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*The Great Pendragon Campaign: medium
specificity and the narrative in a tabletop
role-playing game adaptation of Arthurian
legends*

*The Great Pendragon Campaign:
specyfika medium i opowieść w adaptacji
legend arturiańskich na narracyjną grę
fabularną*

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SUMMARY

The great Pendragon campaign by Greg Stafford is a supplement for the tabletop role-playing game *King Arthur Pendragon* designed by the same author, adapting the tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. In this thesis, I discuss how *The great Pendragon campaign* combines Arthurian tales with tabletop role-playing.

First tabletop role-playing games were created in the 1970s, and new titles are released every day. The popularity of tabletop role-playing has varied, and the number of studies on the topic is relatively low. Playing tabletop role-playing games is a social activity, and a role-playing group is usually divided between players who control individual characters in the fictitious game world, and the game master controlling the rest of the game's reality. Tabletop role-playing game sessions consist mostly of talking – describing the actions the characters take and the world around the characters, as well as speaking in-character. The games usually use sets of rules limiting what players and the game master can control and providing ways to resolve characters' actions. Playing a tabletop role-playing game is an ergodic rather than narrative experience, yet it involves a significant degree of narrativity.

Adaptations are a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. Adaptation is an “acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work or works” (Hutcheon 2006: 8). It is a creative process, and always includes changing the source text. A source text can be adapted to a different medium, with changes reflecting medium specificity. At the same time, changes may result from the times, culture, and worldview of the adapter. Adaptations to interactive media can be examples of the most extreme impact of the target medium, as they involve turning the story of the source text into an ergodic cybertext, allowing for the choices of the reader or the player.

King Arthur Pendragon is a game in which players play the knights in the times of King Arthur, in the world combining medieval romances with the culture and history of the whole Middle Ages. The game rules focus on various knightly activities and try to recapture the generic conventions of medieval romance. *The great Pendragon campaign*, published in 2006, contains descriptions of and events happening during the reigns of King Uther Pendragon and King Arthur in a year-by-year format, as well as adventure scenarios which let player characters explore the Arthurian world and take part in the events from the tales.

The campaign makes use of various adaptation strategies, from paraphrases and compressions to omissions and adding new material. As the lives of player characters are the focus of the game, the stories of King Arthur and his knights from the sources become background, and the events from romances become a kind of temporal setting for player characters. At the same time, the rules system of the game facilitates making the situations in which player characters have few possibilities of changing history interesting to the players. The campaign presents the events from multiple perspectives, and its themes include Arthurian idealism and valour despite transience.

STRESZCZENIE

The great Pendragon campaign Grega Stafforda to suplement do narracyjnej gry fabularnej *King Arthur Pendragon* tego samego autora. Jest to adaptacja opowieści o Królu Arturze i rycerzach Okrągłego Stołu. W niniejszej pracy badam, w jaki sposób *The great Pendragon campaign* łączy legendy arturiańskie z grami fabularnymi.

Pierwsze narracyjne gry fabularne powstały w latach 70. XX wieku; kolejne są publikowane każdego roku. Jest to stosunkowo mało znana forma rozrywki, badana w niewielu publikacjach. Uczestnicy narracyjnych gier fabularnych zazwyczaj dzielą się na graczy, kontrolujących po jednej postaci żyjącej i działającej w fikcyjnym świecie gry, i na mistrza gry, kontrolującego resztę świata. Rozgrywka składa się głównie z ustnego odgrywania postaci, opisywania ich działań i otaczającego je świata. Zazwyczaj podczas rozgrywki używany jest system zasad, wyznaczający, jak gracze i mistrz gry mogą wpływać na świat i jak rozstrzygane są działania postaci. Rozgrywka jest bardziej ergodyczna niż narracyjna, jednak posiada wiele elementów narracji.

Adaptacje są wszechobecnym zjawiskiem. Zgodnie z definicją Lindy Hutcheon, adaptacja jest „świadomą transpozycją konkretnego dzieła lub grupy dzieł” [tłumaczenie własne, WK] (Hutcheon 2005: 8). Proces adaptacji jest twórczy i zawsze uwzględnia dokonywanie zmian w oryginale. Zmiany mogą wynikać ze specyfiki medium, na które przełożony zostaje tekst źródłowy, jak również wynikać z czasów, kultury i światopoglądu autora adaptacji. Wpływ docelowego medium jest szczególnie wyraźny w adaptacjach na media interaktywne, które przekształcają opowieść tekstu źródłowego w ergodyczny cybertekst, kształtowany przez odbiorców.

W grze *King Arthur Pendragon* gracze wcielają się w role rycerzy z czasów Króla Artura, w świecie łączącym powieści rycerskie z kulturą i historią całego średniowiecza. Zasady gry dotyczą przygód rycerzy, jak i bardziej prozaicznych czynności, a równocześnie odtwarzają konwencję średniowiecznej powieści rycerskiej. Opublikowana w 2006 roku *The great Pendragon campaign* zawiera opisy wydarzeń mających miejsce w kolejnych latach panowania Króla Artura i króla Uthera Pendragona, jak również scenariusze pozwalające postaciom graczy na wzięcie udziału w wydarzeniach z opowieści arturiańskich.

Kampania korzysta z rozmaitych strategii adaptacji, od parafraz i streszczeń po pomijanie wątków z tekstów źródłowych lub dodawanie nowych. Ponieważ rozgrywka

skupia się na postaciach graczy, historii Króla Artura i jego rycerzy opisane w źródłach stają się zaledwie tłem, a fabuła powieści rycerskich staje się rozłożonymi w czasie realiami gry. Równocześnie zasady gry pozwalają na uatrakcyjnienie sytuacji, w których postacie graczy nie mają wielkich możliwości wpływania na wydarzenia. Kampania przedstawia wydarzenia z różnych punktów widzenia, a jej motywami są arturiański idealizm i dzielność pomimo przemijania.

Poznań, dnia

OŚWIADCZENIE

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Introduction

The story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table was told in Celtic legends, medieval chronicles, and romances. The tales inspired each other, making up an extensive corpus of Arthurian lore. This corpus is constantly increasing thanks to modern versions – from literary retellings to Hollywood blockbusters. There was an Arthurian webcomic (*Arthur, king of time and space* by Paul Gadzikowski), there was a Japanese animated television series (Toei Animation's *The Tales of the Knights of the Round Table: King Arthur*), there is a popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game (*Dark age of Camelot*).

The great Pendragon campaign by Greg Stafford is a supplement for the tabletop role-playing game *King Arthur Pendragon* by the same author, and it is an adaptation of Arthurian tales to the tabletop role-playing medium. Tabletop role-playing games have existed since the 1970s, yet they remain a niche hobby, and there are relatively few studies concerning them.

The campaign is a compelling object of study: it introduces the Arthurian tales, already adapted countless times, to a new medium and it is an attempt at combining the Arthurian narrative with players' interactive experience. Moreover, *King Arthur Pendragon* has been an innovative and influential role-playing game, and Greg Stafford's campaign is his work of love, “the culmination of forty years of research, pleasure, and gaming” (Stafford [2006] 2015a: back of the cover), designed with extraordinary diligence.

This thesis is an attempt at observing the relationship between the narrative and interactivity, at studying a text arising from medieval sources, but at the same time, from a contemporary medium and a modern perspective. The first two chapters serve as an introduction to tabletop role-playing games and to adaptation studies. Chapter 1 discusses the definitions and important concepts of tabletop role-playing games, their history and their

connections with narratives. Chapter 2 provides an overview of adaptations, including adaptations for interactive media, and discusses key terms of adaptation studies.

The other two chapters discuss *The great Pendragon campaign* itself. Chapter 3 is a description of the campaign, as well as the game *King Arthur Pendragon*. Chapter 4 identifies the themes of the campaign and analyses it in the contexts of adaptation studies and game studies.

Chapter 1: Tabletop role-playing games

1.1. Tabletop role-playing games: an overview

In a typical tabletop role-playing game, a number of players sitting together play the roles of imaginary characters, choosing and describing what they do and saying what they say, once in a while rolling dice and comparing the results with the rules of the game to determine the outcome of their actions. At the same time another player, often called the game master, describes the world around the player characters, controls non-player characters, and acts as a referee¹. That is how an average tabletop role-playing game experience may look like.

More detailed descriptions are readily available in the rulebooks of almost every tabletop role-playing game, for instance of the popular 5th edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Mearls et al. 2014: 2). The game that is the subject of this paper, *King Arthur Pendragon*, compares playing it to children's make-believe games like cops and robbers:

Playing Pendragon is like that style of childhood play, but instead of running around the backyard with sticks, the players use their collective imaginations. And instead of the incessant “Got you!” and “No you didn’t!” arguments, you use dice to settle disputes and arbitrations. Game play consists mostly of talk about and on behalf of your character, who is your “pretend guy” in the imaginary world. (Stafford 2010: 4)

¹ Player-game master nomenclature is the traditional one, but it can be confusing: the word *player* may either mean any participant of the game session (such as in the expression *player discourse*, as opposed to *academic discourse*), or any participants excluding the game master (such as in the division *player character* and *non-player* (i.e., game master) *character*). In this thesis, whenever any confusion could arise, outside of usual expressions like these, the word *player* will be used only in the second sense. For the first meaning, which includes the game master, the word *participant* will be used instead.

However, defining and describing role-playing games for academic purposes requires a more detailed approach.

1.1.1. Definition of role-playing games

Tabletop role-playing games are a type of role-playing games. For the latter, there is no one widely-accepted definition (Hitchens and Drachen 2009: 3). Even for the general concept of game, providing a real definition is notoriously difficult. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein ([1953] 1967: 31-34) observed that one cannot provide a single thing common to all kinds of games, from a game of chess to a game of “ring-a-ring-a-roses”. Instead, games could be described by means of family resemblances: there are numerous features shared by some, but not all kinds of games, just as some members of one family share the same eye colour, other the same hair colour, and so on.

Nevertheless, scholars come up with definitions that could be useful in research. The following one, which may be considered the most accurate so far, was devised by Arjoranta (2011) on the basis of the earlier definition by Hitchens and Drachen (2009):

1. **Game World:** There is a game world, which is defined at least partially in the act of role-playing. This game world is at least partially separate from the players [sic] ordinary life, and exists within a magic circle of play.
2. **Participants:** There are more than one participant, which may include computers.
3. **Shared Narrative Power:** More than one player can alter the narrative, or it is not role-playing, but storytelling. Shared narrative power implies narrative.
4. **Interaction:** There are varying modes of interaction with the game world. Conventions of play influence these forms of interaction, limiting the scope (What can I change in the game world?) and modes (How can I change it?) of interaction. (Arjoranta 2011: 14).

This definition is broad and, at least at a glance, does not provide much information about role-playing games. Many of its provisions could apply to numerous types of games. Some kind of imaginary game world exists, or at least is implied, in games from cops and robbers to *Super Mario*, and shared agency seems to be a must in any game with more than one participant. When it comes to two key words that differentiate role-playing games from others, *varying* models of interaction and *narrative*, the difference is rather qualitative:

many games have story elements, and while in role-playing games they tend to be particularly detailed and important (Arjoranta 2011: 8), they are not much more important than in many video games, from *The longest journey* belonging to adventure genre to *Half-life*, which is a first person shooter; and varying modes of interaction, listed by Hitchens and Drachen (2009: 16) as “at least combat, dialogue, and object interaction” do not constitute a clear-cut boundary – Arjoranta (2011: 9) himself noted some shooter video games with fragmentary dialogue options as borderline cases.

However, this is the most accurate definition created so far. The earlier definition by Hitchens and Drachen (2009: 16) included some important concepts for a number of role-playing game sub-categories, such as the division between players and a game-master – but as Arjoranta (2011: 5-6) noted, in other sub-categories such concepts may be absent; other elements of Hitchens and Drachen's definition may be redundant – such as the presence of characters, which, as Arjoranta (2011: 15) observed, are likely to appear in any game with a narrative element. And then, the earlier definitions, collected and reviewed by Hitchens and Drachen (2009: 4-5) were usually too broad or normative instead of descriptive, even if they were still useful for particular kinds of research.

Role-playing games are a diverse phenomenon. Hitchens and Drachen (2009: 4) noted profound differences between various sub-categories of role-playing games, and Arjoranta observed how the change of medium is followed by substantial changes to the game structure (2011: 7). Hitchens and Drachen (2009: 7) exercise the possibility that digital role-playing games are not role-playing games at all, even though eventually, they assume otherwise. Arjoranta's definition, however, is a successful attempt at covering all kinds of role-playing games. Moreover, it highlights two clashing forces, which will be the focus of the later part of this thesis – namely, interactivity and the narrative.

1.1.2. Description of tabletop role-playing games

Tabletop role-playing games are the earliest form of role-playing games (Hitchens and Drachen 2009: 10). The word “tabletop” indicates that the players sit around the table instead of sitting in front of a computer screen (like in digital games) or walking around the space where the game takes place (like in live-action role-playing). This kind of games is

sometimes called differently. “Pen-and-paper role-playing games” is one term, indicating that they are played using stationery rather than computers (and also, in the case of very many role-playing games, instead of game pieces and board). “Fantasy role-playing games” is another, used by Fine in his early, extensive study *Shared Fantasy* (Fine [1983] 2002). Then, enthusiasts and designers of this kind of games tend to apply the term “role-playing games” or “RPGs” exclusively to tabletop role-playing games.

Instead of providing a real definition of this group of games, it will be more useful to describe a number of specific features typical of tabletop role-playing games, in the spirit of Wittgenstein's family resemblances. Usually, there is a number of players involved, sitting together in the same place. Every player, besides the game master, controls a player character – a fictional person in the game world, described with words or numbers on a piece of paper (a character sheet) with respect to his or her traits and abilities (from “eyes: blue” or “race: elf” and narrative records of character background to “Strength 8” or “Dexterity 18”), as dictated by the game rules. In turn, the game master controls the rest of the game world. The name for the game master's function varies between games; for instance, the 5th edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* uses the term *Dungeon Master* (Mearls et al. 2014: 2). In his *Shared Fantasy*, Fine (2002: 2) used the name *referee*, which had been employed in many early games.

Player characters exist in a fictional world, which often is a fantasy or SF setting. During the game, this world is imagined by the players. Its physical representation may boil down to character sheets, or the game may involve maps, counters, miniature figures or handouts. The game play consists of a conversation between the players, it “is oral and does not involve physical activity” (Fine 2002: 7). The game master describes the world (usually what the player characters perceive) and role-plays non-player characters, improvising or following game rules or a scenario prepared earlier. The players decide on the actions of their characters and respond to the game master's words, describing what their characters do and speaking in character.

The game rules, provided in a rulebook of the particular game, regulate to some extent what the participants of the game can do. They divide the narrative power between the game master and the other players, they describe the game world, and define how some situations arising in the game should be resolved. Often, game rules require the use of dice – for instance, the results of a fight between two characters may be decided by a series of

dice rolls and by a comparison of the military prowess of both fighters listed on character sheets or in the game scenario.

Most tabletop role-playing games do not list conditions that must be met for the game to end. They do not recognise winning or losing, although some rulebooks may mention that player characters surviving, gaining wealth and experience constitute a victory (see St. Andre 2013: 3), and others assume that “if everyone had a good time and created a memorable story, they all win” (Mearls et al. 2014: 2). A single game session takes several hours, and the same characters can be played over the course of numerous sessions, with the action of the new session beginning where the action of the last one ended.

There are games without the features mentioned above that are nevertheless considered tabletop role-playing games. However, the pattern is applicable to the most popular games, as well as to *King Arthur Pendragon*.

1.2. Texts contributing to the tabletop role-playing game experience

During a session of a tabletop role-playing game, all participants improvise and contribute to the experience, and also, they depend on the materials provided by the designers of the game, as well as by the authors of game scenario and the supplement (Hammer 2007: 70-71). What affects the players is the game system, game setting, and the game scenario. All these three items can be to some extent separate texts and products, but they are often combined in rulebooks and supplements.

1.2.1. Game system

System, rules system, or game system is a common idea for tabletop role-playing games, and yet, it is difficult to define. In *The Forge*, a community of tabletop role-playing game theorists participating in the players' discourse as opposed to the academic one (Hitchens and Drachen 2009: 4), one definition was provided by Ron Edwards. He described the game system as “The means by which imaginary events are established during play, including character creation, resolution of imaginary events, reward procedures, and more. (...)” (Edwards 2004). In academic publications, the word *system* seems to be used to

describe the totality of game rules, usually, but not always, excluding the game setting (see Hitchens and Drachen 2009: 5, Montola 2009: 22, Mackay 2001: 34.3, Cover 2010: 184, Hammer 2007: 71; for a discussion on whether the notion of system should include the game setting, see Kominiarczuk 2013: 35-37).

The choice of game system impacts the experience of the game. Bergström's study (2012) investigated how different rules systems, explicitly excluding the game setting (Bergström 2012: 7), influence players' creativity. For instance, game rules prevent the players from going too imaginative with their ideas and try to keep a degree of consistency in the narrative emerging from the game play, and different systems do it to different degrees (Bergström 2012: 10). Also, rules can inspire, level playing field between more and less experienced players, simplify communication, develop the game play into an unexpected direction because of the random factor involved, and provide unique ways of dividing diegetic control (understood as power over the gamer world) between players and the game master (Bergström 2012: 11). On the non-academic side, *The Forge* community has among its founding articles an essay "System does matter" by Ron Edwards (Edwards 1999), establishing a theory built around an observation that different game systems cater to different players' needs.

There are countless tabletop role-playing game systems on the market. Most often, all the game rules necessary for playing the game are provided in the main rulebook (sometimes called the core rulebook); sometimes one system requires a number of rulebooks – for instance, edition 3.5 of *Dungeons & Dragons* lists *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* as necessary for play (Tweet et al. 2003: 4). Most popular games tend to have long rulebooks sold separately – in 3.5 edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Player's Handbook* alone is over 300 pages. Furthermore, there are many supplements to tabletop role-playing games, which often develop the basic rules. Still, there are alternative models of publishing – sometimes at least some form of the rules is made available online for free, for instance *Player's D&D Basic Rules* (Mearls et al. 2014), and then, there are minimalistic games – for example, *GHOST/ECHO* by John Harper (2009), which is only two pages long.

