

SPRING 2019

ISSUE N°26

PHOENIX



WOULD YOU MIND COLLECTING A FROG FOR ME? I'LL REWARD YOU WITH GREAT TREASURE...

The Game Culture Issue



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A Famine and a Deer (The Birth of an Idea)

A deer, passing by, is such a familiar view,
Yet evokes thoughts that are all new.

I stand still, and my flashlight shines bright.
The animal and the lamp meet eye to eye.
Be aware, the awakened mind has the deer in sight!

Not knowing what to do, I, the offender without
crimes

Muse and spin my head round some rhymes,
And at last a faint flutter escapes from a nearby
bush.

I put my gun down with dread,
While I sigh and bow my head.
Alas, it fled, and left my soul
Trembling with the afterthought.

'It has strayed, is faded?' I say, and cannot undo
The forest thick, while I maintain
My position in the dark.

A question still reverberates.
Was it worth the sacrifice
To try and gain a 'paradise'?

by Patrick van Oosterom



Hello and welcome
to this story about you!

You are a humble student
who's just trying to
make a living and meet
your countless deadlines.

One day you decide to do some work in the library,
but as you're making your way there,
you're suddenly approached by a Weird Wizard Man.

"Hi there!"

He says.

"You seem like a nice
and broke enough student
who's not afraid to help
an old man out.

Would you mind collecting
a frog for me?
I'll reward you
with great treasure!"

What do you say?

- > **A:** That sounds incredibly weird and suspicious.
No thank you and please leave me alone.
- > **B:** I AM in fact a nice and broke enough student
who's not afraid to help an old man out!
Stay right where you are, I'll get that frog
in no time.

word of the board



When I think of gaming the first image that comes to mind is my brother locking himself in his room for several days just to play video games. While this is a while ago, it still fascinates me how games can make people forget all about their surroundings.

Gaming also reminds me of when I was younger, and we still had this big PC in the living room. I would be playing Rollercoaster Tycoon and my brother and sister would grab chairs and we would all 'play together'. I remember how we went on those rollercoasters, how ridiculous it looked and how unconventional this whole thing was. We would block the entire living room and my mom would often ask us to scoot over. It's when I think back to those times that I realise how much has changed over the last couple of years. In just ten years I went from sitting in a row behind a large PC to sitting in the train typing away on my laptop, with the world underneath my fingertips at all times. It is rather frightening as well, how the world never stops.

Everybody (including me, sadly) is just constantly scrolling away on Facebook.

Last block I took a course on adolescents in the digital age. I loved the course, it was fascinating, but it also made me aware of the things I do every day. I downloaded an app to keep track of how much I am on my phone. Let me tell you, I was shocked by the results. The first several weeks I was on my phone for six (!) hours a day. Just mindlessly scrolling through messages and trying to be 'social'. Another thing that it taught me is how this mindless scrolling (or passive social media use, if you want to use the fancy term) feeds your unhappiness. These days I'm trying to put my phone away more often and actually do something with my life. Go out for walks, talk to people you barely know, read a book, go for coffee all by yourself. I would totally recommend it.

Love,

Caitlin Kroot
Treasurer



PHOENIX

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staff picks: games special



INDIE:
MINECRAFT



LAUREL: PAJAMA
SAM III YOU ARE
WHAT YOU EAT



NURAI:
RUMMIKUB



TANISHA:
30 SECONDS



FLEUR:
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TESSA:
PROFESSOR
LAYTON AND
THE LAST
SPECTER



letter from the editor



A Netflix special came out not too long ago that seemed to be made just for me: *Bandersnatch*, an interactive TV episode from *Black Mirror* creator Charlie Brooker and *Hannibal*'s David Slade. Our own team-member Tessa reviewed the experimental episode for this issue's Culture Corner and was less than favorable. But to me, it was the nostalgia of the format that completely clouded my judgement; I can only recommend everyone to get together with their friends for a couple or more play-throughs of the game/episode.

When I was 15, in high-school and thus bored out of my mind, I tried my hand at creating text-based games optimized for the web using the open source program *Twine*. Or, as this brand of games is known in the mainstream: *Interactive Fiction*. I roped my friends into it, and before I knew it, we were plotting out storylines and bouncing ideas off each other during class. I didn't realize it then, but it was essentially writing fiction. Between writing the code and creating the visuals, we were collaborating on a technically specific and highly informal mode of fiction.

The greatest work we produced had a word count of give or take 15k, with at least 10 possible routes and 15 image elements, lovingly created in *MSPaint*. I would write down more specifics about the game's objective and its setting, but I'm too terrified that anyone would actually find it. Just in case I get incredibly famous one day, no one should have any tangible evidence of what an incredible dork I historically was! The game is near-impossible to beat (It would've taken 40 minutes for us to get through - and we wrote it), and the beats in the plot appear like they were chosen by a dart board.

I'm sure this letter goes out to the benefit of no one, except, okay, maybe five people: For you, I've asked our own illustrator Roos to recreate the pulpiness and the fun nostalgia of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* Game - now brought back into the mainstream with *Bandersnatch* - with *Frog Quest*, which was specifically made as a complement to this issue. *Frog Quest* is, as you can imagine, a whole lot lighter in content than *Bandersnatch*, but they operate the same way, and explore the same question: Do your choices matter? And if you could revisit your choices, would you come out the same regardless?

Frog Quest has 7 possible endings and many, many routes to get to them. Roos' favorite ending is the Golden Ending, where you keep the frog and name him Jimothy. Mine is the Royal Ending, where you kidnap the Frog King and rule his kingdom as a dictator.

Get your friends together to play, and read the options out loud:

[HTTPS://FROGQUEST.NEOCITIES.ORG](https://frogquest.neocities.org)

I can only hope that the success of *Bandersnatch* will resurge an interest in *Interactive Fiction*, and that a similarly bored 15-year old will discover the medium in 2019 the same way I once did all those years ago.

Love,
Laurel Sanders

Quest Get!

That's the spirit! Your years
of Frog-hunt training will
finally pay off today!



Where do you go to catch one though?

- > A: I'll consider my options.
- > B: The park! Where else would you even go?

A Personal Take on Cosplay: Interview with Marije Dröge

Is there a precise definition of cosplay?

Not that I know of now. If I were to define it, I would emphasize the difference between cosplay and simply dressing up for a costume party. There is a big contrast of how seriously you are planning and creating your costume. A costume party is simply for fun, but if you're really putting everything you have into your costume, and you want to look perfect and outstanding, then it becomes cosplay. I blurred those lines last year at a Halloween party. That, however, was because I wanted to try out my costume of Victoria from *Corpse Bride*, which I'll use again upcoming May for the Elfia Fantasy Fair in Haarzuilens.

What exactly is Elfia?

Elfia is a big fantasy fair, where a lot of people come together every year to LARP (live action role-play) or do cosplay. There are also many people who dress up rather moderately, but who just want to fit in thematically and watch all the other amazing costumes. The outdoor event is held at the beautiful Castle de Haar, and it's an enormous area full of music, (food) stands & small tents, which are all thematically corresponding to the overarching gaming-culture, dungeons-and-dragon-y, medieval, mystique vibe. My favourite thing to do there is to just sit on a sunlit spot of grass, and watch the beautiful outfits pass by. I get inspired by them a great deal.

