Raise Your Game: Applying Game Narrative Strategies to Writing Fiction

Panel Questions

1. What have been some of your most memorable game-based story experiences, and how do game mechanics—choice, emergence, failure, etc.—contribute to those narrative experiences? Are there ways to create similar experiences in print-based work?

2. How are games or digital storytelling experiences changing the expectations that readers have for narrative? In other words, how are games changing our definition of what stories are and how they work?

3. Games are often social experiences requiring teamwork and collaboration, and yet the traditional view of the “author” is one person working alone. How has collaboration shaped your own creative process, and to what degree is it useful to rethink traditional definitions of authorship?

4. Games often allow players to contribute to character development throughout the story, for instance, by determining character choices, writing a character’s background, determining key personality characteristics, or selecting from archetypes. What can fiction writers or teachers learn from how games handle character creation and development?

5. Many games like *Skyrim*, *Fallout*, *The Sims* franchise, and others are light on plot. However, these games offer narrative fragments—NPCs, objects, breathtaking landscapes, and conflict—that the player can use to build a compelling narrative within their own mind. No two players will come away with exactly the same story, but these are rich narrative experiences. As writers, can we take any lessons from that? Is there a place for leaving gaps, fragments, loose ends, and narrative holes so that readers can construct their own story?

6. What suggestions do you have for writers who are interested in using game approaches in their writing? In what ways can an understanding of games help us to become stronger writers?
Panelist Bios

Julialicia Case is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay, where she teaches creative writing and literature, with a particular emphasis on game studies and interactive storytelling. She writes fiction, creative nonfiction, and digital work.

Eric Freeze teaches at Wabash College. He has published fiction and essays in periodicals including The Southern Review, Harvard Review, and Boston Review. He is author of Dominant Traits (stories), Hemingway on a Bike (essays), and Invisible Men (stories). He lives in Indiana and Nice, France.

Sequoia Nagamatsu is an assistant professor of creative writing at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. He is the author of the story collection, Where We Go When All We Were Is Gone, and the managing editor of Psychopomp Magazine, an online quarterly of innovative prose.

Jennifer Pullen is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Ohio Northern University, where she teaches creative writing, literature, and whatever else her department needs. Her creative writing and scholarship focuses on fantasy, science fiction, folklore, mythology, and gender. She primarily writes fiction and poetry. Her chapbook A Bead of Amber on Her Tongue, won the Omnidawn Fabulist fiction award.

Brendan Stephens is a writer based out of Houston. He is the recipient of two Inprint Donald Barthelme Prizes. He is currently a PhD student at the University of Houston where he is the assistant online fiction editor for Gulf Coast.