Britta Stockmann, Jens Jahnke

PLAYING BY THE BOOK

LITERATURE AND BOARD GAMES AT THE BEGINNING OF 21st CENTURY

In the end a game (…) is nothing
other than a storytelling machine.
Bruno Faidutti[1]

Gaming is NOT about telling stories.
Greg Costikyan[2]

1. Introduction

Taking these two quotations, which are at first glance diametrically opposed, as a starting point the overall question is, what do games have to do with stories? Bruno Faidutti suggests that games are just another means of getting a story across, while Greg Costikyan seems to imply that though a narrative element is allowed in a game[3], the main purpose of playing a game is something else.

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[1] B.Faidutti, 2005, *Themes & Mechanics 1.0*, <http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/ThemesMechanics1.shtml>, July 2007.

[2] G. Costikyan, *I Have No Words & I Must Design*, in: Katie Salen, Eric Zimmerman (ed.), *The Game Design Reader. A Rules of Play Anthology*, MIT Press, Massachusetts 2006, p. 194.

[3] At one point in his article, Costikyan states "the need for narrative tension" (p. 209), so his argument that games are not about storytelling derives from the opposition of stories being told in a linear way, while "games are inherently non-linear. They depend on decision-making" (p. 194). One could argue against this that games might be treated as a tool which creates narratives in the sense that even though they are interactive and non-linear while being played, the result is not – especially for RPG players, the events of the game may be remembered and later referred to as a story with a clear beginning and ending.

It is notable that a relatively big number of games with a literary theme or background have been published in Germany since about the turn of the century, attesting to a growing tendency towards productions of this type. These obviously do combine a game with a "storytelling machine", so one has to wonder what the outcome might be. The trend of using literature as a source for games is not altogether new though, but while, in the past, themes from novels were mostly grafted onto a certain game mechanism, there have been quite a few games recently, which are trying to be as faithful to the original stories as possible for a board game. Besides, since Rebecca Gablé published her novel *Die Siedler von Catan* (*The Settlers of Catan*) in 2003, the inverse method of using popular board games as inspiration for fiction has been gaining ground. Both of these modes of combining two different media with each other shall be put under closer inspection in the context of the question of how far and in what way it is at all possible to transfer the content of the one into the other.

2. The intersection of literature and game

It is not a new development in game designing that literary themes are utilised by game authors. Titles of novels become titles of games, certain well-known aspects of fiction are recreated to be played or acted out. But while e.g. Role-Playing Games have always formed strong connections with certain kinds of literature (especially from the area of fantasy, science fiction and horror novels), board and table games are much farther removed from the direct influence of written works. Though sometimes board games bear the same or at least similar titles as classic novels (like, for example, *Quo Vadis?* from 1992[4]), the actual link has seldom gone much further than adopting names and/or settings. The reason for choosing a recognisable name is fairly obvious, as such a title is quickly recognised and associated with a wealth of images, memories and emotions by the potential consumer. Titles of popular novels (or also films, for that matter) work like trademarks and might more easily persuade the undecided customer to choose that particular game over another.

The reason which relates RPG closer to the actual texts than board games evidently lies in the structure of literature and the different forms of play. Like fiction, Role-Playing Games develop in a rather linear way, following some sort of timeline and building a story. As Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman point out: "Tabletop RPGs are inherently narrative, as players interact with one another inside fantasy worlds they help to build and maintain"[5]. As they are of a fairly lengthy duration, which gives the players the chance to identify rather strongly with their chosen characters and therefore form a stronger link with the novel

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[4] R. Knizia, *Quo Vadis?,* Amigo, 1992
[5] K. Salen, E. Zimmerman, *Games and Narrative*, in: K. Salen, E. Zimmerman (ed.), op. cit., p. 35.

the game might be based upon, the question of repeatability is not as much to the fore as it has to be for the designer of a board game, which seldom lasts longer than two hours and might potentially be played up to several times in a row. Still, the question for all kinds of game designers who want to reproduce a work of fiction by the means of play remains the same:

How can a fixed story, which develops in a linear, unrepeatable way from a certain beginning to a certain ending, be transferred into a medium which, by definition, has to be not only repeatable, but at the same time changeable and open to decision-making, so as to offer a new experience every time the game is played?