How did you get into cosplay/Elfia?

Oh, I have a long history with costumes/dressing up. I absolutely loved costume parties as a child, and I've always put huge amounts of work into all things creative. From there on it isn't a big leap to cosplay. High-key creativity and dressing up roughly equate cosplay. When I was around 13, I went to Castle de Haar with my family, and we spotted posters of the Elfia Fair. That is how I became familiar with the fair, and this is now going to be my third time there. The past two times I went as Maleficent.



"I like to bend with human characteristics, discover in which way you can change one's appearance."



WRITTEN BY PATRICK VAN OOSTEROM
ILLUSTRATION BY CELONIE ROZEMA

Did you become part of a community in the cosplay scene there?

Not really. There are plenty of communities there, but I'm just not that kind of a social person. It's also that, because I put so much effort into my costumes, people continually take pictures of me, and I don't have time to socialise a lot. It is a cool experience though, to be surrounded by around 20 people who ask you to pose in different positions, but it sometimes lessens my enjoyment.

Do you have any ideas for upcoming projects? The costume of your dreams?

I really want to have these enormous angel wings one day, and combine those with my Maleficent outfit. They have to have a certain wow-factor, and need to be perfect. I also want to try dressing-up as a man one day and see if people notice. I like to bend with human characteristics, discover in which way you can change one's appearance.

What is the most important aspect of cosplay for you?

It sounds rather sad, but I just enjoy being others more than being myself. It's like you've built a character around yourself, a persona, which you change once you become something else. It's almost like a performance, really. Apart from that, it's also about the satisfaction you have with your own creation. I have a lot of confidence in all things creative, and the fact that I'm good at these kinds of things simply heightens my enjoyment.

Leveling up: Interview with a pro gamer

A few weeks ago, Angela and I took the bus to the homely neighbourhood of Oog in Al, near Utrecht's city centre. The reason for our visit was to interview a professional gamer, whom we will refer to as H. Now, I do not know a lot about gaming, though I do enjoy a few video games from time to time. The idea of gaming as a profession seemed intriguing, which was the general consensus at Phoenix, so we wanted to know more. H. was kind enough to agree to an interview in which we would be allowed to gain a little more insight in the life of a pro-gamer.

When did you get into gaming?

I got into gaming at a really young age. I have a brother who is three years older than I am, and we basically grew up with computers from day one. He's really into computers, so he's programming all the time, and he started gaming at a young age as well. That's basically how I got into it.

What type of games do you like to play most?

As a child, my favourite game was Mario Kart; now it's mostly Battle Royale. Strategic shooters, basically. PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) is the game I am pro at right now.

What made you decide that you wanted to start gaming professionally?

It has always been an ambition of mine to go pro. I'm very competitive and I want to be the best at everything I try. For some reason that all fell together in this game [PUBG]. It's strategic and aim-based, and there are a whole lot of different variables that are taking place. It's the diversity of multiple games that all come together in one. I have a love for almost every game form there is, and in this one it all came together, which is what made me good at it.

What was the most exciting contest in which you have ever competed?

I would say that the contest that is going on right now is the biggest. The winning group takes home 80K, which is kind of nuts. It's really difficult to win, considering there are 128 teams competing at the moment. We are actually in the last 32, which is really cool!

Are these contests online? And are there any contests for which you have to go to a location?

Yes, and yes. However, those contests are at the top of the top and are really hard to get into. Right now we're really just trying to get our name out there, which is working really well.

Which advantages does being a pro gamer have?

It depends, really. What I like most about it is that it's a really big hobby of mine. For me to make money out of it is insane. But it's way more than just a hobby or a way of making money. You have your own hours, to a certain degree. We do have squad practices so we do have to train. We need teamwork, we need practice. We need to spend a lot of time in the game with each other so we can familiarize ourselves with the environment and learn.

Are there any negative aspects to being a professional gamer?

Definitely. Most of your hours are late at night. I do like late nights though, I usually play until like 4 a.m. Plus, in the beginning, you usually really like the games you play, as was the case for me with PUBG, but I am getting kind of bored of it now. The competing aspect of it is really fun and it keeps me going, but the game itself has become so-so.

You mentioned most of your hours are late at night. Does that imply that your teammates are international?

Yes. We've got two Dutch people, someone from France and one British guy. Time zones aren't that different, but the current schedule is one that works for all of us. A couple of us work normal jobs on the side, as well.



WRITTEN BY TESS MASSELINK
ILLUSTRATION BY ROOS SPEELMAN

Is gaming the main income for you?

No, I actually have my own company! I'm a video editor.

Returning to your team: are you genuinely friends or do you have a strict business relationship?

Both. We started out as friends, and we're still friends, but there is a big difference between the time that we have to play because we have to practice, and the times that we play for fun. During a squat-practice everyone focusses on the practice, and people change during that time. I definitely do, I'm way too competitive to try and make friends at that time.

Do you feel any pressure to perform well in games, now that you earn money with it? Does that take away a bit of the fun, or does it add to it?

Yeah, I always feel pressure, and it both adds to and takes away from the fun. Where it adds to the fun is with winning, but on occasions where we're in the games with real friends from back in the day, you feel more pressure, almost because they all look up to you.

Is gaming still a leisure activity to you?

Yeah. You wouldn't be a pro gamer if you do it any other way. The number of hours pro gamers spend on their sport is crazy, just because they love it.

Which game do you absolutely hate?

Fortnite, I hate Fortnite. It is currently the kids game. The biggest mechanic of the game is that you build structures to hide in while you're playing. If I shoot at you, I want you to shoot back or be able to hit you, at least. If you're going to hide in a little building you built, then what the hell is going on? The whole mechanic of that game doesn't fit my mindset of gaming.

Do you have any game recommendations, anything for your average gamer?

Pfew! Pokémon Let's Go! No, it really depends on what people like. There are so many games I can recommend, and also so many games I can, eh, 'de-recommend' [laughs].

*"The number of
hours pro gamers
spend on their
sport is crazy,
just because they
love it."*

An online world of play-pretend

WRITTEN BY ROBERT ZIOLKOWSKI
ILLUSTRATION BY CECILIE BALEMANS-HØJBERG

[5:55:48 PM] Sirza narrows her eyes, baring her teeth at the Sith Acolyte in front of her. Should one be using the Force to sense their surroundings, they would feel a spike of anger in the woman's emotional state. As she speaks, her voice sounds like the hiss of a menacing serpent.

[5:55:55 PM] [Sirza] says: "You are a spineless coward... You stand on the hallowed sands of Korriban and defile it every single second your wretched heart is allowed to beat."

[5:58:09 PM] Horuth Azdra glares at the crimson-skinned woman, his yellow eyes almost appearing to glow brighter. He points at the entrance of the tomb, his other hand clenched in a fist. "If you're so keen to die then go ahead, but you won't see me rushing into death's embrace."

[5:59:57 PM] Sirza remains silent as her gaze stays locked onto the Acolyte. She then lets her inner anger overflow, funnelling it into her command of the Force as she extends her hand in a grip-like position. Horuth feels an invisible iron grip around his throat, cutting off his air supply.

[6:01:38 PM] Horuth Azdra is defenceless against the Force Choke, swiftly falling onto his knees as he gasps for air in vain. He turns his eyes to Sirza, pleading with his gaze to show mercy.

