

DANM 132
Games as Literature: The Intersection of Writing and Play
 SUMMER 2011, SESSION II
 (Revised 8/26/11 to reflect course as actually taught in Summer 2011)

Time and Location: DARC 206, M/W/F 2-5pm

Instructor: Aaron A. Reed (aareed@soe.ucsc.edu)

Office Hours: DARC 139, W 5-6:30pm or by appointment

Class Website: <http://gamesaslit.textories.com/>

Required Texts: *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Aaron A. Reed. Course Technology PTR, 1st edition, 2010. ISBN 1435455061. \$39.99 at bookstore.

Required Purchases: *Sleep Is Death* (<http://sleepisdeath.net/>) — Minimum \$2 donation
Echo Bazaar (<http://echobazaar.failbettergames.com/>) — 1 month subscription, \$9.95

Overview and Objectives: Digital games tell stories through increasingly mesmerizing computer graphics, ubiquitous handheld devices, and multimedia special effects. How can mere words compete? If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. This intensive hands-on course will survey the many thriving micro-genres in the neutral zone between games and literature, including hyperlinked narratives, interactive fiction, simulation- and system-based prose, and spatial and collaborative storytelling tools. We will interact with exciting contemporary work and discuss what our experiences teach us about storytelling in the 21st century. Students will also learn several tools for creating their own digital fictions, conducting a series of experiments culminating in a final project, a major piece of creative writing in a digital mode.

IMPORTANT SUMMER DATES

	Session 1	7-wk Sess.	8-wk Sess.	10-wk Sess.	Session 2
Final day to enroll/add	June 25 11:59 pm	June 25 11:59 pm	June 25 11:59 pm	July 2 11:59 pm	July 30 11:59 pm
Final day to drop	June 26 11:59 pm	June 26 11:59 pm	June 26 11:59 pm	July 3 11:59 pm	July 31 11:59 pm
Withdrawal Period at Summer Office (no refund)	June 27 – July 8 (8:00-4:00)	June 27 – July 15 (8:00-4:00)	June 27 – July 22 (8:00-4:00)	July 5 – July 29 (8:00-4:00)	Aug 1 – Aug 12 (8:00-4:00)

Note that during Summer Session there is no auditing of classes, no "Add by Petition," and no "Administrative Drop by Instructor." Failure to attend class does not constitute a "Drop" of the course. **WARNING:** If you enroll in a class, even for a moment, then drop out of Summer Session completely, there is a **\$50 cancellation fee** that you must pay. All deadlines are final.

Be forewarned: this is a five-credit, five-week summer session course, meaning an ambitious agenda and a serious workload. This is not an easy class, but it should be an exciting one. Come with a passion for reading and writing, be prepared to live and breathe electronic literature for five weeks, and it should be a fantastic journey.

Readings will mostly be interactive stories available online, focusing on contemporary text-based work that could not exist on a printed page and that demands participation from the reader. We're limiting ourselves to fresh work less than a decade old that we can actually experience ourselves in class or at home.

Requirements include getting a copy of the required text (see above) and attending all class sessions. You'll need to have regular access to a modern computer you can install custom software on. A laptop and a USB key are highly recommended to facilitate in-class tutorials and turning in assignments; if you have your own web space, that's also useful for turning in work. You should have basic computer skills and be comfortable installing software and navigating the web. No programming experience is required for the course; we'll learn the basics of two different story-making systems, one good for beginners and one better for intermediate to advanced programmers, and you can choose whichever you feel most comfortable with to create your final project.

Grading

Class Participation, 20%. A major component of this course will be interaction with and discussion of the works on the syllabus each week. Students are expected to read/play assigned work outside of class and come prepared to share opinions, experiences, and favorite quotes or excerpts. Attendance is mandatory and more than two absences will make passing difficult.

Weekly Experiments, 30%. You'll create three "experiments," micro-projects designed to get familiar being creative in various interactive storytelling media, each worth 10% of your final grade. We'll have in-class tutorials of tools for making these experiments. Each experiment should be accompanied by a one-paragraph writeup explaining your intentions for the project and any insights or lessons learned from its creation.

Final Project, 30%. During the last week of class, you'll present a final project that tells an interactive short story. The project might incorporate elements of previous weekly experiments or explore in a different direction. You'll have the opportunity to get feedback from classmates and make revisions before turning in the final version. The final submission should be accompanied by a one page artist's statement placing the work in the context of class discussions and readings.

Close Reading, 20%. Each student will be expected to choose one interactive work from the list of related work on the class website, and conduct a close reading of it, at a more in-depth level than for a standard assignment. This might require navigating the work multiple times to gain a fuller perspective, or doing some research into other works by the same author or existing scholarship about the piece. You'll share your results with the class by giving a 5-10 minute presentation, and submit a 2-page summary and research bibliography citing at least two non-Wikipedia sources to the instructor.

