

# University of Europe for Applied Sciences

Faculty of Art+Design  
Game Design



Bachelor Proposal

## Gaming Beyond the Lines Deconstructing Meta-Narratives in Video Games

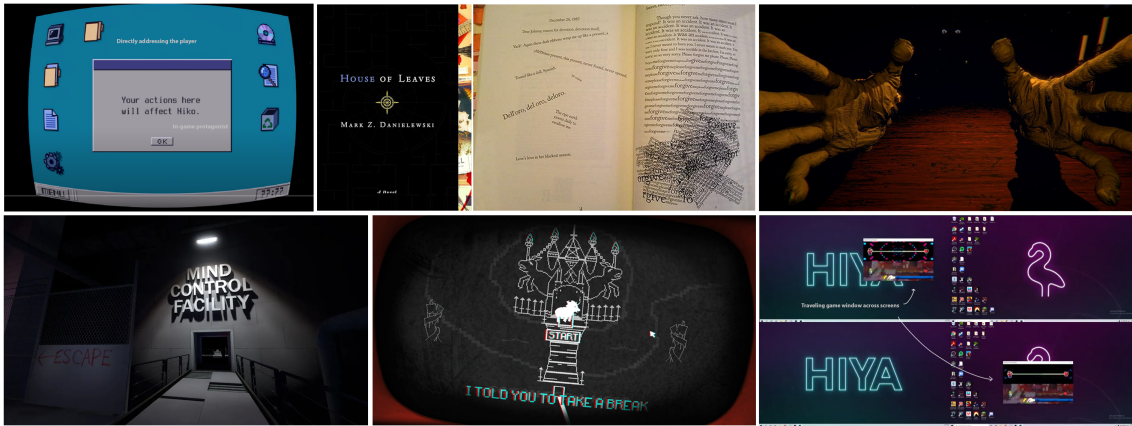
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Time frame:  
Winter Term 2024/25

# 1 Abstract

This paper would like to explore the ways video games approach meta-narratives through their mechanics and visual design. It would investigate the meaning of meta, the definition of metafiction and attempt to define the boundaries of a video game and possibly categorize the design aspects of meta elements in games. This study would also provide an extensive analysis of games that play within the meta narrative realm to figure out what makes them tick. The games that would be put under scrutiny would be Daniel Mullin's Pony Island and Inscryption as well as Galactic Cafe's The Stanley Parable. However, there will be mentions of other games like The Witch's House and One Shot throughout the paper to serve as alternate references. This paper hopes to potentially establish a better understanding of meta narratives in video games and possibly provide a basic guideline on how to approach developing them as well as push the boundaries of ways Players interact and play a game.

The project that would accompany this paper would be a short narrative driven game that attempts to incorporate as many meta design elements within its mechanics. The game would consists of mechanics that require the player to act beyond the confines of the video game's digital controls and inherently pushing the line on ways games can be interacted with by their players. The game would also explore a variety of narrative elements that acts as the driving force for the meta narrative experience the player goes through.



## 2 Introduction to the Topic

1. **Field of research:** The field of research for this topic would be a combination of mechanics and visual design specifically about promoting meta-narratives in games.
2. **Relevant games:** Pony Island, Inscryption, The Stanley Parable, The Witch's House, One Shot.
3. **Summary:** There are some terms that would need to be defined before this paper can begin its course and that would be the term metanarrative and metafiction. According to the Oxford Dictionary metanarrative can be defined as a narrative account that experiments with or explores the idea of storytelling, and the term metafiction is defined as writing about imaginary characters and events in which the process of writing is discussed or described. Though they sound very similar, they each stand for different definitions of meta, metanarrative is the grand underlying theme of a narrative and metafiction is a story that plays with the idea that it is a story. This paper however would be touching upon the narrative in games that upheld the meta concept, thus the term meta-narrative is used in that sense.

### 2.1 References

A short sub-chapter to help to understand references and citations.