[6:02:58 PM] [Sirza] says: "Then you better head back to the library and your books. Because your knowledge is the only thing that keeps you useful to me, which is the only thing keeping you alive. And the moment your intellect ceases to be beneficial to me..." [the invisible grip around his throat tightens even more] "Is the moment you will die." [upon which she ceases her Force Choke and drops her arm to her side]

What you have just read is a transcription of a scene played out between a friend and me in the MMORPG[1] *Star Wars The Old Republic*. Now I hear you thinking "what did I just read?", which is a totally valid question if you read the scene without any further context. But fret not, for I have come to your aid! What my friend and I did is called "online role-playing", which is not to be confused with an online role-playing game, mind you. What does that mean? In the specific context of the aforementioned scene it means this: I assumed the role of my character – the female Sith named Sirza – and my friend his, the unfortunate Sith Acolyte, upon which we played out the scene you read. This may sound familiar, as LARP[2] for example evolves around the same concept. Yet the main difference between online role-playing and LARP is that the former happens in the online environment of a game and the latter in the real world. It sounds rather obvious, but naturally it isn't as simple as that. Both have their own unique and intricate communities. So, as an online role-player myself, let me give you a glimpse of our wondrous world! Most of the time games have an inbuilt narrative – or story campaign if you will – written by its developers. This is the case with the *Mass Effect* trilogy, the *Dragon Age* games or the *Fallout* series, for example. You create and customise your character – or simply choose to play as male or female – and set out along the scripted path of the game's story. This specific genre of games – especially those that have a heavy focus on the choices you make and the storyline itself – are called RPG's[3]. You usually play them offline and by yourself, meaning you can't group up with other players to clear content together. Yet this specific genre also has a sort of sub-class, namely that of MMORPG's, which combine the elements of online games with those of story-focused ones. *Star Wars The Old Republic* is an example of that, but there are also many others such as *Elder Scrolls Online*, *Guild Wars 2* and the famous – or notorious – *World of Warcraft*, to name a few.



Role-players basically create a game within a game. Just like in RPG's we create our own original characters set in the universe of the game we play. We think up backstories for them, what type of personality they have and what their goals are in life. My character Sirza, for example, is the illegitimate daughter of a Sith Lord and seeks to prove her worth to earn her father's family name. Others think up different backgrounds, all within the boundaries of the game's lore. In other words, we rely on the story the developers create – you could say it sets out the laws of the universe we play in – to create our own stories with each other, which happen in small scenes – like the one above with my friend – or larger ones with more people. Now I hear you asking, "why would you do this?", which again, is a totally valid question. The answer this time is simple: because it's fun. The narrative within RPG's is bound by the imagination of the developers, the dialogue choices and actions limited. But role-players? The only limit we have is the depth of our imagination. And in all honesty, let's face it, who doesn't love to cut themselves loose from the real world from time to time and choose to be someone else for a while?

[1] Massively multiplayer online role-playing game

[2] Live-action role-play

[3] Role-playing games

THE GIRLS WHO SAW IT ALL

Season I, Episode 3 - A Handsome Mask, A Deadly Face

written by Robert Ziolkowski

After that night, Marie and Emily slept over in turns. Whoever the unknown man outside might have been, his intent of instilling fear in the two women had most certainly yielded a positive result. Whenever they went outdoors, the two found themselves looking over their shoulders more frequently than ever, even jumping at their own shadow. Several of their friends had taken note of this change in behaviour, yet they assumed the couple was simply still shaken up from having found the lifeless body of that student in the dark alleyway. Marie and Emily wagered that, had anyone known the truth behind their dread, they would have urged them to report the incident to the police. Reason dictated this as the most prudent course of action, yet sadly fear has a tendency to scream louder.

"I'm thinking about going back to the States for a while," Emily said, breaking the silence as the two women lay cuddled up against one another in bed one evening.

Marie sighed, as the statement was no surprise to her. "I understand. I'd want the same thing if I were you," she replied. She felt the blonde stir behind her as she turned her head around, her eyes findings Marie's.

"You should come with me, leave this shitshow behind for a while as well. I'd love for you to meet my family," Emily said in an almost pleading tone.

The other girl smiled but without mirth, the sadness in her grey eyes in stark contrast with the gentle smile resting on her lips. "You know I'd love to, but it's not that easy."

"Then make it easy. Just say 'fuck it' to everything and everyone and come with me. We witnessed a fucking murder, Marie. The universe will forgive us if we kick responsibility in the ass."

Marie smiled, this time more genuinely. "So her fire hasn't gone out yet. Good," she thought.

"I'll give it some thought." She turned her head to the side slightly, giving Emily a reprimanding look as the other immediately rolled her eyes in protest. "No, not the 'I'm being polite' version of it. I mean it, I will really consider going with you."

The blonde narrowed her eyes in mock distrust, eventually turning onto her side again, snuggling more closely with her back to Marie. "Good."

The next day Emily and Marie went to the library on Drift, as both of them had essays to write and sources to find. The moment they had passed through the revolving door, Emily announced that she needed to go to the bathroom.

"Here, hold my bag and phone, I'll be back in a sec," she said, having already pressed her stuff into Marie's hands before she had finished talking.

"Sure you don't need help?" she joked. Emily rolled her eyes in mock exasperation.

"Ha. Ha. Very funny." She responded, upon which she disappeared around the corner towards the toilets near the entrance of the library. Emily remained standing with her girlfriend's phone and bag in her hands, which was heavy, as the two had decided to pack all their stuff into one for the sake of efficiency. As she stood there, she noticed from the corner of her eye that a man was headed in her direction. Initially she believed he would just pass her by, but as he drew closer she realised he was looking directly at her.

"Morning," he said, his voice deep and pleasant, somewhat jovial even, as he stopped right in front of her. Emily looked up at him, trying to feign surprise.

"O-oh, hello," was her response.

As he smiled in a charming way, she studied him, recognising the dark-haired man had a handsome face with a light stubble and had his half-long hair combed back. He had a somewhat fuller figure, was dressed in a white button-up shirt, dark blue jeans and a black woollen coat, giving every appearance he was a member of the fraternity.

"Nice weather, isn't it? A bit chilly, if you ask me, but it's autumn after all," he continued, putting his hands in the pockets of his coat. Marie smiled politely, starting to get a feeling where this conversation was headed and what this poor guy's intention was.

"Yeah, my girlfriend said the same this morning," she replied in a friendly tone. She studied the student's face, curious how disappointed he would be or how embarrassed, for that matter. He actually surprised her in that moment, as he smiled more broadly, flashing his teeth.

"Ah, the one with the amazing view from her window, yes?"



SUDS ONE ACT FESTIVAL

A recap of the succesful production by the Students of Utrecht Drama Society as told by key players from each of the four plays.



Lysanne Hilhorst

Pandora's inbox

The origin of Pandora just got an upgrade. Our lives are but a game of Sims in the eyes of the gods, or in this case, game developers.

Lysanne Hilhorst, 20, Educational Sciences:

The One Act Festival was a night with four amazing performances, written, directed and played by students. I performed in one of the two myth-based comedies, and there was also a poetic drama and a comedy with a shocking ending. The pieces were different, but were all created with such enthusiasm, which makes sense when you're with such lovely people! It was a great experience performing with such a small group because it was so personal. It was nice to see everyone getting more and more comfortable and being the best version of their role at the festival!