A novel in itself is inflexible; the moment it has been printed, the story is set, and all the incidents are prearranged and bound for all times. Any game designer, who wants to reproduce the story in his medium, has to take a double look at the text before setting to work, as "to try to hew too closely to a storyline is to limit players' freedom of action and their ability to make meaningful decisions"[6]. But how will he do it? Is he going to take a step back and regard the events from what would be the author's point of view during the process of creation, while everything is still afloat and the decisions are open? Will he compare the possibilities which the events, characters etc. offer during that stage to the finished story, and specify which are the mainstays on which the story rests and which, therefore, must find their way into the game as well, so the changeable part of the action can take place around them? If the game designer wants to portray the plot of the novel, he has to think about choosing similar starting and finishing points, find comparable roles for the players (which offer the same chances of winning the game to each), and adapt the storyline as much as possible to the conditions of the game board, which can happen in different ways: on the one hand, the outstanding events of the story could be used as fixed points, which the players must reach at certain times during the game; this would also allow a chronological order like in the book. On the other hand, certain elements that occur again and again in the story, and therefore can be used relatively freely in the game, might be chosen to establish the link with the novel. In any case, it is important to establish a common goal, which works for the book as well as for the game.

The question now is how literature-based games manage to map the events of their models and where they reach their natural limits.

2.1. Novels as source of inspiration

While a glance into the game archives goes to show that, though there have been games, which in one way or another refer to novels, their number – especially before the year 2000 – seems comparatively low. Still now, more games with

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[6] G. Costikyan, op. cit., p. 195.

original themes appear, but during the last few years, a relatively large number of literature-based board games have entered the market, among them quite a few games for children based on children's literature classics and popular titles or series. The most out-standing game designer in this area is Kai Haferkamp with his adaptations of popular German children's books like *Das kleine Gespenst* (*The Little Ghost*), *Die kleine Hexe*[7] (*The Little Witch*), *Jim Knopf* and *Das Sams* among others, as well as a version of the French *Le Petit Prince*. All of them have been published by KOSMOS. Regarding the literature-based games currently on offer, it becomes obvious that it is this editing house which is specializing in the field. Another children's game, *Inkheart*, this one designed by the *Catan* inventor Klaus Teuber, was also edited in 2007 by KOSMOS[8]. What has been noted in the children's sector is also true of games designed for older players – almost all relevant titles so far have been published by KOSMOS. It is not only the concentration of literature-based games at one editing house that is notable, but also the recurrence of a limited number of authors. The game designers most active in this field apart from Kai Haferkamp are Michael Rieneck and Reiner Knizia.

Of the first it can be said that almost all his games up to now are based on some form of literature, as there are: *Dracula* (2003), *In 80 Tagen um die Welt* (*Around the World in 80 Days*) (2004), *Asterix & Obelix* and *Die Säulen der Erde* (*The Pillars of the Earth*) (2006), *Nichtlustig* (2007). *Asterix & Obelix* and *Nichtlustig* could be excluded from the analysis, as they are based upon comics and cartoons, and not upon novels.

In Knizia's immense ludography, games with literary themes form only a small part; nonetheless he received was given a special award by the Jury "Game of the Year" for "Literature in Game" in recognition of his adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* in 2001, and in 2005, he also designed a game version of the old English epos *Beowulf*.

2.1.1. Added theme

It is often a problem that players are lured to buy a certain game, because the theme appeals to them, but after playing the first round they discover with disappointment, that the theme has only been pasted onto a certain mechanism, which has no real connection to the game's title[9]. In this case the mechanism, which might be a very good one, is invented first, and only later the author looks for a theme that either is fitting or helps to sell the game. Larry Levy exposes Reiner

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[7] Both written by Otfried Preußler. *Das kleine Gespenst* won the Award „Children's' Game of the Year" in 2005.

[8] On the website, KOSMOS even offers a special search category called "literature games" as well among the keyword "children's games" as also under the general heading "games".

[9] See also: L. Levy, *When Good Games Have Bad Themes*, 2000, <http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/GoodGamesBadTheme.shtml>, July 2007.

Knizia's *Vampire* (2000) as a game in which the theme is mere "window dressing" for a "rummy-like card game"[10]. Something similar might be said about Rieneck's *Dracula*, pointing out the fact that it singles out two of the principle characters of Bram Stoker's novel, namely the count himself and his opponent Van Helsing, and sets them against each other on a rather limited field of action. The other characters of the novel do not appear, and the game's mechanism would have worked just as well with another theme that combines two opposing forces. Yet Michael Rieneck pointed out[11] that the original idea stemmed from *Dracula*, though rather from the movie version than the book. Watching the film provided the inspiration for singling out the count and his enemy and setting them against each other in a duel with two players acting out the roles. In his *Around the World in 80 Days*, on the other hand, none of the main characters – apart from the detective – appear on the game board, so it could be argued that Rieneck maintains a certain distance from the novel here as well.