- Reference

### 3 Relevance to the Field

1. Narrative is a core factor in many games from casual mobile games to AAA titles.
2. Meta-narratives have gained quite a considerable amount of traction in the indie horror game scene as it's very existence sparks a sense of fear within players.
3. Developers are always pushing the limits of their games in terms of introducing game mechanics that encroaches beyond the confines of it's self as a digital program.

### 4 Personal Motivation

I always enjoyed media that exceeds my expectations. Narratives that subverts my preconceived expectations and shakes my core understanding and beliefs, introducing a new perspective that I have not considered before. I am also personally curious on the ways these narratives are conveyed and how they are designed to push the boundaries, blurring the lines of the real world versus the in-game world, "who" is playing the game and what constitutes as "playing" in this context.

## 5 Method(ology)

### 5.1 Theory

#### Table of Contents

1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Defining the terms
    - 1.1.1 What does meta-narrative mean?
    - 1.1.2 Metafiction in games
  - 1.2 History of related games
  - 1.3 Clarification on the angle this paper is intending to approach the topic
2. Defining the bounds of a game
  - 2.1 What is considered "inside" or "outside" the game?
  - 2.2 Who is the "Player"?
3. Design aspects of meta elements
  - 3.1 Easter eggs
  - 3.2 Direct address of the Player
  - 3.3 Lost of control from the Player over the game
  - 3.4 Subversion of expectations
  - 3.5 Multiple narrative layers
  - 3.6 HUD and UI
4. Breaking the bounds of a game
  - 4.1 Is it possible?
  - 4.2 Establishing it as a core mechanic
5. Dissecting example games
  - 5.1 Pony Island / Inscryption
  - 5.2 The Stanley Parable
6. Conclusion
7. References

## 5.2 Project

### Technical Resources

- Unity
- Codecks
- Maya
- Adobe Suite

## 6 Timeline

detailed information on 6 weeks theory and 12 weeks project (theory focus: 12 weeks / 6 weeks)

Time	Todos
Weeks 1 - 2	– Reading
Weeks 3 - 4	– Building Structure
Weeks 5 - 6	– Finishing
Weeks 7 - 8	– Distributed slices
Weeks 9 - 10	– Distributed sharing
Weeks 11 - 12	– Processing semantics
Weeks 13 - 14	
Weeks 15 - 16	
Weeks 17 - 18	

Table 1: Planned Time Table

## 7 Bibliography

Britta Neitzel, “Narrativity of computer games,” *Handbook of narratology* 2 (2014): 608–622

J. Lebowitz and C. Klug, *Interactive Storytelling for Video Games: A Player-centered Approach to Creating Memorable Characters and Stories* (Focal Press, 2011), <https://books.google.de/books?id=QUrarEcvaO8C>

Öznur Özdal and Guven Catak, “Breaking the Fourth Wall in Video Games: A New Terminology and Methodology” (December 2021), 45–59

Espen Aarseth, “A narrative theory of games,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, FDG ’12 (Raleigh, North Carolina: Association for Computing Machinery, 2012), 129–133, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2282338.2282365>

## **7.1 Other Media**

1. Pony Island
2. Inscryption
3. The Stanley Parable
4. One Shot
5. The Witch's House MV
6. Rhythm Doctor

## 8 Whole Bibliography

- Aarseth, Espen. “A narrative theory of games.” In *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, 129–133. FDG '12. Raleigh, North Carolina: Association for Computing Machinery, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2282338.2282365>.
- Cox, James. “The Four Types of Metafiction in Videogames,” 2014. <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/the-four-types-of-metafiction-in-videogames>.
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- Liu, Yongcheng. “Breaking the fourth wall: meta-elements design in story-oriented games,” 2023. <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/breaking-the-fourth-wall-meta-elements-design-in-story-oriented-games>.
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## All Games

- Daniel Mullins Games. *Inscription*, 2021. <https://www.inscription.com>.
- . *Pony Island*, 2016. <https://www.pony-island.com>.
- Galactic Cafe. *The Stanley Parable*, 2013. <https://stanleyparable.com>.