A531. †A531. Culture hero (demigod) overcomes monsters.]

[B10. †B10. Mythical beasts and hybrids.]
[F759.1. †F759.1. Mountain with marvelous objects at top.]
[F840. †F840. Other extraordinary objects and places.]
[†J830. Adaptability to overpowering force.]
[†J850.--J899. Consolation in misfortune.]
[G105. †G105. Valley of the one hundred giants.]

Propp-style Functions

identification)]

[NPC/QG with information/services requires help]
[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

PC must use dialogue challenges]
[Investigation via environment (map marker)]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Boss encounter]
[Reward(s) (exp, item)]

Jade Empire

BioWare/Microsoft Game Studios

2005

Fantasy

“The Flower of the Fields”

Side

A peasant’s family has been kidnapped.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

[ANECDOTES AND JOKES 1200-1999]

[Stories about Married Couples 1350-1439]

Thompson Motif:

[B411.2. †B411.2. Helpful ox.]

[H1220. †H1220. Quests voluntarily undertaken.]

[P431. †P431. Merchant.]

[P475.2. †P475.2. Robbers defeated and killed.]

[Q53. †Q53. Reward for rescue.]

[R110. †R110. Rescue of captive.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (money)]

“The Imperial Arena”

Side

A fight promoter wants to see if the Imperial Champion can be defeated.

ATU:

[TALES OF THE STUPID OGRE (GIANT, DEVIL) 1000-1199]

[Contest between Man and Ogre 1060-1114]

[FORMULA TALES 2000-2399]

[Cumulative Tales 2000-2100]

Thompson Motif:

[E422.3.2. †E422.3.2. Revenant as a very large man (giant).]

[H1561.1. †H1561.1. Tests of valor: tournament.]

[H1568. †H1568. Test of the champion.]

[K0. †K0. Contest won by deception -- general.]

[K1. †K1. Contest won by magic.]

[L400. †L400. Pride brought low.]

[P251.2. †P251.2. Warrior will not fight where his brother was

slain.]

[P251.3.1. †P251.3.1. Brothers strive to avenge each other.]

[Q111. †Q111. Riches as reward.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC requires notoriety/access]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may use alternate method (companion) (partial)]

[Boss encounter]

[Reward(s) (exp, money, item, skill)]

Kingdom Come: Deliverance

Warhorse Studios/Deep Silver

2018

Historical

"Mysterious Ways"

Main

A priest and a scribe hold clues to a horrific attack.

ATU:

[ANECDOTES AND JOKES 1200-1999]

[Stories about a Man 1525-1724]

[The Clever Man 1525-1639]

[Jokes about Clergymen and Religious Figures 1725-1849]

[Clergyman and Sexton 1775-1799]

[Other Jokes about Religious Figures 1800-1849]

[1826. The Parson has no Need to Preach]

Thompson Motif:

[C250. †C250. Tabu: drinking.]

[C110. †C110. Tabu: sexual intercourse.]

[C116. †C116. Tabu: sexual intercourse in sacred precinct.]
[J200. †J200. Choices.]
[J231. †J231. Wisdom chosen above all else.]
[J247. †J247. Goodness preferred to wealth.]
[V0. †V0. Religious services.]
[Q40. †Q40. Kindness rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC requires information]
[NPC/QG with information requires help]
[Fetch objective (potential)]
[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive identification)]
[PC must use dialogue challenges]
[Investigation via environment (clues, items, notes)]
[NPCs/QGs confront/challenge PC]
[PC may negotiate (information, cost, services, items) (skill checks)]
[PC may use alternate actions (reject QG's request)]
[PC must memorize/learn ideal dialogue]
[PC participates in play/litany/staged dialogue]
[PC may track]
[Specific/Unique action/item required]
[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]
[Multiple completion outcomes]
[Reward(s) (info, regard)]

"Mightier Than the Sword"

Side

Henry wants to learn to read.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

Thompson Motif:

[H502. †H502. Test of learning.]

[H1220. †H1220. Quests voluntarily undertaken.]

[P425. †P425. Scribe.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC is alerted to quest via journal (quest automatically appears)]
[PC requires information]
[NPCs/QGs confront/challenge PC]
[PC must memorize/learn ideal dialogue]
[PC participates in play/litany/staged dialogue]
[Specific/Unique action/item required]
[Reward(s) (skill)]

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

38 Studios/Electronic Arts

2012
Fantasy

“Oh, The Indignitaries”

Side

There are protocol difficulties within the Fae court.