At this point one difficulty with transforming a novel into a board game can be well illustrated: it is problematic to simply assign the players to the roles of the protagonists, as the book does not offer every character in the story the same chances and often presents them with different tasks and functions. This can hardly ever be transferred into a 1:1-relation onto a board game, which forces the author to look for other options. In the interview with Michael Rieneck, he pointed out that his approach is usually one of searching for a common aim of a novel's protagonists and transferring that aim onto the players. In the case of *Around the World in 80 Days* this means the players do not accompany Phileas Fogg[12], but act out a similar bet and retrace his steps around the globe. In that sense, *Around the World in 80 Days* is not a game version of the novel, but a game that puts the players in a situation similar to that which Jules Verne presents in his book. In doing this, Rieneck's game manages to capture a lot of the atmosphere of the 19th century, and with the clever idea that the winner is not the one who reaches London first, but who needs the fewest days to get back there[13], Rieneck allows the players to even beat Phileas Fogg's record and arrive in less than 80 days. So it is obvious that this game does not belong in the category "added theme", because clearly the idea of using Jules Verne's book as the basis for the game has come first and the aim of the game, board and mechanism have been adapted to this theme[14].

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[10] Ibidem.

[11] In an interview conducted in Kiel on May 3rd, 2007 by author of this study.

[12] Fogg, by the way, is a passionate Whist player, which adds a nice little twist to turning his story into a game.

[13] During the game, the players have to travel by train and boat – using them always costs a number of days, which explains the paradox that the player whose figure arrives back in London first does not have to be the winner, as in the end the days needed for the journey are counted.

[14] The author himself, who explained that (again) inspired by the film version of the novel, he constructed the mechanism to fit the aim of racing around the world and re-enacting Fogg's bet, supports this observation. The decision of using Verne's novel quickly determined various aspects of the game, like for example that

As has been mentioned before, Reiner Knizia designed a game version of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which even earned him a special prize for literature in games, so this game must also be considered a successful adaptation and will be discussed at a later stage. But in the wake of the film versions of Tolkien's work, quite a number of games making use of the theme have been published. The sheer number appearing during a certain time span (while the movies were being released) is already in itself an indicator that the game publishers' concern was not so much for literature adaptation but rather for using the current hype to make money. As a result, quite a few of the published games are clearly identifiable as merchandising products. This becomes especially explicit, when the theme is simply pasted onto an existing game classic like *Risk* or *Trivial Pursuit*. But also original works use the popular theme by grafting it onto a certain mechanism and then linking it randomly to the theme – sometimes even deviating far from the original story[15]. This is true of the card game *Der Herr der Ringe. Die Gefährten* (2001), another *Ring*-game by Knizia. It uses elements and photos from the movies, but unlike his first *Ring*-game, it is only reproducing aspects of one of the movies instead of basing the game on the literary original. Or as Claussen says about another game of the same title[16], it is not a literature-based but a movie-based game, which might make Tolkien's fans happy and is quite nice to look at, but has no intriguing mechanism and does not manage to do justice to the novel[17].

Bruno Faidutti points out that "the theme helps to immerse players in the game, by providing a human dimension to the tale"[18], and that the game author[19] has to find a way of creating a synergy between theme and mechanism. He polarises by saying that worshipping the theme is typical of what he calls the American School, while the German School focuses on mechanisms, where "the theme is almost a decorative element, added at the last moment, and sometimes changed

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the board would have to show a world map, that the means of transport would have to be 19th-century ones, and, of course, that the border scoring track would show days instead of the common victory points. The novel also helps with finding explanations for certain necessary mechanisms, like e.g. the detective as a way to block other players.

[15] Compare e.g. the reviews of Peter Neugebauer's *Der Herr der Ringe – Die Suche* (2001) on <http://www.spielbox.de> by Petra Schmidt (<http://www.spielbox-online.de/indxtemp.html?/spielarchiv/leser/diesuche.htm>) and Dr. Arne Claussen (<http://www.spielbox-online.de/indxtemp.html?/spielarchiv/ac/diesuche.htm>).

[16] This one a board game designed by a team of authors and published by KOSMOS, also in 2001. It does not claim to be based upon the novel though, but states explicitly that it is based upon the movie.

[17] Compare Dr. Arne Claussen's review of *Der Herr der Ringe – Die Gefährten* (2001) <http://www.spielbox-online.de/indxtemp.html?/spielarchiv/ac/dhdrdiegefaehrtenk.html>, July 2007.

[18] Bruno Faidutti, op. cit.

[19] Faidutti (ibidem) regards the game author not as an inventor or engineer, but sees him akin to the writer, as "a game is indeed structured like a novel or a film screenplay" – thus forming another link between game and literature.

by the publisher without the author's participation"[20]. The next moment though he admits this simplification and refers to the fact that "these last few years have seen German designers more and more concerned about theme". The fact that during the last few years the number of German games based on books has constantly been growing can be considered an indicator of that change.