The Three New Fates

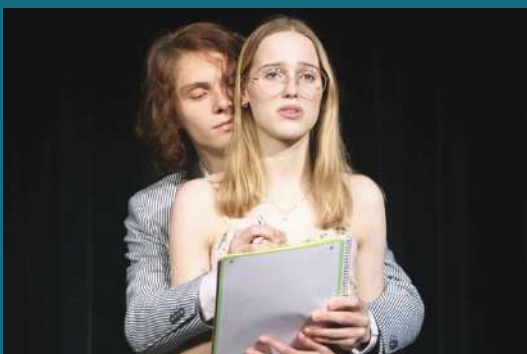
The Fates in charge of spinning the lives of us mere mortals are looking for replacements, but are the ones who should replace the Fates in charge of their own choice in the matter?

Maud Siegers, 19, Media & Culture:

"Do you want to do theatre instead of just learning about it?" I read this sentence on a Facebook post and I was instantly excited. After two nights of information script-reading and acting, everyone got their roles. I got the role of Lachesis, a perpetually high goddess unaware of any drama. A few months of rehearsing later we found ourselves backstage at the One Act Festival. Trying to keep quiet, communicating via Snapchat and trying not to laugh. In the end, our performances made two amazing nights happen and I certainly can't wait for the Big Play!



Patrick van Oosterom (l), Maud Siegers (r)



Eduard Faessen (l), Nanne Veeke (r)

Cinnamon Summer

An old acquaintance returns and asks for more than a little favour. A poetic attempt of a long-overdue confrontation between two people.

Eduard Faessen, 18, English Language & Culture:

When we started rehearsing for Cinnamon Summer, I didn't really have any acting experience except for a tiny high school musical role, so being cast as half of a twenty-minute dialogue was a big step for me, but I think it was great for my growth as an actor. Being guided by my director helped me form a better image of the character I was playing and helped me be more confident in what I was doing, which added depth to my character. It made me realise that acting is just as fun as it is hard work!

Leonardo

Based on Four Rooms, Leonardo follows a distressed bellhop on the job as he deals with a set of atypical hotel guests, their Tarantino inspired bet, and a meat cleaver as sharp as the devil himself.

Evelien Vermeulen, 20, English Language & Culture:

I had the absolute pleasure of co-directing the short play Leonardo for SUDS' One Act Festival. It was written and co-directed by Laurel Sanders and it starred a bunch of mega-talented people. Although this wasn't my first time directing, I had never directed a play before, so it was an invigorating experience. There were definitely some challenges. We struggled a bit with setting up meetings, for example, and due to small rehearsal spaces, some of our rehearsals were a little rough. In the end, though, it all worked out, and I was very happy with the result!



Emma Korver (l), Liepa Gorinaitė, Artem Varaksin (r)

GENIUS VERIFIED

For this issue, I visited SUDS board member and English student Evelien to chat about French electropop, theatre, and her childhood love: Kinderen voor Kinderen.

How did your love for singing and acting start?

Like most kids, I was obsessed with *Kinderen voor Kinderen*. I actually participated in one of their shows, which I did not get very far in, but that did not stop me from liking their music. I think what drew me in the most was the fact that they wrote songs kids could relate to, which I remember really liking. As for acting, I used to go to a lot of musicals catered towards children with my mum when I was little. This led me to join a company myself when I turned five, and I haven't really stopped since.

Do you play any instruments to accompany your singing?

Well, I play the violin, but that is not exactly an ideal instrument to use when singing [laughs]. I know some chords for the piano, and I can read music, but not well enough to be able to play properly. I'm fine when I'm playing with one hand, but as soon as the second one comes in, I'm a bit lost. I do want to learn it someday, though!

Which artists inspire you?

There is this French electropop duo called Madame Monsieur that I really like! They capture my taste in music perfectly. Everything they put out they write and produce themselves, which I really appreciate. Besides that, I obviously also really like musical soundtracks, two of my favorites at the moment are "Company" and "Hadestown: The Myth. The Musical." I would definitely recommend those.

If you could play any role in a theatre production, what would it be?

My favorite musical changes from day to day, but at the moment I would love to play Florence in "Chess". I don't care whether it would be on Broadway or at a local community theatre, playing her would be a dream come true.

Lastly, if you could give any advice to someone wanting to get into theatre but who is hesitant to, what would you say?

First off, make sure to find a group of people to join that you really click with. The most important thing with theatre is that you feel comfortable, you should do it because you love it. Secondly, don't be afraid to fail. Not getting into the drama school I applied for did not stop me from doing what I love. If an exciting opportunity comes up, I will obviously take it, but I'm not pursuing acting professionally right now. I'm just trying to have fun and I think that is what theatre is ultimately all about.



Interview and photo by Tessa Karsten.

Master Market with Minthe Woudstra: Literary Studies

Choosing a Master can be daunting, and my experience with it was not any different. At a certain point before the new academic year, I was enrolled in three different Masters because of my inability to choose just one. I contemplated doing all of them to avoid making the decision, but ultimately, I rightfully came to the conclusion that one was plenty. Eventually, I chose the Master Literary Studies; English Literature and Culture at the University of Leiden. At first, I was pretty bummed about there not being a normal (i.e. non-Research) Master in Utrecht that focusses mainly on English Literature. However, the programme in Leiden does have some great pros.

One of the things that is so awesome about it is that you are open to choose any course you want to take. Usually, there is a set path within a Master which needs to be followed; with the master in Leiden you have a 'freedom within bounds' policy: basically, if the course is literature-related you are able to take it. This means your options are nearly endless and you can decide for yourself what your specialisation should be.



Another aspect which made the decision that much easier was the science-fiction and horror literature course they offer in the first semester, as well as a course focused solely on graphic novels and comics. These topics were so interesting to me and differed so much from what I was used to, that they quickly made me go overboard. In these courses, we discussed works that offer a completely different side to literature, which was really cool. In the end, my essay for the first course was focused on the novel *The Exorcist* in combination with radical second-wave feminism on religion and the notion of God. I never had more fun writing an academic essay! So, I'd say that in the end, the programme in Leiden was the right choice for me.

Minor Market with Bo Molenaar: Philosophy

Since the start of this academic year, I've been taking courses from the philosophy minor. I must admit I used to see philosophy as something boring and dull, and reserved for bearded old men. Luckily, none of this turned out to be true. I actually ended up taking this minor after taking the first course and getting hooked straight away.

The first course, 'From Socrates to Wittgenstein', introduces the most important aspects of the Western philosophical tradition up until the 20th century. During this course, you'll get a taste of what it's like to practice philosophy, which essentially boils down to learning how to ask the right questions – because only those questions will lead to the answers you're looking for, regardless of what the subject is.

The core courses of this minor follow in blocks 2 to 4, where the main philosophical subjects (ethics, truth, arts) are covered. In block 2, you'll take 'The Good: Ethics and political philosophy'. This was a very interesting course, and I enjoyed it especially because I hadn't expected ethics to appeal to me as much as it did. During the course, you'll write a paper on normative ethics, which feels very relevant to the 'real world' because you're directly applying philosophical theory to your own daily life. The third course, 'The True: Epistemology and philosophical logic', introduces the concept of logic and how to use it to determine whether something is true. So far, it's a bit more difficult than the previous courses, but I'm definitely enjoying it. Just like the previous course, it just feels much more relevant than I expected it to be, but more so on an academic and rhetorical level.

