

EN-212 1 Bacheloroppgave i engelsk

Kandidat 6507

Oppgaver	Oppgavetype	Vurdering	Status
1 Forside	Flervalg	Automatisk poengsum	Leveret
2 Oppgaveinnlevering	Filopplasting	Manuell poengsum	Leveret

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Emnekode	EN-212	PDF opprettet	15.02.2017 14:35
Vurderingsform	EN-212	Opprettet av	Digital Eksamen
Starttidspunkt:	12.05.2016 22:45	Antall sider	37
Sluttidspunkt:	27.05.2016 12:45	Oppgaver inkludert	Ja
Sensurfrist	201606170000	Skriv ut automatisk rettede	Ja

Seksjon 1

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Filnavn	4699634_cand-2388276_4957413
Filtype	pdf
Filstørrelse	6544.942 KB
Opplastingstid	27.05.2016 11:24:06



Neste side
Besvarelse vedlagt

**Video Games, The Modern Narrator:
Telltale Games' Adaptation from Robert Kirkman's Comics, *The Walking
Dead*.**

by

Candidate number: 6507

Tanya Laolapha Pettersen

EN-212

English Bachelor Thesis

Spring 2016

University of Agder

Faculty of Humanities and Education

Department of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies



UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

Tanya Laolapha Pettersen

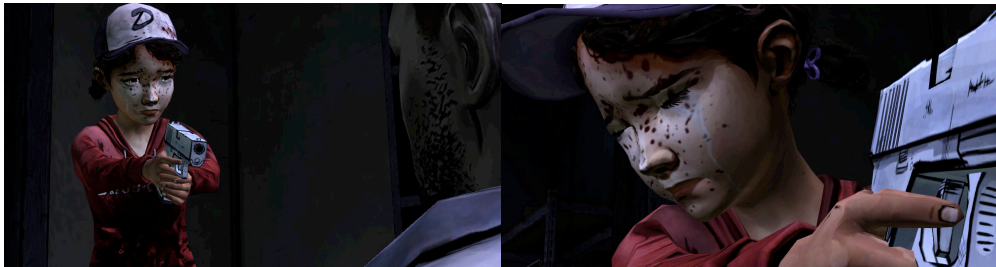
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Professor Michael J. Prince

27 May 2016

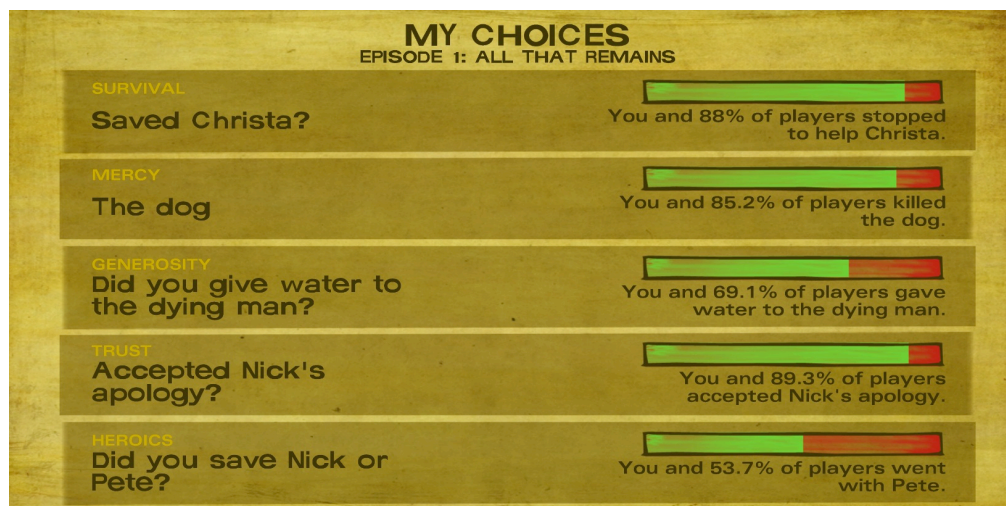
Video Games, The Modern Narrator: Telltale Games' Adaptation from Robert Kirkman's Comics, *The Walking Dead*.

Imagine being an 8-year-old girl, in the middle of a zombie apocalypse with no parents present. A man comes by, needing help. She immediately trusts him, because he is the only live person she has seen in a long time in this virus-infested world. He wants to help the girl find her parents, so she joins him on his journey. In the course of months, this man becomes a guardian - a substitute father. The girl attaches to him. However, the story tragically changes course when the man gets bitten by one of the zombies. The girl knows that there is no turning back and that his days are rapidly coming to an end. Weak and in pain, the man has chained himself to the wall. He puts a gun in the girl's hand and asks if she could end his suffering. The girl has lost everything, and now she is losing the only person that she cares about.