2.1.2. Theme first

In Faidutti's terms, the predominance of theme is a trademark of American game design, which has resulted in a wealth of simulation games like wargames and RPGs, where "rules are created for the express purpose of reproducing (…) a historic or literary situation"[21]. As has been said before, RPGs are probably more suited to the re-enacting of literary stories than board games are, because they can be more flexible about the rules[22], and they have the advantage that "in an RPG, a player literally assumes the identity of a game character in a narrative world, and performs as that character throughout the game"[23], which is not always possible in literary-based board games, as will be shown in the case of *The Pillars of the Earth*. But the basic problem remains in both cases: how to transfer a fixed string of events, where everything from beginning to end is known, into a changeable medium, which should be open to the players' decisions as well as true to the story?

To achieve a reproduction of a novel in the form of a game, the theme cannot be slapped on at the last minute, but has to be the foil, on which the whole plan is mapped out from the start. This has been already hinted at with *Around the World in 80 Days*. Another good example of "theme first" is Michael Rieneck's version of *Asterix & Obelix*, which has been a remittance work for KOSMOS. The editing house wanted a game based on the popular comic series, the adaptation of which is a rather rewarding task, as the comics have certain characteristics in common with a game, first of all the recurrence of certain elements. Each of the comics repeats basically the same story, which boils down to a big punch-up. In addition to that, a "game" even occurs within the story and is repeated time and again, namely what Obelix considers the game of beating up Roman soldiers and later comparing numbers with Asterix, (who though tends to be a spoilsport). So there are the elements of repetition, an aim and a fixed "battle" field – all in all, a good example of the possibility of the players taking on the roles of the protagonists, as both Asterix and Obelix pursue the same aim. The logical conclusion has been to design it as a game for two, who compete in beating up Romans and sometimes

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[20] Ibidem.
[21] Ibidem.
[22] Or as Faidutti (ibidem) sees it: "That's why role playing games, where rules are designed to be discreet and easily forgotten, are the ultimate form of game – like novels are the ultimate form of literature".
[23] K. Salen, E. Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 29.

are distracted by a wild boar. Though the game does not take into account all the travelling Asterix and Obelix undertake, it captures the essence of the comic series extremely well, especially as some other recurring personal and events make an appearance in the game, too, like e.g. the pirates and the village feasts.

The polarisation of German games as mainly focused on mechanisms versus American games mainly being concerned with themes, cannot be upheld for modern literature games. In the case of *Asterix & Obelix* clearly the author's first concern is the theme, on which he bases the mechanism.

2.2. Two games put to the test

To prove the point, a closer look shall be taken at two games by prominent game authors. Michael Rieneck, as said above, has so far published mainly literary-based games, though as he himself points out, inspiration does not always come from the book itself, but can also be derived from a movie version of a certain novel. *The Pillars of the Earth* however, his co-production with former bookseller Stefan Stadler, is purely based on the book and can be used well to illustrate both the potential and the shortcomings, which a game author faces, when tackling a literary-based game project.

Besides, Reiner Knizia's award-winning game *The Lord of the Rings* shall be looked at more closely, too, to discover how it has come to deserve the prize it received.

In both cases, the authors evidently have high ambitions, choosing a very voluminous and complex work, which is well known and popular with the readers. The advantage is, of course, that it will easily attract attention, on the other hand though, it has to live up to the expectations.

2.2.1. Michael Rieneck & Stefan Stadler - *The Pillars of the Earth*

While in *Dracula* just a certain aspect has been taken from the novel – the atmospheric and epic contest of good and evil forces in person of Count Dracula and his opponent Van Helsing – in *The Pillars of the Earth*, Rieneck and his co-author Stefan Stadler have clearly worked on retaining as many characteristics of the novel as possible, while adapting it to the game board. Still it is unnecessary to mention, that it is not possible to fit all events and relations from roughly 1000 pages into two hours of play, especially a complex work that covers forty years and more than one generation, with changing protagonists. This fact alone makes it impossible for the players to assume the roles of the novel's characters. So the main questions, which arise for the game authors are, which roles to assign to the players and how to set them a common goal. For Ken Follett's novel, this has been quickly answered, as in the novel the action is centred on the erection of the new cathedral. In consequence, the players pursue the same aim and have their roles

defined as master-builders. By assigning them this task, the authors make sure that all players start on an equal footing, though at the same time, the main focus shifts away from the protagonists and their relationships to the tasks of gaining building materials, influence and money. What remains is the atmosphere of the book, in which the players can immerse themselves and which allows reliving something of the protagonists' experiences.