1.2.2. Game setting

The *setting* is the fictitious game world. The inclusion of game setting in the idea of game system is problematic, as the two are intertwined (Bergström 2012: 11); if a game allows the player to play a wizard, it implies that it is possible to be a wizard in the game world. A setting may be very broad – for instance, in the context of *Dungeons & Dragons* a setting usually means a plane of existence, a whole fictitious reality (Mearls et al. 2014: 2-3). It may be also more specific: in *Grey Ranks* the setting is limited to a single city (Warsaw) and a specific time frame (Warsaw Uprising) (Morningstar 2007). A setting can be described in the main rulebook, provided in a separate supplement, or not be described by the designers at all. A single game can be a rule system without a specific setting in mind, like *Fate Core System* (Balsera et al. 2013: 2), or with numerous suggested settings (see Mearls et al. 2014: 2-3), and game masters are sometimes considered to be responsible for developing the game setting on their own (Cover 2010: 6). The setting has a direct influence on the game play. Above all, it describes where the action takes place. Also, it greatly impacts the themes of game sessions – for instance, as Fine (2002: 76-77) observed, if the world contains endless treasures to be looted, the game subscribes to the American world view of unlimited good.

1.2.3. Scenario

The notion of *scenario* dates back to wargames, from which tabletop role-playing games emerged (Mackay 2001: 414.8). The idea what exactly a scenario is has varied over 30 years of the history of tabletop role-playing games. Writing in the 80's, Fine (2002: 78-79) equates a scenario with a motivation provided for player characters to act in the game world. According to this view, an evil knight imprisoning a princess in his castle would constitute a scenario, and the castle that the player characters would explore would not be a part of the scenario, but of the setting. Today, a scenario is often understood as a number of linked events happening during the game (for example see Balsera et al. 2013: 226 or Stafford 2010: 95, although a different definition is provided in Stafford 2010: 191). At the same time, different names for the scenario arose, with the term *adventure* likely being the

most popular (see for instance Mearls et al. 2014: 5), and sometimes used in academic publications, such as Cover (2010).

Completing one scenario takes one or more sessions of play (see for example Stafford 2010: 95, Balsera et al. 2013: 226, Mearls et al. 2014: 5). Furthermore, scenarios may be further linked into *campaigns* – series of adventures played with the same characters (see Mearls et al. 2014: 5), possibly connected by their plot. The distinction between scenarios and campaigns is not clear-cut; Cover (2010: 13) defined campaigns as series of game sessions, during which the same players play the same scenario. Because the same story is continued over the course of several game sessions, Mackay (2001: 26.6-27.6) mentions in his definition that the tabletop role-playing game is an *episodic* story creation system.

As opposed to film scenarios, which define in a detailed manner what will happen in the story and what characters will do, tabletop role-playing game scenarios assume at least a degree of freedom of the characters. Hammer (2007: 71) notes that even though a scenario can have a pre-defined outcome, what leads to this outcome still depends on the players' decisions. Scenario authors use various devices for keeping the game interactive, and for ensuring that the scenario is flexible enough to incorporate unexpected player choices. For instance, Mackay (2001: 139.0-141.5) mentioned preparing descriptions only of these non-player characters that are likely to appear during the game session, and planning the events that will happen no matter what choices players take. Cover (2010: 29) discusses the implications of a scenario organised around a flowchart, where different outcomes of an event are supposed to lead to different boxes in the diagram. In a popular advice article for game masters, John Ross ([1999] 2002: 1) states that only a general structure of the story happening during the session is needed. Alternatively, game masters can play without a scenario, just letting the players explore the game world (Fine 2002: 79-80).

Many game masters design their own scenarios. Preparation for the game is often considered to be time-taking (Mackay 2001: 141.5). Alternatively, numerous pre-made scenarios are available. Some scenarios are included in tabletop role-playing game rule-books – often, an introductory scenario is provided for new players starting the game (see Stafford 2010: 191). Sometimes, especially in the case of more avant-garde games, the whole system is designed with a single scenario in mind (see Harper 2009). Then, there are numerous scenarios published separately, sometimes called *adventure modules* (Mackay

2001: 60.4). They may be published commercially or fan-designed and made available for free.

There is no strict pattern that all ready-made scenarios follow. While some may take tens of pages rife with narration, descriptions, and numerous illustrations, others may consist of a single page with a map and a key (see *One Page Dungeon Contest* 2015). Nevertheless, there is a general outline that seems to be followed by official adventure modules to the most popular games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Pathfinder* or *Dark Heresy*. This outline may be observed on the example of *We be goblins*, a *Pathfinder* scenario (Pett 2011).

1.2.4. A sample scenario: *We be goblins!*

We be goblins! is a 16-page long booklet, published in colour. Its text is divided into sections that correspond to narrative divisions in the plot of the scenario, similar to scenes in drama or film. The text is addressed to the game master, and contains advice how the scenario should be run, such as “Allow the players a moment to describe their goblin characters to each other” (Pett 2011: 4). More importantly, it also contains descriptions of the parts of the game world that the player characters will encounter, including the events that are supposed to take place during the game, such as “the other goblins from the tribe begin daring the PCs to show off their heroics” (Pett 2011: 5). The game master is supposed to develop the events of the game on the basis of such descriptions. Then, some parts of the text, written in blue, are supposed to be read aloud by the game master during the session, for instance while role-playing the goblin chief sending the player characters for a mission: “And if you not find fireworks, you not come back or we feed you to Squealy Nord!” (Pett 2011: 4).

Besides such a text, the module contains various aids for the game master. There are blocks containing the game statistics of the encountered creatures and traps, referencing the *Pathfinder* system. Then, there are illustrations depicting characters, creatures and things described in the module, as well as small frames with goblin rhymes, contributing to the feel of the scenario. Finally, there are two maps: one situating the area where the scenario takes place in the part of *Pathfinder* game world, and one of the old shipwreck that the player characters are ordered to explore, with numbered areas. The part of the module con-

cerning the exploration of the shipwreck references these areas and contains their descriptions: how they look like, and what monsters, traps, and treasures they contain. The pre-generated player characters are another gaming aid – the players are supposed to play them or create their own characters instead (Pett 2011: 3).

Like most tabletop role-playing game scenarios, *We be goblins* mixes linear narrative and interactivity. In the scenario, each player controls a goblin, who is sent from his or her village to loot a stash of fireworks from a shipwreck. Two general outcomes are mentioned in the scenario – the characters either succeed in their quest or not (Pett 2011: 11). However, numerous times the module describes the opportunities for the players to take small-scale choices, influencing how their path to the ending will look. Significantly large parts of the module are conditional: “The PCs [player characters] are free to take a dare or not, but for every dare that is proposed with no PC stepping up to the challenge, the other Licktoads mock the PCs furiously” (Pett 2011: 5), or “If the PC can make the five Fortitude saves in a minute, she is rewarded with a loan of the mighty Gorge of Gluttons” (Pett 2011: 6), and the action develops differently depending on the player’s choice or the results of dice rolls. Sometimes the text of the module describes just the events that happen regardless of players’ decisions, and does not mention how the players are likely to react to them. The module assumes that the players act predictably – the scenario does not give any assistance to the game master if they try, for instance, to assassinate goblin chief instead of obeying his orders (Pett 2011: 4), even though the interactivity of tabletop role-playing games makes such a turn of events entirely possible. Ultimately, the scenario assumes that there is a single path that the players will follow, with some relatively insignificant exceptions – as is the case with the dares mentioned above, or with the possibility to explore the rigging of the shipwreck or not.

1.3. History of tabletop role-playing games

Tabletop role-playing games arose from miniature wargames (Mackay 2001: 43.0-49.0), especially from their more open-ended scenarios played with a referee by a larger number of players (Appelcline 2014a: 9). The first game system, *Dungeons & dragons* by Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax, was published in 1974 (Appelcline 2014a: 14). It was a medieval fantasy game. 70s’ also saw the first tabletop role-playing game with a detailed setting (*The*

empire of the petal throne), the first game supplements including setting supplements, and the first published scenario (“The temple of the frog”) (Appelcline 2014a: 19-20), as well as forays into different genres, from SF to western.

In the '80s, the popularity of the hobby was at its peak (Appelcline 2014b: 351). One of the innovations of the decade were very successful published scenarios linked into long campaigns, together telling epic stories – for instance popular *Dragonlance* for *Dungeons & Dragons*, *The Enemy Within* for *Warhammer Fantasy Role Play*, or *The shadows of Nyarlathotep* for *Call of Cthulhu* (Appelcline 2014a: 60, 148, 260). Many games designed in the '80s paid heavy attention to the theme and storytelling, such as *Call of Cthulhu* based on Lovecraftian horror (Appelcline 2014a: 259), *Toon* (Appelcline 2014b: 33) or dystopian *Paranoia* (Appelcline 2014b: 245). Such games, called by Shannon Appelcline *storytelling games*, were experimenting with styles of game play different from this of exploration-focused, combat-heavy *Dungeons & dragons*, focusing on plot and character instead (Appelcline 2014c: 6, also see Appelcline 2014a: 260). At the same time, a number of tabletop role-playing games (or, as Appelcline (2014b: 19) calls them, pseudo-RPGs) focused on tactical game play reminiscent of wargames and boardgames (Appelcline 2014b: 11, 19, 20), or pursued the rules-heavy, simulation approach set as early as in the 70s with *Chivalry & Sorcery* (Fine 2002: 18-19), for instance *GURPS*, the first “universal” system (i.e. designed to fit any possible setting) (Appelcline 2014b: 37-38), or *Rolemaster* (Appelcline 2014b: 97). Generally, the decade was a period of complexity in game rules (Appelcline 2014b: 353-354).

The '90s was a period of continuing development of storytelling games, with the horror/urban fantasy/dark superhero games published by White Wolf, such as *Vampire: The masquerade* or *Werewolf: The apocalypse* rising to top popularity (Appelcline 2014c: 13, 376). White Wolf systems influenced other games, from steampunk *Castle Falkenstein* (Appelcline 2014b: 294) to SF *Fading Suns* (Appelcline 2014c: 274) to Asian fantasy *Legend of five rings* (Appelcline 2014c: 100). At the time, the idea of *metaplot* appeared – of the ongoing story of a role-playing game setting, developed with every new publication (Appelcline 2014c: 371). When it comes to game rules, there was a reaction to the complexity of the '80s, with some far simpler games, like *Over the edge* or *FUDGE*, being released (Appelcline 2014c: 55, 255), and there was a number of notable experiments with core assumptions of tabletop role-playing games, such as in *Amber Diceless Role-Playing* (Appelcline 2014c: 112)

In 2000, the third edition of *Dungeons & dragons* was released, and because of an innovative Open Game Licence, the rules of the game could be used by other publishers. This spawned countless supplements and rulebooks compatible with *Dungeons & dragons* in the following years (Appelcline 2014c: 156-158), as well as gave rise to complete games independent from *Dungeons & dragons*, yet using its rules (Appelcline 2014c: 172), including hugely popular *Pathfinder* (Appelcline 2014d: 221-224). Then, games like the fourth edition of *Dungeons & dragons* and the third edition of *Warhammer fantasy role play* borrowed a lot of design elements from boardgames (Appelcline 2014c: 311). At the same time, many designers and players returned to the past (and they still do) with new games either heavily inspired by the tabletop role-playing games of the '70s and '80s (mostly old editions of *Dungeons & dragons*) or being their remakes (for example, *Dungeon Crawl Classics* – see Appelcline 2014d: 96-97; other games in the same vein include for instance Raggi 2013)

The 2000s also saw a proliferation of experimental game designs, new mechanics affecting the core ideas of gameplay, self-published, rules-light games inspired by the Forge theory, and story games (Appelcline 2014d: 407-409). The latter are either borderline tabletop role-playing games or a different entity altogether. Another important trend of the '00s was the rise of PDF publishing, print on demand and Internet sales, all making publishing easier and cheaper. It was followed by the popularity of crowdfunding tabletop role-playing game publications in the last few years (Appelcline 2014d: 3).

1.4. Narrativity of tabletop role-playing games

In the study of tabletop role-playing games, a modest number of academic writing on the topic, accompanied by a relatively large number of non-academic theory by the gamers themselves, uses a variety of approaches (Hitchens and Drachen 2009: 4). In this thesis, I discuss how Arthurian story is adapted to tabletop role-playing games. Narrative aspects of these games have been studied a number of times, but still, the questions remain to what extent they feature the narrative and whether they can be considered a narrative genre.

A narrative may be defined as “the representation (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators to one, two, or several (more or less

overt) narratees” (Price 2003 [1987]: 58). Under a broader definition, narrative could be also understood as a mode of telling events (as opposed to e.g. enacting them) (Price 2003: 58). Narratives appear in various areas of human experience (Guter 2010: 139), and one could consider tabletop role-playing games to be such an area. The role-players tell the adventures of their characters, and often perceive gaming as a narrative activity (Cover 2010: 86). What is more, Linda Hutcheon (2006: 22) lists interactivity as one of three modes of engagement with stories, along showing and telling. An interactive game can contain a story like a book or film, even if it is experienced in a different way.

However, it is argued that tabletop role-playing games are not narratives. Even though Daniel Mackay (2001: 26.6) defines these games as story-creation systems, he claims that no narration takes place in them. Instead, playing a tabletop role-playing game is an ergodic, not narrative, experience, as it consists of player choices and descriptions which do not constitute a story (Mackay 2001: 356.0-360.5). Narration is created only afterwards, for instance by players discussing the game (Mackay 2001: 360.5).

John Kim (2003) states that stories *are* present in tabletop role-playing, either as participants' “interpretation of shared play” or their “full conception of the imagined reality”. Still, under the model of static storytelling he uses, tabletop role-playing games are not a medium. Kim claims that for something to be a narrative medium, it has to be a means of transmitting the story from the author to the audience, and in the case of such games these two roles are not separate. Instead, he states that the games themselves make use of various media, such as speech or computers (in the case of games played using Internet Relay Chat). Kim identifies two contrasting paradigms for thinking about the games: they are either understood as shared storytelling or as a virtual experience. Narrative analysis is possible only under the first paradigm.

The authors of articles on the definition of role playing games, Michael Hitchens and Anders Drachen, as well as Jonne Arjoranta, are cautious with describing the relationship between role-playing games and the narrative. Hitchens and Drachen (2009: 8) acknowledge that the existence of narrative in role-playing games is disputed, and in their definition write that such games have narrative elements, but “these elements cannot be termed narrative according to traditional narrative theory” (Hitchens and Drachen 2008: 16). Arjoranta (2011: 8) wrote that all games, not just role-playing games, have “narrative elements due to containing consecutive sequences of events given meaning to by the player” (Arjoranta 2011: 6). According all three scholars, there is a narrative in role-playing

games, but it is emergent, as it is created by players during the game, and does not exist beforehand (Arjoranta 2011: 14, Hitchens and Drachen 2009: 15).

The creation of narrative in tabletop role-playing games by Jennifer Grouling Cover (2010) provides a wider perspective. Cover (2010: 53) claims that tabletop role-playing games may be perceived as multimedia texts, and as systems using oral text of the game session and written texts of the rulebooks to create and tell stories. It is not obvious if tabletop role-playing games should be considered to be a medium or genre, as the two notions are blurry (Cover 2010: 56), but the expression “tabletop role-playing game medium” is nevertheless used (Cover 2010: 125).

According to Cover, there are narrative elements during the sessions, such as when the game master acts as a narrator to tell a sequence of events to the players-narratees, but they are far from the traditional model of narrative because, for instance, the narrator tends to address the narratees in the unusual second person (Cover 2010: 85-86), or because the participants skip from talking about the game world to talking about the real world (Cover 2010: 88). During a game session, it is difficult to point out to boundaries between what is narrative and what is not, as different parts of the game are situated in different places in the spectrum of narrativity. Game master's descriptions of the world and events and the player's descriptions of their characters' actions possess high narrativity, while dice rolls, players talking about their possible actions or discussions out of game world (that is, off-record speech) feature low narrativity (Cover 2010: 94). In conclusion, tabletop role-playing games do not need to consist solely of narratives in order to be considered narrative games (Cover 2010: 105).

The idea of role-playing games not being narratives but possessing a degree of narrativity is endorsed by a reading of the seminal book *Cybertext: Perspectives on ergodic literature* by Espen J. Aarseth (1997). The author develops the notion of *cybertext*, a category fundamentally different from the narrative (Aarseth 1997: 85), consisting of works from text adventure video games to *I Cing*. While narratives consist of narration and description, a cybertext consists of narration, description, and ergodics, that is, reader's or player's choices (Aarseth 1997: 95). While approaching the roots of adventure video games, Aarseth (1997: 98) discusses the tabletop role-playing game *Dungeons & dragons* and categorizes it as an oral cybertext, even though he mistakenly calls it a strategy board game. Categorizing tabletop role-playing games as cybertexts means acknowledging that they are

a distinct entity from narratives, but still share the elements of narration and description with them.

In this thesis, I assume that a tabletop role-playing game, and especially a text of a rulebook or of a scenario, does not constitute a narrative; at best, narrative can be one of its parts. A published scenario resembles a technical manual rather than a novel or film (Cover 2010: 63). However, while a game may not be a story itself, its world still has a potential for stories (Cover 2010: 90). Also, a single game consists of three levels of texts: primary (game system), secondary (scenario), and tertiary (game session) (Hammer 2007: 70-71), and they all to some extent influence the events happening during the game play, even though the ability of the game master to modify the game text is a significant affordance of tabletop role-playing games, and even though one can argue that the performance of players and game masters during the session is what matters the most (Mackay 2001: 19.2). Thus, the themes, genres, intended messages and underlying world-views of primary and secondary texts transpire to the game experience and influence it. That is why I am convinced that it matters to study such features of game systems and scenarios using an approach similar to the one applied to narrative texts, but still taking into account ergodic and interactive nature of the game; moreover, I think that observing how the form of a game impacts themes and motifs of texts of culture can provide insight into gaming, as well as into contemporary culture in general.

1.4.1. Selected studies on narrative aspects of tabletop role-playing games

Only a few studies discussed the narrative aspects of tabletop role-playing games (Cover 2010: 88). In the most substantial one, Cover (2010) provided numerous observations besides approaching the problems described in the previous sections. While discussing the differences between tabletop and computer role-playing, she argued that narrative agency is the defining trait (the *rhetorical purpose*) of the former (2010: 47-50). She also discussed the impact of different media on the story that originated from the *Dungeons & dragons* scenario *The temple of elemental evil* (Cover 2010: 63-71) and came to the conclusion that in this case, only the narrative elements, not the whole narrative, are common to different media (Cover 2010: 68-69). Another topic she brought up was whether tabletop role-playing games comprise of spatial exploration or of a narrative; she found out that the

games have a number of features of both (Cover 2010: 75-84). She applied the alternative possible world theory to role-playing, using the distinction between actual world, alternative possible world, textual actual world, text reference world, and narrative textual world to describe different elements of games (Cover 2010: 89-91). Finally, she also discussed authorship in tabletop role-playing games (Cover 2010: 124-147).

A number of Polish scholars studied the narrative aspects of tabletop role-playing games, and especially, of published game scenarios. The studies by Michał Mochocki and Jerzy Szeja (as cited in Krawczyk 2009: 138) are two examples of general studies with a significant focus on scenarios. Then, the article by Stanisław Krawczyk (2009) is an example of a narratological study tackling a more narrow research problem: identifying story patterns in scenarios published for two popular game systems. All these studies followed the notion that tabletop role-playing game scenarios contain a large number of literary features and thus may be researched using the methodology of literary studies (Krawczyk 2009: 138).