The girl is in a quandary with only two possibilities; kill the last person she trusts and cares about, or leave him to become a zombie. She is trapped in a lose-lose situation. This is, briefly, what Telltale Games' interpretation of *The Walking Dead* universe is about, and the last scenes are among the most hard-hitting in *The Walking Dead: Season One*. The genre of

the game is defined as graphic adventure/interactive drama, and the scenario centers on protagonist Lee Everett, a convict who is on his way to prison for killing his wife and her lover. The police car hits a zombie, and they drive off the road. Lee injures his leg and searches for help in one of the nearby houses. There he finds a little girl named Clementine, hiding in her tree house from zombies or other unknown people. She joins him on his journey so that she may look for her lost parents, and this is where the storyline starts. The game is split up into five episodes, which was published over the course of 5 months. At the end of each episode, the game shows us statistics of each choice, showing us a percentage of the players that chose differently:



Statistics of the decisions made in The Walking Dead – Season Two, Episode One.

Dilemmas are important in games like this, because these types of choices present significant ethical challenges, which is one of the things that the game developers aimed for when making a narrative game. It creates a certain standard, knowing that the player will not only be playing a game but will also be taking a “moral” standpoint. This interactive gameplay challenges the player in new and different ways. The differences between the

dilemma in the games compared to the source text from which it was adapted - *The Walking Dead* comics series - is that the reader has no choice but to follow the storyline and may be left with a feeling of helplessness. The player, on the other hand, controls the character and the narrative in a different way and is in some measure responsible for what happens. The player may also feel helpless, but more of being in an ethical dilemma, rather than not having any control at all. The game challenges the player to act according to his/her moral structures. As game designers Salen and Zimmerman have explained, the intriguing play relies on the player being granted meaningful choices, with distinguishable outcomes (Carr, Campbell and Ellwood 156). This thesis will argue that games are indeed embedded in modern narration, and that adaptation has been a way for games to impose themselves into the narrative landscape of our society. When discussing this, *The Walking Dead* franchise will be analyzed, where the focus will lie primarily on the game and the original comic book series¹.

The Importance of Video Games as a Modern Media:

Along with the fear of things dying, there's a fear of things rising. Will the rise of digital media displace the traditional sense of story? Introducing a new medium is not easy, even though games have become a key factor in the globalization of the media industries (Buckingham 4). They have had a steady increase in popularity, but they continue to be lowered by critics and commentators; they have been accused of being "a vehicle for sexism and mindless violence, as antisocial and anti-educational, or alternatively just a pointless waste of time". David Buckingham points out in the book *Computer Games: Text, Narrative, and Play* that these kinds of criticisms have reoccurred with the rise of every new medium.

¹ Due to the size limitations of this thesis, I have elected to exclude the television series from this analysis. The game designers have stated that the game is based upon the comics series, not the television show.

The same type of debates occurred when the television entered the market, and Buckingham establishes the claims simply as inconclusive (3).

David Buckingham argues that it is important that computer games are acknowledged and studied as games and not as a new form of hypertext, literature, drama or cinema (5). However, is it not possible to think of for example television shows as something that has blended from the idea of a movie or chapters in a book? Narrative designer and journalist Cara Ellison points out that it is important to have an open mind, and perhaps be more aware of these forms of media being meshed together into something new (Oslo, 2016).

Narrative in games – the importance of stories:

In a way, storytelling has to a great extent become interactive because narratives have also morphed into the form of games. One has to distinguish the differences between a “game narrative” and “regular narrative”. A game narrative is important regarding creating a proper story for the game, even though many games does not have fitting plot-lines, like Tetris. However, a game story most of the time functions as the “hook” to keep the player playing the game and is what makes the game move forward. In the lecture *Digitale Liv: The Art of Storytelling in Video Games* narrative designer and journalist Cara Ellison makes a comment about how a narrative designers’ work is to make a player want to open a door and get to know what is behind it (Oslo, 2016). In other words, she claims that narratives are important in order to make the player want to continue playing the game. It is also important to have in mind that narration does not play as an important part in video game production today as it should be. Video game design is the prioritized part in developing. Cara Ellison stated that when in the process of making a game, the first thing developers do when they are forced to

do a budget cut, is removing the narrative section. Skolnick supports this statement in his book *Video Game Storytelling*, where he says that

“During the slog of a game’s development cycle, it is frighteningly easy for “Game Design Plus Narrative” to become “Game Design vs. Narrative... In a story-based game, changes in design or narrative plans can wreak havoc on each other... However, when the narrative is in the mix, it tends to be regarded as the ugly stepchild and can often be trumped by other considerations, almost by default.” (Skolnick 128)

It is clear that game design is the currently prioritized department, which is seen in triple-A games such as Tetris, Wii Sports, Minecraft and Grand Theft Auto V, which are the top 4 best-selling video games to date, according to Wikipedia’s “list of best-selling video games.” These games have a few common features: they all have a multiplayer feature, and none of them have a particular narrative element. This may prove that storytelling in video games still has ways to go, but the world of games is in constant development. However, developments in console capacity and A.I construction will lead to a further deterioration in the already existing distinction between storytelling and gameplay (Carr, Campbell and Ellwood 161).

