

The 2025 International Conference on Games and Narrative presents:

Adapt, Adopt, Adjust: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Adaptation, Storytelling, and Simulation

HYBRID – Hosted by the Games Institute, University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
Monday, March 3rd, 2025 – Thursday, March 6th, 2025

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Deadline: November 20th, 2024

Abstracts undergo single-blind review; submit via EasyChair
Decisions on papers, panels, and workshops: early December
Proceedings published (extended abstracts): April 2025

The [2025 International Conference on Games and Narrative \(ICGAN'25\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/events/international-conference-games-and-narrative-2025)¹ is a venue for researchers from a variety of disciplines (humanities, digital media, human-computer interaction, culture studies, psychology, computer science, communication studies, engineering, etc.) to discuss the plethora of factors impacting games and interactive storytelling. This year's conference theme "Adapt, Adopt, Adjust: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Adaptation, Storytelling, and Simulation", asks us to consider the power of adapted and adaptive narratives, experiences, genres and mechanics.

Games engage players through various modalities—such as audio, visual, and haptic cues—filtered through the player's senses and cognitive perception. Narratives reinforce these experiences. Narratives, as understood through the video game medium, have now extended broadly toward many forms of interactive and immersive media. Interactive media exploit narrative techniques, employ narrative suspense, and rely on our existing understanding of narrative concepts such as setting and character. Games and interactive immersive media development continues to push the bounds of how we understand the power of storytelling both within game worlds, as well as the culture and experiences surrounding them

For ICGAN'25 we seek to engage researchers from various disciplines to explore questions such as:

- How can game mechanics be leveraged to adapt diverse experiences, emotions, and narratives?
- Is the external narrativization of our game experience a type of adaptation?
- How do interactive narratives adapt and translate the history of our world including gender, racial sexual, national, and cultural identities?

¹ <https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/events/international-conference-games-and-narrative-2025>

- How do adaptive mechanics and systems co-construct various types of narratives?
- How are analogue games adapted into digital games and vice versa?
- How does interactive media change discussions surrounding issues of fidelity, legality, “source text,” cannon and fandom?

To our friends, both international and from the other side(s) of Canada ...

To accommodate an international audience as well as in consideration of the financial, health, and ecological concerns conference goers may have, this conference **will be held in a hybrid format**. In-person participants can join us at the Games Institute at the University of Waterloo, while virtual participants will come together in our online spaces on [Gather](https://www.gather.town/)². The hours of the conference will be adjusted to suit scholars in different time zones. During registration, you will have a chance to indicate if you are attending in-person or virtually and your time zone.

A note on interdisciplinarity and inclusivity:

Different disciplines have various ideas about what “conferences” look like and how they work. Creating a conference that provides researchers from all disciplines a structure that works for them is daunting, and not always possible. However, for an earnest exchange of ideas with folks from all walks of life and research, we welcome submissions from researchers studying games and narratives from any disciplinary and academic background and encourage a curious and open mind when exploring ICGAN’25 key topics and themes. This includes independent scholars, journalists, and industry professionals. We have taken steps to use inclusive language and terms that are the “disciplinary norm” for various conferences to forward our vision of an interdisciplinary conference and welcome both feedback and questions!

We will be publishing the extended abstracts of accepted submissions as conference proceedings after ICGAN’25, as we recognize this is a necessary output in some disciplines to have their participation recognized. More details on this process to come.

ICGAN’25 Key Theme: Adaptations

Adaptations, simulations, immersive experiences, and interactive digital narratives (IDNs) face the complicated problem of adapting real-life experiences, history, or fantastical imaginings into the multi-modal, interactive medium of games and other digital mediums. For ICGAN’25, we conceptualize adaptation in the broadest way possible. Our understanding and use of the term adaptation includes among others:

- Adapting a digital experience into another medium
- Adapting knowledge and information
- Adapting emotion and personal experience
- Adapting gameplay styles, mechanics, and genres

² <https://www.gather.town/>

- Adapting existing narratives and transmedia or multiplatform storytelling
- Adapting and simulating historical events or imagined histories
- Adapting physical experience (skateboarding, swimming, hunting etc.)

Storytelling is an inherent part of the human experience and integral to human connectedness; humans have been adapting myths, folklore, and history for our entire history (Chan, 2012, 412). They have a vital function in human cognition and emotion; telling or listening to stories is in our human nature (Schneider et al., 2004); and even before we wrote them down, we have used stories to exchange information, share perspectives, and engage in epistemological and moral reasoning (Lee, 2023).