One Polish study that seems to be particularly involved in the topics related to this thesis is *Socialized fiction: Role-playing games as a multidimensional space of interction between literary theory and practice* by Agata Zarzycka (2009). While studying the rulebooks for *World of darkness* games as *poststructures*, entities with traits of both literary texts and technical manuals (Zarzycka 2009: 125-126), the author made a number of observations on the narrative aspects of tabletop role-playing games. She listed similarities between the games and literature: various literary concepts and techniques used in the games, intertextuality, and connections with pop-cultural works created for other media (Zarzycka 2009: 90-95). She noted that tabletop role-playing games create a unique multivocal narrative environment for “exchanging often radically different viewpoints and, moreover, incorporating such exchanges into a bigger whole” (Zarzycka 2009: 154). She observed that language, nomenclature, and cultural references may be used in a rulebook to enhance immersion (Zarzycka 2009: 133-135). Moreover, she studied the fictional realities of role-playing games in a way resembling literary analysis: she approached game rulebooks with regards to their underlying themes and philosophies, describing the postmodern and post-structuralist influences in *Mage* (Zarzycka 2009: 125-149), the role of subversion in *Changeling: The dreaming* (Zarzycka 2009: 178-191), the influences of ecological theories and social issues on *Werewolf: The apocalypse* (Zarzycka 2009: 210-222) or the signifi-

cance of the taming of the unknown and estrangement of the known in the whole line of games (Zarzycka 2009: 200-205).

Liz Henry (2003) approached the tabletop role-playing as an example of group narrative and discussed the authorship, arriving at conclusions that role-playing experience draws from many texts and many authors; similar observations were made by Hammer (2007: 70-71). Henry also described the issues of power relations, gender, and information flow in authorship. In her view, all components and participants of tabletop role-playing games are parts of “the narrative system that makes the story” (Henry 2003).

Daniel Mackay, while studying tabletop role-playing games as a performing art, tried to identify what constitutes the script sphere during the game (Mackay 2001: 239.0); in such a sphere, role-playing game campaign (called there “narrative”, see Mackay 2001: 27.9) would exist as a chronicle of events that happen during the game (Mackay 2001: 313.2), thus taking a form similar to narrative texts. Also, cultural allusions arising in the game were also approached (Mackay 2001: 195.0 – 203.0). According to Mackay, they make the game play a kind of “pretechnological, enacted, hypertext” (Mackay 2001: 197.3) referencing pop-culture texts known to the players. He compared such references to ones made by characters of satirical comedy films and to the carnivalesque as described by Mikhail Bakhtin (Mackay 2001: 198.4-199.6). Ultimately, the whole reality of the game is described as derived from the patterns of pop-cultural artefacts (Mackay 2001: 216.6).

When it comes to player discourse, discussing the very large corpus of published player aids, game master advice books, articles, blog posts and topics on discussion boards lays outside of the scope of this thesis, even if I were to limit myself to the texts with a focus on narrative elements of the game; three selected sources will have to suffice as a sample. One example of approaching the tabletop role-playing games similarly to narratives is *The big list of RPG plots* by John Ross (2002), a list trying to describe all possible plots in tabletop role-playing boiled down to simple patterns, collected from published scenarios as an aid for the game masters preparing for a game session. The list contains 34 abstracted story premises with common plot twists and complications. The author claims that there is not much more to tabletop role-playing game plots than just a premise, and that the game-play should be character-driven, not plot-driven (Ross 2002: 1).

Another piece of player discourse is the essay by Dariel Quiogue (1998), where he analysed tabletop role-playing games in terms of theme, setting, and plot, and observed the general pattern of the plot. The author described the tabletop role-playing games as works

of collaborative fiction as well as games, with participant taking on dual roles of authors and the audience. In this light, he interpreted the traits of player characters in terms of affecting the story, not the game world: “All character descriptors, including equipment, spells, special knowledges, social contacts, etc etc are nothing more or less than plot control devices, 'switches' by which the player may try to influence circumstance to follow a desired direction” (Quiogue 1998). He observed that like a narrative, a role-playing game session can have its central theme. The story of a game follows the pattern of plot hooks which the player characters will encounter, obstacles they will meet, actions which they will take, resolutions of these actions and their consequences. At the same time, the game master prepares only the framework of the story – “a whole network of tracks” (Quiogue 1998) that the players choose to follow or not.

Narrative aspects of tabletop role-playing games were also discussed in non-academic, but highly influential Ron Edwards' essays, especially “Narrativism: Story now”, where Edwards develops the approach observed by Kim (2003), and similar to the earlier one by Quiogue (1998), of understanding tabletop role-playing games as shared storytelling (Edwards 2003). The essay follows the Threefold Model of role-playing games, which was developed in the Forge community and which assumes that players follow different goals (called *creative agendas*), and the game systems differently facilitate achieving these goals: *gamism* means the goal is to compete, *narrativism* – to create the story and pursue its theme, *simulationism* – to explore the various aspects of the game world and its characters and situations (Edwards 2001). As Edwards claims, these goals are not universal to all players and may be exclusive. Like other scholars and players, Edwards in his 2003 essay writes that a fixed story does not exist during play – it starts to exist only when the game session is over. What follows is a discussion on how the narrativist premise may be applied in games and game design. The whole essay is rather normative than descriptive – it stands as a critique of particular 'dysfunctional' styles of play, and as a recommendation of techniques that may be used by game participants and designers to cater for narrativist needs.

All in all, scholars and role-players alike raised a number of research questions focusing on stories in tabletop role-playing games. The most important one is whether tabletop role-playing games possess narrative features, and if so, how and to what extent. Other significant ones include the issues of narrative agency, authorship, and relationships between tabletop role-playing games and stories from other media. Role-playing games are different from traditional narrative media, but I do not see the differences as hindrances in

research. Instead, they create a unique environment where stories – in some way or another – are born, and studying them is rife with possibilities.

Chapter 2: Adaptation theory

2.1. Adaptation studies

Adaptations are an indispensable part of our culture. They appear everywhere, from filmic versions of literary classics, through hugely successful multi-media franchises, to stagings of plays and operas. And they are appreciated: despite countless fans angry at every last adaptation of their favourite work and despite never-ending fidelity criticism, they are enjoyed by audiences, acclaimed by critics, and on many times considered cultural cornerstones – for one, the plays by Shakespeare were adaptations of earlier works, just as Homer's epics were adaptations of oral legends.

One can suspect that scholarly and critical interest in adaptations already existed in ancient Sumer, as the first readers of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* likely discussed how it differed from the earlier tales about the hero. Since then, numerous scholars studied how, for instance, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Paradise Lost* or *Ulysses* adapted their sources. Recently, the interest was rekindled by the developments in film studies and the postmodern idea of intertextuality. At the same time, scholars have been inspired by the prominence of many cinematic adaptations, with the majority of winners of Best Picture Academy Awards being adaptations.

Besides a large number of case studies discussing particular adaptations, there have been some academic works, both international and Polish ones, trying to describe the whole discipline and develop its theoretical background. First examples of critical reflection on filmic adaptation date back to 1920s (Miczka 1998: 9). Half a century later, *The novel and the cinema* by Geoffrey Atheling Wagner (1975, as cited in Whelehan 1999: 8-9) described the relationship of the novel and the filmic medium, including stems of modern adaptation

theory. Later significant works written specifically with a focus on adaptation and concerned with literature and cinema include *Novel to Film* by Brian McFarlane (1996, as cited in Whelehan 1999: 9) and *Adaptations: From text to screen, screen to text* edited by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (1999). Among the notable works not limited to adaptations to and from filmic medium are *Adaptations and appropriations* by Julie Sanders (2006) and *A theory of adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon (2006). When it comes to Polish studies, particularly significant is Alicja Helman's *Twórcza zdrada: Filmowe adaptacje literatury* [Creative adultery: Cinematic adaptations of literature] (1998b), providing an in-depth overview of the theory of cinematic adaptation. Most of these studies described a body of adaptation theory illustrated by case studies of selected adaptations.

Judging adaptations by the degree of fidelity to their originals is common. Critics, authors, and fans alike sometimes accuse adaptations of desecration, betrayal, and various other heinous acts against the original work (see Hutcheon 2006: 2-3). However, contemporary scholars of adaptation tend to reject such fidelity criticism. After all, different forms of art have different means of expression and total fidelity is impossible (Hutcheon 2006: 3). According to Imelda Whelehan, judging fidelity is inherently subjective (1999: 2) and boils down to value judgements on whether one medium is superior to another (1999: 9). As an alternative to such a form of criticism, she suggests “the practice of comparing narrative strategies in order to better establish what key shifts are made in the process of transition” (1999: 9).

Adaptations are an attractive field of study, especially since abandoning fidelity criticism paves the way for more scientifically promising approaches. The adaptation is a cultural phenomenon of enormous proportions. At the same time, every adaptation is a testimony to the time when, and the culture in which, it was created (Helman 1998b: 12), as the changes to the same core story adapted to a different medium reflect the themes and ideas important to the adapters and their audiences. What is more, a single work is often adapted many times, providing an excellent opportunity for comparison of different adaptations, different authors, and different societies (Helman 1998b: 12).

2.2. Definition of adaptation

As a formal entity, adaptation is an “acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work or works” (Hutcheon 2006: 8). It is a broad concept, which encompasses all kinds of source- and target media and genres, and takes many forms – including, for instance, sequels, prequels, parodies, or compressions of the source work (Sanders 2006: 18). There are so many adaptation strategies and practices that, in fact, it is impossible to frame adaptations as a single mode of work with a source text (Helman 1998b: 8). Moreover, the term *adaptation* itself does not only denote a formal entity, but also a process of creation – a “creative *and* interpretative act of appropriation/salvaging” and of reception – an “extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (Hutcheon 2006: 8).

Adaptations are not merely replications of their source texts or of their meanings; they are inherently creative works. One source text can be transposed to the same medium as a previous adaptation, and yet produce radically different results – one can compare Robert Bresson's 1974 *Lancelot du Lac* and 1975 *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, both based on Arthurian legends, as a particularly striking example. An adapter has to interpret the source text; the adaptation is a result of this interpretation (Hutcheon 2006: 8), and thus, something which has not existed before. New elements are added to the original to fill the requirements of the new genre or medium, to make the adapted work relevant and topical, or to revise the original and present its themes from a different point of view (Saudners 2005: 19). Adapters bring to the source text the sensibilities and values of their time, culture, and of their own (Whelehan 1999: 13). The resulting adaptation can end up owing much more to the adapter than to the author of the original. And then, even the authors of original works are heavily inspired by other works, including works of other genre or medium; Eisenstein, for one, regularly reread novels by Émile Zola, which affected his films (Eisenstein [1928]: 95). Thus, criticizing adaptations as inherently derivative and not creative is groundless.

There are numerous reasons for the popularity of adaptations, and for adapting an existing work instead of creating an original work from scratch. For the audience, there is a pleasure in experiencing the material which one knows and likes, and which is at the same time kept fresh by the changes inevitable in an adaptation; it is a pleasure of “revisiting of a theme with variations” (Hutcheon 2006: 115). Adaptations also have an intertextual appeal, as they can invite the audience to interpret the allusions to the original, and also can provide

commentary on the nature of the source and target forms of art (Hutcheon 2006: 117). For the authors, the reasons to adapt include both financial gain (which is likely if the source work is popular, as is the case with canonical texts of culture) and personal reasons, from educating the audiences about the original and entering the dialogue with the source text to paying homage to the beloved work.

2.3. Key terms in adaptation studies and typologies of adaptations

The key concepts in adaptation studies include various typologies of adaptations, as well as the most important adapter's motivations and other factors influencing their work. Probably the most basic distinction is the difference between *adaptations* and *appropriations*. Julie Sanders (2006: 26) defines appropriations as having a more distant relationship with the original than adaptations. She seems to suggest that the boundaries between the two concepts are not set in stone: appropriations *may* be to a genre different from that of the original, the reading of the original *may* not be crucial to understanding the appropriation, and the information that the work is based on another *may* not be very overt (Sanders 2006: 26). As appropriations, Sanders discusses for instance *Kiss me Kate*, the 1953 film in which the storyline of the original *The taming of the shrew* is a play-within-a play (Sanders 2006: 27), and Graham Swift's *Last orders*, a novel that follows the form and structure of William Faulkner's *As I lay dying* without acknowledging the source (Sanders 2006: 32). It seems that it is impossible to categorize most works as either adaptations or appropriations – between these two extremes there is a whole continuum of adaptations more or less connected to the original.

Among the typologies of adaptations, the one by Geoffrey Atheling Wagner is quoted particularly often. In his system, *transpositions* are works directly transferred to a different form or medium (in his case, from novel to film), *commentaries* change the source text, and *analogies* dramatically recontextualize the originals (Wagner 1975: 222-223, as cited in Whelehan 1999: 8). This categorization is another continuum – above all else, direct transpositions with no changes of any kind to the source text are an impossible ideal; Wagner himself admitted that his model example of transposition, the 1939 filmic adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, include significant cuts to the original (Whelehan 1999: 9). Some other typologies of adaptations, or rather of adapter's approaches, were collected in

Miczka (1998); similarly, they focused on “the levels of proximity” to the original (Hutcheon 2006:7). In the end, though, as Linda Hutcheon (2006: 7) noted, typologies like that draw attention to the fidelity of adaptations, and that is not the primary concern for this thesis.

2.3.1. Story as the object of adaptation

One key term that is particularly important and requires further elaboration is *story*. Like *game*, it is a word that is commonly understood, but which is difficult to define. For most theorists, it is the story that is the most significant entity transposed during adaptation (Hutcheon 2006: 10).

In the context of narratology, stories are not just series of related events – that is the definition of *fabula* (Bal [1985] 1999: 5). Besides the *fabula*, a story has a number of *aspects* (Bal 1999: 78). These are the following: the temporal framing and the specific ordering of events which may not be the same as the chronology (Bal 1999: 80); the *rhythm* of a story, that is, the speed at which events happen (Bal 1999: 99-100); the *frequency*, or, how many times a single event is described, or how many repetitions of that event happen without description (Bal 1999: 111-112); personalized *characters* instead of abstracted *actors* of the *fabula* (Bal 1999: 114-115); *fabula's places* being linked and transformed by character's perception and thus becoming *spaces* (Bal 1999: 132-133); and finally, *focalization*, the perspectives from which the events are observed and narrated (Bal 1999: 142-143).

The aspects listed by Bal (1999) exist on the narrative level, not on the level on physical representation. Still, the question whether a story can exist regardless of its genre or medium is non-trivial (Hutcheon 2006: 10). However, a degree of independence has to be assumed if the story is to be considered adaptable.

2.3.2. Medium specificity and related terms

Another key term is *medium specificity*, which becomes crucial when a work is adapted from one medium to another. Different media, and similarly, different genres, use different means of expression. An adapted work has to be translated to the formal conventions of the

new medium or genre (Hutcheon 2006: 35). Novels adapted to films are cut, streamlined and condensed, while stories of films adapted to novels can be extended, and their characters' motivations can be developed. As discussed by Tadeusz Miczka (1998: 19-20) some scholars argued for the *equivalence model*, stating that among different media there is a universal grammar of sorts, where every sign of one medium has its specific, unambiguous equivalent in another. However, the opposite seems more likely: that telling “is not the same as showing” (Hutcheon 2006: 43), that systems of meaning of one medium cannot be straightforwardly translated into another.

To immerse the audience in the fictional world and the story, different media employ differently the three *modes of engagement*: telling, showing, and interaction (Hutcheon 2006: 22). Because of them, different media are often seen as predestined for conveying specific stories in a specific way. Telling mode is associated with a large scope of possibilities when it comes to focalization, with intimate first person narrators and distanced omniscient narrators available to the authors of prose fiction (Hutcheon 2006: 52-53). Showing and interaction seem to fare well with presenting external world, but are considered less suitable for interiority – what the characters think and feel (Hutcheon 2006: 56-57). Telling mode is also attributed unique capabilities of handling temporal relations (Hutcheon 2006: 63), and has many specific rhetorical figures available (Hutcheon 2006: 68). Hutcheon (2006: 52) warns that these preferences for particular ways of telling stories are clichés and can, and often are, averted; nevertheless, they may help to understand particular adapters' choices when they change the source material.

2.3.3. Topicality

The last key term related to adaptation that will be discussed here is *topicality*. As was said before, an adaptation bears the mark of its time, place, and other contexts. Thus, it is possible to say that an adaptation is *always* topical, “it does not exist in vacuum” (Hutcheon 2006: 142). The effect of topicality is probably the most overt when the adaptor changes time, place, or culture of the original work. Modernized filmic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, such as Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *Romeo + Juliet* or Michael Almereyda's 2000 *Hamlet*, stand as prominent examples of the pursuit of topicality by moving the original story to contemporary times. No less topical are the changes to the genre or stylistics of the origi-

nal: Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet* was modernized not only by using a contemporary setting, but also by adopting the visual style reminiscent of MTV and music videos. However, even retaining or emphasizing the context of the original can be topical. Linda Hutcheon (2006: 145) provides an example of Michael Radford's 2005 film version of *Merchant of Venice*, which highlighted the social relations, especially an approach to women and Jews, of historical Venice. Thus, the film provided a commentary on very topical issues of anti-Semitism and the discrimination of women.

Topicality and medium specificity lead to shifting the context of the original work, and thus make adaptation studies a valuable tool at analysing not only a singular work, but also culture and society. Adaptations “make alterations that reveal much about the larger contexts of reception and production” (Hutcheon 2006: 28). By understanding what is adapted, how and why, and by analysing the differences between different versions of the same story, it is possible to come to conclusions about what the adaptors, and by extension, their cultures, find topical and important, how they perceive the story and the medium. It is possible to see what parts of the original story we want to tell and revisit, and what we prefer to change or forget.

2.4. Adaptations for interactivity

While a large part of adaptation theory has focused on the relationship between film and literature, adaptations to and from interactive media remain a less studied, but equally interesting phenomenon. Moreover, they gain more and more cultural significance, at least when it comes to video games: for Hollywood films, adaptations to this medium are becoming commonplace (Takahashi 2009), and at the same time, video games are capable of outselling both the most popular books and blockbuster films (Moore 2010: 184-185). As introducing the interactive mode of engagement has a huge impact on traditional storytelling, adaptations to video games, board games, or even theme park rides often can be examples of the most extreme influence of medium specificity.

