

# Creative Encoding

Ian Michael Waddell | DHum 150 | 25 Feb 2019

# *You Will Select a Decision*

by Brendan Patrick Hennessy (2013)

How is this both a  
story and a game?

## Definitions of Interactive Fiction

“Interactive fiction is any story  
which cannot be told without  
interaction from its reader”

--sub-q magazine

## Definitions of Interactive Fiction

“a kind of video game where the player’s interactions primarily involve text”

--Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation

## Definitions of Interactive Fiction

“The interactor, confronting ... an interactive fiction work, is a reader and also a writer”

--Nick Montfort

Digital interactive fiction is a kind of video game (a video game that tells stories and is focused on text)

AND

Interactive fiction is a type of literature (where the reader is an active participant)

## Forms of Interactive Fiction - Parser

- Earliest form of digital interactive fiction; began with *Adventure* in 1975 by Will Crowther
- Uses the parser (variation of command line) for entering commands; less accessible for newcomers
- Games tend to focus on the setting or the world; privileges open, player-directed exploration



# *Lost Pig*

by Admiral Jota (2007)

## Forms of Interactive Fiction - Hypertext

- Often considered its own category; leans more on the story end of the story-game spectrum
- A series of links or hypertexts embedded within the text
- “... can offer a feeling of exploration of a different sort than that found in parser IF” (IFTF)

## Forms of Interactive Fiction - Choice

- Series of choices presented for the player, either through a menu (CYOA/choice-based) or with links embedded within the text (hypertext)
- Can be digital or physical
- Narrative branches/paths often more explicit
- Often less exploratory and more temporal (choices tend to have more weight, move the story forward)

When one creates IF,  
are they writing a story,  
or programming a  
game?

# Creating Interactive Fiction

- Formerly, a programming background (or the patience to learn programming skills) was assumed of a new IF author
- Ongoing effort by some developers to lower the barriers of entry

```
1057 Place In_Cave "Inside Cave"  
1058   with description  
1059     "A wide but shallow cave not far inside the hill. There is no  
1060     obvious exit, except for the way you came in.",  
1061     out_to  
1062     [; if (CoinsIn(left_pan)+CoinsIn(right_pan) < 6)  
1063       "Something bars your way, and you hear  
1064       the scales jangling militantly. You were trying to  
1065       steal its coins!";  
1066       if (scales.number~=0) "Something bars your way, and you hear  
1067       the scales jangle slightly with energy.";  
1068       return Iron_Door;  
1069     ],  
1070     e_to  
1071     [; return self.out_to();  
1072     ],  
1073     cant_go "The only way is back ~out~ through the iron door.",  
1074     after  
1075     [; Take: if (parent(noun)=left_pan or right_pan)  
1076       print_ret "Taken from ", (the parent(noun)), ". ";  
1077     ],  
1078     has ~light;  
1079
```

**LEFT:** Inform 6,  
developed in 1993,  
which uses a  
traditional  
programming  
syntax

**RIGHT:** Inform 7,  
developed in 2006,  
which uses a  
“natural language”  
syntax

```
Carry out wearing the helmet:  
  repeat with item running through people  
  begin;  
    change the sound of the item to "steady breathing";  
  end repeat.
```

```
Carry out taking off the helmet:  
  repeat with item running through people  
  begin;  
    change the sound of the item to "silence";  
  end repeat.
```

```
After wearing the helmet:  
  say "You settle the helmet over your head, and there is a roaring in  
  your ears at first[IF THE PLAYER CAN TOUCH THE RAIN], both from  
  your heartbeat and from the raindrops on metal[END IF]. But then  
  the sharpened hearing begins to feel natural again."
```

```
After taking off the helmet: say "You lift the helmet from your head, and  
the sudden quiet feels like going deaf."
```

# Twine

- The development of Twine in 2009 was a major step forward in eliminating barriers to writing hypertext/choice-based IF
- Twine is free; open-source; incredibly easy to use; allows the user to export their games directly to HTML, ready for publishing online
- No programming experience required; however, you can augment your Twine works with custom HTML/CSS/Javascript if you so choose

## Twine's Accessibility

"Twine's financial and technical accessibility are major reasons for its broad adoption, especially among economically marginalised, non-traditional game designers ... People who might otherwise never make a videogame make them with Twine"

(11)

## “Twine Renaissance”

“The Internet in particular has made self-publishing and distributing games both possible and easy. Authors are able to not only put their works online but to find audiences for them. Publishers want to be the gatekeepers of video games, but the Internet has opened those gates” --Anna Anthropy

Anna Anthropy, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*. Seven Stories Press, 2012.