According to Rieneck, it is important that a story is exciting and its characters pursue a measurable goal, which can be transferred to the game. Interpersonal relationships on the other hand, which cannot be quantified and are usually based upon an emotional level, are inapplicable to games, which by definition derive from a mechanical, mathematical sphere and are governed by a set of fixed rules. Apart from that, Rieneck claims that it helped to use a plot, which was not set in the players' everyday world, but removed to far-away places, historic times or even fantastic worlds[24]. So the framework for an adaptation consists firstly of a goal and a certain atmosphere, which carries the spirit of the book. After that follows the search for the smaller components, which every game needs to create tension and excitement, to generate incalculability as well as the tactical possibilities and the means to hinder the opponents' progress. The novel in this respect can be considered a treasure trove for motivating the mechanism, the moves, the unpredictable elements. Event cards, for example, can influence the game in an unexpected way, and at the same create the opportunity to integrate those elements from the book into the game, which do not fit into the general mechanism – like the individual characters or certain events. In this manner, Rieneck and Stadler incorporate the novel's main characters into the game, hinting at their personalities by associating them with good or bad deeds. Aliena, for example, supports the construction work, while William Hamleigh, imposing a compulsory levy on the builders, hampers the players. While some of these cards are only a temporary occurrence (like when parts of the cathedral collapse and each player loses one of their craftsmen), most of the main characters have a permanent function and, once drawn, are present for the rest of the game.

In the same way, the authors can look for elements of the book to motivate certain parts of the mechanism. If the question was, for instance, how the players could gain additional victory points, the novel suggests that, as Prior Philip supports the erection of the new cathedral, a priory is marked out on the game board, where the players can receive extra points by placing one of their markers there.

In short, it can be said that though the characters actually are not necessary for the game, they enhance the atmosphere and constitute a familiar element for the readers of the novel. On the other hand, they do not obstruct the comprehension of the game for those who have not read the book, which is also an important factor when developing a literary-based game, as it has to be enjoyable for both of

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[24] In the interview of May 3rd, 2007.

these groups. In any case, having the protagonists visualized helps generating the atmosphere, even for those unfamiliar with the novel.

Another factor for allowing the players to easily slip into long-ago England is the illustration of game board and cards. For *The Pillars of the Earth*, illustrator Michael Menzel designed a beautiful board, which brings together the important places, where most of the novel's action takes place, while also paying heed to the game's need of collecting building materials by reserving a big part of the board for forest, quarry and gravel-pit areas. In addition, the cards, as well as the board, supplement the theme by making use of elements like cathedral windows and arches. Last but not least, the six-piece wooden model of the cathedral, which grows with each round, adds a finishing touch to the whole design by its three-dimensional embodiment of the game's theme, which in short is building a cathedral.

When asking the game author[25] about the advantages of adapting a novel for the game board, Rieneck explains that one major benefit was avoiding the search for a theme after the game mechanism had been developed. As the theme is clearly defined from the very start and will not be changed by the editor either, there is no danger that it might appear as "window dressing" later on, and an additional advantage for the author is the fact that he does not have to sit with a blank page and wait for inspiration. A story is something to work with, as it often supplies the aim of the game, and its dramatic action motivates the author to find ways of transferring it into the other medium. So, as Rieneck puts it, using a novel means that a professional storyteller has already provided a guideline. The ideal case for both author and editor would in this respect be a very popular book, best with an unusual or exotic setting, in which the protagonists strive for a measurable goal. Still, a degree of abstraction remains necessary, as no previous knowledge must be required of the player, though certain identifying features can be used, which are irrelevant to the course of the game but which communicate that the game is based upon a balanced plot.

2.2.2. Reiner Knizia - *Lord of the Rings*

Like in *The Pillars of the Earth*, Knizia's *Beowulf* does not put the players into the roles of the actual protagonists, who instead appear mainly on the game board and cards – only Beowulf himself is represented in form of a marker, which is the only figure that moves across the board. The players instead represent Beowulf's men, who support him in his adventures and whose common goal it is to become Beowulf's successor after his death.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, on the other hand, the players actually assume the roles of a group of compatible characters from the novel, namely the Hobbits.

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[25] Ibidem.

Their common goal is to outwit the dark forces that oppose them. But unlike *The Pillars of the Earth* or *Beowulf*, it is a co-operative game, in which only the group as a whole can win, or all players become the losers.

Like with *The Pillars of the Earth*, the illustration[26] helps a lot to create the atmosphere of the game. Unlike most board games, *The Lord of the Rings* does not content itself with just one board, but uses several, which represent parts of the way the Hobbits have to cover in order to reach their goal. The game therefore is rather episodic, following the storyline, which is given as a summary on the last two pages of the rules booklet. So even those players, who have not read the book (or watched the movie), can get a short outline of the events which they are going to play through[27]. The story is divided into seven parts, which correspond with the seven regions of Middle Earth, through which the journey takes the players and of which four have individual game boards ("scenario boards"). Those are the places where the more dramatic action takes place, while the events occurring in the other three regions are stated on the Master game board, as they have a mainly recreational function, supplying the Hobbits with certain equipment. The players have to move along a fixed route through the game, which corresponds with the story's events, so step by step, they retrace the journey from Bag End to Mordor. Unlike in the book however, the outcome of this journey is not fixed, so it is possible that Sauron catches the ring-bearing Hobbit and the dark forces win the game, which in turn means that all players together have lost.