Furthermore, having narration in focus in a video game culture today might be risky. There is a risk that the developers have to take because they do not know what percentage of the players will be story-philes, or story-phobes (Skolnick 117). Skolnick refers to the terms ‘game story’ and ‘player story’, which are games that include two narratives running in parallel. Game story is the narrative “predefined by the developers to be the same for every player who experiences it.” Player story is the “narrative unique to each player based on the choices made or happenings that occur via various interactions of game systems with each other and the player’s actions” (Skolnick 119). Skolnick believes that when games with story

content on a general basis will fall into four categories: Game story dominant², balanced game and player story³, player story dominant⁴ and 99 percent player story⁵ (119-125). As we can see, *The Walking Dead* falls in the genre of “balanced game and player story” - a game design intended to create a fine line between the predetermined story and the player’s choices.

Skolnick says that this relationship is the concession favored by many game designs (122).

The Walking Dead: Season One provides small, insignificant choices alongside the game-changing ones, which keeps the player engaged in the narrative. Asserting that games are on the rise is not necessarily an overstatement. However, there are still a few hiccups when it comes to integrating storytelling into games. For a long time, there has been a conflict between scholars who study narratology and scholars who study ludology. According to Smith, Tosca, and Egenfeldt-Nielsen, ludology is defined as the “study of a game structure (or gameplay) as opposed to the study of games as narratives or games as a visual medium.”

Narratology is defined as “the study of narratives. Within computer game research narratology is often seen as opposed to ludology.” (287) Game theorist Gonzalo Frasca introduced the term “ludology,” and suggested that ludology was to be thought of as the “discipline that studies game and play activities.” However, there is no direct opposition shown to taking a literary approach, and “ludology” is indeed most often referred to as “the study of games”. However, Frasca has specified that having a ludological stance implies that “games cannot be understood through theories derived from narrative.” Ludologists aim to consider video games as games, and not as narratives or anything else (Heide Smith 214).

Jesper Juul offers a balanced introduction to this debate in his article *Computer Games Telling Stories?*⁶ He argues that part of the problem is the broad use of the word “narrative”. If everything is defined as a narrative, it is counterproductive to say that video games also can

² *Uncharted*-series.

³ *The Walking Dead: Season One*.

⁴ *Starcraft*-series.

⁵ *The Sims*-series.

⁶ This article is taken from Heide Smith’s book.

be described as such. Juul argues that the reasons for why scholars quickly make this confusion is because the game experience will always to some extent be different from player to player. The narrative elements in games also sometimes have to be triggered by a cut-scene or in another sequence. In addition to this, video games and narratives share structural traits. Juul concluded that one should resist the temptation to confuse the two forms, because it is impossible to translate video games into stories, and vice versa (Heide Smith 214-215). This is contradictory to Jonathan Gottschall and Skolnick's point of view. In his book *The Storytelling Animal*, Gottschall believes that storytelling will evolve in new directions over the next decades in the form of interactive fiction as role-playing games. These types of games make it possible for us to enter richly conceived fictional worlds and not as passive imaginers like we do in traditional fiction, but as active characters. Role-playing games are crossbreeds of games and stories, and he further argued that the word "game" is the name we give to our interactive relationship with the story world (189, 190). In Evan Skolnick's book *Video Game Storytelling: What Every Developer Needs to Know About Narrative Techniques*, he writes a paragraph about how much focus there should be on narrative – in the view of video game development. He argues that one of the first things we need to ask ourselves regarding a game's narrative element is "how important and central you believe they are to the game's design, appeal and success" (117). The conflicts between ludology vs narratology, and narrative & play or narrative VS. play, are two disputes that have a close connection. Much of the reason why it is difficult for the narrative section in video game development to be "taken seriously", may be because of the already existing conflict between narratology and ludology. Narratives has unwillingly been given a certain role, and they have had a rough history in video game development because of this exact debate.

In many ways, a regular narrative is much of the same as a game narrative. Such stories that one will find in literature is naturally more dependent on narration. Without narration in literature, one might not define literature as such.

Literature is one of the oldest subjects of study; methods of storytelling have been exported to study of newer media. As a natural consequence, different media forms such as novels and movies influence games, naturally joining a wider popular culture. Older steps usually inspire the first ones in creating new disciplines, and games are a prime example of this. It is important to establish that narration is still necessary for modern media, and will presumably continue to be so.

The “Art” of Adaptation:

Since this thesis will be talking about the game adaptation from the comics, it is important to establish what to have in mind when making an adaptation on a general basis. In their chapter *Film, Adaptation and Computer Games*, Carr, Campbell, and Ellwood mainly talk about video game adaptation from film and vice versa, but this is because it has become quite common over the past two decades (149). This thesis will, however, try to use these findings in such a way that fits its particular case. Carr et al. focuses on John Carpenter’s 1982 film *The Thing*, and the video game from 2002 that worked as a sequel. Both mediums are horror and feature monstrous ‘things’ blurring the divide between “us” and “them” (150). They discuss the horror genre in general, and its transition to video games. This thesis will use this as a starting point as well, considering many would perhaps describe *The Walking Dead* universe as ‘scary’, and many horror elements are featured in the game. Horror can offer death as entertainment, and it has the power to promote a physical sensation. The horror genre appeals to the youth, a market central to the game industry. Carr et al. continue to argue that the gameplay’s interactive nature intensifies the dynamics of horror. Scary games provoke

fear, which may trigger the 'fight or flight'-mechanism (161). All of these traits are both in *The Walking Dead* game and comics. They feature 'monstrous' things in the form of zombies. They offer death as entertainment in the shape of killing people from the protagonist's group or creating a dilemma about which person to save when the player knows that the other person will die.