The origin of adaptation studies as a field is rooted in the study of film, examining literary works being adapted to the screen with early scholarship starting in the 1990s (Chan, 2012, 412). It has since expanded into understanding issues around translating narratives, language, emotions, and experiences from one medium into another. More recently, scholars have been attempting to elucidate “the role adaptation studies might play in the growing field of game studies” (Randall and Murphy, 2011, 114).

When consuming adaptations there is a “conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing” (Hutcheon, 2006, 139). Many want adaptations to always be completely “faithful” with no details changed or updated. Others want the original source to be “preserved” playing into “our most conservative sense of culture” and our “human desires” for “security and immortality” (Kranz and Mellerski, 2013, 2-3). This conservatism is on display in many scholarly examinations and fan critiques of media adaptations; there is an outsized focus on one-to-one comparisons that privilege fidelity above all else with a reverence for the source text or texts (Leitch, 2008; Randall, 2017). This is despite the reality that the strongest adaptations often make many changes to align the narrative with the constraints and affordances of the medium they are adapting into.

For instance, Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski adapted Slavic and Germanic folklore into his book series, *The Witcher*, which first appeared as a short story in the 1985 *Fantastyka* magazine. It was then translated from Polish to many other languages; turned into a series of graphic novels; adapted into multiple television shows; and, into a series of AAA video games. These video games were so successful that they have led to many *The Witcher* spin off games, including a *Pokémon Go* style locative game, multiple digital card games, and board games; with more games currently in development. Many adaptations have become a transmedia phenomenon of “adaptations on adaptations on adaptations” (Schmidt 2018). Furthermore, source material is often a complex notion in games. For example, games in the Pokémon IP’s blueprint come from video games, mobile games, trading card games (TCGs), a boardgame, tabletop roleplaying games (RPGs), a book series, manga, and an anime (to name a few).

Moving beyond traditional ideas of adapting from one medium to another, there is also the notion of adapting experiences and emotions into interactive narratives. For example, Player Experience (PX) is an emergent player property (Wiemeyer et al., 2016), that game designers strive to create by carefully choosing and combining game mechanics and aesthetic elements (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003), with the hope of

promoting player fantasies, experiences, and feelings. Computational Models of Emotion (CMEs), software systems influenced by affective research, embody at least one emotion theory as the basis of its models and mechanism (Smith and Carette, 2022). There is even the potential to apply literary analysis to films so that we can develop test cases for believable Non-Player Characters (NPCs) (Smith and Carette, 2023).

From yet another angle, the gameplay genre “Metroidvania”—a portmanteau from the *Metroid* (1986), and *Castlevania II* (1987) games—is now a mechanical template adapted into other games and game properties. Beyond this, all digital games come from roots in tabletop gameplay (such as Dungeons and Dragons), and tabletop gameplay itself was adapted from tabletop wargaming mechanics and the fantasy and science fiction literary genres (Vossen, 2020). As digital and analogue games reunite through hybrid board games (Rogerson et al., 2021), there are open questions about the ways these related genres and play styles adapt to the mixed technology and expectations of players. As Neil Randall points out in “The boardgame online: Simulating the experience of physical games” when we take board games and adapt them to digital versions: “Immersiveness differs, narrative generation differs, simulational value differs, styles of player interaction differ, and social norms of gameplay differ” (2011, 105).

On an individual level, games and game systems play with adaptations to create unique, personalized experiences and narratives. Adaptive mechanics assess players and tune the game to their needs and desires. Cases of individual adaptation range from dynamic difficulty adjustment (Baldwin et al. 2013), like rubber banding in the *Mario Kart* franchise (1992-present), to the game world and narrative changes in *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* (2009). In this way adaptation inside games can affect both the emergent narratives of play and the embedded narratives of the game. Analogue games similarly explore emergent and personalized narratives through “Legacy” and “Campaign” mechanics which adapt and alter the game rules and components between game sessions.

Lastly, as Thomas Leitch asserts, “adaptation” itself can be considered a genre with specific features that we use to identify adaptations. He argues that pointing out a lack of fidelity to a source text and signaling yourself as a “knowing audience” is part of the enjoyment of consuming adaptations. Consuming and discussing adaptation, as opposed to a purely new text, is an “intertextual game” between fans—in which they are constantly looking for “textual markers” and fetishizing the source text (Leitch, 2008, 108).

While we welcome submissions on any topic related to games and narrative, we are especially interested in submissions that examine the ideas outlined above or in the broad examples of relevant work below. We view these examples as “adaptations” of knowledge from other disciplines to game design, and evidence of our need for interdisciplinary work to effectively realize narratives in games.