Knizia succeeds very well in adapting Tolkien's complex work into a board game, knowing that "even though I couldn't cover the entire story line, my aim was to stay within the spirit of the book so that the players would experience something similar to the readers of the book"[28]. The goal is clearly defined and the same in both cases. Besides, the game boards are designed in such a way that the players are forced to form a fellowship and play together if they want to win, which allows for a lot of interaction and discussion, making it a very communicative game. Also, the story's main places are visited, and some of the protagonists (namely the Hobbits and Sauron) are physically present on the Master game board, while the other important characters and objects appear on at least one card[29] and/or in a text on one of the game boards. Most of the special cards depict persons or objects from a certain place, and therefore – fittingly – can only be acquired at a predefined stage during the game: the card "Éowyn", for example, appears late in the game, as her great moment is during the battle against the armies of Sauron. In Rivendell and Lothlórien on the other hand, cards with

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[26] By John Howe.

[27] The same is true for *Beowulf*, a summary is given at the end of the instructions manual.

[28] R. Knizia, *The Design and Testing of the Board Game – Lord of the Rings*, in: K. Salen, E. Zimmerman (ed.), op. cit., p. 22.

[29] Galdalf is even represented by six cards, one of which appears during the game, while the other five are always present till used to help the players, for which they have to pay a special price though.

special properties or characters are dealt to the players, which will be of use later. For instance, in Lothlórien, the elves supply the Hobbits with magic objects like Elessar (a jewel) or Lembas (special food), while in Rivendell some weapons and the Hobbits' travel companions Aragorn, Gimli, Boromir, and Legolas enter the game. Though they do not have the same importance here as in the novel, like the protagonists in *The Pillars of the Earth*, they help with creating the atmosphere and constitute another element of recognition for those familiar with the story.

All in all, the game captures the spirit of the novel very well, and as Knizia points out, it "would not just re-tell Tolkien's plot, but more importantly it would make the players feel the emotional circumstances of the story"[30].

2.3. Games as source of inspiration

While the use of novels as a theme for games is not a new occurrence, the inverse situation of using a board game as the background for a book had not been heard of until Rebecca Gablé published her novel based on *The Settlers of Catan* in 2003. This is not to say that games have never before inspired a writer, but so far only computer and video games have found their way into fiction – and here the list is actually very long[31]. Besides, age-old classics like chess have motivated stories that are in some way connected with the game. So perhaps it was only a matter of time till a board game so hugely popular and inspiring that it could be the base of a literary story entered the arena. It is no surprise that this special game is *Settlers*, which, with reason, is considered the "watershed-game"[32]. Other novels have begun to follow just recently like *Blue Moon* (2006) and *Anno 1701* (2007). The last one is especially interesting as a good example of cross-over merchandising, beginning with a computer game that has been converted into a board game, then into a card game as well and shall now attract a wider public in the form of the novel or probably even a series of novels.

2.3.1. Rebecca Gablé – *The Settlers of Catan*

A novel based on a game has something in common with its counterpart: like literature-based games, which have to be playable also for people who have not read the book, the game-based novel has to be enjoyable also for the readers who do not know the original game. In both cases, two audiences have to be satisfied. Those who are familiar with either the book or the game exclusively must be

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[30] R. Knizia, op. cit., p. 26.
[31] To name a few: Novels or series of novels have appeared of *Final Fantasy*, *Doom*, *Tomb Raider*, *Warcraft*, *Resident Evil*, *Devil May Cry* and many more.
[32] In his article *Evolution of German Games* (2003), Bob Scherer-Hoock explains how German games became popular again in the United States after the publication of *The Settlers*. <http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/GermanHistory2.shtml>, July 2007.

able to recognize known structures, characters and actions in the other medium, while at the same time no hurdles must be erected for those who are not familiar with it. In both cases previous knowledge must not be presumed by the author.

Considering the original *Settlers of Catan*, some obvious obstacles spring to mind when thinking in terms of narrative structures: The original game offers no individualized characters nor a real story line. As it turns out though, these ostensible disadvantages have in fact been advantages, as Rebecca Gablé points out[33] that the missing plot and characters were her condition for writing the novel at all.