The relationship between gameplay and cut-scene is established, as a way of intensifying the player's awareness of being in control and out of control (Carr, Campbell and Ellwood 150). A cut-scene is "a cinematic sequence used to relay information to the player" In the recent years, games have begun to integrate cut-scenes more closely with gameplay, which is clearly shown in *The Walking Dead* game, where cut-scenes are frequently used. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et.al. 201, 202). Even though the majority of the game consists of small cut-scenes, they are, however, "interactive cut-scenes". The game starts a cinematic sequence in the form of a conversation between characters, and when the player has to make a choice the conversation "pauses" so the player can choose what the protagonist is going to say next. The relationship between gameplay and cut-scene in *The Walking Dead* game is notably close, seeing that the focus of storytelling is crucial.

To be able to function as a game, *The Thing* must confront the player with challenges. However, the player must also be able to win the game, something that differentiates the game from the film. "When watching the film one cannot kill or outsmart the monster, and the movie's hero will not repeatedly die because of the viewer's lack of dexterity." (153) The game represents material from the film, yet it changes function and meaning. The game developers watched Carpenter's film and observed what could be adapted purposefully into the game. This meant selecting different features from the movie such as infection, the setting, and weather. It could also mean the characteristics of the alien, and convert those elements into game mechanics (155).

When reading a book or a comic - or even watching a movie or television show, the text in the book and the plot in the film will always be the same. While in a video game not a single session will be the same. Game designer Celia Pearce points out the fundamental difference between games and other kinds of cultural texts: games are played, and the rules of the game provide a framework for play. The computer game is not as self-contained as a book or a film, and games involve a different type and level of participation from that of reading a novel or watching a movie (Buckingham 6). While there may still be a discussion whether one might define games as 'art', they are still an established cultural form, with their history and place in the broader landscape of the modern culture (3).

Buckingham discusses the fictional nature of games – the idea that games are fundamentally set apart from 'ordinary life' (6,7). Furthermore, he argues that more emotional players may be more affected by the outcome of a game, but they nevertheless recognize on some level that it is 'just a game.' Even though there are significant differences between what the implications are in games, and what is the significance in real life. Games like *The Sims* make strong assertions to resemble real life (Buckingham 7). Smith, Egenfeldt-Nielsen and Tosca have written a chapter on narrative in games in their book *Understanding Video Games*. They have divided the concept of storytelling into three broad categories: the "who", which is the fictional world that includes the story's settings and actors. The "what" is the 'mechanics' of the narrative, and how they organize the action of the story. And finally the "how/why", which is the reception, or the way the players experience the story and figure out the connection (199).

However, many game developers and narrative designers are well on their way to prove that they are blending narration into a new media in innovative and unexpected ways. Narrative designer Cara Ellison points out that we are entering a post-genre era, where one game no longer fits into one certain genre. This way, narrative games have a more open arena,

and may take many different forms. “We just wanted to kill stuff before, but times have changed,” she claimed.

The Walking Dead – understanding and comparing the game to the comic.

Looking at the iconic vs. photorealistic.

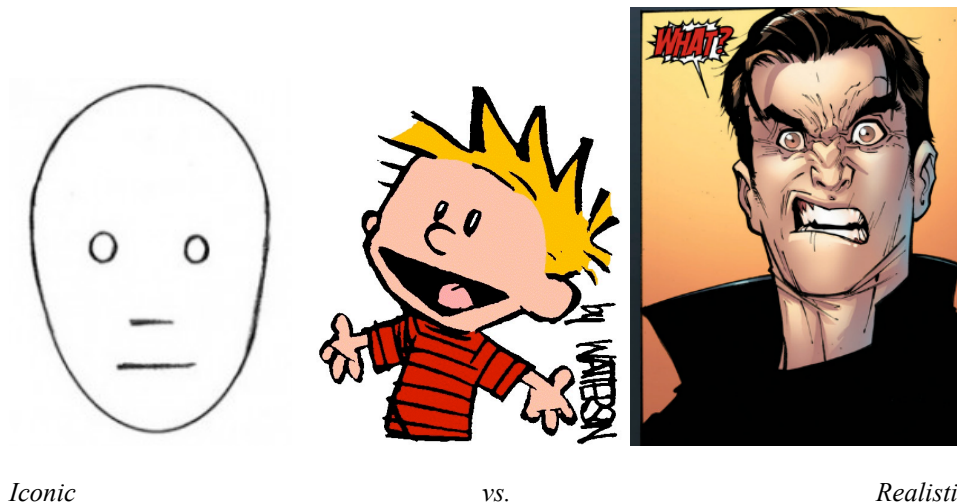
In his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud gives his own definition of a comic;

“Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9).