ATU:

[FORMULA TALES 2000-2399]

[Cumulative Tales 2000-2100]

[Chains Involving Other Events 2029-2075]

Thompson Motif Index:

[+J200.--J499. Choices.]

[J1041. +J1041. Impossibility of pleasing everyone.]

[+J810. Policy in dealing with the great.]

[+J860. Consolation by a trifle.]

[+J880. Consolation by thought of others worse placed.]

[+P600-+P699. Customs.]

[P632. +P632. Customs concerning recognition of rank.]

[Z40. +Z40. Chains with interdependent members.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[PC encounters riddles/puzzles]

[PC must memorize/learn ideal dialogue (discover ideal order)]

[Reward(s) (exp, money)]

“Red in Tooth and Claw”

Side

A transformed wolf seeks a return to his true form.

ATU:

[ANIMAL TALES 1-299]

[Wild Animals and Humans 150-199]

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]

Thompson Motif:

[B29.5. +B29.5. Man-wolf.]

[B211. +B211. Animal uses human speech.]

[D113.1. +D113.1. Transformation: man to wolf.]

[D313.2. +D313.2. Transformation: wolf to man.]

[D1242.1. +D1242.1. Magic water.]

[F718. +F718. Extraordinary well.]

[Q40. +Q40. Kindness rewarded.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[PC may use alternate method (stealth) (partial)]
[Specific/Unique action/item required]
[Quest item(s) obtained]
[Reward(s) (exp)]

Mass Effect
BioWare/Electronic Arts
2007
Science Fiction

“Prologue: Find the Beacon”

Main

An archaeological dig reveals a galactically significant artifact.

ATU:

[RELIGIOUS TALES 750-849]

[The Truth Comes to Light 780-799]

Thompson Motif:

[+A1000.--A1099. World calamities.]

[F774. +F774. Extraordinary pillars.]

[+K800.--K999. Fatal deception.]

[+K950. Various kinds of treacherous murder.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Fetch objective]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[PC may use dialogue challenges]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[Timed event]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Quest item(s) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp, follower)]

Mass Effect 2
BioWare/Electronic Arts
2010
Science Fiction

“Samara: The Ardat-Yakshi”

Side/Companion

A companion has unresolved issues with her daughter.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Clever Acts and Words 920-929]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

[TALES OF THE STUPID OGRE (GIANT, DEVIL) 1000-1199]

[Partnership between Man and Ogre 1030-1059]

[Man Outwits the Devil 1155-1169]

Thompson Motif:

[A531.1.1. †A531.1.1. Culture hero banishes demons.]

[C100. †C100. Sex tabu.]

[K1800. †K1800. Deception by disguise or illusion.]

[S110. †S110. Murders.]

[T173.1. †T173.1. Strong bride tries to stifle husband in bed.]

[T173.2. †T173.2. Hostile brides kill husbands in the bridal bed.]

[Q210. †Q210. Crimes punished.]

[Q210.1. †Q210.1. Criminal intent punished.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help (resolves honor)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[Investigation via environment (items, clues, notes, recordings)]

[Boss encounter]

[PC may use alternate methods (sabotage objectives)]

[PC may assist QG opponents]

[Companion/Follower regard potentially affected]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality affected)]

[Reward(s) (exp, money, resources, skills, follower, regard)]

Mass Effect 3

BioWare/Electronic Arts

2012

Science Fiction

“Priority: Tuchanka: The Shroud”

Main

The fate of a civilization rests in the hands of an old companion.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]

[Magic Objects 560-649]

[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Clever Acts and Words 920-929]

[Tales of Fate 930-949]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:

[+A1040. Continuous winter destroys the race.]

[A1082. †A1082. Battle of gods and monster at end of world.]

[F772. †F772. Extraordinary tower.]