Video games can have narrative and dramaturgical function (Cutting 2012: 173-174). Still, the discussions whether interactive media can tell stories are similar to these concerned specifically with storytelling in role-playing games, as described in Chapter 1, and thus provide no definitive answers. Linda Hutcheon suggested that interactive video

games are especially suitable for the adaptation of the *world* of the source text, not of its story; according to her, the latter becomes less important than problem-solving inherent in gameplay, and its significant parts can be told in non-interactive cut-scenes (Hutcheon 2006: 13-14). Hutcheon also pointed out to immersion, excitement, and the visceral experience that the interactive mode contributes to (Hutcheon 2006: 51).

Video games tend to focus on physical action rather than inner thought (Cutting 2012: 175), and this focus seems natural for most interactive media. This can be observed in the changes to the source text in video game adaptations. Cutting (2012: 172) notes that *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Divine Comedy*, both largely devoid of combat, action heroes, or physical, fast-paced action, were turned to action games (*American McGee's Alice* and *Dante's Inferno* respectively) where Alice or Dante slay countless foes.

However, interiority is also present to some extent in interactive media. When players start to identify with the characters they are playing, they are engaging in their inner life (Cutting 2012: 176), and there are devices in video games that simulate minds of characters such as logs or journals available in many role-playing games and adventure games, the elements of interface, playing through the hallucinations of the player character (Cutting 2012: 177), as well as visual and aural effects describing interiority similarly to how they could be used in film. Still, such elements make it possible to show or tell inner life of characters, but not really interact with it; for instance, journals in video games tend to comprise of text written solely by the authors of the game and based on events in external world of the game (such as in *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*), and if players are able to write anything in them, this text has no effect on the world of the game.

Sometimes, though, interacting with interiority does happen. Possibly in the most linear and non-interactive of tabletop role-playing game scenarios, the only agency left to players lacking meaningful choice is role-playing inner life of their characters; also, numerous YouTube videos, where authors record themselves playing a video game and providing commentary, which is often humorous and in-character, may be an example of playing with the thoughts of a game character. However, these examples are very far from being the main focus of any games I know about. At the same time, a focus on meaningful choices over the thoughts of characters *is* possible, if rarely used, and was employed in at least one video game, 2010's *Heavy Rain* (Cutting 2012: 178-179). Cutting (2012: 180) hypothesizes that it could be possible to create a video game adaptation of Henry James' *The turn of the screw* focusing on interiority as much as the original novel.

2.5. Adaptations to tabletop role-playing games

In tabletop role-playing games, adaptations have a long history. Intertextual references have been present in tabletop role-playing as early as in the first published role-playing game ever, as the original version of *Dungeons & Dragons* mentioned creatures from J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth (Appelcline 2014a: 27). The line between adaptation and a game inspired by a particular source work is often blurry: 1976 *Bunnies and burrows* by Dennis Sustare was clearly inspired by Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down*, but did not use any copyrighted ideas and was published as a generic game about rabbits (Appelcline 2014a: 230); 1978 *Starships & spacemen* by Leonard Kanterman was designed as a *Star trek* adaptation, but as the author did not obtain a licence, the game was released as a non-specific science fiction system (Appelcline 2014a: 1978). According to Shannon Appelcline (2014a: 307), the first acknowledged and licensed role-playing adaptation was another *Star Trek* game, 1978 *Star trek: Adventure gaming in the final frontier* by Michael J. Scott.

Tabletop role-playing game adaptations often are licensed games, based on a successful franchise, monetizing its popularity and enabling players and game masters to engage in the world of a familiar story. The source texts include works of a variety of media: literature, as in 1984 *Middle-earth role-playing* and 2011 *The One Ring: Adventures over the edge of the wild* both based on Tolkien's fiction; cinema, as in a number of *Star Wars* games as listed by Appelcline (2014b: 67) or in 1984 *The adventures of Indiana Jones*; television, for instance in 1980 *Dallas: The television role-playing game* based on a soap opera; comics, as in 1984 *Marvel super heroes* game; video games, for instance in *Dragon age* tabletop role-playing game published in a series of sets from 2009 onwards; or even professional wrestling in the case of *World Wrestling Federation adventure game* released in 1993. Source works are of variety of genres, but particularly popular with the adaptors are fantasy, science fiction, and horror. The process of adaptation can inspire new trends in tabletop role-playing: for instance, the designer of *Bunnies and burrows* attempted to incorporate the themes of *Watership down*, and thus abandoned the focus on combat, prevalent in role-playing games of his time (Appelcline 2014a: 230).

A survey on the player interest in different types of tabletop role-playing game adaptations was quoted by Matthew Colville (2011). It indicated that role-players prefer different kinds of adaptations depending on the source work. For some source texts, they want to create their own stories in an adapted setting, in line with Linda Hutcheon's observation

of the interactive media's preference to adapt worlds instead of stories (2006: 17). For others, such as Frank Herbert's science-fiction novel *Dune*, they would rather play secondary roles in the events described in the original. Some gaming supplements, such as *Angmar, Land of the Witch King* (Kubasch 1982) or *Far Harad* (Crutchfield 1988), both for *Middle-earth role-playing*, are particularly striking examples of adaptation aimed at describing a world for the player characters to explore, as they expand Tolkien's Middle-earth describing places and characters barely mentioned in the original work. At the same time, some adapted tabletop role-playing games approach the sources differently: *Marvel super heroes*, for instance, makes it possible to play existing heroes of Marvel comics (Grubb [1986] 2015). In *Amber diceless role-playing*, game masters are advised to develop their own version of the multiverse presented in Roger Zelazny's *Amber* novels, with some of the original characters substituted for characters created by the players (Wujcik 1991: 121).

2.5.1. Adaptations to tabletop role-playing systems and settings

Adaptations to tabletop role-playing games can exist on two levels, of the whole game and of a scenario. While scenarios can more or less easily adapt stories with their *fabulae*, usual tabletop role-playing games, designed to help players and game masters to come up with their own stories, tend to focus on adapting the world, style, and themes of the source. Medium specificity, stemming from both the constraints of medium and from the usual practice of tabletop role-playing game design, affects these two kinds of adaptation differently. I do not know of any comprehensive overview of adaptations into tabletop role-playing games and scenarios. Thus, the examples of adaptation strategies and effects of medium specificity collected below are just anecdotal evidence. However, they should be sufficient as a background for a more detailed analysis of *The great Pendragon campaign* in Chapters 3 and 4.

As a source is adapted to a role-playing game, it is transposed to: the game's setting – for instance, *The One Ring: Adventures over the edge of the wild* by Francesco Nepitello takes place in Tolkien's Middle-earth; its rules – from the very obvious ones, like providing the statistics of heroes and villains from the comics in *Marvel super heroes* (Grubb 2015: 23-57), to more subtle renditions of the original, like the resolution system with no random element of *Amber diceless roleplaying* designed to mimic the novels by Zelazny, where

godlike Princes of Amber succeed or fail because of their prowess rather than chance (Appelcline 2014c: 111); and finally, to other contents of rulebooks, for instance to the art referencing the source work, or to the guidelines for game master on how to incorporate particular elements of the source work into the game.

When adapting a literary or cinematic setting to a tabletop role-playing game, the adaptors often adjust the world to fit the new form. They fill in the blanks, as the issues of no importance to the author of the source work can rise to importance during a game session: in *The Lord of the Rings* it does not matter how much a horse costs in the Shire, but it may do in a role-playing game, where player characters can find themselves in the land of hobbits short of money, with a desperate need of a horse. What was vague in the original can be rendered tangible and specific in a role-playing adaptation; as China Miéville, a fantasy writer and an avid reader of role-playing bestiaries, observed, a monster from a story by H. P. Lovecraft “is completely incomprehensible and beyond all human categorization”, but in a role-playing game based on Lovecraft's fiction “you see [its] “strength,” “dexterity,” and so on, carefully expressed numerically” (Gordon 2003). The reasons for such an approach can be practical – the monster's statistics make it easier to decide whether player characters survive a fight with the creature should they encounter it. At the same time, this approach is grounded in the usual tabletop role-playing game design practice: the idea that the game can (and should) carefully reflect the details of its world and societies dates back at least to *Chivalry & sorcery*, as described by Fine (2002: 18-19), and gods and other mythological entities have been described with (or maybe even reduced to) numerical statistics since *Gods, Demi-Gods, and Heroes*, a 1976's supplement to *Dungeons & dragons* (Appelcline 2014a: 252).

Such an adaptation strategy is sometimes criticized as unfaithful to the spirit of the source texts. According to China Miéville, “[t]here's something superheroically banalifying about that approach to the fantastic” (Gordon 2003). Tomasz Smejliś (2011: 192-193) noted that in *Conan: The roleplaying game*, providing the sword-and sorcery world of Hyboria from stories by Robert E. Howard with a specific, quasi-historiographic description resulted in a convention shift. Adding nuanced morality to different peoples, presented by Howard as unambiguously good or evil, defied the usual tropes of heroic fantasy.

Fidelity is generally a topic discussed by the designers of adaptations to tabletop role-playing games, especially when they try to reconcile adhering to the original and allowing for player agency. As players can usually create their own characters and take their

own decisions, and as game masters can design their own scenarios, role-playing game adaptations are inherently unfaithful; at the same time, massive contradictions to the sources could lessen the enjoyment unique to playing an adaptation, as well as disappoint the fans reverent of the canon. In *The One Ring*, the author admits that contradictions to the canon are not readily welcome by the players (Nepitello 2011: 8).

There are many approaches to coping with canon, and many games take more than one. A simple solution is to set the game in an area or time not explored in the source text, as in *The One Ring*, where the campaign is supposed to take place after the events of the *Hobbit*, and in the locations described in the novel, but rarely mentioned in its sequel, *Lord of the Rings* (Nepitello 2011: 9). Then, just as in some role-playing scenarios game masters are advised to set the scene but nothing more, and to let the plot develop according to player choices, in some licensed games, such as in *Marvel super heroes* (Grubb 2015: 17), game masters are advised to start a campaign with a situation faithful to the canon, but not to worry about fidelity as players make choices and story progresses. Some games go further and undermine the validity of the canon. In both *The One Ring* and *Amber*, game masters are suggested to treat the source texts as if they were in-game texts, written by unreliable authors – respectively, by boastful hobbit Bilbo Baggins or by outright lying Prince of Amber, Corwin (Nepitello 2011: 9, Wujcik 1991: 124). That said, adaptations into tabletop role-playing games can be, and often are, more respectful of the canon: for instance, they can recommend reading, or re-reading of the source material (Nepitello 2011: 7, Grubb 2015: 17).

2.5.2. Adaptations to tabletop role-playing scenarios

There are plenty of adaptations to tabletop role-playing games, but less adaptations to tabletop role-playing scenarios or campaigns. One reason for that could be that on the level of a scenario, the clash between fidelity and player agency becomes even more jarring. The plot developments of the original may not happen if the players make different choices than the protagonists in the source text, and the pleasure of exploring the game world may be diminished if the players already know all the places and events from the original book, comic or film.

Still, adaptations to scenarios are possible, both for games that themselves are adaptations and for others. *Beyond the mountains of madness*, a campaign supplement written for *Call of Cthulhu*, a game based on Howard Phillips Lovecraft's horror fiction, is a sequel to Lovecraft's novella *At the mountains of madness* (Engan et al. 1999: 12). Being a sequel, it also constitutes an adaptation (Sanders 2006: 18). Then, in the core rulebook to Japanese-themed fantasy game *The legend of the five rings* the author suggests using the plot of *Star wars* as a framework for scenarios (Wick 1997: 166-167), and an adventure for steampunk game *Wolsung*, submitted for Quentin, a Polish tabletop role-playing game scenario competition, titled *Testament Theodora Sixta* [The testament of Theodor Sixt] (Kubiesa 2011) as its main inspiration mentions a theatre play *Testament Teodora Sixta* [The testament of Teodor Sixt], which was not related to *Wolsung* in any way.

Scenarios entail their own medium specificity. Some constraints on the adapted work result from the nature of the gameplay. For instance, gaming groups tend to be composed of small numbers of players; for Mackay, the preferred size is three to four players plus the game master (Mackay 2001: 159.8). Thus, scenarios tend to include a similar number of player characters, who are the protagonists of the story. Similarly, stories depending to a large extent on interiority, or on personality of a particular character, may be difficult to adapt: in tabletop role-playing games, these depend mostly on players, not the game master, and it is only the game master that reads the whole scenario before play.

Other effects of medium specificity may be resulting from the practice of scenario design. Many scenarios focus on physical action, especially combat, and this could be the reason why *Dungeonland* and *The land beyond the magic mirror*, appropriations of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the looking glass*, turned nearly every character from Lewis Carroll's book into a deadly enemy ("The Hatter is quite insane, even in lucid, seemingly rational moments. He is also dangerous and highly unpredictable. He will attack with hats until he is actually molested", Gygax 1983: 19). Tabletop role-playing scenarios also have a number of conventional plot patterns and plot elements, which may depend on the system for which the scenario is designed (Krawczyk 2009: 148-149).

Jennifer Grouling Cover (2010) analysed what changes were made to the *Dungeons & dragons* scenario *The temple of elemental evil* when it was adapted to a video game and a novel. By reverse-engineering Cover's approach, it is possible to find out a number of affordances and conventions specific to tabletop role-playing game scenarios, and how they can influence the stories adapted from other media. Instead of a *fabula*, a series of events,

the scenario uses locations which can be visited in various orders or not visited at all (Cover 2010: 64). The plot is controlled by the game master, who can, for instance, introduce some non-player characters at any place or time (Cover 2010: 64), or decide which elements of the plot are revealed to the players (Cover 2010: 68). Indeed, some background elements of the story may not be revealed at all, if such is the effect of players' choices (Cover 2010: 68). Cover also observed that in the scenario, game structure can be moved from one setting into another (e.g. from the fictional world of Greyhawk into a fantasy version of medieval Normandy) more easily than in a non-interactive medium (Cover 2010: 65), and that the scenario lacks the primary protagonist or a variety of points of view (Cover 2010: 67). It must be noted, though, that some of these features may be specific for *The temple of elemental evil*, or for other *Dungeons and dragons* modules from that time, but not to all tabletop role-playing game scenarios.

Making the adaptation a sequel to the source work is a viable strategy for providing an adapted scenario with player agency and potential for exploration. In *Beyond the mountains of madness*, player characters are explorers following the footsteps of the Antarctic expedition from Lovecraft's novella (Engan et al. 1999: 12), which lets the players revisit the places as well as themes of the source text. The scenario embraces what could be a hindrance: the fact that the players may be already familiar with *At the mountains of madness*. The novella, being a fictional report of an explorer of Antarctica, exists in the scenario as an actual record from the last Antarctic expedition, and can be read by player characters (Engan et al. 1999: 14).

There is a number of other viable approaches. An adaptor can create an alternative version of the original story. That was the case with *Terminator: Decydujące starcie* [Terminator: Showdown] (Doraczyński 2006), the winner of 2006 Quentin. The author, disappointed with the third instalment of the *Terminator* film franchise, wrote the scenario as a different take on the story. He used some elements from the film, including a female Terminator, but changed the plot, including the ending, which in the scenario is driven by player choice. Another adaptation strategy is creating an appropriation, loosely connected to the original. In the final scenes of *Testament Theodora Sixta*, which was inspired by a semi-historical play, the author introduced a fight with a gigantic troll, which fits well the setting of *Wolsung* and provides an opportunity for exciting gameplay (Kubiesa 2011: 30-31).

And finally, there are some adapted scenarios that try to be faithful to the plot of their source texts. One of them is the unreleased campaign based on *Dune*, where players play background characters, never named in the novel, and witness the whole story as written by Frank Herbert (Colville 2011). Another is *The great Pendragon campaign* by Greg Stafford, which will be discussed in the next chapters.

Chapter 3: *King Arthur Pendragon* and *The great Pendragon campaign*: description

3.1. Introduction

The great Pendragon campaign is a special case of adaptation, because of its unusual target medium and its source material – stories and legends which themselves are palimpsests, bearing the mark of countless earlier iterations of Arthurian tales, influencing and cross-referencing one another. At the same time, though, it is unique even among other adaptations to tabletop role-playing, and other adaptations of Arthurian material.

The great Pendragon campaign is a supplement to the tabletop role-playing game *King Arthur Pendragon*. Both texts were written by the same author – Greg Stafford – and the latter is indispensable in understanding the former, especially in the light of the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary tabletop role-playing texts by Hammer (2007: 70-71). While the game experience is complete only during a game session (the tertiary text), when players and the game master meet and role-play, their experience is grounded in game scenarios (many of which may stem from *The great Pendragon campaign* source-book), that is, in the secondary text. And then, the scenarios, as well as the details of the session itself, are grounded in the primary text: *King Arthur Pendragon* rules and setting.

What follows is an overview of primary and secondary texts for *The great Pendragon campaign*. I present an introduction to *Pendragon* and the *Campaign*, the history of the game, and the bibliography used by Greg Stafford.

3.2. A general overview of *King Arthur Pendragon* and *The great Pendragon campaign*

King Arthur Pendragon is a tabletop role-playing game, and *The great Pendragon campaign* is a tabletop role-playing supplement. The latter is a combination of setting material, game rules, and more or less detailed adventure scenarios; its ontological status will be discussed later on. For this thesis, I decided to use the most current versions of the game and the supplement. *The great Pendragon campaign* was published in 2006 by White Wolf; in the thesis, I used its re-edition from 2015 by Nocturnal Media as a PDF file, also available in print, consisting of 429 pages in US letter format. The campaign was designed for the fifth edition of *King Arthur Pendragon* (Stafford 2015a: 1), and for the thesis, I used the most current edition edition 5.1. published by Nocturnal Media in 2015 as a 236-page letter-sized book. As was the case with the campaign, I used the commercially available PDF version of the rulebook. Both books are illustrated an black-and-white.

3.2.1. Similarities between *King Arthur Pendragon* and other tabletop role-playing game rulebooks

Although *King Arthur Pendragon* certainly was innovative when its first edition was published, with a unique treatment of its themes and novel game mechanics (Stafford 2015b, Appelcline 2014d: 265-266), 30 years later its current edition is a mainstream tabletop role-playing game, resembling in many ways most popular game systems, from *Dungeons & Dragons* to *Vampire: The masquerade*, at least as opposed to experimental independent games of the last two decades. *Pendragon* follows traditional game design patterns, but it is worth noting that throughout the history of role-playing, it has also contributed to how these patterns look like.

Eight chapters of *Pendragon* rulebook provide an overview of the setting (“The *Pendragon* realm”), rules for character generation (“Character generation” and “Family and fatherland”), and for various situations arising in play, including a whole chapter on combat (“Stats and skills”, “Game mechanics”, “Combat”). They also describe society of the game world (“Ambition and faith”), as well as economy and equipment (“Matters of Wealth”). Then, there are six appendices providing additional information and rules. Such contents of the rulebook and the way they are organized resemble these of many popular systems, for

instance, of popular editions 3.5 and 5 of *Dungeons and dragons* (Tweet et al. 2003, Mearls et al. 2014). These two differ from *Pendragon* mainly by downplaying setting description and providing extensive chapters on magic, as they were designed with a more generic fantasy milieu in mind.