In ordinary language, it means that pictures/images are put side-by-side in a certain arrangement to tell a story. He argues that comics works as vessels that can hold ideas and images (6). Modern comics appeared in the 1830s in the form of Rodolphe Töpffer’s work and made them simultaneous with the invention of photography. He made picture stories, which featured the first mutually dependent combination of words and pictures seen in Europe (17). Furthermore, McCloud argues that human beings exist in two different realms: the realm of concept and the realm of senses. Human identities belong to the realm of the conceptual - it cannot be seen, heard or touched. The conceptual world simply consists of ideas. Everything else belongs to the sensual world, which is the world outside of us (39, 40). Objects of the physical world possess identities of their own by being an extension of human beings (40-41).

Alongside with games, comics as a medium is simply one of many that functions as a form of self-expression and communication (McCloud 162). The reader being able to identify him/herself in a comic is according to McCloud “the specialty of cartooning”, and this way they had an advantage in breaking into popular culture (42).

McCloud also talks about the realistic vs. iconic. When reading a comic, it is easier to identify with the characters if he/she is not as detailed. Human minds are egotistical and are quicker to determine that it resembles a face if based on a circle with two dots and a line compared to a detailed face, as shown in the pictures below. Perhaps this is also why Robert Kirkman, the author of *The Walking Dead* comics, chooses to omit colors in his comics, to exclude the realistic. He wants the audience to relate to his characters, by making them more iconic drawn. However, while it is arguably noticeable that some frames show a clearly detailed face, one would come to a conclusion that Kirkman's work is somewhere in between the total iconic and the totally realistic.

*Iconic*

vs.

Realistic.

The iconic, “the idea of form”, is placed in a world that McCloud calls ‘the world of concepts’. This is also where the cartoon sets itself. He says that “through traditional realism, the comics artist can portray the world without, and through the cartoon, the world within.” What McCloud means by this is that human beings sense the world around themselves, but reach out to the physical objects of our world, and connect with it by giving them identities of their own (40-41). Robert Kirkman chooses to create a fine line between McCloud’s realm of concept and realm of the senses. In an interview with him, Kirkman states that the comics may very well be an expression of fears that he has about life (“The Walking Dead’s Robert

Kirkman tells his story – Speakeasy” youtube.com, watched 25.04.2016). This is portrayed in the grotesque scenery, or perhaps the horrifying fate that some of the characters have⁷.

Kirkman tries to make it realistic in the way that he creates realistic stories behind each character, and everything that happens to them is from a realistic perspective. However, at the same time, he takes inspiration from the world of concepts – in the form of a zombie apocalypse.

McCloud distinguishes a difference between the received and perceived information. **Pictures** are received information because the message is instantaneous. On the other hand, **writing** is perceived information because it takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the symbols of language (49). Comics tries to create a fine line between the perceived and the received information – looking upon different examples from *The Walking Dead*, this comic uses a great variety of this. Sometimes a few frames consist of simple dialogue, to no talking at all, to create an effect which makes the image speak for itself. On the other hand, the creators have put in more text so that the images become less important, and the dialogue in focus. In the picture on the right, one might focus more on what is being spoken than the expressions of the characters.



⁷ Safety of children, endangering one's family, violence, rape, etc.

The Walking Dead franchise started out in 2004 as a comic book. The first volume was published with the name “Days Gone Bye”. Even though the comic is not finished yet, several popular mediums is continuing to branch out on the franchise in various forms, like the television show, which has made *The Walking Dead* universe as popular as it is today.

In 2012, Telltale Games decided to pick up on the franchise and released five episodes in total in a one-month interval. The game developers informed the viewers in an interview that they chose this format of publishing because it was beneficial both from a technical and a storytelling perspective. The player pays a small amount of money to get a big piece of content, but will also receive small pieces of content stretched over a longer period. From the creative perspective, the developers can tell a long-formed story, which means that they can go much deeper into the story, and not only touch the surface. This way of making a story is usually difficult to do in the video game industry. Doing this with a retail product, a developer would have to give up a decade of his/her life, because the game would have three sequels before they finally had a long-formed story. With Telltale Games’ format, the developers can tell a long-formed story over the course of five-six months, and that way one can get to know the character in an entirely different way. Looking from a developers’ point of view, watching all the people play through the same way one “plays through” a television show is fascinating. The difference is that the experience is different. Usually, people would play through the entire game before making a judgment or speaking to anyone about it. However, with Telltale's way of publishing games, they make the player experience one chunk at a time and build the suspense for the next piece of the game. One might compare this format to a television show, where they broadcast one episode each week (“Playing Dead: Episode 1” youtube.com, watched 03.03.2016).