[†K840. Deception into fatal substitution.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Boss encounter]

[PC may use alternate methods (sabotage objectives)]

[PC may assist QG opponents]

[Companion/Follower regard potentially affected]

[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality affected)]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp, allies, resources, regard)]

Mount & Blade

TaleWorlds Entertainment/Paradox Interactive

2008

Historical

“Persuade Lords to Make Peace”

Side

Warring factions must come to an agreement.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Clever Acts and Words 920-929]

Thompson Motif:

[J218. †J218. Enemies make peace rather than slay each other.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may use alternate methods]

[Investigation via dialogue]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Reward(s) (exp, money, regard)]

The Outer Worlds

Obsidian Entertainment/Private Division

2020

Science Fiction

“Don’t Bite the Sun”

Side/Companion

A companion needs help arranging a romantic setting.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[The Man Marries the Princess 850-869]

[The Woman Marries the Prince 870-879]

Thompson Motif:

[H910. †H910. Assignment of tasks in response to suggestion.]

[H1558. †H1558. Tests of friendship.]

[H44. †H44. Recognition by perfume.]

[H335.5. †H335.5. Suitor task: to bring back food as a marriage

present.]

[Z40. †Z40. Chains with interdependent members.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information/services requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Reward(s) (exp, regard)]

Planescape: Torment

Black Isle/Interplay

1999

Fantasy

“Defeat the Intruder in the Mausoleum for the Guardian Spirit”

Side

A Guardian Spirit requires assistance.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]

[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]

Thompson Motif:

[E748. †E748. The soul as a guardian spirit.]

[H1430. †H1430. Fearless traffic with ghosts.]

[H1150. †H1150. Tasks: stealing, capturing, or slaying.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with (minor) information requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (map marker)]

[PC may negotiate (services)]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Boss encounter]
[Reward(s) (exp)]

Red Dead Redemption
Rockstar San Diego/Rockstar Games
2010
Western

“Remember My Family”
Side

A significant wrong must be avenged.

ATU:
[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]
[880-899: Proofs of Fidelity and Innocence]
[890. The Pound of Flesh]
[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]
[Other Realistic Tales 970-999]

Thompson Motif:
[H1228. †H1228. Quest undertaken by hero for vengeance.]
[H1228.2. †H1228.2. Son goes out to avenge father's death.]
[Q411.6. †Q411.6. Death as punishment for murder.]
[W35. †W35. Justice.]

Propp-style Functions
[PC requires information/resolves honor]
[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive
identification)]
[Investigation via environment (map marker)]
[Boss encounter]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[PC may choose to encounter additional mini-boss (not
dependent on completion)]
[Specific/Unique action/item required]
[Reward(s) (money)]

Risen
Piranha Bytes/Deep Silver
2009
Fantasy

“A Bottle of Beer for the Drunkard”
Side/Recurring

Find and exchange beer for information.

ATU:
[FORMULA TALES 2000-2399]

[Cumulative Tales 2000-2100]

Thompson Motif:

[P414. †P414. Hunter.]

[Q45. †Q45. Hospitality rewarded.]

[Z30. †Z30. Chains involving a single scene or event without interdependence among the individual actors.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC requires information]

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

identification)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[Fetch objective]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp, info)]

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

BioWare/Lucas Arts

2003

Science Fiction/Fantasy

“Kashyyyk: A Chieftain in Need”

Side/Companion

Tribe members must confront their leader.

ATU:

[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]

[Good Precepts 910-919]

[Clever Acts and Words 920-929]

[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:

[H240. †H240. Other tests of truth.]

[J211. †J211. Choice: free poverty or enslaved wealth.]

[J226. †J226. Difficult choice between relatives.]

[J230. †J230. Choice: real and apparent values.]

[Q40. †Q40. Kindness rewarded.]

[Q114.3. †Q114.3. Sword as reward.]

[Q200. †Q200. Deeds punished.]

Propp-style Functions

honor)]

[NPCs/QGs with information/services require help (resolve

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[PC may negotiate (money, rewards)]

identification)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]

[PC may assist QG/NPC opponents]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]
[Boss encounter]
[PC must use dialogue challenges]
[PC may use alternate methods (refusals mid-quest)]
[Companion/Follower regard potentially affected]
[Multiple completion outcomes (Morality affected)]
[Reward(s) (exp, money, items, regard)]

Thief: The Dark Project
Looking Glass Studios/Eidos Interactive
1998
Fantasy/Steampunk
"The Sword"
Main

A reclusive eccentric is in possession of a valuable weapon and a unique estate.