King Arthur Pendragon uses a traditional distinction between the players who control their characters and the game master who controls everything else (Stafford 2010: 4-5), although there are some distinctive features of Greg Stafford's game, which will be discussed below. Just as traditionally, rolling dice (including a twenty-sided die) is used for deciding the outcome of characters' actions (Stafford 2010: 5).

Like in countless tabletop role-playing games, characters in *Pendragon* are described using numerical parameters used in the game rules. These parameters include attributes, which describe physical traits of characters, such as Strength or Appearance (Stafford 2010: 28), and skills, such as Awareness, Singing, or Sword (Stafford 2010: 80-91). Attributes and skills are common parameters in many games, including recent editions of *Dungeons and dragons* (Tweet et al. 2003, Mearls et al. 2014).

The basic mechanic for resolving characters' actions consists of rolling a 20-sided die and comparing the result with the numerical level of a parameter of a character. Results equal or lower from the level indicate success, and thus characters with higher skills or attributes have higher chances of succeeding (Stafford 2010: 92). Many tabletop role-playing games have used similar systems; in *Warhammer fantasy role play* the most conspicuous, and yet, still a minor difference, is rolling an equivalent of 100-sided die² instead of a 20-sided one (Halliwell et al. 1994: 64).

In *Pendragon*, combat between characters is one of the parts of the game which are most extensively described in the rules, and that, again, is very common in mainstream tabletop role-playing games. The flow of a real fight is simulated by dividing the combat into rounds (Stafford 2010: 112) – just as in nearly every tabletop role-playing game with a combat system. Every round combatants roll to see which one gains upper hand and deals damage to the opponent. While this roll-off in combat is an uncommon mechanical solution, deducting the damage from *hit points* (HP) of a character until the points go below a certain threshold and the combatant falls dead, unconscious, etc., also used in *Pendragon*,

² While a 100-sided die would likely be unintelligible, many role-playing games use a pair of ten-sided dice; one of them is rolled to determine the number of tens, the other – the number of ones. Such a dice-rolling convention is usually called d100 or d%, just as a 6-sided die is called d6, a 20-sided one – d20, and so on.

is a ubiquitous mechanism in tabletop role-playing (see for instance Mearls et al. 2014: 74-75, Halliwell et al. 1994: 13, Wick 1997: 107-108).

There are also some resemblances between *King Arthur Pendragon* and other tabletop role-playing games in how the game setting is presented. One example is the description of the geography of the world, in case of *Pendragon*, of Arthurian Britain (Stafford 2010: 12-15, 56-62, compare e.g. Halliwell et al. 1994: 270-286, Wick 1997: 230-244). Another example of similarities is the an appendix (Stafford 2010: 176-190) covering non-player characters, animals, and monsters, all with their game statistics – a counterpart to various game bestiaries, such as *Dungeons and dragons Monster manuals*. Finally, while *Pendragon* devotes some space to Christianity and paganism (Stafford 2010: 14, 138-153), many other tabletop role-playing games also cover religions, for instance by providing descriptions of various deities worshipped in their worlds (e.g. Halliwell et al. 1994: 193-210; Mearls et al. 2014: 107-108).

3.2.2. Features unique or particularly specific to *King Arthur Pendragon*

Some parts of the *King Arthur Pendragon* rulebook feel especially novel and different from other tabletop role-playing games. It is virtually impossible to prove that these elements were not used in any other game, especially that *Pendragon* could and did inspire other game designers; Shannon Appelcline (2014c: 111) noted that the Arthurian game was a part of a larger trend of “tightly integrating the feel of the (...) setting into the game”. However, on the background of a variety of tabletop role-playing systems, including most popular games from 40 years of the hobby, *Pendragon* clearly has a number of distinctive features, which are particularly important in determining the themes and adaptation strategy used in the game.

The core assumption that makes *King Arthur Pendragon* particularly distinctive is its intended time scale of gameplay. One session of play is designed to encompass on average one year in the game world (Stafford 2010: 95, 106). “The objective is to go through almost ninety game years, covering the entirety of King Arthur's life” (Stafford 2010: 5). This assumption makes the death of player characters inevitable (“every character is going to die” – Stafford 2010: 5), and makes it possible to include in the gameplay long-term processes, such as ageing, starting a family, raising heirs (which can become new player char-

acters after the death or retirement of the old one), as well as enabling player characters to participate in numerous historic events (Stafford 2010: 5).

Quite unusually for a tabletop role-playing game, *King Arthur Pendragon* mentions a single goal for the players: “The object of the game is to acquire Glory” (Stafford 2010: 5). Glory, measured in points, gained for various knightly deeds, and accumulated throughout years, at the same time stands for characters' fame and lets them further develop their game statistics (Stafford 2010: 100-106). In many ways, it is similar to experience points used in other games, which are also accumulated over time and measure characters' prowess; however, only rarely collecting experience points is explicitly called the objective of the game.

When it comes to character generation, *King Arthur Pendragon* is distinctive in that in contrast to many games boasting nigh-endless possibilities in creating player characters (see e.g. Balsera et al. 2013: 32), it limits the possible player character choices to knights (or about-to-be knights) from Salisbury (Stafford 2010: 4, 25). The rulebook provides rules for creating player characters ladies instead (Stafford 2010: 38-41), but such possibility is neither emphasised nor encouraged. There are only three religions to choose from – British and Roman Christianity, as well as paganism (Stafford 2010: 27), as opposed to a wide range of beliefs or deities.

The character creation process in *Pendragon* is distinctive not only because of the limits it imposes, but also because of the level of integration of player characters with the game world. A series of tables lets the players determine the history of their family from player characters' grandfathers onwards (Stafford 2010: 44-50). Player knights are leaders of their families, and there are rules for determining who the rest of the family are (Stafford 2010: 51-53), as well as where the family lives (Stafford 2010: 61-62).

At the core of *King Arthur Pendragon*, there is a system of *traits* and *passions*, a unique feature of the game. 26 Traits, grouped into opposing pairs, describe personality of all characters; sum of every pair has to be 20, so a knight can have Valorous 12 and Cowardly 8, Chaste 5 and Lustful 15, and so on (Stafford 2010: 27). Passions also describe personality, but are not universal for all characters. For instance, while a knight may have the passion of Loyalty: Lord or Amor: Queen Guenever, a Saxon may have neither, and a passion Hate: Britons instead (see Stafford 2010: 27).

Traits can be rolled for similarly to skills and attributes (Stafford 2010: 67) in order to determine what action a character takes. If a trait is raised to a particularly high level, a

roll may be required whenever a “crisis” would force a character to “act according to their character, not spontaneous or ambiguous choices” (Stafford 2010: 66). Trait rolls may force the players to act consistently, but also rarely, through a quirky feature of the rules, inspire characters to act contrary to their usual personality – in an example provided in the book, an unlikely roll for the trait Chaste forces a player character to gently touch the cheek of a passing fair maiden (Stafford 2010: 67).

To some extent, passions work differently. Besides directing characters' behaviour, they may also *inspire* them, extremely increasing their skills; a knight fighting for his lady love may be unstoppable (Stafford 2010: 73). However, a failed passion roll may cause the character to fall into melancholy or madness (Stafford 2010: 73-74).

Trait and passion levels change over time. For instance, if a player character acts bravely all the time, the Valorous trait is likely to increase (Stafford 2010: 66). Thus, the parameters of characters are likely to reflect their actual behaviour. The game favours outstanding, passionate characters: high trait and passion levels confer significant amounts of Glory points (Stafford 2010: 105), and a combination of high values in traits representing a religion or a particular set of ideals, such as chivalry, can provide even more Glory and additional mechanical benefits (Stafford 2010: 69-70, 167-168).

Besides a complex system for personality, *King Arthur Pendragon* has rules that cover the things that other tabletop role-playing games rarely mention. One part of the game is the *winter phase* – played after each year of the game time, with rules for training, ageing, harvest, and other everyday events and activities (Stafford 2010: 106-111). There are rules for enlarging family and raising heirs (Stafford 2010: 52-53). The combat mechanics include rules for squires, horse combat, and unhorsing (Stafford 2010: 112-121). Healing (Stafford 2010: 122-127) takes longer and is a more complex process than in a typical role-playing game. Detailed rules for fighting skirmishes and mass-scale battles are presented (Stafford 2010: 128-131, 205-216). There are rules for attaining noble titles, with players of the rank of Baron or higher required to take some of game master's duties (Stafford 2010: 133-137). There are rules for love and romance (Stafford 2010: 168-172, 202-204). And finally, the last appendix covers tournaments (Stafford 2010: 217-219).

King Arthur Pendragon is distinctive not only when it comes to its rules, but also to its setting. Most importantly, it is set in Arthurian Britain; few other tabletop role-playing

games are³. But also, *Pendragon* describes the setting with a specific focus and in a specific way. A short in-game history of knighthood (Stafford 2010: 15-17) emphasises the game's focus on knightly matters. Many pages cover the society, values, and customs of feudal Middle Ages (Stafford 2010: 17-24). Along with rules for playing ladies and, possibly, female knights, the rulebook provides an overview of the role of women in a medieval setting (Stafford 2010: 38-43). Besides a general description of Britain, the book details Salisbury, the player character's homeland, including descriptions of important places and people, of player characters' manors, and so on (Stafford 2010: 54-62). History, doctrine, and important places are described for the Church and for paganism (Stafford 2010: 139-153). Magic, which in many fantasy games is developed into a detailed rules system, in the *Pendragon* rulebook is described as a part of the setting (Stafford 2010: 153-155). The section on economy, which in many games tends to boil down to lists of equipment, in *Pendragon* also includes descriptions of taxes, cultivating land, and so on (Stafford 2010: 156-163). In the end, the first appendix, covering the future of the campaign after Arthur's coming to power and the setting moving to an equivalent of High Middle Ages, includes detailed descriptions of customs connected to romance and chivalry (Stafford 2010: 167-173).

3.2.3. An overview of *The great Pendragon campaign*

The great Pendragon campaign contains features of various tabletop role-playing texts – adventure scenarios, rules supplements or setting guides. In the introduction, it is described as “a guideline for an 81-year campaign that includes the entire reign of King Arthur, starting a short time before his birth and ending just a few years after his departure to Avalon” (Stafford 2015a: 6). It is designed as an aid for the game master (Stafford 2015a: 7); players are not supposed to read the supplement.

The main part of the book consists of descriptions of years during which the campaign takes place. They are based on the chronology of King Arthur's life as depicted in Thomas Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur*, but also correspond to the whole Middle Ages – in *King Arthur Pendragon*, “fifteen years of game time approximate a hundred years of real-

³ Other Arthurian tabletop role-playing games include *Prince Valiant: The storytelling game*, also designed by Greg Stafford and based on the popular comic strip of the same name (Stafford 2015f); or *Dark Camelot* by Umberto Pignatelli (2013), a minimalistic setting for an equally minimalistic game *Adventurers*, also by Pignatelli.

world medieval history” (Stafford 2010: 5). Besides that, the book contains an introduction with advice for game masters, some additional rules for the game, an extended bestiary and additional setting material.

The campaign is divided into a number of chapters, each detailing a different period. King Uther Period (covering years 485-495) describes the last years of the reign of Uther Pendragon, King Arthur's father, and stands for historical Dark Ages (Stafford 2015a: 25). The Anarchy Period (496-509) describes the turmoil after King Uther's death and corresponds to the times of the Norman conquest (Stafford 2015a: 70); an additional chapter covers the adventures in The Forest Sauvage that may happen in this period (Stafford 2015a: 98). The Boy King Period (510-518) details the first years of the reign of King Arthur and references 12th century, with Queen Guenever as a counterpart to Eleanor of Aquitaine (Stafford 2015a: 121); a supplementary chapter details the adventures in the Wasteland in this and later periods (Stafford 2015a: 161). The Conquest Period (519-530) covers the wars of King Arthur against France and Italy (Stafford 2015a: 180, 204-209); the author noted that while this may not fit the assumed chronology, the conquest of France is similar to the wars of Henry V (2015a: 180). The following Romance Period (531-539) describes the relative peace after the wars on the Continent and the bloom of courtly romance; it is compared to early 13th Century (Stafford 2015a: 226). In the Tournament Period (539-553), an equivalent of early 14th century in England, the peace continues and the knights may take part in more and more frequent and elaborate tournaments (Stafford 2015a: 269). The Grail Quest Period (554-557) covers the quest for the Holy Grail (Stafford 2015a: 323). Finally, the Twilight Period (558-565) describes the last years of King Arthur's reign and corresponds to the War of the Roses (Stafford 2015a: 353).

The most significant part of the description of every campaign year is the section titled “Events”. The events are described in the introduction as “a variety of adventures and occasions to entertain a group of Pendragon players” (Stafford 2015a: 7). Many events are based on Arthurian lore, and together, they tell large parts of the story of King Arthur as known from Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur* and other sources – when it comes to the most well-known elements of Arthurian stories, they include for instance the drawing of the sword in the stone (Stafford 2015a: 129-134), the first arrival of Percivale to Camelot (Stafford 2015a: 250-252), and the end of King Arthur's reign in the battle of Camlann (Stafford 2015a: 374-377). Depending on how the game story develops, player characters can, but do not have to, take part in these events or at least witness them.

Most events are described in a way reminiscent both of narrative and tabletop role-playing adventure scenarios. The first event section in the book (Stafford 2015: 35-36) can be a good example, as the initial part of the campaign is intended as a tutorial for game masters and players (Stafford 2015a: 25). The section consists of a short military campaign of King Uther against the Saxons, for which player knights are summoned. The event section consists of five paragraphs of texts – first two describing the king's army, and the other three summarising the two significant battles of the campaign. The elements typical to role-playing texts include the use of present tense, the focus on player characters (“Earl Roderick comes with all his knights, including all the player knights”, Stafford 2015a: 35), as well as the inclusion of a number of parameters used with the game rules to play the first battle, such as its length in turns, modifiers to dice rolls, and skill levels of army commanders.

Further events may incorporate dialogue, provide detailed reasons for decisions of non-player characters (“Because Lancelot is scrupulously honest (...), he makes a clear and direct point of his chaste stay at the Castle of Adventure (...), Stafford 2015a: 306). Some build tension and have their own non-player protagonists, and in general resemble literature. For example, the main part of “Gilded box” (Stafford 2015a: 298-299) is a description of a scene with next to no opportunities for player involvement, in which Sir Kay's wit and arrogance turns into horror when he and the whole court realize that the box from the event's title contains the head of the King Arthur's son Kay had killed. The scene could work as a short story, and the use of present tense and few mentions of the rolls the witnessing players have to make are the only things typical to a tabletop role-playing scenario left. Some other events are just short narratives which do not seem suitable for player character involvement – such as the secret murder of Sir Lamorak (Stafford 2015a: 308). Greg Stafford (2015a: 7) emphatically denied that the events in the campaign are “a retelling of the entire Arthurian legend, a scholarly essay, or a new form of fiction”, but they share some features with all these forms.

In turn, some events are full-blown, detailed scenarios that set the scenes, provide player characters with problems to solve, describe the rolls the players have to make, list game statistics of non-player characters and enemies, often use conditional (“If they are victorious, then the old man can be heard (...)", Stafford 2015a: 38), feature multiple possible endings, and share other features with typical role-playing adventures. The first example of such a scenario in the campaign is “Sword lake”, an adventure in which player

knights assist Merlin in taking Excalibur from a Lady of the Lake (Stafford 2015a: 38-39). The role of narrative and ergodic elements in *The great Pendragon campaign* will be further discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

Besides the events section, campaign years are described in a similar manner. At the beginning of every year, there is a number of recurring sections: *court*, describing where the king's court is held; *special guests* (and later *away from Camelot*) – a list of visitors or absentees; *gossip*, a short dialogue on recent affairs, resembling chatter of ladies at court; *news*, some information about recent events in form of quotes from important figures, including Merlin and Sir Gawaine; *royal conversation* – a short quote from the king concerning recent matters; and *intrigue* – a bit more obscure information, usually about politics. The sections vary to some extent in different periods, for instance the Anarchy Period has no royal conversation as it is a time of interregnum, there are tournament schedules when tournaments become popular, and from the time Mordred arrives at court onwards there is a “Mordred talk” section where he cynically comments on the recent events. Then, two short sections at the end describe the events and atmosphere of this year's Christmas court, as well as Winter Phase modifiers, which consists mostly of how the events, weather, and other factors affected the harvest and taxes in a particular year.

Additionally, every chapter describing a Period, as well as a few descriptions of years, cover various matters significant in that particular time. These include politics, geography of important areas, emerging customs, changes in heraldry and tournaments, evolution of warfare, updated equipment lists, as well as descriptions of changes in Camelot and in the player characters' hometown of Sarum.

3.3. Publication history of *King Arthur Pendragon*

The great Pendragon campaign did not come out of nothing. Besides being an adaptation of Arthurian tales, it is also an effect of evolution of the *King Arthur Pendragon* game, shaped by ideas arising throughout around 30 years of its history. Thus, an overview of the past editions of *King Arthur Pendragon* and their supplements can provide additional insight into the campaign and its origins.

King Arthur Pendragon is a tabletop role-playing game by Greg Stafford, born in 1948 in Hartford, Connecticut (Stafford 2012). Stafford is a designer of numerous tabletop

role-playing games and board games, the founder of Chaosium, one of the pioneering role-playing game publishers (Stafford 2010: 224), and of two other game companies (Varney 2009), as well as a writer and a practitioner of shamanism (Varney 2009).

Stafford entered the gaming hobby through wargaming, with a copy of Avalon Hill wargame *U-Boat* purchased in the 1960s (Appelcline 2014a: 247). He attempted to write fantasy fiction, and difficulties at having it published resulted in him taking up game design; he debuted with *White bear and red moon*, a wargame set in Stafford's own world of Glorantha, published by his newly-founded Chaosium in 1975 (Appelcline 2014a: 247-248). Stafford's first games were mostly wargames, set in various fantasy settings, including Glorantha, but also, notably, in the Arthurian milieu in the case of *King Arthur's Knights* from 1978 (Appelcline 2014a: 248). The release of the Arthurian game was followed in 1983 with *King Arthur Companion* by Phyllis Ann Karr, a non-game book that was a guide to “people, places and things” (Stafford 2015c) from Arthurian sources, compiled originally to help Stafford with Arthurian game design. Indeed, Stafford was a long-time enthusiast of Arthurian fiction (Stafford 2010: 224).