Did I mention this minor has amazing lecturers? They really appeal to your curiosity and show great interest in combining knowledge from your major with the content they're teaching. This makes seminars a lot of fun! I'd definitely recommend this minor to any English student. It'll greatly improve your ability to think about things more thoroughly, and honestly – what more does a student need?




Humans of Albion: Gala van der Meer (21)

I'm really into role-playing videogames. I love Mass Effect 2, Dragon Age: Origins, The Legend of Zelda and the list goes on! The most recent game I played and loved is Red Dead Redemption 2. The story world is so big and the creators paid great attention to detail in terms of design! What I especially like with regard to my English degree is that it makes me feel as if I'm playing a Shakespearean tragedy. The game is divided into acts: act one is when the characters start out in an awful situation, but it gradually gets better. Act two starts out well, but then it leads up to a climax where ultimately everyone dies. Classic Shakespeare!



"Hyeeeh
kyaah hyaaah
haa hyet hah
haa yaa!"

- Link, The
Legend of
Zelda



Tea time

WITH STELLA GRYLLIA

On a sunny Wednesday in March, we headed out to the home of Stella Gryllia, one of the new additions to the teaching team. Upon arrival, we were welcomed into a cosy and beautifully decorated home with a view upon a lovely park and neighbourhood. One of the first things that we both noticed, were the many paintings hung on the walls in Stella's living room and kitchen. While Stella was pouring us some tea and cutting up a delicious forest fruit pie, I started the interview.

In conversation with Robert Ziolkowski & Angela Kroes
Photos by Angela Kroes & Written by Robert Ziolkowski

Do you like paintings?

Yes, I really love paintings! There are two more over there, in the kitchen. One of them is the image of a cat sitting in front of a window and the other one next to it depicts flowers. Over here, [Stella points to a painting hanging in the corner of the living room] you will probably recognise a typical Dutch cityscape, as it's the city centre in Delft. Some of my Greek friends knew that I really love paintings, so they gave me this one as a present. Then over here, [Stella points to a painting on the opposite wall] is a painting that also has a story behind it. While I was doing my Ph.D. in Leiden – I didn't have a scholarship yet – I was always glad to do small things for professors as a teaching assistant. At some point there was an opportunity to be involved in a project about Basque grammar. In 2003, Rudolf de Rijk passed away and left behind all his manuscripts. Lisa Cheng – who is a professor of syntax and Chinese linguistics at Leiden university – knew him and asked me if I wanted to help Rudolf's widow in compiling the grammar and I told her I'd love to. When we were done, Rudolf's widow – who was a painter – wanted to do something for me in return and I told her I liked paintings, and that is how I got that one.

Do you paint?

No, not really. However, there is one thing I used to do; paint pebbles. Whenever we went to the beach, I collected pebbles that I found along the shore and when we got back home, I painted them. But otherwise, no, I don't paint myself. I just really enjoy going to exhibitions, museums and galleries to admire the work of others.

The amazing thing about going to such places is being able to visit them more than once. I absolutely love going to a museum multiple times, because each time you are there you see something new or something that you missed before. It really depends on what kind of mood you are in or what you have been doing that day. For example, if you go to an art gallery while you are feeling good and happy, you'll see the paintings in an entirely different light than when you go after something sad has happened. Or if you have had a particular thought you will see it reflected in the paintings you see. It's really amazing to experience how that works, how your feelings and thoughts have an effect on the perception of the art you see.

After a few sips of warm tea and a few bites of delicious pie, our conversation turned towards the subject of Stella's home country.

Do you frequently go back to Greece?

Yes, I definitely do! I admit that last year I overdid it. We went back five times in a year, which in the end was a little too much, I think [laughs]. I have two kids, the oldest one is already at school, so we spent the October holidays in Athens and also the summer holidays. We actually went to Greece almost every time my girl had holidays, but it was really nice. In the beginning, when I came to the Netherlands – which is sixteen years ago – I wanted to go back to visit family and friends. Now, I go back for my children and the weather. After all these years here, I still complain about the weather in the Netherlands [laughs]. When it's nice and sunny like today it's fine, but usually this is not the case, so I do miss the warm Greek weather a lot. But well, the main reason for regularly going back is my children which are raised bilingually. We speak Greek at home – as my husband is also Greek – but the quality and the quantity of the language input is

higher when we are in Athens. Our oldest child, she is six now, learns Dutch at school; it is interesting to see the degree of exposure to Dutch that my younger son, who is two years old, gets through his sister.

We linguists know in theory about bilingualism and how language works. We know that children can in principle learn two or three languages simultaneously and acquire various grammars and systems. But every time I see it happening in real life, it's different and it really excites me. It is really interesting to observe how language develops.

As you know, input plays a role in language development, so during the Christmas holidays in Athens we went to a number of theatrical plays. The quality was high and the number of plays that were available for my children's age was more than one could attend. When we were back to The Hague, we went to one here, and I thought "why can't they also make them nice here?" [laughs]. But Athens has been culturally active for a long time, as you may know, even during the economic crisis. Which is really interesting, because I was convinced that people wouldn't be going to theatres or exhibitions and luckily, I was wrong. Theatre in Athens is thriving, and it's nice to see.

"Staying in one academic environment for too long makes it less interesting and engaging. You get used to it and then it loses its charm."

From there we continued onto the subject of Stella's academic life and her field of study within linguistics, which is prosody and intonational phonology of which she was able to tell us incredibly much.

Recent studies have shown that video games can have a positive effect on the brain. Do you think that such games could be used in the field of linguistics or the study of language acquisition?

There are indeed studies out there that have shown that games, in particular video games, could be used to elicit linguistic data. Video games can be a useful tool in investigating second language acquisition. In a fun way you can conduct research in how language is learned and keep participants engaged. So, looking at it in that way I would say yes, it can be a useful tool to elicit linguistic data. The only problem is that we – as linguists – don't always know enough about programming to create these games ourselves. The other option is to ask others, who know how to develop and programme such games, to do it for us.

What about teaching a new language through the use of video games? Would it also be a useful tool then?

When you look at what's available now, there is already a huge variety of games that can be used for educational purposes. For instance, games are used to teach children or adults vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, nowadays, video games are used to train students of medicine and professionals on how to use medical

equipment. Certainly, video games will become a tool that will be used more and more in the future. However, there is some limit to this. Studies have shown that learning language by taking notes has a much more lasting effect on the brain. This is why I always encourage my students to take handwritten notes during class. So, yes, it can be a useful tool, but I hope it will not become the only tool in the future.

What were you like in college?

For me it was a really great time, perhaps I should say that it was my best time [smiles]. As lectures were on a voluntary basis, as opposed to school where you just had to go, I was completely free to create my own schedule. But more importantly, I was finally able to choose topics or subjects that were more interesting to me. Which naturally is not an option in secondary school. I particularly enjoyed spending time in the library, discussing various topics with other students.

What was especially beneficial for me during this period was changing my academic environment moving from Athens to Leiden. Staying in one academic environment for too long makes it less interesting and engaging. You get used to it and then it loses its charm.

Leiden was great. Various academics from all across the globe would come to give seminars or lectures. This is how I started feeling a member of the world linguistic community. I really loved this!