Course Outline

Each week we'll focus on a different mode of interactive literature, charting a rough trajectory from simpler/older to more complex/newer forms. **Mondays** I'll introduce the week's topic with a brief lecture, and we'll try a representative work together as a class. After the first week, we will also go over students' weekend experiments in a casual demo fair style roundtable. For **Wednesdays** students should come prepared to discuss the two works on the syllabus, having spent enough time with each to have a productive discussion. We'll discuss our experiences with these two works in depth, then have a tutorial introducing a piece of software you can use to create similar work of your own. **Fridays** some students will give presentations on their close readings, and we'll have a more extended tutorial and workshop to give you a solid grounding for your weekend experiments.

Week One: Hypertext and Forking Paths

Monday, 7/25

- Class Welcome
- Lecture: Hypertext and Forking Paths
- *The (Former) General In His Labyrinth* (2008, Mohsin Hamid; HTML/Javascript)
- Homework for Wed.: Interact with Wednesday pieces (links on class website).
- Homework for Wed.: Get a class Twitter account

Wednesday, 7/27

- *These Waves of Girls* (2001, Caitlin Fisher; HTML & Audio)
- *Underbelly* (2010, Christine Wilks; Flash)
- Writing Exercise: Character and Conflict
- Tutorial: Twine
- Homework for Fri: Sign up for a close reading on class website
- Homework for Fri: Install Twine

Friday, 7/29

- Close Reading Presentations
- Workshop: Twine/CSS
- Homework for Mon: Weekend Experiment #1: Create a link-based fiction

Week Two: Interactive Fiction

Monday, 8/1

- Weekend Experiment Demos
- Lecture: Interactive Fiction
- *The Warbler's Nest* (2010, Jason McIntosh; Inform 7/Glulx)
- *Hoist Sail for the Heliopause and Home* (2010, Andrew Plotkin; Inform 7/Z-code)
- Homework for Wed: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 1-2.
- Homework for Wed: Install Inform 7.
- Homework for Wed: Interact with Wednesday pieces.

Wednesday, 8/3

- *Earl Grey* (2009, Rob Dubbin and Adam Parrish; Inform 6/Glulx)
- *Everybody Dies* (2008, Jim Munroe; Inform 7/Glulx)
- Tutorial: Inform 7
- Homework for Fri: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 3-6, 11.

Friday, 8/5

- Close Reading presentations
- Screening: *Get Lamp* (clips)
- Tutorial: Inform 7 (continued)
- Workshop: Basic I7 Skills
- Homework for Mon: Weekend Experiment #2: Tell a story using exploration, spaces, and things.

Week Three: Computational & Simulationist Narratives

Monday, 8/8

- Weekend Experiment Demos
- Lecture: Simulation and system-based narratives
- *The Two and Through the Park* (2008, Nick Montfort; Python)
- *Game Developer's Conference 2009* (2009, Jim Munroe; Inform 7/Glulx)
- Homework for Wed: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 7-8.
- Homework for Wed: Interact with Wednesday pieces.

Wednesday, 8/10

- *'Mid the Sagebrush and the Cactus* and source code (2010, Victor Gijbers; Inform 7/Glulx)
- *Balance of Power: 21st Century* (2009, Chris Crawford; StoryTron/Java)
- Group workshop: Brainstorm a board game based around an interesting process
- Tutorial: Inform ATTACK
- Homework for Fri: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 9-10.
- Homework for Fri: Create an Echo Bazaar profile and begin playing.

Friday, 8/12

- Close Reading presentations
- Demo: *Prom Week* (2011, Josh McCoy, Mike Treanor et al; Flash)
- Mini-lecture: Microfiction
- Workshop: Conversation Framework for Sand-dancer
- Homework for Mon: Weekend Experiment #3: Tell a story through simulation or systems using Inform ATTACK, Threaded Conversation, or your own rules.

Week Four: Spatial & Collaborative Texts

Monday, 8/15

- Weekend Experiment Demos
- Lecture: Spatial & Collaborative Fictions
- *SpecTrek* (2010, spectrekking.com; Android/iOS)
- Homework for Wed: Interact with Wednesday pieces.
- Homework for Wed: One paragraph project proposal.

Wednesday, 8/17

- *Sleep Is Death* (2010, Jason Rohrer; Windows/Mac application)
- *Echo Bazaar* (2009—present, Failbetter Games; S#arp/HTML/Javascript)
- Workshop: Open project time
- Homework for Fri: Play “Mime Academy.”

Friday, 8/19

- Close Reading presentations
- *Mime Academy* (2010, No Mimes Media; ARG for web, email, phone)
- Mini-lecture: Avoiding clichè
- Workshop: Open project time

Week Five: The Future of Post-Print Fiction & Final Projects

Monday, 8/22

- Lecture: 2012 and Beyond
- Group: Break into groups first by system then by story theme & discuss final project
- Workshop: Open project time
- Homework for Wed: Beta version of final project

Wednesday, 8/24

- Group: Find a beta partner and test each other’s project
- Workshop: Open project time
- Group: Find a different beta partner and test each other’s project
- Homework for Fri: Final project & artist’s statement

Friday, 8/26

- Final project demos