First edition of *King Arthur Pendragon* was published in 1985, after Greg Stafford was designing it for some years with the help of Ken St. Andre, the designer of the role-playing game *Tunnels & Trolls* (Appelcline 2014a: 265). By that time, Chaosium was a successful role-playing game publisher, with its tremendously innovative *RuneQuest* by Steve Perrin set in Glorantha (Appelcline 2014a: 251-252), with a generic rule set *Basic Role-Playing* by Stafford and Lyn Willis based on boiled-down rules of *RuneQuest* (Appelcline 2014a: 257), with *Stormbringer* by Ken St. Andre and Steve Perrin, based on sword-and-sorcery fiction by Michael Moorcock (Appelcline 2014a: 258), and with *Call of Cthulhu*, based on horror fiction by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, published in 1981, basically introducing horror genre to role-playing (Appelcline 2014a: 259), and popular to this day.

1985's *King Arthur Pendragon: Chivalric Roleplaying in Arthur's Britain* by Greg Stafford was published as a boxed set, which included rulebooks, play-aids, dice, and a map. The game's rules were an evolution, and a departure, from the Basic Role Playing system (Stafford 2015c). Stafford (2015c) noted two things which were particularly important to him while he was designing the game. The first one was personality traits, initially designed to enforce consistent player character behaviour. The other is simulation, but not the kind of simulation from *Chivalry and Sorcery*, with its extreme attention to detail in depicting medieval combat and rendering medieval laws into game rules. Instead, Pendragon

strived, and, at least according to Stafford (2015c), managed, to make the players and the game masters play in accord with medieval culture and customs. Early *Pendragon* differed from later editions when it comes to the contents of the game; the changes, however, were not dramatic, especially when it comes to the rules (Stafford 2015b).

The publication of the first edition of *Pendragon* was followed by four supplements (Stafford 2015b). One of them, *The Pendragon Campaign* (Stafford 1985), was a setting supplement – it provided additional information about running games in Arthurian Britain, a bestiary, a list of characters from Arthurian legends, including chronologies of their lives and some important life events, such as Guenever's kidnappings (Stafford 1985: 31), and an overview of the general Arthurian chronology designed as a background for the campaign (Stafford 1985: 42). It covered years 495-577, starting with Anarchy Period around Uther Pendragon's death, and ending with postscripts to Arthur's life, such as the Saxon conquest (Stafford 1985: 43-54). It also provided advice on how to run first sessions of play – in fact, a number of roughly drafted scenarios (Stafford 1985: 54-67). The supplement ended with a bibliography and designer's notes. In general, it may be seen as a predecessor to *The great Pendragon campaign*, published 21 years later.

Other supplements to the first edition included *The noble's book*, consisting of expansions to game rules, as well as player and gamemaster aids; *The Grey Knight*, an adventure scenario, notably written by Larry DiTillio, a film and television screenwriter – a rare event of one person writing for these two media as well as for a tabletop role-playing game; and the *Tournament of Dreams*, consisting of two scenarios.

The second edition of *King Arthur Pendragon* was planned, but never published (Stafford 2015c). Instead, third edition was released around 1990, this time as a single rule-book. From 5 supplements published to the third edition, the most important one is *The boy king: Arthur claims the throne of Britain*, published in 1991. It described the events in Arthurian Britain from before Arthur's reign, through his first years on the throne, up to year 531, 20 years after the pulling the sword from the stone, and it was meant to “show GMs [game masters] how to run a campaign” (Stafford 2015d). It was another forerunner to *The great Pendragon campaign*, which re-used the format of the book, as well as some parts of its text. Other supplements to the third edition included two “region books”, every one of which described a particular region of Arthurian world, with setting information, adventures, and events inspired both by legends and Medieval history (Stafford 2015d). The re-

maintaining third edition supplements were a mix of rules, setting, advice, and scenarios (Stafford 2015d).

In 1993, the fourth edition of the game was published. The core rulebook incorporated some parts of earlier supplements, but besides that, the game did not change (Stafford 2015d). What followed was another three regional supplements, this time describing more exotic lands – Pictland (today's Scotland), Ireland, and Scandinavia; the last two were based on materials other than Arthurian legends, including Irish mythology and *Beowulf* (Stafford 2015d). Some of the later books for the fourth edition included a rules expansion and a sourcebook about Saxons. The late '90s were significant for *Pendragon* as they saw some turmoil in Chaosium; in 1998 Greg Stafford left the company, leaving *Pendragon* licence behind (Stafford 2015d).

The licence was acquired in 2004 by White Wolf, an RPG publisher famous for *Vampire: The masquerade*, and Greg Stafford was hired to write the fifth edition of *Pendragon* (Stafford 2015e). The new edition, published in 2005, went back to the game's roots, sometimes limiting player choices – e.g. providing no rules for playing starting knights from outside of Salisbury or for playing magicians, which were available as player characters before. At the same time, in line with White Wolf's pursuit of inclusivity, it provided opportunities of playing female knights (Stafford 2015e). The first supplement to the fifth edition was *The great Pendragon campaign*, and the core rulebook was re-released by Nocturnal Media in 2010 as edition 5.1. There was a number of smaller supplements published after *The great Pendragon campaign*, but they fall outside of the scope of this thesis.

3.4. The bibliography of *King Arthur Pendragon* and *The great Pendragon campaign*

King Arthur Pendragon and *The great Pendragon campaign* are adaptations of various Arthurian stories. Instead of being based on a single source text, Greg Stafford (2010: 6) claims that “The *Pendragon* game uses parts from all literary versions”. While “all” is likely to be an exaggeration, the number of sources used in *Pendragon* is prominent indeed, and the attention the game pays to the source texts is similarly distinctive.

The single source given precedence over all others is *Le morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory – Greg Stafford (2010: 6) notes that it is “the first modern English interpretation of French and English sources” and that it “serves as the basis for this game”. In par-

ticular, the game uses the Penguin Classics edition with modernized spelling (Stafford 2010: 2).

King Arthur Pendragon rulebook has two overviews of its sources. The first one, “Which Arthur Is This” (Stafford 2010: 6), discusses what elements of different Arthurian literary traditions the game embraces. The traditions listed are English, French, and Welsh medieval tales, as well as historical chronicles and contemporary versions (with a subgroup of radical interpretations of Arthurian tales). Then, the section “Suggested reading” lists different books “recommended for players and Gamemasters wishing to obtain familiarity with the legend of King Arthur and with the history that surrounds it” (Stafford 2010: 223).

What follows is the list of the sources mentioned in both overviews in *Pendragon*. English medieval fiction: *Le morte d'Arthur*, *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight*, *Sir Gawaine and Dame Ragnell*, “Golagros and Gawain” (and other tales from *The knightly tales of Sir Gawain* – the collection by Louis B. Hall (Stafford 2010: 223)). French medieval fiction: works of Chrétien de Troyes, *Vulgate Tristram*, prose *Tristram*. Welsh medieval fiction: *The Mabinogion*, specifically the branch “Culhwch and Olwen”. A medieval chronicle: *History of the kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Modern fiction: some of the Arthurian novels by Mary Stewart, *The once and future king* by T. H. White, “Howard Pyle's Arthurian Compilation” (Stafford 2010: 6), Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* (comic strip), *That wicked day* by Mary Stewart, *The idylls of the queen* by Phyllis Ann Karr, *The mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The acts of Arthur and his noble knights* by John Steinbeck. Modern non-fiction: *The knight and chivalry* by Richard Barber, *Feudal society* by Marc Bloch, *The knight in history* by Francis Gies, *Chivalry* by Maurice Keen.

Still, this list is just a part of all the sources mentioned in *King Arthur Pendragon* and *The great Pendragon campaign*. First, both books frequently quote or paraphrase all kinds of literature. Thus, the game discusses the possibilities for female player characters with the help of a medieval triad on The Three Amazons of Britain (Stafford 2010: 43); passages from Malory is used to present game concepts, such as the use of the Modest trait (Stafford 2010: 102); Arthur's fictional code of laws is modelled after the one by William the Conqueror (Stafford 2010: 23); parts of Gildas' *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* from 5th century are used to introduce the Saxon threat; and so on. Also, many uncredited sources must have influenced Greg Stafford or must have been used in his research.

Finally, many events in *The great Pendragon campaign* cite source texts from which they were adapted. In the campaign book, sources of many kinds are mentioned: above all, *Le morte d'Arthur* (Stafford 2015a: 52, 128, 149, 150, 189, 190, 197, 199, 202, 237, 243, 246, 247, 248, 252, 253, 254, 255, 257, 277, 279, 282, 283, 285, 286, 287, 291, 292, 293, 294, 301, 305, 307, 349, 357, 358, 360, 362, 363, 366, 367, 374); then, Arthurian romances: *Erec, roman arthurien en prosepublic d'apres le ms. fr., 112 de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Stafford 2015a: 60), the Vulgate Cycle (Stafford 2015a: 193, 194, 238, 248, 257), *Guiron le Courtois* (Stafford 2015a: 223), *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette* by Chrétien de Troyes (Stafford 2015a: 257), *Perlesvaus or the High History of the Holy Grail* (Stafford 2015a: 298), prose *Tristan* (Stafford 2015a: 334), and *Roman du Graal* (Stafford 2015a: 334); chronicles: *Historia Regnum Britannia* [sic] by Geoffrey of Monmouth (Stafford 2015a: 48, 60, 63, 150, 153, 197, 199, 202) and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Stafford 2015a: 55, 76); medieval hagiography: *Vita sancti Gildae* (Stafford 2015a: 257); the *Mabinogion* (Stafford 2015a: 403, 405); medieval non-fiction: *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* by Gildas (Stafford 2015a: 155); poetry: “Goblin Market” by Christina Rossetti (Stafford 2015a: 416); a comic book: volume III of *The books of magic* by Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess (Stafford 2015a: 416); and finally a film: *Excalibur* by John Boorman (Stafford 2015a: 47). The campaign mentions also other sources, such as “Art of courtly love” by Andreas Capellanus (Stafford 2015a: 256), but only the one listed above are credited as source texts of events and adventure scenarios.

Because of such a large base of source texts, Greg Stafford had to be selective – *The great Pendragon campaign* book had size constraints (Stafford 2015e), and thus many plots had to be omitted, and there was a need to choose a preferred version whenever many sources described the same event. Eventually, the multitude of sources impacts the choice of adaptation strategies; possibly, its use may also be an adaptation strategy in itself. In the next chapter, the adaptation strategies are discussed, along with medium specificity, interactivity, themes, and the narrative elements in *The great Pendragon campaign*.

Chapter 4: *The great Pendragon campaign*: analysis

4.1. Adaptation strategies

Adaptation is “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work or works” (Hutcheon 2006: 8), and *The great Pendragon campaign* fits this definition, although it does not feature a single sentence explicitly stating that the whole book is based on any work. Still, on the title page, there is a caption “This work was prepared using the Penguin Classics edition of *Le morte d'Arthur*, edited by Jane Cowen” (Stafford 2015a: 2), and many events specify their sources. Just as importantly, Greg Stafford states that the book “provides materials (...) to bring the Arthurian realm to life” (2015a: 6) and that the campaign “includes the entire reign of King Arthur” (2015a: 6), thus referencing the whole corpus of unspecified Arthurian tales. It may be said that the book is a collection of miniature adaptations in the form of Events of the campaign. It may also be said that the whole supplement is an adaptation of Malory, as *Le morte d'Arthur* is the most excessively quoted source, and the general timeline of the campaign follows Malory's chronology. And at the same time, it may be said that Stafford adapted “The Great Tales”: “the core of the legend that hasn't changed through over 500 years of rewrites” (Stafford 2015a: 8).

The eclectic origins of *The great Pendragon campaign* are no hindrance for analysing the strategies used in the process of adaptation. Discovering what elements of the source material were transposed to the campaign book, and how this transposition was done, will make it possible to answer the questions for what purpose the Arthurian tales were adapted, what Arthurian sources bring to tabletop role-playing, and what tabletop role-playing brings to the tales of King Arthur. First, though, it is worth noting what adaptation strategies are explicitly mentioned in the text of *The great Pendragon campaign*.

4.1.1. The approach to adaptation as stated in the text

The stated purpose of the campaign has already been described: it is “to bring the Arthurian realm to life” (2015a: 6). No matter how much space in the book the story of Arthur and his knights takes, in game sessions it is intended to be only of secondary importance: “This book is not the game, but the stuff behind the game”, it is “what goes on while the player character knights are living their lives” (Stafford 2015a: 6).

The events covered by the campaign are called “A weaving together of many Arthurian sources, with an invitation to weave the player knights into the ongoing saga” (Stafford 2015a: 7). This implies a degree of fidelity to the sources on the level of the contents of the book (the secondary text); “weaving the player knights” in during game sessions (the tertiary texts), by definition, introduces changes to the source material. However, two suggested ways of giving spotlight to player characters are means to telling a story similar to the one in the sources. The first and default one is to focus on player knights' lives and leave the story of King Arthur, Lancelot, Guenever, and others in the background (Stafford 2015a: 6). The other is to let player characters take the place in the story which was originally occupied by an existing character – for instance, they may “undertake the roles of being the Queen's lover or the murderers of Pellinore and Lamorak” (Stafford 2015a: 11).

The text acknowledges changes to the sources made according to the preferences and gameplay experience of the author (Stafford 2015a: 7). Greg Stafford also writes about contradictions in various sources and provides an overview of what versions are true in the campaign, at the same time leaving game masters the possibility of making different choices by changing the campaign background (Stafford 2015a: 8-9). And while there is an assumption that during game sessions, the story of King Arthur as presented in the campaign will be followed more or less strictly, the possibility of a dramatic departure from the canon is nevertheless acknowledged and embraced: “your campaign may take an unlikely turn ('Hey, great! You just unhorsed Lancelot!') or two ('What, you killed Mordred?')” (Stafford 2015: 6).

4.1.2. Paraphrase, compression, reordering

Considering the extent of the difference between the medium of the source text and the medium of adaptation, it is surprising how often *The great Pendragon campaign* employs adaptation strategies involving minimal changes to the source text. The most extreme strategy of this kind is paraphrase – a large number of times, an event entry in the campaign, or a part of it, consists of the text closely following a fragment of its source. A fine example is the event titled “The horn of chastity”:

Morgan le Fay creates a beautiful drinking horn, bound in gold. It is magical, for any woman who drinks from it will spill upon herself if she has been unfaithful to her husband. She gives it to one of her knights, with instructions to take it to Camelot and challenge the women of court to drink from it.

When the knight is traveling to court, he comes across Sir Lamorak, who asks his business and learns of this travesty of honor. He orders the knight to go to the court of King Mark instead of Camelot. The knight does.

At the Court of Cornwall, one hundred ladies drink from the horn, and of all of them only four do not spill upon themselves — and the queen is not one of the four. King Mark is enraged, for he sees this to be proof that Queen Isolt has been unfaithful to him. In an extreme fit of jealousy, he orders his wife and the other 95 women to be burned at the stake for their unfaithfulness.

However, his court convinces him to be calm. They point out that this is a sorcerous thing, made by a wicked witch who hates all that is good. They swear to make short work of Morgan if they ever cross paths with her, and after a time King Mark is convinced.

Tristram conceives a hatred for Sir Lamorak at this, however, for he knows that Lamorak sent the horn to Cornwall specifically to expose him to the king. (Stafford 2015a: 252-253)

The event credits book VIII, chapter 34 of *Le morte d'Arthur* as its source:

(...) So the king went his way unto King Mark, and brought him that rich horn, and said that Sir Lamorak sent it him, and thereto he told him the virtue of that horn. Then the king made Queen Isoud to drink thereof, and an hundred ladies, and there were but four ladies of all those that drank clean.

'Alas,' said King Mark, ' this is a great despite,' and sware a great oath that she should be burnt and the other ladies.

Then the barons gathered them together, and said plainly they would not have those ladies burnt for an horn made by sorcery, that came from as false a sorceress and witch as then was living. For that horn did never good, but caused strife and debate, and always in their days

she had been an enemy to all true lovers. So there were many knights made their avow and ever they met with Morgan le Fay that they would show her short courtesy. Also Sir Tristram was passing wroth that Sir Lamorak sent that horn unto King Mark, for well he knew that it was done in the despite of him. And therefore he thought to quit Sir Lamorak. (Malory [1969] 2004a: 363-364)

In these two fragments, there are some minor differences, but the overall similarity is significant. This strategy is also employed, for instance, in the event “A different proof” (Stafford 2015a: 254, paraphrasing Malory 2004a: 364-367), or in the event detailing the arrival of Roman envoys to King Arthur's court (Stafford 2015a: 198), where parts of dialogue are paraphrased from *Historia Regnum Britanniae* (Geoffrey [1912] 1928: 173-174).

Nevertheless, more or less close paraphrases are far less frequent in *The great Pendragon campaign* than the ubiquitous examples of compression. This strategy involves summarising a fragment of the source text and omitting many details, descriptions, and dialogues. This results in the adapted text which is less literary, but transmits the same general meaning, or at least the same *fabula*. Examples of compression include Gawaine's parley (Stafford 2015a: 202-203, adapted from Geoffrey 1928: 182-185 and Malory 2004a:), Grail healing of Sir Percivale and Sir Ector (Stafford 2015a: 301, adapted from Malory [1969] 2004b: 211-214), the end of Lancelot's madness (Stafford 2015a: 305, adapted from Malory 2004b: 223-229) or Guenever's accusation of poisoning (Stafford 2015a: 360, adapted from Malory 2004b: 376-389). The Lonazep tournament, the longest of all Malory described, is covered in just four lines of campaign text (Stafford 2015a: 309).

A bit more intrusive adaptation strategy used in *The great Pendragon campaign* is reordering. A particular event may stay close to the source, but its place in the campaign may be different from its place in the source narrative. While many books of Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur* focused on the story of a single knight or a small number of knights, the campaign presents many of these stories as happening at the same time. For instance, in Malory, Book VIII starts with Sir Tristram's birth (Malory 2004a: 303) and before it ends, Tristram marries Isolt La Blanche Mains (Malory 2004a: 368). In Greg Stafford's campaign, Tristram is born in year 501, in the Anarchy Period (Stafford 2015a: 84) and marries in year 537, in the Romance Period (Stafford 2015a: 255), and between these two events, a large part of the story of King Arthur is told, including his crowning, marriage, wars with Saxons, and the conquest of France and Rome. In *Le morte d'Arthur*, the order in which the events are presented is not the same as chronology, and sometimes the reordering of events

in *The great Pendragon campaign* may not contradict the chronology present, or assumed, in the sources.