Stella blending in!

"I do miss the warm Greek weather a lot."

Do you have any advice for students?

I would tell you to take advantage of these years while you are studying. Go to summer schools, go to colloquiums and talks. There are so many people that have endless amounts of knowledge around you that is waiting to be used. Don't treat university as a nine-to-five job or only be busy with your study when you have to go to class. Try to broaden your academic horizons beyond seminars as well. It always makes me a little sad when I see students during a seminar or lecture just sitting there because they have to be there. I always think "why aren't you enthusiastic, please be enthusiastic, this is fun and interesting" [laughs]. No, but really, we as teachers are enthusiastic about our work and the studies we perform. We want to share it all with you, so try to take advantage of it all. It can be really fun!



Red details everywhere...

short story contest!

1st place by Imke van Dam

Character, item, and setting prompt: the grim reaper, dice, barren land, and the line: *I will need to take a big, fat nap now.*



The god of Gambling decided to challenge the god of Death to a game of Yahtzee. Why, you may wonder? He didn't really know that himself. Nobody usually wanted anything to do with the reaper; the guy had a bit of an intimidating aura around him. Most of the other gods never set a foot in the reaper's general direction and tried to avoid looking at him. Some took pity on Death. The god of Family often said (when Death itself was out of hearing distance): "Poor spirit, he must be completely deprived of compassion and love," but Family was enough of a hypocrite to never take it upon himself to approach Death.

However, Gambling's reason to invite Death to a game wasn't pity. He never partook in such emotions, because they usually ruin the chance of winning. Curiosity was also out of the picture; it's a real game-killer (this was also why Gambling would never play with Curiosity). Perhaps it was a mix of boredom and thrill of a challenge. Nobody had ever talked to Death, let alone invited him to a social event. Sadly, once Gambling had pitched his idea to some of the other gods, he hadn't been able to persuade others to join the game. Even Courage and Stupidity (they were twins and often seen together) wouldn't consider it.

This resulted in Gambling walking up to Death in a (pretend-)indifferent manner and asking if he would join Gambling in a game of Yahtzee. "Why Yahtzee?" was Death's response. "Because it is considered a beginner-friendly game. Do you know the rules?" Death admitted that he'd seen some humans play it over the last century, so he'd know how to get by. Before Gambling could respond, Death added, as Gambling had made so courtly an offer, that he would return the honour by offering his realm as the game-spot. Gambling didn't really know how to respond, so the god just uttered a weak "great" and conjured the dice, paper and pens. Death took them to his realm and Gambling was immediately overwhelmed by the sheer nothingness of the place. The reaper excused himself and quickly made two chairs and a table appear, although it didn't help to forget the distracting nothing surrounding it. ('How can nothing surround a thing?' Gambling asked itself.) The two gods each took an uncomfortable seat, divided the pens and paper and started rolling the dice.

Of course, Gambling won. Death was actually pretty bad at Yahtzee, so the game was over quickly. As soon as all the boxes were filled with scores or X's, Gambling let out a tired "I win" and slowly stood from his chair. Death's realm seemed to have an oppressing and tiring effect on anyone who entered it. The reaper merely thanked Gambling for playing and sent him back in the blink of an eye. Other gods quickly swooned Gambling, but all he could say was: "I will need to take a big, fat nap now".



photo: The Joker from 'Phoenix Ranks'. p. 19

Q&ALUMNI WITH SUZANNE HOOGSTRATEN

Suzanne Hoogstraten (22) is fresh off her master's degree in Contemporary Literature, and already has her own freelance editing and translating company: White Rabbit. She has a warm Albion history, as she was the secretary of the AcCie in 2015-2016, camp counselor during the fresher's camp in 2015, and has even written pieces for this very magazine. Time to take a closer look at her experiences in Utrecht, and what followed.

Why did you decide to study English?

First of all, I got the best grades for it in secondary school. I visited an open day twice, and the first time I was already quite certain of my choice. The whole degree just suited me so well. I knew that this was also taught at the University of Amsterdam, but I preferred Utrecht. Utrecht felt a bit cozier and more personal. Apart from that, I've always loved reading. If you take a look at old holiday snaps, you will see me and my sister reading on the couch, or even in the swimming pool. I currently read a lot of children's literature, but I also like contemporary novels by authors like Zadie Smith from time to time.

What did you think of your studies? Which memories pop into your head right away?

I loved all the trips! I went on the Big Trip twice. In my third year I studied abroad, and that's when I didn't go. But they were absolutely the best part, and I never had any doubts about this study. I enjoyed it so thoroughly, I sometimes miss it a bit. During my master, I have wished multiple times that I were still doing my bachelor.

What was your favourite year of the bachelor?

I think I liked them all for different reasons. In my first year, everything was still fresh, and I also lived at home. In the third year, I studied abroad, so I wasn't in Utrecht for half of the time. It was really awesome, but it was just so different from studying in Utrecht. So, I think that I would say my second year. I had my own space in Utrecht then, and I participated in many Albion activities. We also went to Dublin that year, which was fantastic.

How was your experience with studying abroad?

I was in Canterbury, and it was similar to Utrecht, yet different. You know you'll only be there temporary, and you have less of the feeling that you're going to a university. I went on a few trips to London, and I discovered many lovely people. It was totally worth it, even though it was a bit out of my comfort zone. I hesitated for a long time, and I signed up rather late, but I would highly recommend it to everyone.

What did you want to do when you were finished with your studies?

I just finished my Master's Programme, and I really want to work in the publishing industry. I'm also thinking about pursuing a Ph.D., but that is very hard to enter. I'm currently doing freelance work as a text corrector and editor, and sometimes translator. I have a steady administrative job, but that is more temporary. I know what I want to do, but I'll just have to see how I'll get there.

Do you have any idea on which area of research you want to base your Ph.D.?

Probably literature. I wrote my MA thesis about autobiographic graphic novels. Something like that intrigues me: combining literature with other forms of media, such as comics and illustrations. I did my BA thesis on adaptation, so a Ph.D. concerning autobiographies could be a possibility.



Written by Patrick van Oosterom.
Photo by Angela Kroes.

“Enjoy your time as a student, it won't ever return.”

How was your MA thesis experience?

I did it simultaneously with my internship, and those two things are difficult to combine. My master was set up in a way that in the first half of the year I followed regular courses, and the other half was reserved for an internship and writing the thesis. My internship was supposed to last five months, but it became a bit longer in the end, and I worked four days a week. I tried to write my MA thesis, but that was simply a bit too much. I decided to wait until after the summer holiday, and then finish it. That was a very wise decision, because I could take my time. I don't think I would have accomplished the same results if I finished my thesis during my internship.

Where did you have your internship?

Meis & Maas, a children's books publishing company. Some books are rather standard, but they also publish on behalf of brands like Star Wars and Lego. I started out doing marketing and PR. After that, I started doing more editorial work, because my marketing- and PR-mentor left the company and they had to reorganise everyone. I checked the work of text correctors, and I read manuscripts and gave my opinion on them. We figured out what the target audience was, if the book suited our company, and who was going to buy it.

Can you give a summary of your present working day?