Telltale has also made *The Walking Dead: Season 2*, which continued the story from the first season, and *200 Days*, which connects the timeline between season 1 and 2. The

company decided that they wanted to continue further with the franchise, and created a smaller game series for one of the *Walking Dead* universe's iconic characters, *Michonne*. The first episode was released February 23rd, 2016 and is one of a three-part episode event. In even more recent developments, Telltale confirmed a third season of *The Walking Dead* game. Safe to say, this franchise is an established one, and will not be discontinued anytime soon. To further explore the comics to game adaptation transition, the rest of this thesis will make analyses of memorable settings, characters, and episodes that occur in the comic book and the game. Even though the television show in many ways bears more resemblance to the comics, it will be excluded from this thesis. It must also be mentioned that this thesis will only take *The Walking Dead: Compendium One* of the comics into the analysis.

What makes *The Walking Dead* franchise so intriguing, is the moral and ethics of the world they live in. It shows how humanity is challenged by the “end of the world”, and how humanity acts to survive. In an interview with the game developers, they stated that it is important to have in mind that in the comics, Rick has to deal with people as well as with zombies. One of the viewers asked whether this would be transferred into the game. They answered that that is where the story truly comes from. The zombies are there because they are the cause of the apocalypse, but over time, they become less of the immediate threat. In the end, it is the people that become the problem, not the zombies.

What makes Telltale's contribution to *The Walking Dead* franchise so unique? The game is placed in a 3D world inspired by the comics. The player will be interacting with different characters and solving problems. What the game developers claim were distinct in this game compared to previous Telltale games, is that the choices you make are much more real. They are not only holding on for a single episode but will stay with you from month to month. What is common about most zombie games, is that they are about the fantasy of the apocalypse; the player is an “unkillable survival machine” – which is contradictory to a

zombie movie which is more about the horrors of the apocalypse rather than the fantasy about it. It immediately becomes more realistic when a player does not have an endless supply of ammo, and that the zombies in front of you are not nameless and faceless. They can be a brother, friend, or even the guy who worked in the store across the street. This is the kind of narrative that the player will drive the central figure, Lee, through. The developers want the players to understand; what is motivating these people to survive? (“Playing Dead: Episode 1” youtube.com, watched 03.03.2016)

To be able to look at the visual palette and the visual qualities of the video game adaptation, it is important to talk about character analysis as well. There is a different protagonist in the comics than in the game. The comic character Rick Grimes wakes up from a coma in an abandoned hospital, where the remaining people have turned into zombies. Our video game protagonist Lee Everett is on his way to prison when the infection starts. The two protagonists are very different in that Rick from the comics already has the natural leader-skill in that he worked as a sheriff. Rick is relentless in some of the choices he takes, regardless of what the rest of the group thinks – this eventually takes its toll on his mentality, and he is eventually asked to step down from the role of being a leader. In the game, Lee worked as a teacher at a university and perhaps became the natural leader of the group because he is much more of a diplomatic person than Rick is. Lee does not necessarily want to become a leader, but the rest of the group encourages him to. There are a few verbal fights with the current leader of the group before he eventually becomes the respected leader. These two protagonists are also different in the way that they care about people. Even though he has a dark history, Lee quickly comes off as a kind and caring man. He is willing to sacrifice his life for Clementine if he has to, and he only wants everyone in the group to be happy. During the first season of the game, Clementine quickly grows to become one of the most important characters in the game. She starts out as an ordinary girl in a hopeless world, and she quickly

grows up to be a strong-willed character. Clementine is the character that develops the most during the game, and there is a reason for that. She becomes necessary because she will become the main protagonist throughout the second season of the game, i.e. *The Walking Dead: Season Two*.

However, what makes Clementine so important? She was put in the game by the developers because they needed the player to connect with something or someone. It is, however, important to mention *The Walking Dead* franchise's use of children as sources of hope and innocence in the middle of an apocalypse. In the game, Clementine is the leading representative for that. A character like her is important to have in a game like *The Walking Dead* because the player needs something "to hold on to", especially when the protagonist Lee dies at the end of the game, and Clementine is the only person left that the player has sincerely cared about.

In the comic books, his son Carl and his wife Lori are the only people the protagonist Rick Grimes cares about. However, he always does what is best for the group as a whole, regardless if it makes some individuals in the group unhappy. He solely wants everyone to survive. To a conclusion, the two protagonists are fairly different. This can be confirmed in the interview with the game designers, where they established that the comics were the main story. Holding that in mind, they chose to create a different set of stories that was happening alongside the original story. Both game and comic take place in Atlanta, US. The game starts where Rick is in a coma, and the two different stories branch out from there, experiencing the zombie apocalypse in different perspectives ("Playing Dead: Episode 1" youtube.com watched 03.03.2016). With that said, the first episode of the game takes place with a new set of characters – with a few that are also in the comics.

Hershel Greene and Glenn⁸ are the two characters adapted directly from the comics. They were brought into the story because of the way the developers wanted to connect the stories together, and how people that were familiar with the characters from the comic, would recognize them right away. They also studied the comics by looking at the different characters and wanted to look at where some of the characters were and what they were doing before they met Rick and his group (“Playing Dead: Episode 1” youtube.com watched 03.03.2016). It is important to have in mind that the Hershel Greene and Glenn that are in the comic, are a bit different from the game version. However, there is a legit explanation for this. As mentioned earlier, the game starts at the same time as Rick Grimes is in a coma. This indicates that there will probably be several months if not a year until Rick meets the same people as Lee and Clementine did.