Sometimes, though, the contradictions are explicit; for instance, Malory states that Tristram was born already during Arthur's reign (Malory 2004a: 303). The reason for this particular contradiction remains unclear. When Sir Tristram kills Sir Marhaus in the campaign, in the year 529, he “has just returned to Cornwall from being raised in Brittany”, and he is described as a young knight (Stafford 2015a: 214). If he was born in 510, the first year of Arthur's reign in the campaign, he would be of fitting age of 19, but according to Greg Stafford's chronology, he is 28 – barely a young knight by medieval standards. However, other contradictions may be the direct result of providing a medieval romance with a strict, year-by-year chronology. Arthur's last battle is fought in year 565, 74 years after his birth (Stafford 2015a: 57, 372), and stretching his age further could impact believability of the campaign.

4.1.3. Omission, addition, character substitution

Despite the numerous examples of less intrusive adaptation strategies used in *The great Pendragon campaign*, it by no means constitutes a record of everything that happens during King Arthur's life in *Le morte d'Arthur* or in other sources. Very often, the campaign omits large parts of the source narrative. This is especially valid for more personal stories, such as the quests of individual knights, which have little significance for the whole kingdom or the whole court. From all the contents of Malory's Book 7, devoted to Sir Gareth, only his marriage is alluded to in the campaign (Stafford 2015a: 306). And La Cote Male Taile, described in *Le morte d'Arthur* as the protagonist of Book 8 (Malory 2004a: 380), is mentioned in the campaign only once, at the end (Stafford 2015a: 378). Omissions happen possibly because such stories are not likely to have much significance during game sessions, which focus on player characters, the events that affect them, and the world immediately around them.

At the same time, the campaign features numerous events not credited to any source, and possibly not adapted at all, being original additions by Greg Stafford. Examples of such events include: increasingly elaborate Pentecostal tournaments, described in the campaign for most years from 540 (Stafford 2015a: 277) to 562 (Stafford 2015a: 361);

original adventure scenarios, providing opportunities for player characters, such as “Sword Lake” (Stafford 2015a: 38-39), “Bessinger Inheritance” (Stafford 2015a: 314-315), or “Stone House Visit” (Stafford 2015a: 315-317); most of the Anarchy Period (Stafford 2015a: 70-97), as it describes the time between King Uther's and King Arthur's reign, not detailed in the sources; and many events connected to the Faerie, with fantasy or folklore themes, including the visits of King Today and Emperor Yesterday to King Arthur's court (Stafford 2015a: 242-243, 330). Besides the events, the gossip, news, and royal conversation sections of the campaign also have no direct counterparts in the original texts, even though they discuss the events found in Stafford's sources.

Another relatively common adaptation strategy that introduces essential changes to the source material is the substitution of characters from the source with player characters. A number of times, Greg Stafford describes in *The great Pendragon campaign* a particular event or adventure which was experienced by Sir Lancelot or another famous knight, and either mentions that the player characters may take the quest instead; or he designs the adventure specifically with player characters in mind, mentioning the original protagonist in a commentary; or else he completely omits the original protagonist.

An example of the first kind of substitution is the quest of Sir Gawaine, Sir Tor, and Sir Pellinore after King Arthur's wedding (Stafford 2015a: 145-146, adapted from Malory 2004a: 98-99). The second approach was used, for instance, in the event “Sir Turquine's vendetta”, where Stafford mentions that should the players fail, vile Sir Turquine will be defeated not by them, but by Sir Lancelot, just like in the Arthurian canon (Stafford 2015a: 247). Examples of the third approach include some of the most significant quests of the Arthurian tales: the events in the Adventurous Castle, where the Holy Grail can be achieved (Stafford 2015a: 349-352, citing no sources, but close to Chrétien 1990b: 377-381); or the campaign's end, when it is not Sir Bedivere who throws Excalibur into the water and witnesses the departure of King Arthur, but the last surviving player knight (Stafford 2015a, 376-377, adapted from Malory 2004b: 515-518).

Other adaptation strategies that essentially change the *fabula* of the source texts were also used in *The great Pendragon campaign*, but they were less common, and thus, less meaningful on the level of the whole campaign. The changes include, for instance, connecting the tournament in which Tristram fought with his meeting with Sir Lancelot. These two events were separate in the source, divided by a number of adventures of Sir Tristram (Stafford 2015a: 283-284, adapted from Malory 2015a 459-468).

4.1.4. Focalization, dramatisation, imagery, dialogues

Besides the essential changes, impacting the *fabula* of the Arthurian tales, *The great Pendragon campaign* features numerous minor changes, and many of them are regular enough to be considered conscious and significant adaptation strategies. It is worth mentioning that many of these strategies are important for the issues of medium specificity and topicality.

The strategy that seems to be the most pervasive is the change of focalization. According to the author's advice, the player characters should be the protagonists of the campaign instead of King Arthur and the most famous knights from the tales (Stafford 2015a: 6), and thus, events are usually described from player knights' perspective. For instance, the author is likely to omit the details of a private king's council provided in the source texts and instead, relate what was happening at the time at the court – as is the case during the arrival of Roman envoys (Stafford 2015a: 197-198, based on Geoffrey 172-174 and Malory 2004a: 167-171), or after Agravaine's accusation of Guenever (Stafford 2015a: 363, based on Malory 2004b: 456-458). The opportunities for player characters to act are mentioned very often, even though sometimes the only suggested player actions are not much more than making a number of dice rolls (as in Stafford 2015a: 252). Changes in focalization can also be a reason for adding, omitting, and summarising source materials – for example, Malory can detail the adventures of Gawain, Ywain, and Nimue or the youth of Tristram; Stafford, however, summarises all these on a single page (Stafford 2015a: 190), as player characters can hear stories about them, but not experience them.

Minor changes to the story are not limited to the changes in focalization. Often, the way the events are described is changed when it comes to dramatisation and imagery. In *The great Pendragon campaign*, the envoys from Rome include a Goth, an Ethiopian, a Byzantine, and other representatives of peoples under Roman rule (Stafford 2015a: 197). These details are absent from both sources cited by Stafford, but they emphasize the importance of the event, in which King Arthur is confronted with the emperor of the most of the known world. Dramatization is often achieved by means of the “show, don't tell” principle – where sources may explicitly mention what happens, what characters feel, etc., *The great Pendragon campaign* often provides immersive imagery. When King Arthur hears Agravaine's accusation of Guenever, Malory (2004b: 458) states “For as the French book saith, the king was full loth”; in turn, in the campaign, “the king looks cold and strange now, not like the man he was moments ago” (Stafford 2015a: 363).

Dialogues from the source texts are also changed often. The language tends to be modernized, and utterances shortened. It can be observed, for instance, in the following fragments of the event “Grail appearance” (Stafford 2015a: 327-328), in which a stone with a sword destined for the best knight in the world appears. The event does not credit any source, but analogies to Malory (2004b: 239-244) are evident:

“The king then orders Sir Lancelot to draw the weapon, 'For surely you are the best knight in the world'” (Stafford 2015a: 328)

“Fair sir, this sword ought to be yours, for I am sure ye be the best knight of the world” (Malory 2004a: 241)

“Certainly, Sir, it is not my sword. And whoever tries to take it out will be sorely wounded by it” (Stafford 2015a: 328)

“Certes sir, it is not my sword; also, sir, wit ye well I have no hardiness to set my hand to, for it longed not to hang by my side. Also, who that assayeth to take the sword and faileth of it, he shall receive a wound by that sword that he shall not be whole long after. (...)” (Malory 2004a: 241)

In the examples above, the language was changed, but there were no significant changes in the register. However, sometimes in the campaign, elevated, formal speeches from the sources become highly informal, for instance when wounded King Arthur for the second and third time asks the knight to throw Excalibur into the water (in *The great Pen-dragon campaign*, the king repeats the request only once):

“That is untruly said of thee,' said the king, 'therefore go thou lightly again, and do my commandment; as thou art to me leve and dear, spare not, but throw it.' (...) 'Ah, traitor untrue,' said King Arthur, 'now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that hast been to me so leve and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword? But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee mine own hands; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead.'” (Malory 2004b: 516-517)

“Throw it into the pool, man!” Arthur insists. “I grow cold! They need this to open the way to Avalon! Throw it into the pool!” (Stafford 2015a: 377).

4.1.5. Added context, interpretation, commentary

The final group of changes to the Arthurian sources introduced in the process of adaptation does not include the changes to the story, but rather, provide the story with additional context, interpretation, and commentary. Most such additions make up the introductory sections of each chapter – such as the descriptions of new customs and equipment, of Camelot at its peak, of Arthur's sons and of Courts of Love at the beginning of the chapter describing the Romance Period (Stafford 2015a: 226-237). Other comments are included in the events of the campaign; for instance, when king Anguish is accused of murder, Stafford (2015a: 246) provides an insight into the political game that resulted in the accusation. Often, the commentary seems academic, with little to no practical use for the game masters running the campaign. For instance, Stafford (2015a: 284) discusses Sir Lancelot and Sir Tristram as both being perfect knights, each in his own way, or he emphasises how petty Guenever's accusations of Lancelot are and interprets Lancelot's personality – “another proof he [Lancelot] believes suffering for love is good” (Stafford 2015a: 358-359).

A different type of commentary includes many allusions to game rules. Just as player knights pass or fail skill, trait, and passion rolls, so do the knights from the Arthurian canon. Sir Turquine poses a grave danger to the Knights of the Round Table possibly because he is inspired against them (that is, by means of a successful passion roll) (Stafford 2015a: 247). Similarly, Tristram is inspired by his love when he defeats Lancelot during a tournament (Stafford 2015a: 248), and while he is an envoy, Gawaine fails a Hospitality roll and kills Sir Gainus (Stafford 2015a: 248). The Sword skill of Lancelot is discussed at length when he fights Mordred's knights at the door of Guenever's chamber (Stafford 2015a: 364); it is an appropriate time indeed, as at this moment, Lancelot's skill level reaches nigh-impossible heights. It seems that the game mechanics is supposed to control the entire game world, not just the events happening during a game session.

4.2. Medium specificity

Many of the adaptation strategies discussed above may be attributed to medium specificity. When it comes to the most prosaic reasons, omission and summarising might have resulted from length constraints of a tabletop role-playing supplement, and from the fact that *The*

great Pendragon campaign is a sourcebook for role-players rather than literature, and thus requires less plot and descriptions. Speech is modernised, as players and game masters are not likely to be able to switch to Early Modern English while playing. Similarly, the campaign supplement format makes it possible to advise the game master to read at least the fragments of *Le morte d'Arthur* (Stafford 2015a: 7, 188, 190, 327), so *The great Pendragon campaign* does not need to depend on telling the whole story on its own as much as literary or filmic adaptations. However, many connections of adaptation strategies to the nature of the medium are more complex.

4.2.1. Consistency

As mentioned in Chapter 2, tabletop role-playing games tend to present specified, tangible realities. Such realities may contain supernatural elements, but they tend to be internally consistent. Sorcerers and clerics may have the power of resurrection, but a dead character coming back to life without any explanation is bound to provoke questions on behalf of the players. It could subvert the rules governing the reality of the game and ultimately break the immersion.

Le morte d'Arthur often lacks such consistency, especially when judged from the perspective of a 21st century reader. Arthur is supposed to be a benevolent ruler, and yet he orders a massacre of newborns reminiscent of King Herod (Malory 2004a: 58-59); the knights seek the Holy Grail, even though Galahad was raised in the castle where it was kept, and Bors has already visited this castle before (Malory 2004b: 194-196); when the Grail Quest starts, suddenly the knights' adventures become allegoric and feature an extraordinary number of wise hermits explaining the meaning of these allegories. The inconsistencies increase when one takes more than one source text into account – for instance, in *Le morte d'Arthur*, the Grail is the cup from the Last Wedding, and is achieved by Galahad, Bors, and Percivale; in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the Grail is a stone from heaven, and it is found by Parzival (that is, Percivale) alone.

The great Pendragon campaign is an attempt at taking the inconsistent reality of the sources and turning it into a consistent one. The events are arranged chronologically, the places of mythical Britain are situated on the map. Legendary knights and mythical creatures are described with game statistics. Sometimes, such a balancing act makes it neces-

sary to accept one source and reject another, and sometimes, the sources are connected and form a collage of sorts: “the Grail is a sacred cup used at the Last Supper (...) made from a magical object that fell out of Heaven” (Stafford 2015a: 8); all the three knights achieve the Grail quest, but it is Percivale, not Galahad, who heals King Pellam (Stafford 2015a: 357). At least one source text, *Perlesvaus*, is called by Stafford (2015a: 298) “non-canonical”, even though he never mentions what sources make up the canon.

This consistency also applies to a large degree to the supernatural in *The great Pendragon campaign*. The campaign develops the idea of the Enchantment of Britain:

After Arthur's knights begin to provoke the creatures of the deep landscape, the Faerie kingdom begins to interact actively with the world of mortals. The result is that magical beings appear more often, and magical effects as well. (Stafford 2015a: 8)

The progressing Enchantment is the cause of wonders appearing throughout the game world. The wonders themselves become more specific – the reader is presented with extensive descriptions of the effects of the Wasteland (Stafford 2015a: 272-274), the angelic knights that player characters may encounter during the Grail Quest are described as “not really living beings at all, but automatons created only to perform their fighting task” (Stafford 2015a: 347). Along with the adaptation to tabletop role-playing, the medieval Arthurian legends underwent a genre shift to contemporary fantasy, in which magic is causally coherent and limited (Dixon 2011: 345-347).

Similarly, trait and passion rules, which let inspired characters become far more powerful, are a consistent part of game world. In *Pendragon*, every second character is mad from love not only because that is a part of romance genre, but also because mad love is a natural force, just as real as gravity. Greg Stafford accepts that such a world, and characters in such a world, may seem strange and silly: “That’s the downside of a Love passion of 35 – you are a slave to stupidity” (Stafford 2015a: 343).

Finally, sometimes inconsistencies are left unchanged, acknowledged and embraced. The adventure titled “The Grail feast” “is virtually identical to that described in the ‘Castle of Joy’ section in Chapter 5, save that the Fisher King and King Pellam seem to have mysteriously been divided into two separate people” (Stafford 2015a: 352).

4.2.2. Player agency

The great Pendragon campaign is an attempt at presenting the history of King Arthur, and at the same time, at making it possible for the game masters to create an interactive experience during the game sessions. The coexistence of the game master's sole authorship of the story and player agency is an extensively criticised fallacy (Edwards 2003, Edwards 2004); similarly, player agency cannot coexist with an unchangeable narrative contained in the campaign supplement. Connecting the two in *The great Pendragon campaign* resulted in changes to the story, limits on player agency, and also in some novel solutions, rarely seen in tabletop role-playing games.

In the campaign, the events tend to be described in a definite manner, with just one outcome mentioned. This seems to give few possibilities for player characters to change history. On many occasions does the campaign mention that some events *have to* happen, for instance “All the player knights may fail, but the purpose here is to kill the duke. If the players do not succeed, then other knights in the camp do” (Stafford 2010: 54). However, it is necessary to bear in mind that changing the course of history is possible; the campaign “may take an unlikely turn” (Stafford 2015a: 6). In the campaign in which Greg Stafford himself played, he considered an untimely death of King Arthur a possibility, but one which would end the campaign (“542: Good news, bad news” 2007). He also admitted a departure as significant as the deadly poisoning of Sir Lancelot (“And all hell broke loose” 2010); the campaign continued after that, even though the the poisoning was the last event described on the campaign blog (Greg Stafford, p.c.).

Moreover, very often the campaign mentions how players can exercise agency. Some of these opportunities include the aforementioned character substitution. In *The great Pendragon campaign*, players may win the castle Dolorous Garde which in Malory was destined to be won by Lancelot – and then the castle can turn out to be destined for player knights (Stafford 2015a: 159); player characters can rescue King Arthur kidnapped by the enchantress Annowre, instead of Sir Tristram (Stafford 2015a: 311-313, based on Malory 2004a: 407-409); it is not sir Bedivere, but a player character who accompanies Arthur during his departure (Stafford 2015a: 374-377). Also, the events from the sources are often developed so that they introduce more opportunities for player characters, for instance, during the Battle of Lindsey (Stafford 2015a: 48-49), player characters may attempt to capture

a Saxon wolf's head banner, which was not mentioned in the source (Geoffrey 1928: 145-146).

However, in many Events sections of the campaign, player agency is added with minimal changes to the adapted story; often, this limits player agency or leads to expressing it through means uncommon in role-playing. Very often, player characters are supposed to just witness the events, playing second fiddle to famous knights. When Percivale (Stafford 2015a: 250-251) arrives to the court, player characters can at best mock him (or not), attempt to save him from an evil knight (which does not change much, because Percivale kills the knight anyway), explain him some knightly matters, help him don his armour, etc.

Many times, players' actions are limited by their skill, trait, and passion rolls. A player knowledgeable in Arthurian lore can know that the key to healing King Pellam and achieving the Holy Grail is to ask the question during the Grail feast, but player knights can ask the question only if they critically succeed in three rolls (against the skill Religion, the trait Pious, and the passion Love [deity]) in a row (Stafford 2015a: 169), an extremely unlikely event even for an extraordinary knight. Leaving the player characters in the role of witnesses and letting the dice determine their actions could be seen as severely limiting player agency if it had not been for the specifics of *Pendragon* rules. Even small actions, such as trying to help Percivale, provide experience checks (Stafford 2015a: 250-251), which contribute to raising appropriate skills, traits, or passions (Stafford 2010: 106-107), and thus impact chances of succeeding in subsequent rolls. Asking the question at the Grail feast is less a reward for a single good idea or for some lucky die rolls, and more for long-term, consequent role-playing a pious knight; it is a cumulative effect of all the small, seemingly meaningless choices taken before.

Other strategies of uniting player agency and the Arthurian narrative include the use of metagaming⁴ and interiority. A number of times, the game master is advised to provide the players with a choice concerning future events giving them clues outside of the game world, which player characters cannot be aware of: “Gamemasters may wish to give them [the players] a choice of going to battle at Terrabil to get Glory, or to go to Tintagel and *possibly* witness an event that earns them none” (Stafford 2015a: 52), “Do you want to witness a famous story but have little to do, or go adventure?” (Stafford 2015a: 258). And a number of times, while player characters may have few opportunities to act, the game mas-

⁴ “Metagame mechanics: Techniques which do not require justification using in-game cause (...)”, Edwards 2004.

ter is advised to ask the players what they characters think about a particular situation, for instance about the mysterious shield given King Arthur by Morgan le Fay (Stafford 2015a: 283-284), or a new custom introduced during a tournament (Stafford 2015a: 283-284). This is one of the few examples of the use of interiority in a tabletop role-playing game.