ICGAN'25 Key Topics:

Narrative and design structures in games and play:

- Time, space, and perspective
- Characters, Non-Player Character (NPC) behaviour, language learning models (LLMs), and artificial intelligence (AI)
- Hypertext fiction and programming languages
- Narrative determinism
- Innovative design or application of game mechanics
- Applied, serious, and persuasive games (e.g., games and play for health, wellbeing, and learning)

Technology's influence on narrative, design, and play:

- Relationships between technology and narrative
- Accessible and inclusive design
- Virtual reality, mixed-reality devices, augmented reality, and haptics
- Novel and emerging tools for game creation and analysis
- Player and gameplay models for adaptive design

Narrative co-creation in games and play:

- The relationship between designer, text (object of analysis), and player
- Agency and performativity
- Emergent narrative and storytelling
- Social and multiplayer games
- Livestreaming, parasocial relationships, fandom, and games culture
- Games narratives for pedagogy

Presence and immersion in narrative, design, and play:

- Player experience and gamification
- The impact of identity on immersion and presence
- Environmental storytelling
- Worldbuilding
- Simulating cultures, societal issues, history in games and play

Submission Guidelines

1. **Deadline for submissions is November 20th by 11:59 PM** (according to [your time zone, \[AOE\]³](#))
2. All submissions will undergo a single-blind review.
3. [Submit all abstracts via EasyChair⁴](#)
4. For questions, please email icgan.submissions@uwaterloo.ca
5. All submissions MUST include:
 - a. At least 3 citations (use ANY citation style you are comfortable with). These are NOT included in the word count. NB: Demoes do NOT require citations.
 - b. 100–150-word author(s)' statement(s) including:
 - i. Full Name
 - ii. Affiliation (institutional, industry, independent, etc.)
 - iii. Description of research, publications, and presentations
 - iv. The author's statement is NOT included in the word count
 - c. Abstract/description of the contribution (details below)

Paper or Video Essay Submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 300–800-word abstract outlining the work - Individual or co-authored presentations can be either finished works or works-in-progress (i.e. dissertation research, or original, incomplete work from on-going research)
Panel Submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 500–800-word abstract describing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The panel's motivation o Its goals and themes - 150–200-word abstracts for each panelist's contribution
Workshop Submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 500–800-word abstract including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The workshop's motivation o Its goals and themes o Schedule and structure of workshop activities; and o Any components that are needed to run it - Workshops can also include game jams, the creation or teaching how to use design tools, storytelling, etc.
Demo Submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 250-word abstract outlining video/analogue game creation or interactive narrative experience in the demo - Link to 3-minute demo of the interactive artefact - No citations needed

³ https://time.is/Anywhere_on_Earth

⁴ <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=icgan2025>

The event is hosted by the Games Institute, at the University of Waterloo

The Games Institute (GI) is an interdisciplinary research network hub that seeks to advance the study, design, and purpose of interactive, immersive technologies and experiences through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research approach. Our mission is to foster an inclusive ecosystem of research, knowledge dissemination, outreach, and collaboration on interactive immersive technologies and experiences. GI researchers and collaborators come from a wide array of disciplines including but not limited to humanities, social sciences, computer science, health sciences, and engineering. The GI network extends to multiple universities and industry partners with the goal of forwarding research in technology and human interaction.

- [Learn more about the Games Institute⁵](#)
- [Learn more about how we support research⁶](#)
- [GI YouTube Channel⁷](#)
- [GI LinkedIn⁸](#)
- [GI Instagram⁹](#)
- [GI Podcast¹⁰](#)

GPS Address: 175 Colombia Street West, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5Z5

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⁵ <https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/about-games-institute>

⁶ <https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/our-research>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/@TheGamesInstitute>

⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-games-institute/?viewAsMember=true>

⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/thegamesinstitute/>

¹⁰ <https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/our-research/games-institute-gi-official-podcast>

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Important Links (earlier hyperlinked in the document):

1. Conference website (<https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/events/international-conference-games-and-narrative-2025>)
2. Gather (<https://www.gather.town/>)
3. Anywhere on Earth, exact time for any time zone (https://time.is/Anywhere_on_Earth)
4. EasyChair submission portal (<https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=icgan2025>)
5. About Games Institute (<https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/about-games-institute>)
6. Games Institute research (<https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/our-research>)
7. Games Institute YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@TheGamesInstitute>)
8. Games Institute LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-games-institute/?viewAsMember=true>)
9. Games Institute Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/thegamesinstitute/>)
10. Games Institute Podcast (<https://uwaterloo.ca/games-institute/our-research/games-institute-gi-official-podcast>)