

# Narratification: Unifying Narrative and Gameplay

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we introduce and validate the term narratification. This term represents a framework for analysing, discussing and most importantly developing narrative games in a more meaningful way. We argue that the existence of a term that defines the process of implementing narrative elements in games will make this process of making a game narrative more intentional and reflective. The implementation of narrative elements is a common tendency in the video game industry as well as in other fields, like organisational identity and strategy. Narratives can be powerful vehicles for empathy and perspective and are therefore being used as argumentative and immersive devices.

## General Terms

Design, Theory

## Keywords

Narratification, gamification, storify, empowerment, engagement, goal, motivation, conflict.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We want to raise a discussion concerning quality. We believe that if designers want to make great narrative games, they will have to make great narratives as well. When the great game and the great narrative unite, they create a platform for engagement as well as an empowering interactive experience. We believe this unity should take place through an iterative and thoughtful design process, instead of an implementation during the last phases as normally the case. The nature of merging narrative elements with non-narrative activities is nothing new, however no term for this exists that is applicable to video game theory. We believe that the lack of a rhetorical definition can result in a lack of conscious use of narrative elements in the game design process. By using a terminology that emerges from narrative theories, we believe that the process of implementing narrative elements will lead to a conscious use of methods and techniques from narrative theory and practice. We argue that these methods and techniques are best suited for the handling

of narratives, and that the methods and techniques from video game theory and practice are best suited for games. However, traditional narrative theory lacks any attention towards player participation and interaction [6,10]. In this paper we present an example of how the application of narrative methods, in this case the GMC (Goal, Motivation and Conflict), can be modified to the narratification process and framework. In the next section we would like to introduce our definition of narratification as well as our thoughts on why we believe the term to be an asset to game theory.

## 2. Narratification

Narratification derives from the intention of making something narrative, and more particularly intended for making games narrative. The making of something implies action, and action implies processes and methods. This intention of making something narrative is an exploration of how these processes might look, and how these methods may work. The term narratification has similarities to the known term *gamification*.

Gamification is, as the word implies, when something that is not a game adapts the features of games [3]. Such an example could be experience points (xp) adapted to the grading system at the game design school at Indiana University, initiated by professor Lee Sheldon. What defines gamification is the fact that it does not create actual games as we know them, but creates gamish experiences. The -fication part implies a foundation that is of another domain - in the case of Indiana University, a classroom session. Similar characteristics applies to the definition of narratification, only in this case the foundation is of the game-domain, and particularly the game design-domain, which adopts the features of narratives. Marie-Laure Ryan introduced the terms narrative games and playable stories in 2009, and observed a shift of focus in the game industry, as well as a rising demand for games where story acts as a key element in the game experience[12]. This dualistic approach to game and story combined with the likely dominance of either of the two is something we share. Whether this dualistic approach is in fact beneficial to both the designing of games as well as the understanding of games is uncertain. We believe this perspective to be deeply rooted within the tradition of game studies, yet we feel that there is an imbalance. For many years the discussion “are there narratives

in games?” has dominated the theoretical scene of game studies [7, 6, 2, 8, 1, 5], meanwhile the game industry as well as the game audience has been discussing the quality of narratives in games. The experiment of introducing narratification to the equation is our contribution to an equalization of this imbalance, and the exploration of another discussion concerning narratives in games: How can we (the designers) make the best narrative games? How can we make it part of the process, without making either story or game an add-on?

### 3. Interactive Goal, Motivation and Conflict – IGMC

In this section we present a model for using narratification in action. To do this, we have developed a model (IGMC) to generate plots, which easily integrates story and player interactions in a symbiosis. There are many ways to tell a story, and the following example is simply one take on storytelling in games and not a universal form.

The IGMC model derives from the GMC technique conceived by Debra Dixon which is designed to aid novelists and script writers in developing interesting character-centered plots by focusing on the character's goals, motivations and conflicts (the character's GMC). A character's GMC can be divided into a matrix in which it is easy for the writer to develop and list a character's internal and external goals, motivations and conflicts, and at the same time get an overall picture of the plot that thickens [4]. An example could be Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone*[13]:

<b>Goal</b>	<b>External:</b> Survive, become a wizard, pass exams, do good <b>Internal:</b> investigate, find out who he is, and why Voldemort tried to kill him, make his parents proud
<b>Motivation</b>	<b>External:</b> Escape from his evil step family, be at Hogwarts, be with his friends, discover mystical and personal secrets <b>Internal:</b> Feel at home, and like he is a part of something, get the family he never had, figure out who he is
<b>Conflict</b>	<b>External:</b> Voldemort, dangers, enemies and exams <b>Internal:</b> Ghosts from his past, insecurity, fear of discovering dark secrets about himself

As depicted above, the GMC of the character Harry Potter provides a quick overview of the theme of the book, as well as the overall plot structure. The external GMC depicts the plot very roughly and lists the physical and visible variables of the plot of the character, whereas the internal GMC depicts a deeper and often hidden aspect of the character (commonly hidden from the other characters in the narrative). With this extra layer Harry is not just a teenage wizard orphan with overly proportioned problems such as a psychopathic necromancer out to get him - he is nuanced, and he has problems that are relatable - he is insecure and fears the discovering of his own identity.