ATU:
[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]
[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]
[Supernatural Tasks 460-499]
[Magic Objects 560-649]
[Supernatural Power or Knowledge 650-699]
[REALISTIC TALES 850-999]
[Robbers and Murderers 950-969]

Thompson Motif:
[D838.1. †D838.1. Stolen objects powerful in magic.]
[D838.13. †D838.13. Magic object stolen at night.]
[D861. †D861. Magic object stolen.]
[D1081. †D1081. Magic sword.]
[F781. †F781. Extraordinary rooms.]
[F781.1. †F781.1. Labyrinth.]

Propp-style Functions
[PC has faction obligations/mission]
[Fetch objective]
[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (clues, notes)]
[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts, stealth)]
[PC may use alternate methods (pathfinding)]
[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]
[Reward(s) (money)]

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
CD Projekt Red/CD Projekt
2015

Fantasy

"Family Matters"

Main

A warlord is haunted by his personal mistakes.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

Thompson Motif:

[P233.9. †P233.9. Son chastizes father for scorning mother.]

[P242. †P242. Children punished for fathers' sins.]

[Q580. †Q580. Punishment fitted to crime.]

[E225.1. †E225.1. Ghost of abortion.]

[Q211.4. †Q211.4. Murder of children punished.]

[Q211.3. †Q211.3. Uxoricide punished.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (items, clues, notes, recordings)]

[Fetch objective]

[Boss encounter (potential)]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[PC may negotiate to diffuse situation]

[PC may use alternate actions (rescue)]

[PC must escort]

[PC may use alternate methods (battle vs. pacification)]

[NPC with information shares gossip]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[NPC is exposed/confesses]

[PC must track]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp, info)]

"The Isle of Mists"

Main

The Witcher continues his search for Ciri on an obscured and enchanted island.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

[Supernatural Helpers 500-559]

[Other Tales of the Supernatural 700-749]

[709. Snow White]

Thompson Motif:

[E50. †E50. Resuscitation by magic.]

[†D1960. Magic sleep.]

[Z230. †Z230. Extraordinary exploits of hero.]

[+F110. Journey to terrestrial otherworlds.]

Propp-style Functions

[NPC/QG with information requires help (repays assistance)]

[PC must cross boundary (cannot return unless metrics are met)]

[PC must track]

[PC may use standard martial combat (loadouts)]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[Investigation via environment (clues)]

[PC must escort]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[Quest item(s) (objective) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp, info)]

Vampire: The Masquerade: Bloodlines

Troika Games/Activision

2004

Fantasy

“A Dish Best Served Cold”

Side

A restaurant critic must be persuaded to write a scathing review.

ATU:

[ANECDOTES AND JOKES 1200-1999]

[Jokes about Clergymen and Religious Figures 1725-1849]

[The Clergyman is Tricked 1725-1774]

Thompson Motif:

[E251. +E251. Vampire.]

[K440. +K440. Other cheats.]

[K1300. +K1300. Seduction.]

[K1700. +K1700. Deception through bluffing.]

[K1800. +K1800. Deception by disguise or illusion.]

[K2319. +K2319. Deception by equivocation -- miscellaneous.]

[K2320. +K2320. Deception by frightening.]

[X0. +X0. Humor of discomfiture.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has faction obligations/mission]

[Investigation via dialogue (skill checks, perceptive

identification)]

[PC must use dialogue challenges]

[PC may use alternate methods (multiple skill/class-based

arguments)]

[Reward(s) (exp, money)]

“The Ghost Haunts at Midnight”

Main

A particular piece of jewelry is a focal point for paranormal behavior at an abandoned hotel.

ATU:

[TALES OF MAGIC 300-749]

[Supernatural Adversaries 300-399]

Thompson Motif:

[E251. †E251. Vampire.]

[E280. †E280. Ghosts haunt buildings.]

[E334.1. †E334.1. Ghost haunts scene of former crime or sin.]

[E451.9. †E451.9. Ghost laid when revenge is accomplished.]

[H1132. †H1132. Task: recovering lost objects.]

Propp-style Functions

[PC has faction obligations/mission]

[Fetch objective]

[Investigation via environment (items, clues, notes, recordings)]

[Specific/Unique action/item required]

[PC may assist QG/NPC opponents]

[Multiple completion outcomes]

[Quest item(s) obtained]

[Reward(s) (exp)]

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