Let us begin with Hershel Greene. This character changes during the two mediums, and he is only present for the first episode of the game. He lives on a farm with his son Shawn, in a decently isolated place a safe distance from the city. Hershel is a veterinarian, so he is able to help with Lee’s injury when he and Clementine comes to the farm. He is very welcoming, though suspicious of Lee’s relationship with Clementine, suspecting that he has some untold secrets. The player can choose whether to tell Hershel about being on his way to jail, or lie about it and tell him that you are either Clementine’s babysitter, neighbor, or “just some guy” (*The Walking Dead*, video game). However, he trusts that Lee is going to take care of Clementine, and protect her. A “problem” that Hershel has is his total denial of the apocalypse: a problem he has both in the comics as well as in the game. In one scene, his son Shawn suggests that they reinforce the fences around the farm, so the zombies cannot come onto the premises. Regardless, Hershel believes that the zombies will not come such a distance from the city and that they are safe. However, Shawn decides to work on the fences

⁸ Glenn is one of the character’s whose last name is not revealed in the comics. However, in the television series, he is referred to as Glenn Rhee.

anyway, and a boy named Duck decides to sit on a non-functional tractor and play. The next scene unravels the game's first dilemma. Zombies have gotten ahold of both Shawn and Duck. The player then has to choose which one to save. Shawn ends up dying either way, because a zombie bites him.

These last scenes from Hershel's farm in the game, clearly backs up the comic's storyline regarding the same characters. The death of his son changes Hershel as a person, and in the comic Rick discovers that Hershel has put his son, Shawn, in the barn along with other zombies⁹. He does this because as a veterinarian, he believes he has the ability to find a cure, making all the zombies in his farm human again. He simply thinks that the zombies are still just people. So he has this ignorance towards it all, and this also transitions to the storyline of the comic. One of the things that do not quite fit is that according to the comic, Hershel has several children; not just Shawn. This is not mentioned whatsoever in the game, but it is a possibility that they are somewhere else at that point in time. In the comic, one of Hershel's other sons, Otis, shoots Rick's son Carl by accident. This is how they get introduced to the farm.



Hershel Greene in the comic book vs. the game.

⁹ In *The Walking Dead* universe, a person has to be shot in the head in order to NOT turn into a zombie. In the game, it is clearly indicated that Hershel did NOT do that to his son, Shawn, which makes it a natural transition to the plotline in the comic.

Looking at the portraits of Hershel Greene, he looks kinder in the game version than in the comic version, which is explainable. These two pictures are in a way symbolizing before his son's death and after. In the picture to the left, he is roughly drawn with harsh lines. It is clear that the game developers have tried to make a slightly "softer" version, but still "rough around the edges". Telltale's cartoony style of designing games comes in handy when making a game based on a comic, and the portraits of the characters clearly show this.

Glenn is a slightly trickier character. In the game, he is more anonymous while in the comic, he has a more distinct personality. This could be the case because Glenn has a much more central role in the comic than he does in the game. In the game, Glenn is a young man who is born and raised in Macon, same as Lee. He used to work as a pizza-delivery boy. Therefore, he knows his way around the place. Glenn is already a part of the group that Lee and Clementine gets introduced to, thus he is presented as simply another sheep in the flock. He makes his presence in the first episode, and it may seem that he is put in the game simply so that the fans are able to meet a familiar character. In the comic, Glenn is much of the same person that he is in the game. However, he is a scavenger, and the group uses that to their advantage. Every day he goes scavenging for supplies and being careful not to run into any danger.



Glenn in the comic book vs. the game.

Based on these pictures, the statement made about Telltale Games sticking to their distinct style, may also be applied when looking at Glenn in these images. One might say that the adaptation of Glenn might be an even closer one compared to Hershel Greene. Here, Glenn has the same Asian look, narrow eyebrows, stubbles, and even the same wrinkles on his face. The pictures also indicate that they are even wearing some of the exact same things.

There are also some settings from the comic included in the game. The first and most important one is Hershel Greene's farm. This is very recognizable for those who are already familiar with *The Walking Dead* universe, and as mentioned earlier, a vital part of the continuation of Hershel Greene's story. Another setting that is not shown in the game, but is still an important detail to the story, is the prison. According to the game developers, it is heavily suggested that the jail Lee is going to at the beginning of the game is the same prison that Rick and his group find shelter in during the comics ("Playing Dead, Q & A," watched 03.03.2016). It does not affect the stories in any way, but it is an interesting detail to the plotline.