The GMC is a tool to develop a coherent, layered and meaningful plot, based on a character's internal and external goals, motivations and conflicts, but the technique does not entail the dimensions of interaction. The following section is an introduction to the IGMC, our take on an Interactive Goal, Motivation & Conflict model .

IGMC is a model for designing and structuring plot, character and interaction in video games, while designing the player experience and gameplay. We believe that the designer will easily and intentionally be able to generate and evaluate by using narratification tools like the IGMC. We have further modified the original GMC model by adding an additional column: the player. The player is an equivalent to the character in the way that each of them is the central figure of their domain, and the two are interconnected in the game experience. The goals, motivations and conflicts of the fictive character must be carefully entwined with the goals, motivations and conflicts of the player, and vice versa.

Below is an example of the IGMC model in use. In this paper we have chosen to use the IGMC model to analyse a widely known game, *Max Payne*[11], in order to give the reader a clear understanding of the model we present. We are working on an extended paper in which we demonstrate the model-in-action for creating original game concepts.

<b>Max Payne</b>	Player	Character (Max Payne)
<b>Goal</b>	Beat the gangster mob responsible for Max's agony - guns blazing (win condition)	<b>External:</b> Revenge, clear his name He wants to find the ones responsible <b>Internal:</b> inner peace, redeem the memory of his family - be with them (although it is too late)
<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Investigating</b> the truth behind the killing of Max's family - who? and why?  <b>Empathetic identification</b> with Max Payne  <b>Fun and challenging</b> gameplay makes win condition natural - the game invites the player to go on killing spree  <b>Atmosphere:</b> the noir feel, monologue and experience.	<b>External:</b> Do Justice, he is a police officer after all - His search for justice and revenge serves as his prior motivation and justification for going the distance, and killing all those people, "evil" as they may be  <b>Internal:</b> Guilt - he feels responsible. He couldn't protect his family. Max has nothing left to lose
<b>Conflict</b>	Many hostiles. As Max, the player is being hunted by the police as well as the gangsters	<b>External:</b> He is a one man army. The police is haunting him (he is a suspect). He is on the run and simultaneously trying to infiltrate the mafia  <b>Internal:</b> The guilt weighs him down. He is not a killer, but he has nothing to loose, excepts what's left of his humanity

When analyzed and categorized in this model, it is possible to get a holistic view of the game experience. Many of the entries in each section point towards a narrative focus. There is a strict

storyline which the player can experience by undertaking max's mission and by hearing his internal GMC through his cut-scene monologues

As in the Harry Potter example, we get an overview of the plot of the game (his family murdered, he gets framed, he's in over his head trying to uncover a mafia scheme and getting revenge) while getting an impression of the internal crisis Max Payne is going through (hence the name Payne = Pain). In the "Player" Column we get another kind of overview. The "Goal" and "Conflict" reveal the winning condition of the game, which in this case is the primary goal in Max Payne's quest for answers: Eliminating the enemies. The "Motivation" on the other hand describes something quite interesting: It lists the reasons for playing the game. We believe this aspect to be crucial in the writing process, calling for much discussion and reflection. This aspect gives the designer the opportunity to determine which game experience to create in the design process, with the narrative elements within peripheral view. The "Character Motivation" cell should be carefully linked with the motivation of the player, since this relationship can result in meaningful and engaged play. In this example we have chosen five primary motivations: investigation, empathetic identification, entertainment, challenge and atmosphere. We would like to stress that motivations are variables that should be adjusted to each design project. They can be very particular or very broad like the ones we have chosen. The motivation for (keeping on) playing the game is crucial, and we claim that you can get the player engaged with the craziest of goals if the motivations for pursuing these goals are good enough. Goals can shift during the game's progression, and it is then important that a new motivation for pursuing the new goal is established.

In Max Payne there are some heavy game mechanics such as slow motion, jumping, running and gunning which do not add much to the narrative even though they are very important for the holistic game experience. The mechanics make the game entertaining and give the player a presence in the "game world". Games like Max Payne are scripted and linear. The player's only freedom is the exploration of physical boundaries within the gameworld, identifying herself with the atmosphere and world of Max Payne. Don Norman introduces the "behavioural" level as the second level of interaction, preceding the third level of "reflection"[9]. This behavioural level makes the cutscenes and monologues, which are the most explicit narrative elements in the game, able to inspire reflection and empathetic identification with the player. The behavioural level, i.e. the gameplay-heavy part of the game, makes the game entertaining also for players who are completely uninterested in the narrative elements, which gives Max Payne a broad appeal.

## 4. Conclusion

In some games the character does not have any scripted goals or background but is merely a vessel or an avatar for the player. In

other games the player has to adopt and pursue various goals and motivations from a fictive character. Between these two types of games there is a great spectrum of games, which in different ways combine scripted narrative and player generated narrative i.e emergent narrative [14], as well as nonlinear, player-chosen narratives. We do not seek to promote one solution. However, we do seek to promote that designers should be more conscious of this choice when designing the relationship and interaction structure between player and the played character. The model we present, the IGMC, is an attempt to structure this process and make it more reflective. The IGMC is a tool for developing plot and interaction between player and character by combining both aspects in an attempt to reach a symbiosis and a synergy effect between gameplay and narrative. We hope for similar models, methods and techniques to be developed within the narratification framework and for further discussion to arise concerning how we design great games and great narratives.

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