The game itself seems to offer little dramatic action as it is mainly about exchanging goods and enlarging settlements, but around these basic elements of trading and settling, Rebecca Gablé develops a gripping story by choosing a specific historic era and developing a set of intriguing characters. The story is set in the age when the Vikings were travelling the seas, discovering new lands, trading, and fighting, and many elements of the game are recognisable in the story, which go beyond the mere settling on a newly discovered island, gaining resources and trading with the neighbours. In the novel, like in the game, these resources are not necessarily close at hand, and the distribution of resources is not divided equally. Besides, during the course of the story, from the midst of the community springs a thief who then hides in an impassable landscape and together with his men attacks the settlement to steal the goods of the trading settlers. Gablé allows also for the fact that there is more than one settlement in the game, though rather late in the story, when she lets the community break up at the end and a little group move on to another part of the island.

When asked how she approached the matter of adapting the board game to the novel, Gablé explained that she played the game many times to develop a sense of its atmosphere, the main elements and its "message"[34]. She considered it important to broach the issue of shrewdness and trading skills as well as to dwell on the belief that material wealth offers a certain sense of security, while at the same time all ventures depend to a good degree on luck and chance.

Besides, a good knowledge of the Viking era, their beliefs and customs and everyday life has been necessary for the creation of the novel. Independent of the timeframe, one point of conflict easily arises from the game: the figure of the thief, which has the potential to hinder a player's progress, made it quickly into the novel, where it creates some dramatic action. Another pivotal conflict centres on the clash of old and new beliefs, as one member of the group is a Christian missionary. This character is an invention based on the historical background, which Gablé added, and therefore can be considered part of the artistic freedom, although it also hints at the further development of Catan, which can be

[33] In an interview conducted via e-mail on August 7th, 2007 by the author of this study.
[34] Ibidem.

concluded from the board and the card game, where knights play an important role and therefore suggest rather a later epoch with a Christian background[35].

To be exact, the game and the novel do not have the same starting point as Gablé takes a step back by describing not only what is happening on the island, but also where the settlers come from, why they set out to discover new land, and how they travel to Catan. With her novel therefore, she gives the Catanians a history[36], telling what the game does not disclose. While the settlers in the game remain abstract, the first settlers – their ancestors so to say – are individualized and give a face to the game, even in a literal sense, as with *Candamir* Klaus Teuber published a game that not only carries the name of one of the book's protagonists but also uses many characters and events from the story and allows the players to assume the role of one of the minor characters[37]. One could say that the idea has come full circle with the game inspiring a book, which in turn inspires new games.

In short, it can be concluded that game and novel have a reciprocal effect on each other. Neither of them can be merely a copy into the other medium, for each has its distinctive features, which would not work in a 1:1-transfer. To meet the requirements of the novel (respectively the game), the (game) author has to take a step back from the original after having immersed himself in it to get a feeling for its characteristics. As Rebecca Gablé puts it, the adaptation can only work in an abstract way. The task of the writer is to look for the game's formative elements and in combination with his own creativity to develop an independent work of art. The same mode of operation she sees in Teuber's adaptation of her novel – he, too, had to detach himself from the original to develop a successful game from the elements of the story. The main thing for an adaptation of a book or a novel therefore is to reflect the spirit of the original[38].

2.3.2. Further interconnection

What once began as the board game has in the meantime expanded considerably. In the wake of the successful original game appeared not only expansions, but also card-, dice- and computer game versions, special paraphernalia like tin figures or a travel box, and a number of other board games such as a version for

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[35] In the card game, the atmosphere is one of a later medieval period – apart from a big number of knights, there are also e.g. bishops and churches.

[36] This aspect is even broached in the novel, as the monk starts writing a chronicle of the events taking place on Catan.

[37] To avoid inequality, the minor characters are more suitable as roles for the players, as less about their personal history is known, and they all have the common goal of expanding their means as fast as possible. The main characters on the other hand are mainly present on the game board.

[38] From the interview on 7th, August 2007.

children, and games based upon the original *Catan* but with different settings[39]. The real innovation though has been the crossover to a medium for which board games had not, until recently, really been a source of inspiration. Again *Catan* has been the forerunner, acting as the cataclyst for Rebecca Gablé's novel, which in turn inspired game author Klaus Teuber to develop *Candamir* and *Elasund*, two board games based more or less directly upon the book.

According to Fritz Gruber, *Candamir* even takes a step away from being a mere board game and connects the classical strategic game with the modern role playing game: "*Candamir* is an adventure, which reminds one of the great RPGs, but whose rules are of an easier structure and quickly learned"[40].

Apart from the games based directly upon Gablé's novel, *The Settlers of Catan* has even had an impact on a completely different medium: Inspired by the story, Tobias Strauß composed the *Catan Projekt*, which the band *Pax Dei* recorded as a musical interpretation of Gablé's novel[41].