In the morning I go to Houten for my job, where I do many, rather tedious administrative tasks: filing things into the computer system, check for errors in documents, etc. It's a classic 9-to-5, and after that I go home. In the evenings or on the weekends, I sometimes do freelance work, with which I can continue to work on my CV.

Are you often approached by people who want you to do a project?

I still do projects for my internship company, and currently also for another publisher. I discovered, however, that as a freelancer you predominantly have to network in order to be able to work. There are already many text correctors out there, so you have to approach the employers directly, which can be quite hard.

Do you have any advice for current students?

Do everything you can. Going abroad especially, it is the best thing ever. Furthermore, enjoy the time you've got as a student, it won't ever return. Also, don't worry too much about your studies. You will probably be just fine in the end. Participate in as many activities, trips and drinks possible, get to know other people and make friends!

EDUCATION

- 2017-2018** **Master Literature Today**
Utrecht University
Thesis: The Literariness of Hybrid Forms:
The Place of Autographics Persepolis,
Fun Home and Can't We Talk About
Something More Pleasant? in the
Literary Field
- 2014 – 2017** **Bachelor English Language and Culture**
Utrecht University
Thesis: Alice in Adaptation: Disney's
Re-Imaginations of Lewis Carroll's
Victorian Girl-Child

JOBS

- 2019 – present** **Operations Support**
Arval BNP Paribas group
- 2018 – present** **Owner**
White Rabbit Redactie & Vertaling
- 2018-2018** **Intern Marketing & PR**
Meis & Maas
- 2015-2017** **Homework tutor**
Studiehuis Zuidooost
- 2012-2015** **Sales assistant**
Albert Heijn

Culture Corner: Bandersnatch (2019)

by Tessa Karsten

For someone who gets stressed out over what socks to wear in the morning, this experience seemed like a nightmare in every sense of the word.

The stand-alone entry of Black Mirror provides viewers with the opportunity to take control of the plot. Bandersnatch lets you release your inner Charlie Brooker by being a choose-your-own-adventure film, guiding the young programmer Stefan (Fionn Whitehead) through his process of creating his multiple-ending game Bandersnatch in the 80's.

I have to admit, it is a thrilling experience at first. It eases you in with a decision of what cereal to have, and builds to more disturbing life-and-death decisions. The choices you make lead you to a different path, resulting in five endings. That being said, the seemingly important choices ultimately appear to have little effect on the plot of the film.

After having spent three hours crouched over my laptop exploring several different paths, I ended up getting stuck in a loop. Once you stumble upon a branch which is a blind alley, Netflix sends you back and makes you rethink one of your decisions, which sort of undermines the whole premise. The decision-making process ends up feeling slightly gimmicky, only giving you the thrill of making decisions without them actually having any consequences.



Sure, the concept is fascinating and the way in which they project the classic Black Mirror "choice is an illusion and existence is a prison" message is clever, but the experience is unsatisfying. Even after rewinding the story and sitting through some alternative endings, nothing feels definitive. While being an entertaining experience at first, it is ultimately not the nightmare Black Mirror experience I secretly hoped for. Fun as a concept, not as a full feature film.

BOOKSHELF



In the midst of a bright February day, Tessa and I travelled all the way to the South to visit the village of Best. At the station (which was larger than we expected), we found that Bram was already awaiting us, and he drove us to his house. There, we were greeted most enthusiastically by two lovely dogs, and we went inside for a good cup of tea and a chat about books, games, books based on games, games based on books, and Netflix adaptations of games which are based on books.

What is your most recent read?

That would be Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. My niece recommended it to me. Last summer, I travelled through Europe, and I took it along with me. It is really masterfully written, and it tackles heavy issues in a way that is not very upfront. It makes a sketch, a contour of the problems, and it does it rather subtly, full of petite gestures and manners that indicate the troubled relationship between the races in the American South. It also tackles many other issues, and I absolutely enjoyed reading about this diverse range of topics.

Do you have a favourite author?

I've read *1984* by George Orwell, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. It is uncanny that he wrote this all the way back in the 1940s. He is uncomfortably accurate about the way the future would play out. I also find it very refreshing that although he was a socialist, he still condemns this dystopian, communist regime. He composed the novel just after World War II, and he was a socialist in a country that was not very fond of socialists, so to speak. Orwell's influence regarding style and vocabulary is also remarkable. He conjoined many new words, which soon became part of the everyday lexicon.

Do you have any books you still want to read?

In the back of my head I do have a list of important books I'll eventually want to get to. They are predominantly adaptations of movies or series I've seen, or games I've played. Novels often get adapted for the silver screen when they are top notch. Over the past decade or so, this has also increasingly happened with games. There is, for example, the *The Witcher*-series. These games are based on the work of Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski, who wrote a fantasy series of short stories and novels about the witcher Geralt of Rivia. At first, they were only available in Polish. A Polish game developer, who greatly admired Sapkowski's fantasy world, wanted to make it into a game. That game became madly successful. In 2013, the last instalment was released, and it became one of the best-selling

games of the past few years. The games are based on the fantasy world that Sapkowski created. *The Witcher* has 14 books, and I still want to read them. I also plan to read a series of books written by Matthew Colville. He based them on his and his friends' adventures and experiences with *Dungeons & Dragons*. I do say this rather hesitantly though, because there are, in this day and age, still certain stigma's and connotations associated with D&D-players: an image comes to mind of a Mountain Dew-drinking, Doritos-nibbling, unshaven gamer type who spends his whole spare afternoon gaming.

Do you have a favourite game based on a book?

Yes, that would be *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. I still have to play parts 1 and 2 though. It's like a story where you can decide your own actions. You are a character, and you have influence on the development of the narrative. You're really involved in it, and it's comparable with *Black Mirror's* *Bandersnatch* episode. It is a rather early iteration of the Open World RPG (role playing game), based on *Dungeons & Dragons*. The player's freedom is paramount. *The Witcher* as a game has approximately 35 different endings, whereas the books have only one. I picked up the third instalment during the summer holiday and I rarely took a break from it. It was just that good. I think I played about 100 hours divided over only two weeks. The storyline was just so immensely compelling. I had the same experience while reading *1984*. You start reading, and you just cannot stop, and you finish it in no time.

Do you have any recommendations?

The *Metro*-series was, to me, a surprisingly good horror game. It is based on novels by Russian author and journalist Dmitry Glukhovsky, and it follows this story about post-nuclear Moscow, where people can only survive in the metro system. You have all these dark tunnels and sewers, and it is just terrifying. You have to walk around, armed, and with an empty flashlight so you can hardly see anything. The jump scares you get from it are insane, and it is almost palpation inducing. This all contributes to a very interesting gaming experience. It becomes nearly physical. The latest instalment in this franchise, *Metro: Exodus*, has just been released and I really want to play that too.

Do you have a certain character in books/games that you like to see?

A lot of characters seem to define themselves as a kind of standard character, like a Mary Sue who can't do anything wrong. Like Katniss Everdeen (from *The Hunger Games*) for example, almost like a trope.

"A story is not worth anything if you have a protagonist without flaws."

I do, however, like characters who do the unexpected, characters who take you by surprise, e.g. Boo Radley from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. (Spoiler alert) I did not expect that he really existed. He seemed such a fantasy made up by the children. Lee truly created a magnificent subplot concerning his mysterious house, which no one should try to come close to.

Do you have a favourite movie adaptation?

