

Fictional, Fake, Nonexistent, Nonactual, Imaginary, Impossible and Unplayable Games

Riccardo Fassone

University of Torino
Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici
Via Sant'Ottavio 20
10124 Torino, Italy
riccardo.fassone@unito.it

Dom Ford

ZeMKI, Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research
University of Bremen
Linzer Str. 4
28359 Bremen, Germany
domford@uni-bremen.de

Nele Van de Mosselaer

Tilburg University
Tilburg, The Netherlands
N.VandeMosselaer@tilburguniversity.edu

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

This is a three-hour, discussion-based workshop. To participate, you do not need to submit anything, but you need to register so that we can keep track of the number of people who will attend. There is no deadline for registering, but if there are too many registered participants for the assigned room, participants will be accepted on a first come, first serve basis, so register as early as you can to ensure your place.

To register, fill out the following form: <https://forms.gle/oGuEmZhbQLpwzhhm6>.

DESCRIPTION

Fictional games are “playful activities and ludic artefacts that were conceptualized to be part of fictional worlds ... and cannot be – or, at least, were not originally meant to be – actually played” (Gualeni and Fassone 2023, 171). Some well-known examples of this are Quidditch, OASIS, Calvinball, the Cones of Dunshire, Jumanji and the titular Hunger Games. These may be unplayable because the author did not supply enough detail regarding the rules, because it would not be possible without, for example, magic that is present in the fictional world, because of the limits (physical or cognitive) of humanity, or because of morality (Gualeni and Fassone 2023, 171–72). Some fictional games have been adapted into playable versions, such as Quidditch or Gwent, but these often differ substantially from the ‘actual’ fictional versions of those games.

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Fictional games are made for many reasons, such as narrative and character development or exposition, or to reflect certain ideological structures in the fictional world (both based on the game itself and on how characters react to it). Some of these, like the Hunger Games or Jumanji, become the orbital centre of a narrative. Others, like Holochess in *Star Wars* or Cyvasse in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, are much smaller parts of the overall worldbuilding. They are also deployed for nonfictional purposes, such as advertisement, argumentation, theory-building or deception, along similar lines to thought experiments, hypothetical scenarios, fake news, and cinematic game trailers.

This workshop will explore the boundaries of these kinds of games: fictional games as well as those for which the label does not properly fit, but which are also not unambiguously 'real' games. The title of the workshop gestures at these: fake, imaginary, nonexistent, nonactual, impossible, unplayable. The goal is to consider these games together in a broader category, and in doing so to forge links with other potentially fruitful areas of research. For example, the use of gameplay footage from games which do not exist to advertise mobile games (Mago 2020; Moradzadeh and Kou 2024) shows overlap with platform studies and game production studies; Gualeni's (2024) theory-fiction novel *The Clouds* demonstrates the use of fictional games for a more direct advancement of philosophical argumentation (as opposed to less direct means in science fiction, for instance).

The three-hour workshop will be divided into three thematic parts. During each part, participants will split into groups to discuss questions relating to the theme for the first half of the hour, with the remaining half used for a group plenary.

Theme 1: Limits of the concept

What examples complicate the definition of fictional games? What does 'fictional' mean in this context? Is there an umbrella term we can use to refer to these kinds of games? What can we learn from the edge cases?

Theme 2: Fictional games in the real world

How should we think about games that were conceived of as fictional but now have playable adaptations, like Quidditch or Gwent? How could we take a fictional game and make it playable? Which fictional game is the 'real' world most similar to?

Theme 3: Fictional games and game studies

Do the kinds of games discussed here challenge typical definitions of games? Is a fictional game still a game when it cannot be played or the rules are not fully known? What is the utility of studying these kinds of games when plenty of 'actual' games could be studied instead? How do these examples corroborate or challenge theories of fiction and virtuality within game studies (e.g., Aarseth 2023; Juul 2021)?

In general, the workshop is intended to establish links between the burgeoning study of fictional games with other fields and sites of enquiry. We hope to show that the use of fictional games is a relevant and meaningful strategy in many areas, from

fantasy and sci-fi novels to predatory mobile game advertisement. The workshop is intended to plot a concrete course forward for fictional games, following (among others) Gualeni and Fassone's (2023) book and a forthcoming special issue on the topic (edited by Gualeni, Fassone and Ford). Currently, this is in the form of an edited volume stressing the links between fictional games and other fields. However, this will form a part of the discussions at the workshop itself.

Keywords

fictional games, fake games, nonexistent games, nonactual games, imaginary games, impossible games, unplayable games

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