## “Twine Renaissance”

"The problem with games in general ... is that mainstream games are really depersonalised ... I think that what I want to see more of in game is the personal—games that speak to me as a human being, that are relatable, which is the opposite of the big publisher games that I see. People who are creating personal games aren't hundred-person teams, they are people working at homes, making games with free software of their own experiences" --Anna Anthropy

*[“Anna Anthropy and the Twine Revolution.”](#) *The Guardian*, 10 Apr 2013.*

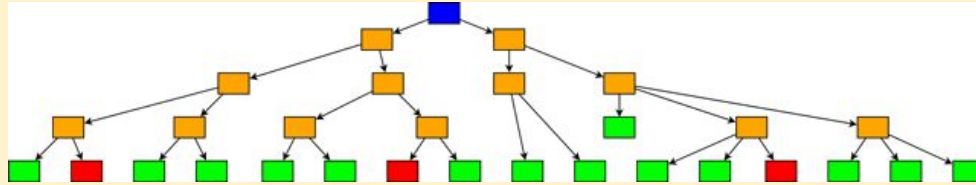
You are standing at  
the entrance of a  
grocery store.

.. that's a lot of choices, hey?

- Implementing multiple stories/paths is *really hard*
  - Each choice might be valid, but implementing them all would amount to an unrealistic amount of work from the author
- There's a fine line between handholding the player (which removes the allure of interactivity) vs too many choices (which is too hard for the author to make)
- Designing narratives in games is often about *restriction*—what the player can and cannot do, and how this affects their play experience

How do we structure our ideas  
in a manner which is both  
responsive to the player and  
manageable for the writer?

# Time Cave



- Most common to CYOA stories
- Generally short, but broad; lots of content and possibility (the story could go anywhere)
- Heavily branched, with little to no re-merging of branches
- Privileges openness & freedom; spatial and temporal movement

# Entrance to Grocery Store



Go to the  
Produce Section

Go to the Frozen  
Food Aisle



Apples?

Oranges?

Pizza?

Perogies?



Chronic  
apple  
shortage!

POISON  
apple!

Slip on an  
errant  
orange!