It could be said that right now only a movie version of the settlers' adventures is still missing. So far only computer games have been turned into films[42], but as game authors also use movies as a source of inspiration (like the film version of *The Lord of the Rings* e.g.) and editors publish merchandising games (like those based on the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies), it might only be a question of time until a board game makes it to the big screen.

3. Conclusion

Merchandising is at current an obvious development trend, especially in the area of toys. That, too, affects board games, as many editing houses are buying not only original game ideas, but also are increasingly interested in acquiring the licence to use a popular book, particularly if it is a bestseller, as basis for new games. This offers an attractive choice of exiting stories and besides, an additional sales channel, as games with literary theme can legitimately be put on display in bookshops as well. In conclusion, as far as the business side is concerned, the trend seems to be that the production of more board games with literary titles can be expected.

But also for the game authors, working with a given theme has its advantages, as has been shown. The probability that theme and mechanism are in harmony is very high, when the author works on them simultaneously. In addition, the likelihood of editors changing the theme completely, as it often happens to prototypes

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[39] *The Starfarers of Catan* can be mentioned here as well as Catan-based games with a historical setting like *The Settlers of the Stone Age* or *Fight for Rome*.
[40] See <http://www.spielbox.de/spielarchiv/press/candamir.php4>.
[41] The music can be downloaded from <http://www.catan.com/CMS/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=366&Itemid=158&limit=1&limitstart=3>, July 2007.
[42] Popular examples might be *Tomb Raider* or *Resident Evil*.

with no such fixed theme, is in this case very low. What remains is the question of what will happen if the urge to produce under licence becomes too strong and literary themes will be pasted onto existing mechanisms – as has been hinted at, concerning the *Lord of the Ring*-movies. But as far as the games examined in this study are concerned, no "window-dressing" has taken place. The game authors, Michael Rieneck and Reiner Knizia, as well as the novelist, Rebecca Gablé, genuinely worked on their subjects, and clearly immersed themselves in the other medium before adapting it to their own.

Turning a board game into a novel means transferring a story from a changeable medium into a fixed one and vice versa, a board game representing a novel has to assimilate the essence of the book's story. In a way, one could say that oppositional forces are at work. While the game author has to look for hard facts and leave aside the incalculable emotional level of the story, the novelist on the other hand will weave the narrative around the main elements of the game, filling it with the emotional life and elaborate characters, for which the game board offers no room.

Still they have something in common, as both Rieneck and Gablé stress that for the adaptation of the respective original a certain degree of abstraction is indispensable.

For a novel like *The Pillars of the Earth*, for example, the game author has to ask himself how to replace its characters with the players. While in a cooperative game like *The Lord of the Rings* it is not a problem to put players directly in the place of the relatively homogenous group of the Hobbits and let them retrace their steps through the story, Ken Follett's novel offers no such group. As the central element of the story is the construction of the cathedral, which takes time, protagonists die in the course of the action, and the focus switches from one generation to the next. Under such conditions, a player cannot take the place of Tom Builder, but can only be put in his situation – that is, pursuing a similar aim, but acting on his own authority. Therefore the game author has to define new roles and shift emphasis – in this case from the main characters and their emotional life to the builders and their efforts to advance the construction of the cathedral.

The novelist also has to be allowed to change certain elements of the game to suit the story, such as Gablé's having to dismiss the knights mentioned in the *Catan* game, for – in agreement with Klaus Teuber – she placed the action in the Viking era. The hard facts of the game – namely the settling and trading – are the framework around which the novel evolves in its own way.

So in both cases room for artistic freedom must be granted. The aim is not to create a 1:1-translation, which obviously is not achievable anyway. As the game is repeatable and changes with each round, the novelist would not even know where to start writing, for once the story is written, it is fixed. Likewise a game that sticks completely to the book would not be playable more than once, as it does not offer an open outcome – it would simply be a staged play. So in short,

a board game is not about re-enacting, but about participating in the world of the novel. And like a game makes a novel tangible, the novel adds a deeper, more emotional dimension to the mathematical sphere of the game.

To make a long story short, though game and literature are different media diverging in certain respects, they perfectly complement one another, when it comes to telling a story.

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Recent papers in 20th- and 21st-century literature in English. Papers. People. J. Homberg-Schramm, A. Rasokat, F. Schweiker (eds). The paper suggests that the increasing proliferation of network fictions in literature, film, television and the internet may be interpreted through a theoretical framework that reconceptuallises the originally strictly psychoanalytic more. The paper suggests that the increasing proliferation of network fictions in literature, film, television and the internet may be interpreted through a theoretical framework that reconceptuallises the originally strictly psychoanalytic concept of the Unheimlich (Freud's idea of the 'unhomely' or 'uncanny') within the context of political, economic and cul