I think that the first *Hunger Games* movie is my guilty pleasure. I simply enjoy that a lot. I've read all three books, and sadly the movies became rather bad as they progressed. The second one was all right, but the third one has so many plot twists that it was hardly believable anymore. It is also quite lamentable that it plays into so many tropes: she gets her boy, she is the underdog, she overcomes all odds, she will win eventually, etc. That is sad, since the concept is actually very highbrow and interesting. If you have a perfect, flawless main character the narrative becomes a lot less interesting. A story is not worth anything if you have a protagonist without flaws.

Do you have a favourite character?

That would be Ciri from *The Witcher*, which will also get a Netflix adaptation by the way. She brings a pleasant twist to the otherwise boring trope of a father saving his daughter. She is extremely capable, and the complete opposite of a helpless damsel in distress.

How would you describe your own taste?

I prefer it to be as realistic as possible, something that could be applicable to the present-day world, like 1984. *The Witcher* certainly takes place in the high fantasy realm, but it does deal with many realistic issues. There are people who are severely depressed, and there is a subplot about a gay couple. They are a hunter and a baron's son, who in the end both commit suicide. It is less superficial than one would think at first.

What are the most profound truths/lessons you got from a book?

1984 absolutely awakened and reinvigorated my interest in politics. It made me see the ugliness of extremism, which could be applied to both sides of the political spectrum. I became aware of the malice behind the far-right in America and the horrors of the Soviet Union. It also made me think about privacy. The way Orwell described the electronical screens/camera's that are always on in the living room is borderline prophetic.



Culture Corner: Anthem (2019)



Written by Robert Ziolkowski Illustration by Celonie Rozema

I have loved Bioware and the stories they have created ever since I first played *Knights of the Old Republic* back in 2008. When I gorged on the *Mass Effect* Trilogy not long thereafter, I became somewhat of a Bioware devotee. On the 26th of November 2018, I celebrated my six-year anniversary of playing the company's MMORPG *Star Wars The Old Republic*, so it is needless to say that when they had announced *Anthem* I was beyond giddy and could not wait to set my teeth in it. Finally, on the 22nd of February 2019 when the online multiplayer was released, I got the chance to play the game and now it is time to share my impression of it.

Credit has to be given where it is due and looking at *Anthem* purely from a graphical viewpoint establishes that the game looks stunning. I tested various graphical settings and even on medium the environment is absolutely mesmerising and lively. Bioware received a lot of criticism for their animations in *Mass Effect Andromeda*, but it is evident they have learned from their past mistakes. *Anthem's* animations are anything but goofy or clumsy, they are streamlined and realistic with facial designs thankfully not moving into uncanny valley territory.

Yet I am not entirely jubilant about *Anthem*. Why? Well, Bioware is known for their immersive, engaging and epic storytelling. In *Mass Effect* or *Dragon Age*, you get to make choices in the story that impact how the narrative will flow. You will see the effects of your actions in the environment or subsequent story, but this element is missing from the company's newest title.

In *Anthem*, the focus really is on the missions you pick up, grouping up with players and clearing content together in your "Javelins". Those are robotic exoskeleton suits in which so-called "Freelancers" fight against titanic enemies spawned by an omnipresent energy source known as "The Anthem of Creation". So yes, the game has a story campaign, but it feels to me as if it was not the focus of the game, but rather an afterthought.

This is why *Anthem* is not entirely what I had hoped for, namely another brilliant story-driven game that the company is known for. Sure, it is incredibly fun to jump into your "Javelin" and roam around the beautiful and gorgeous landscape shooting things, but it is not enough to keep me satisfied for a long time. The story of a game is – in the end – what keeps me playing or replaying it. It is therefore my hope that Bioware will include more story-heavy expansions in the future, because the current campaign can be finished rather swiftly and is too linear and simple, in my opinion.

So, if you're looking for the classic Bioware epic story experience, you should look elsewhere because *Anthem* is rather underwhelming in that regard. However, if you are more interested in open-world combat, flying around in a gorgeous environment and shooting things along with other players, then this game is the right one for you!

Phoenix ranks!

Game stores edition

NEVERNEVERLAND, OUDEGRACHT 202

1



This tiny and neat game store opened its doors in 2002 which makes it the second oldest store in its field on the Oudegracht. The owner looked to J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan to come up with the name of NeverNeverLand and their motto retains the essence of this dream land: never grow up and keep playing games! The friendly personnel offer a wide variety of games for dedicated- and casual players, so it's a good stepping stone if you're interested in becoming more involved with the gaming world!

GAMESTATE, MARIAPLAATS 13.

2



Do you want to beat your friends at Mario Kart, an Alien shooting game or air hockey after a long day of classes? You can at GameState! The idea is simple: re-charge your GameState card with €10 and pay a small amount for every game you play! Bring the tickets you've won to the counting machine and save them for cool prizes!



SUBCULTURES, OUDEGRACHT 183

3



If you're looking for a game store that offers a bit more than the games they sell: this is the place for you. Subcultures has two literary-themed escape rooms ("The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe and "Royal Jelly" by Roald Dahl!) that are, unfortunately, not located in the store itself, but are worth checking out. They also have LARP equipment in their cellar for anyone that is interested! The store also organizes game nights on Mondays in the wharf cellar beneath The Joker, and Wednesdays at StayOkay. The shelves are labeled and display all types of board- and card games but the overall interior comes off a bit disorganized since most shelves are stacked on top of each other.

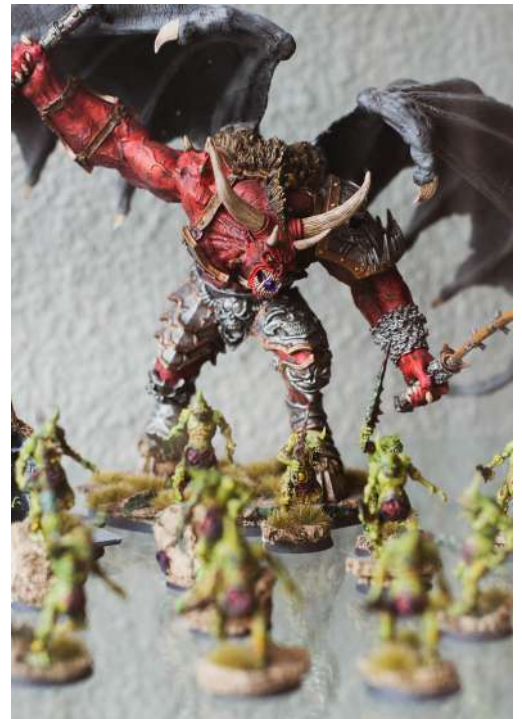
THE JOKER, OUDEGRACHT 230A



Being the oldest game store on the Oudegracht, The Joker knows how to handle game nights. They organize them every Friday and Saturday night from 7 PM in their cellar! Unfortunately, their game collection is not as big compared Subcultures or NeverNeverLand.

'T LAB, OUDEGRACHT 207

5



'T Lab organizes game nights specifically aimed at Magic the Gathering every Tuesday and Friday night and board games on Thursday night. Although games of a certain genre are grouped together, the shelves are not labeled which makes it a bit hard to find what you're looking for.



While I dislike confrontations, I think the idea of a puzzle battle to be quite alluring. Or, to use a colloquialism: please bring it.

- Professor Hershel Layton