Even not accounting for the added player agency discussed above, *The great Pendragon campaign* creates a connection between a narrative and interactivity by moving the major events of the Arthurian tales, the tales' foreground, to the campaign's background. To a large extent, player characters (and players themselves) *experience* King Arthur's story (Stafford 2015a: 6), not create it. “The real game is the story of the player characters” (Stafford 2015a: 6), and player choices tend to determine not how the reign of King Arthur will look like, but whether their knights will be worldly or pious, valiant or cowardly, noble Grail seekers, romantic lovers, or bloodthirsty murderers. In *The great Pendragon campaign*, the story of King Arthur, with all its events and adventures, often plays the role of places on a map of a more traditional game setting, like the forest of Lothlorien or the mines of Moria in a game based on Tolkien's Middle-Earth, which player characters can visit and interact with. The difference is that traditional settings describe places in space, while *The great Pendragon campaign* describes events in time.

4.3. The narrative

Even though in *The great Pendragon campaign* the Arthurian narrative becomes the background to the actions of player characters, it remains detailed and significant enough to convey meanings and be subject to interpretation. In addition, the events of the campaign are bound to influence player characters' stories, and thus the campaign supplement affects the themes and meanings emerging during game session.

4.3.1. The periods of the campaign

The adapted story of King Arthur was divided into eight periods, and to an extent, they all are narrative unities. Every period has its own themes, story arcs, and narrative dynamics – early years have more elements of exposition, and by the end of the period, there usually is

a climatic event of some kind. At the same time, the periods are heterogeneous, they feature many different events, and a period may contain a number of events or adventures unrelated to the its central themes. Over the periods, the fates of the king an his knights are intertwined with these of player characters, and of the whole Britain – “the king is the land and the land is the king” (Stafford 2015a: 276).

King Uther Period is the introductory part of the game (Stafford 2015a: 25). Its main themes are the wars with Saxons, uniting the land under Uther Pendragon's rule, and the foreshadowing the things to come – including the first appearance of Excalibur (Stafford 2015a: 38-39) and Uther's love to Ygraine. Player characters can take part in these events – fight in battles, help Merlin obtain Excalibur, or witness the moment when Uther fell in love (Stafford 2015a: 50). After the period's last battle and a decisive victory over Saxons, king Uther and his men are poisoned; there is a great likelihood that all player characters will die (Stafford 2015a: 63-64). This is a rejection of the pattern of challenges, victories, and rewards common in tabletop role-playing games⁵.

During the subsequent Anarchy period, the campaign “is far less directed” (Stafford 2015a: 70). Player characters (possibly new player characters) are likely to rise to prominence as advisers to the countess of Salisbury after the earl, her husband, died along with King Uther, but at the same time, their prosperity may be threatened by the tributes paid to the Saxons. The period ends with late earl's son coming of age (Stafford 2015a: 93).

The Boy King period focuses on Arthur's rise to power, his battles against rebel kings and Saxons. Arthur wins spectacular victories, providing player characters with plenty of opportunities to plunder and collect Glory. He also starts the fellowship of the Round Table (Stafford 2015a: 147-148) and propagates the ideas of chivalry, personified in the mysterious character of the White Knight, who later turns out to be a Grail Templar (Stafford 2015a: 192). The period ends with a climatic battle of the Badon Hill (“Gamemasters should be prepared to emphasize the desperation and chaos by killing off about half of the player knights; such ruthlessness will make everyone remember the event, and when someone says, “I was at Badon,” then everyone will understand”, Stafford 2015a: 155).

The Conquest period focuses on the subsequent wars of King Arthur, which have an increasing scale of importance, from a battle with the Irish and the Picts (Stafford 2015a:

⁵ While common, it is by no means the only pattern for tabletop role-playing scenarios. First of all, it assumes that player characters win, and this is not a given in an interactive game. Moreover, according to Krawczyk (2009: 146), many scenarios feature unhappy endings, which can inspire further events of the campaign.

184-185) to the conquest of Rome (Stafford 2015a: 206), with somewhat anticlimactic conquest of Ireland in the end (Stafford 2015a: 215-216). This is the period when Sir Lancelot appears (Stafford 2015a: 194-196); from then on, he becomes one of the most significant non-player characters in the campaign. As the wars are coming to an end, *Pax Arthur* is introduced, and it is reflected in the game rules by the increase of the prosperity of player knights (Stafford 2015a: 214).

The Romance period opens after the first performance of a courtly poet following the Roman wars (Stafford 2015a: 209) – an event with no parallel in the sources, but highlighting how periods of the campaign reflect different parts of the Middle Ages. The rise of the courtly love means that player characters are likely to engage in romance, possibly paralleling the love affairs of Sir Lancelot or of Sir Tristram, the knight whose adventures start to be related shortly before the period begins (Stafford 2015a: 214). Another significant event of the campaign is the visit of King Today at Arthur's court, which accelerates the Enchantment of Britain (Stafford 2015a: 242-243). The period ends with Percivale's failure to heal King Pellam (Stafford 2015a: 260-263), from which point on, the Wastelands start to spread, and King Arthur's sickness begins.

For the following Tournament period, the ongoing theme seems to be the decay lurking behind ennui and superficial prosperity. The Pax Arthur continues, and instead of wars, player characters can take part in tournaments, as a large number of them is held each year. However, the Wastelands spread, both king Arthur's sons are killed (Stafford 2015a: 280-281, 298-299), the gossip of Lancelot and Guenever's love affair becomes common (Stafford 2015a: 283), and Sir Gawaine's family murders Queen Margawse and Sir Lamorak, intensifying the feud between Gawaine's brothers and De Ganis clan that will eventually devastate the Round Table (Stafford 2015a: 287, 308). In the News section, for a number of years Sir Kay brags of bountiful harvests and rare spices, downplaying increasing poverty in the north caused by the Wastelands. Then, the new Seneshal, Sir Constantine, is terrified to discover the extent of the desolation (Stafford 2015a: 307). Somewhat on the contrary to this downbeat theme, the period has plenty of opportunities for player characters to rise in prominence: they can capture King Mark for a king's ransom (Stafford 2015a: 285), rescue King Arthur (Stafford 2015a: 311-314), or marry noble Melanie, the lady of Bessinger (Stafford 2015a: 314-315). The victories of player knights may emphasize the theme of valour in face of hardships.

The Grail Quest Period starts with the vision of the Grail, the arrival of Galahad, the start of the Grail Quest, and the visit of Emperor Yesterday announcing the incoming end of the Enchantment of Britain (Stafford 2015a: 327-332). The period is short, and the players are likely to attempt to seek the Grail themselves, facing the supernatural adventures and worldly temptations (Stafford 2015a: 347). For player characters staying at home, a scenario “Cornish invasion” is provided (Stafford 2015a: 334-341), in which they may fight the armies of King Mark armed with a humongous cannon (the “infernal engine”, Stafford 2015a: 339). The period ends when Galahad, Bors, and Percivale find the Holy Grail, the Wasteland is healed along with King Arthur, and the Enchantment of Britain ends (Stafford 2015: 344-345).

Twilight Period, the last one, is particularly interesting as it features a genre shift. Violence triumphs over courage, love, and piety. Despite trying hard, Arthur's armies are constantly too late to defeat their enemies (Stafford 2015a: 356, 357, 359), while previously they were victorious thanks to their leadership and chivalry. The news sections tell the tale of the Lass of France – a Joan of Arc counterpart, who liberates France conquered by Arthur, only to be accused of sorcery and burned (Stafford 2015a: 356, 361, 363). In the previous period saints were gloriously winning the Grail and healing the land, in this one a saint is martyred. Lancelot's “courtly poetry (...) seems stale and empty” (Stafford 2015a: 356), and it is only a prelude to the subsequent downfall of the Round Table.

The campaign ends like *Le morte d'Arthur*. Agravaine accuses Guenever of infidelity, the queen is to be burned at stake, Lancelot rescues her, but accidentally kills Gareth and Gaheris (Stafford 2015a: 363-365), Arthur and Gawaine siege Lancelot in Joyous Garde (Stafford 2015a: 366-369), Lancelot departs to France and is followed by the King's forces (Stafford 2015a: 369-370), Mordred usurps the throne. In the campaign, he “warms himself every day in front of a roaring fire stoked by the shattered pieces of the Round Table” (Stafford 2015a: 372). All the player characters who are alive take part in final Battle of Camlann; the battle lasts until only one of them is alive (Stafford 2015a: 374). Arthur departs to Avalon, and the last year of the campaign works as a postscript, summarizing the fates of the surviving knights and ending with a brief timeline of the subsequent Saxon conquest. “History asserts itself” (Stafford 2015a: 377).

4.3.2. Themes

The great Pendragon campaign conveys a number of overarching themes, and one of them is Arthurian idealism. The rise of King Arthur and chivalry leads to prosperity, peace, and spiritual rebirth, as achieving the Holy Grail heals the king and the Wasteland (Stafford 2015a: 344-345). From the Boy King period until the beginning of the Twilight period, the game world becomes a better place – tournaments replace wars, vile knights do not break promises they gave their conquerors (Stafford 2015a: 195), the warlike duke Galeholt surrenders to Arthur just because he witnessed Lancelot's chivalry (Stafford 2015a: 214). Arthur's downfall is blamed on treason rather than on Lancelot's love affair (Stafford 2015a: 259). At the same time, however, the commoners remain hungry (Stafford 2015a: 303), and the reign of King Arthur and the adventures of his knights further the Enchantment of Britain (Stafford 2015a: 8, 395), which, as wondrous as it may be, is connected to the horrors of the Wastelands.

The desire of adventure common in Arthurian literature works well in a role-playing game, in which players are likely to look for action and danger, not for uneventful prosperity. According to the Welsh triad, Arthur uncovered the head of Bran forfeiting its magical protection over Britain, “because he chose not to hold the Island except by his own strength” (Stafford 2015a: 212). Players are likely to understand that sentiment, even though it may ultimately lead to Saxon conquest, just as they are likely to understand the ennui of more and more elaborate tourneys of the Tournament period.

Arthur is presented as flawed, yet in the end, noble and heroic. Arthur's sending May Day newborns to death is implied, but never addressed directly (Stafford 2015a: 139-140, 143); soon after the children are lost at sea, King Arthur does 40-day penance at St Albans (Stafford 2015a: 149), in contrast with *Le morte d'Arthur*, where his guilt is never mentioned. After witnessing a kidnapping of a lady at his wedding, Arthur says, “I'm glad it's over! Good riddance: Her shouting gave me a headache!” (Stafford 2015a: 146) – close enough to Malory's (2004a: 98) “the king was glad, for she made such a noise”. As the years pass, however, Arthur becomes increasingly noble and wise, often going against medieval customs. His killing of Saxon hostages in retaliation to Saxon treachery (Geoffrey 1928: 157) is never mentioned in the campaign. He grants mercy to defeated Picts and stops the plunder (Stafford 2015a: 185), refuses to occupy conquered France and Rome (“occupation of foreign lands always leads to hatred and downfall. We are content with the

plunder”, Stafford 2015a: 255), cares for just laws for both the strong and the weak (Stafford 2015a: 302), and does not care for Lancelot and Guenever's affair (Stafford 2015a: 259).

Lancelot is similar. His countless heroic deeds are recalled in the Gossip sections throughout the campaign, often humorous and exaggerated (“he was in Cambria rescuing the Lady of the Butterfly, smiting the Giant Weasel of Appleby, smashing the Skull of Elva, subduing the bandit lord Gregorius and his sister Gre—”, Stafford 2015a: 237). His perfection does not make it easy to relate to him – when for once, after his failure during the Grail quest, he is humble and relatively open about his feelings, “many young knights [listen] in awe to just hear *anything* human come out of their hero” (Stafford 2015a: 345). Lancelot's senseless killing of a King Arthur's knight (Malory 2004b: 5-12), which inspired the essay “The double life of Malory's Lancelot du Lake” (Jesmok 2007) is never mentioned in the campaign, and even if it had happened in the game world, it could be attributed to his madness, during which Lancelot may become “a bloody murdering bandit” (Stafford 2015a: 299) – and in a world ruled by mechanics of *King Arthur Pendragon*, this could happen to anyone. Like in *Le morte d'Arthur*, despite his affair with Guenever, Lancelot, being the best knight in the world, miraculously heals Sir Urré (Stafford 2015a: 357), and in the end, dies a saint (Stafford 2015a: 378).

Arthur and his knights struggle against their own flaws and their certain doom. The campaign, based on literary sources from different historical periods as well as on history itself, tells the story of King Arthur living in the 6th century, but advancing technological and social developments at least up to the level of late Middle Ages. Arthur is a living anachronism, and inevitable demise of him and his untimely golden age is emphasised by frequent foreshadowing and omens reappearing throughout the campaign, but also by the player's knowledge of Arthurian tales and of history. The change he brings about is short-lived; “Let them fall back into the stink of their own decadence”, he says in the campaign about the rebelling Merovingian Franks, and Greg Stafford comments, “And they do, until a barbarian king conquers them and becomes Emperor Theoderic” (Stafford 2015a: 214).

Such a story may contain little hope, but nevertheless, it embraces the paradoxical Arthurian optimism, as described by Roberta Davidson (2012: 15). Ultimately, Camelot has to fall, but for a while, it becomes “a place of man-made magic, conjured into being by Arthur's dreams and hard work” (Stafford 2015a: 304). A “glorious kingdom can be established, to hold back the darkness for a while (...). Because the darkness is inevitable is no

reason to surrender the opportunity to kindle the flame as brightly as possible” (Thomson 1985: 172, as quoted in: Davidson 2012: 15). This sense is prevalent in a game in which all player characters are going to die at some point (Stafford 2015a: 5).

Such optimism is emphasised in the changes to the source texts in the final scenes of the campaign. In *Le morte d'Arthur*, Arthur pierces Mordred with a spear, Mordred thrusts himself at the king and smites him at the head with his sword (Malory 2004b: 514). In the campaign, it is Mordred who wields the spear, and “The king flinches, but grimly pushes himself up the shaft (...) and strikes Mordred, shattering his skull”. It is a deliberate change to the source text – “Arthur should use his sword (...) to strike his last blow, the last action of his reign” (Greg Stafford, p.c.). It is not the evil of Mordred that perseveres despite being nearly defeated, but the valour of Arthur. And in the end, Stafford gives the few remaining survivors an ending that a contemporary reader, or a player, can consider a happy one: “Malory says that Sir Bors and the last few knights of the Round Table go to the Holy Land and die fighting Saracens. I say they went back to Ganis and died as old men, surrounded by grandchildren” (Stafford 2015a: 378).

While it could be an overstatement to call *The great Pendragon campaign* a post-modern deconstruction of the Arthurian tales, it has at least one specifically postmodern feature. Namely, it presents the story of King Arthur from a number of different perspectives – besides the voice of the noble knights, the readers hear the voice of cynical Sir Mordred in “Mordred talk” sections; besides the events directly relating to the Knights of the Round Table, the supplement relates the fates of the common folk. The campaign describes the plight of peasants living in the Wastelands (Stafford 2015a: 274) or the custom of food tournaments – knightly tourneys held in some parts of the realm during the times of hunger, in which food, and thus survival of people, is wagered (Stafford 2015a: 289).

The great Pendragon campaign also gives voice to pagans – medieval Others. Stafford emphasises the roles of mythic Faerie (Stafford 2015a: 242-243, 330), introduces pagan places of worship to the Arthurian landscape (for instance, Stafford 2015a: 46, 316) and reinterprets various characters as pagan. Merlin is the Archdruid (Stafford 2010: 11), Ladies of the Lake are “one of the few pagan organizations that still wield significant power” (Stafford 2015a: 429). King Lot is a pagan – in Malory (2004a: 22), when he and other kings were advised by Merlin, “more other called him [Merlin] witch”; Stafford subverts this quote: “King Lot proclaimed that, as any reverent pagan knows, you cannot trust a sorcerer” (Stafford 2015: 129). And most importantly, in the campaign, the Grail is suggested

to be a pagan relic, The Cauldron of Inspiration, at least to the same extent as a Christian one; the pious knight who achieves it may be of any religion (Stafford 2015a: 168-169).

At the same time, besides the serious and tragic themes, *The great Pendragon campaign* uses humour, sometimes bordering on being a satire or a parody. Sir Tristram's habit of starting combat with whomever he meets is attributed to him being “monstrously near-sighted” (Stafford 2015a: 243). The Gossip section often subverts the loftiness of King Arthur's court and resembles contemporary small talk (“Who *is* the queen's designer, anyway?”, Stafford 2015a: 282). Multiplicity of voices is facilitated by the romance genre, with its inherent plurality of perspectives (Gaunt [2000] 2004: 46-47), by the interactive medium with its habit of describing multiple aspects of game reality in detail, by the use of multiple sources, and by the intersection of idealism of romance and harsh medieval history.

Conclusion

The great Pendragon campaign includes interconnected tabletop role-playing scenarios, describing the events which player characters can encounter, and giving players opportunities to act and make choices. But, above all else, Greg Stafford's campaign is also a temporal setting, overarching background for player characters' lives over many decades of game time.

Such an approach gave the author unique opportunities when it comes to adapting an existing story to an interactive medium. Linda Hutcheon's observed that adaptations for interactivity often adapt the world of the source texts rather than the story (Hutcheon 2006: 13-14). However, in *The great Pendragon campaign*, it is the story that is adapted, but in the process, it itself becomes a part of the game world. Like numerous licensed tabletop role-playing games, but unlike many adaptations to other gaming media, the campaign does not let the players play the protagonists of the original story, but instead, the main characters of their own story, the story which coincides, and is connected with, the life of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table.

For Hutcheon (2006: 13), adapting the world meant that the story of the original becomes of secondary importance. In *The great Pendragon campaign*, it may indeed become less important during the game sessions, overshadowed by the emerging stories of player characters. However, on the level of the secondary text (the campaign book), the adapted story stays in focus. The events from *Le morte d'Arthur* and other sources may be relatively unchanged; what changes is their context. Instead of being the central elements of the plot, they become a background for player characters.

The great Pendragon campaign is not a narrative, but an ergodic cybertext with narrative elements. Nevertheless, can have themes and convey meanings just like narratives

do. Geoffrey Atheling Wagner (1975: 222-223, as cited in Whelehan 1999: 8) divided adaptations into transpositions, commentaries, and analogies, and *The great Pendragon campaign* has some traits of all these types. The events from the sources are often directly transposed or paraphrased; at the same time, the context is changed, and the presented vision of King Arthur and history is a topical commentary on Arthurian tales, but also on history and transience.

So far, international studies of tabletop role-playing games paid little attention to scenarios, focusing instead on the games systems and on the process of role-playing. *The great Pendragon campaign* is exceptional in the context of other scenarios, but also, in the context of challenges faced by designers of tabletop role-playing games, as well as of other games. It is a balancing act of uniting meaningful story and player agency, and for that purpose, it makes unusual design choices. Probably the most notable one is the introduction of many events during which players may decide how their characters act, but whose outcome they cannot change; such events become playable and interesting by working in accord with the trait and passion system of the game. In the end, player characters live their own stories, but in a sense, those are the stories of King Arthur and his knights; the stories of chivalry and valour in face of inevitable decline.

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