CHARACTER VISUALIZATION, THE GAME VS. THE COMIC:

Looking at the visualization of the game, the perspective of the character gameplay is quite different from the viewpoint in the comics. The camera angle varies from viewing over the shoulder of the protagonist, to a "locked camera" angle; meaning that when you enter a small room or area in the game, the camera is already locked from a particular angle, and the player has to move the character accordingly. Perhaps this way of using camera angles in *The Walking Dead: Season One*, is done from inspiration from older games like the first Resident Evil game, or Crash Bandicoot? Thus, it mostly is a mix between that and seeing the game from a third person perspective. In the cut-scenes of the game, which are a big part of it, the perspective is simply like when one is watching a movie or a television show.

However, when comparing the visualization of the game with the visualization of the comic, the comics are harder to establish because the reader “follows” several characters, and not just one. The reader can see the story from different perspectives e.g. when other characters talk together, even though there is one protagonist in the comic – Rick Grimes. The comics has various perspectives, though the main one is the same as used in the game; the third person view. The other perspectives change depending on the situation. The comic shows a bird-like view when introducing the reader a new area. A different perspective is when something serious is happening. A prime example of this is when the comic’s protagonist Rick Grimes has one of the comic’s most famous “speeches”, when he talks about how the living human beings are the walking dead, the view of Rick is zoomed in on the face of the character. With the use of these perspectives, the comics create an even greater effect on the reader. Furthermore, when the characters are in a conflict with each other, the “camera angle” is viewed from the ground and up, making the reader receive a sense of inferiority to the characters.

SPATIALIZATION, THE GAME VS. THE COMIC:

When looking at the environment and the setting of the game, the obvious difference is that the game is in colors, and the comics are in black and white. This affects the different medias in various ways. In the game, interactive objects are a bit more outlined than non-interactive objects, comparable to older cartoon-movies. An interesting difference in the game is that the player gets the impression that the world seems small. The game gives the player control, and in other words, a certain sense of “free will”. This way the player is granted the chance to be independent, and think “what happens if I do this...”. To illustrate this, take for example Hershel’s farm. You cannot move your character out of the farm before triggering the sequence that leads the story to move on, making the player leave whether one would like

to or not. However, these shut-off spaces in the game create a limitation that takes some of the control from the player. Thus, in a game like *The Walking Dead: Season One*, that does not affect the gameplay in a negative way, because it falls naturally on the story.

The environment of the comics varies from detailed to not-detailed, depending on the situation of the story. Unlike the limitation existing in the game, the comic gives us the feeling of being free, even though the story is predestined, and the reader has no control whatsoever of what is going to happen. The comics create a sense of non-existing freedom, and the “benefit” of not giving the reader any control is that the comics creators seduce the reader into the story, making one unaware of not having that control.

“We Could Be Heroes, Just for One Day” – A Conclusion.

We have discovered that there are scholars who happily includes the element of narration in video games, and there are scholars who would rather avoid it. Current game development quickly determines that the narrative department is the first thing to go when experiencing a budget cut, and it becomes “the survival of the fittest,” in which narration currently plays the weakest part. Some of the scholars might have to reconsider the debate about excluding narration in games because in spite of this conflict, the “art” of narrative has grown – and morphed itself into the shape of games; as interactive storytelling. Creating one’s virtual family and simulating real-life experiences in the universe of *The Sims*; or be the hero in a zombie-apocalyptic world in *The Walking Dead* games, which as a part of a popular, though continually growing, franchise – and has also been the primary focus of this thesis.

Even though we do not read as much as we once used to, modern media has a fascinating way of adjusting; and adaptation is a part of it. Comics are an important medium for making adaptations today, whether it be in the form of games, television shows, movies, etc. Take for example the Marvel universe, and *The Avengers*, or *The Fantastic Four*. There

are innumerable films today based on comics, and people are familiar with the superhero universe, which is a big part of what is being shown on cinema screens in the current years. However, are they aware that the movies are adapted from comics? From personal experience, many are not aware of this fact. Comics are in many ways the very foundation of what popular culture consists of today, and adaptation is frequently used in modern culture as a way of expanding a franchise. Whether it is because of economic reasons or just pleasing the fans, there may be a fine line between them. We are accustomed to exploring familiar worlds further, for example in Harry Potter, which is currently creating new content in the form of a West End play, and an upcoming movie¹⁰, adding more story to the infamous wizarding world.

We as humans will always crave a good story, and it is the media's responsibility to provide it. There is indeed a future for narratives – one might just have to look for it somewhere else than only in literature. Our imagination works in mysterious ways; in the end, a human mind is a place where stories are created. Humans are creatures of story – it touches almost every aspect of our lives. Stories might well be a source for us to explore our imagination. Humans often use stories as a way of 'hiding from reality', but also perhaps to organize their reality? (Gottschall 15, xiv) Even though it is not one of a human being's basic needs, they still crave stories as if it were water. We, as a human race, will never mind receiving stories about teenage wizards, ugly orcs or beautiful elves, supernatural monsters or sparkling vampires. As long as it is something 'interesting'. With video games becoming a way of interactive storytelling, it is fully possible to be a hero for one day. When it comes to narrative, people are becoming more aware of its role in not just films and literature, but also in video games. As a result, narration will have a bigger impact on video game development in the future.

¹⁰ **Play:** *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child*. **Film:** *Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them*.

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Section 2

Section 3