The  
orange is  
cursed

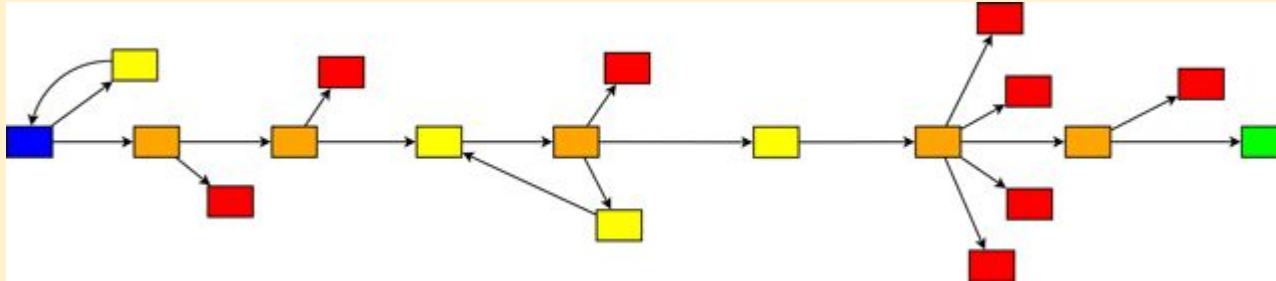
Recruited  
for pizza  
delivery

Get stuck in  
freezer

The  
perogies are  
also cursed

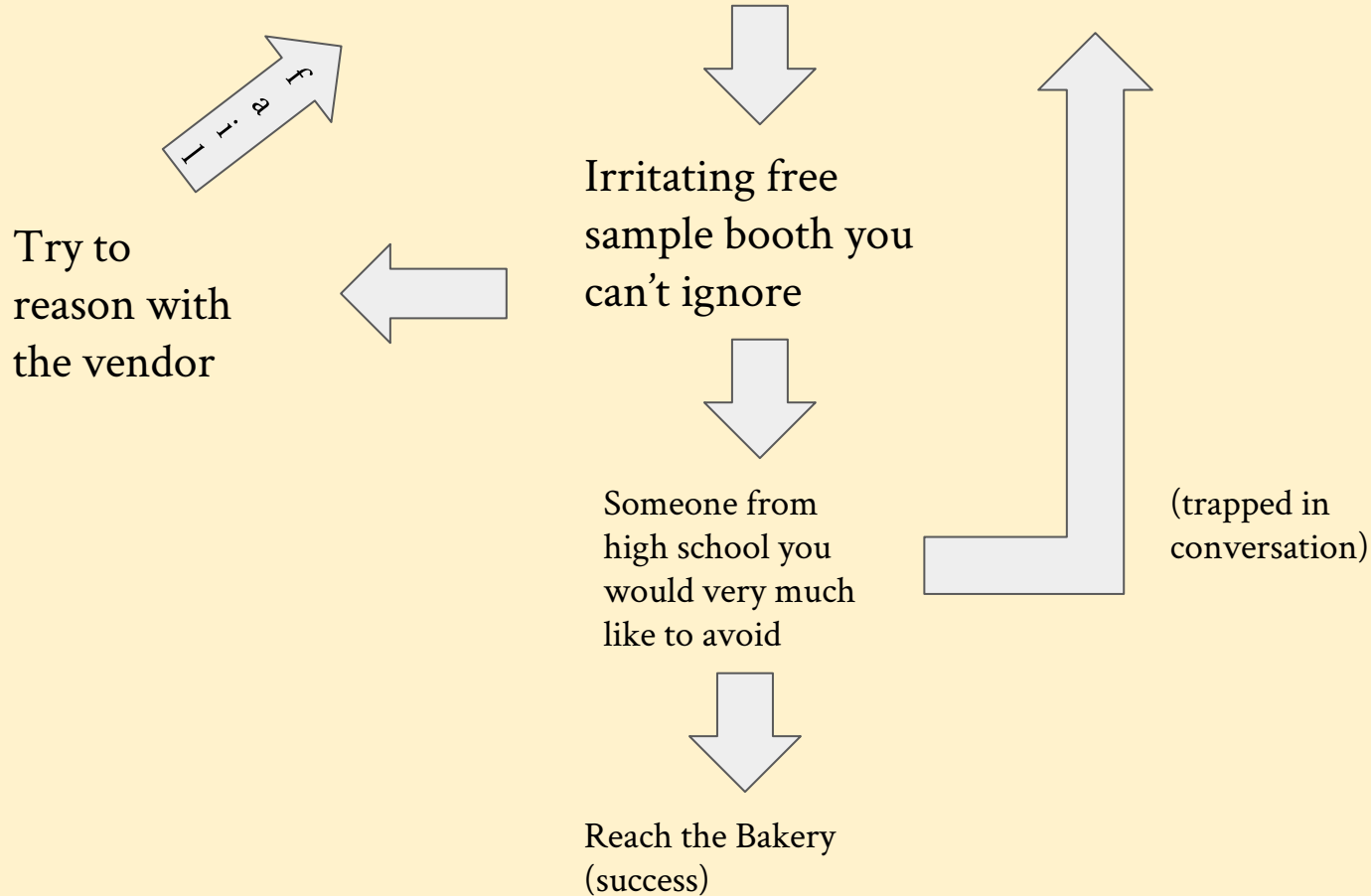
Praised for  
yr good taste

# Gauntlet



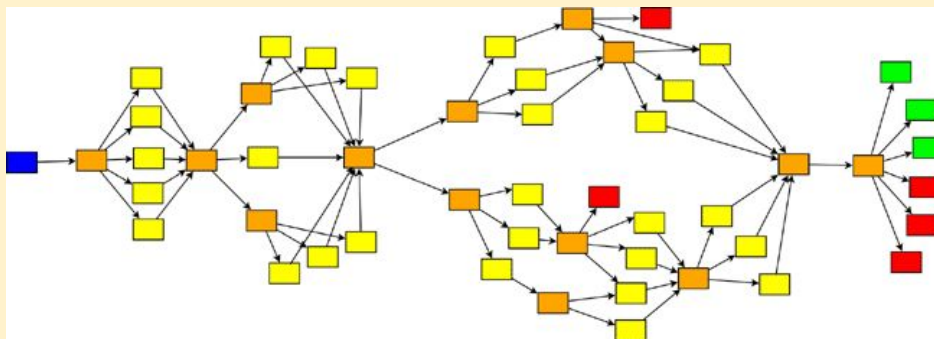
- Generally linear & constrained; the player proceeds along a central path
- branches slightly but will merge back onto the main path depending on success/failure
- SKA classifies them as “deadly” or “friendly”

# Entrance to Grocery Store



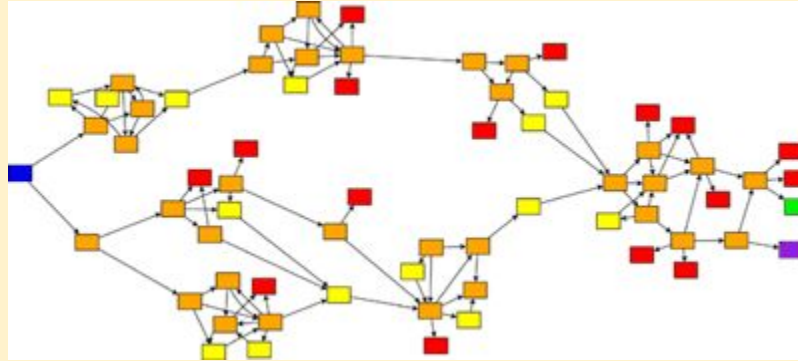


# Branch and Bottleneck



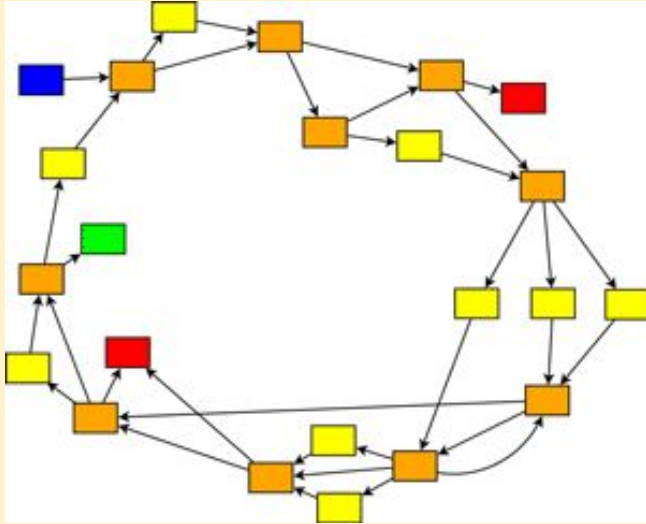
- Paths diverge, but will come together at common points (“bottlenecks”) during each playthrough of the story
- Allows a great amount of player agency while cohering enough to avoid combinatorial explosion; heavily temporal

# Quest



- Quests feature distinct, modular branches; often a journey of (geographic) exploration with a specific purpose/goal in mind
- Modules often have little connection to the main quest; no backtracking or re-merging; always moves forward

# Loop & Grow



- Looping thread which repeats over and over from a central node (or series of nodes), with changes implemented with each iteration
- largely static/familiar world, with temporal and narrative momentum through each iteration

# Further Reading/Resources

- Anthropy, Anna. *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*. Seven Stories Press, 2012.
- Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation. <http://iftechfoundation.org>
- Montfort, Nick. *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction*. MIT Press, 2003.
- merritt k, editor. *Videogames for Humans*. instar books, 2013.
- Emily Short (<http://emshort.blog>)
- sub-q magazine (<http://sub-q.com>)
- Sam Kabo Ashwell (<https://heterogenoustasks.wordpress.com>)
- Interactive Fiction Database; go here for games! (<http://ifdb.tads.org>)
- Interactive Fiction Archive (<http://ifarchive.org/>)
- .. or ask Ian for specific readings / games!